

Desiring Myth: History, Mythos and Art in the Work of Flaubert and Proust

By

Rachel Anne Luckman

A thesis submitted for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of French Studies  
College of Arts and Law  
The University of Birmingham  
August 2009

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**University of Birmingham Research Archive**

**e-theses repository**

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

## Abstract

Previous comparative and parallel ‘genetic criticisms’ of Flaubert and Proust have ignored the different historical underpinnings that circumscribe the act of writing. This work examines the logos of Flaubert and Proust’s work. I examine the historical specificity of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in respect of the gender inflections and class-struggles of the Third French Republic. I also put forward a poetics of Flaubertian history relative to *L’Education sentimentale*. His historical sense and changes in historiographic methodologies all obliged Flaubert to think history differently. Flaubert problematises both history and psychology, as his characterisations repeatedly show an interrupted duality. This characterization is explicated using René Girard’s theories of psychology, action theory and mediation. Metonymic substitution perpetually prevents the satisfaction of desire and turns life into a series of failures. Mediation is taken further in Proust, and characters are sacrificed to preserve the harmony of the salon.

Culture is composed not only of logos but of mythos as well: Poetry, Art, History and Religion are all analysed in this study. Flaubert’s works enact a repeated invocation and repression of the visual, most evident in the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, where the symbol is occluded and the logos is lost, whilst Proust’s itinerary as a writer involves resurrecting the soul of John Ruskin and culminates in his protagonist’s initiation into the Arts. Proust culminates a series of attempts since the Realists to analyse the predicament of post-revolutionary Man. The works of the two authors show a flight from the exterior world to one of interiority, but there is no solace to be had in either Flaubert’s world of the logos or Proust’s of the mythos.

Table of Contents	Page
Introduction	1
PART ONE	
Chapter One	55
Chapter Two	97
PART TWO	
Chapter Three	129
Chapter Four	169
PART THREE	
Chapter Five	216
Chapter Six	245
Conclusion	277
Bibliography	295

## Editions Used in This Work

Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, (ed. by Jaques Suffel), Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966.

- *Correspondance*, in IV vols (ed. by Jean Bruneau), Paris, NRF Collection Gallimard, 1973.
- *L'Education sentimentale*, (ed. by Albert Thibaudet), Paris: Folio, 1935.
- *Madame Bovary*, (ed. by Bernard Ajac) Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1986.
- *Mémoires d'un fou, Novembre, Pryrénées, Corse; Voyage en Italie*, (ed. by Claudine Gothot-Mersch), Paris: Folio, 2001.
- *Œuvres de jeunesse*, (ed. by Claudine Gothot-Mersch and Guy Sagnes), Paris: NRF Gallimard, 2001.
- *Par les champs et par les grèves*, (ed. by Pierre-Louis Rey), [n.p.]: Editions Pocket, 2002.
- *Salammbô*, (ed. by Henri Thomas), Paris: Folio, 1970.
- *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, (ed. by Jacques Suffel), Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967.
- *Trois contes*, (ed. by Pierre-Marc de Biaisi), Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1986.

Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve (Pastiches et mélanges, Essais et articles)*, (ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre), Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1971.

- *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in IV vols, (ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié), Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1987-89.

## Introduction

This thesis considers new and important aspects of the engagement between Flaubert and Proust. There are at least six extant readings of the two authors, all proceeding from the same facts: in 1908, one of Proust's works-in-progress was an essay entitled *Sur Sainte-Beuve et Flaubert*. There was also an essay, written for the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1920, entitled *A propos du 'style' de Flaubert*. But the first essay never saw the light of day. Had Proust, in the interim, abandoned his favourite author, whom he imitated so wittily in his *pastiches*? Hardly. Flaubert is ever-present in the Proustian work, but always at a remove. The unearthing of Proust's voluminous *Correspondance* and the deciphering of his manuscripts allowed structuralist and genetic criticism to transform a wholly impressionistic reading of Proust's work into a more certain enterprise. At the moment Proust's novel was conceived, Flaubert was very much in vogue with the *actualité éditoriale*, and in Proust's readings and re-imaginings of Flaubert the former found themes, motifs, images and characters that he could intercalate into his own work. Through the author of *L'Education sentimentale*, Proust gave expression to his aesthetic; surpassed and transgressed the poetics of the latter. Flaubert became Proust's double, really and fictively, but was always held at a distance. We shall focus on interdiscursive borrowings of Proust from Flaubert in a moment.

The present study examines 'culture' in its widest sense, beginning with the historical underpinnings of the writing of the two authors, in Part One. Amongst the many provocative statements made by Lionel Gossman in his *Between History and Literature*, we find the curious statement that, in the modern world, History, as a discipline, has become a

fetish, a perversion, even.<sup>1</sup> The Frankfurt School, and then Derrida and Foucault fostered a kind of ethical, politically motivated and scientific approach to anything and everything. It was a far cry from the late eighteenth century, when Voltaire and Gibbon were writing history as a literary genre. They had no doubt that they were writers in a genre with a noble pedigree, stretching back over generations. Michelet and Burckhard also saw themselves as writers of epic histories. The border between literature and history has always been permeable, and the work presented here represents some years' reflection on the terms 'history' and 'literature'. The topics studied in Part One of the thesis concern precisely the historiographical import of texts demonstrating 'literariness'. If awareness of the literary character of history dissolves for us the necessity and objectivity of historical categories, awareness of the historical character of history forces us to recognise that literary categories are neither universal nor necessary. Underlying this study is the belief that neither history nor literature can provide a *terra firma* from which the other can securely be surveyed. Until recently at least, history has been a narrative in words, and for that very reason it has been subject to literary and rhetorical analysis. Like everything else, moreover, literature and language are also historical phenomena, and as no essence of 'literariness' has ever been discovered, the search for a defining logos probably reveals more about a particular cultural moment and its ideologies than it does about the nature of literature. Both Flaubert's and Proust's narratives are grounded, I shall demonstrate, in the socio-historical framework of their times. Proust minutely catalogues the temporal markers of the *Belle Epoque*, and Flaubert writes meta-historical analyses of contemporary historiography.

A very different type of structural analysis of literature has been undertaken by the anthropologist and critic René Girard. Through a close reading of five major novelists –

---

<sup>1</sup> Lionel Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, London: Harvard University Press, 1990, see particularly pp. i-x.

Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust and Dostoevsky – Girard attempts to define the essence of a certain type of novel, and the mechanisms of desire operating within them. His study extends beyond the scope of literature into the psychology of much of our contemporary life and society, including fashion, advertising and propaganda techniques. In considering such aspects in relation to his central theme, Girard goes beyond the domain of pure aesthetics and offers an interpretation of some basic cultural problems of our time. Girard is thought to be one of the most important, if controversial, theorists of the twentieth century. In Part Two of the present study – which I believe to be the only one of its type – I aim to unpack the hypotheses at the centre of Girard’s thought on mimetic desire, surrogate victimhood and scapegoating, to bring new insights into areas such as motivation that Girard discusses only briefly, if at all.

‘Culture’ has many facets, and in Part Three of the present study, I weave together art and literary history in a joint study of these fathers of the modern. Modernity, I argue, is a blending and hybridization, as well as a movement between image and text. Both Flaubert and Proust ‘contaminate’ their works with visual representations. There is an element of negativity in this work which I have not been able entirely to expunge. As Adorno has it, art, even Realist art, always has been a force of protest of the humane against the pressure of domineering institutions, religious or otherwise, even while at the same time it reflects their objective substance.<sup>2</sup> Be it observed that I take the general point from Althusser that I do not rank art amongst the ideologies, although art does have a particular and specific relation to ideology. Art makes us *see*, which is not the same as to know; it makes us perceive in some sense from the inside, the internal distance, the very ideology in which art

---

<sup>2</sup> Theodor Adorno, ‘Theses Upon Art and Religion Today’ in *Noten zur Literatur*, Vol. XI of *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Mein: [n.e.] 1974, pp. 194-5.



is held.<sup>3</sup> Flaubert's texts perpetually enact a production and repression of the visual, whilst Proust's theory of involuntary memory has its roots in aesthetic appreciation.

But let us begin in the area in which perhaps the most productive work on Flaubert and Proust has been undertaken: the realm of genetic criticism. There is nothing particularly new or surprising about comparative or even parallel readings of Flaubert and Proust. For Mireille Naturel, author of the most comprehensive study of the two writers, *Proust et Flaubert: Un Secret d'écriture*,<sup>4</sup> the idea of a project on Flaubert stems from a fundamental enigma: the role of quotations at the *Dîner de Guermantes* in *Le Temps retrouvé*, which were deleted from the Gallimard notes in 1919 and added later to the manuscript again.<sup>5</sup> In the same way, the Goncourt pastiche of *Le Temps retrouvé* appears only in a parenthesis and did not figure in the original *ébauche*.

Certainly, Flaubert is not the only literary influence on Proust; Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Chateaubriand, Nerval, Baudelaire and Saint-Simon were all considered 'aimables poteaux indicateurs' by Proust.<sup>6</sup> In discussing possible models for Bergotte, Anatole France is often quoted.<sup>7</sup> But Flaubert remained the principal influence and was the basis for Proust's first published text, *Mondanité et mélomanie chez 'Bouvard et Pécuchet'*. He is omnipresent in the series of pastiches devoted to the *Affaire Lemoine*, amongst which appears a pastiche of Flaubert, followed by one of Sainte-Beuve caricaturing Flaubert. In 1908, on the 5 or 6 of May, Proust wrote to Louis d'Albufera that he was writing 'une étude sur la noblesse, un roman parisien, un essai sur Sainte-Beuve et Flaubert, un essai sur les femmes, un essai sur

---

<sup>3</sup> Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London: [n.e.], 1971, pp. 202-203, in Mireille Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert, Un secret d'écriture*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Naturel gives virtually no page-references. I have tried to locate these where possible.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Levaillant, 'Note sur le personnage de Bergotte', *Revue des sciences humaines*, jan-mars, 1952, pp. 33-48.

la pédérastie (pas facile à publier) une étude sur les vitraux, une étude sur le roman'.<sup>8</sup> Proust's *Correspondance* reveals that as early as 1913 Proust had the intention of writing on Flaubert and that his interest was limited to what, on 1 January 1920, was published as *A propos du 'style' de Flaubert*.

It is undeniable that the years 1910-1920 saw a great resurgence in interest in Flaubert. His style (or what passed for such) was widely imitated in official discourse. A number of his early works, notably the *Œuvres de jeunesse*, were 'discovered' and published. Louis Bertrand's *Gustave Flaubert, avec des fragments inédits*, was published by *Le Mercure de France* in 1912 and the *Editions Conard* published the *Œuvres complètes* in 1910. This is almost certainly how Proust would have come across *Par les champs et par les grèves*, which he had initially borrowed in 1896, whilst writing a piece on Beg-Meil for *Jean Santeuil*.<sup>9</sup> The *Mémoires d'un fou* were published for the first time in the *Revue blanche*, according to the original manuscripts, in December 1901 and January / February 1902. The 1845 version of *L'Education sentimentale* was first published in the *Revue de Paris* between November 1910 and February 1911, before appearing in the *Œuvres complètes*, containing the *Œuvres de jeunesse*. *Madame Bovary* appeared for the first time in the *Œuvres complètes*, whilst Bertrand popularised the (first) *Tentation de Saint Antoine* before it was also included in this volume. Flaubert's correspondence with George Sand and with his niece, Caroline, were published in 1904 and 1906 respectively. Proust read them avidly and undoubtedly, this had an influence on the identification of Proust with his predecessor.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> VII 113, Kolb edition of Proust's *Correspondance*, quoted in Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert*, p. 12.

There are obvious parallels in the lives of the two authors. Albert Thibaudet, in a letter dated 28 June 1920, underlined a biographical link between the two men: ‘Avez-vous remarqué que le couple d’ailleurs fort élégant d’un littérateur et d’un médecin est fréquent dans nos familles françaises? J’en connais – avec ceux de Flaubert, de Maurras – quantité d’exemples’.<sup>11</sup> Both had medical fathers and brothers. The first never recovered from the death of his sister, the second from that of his mother. Both obtained positions as functionaries at the Mazarine, and both were semi-invalids, who suffered from severe neuroses, transforming them into prodigious creative forces, for which they sacrificed everything. Death surprised them before they could complete their work.<sup>12</sup>

There are thousands of subjacent borrowings in Proust from Flaubert, and a much more concise account of the inter-discursive borrowings of Proust from Flaubert is to be found in Annik Bouillaguet’s *Proust lecteur de Flaubert et de Balzac: une imitation cryptée*.<sup>13</sup> Like Naturel’s work, this stems from the school of ‘genetic criticism’ and looks at the traces left by Flaubert in Proust’s *avant-textes* (letters, *cahiers* and alterations to manuscripts). Proust was, at the outset, a *pasticheur* of Flaubert, Balzac and others, and it is in the mode of pastiche that most intertextual borrowings operate in Proust. Jean Milly proposed this definition of the activity of the *pasticheur* in 1967:

Le pasticheur interprète comme une structure des faits redondants du modèle [et] grâce à l’artifice d’un nouveau référent, il reconstruit cette structure plus ou moins fidèlement selon l’effet qu’il veut produire sur les lecteurs.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> In Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn*, New York: OUP, 1963, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Annik Bouillaguet, *Proust lecteur de Flaubert et Balzac: une imitation cryptée*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Milly, ‘Les Pastiches de Proust, structure et correspondances’, *Le Français moderne*, 35, 1967, p. 37.

The communicative function alluded to at the end of the passage reminds us of the connotative function alluded to by Roman Jakobson, as does the idea of a new referent, the referential function. These two functions, to which we might add the metalinguistic and poetic functions (judiciously re-baptised ‘the stylistic function’ by Riffaterre) constitute, in their various combinations, different types of structure.<sup>15</sup> Proust was always insistent on the musicality of pastiche, whatever its structure, as he pointed out in a letter to Robert Dreyfus on 21 March 1908 on the subject of a pastiche of Renan:

Il m’en venait tellement à flots que j’ai ajouté sur les épreuves des pages entières à la colle, et tellement à la dernière minute qu’il y a des citations de Madame de Noailles que je n’ai pas pu vérifier. J’avais réglé mon métronome intérieur à son rythme et j’aurais pu écrire dix volumes comme ça.

These lines open what today is conventionally taken as the end of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, in the revised form (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 312). In the edition today the fragment forms part of the ‘Note sur la littérature et la critique’. Both passages expose the procedure of pastiche, that of having a melody in reading, which then espouses both the tune and the metre. Those combine into what we would describe as inspiration – the vital *pulsion d’écrire*. As Proust expresses it in the last paragraph of *Sainte-Beuve*:

Les belles choses que nous écrivions si nous avons du talent, sont en nous, indistinctes, comme le souvenir d’un air qui nous charme sans que nous ne puissions en retrouver le contour, le fredonner, ni même en donner un dessin qualitatif, dire s’il y a des pauses, des suites de notes rapides. (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 312)

---

<sup>15</sup> M. Riffaterre, *Essai de stylistique structurale*, [n.p.]: Flammarion, 1971.

Suggestive both of prolixity and of only the work in progress being absent, the musical air which remains to be found resembles, if only by metaphorical verisimilitude, the musicality of reading. Between reading and writing, between pastiche and ‘the novel to come’, there is only reminiscence, in the Platonic sense of the term.

The above quotation reveals to us, at a time when Proust was considering his vocation (the conditional mood seems to convey an aspiration) that Proust felt the work to come as a distant memory, whether within himself or another, we cannot say. The continuation of the text confirms that the reminiscence in which he delights has Platonic overtones: ‘Ceux qui sont hantés par ce souvenir confus de vérités qu’ils n’ont jamais connues sont [des] hommes doués’ (*Sainte-Beuve*, *ibid*). Proust is still unsure whether he is one of them, but time is running out: ‘Il arrive un âge où le talent faiblit comme la mémoire, où le muscle mental qui approche les souvenirs intérieurs comme les extérieurs n’a plus de force’ (*Sainte-Beuve*, *ibid*). Imitation of this type is, of course, not limited to the open pastiches (such as that of the *Affaire Lemoine*, which *Temps retrouvé* echoes) but becomes an integral part of *Temps retrouvé*, continuous, absorbed in the living material of the novel. Imitation of this type does not announce itself, but allows itself to be revealed in tiny clues, often very brief, but having an unmistakable flavour. These clues may be a particular noun, a series of nouns recomposing a description, an image or a novelistic theme, a character trait or a social custom.

Balzac is the clearest intertextual source for *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and Flaubert is alluded to much more discreetly. He is most evident in the passage where Morel is trying to rebuff the advances of Charlus (III 668), the comedy of the scene coming from the ever

more solicitous advances of the Baron. The Baron tries to persuade the young man to give up his lessons in ‘algèbre vespéral’, or at least, visit him after his class. ‘Impossible, c’est une vieille peinture italienne’, replies Morel, thus quoting the penultimate chapter of *L’Education sentimentale*. The source takes us back to a passage in which Frédéric Moreau, in a situation not unlike Morel’s, tries to direct Mme Arnoux’s attention, lest she should recognise a portrait of Rosanette ‘à demi cachée par un rideau’ (*L’Education*, p. 445) in the very image of Morel’s mistresses, on which Charlus’ suspicions fall.

Charlus himself initiates Morel into Flaubert, just as he will later with Albertine into Balzac. The disciple ‘par plaisanterie [...] ne prononçait jamais le mot ‘impossible’ sans le faire suivre de ceux-ci: “C’est une vieille peinture italienne”’ (ibid.). Here we find the same automatism as in *A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, in which the Madame of the *bordello* mechanically repeats ‘Rachel, quand du seigneur’, without understanding the reference to Halévy (II 567).

At times, Flaubert provides not the ‘noyaux’, around which a pastiche is created, to borrow Milly’s term, but the foil against which Proust writes.<sup>16</sup> Such is the case of Mme Verdurin, the ‘charmante femme à la parole vraiment amoureuse des colorations [de la] contrée’ (IV 291) who, it appears, has left her fictional status in one text, only to reappear within another, the *Journal* of the Goncourt Brothers. The reader is not supposed to be duped by this pastiche, since the characters are all mentioned in *Du côté de Chez Swann*. Moreover, Edmond de Goncourt outlived Jules by 26 years, and refused to publish anything wounding to his entourage during his lifetime. This miniature pastiche, the only one in *A la recherche*, is supposedly written as the Goncourts take a journey around Normandy in Flaubert’s

---

<sup>16</sup> Milly, ibid.

footsteps. ‘Led’ to Trouville by Flaubert, they are alleged to have composed a ‘Flaubertian’ description of the sea, which opens: ‘A la fin du jour [...] l’étéignement sommeilleux de toutes les couleurs où la lumière ne serait plus donnée que par une mer presque caillée ayant le bleuâtre du petit lait’ (IV 291). The features of the Flaubertian text are quietly understated in Proust’s pastiche: the sea is not in its habitual state or colour, or at least, is not water but milk. And the milk is not in its habitual state or colour, for this blue is the quintessence of white. The adjective is suffixed with –âtre to give the indefinable and approximative character so dear to Decadent writers. The Normandy countryside, compared to an English park, is just as artificial. The utilitarian becomes the aesthetic, as the pear-trees become, under the eye of decadence, art objects of ‘le bronze d’un appliqué de Gouthière’ a sculptor much admired by the Goncourts.<sup>17</sup> The precious pear-trees become: ‘sur une porte de paysans [une] installation [simulante] une enseigne tout à fait ornamentale’.

We are a world away from the ‘fumiers’ that surround the pear-tree in *Madame Bovary*, but brought back to Trouville by the vegetation, the ‘fouillis des ronces, des houx’. In the Goncourts’ actual *Journal* there is a reference to ‘un forgeron devenu marteleur artiste de fer’ who produced ‘des feux de fer forgé, représentant un rosier, avec la légèreté, la souplesse, l’embuissonnement de l’arbuste’.<sup>18</sup> This is, as Bouillaguet points out, a ‘pastiche par opposition’, denying, but written in the name of, the Father.<sup>19</sup>

Let us take one further example of interdiscursive borrowing from Bouillaguet. Flaubert brings to the Proustian narrative a contribution that is less evident but perhaps more profound than Balzac’s. His intertextual (or, to borrow Genette’s term, hyper-textual)

<sup>17</sup> Bouillaguet, *Proust lecteur*, p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> Bouillaguet, *Proust lecteur*, p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

borrowing seems to have contaminated the novel on a number of levels. When Proust was writing his article *A propos du 'style' de Flaubert*, *A la recherche* was already in its embryonic form. Proust's thoughts on Flaubert were already taking shape, as evidenced in the notes *A ajouter à Flaubert*. These are partly-written notes which remain, in current editions, under the title, which is barely decipherable, as the editors tell us. It seems they were written in 1910, ten years therefore before the article proper, published in the *Nouvelle Revue française* in January 1908. It is not certain that these notes were ever intended to be part of *Sainte-Beuve*. It is noteworthy too that they are also posterior to the open pastiche of Flaubert, *L'Affaire Lemoine par Gustave Flaubert*, published on 14 March 1908. When viewed next to the article, the notes appear as a preliminary *ébauche*: certain remarks and examples (from *Bovary* and *Hérodias*) are textually identical to those found in the finished article. At this time, when *A la recherche* was under construction, Proust hailed Flaubert as 'un génie grammatical'. It is to the latter's syntax that Proust is particularly sensitive, which Bouillaguet calls 'une syntaxe de l'indétermination'.<sup>20</sup>

Flaubert's peculiar syntax stems from the positioning of the verb and subject. In his homage to Flaubert, Proust notes that in descriptions of things ('la vision') 'les choses [...] sont généralement le sujet de la phrase, car le personnage n'intervient pas et subit la vision: "Un village parut, les peupliers s'alignèrent" etc' (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 299). The *Lemoine* pastiche reproduces this process in almost every paragraph. Let us trace the description of the courtroom:

Pour finir, il attesta les portraits des Présidents Grévy et Carnot, placés au-dessus du Tribunal; et chacun, ayant levé la tête, constata que la moisure les avait gagnés dans

---

<sup>20</sup> Bouillaguet, *Proust lecteur*, p. 101.



cette salle officielle et malpropre qui exhibait nos gloires et sentait le renfermé. Une large baie la divisait par le milieu, des bancs s’alignèrent [...]’ (*Pastiches et mélanges*, pp. 13-14)

The same procedure is found in the character-sketches, whether of the presiding judge or of one of the audience, Nathalie. The character either becomes the primary object (‘une douceur l’envahit’) or a secondary one (‘ses favoris donnaient à toute sa personne...’). The technique is recognisable in a scene whose modernity is striking, as the protagonist discovers, in Elstir’s studio, paintings representing yachts and their rigging. The pictures are almost certainly from the Impressionist School, the new technique which Marcel discovers in Balbec.

Before his initiation into Impressionism, this is how Marcel views Brittany and Normandy from a railway carriage:

C’était, dominant la mer lointaine du haut de leur dune où s’accommodait déjà pour la nuit au pied de collines d’un vent cru et d’une forme désobligeante, comme celle d’un canapé d’une chambre d’hôtel où l’on vient d’arriver, composé de quelques villas que prolongeait un terrain de tennis et quelquefois un casino dont le drapeau claquait au vent fraîchissant, évidé et anxieux, de petites stations qui me montraient pour la première fois leurs hôtes habituels, mais me les montraient par leurs dehors – des joueurs de tennis en casquettes blanches, le chef de gare vivant là, près de ses tamaris et des roses, une dame coiffée d’un ‘canotier’ qui [...] rappelait son levier (II 22).

Objects (inanimate) being subjects (of verbs) and animate things becoming objects (of sight, but also of other senses) give the description its very substance and structure. It is the ‘petites stations’ which ‘dominent’ the sea, settle down for the night and show their ‘hôtes’. The latter sub-theme is developed into the main theme as it decomposes into tennis-players, a station-master and a lady out walking. In this description, the grammatical sense of the word (the word ‘hôtes’) becomes the subject, the multiple agent of any number of actions.

In his article, Proust remarks that ‘en contraste avec la variété des verbes’ which he has pointed out, Flaubert does not shy away from using ‘le verbe avoir, si solide’, which he frequently uses ‘là où un écrivain de second ordre chercherait des nuances plus fines’, citing as examples ‘les maisons avaient des jardins en pente’ or, ‘les quatre tours avaient des toits pointus’ (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 593). He has recourse to this verb himself in a passage in which the protagonist is walking around Balbec, coming out of Carqueville church which he has just visited. In a very brief scene, annunciatory of the meeting with the *jeunes filles en fleurs*, one of the girls ‘avait un teint bruni, des yeux doux, mais un regard dédaigneux de ce qui l’entourait, un nez petit, d’une forme fine et charmante’ (II 103). Could we see, in the use of such a banal verb, which Proust dubbed heavy and vulgar, a means of refusing the facile ‘mondain’ aestheticism by which writers show their ‘filiation avec le passé’? It appeared that the memory of Flaubert had achieved resurgence through the painterly description of a girl.

The opening passage of *L’Education* also shows Flaubert’s predilection for treating things as animate objects:

Le 15 septembre 1840, vers six heures du matin, *La Ville de Montereau*, près de partir, fumait à gros bouillons devant le quai Saint-Bernard. Des gens arrivaient hors d'haleine, des barriques, des câbles, des corbeilles de linge gênaient la circulation; les matelots ne répondaient à personne; on se heurtait; les colis montaient entre les deux tambours, et le tapage s'absorbait dans le bruissement de la vapeur. (p. 19)

As if to underline the identity between things and people Flaubert, not content with making inanimate objects the primary subjects of verbs of action, alternates objects and people: the boat, the cables, and then the sailors. There is an indistinctly human reference, 'on', and then the packages. The scene reads like a Flaubertian self-parody, in which things and people are quite indifferent: *fumait, gênait, répondaient, heurtait, montaient* and *s'absorbait* are used equally for the animate and inanimate. The structure of the sentence itself is built on an enumeration; it seems to advance to infinity by the juxtaposition of short phrases separated by semi-colons, the only markers of their ends. This famous *incipit* leads to an apparent banalisation of things and people: all are seen in an encompassing vision. It is thus that the narrator of *A la recherche* sees fragments of the landscape from a railway-carriage and, indeed, both narrators are departing on the journey of a *Bildungsroman*.

Proust reprises the aesthetic of indeterminacy in many descriptive passages of *A la recherche*, notably the second part of *jeunes filles*. Thus the narrator, on discovering the church at Balbec, sees everything in an instant of perception: 'Et l'église – entrant dans mon attention avec le café, avec le passant avec qui j'avais fallu demander mon chemin' (II 19). The role devolved to the character – the passer-by – is subordinate to that of the café, the word-order implies. Contrary to Flaubert's usual practice, it is animate beings which benefit from the attention to things when the latter appear important in the semantic confusion. This

is the case of the church at Balbec which, for the moment, the narrator perceives only fetishistically. The narrator has not yet learned to see as Elstir does, and the Flaubertian model symbolizes a youthful, untrained eye, of which maturity is the corrective.

One wonders why in *Temps retrouvé*, Flaubert should have been omitted from the ‘noble filiation’ of writers whose ‘sensations transposées’ and ‘ressouvenirs inconscients’ (IV 919-20) inspired Proust in his turn to defy Time and build his masterpiece on a similar foundation. In the essay *A propos du ‘style’ de Flaubert*, however, he admires unreservedly Flaubert’s ability to make music of the tenses: ‘Le premier, il les met [les changements de temps] en musique’ (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 595), and he admires him as his precursor in respect of his ability to give *l’impression du temps*, citing as illustrations passages where Flaubert conveys the flow of time in a highly individual manner. It seems to Proust as though by leaving *lacunæ*, by interposing an architecture of space and so of time between the bare verbs, the novelist had achieved a new and arresting effect. So in *L’Education* we read:

Et Frédéric béant reconnut Sénécal.

Il voyagea. Il connut la mélancolie des paquebots, des froids réveils sous la tente, l’étourdissement des paysages et des ruines, l’amertume des sympathies interrompues etc.

Il revint (p. 450).

If Proust had alighted on the first version of *Bovary*, he would have felt more than a passing affinity with the author, and been tempted to believe that he and Flaubert shared a common spiritual landscape as far as the construction of time was concerned: ‘Chaque

artiste semble aussi comme le citoyen d'une partie oubliée de lui-même, différente de celle d'où il viendra appareillant pour la terre, un autre grand artiste' (III 257).<sup>21</sup>

Margaret Mein in *A Foretaste of Proust* points out that both writers cultivate the 'iterative imperfect', Proust for its intense affective power, and both men for its fluidity, for the permanence which, in common with metaphor, it confers upon style.<sup>22</sup> In *Sainte-Beuve*, Proust claims that :

'J'avoue que certain emploi de l'imparfait de l'individualité – de ce temps cruel qui nous présente la vie comme quelque chose d'éphémère à la fois et de passage qui, au moment même où il retrace nos actions, les frappe d'illusion, les anéantit dans le passé sans nous laisser comme le parfait, la consolation de l'activité – est resté pour moi une source inépuisable de mystérieuses tristesses (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 70).

Albert Thibaudet calls attention to the Proustian character of certain passages of *Bovary*.<sup>23</sup> At the *Comices agricoles* Emma, held in thrall by the present situation – the scent of Rodolphe's hair – lives now in the present, now in various vistas of the past. There is a gentle imitation of reverie: 'Il se tenait les bras croisés sur ses genoux' (p. 207), before tenses and times blend in rhythmical dance. The transposition of senses, here released by the scent of hair pomade, enables Emma and the reader to transcend time. The vanilla and lemon exhaled by Rodolphe's hair recalls the Vicomte because the latter used the same hair oil. Next, sight intervenes; after half closing her eyes, in an effort to concentrate on the

---

<sup>21</sup> *Madame Bovary* was begun at Croisset on Friday 19 September 1851 and completed, perhaps, in Paris in April 1856. The period of composition falls roughly into three phases: the first phase of the novel was written from September 1851 to July 1852, the second from September 1852 to the end of 1854, and the third from the beginning of 1855 to April 1856. The primitive version was reconstructed from manuscripts by Pommier and Leleu.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1974, p. 161.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Thibaudet, *Gustave Flaubert*, Paris: Plon, 1922, p. 336.

scent and draw from it all its power, Emma arches her neck ('en se cabrant dans sa chaise')<sup>24</sup> and, in doing so, catches sight of *L'Hirondelle*, intimately associated with Léon's trips to visit her, and also with his final departure. As she imagines that she can feel Léon's hand in hers, the part of her past evoked by the pomade asserts itself again, and tries to gain ascendancy, and she feels she is moving in time to the waltz ('il lui sembla qu'elle tournait encore, dans la valse, sous le feu des lustres, au bras du Vicomte' (p. 213)) but it never ousts Léon's image or Emma's sense of his immanence. It is again the scent of Rodolphe's hair pomade which finds its way back to the immediate context, and so brings to a close the very dream it had initiated: 'La douceur de cette sensation pénétrait ainsi ses désirs d'autrefois'.<sup>25</sup>

Confronted with the preliminary version, Thibaudet might have been tempted to apply the term 'Proustian' to a host of other passages: 'Lisez cette page de *Madame Bovary*, et voyez à quel point elle contient (avec son style tout opposé) les tours, les détours et retours du temps perdu, à la manière de Proust'.<sup>26</sup> One cannot help but notice that much of this material concerns incidents of involuntary memory and the dislocation of time. The passages in question, as Mein remarks, almost threaten to overwhelm the plot and prevent it moving forward chronologically, and present, in essence, the same danger to syntax and the novel's structural evolution as Proust's interpolations and disrespect for outer time.<sup>27</sup>

Certain experiences can grow into so much part of ourselves, of our own duration that, dormant within us, they remain totally impervious to the flow of external time. When, yielding to Père Rouault's persuasion, Charles returns to Les Bertaux after his wife's death,

---

<sup>24</sup> Quotations from the *Pommier and Leleu* version, abbreviated here to *P et L*, quoted in Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 162. Other quotations from the present Flammarion edition.

<sup>25</sup> *P et L* in Mein, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Thibaudet, *Gustave Flaubert*, p. 336.

<sup>27</sup> Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 163.

he finds everything unchanged, only the natural season reflects mobility and a sense of flux (p. 81). The experience leads him to believe that within his mind there has been no interval or interruption. Whatever the change in the external season, inwardly the unity remains inviolate. The whole of the incident falls into two parts: the first, where the present appears to be identical with the past, exemplifies unity; the second, where the differences and, consequently, the interval of elapsed time become sharply present, exemplifies division within time. Thus Flaubert, anticipating Proust, demonstrates unity and disintegration within time, and vividly illustrates his own generalisation in the *Correspondance*:

On se dit: ‘Il y a dix ans, j’étais là’, et on est là, et on pense les mêmes choses, et tout l’intervalle est oublié. Puis il vous apparaît, cet intervalle, comme un immense précipice où le néant tournoie.<sup>28</sup>

On the return to Les Bertaux, the main stimulus to ponder time, and above all interior time, is afforded by the external scene, with a visionary light shed on material objects from within, a kind of union between subject and object.<sup>29</sup> A quotation which Georges Poulet selected from the 1849 *Tentation de Saint Antoine* suggests an interpretation of the subject and object verging on pantheism: ‘Un degré de plus et tu devenais nature, ou bien, la nature devenait toi’.<sup>30</sup> Flaubert conceives of the way in which one groups and arranges sensations as extremely important: ‘Il n’y a que des rapports, c’est-à-dire la façon dont nous percevons des objets’ (VIII 135).<sup>31</sup> The identity of the scene is all the more surprising since, despite the interval of five months, even the fire seems unchanged. Only one who had returned to

---

<sup>28</sup> Vol. III Conard, pp. 331-2, in Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> The union of the subject and object preoccupied Baudelaire in ‘L’Art philosophique’: ‘une magie suggestive contenant à la fois l’objet et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l’artiste et l’artiste lui-même’ (Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 1099, in Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 164).

<sup>30</sup> Georges Poulet, *Etudes sur le temps humain*, Paris: Plon, 1950, p. 320.

<sup>31</sup> In Mein, *ibid.* cf. Proust: ‘Ce que nous appelons la réalité est un certain rapport entre les sensations et les souvenirs qui nous entourent simultanément (*La recherche* III 889).

life after a resurrection could give such intensity of vision as we find in the Pommier and Leleu version:

La longue crémaillère de la cheminée avait toujours, à son crochet d'en bas, la même grosse marmite de fonte, se noircissant au fumignon de la bûche, qui semblait presque la même ou n'avoir pas brûlé sous ses cendres (*P et L*, 162).<sup>32</sup>

Such an experience as this was to make Verlaine in the poem *Kaléidoscope* exclaim at the supernatural clarity and apparently reinforced identity of things. Any experience of this type would seem to refute the Leibnizian theory of 'Les indiscernables' or the traditional claim that the static is impossible, and that flux will always triumph.

In the incident in question, the ticking of the clock forms the immediate sensation, establishing a link with the past, and eventually enabling the present to be displaced by the past; thus unity bridges any apparent gulf between the present and days long past:

Le grand balancier de l'horloge aussi battait dans la cuisine heurtant de droite et de gauche, à temps égaux entre les parois de sa boîte sonore – et les aiguilles marquant les mêmes heures...ramenèrent la pensée de Charles à des jours qu'il avait passés. Comme si depuis eux rien d'autre chose dans son existence n'avait eu lieu, il ne se rappela qu'eux seuls (*P et L*, 162-3).<sup>33</sup>

The sense of continuity is bound, by its creative element, to be in conflict with conventional time. A memory can, it is true, be recalled so suddenly that it seems an

---

<sup>32</sup> In Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 164.

<sup>33</sup> In Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, *ibid.*



integral part of ourselves and may be closer to our core identity than all that has happened in the interval. Proust explains this striking immediacy of the forgotten and now resurrected by claiming that its very detachment in oblivion alone has enabled us to preserve our reactions and spontaneous selves completely intact, shielded from the ravages of habitual use or voluntary memory. There is a foretaste of Gide's belief that only the essence of spontaneity, *l'acte gratuit*, in fact, can embody and reveal *le moi profond*.

All moments intermingle and are, in reality, consubstantial. Only one's intelligence establishes artificial distinctions or divisions. As Proust writes in *A la recherche* of the subsequent intervention of intelligence:

Mes rêves de voyage et d'amour n'étaient que des moments – que je sépare artificiellement aujourd'hui, comme si je pratiquais des sections à des hauteurs différents d'un jet d'eau irisé et en apparence immobile – dans un même et inflexible jaillissement de toutes les forces de ma vie (I 87).

Only at the end of this moment in *Bovary*, when the representation of the past within the present threatens to overwhelm the novelist, does Flaubert's sense of disunity in time begin to reassert itself. This is the supreme moment of unity as long as it endures, past and present merging indissolubly, as they did for the narrator at Combray, when the prolonged ringing of the doorbell only superficially betokened interruption from forgetfulness. Here, we might imagine we were reading Proust when Flaubert tells us:

Un instant interrompu par cet intervalle oublié, sa sensation lointaine continuait, le passé se trouvant être maintenant le présent et son souvenir une émotion renouvelée (*P et L*, 163).<sup>34</sup>

The vision is already beginning to fade from the moment that Charles awakens to a realisation of the changing of the seasons and recognises the law of flux and change, when he emerges from his world of timelessness. Withheld from sight as long as he remained engulfed in the stream of consciousness, the differences between past and present stand out clearly. The division within time which the last part of the incident reveals is exemplified in Proustian terms in the first *L'Education* of 1845. Whilst *dédoublement*, if not disintegration of personality, amazed and confounded Flaubert to the point of making him assume 'une vie antérieure', we are reminded that such fragmentation in his life was to take Proust further and make him doubt whether any unity of personality remained beyond death. Flaubert's glance is still retrospective, but his mention of the part played by the scene in reviving an experience foreshadows the role of setting, and an analogous sensation in Proustian incidents:

Effrayé de ses souvenirs, rendus plus vivaces encore par la présence de ces lieux où ils avaient été des faits et des sentiments, il se demandait si tous appartenait au même homme, si une seule vie avait pu y suffir, et il cherchait à les rattacher à quelque autre existence perdue, tant son passé était loin de lui! (*Œuvres III*, 242).<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> In Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 164.

<sup>35</sup> The passage is quoted in Poulet, *Etudes*, p. 320.

Unity and disintegration seem related rather than polar opposites. Indeed, unity paradoxically expresses itself, as Mein points out, ‘in and through its opposite’.<sup>36</sup> Flaubert believes strongly in the unity of all spiritual life, and finely observes that a change in routine, anything that breaks the continuity and produces silence, alone enables us to recognise most clearly the strength of previous experience. The force of a prolonged vibration, he asserts, can best be measured by the force of the silence that ensues; just as we become aware of sounds through silence, so inner life makes itself most powerfully felt through an irruption into the continuity of life.

The terms which Flaubert uses vividly foreshadow Proust’s ‘sonorité identique’. The notation of sound by silence, of sensation in negative terms, derives in Proust’s case from an innate tendency to ‘syncopate with’ external time, to enjoy reality always at a remove, never directly, but refracted through a medium. Such a temperament finds full scope and vindication in memory and metaphor. This notional endowment and, perhaps, illness, propelled Proust in this direction, transforming him into the Noah of legend, cut off from direct experience by the flood. In the *Dédicace* to *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, he confesses that illness really enabled him to understand Noah’s depth of spiritual vision. From a strange combination of nature and necessity, Proust seems to exemplify a form of reversal in his innermost essence as well as his technique. In a letter written to the Princesse Bibesco, 1 May 1912, he reveals both the obliqueness of his quest and his approach: ‘Rien n’est plus étrange que de chercher dans la sensation à plus forte raison dans la réalisation matérielle la présence du bonheur’.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 165.

<sup>37</sup> In Mein, p. 165.

For Proust, the cooing of pigeons partakes of silence, but most subtly, before reaching him, it has to pass through colour and the image of ‘une première jacinthe déchirant doucement son cœur nourricier pour qu’en jaillit, mauve et satinée, sa fleur sonore’. At Combray, scents are ‘la fine fleur d’un silence...nourricier’.<sup>38</sup> The stress is on the elusive essence rather than the directly obtainable reality, ‘trop en mon pouvoir’, as Proust has it in the above letter. It is everywhere apparent in this writer, lying at the heart of his conception of metaphor, and relating him closely to the Symbolists. Flaubert also experiences reality and the essence of unity at a remove and through its apparent negation. He thus anticipates the Platonic position of Proust, namely his enjoyment of reality in a spiritualised form, between the past and the present, and outside time. As we shall see, Proust enjoys reality through memory, through dreams and, above all, through art; Marcel delights in finding the world through Bergotte’s writing or Elstir’s painting. The world is transformed by the interplay of analogy. Without being anything like Charles Swann, an artist who has failed, Emma Bovary is, in many respects, consubstantial with her author, and her *delectatio morosa* is charged with the artist’s dilemma in general, and with that of Flaubert and Proust in particular: it is the problem of the disproportion of the dream and reality. For Emma as for Marcel, the drama remains on a purely emotional level.

When Léon has left Yonville, and thereby plunged Emma into despair, Flaubert analyses this reaction until it assumes universal significance. Since the experience owes its birth to an event which has interrupted habit, it is an intensely human situation leading to a nostalgia for things past:

---

<sup>38</sup> These quotations are to be found in Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 166. I have not been able to locate them in the original.

C'était cette tristesse qui suit l'accomplissement de tout ce qui ne vous reviendra plus, cette fatigue sans fond, que tout fait laisse derrière soi, cette douleur enfin qu'apportent au corps ou à l'âme toute action résolue, les séparations, les morts, les départs, les arrivées quelquefois, les habitudes brisées, les plaisirs accomplis, l'interruption de tout mouvement accoutumé, la cessation brusque de toute vibration prolongée. Le silence qui lui succède devient ainsi la mesure même de sa sonorité et l'on aperçoit de sa durée à l'étourdissement qui vous saisit (*Bovary*, p. 414).

Does not Flaubert stress here the need to lose an experience, at least in time and in terms of material, external reality, before one can realise its depth and value? For Proust, a further consequence of this 'syncopation' between events and their realisation will be the artist's need to withdraw in order to create.

Involuntary memory inspires Flaubert generally with the sense of a void, a feeling that the past has somehow become detached, belonging to another 'moi' and now leads an independent existence. Proust shares with Flaubert this *sensation du gouffre* and its accompanying vertigo.<sup>39</sup> In a letter to Louis Bouilhet of 23 August 1853, Flaubert records his impressions of visiting Trouville after a gap of eleven years: '...il semble, à certains moments, que l'univers s'est immobilisé, que tout est devenu statue et que nous vivons seuls'. Flaubert's terms are Proustian as he contemplates this inner fragmentation, a veritable death before its time.

Nothing of eternal Nature would seem to match the speed of our inner flux, of our infinite mobility. This is truly time in disintegration:

---

<sup>39</sup> Although he uses the same term, Baudelaire's act of recoil before the abyss is more Pascalian and more metaphysical.

Et est-ce insolent la Nature! On se torture l'esprit à vouloir comprendre l'abîme qui nous sépare d'elle. Mais quelque chose de plus féroce encore, c'est l'abîme qui nous sépare de nous-mêmes. Quand je songe qu'ici, à cette place, en regardant ce mur blanc à rechampi vert, j'avais des battements de cœur et qu'alors j'étais plein de 'Pohésie', je m'ébahis, je m'y perds, j'en ai le vertigo comme si je découvrais, tout à coup, un mur à pic, de deux mille pieds au-dessous de moi.<sup>40</sup>

We are reminded here of Proust, baffled by the extent to which desire over-reaches itself and parts of the human personality syncopate with events. At the end of *Temps retrouvé*, he experiences the same sense of *vertige* on beholding the space of time which he contains: 'J'éprouvais un sentiment de fatigue et d'un effroi que tout ce temps si long [...] était moi-même [...] qu'il me supportait, moi, juché à son sommet vertigineux, que je ne pouvais me mouvoir sans le déplacer' (III 1047).

Both Flaubert and Proust conceive of the past either as a potential burden, ready to assert its claims and oust the present if it can or, when dwindling, as likely to indulge in elegiac lament and plead for rebirth, but hardly ever achieving synchronicity with the present or future. Action alone, as opposed to reverie, would seem capable of redressing the balance, but Emma belongs to a world where, as for Baudelaire, action bears little relation to the dream.

What 'genetic' criticism does very well, is point out what is specifically 'Flaubertian' about Proust's writing and vice-versa, from a structuralist point of view. Years after Coleridge

---

<sup>40</sup> *Correspondance*, Conard, Vol. III, in Mein, *A Foretaste of Proust*, p. 167.

asked himself ‘What am I doing when I write a poem?’, the question of what precisely we do when we write and, more importantly, how a complex literary text takes shape in the course of its genesis, is still far from being resolved, although it has, in recent years, become the subject of a wealth of psycholinguistic, cognitive and sociological studies. The main objective of the genetic school, as defined by one of its most articulate advocates, Almuth Grésillon, is to explain ‘par quels processus d’invention [...] et de transformation un projet est devenu ce texte auquel l’instruction confréera ou non le statut d’œuvre d’art’.<sup>41</sup> Genetic criticism effects a rapprochement between *A la recherche* and *L’Education*, which have long been hailed as the masterpieces of modernity.

Flaubert is commonly acknowledged as the founding father of the ‘modern’ novel, whilst Proust is considered as one of his intellectual heirs in the transition from the late nineteenth to early twentieth-century writing.<sup>42</sup> Discussions of the modernity of Flaubert tend to gravitate around *L’Education*, which set new standards for the treatment of narrative and the (increasingly difficult) relations between text and reader, owing to the growing complexity of mimetic representation.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, Proust himself, in the now famous *style de Flaubert*, claims that in *L’Education*, the Flaubertian revolution (i.e. his new mode of representation) was accomplished. *L’Education* and *A la recherche* compare in a number of ways. They are, as we have noted, both *Bildungsromane* (although the genre is treated quite differently in each case). Both are rooted in a specific historical context (the 1848 Revolution and the Dreyfus Case), and they both recount a young man’s first steps into Parisian high society. Love, desire and delusion form dynamic themes in both works, and

---

<sup>41</sup> Almuth Grésillon, *Eléments de la critique génétique*, [n.p.]: PUF, 1994, p. 206.

<sup>42</sup> See Larry Schehr, *Flaubert and Sons; Readings of Flaubert, Zola and Proust*, NY: Peter Lang, 1986.

<sup>43</sup> See *inter alia*, Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert, The Uses of Uncertainty*, London, Ithaca: Cornell, 1974 and Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert*, Cambridge: CUP, 1986.

both are now famous for their sharp social critique and exploration of the problematic notion of the Self.

Comparative readings of Flaubert and Proust are no longer based on the finished, published texts. From the very rich studies of the two authors, we know that *L'Education* and *A la recherche*, perhaps more than any other texts, underwent a complex process of transformation and revision. The published text that we appreciate is only the surface manifestation (the pheno-text, to borrow Kristeva's term) of a whole set of earlier, often significantly divergent, stages. Genetic criticism's investigation of the early phases of writing enlightens us about the intellectual and technical processes which give a literary work its present shape and meaning. It is likely to enrich, but also problematise, our understanding of the published text which, from this perspective, we can no longer take as our only point of reference.

The problem with this exploration of the genesis of structures – the diachronic approach par excellence- is precisely that its examination of narratological strands and thematic components of literary works ignores the very different historical underpinnings of their creation. Thus it will be the first concern of the current analysis, in chapters one and two, to establish the logos, the historical basis of each author's chronotope, or spacio-temporal dimension. But is it not forcing the issue to regard the novelist as an historian?

Perhaps Max Nordau's essay *The Meaning of History* can enlighten us, as it is contemporaneous with Proust.<sup>44</sup> Firstly, the confusion everywhere prevalent between history and the writing of history is to be avoided. The philosophy of history, even in the

---

<sup>44</sup> Max Nordau, *The Meaning of History* (trans. M. A. Hamilton), London: Rebman Ltd, 1910.



hands of its most distinguished exponents, has tended far too much to identify the object of description rather than that object itself. Freidric Schiller shared none of this arrogance, for he did not hold that nothing is history but what is represented by the historian. On the contrary, in his *What is History and Why it Should be Studied?* he says: ‘The historian selects from this mass of occurrences those which have had a direct influence, and one which can readily be traced upon the present aspect of the world and the conditions of the generations living today’.<sup>45</sup>

A long series of causally interconnected events can be traced back from the present moment to the origin of the human species, claims Nordau.<sup>46</sup> How then can anyone assume (or presume) to make an arbitrary selection amongst these countless causes of which effects continue to operate in the most direct linearity? Why should only those occurrences be selected which have exercised an influence and can readily be traced upon the present aspect of the world? Is an influence any less direct and any less important when it can be traced, not with difficulty but with ease? Most notably for us, as interested in literature, a superficial view of any human event will suggest invisible causes which are hardly ever “real” ones. To take but one example: Menzel on *The Last Two Hundred Years of History* begins his account of account of the French Revolution thus: ‘The greatest event of modern times, the French Revolution, began on the day on which [...] the long-desired meeting of the Estates-General, was opened by Louis XVI’.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Louis Blanc, writing his *History of the French Revolution*, states: ‘Preamble: History begins and ends nowhere. The facts which compose a world process are so obscure and confusedly connected that

---

<sup>45</sup> In Nordau, *The Meaning of History*, p. 2. This quotation is borrowed by Schiller from Kant. It seems illuminating, but on further inspection, barely justifies it.

<sup>46</sup> Nordau, *The Meaning of History*, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Wolfgang Menzel, *The Last Two Hundred Years of History*, Vol. I, p.1, in Nordau, *The Meaning of History*, p. 4.

there is no event of which the first cause or final result can be stated with certainty'.<sup>48</sup> He does not reach the Convocation of the Estates-General, in which Menzel saw the dawn of History, until page 258. Unlike the historian, the novelist has no such qualms about what to include in the work or its opening, whether it is the drama of a child going to bed or a steam-ship journey up the Seine.

The forms which determine events are often deeply hidden; the most penetrating insights and laborious investigation are necessary before they and their interrelation can be discovered. Knowledge which stops short of 'occurrences which have exercised an influence which can readily be traced upon the present aspect of the world', as we saw in Schiller, may explain history as it is written by Scribe in his *Verre d'eau*, or Pascal, when he claims that the whole history of the world would have been different if Cleopatra's nose had been a different shape. No doubt our *sympathy* is principally aroused by something whose relation to the present world and the condition of generations living today can easily be seen. But this only affords us a nebulous view of history. According to it, what is history for us today will cease to be so for future generations, and those works that are greeted with acclaim today will be assigned to the wastepaper basket tomorrow. What was history for the Orientals has never existed for the Europeans and vice-versa. History changes with place and time, and it wanders through the darkness of the past like a man with a lamp. There is a dim circle around it and, as it passes, darkness falls upon a spot that was bright a moment ago.

It is the caprice, or call it personality, of the historian / author which will decide the manner in which he treats and selects his material and this, according to the accepted definition laid

---

<sup>48</sup> Vol. I, 1847, In Nordau, *ibid.* I assume the translation is Hamilton's.

down by historians as a body, is History itself; the writer of History creates it. The danger of this view is those who have laboured at the loom of time sink into insignificance in comparison with the man behind, looking attentively and recording their work more or less objectively. History then, ceases to be a logical sequence of events arranged in a regular progression, whether that progression be intelligible or not, and becomes dependent on the cast of mind of a particular human being, who selects from the mass of detail what best suits his interests, gratifies his feelings and falls within his particular aspirations; its arrangement depends on his understanding, and its form, his abilities. In a word, History is no longer objective; it has become the subjective domain of the novelist.

Some historians speak of wanting to ‘extinguish the Self’ in order to display the naked reality of things, but well might Georg Simmel remark in *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*: ‘The gratification of Ranke’s wish to extinguish the Self in order to see the facts in themselves would destroy the success which he imagined he had gained by it. Self extinguished, there would be nothing left to observe the not-Self’.<sup>49</sup> One might observe that there would be nothing left to feel sympathy with human beings, which is arguably the impulse to any historical narration. The personality of any historian governs all historical discourse, Ranke’s included, and speaks in and through the impress upon the reader. Let us quote the settled verdict of Antiquity. The Ancients believed that the writing of History was an art rather than a science, for Aristotle assigned to it an aesthetic value only, bringing it closer to Beauty than Truth: ‘Poetry is more useful than history’, he says, and admits that ‘Fancy is the Mother of all history, as of all poetry’.<sup>50</sup> The admission became commonplace after Mommsen’s study, and thereby recognised a blood-relationship between the two; remarkably for one who wanted to place History on the level of scientific discovery. Nordau

---

<sup>49</sup> In Nordau, *The Meaning of History*, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *Roman History* (ed. Mommsen) in Nordau, *The Meaning of History*, p. 6.

quotes A. F. Pollard's *Factors in Modern History* in Mommsen's defence, claiming 'I make no apology for placing imagination in the forefront of all qualifications indispensable for students and teachers of history [...] Probably, it includes fact as well as fiction, and realises the power of signifying things unseen'.<sup>51</sup>

In its early Herodotean origins, history was a form of writing distinguished only from the *epos* by its prose form. Both Flaubert and Proust, it could be argued, are writers of modern epics. But, most importantly, Nordau says: 'Today, despite all its [history's] claims to rank amongst the sciences, despite its wordy, painful efforts to pass as a child of Truth, its real affinities are with the novel'.<sup>52</sup> The only difference between the historian and the novelist, then, is that the invention of the former is limited in regard to the facts, of which a recognised version is current. He cannot arbitrarily contradict what is established by the majority, but the play of his imagination is unfettered in all but a very few directions that are circumscribed by indisputable records. There is no exaggeration in saying that history, as it was written when Proust was at work, was a kind of *roman à thèse*, generally consciously, rarely unconsciously. To speak of a 'science of history' is to play with a term whose meaning cannot be altered capriciously.

Science, as the only systematic practice that is verifiable, is simply the knowledge of the causal connections of phenomena, and the universal natural laws that they express. It is true that the word is used in a wider sense to cover the descriptive sciences, which confine themselves, in the lack of any mental nexus between concrete facts, and observing them as accurately as possible, and arranging them according to external resemblances for the sake of convenience. But some historians deprecate as unreliable the use of the word 'science'

---

<sup>51</sup> A.F. Pollard, *Factors in Modern History*, 1907, in Nordau, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Nordau, *ibid.*

for such a mere catalogue of basic, empirical facts. Now History is not a science in the strict sense. Success may have crowned the philosophical historians who traced causal connections between facts and laid down laws governing their progress, but modern criticism makes short work of their dogmatic assertions.<sup>53</sup> Nor is History a ‘descriptive science’, in the Balzacian sense. The events it describes are forever withdrawn from empirical observation, experiment and examination, and nothing can be recovered from the traces that are left, except precisely those domains in which the novel is strong: conclusions, interpretation and rounding-off.

The other area in which the historian is deemed to differ from the novelist is in the accuracy of observation. It is in second place, as a less essential objection. History is never successful in conceiving events and setting them down exactly as they took place. It is superfluous to quote all the innumerable hackneyed anecdotes of the impossibility of acquiring from the various accounts of eye-witnesses an irrefutable picture of any event whatsoever. The developing methods of observing facts, as Proust was writing, by the increased use of photography, enabled us to obtain some degree of objectivity in our records of the phenomena visible to the senses, but the gain has arguably not been very great.

The canonical work which regards Proust as an historian is Michael Sprinker’s work on Proust and the Third Republic.<sup>54</sup> This critical reinterpretation of Proust’s work offers a fresh, socio-historical analysis of the novel. Departing from more formalist and rhetorical trends in recent Proustian criticism, Sprinker draws upon historical scholarship to assess Proust’s portrait of French society, and shows that the novel’s account of the class-structure

---

<sup>53</sup> See Anne Rigney, for whom history is essentially ‘headless’. *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Sprinker, *History and Ideology in Proust: ‘A la recherche du temps perdu’ and the Third French Republic*, Cambridge: CUP, 1994.

and the rivalry between the landed aristocracy and the Bourgeoisie during the first half of the twentieth century was both precise and critically engaged. He argues that in other areas, notably those of nationalist sentiment and gender politics, Proust offers insight into phenomena studied previously in only fragmentary ways. His study provides an original approach to history and literature and is one of the most thorough works of Marxist criticism.

Sprinker's work attempts to discover some of the historical specificity that permeates *A la recherche* and makes it the text that it is. Only by undertaking this type of investigation, claims Sprinker, can we begin to understand the true complexity and assess the lasting value of those works that, for whatever reason, have been enshrined in the European pantheon of High Art. Proust's reputation is well-established, and Sprinker aims to see whether and on what grounds, his inclusion in the canon is merited.

The principal and, in the end, only defensible reason for pursuing such a study is historical. Eric Hobsbawm has put the matter well in the 'Overture' to his *Age of Empire*, arguing that the peculiar contradictions of our own time were born in a period which reached its apogee in August 1914. He characterises the break as one with liberal capitalism and states that: 'Since 1914, the century of the bourgeoisie belongs to history'.<sup>55</sup> Whether or not we affirm his judgement of the bourgeoisie's demise, it is difficult to disagree with the view that bourgeois society's familiar institutions reached maturity and found general acceptance in the period just preceding the Great War. Parliamentary democracy (accompanied by universal male suffrage), corporate enterprise, mass-produced consumer goods (along with the modern advertising that sustained desire for them), mass communications - all the now

---

<sup>55</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, New York: Pantheon Press, 1987, p. 12.

familiar features of advanced capitalism, came into fruition during this period. This was a moment when the Euro-American bourgeoisie attained at one and the same time the apogée of their direct global domination in the form of colonial empires, and their greatest prosperity, comfort and stability in the national domestic sphere. Not without reason has the era been dubbed *La Belle Epoque*. Even as it served for so many who survived it as an Edenic memory of a more secure and stable world, so it seemed to many who lived through it to hold the promise of an eternally bright future that would reproduce the materially virtuous present.

Not everyone held such sanguine views, of course, but to the extent that it makes sense to call this period ‘bourgeois’ it can be said that the dominant ideology of the hegemonic class was optimistic. Even the dominated classes could share in this optimism, claims Sprinker.<sup>56</sup> The period also saw the growth of mass working-class organisations, including political parties which in one incarnation (the Second International led by the largest European political party, the German Social Democrats) reproduced bourgeois optimism. They believed that capitalism would inevitably evolve into socialism, through the sheer expansion of productive forces.

Among those who did not share in this view of liberal capitalism’s achievements and future promise were the titled nobility and landed gentry, those relics of the *ancien régime* that ‘persisted’ as Arno Mayeur has eloquently argued, long beyond the formal demise of their political and social hegemony in Europe.<sup>57</sup> In the heyday of bourgeois supremacy the European aristocracy waged a sometimes fierce, but more often quiet and subtle, rearguard action to stave off their ultimate demise, which they certainly felt to be anything but

---

<sup>56</sup> Sprinker, *History and Ideology*, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Arno Mayeur, *The Persistence of The Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, NY: Pantheon Press, 1981.

inevitable. Like the history of all hitherto existing society, that of the *Belle Epoque* was, from a certain angle, one of class struggles. This is the history Proust came to chronicle and explain in his enormous œuvre, *A la recherche*. Proust's novel remains significant to the extent that it illuminates a decisive moment in the formation of the modern world, from the Fall of Sedan to the Treaty of Versailles.

This is not to suggest that *A la recherche* is totally exogenous to the domain of ideology. Theories can at once be scientific, that is to say: a means for producing knowledge, and ideological, or products of distinctive socio-historical conditions – a point I take generally from Althusser and Foucault. Be it observed that I differ from them in attributing a knowledge-producing function to works of art, as Malcolm Bowie does in his *Proust Among the Stars*.<sup>58</sup> My own sense of the theoretical import of literary texts is close to the formulations of the young De Man:

If literature cannot be acknowledged as a scientific means of formulation, it can still, from a sociological point of view, go together with theoretical research and, in many cases, open up horizons, and offer possibilities which otherwise would not have been suspected.<sup>59</sup>

The scientific basis of Proust's *Weltanschauung* has been more than amply described in Nicola Luckhurst's *Science and Structure in Proust's 'A la recherche du temps perdu'*.<sup>60</sup>

That Proust's novel also forecasts something of the future that lay beyond its historical horizon, I hold out as a possibility, implied but barely argued for in this thesis. Proust not

---

<sup>58</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among The Stars*, London: Fontana Press, 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Ortwin de Graef, *Serenity in Crisis*, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> Nicola Luckhurst, *Science and Structure in Proust's 'A la recherche du temps perdu'*, Oxford: OUP, 2000.



only diagnosed the fall of the French aristocracy; he also discovered the contradictions in the historical contingency of bourgeois hegemony. Such, proceeding from Sprinker's original work, is my thesis in chapter one.

Flaubert is not generally acknowledged as an historiographer, but his works certainly embrace a 'poétique de l'histoire', to reprise Séginger's term.<sup>61</sup> Flaubert read Michelet very early on, as his tutor, Adolphe Chéruel, was a former student of the great historian. When Flaubert left the Collège de Rouen in 1844 and was obliged to rest for health reasons, he described a need to 'repasser mon histoire' (in a letter to Vasse de Saint-Ouen, January 1845). He perpetually revised his notes, partly for his own 'culture', and also with a view to tutoring his niece, Caroline. He corresponded with Michelet and frequented Alfred Maury, Alfred Baudry, Taine and even Renan, whose judgement he sought on the 1874 version of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, a work which brought together the history of religions and literature. From his *Œuvres de jeunesse* to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1880), his works have an historical dimension, be it ancient history, as in the case of *Salammbô*, *Hérodias* or the *Tentation(s)*, or modern, as in the case of *L'Education* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Even *Madame Bovary* textualises, in a different but no less critical manner, recent nineteenth-century history.

Flaubert's *Correspondance* shows the interest Flaubert took in History, and the place it occupies in his education, as well as in his aesthetic reflexions, where it serves as a model which art strives to imitate. History has a determining position in Flaubert's *œuvre* not only because he frequently draws on it, but because it is indissociable from the novel as a genre. In the *Correspondance* we see that reflexion on history engages him in wider critical

---

<sup>61</sup> Giselle Séginger, *Flaubert: Une Poétique de l'histoire*, Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2000.

thinking on the direction, meaning and knowledge of the subject, which has a direct bearing on the poetics of Flaubert's novels. From this point of view, Flaubert is certainly a man of his times. The nineteenth century is the period par excellence of history, as it reproduced and re-analysed recent events. Antiquity was also studied to provide a blueprint for future direction, and Flaubert read Polybius avidly in preparation for *Salammbô*. Reviews and institutions favoured the growth of history as a discipline and Time became the *a priori* of Knowledge.

Fascinated by times past and, in particular, Antiquity, Flaubert was interested in historians, philosophers of history, and other novelists, in their representations of distant and recent events, such as the 1848 Revolution. 'History' in English, as in its French cognate, has two accepted senses, as it designates both the unfolding of events (with overtones of untruth or fictional elaboration) and the discipline which studies them. The two senses merge in Flaubert when he speaks of History to his correspondents. He seeks both a knowledge of the past and 'un dépaysement temporel'.<sup>62</sup> When one reads the *Correspondance* one is struck by Flaubert's fascination for ancient times. From 1844 onwards he admitted his admiration for Antiquity and, perhaps remembering Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, denigrated his own era, one marked by the rise of Christianity: 'Les masses ont perdu leur poésie depuis le Christianisme. Ne me parlez plus des temps modernes, en fait de grandiose' (to L. de Cormenin, 7 June 1844). Flaubert signed his letters 'Polycarpe', as this austere Christian willingly vituperated against his own time, complaining abundantly about the mediocrity of his society, bourgeois prejudices and received ideas. History is, for Flaubert, a past which temporal distancing allowed him to idealise and thus oppose aesthetically to the ugliness of the modern world. After the trial of *Madame Bovary* in 1857, Flaubert announced that he

---

<sup>62</sup> Séginger, *Une Poétique de l'histoire*, p. 6.

would escape to Antiquity for his next novel: ‘C’est pour fuir toutes les turpitudes [que] je me réfuge désespéré dans les choses anciennes’ (3 February 1860). He loved the past as he loved the Orient, for its difference from a modern, Western world in which Beauty seemed dead. Claiming to the Goncourts that ‘Les morts m’intéressent plus que les vivants’ (3 July 1877) Flaubert believed in the transmigration of souls and thought he had been reincarnated many times.

Changes in methodologies, a certain finality, and change in the way the objects themselves of historiography were viewed, which the long nineteenth century witnessed, all leave their traces in Flaubert. The nineteenth century may not have invented historiography, but Flaubert claimed that ‘Le sens de l’histoire date d’hier. Et c’est peut-être ce que le 19ème siècle a de meilleur’ (to Goncourts, *ibid.*). The eighteenth century had manifested a great interest in History, and neither Montesquieu nor Voltaire had been content to write purely evenemential histories, but rather concentrated on the interrogative and explicative. At the extreme end of the century, Volney and Condorcet believed that History was developing towards a scientific progress of knowledge. Almost in the middle of the Revolution, Condorcet was writing the evolution of the human spirit and demonstrated that the *Lumières* could abolish error, superstition and dogma. The title of one work, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (1795) is significant; the era is one of unified knowledge, which is everyday evolving in a discernible direction.<sup>63</sup>

This is precisely what changes in the nineteenth century. This ‘historical sense’ of which Flaubert speaks is the consciousness that time does not merely play a role in the unfolding of events or the progress of knowledge, but appears, on the one hand, at the heart of the

---

<sup>63</sup> Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, Kingsport, TN: Athenian Press, 1967.

objects it circumscribes and, on the other hand, carries knowledge itself in a movement of transformation and differentiation which engenders ‘des savoirs’ and ‘des connaissances’ (in the plural). An historical sense would oblige writers such as Flaubert to rethink the totality of history differently, as a synthesis preserves difference, plurality and transformation. Whether history was recomposed literally (Michelet) or philosophically (Hegel) it had to be considered as a totality conciliating unity and movement.

Flaubert often stated that he felt alien to his own times. But his *Correspondance* shows that he defended history with a certain relativism which allowed him to distance himself from peremptory, bourgeois judgements. The history Flaubert writes in his novels is born of new theories and Flaubert’s belief in a ‘scientific’, epistemological history of Man. His works are, notwithstanding, highly critical of what were perceived as ‘new’ methodologies. In fact, Flaubert transforms history into narratives and figures which have the particularity of being less systematic than exploratory. He does not propose a new interpretation of history and, in fact, said to Louise Colet:

Du moment où vous prouvez, vous mentez. Dieu sait le commencement et la fin;  
l’homme le milieu – L’Art comme lui en espace, doit rester suspendu dans l’infini,  
complet en lui-même, indépendant de son créateur. (27 March 1852)

Suspicious of ‘la littérature probante’ (ibid.), Flaubert turned to infra-discursive narrative as a *mise en scène* of history. In fact, as we shall see in chapter two, *L’Education* problematises both history and psychology. The impetus of all writers is to create, claims Ginsburg, but 1848, shattering the dreams of an entire generation, made writing

problematic.<sup>64</sup> That the act of writing is circumscribed biographically, historically and culturally has already been established. The belief in a uniqueness of self, in its irreducible individuality, its unity and coincidence with itself, and the desire to capture this self through writing, through a language that is as individual and original as the self that expresses itself within it, all underlie Flaubert's works and are by no means unique to him. But the narrative impasse generated by writing – the doubling of the self and its alienation through representation, are also something Flaubert shares with other writers. But what we shall see in chapter three is that the attempt to circumvent this impasse leads Flaubert to develop certain strategies that end up generating a whole text. The strategy I shall analyse is not one designed to perform a specific task (that of demoralizer, for example) or to resolve in fiction a psychological problem, as Sartre maintains, that remained unresolved in life; neither is it a way for Flaubert to express certain ideas about the world.<sup>65</sup> It is a strategy to make writing possible.

The representation of Frédéric Moreau as a weak and vacillating character is determined by the needs of the narrative. For the narrative to continue, Frédéric has to be depicted as a character who undergoes experience in a disconnected way, who constantly oscillates between self-assertion and renunciation, and who is unable to choose. Frédéric's emergence as both character and narrator, as both self and eye that allows the story to unfold, requires that both his life and his story be failures. Frédéric cannot achieve anything in his life and receives no 'education' in this loosely-constructed text which, in Flaubert's own words, 'ne fait pas la pyramide'<sup>66</sup> and lacks unity, leads nowhere, and makes no sense.

---

<sup>64</sup> Michal Peled Ginsburg, *Flaubert Writing: A Study in Narrative Strategies*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.

<sup>65</sup> J-P Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille, Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Ginsburg, *Flaubert Writing*, p. 40.

In *L'Education*, the appearance, disappearance and re-emergence of the characters cannot entirely be attributed to Frédéric, who can neither choose nor renounce. Such events are governed by a rhythm created by the particular way in which the problem of representation has been solved in the novel. The particular solution of *L'Education*, I shall contend, is the creation of a character-narrator who lives through the fascination of historical events, but cuts that fascination short, so that events and narration move on, and so that the novel moves precisely by constantly interrupting a narcissistic duality. It does this by repeatedly introducing a third element, by creating a triangle, only for this to be reduced to a dyad as soon as one of the elements disappears or is excluded, until this new duality is again interrupted, up to the end of the narrative.

The dyadic and triangular nature of relationships (between characters and to history itself) means that Flaubert's work is susceptible to interpretation through the optic of the works of René Girard. Girard is best known for his work on sacred myth and ritual but, for other critics, he is an eminent structuralist who offers challenging readings of major works. Still others know him for his analyses of the Bible. Central to all aspects of Girard's work is his theory of mimesis, a basic hypothesis of the structures of human relationships.<sup>67</sup> Mimesis is Girard's fundamental construct and all of his interpretive and explanatory claims are based on this. Traditionally, *pace White et al.*, 'mimesis' has meant 'theory of representation', but in Girard's usage this term embraces a much broader range of phenomena.<sup>68</sup> Mimesis is said to be a 'mechanism' that generates a pattern of reaction and interaction, personality formations, beliefs, attitudes, symbolic forms, cultural practices and institutions. Girard insists that there is an intimate link between mimesis and desire and that conflict and

---

<sup>67</sup> See René Girard *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, Paris: Grasset, 1961, *La Violence et le sacré*, Paris: Grasset, 1972 and *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, Paris: Grasset, 1978. It is hoped the present study will extend insights into works that Girard discusses briefly, if at all.

<sup>68</sup> Hayden V. White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

violence, as well as a number of pathological and self-defeating behaviours, can be explained in terms of this link. He claims that failure to understand the relationship between desire and mimesis has been a fundamental blind spot in the various conceptions of human agency with which humanity, in particular the sciences, has worked. The individual agent is wrongly thought of as desiring spontaneously, that is, in direct and immediate relation to the objects of desire. Contrary to this view, Girard asserts that desire is ‘mediated’ or ‘mimetic’. This means that people desire ‘according to the other’ (‘selon l’autrui’) and not according to their own intrinsic preferences. And in Girard’s opinion, to fail to focus on the basically mimetic structure of human motivation is to miss the fundamental basis of human experience. Girard goes so far, indeed, as to claim that it is an increased mimetic propensity that is the primary factor behind the emergence of specifically human cultures: mimesis produces a sequence of interactions leading to what Girard terms the first ‘non-instinctual’ consciousness, and this experience is taken as the starting point for the sacred beliefs and rituals held to be the basis of human society. Moreover, a mimetic system is said to underlie the persistence and dynamics of certain invariant institutional forms, as well as the fundamental features of modernity. The theory of mimesis is then the foundation of the ‘Girardian cathedral’ as Dupuy has it.<sup>69</sup>

The present study does not aim at a total reconstruction of Girard’s discussion of mimesis. In its selectivity, my goal is simply to clarify some of Girard’s ideas about the role of mimesis in the two authors. To that end, I draw distinctions between various Girardian notions such as ‘acquisitive mimesis’, ‘mimetic desire’ and ‘internal / external mediation’.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> G. Dupuy, ‘Mimésis et morphogénèse’, p. 125, in *Ordres et désordres: enquêtes sur un nouveau paradigme*, Paris: Seuil, 1982, pp. 125-8.

<sup>70</sup> I think it is fair to say that a reader expecting a coherent formula, algorithm or grammar of Girardian poetics will be disappointed with his works. The most coherent explanatory work on Girardian principles, on which the emphasis has shifted over time, is ‘Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism’, (author unknown) pp. 9-19, in the now defunct *Berkshire Review*, 14, 1979.

In examining *L'Education* through the prism of Girardian theory, I aim to demonstrate that the motivational phenomena he evokes are accurate descriptions of desire and interaction in a particular corpus of literary works. I suggest that Girard intends these mimetic patterns to extend beyond the domain of literary representation. In my effort to identify what is unique in Girard's intuitions about desire, I have drawn on the philosophy of psychology and action theory, and I have also found it useful to relate Girard's assumptions to empirical work in non-Freudian psychology. Here is a domain in which the specificity of Girard's insights needs to be recognised, for Girard can bring new appreciations to Flaubert's novel which, too frequently, frustrates and disappoints.

In examining *L'Education* I discuss the role played by imitation and desire in Frédéric's character, and take up the dispute between cognativist and conativist stances in motivational theory. I examine how Frédéric's attitudes can be reduced to a mechanism of desire, and examine the (lack of) Frédéric's beliefs, desires and intentions. I subsequently analyse a minimal episode of mimetic desire (the return to Nogent). A key feature of this analysis is the 'desiring agent's' beliefs about the Other, the 'model'; it is the agent's 'tutelary beliefs' about the model that inform the imitative forms of desire. I demonstrate that there are various ways of 'desiring according to the Other' and distinguish between imitative and emulative form of desire, a distinction that responds to Girard's emphasis on the difference between internal and external mediation. In the analysis of Frédéric's desire, I demonstrate that a process of metonymic substitution between characters perpetually prevents the satisfaction of desire, and this saves the self from narcissistic fascination, but at the expense of turning a life into a sequence of failures. This movement of 'desire according to the Other' supplies Frédéric's desires, but ultimately at the cost of evicting him from the narrative. Frédéric learns nothing from his experiences, and yet the narrative must end.



If one surveys the literature on imitation, one quickly becomes aware that acquisition and appropriation do not figure amongst the modes of behaviour that are likely to be imitated. If acquisition and appropriation were included, imitation as a social phenomenon would be much more problematic than it first appears and, above all, more conflictual. If the appropriative gesture of A is rooted in the imitation of B, it means that A and B must both reach for the same object. If the tendency to imitate presents on both sides, imitative rivalry will be reciprocal; it will be subject to the back-and-forth reinforcement of communication that linguists term 'a positive feedback loop'.<sup>71</sup> In other words, the individual who first acts as a model will experience an increase in his own appropriative urge when he finds himself thwarted by an imitator. And recursively. Each becomes the imitator of the imitator and model of his model.

Violence is, claims Girard, generated by this process, or rather, violence is the process itself when two or more rivals try to prevent each other from appropriating an object. Under the influence of our judicial viewpoint and of our own, personal psychological impulses, we always look for some original violence or, at least, some well-defined act of violence that would be separate from non-violent behaviour. We want to distinguish the culprit from the innocent and, as a result, we substitute discontinuities and differences for the similarities and reciprocities of mimetic escalation.

Sacrifice is the traditional resolution and conclusion of a ritual because collective murder or expulsion resolves the mimetic crisis that ritual mimics. What kind of mechanism can this be? Judging by the evidence, this resolution must belong to the realm of what is

---

<sup>71</sup> *Mimesis and Violence*, p. 9.

commonly called the scapegoat effect. The term 'scapegoat' refers to two things: the ritual described in Leviticus 16 or similar ritual, which are imitations of an immolation. There is scapegoating as a ritual and scapegoating as an effect. By a scapegoat effect, I mean that strange process through which two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs or frightens the scapegoaters. They feel relieved of their tensions and coalesce into a harmonious group. They now have a single purpose, which is to prevent the scapegoat from harming them, by expelling and / or destroying him. This is precisely what happens to Saniette at the hands of the Verdurins, I shall show in chapter four. Charlus is also tortured, to a lesser extent. It must be remembered that *A la recherche* takes place against the backdrop of the Dreyfus case, a very public scapegoating, in Proust's eyes; the mystery of persecution is therefore at the heart of Proust's novel.

'Culture' is, of course, composed not merely of logos but of mythos as well. Heroic accounts of progress and the march of civilisation regularly grant a prominent place to the transformation of speech and thought from the mythos of Homer and Hesiod to the logos of Plato and Heraclitus, a move associated with the transformation from symbolic to rational discourse. The overlap between the two remained, however. The Greeks found that the juxtaposition of *mythomai* and *legein* the most comprehensive and effective way of drawing a multivalent contrast between true speech and deception (or, at least, ambiguity), between the straight line and the curved; also between that which is superficial and ornamental on the one hand, and that which is blunt but accurate on the other; and, yet again, between the

play of poetry and serious legal struggle. Neither though, was wholly associated with *alethēa* (Truth).<sup>72</sup>

Today, we are more likely to view mythos as ‘unscientific’ or even ‘untruthful’. To do so, however, is to confuse mythos with mythology, a subject unpicked by mythopoesis of the type Margaret Topping undertakes in *Supernatural Proust*<sup>73</sup> or *Proust’s Gods*.<sup>74</sup> The modern historical consciousness is more likely to explore how we can understand the hidden meaning of a particular people as mythos. The logos (or *gerede*) of a particular people always conceals the mythos. But arguably, there are two kinds of logos: one which denies its meaning and grounding as logos (as we shall see in the *Tentation* in chapter five) and secondly, a logos which preserves and shelters its meaning and grounding, for political purposes and the protection of bourgeois hegemony, as we see in the case of *A la recherche*, in chapter six.

Both Flaubert and Proust lived in an age of rapid scientific evolution, dominated, as Heidegger has it, by the ‘mathematical spirit’. As he points out in the *Question Concerning Technology*, the sciences are about things we already know.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, we do not get knowledge out of them; in a sense, ‘we bring it already with us’.<sup>76</sup> The technological character of our age conceals the mythos, as we shall see in *Bouvard* in chapter five, because it denies that it is a mythos at all, and presents every theory with the monolithic seriousness of logos. Yet the very enframing of our technological epoch is a constant form

---

<sup>72</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship*, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Topping, *Supernatural Proust: Myth and Metaphor in A La Recherche du temps perdu*, Cardiff: The University of Wales Press, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Topping, *Proust’s Gods: Christian and Mythological Figures of Speech in the Works of Marcel Proust*, Oxford: OUP, 2000.

<sup>75</sup> M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (trans. W. Lovitt), NY: Harper and Row, 1933.

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, *Writings*, p. 276.

of revelation and concealment, a form of poesis. By claiming that it holds the sole access to truth, logos marginalizes other paths to *alethēa*. Other forms of mythos which are also revealing / concealing include poetry, art, history and religion, which are all attempting to legitimate themselves in the face of science, and all find their place in the present study. In other words, when we understand ‘mythos’, we are not speaking of fabrication or untruthfulness, but of that which is the meaning and grounding of our society, which is taken up by our everyday discourse or *gerede*.

The task facing us is thus to resume, through an examination of Flaubert and Proust’s work, a central concern which, since the French Revolution, it has been the task of fiction to explore. The forms of this exploration animate the tradition in which Proust must be placed, and of which he was acutely aware. But the concept of a ‘tradition’ implies something more. Among the forces which determine the novel’s progression from Flaubert to Proust, the most essential is not the relation of book to book or writer to writer, but the relation of each writer’s effort to the object of his travails, of each work to the evolving social reality it tried to comprehend. The traditions of ‘Realist’ and ‘Modern’ novels are thus the reflections of the real movement of human history. The paradigm shift from Flaubert to Proust is the dynamic record of the individual’s situation in the face of an evolving crisis which placed the Self in unprecedented peril. The techniques of these novels are innovative because the crisis was unprecedented.

But there is a difference between the rate at which social crisis evolves and that of the conceptual formulations – what we commonly call a writer’s ‘vision of experience’ – which are a writer’s response to it. In examining Flaubert’s fiction, the emphasis, in chapter five, is on delineating the crisis at the heart of the logos, but I also demonstrate that that logos was

essential to Flaubert. At the time of writing, individuals experienced a rapid alteration of social relations and responded with attempts to understand what was happening to the people. *L'Education* was born, one might say, of a social emergency, and it brilliantly saw what, in the logos, the outside world might explain the individual's disorientation. Seeking individual meaning in the outside world is central to Flaubert's fiction, although the path is extremely difficult. The difficulty itself is reflected in the form of Flaubert's fiction.

By the time of Proust, the outward characteristics of the individual's crises were thoroughly known; the sense of emergency and its accompanying atmosphere of abrupt movement and tragic discovery, had died out long before. Proust had time to fill in a portrait that Flaubert had only begun to sketch. Proust's leisurely pace, his extreme detailing and exquisite awareness of his own artistic practice, are all symptoms of his position at the other end of this crisis.

Of course, Proust's task was not simply to resume. *A la recherche* culminates a whole evolution of attempts (from Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert) to understand the predicament of post-Revolutionary Man by advancing the analysis of the predicament to a new level of penetration. But Proust accomplished his task by conceiving of the subject more narrowly than had been done before. The object of his study as he defined it had been insisted upon relentlessly since the Realists, but never realised to the same degree before *A la recherche*. Proust decisively 'moved inside', to the mythos. The impression of hypertrophy we have in reading *A la recherche* is the immediate sign of how much 'inner territory' was opened up when Proust narrowed the subject matter of previous novelists' investigation. This work illuminates the history of this entire movement, as we shall see, by unfolding its most profound implications for individual consciousness. Placing Proust in the nineteenth-

century tradition means explicating these new relations of form to subject-matter and showing that what seems new in Proust are precisely those aspects of his system which subsume the implications of preceding systems and reveal retrospectively their latent content.

Finally, in the Technological Age, one of the associations of literature that is thought to reach beyond the material considerations of either writing or history is art. They are not distinct, but are intertwined. Literature, it is traditionally held, aims to replicate the vividness and immediacy of painting, whilst painting strives to appropriate literature's power to depict actions, emotions or ideas. This old aesthetic masks an unsettling implication: that a certain gap might appear in one cultural form, like a text, so that it invokes another form, like a painting, to supplement or authorise itself. This is clearly what happened at the end of *La Légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier*: 'Et voilà l'histoire de Saint Julien l'hospitalier, telle à peu près qu'on la trouve, dans un vitrail d'église, dans mon pays' (p. 108).

The present study contests, in chapters five and six, what remains of the most influential account of the beginnings of modern art, namely that of Clement Greenberg. Greenberg takes issue with the aesthetic doctrine of *ut pictura poesis* which, according to its classical formulation by Horace, prescribes that each art imitate the other. Fully conscious of this tradition, Greenberg argues that Modern Art 'happens' when both painting and literature expel any traces of the other. The two arts are obliged to separate, to attain 'purity' – a recurrent and telling word – in order for each to explore its own character:

Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself [...]. The task became to eliminate from the effects of each art, every effect that could conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art form. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of the standards of its quality as well as of its independence.<sup>77</sup>

For painting, this means, above all, purging the 'literary': Modern Art demands that a literary theme be translated into a purely scopic, two-dimensional term before becoming the subject of a work of art, which means its being translated in such a way that it loses its literary character. For Greenberg, the pursuit of purity begins with Manet, who became the first 'modern' painter by exterminating literature from painting.<sup>78</sup> Pierre Bourdieu offers the necessary corrective to Greenberg by arguing that one cannot take up the development of painting or literature as long as one separates the two arts. To read the invention of the modern artist (or writer) he insists that 'one has to go beyond the limits imposed by the division of specialities and abilities. The essential remains unintelligible as long as one remains enclosed within the limits of a single artistic or literary tradition'.<sup>79</sup> This gauntlet was the one picked up retrospectively by Flaubert.

Flaubert's responses to art were in fact highly personal. The present study traces an arabesque of the visual, present in all of Flaubert's writing. His works enact a repeated pattern of invocation and repression of the visual – a feature most prominent in the *Tentation*, which shows a reliance upon the image and a turning away from it, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion. The tensions of this lifelong confrontation are felt

---

<sup>77</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', IV p. 86, in *Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John Brian, 4 vols., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

<sup>78</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' in *Art and Literature*, 4, Spring 1965, pp. 193-201, p. 199.

<sup>79</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production; Essays on Art and Literature*, NY: University of Columbia Press, 1993, p. 238.

throughout Flaubert's work; behind characters, themes and *leitmotive*, we glimpse from time to time the fingers of the master puppeteer, displaying a related but quite distinct series of configurations. His comment in a letter of January 1845 to his niece, Caroline, is true not only of *Education*, on which it was addressed: 'Je rapporte à cette œuvre (suivant mon habitude) tout ce que je vois et ressens'. The relationship between image and text is, as the present study will show, one of the most important ways of seeing and feeling in Flaubert.

This will be seen in various guises and modes. In later life, Flaubert described himself as 'saturé' with images. He valued art for itself and for what it could bring to his own writing – thematically and formally, it provided confirmation that he was on the right lines, even if these paths take him in unexpected directions, as in the case of Brueghel's presentation of the *Temptation of Saint Anthony*. In Flaubert's rendering of the tale, we shall see how the author adheres to the thesis of desymbolisation, but in an original and nihilistic way. Flaubert reduces the religious content to that of a symbol, then by obfuscation or occultation, deprives that symbol of any ideological content. The visual in the text replaces the explicatory, I argue, and the style remains paratactic; conjunctions and words that express causal links are suppressed, replaced by interjections and queries, by repetition and synonymy. As the ideological content of the symbol is evacuated, the logos is clouded, lost in the syncretism not of Christianity but of Ophitism, and with it, the Word is lost.

Novelistic analysis consists of translating an idea expressed in general terms into an idea for a novel. And one of the several tasks *A la recherche* proposes, and which I shall analyse in chapter six, is the spiritual and aesthetic trajectory of the narrator. A great deal of *A la recherche* is given over to art, often as a commodity with both a use-value and a market



value.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the emancipated subjectivity of the work, the affirmation of the *right* to subjectivity, the championing of the freedom of investigation and the autonomy of artistic practice, all betoken Modern Art. But to say thus, we have to ascertain in what respects *A la recherche* is a ‘modern’ work. What this question asks for is a vantage point from which Proust can be compared with other authors, other artists, who are recognised as modern. This will involve some discussion of recurrent themes: ‘modern’, ‘modernity’ and related terms.

To say that Proust propounds a philosophy of art implies that there is such an entity as the philosophy of the novel. I advance the idea that a novel may be philosophically instructive, and not only through its speculative digressions intermingled with narrative. *A la recherche* gives us the means of thinking about certain subjects without being the simple transposition of a body of philosophical doctrine. *A la recherche* does, at times, seem to be a book of philosophy, a treatise on Time and Essence, but it is principally instructive on the philosophy of art, because of the concepts the novelist builds into his story. We will examine Marcel’s initiation into art in Elstir’s studio. Elstir is not just another artist in *A la recherche*, for whilst the others provide Marcel with sensory delight, and are his aesthetic benefactors, a particular canvas of Elstir’s is an organ of spiritual progress. What his painting teaches Marcel is how to come to terms with the material world. This is part of a greater initiation on Marcel’s part into a number of the Arts, notably music and poetry.

If there is a philosophy of the novel, there ought to be a recuperable logos within it. In the case of Proust, this is provided by Ruskin. Taking up this historical conjecture, in chapter six, carries us swiftly to the deepest levels of Proust’s creation: to the discovery of the

---

<sup>80</sup> Bowie, *Stars*, p. 7.

fundamental difference between seeing and knowing. Tracing the typology of reading – literal, figural and allegorical – in Proust’s reading of Ruskin, the present study will show Proust literally walking in the steps of Ruskin to bring his soul back to life, then turning away from the intellectual and erudite, which Proust terms idolatry, to a form of understanding we recognise as typically Proustian. Involuntary memory has its roots in art. What follows, in Proust’s itinerary as a writer, is a subtler expression incorporating Ruskin; the very text of *A la recherche* contains Ruskin’s soul, if the reader knows how to resurrect it.

If one steps back to examine the course of the novelistic tradition since the Realists, the entropy of fictional worlds in Flaubert and Proust seems evident. Writers since Flaubert have, of necessity, experienced social reality as a negation of their hopes and a resistance to their dreams of self-realisation. ‘What else could they communicate?’ asks Terdiman.<sup>81</sup> Until outward reality is altered, until the negation of this degenerescence, in some form yet obscure, restores positive energy to the relations between individuals and their world, fictions will be trapped in an impasse.

The task is rather to place Proust in the course of a tradition, but one which he himself denied. Proust’s tense and conflicted relation to historical consciousness is visible in the very vigour with which he denies it. This novel epitomises a system of thinking in which historical crisis has become painfully apparent. It seems so disastrous that, in its own defence, the creative mind begins to explore the realisation of human consciousness: ‘Les déceptions de ma vie me faisaient croire que la réalité devrait résider ailleurs qu’en l’action’ claims Proust. There is a palpable sadness in all retreats from the outside world, all flights

---

<sup>81</sup> Richard Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation: Self and Society in the French Novel From the Realists to Proust*, London: Yale University Press, 1976, p. 3.

‘inside’, from Flaubert to Proust. But in Proust, we find a defence of the Self, entirely absent in Flaubert, and we are able to comprehend to what extraordinary lengths the Self – which seeks realisation in concrete activity – will go to be something in the modern world. Proust correctly traced this back to a sense of ‘impuissance’ (*‘J’étais accablé de mon sentiment d’impuissance’, IV 618*). This pain had been felt by every writer since the Revolution. Moreover, there was no solace to be had either in Flaubert’s exterior world or Proust’s ‘inside’.

## Part I

## Chapter One

This chapter offers a fresh, socio-historical analysis of Proust's work. Departing from the more formalist and rhetorical trends in Proustian criticism, I draw upon historical scholarship to assess Proust's portrait of French society, and show that the novel's account of the class-structure and the rivalry between the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie during the first half-century of the Third Republic was both precise and critically engaged. I argue that Proust offers insights into phenomena, such as gender relations and the nature of nationalist sentiment, that previously had only been discussed in fragmentary ways.

The canonical statement of Proust's aesthetic is probably found in *Sainte-Beuve*, in which the method of historical analysis is persistently ridiculed. In the essay on Balzac, Proust accuses the latter of failing to distinguish between the triumphs of Art and Literature, which Balzac has scornfully placed on the same level ('sur le même plan', p. 265). Proust's contempt for historical realism is plain:

Une soirée dans le grand monde décrit par ... y est dominée par la pensée de l'écrivain; notre mondanité y est purgée, comme le dirait Aristote.

Paradoxically, however, Proust recognises in Balzac a certain historical interest of the type that can arguably be attributed to *A la recherche*. In the notes to the Balzac essay, Proust recognises that the *Comédie humaine* provides not only escapist art, but an historical snapshot:

Et comme tout cela se rapporte à une époque et en montre la défroque extérieure, en juge le fond avec grande intelligence, quand l'intérêt du roman est épuisé il recommence une

vie nouvelle comme document d'historien. De même que *L'Énéide*, là où elle n'a rien à dire aux poètes, peut passionner les mythologues. Peyrade Félix de Vandenesse, et bien d'autres nous ne semblaient pas très riches de vie. Albert Sorel nous dit que c'est en eux qu'il faut étudier la police du Consulat ou la politique de la Restauration (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 290).

It is possible and, indeed, highly enjoyable, to read Proust as a series of data, construing the fictional text as a presentation of punctual facts, whose pertinence is derived from selected details of an authentic period's historical appearance (say costume or décor). This is the approach taken by Sprinker in *History and Ideology in Proust*.<sup>1</sup> *A la recherche* can thus be understood as a record of the *Belle Époque* as it was lived by the Third Republic. It furthermore projects, as Sprinker points out, 'the anatomy and pathology of bourgeois society'.<sup>2</sup>

To consider *A la recherche* as an historical document is not a new or inspired undertaking. But previous studies have overestimated its status as nostalgic reverie for the pre-Revolutionary era. As Descombes has it: 'Combray knows nothing about the external world encircling it and destined to destroy it during the Great War'.<sup>3</sup> Cobban concurs, asserting that 'Nothing ever happens to Combray – nothing ever will happen to spoil the idyllic, Rousseauist charm of Combray'.<sup>4</sup> To adopt such a viewpoint, which privileges the rural idyll, monolithic aristocracy and boyhood enthusiasm, is to confuse the narrator's views with those of the Combray citizens he slyly ironises. Marcel well knows the fate of Combray and the seeds of destruction are sown early on in the work. As he walks by Tansonville he observes Charlus and hears of Odette's infidelity,

---

<sup>1</sup> Sprinker *History*.

<sup>2</sup> Sprinker *History*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Descombes, *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel* (trans. Catherine Chance Macksey) Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> A. Cobban, *The Historical Significance of Marcel Proust*, p. 615, quoted in Sprinker, *History*, p. 14.

and is initiated into the world of illicit liaisons at his uncle Adolphe's house (I 79-81). Marcel's mind inhabits a greater cultural and social sphere than those of the Combray dwellers.

There can, of course, be no sense of history without a sense of time passing, a notion explored amply in Julia Kristeva's *Time and Sense*: 'Whether we are losing time, lost in time or losing our lives without discovering anything in death, we are made of the same substance as time because it defines the boundaries of our speech'.<sup>5</sup> Thus Kristeva introduces her chapter on the embodiment of time in Proust, and argues that *A la recherche* is composed of superimposed images, the shattered fragments of the narrator's experience, burned in to his memory, which have meaning once we piece together the sensations associated with them. The *madeleine* that Mamma offers and which Tante Léonie shares, the paving stones of the Guermantes' courtyard and those of the baptistery of Saint Mark, being cases in point.<sup>6</sup> Such associations are metaphors for Kristeva and Proustian time unites sensations 'imprinted' in such metaphors. Through the intermediary of time, the cyclical ending of *Temps retrouvé* sets a spiral in motion, which engenders the quest for 'an embodied imaginary, a space where words knit...I the writer...I the reader, and the living and dying I'.<sup>7</sup>

The inflection of events through a largely personal chronology, in which universal temporal markers are scant, is also a characteristic of the Proustian novel. The first-person narrative, not to say self-obsessed introspection of the narrator, have led critics to question how far *A la recherche* can reliably be regarded as an historical document at all. J. M. Cocking's comments on Proust's relation to historical facts are characteristic in this regard:

---

<sup>5</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (trans. Ross Gruberman), New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Kristeva *Time*, p. 169.

<sup>7</sup> Kristeva, *ibid.*

Apart from [Proust's] comments on the Affair, where the interest is sociological in very general terms but not specifically political, there is not much historical reference in the novel; nor is there much to be found in the letters in this selection. He comments sometimes on day-to-day events as any intelligent reader of *Le Figaro* might do. But there is no sign of awareness of the major political changes in the Third Republic: the definitive victory of the bourgeoisie, the increased influence of the financiers and industrialists, the establishment of Radicalism as the majority political attitude, with lip-service to the Revolution and the Nation, hostility to aristocracy, Church and army, and real interest in wealth and material prosperity. Unlike Balzac, Proust is not much interested in the economic mechanisms of social change, only the repercussions of such change on social groupings, conventions and rituals.<sup>8</sup>

Proust's texts may not have the overt representational figures of Balzac or even Flaubert, but he was more than 'aware' of the manifest 'signs of change' in his time.

When White refers to historical narratives as 'verbal fictions', he is clearly trying to provoke deeper thinking about the permeability of the border between historical and other types of expression, and about the role of imagination in producing history. To an extent, history is made rather than found on the archival shelf, often using the same techniques as those texts whose function is primarily aesthetic.<sup>9</sup> Reversing the mechanism then, we may justifiably use the insights of the historiographer to peer behind the decorous curtain of aesthetics to expose the historical situations presented in the text. This is on the assumption that the novel presents us

---

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Cocking, Introduction to *Marcel Proust: Selected Letters, 1880-1903*, ed. Philip Kolb (trans. Ralph Manheim) Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1983, pp. XXIV-XXV.

<sup>9</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975, p. 3.

with a view of the past about which we can speak meaningfully as historians, since the readers of novels seldom pose the metaphysical question of whether the past exists, or the epistemological question of whether it is knowable.

Kristeva's 'embodiment' in narrative echoes Auerbach's ideas of literature and literary history as an *Erfüllung* or 'fulfilment'. For him, the representative literary text is a fulfilment of a previous text and a prefiguration of some later narrative. Furthermore, Auerbach's figuralist model explicates the author's experience of an historical milieu and is therefore a prefiguration of a piece of historical reality. As Kristeva's image of the perpetual spiral makes clear, *Erfüllung* is an anomalous, non-determining force or ateleological ending, i.e. one which is always becoming but is never actualised. But this is not to say that the literary text lacks historical validity, for the meaning of a literary text is found precisely in its relation to its historical context, not in its relation to some archetype of 'Truth' or 'Beauty'. In *Mimesis*, Auerbach presents figuralism as a characteristic of Western post-industrial culture: 'it has extended through the atmospheric realm of Balzac and the descriptivism of Flaubert, down to the Modernism of Proust, Wolfe and Joyce'.<sup>10</sup>

Central to Auerbach's claim is the discovery that human life and society find whatever meaning they might possess through history, not in any transcendental or religious realm. Literary Realism in its classic, nineteenth-century incarnation was the application of this process to the representation of present social reality. Thus in *Mimesis* Auerbach could write:

When [people] came to appreciate the vital unity of individual epochs, so that each epoch appears as a whole whose character is reflected in each of its manifestations; when,

---

<sup>10</sup> Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis* (trans. Willard R. Trask) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 556.



finally, they accept the conviction that the meaning of events cannot be grasped in abstract forms of cognition and that the material needed to understand it must not be sought exclusively in the upper strata and in all major political events but also in art, economy, material and intellectual culture, in the depths of the workaday world and its men and women, because it is only there that we can grasp what is unique, what is animated by inner forces, and what, in both a more concrete and a more profound sense is universally valid.[...] Now, we know the insights which I have just enumerated and which, taken all together, represent the intellectual trend known as Historicism. (pp. 443-4).

The apparent osmosis between history and literature has been all the greater for our understanding that the representability of history and the accounts of history based upon it are always necessarily, as Anne Rigney has it, ‘imperfect’.<sup>11</sup> We cannot achieve total objectivity in our cognitive dealings with the past, she claims, ‘on the contrary, historical representation as such is premised on the loss or absence of a past reality as on its former existence’.<sup>12</sup> The point has been also made by Spiegel, who has written of the growing realisation that ‘the past inevitably escapes us, that words, names, signs, functions – our fragile instruments of research and scholarship – are at least only momentarily empowered to capture the reality of the past’.<sup>13</sup>

Auerbach’s distinctly modernist approach to literary historiography is expressed precisely in terms of loss and imperfection. *Mimesis* is, in many respects, the scientifically-elaborated story of how the figures that compose history have been fleshed out, so that historicity, humanity’s

---

<sup>11</sup> Rigney, *Imperfect Histories*, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Rigney, *Imperfect Histories*, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Gabriel Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 42-43.

primary mode of being in the world, is represented as the only one which individuals, events, institutions and discourses are apprehended in relation to each other.

Thus envisaged, Modernism effects the closure of the gap between history and the predominant version of literature called *fiction*. For Rigney, the term has accumulated a number of highly-charged meanings, ranging from ‘invented’ or ‘imaginary’ to the ‘unreal but seen as legitimate’.<sup>14</sup> In Modernism, literature takes form as a manner of writing which conjoins former oppositions between the ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’ dimensions on one hand, and the ‘factual’ and ‘fictional’ on the other. Consequently, claims White:

Modernism is the setting aside of the long-standing distinction between history and fiction, not in order to collapse the one onto the other, but the better to examine the ‘myths’ of the grand narratives of Fate, Providence, *Geist*, Progress and the dialectic.<sup>15</sup>

The function of the Proustian narrative as *Erfüllung* is demonstrated in the first chapter of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, in a passage appearing just after Marcel has succeeded in being admitted to the circle of the Prince de Guermantes, and has immediately thereafter witnessed Swann’s banishment from the party. Hayden White has produced a fine example of close textual reading of this interlude (III 54-58), but perhaps fails to grasp the importance of his own analysis.<sup>16</sup>

At first, the passage seems to come from the School of pure Descriptivism – it is an account of one consciousness’ purely phenomenological attempt to grasp an art-object – the fountain by Hubert Robert (III 56-7). By turns, however, the description of the fountain comes to stand in

---

<sup>14</sup> Rigney, *Imperfect Histories*, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> White, *Figural Realism*, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> White, *Figural Realism*, pp. 100-104.

meta-narrative manner for the larger narrative that recounts Marcel's entry into noble society after an absence of some ten years. The scene is, in fact, structured as four phases of comprehension, cast in the rhetorical modes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Furthermore, the passage has a close structural semblance to the three scenes that precede it, and into which it seems ponderously inserted. The three sections are firstly, the narrator's observation at the start of *Sodome* of Charlus' seduction of Jupien (III 4-9), his reflection on the nature of the descendants of the Cities of the Plain (III 16-32) and his classification of them like so many plant and animal species. Secondly, this preface is followed by Marcel's attempts to recognise the characters he encounters on his way to meet the Prince (III 36). There are four extended descriptions – and another taxonomy of social types. Finally, Marcel is presented to the Prince and reflects on the difference between true nobility and its *arriviste* imitation. Each of these scenes consists of an attempt at interpretation. Each of these narrations moves from metaphorical apprehension of the scene, through metonymic dispersion of its attributes, to a synecdochic comprehension of its nature, creating an ironic distance from the narrative itself.

Marcel's contemplation of the Hubertian fountain is framed by two acts of deviance – one social, the other natural. The passage ends with one of the errant jets of water playing over Madame d'Arpajon, much to the tendentious amusement of the company. It coincides with Marcel's conversation with the Prince, when he observes a new 'considération' engulfing Swann 'avec la puissance d'une pompe aspirante', establishing an identity between the two characters and the 'célèbre jet d'eau d'Hubert Robert' (III, 56).

The first description is introduced by a view of the fountain from afar: 'On le voyait de loin, svelte, immobile, dure, ne laissant agir par la brise que la retombée plus légère de son panache pâle et frémissant'. The description itself only specifies the image as an unfathomable

‘impression de l’art’, and features a synecdoche, ‘le XVIII siècle’, a pun on ‘style’, two metaphors, ‘faîte’ and ‘nuage’, and a simile ‘comme ceux qui’. The passage moves subsequently into metonymic mode, introduced by the phrase ‘De plus près’. The single flow, of which one only had an impression, is now revealed to be sending forth ever new streams of water according to ‘le dessein préalablement tracé’. The rhetorical mode of this passage could therefore be called metonymic, as it reduces the aesthetic appearance of the fountain to its base materiality. The fluidity of the water is like the ‘stones of an ancient palace’.

The third part of the description is scarcely more than mathematical. It essentialises the fountain to such a degree that form and content become inseparable. But this description, beginning ‘De plus près’ is, in fact, a synecdoche of the paragraph itself. The continuity of the passage is itself assured by an ‘apparence toute linéaire’, each line of which is incorporated into a ‘reprise latérale’ of a succession of descriptions, which mounts ‘plus haut que le premier et était lui-même à une plus grande hauteur, mais déjà fatigante pour lui, relevé par un troisième’.

It might seem that any further description would be superfluous to our understanding, but Proust ironises his / Marcel’s own view of the fountain. Having personified the water in the eyes of the observer, any notion of ‘on voyait’ or ‘on se rendait compte que’ is removed from the narrative. The personification is extravagant as it describes the ‘gouttelettes’ of water and ‘leurs sœurs’ dancing in a chaotic fashion, blurring the rectitude of the proud, male ‘tiges’ at the top of their stems. Once again we are brought back to art images, as a cloud ‘en apparence peint’ is composed of thousands of tiny water droplets. All too abruptly and, with comic bathos, we are reminded that ‘Malheureusement, un coup de vent suffisait à l’envoyer obliquement par terre’ (III 57). ‘Panache’, ‘art’ and ‘Versailles’ give way to stiffness and immutability. A fountain is only a jet of water. White comments that:

By the time we reach the fourth description, we are permitted to discern something like the retrospective kind of plot that allows a correlation of events in this story. But what we have been permitted to comprehend is less the nature of the ‘jet d’eau’ than that of figuration itself.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth description bears the same relation to the three preceding parts that the fountain scene as a whole bears to the narratives that deal with homosexual seduction, types of socialite and the true nobility. The meeting with the Prince also constitutes four distinct stages of recognition, marked by ‘Je compris tout de suite que’, ‘je trouvai dans sa réserve’, ‘je trouvai l’acueil du Prince’ and ‘comprenant que je ne l’avais posée...’. Like the fountain description, the Prince at first seems stiff (‘compassé’), solemn and haughty, at least in contrast to the genial Duc de Guermantes. But, from the first words spoken to Marcel, the latter realizes that the disdainful one is the Duc, whilst the Prince has the true simplicity of the nobility.

The sequence of rhetorical modes of figuration in this scene follows the same as that set by the fountain scene. There are two metaphorical apprehensions of the Prince from afar. Upon closer inspection, these are reduced to metonymies, in the status of two masks of character – just as the fountain has the status of ‘une sensation de l’eau’ and ‘une impression de l’art’. In the third characterisation, the elements of the Prince’s manner are combined into a synecdoche of ‘un sentiment plus grand’, and the identification of the ‘hauteur traditionnelle’ of the representatives of such milieus with the ‘simplicité réelle’ lacking in their affected modern descendants.

---

<sup>17</sup> White, *Figural Realism*, p. 137.

This comprehension of the Prince's consideration is furthermore undercut by his behaviour in intercepting Swann and carrying him off with the force of a suction pump (III 56). This social hiatus mirrors the swerve of the disobedient jet of water which drenches Mme d'Arpajon – here distancing and problematising social relations (we later learn that the Prince has converted to Dreyfusism) rather than artistic ones.

The two scenes are not connected by any logic in the pure sense; there is no basis for connecting the description of the fountain and the meeting with the Prince by deduction – their relationship is arbitrary, unpredictable and even unnecessary, but at the same time, functionally effective. It is a genealogical relationship, bodying forth from imagination. Nevertheless, the fountain scene will inevitably be *retroduced* from the meeting with the Prince, as the three images that specify its nature as Art are 'panache', 'le XVIII siècle' and 'Versailles' – all associated with the *ancien régime*. All were put in place by 'un dessein préalablement tracé', much as the Old Order was thought to be divinely ordained. There is historical reference on the micro- and macro-narrative levels.

If the object of an enquiry is the constituent of the physical world, such as a force or body, it is not incumbent on the enquirer to raise the prior question of the basis of the enquiry itself. This would normally be true of bodily functions or of organisms endowed with subjective capacities because the body is also constituted by such forces and substances. But if we are to attempt an analysis of the Proustian concept of Being, which does not relate primarily to the physical world but to the implicit one of subjectivity, then it is necessary to situate that Being in relation to the spacio-temporal process.

Proust speaks in *La Prisonnière* of novelists such as Balzac who discovered the shape of their *œuvre* only after they were in the process of writing it. This is, of course, a self-referential remark, given the metamorphosis that *A la recherche* underwent after the publication of *chez Swann*. Traditional, nineteenth-century fiction used an arbitrary temporal framework, involving a precise moment of beginning and ending, so that, as Houston points out: ‘a piece of fictive reality, however great the sense of temporal realism, was lifted out of the larger, indefinite sweep of time’.<sup>18</sup> The first-person narrative was no exception. The *passé composé* used in the opening words of the novel, ‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure’, gives the impression of establishing just such a traditional ‘double-time’ reference: a time when the ‘I’ narrates the present and past of a character-focussed narrative. This would place us within the mode of speech of ‘true’ lived experience (*gerede*) and the ‘proclaiming’ verb of the *logos*.<sup>19</sup>

The period of Swann’s love for Odette can be determined with some accuracy. Alexandre Dumas’ *Françillon* has just opened, Jules Grévy is President of the Republic, Gambetta’s funeral takes place, and in the avant-garde salons, Wagner is all the rage, until Beethoven supplants him amongst the snobs. We are certainly in the decade of the 1880s. Indeed, Odette is, in many ways, with her penchants for exotic fashions, the embodiment of the World Exhibition of 1878. But as we read, the ‘recent present’ becomes more elusive. There are few intercalations of dates. We move, with the Dreyfus Affair hovering in the hinterland, to the accession of the Prince of Wales, a friend of Swann’s; the Boer War comes to an end. We progress through fashions in dress and furniture, minutely and with infinite patience, as Proust charts the names of caterers, plays, restaurants, clubs and manners of speech. The richness of these details suggests that Proust clearly wishes to provide an accurate historical setting. The inhabitants of this world, whilst for

---

<sup>18</sup> John Porter Houston, *The Shape and Style of Proust’s Novel*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> Lincoln, *Myth*, p. 4.

the most part, fictional, undergo physical changes, providing a physiognomy of history, in which the narrative is anchored.

Sprinker's penetrating study of history and ideology in Proust has been written somewhat against the grain of appreciations of *A la recherche*. Weber concludes his study of social life in the early Third Republic with a typically anti-theoretical view of the novel:

For what is *la recherche* (sic) but the profound account of a profoundly frivolous world? A fin- de-siècle view of the fin-de-siècle, always remembering that Proust's inspiration was Clio, the muse who gathered up everything that the loftier muses rejected – everything not founded on Truth – the contingent, the uncertain, the accidental, incidental and ultimately dependent on the evanescent impressions and distorting visions of men.<sup>20</sup>

The difficulty in ascertaining even relative time in *Combray* is in part due to mere indications such as 'une fois' or 'une fois par an', when the events are clearly specific but the dominant tense is the imperfect, indicating repeated habitual actions rather than a completed event. Houston remarks that the Proustian narrative is 'not so much iterative' as 'typical' – a technique which may have been inherited from Flaubert.<sup>21</sup> In the 'typical imperfect' of the logos, the verbs of inquit clauses are simply and bluntly 'disait' or 'répondait', giving the narrative a sense of inertia as one cannot relate the specifics of what was supposed to happen on many occasions in this way (see I 58). Seasons and cyclical events can easily be transcribed within this tense, although with less stagnation than in *Bovary*. The various moments of the *Combray* section can be melted into one Sunday, stretching from cool weather and weak sunshine in the morning, to the longer

---

<sup>20</sup> E. R. Weber, *Fin de Siècle*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Houston, *Shape and Style*, p. 61.



evenings of Ascension tide. Saturday is played out in a minor key in this cycle of life. Then, as Proust describes the hawthorn blossom, we return to Sundays. The May blossom is a recurrent temporal marker through its associations with Swann, and later, with Gilberte.

The 'Méséglise Way' is composed, apparently, of a series of narrative digressions, each representing a spatial deviation. Upon closer inspection, it is furthermore subdivided into two subsections, referring to different general areas of time but encompassing the same scenery at different moments (e.g. I 159). The narrator gives to the two ways (the first prefiguring the second), the cohesion, the unity 'which belongs only to creations of our minds' (I 134), indicating that Proust in no way intended us to substitute an exact model of real time for the time in his fictive model. Thus, key events in the novel which are referred to but not represented diegetically may be impossible to situate exactly. Since the marriage of Swann and Odette takes place when the narrator is a child, it must be situated somewhere between the period of time he remembers and actual 'historical' time. The whole section, of course, begs the question of how historical events may be recuperated at all, given that they are unknown to us.<sup>22</sup> A sense of temporal progression is often given within an apparently limited physical space.

'Nous juxtaposons, dit Bergson, nos états de conscience de manière à les apercevoir simultanément, non plus l'un dans l'autre mais l'un à côté de l'autre; bref, nous projetons le temps dans l'espace'.<sup>23</sup> Thus Poulet begins his *L'Espace proustien*. Such an occasion of time shifting without, whilst the protagonist remains in the confines of his room, is provided in the *Noms de pays: Le pays* section of *A la recherche*. As the narrator gazes from his hotel window, time expands:

---

<sup>22</sup> Gareth H. Steel, *Chronology and Time in 'A la recherche du temps perdu'*, Geneva: Droz, 1979, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Georges Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, Series Tel, 68, Paris: Gallimard, 1982, p. 3.

Car – comme la baie de Balbec était un petit univers à part au milieu du grand, une corbeille de saisons où étaient rassemblés en cercle les jours variés et les mois successifs, si bien que, non seulement les jours où on apercevait Rivebelle, ce qui était signe d’orage, on y distinguait du soleil sur les maisons pendant qu’il faisait noir à Balbec, on était certain de trouver sur cette autre rive deux ou trois mois supplémentaires de chaleur – ceux de ces habitués du Grand-hôtel dont les vacances commençaient tard ou duraient longtemps faisaient, quand arrivaient les pluies et les brumes, à l’approche de l’automne, chargés de leurs malles sur une barque, et traversaient rejoindre Rivebelle ou Costador.

(II 36)

This is, of course, the condensation of the period(s) of the narrator’s sexual awakening, between the day on which Marcel saw the band of girls on the beach and the evening on which Elstir introduces Albertine and her friends. The transition in time is one of maturation. The very first paragraphs of the novel in which the boy awakens disoriented and anguished, show us that, concordant with Modernist astrophysics, the Proustian Being is inseparable from *when* it exists.

Sprinker has provided an admirable concordance to historical events alluded to in *A la recherche*, to which very little need be added. The hegemony of the bourgeoisie of the Third Republic arose from the defeat at Sedan (2 September 1870) and the suppression of the *Commune* in 1871. The Republic over which Thiers would preside would only truly expire after the German invasion of 1940. ‘The decapitation of the left and the delegitimation of the Right’s most politically significant faction, consequent upon its humiliating defeat by Bismarck, brought to

fruition the long process of establishing a bourgeois democracy' which would leave the Aristocracy, like the Guermantes' fountain, as a relic to a former age.<sup>24</sup>

The principal apparati depicted in *A la recherche* are the military, as presented in the Doncières section of *Le Côté des Guermantes* and the person of Saint-Loup, hero and martyr of the Great War. The army affects the lives of Combray-dwellers such as Françoise, who is deeply disturbed by the sight of soldiers walking through the town, and voices her opinions to the gardener (I 87). Their respective views on national service reflect the acrimonious debate in the early years of the Third Republic on that very subject (and on the exploitation of new forms of weaponry).<sup>25</sup> Swann stands as a curious figure in that his (and probably Proust's) sentiments about militarism are rather ambivalent. At the height of the Dreyfus Affair, he insists on wearing his war medals, and simultaneously requests that he be buried with the due ceremony attendant on a chevalier of the *Légion d'Honneur* (II 739). Proust enjoyed his time in national service as it afforded him male company and ample time to daydream.<sup>26</sup> Marcel's correspondence with Gilberte in *Temps retrouvé* shows Proust's interest in World War I, and Marcel discusses strategies and tactics with Saint-Loup (I 769, II 109-117 and IV 339-40). Proust's support for Dreyfus is well-known and he had little time for the jingoistic discourse that dominated the War.

The novel gives a tiny *aperçu* of the wider internecine warfare being waged between the classes of French society. Saint-Loup is often seen defending the titled nobility which had newly embraced bourgeois ideals. Charlus, by contrast, is an anachronism whose political allegiance is fashioned by his lineage rather than by any independence of mind. Charlus and his ilk, 'Carpes et

---

<sup>24</sup> Sprinker, *History*, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Elliot Kaplan, *Forgotten Crisis: The Fin de Siècle Crisis of Democracy in France*, Washington, DC: Berg, 1975, p. 175.

<sup>26</sup> J-Y Tadié, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, London: Penguin, 2000, p. 226.

escarpes à la Chambord', were silenced during the 1876 elections, and effectively disarmed by Chambord's passing (the last of the Bourbon dynasty) in 1883.<sup>27</sup> Charlus survives, however, long past the 1914-18 War.

The police make few appearances in *A la recherche*, and Proust's principal concern is that France should be protected from foreign invaders rather than repress her own citizens. Saint-Loup is posted to the newly-acquired protectorate of Morocco, and M. Bontemps sponsors the law increasing military service from two to three years (IV 305).

Many of the struggles surrounding the first thirty years of the Third Republic concerned the status of the Catholic Church. Proust himself remained ambivalent to the Church's power, although he was aware that it inflected every aspect of provincial existence. The rivalry between Brichot and the Combray *curé* over the etymology of French place-names, like the Aunt's anxieties over whether Mme Goupil arrived at Mass in time for the elevation of the host (I 68), are comic interludes in the narrative. Proust was not insensitive, however, to the clergy's role in promoting the military's agenda and spreading anti-Semitism. The Church was, as Kaplan points out, a prime agenda-setter in the fight against the moral turpitude of youth, and formed the majority of the hecklers when Raphaël-Georges Lévy addressed students in the Latin Quarter in 1896.<sup>28</sup> In a letter to du Lauris of July 29 1903, Proust attacks the anti-clerical laws being enacted. The Church was not a progressive institution for Proust, but he maintained that secularism would divide one Frenchman from another:

---

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Marie Mayeur, 'The Origins of the Third French Republic', in *The Complete History of Modern France, 1871-1898*, part 1 of 4 (trans. J. R. Foster) Cambridge: CUP, 1984, pp. 161-170.

<sup>28</sup> Kaplan, *Forgotten Crisis*, p. 133.

Il me semble que ce n'est pas bien que le vieux curé ne soit plus invité à la Distribution des prix, comme représentant dans le village quelque chose de plus difficile à définir que l'office social symbolisé par le pharmacien, l'ingénieur des tabacs retiré, et l'opticien, mais qui est tout de même assez respectable, ne fût-ce que par pour l'intelligence du joli clocher spiritualisé qui pointe vers le couchant et se fond dans les nuées avec tant d'amour et qui tout de même, à la première vue d'un étranger débarquant dans le village, a meilleur air, plus de noblesse et plus d'intelligence....<sup>29</sup>

Proust's defence of religion seems a little sentimental, but it is the Church that remains an inseparable part of the human condition, a locus of values, the core of the logos. He bases his defence of the Church on aesthetico-ethical grounds; the spires recalling those of Martinville.

Proust bears none of the signs of 'conventional right-wing religiosity', to reprise Sprinker's term.<sup>30</sup> He is quite aware of the liberality of many Catholic priests. The real menace to social cohesion is not the Church but the press:

D'ailleurs les maîtres (professeurs des écoles) fussent-ils mauvais, ce n'est pas l'influence des maîtres qui forme les opinions des jeunes gens... c'est la Presse. Au lieu de restreindre la liberté de l'enseignement si l'on restreint la Liberté de la Presse on diminuerait peut-être un peu les ferments de division et de haine. Mais le *protectionnisme intellectuel* (dont les lois actuelles sont une forme méleniste cent fois plus odieuse que Méline) aurait bien des inconvénients aussi.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> From *Selected Letters*, ed. Philip Kolb, Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1983, p. 384.

<sup>30</sup> Sprinker, *History*, p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> In Kolb, *Selected Letters*, p. 343.

We know that both Marcel and the Duc de Guermantes read *Le Figaro* (to which Proust was a contributor). Proust's letter to du Lauris makes plain that the periodical press was not content with promulgating reactionary ideologies but with safeguarding entrenched, mundane ones (the same point is made by Charlus in *Temps retrouvé*, IV 364). Freedom of the press had supposedly been granted in 1881, but persisted in various forms.<sup>32</sup> As the mouthpiece of what the characters believe, it is the repository of the logos and, more directly, is the reference work of all those whose salons Marcel wishes to penetrate.

*A la recherche* is emphatically not a *roman à clef* which records, in fictional manner, every characteristic of the Third French Republic. Political parties are named but their policies are not explicated in detail. 'Politics', writes Bowie, 'fascinates Proust only in extreme dilution'.<sup>33</sup> His palette extends, it is true, from Françoise, the honest servant, through institutions such as the Jockey Club and the *Académie française*, to which the bourgeoisie aspires, through the fabulously wealthy members of the upper bourgeoisie such as the Duc de Guermantes. In a static society, the interest in wealth, class, status, determined by the narrative voice, would be the seat of the logos. So convoluted, however, are class-relations within *A la recherche* that nothing could be more complex than to map the relations between these attributes.

The aristocracy is particularly favoured by the narrator as an object of social enquiry, for its complexity and the richness of images that betoken it. The apparent timelessness of the nobility and its unity in fact hide an array of sub-castes, each with its own identity and values. As Bowie describes the in-fighting amongst the aristocracy:

---

<sup>32</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *The Press: Politics and Anger, France 1848-1945*, NY: OUP, 1979, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Bowie, *Stars*, p. 127.

The timeless and unified character that the aristocracy possesses for the hasty reader soon breaks down, on closer inspection, into a fluid array of sub-species.<sup>34</sup>

The reader is frequently reminded that the aristocracy is not the ‘*ancien régime* nobility’, but those whose titles have been ‘conferred’ by the Emperor. The Prince de Borodino and Saint-Loup are brought together only by military service, as a gulf exists between these two arms of the aristocracy. There is a certain coolness between these two comrades (II 73 and II 427). In *La Prisonnière*, Charlus has shrunk to the role of adviser to Mme Verdurin, an upper bourgeoisie, and schools her in matters of old-aristocratic taste, and tries to fashion her guest-lists accordingly. There is apparently a logos of these shadings:

‘Je vois dès les premiers mots que nous ne parlons pas la même langue, puisque je parlais de noms de l’artisticratie et que vous me citez le plus obscur des noms des gens de robe, de petits roturiers retors, cancaniers, malfaisants, de petites dames qui se croient des protectrices des arts parce qu’elles reprennent une octave au-dessous les manières de ma belle-sœur Guermantes, à la façon du geai qui croît imiter le paon’ (III 739).

Charlus’ lofty scorn and sarcasm speak of a class-system that is already in terminal disarray. The system ought to be intelligible, and have a neatly stratified pyramidal structure, but the buying of titles, intermarriage and ‘invented’ genealogies have all caused confusion. The novel, moreover, has no unbiased commentators; each has a voice expressing their own desire for social dominance or advancement.

---

<sup>34</sup> Bowie, *ibid.*

Charlus rewrites his account of aristocratic codes of speech and manner to suit his own caprice, and recomposes his letters of credence in accordance with his latest campaign of sexual conquest. Ambitious hostesses compete for the favours of the nobility, who in turn have a strong sense of their own market-value. The preservation of class boundaries calls for rigorous policing, yet the task is a futile one. The legitimacy of the Guermantes now only exists in Marcel's dreams of their glorious past. In the present, they offer a tawdry spectacle. Their battles and conquests are played out only in the drawing-rooms of the Faubourg Saint-Germain (II 736).

Jean-Charles Asselain emphasizes the variegated nature of the French economy in the late nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> France's class-structure was inflected differently from that in Britain or Germany. Perhaps the most important feature of France's uneven economic development - and therefore rapid economic growth - was the explosion of Paris, the *département* circumscribed by *Le Nord* and the east, in comparison with the rest of France. The Third Republic witnessed the final stages of the war between the titled aristocracy (traditionally the pre-eminent landowning class) and the capitalist bourgeoisie. In *A la recherche*, only rarely is this struggle openly acknowledged. Society or *le monde* refers to the daily round of public and private intrigues of salon life, reported in the national newspapers. Class differences or conflict are evidenced in the characters' anxieties about their changes in social status. Proust's novel is an anatomy of what Bourdieu terms 'Distinction'.<sup>36</sup>

The aristocracy have received scant attention from historians compared to the workers of the Third Republic, largely because of residual republican prejudices amongst French intellectuals –

---

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Charles Asselain, *Histoire économique de la France du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, Vol. I, pp. 195-6, in Sprinker, *History*, p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (trans. Richard Nice) Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1984.



‘one consequence of the bourgeoisie’s successful ideological programme during the Third Republic and after’, claims Sprinker.<sup>37</sup> Casting itself as the inheritor of 1789 traditions and values, the bourgeoisie effectively demonised both throne and altar, playing upon popular fears that support for the aristocracy meant a return to the economic mis-management of the *ancien régime*. French nobles tended to see themselves as part of a distinct class well until the First World War, and thus constituted ‘an objective reality’.<sup>38</sup>

Gibson defines the nobility as the descendants of those who voted with the Aristocracy at the meeting of the Estates-General in 1789.<sup>39</sup> He estimates them to have numbered 12, 000 families or 60, 000 people. With the creation of the new aristocrats by the Emperor, and acquisition of the particule by wealthy bourgeois, these figures become unreliable. Higgs defines the aristocracy in terms of its values, although the *revanchisme* that characterised the majority of the aristocratic views of the Dreyfus case was not the sole prerogative of the nobility.<sup>40</sup> The nobility’s identification with the officer class was general – no doubt reinforced by their over-representation in the military in general.<sup>41</sup>

Their success was in part due to their immense flexibility and adaptation to industrialization, and in part, to their marriage to the *haute bourgeoisie*.<sup>42</sup> Up to World War I, the French nobility remained a powerful and unassailably self-confident force. Daniel Halévy’s Republic of Dukes persisted on this level for many years – long after its political demise in the 1870s. Dominant

---

<sup>37</sup> Sprinker, *History*, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Ralph Gibson, ‘The French Nobility in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Elites in France: Origins, Reproduction and Power*, eds. Joylon Howarth and Philip G. Cerny, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1981, pp. 31-37.

<sup>39</sup> Gibson, *French Nobility*, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> David Higgs, *The Nobility in France: The Practise of Inegalitarianism*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 2-3, in Sprinker p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Gibson, *French Nobility*, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Zeldin, *Politics and Anger*, pp. 41-42.

since the July Monarchy, unchallenged since the failed Restoration attempt of le Seize Mai, the bourgeoisie struggled for ideological hegemony.

Gibson argues that the bourgeoisie's ultimate triumph was achieved politically because it waged a successful campaign to capture the hearts and minds of a majority among ordinary people, the rural masses in particular.<sup>43</sup> It could do so in large measure because by the early 1880s it had obtained the means to dictate the terms of political struggle on a national level, consolidating its control over key areas of cultural capital (national and local) and reproducing itself in the key areas from which political power could be exercised.

*Pace* Alfred Cobban *et al.*, the Revolution of 1789 provided the commercial and professional bourgeoisie with an entrance-ticket to France's national political arena. The Napoleonic defeat opened the door for the aristocracy to eject them once more, but the Restoration signally failed to consolidate the nobility's position in any permanent or stable structures. The exact form of bourgeois political power would take over half a century to realise, but during the entire period from 1830 to the mid-1870s, the steady, occasionally rapid expansion of French capitalism effectively ensured that the ruling class in France would never again derive its wealth from feudal prerogatives or seigniorial extractions. Once definitively astride the state apparatus, the French bourgeoisie set about consolidating and extending its economic domination and made its services indispensable to the smooth functioning of the state. The bourgeoisie's class project under the Third Republic constructed new cadres for a social elite bearing its own stamp.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Gibson, *French Nobility*, pp. 31-37.

<sup>44</sup> Sprinker, *History*, pp. 57-58.

Zeldin claims that the republican state preserved much of the imperial state it replaced.<sup>45</sup> To the extent that this is so, it can be read as a sign of the bourgeoisie's powerful position under the Napoleonic administration. What did change, however, in addition to the precipitous decline in the nobility's parliamentary representation, was the institutional basis for recruitment that would guarantee the bourgeoisie's political preferment. The *grandes écoles*, the *Ecole des Mines*, the *Ponts et Chaussées*, and later the *Polytechnique* and the *Ecole normale* were all expanded after the Revolution, and produced a powerful mandarinat that shaped civil society, whilst entrance by competitive examination made *lycée* training essential.

The 'ideological state apparatus', if I can use such Marxist terminology, that features most prominently in *A la recherche* is the school system. In 1894, Max Leclerc observed that the elements of an English education (upbringing, moral instruction and character-building) were so mixed together that only one French word, 'la formation', expressed all that he saw in English schools. He contrasted paternalistic English schoolmasters with the *maîtres-répétiteurs* in French *lycées*.<sup>46</sup> Brichot is a professor at the Sorbonne and Cottard holds a position at the medical faculty. Since both are socially inept and professionally dubious, it is reasonable to assume that Proust held out no great hopes for improvement in schools in the wake of the Ferry reforms.<sup>47</sup>

On 21 December 1880, the Ferry ministry passed the law on the extension of free (secondary) education for girls.<sup>48</sup> Near the end of *jeunes filles* (I 913) we find Albertine and her friends writing on Racine. This is probably a reference to the 'superior primary'<sup>49</sup> certificate to which

---

<sup>45</sup> Zeldin, *Politics and Anger*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>46</sup> Kaplan, *French Nobility*, p. 130.

<sup>47</sup> Kaplan, *French Nobility*, pp. 180-95.

<sup>48</sup> Mayeur, *Origins*, p. 167.

<sup>49</sup> Sprinker, *History*, p. 41.

only the wealthiest daughters of the bourgeoisie could aspire.<sup>50</sup> Albertine later receives a letter from Giselle, which includes ‘une composition qu’elle avait faite pour son certificat d’études’ (II 264). Whilst Andrée finds fault with every aspect of the composition, Albertine sits with eyes sparkling as she hangs on her friend’s every word (II 266) presumably as she herself will soon be sitting the same examination. Marcel is acting as her mentor on this occasion, being sufficiently advanced in years to direct Albertine’s tastes. Patently, this scene could not have occurred prior to *la loi Sée*. Odette, on the other hand, seems to have had little formal instruction, and her chaotic artistic tastes are a source of comedy both for Swann and the reader. The *salonnières* of the novel seem to have had only a desultory education in music, literature and art. Bonnie G. Smith’s *Ladies of the Leisured Classes* asserts that women were still educated in convents (c.f. *Bovary*) if their parents could not afford a private tutor.<sup>51</sup> Examinations were a fashion or nosegay to complete a woman for marriage in society.<sup>52</sup> Traditionally conservative and pious, the women of the Republic became ideological puppets in the defence of *la Patrie*, as exemplified by Mme Verdurin, who is violently anti-aristocratic when we first meet her, but is a passionate Dreyfusard and patriot during the War.

If I have dwelt on the educational process, this is because it was arguably the decisive instrument for securing bourgeois hegemony. It inculcated republican values among all classes (save the nobility, who long resisted public education), and it sorted out candidates through a system that was nominally a meritocracy, though was in fact a materially exclusive process of funnelling. Capitalism produced a class whose ethos was to buy cheap and sell dear. The bourgeois’ project was double: to defeat the nobility and co-opt ‘The People’ (in a Micheletist sense). That the

---

<sup>50</sup> See Renée Balibar, *Les Français fictifs: Les Rapports des styles littéraires au français national*, Paris: Hachette, 1974, in particular, Ch. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Bonnie G. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisured Classes: The Bourgeois of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Les Religieuses enseignantes’, in Mayeur, *Origins*, Vol. 3, p. 120.

project succeeded was demonstrated during World War I: no significant faction of French society bolted from the national coalition, even as it blundered from one mistake to another. By 1914, the bourgeoisie had secured not only the capacity to rule, but the belief that it was in its own interests to do so. Less than half a century earlier, such a consensus would have been unthinkable.<sup>53</sup>

If there is a lesson to be learned from Proust's handling of the pseudo-politics of the Third Republic that is *A la recherche*, it is probably that wishful fantasy is a powerful political force, and one which needs to be acknowledged within and outside the institutions of state. It is this conviction that provides the anchorage for Marcel's meditations on Dreyfus Affair, the primary political hinterland of the novel (e.g. II 190). The Dreyfus Affair has frequently been cited as an example of French anti-Semitism, but it cannot be understood without comprehension of the love of *la Patrie* and *la Nation* that underpinned military and civil authority throughout the Third Republic. For Proust, the social and political typography of the Affair cannot coherently be mapped without making continual reference to the habits of feeling that typify the main groups involved in it. Beneath a history of accusations and counter-claims there is a 'history of visceral emotions'.<sup>54</sup> The Faubourg Saint-Germain brings calumny upon itself by inviting into its ranks those who would crusade against Dreyfus and have no outstanding qualities save their xenophobia.

A rough consensus exists between historians that just prior to the Great War the French Military enjoyed its 'Golden Age'. The shock defeat of 1870 had led the republican leaders to sharpen their training and tactics – hence the development of the 75mm cannon, the details of which

---

<sup>53</sup> I am summarizing Sprinker, *History*, pp. 59-61.

<sup>54</sup> Bowie, *Stars*, p. 130.

Dreyfus was alleged to have leaked.<sup>55</sup> A national war against outsiders was waged, which became a class war; an embattled caste, in its attempts to strengthen itself, opened up to another invasion, a part of its own slow demise.

In addition to his collective frescoes of emotion, Proust depicts individual studies which are connected to the wider stage of public affairs. Charlus rehearses a gamut of *idées reçues* in *Côté des Guermantes* and subjects Bloch to a sadistic tirade. The scenarios of sadistic torture that characterise popular anti-Semitism emerge as casual commonplaces in Charlus' discourse, but give way to fascination. Charlus is enchanted by Bloch, excited even, throwing Charlus into a frenzy of sexual disarray. The Dreyfus Affair becomes a mobiliser of his libidinal desires, and only the War can satisfy his sexual appetite.

Surrounded by males during his national service, as was Proust during his youth, Saint-Loup is described as living out his sexual desires 'ennuagés d'idéologies', in a latter-day type of chivalric ideal. The Affair is first encountered in the Doncières section of *Côté des Guermantes*, and at the *matinée* of Mme de Villeparisis. Doncières represents a male chronotope to parallel the Faubourg Saint-Germain salon. The episode is dominated by inter-class factionism between rival branches of the nobility. At Doncières, Saint-Loup's fervent Dreyfusism (a result, it is said, of his Jewish mistress, Rachel) is again part of a libidinal economy. It is muted for fear of offending his fellow officers, who are loyal militarists and therefore anti-Dreyfusards. In the salon, Charlus' speech discloses deep rifts in the upper classes' ideology. The 'beau monde' and the army are distinct social spheres, although through them circulates the same cultural capital. Nationalisms were therefore divided and variegated during the Third Republic.

---

<sup>55</sup> Kaplan, *French Nobility*, p. 8.

Proust's own views were perhaps closest to those of Saint-Loup. He was an early Dreyfusard who attended the *procès Zola* and denounced the jingoistic banter of Barrès and Maurras. The question is resolved by the end of the work, and is already fully expounded by the time of the meeting of Swann and the Prince, as we have seen. The question gives rhythm to the narrative during several episodes. The politics of sexual intimacy observed between the narrator and Albertine, Swann and Odette, or Charlus and Morel, have the same underlying structure as the politics of State or the formalities and protocols of the salon: the power-play of these arenas consists of deceit, subterfuge, conspiracy and technical lying, and the deferral of gratification by mere eloquence and indiscretion. As in *L'Education*, the politics of the bedroom approximate those of the Chamber of Deputies.

Bowie has provided a useful way for us to come to terms with both the density of political reference in *A la recherche* and the thinness with which it characterises statecraft, by appreciating that the novel is recounted through a single consciousness.<sup>56</sup> 'Society' is thus understood not as a durable set of inter-personal institutions, but as the sum of all exchanges within a given community. Republicanism and Monarchism alike result from the reconfirmation, over successive generations, of one single individual's desire. Understanding society does not mean looking for any system of which it may be part, as we have used in classically Marxist criticism, but rather paying attention to the rhythms and intensities of the individual experience. Marcel seems to be leaning towards this view when he claims in *Temps retrouvé*: 'Je sentais cette influence capitale de l'acte interne jusque dans les relations internationales (IV 492)'.

Most interestingly, the narrator remarks:

---

<sup>56</sup> Bowie, *Stars*, pp. 50-61.

Des changements produits dans la société je pouvais d'autant plus extraire des vérités importantes et par degrés de cimenter une partie de mon œuvre qu'ils n'étaient nullement, comme j'aurais pu être au premier moment tenté de croire, particuliers à notre époque.  
(IV 967)

The displacement of the political process as an object of enquiry, having powerful expression and affective states, then appears comprehensible. It has sufficient irony and vision no longer to constitute an extension of the Romantic cult of the self and its extreme emotions. This is not to reduce the 'inner life' of the protagonist to mass social psychology, for the facets of the debate are too numerous, but the overriding ethos of Proust's comedy can be summarized, in Bergsonian fashion, into a single phrase: the disproportion between cant and ceremony and the paucity of the argument which sustains it.

Proust's narrator dreams as a child that a fabulous feudal system has moved into the modern era, but as an adult, realises that an aristocracy that has long been a phantasmagoria is now on the point of extinction. Dreyfus provides the *beau monde* with the last gasp of a common cause. Loyalty, duty, and patriotism can no longer be taken for granted: they are everywhere to be tested, and protected when threatened. In the dying moments of its history, the aristocracy finds a last (spurious) sense of an historical mission.

The Prince is an anti-Semitic snob, whilst Swann is a Dreyfusard and a Jew, indeed, it is suggested that he is a Dreyfusard, *because* he is a Jew. Saint-Loup abandons the Dreyfus Case as he abandons Rachel (II 462). The Princesse de Guermantes secretly believes in Dreyfus' innocence and has a Mass said for him, much to Charlus' amazement. The ideological values put



in motion by the Affair can be mapped, with Zionism as the neutral point in the schema, negating both anti-Semitism and right-wing nationalism.

Whilst the narrator is more circumspect in his Dreyfusism than Proust the man was, it is apparent from the first details of the Affair that the case is to be a privileged site of moral and political debate (II 451). Saint-Loup diverges from his peers and finds only one like-minded individual at the Doncières barracks: ‘Saint-Loup m’avait parlé d’un autre de ses camarades qui était là aussi, avec qui il s’entendait particulièrement bien, car ils étaient dans ce milieu les deux seuls partisans de la révision du procès Dreyfus’ (II 407). The narrator describes himself as sharing in an atmosphere of fraternal warmth, which is identified with the Dreyfus case.

The narrator casts a critical and derogatory eye over the myths and superstitions of the anti-Dreyfusards, exposing their rigidities and errors when truth is at hand. The question of narrative perspective naturally arises at this point. Where can the narrator speak from? What is his vantage point, lest he fall victim to his own critique? The anti-Dreyfusards cannot be simply attacked on the grounds of preferring mendacity, since this has its own charms. Proust states the problem in *jeunes filles* using a typically visual image:

Pareille aux kaléidoscopes qui tournent de temps en temps, la société place successivement de façon différente des éléments qu’on avait crus immuables et compose une autre figure. Je n’avais pas encore fait ma première communion, que des dames bien pensantes avaient la stupéfaction de rencontrer en visite une Juive élégante. Ces dispositions nouvelles du kaléidoscope sont produites par ce qu’un philosophe appellerait un changement de critère (I 507-8).

The rhetoric of pro- and anti-Dreyfusards is similar in many respects, as are their appeals to tradition, but there is no moral equilibrium between them. On one side there is justice, on the other, infamy. In *Sodome*, Swann tells Marcel that the Prince de Guermantes has changed his mind over the question of Dreyfus' supposed crime. We learn that he has discovered new facts about the case that mean he can no longer sustain his former view. Swann's admiration for the Prince is echoed and amplified by the narrator: the truth must be told, and justice done.

The logos for much of the book is anti-Semitism. Whilst this is dismantled in certain sections of the work, it is gleefully reconstructed in others, as in a passage from *jeunes filles*, in which the narrator describes the absence of communication between Jews and non-Jews at Balbec:

Or cette colonie juive était plus pittoresque qu'agréable. Il en était de Balbec comme de certains pays, la Russie ou la Roumanie, où les cours de géographie nous enseignent que la population israélite n'y jouit point de la même faveur et n'y est pas parvenue au même degré qu'à Paris par exemple. Toujours ensemble, sans mélange d'aucun autre élément, quand les cousines et les oncles de Bloch, ou leurs coreligionnaires mâles ou femelles se rendaient au Casino, les unes pour le 'bal', les autres bifurquaient vers le baccara, ils formaient un cortège homogène en soi et entièrement dissemblable des gens qui les regardaient passer et qui les retrouvaient là tous les ans sans jamais échanger un salut avec eux, que ce fût la société des Cambremer, le clan du premier président, ou les grands ou petits bourgeois, ou même de simples grainetiers de Paris, dont les filles, belles, fières, moqueuses et françaises comme des statues de Reims, n'auraient pas voulu se mêler à cette horde de fillasses mal élevées, poussant le souci des modes de 'bains de mer' jusqu'à toujours avoir l'air de revenir de pêcher la crevette ou d'être en train de danser le tango. Quant aux hommes, malgré l'éclat des smokings et des souliers vernis,

l'exagération de leur type faisait penser à ces recherches dites 'intelligentes' des peintres qui ayant à illustrer les Evangiles ou les *Mille et Une Nuits* pensent aux pays où la scène se passe et donnent à saint Pierre ou à Ali-Baba précisément la figure qu'avait le plus gros 'ponte' de Balbec (II 98-99).

The passage is, in a sense, a physiognomy of Jewishness, and a descriptive catalogue of the images on which anti-Semitism rests. The Jews who visit Balbec are colonisers; they are assimilated, yet proclaim their difference; they are foreigners in manner if not in fact, and bring a disturbing breath of the Orient to the bracing Normandy coast. They are a homogenous, exclusive group; their women form a 'horde' and the men attract attention by the glare of their clothes. They affront Christianity by refusing to conform to the statuary of the great cathedral and by sacrilegiously re-Judaizing the gospels. Their social behaviour brings upon itself, by its immodesty, the unanimous disapproval of French society; they are themselves to blame for whatever afflictions they continue to endure. The passage is nuanced, it is true; the Cambremers are not to be trusted, and in so far as the family is associated with Jewish exclusivism, the charges must perforce be unreliable. Yet there is still something disturbing about the cornucopian delight with which the narrator relates this interlude, and the ease with which he embraces such a vindictive vignette.

Xenophobia has expanded to fill the entire social space. Its characteristic assumptions explain everything in sight, and provide the beach or ballroom with a cogent geometry. In its monolithic accumulation of detail, the rhetoric of the passage is close to Céline. Later, in *Côté des Guermantes*, a critique of Orientalist anti-Semitism dissolves into a rhapsodic recreation of Orientalism itself. Even pastiche is part of the genre it denies.

It is unsatisfactory to say of such writing that it is one voice against many in the work, and that there are sympathetic accounts of Bloch and the Jewish community at large. The aggression in the anti-Semitic logos is searing, as we learn when Charlus claims that Dreyfus cannot be called a traitor since, as a Jew, he has no natural allegiance to France. The narrator recoils in horror from Charlus at this moment, but the narrator reports on a conversation between M. Bloch Snr. and Nissim Bernard:

S'attristant au malheur des Juifs, se souvenant de ses amitiés chrétiennes, devenant maniéré et précieux au fur et à mesure que les années venaient, pour des raisons que l'on verra plus tard, il avait maintenant l'air d'une larve préraphaélite où des poils se seraient malproprement implantés, comme des cheveux noyés dans une opale (II 586).

'Larve' implies a parasite devouring its host - Christian society; the biologising of much anti-Semitic writing being popular at the time of composition (c.f. Toussenel's anti-Semitic ornithologies of the 1880s). Some of the grotesque imagery here – hairs at the heart of an opal – proleptically refers to Nissim Bernard's homosexuality, which is unnatural and bestially corrupts the prefect jewel of his heterosexuality.

The logos of class values is also perceptible in the detailed portraits that Proust presents of workers and the family servants. They are the embodiments of folk-wisdom and form a bridge with the past. They are a link with feudalism, and their language, complete with malapropisms and faults of grammar and pronunciation, is a philological wonder as well as a source of comedy. The working-classes who drive omnibuses and operate telephones are alive to the syntax and vocabulary of the new, whereas high society would preserve oil-lamps and spurn modern machinery (I 507). Proust is held between disdain and wonder at the New World and its agents,

most notably in *Sodome* in which the relationship between Marcel and Albertine is inflected through aeroplanes and the motor-car. The narrator remains censorious and chivalric in discussions of class and taste:

Car pour la chose, je n'avais jamais fait de distinction entre les classes. Et si j'avais, à entendre appeler un chauffeur un monsieur, le même étonnement que le comte X... qui ne l'était que depuis huit jours et à qui, ayant dit ' la comtesse a l'air fatiguée', je fis tourner la tête derrière lui pour voir de qui je voudrais parler, c'était simplement par manque d'habitude du vocabulaire ; je n'avais fait de différence entre les ouvriers, les bourgeois et les grands seigneurs. (III, 414-5).

Far from unambivalent, however, the narrator simultaneously projects himself in two directions at once, away from his own class position, identifying himself with the nobility and the class of beneficent givers, and with the workers as recipients. If the bourgeoisie are removed from the equation, remarks Sprinker, equality of a type can exist among non-equals.<sup>57</sup>

Jew and non-Jew can also meet on an equal footing, but it is on the precondition that the former renounce his Jewishness:

Soit à cause de l'absence de ces joues qui n'étaient plus là que pour le diminuer, soit que l'artériosclérose, qui est une intoxication aussi, le rougît comme eût fait l'ivrognerie ou le déformât comme eût fait la morphine, le nez de polichinelle de Swann, longtemps résorbé dans un visage agréable, semblait maintenant énorme, tuméfié, cramoisi, plutôt celui d'un vieil Hébreu que d'un curieux Valois. D'ailleurs, peut-être chez lui un en ces derniers

---

<sup>57</sup> Sprinker, *History*, p. 116.

jours la race faisait-elle reparaître plus accusé le type physique qui la caractérise en même temps que le sentiment d'une solidarité morale avec les autres Juifs, solidarité que Swann semblait avoir oubliée, et que greffées les unes sur les autres, la maladie mortelle, l'Affaire Dreyfus, la propagande antisémite avaient réveillée. Il y a certains Israélites, très fins pourtant et mondains délicats, chez lesquels restent en réserve et dans la coulisse, afin de faire leur entrée à une heure donnée de leur vie, comme dans une pièce, un mufler et un prophète. Swann était arrivé à l'âge du prophète (III, 89).

The passage continues as the narrator remarks on his own changed attitude to Swann, to explain his lack of nervousness in the former's presence. His new-found ease is a sign, moreover, that Marcel has now replaced Swann as the most desirable dinner-guest in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It would be wrong to assert either Proust's or the narrator's simple identification with right-wing nationalism, or even any sympathy with its prejudices. Both the Prince and the Duc de Guermantes become Dreyfusards. Aristocratic prejudice can be combined with progressive political views. Whilst they are never completely autonomous of social determinations, political positions do not always reflect them, either.

This truth is demonstrated in the cases of Odette and Mme Verdurin. Several pages illustrate this through the contrasting fortunes of the two women during the Dreyfus Affair. The former hosts a nationalist salon and is thereby catapulted into new social spheres, eventually appearing at the theatre with the Comtesse Molé. In contrast, Mme Verdurin seems confined in her social circle, since the aristocracy cannot conceive of a Dreyfusard salon.

History is, in the last instance, the history of society, and if social rank is negotiated in class terms, it is mediated through the agreed codes of contemporary language. Society is an

impersonal mechanism for the production of political change. The spokesperson of the logos is Norpois. He is the main source of information on King Théodose II, and his oratorical skills are given free rein in *jeunes filles*:

‘C’est tout simplement un coup de maître; un peu hardi je le veux bien, mais d’une audace qu’en somme l’événement a pleinement justifiée. Les traditions diplomatiques ont certainement du bon, mais dans l’espèce elles avaient fini par faire vivre son pays et le nôtre dans une atmosphère de renfermé qui n’était plus respirable. Eh bien! Une des manières de renouveler l’air, évidemment une de celles qu’on ne peut pas recommander mais que le roi Théodose pouvait se permettre [...] j’y applaudis des deux mains’ (I 451-2).

Norpois’ Homais-ian prolix commentary conjures Théodose into being; but the King is an empty signifier, and this brings forth another stream of vacuities from the former ambassador. Norpois’ *idées reçues*, clichés, proverbs and truisms coalesce into unstemmable tirades of mixed metaphors, pleonasm and circumlocutions, in which the narrator clearly delights. Norpois’ language is by turns archaic and stiltedly modern, expansively digressive and brutally plain.

If Norpois’ social rank gives him licence to speak voluminously on trifles, the same cannot be said of the other two aristocratic figures who exert influence over Marcel: Saint-Loup and Charlus. Their speech is rather more reliable than Norpois’, as it is not dispossessed of its historical axis. Saint-Loup is able to trace over long periods the migration of tactical devices in a manner that speaks to the narrator’s own literary ambitions. He also has ‘extensive tracts of time to manage’ and ‘inherits former models’ from his ancient and modern forbears (II 410-11). He is himself the author and agent in his historiography rather than a mere chronicler of events. His

family has long since left the historical stage, but he speaks as if they still held sway over it. Charlus, by contrast, dwells with relative ease on the historical dimension, and bases his claims to distinction on his aristocratic titles:

- Permettez, répondit M. de Charlus avec un air de hauteur, à M. Verdurin étonné, je suis aussi duc de Brabant, damoiseau de Montargis, prince d'Oléron, de Carency, de Viareggio, et des Dunes. D'ailleurs, cela ne fait absolument rien. Ne vous tourmentez pas (III 333).

There is an element of comedy in Charlus' enumerated titles, but both he and Saint-Loup are able to exploit history for their own ends. Earlier in the novel, Charlus has offered to initiate Marcel into the ways of the world, inculcating him into the arcane and recondite history of European political institutions. Within the scope of the novel, the Emperor of Austria has praised Charlus for the depth of his historical knowledge, regretting only that the Bourbons did not have the benefit of his counsel. Charlus points to a necessary understanding of historical events if Marcel is to become a novelist. Both Charlus and Saint-Loup have recourse to history to situate themselves in genealogical time, but do not fail to glory in the gratuitousness of their heredity. The narrator has no such history, and must look to art to make up for this deficiency.

At this juncture, we might remember Deleuze's assertion of the Proustian 'bankruptcy of the logos'.<sup>58</sup> Deleuze asserts that Saint-Loup, passionate about friendship, Norpois, obsessed by the conventional significations of diplomacy, and Cottard, who has concealed his timidity with the cold mark of authoritarian scientific discourse, have value only because of their familiarity with the mute, fragmentary and subjacent signs that integrate them into the logos. Cottard is an

---

<sup>58</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, (trans. Richard Howard) London: Athlone, 2000, p. 106.



illiterate fool but finds genius in the diagnosis of ambiguous syndromes. Norpois knows well that the conventions of diplomacy, like those of worldliness, mobilise and restore pure signs under the explicit significations employed. Saint-Loup explains that the art of warfare depends less on science and reasoning than on the penetration of signs that are always partial and enveloped in heterogeneous factors, or even false signs intended to deceive an adversary. There is no logos of war, politics or surgery, claims Deleuze, but only ciphers coiled within substances and fragments that make totalizable the strategist, diplomat or physician, and ‘make so many fragments of a divine interpreter closer to the parlour Sybil than the learned dialectician’.<sup>59</sup> Everywhere, claims Deleuze, Proust contrasts the world of signs with that of attributes, the world of hieroglyphs and ideograms with the world of analytic expression.<sup>60</sup> What are constantly impugned are ‘the great disciplines inherited from the Greeks: *Philos*, *Sophia*, *Dialogue*, *Logos* and *Phoné*’.<sup>61</sup> Deleuze claims that the world of signs is contrasted with the logos in five respects: the configuration of the parts as they are outlined in the world, the nature of the law they reveal, the use of the faculties they solicit, the type of unity they create, and the structure of the language that translates and interprets them.

There is a certain Platonism about Proust, claims Deleuze, and the entirety of *A la recherche* is an experimentation with experiences and essences. The use of the faculties in Plato’s model of education opens up a remembering soul that discovers its meaning and discerns a new essence. But an obvious difference appears: Plato’s reminiscence has, as its point of departure, sensuous qualities apprehended in apposition and in fusion. This intelligence imitates the Idea as best it can. And the Idea as the goal of reminiscence is the stable Essence, the element separating opposites, introducing the perfect mean into the whole. It is for this reason that the Idea is always

---

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze, *Signs*, p. 108.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze, *Signs*, p. 112.

<sup>61</sup> Deleuze, *ibid.*

presupposed, even when discovered retrospectively. The use of the faculties is therefore a prelude to the dialectic that unites Ideal and Essence in a single logos.

In a sense, this is untrue of *A la recherche*; qualitative transition, mutual fusion and unstable opposition are all inscribed within an 'état d'âme' which is no longer that state of things nor of the world.<sup>62</sup> A slanting ray of sunshine, an odour or a flavour owes its value to the subjective aspect that it penetrates. This is indexed when reminiscence intervenes, because a quality is inseparable from a chain of associations. The subjective aspect is never the last word, of course, in *A la recherche*; Swann's weakness is precisely that he proceeds no further than simple associations, forever linking Vinteuil's phrase with his love for Odette (I 237). Individual subjective realities are only to be transcended in the direction of a perfect Essence which remains superior to the person who apprehends it. Even Swann sees that art refers to what we might term a 'superior reality'.

Despite Deleuze's assertion that Marcel is in fact inculcated into an anti-logos, most critics agree that the authority attributed to the narrator rests ultimately on the reader's willingness to credit the narrator with *alethēa* ('truths', 'meanings' or 'interpretations'). Whether or not one believes that it is the narrator's intention to manipulate a particular metaphor, or to achieve a desired effect, the conclusions drawn by the reader determine the narrator's authoritative status. The narrator invites this type of judgement by appealing to the reader to read the novel as a looking-glass in which to examine his own life:

---

<sup>62</sup> Deleuze, *Signs*, p. 109.

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 qu'il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n'eût peut-être pas vu en soi-même (III 911).

The status of this gesture is debatable. We are as yet unsure whether the narrator is conferring ultimate authority on the reader, or whether this gesture is intended to seek confirmation of the narrator's mastery. It may simply be an honest enquiry into the reader's own experience. For Terdiman, the *Bildungsroman* is presented as an initiation into semiotics, the project of novels of this genre being to describe 'how codes and signs in the social world are constituted, transmitted and manipulated, and the consequences of such operations'.<sup>63</sup> This understanding of the *Kunstler-* or *Bildungsroman* reframes the concept of education from a more formal institutional or societal ('coming of age') process to an understanding of language itself. Deleuze describes *A la recherche* as a *Bildungsroman*. Only at the end of the work, when Marcel finishes his apprenticeship does the novel become more than a *Bildungsroman* because the narrator has acquired Truth: 'le narrateur n'en soit pas seulement, et tout empiriquement davantage que le héros; il sait dans l'absolu, il connaît la vérité'.<sup>64</sup> Knowledge gives the narrator a sovereign authority over the text and provides the commentary and interpretation to Marcel's own story.

In a footnote to his discussion of metaphors in Proust, Genette implies that narrative authority arises from the narrator's position as a writer rather than an historian, as biographies and chronicles of events are governed by experience rather than imagination.<sup>65</sup> The writer who chooses and selects amongst words, images and stories of the text exercises control - he is master of the logos. The narrator, a spider, 'dont la toile même est *A la recherche* en train de se faire, de

---

<sup>63</sup> Terdiman, *Dialectics*, p. 212.

<sup>64</sup> Genette, *Figures III*, Paris; Editions du Seuil, 1962, p. 237.

<sup>65</sup> Genette, *Figures*, p. 50.

se tisser avec chaque fil remué par tel ou tel signe', is a type of machine that, whilst weaving the thread of the text and creating multiple truths, creates and instigates meanings.<sup>66</sup> To create meaning implies an agency in which one is not merely subject to the semiotic system but can freely manipulate language. In Bénéviste's terms it is the difference between being the *sujet d'énoncé* and the *sujet d'énonciation*.

Besides understanding whether or not the narrator has achieved mastery over language, the second important question in Terdiman's discussion of the *Bildungsroman* is that of the mentor or initiator. It is Swann who introduces Marcel to the world outside Combray. The curious novel-within-a-novel, *Un Amour de Swann*, confirms Swann's unique place in a work which is otherwise related in the first person. The similarities between the experiences of Swann and Marcel are plentiful; Swann's story is in many ways a *mise en abîme* of Marcel's. Although there are important differences between the two individuals, Swann is the adult Marcel aspires to be.

Swann's role in Marcel's education is that of the father. The relationship between Swann, the mother and Marcel therefore fits the Oedipal triangle of Father-Mother-Child. The child has an original union with the mother which is interrupted by the father, instituting difference. Swann similarly disrupts the routine of Combray, bringing difference to the closed world. He also instigates the *drame du coucher*, when the mother absents herself from Marcel to entertain Swann. Just as the child seeks to lose his attachment to the mother in order to become the father, Marcel seeks to become master of the logos. The relationship between Marcel and Swann prefigures the relationship between Marcel the boy and Marcel the narrator. To become the narrator is to accede to a privileged position, to become the father, having moved to truth and knowledge from error and falsehood.

---

<sup>66</sup> Genette, *Figures*, p. 218.

The question therefore arises: will Marcel's fate be that of Frédéric Moreau, or Bouvard and Pécuchet? After a life of disenchantment and failure, Frédéric, unable to satisfy his desires, is condemned to retell his story; the search for meaning becomes the desire to narrate. *A la recherche* specifically addresses the question of desire and defines it as an endless series of substitutions. Charlus, like Marcel, attempts unsuccessfully to make a continually changing series of partners fit an ideal, but the fit is always inadequate and the quest continues. As we shall explore in the next section, desire depends precisely on a lack of fit; it cannot be assuaged by a physical act, but is instead the transformation of sexual attraction into a need for the impossible possession of the Other. Marcel's need for understanding of the laws of desire and his realisation that language cannot be appropriated from an Other, make him into the narrator. In other words, desire must be negotiated within the mythos.

## Chapter Two

‘Le sens de l’histoire date d’hier. Et c’est peut-être ce que le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle a de meilleur’. Thus Flaubert defined the epistemological difference that characterized the historical knowledge of his own times. This transformation gave a new *élan* to historical studies in Flaubert’s time. In this chapter, I show that he himself accorded a privileged position to historical representation in his work, whether it dealt with the ancient, modern, political, religious or social. His own reading of history testifies to the profound rethinking of the discipline that the nineteenth century witnessed, and the emergence of new objects of study: social forces, lived experience, mentalities and representations. Flaubert also introduces a critical dimension, however, and slyly deconstructs contemporary currents in historiography.

It was during his adolescence, spent at the Collège de Rouen, that Flaubert was introduced to historiography. His tutor, Adolphe Chéruel, was a former tutee of the famed historian, Michelet. On leaving the Collège in 1839/40, when illness rendered him bedridden, he wrote to Vasse de Saint-Ouen that he had returned to history to enlarge his knowledge and with a view to educating his niece, Caroline. During his life he corresponded with Michelet, was acquainted with Alfred Maury, Alfred Baudry, Taine and Renan. All of his works have an historical dimension, from the *Œuvres de jeunesse* (1835-42) to *Bouvard* (1880), whether they recount ancient history as in *Salammbô* (1862), *Hérodias* (1877), the versions of the *Tentation* (final version 1874), or modern events such as we find in *L’Education* (1869).

His correspondence shows the fascination that history held for him during his formative years, as well as its importance in developing his aesthetic, in which it serves as a model which art strives to imitate. Not only does Flaubert depict historical events; these are indissociable from the

evolution of his novelistic forms. In the *Correspondance*, we see that a reflection on history broadens into a more expansive meditation on meaning and knowledge, which would have a determining effect on the Flaubertian novel.

To an extent, Flaubert is a product of his times. A major component of the Romantic historiographic project was, as Crossley points out, a reconstruction of the past.<sup>67</sup> The past was retrieved, rediscovered and re-presented many times, in the writings of Guizot, Thierry, Michelet and others. Crossley demonstrates that the discourse on history became an essential component of French Romantic thought in the nineteenth century, largely as a result of the unresolved consequences of the Revolution. The Revolution problematised a nation's whole relationship with the past, whilst at the same time, apparently setting the agenda for future political directions.<sup>68</sup> The nation stood in a new relationship to Time itself, as the language of renewal assumed a concrete form in the revolutionary calendar. But present concerns could easily overwhelm any promise betokened by the past and, as the hopes of 1789 faded, France was mired in division, civil war, *la Terreur*, the rise and fall of Napoleon and humiliation at Waterloo. The *ancien régime*'s certainties of political, moral and spiritual authority were destroyed, but no stable order emerged to replace them. After 1815 the need to understand recent history broadened into more general reflections on the past and its meaning.

Anne Green's seminal work *Flaubert and the Historical Novel* attempts to situate *Salammbô* within some of the trends and theories that were contemporary to Flaubert.<sup>69</sup> His writing in *Salammbô* can be shown to have an awareness of the theories of Michelet on Afro-Roman

---

<sup>67</sup> Ceri Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, The Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 2-4.

<sup>68</sup> Crossley, *French Historians*, *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Anne Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel; Salammbô Reassessed*, Cambridge: CUP, 1982.

relations, those of Thierry on race and heredity, and Gobineau on the decline of civilisations. Green sees in *Salammbô* not just a rendering of ancient Carthage, but of France in 1848. The unreasoned aspirations of the populace, the unbridled general enthusiasm for revolt and the brutality of the empowered and unempowered groups are as characteristic of the 1848 episode as they are of the Mercenary Wars.<sup>70</sup>

*L'Education* is more than an historical novel; it is what we might term 'a fictional form which relates events imaginatively' as it does, at times, have the precision of an historical document. But historical precision was perhaps not Flaubert's primary aim. Commentators as diverse as Lukács and Sainte-Beuve have all, moreover, reinforced the notion that 'historical fiction' is an oxymoron, and only 'Realist Fiction' is valid, in that it authentically reproduces a familiar and knowable segment of history. For Lukács, the decline of the genre is related to the upheavals of 1848. Detached from the historical process of development and experiencing profound historical discontinuity, Flaubert and his contemporaries were isolated from their ideological origins.<sup>71</sup> This alienation is perceptible in various types of 'inauthentic' discourse. History in *Salammbô* is, claims Lukács, a decorous setting for a patrician young maiden's hysteria. Lukács' comments on 'historical untruthfulness' in Flaubert's writing are surprisingly similar to Sainte-Beuve's criticism of *Salammbô* as historical fiction. The subject-matter ('une guerre perdue' in the history of a doomed civilisation) was too remote to be of interest to contemporary readers, who were only interested in literature through which they could recover the seeds of the present.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Green, *Historical Novel*, p. 116.

<sup>71</sup> G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, (trans. Mitchell), London: Merlin, 1962, p. 402.

<sup>72</sup> Sainte-Beuve's article in *Le Figaro* on *Salammbô* of 22 December 1862; in Eugene Donato, *The Script of Decadence, Essays on the Fictions of Flaubert and the Poetics of Romanticism*, New York: OUP, 1993, p. 428 *et passim*.



Both Sainte-Beuve and Lukács use mimetic fidelity as the standard for historical verisimilitude. On this charge, *Salammbô* is both too remote and too familiar. Flaubert had deviated too far from a knowable (representable) past in his description of Punic civilization. If historical novels implied a re-creation of the past, that past should not be temporally or spatially too distant from the present. Walter Scott was undoubtedly the greatest influence on French historical fiction in the nineteenth century, and by the time his *Quentin Durward* arrived in France in 1823, Scott's reputation was firmly established.<sup>73</sup> For Sainte-Beuve, Scott was a truly accomplished writer, whose *Ivanhoe* described the Middle Ages from a privileged position not granted to Flaubert when describing ancient Carthage from the standpoint of a nineteenth-century Frenchman:

Walter Scott, le maître et le vrai fondateur du roman historique, vivait dans son Ecosse, à peu de siècles, à peu de générations de distance des événements et des personnages qu'il nous a retracés avec tant de vie et de vraisemblance.<sup>74</sup>

Sainte-Beuve and Lukács' arguments proceed from the same metaphysic: that the past is recreatable. Sainte-Beuve may express his views in terms of knowing 'l'âme' or 'la vie' of a culture through a work, and Lukács may seek 'the real historico-social driving force within it' but both assume that the function of historical literature is to present some objective reality; to be 'true'.<sup>75</sup> If Sainte-Beuve's and Lukács' ideas carry any weight, it is perhaps because they go some way to explaining why readers feel more comfortable with the 'here and now' of novels such as *L'Education* rather than with the 'there and then' exoticism of novels such as *Salammbô*. But both Lukács and Sainte-Beuve reveal not an *idea* of a place or people, but a description of them as if they had actually existed, rather than having been retrospectively constructed.

---

<sup>73</sup> Green, *Historical Novel*, p. 24.

<sup>74</sup> In Donato, *Script of Decadence*, pp. 429-430.

<sup>75</sup> Donato, *Script of Decadence*, p. 428.

Flaubert did not deny Sainte-Beuve's criticisms at all, but merely rebuffed him on the pertinence of his charges. He stated that his purpose in writing was the object of Art, not the truth of any Platonic Ideal, for the past is always inflected through the present, which precludes investing it with any trans-historical truth:

Dieu sait jusqu'à quel point j'ai poussé le scrupule en matière de documents, livres, voyages, etc. [...] Eh bien, je regarde tout cela comme très secondaire et inférieur. La réalité matérielle (ou ce que l'on appelle ainsi) ne doit être qu'un tremplin pour s'élever plus haut. Me croyez-vous assez godiche pour être convaincu que j'aie fait dans *Salammbô* une vraie reproduction de Carthage, ou dans la *Tentation de Saint Antoine* une peinture exacte de l'Alexandrianisme? Ah non! Mais je suis sûr d'avoir exprimé quelque chose qui ressemble à l'idéal qu'on en a aujourd'hui (to L. Hennique, 2-3 February 1880).

Sainte-Beuve's comments following the publication of *Salammbô* in 1862 show his failure to understand how history and literature problematise each other. The conjoining of history and fiction in the light of new theories of historiography was a subject on which Flaubert speculated for much of his life. He seems to have had no objection in principle to the hybrid genre of 'historical fiction'. Flaubert apparently first became interested in historical literature through the plays he saw performed as a boy.<sup>76</sup> These included vogue-pieces of the day such as Dumas' *Catherine Howard* and Hugo's *Marion de Lorme*. His correspondence with his friend Ernest Chevalier shows his excitement at visits to the theatre in Rouen, as well as his enthusiasm for putting on plays and reading them to friends. When Mignot, a family friend, read *Don Quixote* to Gustave (aged 11), the boy took copious notes on its style and setting (15 January 1832). Gustave

---

<sup>76</sup> Green, *Historical Fiction*, pp. 5-12.

and Ernest later copied reviews of the latest theatrical pieces into their short-lived journal, *Art et progrès*.

Flaubert's interest in historical drama influenced his early literary output, his most substantial piece of juvenilia was a five-act play, *Loys XI* (1838) but he also wrote pastiches of Hugo, Corneille and Dumas (15 January 1832). Critics see little merit in these plays, as the pieces written up to 1838 complete with intrigues, disguise and a *deus-ex-machina* merely parrot the conventions of the Romantic stage.<sup>77</sup> He may have been interested in drama for its own sake, for its colourful action, but we must remember that it represented an escape for the generation of 1830, as many of the authors he parodied (e.g. Goethe) were regarded as vaguely scandalous when Flaubert was at the Collège de Rouen (1832-9).

In time, Flaubert's taste for generic melodramas waned, and after 1838 he mentions the theatre only with a type of detached irony, as he came to view its plots as hackneyed and its characters as lifeless. When Bouvard and Pécuchet turn to the theatre, for example, one finds that:

Il avala deux Pharamond, trois Clovis, quatre Charlemagne, plusieurs Philippe Auguste, une foule de Jeanne d'Arc et bien des Marquises de Pompadour et des conspirations de Cellamare. Presque toutes lui parurent plus bêtes que les romans. Car il existe pour le théâtre une histoire convenue que rien ne peut détruire (*Bouvard*, p. 157).

Generally, however, novelists took the concept of historical fiction more seriously than did dramatists, and throughout the 1820s and 30s there were continual attempts to resolve the problem of bringing together history and fiction.

---

<sup>77</sup> Green, *Historical Fiction*, p. 6.

The first flower of Romanticism was beginning to fade in Paris by the time Flaubert composed *Bovary*, but it was arguably just beginning to blossom in the provinces. Flaubert, too, had to wrestle with the paradigm created by Scott's fiction. His correspondence shows that he was familiar with Scott's work (23 July 1835 and 23 January 1857). *The Pirate* in particular seems to have whetted Flaubert's appetite for the *conte oriental* he was preparing. Elsewhere, however, 'Scott' is used to imply an insipid form of writing. Emma Bovary's reveries of minstrels, castles and guardrooms are all attributed to the sway that Scott's fiction holds over her. Frédéric Moreau (another indiscriminating protagonist) aspires early on in his career to be 'le Walter Scott de la France' (*L'Education*, 31). Even Balzac wrote in 1831 that the reading population of France was nauseated by 'l'histoire de la France Walter-Scottée'.<sup>78</sup> Imitators of Scott became known as 'The Wardrobe School' of novelists, for their interest in conveying the atmosphere of a time and place in picturesque detail, and showing antiquated gestures, with little concern for historical substance. Characteristically, Bouvard and Pécuchet are initially dazzled by the 'lanterne' that historical fiction seemed to hold up to history: 'Les hommes du passé qui n'étaient pour eux que des fantômes ou des noms devenaient des êtres vivants' (*Bouvard*, 155). But they are disillusioned when they discover Scott's cavalier attitude to documented historical truth, in order to make the narrative more interesting and intelligible.

One of those who gave particular attention to the question of inscribing history within a fictional framework was Vigny. He believed the novel capable of showing the hidden movements of history, as the novelist could suggest causes and trace outcomes in a manner not possible for the historian. The historian relied on existing material, he claimed, to produce *le vrai* as opposed to *la vérité* of the novel – what is known to have happened, rather than what might or *ought to have*

---

<sup>78</sup> *Préface to La Peau de chagrin*, (ed. by Pierre Citron), Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971.

happened. In Art, thought Vigny, probability is more important than clinical truth; ‘bad’ historical novels resulted from the slavish copying of authentic chronicles, where the result might be honest but unconvincing. The virtue of the novel was precisely its status as fiction, by reason of its ability, through the imagination of the author, to access a higher truth than is possible for the historian.

In Vigny’s argument one can discern shades of the Aristotelian view that a poetic history is more valuable than a factual account, since the artist can extrapolate universal or transcendent truths from specific events. Flaubert disapproved of Vigny’s handling of history in *Servitude et grandeur militaires*, but only on the basis of its ‘lofty (although pedestrian) style’, rather than the principle of bringing together history and fiction. Vigny’s ‘bombast of patriotism’ scarcely appealed to Flaubert.<sup>79</sup> Instead, he explained to Louise Colet that he would have treated the same subject with passion, in order to ‘donner un peu d’air à la conscience humaine qui en (sic) manque’ (7 April 1854).

Flaubert was not critical either of Hugo’s treatment of historical fact. Hugo saw himself as the natural successor to Walter Scott, in creating a novel that would at once be prosaic and picturesque. Hugo deemed that the merits of the novel stemmed from the fact that it was a work of caprice, fantasy and invention, and his documentation was avowedly superficial and derivative.<sup>80</sup> Flaubert’s comments on *Les Misérables* (1862) curiously centre on the writer’s deficiencies in the conception of his subject-matter: Hugo concentrated on the minutiae of décor and trivia, thought Flaubert, at the expense of truly significant events. Hugo’s characters were lacking in depth and his philosophy was (grandiose but) vague (15 June 1857 and 1 May 1870).

---

<sup>79</sup> Green, *Historical Fiction*, p. 31.

<sup>80</sup> Green, *Historical Fiction*, p. 32.

Flaubert makes no criticisms of Hugo's anachronisms, however, or his distortions of fact to create thematic unity or stimulate the reader's interest. The overall view was, as he explained to George Sand in 1875, that 'une impression générale' and the total beauty of a work should be the primary concerns of a novelist. In his *Notes de voyage*, after visiting the Punic lands, Flaubert later reassessed the relationship between Truth and Beauty. 'Il faut faire', he remarked, 'à travers le Beau, le Vrai quand même'. The tension between *le Beau* and *le Vrai* would call for a very different order of narratology to that which he found among his contemporaries.

*L'Education*, Flaubert's third published novel, appeared at the height of his fame, when he was 48. This was before the tragedy of the war on the Commune, before the death of his most beloved friends, Le Poittevin and Louis Bouilhet, just as war was declared. Jules de Goncourt died in June 1870. There was the death of his mother in April 1872, and that of the 'second mother to him', George Sand, in 1876.<sup>81</sup> Then in 1875 there was his impoverishment when, to save his niece's husband from the disgrace of bankruptcy, he sacrificed his personal fortune and lived out his days in penury. *L'Education* marks the height of his fame, but it also marked the end of his happy and prosperous years. It was for him an important date which would have a profound effect on how recent history was written.

Although *Bovary* is set in a definite epoch of French history, references to actual events are few, and there is little attempt at recreating the atmosphere peculiar to a particular period.<sup>82</sup> *Salammbô*, dealing with the Mercenary Wars contained in Polybius' *Histories*, deals with a distant era unfamiliar to Flaubert's readers and therefore more easily manipulated to meet the

---

<sup>81</sup> Enid Starkie, *Flaubert the Master, A Critical and Biographical Study (1856-1880)*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971, p. 140.

<sup>82</sup> Homais' reference to 'Les inondés de Lyon' puts the action sometime after 1840; see D. A. Williams, *The Hidden Life at its Source: A study of Flaubert's L'Education sentimentale*, Hull: Hull University Press, 1987.

exigencies of a conventional narrative. In *Salammbô*, Flaubert created an historical epic, a form prized for its all-inclusiveness, as Merchant reminds us.<sup>83</sup> *L'Education* sits alongside Zola's frescoes of industrialization such as we find in *Germinal*, or the vast social panoramas of Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*. These too, represented new ways of bringing together history and fiction. The historical epic of Quinet's *Ahasvérus* or Lamartine's *La Chute d'un ange* owed much to the epical revival, precipitated by evolutions in historiography, progress in the physical sciences and the influence of Occultist thought (notably Illuminism). *L'Education* does not fall into the category of those works, however, which represent the ascent of Man in terms variously described as cosmogonic or palengenesic. Flaubert's logos in *L'Education* in fact becomes a meta-historical critique of contemporary historiography; an epic about the writing of history itself.

The 'epic' is not easily defined. Yet Lucas' entry in the *Chambers Encyclopaedia* offers a useful summary of the essential epic qualities:

Unity of action, rapidity; art of beginning in the middle; the use of superstition, of prophecy; the ornamental simile; the recurrent epithet and, above all, a nobility understated except at times of heightened emotion.<sup>84</sup>

Mary McCarthy adds that the epic is any work which surpasses Realism, whilst Ezra Pound in his *ABC of Reading* merely claims that the epic is a poem including history.<sup>85</sup> These two poles: 'surpassing Realism' and 'including history' represent the two ends between which we usually place the experience described as 'epic'.

---

<sup>83</sup> Paul Merchant, *The Epic*, London: Methuen, 1972, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> In Merchant, *Epic*, p. vii.

<sup>85</sup> In Merchant, *Epic*, p. 2.

Writing recent history, as opposed to ancient history in *Salammô*, posed problems which were new to Flaubert, and concerned precisely the relationship between the colourful historical background – specifically the events of 1848 - and the lacklustre figures in the foreground:

J'ai du mal à emboîter mes personnages dans les événements de 1848. J'ai peur que les fonds ne dévorent les premiers plans, c'est là le défaut du genre historique. Les personnages de l'histoire sont plus intéressants que ceux de la fiction, surtout quand ceux-là ont des passions modérées; on s'intéresse moins à Frédéric qu'à Lamartine. Et puis, que choisir parmi les faits réels? (*Correspondance* V, 363).<sup>86</sup>

The frame risked overwhelming the picture.

The most important means by which Flaubert resolves this disproportion is by the intensification of the emotional life of Frédéric Moreau at the various turning-points of history. Flaubert's famous remark from *Carnet* 19, 'Montrer que le sentimentalisme ...suit la politique et en reproduit les phases',<sup>87</sup> shows that rather than functioning as a backdrop for events, the historical element was to be linked to the fictional side by a complex series of developing parallels in a pattern synchronizing history and psychology.<sup>88</sup> Williams demonstrates that Flaubert put most emphasis on the psychological element, grafting on historical material after the final outcome of Frédéric had been decided upon. Although this gave room for manoeuvre as far as the historical element was concerned, on account of events having to take place in a specific order, the

---

<sup>86</sup> In Williams, *Hidden Life*, p.193.

<sup>87</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 194.

<sup>88</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 195.



composition of the novel was more a question of adjusting historical events to psychological changes than of synchronizing Frédéric's development to match the course of politics.<sup>89</sup>

It has been generally accepted, since Jacques Proust's study, that the main parallel in the novel is between the disintegration of Frédéric's life and the demise of the Second Empire, and thus history and psychology become extensions of each other.<sup>90</sup> Clear demarcation exists nonetheless between the two spheres of action in the novel; the emotional development of Frédéric on the one hand and the political evolution of France on the other, from the Bourgeois Monarchy of Louis-Philippe to the Second Empire. For some, the most striking parallel between the said spheres is the fixation in the Ideal and on the Feminine in particular.<sup>91</sup> What Flaubert referred to as 'l'adoration quasi-religieuse de la femme' in conversation with the Goncourt Brothers has its counterpart in 'l'adoration de l'humanité pour elle-même et par elle-même'.<sup>92</sup> Flaubert establishes a network of similarities between the two spheres and Frédéric and the political activists embark on a problematic quest for the Ideal Woman or the Ideal Republic. Flaubert took a dim view of the poeticisation of the Feminine, linking it to the influence of religion and the cult of the Virgin Mary. Similarly, he was sceptical about the efficacy of 'la race stérile et sèche (inactive dans le bien comme dans l'idéal) des humanitaires républicains' in general,<sup>93</sup> but was particularly scornful towards Utopian Socialism: 'O, Socialistes! C'est là votre ulcère: l'idéal vous manque et cette manière que vous poursuivez vous échappe des deux mains'.<sup>94</sup> Socialism, claimed Flaubert, was steeped in the traditions of primitivist Christianity, as he claimed that 'Ce

---

<sup>89</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, pp. 98 – 143.

<sup>90</sup> Jacques Proust, 'Structure et sens dans L'Education sentimentale' in the *Revue des sciences humaines*, 36, (1971), pp. 365-72.

<sup>91</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 195.

<sup>92</sup> *Correspondance* III, In Williams *Hidden Life*, p. 208.

<sup>93</sup> *Correspondance* III, in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 178.

<sup>94</sup> *Correspondance* III, in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 208.

que je trouve de Christianisme dans le Socialisme est énorme'.<sup>95</sup> Flaubert also wrote six pages of notes on why 'les Socialistes sont Catholiques'.<sup>96</sup> Bringing together the worship of the Feminine and of the People, he attributes the sorry state of France to the dual influence of religion and socialism: 'Le néo-Catholicisme d'une part et le socialisme de l'autre ont abêti la France. Tout se meurt entre l'Immaculée Conception et les gammelles ouvrières'.<sup>97</sup> The main criticism levelled against the ideologues of the modern era is that they fail to see (or ignore) 'l'évolution fatale des choses'<sup>98</sup> or 'l'organisation essentielle de l'histoire', that is, the basic tendency of all life to degeneration.<sup>99</sup>

After his first encounter with Mme Arnoux, Frédéric basks contentedly in the expectation of future fulfilment, 'et bercé par le mouvement de la voiture, les paupières à demi-closes, le regard dans les nuages, il s'abandonnait à une joie rêveuse et infinie' (p. 27). Deslauriers also has high hopes for the future: 'Patience! Une nouvelle '89 se prepare!' (p. 34). Yet remarkably little happens to bring either character any closer to his dream. For a whole year, Frédéric sees no more of Mme Arnoux and Deslauriers is unable to be in Paris. Frédéric is invited to dinner-parties at the Arnoux's and his relationship with Mme Arnoux remains very formal, whilst in the political domain, apart from the skirmishes of I 4, there is little action. The attitude of Frédéric's entourage is the barometer of popular sentiment towards the government, and demonstrates hostility to the current regime: 'Tous sympathisaient. D'abord, leur haine avait la hauteur d'un dogme indiscutable' (p. 48). By contrast, in the private sphere, Frédéric bears no ill-will to either Arnoux or his wife; at this early stage, the illusory faith invested in the Ideal Republic has not yet crystallized, just as Frédéric's hostility to Mme Arnoux has yet to materialize.

---

<sup>95</sup> *Correspondance* III, in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 385.

<sup>96</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p.242.

<sup>97</sup> *Correspondance* IV, in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 275.

<sup>98</sup> *Correspondance supplémentaire*, in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 275.

<sup>99</sup> *Manuscrit* V, in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 209.

In Part I, Frédéric's aims in relation to Mme Arnoux remain ill-defined, but in Part II he entertains more definite hopes of making a conquest either of Rosanette or Mme Arnoux, just as Deslauriers takes the 'prochaine Révolution' for granted. In both domains, moreover, despite the progress made, there are set-backs and rebuffs, progress and concessions. Frédéric's advances at Cruveil meet with the same rejections as Sénécals 'génie de la Révolution' (p. 107), which leads to his arrest and imprisonment. He is released in the last chapter, just as Mme Arnoux capitulates to love for Frédéric. By the end of Part II, then, the moment is propitious both for the revolution and for Frédéric's love of Mme Arnoux to be consummated.

The main parallel between erotic and political aspirations emerges early in the narrative, and is further complicated by Frédéric's involvement with Rosanette as well as Mme Dambreuse, and the diversification of political tendencies amongst Frédéric's entourage. The progress of his relationship with Rosanette parallels that with Mme Arnoux and it is finally the former whom he takes as his mistress in the room prepared in the Rue Tronchet. The Ideal, it appears, has its *remplaçantes*.

Frédéric's increasingly complex entanglements are mirrored, in Part II, by events on the political front. Sénécals becomes a socialist and makes a concerted bid to establish the Republic, whilst Deslauriers, like Flaubert himself, remains sceptical of any political ideology, and socialism in particular. He remains emotionally committed to the republican Ideal as he longs for 'un grand bouleversement' in which he will find his niche in society. Dussardier's attachment to the Republic seems typically naïve and sentimental: 'elle signifiait, croyait-il, affranchissement et bonheur universel' (p. 150). For Williams, these different outlooks correspond to different strands in Frédéric's increasingly complex relations with women: Sénécals combination of

disinterestedness and determination matches Frédéric's own combination of ascetic denial and determination to act; Deslauriers' self-seeking desire matches Frédéric's desire for mastery over Rosanette, and Dussardier's happy faith in the liberating effect of a shift to republicanism matches Frédéric's fixation upon the Ideal Feminine of Mme Arnoux.<sup>100</sup>

Whilst varying considerably in political outlook, Frédéric's friends share a common hatred of the government in power, which culminates in anarchistic exasperation. Dussardier sums up their attitude: 'Tout le mal sur la Terre, il l'attribuait au pouvoir, et il le haïssait d'une haine essentielle qui lui tenait le cœur et raffinaît sa sensibilité' (p. 160). Frédéric's response at this point is noticeably lukewarm, whilst Deslauriers is seized with a desire for 'la destruction complète de l'ordre actuel' (p. 161). The counterpart of these sentiments in Frédéric's private life is an increased hatred and exasperation in the face of resistance from both Rosanette and Mme Arnoux. More pertinently, perhaps, Frédéric resents Arnoux's possession of both a wife and a mistress. It is for this reason that he can 'bay with the wolves' and vituperate against the government. Sexually and politically, Arnoux belongs to the category of 'ceux qui ont', whilst Frédéric belongs to 'ceux qui tâchent d'avoir'. Flaubert cannot be said to be immune to the resentment of the poor in respect of the rich, which he thought was endemic in France.

The culmination of the sentiments of hatred and adoration throughout the 1840s is Deslauriers' image of the ripe pear, 'la poire est mûre' (p. 305). Louis-Philippe was frequently caricatured as a pear, and Deslauriers implies that the moment is now propitious for the picking of the monarchy and the fruition of the revolution. The image of fruit ripening and falling, as distinct from one that is picked, had already been used in *Bovary* to suggest libidinal economies. Mme Arnoux has, in a sense, reached her sexual fruition (the original title of the work being *Les Fruits secs*). The

---

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 197.

negative associations of the image are also rich; Mme Arnoux can become a fallen woman just as a king may lose his throne. In fact, Mme Arnoux's missed rendez-vous prepares her for this indignity.

The missed tryst in the Rue Tronchet leads Frédéric to switch his attentions to Rosanette, a development which he himself jocularly compares to events in the political sphere, 'Je suis à la mode; je me réforme', as the gaiety of Paris unfolds around him (p. 310). Doom hangs over both spheres, however, and as the shooting of the demonstrators in the Rue des Capucines is likened to the tearing of a piece of silk, Frédéric sobs as he substitutes Rosanette for Mme Arnoux. Rosanette falls short of Frédéric's Ideal, just as the new regime will not measure up to the Ideal Republic. In both cases, the time spent dreaming of change and the eventual release as it finally occurs generates a powerful, if bitterly ironical, sense of loss. History is made the objective correlative of psychology.

In Part III, there is an intensified relationship between history and psychology. For Williams, the material presented is so rich, that it is not apparent what the significant relationships are.<sup>101</sup> If one puts the emphasis on Mme Arnoux, the parallelism between the two spheres fades, and Duquette's linking of Frédéric's disappointment with Mme Arnoux's failure to attend the rendez-vous and the sacking of the Tuileries ignores significant differences between these events and the difference in space and time that separate them from Frédéric's reaction at the end of Part II.<sup>102</sup> Frédéric's principal preoccupation in Part III is Rosanette, and the parallel is apparently between Frédéric's attitude to her and the course of counter-revolutionary politics.

---

<sup>101</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 109.

<sup>102</sup> J. P. Duquette, *Flaubert ou l'architecture du vide*, Montréal: Presses Universitaires de Montréal, 1972, pp. 134-5.

As Starkie indicates, the 1848 Revolution is intensely dramatic, and Flaubert gives us a vivid picture of historical events.<sup>103</sup> The greatest emphasis is on the violence of the mob as it rampages through the Tuileries and Palais Royal. The figure of the prostitute, posing as the Statue of Liberty, is a metaphor for the profanation and desacralisation that is occurring in public life: ‘Dans l’anti-chambre, debout sur un tas de vêtements, se tenait un fille publique, en Statue de la Liberté – immobile, les yeux grands ouverts, effrayante’ (p. 319). Hussonet’s mocking comment ‘Quel mythe... voilà Le Peuple souverain!’ serves to underline the *bêtise* of giving power to the masses (p. 317). It further undermines Dussardier’s naïve faith and over-optimism as expressed in ‘Tout va bien! Le Peuple triomphe! Les ouvriers et les bourgeois s’embrassent!’ (p. 320). The entry of The People into power is characteristically marked by the spouting of errant nonsense in political clubs and the election of a dictator.

It is perhaps fitting that *une fille publique* should occupy Frédéric’s attention, and become his mistress with the same indecent rapidity that the Second Republic has been established. Rosanette herself disparages the Republic, likening it explicitly to a woman of her own small virtue: ‘Elle se fait entretenir, ta République. Eh bien, amuse-toi avec elle!’ (p. 338). Frédéric’s mood of carnival gaiety echoes the mood which prevails in Paris (p. 322) and he thinks of entering public life, and of becoming elected. Confronted, however, with Rosanette’s ‘avalanches de sottises’ and ‘langage populacier’ (p. 339), Frédéric is as disappointed as with the ‘nuages de sottises’ encountered at the *Club de l’Intelligence* (p. 331). In both spheres, February 1848 represents a crucial moment when the Ideal must come into being, but cannot remain untarnished in the process.

---

<sup>103</sup> Starkie, *The Master*, p. 146.

From an early stage Flaubert envisaged an episode in the guardroom in which Frédéric imagines Arnoux being shot during the June Days.<sup>104</sup> The incident forms part of the structures of paternal authority that animate the work, just as *Salammbô* is governed by the heliocentric / male order. Frédéric experiences growing antagonism to Arnoux, but this is resolved in brotherly comradeship (p. 334). The same drama is played out in the political sphere, as soon after the 1848 Revolution, a reactionary movement manifests itself, as members of the bourgeoisie fear for their property. ‘Collectively’, claims Williams, ‘the French nation suffers from the absence of any obvious figure of authority’<sup>105</sup>: ‘La France, ne sentant plus de maître, se mit à crier d’effarement, comme un aveugle sans bâton, comme un marmot qui a perdu sa bonne’ (p. 324). The closure of the National Workshops is seen as a reactionary movement and the Parisian workers feel an exasperation close to Frédéric’s, and engage in a titanic struggle which is entirely missed by Frédéric at Fontainebleau with Rosanette. The principle of authority is established in brutal circumstances, symbolised by Le Père Roque’s killing of a young man who had the temerity to ask for bread (p. 368).<sup>106</sup> The collapse of Frédéric’s opposition to Arnoux is equated with the proletariat’s acquiescence to political paternal authority.

The pantheist idyll at Fontainebleau, through which Frédéric completely misses the June Days in Paris, mirrors the political honeymoon. In a sense, Frédéric is repressing his true feelings, just as the populace were oppressed. An oedipal drama is being played out in this section as Rosanette is not merely the mistress but an extension of Mme Arnoux, so that she is also the mother whom Frédéric is seeking to wrest from the father. This provokes a violent upheaval similar to the one experienced by the Parisian workers. The profanation of the Palais Royal corresponds to what would have happened in the Rue Tronchet; the bloody fighting evokes what would have

---

<sup>104</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 201.

<sup>105</sup> Williams, *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Flaubert’s characters, it appears, have read *Les Misérables*.

happened if Frédéric had given in to the oedipal temptation in the guardroom, and the repression of the ‘terrace au bord de l’eau’ expresses the outcome of that struggle if it had not dissolved into false fraternalism.

The remainder of *L’Education* is more focussed on sentiment than politics, but it is nonetheless possible to detect parallels between events in the two spheres. The precariousness of the financial climate is shown by Arnoux being forced to leave the country. The auction, at which both of his mistresses are present, marks the moment at which Frédéric’s Ideal disintegrates ‘et le partage de ces reliques, où il trouvait confusément les formes de ses membres, lui semblait une atrocité, comme s’il avait vu des corbeaux déchiquetant son cadavre’ (p. 445). Frédéric feels his heart depart with each lot. Mme Dambreuse’s ‘brutality’ at buying the precious casket that belonged to Mme Arnoux provokes one final pointless gesture of sacrifice and vengeance on the part of Frédéric. These final gestures are akin to the fading hopes for an Ideal Republic, entertained in particular by Dussardier. He had not known which side to fight on and concludes that he has made a mistake. Dussardier becomes progressively disillusioned by the reactionary movement and finally exclaims ‘ils tuent notre République!’ (p. 430), as Frédéric muses over the corpse of Mme Arnoux’s belongings to the cry of ‘Vive la République!’

Despite the lingering influence that the Ideal continues to exert over the life of Frédéric, the course of events from June onwards in both the public and private spheres reflects a downshift from the unreasonable hopes that preceded the February Revolution. Frédéric experiences a mixture of sensual delight and exasperation at Rosanette’s deficiencies; when he tries to impress her by taking her to the palace, he is hurt by the triviality of her responses and general ignorance. They visit the rooms in which Napoléon signed his abdication, but her only reaction on learning of the assassination of Monaldeschi is ‘C’était par jalousie – prends garde à toi!’ (p. 350). The



only thing that appears to interest her is the pond of carp. Rosanette's pregnancy affords Frédéric little satisfaction, and he is as unmoved by the appearance of the child as by its death. Comments on the political events at this time reflect a general *taedium vitae*, as Sénécal says, 'le Peuple est mineur'. Rosanette's over-long pregnancy is perhaps indicative of the delayed birth of the Second Republic, which dies along with her child.

Frédéric's relationship with Mme Dambreuse, on the other hand, corresponds to the growing authoritarian movement, and he is content to allow her to dominate him. In the political domain, there is likewise a tendency to 'relever le principe d'autorité' and a demand for 'le bras de fer'. Sénécal in particular seems to exemplify the desire for a totalitarian democracy, and it is unsurprising that he should aid Louis-Napoléon's *coup d'état* – a gesture aimed principally at establishing order. As Alison Fairlie puts it, Frédéric never goes so far in his personal life, but:

His personal life reflects the process through which post-insurrection activities have moved, by way of chaos and confusion, to the disillusioned desire to draw personal profit from the immediate opportunity.<sup>107</sup>

Marx makes, as Williams claims, a distinction between the beautiful Revolution of February and the ugly one of June, but all Flaubert's swans are geese and there is little beauty in the February Revolution, whilst the June days are obscured by the 'idyll' of the honeymoon with Rosanette.<sup>108</sup> The drama of profanation, the oedipal struggle and the re-assertion of paternal authority all have their counterparts in political life, in the February and June Revolutions and in the events leading up to the *coup d'état*. The pattern of parallels between the two domains stimulates the reader's

---

<sup>107</sup> Alison Fairlie, 'Some Patterns of Suggestion in *L'Education sentimentale*', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 6, 1969, 268, pp. 266-93.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 206.

imagination, but it has been suggested that, in order to make the narrative more comprehensive to history, Flaubert reduces the amount of psychology within it and suppresses what had previously been the bedrock of fiction itself - character.<sup>109</sup>

In *Bovary*, Flaubert had intended to paint for eternity, so that what he said would be as true for the future as it was in his own day. He took the greatest possible trouble to leave everything vague and avoid contemporary references and local trivia, and would not be tied down to contemporary problems. In *L'Education*, on the other hand, he wished to paint a very definite period of history, all the details of which had to be correct. Writing to Barbès in October 1867, while he was completing the book, he claimed that although the subject of the book was 'l'analyse', he did touch upon events of the time (10 October 1867). He was to achieve much more than that.

The novel begins as France enters the precarious era that preceded the 1848 Revolution; it is the period of the running-down of Louis-Philippe's regime. Flaubert had come to manhood during this period and neither liked nor admired Louis-Philippe. He wrote during the Revolution that there were many disoriented faces which he was only too happy to behold. He took delight in seeing so many ambitions flattened (to Louise Colet, 29 May 1867). The early period of the novel is that of *La réforme*, when campaigning was vigorous to enlarge the franchise, and radicals wanted universal male suffrage. When a deputation was sent to Guizot to ask him to increase the franchise, limited then by income, he famously replied 'Enrichissez-vous!'. There was a great deal of poverty and corruption at this time which increased the margin between rich and poor. Flaubert's novel is an account of the disillusionment with the regime as the hopes of 1830 faded.

---

<sup>109</sup> J-C Masseron, 'Sur le récit flaubertien' in *Flaubert et après* (ed. B. Masson), Minard, 1984, pp. 173-92.

Flaubert chose that period because he knew it best, having been a student of Law in Paris before the 1848 Revolution. We see the students of the time, sympathise with their problems, and feel the need for change. We are also given glimpses of the lives of the upper bourgeoisie, created by the regime of Louis-Philippe. All the milieus are carefully built up from contemporary records and are factually correct, but certain sections of society such as the courtesans and upper bourgeoisie give an atmosphere much more reminiscent of the Second Empire than the July Monarchy<sup>110</sup>. This was the heyday of the *grande cocotte* such as Hortense Schneider and Jane de Tourbey, with whom the Emperor was implicated. One could say that Flaubert's depiction of the kept woman deflates the Romantic myth of the courtesan.

The chronology of events is, as we have seen, carefully contrived as necessary for the truth of the narrative. Even when there are errors these do not, on the whole, matter to the verisimilitude of the work. For instance, a whole year, from September 1843 to September 1844 is dropped entirely. Then, at the beginning of Part II, 1846 disappears altogether. Frédéric returns with his fortune to Paris in December 1845, and gives his house-warming in January 1847, without any reference being made to 1846. In the third chapter of Part III, we see August 1848 swiftly followed by May 1850. Then Rosanette announces her pregnancy to Frédéric in January 1849, but does not give birth until February 1851 – a gestation of over two years. None of this actually impinges on our enjoyment of the narrative, however, so carefully is it constructed. But it does present us with a contradiction: a novel apparently about historical events which spends itself on petty and tawdry affairs of the everyday. Moreover, it abounds in lacunae, leaving a void at the centre of historical rationality.

---

<sup>110</sup> Starkie, *The Master*, p. 150.

In the projected scenes for *Bouvard*, Flaubert imagined a chapter in which the two woodlice would take up the subject of historiography. The two protagonists would consider the merits and short-comings of each type of historical narrative:

1° *Ceux qui croient à un auteur* et ne le critiquent pas: Rollin, Anquetil, les naïfs, c'est par là qu'ils commencent. 2° *Ceux qui ont une idée préconçue*, vouloir que telle chose y soit ou que l'événement fournit des preuves, des arguments. Alors qu'ils soient de bonne foi ou non, l'historien a la vue obscurcie. Ex.: les historiens de la Révolution française. Théorie de Michelet qu'il faut être partial. Donc, nous ne devons pas nous attendre à la vérité. D'autre part, si l'histoire était impartial, il n'en écrivait pas, car il n'entreprend son œuvre que pour étayer son opinion, prouver son idée. Ainsi l'histoire n'est jamais qu'un jugement personnel. 3° *Ceux qui ont des grands principes; Morale, Providence, Philosophie* 'et voient aux choses de ce monde' *un plan bien clair*: Mably, Bossuet, Vico. 4° [Restent] ceux qui écrivent *ad narrandum*, l'école pragmatique. Mais ils sont aussi dans le faux, car il faudrait épuiser tous les documents, ce qui est impossible.<sup>111</sup>

Flaubert seems to have been quite precise about the direction the chapter would follow: a failed quest for an Ideal. This truth would be akin to the irrefutable dogma expounded by Sacy, of which Flaubert made such fun. The protagonists would eventually conclude that 'l'histoire ne sera jamais fixée'.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Manuscrit de la Bibliothèque de Rouen, gg 10 F °9 bis; in Séginger, *Poétique*, p. 233.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

The first draft of this chapter is quite unambiguous in its demonstration of ‘le sceptisme radical et absurde’ towards which his characters would work.<sup>113</sup> The aim was to show that Positivist history was a certain conception of history which was unequal to the task of discovering humanity over time. Despite the attractions of Positivism for him, Flaubert saw that history was itself a human science, always in the process of transformation because it depends on the era and society in which it is constructed. What Bouvard and Pécuchet fail to grasp (and what invalidates history as a discipline for them) is that absolute truth will always surpass time and individual point of view. In his notes accompanying the chapter, Flaubert wrote: ‘Démontrer la vérité que si l’on étudie l’histoire à un point de vue quelconque, on fausse, puisqu’on néglige les points de vue’.<sup>114</sup>

Bouvard and Pécuchet thus arrive at an aporia, as Flaubert explained:

Il faut montrer les faits sur leurs vrais formes, mais pour les montrer, il faut les interpréter. D’où l’on arrive à l’impossibilité de l’histoire parce qu’on lui demande plus ce qu’elle ne comporte et qu’on a [après] une idée fausse.<sup>115</sup>

Flaubert’s later novels may thus be described as how one writes history in an ‘ère du soupçon’.

*L’Education* is a novel of opacity, of uncertain facts and of the unforeseen. The shooting of the protesters on the Boulevard des Capucines is a minor incident in the novel because Frédéric is, at the time, occupied with Rosanette. The novel gives only one disdainful comment on the event: ‘Tiens! L’émeute!’ (p. 356). This shooting will in time lead to the fall of the Monarchy, as the

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

elections of 1846 had given a majority to Guizot, but the bourgeoisie felt disenfranchised, and held a series of Reform Banquets from July 1847 onwards. Afraid, the government forbade the final banquet of 22 February 1848. Amid scenes of barricades in the streets, the bourgeoisie revolted and the National Guard sided with the Reformists. The King dismissed Guizot and the Revolution was unleashed, and the King abdicated on the 24 February in favour of the Comte de Paris. Under the unreliable gaze of Frédéric, however, events are subjectified by ‘*crut apercevoir*’. This subjectivisation of history and oscillation between the public and private spheres can make a minor *fait divers* into an event or, conversely, blot out the importance of a major struggle. Flaubert places no reliable, Balzacian-eye-view at the heart of the action; as the Tuileries are sacked, Hussonet and Frédéric polyphonically exchange *idées reçues* over the greatness of the People and disgust at its baseness. *L’Education* is therefore a novel of the crisis of the logos.

Two years after the coup d’état, Flaubert concluded that ‘’89 a démolit la royauté et la noblesse, ’48 la bourgeoisie et ’51 le Peuple’ (to L. Colet, 22 September 1853). In *Bouvard*, Flaubert would show how 1848 simply inverted class values: ‘Les puissants flagornaient la basse classe. Tout passait après les ouvriers. On briguaient l’avantage de leur appartenir. Ils devenaient des nobles’ (*Bouvard*, p. 125). Since 1789 the Divine Right of Kings had passed from being an issue of legitimacy into historiographical discourse. Quinet and Michelet had substituted popular knowledge, patriotism and comradeship, passed down through generations of ordinary Frenchmen for the Divine Right of Kings, finding their legitimacy in *le Peuple* as the blueprint for further political constructs and guarantors of veracity. Flaubert was adamant, however, that ‘il n’y a plus rien, qu’une tourbe canaille et imbécile’ (to L. Colet, 22 September 1853). What he termed ‘le sens historique’ – a consciousness of historicity in all things – prevented him from

believing in the possibility of founding a new legitimacy on history. He thus dissociates himself from Republican historians and even liberal ones such as Guizot.

Guizot himself had championed a theory of legitimacy founded on historical movement and social forces. Legitimate governments were seen as those ‘en qui retintit la société entière’ he claimed in 1821, whilst still in opposition as he published *Des Moyens de gouvernement et d’opposition dans l’état actuel de la France*. Power only has any real force when it is a direct consequence of the social movement and change: ‘Traiter avec les masses, c’est le grand ressort du gouvernement !’.<sup>116</sup> In his *Histoire de la civilisation*, he analyses the conditions under which new legitimacy could be established in the wake of a revolution: ‘En reniant le maître déchu les hommes n’ont point perdu l’espérance d’obtenir enfin le maître qui ne saurait déchoir’.<sup>117</sup> Legitimacy was, for Guizot, always conditional only if those ‘qui refusent à toute souveraineté de fait, la souveraineté de droit’ accede to it, and consequently ‘ils recherchent incessamment le pouvoir légitime, la vraie voie, dont ils reconnaissent l’existence, mais qu’ils se vantent de ne jamais posséder sûrement et à toujours’.<sup>118</sup> Guizot apparently overlooked this in 1848.

Flaubert in fact saw the new legitimacy usurping the place of former beliefs in 1848. If the later *coup d’état* had any merit, it was in laying bare power-structures in France, and showing naked ambition for what it was – a manipulation of public opinion. Louis-Napoléon had deftly turned his coat, thought Flaubert, in proclaiming himself for public order at Chavignolles, after having so long championed liberty.

---

<sup>116</sup> Guizot, *Des Moyens de gouvernement et d’opposition dans l’état actuel de la France*, Paris: Belin, 1988, p. 79, in Séginger, *Poétique*, p. 248.

<sup>117</sup> Guizot, *L’Histoire de la civilisation*, Paris: Hachette, 1985, p. 320, *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

Flaubert would never come to believe in the foundation of the state on reason and liberty (Guizot), the Progress of Right (Thierry) or the conquest of the sovereign People (Michelet). 1789 marked the commencement for him of the ‘Era of Suspicion’,<sup>119</sup> and in 1875 he wrote to George Sand:

Les élections sénatoriales sont un sujet de divertissement pour le public – dont je fais partie. Il a dû se passer dans les couloirs de L’Assemblée Nationale des dialogues inouïs, de grotesque et de bassesse. Le XIXè siècle est destiné à voir périr toutes les religions. Amen! Je n’en pleure aucune (16 December 1865).

*L’Education* is, in many respects, a *mise en scène* of the crisis of legitimacy. The novel begins in 1840, the year in which Thiers (whom Flaubert hated) came to power in May as a liberal, much to the chagrin of reactionaries, and lasted only until Guizot’s election in October of the same year. The year marked the beginning of the end of the regime. The first political chapter of the work is set in December 1841 (I 4) in which no form of government is acceptable to the people:

A bas Guizot!

A bas Pritchard!

A bas les vendus!

A bas Louis-Philippe! (p. 47)

Eloquent in its ellipses and lacunae, the novel makes the Second Empire into a power vacuum, devoid of all legitimacy. In *Bouvard*, neither the Comte nor the Curé can enlighten the protagonists on the subject of social custom, simply parroting that authority dies if it is

---

<sup>119</sup> Flaubert, of course, does not use this term.



questioned. Gorgu, an emblematic figure of the 1848 Revolution, makes his name ‘à force de bavarder’ and is popular because of his ‘bagout’. But his social ascension after the *coup d’état* owes more to personal ambition and flattery than to political prowess. The ebb and flow of politics, here and at the *Club de L’Intelligence*, demonstrates Flaubert, can be explained by causes that have no basis in history.

The absence of any legitimate figure of authority discredited politics in Flaubert’s eyes. After the advent of the Emperor (nicknamed Badinguet or Isodore in his notes), Flaubert remarked bitterly : ‘et j’irais même lui baiser le derrière pour l’en remercier personnellement s’il n’y avait pas une telle foule que la place est prise’ (29 May 1852). The Revolution and Empire shared the outcome of overturning accepted principles, but if 1848 saw the defeat of the July Monarchy, the abortive revolution saw the defeat of political Ideals. The nineteenth century may have been characterized by ‘le sens historique’ but progress was not forthcoming in all domains; politics lagged behind the human sciences in which knowledge had triumphed over religious belief. Shortly after writing *L’Education*, Flaubert told Sand that:

Au XVIIIè siècle, l’affaire capitale était la Diplomatie. ‘Le secret des cabinets’ existait réellement. Les peuples se laissaient encore conduire pour qu’on les séparât et les confondît. Cet ordre des choses me paraît avoir dit son dernier mot en 1815. Depuis lors on n’a guère fait autre chose que se disputer sur la Forme extérieure qu’il convient de donner à l’être fantastique et odieux qu’on appelle *l’Etat*. L’expérience prouve (il me semble) qu’aucune forme ne contient le Bien en soi: Orléanisme, république, empire ne veulent plus rien dire, puisque les idées les plus contradictoires peuvent entrer dans chacun de ces casiers.

[...]

La *question* est donc déplacée. Il ne s'agit plus de rêver la meilleure forme de gouvernement, puisque toutes se valent, mais de faire *prévaloir la Science*. Le gouvernement d'un pays doit être une section de l'Institut et *la dernière de toutes*. (05 July 1869, original emphases).

Flaubert told Sand that his 'grande moralité' would be to 'prouver la bêtise de tous les principes' and this emerges in *Bouvard* as a chapter which serves to 'établir l'indifférence de toutes les formes'.<sup>120</sup> In the end, Bouvard and Pécuchet want a transcendent, infallible form of legitimacy, but their investigation flounders in diverse theories. Significantly, however, the professor friend of Dumouchel, who mentors the two woodlice, refuses to vouch for any theory – neither the Divine Right of Kings nor government by popular consent. Meanwhile, the Liberty Tree donated by Pécuchet in honour of the People ends up as firewood for the Curé. Bouvard and Pécuchet may end up repeating popular *sottises*, to the effect that priests are servile, the bourgeoisie barbarian and the people ready to accept any tyrant, but their ultimate critique of politics seems to stand uncorrected: 'Hein, le Progrès, quelle blague! Et la politique, une belle saleté!' History becomes the corrective of politics.

In the crisis of the logos, all discourses become reduced to the level of imbecilic *doxa*, which were already so divorced from their original context that would have been obscure even for a readership of 1869. Political discourse becomes fragmented, floating over social intercourse in a free indirect style of *idées reçues*. At the Dambreuses' we hear: 'Tous déclarèrent les crimes politiques inexcusables. Il fallait plutôt pardonner à ceux qui provenaient du besoin. Et on ne manqua pas de mettre en avant l'éternel exemple du père de famille volant l'éternel morceau de pain chez l'éternel boulanger' (p. 368). The evenings at the Dambreuses disintegrate into mere

---

<sup>120</sup> Manuscrit, g 226 F°321 in Séginger, *Poétique*, p. 207.

phonemes, ‘Eh! Ah!’), as at the *Club de L’Intelligence*, in which a cacophonous crowd punctuates every speech with ‘A la porte!’ (p. 331). This culminates in the incomprehensible speech of the Spanish patriot, the only speaker not to be shouted down. Sénecal’s speech in particular is rich in popular received wisdom, as he evokes ‘les riches, se gorgeant de crimes sous leurs plafonds dorés’. 1848 marks the ‘dérèglement de la parole’ as Séginger has it.<sup>121</sup>

*L’Education* is constructed around binary oppositions – the public and the private, republican and authoritarian, the Ideal and the debased, leaving a sense of demotivated history. But Flaubert was aware that such an approach could have its own impersonality and objectivity. Whilst he was composing *L’Education* he wrote to Sand that:

Je vous ai mal expliqué, si je vous ai dit que mon livre accusera les patriotes de tout le mal. Je me reconnais le droit d’accuser personne - je ne crois même pas que le romancier doive exprimer *son* opinion sur les choses de ce monde. Il peut la communiquer, mais je n’aime pas à ce qu’il la dise (cela fait partie de ma poésie à moi).

Je me borne donc à exposer telles qu’elles me paraissent, à exprimer ce qui me semble le Vrai. Tant pis pour les conséquences. Riches ou pauvres, vaincus ou vainqueurs, je n’admets rien de tout cela. Je ne veux avoir ni amour, ni haine, ni pitié, ni colère. Quant à la sympathie, c’est différent. Jamais on n’en a assez. Les Réactionnaires du reste seront encore moins ménagés que les autres, car ils me semblent plus criminels.

---

<sup>121</sup> Séginger, *Poétique*, p. 212.

Est-ce qu'il n'est pas temps de faire entrer la Justice dans l'Art? L'impartialité de la peinture atteindrait alors à la Majesté de la Loi – et à la précision de la Science. (10 August 1868).

Flaubert was of course not naïve enough to deny his own bourgeois origins, and the terms 'semblent', 'crois' and 'paraissent' nuance the passage and mean that objectivity does not exclude explicit judgements. But Flaubert was adamant that no Balzacian-style interpolations were to infiltrate his work:

Balzac n'échappe pas à ce défaut, car il est légitimiste, Catholique, aristocrate – l'auteur, dans son œuvre doit être présent partout et nulle part visible. L'art étant une seconde nature, le créateur de cette nature-là doit agir par des procès analogues'. (To Colet, 09 December 1852).

The Flaubertian Realist novel becomes a contemplation of the Real, and the historical novel becomes an analysis of historiography itself. In *Salammbô*, Flaubert presented different interpretations of history which mutually deconstruct each other. In *L'Education*, he deconstructs the principal currents of historiographical thought of his day: Liberal, Socialist and Republican, and switches optics from the private to the public sphere to show not linearity or continuity of events, but problematic voids and repetitions. The very foundations of historiography itself are undermined by the severing of the link between logical succession and causality, a sequence dating back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. The Flaubertian narrative evidences implicit and problematic figurations which determine our perception of *le vrai*, and thus critique the Imaginary of time in the nineteenth century.

Flaubert effectively underpins his discourse with the models of rationality that belonged to his own time: the quest for the Ideal and the struggle for legitimate authority, and these allow the reader space for interpretation and comprehension. The validity and extent of knowledge are thus questioned and we become aware of the ever-widening gap between things and words. As Bouvard and Pécuchet discover, it is better not to interpret but to copy, and the process of copying lies at the heart of Flaubert's expression of desire.

## Part II

### Chapter Three

The starting point for this chapter is my conviction that Flaubert's difficulty in sustaining a narrative, even one which was organised around historical events, was never completely overcome. Unlike such authors as Balzac and Stendhal, Flaubert seems to have difficulty generating his text. How then was that difficulty to be circumvented? And, most importantly, how do this problem and the strategy used to overcome it shape the narrative? In this chapter, I show that the process of representation is itself problematic. Here, I trace the conflict between two impulses, showing how these impulses – and the strategies designed to solve the conflict between them – shape the narrative. These impulses are explicated in terms of Girardian theories of mimeticism; the first is the sterile, narcissistic urge to freeze and assimilate a projected mirror image; the second, the urge of the self to die into its creations so that the string of events can continue independently of the author's self-directed impulses. No synthesis, I argue, ever fully resolves the tension between them.

Who is Frédéric Moreau? A pilgrimage of a hero amongst legions of friends and enemies usually furnishes an answer to such a question: enlightenment and the end of a work are usually coextensive. We expect such elucidation at the end of *L'Education*, but the pilgrimage loses its way. The choice of 'education' as a subject for the novel seems optimistic, even Rousseauist, the beginning of a success story. Flaubert, on the contrary, sets up the machinery for a *Bildungsroman*, but turns development towards decay. We assume that movement and

change guarantee progress and growth, but find that an ‘unswayed insight’ has found a progressive disintegration in all things.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot be certain of what we find in the example of Frédéric Moreau, any more than he himself is. Language is usually a logical tool and it is difficult to give verbally an impression of the drifting which is the course of an average person’s life. The best we can do is see Frédéric as he himself does, a character who drifts on a sea of ambiguous experience. Cortland is right to underline the idea of drifting because it is allied with the notion of helpless freedom which the reader must accept when questioning the notion of Romantic life.<sup>2</sup> Frédéric’s unconscious ambition concerning his own is unwittingly revealed in an exchange with his mother, on receiving news of his uncle’s legacy:

Il signifie sa résolution d’habiter Paris.

‘Pourquoi y faire?’ (sic)

‘Rien!’ (p. 54)

One of the strongest expectations of readers of fiction is that the novel will provide a satisfactory answer to why the characters behave in a certain way, and why their lives possess the shape they assume; the way in which formative experiences, different blends of characteristics and different attitudes produce different results, success or failure, happiness or misery, frustration or fulfilment, is something novelists attend to closely. Speculation about

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Cortland, *The Sentimental Education; An Examination of Flaubert’s L’Education sentimentale*, The Hague: Mouton, 1967, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cortland, *Sentimental Education*, p. 7.

crucial determinants is particularly likely in novels in which the destinies of two similar characters are compared. The need to offer a convincing account of why characters turn out as they do can be strong, as Flaubert's comments on the first *L'Education* (1845) show:

Il faudrait, pour *L'Education*, écrire un chapitre qui manque, où l'on montrerait comment fatalement le même tronc a dû se bifurquer, c'est-à-dire pourquoi telle action a amené ce résultat dans ce personnage plutôt que telle autre. Les causes sont montrées, les résultats aussi; mais l'échaînement de la cause à l'effet ne l'est point. Voilà le vice du livre, et comment il ment à son titre.<sup>3</sup>

The presentation of the divergent histories of Jules and Henry, each subjected to a particular formative experience is deemed unsatisfactory precisely because the final outcome, the choice of a way of life, is not felt to be the necessary outcome of the combination of a certain type of character and a given set of experiences. It is debatable whether the two protagonists are fundamentally the same ('le même tronc') or whether they may be capable of responding differently to various influences. Such hesitation, over the identity of the characters leads, as Williams points out, to a certain equivocation when attempting to determine how important experience is at all.<sup>4</sup>

There is a much stronger opposition, on the other hand, between the 'characters' of Frédéric and Deslauriers, although they experience a common failure. What is perhaps significant in the later *L'Education* is the abandonment of the earlier narrative mode which included

---

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance*, Vol. II, p. 344, in Williams, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 128.



sweeping statements relating to the overall pattern of the lives of the protagonists. Rather, Frédéric and Deslauriers are left to this task themselves:

Et ils résumèrent leur vie.

Ils l'avaient manquée tous les deux, celui qui avait rêvé l'amour, celui qui avait rêvé le pouvoir. Quelle était la raison?

'C'est peut-être le défaut de ligne droite', dit Frédéric.

'Pour toi, cela se peut. Moi, au contraire, j'ai péché par excès de rectitude, sans tenir compte de mille choses secondaires plus fort que tout. J'avais trop de logique, et toi, trop de sentiment.'

Et ils accusèrent le hasard, les circonstances, l'époque où ils étaient nés.

(p. 457)

It has been argued that this discussion is largely misleading and that the characters have learned nothing. Deslauriers' life is apparently not a failure, particularly after 1851, and he cannot be accused of excessive logic. The factors adduced in the final sentence are, moreover, virtually synonymous.<sup>5</sup> The reader is left in a quandary as to why the two characters fail: 'There is no attempt to adjudicate between fate and error, as both positions are portrayed as stupidities'.<sup>6</sup> The passage holds out the tantalizing prospect of a moment of lucidity, but there is little personal responsibility taken here and there is something faintly comic about the reductive and oversimplified manner in which the characters come to terms with their failure. The discussion cannot be dismissed as irrelevant, however. In a plan for the last chapter,

<sup>5</sup> See Jonathon Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*, London, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Culler, *Uses of Uncertainty*, p. 67.

Flaubert wrote that the two protagonists ‘font eux-mêmes la morale du livre, se disent pourquoi [peut-être] ils n’ont atteint leur but’.<sup>7</sup> There may well be an element of irony underlying the phrase ‘la morale du livre’, but this in no way invalidates the characters’ own assessment.

There is agreement, firstly, that the characters have made a failure of their lives, but it is not clear whether the abortive pursuit of an Ideal constitutes a failure in itself. This ambiguity is crucial in the case of Frédéric who fails *in* as much as *through* his relationship with Mme Arnoux. It is by no means certain that, by the end of the novel, the characters have renounced their ideals, and there is no certainty in the notions qualified by ‘peut-être’ or ‘cela se peut’. Frédéric is the first to offer an explanation, but it is immediately advanced to be applicable to both characters. His model of the disappointing trajectory of his life can be related to the Balzacian paradigm that haunts the book. Deslauriers’ advice to Frédéric to act as Rastignac does in *La Comédie humaine* reminds the reader of Vautrin’s advice to his protégé (p. 35). Frédéric’s explanation reflects, therefore, an adherence to a totally inappropriate set of prescriptions for social success. It can also be related to the Romantic Ideal of sustained devotion that Flaubert professed to admire: ‘J’aime les passions longues et qui traversent patiemment et en ligne droite tous les courants de la vie’.<sup>8</sup> The two implications of what is meant by a direct course both have some validity as Frédéric strives for conflicting goals in more than one area. The diametrically opposed trajectory adduced by Deslauriers as the reason for his failure also takes on extra resonances in the context of his over-reliance on the Balzacian model; only at this late stage does he realize that Vautrin’s prescription of an

<sup>7</sup> National Archives of France, 17611, F°64, in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 130.

<sup>8</sup> *Correspondance*, III, pp. 202-3 in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 131.

unswerving course leads to the fatal neglect of contingent social factors. The Balzacian formula, to which Frédéric belatedly turns, is shown by Deslauriers to be unworkable in practice.

In neither case is the failure to follow the right course felt to be the only significant factor at work. Deslauriers' diagnosis of the causes of failure identifies for each of them a corresponding tradition: one which is defined in terms of being burdened with too much rationality or sentimentality. This is the point at which a modicum of personal responsibility is reached. Deslauriers is here identifying a characteristic imbalance, amounting to personal failure, as the crucial determinant. While Deslauriers may, with his more analytical mind, make the more trenchant assessment, the final invocation of external factors is made by both characters. Are the various factors synonymous, Culler suggests? 'Le hasard' stands for chance, and coincidence, a contingent realm; 'les circonstances' in contrast designates the financial circumstances in which the characters found themselves, and which is more enduring than mere 'hasard'; finally, 'l'époque' stands for the historical and political circumstances in which they have been enmeshed. The brief summary of the final stage of the discussion marks a kind of progress in the thinking of the two characters, with the various factors arranged in ascending order. To have listed the factors in reverse order would, I contend, have produced a very different effect.

Although external factors are blamed by both characters, they seem more relevant to Deslauriers than to Frédéric. In particular, Flaubert has set up a strong contrast in the two characters' financial circumstances. Fortune smiles on Frédéric, in the form of his inheritance,

whilst Deslauriers is bedevilled by his penury. It is not a little paradoxical that beneath the surface of common failure, which constitutes a neat parallel, diametrically opposed forces are at work.

It would be forcing the issue to suggest that internal and external forces play an equal part in the unfolding of the narrative. Although Deslauriers features prominently in the opening and closing sequences of the novel, he is only intermittently present in the main body of the work, and it is the behaviour of Frédéric that occupies much of the reader's attention and as a result, it is the importance of psychological factors which comes over most forcibly. There is a marked contrast, however, between *L'Education* and *Bovary*, for in the latter an inner determinism is created with a strong sense of inevitability. This is to a large extent because *L'Education* is much less explicit about the presentation of motive forces. There are good reasons for stating with Williams that the underlying assumptions relating to the rigidly determined nature of human behaviour undergo no substantive change in the novel.<sup>9</sup>

Interpreting Frédéric's basic intuition, then, we may usefully refer to the works of René Girard on 'mimetic desire'. Frédéric's exchange with his mother concludes a daydream of himself as a minister. He does not need to support himself and can therefore abandon himself to whatever effete lusts occur to him at any one moment. Frédéric is then the Modern Man defined by Girard. In a deceptively simple and far-reaching expression, Girard sums up mimetic desire simply as 'le désir selon l'autrui', and contrasts it with 'le désir selon soi'; a desire that is a spontaneous and autonomous expression of an individual's wishes or

---

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 131.

preferences. Instead of having an immediate relationship to the world, the one who desires mimetically, as Frédéric does in imitating the models of Romantic fiction, has a mediated relationship to it; that is, desire takes a diversion through a model. Desire in the case of Frédéric is, in Girard's terms, 'triangular', for it involves an agent who desires, the object of desire and the (sometimes absent or only implied) mediator of that desire.

As a first example, we may evoke one way of understanding the basic insight conveyed by the notion of mimetic desire as a contrast to the Romantic myths of the individual's spontaneity. In keeping with this contrast, it can be assumed that the mimetic theory defines the desiring subject as a passive entity whose desiring states are fashioned automatically upon contact with an external reality, the desires of others. Individual agency is not, therefore, a locus of a spontaneous and selective process, but of a process that is not fully reflective and lucid in its deliberations. Desire is selective nonetheless, and the selectivity in question has several facets. Firstly, there is the selection of a model. Frédéric singles out which model is to be mediated at any one time. Indeed, at times, it appears he is pursuing Arnoux rather than his wife. A second element of selectivity pertains to the determination of the imitation of the particular states of desire of the model. People, even fictional characters, do not have access to others' states of desire, any or all of which could be imitated. The point is implicit in Frédéric and Deslauriers' case as the possibility of error and illusion; we can imitate models we wrongly believe to exist, just as we erroneously attribute certain desires to others. Another sort of selectivity comes into play in those cases where the model's desire does not have an independent reality known to the imitative agent. Mimetic desire may in fact involve a selective transformation of the model's desire, perhaps unbeknown to the agent.

Given the selective nature of mimetic desire, it can be said that mimetic psychology differs from Romantic conceptions of the self. It is sometimes taken for granted that the distinction hinges on assumptions about the agent's ability – or inability - to be aware of their own desires. Jean-Michel Oughourlian, for example, has proposed that Romantic psychologies have two blind-spots, for they do not acknowledge the role played by desire in the constitution of the self, and they fail to understand the role that others play in the erection of desires.<sup>10</sup> Frédéric's freedom and spontaneity are myths, just as are those of Dostoevsky's Underground Man, because the agent fails to understand the effect that others have on his desires.<sup>11</sup>

Charles Baudelaire expressed a key intuition when he wrote 'C'est toujours l'animal adoreur se trompant d'idole'.<sup>12</sup> Following this approach, the true goal of mimetic subjects, the secret reason for their writing, behaviour, and unswerving erection of models, mediators and masters above themselves, is a persistent quest for transcendence. Humanity's sense of finitude, its imperfection and its uneasy position between what Pascal termed 'les deux infinis', is the existential basis for an essential desire for salvation, the perverse expression of which is the idolatry of mimetic desire. Salvation can be religious or secular; from the moment of her 'Transfiguration' on the steam-ship to Nogent, Mme Arnoux is pursued by Marian iconology.

---

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *Un mime nommé Désir: hystérie, transe, possession, adorcisme*, [n.p.]: Grasset, 1982.

<sup>11</sup> Girard, *Mensonge*, pp. 256-9.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 1295.

In Flaubert, we do not feel the Zolaesque weight of determinism, but the political and social extremes into which the characters are drawn suggest environmental control of the ridiculous actions that carry away the several characters. Frédéric, who is a member of a socially superior class, dreams of farcical conquests in love in the manner of Anthony and Cleopatra; Deslauriers dreams of political power, not for any reforming purpose, but to convince himself of his own social stature. Each has the character to act on his pose, but it would seem that a pose, by its very nature, is unsustainable, and life eludes them. One allows himself to be intoxicated by his propensity for sentiment, the other by his weakness for logic: ultimately, it is the dream of a possibility of choice that defeats them.

It is Frédéric's desire for transcendence that sets him apart from the lesser characters, for whom the mania is glory. Dussardier's simple rectitude and Sénécal's malevolence are healthy, unfeigned attitudes and although these 'pure' lives earn a useless death for the one and a despicable life for the other, we feel that they have made full use of their potentialities. Dussardier, the delivery-boy grown into an example of political nobility, seems a Rousseauist noble savage. He is a dim fragment of perfection for whom the author reserves a spotless life; he is a form of masculine virtue akin to the Ideal Feminine embodied by Mme Arnoux.<sup>13</sup> Sénécal is, on the other hand, a ruthless opportunist, devoted to emotionless absolutism of any stripe that offers itself, a budding Stalin. The more harmless of these caricatures merely seem amusing: Regimbart, 'The Citizen', who spends his days on an endless round of bars and serves the Revolution by presenting the Spanish patriot; or Hussonnet, the society writer, who stoops to any malicious inanity to keep himself fed and in the public eye. Whether they are

---

<sup>13</sup> Mary Orr, *Flaubert: Writing the Masculine*, Oxford: OUP, 2000; see in particular pp. 45-55.

momentarily attractive or the converse they remain fixed in their lives – it is their fixity which we find objectionable. The aimlessness of Frédéric is preferable since it allows him a variety of experience and maintains the possibility of change and education until the very end.

With a slight change of emphasis, we might say that Girardian subjects desire the Being of the Other, rightly or wrongly perceived to be superior. If this is the case, it is clear that the theory hardly leaves the mimetic subject's desires indeterminate; on the contrary, it is essentially determinate, since characterised by a profoundly religious essence in one version and an ontological or metaphysical preoccupation in another. The epigraph to *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* is a citation from Max Scheler, to the effect that human beings must have either a God or an idol and, throughout the work, the terms 'metaphysical desire' and 'mimetic desire' are used interchangeably. We read here that the mimetic subject, Frédéric in this case, suffers from an ontological sickness and seeks remedy in his futile attempts to conquer the being of Mme Arnoux. The desire for transcendence is presented as a fact of universal experience for Girard, yet no character stands out as a God whom Frédéric may imitate in *L'Education*. Lacking being, Frédéric pursues Mme Arnoux instead, whom he qualifies with saintly or religious qualities, as she appears to possess 'some plenitude of being'.<sup>14</sup>

The agent thus suffers from some essential indeterminacy or lack, and the attempt to put an end to such lack is Frédéric's guiding motive. In one version of Girardian theory, a firm sense of self-identity is the real goal of the mimetic subject in the agent's various relations to the world. The subject's basic problem is that of coming up with an answer to the question 'Who

---

<sup>14</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 146.



am I?’ As no solution may be found by peering into the abyss of solitude, it is imagined that the response be found in the eyes of others. The labels for the real object of the mimetic quest may vary: some speak of recognition, others of determination of self-esteem. In less cognitive and philosophical terms, this is the ‘Other-directed’ subject desirous, above all else, of the Other’s love and approval.

In another variant, instead of puzzling over the question of self definition, the uncertain mimetic subject puzzles over the nature of the world, especially its values. The guiding question thus becomes ‘What is to be done?’ The mimetic agent seeks in others the knowledge he lacks. Perhaps others know which actions are inherently best; perhaps another can be found who has a privileged viewpoint. Girard touches upon this idea when he claims that when modern theorists envisage Man as a being who knows what he wants, or at least, has an unconscious that knows for him, they have simply failed to see the domain in which human uncertainty is most extreme.<sup>15</sup> In the last resort, claims Girard, the human subject does not really know what to desire, and is quite incapable of desiring consistently or relentlessly. That is why he is given over to the paradoxes of mimetic desire.

Surrounded by mistaken enthusiasms personified, Frédéric in fact eschews any form of practical accomplishment. In the Parisian world where stale luxury goods abound, Frédéric is not tempted, as Arnoux is, into the manufacture of products. The latter strays into various fields, seeking an ideal colour, and sinking into vulgarity. Frédéric does imitate him in his loves, however, one a model of domestic perfection, the other a courtesan. Rosanette, arguing

---

<sup>15</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 204.

with La Vatnaz, expresses the ideal feminine: ‘Les femmes, selon Rosanette, étaient nées exclusivement pour l’amour ou pour élever des enfants, pour tenir un ménage.’ (p. 327).

Frédéric, imitating his Romantic models and free from the necessity of earning a living, thinks in terms of ideals and abstracts. The only colourful characters in his world are porters and actresses; the middle class is despised from above and below. In his world there is no patriotic convincing endeavour. The only credo which could redeem him is intellectual ambition, but the hero of this novel is, as Cortland expresses it ‘a nobody’, an empty vessel, who has neither the intellect nor the will-power to undertake such a task.<sup>16</sup> The difference between Flaubert the man and his character is that the author was able to find a purpose in life by writing on Frédéric, a shadow of himself. The austerity dictated by serious academic rigour saved Flaubert from the sentimental dissipations to which the character falls victim; the education in sentiment which we see seems identical to an education in decadence.

When we return to the text, we find many incidents related which display in miniature the tendency of Frédéric to a lack of selfhood and of the work in general to degenerescence. The opening scene gives us a precise setting which is ironically confused by realistic activity:

... le tapage s’absorbait dans le bruissement de la vapeur, qui s’échappait par les plaques de tôle, enveloppait tout d’une nuée blanchâtre, tandis que la cloche, en avant, tintait sans discontinuer (p. 19).

---

<sup>16</sup> Cortland, *Sentimental Education*, Ch. 2.

The movement of the passage is retrogressive; Frédéric is not going downriver to adult experience, but upstream, back to childhood scenes, literally and symbolically, as in terms of the book he finally returns to the memory of a salacious incident in his youth.

The separate scenes seem very much set up according to the dictates of the Realist stage. From the midst of the scene emerges a clear hero, who lets out a great sigh. As in *Bovary* we find a ridiculous protagonist who yet has some admirable stature. The text of *L'Education* is, however, constantly evocative of the Romantic pose and of its contrast to the more prosaic realms of the surrounding characters. When the boat passes a group of houses, the passengers dream appropriately of domestic bliss, of possessing property and of general dullness. The hero's alternative dreams are an improvement, but illustrate the unformed quality of a very young mind: 'Frédéric pensait à la chambre qu'il occuperait là-bas, au plan d'un drame, à des sujets de tableaux, à des passions futures.' (p. 20)

Frédéric never knows what he wants to do and never settles on any plan of definite action; he is already half-determined to be unhappy and is disappointed that a suitable adventure in life has yet to befall him. He attempts to see his experience as suitably Romantic and is ready to interpret any incident as a great, passionate encounter: 'Il trouvait que le bonheur mérité par l'excellence de son âme tardait à venir' (ibid.). He cannot accept the discrepancy between his unexpressed wishes and the lack of concern shown by the outside world. As in the Girardian model, Frédéric's is basically an objectless desire, and we find him in these initial scenes drifting about, vaguely suspended until given some impulse to reanimate his life. The vision is provided:

Ce fut comme une apparition.

Elle était assise, au milieu d'un banc, tout seule, ou du moins il ne distinguait personne, dans l'éblouissement qui lui envoyèrent ses yeux (p. 22).

Created by his own imagination, he sees her before him, radiant as a saint. She conforms to the Romantic Ideal with her ribbons, oval face and hair parted in the middle. The implied duality of point of view is important here, as whilst Frédéric sees an apparition, she is in fact quite ordinary and contented. Frédéric's illusions are presented quite convincingly and we remember that for Flaubert, this is the unattainable love, Elise Schlésinger. The illusion and reality seem equally valid, for sentimentality allows two women to exist in the same place. Frédéric must clothe the apparition with life; lacking being himself, he must surround her with exotic things he can grasp, but he does not attempt to know the real woman within:

Quels étaient son nom, sa demeure, sa vie, son passé? Il souhaitait connaître les meubles dans sa chambre, toutes les robes qu'elle avaient portées, les gens qu'elle fréquentait; et le désir de la possession même disparaissait sous une envie plus profonde, dans une curiosité douloureuse qui n'avait pas de limites (p. 23).

The passage as a whole makes an interesting complement to the start of IV 3, in which Frédéric has, in a sense, become successful, as things such as physical possession have been overcome, but Frédéric is overwhelmed by a debilitating *ennui*. Frédéric yearns for mysteries, as Emma longs for the land of the perpetual honeymoon. In this mood, there is a strong sense of Platonism, of questing for knowledge once possessed, a recognition of an affinity once

enjoyed at a happier time; Frédéric remains crudely self-centred, however, and on seeing Mme Arnoux, merely holds up a mirror to himself as he fills her outline with his own Romantic longings.

Frédéric saves Mme Arnoux's scarf from falling over the rail. When he first sees it, it too is part of her exotic atmosphere and thus a source of satisfying wonderment; he sees it as a faithful servant whom he would like to replace: 'Elle avait dû, bien des fois, au milieu de la mer, durant des soirs humides, en envelopper sa taille, s'en couvrir les pieds, dormir dedans' (p. 23). Communication for Frédéric is attempted on such a spiritual plane that material substitutes are needed for the Ideal; the clothing is the only part of the person actually there. If one attempts to grasp the being within, our hands close on air. Suitably, the background music to the scene is provided by a harpist playing an oriental ballad and Frédéric's 'mouvement de cœur presque religieux' forces him to hand over twenty francs. Confusion of abstract qualities is a primary condition of sentimentality.

Having endowed Mme Arnoux with the benefit of the exotic landscapes he has read about in books, Frédéric then places her against the backdrop of all he sees. The frustrated dreams, on the edge of realisation impossible to imagine, and from which the dreamer can only awake, are momentarily realised in the proceeding scene ('Un peu plus loin...') which constitutes 'a silent film on the subject of bliss'.<sup>17</sup> The house is suitably Romantic, with secluded walks around which he could take Mme Arnoux, and then his dream is materialized through the intensity of his desires, as he and she appear in the same scene, between two potted orange

---

<sup>17</sup> Cortland, *Sentimental Education*, p. 28.

plants, which add to the ridiculous artificiality of the scene, and recall Emma's daydreams in which northern and tropical elements clash. All of these tableaux drawn from Romantic literature have about them an aura of cosy domesticity. As Girard claims, the Romantic subject seeks to escape the world in a pacific paradise of childhood. Frédéric's dreams are never adult, and the scene vanishes quickly, allowing him to remember it as a moment of perfection.

Already, the overall pattern of Frédéric's education is becoming visible. He becomes lost in a world of innumerable details, all of which he rejects because he cannot find his type of sentimental satisfaction in aspects of living requiring organisation or logical thought. When he finds fragmentary, vague experience, he seizes this as a vehicle for his dreams and makes as much of the outside world as possible into a copy of himself. With this mentality, Frédéric bypasses the revolutionary theories and events of his day. It is though Frédéric enjoys a picaresque series of adventures, turning all the practical structures around him into windmills and jousting at them. We cannot help but sympathize with the Quixoticness of his quest for sentimental bliss, even though they may be sadistically undercut. The last chapter of the book, which shows the degeneration of Frédéric and Deslauriers, is prefigured by the adolescent dreams they express in I 2, and which reveal the models they choose on their mimetic journey. Their ambitions are vague, medieval and metaphysical:

Frédéric, dans ces derniers temps, n'avait rien écrit; ses opinions littéraires avaient changées; il estimait par-dessus tout la passion; Werther, René, Franck, Lara, Lélia et d'autres plus médiocres l'enthousiasmaient presque également. Quelquefois la musique lui semblait seule capable d'exprimer ses troubles intérieurs; alors, il rêvait

des symphonies; ou bien la surface des choses l'appréhendait, et il voulut peindre. Il avait composé des vers, pourtant; Deslauriers les trouva fort beaux, mais sans demander une autre pièce (p. 33).

His ambitions are those of Romantic youth in general and of the younger Flaubert in particular; the structural point here is that these characters seem, like Emma, to have been so sensitised by their reading that these ambitions never dim, and are a direct cause of their abandonment of all practical action. A course of mimetic action, an attitude in this case, which seemed to give them stature and interest in their youth, becomes a cause of lost humanity and spiritual ill-health in their maturity.

Their sensual dreams hold too tenaciously. The musings are, again, typical of youth, but are never surrendered; they are entertained in a sensuous atmosphere of summer, companionship and adolescence. Mere sensations do not, on their own, constitute a philosophy of being, however, and a more precise objective is contained in the dream of sexual adventure:

D'abord, ils entreprendraient un grand voyage avec l'argent que Frédéric prélèverait sur sa fortune, à sa majorité. Puis il reviendraient à Paris, ils travailleraient ensemble, ne se quitteraient pas, et comme délassément à leur travaux, ils auraient des amours de princesses dans des boudoirs de satin, ou de fulgurantes orgies avec des courtisanes illustres (p. 31).

The realisation of these ambitions would, they feel, be a perfect employment of their lives; the irony is that the course is followed and the results are boredom and depravity; they are right to exclaim; ‘C’est là que nous avons eu de meilleur!’, but that truth implies no success in either the past or the present. Their sexual idyll falls into alexandrines: ‘Des amours de princesses / dans des boudoirs de satin’, and we witness the birth of a course of imagined action which nothing ever replaces.

When we return to the present we again have a proleptic element in the mentioning of the scene at the *bordello*, which figures in the final exchanges in the novel:

Alors, il [Deslauriers] dit emphatiquement, tout en retirant son chapeau:

‘Vénus, reine des cieux, serviteur! Mais la Pénurie est la mère de la Sagesse. Nous a-t-on assez calomniés pour ça, Miséricorde!’

Cette allusion à une aventure commune les mit en joie. Ils riaient très haut dans les rues (p. 36).

The posture of sophistication is the same as we find at the end of the work, in the reference to the incident *chez la Turque*.

The strength of companionship, prefiguring the homoerotic relationship between Bouvard and Pécuchet, is enough nonetheless to sustain Frédéric, and he constantly muses on the heights he would have achieved if he had enjoyed some perfect love, ‘J’aurais fait quelque chose avec une femme qui m’eût aimé’, he claims. The character of the wronged one, of the disabused,



Mussetian generation, ‘la race des désinherités’, and the idea that one small thing would have been enough to bring out his brilliance, is flattering to Frédéric. The language of sentiment is more intellectual than that used by Emma, and both the beauty and folly of Romantic posturing are brought out, and from the tension, art is the result:

Sénécal protesta. L’Art devait exclusivement viser à la moralisation des masses! Il ne fallait reproduire que des sujets poussant aux actions vertueuses; les autres étaient nuisibles (p. 70).

Frédéric does not disagree with Sénécal on this point, particularly as he regards ‘des œuvres sublimes’ as the result of extraordinary emotion. Frédéric’s attempts at art are no less hideous than Sénécal’s theories. He invents exotic adventures to follow from his inspiration. There is the Lamartinesque vision of Renaissance Venice:

Il se mit à écrire un roman intitulé *Sylvio, le fils du pêcheur*. La chose se passait à Venise. Le héros, c’était lui-même; l’héroïne, Mme Arnoux. Elle s’appelait Antonia, et, pour l’avoir, il assassinait plusieurs gentilshommes, brûlant une partie de la ville et chantait sous son balcon, où palpitait à la brise les rideaux en damas rouge du Boulevard Montmartre (42).

The combination of the local and distant is particularly deflating. He will live only for her; he does in fact and the result is a wasted life. The Romantic subject appears to have as the result

of his mimetic quest, a centre of devotion, and is impatient with trivial facts. Frédéric's reading and imagination are his experiences and memories:

Quand il allait au jardin des plantes, la vue d'un palmier l'entraînait vers des pays lointains. Ils voyaient ensemble, au dos d'un dromadaire, sous le tendelet des éléphants, dans la cabine d'un yacht parmi des archipels bleus, ou à côté sur deux mulets à clochettes, qui trébuchaient dans les herbes contre les colonnes brisées (p. 88).

Alternating with the sentimental inflation of Frédéric's dreams and, in a sense, giving rise to them, are the deflating sarcastic passages that reveal the confusion, spite and ugliness of all concerned. Frédéric's tastes seem low, though rather from naivety than depravity. His confusion of extremes, his acceptance of any female as a reminder of Mme Arnoux shows, on the contrary, a persistence of the mimetic quest:

Les prostituées qu'il rencontrait au feu de gaz, les cantatrices poussant leurs roulades, les écuyères sur les chevaux au galop, les bourgeoises à pied, les grisettes à leur fenêtre, toutes les femmes lui rappelaient celle-là, par des similitudes ou par des contrastes violentes (p. 87).

Frédéric's quest seems ridiculous, having something of the tongue-in-cheek *Candide* about it, but it is still preferable to hideous reality. At the ball, we have a disquisition on social depravity that no reader could be tempted to take part in. The stock-in-trade figures that the characters are pretending to be reveal some truth about them, and the progression of sad

figures shows how they have marked and degraded the Ideal. Hussonnet has read fifty-three papers, and yet will only recount in his organ the tale of the Parisian woman who is playing a part natural to her. Pellerin has an assignation with a model, but the Chorister has three of his own. The Angel, betrayed by her base intestines, cannot rise to heaven or even her cab, and must be supported by the Baron; the secular aristocratic arm in support of the Church. This society has given its spiritual creatures feet of clay, devoid of dignity or faith. As Pellerin has it:

Laissez-moi tranquille avec votre hideuse réalité. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire, la réalité? Les uns voient noir, les autres bleu, la multitude voit bête (p. 66).

Under the influence of Mme Arnoux's favourable glances, Frédéric suddenly develops a great enthusiasm for his law studies, and dreams of the power he may wield as a lawyer, seeing himself in the court of assizes, in the dim glow of a winter night (p. 106). There are two pleasures involved in this daydream, as in all his others: the future joy of the imagined circumstance, and the knowledge that it is at a distance and that he will never arrive there. His lawyer's costume would make him an historical figure, and he would serve his lady in the finest chivalric traditions of the Romantic hero.<sup>18</sup> The great value of the dream is that it allows Frédéric to express his love in the accepted practice of his profession, and he makes the consummation of his love identical with the achievement of an absolute, paternalistic position, which, as we have seen, he is unlikely ever to achieve. Mme Arnoux remains, as Girard has it, not merely the perfection of an ideal but 'the Ideal behind all Ideals', and perhaps the World-

---

<sup>18</sup> Louis-Philippe's system of government was based on an idealized version of the English legal system, including phraseology and styles of dress – Cortland, *Sentimental Education*, p. 36.

Soul in its entirety, one part of which is destined to merge into the soul-fragment that is Frédéric.

The key to Frédéric's multiplication of absurd dreams lies in his blindness to the rest of humanity. He continually flirts with society, but never establishes a permanent relationship with it. Only his relationship with Deslauriers survives all vicissitudes, but Frédéric finds the vast majority of humanity indifferent to his abortive dreams of friendship because each has his own preferences and social world.

Frédéric, for all his love of the glitter of history, has no understanding of its practical movement. He fails to perceive that the repetitions and frictions of history have dulled the sensibilities of social groups and individuals alike. Frédéric, who frequently appears child-like, seems to believe that the world was freshly created with his experience and fails to see the acquisitive nature of his quest: he thinks each of his actions is original and merits an original perception, despite being himself obtuse towards others. He is not capable of influencing the world in any way. He fails throughout life to make an impact on the world not only because society fails to appreciate his excellent soul, but more importantly because he fails to encounter the world in those terms to which it can respond.

Part of the problem of selfhood in Flaubert is best described as one of metonymical substitution. Much of the complexity of the 1869 *L'Education* results from Flaubert's using the novel to rethink some of his earlier works; not only its immediate predecessor, *Salammbô*,

but also the second version of the *Tentation*, written between *Bovary* and the first *L'Education* of 1845.

In the opening of the first *L'Education*, Jules and Henry have already separated after living together in the provinces. Henry goes away to Paris, to America, whilst Jules remains in the provinces. If the nucleus of the first *L'Education* is the pairing Jules / Henry and the opposition between Paris / the provinces, then although these two elements are present in the second *L'Education*, their schematic neatness has been lost. As the novel starts, Deslauriers has already returned from Paris after spending two years there (that are not part of the novel) and it is Frédéric's turn to go to Paris, where Deslauriers hopes to join him soon. It is therefore not clear which character corresponds to that of Jules and which to that of Henry. The second *L'Education* does not, moreover, begin with Frédéric's departure for Paris; rather it starts with Frédéric aboard a ship watching Paris disappear in the distance. He thus appears to leave Paris before visiting it. His actual arrival in the city two months later is only briefly alluded to. This first departure is more of a repetition than a beginning; it is not a discovery of something new but an attempt to recover something once known, something that belongs to the past and has already been lost and degraded. When Frédéric finally finds Mme Arnoux again, he finds this very degradation and feels that she has lost something.

The beginning of *L'Education* is a return to the past, from a Paris that has been missed, and that when reached, is already marked by repetition and loss. Neither Frédéric nor Deslauriers will ever have a first arrival in either Paris or the provinces. In this going and coming, the neat opposition between Jules and Henry, between Paris and the provinces, the place of youthful

illusion and the place of disillusionment and education, has been lost, and it is hardly surprising that Frédéric's education amounts to very little.

The first *L'Education* differs from earlier works and resembles *Bouvard* in that it posits as a point of departure not a unity but a duality, in which self and its mirror image, experience and language, clearly coexist. This insistence on a duality means that the two main characters are presented as two parts of the self, as alternatives to each other, and the text moves by oscillation between two poles. Henry's narcissism is opposed to Jules' acceptance of death and alienation, and the two courses are seen as independent and separate possibilities, between which (in contrast to *Bouvard*) one can choose.

The assumption that a clear opposition can be made between separate positions, different possibilities and points of view, is gradually undermined in subsequent works. It is already showing anfractuosités in *Bovary*, where the conflicting features of the various narrators and intermittent use of the free indirect mode blur both the distinctions between different characters and the difference between character and narrator. In *Salammbô*, where binary oppositions are shown to be impossible through the suppression of inner divisions, making each side prone to slide into its opposite, the very notion of identity itself is shown to be illusory, and with it, the possibility of oscillation between two distinct poles is destroyed. Thus, whereas in the first *L'Education* the oscillation between different positions is a productive dialectic creating a rhythm of mystification / demystification, in the subsequent works the underlying distinctions are lost; the self / agent and Other are coextensive, and so this rhythm is no longer possible. Consequently, in the *Education* of 1869 (as in *Salammbô*)

plot, themes and movement are generated not by opposition between characters, places or parts of the self / agent, but by metonymical sliding and substitution. This change is already visible in Frédéric's return visit home.

The return trip is a recurrent motif in the Flaubertian œuvre (the visit to the seaside village in the *Mémoires d'un fou*, the voyage to X- in *Novembre*). In these earlier works, the return home was a sign of internal division, or a difference from the self / agent, a difference connoted by a change in landscape or a character's changed reaction to it. But, having left Mme Arnoux, Frédéric, now in the carriage, sees new details in the landscape as he looks at the field of stubble (p. 27). At first it seems that now, on his return journey from Le Havre, and after having experienced a crucial meeting with Mme Arnoux, Frédéric is reliving the journey and, having changed, perceives his surroundings differently. But the fact that Frédéric now notices Mme Arnoux's foot peeping out from under her dress makes clear that he is not reliving a previous journey he has made some time ago, but the one he has just completed with her. The act of memory is not triggered, as in Proust, by repetition, neither is it prompted by another journey to the same place at another time; rather, it is recalled by a trip in a carriage, passing through totally different places. One landscape does not resemble or differ from another (which would make for a metaphorical repetition) but it is metonymically adjacent to it. One journey is simply superimposed upon another. In one journey another can be read, one landscape evokes another and, instead of seeing himself changed, it is Mme Arnoux whom Frédéric recalls. What was, in the early works, a structure based on memory, hinging on the concept of the self and on the problem of repetition (with attendant similarity and difference) has become a structure based on metonymical substitution in which the very problem of

selfhood / agency is foregrounded. Frédéric and Deslauriers, Paris and the provinces, Mme Arnoux and Frédéric, and boat-trip and a carriage-journey can all be substituted for each other, thus losing their very identity and particularity.

In *L'Education*, every structure based on memory is shown to be illusory and is undermined by metonymical substitution. For example, when Frédéric asks Mme Arnoux how she discovered that she loved him, she recalls an evening when he kissed her between her sleeve and her glove. But the kiss was given to Rosanette, and the kiss to Mme Arnoux was given by Deslauriers. The same kind of substitution (assuming there is no error on Flaubert's part) takes place in the carriage coming back from the Champ de Mars with Rosanette, when Frédéric remembers how he longed to be in such a carriage with these women. But he in fact imagined Mme Arnoux in a carriage similar to the Dambreuses'.

Temporal difference allows the self to be represented as different from the self (it sees its own agency as the Other) but also similar to itself (it recognises itself in the Other). Hence, temporal distance does not destroy the concept of the self; at the end there is still the possibility of a totalizing effect, of presenting these dislocated states of development as the sum total of these stages. With spatial distance, however, where characters are being metonymically substituted for any other, and where any agent can play mimetic agonist to any other, the agent is always represented as both self and Other, always different from the self so as to make totalization impossible.



The double ending of *L'Education* exemplifies these two ways of seeing the self and Other, and shows how the first manner may undermine the second. Both final chapters are marked by memory and the reconstruction of the past, as Frédéric and Deslauriers talk about times past. But whereas the scene of Mme Arnoux's departure is one of totalization – despite the misplaced kiss and Frédéric's disappointment - Mme Arnoux is able to organise herself around the idea of the woman she has ceased to be. In the scene with Deslauriers, however, the friends see themselves and their contemporaries as not coinciding with what they were or had aimed to be. If the scene with Marie Arnoux emphasises the mother, the specular image that in its otherness and similarity gives the self a unified image of itself, then the scene with Deslauriers which centres around a prostitute, in her non-exclusive relations and ever-changing nature, gives back to the self a reflection that is unstable and dispersed.

Metonymical substitution in *L'Education* is not only a way of demystifying a certain concept of agency, it is also, and principally, a way of generating the novel's plot, themes and movement; the concept of the self is a consequence of the way the plot is written. The depiction of a character who experiences life in a disconnected way, never fixing his attention for any length of time on one object, and never entirely renouncing any of the relations or modes of life thrown in his path, is a solution to the problem of representation that Flaubert had encountered in *Bovary* on the one hand, and the first two versions of the *Tentation* on the other. In the figure of Appollonius / Frédéric we find a narrator and character combined, who can prolong the text without premature death, and yet at the same time, the character is not a spectator but one who can move and act.

The representation of Frédéric as a weak and vacillating character is dictated by the needs of the narration. For it to continue forwards, Frédéric has to be represented as a character who undergoes experiences in a disconnected way, constantly wavering between self-assertion and self-renunciation, and who is never able to choose. Frédéric's emergence as both character and narrator, as both self and an eye that permits a story to unfold and develop, requires that both his life and his story be failures. Frédéric fails in his education, and in Flaubert's own words, the text 'ne fait pas la pyramide'.<sup>19</sup>

One important feature of Antoine's story is that the images or temptations are neither annihilated totally nor renounced and discarded by the saint. They continue to exist and reappear, each replacing the previous one. Each appearance does not, however, mark a development but only a change of disguise and external appearance. The basic structure of *L'Education* is visible in these images, with the scenes represented as characters, keep appearing constantly, substituting one for another, without any real development. They simply appear in different contexts, with different fortunes, women, and so forth.

In the *Tentation*, the particular order in which the temptations appear can be attributed to the power of Satan. But in *L'Education*, the appearance and disappearance (and reappearance) of characters cannot be attributed entirely to Frédéric. The appearance of the vast cast of characters seems to be quite arbitrary. In fact, however, appearances and disappearances are governed by a rhythm generated by the particular way the problem of representation has been solved. Since the particular solution of *L'Education* is the creation of a central character-

---

<sup>19</sup> I have not been able to locate this quotation. It is in Williams, *Hidden Life*, p. 43.

narrator who both lives through the fascination exerted by dual relations and cuts this fascination short, so that the narrative can continue, the novel moves precisely by constantly interrupting a narcissistic duality. It does this repeatedly by repeatedly introducing a third element, and antagonist to the agent, to create a Girardian ‘mimetic triangle’, only to have it reduced to a dyad as soon as one of those elements is excluded or disappears. The agent / antagonist relationship is a strong generator of emotions. Jealousy does not, for example, cause Deslauriers to appear in Paris on the same day as Frédéric is invited to the Arnoux’, but the interruption of a third party threatening a dual relationship can be seen as generating this emotion. So the movement of the narrative cannot be explained in terms of Intentionalist psychology, even though some of the patterns that this ‘mimetic doubling’ produces coincide with patterns that we usually interpret in psychological terms.

The mechanical movement of the novel is evident in the incidents in which interruption and exclusion are apparently unmotivated. The dual relationship (a duel, in this case) between Frédéric and de Cisy is interrupted by Arnoux. This appearance is apparently motivated by Arnoux’s love and gratitude to Frédéric. But the relation Frédéric / Arnoux is arbitrarily turned into a triangle by the inclusion of Regimbart (though Dussardier is present, he does not play any role; he is not yet needed). From this triangular relationship, Frédéric / Arnoux / Regimbart, we move to a new dual relationship with the again arbitrary exclusion of Frédéric, as Arnoux and Regimbart move away to discuss bills and dates of maturity. Frédéric is left excluded by Regimbart and Arnoux (a modification that gives rise to Frédéric’s otherwise incomprehensible resentment of Arnoux). This dyadic idyll is soon broken up again by the arrival of Sénécal, and the dual relationship again becomes triangular as the two friends set

about finding some way of saving Sénécal. This *tropisme* gives rise to Frédéric's admiration of Sénécal.

In another sequence, the dual relationship Frédéric / Dussardier is broken up by the introduction of Deslauriers. Finding Dussardier irksome for them, Frédéric and Deslauriers divest themselves of the delivery-boy. The arbitrariness of this mutation seems to need justification from the narrator, who can only claim that some men are like bridges; one crosses them and leaves them behind. One wonders whether this assessment should be taken seriously, but careful reading shows that almost every character in the book can function as the mimetic agonist to any other, any that every relationship can be a triangular one.

Thus any character can play the role of mimetic agonist to any other, either as a direct mirror-image or third element. Such changing poles naturally create patterns of opposition and similarity. And since this syntagmatic aspect (i.e. of 'horizontal relationships') in the novel seems governed by mechanical chance, and devoid of meaning, the interpreter (whether it is a character interpreting their own experience or the reader) is tempted to invest these configurations with meaning. Thus, for example, we see the opposition between Mme Arnoux and Rosanette as that between the honest woman and *lorette*, an opposition that Frédéric himself reinforces when speaking of the 'deux mélodies' in his life. At the end of the novel, Frédéric and Deslauriers analyse their experience in terms of opposing characteristics. The possible configurations are endless, as are the thematic conclusions that can be drawn from them. Delmar and Dussardier both share the name Auguste, for example, showing that the most pure and most debased are in fact the same, and so on.

Moreover, the characters are not merely the mimetic agonists of each other; they can replace each other, and become the position occupied by the self / agent. Deslauriers, for example, is not merely the contrary of Frédéric; the two of them are repeatedly substituted for each other. Frédéric has, at the start of the novel, fine clothes, and presents himself at the Dambreuses'. He becomes Mme Dambreuse's lover and thus becomes what Deslauriers desires. Later, Deslauriers tries to supplant his friend as the lover of Mme Arnoux, offering his services to Mme Dambreuse, and even marrying Frédéric's childhood sweetheart, Louise Roque.

Since characters can replace each other, none has any intrinsic qualities (no-one is entirely debased or pure, etc). Instead, the characters are constituted by their relations to others, by the position they occupy in a given social configuration. And since these configurations change constantly, 'character' is by no means a stable entity. This is why the characters are distinguished by their changeability (which does not include progress, growth or education; these are fixed). Arnoux changes domiciles and occupations, Mme Arnoux changes her surroundings, and Frédéric and Deslauriers change political opinions.

Political opinion, then, is generated in the same way as sentiments are born: they are the result of the changing configurations of characters. In *Bovary*, the narrative remains within the static confines of the narcissistic, specular mode and consequently, opinions too have a specular quality, as revealed in the relationship between Homais and Bournisien. But in *L'Education*, where the narration is governed by the alternation between dyadic and triangular relationships, brought about by the constant intervention of a third party, opinions are unstable and are subject to the principle of metonymic substitution. Just as jealousy, resentment and admiration

are not here a direct relationship between agent and Other, but are the results of changing relations between characters, and are thus, in Girardian terms, 'mediated', so too political opinions express changes in group configurations.

At the Arnoux's, Frédéric attacks the newspapers not because he has a certain opinion of them, but because he wants revenge on Mme Arnoux who, by ignoring his claims as a lover, excludes him from the triangular relationship he used to enjoy with her and her husband. As a result, his attack on the newspapers is defined in terms of his attack on Arnoux. Similarly, La Vatnaz supports Communism to annoy Rosanette, her competitor for Delmar, and Deslauriers embraces Sénécal's radicalism to get back at Frédéric who has refused to lend him any money. There are many other examples of this instability of opinion, especially political opinion. Dussardier moves from supporting the insurgents to supporting the National Guard, Sénécal changes from radical to police informer, and Deslauriers, who has made speeches against the oppression of Arabs, becomes Director of Colonisation in Algeria. At one point, Sénécal is the secretary to Deslauriers, who manages the candidacy of Frédéric, sponsored by Dambreuse.

We have seen that the characters are neither psychological entities with inherent properties, nor representatives of ideological or political positions. They are the temporary repositories of attitudes, opinions and sentiments that are generated by an endless series of substitutions whose movement they do not control. The only thing that gives an impression of continuity and permanence is personal names and supplemental labels such as 'le Citoyen' or 'le Bohémien'. These names and labels are, however, wholly external and do not refer to any stable or intrinsic qualities; indeed, 'The Citizen' seems highly ironic. They are like the

costumes at the ball Rosanette gives. The fact that she ‘derives’ ‘la Maréchale’ so easily justifies Ginsburg’s view that, as Musset also demonstrates in *Lorenzaccio*, these attributes are as changeable as costumes.<sup>20</sup>

Some characters do seem, nonetheless, to have a more stable ‘self’ than others, particularly Mme Arnoux and Dussardier. Both of these characters undergo however a process of substitution which corrodes their individual identity. For example, when Frédéric wants to borrow money from Mme Dambreuse to save Arnoux from bankruptcy, he substitutes Dussardier for Arnoux, saying that he needs the money for the former. In giving his reason that Dussardier has, of all things, committed a theft, he confuses Dussardier with La Vatnaz, whose theft has, Frédéric learns, linked her with Dussardier. Mme Arnoux also undergoes various substitutions, for her first name is either Marie or Angèle (on the occasion of her birthday), or Sophie, according to de Cisy. When Deslauriers encourages Frédéric to become a second Rastignac, he substitutes Mme Dambreuse for Mme Arnoux and, most importantly, she changes as her surroundings change. Her existence is, from the outset, linked to the objects around her. And, since objects such as the casket and parasol migrate like the *zaimph* in *Salammô*, this instability undermines the cogency of her character.

For Cortland, Dussardier and Mme Arnoux strike us, despite the brevity of their appearances in *L’Education*, as purer than the other characters and having more of an inherent, individual essence.<sup>21</sup> This is because the only two scenes which could be described as emotionally

---

<sup>20</sup> Michal Peled Ginsburg, *Flaubert Writing: A Study in Narrative Strategy*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986, p. 24

<sup>21</sup> Cortland, *Sentimental Education*, p. 149.

charged, pathetic even, are the death of Dussardier and the last meeting with Mme Arnoux. The reason for this pathos is precisely that these scenes show Dussardier and Mme Arnoux trying (albeit fruitlessly) to resist changeability. It is important to note that whilst Dussardier and Mme Arnoux are presented as constant this characterisation, like all others in the novel, is the result of arbitrary syntagmatic substitutions. In the changing patterns of configuration, Dussardier is never in the position of competing directly with Frédéric for possession of the same object; his sacrifice is needless in every sense. Similarly, Mme Arnoux never participates directly in a configuration in which another character is substituted for Frédéric. Exclusivity and lack of rivalry are what characterize the ideal Other / mirror image. Dussardier and Mme Arnoux are ideal mirror images, marked by purity and stability, but the qualities that make them thus are produced arbitrarily, and this in fact undermines the very notion of the ideal mirror image.

We have seen how the plot of *L'Education* is generated by a constant metonymical sliding that brings Frédéric into relations with a variety of other characters. The alternation between dual and triangular relationships and the substitution of characters do not, however, account for the totality of *L'Education*. Every now and then this movement is interrupted by scenes presenting the gathering of numerous characters. This happens with a certain regularity throughout the novel in the big 'set-pieces': the gathering at *l'Art Industriel*, the dinner at the Arnoux's, the birthday of Mme Arnoux at St. Cloud, the ball at Rosanette's, the various soirées at the Dambreuses', the housewarming party at Frédéric's, the de Cisy party, the punch party at Dussardier's.



In some of these scenes – the Arnoux dinner, Rosanette’s ball, Mme Arnoux’s birthday – Frédéric is presented as a character whose feelings, thoughts and words are the subject of the narration. In these cases he also serves as the point of view mediating between us as readers and the scene presented, and in this instance we remain within the limits of what Raimond calls ‘subjective realism’ but in many of these scenes, Frédéric’s presence as a character is rather weak. Most of these scenes involve discussions and conversations, and Frédéric’s voice is hardly heard.<sup>22</sup> At most, his voice is one amongst many; the centre of conversation is nearly always some else (for example, Sénécal at the punch party, Martinon at the second Dambreuse soirée). Nor are his thoughts and reactions to the conversations around him conveyed, an omission that is particularly striking at the house-warming party.

In such scenes, the point of view becomes problematic. Whenever Frédéric’s actions or inner reactions are not described, he tends to disappear from the narration, and we are not sure whether his are actually the eyes through which events unfold. His function is limited to introducing us to a scene; once this function has been fulfilled, he disappears. At the gathering at *l’Art Industriel*, for example, we see Frédéric arriving with Hussonnet; he crosses the shop, goes up the stairs, is seen by Arnoux in the mirror, and then disappears for a moment until Mme Arnoux’s voice makes him emerge for a moment, only to disappear again a few moments later. He emerges once more at the end of the scene, when we are told that he and Pellerin are the last to leave. Between his arrival and departure, Frédéric’s presence as both character and spectator is not felt. The actions is either summarized by an omniscient narrator, or presented in direct dialogue. Similarly, in the Alhambra ball scene, we are told that Frédéric

---

<sup>22</sup> Michel Raimond, ‘Le Réalisme subjectif dans *l’Education sentimentale*’, *Cahiers de l’association internationale des études françaises*, no. 23, 1971, pp. 299-310.

has arrived in the company of four friends. What follows is a description of the activities of Frédéric's friends; Frédéric himself, once he has brought us to the ball, is not mentioned, and since it is impossible to locate him until the very end of the scene, when Arnoux's voice causes him to reappear, we cannot be sure that he is the spectator through whose eyes the scene has been viewed.

In these instances, we can say that having 'projected' the scene, Frédéric effaces himself as narrator, and gives his place to the spectacle he has projected. This explains why the emphasis is on the movement from one place to another. At the end of the second Dambreuse soirée, we learn that Frédéric goes up the stairs, wandering from group to group until he comes to a card-room, and finds himself in the doorway of a boudoir. The movement forward is toward the object of desire; it is a movement of concentration by means of which the object of desire gradually materializes and emerges as a fully alive character, ready to satisfy the hero's desire, but equally ready to annihilate him. We have seen this movement in *Novembre*, in the pursuit of Marie through the backstreets, to a particular house, to a particular room. But Marie eventually becomes the narrator of her own story. In *L'Education*, Frédéric's quest never leads to such a satisfying (or even threatening) appearance. In many of the group scenes, Frédéric's movement does not reach its term in the form of a concrete, materialized desire; rather it appears at the second Dambreuse soirée, as a diffuse, fragmented multiplicity, as a plethora of nationalities and trite traits.

In other instances, the movement forward results not in the materialization of the object of desire, but in the discovery of a substitution. At Rosanette's for example, Frédéric moves

progressively from the large drawing-room to a sort of boudoir. Here, he finds Rosanette, who seems to think that he fought de Cisy because of her (rather than because of Mme Arnoux). This substitution, strangely enough, undermines the possibility that Rosanette will incarnate Frédéric's desire, as both feel a certain constraint, a barrier separating them. The same mechanism is at work in the relationship with Mme Dambreuse. Frédéric takes a painfully circuitous route to reach the site of the Feminine, her boudoir, but the reality of substitution prevents the actualization of desire, and Frédéric is initially unsuccessful at seducing her.

Most importantly, the movement towards Mme Arnoux does not lead to her. Frédéric believes he can reach her through the back door of *l'Art Industriel*, only to find there...La Vatnaz. And his search for Mme Arnoux at the start of Part II, instead of moving forward to ever greater concreteness, as did the search for Marie, is constantly deflected by a process of substitution: Frédéric first looks for Mme Arnoux, then for Regimbart, who may know of her whereabouts, then for the cafés and bars in which Regimbart may be found. And Mme Arnoux suffers the consequences of this deflection; when Frédéric finds her, she no longer incarnates desire, she is somehow degraded.

The ever-present process of substitution in fact makes it impossible for Frédéric ever to 'arrive' at the object of desire; this means that his desire can never be fulfilled, and that his life is the sequence of failures and frustrations we have already discussed. But these failures and frustrations allow the narrative to continue. But though characters are constantly substituted for one another, and this process prevents Frédéric from ever fixing his attention on any one object of desire, the story is not entirely of repetition without development. Even though at no

specific point does Frédéric manage to fulfil the desire he has at that particular moment, the movement of the novel as a whole is towards the possession of three women, whose admiration and love he enjoys.

The movement by which the self gives life to the image of its desire and then encounters it as a reality, satisfying and threatening at the same time, is also the narrative process by which a character-protagonist becomes a narrator, by creating another character who, in turn, also becomes a narrator. We have seen the movement towards the object of desire impeded at every stage by metonymical substitution, and yet is fulfilled in a diffuse way when Frédéric turns from being subject to the object of desire. This reversal has a parallel on the narrative level. The narrative as a whole is transformed from one in which Frédéric is the narrator-protagonist into a narrative that does not depend on him, or even include him, or includes him simply as a character in another's story. Characters of whom Frédéric is only dimly aware become independent beings with their own thoughts and feelings. At the last Dambreuse soirée, for example, we follow M and Mme Arnoux on their way home, getting snatches of conversation of which Frédéric cannot possibly have any knowledge.<sup>23</sup> This 'emancipation of the characters' first takes place at the house-warming party, when we follow the guests after they leave Frédéric. We find it in the passages presenting Pellerin's thoughts when approached by Rosanette and Frédéric for her portrait, de Cisy's thoughts before the duel, and Mme Arnoux's musings at her child's bedside. Paired with this emancipation of the characters is a shift in the emphasis of the plot, which turns to characters and intrigues which are barely relevant to the plot, such as the intrigue between Martinon, Cécile and de Cisy.

---

<sup>23</sup> I am following Ginsburg's argument here, *Flaubert Writing*, pp. 152-153.

We could therefore say that in *L'Education*, the movement of metonymical substitution is complemented by a movement of narration that could be described as metaphorical. The movement of metonymical substitution prevents the satisfaction of desire and saves the self from the deadly consequences of narcissistic fascination – but at the cost of turning Frédéric's life into a failure. If this movement brings failure, it also brings life (to succeed is to die). This chiasmic relationship could be recuperated dialectically (one fails as a character in order to live as narrator) if it were not always complemented by another chiasmic relationship (one succeeds as a character but dies as a narrator). *L'Education* shows the impossibility of separating the interests of the narrator from those of the characters, even if these desires are in conflict, and thus the novel shows the impossibility of a dialectical movement: Frédéric does not learn anything, and yet the novel must end.

## Chapter Four

In this chapter, I aim to produce a more rigorous critical reconstruction of Girard's theory of mimesis. Drawing a careful distinction between the theory, its implications, and Girard's often ambitious claims about it, this chapter provides a more systematic presentation of Girard's ideas about the role of imitation in human motivation than in the previous chapter. It surveys responses to Girard's work and compares his theory of mimetic desire with recent work in cognitive psychology and philosophy. Girard in fact provides a salient theoretical alternative to the false choice – between psychoanalysis and anti-psychological doctrines – that dominates current literary theory. Rather than 'desire according to the Other', this chapter surveys the internal and external mediation in Combray and the salons, and examines the victimisation and scapegoating that characterises relationships within the novel. Seen against the backdrop of the Dreyfus Affair, it examines the mystery of persecution at the heart of Proust's novel.

In Proust, as in Flaubert, we find 'an uncertain subject' who suffers from an essential lack or indeterminacy, and find that the attempt to put an end to this lack is the guiding motive. In one version of Girard's thought, a firm sense of personal identity is the real goal of the mimetic subject, the consistent object of the agent's various relations to the model, be this model real or imaginary. The subject's basic problem is that of coming up with an answer to the question: 'Who am I?' As no solution may be found by peering into the abyss of solitude, it is imagined that the response is to be found in the eyes of Others. The labels for the real object of the mimetic quest may vary: some speak of recognition, others of self-determination and self-esteem. In less cognitive and philosophical versions, this is the Other-directed subject; desirous, above all else, of the Other's love and esteem.

In another variant, instead of puzzling over the problem of self-identity, the uncertain mimetic subject puzzles over the nature of the world and its values. The guiding question thus becomes: ‘What is to be done?’ The mimetic agent seeks in others the knowledge he lacks. Perhaps these others know which objects are inherently best; perhaps some other person may be found who has a privileged viewpoint. Girard touches on this idea when he claims that when modern theorists envisage Man as a being who knows what he wants, or at least, has an ‘unconscious’ that knows for him, they may simply have failed to see the domain in which human uncertainty is most extreme.<sup>1</sup>

Another sub-variety of this approach may be identified: André Orléan’s rationally mimetic agent, who knows that he does not know best.<sup>2</sup> Having found an agent who makes a choice, mimetic agents copy this choice, not because they believe that the model certainly knows, but because there is a chance that the model *might* know. Or again, it may be that the rationally mimetic agent knows very well that Others have no real knowledge of the intrinsic values of things and considers that these Others are behaving mimetically. In this case, the rationally mimetic agent understands that the pragmatic value of an object – say, its price on the market – will effectively be determined by the results of a mimetic interaction that happens to converge on a particular unanimous decision. In another variety, the situation is similar, but the mimetic agents effectively believe that the model possesses the lacking knowledge, so that the model is thought to have a secret knowledge of what is desirable and valuable.

The mime then, is ambivalent. According to this line of interpretation, which is inspired by a certain reading of Hegel and André Kojève, to say that desire is mimetic is to say that desire is always an imperfect desire, a self-consciousness that seeks itself in the Other, the Other being perceived as a self that dispossesses oneself from oneself. Thus, ambivalence is the

---

<sup>1</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> See Paisley Livingston, *Models of Desire: René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 6.

fundamental intersubjective relation, and the essence of this relation is conflict. Desire is violence because it is a desire for a being of one's own, a desire for self-possession ('parce qu'il est désir propre, désir de appropriation') and as such, is a murderous desire.<sup>3</sup> This conflictual relationship, a bizarre admixture of *Philia* and *Neikos*, is said to be prior to any objects of desire; indeed it is constitutive of, and anterior to, all of the effects that psychological theories may label the subjects or objects of desire.

Girard sometimes comes close to asserting that mimetic interaction is necessarily an objectless struggle. He has stated, for example, that the double bind, from being limited to pathological cases, is an extremely common phenomenon, one that might form the basis of all human relationships.<sup>4</sup> At times, he explicitly asserts that mimetic desire is conflictual. Thus Girard affirms that mimesis coupled with desire leads inevitably to conflict.<sup>5</sup> In the same work he claims that mimeticism is a source of perpetual conflict, and that by making one man's desire into a replica of another's, it transforms desire into rivalry, and rivalry leads to violence.<sup>6</sup> In another text we find that desire is the mimetic crisis itself, and it is the acute mimetic rivalry with another that occurs in all the circumstances we call 'private', from eroticism to professional or intellectual ambition.<sup>7</sup> The subject has no wish to triumph over the rival; he has no wish for the rival to triumph over him. In the first scenario, the object would fall to him but would have lost its value. In the second event, the object would attain infinite value but would be forever out of reach.<sup>8</sup> Thus the subject's relation to the conflict with the Other is one of profound ambivalence insofar as no lasting satisfaction can be found in either victory or defeat.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> M. Borsch-Jacobsen, *Le Sujet freudien*, Paris: Flammarion, 1982, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 206-7.

<sup>5</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 205.

<sup>6</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 235.

<sup>7</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 408.

<sup>8</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 500.

<sup>9</sup> We have already seen this in Frédéric's relations with women.



The subject then, is a paradoxical narcissist. Another manner of interpreting Girard's basic idea is to say that the mimetic agent prizes one thing: self-sufficiency. The surest sign of its lack is to experience a romantic desire or passion for another. Yet the agent inevitably succumbs to such a desire, and its complete absence is a plenitude that others can only be imagined to enjoy. Thus the subject's model – who is also the object of desire – is a person thought to embody a certain type of narcissism. Desire is self-defeating because a mimetic enslavement to such a model guarantees that the subject can never successfully realize the essential desire for individual autonomy. Girard writes that desire implicates a contradiction, for it aims at complete autonomy, at a near divine self-sufficiency, and yet it is imitative.<sup>10</sup> In discussing Proust, Girard again adopts such an emphasis in stating that everyone believes that someone else possesses the self he wants to acquire and that is why everybody experiences desire. Since every desire seeks self-sufficiency, nobody truly possesses it.<sup>11</sup>

This evocation of the basic mimetic intuition does not amount to an exhaustive survey of the available readings of Girard, but it should suffice to demonstrate that there are some very different ways of specifying the essential dispositions of the agent of mimetic desire. In the light of these differences, it is not the least self-evident that the term 'mimetic desire' has a univocal and coherent meaning. Mimetic psychology cannot embrace all of these characterizations beneath some simple and sovereign concept of mimetic desire. Instead, some distinctions and sub-categories must be provided.

One way to understand the multiplicity of portraits of *homo mimeticus* is to consider that at least some of them are very good depictions of different manifestations of desire. Girard frequently refers to different personality formations, attitudes and strategies as the 'stages' of a single dynamic process, thereby suggesting that mimetic desire is not to be conceived of as a

---

<sup>10</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 84-120.

<sup>11</sup> Girard, *ibid.*

single, undifferentiated entity. Yet at the same time, Girard wants to stress the unity of the phenomenon. In *Mensonge romantique*, Girard asserts that the diverse forms of the mimetic triangle are organised within a universal structure. He likens this structure to a falling object, the shape of which changes as the speed of its descent increases. If different novelists emphasize different aspects of desire, it is because they observe the object at different stages of the fall. The goal of Girard's own theory is different. Moving freely from one stage to another, he attempts to espouse the very movement of the metaphysical structure, he claims. It seeks to establish a typology of imitative desire.<sup>12</sup> This kind of emphasis on the dynamics of imitative desire, on the stages or levels of a single structure or mechanism of desire, is sometimes carried forward into the later texts, in claiming, for example, that there is only one and the same structure in perpetual becoming.<sup>13</sup>

The implications of these claims must be considered in any confrontation with Girard's view of mimetic desire. The point has been stressed by Dupuy, who acknowledges that Girard's theories are not reducible to a disparate collection of mimetic figures, insofar as Girard makes strong claims about the dynamic continuity between the 'étapes' of mimetic desire. It is necessary, then, to state the nature of the laws governing the transitions between these different figures. Is there a logic of transitions, as Dupuy suggests?<sup>14</sup> If so, then neither Dupuy nor Girard has presented an explicit description of this logic. Perhaps the differences and emphases correspond to aspects or moments in the development of mimesis. Yet if these differences correspond to aspects or moments of the same thing, what is it that remains invariable? What are the basic constituents of a moment of mimetic desire? Answers to these questions must be provided if talk on the universal structure of 'desire according to the Other' is to be made clear, and if the empirical value of the theory is to be postulated.

---

<sup>12</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 113.

<sup>13</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 370.

<sup>14</sup> J-P Dupuy, 'Mimesis et morphogenèse', in *Ordres et désordres: enquêtes sur un nouveau paradigme*, [n.e.], Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982, pp. 125-85; see in particular pp. 128-9.

It may be argued that in spite of their sweeping quality, some of the interpretations of mimetic desire surveyed really amount to character sketches or ‘snapshots of the particular clothing worn by the mimetic agent in specific cultural contexts’.<sup>15</sup> What should be sought at the level of theory, then, is a formulation of mimetic desiring that is as neutral as possible in regard to the contextual features with which motivational structures interact in novelistic histories. But this requires that the conceptual models of the different forms of mimetic desire be kept distinct from many of the particular factors that appear in the concrete manifestation of human desire. To claim that the mimetic agent adopts an essentially religious attitude towards the model, or again, that the imitator desires the model’s ‘being’ is to fail in this regard, for this type of stipulation amounts to an undue generalisation of one type of configuration of belief, desire and behaviour, a generalisation that needlessly limits the scope of Girard’s enquiry.

The basic intuition of mimetic psychology, the idea that one may desire according to the Other, could use some clarification. In view of the chaotic results that identify the philosophical and world-historical implications of a mimetic desire that has seldom been defined, this is the purpose of the present study.<sup>16</sup> One manner of exploring the concept of mimetic desire is to isolate the differences between this and some of Girard’s other concepts of mimesis. Livingston’s careful reading of Girard’s work underscores the necessity of distinguishing between terms such as ‘acquisitive’ (or ‘appropriative’) mimesis and the conflictual (or ‘antagonistic’) variety. If the term ‘mimesis’ can designate a very broad class of behaviour and psychological states, then mimetic desire, which may itself take a number of shapes, must be posited as a subset of mimesis, a subset to be defined in terms of more complex criteria. Not all behaviour is mimetic, and Girardians who subscribe to an

---

<sup>15</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> See René Girard, *The Hypothesis* at [www.cottet.org/girard/desir1.en.htm](http://www.cottet.org/girard/desir1.en.htm), 4th September 2008.

imperialistic theory will not hold this opinion, but they should remember that the relative empirical frequency of occurrences of the two kinds is left open. Although Girard's approach to Proust in *Mensonge romantique* is somewhat atomistic in that his aim is to construct definitions of individual states, attitudes and episodes, the theory of desire in view is a theory of personality and of social interaction that can be articulated in response to certain socio-historical contexts.

In terms of psychological assumptions behind Girard's thinking, it is clear that some of the most important differences of interpretations of Girard's idea derive from the fundamentally different assumptions that readers bring to bear on his work. Some of the interpretations betray the specificity of Girard's work. For example, although it is true that Girard developed his work in dialogue with psychoanalysts, it may be erroneous to attempt to fold his ideas back onto that sort of approach. Girard expressly rejects, for example, the Freudian concepts of repression, the energetic model of libidinal forces and the developmental bias that situates the fundamental and lasting determinants of personality in early childhood. Some of Girard's terminology retains a psychoanalytical flavour, nonetheless. There is little chance of faithfully elucidating Girard in this way, however, and of thereby coming up with any superior psychological hypotheses.

In terms of intentionalist psychology, Livingston situates Girard in the 'conativist' school.<sup>17</sup> In attitude psychology, we explain behaviour in terms of the subject's reasons or 'instrumental beliefs', that bring about an action, by attributing certain attitudes or mental states to a person. The key idea here is that belief and desire orient and perhaps even cause a certain action. According to Donald Davidson, we explain actions by attributing to another person a 'primary belief' or 'pro- attitude' combined with desire. Intentionalist psychology is

---

<sup>17</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 13.

highly fallible, however, and cannot in itself account for all the factors in Girardian desire. It fails externally, when an adequate grasp of the preferences and beliefs of the agent does not seem to be enough, and we want to 'go upstream' to the complex conditions that led to the agent's being in a particular situation, and equipped with a particular set of psychological dispositions. An aspect of this issue that is directly pertinent to Girard's theory, centres on the role of desire and other motivational terms. In this regard we may refer to the debate between Humean and anti-Humean positions, or what are called the cognitivist and conativist stances. Conativism is the view that cognitive states alone cannot generate action; there must be at least one motivational state whenever there is genuine action. Whilst the general conativist stance, associated with David Hume, is compatible with the view that desire is necessary to action, desire alone is not enough; some of Davidson's pro-attitude is also necessary. Moderate and weaker versions of conativism can be developed by defining the necessary motivational state more broadly.

Some of Girard's readers may be surprised that one could entertain the idea of a rapprochement between his views and intentionalist psychology.<sup>18</sup> After all, one of the central and most explicit thrusts of Girard's thought is his rejection of individual myths of autonomy, personal lucidity and so on; far from being a philosophy of 'consciousness', his theory insists on the role of desire, and moreover, a desire that is a source of blindness, confusion and delusion. Girard explicitly wants to break with a philosophical tradition that conceives of mimesis only as representation, and not as desire, as interaction. Such an ambition leads him to deploy expressions in which desire 'is made the determining condition of a wide-range of behaviours'. For example, Girard writes that far from being unconscious, in Freud's sense, of only appearing in our dreams, desire not only observes, but never stops thinking about the meaning of its observations. Desire is always a reflection on desire.<sup>19</sup> In another passage,

---

<sup>18</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 460.

Girard asserts flatly that desire is finally, the first to acquire a knowledge about itself that it finds unbearable.<sup>20</sup> As we read on, it would seem that desire (and the mechanism that Girard associates with it) is ‘responsible’ for all sorts of activities, including a wide range of seemingly intentional activities and cognitive attitudes: desire ‘knows’, ‘misunderstands’, ‘forgets’, ‘deceives itself’ and so on. In other words, Girard sometimes describes desire as if it were what pulled the strings of the human puppet, and this string-puller is a kind of homunculus equipped with whatever cognitive functions are required for complex feats of reflecting, learning and forgetting.

Girard has, it is true, a tendency to reduce any number of psychological states, and most noticeably, the full range of attitudes, to a single entity named Desire (sometimes the reduction is extreme: not only are beliefs and intentions said to be controlled by desire, they are said to be no more than manifestations and effects of it). The question of the status of such allegories is proposed directly in *Des choses cachées*, when Oughourlian questions Girard about the use of the term ‘Desire’. ‘Do you not agree that you are tending to give desire a false identity?’ (‘Ne pensez-vous pas que vous êtes en train d’hypostasier le désir?’)<sup>21</sup> Girard’s response is also his most explicit statement on the issue: if desire is the same for all of us, he claims, and if it is the key to the system of relationships, there is no reason to make it the real ‘subject’ of the structure – a subject that comes back to mimesis in the end. Girard avoids saying ‘desiring subject’ so as not to give the impression of relapsing into a psychology of the subject. (*choses cachées*, p. 428).

In autonomizing an entity called desire, Girard gives his work strong Idealist overtones, and effaces many of the distinctions that he is at pains to erect in other places. Various thinkers

---

<sup>20</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 427.

<sup>21</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 428.

would contest the unity of desire, and Girard does not prove that all particular states of desire are identical, or that there exists a single structure to which all such phenomena can be related. Some of the crucial distinctions between types and stages of mimetic desire drawn by Girard hinge precisely on the agent's ability to have reliable beliefs about the aspects of the motivational process and intersubjective situations in which the agent is involved, which implies that a distinction between desire and belief is already present in Girard's theorizing. Not only does Girard emphasize the idea that desire is always a reflection on desire, but he grants this reflection a decisive role. Desire is influenced by, oriented by this reflection. Desire is a strategist, claims Girard, and it alters its aim as a function of what it has learned about itself.<sup>22</sup> It is clear in these phrases that the beliefs and other intentional attitudes attributed to the processes of mimetic desire are not all epiphenomenal in Girard's view; they are said to determine the very course of desire.

Belief and desire (and intention) are certainly not co-terminous, but they do interact. The existence of cases where one believes something to be true without desiring either the reality or one's knowledge of it runs contrary to the idea that all beliefs are simply over-determined by our desires. This does not imply a return to the much-despised category of the 'Subject', with its excessive confidence in the role of the unified and masterly ego, however. Particular agents can be identified in terms that make no claims about the unity or autonomy of consciousness, or the subject in an Idealist sense. Reference to the states of belief, desire and intention need not engage us in any unwanted assumptions about Proust's narrator's lucidity, mastery or self-knowledge, ideal rationality, perfect coherence across time, identity and so on. I have argued that the theory of mimetic desire belongs within an intentionalist psychology, where states of desire and motivational processes would be held to interact with beliefs and other attitudes in the explanation of behaviour. Thus, I shall not be asking how Girard's

---

<sup>22</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, pp. 460-1.

insights concerning imitation overturn or replace everyday psychology, but how these insights may be put to work in improving our understanding of Girard's work on Proust.

What are the differences between desire and mimetic desire? If mimetic desire is 'desire according to the Other', it would seem obvious that the first factor to be added to the elementary situation of desiring in order to characterise a basic episode of mimetic desiring must be the desiring agent's belief that someone else desires something. Thus, Girard claims that at the origin of desire there is always the spectacle of another real or illusory desire.<sup>23</sup> We may refer to that someone else as the model, but the term 'mediator' is also used in Girard's thought. It is important to emphasize Girard's stipulation that the desiring agent's belief about the mediator can be false. The belief about the model may not refer truthfully to any real agent, or in cases where this belief does refer to an existing agent, it may not refer truthfully to the model's state of desire. The agent of desire may wrongly assume that the mediator wishes to acquire or maintain a purely imaginary social distinction, and may mimetically desire the same thing.

Although there must be a belief to the effect that the model has a certain desire, the mimetic agent need not make any direct comparison between his own desires and the Other's. The latter stipulation is included because the theory of mimetic desire must allow for two possibilities: on the one hand, cases in which the desiring agent does not believe that his desires are oriented by beliefs about the mediator's desires; on the other hand, cases in which there is just such a belief. We do not want to stipulate that the desiring agent necessarily believes his own desires and the model's are the same.

---

<sup>23</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 124.



More explicitly, the first difference between mimetic and other states of desire is that in the former, the emergence of desire is linked to the agent's holding of a belief belonging to a certain class. These beliefs may be labelled the mimetic agent's 'attributions of desire', as it is a matter of the desiring agent attributing a state of desire to some 'model'. But what is a model? First of all, the model figures in the beliefs of the desiring agent. We assume that the individual, relations, situations and events figuring as the contents of mental attitudes may or may not refer accurately to a real state of affairs or course of events (the model could be supernatural, non-existent, a collective or composite subject, a memory or fantasy of the agent's former self – the latter being particularly important in Proust's writing). We do not even want to stipulate that the desiring agent even believes in the literal reality of the model. It is possible that a mimetic agent could know very well that the model is a fiction and that the novelistic events never took place, and yet believe that events of the sort evoked by the story either could or should transpire and be inspired to 'desire according to' the fictional other.

Combray is a closed universe, in which the child lives in the shadow of his parents and family idols with the same happy intimacy as the medieval village in the shadow of the belfry. Combray's unity is as much spiritual as it is physical and Combray is the vision shared by all the members of the family. A certain order is imposed on reality and becomes indistinguishable from it. The first symbol of Combray is the magic lantern whose images take on the shape of the objects onto which they are projected, and are returned in the same way via the wall of the room, shutters or door-knobs.

Combray is a closed culture in the ethnological sense, or *Welt* in the German; 'un petit monde clos' (I 221) as the novelist has it. The gulf between Combray and the rest of the world is one of perception, as between the perception of Combray-dwellers and *les barbares*, there is a specific difference, which it is the task of the novelist to reveal. The two bells at the entrance

of the house provide us with an allegory of this difference, for there is the ‘grelot que toute personne de la maison déclenchait’ and there is the ‘double tintement timide de la clochette pour les étrangers’ which evoke two incommensurate universes.

At a superficial level, Combray is still capable of making out the difference in perceptions. Combray notices the difference between the two bells; Combray is not unaware that its Saturday has a colour and tonality all of its own. Lunch is moved up an hour on that day:

Le retour de ce samedi asymétrique était un de ces petits événements intérieurs, locaux, presque civiques qui, dans les vies tranquilles et les sociétés fermées, créent une sorte de lien national et deviennent le thème favori des conversations, des plaisanteries, des récits exagérés à plaisir; il eut été le noyau tout prêt pour un cycle légendaire, si l’un de nous avait eu la tête épique (I 45).

Members of Combray feel a certain solidarity and brotherliness when they discover something that distinguishes them from the outside world. Françoise in particular enjoys this feeling of unity, and nothing causes her more amusement than the little misunderstandings occasioned by the family’s forgetting, not that Saturdays are different, but that outsiders are not aware of this fact. *Les barbares*, amazed at the change in schedule, of which they were not forewarned, appear slightly ridiculous as they are initiated into the truth of Combray. Patriotic rites emerge in that intermediate zone, where the differences between ourselves and others become perceptible without being totally effaced. This misunderstanding is half-voluntary, claims Girard. On a more profound level, it is not voluntary at all, and only the author / narrator can bridge the abyss between perceptions of a single object. Combray is incapable, for example, of understanding that, apart from the bourgeois, domestic Swann, to whom it is

accustomed, there exists another elegant and aristocratic Swann, perceived only by high society:

L'ignorance où nous étions de cette brillante vie mondaine que menait Swann tenait évidemment en partie à la réserve et à la discrétion de son caractère, mais aussi à ce que les bourgeois d'alors se faisaient de la société une idée un peu hindoue et la considéraient comme composée de castes fermées où chacun, dès sa naissance, se trouvait placé dans le rang qu'occupaient ses parents, et d'où rien, à moins des hasards d'une carrière exceptionnelle ou d'un mariage inespéré, ne pouvait vous tirer pour vous faire pénétrer dans une caste supérieure (I 16).

The novelist attempts to make us see, touch and feel what other men, by definition, never see, touch or experience: 'deux évidences aussi impérieuses que contradictoires', claims Girard.<sup>24</sup> Between Combray and the outside world, there is only an appearance of communication. The misapprehension is total, but here its results are more comic than tragic. We are provided with another example of comic misunderstanding in the imperceptible thanks which Tante Céline and Tante Flora give Swann for a present they have received. The allusions are so vague that no-one notices them, but the two old ladies do not for a second suspect that they might not have been understood.

The origin of the ability to communicate is, in the case of the two Swanns, a simple lack of information, and some of Proust's expressions seem to confirm this. It is 'l'ignorance' of the family that creates the Swann of Combray. The narrator sees, in this familiar Swann, one of the charming 'erreurs' of his youth. The error is usually accidental, and disappears as soon as the attention of the person involved is drawn to it, as soon as a means of correction is

---

<sup>24</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 221.

provided. But, in the case of Swann, the evidence is amassed without the opinion of the family, especially that of the Aunts, being in the least affected. It is learned that Swann frequents the aristocracy, and *Le Figaro* reports paintings ‘de la collection Charles Swann’. But the Great Aunt never swerves in her belief. Finally, it is discovered that Swann is a friend of Mme de Villeparisis; far from causing the Great Aunt to esteem Swann, this news has the effect of lowering her opinion of Mme de Villeparisis: ‘Comment! dit la Grande Tante à la Grande Mère, elle connaît Swann! Pour une personne que tu prétendais parente du Maréchal Mac-Mahon!’ (I, 20). ‘La vérité, telle une mouche importune, revient sans cesse se poser sur le nez de la Grande Tante, mais un revers de la main suffit pour la chasser’.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the Proustian error cannot be reduced to its intellectual causes, and we must beware of judging Proust on the basis of one expression, especially given the particular meaning ascribed to it by the philosophers.<sup>26</sup> The truth about Swann does not penetrate Combray, because it contradicts the family’s social beliefs and its sense of bourgeois hierarchies. Proust tells us that the facts do not penetrate the world where beliefs reign supreme; they neither give rise to them nor destroy them. The Mother observes the Father but not too closely, for she does not wish to understand ‘les secrets de sa supériorité’.<sup>27</sup> The Aunts Flora and Céline possess to an even higher degree the ability of not perceiving; they stop listening the moment the conversation changes in their presence to something which does not interest them:

Leur sens auditif [...] mettait alors au repos ses organes récepteurs et leur laissait subir un véritable commencement d’atrophie. Si alors mon grand-père avait besoin d’attirer l’attention des deux sœurs, il fallait qu’il eût recours à ces avertissements physiques dont usent les médecins alénistes à l’égard de certains maniaques de la distraction:

---

<sup>25</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 224.

<sup>26</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 196.

<sup>27</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 224.

coups frappés à plusieurs reprises sur un verre avec la lame d'un couteau, coïncidant avec une brusque interpellation de la voix et du regard (I 21).

'Ces mécanismes de défense', says Girard, 'relèvent évidemment de la médiation'.<sup>28</sup> Clearly the content of additional beliefs or set of beliefs, are what serve to make an agent into a model, for some desiring agent (which is not the same as saying that the agent must foreground the idea that the Other is a 'model').

These beliefs may be referred to as 'tutelary beliefs'.<sup>29</sup> Girard's analyses constantly presuppose the idea that it is the agent's beliefs about the model that in one way or another qualify the model as such, in the agent's mind. This point seems self-evident; to present but a single example, we recall Girard's claims that the disciple admires and respects the model, for if he had not done so, he would hardly have chosen him as a model in the first place.<sup>30</sup> Girard is eloquent about the number of things that a model can fulfil to those in the grip of mimetic desire. In the eyes of the Aunts, Swann has a God-like quality and appears to be a unique and superb source of orientation. In many of Girard's descriptions of the inception of mimetic desire, it is the prestige that surrounds the model that leads to the first 'selection' of this person as a source of desires to be imitated.

It does not seem like a good idea to attribute to all agents a belief (or set of beliefs) having an essentially philosophical content. In the opinion of Livingston the mimetic hypothesis should not attribute to everyone a single essential desire underlying all actual states of desire.<sup>31</sup> It is reductive and too extreme to assert that the ultimate object of desire is a philosophical object, such as 'The Good', 'Being', 'Autonomy' or 'Originality', or a psycho-analytical object such

---

<sup>28</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 225.

<sup>29</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 135.

<sup>31</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 35.

as ‘The Mother’ or ‘The Phallus’. The mimetic hypothesis does indeed, as we shall see, include the rationally-mimetic agent, studied by Orléan, that has the most minimal tutelary beliefs about the individual.

Girard himself intended for a long time to adopt the philosophical approach to this issue, insofar as he privileged an existentialist way of talking about the agent’s belief about the mediator. The imitator has been constantly cast as a subject of ‘ontological sickness’ and quite coincidentally, Tante Léonie is a bed-ridden valetudinarian. Some of Girard’s statements break with the tendency to see the agent as on a perpetual quest for ‘being’ and emphasize instead the diversity of the content of tutelary beliefs.<sup>32</sup> Girard always insists on the illusory nature of the agent’s belief about the model, but does not assert that any one term can sufficiently characterize the sum total of these beliefs – although the term ‘prestige’ is used in many instances. Clearly, we cannot furnish the agent with a precise set of preferences about the possible objects of desire; the specificity and interest of mimetic desire reside precisely in not equipping the human motivational system with a pre-established programme that specifies in detail a set of preferred states, built-in systems of rewards or incentives, or any overarching mechanism that establishes incentives through reinforcement.

A utility-driven imitation may very well have its sphere of pertinence but should not be confused with mimetic desire, which is different insofar as it identifies an essentially comparative formation of desire, and not simply another orientation towards an item in a list of possible goals that range from the satisfaction of basic appetites to complex elements of our sense of selfhood.

---

<sup>32</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 321.

A key factor in Girard's analysis of Proust is the necessity of the mimetic agent's misinterpretation or 'unawareness' of certain key factors of their situation. A central term in Girard's discussion of mimetic desire is *méconnaissance*, which may be translated variously as 'mis-reading', 'failure to recognise or to appreciate fully', 'misrepresentation' and so on.<sup>33</sup> Girard speaks of desire's false conclusions, of its 'forgetting', 'its primordial error' and of its 'inability to recognise' certain realities.<sup>34</sup> He asserts that there is a logic proper to the *méconnaissance* engendered by mimetic phenomena. In the context of a discussion of Freudian theories, he proclaims that failure to recognise the true nature of mimesis is 'le véritable inconscient'.<sup>35</sup> In a striking passage, Girard expands upon the strange combination of knowledge and error, lucidity and forgetting, at work in certain advanced stages of mediation, claiming that desire is always using for its own ends, the knowledge it has acquired of itself; it places the truth in the service of its own untruth.<sup>36</sup>

Is it possible to distinguish between different types of *méconnaissance* that are the condition and consequence of mimetic desire? It may be useful to recall here the stipulations made earlier, namely that it is not categorically untrue that the self cannot be aware of its own desires or of the role of mimesis in the formation of those desires (which is not the same as saying that the self can attain some kind of total self-knowledge). Nor does it seem, in the case of Proust, a good idea to make the total lack of any significant moments of awareness of the mimetic bases of desire part of a normative (or descriptive) concept of normality. In Combray, it is normal to be aware that one's self-concept is determined by one's relationship to a parent, elder or Other. Is there any sense in which cases of mediation necessarily involve *méconnaissance*? Let us recall that only two beliefs need feature in a minimal episode of mimetic desire, namely, the belief about the model's state of desire around a particular object

---

<sup>33</sup> The most accurate English translation is 'misprism'.

<sup>34</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 461.

<sup>35</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 260.

<sup>36</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 429.

or state, and a tutelary belief which qualifies this belief for the desiring agent. Given that either of these beliefs can refer falsely to a real state of affairs, either can be a misrepresentation on the part of the desiring subject. Moreover, one could also identify a second type of cognitive constraint within mimetic desire by pointing to the agent's consistent failure to have an acute awareness of other aspects of the situation –not so much a *méconnaissance* but a *manque de connaissance* or lack of belief in regard to a particular entity.<sup>37</sup>

Thus Girard can claim that, in the case of Combray, mediation is not the result of some form of Sartrean *mauvaise foi*, but what Max Scheler in *L'Homme du ressentiment* calls 'la falsification de l'expérience'.<sup>38</sup> This falsification of experience is not carried out consciously, as in a simple lie, but rather, the process begins in advance of any conscious experience, at the point at which representations and feelings about value are first elaborated. The 'organic falsehood' functions every time someone wishes to see only that which serves his own purpose or some other disposition of his instinctive attention, whose object is then modified, even in memory.<sup>39</sup>

'Combray se détourne des vérités dangereuses, tel l'organisme sain qui refuse d'assimiler ce qui peut nuire à sa santé' writes Girard.<sup>40</sup> Everyone at Combray is his own self-censor, but this self-censorship, far from being painful, blends in with the peace of Combray. And in its essence, it is identical to the pious watchfulness with which Tante Léonie is surrounded. Everyone makes an effort to keep her from anything which might disturb her tranquillity, Marcel earns a reprimand from her, when he claims to have met 'quelqu'un qu'on ne connaissait pas'.

---

<sup>37</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 225.

<sup>39</sup> Girard, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Girard, *ibid.*



In the child's eyes, Tante Léonie's room is the spiritual Holy of Holies in the family home. The night-table crowded with *eau de Vichy*, medicines and religious pamphlets is an altar at which the High Priestess of Combray officiates with the help of Françoise. The Aunt seems not to be active, but it is she who is responsible for the creation of Combray lore. She identifies passers-by and stray dogs and reduces the unknown to the known. Combray owes all its knowledge to her. The village is a medieval circle and Tante Léonie, in her bed, is its epicentre. She does not participate in the family activities but it is she who gives them meaning, and it is her daily routine which makes the sphere revolve harmoniously. The family crowds around the Aunt like the houses of the village around the Church.<sup>41</sup>

In Livingston's discussion of 'The Elements of Mimetic Desire',<sup>42</sup> he tries to avoid translating Girard's discussion of mimetic desire into terms appropriate only to one type of background of socio-cultural beliefs and practices, or again, to one type of personality formation or deep-seated existential attitude. Even the apparently means-end rationality framework of utilitarian psychology may be a too-limited approach to the diversity of the phenomena with which mimetic desire may be associated. What is precisely interesting about mimetic desire is the flexibility it allows one to attain in the description of a motivational system that remains open to contextual determinants. At the same time, however, the theory of mimetic desire is meant to identify invariant patterns and processes in a manner that a purely contextualist or culturalist approach cannot: 'The Girardian model seeks then, to combine an emphasis on positing dynamic invariants and constraints with an emphasis on the theory's openness to contextual determinants'.<sup>43</sup>

The reader may be understandably sceptical about a concept that is so essentially protean. On the one hand, mimetic desire is said to involve an agent's cumulative relation to another

---

<sup>41</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 226.

<sup>42</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, pp. 31-59.

<sup>43</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 55.

person, a relation that, as we shall see, is inherently tendentious and conflictual: the Other's desire is at once a model and an obstacle, with rivalry being the likely result. On the other hand, another type of mimetic desire is said to involve an agent's hierarchical relation to another person, a relation that is essentially one of subordination: the imitator perceives the model as master or ruler and is said to desire quite spontaneously the Other's satisfaction. Is this not a matter of trying to explain two different situations in terms of the same kind of desire? When queried along these lines, Girard responded that it was the 'culture' that was the determining condition of such differences.<sup>44</sup> In the terms proposed earlier, the difference between the 'imitative and 'emulative' desires would be linked to the two different kinds of tutelary beliefs that the desiring agent may have about the model. One posits a model who is superior, and whose superiority is, in one way or another, placed out of reach. To desire following this pattern is not to seek to equal or surpass, but to subordinate one's wishes to those of the model. There are many examples in many cultural spheres, especially in those where religious beliefs serve to ground social differentiation in a transcendent, extra-social source. The other constellation of tutelary beliefs about the model also involves a notion of the model's superiority or hierarchical difference, but this advantage is not perceived as permanent. It is instead taken as a strategic difference to be overcome if possible. The Other's perceived difference is a spur to actions that have the goal of diminishing this difference, or more frequently, of maintaining the relation of inequality whilst reversing the roles. This is the world of envy.

Thus it is possible to flesh out the tutelary beliefs so as to make the motivational scenarios more credible; in reference to more specific contexts, such descriptions can involve a great deal of nuance and detail. It is in such terms that Girard specifies his concept of the 'distance' between the mediator and subject, and with it, the difference between 'internal' and 'external'

---

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication, 1997, quoted in Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 55.

mediation. Girard writes that this distance cannot be defined in terms of physical space: the distance between the mediator and the subject is, first of all, a spiritual distance. He goes on to imply that the distance may be social or intellectual. External mediation thus involves a desiring agent's relation to what may be termed a hierarchical model. Internal mediation, on the other hand, involves an agent's relation to 'an obstacle model' in an emulative form of desire.<sup>45</sup> In this manner we express the distinction between internal and external mediation in precisely the terms called for by another of Girard's claims, which is surely amongst the most essential, for he states that in the case of external mediation, no rivalry with the mediator is possible.<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere in the same text, Girard similarly equates a decrease in distance between model and imitator with an increase in equality that exacerbates rivalry.<sup>47</sup>

There are striking analogies, claims Girard, between the organic structure of Combray and the structure of the fashionable salons.<sup>48</sup> There is the same circular vision, the same internal cohesion sanctioned by a system of ritual gesture and word. The Verdurin salon is not merely a meeting-place, it is a way of feeling and judging. The salon is also a closed culture, which will reject anything that threatens its spiritual unity. It thus possesses an eliminative function, akin to that of Combray.

The parallel between Combray and the Verdurin salon can be followed all the more easily since the foreign body in both cases is the unfortunate Swann. His love for Odette draws him to the Verdurins'. His crossing of social barriers, his cosmopolitanism and his aristocratic ties appear more subversive at the Verdurins' than at Combray. The Great Aunt is satisfied with a few, relatively inoffensive sarcasms in reaction to the general feeling of uneasiness generated by Swann. There is no threat to good neighbourly relations, and Swann remains *persona*

---

<sup>45</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 160.

<sup>48</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 226.

*grata*. The situation evolves differently in the Verdurin salon. When the patroness realises that Swann cannot be assimilated, absolute excommunication is pronounced, and Swann is banished to the outer darkness.

There is something strained and rigid about the unity of the salon, which is not present at Combray, continues Girard. The difference is particularly finely drawn at the level of the religious imagery expressing that unity. The images used to describe Combray are usually borrowed from the Old Testament, from primitive religions and from medieval Christianity. The atmosphere is that of young societies in which epic literature flourishes, faith is naïve and vigorous, and foreigners are always barbarians but never hated.

The imagery of the Verdurin salon is completely different, as the dominant themes belong to the Inquisition and *autos-da-fé*. Its unity seems constantly threatened. The patroness is always standing in the breach, ready to repulse the attack of the infidels; she nips schisms in the bud, she disparages distractions, which are beyond her influence, she demands absolute loyalty, she roots out any sectarian and heretical spirit which compromises the orthodoxy of the *petit clan*.

‘Pourquoi cette différence’, asks Girard, ‘entre le sacré Verdurin et le sacré de Combray?’<sup>49</sup> Where are the Gods of Combray?, one might ask. Marcel’s gods are his parents and the writer Bergotte. They are the ‘distant’ gods, with whom any metaphysical rivalry is out of the question. If we look around the narrator, we find examples of external mediation everywhere. Françoise’s gods are the family and particularly Tante Léonie; God for Marcel’s Mother is the Father whom she does not examine too closely, in order not to cross the barrier of respect and adoration between them; the Father’s god is the Olympian M. de Norpois. These gods are

---

<sup>49</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 228.

always accessible, but they are separated from mortals by an insuperable distance, a distance which prohibits any metaphysical rivalry. Where then are the gods of the Verdurin salon to be found? In the first place, there are lesser divinities in the painters, musicians and poets who frequent the salon; more or less ephemeral incarnations of the supreme religion: art – whose slightest emanations are enough to throw Mme Verdurin into ecstasies. There is no danger of the official cult going unnoticed. In its name, the *béotiens* and the *ennuyeux* are excommunicated. Sacrilege is punished more severely than at Combray, and the slightest heresy can provoke a scandal. The temptation is to draw the conclusion that faith is more vigorous at the Verdurins' than at Combray.

The difference between the two closed worlds, the more rigid distinction of the salon, so Girard believes, would therefore seem to be explained by a strengthening of external mediation. Behind the parent gods of external mediation, who no longer have any real power at the Verdurins', are the true, hidden gods of internal mediation, no longer of love, but of hatred. Swann is expelled in the name of official gods, but in reality, we must see him as the victim of a reprisal against the indefatigable mediator, against the disdainful Guermantes, who close their doors to Mme Verdurin, and to whose world Swann reveals he belongs. The real gods of the patroness are in fact enthroned in the Guermantes' salon, but she would sooner die than worship them as they demand. This is why she carries out the rites of her religion, false and aesthetic as it is, with a passion as frenetic as it is mendacious.

From Combray to the Verdurin salon, the structure of the *petit monde clos* does not seem to have changed. The most obvious of its traits are merely strengthened and emphasised. The salon is a caricature of the organic union of Combray and, on closer examination, it can be seen that the elements of the structure, identical in both cases, have a different hierarchy. At Combray, the rejection of the barbarians is subordinate to the affirmation of the gods. The

reverse is true at the Verdurins'. The rites of union are camouflaged rites of separation. They are no longer observed as a means of communication with those who observe similar rites, but as a means of distinction from those who do not observe them. Hatred of the omnipotent mediator supercedes the love of the faithful:

La place disproportionnée qu'occupent les manifestations de cette haine dans l'existence du salon constitue le seul mais irrécusable indice de la vérité métaphysique: les étrangers haïs sont les véritables dieux (*Mensonge romantique*, p. 230).

The almost identical appearances conceal two very different types of mediation. We are now observing the transition from external to internal mediation, not on the level of the individual, but of an entire portion of society. The childhood love of Combray yields to the adult rivalry, and to the metaphysical rivalry of snobs and lovers.

Collective internal mediation faithfully reproduces the traits of individual mediation, and the aggressive unity presented by the Verdurin salon is simply its façade; the salon has only contempt for itself. This contempt is revealed, as we shall see, in the persecution of Saniette. This character is the most faithful of the faithful, the pure soul of the Verdurin salon. He would play, if allowed, the role of Tante Léonie at Combray. But instead of being honoured and respected, Saniette is buried under insults and is the butt of the Verdurin salon. The salon is unaware that it despises itself in the person of Saniette.

The distance between Combray and the life of the salon is not the distance separating true from false gods. Nor is it the distance that separates a pious and useful lie from the cold truth. Neither can we agree with Heidegger that the gods have 'withdrawn'. Here, the divergence

between neo-Romantic thought and the Proustian spirit become clear. Neo-Romantic thinkers such as Flaubert soundly denounce the artificial character of a cult confined to accepted values and faded idols in the bourgeois universe. Proud of their perceptiveness, these thinkers believe that the source of the sacred has simply dried up, and never wonder what may lie behind the hypocrisy of the middle classes. Proust looks behind the deceptive mask of the official cult and finds the hidden gods of internal mediation. Proust does not define his universe by an absence of the sacred, but by the perversion and corruption of the sacred, which gradually poisons the source of life. As one goes further from Combray, a positive unity of love develops into the negative unity of hatred, into the false unity which hides duplicity and multiplicity. This is why there is only one Combray, but several salons.

Girard is widely known for his perceptive descriptions of a social dynamic, having two central components: on the one hand, the crisis of violence, and on the other, 'the scapegoat mechanism', which provides resolution to this violent crisis by uniting the group in opposition to a single victim. The theory of scapegoating is at once a description of the basic patterns of interaction, characteristic of these two components, and the specification of their socio-cultural and psychological conditions and consequences. In regard to this myth, it is crucial to distinguish between different scapegoat mechanisms in Girard's analyses, or at least, between different ways in which a similar configuration is manifested. Firstly, there is the pattern of scapegoating that figures within Girard's hypotheses of the origins of human culture. This is said to be a mechanism that is activated when the crisis of violence disturbs the order of hominid groups; it produces a collective murder that results in what Girard terms 'the first non-instinctual state of awareness'. This mechanism and the symbolic effects it engenders are the ultimate basis of a properly human order. Secondly, there are the crises and resolutions of violence occurring within historical contexts that are already human and cultural (that is, already constituted by the beliefs and institutions of the sacred). Within the latter category, it

is possible to distinguish between spontaneous instances of the pattern, and those that correspond to an institutionalised framework of action, such as that of ritual. The actions and interactions that take place in these two different frameworks may, on occasion, be structurally isomorphic, and the boundary that separates them may, in practice, be porous, but the distinction between them remains important.<sup>50</sup> It is central to distinguish the principle contexts – the many and the one, in which certain patterns of scapegoating may appear. What is the essential difference between these various manifestations of an invariant pattern of interaction? The answer to this question involves the role played by beliefs and symbolic representations in all cultural manifestations of the mechanism. For example, in any instance of scapegoating in a cultural context, the group's choice of a victim will be motivated by 'difference' or 'otherness' which coalesce into 'guilt'. Girard refers to some of these beliefs as the 'stéréotypes de la persécution' and lists the typical signs of difference (or 'deviation' from the group norm) that motivate the selection of the victim; a selection that is in fact quite arbitrary as it is unjust for the simple reason that the individual chosen could not have been the cause of the social crisis as a whole. Such, however, is a mimetically-supported delusion of the scapegoating community, which finds unanimity in the hapless victim. It is easy to see how mimetic desire can contribute to this unanimity: once the accusation has been made, and aggressive intent has been expressed, members of the group are strongly motivated to copy the motives of those believed to be on the side of order. And this strengthening of social cooperation and consensual thinking lends a spurious support to the accusatory beliefs that motivated the selection of the victim. Social order is strengthened or restored by virtue of the scapegoating process, and this effect is wrongly interpreted as confirming the initial accusation. Scapegoating works, then, but only at the cost of fundamentally misrepresenting both the victim and the social process of scapegoating itself.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>51</sup> Livingston, *Models of Desire*, p. 106.



The analysis is different in the case of pre-cultural manifestations of the scapegoat pattern. Girard does not want his generic hypothesis to be circular and, as a result, in his model of the generation of cultural beliefs and representations models cannot themselves play any role in the functioning of the very mechanism that brings them into existence. Thus, in the description of the mechanism that brings about the crisis of violence and its resolution, by means of an original collective murder, there can be no reference to the hominid group's beliefs about the victim. This means that the choice cannot be motivated by the stereotypes of persecution or by a belief in the 'guilt' of the victim. Instead, more primitive non-intentional forms of mimesis, namely Girard's conflictual variety, must be responsible for the functioning of the generative mechanism. The same motivational symptoms may also be operative in the cultural varieties of the dynamic of crisis and resolution, but here they may be supplemented by, and guided by, the products of the mechanism's own history. Once we are in an historical context, sacred beliefs, notions about the cosmic order, knowledge of kinship ties and so on will play an important part in orienting the agent's action. Violence itself, which in the genetic mechanism is but the product of the most mechanical form of agency, becomes invested with a cultural signification that in turn, shapes the individual's motivational states and understandings of the possible and desirable courses of action. As Girard himself claims, desire clings to violence, and stalks it like a shadow, because violence is the signifier of divinity.<sup>52</sup>

We are now in a better position to understand the treatment of Saniette, the Verdurins' scapegoat. He is hounded to death after hearing Vinteuil's septet (III 769-70). Verdurin torments Saniette (III 328) as around him a group of guests 's'empressaient, prêts comme des lions, à dévorer l'homme terrassé'. He is picked on for using archaic expressions (III 730); he has a 'visage torturé' (II 411) and Mme Verdurin even feigns being kind to him (III 341). One

---

<sup>52</sup> Girard, *Violence*, p. 211.

lady who has hitherto been cordial to Saniette and has even lent him a book no longer wishes to be indebted to one who is not *persona grata* with the *petit clan*. Scarcely five minutes later, we learn, Saniette collapses of a stroke in a courtroom and lingers on for several weeks, but only intermittently regains consciousness. Against Saniette, the group unites in solidarity with the executioner, a *sacerdos*, who conducts the ritualised tribal immolation required to cement the ties of the *petit noyau* (III 328), which is also a *petite église* (III, 749). Forcheville and Verdurin do not act in isolation, they rely on the complicity of the horde, whose crowd mentality urges them into action.

The scapegoating of Saniette has been explored amply by Anguissola who also takes a Girardian approach, to which very little need be added.<sup>53</sup> Later in *A la recherche*, the death of Saniette is recounted in quite a different way. He has an attack when an unsuccessful deal on the stock-market goes wrong, and he lingers on for several years before his demise. M. and Mme Verdurin come to his aid by disbursing ten thousand francs to him, which means they must stop renting La Raspelière and, like good Christians, they let Saniette believe that the money has come from the Princesse Sherbatoff. The two versions are contradictory as far as the narrative is concerned, but are entirely consistent with Girard's theory of victimization: when alone, the Verdurins can be as generous as anyone else, but in the midst of their clan, they must exert *la plus féroce persécution* against the weakest. The issue therefore is not to comprehend whether the Verdurins are good or evil, but to understand the collective and ritual nature of their violence.<sup>54</sup>

The narrator's Grandmother is taunted by the Great Aunt in the opening pages of *Combray* (I 11-12). Tante Léonie's kitchen-maid is taunted by Françoise (I 122) and the young equerry is taunted by Oriane (II 874-5). Saint-Loup suggests to one of the Duc de Guermantes' men that

<sup>53</sup> Alberto Beretta Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', in *Proust in Perspective: Visions and Revisions*, (eds. Armand Colin Mortimer and Catherine Kolb) Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 2002, pp. 85-102.

<sup>54</sup> Anguissola, Proust and Scapegoating, p. 89.

he devise a plot to get another footman dismissed. When the man has qualms, Saint-Loup replies: 'Qu'est-ce que ça vous fiche du moment où vous serez bien? Vous aurez en plus le bonheur d'avoir un souffre-douleur' (IV 53). Nissim Bernard is another scapegoat, who because of his unbounding bonhomie is insulted by his nephew, Bloch (II 132). Charlus inflicts terrible humiliation upon certain ladies of the aristocracy, who strike him as unworthy of his ancient and glorious heraldry (III 98-100). Even the narrator is so ruthless with his Grandmother and with Albertine that, after their deaths, he feels pangs of guilt over 'un double assassinat que seul la lâcheté du monde pouvait me pardonner' (IV 78). But in these cases, the cruelties only involve two people and cannot be explained by phenomena related to crowd psychology. This violence would remain behind closed doors were it not for the narrator / voyeur who discloses it to the reader. It is only in the case of Saniette that we literally find a 'souffre-douleur' (III 293).

The group that persecutes Saniette feels justified or, at least motivated, by the flaws that can be seen as a cause of collective violence. But, as inevitably occurs in the scapegoating mechanism, the flaws are nothing of the kind, and may be positive qualities. Saniette's flaws are shyness, simplicity, kindness, erudition and a willingness to please. Beyond that, he has a distinguished family background and a flair for language (I 200, III 265 and III 733), as well as good taste in music:

Il avait dans la bouche en parlant, une bouillie qui était adorable parce qu'on sentait qu'elle trahissait moins un défaut de la langue qu'une qualité de l'âme, comme un reste de l'innocence du premier âge qu'il n'avait jamais perdue. Toutes les consonnes qu'il ne pouvait prononcer figuraient comme autant de duretés dont il était capable (I 200).

Saniette is something of a saint and indeed, his name is an anagram of Sainteté as Anguissola points out.<sup>55</sup> It is his saintliness that causes him to love his tormenters. Though offended on countless occasions, he returns to the Verdurins' as a faithful dog who is kicked. He fulfils the beatitudes of the Gospels and turns the other cheek, and bears no grudge. This idiot of sorts whose name connotes safety and health is, like Père Goriot, an incarnation of Christ. It is thus to be expected that the *fidèles* of the Verdurin salon should feel driven into their role as sacrificial killers.

The narrator's attitude to these victimising events is somewhat ambiguous. He appears to empathise with the innocent victim and shares and intensifies the reader's indignation. Yet he seldom does anything to prevent the ritual blood-letting. Only once does the narrator intervene and change the topic of conversation: 'Pour mettre fin aux supplices de Saniette qui me faisaient plus mal qu'à lui, je demandai à Brichot ce que signifiait Balbec' (III 327). But in doing so, the narrator is merely ending his own suffering, and establishing his own psychological superiority over the victim, whose fault – of being incapable of suffering – is thus brought to light. The scapegoat is thus reduced to the sub-human status of an animal: an inferior species that can be tormented for the entertainment of sensitive and superior beings, without this behaviour being considered reprehensible. In fact, the narrator shares in the prevailing dislike of Saniette, whom he too finds ridiculous and annoying, and this scene is repeated in the main scenarios representing the collective torment of the isolated victim.<sup>56</sup>

The two outstanding moments of victimization, besides that of Saniette, are the social execution of Bloch, as masterminded by Mme Villeparisis in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, and the humiliation of Charlus by Mme Verdurin in *La Prisonnière*. In the case of Bloch, the narrator seems convinced that his lack of manners, his small-mindedness and his impudence fully

---

<sup>55</sup> Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 93.

<sup>56</sup> Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 92.

merit the punishment meted out to him by the aging Marquise. Thus the cruelty is justified, almost applauded. Bloch has committed so many errors that he must be guilty.

Consideration allows us to assess things differently, however, and we see that, if anything, Bloch deserves our *Mitleid*. He is a young Jewish man who is humiliated in public because of his race. When Bloch asks him what he thinks of the Dreyfus case, Châtellerault replies discourteously ‘Excusez–moi, Monsieur, de ne pas discuter Dreyfus avec nous, mais c’est une affaire dont j’ai pour principe de ne parler qu’entre Japhétiques’ (II 544). The group’s reaction is to smile in a show of complicity with the tormenter. Mme de Villeparisis pretends not to notice Bloch’s attempts to bid her good-night at the end of the evening. This snub of the Marquise reverberates around the salon over the next few days, where it is approved and admired (II 546).

The text hints that Bloch has become a scapegoat; ‘il avait maintenant le menton ponctué d’un bouc’ (II 487). All Jews were scapegoats during The Affair, and Norpois uses the term ‘bouc émissaire’ with respect to the diplomat Marcel Paléologue (IV 211). Bloch would have a claim to the narrator’s solidarity for an additional reason: he is fighting to save an innocent man – Dreyfus – from the horrendous sufferings of a deportation. Bloch is depicted, despite his generosity, as if he were guilty of some hubris that compelled the Gods to drive him away. For René Girard this situation reflects the foundation in scripture that his theories have – only Christian Scripture can identify with the victim.<sup>57</sup>

Much of the same thing happens during the party at the Verdurins’ when Charlus is accused publicly of corrupting Morel, and is expelled. The narrator, who had been informed of what was to happen, and could have forewarned Charlus, simply says nothing. By way of an

---

<sup>57</sup> Girard, *choses cachées*, p. 219.

excuse, he attributes the persecution of Charlus by a blighted social group, not to their aggressive homophobia, but rather to the 'errors' made by Charlus and his guests. That evening, Charlus is said to have committed some social gaffes, most noticeably by failing to introduce the lady of the house to the group of aristocrats who have come to hear Morel. The narrative misleads the reader into justifying the torture of Charlus on the basis of the supposed mistakes of the victim.

It must be remembered that the narrator is not Proust the man, and his perspective on events need not coincide with those of the writer. Proust wants us to experience mistakes from the inside, to live them as if committing them. As he writes to Jacques Rivière on 16 February 1914:

Cette évolution d'une pensée, je n'ai pas voulu l'analyser abstraitement mais la recréer, la faire vivre. Je suis donc forcé de peindre les erreurs, sans croire devoir dire que je les tiens pour des erreurs; tant pis pour moi si les lecteurs croiront que je les tiens pour la vérité. Le second volume accentuera ce malentendu.<sup>58</sup>

This explanation is not only applicable to the ending of *Du côté du chez Swann*.

How could one imagine that, as long as the narrator remains imprisoned in his snobbery, he could possibly make a break with the world-view expressed by the social groups to which he belongs, or would give anything to join? How could he bring himself to criticise Mme de Villeparisis' behaviour towards Bloch when the Marquise represents the gate-keeper of the requisite path to the kingdom of Mme de Guermantes? Snobbery is not, then, a neutral phenomenon, a mere object of social enquiry, cordoned off from the deepest levels of moral

---

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 93.

life. Snobbery is essentially cruel, a form of mass violence against the weak, a bloodthirsty persecution. This holds true for the *arrivés* who are already part of the *élite*, and thus reject new arrivals, as well as for those who are struggling their way to the top and are often the most ruthless. With the example of Saniette, a sacrificial victim, we feel that some of the hitherto solid partitions in *A la recherche* give way.

Anti-Semitism and snobbery perform the same function in the novel: to drive away and cast out anyone considered inferior, for one reason or another. Ostracism of the lowly produces the same effect, as does human sacrifice in primitive civilisations – that of laying the foundations of a culture, of achieving cohesion and communion with the tribe, thanks to the suffering and torment of the victim. All *élites* are violent, and the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes are, beyond the spell cast by their name, a team of killers with the narrator as their accomplice.

The strands are brought together as Swann announces his impending death to the Duc de Guermantes. There is an intertwining of what appear to be disparate strands, but which converge. Interlinked are: the fatal illness which provides a natural way of expelling the weak; the human solitude when faced with the death of others, the heraldic superiority of Dukes, a powerful instrument of persecution and exclusion wielded against innocent targets; their conviction that, whether guilty or innocent, Dreyfus must remain on the Ile du Diable, so as not to upset the social hierarchy, religious tradition and established order; Swann's sense of revolt at the point of death, against a wave of hatred against the Jews, his own people; the heartache of the footman that the Duchesse, for no reason save her own sadism, prevents him seeing his betrothed. There is no structuralist adhesive that keeps the ensemble together, merely the obsessive presence of the theme of persecution.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 94.

At the end of the journey of Saniette and Proust's other scapegoats, we are able to understand fully the role played by the Dreyfus case in *A la recherche*. The story of the Jewish captain, unjustly indicted on charges of espionage, is a synecdoche – the part stands for the whole. Dreyfus, like Saniette – is the human condition, the encounter with the awful truth, with the supremacy of the negative and the pain whose very revelation is the purpose of art and literature.

Certain instances of Swann's ingeniousness when it comes to the Dreyfus Affair have compelled some critics to conclude that, towards the end of his life, Proust was convinced that all Dreyfusards were rather guileless. They see something faintly comic in Swann's twilight conversion and Dreyfusism. But his conversion has a tragic, not to say heroic, quality: 'Arrivé au terme de sa vie', we learn, 'comme une bête fatiguée qu'on harcèle, il exérait ces persecutions et rentrait au bercail religieux de ses pères' (II 868). Swann discovers solidarity with the French Jews under threat: 'Solidarité que Swann semblait avoir oubliée toute sa vie, et que greffées les unes sur les autres, la maladie mortelle, l'Affaire Dreyfus, la propagande anti-Sémite, avaient réveillée' (III 89). The tragic menace looming over European Jews (which the vindication of Dreyfus merely postponed) would last only forty years, as Anguissola reminds us.

There is therefore nothing ridiculous about Swann's twilight conversion. When seeking to explain the phrase 'la constipation des prophètes' (I, 395) Anguissola points out that that prophecy signifies as strongly as 'constipation'. Towards the end of their respective lives, Swann and Proust both acquired the power to anticipate what was to come. As Proust writes to the Duc de Guiche on the 17 June 1921:



Or, j'ai pendant toute la guerre, et pour laisser les questions militaires de côté, j'ai dans mes livres noté une série de faits que j'inventais, que je ne pouvais savoir, qui souvent n'avaient pas encore eu lieu, et qui sont trouvés minutieusement réalisés dans la vie... Mais ce n'est nullement à la télépathie et à la théorie de Bergson que j'attribue cette description de faits que je ne pouvais connaître. Je crois qu'elle est une conséquence logique de prémisses vraies.<sup>60</sup>

It is illness, probably cancer, that causes Swann's death. At the end of *Côté des Guermantes*, Swann's plight is as tragic as Phèdre's. Racine's heroine cannot survive without her honour, just as the meaning of Swann's life was contingent on the integration of Jews and Gentiles in France. Swann, once the charming member of the Jockey Club who was welcomed into the most refined society, rejects the Club and all it stands for: 'Depuis tout ça, je ne mets plus les pieds dans cet endroit-là' (II 871). The Affair has turned Swann, like Phèdre's *flamme noire*, into an oxymoron; an intimate who would prefer lies and injustice to truth.<sup>61</sup>

There is something of the metaphysical or religious in Proust's anxiety over the affair. Especially striking is the sacrilege committed by Catholic anti-Dreyfusards. If Christians are blind to a victim's innocence and cannot recognise a persecuted victim in their midst, are they any less blinkered than the others? It is Zézette, a Jewish actress and Saint-Loup's lover, who first becomes indignant over Mme de Marsantes' uncharitable anti-Dreyfus stance: 'La mère de Robert, une femme pieuse, dit qu'il faut qu'il reste à l'Ile du Diable, même s'il est innocent, n'est-ce pas une horreur?' (II 462). Conversely, and not surprisingly ('un Catholique pratiquant comme Saniette tenait aussi pour la révision', II 870) victims will recognise victimhood in others.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 96.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 97.

Proust wrote to Kiki Bartheloni ‘Comme si les défenseurs de l’Autel n’auraient pas dû avant tous les autres être les apôtres de la vérité, de la pitié et de la justice’.<sup>63</sup> Equally interesting is a letter to Pierre d’Orléans, a sincere anti-Dreyfusard who had been Proust’s C.O. when he was undertaking his military service. Proust is surprised at how people of different religions or opposing political or philosophical positions can remain friends, whereas those who disagree over Dreyfus’ innocence must despise each other. He adds ‘Si un prêtre est Dreyfusard, les Catholiques l’insultent’ (Nov 30 1899). Proust is convinced that these are Catholics in name only, that they are the worshippers of the Antichrist that had taken hold of France at the end of the nineteenth century, the unavoidable consequence of which had been the near de-Christianisation of France.

Once he is convinced of Dreyfus’ innocence, the Prince de Guermantes secretly meets with his confessor, the Abbé Poiret, (who is also a closet Dreyfusard) and requests that he celebrate mass for the prisoner on Devil’s Island. The Princesse has long been doing as much, without her husband’s knowledge (III 107). The couple has a good sense of theology, for the mass is, we recall, a sacrifice, the immolation of an innocent victim, precisely what had been taking place in France since 1894. Proust is well aware of the connection between the Eucharist and every new human sacrifice. Anguissola demonstrates that these involuntary memories underpin *A la recherche* – the resurrection of Venice, ‘le bouleversement de toute ma personne’ and the episode of the madeleine are all steeped in baptismal themes. But there would be no Eucharist without the deadly violence of the crowd against the sacrificial lamb (Christ, Dreyfus, Saniette). The mystery of persecution is therefore at the heart of Proust’s novel.

---

<sup>63</sup> *Correspondance* Vol. 2, p. 244. Kolb believes that this letter dates from the summer of 1898.

It is apparent that Proust's enthusiasm for the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and hence his contempt for commitment, must be placed in the context of the huge success of 'decadent philosophy' in Europe in the 1880s: by the time young intellectuals embarked upon the new century, the magnetic force of *The World as Will and Representation* had begun to weaken. Why would Proust have been the only one of his generation to move backwards? Anguissola's book *Proust e la Bibbia* contains a chapter affirming that Proust's ideas had indeed moved away from those of the philosopher.<sup>64</sup>

Those who uphold the view that the Dreyfus Affair was no longer of any intrinsic value to Proust when he began composing *A la recherche*, fail to distinguish between what the writer thinks and the opinions he ascribes to Charlus on the same issue. Proust writes to Mme Strauss on 18 October 1920:

Ne me croyez pas devenu anti-Dreyfusard. J'écris sous la dictée de mes personnages, et il me semble que beaucoup de ce volume-ci le sont... Comme légèrement dans le volume suivant, et énormément dans le volume qui suit, mes anti-Dreyfusards sont devenus des Dreyfusards, et d'autres qu'on croyait anti-Dreyfusards sont follement Dreyfusards, et l'équilibre sera rétabli.

Charlus' stance is described in *A la recherche*: 'sa frivolité était si systématique que la naissance unie à la beauté et à d'autres prestiges était [pour lui] la chose durable – et la guerre, comme l'Affaire, des modes vulgaires et fugitives' (IV 379). This critical remark that the narrator directs against Charlus should guide us in our interpretation of the well-known passage on aesthetic meditation in the Duc de Guermantes' library:

---

<sup>64</sup> Anguissola, 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 98.

Quant au livre de signes inconnus...pour la lecture desquels personne ne pouvait m'aider d'aucune règle, cette lecture consistait en un acte de création où nul ne peut suppléer ni même collaborer avec nous. Aussi combien se détournent de l'écrire! Que de tâches n'assume-t-on pas pour éviter celle-là! Chaque événement, que ce fût l'Affaire Dreyfus, que ce fût la guerre, avait fourni d'autres excuses pour ne pas écrire ce livre-là; ils voulaient assurer le triomphe du droit, refaire l'unité nationale morale, n'avaient pas le temps de penser à la littérature (IV 450).

The difference is slight between what the narrator thinks and the 'frivolous' ideas of Charlus, but within that nuance lies a whole universe of the philosophy of art. The meaning of the quotation above is that reality and true literature coincide: the discovery of injustice is in itself real literature since 'le plaisir esthétique est précisément celui qui accompagne la découverte d'une vérité'.<sup>65</sup> Proust writes a few pages later that 'la vraie vie, la vraie vie découverte et éclaircie, la seule par conséquent vécue, c'est la littérature' (IV 474), but this view represents anything but aestheticism, since here, all barriers between art and life are removed.

In a letter to Mme Strauss, dated 21 July 1906 Proust writes, not altogether ironically, that the lives of Picquart and Dreyfus read like fairy tales. In both, Providence saves the day and a 'happy end' results. But the Affair was an exception to the brutal norm; most victims have little consolation in life; Providence is mute and God remains hidden. Proust gives a voice and life beyond death, to the horror of a victim brutalised by the inhuman beast that is the crowd. Restoring voice and dignity to the scorned and forgotten is the *raison d'être* of writing, for literature is, as Proust wrote, 'le jugement dernier' (IV 458).

---

<sup>65</sup> Anguissola gives no reference for this quotation, and I am unable to locate it. 'Proust and Scapegoating', p. 100.

We can distinguish three main stages of mimetic desire in *A la recherche*: Combray, the Verdurin salon and Charlus. The identity between the two worlds, Combray and the salon, is revealed when Mme Verdurin claims that Charlus is a German spy. The patroness depicts herself, exaggerating wildly, as she depicts Charlus, but she is very aware that she is piercing Charlus in the most vulnerable part of his being, as he is a defeatist. He is not content to despise Allied propaganda in silence. His Germanism chokes him.

Proust analyses at length Charlus' defeatism. He gives many explanations but the most significant is his homosexuality. Charlus feels a hopeless desire for the nubile German soldiers that are swarming all over Paris, who become exquisite tormentors for him. They are automatically associated with Evil. The war which divides the universe into opposing camps provides nourishment for his instinctual masochism. The Allied cause being that of the wicked persecutors, Germany must represent the Good, claims Girard. Charlus confuses his cause with that of the enemy nation all the more easily since the Germans inspire real physical revulsion in him; he makes no distinction between their ugliness and his own, their military defeats or his own defeats. Charlus is justifying himself when he justifies a crushed Germany.

His feelings are essentially negative, as his love of Germany is not really as strong as his hatred of the allies. The frenzied attention he pays to chauvinism is thus, in Girardian terms, of the subject to the mediator. The unity of Charlus' masochistic *Weltanschauung* becomes even more evident if we examine his social life, an intermediary state between his sexual life and his defeatist opinions. For Charlus is a Guermantes, and as such, is the object of an idolatrous cult in the salon of his sister-in-law. He never misses an opportunity, especially in more plebeian company, of proclaiming the superiority of his background, but for him, the Faubourg Saint Germain has none of the fascination it holds for the bourgeois snobs. By definition, metaphysical desire is never aimed at a wholly accessible object. Thus the Baron's

desires are not drawn by the local dignitaries, but from the populace. This ‘descending’ snobbism explains his passion for the debauched Morel. The prestige of baseness with which Charlus endows him extends to the whole Verdurin salon.

Chauvinist, immoral and bourgeois, the Verdurin salon is a fascinatingly wicked place at the heart of that greater and equally chauvinist, immoral and bourgeois France. The Verdurin salon offers a refuge for the seductive Morel; France at war is full of proud officers. The Baron feels no more at ease in the Verdurin salon than he does in chauvinist France, but desire draws him to France and to the salon. The Guermantes salon, aristocratic and insipidly virtuous, plays a role in the Baron’s social system similar to that of Germany, beloved but distant, in his political system. Love, society and war are three aspects of an existence which is perfectly double in its contradiction.<sup>66</sup>

Thus the counterpart of Mme Verdurin’s chauvinist obsession is the anti-chauvinist obsession of Charlus. These two obsessions do not isolate each other as one would expect or close them into incommensurable worlds, but rather bring them into a communion of hatred. Mme Verdurin claims to be loyal to her salon, but her heart is with the Guermantes. Charlus claims to be loyal to the Guermantes, but secretly longs for the Verdurins. Mme Verdurin praises her *petit clan* and scorns *les ennuyeux*, where Charlus praises the Guermantes salon and disdains ‘les gens du rien’. The madness of one joins the other in insane unity, completely disregarding the barriers that common sense would presume to exist between life, society and the war. Each has only to yield to his madness to understand the other with an acute but incomplete knowledge – acute because passion does not perceive the triangle of desire and fails to recognise the anguish behind the Other’s pride and apparent mastery.

---

<sup>66</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 238.

The foregoing analysis naturally begs the question of narrative viewpoint, and how time can be shown from within. Proust tells us that an object never looks the same to Combray as to the outside world. The novelist does not examine objects under the microscope in order to analyse them and split them into minute particles; on the contrary, this atomistic and sensationalist approach, which allows anonymous perception to be split into objective parts, is rejected at the very start of the novel: ‘Si ma tante avait vu par hasard passer un chien “qu’elle ne connaissait point”, elle ne cessait d’y penser et de consacrer à ce fait incompréhensible ses talents d’induction’ (I 57).

The quarrel of the critics is over Proust’s words. Some are pained by terms such as habit, sensation, idea or feeling. But the most fruitful intuitions of phenomenological and structural analyses are already present in Proust’s work. Proust’s phenomenology, which sets him ahead of his time to many readers, clarifies and develops some intuitions that are common to all great novelists, but these intuitions were not the subject of didactic developments for former novelists. In order to depict desire, Girard argues, Proust must have experienced it himself, and overcome it. He has been victorious in his struggle with the imperialism of perception and remembering it, can make a comparison. It is this process of comparison which the narrator defines at the beginning of *chez Swann*, when the narrator speaks of knowing two ‘Swanns’.<sup>67</sup>

Like all novelists, Proust’s narrator moves freely from room to room in the museum without walls of his existence. The novelist / narrator is none other than Marcel, cured of his errors, who has overcome his desires and is rich with novelistic grace. Cervantes is also a Don Quixote, who has overcome his desires, claims Girard, a Don Quixote who can see a barber’s basin as such but nevertheless remembers that he once saw it as Mambrino’s helmet.<sup>68</sup> This clear-sighted Don Quixote is present in the book only for an instant. It is the dying Don

---

<sup>67</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 262.

<sup>68</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, pp. 262-3.

Quixote of the novel's conclusion. Proust's narrator is similarly cured in death, chiastically, only to be reborn as a novelist.<sup>69</sup> The novelist is the hero cured of metaphysical desire. He is at once as far from the primitive hero, as the transcending of *A la recherche* requires, and as close as the conditions of the novel's revelations appear. The creator is present in his novel, and in truths, not to multiply the number of digressions, but to enrich the novel's descriptions.

*A la recherche* is a novel, but it is also the exegesis of that novel. In it the subject-matter becomes the object of a reflection which transforms the narrow stream of other novels into an immense 'fleuve', and the idea that Proust divides sensation into minute particles is a clumsy attempt to interpret this metamorphosis. If we were to determine the contribution of *A la recherche* to the art of the novel, we should not start from a Realist or Naturalist copy but from Stendhal or Cervantes, claims Girard, for, if Proust were a supernaturalist, perception would have no absolute value in his work; the novelist would not be aware of the role of metaphysical desire in his victims' varying interpretations of reality, and would be incapable of constructing the *quid pro quos* that are essential to the novelistic structure.<sup>70</sup>

The presence of a narcissistic narrator makes it possible to incorporate into his work a reflective element different from previous authors' work. We have seen that Mme Verdurin feigns an insurmountable disgust for the Guermantes salon that nothing in either her consciousness or conduct contradicts. We have reached a stage at which voluntary askesis for the sake of desire becomes Sartrean (*mauvaise foi*). Consequently, it is no longer enough merely to break into the characters' consciousness. None of the techniques of previous novels can be used, since the truth is nowhere present and there is no logos. Julien Sorel conceals his desire from Mathilde but not from himself or the reader. Thus Stendhal need only violate the intimacy of his heroes in order to reveal to us the truth about their desires.

---

<sup>69</sup> Girard, *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 264.



The present moment in Proust is a vast desert unequipped with signposts. In order to understand that Mme Verdurin's hatred hides a secret adoration, we have to turn to the future; we need to compare the ferocious patroness of the *petit clan* with the future Princesse de Guermantes, mingling with 'les ennuyeux' whom she once found intolerable. Similarly, when Marcel sees Gilberte for the first time, he grimaces at her. Only time can tell us how much adoration there really was in this behaviour.

The question of revelation in the novel can only be solved by adding a new dimension to the omniscience of the Realistic novel – the temporal dimension. Spatial 'ubiquity' is no longer sufficient, claims Girard, and this dimension can only be added if a change is made from an impersonal to a personal style. The modalities peculiar to Proust's metaphysical desire necessitates the novelist / narrator's presence at the heart of the book. Stendhal and Flaubert never really needed the future or the past, since their characters were neither divided within themselves, nor split into several successive selves. Homais and Frédéric remain themselves, unable to transcend their novelistic status. It is enough to bring Flaubert's puppets together to settle their accounts once and for all. They are forever transfixed in the attitude in which their author has surprised them, and the same scenes appear repeatedly, obsessively, from one book to another.

Flaubert's 'iterative imperfect' contrasts with the vast frescoes established by Proust. As Girard says of him:

Seul le romancier omniprésent et omniscient peut rassembler des fragments de durée et les rapprocher pour révéler des contradictions qui échappent aux personnages eux-

mêmes. La multiplication des médiateurs et les modalités particulières de la médiation exigent un art essentiellement historique (*Mensonge romantique*, pp.267-8).

By way of suffering, then, Marcel overcomes his own desires, pierces those of others, and finally becomes a writer. At the beginning of *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, we learn from a private discussion with Swann, that Marcel is a Dreyfusard. This is the reason Swann takes him into his confidence, but he adds ‘Et puis aussi, pour une autre raison, que vous saurez un jour’ (III 103). Unfortunately, Proust died before writing the explanatory pages to this episode, so this mystery has shared in creating the aura of the sacred and solemn around the interlude. We think of Samuel anointing David, or John’s baptism of Christ. In the manner of the prophets of the Old Testament, Swann bears witness to the mission of the narrator. What was once only implicit in the gesture of the grandmother at Balbec (II 29) when she helped her tired grandson take off his boots (c.f. Matthew 13 v. 11, Luke 3 v. 16) becomes explicit here.

Clearly the mission is the sacrifice of writing itself. Swann, like John the Baptist, understands that, in his wake, will come someone stronger than he and more capable of overcoming the sterilising obstacle that he had been unable to surmount. And it is quite significant that the testimony born to this mission of ‘creator’ assigned to the narrator is linked religiously and historically to the Dreyfus Affair that is, to the denunciation of scapegoating and the suffering of the innocent. The narrator has been entrusted with the revelation of ‘things hidden since the foundation of the world’.

In *A la recherche*, there is a rather paradoxical passage in praise of suffering. The work of art, says Proust, is the artist’s only effective form of salvation, since it can turn negative into positive, as the alchemists once believed they could take the suffering and mediocrity of the *œuvre au noir* and turn it into the gold of a *magnum opus*, the philosopher’s stone. But is it

only the writer's desire at stake here, or can he assuage the suffering of those whom the author has encountered in real life?

J'avais beau croire que la vérité suprême dans la vie est dans l'art, j'avais beau, d'autre part n'être pas plus capable de l'effort de souvenir qu'il m'eût fallu pour aimer encore Albertine que pour pleurer encore ma grand-mère, je me demandais si tout de même une œuvre d'art dont elles ne seraient pas conscientes serait pour elles, pour le destin de ces pauvres mortes, un accomplissement. Ma grand-mère que j'avais, avec tant d'indifférence, vue agoniser et mourir près de moi. O puissé-je, en expiation, quand mon œuvre serait terminée, blessé sans remède, souffrir de longues heures, abandonné de tous, avant de mourir! D'ailleurs j'avais une pitié infinie même d'êtres moins chers, même indifférents, et tant de destinées dont ma pensée en essayant de les comprendre avait, en somme, utilisé la souffrance ou même seulement les ridicules. Tous ces êtres qui m'avaient révélé des vérités et qui n'étaient plus, m'apparaissaient comme ayant vécu une vie qui n'avait profité qu'à moi, et comme s'ils étaient morts pour moi (IV 481).

Art, into which the narrator is about to immerse himself through writing, can represent for all these forgotten victims the fulfilment that they were never able to experience.

We have made it our purpose here to demonstrate the centrality of suffering in *A la recherche*. Having traced the origins of victimage back to rivalries between Combray factions and competing salons, we see Saniette and his mistreatment as a scapegoat at the hands of the Verdurin clan. Our circle has widened, to include Dreyfus himself, the nobles and the snobs whose anti-Dreyfusism is castigated as cruelty, the changes rung around Swann and Bloch, the narrator's own sense of having caused suffering to his grandmother, his mother and to

Albertine, and a bringing to the surface what is most hidden. The Proust of *Jean Santeuil* was perhaps politically disengaged, whereas the Proust of *A la recherche* invests the Affair with a central, radical function that radiates into all corners of the text, eventually giving rise to the desire to write.

## Section Three

## Chapter Five

Flaubert is interested in the natural points of contact between image and text: the unreadable traces in the rocks at Gavrinis or in Egyptian temples, or the natural prolongation of one into the other. He is the bibliophile in *Bibliomanie*, who loves a book as a work of plastic art, the date illegible, the letters objects in their own right, of the same nature as the heavy gilding on the drawings; he loves the word *finis* embedded in pictorial images of various kinds – surrounded by cherubs, inscribed on a ribbon, a fountain or a tombstone.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, images mark the end of the text: *finis*. Conversely, Flaubert's text may repress the visual. Pictures may be vital, but they take second place: a museum is more than its pictures. What I shall demonstrate in this chapter is that Flaubert's texts perpetually enact a repeated pattern of invocation and occlusion of the visual, and that his images are not always pictorial in the accepted sense. Images are reduced to glimpses and fragments. Vital to the establishment of a stable logos, the visual remains a safe haven for Flaubert, in a world of unstable meanings. His art criticism must be seen furthermore in the context of the wider debate on the status of the image, and contemporary discussions on the depiction of religions in art. Flaubert in fact operates, I shall argue, a persistent process of desymbolisation in the third version of the *Tentation*. The image is constructed, then by occultation or obfuscation, it is evacuated of its ideological content, destabilising the logos again. Yet there is a persistent need, as evidenced by *Bouvard*, for the monolithically stable Word.

Adrienne Tooke's seminal work on *Flaubert and the Pictorial Arts* stems from her fascination with Flaubert's travel-writing.<sup>2</sup> The texts are as great as anything found in the *Correspondance*. They are, by nature, unfinished texts which offer a wealth of information to the traveller, reader and scholar. Flaubert's art commentaries are as detailed as anything offered by Baudelaire, and offer valuable insights into visits to art galleries and museums.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Tooke, *Flaubert and the Pictorial Arts; From Image to Text*, Oxford: OUP, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Tooke, *Pictorial Arts*, p. 127.

Flaubert's often eccentric and highly emotional reactions to art make his commentaries personal and stimulating. Flaubert inevitably developed theoretical considerations on the works of art that he observed and developed his own descriptive techniques as a result. This poses a broader question of the relationship between image and text, and what it means to say that Flaubert is a pictorialist writer.

For Alison Fairlie, there is no doubt that Flaubert is a painterly writer and notable art-critic: 'Si j'ávais été peintre, j'aurais été furieusement embêté' wrote Flaubert in a letter.<sup>3</sup> He had been trying to capture in language what many painters have failed to do in art – evoke the shifting patterns of light on a sea-scape. Flaubert often denied having any technical qualifications as an art critic, but he reacted strongly to individual works, and Fairlie identifies three main types of response.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, there are consideration of aesthetics and the problem of representation in general. Secondly, there is, in modern parlance, the sociological approach; that is, a fascination with contemplating the detail which might be referred to as the taste of the times, whether he contemplates the great masters or is provoked into a 'sacrée horreur' by the adoration of the base and second-rate.<sup>5</sup> The terms 'aesthetic' and 'sociological' would have been anathema to Flaubert; he finally sums up Pellerin from *L'Education* as 'un esthétiseur qui fait le portrait d'un enfant mort'. It is Flaubert's response which perhaps matters most, and which was evident, as in the case of Baudelaire, from his early childhood; his reaction to pictures as a means of extending and crystallizing his own aspirations and projects. Visual stimulus may be less an initial source than a means to 'crystalliser des pensées et des rêves encore flottants'.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Alison Fairlie, 'Flaubert and Some Painters of his Time', in *Imagination and Language: Collected Essays on Constant, Baudelaire, Nerval and Flaubert*, Cambridge: CUP, 1981, pp. 355-78.

<sup>4</sup> Fairlie, 'Flaubert and Some Painters of his Time', p. 355.

<sup>5</sup> *Correspondance* Vol. II, p. 172; in Fairlie, 'Flaubert and Some Painters of his Time', p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Seznec, *Une Nouvelle Etude sur 'La Tentation de Saint Antoine'*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1949, p. 12.

The terms painterly or artistic were applied to Flaubert by his contemporaries in a largely laudatory manner. Both Leconte de Lisle and Fromentin acknowledged Flaubert as a kindred spirit – ‘un poète et un peintre, comme il n’y en a peu’, ‘un grand peintre’, ‘un grand visionnaire’, they hailed him.<sup>7</sup> Flaubert’s writing has been compared by critics, both modern and contemporary, to the work of a number of painters, but a great deal depends on how ‘pictorialism’ is defined. Tooke, after Hefferman, gives a good working definition, from the *Museum of Words*: ‘pictorialism’ is the generation in language of effects similar to those in art, as opposed to *Ekphrasis* (the depiction in language of a real work of art) or *notional Ekphrasis* (the depiction of an imaginary work of art). But these are question-begging statements taking us no further as to how we define a picture. It is questionable whether Flaubert’s writing is pictorialist at all, according to some, as pictorialism implies *statisme*. It was in the nineteenth century that the term ‘pictorial’ shed its associations with *statisme*. Flaubert’s writing both reflects and anticipates this evolution in the understanding of what constitutes the pictorial, and practises a whole range of pictorialist effects, from full-scale Parnassian frescoes (about which he was very dubious – witness the description of Charles Bovary’s hat or Emma’s wedding cake, which seem to test the limits of such description) to the evocation of impressionist writing.

Flaubert saw art not as a sister enterprise nor even as a rival, but as a foil. He was perpetually aware of the respective limits of both painting and literature, and was suspicious of hybrid genres, such as *les peintures à idées*, for example, or, conversely, the kind of pictorialist writing embodied by Leconte de Lisle, which for Flaubert (as in the case of Charles’ hat) singularly failed to ‘faire voir’. If writing was in any sense to imitate painting, it was only in Cousinian terms, that is, by attending to the materiality of its own techniques. Some of the finest and most original effects in Flaubert’s writing are produced, as Tooke has it, precisely by the

---

<sup>7</sup> *Correspondance* Vol. III, pp. 1209-1210, in Fairlie, ‘Flaubert and Some Painters of his Time’, p. 157.

never-resolved tension between image and text, between all that Flaubert associated with the pictorial and the status of his own œuvre.<sup>8</sup>

Flaubert was sensitive to the visual in general and to painting in particular. The responses vary from detached, intellectual appraisal, to more primal feelings of delight, shock and horror, the latter having no small bearing on the mysterious nervous attacks to which he was subjected from 1844 onwards; Flaubert could never afterwards remain neutral about images, whether painted or otherwise.

Proust's narrator in *A la recherche* notices that the painter Elstir pursues a particular arabesque throughout his work. One such arabesque in Flaubert's work is the tension between image and text. It accounts in no small part for his fascination with the subject of Brueghel's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. The meaning of the word 'symbol' in this context is so ambiguous that one hesitates to use it; do we need to add 'desymbolisation', which is not in Littré's otherwise excellent record of the language, nor in the writings of Flaubert, nor in those of the philosopher Victor Cousin? It does appear in more recent writings, such as Biasi's 'The Temptation of the Orient: Flaubert's *La Légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier*'.<sup>9</sup> Biasi's article evokes Michelet, who did use the word:

The fundamental question is centred on the historical modulation between language and the notion of the symbol. The generic hypothesis could be stated in this way: the Orient is the cradle of symbolic language, which the Occident then adapts in order to desymbolise it into the language of the Law.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre-Marc de Biasi, 'The Temptation of the Orient: Flaubert's *La Légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier*', in *Romantisme*, 34, 1981, pp. 47-56.

<sup>10</sup> Biasi, 'Temptation of the Orient', p. 47, in Frank Paul Bowman, *French Romanticism: Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Readings*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p. 156.



The problem of desymbolisation was a fundamental concern of many Romantic thinkers, even if they did not use that word specifically. In the analysis of Flaubert's text, Biasi proposes as an example the pair of sandals, which Julien, once he has discovered that he has murdered his father, leaves behind for his wife - a trifling detail, but why should Flaubert mention the sandals? Biasi considers the sandals of Empedocles, Moses' sandals, citing Michelet, the sandals offered to seal session contracts; the deposition of sandals as a symbol of *Askesis* in Plotinus. He concludes that Flaubert, who constructs the discreet congruity of this detail by an erudite manipulation of cultural references, which he associates, condenses and displaces in order to create another kind of pertinency, the pertinence of the undecidable. This indecision is the result of the tension between image and text.

Desymbolisation, a way of thinking that is widespread in theories about Law, about the history of religion, and about hermeneutics in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, first tries to determine what the symbol signifies, and it is only after the symbol has been separated from its *signifié* by reading or interpretation, that decides that signification – and that reading is conceived as a manifestation of historical progress – it is only then that the symbol acquires its undecidable nature. This theory, it would seem, flourished particularly between 1844 and 1849.

Frank Paul Bowman has also discovered another text that links the depiction of footwear and murder:

Among the Franc-Salvians, is the ritual known as Chenuconda, relating to the ceding of goods, because of the incapacity to pay the recompense for a homicide, the debtor,

after performing a symbolic number of rites, abandons his home without shirt and without shoes.<sup>11</sup>

This is exactly what Julien does. The quotation comes from Pierre Chassan's *Essai sur la symbolique du droit* (1847).<sup>12</sup> The essence of Chassan's theory is that the Law has not always been expressed in purely verbal forms. In primitive ages, in order to understand and remember the law, people used images, symbols and the pictorial. Chassan offers a taxonomy of these symbols, describes their origins and traces their transformations, proposing that in the history of law there is a struggle between two principles, on the one hand sacerdotal and patrician, and which strives to maintain the symbolic form, and on the other civil and plebeian which strives to desymbolise. Because of the emancipation of the plebeian, the law gradually moved from concrete to an ever more verbal form, but the law can never achieve total abstraction; if it did so, it would disappear. Chassan was a disciple of Ballanche, from whom he borrows his theory of history as a struggle between patrician and plebeian factors, but Chassan also read Hegel. His aim in part was to show as incorrect Michelet's theory that law in France was, in its inception, verbal in its formulation.

Flaubert's interest in pictorial art was dual almost from the start. Once he had moved from an initial position of resistance to anything that smacked of 'bourgeois' culture, he came, like Stendhal, Baudelaire and Zola, to value pictorial art not only for itself, but for what it could contribute to the practice of his own art.<sup>13</sup> But, at the same time, Flaubert constantly measured his own writing against painting. If painting is there to be milked - and Flaubert does milk it mercilessly, so Tooke has it - it is also there to be transcended.<sup>14</sup> Flaubert's education in the pictorial arts belongs very much to the period of his literary apprenticeship and ceases more or

---

<sup>11</sup> Bowman, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 12.

less in 1851, when he embarks on *Bovary*. But the arabesque which remains constant in Flaubert is his preoccupation with images - the relation between the symbol and desymbolisation. The gesture of the painted saint, Antoine, turning away from the hordes of images that beset him, to take refuge in the Book, is the arabesque which informs the whole of Flaubert's writing life. The present study will look at this same fundamental dichotomy in a number of contexts and modes. Flaubert strove for impartiality, as is well-known, but his writing is permeated with personal preoccupations, thus ensuring that the author is 'présent partout' even if 'nulle part visible'. Genetic criticism, to which the studies by Tooke and others are indebted, has made increasingly apparent the extent to which all Flaubert's texts and *avant-textes* can be seen as forming a coherent intellectual adventure, transcending the usual limits of autobiography, but still constituting an autobiography of a kind, 'une autobiographie impersonnelle' as Biasi calls it.<sup>15</sup> Pictorial images are part of this adventure, of the personal subtext that drives Flaubert's writing.

Flaubert's visual acuity is well attested. In the 1860s, Taine set about collecting material for his work, 'De l'Intelligence', which dealt in part with the connection between visual sensitivity and the artistic imagination. He turned for information to those individuals with particularly well-developed capacities in those areas: 'cas spéciaux', 'hypertrophiés', in his words, artists, scientists, visionaries and observers, a chess-player who would play blindfolded, a mathematician who did long multiplication in his head, the artist Gustave Doré and Flaubert.

It is no exaggeration that, according to Tooke Flaubert had a mystique of vision.<sup>16</sup> The sight of three waves ruffling the surface of the Nile could move him to prayer. As he said:

---

<sup>15</sup> Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, [n.p.]: Editions de l'Imprimerie Nationale, 1994, p. 51, in Biasi, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 14.

C'est alors que, jouissant de ces choses, au moment où je regardais trois plis de vagues qui se courbaient derrière nous sous le vent, j'ai senti monter du fond de moi un sentiment de bonheur solonnel qui allait à la rencontre de ce spectacle, et j'ai remercié Dieu dans mon cœur de m'avoir fait apte à jouir de cette manière – je me sentais fortuné pour la pensée quoiqu'il me semblât pourtant ne penser à rien – c'était une volupté intime de toute mon âme.<sup>17</sup>

Looking is not only sensual ('l'épreuve presque des sensations voluptueuses rien qu'à voir, mais quand je vois bien', *Correspondance*, I 234) but analytical ('je sais bien voir et voir comme des myopes, jusque dans les pores des choses', II 30). Vision is not only central to painters ('Tout se concentre dans l'œil' says Flaubert of a painting by Titian, I 368) but to all artists. Flaubert urges his friend Le Poittevin to 'fais-toi prunelle' (I 234) and, in Egypt, decides that he must practise his own precept and 'être œil' (I 602).<sup>18</sup>

However, an image of a lynx-eyed Flaubert, ever on the alert, would be anathema to Flaubert's contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> It often seemed to outsiders as if Flaubert was not observant at all. According to Maxime du Camp, his travelling companion in Brittany and the Middle East, Flaubert never seemed to engage with what he saw. As *distrain*, as his hero Jules, Flaubert seemed to register nothing: 'Les temples lui paraissaient toujours les mêmes, les paysages toujours semblables et les mosquées toujours pareilles'.<sup>20</sup> Du Camp attributes this lack of enthusiasm to lethargy – Flaubert would really have preferred to travel lying down, while images rolled past him as if on the screen of a panorama. Whilst lethargy and ennui were certainly a feature of Flaubert's experience of travel ('les temples égyptiens m'embêtent

---

<sup>17</sup> *Voyages en Egypte*, p. 274.

<sup>18</sup> All references from Tooke, *From Image to Text*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>19</sup> Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Maxime du Camp, *Souvenirs littéraires*, in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 16.

furieusement'),<sup>21</sup> they do not seem to have inhibited a capacity for almost total recall. Du Camp notes with amazement that, despite apparently seeing nothing at the time, Flaubert manages to recall with great clarity, distinct visual impressions. In this way, he resembles Balzac. 'Par un phénomène singulier, les impressions de ce voyage lui revinrent toutes à la fois et avec vigueur lorsqu'il écrivit *Salammbô*. Balzac était ainsi : il ne regardait rien et se souvenait de tout.'<sup>22</sup> Faure said of him : 'Sa nièce nous dit qu'il préférerait l'image à la réalité. Les paysages qu'il a sous ses yeux ne semblent pas le captiver ; c'est plus tard qu'il se les rappellera'.<sup>23</sup> Flaubert knew that there was more to seeing than using the eyes.

Whether Flaubert appeared at the time to be looking or not, it is clear that he regarded the act of looking as a double-edged sword, particularly at this level of intensity. As is the case when Proust's narrator looks at Albertine's face, looking may reveal nothing useful. 'Par cela même que je connais les choses, les choses n'existent pas' remarks the Gymnosophe in the *Tentation* ; and when Antoine finally attains his goal, and sees the very heart of matter, what he finds is only the 'cellule sacrificielle' in the shape of an eye. Looking is dangerous; if Antoine yields to the temptation to gaze into the eye of the Catoblépas he will die, whilst he is almost driven insane by peering into the heart of matter. Flaubert himself admitted being unhinged in *Par les champs et par les grèves* : 'nous regrettons que nos yeux ne puissent aller jusqu'au sein des rochers' (p. 302).

Even when Flaubert's tastes seem to corresponded to what might be termed 'the artistic tastes of the times', they always have a particular slant which makes them original and highly personal. What he famously says he responds to most in art is its capacity to 'faire rêver' and, in this way, he resembles Diderot, Delacroix and of course, Baudelaire:

---

<sup>21</sup> *Voyages en Egypte*, p. 347, et passim.

<sup>22</sup> Du Camp, in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> G. Faure, *Pélerinages passionnés*, p. 142, in Tooke, *ibid.*

Ce qui me semble le plus haut dans l'Art (et le plus difficile) ce n'est ni de faire pleurer, ni de vous mettre en fureur, mais d'agir à la façon de la nature, c'est-à-dire de *faire rêver*. Aussi les très belles œuvres ont du caractère. Elles sont sereines d'aspect et incompréhensibles (*Correspondance* II 417, original emphasis).<sup>24</sup>

As the *Tentation* shows, Flaubert is drawn to the enigmatic in art, of the kind which evokes feeling, as being 'comme un souvenir des choses que je n'ai pas vues' (*Par les champs*, p. 341). When Jules de Goncourt sends Flaubert drawings by himself ('à votre intention') of bas-reliefs of various grotesque figures in the Museum of Leiden, Flaubert's response is illuminating – the one he prefers (three legs dancing on a bull) is the one he understands not at all; 'La troisième (les trois jambes dansant sur un taureau) me fait le plus grand plaisir, bien que je n'y comprenne goutte' (*Correspondance* III 176). Later on, receiving Maurice Sand's 'dessins fantastiques' for the *Tentation*, Flaubert laughs at the way his imagination is triggered by his searching for meaning he knows he will not find: 'Peut-être y a-t-il un symbole profond caché dans le dessin de Maurice? Mais je ne l'ai pas découvert...rêverie!' (*Correspondance*, IV 490). The idea that art plays on the inexpressible is both old and familiar, but it is of particular relevance to Flaubert. His feeling for the incomprehensible takes him into areas which other artistic commentators do not care to penetrate. It was part of what drew him to Brueghel, who for most of his contemporaries, was simply a source of ugly enigmas, best ignored. Few writers valued or even mentioned the Brueghels.<sup>25</sup> Flaubert himself mentions how visitors to the Palazzo Balbi do not even look at the Brueghel which so captivated him, or if they do, they consider it bad art.<sup>26</sup> The lure of the enigmatic also

<sup>24</sup> c.f. Baudelaire 'Salon de 1848', *Critique d'Art*, 81: 'Rembrandt est un puissant idéaliste qui fait rêver et deviner au-delà', in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> But c.f. Arsène Houssaye's *Histoire de la peinture flamande et hollandaise* (1846) which includes a section on the Brueghels, and Baudelaire's analysis in 'Quelques caricaturistes étrangers' in *Critique d'Art* (1857), pp. 232-4 in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Correspondance* I, 1510, in Tooke, *ibid.*

accounts for Flaubert's later attraction to Moreau, who was another closed book to most of Flaubert's contemporaries, and also carried a reputation for obscurity.<sup>27</sup>

Flaubert took great pleasure in contemplating the incomplete. Like the hero of *Novembre*, who delights in mutilated marbles, one of Flaubert's most enthusiastic discoveries was the famous torso in the Vatican. This was not so much a reflection on current debates, on the status of the sketch, the unfinished, the fragment. There was a Romantic taste for the *ébauche*, comparable with the taste for ruins, which Flaubert shared, and a growing appreciation for a sketchy finish, as opposed to the *l'éché* surface of official art. Rather, it expresses something at the very heart of Flaubert's being, a sense of his own incompleteness. He was aware that his aesthetic responses, his *Weltanschauung*, what he himself calls his *système*, rests on the urge to find an echo to the monster inside himself, an eternal *coup de sifflet*, which will add piquancy, without which things would be too perfect: 'Mon système [...] mon cœur [...] ma nature peut-être, qui incomplète elle-même, cherche toujours l'incomplet.'<sup>28</sup>

Flaubert's other side, however, the joyful rumbustious side, was drawn to the type of art which gives the sense of a superabundance of life ('Malheur à qui ne comprend l'excès!') hence the immediate appeal to Flaubert of Brueghel's *Temptation*.<sup>29</sup> He seems to have yearned for a living art (as do Zola and Huysmans after him): the terms 'mouvementés' and 'heurts' are high praise for him. This yearning is at the heart of much of Flaubert's work. Flaubert applies the Kantian idea that art, at its best, imitates the natural processes (not nature itself) in writing the incongruous in an 'harmonie discordante' (*Par les champs*, p. 512) or 'une harmonie de choses disparates' (*Correspondance* II, 283). This aesthetic is an organic

---

<sup>27</sup> c.f. Du Camp, *Les Beaux Arts*, 1867, pp. 134-5: 'Le reproche principal qu'on peut adresser à la conception même des tableaux de M. Morel, c'est qu'elle n'est pas suffisamment claire. Le Français ainsi fait qu'il veut voir et comprendre au premier coup d'œil, tout ce qui n'est point parfaitement net et même un peu banal, n'a pas le don de lui plaire; il n'aime pas les sens mystérieux et caché [...] j'avoue que je ne suis pas ainsi, et qu'un peu de rébus ne me déplaît pas', in Tooke, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Correspondance* Vol. I 279, in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> 'Jerusalem' in *Carnets de voyage*, 10, p. 564 in Tooke, *ibid.*

theory of art, and as such draws on central concepts of Romantic theory. Where Flaubert's writing differs from say, that of Hugo, is in the extent to which he gives difference its full due, while never abandoning the idea of an overall pattern or unity.<sup>30</sup> The various ramifications of this central idea – such as the recuperation of monsters and the fantastic into the scheme of things – are everywhere apparent in Flaubert's responses to painting. One of the most important models for Flaubert's aesthetic was that of the natural scientist, Geoffroy de Saint Hilaire, who envisaged a precarious kind of zoological system which accommodated the types of life-forms which appear most resistant to it – monsters and chimeras do not escape nature's limits but are, on the contrary, subject to natural laws, a sign of nature's exuberance.<sup>31</sup>

Flaubert's description of the *Temptation* is his first piece of real art criticism. It does not come easily. When he first sees the painting in Genoa he merely alludes to it, not attempting to describe it ('Il a effacé pour moi toute la galerie où il est, je ne me souviens plus du reste', *Correspondance* X 373). He does not get around to writing a commentary until he is in Milan, at the end of his voyage (though all editions omit this detail).

Brueghel's *Temptation* has long been recognised as playing a central part in Flaubert's development, not least of all by Flaubert himself: 'Cette œuvre de toute ma vie, puisque la première idée m'est venue en 1845 à Gênes, devant un tableau de Brueghel, et depuis ce temps-là je n'ai cessé d'y songer et de faire des lectures afférentes' (05 June 1872). Seznec has pointed out that the painting crystallised Flaubert's emotional position.<sup>32</sup> It certainly exerted a tremendous influence: the Saint beset by images of a horrifying strangeness and

---

<sup>30</sup> Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> c.f. *La Philosophie anatomique*, 1818, p. 260 : 'Il n'y a pas de monstres, la nature est une.' See also Flaubert, *Correspondance*, II pp. 450-1: 'Sainte Hilaire est ce grand homme qui a montré la légitimité des monstres', in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 29, although Flaubert may have been referring to Isodore, son of Etienne Geoffroy de Sainte-Hilaire.

<sup>32</sup> Seznec, *Nouvelles Etudes*, p. 86.



intensity, is a mirror image of Flaubert himself, whose nervous attacks had begun only recently. ‘Saint Antoine, c’est moi’ said Flaubert (*Correspondance*, II 127). Anthony is both seduced and terrorised by images, and they make him feel as if his very being is exploding into the myriad pieces of a firework display. Images haunt not just the *Tentation* itself but Flaubert’s writing as a whole, erupting into his work from time to time, as elsewhere detectable as subterranean presences, discreetly conditioning some of Flaubert’s writing’s subtler effects.

But more than a question of shared ‘sensibilité’ is at issue. When Sez nec claims that the painting crystallises Flaubert’s thought, he was thinking of the idea of being beset by images. But that thought must include the issue of where language stands in relation to images. As the eye of the viewer scans the picture, it moves from the images, which dominate, to the seemingly marginalised figure of the Saint with his Bible. In the face of that teeming mass of images, the Saint averts his eyes and takes refuge in the sacred text. The Brueghel relates directly to the question to the relation between text and image. The book may be a refuge after all – the Bible is full of monsters and may indeed evoke these images, or at least, do little to dispel them. That idea is confirmed, for Tooke, by another painting which Flaubert saw in Naples in 1851. In this *Crucifixion* by Joos van Cleve, a woman is praying with her missal open beside her. Lurking by the missal is a chuckling little demon, reminiscent of Cazotte, of which Flaubert wrote: ‘A côté de la femme, agenouillé sur un prie-Dieu et un livre à la main, paraît la figure monstrueuse, d’un diable-dragon, qui rit; il a l’intérieur des oreilles coloriés comme si on y avait figuré des fleurs’ (*Correspondance* XI 118). Whether the demon is being kept at bay or conjured up by the book is impossible to say. Flaubert’s *Tentation*, like Brueghel’s and the van Cleve, plays on the central question of whether the text is any refuge at all, as the images that besiege Antoine, come from the very Bible in which he tries to take comfort.

The whole of Flaubert's *œuvre* is a magnified version of the Saint's turning away from image to text. The Saint's gesture is a re-enactment of one of the central episodes of the first *L'Education*, in which Jules meets the monstrous dog.<sup>33</sup> It was this image, with its crude juxtapositions of red sun and yellow water, which directly precipitates Jules' turning to writing. But whereas this episode implies that Jules has nothing more to fear, Flaubert's sight of the Brueghel turns everything into disorder once more and shows that images retain their power to subvert and disturb.

Baudelaire's description of the *Temptation of Saint Anthony* as 'une chambre secrète de son esprit' is perfectly apt.<sup>34</sup> The *Tentation* is about the image and is, in that regard, a *mise en abîme* of Flaubert's work in general. The effect of the Brueghel is all the more devastating in that it is parodic. It is art, simply a mirror image, but an image distorted like the image Flaubert sees of himself in the shaving-mirror. With its vivid colours and visual humour, it takes the age-old theme of the tussle between God and all the demons of Life and its pleasures, and mocks them, turning them into a subject for comedy, as Saint Romain did. Irony makes the drama worse, as if the greatest tragedy of all in the human condition were that its dramas are enacted on the level of the marionette show or *blague supérieure*: 'Le comique ne fait pas rire, le lyrisme dans la blague'. Pursuing his *ligne droite*, despite the hordes of images, grimacing grotesquely and maniacally around, the Saint is a tragic figure of fun as well, and sends back a parodic echo to Flaubert of his own position at this time, poised in a precarious state of balance, product of an entirely closed system, as he later defines to Louise Colet: 'Je marchais avec la rectitude d'un système particulier, fait pour un cas spécial' (08 August 1846).

---

<sup>33</sup> Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> 'Madame Bovary', in *Curiosités esthétiques*, p. 651, in Tooke, *ibid.*

Other elements of Flaubert's position are parodied, too, notably his early aesthetic. It was Brueghel's *désordre très ordonné*, as Huysmans put it, that attracted Flaubert just as much as it repelled his contemporaries: 'fourmillant' and 'grouillant' were just some of the terms they employed (*Correspondance*, X, 373).<sup>35</sup> The painting is full of life and apparent disharmonies. It plays with metamorphoses, it blurs the boundaries between the natural and the monstrous, Man and animal, just as the aesthetic does. Once again, the mirror sends back a distorted image. The splendidly pantheistic emotion of Flaubert's aesthetic is parodied in the painting. Infinite flexibility becomes nightmarish flux and the painting suggests that personal identity can be destroyed by it. Colour has become an abomination, appearing in the form of the 'mets coloriés' offered by Gluttony.

But Brueghel's *Temptation* is not just the embodiment of Flaubert's central dilemma. It also, more prosaically, poses questions about form, to which Flaubert had hitherto paid little attention. Immediately after noting particular figures in the painting, Flaubert passes without transition, to questions of presentation:

Tout semble sur le même plan. Ensemble fourmillant, grouillant et ricanant d'une façon emportée, sous la bonhomie de chaque détail. Ce tableau paraît d'abord confus, puis il devient étrange pour la plupart, drôle pour quelques-uns, quelque chose d'autre pour d'autres : il a effacé pour moi toute la galerie où il est' (*Correspondance* X 373).

The accusation of a lack of structure - 'tout sur le même plan' - was one of those levelled at Flaubert by Sainte-Beuve regarding *Salammbô*: 'Les tableaux où tous les plans sont sur le même plan.'<sup>36</sup> In the case of *Salammbô*, the criticism was unfounded; Flaubert does not in fact risk constructing his narratives in this same way until *L'Education* ten years later.

---

<sup>35</sup> Huysmans, *Trois églises et trois primitives*, 1908, pp. 183-4, in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 111.

<sup>36</sup> *Correspondance*, Vol II, p. 440, in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 124.

Flaubert wondered whether this very incorrectness of form was not the novel's greatest strength:

Pourquoi ce livre-là n'a-t-il pas eu le succès que j'avais attendu ? Robin en a peut-être découvert la raison. C'est trop vrai et, esthétiquement parlant, il y manque la fausseté de la perspective. A force d'avoir bien combiné le plan, le plan disparaît. Toute œuvre d'art doit avoir un point, un sommet, faire la pyramide, ou bien la lumière doit frapper sur un point de la boule. Or rien de tout cela de la vie. Mais l'Art n'est pas la nature ! n'importe ! Je crois que personne n'a poussé la probité plus loin' (8 October 1879).<sup>37</sup>

Like Brueghel, Flaubert was pushing structure to its limits in the *Tentation*.

Another reason for the painting's appeal to Flaubert is that it appeals to his sense of the enigmatic, so much so that he cannot find words to express it; the painting is 'confus [...] étrange [...] et quelque chose de plus'. For Baudelaire, writing some twelve years later, Brueghel's attraction for the modern observer consists precisely of this resistance to meaning, and his 'allégories presque indéchiffrables aujourd'hui' are amongst the most disturbing features of Brueghel's art: 'Les maisons dont les fenêtres sont des yeux, des moulins dont les ailes sont des bras, et mille compositions effrayantes où la nature est incessamment transformée en logogriphe.'<sup>38</sup>

Brueghel's paintings are an enigma to the modern observer, an allegory whose meaning is hidden, a cryptogram whose code is lost. *The Temptation* is only the first of many paintings to

<sup>37</sup> 'Personne n'a poussé la probité plus loin', realised Zola, Huymans and Proust. Compare with Zola in the *Messenger d'Europe* (November 1875): 'Gustave Flaubert refusait toute affabulation romanesque et centrale. Il voulait la vie au jour le jour, telle qu'elle se présente, avec sa suite continue de petits incidents vulgaires, qui finissent par en faire un drame compliqué et redoutable [...] l'apparent décousue des faits et le train-train ordinaire des faits [...] rien que des figures de personne bousculant sur un trottoir.' See also Flaubert's reply to Zola, *Correspondance*, XVI, p. 277: 'Comme vous y allez ! Comme vous me vengez ! Mon opinion secrète est que vous avez raison; c'est un livre honnête. Mais n'ai-je pas voulu dire au roman plus qu'il ne comporte ?'

<sup>38</sup> 'Quelques caricaturistes étrangers', in *Critique d'art*, p. 233, in Tooke, *From Image to Text*, p. 113.

catch Flaubert's attention for its enigmatic power. It satisfies one of Flaubert's highest criteria in art: it makes the viewer 'rêver à l'insaisissable' and enacts one of his own temptations, as he claims 'Ma vie s'est passée à vouloir saisir des chimères' (*Correspondance* XVI 58 and 78). But here again the Brueghel takes the most essential and valuable of Flaubert's criteria and pushes it to its limits.

The actual material input from Brueghel's painting to Flaubert's *Tentation* is minimal. But its influence on Flaubert's work was as enormous as it was indirect. Brueghel aside, Flaubert was little interested in form in his early career, although he does have an eye for the odd discordant detail and strange angles. Despite the confident assertions of the early aesthetic, Flaubert was never entirely happy with anything that suggested irresolution of figure and ground. There are other examples. In Guercino's *Gesú saccia i mercanti*, which he finds overall 'peu agréable', he notes as 'beau' the disruptive detail of the back of a man running away (*Correspondance* X 366); he also notes the 'tapis trop colorié' in *Esther et Ahasvérus*, which distracts the eye (*Correspondance* X 367); in Raphael's cartoon for the School of Athens, he registers of the mathematician that 'on ne lui voit que le haut de la tête' and that another philosopher is only seen from behind. Emphasis on such features would become commonplace by the time of the *Voyage en Orient*.

Flaubert's aesthetic needs to be seen in the wider context of the debate surrounding comparative religion and mythology in France when Flaubert composed his first *Tentation*. In that work, Flaubert treats questions which were highly controversial in his day. What methodology should be used to study religion, and what were the nature and origin of religions and myths? How do myths and religions evolve? What were the origins of Christianity? How should religions be depicted in art? The debate provided several options, amongst which Flaubert could choose. It is difficult to imagine Flaubert taking the path of a

Lammenais. With the sacrifices to Moloch, Flaubert was perhaps satirising de Maistre and his disciples. Flaubert could have constructed a text according to the theories of Dupuis and the Solar School; he could have illustrated the themes of Creuzer, or those of Jules Simon. Flaubert refused these options; he does echo these themes but in a satiric way. The contemporary readers of the *Tentation* would probably have expected the text to correspond to one of the points of view in the debate, and it may have been Flaubert's refusal to do this, as well as certain stylistic aspects of the text, that made his first audience react negatively. Taking one of these options would have furthermore meant espousing the principle of Progress to which Flaubert was opposed. More importantly, Flaubert did adhere to the thesis of desymbolisation, as defined by Frank Paul Bowman but in an original and nihilistic way.<sup>39</sup> 'One can read *Salammbô* as an illustration of desymbolisation; there, according to how intellectually or morally advanced the character is, s/he believes in certain dogmas, attributes literal or metaphorical meaning to the symbols', says Bowman.<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, rather than representing religion as gradually freeing itself from the symbol in order to become philosophy, Flaubert reduces the religions to their symbolic forms, then by omission or occultation, 'deprives that symbol of its ideological content and proceeds to degrade the logos, in part by playing with the age-old syncretist technique of juxtaposing differences and thus undermining resemblance'.<sup>41</sup> The logos is the cult of the parrot-paraclete.

In order to clarify what is simultaneously a stylistic technique and an ideological choice, we will examine in more detail Flaubert's description of the Ophites in the *Tentation*. This passage is much less obfuscatory than others, although Flaubert uses some surprising techniques to make meaning occult. This centres on the demonstration of a strange thesis, yet this thesis is not without significance in the history of religions and in Romantic thought. The Ophites were Gnostic heretics, who regarded the serpent of Genesis 3: 11 as the saviour of the

---

<sup>39</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 182.

<sup>40</sup> Bowman, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 183.

world from the God of the Old Testament. They reversed the interpretation of the Fall, seeing it as marking Man's emancipation from primeval ignorance. Originally, in the Graeco-Roman world, Gnosticism merited its designation by claiming a secret knowledge or gnosis about the constitution of the universe, human nature and destiny. Basically, claims Brandon, they represent a widespread desire to account for human nature as being compounded of an immortal ethereal soul, and a material mortal body.<sup>42</sup> This situation was basically emphasized in terms of cosmogony, according to which the world was made by a demiurge, who was an inferior entity to the Supreme Being, who was often equated to Mind ('Nous'), Life ('Zoë') and Light ('Phos'). Between the Supreme Being and the world were a series of entities or Aons, amongst which were demonic powers inhabiting the planets and being immediate rulers of the world. Mankind stemmed from union with Nature ('Fusis') and an archetypal Man ('Anthropos') who had descended from the Supreme Being. Hence mankind had a dual nature; the Spirit came from the divine Man and the Material from Nature. In this world, men were subject to rule by the Arcorites (planets). They could be saved from the wretched state by true Gnosis of their real nature, and by following a prescribed discipline, which would return them to communion with the Supreme Being. A belief in metempsychosis was a basic tenet (*Tentation*, p. 95).

The Ophites turned the snake with his promise that men should be gods, into the hero of the scene of the Garden of Eden. He thus becomes a Promethean figure, a symbol of how, to quote Pierre Larue: 'The Fall is, as well as being progress in Genesis, a Fall'.<sup>43</sup> The Ophites were a favourite heresy in the nineteenth century, for in it was seen a secularisation of the Hope Principle. Indeed, could there be any more marvellous and scandalous way of separating the logos from the Jesus of history, than by suggesting that the Serpent was the true saviour?

---

<sup>42</sup> S. G. F. Brandon, *A Dictionary of Comparative Religions*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970.

<sup>43</sup> Pierre Larue, 'Trois Discours aux philosophes', in *Œuvres*, 1850, p. 189, in Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 184.

This is something for Romantic Satanism to delight in, as well as Prometheanism. Flaubert plays with these two possibilities, but espouses neither.

Flaubert obviously considered the scene important. Firstly, it is fairly lengthy, 130 lines in the third version, where the Ophites come at the end of the Gnostic section, as they represent the extreme end of Gnosticism. Version III is completely re-written; Flaubert keeps only from the previous two versions a few descriptive details. For example, in Versions I and II, the children hold the snake with their arms uplifted, the women with it on their breasts, and the men on their stomachs; in Version III it is with their arms uplifted on their heads. Versions I and II primarily describe Eve's temptation (p. 190) and end with the Benediction of the Eucharistic Bread by the serpent. Version II adds a refutation of the heresy by Saint Anthony. In Version III, Antoine attends an Ophite ceremony, and both ritual and dogma are more fully expounded, including the addition of the thesis that the serpent enters Christ's breast at the moment of his baptism. The temptation of Eve is suppressed, and the snake merely crawls along the bread at the benediction. The refutation is suppressed: Antoine merely faints away in horror. These changes can be explained in part by a difference in source; I and II are mostly a re-writing of Plouguet, where III owes much to Jacques Matter.<sup>44</sup> The changes here are so great that we cannot look on the previous versions as drafts; they are completely re-written. Nonetheless, there is a kind of unity on the Imaginary level, as the detail of the serpent's coils (p. 117) in all three versions demonstrates. For the problem of how the presentation both constructs and deconstructs the logos, I and II must be compared with III, which is considerably more obscure. Didactic exposition of the Ophites' doctrine takes up much more space (pp. 94-128), but Flaubert seems at great pains to make it incomprehensible. This, despite the fact that Flaubert could not have presupposed much familiarity with Ophitism amongst his readers. In this respect, the deliberate obfuscation of religious doctrines in the

---

<sup>44</sup> F. Plouguet, *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des égarements de l'esprit humain ou Dictionnaire des hérésies*, 1762, in Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 191.



*Tentation* is quite different from that of the political doctrines in *L'Education*, for there the reader can recreate and reconstruct the political discourses of Guizot or Pritchard from the caricature Flaubert provides. In all three versions of the *Tentation*, the style remains paratactic, conjunctions and words that express causal links are suppressed, replaced by interjections and queries, and by repetition and synonymy.

In the first *Tentation*, already disquieting, we find a description of an enormous serpent and a vague setting. Eve is then mentioned, and only then do we realise that the Garden of Eden is being evoked. These follow several paragraphs on Eve's (sensual) reaction where Flaubert introduces the 'harmonies of Nature' 'that he loved to satirize' (as the lotus opens and dates ripen) which shift the reader's attention elsewhere; in the context, these details may seem symbolic, but no symbolism can be attached to them.<sup>45</sup> Here, at least, one paragraph explains why the Ophites adored the snake:

Once more, if they had tastes of it, they would have become gods, according to the tempter's promise. To punish the son too prodigal with the gifts of heaven, God condemned him to keep this form; the victorious woman put her foot on his head. But by the bite he made on her heel, the eternal venom mounted up to her heart.<sup>46</sup>

This paragraph does introduce the Promethean theme, but only to destroy it by evocation of the Virgin Mary, and by attributing poisoned venom to the serpent. Far from explaining the Ophites' belief, Flaubert scrambles everything. In Version II of the *Tentation*, the résumé of the doctrine is reduced to one sentence, and the Promethean theme is suppressed.<sup>47</sup> Antoine's refutation, added in this version – that a Christian would not have chosen to be incarnated in such an ugly form – is surprising, since there has previously been no equation of a Christian

---

<sup>45</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 192.

<sup>46</sup> *Tentation*, Version II, in Bowman, *French Romanticism*, pp. 191-92.

<sup>47</sup> Bowman, *ibid.*

with the serpent. It does provide a transition towards the next section of the Arcites, but that transition is effected by the signifier not the signified.

Version III is much more obfuscatory than I or II, and in the first two, at least the serpent is present from the start, and so is the term Ophites, so that a reader versed in Ophitism, or who consults a work on Gnosis, could at least have a vague impression of what is going on.<sup>48</sup> In Version III, the snake is not present until three-quarters of the way through the episode – and even then, rather comically, he has to be begged to do so – and the name itself ‘Ophites’ only occurs at the very end in the transition to the next scene. Before then, the reader, like Antoine himself, is disorientated and image overcomes text. On the other hand, the text carefully prepares the thematic of the voyage, with evocations of water, embarkations and indeed, at the end of this passage, Antoine does set sail with the Ophites, on the march of heresy, to find himself next with the Christian martyrs of ancient Rome – a typically Flaubertian piece of irony. Throughout the text, Flaubert is careful about creating effective thematic and narrative presentations, but does so at the expense of explaining any of the ideas involved. The oneiric atmosphere is particularly strong; here the snake’s tail ‘sautant par le trou de la muraille, s’en va indéfiniment jusqu’au fond de la mer’ (p. 117). If the text this demands reading as imaginary it destroys that reading with theological declarations which refer back to the imaginary. ‘For Flaubert, these declarations propose fractured symbolic significations’ says Bowman.<sup>49</sup> Variations in tone and rhythm seem to suggest an ironic reading.

The exposition of dogma occupies a good proportion of the scene. The Ophite history of salvation is rapidly evoked, and even that is interrupted by the cries of *les fidèles*, the appearance of the serpent and so on. L’Inspiré unravels a placard covered in cylinders whose function is not even explained (p. 115). The opposition between Jehovah and Sophia is

---

<sup>48</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>49</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 193.

brought up (117, 119) for which a distinction between the Gnostic entities of God and Creator must be made. The text does at least make clear that God is bad, Sophia and the serpent good, and that it was beneficial to have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge; this scandalous aspect of Ophite doctrine is highlighted in the passage on the relationship between Jesus and the serpent, where it is explained that Jesus' supernatural force when he drank the snake in baptismal waters, his weakness comes from the fact that the snake left him at his crucifixion (p. 118). The serpent, not Jesus, is the logos-Christ. 'Antoine s'évanouit d'horreur' (ibid), and so hoped Flaubert of the reader. His aim is to shock, not to propound a theology.

The numerous proper names in the text cloud its ideological content. The word-play confuses Jesus, logos, Christ and the serpent. For Sophia, an elementary knowledge of Gnosticism is certainly helpful. Confusion abounds: 'Astophios, Oraoïs, Saboath, Adonaï, Eloï, Laô' (p. 115). Even one of Flaubert's editors goes astray when he calls these 'divine names given to Jehovah'.<sup>50</sup> That is not true of the first two names, which are those of Ophite demiurges. They called Jehovah 'Labdalaoth', which features in Flaubert's text, but Flaubert does not explain the reference. And if we do not recognise who the first idol Knouphis (p. 114) is, it is of little consequence, since the Ophites cry, 'Ils croient, les sots, que nous adorons, Knouphis!' The symbol is reduced to a proper noun, and then emptied of meaningful content. The same is true of the litany of proper nouns, the list of the snakes of history, with which Flaubert satirizes the quest for figures of the Messiah in the Old Testament.<sup>51</sup> L'Inspiré praises the snake that cured Ptolomy (which one?), the soldiers of Moses and 'Glaucus fils de Minos' (p. 117). The Orient, Greece and Egypt are syncretized, not in Christianity but in Ophitism, the cult of the serpent – a satire claims Bowman, on the Eclectic version of Christianity. The allusions remain precise but incomprehensible. The text is achieving two things here – satirizing the syncretist's desire for resemblances, whilst preventing an ideological reading of his text.

---

<sup>50</sup> Notes to p. 541 of *Edition Intégrale*, in Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 193.

<sup>51</sup> Bowman, *ibid*.

This is done with sharp irony, created by variations in the rhythm, by the juxtaposition of poetic and disgusting elements: ‘Des enfants demi-nus, dévorés de vermine’, short sentences such as ‘la verdure s’agite et des fleurs tombent’ and exaggeration ‘ces anneaux se dédoublent, emplissant la chambre’. The economy of style contrasts very keenly with irrelevant descriptive details: ‘Ils [...] se communiquent des remèdes pour la maladie’. Comparison is used to devaluate, as the women are ‘tellement perdus dans leurs voiles qu’on dirait des tas de hardes le long du mur!’ Synonymy itself is reductionist: ‘Il est énorme et d’un poids considérable’. The bombastic exaggeration contrasts with Antoine’s inadequate reactions. The *Tentation* wants to make us laugh, claims Bowman, but with bitter, sardonic laughter.<sup>52</sup>

Flaubert’s treatment of his sources is revealing. Foucault says of this scene: ‘One is rather astonished at how much meticulous scholarship creates an impression of pure fantasmagoria’.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the meticulousness is lacunary. Jacques Matter explains the significance of the entities that Flaubert evokes, indeed, only recites. Matisse explains the theory of double creation, and the way in which Gnosis distinguished between logos, Sophia and Creator, but this is suppressed by Flaubert. Taking information provided by Origen, Matter had an engraving made of Ophite symbols, which Flaubert’s *L’Inspiré* unrolls, but Matter explains at length the symbols therein.<sup>54</sup> In his case, words provoke the creation of a figure, which bodies forth an explanation, and Matter proposes the figures in order to make Origen clear, whereas Flaubert does so to make Matter obscure. This is what Flaubert also does with the image of Knouphis, where Flaubert takes Matter’s engraving and turns it into text. Flaubert’s predilection for Matter’s images rather than text shows that he wants to depict

---

<sup>52</sup> Bowman, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘La Bibliothèque fantastique’ in *Flaubert, textes recueillis et présentés* (ed. Raymond Debray Genette), 1970, p. 73, in Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 194.

<sup>54</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 195.

not an explication of an ideological content of a system of belief, but its symbolic representation, just as he presents the various Socialist Schools in *L'Education* by their rhetoric and figurations and not by their ideology. The choice of Matter was fully justified; his *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme* (1843-44) was the contemporary authority on the subject, and Matter himself was open-minded.<sup>55</sup> He treated Gnosticism favourably, whereas many contemporary texts were violently anti-Gnostic. Not only does Flaubert suppress material from Matter, he also changes it.<sup>56</sup> Flaubert has the Gnostics claim that Jesus swallowed a serpent at his baptism, and that the snake then abandoned him on the cross, therefore evoking the despair of Christianity at his passion. According to the Ophites as Matter presents them, the snake suffered from the Fall as much as Man did, and it was not the serpent but Sophia in her emanation *Christas* who rejoined Jesus after the resurrection; the resurrected Jesus spent eighteen months living on Earth with perfect knowledge. By this change, Flaubert suppresses the entirety of Ophite soteriology. Like most Romantics, he is little interested in Jesus after the crucifixion. He destroys the message of the Ophites, which Matter presents quite clearly, and substitutes for it a paradox: the serpent was the saviour.

One can offer a generic explanation of these differences; the *Tentation* is not a book of heresies, but something more. Where Matter retraces Gnostic thought in a fluid and continuous fashion, Flaubert uses parataxis and irony (p. 195). Matter uses symbol, Flaubert represents the symbol without content or else, changes that into something ridiculous and scandalous. It is not a question of profiting from the polysemic possibilities of the serpent; rather, semantic content is destroyed, although polysemic meaning does appear at the end of the scene, as the Nile appears 'Comme un grand serpent au milieu des sables' (p. 118). That suggestion is difficult to weigh in terms of its pertinence, our imagination finds its space, not as Foucault suggests, between the Book and the lamp, but by the occultation of the text. The

---

<sup>55</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 194.

<sup>56</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, *ibid.*

*Tentation* does not substitute traditional beliefs, the credo of Spinoza, or the Micheletists' theory of Love, it destroys the significance of religion in general. Flaubert destroys the most scandalous version of Christianity there is – the Ophite doctrine, and at the same time – destroys the Word.

The *Tentation* does contain some overtly syncretist passages, as Hilarion suggests that the gods, under their criminal forms, may contain some truth. If Flaubert does present religion as a solar or phallic cult, he does not subscribe to Dupuis' theories. Rather, he presents and incessantly metamorphoses the heresies in which the gods themselves are metamorphosed, in a play of repetition, but without the *amplificatio* that, according to classical rhetoric, should accompany a figure of repetition. Apollonius promises 'Je t'expliquerai la raison des formes, durcies, pourquoi Apollo est debout, Jupiter assis, Vénus noire à Corinthe, carrée dans Athènes, conique à Paphos'(p. 157).

For Bowman, the text is marked by two important stylistic traits: the solution of continuity, and the crisis of nomination.<sup>57</sup> The solution of continuity is created by the very rapid succession of gods and religions – gods who do not even finish their sentences, and by the voids and lacunae which separate the gods and heresies. In Version I, *La Mort* provides the narrative justification for this rapidity, but in III this rapidity has no identifiable cause; it is simply the nature of knowledge and history. The examples are multiplied in Version III, but they are not linked. But this means that they do not exist; the history of religions shows the void, the vacuity of all religions, and the entry for *mythe* in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* is only '...'. Jehovah concludes the procession of gods saying 'J'étais le Dieu des années, le Seigneur Dieu, and then 'se fait un silence énorme, une nuit profonde' (p. 213).

---

<sup>57</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 197.

The crisis of nomination is even more acute in *Salammbô*, where to a given god, a multitude of names are attributed, just as the gods themselves are multiplied. Flaubert deprives the signifier of any signified, and also refuse to name the gods, indicated that they can only be hailed in fear and trembling. Zoraster has only one desire: to name the gods, but he fails to do so, the divinities pass by too quickly. To name is no longer a way of contrasting, organising, defining because the effort of naming fails and insignificance prevails faced with the plurality of gods; the *Tentation* question both the logos and the names. Antoine resembles Bouvard and Pécuchet, faced with the passing clouds, which scuttle past too rapidly to be named.

*Bouvard* is in many ways a modern parody of the *Tentation*. Syncretism is discussed in the sections on archaeology, mineralogy and history, as well as featuring in the religious curios of the two protagonists. The matter is expounded more fully than in the *Tentation*, for it contains sections on Druids and Celts, and there are some new ideas, such that of reducing all religion to the cult of the Phallus. The exploratory techniques are simplified in *Bouvard*, often reduced to simple juxtapositions of proper nouns. Etymology plays a more important role, and Flaubert caricatures the etymological quest in order to reveal the feebleness of the quest for the original religion:

Il comparait la Vierge à Isis, L'Eucharistie au Homa des Perses, Baccus à Moïse, l'arche de Noé au vaisseau de Xithuros, les ressemblances pour lui démontraient l'identité des religions (*Bouvard* p. 278).

The vocabulary of causality, absent in the *Tentation*, is very common in *Bouvard*, but it only serves ironically to underline the parallelogisms. The significance of religion depends on the view of the observer: sacrificial Druidic vessel or baptismal font? Finally the novel provides the confrontation both for syncretism and against it. In the argument with Le Père Jeuffroy

(pp. 272-82), each side uses the same thesis to prove opposing points, in an erudite combat, which is reduced to a mere catalogue of names. The two woodlice offer a schematic history of religion à la Hegel: formally God created winds and lightning, now He is diminishing in power and remains unknowable, even if He exists. In the text that Ezra Pound thought to be a precursor of absurdist comedy, we find that the belief matters little, as long as one believes.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere, Flaubert shows a disdain for popular superstition, but this does not solve the problem of knowing who / what God is.

In *Bouvard*, religious syncretism is only one aspect of a more general problem. The confusion of religious content that syncretism creates is only a particular case of pervasive confusion of everything, symbolised by the melon, so dear to Charles Fourier in his vision of a harmonious and finalist universe:

En effet, comme il avait les uns près des autres, des espèces différentes, les Sucrins s'étaient confondus avec les Maraîchers, les Gros Portugal avec le Mogul, le voisinage des pommes d'amour complétant l'anarchie, et il en était résulté d'abominables mulets qui avaient le goût de citrouilles (p. 60).

Here is another instance of repetition with *amplificatio*, where the syncretism of fruits produces only abominations. One can hope, as did the Saint-Simonians, that a new and broad synthesis would replace the old analysis, but the result still tastes like pumpkin. Then comes the attempt to apply the Luke-Howard mnemonic system to the clouds, but they find the forms change before they can name them (pp. 61-2). The absurdity of naming becomes the impossibility of naming; the names of God are signifiers signifying nothing, for one cannot

---

<sup>58</sup> Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, NY: 1934, pp. 116 and 119, in Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p.198.



name God, nor the clouds, and myth conotates silence. The logos exists, but cannot be named, yet there is a persistent need to do so.

If Flaubert attacks religious syncretism, it is because syncretism is a part of a more serious and far-reaching problem; his questioning of the Romantic theory that there exists a harmony between words, the Self, the world and the transcendent. Flaubert substitutes for that harmonious vision, one of ironic chaos. This very use of the word is itself revealing; it appears frequently in his early writings, less so in his work after 1849, and then either in a limited aesthetic sense as in describing works of art or in a pastiche text. Just as he refuses the harmonies of religion, so he refuses those of nature, of the spheres, of Fourier. He so often drew an identity between socialism and religion – the red *bonnet phrygien* is only a sacerdotal skull-cap. But the theme runs in his *Correspondance*.

The pictorial was a refuge for Flaubert, where harmony and the logos were sound. Occlusion in many instances is repression but also a perverse kind of tribute to the pictorial, providing a model of what Flaubert thought the pictorial should be. Both religion and socialism tried to harmonise Creation in a significant teleological order, and Flaubert, who did not believe in Progress and saw only chaos, refuted both for the same reason – just as he questioned any concordance between the logos and the world. As Gaillard has noted, Bouvard and Pécuchet's failure comes from the fact that they want to remotivate the signifying function of the Sign, doing without God, but by repetition Flaubert serves to abolish any unequivocal relationship between the signified and the signifier.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Introductory essay to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.

## Chapter Six

‘Dead, he continues to shine upon us, like those extinct stars whose light still reaches us’ (*Sainte-Beuve*, p. 439). Thus wrote Proust on the death of Ruskin, in January 1900. On the hundredth anniversary of that event *Ruskin 2000* took place at Christchurch, Oxford, along with a symposium at Lancaster University, where a Ruskin library was dedicated, and a major exhibition at the Tate Gallery on Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites was inaugurated.<sup>60</sup> Proust’s interest in Ruskin began in 1899 when he read Robert de La Sizeranne’s *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté*.<sup>61</sup> What attracted Proust to Ruskin was, among other things, the emphatic distinction between the observed and the known, between fresh observation and dulling habit. Ruskin, resurrected by Proust, provides the latter with a recuperable logos. As I shall demonstrate in this chapter, *A la recherche* is not merely the biography of a novelist who resembles Proust, as Descombes contends, it is the description of the very experiences by which the protagonist becomes a novelist who shares Proust’s own conception of art and the creative process. Focussing on the form and meaning of these experiences, I shall tie together the crucial events, or initiations into the Arts, that lead to Marcel’s discovery of his artistic vocation. Applying Proust’s own method of criticism to the novel, I examine Proust’s *phrases-types* – patterns of expression that suggest the inner structure of the creative mind. These are found in heightened moments of consciousness when Marcel is struck by something new or unforeseen – that both forms his vision and reveals to him the means of expressing it.

The centenary of Ruskin’s death marked the importance of another event: the beginning of Proust’s writings on Ruskin. In fact it was that death itself that formed the occasion for Proust’s first essay on Ruskin, a *nécrologie* published on the 20 January 1900 that began with

---

<sup>60</sup> Diane R Leonard, ‘Proust and Ruskin: Ces étoiles dont la lumière nous arrive encore’ in *Proust in Perspective: Visions and Revisions*, (eds. Armine Kotin Mortimer and Katherin Kolb) Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002, pp. 210-98.

<sup>61</sup> Sara Danius, ‘The Mobilisation of the Eye’, in *Proust in Perspective*, pp. 229-300.

the question-begging statement ‘*Ruskin est mort*’. During the years that followed Proust undertook many projects dedicated to keeping this star shining. Between 1900 and 1907 he went on a number of Ruskinian ‘pilgrimages’, published a number of essays on Ruskin, and translated both the *Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lilies*. From the outset, Ruskin was the fixed star in Proust’s moving firmament. He directed his essays towards a search for Ruskin’s living soul, rather than his dead body in the tomb. It was for this reason that he urged readers to make pilgrimages to Ruskin’s favourite sites in France: We honour with fetishism, claimed Proust, which is no more than a delusion, a tomb in which there lies that part of Ruskin which was not his essential self. Ruskin’s spirit lived on, then, incarnated in the places he had loved, and the works he had written. By visiting these places, and by reading his books, Proust believed, he might seek out the logos; by writing about the places and translating books, he might transmit the logos to others. It was in this spirit that Proust undertook his *pélerinages ruskiniens* and his Ruskin translations. His desire to transmit Ruskin’s soul through these translations, was revealed in a letter to Georges Goyau in 1904, thanking him for his praise of *La Bible d’Amiens*:

Vous savez quelle admiration j’ai pour Ruskin. Et comme je crois que chacun de nous a chargé des âmes qu’il aime particulièrement, chargé de les faire connaître et aimer et de leur éviter le froissement des malentendus et la nuit, l’obscurité comme on me dit, vous savez de quelles mains – scrupuleuses mais pieuses et douces que j’ai pu – j’ai touché à celle-là.<sup>62</sup>

Both of the two long essays Proust wrote in 1900 conduct the reader, Leonard tells us, on a guided tour in which he quotes liberally from Ruskin’s text, giving a series of lessons on how to read the cathedral which Ruskin called ‘The Bible of Amiens’. Ruskin was deeply

---

<sup>62</sup> *Correspondance* 4, pp. 398-99, in Leonard, ‘Proust and Ruskin’, p. 214.

concerned with the typological language in which the Gothic cathedral was ‘written’, which had been forgotten in his own time, although it had been the dominant mode of expression and interpretation throughout the Christian Middle Ages.<sup>63</sup> According to this exegetical method, a given historical event was viewed as a type of prefiguration of another, a promise of which a later occurrence was the fulfilment. With regard to the scriptures, figuralism held that the Bible must be read on four levels: literal, figural, moral and analogical. On the last three levels – the spiritual levels – the signs to be interpreted were not works but their referents, the things the word represented, which were to be read as a pictorial language. The cathedrals of the Middle Ages had been inscribed in this pictorial language of figuralism – their sculptures, bas-reliefs and stained-glass windows all portrayed types or figures that had been recodified into a type of language, recognisable to the illiterate masses. However, after the spread of literacy, this pictorial language fell into disuse, and was forgotten, with the result that the meanings expressed in cathedral ornamentation, could no longer be read. In his book on Amiens, therefore, Ruskin tried to restore the lost logos by providing a chapter on ‘Interpretations’ in which he tried to present a literary-guided tour through the cathedral, reading from each of its pages in turn.<sup>64</sup>

In imitation of Ruskin, Proust shows how to read the cathedral sculptures, quoting frequently from *La Bible d’Amiens*. In doing so, he resurrects not only the lost logos but Ruskin’s soul: it was the soul of Ruskin he went to seek there, and which he imparted to the stones of Amiens, as deeply as the sculptors had imparted theirs. By the end of the essay, Proust seems to have found the soul for which he was searching. Though Ruskin may not be among the great prophets on the porch, he writes, we cannot say that he is absent, for we feel him everywhere: if his statue is not at the door of the cathedral, it is at the door of our hearts.

---

<sup>63</sup> Leonard, *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Leonard, ‘Proust and Ruskin’, p. 215.

Having identified Ruskin with the Old Testament prophets in his Amiens essay in 'John Ruskin', Proust identifies him with the archangel whose trumpet-call awakens the dead at the Last Judgement. Here, Proust performs an explicit act of resurrecting Ruskin's soul by searching for, and finding, a *petite figure* carved on the portal of the cathedral, that Ruskin had described in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Proust tells the story of his pilgrimage to Rouen in search of the carving, recounting his difficulties in finding the tiny figure amongst the crowd of sculptures on the cathedral portal, followed by his delight as his companion recognises it. Inspired by a depiction of the Last Judgement on the tympanum above the portal, he assimilates Ruskin into the image of the archangel who resurrects the dead, and the little figure into one of the saved, who assume bodily form.

Proust makes Ruskin a type of archangel; he then emulates the example Ruskin had set in restoring the typological language of the cathedral, but he translates this language into the secular concern of the artist's immortality. In noticing and pointing out the little figure, Ruskin had resurrected the soul of its dead sculptor, had 'reincarnated it' by assimilating it into his own consciousness, his own mythos. Then he had gone a step further: by writing about the figure, he had transmitted the sculptor's soul to his readers. Thus Proust makes of this preservation and transmission of the soul of the artist through art a type of Christian concept of death and resurrection: the artist's soul only dies when his work falls into oblivion, and is resurrected again when it is held in human consciousness and is then given a new resurrection. And one cannot help thinking of the artist with emotion, says Proust, though he does not seem to be attractive because he is a living creature; through so many centuries he was dead. Proust interiorizes the Christian notion of resurrection, transforming it into a resurrection in consciousness; the work only lives at those moments when it is actually being seen or remembered. When it goes unnoticed it is dead, 'Though it may retain its potentiality

for living in the vivacity of its expressive attributes'.<sup>65</sup> In finding the little figure, Proust implies, he is resurrecting Ruskin's soul, for by adding layers of interpretation to the figure, Ruskin had incarnated his soul there also. He was touched in finding the figurine there again; nothing therefore dies that has survived, no more the sculptor's thought than Ruskin's thought.

In the light of this dramatic resurrection, it is all the more surprising to find Proust putting Ruskin back in the tomb in 1903, in a post-scriptum that he added to the essays that are used to form the preface of *La Bible d'Amiens*. Proust states unequivocally that the resurrections of the logos are over. Proust has apparently succumbed to the frozen memory of facts which lacks the power to bring Ruskin back to life. This sort of memory seems to be closely related to the erudition that elicited Proust's charge of idolatry against Ruskin earlier in the post-scriptum when he describes his own reaction to reading a page of *The Stones of Venice* inside St Mark's Church:

Une traduction des *Stones of Venice* conquérant à l'intelligence française une part nouvelle et notable de l'âme de Ruskin et de l'âme de Venise, aurait été à toute époque et en dehors de toute contingence un événement intéressant de notre histoire littéraire. Mais celle (la première en langue française) que nous devons à l'admirable effort de Mme Crémieux vient aussi, comme on dit, bien à son heure. L'heure de Venise, peut être aussi, peut-on penser à certains signes l'heure de Ruskin en France, l'heure de Venise en tout cas. Jamais Venise n'a joui auprès des intelligences d'élite d'une faveur aussi spéciale et aussi haute qu'aujourd'hui. Pour reprendre cette place éminente Venise n'a pas eu, comme Versailles, à remonter une pente de dédains [...] la vogue un peu populaire et confuse qui était la sienne (et ne le distinguait guère de Naples ou

---

<sup>65</sup> Leonard, 'Proust and Ruskin', p. 216.

de Sorrente que par les légendes tragiques qui faisait fond romantique dans ce décor d'amour quelconque) s'est changé en une prédilection sans cesse affinée et approfondie des plus rares esprits de ce temps. [...] Et, maintenant, de cette contemplation un peu passive de Venise, Ruskin va nous faire sortir (*La Bible d'Amiens*, pp. 521-2).

Proust illustrates Ruskin's idolatry by placing the image of the mosaics in opposition to the Byzantine inscriptions accompanying them. In doing so, he implicitly contrasts St. Mark's with the Cathedral of Amiens: in the Gothic cathedral, there is no explanatory text, whereas in the Byzantine church, by contrast, the figures in the mosaic are identified by labels bearing their names and stories. Proust finds that in St Mark's the viewer's attention is therefore diverted away from the effort to decipher the figures to the intellectual act of identifying them; from the act of seeing to the act of knowing. Proust therefore defines one of the problems fundamental to figural interpretation: as long as the reader concentrates on the words of the text, he cannot see the figures they represent. It is only when words become transparent that figures appear.

Such reading not only obfuscates reading the figures; it also impedes resurrection of the past because it appeals to the wrong kind of memory. The frozen memory of facts that it utilizes, the memory of the intellect, can give information about the past but it lacks the power to bring it back to life, to make of it a living present. In the *avant-propos* to his *Préface* to *Sainte-Beuve*, Proust had already hinted at the division between two kinds of memory. Proust said that he had created a sounding-board against which the words of the *Bible of Amiens* could ring more deeply. The echoes, he admits, would not correspond to the words of the *Bible of Amiens* as they penetrate a memory which is itself composed of horizons generally hidden from our sight and whose various distances are only perceptible on a day-to-day basis. To

come into focus, says Proust, mixing his metaphors, with the present word whose resemblances evoked them, these echoes will not have to go through the gentle resistance of that interpoised atmosphere which is the spring of our own life, poetry and memory.

Proust here sets up a contrast between an artificial and living memory – the artificial memory provided by the *caisse de résonance* of footnotes and citations can provide a compendium of knowledge, a context to enhance the reader's intellectual grasp of Ruskin's text. But it cannot bring back to life the past experience of having read those works if the reader has not done so. This contrast becomes in the post-scriptum the opposition between the tomb of the frozen memory of facts, of the intellect, and the potential resurrection of a lost logos.

Clearly, and as Leonard concludes, we have here an early adumbration of the distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory of the kind that will be central to *A la recherche*.<sup>66</sup> Voluntary memory is a function of the intellect and the past it recalls is dead, since it cannot give us the power to relive it. At the end of the post-scriptum therefore, Proust is portraying himself implicitly as having buried Ruskin's spirit under an apparatus of erudition. Yet he also implies that Ruskin awaits in his grave the potential awakening of his soul through a future awakening from the death of oblivion in Proust's (or the reader's) involuntary memory.

The search for a logos in the novel implies that the novel is, in some way, a philosophy. Rather, Vincent Descombes maintains, we should begin with the premise that *A la recherche* is a novel that might have been a book on philosophy.<sup>67</sup> Gilles Deleuze makes the intriguing suggestion that the novel contains a 'critique' of philosophy.<sup>68</sup> If so, this critique of

---

<sup>66</sup> Leonard, 'Proust and Ruskin', p. 217.

<sup>67</sup> Vincent Descombes, *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel*, (trans. Catherine Chance Macksey), Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, (trans. Richard Howard), London: Athlone Press, 2000.



philosophy which Deleuze acknowledges to be ‘eminently philosophical’, is to be sought in the novel.<sup>69</sup> But if *A la recherche* had to give up being a book of philosophy (and perhaps other kinds of book as well) in order to be the novel that it is, then the philosophy of this novel is to be sought first and foremost in the fact that a thing such as the novel exists at all. The philosophy of this novel must be understood through the philosophy of the genre itself.

The term ‘philosophy of the novel’ should be given to mean: the express reasons the author would have given – had he been asked, and had taken the trouble to formulate them – for his choice of the novel in preference to other forms. According to this hypothesis, the only ideas there can be in a novel are ‘novelistic ideas’. As for the philosophy of the novel, it is never set forth in the novel itself, it will be found in commentary – the commentary we construct to explain why and how we understand the novel.

We know that Proust hesitated for some time between the genre of the essay and that of the novel, and that he was severe in his diagnosis of this state of uncertainty. He saw it as a new manifestation of the enemy within that blocked achievement of his vocation to be a writer; ‘Premonition of death. Soon you will no longer be able to say it all. Sloth, doubt and impotence hiding behind uncertainty as to form. Should I make it a novel, a philosophical study, am I a novelist?’<sup>70</sup>

Proust is not the first or only writer to have felt thus. In fact, we recognise here a very Flaubertian experience: a sort of paralysis of the will, growing in proportion to the wealth of possibilities open to the individual. Whatever the author writes will, moreover, be judged as though the rules of the genre were his own rules. That is why the official modern solution to the burden of choice is, theoretically, the refusal to choose. At least, that is the solution

---

<sup>69</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, p. 165. I have not been able to trace the original.

<sup>70</sup> Carnet de 1908, no. 61, 15, in Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 10.

professed by Nominalist critics. The artist, according to such thoughts, does not have to choose amongst pre-existing art-forms. He is to appropriate them as he pleases. He must 'create' his logos from his style, authentic values and medium of expression. Here as elsewhere 'Modernism' amounts to a call for the emancipation of the individual from historical and collective constraints. The modern response is that of the individualist.

At one point of the Proustian logos we find pure matter and force, at the opposite pole, spirit and personality. Between the two stand human desires, tending sometimes towards the brutality of this world, sometimes towards the poetry of other worlds. Charlus dreams of something else, and so in the depths of the brothel remains a transcendent creature.

In all, his desire to be beaten, with all its ugliness, betrayed a dream:

Or les aberrations sont comme des amours où la tare malade a tout recouvert, tout gagné. Même dans la plus folle, l'amour se reconnaît encore. L'insistance de M. de Charlus à demander qu'on lui passât aux pieds et aux mains des anneaux d'une solidité éprouvée, à réclamer la barre de justice, et à ce que me dit Jupien, des accessoires féroces qu'on avait la plus grande peine à se procurer même en s'adressant à des matelots – car ils servaient à infliger des supplices dont l'usage est la plus rigoureuse, à bord des navires - au fond de tout cela il y avait chez M. de Charlus tout son rêve de virilité, attesté au besoin par des actes brutaux, et toute l'enluminure intérieure, invisible pour nous, mais dont il projetait ainsi quelques reflets, de croix de justice, de tortures féodales (IV 419).

A prosaic title says only what it says. A title that says more is poetic or figural. It symbolises something that cannot be connected directly, that is beyond ordinary life and its trivialities. In

his study of Flaubert, Proust praised the wonderfully solid title *L'Education sentimentale*. Indeed, the title of this novel could serve as that of a dozen novels. The title *Madame Bovary*, in contrast, is positive; it is valid only for a single novel. Symbolism in literature is precisely this aspiration to generality, akin to the desire for immateriality. The symbolist dreams of writing a book that would be the equivalent of all books and finding for this book – the Book – a title that would be all titles, that would concentrate in one sentence the Word, the secret of all sentences and words. This undertaking involves a danger that Proust recognises quite early. In 1896 he was already raising objections, saying that Symbolism, like the Republic, had its partisans, and that young people were wooed into it as into politics.<sup>71</sup>

The Proustian logos, as Descombes points out, resides in a fundamentally dualistic cosmology in which everything is arranged in polar opposites:<sup>72</sup>

Matter	Spirit
Ugliness	Beauty
Positive, Symbolic, Figural	Limited, general
Commonplace	Poetic reverie/artistic creation
Space and time	Eternity

The point must be stressed that this cosmology is not a 'philosophy of Proust'. It represents not his thought, but the world-system in which he thinks. At no point does Proust feel the need to defend these oppositions; he proceeds as if he saw in them an order essential to thought, an unquestionable common asset. In this world-view, poetry, art and philosophy are on the same side. Faithful to Aristotle, Proust sees poetry and history as in opposition to each other. Poetry is more philosophical than history because it aspires to the necessary and

---

<sup>71</sup> 'La Jeunesse flagornée', *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 395.

<sup>72</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 18.

universal. In *Albertine disparue*, the narrator and his mother comment on two surprising marriages, those of the little Swann girl and of Jupien's niece. This conversation occasions an interlude of the wisdom of families. This homespun wisdom is alien to poetry and art. It is not the muse of childhood. It is the wisdom inspired by the muse: 'ce qui féconde un enfant, ce n'est pas un livre d'enfantillages' (*Sainte-Beuve* p. 310).

Proust accepts the categories of a cosmology that opposes the categories of the artistic and the historical. But the novel is future history. The novel is on the side of the commonplace, the contingent, the ethereal. Choosing to write a novel is to gather up in one form, everything that the more exalted muses have rejected. Anyone writing a novel has chosen to include the commonplace. When Proust abandons his project against Sainte-Beuve, and commits to *A la recherche*, he accepts the risk of mixing the ordinary, the *gerede*, thereby resisting the seductions of the artistic dream and the unattainable Ideal. In the form of a novel, the search for truth will no longer be the absolute search for an Ideal; it will be a search for the Absolute in the Balzacian sense. Once we are 'inside' the novel, truth and the absolute necessarily take on the aspect of concrete fact. Philosophical truth becomes our logos. The search for truth becomes an inquiry into Odette's past or Albertine's friends. Both Swann and Marcel are two great seekers after truth. But the questions that haunt them are quite specific. What did Odette do with Forcheville on the day she would not open her door? Did Albertine have a rendez-vous with Vinteuil's daughter?

Readers who look for the Proustian logos do not feel they are abusing the text or forcing irrelevant questions on it. The narrator himself is, in many respects, a mentor. He claims not only to have drawn from life, but to arrive at important conclusions: 'des grandes lois' and 'des précieuses vérités'. Of all the doctrines *A la recherche* seems to contain, the most celebrated is the doctrine of Time and Memory. But on the subject of the narrator-mentor, we

can make the same observation as before that the narrator makes about the painter Elstir. This painting represents a hospital, as beautiful beneath the lapis-lazuli sky as the cathedral itself, but is more daring than Elstir the theoretician, the Elstir, the man of taste, the lover of things medieval. It may well be that Proust's narration is bolder than his narrator.

None of the characters in *A la recherche* is presented as a thinker. The writer Bergotte is a sceptic. The scholar Brichot seems superficial. A single philosopher makes a fleeting appearance at the dinner-party given by the Verdurins at la Raspelière, a Norwegian professor, who speaks French only haltingly. This is for two reasons: firstly, he has just learned it and therefore lacks spontaneity. In the second place, he is a philosopher, and being a metaphysician, he always thinks of what he intends to say as he is saying it, which even in a native Frenchman would be the cause of slowness. The only philosopher in *A la recherche* is quickly interrupted by Mme Verdurin. As we know the characters in *A la recherche* spend much of their time chatting. The philosopher among them would have to be foreign, to compound any problems faced by a metaphysician at a social gathering. He is unable to remain on stage for very long: 'Cet homme au parler si lent (il y avait un silence après chaque mot) devenait d'une rapidité vertigineuse pour s'échapper dès qu'il avait dit adieu'. This halting speech represents the total presence granted in the entire novel to metaphysics. Poetry is given equally short shrift. When Rachel reads a poem of La Fontaine at the final afternoon party of the novel, there is general astonishment. As the poem is well-known, the guests expect something familiar. But Rachel's rendition, Proust, tells us, was 'intelligent': 'car il présupposait la poésie que l'actrice était en train de dire, comme un tout existant avant cette récitation et dont nous n'entendions qu'un fragment' (IV 576). The recitation interrupts conversation, a fragment of poetry rises up to dominate the gathering, never blending into the ordinary chit-chat. Rachel reads lavishly, with pauses between words:

L'annonce de la poésie que presque tout le monde connaissait avait fait plaisir. Mais quand on vit l'actrice, avant de commencer, chercher partout des yeux d'un air égaré, lever les mains d'un air suppliant et pousser comme un gémissement chaque mot, chacun se sentait gêné, presque choqué de cette exhibition de sentiments. Personne ne s'était dit que réciter des vers pouvait être quelque chose comme cela (IV 597).

On this occasion it is the Princesse de Guermantes who intervenes in order to keep the situation from deteriorating. She almost interrupts the actress by giving the signal for a general applause, mistaking a pause in the poem for its end.

Neither philosophy nor poetry manages to impose its presence on the novel. One does encounter the writer Bergotte in the drawing-room of Mme Swann. But just at the critical juncture, Proust musters his distinction (already elaborated in his criticism of Sainte-Beuve's method) between an authentic self and a social self. The person one meets in Odette's drawing-room is Bergotte *homme du monde*.<sup>73</sup> As for Bergotte the artist, one can never meet him; he has to be read. Proust never actually gives us sustained examples of Bergotte's prose. He speaks frequently of Bergotte's style, without ever delivering up one sentence from his pen. We are destined never to see more than such scattered fragments as 'le vain songe de la vie', 'l'inépuisable torrent des belles apparences', 'le tourment stérile et délicieux de comprendre et d'aimer', the 'émouvantes effigies qui anoblissent à jamais la façade vénérable et charmante des cathédrales (I 93), along with phrases from his brochure on La Berma: 'noblesse plastique' and so forth (II 435). The great man is presented for us as a man of the world. The writer in him is only ever evoked.

---

<sup>73</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 33.

Neither the profound thinker nor the contemplative artist can become a character in the novel. This limitation of the novel – as much a resource as much as it is a limitation – has to be taken seriously. That novel is at home only in limpid prose.<sup>74</sup> Novelists have no difficulty in showing us a character who would like to be an artist, or who believes himself so, or who has not proved capable of being one. The novel can accommodate the apprentice philosopher, the budding poet fresh from the provinces, or the student who may someday be somebody. It can also accommodate the mad thinker, the bankrupt genius, the failed artist, the uninspired poet. What the novel cannot demonstrate, is the artist in the moment of producing his work, or the writer in the art of writing.

And yet the subject matter of *A la recherche* is, by common agreement, that Marcel becomes a writer. Although the doctrine of the dual self would seem to rule this out: Marcel the *homme du monde*, is not to be confused with Marcel the being who, in the end, is vouchsafed the strength to write. But whatever the case with the writer, the narrator, a very real presence in the novel, is also a mentor. And his teachings are to some degree the ‘philosophy of Proust’. One of the distinguishing features of philosophy however, from the time of Plato, is that it can be transmitted through a logos (unlike bodies of wisdom that cannot be revealed or comprehended without the aid of the master). In order to contain a philosophy of art, *A la recherche* would have to be an expository work, of the type that discusses Proust’s reflections on art. In point of fact, as Descombes points out, such a work would be purveying a fiction.<sup>75</sup> It is a doctrine that might have been proposed by someone at the turn of the twentieth century, but that someone is not Proust, nor is it Marcel, a person who might become a philosopher if only he could find a subject to which he could give ‘un sujet où je puisse faire servir un philosophie infinie’ (I 175). The future philosophy of Proust is fabricated nevertheless on the basis of Marcel’s disconnected propositions. In order not to confuse the philosopher, to whom

---

<sup>74</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 73.

<sup>75</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 34.

this philosophy is attributed, with Marcel, who longs in vain to find his subject, Descombes suggests that we refer to the former as pseudo-Marcel and imagines the following encyclopaedia entry for him:

Qu'enseignerait le pseudo-Marcel? Comment argumentait-il? Qu'avait-il à répondre aux objections? Quelle sorte de preuves acceptait-il? Avait-il une méthode particulière, un point de départ, des techniques propres? Tout ça, nous l'ignorons. Il nous manque donc non seulement le texte de ce philosophe, mais son *logos*, son discours philosophique. Il nous manque cela même qui fait une philosophie.<sup>76</sup>

Does Proust believe in idealism, in pessimism, in monadology, in solipsism or in any of those doctrines described by Lalande in the *Vocabulaire de la philosophie*? Does he seriously believe that *les philosophes* know the answers to these questions? We note that some of these issues were debated by thinkers of the period, notably William James and Henri Bergson. The truth is that we have no idea, although it is easy to find eminently quotable set-pieces expressing the most orthodox pessimism.

One can indeed multiply the quotations in defence of optimism or pessimism. The last word belongs by right to the example of History, in accepting 'tout ce que les muses plus hautes de la philosophie et de l'art ont rejeté, tout ce qui n'est pas fondé en unité, tout ce qui n'est que contingent'. The novelist shows us a subjective idealist, just as he is, not only in his pronouncements, but in his 'contingency' and, by the same token, in his infidelities to truth: 'L'ivresse réalise pour quelques heures l'idéalisme subjectif, le phénoménisme pur; tout n'est plus qu'apparences et n'existe plus qu'en fonction de notre sublime nous-même' (II 173). He

---

<sup>76</sup> Descombes, *Proust: La Philosophie du roman*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1987, p. 56.



may, for example, be someone like Legrandin, who cannot refrain from expressing his social admiration:

Certes, je savais bien que l'idéalisme, même subjectif, n'empêche pas de grands philosophes de rester gourmands, ou de se présenter avec ténacité à l'Académie. Mais vraiment Legrandin n'avait pas besoin de rappeler si souvent qu'il appartenait à une autre planète quand tous ces mouvements convulsifs de colère ou d'amabilité étaient gouvernés par le désir d'avoir une bonne position de celle-ci (II 204).

Does this mean that the idealist is unmasked, or that his idealism is, as in the case of Legrandin, merely the ideology of a social climber? Legrandin, with his comic-serving name, may be a sorry specimen of idealism, but there is no other figure in the novel who presents true idealism. The narrator learns from life a lesson in idealism, as we learn in *A la recherche*:

Chaque personne qui nous fait souffrir peut être attachée par nous à une divinité dont elle n'est qu'un reflet fragmentaire et le dernier degré, divinité (Idée) dont la contemplation nous donne aussitôt de la joie au lieu de la peine que nous avons. Tout l'art de vivre, c'est de ne nous servir de personnes qui nous font souffrir (IV 477).

The mind cannot get outside itself to reach external things; it knows only its own representations. Proust implies that we fail to take into account a reality that is perfectly accessible. The episodes that are most revealing, with regard to the subjective idealism in which we live, in ignorance and at our own cost, are the episodes of our own romantic life. Proust does indeed sound like a metaphysician when he speaks of the existence of the external world. But he uses the phrase in an oblique, prosaic sense, in which the existence of the external world means the role played in the birth of love, by the reality of the person loved:

‘M’eût-il fallu dessiner de mémoire un portrait de Mlle de d’Eporcheville, donner sa description, son signalement, cela m’eût été impossible, et même de la reconnaître dans la rue’ (II 566). The external world certainly exists, in which one may meet Mlle d’Orgeville, and Mlle de Forcheville, alias Gilberte. But none of this counts, claims Proust, at the moment at which love crystallises around a fleeting image. This lesson in idealism has no relation to metaphysics. It coincides rather with the conclusion of an unsparing *moraliste*:

Certains philosophes disent que le monde extérieur n’existe pas et que c’est en nous-mêmes que nous développons notre vie. Quoi qu’il en soit, même en ses plus humbles commencements, ce qui est un exemple frappant du peu qu’est la réalité pour nous (II 566).

Questioning the accessibility of the external world puts Proust firmly in the category of ‘Modern Art’. When we speak of modernity, the modern, and modernism we remember that these terms have their French counterparts but have come into being in the course of separate debates, as Descombes reminds us in his ‘Notes sur la concept de la modernité’.<sup>77</sup> German thinkers are more likely to speak of *die Neuzeit* as modern philosophy, as modern philosophy is post-Cartesian. When German authors speak of the post-modern, they speak of the ‘modern’ as the erstwhile alliance between natural sciences and the project of human emancipation, under the aegis of *die Aufklärung*. As for the post-modern, it corresponds for them to a decline of modern ideas. The signification given here to modern times is expressed in philosophical terms. The modern period will often be defined as the era of emancipated subjectivity, or an era of the affirmation of the *right* to subjectivity, as manifested in *La Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*, the champion of freedom of conscience, and freedom of investigation, the autonomy of art.

---

<sup>77</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, pp. 150-152.

Who speaks of modernism? In French the word had no currency in the early twentieth century, except in the vocabulary of Catholic theologians, for whom modernism was the attempt to re-formulate dogma with a view to making it compatible to what was called ‘the Modern mentality’; Proust makes fun of the term *emmentalité* (II 237). Today it is primarily professors of Anglo-American literature who employ the term, defining a canon that includes Eliot and Pound for poetry, Joyce and Woolf for the novel. In this usage the word conveys an attitude that suggests quite well Rimbaud’s injunction to be ‘absolument moderne’. Modernism is a state of mind (a *mentalité*, as the Duc de Guermantes would say) that first asserts itself in literature and the arts. The modernist is the artist who feels compelled to overthrow the art forms handed down by tradition. This authors who speak of modernism are thinking less of ‘modern ideas’ than of a style. In what respect is there a modern style? The word modernism, as it ends with the abstraction *-ism*, suggests a militant adherence to some programme or dogma, which would lead us to think that there is a modern style whose partisans are presumably modernists. And yet, as we regard modernism as an inexhaustible desire for rupture (in the domain of forms) it seems difficult to attribute to it any commitment to a particular style. In fact, critics dealing with modernism are never happier than when dealing with literary history and the history of art, in which there is open conflict between the champions of Conservatism and the partisans of invention. In painting the shrines dear to the modernist will be the *Salons des refusés* (Paris, 1863), the independent exhibitions of the Impressionists (Paris 1874, 1876, 1877), the post-Impressionist exhibition organised in London by Roger Fry and the Armory Show (New York, 1913).<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 151.

American critics who have tried to define modernism through Formalist doctrine have rediscovered the inspiration of Mallarmé. Clement Greenberg has defined the modernist tendency in art as an attempt at purification:

What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique, irreducible, not only in art in general, but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects particular and exclusive to itself. It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art corresponded to all that was unique to the nature of its medium.<sup>79</sup>

Michael Fried has quite aptly corrected the essentialist factor in the formalist position and stressed the importance of an agnostic element, an element of challenge in the modernist movement. What the modernist painter can be said to discover in his work:

What can be said to be revealed to him in it – is not the irreducible essence of all painting rather than that which, in the present moment of painting's history, is capable of convincing him that it can stand comparison with the painting of both the modernist and pre-modernist past whose quality seems to him beyond question.<sup>80</sup>

Valéry is defining modernity in Baudelaire's sense (rather than the Anglo-Saxon 'modernism') when he writes:

Une époque, peut-être, se sent 'moderne' quand elle trouve en soi, également admises, coexistantes et agissantes dans les mêmes individus, quantités de doctrines, de

---

<sup>79</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' in *The New Art, A Critical Anthology*, (ed. G. Battcock), New York: Dutton, 1966, p. 102.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Fried, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings', in *New York Painting and Sculpture, 1840-1970* (ed. Goldzahler), New York: Dutton, 1969, p. 422.

tendances, de ‘vérités’ fort différentes, sinon tout à fait contradictoires. Ces époques paraissent donc plus compréhensives ou plus éveillées que celles où ne domine guère qu’un seul idéal, une seule foi, un seul style.<sup>81</sup>

The text of Valéry’s provides a principle for making a distinction. A period feels ‘modern’: ‘modernity’ is a question of sensibility or feeling, and therefore is directly aesthetic. But if one can feel modern, one cannot also think as a modern, follow the *via moderna*. This is the modern in the German sense, a question of representation and theoretical principles. And finally, one can take the modern as one’s goal – and this attitude defines modernity.<sup>82</sup>

Debates on the post-modern would no doubt be clearer if one distinguished between 1) the post-modern or the re-examination of the theoretical bases of all modern orientation of thought. 2) post-modernism, or the questioning of the liberating value of modernism and 3) post-modernity, or the decline in the heroism of modern life.<sup>83</sup>

Is Proust modern? The question has to be made more specific. He is not a ‘modern’ author in the Enlightenment sense. Although he remains faithful to the ideal of an emancipation of subjectivity, he does not expect an historical liberation from it. From this point of view, Proust would already be post-modern, since he attached no significance to historical evolution. If modernity is a question of style, Proust may, in certain senses, be considered modern. He does share the modernist conviction that an artist wants to measure himself as an individual against the whole tradition of his art as it is embodied in styles that are in every case individual. His modernism remains profoundly individual. As soon as one begins to speak of the avant-garde programme, one finds oneself in the company of the Verdurin clan or Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin. And finally there is the question of modernity: is Proust a

---

<sup>81</sup> ‘Le Triomphe de Manet’, in *Œuvres* II, p.1327, in Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>82</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 154.

<sup>83</sup> I am using Descombes’ definitions, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 153.

writer of modern life? If modernity consists of the poetic revolution that changes the sources of artistic inspiration (heroic ideals) from the public to the private, then Proust must be considered one of the foremost writers of modernity. For *A la recherche* systematically eliminates public events – and the historical – as the source of either exaltation or despair. The Dreyfus Affair is a mere topic of conversation, the occasion for a lesson in scepticism with regard to history. The Great War has no meaning in itself; the only possible meaning might be that it resulted from a series of misunderstandings. On the other hand, *A la recherche* draws upon private sources of inspiration to a degree never before seen in literature. In Balzac's work, the private subjects that furnish ideas for a novel are drawn as of private life in the sense of a life restricted to the domestic social sphere.<sup>84</sup> Private life means marriage, career, social success. Proust displays the poetry of private life and circumscribes it within the limits of an individuality. It is not Marcel's life that gives occasion for exaltation or despair, but his experience.

Critics can be credited with stressing the 'typically modern aspects' of *A la recherche*, but their interpretation of these modernist traits is of doubtful value. Nonetheless, we must reckon with the traits they identify:

- 1) The consciousness of a gap between language as it is ordinarily used and as it is used in a literary work, with the result that in the novel, the concern for language seems to dominate,
- 2) the act of self-contemplation involved in the work; an attempt to show what has made the work possible and
- 3) the difference between the book the author speaks of – only described as 'le livre à venir', and the work we are reading.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Descombes, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 157.

<sup>85</sup> *Pace* Descombes, *ibid.*

But we remember that the comparison to be made is between Proust the novelist and other novelists, to compare like with like. We need a version specific to the traits that have been identified as ‘typically modern’. We will find them in the life of Marcel, the individual’s life within the novel. We will not find them in Marcel’s inner life (as his logos, is, by definition, inaccessible to others). Will not find them in his intellectual life (which would be expressed in theoretical propositions) but in the life Marcel leads with his family and friends. We must attend less to Marcel’s ideas about pictures, literature and churches than to the ideas for a novel that Proust finds in a sonata, a painting or a book.

The apprenticeship of the protagonist over the course of the narrative is in many respects an education into the Arts through the Arts. Wherever possible, Proust tries to present the experience as occurring for the first time: a reading of a first novel, attendance at a first theatre matinée. Marcel’s initiation corresponds to the nineteenth-century systems developed by the professors of philosophy, as Anne Henry reminds us.<sup>86</sup> We find a complete aesthetic flowing from Proust’s pen – not merely a painting or music, but a general aesthetic. Proust delivers up his aesthetic in the form of a narrative, done in a fairly simplistic manner. Didacticism would be hard to swallow if the episodes of aesthetic initiation were not scattered throughout the story. The procedure consists of showing us Marcel just before and just after his personal discovery of a particular art. Beforehand, Marcel is ignorant of the art he desires so much to know. La Berma in *Phèdre*, for example, is ‘drame mycénien, symbole solaire, mythe delphique’, whilst the church at Balbec is ‘une église presque persanne’. Not knowing what he is to experience, his head is filled with naïve preconceptions he has formed by taking some words literally. Marcel proves insensitive at first contact to what each work of art has to offer. None of his preconceived ‘limpidité’ (II 623) corresponds to the ‘nuances nombreuses’

---

<sup>86</sup> Anne Henry, *Marcel Proust: Théories pour une esthétique*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1981.

that a truly beautiful work of art has to offer (I 623). Afterwards, we are shown a Marcel now capable of receiving this individual impression, fortunate enough to have been initiated by a mentor (Bergotte for Berma, Elstir for Balbec). He has learned to see and to hear, and can now experience the individuality of the aesthetic object.

When Proust chose to show us a character progressively discovering the reality of art, he had to present him as a character in a novel. This presentation brings out certain noteworthy peculiarities of Marcel's aesthetic education. Broadly speaking, Marcel's aesthetic education corresponds to a vocation because its goal is to make him capable of doing what he is meant to do: to take in and translate an individual impression. The moment of Marcel's achieving this is the moment of final deliverance (or *Le Temps retrouvé*). One finds in *A la recherche* the same paths to wisdom as in the Ancient doctrines: a 'short way' and a 'long way'. The short or mystical way is that of the Mysteries, whereas the long way involves the practice of exercises of contemplation through mediation. Readers of *A la recherche* are often struck by the 'short way' of involuntary reminiscence and illuminations. Deliverance occurs in the beatific instant on the occasion of a sensation experienced for its own sake. In contrast, the 'long way' of *A la recherche* is, as with the Ancients, dialectical, it takes time. Purification of the soul requires that the postulant submit himself to exercises of increasing difficulty, and that he confront paradoxes and contradictions of various kinds – in short, that he pass through all the stages of an initiation into Truth. Only at the very end is Marcel blessed with illumination. Proust seems to make the short way a reward for those who have shown willing to travel by the long way.

Passage through the various artistic disciplines is necessary. Successive episodes in the novel that have an artistic theme can be stations along Marcel's path to deliverance. These episodes, compared with each other as the terms of a series, all tell the same story. Marcel learns that



when an authentic prize is grasped, the event involves an accentuation of a part at the expense of a whole. If he wants to become an accomplished aesthete, Marcel must be ready to sacrifice the whole of the work or performance, the better to appreciate its individuality which shines with an 'éclat individuel'.

Marcel's encounter with Elstir's art takes place at Balbec. Hoping to meet the girls of the *petite bande*, he has no desire to visit the painter, and when he finally decides to visit Elstir, it is only to obey his grandmother's wishes (II 186). But once he enters the artist's studio, his boredom and indifference are suddenly replaced with a feeling of joyful anticipation:

'C'est aussi en détournant les yeux que je traversai la jardin qui avait une pelouse – en plus petit comme chez n'importe quel bourgeois dans la banlieue de Paris – une petite statuette de galant jardinière, des boules de verre où l'on se regardait, des bordures de bégonias et une petite tonnelle sous laquelle des rocking-chairs étaient allongés devant une table de fer. Mais après tous ces abords empreints de laideur citadine, je ne fis plus attention aux moulures chocolat des plinthes quand je fus dans l'atelier; je me sentis parfaitement heureux, car par toutes les études qui étaient autour de moi, je sentais la possibilité de m'élever à une connaissance, poétique, féconde en joies, de maintes formes que je n'avais pas isolées jusque-là du spectacle total de la réalité. Et l'atelier d'Elstir m'apparut comme le laboratoire d'une sorte de nouvelle création du monde, où, du chaos que sont toutes choses que nous voyons, il avait tiré, en les peignant sur divers rectangles de toile qui étaient posés dans tous les sens, ici une vague de la mer écrasant avec colère sur le sable son écume lilas, là un jeune homme en coutil blanc accoudé sur le pont d'un bateau. Le veston du jeune homme et la vague éblouissante avaient pris une dignité nouvelle, du fait qu'ils continuaient à être,

encore que dépourvus de ce en quoi ils passaient pour consister, la vague ne pouvait mouiller ni le veston habiller personne' (II 190).

The important word is 'poétique' for Marcel immediately senses that Elstir is a maker, the creator of a new world, drawn from reality yet different from it. The painter has consciously 'extracted' certain elements and motifs from the confusion and chaos of actuality, and it is only when they have been thus isolated and formed by a creative art that these elements can fully be seen. Marcel is discovering that the only way to see the world is through the eyes of an artist.

At the same time as he perceives this fundamental distinction between the opaqueness of life and the clarity of art, Marcel also begins to understand the nature of things in art, and their essential difference from actual things: the young man's jacket and the splattering wave acquire a fresh dignity, from the fact that they continue to exist (II 191).

This observation seems at first very simple. Marcel is noticing what, at first glance, anyone who has ever looked at a painting would have noticed, namely that the objects represented are not real persons or objects but only images in paint. Despite its apparent simplicity, Marcel's observation is the key to Proust's conception of art, however. For Proust, the creative art results from the 'spiritualization of reality' and this spiritualization, so the argument runs, involves the transformation of the actual into the virtual.<sup>87</sup> Elstir extracts not a wave but the appearance of a wave from material reality. Whereas in the context of the actual world, the function of a wave is to splash, in the context of painting its *dignité nouvelle* derives from its new function – that of a pictorial motif expressing a particular vision of reality. The extraction or 'abstraction' of motifs from the actual world necessarily implies the exclusion of that world

---

<sup>87</sup> George Stambolian, *Marcel Proust and the Creative Encounter*, London: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 20.

together with its appeal to all the senses. Vinteuil's music is composed only of sounds, so Elstir creates a world that can be seen because it is only given to vision. In other words, the reality of the world can be seen and known only by images that, by definition, determine their own modes of perception, and that exist only within the limits of the virtual, and 'purified' space, to reprise Greenberg's term.

These ideas of Stambolian's can be applied with equal validity to literature. In *chez Swann*, the narrator remarks that a novelist gives his reader a powerful sense of reality, precisely because his characters are not real people (I 18-19). Although the novelist's remarks accurately describe what is the discovery of any novelist, they are particularly relevant to Proust's own experience and the type of novel he wrote. Marcel is continually forced to acknowledge his inability to possess the world outside himself. And when the reality of the exterior world is revealed, it often causes him intense suffering or disappointment. To use the example provided by Elstir's painting, Marcel begins with an image of a wave in his mind, only to discover that in reality, a wave splashes. The sole escape from the anguish he must endure each the deluge of reality strikes him, seem to lie in habit and forgetfulness. But if forgetfulness protects him from suffering, it also destroys his sense of time and change by creating a succession of selves. *A la recherche* describes therefore,

precisely, those conflicts and difficulties of life in time and reality that according to the narrator, it is the novelist's task to overcome and that Proust, in his writing, did overcome, by replacing the strangeness and otherness of life by the strangeness and otherness of images of art.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Stambolian, *Proust and the Creative Encounter*, p. 203.

The narrator's definition of the particular form reality takes in a book adds new significance to Proust's metaphor of the 'inner book', revealed by involuntary memory. It also explains why the art of self-contemplation, the modernist trait *par excellence* is equated to 'reading of one's own life'. The book of memory gives *dignité nouvelle* to Marcel's life by revealing a past that has already been spiritualized. He discovers, in this virtual world that all events, persons and places continue to exist in their reality as images that can be fully possessed or assimilated by the mind. He can therefore see them because they have lost their opacity and he can know them because he does not have to endure the pain of their actuality. Above all, because of the virtual existence of this world within him, Marcel is able to perceive the true form of time and space.

The very words that Proust uses to inscribe the world revealed by involuntary memory apply as well to the actual world of art. Both are, at the same time, real and ideal without being actual or abstract. In both, persons and things are present as images but absent as actual things. Finally, because both worlds are virtual, they affirm paradoxically, the true existence of reality, while at the same time revealing its essence. The world re-designed again by art alone can give expressive form to the images that memory has extracted from life. The past that is recovered and re-constructed through involuntary memory must be fully read and translated by art into the spiritual equivalents of language. Just as a painter gives form to space by means of a brush, so the novelists must form the space and time of his novel by means of words.

It is important to recall, as Stambolian points out, that the virtual world Proust presents is, for Marcel, an actual world, until he discovers his vocation.<sup>89</sup> The reader who can 'possess' Albertine, despite all her mystery, because she is a fictive character, reads the story of a man

---

<sup>89</sup> Stambolian, *Proust and the Creative Encounter*, p. 203.

who cannot possess her, as long as she remains a real person. In other words, the reader is given ideas of suffering created by Proust, but only Marcel truly suffers. In his encounter with Vinteuil's music Marcel himself learns, of course, that for the artist, suffering becomes joy, once it is transformed into images or sounds, and given form.

The function of art is to liberate us from the prison of the actual world by converting things into images. This conversion can only take place within the soul because it results from the creative activity of the *esprit*, which Proust defined as 'liberté'. Art alone can transform reality without disfiguring it. Unlike habit and forgetfulness, that allow us to escape suffering, but blind us to the truth, art gives us a knowledge of the real world. For both the artist and the reader this knowledge is the source of joy and exaltation. By means of art, both are liberated, not only from the subjugation of things, but also the egoism of the superficial self, which, because it is tied to the actual world, can alone be subjugated by it. The spirit of the artist, which is both real and ideal creates a logos, a world analogous to it, which in turn can be assimilated by the reader:

Les stores étaient clos de presque tous les côtés, l'atelier était assez frais et, sauf, un endroit où le grand jour apposait au mur sa décoration éclatante et passagère obscure; seule était ouverte une petite fenêtre rectangulaire encadrée de chèvrefeuilles qui, après une bande de jardin, donnait sur une avenue; de sorte que l'atmosphère de la plus grande partie de la chambre était sombre, transparente et compacte dans sa masse, mais humide et brillante aux cassures où sertissait la lumière, comme un bloc de cristal de roche dont une face déjà taillée et polie ça et là, luit comme un miroir et s'irise. Tandis qu'Elstir sur ma prière, continuait à peindre, je circulais dans le clair-obscur, m'arrêtant devant un tableau puis devant un autre (II 191).

The description immediately recalls the work of Vermeer, which so often represents a room in which all the objects and figures are bathed in the light from a single window – a light that is also fresh and cool.<sup>90</sup> Even more striking are the similarities between Elstir's studio and other privileged places in the novel. It is cool and dusky in the bedroom at Combray when the young Marcel awakens, filled with an *obscure fraîcheur* in which Marcel reads in the filtered sunlight. The painter's studio is also like Marcel's room in Paris in which he experiences the joys of solitude that transform his room into an ark. In the *clair-obscur* between the atmosphere of these rooms, the exterior world enters the space of the *esprit* in the form of images or reflections that are both real and ideal. Proust's art in describing Marcel's room reveals some of the qualities he found in the domestic scenes painted by Chardin, an artist Proust admired for his ability to combine things and people in those rooms, which are more than a thing, and perhaps more than a person (*Sainte-Beuve*, pp. 372-4).<sup>91</sup> Like Chardin's rooms, the privileged spaces of the novel express the ties between people, between beings and things, between past and present, between light and shade. Both beauty and happiness are created by the same conditions of harmony.

One understands now why, in 1904, to the Comtesse de Noailles, Proust wrote that in a perfect work of art, all elements are bathed in the same atmosphere:

But if one tries to discover what constitutes the absolute beauty of certain things, one sees that it is not profundity, or this or that other virtue that seems eminent. No, it is a kind of fusion ('fendu') of transparent unity where all things, losing their original aspects as things, have come to arrange themselves, each next to the other in a kind of order, penetrated by the same light, seen each in the other, without a single word

---

<sup>90</sup> Stambolian, *Proust and the Creative Encounter*, pp. 205-6.

<sup>91</sup> Stambolian, *ibid.*

remaining outside, remaining refractory to this assimilation [...] I suppose that this is what is called the polish ('vernis') of Masters.<sup>92</sup>

*Fondu, vastes, surfaces unies, tranparence, assimilation, lumière, reflets* – these are the words that he can found in all of Proust's descriptions, both in his critical works and the novel. Marcel uses them when he elucidates La Berma's acting and Vinteuil's music, and they are implicit in Bergotte's judgement of that supreme example of artistic excellence – the little patch of yellow wall – in the *View of Delft*.

The word *fondu*, variously translated as 'fusion' or 'blending' is at once a most important and ambiguous expression. Since Proust associated it with assimilation and absorption into a uniform substance, it may be thought that this fusion of all elements implies the loss of their particularity and consequently, of a real multiplicity. This is certainly not the case in *A la recherche*, whose structure is based on a series of separate and distinct incarnations, apparitions, impressions and events.

However, when Proust speaks of 'fondu' he is really pointing to the difference that exists between the chaotic multiplicity of the critical world, the ordered multiplicity of the artistic components in a work of art. Marcel learns when he looks at Elstir's paintings the uniform substance of the artist's style and vision does not exclude the presence of a powerful unity (II 835-6). *Fondu* describes, therefore, the organic unity and autonomy of a work of art that an artist guarantees only by creating a purely spiritual virtual world in which things have lost their original aspect as things or hacity, to become reflections of reality.

---

<sup>92</sup> *Correspondance* II, pp. 86-87, in Stambolian, p. 206. I have not been able to locate the original. Later, Proust recognised the same quality in Flaubert's work; see *Sainte-Beuve* pp. 588-9.

Here again, the relationship between art and involuntary memory can be seen, for in the autonomous *vases clos* that Marcel discovers within himself, things of the past exist as virtual components of a distinct 'atmosphere'. In a work of art, as in the *vases clos*, the barriers that intelligence creates for the needs of praxis, are destroyed. Freed from the real world, the things of life are able to blend together so that each reflects the other. These analogies that reflections express are examples of the same law that governs the activity of the creative spirit as it seeks to discover similarity in difference and unity in multiplicity. The world enters the mind in the same way as it enters Elstir's studio or Marcel's room – as reflections free of dogma.

Guided by Ruskin, Proust's narrative offers a challenge, as does any work of modern art. What the modernist painter can be said to discover in his work – what can be said to be revealed to him in it – is not the irreducible essence of all painting, but rather that which, at the present moment in art history, is capable of convincing him that it can stand comparison with the past. Proust himself recognised in Flaubert's work the first signs of the metamorphosis of the novel, claiming that what was once action had become artistic impression.<sup>93</sup> Marcel's encounters, to reprise Stambolian's term, are 'creative shocks', in which creation depends on certain impressions and sensations that involve a plunge into the depths of the Self, during which all efforts must be directed at protecting the activity of the mind from corruption.<sup>94</sup> It was surely just such an activity that Proust himself engaged in as he wrote and developed the material of his novel.

One could object that the very idea of an artist giving himself shocks either in life or in the process of writing contradicts the principle of an encounter that cannot be willed. Although Proust often speaks of the fact that an artist's initial discoveries may be totally unexpected, he

---

<sup>93</sup> Michel Raimond, *La Crise du roman*, Paris: José Corti, 1967, p. 160.

<sup>94</sup> Stambolian, *Marcel Proust and the Creative Encounter*, p. 240.



also writes that the artist gradually begins to seek out those sites, experiences and situations in life which contain his ideal. All of Marcel's encounters are, after all, with *his* world and fall within the context of an inner commitment to certain special truths. Proust is torn between desire and fear of the real, between curiosity and the inclination towards habit. This conflict is resolved only by involuntary memory which provides Proust with a world which is at once real yet contained within himself. The reader of *A la recherche* enjoys the same liberation whenever he sees, through the world of the novel, his own world in a new light.

## Conclusion

Happiness is an illusion for all the great novelists of the nineteenth century, writes Terdiman.<sup>1</sup> But this was not always the case; for example, Stendhal's Romantic sense of its pursuit infuses the action of his text with the illusion, which he himself seems to share, until the very end. Balzac's pessimism is more concerted but he is careful to show how the illusions that guide his characters' lives are generated within those characters, out of clearly defined social hopes and personal needs. In Balzac's novels, the process which destroys illusions unfolds with compelling verisimilitude. But Flaubert endows his characters with the most extravagant dreams, only to demolish them. No-one had ever cut the ground from under his heroes with such cruelty. The social process by which illusions are lost in the earlier Realists becomes a formalised strategy of failure in Flaubert. The Balzacian sentence has its referent action in the world of concrete social reality. As early as *Bovary*, Flaubert's sentences start to become events of pure language. Many of the disasters that the characters encounter are purely rhetorical rather than experiential. Hence the well-known shape of the Flaubertian narrative: a hopefully ascending beginning, a middle section of intense desire, and a conclusion which cuts the dream to pieces. For Flaubert, there is no redemption in experience, and he will provide none out of sentiment.

This pessimism appeared quite early:

C'est étrange comme je suis né avec peu de foi au bonheur. J'ai eu, tout jeune, un pressentiment complet de la vie. C'était comme une odeur de cuisine nauséabonde qui s'échappe par un soupirail. On n'a pas besoin d'en avoir mangé pour savoir qu'elle est à faire vomir (7 April 1846 to Maxime du Camp).

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation: Self and Society in the French Novel, From the Realists to Proust*, London and Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1976.

In *L'Idiot de la famille*, Sartre provides a detached interpretation of the psycho-social mechanism which generated Flaubert's *nausée de vivre*. His feeling expressed to Du Camp in the 1846 letter has its roots, according to Sartre's theory, in Flaubert's early life, but it develops organically, dominating Flaubert's emotional life and dictating the shape of his novels. At the centre of the emotion is a conflict between the empiricist ideology which was Dr Flaubert's legacy to his son, and Gustave's own experience of misery.<sup>2</sup> The bourgeoisie sees experience as sequential, progressive, analyzable: this is the view of the world that informs the characteristic shape of the novels of Balzac and Stendhal. To men like his own father, Flaubert's views seemed absurdly mystical; to Flaubert, his father's view seemed naively optimistic. In directly quoting the 1846 letter to Du Camp, Sartre observes that:

Telle est la première contradiction qui, sur le terrain de la connaissance, oppose Gustave à son père, sans qu'aucun d'eux s'en aperçoive; Gustave *sait tout*, une unique expérience lui a donné un pressentiment complet de la vie : Achille-Cléophas en bon impérialiste tient, au contraire, l'expérience pour la somme – jamais achevée - de toutes les expériences qui se produisent non seulement au cours d'une vie humaine mais depuis la naissance de l'humanité.<sup>3</sup>

But Flaubert was aware that he knew better than his father. At the centre of his fiction is an ideology of omniscience. Balzac and Stendhal discover the fate of their heroes; Flaubert knows the destinies of his own because he knows the total shape of life: 'L'analyse est déjà faite et ... il

---

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille*, I, pp. 830-90 in Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Sartre, *L'Idiot*, pp. 483-4, in Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, p. 64.

sait déjà ce qu'elle lui apportera.<sup>4</sup> Time is becoming metaphorised; experience is no longer fundamentally sequential for Flaubert. Miscarriage and collapse define the shape of life, which is no longer defined as a series of consequential actions, but as an image of disaster, in which the developmental chronological element is no more than contingent.

In Sartrean terms, the meaning of experience is totalized in each Flaubertian instant, and the sum of these instants which make up a human life 'adds only imagistic depths to the unvarying diagnosis.'<sup>5</sup> The outward form of the novel corresponds to the empiricist ideology of the first post-revolutionary generation, to the ideology of Dr Flaubert. But, by Gustave's time, the experiment was finished.<sup>6</sup> Flaubert's statement to the Goncourts, that in *Bovary* he had been trying to capture a tone, the mouldy colour of the woodlice's existence', implies both the ideology which dominates his fiction and the techniques which he developed in response. His waiting problem became how to construct a series of moments which, suffered one by one, would make the outward condition of his protagonists coincide with the fate he had chosen for them. The total quality of the Flaubert moment is thus in conflict with the developmental impulse which propels forward the action of traditionally Realist fiction. The conflict finally forced Flaubert beyond the Realist paradigm altogether to the point where effective action virtually disappears from his works.

Proust's admiration for Flaubert is based precisely on Flaubert's move away from Realism. This is no doubt why, in his 1919 essay, he hardly mentions *Bovary*, because the influence of Realist texture, although already in conflict with other tendencies, is still quite apparent in this novel.

---

<sup>4</sup> Sartre, *L'Idiot*, p. 489, in Terdiman *ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Stambolian, *Proust and the Creative Encounter*, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> see Pierre Barbéris, 'Balzac, ou le Mal du Siècle', *Contributions à une psychologie du monde moderne*, 2 Vols, Paris: Gallimard, 1970, pp. 407-8.

The novel has always been peopled with anti-heroes. The dissonances it explored always set a figure we are meant to admire, against an outside reality or set of accepted values, which the anti-hero values (for example, those of Julien Sorel) and which they are meant to supplant. ‘Anti’ in the phrase has a positive ring, it reveals ‘the operation of a dialectic which seeks to resolve the contradictions of experience (that the novel portrays)’.<sup>7</sup> Until the nineteenth century the system of values embodied by an anti-hero had implied a world in which conduct would become heroic again. An anti-hero dialectically implied his contrary, as the satirical or corrective explored what a better reality might be.

After the Restoration, however, this ceased progressively to be true. Balzac and Stendhal are, admittedly in different ways, reactionaries who seek their values in the pre-revolutionary period, but what of Flaubert’s values? To what moment in history do they point? What are their ethical implications? The disaster they imply is that they look nowhere and imply nothing but disaster.

As is usual, with the profound change in the ideology underlying a fictional system, the formal implications of this change are immense. When precisely they occur in time is difficult to say. Flaubert was innovating on many technical fronts at once. Perhaps the question is best answered by the change that occurred between *Bovary* and *L’Education*. In its overall shape, the plot of *Bovary* conserves a belief in experience as chronologically determined. History is still – if painfully – the force that generates and reveals the truth about the world. Everything in the novel contributes to and projects forwards towards Emma’s suicide.

---

<sup>7</sup> Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, p. 68.

By the time of *L'Education*, a sea-change in narration had occurred. As Proust put it, with an unintended pun, 'With *L'Education* a revolution has taken place'.<sup>8</sup> The Revolution of 1848 (to which Proust was not referring), the event around which the novel is organised, is precisely the event that made it impossible for writers to believe in history; hence the suppression of historical events and aimless *dédoublement* and substitution of character. In 1848, Baudelaire dedicated his Salon in the 'Préface' to *la bourgeoisie*: 'Un jour radieux viendra où les savants seront propriétaires, et les propriétaires savants. Alors votre puissance sera complète, et nul ne protestera contre elle'. Perhaps all revolutionary writers sound naïve today, but it is remarkable to encounter this credulous Baudelaire.<sup>9</sup>

The ideological effects of the Revolution that attempted to join the ideals implied in this optimistic dedication have often been chronicled, by Marx *et al.*, but the depression caused in artists and intellectuals by the failure of the revolution was no better captured than by Flaubert. The novel of *L'Education* is the darkly comical account of these failed aspirations. The present is much of a source of hope; for this we must look to art to provide a stable logos. History ceased for the middle-class idealists who lived beyond 1848. Baudelaire does not eulogise the bourgeoisie in *Les Fleurs du mal*.

In the novel, the change in ideology progressed in parallel fashion. The reconceptualisation of experience always requires a painful and prolonged psychological reequilibration. *Bovary* was begun in the wake of the Republic, after the *coup d'état* of December 1851. The consequences of this were far from clear, as Emma Bovary's story unfolded. By September 1864, however, the full import of these events was realised, as Flaubert began writing *L'Education*. Describing his

---

<sup>8</sup> *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 588.

<sup>9</sup> Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, p. 70.

new work, Flaubert famously wrote to Mlle Leroyer de Chantpie: ‘C’est un livre d’amour, de passion; mais de passion telle qu’elle peut exister maintenant, c’est-à-dire *inactive*’ (6 October 1864).

The word *inactive* describes what is profoundly new in this novel. *Bovary* may have read slowly, but in *L’Education* little happens at all. The novel shows this characteristic – and the critical disapproval that it entailed – with Proust’s monument to narrative immobility fifty years later. The most inactive scenes in Stendhal, such as Julien’s time in prison, do not exhibit the stasis of Flaubert’s story. Proust made the point precisely in his 1919 essay; ‘*L’Education* est un long rapport de toute une vie, sans que les personnages prennent pour ainsi dire une part active à l’action.’<sup>10</sup> Proust’s essay goes to the heart of the question: what, if not action, is recounted in the ‘eternal imperfects’ which, for him, defined the originality of Flaubert’s style?<sup>11</sup>

Terdiman posits a distinction between two techniques: the ‘active’ and the ‘synthetic’.<sup>12</sup> The active mode of narration depicts the sort of events that change lives, animate forward – moving plots – precisely the sort of movement that animates the Realist novel. The synthetic mode, on the other hand, seeks to create images of representative atmospheres. It tends to dissolve chronology and seeks to portray the mental landscapes so important in much modern art. As a result, it saps the energy of the individual events that narrative action accentuates. Active narration is based on the *passé simple*, the tense which fixes punctual events. The synthetic, by contrast, exploits a special ‘veiling quality’ available in the French *imparfait*, which Proust calls ‘le plan incliné et tout en demi-teint des imparfaits’.<sup>13</sup> It is the narrative mode of choice for

---

<sup>10</sup> *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 590.

<sup>11</sup> *Sainte-Beuve*, pp. 590-1.

<sup>12</sup> Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 591.

writers who no longer believe that their characters' hopes can be realised in the world of concrete experience.

The synthetic mode is the primary mode of narration in *A la recherche*, and Proust found it in *L'Education* because the view of experience to which both the movement of history and his own technical experiments drove Flaubert, are notionally the same as Proust's. Together, this view of human possibilities links them in opposition to the Realists. They lived after the Fall. In this sense, the picture they paint is akin to Impressionism. People have argued that if Emma Bovary had been rich, if she had been a man, and if she were freer, her life would have been less tragic. *L'Education* disproves the thesis quite comprehensively in the life of Frédéric Moreau. His slow decline, up to the book's 'rat's tail ending', represents a failure which is all the greater because Frédéric's freedom offers so many possibilities.<sup>14</sup>

*L'Education* does alter the balance of narrative factors – psychological on one hand, and purely formalistic on the other – which are so much in conflict in *Bovary*. Since Frédéric is freer than Emma Bovary, his failure in the novel depends less on the fatality that Charles blames for his wife's suicide, than on a number of coincidences and contrived bad luck. The sense of fatality flows from the psychological rigour with which a set of emotional limitations circumscribe the heroine's destiny. But destiny in *L'Education* is a matter of chance.

The change from *Bovary* to *L'Education* can be measured, as we have seen, by examining the technical elements of the narrative. In the first case is the Flaubertian creation of the psychological symbol, termed by Girard as 'l'autrui'. Felt through the consciousness of the characters in the book, the strength of this desire is organic. It seems to spring coherently from

---

<sup>14</sup> Marie-Jeanne Durry, *Flaubert et ses projets inédits*, Paris: Nizet, 1950, p. 137.



the emotional organisation of the novel and resembles the developmental logic that underpins Realist fiction. But the second of these elements, the fortuitous obstacle happens only at Flaubert's behest. It intervenes, with its partner, 'l'autre' and violates the story's coherence.

For the 'history of an entire generation', as Flaubert told Mlle de Leroyer-Chantpie (6 October 1864), of his book, the cast is small. Between the few actors a confusion of relationships grows up; pivoting around Frédéric, which the hero is finally, unable to manipulate. The entire complex, 'le désir triangulaire' collapses under its own weight. The symbol of *l'autrui* is associated with these movements when the structure of Frédéric's relationships begins to become unsteady. The figure of *l'autrui* appears like an evanescent character, nearly real, and yet clearly fictive, symbolising for each of the relationships in which Frédéric tries to succeed, the implacable outside force that prevents his happiness.

Of course the characters in the novel are internally flawed by their cravenness and indecision. But their deficiencies alone do not explain their defeat. Flaubert had planned it thus in one of his earliest outlines for the book: 'Quant à l'empêchement de baiser quand tout est mûr, p[our] cela il n'y a pas que sa vertu qui l'empêche mais une circonstance fortuite'.<sup>15</sup> Such circumstances abound. In these 500 pages, systematically, every moment of intimacy is interrupted by the sound of boots in the hall or other accidental event. The repetition of such incidents creates a constant obstacle or *circonstance fortuite* that defines the novel's rhythm. Whatever *fatalité* the book can be said to have, flows from this procedure.

More than anything else, the tone and technique used in *L'Education* recall caricature. The task of writers since Stendhal, claims Terdiman, had been to motivate the fates of their protagonists,

---

<sup>15</sup> Durry, *Projets inédits*, p. 187.

to search out within their souls and surroundings, the profound origin of their disasters.<sup>16</sup> Disaster in *L'Education* is pure caprice, were it not for the fact that Flaubert treats his characters with high seriousness. There is a fine line between comedy and tragedy, and Flaubert has no love for his characters as there is no hope for them. But we are not meant to laugh at their undoing, even if their errors seem contrived.

The constant obstacle, the entry of *l'autre* in the psychological configuration of Frédéric Moreau, thus represents the only significant intervention of the sort of narrative action that changes lives (the interventions, therefore, of history into the narrative context). The world outside the characters' minds has become thoroughly hostile, and is thoroughly despised; the Revolution at the ideological centre of the novel (representing the ideal) is seen in retrospect as an exasperating hindrance or, worse still, a mere footnote of history.

As for the usual run of experience in *L'Education*, it strongly resembles Proust's synthetic mode, and is well documented by him in his 1919 essay: 'le grand trottoir roulant que sont les pages de Flaubert, au défilement continu, monotone, morne, indéfini'.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that in *L'Education*, how much Flaubert's stance in relation to experience recalls that of the Romantic poets thirty years previously. Frédéric Moreau, waiting for his boat to leave Paris, bears much more resemblance to Lamartine, standing on the shores of the lake, than he does to Rastignac, ready to begin his campaign as *Le Père Goriot* begins, or to Julien before the courtroom.

The timeless imperfects which devolve the story are used in Flaubert (as in Proust) to insulate the material synthesized in the image from contamination by the movement of time outside the

---

<sup>16</sup> Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 587.

privileged moment. But at the time of writing *L'Education*, the dream of the liberal ideal of *fraternité* had been completely buried. By 1864, of course, Flaubert was aware of this and had no illusions left. His effects were finely calculated in consequence. Long before *L'Education*, Flaubert had told Louise Colet that irony seemed to dominate life (8-9 March 1852). By now he had reached an attitude towards the larger society of total outsidership. Flaubert remains a writer of the logos. Like the aristocratic Romantics who mourned the passing of their world, his relation to concrete reality is one of detached contemplation, without even the earlier consolation of knowing just what had been lost.

For Flaubert, the logos is barely recuperable for the thinking subject. Yet the outside is the only world he has. *L'Education* points forward to attitudes we have encountered in Proust – viz.: the total primacy of art over life, of ‘mental’ over real events. But Flaubert’s irony guarantees that the ‘dialectical relationship between the inside and the outside’ or mythos and logos still subsists (indeed, without it, irony would not be possible). Flaubert completes the investigation the Romantics had begun. The dilemma they started to explore is now fully fleshed out. There is no happiness to be found in the logos, in the world outside the individual; the soul flees inside, attempting to find peace in isolation. The inside myth proves hollow.

The hollowness of the inside and the irruption of the outside forms the basis of *Bouvard*, the novel *par excellence* of the logos. *Bouvard* went beyond the caricatural possibilities of *L'Education*, to complete Flaubert’s revolt against what today we would term ‘psychological realism’. He hated the beings he created only then to annihilate them subsequently, and found it much more satisfying to watch his woodlice careering towards destruction from the outset. All that remained was to abandon the high moral seriousness he had long maintained concerning his characters; thus *Bouvard* transforms his laughter into comedy, the better to explain the ‘waves of

hatred' (letter to Bouilhet, 30 September 1855) he felt against the stupidity of his age. The moral significance of the work, did not change, of course. The action was devised as in *Bovary* and *L'Education*, to provide the greatest number of misfortunes, with the protagonists simply more maladroit than before. Now, however, Flaubert was able to give free reign to his disgust without wrenching the realist texture that had dominated his earlier works. As he wrote to Mme Roger des Genettes, it seemed to him that nobody had yet tried the comedy of ideas (2 April 1877).

In the process, *Bouvard* ceases to be a conventional novel. Progressive movement of life, which the novel had hitherto existed to depict, is totally absent here, since the action is supposed to last over thirty years, but the two heroes are no perceptibly older at the end than at the start. Verisimilitude is the first casualty of a novel that deals exclusively with the logos. Bouvard and Pécuchet play out a bitter comedy, foreshadowing Beckett's drama, which arises when life is made to function like a mechanism. But that the purpose was more than mere slapstick comedy is evident from a letter of 25 July 1875 to Turgenev:

Malgré l'immense respect que j'ai pour votre sens critique, je ne suis point de votre avis sur la manière dont il faut prendre ce sujet-là. S'il est traité d'une façon légère et concise, ce sera une fantaisie plus ou moins spirituelle, mais sans portée et vraisemblance tandis qu'en détaillant et développant, j'aurai l'air de croire à mon histoire, et on peut en faire une chose sérieuse et même effrayante.

Much of what I have proposed on *L'Education* and *Bouvard* is offered within a framework established by Bowman: that literature should be read as part of intellectual history, and that the shift in the history of ideas from the outside involved a seismic transformation, from a static, mechanical outside to a dynamic and organic interiority. Firstly, we are aware that Romanticism

was an age of exaggerated polarities, the cult of reason and of the irrational, of inspiration and learning, of pessimism and a belief in progress, a religious renewal and a radical questioning of religion. Whilst Bénichou's *Le Temps des prophètes* is organised around these polarities, many studies reveal them.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, we must realize that the interplay between literature and philosophy must be extended to include politics, theology, history and the natural sciences, all of which have had their place in this study. For the Romantics, the interplay between literary, political and religious discourse was intense, and only by understanding their intertextual context can they be understood. Lastly, we have become aware, as Flaubert was, of the somewhat autonomous nature of discourse. Language plays out history by its own operations of imitation, and because of the quasi-autonomous nature of language, the integrity of the speaking subject is somewhat problematic. The common links between the Arts, which Cicero spoke of, are signs, here mostly words, and it is their permutation that we trace in the *Tentation* from discourse to discourse, source text to imitation. Bowman describes these 'borrowings', 'imitations' or 'influences', i.e. movements of *topoi* from discourse to discourse, as 'transformations'.<sup>19</sup>

A few summary generalisations about these transformations in the *Tentation*: firstly, its intertextuality is broad, despite its reliance on Matter. It is difficult to know what exactly Flaubert had read. He read extensively and with great freedom, at times refusing to understand what he read. Rather than slavishly copying what he had digested, he transformed it.

The second point to be made is that the transformation not only reflects a political and ideological stance, but stems from a desire to dislocate the previous ideological context and significance of the document. The source material for the *Tentation* was on heresies; Flaubert has

---

<sup>18</sup> Paul Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes: Doctrines de l'âge romantique*, [n.p.]: NRF Gallimard, 1977.

<sup>19</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 202.

made of it a hagiography, as he did in the *Trois contes*. Thirdly, there was a very real quest amongst the Romantics – what Bowman terms the *libido sciendi* for documents susceptible to transformation.<sup>20</sup> This is perhaps fundamental to Romanticism; one wanted to uncover perhaps hitherto unknown texts about the Ophites in order to give them a new form. Michelet was not the only archive glutton; so was Flaubert. Tensions arising from these transformations led to new and extended readings.

The fourth generalisation is that the drives to symbolise or desymbolise often governed the forms of transformation. In many cases, the transformation gives meaning to the document, in others, the text is deprived of its symbolic meaning. Desymbolisation always involves a move to a level of abstraction, and that move – although it was proposed by Ballanche – was a move few Romantic writers would make. On the one hand, was their desire to write for a large, not to say popular, audience more easily swayed by symbolic expression. On the other hand was their ambivalence towards certain problems more easily embodied in symbolic rather than abstract expression. Flaubert, who does not shy away from abstract expression, contrasts with say, Stendhal, who writes ‘lyrically’ and in a symbolic manner whenever his ambiguities about solitude, love or religion come into play. The final, most superficial and yet most important generalisation is that Flaubert considered transformational writing as the locus of his expressivity. Flaubert, Lamartine and Nerval re-write, in one way or another, earlier documents and their subjectivity is located in that act of re-writing, of transforming the document. Flaubert is concerned in the *Tentation* with how one re-writes the logos – the Book, particularly the Gospels – but that text does not come unmediated to him. He re-writes not only the Gospels but the discourse on the Gospels. The practice of transformation is therefore not condemnable; it contrasts with *Quellenforschung* – the quest for absolute knowledge based on a belief in being,

---

<sup>20</sup> Bowman, *French Romanticism*, p. 202.

accusatory to any text that evoked another. No discourse can do other than echo another. This is how language operates, and literature even more so.

*Bouvard* is the logical step beyond the proto-Naturalism of *L'Education*, and the *Tentation* is something of an oddity in the chain. But the progeny of *Bouvard* lie mainly outside the tradition of the novel; it had no influence on *A la recherche*. The texture of *Bouvard*, which simply accumulates a series of disasters in the preterite, is a world away from the impressionistic scenes in *L'Education* which influenced Proust. Nor will we find it in the Naturalists' elements of the tradition, from which the Proustian narrative emerges. The Naturalists were at pains to furnish (sometimes specious) theoretical groundings for their novels, but none of their ideological innovations required any formal ones. Zola's narration adds virtually nothing to the techniques that Flaubert and even Balzac had made available to novelists.

If there is an intermediary stage between *L'Education* and *A la recherche*, it probably to be found, and here I side with Stambolian, in another post-Naturalist work, almost contemporary with *Bouvard* (and like it, composed by a lapsed Naturalist): Huysmans' *A Rebours*. *A Rebours* has anecdotal connections with Proust that have become critical commonplaces. Des Esseintes and Charlus share a model in Robert de Montesquiou etc. But, for our purposes, the importance of Huysmans' novel is not found in such details. Between the apathy of Frédéric Moreau and the techniques employed by Flaubert to make a story out of it, on one hand, and the extensive departures from traditional narrative employed by Proust, Des Esseintes stands as a notable experiment in the interiorisation of experience.

The meaning of parts of *A la recherche* – notably *La Fugitive* – is that experience outside the self has become totally unmanageable. The temptation is to 'recuperate' this vision and deem it due to

Marcel's insanity after Albertine's death. This view implies that if individuals are cut off from their surroundings, these represent only temporary aberrations. This seductive view implies that the pessimism emerging from *La Fugitive* about experience outside the self crystallises into a severe attack of neurasthenia.

But the novelists in Proust's tradition seem continually to assert that experience is refractory. Taken as a group, do their protagonists not rather stand with the narrator of *A la recherche* as persistent examples of the impossibility of self-realisation in concrete social activity? According to Stambolian, *A la recherche* subsumes and powerfully synthesizes a hundred-year developing sense of isolation of post-revolutionary Man. The feminised delicacy of Julien Sorel (which denotes his lack of adaptation to the coarse manners of the world) is present in Marcel, too, but exaggerated into neurasthenia. Balzac's theme of a young bourgeois entering *mondaine* society, when he finally penetrates the world of the salons is prolonged in Proust into a critique of all society. Friendship is a grave issue for Frédéric and Deslauriers in *L'Education*; Proust pronounces that all friendships are impossible. The explicit diagnosis of this malady is summed up in the celebrated remark that 'Chaque personne est bien seule'. This anguished cry is a constant element of Proust's understanding of experience.

Proust's penetration of the narrator's consciousness transcends Realist techniques of psychological analysis on many levels. Not only does Proust draw us deeper inside; but we are taken further 'back' into early childhood to discover the origin of Marcel's isolation. Novelists of the *Bildungsroman* typically begin tracing the formation of their heroes in late adolescence because the authenticity and idealism threatened by contemporary existence could still be seized in this period of the hero's life; before the disillusionment of adult life, which forms the main corpus of the novel. For Flaubert, the locus of disenchantment moves back in time (as in the



quote of 7 April 1846 above shows). After Flaubert, paradise is lost very early on. Proust, Joyce and Freud all recognise that the child is the father of the man. One can look only at its secrets for the image of hope against which all future disappointments will be measured.

For a time, the early sections of *A la recherche* conceal the melancholy reasons why the account of Marcel's life needs to be taken so far back. This is why *Combray* initially seems decorous and sunny. But concrete experience will negate Combray, as textually, *Un Amour de Swann* does immediately afterwards. No matter how cheerfully they are described, the 'two ways' of Combray are both false paths. What appeared beguiling at the start of the novel, will reveal itself to be repulsive.

Even in sunny Combray, the narration portrays the world of latent disaster. The narration subtly under-individualises concrete events, so that we grow accustomed to a certain hollowness and schematicism in the contact between subjective consciousness and the outside. People are progressively disembodied and grow grey. The world after Marcel's madness is disheartening. Proust insists that the locus of human meaning must be elsewhere than in any contact with the hollow world of the logos, played outside. By the time of *La Fugitive*, this contact has reached a crisis of unendurable finality. After this point, the logos becomes spectral and tellingly, there will be no more love-affairs for Marcel.

The source of impossibility of union with another in this twilight world seems to lie in the pattern of imprisonment and flight which is the common experience of couples in this novel. Proust defines the possession of another as a figurative and impossible fixing of a pictorial image, with the narrator tellingly relating that he could not possess Gilberte / Albertine unless he possessed what was in her eyes (I 794). But in a later passage, the narrator also reflects on 'la

fugacité des êtres' revealing the impossibility of ever possessing the Other: 'L'amour est l'exigence d'un tout... on n'aime que ce qu'on ne possède pas tout entier' (III 106). The whole drama of Proust's search for a totality which would include the self but not be limited to it, can be felt in this assertion from *La Prisonnière*. The recoil into total subjectivity, to the comforting zone of the mythos, is nothing more than the self-defensive obverse of this longing for a wholeness with someone outside the self.

To whom is then Proust appealing, when he asks us to understand this portrait of experience? To whom is the novel addressed? Proust believes in 'the Others outside' – the writing of a novel is indeed predicated on such a belief, but Proust cannot write about them – they exist nowhere within the novel. The world portrayed and the world defined are thus totally discontinuous.<sup>21</sup> The Realist confidence in the logos has long since disappeared, yet Proust still requires this outside. *A la recherche* asserts that the only heroic stance which remains possible is that of the artist-hero who achieves self-realisation in imaginative creation. The world exists to end up as a book. But this defensive strategy of situating authentic life in artistic creation was not totally comfortable for Proust and did not altogether convince him.<sup>22</sup> He remained too ingrained in the moral tradition of the novel to believe that redemption could be found in aesthetic pleasure in the sheer joy of unrestricted mental play. He is a world away from Symbolism and certainly Surrealism.

Proust's 'religion of art' is just as inadequate to the task of seizing concrete reality as Balzac's reactionary Catholicism was to the demands of the July Monarchy. Both however, are symptomatic of the dilemma of post-revolutionary Man. There are limits to what art can do. Art portrays, rather than resolves, dissonances and contradictions of the world, and powerfully shows

---

<sup>21</sup> Stambolian, *Proust and the Creative Encounter*, p. 235. Descombes makes the same point, *Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, p. 70.

their problematic qualities. Certainly, Proust's intellectual, idealist solution appears to offer respite from human alienation. But, just as surely, salvation through art is insufficient. Nobody could live as Proust did, and retire to sequestration to produce his own version of *A la recherche* (as the *nouveaux romanciers* would have us do).

Through the paradox of the novel's problematic existence, we are able to comprehend to what extraordinary deformation of the self – which seeks its realisation in concrete social activity – Proust was driven when he tried, just under forty years after Flaubert began the effort in earnest, to determine what a person could be in the modern world. The experiences they depict, of love, disappointment and missed opportunities are experiences of pain. In a piece of stock-taking near the end of *A la recherche*, Proust traces this pain back to 'l'impuissance que nous avons à nous réaliser dans la jouissance matérielle, dans l'action' (IV 877). That pain has been at the heart of the novel since Flaubert, and cannot be understood outside the post-revolutionary topos that living in the logos of Flaubert or mythos of Proust, has become unlivable.

## Bibliography

Addison, Claire, *Where Flaubert Lies: Chronology, Mythology and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996

Adorno, Theodor, 'Theses Upon Art and Religion Today' in *Noten zur Literatur*, Vol. XI of *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Mein, 1974

Auerbach, Eric, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. Trask, Willard) New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957

Bataille, George, *L'Erotisme*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1957

Baudelaire, Charles, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961

Bénichou, Paul, *Le Temps des prophètes: Doctrines de l'âge romantique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1977

Biasi, Pierre-Marc de, 'La Tentation de L'Orient dans La *Légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier*' in *Romantisme*, 34, 1981, pp.47-56

Bogaard, Paul A., and Treash, Gordon (ed. by) *Metaphysics as Foundation; Essays in Honour of Ivan Leclerc*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993

Borsch-Jacobsen, M., *Le Sujet freudien*, Paris: Flammarion, 1982

Bouillaguet, Annick, *Proust lecteur de Balzac et de Flaubert: une imitation cryptée*, Paris: Champion, 2000

Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field of Cultural Production; Essays on Art and Literature*, NY: The University of Columbia Press, 1993

- *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (trans. Nice, Richard), Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1984

Bowie, Malcolm, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999

- *Proust Among the Stars*, Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1998

Bowman, Frank Paul, *French Romanticism: Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Readings*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990

Bradbury, Malcolm and McFarlane, James (eds.) *Modernism 1890-1930*, Aylsbury: Penguin, 1981

Brandon, S. G. F., *A Dictionary of Comparative Religions*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970

Bree, Germaine, *Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time*, (trans Richards, C.Y. and Truitt, A. J.), Edinburgh, Chatto and Windus, 1956

Brix, Michel, *Le Romantisme français: Esthétique, platonicienne et modernité littéraire*, Louvain: Editions Peeters/ Etudes Classiques, 1999

Chapman, Guy, *The Third Republic of France: The First Phase: 1871-1894*, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1962

Compagnon, Antoine (trans. Goodkin, Richard E.) *Proust Between Two Centuries*, New York: The Columbia University Press, 1992

- *La Troisième République des lettres: de Flaubert à Proust*, Paris: Seuil, 1983

Conroy, Mark, *Modernism and Authority: Strategies of Legitimation in Flaubert and Conrad*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985

Cortland, Peter, *The Sentimental Education; An Examination of Flaubert's 'L'Education sentimentale'*, The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1967

Crossley, Ceri, *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, The Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet*, London: Routledge, 1993

Culler, Jonathan, *Flaubert, The Uses of Uncertainty*, London, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974

Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust and Signs*, (trans. Howard, Richard), London: Athlone, 2000

Descombes, Vincent, *Proust: Philosophie du roman*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1987

- *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel* (trans. Chance-Macksey, Catherine),  
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992

Donato, Eugene, *The Script of Decadence, Essays on the Fictions of Flaubert and the Poetics of Romanticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993

Duclerc, Vincent, 'Anti – Intellectualisme et intellectuels pendant l’Affaire Dreyfus’ in *Mille Neuf Cent: Revue d’histoire intellectuelle*, 15, 1997, pp. 69-85

Dumouchel , Paul (ed. by), *Violence and Truth: On the Work of René Girard*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998

Dupuy, G., 'Mimésis et morphogénèse', in *Ordres et désordres: enquêtes sur un nouveau paradigme*, Paris: Seuil, 1982, pp. 125-8

Duquette, J. P., *Flaubert ou l’architecture du vide*, Montréal: Presses Universitaires de Montréal, 1972

Durry, Marie-Jeanne, *Flaubert et ses projets inédits*, Paris: Nizet, 1950

Eliade, Mircea, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984

Everman, Anthony Albert, *Lilies and Sesame: The Orient, Inversion and Artistic Creation in 'A La Recherche du temps perdu'*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998

Fairlie, Alison, (ed. by Bowie, Malcolm) *Imagination and Language. Collected essays on Constant, Baudelaire, Nerval and Flaubert*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981

- 'Some Patterns of Suggestion in *L'Education sentimentale*', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 6, 1969, pp. 266-93

Feldman, Burton and Richardson, Robert D., *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975

Ferraro, Thierry, *Flaubert: 'Madame Bovary', 'L'Education sentimentale' et 'Salammbô'*, Allier, (Belgique): Marabout, 1992

Fried, Michael, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings', in *New York Painting and Sculpture, 1840-1970* (ed. Goldzahler), New York: Dutton, 1969, pp. 129-53

Gay, Peter, *The Pleasure Wars: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, Vol V, Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1998

Genette, Gérard, *Figures III*, Paris; Seuil, 1962



Ginsburg, Michal Peled, *Flaubert Writing: a Study in Narrative Strategies*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986

Girard, René, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, Paris: Grasset, 1961,

- *La Violence et le sacré*, Paris: Grasset, 1972
- *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, Paris: Grasset, 1978.
- *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977

Giraud, Raymond, *The Unheroic Hero in The Novels of Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957

Goodheart, Eugene, *Desire and its Discontents*, New York; Columbia University Press, 1991

Golsan, Richard J., *René Girard and Myth: An Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2002

Gossman, Lionel, *Between History and Literature*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001

Gray, Margaret E., *Postmodern Proust*, Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992

Graef, Ortwin de, *Serenity in Crisis*, London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1993

Green, Anne, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel; 'Salammbô' Reassessed*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982

Greenberg, Clement, 'Modernist Painting', in *Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. by Brian, John, 4 vols., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986

- 'Modernist Painting' in *Art and Literature*, 4, Spring 1965, pp. 193-201
- 'Modernist Painting' in *The New Art, A Critical Anthology*, (ed. Battcock, G.), New York: Dutton, 1966

Grésillon, Almuth, *Eléments de la critique génétique*, [n.p.]: PUF, 1994

Gros, Bernard, '*A La Recherche du temps perdu*' (1913-27), Paris: Hatier (Profil d'une œuvre), 1986

Hamilton, Paul, *Historicism*, Kings Lynn: Routledge, 2002

Haskell, Levi and Shackleton (eds), *The Artist and the Writer in France: Essays in Honour of Jean Seznec*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974

Haxell, Nicola Anne, *Reflections on the Revolution: Poetry and Prose from the Second French Republic*, Durham: University of Durham Publications, 1993

Heidegger, M., *Basic Writings* (trans. Lovitt, W.), NY: Harper and Row, 1933

Hemmings, F. W. J., *Culture and Society in France 1789-1848*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987

Henry, Anne, *Marcel Proust: Théories pour une esthétique*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1981

Hobsbawm, Eric, *Age of Empire*, New York: Pantheon Press, 1987

Hodson, Leighton, '*A L'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*', Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1994

Houston, John Porter, *The Shape and Style of Proust's Novel*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982

Howarth, Joylon and Cerny, Philip G., eds., *Elites in France: Origins, Reproduction and Power*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1981

Hunt, Herbert J., *The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1941

Ippolito, Christophe, *Narrative Memory in Flaubert's Work*, New York: Peter Lang, 2001

Jonas, Hans, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, Boston: The Beacon Press, 2005

Kaplan, Robert Elliot, *Forgotten Crisis: The Fin de Siècle Crisis of Democracy in France*, Washington, DC: Berg, 1975

Kristeva, Julia, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (trans. Guberman, Ross), New York: The Columbia University Press, 1996

- Proust: *Questions d'identité*, Oxford: Legenda, 1998

Large, Duncan, *Nietzsche and Proust, A Comparative Study*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2001

Levaillant, Jean, 'Note sur le personnage de Bergotte', *Revue des sciences humaines*, Jan-March, 1952, pp. 33-48

Levin, Harry, *The Gates of Horn*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1963

Lincoln, Bruce, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999

Livingston, Paisley, *Models of Desire: René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992

Lukács, Georg, *The Historical Novel* (trans. Mitchell, Hannah and Stanley), Boston: The Beacon Press, 1963

Luckhurst, Nicola, *Science and Structure in Proust's 'A La Recherche du temps perdu'*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2000

MacKenzie, Robin, *The Unconscious in Proust's 'A La Recherche du temps perdu'*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000

Manuel, Frank E., *Shapes of Philosophical History*, Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993

- *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, Kingsport, TN: The Athenian Press, 1967

Maurois, André, *The Quest for Proust* (trans. Hopkins, Gerard), [n.p.] Peregrine Books, 1962

- *The Art of Writing*, (trans Hopkins, Gerard), New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1960

Merchant, Paul, *The Epic*, London: Methuen, 1972

Marder, Elissa, *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity (Baudelaire and Flaubert)*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002

Mayeur, Arno, *The Persistence of The Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, NY: Pantheon Press, 1981

Mayeur, Jean-Marie, 'The Origins of the Third French Republic' in *The Complete History of Modern France, 1871-1898*, part 1 of 4, (trans Foster, J. R.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984

McKenna, Andrew J., *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Destruction*, Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1992

Mein, Margaret, *A Foretaste of Proust, A Study of Proust and his Precursors*, Glasgow: Robert MacLehose and Co, The University Press of Glasgow, 1974

Milly, Jean, 'Les Pastiches de Proust, structure et correspondances', *Le Français moderne*, 35, 1967, pp. 32-9

Mortimer, and Kolb, (eds.) *Proust in Perspective; Visions and Revisions*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002

[n.a.], 'Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism', *Berkshire Review*, 14, 1979, pp. 9-19

Naturel, Mireille, *Proust et Flaubert: Un secret d'écriture*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007

Neiland, Mary, *Les Tentations de Saint Antoine and Flaubert's Fiction: A Creative Dynamic*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2001

Neville, Robert C., (ed. by) *New Essays In Metaphysics*, Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1987

Nordau, Max, *The Interpretation of History* (trans. Hamilton, M. A.), London: Rebman Limited, 1912

Oliver, Hermia, *Flaubert and an English Governess: The Quest for Juliette Herbert*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980

Orr, Mary, *Flaubert: Writing the Masculine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000

Oughourlian, Jean-Michel, *Un mime nommé Désir: hystérie, transe, possession, adorcisme*, Paris: Grasset, 1982

Porter, Laurence M., (ed. by) *Critical Essays on Gustave Flaubert*, Boston, Mass. : G.K. Hall and Co., 1986

Pasco, Allan H., *Allusion: A Literary Graft*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994

Potts, D.C. and Charlton, D. G., *French Thought Since 1600*, Bungay: Methuen, 1974

Poulet, George, *L'Espace Proustien*, Paris: Gallimard, 1982

- *Studies in Human Time*, (trans Coleman, Elliott,) New York: Harper, 1959
- *Etudes sur le temps humain*, Vol. I, Paris: Plon, 1950, Torch Books, 1959

Prendergast, Christopher, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988

Prichett, V.S., *The Mythmakers: Literary Essays*, London: Random House, 1979

Proust, Jacques, 'Structure et sens dans *L'Education sentimentale*', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 36, (1971), pp. 365-72

Raimond, Michel, 'Le Réalisme subjectif dans *l'Education sentimentale*', *Cahiers de l'association internationale des études françaises*, no. 23, 1971, pp. 299-310

- *La Crise du roman*, Paris: José Corti, 1967

Raitt, A. W., *Flaubert: Les Trois Contes*, London, Grant and Cutler, 1991

Reardon, Bernard, M. G., *Religion in the Age of Romanticism: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985

- *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Illustrated by Writers of the Period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1966

Reed, Arden, *Manet, Flaubert and the Emergence of Modernism: Blurring Genre Boundaries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003

Richard, Jean-Pierre, *Stendhal, Flaubert: Littérature et sensation*, Paris: Seuil, 1954

Riffaterre, M., *Essais de stylistique structurale*, Paris: Flammarion, 1971

Rigney, Ann, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001



Sartre, J.-P., *L'Idiot de la famille, Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971

Schehr, Larry, *Flaubert and Sons; Readings of Flaubert, Zola and Proust*, NY: Peter Lang, 1986

Schmid, Marion, *The Process of Literary Creation: Flaubert and Proust*, Oxford: European Humanities Research centre of the University of Oxford, 1998

Schor, Naomi, and Majewski, Henry F., (eds) *Flaubert and Postmodernism*, London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1984

Seznec, Jean, *Les Sources des episodes des dieux dans 'La Tentation de Saint Antoine' (1849)*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique de J. Vrin, 1940

- *Nouvelles Etudes sur 'La Tentation de Saint Antoine'*, London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1949

Séginger, Gisèle, *Flaubert: Une Poétique de l'histoire*, Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2000

Shattuck, Roger, *Proust's Binoculars: A Study of Memory, Time and Recognition in 'A La Recherche du temps perdu'*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983

- *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to 'In Search of Lost Time'*, London: Penguin, 2000

Smith, Bonnie G., *Ladies of the Leisured Classes: The Bourgeois of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981

Spiegel, Gabriel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997

Sprinker, Michael, *History and Ideology in Proust: 'A La Recherche du temps perdu' and the Third French Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994

Starkie, Enid, *Flaubert: The Making of the Master*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson. 1967

- *Flaubert the Master: a Critical and Biographical Study (1856-1880)*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971

Steel, Gareth H., *Chronology and Time in 'A La Recherche du temps perdu'*, Geneva: Droz, 1979

Stambolian, George, *Marcel Proust and the Creative Encounter*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972

Surprenant, Céline, 'A Blatant Interrogative in Proust's *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*', in *French Studies*, Vol. LVII, 2, April 2003

Tadié, J-Y, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, London: Penguin, 2000

Taylor, Charles, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992

Terdiman, Richard, *The Dialectics of Isolation: Self and Society in the French Novel from the Realists to Proust*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976

Thibaudet, Albert, *Gustave Flaubert*, Paris: Plon, 1922

Thody, Philip, *Marcel Proust*, London: MacMillan Educational Ltd, 1987

Thomas, N., and Le Saux, F., (eds) *Myth and Legacy in European Literature*, Durham: The University of Durham Publications, 1996

Tooke, Adrienne, *Flaubert and the Pictorial Arts: From Image to Text*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000

Topping, Margaret, *Supernatural Proust: Myth and Metaphor in 'A La Recherche du temps perdu'*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007

- Proust's Gods: *Christian and Mythological Figures of Speech in the Works of Marcel Proust*, Oxford: Oxford Press University, 2000
- 'Artists and Alchemists in Proust's 'A la Recherche du temps perdu'', *French Studies*, Vol X, 4, Oct, 2006

Turnell, Martin, *The Novel in France: Madame de la Fayette, Laclos, Constant, Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert and Proust*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963

Unwin, Timothy, *Art et infini: L'Œuvre de jeunesse de Gustave Flaubert*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991

Ushiba, Akio, *L'Image de l'eau dans 'A La Recherche du temps perdu': fonctionnement et évolution*, Tokyo: France Tosho, 1979

Vickery, John B, (ed. by) *Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice*, Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1969

Wassenaar, Ingrid, *Proust: A Beginner's Guide*, London; Hodder and Stoughton, 2000

Weber, E. R., *Fin de Siècle*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986

Wetherill, Michael, *'Du Côté de chez Swann'*, Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German publications, 2000

- *Flaubert; La Dimension du texte*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982

White, Hayden, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999

- *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985

Willemart, Philippe, *L'Education sentimentale chez Proust: Lecture du 'Côté des Guermantes', suivi d'un essai sur les divers inconscients qui circulent dans le texte*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003

Williams, D. A., *The Hidden Life at its Source: A study of Flaubert's 'L'Education sentimentale'*, Hull: Hull University Press, 1987.

Williams, James G., *The Girard Reader*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002

Zeldin, Theodore, *France 1848-1945*, in III vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979

René Girard: The Hypothesis at [www.cottet.org/girard/desir1.en.htm](http://www.cottet.org/girard/desir1.en.htm), 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008, 17.00h