A Hothouse of Orchids: Proust's *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*

Dissertation

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To my parents
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the work:

BSAMP: Bulletin de la société des amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray.

Corr.: Correspondance de Marcel Proust.

Corr. gén.: Correspondance générale de Marcel Proust.


Roman numerals refer to the volume; page numbers are in Arabic numerals.
Introduction

Two particular interests come together in this study: Proust and the literature of the French Decadence. As the point of intersection between the two, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, Proust's earliest published work, dating from 1896, is an obvious choice of text on which to concentrate. It has received relatively little attention from Proust scholars; as the *Recherche* has rightfully commanded the lion's share of analysis and commentary, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* have generally been called upon to demonstrate the evolution of Proust's thoughts, motifs, themes and command of his art. Henri Bonnet, for example, has discerned in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* evidence of Proust's continuous interest in and reflection on the life of the mind,¹ Maurice Bardèche finds in it proof that Proust assembled the *Recherche* as a montage of fragments worked and reworked,² and Brian G. Rogers reads in its fiction Proust's early hesitation between the techniques of the novelist and the moralist's impulse to analyze and comment, moving slowly but surely towards the narrative "double vision" of the *Recherche* and the incorporation of the passage of time into the meaning of narrative itself.³ W.L. Hodson's article, "Proust's Methods of Character Presentation in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* and Jean Santeuil," and "'La Fin de la Jalousie': A First Start" by Muriel Domínguez are also studies in the evolution of Proust's narrative techniques.⁴ For Henri Massis,
Les Plaisirs et les jours are a valuable confession of the moral crisis of sexuality whose fruit is the Recherche. André Vial has interpreted the early work as the elaboration of a consciousness of self and the world against an all but overwhelming nostalgia for union with the omnipotent mother. In more recent studies, Paola Placella has traced the themes of the Recherche to their embryonic appearances in Les Plaisirs et les jours and Jean Santeuil, and Maria Paganini has examined the structure of desire in the short story, "La Mélancolique villégia- ture de Mme de Breyves."

Other works have included discussions of Proust's visual sense and his treatment of painting in Les Plaisirs et les jours, or his approaches to involuntary memory. Yet the book's obvious fin-de-siècle qualities, in topics and tonality, have more often than not resulted in its dismissal as "decadent"—a slight to both Les Plaisirs et les jours and to the literary movement of the Decadence at the end of the nineteenth century in France. It is the appropriateness of this tag for Les Plaisirs et les jours, and the reading it suggests for the work, that I have proposed to explore here as a significant part of the effort to reinstate Proust's earliest book as a text worthy of critical attention in its own right.

Literary labeling is a tricky business at best; at worst, it represents a heavy-handed pigeonholing of literary works according to certain general characteristics at the expense of nuance and originality. The problem is compounded when the labels one has to work with are as nebulous as Symbolism and Decadence, continuously defined and redefined by the writers and poets of the tumultuous last twenty years.
of the nineteenth century, in keeping with their changing views of literature and their internecine rivalries. It is compounded again by Proust's intelligence and critical discernment, the complexity and originality of his artistic vision even when he is borrowing from others, as he does so often in Les Plaisirs et les jours. Proust's place within the Symbolist uproar has thus usually been described as marginal: as Henri Peyre has pointed out, he cast his lot early with the Right Bank salons and the choice effectively removed him from the bohemian world in which Jean Moréas, Stuart Merrill, Viélé-Griffin, René Ghil and others were playing midwife to successive "definitive" versions of renovated French poetry. With "Contre l'obscurité" in 1896, published in the Revue blanche, Proust is said to have entered the fray to express his hostility to Symbolism, while the Recherche finally is Proust's "return" to certain principles of Symbolism, the heady spring wine of the early movement having matured with this novel into a superior cru. Proust's portrayal in the Recherche of the moral bankruptcy of the French aristocracy and the decline of the society towards world war has been identified as his principal connection with the notion of decadence, when the term is not applied in the Marxist sense to decry the novel's lack of realism and its attachment to what is "historically transient" in its content and style.

Proust's originality in the Recherche is largely disserved by an overly enthusiastic attribution of literary labels. Les Plaisirs et les jours, however, produced during those years of upheaval of which Proust in the Recherche is seen to be "inheritor," fills in some of the gaps between the salonnard and the bohemians, between A Rebours and
Proust's masterpiece some thirty years later. Thus, "Contre l'obscurité" and the transposition of art forms in the "Portraits de peintres et de musiciens" in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* show us Proust's attraction to certain elements of the Symbolist aesthetic and the lines along which he is elaborating his own concept of the symbol. Even more pervasive are the traits *Les Plaisirs et les jours* shares with the literature of the Decadence; the coincidence of themes and preoccupations sheds light upon both *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, complementing if not correcting previous readings of the work, and the period of the Decadence itself, whose bibliographies generally overlook Proust's contribution to it in 1896.

Determined not to produce yet another "evolutionary" study of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, I have tried to limit as much as possible my references to the *Recherche*, keeping in mind nonetheless which is the masterpiece and which the *oeuvre de jeunesse*; were it not for the former, the latter would command an even more reduced readership than it presently does. *Les Plaisirs et les jours* are a flawed work, over-ambitious and self-conscious, derivative and repetitive, but offering from time to time, as in the use of pastiche for tales of high society, brilliant solutions to the apprentice's fundamental problem of fitting content to literary form. Our discussion of the work is divided into three parts: the first deals with the preparation and publication of the original edition, the second with Symbolism and the Decadence, and the third with Proust's treatment of two of his principal topics, society and sexuality.
Looking back upon *Les Plaisirs et les jours* in the light of the *Recherche* as it existed in 1923, André Gide expressed his astonishment that the earlier work had failed to get the attention it seemed retrospectively to merit. On the other hand, Henri Rambaud (who had not, like Gide, to compensate for having rejected *Du Côté de chez Swann* at the *Nouvelle Revue Française* ten years earlier), gave hindsight its due in his review of the 1924 edition of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*:

> Il est bien aisé d'être prophète après l'événement. Pour moi, si délicat que soit ce recueil d'un art exquis et bien qu'à nos yeux maintenant avertis tout le génie de Marcel Proust y semble justement préfiguré jusqu'en ses traits les plus singuliers, je préfère ne pas m'étonner que ses premiers lecteurs n'y aient pas vu l'annonce d'une grande œuvre ... seul nous permet de l'appréciar le complet développement de l'œuvre qui devait le suivre et dont il était comme l'esquisse déjà minutieuse et poussée.

If it is hindsight that leads us to discover *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, so much the better. Our reading of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, however, describing for it a context other than that of the *Recherche* itself, is an attempt to pull the early work, however slightly, out of the shadow of the masterpiece and consider it on its own merits as a work of fin-de-siècle literature.
Footnotes


Chapter One
The Original Edition

Proust, Darlu and Anatole France

Marcel Proust turned twenty-five on 10 July 1896, one month after the publication of his first book, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*. With that twenty-fifth birthday, he was just touching upon the midpoint of his existence, for he would die in 1922, at the age (like Balzac) of fifty-one. The *hantise* of wasted time is a theme to which Proust would accustom his future readers in *A la recherche du temps perdu*; that he felt it to be a theme of his own life is evidenced in a comment made to Léon Yeatmann a few years after this halfway mark, on 10 July 1901: "J'ai aujourd'hui trente ans, et je n'ai rien fait!"¹ The statement is melodramatic, but it suggests that Proust was still casting about, waiting for his "real" life and his "real" literary production to begin.

What, however, had been Proust's life and work up to the moment of the publication of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*?² By 1896, he had completed his secondary education at the lycée Condorcet in Paris and his one-year military service, the *volontariat*, in garrison at Orléans (1889–90). He had earned his *licence de droit* in October 1893 and his *licence ès lettres* in philosophy in March 1894. He had already published in a variety of literary journals, numerous pieces of fiction,
society portraits, comptes-rendus, and book reviews, some of which he selected for inclusion in Les Plaisirs et les Jours. He had co-authored with pianist Léon Delafosse a plaquette entitled Mensonges, words and music to Proust's original poem of the same name. Under pressure from his family to decide on a career, he had considered the magistrature, museum work, and the diplomatic service, and definitively rejected the study of law, writing to his father in September 1893, "...entre plusieurs maux il y en a de meilleurs et de pires. Je n'en ai jamais conçu de plus atroce, dans mes jours les plus désespérés, que l'étude d'avoué. Les ambassades, en me la faisant éviter, me sembleront non ma vocation, mais un remède." His real choice of career he stated in inspired terms with this letter: "...toute autre chose que je ferai autre que les lettres et la philosophie, est pour moi du temps perdu." By 1895, nonetheless, he had made a career decision of sorts and gotten himself accepted as unpaid assistant at the Bibliothèque Mazarine; once on the roster, however, he proceeded to request and receive one leave of absence after another until the administration finally relieved him of his duties in March 1900. During the five years of his appointment, Proust put in only about two weeks of actual service at the Mazarine.

Obviously, his ambitions in 1896 lay elsewhere. While still a lycéen, he had acquired a taste for society in the salon of Mme Emile Straus; by 1896, his social climbing had almost completely alienated him from the serious young writers who had formed his circle of friends and collaborators at Condorcet and on the staff of Le Banquet in 1892. This group—that continued to hail as their guiding lights Daniel
Halévy, Jacques Bizet, and Fernand Gregh, author of the critically acclaimed _La Maison de l'enfance_ in 1896—followed Proust's progress from afar with decided reprobation, taxing him with snobbery and be-moaning the waste of his obvious literary talent. Proust, meanwhile, had found new friends to serve as his own guiding lights: at Mme Madeleine Lemaire's salon, he had met Reynaldo Hahn, the Venezuelan-born singer and composer whose musical transcriptions of Verlaine's _Chansons grises_ in 1892 had already earned for him a solid celebrity in the _grand monde_; through Reynaldo he had been introduced to the family of Alphonse Daudet and begun with Lucien, several years his junior, the friendship that, like his friendship with Hahn, would last a lifetime. Proust's friendship with Hahn in particular would have a direct effect on the composition and assembling of _Les Plaisirs et les jours_: Hahn's piano music for the verse section "Portraits de peintres" was included in the original edition of the work; this collaborative effort of poet and musician was also published separately as a plaquette "Portraits de peintres" in 1895. Hahn and his sister Maria read and commented upon a number of the component parts of _Les Plaisirs et les jours_ as Proust composed them, notably "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande," "Critique de l'espérance à la lumière de l'amour," and "Un Dîner en ville." The second half of the Flaubert pastiche "Mondanité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet" was composed specifically for Reynaldo, just as some of the prose poems in the section _Les Regrets, rêveries couleur du temps_ were meant to recall Proust's and Reynaldo's shared experiences in nature. The novel that Proust had begun writing at Beg-Meil while on vacation with Hahn in September 1895 (Jean Santeuil) was,
additionally, to contain a hidden tribute to him: "Je veux que vous y soyez tout le temps, mais comme un Dieu déguisé qu'aucun mortel ne reconnaît."\(^{11}\) Besides this "Dieu caché," however, there was in Proust's life in 1896 another type of god, highly visible and imposing, the erratic and irascible Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac, with whom he curried favor on every possible occasion, flattering and humoring him, addressing him as "Maître," hoping all the while to gain entrance through him into the highest ranking of the Parisian salons.\(^{12}\)

The most significant facts of Proust's life in 1896, however, concern his literary ambitions. A great many of the pieces that figure in _Les Plaisirs et les jours_ had already been composed prior to that year; although Proust himself does not elaborate on the matter, his decision to collect and augment his work to date, first announced in a letter to Robert de Billy in 1893,\(^{13}\) responded to two imperatives of the moment: his need to demonstrate to his still-skeptical parents the feasibility of his choice of a literary career, and a corresponding and potentially contradictory need—decried by his old friends as totally opposed to the seriousness and dedication demanded for a truly literary career—to impose himself and his talents upon the gratin. In its deepest sense, then, _Les Plaisirs et les jours_ represented a description and an affirmation of the self against the prevailing authorities of family and society; while down-playing the self-assertive intent of which he was perhaps only vaguely conscious in 1896, Proust himself would later acknowledge at least the autobiographical nature of the book by describing gift copies to Antoine Bibesco and Clément de Maugny among others as "une photographie de moi-même" surviving from his
youth. At any rate, his novel-in-progress after September 1895 was an openly autobiographical project; his work on it and *Les Plaisirs et les jours* surrounded Proust with all the trappings of a busy and viable literary career. Even as he put the finishing touches on *Les Plaisirs et les jours* at the end of 1895 and in the early months of 1896, and then anxiously followed its critical reception, Proust's correspondance shows him enthusiastically absorbed in the creation of the new novel, filling notebook upon notebook, keeping count of completed pages, and envisaging publication (by Calmann-Lévy, publishers of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*) in early 1897. In the midst of all this activity, Proust ventured into the debate over Symbolism by sending his article "Contre l'obscurité" to the Symbolist-leaning *Revue blanche*, in which he had published a number of "Études" in 1893; the *Revue blanche* published "Contre l'obscurité," with a rebuttal by Lucien Muhlfeld, secretary of the *Revue*, in its issue of 15 July 1896. Surely then in 1896, all of these irons in the fire must have done much to help Proust consider himself well on his way to becoming an established figure in French literature.

Yet at the same time—the less than enthusiastic welcome *Les Plaisirs et les jours* received at their publication alone is proof of this—important questions remained. What Proust published in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* were essentially experiments in form, highly polished little pieces, as numerous critics and Proust himself have pointed out, but experiments all the same in prose narrative, poetry, and prose poetry. Even when, in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust settled on prose narrative as the form to be exploited, he was still experimenting with the
relationship of life to art, embedding his first-person story within a novel supposedly written by the novelist C... and asking in his preface, "Puis-je appeler ce livre un roman? C'est moins peut-être et bien plus, l'essence même de ma vie, recueillie sans y rien mélér, dans ces heures de déchirure où elle découle. Ce livre n'a jamais été fait, il a été récolté." Thus in 1896, Proust's personal aesthetics were not completely formed; although he was already elaborating the bases of his philosophy of art, the details of this philosophy remained sufficiently fluid to allow any number of borrowings in Les Plaisirs et les jours from surrounding literary movements. These borrowings will occupy us in later chapters of this study; for now, it should prove instructive to look briefly at the sources and features of Proust's philosophy of art, such as it is, in 1896.

In Les Années de collège de Marcel Proust André Ferré has sketched the evolution of Proust's growing command of the tools of the writer's trade; his analysis of a group of Proust's devoirs de français from the lycée Condorcet reveals in them an already well-developed sense of drama and dramatic reversal, an elegant and easy style more often attuned to the sentimental than to the picturesque, attention to such details as setting and dialogue that fill out his scenes and bring them to life on the page, and a preoccupation with moral traits and with such themes, destined to recur in the Recherche, as captivity, exile, and ingratitude. These devoirs, says Ferré, testify to the deepseatedness in the lycéen of the writer's vocation: "Des pages comme ["Nuages"] traînissent non seulement le plaisir d'écrire, mais aussi l'entraînement à écrire, l'habitude d'écrire: on y sent leur
auteur déjà en possession d'une certaine technique d'écrivain.° 20 Further, and despite Proust's own protests to the contrary, he asserts that the young writer in his last years at Condorcet had in fact conceived of an aesthetics: "Elle tient en deux axiomes très simples: n'écrire que si l'on a quelque chose à dire; le dire dans la seule forme qui exprime véridiquement et totalement la pensée." 21

The difficulty for Proust in such an aesthetics, Ferré continues—and this is why one can refer to Les Plaisirs et les jours and Jean Santeuil as experiments in form—is that, until Proust stumbled upon what he would fictionalize as the hero-narrator's revelation of the form of his masterpiece at the Guermantes' matinée, much as Balzac had discovered, to Proust's admiration, the key to the Comédie humaine in the technique of reappearing characters, 22 Proust was unable to follow the aesthetics of "sincérisme" that Ferré deduces from these axioms (the term, as well as the statement of the two principles, are Ferré's):

...le drame de la vocation proustienne tient... à ce que cette esthétique, si alertement, si définitivement (et si précocement) formulée, le futur auteur du Temps perdu restera, pendant des années qui s'accumuleront de façon à la langue inquiétante, incapable de s'y conformer lui-même. Certes, il savait bien qu'il a quelque chose à dire, et il se sentait pressé de le dire. Mais sous quelle forme, autour de quelle invention, et même selon quel "genre"? 23

In October 1888, Proust began his last year at the lycée Condorcet, his année de philosophie; his philosophy teacher was Alphonse Darlu, the master who, in Robert Proust's words, exercised "une influence considérable" over Marcel. 24 Darlu's impact on Proust was immediate and profound; in the fictionalized version of this first...
philosophy class that Proust composed for Jean Santeuil ("La première classe de M. Beulier"), he depicted Darlu/Beulier as taking firm control over the adolescent Santeuil: the new teacher first assigns to Santeuil an hour's detention for disrupting the class, and then instead of announcing to the class as he returns their homework compositions Jean's potential as a great poet, reads the young man a stern lesson in style. The real classroom encounter may have been less dramatic than its literary transposition, but Proust's immediate response to Darlu was nonetheless extraordinary: two days into the school year, he addressed to Darlu a long and intimate letter, a hesitant and yet hopeful "confession" prompted by the particular relevance for his own "case" that Proust had discerned in that day's class lecture:

Ce matin vous nous parliez des jeunes gens qui trop tôt prennent de fâcheuses habitudes d'esprit, se dédoublent, pour ainsi dire très vite, qui ne peuvent rien faire ou rien penser sans que leur conscience n'étudie ou n'analyse ces actes et ces pensées.... J'ai conçu une si grande admiration pour vous depuis deux jours, que j'ai un irrésistible besoin de vous demander un grand conseil, avant de commencer l'étude de la philosophie.

Vous parliez si bien de cette maladie, que, n'eût été la présence de mes camarades je n'aurais presque pas pu m'empêcher de vous demander où est le remède. 26

Specifically, Proust complains in his letter to Darlu of an obsessive dédoublément, of his inability to think or to act without the consciousness that part of himself is at the same time watching and judging. Proust describes for Darlu the chronological development of his "illness":

Quand j'ai commencé, à près à quatorze ou quinze ans, à me replier sur moi-même et à étudier ma vie intérieure cela n'a pas été une souffrance, au contraire.

Plus tard, vers seize ans, cela est devenu intolérable, surtout physiquement, j'en ressentais une fatigue extrême, une sorte d'obsession. Maintenant, cela n'a plus du tout ce caractère. Ma santé, autrefois très faible, étant devenue presque bonne, j'ai pu réagir contre l'épuisement et le désespoir que causent [sic] ce dédoublement constant.

Mais ma souffrance pour avoir changé presque entièrement de caractère n'en est pas moins vive. 27

In this attention paid to himself, as Henri Bonnet has pointed out, Proust was nothing more nor less than an enfant du siècle; coming to emotional and intellectual maturity during the heyday of the Symbolists and Decadents, Proust asked nothing better, says Professor Bonnet, "que de vivre en contact avec le plus intime de [son] âme." 28 As Proust explains it to Darlu, however, the problem of dédoublement is particularly acute for its interference with his enjoyment of works of art:

Je ne peux plus trouver de plaisir complet à ce qui autrefois était ma joie suprême, les œuvres littéraires. Quand je lis par exemple un poème de Lecomte [sic] de Lisle, tandis que j'y goûte les voluptés infinies d'autrefois, l'autre moi me considère, s'amuse à considérer les causes de mon plaisir, les voit dans un certain rapport entre moi et l'œuvre, par là détruit la certitude de la beauté propre de l'œuvre, surtout imagine immédiatement des conditions de beauté opposées, tue enfin presque tout mon plaisir. 29

Intellectualization thus makes of art a paradis perdu with unmistakable sexual overtones. Robert Soucy has observed that for Proust in the Recherche, youth represented a "golden age of reading," a period
in which one of the chief pleasures of reading is the temporary loss of self into the world of the author; this nostalgia, Soucy notes, ushers in the *Recherche* with the narrator's description of himself as the subject of the book over which he has fallen asleep. It is to just such an absorption that Proust refers here, writing to Darlu of the "plaisir complet" and the "voluptés infinies d'autrefois" that he has been accustomed to finding in literature. The fusion of subject and object effected by art, overtly pleasurable and nostalgically longed for is symptomatic of a deeper nostalgia as well: that of the infant with its mother before it learns to delineate its own selfness from that of the mother, before it learns, that is, that real barriers separate the "self" from the "other." 

The anguish of separation, real or imagined, from his mother, is among the most heartfelt themes of Proust's biography and literary production; most immediately obvious in the letter to Darlu, however, is the transfer at the end of the golden age, of the separation trauma to the level of art and its repetition there: Proust, se dédoublant in his own mind to watch and to judge himself, spoiling the non-reflexive pleasure he took in art, repeats the childhood schism that formed the original, and intolerable, mother-child dualism. Darlu becomes the type of spiritual father on whose authority depends the resolution of this literary Oedipal complex, whose judgments must now guide those of the newly formed consciousnness:

Littérairement je ne peux plus rien juger depuis plus d'un an, je suis dévoré du besoin d'avoir des règles fixes d'après lesquelles je puisse juger avec certitude les œuvres d'art. Mais alors, pour
A brief venture into Lacanian theory can help us understand in another way the relationship between literary art, separation anxiety and Proust's experience of dédoublement. In the Lacanian analysis, the child's separation from the mother and its recognition of itself as subject is intimately bound up with its acquisition of language, that is, with its discovery of the process of symbolization; the child posits himself as "I" distinct from a "Thou" (the mother) and his primitive non-differentiated relationship to her becomes more and more dominated by the symbols (sounds) he uses to refer to her:

The grammatical category of the "I" is the index of individuality because it cannot be conceived without the Thou, without the He/it or without the listener to which it is opposed....

Language is thus the precondition for the act of becoming aware of oneself as a distinct entity. It is also the means by which the individual keeps his distance and autonomy from the world of real things which he posits "in themselves" as being different from the concepts which convey their meaning and different from the words or symbols which actualize concepts in the social relation of communication. 33

Recognizing then the inevitability of his own dédoublement, Proust in his letter acknowledges the fatality of his existence as a singular and isolated subject trapped within his own consciousness; he further recognizes that his consciousness is mediated by language, lamenting the interference of the "conditions de beauté opposées"—linguistic descriptions of beauty—in his unmediated enjoyment of the "beauté propre de l'oeuvre." From the law-giving father (Darlu), Proust
therefore requests the terms to what he assumes to be the accepted and conventional response to art, the (social) code of aesthetics that would enable him to function adequately and with less anxiety than at present on the symbolic level. This is the best he can hope for, the intellectual satisfaction of "correct" judgment standing in for the real but elusive goal of the loss of self in the (maternal) work of art.

At the beginning of Proust's literary career, we discover therefore the same configuration with which the Recherche begins: Darlu is to Proust as the narrator's father is to the young hero of the Combray bedroom drama: it is he who grants to the subject, in both cases an outsider to a social code, access to the object of desire, mother or work of art. In neither case, moreover, is the desired communion fully realized: knowledge of the principles of aesthetics is still far removed from that overwhelming experience of beauty that melts, however temporarily, one's consciousness of one's self. This lesson in the inevitable primacy of symbolized over real experience is written into the conclusion of the Combray bedroom drama, in which Marcel's mother spends the night in her son's bedroom, reading to him from François le Champi; that she leaves out the love scenes as she reads speaks eloquently of the unavoidably second-best nature of the drama's conclusion, covering up by a detour into art its inability to respond to the child's real desire for union with his mother. The significance of the bedroom drama, legible already in the letter to Darlu, lies then in the child's acceptance of the symbolic order as the socially ordained means of communication, the basic unit of exchange between individuals. As Lacanian theory has it:
...man--existentially a being by and for the other
--can only reconcile the necessity of his condition
with its drawbacks by recuperating himself through
exchange. The symbolic is the agent and guarantor
of that step. It is the field, the common ground
in which individuals assert themselves, oppose each
other and find themselves again. 35

It is in a moment of rebellion against the deficiencies of the
symbolic that Proust, seduced by the authority and intelligence of his
new philosophy teacher, wrote to him the passionate and revealing let-
ter that he recognized as flaunting the social code:

Vous pardonnerez, Monsieur, je l'espère, à mon
extrême admiration et à mon infini désir de savoir
ce que vous pensez de ceci, la bizarrerie et peut-
être l'indiscrétion qu'il y a à faire des confi-
dences aussi intimes à un inconnu.... Je vous
supplie, Monsieur, de ne pas faire la moindre al-
lusion en classe à cette lettre qui, pour moi,
est surtout une sorte de confession. 36

This type of rebellion is destined to flare up again on numerous occa-
sions in Les Plaisirs et les jours, Proust's nostalgia for immediate
experience, for the loss of self, perceptible over and over again be-
neath the surface of his (mediating) text. If Darlu gave any specific
advice on the rules of aesthetic judgment, we might find it in his
counsel to the student Jean Santeuil, presumably Proust in the origi-
nal, to steer clear of the preciosity and vague suggestiveness borrowed
from the newspapers and literary reviews and aim instead for a precise
and direct rendering of his subject matter. 37 As M. Beulier-Darlu says
in Jean Santeuil, however, his primary role was to teach his students
philosophy, not instruct them in style and rhetoric, 38 and, having thus
presided over what we might now call Proust's accession to the symbolic
(that neatly leaves the real Oedipal fixation unresolved and thus available as a theme for literary investigation), Darlu made his influence chiefly felt in Proust's philosophy of art. All philosophy was rooted for Darlu in: a deeply-felt moral sense transcending established religions; he thus set for Proust an example of faith in the worth of the life of the (symbolizing) mind:

...ce que Proust a surtout admiré en Darlu c'est la foi; la puissance d'affirmation, l'inaltérable et olympienne confiance de cet homme de talent—en dehors ou au-dessus de tout mysticisme religieux—dans le progrès de l'esprit par la succession des grands esprits, philosophes ou poètes. 39

Darlu, on the other hand, was but one of two masters; he represented only one of the two poles between which Proust, his crisis not entirely resolved, vacillated during the years most pertinent to the elaboration of Les Plaisirs et les jours, 1888-1896. The other, author of the preface and thus, in Fernand Gregh's term, one of the works "fées bienveillantes,"40 was Anatole France. Darlu and France were acquainted with each other; in his passion for France's writing, Proust was delighted to learn of Darlu's own admiration for the novelist.41 Yet, as Professor Bonnet has pointed out, the two men subscribed to opposing philosophical views, Darlu's faith in the existence of a "principe absolu"42 contrasting with France's skepticism:

[Darlu] veut qu'on présente à l'enfant des vérités en les débarrassant des doutes intéressés qui les obscurcissent, "en écartant surtout ce doute léger, mais corrosif du dilettante qui se fait un spectacle des contradictions humaines et s'amuse, comme il arrive souvent à M. Anatole France, par exemple, à faire briller, au-dessus de nos joies et de nos
peines, les couleurs changeantes du voile de Maïa, semblable à la robe de la danseuse. Eh oui! sans doute, toutes nos pensées sont relatives, relatives à notre faiblesse ... Mais ... il y a tout de même les points fixes et le fond solide de la vie humaine. 43

Towards the end of his year in Darlu's class, "un élève de philosophie," as Proust signed himself, addressed to Anatole France a letter no less extraordinary than the one he had written to Darlu. The pre-text of this letter was a scornful review of France's Balthasar published by Henri Chantevoine in May 1889 in the Journal des Débats.44 It is indicative of Proust's ability to "lose himself" in France's work that he took the critic's disparaging remarks personally; picturing France's reaction in the image of his own, he thus began his letter with the suggestion that "...un témoignage de sympathie passionnée pourrait peut-être vous consoler,"45 before proceeding to, once again, confess himself to the object of his admiration.

What dominates in this confession, however, is not the anxiety of dédoublement but a panegyrical to the beauty of France's work couched in rapturous terms of joy and love. The arrival of Le Temps every Saturday morning, containing France's column, brings him "la plus pure des joies"; France has been for him the source of pleasures previously unknown: "Vous m'avez appris à trouver dans les choses, dans les livres, dans les idées, et dans les hommes, une beauté dont auparavant je ne savais pas jouir." The experience comes very close to being that immediate fusion with beauty of whose rarity Proust had complained to Darlu. "Merger," the blurring of the boundaries of the self, is the keynote of the young correspondent's relationship to France and his
writings: he knows France's books by heart, "cathecizes" for him among his own friends and teachers, and shares a one-way communion with France in his innermost being: "...J'ai fait avec le souvenir des heures d'exquises délices que vous m'avez procurées, une chapelle toute pleine de vous, au fond de mon coeur." Intelligence, the exchange of immediate for mediated experience here plays a secondary role to the giving over of the self to beauty, as Proust readily admits his greater ability to love France's work than to understand it: "...depuis quatre ans je vous ai tant aimé que je crois vous comprendre un peu," he writes and in the next paragraph, "En attendant je me contente de vous aimer, de tâcher à vous plus pleinement comprendre et je lis vos livres aux plus intelligents de mes camarades de Condorcet." "Intelligents" in this context clearly means "capable of perceiving beauty." When Proust uses the adjective again a few lines later in a reference to Darlu—"Quelle joie j'ai eu[e] à rencontrer cette année chez mon professeur de philosophie qui est un grand penseur, un amour extrême- ment intelligent de vos livres!"—he is suggesting a synthesis of the two modes of experience in which even the mediating function of language and reason that can understand and account for the conditions of beauty (symbolic rather than real experience) do not override the superior, lived (preverbal) contact with beauty. To France's works, then, is due a certain satisfaction of the persistent nostalgia for the comforting union with the mother necessarily transferred to the realm of art, of which Proust complained in his letter to Darlu. His letter to France is the other side of the coin he keeps tossing just prior to Les Plaisirs et les Jours to try to determine the relationship of art
to life. There is something of each side present in the completed work.

**The Publication**

Proust was introduced to Anatole France at Madame Arman de Caillavet's salon in the fall of 1889, at the beginning of his long frequentation of that society. At the same time he remained within the sphere of Darlu's influence, taking private instruction from the philosopher in preparation for the licence in philosophy he completed in 1894. Proust thought of offering to each of the two men as well as to Reynaldo Hahn, the hommage of his first book, but ultimately settled for simply mentioning all three in the dedication to his friend Willie Heath; the latter had over his rivals the tremendous advantage of having died at an early age:

> Que l'ami véritable, le Maître illustre et bien-aimé qui leur ont ajouté [aux Plaisirs et les jours], l'un la poésie de sa musique, l'autre la musique de son incomparable poésie, que M. Darlu aussi, le grand philosophe dont la parole inspirée, plus sûre de durer qu'un écrit, a, en moi comme en tant d'autres, engendré la pensée, me pardonneront d'avoir réservé pour vous [Willie Heath] ce gage dernier d'affection, se souvenant qu'aucun vivant, si grand soit-il ou si cher, ne doit être honoré qu'après un mort. 49

To Anatole France, however, went the task of composing the preface to the book. Fernand Gregh, among others, blamed Proust for this too-obvious piece of literary and social strategy that enlisted the aid of the celebrated writer, "clou" of Mme de Caillavet's salon, to "sponsor" the book. 50 In two scathing reviews of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* in
Le Journal, Jean Lorrain attacked Proust as a social climber more interested in "getting his preface," mark of distinction, from the patriarch Anatole France, than in producing anything worthy of consideration as art. It is not entirely certain either that France took more than a condescending interest in the work of his young admirer; Fernand Gregh portrayed him in his recollections as "amical à son jeune talent [de Proust], mais plus souriant que crâdule à sa gloire." In any case, despite the tradition that continues to speak of the preface as the work of Anatole France, it is generally understood that all France contributed to it were a few corrections and his signature; the preface itself is most likely the work of Mme de Caillavet, France's mistress.

In Gregh's metaphor, another "good fairy" besides France was present at the "christening" of Proust's book, also introducing the work to society and lending to its obscure young author the prestige of her name: his illustrator, society hostess Madeleine Lemaire. Proust, who had begun attending Mme Lemaire's Tuesday soirées early in his career as a mondain, published in 1901 a description of her "studio" at 35 rue Monceau, where the roses painted on her canvases rivaled in beauty the real flowers posed in vases next to them and announced the studio of the future Mme de Villeparisis, where the perfume of innumerable lilac bushes wafted in from the garden, and where aristocratic guests, crowding into the room with the artists and political figures attracted, like them, by the personality of the hostess and the quality of her "programs," stood on chairs to see Reynaldo Hahn sing or watch
Monnet-Sully recite poetry. Henri Bardac, longtime habitué of Mme Lemaire’s, has also recalled the heteroclite nature of her gatherings:

Si étanches que fussent alors les cloisons sociales, parce qu'on appréciait son animatrice en des milieux très divers, ce salon était une sorte de terrain neutre où l'aristocratie rencontrait des hommes politiques, des gens de lettres, des peintres, des maîtres du barreau, des médecins célèbres et de grands musiciens.

He theorizes that Proust responded particularly well to the relaxed atmosphere of this salon for its favorable contrast to the more reserved, and often hostile, reception he encountered in various other more restricted and elegant salons of the time.  

Bardac thought as highly of Mme Lemaire’s talent as he did of her person:

Chacun sait qu’elle fut un peintre renommé. Ses toiles ont perdu, il est vrai, la vogue dont elles jouirent pendant longtemps, mais son œuvre décela une habileté, une science, un métier que d’autres lui envièrent.

Infatigable, elle créait plutôt qu’elle ne peignait des roses et des violettes.  

Montesquiou wrote verses in honor of Mme Lemaire whom he called "cette impératrice des roses"; in the same breath, he referred to Proust as a product of the garden that Madeleine did not always tend as well as she might. Proust himself recorded in "La cour aux lîles et l'atelier aux roses" the appreciation of Mme Lemaire attributed to Alexandre Dumas fils that he also used in the dedication of Les Plaisirs et les jours, "que c’était elle 'qui avait créé le plus de roses après Dieu.'"
By the time Proust announced to Robert de Billy in November 1893 his intention to publish *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, he had already secured Mme Lemaire's promise to do the illustrations. Proust remarked to his friend that the fact of this collaboration would gain for the book a larger audience than it could have originally expected: "Mme Madeleine Lemaire va illustrer ce petit livre. Aussi va-t-il courir dans bien des bibliothèques d'écrivains, d'artistes, de gens considérables de partout qui l'auraient ignoré sans cela et ne le garderont que pour les illustrations." It is by reason of this extended audience that he had decided to remember Heath in his dedication, as well as Edgar Aubert, with whose family Proust asked Billy to serve as intermediary:

Il me serait doux alors que toute cette élite qui eût apprécié Edgar et Heath si elle les avait connus, qui les eût admirés, aimés, sache au moins par mon humble témoignage, par une courte préface, qui ils ont perdu.  

Partly as a result of this collaboration that was to do his work such honor, (Proust wrote to Clément de Maugny in 1918 that Calmann-Lévy had agreed to publish the book because of Mme Lemaire's illustrations) and partly through his own expansions and revisions of the written text, Proust's prediction to Billy of publication "cette année," meaning probably not chronological 1893 but the '93-'94 Winter Social Season, proved more than a little short-sighted: in what would become typically Proustian fashion, the project of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* was destined to stretch itself out over another two and a half years before it finally saw publication in June 1896.
By 1893, Proust had already written many of the texts he intended to include in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*: more than a dozen "Etudes" that would form parts of *Fragments de comédie italienne* and of the *Regrets, "Violante ou la Mondanité," "La Mélancolique villégiature de Mme de Breyves,"* and some of the poetry. As far as the chronology of other texts can be determined, the poems on Watteau and Van Dyck, "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande," and the dedication to Heath date from 1894, "Baldassare" meant to replace "L'Indifférent" as the first story of the collection; "Un Dîner en ville" and "Les Marrionniers" are from 1895. To Mme de Brantes he wrote in October 1894 that the project, growing steadily with additional texts and illustrations, was absorbing the energy he was supposed to be devoting to his philosophy examinations and that it was impossible, therefore, to predict a publication date:

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J'ai tant écrit que je n'ai même plus songé à me présenter en Octobre à la licence de philosophie. Ce sera pour Avril au plus tôt. Pourtant je ne sais encore quand vous pourrez recevoir sous sa forme la plus somptueuse qui vous sera réservée—mon petit volume, ou plutôt mon gros volume, tant j'y ai ajouté de nouvelles choses.... C'est que Madame Lemaire s'y est intéressée davantage en y travaillant et, après beaucoup de dessins, commence ... des aquarelles. Tout cela peut être long à reproduire. 63
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Having begun work on *Jean Santeuil* in September 1895, however, Proust set a target date of February 1896 for publication of his *recueil*, apparently intending now to concentrate chiefly on his novel in progress and add nothing more to *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*. 
Unfortunately for his plans, Mme Lemaire did not share his new sense of urgency in completing the work; Proust’s letters from late 1895 through the first part of 1896 reflect his growing impatience at the delay caused by her failure to complete the illustrations. To Hahn he wrote in November 1895:

Je suis bien content que Madame Lemaire aille mieux. La Maison Calmann regrette bien de ne pas avoir ce qui est déjà fait pour commencer toujours. Elle le lui demandera dès son retour et Madame Lemaire n’aura ainsi besoin de donner les hors-texte qui manquent qu’au dernier moment. Et moi, je lui demanderai 2 jours pour tout relire. 64

The day after Christmas 1895, Proust wrote to his editor at Calmann-Lévy, a Monsieur J. Hubert, to solicit his professional help in pressuring Mme Lemaire to complete and submit her drawings, complaining of his illustrator’s tendency to procrastinate:

Pour ce qui est de Madame Lemaire vous me feriez bien plaisir en lui écrivant: "Nous voudrions bien toujours ce qui est prêt, car nous ne pourrons plus, sans cela, paraître cette année, dans la bonne saison." Car j’ai une raison très importante que je vous dirai pour laquelle je voudrais paraître en février. Mais si on dit à Mme Lemaire février, elle se dira "il est temps en mars" etc. [sic] 65

Proust never specified the "raison très importante" for his choice of a February publication date; what he probably had in mind was an appearance timed as one of the winter "events" in Parisian society, a strategy that, though it failed for Les Plaisirs et les Jours, he retained in his anticipation also of a February (1897) publication date for Jean Santeuil. Proust’s request, however, that Hubert act to speed up production in view of the February deadline, had just the opposite
effect on Mme Lemaire's work habits, for she had by then, and apparently with Hubert's encouragement, decided to include in her illustrations a more complicated and time-consuming series of drawings. Proust complained again of the delay in a letter to his editor on 27 December asking him to address to Mme Lemaire the reproaches which he himself could not, however much he might like to, address to her directly:

Depuis que vous avez eu la malheureuse idée (par-donnez-moi ceci qui est [dit] en riant) de conseiller à Mme Lemaire de faire de nouveaux en-tête, elle en a sans doute conclu avec une logique toute féminine, que rien ne pressait plus, et après avoir fait le tiers d'un en-tête, elle a commandé pour je ne sais pas quand des modèles, pour continuer des en-tête à figures, ce qui peut durer un an ou deux, et sans plus s'occuper du livre elle travaille à des aquarelles tantôt pour Benguet, tantôt pour Boussod. Vous seriez bien gentil de lui écrire, en lui disant: "Madame, voici les dernières limites dépassées, si vous ne m'envoyez pas le tout, nous ne pourrons plus paraître cette année, ou du moins je n'en réponds plus, car si nous sommes prêts quand la saison est finie, il vaudra mieux remettre à l'autre année. S'il vous reste quelques hors-texte à faire, certainement dépêchez-vous de les faire, mais envoyez toujours le reste du livre, sans cela nous n'aurons plus le temps d'être prêts. Sur vos cinquante petits dessins nous trouverons bien à distribuer à peu près également les en-tête, puisque n'ayant pas de sujets déterminés ils iront aussi bien ici que là."

In this same letter, Proust also suggested that the book would look more uniform if the illustrations were reproduced in black against a background of the same color throughout, with color reproductions reserved for the fifty deluxe editions of the work. These suggestions were followed in the printing.

Another letter from Proust to M. Hubert on 31 December 1895, shows Mme Lemaire, again encouraged by Hubert, continuing to produce new
drawings, this time for the *Fragments de comédie italienne* that Proust, probably to add weight to his argument, dismissed as the least remark-
able section of the book:

J'ai eu une vive déception en apprenant qu'au lieu de soutenir mon avis (que je ne me serais pas permis de vous donner si je n'avais cru qu'il était aussi le vôtre) vous avez encouragé Madame Lemaire à con-
tinuer de nouveaux dessins. Il en naît pour moi un nouvel inconvénient (que je puis celui-là lui dire moi-même) c'est que les petits morceaux insignifiants réunis sous le titre *Comédie italienne* ayant plus de dessins que les grandes nouvelles sont mis en relief, et comme c'est ce qu'il y a de moins bon dans mon livre, cela m'ennuie que le lecteur est [sic] d'abord l'œil attiré là-dessus. 67

The grammar error is as clear an indication as any of Proust's annoy-
ance with Hubert at this point; in fact, hurt and pouting as if this were a quarrel with Reynaldo rather than with his editor, Proust fur-
ther accused Hubert of betraying his confidence through his actions that have now jeopardized the February publication date upon which he had had his heart set. As Proust repeats, half-heartedly, his request that Hubert impose a firm deadline on Mme Lemaire, the editor himself be-
comes another "good fairy" of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, who holds it in his power to grant the neophyte author's fondest wish:

Mais ce qui m'ennuie surtout, vous le savez, et je vous en ai dit la raison, c'est si je ne parais pas en février. [sic] Je vous avais confié et n'avais confié à nulle autre personne, ce rêve, espérant que vous voudriez bien en seconder la réalisation. Vous seul le pouvez. Madame Lemaire aurait d'autant plus fait ce que vous lui auriez dit, qu'elle dit toujours que vous êtes trop discret et qu'elle ne vous en voudrait nullement de la presser. Aujourd'hui encore (mais je n'y compte plus puisque vous ne l'avez pas fait) si vous lui écriviez: "Décidé-
ment, Madame, faites ce que vous pourrez d'ici là
mais à partir de lundi prochain, je ne pourrai plus rien prendre, sans cela nous ne parantrions pas" vous auriez tout lundi et mon ai grand désir de paraître en février, fût-ce le dernier jour du mois (puisque avec tous ces retards les premiers jours sont maintenant impossibles) serait par vous [réalisable]. Comme je vous ai dit je n'y compte pas, puisque vous avez fait le contraire lundi et je n'ai pas trouvé cela très gentil." 68

According to a final letter from Proust to Hubert in January 1896, Mme Lemaire had still not kept the promise she made Christmas Day to have everything ready for the printer by New Year's; less openly irritated with Hubert than in his letter of December 31, Proust once more recommended a firm hand in dealing with the retardataire:

Pour ce qui est de Madame Lemaire soyez assuré qu'elle n'a rien fait et ne fera rien tant que vous ne lui demanderez rien. Si donc vous me permettez non de vous donner un conseil mais de vous exprimer un désir, écrivez-lui tout de suite que vous avez besoin des deux hors-texte (ou plus, je ne me rappelle pas combien il vous faut encore de hors-texte) et en lui demandant quand vous pouvez venir les chercher. Sans cela nous ne serons pas plus avancés dans un mois. 69

Proust suggested in his letter that the specific illustrations Hubert ought to request are those for "Baldassare" and "La Fin de la jalousie;" the other, smaller illustrations could be requested as necessary once the printing and proofing process was under way. In the meantime, Reynaldo at least had stopped by the printers to see about the reproduction of his manuscript sheets of piano music meant to figure at the center of the book. Proust apparently had to answer to charges by Hubert that he sent Reynaldo to him as an emissary pushing for speedier publication, for his letter began with the disclaimer: "Mais je ne vous
ai jamais envoyé Reynaldo! Il m'a raconté qu'il était allé vous parler de sa musique et m'a dit ce que vous lui aviez dit (élegant répétition).”

Despite Proust's ardent desire to see his book published by the end of February, the first set of proofs was not compiled before the end of March 1896; the épreuve en deuxième bears the date "28 Mars 1896." One can surmise that Mme Lemaire had, whatever protests M. Hubert had finally resolved to address to her, continued to take her time with the illustrations. Neither had Anatole France rushed to keep his promise of a preface; a letter to him from J. Hubert, dated 28 February 1896, requests both the preface—"Je compte même recevoir de vous une petite préface que vous lui avez promise" and a larger, conspiratorial service, perhaps explaining Hubert's own temporizing, to be rendered by France in favor of "notre juvénile auteur.""

Hubert would like France to help Proust correct his forthcoming proof sheets "et de lui faire les observations que, Mme Lemaire et moi, nous ne pouvons lui faire." Specifically, France ought to convince Proust to shorten his dedication (which turned out to occupy five pages at the beginning of the book, as Philip Kolb has pointed out, explaining and justifying Hubert's complaint) and to take out "certaines pièces un peu embrouillées et sans intérêt" that Proust is bent, Hubert says, on including. As for Proust's style, Hubert's first impression is that it is awkward, but it might after all—he isn't totally sure—be charming: "Je ne parle pas de ces ingénuités que l'on rencontre à chaque ligne, de ces formes de phrases un peu gauches et de ces profusions d'épithètes parfois un peu contradictoires; cela donne peut-être
un charme à cette œuvre de jeune homme." The publishers themselves, he notes, aren't nearly as concerned as he about the book's shortcomings--"Messrs. Calmann-Lévy ... acceptent le volume les yeux fermés"--so he appeals to France's goodwill and to his influence over Proust in this delicate attempt to guide the young and promising author: "Si donc vous avez le temps veuillez m'aider à perfectionner un livre de début dans l'intérêt de l'avenir littéraire de notre jeune ami."  

There is nothing in the Correspondance to indicate whether Anatole France actually accepted the role of intermediary proposed to him by M. Hubert. Proust did leave certain texts out of Les Plaisirs et les jours that the editors of the Pléiade edition later saw fit to include as an appendix to the work; the most notorious of these omitted texts is "Avant la nuit," originally published in La Revue blanche in December 1893. Proust may have had in mind this dramatic deathbed confession of homosexuality when he wrote to Robert de Billy of "la grande liberté de certaines parties" of the collection as it existed in 1893. One would think, however, that if this piece had been among those finally submitted to the publishers as Les Plaisirs et les jours, M. Hubert would have found stronger adjectives than "un peu embrouillée et sans intérêt" to describe his objection to it, especially since Calmann-Lévy was not noted for its eagerness to publish scabrous or scandalous material.  

On the other hand, the considerable changes that mark the text of Les Plaisirs et les jours as it passed through the final stages of publication in the spring of 1896 suggest the possibility of outside editorial intervention, perhaps indeed by Anatole France. On the first
set of proofs, for example, the preface is not included in the table of contents; it probably had still not been written at that point. Fragment X of the Comédie italienne is listed in the contents as "Pensées," a title that was later dropped. "La Mélancolique villégiaiture de Mme de Breyves" precedes "Mondanité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet" in the proofs; in the completed text this order is reversed, most likely for the symmetry of having a "grande nouvelle" ("Mélancolique villégiaiture" and "La Confession d'une jeune fille") fall on either side of the "Portraits de peintres et de musiciens," the poetry center of the book. The story that appears in the edition as "Un Dîner en ville" is titled on the proofs "Un Dîner en ville et après dîner;" the Regrets, Rêveries couleur du temps have as their original title in the table of contents the rather more explicit (and less poetic) Fragments sur la musique, la tristesse, et la mer. The title which Proust eventually settled on for this section does appear, however, at the head of a proof sheet for "Famille écoutant la musique" and "Rêve;" it bears the dedication "A.M. Darlu: Maître de Conférences, de Psychologie, et de Morale, à l'école normale de Sèvres," which was dropped in the edition, as were two other dedications that did not survive the proofs, that of the poem on Chopin to the pianist Édouard Risler and the dedication of "La Confession d'une jeune fille" to M. le Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac. Proust wrote later to the Princess Hélène de Caraman-Chimay (sister of Anna de Noailles) that Mme Lemaire had insisted he eliminate the dedications. 76

The Regrets themselves—the section most likely to be what Hubert had in mind by "certaines pièces un peu embrouillées et sans intérêt"—
underwent considerable revisions in naming and arrangement between the proofs and the edition. *Regret* I "Versailles - Tuileries" became just "Tuileries;" "Versailles" became *Regret* II. *Regret* II was formerly entitled "Paons;" this would appear to be the original title of the text "Promenade," pushed back now in the edition to figure as *Regret* III. On the proofs, *Regret* III was "Famille écoutant la musique," moved down to position IV in the published work. *Regret* IV on the proof sheet is listed as "L'eau couleur du temps;" this piece appears to have been dropped. *Regrets* V and VI are untiiled on the proofs as in the edition; *Regret* VII, however, the story of the captain and his souvenirs, bears the title "Autres Reliques," destined to be discarded, while *Regret* VIII in the edition, "Reliques," does not figure at all in the table of contents in the proofs. "Sonate clair de lune," *Regret* IX in the edition, is *Regret* VIII in the proofs, followed by "Source des larmes qui sont dans les amours passées," *Regret* IX in the proofs, and X in the edition.

The short piece "Amitié" is *Regret* XI in both the proofs and the edition; however, it was originally meant to follow "Éphémère efficacité du chagrin" (*Regret* X on the proofs and XII in the edition) which it was then repositioned to precede. *Regret* XII in the proofs is an untiiled text that appears also to have been omitted in the edition. "Éloge de la mauvaise musique" figures as *Regret* XIII in both the proofs and the edition, followed in the former by another text, omitted from the edition, "Prévoyance" (*Regret* XIV). "Rencontre au bord du lac" is listed as *Regret* XV in the proof's table of contents; it is *Regret* XIV in the edition, followed there by the untiiled *Regret* XV
("Comme un ciel sanglant avertit le passant"), "L'Etranger" (Regret XVI), and "Rêve" (Regret XVII). In the proofs, these three prose poems are separated from the "Rencontre" by "Critique de l'espérance à la lumière de l'amour," originally Regret XVI but moved far back in the edition to become Regret XXV.

"Tableaux de genre du souvenir" is Regret XX in the proofs, XVIII in the edition, followed in both by "Vent de mer à la compagne," (Regret XXI in the proofs, XIX in the edition), and then by an untitled piece, Regret XXII in the proofs, which is probably "Les Perles" (Regret XXII) of the edition. "Les Rivages de l'oubli" is positioned in the proofs as Regret XXIII; it is Regret XXI in the edition. "Comme à la lumière de la lune" was originally to follow "Les Rivages" as Regret XXIV; in the edition its number is also XXIV, but it has been moved back two places to precede the "Critique de l'espérance;" "Présence réelle," Regret XXV in the proofs, follows "Les Rivages de l'oubli" in the edition as Regret XXII; in both versions it is followed by "Coucher de soleil intérieur," numbered XXVI in the proofs and XXIII in the edition. "Sous-bois" is Regret XXVII in the proofs; it is XXVI in the edition, "Comme à la lumière de la lune" and "Critique de l'espérance" having intervened between it and the "Coucher de soleil intérieur."

"Les Marronniers" follows "Sous-bois" both in the proofs (Regret XXVIII) and in the edition (Regret XXVII). The next two texts, "Marine" and "La Mer," are interchanged from the first to the second version: "Marine" is Regret XXIX and "La Mer" is Regret XXX in the proofs; in the edition "La Mer" is Regret XXVIII and "Marine" is Regret XXIX. "Voiles
au Port" concludes the section in both versions, numbered Regret XXXI in the proofs and Regret XXX in the edition.

One of the goals of Proust's revisions of Les Regrets was thus probably to "tighten up" the section by ending on a round number (thirty), more aesthetically satisfying than an odd number for the sense of closure it provides. Rather than merely drop one of his original texts, however, Proust adopted a fairly complicated process of revision: he made of his first Regret—"Versailles-Tuileries"—two separate prose poems, added "Reliques," and dropped "L'Eau couleur du temps," "Prévoyance," and a third untitled text (which could be any one of "Souvenir," "Tout à l'heure, en traversant les Tuileries," or "Allégorie," included as an appendix to Les Plaisirs et les Jours in its Pléiade edition)77 to arrive at the difference of one that reduced the section from thirty-one to thirty pieces. And while he was at it, he changed one title, "Paons," to "Promenade," dropped or changed another ("Autres reliques"), and added a third, ("Les Perles"), at the same time as he did some considerable reshuffling of the order of the various texts themselves. The Proust who would constantly revise and amend his massive novel right up to the moment he died—Proust, the printer's nightmare—was already at work on a smaller scale in 1896.

One other significant variant between the first set of proofs and the edition of Les Plaisirs et les Jours is its title: in March 1896 the work was to be called Le Château de Réveillon, an elegant compliment to Mme Lemaire, recalling her property where Proust and Reynaldo had been frequent guests. There is no mention in Proust's correspondence of when or why he decided to change his title to Les Plaisirs et
les jours. It is entirely possible, however, that at some point between March and June of 1896, Proust realized the importance that the fictional family named Réveillon would assume in his novel-in-progress; fully expecting publication of Jean Santeuil to follow shortly upon the heels of Les Plaisirs et les jours, he most likely reconsidered the wisdom of insisting on the single name of Réveillon. His choice then of a title referring to the Greek poet Hesiod's Works and Days, added to Proust's work a dignity and seriousness of purpose that the original title had not been able to convey, at the same time as it responded to Proust's complaint that contemporary literature had turned its back on the classics. A less significant but rather more amusing change was also made in the text between the first set of proofs and actual publication: Proust yielded to Montesquiou, who was at that moment preparing his Roseaux pensants, the quote from Guez de Balzac that he had himself intended to use as the epigraph to "Promenades" ("Paons"). The citation—"Et parce que je n'ai ni l'âme, ni les yeux avaries, je trouve les émeraudes de vos paons d'aussi grand prix que celles des lapi-daires,—was forwarded to Montesquiou with self-conscious solemnity and perhaps more than a little pique:

Il y a déjà quinze jours que je l'avais supprimée [la citation] de mes épreuves, mais, depuis, je suis impardonnable de ne pas vous l'avoir encore envoyée. Mon livre sera sans doute trop peu lu pour qu'il ait risqué de défraîchir votre citation. Aussi l'ai-je retirée moins pour vous que pour la phrase elle-même. Je pense, en effet, qu'il existe pour toutes les belles phrases un droit imprescriptible qui les rend inaliénables à tout acquéreur, autre que celui qu'elles attendaient par une destination qui est de leur destinée. Je pense que celles-ci, de Balzac gémissant en servage dans un chapitre de mon livre, n'auraient cessé de réclamer
le sort illustre où elles peuvent prétendre, qui est de siéger au seuil du vôtre. Et peut-être, pour les avoir usurpées, me serait-il arrivé de grands maux. En vous envoyant ce joyau ... je pense faire, du moins, sa part à la destinée. 81

A second set of proofs—the *mise en pages*—was sent to Proust in April of 1896; they contained his dedication to Willie Heath set in italic font, Mme Lemaire’s illustrations, and the preface, dated 1896. This preface appeared in *Le Gaulois* on 9 June 1896, 82 three days before the publication of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* on 12 June 1896, which *Le Gaulois* duly announced one week later on 20 June: "'A signaler l'apparition d'un volume de grand luxe, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, illustré de ravissantes aquarelles de Madeleine Lemaire. L'auteur ... est un jeune, dont les premiers essais portent déjà la marque d'un talent très personnel et très muri....'"83 George Painter gives the publication date as 13 June 1896 (this is probably incorrect, however, as Proust began sending gift copies on the 12th), and writes that the laudatory publication announcements it received in *Le Gaulois, Le Temps*, and *Le Figaro* ought not to be misread. Proust owed them chiefly to his own reputation as a "diner-out" and to the prestige of his illustrator. 84

**The Illustrations**

Although by 1896 (as we shall see in a discussion of Proust’s opinions on the merits of literary schools 85), Proust had arrived at definite ideas on the nature of literature as a "spiritual" activity, the description in *Le Gaulois* correctly points out the considerable attention he lavished on his first book as a material object, an objet d'art in its own right. As originally published in 1896, *Les Plaisirs*
et les jours was a book meant to be looked at as well as read; it was what we now call a "coffee table book." In "Livres illustrés" of the Revue de Paris just before Christmas 1896, Fernand Gregh suggested that the book would make a lovely New Year's gift; he called it "...un fort beau livre d'étrennes, qui a le mérite assez rare d'être aussi agréable de contenu qu'il est beau d'aspect." Its price tag, however, made of Les Plaisirs et les jours an expensive gift: 13 francs 50, André Maurois said it cost, comparing this to the usual price of 3 francs 50 for books in 1896. Even Maurois' figure, however, is an underestimation: in 1897 Proust sent his friend Robert de Flers to Calmann-Lévy to inquire about a more salable reprint at 3 francs 50 and received this report: "Ton volume n'est pas épuisé et ils prétendent ne pouvoir songer à l'édition 3 50 que lorsque celle à 15 F sera complètement enlevée." The 15 franc edition never would be "complètement enlevée;" as Philip Kolb has noted, by June of 1918, approximately 1200 of the 1500 copies he gives as the total tirage, were still stacked up, unsold, at the publishers'. At about the same time, Proust was writing to Clément de Maugny of these unsold copies and their cost to the publisher:

...il m'a fait savoir des tas de fois qu'il avait perdu un argent énorme avec ce livre, et qu'il le vendrait à vil prix si je refusais de le racheter. J'ai refusé naturellement de racheter des milliers de volumes que je ne saurais où mettre, et suis d'ailleurs tout à fait indifférent à ce qu'il fera d'une œuvre qui diffère du tout au tout de ce que je fais aujourd'hui.  

The legend of Proust's inability to handle money benefits in retrospect from the project of Les Plaisirs et les jours. He published the book à compte d'auteur; the procedure fairly guaranteed its dismissal
by the world of letters as the self-indulgent fantasy of a mondain. 91

He lost money on the venture and had not, in fact, even signed a contract with the publishers, as Robert de Flers' letter on the reprint reveals, shedding new light at the same time on the naïveté of Proust's dealings with M. Hubert:

Quant à la question de tes droits d'auteur M. Gaston et M. Hubert disent qu'il n'y a eu aucun traité passé entre vous mais une convention tacite en vertu de laquelle tu n'aurais droit à quelque rémunération pécuniaire que le jour où les frais de l'édition seraient entièrement couverts—et que ce moment croyaient-ils (pour la certitude il leur fallait vérifier les livres) n'était pas encore arrivé.— Tu as eu grand tort mon cher petit de ne pas faire de traité avec des gens d'une amabilité aussi dangereuse. 92

An elegant neglect of production costs is the most immediately obvious feature of the 1896 edition: the large in-quarto volume boasts large and easy-to-read type on thick, smooth, glossy paper, separate inside title pages for the various sections of the book, and color backgrounds, most of a pale yellow green, for certain of the illustrations. Large margins—a maximum of twenty-nine lines of type are centered on each printed page—speak of sufficient affluence on the part of the author to permit him to neglect the price of the paper used for his volume; the original edition stretches out over an impressive 271 pages, as compared to 178, including appendix, in the 1971 Pléiade edition with its smaller pages and reduced typeset. Of the original tirage, thirty numbered copies were printed on papier de Chine. Another twenty copies printed on Imperial Japan featured silk bindings and a signed watercolor by Madeleine Lemaire; of these numbered copies, the first
went to Montesquiou. As Bardêche has observed, everything about this edition contradicted the author's aspiration to be taken as a serious literary figure, labeling him instead a "riche amateur" for whom literature served merely as a "divertissement." Mme Lemaire's illustrations constitute the major difference between the original and present editions of the work; their number and repetitiousness are little short of amazing, although they do not, as Antoine Adam has suggested, completely overwhelm the printed text. Mme Lemaire's abundant contribution could not help but attract the attention of the first critics of the work, and not always favorably. The acerbic Jean Lorrain, for example, had a field day holding the illustrations up to ridicule, and through them, the artist and author of Les Plaisirs et les jours; Lorrain's compte-rendu in Le Journal is willfully distorted:

...l'un des chapitres s'appelle: La Mort de Baldas-sare de Silvande [sic], le vicomte de Silvande. Illustration: deux cruches. Un autre, Violante ou la mondanité. Illustration: des feuilles de roses (je n'invente pas). L'ingéniosité de Mme Lemaire ne s'est jamais adaptée aussi étroitement à un talent d'auteur; M. Paul Hervieu, et son Flirt, n'avaient certainement pas inspiré aussi spirituellement la charmante peintresse. C'est ainsi qu'une histoire de M. Proust, intitulée, Amis: Octavian et Fabrice, a pour commentaire deux chattes jouant de la guitare, et une autre, dite Rêverie couleur du temps, s'illustre de trois plumes de paon.

Oui, madame, trois plumes de paon; après cela, n'est-ce pas, on peut tirer l'échelle. Proust's famous duel with Lorrain followed by three days publication of this article; its cause, however, was not the insult to Mme Lemaire's talents, but much more probably the thinly veiled aspersión
Lorrain cast in conclusion on the nature of Proust's friendship with Lucien Daudet:

M. Marcel Proust n'en a pas moins eu sa préface de M. Anatole France, ... et soyez sûrs que, pour son prochain volume, M. Marcel Proust obtiendra sa préface de M. Alphonse Daudet, de l'intransigeant M. Alphonse Daudet, lui-même, qui ne pourra la refuser, cette préface, ni à Mme Lemaire ni à son fils Lucien. 97

Proust and his illustrator found a kinder critic in Paul Perret of La Liberté, who, if he did not fully appreciate all of the drawings, was at least gracious enough to respect their evocative intent and to avoid parodying them: "...de sa main de fée, [Madeleine Lemaire] y a semé des bouquets adorables et des figures qui veulent être suggestives. L'habile artiste réussit mieux à rendre le visage des fleurs que les physiognomies humaines."98 Finally, in the commemorative issue of the Nouvelle Revue Française published just after Proust's death in 1923, Roger Allard returned to Les Plaisirs et les Jours to call it a "livre illustré de la façon la plus singulière, faite pour témoigner à jamais que l'aquarelle et la photogravure sont les deux métiers les plus incompatibles avec la lettre imprimée."99 It would thus seem reasonable to ask just how good, or bad, are Mme Lemaire's illustrations, and what purpose, if any, they serve in the overall work.

To have chosen Mme Lemaire as illustrator of Les Plaisirs et les Jours was in effect to have chosen flowers as their main illustration; although there are fewer roses in the work than one might expect of the "impératrice des roses," flowers of all sorts, not always identifiable, abound on the pages, particularly in the Regrets or wherever they might be the most obviously significant: pansies (a pun on "thoughts"
and the name of the flower) for the dedication to Heath, or roses shedding their petals, an almost palpable préciosité, at the unfortunate ends met by Violante and Françoise de Breyves. The cover, featuring daffodils or gladioli and the title and author's name fading off into indistinct, filmy clouds, is altogether worthy of Maeterlinck and seems to situate the contents of the book in the vaporous nether regions of the dream. On the title page there appears, however, a sketch of a chateau partially masked by a fir tree—the chateau of Réveillon itself; as the chateau is sketched again at the end of the book, one is meant to understand that this is the situation of the book, in the combination of social pleasures and pleasures of nature afforded by a summer stay at a country estate. There are problems, however, with this imagery: the second of the two chateaux is drawn off in the left background of the page, with to the right a vague reference to trees. In the foreground, a curving drive bordered by a low stone wall leads up to a tall, ornate, iron gate, joined by arabesques to the wall and decorated by a crown at its summit; as it leads the viewer's gaze up this drive towards the chateau, this illustration at the end of the book suggests far more strongly "arrival" than "departure." An additional problem is that the change in the book's title, apparently decided upon too late in the production process to permit a corresponding change in "frame" images, seriously compromised the relevance to the text of the chateau drawings.

Relevance to the text is a continuing problem for the illustrations throughout the work. There are portraits of most of the major characters: Baldassare, ill, waiting death in his chaise longue.
surrounded by his musical instruments, his cat, and his peacock; Violante untouched by worldliness and dreaming of love contrasted in a second sketch to Violante the mondaine in full evening dress, gazing back over her shoulder with a look of self-satisfaction and vanity; Françoise de Breyves, seated at her writing table, head resting on her hand, day-dreaming over her letter requesting an introduction to Jacques de Laléande; the jeune fille of "La Confession" lying wounded on the floor. For "La Fin de la jalousie," however, the illustrations are definitely and distractingy out of order. The story, like many of the others in the book, has its own inside title page; the title page for "La Fin de la jalousie" is decorated with tall irises, the taller inclining to the right and the smaller to the left, symbolic perhaps of the disunion of the lovers Honoré and Françoise that forms the subject of the nouvelle. The first page of the text repeats the title and is illustrated by a drawing of a woman with short curly hair; wispy tendrils escape from her coiffure to brush softly and elegantly against her neck. Her head is raised in a noble, almost haughty attitude; she smiles slightly as she looks back over her bare shoulder in a three-quarter turn towards the viewer. She is in décolletée and the fingers of both her hands are interlaced gracefully beneath her bust. This is the heroine of the story, feminine and attractive, sensuous, discreet and modest, the proper object for Honoré's jealous imagination of her infidelities.

Two full-page illustrations within the story seek to repeat visually Proust's tale of this nearly perfect love poisoned by jealousy. The first, however, showing the lovers together, arm in arm, decked out
in evening clothes, speaks more of jealousy than of the passion recounted by the facing text—"Et ils se dirent presque en même temps, avec une exaltation sérieuse, en prononçant fortement avec les lèvres, comme pour embrasser: 'Mon amour!'" (p. 147). Honoré appears troubled, refusing to meet Françoise's adoring gaze, contemplating instead some private mental image of his jealousy. This illustration would certainly have been better placed farther along in the text, to correspond to the account of Honoré's tortures; what we find instead facing his fervent prayers "de ne plus aimer Françoise, de ne plus l'aimer trop longtemps,
de ne pas l'aimer toujours, de faire qu'il puisse enfin l'imaginer dans les bras d'un autre sans souffrir puisqu'il ne pouvait plus se l'imaginer que dans les bras d'un autre" (p. 155), is the representation of their unity from the beginning chapter: with her left hand Françoise gathers the folds of her frilly peignoir; her right is clasped in the right hand of the man standing behind her who leans over to kiss her on the neck—an action that is the subject of a long commentary by Honoré in Chapter I—as she looks back at him with a tender smile. One might conceivably reconcile this image to the surrounding text by considering it a representation of what Honoré imagines—"il ne pouvait plus se l'imaginer que dans les bras d'un autre"—and thus interpreting the male figure as the "autre." Such subtlety, however, exceeds the demands of the illustration; by this point in the book, Mme Lemaire has accustomed the reader to such an elementary level of symbolism that the best interpretation for this and the preceding illustration is that they are simply out of place and ought to have been transposed. Another obviously irrelevant image is that of a sailing party announcing
"La Mer;" the very presence of a social group on the water contradicts the celebration in this prose poem of the mystery and consolation afforded by the sea to those afflicted by "le dégoût de la vie" (p. 142).

On the other hand, some of the illustrations do seem to complement the themes and coherence of the work, the visual representations actually enhancing the literary representation and the presentation of the text. For example, the dedication ends with the image of a bird in flight, a branch in its beak, inspired by the image of Noah's ark Proust used in the dedication: "Je compris alors que jamais Noé ne put si bien voir le monde que de l'arche, malgré qu'elle fussent close et qu'il fût nuit sur la terre" (p. 6). The bird returning to the ark with the branch in its mouth, sign in Genesis of land and renewed life, is thus a reference to the central dilemma of presence and absence, life and death, in the dedication; there, as in the first nouvelle, "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande," illness (enclosure in the ark) and death are depicted as sweet refuge—made so for the author Proust by his mother's consoling presence—aft er which healing and the return to life are inevitably tinged with sadness: "Douce colombe du déluge, en vous voyant partir comment penser que le patriarche n'ait pas senti quelque tristesse se mêler à la joie du monde renaissant?" (p. 7). Mme Lemaire's dove, emblem of this contradictory state of affairs, guarantees that the note of pathos in the dedication is sounded again at its end, just before the story to which it is connected by its theme of the pleasures of illness and death.

The beginning and ending illustrations for the Fragments de comédie italienne function similarly as emblems. On the title page for
the *Fragments* a masked Pierrot announces the change of mood from somber reflection in "Violante ou la mondanité" to *divertissement* and gaiety; posed gracefully to recall Watteau's theatre paintings, he holds up the theatre card on which is printed the title of the section. The drawing at the end of the *Comédie* corresponds to this Pierrot; at the bottom of the page stands a rotund little clown from the Italian Comedy, eyes opened wide beneath his broad-brimmed feathered hat; he is smiling knowingly, yet his ambiguous expression, at once very wise and very naïve, seems to call forth a smile of delight and bewilderment from the viewer. His hands turn his empty pockets inside out; he smiles, either because of or in spite of his impoverishment, but his literal meaning for the text is clear: this jolly clown can produce no more entertainment, his stores are depleted, it's the end of the *Comédie*. At another level, however, the clown with his empty pockets might be read as an allegory of the section itself, whose thrust is in large part a demasking, in the manner of La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld, of the hidden motivations and desires of society, of the vanity of its habitual pursuits. The clown's empty pockets become thus an image of the emptiness of society: the hollowness of its pleasures and preoccupations, the shallowness of its judgments and pronouncements. The final text of the *Fragments* ends, in fact, with a declaration of lack: "...À moins qu'il puisse jouer avec grâce les jeunes premiers, dont on manque toujours" (p. 56). It is the ambiguity of the clown's smile, however, that captivates: is he wiser than the other players in the comedy for accepting that the point of the game is to cover up its vacuity, or does he remain the dupe of the very bankruptcy he represents, an interpretation
that, by joining him to the Pierrot at the beginning of the Comédie, permits a cyclical continuation of the attitudes and activities described in the text? The difference is only subtly alluded to, if at all, in the illustration, and it is entirely possible, of course, that whatever spice such an interpretation adds to the drawing, the clown as allegory could be more our doing than Mme Lemaire's.

To one returning nearly one hundred years later to Mme Lemaire's drawings for Les Plaisirs et les jours, her popularity as an illustrator in late nineteenth-century France is somewhat incredible; from our vantage point, it is easy to agree with Edmond Jaloux's rueful observation that Madeleine Lemaire is a perfect example of flux in artistic matters, a lesson in the evolution of taste: "Le fait que Marcel Proust admirait Madeleine Lemaire devrait faire réfléchir les jeunes gens qui croient volontiers que tout, dans l'ordre littéraire et artistique, est installé pour toujours et qu'ils ont la chance de posséder enfin une vérité définitive." 101 Overall, Mme Lemaire's style is facile and repetitive, characterized by long, sweeping brush strokes for the main lines of her figures, and shorter, nervous strokes for hasty shading effects, angular lines and undefined backgrounds. She offers few inventive or imaginative solutions to the problem of space, positioning her flowers between texts at either mounting or descending angles and twisting leaves and stems into the arabesque patterns that function in her vocabulary, along with frills and fans, and folds of dresses gathered in her subjects' hands, as "elegant." Not surprisingly, then, the illustrations have not aged well. Their original pathos has for the most part declined into bathos and it does require some measure of
imagination not to perceive them as detracting from the text, particularly—and ironically—in the case of the en-tête to "La Confession d'une jeune fille," to which we shall return shortly. Their abundance and repetitiousness turn the illustrations into a source of ennui for the modern reader; with neat parallelism, they become decidedly overdone and tedious at approximately the same point in the overall work—Les Regrets—that the poses and mannerisms of Proust's text itself come to seem exaggerated, pretentious, saccharine, ennuyeux. The combination serves admirably to date Les Plaisirs et les jours as a work of the fin-de-siècle.

Yet, as even the few examples given above suggest, the illustrations ought not to be shrugged off as an incidental and easily expendable part of Les Plaisirs et les jours; they are not that at all. Their primary function was to decorate Les Plaisirs et les jours, enhancing the visual appeal of the work as a physical object and source of aesthetic delight, a goal not totally incompatible with a love for literature and belief in the high seriousness of its purpose. The concern for decoration and presentation speaks directly in fact to the valuation of art object as fetish not at all uncommon in the literature of the fin-de-siècle. In the original work, moreover, the presence of the illustrations set up a different relationship between the reader and the text than the type of relationships we can experience in the non-illustrated version. The illustrations of the 1896 edition serve first of all as guides for the reader; they prompt his imaginative response to the text by objectifying the characters and situations of the fiction, thereby bringing the fiction into a reassuring contact
with observable reality and paradoxically encouraging "the willing suspension of disbelief" the reader needs to participate for himself in the creative act of the fiction. The readily comprehensible symbolism of the illustrations likewise promotes and directs the reader's emotional response to the text: the many persons depicted resting their head on their hands are melancholy or dreaming, and invite the reader to share that experience; flowers with drooping blossoms signify sadness, flowers without petals waste and melancholia, and autumnal motifs of Les Regrets, nostalgia and regret.

There is a sense in which the illustrations in their role as guides--exception made for those that are in obvious discordance with the text--may have even been intended as compensation for perceived or suspected failures in the text. The future author of the Recherche, who would allow his narrator to lament his chronic inability to "observe," wrote to Albert Flament in 1897, complimenting him on his obituary article for Alphonse Daudet, interested by the precise and detailed manner in which Flament described Daudet at work and prompted to comment on his own ability to describe:

Chaque détail est poussé jusqu' où un autre n'aurait pu le conduire et vous l'appropriez d'une façon incontestable, comme un droit de propriétaire. Pour un homme de lettres, il y a un monde entre la tête de Christ de Daudet dont tout le monde a parlé et votre "Christ espagnol exposé," etc. Votre tête penchée avec indication du côté ajoute un esprit d'observation physique que je vous envie car il m'a toujours manqué et sans lui, les choses ne se fixent pas, flottent comme dans le rêve." 104

Recourse to an illustrated text for his first book, might therefore, in addition to its heightened fashionable appeal, have occurred to
Proust as a supplement to his own creative powers, the illustrations serving to "fix" the images he would like to evoke, giving them the physical precision he says he cannot supply. At the same time, those illustrations of flowers and the like that are left deliberately vague or emotionally suggestive serve in turn to enhance the atmosphere of dream which Proust purportedly finds to be more in keeping with his talents. The complementarity of precision and suggestiveness that the illustrations thus establish with the text is likewise a feature, as we shall see, of Reynaldo Hahn's piano music, the second most important supplement to the original text of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*. 105

The illustrations additionally were meant to be among the pleasures of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*; they offered to the original readers in fact a choice of pleasures—reading or viewing. Those having to do with viewing are actually a combination of pleasures, the first of which is the pleasure—recessive in the text of the work, particularly in the *Regrets*—of the mirror. The "observable reality" to which the illustrations link the readers is the reality of themselves and their preoccupations: the personages drawn by Madeleine Lemaire are all clearly members of the idle upper-classes to whom the *édition de luxe*, at its outrageous price, was offered. Thus the illustrations at their simplest level invite the reader to delight in the image of himself that they propose to him; they offer the (socially acceptable) pleasure of self-contemplation, *épanchement* for the society reader's inclination to narcissism. Representative of this particular pleasure is the illustration that accompanies "Un Dîner en ville," depicting as one of the guests at the dinner table a young man whose large eyes and
serious gaze suggest for all the world that this is a drawing of Proust
himself, the author made visually present to the reader and to himself
within the pages of his book, or "photograph."

The second pleasure proposed by the illustrations is that of voy-
eurism. The scenes depicted are of members of society caught at un-
guarded moments, their emotions written in the least details of their
gestures, attitudes and surroundings. In such illustrations as Baldas-
sare meditating in his chaise longue, Mme de Brevyes dreaming over
the opening words of her letter, Honoré kissing Françoise in her dressing
gown or gazing off into space as they enter a salon together, the
viewer is granted admission to the private space of the characters
that, as the accompanying texts generally assure us (thus certifying
that there is transgression involved in observing them) they jealously
shelter from public scrutiny.

Nowhere is this voyeuristic relationship of the reader to the text
more evident than in the opening illustration for "La Confession d'une
jeune fille." The illustration immediately announces the end of the
jeune fille's experience that begins this narrative told in flashback:
at the top of the page the heroine reclines languidly against the wall,
a pistol in her hand on the floor. Meant to inspire pity and terror
by this spectacle of a suicide, this illustration is unfortunately
among those that have aged most poorly; one wonders from the jeune
fille's expression whether she is in fact dying or merely dreaming, for
the artist has left just enough lucidity in her eyes to make it plau-
sible for her to tell her story before breathing her last. This is
what the nouvelle requires, supposedly recounted between the suicide
attempt and her actual death. Despite the self-conscious seriousness that gives to this illustration a cloying and artificial look (and makes one want to laugh at it), an air of solemnity reigns on the first page of the somber tale. The space of the page is occupied mainly by preliminaries to the text: beneath the illustration is the title in large print, followed by the epigraph from the *Imitation of Christ*; the Roman numeral I (chapter number) follows that, after which there is a quotation from Henri de Régnier on "le doux parfum mélancolique du lilas" (p. 85). The reader's approach to the text, which only begins with a few short lines at the bottom of the page, is thus rendered slow and deliberate, almost processional; one's sense of time is joined to that of the narrator so that the opening sentence "Enfin la délivrance approche" is experienced with her as a liberation, with a sense of relief and fulfillment after the long wait. At the same time, however, we have already seen the *jeune fille* in a pose intended as shocking and memorable; the long approach to the text thus also increases the reader's sense of having trespassed into forbidden space at the same time as it (supposedly) heightens his curiosity about what he has seen.

The suspicion of voyeurism is borne out by the story itself. It is, first of all, an act of voyeurism that has led the *jeune fille* to her suicide attempt, as her mother happened to catch sight of her and her lover in *flagrant délit* and died of the shock; the girl returned her mother's horrified stare and now she too must die, having promised herself not to outlive her mother. Secondly, the illustration purports to capture the *jeune fille* the moment after she shoots herself; thus, the action that the illustration represents sets the narration
itself in motion, with the *jeune fille's* attempt to explain and justify her suicide in her final "confession." That confession is addressed to an unidentified interlocutor—the reader; by virtue of the illustration encountered before the text, the reader is drawn immediately and without preliminary explanation into the text's cycle of voyeurism and death; he is, additionally, forced by the illustration to assume at least partial responsibility for the existence of the text, as the narrator undertakes to explain to the reader the scene he has just witnessed. In the text itself, narrated in the first person, there lies hidden the further, perverse pleasure—one of a number of the *frissons délicieux* sown throughout *Les Plaisirs et les jours*—of identifying with the *jeune fille* in a symbolic matricide of one's own, an imagined release from the constraints of the social and sexual taboos that the *jeune fille's* mother represents in the text. In an article to which we shall return in a later chapter, "Writing and the Return to Innocence: Proust's 'La Confession d'une jeune fille,'" Walter Kasell discusses the *plaisir troublé* that the *jeune fille* experiences, recognizing that the consciousness of transgression is a necessary element in her pleasure. Such a *plaisir troublé* is what the illustrations of intimate events offer to the reader of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*; the illustration for "La Confession d'une jeune fille" serves as the prototype for the temptation offered by the other illustrations, to transgress knowingly into private spaces, recognizing boundaries but refusing to see them as obstacles, in fact incorporating them into, one's own jouissance. This holds true even for the more "symbolic" illustrations of the work, the emotional props and guides that mainly take the shape of
flowers, leaves and the like. A major current of solipsism runs through the various texts of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*; against such intimacy, these illustrations can be seen as invitations to transgress upon the narrator's private world of reverie to appropriate its seductiveness for oneself. The difference between public and private spaces may also, finally, permit a recuperation of the illustrations of the chateau of Réveillon at the beginning and end of the book: in both drawings, the reader stands outside the walls of the chateau before and after the penetration into the chateau's inner space provided by his reading of the text.

**A Musical Interlude**

A second collaboration, between Proust and Reynaldo this time, produced another *plaisir* of which modern readers of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* are also deprived: enjoyment of Reynaldo's piano scores, accompaniment to Proust's "Portraits de peintres." The pleasure of the music was not, incidentally, one reserved only for the book, as Hahn's compositions were featured at two "soirées musicales" in Paris before and after publication of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*. The first of these soirées was held at Mme Lemaire's on 28 May 1895. Proust invited Montesquiou to the occasion in terms of utmost deference, suggesting that the Count had provided by his verses the model for Proust's:

...on entendra demain quelques-uns de mes plus mauvais vers dans ce même atelier où on entendit de si beaux ... si, parmi toutes les belles musiques qu'il y aura demain, vous pouviez prendre quelque plaisir à constater dans les vers des jeunes gens non seulement l'admiration mais l'imitation des vôtres ... je vous demanderais de venir de bonne heure.... 110
Montesquiou attended, as did a sufficient number of other luminaries for Le Gaulois to describe the event the following day as "une soirée musicale des plus brillantes," during which "on a entendu et applaudi Mmes Eames-Story, Gabrielle Krauss; MM Pugère, Edmond Clément et Risler, qui surtout ont admirablement fait valoir les belles oeuvres que M. Hahn a composées sur des poésies finement ciselées par M. Marcel Proust." Of these poems and or their musical transcriptions (it is not clear which are referred to), the compte-rendu continues, "Chacun des Portraits de peintres est un petit bijou."111 Le Gaulois published the text of Proust's four poems a few weeks later in its June 15 issue; in 1896 the poems and music were published together in an elaborate plaquette that featured the additional raffinement of reproductions of portraits of each painter.112 A second performance of the Portraits, poetry and music, formed part of the program for an "heure de musique moderne" at la Bodinière on 21 April 1897, featuring the works of Reynaldo Hahn; Mlle Moreno recited the text of Proust's poems at this gala.113

In his article on the "Portraits de peintres," Professor Johnson has painstakingly described the technical features of Hahn's compositions and their relationship to Proust's poems. The music for "Albert Cuyp," for example, follows that poem's narrative line from the "limpid, scintillating bars" of the opening, translating along with the poem's opening lines, "the static luminescence of Cuyp's landscapes," through the central "heavy measure" signifying the horses upon which the poet's attention rests for a moment, to a restful and repetitive sameness at the end, a circularity of structure that elicits praise from Professor
Johnson: "This final section," he writes, "is much like the opening measures of the piece, but now one feels that time has been arrested, a tour de force in an art form which is by its very nature dynamic and sequential."\(^{114}\) For the music to "Paulus Potter," Johnson continues, "Rather than following rigorously the pattern established in Proust's verse, Hahn has tried to capture through the recurrent melody and its reworkings the melancholic uniformity of Potter's landscapes."\(^{115}\) For the poem on Van Dyck, the music is adapted to both the story and the tonality of the poetry: a "graceful, elegant, regal melody, sustained by inner voice motion in eighth notes supported by more slowly moving chords in the bass very beautifully captures Van Dyck's stately portraits, while underlining the tragic destiny of the British royal family."\(^{116}\) Finally, in the music for "Watteau," Johnson finds that "the nervous recurrence of the fragile melody, the shimmering movements of the sixteenth notes, the broken chords and the shifting key signatures all create musically the delightful artistic imbalance that one experiences while absorbed in Watteau paintings."\(^{117}\) Johnson's conclusion is that this collaborative effort between poet and musician was particularly fruitful, resulting in a group of "little masterpieces within a rare and hybrid genre which has produced few universally recognized masterpieces."\(^{118}\)

To one less comfortable with the verbal transcription of musical notes, what is most striking in Hahn's music in Les Plaisirs et les Jours is the abundance of extra-musical notations it includes along with the musical signs and symbols we have just seen described and interpreted. For each section of each composition, Hahn specifies in
surprisingly subjective terms the manner in which he intends his music to be played: "aérien," "sans nuances," "un peu lourd, comme la croupe des chevaux flamands," "avec bonne humeur," "très franchement" figure among other such notations in Cuyp: "fantasque et langoureux," "également--à l'ombre--avec une sonorité chaude et douce," "un peu allègre ... comme un souvenir" are noted for Watteau, "avec élégance et mélancolie" for Van Dyck. There are thus two codes at work in Reynaldo's written music: the strictly musical code composed of the standard notations for notes, key signatures, crescendos, sustenuto, decrescendos and so on, and the discursive notations designed to limit as much as possible an artist's personal interpretation of the written music, assuring that the music as played will approach to some enhanced degree (a complete coincidence is impossible, given the subjective nature of such a direction as "avec bonne humeur") the composer's notion of what his music is.

At the time of their collaboration, Proust and Reynaldo were at odds over just these two codes and their role in music. First of all Reynaldo, of the two of them the professional musician, tended to disparage Proust's notions about music, apparently on the basis of Proust's lack of formal instruction in that art. Proust wrote, for example, to Gabriel Fauré in 1897 to compliment him on Le Parfum imperissable by which Proust declares himself "enivré," adding, "C'est du moins une ivresse clairvoyante car j'ai dit à Reynaldo sur ce Parfum des choses qui lui ont paru justes, et Dieu sait s'il est sévère pour les jugements des littérateurs sur la musique." He had already written something similar to Mme Lemaire's daughter Suzette in 1895:
...je dois dire qu'en effet dans le monde je ne discute pas volontiers les opinions musicales de Reynaldo. D'abord ce serait un grand orgueil de ma part. Je sais trop tout ce qu'il peut entrer de condescendance dans votre gentillesse ou dans la sienne, s'il consent à parler musique avec moi, vous peinture avec moi. Et je ne me donnerais pas le ridicule d'opposer l'opinion d'un ignorant à celle d'un artiste spécial. 120

When Tannhäuser opened for the second time in Paris in 1895 (following its initial failure in 1861), Proust wrote to Reynaldo that while he only liked the end of that particular opera he had to contradict Reynaldo's opinion, and feel that the more Wagner turned to the legendary, the more "human" he became:

Je me suis fort ennuyé à Tannhauser [sic] jusqu'au récit. Et malgré les exclamations admiratives de toute la salle cette languissante prière d'Elisabeth m'a laissé glacé. Mais que toute la fin est belle. Je ne suis décidément pas de votre avis sur la phrase "légendaires au lieu d'humaines".... Plus Wagner est légendaire, plus je le trouve humain et le plus splendide artifice de l'imagination ne m'y semble que le langage symbolique et saisissant de vérités morales. 121

As he repeated to Suzette Lemaire another difference of opinion with Reynaldo over Wagner—"...la mort d'Elisabeth qui rachète l'âme de Tannhäuser [sic] c'est déjà la doctrine chrétienne qui sera littéralement exposée dans Parsifal. Je dis tout bas, Reynaldo ne m'entendant pas, que je crois que ce sont là des thèmes essentiellement musicaux, parce qu'ils sont irrationnels"122—Suzette assumed that the difference between Proust's and Hahn's views on music was simply that Proust liked Wagner and Reynaldo did not. Not so, Proust wrote again to Suzette, this
time explaining that their fundamental disagreement was over the nature of music, the type and manner of its expressiveness:

Vous m'avez bien mal compris. Je cache d'autant moins mon Wagnerisme à Reynaldo qu'il le partage. Le point sur lequel nous sommes en désaccord c'est que je crois que l'essence de la musique est de réveiller en nous ce fond mystérieux (et inexplicable à la littérature et en général à tous les modes d'expression finis, qui se servent ou de mots et par conséquent d'idées, choses déterminées, ou d'objets déterminés—peinture, sculpture—) de notre âme, qui commence là où le fini et tous les arts qui ont pour objet le fini s'arrêtent, là où la science s'arrête aussi, et qu'on peut appeler pour cela religieux. 123

For Reynaldo, on the other hand, with what Proust calls his "tempérament de musicien-littéraire," music is highly determined, functioning with the precision and clarity of a discursive language; the composer on whose value he and Hahn could not agree, Proust further explained to Suzette, was Beethoven, far too abstract for Reynaldo's taste, but admired by Proust precisely for his suggestiveness:

Reynaldo au contraire, en considérant la musique comme dans une dépendance perpétuelle de la parole, la conçoit comme le mode d'expression de sentiments particuliers, au besoin de nuances de la conversation. Vous savez qu'une symphonie de Beethoven (ce qui pour moi est non seulement ce qu'il y a de plus beau en musique, mais encore ce qui remplit la plus haute fonction de la musique, puisqu'elle se met en dehors du particulier, du concret—est aussi profonde et aussi vague que notre sentiment ou notre volonté dans son essence, c'est-à-dire abstraction faite des objets particuliers et extérieurs aux-quels elle peut s'attacher) l'ennuie beaucoup. Il est bien trop artiste pour ne pas l'admirer profondément, mais ce n'est pas cela qu'est pour lui la musique et cela au fond, ne l'intéresse pas. 124
By the time he wrote *Un Amour de Swann*, Proust would himself arrive at a notion of music as particular and discursive; this is the basis of the final appeal for Swann of Vinteuil's "petite phrase," to which "Swann [se] reportait comme à une conception de l'amour et du bonheur dont immédiatement il savait aussi bien en quoi elle était particulière, qu'il le savait pour la Princesse de Clèves ou pour René, quand leur nom se présentait à sa mémoire..." while in the dialogue for piano and violin at the end of the sonata, "la suppression des mots humains, loin d'y laisser régner la fantaisie, comme on aurait pu croire, l'en avait éliminée; jamais le langage parlé ne fut si inflexiblement nécessaire, ne connut à ce point la pertinence des questions, l'évidence des réponses." In *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, however, Proust's references to music echo his comments to Suzette Lemaire on its mysterious, indeterminate, religious appeal; he writes, for example, of the sea in "La Mer," "Elle nous enchante ainsi comme la musique, qui ne porte pas comme le langage la trace des choses, qui ne nous dit rien des hommes, mais qui imite les mouvements de notre âme" (pp. 143-44), and described as a mystical experience in "Famille écoutant la musique" the variety of thoughts and emotions called forth in each member of the family as they listen to someone singing at twilight:

L'étranger passant devant la porte du jardin où la famille se tait, craindrait en approchant de rompre en tous comme un rêve religieux; mais si l'étranger, sans entendre le chant, apercevait l'assemblée des parents et des amis qui l'écoutent, combien plus encore elle lui semblerait assister à une invisible messe, c'est-à-dire, malgré la diversité des attitudes, combien la ressemblance des expressions manifesterait l'unité véritable des âmes, momentanément réalisée par la sympathie pour un même drame idéal, par la communion à un même rêve. (p. 109)
There is, in "Famille écoutant la musique," a hint of compromise between Proust's and Reynaldo's conflicting views on musical beauty; among those listening to the song at twilight is "le musicien, qui pré-
tend pourtant ne goûter dans la musique qu'un plaisir technique, [mais
qui] y éprouve aussi ces émotions significatives, mais enveloppées dans
son sentiment de la beauté musicale qui les dérobe à ses propres yeux"
(p. 109).

Hahn's piano pieces with their two codes, the one musical and the
other discursive, represent a blending of the two friends' perceptions
of music, with the goal, naturally, of enhancing the reader's plaisir
in the text. The reproduction telle quelle of Reynaldo's piano scores
offers the reader his choice of codes: if he is a musician himself, he
may understand and imagine the music itself as Hahn's notations repre-
sent it on the page; if he is not, he may at least get the "feel" of
the music and divine its relationship to the emotional rhythms of
Proust's poems through the verbal code—"aérien;" "un peu lourd, comme
la croupe des chevaux flamands;" "avec élégance et mélancolie"—accomp-
panying the scores. Something of an exchange of roles thus takes place
here between the musician and the man of letters. Proust's chief in-
terest would seem to be in the musical code itself, the score with its
notes and standard notations offering access to the unexplored regions
of the soul that it is music's chief function to express but not trans-
late, while Reynaldo's extra-musical notations are an attempt to insure
a linguistically clear and precise conversational approach to the music,
as they reattach the musical score to the written text of the poems
the music transcribes, and insure at least a rudimentary comprehension
of the music's intent as transposition of the poetry. Whichever code he chooses to follow, however, the reader is drawn into the dual experience of music and poetry and invited to dream over the inaudible score, much as the poet dreams over the paintings, themselves visible to the reader only through the reconstructions provided by the poems.

The Reviews

Despite this combination of plaisirs Proust's first book thus set out to offer its readers—prose, poetry, painting and music—Les Plaisirs et les Jours were hardly well received by its critics or its intended public. Maurice Duplay has recalled that the book was "généralement dédaigné ou persiflé;" and Edmond Jaloux agrees that "peu de livres furent aussi peu remarqués à leur apparition que Les Plaisirs et les Jours et surtout par les écrivains." This is not to say that the work was entirely ignored in 1896; a mixed bag of reviews greeted Proust's arrival on the literary scene of the day.

The first of these appeared in La Liberté on 26 June 1896, signed only with the initials P.P. Proust saw the article and wrote to Lucien Daudet, inquiring about the critic's identity, and expressing his delight at the review: "Savez-vous qui est M. Perret? Il m'a fait un article long, long dans la Liberté, trop gentil mais qui m'a paru très bien fait. Naturellement!"

Proust had reason to be pleased with Perret's appreciation of Les Plaisirs et les Jours; this first review would also prove to be one of his most favorable. Perret remarks first of all the bittersweet meaning the stories give to the word "plaisirs" in Proust's title:
Rien que des plaisirs, et ce doit être assez pour remplir la traversée des jours. Il me semble que l'effort du peintre tend précisément à faire voir que cela ne suffit pas. Ils sont mélancoliques—elles sont dévorées de désirs hasardeux et de curiosités inassouvies, les héros et les héroïnes de ces courtes, fines et souvent cruelles histoires. 130

As for the author, he is a "modern," not for his style but for his accordance with the present moment of "decadence:" in Les Plaisirs et les jours, writes Perret, one does not find

la recherche de formes littéraires baroques et ordinairement vides; [l'auteur] n'est point du tout un trouvère d'amphigouris ni un ciseleur de pathos. M. Marcel Proust est moderne, parce qu'il exprime des sentiments qu'on a dans le moment où nous sommes et qu'on n'eût point en d'autres moments. Ce n'est pas gai—c'est même tout le contraire de la jovialité gauloise; cela sent le profond ennui, le toedium vitae des Romains de l'ère des Césars, et, en général, de toutes les décadences; c'est subtil, quelque peu pervers.... 131

The most "modern" of what Perret distinguishes as the three principal stories of Les Plaisirs et les jours is "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande" for its presentation of "la fin lente et cruelle d'un heureux de ce monde," the most striking is "La Confession d'une jeune fille" with its analysis of "la perversité native d'une fille du grand monde;" the best written is "Violante ou la mondanité," "parce qu'elle a un objet précis qui est la satire des mœurs mondaines." Perret has kind words for Proust as "un joli satiriste" citing in the author "une certaine malignité de tempérament," and noting, "Il n'est presque point de page de son livre qui n'assaille de front ou ne harcelle de flanc l'insupportable snobisme courant. Les traits sont justes et méchants
et l'on prend plaisir à suivre cette grêle aiguë qui tombe." On the other hand, according to him, the stories suffer from the same lack of proportion that he bemoans in other beginning authors. While Proust's stories are "infiniment agréable à lire," Perret remarks that upon closer examination

[on] aperçoit le défaut des proportions, il signale les parties mal éclairées. Ces récits, au cours desquels la psychologie des personnages est toujours très serrée, sont enserrés dans des cadres vagues; ces personnages très réels sont revêtus d'oripeaux étranges dont les couleurs et la coupe n'ont aucune réalité; ce sont comme des héros et des héroïnes de contes de fées qui s'appellent la princesse de Styrie, le duc de Bohème, etc. Je sais bien que telle est la fantaisie nouvelle; on l'accouple à la sévère madame Psychologie, c'est un jeu de l'auteur; mais le liseur attentif remarque bientôt que ladite sévère madame ne se trouve pas très bien d'être ainsi follement appariée. Il regrette que de jeunes ouvriers enlèvent à ce bel art si français de la "nouvelle" ses proportions justes et rigoureuses....

This observation will be echoed by Fernand Gregh in his evaluation of

Les Plaisirs et les jours:

Ils contenaient ... des pages délicieuses, d'autres révélateuses de ses angoisses et qui donnent même, par exemple dans Violante et [sic] la Mondanité, des coups de sonde dans ses profondeurs. Mais trop de princesses, trop de belles mélancoïques, trop d'élegances, qui ont fait prendre Proust par beaucoup ... pour un 'salonnard' et un amateur. 132

Perret likewise finds Proust's insistence on rêverie a pose that weakens the effect of his book; he disputes as immature the phrase from Regret VI—"le désir fleurit, la possession flétrit toutes choses; il vaut mieux rêver sa vie que la vivre, encore que la vivre ce soit
encore la rêver" (p. 111) that serves for the critic as the résumé of Proust’s poetics:

...rien n’est moins vrai, ni moins humain, ni moins social, [que cette affirmation]. Tout au plus, peut-on accorder qu’en une société confuse et plate comme celle d’à présent, le rêve devient refuge naturel de certaines âmes ou trop délicates ou trop ardentes, qui ne se peuvent dépêcher ni en tendres-ses sincères ni en beaux héroïsmes; mais alors elles doivent se retrancher dans la méditation, et ne plus jamais sortir de cette prison qui a ses délices. Ecrire, c’est se rejeter à nouveau dans le vif de la vie; un livre, c’est une action, et le tenir enveloppé de cette couleur crépusculaire de la rêverie, c’est lui ôter sa portée et sa force.

His conclusion, however, is positive, praising the "étonnante variété" of the book and predicting for its author, "riche-ment doué," "un bel avenir d’écrivain."133

The novelist Edouard Rod published a rather more reserved review of Les Plaisirs et les jours in the June 27 edition of Le Gaulois; like Perret, he found the work "bien caractéristique du temps où nous sommes," failing, however, to qualify that as good or bad. Of the author, he wrote: "Comment peut-il y avoir tant de qualités d’observation dans un esprit si nouveau? Par moment, on voit pointer un La Bruyère de notre 'monde'; et cela est très révélateur."134 Proust’s response to this review was to pronounce himself, in a letter to Rod, "fier, confus, reconnaissant et charmé," and to suggest that the reviewer take a moment to read the first story of the book, "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande," which, Proust, suspects, "peut-être ne vous déplaira pas trop."135
Léon Blum, with whom Proust had collaborated on Le Banquet in 1892-93, reviewed Les Plaisirs et les jours in La Revue blanche on July 1; Blum hesitated between praise and blame for this book that unites "tous les genres et tous les charmes," but that is, overall, "trop coquet et trop joli." The book will please some, he suspected, but Proust ought not to be surprised that the reviewer expects more of his obvious talent:

...les belles dames et les jeunes gens liront avec un plaisir ému un si beau livre. Mais moi, qui connais M. Proust, qui lui porte la sympathie et l'estime que méritent son talent et des dons si beaux, je voudrais avoir sur lui une autorité assez forte, et je lui parlerais affectueusement mais non sans sévérité. Il sait bien ce que je lui dirais, il le sait mieux que moi, et il nous prouvera qu'il le sait. Quand on a tout le talent de style, toute l'aisance de pensée que recèle ce livre trop coquet et trop joli, ce sont là des dons qu'on ne peut pas laisser perdre. 136

Blum made note of his regret that "les Plaisirs et les Jours n'avaient pas paru deux ans plus tôt"; his meaning, perhaps, is that at twenty-five years of age, Proust ought to be producing more mature works than the "nouvelles mondaines, histoires tendres, [et] vers mélodiques" that comprise Les Plaisirs et les jours. At any rate, Blum ended his review also on a positive note: "Et j'attends avec beaucoup d'impatience et de tranquilité son prochain livre." 137

Jean Lorrain's review poking fun at Mme Lemaire's illustrations and offending Proust by his sexual innuendos appeared over the signature "Raitif de la Bretonne," in Le Journal, 3 February 1897. In July 1896, however, Lorrain had already fired the first salvo of his attack,
blaming Heredia and Anatole France for encouraging with their prefaces the new group of social-climbing pseudo-authors represented by Montesquiou and Proust:

MM. Jose-Maria de Heredia et Anatole France sont vraiment bien coupables. Avec leur condescendance de gualantuhomo, en écrivant des préfaces complaisantes à de jolis petits jeunes gens du monde en mal de littérature et de succès de salons, ils ont ouvert la voie; pis, ils l'ont tracée à un tas de gens armés de meilleures intentions et qui, sans leurs précédents, eussent été des rapports possibles, sinon agréables. Mais voilà, les Hortensias bleus de Montesquiou, les Plaisirs et les Joies [sic!] de M. Marcel Proust, estampillés de la signature de l'Académie, ont tourné la cervelle à tous les petits kioukious, poètes peu ou prou, qui fréquentent chez Mme Lemaire. 138

The problem, as Lorrain described it, was an epidemic of snobbery common to both the old guard and the upstarts:

Tout le monde, aujourd'hui, s'est mis en tête d'écrire, de remuer la Presse et l'opinion autour de sa petite gloire et à coups de dîners, d'influences mondaines, de petites intrigues d'éventails, de menus d'évêque et de garden-parties, d'arracher à Pierre une préface, à Jean un article et à tous une réclame, afin de violenter sinon d'attirer l’attention. Tous les snobs ont voulu être auteur et y ont réussi, encouragés par un snobisme plus décevant encore, celui des gens de lettres, flattés, chatouillés, titillés dans leur amour-propre par les plus adroites manoeuvres. 139

As for Proust, Lorrain lamented his appearance on the social and literary scene as a copy in miniature of Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac, a triumph of worldly intrigue over talent and common sense:

Enfin, brochant sur le tout, le salon de Mme Arman de Cailliavet vient d'avoir raison des dernières résistances de l'auteur de Thaïs, et nous devons à M.
Anatole France, ce succédané de M. de Pézensac jusqu'alors unique dans son genre, le jeune et charmant Marcel Proust. Proust et Brou! 140

The article that Fernand Gregh published on *Les Plaisirs et les jours* in the *Revue de Paris* on 15 July 1896, must have been scant consolation to Proust after Lorrain's attack. For some of what Gregh had to say was in agreement with Lorrain, although Gregh was much more diplomatic in his choice of words. Gregh too thought Proust had depended far too much on social influence to "launch" his book; he speaks of the "fées bienfaisantes"—France, Mme Lemaire and Reynaldo Hahn that Proust had gathered around his work to insure its success; serious talent, he implies, would have scorned such a procedure. Proust wrote to Gregh in November 1896 that he had found him "très sévère" for *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, adding, however, "Mais c'est sans doute que tu le trouvais mal."¹⁴¹ The occasion for this letter was Proust's response to Gregh's gift of his own book, *La Maison de l'enfance*, which the former professed to find "réellement beau ... une œuvre ... importante, consistante et transparente à la fois ...[un] morceau de vie intérieure."¹⁴² A few weeks later—and one can only speculate on the role of Proust's kind letter in this—Greegh wrote his "livre d'êtrennes" notice on *Les Plaisirs et les jours* for the *Revue de Paris* with its slightly recast view of the work as the godchild of the fairies: "Le livre se présente très bien tout seul, mais la bienveillance du maître du Thaïs et du Lys rouge l'orne, comme les fleurs de Madeleine Lemaire, et l'embellit encore."¹⁴³

In August 1896 a final review of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, apparently accompanied by a photograph of their author,¹⁴⁴ appeared in the
Revue encyclopédique. Charles Maurras' article, "Un Poète, deux Pamphlétaires, un Sociologue et un Moraliste," praises Proust (the moralist) for his "extrême diversité de talents," for the "assemblage heureux, brillant et facile" formed by these talents, and for a poetic language that is "pure, transparente, sans rythme trop sensible, mesurée par un goût exquis."\(^{145}\) As had Paul Perret and Léon Blum, Charles Maurras professed optimism for Proust's future in literature: "Il faut que la nouvelle génération s'accoutume à faire fond sur ce jeune écrivain."\(^{146}\) Proust's response to this article was understandably enthusiastic and grateful, as he wrote to Maurras on 28 August 1896:

> Vous trouvez précieux les livres auxquels vous touchez, sans vouloir remarquer que c'est vous, en y touchant, qui les avez changés en or. Tout étonné de la métamorphose je remercie de tout mon cœur l'aimable enchanteur que vous êtes; ... quelque jour le lecteur charmé qui vous lira croira que c'est par quelque injustices que mon livre n'a pas subsisté et que peut-être j'avais du talent. En attendant je suis bien reconnaissant et bien fier que vous ayez dit sur moi des choses si aimables. \(^{147}\)

Proust was possibly overstating Maurras' intentions in this elegant response; George Painter has suggested that Maurras' article had more to do with his use of Mme Arman de Caillavet's salon for the advancement of his own career than it had with encouraging and promoting Proust's.\(^{148}\)

In the meantime, Proust was busily engaged in sending out the gift copies of his book, his dedications politely praising the reader at the expense of the text, as for example in this inscription to Mme de Brantes dated 12 June 1896:
A Madame de Brantes, pour qu'elle daigne accepter l'hommage respectueux de ce livre dont le seul prix restera de lui avoir plu, alors qu'il était épars et informe, et que la bienveillance de sa sympathie —en cette seule circonstance je ne dirai pas la clairvoyance de son esprit et de son goût—l'a distingué et élu. 149

To his friend from Condorcet Pierre Lavallée, he wrote, "...je me sens un peu honteux d'entendre appeler mon livre, d'avoir à te dédier un livre qui pourrait être aussi bien le tien, si l'ayant comme moi, mieux que moi toute ta vie rêvé, tu avais pris la peine, au lieu de moi, de l'écrire."150 The continuation of the letter, suggesting that Lavallée's copy should bear a special dedication, is a vague foreshadowing of the concept explained in *le Temps retrouvé* of the particularity of each reader's experience with the literary work: "Un exemplaire que tu lis, surtout si c'est un exemplaire de mon livre, ne saurait ressembler aux autres. Que de sens cachés aux autres, de profondeurs—relatives—connues de toi seul, se découvrent si c'est toi qui lis."151

Thanking Proust for his copy, Alphonse Daudet described *Les Plaisirs et les jours* as the "beau panier fleuri où vous m'envoyez toute votre jeunesse—rêves, musiques et frissons—magiquement enrubannée par une artiste fée qui est de vos amies," thus echoing, consciously or not, Gregh's image of the "fées bienveillantes."152 A copy inscribed "A Madame Laure Hayman pour les délicatesses infinies de son coeur, de sa beauté et de son incomparable esprit" went to the demimondaine whose features were to contribute to those of the *dame en rose*; to Henri Cazalis, colleague of Dr. Proust, friend of Mallarmé and model for Legrandin, Proust promised one of the copies at 3 francs 50 when they should appear, noting Cazalis' reputation as "indulgent pour les
jeunes gens," but claiming (falsely) that he had no de luxe editions to send. Mme Lemaire, however, took it upon herself to send to Cazalis a copy of the de luxe edition; Cazalis' telegram acknowledging receipt of the book later arrived postage due, prompting Proust's amused comment in a letter to Hahn: "Egayez-vous à cette vieille dépêche de Cazalis reçue au Mont-Dore pour laquelle nous avons dû payer près de 3 francs et qui a exaspéré chez Maman les instincts, également lésés, de la concision et de l'économie." A copy Proust sent to novelist Pierre Loti was later found uncut among the latter's papers; Colonel Picquat received a copy in his cell at Mont-Valérien, as Proust recalled many years later in a letter to Mme Straus, commenting on the "romanescque" outcome of the Dreyfus case—"La vie a été pour [Dreyfus et pour Picquat] 'providentielle' à la façon des contes de fées et des romans feuilletons"—and comparing his proposed gift of Sésame et les lys to his earlier one: "Quand je pense à la peine que j'ai eue à faire parvenir à Picquat au Mont Valérien où il était détenu les Plaisirs et les Jours, cela m'ôte presque l'envie de lui envoyer Sésame et les Lys maintenant comme trop facile." 

Montesquieu, as noted earlier, received the first of the series of numbered copies of the work; by January 1897, however, he had still not written to Proust his opinion of Les Plaisirs et les Jours. Montesquieu referred to this in one of Proust's letters he sent back to him, corrected, annotated and graded "moins quinze" on a scale of 20; he claimed to discern in the young man's opening lines his "aigreur pour n'avoir pas reçu d'appréciation écrite de son livre." Montesquieu nonetheless inserted in the Roseaux pensants a reference to Les Plaisirs
et les jours—"Et j'aime en passant à saluer d'un élogieux souvenir le joli livre de début de notre jeune ami Marcel Proust, d'ailleurs deux fois présenté au public sous haut et gracieux patronage, et rechercher en ses soyeux feuillets une neuve et fine réapparition de ce caractère ...."\(^{158}\) —a phrase which Proust himself quoted in a letter to Mlle Kiki Bartholoni thanking her for her favorable letter: "...dans Roseaux Pensants, Monsieur de Montesquiou parle des pages 'soyeuses' de mon livre, et ailleurs de mes vers 'harmonieux.'"\(^{159}\)

It would be inaccurate to interpret Proust's use of Montesquiou's opinion here as anything more than a compliment to Mlle Bartholoni, who had apparently used some of the same terms as he in her letter to Proust. Proust's own opinion of Les Plaisirs et les jours varied considerably in the years after its publication, depending mostly, it seems, upon his current opinion of his literary abilities and his works in progress. For example, at the end of 1899 Reynaldo's cousin Marie Nordlinger, Proust's future collaborator for his translations of Ruskin, wrote to compliment him on Les Plaisirs et les jours. Proust at that moment was still, after four years, working on Jean Santeuil; his discouragement and the poor health of which he complains in his response to Marie add a perceptible note of sincerity to the polite manner in which he usually turns praise back upon the praise-giver:

Ma santé qui était déjà assez mauvaise a encore empiré. Et malheureusement mon imagination qui me donnait un peu de joie si elle n'en donnait pas aux autres (car vous êtes une exception dans votre goût pour ce que j'écrivais, comme vous l'êtes en tout) me semble avoir subi le contrecoup de mes fatigues. Je travaille depuis très longtemps à un ouvrage de très longue haleine, mais sans rien achever. Et
il y a des moments où je me demande si je ne ressemble pas au mari de Dorothée Brook dans Middlemarch et si je n'amasse pas des ruines....

...Je ne sais pas si je vous ai bien dit combien votre lettre m'a fait plaisir. Cela ne m'est pas très facile parce que je trouve si ridicule de ma part d'avoir l'air d'admettre autrement que comme une gentillesse de votre part ce que vous dites de mon livre, et de croire que cela correspond à la réalité, à ce qui serait chez moi, un véritable talent, que je n'ose aborder de front votre compli-

ment. 160

Similarly, Proust expressed surprise at Edmond Jaloux's appreciation of his book, in a letter addressed to the latter in December 1903:

Je suis toujours un peu étonné que quelqu'un ait lu les Plaisirs et les Jours. Mon éditeur m'a assuré que personne n'était jamais venu lui demander cet ouvrage. Il faut qu'il exagère un peu. Mais on serait déjà très heureux d'écrire pour un seul lecteur exquis comme vous êtes. 161

His dedication of a copy of the book a few months earlier to Louis d'Albufera and Louisa de Mornand had spoken of the gap that separated him from Les Plaisirs et les Jours:

[Ce livre] est déjà bien ancien et ne me ressemble plus que très vaguement comme la photographie d'un enfant qui a beaucoup changé. Pas à son avantage hélas et vous ne pourrez pas m'appliquer la phrase banale qu'on dit en pareil cas: "je ne vous reconnaissais pas tant vous avez grandi." j'ai plutôt diminué. 162

Proust's father had died in the interval between these references to Les Plaisirs et les Jours; it is not impossible that the "étonnement" of Proust's response to Edmond Jaloux had as much to do with a sense of Les Plaisirs et les Jours as belonging to a childhood past that his
father's death had definitively closed for him as it had with a deni-
gration of the work's literary merit.\textsuperscript{163}

The reviews Proust received for the first of his Ruskin transla-
tions, \textit{La Bible d'Amiens} published in 1904, were largely favorable.\textsuperscript{164}

Apparently encouraged by this success, Proust wrote favorably of his
first work in a letter in April of that year addressed to Henry Bor-
deaux, who had requested a copy of \textit{Les Plaisirs et les jours}, proposing
to do a study of Proust and his work. Proust's response denigrated his
present work, perhaps as a mark of polite modesty, and gave \textit{Les Plai-
sirs et les jours} as superior to the preface to \textit{La Bible d'Amiens} for
which Bordeaux had expressed his admiration:

\begin{quote}
Je vous ferai envoyer avec le plus grand plaisir le
volume dont vous me parlez. Il y a quelques vers
dedans, mais c'est surtout un volume de nouvelles.
Il y en a une ou deux, notamment la \textit{Fin de la Jalou-
sie}, qui sont je crois assez vivantes. C'est hélas!
beaucoup mieux que la Préface dont vous me parlez
si gentiment, mais je suis trop malade pour pouvoir
travailler. Mais ne prenez donc pas la peine de
faire une étude sur moi! Non pas que je n'en serais
envié d'orgueil et de joie, mais si vous me dites
tout simplement quand je vous verrai, ou si ce
n'est pas abuser, par une lettre, si mon livre vous
a plu, cela me fera tout autant de plaisir. \textsuperscript{165}
\end{quote}

Shortly thereafter, Proust directed his mother to send off as a thank-
you gift to Dr. Pierre Merklen a copy of \textit{Les Plaisirs et les jours},
adding to his note that he needed more copies from Calmann-Lévy;\textsuperscript{166} the
success of his article "Sur la lecture" (preface to \textit{Sézame et les Lys})
published the following year in the \textit{Renaissance latine} prompted a simi-
lar request for presentation copies of all his published books—
Y a-t-il plusieurs Renaissance Latine. Il me ser-rait vraiment fort utile de pouvoir en donner quel-
ques-unes. D'autre part j'ai besoin de deux Plaisirs et les Jours et de trois ou quatre Bible d'Amiens que nous remettons sans cesse (pas des premières éditions elles sont trop sales). 167

All of this suggests that, whatever his own opinion of the merits of Les Plaisirs et les jours, Proust at this stage of his career was not above playing politics with a favorable reviewer, advancing his early work (with his repeated claim of its superiority to the current work) on the coattails of his present success, thereby creating at least the illusion of a continuous and diversified literary production.

This is not to say, however, that Proust had lost his concern for the literary qualities of Les Plaisirs et les jours and, more generally, for the evolution of his "talent." A letter to Fernand Gregh in June 1905 reveals the seriousness of Proust's concern for his improvement or lack of it as a writer; professing his confidence in Gregh's taste, Proust would like for his old friend to read "Sur la lecture" and give him an honest and unsparing "progress report":

...j'aimerais que, sans gentillesse aucune, ce qui serait peu gentil, tu me dises exactement où j'en suis, s'il y a progrès ou recul sur les Plaisirs et les Jours et la Bible d'Amiens, et d'autre part, ses relations avec les autres choses de moi, comment cela est en soi. Je voudrais une "note" comme au collège. Et, si ce n'était pas abuser de toi, des corrections en marge. 168

A year later, Proust wrote back to Gregh, reproaching him for never having given him the "diagnostic" he had sought on his progress or decline;169 as Gregh later explained the matter in his Age d'airain, what had happened, unfortunately for Proust and for those future
readers who would have enjoyed learning his opinion on the matter, was that he had misplaced the original letter and had thus remained completely unaware of Proust's request until the latter's second letter! Proust, at any rate, had formed his own opinion of his evolution, and it was not good. To Robert Dreyfus, he wrote in mid-June 1906,

Ce que tu me dis de ma préface ["Sur la lecture"] m'enchante et en effet il y a dedans des choses qui me paraissent assez approfondies, quoique en général j'aie l'impression d'écrire tellement moins bien qu'à l'époque des Plaisirs et les Jours. Quant aux notes [pour Sésame et les Lys] c'est du pur bavardage et j'aimerais mieux travailler sérieusement. 171

Proust's mother had died in December 1905; the depression and désœuvrement that followed this event for him are reflected in this letter to Dreyfus, as they are in even more pronounced fashion in a letter to Lucien Daudet from February 1907. As Proust thanks Daudet for his kind words on Sésame et les Lys, he laments that the talent he recognizes in himself when he rereads Les Plaisirs et les Jours has gone to waste:

...quand je vous lis je crois que j'ai du talent, mais quand je me lis et surtout quand j'écris—(car je ne me lis jamais)—(il est vrai que je n'écris jamais non plus) je sens bien que je n'en ai pas! Et cela m'ennuie d'autant plus que quand par hasard les Plaisirs et les Jours (vous savez ce livre que Mme Lemaire avait illustré) me tombe sous la main, je trouve que j'en avais alors... 172

The waste is even greater, continues Proust, for his consciousness of what he could be capable of if only he were convinced he could write:
Je vous jure que quand je reçois une lettre de vous sur quelque chose que j'ai fait, j'ai le sentiment, je peux même dire la certitude qu'elle est supé-
rieure à ce que j'ai fait. Vous pouvez me répondre d'abord que si ce que je fais est mauvais, ce que vous écrivez peut être supérieur sans être remar-
quable. Mais vraiment nous n'avons pas besoin de
nous mentir et je peux vous dire que je ne suis pas
si modeste, et si je trouve que je n'ai pas de
talent, que je n'ai pas su, pour bien des raisons,
me faire le talent de mes dons, que mon style a
pourri sans mûrir, en revanche je sais bien qu'il y
a dans ce que je fais bien plus d'idées vraies, de
choSES senties, que dans presque tous les articles
que l'on publie. Marcel Prévost, Rod, Margueritte
etc. seront bientôt de l'Académie. Et je sais bien
que si mes articles n'étaient pas de moi, et si je
les lisais à côté des leurs les miens m'intéresse-
raient beaucoup plus. 173

What remains, then, is that in 1907, eleven years after his first work
and his masterpiece not yet begun, Proust had resigned himself to con-
sidering Les Plaisirs et les jours the best he could do, if only for
the promise of its style. It is significant that he concludes this
pessimistic letter to Daudet with a lesson on the irrelevance of chro-
nological age for the true artist, that does not, however, excuse him
for wasting time:

...vous avez tort de vous considérer toujours dans
le temps. La partie de nous-même qui vaut, dans
les moments où elle vaut, est en dehors du temps.
C'est bon pour un Roqueplan, pour un Alphonse Karr
de se dire: j'ai déjà tel âge, j'ai eu tel âge. Ne
pensez à vous que comme à un instrument capable de
faire les expériences de beauté ou de vérité que
vous voulez et votre tristesse s'évanouira.
D'ailleurs Lafontaine a commencé à travailler à
quarante ans au plus tôt, et surtout dans votre
art, voyez Hals n'a fait ses vraiment belles choses
qu'après quatre-vingts ans, et Corot ses meilleures
qu'après soixante.... Ce que je vous dis de Hals
et de Corot est pour que vous ne pensez pas au
temps perdu, non pour que vous en perdiez davan-
tage. 174
Proust's own period of "temps perdu" came to an end with the beginning of his absorption into the creation of the Recherche. This new period of certitude and creativity did not mean, however, the complete disparagement of Les Plaisirs et les Jours by their author. On the contrary, the masterpiece finally allowed for proper evaluation of the early work, its strengths and its shortcomings. Les Plaisirs et les Jours are still "mieux écrit ou moins mal" than his present novel, Proust wrote to Walter Berry;\textsuperscript{175} the ideas in the Recherche, though, are better: "Au temps où je savais écrire un tout petit peu, à quatorze ans (Les Plaisirs et les Jours) j'ai exprimé des choses bien moins fortes, mais il me semble que j'arrivais à tourner la difficulté."\textsuperscript{176}

To Robert de Flers, he described Swann as different in style and better in conception than Les Plaisirs et les Jours that are nonetheless the source of his themes: "Surtout c'est très différent des Plaisirs et les Jours et n'est ni 'délicat' ni 'fin.' Cependant une partie ressemble (mais en tellement mieux) à la Fin de la jalouse.\textsuperscript{177} To Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, he spoke of the book as a "réunion de choses écrites au collège" (a deliberate predating of the work that figures in all of Proust's letter to Vaudoyer in which he refers to it, thus emphasizing its nature, compared to the Recherche, as oeuvre de jeunesse) that is, however, worth having if only for a collector's item and about which Proust graciously accepts Vaudoyer's compliments:

Vous m'avez fait trop d'honneur en rappelant sur l'un de ces livres une des jeunes femmes des Plaisirs et les Jours, un livre sur lequel nous sommes encore moins d'accord que sur Gautier. Mais il a été écrit à dix-sept ans, quoique publié plus tard. Je ne le possède pas et si je m'étais souvenu qu'il contenait ces fragments si peu italiens de comédie
italienne je les eusse arrachés de l'exemplaire avant de l'adresser au grand et délicieux Italien que vous êtes. Vous êtes cause que si je réimprime le volume j'y laisserai des pages condamnées (comme la Confession d'une jeune fille et Eventail) à qui c'est un titre suffisant pour être graciées que de vous avoir plu. 178

For the moment, though, a more important project demands his attention: "Dès que je serai mieux j'achèverai le long roman auquel je travaille."179 Proust's final opinion, and rightly so, was that Les Plaisirs et les jours should be kept in the background while the real work of the Recherche was in progress; he wrote to Gaston Gallimard in 1921, objecting to a proposed reedition of the early work before the final volumes of his novel were completed: "Je trouverais déplorable que Les Plaisirs et les jours, oeuvre de jeunesse, écrite au collège, avant le régiment, paraisse avant qu'A la recherche du temps perdu ne soit terminée...." Once all was completed, though, this "beau panier fleuri" of Proust's youth could take its proper place in his overall production, with the "beau style" on which Proust still insists and its variety of plaisirs: "Ce n'est pas que je méprise Les Plaisirs et les jours. Et ce style de débutant est meilleur que celui d'aujourd'hui.... Une fois tout fini, Les Plaisirs et les jours plairont, je le crois, et vivront de vieux jours."180 One does not, after all, so easily discard a photograph of one's youth; it is to the elements of that photograph, the time in which it was made, and its relationship to the literary world around it, that we next turn our attention.
Footnotes

1 Quoted by Philip Kolb in the "Chronologie" to Correspondance de Marcel Proust, vol. II (Paris: Plon, 1976), p. 32. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Proust's correspondence in this study will be taken from this edition in seven volumes of Proust's letters from 1880-1907. Volume VII, the most recent in this edition-in-progress, was published in 1981.

2 For a detailed account of Proust's life and work, upon which is superimposed the structure of the Recherche, see George D. Painter, Marcel Proust: A Biography, 2 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus; Boston: Little, Brown, 1959, 1965). An earlier biography of Proust by Richard H. Barker (New York: Criterion Books, 1958), is rather sketchy, lacking the convincing documentation and narrative interest of Painter's work. The detailed "Chronologie" that introduces each of Kolb's volumes of the Correspondance is also an excellent source of biographical material on Proust.

3 The text of "Mensonges" may be read in the section "Débuts littéraires" of Contre Sainte-Beuve, précédé de Pastiches et Mélanges, et suivi de Essais et articles, eds. P. Clarac and Y. Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971), p. 367. Mensonges by Proust and Delafosse was published in April, 1894. As this volume is the fifth in the Pléiade series of Proust's complete works, we will refer to it in subsequent references by the Roman numeral V.

4 Corr. I, p. 238. Proust also complained of family pressure in a letter to Robert de Billy in September 1893: "Je suis tout ce qu'il y a de plus embarrassé car il faut, papa le veut, que je décide de ma carrière" (Corr. I, p. 236). The theme is carried on in a flurry of letters Proust dispatched during the month of November 1893 to Charles Grandjean, soliciting his advice on the possibility of undertaking a career as museum attaché (Corr. I, pp. 246-63).

5 Mme Straus, remarried widow of the composer Georges Bizet, was the mother of Jacques Bizet and the aunt of Daniel Halévy, both companions of Proust at Condorcet. She was for a time the object of Proust's somewhat puerile and platonic affection. A letter Proust wrote to her in 1902, describing the evocative power of a song Reynaldo happened to sing for him, recalls this period of his flirtation with her: "Le même Reynaldo par je ne sais quel hasard m'a chanté l'autre jour Eros d'Holmès. Je ne peux pas vous dire à quel point m'a ému ce 'Chasseur cruel aux yeux si doux' que je n'avais jamais entendu depuis le temps où vous le chantiez après déjeuner boulevard Haussmann pour les amis de Jacques ... où pendant deux mois je me promettais de vous baiser la main le jour suivant et je n'osais pas. Je ne peux pas vous dire combien cette mélodie non pas en me rappelant tout cela car j'y pense bien souvent, mais en m'en mettant brusquement en présence, sans rêverie préalable, m'a donné l'impression d'un charme et d'une poésie dont elle est pourtant elle-même dépourvue" (Corr. III, pp. 33-34). Proust moved to 102
boulevard Haussman after his mother's death in 1905, so the reference must be to the residence of Mme Straus. The experience of involuntary memory that Proust describes in this letter, occasioned by the words of the song "Chasseur cruel aux yeux si doux," is a forerunner, of course, of similar incidents in the Recherche, notably Swann's experience of the Vinteul sonata at Mme de Saint-Euverte's soirée. More immediately, however, the impression of charm and poetry that sentimental accompaniment gives to banal popular music is the topic of "Eloge de la mauvaise musique," in Les Plaisirs et les jours.

Robert Dreyfus recalls this period and the group's disappointment with the Proust of Les Plaisirs et les jours in his Souvenirs sur Marcel Proust (Paris: Grasset, 1926). Despite the likewarm appreciation of Les Plaisirs et les jours that Gregh had demonstrated in his review of the book for the Revue blanche, Proust had the graciousness to compliment Gregh on his 2,000 franc prize, the prix Archon-Despérone, awarded him by the Académie française for the Maison de l'enfance, writing to him in 1897 with only the slightest hint of a jagged edge: "Je t'envoie tous mes compliments les plus sincères et plus satisfaits que tu ne le crois probablement" (Corr. II, p. 189). Proust called Gregh's second book, of essays and prose poems, in 1901, "un admirable livre de poésie" (Corr. II, p. 474), and devoted two letters to a fairly detailed discussion of the book, particularly of the prose poem "Les Cloches sur la mer" that Gregh had dedicated to Proust in souvenir of their mutual visit to Honfleur in 1892. See letters 297 and 298, with Kolb's annotations, in Corr. II, pp. 474-76.

Philip Kolb gives the probable date of this meeting as 22 May 1894 in his "Chronologie," Corr. I, p. 76.

From vacation in Dieppe in August 1895, Proust wrote to Maria Hahn asking that she return to him or to Mme Proust in Paris with her comments the copy of "Baldassare" that he had sent her, as his deadline for submission to the Revue hebdomadaire was approaching: "Je ne sais plus comment faire avec Baldassare, car il faut maintenant que je l'envoie à une revue et alors je ne verrais pas vos annotations. Pourtant votre opinion est à peu près la seule qui m'importe et si quand ce sera paru dans le volume on en parle ou on en écrit cela m'intéressera bien moins que l'opinion de la plus intelligente des femmes" (Corr. I, p. 419). Robert de Billy also had a hand in the elaboration of "Baldassare," in September 1895, Proust wrote to him to suggest he keep an eye on the table of contents of the Revue hebdomadaire: "Je viens d'y envoyer et vous y trouverez sous peu ce Baldassare Silvande que vous m'avez corrigé un soir aux lumières et qui ne vous avait déplu que dans quelques parties" (Corr. I, p. 428). George Painter has suggested that the gift of a pony made to the young Alexis at the beginning of "Baldassare" is what prompted Reynaldo's nickname of "poney" for Marcel (Painter, vol. 1, p. 181); Marcel, however, objects to the nickname--"Pourquoi 'Marcel le poney'? Je n'aime pas cette nouvelle chose. Cela ressemble à Jack l'Eventreur et à Louis le Hutin"—in a letter that precedes by a week the letter that Kolb reads as the announcement of work begun on "Baldassare" (letters 187 and 190, respectively, Corr. I, pp. 326-27 and 333-34).
In the spring of 1895, Proust had given Reynaldo "Critique de l'espérance à la lumière de l'amour" to read and comment upon; Hahn had apparently liked the piece, to which Proust replied with a denigration: "La Critique de l'espérance a été écrite en un quart d'heure et jamais corrigée de sorte que malgré ma confiance dans le goût du petit maître [Hahn] je ne puis la croire bien écrite. D'ailleurs moralement elle est fausse. Mais du moment que fût-ce une minute je l'ai sentie comme vraie, cela lui donne une vérité psychologique à laquelle (heureusement) rien ne correspond dans la réalité" (Corr. I, p. 382). The "Critique de l'espérance," which figures as one of the Regrets in Les Plaisirs et les jours, outlines what will become a major theme of Proust's mature work: the failure of the present experience to correspond to one's hopes for it and the compensating power of memory; Proust must have feared that Hahn would interpret the pessimistic zone of the "Critique" as a negative commentary on their own friendship. The Pléiade editors suggest that the "Critique de l'espérance," was in fact written "à un moment où les relations sentimentales entre Proust et R. Hahn commençaient à se détériorer" ("Notice," Jean Santeuil précédé de Les Plaisirs et les jours, eds. P. Clarac and Y. Sandre [Paris: Gallimard, 1971], p. 97). A letter which Clarac and Sandre quote as evidence of the conflicting forces of love and hope in the relationship between Proust and Hahn would also, by its style and themes, appear to refer directly to the composition of the "Critique de l'espérance," although Kolb places it after Proust's letter denying the moral truth of the completed piece: "Je suis en train, dans un petit morceau pour le livre, de mouiller 'le sourire du souvenir de toutes les larmes de l'espoir' et ma seule consolation pendant cette promenade que je me force sans pitié pour moi à faire sur les routes effeuillées de ma mémoire et sur les routes aussi dépouillées d'avance par une clairvoyance cruelle de mon avenir—c'était vous. Pourquoi en me disant ce mot si triste faites-vous évanouir le compagnon consolant dont je serrais la main pour ne pas mourir de chagrin pendant cette promenade d'octobre et qui était 'l'avenir de notre amitié'" (Corr. I, pp. 437-38). The "Critique de l'espérance" begins with some of the same images as those in this letter: "À peine une heure à venir nous devient-elle le présent qu'elle se dépouille de ses charmes, pour les retrouver, il est vrai, si notre âme est un peu vaste et en perspectives bien ménagées, quand nous l'avons laissée loin derrière nous, sur les routes de la mémoire"—evokes the cruelty of certain words pronounced by the loved one—"Vous m'aimez, ma chère petite; comment avez-vous été assez cruelle pour le dire?"—and ends with "tears of hope and the smile of memory": "Essuyez vos yeux, pour voir, je ne sais pas si ce sont les larmes qui me brouillent la vue, mais je crois distinguer là-bas, derrière nous, de grands feux qui s'allument. Oh! ma chère petite amie.... donnez-moi la main, allons sans trop approcher vers ces beaux feux ... Je pense que c'est l'indulgent et puissant Souvenir qui nous veut du bien et qui est en train de faire beaucoup pour nous, ma chère" (Marcel Proust, Les Plaisirs et les jours, in Jean Santeuil, précédé de Les Plaisirs et les jours, eds. P. Clarac and Y. Sandre [Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971], pp. 139-41). All references to Les Plaisirs et les jours in this study will be to the Pléiade edition, with page numbers indicated in the text. Additional references to this volume will be
indicated by the Roman numeral IV. Given these similarities, one can read Proust's denigration of the "Critique" to Hahn in the letter that Kolb says, erroneously, I think, is anterior to the one we have just looked at, as a possible attempt at reconciliation after the "falling out" (not an unusual occurrence in their relationship) of which the "Critique" is a reflection.

In spring of 1895 also, Proust asked Reynaldo for his comments on "Un Dîner en ville" before it was forwarded to Mme Lemaire: "Si en cinq minutes vous pouvez lire le Dîner en ville lisez-le et dans ce cas écrivez à propos de n'importe quoi une dépêche à Madame Lemaire où vous direz purement et simplement comment vous le trouvez (je viens de lire le Dîner en ville qui etc.). Si vous n'avez pas le temps laissez partir le Dîner en ville. Et écrivez la même chose de confiance, ou plutôt n'écrivez rien du tout" (Corr. I, p. 392). As Philip Kolb has pointed out, Proust had reason to be wary of Mme Lemaire's reaction to his portraits of gens du monde with which he composed most of the piece: his parodies might have seemed to Mme Lemaire more critical of her and her friends than Proust would have wished (Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn [Paris: Gallimard, 1956], p. 40).


10 "Les Marronniers," one of the Regrets, was written at Réveillon in 1894 where Proust was on holiday with Reynaldo visiting Mme Lemaire; George Painter dates "Sous-bois," another of the Regrets, from Proust's vacation at Dieppe with Reynaldo in August 1895 (vol. 1, p. 181).

11 Quoted by Philip Kolb in Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn, p. 15. He identifies as disguised portraits of Reynaldo in Jean Santeuil the marquis of Poitiers playing the piano in Reynaldo's manner; Henri de Réveillon, although this is a composite portrait; and the young playwright Daltozzi (pp. 15-16).

12 For the relationship between Montesquieu and Proust, see Painter's biography. There is something more than a little appealing in his suggestion that Proust's portrait of the Baron de Charlus in the Recherche constituted his revenge for the humiliations Montesquieu's haughtiness inflicted upon him (vol. 1, p. 133).

13 Kolb dates this announcement 5 November 1893: "Je publie cette année un recueil de petites choses dont vous connaissez déjà la majeure partie" (Corr. I, p. 247).

14 Proust sent a copy of Les Plaisirs et les jours to Clément de Maugny on 13 July 1899, with the explanation: "Souvent on montre à un ami, qui ne vous a connu que tard, une photographie où l'on est enfant. Il en est ainsi de ce livre qui vous présente un Marcel que vous n'avez pas connu" (Corr. II, p. 291). Antoine Bibesco's gift copy, addressed to him on 30 October 1901, is inscribed "A Antoine Bibesco, Cette photographie de moi à un âge où il ne me connaissait pas," and includes the quote from Hamlet of which Proust is quite fond, having
used it in a letter to Hahn on Bouvard and Pécuchet (Corr. I, p. 321) and as the epigraph to the final chapter of "Baldassare": "Bonne nuit aimable Prince et que des essaims d'anges bercent en chantant votre sommeil," as well as a citation from Molière's Le Misanthrope, depreciating the value of the "photograph": "Franchement il est bon à mettre aux cabinets" (Corr. II, p. 461). The theme of Les Plaisirs et les Jours as a photograph is repeated in a dedication of a copy of the book to Louis d'Albufera and Louisa de Mornand in 1903 (Corr. III, p. 435), and again in 1906 to Armand de Guiche (Corr. VI, p. 67).

15 Proust wrote to his mother in September 1896, "...si je ne peux pas dire que j'aie encore travaillé à mon roman dans le sens d'être absorbé par lui, de le concevoir d'ensemble, depuis le jour (quelques jours avant ton départ) le Cahier que j'ai acheté et qui ne représente pas tout ce que j'ai fait, puisque avant je travaillais sur des feuilles volantes--ce cahier est fini et il a 110 pages grandes..." (Corr. II, p. 124). He wrote again shortly afterwards to Mme Proust with the following progress report: "Hier je n'ai pas travaillé. Je me suis remis ce matin et où que j'aille ne manquerai pas un jour. Si avec quatre heures par jour je pouvais être prêt pour le premier février je serais bien content" (Corr. II, p. 130). He was still at work on the novel a full year later, writing for example to Mme de Brantes in September 1897, "J'ai trouvé dans Gobseck de ces portraits de vieux nobles comme il m'en faut un pour mon roman et pour lequel je glane des mots 'à la Aimery de La Rochefoucauld,' et des traits de caractère, bien entendu non pour les copier mais pour m'en inspirer" (Corr. II, p. 214).

16 While he refers to the material of Les Plaisirs et les Jours as "exercises," Maurice Bardèche also calls the book "une vitrine dans laquelle sont exposés nonchalamment des objets de luxe" (Marcel Proust romancier, Paris: Les Sept Couleurs, 1971, pp. 127, 46). In Mon Amitié avec Marcel Proust: Souvenirs et lettres inédites (Paris: Grasset, 1958), Fernand Gregor wrote that certain of the "Etudes" in Les Plaisirs et les Jours "...sont particulièrement bien écrites, mieux même que son énorme ouvrage où les choses à dire se pressent sous sa plume et qu'il n'a jamais eu le temps de paraître comme il avait poli à loisir ses premiers essais" (p. 53). During the First World War, Proust promised to send the lawyer and bibliophile Walter Berry a copy of Les Plaisirs et les Jours for his collection if Céleste could still find one somewhere in Paris: "Je me demande si vous avez les Plaisirs et les Jours (un livre écrit par moi au collège, mais mieux écrit ou moins mal, que Swann). Quand je vous verrai, si vous me dites que vous ne l'avez pas, je chargerai Céleste d'envoyer ses servantes à travers Paris pour vous en avoir un exemplaire" (Corr. gén., eds. R. Proust and P. Brach, Paris: Plon, 1935, V, p. 38). Y. Sandre gives this quote as "Je me demande si vous avez les Plaisirs et les Jours..." ("Notice," p. 902), which changes somewhat the meaning of Proust's question to M. Berry; the letter as published in the Corr. gén. would seem to indicate that Proust was calling his early work to Berry's attention simply in the interest of the latter's collection of unusual or hard-to-find books. M. Sandre couples his quotation, however, with another
reference by Proust to the polished style of Les Plaisirs et les jours, citing a letter written in 1921 to a captain Bugnet in which Proust calls the period of the composition of the work the "temps où je savais écrire un tout petit peu, à quatorze ans...j'ai exprimé des choses bien moins fortes, mais il me semble que j'arrivais à tourner la difficulté" (p. 902).

17 IV, p. 181.


21 Ferré, p. 146.

22 Cf. The chapter "Sainte-Beuve et Balzac" in the Contre Sainte-Beuve: "De tels effets ne sont guère possibles que grâce à cette admirable invention de Balzac d'avoir gardé les mêmes personnages dans tous ses romans.... C'est l'idée de génie de Balzac.... Sans doute, pourra-t-on dire, il ne l'a pas eue tout de suite ... les ajouts, ces beautés rapportées, les rapports nouveaux aperçus brusquement par le génie entre les parties séparées de son oeuvre qui se rejoignent, vivent et ne pourraient plus se séparer, ne sont-ce pas de ses plus belles intuitions?" (V, p. 274).

23 Ferré, p. 146.


25 Henri Bonnet has identified the use of Darlu as the model for M. Beulier in a discussion of this episode in Alphonse Darlu (1849-1921), le maître de philosophie de Proust, suivi d'une étude critique du Contre Sainte-Beuve (Paris: Nizet, 1961), p. 59.


31 Norman Holland relates his discussion of adult "absorption" into literature to the oral gratification the mother provides the non-differentiated child during the early months of its life. See his chapter "The Willing Suspension of Disbelief" in The Dynamics of Literary Response (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), pp. 63-103. Proust occasionally uses images of food in Les Plaisirs et les jours to describe the erotic pleasures of reading; see our discussion in Chapter 4, pp. 328-29, as well as Chapter 5, pp. 386-92, on the hantise du baiser, pleasure and threat combined in the oral manifestation of affection. For a discussion of Proust's failure to resolve his Oedipal attraction to his mother by identifying with his father, and the role this plays in the Recherche, see Ghislaine Florival, Le Désir chez Proust (Louvain, Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1971), pp. 175-234. We will discuss the absence of the father from Les Plaisirs et les jours in Chapter 3, pp. 245-48.


34 In her synthesis of Lacan's writings, Anika Lemaire insists upon the importance for Lacan of the "thesis that birth into language and the utilization of the symbol produce a disjunction between the lived experience and the sign which replaces it. This disjunction will become greater over the years, language being above all the organ of communication and of reflection upon a lived experience which it is often not able to go beyond. Always seeking to 'rationalize,' to 'repress' the lived experience, reflection will eventually become profoundly divergent from that lived experience. In this sense, we can say with Lacan that the appearance of language is simultaneous with the primal repression which constitutes the unconscious" (p. 53).

35 Lemaire, p. 67.


37 "Il faudra soigneusement bannir toutes ces métaphores, toutes ces images qui, mieux choisies que les vôtres, peuvent plaire au poète, mais que même alors la philosophie ne tolère pas. Mais même pour le professeur de lettres, ne grossissez pas la voix pour dire des banalités. 'Les rouges incendies du couchant,' comment osez-vous écrire cela? C'est de la couleur pour un petit journal d'où, voyons, de province, non plus même, des colonies.... De même, vous parlez tout le temps de parfums exquis, d'odeurs embaumantes. Qu'est-ce que cela dit à l'imagination? ... Vous avez sans doute éprouvé, comme tout le monde, la noble volupté que donnent certains parfums: tâchez de nous la rendre, et ce sera mille fois plus intéressant. Regardez comme vos phrases
sont vagues.... Laissez d'abord vos suggestions: si c'est pour nous dire qu'elles sont obscures sans être capable de les éclairer, autant n'en pas parler" (V, p. 263). Proust will elaborate for the usage of the Symbolists in "Contre l'obscurité" a similar requirement that art bring to light what is at first obscure. See pp. 117-29 of this study.

38 V, p. 263.

39 Bonnet, Alphonse Darlu, p. 10. Kolb notes Proust's curious repudiation of Darlu's influence expressed in a note in one of the carnets Proust kept while working on the Recherche: "Aucun homme n'a jamais eu d'influence sur moi (que Darlu et je l'ai reconnue mauvaise)" (Corr. I, p. 127N6). One wonders, however, if this first-person reference is to Proust himself and his own experience, or to the narrator of his novel, of whom Proust habitually says "je" in his discussions of his novel.


41 In his biography of Darlu, Henri Bonnet has attested to the mutual acquaintance of the writer and the philosopher (Alphonse Darlu, p. 69).

42 Henri Bonnet, "Les Idées de Darlu," BSAMP 10 (1960), p. 232. Although Darlu was a founder of the Revue de métaphysique et de morale, he himself left very few written works, a fact to which Proust refers in his preface to Les Plaisirs et les jours when he speaks of Darlu's "parole inspirée, plus sûre de durer qu'un écrit..." (p. 8).

43 Bonnet, "Les idées de Darlu," p. 229. He is quoting from one of Darlu's few written tracts, an 1890 speech on "L'Enseignement de la morale."

44 See Philip Kolb's notes to this letter in Corr. I, p. 126, for a summary of Chantevoine's review in the 15 May 1889 issue of the Journal des débats. Kolb bases his identification of the "sève de philosophie" who wrote to France as Marcel Proust on handwriting comparisons as well as on the accuracy of such autobiographical details revealed in the letter as Proust's habit of "proselytizing" his classmates and even his professors in favor of his preferred authors and works of literature (p. 127).


48 Heath died of typhus in Paris in October 1893.
Another young friend of Proust, Edgar Aubert, had died a year earlier than Heath. The project of a combined dedication to Heath and Aubert, about which Proust consulted Robert de Billy in November 1893, fell through for want of endorsement by Aubert's family. See Corr. I, p. 248N3.

50 Gregh, Amitié, p. 10.


52 Gregh, Amitié, p. 156. Henri Bonnet has also written that Anatole France considered Proust "un jeune et brillant mondain égaré temporairement dans les Lettres" (Progrès spirituel, p. 165).

53 Although Painter says that France wrote the preface himself (vol. 1, p. 190), Gregh attributes it to Mme de Caillavet (Amitié, p. 10). Referring to the "discrète collaboration" that marked the long years of France's relationship with Mme de Caillavet, André de Billy also affirms that Proust's preface was the work of the latter (André de Billy, L'Epoque 1900: 1885-1905 [Paris: Tallandier, 1951]), p. 324.

54 See Proust's article first published in Le Figaro in May 1903, "La Cour aux lilas et l'atelier des roses: Le Salon de Mme Madeleine Lemaire," Essais et articles, V, pp. 457-64.


56 Bardac, p. 137. In personal tribute to Mme Lemaire, Bardac recalls in his article the bravery of her life at Réveillon during the war (not unlike that attributed to Gilberte in the Recherche) and her memorable "geste de grande dame": the reverent curtsey that Mme Lemaire, dressed only in her dressing gown, made to a company of French soldiers as they passed through her property.

57 Bardac, p. 137. In L'Epoque 1900, André de Billy cites these lines from Montesquieu's Dédicaces à Madeleine Lemaire: "Les roses ont chanté votre gloire; les lis/Content votre mérite et les douces pensées/Disent la vôtre.../Les fleurs pensent à vous avant que d'éclorer;/Poser pour vos pinceaux les engage à fleurir..." Billy adds that the fact of writing poetry in Mme Lemaire's honor "ne l'empêchait pas [Montesquieu] quelques instants après, de s'esclaffer dans les coins sur 'les travaux de dame' de son hôteesse" (p. 332). Proust quoted from Montesquieu's verses in his preface to Les Plaisirs et les jours: "Poser pour vos pinceaux les engage à fleurir.../Vous êtes leur Vigée et vous êtes la Flore/Quoi les immortalise, où l'autre fait mourir!" (p. 5).

58 V, p. 458.

60 **Corr. I, p. 247.**

61 "Je n'ai fait qu'une fois un volume illustré Calmann-Lévy qui n'en a jamais fait d'autres (les illustrations de Mme Lemaire l'avaient attirés)" (**Corr. gén., V, p. 103**).  

62 Proust wrote to Reynaldo in September 1894: "Je suis à une grande chose que je crois assez bien et j'en profiterai pour supprimer de mon volume la nouvelle sur Lepré, l'opéra etc. que vous faites copier" (**Corr. I, p. 333**). Having uncovered this short story, Kolb has published it as a separate volume (**L'Indifférent** [Paris: Gallimard, NRF, 1978]).

63 **Corr. II, p. 491.**

64 **Corr. I, p. 441.**

65 **Corr. I, p. 453.**

66 **Corr. I, p. 454.**

67 **Corr. I, pp. 456-57.**

68 **Corr. I, p. 457.**

69 **Corr. II, p. 42.**

70 **Corr. II, pp. 41-42.**

71 **Corr. II, p. 50.**

72 **Corr. II, p. 51N2.** See also Kolb's article "Marcel Proust et les dames Lemaire," **BSAMP 14** (1964), 114-51.

73 **Corr. II, p. 51.**

74 **Corr. I, p. 247.**

75 Proust says this of his old publishing house in a letter to Louis de Robert in 1913, explaining that **Swann** contained far too many objectionable passages for him to even consider submitting it to Calmann-Lévy. See Louis de Robert, **Comment débute Marcel Proust** (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 21.

76 **Corr. V, p. 332.**


78 See Proust's article on Montesquieu and the Decadence, "Le Souverain des choses transitorres," **V, pp. 405-9.** We will return to this article in Chapter 3, pp. 196-204.
Roseaux pensants (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1897).

The epigraph in question, according to Kolb, is from the Suite de la seconde partie des Lettres de Mr de Balzac (Paris: Rocolet, 1637), pp. 93-96 (Corr. II, p. 54N3).


Quoted by Sandre, IV, p. 907.


Fernand Gregh, "Livres illustés," Revue de Paris (15 December 1896), p. 909. Kolb quotes the text of Gregh's notice in Corr. II, p. 157N4. Proust wrote to Gregh on 18 December 1896 that he had just then come across Gregh's unexpected mention of Les Plaisirs et les jours in the Review de Paris; having stopped by Gregh's office two days earlier to chat with his friend who had turned out not to be there, Proust wanted to assure Gregh that his visit had had nothing to do with the notice he hadn't known Gregh was planning to write (Corr. II, p. 157).

André Maurois, A la Recherche de Marcel Proust (Paris: Hachette, 1949), p. 81. Maurois, among others, has recounted the sarcasm with which Proust's old friends assailed the book in a sketch in which Léon Yeatmann, playing Proust, added up the price of its contents: "Une préface de Monsieur France: quatre francs.... Des tableaux de Madame Lemaire: quatre francs.... De la musique de Reynaldo Hahn: quatre francs.... De la prose de moi: un franc.... Quelques vers de moi: cinquante centimes.... Total: treize francs cinquante; ça n'était pas exagéré?" (p. 85).


This is the reason Louis de Robert gives for his attempts to dissuade Proust in 1913 from publishing Du Côté de chez Swann at his own expense: "Je m'efforçai de montrer à Proust l'espèce de discrédit qu'il risquait de jeter lui-même sur son ouvrage. Ne se classait-il pas ainsi parmi les riches oisifs tourmentés du désir d'écrire et qui achètent à prix d'argent la satisfaction de voir imprimées leurs élucubrations littéraires?" (Comment débute Marcel Proust, p. 8).

93 See Kolb's annotations to Proust's letter to Montesquiou at the end of June 1896. Proust is writing from Auteuil where his maternal grandfather, Nathé Weil, was dying (Corr. II, p. 84).

94 Bardèche, p. 32.

95 Adam, in "Une vie laboratoire d'une œuvre" (Proust, Collection Génies et réalités [Paris: Hachette, 1965]), has this to say of Les Plaisirs et les jours: "Pour nous, qui savons y reconnaître les prémices d'une œuvre entre toutes géniale, ce volume révèle déjà, en de nombreuses pages, des dons éminents. A l'époque de sa publication, ses analyses semblaient d'une vaine subtilité, et son style parut d'une élégance molle et fade. La présentation était déplorable, et le texte étouffé par les illustrations de Madeleine Lemaire et par la musique de Reynaldo Hahn qui y étaient jointes. Le prix du volume, au surplus, était extravagant. L'échec fut complet" (p. 15).

96 Jean Lorrain in Le Journal, 3 February 1897.

97 Jean Lorrain in Le Journal, 3 February 1897. George Painter agrees that this conclusion was the cause of the duel, writing dramatically that "only the most inattentive of Le Journal's hundreds of thousands of readers could fail to understand that this was a public accusation of homosexuality" (vol. 1, p. 299).


100 This illustration, along with that of Baldassare reclining in his chaise longue, is reproduced in Proust (Collection Génies et réalités), as appropriate representatives of the themes and atmosphere of Les Plaisirs et les jours, pp. 94, 121.

101 Edmond Jaloux, Avec Marcel Proust, suivi de dix-sept lettres inédites de Proust (Geneva: La Palatine, 1953), p. 54. This error was not entirely Proust's; he held in high disregard, as we shall see, any school of literary thought claiming to have discovered the "vérité définitive" in literature. As for art, into Proust's appreciation of the work of such (retrospectively) minor figures as Madeleine Lemaire and Jean Béraud (who served as one of his witnesses for his duel with Lorrain) there entered a considerable part of compliance with the tastes of fashionable society. Lucien Daudet assures us, on the other hand, that Proust "était un grand critique d'art.... Tout ce qu'il découvrait dans un tableau, à la fois picturalement et intellectuellement, était merveilleux et transmissible; ce n'était pas une impression personnelle, arbitraire, c'était l'inoubliable vérité du tableau" (Autour de soixante lettres de Marcel Proust, Cahiers Marcel Proust 5 [Paris: Gallimard, 1952], p. 18). Evidence of Proust's receptiveness to other

102 See particularly George Jean's discussion of the novel as object in Le Roman (Paris: Seuil, 1971), drawing attention to the importance for the reader of physical contact with the book: "La plupart des lecteurs aiment toucher, caresser, soupeser le roman qu'ils vont lire; ils se donnent de ce fait un plaisir à venir, retardant le moment où, par une sorte d'effraction, de viol, ils vont ouvrir le livre. Il n'est pas indifférent de souligner que certains lecteurs, avant de lire vraiment, aiment feuilleter, parcourir des doigts et des yeux les romans qui les attendent" (p. 46). This type of "attente" is what the physical disposition of the opening page of "La Confession d'une jeune fille" in the 1896 edition assures for the reader; we will discuss shortly its implications as transgression. On the book as art object in the fin-de-siècle, see for example, the attention Des Esseintes lavishes on the material qualities of the books in his library in Huysmans' A Rebours (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, Collection 10/18, 1975), pp. 275-307. Germaine Brée has also related Proust's choice of an illustrated text to fin-de-siècle tastes and concepts of literature in The World of Marcel Proust (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), pp. 36-37. Among the manuscript papers for Les Plaisirs et les jours at the Bibliothèque Nationale is a type of presentation copy of "La Confession," with a hand-printed cover and the text recopied by hand in a flowing script. The same type of copy also exists for "La Fin de la jalouse," the origins perhaps of the notion of an édition de luxe for Les Plaisirs et les jours, and witness to a (fetishist) reverence for the written word that leads the author to concern himself overmuch with its adornment and presentation.

103 See the narrator's discussion with himself of his ineptitude for literature following the reading of the Goncourt Journal, III, pp. 718-19.


105 See Chapter 1, pp. 57-55.

106 Bernard Gicquel has also noticed this resemblance of the young man in the drawing to Proust ("La Composition des Plaisirs et les jours, BSAMP 10 [1960], p. 252N4").
There is a major narrative problem in this crucial scene from "La Confession": it is the theme of profanation that requires the jeune fille's mother to appear on the scene at this moment of sexual passion, not the logic of the plot, which in fact provides no justification for her appearance.

"J'étais décidée à me tuer dans la minute qui suivrait sa mort" (p. 88).


Corr. I, p. 393. Proust continues in this letter to call his line "plus tristes d'être bleus" from the poem on Potter "un écho fidèle et affaibli d'augustes mains 'plus belles d'êtres nus,'" in Montesquiou's poetry. Professor Johnson correctly questions the faithfulness of this "echo," suggesting rather that it is "another example of the ingratiation if not obsequious manner Proust often used in his correspondence with the irascible count." Besides, Johnson continues, Proust's line of verse is poetically superior to Montesquiou's ("Portraits de peintres," p. 401).


See Johnson, "Portraits de peintres," for a description of this 1895 plaquette, pp. 399-400. As Johnson points out, Au Menestrel, the firm that published the plaquette, had also published in 1892 Hahn's collection of music for seven Verlaine poems, entitled the Chansons grises, pp. 398-99.


Corr. I, p. 389. This is not false modesty on Proust's part. See for example I.K.E. Dunlop's account in the article "Proust and Painting" (Marcel Proust 1891-1922, ed. P. Quennell [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971], p. 124), of Proust's reluctance to impose his own judgments in art upon those he considered specialists in the field.


Corr. I, p. 389. Another version of this difference of opinion is provided by Maurice Duplay who, while he corroborates Proust's résumé of Hahn's musical principles, also taxes the latter with impudence towards Proust: "[Hahn] pritais, en littérature et en musique, la concision, la netteté.... Point d'art plus opposé au sien que celui de Proust. Je gagerais presque que si Marcel n'était pas devenu illustre, il ne l'aurait jamais pris au sérieux. Il ne se gênait pas pour le critiquer, même célèbre, sur la longueur de ses phrases" (Mon ami Marcel Proust Cahiers Marcel Proust 5 [Paris: Gallimard, 1972], p. 50). Hahn may have been familiar with the ideas on the precision of musical language in J. Combarieu's 1894 Rapports de la musique et de la poésie. The debate over the nature of music and its relationship to the other arts was an ongoing feature of the fin-de-siècle. See A.C. Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France: 1885-1892 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), pp. 215-29.

RTP I, pp. 350, 351.

Maurice Duplay, Mon ami Marcel Proust, p. 49.

Edmond Jaloux, Avec Marcel Proust, p. 53.

He has since been identified as Paul Perret. Y. Sandre, "Notice," IV, p. 907N2.

Corr. II, p. 83. Kolb quotes excerpts from this article in his notes to this letter.

Paul Perret, La Liberté (26 June 1896).

France described Proust in the preface to Les Plaisirs et les jours as comprised of "du Bernardin de Saint-Pierre dépravé et du Pétrone ingénû" (p. 4).

Gregh, Amitié, p. 65.

The entire conclusion to Perret's article is cited textually in Sandre, "Notice," IV, p. 908.

Quoted by Philip Kolb, Corr. II, p. 81N2.


Blum, p. 46.

Jean Lorrain in *Le Journal* (1 July 1896).

Lorrain in *Le Journal* (1 July 1896).

Lorrain in *Le Journal* (1 July 1896).

_Corr.* II, p. 156.


See Proust's letters to Charles Maurras giving his permission for the article and promising to send Maurras or the *Revue encyclopédique* a photograph, _Corr.* II, pp. 98–99.

Charles Maurras, "Un Poète, deux Pamphlétaires, un Sociologue, et un Moraliste," *Revue encyclopédique* VI, no. 155 (22 August 1896), 584. The excerpts of this article pertaining to Proust are quoted by Kolb, _Corr.* II, p. 109N2.


_Corr.* II, p. 76.

_Corr.* II, p. 76. *RTP,* III, p. 911. Painter says that "Promenade" was written in memory of a stay with Lavallée in 1895 at the country estate belonging to the latter's family (vol. 1, p. 179).

_Corr.* II, p. 79.

_Corr.* II, pp. 81–82. Henri Cazalis is identified as the principal source for Legrandin, as Laure Hayman one of the sources for Odette, by Painter, vol. 1, pp. 194, 85–88.

_Corr.* II, p. 120.


_Corr.* VI, pp. 159–60. This letter is dated 21 July 1906, the evening of the ceremony (to which Proust refers in the letter) restoring to Alfred Dreyfus his commission in the French army and his rank in the Legion of Honor.
The letter showing Montesquieu's handwritten corrections is reproduced on pp. 168 and 171.


Kolb, "Introduction," Corr. IV, pp. VI-VIII.


"C'est cette Préface sur laquelle je m'étais permis de te demander l'année dernière ton diagnostic (si j'étais en progrès ou en déclin, sur les Plaisirs et les Jours et la Bible d'Amiens) et que tu n'as jamais voulu me donner!" Corr. VI, p. 108.


180 Quoted by Sandre, "Notice," IV, p. 903.
Chapter 2
The Skirmish with Symbolism

**Fight or Flight**

In 1891, Jean Moréas announced to Jules Huret that the publication of his (Moréas') *Pèlerin passionné* in that year marked the end of Symbolism, the definitive rupture with what had been at any rate only a transition period along the way to the total renovation of French poetic language that was Moréas' ultimate goal.¹ At the same time, Charles Morice was confiding to Huret that there had never really been an "école symboliste," and that even if there had been one, Moréas himself, more given to allegory than to symbols, was not a symbolist.²

For his part, Henri de Régnier recognized in his interview with Huret the legitimate existence of a Symbolist school; he gave it at one and the same time, however, a striking broad definition—"ce qu'on appelle l'Ecole symboliste doit plutôt être considéré comme une sorte de refuge où s'abritent provisoirement tous les nouveaux venus de la littérature"—and a strikingly narrow one:

Oui, je le sais, nous n'inventons pas le symbole, mais jusqu'ici le symbole ne surgissait qu'instinctivement dans les œuvres d'art, en dehors de tout parti pris, parce qu'on sentait qu'en effet il ne peut pas y avoir d'art véritable sans symbole.

Le mouvement actuel est différent: on fait du symbole la condition essentielle de l'art. On veut en bannir délibérément, en toute conscience, ce qu'on
appelle,—je crois,—les contingences, c'est-à-dire
les accidents de milieu, d'époque, les faits parti-
culiers. 3

There is also room in Régnier's notion of symbolism for a prediction
in 1891 of its demise as rallying point for the "nouveaux venus;" the
aims of renewal that had been the movement's from the beginning would
have won such acceptance as to make the "umbrella" of the formal school
unnecessary:

Dans cinq ans ou dans dix ans, il ne subsistera
sans doute pas grand'chose d'un classement aussi
sommairement improvisé, aussi arbitraire. Et cela
se comprend, ce groupe symboliste, outillé d'esprits
si divers et de nuances différentes, ... mais, fatale-
ment, l'heure venue, il s'égaillera à travers toutes
les spécialités, selon les goûts, les aptitudes et
compétences de chacun. 4

This prediction proved to be overly sanguine, despite the lucidity of
the distinction between literature as a symbolizing activity and "sym-
bolist" literature that argues for Régnier's credibility as a witness
to the evolution of the movement. As Guy Michaud's study of the per-
iod of Symbolism in France has made clear, the next several years after
Huret's Enquête was published in the Echo de Paris continued to be
marked by the same types of confusion, the same difficulties of defini-
tion and the same exaggerated reports of the life or death of Symbolism
that had confronted Huret in his interviews with the leading writers
of the early 1890's. Far from breathing its last in 1895, writes
Michaud for example, Symbolism had just taken hold as something una-
voidably "in the air:"
Ce qu'il y a de nouveau, c'est maintenant une âme collective. Il n'y a plus de petits groupes, mais une communauté, une société symboliste. Le Symbolisme n'est plus seulement un drapeau, mais déjà la caractéristique d'une époque. On est symboliste comme on était pessimiste dix ans plus tôt; le symbolisme est à la mode.  

Yet the controversy and debate that had marked Symbolism's early years, the revolutionary tendencies that urged poets and writers to go beyond what had just been produced, were never far behind, and the debate over the very existence of Symbolism itself continued:

Vers 1896 en effet on peut dire avec Rolland de Renéville que "l'école nouvelle, après tant d'éclat, semblait parvenue à ce moment d'agonie où toute innovation prend les apparences de décrépitude, mais plus réellement commence à féconder les générations qui croient s'opposer à elle, et célèbrent chaque jour sa prétendue disparition."  

Among those "générations" discernible on the horizon in 1896, Michaud lists "paroxysme, ésotérisme, naturisme, synthétisme, humanisme, en attendant le somptuarisme, l'intégralisme et l'unanimisme," remarking that each new -isme, believing itself more revolutionary than its precedents, did its best to "battre en brèche l'édifice si patiemment construit."  

Michaud's image conveys a much more structured view of the Symbolists and their movement than the Symbolists apparently ever had of it themselves. As Paul Valéry aptly quipped some decades after all the fuss had calmed down, Symbolism really only referred to "l'ensemble des gens qui ont cru que le mot Symbole avait un sens."  

Although Les Plaisirs et les jours were published in the thick of the fray in 1896, one does not customarily speak of a "Symbolist period" for Proust as for his contemporaries Gide or Valéry. Gide, it is
true, had already by 1896 published much more than Proust and in a specifically Symbolist context: *Le Traité du Narcisse: Théorie du symbole* in 1892 and *Le Voyage d'Urfien* in 1893, proposed as the symbolist novel. With *Paludes* in 1895, Gide was in fact concluding his stay as a "nouveau venu" among the Symbolists. Valéry, for his part, and despite the intensity of his personal meditation on poetry, remained of all the poets who cut their teeth on Symbolism, says Henri Peyre, "celui qui en conserva la nostalgie la plus durable." Yet, for all the time he spent courting the upper classes, it is impossible to think of Proust as totally removed from the debates and developments that marked the literature of the 1880's and '90's in France. Antoine Adam has called attention to Proust's enthusiasm for contemporary literature expressed in a letter to Robert Dreyfus in 1888: "Ce que nous avons de commun avec quelques autres, c'est que nous connaissons un peu la littérature d'aujourd'hui, et que nous l'aimons, que nous avons d'autres façons d'entendre l'Art, et que nous jugeons les traductions des écrivains ou des artistes d'après des règles assez différentes." Robert de Billy echoes this enthusiasm in his reminiscences of his years with Proust at the Institut des Sciences politiques; the terms of their devout homage to literature are a direct borrowing from Symbolist aesthetics:

...nous savions, à n'en pouvoir douter, que la lecture était un sacerdoce et non l'occupation des désœuvrés, que le théâtre n'est pas seulement un adjuvant de la digestion et qu'il importait, avant tout, de restituer à la littérature son éminente dignité. Nous parlions de la philosophie de Guizot, de Tarde, de Ribot.... On s'enthousiasmait pour Ibsen, le roman russe, le théâtre libre, pour des idées plutôt nées au Septentrion qu'au Midi et qui
avaient pour nous un point commun: la certitude qu'elles s'imposeraient au monde sitôt après avoir conquis nos jeunes cerveaux. 14

The Decadence also tempted Proust, as he wrote to Dreyfus of his année de rhétorique:

J'ai fait des devoirs qui n'en avaient pas du tout l'air. La conséquence, ça a été qu'au bout de deux mois une douzaine d'imbéciles écrivaient en style décadent, que Cucheval m'a considéré comme un empoisonneur, que j'ai mis la guerre dans la classe, que je me suis fait passer auprès de quelques-uns pour un poseur. Heureusement, au bout de deux mois, c'était fini, mais il y a un mois encore Cucheval disait: "Lui sera reçu parce que ce n'était qu'un fumiste, mais il en fera refuser quinze." 15

He wrote again to Dreyfus in September 1888 that the fine weather had given him "des velléités de grand seigneur" and a desire to put on airs; thus, "J'aimerais dire ... à X ou Y que je suis décadent." 16 A letter to Proust from his mother the next year reveals both their familiarity with the writings of Sœur Péladan and the irony with which they regarded extreme manifestations of dandysme: "Nous avons retrouvé (cela se retrouve toujours!) le décadent Belge de l'an dernier, qui décède toujours plus bas et ne s'enflamme que pour Joséphin Péladan." 17 This young man was eventually granted a walk-on role in the Recherche, showing up on vacation at Balbec in A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs as:

...un jeune gommeux, fils poitrinaire et fêtard d'un grand industriel et qui, tous les jours, dans un veston nouveau, une orchidée à la boutonnière, déjeunait au champagne, et allait, pâle, impassible, un sourire d'indifférence aux lèvres, jeter au Casino sur la table de baccara des sommes énormes
'qu'il n'a pas les moyens de perdre,' disait d'un air renseigné le notaire au premier président duquel la femme 'tenait de bonne source' que ce jeune homme 'fin de siècle' faisait mourir de chagrin ses parents. 18

One of the principal characteristics of the literary era 1880-1900 was its contentiousness, and it is here that Proust parted company, early and decisively, with many of his contemporaries. His refusal to sign on with one or another "school" resulted, Robert de Billy has said, in Proust's being taken for a " dilettante," but he was only following his own convictions: Proust "négligeait d'instinct les apparences et, dans l'ordre intellectuel, les écoles.... [Il] ne croyait qu'au travail et à la vie intérieure." 19 This instinctive non-partisanship was rooted also in a fundamentally different concept of literature from the one Proust perceived at the heart of literary schools and squabbles, as his comments to Dreyfus in 1892 make clear: "Je pense comme toi que toutes les écoles qui prétendent ruiner la précédente ne valent pas grand'chose. La raison, je pense, c'est qu'elles se font une idée trop matérielle de la souveraineté littéraire." 20 The influence of Darlu—his anti-positivism, his idealism, his refusal of materialism—is clearly perceptible in this affirmation by Proust: literature is and will remain for him a spiritual activity, as is evident again in a letter to Hahn, written in November 1895, expressing Proust's disappointment in Alphonse Daudet's materialist (naturalist) view of literature:

Constaté avec tristesse ... l'affreux matérialisme, si extraordinaire chez les gens "d'esprit." On rend compte du caractère, du génie par les habitudes physiques ou la race. Différences entre Musset,
Baudelaire, Verlaine expliquées par la qualité des alcools qu'ils buvaient, caractère de telle personne par sa race (antisémitisme)... Tout cela est bien peu intelligent. C'est la conception la plus bornée de l'esprit (car tout est conception de l'esprit) que celle où il n'a pas encore assez conscience de lui et se croit dérivé du corps. 21

He returns in the same letter to another objection to materialism, this time in defense of Mallarmé:

Daudet... croit que Mallarmé mystifie. Il faut toujours supposer que les pactes sont faits entre l'intelligence du poète et sa sensibilité et qu'il les ignore lui-même, qu'il en est le jouet. C'est plus intéressant et c'est plus profond. Paresse ou étroitesse d'esprit à expliquer par un pacte matériel (avec intention charlatanesque) avec ses disciples. 22

Such anti-materialism, rejecting all mechanistic relationships between the workings of the body and the creations of the mind, meant that for Proust, of all the contemporary literary movements, Zola and the Naturalists were wrong in their concept of reality based on the positivism of Taine and Comte, and that their pursuit of the "roman expérimental" with its concentrated attention to material detail and its pretense to total objectivity was in fact anti-literary. An early expression of this position comes from Daniel Halévy's souvenirs of Proust at Condorcet; having submitted a poem to Proust for commentary, Halévy received it back with this notation among others in the margin: "Naturaliste, ergo stupide."23 The narrator of the Recherche would later make of the opposition between material and immaterial, objective and subjective, a founding principle of all art, scorning as deceptive
all so-called "realist" schools, for their efforts to situate reality purely in the material object:

C'est que les choses—un livre sous sa couverture rouge comme les autres—, sitôt qu'elles sont perçues par nous, deviennent en nous quelque chose d'immatériel, de même nature que toutes nos préoccupations ou nos sensations de ce temps-là, et se mêlent indissolublement à elles....

De sorte que la littérature qui se contente de "décrire les choses," d'en donner seulement un misérable relevé de lignes et de surfaces, est celle qui, tout en s'appelant réaliste, est la plus éloi-
gnée de la réalité, celle qui nous appauvrît et nous attriste le plus, car elle coupe brusquement toute communication de notre moi présent avec le passé, dont les choses gardaient l'essence, et l'avenir, où elles nous incitent à la goûter de nouveau. C'est elle que l'art digne de ce nom doit exprimer, et, s'il y échoue, on peut encore tirer de son impuissance un enseignement (tandis qu'on n'en tire aucun des réussites du réalisme), à savoir que cette essence est en partie subjective et incommunicable. 24

On the other hand, style could be redemptive even for the Naturalists read by one as discriminating and sufficiently steeped in the French classical tradition as Proust. Maurice Duplay has recalled that Proust found Maupassant irremediably vulgar while Zola was, in his opinion, "grossier, cru, brutal, trivial, mais jamais vulgaire." The difference was style: "A propos de Maupassant et de son indélébile vul-
garité," writes Duplay, "il insistait sur le point que ce n'est jamais le sujet qui constitue celle-ci mais la manière de le traiter."25 Such insistence is significant in light of the subjects Proust would choose for his own work, notably sexual transgression and matricide in "La Confession d'une jeune fille" in Les Plaisirs et les jours, homosexuality in the Recherche. A second objection to Naturalism, though, is its
"manière de traiter" that turns the literary work into a demonstration of theory, no less strongly worded in the Recherche than the narrator's objection to "materialist" views of literature:

Je sentais que je n'aurais pas à m'embarasser des diverses théories littéraires qui m'avaient un moment troublé... même avant de discuter leur contenu logique, ces théories me paraissaient dénoter chez ceux qui les soutenaient une preuve d'inferiorité.... L'art véritable n'a que faire de tant de proclama-
tions et s'accomplit dans le silence.... Une oeuvre où il y a des théories est comme un objet sur lequel on laisse la marque du prix. 26

This is already, as we shall see, a major argument in "Contre l'obscurité," suggesting the sureness and staying power for Proust's mature work of some of this "dilettante's" earliest published insights into literature. 27

Despite his hostility to the spirit of literary coteries, Proust spent a great deal of time and effort during the late 1880's and early 1890's collaborating on a series of literary journals, from such obscure "publications" at Condorcet as Lundi, the Revue de seconde, the Revue verte and the Revue lilas to the prestigious Revue blanche; 28 in every instance, however, one senses that the group and review with which he is associated provided only an occasion for him to write and publish according to his own literary bent and ambition, not according to a commonly shared aesthetic doctrine. Indeed, Proust's collaborations are marked by a certain amount of dissension from his fellows; he threatened to resign as secretary of the Revue verte, for example, if Halévy failed to destroy the review's single issue that Proust called "[des] feuilles journalières écrites à la hâte" and a "simple
divertissement,"²⁹ and he later submitted to the *Revue lilas* a "portrait du charmant Glaucos" that Halévy and his editorial board rejected as "scandalous."³⁰

In 1892 Proust established with Fernand Gregh, Robert Dreyfus, Louis de la Salle, Halévy, Jacques Bizet and Horace Finaly³¹ a new monthly publication christened *Le Banquet* after Plato's dialogue.³² Léon-Pierre Quint has said in praise of this enterprise that of the many reviews that sprang up and died in the 1890's, few could boast of as many future celebrities in its ranks as the *Banquet*;³³ Dreyfus described the group as a loose cenacle of friends united by a common love for literature, "un groupe assurément très libre, peu discipliné, qui n'accepterait pas volontiers la tutelle d'un chef..."³⁴ although Gregh was tacitly recognized as its leading figure. Their manifesto declared their "éclectisme," their attraction to foreign literature, and their espousal in literature of "les doctrines anarchiques les subversives," within limits, however: "Nous ne serons pas symbolistes mais nous ne serons pas tolstoïsants. La largeur de notre éclectisme réconciliera nos tempéraments."³⁵

Bardèche finds it significant that the condisciples of *Le Banquet* were all received in the salon of Mme Strauss; this frequation must have encouraged Proust in his choice of society topics for the review and his appeal to society readers:

> C'est donc dans une sorte de départtement un peu spécialisé de sa vie mondaine que Marcel Proust fit connaître ses premières productions. Cette circonstance n'est pas indifférente, car le caractère mondain et la destination mondaine de ces premiers fragments sont leurs traits les plus remarquables et même leur donnent leur véritable signification. ³⁶
The fragments to which Bardèche refers here include those pieces, for the most part society portraits, that Proust first published in *Le Banquet* and later included in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, mainly as the *Fragments de comédie italienne* and the *Regrets, rêveries couleur du temps*. In April 1892 Proust gave in *Le Banquet* the series of *Etudes* that appear in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* as "Les Maitresses de Fabrice," "Cydalise" ("Cires perdues I"), "Les Amis de la comtesse Myrto," "Hélédemone, Adelgise, Ercole;" in May 1892 more *Etudes*, including "L'Inconstant," "La vie est étrangement facile et douce...." and "Snobs I et II" in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*; in July 1892, the *Etudes* that became *Regrets V, VI, and XXV* ("Critique de l'esperance à la lumière de l'amour") in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*; in November 1892 the *Etude* "La Mer" that figures as *Regret XXVIII* in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, along with "Portraits de Mme ***" that the Pléiade editors give in their appendix to *Les Plaisirs et les jours* as Proust himself did not reprint it there. The short story "Violante ou la mondanité" was first published in *Le Banquet* on 7 February 1893, before being included in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*; other texts of Proust which first appeared in *Le Banquet*, indicative of more than a visée mondaine, but which he never reprinted, include reviews of *Les petits souliers* by Louis Ganderax, of Henri Murger's comedy *Le Bonhomme Jadis* entitled "Un livre contre l'élégance: Sens dessus dessous," and of Henri de Régnier's "Tel qu'en sone," a review to which we shall return. He had other concerns during the period of this collaboration as well, one of which had to do with the opinion of posterity, as Proust wrote to Dreyfus in 1892 this suggestion for a joint article: "Je voudrais faire une chose en collaboration
avec Gregh ou Halévy, en collaboration assez distincte: par exemple, chacun un discours académique, Halévy (Daniel) me recevant à l'Académie par exemple." Another had to do with the integrity of the review's concept of literature: Proust protested vehemently to Gregh the staff's acceptance of Léon Blum's "Méditation sur le suicide d'un de mes amis," judging the story artificial and implausible, an example of extremism in fin-de-siècle literature:

Le jeune homme (Maxime) a-t-il réellement existé? Si oui, je le plains de la chromo fin de siècle, la plus répugnante de toutes, dont il vient d'être le modèle. Mais non, il n'a jamais existé! Comment un Monsieur, dégoûté de tout, désabusé de tout (attitude pour laquelle l'auteur professe une admiration irritante qu'il croit évidemment tout à fait "distinguée" et "intelligente") emprunterait-il de l'argent, signera-t-il des billets, aurait-il recours aux usuriers? 39

His own articles might be worse than Blum's, Proust allowed, but publishing a few "mauvais articles de mode" would at least not dishonor the Banquet as would the "Méditation," and besides, he was a member of the staff! 40 The period of Proust's collaboration with the review was soon to end, however; his article in February 1893, "Conférence parlementaire de la rue Serpente," was judged by his colleagues sufficiently contrary to the aim of Le Banquet to warrant the published disclaimer: "les opinions exprimées dans un article n'engagent que le signataire." 41 Robert Dreyfus has suggested that Proust read this as a sign of rejection and thus ceased contributing to the Banquet, which at any rate published only one more issue in March 1893; the incident resolved the question of who was really dishonoring the journal, as Dreyfus recalled:
Proust thus came to appear in the eyes of his colleagues as little more than a "vil courtesan," changing his tune according to his subject, always in hopes of pleasing his audience. His withdrawal from Le Banquet did not mean, however, Proust's complete rejection of the Banqueters and their talents: Professor Kolb has recently found evidence of a four-part collaboration with Halévy, Gregh, and Louis de la Salle in the summer of 1893, aimed at producing an epistolary novel, each of the writers responsible for the letters of a single character.

Bardèche has spoken of Proust's collaboration on La Revue blanche in 1893 as an important step up for the young author. Among those who published their poems, essays, or short stories in La Revue blanche were Stuart Merrill, Lucien Muhlfeld, who served as the review's secretary and literary critic, Paul Adam, Apollinaire, Jacques Baignères, Maurice Barrès, Henri Bataille, Julien Benda, Tristan Bernard, Léon Blum, Paul Claudel, Claude Debussy, Robert Dreyfus, Édouard Dujardin, Henri Ghéon, André Gide, Rémy de Gourmont, Fernand Gregh, Heredia, Francis Jammes, Alfred Jarry, Gustave Kahn, Jules Laforgue, Jean Lorrain, Pierre Louÿs, Lugné-Poë, Maeterlinck, Mallarmé, Moréas, Péguy, Péladan, Henri de Régnier, Jules Renard, Saint-Pol-Roux, Émile Verhaeren, Paul Verlaine, Viénot-Griffin, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Zola. The Revue blanche, "bastion du Symbolisme," as Guy Michaud has described
it, absorbed the disbanding Banquet in May 1893; its manifesto, which had been published as a simple prefactory note in the first issue of its Paris series in 1891, was on the surface much less aggressive and partisan than that which had inaugurated the "non-Symbolist" Banquet:

Qu'on ne se méprenne point sur la juvénilité de notre format: ceci n'est guère une revue de combat. Nous ne nous proposons, ni de saper la littérature installée, ni de supplanter les jeunes groupes littéraires déjà organisés. Très simplement, nous voulons développer nos personnalités, et c'est pour les préciser par leurs complémentaires d'admiration ou de sympathie que nous sollicitons respectueusement nos maîtres, et que nous accueillons volontiers de plus jeunes. 49

Nonetheless, as even the partial list of contributors given above indicates, the Revue blanche did not hesitate to publish Symbolists and even Decadents; according to A.B. Jackson,

La Revue Blanche, sans être une revue "symboliste" comme le Mercure de France, ouvrait volontiers ses pages à des poètes appartenant à cette école, et il n'est pas étonnant que Fernand Gregh, qui s'opposa à l'esthétique symboliste, ne se soit pas toujours trouvé à l'aise dans le milieu Revue Blanche. 50

Proust's contributions to the Revue blanche—with the exception of "Contre l'obscurité" in 1896—were all languorous rêveries or social portraits similar to those he had published in Le Banquet; appearing in the Revue within six months of its merger with Le Banquet, they included Études I–IX in July–August 1893 (reprinted in Les Plaisirs et les jours as Regret VII, Regret VIII, "Reliques," "Eventail," "Source des larmes qui sont dans les amours passées," "Contre la franchise," "Éphémère efficacité du chagrin," "Scénario," "Mondanité de Bouvard et
Pécuchet" [first half of "Mondonalité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet"], and "Amitié.") In the 15 September 1893 issue of the Revue blanche Proust published "Mélancolique villégiaiture" ("Mélancolique villégiaiture de Mme de Breyves" in Les Plaisirs et les jours), and more Études in December 1893 ("Présence réelle," "Avant la nuit" and "Souvenir," neither of which was reprinted in Les Plaisirs et les jours, "Rêve," "Contre une snob," and "A une snob"). Between December 1893 and July 1896, he addressed himself to other publications, such as the Revue hebdomadaire, which paid him 150 francs for "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande" in October 1895; 51 Le Gaulois for the "Portraits de peintres" in June 1895 and the article on Montesquieu "Une Fête littéraire à Versailles" in May 1894; and Gratis-Journal for his review of the count Henri de Saussine’s novel Le Nez de Cléopatre. His failure to contribute to the Revue blanche during all this time would seem to confirm the impressions of Fernand Gregh that at the Revue blanche, and despite its announced noncombativeness, he and Proust "...n’étions plus chez nous, nous n’étions que des invités." 52

"Contre l’obscurité"

"Contre l’obscurité" appeared in the 15 July 1896 issue of the Revue blanche. In a letter to his mother the day after its publication, Proust apologized to her for its timing; she was in mourning for her father, who had died two weeks earlier. Proust explained that the Revue blanche had held the article for six months before printing it "sans me consulter, sans m’avertir, sans m’avoir envoyé les épreuves à corriger," and regretting, "peut-être t’est-il désagréable qu’il
paraisse en ce moment quelque chose de moi et à cause de cela cela me fâche beaucoup." The Revue blanche, on the other hand, apparently had its own reasons for publishing the article so soon after the appearance of Les Plaisirs et les jours: in the responding article, "Sur la clarté," with which it was coupled in the Revue, Lucien Muhlfeld confidently attacked Proust's opinions as those of an ignorant mondain, thus making of Proust a type of easy strawman against whom to elaborate his own polemical defense of the "jeune école." Muhlfeld further hints at the beginning of his article that it was Proust who invited the controversy, noting either as a tongue-in-cheek mystification or an allusion to a conversation from which the pair of articles arose, "Sur mon désir exprimé de le contredire, M. Proust, avec une courtoisie charmante m'a par avance communiqué son article." Whoever started it, Proust's debate with the Symbolist-leaning Revue blanche was born and died on the pages of its 15 July issue; Proust never responded to Muhlfeld's defense, preferring to end at that point his association with the review.

Robert Greer Cohn has suggested that "the Symbolist aesthetic fairly dominates Les Plaisirs et les Jours"; Ninette Bailey agrees that the major influences on the work are Symbolism and impressionism. Rather than an out-and-out attack on Symbolism, "Contre l'obscurité" is more in the nature of a position paper on the "jeune école"; it is not improbable that Proust wrote it to allay charges of "dilettantism" against himself and his new book by seeming to take sides in the on-going literary debate. Yet the practice of Les Plaisirs et les jours often crosses the lines he draws in the article—a sense of this
inconsistency may have been part of his discomfiture at its untimely publication—while the understanding of the symbol sketched out in the essay is the basis of the practice of Symbolism in the Recherche.

We should note first of all with Robert Cohn that Mallarmé is not among the poets Proust accused of "obscurité"; Proust was in point of fact a sincere admirer of Mallarmé's poetry, explaining to Hahn for example, the technique of "brilliant obscurity" in a quatrains in honor of Méry Laurent:

... je ... dirai, de ce poète en général, que ses images obscures et brillantes sont sans doute encore les images des choses, puisque nous ne saurions rien imaginer d'autre, mais refletées pour ainsi dire dans le miroir sombre et poli du marbre noir. Ainsi dans un grand enterrement par un beau jour les fleurs et le soleil brillent à l'envers et en noir au miroitement du noir. C'est pourtant toujours le "même" printemps qui "s'allume" mais c'est un printemps dans un catafalque.... 56

Such an explication sounds as if Proust had the "Sonnet en -x" in the back of his mind as he wrote. Cohn finds the reading appreciative of Mallarmé's originality and seriousness of purpose even in a vers de circonstance, but somewhat misleading and "over-influenced by a decadent strain more proper to the morbid moments of Baudelaire, or to Samain and the minor Symbolists"; Proust was apt to take from Mallarmé in general, he says, here as in the choice of "La chair est triste, hélas!" from "Brise marine" for the epigraph to a chapter in "Baldassare," only the poet's "dark moments," or a "general sense of fatality," which, while they are certainly present in Mallarmé, nonetheless "do not establish a pervasive death-atmosphere," as Proust's readings would have it. 57 On the other hand, Proust was also sensitive to Mallarmé's
use of language, the suggestiveness of his imagery, and his faithfulness to nature, all of which create his "charme"; the word is used, one suspects, in the sense of "enchantment" as Proust continued in his letter to Hahn:

...Son charme me semble consister comme pour beaucoup de choses de Mallarmé, en ceci: passer, sous couleur d'archaïsme, ... d'une forme classique inflexible et pure, presque nue à la plus folle préciosité.... Ajoutez que dans la préciosité les images restent d'une sincérité, d'un naturel exquis (je veux dire empruntées à la nature). Ce pied altéré qui va boire comme une plante nous donne merveilleusement l'idée de ces êtres obscurs que sont nos organes et qui paraissent en effet vivre d'une vie particulière mais obscure.... Enfin c'est un grand plaisir que de trouver tant d'archaïsme, de grandeur, de mythologie, de goût, et de nature dans une sorte de court billet familier. C'est là "en dernière analyse" qu'est le charme. C'est au reste le charme de Mallarmé et le rôle du poète de solenniser la vie. 58

By his art, Mallarmé thus brings to light what was at first only vaguely sensed or felt; this, along with fidelity to nature, is one of the conditions of art that Proust set down in "Contre l'obscurité."

Mallarmé's "clarity," Proust wrote of "Soupir" to Mme Strauss in 1893, is thus that of "pure poetry":

Si vous aimez cela, c'est-à-dire si vous aimez la poésie (ailleurs vous pouvez—you rencontrant de l'éloquence, de la passion, du trait—dans Musset par exemple, croire que c'est la poésie que vous y aimez, quand c'est en réalité l'éloquence, la passion—mais ici c'est de la poésie pure et rien ne peut adoucir votre ennui si elle vous en fait éprouver) que diriez-vous des Fenêtres, d'Hérodiade, de plusieurs parties de l'Après-midi d'un Faune. 59
This particular poem, furthermore, had special resonances for Proust in the 1890's. Its image of the jet d'eau --"Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!"60 recurs in a quatrain Mallarmé wrote for Reynaldo: "Le pleur qui chante au langage/Du poète, Reynaldo/Hahn tendrement le dégage/Comme en l'allée un jet d'eau."61 Proust adapted the image for his prose poem "Tuileries" in the Regrets: "Irisés de soleil et soupirant d'amour, les jets d'eau montent vers le ciel" (p. 104), while Mallarmé's "--Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur/Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langueur infinie" shows up in "Promenade" as "ce ciel pâle et lassé des beaux soirs d'octobre qui, étendu au fond des eaux, semble ymourir d'amour et de mélancolie" (p. 107).

"Contre l'obscurité" then is addressed not to the Master but to the followers, to the "generation of 1885," Viénot-Griffin, Stuart Merrill, and René Ghil among others, who were in fact--Cohn agrees with Proust on this--cultivating obscurity for its own sake as a poetic device.62 For his criticism of these poets, Proust adopts first of all the position of a "monsieur de cinquante ans" appraising the younger generation of poets; his stance corresponds to Anatole France's description in the preface to Les Plaisirs et les jours: "Sans doute il est jeune. Il est jeune de la jeunesse de l'auteur. Mais il est vieux de la vieillesse du monde" (p. 3). In "Contre l'obscurité," the vieillesse that Proust brings to bear on the Symbolists is that of the French literary tradition; the examples he uses to illustrate that tradition and its response to innovation are principally those of Racine and Hugo. Imagining a dialogue between himself and the "jeunes poètes,"
Proust argues that "talent" consists of more than the facile versification and hackneyed imagery he reads in much contemporary poetry:

Certes si le talent consiste dans une certaine rhétorique ambiante qui apprend à faire des "vers libres" comme une autre apprenait à faire des vers latins, dont les "princesses," les "mélancolies," "accoudées" ou "souriantes," les "béryls" sont à tout le monde, on peut dire qu'aujourd'hui tout le monde a du talent. 63

This charge is somewhat embarrassing in the light of Les Plaisirs et les Jours, replete with "princesses" and "mélancolies," a large number of whom are "accoudées" or "souriantes;" neither is Proust above using in his book the langorous, substantive, and overdetermined style of his time in such sentences as "Les statues ... rêvent ici dans les charnailles comme des sages sous la verdure lumineuse qui protège leur blancheur" in "Tuileries" (p. 104), "Elle ... promenait [ses rêves] dans les allées du parc" in "Violante" (p. 30), or even "Il éprouvait ... à accouder sa résignation à la fenêtre ... une joie mélancolique" in "Baldassare" (p. 18). In any case, and sounding much closer now to the future narrator of the Recherche, he proceeds in his article to counter the widespread acceptance of facile talent with his own definition of authentic talent: it is not the free expression of personality, to the neglect of the "lois générales de l'art," but a creative respect for those laws, as well as for the nature and qualities of language itself: "...le talent est en effet plus que l'originalité du tempérament, je veux dire le pouvoir de réduire un tempérament original aux lois générales de l'art, au génie permanent de la langue" (p. 390).
The rest of "Contre l'obscurité" proposes some of these "lois générales de l'art" which Proust accuses the Symbolists of disregarding, and offers a number of reflections on this "génie permanent de la langue." Proust argues that intelligibility is a first characteristic of an artistic masterpiece, even given the shocking newness, relative to what they succeed, of truly revolutionary works; deliberate obscurity is a recent invention and "autre chose que l'étonnement et, si vous voulez, le malaise que purent causer les premières tragédies de Racine et les premières odes de Victor Hugo." To think otherwise, Proust suggests, is puerile and self-serving:

... le sentiment de la même nécessité, de la même constance des lois de l'univers et de la pensée, qui m'interdit d'imager, à la façon des enfants, que le monde va changer au gré de mes désirs, m'empêche de croire que, les conditions de l'art étant subitement modifiées, les chefs-d'oeuvres seront maintenant ce qu'ils n'ont jamais été, au cours des siècles: à peu près inintelligibles. (p. 391)

Obscurity based on the complexity of philosophical or literary theory embodied in a given poem is not acceptable; sentiment, not reasoning, is what guides the poet, according to Proust, in his perception and understanding of the world:

... si le littérature et le poète peuvent aller, en effet, aussi profond dans la réalité des choses que le métaphysicien même, c'est par un autre chemin ... l'aide du raisonnement, loin de le fortifier, paralyse l'élan du sentiment qui seul peut les porter au cœur du monde. (p. 392)

The "truth" of sentiment is an important point in Proust's argument; it will be shown later (another example as well of his ability to
distinguish between the merits of individual writers and the polemics of their "schools") that his attraction to Henri de Régnier's poetry was based on what he saw as the latter's reliance on and expression of sentiment over intelligence.

The difference between presentation of the world through the rigorous logic of metaphysics, Proust continues, and presentation of the world through poetry lies in the amount of mystery each method will tolerate; by refusing the strictly denotative function words fulfill in a theoretical tract, poetry, even as it discovers the world, begins and ends with a type of mystery:

Les mots ne sont pas de purs signes pour le poète. Les symbolistes seront sans doute les premiers à nous accorder que ce que chaque mot garde, dans sa figure ou dans son harmonie, du charme de son origine ou de la grandeur de son passé, a sur notre imagination et sur notre sensibilité une puissance d'évocation au moins aussi grande que sa puissance de stricte signification. Ce sont ces affinités anciennes et mystérieuses entre notre langage maternel et notre sensibilité qui ... en font une sorte de musique latente que le poète peut faire résonner en nous avec une douceur incomparable. (pp. 392-93).

Henri Mondor has suggested that Proust took from Mallarmé his notion of the "musique latente" of language; whether or not that is the case, Proust's comments on language here represent a strikingly sure tâtonnement towards the type of symbolic expression he would generate in the Recherche. Georges Cattaui has written of figurative language in the Recherche:

On voit que, pour Proust, toute émotion vraiment élevée correspond à une réalité spirituelle qui se manifeste à travers des métaphores et des symboles.
Cette réalité, étant ineffable, ne saurait être exprimée autrement que par des allusions. Or, la figure est le langage de tout ce qui, absolument invisible, règne pourtant jusque dans le visible et le fonde. 65

The Proustian symbol, Cattau explains, thus takes root in the interstices between the material world and the life of the mind, the mind's powers of analogy and synthesis aided and triggered by sensation; of the symbols that are the madeleine episode with its evocation of Combray, or the appearance of Mlle de Saint Loup, intersection of the narrator's experience of the Swann and Guermantes ways, Cattau writes:

... ce sont des symboles que deviennent alors pour le poète certains événements, certaines rencontres. Compagnons de notre enfance, amis disparus, invoquant de communs souvenirs, les choses-fantômes viennent à nous comme des ombres, nous demandant de "les rendre à la vie"... Et le poète de "Combray,"... s'efforcera de formuler dans un symbole la particularité d'une essence spirituelle. 66

Proust's early rejection of "materiality" in art is of a piece with this progress toward the symbol and very much in keeping with Symbolist theory. The connections between the material world and the mind, the memories evoked, the affective responses and sensory experiences attendant upon the original conjunction and later recalled in a "miraculous" analogy, that would define the work of art in the Recherche is already what the Symbolists, searching like Proust, says Emeric Fiser, for "ce qui se cache derrière les choses et dans les états profonds de notre âme," had in mind by "symbol."67 The aspiration to a sense of the pure (extratemporal) duration of the moi profond that
would mark the Recherche—and which is already a feature of the Regrets—

Fiser likewise defines as essentially Symbolist:

Echapper au présent, appréhender la durée pure, et vivre pour quelques instants la totalité de ce fragment du passé dont la durée se compose, voilà à quoi vise l'artiste symboliste.... C'est donc dans la durée pure, dans le passé revécu que l'artiste doit chercher cette joie que la réalité présente est incapable de lui procurer. 68

Proust's "Journées de lecture" is a type of intermediary text between Les Plaisirs et les jours and the Recherche for its tentative expression of the aesthetic relationship between the mind and the external world: what is remembered with delight from the "journées de lecture" is not the book and its contents but the circumstances and sensations of the reading, of which the book, we may now say, serves as the symbol. 69 Present in "Contre l'obscurité" are the first steps toward Proust's mature theory of the symbol: all the words of his native language are for Proust in this article potential symbols, playing by their subjective resonances on the bridge between the outer world and the inner life of the mind. The intimate nature of the experience of the symbol becomes, further, the basis of Proust's rejection of the conventional symbols of the generation of 1885; the true artist deals only with his own intensely felt symbols which it then becomes his duty to translate clearly for his readers.

In "Contre l'obscurité," however, Proust only states that the resonances of the symbol can and ought to be clearly expressed by the work of art; in Les Plaisirs et les jours, much of the symbol-making process retains a certain conventionality, as in the jeune fille's use
of lilacs and pansies to recall her childhood and lost innocence, while the investigation of the manner in which the symbol connects the mind and the outside world, the past and the present, is conducted rather fragmentarily and lacks for the most part that quality of spontaneous revelation characterizing the madeleine episode or the encounter with Mlle de Saint Loup in the Recherche. In Les Plaisirs et les jours, Proust's sense of the "musique latente" and the subjective response to language show up principally in the préciosité of his style; in a sentence such as this one from "Versailles:"—

A six heures du soir, quand on passe par les Tuileries uniformément grises et nues sous le ciel aussi sombre, où les arbres noirs décrient branche par branche leur désespoir puissant et subtil, un massif soudain aperçu de ces fleurs d'automne luit richement dans l'obscurité et fait à nos yeux habitués à ces horizons en cendres une violence voluptueuse" (p. 105)—

the private resonances of the words remain private, merely hinted at by the manner in which Proust appears to caress them, revering their very existence as language as he arranges them on the page. Perhaps because of its non-discursive nature, and thus its availability for a nearly limitless variety of subjective interpretations, the theme of music comes closer than anything else in Les Plaisirs et les jours to illustrating the union between the material and the spiritual embodied in the symbol: Mme de Breyves makes of a phrase from Die Meistersinger "le véritable leitmotiv de M. de Laléande" (p. 74); in "Famille écoutant la musique," each personality distinguishes a different appeal to his dreams in the same melody; popular melodies in "Eloge de la mauvaise
musique" recount "l'histoire sentimentale des sociétés" by what they have come to symbolize for their listeners:

Telle fâcheuse ritournelle, que toute oreille bien née et bien élevée refuse à l'instant d'écouter, a reçu le trésor de milliers d'âmes, garde le secret de milliers de vies, dont elle fut l'inspiration vivante, la consolation toujours prête, toujours entrouverte sur le pupitre du piano, la grâce rêvée et l'idéal (pp. 121, 122).

The attempts of the Symbolists, as we return to Proust's charge in "Contre l'obscurité," to straddle the denotative language of systematic metaphysics and the suggestiveness of poetic language have left them with nothing but an obscure muddle:

Ne s'adressant pas à nos facultés logiques, le poète ne peut bénéficier du droit qu'a tout philosophe profond de paraître d'abord obscur. S'y adresse-t-il au contraire? Sans arriver à faire de la méta-physique qui veut une langue autrement rigoureuse et définie, il cesse de faire de la poésie.... A l'aide de vos gloses, j'arriverai peut-être à comprendre votre poème comme un théorème ou comme un rébus. Mais la poésie demande un peu plus de mystère et l'impression poétique, qui est tout instinctive et spontanée, ne sera pas produite. (pp. 392-93).

Obscurity of subject matter is likewise rejected as a basis for obscurity of form, since the purpose of art, as Proust recognized in Mallarmé, is to enlighten the obscure: "...si les sensations obscures sont plus intéressantes pour le poète, c'est à condition de les rendre claires" (p. 393). In the same way, detecting once more traces of a materialist view of literature, he finds unacceptable the use of obscurity to "protect" the literary work from the comprehension of the ordinary reader:
Celui qui se fait d'un poème une conception assez naïvement matérielle pour croire qu'il peut être atteint autrement que par la pensée et le sentiment (et si le vulgaire pouvait l'atteindre ainsi, il ne serait pas le vulgaire), celui-là a de la poésie l'idée enfantine et grossière qu'on peut précisément reprocher au vulgaire.... Tout regard en arrière vers le vulgaire, que ce soit pour le flatter par une expression facile, que ce soit pour le déconcert par une expression obscure, a fait à jamais manquer le but à l'archer divin. Son œuvre gardera impitoyablement la trace de son désir de plaire ou de déplaire à la foule, désirs également médiocres, qui raviront, hélas, des lecteurs de second ordre...

(p. 394).

It is tempting to speculate that Proust, whose distate for Zola's works reposed exactly on the latter's "materialist" concept of literature, had Zola, his school, and his publicity campaigns in mind with this comment; on the other hand, Proust is again guilty of duplicity on this point, for one of the major flaws of Les Plaisirs et les jours is the too-evident "trace de son désir de plaire," the persistence of its "regard en arrière" to the worldly readers Proust hoped to attract.

Finally, and most importantly, Proust reproaches the Symbolists for their faulty concept of the eternal; by their impersonal and atemporal settings and dramas, they fly in the face of "une autre loi de la vie qui est de réaliser l'universel ou éternel, mais seulement dans des individus" (p. 393). It is thus a law of art that the "accidents de temps et d'espace" be represented as necessary steps to the discovery of the eternal for, paradoxical as it may seem, "...c'est quand [les hommes] sont le plus eux-mêmes qu'ils réalisent le plus largement l'âme universelle" (p. 394). What the Symbolists have produced lacks life, depth and dimension, Proust complains; perhaps attempting to justify his own "princesses" and "cavaliers" in Les Plaisirs et les
jours, he explains the difference between their potential and their realization at the hands of the Symbolists:

Les oeuvres purement symbolistes risquent donc de manquer de vie et par là de profondeur. Si, de plus, au lieu de toucher l'esprit, leurs "princesses" et leurs "chevaliers" proposent un sens imprécis et difficile à sa perspicacité, les poèmes, qui devraient être de vivants symboles, ne sont plus que de froides allégories. (p. 394).

This is by far the most serious of Proust's complaints about Symbolism, echoing the same dissatisfaction that Gide had tried to exorcise in Paludes and that Guy Michaud has summed up as the general trend of reaction in the latter half of the 1890's against Symbolism's preoccupation with itself:

On réclamait ce que le Symbolisme n'avait pas su donner: un élan, un sens aigu de la vie, une vue du monde. Au moment même où la mode symboliste semblait s'imposer partout, et par là même probablement, on se fatiguait des princesses lointaines, des parcs enamourés, des rubis et des gemmes. On oubliait ce que le Symbolisme avait voulu être pour ne retenir que ce que, trop souvent, il avait été dans ses œuvres: un jeu de dilettantes, une attitude d'esthètes, une nouvelle préciosité. 72

What is significant in Proust's complaint is that his devraient être bears witness nonetheless with the rest of the Symbolists to his belief in the possibility of "de vivants symboles"—Violante, perhaps with her experience of life in society, or Mme de Breyves and her experience of love—taking their place in art. His phrase in fact echoes Baudelaire's formulation in "Correspondances" of the "vivants piliers" of "des forêts de symboles,"73 and suggests more than anything else that Proust's irritation with the "jeune école" is based on his disappointment
that they have not measured up to the innovative vision and high standards set for art by the masters Baudelaire and Mallarmé. For his conclusion, Proust picks up from "Correspondances" the idea of nature as the source of poetic inspiration and "familiar" symbols: "Que les poètes s'inspirent plus de la nature, où, si le fond de tout est un et obscur, la forme de tout est individuelle et claire" (p. 394). His final pointe attacks the clichés of the Symbolists' use of nature, along with their elitism and the willful obscurantism of their language:

Et je devrais citer surtout, puisqu'il est la véritable heure d'art de la nature, le clair de lune où pour les seuls initiés, malgré qu'il luise si doucement sur tous, la nature, sans un néologisme, depuis tant de siècles fait de la lumière avec de l'obscurité et joue de la flûte avec le silence. (p. 395).

There is a quiet grace to these images of the moonlight chiaroscuro and the music made of silence with which Proust ends his argument—almost enough to score him a point or two—until we recall that at least two texts of Les Plaisirs et les jours, the "Sonate clair de lune" and "Comme à la lumière de la lune," bow to the reigning taste for melancholy moonlit settings, while the perception of nature as art, we shall see, forms an important part of his aesthetics in the Regrets.74

"Sur la clarté," Lucien Muhlfeld's response to Proust in the Revue blanche, is interesting as a delineation of the battlelines between the mondains of the end of the century and the self-appointed literary elite, as a portrait of the author of Les Plaisirs et les jours and review of the work as they appeared to a coterie of "serious" Symbolists, and as a document on the "state of the art" of Symbolism brushing
up against the contemporaneous literary movement of the Decadence in 1896. To the politeness of Proust's criticisms, Muhlfeld responds with irony, depreciating his remarks as those of a **mondain** whose opinions on literature have all the significance and staying power of a conversation at a soirée: "...quand il déplore l'obscurité de la littérature récente, M. Proust résume l'opinion d'un lot honorable de lecteurs mondains: même il leur fournit, avec un ou deux raisonnements, diverses métaphores excellentes à la conversation" (p. 73). If Proust's ideas have any significance at all, Muhlfeld continues, it is as a representation of the "other side," a summary of the rumors the uninformed have been spreading about the Symbolists. And he has no doubts that Proust is uninformed:

> Que les littérateurs visés par l'article précédent aient eu du talent ou du génie, aient connu leur métier d'écrivain et l'aient valablement rénové, c'est une question que M. Proust résout gratuitement par la négative. Il ne les a pas lus. (p. 74).

Muhlfeld taxes Proust's arguments with a lack of precision; he deplores a lack of rigor in his thinking, and most particularly, his failure to name names. Of the "rhétorique qui apprend à faire des vers libres," he demands to know where Proust has ever seen such a "recette" for versification; he wishes Proust had specified who is a "versificateur à système," who ever said anything about protecting one's verses from the public and where was it said, which of the Symbolist poets ever claimed to not base his poetry on sentiment rather than reason. Muhlfeld's imperious questions, seeking to draw Proust into a fiery exchange of names and verses for the sake of points in the argument,
demonstrates as clearly as Proust's own protests his remoteness from the literary battlefield in general: Proust's reasoning is based on his intuitions about art and has nothing at all to do with personal attacks or partisan bickering. As for specific arguments, Muhlfeld maintains that the "reduction of an original temperament to the general laws of art and the permanent genius of language" constitutes sloppy thinking, obscure and contradictory, and that, further, the artist's temperament is the source of his art, while philosophizing in verse (implied: as Proust should know, having just pastiched Hesiod's title for his new book) has been the honorable task of such poets as Lucretius, Vigny, Ménard and of course Hesiod. Proust's notions of the music and affective resonances of language go right over the respondent's head; Proust had characterized Symbolist linguistic innovations as "une langue que nous ne connaissons pas, où des adjectifs, sinon incompréhensibles, au moins trop récents pour ne pas être muets pour nous, succèdent dans des propositions qui semblent traduites à des adverbes intraduisibles," (p. 393), prompting from Muhlfeld an accusation of obscurity and another challenge to name names: "Et ... 'trop récents pour ne pas être muets pour nous?' Mystère encore. A-t-on en vue les joyeusetés néologiques si savoureuses de Romain Coolus ou de Raoul Ponchon?" (p. 75).

The rest of "Sur la clarté" is an apologia for the "jeune école," a glorification of its difficulty as an exalted literary quest. If, for example, says Muhlfeld, Musset and Feydeau seem more intelligible than the Symbolists, that is because, "la littérature immédiatement antérieure était plutôt une littérature d'illétrés et la présente une
littérature de lettrés" (p. 78). The contemporary poets bring a much more serious, rigorous and all-embracing background to literature than had their predecessors: "tandis que les notoires qui les précédèrent étaient éclat dans l'atmosphère des journaux gais et des théâtres légers, eux apprirent à penser dans les gymnastiques supérieures de Hume, de Bossuet, de Schopenhauer, de Claude Bernard" (p. 79); it is only natural then that the new literature should be beyond the grasp of the less well-educated:

On feint de croire que [le lettré] peine à raffiner pour effaroucher les gens simples. Il écrit pour lui et pour l'amateur de plain-pied. En une époque où, par la décadence des études d'adolescence et la désuétude de lire, cet amateur est rare, l'écrivain lui-même semble précieux. Mais son instrument complexe lui est naturel et familier. Il ne transpose pas, sauf, au contraire, les jours qu'en des buts pécuniaires, il s'adonne au pot-au-feu des feuilletons. (p. 79).

The Symbolist poets thus constitute an intellectual elite, irrevocably separated from both the bourgeoisie and from worldly readers such as Proust; not only is this gap typical of periods of decadence—"Les décadences générales coïncident toujours avec quelques exceptions de culture intensive"—it may even herald the evolution of French into two distinct languages: "Qui sait si les dialectes même de l'élite et de la foule n'iront pas décidément divergents, s'il n'y aura pas un français littéraire et un français vulgaire? Le cas ne serait pas neuf...." (p. 80). Muhlfeld's final argument is based on a definition of clarity, as much a function of the reader as of the text: "...abstraction faite des péripéties (vraies ou fausses), tout aliment intellectuel, spécialement littéraire, apparaît obscur ou clair suivant la
réaction de l'esprit en présence d'une oeuvre.... Autant que du spectacle, la clarté dépend du spectateur" (p. 31). He can then dismiss Proust as simply not intelligent enough to understand the Symbolists—"La clarté, voyez-vous, c'est l'intelligence, les deux mots n'ont pas de sens différents"—and with a last denigrating allusion to Les Plaisirs et les jours, "Il y a des lumières fumeuses, issues pourtant de chandelles connues, salonnières et réputées; mais l'œil instruit les jugera obscures" (p. 82), drum him out of the ranks of the Revue blanche and back to the Right Bank salons. It is hardly surprising that Proust never responded—other than by the Recherche itself, with its rectification of his intelligence and talent—to Muhlfeld's accusations.

What "Contre l'obscurité" demonstrates, however, is a Proust more in touch with the real goals of Symbolism in 1896 than Muhlfeld's derisive response would indicate. Proust's complaint had to do with Symbolism's excesses and conventionality, some of which, "in the air" as they then were, seeped embarrassingly into Les Plaisirs et les jours. Yet the midground Proust staked out in "Contre l'obscurité" is the one that, by and large, governs the relationship of Les Plaisirs et les jours to Symbolism. Proust believed with the Symbolists that art could take in all of the world, visible or invisible; his variety of subjects and genres in Les Plaisirs et les jours, combining description, anecdote, introspection, allegory, narrative, and poetry, is witness to that belief just on the surface of the work. His recourse to nature for symbols that grant access to the invisible world—the sea, for example, in "La Mer," or the trees of "Sous-bois" from which "Nous
n'avons rien à craindre, mais beaucoup à apprendre..." (p. 141)—is firmly in the lineage of Baudelaire's "correspondances;" what Catteau has said of nature in the Recherche, tracing Proust's discipleship back to the English precursors of the French Symbolist movement, is also true of nature in Les Plaisirs et les jours: "Comme Coleridge, Shelley, Keats et Wordsworth, Proust est le poète des éléments ... en lui se forme la synthèse d'un paysage symbolique où la nature imite l'art." 75

Paul Perret called attention in his review to the sense of paysage that Proust shared with the masters portrayed in the "Portraits de peintres;" the combination of art forms—painting, music and literature—represented in the "Portraits de peintres et de musiciens" is as much a statement of belief in the Symbolist principle of the interrelatedness of all the arts as it is an hommage to the "masters," and a collection of plaisirs offered to a salon audience by a young author eager to please. Proust's project of transposition of the arts in his series of "Portraits" thus makes this section particularly appropriate for a more detailed investigation of the relationship between Symbolism and Les Plaisirs et les jours.

"Portraits de Peintres et de Musiciens"

A.G. Lehmann points out in his study of Symbolist aesthetics that one of the implications of Baudelaire's "universal analogies" was to establish a synonymous relationship among all the various arts, one art seen as easily capable of substituting for another. According to Baudelaire, Lehmann writes, "There is no hierarchy of 'more' and 'less' artistic art-media, no barrier between poetry and music save one of
convenience or personal aptitude in the use of language." The result of all of this is a demonstration in Baudelaire of a "needless redundancy of effort in the world, since each art can do what all the others can." Yet at the same time, such redundancy could be and was cultivated in the late nineteenth century in keeping with the Symbolists' belief in the interrelatedness of the arts, for the sake of bringing to light the "universal analogies" of which Baudelaire spoke. Baudelaire's own poem "Les Phares" is an example--an important one for Proust, since he used it as the model for his "Portraits de peintres"--of painting transposed into poetry; Hahn's Chansons grises, Fauré's arrangements of Verlaine, Debussy's l'Après-midi d'un faune and Pelléas et Mélisande translate poetry into music. The attraction of the Symbolists for the correspondances between these two particular arts was intense, as Henri Peyre has noted, even if the preference for most expressive of all arts was given finally to poetry over music.

The midsection of Les Plaisirs et les jours represents Proust's contribution, prior to his invention of Elstir's paintings and Vinteuil's sonata and septet, to the art of transposed art. The first four poems of the series describe paintings by Albert Cuyp, Paulus Potter, Antoine Watteau, and Antoine Van Dyck; the second four, the music of Chopin, Gluck, Schumann, and Mozart. Calling his poems "Portraits," however, Proust plays further upon the notion of transposition; he suggests that his poems based on paintings or music are of the nature of paintings themselves, a suggestion carried out in his separate publication of the "Portraits de peintres" with reproductions of actual portraits of each painter. At the same time as there is
transposition in his poems, there is also identification: the works of art and music are described under the name of each particular artist, the person merged with and indistinguishable from his production. Proust's article on Gustave Moreau, written probably in 1898, explains this identification: each artist, Proust says, does indeed "sign" his works with certain recognizable motifs that "se retrouvent comme leur caractère essentiel dans toutes ses toiles," making of each particular painting "une sorte d'apparition d'un coin d'un monde mystérieux dont nous connaissons quelques autres fragments, qui sont les toiles du même artiste."82 This "monde mystérieux" Proust also calls the artist's pays, his soul: "Le pays, dont les oeuvres d'art sont ainsi des apparitions fragmentaires, est l'âme du poète, son âme véritable, celle de toutes ses âmes qui est le plus au fond, sa patrie véritable, mais où il ne vit que de rares moments."83 This idea will again be an explicit part of the characterization of the artists of the Recherche, particularly Vinteuil. As did Baudelaire in "Les Phares," Proust in his "Portraits" uses the rhetorical device of apostrophe then to render the identification of the artist with his art: "Cuyp, [est] soleil déclinant dissous dans l'air limpide;" "Potter, [est] mélancolique humeur des plaines sombres" (p. 80); "Chopin, [est la] mer de soupirs, de larmes, de sanglots" that Proust hears in his music (p. 82).

The poems on Gluck, Schumann, and Mozart evoke, with references to the titles and subjects of the composers' best-known works, the images and atmosphere suggested by the works as the poet listens; each sketches out at the beginning and the end a narrative line that is, however, scrambled and obscured by the intervening images and references
--Proust's compromise between the essentially discursive nature of his poetry that rearranges the music as a story told, and the discrete, disconnected images it is music's power to represent and the poems' goal to transpose. Such a compromise, that ultimately gives to these three poems a stilted conventionality, an air of the poet's having tried too hard to be as suggestive as music itself, may have its roots in the hybrid nature of the music transposed, always a combination of words and music: opera in Gluck and Mozart (Orfeus and Euridice, Alceste, Armide, and Iphigenia in Tauris for the former; The Marriage of Figaro, Don Juan and The Magic Flute for the latter), art songs in Schumann.

To Gluck Proust attributes an eighteenth century heavy with mythology; he contrasts the gravity and depth of Gluck's music to the "mignardise" of the art that surrounded him: "Mais l'artiste allemand--.../Plus grave et plus profond sculpta sans mignardise/Les amants et les dieux que tu vois sur la frise:" (p. 83). Against the fleeting pleasures of courtly life represented by the gallant art of Watteau and summed up as "amour"--"...maint amour Watteau bandant son arc/Prend des coeurs glorieux pour cibles de sa rage"--there remain Gluck's dramatic stagings of deeper emotional appeal (with reference here to Baudelaire's "La cloche fêlée" for the evocation of the vanished past):

Les talons en dansant ne frappent plus l'allée
Où la cendre des yeux et du sourire éteints
Assourdit nos pas lents et bleuit les lointains;
La voix des clavecins s'est tue ou s'est fêlée.

Mais votre cri muet, Admète, Iphigénie,
Nous terrifie encore....
The reason for this endurance is Gluck's inspiration in myth, expressed by Proust in a banal and pretentious reference to "Le Styx,--sans mâts ni ciel--où mouilla ton génie," allusion also to Alceste's aria "Divinités du Styx," in the opera named for her. For his conclusion, Proust returns to the temples with which the poem began; the source of the image, presumably, is the Temple of Love in which Orpheus and Euridice are reunited in the final act of their opera: "Temple à l'amour, à l'amiété, temple au courage/Qu'une marquise a fait élever dans son parc/Anglais...." The end of the poem celebrates the survival of Gluck's music: to the "caprices d'un âge" represented by the vanished dances and smiles is reserved a "mort inévitable," while as for Gluck: "Il est debout, auguste temple du courage,/Sur les ruines du petit temple à l'Amour."

Schumann and his music are evoked in a series of contrasts with an overriding tone of lassitude and disappointment. Schumann, imagined as surrounded by happy children playing in a garden, is an "amoureux las" and a "soldat songeur que la guerre a déçu" (p. 83). Happiness is always mixed with foreboding as in the garden of the first two stanzas --"La brise heureuse imprègne, où passent des colombes,/De l'odeur du jasmin l'ombre du grand noyer,/... /Le nuage ou le vent parle à ton coeur des tombes"--or in Schumann's "Carnival" recalled--"Jadis tes pleurs coulaient aux cris du carnaval/Ou mêlaiens leur douceur à l'amère victoire/Dont l'élan fou frémit encor dans ta mémoire;/Tu peux pleurer sans fin: Elle est à ton rival." In the fourth stanza, the tears lead to a contrast of past happiness and present sorrow, with an echo of Verlaine, not to mention a distracting and probably inadvertent reminder
of La Fontaine: "Vous chantiez!—Mais brisé de chagrin, tu t'endors... 
/Il pleut des pleurs dans des ténèbres éclairées." The contrasts con-
tinue into the fifth stanza, perhaps the best of the poem for its de-
scription of the dream world that reverses reality and the shock of the
awakening that reverses the dream: "Rêve où la morte vit, où l'ingrate
a ta foi,/Tes espoirs sont en fleurs et son crime est en poudre.../Puis
éclair déchirant du réveil, où la foudre/Te frappe de nouveau pour la
première fois." (p. 84). Despite its préciosité and the banality of
the lightning bolt image for the suddenness of the awakening, the final
line of this stanza is striking for what it foreshadows of the narra-
tor's experience with grief in the Recherche, in which it is the re-
peated action of unbuttoning his boots that tells him "pour la première
fois" that his grandmother has died, or in which each of the various
"selves" that had encountered the different facets of Albertine must
come to the realization, new and at once repetitious, of her death. 84

Finally, Proust calls forth the variety of moods Schumann was capable
of creating in his music, flowing, martial or melodic: "Coule, embaumé,
défile aux tambours ou sois belle!" He calls the composer the "confi-
dent des âmes et des fleurs" for Schumann's treatment of love and na-
ture in his music, and attributes a final contrast to the Rhine (also
mentioned at the beginning of the fourth stanza: "Vers Cologne le Rhin
roule ses eaux sacrées") as Schumann captured it in his songs: "Entre
tes quais joyeux fleuve saint des douleurs;" the reference here is per-
haps to Schumann's attempted suicide in the Rhine. The garden returns
at the end of the poem, overgrown with Symbolist imagery and an alliter-
ation in that translates the flow of this music of the Rhine—"Jardin
pensif, affectueux, frais et fidèle,/Où se baissent les lys, la lune et l’hirondelle,"—before yielding to the concluding images that accompany each of Schumann’s moods: "Armée en marche, enfant qui rêve, femme en pleurs!"

The poem on Mozart begins with a languid recital of the adventure of the lover encountering finally "la paresse ardente d’être aimée" (p. 84); the adventure comes to its equally languid conclusion (Don Juan’s inability to settle for just one woman, apparently) at the end of the second stanza: "Il livre aux mains trop faibles pour le retenir/Le rayonnant espoir de sa tête charmée." The third stanza interrupts this melancholy recital for a celebration of the power to endure of Mozart’s operas, beginning with the interpellation, "Chérubin, Don Juan!" and continuing with an embroiled image of Mozart’s triumph over oblivion: "...Joïn de l'oubli qui fane/Debout dans les parfums tant il foula de fleurs/Que le vent dispersa sans en sécher les pleurs/Des jardins andalous aux tombes de Toscane!" "Debout" is a description of the operas Don Juan and The Marriage of Figaro; it is "l'oubli" that is responsible for trampling underfoot the "tant de fleurs" that once stood around these operas (other flowers in the same garden), leaving only the "parfums." The name of the heroine Fiordiligi in Cosi fan tutte is a possible source of the flower imagery; this opera with its Neapolitan setting also permits a recuperation of the "Italiene" that began the poem with the line: "Italiene aux bras d’un prince de Bavière." It is not clear, in Proust’s image, though, whether the wind dispersed flowers or perfumes from the Andalousian gardens (setting of Figaro) to the cemeteries of Toscany (a reference to the cemetary in
Don Juan, although the "Toscane" is fanciful; what is important, it seems, is that the tears were not dried in the process: one can take this to mean that the emotive power of the operas has remained. As with the poems on Gluck and Schumann, this one also takes its concluding images from the beginning; the "Italienne" returns in the final stanza—"L'Italienne encore est reine de la nuit"—suggesting with "encore" the completion of an intervening action or meditation, and leading into mention of The Magic Flute by her new characterization as Queen of the Night, a character in that opera. This night is an enchanted night as the Italienne becomes a metaphor for the composer himself, Proust playing upon the title of Mozart's last opera and the lighter, jovial qualities of some of Mozart's compositions: "Son ha-leine y fait l'air doux et spirituel/Et sa Flûte enchantée égoutte avec amour/Dans l'ombre chaude encor des adieux d'un beau jour/La fraîcheur des sorbets, des baisers et du ciel." The progression sorbets-baisers-ciel is not particularly well chosen, however, either for its logic—it moves in the direction of decreasing, not increasing fraîcheur—or for the discordance of the repeated open e sound in des sorbets, des baisers.

Proust's concern in the poems on Gluck and Mozart is thus principally for the power of great art to endure through time and its corresponding power to excite the imaginations of those who encounter it; the importance of Schumann's music also lies in the kinds of images it suggests to the listener. These three poems then represent reveries to accompany the music of the three composers. Except for the line of alliterative l's in the poem on Schumann, however,—"Où se baisent les
ly, la lune et l'hirondelle"—in which the sounds of the language are arranged so as to reproduce the liquid, flowing effects of the music, there is little effort in the poems to transpose verbally the rhythms of the music of each composer.

For this reason, the poem on Chopin that begins the "Portraits de musiciens" is a much more successful exercise in transposition than the three that follow in the series. References to Chopin occur frequently in the Recherche; the composer is, for example, a comical leitmotif characterizing Mme de Cambremer mère, whose claim to musical competence (rejected by her daughter-in-law, Legrandin's sister) resides principally in her having learned to play Chopin as a young girl, taught by one of the Master's own last surviving pupils. In the Jeunes filles en fleurs, the narrator compares the freshness of a summer evening breeze to a phrase by Chopin; the rhythm of his sentence imitating the young girls' steps and jumps along the beach also imitates the rhythm of a long virtuoso phrase in Chopin:

Mais elles ne pouvaient voir un obstacle sans s'amuser à le franchir en prenant leur élan ou à pieds joints, parce qu'elles étaient toutes remplies, exubérantes de cette jeunesse qu'on a si grand besoin de dépenser que, même quand on est triste ou souffrant, obéissant plus aux nécessités de l'âge qu'à l'humeur de la journée, on ne laisse jamais passer une occasion de sauter ou de glisser sans s'y livrer consciemment, interrompant, semblant sa marche lente—comme Chopin la phrase la plus mélancolique—de gracieux détours où le caprice se mêle à la virtuosité. 85

A similar transposition from the music, with its long arpeggios and virtuoso meanderings, to the prose, with its sustained rhythms,
interruptions, and relancements, is effected beautifully in this description of Mme de Cambremer listening to a Chopin prelude at the soirée of Mme de St.-Euverte:

...Mme de Cambremer lança à Mme de Franquetot un sourire attendri de satisfaction compétente et d'allusion au passé. Elle avait appris dans sa jeunesse à caresser les phrases, au long col sinuex et démesuré, de Chopin, si libres, si flexibles, si tactiles, qui commencent par chercher et essayer leur place en dehors et bien loin de la direction de leur départ, bien loin du point où on avait pu espérer qu'atteindrait leur attachement, et qui ne se jouent dans cet écart de fantaisie que pour revenir plus délibérément--d'un retour plus prémédité, avec plus de précision, comme sur un cristal qui résonnerait jusqu'à faire crier--vous frapper au cœur. 86

Finally, Chopin's music is depicted as capable of considerable effects of melancholy, as Charlus explains to Morel why he never heard Chopin perform:

Je n'ai jamais entendu jouer Chopin, dit le baron, et pourtant j'aurais pu, je prenais des leçons avec Stamati, mais il me défendit d'aller entendre, chez ma tante Chimay, le Maître des Nocturnes.... Il avait compris que j'étais une "nature" et que je subirais l'influence de Chopin. 87

All of these elements associated with Chopin and his music in the Recherche—youth, volupté, exuberance, sadness, and neurasthenia—are present in the poem of Les Plaisirs et les jours, along with an attempt to capture in the rhythms of the verse the same musical rhythms that the prose would later transpose with such sureness and elegance. The fifteen-line poem begins, we have noted, with the technique of apposition imitated from "Les Phares," identifying the artist with his art:
"Chopin, mer de soupirs, de larmes, de sanglots" (p. 82). As for Schumann, water recurs throughout the poem to characterize Chopin's music as limpid and flowing; the associated image of tears conveys the underlying melancholy Proust perceives in the composer and his music. The capriciousness that the young girls at Balbec share with Chopin's music appears here as "L'oubli vertigineux et doux de ton caprice," while the poem itself is marked by a certain capriciousness of structure: its single line in excess of a sonnet leads to the unusual asymmetry of a quatrains (ll. 1-4) following by a cinquain (ll. 5-9), followed by another quatrains (ll. 10-13), in turn followed by a couplet (ll. 14-15). The poem has the irregular rhyme scheme ABAB CDCDC EFEE GG; further asymmetry is provided by the full stop at the end of line 9 that divides the poem into two unequal sections of nine and six lines respectively. The first section describes Chopin's music, and the second, pivoting on another water image—"la soif des pleurs" in line 9—moves on to a contemplation of the pale figure of the tubercular Chopin himself.

In the second and third lines of the poem, the melancholy and sorrow of Chopin's music yield to a seemingly irresistible movement of lightness and joy contained in the image of butterflies dancing on the waves; the repeated enjambement of the first three lines is a close approximation of the breathless run of a well-executed Chopin arpeggio: "Chopin, mer de soupirs, de larmes, de sanglots/Qu'un vol de papillons sans se poser traverse/Jouant sur la tristesse ou dansant sur les flots." The broken rhythm of the fourth line is a stylistic audacity probably inspired by Baudelaire and imitative of Chopin's precisely
placed interruptions of his legato sweeps: "Rêve, aime, souffre, crie, apaise, charmé ou berce;" the broken line contrasts with the enjambements preceding and following it, while its combination of open and closed vowel sounds, its initial or ending consonant sounds, demands at the same time a declamatory virtuosity not unlike the challenges of keyboard fingering in Chopin. The poet returns to Chopin's coupling of the solemn with the exuberant in his dizzying runs—"Toujours tu fais courir entre chaque douleur/L'oubli vertigineux et doux de ton caprice;" the image is once again of butterflies moving lightly from flower to flower as Chopin's melodic improvisations begin and end with the somber notes Proust finds representative of his "douleur."

To the complicity of joy and sorrow in Chopin's music, there then is added the advantage of physical illness, enhancing both Chopin's physical beauty and his musical creativity. In the poem, the illness creates a languid affinity between the composer, the pale moon of his Nocturnes (a noxious influence in itself for the other privileged sufferers of the fin-de-siècle, the nerveux), and the water with which Proust has associated Chopin's music; the composer is thus "De la lune et des eaux pâle et doux camarade/Prince du désespoir ou grand seigneur trahi" (ll. 10-11). The poem concludes with a flood of sunlight, representing health and hope, into Chopin's sickroom; the opposite of the pale moon with which the composer has been identified, the sun only accentuates his paleur and allows him to rejoice in his present state of melancholy: "Tu t'exaltes encore, plus beau d'ètre pali;/Du soleil inondant ta chambre de malade/Qui pleure à lui sourire et souffre de le voir.../Sourire du regret et larmes de l'Espoir!" (ll. 12-125). The
subject of "pleure" and "souffre" in line 14 is either "malade" or "ta chambre de malade" in the preceding line. Although both verbs are in the third person, it is more likely the invalid composer who greets the sun with a mixture of smiles and tears; the poet's switch from second to third person in relation to Chopin (from "tu t'exaltes" to "malade qui pleure et souffre") is awkward, but might be interpreted as the poet taking leave of his subject: from the interlocutor "tu,"

Chopin becomes an object of contemplation. Such an interpretation is supported by the silence indicated by the points de suspension at the end of line 14. The final line attributes affective causes to the composer's smiles and tears but the expected pairing of smiles with hope and tears with regret in Chopin's état d'âme is deliberately and self-consciously reversed to close the poem on an image of Chopin himself as a "nature" susceptible to the charms of melancholy; there is an echo of Baudelaire and the Symbolist personification of emotion in the capitalized, accentuated "Espoir," while the inversion of familiar or expected terms in a series recalls the similar device, cultivated for its shock-value and promoted as a work of refinement and originality, in Montesquieu's poetry. Overall, it is difficult not to conclude that of the "Portraits de musiciens," this poem on Chopin is the least contrived, and the most successful transposition of music into poetry, particularly in its first seven lines.

Perhaps because of its more obviously representative nature, lending itself more readily than music to description by discursive language, painting fares somewhat better as a transposed art in Proust's hands; by and large superior to the "Portraits de musiciens," the
"Portraits de peintres" are sufficiently precise in their pictorial detail to permit identification après-coup of the paintings described, while they remain evocative of the typical "atmosphere" of each painter and of Proust's own emotional response.

As Professor Johnson has shown, Proust's transpositions belong to what was already at the end of the nineteenth century a well established tradition of the writer as connoisseur and critic of art, reaching back to Diderot's salons and coming into its own with the active interest in painters and painting that occupied such figures as Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé. 90 Many of the paintings that Proust wrote about in his "Portraits" he admired in the company of Robert de Billy in 1891; the latter has recalled that during a visit to the Louvre's Grande Galerie, Proust recited verses from "Les Phares" before certain paintings, stopped particularly to admire "l'atmosphère dorée des fins de journée plus éclatante chez Claude Lorrain, plus intime chez Cuyp..." and, admiring Watteau's L'Embarquement à Cythère, spoke of the Fêtes galantes "et de l'agonie de Verlaine qui commençait et qui dura cinq ans encore." 91 Van Dyck's portrait of the Duke of Richmond caught Proust's attention at some length, Billy continues, and "je lui dis que toute cette belle jeunesse dont on voit les portraits en Angleterre, à Dresde, à l'Ermitage, avait été fauchée par les Côtes de Fer de Cromwell;" this detail led to a philosophical discussion about the deaths of the Cavaliers and Charles I, as well as to the composition of Proust's verses on Van Dyck. 92

Proust referred to these poems on painters from time to time after their publication. To Antoine Bibesco he wrote in 1905 of his
disappointment at having missed his chances to dine with a M. Gordon Lennox, descendant of Van Dyck's Duke of Richmond:

Imagine-toi que j'ai appris qu'un de tes amis avec qui tu m'avais invité à dîner mais je n'avais pas pu—et avec qui Croisset m'avait invité aussi sans que je puisse non plus—M. Cosmo Gordon Lennox descend du duc de Richmond dont le portrait par Van Dyck a été ... l'objet d'une de mes grandes admirations autrefois et le sujet de vers qui se trouvent dans les Plaisirs et les Jours. Tout cela me rend M. Gordon Lennox extrêmement intéressant. 93

Proust's excitement here is similar to the attitude he satirized in "A une snob" in Les Plaisirs et les jours—"Car la figure de vos nouveaux amis s'accompagne dans votre imagination d'une longue suite de portraits d'aïeux" (p. 45)—and heralds the identification in Swann, stripped of its dilettantism and elevated to an illustration of the psychological complexities of love, of Odette with the portrait of Zephora. Proust discovers, however, in the same letter to Bibesco, the error of his own identification:

Je vois que je me trompe pour le Duc de Richmond. Car quand le premier Duc de Richmond Lennox est né (n'étant pas encore duc de Richmond) Van Dyck était déjà mort. Il est vrai que si le titre existait dans la famille d'Angleterre, comme ce Lennox était un bâtard du roi, il y a parenté tout de même. Mais enfin cela cesse d'être aussi intéressant. 94

In 1921, Proust referred again to the poems in a letter to J. L. Vaudoyer:

Céleste me dit que vous avez les Plaisirs et les jours. Vous y trouverez les seuls vers sur Cyp [sic] restés dans mon souvenir. Ils furent écrits avant une classe à Condorcet, en sortant du Louvre où je venais de voir les cavaliers qui ont une plume rose au chapeau. 95
If Proust is correct in his reminiscence, this would mean that the poem on Cuyp was written before 1889, the year he finished his studies at Condorcet. André Féré, among others, has taken Proust at his word on this. However, some caution is in order, given Proust's repeated efforts in letters to Vaudoyer to play down Les Plaisirs et les Jours as an oeuvre de jeunesse, of little significance next to his masterpiece. There is also the fact that in 1892 Proust published in Le Banquet a favorable review of Henri de Régnier's recently published Tel qu'en songe. In the opening "Exergue" to this collection one finds reference to "Les grands marais d'argent, de lunes et givre" which "stagnent au crépuscule au bout de tes chemins." The similarity of these lines to Proust's "Ou marais de clarté stagnant dans le ciel vide" in his poem on Cuyp ought not to be passed over lightly, in the case of so facile a pasticheur as Proust, who was also, Laurent Lesage has determined, considerably influenced by Régnier's work at the time of Les Plaisirs et les Jours. The similarity to Régnier suggests that the verses on Cuyp were in fact written in 1892 or thereabouts; if this is indeed the case, then the entire series of the "Portraits de peintres" dates roughly from 1891-1892.

"Albert Cuyp" is a twelve-line poem, broken by the period and a rhyme at the end of line five into two separate sections: the first (ll. 1-5) is a composite description through characteristic elements, of Cuyp's work (the specific paintings Proust had in mind have been identified as Promenade and Départ pour la promenade, and the second (ll. 6-12) is a description in three moments of the "action" of the paintings--already a transposition of the visual simultaneity of
painting into the linearity and successive time of discursive language. All twelve lines of this poem are alexandrins, their regularity broken, however, by an early caesura in line 3 ("Moiteur d'or, nimbe au front d'un boeuf ou d'un bouleau"), an early strong caesura in line 7 ("Paume au côté; l'air vif qui fait rose leur peau"), and two caesurae in line 9 ("Et, tentés par les champs ardents, les fraîches ondes"). There is a single enjambement in the poem: "Sans troubler par leur trot les bœufs dont le troupeau/Rêve dans un brouillard d'or pâle et de repos" (ll. 10-11); the rhyme scheme is a somewhat skewed ABBBA BBCCBBC.

Lines 1-5 represent Cuyp as a painter of twilights; the painter's name is in apposition with the elements of his painting that Proust identifies with him: "soleil déclinant," "moiteur d'or," "nimbe au front d'un boeuf ou d'un bouleau," "encens bleu," "marais de clarté." Cuyp's twilight is remarkable first of all for its liquid quality: the air is "limpide," rippled, as if it were water, by the flight of the birds; the setting sun "dissolves" in this liquid air, casting a golden humidity over the scene, and crowning the barely distinguishable animals or trees with a wispy golden halo. It is this quality of the light that attracts Proust to Cuyp's art; significantly, the transposition of this effect into poetry is done by metaphor, Proust using the qualities of one element (water) to describe those of another (air), as in the second line of the poem: "...l'air limpide/Qu'un vol de ramiers gris trouble comme de l'eau..." This poetic device recurs in Les Plaisirs et les jours in Proust's descriptions of the sea in the Regrets; as Michel Butor has demonstrated in "Les oeuvres d'art
imaginaires chez Proust," description by metaphor is the manner in which Vinteuil composes and Elstir paints. 101

Not all is limpidity and golden haloes in Cuyp's twilights, however; negative images in lines 1-5 create an undercurrent of uneasiness in the poem and suggest nature precariously balanced on the point of dissolution. Three present participles in these lines convey motion arrested in the painting: the sun is déclinant (l. 1), the blue incense of the evening fires is fumant (l. 4), and the "marais de clarté" is stagnant in the sky (l. 5). As the golden sun sets, grey birds rise, and the limpid air becomes murky. The "encens bleu des beaux jours" suggests that the days themselves have become burnt offerings to the twilight; their smoke on the hillside picks up the grey of the birds and leads to the revalued imagery of the fifth line, in which the patch of clear light becomes a stagnating swamp in an empty (darkening) sky.

The poem's final seven lines, dealing with the "cavaliers qui ont une plume rose au chapeau," depart briefly from this atmosphere of the impending gloom of nightfall, to return to it in a curious synthesis at the poem's conclusion. Colors are once more, positive, if muted, in these lines: the cavaliers' plumes and skin are "rose" (ll. 7 and 8), their curls are golden, and the fog, as the sun sets, is a pale gold, which the poet immediately qualifies as a restful color: "... dans un brouillard d'or pâle et de repos" (l. 11). In place of the "marais ... stagnant" of line 5, we find here an "air vif" that brings a rosy tint to the horsemen's skin and blows lightly through their hair (ll. 8-9). The "fraîches ondes" of line 10 answer to the "champs ardents" of the same line, as well as to the swamp and troubled water of the poem's
first section. In fact, unlike the birds, their living and moving counterparts in the first five lines, the horsemen specifically do not trouble their surroundings: "Sans troubler par leur trot les boeufs..." (l. 11).

The "action" of the horsemen is described in three stages: there is a moment of preparation ("Des cavaliers sont prêts" [l. 7]), which gives the poet an opportunity to describe their noble attitude ("... plume rose au chapeau,/Paume au côté..." [ll. 7-8]); the moment of the temptation, in which the verb "enfle" (l. 9), together with the "fraîches ondes" of line 10, suggests wind gently filling a sail and coaxing a ship into movement—an ébranlement made all the more dramatic by the strong caesura of line 7; and finally, the moment of departure itself: "Ils partent respirer ces minutes profondes"(l. 12), following upon the graceful and uninterrupted rhythm of the two preceding lines (enjambées) that translate the peacefulness of the departure and the persistence of the oxen's "rêve."

As they began the poem, so too do fused images of air and water conclude it. The purpose of the horsemen's journey is to breathe in the twilight moments described at the beginning of the poem; these minutes share in the water motif by their depth ("minutes profondes") and envelop both the peaceful and the threatening aspects of twilight in their figurative, spiritual, and entirely positive, profondeur. In a curious and round-about way, then, the horsemen become themselves an image of the spectator of Cuyp's art; with the spectator, they breathe in the arrested "minutes profondes" of light and dark, motion and
stagnation, that is Cuyp's twilight, and of which they themselves are a part.

"Paulus Potter" is, of the four poems, the one most directly modeled on "Les Phares," recalling specifically Baudelaire's stanza on Puget. Not only is the line, "Potter, mélancolique humeur des plaines sombres," rather obviously inspired by Baudelaire's "Puget, mélancolique empereur des forêts,"¹⁰² but Proust's entire stanza copies that of Baudelaire, evoking first the qualities of the artist's work, again named in apposition to him, and reserving till later (line 5 in Proust, line 4 in Baudelaire) the mention of the poet's name; the technique allows Proust to dwell on the emotional suggestiveness of Potter, creating first an atmosphere of impenetrably grey and somber melancholy that he will then identify with the painter. If "Albert Cuyp" was a poem of air and water, "Paulus Potter" is a poem of the earth: there are two references to "plaines," "transies" in line 3 and "sombres" in line 5; the poet's attention is riveted on the barrenness of the landscape, with its endless, colorless, joyless fields, its stark trees and town, its flowerless gardens. As Proust describes Potter's landscapes, color only accentuates their desolation. Like the luminescent "marais" in Cuyp, the rare blue patch of sky in Potter serves to render the sky's monotonous grey more apparent and more sad. (In Chevaux devant une Chaumière, the painting Proust is describing, the patch of blue sky in the upper right hand corner of the relatively small canvas does in effect appear sullied and forelorn for the dull grey tones that surround it.) The sun, that bestows a pale golden radiance upon Cuyp's landscapes, is powerless to brighten or warm Potter's frozen plains;
it is anthropomorphized as "incompris" (the conventional Romantic male-diction) and its scant rays become "tièdes pleurs" as Proust once again uses water as a metaphor for light passing through air.

Although it is a twelve-line poem like "Albert Cuyp," "Paulus Potter" is composed rather of three quatrains, their divisions marked by the semi-colon at the end of line 4 and the period at the end of line 8, as well as by the rhyme scheme: ABBA, CDCD, EFEF. (The A rhymes are in -i, while the B rhymes are in -ie. Although Proust is not overly rigorous in his choice of and adherence to a particular rhyme scheme—not one poem in this section follows a single rhyme scheme throughout—he respects for the classical rule of masculine and feminine alteration is constant.) Most of the poem is written in alexandrins, with the exception of lines 3, 7, and 9, in which the feminine -e becomes a thirteenth syllable. Given the poem's generally solemn and regular metric pattern, these lines are probably not examples of Verlaine's "impair" from the "Art poétique," but rather a simple excess syllable in each line, which could, à la rigueur, be seen as a "stretching out" of the rhythm of certain lines in the same way that Potter's landscapes "stretch out" before the spectator. Line 6, however, which states the expanse of the plains "qui s'étendent sans fin, sans joie et sans couleur," is a regular alexandrin; the impression Proust intends to convey is apparently not expansiveness, but rather, uniformity, regularity, monotony.

As in the preceding poem, "Paulus Potter" concludes with a reference to living beings—a farmer and his mare returning home. (Chevaux devant une chânière shows two horses in the foreground eating, while
their master tarries in the middle ground, arm outstretched in a somewhat ambiguous gesture, directed perhaps toward the dog accompanying him.) While the farmer is described in Proust's poem merely in terms of his labor—"laboureur tirant des sceaux" (l. 9)—not fewer than five adjectives distributed across three lines of poetry describe, and in rather contradictory terms, the mare. No fine specimen of a horse, she fits into her grey surroundings by her very mediocrity; she is at once resigned and anxious, pensive and upset ("...et, chétive,/Sajument résignée, inquiète et rêvant,/Anxieuse...") [ll. 9-10]). As she raises her head in the foreground, her anthropomorphism is completed by Proust's mention of her "cervelle pensive" (l. 11). There recur at the end of this poem the same motifs that concluded the poem on Cuyp: animals "dreaming"—a projection of the spectator into the paintings, as Proust attributes to the animals his own reaction to the landscape—and breathing, an ingenious animation of the painting by the reference to air and wind. In this second poem, however, the "air vif" that characterized Cuyp, is intensified to become the "souffle fort du vent" that the mare breathes in a short gasp; this gasp is reproduced in the awkward assonance pattern of line 12, in which "souffle court le souffle..." sets up an expectation of continued assonance in -ou for the remainder of the line, an expectation cut off, however, by the shift in vowel sound in the adjective "fort" that follows the second "souffle." In contrast to the final peacefulness of the Cuyp landscape, then, this poem ends on a note of sadness and anxiety that was resolved in the preceding poem by the horsemen's departure; the mare
remains in Potter a type of Pascalian "thinking reed" in her bleak
landscape threatened by the cold breath of the wind.

If the colors and atmosphere of the poem on Cuyp make of it a
spring or autumn poem ("plume rose," l'air vif," "brouillard d'or
pâle"), and those of the poem on Potter make of it a late autumn or
winter poem, "Antoine Watteau," inspired by L'Indifférent and L'Embar-
quement à Cythère, 103 shimmers hazily as a summer poem. Lit by a twi-
light that renders trees and faces indistinguishable, that distances
the spectator from what he sees and moves him to tenderness for the
scene, the poem has as its themes distance, masquerade, falseness and
love. The atmosphere of melancholy that Proust creates in this poem
is in fact his lasting impression of Watteau's work, apotheosis of love
and pleasure, as he called it later in a prose sketch of the artist:

Je pense souvent avec [une] sympathie mêlée de pitié
à la vie du peintre Watteau, dont l'oeuvre demeure
la peinture, l'allégorie, l'apothéose de l'amour et
du plaisir, et qui était, au dire de tous ses bio-
graphes, d'une constitution si faible qu'il ne put
jamais goûter, ou presque jamais, au plaisir de
l'amour. Aussi dans son œuvre l'amour est mélan-
ocolique, et le plaisir même. 104.

One notes here again the theme of the suffering artist already alluded
to in Proust's comments to Billy and represented in the figure of
Chopin.

It is on the melancholy nature of love and pleasure that Proust
insists in his poem on Watteau. This is the only one of the four "Por-
traits de peintres" in which the painter is not mentioned by name—a
reference to Watteau's abstinence from the pleasures he describes, per-
haps, or a play on the nature of masquerade in his work, as he creates,
or is hidden behind, a mask so characteristic of him that the masquerade itself reveals him. It is also the most suggestive of the poems on painters; to evoke the phantom-like atmosphere of the bal masqué in Watteau—Baudelaire's "...carnaval où bien des coeurs illustres, Comme des papillons, errent en flamboyant"—Proust makes use in his first stanza of a disjunctive syntax that contrasts strongly with the highly conjunctive, prosaic sentence structures predominant in the preceding two poems, the disjointedness of his style and the lack of verbs conveying the impossibility of identifying, defining or making any connections in the deceptive twilight. The twilight itself is a mask, "gri-mant les arbres et les faces" (line 1); the reference is also to the face and mouth of "l'indifférent" that are difficult to distinguish, in fact almost smeared, in the portrait. A striking example of grammatical disjunctiveness, the "son" of poem's second line, "Avec son manteau bleu, sous son masque incertain," refers not to "crapuscule," its only possible grammatical antecedent in the poem, but to the human figure of "l'indifférent," who thus makes his abrupt appearance, unnamed, impenetrable, and describable only by externals. (Proust's description of "L'Indifférent," is only approximate: the figure's cape is rose, not blue, with the exception of a narrow blue revers; the rose of the cape is matched by a rose-colored plume in the figure's cap of which Proust makes no mention.) The poem's third line introduces the theme of love, exchanged in the past so that it is now a mere "poussière de baisers;" this image is also a possible interpretation for the painter's vague rendering of the figure's mouth. Love in Watteau's painting is accompanied as well by satiety, as the poet
evokes other figures (La Finette, perhaps, the figures decorating the landscapes of Gilles or L'Embarquement à Cythère) as "des bouches lasses." Such synecdoche recreates in the poem the muted lighting effects of Watteau's art, suggesting that it is impossible to distinguish clearly little more of the figures than their surfeited pouts. The points de suspension at the end of the line offer poet and reader "time out" for a romantic dream or a sigh of melancholy, before the stanza concludes with a summary of the twilight's effect on the scene and on the poet's emotions and vision: "Le vague devient tendre, et le tout près, lointain."

In the second stanza, masquerade is defined as a distance, "La mascarade, autre lointain mélancolique," (l. 5), with a precise effect on love, or rather on the motions of love—"le geste d'aimer," (l. 6)—for in Proust's interpretation, at the heart of Watteau's lovely and galante masquerade, there is nothing. Watteau, who depicted love so charmingly, knew little or nothing of it himself, Proust thought; this imposture combines with the attitude of Watteau's subjects to render the gesture of love "plus faux, triste et charmant" (l. 6), the conjunction et in this phrase firmly linking the enchantment of Watteau's love scenes to their almost desperate falseness and connecting Watteau's experience to that of the lover in general. It is in fact a general philosophy of love that Proust extracts from Watteau's paintings. "Caprice de poète" (l. 7)—the "poète" referred to is Watteau, an image mediated by that of Verlaine of the Fêtes galantes—suggests Proust's view that the charming masquerade, its smoke screens, and its melancholy are mere poetic devices, until the incised phrase beginning "—ou
prudence d'amant," reveals the emptiness of love, which the circumspect lover does well to mask as ornately as possible. "L'amour ayant besoin d'être orné savamment--" (l. 8) sounds what will become one of the major themes of the Recherche, while pessimism, the conviction of love's chimerical nature, and the fear of indifference in the loved one, are already part of Proust's philosophy of love in his twenties. The adverb savamment strikes a false note, however—perhaps appropriately so in this poem about falseness and masquerade—for Proust's own characters in the Recherche will rarely act consciously and artfully as they attempt to keep their loves alive by decorating them with false images, faked jealousies, empty threats and imagined needs; the savamment of the poem is prompted perhaps by Watteau's lush but discrete eroticism or by the exotic settings abundant in Baudelaire. Like the two poems preceding it, this one ends on a sensual note, inviting the reader/spectator, not to breathe in a fresh breeze or strong wind, but to imagine the various pleasures addressed to the various senses in Watteau, the pleasures of "barques, goûters, silences et musique." Not the pleasures of love, admittedly, but those of its accessories, those, in short, of the masquerade.

In the fourth poem of the sequence, on Antoine Van Dyck, the twilight setting that has characterized the entire group expands to take on a moral significance, as Van Dyck's paintings represent, and Proust's poem celebrates "...tous les êtres beaux qui vont bientôt mourir" (l. 6). The combination of royalty and imminent death inspires a majestic rhythm and vocabulary in the poem: of its twenty-four lines, twenty-one are regular alexandrins; jewels and eyes "brillent," replacing the
muted colors of the preceding poems; the poem includes no fewer than three exclamation points and two question marks, translating an affective response on the part of the poet; the royal children and Charles I are portrayed in attitudes of resignation, repose and calm dignity that move the poet-spectator to an uncomprehending dream. A technique used in the poem on Watteau—the incised phrase, which there allowed the poet to comment on the nature of love—is exploited systematically here to allow for similar commentary on the noble attitudes of the royal figures and the tragedy of their fate. The nobility of the figures is a language to be read in their being and in their surroundings: "Douce fierté des coeurs, grâce noble des choses/Qui brillent dans les yeux, les velours et les bois,/Beau langage élevé du maintien et des poses" (ll. 1-3). In a first aside, this language is further qualified as the "—Héritier orgueil des femmes et des rois!—" (l. 4), thus inherently inaccessible to those, among whom is the poet, not born into either of those groups (although the reference to the language of women's poses seems gratuitous and rather too calculated to please a particular type of feminine reader). By his art, however, Van Dyck has broken the code and rendered the language, thus acceding to an artistic royalty himself: "Tu triomphes, Van Dyck, prince des gestes calmes,/Dans tous les êtres beaux qui vont bientôt mourir," (ll. 5-6). A second aside "—qu'importe?—" (l. 7), strengthened from its variant "peut-être," completes this language of nobility with a Baudelairean note of heroic stoicism.

The royal children, remarkable for their refusal to cry, next attract the poet's attention. In the painting Charles I, roi d'Angleterre,
the king and the children are dressed as horsemen and have stopped with their horses not far from a river that flows in the painting's left background. Like the river, they are calm (more concerned in the painting with their horses than with their eventual destiny) and near tears, says Proust, consciously manipulating once again the water-tears imagery used in Chopin, yet the glistening that would be tears is found only in the jewels that the children wear: "Et bijoux en qui pleure—onde à travers les flammes—/L'amertume des pleurs dont sont pleines les âmes/Trop hautaines pour les laisser monter aux yeux" (ll. 13-15).

Proust is again inventing, for neither the children of Charles I or those of an adjacent painting, Le duc de Bavière et son frère le duc de Cumberland, wear any jewels and Proust seems to translate his own sorrow rather more than that of the children by his précieuse conjunction of water and flames to speak of the children's dignity unextinguished by sorrow. The identification of jewels with eyes, however, is common to Decadent literature, expressing, in Jean Lorrain's Monsieur de Phocas, for example, a combined fascination with refinement, luxury and mutilation. Thus the image of crying jewels, although it is largely absent from the painting, is a singularly appropriate expression for royalty threatened by death.

Most dignified of all in this group of condamnés, however, is the Duke of Richmond, subject of Van Dyck's painting presently displayed in the Louvre next to Charles I under the title James Stuart, duc de Lennox. 106 Proust links the duke to the theme of jewels by describing him as a "promeneur précieux" (l. 16); at the end of the poem, the Duke's eyes will be said to smolder as the sapphire that fastens his
cloak (11. 22-23), the color of the jewel likewise reflected in the "chemise bleu pâle" (1. 17) worn by the duke.

The noble language of gestures and poses described at the beginning of the poem becomes incomprehensible to the spectator-poet in the portrait of the duke; Professor Johnson has pointed out the ambiguity that surrounds the duke: he is either a "jeune sage" or a "charmant fou" (1. 22) to face death with such tranquility. 107 Yet on another level, the language of the painting itself is easily discernable to the poet, for the "fruit feuillu détaché de la branche" (1. 18), which the Duke holds in his hand is—for having been cut off in its prime—a symbol of the young man's destiny. In other words, the fruit attests to the "laws" of Van Dyck's mysterious world, perceptible to the poet, that provide it with coherence, signification and a type of reductibility, as Proust explained for Gustave Moreau's symbolism in his article on the latter:

...et plus encore l'atmosphère intellectuelle de ce monde où le soleil se couche souvent, où les collines sauvages ont à leur front des temples et où, si un oiseau suit ce poète et si une fleur croît dans cette vallée, c'est en vertu d'autres lois que les lois de notre monde, de lois qui ordonnent à l'oiseau de distinguer le poète, de le suivre, de rester attaché à lui, si bien que dans son vol, qui bat autour de lui, il y a une sorte de sagesse précieuse, et que cette fleur croît dans cette vallée près de cette femme parce que cette femme doit mourir, que cette fleur est la fleur de la mort et que dans le fait qu'elle ait poussé là, il y a comme un pressentiment, et dans [sa] croissance rapide comme une sorte de menace grandissante, et qu'elle semble la regarder, sentir son dernier moment. 108

As the flower then in Moreau's Courtisane sur sa terrasse, so the fruit snapped from the branch in Van Dyck's portrait of the Duke of Lennox is
a visual rendering, a hieroglyphic of the key narrative element of the painting: the imminence of the young duke's death; the poet "rêve sans comprendre à ton geste et tes yeux," (l. 19), but by his interpretation of the fruit as symbol he brings to light a "correspondance" implicit in the painting, thus demonstrating his proper understanding and interpretation of the language of the painting.

It is only in this last poem that the spectator makes reference to himself as "je" in direct contact with the painting under observation: "Je rêve sans comprendre..." (l. 19) and "Je te reviens toujours" (l. 22). There is more at stake here than a simple ironic denial of the poet's comprehension in the poem that displays precisely the most comprehension of the laws of painting through the use of the symbol. For the most striking feature of the portrait of the Duke of Richmond is his eyes: large and almond-shaped, with drooping overlids and puffy underlids, they are Proust's own eyes, attractive, profound and mysterious, such that the look exchanged between the viewer and the viewed is circular, narcissistic and charged with sexual tension. The identity of the regard exchanged absorbs the viewer into the painting, thus creating what Beckett called a moment of "inspired perception" that unites the subject and the object as one; such moments, he continues, will provide "the only reality" in Proust's mature work, affective perceptions being more reliable indicators of truth in Proust than the conclusions of the intellect. It is for reason of this heightened emotional appeal that Proust here insists on his inability to comprehend the portrait; as we saw earlier, absorption into art is an experience sufficient unto itself for Proust. The alternative to the
troubling experience of dédoublement is here provided by an encounter with the double, externalized, however, and immortalized in the work of art, available as the image of the subject (the same as and yet different from him) in which the viewing subject is invited to lose himself. The implied presence of a third party heightens the sexual tensions of this identification: the eyes of the portrait are also those of Willie Heath; the Duke of Richmond, interesting for his closeness to death, makes present Proust's absent friend at the approximate mid-point of the work dedicated to Heath.

As might be expected from "Contre l'obscurité," the technical features of all eight "Portraits" are a far cry from the experiments of Symbolism. Maurice Chernowitz correctly related the "Portraits de peintres" to the style of the Parnasse, while the intended suggestiveness of the poems on Gluck, Schumann and Mozart results only in obscurity. Irregularity of rhyme scheme may have been one bit of innovation Proust allowed himself in the poems on painters, but their predominant patterns of alexandrins are more closely related to the classical verse of Corneille and Racine, tempered in Proust by an appeal to enjambements and mid-line pauses to translate emotional rhythms, than they are to the vers libre of, say, Viéville-Griffin. Such versification is more typical of the Romantics than it is for the Symbolists, says Henri Mazel; Proust for his part saw nothing contradictory in combining new poetic ideas with established classical forms, writing of Baudelaire, for instance, that he was neither a Romantic nor a Decadent but that his verses recalled those of Racine.
Neither does Proust invent any neologisms for his poems; there is little contrived or recherché about either his vocabulary—which in fact seems rather restrained and limited here—or his syntax, which, with the exception of the string of ellipses that introduce the poem on Watteau, or the "loin de l'oubli qui fame" in Mozart, is rather more that of prose than of poetry. One might even venture the judgment, overall, that these (excepting the poems on Watteau and Chopin) are not highly poetic pieces, Proust seeming to rely mostly upon the arrangement of his lines into verse with a fairly strong steady rhythm, rather than on unusual or original effects of assonance, consonance, or poetic inversion, to release the "poeticality" of his compositions. On the other hand, such framing serves to solemnize the text and the experience it relates. Paul Perret was correct in perceiving such an intent in the poetry section of Les Plaisirs et les jours—"...il parle d'Albert Cuyp, de Van Dyck, de Watteau, de Chopin et de Gluck en vers, c'est plus noble,"—for solemnization, we heard Proust tell Hahn in reference to Mallarmé, is the function of poetry.

Still in keeping with the principles of "Contre l'obscurité," these rather prosaic poems are not rigorously ordained demonstrations of literary or metaphysical theory; they are not des vers à système. "L'élan du sentiment" is both their starting and their ending point, accompanied by the strong appeal to the senses that we have noted in such details as the feel of the wind in Cuyp and Potter, the goûters and musique in Watteau, the fraîcheur des sorbets in Mozart. The refusal to intellectualize separates Proust from his model, Baudelaire, in these poems; whereas Baudelaire's "portraits" in "Les Phares" lead
to the poet's anguished reflections on art and man's fallen state, Proust refuses to draw any conclusion, any "moral" from his inquiry into the paintings, preferring to remain on the level of impression and emotion. There is likewise in the poems on painters a concern to preserve, through an individualization of the figures, through their detailed and emotion-charged characterizations that are particularly evident in the portraits by Van Dyck, "les accidents de temps et d'espace" that "Contre l'obscurité" accused the Symbolists of neglecting; Proust intended to suggest in his article that the larger mysteries of life and death that art aims to seek out, are best revealed by the individual: "Dans les œuvres comme dans la vie les hommes, pour plus généraux qu'ils soient, doivent être plus fortement individuels..., et on peut dire d'eux, comme de chacun de nous, que c'est quand ils sont le plus eux-même qu'ils réalisent le plus largement l'âme universelle" (p. 394). The abundance of animal anthropomorphism in these poems, as well as the absorption of the viewer into the portrait of the duke of Richmond, participate in this movement to particularize and humanize—as opposed to etherealize—the figures in the paintings, the paintings, and the painters themselves, making of them not "de froides allégories" but "de vivants symboles."

On the other hand, the terms of the mid-ground relationship to Symbolism are clear. The Duke of Richmond holds in his hand the symbol of his destiny; nature becomes significant, a communicator of experience, when reorganized by art. More points of correspondance become apparent in a comparison between Proust's poetry and Henri de Régnier's in *Tel qu'en songe*, a collection Proust praised for its "immateriality:"
...cette fois, rien de matériel où s'accrocher, rien qu'un infini bruissant et bleuâtre, reflétant l'éternité du ciel, vierge comme la mer, sans un vestige humain, sans un débris terrestre. Mais aussi, ceux qui aiment la poésie y pourront rêver sans fin comme s'ils voguaient sur la mer ou sur les vers de Baudelaire, de Lamartine ou de Vigny. 114

Régnier's newly restrained and respectful use of language in Tel qu'en songe must have also appealed to Proust,115 as did what he observed of Régnier's appeal to sentiment over intellect:

Si une telle poésie n'est pas œuvre d'intelligence, comment oserons-nous la juge divine, et pourrons-nous tant à la fois nous en griser et nous mépriser de nous en être grisés?

Au-dessus de ce qu'on appelle généralement intelligence, les philosophes cherchent à saisir une raison supérieure, une et infinie comme le sentiment, à la fois objet et instrument de leurs méditations. C'est un peu de cette raison, de ce sentiment mystérieux et profond des choses que Tel qu'en songe réalise ou pressent. 116

Proust's "Portraits" share with the poems of Tel qu'en songe a persistent attraction to twilight settings that finally, in Proust, take on moral significance; their pervasive atmosphere of dream is likewise coupled with a deep sense of foreboding, unexplained in the first two poems on painters, where it is carried only by the twilight images themselves, but interpreted as the disguised emptiness of love in the Watteau poem and the imminence of death in the Van Dyck. In Chopin the tension is between despair and exuberance, illness and health; in Schumann, between happiness and despair. Water, wind, fog, palms, and precious stones all figure in Proust's landscapes as in Régnier's, just as melancholy, gravity and hauteur, a kind of moral
superiority, characterize the human figures described by both poets. As does Régnier, Proust attributes moral significance to objects—"vêtements résignés," and "plumes braves" in the poem on Van Dyck, "brise heureuse" and "quais joyeux" in Schumann; this and Proust's use of anthropomorphism participate in the larger Symbolist quest for metaphysical unity, while they at the same time testify to the belief that if, as Proust agrees with the Symbolists in "Contre l'obscurité," "le fond de tout est un et obscur," this oneness, this essentiality, can nevertheless be expressed by such symbols as a cloak, a plume, an animal dreaming the poet's dream and suffering the poet's anxiety, or a leafy fruit cut off from the tree in the hand of a young man marked for death.

Emeric Fiser has explained the process of the transposition of art forms based on the Symbolist belief in the unity of the arts: one first breaks down the original art object to discover its center, its point of departure from nature that is also its point of intersection with all the other arts; the next step is the reconstruction of the experience recorded in the original art form according to the laws of the art into which it is transposed. What Proust finds at the center of these paintings and music as he "decomposes" them in order to recompose them in poetry, the unifying element that poet and painter or musician share in this two-way aesthetic experience, is the starting point of art as he described it in "Contre l'obscurité" and the review of Tel qu'en songe, the emotion that marks the connection between the material world and the life of the mind from which all art takes its source. It is this affective experience that Proust seeks to recompose and transmit
in his poems, but the process, particularly where the representative art of painting is concerned, is not as straight-forward as Fiser described it. For even as the paintings originally translated the response of the artist to the material world, the paintings themselves become parts of the material world, then capable of inspiring the poet. Artistic impression was significant for the painters in their transcription/deformation of material reality; it is even more significant and, as such, more expressive of the conditions of art, for the poet who adds to his poetic transpositions of the paintings his own impressions, his own emotions. The same thing happens, although in a less "material" way, for the poems on music, retranscriptions according to the poet's response to the emotions he perceived transcribed in the original music.

Two subjectivities thus meet at the center of the art: the painter or musician and the poet; the reader of the poems, expected to hear Chopin or see Watteau as he reads, and respond to the combined experience of music-poem or painting-poem, adds a third, while the enterprise of transposition itself testifies to the power of art to bridge the gaps between individuals and communicate what is deeply felt, ineffable, immaterial. Interpretations as well as transpositions, Proust's "Portraits" are not simply a parallel art form next to the paintings or the music; they are (in keeping with the high goals of the Symbolists for poetry and Proust's for literature in general) a higher art form, capable of reconstructing in terms of art the material world (in the case of the paintings), and even and more importantly, by the added degree of subjective impression the poet brings to the original art,
the immaterial, akin to the "affinités anciennes et mystérieuses" set off by language in "Contre l'obscurité." As Proust's poems then share in the Symbolist faith in the essential unity of the arts, borrowing from the Symbolist store of imagery and techniques certain means of poetic expression while steering clear of others, they add to this faith a pronounced emphasis on the role of sentiment in art and an implicit assertion of the communicability of (emotional) experience, in clear and intelligible terms, by all forms of art. In the Recherche, Proust would go one step farther and show us music as sign, its message clearly translatable and addressed personally to the listener—but for now, the essential "truth" of art as Proust presents it seems to be the emotions it evokes, starting and ending point here for both the "Portraits de peintres" and the "Portraits de musiciens."
Footnotes


3 Huret, pp. 91, 93.

4 Huret, p. 92.


8 Paul Valéry, _Cahiers_ X, 81. Quoted also by Peyre, _Symbolisme_, p. 205.

9 Gide wrote to Valéry in 1891: "...Mallarmé pour la poésie [symboliste], Maeterlinck pour le drame—et quoique auprès d'eux deux, je me sente bien un peu gringalet, j'ajoute Moi pour le roman" (Gide-Valéry, _Correspondance 1890-1942_ [Paris: Gallimard, NRF, 1955], p. 46).

10 The composition of _Paludes_ followed in 1894 Gide's return from his trip to Tunisia; Claudel wrote to him of the work in 1900: "Paludes est le document le plus complet que nous ayons sur cette atmosphère spéciale d'étouffement et de stagnation que nous avons respirée de 1885 à 1890." Quoted by J.-J. Thierry, "Notice," in André Gide, _Romans, récits et soties, œuvres lyriques_ (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), p. 1473.

11 Peyre, _Symbolisme_, p. 219.


13 See Lehmann, _Symbolist Aesthetic_, p. 30: "The first and most striking feature of the symbolist aesthetic was its attempt to establish art as an autonomous branch of human activity."


Dreyfus, p. 109; Corr. I, p. 173. Dreyfus had sent Proust an article of his to critique; Proust accused Dreyfus of writing out of a "conception matérielle ... de la littérature et de l'art" in his defenses of Sarcey, Voltaire and Barrès, allowing, however, that Dreyfus' article might have been simply "une pure fumisterie." See Corr. I, pp. 173-74, with Kolb's annotations, pp. 174-75.


Ferré, p. 144.

RTP III, p. 885.

Duplay, p. 22.

RTP III, pp. 881-82.

See our discussion of "Contre l'obscurité" in this chapter, pp. 121-27.

For a history of these short-lived journals Daniel Halévy organized at Condorcet, see Ferré, pp. 141-209, and Painter, vol. 1, pp. 60-64.

"Considérant que la Revue verte...," Essais et articles, V, pp. 332-33.


For a discussion of how this title won out over the others proposed for the review, see Dreyfus, p. 80.


Dreyfus, p. 73.


Bardèche, p. 33.
37 See *Essais et articles*, V, pp. 343–47, and pp. 166–68 of this study.


39 Corr. I, p. 170. Kolb remarks the personal antipathy Proust had for Blum; this may account for his asperity in this letter and his judgment on the "chromo fin de siècle" that is also that of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*.


42 Dreyfus, p. 103.

43 Dreyfus, p. 104.

44 Kolb, "Introduction," Corr. IV, pp. xix–xx. Letters discussing this project may be found in the same volume, pp. 413–21.

45 Bardèche, p. 38–39N2.

46 For a complete list of contributors to the *Revue blanche*, see Jackson, pp. 153–257.


48 Jackson explains that the *Revue blanche* destined for fame was the series that took over in 1891 from two separate but related publications of the *Revue blanche* in Paris and in Liège (pp. 11–19).

49 *La Revue blanche* I (October 1891).

50 Jackson, p. 48.


52 Quoted by Jackson, p. 47.


54 *La Revue blanche* XI (July 1896), p. 73. Subsequent references to "Sur la clarté" will appear in the text.


57 Cohn, pp. 263-65.

58 Corr. II, pp. 111-12. If Proust is punning on "la plante des pieds" in "ce pied altéré qui va boire comme une plante," it is less to detract from Mallarmé than from his own explication de texte which, not wishing to appear pedantic, he had displayed some reluctance to write: "Pour Mallarmé, s'il est toujours pédant d'expliquer un charme littéraire et surtout poétique, cette prétention deviendrait ridicule appliquée à un quatrains tout de circonstance, et à une de ces poésies qu'on nomme fugitives, sans doute pour marquer qu'elles fuient en quelque sorte l'esprit assez audacieux pour essayer de les retenir et de les analyser" (Corr. II, p. 111).


61 Quoted by Kolb, Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn, p. 14.

62 Cohn, p. 266.

63 "Contre l'obscurité," Essais et articles, V, p. 390. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.


66 Cattaux, pp. 193-94.


68 Fiser, Symbole, p. 157.

69 Essais et articles, V, pp. 160-94.

70 "Je repense surtout maintenant au petit jardin où je prenais avec ma mère le déjeuner du matin et où il y avait d'innombrables pensées.... Je les cueille toutes maintenant dans mon souvenir, ces pensées, leur tristesse s'est accrue d'avoir été comprises, la douceur de leur velouté est à jamais disparue" (p. 88). See also Elizabeth R. Jackson's Evolution de la mémoire involontaire; she concludes that although Proust in Les Plaisirs et les Jours was apparently fully conscious of the phenomenon of involuntary memory--closely related, we have seen, to his understanding of the symbol in "Contre l'obscurité"--the literary use of involuntary memory in Les Plaisirs et les Jours remains "disorganized" and "embryonic" (pp. 17-36).

71 See our discussion of Proust's views on music at the time of Les Plaisirs et les Jours in Chapter 1, pp. 60-65.


Cattau, p. 193.

Lehmann, p. 219.

Lehmann, p. 220.


Lehmann discusses the transposition of poetry into music and the problem of the relationship of the musical work to the poem, pp. 219-20.

"Nul groupe de poètes ou de théoriciens n'a jamais autant parlé de 'poésie musicale' et de mariage entre les deux arts que celui de 1888-1895" (Symbolisme, pp. 196-97).

See Peyre's discussion in Symbolisme: "C'est cette possibilité de rêver à propos de la musique, de rechercher parfois dans leurs vers la mollesse et l'indécis, la fluidité des sons et le moins possible de netteté sculpturale de contours, que certains poètes du symbolisme ont aimée dans la musique. Mais en regard de cela, il y eut l'hostilité de Mallarmé pour cette rivale.... Pour Mallarmé, cette synthèse [de tous les arts] aurait été le fait, non de la musique, mais d'une poésie idéale qui englobait tous les arts" (p. 199).


RTP I, p. 791.

RTP I, p. 331.

RTP II, p. 1090.

Henri Peyre has pointed out, however, that Proust's prose has not always been recognized as "musical": "Il n'y a pas si longtemps que Proust était honni de beaucoup et notamment par des amateurs de
musique, comme totalement dénué d'harmonie dans ses impossibles périodes (Symbolisme, p. 197). On the other hand, Proust's understanding of music and his ability to recreate it in his prose has been highly praised by Claude Lévy-Strauss in L'Homme nu (Paris: Plon, 1971), p. 586.

89 Susan Sontag writes in Illness as Metaphor (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1977), of the popular sickly look in the nineteenth century: "The TB-influenced idea of the body was a new model for aristocratic looks—at a moment when aristocracy stops being a matter of power, and starts being mainly a matter of image ... the romanticizing of TB is the first widespread example of that distinctively modern activity, promoting the self as an image (pp. 28-29). In Proust's description of Chopin, the illness is also a mark of creative potential.


91 Billy, p. 29. Verlaine's death in 1896 permits us to give 1891 as the date of this incident.

92 "Nous philosophâmes sur la mort des 'Cavaliers' et de leur roi Charles, et l'écho de nos pensées se retrouve dans ses vers charmants dont Reynaldo Hahn écrivit l'accompagnement sonore..." (Billy, pp. 29-30).


94 Corr. V, p. 311. Kolb verifies Proust's information on this point; the painting was erroneously thought to be of the Duke of Richmond and was so labeled when Proust admired it in the Louvre (p. 312N9). The present title of the painting is James Stuart, duc de Lennox; for the sake of consistency with Proust's references to the painting in his poem on Van Dyck, we will continue to refer to the figure in the painting as the Duke of Richmond.

95 Corr. gén. IV, p. 89. This same letter to Vaudoyer contains Proust's recognition of a factual error in his poems: "On m'a assuré depuis que le vêtement du duc de Richmond était non bleu pâle, mais blanc;" this corroborates our suspicion that Proust was minimizing the value of Les Plaisirs et les jours by deliberately antedating the verses on Cyp.

96 Ferré, p. 176. He finds in this poem an example of the "grâce, ... densité, ... pouvoir d'évocation, [et] harmonieuse réussite..." that marked Proust's juvenilia.


98 Laurent Lesage, "Proust and Henri de Régnier," Modern Language Notes 68 (1953), 8-13. He points out in particular the "remarkably close kinship" between Les Plaisirs et les jours and Régnier's La Canne de jaspe (p. 12).
99 Sandre and Clarac, IV, p. 945.

100 Johnson also points Proust's shift from visual simultaneity to successive language in "Portraits," p. 400.


103 Sandre and Clarac, IV, p. 945.


106 See p. 176 of this study for a discussion of the name of this painting at the turn of the century.


113 See p. 118 of this study.

114 "Tel qu'en songe," p. 354. The terms of this description recur in "La Mer" in Les Plaisirs et les jours, which Juliette Hassine has in turn linked to Baudelaire's "La Musique" (Essai, p. 156): "[La Mer] refroidit notre imagination parce qu'elle ne fait pas penser à la vie des hommes, mais elle réjouit notre âme, parce qu'elle est, comme elle, aspiration infinie et impuissante, élan sans cesse brisée de chutes, plainte éternelle et douce. Elle nous enchante ainsi comme la musique, qui ne porte pas comme le langage la trace des choses, qui ne nous dit rien des hommes, mais qui imite les mouvements de notre âme" (Les Plaisirs et les jours, pp. 143-44).
With *Tel qu'en songe*, says Henri Mazel, Régnier gave up his earlier experiments with syntax and grammar that produced such verse as the line, "Les sables qu'être roux sont leurs seules automnes," to confine himself to more "correct" constructions, although they are in Mazel's eyes more obscure and less poetically satisfying. Mazel writes of this modification in Regnier's versification, "Henri de Régnier comprit vite qu'il ne fallait pas faire violence à ce qui vit, et quoi de plus vivant qu'une langue?" (p. 139).

"Tel qu'en songe," p. 355. Lesage finds in this article the "basic esthetic ideas which Proust will elaborate as his final message to the world in the second volume of *Le Temps retrouvé*" ("Proust and Régnier," p. 10).

Chapter 3
The Decadence

Symbolism, Decadence and Society

One of the reasons Proust had so much room to manoeuvre within the context of Symbolism, accepting and copying certain elements, disdaining others, and generally eschewing partisan politics, was the confusion (some of which we saw at the beginning of the preceding chapter) within the movement itself. This same confusion makes it extremely difficult to say exactly where Symbolism both as a "movement" and as a literary epithet, leaves off, and the Decadence, also considered under both of these aspects, begins. As François Livi has wryly addressed the problem: "Il n'est pas ... très utile de proposer une définition de l'esprit décadent qui s'appuie sur celle du symbolisme, car il n'a jamais été prouvé qu'une lumière jaillisse de deux obscurités."¹ Nonetheless, such is the problem at hand, if we are eventually to make any sense at all of the label "décadent" that has been more often than not attached to Les Plaisirs et les Jours.²

The first manifestations of the artistic reaction against Taine, positivism, and middle-class ideology, took the bohemian, outrageous, épater-le-bourgeois form typified successively before 1885 by such groups as Les Hydropathes, Les Hirsutes, Les Jeunes, Les Zutistes, and
Les Jemenfoulistes. These young artists took it to their credit that the bourgeois called them "décadents;" a series of events in the middle of the decade brought a new respectability to the term, bearing out Bourget's famous acceptance of it in 1876: "Nous acceptons sans humilité comme sans orgueil ce terrible mot de décadence." Chief among these events was the publication in 1884 of Huysmans' A Rebours, his renunciation of the naturalist school with his strangely arresting portrayal of the decadent-type Des Esseintes, neurotic aesthete cloaked in a vocabulary as rare and refined as his environment. In the same year, Verlaine's Poètes maudits celebrated in the relative unknowns, Mallarmé, Laforgue and Corbière, the poet cursed by his commitment to a new type of art and destined to be understood by few. In 1885, France mourned the death of Hugo, hero of the last revolution in poetry; his elaborate state funeral spoke eloquently of the resorption of his innovations into the public taste, while the disappearance of the official laureate was seen as a liberation for the new generation of poets. In his stead, Mallarmé, thanks to Huysmans and Verlaine, became the rallying point of the "generation of 1885," and Baudelaire began to be recognized as the spiritual father of those rejecting the values of the bourgeois majority. Verlaine himself provided the poetic cri de guerre for the movement in the poem "Langueur" from his 1884 Jadis et Naguère, "Je suis l'empire à la fin de la décadence," while Bourget's Essais in 1885 offered a theoretical framework for decadence, suggesting a new direction for literature in exploration of the new collective "crise d'âme" that science, tentatively substituting "relative certainties" for the soul-satisfying mysteries of religion, had occasioned. The
dominant tone of the Essais, as for the Symbolists and Decadents in
general throughout this twenty-year period, is one of pessimism, which
Bourget justifies by his belief in degeneration. Jean Pierrot explains
that Bourget's pessimism

...trouve son origine dans la constatation d'un
désaccord fondamental entre la réalité du monde et
les désirs de l'homme, désaccord que les progrès
de la civilisation ne peuvent qu'accentuer: "Quand
la créature humaine, écrit-il à propos de Baudelaire,
est très civilisée, elle demande aux choses d'être
selon son coeur, rencontre d'autant plus rare que
le coeur est plus curieusement raffiné, et l'irré-
médiable malheur apparaît." 10

These extremes of refinement and civilization carry with them a compo-
ment part of exhaustion; the wearing-out of men and civilizations is the
basis for Bourget's proclamation of the present decadence:

...ce désaccord provient ... de l'épuisement phy-
sique et nerveux qui est la rançon des siècles de
civilisation passée: l'espèce humaine, comme un
organisme individuel, a atteint l'âge de décrépi-
tude, spécialement dans les pays de vieilles
civilisations.... 11

Finally, the nature of thought, also pushed to an extreme in the devel-
opment of the human species, contributes to the exhaustion of indivi-
duals and races ("...d'une part, la réflexion, en anticipant sur le
plaisir ... fait de toute expérience une fatale désillusion; d'autre
part, l'activité même de la pensée, rendue plus forçée par les condi-
tions du monde moderne, épuise l'organisme..."12), and makes way for a
phantasm of violence that comes to seem the only way out of the impasse:
Dans ce "même esprit de négation de la vie, qui, chaque jour, obscurcit davantage la civilisation occidentale, nous sommes loin, sans doute, du suicide de la planète, suprême désir des théoriciens du malheur. Mais lentement, sûrement, s'élaborie la croyance à la banqueroute de la nature, qui promet de devenir la foi sinistre du XXe siècle, si la science ou une invasion de barbares ne sauve l'humanité trop réfléchie de la lassitude de sa propre pensée." 13

We have already seen something of Bourget's complaints in Proust's letter to Darlu: reflection empties literature of its pleasure for the adolescent already tired of the relentless action of analytical thought concentrated on his own person. The similarity is not surprising, since Proust was a reader of Bourget; in his letter in fact he sounds well on his way to fulfilling the conditions of the Decadent artist described by Pierrot, tragic in the internal divisions of his own consciousness:

Par vocation aussi, et par suite de l'acuité même de son intelligence critique, l'artiste est amené à disséquer tous les sentiments, ceux qu'il éprouve lui-même comme ceux d'autrui, à en découvrir les ressorts cachés. Victime d'un fatal dédoublement, il tue en lui toute spontanéité, se condamne à être déchiré entre une partie de lui-même qui éprouve intensément, douloureusement même, toutes les impressions de la vie, et une autre qui les juge en observateur lucide et désabusé. 14

Mario Praz's study of the Decadence in The Romantic Agony defines the movement by what it continued and exploited of the "darker side" of French Romanticism—-sadism, satanism, morbidity and macabre exoticism. The exploitation of these elements in the new movement, suggests Praz, was made possible by the doctrine of the liberation of Art trumpeted by Théophile Gautier and by Baudelaire; during the nineteenth century in France, he writes,
...the theory of Art for Art's sake steadily gained ground, and, by criticizing all literary inspiration that was dictated by ethical ideals as being due to intrusions of the practical, destroyed such barriers as dammed up the morbid tendencies of Romantic sensibility, thus leading to the progressive cooling of the passionate quality with which the first of the Romantics had invested even morbid themes, and finally to the crystallization of the whole of the movement into set fashion and lifeless decoration. 15

The monstrous inventions of the Decadent imagination that Praz catalogues in The Romantic Agony are directly related to the split consciousness of the Decadent artist, condemned for its part to give birth, writes Victor Jankélévitch, in his article on Decadence, to a constant series of "monstres narcissiens d'introspection:"

La conscience qui a une fois pris conscience de son opération découvre en elle-même une ironie réflexive, un pouvoir indéfini de dédoubllement dont nulle force au monde ne peut l'empêcher de compliquer et subtiliser l'exposant; la conscience qui s'est une fois découverte ne cesse de se diviser cancéreusement d'avec soi, de devenir plus abstraite, plus légère et plus intelligente.... 16

For this reason Jankélévitch defines decadence as "la maladie constitutionelle de la conscience,"17 and notes that the illness, the creation of monsters, is a source of perverse pleasure: "En fait, la conscience qui dégénère prend goût à sa propre dégénérescence et trouve à s'eplucher elle-même une sorte d'amère et morose délectation."18 The continued and constant amenuisement of concerns that occupy the consciousness in Jankélévitch's explanation19 corresponds then to that "progressive cooling" that Praz determined in the evolution of artistic sensitivities in the nineteenth century; this cooling process in its turn
corresponds to Bourget's notion of "épuisement." We are with this led back to the central metaphor and the central myth of the period of the Decadence: the wearing out and running down of the human body and thus of the collective body, human civilization, as typified in the example of the collapse and fall of Rome and her final and grandly "decadent" civilization.

In Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet, Richard Gilman examines the pervasiveness in Western thought of the analogy of the body’s inevitable decline toward death applied to the life of civilizations; the idea of "progress," which offers an alternative to the analogy, through the convictions of scientific thought that the future can in fact be predicted, controlled, and made better than the present, is, he says, a relatively new development in Western thought, dating only from the past two centuries. Gilman goes on to argue that even the notion of Rome's "decadence"—prototype of all civilizations that rise and fall in accordance with the bodily analogy—is representative of prescientific thought applied to historical phenomena that can be more properly accounted for by notions of progress and change:

The very success of Rome led not to her fall but to the idea of that fall, the notion of a great muscular organism being secretly eaten by a cancer. But the truth is that when on the political level Rome collapsed, great strains of energy were passed on, the world after Rome was shaped and inspired by her having existed. History is not a chronicle of discrete events or epochs, nor is it to be understood in categorical ways.... The reason "decadence" will not do as a description of Rome is that it does injustice to both her past and her future; she did not wind down, she did not disappear, nor did she bring down on herself her own fate. Fate was there, and fate is another word for change.
Myth though it be, and A.E. Carter agrees that it was, speaking in *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature* of the "Procrustean distortion" the nineteenth century imagination wrought upon the fall of Rome, it is impossible to ignore the appeal to the artistic imagination of late nineteenth-century France, in full and explicit rebellion against bourgeois positivism with its glowing belief in progress, of the view that their very own moment in time was one of "decadence." And of a salutary decadence, at that, permitting the artist in his exploitation of the real or imagined excesses he could cull from other "decadent" civilizations, in his constant refinement of his art itself, to differentiate himself and his endeavors from those of the bourgeoisie. It is in this respect that we can understand how, as Gilman says, belief in decadence and a dedication to its manifestations took on the power of a religion for the artist in the last decades of the century. Gilman puts us in mind of Flaubert's scathing portrayal of the pharmacist Homais when he writes of the Decadent artist's violent opposition to the *bourgeois*:

Whatever the perversity of individual minds, however often (as is true in all periods) boredom became an excuse for corrupt sensuality, the cumulative testimony of the era's keenest minds was to its commonplaceness, the insipidness of its most triumphant enterprises, the dullness that emanated from its health. As an aspect of all this, the spreading democratization of society brought alarm to the artistic mind.... In a movement with affinities to aspects of our arts today, [men of letters] returned intellectual acts to a hieratic and jealously personal ambiance, and did it all in the name of a new or revived aristocracy of utterance and gesture, intending by it a grave, passionate rebuke to the philistines.
The myth of the decadence of present civilization was reinforced on the political level by the Prussian victory over the French Imperial Army in September 1870; Carter sees in the defeat the crystallization of the movement and the impetus to the dominant analogy of France with ancient Rome destroyed by invading hordes. Jean Pierrot also discusses the pervasiveness in the popular consciousness of the disillusionment and sense of national decline that followed the defeat:

Avant que, vers la fin du siècle, le nationalisme reprenne des forces, et que l'idée de Revanche se propage dans des couches de plus en plus larges de la population, beaucoup de Français pouvaient penser que c'en était fini de tout grand destin national... On commençait à se dire qu'un peuple... pouvait disparaître, une entité nationale se désagréger, un territoire être définitivement morcelé. La défaite de 1870 n'était-elle pas le signe avant-coureur d'une catastrophe plus générale dans laquelle s'abîmerait entièrement l'État? ... la France du fait même de son haut degré de civilisation, n'était-elle pas devenue un organisme particulièrement fragile, menacée des assauts de quelconques barbares venus de l'Est? 25

Finally, even the spirit of nationalism to which Pierrot refers as an antidote to national despair, the nationalism whipped up in the concluding years of the century by the furious debate over the Dreyfus affair and German militarism, may be understood as yet another manifestation of the generalized fear of national decline, in the sense that the outcry against Dreyfus and the call to French military strength were strategies aimed at reversing France's slide from European prominence.

The enterprise of the Decadent artist loses none of its character as revolutionary and opposed to the bourgeoisie for its unfolding
against a generally held, if only tacitly acknowledged, sense of decadence in society; rather, through what could be called its aesthetics of excess, through the plus values it attached to the taboos of bourgeois society, through its unrelenting display of the conditions of decay, the movement continually exploited the bourgeois fear of moral collapse. Such, for example, is Pierre Louÿs' purpose in his preface to _Aphrodite_, published in the same year as _Les Plaisirs et les Jours_; in the preface, intended as a justification for his tale of _luxure_ set in ancient Alexandria, Louÿs cleverly reverses the terms of the conflict between the civilized world and the barbarians, claiming instead that the enemy is within, that the bourgeois themselves are the dreaded "barbares:"

...le monde moderne succombe sous un envahissement de laideur. Les civilisations remontent vers le nord, entrent dans la brume, dans le froid, dans la boue. Quelle nuit! un peuple vêtu de noir circule dans les rues infectes....

Du moins, qu'il soit permis à ceux qui regretteront pour jamais de n'avoir pas connu cette jeunesse enivrée de la terre, que nous appelons la vie antique... au temps où... l'amour le plus sensuel, le divin amour d'où nous sommes nés, était sans souillure, sans honte, sans péché; qu'il leur soit permis d'oublier dix-huit siècles barbares, hypocrites et laïds, de remonter de la mare... à la beauté originelle.... 26

The initial fervor of the Decadents as outrageous young radicals bent on scandalizing the bourgeoisie appears to have calmed down somewhat by 1890, as the name and notion of "symbolisme"—for certain restless and theoretical minds, a more tempting concept and subject of debate, through its reference to the elusive notion of "symbol"—took
over from overt variations on a theme of decadence as interpreted by the Hydropathes, the Zutistes, and the Jemenfoutistes. 27 Jean Pierrot suggests that the example of Mallarmé exerted a steadying influence upon the new literature of revolt (an analysis that posits Mallarmé as the opposite figure to Verlaine, the master bohemian), so that now Symbolism and the Decadence could begin to pull apart into two distinct but interrelated movements:

Si l'influence de Mallarmé a joué dans le sens de l élaboration d'une doctrine poétique fondée sur une métaphysique plus cohérente et ambitieuse, si, à partir de 1890, la plupart des écrivains d'avant-garde préfèrent le qualificatif de symboliste à celui de décadent, il n'en reste pas moins vrai que jusqu'à la fin du siècle, jusqu'à se soient affirmés ce retour à la vie et cette réconciliation avec le monde moderne qui marqueront la période ultérieure, la sensibilité décadente continue à imprégner l'ensemble du mouvement poétique. 28

What Symbolism chiefly retained in common then with its origin as Decadence is its basic philosophical position of transcendental idealism, its confident and delighted repetition of the lesson learned tant bien que mal from Schopenhauer that, in Rémy de Gourmont's words, "Le monde est ma représentation." 29 Two different explorations of this idealism account roughly, for Pierrot, for the formal distinction between Symbolism and Decadence as they evolved from 1885 to 1900. Moving toward a Platonic conception d'un univers des idées, d'un monde de relations abstraites dont le monde sensible n'est que la projection approximative et le symbole," Mallarmé and his followers occupied themselves with an investigation of language:
Pour [Mallarmé], l'essence du réel étant constituée par le langage, qui lui donne sa forme et sa signification, la fonction de l'artiste, et spécialement du poète, sera de mettre en évidence par le langage cette essence spirituelle [du monde sensible]. A l'univers concret devra être substitué un univers de notions pures, à la fleur particulière la fleur idéale qui n'existe que dans la conscience.... 30

This investigation, intellectualist in nature, he affirms, thus opposes the sensualist tack preoccupied with dreams, emotions, and the imagination still taken by the Decadents:

Au subjectivisme absolu se substituera donc un idéalisme de tendance intellectualiste, qui s'appuiera sur la doctrine occultiste des Correspondances. Intellectualisme d'un côté, subjectivisme de l'autre, tel est bien l'une des lignes de clivage que l'on peut découvrir, dans les quinze dernières années du siècle, entre Symbolisme et Décadence. 31

Tempting as this definition sounds, it is not wholly adequate to the task of delineating the boundaries of Symbolism and the Decadence. On the one hand, despite the rigorousness of Mallarmé's approach to language and poetry, classification of him as an "intellectualist" is, in the context of the debate over art in nineteenth-century France, rather misleading. For Taine's aesthetics, based on the division of art into two component parts of content and form, gave to the strictly "intellectualist" approach to art in the nineteenth century the meaning of concern for the truth-value of its content; this is surely far removed from Mallarmé's undertaking, in which notions of the "truth" or "falseness" of art had no meaning. On the other hand, readers of Mallarmé, such as Robert Cohn, have argued that there is far more that qualifies as sensual, ordinary and down-to-earth in Mallarmé than is
generally assumed. "L'Après midi d'un Faune," of which Proust wrote so enthusiastically to Mme Straus, alone is testimony to this.

The key to the dilemma of differentiation between Symbolism and the Decadence lies in the very pervasiveness of that "sense of an ending" in French society and literature at the end of the last century, of that apocalyptic sense that did indeed find its justification in the cataclysm of the First World War. With such the case, it appears far more fruitful, and more exact, to reverse the usual terms of the relationship, and suggest that Decadence, said to precede Symbolism and then somehow, with its cast of exotics, neurotics, and eccentrics, run parallel to it into the first years of the twentieth century, actually subsumes the Symbolist movement as a particular manifestation of itself. In other words, we would prefer to think of Decadence as the principal "movement" and Symbolism as its off-shoot, one of the names given to a particular manifestation of the widespread and deep-seated belief in social and moral decay at the end of the nineteenth century; this point of view, which recognizes the primacy of the metaphor of bodily degeneration over all the activities of the culture, is only too familiar to readers in late twentieth-century America, to whose own civilization, and in its varied manifestations, political, military and ethical, the term of "decadence" has been applied with increasing frequency. For the modern reader this apocalyptic sense has a great deal to do with nuclear armaments and the lines that the civilized world has felt compelled, again and again throughout the twentieth century, to draw in the dust against the repeated threats of "barbarians from the east," fascist or communist; for France in the late nineteenth
century, it recalled the upheaval with which the previous century had ended and anticipated correctly the conflict that ushered in the sweeping social and political changes of the new century. It is thus—to return to the original problem of differentiating Symbolism from the Decadence—out of the winding-down century's general sense of an ending, not beside it, that Symbolism plays itself out, searching for new connections between the material world and the world of ideas and for a new language in which to express those connections. And not only Symbolism but all the other offshoot -isme as well, as George Ross Ridge writes of the period 1880-1914 that "all the so-called literary schools, in varying degrees, are united by a common preoccupation with decadence," suggesting further that the complete bibliography of "Decadent" literature in France would have to include "most if not all works from Baudelaire to the outbreak of World War I [since this] is the literature that is concerned with the idea of decadence, of decline and fall, whether interpreted as cosmic pessimism, pathological degeneration, or an eclipse of society." Lucien Muhlfield's defense of Symbolism against Proust's objections is a good example of decadence underlying the Symbolist enterprise, as arguing for the existence of a poetic elite, Muhlfield had relied on the model of decadence as the most compelling point of his argument, advancing not an argument for decadence but a confident acceptance of the notion as applicable to literary France in 1896 (p. 80). It might be possible to suggest here a tentative point of distinction between Decadence and its manifestation as Symbolism: while both reject the faith of the bourgeois in the notion of progress, for the Decadent the rejection is absolute, while the efforts of the
Symbolists were organized, however cautiously, around a notion of progress in art to be obtained by its constant purification, by the constant reworking of its relationship to the material world.

One is even tempted to speculate further on the reasons why the last two decades of nineteenth-century literary France have come down to us marked principally by the tag of Symbolism with "Decadence" either ignored or reserved for the eccentric, the morbid and the macabre. The threat that the notion of decadence opposes to the bourgeois sense of order and stability lies in its original, constitutive premise: the belief that the end is near, that continuity is impossible; that the old order is irremediably on its way out. The floodgates are thus opened to all of the excesses, moral as well as artistic, which the bourgeois sensibility reproves. The threat, however, would never have been perceived as such, if the bourgeois himself did not share with the artist a sense of decadence, a belief too frightening to be expressed, in the imminent collapse of civilization, a sense of the ending masked for the bourgeois by his loudly proclaimed belief in the science and progress rejected by the Decadent artists. As Carter has suggested, the distorted myth in the nineteenth century of a decadent Rome falling to the barbarians owed its very popularity to the manner in which it revealed the era's "secret misgivings." The vulnerability of bourgeois society to the threat of decadence is measurable in the violence of its attacks against those who dared express in art society's own repressed fears: the official condemnations in 1857 of Madame Bovary and Les Fleurs du mal are easily interpreted as defenses masquerading as an offense, as frantic responses meant to suppress once
more the nagging and unexpressed question, "What if the poet and the novelist are right?"—as manifestation, that is, of a paranoid bourgeois reaction to the externalization of its own secret fears of social disintegration. An even more compelling example might be found in the visual arts of the Third Republic: it can be argued that what the bourgeois rejected in impressionism was the vision of dissolution these artists displayed in the Salon des refusés just three short years after the defeat at Sedan; the reaction contrasts strongly to the ready popular acceptance of photography in the second half of the century, as this art form required from science, not dissolution and reconstruction, but continuously improved means of "fixing" the recorded image and ensuring its preservation.

The Decadent literature of the nineteenth century, therefore, functions in relation to the bourgeois sense of decadence not only as a representative of what is repressed, but also as a sinister prophecy, a large measure of whose provocative power comes from another repressed fear in the bourgeois that "saying it will make it so." Proclamations of the decadence will actually bring it about, descriptions of sexual luxuriance will bring down the moral order, literature that rejects truth and falsehood as criteria will lead to the irremediable loss of truth and certainty. The bourgeois here meets the decadent artist at the level of their shared neurosis, in their belief (also shared with children and animists) in the power of representation over reality that Freud described in Totem and Taboo as the perceived equivalence of word and deed, or as he called it, the belief in the omnipotence of thought. There remains even here, though, a significant distinction
between the bourgeois and the decadent artist; while the former re-
presses this fear along with all his other fears, the latter gladly
assumes his as his allotted portion, indeed, as evidence of his moral
superiority, and proceeds to make of it the very condition of his art.
As Beaucclair and Vicaire wrote in the preface to their parodic
Déliquescences d'Adoré Floupette, what indeed was the literature of the
present time if not "une attaque de nerfs sur du papier!"41

As a record then of the "crise d'âme" that Bourget defined in 1885
as the new subject for literary investigation, Decadent literature is
marked by its belief in the exhaustion of men and civilization, with
an attendant complacency towards the processes of illness and death;
by the necessity, fostered by the ennui that the long and tired history
of civilization has created, too seek out the increasingly rare and
precious in all activities; by its aestheticism, its fetishist attach-
ment to art objects (the dandy, one type of the Decadent aesthete,
makes of himself an art object), its mania for decoration and decor;
and by its general preference, grounded in an adaptation of Schopen-
hauer's idealism, for what is mediated and artificial over direct ex-
perience. To the Decadent, therefore, dreams are better than waking
life, and art is preferable to nature just as thought is preferable to
"real" action taken upon the "real" world. These preferences consti-
tute the metaphysics of the Decadent writers; if they refused to be-
lieve in "progress," it was because that sense of an ending which they
constantly held up to the bourgeois was coupled with their refusal--
joyously and perversely celebrated as exhaustion, neurosis, and death--
to believe in material reality, or in the possibility that reality is
knowable at all. From Schopenhauer's writings, the Decadents took the belief that all knowledge comes only in the form of representations; this belief provided them with, as Pierrot says, "une justification philosophique à la tristesse profonde et au découragement dont ils se sentaient accablés." The beauty of the Decadents' understanding of Schopenhauer is that it injected new life, that of the thinking and representing subject, into their metaphysics of decline without ever requiring that the Decadents pull back from their preferred stance at the extreme limit of civilization and affirm life. Rémy de Gourmont speaks of "renewal" when he calls "le principe de l'idéalité du monde" in Le Livre des Masques "cette vérité, évangélique et merveilleuse, libératrice et rénovatrice." The twist is that the subject, as exhausted and frail as his civilization, is condemned by the nature of knowledge and his own cognitive process, to never know anything directly, to stand always by the very fact of his intellect, between himself and "reality." As Gourmont explains,

Par rapport à l'homme, sujet pensant, le monde, tout ce qui est extérieur au moi, n'existe que selon l'idée qu'il s'en fait. Nous ne connaissons que des phénomènes, nous ne raisonnons que sur des apparences; toute vérité en soi nous échappe; l'essence est inattaquable.

What this means for the Decadent is that he is thus obliged to live ever farther removed from a hypothetical and unknowable center called "reality;" as he loses himself in representation he revolves around this center in an ever-widening spiral which must eventually, in accordance with his ingrained sense of decay, wear itself out and expire.
The image of the spiral is from Yeats' apocalyptic poem "The Second Coming:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold,
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.... 46

For the Decadents, the problem turned in upon itself as both justification and celebration, is that the center already does not hold.

A Hothouse of Orchids

As "Contre l'obscurité" was Proust's reproach to the excesses of Symbolism, so too a critical article that Proust wrote on Montesquiou and his poetry in 1893 takes as its target the excesses of Decadent literature. Proust's purpose in the article, originally entitled "La Simplicité du Comte de Montesquiou" and never published (but included in the Essais et articles as "Le Souverain des choses transitoires, 47 is to disassociate Montesquiou from his fictional representation as Des Esseintes; he wrote to Montesquiou in October 1893 his intention to demonstrate, "combien vous différez du banal décadent de nos jours, la puissance de votre volonté et la richesse de votre intellectualité, ce que vous aviez de dix-septième siècle...."48 And to make sure his readers understood how far removed Montesquiou was from Des Esseintes, Proust would even like to portray the Count as interested in making money from his writings, a consideration that no true Decadent, with his scorn for bourgeois values, could abide; Montesquiou's ideas on making money are meant as proof of the energy that separates him from
the Decadents: "Vous plairait-il ou vous déplairait-il que je raconte ...
vos idées sur le succès, que l'homme de talent doit être en même
temps celui qui gagne de l'argent avec ses livres (je rattacherais cela
à l'éloge de votre volonté)?"49

Montesquieu may have frowned on this particular revelation, for
it came out in an attenuated and nobler version in the article, as a
reference to "cette loi stupide qui veut que les mauvais écrivains
fassent fortune, et que les grands meurent de faim," with the added
suggestion that "le talent doit servir, non pas au moins à cela, mais
aussi à cela" (p. 408). On the other hand, Proust gave full play in
the article to his notions of Montesquieu's energy and classicism, de-
scribing at the same time his own conception of just what constituted
the Decadence; in light of Les Plaisirs et les Jours, his criticisms
are almost as embarrassing as certain of his remarks in "Contre l'ob-
scrité."

To begin with, Proust gives as the subject of Decadent literature
"toutes les corruptions de l'esprit et tous les raffinements de l'Ima-
gination" (p. 406). He admits the attraction of corruption and refine-
ment as material for literature, and indeed writes Imagination with
a capital "I" as if to pay hommage to the "faculté maîtresse" of the
Decadents and Symbolists. The problem according to Proust, however,
is that the form taken by this literary investigation is shallow, des-
tined for a short life and already losing its exceptionality, growing
"de plus en plus ... ouvert à tout le monde;" without explaining exactly
what he means, Proust falls back here on his insistence that literature
cease its competition as "schools" and deal with what is "immaterial":
"L'élegance et le péché ne sont pas des choses profondes.... Les vraies royautés doivent être fondées sur une naissance plus haute ou sur une plus immatérielle conquête" (p. 406). If Montesquieu's art were based only on these subjects, Proust continues, he would be only "un exemplaire original et somptueux du banal jeune homme contemporain" instead of the equivalent of Baudelaire, Corneille and Racine that Proust will conclude (extravagantly) that he is. One hardly need point out that "l'élegance" and "le péché" are among the principal themes of the book that Proust is assembling at the same time he is composing these lines on Montesquieu.

It is to the "banal jeune homme contemporain" that Proust next turns his attention; his position of personal distance here from the present generation is similar to the one he developed as an opposition of age towards youth in "Contre l'obscurité." He correctly identifies the oracle of "la génération proprement décadente" as Théophile Gautier in his preface to Les Fleurs du mal, citing its passages on the style of the Decadence—"'la langue marbrée déjà des verdures de la décomposition et comme faisandée!'"—and on the necessity, the intellectual and moral superiority of depravation—"'c'est une 'preuve de grandeur,'... c'est-à-dire l'écart du type normal, [qui] est impossible à la bête, fatalement conduite par l'instinct immuable!'"—as theories whose out-datedness is already evident, but which have nonetheless been rich in consequences. The first of these has been the elaboration of a one-sided, and therefore, false legend about the figure of Baudelaire:

Le première [conséquence] fut de substituer à l'admiration que tout noble esprit devrait vouer à Baudelaire, comme au plus grand poète du XIXe siècle,
comme au seul intellectuel et classique, en franche opposition avec le romantisme[1], les sentiments que peut inspirer un pur satanique et décadent, fatalement destinés à osciller entre l'engouement et l'irritation, à créer autour de la réalité géniale de Baudelaire une obscurcissante légende qui n'est pas dissipée aujourd'hui encore (p. 407).

Parenthetically he adds that Montesquiou, as intellectual in approach and as classical in style as Baudelaire, "est en train d'être victime d'une légende identique."

The second consequence is the very existence of the Decadent generation, about which Proust has little complimentary to say. In the first place, all the Decadents resemble each other; in the second, "ils ont tous une 'maladie de la volonté'" (p. 407). Commentators of the Decadence have noted here again the influence of Schopenhauer, for whom the world presented the dual aspects of representation and will, in this attitude of total passivity with which the Decadent faced the world. For Schopenhauer the will is the life force that informs and activates all of nature, including the intellect (Schopenhauer calls the human body an objectification of the will); it is through the agency of the will that the intellect arrives at the representations that are the basis of knowledge. The will, however, as it is manifested in the individual, leads him first and foremost to the knowledge of misery and insufficiency in his existence: "all willing ... arises from a deficiency and therefore from a suffering; a wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one."50 Escape from this situation is possible only through the denial of the will as it is objectified in the individual, a denial of the will that occurs when the subject "loses himself" in aesthetic contemplation. The loss is made possible by Schopenhauer's
definition of Ideas as (analogous to the intellect) grades of the ob-
jectification of the will, so that "in knowledge of the Ideas the sub-
ject ceases to be merely individual and becomes a 'pure will-less, pain-
less, time-less subject of knowledge." There is a paradox at work here:

Schopenhauer's view seems to be, therefore, that even if knowledge of the Ideas is possible for us only because we are individuals who have represen-
tations in the ordinary way, it is possible for us in having that knowledge to free ourselves from our ordinary individuality. In that case, he claims ... the subject becomes object; he is no longer subject to the conditions of ordinary knowledge. Since, however, the object is what it is—an aspect of the will in effect—this means that in this state it is really a case of the will knowing it-
self. Hence anyone who becomes so lost in contem-
plation of nature that he becomes a purely knowing subject thereby becomes immediately aware that he is "the condition, and so the support, of the world and of all objective existence." He and the object are both will. 51

This loss of the individual will into the universal manifestation of
the will in art provides, moreover, release from the pain and suffering
known by the individual conscious of himself as such. 52

If all of this sounds rather confusing, it is; one has a definite
sense of Schopenhauer splitting hairs to make all of the world and
aesthetic experience hold between the two concepts of will and repre-
sentation. The Decadents resolved their confusion by reducing Schopen-
hauer's principles to two: the supremacy of representation and the ne-
cessity of the loss of will, preferably in aesthetic contemplation. As
for Proust, this description of aesthetic experience recalls on several
points the experience of literature that he described in his letter to
Darlu: the loss of self as the goal of aesthetic contemplation, the
silencing of the subject whose representations—in the Lacanian analysis of Proust's complaint, this process of representation is the symbolic process itself—mediate and thus interfere with, "lived" experience.

His own experience notwithstanding, Proust voices nothing but scorn in his essay for the "jeunes gens" afflicted with this bent for passivity, with the desire to surrender up their will:

Ils ne peuvent pas vouloir, d'où ils ne savent agir et ne veulent pas penser. La plupart s'en glorifient, d'autres affectent de s'en plaindre, comme d'une faiblesse infiniment distinguée. Quelques-uns sentent la profondeur du mal, ses ravages dans l'esprit et dans l'action, mais ne peuvent changer, justement parce que pour cela il faudrait vouloir. Si ce n'était la plus pitoyable des misères, ce serait la plus écoeurante des banalités (p. 407).

This is a strange accusation from the future creator of a quasi-autobiographical narrator-hero whose chief malady, as he analyzes himself, is an inability to "want," "une maladie de la volonté." And one need not even go so far as the Recherche to discern the discrepancy: as Henri Massis has pointed out, the principal fault of the heroes and heroines of Les Plaisirs et les jours is precisely their "manque de volonté." Certainly, then, Proust is not entirely in good faith in condemning as "la plus écoeurante des banalités" this malady, which he himself held for "la plus pitoyable des misères." He may be discreetly confessing and chastizing himself in the passage, but the next paragraph of the essay reveals that his real intention is, again, to distinguish Montesquieu from among the pack of Decadents:
Or, ce qui frappe d'abord chez M. de Montesquieu c'est la volonté, adroite, tenace, impérieuse, toute-puissante. Sa conversation en est l'image. Sa gloire en est le triomphe. Dès qu'il parle, on est dompté par un rythme puissant qui étonne d'abord, habitué qu'on est aux molles voix, sans accents, d'aujourd'hui.... Il ressemble plus à ces conquistadors que M. de Heredia a immortalisés, qu'aux névrosés d'aujourd'hui. (p. 407).

The argument responds only poorly, if at all, to the real question of volonté, but Proust forges ahead into a second distinction between Montesquieu and the Decadents, based this time on erudition:

Le décadent est généralement ignorant, au moins de ce qui n'est pas les littératures de décadence. Il n'est jamais réfléchi, et son œuvre, s'il n'est pas encore arrivé à la stérilité littéraire, reflète avec les nuances morbides de ses sensations le néant de sa pensée. M. de Montesquieu est profondément nourri des littératures classiques, comme ses épigraphes, choisies avec un art exquis, suffiraient à le prouver. Mais par-dessus tout ... M. de Montesquieu ne se contente pas d'être le plus raffiné des sensitifs, c'est aussi un des seuls poètes penseurs du XIXe siècle. C'est un intellectuel avant tout. Aussi, comme il est arrivé pour Baudelaire, les vers-maximes abondent dans ses vers, et ses vers sont aussi souvent cornéliens que ceux de Baudelaire sont souvent raciniens. (p. 408).

The comparison with Racine is one that Proust would retain for Baudelaire to defend the poet of Les Fleurs du mal against charges of decadentism, writing to Mme Hélène Fortorie in 1905 of Baudelaire, "A-t-on dit que c'était un décadent? Rien n'est plus faux. Baudelaire n'est pas même un romantique. Il écrit comme Racine."

As for Montesquieu, Proust is asking quite a bit of his reader that he accept a felicitous choice of epigraphs and frequent use of the "vers-maxime" (Proust himself decried the use of verse for philosophizing when that suited his
purpose in "Contre l'obscurité") as evidence of a superior intellect. One prefers to such an evaluation of Montesquieu the poet the much less interested opinion of Rémy de Gourmont, who preferred in Le Livre des masques exactly the opposite view of Proust's:

Il réussit l'arabesque mieux que la figure et la sensation mieux que la pensée. S'il pense, c'est comme les Japonais, par des signes idéographiques.... "Je voudrais que ce vers fût un bibelot d'art," dit l'esthétique de M. de Montesquieu, mais le bibelot n'est qu'une chose amusante et fragile à mettre sous une vitrine ou dans une armoire—oui, plutôt dans une armoire." 55

At the end of his essay, Proust destroys his entire argument by the explication he gives for the opening line of the poem "Maëstro" in Montesquieu's Chauves-Souris: "Je suis le souverain des choses transitoires." Proust paraphrases this line to assert that Montesquieu is in effect "le souverain du reflet des nuances et de l'ombre des apparitions" (p. 409). Meant as a compliment to Montesquieu's refined and minute descriptions, the reference to "nuances" and "apparitions" takes us right back to the tout passe of Decadent sensitivity, as well as to the "widening gyre" of representations removed from reality in Decadent metaphysics. Proust must have sensed that the argument did little to support his claims of Montesquieu's classicism, for he hastens to assert, on the evidence of Montesquieu's "Laus Noctis," that the poet is concerned with the eternal as well as with the fleeting:

"la conclusion de ces courtes réflexions ne serait-elle [pas] que son royaume n'est pas seulement de ce monde"—a common enough concept in Proust with his belief in the "monde mystérieux" that each artist inhabits—"et que les choses éternelles autant que les transitoires l'ont
aussi souvent préoccupé?" (p. 409). Against Huysmans' transposition of Montesquieu into the fictional Des Esseintes, against the evidence of Montesquieu's poetry itself, with its préciosité, its word play, its dominant concern for the surface effects made possible by the exaggeration of poetic technique, Proust's attempt to rescue Montesquieu from the Decadence remains of little consequence, apart from whatever credit with Montesquieu his flattery earned him. For us, however, and despite its pro-Montesquieu bias, the essay reveals Proust's understanding during the years of Les Plaisirs et les jours of just what characterized the Decadents and their literature: a combination of refined sensitivity, depravity, abdication of will, ignorance of classical literature and preoccupation with the transitory. Most of these characteristics (the title borrowed from Hesiod eliminates "ignorance of classical literature") can be found in Les Plaisirs et les jours.

Although Anatole France does not use the word "decadent" itself in his preface to Les Plaisirs et les jours, his description of the atmosphere of the work is studded with catch words and concepts associated with Decadence. France's initial question defines the book immediately as a type of bibelot or objet d'art meant to be enjoyed by a select few capable of appreciating its refinement: "Pourquoi m'a-t-il demandé d'offrir son livre aux esprits curieux?" (p. 3). There is a studied delicacy, a "hands-off" attitude in France's use of the third-person pronoun in place of Proust's name in this sentence and in the one that follows, "Et pourquoi lui ai-je promis de prendre ce soin fort agréable, mais bien inutile?" This delicacy is apparently meant to emphasize the rarity of the work as bibelot, a rarity then made explicit
in the first of the series of metaphors that France uses to describe
the book: "Son livre est comme un jeune visage plein de charme rare
et de grâce fine."

As befits a description of Decadence, age and the decline toward
death are the next qualities France chooses to point out in Proust and
his work; he does this through the process of contrast and paradox that
marks the entire preface. The work, says France, is both young and
old, with balance tilted in favor of age: its (chronologically) young
author is conscious of the weight of the centuries upon him, aware also
of the death that preys upon new life. France uses the analogy of the
centuries-old forest that knows its springtime bloom is destined to be
short-lived: "C'est le printemps des feuilles sur les rameaux antiques,
dans la forêt séculaire. On dirait que les pousses nouvelles sont
attristées du passé profond des bois et portent le deuil de tant de
printemps morts." In such circumstances, melancholy is the appropriate
artistic response; in France's estimation, this is a measured response,
the middle position between sadness and joy. To the 
mondains and mon-
daines of the end of the century, pleasure itself has become a source
of ennuï, and the young author has duly noted this affliction: "comme
le prétend cet homme d'État anglais, la vie serait supportable sans les
plaisirs. Aussi le livre de notre jeune ami a-t-il des sourires lassés,
des attitudes de fatigue qui ne sont ni sans beauté ni sans noblesse."
Through its artistic representation, however, the affliction becomes a
pleasure once again: "Sa tristesse même, on la trouvera plaisante et
bien variée, conduite comme elle est et soutenue par un merveilleux
esprit d'observation, par une intelligence souple, pénétrante et
vraiment subtile." France evokes Hesiod, comparing to the calendar ofWorks and Days Les Plaisirs et les jours, calendar of men and of na-
ture: 58 "Ce calendrier des Plaisirs et des Jours marque et les heures
de la nature par d'harmonieux tableaux du ciel, de la mer, des bois,
et les heures humaines par des portraits fidèles et des peintures de
genre, d'un fini merveilleux." France might have added that the hours
of nature preferred by Proust are those of decline—twilight and autumn
(although he does mention later Proust's penchant for "la splendeur
désolée du soleil couchant"), and that his portraits are for the most
part of individuals nourishing within themselves a variety of secret
ills.

In his description of the content of Les Plaisirs et les jours,
France insists upon Proust's attention to suffering—not just any suf-
fering, but (as one might expect from the rarity of direct experience
and the insufficiency of nature in the Decadent scheme of things),
an artificial suffering created by the individual himself, this con-
trived suffering (Jankélévitch's "maladie constitutionelle de la con-
sience") rivals in intensity the sufferings inflicted by nature and
provokes admiration for its very artificiality:

Il excelle à conter les douleurs élégantes, les
souffrances artificielles, qui égalent pour le moins
en cruauté celle que la nature nous accorde avec
une prodigalité maternelle. J'avoue que ces souf-
frances inventées, ces douleurs trouvées par génie
humain, ces douleurs d'art me semblent infiniment
intéressantes et précieuses, et je sais gré à
Marcel Proust d'en avoir étudié et décrit quelques
exemplaires choisies. (pp. 3-4).
The "prodigalité maternelle" with which nature distributes suffering figures here as a sample of the paradox, valued for its own sake, characteristic of France's own often precious style; Darlu might have found it representative of the intellectual dilettantism that amuses itself by the creation and contemplation of oxymorons. The image, however, of the maternal prodigality in (mother) nature's dispensation of suffering—refuting the more popular image of nature and mothers as bountiful sources of pleasure and good—will be borne out at length in Les Plaisirs et les jours: where it occurs in the work the maternal image is highly ambiguous, mothers shown for the most part as jealously measuring out the pleasure their children take in them and thus guaranteeing that the child's relationship to the mother becomes one of longing, expectation and pain.59

Anatole France concludes his preface with a series of somber and explicit images of decadence applied to Les Plaisirs et les jours; proclaiming the beauty and morbid charm (enchantment) of the closed world of the book, France declares himself fascinated and delighted with the maladies of thought and desire Proust lays bare, as if by x-ray, a flash of lightning cutting through the sultry atmosphere:

Il nous attire, il nous retient dans une atmosphère de serre chaude, parmi des orchidées savantes qui ne nourrissent pas en terre leur étrange et maladive beauté. Soudain, dans l'air lourd et délicieux, passe une flèche lumineuse, un éclair qui, comme le rayon du docteur allemand, traverse les corps. D'un trait le poète a pénétré la pensée secrète, le désir inavoué. (p. 4).

The image of the hothouse recalls the title of Maeterlinck's 1889 Serres chaudes; it is in fact a common image in the fin-de-siècle,
referring to oppressiveness, artificiality, and the fantastic creations produced by minds preoccupied with themselves. 60 Something of the languid atmosphere of Maeterlinck's Serres Chaudes, with their tears, affectations, and lassitude, 61 is also to be found in Les Plaisirs et les jours; more importantly, the strange and beautiful orchids of Proust's hothouse lead France in his preface—perhaps through the unexpressed intermediary of Baudelaire's fleurs du mal—to a consideration of Proust's refinements in the moral order, to his refinements in depravity. For, as France explains, if the young author is so amazingly perceptive of the desires one normally hides, that is because his youth is deceptive: "Il n'est pas du tout innocent." The hidden premise is that, as heir to the world's old age (to Louys' "dix-huit siècles barbares, hypocrites et laïds"), Proust could not possibly have retained his innocence. Part of this is the backwash of Romanticism; Jonathan Culler has described the particular inheritance of the generations nourished on Chateaubriand and Musset as the conviction—and the premature disillusionment—of having seen and done it all through literature, before they had had in fact any real adult experience of life at all. 62 Proust, as Anatole France introduces him, is a tantalizing paradox; by the very sincerity with which he treats evil, the loss of innocence retains a youthful and appealing naïveté that takes the edge off his representations of both good and evil: "...il est si sincère et si vrai qu'il en devient naïf et plaît ainsi. Il y a en lui du Bernardin de Saint-Pierre dépravé et du Pétrone ingénue."

Such combinations of virtue and corruption—or at least the pretense to such a combination—were not rare among the Decadents, for
whom conventional morality was but another nefarious invention of the bourgeoisie, and to whose jaded senses the *piquant* of borderline cases (neither good nor evil but both at once) was necessary. Again, Pierre Louÿs serves as an example, disingenuously protesting in his preface to *Aphrodite* the innocence of physical love among the ancients, and thus the innocence of his portrayal—licentious by nineteenth century standards—of the customs of ancient Alexandria:

> On voit que la vie des anciens ne saurait être jugée d'après les idées morales qui nous viennent aujourd'hui de Genève.

> Pour moi, j'ai écrit ce livre avec la simplicité qu'un Athénien aurait mise à la relation des mêmes aventures. Je souhaite qu'on le lise dans le même esprit. 64

There is more than an echo of this protest of the simultaneous appeal to good and evil, in Proust's assertion at the end of his dedication to Willie Heath in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* that his "liberté de ton" is not meant to scandalize:

> Je n'ai jamais peint [l'immoralité] que chez des êtres d'une conscience délicate. Aussi, trop faibles pour vouloir le bien, trop nobles pour jouir pleinement le mal, ne connaissant que la souffrance, je n'ai pu parler d'eux qu'avec une pitié trop sincère pour qu'elle ne purifiât pas ces petits essais. (p. 8) 65

**Art Over Nature**

Proust's dedication to Heath takes up a number of the themes of the Decadence and, wittingly or not, elaborates on many of those proposed by France in his preface. Among them is first of all the combination of innocence with its opposite, as Proust wrote to Robert
de Billy of his misgivings about the project of the dedication, the incongruity of coupling the noble memories of Willie Heath and Edgar Aubert with the morally questionable contents of certain sections of the book: "...la médiocrité de l'ouvrage, la grande liberté de certaines parties, l'inutilité d'un hommage public toujours inférieur au souvenir inexprimé m'avaient détourné de [le] leur donner autrement que dans l'élan de mon coeur." The reasoning that changed his mind in favor of the dedication—that is, the audience that the illustrations would attract to the book—is the one Proust repeats in the completed dedication: "Ses admirateurs [de Mme Lemaire] sont une élite, et ils sont une foule. J'ai voulu qu'ils voient à la première page le nom de celui qu'ils n'ont pas eu le temps de connaître et qu'ils auraient admis (p. 5).

Proust laments in his dedication that he himself had not had sufficient time to enjoy his friendship with Heath: "Moi-même, cher ami, je vous ai connu bien peu de temps" (p. 5). The book, nonetheless, "ce gage dernier d'affection," (p. 8) is meant to bear witness to the strength of that friendship cut short by death. All this, however, as Fernand Gregh tells the story of the friendship, conceals a fair amount of pretense; Proust and Heath were never great good friends, he insists—not attached enough in any case, to justify Proust's dedicating an entire book to the young Englishman. To Gregh's mind, there was another, more plausible reason for the dedication: a faddish attraction, of a piece with Proust's snobbery, to things English, the height of "chic" in fin-de-siècle France. One recognizes here then a fundamental attitude of Les Plaisirs et les jours, recalling the "souffrances
artificielles" of the preface: its preference for what is in fact invented or artificial.

The preference for art over nature is clear in the verses from Montesquieu that Proust quotes in praise of Madeleine Lemaire's flowers:

. Poser pour vos pinceaux les engage à fleurir /.../
   Vous êtes leur Vigée et vous êtes la Flore
   Qui les immortalise, où l'autre fait mourir! (p. 5)

Nature destroys, art preserves—it is possible to see in Proust's choice of these verses evidence of his early and deep-seated belief in the power of art to conquer time, to immortalize. Yet it is equally possible to read that same preference as less specifically "Proustian" (as the revelation of Le Temps retrouvé has taught us to use the adjective) and more in keeping with an important aspect of Decadent sensibility. Proust's description of Heath in the dedication is phrased in terms of art:

C'est au Bois que je vous retrouvais souvent le matin, m'ayant aperçu et m'attendant sous les arbres, debout, mais reposé, semblable à un de ces seigneurs qu'a peints Van Dyck, et dont vous aviez l'élegance pensive.... Tout d'ailleurs contribuait à accentuer cette mélancolique ressemblance, jusqu'à ce fond de feuillages à l'ombre desquels Van Dyck a souvent arrêté la promenade d'un roi.... Mais si la grâce de votre fierté appartenait de droit à l'art d'un Van Dyck, vous releviez plutôt du Vinci par la mystérieuse intensité de votre vie spirituelle. Souvent, le doigt levé, les yeux impénétrables et souriants en face de l'énigme que vous taisiez, vous m'êtes apparu comme le Saint Jean-Baptiste de Léonard. (pp. 5-6)

With "m'ayant aperçu," Proust momentarily turns the tables of perception: from subject who sees and tells what he sees, he becomes the object seen by Heath; Heath as object becomes in the same instant
a subject of perception. The subsequent description of Heath as tableau then returns him to his status as object of contemplation—of aesthetic contemplation which for the moment of the "m'ayant aperçu," has allowed the ideal merger of subject and object, the identification of each with the other, as the subject and the object, however briefly, exchanged positions. The moment of "inspired perception" is similar to the fusion of subject and spectator in the poem on Van Dyck. What is significant for Willie Heath in the dedication, however, is that he and his natural surroundings attain their highest value through their transposition into works of art, a process readily understandable as a variation of the Decadents' absolute preference for the work of art over the work of nature; the preference for (artistic) representation over reality is a conclusion that must necessarily be drawn from the philosophical position of the pure ideality of the world, in which direct experience of the world is denied and then sublimated into the loss of self in art. The experience of art is itself an experience of mediation, but to the Decadent, it paradoxically becomes the only possible promise of immediate experience.

There is, to be sure, a certain dilettantism, a showing off of artistic taste, knowledge, and sensitivity before a select public, in Proust's comparisons of Heath to figures in Van Dyck and da Vinci; underlying these comparisons, though, and thus serving as a basis for the more systematic comparisons he will make between art and life in the Recherche, is a conviction of the superiority of representation over reality, of art over nature, that is borrowed from the Decadents. This conviction is demonstrated at length in a number of the prose
poems of the *Regrets* in which nature is infused with the *regard* that perceives it (becoming at once a mirror of the poet's soul and the décor of his emotional experiences) and transformed into an art object.

*Regard* and reflection are recurrent motifs in the *Regrets*; nature, like the paintings of the Duke of Richmond and John the Baptist/Willie Heath, throws back to the observer the *regard* he casts upon himself.

In "Tuileries," "Les bassins au fond desquels se prélassé le ciel bleu luisent comme des regards" (p. 104). In "Promenade" the quality of the sky's reflection in water changes from season to season, the clarity of springtime bringing with it a veritable interchange between sea and sky:

Entre les troncs, le sol nu de l'hiver s'emplissait d'anémones, de coucous et de violettas, et les rivières, hier encore sombres et vides, de ciel tendre, bleu et vivant qui s'y prélassait jusqu'au fond. Non ce ciel pâle et lassé des beaux soirs d'octobre qui, étendu au fond des eaux, semble y mourir d'amour et de mélancolie, mais un ciel intense et ardent sur l'azur tendre et riant duquel passaient à tous moments, grises, bleues et roses, --non les ombres des nuées pvesives,--mais les nageoires brillantes et glissantes d'une perche, d'une anguille, ou d'un éperlan. (p. 107)

In "Vent de mer à la campagne" the wind and quality of light particular to the setting suggest the absent sea: "Arrivés en haut de ce chemin qui, brûlé de lumière et essouflé de vent, monte en plein soleil, vers un ciel nu, n'est-ce pas la mer que nous allons apercevoir blanche de soleil et d'écume" (p. 131); the same text also contains a transposition of sun and wind, each element reflecting qualities of the other, as "le vent met une ardeur folle et inutile à disperser les rafales du
soleil" (p. 131). The shifting harmonies of the sea and the sky are described in "La Mer:"

Elle [la mer] n'est pas séparée du ciel comme la terre, est toujours en harmonie avec ses couleurs, s'entrelue de ses nuances les plus délicates. Elle rayonne sous le soleil et chaque soir semble mourir avec lui. Et quand il a disparu, elle continue à le regretter, à conserver un peu de son lumineux souvenir, en face de la terre uniformément sombre. C'est le moment de ses reflets mélancoliques et si doux qu'on sent son coeur se fondre en les regardant. (p. 143)

Finally, in "Allégorie," a text Proust omitted from his collection in Les Plaisirs et les jours, the reflection of the sky in water is given as a metaphor for the purifying effects of suffering on the human heart: "Et désormais ceux qui aiment les vastes spectacles du ciel vont souvent les regarder dans l'étang. Heureux le coeur ainsi défleuris, ainsi saccagé, si maintenant plein de larmes il peut lui aussi refléter le ciel" (p. 178). An even stronger image of reflection, mirrors, also occurs in the Regrets describing, in Regret VII the gradual fading of the captain's memories--

Et il n'avait toujours attrapé aucun des papillons, mais chaque fois il leur avait ôté avec ses doigts un peu du mirage de leurs ailes; ou plutôt il les voyait dans le miroir, se heurtait vainement au miroir pour les toucher, mais le ternissait un peu chaque fois et ne les voyait plus qu'indistincts et moins charmants. Et ce miroir terni de son coeur, rien ne pouvait plus le laver.... (p. 114)--

and the illusory, self-directed passion of the indifferent in Regret XV: "...souvent certains regards embrasés dénoncent des passions qu'ils servent seulement à réfléchir. Ce sont les flammes sur le miroir" (p. 125).
Actual transposition of nature into art occurs in the prose poem "Tableaux de genre du souvenir." It is not enough here to have memories; the memories are recalled and presented as a series of paintings, their comparison with the art ennobling and preserving them, while the key to their perceived beauty is the (aesthetic) distance between the spectator and the memory/work of art, the éloignement to which Proust refers in his opening paragraph:

Nous avons certains souvenirs qui sont comme la peinture hollandaise de notre mémoire, tableaux de genre où les personnages sont souvent de condition médiocre, pris à un moment bien simple de leur existence, sans événements solennels, parfois sans événements du tout, dans un cadre nullement extraordinaire et sans grandeur. Le naturel des caractères et l'innocence de la scène en font l'agrément, l'éloignement met entre elle et nous une lumière douce qui la baigne de beauté. (p. 130)

The elevation to art of humble scenes in Dutch paintings recalls an earlier, and somewhat forced, metaphor Proust contrived for the same process in the description of the sunlight on the courtyard in "Promenade:"

Le soleil comme un poète inspiré et fécond qui ne dédaigne pas de répandre de la beauté sur les lieux les plus humbles et qui jusqu'ici ne semblaient pas devoir faire partie du domaine de l'art, échauffait encore la bienfaisante énergie du fumier.... (p. 107)

In "Tableaux de genre du souvenir," the contrast is less earthy but the qualities celebrated in the model remain the same—naturalness, simplicity, and a calm mediocrity:
Ma vie de régiment est pleine de scènes de ce genre que je vécus naturellement, sans joie bien vive et sans grand chagrin, et dont je me souviens avec beaucoup de douceur. Le caractère agresté des lieux, la simplicité de quelques-uns de mes camarades paysans, dont le corps était resté plus beau, plus agile, l'esprit plus original, le coeur plus spontané, le caractère plus naturel que chez les jeunes gens que j'avais fréquentés auparavant et que je fréquentai dans la suite, le calme d'une vie où les occupations sont plus réglées et l'imagination moins asservie que dans toute autre, où le plaisir nous accompagne d'autant plus continuellement que nous n'avons jamais le temps de le fuir en courant à sa recherche, tout concourt à faire aujourd'hui de cette époque de ma vie comme une suite, coupée de lacunes, il est vrai, de petits tableaux pleins de vérité heureuse et de charme sur lesquels le temps a répandu sa tristesse douce et sa poésie. (pp. 130-131) 68

The elegy of naturalness and simplicity in this passage is, however, deceptive: the "simplicity" of the memories can only be enjoyed when it has been complicated, initially by a comparison with the opposites the poet has encountered ("les jeunes gens que j'avais fréquentés auparavant et que je fréquentai dans la suite"), and then by its insertion into its frame, its recasting as a work of art. For it is in the "petits tableaux" of his own reconstruction that Proust locates the "vérité heureuse" of the experience; the "douceur" lies, not surprisingly, far from the anterior moments as originally experienced and on the side of the reconstruction.

In "Tuileries," the experience of art and nature in the Tuileries Gardens is chiefly an experience of the self read into the setting that is itself interpreted as a self-reflexive work of art. Such refinement and overdetermination also go by the name of préciosité, a style well suited to the Decadent taste for the extreme: "On peut dire," writes Paul van Tieghem in Le Sentiment de la nature dans le
pré-romantisme européen, "que le style poétique devient style précieux lorsquelles sentiments prêtés aux êtres naturels sont trop complexes, trop accompagnés de pensée ou de volonté, et surtout trop suggérés dans le détail par des analogies matérielles de formes, de couleurs, de port ou d'attitude." Thus, Huysmans' description of the forest as perceived by Gilles de Rais in Là-Bas has something of the précieux about it, the medieval satanist reading his own perversion in the "immobile fornication qui se répète et diminue, de rameaux en rameaux, jusqu'à la cime" of the dividing and intersecting branches that climb through the trees' leafy skirts. Consistent with the Decadent preference for representation, overdetermination (excess of volonté) in art compensates for the lived will-lessness borrowed from Schopenhauer and forms the basis for a Decadent préciosité.

In "Tuileries," consciousness of the natural setting is at the same time the poet's consciousness of himself and his role as poet, obliged to animate the spectacle before him with his own exaltation and with metaphors that present the scene as art. This consciousness of self and spectacle combined prompts the adjective "charmé" for the wind as it brings the scent of the new lilacs of spring to mingle with the "parfum du passé" the poet imagines emanating from the Tuileries palace; the contrast between old and new is also emphasized in the image of the young shoots that "verdissent" (a verb also used in French to convey the notion of aging when applied to statuary changing color as it ages) against the stone of the "vieux palais," as it is also by the glimpse the poet in the garden is afforded of the hussard across the river, "sortant du vieux quartier du quai d'Orsay, sur l'autre rive et comme dans un autre siècle" (p. 104). Even the statues in
this privileged garden offer a contrast with their fellows in public squares, whose meditative poses condemn them to be perceived as fools by the passers-by hurrying past them; the statues of the Tuileries Gardens are in perfect harmony with their surroundings as they are with the poet's disposition to meditation: they "rêvent ici dans les char-milles comme des sages sous la verdure lumineuse qui protège leur blancheur" (p. 104). Luminosity translates the joyous emotions evoked in the poet by the springtime; it recurs in the prose poem as transparency—in the basins in which the sky is brilliantly reflected and in the iridescence of the sunlight, in the jets d'eau—and as a shimmering "ardeur" in the heliotrope that, an incense burner adoring the sun, "brûle ses parfums."

Perceived motion in the stationary scene is another translation of personal exaltation in the prose poem: border plants "décordent follement des vases;" roses "s'élancent" in front of the Louvre; the stone horseman is "lancé sans changer de place dans un galop fou," while the quality of his inaudible trumpet blast is transferred to the instrument itself, a "trompette joyeuse" (p. 104). The metaphors given to the roses, only loosely connected to the elements of the scene, extend the present experience to other settings and other experiences, adding at the same time a hint of sexual ardeur to complement that of the sun: the roses are "légères comme des mâts" (reference to the sea that stretches the water motif created by the basins and the river in the prose poem), "nobles et gracieuses comme des colonnes" (continuation, but not a strict one, of the motifs of the palace and statuary, while along with that of the masts of ships, an image of sexual
anticipated), "rougissantes comme des jeunes filles," an image to complement that of the sleeping "adolescent blond" to which the sun was compared at the beginning of the piece and certify, however chastely, the eroticism inspired by the natural spectacle, according to which the image of the fountains—"Irisés de soleil et soupirant d'amour, les jets d'eau montent vers le ciel"—may, but do not need to, be read as a type of climax.

To conclude the scene, Proust returns to the technique of contrast that determined his early perceptions of the palace, greenery and statues: with the approach of a rainstorm, and the loss of the brilliant sunlight, the elements of the scene and their affective resonances change. The basins, once shining with their reflection of the sky, now "semblent des yeux vides de regards ou des vases pleins de larmes;" the fountain is "absurde," its sighs changed to a "hymne maintenant dérisoire;" the aroma of the lilacs is "inutile;" the cavalier, still trapped in the contradiction between the furious movement of his pose and the immobility of the stone he is made of, alone continues as he was in the sunshine, a persistance which merits him the epithet of "inconscient." No "lesson" is drawn from the experience; no real conclusion other than the contrast between sunshine and approaching rain is arrived at. In this inconclusiveness, repeated in others of the Regrets devoted chiefly to description such as "Versailles," "Promenade," "Sous-bois," "Les Marronniers," "La Mer," "Marine," and "Voiles au port," lies the final préciosité of the prose poem: the piece is entirely turned in on itself, emphasizing as an end in itself what Jakobson has called the poetic function of language or what Northrop
Frye refers to as the literal level of the poem *qua* poem, anterior to any act of interpretation or determination of its referentiality. In other words, the prose poem becomes a kind of *bibelot*: its point is the artistic representation of the natural setting, chiefly through its abundance of metaphors that, particularly as Proust changes the lighting on the scene from the first to the second paragraph (sunshine to threatening skies) call attention to themselves as the full significance of the piece. Grafted upon the poetic function of language in "Tuileries," however, there is also the emotive function, traces of the poet himself surfacing in his very choice of metaphors and in such anthropomorphisms as the "vent charmé" and the fountain "soupirant d'amour." It is clear that, conscious as the language is of itself in "Tuileries," it is also language manipulated by a highly reflexive consciousness, even in the absence of any first-person pronoun in the text. Proust's metaphor of the *regard* and the images of reflection he uses elsewhere in the Regrets suggest that, for him as for the Decadents, direct contact with nature is an impossibility. There is always someone watching, reading in water the colors of the sky and in the color of the sky laughter, love, tenderness, and melancholia, calling attention as he does so to the act of watching and to the artistic recreation, the overdetermination or excess of *volonté*, that makes of nature in these highly polished texts, a mirror in which the soul might admire itself. The *regard* exchanged between Proust and Heath as John the Baptist in the dedication is thus of a piece with the narcissism and mediation through art that informs the use of nature and natural settings in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*. To Heath's identification with
paintings by da Vinci there is added, however, the peculiar melancholy stemming from the absence of the center: not only is Heath himself dead and gone, but Proust is well aware that even in real life he was not the model for Van Dyck's or da Vinci's figures—just as Odette could never have posed for Botticelli: the refined sensitivity compensates for this absence by the preference for art over life, seeking in art and in nature the representation of the self that first and foremost perceives them as representations.

Noah's Ark

In his preface, Anatole France used the image of the hothouse—with its connotations of heat, heavy air, and claustrophobic enclosure—to describe the atmosphere of Les Plaisirs et les jours. What Proust's hothouse produces are not real, but artificial flowers, symbols not so much of life as, by their "étrange et maladive beauté," of death. Similarly, Heath's existence has drawn its particular beauty from its nearness to death, as Proust explains first in his comparison of Heath to Van Dyck's subjects—"comme tant d'entre eux qui furent ses modèles, vous deviez bientôt mourir et dans vos yeux comme dans les leurs, on voyait alterner les ombres du pressentiment et la douce lumière de la résignation" (p. 6)—and then as an introduction to a forthright celebration of illness:

Votre vie, telle que vous la voulez, serait une de ces œuvres à qui il faut une haute inspiration. Comme de la foi et du génie, nous pouvons la recevoir de l'amour. Mais c'était la mort qui devait vous la donner. En elle aussi et même en ses approches résident des forces cachées, des aides
secrètes, une "grâce" qui n'est pas dans la vie. Comme les amants quand ils commencent à aimer, comme les poètes dans le temps où ils chantent, les malades se sentent plus près de leur âme. La vie est chose dure qui serre de trop près, perpétuellement nous fait mal à l'âme. A sentir ses liens se relâcher, on peut éprouver de clairvoyantes douceurs. (p. 6)

Morbidity, cornerstone of the Decadent sense of an ending with its accompanying desire for self-destruction, is thus a second fundamental attitude announced in the dedication of Les Plaisirs et les jours. Acquiescence in decline is the first note sounded by Proust in his epigraph to the dedication: "Du sein de Dieu où tu reposes ... révèle-moi ces vérités qui dominent la mort, empêchent de la craindre et la font presque aimer." (p. 5). The sense of decline in the dedication takes the familiar form of the opposition between youth and age; Willie's disappearance at an early age—"Plus grave qu'aucun de nous, vous étiez aussi plus enfant qu'aucun" (p. 7)—unites the opposites of birth and death in a frisson délicieux and allows Proust to apply the same réunion of opposites to himself. He is young, but by virtue of frequent illness, he is well acquainted with decline; carrying upon himself the world's old age, he can speak of the "descendance exilée de la colombe de l'arche" and write of his nostalgia for death:

Et qui même n'a connu de ces moments, cher Willie, où il voudrait être où vous êtes? On prend tant d'engagements envers la vie qu'il vient une heure où, décuragé de pouvoir jamais les tenir tous, on se tourne vers les tombes, on appelle la mort, "la mort qui vient en aide aux destinées qui ont peine à s'accomplir." (p. 7)

In the same way, the compositions of Les Plaisirs et les jours are works of youth now appraised by age: "Si quelques-unes de ces pages ont
été écrites à vingt-trois ans, bien d'autres ... datent de ma vingt-
tième année. Toutes ne sont que la vaine écume d'une vie agitée, mais
qui maintenant se calme" (p. 7-8).

France's image of the hothouse is succeeded in the dedication by
Proust's image of Noah's ark, combining in itself the themes of arti-
ficiality and morbidity. Like the hothouse, Noah's ark is an image of
enclosure; it is also a refuge (an escape) from nature: "Quand j'étais
tout enfant," Proust writes, "le sort d'aucun personnage de l'histoire
sainte ne me semblait aussi horrible que celui de Noé, à cause du
déluge qui le tint enfermé dans l'arche pendant quarante jours" (p. 6).
Illness, however, makes of the enclosure a positive experience; closed
off from the external world, the sufferer enters into closer contact
with his soul. He becomes something of a pure subjectivity, for in the
shelter of his ark, the world exists only according to his representa-
tions of it: "Plus tard, je fus souvent malade, et pendant de longs
jours je dus rester aussi dans l'arche." Je compris alors que jamais
Noé ne put si bien voir le monde que de l'arche, malgré qu'elle fût
close et qu'il fit nuit sur la terre" (p. 6). To a reader of Decadent
literature the enclosure within the ark recalls strongly that of another
malade peacefully enclosed within four walls--Des Esseintes in his
elaborately contrived retreat of Fontenay.

The image of Noah's ark has attracted commentary by a number of
critics of Les Plaisirs et les Jours: among them is André Gide, for
whom the image heralds the older Proust, ill and enclosed in his room,
concentrating his energies on the production of the Recherche. In a
similar vein, David McDowell, who calls Proust's dedication to Heath
"an important chapter in what is one of the most remarkable 'textbooks' of a writer's progress," sees in the image of the ark a foreshadowing of Proust's future creative effort:

Proust's world ... is essentially a strange, almost unreal, creation of memory and the imagination, modified by his physical and moral isolation. It was achieved by an almost ridiculous extension of Wordsworth's dictum about "emotion recollected in tranquility" and its faults and distortions are implicit in the extreme of isolation.... By that time, there was really only one world left: it was a shadowy world, already lost to Proust as a man, a world only seen and remembered from the ark. 82

A more recent article, however, by Gerald Kamber and Richard Macksey, "'Negative Metaphor' and Proust's Rhetoric of Absence," suggests a deeper significance for the view of the world from the ark. Analyzing the structure of a number of extended metaphorical passages from the Recherche, the authors argue for the existence of a class of "negative metaphors" in Proust's masterpiece. That is, in contrast to the usual workings of metaphor, whose purpose is to enrich a first item (I.A. Richards' tenor) by its association with a second (the vehicle in Richards' terms), "negative metaphors" overwhelm the tenor and focus the reader's attention on the metaphor itself. As the authors explain:

In this type of metaphor a curious reversal of basic vision takes place, so that the metaphorical emphasis shifts irrevocably from the initial given or first term of the comparison to the succeeding one, a process contrary to the normal metaphoric process.
Because of this reversal in the dynamics and the movement away from the initially posited sensation or object toward the imaginary, we propose to call the phenomenon "negative metaphor." 75

The most dramatic examples of negative metaphor that they cite from the Recherche all occur within an enclosed space: the narrator reading in his bedroom at Combray imagining the summer day outside; the narrator imagining from his Paris bedroom a walk through the sunlight streets of Balbec to the "luminous shadows" of a cool restaurant; the narrator reading in the salon at Combray, describing without watching it, the summer rainstorm outside. In each of these instances sensorial reversals come into play, all to the benefit of the imagination; in the first, for example, the "obscure fraîcheur" of the bedroom at Combray is described by Proust as the same complement to the "plein soleil de la rue" as a shadow is to a ray of sunlight—"c'est-à-dire aussi lumineuse que lui"—allowing him to see the summer day more clearly than if he had been outside. 76 The interior of the room thus relates to the external world, the authors say, as the negative relates to the photograph. With the attribution of luminosity to the shadow of the room, however, the negative metaphor is completed by a final reversal in the direction of the imaginary:

Proust has crossed the line of optical logic into oxymoron by asserting that darkness can be a source of light, but in the metaphoric sense which he carefully specifies. For it is precisely this contradiction in sensorial logic which enables him to apprehend, in his imagination, the total spectacle that is summer—a kind of vast sea of circumambient light upon which floats his own tiny island of dark coolness. And he further asserts that the peculiarly total grasp of summer accorded him by the isolation of his dark, cool room would have been denied him
had he in reality been immersed in the sea of light; that is, his senses could have recorded only in fragments the "summer" which he is remembering.... Thus, the spectacle (unseen by the senses) of the summer outside, paradoxically perceived by the imagination within the darkened room, finally eclipses the original tenor of the metaphor in a timeless present where shadows are luminous. 77

There are thus two aspects to this negative metaphor of shadows luminous as sun rays. The conditions of the interior are the opposite of those of the exterior, and the thrust of the metaphor is toward the representation not of what is present and perceived by the senses, but of what is absent and imagined. The sum of the negative metaphors of the Recherche is the "rhetoric of absence" formulated in the Temps retrouvé:

Tant de fois, au cours de ma vie, la réalité m'avait déçu parce qu'au moment où je la percevais, mon imagination, qui était mon seul organe pour jouir de la beauté, ne pouvait s'appliquer à elle, en vertu de la loi inévitable qui veut qu'on ne puisse imaginer que ce qui est absent. 78

Such a rhetoric of absence is certainly evident in Proust's image of Noah's ark in the dedication to Heath: because of, not in spite of, his isolation, "jamais Noé [or Proust] ne put si bien voir le monde que de l'arche, malgré qu'elle fût close et qu'il fût nuit sur la terre" (p. 6). This rhetoric, and the negative metaphors it produces, again find their philosophical, or we might say with Freud, pathological, justification in the overestimation of representation over reality. From the basic reversal, characteristic of the Decadence, flow all the others; Proust's description to his absent friend Heath of the conditions of his own Noah's ark lays the groundwork for his mature "rhetoric
of absence" in the drama he sketches of enclosure, of presence and absence, of constant reversals in terms and qualities, that bring us back to an identification of Decadent traits in the dedication.

Recurrent room imagery (in dreams or in art) is frequently interpreted by psychoanalysts as a manifestation of nostalgia—of the desire, that is, to return to the shelter of the mother's womb. Proust's choice of Noah's ark as a metaphor for his sick room adds to the traditional image of the room the notion of the couple, in keeping with the original population of the ark. It comes as no surprise that the second half of the Proustian couple in the ark is the mother:

Quand commença ma convalescence, ma mère, qui ne m'avait pas quitté, et, la nuit même restait auprès de moi, "ouvrit la porte de l'arche" et sortit. Pourtant comme la colombe "elle revint encore ce soir-là." Puis je fus tout à fait guéri, et comme la colombe "elle ne revint plus." (pp. 6-7)

The bedroom drama at Combray, along with the preceding consideration of "negative metaphor," again cautions against surprise at the ambiguity surrounding the figure of the mother in Proust's Noah's ark. The compensation for illness, in fact the very reason it is welcomed and reveled in, is the unloosening of one's burdensome ties to life: Proust calls this in his dedication the "Douceur de la suspension de vivre, de la vraie 'Trêve de Dieu' qui interrompt les travaux, les désirs mauvais. 'Grâce' de la maladie qui nous rapproche des réalités d'au-delà de la mort..." (p. 7). This "suspension," then, this gentle decline from life towards death brings with it also a decadence—in its original sense of a "falling away" from the norm—in the prevailing moral code. In the light of the Combray bedroom drama, the mother's
remaining all night in the room with the child can only be seen as a
breech of the household ethics, a transgression that the mother commits
only when ordered to do so by the law-giving father and for which the
child assumes the guilt: even without the aid of the text on Combray,
Proust's comparison here of the mother's two manners--sweetness and
comfort during the period of illness, reverting to severity and a pre-
occupation with duty after the convalescence--suffices to present the
time of the illness as a time of moral relâche in his mother's rela-
tionship to him.

The ambiguity of the maternal figure in the early text resides
precisely in her relationship to her son's desire for her. Within
the ark, there is at least a symbolic union of the son with the mother:
he is the object of all her attentions, she spends the night there,
the room is as filled with her presence as her womb once was with his.
If a "trêve de désirs mauvais" accompanies this state of affairs, it
is not that the situation is blameless: although the mother is in some
sense "possessed" by the son in the ark, desire and fulfillment are
already posited as mutually exclusive. Because desire is the privilege
of imagination, and imagination in turn depends upon absence, desire
cannot coexist with fulfillment; in the presence of fulfillment,
(the privilege of reality and presence), desire fades away. The pat-
tern is easily recognizable as that of the narrator's intermittent
desire for Albertine in the Recherche. In Les Plaisirs et les jours,
it appears as a tight knot of conflicting desires and moral uncertainty,
the combination of illness, presence of the mother in the sick room/
womb, fulfilled desire, and absence of evil desires, is dominated by a
complacency in the illness that was the first domino in the series, and by the heightened awareness of the self as noble and inspired brought about by the expectation of death. Thus Proust can claim that, if the mother-son relationship within the ark has an air of culpability about it, this is at least not because of any "désirs mauvais."

With the return to health, however, the terms of the situation are reversed. Leaving the sickroom, the mother allows for the return of the "désirs mauvais;" Proust's imagination is stimulated by her absence. As the mother becomes once more the inaccessible object of desire, she undergoes a purification in the language her son uses to describe her—she becomes the dove—symbol of purity—that Noah sent out from the ark each evening until the waters of the flood had receded and new life could begin on the earth. Proust, however, experiences as a death the "new life" heralded by his mother's failure to return: separation from his mother and renunciation of the rich inner life with which the isolation of the ark had brought him into communication make of life and health a greater suffering than physical illness and death:

Il fallut recommencer à vivre, à se détourner de soi, à entendre des paroles plus dures que celles de ma mère; bien plus, les siennes, si perpétuellement douces jusque-là, n'étaient plus les mêmes, mais empreintes de la sévérité de la vie et du devoir qu'elle devait m'apprendre. (p. 7)

The progeny of the sickroom/mother's womb has the mark of death upon him; we are not far here from the Decadents' notion of the race épuisée, condemned to death by the burden of its own heredity.

Thus the aptness for Les Plaisirs et les Jours of the "prodigalité maternelle" with which nature dispenses suffering. In Proust's Noah's
ark drama, the mother's ambiguous relationship to the suffering of her son relates her to the dual image of woman in Decadent literature; she is either or simultaneously angel or cold and unyielding temptress. 

Present in the sickroom, the mother calms her son's anguish; Proust speaks of her as "...le visage même de notre tristesse ou ... le geste de la protection implorée par notre faiblesse..." (p. 7). She is here the loving (in the sense of caritas) and comforting angel, seemingly beyond the reach of sexual desire—yet she comforts precisely by the faithfulness of her (incestuous) presence in the sick room. If her leave-taking, on the other hand, purifies her of the fruit, it is by leaving the sickroom that she causes her son to suffer; as he becomes again conscious of his desire for her, she resumes her role as the severe interpreter of duty—the untouchable temptress known as the femme fatale. The next step in the cycle, then, the way in which the son breaks the tension of the mother as femme fatale, is his relapse into illness, disingenuously luring the mother back into the ark with its through-the-looking-glass reversals of terms. Illness thus becomes a convenient metaphor for the attraction to evil in Les Plaisirs et les jours: "On tient pour 'malades,'" writes George Bataille in response to Fretet's study of "alienation" in Proust, "ceux qui faute d'être calmés par la peur (dissimulée sous le nom des divers 'sentiments moraux') cédent, et ne peuvent que céder, à la sollicitation du 'mal.'" 81

In Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rielke, and Proust, 82 Paul de Man examines reading and writing in the Recherche, pleasures often set within what he calls the "thematic of closeted and hidden spaces" in the novel. 83 Because they take place in
solitude, reading and writing are activities tinged with guilt for the young narrator, associated with the other "shameful pleasures" with which he experiments in the recesses of the Combray house. Like illness, then, reading and writing also function as metaphors for guilt and the attraction to evil.  

In the writing of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, the guilt of enclosure in the "closeted space" of the ark is diluted in two ways: by the presence of the other and by an extension into fiction of the preoccupation with illness and death. If the mother shares the solitude of the sickroom/ark, the dedication to Willie Heath makes of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* an experience of combined retreat:

Nous formions alors le rêve, presque le projet de vivre de plus en plus l'un avec l'autre, dans un cercle de femmes et d'hommes magnanimes et choisis, assez loin de la bêtise, du vice et de la méchanceté pour nous sentir à l'abri de leurs flèches vulgaires. (p. 6)

Interrupted by Heath's death, this project recalls the retreat of Boccaccio’s narrators in the *Decameron*, determined by their experience of illness and death in plague-stricken Florence of 1349; for the group of ten narrators, "cercle de femmes et d'hommes magnanimes et choisis," retired together in the countryside, the experience of story-telling brings to them the absent external world in mediated fashion, through language and the processes of fiction. Proust’s project of retreat with Heath is a variation of the definition of happiness Proust had recorded some ten years earlier: "Vivre près de ceux que j'aime avec les charmes de la nature, une quantité de livres et de partitions, et pas loin un théâtre...." The component parts of *Les Plaisirs et les*
jours correspond strikingly well to this expressed ideal—the Regrets celebrate "les charmes [médiasés] de la nature," the nouvelles and the poems on painters and musicians, provide the "quantité de livres et de partitions," and the *Fragments de comédie italienne* serve as the "théâtre." Combined with Proust's later project of communal life with Heath, *Les Plaisirs et les jours* become the "negative metaphor" conceived in the sickroom and in the presence of death, an imagined world realizing through literary representation the interrupted project of happiness and friendship, justifying the writing, and exculpating the real solitude in which it was accomplished.

Many of the characters of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* share with their author a preoccupation with illness and death; this hantise of the Decadence serves here to neutralize by its generality the connection between illness and guilt. As with Willie Heath, the existence of Baldassare Silvande in the first nouvelle is infused with meaning (takes its inspiration, as Proust said of Heath's life in his preface) from the imminence of death. Proust brings Baldassare to life in fiction only to be able to recount the process of his dying; the process is identical to the personal experience of illness in the dedication, as the proximity of death, offering to the sufferer his most valid perceptions of himself and of life, leads him to prefer sickness to health:

A l'abri des intempéries de la vie, dans cette propice atmosphère de douceur ambiante, de calme forcé et de libre méditation, avait obscurément commencé de germer en [Baldassare] le désir de la mort. Il était loin de s'en douter encore et sentit seulement un vague effroi à la pensée de recommencer à vivre,
à essuyer les coups dont il avait perdu l'habitude
et de perdre les caresses dont on l'avait entouré....
Comme si maintenant il sentait un nouvel amour natal
encore inconnu s'éveiller en lui ainsi qu'en un
jeune homme qui aurait été trompé sur le lieu de sa
patrie première, il éprouvait la nostalgie de la
mort, où c'était d'abord comme pour un éternel exil
qu'il s'était senti partir. (pp. 20-21)

In the second nouvelle, Violante ou la mondanité, love is represen-
ted as an illness which, like physical illness, is a means to under-
standing: "[Violante] ne connaissait pas encore l'amour. Peu de temps
après, elle en souffrit, qui est la seule manière dont on apprenne à le
connaître" (p. 32); in many of the book's sketches, such as "L'Incon-
stant" in the Fragments de comédie italienne and "Les Rivages de
l'oubli" in the Regrets, love is interesting to the author precisely
for the way in which it, like an illness, follows its course and dies.
"La Confession d'une jeune fille" is a death-bed confession; the end
of both love and jealousy to which Honoré aspires in "La Fin de la
jalousie" is only possible with the death of the jealous lover himself.
And as André Vial has pointed out, the recurrent image of the sea in
the Regrets expresses a longing for oblivion, the silencing of con-
sciousness altogether analogous to that preceding birth; 86 oubli in
Les Plaisirs et les jours is the alternative to guilt (the jeune fille
agonizes over her inability to forget: "...je peux rester encore huit
jours comme cela et je ne pourrai cesser jusque-là de raisonner sur
les commencements et de voir la fin" [p. 95]) and the blessed end
result of illness.
DREAMS, DRUGS AND FAMILY LIFE

Other Decadent themes and distortions, all of them traceable in some way to the primary experience of illness, maternal care and altered perception contained in the image of Noah's ark, figure prominently in Les Plaisirs et les jours: the subjective reality of dreaming, superior to that of walking life; the paradis artificiel of intoxication; abnormal family configurations; and the neurotic omnipotence of thought. The first of these, the most "innocent" and the one to which Proust himself assigned the work, is the dream. In "Rêve," the narrator recounts the curious dream in which he shares with Mme Dorothy B., (to whom he is indifferent in real life), several moments of exquisite tenderness; the dream completely changes his waking opinion of Mme Dorothy B. until it finally, like everything else, fades out of his memory. The experience is, at the end of the piece, compared to the absolute subjectivity of love:

Hélas! l'amour a passé sur moi comme ce rêve, avec une puissance de transfiguration aussi mystérieuse. Aussi vous qui connaissez celle que j'aime, et qui n'éêtes pas dans mon rêve, vous ne pouvez pas me comprendre, n'essayez pas de me conseiller. (p. 130)

A companion to this dream and its effects on "real" life is the waking dream recounted in "Rencontre au bord du lac." Here the narrator's perception of his beloved waving to him beside the lake—a perception he later recognizes as false—supersedes the reality of her indifference, of which he had previously been convinced:

En bien! le plus horrible est que cela ne fut pas comme si cela n'avait pas été. Cette image aimante de celle qui ne m'aimait pas, même après que j'eus
reconnu mon erreur, changea pour longtemps encore l'idée que je me faisais d'elle.... souvent dans ma peine, pour me consoler en m'efforçant de croire que c'étaient les siennes comme je l'avais senti tout d'abord, je fermais les yeux pour revoir ses petites mains qui me disaient bonjour, qui auraient si bien essuyé mes yeux, si bien rafraîchi mon front, ses petites mains gantées qu'elle tendait doucement au bord du lac comme de frêles symboles de paix, d'amour et de réconciliation pendant que ses yeux tristes et interrogateurs semblaient demander que je la prisse avec moi. (p. 124)

The maternal image of the beloved here repeats Proust's evocation of his mother in the dedication to Heath, recalling in its tender gesture not only Baldassare Silvande's visions of his mother on his death-bed —"Il revit sa mère quand elle l'embrassait en rentrant, puis quand elle le couchait le soir et réchauffait ses pieds dans ses mains, restant près de lui s'il ne pouvait pas s'endormir..." (p. 27)—but similar reminiscences of maternal care upon which the jeune fille meditates:

...je ne m'endormais plus à force de la rappeler pour me dire bonsoir encore, n'osant plus à la fin, n'en ressentant que davantage le besoin passionné, inventant toujours de nouveaux prétextes, mon oreiller brûlant à retourner, mes pieds gelés qu'elle seule pourrait réchauffer dans ses mains. (p. 86)

In the section devoted to "Rêveries couleur du temps," other texts continue the celebration of the superiority of the life of dreams over reality, Proust declaring forthrightly in Regret VI, "...il vaut mieux rêver sa vie que la vivre, encore que la vivre ce soit encore la rêver, mais moins mystérieusement et moins clairement à la fois, d'un rêve obscur et lourd, semblable au rêve épars dans la faible conscience des bêtes qui ruminent" (p. 111). Accordingly, the captain of Regret VII finishes his life reliving in a waking dream the past loves recalled
by his collection of old letters; in "Reliques," the narrator looks for the secrets of his beloved's life in the objects she used to own and concludes, "Sa plus réelle beauté fut peut-être dans mon désir. Elle a vécu sa vie, mais peut-être seul, je l'ai rêvée" (p. 115). The evocation of the dream that lifts the auditor far from the everyday world gives to popular music in "Eloge de la mauvaise musique" its charm and its justification, as the narrator explains,

Un cahier de mauvaises romances, usé pour avoir trop servi, doit nous toucher comme un cimetière ou comme un village.... De cette poussière peut s'envoler, devant une imagination assez sympathique et respectueuse pour taire un moment ses dédains esthétiques, la nuée des âmes tenant au bec le rêve encore vert qui leur faisait pressentir l'autre monde, et jouer ou pleurer dans celui-ci. (p. 122)

The "Sonate clair de lune" recounts in the same key of blanc mineur as Gautier's "Symphonie," the externalization of a dream into reality, the triumph of the "autre monde" over "celui-ci:"

Bientôt je rêvais que devant moi, le coucher du soleil éclairait au loin le sable et la mer.... Dans ce crépuscule spécial aux rêves, c'était comme le coucher d'un soleil malade et décoloré, sur une grève polaire .... La contradiction de ce resplendissement obscur, le miracle de cette trêve enchantée à mes maux ne m'inspirait aucune défiance, aucune peur, mais j'étais enveloppé, baigné, noyé d'une douceur croissante dont l'intensité délicieuse finit par me réveiller. J'ouvris les yeux. Splendide et blême, mon rêve s'étendait autour de moi.... La seule réalité était dans cette irréelle lumière, et je l'invoquais en souriant. (pp. 116-118)

Highly subjective in nature, the dream recalls the conditions of enclosure announced in the image of Noah's ark; like "negative meta-

phor," the dream is a form of enlightened perception. In "Après dîner,"
of "Un Dîner en ville," Proust describes the ascent to a state of enlightened perception similar to that of the dream world, that of the paradis artificiel of drunkenness, "mirage," Proust writes, "ou la réalité d'un seul soir" (p. 103). Honoré, a guest at the dinner party and hero of the narrative, abruptly leaves the gathering, "sentant que le mélange des vins lui avait un peu tourné la tête..." (p. 102). His tipsiness, however, offers him two causes for a sensation of intense joy. The first is the substitution of the dream for reality made possible here by the artificial stimulation of the alcohol: "Les barrières d'impossibilité qui ferment à nos désirs et à nos rêves le champ de la réalité étaient rompues et sa pensée circulait joyeusement à travers l'irréalisable en s'exaltant de son propre mouvement" (p. 102). The second is this elimination of the limits between himself and others, holding out to him an unexpected possibility of union with them:

Les mystérieuses avenues qu'il y a entre chaque être humain et au fond desquelles se couche peut-être chaque soir un soleil insoupçonné de joie ou de désolation l'attiraient. Chaque personne à qui il pensait lui devenait irrésistiblement sympathique, il prit tour à tour les rues où il pouvait espérer de rencontrer chacune, et si ses provisions s'étaient réalisées, il eût abordé l'inconnu ou l'indifférent sans peur, avec un tressaillement doux. (pp. 102–103).

On top of this, the communion Honoré enjoys is a communion with himself. His sense of well-being is threatened, however, at the midpoint of the narrative, by the sudden recognition of a division within himself, his emotional release all at once intruded upon (the problem is by now a familiar one) by his critical faculties; diminished by the alcohol, his habitual observation of himself (the conscience dédoublée) has
fallen behind the sense of escape from himself. It is only now, be-
lately, catching up with him, threatening to re-enclose him within
the limits of his own mediocrity:

Alors il fut frappé du bruit de sa voix un peu
grossie et exagérée qui répétait depuis un quart
d'heure: "La vie est triste, c'est idiot" (ce
dernier mot était souligné d'un geste sec du bras
droit et il remarqua le brusque mouvement de sa
canne). Il se dit avec tristesse que ces paroles
machinales étaient une bien banale traduction de
pareilles visions qui, pensa-t-il, n'étaient
peut-être pas exprimables.

"Hélas! sans doute l'intensité de mon plaisir
ou de mon regret est seule centuplée, mais le
contenu intellectuel en reste le même. Mon bon-
heur est nerveux, personnel, intraduisible à
d'autres, et si j'écrivais en ce moment, mon
style aurait les mêmes qualités, les mêmes dé-
fauts, hélas! la même médiocrité que d'habitude!"
(p. 103)

The reader of Swann can hardly fail to recognize in this passage
a rehearsal of the later narrator's walk on Swann's way, during which
"Zut, zut, zut," an even less expressive and appropriate characteriza-
tion of his privileged situation than Honoré's "La vie est triste,
c'est idiot," accompanied by a brandishment of his umbrella (the coun-
try walk equivalent of Honoré's Paris cane), serves as the admittedly
"bien banale traduction" of an enthusiasm that stubbornly resists more
precise verbalization. Curiously enough, as the scene evolves in the
Recherche, the narrator's frustration centers on his inability to
discern precisely what his unsatisfactory "Zut, zut, zut" was intended
to express, that is, the mystery of his enthusiasm itself: ";...je
sentis que mon devoir eût été de ne pas m'en tenir à ces mots opaques
et de tâcher de voir plus clair dans mon ravissement."88  His problem is, roughly, one of content. For Honoré, however, the problem is style. He passes rapidly in review his own style, judging it insufficient to express his subject, that is, his personal and untranslatable experience of pleasure or regret, that presumably the right words and their proper poetic disposition could communicate. What he wants to communicate, however, is the experience as is, with its personal and untranslatable nature. As might be expected, Honoré's assessment of the literary problem is the more naïve of the two, failing to recognize that art is a means of, as Proust said in "Contre l'obscurité," rendering clear what is at first only vague and obscure. It is also the position more closely related to the Symbolist and Decadent aesthetics, for its easy acceptance of solipsism and the untranslatable as the necessary subject of literature. Proust has Honoré reflect, in fact, not "mon bonheur est nerveux, personnel, intraduisible à d'autres, mais si j'écrivais en ce moment," but "mon bonheur est nerveux, personnel, intraduisible à d'autres, et si j'écrivais en ce moment." The very fact that during his moments of inebriation Honoré even thinks of writing (a project that would entail more of the kind of self-reflexive activity that the alcohol helps him to escape) jars ever so slightly with his exaltation and loss of self; it registers as a sign of naïveté on the part of his narrator, over-anxious to record his experiences before coming fully to terms with the problem his own subjectivity poses for his writing.

On the other hand, writing crops up here again as a metaphor for Honoré's attraction to alcohol as a transgression (his drunkenness was
cause of his abrupt and ill-mannered self-exclusion from the society of the dinner guests, to whom he dià not so much as say goodbye) and a potential evil. Fortunately for him, the split between his emotions and his intellect is rapidly resolved, again through the intervention of the artificial stimulant: "Mais le bien-être physique qu'il éprouvait le garda d'y penser plus longtemps et lui donna immédiatement la consolation suprême, l'oubli" (p. 103). The conclusion of the narrative, however, portrays Honoré as the center of attention—his own and that of the passersby—on the boulevards of late-night Paris; this is a repetition of the narcissistic infantile union with the mother Proust described in his dedication. Despite the substitution of the expanse of the city and its streets for the closed space of the sickroom, this passage merely displaces the sense of enclosure to the person of Honoré with his incommunicable (closed in upon himself) experience of drunkenness. In a revealing gesture, Honoré opens his overcoat at the end of the story as he resumes his tender thoughts about the strangers he passes. Additionally, as Honoré offers himself as spectacle and partner to the passing strangers, there is added to the original experience a suggestion of promiscuity:

Des gens passaient, à qui il donnait sa sympathie, certain de la réciprocité. Il se sentait leur glorieux point de mire; il ouvrit son paletot pour qu'on vît la blancheur de son habit, qui lui seyait, et l'oeillet rouge sombre de sa boutonnière. Tel il s'offrait à l'admiration des passants, à la tendresse dont il était avec eux en voluptueux commerce. (p. 103)

The dark red flower revealed against the whiteness of Honoré's suit as he opens his coat to his admirers is a fitting image of the
stain of profanation implicit in Honoré's inebriation. In Proust's world, alcohol is a dangerous drug and one associated with transgression and profanation. The child of Combray suffers to see how his grandfather's glass of cognac upsets his grandmother; later, his own medicinal use of alcohol serves as an act of aggression against her. In Les Plaisirs et les jours, the danger of the drug resides in its double nature as both stimulant and depressant. Honoré's experience was of wine as a stimulant; it is only beginning its tranquilizing effects as "Un Dîner en ville" ends. For the jeune fille of "La confession," however, already characterized as an hypertropique, champagne is at once stimulant and a depressant, acting directly upon her nerves and setting her up for the moral situation-limite, with its ambiguities, that is to follow: "Mais le vin de Champagne était si frais que j'en bus encore deux autres verres. Ma tête était devenue très lourde, j'avais à la fois besoin de me reposer et de dépenser mes nerfs" (p. 94). The effect of the wine is a further weakening of the jeune fille's already impaired will-power; the real act of profanation is not her sexual conduct but her drinking: "Ce fut en disant ces paroles, avant même peut-être, en buvant le second verre de vin de Champagne, que je commis l'acte vraiment responsable, l'acte abominable" (p. 94). The abuse of the drug and the consent given to diminished volonté fall firmly within the sphere of Decadent morality and sensibility; Proust describes here the same fault--lack of will power--that he equated with the Decadence in his article on Montesquiou. Moreover, as the self-reflexive conscience of the jeune fille divides her act into ever smaller pieces to locate the true moment of transgression, Proust draws
upon the resources of the *peradis artificiel* to exacerbate the fault and exploit its nature as profanation.

At the same time as the presence of the mother in the Noah's ark sickroom is an exceptional occurrence, representing a transgression of the household ethics, it likewise effects a rewriting of the traditional family structure: it substitutes the son for the father as the mother's partner, an extraordinary fulfillment of the son's Oedipal desires. Similarly abnormal family configurations abound in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*. The father of Alexis in the first *nouvelle* is never mentioned by the narrator; Baldassare is the boy's favorite uncle, his mother's brother-in-law. A subtle sexual tension pervades the tender relationship between Baldassare and Alexis' mother, who watch over each other in their separate encounters with death. It is an ambiguous attraction, permitted by their lack of blood relationship but forbidden by the legal bond of marriage that established them as in-laws; independent of a husband, Alexis' mother is thus also "saved" for her son from the predatory ways of Baldassare, the uncle who, while he might still manifest an interest in sexual adventure even as his body winds down toward death, represents no threat at all to the boy. Baldassare's romantic interlude while visiting the neighboring estate is, at any rate, more of a showcase for Proust's overtly cynical description of the birth and death of passion, painstakingly built up and sweepingly dismissed--

*Ils s'ingénèrent réciproquement à rassurer leurs consciences, ils s'habituent aux remords qui diminuent, au plaisir qui devint aussi moins vif,*
et, quand il retourna en Sylvanie, il ne garda
comme elle qu'un souvenir doux et un peu froid de
ces minutes enflammées et cruelles. (p. 16)

than it is an integral part of the narrative.

Violante of "Violante ou la mondanité," has no parents; they are
done away with in the first paragraph in a violent hunting accident,
stated as a fact, not described. As substitute father, Augustin exer-
cises over Violante a "garde vigilante mais maladroite," (p. 29); his
age further erodes the authority that Violante ultimately rejects by
her departure from Styrie and her entry into society. The society
characters of the Comédie italienne don't have families; they move in
wider and more complex circles of lovers, detractors and admirers.
With Françoise de Bréyves, however, begins a series of widows. Fran-
çoise's husband died four years before the beginning of the period of
her life recounted in "Mélancolique villéggiature de Mme de Bréyves." The
mother of the jeune fille has been in mourning for her husband for
ten years and is only just coming out of her mourning—as announced
by the bit of mauve added to her usual black attire—as the night of
her own death. Her partner at the engagement dinner is another uncle,
cast also in the role of law-giver—"Mon oncle déclara qu'à un moment
comme celui-là, je pouvais faire une exception"—but remembered by the
jeune fille as a sinister figure: "Je revois très bien sa figure gaie
en prononçant ces paroles stupides.... Il me regarda en riant en
disant cela, je bus vite avant d'avoir regardé ma mère dans la crainte
qu'elle ne me le défendît" (p. 94). Finally, Françoise of "La Fin de
la jalousie" is the widow of a certain M. Seaune for whom she had
renounced her aristocratic name of Galaise-Orlandes; the death of her
lover Honoré widows her a second time and she closes her salon for three years to mark her period of mourning.

Maria Paganini has discussed the sexual ambiguity, necessary to the development of the story, that widowhood represents for the heroine of the "Mélancolique villégiature:" Françoise de Breyves is both sexual, by the fact of her marriage, and asexual, since having lost her husband, she is now assumed to be celibate. The case of the widow thus corresponds to that of Baldassare's sister-in-law: once the husband has established his wife's legal status and, occasionally, fathered a child, he is removed from the scene; the wife/widow can then be simultaneously reintroduced to and preserved from sexual temptation, in a repetition of the sinner-saint dualism characterizing the mother in the Noah's ark sickroom. As with illness and the project of combined retreat, the private and morally questionable experience is relieved of its exceptionality by its generalization in fiction.

The elimination of the father is a clearly discernible pattern in Les Plaisirs et les jours. The "Sonate clair de lune," the only piece which overtly opposes the son to the father, serves as a prototype both of this opposition and of the method by which the father is eliminated: "les décisions de mon père" are among the chagrins that disappear when the narrator in the moonlit forest awakes to find the colors of his dream spread out before him. The narrator turns at that point from the male to the female members of the dream family that has become more real to him than his own: "J'appelai par son nom ma sainte mère la nuit, ma tristesse avait reconnu dans la lune sa soeur immortelle, la lune brillait sur les douleurs transfigurées de la nuit et dans mon
coeur, où s'étaient dissipés les nuages, s'était levée la mélancolie" (p. 118). The method of elimination is thus the externalization of fantasy—the equivalent of the triumph of the dream over reality as experienced in the "Sonate."\textsuperscript{91} Caroline Wijsenbeck has pointed out that the solution Proust finds for his "lifelong fixation in the unsolved Oedipus complex and the domination of his life by his yearning for the Paradise Lost of the relation to his mother" is always a solution in fantasy.\textsuperscript{92} The fantasy of literature is for Proust of the Recherche, she says, a complex bundle of guilt, expiation and aesthetic pleasure; his concepts announcing those of the Freudian school, the work of art functions for him as "an expiation in fantasy reenactment of the original sin [here, the wish to eliminate the father] in a form that affords aesthetic pleasure and in such disguise that others are able unconsciously to live through the same psychic process, thus affording them a temporary freedom from repression together with the satisfaction of their sense of beauty."\textsuperscript{93}

We will be able to point out later a particularly successful example of disguised sexual and aesthetic pleasure in the prose poem "Coucher de soleil intérieur" of the Regrets.\textsuperscript{94} More pertinent, however, Proust's fantasy of the absence of the father, this aesthetically pleasurable distortion of the family, demonstrates once more a significant relationship between Les Plaisirs et les jours and the Decadence. In La Révolution du langage poétique, Julia Kristeva argues that the defeat of 1870 ushered in a series of attacks in fin-de-siècle France against the authoritarian image of the father in politics and in the
family; this process of emasculation was part of the general sense of decadence in the society, humiliated by the Prussian victory:

La destruction des institutions féodales, que consacre définitivement la chute de Napoléon III ... s'accompagne d'une mise en cause de la société patrilinéaire qui domine la société de classe. Le renversement du Monarque et son remplacement par l'État ne marquent pourtant qu'un chancellement du pouvoir paternel, non pas son renversement: l'État bourgeois, on l'a dit, transpose en la multipliant ensembles faussement autonomes, l'instance para-noïde du chef. Malgré ce maintien du pouvoir ... il reste que sa fallacité, apparue au niveau étatique durant la guerre de 1870, se ressent dans toutes les cellules de la société et jusqu'à sa base, jusqu'à l'État dans l'État, la Famille. Là, c'est le pouvoir du Père géniteur qui est mis en cause: la loi, votée en 1884, qui institue le divorce, enregistre cette mise en cause du pouvoir paternel et de la solidité de la cellule familiale. 95

With the accompanying repression in the bourgeois society, she continues, of sexuality and procreation as pure *jouissance*, as a "dépense" unrelated to economic production (the assumption here is that an industrialized society has less need of progeny to carry on the family work than has an agricultural society dependent upon the family farm) the function of the father is emptied of its real content of power to become a largely symbolic function, maintaining itself on the level of the symbolic:

A l'instar du pouvoir exécutif ou du parlement, le pouvoir paternel est maintenu comme pouvoir de représentation: le Père représente la reproduction dont la véritable détentrice est la mère; la fonction paternelle apparaît en conséquence, comme symbolique donc relativisée, mais néanmoins contraignante. Le fait d'être conscient que le pouvoir paternel est de l'ordre de la représentation, n'empêche pas que ce pouvoir soit maintenu. Comment?—Symboliquement,
The suppression from Proust's first book (his first outing as author/creator/genitor in his own right) of the father figure is his assumption of this very situation for his family and fantasy life: literary creativity is the "real" procreation undertaken on the symbolic level in union with the figure of the mother (in the sickroom/ark or collaborating on translations of Ruskin), while to the father is reserved a purely formal productivity: the economic gain through his work that finances the "dépense" of the son. It is not incidental to this that a major source of tension between Proust and his father was Marcel's handling of (Dr. Proust's) money, particularly the "dépense inutile" of the young man's extravagant tips. 97

Set upon the final disappearance of an already extenuated race, the Decadent aesthetic allows little room for procreation by real mothers and real fathers. The rejection of the parents therefore exaggerates the perceived emasculation of society and the race into a deliberate celebration of effeminacy (as in the person of the dandy, or in the cult of the "feminine" ailment of nervous susceptibility that replaces heroism and virility as a standard of male conduct), that assures infecundity among the women deprived of their males and eventually denies the sexuality of the women themselves. In Louÿs' Aphrodite, for example, Démétrios enjoys in a dream the favors of the beautiful courtesan Chrysis, only to reject the same favors when she offers them in person; it is only after her death that he again desires her—not as a living and possibly fertile woman, but as a statue,
"sorte de monstre barbare" that he molds first in clay, then in marble, a fetishist displacement of eroticism from the woman (always a potential mother or producer) to the non-productive objet d'art. As for the pallid and consumptive women of the Decadence—Des Esseintes' mother or Cécile of Edouard Rod's *La Course à la mort*—they are at one and the same time attractive, alluring, untouchable and punished for the sins of their mothers.

Proust's treatment of the family in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* represents a similar attempt to arrest the processes of procreation, as he consistently denies sexual partners to his women and punishes all of the parents in his book—Alexis' mother, Violante's father and mother, the mother of the jeune fille—with violent accidents. He does all of this, one might say, to keep his mother to himself. But lurking just below the surface there is also a pronounced fear of sex, a neurotic equation of sex with death (from the sickroom/womb there emerges a death-in-life) which accounts for the ambiguity of the mother's own sexuality. Inaccessible to her son's desire, she is pure and blameless, beyond sexual contamination; as a progenitor, however, the father's lover, she is guilty of sex and thus threatened by death. It is with some sense of desperation, then, that Proust multiplies in his book the uncles and the widows, the brothers and the sisters-in-law, exposing them to temptation and yet keeping them from it, seeming to call for a halt to the procreation, and asking in his representations of *fils* and *filles uniques*, that, if he can't undo his mother's original sin, he at least be allowed to remain the end of the family line.
The Omnipotence of Thought

The exhaustion of the race celebrated by the Decadents—with its symptoms of physical weakness, lack of will, and a nervous hypersensitivity that accompanies and manifests itself in extremes of aesthetic refinement—went already in the nineteenth century by the name of neurosis, as Jacques Lethève has written first of the affliction—"Nés trop tard, les individus du XIXe siècle n'ont plus la robuste santé des primitifs; menés par leurs nerfs, ce sont des névrosés, terme nouveau dont la fortune sera considérable"—and then of its principal literary manifestation in A. Rebours:

L'histoire du héros Des Esseintes s'incrit nettement dans la suite des traités sur la névrose. Car la structure du livre repose sur une étude pathologique, celle d'un noble tare ... Huysmans de son côté affirmait avoir en l'écrivant, exaspéré sa "personelle névrose": c'est donc l'histoire d'un névrosé par un névrosé. 100

The same term has frequently been called upon to describe Proust's own psychological peculiarities, as in a recent clinical examination of Proust, Maladies of Marcel Proust: Doctors and Disease in his Life and Work, in which Dr. Bernard Straus writes of Proust's highly refined sensibilities:

Proust may be said to be an ultrarefined seeker of the very essence of experience, with self-awareness and an ability to articulate that awareness. It is not so much that Proust is essentially flawed, it is that he is extreme—in his relationships, in his unhappiness, in his self-doubt, in his insecurities. This is his neurosis, of which narcissism is one expression.... In his view, everything becomes flawed. All his friends, finally, are flawed by triviality or vulgarity, inversion or perversion, by homosexuality or sadomasochism, just as Proust himself was so flawed....
Analyzing the importance of the scene of the mother's goodnight kiss in *Swann*, Bardèche likewise speaks of Proust as a neurotic, victim of a psychological disturbance as powerful and obsessive as a drug addiction.

... la maladie de Marcel Proust, ce n'est pas seulement cet asthme qui le condamnera à une vie anormale, mais c'est aussi, c'est surtout une maladie mentale, qui fera de lui pendant toute sa vie le prisonnier de sa soif, de chacune de ses soifs, et aussi de son imagination.... Et il veut que nous sachions par cette action révélatrice ce qui commande toute sa vie comme un symbole, qu'il est, qu'il ne sera jamais qu'un homme qui réagit comme un drogué. Et le mot ... qui revient si souvent chez lui ... et qui est le mot-clé qui explique pour lui l'amour, la jalousie, c'est le mot des drogués, c'est l'apaisement. 102

For *Les Plaisirs et les jours* themselves, Edmund Wilson has suggested that the chief interest of their nouvelles for Proust and for the reader, lies in their status as "case histories" of "neurotic psychology;" failing to draw out the correspondance between such an interest and Decadent aesthetics, Wilson goes on to interpret *Les Plaisirs et les jours* as a "realist" exercise (by "realist," he presumably means "naturalist") merely masquerading as "fin de siècle sensibility" and as "déliquescent Romanticism."103

The notion of representation establishes the basic affinity between *Les Plaisirs et les jours* and Decadent aesthetics; it organizes the Decadent configurations in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* of illness and death, dreams, drunkenness, and the fatherless family. In each of these instances, what takes place is the substitution of an "artificial" reality for a "natural" one; subjective invention is valued at the expense of objective reality.
The overvaluation of the subjective divorced from objective reality is the dominant trait of neurosis, defined as a disorder of the representative processes. According to Pierre Trotignon's exposé, "Réflexions métaphysiques sur le concept de la représentation," the process of representation is a process of substitution; representation is first and foremost "l'activité qui unit un être A à quelque autre réalité X," such that X becomes the mental representation of A, regardless of whatever resemblance there may or may not exist. In "healthy" or normal psychic activity, representation is a life-preserving activity for the organism, providing it with continuous feedback about its environment. Such a process serves, Trotignon postulates, to resolve an internal tension between the organism's primary state of uncertainty and its need to interreact with its surroundings; in a formulation surprisingly similar to Schopenhauer's, he speaks of the organism's "volonté logique," an impulsion to go after data from the environment and organize the data into representations and signs (signs are representations that signify, as well as substitute for, the "other reality X"), in order to maintain the life of the organism. It is language finally, that bridges the gap between the internal world of the subject's representations and the external world that is represented, inscribed as it were, in the subject's mind: "le langage abolit la distinction de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur et l'accord des mots et des choses s'instaure, train ordinaire de notre existence."105

The question is thus one of balance between an inside and an outside, the subject existing as a kind of membrane between the outside world of reality and the inner world of his own representations.
Neurosis, as Freud discusses it in *Totem and Taboo*, is an upsetting of that balance, similar to what happens in primitive magic. In both imitative and contagious magic, writes Freud, reality is acted upon through an indirect means of representation: in the former, the subject seeks to bring about gratification of a desire by acting out the desired result (voodoo with its injuries inflicted upon effigies is a familiar type of imitative magic), while in the latter, an association of ideas is employed to provoke the desired result, as in the practice of caring for a wound by attention to the weapon that inflicted it. Both kinds of magic are manifestations of the primitives' belief in the omnipotence of thought:

...theirs is an attitude towards the world which according to our understanding of the relation of reality to thought must appear like an over-estimation of the latter. Objects as such are overshadowed by the ideas representing them; what takes place in the latter must also happen to the former, and the relations which exist between ideas are also postulated as to things.... In the animistic age the reflection of the inner world must obscure that other picture of the world which we believe we recognize. 106

The case of the neurotic is analogous to that of the primitive with his belief in magic, Freud continues, explaining neurosis as the result of a similar disruption of the relative values and functioning of representation and reality:

In every one of the neuroses it is not the reality of the experience but the reality of the thought which forms the basis for the symptom formation. Neurotics live in a special world in which ... only the "neurotic standard of currency" counts, that is to say, only intensely thought of or affectively conceived are effective with them, regardless of whether these
things are in harmony with outer reality.... Thus the omnipotence of thought, the overestimation of psychic processes as opposed to reality, proves to be of unlimited effect in the neurotic's affective life and in all that emanates from it. 107

Neurotic inhibitions, therefore, have to do primarily with actions—the Decadent manque de volonté which can now also be seen as a perversion of the feedback process maintaining the life of the organism—for as Freud repeats later, in the neurotic "the thought is a complete substitute for the deed." 108

Lord Henry Wotton's admonition to Dorian Gray in the opening pages of Oscar Wilde's novel that "the great events of the world take place in the brain" 109 is one literary manifestation of the theories on neurotic representation as Freud would develop them. Another is Huysmans' A Rebours, in which Des Esseintes deliberately provokes, through such stimulants as whisky and a particular type of losenge, correspondences between a present physical sensation and a past memory; the scenes which then unfold in his mind—a visit to the dentist, a scene with a former mistress—are presented in the novel as events equivalent in their "reality" to the description of Des Esseintes' library or his accumulation of rare gems and flowers. These imagined scenes of A Rebours, (those, that is, that take place entirely in Des Esseintes' mind) do, in fact, come across to the reader as more "real," in the context of the novel, than do the lists and descriptions which serve as its "plot," since it is in these scenes that one finds the action, adventure, love and character development that are the usual concerns of novels. Des Esseintes' one excursion out of his retreat at Fontenay—his famous trip to London realized totally in his imagination, aided by the rain
in Paris, the very British atmosphere of the bookstore, and the meal over which he lingers while deciding to miss his train—"is again evidence of his contentment with a purely "neurotic standard of currency;" Des Esseintes reflects upon his trip, "A quoi bon bouger, quand on peut voyager si magnifiquement sur une chaise." His imagined trip has in fact been so real to him that he returns home to Fontenay, the very evening of his day of departure "ressentant l'éreintement physique et la fatigue morale d'un homme qui rejoint son chez soi, après un long et périlleux voyage." The ability to voyage in such a way, the ability to elevate oneself from physical reality to the superior level of mental representations is to Des Esseintes both an art and proof of his own superiority among men:

Le tout est de savoir s'y prendre, de savoir concentrer son esprit sur un seul point, de savoir s'abstraire suffisamment pour amener l'hallucination et pouvoir substituer le rêve de la réalité à la réalité même.

Au reste, l'artifice paraissait à des Esseintes la marque distinctive du génie de l'homme. 112

Des Esseintes' experience in the world of representations foreshadows in an uncanny way the experiences that will come to be most closely identified with the Proust of the Recherche: the resurrection of past experience through a present physical sensation also experienced in the past, as well as the disappointment that reality inevitably reserves for the fervent dreamer. Yet in Les Plaisirs et les jours, thought too is omnipotent: it can be a substitute for action, as the grave Augustin explains to Violante, "J'ai pensé et c'est tout vivre!" (p. 35). Many of the heroes and heroines of Les Plaisirs et les jours,
such as the child desperately in love with a girl he rarely sees, who attempts to kill himself after a lengthy interview with her (Regret VI) prefer their dreams and their fantasies to a reality that most often contradicts their subjective representations of it.

Baldassare Silvande's protracted agony in the first nouvelle is also an extended bout with the appeal and seduction of fantasy. Stimulated by the approach of death, Baldassare frequently gives himself over to representation. He is enclosed in the château and immobilized in his paralysis, and so he allows reality to fade before his inner visions of what his death will be like, returning again and again to the perverse satisfaction those visions provide:

Il éprouvait à parer son corps dolent, à accouder sa résignation à la fenêtre en regardant la mer, une joie mélancolique. Il environnait des images de ce monde dont il était encore tout plein, mais que l'éloignement, en l'en détachant déjà, lui rendait vagues et belles, la scène de sa mort, depuis long-temps préméditée mais sans cesse retouchée ainsi qu'une oeuvre d'art, avec une tristesse ardente. (p. 18)

His favorite vision is that of his last meeting with "sa grande amie platonique," the Duchess Oliviane; as Baldassare spins out this fantasy, the "oeuvre d'art" identifies itself as a novel, of which Baldassare fancies himself the languorous hero, rememorating with exquisite sensitivity his relation with the Duchess and taking care to set the scene in a voluptuous and melancholy country evening:

...Le soleil était couché, et la mer qu'on apercevait à travers les pommiers était mauve. Légers comme de claires couronnes flétées et persistants comme des regrets, de petits nuages bleus et roses flottaient à l'horizon. Une file mélancolique
de peupliers plongeait dans l'ombre, la tête résignée dans un rose d'église; les derniers rayons, sans toucher leurs troncs, teignaient leurs branches, accrochant à ces balustrades d'ombre des guirlandes de lumière. La brise mêlait les trois odeurs de la mer, des feuilles humides et du lait. Jamais la campagne de Sylvanie n'avait adouci de plus de volupté la mélancolie du soir.

"Je vous ai beaucoup aimé, mais je vous ai peu donné, mon pauvre ami," lui dit-elle.

"—Que dites-vous, Oliviane? Comment, vous m'avez peu donné? Vous m'avez d'autant plus donné que je vous demandais moins et bien plus en vérité que si les sens avaient eu quelque part dans notre ten- dresse.... Chère amie, donnez-moi vos mains que je les baise..." (p. 19)

Naturally, the reality of Oliviane's visit contradicts the gracious harmony in which his imaginings had enveloped it: the Duchess arrives at ten o'clock on a grey and rainy morning, and Baldassare, no longer under the charm of his death scene as he had once imagined it, refuses to see her.

What has happened in the interim is that his sister-in-law's accident has made death "real" for Baldassare, externalizing it in the person of his sister-in-law; watching over her night after night, Baldassare has looked death in the eye and stared it down: "Quand la mort était venue à lui peu à peu il n'avait pas voulu la voir; maintenant il s'était trouvé subitement en sa présence. Elle l'avait épouvanté en menaçant ce qu'il avait de plus cher; il l'avait suppliée, il l'avait fléchie" (p. 22). The result is his renunciation as a profanation of the fantasies he had formerly enjoyed:

C'était la mort maintenant qu'il regardait en face, et non les scènes qui entoureraient sa mort. Il voulait rester tel jusqu'à la fin, ne plus être
repris par le mensonge, qui, en voulant lui faire
une belle et célèbre agonie, aurait mis le comble à
ses profanations en souillant les mystères de sa
mort comme il lui avait dérobé les mystères de sa
vie. (p. 22)

Baldassare hallucinates wildly and violently for a period of sev-
eral days before his death; for this delirium, so embarrassingly dif-
ferent from a "belle et célèbre agonie," he apologizes sincerely, yet
the narrator hastens to assure us that these particular hallucinations
were the result of the fever and thus not Baldassare's fault:

Ces anges exterminateurs qu'on appelle Volonté,
Fensée, n'étaient plus là pour faire rentrer dans
l'ombre les mauvais esprits de ses sens et les
basses émanations de sa mémoire. Au bout de trois
jours, vers cinq heures, il se réveilla comme d'un
mauvais rêve dont on n'est pas responsable, mais
dont on se souvient vaguement. (p. 25)

Responsably or not, however, at the moment of his own death, Baldassare
fails to look death in the eye as he had thought he could. Reposing
in the salon with its view of the sea on one side and the fields on
the other, Baldassare turns away from the tempting distraction of the
departure of a ship; he can supply in his mind's eye the details of
that scene: "Baldassare ne distinguait pas les gens debout sur le
pont qui levaient des mouchoirs, mais il devinait la soif d'inconnu
qui altérait leurs yeux..." (p. 26). He prefers to contemplate the
fields, only to have the real scene before him intruded upon by fan-
tasy: "Il regarda les champs, mais il entendait encore le cri d'adieu
poussé sur le trois-mâts, et il voyait le mousse, la pipe entre les
dents, qui tendait ses filets" (p. 27).
In the final moments of Baldassare's life, the sound of the Angelus bell through the open windows triggers his final lapse into a spontaneous fantasy, fruit of a long habit of such lapses:

C'était une voix présente et bien ancienne; maintenant il entendait son cœur battre avec leur vol harmonieux, suspendu au moment où [les cloches] semblent aspirer le son, et s'exhalant après longuement et faiblement avec elles. A toutes les époques de sa vie, dès qu'il entendait le son lointain des cloches, il se rappelait malgré lui leur douceur dans l'air du soir, quand, petit enfant encore, il rentrait au château, par les champs. (p. 27)

It is at this precise moment that the doctor declares the final approach of death; rather than concentrating on the reality of death, as Baldassare had promised himself he would do, he is immersed in his own vivid representations of his mother and his childhood, prompted by the sound of the bells:

Il revit sa mère quand elle l'embrassait en rentrant, puis quand elle le couchait le soir et réchauffait ses pieds dans ses mains, restant près de lui s'il ne pouvait pas s'endormir; il se rappela son Robinson Crusoe et les soirées au jardin quand sa sœur chantait, les paroles de son précepteur qui prédisait qu'il serait un jour un grand musicien, et l'émotion de sa mère alors, qu'elle s'efforçait en vain de cacher. Maintenant il n'était plus temps de réaliser l'attente passionnée de sa mère et de sa sœur qu'il avait si cruellement trompée. Il revit le grand tilleul sous lequel il s'était fiancé et le jour de la rupture de ses fiançailles, où sa mère seule avait su le consoler. Il crut embrasser sa vieille bonne et tenir son premier violon. Il revit tout cela dans un lointain lumineux, doux et triste comme celui que les fenêtres du côté des champs regardaient sans le voir. (p. 27)
Baldassare expires as this series of visions concludes; Proust underscores brilliantly with a well-placed reference to time, the totally subjective character of Baldassare's representations, existing as they do on another plane of experience from that of Baldassare's companions in the text, and from that of the reader for whom Baldassare, his visions, and the characters around him are all mere literary representations. Having dwelt at length on Baldassare's final visions, Proust contrasts the distance in time between Baldassare's present and his past, eliminated by his representations, the time it took for the narrator to recount them in the story, and the actual elapsed time in the chronology of the narrative: "Il revit tout cela," he writes, "et pourtant deux secondes ne s'étaient pas écoulées depuis que le docteur écoutant son coeur avait dit: 'C'est la fin!'" (p. 27). A second significant characteristic of Baldassare's representations is that they center on the female members of his family, particularly on his mother. There thus recurs the seemingly inevitable conjunction in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* between profanation and the image of the mother, as it is the vivid memory of her that interferes with Baldassare's direct vision of death.

Others of the pieces of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* represent the power of fantasy to overwhelm real life. The story of "L'Etranger" is that of a phantasm, Dominique's soul materializing before him to reproach Dominique for his neglect of solitude. The stranger appears first as the ghost of someone Dominique has murdered—"Jamais [Dominique] n'avait entendu cette voix, et pourtant la reconnaissait si bien, ses remords reconnaissaient si bien la voix d'une victime, d'une noble
victime immolée" (p. 126). Later, as he attempts to recount to his supper guests the details of the stranger's visit, the general conclusion is that Dominique himself had engendered the vision:

...Dominique voulut raconter son entretien avec le visiteur disparu, mais devant l'ennui général et la visible fatigue du maître de la maison à se rappeler un rêve presque effacé, Girolamo l'interrompit à la satisfaction de tous et de Dominique lui-même en tirant cette conclusion:

"Il ne faut jamais rester seul, la solitude engendre la mélancolie." (p. 127)

His brush with fantasy has nonetheless altered his perception of reality, casting a shadow of ambivalence over what had once been his pleasure in his guests: "Dominique causait gaiement mais sans joie, flatté pourtant de la brillante assistance" (p. 127).

"Présence réelle" relates at length a fantasm of presence-in-absence in which nature, up to a point, acquiesces. In the story, the narrator's desire for his beloved brings her mysteriously to life for his excursions in the mountains around the "lost village" of Engadine. The theme of the couple is announced in the narrator's reflection on the name of the village itself with its conjuncture of German and Italian sounds: "Engadine au nom deux fois doux: le rêve des sonorités allemandes s'y mourait dans la volupté des syllabes italiennes" (p. 134). This reflection, announcing those later to be elaborated in the section of Swann entitled Noms de pays: le nom, is purely subjective; the sonorities of the name, resonating in the narrator's consciousness, set the stage for the description that follows of a personal and singular experience to which the narrator's imagination,
Nous nous sommes aimés dans un village perdu d'Engadine.... Oublierons-nous jamais les promenades au bord du lac de Sils-Maria, quand l'après-midi finissait, à six heures? ... Un soir l'heure nous fut particulièrement propice ... nous fîmes un mouvement, nous venions de voir un petit papillon rose, puis deux, puis cinq, quitter les fleurs de notre rive et voltiger au-dessus du lac.... Notre âme devenue scnore écoutait en leur vol silencieux une musique de charme et de liberté et toutes les douces harmonies intenses du lac, des bois, du ciel et de notre propre vie l'accompagnaient avec une douceur magique qui nous fit fondre en larmes. (pp. 134-135)

The Proustian "rhetoric of absence" accompanying the image of Noah's ark should be a tip-off to the irony of the title of this narrative: "Présence réelle" should, and does in fact, describe not the presence but the absence of the "tu." Yet the "tu" and the "nous" forms are maintained matter-of-factly throughout the narration, the representation of the beloved in her absence equalling and then de-passing the reality of the lover's solitude. The narrator asks, "...se peut-il qu'un sûr instinct, mystérieux messager, ne t'ait pas avertie de ces enfantillages où tu fus si étroitement mêlée, que tu vécus, oui, vraiment vécus, tant tu avais en moi une 'présence réelle'"? (p. 135).

"Présence réelle" is a frequent concept in Proust's letters to his friends, signifying the superiority of imagined to real presence between friends; the paradox of presence-in-absence comes from the ecclesiastical use of "présence réelle," for the phenomenon of transubstantiation in the Eucharist; Proust was well aware of this and substantiated his own use of "présence réelle" with it. The related
phrase "matérielles espèces," another reference to Eucharist, also occurs in "Présence réelle." In Proust's narrative, the interplay between dream and reality, the beloved's simultaneous absence and presence, is wrapped neatly and inversely around the ascent and descent of the Alpgrun mountain. The ascent is as towards a dream—the narrator and his (imagined) beloved have been told that from the peak of the mountain they will be able to see as far as Italy, a country which neither had yet ever seen. As they set off up the mountain, then, it is not the beloved's presence that is in question, but the possibility of seeing from the summit the landscape of which they have only dreamed:

... dans le spectacle étendu devant le pic, là où commencerait l'Italie, le paysage réel et dur cesserait brusquement et [il] s'ouvrirait dans un fond de rêve une vallée toute bleue. En route, nous nous rappelâmes qu'une frontière ne change pas le sol et que si même il changeait, ce serait trop insensiblement pour que nous puissions le remarquer ainsi, tout d'un coup. Un peu déçus, nous riions pourtant d'avoir été si petits enfants tout à l'heure. (p. 136)

At the top of the mountain, however, the real and the imagined change positions: a frontier—the one separating the internal world of the subject from the external world of reality in the inside/outside model that demonstrates normal and neurotic processes of representation—is crossed:

... en arrivant au sommet, nous restâmes éblouis. Notre enfantine imagination était devant nos yeux réalisée. A côté de nous, des glaciers étincelaient. A nos pieds des torrents sillonnaient un sauvage pays d'Engadine d'un vert sombre. Puis une colline un peu mystérieuse; et après des pentes mauves entrouvriraient et fermaient tou[r] à tour une vraie contrée bleue, une étincelante avenue vers l'Italie. (p. 136)
As the narrator further explores the summit, wrapped up in his fantasy of the beloved's presence, a singularly beautiful and isolated spot, perfect for making love, brings him up sharply against the physical impossibility of the act in the beloved's absence; the "nous" is suddenly reduced to a "je," and the intensity of desire is identified as the impetus for the fantasy:

Je sentis alors vraiment à fond la tristesse de ne t'avoir pas avec moi sans tes matérielles espèces, autrement que sous la robe de mon regret, en la réalité de mon désir. (p. 136)

The descent from the mountain begins at that point; while at its peak, the dream country had materialized, that is the fantasy that had revealed itself a fantasy of presence conceived in absence. The narrator stops part of the way down the mountain, but still close to the summit and thus to the pivotal point of the presence-absence dilemma, to enter an isolated inn: the sudden enclosure motif recalls the enclosure of Noah's ark and its dual promise of the mother's presence and heightened perception by the mind's eye. At the inn, the narrator inscribes his name in the guest book with, next to his own name, "une combinaison de lettres qui était une allusion au tien" (p. 136). His scribbling is an act of representative magic, an attempt to resurrect the material, real, quality of his fantasy that he had enjoyed up to that moment on the mountain top when this materiality had vanished in the face of overwhelming physical desire. The act of writing also serves as compensation for the impossible act of love, as the narrator explains in terms of relief and release, the exteriorisation of
an internal burden of fantasy: "...il m'était impossible alors de ne pas me donner une preuve matérielle de la réalité de ton voisinage spirituel. En mettant un peu de toi sur ce livre il me semblait que je me soulageais d'autant du poids obsédant dont tu étouffais mon âme" (p. 136). The act is doubly representative in its magic, for it then calls into play the sacredness of literature, and the pact between author and reader by which the written word summons (makes present) the future reader, to bring about the fulfillment of the narrator's cherished hope: "Et puis," writes the narrator, "J'avais l'immense espoir de te mener un jour là, lire cette ligne; ensuite tu monterais avec moi plus haut encore me venger de toute cette tristesse" (p. 136).

The tense changes after the semicolon in this sentence from the imperfect to the conditional; the latter is the tense of projects and dream conceived of as hypothetical (non-real); it substitutes for the "real" imperfects and passé simples of the preceding passages in which the beloved was thought to be, and was therefore described as, materially present to the narrator. The fantasy of the "return" to Engadine with the beloved then continues in the conditional along the same pattern of ascent and retreat to an out-of-the-way place that marked the narrator's original adventure, before it breaks off with a change from the conditional into a past conditional:

Le montée te ferait ralentir tes pas, un peu souffler et ma figure s'approcherait pour sentir ton souffle: nous serions fous. Nous irions aussi là où un lac blanc est à côté d'un lac noir doux comme une perle blanche à côté d'un perle noire. Que nous nous serions aimés dans un village perdu d'Engadine! (p. 137) 115
The narration thus concludes with a rephrasing of the opening sentence "Nous nous sommes aimés dans un village perdu d'Engadine," a more accurate representation of the narrator's experience of presence and absence that summarizes the development and the loss of the fantasy.

Ninette Bailey has pointed out that the juxtapositioning of black and white in Les Plaisirs et les jours, such as for the two lakes in "Présence réelle," is always resolved in an impression of douceur; the juxtaposition and its resolution here are the same, she says, as that found in the "Sonate clair de lune" in which Proust's "rêverie chromatique" draws a peaceful and soothing effect from a violent contrast between light and shadow. Bailey reads into this process of contrasting and reconciling opposites a number of real-life concerns that the young Proust apparently hoped to satisfy through artistic representation, suggesting that,

Au-delà des jeux visuels, la lumière et l'ombre de cet éclairage symbolique [dans la "Sonate"] lui appartiennent, en s'unissant, un gage de réconciliation possible entre les tendances contradictoires que le jeune auteur de Les Plaisirs et les Jours devait sentir en lui: penchant à la paresse et besoin du travail, attirance vers la pureté et tentation du vice. 116

Resolved sexual tension, the peaceful and sweet coexistence of purity and desire, may indeed be what is expressed in "Présence réelle" by the image of the black and white lakes. For, as the narrator recounts his fantasy as a conditional past, a would-have-been, the love affair has now run its course, he has had his fill of the beloved, entirely in his mind: "...je ne me soucie plus de toi: La satiété est venue avant la possession. L'amour platonique lui-même ["ideal" love, lived
in ideas only] a ses saturations" (p. 137). Bailey suggests in her study that the special function of black and white in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* is to symbolize, beyond the personal concerns of the author, a particular desire for the aesthetic resolution of opposites—this corroborates Proust's claim to have "dreamt" rather than "composed" his book, as it refers also to the reconciled polarities of presence and absence in "Présence réelle." Bailey concludes her analysis:

...qu'ils aient droit ou pas à compter parmi les couleurs, le blanc et le noir, dans ce recueil, tiennent leur importance conjointement, du fait qu'ils se situent symboliquement aux deux extrémités de l'échelle des couleurs. Et Proust, avant d'apprendre à se laisser séduire par leurs effets visuels, a d'abord rêvé par eux la réconciliation des contraires. Son livre inaugural permet d'établir l'antériorité et la primauté de cette démarche onirique. 117

Even beyond the use of color in this narrative, however, names, most especially the place names with the combined Italian and German sonorities appropriate to their geographical and psychological situation as "frontier" towns, speak of the contrast between representation and reality that "Présence réelle" relates and of its resolution through its representation as literature. The perceived phonological duality of Engadine introduces the theme of the (subjective) couple; the places seen from the top of the mountain, in that interval between the perception of the dream country as real and the loss of the fantasy's material quality, have all Italian names—Poschiano, Verone, Viola—names that "s'harmonisaient avec cette suavité nouvelle" (p. 136). A woman's name scribbled illegibly in a guest register is a means of reawakening the fantasy as real; the sight of the formerly
beloved, says the narrator at the end, "...ne garde pour moi qu'un charme, celui de me rappeler tout à coup ces noms d'une douceur et rouge, allemande et italienne: Sils-Maria, Silva Plana, Crestalta, Samaden, Celerina, Juliers, val de Viola" (p. 137). An extreme attentiveness to the suggestive power and meaning of names is among the traits associated with the belief in the omnipotence of thought; here at the conclusion of "Présence réelle," Proust again describes the interchange between representation and reality that remains as the result of this "platonic," (imagined) love affair. It is not a setting in nature that the narrator and the beloved had known together that comes to represent the beloved, as is the case, for example, in the elegies to lost love the Romantics set in nature. Rather, it is the beloved who comes to represent the setting "que, sans le comprendre et même le connaître, tu m'évoques avec une fidélité si touchante" (p. 137). And it is not really the natural setting that she represents, but more specifically, the names that represent the places in or near which the narrator imagined her, while even at that, the names represent not the places but the narrator's impressions of the names, their "douceur allemande et italienne." Everything begins and ends solely in the narrator's mind. As his "widening gyre" of representations thus spins farther and farther outward from an unidentifiable center—only one adjective, "mélée," identifies the beloved at all, and then just by her gender—rather, the names of the countryside that have called forth the story, the narrator elaborates a purely affective standard of currency, persistently rejecting—despite the deep regret
and sadness of the text's middle passages—material reality for subjective representation.

The short story "Mélancolique villégiature de Mme de Breyves" is perhaps the best illustration in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* of neurotic entrapment and complacency in a world of pure representation that clings by the most slender of threads to external reality. In fact, this story, whose subject Bardèche has described as "l'insidieux travail de l'imagination," could probably be counted as one of those "case histories" to which Edmund Wilson referred, for in it the heroine undergoes a slow process of degeneration, a dépérissement that heralds that of Swann in love (although as yet without the torture of jealousy) brought on by a passion conceived and sustained entirely in her own mind.

The narrator of "Présence réelle," writing in the first person and caught up in his own solipsism, was little concerned with the question of what resemblance, if any, existed between reality and his representations. The poignancy of Mme de Breyves' experience, however, and the yardstick by which the reader is invited to measure the extent of her dégénérescence, comes from the difference between what is and what she wishes or believes to be. (That Françoise herself perceives this difference in her moments of lucidity adds to her torments that of the conscience dédoublée.) In other words, her neurosis makes of that brief interval between representation (simple substitution of A for X) and signification (the next mental step, that accepts A as meaning X), a yawning gap that allows ample room for perversion of the whole process: the neurosis deliberately eliminates resemblance to
reality as a criterion for representations, and allows the systematic elaboration of a "neurotic standard of currency." Or, as Foucault's model suggests by its insistence on discernment, the perception of difference, as the distinguishing characteristic of scientific over pre-scientific thought, Françoise de Breyves' neurosis scrambles difference and resemblance to create for her a world governed by magic and analogy. She is careful only to keep her representations faithful to themselves; her occasional perception of their difference from reality is immediately recuperated by the intensity of her desire to serve as further stimulus to the fantasies that respond to her desire.

The plot of her story is simple and straightforward. At one of the last soirées of the social season, she finds herself the object of an unattractive and reputedly unintelligent young nobleman's attention. She flirts with him discretely and harmlessly, but refuses to allow him to be presented to her; in the vestibule at the end of the evening, she is shocked to hear him propose that she visit him at his home. Her indifference to Jacques de Laléande is such, however, that she promptly forgets the entire evening, until the end of the season and Laléande's departure for Biarritz turns her indifference into a sudden desperate passion by frustrating her increasingly ingenious attempts to see him again. Françoise recognizes that she has fallen in love with a man she does not even know, and so, imitating the pattern of retreat common in Les Plaisirs et les jours, she retires to her country estate and thence to a "mélancolique villégiature" at Trouville, to nourish her groundless love on music and a photograph of Biarritz, in the end refusing to allow the concerned narrator to fetch
Laléande from Biarritz and thus prevent her from pining endlessly away. We understand that she in fact prefers to pine away, for the story ends on the note of melancholy promised by the title and summed up in a memory of lost opportunity:

Si, se promenant sur la plage ou dans les bois elle laisse un plaisir de contemplation ou de rêverie, moins que cela une bonne odeur, un chant que la brise apporte et voile, doucement la gagner, lui faire pendant un instant oublier son mal, elle sent subi
tement dans un grand coup au coeur une blessure dou-
loureuse et, plus haut que les vagues ou que les feuilles, dans l'incertitude de l'horizon sylvestre ou marin, elle aperçoit l'indécise image de son invisible et présent vainqueur qui, les yeux bril-
lant à travers les nuages comme le jour où il s'offrit à elle, s'enfuit avec le carquois dont il vient encore de lui décocher une flèche. (p. 77)

As a study of representation, however, the story is much more complex. In the first place, the resemblance between Françoise's rep-
resentations and reality is something of a moot point. Jacques de Laléande is in the text another center that does not hold; his charac-
terization is a masterpiece of indirect presentation and sleight-of-
hand. According to the text, Françoise has seen Laléande "seulement deux ou trois fois et pendant quelques instants" (p. 77); from time to time she forgets what he looks like and, by the time she realizes she is in love, she has in fact completely forgotten that her first impres-
sion of him was largely unfavorable. As if to encourage sympathy for Françoise's plight and to generalize her situation, the narrator con-
sistently denies the reader any first-hand knowledge of Jacques. Fran-
çoise's friend Geneviève pronounces him "insignifiant et ennuyeux" (p. 67) and Françoise agrees that he is "un peu laid du reste et vul-
gaire, malgré d'assez beaux yeux" (p. 67). The narrator lets Jacques
himself state his address as 5 rue Royale, but restricts himself to merely surmising that Jacques "devait en effet la trouver [Françoise] bien jolie" (p. 67). It is Geneviève who supplies the information that Laléande is a 'cellist, although a rather poor one, and M. de Grumello, a mutual friend, informs the ladies of the quarry's extended stay in Biarritz. Thus, even more so than in "Présence réelle," there is a hole in this love story where Jacques de Laléande should be, the essential question "who is he?" which should have constituted him as a "reality" in the text, goes begging, sublimated into the more important function of stimulating a specific subjective impression, similar to the "douceur allemande et italienne" of the place names evoked by the formerly beloved in "Présence réelle": "Lui, savait-elle ce que c'était? sinon qu'il en émanait pour elle de tels frissons de désolation ou de béatitude que tout le reste de sa vie et des choses ne comptait plus" (p. 76).

In the second place Françoise's fantasies of a love affair with Jacques are based on a long and carefully constructed process in the text. The only moment of direct contact between Françoise and Jacques is shrouded in ambiguity. The boldness of his invitation—"Il passa près d'elle, remua légèrement le coude de Françoise avec le sien, et, les yeux brillants, dit, au moment où il était contre elle, ayant toujours l'air de chercher [sa canne]: 'Venez chez moi, 5, rue Royale!'"—so shocks Françoise that, the narrator adds, "elle ne sut jamais très exactement dans la suite si ce n'avait pas été une hallucination" (p. 68). As Françoise thus questions the reality of Jacques' initiative, her story enters into the fantastic as Todorov described it, an
indistinguishable mixture of the real and the imagined, dependent for its sustenance upon the persistence of ambiguity. Although the moment of contact seems "real" enough in the story—it forms part of the plot, a link in the chain of its successive events—Françoise's doubts serve to induce her into the compensatory world of fantasy.

Fantasy, a fictional "as if" believed in uncritically, continues to govern the course of Françoise's love affair. Scheming with Geneviève to arrange a private concert of 'cello music, she behaves as if the affair as she imagines it will evolve were already a given in reality:

C'est que je te dirai, j'ai un petit intérêt, même assez grand, pour des choses qui ne me concernent pas et qu'on ne me permettra sans doute pas de te dire avant un mois (d'ici là elle aurait convenu avec [Jacques] d'un mensonge pour ne pas découvert, et cette pensée d'un secret où seuls ils seraient tous les deux lui était douce), à faire sa connaissance et à me trouver avec lui. (pp. 69-70)

As Françoise continues her retreat into fantasy, part of her retains a sufficient hold on reality to allow her to realize how much of her love and misery she has herself invented—"elle maudissait son imagination aussi; elle avait si tendrement nourri son amour que Françoise se demandait parfois si seule aussi son imagination ne l'avait pas enfanté" (p. 74)—but she has completely lost her grasp by the final chapter:

Souvent elle imagine qu'il va venir à Trouville, s'approcher d'elle, lui dire qu'il l'aime. Elle le voit, ses yeux brillent. Il lui parle avec cette voix blanche du rêve qui nous défend de croire tout en même temps qu'il nous force à écouter. C'est lui. Il lui dit ces paroles qui nous font délirer, malgré
que nous ne les entendions jamais qu'en songe, quand
nous y voyons briller, si attendrissant, le divin
sourire confiant des destinées qui s'unissent. (p. 78)

Her refusal to allow the narrator to bring Laléande to her at
Trouville condemns Françoise to entrapment, finally, within her own
representations. In Freudian terms, we are witness to the triumph of
her pleasure principle over her reality principle, the satisfaction
through fantasy of her repressed erotic longings.\textsuperscript{122} Françoise's new
reality is the fantasy world of the neurotic, based on a "neurotic
standard of currency" to which considerable attention is devoted in the
story. The silence of Françoise's devoted servants, chagrined and
respectful of her sorrow, speaks to her of M. de Laléande. She approp-
riates a line from the \textit{Maître chanteurs de Nurembourg}, heard at the
very soirée where she first saw Jacques, as "le véritable \textit{leitmotiv}
de M. de Laléande," (p. 74), a sign of him in his absence that is also
an act of imitative magic. Françoise would in fact, the narrator as-
sures us, exploit this currency even further: "Si elle savait la mau-
vaise musique qu'il aime et qu'il joue, les romances méprisées prend-
raient sans doute sur son piano et bientôt dans son coeur la place des
symphonies de Beethoven et des drames de Wagner" (p. 77). To an unid-
entified and barely distinguishable figure in a photograph of Biarritz
Françoise attributes the features of M. de Laléande; her previous
loathing of Biarritz itself is transformed into an avidity to hear or
talk about the town. Significance thus installs itself in what was
once the merely contingent, and metonomy (which Gérard Genette has dem-
onstrated to be an essential element of representation by metaphor in
the *Recherche*\textsuperscript{123}, forms the common denominator of Mme de Breyves' neurotic currency. The device of metonomy feeds and sustains her neurosis in such a way as to make possible the ultimate revaluation of standard into neurotic currency and guarantee the persistence of her fantasies in an unrelieved alternation of pleasure and pain, that itself repeats the presence-absence drama enacted during illness and (temporary) convalescence in the Noah's ark sickroom. As the final sentence of the story makes clear, Françoise accomplishes the supreme feat of representation that dominates "Présence réelle;" she turns absence into presence—"dans l'incertitude de l'horizon sylvestre ou marin, elle aperçoit l'indécise image de son invisible et présent vainqueur" (p. 79)—eliminating any need for the narrator to act as pander, and precluding a definitive eruption of reality into her imagined world. In other words, Mme de Breyves' fantastic representations remain sufficiently incomplete to continuously fuel the desire that sets the fantasy in motion,\textsuperscript{124} while they offer at the same time an affective completeness sufficiently pleasurable to make them preferable to the reality for which they substitute.

There is still another important aspect of representation to consider in the "Mélancolique villégiature." Just as Baldassare Silvande envisions as literature his final parting from the Duchess Oliviane, thinking of it as a *récit* that he imagines he reads even as he composes it in his mind, Françoise de Breyves depends likewise on prior literary representations to structure her fantasies of impossible love. Her neurosis duplicates that of Emma Bovary in her use of the romantic novel as her model. When, for example, her plans to meet Jacques by
organizing an evening of 'cello music fail, Françoise recognizes her elaborate cat-and-mouse plot for that of a novel: "Jusque-là tout occupée à imaginer des romans pour le voir et le connaître, certaine de les réaliser dès qu'elle le voudrait, elle avait vécu de ce désir et de cet espoir sans peut-être s'en rendre bien compte" (p. 71). Novels appear again several pages later, this time to provide a structural description of her fantasy: "Elle maudissait sa finesse aussi, qui avait si habilement, si bien et si mal arrangé tant de romans pour le revoir que leur décevante impossibilité l'avait peut-être attachée davantage encore à leur héros" (pp. 74-75). Finally, her recurrent fantasy of Laléande's arrival in Trouville and his declaration of love may well be couched by the narrator in terms of the dream—"Il lui parle avec cette voix blanche du rêve..." "il lui dit ces paroles qui nous font délirer, malgré que nous ne les entendions jamais qu'en songe" (p. 78)—but this fantasy is nothing less than the standard happy ending of the stereotypic romantic novel, ending as it does with the obligatory catch-phrase celebrating "des destinées qui s'unissent" (p. 78). The catch-phrases catch the narrator also, as the "nous" that describes the fantasy makes clear; in the rewritten romantic novel that represents Françoise's experience, however, a solution in fantasy, Françoise remaining entrapped by the creations of her own subjectivity, is proposed as the wholly satisfactory alternative to this "union of destinies" suggested by the model.

These remarks on the relationship between Les Plaisirs et les jours and the Decadence are not meant to propose a point-by-point correspondence between the two; as was the case with his appreciation of
Symbolist poetry, Proust remains ever free to pick and choose, and assimilate according to his own instincts, his materials from the various strains of thought and practice surrounding him. He omits from *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, for example, any reference to the satanism that attracted other writers of the Decadence, although profanation as an expression of inverted love is similar to the inverted expression of Christian faith he recognized in Baudelaire's satanism. Nor is his vocabulary as rarified and technical on the one hand; or (with the exception of scattered references to "crimes" and "victimes") as salacious and lugubrious on the other, as that of the Decadents. His limit is by now a familiar one: whatever he shared with the Decadents and the Symbolists, Proust in the 1890's was still too much of a *salonnard*—and too anxious to see his first book well-received—not to prefer elegance of expression to an earthiness that risked being judged as vulgar and shocking; the most overtly shocking phrase of the entire book may be Jacques de Laléandé's open and unexpected invitation to Françoise de Breyves to visit him at his home—and the only reason this may be viewed as "obscene" at all is that it transgresses the social code dictating not an interdiction of liaisons, but discretion and a suitably long flirtation period before undertaking them.

What are compelling, however, are the psychological *rapprochements* manifested in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* between Proust and the Decadents, particularly the belief in the omnipotence of thought preferring representation to reality, in a perverse repetition of the original (infantile) substitution of mediated for immediate experience, that also calls upon fantasy, paradoxically, to compensate for the limits
of experience and to do away with the boundaries of the self. There is a sense in which all art, imposing an artificial (conventional) form upon the original formlessness of nature, is "decadent," a "falling away" from direct experience to the next step removed from nature; that is, the experience of a representation. Proust gave theoretical formulation to the problem of representation in the preface to Jean Santeuil, asking at the outset, "Puis-je appeler ce livre un roman?" and then devising an elaborate smokescreen of embedded narration to distance himself as author and subject from the narrated "il" of the text. The irony of the smokescreen, of course, is that its very use reveals its transparency. Les Plaisirs et les jours, however, conceived by an impressionable young talent during the tenure of the Decadence shares with the movement its fetishist emphasis on representation as both erotic compensation and philosophical necessity. How the salonnard represents in this work society as a pole of erotic attraction is the topic of our next chapter.
Footnotes


2 E.G. Rogers' comments on deliquescence in Les Plaisirs et les jours are typical: "That deliquescent, over-refined quality which marks so much of the final years of the nineteenth century, with its Des Esseintes, its Oscar Wilde and its conscious aestheticism, could not fail to leave a mark on a writer as sensitive as Proust." (Proust and the Nineteenth Century," p. 135). Decadence as moral decay is part of Proust's portrayal of society in the Recherche, as he adds: "Proust catches the final, self-tormenting, life-weary picture of the last romantics, parading their refinement and their ennui in a world made all the more tragic in that they could have no idea that it was soon to be swept away" (p. 136).

3 For the history of these groups and their role in creating the literary revolutions of the fin-de-siècle, see Michaud, Message poétique, 2 (pp. 235-63); George Ross Ridge, The Hero in French Decadent Literature (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1961); Ridge bases his account of the early days of Symbolism on Madeleine G. Rudler's Parnassiens, symbolistes et décadents (Paris: Messein, 1938) and G.L. Roosbroeck's The Legend of the Decadents (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927). Noël Richard's Le Mouvement décadent (Paris: Nizet, 1968), is organized around a study of Anatole Baju's review Le Décadent, founded in 1886.

4 Following Rudler, Ridge attributes use of the epithet to Félicien Champsov, he quotes from Rudler's study: "'La critique et la presse eurent beau jeu pour se raller de ces innovations, sans comprendre tout ce que cette fermentation préparait pour l'avenir de l'art. Félicien Champsov, dans un article qui eut du retentissement, traite tous ces esthètes de Décadents; le mot fit fortune. Par bravade, ils adoptèrent ce titre et devinrent le point de mire de tous les persifleurs'" (p. 4).


6 Roger Shattuck, significantly, begins his study of The Banquet Years (New York: Doubleday, 1956), with a description of Hugo's funeral marking the passing of the old guard from the literary and artistic scene in France.
Valéry has recalled in "Existence du symbolisme" the rare avail-
ability of the Fleurs du mal in 1886, nearly twenty years after Baudela-
laire's death (Oeuvres I, ed. J. Hytier [Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque
de la Pléiade, 1957], p. 696); this could have enhanced Baudelaire's
reputation and his status as something of a cult figure among the
"revolutionaries."

Paul Verlaine, Oeuvres poétiques (Paris: Bordas, Univers des
lettres, 1967), p. 151. Noël Richard points out, however, that Ver-
laine was not above denigrating the use of the term décadence made pop-
ular by "Langueur," calling it "quel bête mot!" and denying to Jules
Huret that the word meant anything at all. Nonetheless, Richard con-
cludes, "Ces rétractions un peu désabusées ne peuvent faire oublier les
encouragements et le soutien actif de Verlaine au mouvement décadent"
(Mouvement, p. 257).

Quoted by Jean Pierrot, L'Imaginaire décadent 1880-1900 (Paris:

Quoted by Pierrot, p. 23.

Quoted by Pierrot, p. 23.

Quoted by Pierrot, p. 24.

Quoted by Raymond Poulliart, "Paul Bourget et l'esprit de

Pierrot, p. 67.

Mario Praz, The Romantic Age (London: Oxford University Press,
1933), p. xxii.

Victor Jankélévitch, "La Décadence," Revue de Métaphysique et

Jankélévitch, p. 339.

Jankélévitch, p. 340.

"Le passage de la conscience théétique à la conscience critique,
ou de la thèse à la crise, est la première décadence; le passage de
cette conscience à sa propre conscience est la deuxième, et il amorce
une série indéfinie d'autres décadences toujours plus raffinées; le tri
des valeurs et des moindres nuances de leurs nuances se fait toujours
plus exquisément délié, cependant que la dose d'innocence ou d'incon-
sience de la conscience de conscience s'amenuise à l'infini sans jamais atteindre cette limite de la totale conscience qui serait, au
terme du déclin, le Bas absolu et l'absolue immobilité" (p. 343). For
a discussion with illustrations of some of these "monsters" in such
painters of the Decadence as Toorop, Moreau, Félicien Rops and Puvis
de Chavannes, see Philippe Jullian, Esthètes et magiciens: l'art fin de


22 See, for example, Carter's observation: "...the most curious thing about all this trifling with depravity is less its manifestation in this or that writer than its general acceptance as a sort of doctrine. We might almost call it a philosophic premise. Nearly all authors of the time thought their age decadent. This was not the whim of a few eccentrics, but the settled opinion of pathologists, philosophers and critics" (p. 145).

23 Gilman, pp. 83-84.

24 "The decadent movement proper came into existence after the disaster of 1870; its authors lived and wrote in the memory of that fiasco which justified, or seemed to justify, the jeremiads on decadence given forth by Gautier, Baudelaire, Taine, D'Aurevilly, etc., years before the first shot was fired. From the literary point of view, the disappearance of Napoleon III was almost providential; it pointed up, by facile analogy, the 'grands barbares blancs' invading the empire 'à la fin de la décadence'..." (p. 146).

25 Pierrot, pp. 65-66. See also Riddle's description of nationally conceded pessimism in France after 1870 based on a sense of social decadence intensified by the defeat (pp. 13-20).


27 Noël Richard writes that "l'année 1885-86 peut être considérée comme la ligne de partage entre la décadence et le symbolisme, du moins si l'on considère la décadence comme le stade préliminaire du symbolisme. Les critiques de l'époque continueront, longtemps encore, à taxer de 'décadents' les novateurs et les irréguliers.... Dès le mois d'août 1885, Jean Moréas avait proposé à la critique de substituer à l'étiquette péjorative de 'Décadents' le mot combien plus évocateur! de 'Symbolistes'" (Mouvem., p. 8). Moréas explained his reasons for the change of name to Huret in 1891: "...c'est moi le premier qui ai protesté, dès 1885, contre l'épithète de décadents, dont on nous affublait, et c'est moi qui ai réclamé en même temps celle de symboliste. Depuis, des gens qui aiment à parler m'apprirent que la poésie fut de tout temps symboliste.... On peut noter avec quelque raison que les poètes qui nous précédèrent immédiatement, les Parnassiens et la plupart des romantiques, manquèrent dans un certain sens de symbole; ils considérèrent dans les idées, les sentiments, l'histoire et la mythique, le fait particulier, comme existant en soi poétiquement. De là l'erreur de la couleur locale en histoire, le mythe racorni par une interprétation pseudo-philologique, l'idée sans la perception des analogies, le sentiment pris dans l'anecdote..." (Huret, p. 76).

30 Pierrot, p. 99.

31 Pierrot, p. 99.

32 See Lehmann, pp. 21-30, for a discussion of Taine's notions of form and content against which he then elaborates the Symbolist view of art.

33 Cohn, p. 274.

34 See, for example, Morton M. Kondracke's use of the notion of decline, complete with reference to barbarians and the fall of Rome in a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* (10 December 1981), "The Crack-up of the Soviet and U.S. Empires": "I submit for discussion," he writes, "the proposition that both the U.S. and the Soviet empires are cracking up—for both internal and external reasons—and that the Goths are close to the gates at both Rome and Constantinople. Instead of merely railing at the Soviets, it's possible that we should be talking to them about how to prevent both our capitals from being sacked and how to save the world from a return to the Dark Ages" (p. 23). This theme was sounded again even more recently in the same newspaper by Irving Kristol on "Exorcising the Nuclear Nightmare," the author argues that nuclear stockpiles combined with a "decaying world order" have contributed to a new political decadence: "...politicians in the free world inevitably gravitate toward a policy of steadily diminishing usable military strength while investing in nuclear arms to protect 'national security,' defined in the most limited and parochial way. Any such policy will gradually but surely produce a weakening in the military ethos and, indeed, a decline in patriotic spirit. We have seen this happening in the Western world, and the proper term for it is decadence" (12 March 1982, p. 22).

35 See Carter on this historical perspective provided by the French Revolution, pp. 147-48.

36 Ridge, pp. 20, 185. Ridge here bases his inclusion of the Symbolists among those preoccupied by decadence on brief references to the true social concerns in such poets as Mallarmé, Verlaine, Maeterlinck or Rimbaud. While I agree with his conclusion, I do not think that it is necessary to demonstrate outspoken social concerns in a writer to show that he participates in the general "set" of the Decadence; what we are talking about as Decadence at the end of the nineteenth century in France is enough along the order of a *zeitgeist*—having certain specific identifiable characteristics in the accompanying literary production—to mean that a writer does not have to display any true reference to society in his work to be seen nonetheless as a
writer of the Decadence. Ridge is trying a bit too hard to substantiate here an entirely valid intuition; he later includes, with more success, Mallarmé, Verlaine and Rimbaud among the "cerebral heroes" of the Decadence, for their preoccupation with "l'idéal" (pp. 83-101).

37 See Chapter 2, pp. 132.

38 As late as 1951, Raymond Poulliart could write in his article on Bourget of the general neglect of "ce sentiment de décadence, qui fut si viv en France à la fin du XIXe siècle dans certains milieux littéraires, et dont la survivance n'est plus guère assurée dans nos mémoires que par quelques bouteaux de Verlaine, les articles et le nom d'Anatole Baju, les Déliquescences d'Adoré Flopette, et l'A Rebours de J.-K. Huysmans" (p. 199).

39 Carter, p. 147.

40 Freud, Totem and Taboo, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Vintage Books, 1918, 1946), pp. 98-129. We will return to a discussion of the omnipotence of thought in pp. 249-75 of this chapter.


42 Pierrot, p. 80. Lehmann discusses the influence of Schopenhauer on Mallarmé, pp. 55-67; Guy Michaud also discusses the importance of Schopenhauer's doctrines of pessimism and revolt on the artists of the 1880's in Message poétique, vol. 1, 211-13. It is usually conceded that the Decadents took from Schopenhauer an abbreviated version of his teachings, adapted to their own penchant for pessimism.

43 Gourmont, p. 11.

44 Gourmont, p. 11.

45 I have to take issue with the "hopeful note" that George Ross Ridge discerns in the Decadent world view, their anticipation, that is, of the survival of the race after the death of their particular moment of civilization (p. 47); their pessimism seems to me to be much more profound than this. As Jankélévitch points out in his article on Decadence, periods of classicism and decadence succeed each other in cyclical fashion, an inevitable setting of standards and falling away from them (pp. 365-69), but this perception of cycles and rise and fall is not so much the perception of the Decadents themselves as it is ours.


47 Essais et articles, V, pp. 405-9. Our references to this article will be indicated in the text.


51  Hamlyn, p. 109.
52  Hamlyn, p. 110.

53  Henri Massis writes in *Le Drame de Marcel Proust*: "L'abdicación de la volunté, voilà le thème anxieux qui circule à travers ces pages où, sous les expériences précoces d'un enfant trop sensible, incapable de résister aux suggestions du désir, nous reconnaissons les penchant qui laisseront le faible Marcel sans recours" (p. 66). See also Philip Kolb’s article, "Les 'Phares' de Proust," arguing that the lack of will power of which Marcel complains in the *Recherche* is autobiographical: "Il est certain que Proust s'en est tourmenté pendant toute sa jeunesse .... On sait qu'il lisait le traité de Théodule Ribot sur Les Maladies de la volonté, qu'il cite dans sa préface à sa traduction de *Sésame et les lys* [1906]" (p. 107).

54  Corr. V, p. 127. In the same letter Proust says of his favorite poet Baudelaire that his Satanism is merely an inverted expression of his profound sense of Christianity.

55  Gourmont, p. 238.

56  Consider for example the overwrought alliteration of this stanza from "Maestro:" "Comme au flanc frissonnant d'un papillon piqué;/On y verra longtemps palpiter des paillettes;/On en respirera l'arôme alambiqué/Comme un vivant bouquet de vieilles violettes." (*Les Chauves-Souris: Clairs-obscurs*, Edition définitive, 1907).

57  Richard Gilman quotes France as saying, "I have heard about this 'decadence,' I don't believe in it" (p. 30).

58  Gilman includes Hesiod among Greek poets opposing decadence in their time, reciting in *Works and Days* the traditions and values of society that he perceived to be in danger of erosion (p. 40).

59  See pp. 229-30 of this study.

60  See for example, Bourget's use of the image in an 1880 article in *Le Parlement*: "Il semble qu'à toutes les époques la surabondance du pouvoir, la surexcitation produite par l'habitude des plaisirs rares, l'épuisement aussi d'une race depuis trop longtemps triomphante aient fini par rendre la créature formée de la sorte presque incapable de sensations simples, difficilement sociable et désireuse d'une existence qui soit autour d'elle comme l'atmosphère d'une serre chaude enveloppe
les arbustes privilégiés—solitaire, taciturne, voluptueuse et mortelle! Quand ces phénomènes se multiplient, et c’est le cas sur presque tous les points de notre Europe, la fin approche." Quoted by Pouilliart, p. 214. Laurent Lesage has also cited the "hot-house atmosphere" by which Régnier's La Canne de Jaspe resembles Les Plaisirs et les jours ("Proust and Régnier," p. 12).

61 See Peyre on this collection of poems: "Maeterlinck avait, en 1889, dans ses Serres chaudes, donné quelques-uns des poèmes alanguis (avec force larmes, lèvres fanées, 'désirs malades de fain,' 'désirs affaiblis de sueurs,' hôpitaux 'avec une ménagerie au milieu des lys') les plus caractéristiques de l'époque" (Symbolisme, p. 151).


63 This balancing act on the borderline between good and evil is the same type of voluptuous hesitation that accounts for the appeal of the figure of the androgyn to the Decadent imagination. See Pierrot, pp. 151-80.

64 Louys, p. 7.

65 Both the 1971 Pléiade edition of Les Plaisirs et les jours and the 1935 edition in the Œuvres complètes (Gallimard) give "immortalité" for the "immoralité" for which the context of Proust's remarks calls. André Vial gives the quote as "immoralité" (p. 69). I have as yet been unable to verify the Pléiade printing against the manuscript of Les Plaisirs et les jours.


68 Emphasis added.


1957), pp. 73-82, and Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), "The principal way in which the poetic function manifests itself as poetry is by a projection of the paradigmatic and metaphoric dimension of language onto the syntagmatic. By emphasizing resemblances of sound, rhythm, image, poetry thickens language, drawing attention to its formal properties and away from its referential significance" (p. 26).

72 Emphasis added.

73 Gide wrote of this image of the ark in "En relisant Les Plaisirs et les Jours": "La vie de Proust a chargé cette prophétique petite phrase d'une émotion singulière. Depuis longtemps la maladie retenait Proust enfermé dans l'arche' et l'invitait ou le contraignait à cette existence toute nocturne à laquelle il avait fini par se faire, sur le fond obscur de laquelle apparaissent si lumineusement les préparations microscopiques fournies par son prestigieux souvenir, et dont ne le distraient plus que par instants les rumeurs de l'heure présente, durant son interminable loisir" (pp. 125-26).


76 Quoted by Kamber and Macksay, p. 874.

77 Kamber and Macksay, pp. 875-76.


79 See Carter, pp. 144-45 and Gilman, pp. 36-40, for etymological discussions of the terms "decadence," and in Gilman, "inclinatio."

80 Descriptions of the femme fatale, her allure and her threat may be read in Praz, pp. 199-281 ("La belle dame sans merci") and in Pierrot, pp. 151-80.


83 De Man, p. 58. He studies the same episode in Swann of Marcel reading in his bedroom during a summer afternoon in Combray that Kamber and Macksay used in their article.

84 De Man discerns that in the Combray reading episode, "the burden of the text, among other things, is to reassure Marcel about his flight away from the 'real' activity of the outer world. The guilty pleasures of solitude are made legitimate because they allow for a
possession of the world at least as virile and complete as that of the hero whose adventures he is reading. Against the moral imperative speaking through the grandmother who 'begs Marcel to go outside,' Marcel must justify his refusal to give up his reading, together with all the more or less shameful pleasures that go with it" (p. 64).

85 See "Questionnaire," Essais et articles, V, p. 335.

86 "...les aubépines, la mer, la mort ont ce rapport avec la naissance de Marcel Proust, que la mer, symbole de l'union indiscernable de la vie et de la chair de l'enfant avec la vie et la chair de la mère, les aubépines, équivalents d'une immaculée conception, la mort, conscience abolie de l'enfant dans le sein de la mère ... sont autant de mythes en quoi se sublime, dans la conscience de Proust, l'obsession abyssale de celle qui l'engendrera et de la façon dont elle l'engendra" (p. 57).

87 Cf. Proust's dedication of his book to Pierre Lavallée to which we have already referred: "...un livre qui pourrait être aussi bien le tien, si l'ayant comme moi, mieux que moi toute ta vie rêvé..." (Corr. II, p. 76; Chapter 1, p. 73.

88 RTP, I, p. 155.

89 Emphasis added.

90 Paganini, p. 146.

91 See William Languth, who discusses in "The Life and World of the Dream" (Yale French Studies 34 [1965]), the absence of Proust's brother from the Recherche: "When an object has not been given representation in any form, this becomes a death beyond death, for then it does not exist, neither to be killed nor brought to artistic resurrection. This is a death which requires the entire book as but token compensation. The lack of repetitive work on feelings about the brother may be a hidden reason, though he may never have intended to act on it, which would cause the narrator to indicate at the end of [the Recherche] that he was ready to produce a compensatory work beyond the fact and the image of the work accomplished and already at hand" (p. 129).


93 Wijsenbeek, p. 159.

94 See pp. 378-86.


96 Kristeva, Révolution, p. 452.
See for example Proust's letter to his mother in July 1903 after Antoine Bibesco had dined with the Prousts and insisted on discussing all the delicate subjects between Proust and his father, particularly money: "J'ai dit cent mille fois à Bibesco combien la fausse interprétation que vous avez adoptée de ma manière de prendre l'existence empoisonne ma vie, et combien, dans la résignation où je suis de ne pouvoir vous prouver qu'elle est erronée vous êtes en ceci pour moi plus un sujet de préoccupation légitime que je ne suis pour vous un sujet de préoccupations gratuites. Par surcroît de précaution, avant le dîner je lui ai rappelé: 'pas de plaisanteries sur les pourboires d'une part--de l'autre pas de questions saugrenues à Papa: "Monsieur, croyez-vous que si Marcel se couvrait moins' etc." (Corr. III, p. 373).

Loutès, p. 230.

Lethève, "Le thème de la décadence," p. 49.

Lethève, "Le thème de la décadence," p. 52.


Bardèche, p. 22.

Wilson, p. 179.


Trotignon, p. 200.

Freud, Totem, p. 111.

Freud, Totem, p. 113.

Freud, Totem, p. 207.


Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 227.

Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 75.

Anne Henry has noted the influence of Tolstoy’s The Death of Ivan Ilyitch on this death scene and the one that closes "La Fin de la
jalousie" ("Les Plaisirs et les jours": chronologie et métapsychose," in Études proustiennes, 1, Les Cahiers Marcel Proust nouvelle série, 6 [Paris: Gallimard, 1973], p. 85). The difference in the perception of time between the moribund and those around him is a mark of approaching death in Ivan Ilyitch, but Proust, framing Baldassare's imaginings with the doctor's announcement "C'est la fin"—a direct borrowing from Tolstoy's narrative—actually uses the disparities on the three levels of time to better advantage in his story.

114 Proust wrote to Lucien Daudet of "le pain quotidien de ma solitude, de la présence réelle," quoting from Racine's poetry: "'C'est ce pain si délectable/Que ne sert pas à sa table/Le monde que vous suivez,/Approchez, voulez-vous vivre;/Prenez, mangez et vivez!'" (Auteur de soixante lettres de Marcel Proust, pp. 155-56). See also letters to Constantin de Brancovan ("Je n'oublierai pas le moment où je l'ai reçu. J'ai eu le sentiment de la présence réelle de l'amitié" [Corr. II, p. 416]), and to Antoine Bibesco ("je serai chez moi n'ayant guère l'intention de sortir mais n'ayant pas d'ailleurs beaucoup d'espoir de vous voir car vous m'avez prévenu que pendant quelques jours il faudrait que je me contente de 'Présence réelle!'" [Corr. II, p. 466]).

115 Emphasis added.

116 Bailey, p. 421.

117 Bailey, p. 422.

118 Wijsenbeck, p. 160.

119 Bardèche, p. 54.


125 See p. 283N54.
See also Bardèche who relates the obscenity of this invitation to the new worlds of sexual possibility opened up by Bloch's revelation to the narrator of the *Recherche* that girls also think about making love (pp. 54-55). For the distance that separated high society from the productions of the Decadents and the Symbolists, see Emile Carassus' *Le Snobisme et les lettres françaises*, particularly his notes on the reception by society of Maurice Rollinat's adaptation of Baudelaire under the title *Les Névrosés*, pp. 153-54.
Chapter 4

Les Plaisirs et les jours: Society

Society and Pastiche

Beginning with the second nouvelle of Les Plaisirs et les jours, "Violante ou la mondanité," and continuing through the Fragments de comédie italienne to "Mondonité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet," Proust's first book presents the reader with a substantial subsection dealing exclusively with life in the "gratin." This "mondanity cycle" is not entirely self-contained; "Un Dîner en ville" is reached somewhat later in the book, after the "Confession d'une jeune fille," the placement of this parody of a dinner in society having probably been determined by a desire to break the lugubrious atmosphere of the preceding "Confession" with a more light-hearted sally. Similarly, certain texts of the Regrets are closely related in topic and style to the reflections of the Comédie italienne, and "La Fin de la jalousie" is set in the world of society. The pervasiveness of Proust's interest in this world in Les Plaisirs et les jours resulted in dismissal of the book as the work of a mondain; even the publication of the Recherche has not completely erased the perception of Proust as chiefly a mondain and snob.¹

Denying Proust's attraction to society at the time of Les Plaisirs et les jours would be pointless and contrary to fact; so would denying his consciousness of the shortcomings of the grand monde he wanted to

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frequent. In the section of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* between "Violante" and "Bouvard et Pécuchet," Proust's representations of that society are dominated by parody, pastiche, and an insistence on masks, that express and exorcise the temptations of society; such suiting of *signifiant* to *signifié* both critiques and redeems the players in the *fin-de-siècle* comedy, while it carves out for the *pasticheur* a fantasi-sized place among them.

Jean Mouton has suggested that Proust's entire first work reads like pastiche for what it recalls of the nineteenth-century authors Proust has absorbed; like the work of Anatole France, he says, one can read in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, "une véritable anthologie des écrivains du XIXe siècle." Pastiche is a literary exercise in which Proust excelled, Mouton continues; it served him as a type of exorcism, a means by which the young author rid himself of the excessive influence of the authors he admired:

...la tentation [du pastiche] est d'autant plus forte que la parenté est plus grande. Le pastiche devient alors un moyen de défense, un véritable vaccin; plutôt que de subir une inoculation lente et sournoise de Flaubert ou de Balzac, Proust, résolument, en fera les copies les plus fidèles; la purification s'opère, écartant l'influence d'écrivains dont il aurait fini par être accablé.

Studying Proust's series of pastiches on the Affaire Lemoine, Jean Milly also presents pastiche as a salutary exercise for Proust; he cites a 1919 letter to Ramon Fernandez in which Proust uses a medical metaphor to discuss his liberation through pastiche:

Le tout était surtout pour moi affaire d'hygiène; il faut se purger du vice naturel d'idolâtrie et
Proust's evaluation of pastiche here is rich in implications for the form and content link between pastiche as **significant** and society as **signifié**. There is a vertical scale set up here between Proust and other authors; "redescendre" places Proust at the lower end of the scale, while the reference to pastiche as a purgative (purgatives acting, naturally, on the lower parts of the body), adds to the "elevated" experience of "idolâtrie," a distinct note of burlesque mockery that seeks to undermine the initial experience of admiration without, however, totally dismissing its seriousness. The image of pastiche as a purgative is one which Proust took seriously; it recurs in similar terms in his article on Flaubert's style: "...pour ce qui concerne l'intoxication flaubertienne, je ne saurais trop recommander aux écrivains la vertu purgative, exorcisante, du pastiche." There is, additionally, in the letter to Fernandez, a coyness brought to bear upon the "idolâtrie," as Proust characterizes idolatry and imitation as a "vice naturel:" they are wrong but not completely reprehensible, and not unequivocally repudiated. They are instead justified by their naturalness, by their independence, Proust seems to assert, of conscious choice on his or anyone else's part. It is not totally wrong, then, to admire and imitate the great authors of the past; the trick is to take one's imitativeness firmly in hand by remaining conscious of it, by at times exaggerating it, thus ending up with the means of
distinguishing the boundaries of the self from those of the (imitated) other. One is irresistibly reminded here of Proust's wildly comic salon imitations of the Count Robert de Montesquiou. As they reportedly brought down upon the mimic the wrath of the Count, separating Proust for a time from Montesquiou's good graces, they can at the same time be understood as Proust's defense of himself (the audiences of his imitations recognized that the performer was not Montesquiou, but Proust) against the temptation to a slavish "idolâtrie" of Montesquiou. 8

The coyness with which Proust both passes and reserves judgment on the "vice naturel" of idolatry is the attitude that pastiche allows him to exploit. A game of literary mirrors, pastiche permits its author to have it both ways: he can imitate and yet remain free, he is guilty and still innocent, he can cover his own traces with traits of the pastiched author and yet reveal them in the gap between the two texts. This gap, writes Jean Milly, is bounded on the one hand by the resemblance of the pastiche to its model, and on the other, by the difference perceptible between them:

...ce n'est pas la reproduction pure et simple qui fait le style propre du pastiche. L'expressivité principale et la force comique tiennent à ce que le lecteur perçoit simultanément ou successivement une ressemblance et une différence avec le modèle. 9

Basing his comments on the schemas of linguistic function proposed by Jakobson and by Riffaterre, Milly details the many possible levels at which the text of a pastiche can function as a more or less deform- ing mirror, in relation to the model text. The pastiche brings into play four main functions of language: the referential function is
compounded by the double reference made by the pastiche first to the event it represents (the Affaire Lemoine, for example) and then to the literary text in terms of which it describes the event; an important part of this game is that the reader is assumed to be familiar with this intermediary, pastiched, literary text. Secondly, the pastiche is meta-linguistic in its deliberate caricature of the linguistic features of the model text. The impressive or conative function of language is evident in pastiche, since its purpose, among others, is to elicit laughter from the reader; the poetic or stylistic function finally adds to the whole an affective or aesthetic "accent." Milly also isolates a number of specific techniques by which Proust manipulates his mirrors in his pastiches on the Affaire Lemoine: there are instances here of simple recognition, in which the significant in the pastiche refers directly to both the pretext-event and the literary model; in instances of verbal inflation or concentration, a content analogous to that of the literary model is deformed by an exaggeration of language characteristics taken from the model. Instances of décalage or discordance borrow elaborate formal techniques from the model and apply them to a content for which they are patently and absurdly unsuitable. Finally, through analogy with the model text, Proust invents new words or contents tantalizingly similar to the language of the original author but that, like the pastiche itself, are an original creation. The classic example of this technique in Proust is the word "aberrant" in the pastiche of Ernest Renan; Proust wrote to Robert Dreyfus that "aberrant" was such a typically Renanian word, and such a wonderfully
parodic invention, that he would be terribly disappointed to ever learn that Renan had actually used the word.\textsuperscript{13}

It is no surprise that these techniques of pastiche demonstrate, one after the other in Milly's typology, a gradual loss of resemblance to the model text in the pastiche; Milly concludes that Proust's pastiches are exercises in "démontage-remontage systique," implying distance and an ironic attitude on the part of the pasticheur.\textsuperscript{14} While his discussion thus suggests the variety of reflections and deflections of the model text that are possible in the mirror-text of the pastiche, what it points up most strongly is the nature of pastiche as an eminently mediated text: pastiche is a complex representation not only of some "reality" or pretext event but of a fictitious literary representation of that reality (the Affaire Lemoine as it would have been represented by Balzac or Henri de Régnier). The pastiche resembles but also differs from other "real," preexisting literary representations by the authors the pasticheur pretends to be; it functions also as a metalinguistic representation of the manner in which the pastiched authors use language to represent. Like the préciosité of "Tuileries," pastiche is thus a form of representation concerned primarily with representation itself; the "widening gyre" returns to dominate Proust's representation of life in the high circles of society, and appropriately so: the basic link between pastiche and society, as Proust depicts a gratin peopled by snobs in Les Plaisirs et les jours, has a great deal to do with mediation.

René Girard's notion of "triangular desire," describing the "idolatry" of the snob, is the key to this connection. "The snob," writes
Girard, "is also an imitator. He slavishly copies the person whose birth, fortune, or stylishness he envies.... The snob does not dare trust his own judgment, he desires only objects desired by others. That is why he is the slave of the fashionable."\(^{15}\) Just as the pastiche depends for its very existence on the other, model text, society also revolves around the other—either to point out what are the fashionable objects of taste and desire (Emile Carassus says that this is the role of intermediary that Montesquiou played for Proust\(^{16}\)), or to furnish the regard on which on depends to determine his status as "in" or "out." Proust's use of pastiche for the "mondanity cycle" of Les Plaisirs et les jours is thus a brilliant example of a literary form matched to its content. Texts posing as works by other authors depict characters themselves posing, for the benefit of their social advancement, as other than what they are; the author copies, the characters copy, all of them put down and take up masks according to the scenarios they wish to direct, knowing full well that they are not really directors, but actors, following the directions of those they copy.

The use of pastiche in this section gives Proust, player and commentator, "d'autant plus habile," in Carassus' opinion, "à décélérer les faux-fuyants esthétiques dont se pare le snobisme qu'il les rencontre en lui-même"\(^{17}\) an attractive choice of advantages over society's "other." In the first place, the conscious assumption of the burden of attraction and influence that is necessary for, and exorcised in, the pastiche argues in favor of Proust's lucidity, his attraction to society matched by his perception of its shortcomings. At the same time, the coyness of his "vice naturel d'idolâtrie et d'imitation" is
preserved, for the pastiche is his mask, a smoke-screen for his criticisms, that can then be easily explained away through the intermediary persona of the pastiched authors. The disclaimer at the beginning of "Mondanité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet"—"Bien entendu les opinions prêtées ici aux deux célèbres personnages de Flaubert ne sont nullement celles de l'auteur" (p. 57)—is as neat an expression as any of Proust's conscious manipulation of the pastiche as mask. Use of the mask to criticize is a "velléité de grand seigneur" Proust described to Dreyfus in 1888; it is a calculated use, however, for the comedy announced by the mask is (not unlike the Noah's ark sickroom) a privileged and gratifying situation just outside of the normal moral order: "Un autre plaisir serait de dire du mal de nos amis.... Donnant la comédie, étant autre que moi, j'en puis médire, sans crime."18 As if to demonstrate then the liberating effects of comedy and the mask, Proust invents in the same letter a most unflattering portrait of himself in society:

Connaissiez-vous X, ma chère, c'est-a-dire M.P.? Je vous avouerai pour moi qu'il me déplait un peu, avec ses grands éclans perpétuels, son air affairé, ses grandes passions et ses adjectifs. Surtout il me paraît très fou ou très faux. Jugez-en. 19

Proust's substitution in this portrait of himself for the "other" who observes and judges him produces a remarkably good approximation (pastiche) of what the "other" must have really thought of Proust at times; that it also summarizes Proust's fears that the portrait might be too accurate a representation of society's opinion (too good a pastiche), is evident in his request that Dreyfus not show it to any of their
friends, particularly Halévy. Criticism by use of the mask has its dangers then if the mask is too transparent or the pastiche is too ressemblant; one ought to be particularly careful in what one says of oneself, suggests Proust, "à moins que ce ne soit par fumisterie transcendentale," another level of comedy and another mask behind which to hide.

The pleasure of comedy reflected in the self-portrait is the same pleasure Proust's play of mirrors offers to his society readers in Les Plaisirs et les jours. However deforming, a mirror is still a mirror; the mirrors that the "mondanity cycle" holds up to the narcissism of its intended audience—much like the courtly audience skewered in La Bruyère's Caractères but who scrambled to decipher the texte à clef—ought to be delighted to catch even the least glimpse of themselves.

The mechanism is similar to that of the backhanded compliment, typified by an unflattering portrait Proust addressed to Madame Straus in 1891; in the elegant prose common to the society portraits of Les Plaisirs et les jours, Proust means to compliment his model by detailing her faults. Her charm is all the more remarkable, he implies, by its persistence in spite of her indifference and superficiality:

...j'ai d'abord cru que vous n'aimiez que les belles choses et que vous les compreniez très bien—et puis j'ai vu que vous vous en fichiez;—j'ai cru ensuite que vous aimiez les Personnes et je vois que vous vous en fichez. Je crois que vous n'aimez qu'un certain genre de vie qui met moins en relief votre intelligence que votre esprit, moins votre esprit que votre tact, moins votre tact que vos toilettes. Une personne qui aime surtout ce genre de vie—et qui charmez. Et c'est parce que vous charmiez qu'il ne faut pas vous rejouir et croire que je vous aime moins. 22
As is the case for society in general, no fault is too great to undo Mme Straus' mysterious enchantment; if the faults, inversely, must be brought to light, the denigration is given a firm basis of admiration—and it is the latter that the model is expected to read as motivation for the critical portrait. Mme Verdurin turning up her nose at the ennuyeux and Gilberste writing insults to the Duchess of Guermantes have merely extended and refined this same process.

Judging Mme Straus, Proust places himself in a superior position to her; "charmed" by her, however, he admits his inferiority while the audacity of the portrait creates the illusion of a midground in which Proust is equal to his hostess. Just as admiration implies an admirer then, and judgment implies a judge—just as the pastiche reflects both a real and a pastiched author—in the mirror of the portraits there is always Proust himself, in a similarly changing perspective dependent upon the point of view employed. To the snobs, he is one like them, conversant with their fault, and admiring himself and them on their side of the mirror. To those who would accuse Proust of snobbery, the self-portraits in the texts on snobs are disarming displays of lucid self-criticism at the same time as they are a "comedy."

To the elegant, however (the audience of choice), Proust in the "mondan-ity cycle" is the discerner of snobs, well versed in social graces and true elegance, on their side against the invasion of their caste by the snobs. In any case, the lucidity of his game is the most elaborate smokescreen of all: Proust's hall of mirrors, the section of his Les Plaisirs et les jours in which he so elegantly vents his spleen against the arbitrary and artificial class to which he could never belong, is yet another in his long series of applications for membership in it.
Violante or Voltaire

As the Pléiade editors point out, "Violante ou la mondanité" was intended by Proust as a pastiche of Voltaire. The imitative intent is obvious first of all in the title of the story; the conjunction ou incorporates the alternative or subtitle into the principal one as in Voltaire's titles that combine the name of the hero with the moral lesson taught by the story: "Candide ou l'optimisme," "Zadig ou la destinée," "Memnon ou la Sagesse humaine." The title "Violante ou la mondanité" thus not only announces the object of Proust's inquiry, it also sets up the story, to be centered on the experiences of Violante, as an exemplum of the perils and pitfalls of life among the great ones of society. These are the very persons that the epigraph from the Imitation of Christ warns the reader to avoid: "Ayez peu de commerce avec les jeunes gens et les personnes du monde.... Ne désirez point de paraître devant les grands" (p. 29).

Violante's story is that of the insidiousness of society's temptations and her inability to extract herself from society once it has gotten hold of her. In his article on Flaubert, Proust discusses the composition of a voluntary pastiche as a kind of automatic continuation of the rhythms of the model text that have insinuated themselves into the pasticheur throughout his reading of that text:

Quand on vient de finir un livre, non seulement on voudrait continuer à vivre avec ses personnages, avec Mme de Beauséant, avec Frédéric Moreau, mais encore notre voix intérieure qui a été disciplinée pendant toute la durée de la lecture à suivre le rythme d'un Balzac, d'un Flaubert, voudrait continuer à parler comme eux. Il faut la laisser faire un moment, laisser la pédale prolonger le son, c'est-à-dire faire un pastiche volontaire, pour pouvoir
In other words, pastiche is for Proust a temptation to which it is far easier to yield than it is to resist; the consciousness that is necessary to the elaboration of a voluntary pastiche is at the same time Proust's consciousness of his lack of critical discernment or attention to effect. It is the consciousness that the foreign voice of the model author is simply prolonging its chant, not (at the time of the writing) a rigorous labor of "démontage-remontage":

"Le pastiche volontaire, c'est de façon toute spontanée qu'on le fait; on pense bien que quand j'ai écrit jadis un pastiche, détestable d'ailleurs, de Flaubert, [dans Les Plaisirs et les Jours] je ne m'étais pas demandé si le chant que j'entendais en moi tenait à la répétition des imparfaits ou des participles présents. Sans cela je n'aurais jamais pu le transcrire. C'est un travail inverse que j'ai accompli aujourd'hui en notant à la hâte ces quelques particularités du style de Flaubert."

This notion of a voluntary involuntariness in deliberate pastiche, with its component parts of habit and temptation, that are both too overwhelming to be resisted, thus speaks directly to the appropriateness of the pastiche form to the tale of Violante, who voluntarily gives in to the temptations of love and society, only to find herself enslaved by her habit of their pleasures, a "chant" that prolongs itself without her having to do anything about it.

Other borrowings in the structure and techniques of the narrative make apparent the mediation of Voltaire's *Contes philosophiques*. Proust aims in "Violante" for the rapid, almost lapidary, pace of Voltaire's
narratives (he does not manage, however, to sustain the pace throughout the story, falling towards the end into an extended languorous description of Violante's état d'âme). The presentation of Violante's family in the first chapter, consisting entirely of one paragraph, mimics Voltaire's technique of summary character presentation—what Wayne Booth calls telling as opposed to showing—dependent upon verbs in the imperfect that set the stage for the protagonist's adventures and provide the reader with all the information he will need to evaluate everything that follows. Just as we learn at the outset of Candide, for example, that the young hero "avait le jugement assez droit, avec l'esprit le plus simple," or that Zadig, born "avec un beau naturel fortifié par l'éducation," was and would remain a moderate man: "Quoique riche et jeune, il savait modérer ses passions; il n'affectait rien; il ne voulait point toujours avoir raison, et savait respecter la faiblesse des hommes," Proust begins "Violante" with similarly authoritarian descriptions of Violante's parents, leading to the presentation of Violante herself, "belle et vive comme son père, charitable et mystérieusement séduisante autant que sa mère," yet—these characteristics, like Candide's naïveté, make possible the rest of her story—she is volatile and sadly lacking in willpower: "Mais les aspirations changeantes de son coeur et de sa pensée ne rencontraient pas en elle une volonté qui, sans les limiter, les dirigeât, l'empêchât de devenir leur jouet charmant et fragile" (p. 29). The first catastrophe follows swiftly upon this setting of the stage: Violante's parents are killed, quickly and off-handedly, in a hunting accident related as a subordinate clause in the pluperfect tense. At age fifteen, Violante is left an orphan with
no maternal guidance to temper her will, and only "le vieil Augustin"
and her dreams for company.

The structure of Voltaire's _contes as apprentissage_ now comes to
dominate Violante's story, her encounters with love and, through love,
society; her adventures are recounted in a Voltairean rhythm of short
sentences in the passé simple, the rapid passage of time throughout the
story marked off in its simplest manner, by such straightforward expres-
sions as "un jour," "l'été suivant," "un soir," "le lendemain," that
dismiss the question of intervals and focus the attention of the narra-
tive on only those events that advance its moral or philosophical les-
tons. In recounting Violante's _apprentissage_, Proust plays skillfully
upon the double levels of meaning made possible when a sophisticated
narrator temporarily adopts the protagonist's naive point of view; the
situations that are thus disingenuously described, defamiliarized by
the change in point of view, are immediately recognized as less than
innocent by the reader, who discerns at the same time the author's
satirical intent. Such is the description in _Candide_, for example, of
Cunégonde observing the "leçon de physique expérimentale" that Pangloss
gives the chambermaid in the bushes, as a result of which Cunégonde
"vit clairement la raison suffisante du docteur, les effets et les
causes, et s'en retourna tout agitée, toute pensive, toute remplie du
désir d'être savante, songeant qu'elle pourrait bien être la raison
suffisante du jeune Candide, qui pouvait aussi être la sienne."27 Less
humorously but with a similar innocence of statement belied by the con-
text, Proust writes that Honoré undertaking to seduce Violante "se rap-
procha [d'elle] pour qu'elle n'eût froid, agrafa sa fourrure sur son
cou avec une ingénieuse lenteur et lui proposa d'essayer de mettre en pratique avec son aide les théories qu'il venait de lui enseigner dans le parc" (p. 30). Veiled allusions are also part of the narrator's disingenuous pose; he knows far more about the situation than his words reveal, but he leaves it to the sequence of events instead to inform the reader of what is happening in the story. In "Violante," for example, the heroine's encounter with her mother's old friend, the Princess of Misène, is only fully understood as Violante's brush with foiled lesbianism when the Princess and her procurer, the douairière, begins to speak of Violante as a "monstre d'orgueil et de perversité," thus punishing her indifference by attributing their own fault to her. This episode of the story illustrates yet another effet pastiched from Voltaire's narratives: the coupling of an action with its swift and immediate consequences. Candide is thrown out of the castle of Thunder-ten-tronckh before he has even finished kissing the baron's daughter; Violante refuses an introduction to the Princess of Misène and "...eut à partir de ce jour deux mortelles ennemies, la princesse de Misène et la douairière" (p. 36).

The role of Augustin in "Violante" is an element of structure also borrowed from Voltaire. Violante's mentor, he represents the voice of reason in her story, the argument that opposes hers, as Pangloss opposes Candide; Augustin in "Violante" is the wise man to whom the reader can look for the "key" to the story, the element of the stability against which to measure the extent of the heroine's metamorphosis. The tug of war between them, with Augustin arguing for Violante's return to Styrie against her temporizing promises, also sets up the most obvious
metalinguistic pastiche in the piece, the refrain; variations on the phrase "partir pour la Styrie" in the mouths of Augustin, Violante or her husband, keep present to the reader the philosophical inquiry their experiences represent in the same way that the recurring phrases, "causes et effets," "raison suffisante," and "tout est au mieux" function in Candide. As the voice of reason in "Violante," Augustin, however, receives help from an unexpected source and thus ties in to what may be considered a religious subtext in "Violante." The warning from the Imitation of Christ to avoid exactly the two types of companions that are Violante's undoing--"Ces jeunes gens et les personnes du monde" is followed up with a similar warning in the epigraph to the second chapter (in which Violante falls in love with Honoré), also from the Imitation of Christ: "Ne vous appuyez point sur un roseau qu'agite le vent et n'y mettez pas votre confiance, car toute chair est comme l'herbe et sa gloire passe comme la fleur des champs" (p. 30). These warnings add a spiritual authority to Augustin's voice; it is against this wisdom that Violante's déchéance becomes a spiritual bankruptcy, measured by her loss of the theological virtue of charity. From "charitable" as she is presented at the beginning—Augustin seeks to dissuade her from leaving by reminding her of "les pauvres du pays [qui] ne seront plus consolés par vos charités quand vous serez au milieu de tant de personnes méchantes" (p. 33)—she becomes far less bountiful and much more self-involved through her association with society: "La bonté ne lui plaisait plus que comme une élégance. Elle ferait bien encore des charités d'argent, des charités de sa peine même et de son temps, mais toute une partie d'elle-même était réservée, ne lui
appartenait plus" (p. 37). The voice of reason, Augustin also functions as a prophet in Violante's story; his predictions of her spiritual change, of her inability to return to Styrε, are fulfilled by the end of the story even if the final pointe—the narrator's assessment of the overwhelming power of habit—overrides Augustin's wisdom.

Augustin's age and his name add to his spiritual authority. Already old during Violante's childhood, he is a veritable patriarch by the time Violante herself ages and dies; this may be an inadvertent invraisemblance on the part of an inexperienced narrator, or it may in fact mean to attribute to the old man the prestige of the legendarily aged wise men of the Old Testament. By his name and experience of the world (although his experience has been acquired mysteriously by reflection rather than by action), Augustin recalls Saint Augustine and his Confessions; as the wisdom recorded in the Confessions is based on a long experience with temptations similar to the ones to which Violante yields, the early doctor of the Church becomes the implied source of Augustin's wisdom in the story.

The figure of St. Augustine introduces a significant confessional element into "Violante." The story in Les Plaisirs et les jours that is specifically given as a confession, "La Confession d'une jeune fille," is the only other piece in the collection to bear an epigraph from The Imitation of Christ; its warning of vanity and emptiness repeats those issued to Violante:

Les désirs des sens nous entraînent çà et là, mais l'heure passée que rapportez-vous? des remords de conscience et de la dissipation d'esprit. On sort dans la joie et souvent on revient dans la tristesse, et les plaisirs du soir attristent le matin. Ainsi
The theme of confession is thus linked to that of imitation in these stories, or more accurately, the confession is of an imperfect imitation, a failure to measure up to some model or standard, as the title Imitation of Christ proposes. In this case, "vice naturel" takes on a new significance, since the model proposed for invitation in Thomas à Kempis' work is so perfect that failure to imitate it is both human and excusable; the sinner's confession of imperfection here is thus a simultaneous accusation and justification. Pastiche as representation of society in Les Plaisirs et les Jours is both imitation and confession; it is a mirror, we saw, that reflects Proust as much as the subject he satirizes and the model author he chooses as intermediary. To draw together these various themes, one might hope to discover a mirror in "Violante," and, that, in fact, is the image Proust uses to dramatize the extent of her corruption by society. A true snob, Violante has become preoccupied only with appearances; of all that could have nourished her inner life—books, nature, meditation—she asks only that it reflect her elegance:

Elle lisait ou rêvait encore le matin dans son lit, mais avec un esprit faussé, qui s'arrêtait mainte- nant au dehors des choses et se considérait lui-même, non pour s'approfondir, mais pour s'admirer voluptueusement et coquettement comme en face d'un miroir .... Elle en était arrivée à ne plus goûter la na- ture qu'avec des sens pervertis, et le charme des saisons n'existait plus pour elle que pour parfumer ses élégances et leur donner leur tonalité.... Et le plaisir d'être élégante corrompait pour elle la joie d'être seule et de rêver. (p. 37)
The "message" of "Violante ou la mondanité" is the one that Emile Carassus has discerned: life in society stifles the inner life of the individual, reducing him to an artificial existence that requires the sacrifice of his solitude. Carassus writes that, already in 1892 (the year in which "Violante was composed), "Proust a l'idée bien arrêtée que de la vie intérieure, de la solitude seule peut naître une grandeur authentique." 29 Having entered society through the mediation of Laurence—a textbook example of "triangular desire," since "Laurence aimait le monde, elle l'aima pour le suivre" (p. 33)—Violante remains there first as a mediator of fashion herself, the arbiter who "seule avait de l'esprit, du goût, une démarche qui éveillait l'idée de toutes les perfections, [qui] lança des comédies, des parfums et des robes" (p. 34), and finally as a victim of the social game of mirrors, the former object of others' desire who now only seeks in her commerce with books and nature the reflection of herself that will make her once more an object of desire to herself. The artificiality of Violante's situation is mirrored in the writing that recounts her adventures as a pseudo-Voltairean narrative, a narrative that remains for all its similarities to the model nonetheless an imperfect imitation in itself; the narrative problem of pastiche thus corresponds to the moral concerns of perfect imitation established by the epigraphs. There is after all far more Proust than there is Voltaire in the melancholy reflections that form for the young author the real point of the story, in Violante's choice to alienate herself from what she might have been:

Elle continuait à offrir le spectacle somptueux et désolé d'une existence faite pour l'infini et peu à peu restreinte qu presque néant, avec seulement sur
elle les ombres mélancoliques de la noble destinée
qu'elle eût pu remplir et dont elle s'éloignait
echaque jour davantage. (p. 36)

There is too much sympathy born of resemblance in Proust's treat-
ment of Violante, for this Voltaire pastiche to qualify as satire; in
the same way he and Violante share too great a complacency in the
"pente" she descends (p. 33) for there to be true repentance for her
fall. The pleasures Violante finds in society may indeed turn out to
be imperfect ones, as the conclusion assures us, but the melancholy of
a misspent life that Proust draws from her experience and offers to his
(society) readers as an equal lesson with the force of l'habitude, has
its own languid, decidedly fin-de-siècle charm that makes acquiescence
in society's temptations, if not profitable to the soul, at least agree-
able to the senses.

Automatons in the Comédie italienne

A narrative stance of distance and a more overtly satirical intent
mark the Fragments de comédie italienne. The perception of distance is
encouraged in a number of ways at the outset of the Fragments, first of
all by the Pierrot of the illustration who presents the section as
divertissement. 30 Secondly the notion of theatre implies physical dis-
tance between the spectacle and the spectator, the type of distance,
perhaps, that separated Proust from the social elite who never fully
admitted him to their ranks, thus forcing him to remain in large part a
spectator of their self-contained spectacle. The theatre of the Frag-
ments is, moreover, defined as distance by its foreign origin: it is
"Italian" theatre and thus geographically specific, while it evokes,
rather than late nineteenth-century France, the courtly entertainments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The distance serves Proust as a mask: he announces the comic intent of his change of representational mode (society represented by the Italian Comedy) in the epigraph from Emerson at the head of the section—"De même que l'écrevisse, le bélier, le scorpion, la balance et le verseau perdent toute bassesse quand ils apparaissent comme signes du zodiaque, ainsi on peut voir sans colère ses propres vices dans les personnages éloignés" (p. 38)—and insists in his conclusion, disingenuously, on the distance between the model and the copy: "ces réflexions, inspirées par la société de Bergame, appliquées à une autre, perdraient leur part de vérité" (p. 56). Finally, by their pronounced antirealism, the names of the personnages themselves—at which Jean Lorrain took such delighted potshots—also work in the section to create distance between society and its representation as comedy; names, naming, and an exclusive vocabulary are, we shall see, important features of the society represented in the Fragments.

As with "Violante ou la mondanité," pastiche dominates the Fragments; the model authors for Proust's character portraits and social maxims are commonly recognized as La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld. Jean Mouton aptly defined Proust's imitation of La Bruyère as the rise-and-fall rhythm dominant in the first several pieces of the section, such as "Les Amies de la comtesse Myrto" and "Heldemone, Adeligise, Ercole." "Les Maîtresses de Fabrice" and "Contre une Snob" are other fragments that follow this movement, described by Mouton as an accumulation of tranquil paragraphs composed of short symmetric phrases
leading to the single word or term that gives the portrait its mean-
ing. Thus, the explanations of a series of portraits can be found in their concluding sentences: Fabric is attached to his beautiful and intelligent mistress because she does not love him; Myrto's treatment of Doris is exactly what Myrto could expect of Parthénis were not Parthénis above snobbery; Ercole discovers that respect and love have different connotations for the duchess and the courtisan, and Elianthe's oddly obsequious behavior, impenetrable to those unacquainted with the ways of society, is easily explained by the fact that she is a snob.

As for Proust's imitation of La Rochefoucauld, Carassus points out the identity of their themes: \textit{amour-propre} and the Protean manifestation of snobbery.\footnote{With imitation, automation is a defining feature of the pastiche. This is not just in the sense of the automatic prolongation in the \textit{pasticheur} of the voice of the pastiched author, the voluntary involun-
tariness of which Proust wrote in his article on Flaubert. Deformation or caricature in the pastiche, Jean Milly explains, depends upon that type of exaggeration that reduces the original to a "tick" repeated almost despite oneself in the pastiche; this density or concentration of the original's features reveals the \textit{pasticheur}'s satirical intent, his difference from the model as well as his resemblance to it:}

\textit{...un contexte mimétique est obtenu par la concen-
tration de figures propres au modèle. Cette densité est une marque par rapport à la proportion des fi-
gures dans l'original, de même que chez Molière la répétition de "Et Tartuffe?" crée une marque par rapport à ce que serait l'expression d'un personnage réel. Dans les deux cas l'effet comique tient au remplacement d'une expression originale par un auto-
matisme aveugle et irrépressible.}
Automatism is the principal characteristic of the behavior of the gens du monde, as Proust portrays them in the Fragments. Like a theatrical performance, their activities and attitudes are predictably (and absurdly) repetitive; they imitate themselves as much as they imitate others. Fabrice, the "Inconstant," wants to believe he will remain in love with Béatrice, and yet he savors already the thought of the friendship that will follow their passion; he repeats, however, the pattern of his love for Hippolyta, Barbara and Clélie by neglecting Béatrice as soon as he falls in love with Giulia, while the reader is encouraged to believe that this passion is as deceptive and destined to a short life as the preceding ones. The passage therefore that recounts one of the Inconstant's loves has recounted them all. Similarly, Olivian (Fragment XIII) is seen "chaque soir" at the Comédie and "souvent" making ready for a trip, never satisfied with his present situation; he presumably never will be satisfied. The "Personnages de la comédie mondaine," secure in their unshakeable prejudices and hierarchies, are the most automated, puppet-like creatures of all, repeating at soirée after soirée the same invariable script assailing "le snobisme de l'un, la malveillance de l'autre, le libertinage ou la dureté d'un troisième" (p. 56). Over and over in this section the use of the present tense conveys the constancy and regularity of society and serves as a statement of general and enduring fact, as for example in Proust's portraits of "Snobs": "Aussi l'on voit telle femme qui proclame le chic une chose tout à fait stupide, y employer une finesse, un esprit, une intelligence..." or "Les femmes d'esprit ont si peur qu'on puisse les accuser d'aimer le chic qu'elle ne le nomment jamais" (p. 43). All but
two of the eighteen *Fragments de Comédie italienne*—"Les Maitresses de Fabrice" and "Cires perdues" I, the portrait of Cydalise—are recounted in the present tense; the comedy repeats and imitates itself.

Such dependable and automatic repetition in society allows for the formulation of the basic laws of society; in Proust's *Comédie italienne* these laws are all varieties of the single law of pursuit. René Girard grounds the importance of pursuit in society in Proust's own experience of the Faubourg: "...a wealthy and brilliant young man of middle-class family, Marcel Proust was irresistibly drawn to the only Parisian milieu where his wealth, charm, and ability were of no assistance to him. The only company he sought ... was that of people who wanted to have nothing to do with him."³⁷ This seems a slightly exaggerated estimation of Proust's status as outsider in high society; there were places in which he was welcomed, although it remains true that the salons of Mmes Strauss and Lemaire ranked lower than that of the Countess Greffuhle into which Proust was jockeying for admittance at the time of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*. Snobbery, however, shares with love the negative criterion set up by the reach beyond one's grasp, as Girard defines his common mechanism: "The snob, like the lover, pursues the 'person who flees him' and there is pursuit only when there is flight."³⁸

An automatic response corresponding to this definition is described repeatedly in the *Comédie italienne*: the disdain for the pursuer evinced by the one pursued (the "mediator," in Girard's terminology) that paradoxically attaches the pursuer even more doggedly to the object of his attraction. Proust sums up this rule later in the *Regrets* in terms of "cette sympathique ferveur de l'égoïsme qui attire autant les autres..."
que l'incendiaire passion les éloigne" (p. 125). In "Scénario," the Bonne Fée describes to Honoré the same rule and recommends he exploits it to assure the success of his suit:

Si, pendant un mois, au risque de gâter par tant d'artifices les joies que tu te promettais des débuts de cet amour, tu dédaignes celle que tu aimes, si tu sais pratiquer la coquetterie et affecter l'indifference, ne pas venir au rendez-vous que vous prendrez et détourner tes lèvres de sa poitrine qu'elle te tendra comme une gerbe de roses, votre amour fidèle et partagé s'édifiera pour l'éternité sur l'incorruptible base de ta patience. (p. 49)

The end of this story, of course, is that upon seeing his beloved, Honoré promptly forgets this sage advice and throws himself upon her with breathless assurances of love. The beloved's automatic response is flight—disdain for the person who shows himself inferior by confessing his need of the other—covered over by the convenient mask of social convention:

Ce fut comme s'il avait soufflé sur la flamme du désir de la bien-aimée. Feignant d'être choquée de l'inconvenance de ce procédé, elle s'enfuit et il ne la revit jamais que le torturant d'un regard indifférent et sévère.... (p. 50)

"Scénario" began with Honoré studying himself in the mirror; it ends with the beloved and her "regard indifférent et sévère," as the image of what Honoré ought to have been to win her attachment. Myrto, in "Les Amies de la Comtesse Myrto," illustrates even more clearly than Honoré the principle of pursuit and flight, for she is trapped inside a veritable hall of mirrors, each of which offers her a different image of herself. In Parthénis, of higher rank than she, Myrto reads
a glorification of herself, the image of her upward mobility; in Lalage she sees an exact reflection of her own status; in Cléanthis, her friend of inferior status, Myrto likewise discerns a flattering image of herself, one that she mistakenly thinks is closer to her "true" nature than her other images: "...à chérir Cléanthis, Myrto sent avec orgueil qu'elle est capable de se désintéresser, d'avoir un goût sincère, de comprendre et d'aimer, qu'elle est assez élégante pour se passer au besoin de l'élégance" (p. 39). It is only in Doris, the social climber who copies Myrto as Myrto copies Parthénis, that Myrto encounters and flees her double, the mirror of her snobbery:

...déplaisant comme Myrto par une disproportion fâcheuse entre son rang et celui où elle aspire, [Doris] lui présente enfin l'image de son vice.... Aussi, trop irritée pour jouer le rôle amusant de protectrice, elle éprouve à l'endroit de Doris les sentiments qu'elle, Myrto, inspirerait précisément à Parthénis, si Parthénis n'était pas au-dessus du snobisme: elle la hait" (p. 39)

The choice of image to project, a choice which more often than not entails flight from an image of the self judged as displeasing, is thus another basic preoccupation of society in the Comédie italienne. The "Snobs" who devote their time and energy to the pursuit of "le chic," but who so ingeniously refuse to admit they fancy anything but elegance (the difference between the two is the difference between imitation and instinct) are prime examples of this flight from the self, as are also the heroine of "A une snob," ironized by Proust for her allegedly historical interest in the ranking families of the Faubourg, and Oranthe, whose detailed case study follows "A une Snob." Oranthe's game is to deliberately violate his natural inclinations in order to offer to
society an image of all that he thinks society esteems—esthete, eccentric, ladies' man and bon vivant; he is a pastiche of himself according to society's mediation. To his interlocutor, however, the narrator who here speaks for high society, Oranthe's poses are clearly transparent:

Pourtant vous êtes honnête homme, assez riche pour ne pas faire de dettes si vous ne les croyiez nécessaires à votre génie, assez tendre pour souffrir de causer à votre femme un chagrin que vous trouveriez bourgeois de lui épargner, vous ne fuyez pas les compagnies, vous savez y plaire, et votre esprit, sans que vos longues boucles fussent nécessaires, vous y ferait assez remarquer.... Mais quoi! à l'âme d'un artiste vous joignez tous les préjugés bourgeois dont sans réussir à nous donner le change, vous ne nous montrez que l'envers. (p. 46)

As Oranthe's case shows, one's choices of image are not so much spontaneous as they are calculated on what one perceives to be the reigning accepted images in society. One's activities in society, like Fabrice's pursuit of the perfect mistress, are always oriented towards an ideal; even if that ideal consists only of society's opinions, such mediation is sufficient to alienate one from oneself and provide guidance for one's social behavior.

Proust offers in his Comédie italienne hints of what type of less calculated and artificial behavior would constitute a liberation from the cycle of mediation that is the grand monde, where "...l'opinion de chacun est faite de l'opinion des autres" (p. 47). Myrto's nostalgia for charity and devoted friendship is one such glimpse that recalls Violante's alienation from these same parts of her nature; the snobs who live for "le chic" could more profitably transfer their energies into love or literature—although even this alternative as Proust
describes it, "écrire un joli conte ou varier ingénieusement les plaisirs et les peines de son amant" (p. 43), retains a good deal of preciousity and social conventionality. Olivian ought to converse more with his friends or stay home to finish writing his book, and Oranthe could simply give in to his natural common sense, his love for his wife, and the artistic instinct that would permit him to appreciate Lamartine and Wagner "en esprit et en vérité" (p. 46). The only character in the Comédie who dreams of revolt against the opinions of society, is B..., represented in "Eventail" as hopelessly outclassed by C... and his bottle of strange and exotic perfumes. B...'s revolt against "l'opinion des autres," is no true rejection of society, however, but rather a reversal of terms; he pursues his usual goals of stylishness and acceptance by society, flaunting society's conventions all the better to fulfill a new and equally conventional role:

B..., désespéré de ne pouvoir renchérir sur [C...], et pensant que la plus sûre manière de devancer la mode, c'est d'être démodé avec éclat, respire deux sous de violette et considère C... avec mépris. (p. 51) 39

Until "real" values of love, art, and simplicity come into fashion, there is not much hope of anyone's imitating them in the Comédie italienne.

Inside and Outside the Comédie

Nowhere in the Comédie italienne does Proust define what constitutes the sought-after ideals of status, elegance, or chic; nowhere are we told what it is about society that makes its attraction so irresistible
and full membership in it so hard to achieve. It is the nature of mystery that it can only be alluded to or shown through its effects; it cannot be explained or analyzed. Proust's preservation of the mystery of society in the *Comédie italienne* points up another of its essential characteristics: high society is a closed world whose codes of thought and behavior are jealously guarded from outsiders and would-be imitators, to whom its message is, roughly, "If you have to ask what's 'in,' you're not." The exercise of pastiche repeats on the textual level the exclusivity attributed to society, for it too organizes its readers into two camps: those who, by their familiarity with the mediating text (their superior literary culture), "get" the joke, and those who don't. Needless to say, it is as difficult to explain the humor of a pastiche to an uncomprehending outsider as it is to explain a private joke, style or elegance to someone not of the "in" crowd.40

It stands to reason then that the *pasticheur* must be an insider; how else could he write the pastiche? And if that is so on the literary level, why can it not also be true on the social level, a simple extension of the illusion of community created in the shared laughter of the pastiche? The position of social insider is the one that Proust adopts for himself throughout the *Comédie italienne*. It is from this point of view that he says "nous" to the bourgeois Oranthe, expressing solidarity not with Oranthe but with the *gens du monde* that Oranthe is trying to impress. The narrator's stance in "Contre une snob" asserts even more strongly his share in society's private code: the critique of Elianthe's snobbery begins with a clear distinction between those who are "in" and those who are not, necessary for the comic
defamiliarization that governs the account of her obsequious behavior. "Si vous n'étiez pas du monde," says the narrator, you would not understand Elianthe's actions, and, casting about for a suitable frame of reference, you would hit upon a juridical context (the metaphor is not irrelevant to the prevailing notion in the Comédie italienne of the regard that appraises and judges both self and others). In Elianthe's case, then, "vous penseriez: quel crime a donc commis Elianthe et qui sont ces magistrats qu'il lui faut à tout prix acheter, à qui elle sacrifie ses amitiés, ses amours, la liberté de sa pensée, la dignité de sa vie, sa fortune, son temps, ses plus intimes répugnances de femme?" (p. 44).

Just as the key to Elianthe's behavior lies in the one word with which the portraits ends--"elle est snob"41--what ultimately distinguishes the insider from the outsider is the former's command of society's vocabulary—a highly arbitrary vocabulary in which names are both labels and masks, conveyors of meaning and judgment, essential to the perpetuation of the social code. It is one's family name, after all, that determines one's status in society; names—proper or common—are thus an important part of the relationship between those who are "in" and those who would like to be.42 "Snob," for example, resumes, judges, and permanently classifies Elianthe, the name of Elegance for the object of their desires is preferable to "le chic" for other snobs who have no clear ideas of what real elegance is; still another snob claims that the aristocratic names of her contemporaries serve her as a "mnemotechnic" for remembering the history of France (p. 45).
Barthes has called Proust's discovery of names, the choice, that is, of the fictional names he would use for characters and places, the poetic origin of the *Recherche*. In the work, he writes, proper names share with the experience of reminiscence three important qualities: citation—the proper noun refers to only one referent; essentiaлизation—when pronounced, the names evoke the essence of the referent; and exploration—since, as Barthes says, "l'on 'déplie' un nom propre exactement comme on fait d'un souvenir." These qualities, he continues, make of proper names "...en quelque sorte la forme linguistique de la réminiscence." Although Proust is not writing in the *Comédie italienne* from the point of view of reminiscence ("Eventail" with its unfolding of past scenes of salon life, is an exception to which we will return), Barthes' comments are a useful starting point for a discussion of the manner in which names function in the "monodity cycle," particularly in the last fragment, "Personnages de la comédie mondaine," whose heavy concentration of foreign names and characters from Italian Comedy frees Proust's hand for an insightful critique of society from the position of insider.

In "Personnages de la comédie mondaine," the proper names are studied as essentiaлизation and as citation; once society has established its conventions, each person's name evokes his role in the social "theatre," becoming in effect his or her stereotype:

De même que dans les comédies Scaramouche est toujours vantard et Arlequin toujours balourd, que la conduite de Pasquino n'est qu'intrigue, celle de Pantalon qu'avarice et que crédulité; de même la société a décrété que Guido est spirituel mais perfide, et n'hésiterait pas pour faire un bon mot à sacrifier un ami; que Girolamo captialise, sous les
The lack of correlation between the real actions of the characters and society's conception of the "personnages" points up the arbitrary manner in which society assigns meaning to the characters' names. For Barthes, one of the peculiarities of the novelist's invention of fictional names in the Recherche is the remarkably high degree of motivation that, contrary to linguistic theory (and to the practice of society in "Personnages") unites the signifiant and the signifié; this motivation functions as a guideline, Barthes suggests, in the linguistic apprentissage of both the narrator of the Recherche and the novelist himself:

...à la vérité, le narrateur et le romancier parcourent en sens inverse le même trajet; l'un croit déchiffrer dans les noms qui lui sont donnés une sorte d'affinité naturelle entre le signifiant et le signifié, entre la couleur vocalique de Parme et la douceur mauve de son contenu, l'autre, devant inventer quelque nom à la fois normand, gothique et venteux, doit chercher dans la tablature générale des phonèmes, quelques sons accordés à la combinaison de ces signifiés; l'un décide, l'autre code, mais il s'agit du même système et ce système est d'une façon ou d'une autre [un] système motivé, fondé sur un rapport d'imitation entre le signifiant et le signifié. Codeur et décideur pourraient reprendre ici à leur compte l'affirmation de Cratyle: "La propriété du nom consiste à représenter la chose telle qu'elle est." 44
The practice of society rewrites as follows this formula from the Cratylus: "La propriété du nom consiste à représenter la personne telle que la société la conçoit;" the arbitrariness of the representation is one more barrier that society sets up against the outsider. Society's whole frame of reference begins and ends with its own convention; society is a mirror that reflects only itself. The roles society assigns its personages, the meanings it attaches to their names, have more to do with society than with the "truth" of the character, yet society's meaning is the one that dominates: "Chacun [est] déjà très différent par nature du caractère que la société a été chercher dans le magasin général de ses costumes et caractères, et lui a prêté une fois pour toutes..." (p. 54).

The encoding process is now complete and like Italian Comedy, produces a closed world of rigid characterization and stock situations. Having decided on the meaning that all will hereafter give to each character's name, society makes of its dealings with its personages a continuous repetition of the original conventionalized meaning, attaching the same significé to the entire range of signifiants that the stereotyped personages might provide; to the original lack of motivation is substituted the motivation of the established convention. As the narrator observes:

Cette divergence entre le caractère véritable de Castruccio, de Guido, de Cardenio, d'Ercole, de Pippo, de Cesare et de Fortunata et le type qu'ils incarnent irrévocablement aux yeux sagaces de la société, est sans danger pour eux, puisque cette divergence, la société ne veut pas la voir.... Quoi que fasse Girolamo, c'est un bourru bienfaisant. Quoi que dise Fortunata, elle est bonne. (p. 55)
In an ironic twist, however—so overwhelming is the urge to imitate in society the conventions by which society is governed, so closely does society's mirror resemble a miroir aux alouettes—the final step in this process of meaning is that the signifiants themselves accept the signifiés that society has determined for them. Thus Girolamo begins to think of himself as an "ami véritable," tempering his criticisms of his friends with an almost heartfelt affection, while Fortunata, with her growing embonpoint, "sent s'adoucir en elle l'acrimonie qui seule l'empêchait de remplir dignement les fonctions vénérables et charmantes que le monde lui avait déléguées" (pp. 55-56). A cycle has been completed, but society, having never noticed any discrepancies between signifiant and signifié, is none the wiser; it goes on comfortably repeating its conventions to itself: "...chacun, sans s'embarrasser des contradictions de la conduite de ces personnages, sans remarquer leur lente adaptation au type imposé, range avec ordre leurs actions dans le tiroir bien à sa place et soigneusement défini de leur caractère idéal ..." (p. 56).

Last in the series of the Comédie italienne and the Fragment most heavily dependent upon the masks and stock characters of the Italian Comedy as the frame of reference for its satire, "Personnages de la comédie mondaine" draws together a number of the criticisms of society sketched out in the preceding fragments. What society does not do—that Proust, Barthes says, will do in the Recherche—is use the name as exploration: it, no more than the person who bears the name, is never "unfolded" or examined; such exploration would redeem society's unmotivated significations by overthrowing the preference for the paraître
over the être that presently governs the attribution of names. In Barthes' analysis, exploration of the name, along with the experience of reminiscence, is the key to artistic creation in Proust; society's refusal to explore the name makes of the gens du monde bad readers and incompetent creators. Thus, the vague opposition that Proust touches upon in this section between the artificial values of society and other "real" values, among them literature, comes a bit more clearly into focus; one reads in society's misuse of the name to limit rather than to explore, to exclude the uninitiated rather than to draw him into an experience of generalized truth and significance, the beginnings of the dramatic incompatibility between art and mondality, a worrisome preoccupation for Proust in the 1890's destined for personification in his later novel under the traits of Charles Swann.

Decadence and Décadentisme

Proust includes among his Fragments de Comédie italienne satirical portraits of that particular type of Decadent figure known as the aesthete, intersection of the snob with the literary Decadence. Emile Carassus has described this variety of décadentisme apparent in the Délicescences d'Adoré Floupette:

...on sent [dans les Délicescences], à côté des provocations decadentes, une languer plus raffinée, quelque chose d'exquis, et de délicieusement malade, sans corruption éclatante, à côté de l'or vieille et du sang, le pastel délicat....

C'est que, pris sur un mode mineur, le décadentisme s'intègre fort bien dans un cadre élégant, qu'il convient fort bien à une classe aux sens affinés et de sang appauvri. 45
The snob-appeal of such *décadentisme* is, moreover, easily discernible, as Carassus continues:

Le souci de modernité, le désir d'apparaître soi-même comme le produit suprême d'une civilisation, la propension à lier son sort à celui des classes aristocratiques, la conviction d'adopter une attitude esthétique fort distinguée, tous ces éléments jouèrent chez le snob ... incapable de simplicité, se retenant d'éprouver des sentiments largement humains qu'il estimerait vulgaires et dont il croirait être dupe, il a corrompu en lui toute possibilité d'un abandon direct. Pour certains, la décadence peut n'être qu'un passage vers un symbolisme plus Riche, un instinct profond de la beauté et du mystère, vers une spiritualité exigeante, vers des convictions ardentes ou désespérées. Le snob--et avec quelque retard--retiendra cela seul qui le peut séduire, sans l'engager. 46

Both of these manifestations of Decadence—the instinctive convictions and configurations that constitute Decadence proper and its copy—*décadentisme*—the exaggerated aestheticism practiced by the snob—are apparent, then, in Proust's *Comédie italienne*; the latter is an object of criticism, while Decadence itself shows up in the passion for revery and the attraction to the frisson of ambiguity, contradiction and loss.

The principal representatives of *décadentisme* in the *Comédie* are Oranthe and T..., one of the figures painted on the fan in "Eventail." Oranthe's exaggerated desire to appear "original" succeeds only in revealing to what extent he is an imitator, particularly in the domain of art; it is his own imagination, says Proust, and not the artificial decor of snow and cinname that ought to unlock for him the riches of poetry and music: "Vous avez assez d'imagination pour faire tomber de la neige ou brûler du cinname sans le secours de l'hiver ou d'un brûle-parfums... (p. 46).
The charge that Proust thus levels against Oranthe is the very serious one of materialism in literature. The same accusation is made, and more pointedly so, of T... in "Eventail." With obvious reference to Des Esseintes' ingenious interior decoration, Proust depicts T..., seated next to his hostess on the rose-colored sofa: "Il vous décrit sa nouvelle chambre savamment goudronnée pour lui suggérer les sensations d'un voyage en mer, vous dévoile toutes les quintessences de sa toilette et de son ameublement" (p. 52). It was, in A Rebours, Des Esseintes' dining room, not his bedroom, that was arranged to resemble a ship and create the illusion of travel (his bedroom was a facsimile of a medieval cloister), but the parodic attempt is all the more obvious for the deformation, while the smell of tar that must pervade T...'s bedroom completes the satire with its example of over-refinement to the point of absurdity. The hostess shares Proust's judgment here and allows him to make his point against the aesthete's use of material props as an aide-rêverie: "Votre sourire dédaigneux témoigne que vous prenez peu cette imagination infirme à qui une chambre nue ne suffit pas pour y faire passer toutes les visions de l'univers, et qui conçoit l'art et la beauté d'une façon si pitoyablement matérielle" (p. 52). True revery is much more simple and natural, as the narrator advises Olivian in the next portrait: "Les carrosses de voiture vous emmènent bien lentement où votre rêve vous conduirait si vite. Pour être au bord de la mer, vous n'avez qu'à fermer les yeux" (p. 53).

There is room nonetheless for sensual pleasure in Proust's Comédie; this undercurrent of eroticism and sensuality rejoins Decadent themes by its fascination with what is forbidden, and by its provocation of the
frisson délicieux. In Fragment V, for example, Proust praises the air of seductive mystery given off by persons of dubious morality: "La vie est étrangement facile et douce avec certaines personnes d'une grande distinction naturelle, spirituelles, affectueuses, mais qui sont capables de tous les vices, encore qu'elles n'en exercent aucun publiquement et qu'on n'en puisse affirmer d'elles un seul" (p. 41). This fascination is reminiscent of that exercised by Claudius Ethal over the Duc de Frénac in Monsieur de Phocas; the rumored malevolence of the former, by its tantalizing ambiguity, is more effective than proof would have been in attaching to him the impressive Duke. The particular vices Proust had in mind in Fragment V might have had something to do with the homosexuality he had earlier discovered in himself; this Fragment could thus be read as a condensation of the narrator's gradual discovery in the Recherche of the pervasiveness of homosexuality in society. In the Fragments, however, the discovery is that of the frisson encountered where the Decadents both located and cultivated it—at the dividing line between virtue and vice. The image of the garden at the end of Fragment V is an elegant and delicate reference to Baudelaire's conjunction of good and evil in the Fleurs du mal; it confirms the impression of frisson: "Puis, leur perversité donne du piquant aux occupations les plus innocentes, comme se promener la nuit, dans les jardins" (p. 41).

The frisson is elicited in a variety of ways in the Comédie: the proximity of vice to virtue in Fragment V has its opposite, the proximity of virtue to vice, in one of the maxims of Fragment X: "l'exigence du libertin qui veut une virginité est encore une forme de l'éternel
hommage que rend l'amour à l'innocence" (p. 47). It comes from the contemplation of beauty, as in the two portraits grouped as the "Cires perdues": Cydalise draws her power to fascinate from her evocation of a distant and vanished past—

J'aurais voulu vous voir tenir dans la main quelque hanap, ou plutôt une de ces buies d'une forme si fière et si triste et qui, vides aujourd'hui dans nos musées, élévant avec une grâce inutile une coupe épuisée, furent autrefois, comme vous, la fraîche volupté des tables de Venise dont un peu des dernières violettes et des dernières roses semblent flotter encore dans le courant limpide du verre écumex et troublé (p. 42)—

and Hippolyta, progeny of some mythic conjunction of goddess and bird, "donne l'idée du fabuleux avec le frisson de la beauté" (p. 43). There is frisson at the approach of the unobtainable, as Honoré awaits his beloved in "Scénario;" at her entrance, "les roses, les orchidées, les cheveux de Vénus, la plume et le papier, la pendule de Saxe, Honoré haletant vibrent comme une harmonie d'elle" (p. 50). Finally, there is frisson in the displaced eroticism of snobbery. This is suggested by the snob of Fragment IV who reads and rereads her lists of visits in a fever-pitch of agitation, and satirized, through an extended and burlesque vocabulary combining eroticism, food, the charm of the ending, vanity, and death, in the portrait of the provincial snobs, for the "chic" they crave remains—like virtue for the vicious, vice for the virtuous, the past for the present, and the loved one for the lover—always deliciously and tantalizingly out of reach:

A vrai dire, si parler du chic que les autres n'ont pas les réjouit plus, parler du chic que les autres ont les nourrit davantage, et fournit à leur
imagination affamée comme un aliment plus réel. J'en ai vu, à qui la pensée des alliances d'une duchesse donnait des frissons de plaisir avant que d'envie. Il y a, paraît-il, dans la province, des boutiquières dont la cervelle enferme comme une cage étroite des désirs de chic ardents comme des fauves. Le facteur leur apporte _Le Gaulois_. Les nouvelles élégantes sont dévorées en un instant. Les inquiètes provinciales sont repues. Et pour une heure des regards rassérénés vont briller dans leurs prunelles élargies par la jouissance et l'admiration. (p. 44)

Finally, as in the dedication to Heath and the portraits by Van Dyck, there is in the _Comédie_ the _frisson_ that comes from the nearness of death. This sense of death gives to these society figures and their preoccupations a distinct air of vanity and uselessness, but even more than in Violante's wasted life, vanity easily becomes in the _Comédie_ a pretext for the positive value of melancholia. And waste itself, in the Decadent aesthetic, is a necessary precursor to all beauty, as usefulness remains too closely related to the bourgeois ideal of productivity to serve as a criterion for art. 49

The two portraits of the "Cires perdues," as their title implies, fit clearly into this aesthetics of loss. The image of wax for these women likewise evokes the pallid beauty praised by the Decadents—Ethal's paintings, for example, in _Monsieur de Phocas_ of women dying gracefully of consumption, _condamnées_ or _perdues_ in their own right—and applies particularly well to the pale, suffering and unearthly Cydalise; Hippolyta, less anemic than Cydalise, is nevertheless dressed entirely in white.

The model for Cydalise is the Countess de Mailly-Nesle, future wife of the popular Polish tenor Jean de Reszké (himself mentioned in the "Mélancolique villégiature"); Proust observed the Countess one
evening at Princess Mathilde's salon and wrote "Cydalise" at the end of the evening. Reproaching Hahn for pointing out to Mme de Reszké her portrait in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, Proust described the source of her mysterious attraction, cautioning all the while that just as the model is made up of dreams, the portrait is itself only the expression of a dream, a mirror, says Proust, "où ne s'est reflété qu'un aspect ... peut-être irréal et en tout cas si fragmentaire, si passager, si relatif à moi,--d'elle-même, que je suis peut-être le seul à pouvoir en le confrontant à un souvenir y trouver quelque vérité." 

Mme de Reszké is for Proust as he then describes her a mythical figure from the old Breton legends of Viviane and Iseult, mediated by the images of the Pre-Raphaelites and Gustave Moreau and briefly realized in Sarah Bernhardt. There is in his description once again the domination of art over nature, as well as the suggestion of geographical personification in women that will become part of the structure of desire in the *Recherche*:

...Madame de Reszké pour moi, c'est Viviane, la féérique apparition, au seuil de la Forêt de Brocéliande ou du Lac d'Amour, dont le visage adorable et les yeux de songe enchantent les légendes de Burne-Jones. Figures qui paraissent trop conventionnelles dans l'art pour être "crues" par qui les regarde dans Burne-Jones ou dans Gustave Moreau, mais que la nature réalise une fois pour montrer qu'une beauté si "artistique" peut être vraie. Ainsi Madame Reszké, sans doute autrefois Sarah Bernhardt. Dans une certaine mesure Me Greffulhe. Mais seule Madame de Reszké est la créature du songe, qui dépasse infiniment la beauté que nous nous sommes faite avec la Bretagne, mais qui doit être la vraie beauté de Cornouailles, celle que ses poètes seuls ont vue, celle de Viviane encore une fois, celle d'Iseult. 52
In her portrait, Cydalise is a vestige of far-away and vanished ages. Her eyes, associated with water in the description of Mme de Reszké ("...j'irai ... jusqu'en Helgoat [sic] voir si les lacs n'y ont pas la couleur des yeux de Made de Reszké"53), have a primordial quality; they conserve "la fraîche pureté des matins, des eaux courantes aux premiers beaux jours" (p. 41). Like Iseult, she is a legendary princess enveloped in the mists of centuries past:

Puis j'imaginais de vous comme d'une princesse venue de très loin, à travers les siècles, qui s'ennuyait ici pour toujours avec une langueur résignée, princesse aux vêtements d'une harmonie ancienne et rare et dont la contemplation serait vite devenue pour les yeux une douce et envivrante habitude (p. 42).

The image of Iseult is reinforced by the enchantment to which Proust attributes her air of sadness—"comme d'une à qui ce qu'elle aurait voulu eût été refusé, dès avant sa naissance, par les fées" (41-42) and by his reference at the end to the "hanap," a word rarely encountered outside of medieval romans, and the "coupe épuisée," suggesting the magic potion drained by Tristan and Iseult. Like the legends to which she belongs, Cydalise derives part of her mysterious beauty from the air of suffering legible in her eyes and related to her (assumed) unhappily love: "...vous exprimiez surtout quelque chose d'aimant et de souffrant;" this suffering pervades and beautifies her entire being: "Les étoffes mêmes prenaient sur vous une grâce douloureuse, s'attribuaient sur vos bras surtout, vos bras juste assez découragés pour rester simples et charmants" (p. 42). Her most elegant and seductive sadness, however, resides in her exile from the far-away times she represents, in the melancholy there is in contemplating the coupe and
hanap as museum pieces, in contemplating Cydalise herself. The sensitivity to loss and the phantomialike revival of the temps révolu in this portrait is strikingly similar to that of the evocation of the Bois de Boulogne, emptied of its grandes dames and its courtisans who parade only as shadows in the narrator's memory at the close of Du Coté de chez Swann.

Like Cydalise, a large part of Hippolyta's beauty derives from her exile from a time and place that no longer exist; in her, the narrator pays tribute to "...la petite tête royale du paon, derrière qui ne ruisselle plus le flot bleu de la mer, vert de mer, ou l'écume de son plumage mythologique" (p. 43). The background of the sea given to Hippolyta anticipates the figure of Albertine in the Recherche, while the combination of exiled royalty and her bird-like metamorphosis suggests the figures of exile in Baudelaire—Andromaque and the swan. Baudelaire's "cygne," however, becomes Proust's "Paon," leitmotif of exile in "Promenade" (the peacock, "véritable oiseau de paradis dans une basse-cour" is compared to Andromaque in captivity [pp. 107–81]) and in "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande."

It is in "Eventail," however, that the sense of the ending is the most pronounced of the Comédie italienne, and the most specifically linked to death. The title of the piece is evocative of Mallarmé and "la grâce des choses fanées;" the narrator situates himself beyond the time of the scenes of salon life he has painted on the fan, unfolding them as so many charming and fragile memories before the retired hostess to whom he presents it. There is in "Eventail" a carefully designed play of light and shadow: the "lustres" of the salon, whose
streams of light are now "éteints à jamais" (p. 51), served to illuminate the hostess' marvelous collection of bibelots; it is now the painter who illuminates that which time has extinguished. Everywhere, however, the painter lights up only shadows—"J'ai pu les porter innocemment, ces ombres, sur ce fragile papier auquel votre geste donnera des ailes" (p. 52)—since their destruction is irrevocable: the salon is "à jamais fermé maintenant" (p. 50), its guests dispersed. The narrator praises the vanished salon as "un petit univers moins divisé, plus harmonieux que l'autre, vivant pourtant, et qu'on ne verra plus" (p. 51). At the end, however, is the elegant philosophical twist: even when these shadows were alive, says the narrator, they were already practicing for death by the emptiness and artificiality of their life in society; if they came to the salon it was to "anticiper sur la mort et vivre de la vie vaine des fantômes, dans la joie factice de votre salon, sous les lustres dont les branches s'étaient couvertes de grandes fleurs pâles" (pp. 52-53). Their proximity to death of which the salon-goers remained unconscious recalls the "scandale universel" that horrified Alexis in "Baldassare;" that of "ces existences ... marchant à la mort à reculons, en regardant la vie" (p. 14). Against the backdrop of death, life in the salon is a waste of one's time; in "Eventail," however, Proust's resolution of the temps perdu remains purely aesthetic and circular. The flowers on the chandeliers that end the piece also began it: "Les lustres, dont toutes les branches portent de grandes fleurs pâles, éclairent des objets d'art de tous les temps et de tous les pays" (p. 50); the motion is that of the fan being opened and then closed, having revealed itself in the meantime an objet
d'art like those of the salon. At the same time, however, the fan is
different from them for its painted representations of the entire salon,
a relative gift of life through the representations, as fragile as the
models themselves who even in real life hinted of death. The gesture
of opening and closing the fan thus offers an illusory control over
the life and death of the salon, all the more seductive for its being
based on the same tacit premise as the life of the salon itself—the
irreality of it all. Proust's acquiescence here, as opposed to the
critique of society and the authenticity of the real values he sets up
in contrast to society in other passages of the Comédie italienne, is
in the "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" lamented in Ecclesiastes; as
was the case for Cydalise, vanity is here not the least of the charms
proposed by the aristocratic idle class to the son of industrious bour-
geois stock. Waste, even of a life, is the supreme luxury to which
Proust pays homage in the Comédie italienne, the mark of the aristo-
crat that even the lucidity of the young snob, drawn also as he is into
elements of the Decadent aesthetic, does not prevent him from admiring.

"Bouvard et Pécuchet"

An obvious pastiche of Flaubert, announced by its title and the
author's denial of responsibility for the opinions of the characters,
"Mondanité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet" concludes the "mondan-
ity cycle" of Les Plaisirs et les jours with an elaborate play of
mirrors and a sweep of satire sufficiently wide-ranging to exculpate
the author of any indiscretion in his preceding criticisms. The con-
nections between Proust and Flaubert's duo are numerous: Robert de
Billy recalls that his introduction to Proust was later remembered by the two of them in terms of Flaubert's famous couple, so impressed were they by the "complementarity" of their ways of thinking: "Nous nous plaissions à rappeler cette soirée en empruntant le langage de Flaubert, quand il met Bouvard et Pécuchet en présence." The dedication that accompanied the first half of the piece in the *Revue blanche* in 1892, was to three Roberts--Robert Proust, Robert de Flers and Robert de Billy; the similarity of the names sets up a series of mirror images, while the purpose of the pastiche given in the dedication was "pour nous amuser." The second half of the pastiche was written as a gift for Reynaldo Hahn; Proust sent it to him with a letter that Kolb dates as either 27 August or 3 September 1894 and that contains Proust's comments on his own similarity to the characters: "Depuis le peu de temps que je vous connais, j'ai déjà été tant de fois l'un et l'autre de ces deux imbéciles avec vous, que je n'aurai pas besoin d'aller chercher bien loin mes modèles." This second half, "Mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet," was written in 45 minutes, as one judges from Proust's announcement in his letter of an intent to begin writing at nine o'clock, followed by reference to the completed exercise at nine forty-five; like the first half, this exercise is meant as amusement only:

Je n'ai pas d'idées et cela ne peut décidément pas me mener jusqu'à l'heure de me coucher. Gardez-le tout de même et nous verrons ensemble si on ne pourrait pas faire quelque chose là-dessus. Une autre fois je vous ferai un autre cadeau, fait pour vous, plus précieusement travaillé, et "dans le genre sérieux." J'espère que ce sera moins détestable. 58
"Mondanité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet" thus puts Proust himself on stage, in disguised fashion, along with Hahn, Robert de Billy, and the two other Roberts that the latter's name conjures up. The characters behind which this company masquerades—particularly Proust, since the opinions expressed by the "imbéciles" are nearly always the opposite of his—are bourgeois arrivistes, stereotypes based on Flaubert's creation of incompetents boldly attempting to encompass worlds of knowledge hopelessly beyond their grasp. Under cover of Flaubert's legendary contempt for the pretentions and shallowness of his own middle class, Proust offers a deformed representation of the defects of the aristocracy—their exaggerated concern for protocol, their intellectual automatism, and their high opinion of themselves; the mask of Bouvard and Pécuchet allows him to attribute the deformation to the recognized flaws and incomprehension of the characters who attempt unsuccessfully to understand and emulate that society. It is important also for the impunity of the author that no one escapes ridicule through caricature in the piece: authors (even Mallarmé and Henri de Régnier), the nobility, financiers, Protestants, bohemians, actors, Jews, and his own favorite composers, such as, of course, Reynaldo Hahn. The technique of the caricature is what Jean Milly described for linguistic imitation as a concentration of essential traits; thus for the aristocracy, Proust can offer this composite derived from a mish-mash of legend, reputation, and traditional politics, as conceived by Bouvard—

Tout noble a des maîtresses, une soeur religieuse, conspire avec le clergé. Ils sont braves, s'endettent, ruinent et flagellent les usuriers, sont
or this stereotype of the artist, that ironizes bohemian pretentiousness by its attention to the external details of their "décour" that Bouvard and Pécuchet mistake for their character:

...toute artiste est farceur, brouillé avec sa famille, ne porte jamais de chapeau haute-forme [sic], parle une langue spéciale. Leur vie se passe à jouer des tours aux huissiers qui viennent pour les saisir et à trouver des déguisements grotesques pour des bals masqués. Néanmoins, ils produisent constamment des chefs-d'œuvre, et chez la plupart l'abus du vin et des femmes est la condition même de l'inspiration, sinon du génie; ils dorment le jour, se promènent la nuit, travaillent on ne sait quand, et la tête toujours en arrière, laissant flotter au vent une cravate molle, roulent perpétuellement des cigarettes. (p. 61)

Although the analysis of style was for Proust the opposite of pastiche, his article on Flaubert's style is a suggestive yardstick against which to measure the success of the parodic "Bouvard et Pécuchet." The characteristics of Flaubert's style, in Proust's opinion, qualify him as simultaneously a good writer and a bad writer. He is not always grammatically correct and, for Proust, who is by 1920 (date of the article) in full command of his own art based on metaphor, Flaubert is seriously lacking in beautiful or profound imagery. In fact, the insignificance that marks many of his fictional characters carries over into both their language and his: "...ses images sont généralement si faibles
qu'elles ne s'élèvent guère au-dessus de celles que pourraient trouver ses personnages les plus insignifiants" (pp. 586-87). Yet this lack of beauty, this seeming insignificance, constitute precisely Flaubert's originality: "...il n'est pas possible à quiconque est un jour monté sur ce grand Trottoir roulant que sont les pages de Flaubert, au défilement continu, monotone, morne, indéfini, de méconnaître qu'elles sont sans précédent dans la littérature" (p. 587). Proust is particularly responsive to Flaubert's "impersonality," his efforts to eliminate from the text the traces of its author; as Proust words it, this impersonality of vision in Flaubert's descriptions gives things as much of a life as persons, and, paradoxically, becomes the mark of Flaubert's personality as a novelist: "Le rendu de sa vision, sans, dans l'intervalles, un mot d'esprit ou un trait de sensibilité, voilà en effet ce qui importe de plus en plus à Flaubert au fur et à mesure qu'il dégage mieux sa personnalité et devient Flaubert" (p. 588).

Such a vision requires innovations in style, and Proust counts as chief among Flaubert's accomplishments his use of imperfects and his manipulation of indirect discourse; other idiosyncrasies include his placement of the conjunction "et"--never to signify the last item in a series, but rather to shift the reader's attention to another part of his "tableau"--his placement of adverbial expressions anywhere in the sentence, but where one would expect to find them, and, of course, the famous "blanc" at the end of the *Education sentimentale* by which Flaubert "sait donner avec maîtrise l'impression du temps" (pp. 591-95). Flaubert is not a graceful writer, nor is he one of Proust's favorites, "mais nous aimons ces lourds matériaux que la phrase de
Flaubert soulève et laisse retomber avec le bruit intermittent d'un excavateur" (p. 594). And Flaubert's achievement in the treatment of time is ample compensation for the heavy rhythms of his style: "Flaubert le premier, les débarrasse [les changements du temps] du parasitisme des anecdotes et des scories de l'histoire. Le premier, il les met en musique" (p. 595).

Proust's pastiche of Flaubert incorporates surely and comically most of these elements of style. In all but the passages of style indirect libre, the imperfect is the dominant tense; Proust imitates Flaubert's unaccustomed and interruptive positioning of adverbial expressions as in "Ils rêvaient, sans le rencontrer, d'un juste milieu," or "Bouvard s'accoudait à la cheminée, taquinait avec précaution, pour ne pas les salir, des gants clairs sortis tout expres" (p. 57). In another rhythmic imitation, the conjunction "et" practically disappears from Proust's enumerations; witness Bouvard and Pécuchet's steps toward understanding contemporary literature--

Ils s'abonnèrent aux diverses revues qui la répandaient, les lisait à haute voix, s'efforçaient à écrire des critiques, recherchant surtout l'aisance et la légèreté du style, en considération du but qu'ils se proposaient (p. 57)--

or the breathless accumulation of qualities attributed to actors in this catalogue of opinions and idées reçues that ends with the hammer-fall of a short and finely sculpted sentence:

Les artistes, quoique vaniteux et jaloux, rendent sans cesse service à leurs camarades, applaudissent à leurs succès, adoptent les enfants des actrices poitrinaires ou malheureuses, sont précieux dans le monde, bien que, n'ayant pas reçu d'instruction, ils
soient souvent dévots et toujours superstitieux. 
Ceux des théâtres subventionnés sont à part, entière-
ment dignes de notre admiration, mériteraient d'être 
placés à table avant un général ou un prince, ont 
dans l'âme les sentiments exprimés dans les chefs-
d'œuvre sur nos grandes scènes. Leur mémoire est 
prodigieuse et leur tenue parfaite. (pp. 61-62)

"Et" in Proust's "Bouvard et Pécuchet" functions as a relancement, not 
as a conclusion; it is the perfect conjunction to use to avoid emitting 
a personal conclusion or judgment, confining itself only to succession, 
as in this passage from the beginning of the pastiche, in which et substi-
tutes for the alors one might expect instead:

Bouvard objecta que le style de la critique, écrite 
même en badinant, ne convient pas dans le monde. Et 
ils instituèrent des conversations sur ce qu'ils 
avaient lu, dans la manière des gens du monde. (p. 57)

The use of indirect discourse and Flaubert's style indirect libre 
is chiefly responsible, at least in "Mondonité," for the comic effect 
of the pastiche; a full half of the section is written in this style. 60 
As does Flaubert, Proust uses the technique to distance himself from 
his text, the foolishness of his characters, and their opinions. This 
is particularly useful for Proust, for as we have noted, the objects of 
caricature in this piece are ones which he normally admires, exception 
made naturally for Bouvard and Pécuchet themselves, whose solution to 
the difficulties inherent in discussing literature in society, acknow-
ledging or making introductions, or evaluating music is always to deni-
grate and dismiss the issue. Thus Mallarmé and Maeterlinck come com-
fortably under fire—
Mallarmé n'a pas plus de talent, mais c'est un brillant causeur. Quel malheur qu'un homme aussi doué devienne fou chaque fois qu'il prend la plume.... Maeterlinck effraye, mais par des moyens matériels et indignes du théâtre; l'art émeut à la façon d'un crime, c'est horrible! D'ailleurs sa syntaxe est misérable (p. 58)--

as do Lemaître, Anatole France and Paul Bourget--

Lemaître, malgré tout son esprit, leur semblait inconscient, irrévérencieux, tantôt péjoratif et tantôt bourgeois; il exécutait trop souvent la palinodie. Son style surtout était lâché, mais la difficulté d'improviser à dates fixes et si rapprochées doit l'absoudre. Quant à France, il écrit bien, mais pense mal, au contraire de Bourget, qui est profond, mais possède une forme affligante. La rareté d'un talent complet les désolait. (p. 59)

Clichés, although not italicized as in Madame Bovary, also abound in the piece, passing for dialogue and reasoning between the two friends:

--Pourquoi Loti rend-il toujours le même son?  
--Ses romans sont tous écrits sur la même note.  
--Sa lyre n'a qu'une corde, concluait Bouvard. (p. 58)

It is significant that such a convincing pastiche as "Bouvard et Pécuchet" should close the "mondanity cycle" in Les Plaisirs et les jours with what is Proust's most obvious and successful send-up of the entire section. The ludicrous denigrations of Bouvard and Pécuchet make the criticisms in the preceding texts appear reasonable by comparison; the criticism of even respected names here blurs the line for the entire cycle between what is admired and what is deplored, providing yet another mask for the author. The wit that is evident in the piece likewise throws a brighter light over what has gone before it in the cycle, pointing up another value precious to society—entertainment.
While all of this is going on, Proust, ostensibly the better to imitate Flaubert's impersonality, hides himself better in this last text than in any of the preceding ones; Bouvard and Pécuchet are highly serviceable masks of which he takes full advantage, demonstrating superbly a burlesque mastery of the vocabulary of society's closed world.

The imitation common to pastiche and society thus takes on an air of magic in this closing text; as pastiche imitates the closed world of society, the ritual sacrifice of the self in pastiche is an act of imitative magic that prolongs the writer's appeal to society with its automatons and its sacrifice of the individual. The pastiche constitutes an offering of self to society in the latter's terms, which Proust has repeatedly shown he understands, constantly implies he accepts, and in fact shows himself eager to fulfill. For the unforgivable sin in society, as it emerges from the pages of the "monodinity cycle," is not imitation (all of society imitates), but the inability (of the snobs) to imitate well. Proust's pastiches on society prove how well he, like society, can imitate; they call, in Proust's discrete and skillful way, upon life to imitate art.
Footnotes

1 Richard L. Kopp provides a useful study of the history of the critical debate about Proust’s snobbery in his introduction to Marcel Proust as a Social Critic (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971, pp. 7-23). The two sides of the debate can be roughly summarized as follows: to his detractors, Proust’s concerted effort to rub elbows with the aristocracy undermines whatever experience of life he may have attempted to translate into his novel and thus seriously limits his appeal, while his supporters excuse Proust’s social climbing by his vocation as chronicler of society; his years as a mondain were thus a necessary preparation period for the elaboration of the Recherche, whether Proust himself was conscious of this or not. This is the image that Proust satirized, however, in the Recherche under the traits of the "romancier mondain qui venait d’installer au coin de son oeil un monocle, son seul organe d’investigation psychologique et d’impitoyable analyse, et répondit d’un air important et mystérieux, en roulant l’œil: ‘J’observe!’ (I, p. 327). The most reasonable expression of Proust’s resolution of mondanité and art in his novel appears to be Émile Carassus: "Proust n’a pas voulu donner un cadre exclusivement mondain à son œuvre, mais quelle que soit la forme dans laquelle il ait conçu son roman, il n’a jamais envisagé de n’y point placer des pages concernant la vie mondaine" (p. 560).

2 Proust wrote to Reynaldo in September 1895, comparing Mme Daudet’s "bourgeoise" manners as hostess to the type of social graces encountered in higher social circles than hers: "Madame Daudet charmante, mais combien bourgeoise.... A moi déjà la première fois qu’allant la voir je la remerciais de m’y avoir autorisé elle me répondait: ‘M. Hahn me l’avait demandé’ mot énorme! L’aristocratie qui a bien ses défauts aussi reprend ici sa vraie supériorité, où la science de la politesse et l’aisance dans l’amabilité peuvent jouer cinq minutes le charme le plus exquis, feindre une heure la sympathie, la fraternité" (Corr. I, p. 444). It is significant for his representation of society as theatre in Les Plaisirs et les Jours that Proust praises the aristocracy for its inbred ability to play-act.


4 Mouton, p. 41.


6 This notion of the burlesque as a serio-comic union of "high" and "low" with a pronounced emphasis on the scatological comes from Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of the carnival tradition and "grotesque realism" in his introduction to Rabelais and his World, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1965, 1968), pp. 1-58. Bakhtin relates parody (closely allied to pastiche) to this tradition: "Not
only parody in its narrow sense but all the other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh. This is the peculiar trait of this genre which differentiates it from all the forms of medieval high art and literature. The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from imemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes" (p. 20). One might thus see Proust's use of pastiche in the texts on society in Les Plaisirs et les jours as a possible antidote to its mysterious, untouchable attraction.

7 "A propos du 'style' de Flaubert," Essais et articles, V, pp. 586-600. Subsequent references to this article will be indicated in the text. It is not without interest for this metaphor that one of Proust's obsessive-compulsive worries centered on his state of health involved considerable attention devoted to the workings of his intestinal tract and a reliance on the regular use of laxatives, particularly a certain "cascarine Leprince," that he took "une fois par quinzaine, à peu près ... à dîner, au milieu du dîner...." See his letter to George Linossier, author of Hygiène du dyspeptique, detailing his difficulties and asking his advice, in Corr. IV, pp. 248-54.

8 Having already incurred with Lucien Daudet the Count's displeasure for their public outbursts of fou-rire, Proust wrote to Montesquiou in December 1895 that he understands word of his impersonations of Montesquiou has reached him: "Quant au rôle de commis-voyageur de votre esprit qui n'en avait pas besoin, j'y ai dès longtemps renoncé et, pour vous faire plaisir, le reprendre est la seule chose que je ne ferai pas. Alors, en effet, par l'effet qui entraîne le corps à la suite de l'âme, la voix, l'accent se rythmaient sans doute sur l'allure de cette pensée empruntée. Si l'on vous a dit plus, et si l'on a parlé de caricature, j'invoque votre axiome: 'un mot répété n'est jamais vrai.' Je suis fort à l'aïsé, moi, si scrupuleux et inquiet pour le reste de ma vie, quand il s'agit de vous, n'ayant jamais laissé déborder sur les autres que mon admiration pour vous qui, Dieu merci, n'est pas prête de tarir. Aussi j'ai été un peu humilié en voyant que mes 'dernières créations,' comme vous dites, étaient prises en un sens fort peu créateur..." (Corr. I, pp. 451-52). Proust ends this letter with a refusal to send to Montesquiou a copy of "Baldassare Silvande," "une très triste nouvelle, qui, hélas! et heureusement, est aussi une imitation de vous" (p. 452).

9 Milly, pp. 29-30.


11 Milly signals a particularly skillful use of this technique in Proust's "L'Affaire Lemoine par Balzac," in which a profusion of relative phrases, apostrophes, or parenthetical comments characterizes each of the personages presented at the soirée during which discussion of the Affaire takes place (pp. 30-31).
An example of this offered by Milly is Proust's description in terms of a diamond (the Affaire Lemoine was a diamond investment scandal) of a "traînée de morve sur l'habit de Lemoine" in the account of the Affaire pastiched from Henri de Régnier (pp. 31-32).


Milly, p. 35. The description of Proust's pastiche technique as "démontage-remontage," while effectively accounting for the comic precision of Proust's pastiches, is nonetheless inexact in itself, implying that the process of pastiche is more analytical than it actually was for Proust. See his article on Flaubert, pp. 594-95, and our discussion, pp. 300-301.


See Pierre Sipriot's preface to La Bruyère, Les Caractères (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, Livre de poche, 1973); Sipriot notes that the success of the book had a great deal to do with "le malin plaisir de reconnaître le voisin" in La Bruyère's portraits (p. xv).


Sandre and Clarac, IV, p. 916. Their source is Dreyfus, p. 97.


"Candide," p. 264.
28 Gidé declared himself particularly impressed by the austere morality that these references to the Imitation had seemed to announce in Les Plaisirs et les jours: "...de tous les thèmes proposés dans son premier livre, il n'en est aucun qui me paraîse mériter mieux d'occuper l'attention de Proust et dont je souhaitais davantage retrouver l'écho détaillé [dans le reste l'oeuvre]" ("En relisant Les Plaisirs et les jours, p. 125).

29 Carassus, p. 572.

30 For a description of this illustration, see Chapter 1, p. 48-49.

31 See Proust's comments, which we cited earlier, on these "fragments si peu italiens de comédie italienne" that he declares himself embarrassed to have sent to J.-L. Vaudoyer, "grand et délicieux Italien que vous êtes" (Corr. gén. IV, pp. 38-39; Chapter 1, p. 81-82).


33 See, for example, Germaine Brée's "Une étude du style de Proust dans les Plaisirs et les jours," French Review 15 (March 1942), 401-9.

34 Mouton calls this rhythm "une suite égale et tranquille de petits paragraphes, composés de courtes phrases s'accumulant les unes sur les autres comme les pierres symétriquement taillées d'une construction, et qui tout à coup se couronnent d'un mot; mais ce seul mot, qui sert de clef de voûte au fragile edifice, lui donne toute sa signification, et aussi sa robustesse un peu apprêtée" (pp. 39-40).

35 Carassus, p. 563.

36 Milly, p. 31. Milly himself uses the word "tic" to describe this density of features recurring automatically under the pasticheur's pen.

37 Girard, p. 68.

38 Girard, p. 68.

39 This same law is formulated as a "recette" in Proust's letter to Dreyfus on materiality in literature: "...admirer les choses démodées est encore plus élégant que d'être à la mode, et d'ailleurs cela devient très vite la mode." Applied in this letter to music as a fashionable activity—"Ainsi, quand on commença à admirer Wagner, les ex-wagnériens préférèrent Beethoven, puis Bach, puis Haendel"—this is just one more example of "cette conception matérielle... de la littérature et de l'art" (Corr. I, p. 174).

40 An hilarious example of this law of inexplicability is Odette's faltering attempt to explain to Swann, far more the social insider than she, just what one must do to be considered "chic": "Odette disait de quelqu'un: 'Il ne va jamais que dans les endroits chics.' Et si Swann
lui demandait ce qu'elle entendaient par là, elle lui répondait avec un peu de mépris: "Mais les endroits chics, parbleu! Si à ton âge il faut t'apprendre ce que c'est que les endroits chics, que veux-tu que je te dise, moi? par exemple, le dimanche matin l'avenue de l'Impératrice, à cinq heures le tour du Lac, le jeudi l'Eden Théâtre, le vendredi l'Hippodrome, les bals..."--"Mais quels bals?"--"Mais les bals qu'on donne à Paris, les bals chics, je veux dire!" (I, p. 243).

41 Emphasis added.

42 This is developed extensively in the social world of the Recherche. See, for example, the lines of demarcation established by the pronunciation of de Chenouville: "Dans d'autres groupes mondains, quand on parlait des Chenouville, l'habitude était (du moins chaque fois que la particule était précédée d'un nom finissant par une voyelle, car dans le cas contraire on était bien obligé de prendre appui sur le de, la langue se refusant à prononcer Madam'd'Ch'nonceaux) que ce fût l'ê meut de la particule qu'on sacrifiât. On disait: 'Monsieur d'Chenouville.' Chez les Cambremer la tradition était inverse, mais aussi impérieuse. C'était l'ê meut de Chenouville que, dans tous les cas, on supprimait. Que le nom fût précédé de mon cousin ou de ma cousine, c'était toujours de 'Ch'nouville' et jamais de Chenouville. (Pour le père de ces Chenouville on disait notre oncle, car on n'était pas assez gréat à Fêterne pour prononcer notre 'onk,' comme eussent fait les Guermantes, dont le baragouin voulu, supprimant les consonnes et nationalisant les noms étrangers, était aussi difficile à comprendre que le vieux français ou un moderne patois.)" (II, p. 818).


45 Carassus, pp. 159-60.

46 Carassus, p. 161.

47 Jacques Lethève has noted the connotations of homosexuality that came to accompany the word "esthète" in France in the latter half of the 1890's, following Oscar Wilde's trial ("Un mot témoin," p. 441. As we shall see in Chapter 5, Proust, comfortable as he may have been with his own homosexuality, was careful to respect the appearances demanded by society; his distaste for "l'esthétisme" may have had something to do, then, with this negative image, while it does not in any way attenuate the seriousness of his principal objection to aestheticism as "materialist."

48 Critics of Les Plaisirs et les Jours have been inclined to read in it Proust's representation of his discovery of his own homosexuality; we will discuss the representation of sexual transgression—not necessarily Proust's own—in Chapter 5.
Théophile Gautier announced this precept in his preface to Mademoiselle de Maupin in 1835: "Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid, car c'est l'expression de quelque besoin, et ceux de l'homme sont ignobles et dégoûtants, comme sa pauvre et infirme nature.——L'endroit le plus utile d'une maison, ce sont les latrines" (Paris: Editions Garnier-Flammarion, 1966, p. 45). In "Marcel Proust et l'esprit positif" (Nouvelle Revue Française 20 [1923] 179-87), Jacques Rivière writes of Proust's rejection of the utile from his fundamental lack of aptitude for it, with major consequences for his life and art: "Il est mort par manque d'esprit pratique, pour n'avoir pas su changer ses conditions d'existence au moment où elles étaient devenues destructrices; il est mort parce qu'il ne savait pas comment on ouvre une fenêtre, comment on allume du feu.——Mais cela revient à dire qu'il fut un des esprits les plus purement, les plus uniquement spéculatifs qui aient jamais paru sur cette terre. Et tout le prix de son ouvrage tient, en effet, d'abord, à mon sens, à ce qu'elle est, de toutes celles qui furent jamais écrites, la plus dépouillée de rapports avec l'Utilité" (p. 179). We will return to a consideration of waste and melancholy in our conclusion, pp. 416-20.


Corr. VII, p. 239.
Corr. VII, p. 239.
Corr. VII, p. 239.

See the prose poem "Frisson d'hiver" in the Divagations: "N'as-tu pas désiré, ma soeur au regard de jadis, qu'en un de mes poèmes apparaissent ces mots 'la grâce des choses fanées'? Les objets neufs te déplaisent; à toi aussi, ils font peur avec leur hardiesse criarde, et tu te sentirais le besoin de les user, ce qui est bien difficile à faire pour ceux qui ne goûtent pas l'action" (Œuvres, pp. 271-72). There are other echoes in "Eventail" of "Frisson d'hiver": Mallarmé writes of the "fantôme" he might yet perceive in the Venetian mirror and describes and promises to continue describing the worn and faded furnishings of the salon. His opening reference to "cette pendule de Saxe, qui retarde et sonne treize heures parmi ses fleurs et ses dieux," appears to have been borrowed by Proust for the setting of his earlier piece, "Scénario," while it also recalls Laure Hayman's nickname for Proust, her "petit Saxe psychologique."

Billy, p. 23.
Sandre and Clarac, IV, p. 931.
59 The "blanc" that Proust admires is Flaubert's leap across time ("soudain la mesure du temps devenant au lieu de quarts d'heure, des années, des décades...") near the end of the Education sentimentale: "Et Frédéric, bâtant, reconnut Sénécal. Il voyagea. Il connut la mélancolie des paquebots, les froids réveils sous la tente, etc. Il revint. Il fréquenta le monde, etc. Vers la fin de l'année 1867, etc." Quoted by Proust, V, p. 595.

60 The second half of Proust's "Bouvard et Pécuchet" is not as successful a pastiche of Flaubert as the first, although the satire of the gens du monde is occasionally inspired, announcing the dialogue of the mondays of the Recherche, as in Pécuchet's denigration of Hahn's use of Verlaine's poems in his music: "'Travaillez sur Jacques Normand, Sully Frudhomme, le vicomte de Borelli. Dieu merci, dans le pays des trouvères, les poètes ne manquent pas, 'ajoutait-il patriotiquement" (p. 64). The final laugh of the pastiche is at the expense of Montesquio's Chauves-souris set to music by his protégé Léon Delafosse: "Le Français, toujours altéré de franchise et de clarté, toujours exécrera ce ténébreux animal. Dans les vers de M. de Montesquio, passe encore, fantaisie de grand seigneur blasé, qu'à la rigueur on peut lui permettre, mais en musique! à quand le Requiem des Kangourous? ..." (p. 65).
Chapter 5

Les Plaisirs et les nuits: Sexuality

Confession and Travesty

Society is not the only subject in Les Plaisirs et les jours whose representation entailed the use of a mask; critics have been accustomed to read in this early work Proust's preparation for his study of homosexuality in the Recherche, closely related to his adolescent discovery of his own sexual abnormality. Henri Massis has, for example, suggested such a value for Les Plaisirs et les jours:

Qui veut remonter à la source de ses sensations [de Proust] encore neuves, les surprendre à l'état nais-
sant, les replacer dans le temps normal, vécu, à l'éveil de l'être, doit interroger ces confidences
juvéniles qui ont le rare mérite d'être contemporaines de ce qu'il lui fut donné de souffrir. 1

Thus one often finds Les Plaisirs et les jours described as Proust's simultaneous confession of sexual fault and the conscientious disguise of that confession; for Bernard Faÿ, for instance, the style of Les Plaisirs et les jours is an attempted disguise for the extremes of sexuality that interested Proust:

Le style ampoulé, blanchâtre et mollasse me donnait la nausée, mais les histoires me paraissaient singulièrement audacieuses, car la recherche de la volupté y atteignait parfois au sadisme, et parfois ouvraient des perspectives lointaines sur ce que
l'amour et la tendresse pouvaient avoir de plus extrême. Je m'étonnais de trouver une banalité si prétentieuse dans la forme, unie à l'intelligence la plus pénétrante et la plus lucide. 2

Fernand Gregh called the style of Les Plaisirs et les jours willfully obscure, referring to certain pages, "trop nombreuses, [qui] apparaissent précieuses, contournées et obscures (volontairement d'ailleurs, celles-là, et pour cause, puisqu'elles expriment son premier aveu des amours défendues...)." Gregh does not suggest which pages these are, although "La Confession d'une jeune fille," with its dire consequences brought about by sexual transgression, comes immediately to mind. On the other hand, Maurice Bardèche cuts easily through the obscurity of the work, calling Proust's portrayal of himself in his short stories "une audace, on pourrait presque dire une indiscrétion," and concluding that travesty is the key to Proust's "secret language" of pleasure in Les Plaisirs et les jours:

Dans Les Plaisirs et les jours qui paraissent si anodins et même, à vrai dire, si insignifiants, une lecture attentive nous amène non seulement à soupçonner le travestissement, mais à l'affirmer ... nous n'avons pas pu nous résoudre à dire que Proust a systématiquement traduit au féminin, tout le long de son oeuvre, ce qui, dans sa pensée, se présentait d'abord autrement. Mais il nous paraît impossible de nier que dans Les Plaisirs et les jours, pour des raisons qui tiennent sans doute à la vie privée de Marcel Proust à cette époque, ce procédé a été constant et volontaire. 5

Bardèche states finally that the comprehension of the travesty and a willingness by the reader to re-transpose the feminines into masculines (understand the heterosexual episodes as homosexual) is the only way to render Les Plaisirs et les jours intelligible. 6
It is difficult to argue against a reading of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* as personal confession when Proust himself so often called the book "une photographie de moi-même." It is also probable that, as Bardèche suggests, fictional situations in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* are disguised retellings of actual events in Proust's life, although with their settings in society and long passages of introspection, they appear to fantasize more than they transpose Proust's personal experience. (Jean Santeuil, more chronological and episodic than *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, is also more clearly autobiographical than the earlier work.) In either case, it is excessive to make sexual travesty the key to *Les Plaisirs et les jours*; Proust is enough of an idealist already in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* to portray in his stories "psychological laws" of love and jealousy sufficiently general as to be perfectly intelligible and persuasive without reference to his own biography. In the same way, Henri Massis exaggerates in making Proust's discovery of his "vice"—of which *Les Plaisirs et les jours* would be the record—and his supposed remorse and desire for escape, the central drama of the *Recherche*; Massis reads Proust's work as a lesson with a purpose to redeem:

Bien qu'il découvrit un même fond animal et pervers à toutes les passions humaines, Marcel Proust a cru purger l'humanité de certaines dépravations, en lui montrant ce qu'elles ont de hideux et de proprement effroyable. C'était la part que sa "nature" lui avait dévolue. Il entendait qu'on sût dans quel enfer il avait perdu sa vie, n'ayant pas eu l'énergie d'en sortir, et n'ayant pu que s'évader dans cette sorte de paradis imaginaire que l'art lui révéla au terme de ses souffrances, et dont il fit un remplacement de la réalité. 

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If such moral demonstration and edification had been Proust's intention in the *Recherche*, he would most likely not have condemned Gide's representation of homosexuality in *Corydon* as "hideux" and thus likely to provoke reprobation for its practitioners. Proust's goal as an artist was neither to escape his nature nor lead the crowd of his fellows to salvation through a tale of déchéance, but rather to create an object of beauty from the materials he had at hand, one of which happened to be his own experience of homosexuality. It remains to be seen then exactly what is the place of confession in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* whether it is Proust or his protagonists who "confess." A summary of Massis' argument, for the place which he assigns *Les Plaisirs et les jours* in Proust's moral development and the manner in which he sees it functioning as confession, is as useful a point as any at which to begin.

The drama of Proust's adolescence, according to Massis, is his inability to resist the appeal of the (sexual) vice to which his "nature" has predisposed him. Yet, even as his will power fails him, he retains a sufficient nostalgia for purity—represented by his mother and grandmother, in life as in the *Recherche*—to suffer deeply from his fall from grace. Prompted by an obligation in conscience to confess his failing, Proust would then make of his vice the center of his work, changing, however, and for his own protection, from a moral perspective to first a psychological (the vice studied as revelatory of behavioral laws) and then an aesthetic point of view (the vice at the basis of a work of art). *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, for Massis, are situated at the breaking point of this process of development; in the failings of the "enfants déchus" who are his heroes and his heroines, Proust writes his own
confession; in doing so—and this is what Massis calls the "pathétique" of Les Plaisirs et les jours—he has not completely broken with innocence, not fully consented to the moral degradation his vice proposed to him. Les Plaisirs et les jours is thus the record of the combat between Proust's aspirations towards good (his compulsion as Bernard Grasset describes it, to remain always "un enfant parfaitement sage"), and his inclinations towards evil, the anguish, in other words, "d'une âme qui n'a pas spontanément consenti à son indignité."

Two texts of Les Plaisirs et les jours stand out for Massis as particularly revelatory of the poles of this conflict. In the story of the petit garçon who throws himself from his window after a prolonged visit with his beloved, Massis reads Proust's struggle with idealism and deception, his attempts to hold on to what would become an impossible innocence; he writes that this "navrante histoire" of reality in contradiction with imagination must be read as "un symbole de son échec devant la vie." And, as the petit garçon is said at the end of the story to fall into "l'oubli de son âme" (p. 112), Massis draws another parallel with Proust, who "lui aussi, sombrera dans une sorte d'inconscience à l'endroit de son passé moral, de ce qui fut son âme, jusqu'à penser qu'il ne dépendait plus de lui qu'elle pût le redevenir." The second story of particular interest in the combat Massis discerns between good and evil in Les Plaisirs et les jours is "La Confession d'une jeune fille:" in this story, situated on the side of the dialectic that grapples unsuccessfully with the attractions of vice, Massis hears the "dernier écho d'une voix qui se brise: ultime résonance
d'une âme qui se réveille encore, loin de lui, hors de lui, et qu'on ne percevra jamais plus.\textsuperscript{15}

In contrast, then, to Bardèche's insistence on travesty as the key to \textit{Les Plaisirs et les jours}, Massis reads the work as confession merely by observing in its heroes and heroines the same flaw of which the narrator of the \textit{Recherche} will accuse himself—a lack of willpower—and by equating their discoveries of illicit sexuality (pre- or extra-marital in \textit{Les Plaisirs et les jours}) with the supposed trauma of Proust's own. Vice is vice, Massis seems to say, regardless of the sex of one's partner; the remorse of the characters, and Proust's insistence on the tragic consequences of their sexual behavior, are expressions of his own sense of guilt. Massis insists overmuch, however, on Proust's sense of guilt in his estimation of how the young man came to terms with sexuality in \textit{Les Plaisirs et les jours}; the way in which "la nature" might in fact have attenuated the remorse he assumes in Proust is a concept that never surfaces in Massis' analysis. The problem of guilt, however, goes hand-in-hand with the discussion of confession in \textit{Les Plaisirs et les jours}; it is particularly important then that it not be exaggerated.

On the one hand, guilt cannot be dismissed entirely: the remorse that Baldassare expresses on his deathbed, his disappointment in himself for having disappointed his mother's expectations for him, is probably autobiographical, a fictionalized representation of Proust's fears for the outcome of his own life. Similarly, it is not incidental that the \textit{jeune fille}'s offenses have been committed against her mother. As for sexuality, Proust's comment after his first visit to a Latin Quarter
brothel is revelatory: "J'ai senti que j'avais laissé là une partie de mon être moral," he said, a remark that his friends found "ridiculous." On the other hand, Proust's discovery of his homosexuality may have been far less traumatic than has usually been suggested. Philip Kolb points out a series of letters Proust wrote as a lycéen to Jacques Bizet and Daniel Halévy, protesting vigorously their rejection of the proposals of amitié that the cousins had correctly interpreted as less than innocent. Proust gave his response to Bizet's rejection an elegant and classical expression—

...le coeur—ou le corps—à ses raisons que la raison ne connaît guère ... je trouve toujours triste de ne pas cueillir [la] fleur délicieuse, que bientôt nous ne pourrons plus cueillir—

while to Halévy, protesting his own pudeur and délicatesse, Proust wrote a sustained defense of homosexuality based on the example of Socrates, who permitted such relationships among young men, he recounts, so that they could release the "trop plein de leur tendresse" before engaging in the love of women. Besides, he tells Halévy, "mes croyances morales me permettent de croire que les plaisirs des sens sont très bons;" he asks that Halévy recognize the difference between the exalted friendship he is offering and the type of exclusively physical and banal relationship that went by the name of pédérastie: "Ne me traites [sic] pas de pédéraste, cela me fait de la peine."  

Even giving their due to possible exaggerations in Proust's letters here, it could very well be that travesty in Les Plaisirs et les Jours has less to do with guilt than it does with circumspection, and, as we shall presently see, the problem of language; trauma and guilt themselves
seem for Proust the accomplishment of heterosexual rather than homosexual experience. That misadventures befell the heterosexual lovers in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* does not need to be interpreted as Proust's fantasies of the punishments his own "crimes" (confessed to in travesty form) should merit: it is instead perfectly consonant with the Decadent sensitivities we have been tracing throughout the work: the preference for the artificial and abnormal, the horror of procreation, the cultivation of what is sterile and *inutile*, while the response to the ambiguity of the male who is simultaneously female allows the duality of the woman (*angel/femme fatale*) to be tantalizingly preserved and never yielded to. Any bourgeois, after all, particularly the Victorian strain that justifies sex by productivity, can tell the homosexual that he is guilty of transgression; the real refinement, as Louys practiced it in *Aphrodite*, for example, is to transfer the burden of guilt to the bourgeois. As "guilt" or "innocence," moreover, is always determined by standards external to the accused (set by society or religion),¹⁹ the Decadent reversal blurs the line along which judgment is passed and reveals to the bourgeois the disconcerting arbitrariness of his own standards.

Proust's respect at the time of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* for the appearances required by society is unquestionable: his duel with Jean Lorrain is proof of this, as was the distance he kept between himself and Oscar Wilde, and his general disdain for aestheticism.²⁰ At the same time, however, his treatment of homosexuality benefits from the same complacency he brings in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* to the other Decadent themes of illness and death.²¹ His insistence to Bizet that
homosexual activity is not forbidden among young men, repeated in his reference to Socrates in the letter to Halévy, makes of homosexual attraction a mere stage of sexual development, a kind of "grace period" to parallel that of illness during which, as in the Noah's ark sickroom drama, normal rules of moral behavior are suspended and the terms of guilt and innocence, as they apply to the outside world, are reversed.

"Avant la nuit" is a text that Proust chose not to publish in Les Plaisirs et les jours, but which had appeared in the Revue blanche in 1893; it makes clear the relationship between illness and homosexuality and suggests both the pleasure there is in playing with guilt and innocence and the difficulties inherent in asserting one's own standards against those set by society. The text is a confession of lesbianism by the heroine, Françoise, dying of a gunshot wound that, like the jeune fille of "La Confession," she has inflicted upon herself. It is, further, for reasons that remain unclear, a confession she insists on making despite the protests of her interlocutor, Leslie, who, having praised Françoise's maternal qualities at the beginning of the story—"Vous seule avez su de vos mains maternelles et expressives rafraîchir mon front brûlant de fièvre" (p. 168)—goes out of his way to convince the reader of her moral superiority. When Françoise suggests, for example, that her long years of widowhood have been harder on her than he might have suspected, Leslie interrupts:

J'en suis sûr, mais cela ne me regarde pas. Vous êtes une créature tellement supérieure à toute autre qu'une faiblesse de vous aurait un caractère de noblesse et de beauté dont sont dépourvues les bonnes actions des autres. Vous avez agi comme vous avez pensé qu'il était bien et je suis certain que vous n'avez jamais fait que des choses délicates et pures. (p. 168)
As for the confession itself, Françoise speaks not for herself, but in Leslie's name, reminding him of his comments on a lesbian scandal of a few years earlier:

Je me rappelle vos paroles: Comment nous indigner d'habitudes que Socrate (il s'agissait d'hommes, mais n'est-ce pas la même chose), qui but la cigue plutôt que de commettre une injustice, approuvait gaiement chez ses amis préférés? Si l'amour fécond, destiné à perpétuer la race, noble comme un devoir familial, social, humain, est supérieur à l'amour purement voluptueux, en revanche il n'y a pas de hiérarchie entre les amours stériles et il n'est pas moins moral—ou plutôt pas plus immoral qu'une femme trouve du plaisir avec une autre femme plutôt qu'avec un être d'un autre sexe. La cause de cet amour est dans une altération nerveuse qui l'est trop exclusivement pour comporter un contenu moral. (p. 169)

Bardèche, somewhat surprisingly, reads in this text, "une condamnation contre l'homosexualité." This is probably because the confession of lesbianism is followed by Françoise's admission that it is she who shot herself (there has been some mystery about this up to this point). Thus, once again, the severity of the punishment inflicted upon the heroine, stand-in for the author, is assumed to be the measure of the author's guilt for the crimes she commits in his name.

But a variety of factors excuse Françoise, leaving intact even after the confession the moral superiority Leslie took such pains to establish: the historical example of Socrates resurfaces, as does the grey area of illness, the "altération nerveuse" that blurs the question of individual responsibility while it again witnesses to the superiority of Françoise's heightened sensitivities. Similarly, in the Decadent perspective, the "amour stérile" that Françoise has practiced is far
superior to the "devoir familial, social, humain" to which Proust opposes it in "Avant la nuit." A final and powerful argument upon which Françoise relies connects her lesbianism to aesthetic concerns: "Ainsi les aptitudes physiques, plaisir de contact, gourmandise, plaisir des sens, reviennent se greffer là où notre goût du beau a pris racine" (p. 170).

Françoise's lesbianism is thus not a reprehensible condition; there is rather a delicious frisson in the ambiguity she reveals about herself. Leslie's response to the confession is a mixture of remorse and inspired play-acting as he rises to the exalted level of experience Françoise has revealed:

...me laissant aveuglément diriger par une de ces inspirations plus hautes qui, quand nous sommes trop au-dessous de nous-mêmes, trop insuffisants pour jouer notre scène dans la vie, prennent brusquement notre masque et jouent au pied levé notre rôle, je dis avec calme: "Je vous assure que je n'aurais aucun remords, car vraiment je n'ai aucun sentiment de mépris ni même de pitié pour ces femmes. (p. 170)

Having revealed her double nature, though, Françoise ponders the implications of her confession, the impact language has made on her sense of guilt or innocence: if she had not done wrong, she should have had no difficulty talking about her life, yet she had hesitated for shame before her revelations: "...si au fond de ma conscience je crois que ce n'était pas pire, pourquoi avoir honte de vous le dire?—Etait-ce pire?" (p. 169).

Language, her link to the bourgeois society represented by Leslie, thus brings to light the extent to which standards of morality are reversed in this text. Although confession is generally thought of as
the impulse of the guilty, here it is Françoise's recognition of her difference from society (what society calls her guilt) that argues for silence, while her heartfelt innocence, paradoxically, presses for the "confession." The solution Françoise devises to the language barrier imposed by society enables her to both confess and not confess at the same time; borrowing Leslie's words for her own revelations, she knows instinctively what Proust in his own right would later tell Gide about confessional autobiography: "Vous pouvez tout raconter ... mais à condition de ne jamais dire: Je."²⁴ There is thus preserved for Françoise the hesitation, the voluptuous moment of introspection not unlike the closeness to one's soul afforded by illness; an innocence that owes its piquant to the air of culpability that surrounds it from the outside as it were, and against which it asserts itself as innocent (again, like illness in the Noah's ark sickroom), is the experience that ends "Avant la nuit;" the perception is Leslie's that "...jamais nous n'avions eu tant de mal et tant de bien" (p. 171).

Her experience ending on this languid, bittersweet note, Françoise is the most privileged (the least punished) of all the sexual "transgressors" who occupied Proust at the time of Les Plaisirs et les Jours. If Proust "confesses himself" in any of his early characters, it is probably in Françoise, like him simultaneously aware of her own sense of innocence and of the barriers society has raised through language to the proclamation of her experience as innocent. This said, travesty can be assigned its proper place in Les Plaisirs et les Jours: as representation not according to guilt or innocence but along the lines of what is socially acceptable. This process does not exclude at the same
time the rejection of conventional morality that we have seen characterize the Decadence. The heterosexual transgressors whose stories we shall next examine, the jeune fille, and Honoré of "La Fin de la jalouse," are unable to effect the reversal of terms afforded by homosexuality; they are punished much more severely for their actions than is Françoise. Their stories, read then not as autobiographical confessions of Proust's own sexual "guilt," investigate confession as a literary problem, the representation of eroticism within the limits of guilt and innocence set by a society who demands that appearances at least be kept up.

Social and Private Languages

A recent article by Walter Kasell directly addresses the representation of guilt and innocence in "La Confession d'une jeune fille;" he examines this story as the jeune fille's attempted movement from guilt to innocence through her writing. By retelling her lapse into sin, that is, her initial repentance and final relapse, the jeune fille tries to bring back in imagination the world of purity embodied by her mother (whose death she has caused by her sexual activities), as well as her own innocence. "In actuality," writes Kasell, "the confession replaces the figure of the mother in its most essential aspect, as a force of moral redemption."25 This is accomplished through the jeune fille's intended use of language as compensation for the horrible duplicity of appearances of which she became aware at the moment of crisis when her mother's face appeared in the mirror next to hers and that of her lover. At that moment, Kasell points out, she understood
the extent of her moral corruption through the expression not of remorse but of brute sensuality she and her mother read in her reflection. The expression cast into doubt all of her previous gestures of tenderness towards her mother, accusing the jeune fille of having manipulated the appearance of tenderness the better to conceal her vice. This, not her promiscuity, is the measure of her corruption, says Kasell, extending his analysis forward to the moral code of the Recherche:

The triumph of appearance, acceptance of the outer mask as inner reality, disturbs both Marcel and the young girl because for them corruption means taking the sign at face value. For the narrator of "La Confession," her own moral degradation is expressed by her acceptance of surfaces, and documented by the successful use of appearance to disguise her actions. Thus, the most reprehensible aspect of her behavior is her enjoyment of this deception, and the delight she took in mocking those who were fooled by her act. 26

We might extend this backward as well to the Comédie italienne: the principal grievance Proust had to lodge against society there, particularly in "Personnages de la comédie mondaine" was society's stubborn substitution of the mask for the inner reality of its personages; although this fault was not presented in the Comédie as a specifically moral failing, a reading of "Personnages" against the other Fragments and Barthes' analysis of proper names in Proust suggested that their equation of the être with the paraitre made of the gens du monde bad readers of their own text, destined not to participate in the higher values of art and creation—values that would eventually take on for Proust of the Recherche the moral quality of redemption. Proust's discussion of society in the Comédie italienne, concerned with bringing
to light the true être beneath the paraître (Granthe's portrait is an outstanding example of this process) might thus be read as an attempt on the part of the young mondain to "redeem" of its concern for appearances the social world to which he is so attracted, and in the process justify his own attraction. This is the reading that Kasell gives to the jeune fille's confession: the confession is, he says, "an attempt to correct through writing the troubling disjunction of appearance and essence." 27 The confession is meant to be the undoing of the deed through language: "If the primacy of appearance is the hallmark of corruption, then the recovery of innocence will be a return to an appearance fully and immediately itself: a transparent language, entirely free of deception." 28 As in "Avant la nuit" then, we might see the jeune fille as arguing from a position of innocence; what prompts her recital is not her need to confess her faults but a desire to show that her love for her mother was not a shallow pretense.

Yet, Kasell continues, the jeune fille's literary project is doomed from the start; what surfaced at the moment she saw herself in the mirror was the irremediable duplicity of her entire experience: her mother was never more present to her than in her absence, the mother's presence implied her imminent departure, the purity and goodness represented by her mother were thus always adulterated by the cruelty of her anticipated absence. The mother is, in other words, a pure being who nevertheless inflicts pain—not unlike, we recognize, the mother at once angel and femme fatale of Proust's dedication to Heath. For the jeune fille herself, the duplicity that escapes both the image in the mirror and her writing is the complementarity of pleasure and
remorse. Although Kasell does not here refer to Baudelaire's accusa-
tory coupling of pleasure and remorse in "Au Lecteur," this is in fact
the circle in which he describes her as trapped. Her face in the mir-
ror expressed her pleasure, but hiding even her sincere remorse, it
could not show the perverse contribution that her remorse made to her
enjoyment of the transgression; conversely, her writing, intended as an
expression of regret, cannot express the nature of her pleasure, a
"scandalous realization" that Kasell suggests she must continuously
avoiding reaching. As her own writing fails to exculpate her, it
thus becomes singularly appropriate that the fiction leaves her in the
limbo of perpetual convalescence. Convalescence is, we have seen, the
state just beyond that of illness and its assurance of the mother's
presence in the dedication to Heath—the zone, that is, in which the
sickness-health, presence-absence tension comes the closest to reveal-
ing the mechanism by which illness is elaborated as an expression of
culpable desire. Kasell concludes then that all the jeune fille's
non-transparent confession holds out is the possibility of recovered
innocence, constantly thwarted by the physical loss of the mother (who
was not an uncontaminated ideal of purity to begin with) and the ina-
bility of the penitent to understand and account for the full extent of
her sin.

So we see that the most overtly confessional text of Les Plaisirs
et les jours turns out to represent at most an incomplete confession;
its hidden theme is the obstacle to confession with which the heroine,
unable to formulate the pleasure of profanation that is the inverted ex-
pression of her love for her mother, must deal, an ambiguity that renders
her unable to atone for her sin and to receive absolution for it, unable to récapture her innocence. Les discerning than Françoise, she chooses to speak in her own name in a clearly understandable language; it is this very choice that betrays her. The jeune fille's intention to be clear and transparent in her confession, to tell all and fully accuse herself of her transgressions before the moment of her death, expresses her desire to reintegrate herself in the society whose language she uses. What she fails to realize is the double bind to which that intention condemns her: the society to whom the language belongs is also the guardian of the moral code against which she has transgressed. Thus a reintegration by language—that is, the clear expression of her pleasure in her sin that would get at the scandal she hides from herself and restore the coincidence of the être and the paraître—would only reveal the extent to which she has outlawed herself, while limiting her confession to a lesser offense that leaves intact her love for her mother (a kind of linguistic plea-bargaining) prevents her language from fully accounting for her fault.

What was once the jeune fille's sincerity we can now understand as her naïveté; the strength of her desire to reestablish her innocence through a transparent language is no longer laudable, but foolish, since it prevents her from attempting the disguised confession hit upon by Françoise in "Avant la nuit." One of the discoveries of Les Plaisirs et les jours—in the hierarchy of methods for the representation of eroticism with which Proust experiments in the work—is that, the more private the language in which the confession of erotic experience is made, the more successfully it empties guilt and innocence of their
reference to bourgeois morality and adds to the pleasure of "transgression" the aesthetic pleasure of the coherent, multidimensional literary text. 30

In "La Fin de la jalousie," private language is introduced as an integral part of the relationship between two lovers; the misuse of that language, however, results in a limbo of jealous love, neither overtly accusatory nor wholly forgiving, that finds its only solace in a fantasy of effortless, nonverbal confession. The problem of confession in this story is preceded by a lover's game of guilt and innocence inscribed within a larger concept of the affair as transgression against society; this game sets up the dilemma of the response to real transgression when the shadow of infidelity settles over the relationship. Françoise and Honoré have developed a secret language of their own with which to express their mutual tenderness; it is a childish language in its use of pet names to convey the enormity of what they are to each other—"Mon petit arbre, mon petit âne, ma mère, mon frère, mon pays, mon petit Dieu, mon petit étranger, mon petit lotus, mon petit coquillage, mon chéri, ma petite plante," as Françoise addresses Honoré at the beginning of the story (p. 146)—but this language at the same time has within it an arbitrary and highly ritualized code of permissible transgressions and responses. Françoise knows, for example, that Honoré cannot resist kissing her if she pouts and shakes her head in a certain way; Honoré's response to her gesture, besides the passionate kiss, is the tender accusation "Méchante"—he treats Françoise as if she were responsible for his inability to resist her temptation, and Françoise accepts this accusation as a compliment. Honoré likewise
transgresses during the halcyon days of their liaison described in the story's opening pages, by appearing to let his thoughts wander from Françoise. During the dinner party given by the Princess of Alériouvre, Françoise feigns displeasure at Honoré's preoccupied state, knowing that her accusation will amuse him: "Oui, oui, c'est très bien," she admonishes, "tu ne pensais pas du tout à moi!" (p. 149). Her accusation is then treated by Honoré as a transgression on her part, as a lie in fact ("'Comme tu sais très bien mentir!'" he tells her [p. 147]), for the assumption is that she ought to have known he is always thinking of her, and he once again pronounces her the guilty party: "Méchante! méchante!'" (p. 147). Earlier, as Françoise interrupted his musings, he had treated any words at all from her as transgression, presumably because of their too great seductive power; for such a transgression, the threatened punishment was to be the embarrassment of physical contact in public: "'Ne dis pas un mot de plus, ou je t'embrasse, tu entends, je t'embrasse devant tout le monde!'" (p. 149). Honoré's threat reminds us that the liaison itself, kept secret from society and played out against the presence of her brother in the same house as the widowed Françoise, is implicitly presented in the story as a transgression of social norms. The theme of transgression becomes even stronger, finally, at the end of this flirtatious conversation at the dinner party. Stealing a meaningful glance in the direction of the Princess, Honoré plans for himself a gentle disengaging of his ties to Françoise when the time should come to end the affair, promising himself to be as discrete with respect to Françoise in his attachment to his new love as he is now in keeping from her the occasional adventure that "seul mon
corps," as he likes to think, "goûte çà et là en dehors d'elle" (p. 149).

The lovers' game of guilt and innocence, the private language of their relationship that Françoise and Honoré have detached from any referent but themselves, renders the confession of infidelity that Honoré seeks from Françoise all the more difficult to obtain, since the vocabulary needed for the confession is no longer part of their code. The terms according to which Françoise is "méchante" and capable of clever lying have already been used up, exhausted, as it were, as signifiers of affection, and so they are not available to Honoré to help him identify the truth or falseness of Françoise's faithfulness. Thus deprived of the language that connects him to Françoise, Honoré falls back into a private language of his own in which he is the sole interlocutor, responding continually to M. de Buivres' characterization of Françoise as "easy" and to her denials of infidelity, with attempts to find exactly the term that will establish a new code of real guilt, and cause her, puppet-like in the manner of their previous code, to confess.

With this breakdown of the couple and their language, Honoré comes to imagine Françoise in terms of himself; the suspicion of her guilt towards him has forced him into an examination of his guilt towards her, and he now finds that the excuse he had used for himself—that one can lie to one's partner without necessarily loving her any less—becomes monstrous applied to Françoise. He will therefore prompt her confession by his own, and in doing so clear the slate between them. The words he will hear Françoise speak should reestablish the two of
them as a couple by triumphing over the phantasm of a Françoise perhaps
faithful, perhaps not, his imagination has created:

...il essaya de lui dire qu'il l'avait trompée; il
l'essa ya non par vengeance ou besoin de la faire
souffrir comme lui, mais pour qu'en retour elle lui
dit aussi la vérité, surtout pour ne plus sentir
le mensonge habiter en lui, pour expier les fautes
de sa sensualité, puisque, pour créer un objet à sa
jalousie, il lui semblait par moments que c'était
son propre mensonge et sa propre sensualité qu'il
projetait en Françoise. (p. 152)

The attempt to solicit confession by confession fails, however,
first because Honoré cannot finish his own avowal, and secondly because
Françoise responds with an ambiguous gesture not of the anger that one
could expect of someone whose own conscience was clear, but of calm
even in her state of shock: "Il fut effrayé en la voyant pâlir, tomber
sans forces sur un banc, mais bien plus quand elle repoussa sans colère,
mais avec douceur, dans un abattement sincère et désolé, la main qu'il
approchait d'elle" (p. 152). The gesture leaves Honoré more perplexed
than ever—has he lost her or in fact found her out, and might they now
be beginning a new relationship on a common ground of transgression
against each other? "Pendant deux jours," continues the narrator, "il
crut qu'il l'avait perdue ou plutôt qu'il l'avait retrouvée" (p. 152).
The narrator calls Françoise's response to Honoré's confession "cette
preuve involontaire, éclatante et triste qu'elle venait de lui donner
de son amour" (p. 152), but says nothing of her fidelity; we have seen,
and Honoré knows, that one can be loving and unfaithful at the same
time. Besides, there has arisen a complication in Honoré's ability to
get control of the new code of guilt and innocence he is trying to
elaborate: like Swann, he is jealous and therefore interprets everything according to the promptings of his suffering:

Eût-il acquis la certitude impossible qu'elle n'aurait jamais été qu'à lui, la souffrance inconnue que son coeur avait apprise le soir où M. de Buivres l'avait reconduit jusqu'à sa porte, non pas une souffrance pareille, où le souvenir de cette souffrance, mais cette souffrance même n'aurait pas cessé de lui faire mal quand même on lui eût démontré qu'elle était sans raison. (pp. 152-53)

As his strategies to elicit a verbal confession from Françoise all come to naught, Honoré fantasizes a total evasion from the realm of language to confirm or deny the truth of his mistress' guilt. He will, he decides, set Françoise up and catch her in the very act of infidelity:

Il voulait, profitant de ce qu'on ignorait sa liaison avec elle, faire des paris sur sa vertu avec des hommes, les lancer sur elle, voir si elle céderait, tâcher de découvrir quelque chose, de savoir tout, se cacher dans une chambre (il se rappelait l'avoir fait pour s'amuser étant plus jeune) et tout voir. (pp. 153-54)

Although Honoré does not carry out this project, the fact that he even considers it repeats in fantasy the solution to the problem of confession that provided the climax to "La Confession d'une jeune fille": in the earlier story, the jeune fille's inability to tell her mother of her promiscuous behavior is substituted for by her mother's direct observation of the act. Everything proceeds in both of these stories as it did momentarily in "Avant la nuit": as though the words of the confession are too horrible to pronounce—even while the child (the jeune fille or Honoré; "ma mère" is one of the terms of endearment Honoré and Françoise use between them) experiences a perverse need to have the
mother know what he or she has done. Thus, among the solutions to the problem of confession provided by Les Plaisirs et les jours there is one that would like to sidestep language completely; as we learn from Honoré's childhood voyeurism, the fantasy of confession by direct observation both accuses and excuses the child—for what the mother sees the child doing (engaging in sexual behavior), the child has at some point, hidden in a corner of the bedroom, seen her do as well, and so the two are equal. Such reciprocal voyeurism once more blurs the lines along which guilt and innocence are determined: the sex act in which the child is caught cannot be totally bad, or else the mother herself would not be as good as he or she perceives her to be. A more accurate formulation of the pleasures of the moment of observation then, particularly as Honoré imagines them, would be that it repeats the delicious fusion of guilt and innocence that closed "Avant la nuit," eliminating both the need for and the risks of verbal confession.

Confession by direct observation is thus, like ill health and convalescence for the jeune fille in her story and Proust in the dedication to Heath, yet another ploy by which to reverse the attribution of guilt and innocence and achieve unity with (become identical to), the mother, who is at any rate the real but unattainable object of desire. For Honoré, his observation of Françoise with another man would indisputably confirm her similarity to him in the matter of infidelity, and establish a new basis for their relationship. Her confession by the act itself would have been his confession as well, while their mutual offenses against each other would have cancelled Honoré's burden of guilt. In "La Fin de la jalousie," however, Honoré's failure to either observe
Françoise or make her confess results in a type of falsified union with her. Afraid of the temptations to infidelity she could encounter in his absence, he begins to accompany her everywhere, so that through his fear of transgression the original secrecy of their affair is violated. Their joint transgression becomes public knowledge, falsified to a second degree by society's belief that the affair is only of recent date. Honoré's death at the end of the story is usually interpreted as Proust's demonstration of the persistence and insidiousness of jealousy, its grip on the lover relaxed only at the moment of his death; this is in fact the interpretation encouraged by the narrator, who says as Honoré expires, "Et c'était là la fin de la jalousie" (p. 165).\textsuperscript{31} We might remark here that Proust's treatment of jealousy in this story is much less nuanced and sophisticated than his handling of the same theme would be in the \textit{Recherche}; there he would show Swann cured of his jealousy by the simple indifference of daily conjugal life with Odette, while the narrator, to whom cohabitation with Albertine brings a similar if intermittent relief from his torment, discovers that it is possible to be jealous of a lover even after her death. Beyond the question of jealousy, however, a reading of the patterns of guilt, innocence, and impossible confession in "La Fin de la jalousie" suggests that, as for the \textit{jeune fille} and elsewhere in \textit{Les Plaisirs et les jours}, death is the only suitable punishment for (hetero)sexual behavior; that Honoré, like Albertine, meets his death under the hooves of a runaway horse, strengthens this interpretation already proposed by Decadent themes. The image of the horse, already present in the discreetly erotic
"Tuileries," will recur, moreover, in "Coucher de soleil intérieur," as a quite specific representation of erotic pleasure.

Erotic Imagery: The Hidden Adventure

"La Confession d'une jeune fille" with its thwarted will to transparency and "La Fin de la jalousie" with its impossible confession and fantasy of confession by direct observation thus represent opposite poles in the problematic of confession and the representation of sexual experience in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*; they make of confession that leaves no doubt as to the experience confessed at once a very simple and desirable, devious and disastrous, enterprise. Between these extremes there is a third term possible: confession expressed in such intimate terms that the drama of erotic pleasure, guilt and innocence, is played out in the transgressor's mind alone; he gives to his representation of the experience the innocent appearance required by society while the hidden vocabulary of the text spells out the transgression celebrated in the work of art.

The disguises by which Proust represents in the *Recherche* a fundamentally erotic relationship with the surrounding world (an eroticism governed by the terms of Proust's homosexuality) is the subject of Philippe Lejeune's article "Ecriture et sexualité;" the methods of Lejeune's inquiry suggest ways in which we might propose to uncover the terms of a personal vocabulary of eroticism in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, part of Proust's developing mastery of the representation of erotic experience in the work. Lejeune begins his reading of the *Recherche* with the episode of the madeleine and concludes—much as
Honoré and the *jeune fille* insist in their experiences upon the direct observation of the sexual act itself—with a recognition of the "présence centrale de l'orgasme" in the novel, disguised but yet observable to those who know how to read the novel's networks of imagery. The key image is the madeleine, remarkable, first of all, for its description in the novel as a type of "sexe féminin" and secondly for the evocativeness of its name, which brings to bear on the narrator's experience the name and legend of Mary Magdalen. As Magdelen is to Christ, Lejeune suggests, so is the (sexually) guilty child to his mother:

Madeleine et l'enfant sont tous deux dans une situation ambiguë, partagés entre la volupté honteuse, et la fixation "platonique:" et l'évolution du péché au repentir, que connaissent à la fois Madeleine et l'enfant, n'est que la figure inverse d'un mouvement que le narrateur connaît bien: la profanation. Cette identification possible de Madeleine et de l'enfant ... n'empêche pas que Madeleine soit une femme et qu'à un niveau plus apparent, elle unisse en une seule personne, de manière troublante, la figure de la Vierge-Mère (puisqu'elle appartient désormais au groupe des Saintes-Femmes) et celle de la prostituée: la mère et la débauchée, l'amour platonique et le sexe....

There is nothing unusual about such a union in Decadent literature, as we have seen; ambiguity is among the conditions necessary for pleasure. A third feature of the madeleine, Lejeune continues, overrides the first two in importance; this is the sacramental nature of its ingestion: received from his mother, the madeleine melts in the narrator's mouth and becomes his communion with her, the gift to the child of the mother's own body.

The narrator's preoccupation with bell towers in the *Recherche* provides the images of male sexuality that might complement the female
suggestiveness of the madeleine—if, as Lejeune points out, there were not also present the complication of homosexuality; narcissistic in nature, it seeks to repeat the primarily oral experience of the mother's love and union with her (communion through the madeleine):

La description externe des organes [les clochers] ... les composantes orales du fantasme (le sexe-patisserie, le sexe appétissant) orientent plutôt vers une sexe désiré, le sexe d'autrui dans la mesure où il ressemble au sien; l'ensemble renvoyant, à travers le rapport oral, au désir du sein maternel. 36

Instead of complementing each other, then, the two sexes coexist in a kind of uneasy truce, or second-best substitution of one for the other. Lejeune suggests that the passage he calls "le ventre d'Albertine" in the Recherche, in which the narrator describes the body of his lover as he helps her undress,37 is a response, through the desexualization of Albertine's body that makes of her a statue not a woman, to the castration fear that the sign of the mother's (imperfect) body provokes in the small boy, while the basic fantasy, inscribed, says Lejeune, in Albertine's description of the ice cream concoctions she would eat at Dame Tartine's Palace, remains that of an entirely oral relationship (communion) with a (like the madeleine) completely edible world. Lejeune writes:

...la nostalgie fondamentale du narrateur, c'est que le corps humain (de l'autre) ne soit pas comestible; ... De la l'incommunicabilité, la solitude fondamentale: jamais on ne pourra retrouver une liaison aussi intime que celle de la succion infantile qui vous unit profondément au corps de l'autre. C'est ce fantasme qui sert de point de comparaison implicite dans la grande analyse où Proust explique l'insuffisance tragique du baiser (II, 364), passage curieux où il souligne l'absence chez l'homme d'un organe
Sexual phantasm in the Recherche is thus represented by metaphoric description: bell towers, Dame Tartine's ice cream figures, the madeleine. Studying the evolution of the madeleine episode through its successive versions from Contre Sainte-Beuve to the Recherche, Lejeune contends that Proust's use of sexual metaphors is both spontaneous and elaborated, an expression of phantasm that is at once oblique and unmistakable:

La métaphore sert au dialogue, à la "dialectique" de la perception et du fantasme. Elle est employée d'abord pour exprimer sous une forme voilée une ressemblance vaguement sentie avec une troisième chose [le référent sexuel] qui reste latente. Puis quand celui qui écrit s'aperçoit (presque comme d'un acte manqué) de l'arbitraire qui reste dans la comparaison, il modifie l'objet initial pour rendre celle-ci vraisemblable. Mais ce faisant, loin de cacher le fantasme, il le rend plus transparent. 39

This then is the type of transparency to which the jeune fille ought to have had recourse in her confession; an idelect based on metaphor would have allowed for a far more complete and speakable confession of the socially indicible than the false transparency of the sociolect, that, combined with her own horror in the face of her misdeeds, offered her no means of speaking her enjoyment of her transgressions. In search of such an idelect in Les Plaisirs et les jours, we could thus follow Lejeune's lead and rummage through its pages looking for sexual metaphors that may have first slipped out under Proust's pen before he (presumably--Lejeune makes a bit much of intentionality in his analysis,
but the fact that he can do so once more argues against exaggerating
Proust's sense of guilt in his writing) went back and doctored them
to both hide and reveal their sexual intent.

What we find mostly in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* to announce
the madeleine and the bell towers are shells and canes. There is a
"coquillage" in "Les Rivages de l'oubli;" its shape announces that
of the madeleine, while the narrator hears in its crevices echoes of
a lost love. With some imagination, the experience might be read as
a reference to the lost communion with the mother. More obviously
sexual, "mon petit coquillage" is one of the affectionate names Fran-
çoise and Honoré use for each other in "La Fin de la jalousie." A sim-
ilarly explicit reference occurs in the "Mélancolique villégiature":
Jacques de Laleuande is looking for his cane (or pretending to) when he
propositions Françoise de Breyves after the soirée of the Princess of
A***. The sexual imagery is reinforced by Proust's situation of the
incident in a vestibule; in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* as in the *Recherche,*
Maria Paganini has pointed out, the vestibule functions as a type of
unclaimed territory, the place of public dressing and undressing, full
of the potential for sexual encounter. In its ambiguity then, the
vestibule becomes a variant of the Noah's ark sickroom.

The significance that attaches to the cane here suggests that its
reappearance in "Coucher de soleil intérieur" also carries meaning
as erotic imagery. Indeed, the introspective (narcissistic) point of
view, mounting rhythm of excitement, and sexually evocative vocabulary
adopted in this prose poem, suggest that it can properly be read as a
confession of sexual behavior, a phantasm of (solitary) orgasm to which
is added the aesthetic pleasure of the well-composed and ordered work of art. What the text ostensibly describes is a walk in the woods at twilight; the narrator is moved to delirious exaltation and to tears by the response of his soul to the appeal of the twilight, "ce vaste embrasement mélancolique" (p. 137). It is possible that the text is in fact only the description of the emotional griserie stimulated by a walk at twilight; its value as disguise—the innocent appearance that allows the confession to proceed—rests precisely upon such a possibility. The situation of the experience in an open space, as opposed to the enclosures that breed vice, is an important part of this disguise, as is the ambiguity of the language; just beneath the surface of the description, however, the remarkable coherence of sexual vocabulary and imagery points to the possibility of the hidden meaning that we might now set out to uncover. 41

The narrator begins the single paragraph of the text with an announcement of what is a deeply personal experience, but which he recounts instead as common to the others who comprise with him an unidentified "nous":

Jamais les levers de soleil, jamais les clairs de lune qui si souvent m'ont fait délirer jusqu'aux larmes, n'ont surpassé pour moi en attendrissement passionné ce vaste embrasement mélancolique qui, durant les promenades à la fin du jour, nuance alors autant de flots dans notre âme que le soleil quand il se couche en fait briller sur la mer. (p. 137) 42

The change of person from first person singular to plural is a first confessional technique in the text; solidarity with others assures the narrator of a measure of innocence—he is neither alone nor monstrous—at the same time as it hides him among the crowd of his fellows.
Inversely, the "nous" is another tip-off to a hidden content in the text, encouraging its reading as confession of sexual activity, the nature of which is not in fact communal but solitary.

By the lack of boundaries it implies and by its image of flame, the twilight suggests the igniting of sexual desire that overwhelms the narrator and effaces the usual boundaries of the self. (It is upon the heels of this description that the narrator abandons the "je" for the "nous.") Moreover, the stock image of flame for passion has already received in Les Plaisirs et les Jours an extended treatment that identifies it as an unmistakeable part of Proust's vocabulary of desire. Regret XV, "Comme un ciel sanglant avertit le passant..." uses embrasement as a sign of passion--"certes, souvent certains regards embrasés dénoncent des passions qu'ils servent seulement à réfléchir" (p. 125)--and even more specifically, as a sign of passion centered on the self:

Désormais, échauffée seulement par la ferveur de leur égoïsme--cette sympathique ferveur de l'égoïsme qui attire autant les autres que l'incendiaire passion leur éloigne--leur âme desséchée ne sera plus que le palais factice des intrigues. Mais leurs yeux sans cesse enflammés d'amour et qu'une rosée de languueur arrossera, lustrera, fera flotter, noiera sans pouvoir les éteindre, étonneront l'univers par leur tragique flamboiement. (p. 125)

The verb "briller," related to the images of flame by the notion of luminosity, functions in the same manner throughout the work, describing with striking consistency the eyes of those who propose sexual misconduct. Such is the case for Jacques de Laléande propositioning Françoise de Breyves--"Il passa près d'elle, remua légèrement le coude de Françoise avec le sien, et, les yeux brillants, dit, au moment où il était contre elle, ayant toujours l'air de chercher [sa canne]:"
'Venez chez moi, 5, rue Royale'" (p. 68); this is likewise the only
detail of Jacques' face that Francoise remembers in her long degenera-
tion, once more linked specifically to his sexual invitation, as she
imagines she sees Jacques "les yeux brillant à travers les nuages comme
le jour où il s'offrit à elle" (p. 79). The young man—another Jacques
—who seduces the jeune fille after her engagement dinner signals his
intentions in the same way; he lures her to his room with the promise
of a poetry reading, but her response is to his eyes and to the obscene
gesture he makes: "Ses beaux yeux brillaient doucement dans ses joues
fraîches, il releva lentement ses moustaches avec sa main. Je compris
que je me perdais et je fus sans force pour résister" (p. 94). Finally,
Honore in "La Fin de la jalousie" is able to concentrate his jealousy
on a vision of Francoise's eyes, in which he imagines the reflection of
her passion for the unknown other: "il voyait ses yeux briller de
feux qu'il s'imaginait aussitôt allumés autrefois,—qui sait, peut-être
hier comme ils le seraient demain,—allumés par un autre..." (p. 152).

Just as the brilliance of eyes then is an invitation to the forbidden
world of sex, in "Coucher de soleil intérieur," the brilliance of the
twilight also is an invitation into the obscure and the unknown, summed
up here in the image of night, with its moral resonances of what is
forbidden and thus kept out of view, night towards which the narrator
hurries as his solitary adventure begins: "Alors nous précipitons nos
pas dans la nuit" (p. 137).

The image that follows, as the narrator begins to build up the
sense of dizzying speed and increased excitement of the twilight/sexual
experience, is of a horseman borne on the back of a favorite horse:
"Plus qu'un cavalier que la vitesse croissant d'une bête adorée étourdie et enivre, nous nous livrons en tremblant de confiance et de joie aux pensées tumultueuses auxquelles, mieux nous les possédons et les dirigeons, nous nous sentons appartenir de plus en plus irrésistiblement" (p. 137). This image of the "cavalier" fairly bristles with confirmation of the sexual content of the text; a first observation (that explains as well the sexual imagery in the horses that kill Honoré and Albertine) is the similarity between the locus of physical sensation for a sexually aroused male and for a rider astride a galloping horse. There is likewise a play on the physical state of arousal (produced by rapid self-manipulation) in the description of the horse's gait as a "vitesse croissante." As for the horse, it is not called a horse in the text, but rather a "bête adorée." The use of the generic "animal," with its additional meanings of "beast" and "dumb" (nonhuman, nonintelligent), betrays the sense of (moral) conflict that attaches also in the Recherche to the narrator's solitary experiments in the "petit cabinet sentant l'iris." The horseman is himself already part of this conflict, for a "cavalier" can be a soldier in the cavalry; a few lines later in the passage, the countryside is referred to as "le champ solennel" (p. 138), the Pléiade editors' reading of what was in the manuscript and typed copies of Les Plaisirs et les Jours, "le champ de bataille solennel." The "bête," however, contrasts with the "intelligence" that introduces the piece—"Comme la nature, l'intelligence a ses spectacles" (p. 137)—and suggests the dichotomy that makes of sex an anti-rational act, a yielding to the impulses that thinking man shares with the lower species of animals. (It is worth recalling here
that the *jeune fille* was particularly horrified to see herself in the mirror after her relapse, "transfigurée en bête" [p. 95]). There is shame, then, in this abandonment of the higher faculties in favor of the lower ones, yet by a redemptive *dédoublement* of the intelligence, the entire process becomes, is in fact announced as, a "spectacle" for the intelligence. It is not, however, a spectacle devoid of emotional involvement: "bête adorée" suggests the narrator's willing participation in the promptings of his lower, "animal" nature. The notion of spectacle, moreover, offers another possible reading of the "bête adorée" as the male sex organ itself, narcissistically worshipped by the narrator in his solitary sex act; he thus becomes the "cavalier" intoxicated not by the "vitesse croissante" of his horse, but by the much more private phenomenon we obtain by simple transposition of the ideas signaled by "vitesse croissante," that is, the "croissance en vitesse" of the *bête adorée*/*penis*.

The verb *se livrer* in the same sentence as the horseman is part of the vocabulary of struggle, in which the narrator, "tremblant de confiance et de joie," (p. 137) is just as happy to capitulate. It is to an unidentified set of "pensées tumultueuses" that he gives himself over—that is, to his increasing sexual excitement which, through the rhythms of his action upon his body he both controls and allows to control him: "nous nous livrons en tremblant de confiance et de joie aux pensées tumultueuses auxquelles, mieux nous les possédons et les dirigeons, nous nous sentons appartenir de plus en plus irrésistiblement" (p. 137). Under the growing sexual excitement, then, there occurs the dissolution of the boundaries of the self, the *épanouissement*, that the
vastness of the twilight seemed to hold out in promise at the beginning of the text. Yet it is a particular type of épanouissement, for even as the narrator's consciousness seems to escape its normal boundaries, the solitary nature of the act focuses his attention on himself, offering him a paradoxical fusion with himself. Two reflexive verbs in the sentence—"nous nous livrons" and "nous nous sentons appartenir"—would appear to signal precisely this type of fusion, an interpretation that the disjointed syntax of the sentence further encourages. The complement of "nous nous livrons" is "aux pensées tumultueuses," but the two phrases are separated by "en tremblant de confiance et de joie." The split-second hiatus between them thus gives the reader time to formulate, at least subconsciously, the tentative interpretation "we give up to ourselves" (the reflexive pronoun posited as indirect object) for "nous nous livrons." The ambiguity is even more pronounced in the case of "nous nous sentons appartenir." The indirect construction that appartenir requires appeared earlier in the sentence; both reflexive verbs in fact share the same complement, "pensées tumultueuses." The reordered syntax commanded by the second verb is "nous nous sentons appartenir aux pensées tumultueuses." However, as was the case for "nous nous livrons," the verb and its proper complement are separated by an incised phrase, in this case "mieux nous les possédons et les dirigeons," set off by commas from what precedes and what follows it. Thus the reflexive pronoun is once again available, by its proximity to the verb, to fill the role of the indirect object not readily at hand in the sentence and "nous nous sentons appartenir" momentarily
takes on the appearance of a self-contained ellipsis for "we feel as if we belong to ourselves."

The adventure continues with a series of variations on the sexual imagery elaborated in the first half of the text. The countryside is a "campagne" and "le champ [de bataille] solennel" (p. 138) in a prolongation of the battle motif; the oak trees are, moreover, the "témoins épiques" of the adventure, in a rhetorical shift of the quality of the spectacle to an adjective describing the spectator. "Épiques" additionally suggests the more phallic "épis," and indeed in "[nous] saluons les chênes pleins de nuit" there is a reprize of the "bête adorée," of the narcissism focused on the narrator's genitals. Here is introduced at the same time the notion of plenitude, preparatory to climax, while the sense of sexual activity as moral transgression is preserved in the image of the trees as "full of night." A moment of exaltation follows before the narrator's attention returns to himself with the highly sexually charged verb "enfoncer," used, however, reflexively. "Nous nous enfonçons de plus en plus vite dans la campagne" is a statement of progress both through the woods and in the manual stimulation required for climax. The search for companionship in the final sentence—"le chien qui nous suit, le cheval qui nous porte ou l'ami qui s'est tu" (p. 138)—proves illusory, and the focus returns to the phallic image that initially suggested the sexual content of the text: "la canne qui tourne joyeusement dans nos mains fébriles" (p. 138).

In the final movement of the élan, the loss of the self into the sexual experience (where it is nonetheless with the self that the union takes place), the cane/penis becomes an autonomous and affective being, capable
of joy as the release approaches. The release with which the experience ends is, not surprisingly, both dépense (an outpouring of tears substituted for ejaculation) and spectacle: "[la canne] reçoit en regards et en larmes le tribut mélancolique de notre délire" (p. 138). The melancholia of the end corresponds to that of the beginning and suggests, along with the cyclical repetitiousness of the act, the beginning and the ending points of the moral conflict, that is to say, that melancholia as a response to one's inevitable yielding to sexual temptation, comprising an elegant and partially sincere regret for the purity that might have been, is a much more liveable and aesthetically pleasing attitude for the sensitive soul to adopt than is an outright and uncompromising sense of guilt. It is also the attitude that allows for the coexistence of guilt and innocence in the text of Les Plaisirs et les jours that most successfully subverts the language of the social community into a socially acceptable representation (pleasurable in itself) of private sexual experience.

Kiss and Tell

Lejeune's discernment of the nostalgia of comestibilité in the Recherche, of a primarily oral erotic relationship that the narrator entertains with the world, suggests we might examine the kiss in Les Plaisirs et les jours as a particularly ambiguous image in which coexist an original innocence and the possibility of sexual transgression. Among the memories of the retired captain in Regret VII are remembrances of deeply passionate kisses: "Il y avait des évocations de baisers dans la bouche--dans une bouche fraîche où il eût sans hésiter laissé son âme, et qui depuis s'était détournée de lui,--qui le faisaient pleurer
longtemps" (p. 113). The image here of losing oneself in the lover's mouth suggests the ogre-like proportions that the desire to devour the world will assume in the Recherche, according to Lejeune. Kisses are part of physical acts of love in Regret XXV, "Critique de l'espérance à la lumière de l'amour"—"Je défaits vos fleurs, je soulève vos cheveux, j'arrache vos bijoux, j'atteins votre chair, mes baisers recouvrent votre corps comme la mer qui monte sur le sable..." (p. 140)—and function as a sign of purity and filial devotion in "La Confession d'une jeune fille."

Yet, just as the mother's kiss does not prevent the jeune fille from a final relapse into sin, the baiser also appears in Les Plaisirs et les jours as a distinctly insufficient act. This is the case in "Critique de l'espérance," for the above passage continues, "mais vous m'échappez et avec vous le bonheur" (p. 140). A similar note is sounded in "Les Perles," in which the physical presence of the beloved is described as "cette présence imparfaite, masque fugitif de l'éternelle absence que les baisers soulèvent bien vite" (p. 132). Baldassare Silvande complains to Pia, whom he had once loved, of the insufficiency of kisses to attach her to him—"puis-je espérer que la mort et votre gravité accompliront ce que la vie, avec ses ardeurs, et nos larmes, et nos gaités, et nos lèvres n'avaient pu faire?" (p. 24)—while for Honoré of "Scénario" the passionate kiss with which he greets his beloved succeeds only in turning her away from him. Finally Honoré of "La Fin de la jalousie" uses the threat of a kiss in public to "punish" Françoise for talking to him. These occurrences of the kiss in Les Plaisirs et les jours thus link to its insufficiency—one cannot in fact
"drink in" the lover or absorb the mother's purity by a mere kiss—a distinct element of threat.

A pivotal text for the image of the kiss in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* is *Regret* XVII, "Rêve." Here the narrator recounts the strange dream that transfigures for him Mme Dorothy B....; the epigraph to the text is from Anatole France, and links the mouth to the eyes in a single act of love that presages the climax of the narrator's dream: "Tes pleurs coulaient pour moi, ma lèvre a bu tes pleurs" (p. 127). In the dream, as Dorothy begins to cry, so does the narrator; she then proceeds to "drink" his tears that are really, says the narrator, her tears in his eyes:

Au moment précis où ses yeux (par la mystérieuse conscience que j'avais de son individualité à elle, j'en fus certain) éprouvèrent le léger spasme qui précédè d'une seconde le moment où l'on pleure, ces furent mes yeux qui s'emplirent de larmes, de ses larmes, pourrais-je dire. Elle s'approcha, mit à la hauteur de ma joue sa tête renversée dont je pouvais contempler la grace mystérieuse, la captivante vivacité, et dardant sa langue hors de sa bouche fraîche, souriante, cueillait toutes mes larmes au bord de mes yeux. (p. 129)

It is not hard to discern in this climax of the dream another metaphorical representation of sexual climax; in the preceding lines, Dorothy has raised the narrator's moustache (uncovered a sexual organ; the gesture repeats that of Jacques seducing the *jeune fille*) and presented him with a closed and dewy rose (the female sex organ) whose perfume intoxicates the narrator. There then follows the "léger spasme" that results in the same dépense—tears—as the climax of "Couche de soleil intérieur." The entire process is subsequently described by the
narrator as a strange and marvelous new variety of kiss, a (Decadent) refinement in eroticism: "Puis elle les avalait [mes larmes] avec un léger bruit des lèvres, que je ressentais comme un baiser inconnu, plus intimément troublant que s'il m'avait directement touché" (p. 129).

The pudeur of this description—its language and the kiss only indirectly exchanged—is a necessary part of its erotic appeal; at the same time, it links the kiss to the techniques of the metaphorical representation of eroticism we have been following in Les Plaisirs et les jours. A brief return here to Proust's early letters on sexual attraction reveals that for him, beyond the Decadent horror of procreation and the reversal of terms allowed by homosexuality, beyond sexuality even and the respect for conventional appearances, guilt and innocence have meaning primarily in relation to language itself; as we might have suspected from the impediments to confession encountered by Honoré and the jeune fille, the "fault" Proust truly abhors is not sexuality but (as in high society the inability to imitate well) the inability to represent sexual pleasure pleasingly and with discretion: "Je trouve l'impudicité une chose horrible," he wrote to Halévy in 1888, "elle me paraît bien pire que la débauche."46 Significantly, Proust follows up this assertion with praise for the French language; his sense of moral duty commands him to respect it, he says, while, as was the case for "Coucher de soleil intérieur," the language is in itself a source of sensual pleasure:

...la langue française, dame aimable et infiniment gracieuse, dont la tristesse et la volupté sont également exquises, mais à qui il ne faut jamais imposer de poses sales. C'est déshonorer sa beauté.47
French is for Proust, of course, the "langue maternelle;" the problem of erotic representation with which he deals in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* thus represents a transferral to the symbolic level (language) of the recurrent (autobiographical) problem of transgression against the mother—a correspondent in the completed work to the earlier accession to art and the symbolic presided over by Darlu. 48

The kiss therefore has a fundamental ambiguity in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, since the mouth, link to the mother and producer of language, is also the locus of potential impudicité; it can generate obscenity, as in Jacques de Laléande's proposition, or in the obscene gestures made by Dorothy B. and Jacques of "La Confession." Bardèche has described the effect on Françoise de Breuves of Laléande's obscenity as "une sorte d'onde de choc, qui agit sur toute la sensibilité, la mobi-lise, s'en empare;" 49 this description applies equally well to the other instances of obscenity by word or facial gesture in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*. Walking with Violante in the park, Honoré apprises her of "des choses fort inconvénantes dont elle ne se doutait pas" (p. 30), causing in her a reaction of pleasure and shame, a "crise de nerfs," and, eventually, a longing for Honoré based on the memory of the obscenity: "Et par les nuits douces, par les nuits vastes et secrètes, quand la certitude que personne ne pouvait la voir exaltait son désir, elle entendait la voix d'Honoré lui dire à l'oreille les choses défendues" (p. 31). The shock that chases his beloved from Honoré in "Scénario" is the inconvénance, thus the obscenity, of his kiss; all in the text before his gesture (that is, the instructions of his surroundings and the Bonne Fée) prepares the reader to see it as transgression, while
the public kiss with which Honoré threatens Françoise in "La Fin de la jalousie" likewise succeeds as a threat because such undisguised intimacy in public would also pass for obscene.

With its emphasis on the figure of the mother, the experience of the jeune fille of "La Confession" illustrates most clearly in Les Plaisirs et les jours the duplicity of the kiss; in her story the same organ that expresses affection for and seeks union with the loved one, that expresses the nostalgia of comestibilité, is the one that also offends by its impudicité against mother and "mother" tongue, by its capacity for obscenity. Like Violante and Françoise de Breyves, the jeune fille has first been tempted by the obscene propositions of a young man, in this case a fifteen-year old cousin who was, she writes, "déjà très vicieux et [qui] m'apprit des choses qui me firent frissonner aussitôt de remords et de volupté. Je goûtais à l'écouter, à laisser ses mains caresser les miennes, une joie empoisonnée à sa source même ..."] (p. 87). What the jeune fille does, however, immediately upon extracting herself from the company of her cousin, is repeat to her mother "toutes ces vilaines choses qu'il fallait l'ignorance de mon âge pour lui dire et qu'elle sut écouter divinement, sans les comprendre, diminuant leur importance avec une bonté qui allégeait le poids de ma conscience" (p. 87). It is then that she and her mother exchange a purifying kiss. Thus the kiss as hantise in Les Plaisirs et les jours, the simultaneous expression of guilt and innocence, explaining its presence in the work as deeply pleasurable at the same time as it is insufficient and even threatening. It is, in other words, the image attached to the taboo object in compulsive neurotic behavior, capable
of carrying either or both of two contradictory significations, of a piece in "La Confession" with the jeune fille's inability to understand her own contradictions and invent a sufficiently "duplicitous" metaphorical language, revelatory and opaque, with which to express her fault.

**Beyond Sexual Temptation**

In "Rêve," the troubling eroticism centered on the kiss is displaced upwards to the eyes. Both Dorothy and the narrator weep; as in "Coucher de Soleil intérieur," tears are a pudique and noble (metaphorical) dépense. This same type of displacement is expressed in the letter to Halévy to which we have already referred; by an insistence on eyes Proust defends his interest in Halévy as spiritual:

...tu as de jolis yeux clairs qui reflétent si purement la grâce fine de ton esprit qu'il me semble que je n'aime pas complètement ton esprit si je n'embrassec pas tes yeux ... ton corps et tes yeux sont si graciles et souples comme ta pensée qu'il me semble que je me mèlerais mieux à ta pensée en m'asseyant sur tes genoux ... je ne peux séparer ton esprit vif de ton corps léger. 50

In doing so, he substitutes for the ambiguities of oral eroticism a compensatory visual relationship that, capitalizing on the stock image of the eyes as the windows of the soul, now claims to locate the source of erotic attraction in the higher realms of the mind—"ta pensée," as he writes. 51

The most arresting eyes Proust describes in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* are those of the Duke of Richmond in the poem on Van Dyck. In the narcissism of the visual exchange that takes place there between spectator and spectacle, there is a guarantee of sexual infecundity, a
promise, not surprisingly, that the temptation of the "other" will never pass the stage of temptation. Ghislaine Florival has linked this type of blockage to an infantile narcissism extravagantly prolonged by the pleasure of the mother's love and identified it as the source of Marcel's need for the mediation of imagination in the Recherche:

...avant d'en arriver à l'action amoureuse proprement dite, Marcel adolescent se laisse guider par des formes imaginaires qui avivent son désir et dont il peut librement diriger et orienter l'attente et la promesse. Mais ce désir se prend à son propre reflet et risque de se perdre au jeu d'un inlassable recommencement.... L'autre n'est... vécu qu'en image, comme pôle immanent de la tension désirante. Est-il donc étonnant que le sujet se cherche un idéal du moi dans le regard de l'autre qui lui reflète sa ressemblance? L'amour dès lors, est un spectacle qui favorise la résonance sensuelle.... 52

Encounter with the image of the other that is in reality encounter with a reflection of the self: this is the central experience of illusory fusion recounted in the poem on Van Dyck and repeated throughout Les Plaisirs et les jours. The dedication to Heath, posing him as a portrait watching Proust, his eyes "impénétrables et souriants en face de l'énigme que vous taisiez" (p. 6) takes the process back even one step further to the creation of the image by the self, to the auto-eroticism that is the most common sexual experience in the work. To the pleasure of the solitary sex act as spectacle in "Couche de soleil intérieur" corresponds Honoré's imaginings of an unfaithful Françoise created in his own image; lingering between life and death, the jeune fille sees over and over the image of her face in the mirror and prolongs the pleasurable remorse whose true nature she cannot express. The imaginary loves in Les Plaisirs et les jours, as in "Rêve," "Présence
réelle," and "Mélancolique villégature," are creations of characters that understand and share this same auto-eroticism; so are the experiences recounted in "Reliques" and "Rencontre au bord du lac," asserting the ability of the subject, like the child, to find the source and fulfillment of its erotic pleasure within itself. In this preference for auto-erotic representations over the experience of reality, Les Plaisirs et les jours rejoin the experience of Des Esseintes, replaying in his mind and for his solitary pleasure his old love affairs, or those of the hero of Aphrodite, whose dream of Chrysis' love is sufficient for him to have no further need of her physical person. They look forward, moreover, to the continued auto-eroticism dramatized in the Recherche: the narrator, asleep in the opening pages, whose dream of a woman he loves is prompted by "une fausse position de ma cuisse," or Swann, in love with an Odette that is a creation of his own imaginings. Visual eroticism in Les Plaisirs et les jours, confession or "photographie de moi-même," thus begins and ends with the viewer, who looks for his own reflection in what he contemplates, who, as Proust will formulate the psychological "law" in the Recherche, is wrong to locate the source of attraction in the beloved when it is really to be found within the powers of imagination of the lover (of) himself.54

The persistence of narcissism thus sabotages from the start the encounter with the other in Les Plaisirs et les jours; underlying the pattern of temptation-transgression-punishment in the work is a different, more compelling and disturbing experience of eroticism. Just as it has been argued that Proust's own snobbery was what enabled him to produce the lucid and accurate criticisms of this attitude in both
Les Plaisirs et les jours and the Recherche, the personal experience of auto-eroticism recorded in Les Plaisirs et les jours is likewise the glass through which Proust perceives a similar inward-looking eroticism in others. Expressed in a veritable hantise de l'indifférence that parallels in visual eroticism the hantise du baiser of oral eroticism, his fear is that the others to whom he turns his attention will react by turning from him back into themselves, a movement that his own narcissism teaches him is all too probable and that his infantile need to be unconditionally loved leads him to fear. This is the pattern of Proust's many passionate friendships: like a broken record, his letters to Hahn, Lucien, Daudet and Antoine Bibesco announce over and over the end of the friendship, destroyed by this or that "proof" of the other's indifference.55 "Corps sec et souple..." for example, one of the texts that Proust declined to publish in Les Plaisirs et les jours, is addressed apparently to Hahn,56 raising the complaint of indifference against him four times: Hahn is a "coeur sentimental et indifférent;" despite his manifold charms, "son indifférence l'empêche de se mettre à la place des autres" (p. 173); he is "un rêve de sentimentalisme sur un lac d'indifférence;" and combines finally "un fond de nonchalance, une ardeur de cheval, une mollesse de femme et un dédain d'indifférent" (p. 174).

Regret XV, "Comme un ciel sanglant..." is a poeticized version of "Corps sec et souple..." released from its reference to a single person to become a statement of a general "law" of narcissism and its effects. The demonstration is conducted through the metaphor of fire: just as a red sky reflects a fire burning beneath it without sharing in the
fire's warmth, so too eyes that glow with the passion of narcissism announce no true warmth; these "personnes indifférentes et gaiës," herald instead the most deceptive kind of self-directed love:

...échauffée seulement par la ferveur de leur égoïsme ... leur âme desséchée ne sera plus que le palais factice des intrigues.... Sphères jumelles désormais indépendantes de leur âme, sphères d'amour, ardents satellites d'un monde à jamais refroidi, elles continueront jusqu'à leur mort de jeter un éclat insolite et décevant, faux prophètes, parjures aussi qui promettent un amour que leur coeur ne tiendra pas. (p. 125)

One would suspect then that if such is the behavior of the indifferent, they had best just be left to themselves, were it not for (as we observed in the Comédie italienne) the strange magnetism of the indifferent, the law of pursuit and disdain applied to love, or to what passes for love in Les Plaisirs et les Jours. More patient and conniving than the over-eager Honoré of "Scénario," the indifferent attract by their very show of indifference, by their narcissism, by their egoism.

Thus, those who make a show of their auto-eroticism, that is, who demonstrate that their source of pleasure is themselves, are the ones whom others likewise identify as objects of desire; as René Girard would say, the indifferent serve as their own mediators; showing themselves worthy of (their own) desire, they are the ones who are loved. For Proust, the demonstration is, in some respects, a difficult one; a display of froideur does not come easily to one so neurotically anxious to be loved, to the young man who wrote to Robert Dreyfus, "Oh! collant, ça a toujours été mon cauchemar de l'être," precisely because he suspects that he is collant. On the other hand, the
revelations of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* that the "je" who writes of his dreams, his imagined loves, his identification with figures in paintings, is also attracted first and foremost to himself, can find in himself the mechanisms of erotic pleasure, seem destined to use to the author's advantage his understanding of the workings of indifference; if the ploy succeeds, he will be loved, because narcissism, convincingly rendered, attracts.

The most convincing narcissism, auto-eroticism in its purest form free of intrigue or neurotic parti pris, is that of the child in his "mythical world" of his pleasurable body and his all-loving, all-powerful mother. Like illness in the Noah's ark sickroom, auto-eroticism in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* seeks to leave behind itself considerations of guilt and innocence to serve as both ploy and guarantor: ploy for its attempted use of the part to reconstruct the whole of the innocent mother-child union enjoyed in infancy (a necessarily rhetorical response of synecdoche to an impossible "real life" situation), and guarantor that the child, like the jeune fille who will bring her future husband home to live under the same roof as her mother, has not in fact known any separation from her, has known no sexual development beyond the infantile mother-child relationship, rendering betrayal of the mother in favor of sex with any other (male or female) theoretically impossible.

Thus, once again, while the three different "confessional" texts we have examined in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* investigate three different responses to the representation of erotic experience, it is not absolutely necessary that they or the work in general be taken at face value as Proust's own confession of (homo)sexual vice. If Proust
confesses to any "fault" of his own in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, it is to his failure to move beyond infantile narcissism towards an adult sexuality—towards that "amour fécond, destiné à perpétuer la race, noble comme un devoir familial, social, humain" as Françoise expressed it in "Avant la nuit" (p. 169), but which is not represented as a necessarily desirable goal in either *Les Plaisirs et les jours* or Decadent literature in general. The "amours défendues" that Gregh read in the work would thus have to be those that argue against the goal of respectable bourgeois family life, that is, the love of oneself and (excessively) of one's mother—as much a prophecy of Proust's future life as the image of Noah's ark, making the scenes of family life later recalled in the *Recherche* doubly nostalgic. If the homosexuality into which these forbidden loves resolve themselves for Proust can be, to again use Françoise's words, "une altération nerveuse qui l'est trop exclusive-ment pour comporter un contenu moral," (p. 169), then so must they be accepted with equal complacency. The bottom line, as the title of the book implies, is not guilt, but purely and simply pleasure—in part a pleasure that depends upon transgression for the full realization of its pleasurableness, but more significantly, the pleasure of seeing the self in the mirror of the text in which the confession of one's own narcissism is hidden.
Footnotes

1 Massis, p. 60.


3 Gregh, Amitié, p. 9.

4 Bardèche, p. 47.

5 Bardèche, p. 56. He writes of Proust's representation of pleasure in the early works: "Proust est encore timide et tout est langage secret dans Jean Santeuil comme dans Les Plaisirs et les Jours" (p. 97).


7 See Chapter 1, pp. 11-12 and p. 86N14.

8 Massis, pp. 44-45.

9 "Ce qui le délecte [Gide] passe partout pour inâme en dépit de son Corydon, un livre bien grotesque, entre nous, et qui, loin de servir sa cause, achève de la rendre odieuse. Comment ne voit-il pas que la grandeur de ce vice provient, non de l'apparence plus ou moins décorative de ceux qui le pratiquent mais de la réprobation dont ils sont l'objet?" Quoted by Faÿ, p. 97.

10 Massis, pp. 58-60.


12 Massis, p. 52.

13 Massis, p. 80.

14 Massis, pp. 81-82.

15 Massis, p. 76.

16 The incident is recounted by Dreyfus, p. 48. Defending Proust's assessment of his experience, Dreyfus writes that Proust's comment "traduisait assurément avec une force judicieuze la gêne qui s'empare toujours d'un honnête garçon pénétrant dans un mauvais lieu" (p. 48).


19 Proust's awareness of the externality of guilt and innocence is legible in his description at the beginning of Sodome et Gomorrhe of
the "race sur qui pèse une malédiction et qui doit vivre dans le men-
songe et le parjure, puisqu'elle sait tenu pour punissable et honteux,
pour inavouable, son désir, ce qui fait pour toute créature la plus
grande douceur de vivre..." (II, p. 615), complemented by his remarks
to Bernard Faÿ on Gide's misperceptions of the relation between homo-
sexuals and society:"C'est dans cette exagération du mépris, de la
réprobation, de l'exclusive et de l'opprobre dont ils sont l'objet, là
qu'ils trouvent à la fois ce qui les unit le plus étroitement, ce qui
les exalte avec le plus de violence et ce qui fait d'eux une tribu,
sombre, damnée, mais heroïque"(Faÿ, p. 97).

20 See Chapter 4, pp. 324-26. For a discussion of society's re-
ponse to homosexuality in late nineteenth-century Europe, see Robert
Vigneron, "Genèse de Swann," Revue d'histoire de la philosophie 5 (1937),
pp. 67-77, and J.E. Rivers' Proust and the Art of Love: The Aesthetics
Sexuality in the Life, Times, and Art of Marcel Proust (New York: Colum-

21 An exception to this complacency is Violante's decisive re-
jection of the advances of the Princess of Misènè; Rivers says of this
incident that "lesbianism is [here] used as a symbol of all that is
corrupt and depraved in human nature" (p. 105). It seems to me, rather,
that the point of the incident is the hypocrisy of society opposed to
Violante's innate (and conventional) virtuousness, while its moral that
Rivers quotes in translation—"When Violante heard about this, she wept
for herself and for the wickedness of women. She had made up her mind
long ago about the wickedness of men"—is again largely determined by
the story's parodic structure as a Voltairean apprentissage.

22 Publication of an audacious text like "Avant la nuit" during
his mother's lifetime argues against the notion, common in Proust cri-
icism, of a Proust so respectful of his mother's moral standards that
her death represented the liberation he needed to undertake his mas-
terpiece with its scandalous revelations of "vice." Vigneron considers
"Avant la nuit" the very fountainhead of the Recherche, conceived quite
specifically as an inquiry into the theme of homosexuality ("Genèse,"
pp. 68-69, 74-115).

23 Bardèche, p. 52. Rivers calls this story "the first explicit
defense of homosexuality in Proust's work" (p. 110), and goes on to
suggest that social considerations in the wake of Oscar Wilde's 1895
trial may have prompted Proust's decision to exclude this text from
Les Plaisirs et les jours. Rivers says that it was Leslie's professed
tolerance for homosexuality that led Françoise to "experiment" with
it, a reading of the story with which I do not entirely concur; his
conclusion, however, identifies the same disparity between individual
and social morality expressed by language that we have discerned in
Françoise's confession: '"Avant la nuit' issues a powerful plea for
tolerance of homosexuality and at the same time suggests that such
pleas are better left unsaid. It coils itself neatly into a paradox:
'And never had we known so much ill, and so much good!' (p. 111). Our
suggestion is that the paradox can be explained as a manifestation in "Avant la nuit" of the themes and preoccupations of Decadent literature.

24 Gide, Journal 1869–1939 (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1948), p. 692. Gide records in the same journal entry a conversation about homosexuality he had with Proust, the latter insisting that Baudelaire was indisputably an "uraniste:" "La manière dont il parle de Lesbos, et déjà le besoin d'en parler, suffiraient seuls à m'en convaincre...." As for Proust himself, Gide remarked his resemblance in 1921 to Jean Lorrain—"Il est gras, ou plutôt bouffi"—as well as, with some surprise, Proust's acceptance of his own sexuality: "Loin de nier ou de cacher sonuranisme, il l'expose, et je pourrais presque dire: s'en tague. Il dit n'avoir jamais aimé les femmes que spirituellement et n'avoir jamais connu l'amour qu'avec des hommes" (p. 692). There might be some fumisterie on Proust's part here, a certain exaggeration for the pleasure of scandalizing Gide. The topic comes up again, however, in a return visit Gide pays Proust shortly afterwards; they discuss transposition of sexual adventures in the Recherche: "Nous n'avons, ce soir encore, guère parlé que d'uranisme; il dit se reprocher cette 'indécision' qui l'a fait, pour nourrir la partie hétérosexuelle de son livre, transposer 'à l'ombre des jeunes filles' tout ce que ses souvenirs homosexuels lui proposaient de gracieux, de tendre et de charmant, de sorte qu'il ne lui reste plus pour Sodome que du grotesque et de l'abject. Mais il se montre très affecté lorsque je lui dis qu'il semble avoir voulu stigmatiser l'uranisme; il proteste; et je comprends enfin que ce que nous trouvons ignoble, objet de rire ou de dégoût, ne lui paraît pas, à lui, si repoussant" (p. 694).

25 Kasell, p. 33.
26 Kasell, p. 36.
27 Kasell, pp. 36-37.
28 Kasell, p. 37.
29 Kasell, p. 40.
30 See Caroline Wijsenbeck's formulation of the connection between fantasy solutions to repression and aesthetic pleasure to which we referred in Chapter 3, p. 245.
31 Proust notes this connection in a letter to Lucien Muhlfeld in November 1898 on the latter's novel Le Mauvais Désir: "Vous avez fait un livre très beau et très original et dont le dénouement bien cruel est bien profond puisque la jalouse étant au fond qu'on est deux à s'aimer, elle ne cesse que quand on [n']est plus qu'un, par la mort" (Corr. II, p. 265). Randolph Splitter's recent psychoanalytic reading of the Recherche suggests the channels through which this combination of jealousy—love—death acquires meaning in Marcel's experience: "As the
example of his grandmother makes clear, the life of another person, even the intensely 'alive' memory of his grandmother, cannot become part of the self until it is apparently lost forever, dead, as if life were a virulent organism that had to be killed off before it could be assimilated.... Marcel plays the part of a cannibal who kills his enemies in order to 'eat' them, eats them in order to possess their spirits, except that his 'enemies' are those he loves best" (Proust's Recherche: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation [Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981] p. 83). Marcel, of course, in a sense learns his cannibalism from the experience of his mother's kiss; Splitter says, "As a child Marcel thinks that his mother's presence is a kind of magical essence (signified by her kiss) which he can literally assimilate into himself and without which his life has no real meaning" (p. 82). We shall return in this chapter to a discussion of oral eroticism and the ambiguities of the kiss in Les Plaisirs et les jours.


34 Lejeune, p. 141. For this perception, Lejeune refers to Gide's "intuition que la puissance de synthèse de l'orgasme, artificieusement sollicitée dans la vie, était, sur le plan symbolique, au cœur du mécanisme de croissance de [la Recherche]" (p. 142). Gide's comments are recorded in his Journal 1939-1949 (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1954), as another of his observations on the peculiarities of Proust's sexual behavior: "'Lors d'un mémorable entretien nocturne ... Proust m'expliqua sa préoccupation de réunir en faisceau, à la faveur de l'orgasme, les sensations et les émotions les plus hétéroclites.... J'y vis surtout l'aveu d'une sorte d'insuffisance physiologique. Pour parvenir au paroxysme, que d'adjuvants il lui fallait! Mais qui servaient, indirectement, pour ses livres, au prodigieux foisonnement de leur touffe!'" (p. 1223). Quoted by Lejeune, p. 142.

35 Lejeune, p. 118.

36 Lejeune, p. 128.

37 The passage is from the beginning of La Prisonnière: "Avant qu'Albertine m'eût obéi et eût enlevé ses souliers, j'entrouvrais sa chemise. Ses deux petits seins haut remontés étaient si ronds qu'ils avaient moins l'air de faire partie intégrante de son corps que d'y avoir mûri comme deux fruits; et son ventre (dissimulant la place qui chez l'homme s'enlaidit comme du crampon resté fiché dans une statue desséchée) se refermait, à la jonction des cuisses, par deux valves d'une courbe aussi assouplie, aussi reposante, aussi claustrale que celle de l'horizon quand le soleil a disparu. Elle était ses souliers, se couchait près de moi" (III, p. 79). Rivers also discusses this passage as a failed description of an "incontrovertibly female body" (pp. 212-13).
Lejeune, pp. 135-36.

Lejuene, p. 127.

Paganini, p. 147. She locates the spatial ambiguity of the vestibule in its dual nature as artificial enclosure and path or thoroughfare.

It should be pointed out that such "multi-layered" art was not Proust's invention, though the author of "Contre l'obscurité" was probably encouraged in his deliberate obscurantism here, once again, by Symbolist and Decadent literature. Les Déliquescences d'Adoré Floupette in particular come to mind, with this (parodic) formula for levels of meaning in a sonnet: "un pour les gens du monde, un pour les journalistes, et le troisième, affreusement obscène, pour les initiés, en titre de récompense. Vous savez tous que c'est le fin du fin." Quoted by Richard, A l'aube du symbolisme, p. 297.

Emphasis added.

RTP, I, p. 158.

Emphasis added. The editors point out that it is impossible to determine if the suppression of the prepositional phrase is a misprint or if Proust himself made the correction (IV, p. 971).

Lejeune, p. 136.

Corr. I, p. 123. This is the same letter that contains Proust's defense of homosexuality to which we referred earlier in this chapter.


Bardèche, p. 55.


That these two types of eroticism are actually two sides of the same coin has been made clear by Norman Holland in his descriptions of the "eye" metaphors in language and literature (such as the phrase "to feast one's eyes") that betray an eroticism governed by the oral stage of childhood development (Holland, pp. 36-38).

Florival, p. 196.

RTP, I, p. 4.

RTP, III, p. 912: "Je m'étais rendu compte que seule la perception grossière et erronée place tout dans l'objet, quand tout est dans
l'esprit.... J'avais vu l'amour placer dans une personne ce qui n'est que dans la personne qui aime."

55 This letter to Hahn in midsummer 1896 is typical: "Notre amitié n'a plus le droit de rien dire ici, elle n'est pas assez fort pour cela maintenant.... Quand vous m'avez dit que vous restiez à souper ce n'est pas la première preuve d'indifférence que vous me donniez. Mais quand deux heures après, après nous être parlé gentiment, après toute la diversion de vos plaisirs musicaux, sans colère, froidement, vous m'avez dit que vous ne reviendriez pas avec moi, c'est la première preuve de méchanceté que vous m'ayez donné[é]" (Corr. II, p. 100).

56 Proust makes reference to Hahn's "belle peau brune" and his "voix de chanteur" (p. 174); the manuscript is written on the back of a cover for the Revue blanche—an unusual choice of paper for Proust who usually preferred blank sheets—and is entirely crossed out, indicating the portrait was probably written in the heat of a quarrel.

57 See Girard's discussion of "triangular desire" in Proust and Dostoïevsky in Deceit, particularly pp. 37-52, as well as our own use of this concept, along with mediation, pursuit and flight, in Chapter 4, pp. 295-98 and 313-17.

58 Corr. I, p. 108. This letter is dated August 1888.

59 The term is Florival's, p. 195.
Conclusion

Structure and the Calendar

Proust wrote to Jacques Rivière in 1914 of his delight at finding a reader alert to the complex structure he was sketching out in the Recherche: "Enfin je trouve un lecteur qui devine que mon livre est un ouvrage dogmatique et une construction!"¹ To Bernard Faÿ, he explained the work of this construction and its necessity:

"Si vous avez lu les premiers volumes d'A la recherche du temps perdu, vous avez constaté le nombre considérable de personnages et la complexité du problème. Dans les autres volumes, vous les retrouverez tous, mais les relations entre eux changeront, parfois s'inverseront. L'impression de réalité résultera de ces correspondances et de ces conflits. Mon livre est une construction, et là réside le travail essentiel pour moi, le travail le plus délicat, du reste. Il faut relier chaque partie à la précédente, annoncer ce qui viendra tout en ménageant la part de l'imprévu .... La vie supérieure n'apparaît que le moment où les cellules s'ajoutent les unes aux autres, se combinent, réagissent entre elles et forment un ensemble, dont l'unité ne se maintient que par ces luttes intérieures, par cet équilibre de poussées et de résistances."²

This description bears out, moreover, Proust's comments on his novel as a representation of time; in an interview with Elie-Joseph Bois that appeared in Le Temps the eve of Swann's publication, he expresses his regret at not being able to publish the entire work at one time, explaining,
...pour moi, le roman ce n'est pas seulement de la psychologie plane, mais de la psychologie dans le temps. Cette substance invisible du temps, j'ai tâché de l'isoler, mais pour cela il fallait que l'expérience pût durer. J'espère qu'à la fin de mon livre, tel petit fait social sans importance, tel mariage entre deux personnes qui dans le premier volume appartiennent à des mondes bien différents, indiquera que du temps a passé et prendra cette beauté de certains plombs patinés de Versailles, que le temps a engainés dans un fourreau d'émeraude.... Tels personnages se révéleront plus tard différents de ce qu'ils sont dans le volume actuel, différents de ce qu'on les croira, ainsi qu'il arrivera bien souvent dans la vie, du reste. 3

The question, then, has been asked of Les Plaisirs et les Jours, to what extent can the early work, collection of fragments and pieces that it is, also be seen as a "construction," or does it totally lack organic (internal) coherence? Is it as Fernand Gregh called the work, merely, "une de ces œuvres faites un peu au hasard où un amateur très doué rassemble hâtivement ses premiers essais..." or is there within it some concern for logic and organization?

In "La Composition des Plaisirs et les Jours," Bernard Gicquel argues for a finely detailed intentionality in Proust's arrangement of his texts in the work, suggested first of all by his rejection of the chronological order of their composition; what Proust had in mind in the disposition of his texts was more along the line of aesthetic reflections and resonances:

Les thèmes, les images, les situations qui apparaissent dans les Plaisirs et les Jours ne donnent l'impression de scintillement que parce qu'ils se répondent les uns aux autres, se reflètent l'un dans l'autre, s'évoquent mutuellement à des pages de distance; ils suggèrent, sans l'expliciter, un ordre sous-jacent, une mise en place intentionnelle qui
These echoes and resonances might already be seen as an approach to the type of "reliage" Proust described among the various parts of the Recherche to Bernard Faÿ. Beyond them, however, Gicquel describes for Les Plaisirs et les jours a structure that is symmetrical, circular and dynamic: the collection begins and ends with the theme of death (in "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande" and "La Fin de la jalousie"), a theme that is gradually transformed by its passage across the points of the circle. The texts that lead up to the midpoint of the book, the "Portraits de peintres et de musiciens"—"Violante," the Fragments, "Bouvard et Pécuchet" and the "Mélancolique villégiature"—are therefore "negative" texts to which correspond symmetrically the "positive" texts that follow of the "Portraits"—"La Confession d'une jeune fille," "Un Dîner en ville," the Regrets and "La Fin de la jalousie." Between them is the end of the diameter that corresponds to "Baldassare Silvande": the passage through art in the "Portraits" that gives new meaning to (redeems) the experiences of love, society and death in the first series of texts. As Gicquel explains,

...la première moitié du recueil est d'orientation pessimiste parce que marquant la décadence de la personnalité, tandis que la seconde partie est d'orientation optimiste parce que montrant la régénérescence de l'être humain à partir d'un principe spirituel, celui que les Portraits de Peintres et de Musiciens ont révélé.

He continues with a description of the inverse symmetries among the texts on either side of the central discovery of the triumph of art over death:
A Madame de Breyves, qui s'éprend "en esprit" de M. de Laléande sans que son corps suive le mouvement de son coeur, répond la jeune fille dont la conscience renie "les passions de l'amour" qui ont entraîné son corps sans corrompre ses sentiments. Honoré trop heureux de sortir d'un dîner mondain contrasté avec Bouvard et Pécuchet qui n'ont de plus cher désir que d'y entrer. Aux Fragments de Comédie italienne qui critiquent la société, s'opposent les Regrets qui exaltent la solitude contemplative et réflexive. Alors que Violante enfin est prisonnière de l'habitude et se complaît dans ses liens, Honoré lutte de toutes ses forces contre la passion qui menace de s'emparer de lui et trouve sa récompense dans la mort.

For "Baldassare," there is reserved a special place; the inaugural nouvelle of the collection announces all of its themes, which Gicquel lists as "vanité mondaine, sensualité, imagination, volonté, mort," each one having its own "chapter" in the work. The schema of a circular and symmetrical work also permits him to recuperate an obvious technical flaw in "Baldassare": Alexis, the central figure of the first chapter, virtually disappears from it as the story continues; in Gicquel's interpretation, it is Alexis who, departing from his uncle's story, embarks on the series of adventures recounted under other names in the rest of Les Plaisirs et les Jours:

...tandis que Baldassare Silvande s'achemine vers la mort, Alexis, son neveu, marche vers la vie. Ce jeune homme--alias Marcel Proust--est d'ailleurs, semble-t-il, le mobile dont la trajectoire décrira la circonférence qui est la forme imposée à son évolution. C'est vraisemblablement lui qui--sous d'autres noms ou prénoms, masculins ou féminins--sera pris par la force de l'habitude, comme Violante, traversera, en y tenant son rôle, le spectacle de comédie italienne que propose la vie mondaine ou bourgeoise, connaîtra comme Mme de Breyves les meurtrissures d'un amour de tête, puis, régnéré par la révélation de l'art, refusera la sensualité, comme la jeune suicidée et se détournera du monde pour se
consacrer à la contemplation des réalités supra-individuelles que le monde et les hommes recèlent et manifestent—comme Honoré—pour parvenir dans la mort à la possession définitive des vérités ultimes.

That *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* have a circular structure is indisputable. Not only do the beginning and ending stories conclude with a death scene, the two death scenes are narrated in essentially the same manner, focused tightly on Baldassare and Honoré as death detaches them and their thoughts from those around them who are in turn presented as shadowy *figurants* praying or weeping in the background. There is also a discernable parallelism on either side of the "Portraits de peintres et de musiciens," but it is neither as strict nor as subtle as Cicquel presents it; his reading of the "negative" and the "positive" adventures of Mme de Breyves opposed to the *jeune fille*, Honoré opposed to Bouvard and Pécuchet, Violante opposed to Honoré, is determined more by his notion of diameters and changing algebraic signs in the work than it is by the stories themselves. It is difficult, for example, to speak of "uncorrupted sentiments" in the *jeune fille* that make of her experience a more "positive" demonstration than that of Mme de Breyves, or to think of Honoré as less caught up in the throes of his jealousy and less a prey to "décadence" in his personality than Violante. The opposition of the mondanity texts in the first half of the book to the *Regrets* in the second half would appear to be more in keeping with the text, particularly as Proust begins the *Regrets* with an epigraph from Emerson that announces its themes taken from nature: "La manière de vivre du poète devrait être si simple que les influences les plus ordinaires le réjouissent, sa gaieté devrait pouvoir être le fruit d'un
rayon de soleil, l'air devrait suffire pour l'inspirer et l'eau devrait suffire pour l'enivrer" (p. 104). On the other hand, mondanity is not entirely absent from this section, while the preciosity of the prose poems and the complication brought to nature by its description as art belie the "simplicity" with which the Regrets open. Finally, the role that Gicquel attributes to Alexis in the overall structure of Les Plaisirs et les jours is ingenious, but excessive; its basis is a reading of the collection as a chronology in the manner of the Recherche in which all of the narrator's experiences come together finally in the discovery of art on the threshold of death, the discovery that Gicquel situates at the physical center of Les Plaisirs et les jours.

Discussing Gicquel's article, the Pléiade editor objects to the use he makes of the "Portraits de peintres et de musiciens," citing their mediocrity of which Proust was well aware, and proposing a different structure (one in fact closer to the image of the cathedral Proust himself used to describe the Recherche) for Les Plaisirs et les jours: "Ce n'est pas en [les "Portraits"] qu'il faut chercher la clef de voûte, mais dans l'obsession de la mort, d'où rayonnent les différents récits, comme des nervures gothiques." Sandre likewise disputes Gicquel's "positives" and "negatives," suggesting instead that Proust, respecting the "correspondances" repeated from one text to the next, allowed "une banale loi de variété, les pièces courtes alternant avec les pièces plus longues" to determine the placement of his stories, prose poems and portraits. Les Plaisirs et les jours thus present not a chronology, but a series of adventures all organized around recurring themes of which the characters (with recurring names) serve as pretexts:
Il semble que toutes les pièces du recueil soient autant d'"apprentissages"—tous les héros sont jeunes—d'expériences plus ou moins dramatiques qui tendent à s'achever dans l'absolu de la nature, de la mort et, implicitement, dans l'absolu de la création littéraire. Le narrateur est déjà là, témoin ou auteur, en tout cas meneur du jeu délicieux et cruel que représente la vie, avec sa charge de voluptés et d'épreuves. La bipolarité de la condition humaine s'inscrit dans le titre, plus symbolique que parodique.

The discovery of art is not the meaning of the central section of Les Plaisirs et les jours with its verses on painters and musicians and Reynaldo's piano music; art, we have seen, is an essential mediator of Proust's vision throughout the work, one of those "resonances" that hold it together as a unity. (Others of these "resonances," which appear to be a reasonable manner in which to talk about the internal coherence of Les Plaisirs et les jours, have been discussed here as reverie, alcohol, fatherless families, pursuit and desire in society and love, the omnipotence of thought, and problems of erotic representation.) Yet there is meaning nonetheless in the centrality of the "Portraits" and the music. Hahn's music in the middle of Proust's book recalls strongly Montaigne's inclusion of the Latin translations of his deceased friend La Boétie in the exact center of the first edition of the Essais; in both publications, the gesture is a tribute to friendship, the friend's work enshrined, as it were, in the monument of one's own, as the friend is enshrined in one's heart. In Proust's case, the gesture is all the more interesting for the hornet's nest of associations it stirs up: Proust thought Montaigne either practiced or wrote approvingly of homosexuality (which would in Proust's mind shed on Montaigne's relationship with La Boétie the same light there is on his relationship with
Hahn); in addition, the piano music is immediately preceded by the poem on Van Dyck, with its narcissistic sexual encounter and the reappearance of Willie Heath it makes possible. The joining together of persons, real, represented or remembered here with a concentration of art forms, painting, poetry, and music both real and represented, is therefore that union of forces that make up the "construction" of the Recherche, or more immediately, make possible a representation of sexual "paroxysme" at the center of the work. In this case, the immediate "rayonnement" out from this center takes on a new significance: before, there is Françoise de Breyves troubled by and dwelling on Laléande's obscene invitation, and after, the jeune fille recounts the consequences of her own (concluded) sexual adventures. Moving out still farther in both directions, we discover society in "Bouvard et Pécuchet" and "Un Dîner en ville"—the same society in which the jeune fille seeks distraction from her faults and to which Violante is introduced by her love for Laurence, but in which, as in the nature described in the Regrets, indifference and auto-eroticism are the rule. The theme of death from the poem on Van Dyck is repeated in "Baldassare" and "La Fin de la jalousie," thus completing the circle, but it is not the central theme of the book. Rather, we can now recognize its subordination to the theme of sexuality; death enhances, gives their arresting beauty to, Willie Heath and the Duke of Richmond as it invests the existences of Baldassare and Honoré with their final, resonant melancholy.

Gicquel suggests the significance of the circle for Proust's treatment of time in Les Plaisirs et les jours: "À l'origine symbole du retour des saisons, le cercle devient ici l'image même du temps, de ces
'jours' qui figurent dans le titre. En lui s'exprime la vanité de la vie humaine, esclave de la temporalité..."12 Yet in the work it is sexuality that has a cyclical aspect to it, while the theme of death is associated with an opposing and obsessive linear concept of time. Nature is cyclical and ritualized in Les Plaisirs et les jours, in the alternation of the seasons noted and described in the Regrets, or in its diurnal cycles: it is morning in "Tuileries," "Versailles," "Promenade;" early morning in "Les Perles;" evening in "Versailles," "Famille écoutant la musique," "Rencontre au bord du lac," "L'Etranger," and "Voiles au port." The sun sets in "Coucher de soleil intérieur" and "La Mer;" the moon rises in "Sonate clair de lune" and "Comme à la lumière de la lune." Sunrise is an occasion of "attendrissement passionné," (p. 137), although admittedly less so than sunset and twilight in "Coucher de soleil intérieur." In Les Plaisirs et les jours, the natural cycles serve as the backdrop to the cyclical experiences of love and loss, desire, forgetting, and remembering. The reflections on experience that fill the pages of the Regrets between Proust's evocations of the rhythms of the earth show us the promptings of sexuality governed by laws of recurrence as inevitable and unchanging as the natural laws governing sunrise, sunset, and the change of seasons. In "Les Rivages de l'oubli," for example, the former loved one has always to accomplish an evolution in the mind of the lover; the evolution begins with indifference and ends with the just perception of what the beloved has been all along:

L'être ... qui nous a fait tout éprouver et de l'essence de qui nous sommes saturés ne peut plus maintenant faire passer sur nous l'ombre même d'une
peine ou d'une joie. Il est plus que mort pour nous.... Mais ce jugement sur l'être aimé, jugement qui a tant varié... doit accomplir une oscillation dernière.... Maintenant nous comprenons que c'était un don généreux de celle que notre désespoir, notre ironie, notre tyrannie perpétuelle n'avaient pas découragée. Elle fut toujours douce.... Alors nous songeons avec attendrissement à celle dont notre malheur voulut qu'elle fût plus aimée qu'elle n'aimait. Elle n'est plus "plus que morte" pour nous. Elle est une morte dont on se souvient affectueusement... Et par la toute-puissante vertu de la justice, elle ressuscite en esprit dans notre coeur pour paraître à ce jugement dernier que nous rendons loin d'elle, avec calme, les yeux en pleurs. (pp. 133-34)

"Source des larmes qui sont dans les amours passées" is another example of recurrence, linked explicitly to natural rhythms; the knowledge gained from previous loves that passion will eventually and inevitably lead to indifference gives to each new love a bittersweet beginning and a preordained conclusion:

Souvent, en effet, quand nous commençons d'aimer, avertis par notre expérience et notre sagacité, —malgré la protestation de notre coeur qui a le sentiment ou plutôt l'illusion de l'éternité de son amour,—nous savons qu'un jour celle de la pensée de qui nous vivons nous sera aussi indifférente que nous le sont maintenant toutes les autres qu'elle .... Alors cette prescience certaine, malgré le pressentiment absurde et si fort que nous l'aimerons toujours, nous fera pleurer; et l'amour, l'amour qui sera encore levé sur nous comme un divin matin infiniment mystérieux et triste mettra devant notre douleur un peu de ses grands horizons étranges, si profonds, un peu de sa désolation enchanteresse... (pp. 119-20)

In opposition to these cycles, linear time is a succession of days that cannot, for whatever their resemblances to previous days, be repeated; linear time is the ne plus in Les Plaisirs et les jours of time that is running out, towards loss, forgetfulness and death; it is time
conceived of as a décadence, an irremediable and irreversible degradation. The petit garçon of Regret VI, ceasing to eat and sleep in his despair over the insufficiencies of reality, eludes the rhythms of cyclical time and puts an end to the repeated experience of the beloved's imperfections by his leap from his window. The image of the chute dominates the lesson of his experience: reality falls short of the images we caress in our dreams, death is the final term toward which all in human experience tends in a continual effritement: "La vie est comme la petite amie. Nous la songeons, et nous l'aimons de la songer. Il ne faut pas essayer de la vivre: on se jette, comme le petit garçon, dans la stupidité, pas tout d'un coup, car tout, dans la vie, se dégrade par nuances insensibles" (p. 112). Such gradual degradation is the experience of the retired captain in Regret VII; his memories and his grief fade little by little until time runs out for him:

Et chaque fois il avait moins de peine de les avoir perdus, ces baisers dans cette bouche, et ces heures infinies, et ces parfums qui le faisaient, avant, délirer.

Et il eut de la peine d'en avoir moins de peine, puis cette peine-là même disparut. Puis toutes les peines partirent, toutes, il n'y avait pas à faire partir les plaisirs; ils avaient fui depuis longtemps sur leurs talons aîlés sans détourner la tête, leurs rameaux en fleurs à la main, fui cette demeure qui n'était plus assez jeune pour eux. Puis, comme tous les hommes, il mourut. (p. 114)

For Dominique of "L'Etranger," time is also running out: "L'habitude à qui tu me sacrifies encore ce soir sera plus forte demain du sang de la blessure que tu me fais pour la nourrir.... Bientôt tu m'auras tué" (p. 127), while in "Critique de l'espérance à la lumière de l'amour,"
the time has already passed for imagination and hope with the beloved's declaration of love:

Vous m'aimez, ma chère petite; comment avez-vous été assez cruelle pour le dire? Le voilà donc ce bonheur ardent de l'amour partagé dont la pensée seule me donnait le vertige et me faisait claquer des dents! ... Puisque ce secret que l'un de nous cachait à l'autre, nous l'avons proféré tout haut, il n'est plus de bonheur pour nous. Il ne nous reste même plus les joies désintéressées de l'espérance. L'espérance est un acte de foi. Nous avons désabusé sa crédulité; elle est morte. (p. 140)

There is in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* little of the attempt to resurrect lost time, to reconnect the present with the past, through the processes of involuntary memory; the failure to resurrect the loved one through the objects that belonged to her in "Reliques" is in fact a key experience in the work. For the compensation for it is an attraction to irreversible steps in the tales Proust recounts, an obsession with what Frank Kermode has discussed as kairos, or significant time, "the time of the novelist ... a point in time filled with signification, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end." Proust is capable of rather sophisticated plays upon kairos and its opposite, chronos ("passing" or "waiting" time, experienced only as a succession of instants in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, suggesting in "Source des larmes," for example, that novelists (as he himself would do in *Swann*) depict the endings of love affairs first, the better to demonstrate the pointlessness of the passion and its invariable cooling-off, and recounting at the beginning of the concluding chapter of "La Fin de la jalousie," how Françoise observed a three-year period of mourning for Honoré, thereby intensifying the reader's
perception of the purely subjective nature of Honoré's deathbed debate with himself over the question of Françoise's future fidelity.  

The acquiescence in waste that forms part of Proust's adopted aristocratic attitude in Les Plaisirs et les Jours has a great deal to do with his treatment of kairos and chronos in the work. In life as in the fictions, only the consequences of a particular moment reveal whether that moment belonged to the kairos or the chronos. Moments that prove to have been significant Proust insists upon obsessively in his writing: Mme de Breyves "hésita longtemps, ce soir-là, pour savoir si elle irait à la soirée de la princesse Elisabeth d'A..., à l'Opéra, ou à la comédie des Livray" (p. 66), the manner in which Geneviève convinces her to go to the soirée (where she first sees Laléande) is laden with dramatic irony--"On dirait," she says, "que cela peut avoir de graves conséquences pour toi d'aller chez Elisabeth" (p. 66)--and it is faulty timing, related to the inevitable laws of absence and desire, that condemns her finally to her hopeless love: Jacques has already left for Biarritz by the time Françoise realizes she is in love with him. Similarly, in "La Fin de la jalousie," the evening of Honoré's momentous conversation with M. de Buivres happens to be the very evening of a party in honor of the latter's return from a long trip, while the moment of Honoré's fatal accident in the Bois de Boulogne is clearly presented as only one of many possibilities for that moment:

A un moment, il avait regardé l'heure, était revenu sur ses pas et alors ..., alors cela était arrivé. En une seconde, le cheval qu'il n'avait pas vu lui avait cassé les deux jambes. Cette seconde-là ne lui apparaisait pas du tout comme ayant dû être nécessairement telle. A cette même seconde il aurait pu être un
peu plus loin, ou un peu moins loin, ou le cheval aurait pu être détourné, ou, s'il y avait eu de la pluie, il serait rentré plus tôt chez lui, ou, s'il n'avait pas regardé l'heure, il ne serait pas revenu sur ses pas et aurait poursuivi jusqu'à la cascade. Mais pourtant cela qui aurait si bien pu ne pas être qu'il pouvait feindre un instant que cela n'était qu'un rêve, cela était une chose réelle, cela faisait maintenant partie de sa vie, sans que toute sa volonté y put rien changer. (p. 157) 17

It is the fact of the accident, however, that has made his presence in the Bois, "ce matin-là," as Proust noted in the preceding paragraph (p. 157), and Honoré's act of looking at his watch significant.

On the other hand, the potential of each moment of the chronos to become a part of the kairos means that as time ticks away and begins to run out, the once limitless possibilities for the story-line, in life and in art, begin also to run out. What might have happened had Françoise gone to the opera or home to bed, instead of to the soirée? Had Honoré never talked to Buivres or not stopped to check his watch in the Bois? Had Proust not spent so much time and energy among the gens du monde, devoting most of his first book to them, but instead begun during the first half of his life the clausturation that would produce his masterpiece?

In the Temps retrouvé, the total recuperation of life by art—the narrator's realization that his experiences were indeed worthy material for the work of art—redeems the moments of the chronology that had preceded in the novel as the account of his life. It is thus that he can calmly trace all the events of his life/novel back to Swann and his description of the church at Balbec, first in the series of events that now take their meaning from the narrator's dual perception
of them as a life lived and a novel (to be) written. The revelation of the scope of his art leaves room for a small measure of regret for the "roads not taken," yet this too is dominated by the new meaning of the kairos provided by art:

Sans Swann, mes parents n'eussent jamais eu l'idée de m'envoyer à Balbec.... Mais en déterminant ainsi la vie que nous avons menée, il a par là même exclu toutes les vies que nous aurions pu mener à la place de celle-là. Si Swann ne m'avait pas parlé de Balbec, je n'aurais pas connu Albertine, la salle à manger de l'hôtel, les Guermantes. Mais je serais allé ailleurs, j'aurais connu des gens différents, ma mémoire comme mes livres serait remplie de tableaux tout autres, que je ne peux même pas imaginer et dont la nouveauté, inconnue de moi, me séduirait et me fait regretter de n'être pas allé plutôt vers elle, et qu'Albertine et la plage de Balbec et Rivebelle et les Guermantes ne m'eussent pas restés toujours inconnus. 18

The Proust of Les Plaisirs et les jours, however, much younger despite his pretense to age in the work, has not yet arrived at this mature view of possibilities acted upon and found suitable for art, as opposed to possibilities lost, the seductive unknown of other experiences whose value as kairos in the novel that could have been written would have been as great as the novel that was written about Albertine, Balbec, and the Guermantes. Lost possibilities in Les Plaisirs et les jours are part of the temps perdu; to counter the obsession of time lost or wasted, Proust offers in the work first the sea, image of timelessness and perpetual beginning, creating the illusion that the calendar can be turned back—"Le pas d'un enfant sur l'eau y creuse un sillon profond avec un bruit clair, et les nuances unies de l'eau en sont un moment brisées; puis tout vestige s'efface, et la mer est
redevenue calme comme aux premiers jours du monde" (p. 143)—and secondarily, the median aesthetic recuperation of what is irretrievably lost as beautiful for being lost. The response to lost time is thus neither so profound nor committed as grief or sorrow, so elevated as the artistic revelation that brings together all of life and experience in the Recherche; it is instead the elegance of melancholy, taking its source from the sense of what might have been in life but wasn't, contrasting what could have happened to what did and what didn't, and as with "sterile loves," choosing to find pleasure in what has been wasted or lost.

A young man's attitude, this dabbling in the irremediable is only made possible by the underlying if unexpressed conviction that there is still time to retrace one's steps and explore possibilities as yet overlooked, still time to correct the course of a story-line not yet fully drawn. The image of the circle then, sexual, recurrent, corresponding to the natural rhythms of the earth and the sea, denying the power of kairos while admitting a claim of acquiescence in decline, describes the ultimate luxury of the luxurious Plaisirs et les jours. We may read this as an expression of mauvaise foi in the young author who had already by this time at least vaguely apprehended the significance of lost time in his own life and work but who settled for a superficial, if elegant, response. We do better, however, to see it as a mark of the fin-de-siècle, the most resonant of the Decadent echoes sounded in this overpolished and less than perfect work of Proust's own temps perdu.
Footnotes


2 Quoted by Fev, p. 98.

3 "Swann expliqué par Proust," Essais et articles, V, p. 557. At the time Swann was published, Proust assumed his novel would consist of only three volumes: Du Côté de chez Swann, Le Côté de Guermantes (with its subsections Chez Mme Swann; Noms de pays: le pays; Premiers crayons du baron de Charlus et de Robert de Saint-Loup; Noms de personnes: la duchesse de Guermantes; Le salon de Mme de Villeparisis), and Le Temps retrouvé (to contain the subsections A l'ombre des jeunes filles in fleurs; La princesse de Guermantes; M. de Charlus et les Verdurin; Mort de ma grand'mère; Les intermittences du coeur; Les "Vices et les Vertus" de Padoue et de Combray; Madame de Cambremer; Mariage de Robert de Saint-Loup; L'Adoration perpétuelle). See George Painter's description of Proust's original plans for the Recherche in 1913 compared to his expansions and alterations during the years of World War I in his biography, vol. 2, pp. 234-42, "Révélations de Proust sur la suite de son roman vers la fin de 1915," Essais et articles, V, pp. 559-64, and Vigneron's "Genèse de Swann," pp. 91-96.

4 Gregh, Amitié, p. 9.

5 Gicquel, p. 250.

6 Gicquel, p. 255.

7 Gicquel, p. 256.

8 Gicquel, p. 253.

9 Sandre, "Notice," IV, p. 905.


11 Proust included Montaigne with Socrates in his defense of homosexuality for Hautévy: "Je te reparlerai volontiers de deux Maîtres de fine sagesse qui dans la vie ne cueillirent que la fleur, Socrate et Montaigne.... Ils pensaient que ces amitiés à la fois sensuelles et intellectuelles valent mieux que les liaisons avec des femmes bêtes et corrompues quand on est jeune et qu'on a pourtant un sens vif de la beauté et aussi des 'sens'" (Corr. I, p. 124).

12 Gicquel, p. 253.

13 Elizabeth R. Jackson identifies the experience of the perfume of rose cigarettes that evokes the beloved's presence in "Les Perles"
as that of the "sensation-amorce" most akin in Les Plaisirs et les jours to the experience of the madeleine (Evolution de la mémoire involontaire, pp. 22-23), while André Vial notes in "Marine" the narrator's disposition to involuntary souvenir, concluding from this that "dès l'oeuvre première, Proust a insisté sur le privilège d'initiative que gardent les choses" (pp. 23-24).


15 Kermode, p. 47.

16 David McDowell remarks this shift in time in "La Fin de la jalousie" that thus announces Proust's development of such shifts in the Recherche. McDowell sees this technique in the story as a successful use of irony, and calls "La Fin de la jalousie," despite Proust's hesitations here between omniscient and third-person narration, the best story of Les Plaisirs et les jours ("The World from the Ark," p. 154).

17 Emphasis added.

18 RTP, III, p. 916.
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