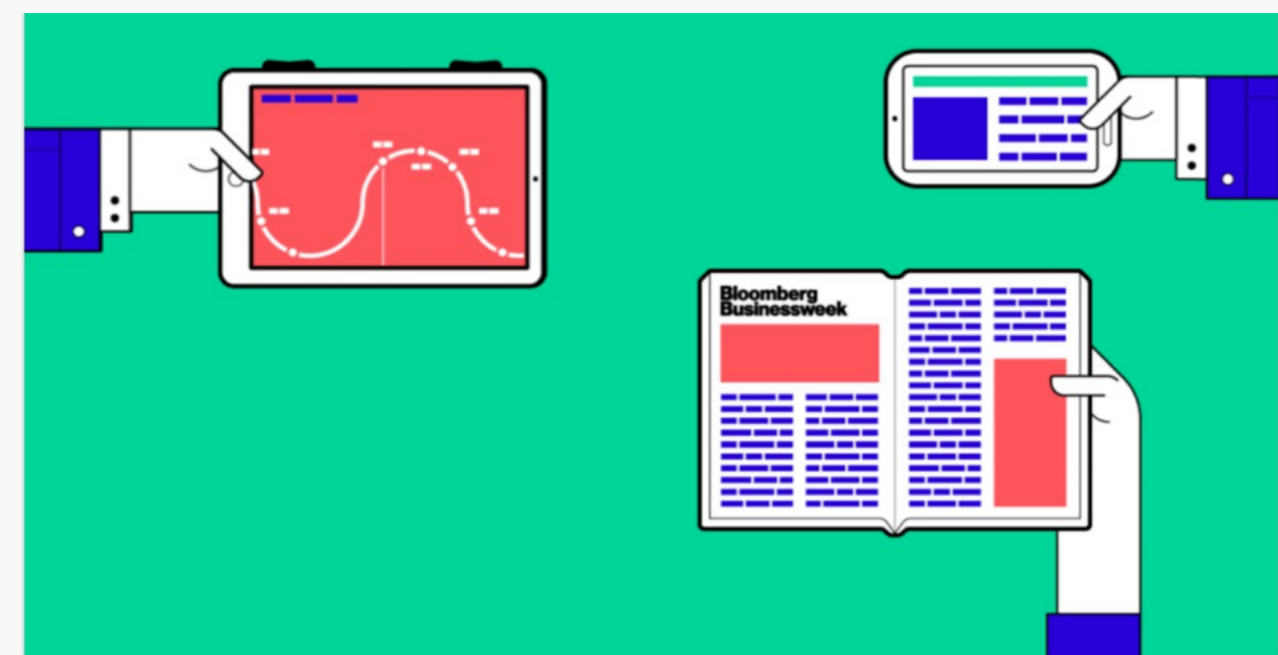


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Did Gide Read Proust?



Oct. 30, 1988



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To the Editor:

I was interested to note (in the paragraph quoted from Gaston Gallimard's biography in Noted With Pleasure, Oct. 2) the reappearance of those "vertebrae" on a woman's forehead that supposedly impelled Andre Gide to reject Proust's manuscript when it was first submitted to Nouvelle Revue Francaise. Apparently these "vertebrae" are now as firmly embedded in anecdotal history as Newton's apple and Washington's cherry tree - and may be just as mythical. Though described as a fact in both George D. Painter's and Richard H. Barker's biographies of Proust, to name two sources, Gide's story is completely contradicted by Celeste Albaret, Proust's housekeeper and confidante, in her memoir "Monsieur Proust" (English translation 1976).

Mme. Albaret declares that both Proust and his valet (who had meticulously wrapped and tied up the heavy manuscript parcel) were absolutely certain it had never been opened at the NRF. And she additionally points out that Gide's story only surfaced long after "Du Cote de Chez Swann" had been successfully published by another firm, and when Gide's NRF colleagues were blaming him for rejecting the book.

And yet if one believes, as I do, that Gide fabricated his story of the rejection, one can admire still his choice of that striking "vertebrae" detail which has stuck in the minds of so many people. OSMOND BECKWITH Wharton, N.J.

A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 30, 1988, Section 7, Page 45 of the National edition with the headline: Did Gide Read Proust?. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

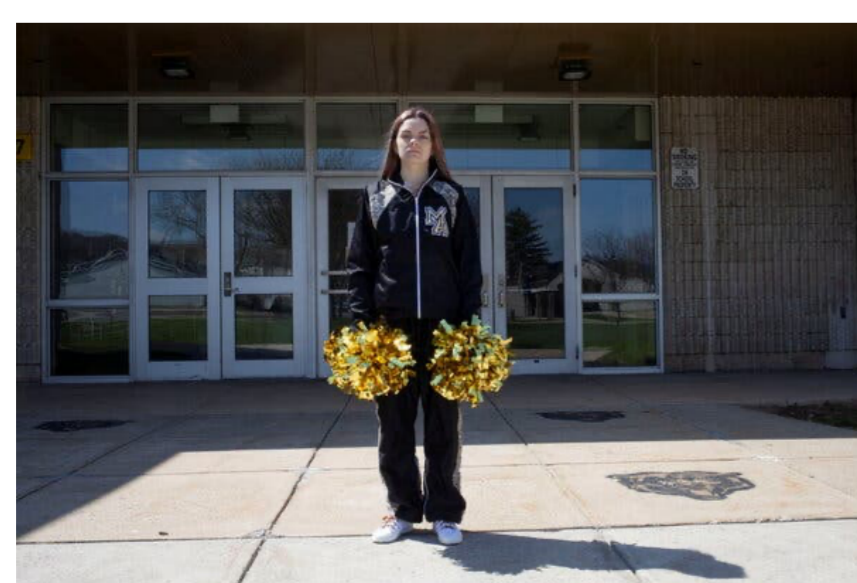


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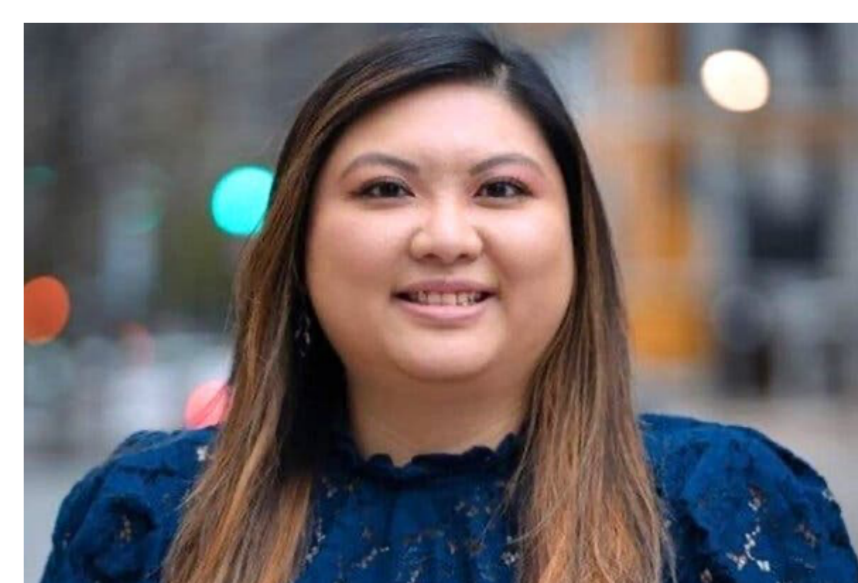
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