# Essays in Aesthetics

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## Matter of Venice

In the workshop of *Remembrance of Things Past*, and still up to the Grasset proofs that Proust probably corrected before the summer of 1913, *Swann in Love* opened with the strange page that follows:[1]

> M. and Mme Verdurin were like certain squares in Venice, unknown and spacious, that the voyager comes across one evening at the chance of his walk, and which no guide book has ever mentioned. He has plunged into a network of little alleys that dissect in all directions with their furrows the chunk of Venice he has in front of him, carved out between canals and the lagoon, when suddenly, at the end of one of the "calli," as though the Venetian matter in the moment of crystallizing had experienced there an unforeseen distension, he finds himself in front of a vast campo, of which he certainly could never have guessed the scale, or even found room for it, surrounded by charming palaces in the pale facade of which the moonshine plays meditatively. This architectural whole toward which, in another town, the main street would have led us first, is hidden here by the smallest streets, like one of those palaces of Oriental tales whither one leads a character for one night, by a path he must not be able to find in the daytime, so he ends up by persuading himself that he only went there in a dream.
>
> And in fact if the next day you want to return to this campo, you will follow alleys which are exactly like one another and refuse to give you the smallest piece of information. Sometimes an indication makes you believe that you will find and see the beautiful exiled square reappear in the confinement of its solitude and of its silence, but at that moment some evil spirit, in the form of a new calle, makes you abruptly turn back and leads you to the Grand Canal.
>
> The anonymous reader of a fashionable newspaper is in the same situation every day; he has become familiar with the names of a lot

of people that he will never know, and who were highlighted there because of a not very large fortune, a title, or a rather doubtful talent; and he never reads there the name of Verdurin. But one day, looking for a place to live at a beach, he sees several villas larger than the others and he inquires. They have all been rented by Mme Verdurin, for herself and for her friends. In Versailles the hotel is full; only the most beautiful apartment, filled with antique furniture, seems uninhabited; but it is not free, it is rented by the year to Mme Verdurin. Because Mme Verdurin has reserved them in advance for herself and her friends, one can't have the box or the table one wanted at an important concert or at a restaurant near Paris. And in those plans of social Paris that columnists work out in such minute detail and at such a grand scale that often a hundred thousand francs of income are enough to guarantee a position for the one who owns them, one notices that the necessarily vast space filled by the Verdurins, who spend about seven or eight thousand francs a year, is nowhere mentioned or foreseen.[2]

If Proust had not suppressed this page *in extremis*, it would have contained one of the first mentions, and certainly the first evocation, of Venice offered to the reader of *Remembrance*, an illustration among others of the practice of dislocation, which places, for example, the first description of the Balbec room at the head of the Parisian section "Place-Names: the Name." The reasons for this suppression are unknown to us, just like those that had at first led to envisage opening this section with a fanfare. The fanfare, the "bravura" side, might explain both gestures: Proust may have wished to open this section with a brilliant comparison, then he might have renounced it because it was too brilliant. Alden judges this page "preposterous," that is to say, absurd, but, if I believe etymology, this absurdity is like a cart put before the horse, the vehicle placed before its tenor, or, if one prefers, the thing to be compared still unknown (the societal situation of the Verdurins) badly enlightened by the thing with which it is compared (which has not yet been encountered and is thus just as unknown, unless one postulates with a Robbe-Grilletian insolence: "everyone knows Venice"). In more Proustian terms it is clearly a matter of one of those metaphors judged "unnecessary," artificial because pulled from afar, not dictated by the context and the situation, that Proust criticized in other writers and tried to avoid himself. The perfect counter-illustration is provided by this phrase from *The Fugitive* in which the narrator,

during his sojourn in Venice, evokes "the Albertine of long ago . . . enclosed within me as in the *Piombi* of an inner Venice, the tight lid of which some incident occasionally lifted to give me a glimpse of the past."[3]

Despite this "defect" in the eyes of a (in this regard) perfectly classical aesthetics (an insufficiently metonymic metaphor being equivalent to what classical rhetoric condemned in the name of "catachresis"), the comparison between the social situation of the Verdurins and the Venetian *campo* presented the great thematic advantage of announcing right away an important trait of this situation: its unsuspected and (oxymoronically said) *secret* character. Actually, this paradoxical character is in itself not at all exceptional in Proustian society, where different milieux, and the more so different cliques, frequently ignore one another, so much so that, for example, the elevated relations of Swann are, out of ignorance or disdain, not known by the petite bourgeoisie of Combray.

But it is a matter there of relative disregard and localized ignorance, based on a sort of social provincialism, due in part to the heterogeneity of characters like Swann or Vinteuil or even Charlus, of whom the Verdurins imagine, at La Raspelière, that he is "just a baron." The "social surface" of the Verdurins is, on the contrary, here given as unknown *in general* and, as it were, in the absolute. It is not only "the anonymous reader of a fashionable newspaper" who does not know it, since this paper never mentions it—nor without a doubt any other: "a space *nowhere* mentioned or foreseen." Once crossed out from our opening page, this somewhat fantastic idea of an absolutely clandestine worldliness will never come up in *Remembrance*, neither in *Cities of the Plain*, in which Charlus, come to slum at La Raspelière for reasons that one knows, will measure its correct (i.e., minute) value, nor in *Swann in Love* itself, in which the inferiority of the Verdurins' salon is sorely felt by the "Patronne" and expressed negatively by her bitter tirades against the "boars." And when, after the death of the "Patron," his widow, become Duchesse de Duras, then Princesse de Guermantes, will continue to "participate" and to "make cliques," it will be no more than a nostalgic look at the completed past of an upstart whose least actions and gestures are henceforth public and reported by all papers. In short the hyperbolic theme (as I have formulated it) of a Verdurin space at the same time considerable and unknown does not exactly correspond to the reality of a career the evolution of which consists, rather, in the passage from a justified obscurity to a certainly considerable but by no means unknown space, whose late acquisition is one of those theatrical surprises that Proust loves so much to arrange. The only foundation of

the comparison thus relates to the financial means of the Verdurins, which, perhaps from *Swann in Love* on, permit them to rent several villas at the beach, the most beautiful apartment in the "hotel" of Versailles, a box at a concert, or a table in a restaurant. The Verdurins' space, purely material since based on money alone, is thus, at the period in which the opening of *Swann in Love* is situated, an empty space, the only one that money can buy: boxes, reserved tables, apartments and villas rented by the year—it is no doubt significant that none of this is bought, still less inherited, and La Raspelière itself will be rented for the season to Mme de Cambremer, as though a fortune or, rather, such plebeian income, whatever its amplitude, could not give access to true property. A "necessarily vast" space then, but the vaster it is, the more unoccupied (though no doubt "furnished"), that is to say, in waiting, perhaps indefinite waiting, for truly frequentable—that is to say, presentable—"friends."

The theme thus corrected is not really paradoxical anymore, and it corresponds faithfully, and for a long time, to the situation of the Verdurins. But at the same time it stops from sustaining the flattering comparison with the vast *campo* "surrounded by charming palaces in the pale facade of which the moonshine plays meditatively," a comparison not only pulled spatially from too far but thematically discordant: the thing with which it is compared too poetic for the altogether prosaic thing compared. A new altogether conjectural explication for a crossed-out passage that, I remind the reader, will suppress at the same time the compared thing and the thing with which it is compared. Or, more exactly, that will suppress the thing compared and will *displace* the thing with which it is compared.

For the evocation of the "unknown and spacious" Venetian square is not abandoned without recourse: we will find it again better located, disengaged of all implication with the vulgar theme of money, in the pages of *The Fugitive* devoted to the Venetian sojourn of the narrator. Reducing this auto-hypertext to its congruent parts, one can (re-)read it as follows:

> After dinner, I went out alone, into the heart of the enchanted city where I found myself in the middle of strange purlieus like a character in the *Arabian Nights*. It was very seldom that, in the course of my wanderings, I did not come across some strange and spacious *piazza* of which no guidebook, no tourist, had ever told me. I had plunged into a network of little alleys, or *calli*, packed tightly together

and dissecting in all directions with their furrows a chunk of Venice carved out between a canal and the lagoon, as if it has crystallised in accordance with these innumerable, tenuous and minute patterns. Suddenly, at the end of one of these alleys, it seemed as though a distension had occurred in the crystallised matter. A vast and splendid *campo* of which, in this network of little streets, I should never have guessed the scale, or even found room for it, spread out before me surrounded by charming palaces silvery in the moonlight. It was one of those architectural ensembles toward which, in any other town, the streets converge, lead you and point the way. Here it seemed to be deliberately concealed in a labyrinth of alleys, like those palaces in Oriental tales whither mysterious agents convey by night a person who, brought back home before daybreak, can never find his way back to the magic dwelling which he ends by believing that he visited only in a dream.

The next day, I set out in quest of my beautiful nocturnal *piazza*, following *calle* after *calle* which were exactly like one another and refused to give me the smallest piece of information, except such as would lead me further astray. Sometimes a vague landmark which I seemed to recognise led me to suppose that I was about to see appear, in its seclusion, solitude and silence, the beautiful exiled *piazza*. At that moment some evil genie which had assumed the form of a new *calle* made me unwittingly retrace my steps, and I found myself suddenly brought back to the Grand Canal. And as there is no great difference between the memory of a dream and the memory of a reality, I finally wondered whether it was not during my sleep that there had occurred, in a dark patch of Venetian crystallisation, that strange mirage which offered a vast *piazza* surrounded by romantic palaces to the meditative eye of the moon.[4]

Narratively, this new (?) state presents itself like an (easy) exercise in transvocalization: a little like certain pages of *Jean Santeuil* taken up again in the *Remembrance*, conversion of the third (and the second) into the first person. The anonymous voyager who, in the Grasset version, discovered the secret square at the chance of a walk is now the narrator himself, in the Proustian and the technical sense of the term. One can follow the details of the grammatical transpositions made here that add to the change of person a transfer from the iterative present to an equally iterative past: "the voyager comes across"

becomes "it was very seldom that . . . I did not come across"; "he has plunged into a network of little alleys," "I had plunged into a network of little alleys, or *calli*"; "a vast campo, of which he certainly should never have guessed the scale," "a vast and splendid campo of which, in this network of little streets, I should never have guessed the scale"; "you will follow alleys which are exactly like one another and refuse to give you the smallest piece of information," "following *calle* after *calle* which were exactly like one another and refused to give me the smallest piece of information," etc.

The comparison (at the second degree in the "first" version) of the Venetian adventure with a typical episode from *Arabian Nights* is now highlighted from the first sentence and stressed by what may seem a double retake. In reality the first mention provides only a preparatory indication: the narrator wanders about Venice like "the Caliph Harun al-Rachid going in search of adventures in the hidden quarters of Baghdad."[5] The "Oriental tale" comes back only a page further on in the original form of the palace furtively revealed to a character who then believes he has seen it in a dream. And it is the motif of the dream which comes back in the end, without reference to *Arabian Nights*, in the name of the confusion of real and dreamed memories.

But the most significant thematic development seems to me to be the one that relates to the contrastive evocation of the square and its surroundings. The contrast is precisely that of empty space suddenly revealed and the "crystallized Venetian matter" that surrounds it. *Venetian matter* was in the Verdurin hypotext and comes back in *The Fugitive* as "chunk of Venice" and "dark patch." *Crystallisation* is found once in the first version, three times in the "definitive" version. The complete syntagm would be something like "dark patch of crystallised Venetian matter," a sufficiently beautiful object for a substantial thematic. The motif of this unexpected characterization of the city of the Doges is evident for the person who remembers the whole episode, in which Proust insists several times over on this Venetian materiality. The Proustian Venice is not essentially the city of the palace of the Doges, of St. Mark's Square open to the lagoon, and the Grand Canal, but, rather, that of the minuscule canals and even more that of the inhabited "patches" of earth "compressed between the canals and the laguna" and of the *calli* themselves "compressed one against the other" and dividing the urban matter with its thin "furrows," as though the sparing squares of the *rios* and the alleys forced it to this extreme density that the image of crystallisation more or less illustrates. Another page of *The Fugitive*, in which the Oriental motif of the voyager guided by a genie returns, insists on the compactness of urban matter cut up

by the outline of the canals seemingly open in an instant for the passage of the visitor:

> One felt that between the mean dwellings which the canal had just parted, and which otherwise would have formed a compact whole, no open space had been reserved; so that a campanile or a garden trellis vertically overhung the *rio*, as in a flooded city. [ . . . ] The belfries rose from the water in this poor and populous district like those of humble and much-frequented parish churches bearing the stamp of their necessity, of their use by crowds of simple folk. [ . . . ] On the ledges of the houses whose crudely cut stone was still rough as though it had only just been sawn, urchins surprised by the gondolas sat trying to keep their balance and allowing their legs to dangle vertically, like sailors seated upon a swing-bridge the two halves of which have been swung apart, allowing the sea to pass between them.[6]

A substantial compactness further accented by the essentially humble and popular, even rural, character of the Proustian Venice, the description of which opens, we remember, with a strongly emphasized comparison with . . . Combray. This paradoxical (in the etymological sense of the word) vision becomes right away the object of a typically apotropaic denial, an accusation against the anti-conformist temptation to present of this sumptuous city only "its poverty-stricken aspects, in the districts where nothing of its splendor is to be seen, and, in order to make Venice more intimate and more genuine, to give it a resemblance to Aubervilliers." But he adds in the same breath: "It was this Venice that I used often to explore in the afternoon, when I did not go out with my mother. The fact was that it was easier to find there women of the people, match-sellers, pearl-stringers, etc."—and it is in fact this Venice that he will continue to describe during almost that entire episode. One sees here that the attention given to the humble city is not without erotic resonances and motivations. With or without an Oriental genie as guide, wandering in these popular quarters, in Venice, in Paris—in Aubervilliers?—relates also to the "cruising" in search of easy and corrupt meetings, a cruising that renews in an urban setting the breathless quest for young peasant girls on the side of Roussainville. To the noble and artistic Venice visited in the dignified company of Madame Mère the proletarian Venice of outings plus riffraff would thus oppose itself. But this easy antithesis, though it is suggested by the text, excessively strains, like the two types of pictorial representations it evokes,

two far more interrelated aspects of the Venetian essence. The popular and the artistic Venice coexist constantly, or, rather, they coalesce in the view of Marcel discovering that here there are "works of art, things of priceless beauty, that are entrusted with the task of giving us our impressions of everyday life"; lessons that mix Chardin and Veronese, where one sees, for example, "a little ivory temple with its Corinthian columns and an allegorical statue on its pediment, somewhat out of place among the ordinary surroundings in the midst of which the peristyle with which the canal had provided it retained the look of a landing-stage for market gardeners."[7]

It is for the grandmother of the narrator that it would have been proper to formulate this trait common to trivial objects of the most humble daily life and to the "magnificent things" that are true artworks, which is clearly their simplicity and natural quality, and here as elsewhere this Combray-like aesthetics (the most constantly and doubtless the most authentically Proustian): " 'How your poor grandmother would have loved this simple grandeur!' Mamma would say to me, pointing to the Doges' Palace. [ . . . ] 'How she would have loved the whole of Venice, and what informality, worthy of nature itself, she would have found in all these beauties, this plethora of objects that seem to need no formal arrangement. [ . . . ] Your grandmother would have had as much pleasure seeing the sun setting over the Doges' palace as over a mountain.' "[8] And still for the length of a page Marcel will feel the "truth" contained in this prosopopoeia of the dead one, all along a Grand Canal of which the dwellings make him think "of sites of nature"—before meeting for dinner, at one of those palaces transformed into hotels, this perfect symbol of a Combray transposed to Venice: Mme Sazerat.

The popular simplicity of the Venetian landscape is also illustrated, in the *Fugitive* version of our page, by a new connection, the incongruity of which is only apparent, even though the common motif of canals is nowhere invoked: that of Venice and Holland, this other emblem, famous since Hegel, of an aesthetics of daily life. This connection enlivens the few lines that I have omitted a moment ago from my quotation of this page:

> I had entered the network of little alleys, of *calli*. In the evening, with their tall, splayed chimneys to which the sun imparts the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds, it is an entire garden flowering above the houses, and flowering in such a variety of tints as to suggest the garden of a tulip fancier of Delft or Haarlem planted above the town. And then the extreme proximity of the houses made of each

> casement the frame in which a cook sits looking out dreamily, a seated young girl having her hair combed by an old woman with a witch-like face distinguishable in the shadow—which resulted in an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings hung in a row, from each poor house quiet and close on account of the tightness of the *calli*.

The analogic motif, as one sees, is double: the splayed chimneys evoke tulips, and the compactness of the dwelling evokes at each vista the tiny courtyards and the narrow corridors of a Vermeer or a Pieter de Hoogh. But this analogy, direct as it is, evokes for the attentive reader a third term, a third urban landscape, that is, simply Paris—the Paris that is also, as we know, at the same time (and quite naturally) aristocratic and popular, of the quarter of the Hotel de Guermantes. For the lines that I have just quoted are themselves a double, reproduced without shame from one of the last pages of *Guermantes Way*, at the moment when Marcel, perched in some "observatory" to watch for his beautiful neighbor, entertains himself a moment by contemplating an urban *veduta* that evokes for him several others:

> It is not only in Venice that one has these views on several houses at once which have proved so tempting to painters; it is the same in Paris. Nor do I cite Venice at random. It is of its poorer quarters that certain poor quarters of Paris remind one, in the morning, with their tall, splayed chimneys to which the sun imparts the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds—like a garden flowering above the houses, and flowering in such a variety of tints as to suggest the garden of a tulip fancier of Delft or Haarlem planted above the town. And then the extreme proximity of the houses, with their windows looking across at one another over a common courtyard, makes of each casement the frame in which a cook sits dreamily gazing down at the ground below, or, further off, a girl having her hair combed by an old woman with a witchlike face, barely distinguishable in the shadow: thus each courtyard provides the neighbours in the adjoining house, suppressing sound by its width and framing silent gestures in a series of rectangles placed under glass by the closing of the windows, with an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings hung in rows.[9]

Here, again, the genetic relationship and the connection of anteriority of the two texts are not evident: one can observe at most that the *Guermantes* version is a little more developed, a little less confused, than the version in *The Fugitive*, which may be only an imperfect sketch of the former. It is nonetheless

true that the analogous Venetian and Dutch types are joined by a third, the Parisian, which confirms its relative universality. The principle of this aesthetics, which would have been illustrated further in the view of Proust, if he had known it, by the Arab type of the medina, is clearly that of the heaping "without arrangement" of a beauty "full of things" and beautiful on account of its very fullness, its unplanned clutter, altogether askew, thrown together, less denied than raised by the unexpected "distension"—for the promenader who wanders without the help of a map at the chance of the *calli*—of a "vast and sumptuous campo" offered, suddenly silent, to the "prolonged meditation of the moonlight." The supreme advantage of the "beautiful nocturnal square," as one saw, is not to be "designated" by the academic and redundant perspective of a large avenue but to hide in the disordered network of alleys, thus participating by its discretion, and as though by chance, in the quite natural and (the word imposes itself in a Proustian context) involuntary aesthetics of the "popular and poor old quarter" at the bottom of which it hides. Here we are decidedly far from the Verdurins.

But not far, it seems to me, from the way Proust, seemingly, eliminates from the opening of *Swann in Love* a more or less well inspired page then borrows (without removing it) another page from the final ones of *Guermantes* in order to compose (if one can call it that) this Venetian episode that is without a doubt—at least in the state his death left it to us—one of the most heteroclite sections of *Remembrance*, obviously made from bits and pieces hastily strung together by the theme of the forgetting of Albertine and the progress of indifference. The patchwork construction, the textual makeshift, are at their height here, as though Proust had wanted faithfully to harmonize the writing with its object and imitate in a puzzling text the labyrinthine and deliciously disconcerting disorder of an emblematic, favorite city. But I have no doubt done well to write "as though . . . ." In fact, Proust undoubtedly did not *want* much here. It just happened like that, from one side as from the other, without anyone truly deciding. Between Venice and its painting—several paintings side by side—the resemblance itself is involuntary.

# 17

## Combray-Venice-Combray

In *Remembrance of Things Past* a (the most) capital aspect of Proustian aesthetics finds its first figure in the Saint-Hilaire church of Combray, with its old porch, "black, and full of holes as a colander," "worn out of shape and deeply furrowed at the sides" by the friction of the cloaks of the peasant women, and more still its apse:[1]

> What can one say of that? It was so crude, so devoid of artistic beauty, even of religious feeling. From the outside, since the street crossing which it commanded was on a lower level, its great wall was thrust upward from a basement of unfaced ashlar, jagged with flints, in which there was nothing particularly ecclesiastical, the windows seemed to have been pierced at an abnormal height, and its whole appearance was that of a prison wall rather than of a church. And certainly in later years, when I recalled all the glorious apses that I had seen, it would never have occurred to me to compare with any one of them the apse of Combray. Only, one day, turning out of a little street in some country town, I came upon three alley-ways that converged, and facing them an old wall, rough-hewn and unusually high, with windows pierced in it far overhead and the same asymmetrical appearance as the apse of Combray. And at that moment I did say to myself, as I might have done at Chartres or at Reims, with what power the religious feeling had been expressed therein, but, instinctively, I exclaimed: "The Church!"
>
> The church! Homely and familiar, cheek by jowl in the Rue Saint-Hilaire, upon which its north door opened, with its two neighbors, Mme Loiseau's house and M. Rapin's pharmacy, against which its walls rested without interspace, a simple citizen of Combray, which might have had its number in the street had the streets of Combray borne numbers, and at whose door one felt that the postman ought to stop on his morning rounds.[2]

The essential feature of this building relates clearly here to its "familiar" character. The church of Combray tries neither to extract itself nor to distinguish itself from the countrylike village that surrounds it and with which it is rather specially and socially united, the physical commonness manifesting and symbolizing a moral citizenship that is, however, in no way a reduction to the secular state: Saint-Hilaire is not at all disaffected; it remains a church, even "the Church" par excellence; it is only, but fully, the church of the village, related to it neither by "artistic beauty" nor by "religious momentum" nor even by the "ecclesiastical" character of an entirely prosaic-looking apse. Its function is clearly religious but of a religion without "momentum," simply of a "practical" nature, daily or weekly, as proved by the wear and tear of the porch and the holy water font, on which the ancient "friction" of the peasant women cloaks has carved "grooves . . . , like those made by cart-wheels upon a stone-gate which they bump against every day."

But the most distinctive feature of Saint-Hilaire is no doubt due to its steeple, which, "from a long way off, inscribing its unforgettable form upon a horizon against which Combray had not yet appeared," signals the approach of the village to the voyagers arrived from Paris for "Easter time," whose slender silhouette "shaped and crowned and consecrated every occupation, every hour of the day, every view in the town," and whose diversely oriented and colored appearances constantly indicate to its fellow citizens the place, the moment, and the season in which they find themselves. It seems to reserve its properly aesthetic lesson for the person most capable of receiving (or creating) it, the grandmother of the narrator, charged (in the final version as apparently in all the earlier ones)[3] with presenting and explaining it to her grandson and to the whole family, who contemplate it, as it were, through her eyes. This lesson is clearly one of simple and natural distinction: "Without quite knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, pretension, and meanness which made her love, and deem rich in beneficent influences, nature itself—when the hand of man had not, as did my great-aunt's gardener, trimmed it—and the works of genius . . . I think, too, that in a confused way my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what she prized above anything else in the world, namely, a natural air and an air of distinction. Ignorant of architecture, she would say: 'My dears, laugh at me if you like; it is not conventionally beautiful, but there is something in its quaint old face that pleases me. If it could play the piano, I'm sure it wouldn't sound tinny.' " One of the first scenes of *Remembrance* shows the grandmother running in all kinds of weather with "her keen, jerky little step" along the

alleys of the garden of Combray, "too straight and symmetrical for her liking, owing to the want of any feeling for nature in the new gardener";[4] this love of nature is accompanied, in her, by a vivid taste for art and literature but only if they stay away from vulgarity and proceed from a "strong breath of genius."[5] Later, in Balbec, Robert de Saint-Loup will make her conquest by the natural ways he has in all things. "For naturalness—doubtless because through the artifice of man it allows a feeling of nature to permeate—was the quality which my grandmother preferred to all others, whether in gardens, where she did not like there to be, as in our Combray garden, too formal flower-beds, or in cooking, where she detested those dressed-up dishes in which you can hardly detect the foodstuffs that have gone to make them, or in piano-playing, which she did not like to be too finicking, too polished, having indeed had a special weakness for the discords, the wrong notes of Rubinstein."[6] In this praise of genius as the trace of the natural in art, and in the enhanced value it implies for "natural beauty,"[7] one hears an echo of Kantian aesthetics, and in this refusal of de-natured nourishments an anticipation of the famous slogan of Curnonsky: that things have "the taste of what they are"; finally, it is not difficult to perceive some relationship between those interpretations of Rubinstein that bear the trace of their spontaneity and the not-tinny sound given to the steeple of Saint-Hilaire.

Passing from architecture to sculpture, the same advantage of nearness and familiarity is found again on the side of Méséglise, under the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs, where, on rainy days, "we would hurry to take shelter, huddled together cheek by jowl with stony saints and patriarchs."[8] By a significant accentuation of the popular character of the message, it is the servant Françoise who here acts as medium, symbolically (because she does not accompany the family on its walks), the saintly characters and the ritual scenes being "represented as they could be in the soul of Françoise," "the medieval peasant (who had survived to cook for us in the nineteenth century)," able to hold forth in her kitchen "about St. Louis as though she herself had known him"; and it is "young Théodore, the assistant in Camus's shop," the grocery of Combray, whom one recognizes in a certain little sculptured angel and who, scapegrace that he may be, spontaneously finds "the same naive and zealous mien" when he helps at the bedside of Aunt Léonie, "as though those carved stone faces, naked and grey as trees in winter, were, like them, asleep only, storing up life and waiting to flower again in countless plebeian faces, reverent and cunning as the face of Théodore, and glowing with the ruddy brilliance of ripe apples." In short "how French that church was!" joining as

it does to the geographic and ethnographic faithfulness that of a historic tradition "at once ancient and direct, unbroken, oral, distorted, unrecognisable, and alive."

So great a value placed in relations of metonymic complicity between a building, perhaps a work in general, and its natural and human surroundings logically entails a refusal of anything that may disrupt or corrupt them and thus of every undertaking that could tear it from its geographic site, deprive it of its original function, or erase the marks of its historical age.[9]

The first case was nonexistent concerning architectural works in Proust's day, Western cloisters not having been transported yet to Fort Tryon Park in the north of Manhattan nor, of course, the Temple of Dendur to the Metropolitan Museum. It does not seem to me that Proust commented, retrospectively, on the transfers of sculptures and paintings, far more frequent at least since the end of the eighteenth century, but one can imagine quite easily what he might have thought of the withdrawals by Lord Elgin from the Acropolis or of the "seizures" of the Revolution, the Directory, and the Empire from the whole of Europe and what side he would have been on in the disputes occasioned by the ephemeral but memorable Museum of French monuments organized by Alexandre Lenoir at about the same period.[10] We know that the function of this museum (first a simple depository) was at its origin one of protection against revolutionary vandalism but also that it degenerated on account of the consuming ambition of its founder and that it raised the lively protests of Quatremère de Quincy, who had already courageously protested against the revolutionary seizures in Italy. In both cases the intention of Quatremère, Proustian before his time, thus was that one was not supposed to tear away a plastic work from its site of origin to exhibit it in a museum.[11]

A page of *Within a Budding Grove*,[12] seemingly contrary to the anti-Elginism that I attribute to Proust by pure deduction, perhaps subtly confirms this. It follows on a passage against automobile travel that has as its effect, by the insensible change in landscape, to efface the irreducible specificity of each place, which by contrast (according to Proust) the more discontinuous character of travel in a train preserves, from station to station and thus from town to town, of which each keeps its "distinct individuality." But, he adds, "in this respect, as in every other, our age is infected with the mania for showing things only in the environment that properly belongs to them, thereby suppressing the essential thing, the act of the mind that isolated them from that environment. A picture is nowadays 'presented' in the midst of furniture, ornaments, hangings of the same period, stale settings which the hostess,

who but yesterday was so crassly ignorant but who now spends her time in archives and libraries, excels at composing in the houses of today and in the midst of which the masterpiece we contemplate as we dine does not give us that exhilarating delight which we can expect from it only in a public gallery, which symbolizes far better, by its bareness and by the absence of all irritating detail, those innermost spaces into which the artist withdrew to create." We could hardly imagine a more enthusiastic, a more profoundly motivated, defense of the museum, but we must observe that it is a matter here of a museum altogether opposed to what Lenoir was looking for in the Convent of the Petits-Augustins, of which the odds and ends of the "period" and the "troubadour" decorations resembled far more the artificial recreations of the hostess ridiculed earlier.[13] This ideal museum, by its nudity and its soberness, rather evokes the look of modern museography, which no doubt was not illustrated at the beginning of the century. What remains, of course, is the stress here on the "abstract" and "isolating" character of the creative act, which does not harmonize with the "commonality" and "citizenship" of the churches of Saint-Hilaire and of Saint-André-des-Champs.

Proust sometimes pleads successively for and against and elaborates freely on a given or encountered theme; we know at any rate that the one concerning the individuality of places, which the initial opposition of the "two sides" of Combray illustrated so strongly, will finally be refuted as a childish belief in the course of the sojourn in Tansonville, where Gilberte reveals to the narrator that "the nicest way to go to Guermantes is by way of Méséglise." But I don't want to play the sophist myself in attributing to rhetorical practice the developments that contradict my interpretation. It seems to me, rather, that Proust, in this case, is sensitive at the same time, and from personal experience, to the effort of "abstraction in the interior spaces" that every artistic creation supposes and to the relation of intelligence that every work entertains with its original site and milieu—the first perhaps being a paradoxical but necessary condition for the second. At any rate one of his points of obvious agreement with Ruskin—his principal initiator to Gothic architecture—is the fact that the latter "made no separation between the cathedrals and that background of rivers and valleys against which they appear to the traveller as he approaches, like in a primitive painting," that he "made no separation between the beauty of the cathedrals and the charm of the country out of which they arose, and which everyone who visits them can savour still in the particular poetry of the country and the misty or golden recollection of the afternoon he spent there. Not only is the first chapter of *The Bible of Amiens* called 'By the Rivers

of Waters,' but the book that Ruskin planned to write on Chartres cathedral was to be entitled 'The Springs of Eure.' . . . We would be more keenly alive to the individual charm of a landscape if we did not have at our disposal those seven-league boots which are the great expresses and were obliged, as in the old days, in order to get to some remote spot, to pass through countrysides more and more like that we are making for, like zones of graduated harmony which, by making it less easily penetrable by what is different from itself, and protecting it gently and mysteriously against brotherly resemblances, not only envelop it in nature but also prepare it in our minds."[14]

We are now clearly at the antipodes of the page from *Within a Budding Grove*, with its praise of the railroad and (lacking journeys on horseback or on bicycle, reserved for Albertine, or on foot) on the verge of an inverse praise of excursions in a car, promenades about which we know how much and how gladly Proust practiced them—always ready to go back to see in its place a Romanesque church or a Gothic cathedral as well as a hawthorn bush or a blooming orchard, with or without Agostinelli and even if he had to keep the window hermetically closed on account of his asthma. A praise that is bound to appear in the neighboring text "Les églises sauvées—journées en automobile,"[15] and which one finds again in *Cities of the Plain*, in which Albertine discovers in this way "that it was easy to go in a single afternoon to Saint-Jean and La Raspelière, Douville and Quetteholme, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux and Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, Gourville and Balbec-le-Vieux, Tourville and Féterne, prisoners hitherto as hermetically confined in the cells of distinct days as Méséglise and Guermantes were long ago, upon which the same eyes could not gaze in the course of a single afternoon, delivered now by the giant with the seven-league boots, clustered around our tea-time with their towers and steeples and their old gardens which the neighboring wood sprang back to reveal."[16] And this modification of space by speed ("Distances are only the relation of space to time and vary with it") clearly has aesthetic consequences: "Art is modified by it also, since a village which seemed to be in a different world from some other village becomes its neighbor in a landscape whose dimensions are altered." Proust comes back to this subject some pages farther on,[17] to observe that "the motor-car [which] respects no mystery" destroys the "special privilege of extra-territoriality" that once upon a time isolated each place in its specific aesthetics. Clearly conscious of the change of values that this conversion implies, he then places in the mouth of the narrator a long justifying palinode, from which I quote the essential:

> It may be thought that my love of enchanted journeys by train ought to have kept me from sharing Albertine's wonder at the motor-car which takes even an invalid wherever he wishes to go and prevents one from thinking—as I had done hitherto—of the actual site as the individual mark, the irreplaceable essence of irremovable beauties. And doubtless this site was not, for the motor-car, as it had formerly been for the railway train when I came from Paris to Balbec, a goal exempt from the contingencies of ordinary life. . . . It took us backstage into the streets, stopped to ask an inhabitant the way. But as compensation for so homely a mode of progress, there are the gropings of the chauffeur himself, uncertain of his way and going back over his tracks; the "general post" of the perspective which sets a castle dancing about with a hill, a church and the sea, while one draws nearer to it however much it tries to huddle beneath its age-old foliage; those ever-narrowing circles described by the motor-car round a spellbound town which darts off in every direction to escape, and which finally it swoops straight down upon in the depths of the valley where it lies prone on the ground; so that this site, this unique point, which on the one hand the motor-car seems to have stripped of the mystery of express trains, on the other hand it gives us the impression of discovering, of pinpointing for ourselves as with a compass, and helps us to feel with a more lovingly exploring hand, with a more delicate precision, the true geometry, the beautiful "proportions of the earth."[18]

It is said that Ruskin never took the train, appreciating and using only horse-drawn carriages. Perhaps he would have ended up by tolerating, despite his hate for the mechanism, this new type of locomotion on roads that the automobile offered, and which favors, as one has just seen, an approach of towns and monuments by "commonality" and "citizenship," an approach that is obviously more in harmony with the landscapist and geographic aesthetics attached to the links in situ that Proust shares with him, perhaps judging, as Giono later judged in Italy, that "the car is nothing but a practical way of walking."[19]

After the destruction of the "territorial" context that the transfer to museums of transportable objects brings about, the second form of treason consists in tearing away buildings from their original function: here is the theme of the "assassinated churches" and the "death of Cathedrals" that, before

relating to the destructions of the war, concerns the secularization, or menace of secularization, implied in the "projet Briand," which will lead in December 1905 to the law of the separation of church and state. In his article of 1904 Proust vigorously counters these menaces,[20] quoting André Hallays's earlier page against a project of secularization of Vézelay ("Anticlericalism inspires great stupidities. To secularize this basilica means to withdraw from it the bit of spirit that remains. When one will have extinguished the little lamp that shines at the end of the choir, Vézelay will be no more than an archeological curiosity. One will breathe in it the sepulchral air of museums"). And he continues in these terms (partially repeating the preface of his translation of the *Bible of Amiens*, which appeared the same year): "It is in continuing to fulfill the task for which they were originally devoted that things, even if they slowly die at it, keep their beauty and their life. Does one think that in museums of comparative sculpture the moldings of the famous stalls of sculptured wood of the cathedral of Amiens can give an idea of the stalls themselves, in their noble antiquity? Whereas in a museum a guard keeps us from approaching their moldings, the pricelessly precious stalls, so old, so famous, and so beautiful continue to work in Amiens their modest function of stalls. . . . These functions consist, even before instructing the spirits, in supporting the bodies, and this is what, worn out at every service and presenting their reverse side, they are modestly used for."[21] The inveighed-against "moldings" are, for example, those of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture created in 1882—and become in 1937 the new Museum of French Monuments. The two (successively) homonymous museums, the one founded by Lenoir and the one inspired by Viollet-le-Duc,[22] thus have, one after the other, illustrated two practices equally condemnable from Proust's point of view, but the second, if it has in principle the advantage of leaving the authentic works in situ, involves by this very fact the defect that it presents only reproductions: this is a form of what Malraux will call, but with more sympathy, the "imaginary museum." André Hallays was, like Robert de la Sizeranne (one of the first translators and commentators of Ruskin), a fierce opponent of museums; in a manuscript sketch of the preface to *La Bible d'Amiens*, Proust distanced himself from this position ("Not that I want to agree with the theory of MM. de la Sizeranne and Hallays on the disorientation and the death of the works in the museums"),[23] but it was in order to add right away: "But a work, by the fact that it belongs for ever to an individual place of the earth and that it belongs to no other (for if it were uprooted it would immediately die) holds us with ties stronger than the artwork itself, by those ties that persons and

countries have to keep us."[24] There followed an antithesis, which has subsisted in the final text, between a painting like the *Mona Lisa*, whose place of origin ("without wanting to displease M. Halleys") is of little importance and which is not "uprooted" in the Louvre, and the statue called "Golden Virgin" of the southern gate of Amiens: "Emerged without a doubt from the neighboring stone quarries, having made in her youth a single voyage to come to the Saint-Honoré porch, not having budged thereafter, having been gradually tanned by that humid wind of the Venice of the North, which bent the arrow above her, watching since so many centuries the inhabitants of this town of which it is the most ancient and the most sedentary inhabitant, she is truly an *Amienoise*."[25]

It thus seems that in this question—which is tricky in theory because often insoluble in practice—the pertinent division for Proust is between, on the one hand, painting, at least easel painting, that one cannot "secularize,"[26] and which can stand "disorientation" (though it is certainly difficult fully to appreciate a Carpaccio elsewhere than in Venice or a Franz Hals elsewhere than in Haarlem, but Proust will return in 1921 to see "the most beautiful place in the world," the *View of Delft* in the framework of an exhibition at the Jeu de Paume), and, on the other hand, architecture and sculpture, at least monumental sculpture, which one cannot disorient without "uprooting" nor disaffect without "assassinating." Here at any rate is the beginning of the conclusion of the article from 1904: "The protection even of the most beautiful works of French architecture and sculpture that *will die* the day when they no longer serve for the worship of the needs for which they are created, which is their function as they are its organs, which is their explanation because it is their soul, makes it a duty for the government to insist that the worship be permanently celebrated in the cathedrals, instead of the Briand project authorizing them to make of the cathedrals, at the end of a few years, the museums and conference halls (to suppose the best) that please it."[27] A strict indictment against a practice of disaffection assimilated to an act of vandalism but above all an ardent plea for an aesthetics that one might call *functionalist*, if one understands thereby an aesthetics that refuses to separate the aesthetic relation from the practical and ritual function and which judges, according to the formulation of Mikel Dufrenne, that "a church can be beautiful without being disaffected"[28]—or, rather, as Proust would no doubt say more radically, that a church cannot be truly beautiful except if it is *not* disaffected, because its "beauty" *implies* its function.

The third form of treason consists in the effacement of temporal marks that

the excessive restoration of ancient works involves. When Swann qualifies as "dejections of Viollet-le-Duc" the castle of Pierrefonds, one clearly has to make room for jealousy toward a trip that Odette takes without him (and in which he would be all too ready to join her under the hypocritical pretext of "getting a more precise idea of the works of Viollet-le-Duc"),[29] but one knows that Proust shared the hostility to this kind of "work" of a historian such as Émile Mâle, from whom he draws his inspiration for different descriptions of *Remembrance*,[30] and to whom he writes in August 1907: "Restored monuments don't make the same impression on me as stones dead since the 12th century for example, and which remained for Queen Mathilde."[31] Two months later, in a letter to Mme Straus on the subject of the *Dictionnaire raisonné*, in which he nonetheless admires the "genius of architecture," he adds: "It is sad that Viollet-le-Duc has damaged France by restoring, with science but without enthusiasm, so many churches whose ruins would be more moving than their archeological patching up with new stones that do not speak to us, and with moldings that are identical to the original and have kept nothing of it."[32] In *Cities of the Plain* he mocks the "small shopkeeper" who goes on Sunday to feel "the potent sensation of the Middle Ages" in front of the vaults that "have been painted blue and sprinkled with gold stars by the pupils of Viollet-le-Duc"[33] and gives to Albertine, in front of the (fictional) church of Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse, "half new, half restored"—which does not leave much of the original—this sentence revealing the influence of Elstir, who is her Ruskin and who has taught her "the priceless, the inimitable beauty of old stones" but also, in the eyes of the narrator, a testimony of "the sureness of the taste she had already acquired in architecture": "I don't like it, it's restored."[34] Marcel observes, however, that "this fetish of objective architectural value" here makes the impressionist painter "contradict himself," since he should take account only of the manner in which the setting sun illuminates this facade, restored or not: according to the lesson of Rembrandt (which was in fact already the lesson of Chardin), "beauty is not in objects, for surely then it would be neither as profound nor as mysterious."[35] The respect for Time, which demands that one leaves the objects in the state they have acquired gradually ("in their juice," as antique dealers say graciously), to leave them to "speak to us" from their period and by way of the "rumor of the distances traversed,"[36] is in sum only a stage toward subjectivism, of which impressionism offers a symbolic illustration and which understands that beauty is wholly *in the eye of the beholder*. From this point of view "what does it matter that a building is new, if it appears old; or even if it doesn't,"[37] providing that

the eye knows how to place on it the "special radiance" of an aesthetic vision?

The gradation, rather than the opposition, from Chardin to Rembrandt, sketched in the famous draft of an article apparently abandoned in 1895,[38] comes back again but to be abandoned, once again, in a page of the manuscript for "Journées de pélerinage."[39] "Chardin taught you not to yawn out of boredom and disdain regarding your modest dining room, but to dream of unknown splendors. In revealing to you the life of the still life, in teaching you to admire the ray of sunshine that makes your glass of water shine, or the outline of your knife on the folds of the table cloth as one of the most beautiful things in the world, he discovered for you the beauty of everyday life. And Rembrandt succeeded in freeing you from this false belief that beauty is attached to objects, making you find beauty only in light and shadow." This double abandonment relates perhaps to the insufficiently contrastive character of these two lessons in subjectivism, which in reality are only one: beauty is not in things but in the light and shadow, which evidently represent the aesthetic power of the spirit, that power that allows Chardin and Rembrandt to "discover" the beauty of spectacles disdained until then. But, if one understands that this beauty has a purely subjective source, what follows is clearly that the privilege accorded till now (since the apse of Saint-Hilaire) to the most humble and familiar objects is only a too simple or too elementary expression of that subjectivism, which has no more reasons to neglect the objects ordinarily taken to be precious.

Another gradation sketches itself then, in the same draft, with a third term, the reference of which is here Gustave Moreau: "But if beauty lives in the most humble things, we must not disdain the things that are rare; we must believe that they can also have their beauty. Gustave Moreau arrives at just the right time to restore in you the love of jewelry and of beautiful materials." In a sketch for *Within a Budding Grove*, on the subject of the lesson of Elstir, Proust takes up again this now triple gradation and adds to the example of Moreau that of another painter, more importantly emblematic (and particularly in Proust himself) of an art devoted to luxury and to brilliance: Veronese. "When one is too much under the influence of Chardin's *La Raie*, which shows us that the simplest laws of relief and consistency suffice to render the most modest objects inestimably precious, or of Rembrandt's *Good Samaritan*, which gives all the value of matter to the lighting that makes the rope of the well and the shadow of the door divine, the view of the *Marriage at Cana* and of certain Gustave Moreaus is important to show that, if the most common things are as beautiful as the most opulent, the most opulent are not excepted and also

have their beauty."[40] Although this piece does not appear in the final text, one will see the sculptor Ski amuse himself farther on with an implicit and paradoxical link between the Veronese of *Marriage* and a still life that could have inspired Chardin: "You shall fill all our glasses, and they will bring in marvellous peaches, huge nectarines; there, against the sunset, it will be as luscious as a beautiful Veronese."[41]

This name inevitably transports us to Venice, even if *Marriage of Cana*, transferred to the Louvre since Napoléon, is cruelly missing there (for reasons already mentioned, we can ask ourselves what side Proust would take in a certain present campaign for its return to the refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore) and thus from the pages of *The Fugitive* that evoke the sojourn of the narrator in the city of the Doges in the company of his mother. This is where the cardinal opposition around which the aborted or abandoned pages turned for a long time (as we have just seen) becomes explicit: "noble surfaces of marble steps continually splashed by shafts of blue-green sunlight, which, to the valuable lesson of Chardin, acquired long ago, added the lesson of Veronese."[42] One cannot say that the vision of marble steps splashed by blue-green sunlight evokes this latter artist most naturally, but this evocation exists already in (at least) two sketches for this text: "vast marble surfaces, wetted by a quick sun, of a staircase as in Veronese and which added to the lesson of Chardin—that the poorest things can become beautiful in the reflection of light—that other lesson: sumptuous things can do so as well and that they are not without beauty"; and "marine wind currents and sunlight, making vast marble extensions shine with shadow as in Veronese, thus teaching a lesson contrary to Chardin's that even opulent things can have beauty."[43] The most pertinent relation is thus clearly for him, as one has seen, between the painter of *La Raie* and the one of *Marriage*. One sees it here qualified in terms that hesitate between complementarity (*add*) and contrariness (*contrary*); it in fact illustrates what I will call in pseudo-Hegelian terms a dialectic of the humble and the luxurious, in which the attachment to humble objects constitutes a first naive degree then the acceptance, despite their price, of precious objects a second antithetical degree ("second simplicity," as Yves Bonnefoy would say),[44] leading to the final acceptance that recognizes the indifference of the object and the radical subjectivity of aesthetic appreciation.[45]

But during the sojourn in Venice this relation takes the more neutral form of an at once analogic and contrastive parallel, or, more precisely, of an *analogy with transposition* between these two symbolic poles of Combray and Venice (of which Chardin and Veronese evidently offer a pictorial version). The mo-

tif of this parallel, that we begin to know well, is clearly indicated from the beginning of this chapter: "as beauty may exist in the most precious as well as in the humblest things—I received there the impression analogous to those which I had felt so often in the past in Combray, but transposed into a wholly different and far richer key."[46] This transposition thus develops for two or three pages, the constant procedure of which consists of an "as in Combray" immediately corrected by a "but in Venice": the morning sun does not shine on the slate of Saint-Hilaire but on the golden angel on the campanile of St. Mark's; the Sunday street is here "paved with sapphire water"; the lined-up houses are here palaces of porphyry and of jasper; the blinds here are "hung between the quatrefoils and foliage of Gothic windows"; the "humble particularities" and the "asymmetries" that made the facades opening on the rue des Oiseaux so "eloquent" have their "equivalents" here, but their message is allotted "upon the ogive, still half Arab, of a facade which is reproduced in all the architectural museums and all the illustrated art books as one of the supreme achievements of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages," etc. This complacently exploited theme necessarily implies that one abandons the part that consists in presenting only the most humble or poverty-stricken aspects of Venice, since such a presentation would reduce to nothing the contrast on which it rests in order "to make Venice more intimate and more genuine, to give it a resemblance with Aubervilliers," whereas here, for the narrator, "it is works of art, things of priceless beauty, that are entrusted with the task of giving us our impressions of everyday life."

For the narrator but also by proxy,[47] and in a completely symbolic manner, for his grandmother, uncompromising keeper and interpreter of the Combraysian aesthetics. "How your grandmother would have loved this simple grandeur!" her daughter exclaims in front of the palace of the Doges. "She would even have loved those soft tints, because they are unmawkish. How she would have loved the whole of Venice, and what informality, worthy of nature itself, she would have found in all these beauties, this plethora of objects that seem to need no formal arrangement but present themselves just as they are. [. . .] Your grandmother would have had as much pleasure seeing the sun setting over the Doges' Palace as over a mountain." The master word here is *nature*. The grandmother, of course, is already dead at this point, without ever having gone to Venice. But Proust had for a time thought of realizing this symbolic confrontation. This takes place in the Esquisse 27 of *Swann's Way*, already quoted, and precisely one of the pre-texts of the description of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, still in the state of the steeple of Chartres: "The year

she died of a sickness she knew and of which she knew the duration, she saw Venice for the first time, where she really liked only the Doges' palace."[48] The circle was closed in advance, and one thinks one hears the absent one murmur on the Piazetta, as long ago on the square of Combray: "My dears, laugh at me if you like; it is not conventionally beautiful, but there is something in its quaint old face that pleases me.[49] If it could play the piano, I'm sure it wouldn't sound tinny."

# 18

## "One of My Favorite Authors"

In his latest book, which seems to testify to an enthusiastic conversion to the hazardous hypothetical practices and the fanatical interpretations of literary psychoanalysis, Michael Riffaterre gives (among other things) a fate to a page of *Combray* that inspires perplexity in even the least informed Proustians.[1] It is about the landscape of Guermantes and the reveries with which it is associated. The two partially quoted sentences are the following:

> I seemed to have before my eyes a fragment of that fluvial [fluviatile] country which I had longed so much to see and know since coming upon a description of it by one of my favorite authors. And it was with that story-book land, with its imagined soil intersected by a hundred bubbling water-courses, that Guermantes, changing its aspect in my mind, became identified.[2]

This fragment contains an allusive mention ("one of my favorite authors") that is bound to raise the curiosity of the reader: who can that author be, one of his favorites, in whom the young Narrator has seen described the fluvial region that evokes for him the landscape of Guermantes? (And, in addition, where is that region?) For Riffaterre the answer leaves no doubt, and this a priori certitude permits him to move on immediately: " 'one of my favorite authors' is, in fact, Virgil himself."

For reasons I will not consider in detail, the supposed reference to Virgil partakes here of an interpretive network of Freudian inspiration, in which the other point of support is a mention (this time real) of the narrative from the fourth *Georgic* about the visit of Aristaeus to the aquatic kingdom of his mother Cyrene (in connection with Swann's worldly relations).[3] But Riffaterre additionally sees in this narrative the "subtext" of the famous episode of the evening at the Opera,[4] where the members of the aristocracy appear to the Narrator, in their boxes, like divinities in their submarine caverns. This is not impossible, but nothing indicates it, and I continue to think another hypothesis more pertinent and more motivated (and more Riffaterrian in his

former manner): this entire metaphor is nothing but the development of the two meanings of the word that textually results in it—the word *baignoire*.[5] As for the value of the theme of the aquarium wall, not psychological (separation from the mother) but sociological (exclusion of the simple spectators), it is strange that Riffaterre does not think of the parallel with the no less famous page of *Within a Budding Grove* on the dining room–aquarium of the Grand Hôtel, illuminated in the evening for the frustrated contemplation of the Balbec populace.[6]

But let us return to Guermantes and to "one of the favorite authors" of the Narrator. The only textual justification put forward for his identification with Virgil is the "hyper-Latin form" of the adjective *fluviatile*,[7] of which Riffaterre knows and mentions another Proustian use, apparently without Virgilian allusion or Oedipal connotation.[8] *Fluviatile* does not seem to me in the least "hyper-Latin": it is an adjective of which the Latin form *fluviatilis* is found, if I believe my Latin dictionary, in Cicero and Livy (but not in Virgil, who only uses *fluvialis*) and of which the Latin meaning concerning vegetables and animals is: "which lives in or near a body of water." Proust turns it around twice for sites or landscapes embellished by modest bodies of water: brooks, torrents, or little rivers like the Couesnon or the "Vivonne"; it clearly contrasts, as a true *diminutive*, with *fluvial*, which evokes a larger river. The simple presence of this word cannot therefore in any case suffice to suggest a Virgilian subtext, with the pseudo-Freudian associations that Riffaterre complacently finds in it.[9] The less so since the use of the word *author* (*écrivain*) to designate the creator of the *Georgics* would be less than idiomatic: it seems to me that, for a writer of the beginning of the century and of the culture of Marcel Proust, Virgil is not an *author* but a *poet*. Linguistic feeling thus opposes such an identification with great force.[10]

In other respects, and above all, the interpretive trail is far more cluttered than Riffaterre seems to believe. In fact, the mention here of a "favorite author" who describes a fluvial country is only the recall of one or two other anterior occurrences in the narrative of the reading afternoons in the garden. We know the theme: the young reader lives more intensely in the landscape evoked by the book than in the one where he finds himself during the reading. Here is the specific illustration of this theme:

> Thus for two consecutive summers I sat in the heat of our Combray garden, sick with a longing inspired by the book I was then reading for a land of mountains and rivers, where I could see innumerable

> sawmills, where beneath the limpid currents fragments of wood lay mouldering in beds of watercress; and near by, rambling and clustering along low walls, purple and red flowers. And since there was always lurking in my mind the dream of a woman who would enrich me with her love, that dream in those two summers was quickened with the fresh coolness of running water; and whoever she might be, the woman whose image I called to mind, flowers, purple and red, would at once spring up on either side of her like complementary colours.[11]

It is clearly these indeterminate erotic-landscapist reveries ("a woman") that, in the course of promenades Guermantes's way, link up with the more precise phantasm of fluvial and poetic loves with the duchess:

> I used to dream that Mme de Guermantes, taking a sudden capricious fancy to me, invited me there, that all day long she stood fishing for trout by my side. And when evening came, holding my hand in hers, as we passed by the little gardens of her vassals she would point out to me the flowers that leaned their red and purple spikes along the tops of the low walls, and would teach me all their names.[12]

The landscape is of the same type, except that the initial reverie dealt with a mountainous region with sawmills, of which the park of Guermantes is only a very calm replica. The taste for landscapes embellished by fresh and rapid courses of water is a constant of Proustian sensibility, and the evocation of purple and reddish (elsewhere yellow or blue) flowers in clusters or cattails is a veritable tic, the "phallic" connotation of which will escape no one and the frequency of which has been pointed up, to my knowledge for the first time, by Jean Milly in his study of the *Pastiches*.[13] He quotes the two pages that have detained us and a sentence from *The Guermantes Way* that recalls "that land of bubbling streams where the Duchess taught me to fish for trout and to know the names of the flowers whose red and purple clusters adorned the walls of the neighboring gardens."[14] These mentions (and others, to which I will return in a moment) are clearly justified in the study of Milly by the presence of another occurrence (the first to be published), in the pastiche of Flaubert: "and they ended up by seeing only two clusters of purple flowers, descending to the rapid water that they almost touched, in the crude light of an afternoon without sun, the length of a reddish wall that was crumbling."[15]

Starting from this rather insistent micro-corpus, curiosity can only orient itself toward two inquiries: that of bookish "sources" and other "sub-

texts" and that of rough drafts, or pre-texts. Milly explored both trails with the means at his disposal at the time. On the side of the subtext the pastiche of Flaubert shows the track that leads to this page of *Sentimental Education*: "Clumps of reeds and of rushes lined it unequally; all sorts of plants, which had taken root there, were flaunting golden buds, trailing yellow clusters, pointing spindly purple flowers or darting out random spikes of green."[16]

One could consider that this quotation closes the inquiry and gives the key to the allusion: "one of my favorite authors" would be quite simply Flaubert, and several commentators have held to this. But this evocation of the banks of the Seine at Nogent is not likely to prompt the vision of a mountainous land, and in any case Milly quoted two fragments of pre-texts, of which one contributes to mixing up the cards:

> On the other hand certain novels that I read then, perhaps *Le Lys dans la vallée*, but I am not sure of this, gave me a great love for certain cattails, whose dark colored clusters grew beyond a flowered path. How many times I looked for them on Guermantes' way, stopping in front of some foxglove, letting my parents go past me, disappearing around some curve of the Vivette, so that nothing would trouble my thoughts, reciting to myself the beloved sentences, asking myself if this was indeed what the novelist had described, trying to identify with the read landscape the landscape I contemplated in order to give it the dignity that literature already conferred for me on reality, in manifesting its essence and teaching me its beauty.[17]

Here, then, is Flaubert in competition with Balzac, but the Indre of *Le Lys dans la vallée* is no more mountainous nor provided with sawmills than the Seine of *Sentimental Education*, and there are neither clusters nor cattails in the Balzacian flora. The newly published pre-texts, of the reading afternoons as well as of the promenades to Guermantes, will perhaps tell us a little more.

Much more, in fact, but I fear that they tell us nothing that draws near to Virgil or his generating penis. I follow this track by going back through the sketches of the Pléiade edition, which seem roughly chronological (to the extent that it is possible to establish a chronology for the Proustian pre-text). Esquisse 26 is still about the days of reading. I extract the sentences that concern our subject most directly:

> The book also provided the landscape that was the one of the day in which I read, and the book I was then reading raised high hump-backed hills, all wet with frothy currents and covered with green

lentils, that make the sawmills work and from the height of which one sees in the valley the silver bubble of a steep-sided river [ . . . ]. The fact is that I desired to see only a land where there were sawmills, natural sources, a silver river seen from high up. I informed myself about the regions of France where I would see these precious things and I asked my parents to send me, rather than to Reims, to Laon, or to Chartres, to spend a few days near Avallon, in the region called Little Switzerland, or in the Vosges. The book that introduced these imaginary sites into my days in Combray and projected desire onto my entire future, wasn't it the one that I figured so much according to the site where it took place, and according to the year I wrote on its cover? Or did it come off one of its pages by an association of ideas because I made myself reconstitute an image it did not contain? In any case, this landscape of brisk waters and aquatic industries that I wanted so much to visit was inseparable for me from some enclosure, at the foot of which grew reddish cobs, clusters of purple and yellow flowers.[18]

Here we thus have again the mountainous landscape, the torrents, and the sawmills, and here is a new referential location: the Vosges or the region of Avallon. But these desired places are not necessarily the "landscape" of the book that communicated the desire, or, rather, they certainly are not: if it were a matter of visiting this landscape itself, there would be no choice between sites as different as the Vosges and the region of Avallon. It is a matter, then, of landscapes *similar* to the one of the book, themselves apparently inaccessible.

Esquisse 31 is probably the oldest. It is also the most revealing. Here is its essential:

When I was reading a book by Bergotte that took place in the Jura [ . . . ] the landscape of the novel rose in the middle of the real landscape, and the images that it evoked constantly of boiling water, of rivers with trouts like silver ribbons seen from the height of wooded hills, of mechanical sawmills walking in the water, of green plants growing in the ramblings of these so fresh edges, of natural sources, of boats descending the rapids, which gave me the desire to ask my parents to let me spend a summer in this or that watering place where I knew there were mechanical sawmills, wooded heights, sources with a fresh and salubrious taste, and where mainly one canoed and fished for trout in agitated rivers.

> In rereading today this book by Bergotte I cannot find anywhere a sentence dealing with reddish cobs, clusters of purple and yellow flowers falling the length of a wall oozing water. Nonetheless this idea of running water, of bubbling water, of silver brooks seen from the height of wooded hills, of wood from the sawmills half decayed by water, that I had all the time before my eyes, dining, taking walks in the garden, which during a year, at least at certain hours, for at others I rather thought of cathedrals and *The Bible of Amiens*, was linked to reddish cobs, to clusters of purple and yellow flowers, that I would have liked to know and that I nonetheless figured out very well for myself, the image of which clearly came from a book, always colored my landscape of mountains and sprightly rivers. I despised the flowers of the garden, and stopped hopefully only on a path along the humid wall of which I saw something that vaguely resembled my purple and yellow clusters. When I had heard the pastor say that Guermantes was a little Switzerland, I saw there the silver brooks, the woods decayed by water, the purple and yellow clusters along a wall spotted by humidity. Now Mme de Guermantes was not only for me the girl of her name, born of her sonority and of her legend. Sometimes I saw her firing a rifle at the trouts along the waterfalls, looking from the height of a hill at rivers which from this high were nothing but a silver bubble, and toward evening going with a slow step to look at the little enclosures of her farms where reddish cobs and yellow and purple clusters were stuck.[19]

There are numerous revelations in this page, fascinating on account of its compulsive repetition. The first relates to the site of the book, this time unhesitatingly the Jura, the apparent origin of all ulterior reveries. The qualificative *mountainous* and the evocation of sawmills clearly applies without difficulty to this region. The second relates to the author, the famous and mysterious "favorite author": here it is quite simply Bergotte. But this identification is only provisional—it will disappear long before the final version; and, moreover, it brings no referential "key," since Bergotte is a fictional author. But there is more to say on each of these two points.

It seems that Proust renounced very quickly attributing the "novel" (since there is a novel in this version) to Bergotte; a note facing this page indicates, "It would be better if this book were not by Bergotte so that the flowers are not associated with Mlle Swann." A note waiting for a new writing that will not be

long delayed and that will remove Bergotte from the paternity of the novel with the "mountainous and fluvial landscape" to make him the author of another. Proust decides, in fact, that Bergotte will be linked to Mlle Swann, as a friend of the family, and associated with more artistic images of visits to cathedrals in the company of Gilberte. There will thus be more than *one* example of bookish influence in the reveries of Marcel; there will be *two* successive ones: the one of the fluvial landscape and the one of the visits to the cathedrals—and Bergotte will be linked only to the second, in a temporal substitution clearly marked by the already quoted final text.[20] The fluvial landscape will nonetheless come back in the course of the promenades around Guermantes, at a moment evidently contemporaneous of the first series of readings, which the anachronic disposition of *Combray* permits. We thus have, starting from that moment (not precisely dated in the genetic chronology), two favorite authors the first of which is no longer Bergotte but an anonymous author, imaginary or not. In the Esquisse 31 there were, however, already two, but two that came to conjoin their influences in the same synthetic reverie: the mountainous land came from "Bergotte," and the cattail flowers came "clearly out of a book," that is to say, certainly out of *another* book. We know the extradiegetic "model" for this one since the 1908 pastiche of Flaubert: it is *Sentimental Education*.

What would remain to be identified is the other, the one whose plot "develops in the Jura," unless there is no model for what would be an invention ex nihilo. But it seems that this is not the case. A note on this sketch by Jo Yoshida in fact indicates:

> Proust is perhaps thinking of Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, of which a passage, extracted by Robert de La Sizeranne in his *Pages choisies*, bears the title: "Spring in the Jura." Ruskin there describes a twilight landscape that he saw on the hills towering over the run of the Ain, above the village of Champagnole. The description of the landscape evoked by Bergotte's book has a striking resemblance with Ruskin's text. Not only does one find the "wooded hills" and the "green plants growing in the ramblings of those so fresh edges" in this passage of the English writer, but there is a whole page devoted to the description of the "clusters of flowers."[21]

Another note, to the final text, confirms this hypothesis by relativizing it, since it mentions both the Flaubert pastiche and the Renan pastiche for its evocations of transparent waters and trout fishing. But this page of the pseudo-Renan,[22] devoted to a fluvial landscape in the north of France, itself

refers us explicitly to Ruskin, who vaunted (in the *Bible of Amiens* translated by Proust in 1901) "the grace of its poplars, the icy freshness of its sources." We are thus left with two "sources"—the right word: Flaubert and Ruskin for the flowers in clusters and in cattails; and Ruskin once again, and he alone (?) for the mountainous landscapes, originally from the Jura, and other evocations of fluvial sites, for which his taste seems as constant as Proust's—it being understood here as elsewhere that one comes under the "influence" of someone only if one calls for it, that is to say, when it meets and confirms an autonomous tendency: a reader indifferent to this type of landscape would not emphasize these descriptions, whoever their author.

A detail of Esquisse 31 seems to me to confirm the Ruskin hypothesis—that is to say, Ruskin here as a model for Bergotte. The dissociation between the two authors having not yet been accomplished, the mention of a reverie on the cathedrals, which later will refer to Bergotte alone, refers also explicitly to Ruskin: "at other [moments] I thought rather of the cathedrals and of *The Bible of Amiens*." This *rather* and this explicit mention seem to me to establish an opposition between *two* Ruskins, the one of *Amiens* and of the cathedrals and the one of the *Seven Lamps* and (among others) of the landscape of the Jura. In this case (a simple hypothesis but made very plausible by the ramblings and the accents of the text) the two Bergottes—the first of which, for reasons already mentioned, will become an anonymous favorite author—would have as their common model the sole Ruskin, but considered from two different sides of his abundant and many-sided work.

Ruskin has long been considered as one of the models of Bergotte. The most pertinent feature of this connection is at least that Ruskin has had an analogous influence on Proust's aesthetic and writing as the one of Bergotte on Marcel[23]—and which is perhaps attested by the evolution from *Jean Santeuil* to *Remembrance*. But the little genetic course that we have just followed in reverse is perhaps its most precise, and its most striking, illustration.[24]

But it is understood that a genetic trail is no more than a genetic trail. It is not a matter of drawing from this one an excluding hypothesis of the kind "The 'favorite author' of the Narrator of *Combray* is, *in fact*, Ruskin + Flaubert"—readings that are not very plausible for a boy who reads *François le Champi*. In *Swann's Way* such as Proust wanted it and ended it in 1913, this author is anonymous and imaginary and on the point of being supplanted, in relation to Gilberte, by the no less imaginary Bergotte. What genetic study does give us is not a key for what is not a roman à clef but only a trace of the process

of transformation by which different elements of reality became elements of fiction. The materials given by reality in no case say the "truth" about a fiction that is exactly what it pretends to be—this is its privilege and its definition. On the other hand, they can tell us a part (even if it is infinitely small) of the truth about the progressive elaboration of that fiction, for this elaboration belongs to reality: a reality that can be called, in this instance, Proustian *bricolage*.

The debate, or rather the division, between genesis and structure always evokes for me the famous page where Saussure compares the evolution of language to a chess game:[25] at any moment of the game the synchronic system of the positions is "totally independent of any previous state of the board. It does not matter at all whether the state in question has been reached by one sequence of moves or another sequence. Anyone who has followed the whole game has not the least advantage over a passer-by who happens to look at the game at that particular moment. In order to describe the position on the board, it is quite useless to refer to what has happened ten seconds ago." This remark is not only valid for the "inspection" of the state of the game but ultimately for the continuation of the game by two players who would come at that moment to take the place of the two earlier ones: the state of the game is such and such, and one can pursue it without paying any attention to its antecedents. On the other hand, if one wants to know and to appreciate the technique of the two first players, it is very useful to know "how they got there." The "state of the game" is an autonomous fictional system that one has to take as it is if one wants to enter into it and participate in it, but the talent of each player is an element of reality (outside the game), the total comprehension of which escapes us, no doubt, but the partial knowledge of which presumes as close a diachronic observation as possible of the stages of the game.

My reader will have seen where I am going: the reading of a text, and especially a fictional text, supposes nothing but a consideration of the state of the game and linguistic competence (to know the meaning of *fluvial* or of *author*) and encyclopedic competence (to know where one finds torrents) that permit one to decipher and to interpret it; the knowledge and comprehension of the author's work are of a different order, for which no information on the diachronic series of antecedents, or what an aesthetician calls the "heuristic path" of the work,[26] can be neglected.

These two points seem to me reasonable, and the exploration of our corpus illustrates them quite well: the immanent interpretation of the object "favorite author—fluvial landscape" demands no knowledge of the genetic course, and

its only condition of validity is the taking into account and the integration of the context: for example, to compare page 188 of *Swann's Way* with page 92, to which it obviously sends the reader, and to page 7 of *The Guermantes Way*, which is its obvious echo, and to infer from it that the author in question is the one the Narrator reads before discovering Bergotte and that the evoked landscape is not only fluvial but mountainous and torrential. By contrast, the comprehension of Proust's work demands a diachronic perspective (when it is possible) on all the elements, bookish and other, of which the genetic record bears the trace.

It is thus appropriate to distinguish these two activities as clearly as possible a priori. But this does not mean that they have no relationship: after all, the literary work is not a practice as autonomous, and exhaustively defined by its "constitutive rules," as a chess (or other) game. First of all, it goes without saying that the reading of a pre-text supposes the same aesthetic appreciations as the one of a "final" text, for the simple reason that a pre-text is also a text. Moreover, it happens that certain anomalies of a text, as there are so many in *Remembrance*, are explained by the consultation of pre-texts, if any exist, and in this case the genesis contributes to enlightening the structure. In situations of an unfinished work (like the one of *Remembrance* after *The Captive*) the distinction even between final text and pre-text becomes problematic, and we know at least since Valéry that the very notion of completion is hazardous. Finally, between the purely aesthetic appreciation (of the kind "This painting is fuzzy") of a work as an autonomous object and its *artistic* appreciation ("This work is Impressionist), which supposes a consideration of its historical context, and thus of its "heuristic path," there can be no watertight divider; there are many interactions.[27] Or, rather, outside the artificial situation à la Condillac, and specifically in literature, the art of signification par excellence, there can be no purely aesthetic appreciation (or completely innocent reading of an absolutely naked text), to which no extratextual datum would associate itself. But, if we begin to integrate this kind of data (e.g., the fact that Proust had read Virgil), it would without a doubt be better to integrate as many as possible (e.g., take into account that Proust has read Flaubert and Ruskin as well), for nothing leads more astray than an incomplete, or truncated, information.

And, above all, it seems to me indispensable to know (and to say) at each moment what one is speaking about. Too often interpretation does not say if it is structural or genetic, if it relates to the rough text or to its process of elaboration, setting aside for itself the ease of jumping onto one terrain as

soon as the other resists, and, for example, invoking a reading of Virgil without specifying if the reader is called Proust, Marcel—or Riffaterre. I know that the night of the Unconscious, where all cows are crazy—especially since we have collectivized it into the "Unconscious of the text" or the "Unconscious of fiction"—legitimates all kinds of dogma and glibness and responds to every unstoppable objection, "All the more reason"; but, as my reader will have understood, that is a little of what I reproach it with.