THE ‘ENVELOPPE CLOSE’:
READING MINDS IN PROUST’S *À LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU*

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The 'enveloppe close': Reading Minds in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to provide a nuanced evaluation of the 'theory of mind' and mind-reading practice depicted in the *Recherche*, and to bring out the positive aspects offsetting the negatives that have come to dominate critical accounts of intersubjectivity in the novel. I explore the interaction between diegesis, narratorial commentary, and imagery to restore the balance which is lost when one focuses disproportionately upon the narrator's despondent pronouncements. I set such pronouncements within their context in the novel itself and re-situate the novel's treatment of the so-called 'problem of other minds' within the broader, traditional and *fin-de-siècle* nineteenth-century philosophical, scientific and literary context that the *Recherche* draws upon, but also interrogates and occasionally mocks.

Chapters 1 and 2 address the novel's spatial representation of other minds, taking issue with readings that use the Leibnizian philosophy at the root of the imagery to cast intersubjectivity in the *Recherche* as blighted by 'monadic' hermeticism. Chapter 1 argues that such imagery is used to figure the 'limit situation' presented by other minds but also to suggest that it may be overcome: figures of containment or closure are frequently pregnant with or offset by more positive connotations of interrelation or accessibility. The chapter includes a detailed, balanced reading of the 'enveloppe close' (III, 886-888) passage, which contains the narrator's cri de cœur about what he feels to be the inaccessibility of Albertine's mind. Chapter 2 addresses what is entailed in the protagonist's project to 'sortir de soi' vis-à-vis the desired other, examining what lies behind the topographical treatment of other

minds, and contextualizing the pronouncement by the narrator commonly relied upon to contend that other minds in the *Recherche* are unknowable: 'L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi, qui ne connaît les autres qu'en soi, et, en disant le contraire, ment' (IV, 34).

Chapter 3 considers, first, the development of the protagonist's sophisticated 'theory of mind', and secondly, his practical application of a cognitive pragmatics in formative mind-reading scenes. I draw on modern theories that have emerged in the cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind since the 1970s to frame my analysis of this 'theory' and 'practice' of mind-reading in the *Recherche*, to the extent that they shed light on Proust's own handling and instantiation of central issues posed by other minds. This chapter demonstrates that the novel is (amongst other things) a *celebration* of the skill and mental dexterity involved in learning to read minds competently, of the manifold challenges they present, and of the enlightenment that may be achieved.

Chapter 4 addresses the challenges posed by Albertine and, adopting a taxonomic approach to the information sought by the protagonist, shows the field of supposed 'unknowability' to be severely circumscribed.

In conclusion, I consider the role of art in exteriorizing the aspect of mind that appears most elusive – *qualia* or the subjective, phenomenal character of experience – challenging (by reference to his own experience) the narrator's declarations that art is the *only* mode of access.

The 'enveloppe close': Reading Minds in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*

Simon Kerr, Keble College, Oxford
D. Phil Thesis – Trinity Term 2025

LONG ABSTRACT

Proust was praised by those who knew him for his ability to read others' minds from the slenderest verbal or behavioural evidence. Similar praise was conferred on him (this time as author) in some of the early critical responses to the *Recherche*. However, in the years following the posthumous publication of *La Prisonnière* (1923), *Albertine disparue* (1925) and *Le Temps retrouvé* (1927), charges of pessimism about his views on intersubjectivity (as evidenced by the novel) became increasingly prevalent. The opening lines of Samuel Beckett's famous 1931 monograph, *Proust*, announced what he regarded as the 'Proustian equation' – 'The unknown […] is also the unknowable' – proceeding to stake a claim for what he diagnosed as 'Proust's pessimism', as exemplified by the tragic relationship between the protagonist and Albertine. Over the ensuing decades, the view that Proust's protagonist and narrator (and, indeed, Proust himself) regard other minds as 'unknowable' has hardened into an orthodoxy amongst scholarly readers.

The aim of my thesis is to challenge this disheartening critical view of the 'mind-reading' depicted in the *Recherche*. The impetus behind the re-examination is three-fold.

First, there has in fact been comparatively little focus on, and no in-depth study of, the development of 'theory of mind' and the practical reading of other minds *as such* as represented in Proust's novel, encompassing diegesis, extradiegetic commentary, and imagery. Where treatment has been given to the topic of other minds, it has tended to focus on particular despondent pronouncements by the narrator in the later volumes, often taking them at face value, interpreting them out of context, and giving them the weight of

philosophical maxims. In parallel, the relationship with Albertine, often viewed through the lens of and reduced to such negative declarations, has commonly been taken to represent the 'Proustian' view of mind-reading. This common approach has resulted in generalized pessimistic appraisals holding that other minds are regarded by the Proustian narrator as 'unknowable', 'inaccessible', and 'impenetrable'. Secondly, such accounts have the effect of foregrounding the conundrum (identified by Benjamin Crémieux in 1924) that, while the narrator goes to great lengths to identify and analyse the difficulties (if not impossibility) of reading others, he is nonetheless able to arrive at 'une conscience toujours approximative, mais pourtant nette et relativement complète et exacte de la personne d'autrui'.[1] This is a conundrum that has not been addressed, adequately or at all, by existing accounts; yet it is critical to determine whether and how it might be resolved before reaching a verdict on the 'Proustian' view of other minds. Although Albertine is necessarily at the heart of that inquiry, it must encompass other minds too. Thirdly, while it has become a commonplace to proclaim Proustian minds to be 'unknowable', there is no critical consensus as to *what* precisely is said to be unknowable or on what basis.

My thesis interrogates the parameters of the orthodox view and puts forward the analytical and evidential basis for a rival assessment which, if not rosily and naively optimistic, is at least not irredeemably pessimistic. It situates the 'Proustian' treatment of other minds within its philosophical, scientific and literary context, to the extent that it usefully informs the question whether the protagonist or narrator subscribes to or reacts against traditional or *fin-de-siècle* nineteenth-century thinking about knowledge and the so-called 'problem of other minds' and, in particular, to what extent (if at all) either succumbs to radical doubt about the ability to read minds. However, the focus of the study is upon

[1] 'La Psychologie de Marcel Proust', *Revue de Paris*, 5, 31.20 (1924), 838-861 (841).

what, appraised holistically, the *Recherche* itself has to say or show about their attitude towards and experience of reading others.

I consider the questions: *what* precisely is said or shown to be unknowable, and the cognitive acquisition of *what content* and *with what degree of conviction*, if any, would or might suffice to render the matter 'knowable' (so far as it is possible to tell from the *Recherche*)? Or, better still, might any such matters in fact be 'known' by the protagonist? And, against this background, what is it that art is said to offer that ordinary mind-reading does not or cannot? My thesis demonstrates that attending to these questions, when examining the theory of mind promulgated by the narrator and the protagonist's mind-reading experience, reveals the field of 'unknowability' to be far more circumscribed than the narratorial pronouncements (and the critical appraisals that cite or paraphrase them) tend to suggest.

The methodology that I apply is one that encompasses all three dimensions of the text (diegesis, narratorial commentary and imagery), examining where they cooperate or conflict, to avoid giving undue weight or priority to elements of negativity and allow (as the text as a whole appears to demand) for an appraisal which is both nuanced and balanced. The thesis begins (and ends) by evaluating the role and significance of the spatial imagery used by the narrator in connection with mind-reading, a poetic aspect forming an essential part of the arc given by Proust to the subject. **Part I** (**Chapters 1** and **2**) addresses key aspects of this spatial representation of other minds, including its relation to the philosophy of Leibniz in particular. Elements of Leibniz's work, especially *La Monadologie*, unmistakably lie at the root of the imagery, and the 'monadology' has sometimes been invoked by scholars in aid of the view of Proustian intersubjectivity as blighted by 'monadic' hermeticism.

Chapter 1 takes issue with such a narrow approach to the philosophy of Leibniz and its influence on the *Recherche*, showing that figures of containment or closure in the novel are frequently pregnant with or offset by more positive connotations of interrelation or accessibility, and putative bodily or material barriers to cognitive interpenetration are figured as being, or having the potential to be, communicative interfaces. It is against this background that the 'enveloppe close' (III, 886-888) passage (which contains the narrator's cri de cœur about what he feels to be the inaccessibility of Albertine's mind)[2] must be interpreted, and I put forward a detailed and balanced reading at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 2 considers what the novel has to say, through spatial representation, about the protagonist's imaginative desire and attempts to access other minds, and the bonds and causal inter-relation that exist between them. Common to both lines of inquiry is the protagonist's desire to 'sortir de soi' and the question of what that objective might entail in relation to the desired other.

The mind of the desired other is given topographical treatment in the *Recherche* as associated with place, landscape or astral phenomena. The fact that the protagonist has a tendency to link women with landscape has been sufficiently canvassed in existing criticism, but the motivation behind it and its significance for mind-reading call for further exploration, especially on the question of (in)accessibility. In the first part of Chapter 2, I adapt and employ philosopher Donald Davidson's concept of 'triangulation' (not to be confused with the Girardian theory of 'triangular' desire) to explain the short-circuiting aspect of the mind-reading strategy that the young protagonist seems to attempt with this

[2] Including the text: 'je sentais que je touchais seulement l'enveloppe close d'un être qui par l'intérieur accédait à l'infini. Combien je souffrais de cette position où nous a réduits l'oubli de la nature qui, en instituant la division des corps, n'a pas songé à rendre possible l'interpénétration des âmes! [...] car si son corps était au pouvoir du mien, sa pensée échappait aux prises de ma pensée.' (III, 888)

topographical association, but one which, misapplied to perpetuate his own subjective concerns, proves entirely self-serving and futile. Later in the chapter, I also demonstrate how the protagonist uses triangulation, more successfully, when reading Saint-Loup.

The second part of this chapter considers whether the weight commonly placed on a particularly gloomy, spatialized pronouncement about other minds (in *Albertine disparue*[3]) in support of the 'unknowability' argument is justified when considered in context. With a close reading of the passage in question, I argue that this bald expression of psychological isolationism is contradicted both by the express terms of the text and the diegesis of the Albertine story from which it is drawn.

Taken together, Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrate that the imagery employed by the narrator to figure other minds and the issues of intersubjectivity do not show him to have succumbed to the subjective idealism, radical doubt and pessimism about knowledge of other minds that some have taken to link Proust with Leibniz and/or Schopenhauer. To the contrary, it suggests that some parts of even the most seemingly remote mind are accessible (something considered in greater detail in Chapter 4 when addressing the relationship with Albertine). Both chapters advance the argument that the relation with Leibniz in particular is more nuanced than is commonly suggested, offering both positive and negative elements, and laying the groundwork for the overarching contention that, while the monadology may be used to figure the problem of other minds, it will form an integral part in the representation of the solution to perhaps its most intractable conundrum (something to which I return in the concluding chapter).

[3] 'Les liens entre un être et nous n'existent que dans notre pensée. La mémoire en s'affaiblissant les relâche, et, malgré l'illusion dont nous voudrions être dupes et dont, par amour, par amitié, par politesse, par respect humain, par devoir, nous dupons les autres, nous existons seuls. L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi, qui ne connaît les autres qu'en soi, et, en disant le contraire, ment.' (IV, 34)

Having started with imagery, the thesis moves in **Part II** to salient elements of the protagonist's 'apprentissage' in theory of mind and mind-reading. My focus is upon mind-reading by the protagonist (rather than other characters), for two reasons: first, his experiences are those that the narrator is best placed to recount and evaluate; secondly, those experiences are the basis for particularly salient pronouncements by the narrator that have been taken to represent his (and even Proust's) view of the problem of other minds.

Chapter 3 focuses on key steps in his acquisition of a so-called 'theory of mind' (i.e. ability to attribute mental states to others), and certain formative scenes where, applying a well-defined cognitive pragmatics, he attempts to read certain characters (including Legrandin, Gilberte and Charlus), unpacking the salient lessons learned. Those lessons include the epistemological benefits and pitfalls of hearsay evidence in the form of 'le potin' (something examined with reference to Norpois, Françoise, Saint-Loup, and Charlus). Adopting an original approach, I draw upon modern theories of mental state attribution that have emerged in the cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind since the 1970s to frame my analysis of the 'theory' and 'practice' of mind-reading depicted in the *Recherche*, to the extent that they assist in illuminating Proust's own handling and instantiation of such central issues as the representational nature of mental intentional states, and the core strategies for mind-reading (including so-called 'theory theory', 'simulation theory', 'interaction theory'), which are so richly exploited in the novel.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that the *Recherche* is (amongst other things) a *celebration* of the skill and mental dexterity involved in learning to read minds competently, of the manifold challenges they present, and of the enlightenment that may be achieved. This is something that much Proustian scholarship appears to have lost sight of.

Chapter 4 examines the extent to which the protagonist's mind-reading efforts are resisted by Albertine – the figure rightly taken by critics to represent the most formidable challenge. It examines, in detail, the boundaries between what is *unknowable* and what is merely *unknown* in relation to this *être de fuite*. Having set the Albertine episode in its literary and philosophical context, I break it down into two 'cycles' (the first trip to Balbec/time spent in Paris; the second trip to Balbec/cohabitation in Paris), on the basis that the protagonist's epistemological focus in the first is different from that in the second. Each cycle is examined, but the weight of analysis is upon the second, in which the protagonist's sexual jealousy has been engaged and he adopts a more exacting approach to mind-reading. The chapter charts the knowledge-acquisition that takes place across the entire episode. Its originality lies principally in its taxonomic approach to the four broad categories of information sought by the protagonist, which facilitates the distinction between that which might be said to be *unknowable* and that which is merely *unknown*. The ambit of unknowability is shown to comprise, at most, Albertine's *qualia* – the qualitative kernel of her experience.

Finally, the study turns to consider what solutions the privileged realm of art might be said (and figured) to provide to the (in)accessibility of *qualia*. The conclusion charts the epiphanic statements made consistently by the narrator about the exclusive power of art to exteriorize and thereby grant access to the unique 'essence qualitative' of the other's mental states, but it challenges the narrator's occasional pronouncements that this is something that conversation *cannot* offer, doing so with reference to the *Recherche* but also what Proust himself wrote elsewhere. The case of Bergotte's oral style (conveyed by its material qualities) is sufficient to disprove the supposedly general rule, but it is not confined to artists since the narrator himself suggests that the oral speech of the *petite bande* and of Albertine herself has qualitatively expressive potential.

In sum, my thesis shows that it is erroneous to maintain that 'all considerations of motive remain hypothetical', that 'Proust's form of subjective idealism rejects the possibility of working out the psychology of other men',[4] or (therefore) that 'Proust […] appears to agree with Marcel about the predicament of insular subjectivity, forever locked out of other minds'.[5] There is often a discernible progression in the protagonist's reading of others. The errors, misunderstanding and even suffering that are shown to bedevil intersubjectivity are the spurs to developing mind-reading skills, acquiring knowledge and discovering the truth (over time) on material questions, however aporetic and painful. What my study offers, above all, is a positive but nuanced antidote to the gloomy appraisal of mind-reading that has gained the ascendancy over recent decades: an argument in favour of irrepressible if heavily qualified optimism.

[4] John Houston, 'Literature and Psychology: The Case of Proust', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 5.1 (1965), 3-13 (5).

[5] Joshua Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

REFERENCES

References to the *Recherche* are by volume and page number to the second Pléiade edition of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié and others, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1987-1989).

The following abbreviations are used to refer to other primary works by Proust:

Corr.	*Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, ed. by Philip Kolb, 21 vols (Paris: Plon, 1970-1993)
Essais	*Essais,* ed. by Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 2022)
Jean Santeuil	*Jean Santeuil*, ed. by Pierre Clarac (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1971)

INTRODUCTION

> Il ne faut pas oublier, lorsqu'on lit Proust, qu'il était un véritable liseur de pensée. Il ne servait de rien, avec lui, de dissimuler. Une pensée émergeait-elle à la surface de votre conscience? Au même moment, Proust marquait par un léger choc qu'il en avait reçu la communication en même temps que vous-même.
>
> Paul Morand[1]

One of the defining features of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and a motor for its originality and enduring appeal, is the granularity, percipience and depth of the narrator's psychological observations. It has deservedly been classed as one of the first modern psychological novels, in its recording of the subjective inwardness of experience.[2] While, since the 1880s, the novels of writers such as Paul Bourget, Marcel Prévost and Joris-Karl Huysmans had turned the focus from the description or evocation of the material world that had so marked the works of naturalists to interiority,[3] Proust used the novel to plumb to new depths the complexity, variability and unpredictability of the human mind.

The *Recherche* is a novel of interiority with both an inward and an outward orientation. On the one hand, slipping between past and present, the narrator episodically reconstructs and dissects the thoughts, feelings and impressions of an embodied consciousness contemplating itself and its encounter with the material world. On the other, the narrator recounts in detail his attempts – driven by 'l'idée de pénétrer dans une vie'[4] – to access the mental life (thoughts, experiences and emotions) of others. It is this latter

[1] 'Notes', in *Hommage à Marcel Proust, 1871-1922*, ed. by Jacques Rivière (Paris: Nouvelle revue française, 1923), 93-95 (95).

[2] See, for example, Leon Edel, *The Modern Psychological Novel* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 11-12.

[3] Michel Raimond, *La Crise du roman: des lendemains du naturalisme aux années vingt* (Paris: Corti, 1966), 33, 45-46, 418, 422-425; Michael Finn, *Figures of the Pre-Freudian Unconscious from Flaubert to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 147.

[4] II, 154.

activity, described in the cognitive sciences as 'mind-reading' and, more specifically 'mental state attribution, prediction, and explanation'[5] (not to be confused with the supernatural phenomenon of telepathy),[6] which is the subject of this study.

The challenge of reading other minds, and the uncertainties and misunderstandings to which it frequently gives rise, pervade the *Recherche*, occasioning much of its drama and comedy, while prompting many of the narrator's most poignant extradiegetic 'explications'.[7] At the psycho-dramatic nadir of relations between the protagonist and Albertine in *La Prisonnière*, the issue is neatly encapsulated in the narrator's cri de cœur about what he feels to be the inaccessibility of her mind:

> je sentais que je touchais seulement l'enveloppe close d'un être qui par l'intérieur accédait à l'infini. Combien je souffrais de cette position où nous a réduits l'oubli de la nature qui, en instituant la division des corps, n'a pas songé à rendre possible l'interpénétration des âmes! [...] car si son corps était au pouvoir du mien, sa pensée échappait aux prises de ma pensée. (III, 888)

The elusiveness of the other's mind is not an issue encountered only vis-à-vis Albertine. Nor is it peculiar to the protagonist. Swann's difficulties in reading Odette and the Verdurins

[5] Shaun Nichols & Stephen P. Stich, *Mindreading: An Integrated Account of Pretence, Self-Awareness, and Understanding Other Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-2. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'mind-reading' more narrowly as '[t]he act or process of discerning (or appearing to discern) what another person is thinking' (Entry 'Mind-reading', Noun, *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, July 2023). In this study, I adopt the broader usage described above.

[6] Telepathy is commonly understood to be 'the supposed communication of thoughts, mental images, etc, from one mind to another by psychic or other paranormal means' (Entry 'Telepathy', Noun, *Oxford English Dictionary*). As Nicholas Royle says in *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), the coinage of the term, in 1882, was 'closely bound up with the more general emergence of spiritualism and psychical research in the second half of the nineteenth century' (3). For a detailed study of the origin of the concept, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). The term *telepathy* ('la télépathie' or a derivative expression) is used on only a handful of occasions in the *Recherche*, drawing on its supernatural and occult connotations with faintly comical intent, to suggest that the phenomenon may (or may not) account for the uncanny ability of one person – especially Françoise – ostensibly to intuit the mental state of another (I, 412; II, 363; III, 606, 869).

[7] In an early genetic study, Albert Feuillerat opined that Proust's 'désir de mettre à nu les mobiles des actions humaines' and his 'goût des explications psychologiques' comprised a major source of the voluminous additions to the novel after 1914: *Comment Marcel Proust a composé son roman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934; repr. 1973), 117.

are at the heart of *Un amour de Swann*, and there are countless instances throughout the novel of other characters' mis-readings of or inability to read one another.

What the narrator offers uniquely in relation to his own interactions with others is a phenomenology of mind-reading: an immersive account of the *experience* of such activity, through accounts of and reflections upon what he observes or infers over time, as epistemically circumscribed by his particular psychological concerns and limitations. His accounts of others are presented not as a sequence of cause and effect, but starting from appearance and impression – like the protagonist's description of characterisation in Dostoevsky, 'nous montr[ant] d'abord l'effet, l'illusion qui nous frappe' (III, 880) – oriented by the observation and impact of others' behaviour, and attempting to work backwards to its psychological cause. Moving between the perspectives of experiencing subject and observer/commentator, the narrator proposes his readings of others' supposed thoughts, but also descriptions of the cognitive processes engaged within his own mind in seeking them out and, very often, (inferentially or otherwise) those of his target in communicating or shielding them.

Such descriptive accounts of the particular in turn provide the material for analysis and general theorizing by the narrator, as part of a relentless radiographic search for explanatory and predictive 'lois psychologiques' (I, 504; II, 523-524; IV, 297, 360). The fragments of philosophy of mind that he dispenses, born of practical experience, are also put to the test. Some of the work of (in)validation is done by the narrator, but much is left to the reader, who must measure theory against the practice embodied in the *récit*.

Finally, the warp and weft of the *Recherche* encompasses more than diegesis and *explications*: the topic of other minds is also the subject of poeticizing imagery, sometimes lyrical and almost invariably spatial. The focus of this study is what the interaction between

these three dimensions of the novel tells us about the accessibility of other minds, covering both the 'theory of mind' which is laconically expounded and the mind-reading seen in action.

I. Critical study of the 'Proustian' mind

Henri Ellenberger was only exaggerating slightly when he said that 'it would be quite feasible to extract from [the *Recherche*] a treatise on the mind'.[8] Many scholarly works have considered the model of the mind that the *Recherche* appears to figure or reflect in its treatment of interiority or of others' sexuality.[9] These works have explored the particular features that characterize or affect the 'Proustian' mind as represented in the novel, including: the unstable, multiple and changing self; the effects of perception, memory, imagination, habit, belief, subjectivity, perspective, emotion, and the passions; the unconscious; the *intermittence* of such cognitive or experiential factors; and, the complicating role of time. What may be broadly categorized as matters of mind have also featured (albeit only in limited respects) in works concerned with the broader sociology or

[8] *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana, 1970; repr. 1994), 168.

[9] In chronological order, the following works are particularly illuminating on a range of psychological topics: Henri Bonnet, *Le Progrès spirituel dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Vrin, 1946), I; Jacques Zéphir, *La Personnalité humaine dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust: essai de psychologie littéraire* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1959); Elizabeth Jackson, *L'Évolution de la mémoire involontaire dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Nizet, 1966); Julius Rivers, *Proust and the Art of Love: The Aesthetics of Sexuality in the Life, Times, and Art of Marcel Proust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Julia Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible: Proust et l'expérience littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994); Emma Wilson, 'Reading Albertine's Sexuality; or, "Why not Think of Marcel Simply as a Lesbian?"', in *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 60-94; Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (London: Fontana Press, 1998); Emily Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea: Homoeroticism and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Inge Crosman Wimmers, *Proust and Emotion: The Importance of Affect in À la recherche du temps perdu* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Joshua Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet', in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; updated edn, 2008); Simon Kemp, *Writing the Mind: Representing Consciousness from Proust to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 17-33; Anna Elsner & Thomas Stern (eds), *The Proustian Mind* (London: Routledge, 2023) (a valuable collection of essays addressing numerous subjects).

social fabric represented in the novel,[10] whether conduct in the salon,[11] or the constraints of friendship,[12] or, more generally, the difficulties of communication that pervade the novel[13] (especially in conversation).[14]

Some of these studies have considered the difficulties depicted by the narrator in grappling with the problem, broadly framed by Benjamin Crémieux, of 'Comment connaître autrui?',[15] whether as part of the broader study of psychology or of otherness in the *Recherche*,[16] or the more systematic and detailed review of relations with others and communication.[17] The topics of communication and mind-reading overlap; in particular, it has 'long been recognised that the act of communicating involves on the part of the communicator and the addressee mutual metarepresentations of each others' mental states'.[18] Josée van de Ghinste observes in her study of communication in the *Recherche*

[10] See, for example, Jacques Dubois, *Pour Albertine: Proust et le sens du social* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); Michael Lucey, *What Proust Heard: Novels and the Ethnography of Talk* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[11] See, for example, Ingrid Wassenaar, *Proustian Passions: The Uses of Self-Justification for À la recherche du temps perdu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[12] See, for example, Bonnet, *Le Progrès spirituel*, I, 169-177; Michael Finn, *Proust, the Body, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[13] See, in particular, Josée van de Ghinste, *Rapports humains et communication dans À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Nizet, 1975), but also Léon Pierre-Quint, *Marcel Proust: sa vie, son œuvre*, 4th edn (Paris: Sagittaire, 1925; rev. edn, 1946), and Phillip Bailey, *Proust's Self-Reader: The Pursuit of Literature as Privileged Communication* (Alabama: Summa, 1997).

[14] Solenne Montier, *Les Interstices de la conversation dans les romans de Proust et de Sarraute* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021); Lucey, *What Proust Heard*.

[15] 'La Psychologie de Marcel Proust', *Revue de Paris*, 5, 31.20 (1924), 838-861 (838-841). See also, for example, Jean-Yves Tadié, *Proust et le roman: essai sur les formes et techniques du roman dans À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 104-180; Vincent Descombes, *Proust: philosophie du roman* (Paris: Minuit, 1987), 84-85.

[16] See, for example, Crémieux, ibid.; Charles Blondel, *La Psychographie de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Vrin, 1932); Zéphir, *La Personnalité humaine*, 34-35, 45-48, 110-117, 162-163, 168-179, 271; Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*; Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*; Erika Fülop, *Proust, the One, and the Many: Identity and Difference in À la recherche du temps perdu* (London: Legenda, 2012), 103-133; Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: Fictions of Life and of Art*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965; rev. edn, 2013).

[17] See, in particular, van de Ghinste, *Rapports humains et communication* (communication); Bailey, *Proust's Self-Reader* (communication). See also: Tadié, *Proust et le roman* (a general work, touching upon the issue *passim*).

[18] Anna Papafragou, 'Mindreading and Verbal Communication', *Mind & Language*, 17.1-2 (2002), 55-67 (55).

that a necessary condition for effective communication is that 'chacun soit accessible, et ouvert aux autres', one that she regards as unfulfilled in the *protagonist's* interactions with others but satisfied by the literary work of the *narrator* (and 'derrière lui Proust, l'auteur').[19] The topics are not, however, coextensive. Face-to-face communication involves a broader 'matrix' of social, communicative and cognitive tasks than mind-reading.[20] Mind-reading therefore warrants separate treatment.

While there have been psychoanalytic readings of the *Recherche*, they have tended to focus upon a narrower field of psychological inquiry than theory of mind and mind-reading. It is generally accepted that Proust had not read any of Freud's works, and it is considered unlikely that he was familiar with his theories (which were little known in France during Proust's lifetime), though he will certainly have encountered philosophical and psychological ideas about the mind that influenced Freud.[21] In the 1920s, René Rousseau and Jacques Rivière were two of the earliest readers to point out analogies between the *Recherche* and the writings of Freud.[22] Since then, the parallels (and divergences) between certain aspects of the *Recherche* and the concerns of psychoanalysis (such as the importance of sexuality and desire, the unconscious, dreams, and childhood experiences) have been considered by numerous scholars, including Malcolm Bowie in his seminal work, *Freud*,

[19] *Rapports humains et communication*, 25, 268-269. In a similar vein, Montier's study of conversation concludes that intersubjectivity in the *Recherche* is so circumscribed as to offer little more than a trace of the other.

[20] Marjorie Barker & T. Givón, 'Representation of the Interlocutor's Mind during Conversation', in *Other Minds: How Humans Bridge the Divide between Self and Others*, ed. by Bertram Malle & Sara Hodges (New York: Guildford Press, 2005), 223-238 (223-224).

[21] See Blondel, *La Psychographie*, 189-190; Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: biographie*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), II, 15; Jack Jordan, 'The Unconscious', in *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*, ed. by Richard Bales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 100-116 (102); Céline Surprenant, 'Freud and Psychoanalysis', in *Marcel Proust in Context*, ed. by Adam Watt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 107-114 (109); Finn, *Figures of the Pre-Freudian Unconscious from Flaubert to Proust*, 1-10, 11-42, 154-186. More is said about this below.

[22] See René Rousseau, 'Marcel Proust et l'esthétique de l'inconscient', *Mercure de France*, 15 January 1922, 361-386; Jacques Rivière, 'Marcel Proust et l'esprit positif', in *Hommage à Marcel Proust, 1871-1922*, 179-187.

Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction.[23] However, even where they are focused upon the mind of the narrator or other characters in the novel,[24] rather than what the novel may be said to reveal about Proust himself,[25] psychoanalytical studies of the Proustian mind(s) tend to encompass or concentrate upon only parts of the inquiries with which theory of mind and the practice of mind-reading are concerned. Broadly speaking, while theory of mind is concerned with *how* one is or becomes able to ascertain the other's thoughts, feelings and other mental states, and mind-reading in practice with determining *what* those mental states are, psychoanalysis is focused upon *why* they have come to have (or repress or deny) such mental states. Theory of mind and mind-reading focus primarily (though not exclusively) upon conscious states of mind, whereas psychoanalysis targets principally the 'unconscious'.[26]

There are areas of overlap however,[27] especially where theory of mind and mind-reading intersect with what Bowie describes as a principal concern of Freud's theories, 'the

[23] Bowie returned to the topic of convergences between the writings of Proust and Freud in 'Proust and Psychoanalysis', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 68.1 (1998), 20-28. Other important works considering the parallels include: Jacques Rivière, *Quelques progrès dans l'étude du cœur humain: Freud et Proust*, in Cahiers Marcel Proust, n.s., 13 (Paris: Gallimard, 1985 [1927]); Blondel, *La Psychographie*; Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le Lac inconnu: entre Proust et Freud* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

[24] See the following important studies in particular: Bersani, *Marcel Proust*, and, 'Death and Literary Authority: Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein', in *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 7-28; Philippe Lejeune, 'Écriture et sexualité', *Europe*, 49 (1971), 113-143; Serge Doubrovsky, *La Place de la Madeleine: écriture et fantasme chez Proust* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1974); Randolph Splitter, *Proust's Recherche: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023 [1981]); Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*; Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible*; Mario Lavagetto, *Chambre 43: un lapsus de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Belin, 1996 [1991]).

[25] See, for example, Milton Miller, *Nostalgia: A Psychoanalytic Account of Marcel Proust* (London: Gollancz, 1957); Jean-Louis Baudry, *Proust, Freud et l'autre* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).

[26] The 'unconscious' dimension of mind has correspondingly received much less attention in studies of 'theory of mind' than the conscious: see Ofri Maor and David Leiser, 'Lay Psychology of the Hidden Mental Life: Attribution Patterns of Unconscious Processes', *Consciousness and Cognition*, 22.2 (2013), 388-401 (390). Maor and Leiser cite (in particular) Henry Wellman, whose 'theory of mind' model concentrates upon the conscious dimensions of thinking, believing, sensing, feeling, etc., though it does allow for the understanding that 'people at times act from […] underground, nonconscious, irrational processes, processes hard to fit within the cognitive rational machinery of belief-desire psychology' (*The Child's Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 312).

[27] Indeed, some psychoanalysts consider that 'mentalization' is part of psychoanalysis (though only when the latter is construed broadly) without one being subsumed by the other, and with 'fertile interconnections in both

indirect, devious and unmasterable routes by which the repressed contents of the unconscious may become available to conscious reflection', including errors, slips, symptoms, mannerisms, and jokes.[28] Although various controversies have called Freudian psychoanalysis seriously into question in recent decades,[29] a number of its theories originated in or are closely related to pre-Freudian thought (with Freud having 'crystallized' pre-existing ideas)[30] allowing some of them to retain a degree of explanatory power – at least in the context of the *Recherche* – even if not one rooted in cognitive science and only by way of loose, unauthoritative analogy. Some of the theories of Freud (or his successors) continue to offer useful insights when ascertaining and interpreting the deep psychic processes that underlie and motivate the conscious mental states and the behaviours (voluntary or involuntary) of the other that mind-reading probes. They may also assist the mind-reader, introspectively, in pinpointing the instinctual urges, needs, desires, and other motivations which may colour, complicate and compromise his own mind-reading endeavour. Accordingly, this study will refer to some psychoanalytical interpretations of the *Recherche* or to so-called 'psychoanalytic tools'[31] where apposite, by way of

directions': 'Mentalization as a process means thinking about what someone does, and what happens between people […] in terms of psychological meaning and motivation. Psychoanalysis clearly contributes unique understanding of particular kinds of motivation (somewhat different kinds depending on the psychoanalytic theory being considered, drive theory, object relations, self psychology, and so on.)' (Mary Target, 'Commentary', in *Mentalization: Theoretical Considerations, Research Findings, and Clinical Implications*, ed. by Fredric Busch (New York: Analytic, 2008), 261-279 (262-263)).

[28] *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, 71. As Jordan observes, 'The Narrator is constantly searching for those revealing moments in human conduct, for any cracks in the conscious constructs that might reveal the hidden unconscious. Like a psychologist, the Narrator observes "Freudian slips" wherever and whenever he can.' ('The Unconscious', 104)

[29] For a work that adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the criticism and defence of psychoanalysis, see the collection of essays, *Philosophy, Science and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Meeting*, ed. by Simon Boag, Linda Brakel, & Vesa Talvitie (London: Karnac, 2015).

[30] Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 548. For a detailed discussion of this aspect of Freudian psychoanalysis, and a more wide-ranging critique and indictment of Freud, see Richard Webster, *Why Freud was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Orwell, rev. edn, 2005). See also Adolf Grünbaum, 'Critique of Psychoanalysis', in *Philosophy, Science and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Meeting*, 17-49 (citing, for example, Leibniz's arguments for 'the occurrence of sub-threshold sensory perceptions, and for the existence of unconscious mental contents or motives that manifest themselves in behaviour').

[31] Julia Peters & Anna-Lisa Sander, 'The Experience of Beauty in Proust – A Freudian Account', in *The Proustian Mind*, 224-235 (227).

convergence or contrast, to what the narrator himself has to say (or does not say) about the reading of others or of himself. However, it will do so sparingly, not only out of an abundance of caution regarding the stringent criticisms of Freud's theories, but heeding (and endorsing) Simon Kemp's salutary observations that undue reliance on psychoanalytic theory may 'obscure the nuances of the uniquely conceived Proustian mind' or take one far from the actual text.[32] Conversely, there are numerous instances where psychoanalytical interpretation would add little or nothing of substance to the narrator's own psychologizing commentary.

To date, there has been comparatively little focus on, and no in-depth study of, the theory of mind and the reading of other minds *as such* as represented in Proust's novel, and where treatment has been given to the topic, it has been predominantly (and bleakly) pessimistic,[33] the salient pronouncements of the narrator on the subject commonly being taken at face value and given the weight of philosophical maxims. What is lacking is a concentrated and holistic probing of this subject, and an assessment of whether the oft-cited pessimism is borne out by the protagonist's experience. How might one resolve the conundrum (identified if not explored by Crémieux) that, while the narrator goes to great lengths to identify and analyse the difficulties (if not impossibility) of reading others, he is nonetheless able to arrive at 'une conscience toujours approximative, mais pourtant nette et relativement complète et exacte de la personne d'autrui'?[34]

[32] 'Postpsychoanalytic Proust', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 75.1 (2014), 77-101 (77, 84-89, 96-97).

[33] See, for example, Carol de Rifelj's comparative study of scepticism regarding other minds, *Reading the Other: Novels and the Problem of Other Minds* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), which includes an essay on the protagonist's difficulties in attempting to 'discover what is going on in Albertine's mind' in *La Prisonnière* (133-162). Rifelj is singled out for citation here because her work focuses on the so-called 'problem(s) of other minds'. Key works of pertinent scholarship are addressed below.

[34] 'La Psychologie de Marcel Proust', 841.

One of the principal aims of this study is to put forward the analytical and evidential basis for a view of mind-reading in the *Recherche* which, if not rosily and naively optimistic, is at least not irredeemably pessimistic (let alone reducible to radical scepticism or solipsism), and therefore to challenge some of the extreme negativity that it is customary to promote as defining the Proustian treatment of other minds. It attempts to situate that treatment within its philosophical, scientific and literary context, to the extent that it usefully informs the question whether the protagonist or narrator subscribes to or reacts against traditional or contemporary thinking about knowledge, and, in particular, to what extent (if at all) either succumbs to radical doubt about the ability to read other minds. However, the focus of the study is upon what the *Recherche* itself has to say or show about their attitude towards and experience of reading others.

II. The 'unknowability' of other minds

Proust was lauded by those who knew him for his uncanny ability to read others' minds from the slenderest verbal or behavioural evidence. Léon Pierre-Quint remarked that he possessed: 'l'art presque miraculeux de deviner les mobiles des hommes, insoupçonnés souvent d'eux-mêmes, les pensées qu'on voulait lui cacher et dont il était averti tout de suite par un don mystérieux'.[35] Similar praise was conferred on Proust (this time as author) in some of the early critical responses to the novel. Reviewing *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* in 1919, Jacques Rivière heralded it as an unprecedented 'monument psychologique', declaring that Proust 'entre dans ses caractères sans brusquerie, mais tout de suite avec profondeur; il les dessine par l'intérieur, s'attachant à en reproduire chaque fibre. C'est un

[35] *Marcel Proust*, 124.

anatomiste.'[36] Similarly, Paul de Belleu wrote of *Le Côté de Guermantes II/Sodome et Gomorrhe I*:

> Observateur remarquable, on sent que rien ne lui échappe. Quand il saisit une personne il semble mettre à nu son cerveau et son cœur et nous montrer toutes les idées qui traversent, ont traversé, traverseront et auraient pu traverser ce cerveau, tous les sentiments qui animent, animèrent, animeront et auraient pu animer ce cœur. […] Nul ne sait comme lui remonter du fait à la cause; et, comme il est des cas où il serait téméraire de prétendre découvrir facilement celle-ci, parfois dissimulée à dessein soigneusement, il se perd en conjectures et en hypothèses. Excellant dans les descriptions et les comparaisons, il ne se laisse pas tromper par les apparences, il enlève rapidement la couche de vernis trompeur et vous révèle la véritable nature d'un homme, toutes ses qualités et tous ses défauts.[37]

However, in the years following the posthumous publication of *La Prisonnière* (1923), *Albertine disparue* (1925) and *Le Temps retrouvé* (1927), charges of pessimism about Proust's views on intersubjectivity (as evidenced by the novel) became increasingly prevalent. Gabriel Marcel appears to have been one of the first to diagnose a 'monadisme proustien' in about 1926,[38] but it was not long before such assessments became the norm.[39]

In his 1932 treatise on the 'psychographie de Marcel Proust', Charles Blondel attributed to Proust the view that it is impossible to achieve 'l'intuition directe des impressions, des sentiments, des émotions d'autrui', that since the other is perceived from the outside and via our senses she remains 'opaque', and worse still, that the culmination of the narrator's reflections on the world, society and individuals is a 'solipsisme radical'[40] that

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[36] 'Marcel Proust', *Excelsior*, 11 December 1919, 4.

[37] 'Un herborisateur humain: Marcel Proust. *À la recherche du temps perdu*, T. IV. *Le Côté de Guermantes II. Sodome et Gomorrhe I*', *La Libre parole*, 1 July 1921, 5.

[38] In *Marcel Proust: sa révélation psychologique* (London: Milford, 1930), at 39, Arnaud Dandieu attributed the criticism to Marcel – an allusion to Marcel's deprecation of 'monadistes proustiens' in his article, 'Note sur l'évaluation tragique', *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, 23 (1926), 68-76 (75). Dandieu himself preferred (summarily) to characterize the novel as swinging between extremes of radical optimism and pessimism.

[39] See Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1931); Blondel, *La Psychographie*; Georges Poulet, *L'Espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 70-71; Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, 4th edn (Paris: Quadrige/Presses universitaires de France, 1964; rev. edn, 1976; repr. 2003), 54-55, 196; Anne Henry, *La Tentation de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2000), 11, 31, 34, 113; Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 17.

[40] *La Psychographie*, 63-69.

treats the subject as isolated and the other as impenetrable. Similarly, the opening lines of Samuel Beckett's famous 1931 monograph announced what he regarded as the 'Proustian equation' – 'The unknown […] is also the unknowable'[41] – proceeding to stake a claim for what he diagnosed as 'Proust's pessimism',[42] as exemplified by the tragic relationship between the protagonist and Albertine. Beckett expressed the 'Proustian' position broadly: the 'impenetrability (isolation) of all that is not "cosa mentale"' entails that there can be no love or friendship because no communication is possible;[43] rehearsing the narrator's drear aphorisms, Beckett summarizes the position: 'We are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known.'[44]

There is no shortage of Proustian scholars who have since espoused this 'unknowability' argument, often with reference to Albertine, but sometimes across the board.[45] It may readily be admitted that, as Emmanuel Lévinas pithily put it, '[l]e mystère chez Proust est le mystère de l'autre.'[46] But, given how vast Proust's depiction of interaction with the other is, the boundaries of this mystery call for definition. An important premise of Leo Bersani's book-length study of the *Recherche* (first published in 1965) was that 'the mystery of other people's personalities is generally dramatized as the mystery of their

[41] *Proust*, 1.

[42] Ibid., 7. Beckett himself was later to admit privately that he had possibly 'overstated Proust's pessimism a little' (John Pilling, 'Beckett's Proust', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 1 (1976), 8-29 (24)).

[43] Ibid., 46.

[44] Ibid., 49.

[45] See below and, for example, Blondel, *La Psychographie*; Alain de Lattre, *La Doctrine de la réalité chez Proust*, 3 vols (Paris: Corti, 1978-1984), II, 175 ('le caractère inaccessible à tout jamais des êtres que nous approchons et que nous voudrions connaître'); Margaret Gray, *Postmodern Proust* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 59 ('[t]he motives of others are consistently unfathomable'); Brian Rogers, *Proust et Barbey d'Aurevilly: le dessous des cartes* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), 182 ('Il ne suffît pas de déchiffrer les signes et les confidences involontaires, l'individualité des autres est inconnaissable'); Christopher Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs: Proust the Skeptic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 37 ('The other in Proust is famously "unknowable"').

[46] 'L'Autre dans Proust', in *Noms propres: Agnon, Buber, Celan, Delhomme* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1976), 117-123 (120).

desires, which usually means their sexual desires'.[47] Such a telescoping proposition focuses the inquiry about other minds in a manner that risks marginalizing the relations that do not concern or centre upon sexual desires or sexual jealousy. It also risks being overly restrictive as to the subject-matter of the mystery, when there is no critical consensus as to *what* precisely is said to be unknowable: for example, unlike Bersani, Jean-François Revel contended that it is only the biographical information of others that is beyond reach (if withheld):

> Ce n'est pas leur caractère, ce ne sont pas leurs sentiments, leurs motifs, leurs passions, leurs pensées qui sont inconnaissables, c'est leur emploi du temps. Personne ne croit en pratique moins que Proust au mystère du dedans.[48]

The risks inherent in such extrapolation also arise in those works, like Nicolas Grimaldi's *La Jalousie*[49] and *Proust: les horreurs de l'amour*,[50] that take as their principal subject the narrower topics of love, sexuality or sexual jealousy, but apply pronouncements made in that context to intersubjectivity more broadly, and conclude that 'l'intériorité de toute personne' is presented as 'inaccessible, toujours soupçonnable et jamais saisissable'.[51]

Conversely, paraphrasing the pronouncements of the narrator that are couched in universal, aphoristic terms may tend to obscure rather than illuminate the question of what one is to derive from the treatment of other minds in the novel as a whole, or from the reading of a particular mind.[52] Particular care is required before lifting absolute statements

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[47] *Marcel Proust*, 43.

[48] *Sur Proust* (Paris: Julliard, 1960), 198.

[49] *La Jalousie: étude sur l'imaginaire proustien* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1993).

[50] *Proust: les horreurs de l'amour* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2008).

[51] *La Jalousie*, 38. See also, for example, André Benhaïm, *Panim: visages de Proust* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2006), 113 ('On ne peut ni connaître, ni posséder l'autre').

[52] For example, Bersani refers to the 'typically Proustian dichotomy between interest and knowledge; whatever engages our feelings thereby becomes unknowable', and, the 'philosophical generalization about the impossibility of our ever knowing what is different from ourselves', *Marcel Proust*, 172, 242.

out of context, but caution is also required even where generalizing in more qualified terms. Jean-Yves Tadié's magisterial *Proust et le roman* takes the position that the form and content of the *Recherche* are geared to underscore 'l'impossibilité d'une connaissance *absolue*' or, in other words, 'l'impossibilité où nous sommes de nous renseigner *exactement* sur autrui' (emphasis added).[53] But, the granular albeit anecdotal detail of Tadié's study, like that of Liza Gabaston's subsequent work on body language,[54] serves to highlight the tension between the various generalizing pronouncements by the narrator expressing pessimism about knowledge of other minds, and the many successful readings performed by the protagonist. Moreover, as Gabaston observes regarding the role of 'signes corporels' as a means of discerning the other's thoughts, it enabled Proust to 'introduire une activité herméneutique très variée'.[55] What such critical works highlight is, therefore, the need to test fragmentary extradiegetic commentary against mind-reading in action.

This is in effect the gauntlet thrown down in general terms by Vincent Descombes in his seminal study, *Proust: philosophie du roman*, which challenged the privileged 'philosophical' status ordinarily conferred upon general and abstract passages of the *Recherche*, urging one to question whether the pronouncements of the narrator are reflected or contradicted by the substance of the text itself. For, as Paul de Man famously declared, the novel 'does not practice what it preaches';[56] and, as Descombes pertinently remarks (echoing Crémieux), while 'Proust théoricien invoque volontiers le dogme de la clôture des consciences', the narrator is 'parfois doté d'une telle clairvoyance qu'on en vient à se

[53] Ibid., 58, 128. To similar effect, see Elisabeth Ladenson, 'Sexuality', in *Marcel Proust in Context*, ed. by Adam Watt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 115-122 (116).

[54] *Le Langage du corps dans À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011). The same is true of van de Ghinste's study of communication in the *Recherche*: *Rapports humains et communication*.

[55] Ibid., 193.

[56] *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 15. See, in a similar vein: Gérard Genette, 'Proust palimpseste', in *Figures I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 39-67 (53); Antoine Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 50.

demander comment les êtres peuvent lui être aussi transparents'.[57] Indeed, the pronouncements are not even always internally consistent.

Joshua Landy's project, in *Philosophy as Fiction*, was to 'extract' a coherent philosophy of mind from the *Recherche*, seeking to identify the novel's 'general theory about minds and their relations with the world'.[58] Landy's position is that the novel exhibits 'a widespread skepticism concerning knowledge of other minds',[59] and the reader must 'take seriously one of the central motifs […] monadic isolation'.[60] Following a well-trodden path, 'the fundamental unknowability of other people in general' is said to be represented by the case of Albertine,[61] and the study contains a deeply insightful discussion of some particular difficulties, ambiguities and shortcomings in the protagonist's attempts to read her.[62] More will be said in **Chapter 4** about this analysis and the 'will to ignorance' on the part of the protagonist that Landy finds evidenced in the short scene involving Albertine's kimono (III, 581-582). Paul Sheehan's similar attempt to 'extract' a theory of mind from the *Recherche* is concerned more with the protagonist's motivation for (unsuccessful) mind-reading and indulging in 'miscognition' than with the exploration of the limits of mind-reading depicted in the novel, and his conclusion is the now commonplace one that it involves the 'bleak prognosis that "there can be no direct knowledge" of other people – Albertine's closedness, her mental "unreadability" being a case in point'.[63]

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[57] *Proust*, 53.

[58] *Philosophy as Fiction*, 8-9.

[59] Ibid., 142 (see also 17).

[60] Ibid., 17.

[61] Ibid., 169 (fn. 40); 172 (fn. 56). See, to similar effect, Richard Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation: Self and Society in the French Novel from the Realists to Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 230.

[62] Ibid., 85-100.

[63] 'Atmospheric Changes: Proust, Mind-Reading, and Errancy', in *The Fictional Minds of Modernism: Narrative Cognition from Henry James to Christopher Isherwood*, ed. by Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 157-178 (173-174).

Although the disheartening 'unknowability' argument has become an orthodoxy amongst Proustian scholars, a handful have disputed it, pointing in general terms to the contradiction between the narrator's negative declarations and the overall tenor of the evidence in the novel as a whole.[64] Erring on the side of pessimism, Martha Nussbaum concludes that, while in love the 'heart and mind of another are unknowable, even unapproachable', she cannot draw any overall conclusions about the novel's account of knowledge of others because of what it has to say about art and artists (most euphorically at IV, 474), but:

> I do think it fair to say that the novel as a whole discourages optimism about knowledge of another within personal love and appears to endorse Marcel's solipsistic conclusion, by showing all apparently hopeful cases of loving to be based upon some kind of self-deception.[65]

These careful reservations and Landy's more negative conclusions both provide impetus for the inquiry at the heart of this study: to question the basis for the 'unknowability' argument and its true scope.

Leaving aside the sometimes posited case of solipsism (which, in some guises, presupposes that no knowledge at all of others is feasible),[66] *what* precisely is said or shown to be unknowable, and the cognitive acquisition of *what content* and *with what degree of conviction*, if any, would or might suffice to render the matter 'knowable' (so far as it is

[64] Morris Weitz, *Philosophy in Literature: Shakespeare, Voltaire, Tolstoy & Proust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 86; Raimond, *La Crise du roman*, 436; Descombes, *Proust*, 53. Examining the expressive role sometimes played by the body in the *Recherche*, Anne Simon has also sought to 'rééquilibrer la balance critique qui s'est jusqu'à présent majoritairement penchée sur l'approche monadique du rapport à autrui chez Proust': 'Proust ou le corps expressif malgré lui', *Littérature*, 119 (2000), 52-64 (54).

[65] 'Love's Knowledge', in *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 261-285 (271 and 274 (fn. 18)).

[66] The argument for solipsism is deservedly dismissed out of hand by Prendergast in *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, though it has its adherents: see, for example, Grimaldi, *La Jalousie*, 46, and *Proust*, 13; Rae Langton, 'Love and Solipsism', in *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 357-381, for whom the protagonist is guilty of moral, epistemological and metaphysical solipsism (376-377).

possible to tell from the *Recherche*)? Or, better still, might any such matters in fact be 'known' by the protagonist? And, against this background, what is it that art is said to offer that ordinary mind-reading does not or cannot? It will be contended that attending to these questions, when examining the theory of mind promulgated by the narrator and the protagonist's mind-reading experience, reveals the field of 'unknowability' to be far more circumscribed than the narratorial pronouncements (and the critical appraisals that cite or paraphrase them) tend to suggest.

III. Philosophy, psychology, and the 'problem of other minds'

The treatment of psychology in the *Recherche* draws upon, interrogates and occasionally pokes fun at a breathtakingly broad array of philosophical and psychological ideas that were 'in the air' in the decades before World War I. Proust's reading of philosophy at school, university and beyond has been examined in some detail, especially by Anne Henry and Luc Fraisse. Fraisse's account is the most thoroughgoing to date, and demonstrates that the approach adopted by Proust in the novel is one of eclecticism rather than strict adherence to the thought of any of the great thinkers that fed into his *culture philosophique*.[67] While there was no developed body of learning on theory of mind or mind-reading as such, developments in other areas of psychology and philosophy formed an important part of the backdrop to their treatment in the *Recherche*.

1. The science of psychology in France

As Elisabeth Czoniczer explained in her survey of the intellectual milieu in France from 1870-1914, the *fin de siècle* (whose intellectual preoccupations heavily infuse the *Recherche*) was a period in which disillusionment with religion coincided with a loss of

[67] *L'Éclectisme philosophique de Marcel Proust* (Paris: PUPS, 2013). See also: Anne Henry, *Marcel Proust: théories pour une esthétique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1981), 76-97.

faith in the ability of science and reason to provide answers to the most essential questions.[68] However, it was also an era in which great advances were made in areas of science concerned with the workings of the mind, entering into mysteries which had hitherto been the province of philosophy and spiritualism. Where established sciences (including medicine) had featured in the literary works of Balzac, Zola and others, the emerging science of psychology, sharing much common ground with the subject-matter, preoccupations and insights of 'psychological' literature, offered an even more natural source of literary inspiration to some authors including, perhaps most prominently (prior to the *Recherche*), Paul Bourget.

It was only during the period 1870-1890 that psychology emerged as a scientific discipline in its own right in France, where previously it had been an abstract and introspective philosophical concern, prone to entanglement with metaphysics.[69] At the vanguard of the move to put it on a scientific footing were Hippolyte Taine and Théodule Ribot who championed a psychology based upon observation, experiment and physiology, accumulating and recording 'faits psychologiques' (sensations, feelings, desires, personality etc) in their minutest detail and 'les manifestations spontanées et concrètes de l'esprit',[70] and searching for laws, rather than employing *a priori* thinking or purely introspective (or metaphysical) modes of inquiry. Both thinkers placed the spotlight on the instability, complexities and aberrations of the human mind, Taine disrupting the notion of a unified self, and Ribot considering such issues as dual or multiple personality under the rubric of

[68] *Quelques antécédents de 'À la recherche du temps perdu': tendances qui peuvent avoir contribué à la cristallisation du roman proustien* (Geneva: Droz, 1957), 22, 30-31.

[69] Jacqueline Carroy & Régine Plas, 'The Origins of French Experimental Psychology: Experiment and Experimentalism', *History of the Human Sciences*, 9.1 (1996), 73–84; Serge Nicolas, 'Théodule Ribot: la psychologie et l'évolutionnisme', in *Darwin au Collège de France*, ed. by Antoine Compagnon & Céline Surprenant (Collège de France, 2020). See also Paul Janet & Gabriel Séailles, *Histoire de la philosophie: les problèmes et les écoles* (Paris: Delagrave, 1887), 24-39 (the manual used to teach philosophy at the Sorbonne when Proust attended).

[70] Ribot, *La Psychologie allemande contemporaine (école expérimentale)* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1879), 41.

psychopathology. These developments, along with the promotion of the concept of the unconscious which gained impetus with the publication in 1877 of *Philosophie de l'Inconscient* (the translation of Eduard von Hartmann's work on the unconscious), influenced numerous French novelists from the 1880s.[71]

As is well documented,[72] Proust was deeply knowledgeable about not only the philosophy but the pre-Freudian psychological thinking of his time, including Taine's *De l'intelligence*[73] and Ribot's principal works. Under the rubric of philosophy, Proust was taught about psychology (including the nascent experimental psychology) as part of the baccalaureat in 1888-1889[74] and his degree in literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1893 to 1895. His family and friends also offered him a reservoir of learning on medicine and psychology.[75]

While the *Recherche* is anything but objectively scientific, and eschews the sort of scientism and materialism associated with Taine and Ribot,[76] what it shares with the scientific tradition of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth is its concern with the minute granular detail or nuance of observable psychological 'facts', the deep recesses and the involuntary aspects of mind, and the inductive formulation of psychological laws. It goes, however, beyond the purportedly objective rationalism of science, placing weight

[71] Raimond, *La Crise du roman*, 416-427; Finn, *Figures of the Pre-Freudian Unconscious*, 147-152.

[72] See, for example, Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 169-172, 198-200; Finn, *Proust, the Body, and Literary Form*, 41-56; Fraisse, *L'Éclectisme*, 847-881; Henry, *Marcel Proust: théories pour une esthétique*, 330; Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible*, 448 et seq.

[73] 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1870).

[74] Fraisse, *L'Éclectisme*, 89, 95-97, 103.

[75] Czoniczer, *Quelques antécédents*, 34-35.

[76] See, for example, Terdiman, *Present Past*, 169-172. Sartre was unfairly critical of the 'psychologie de Proust', dismissing it as 'celle de Ribot' (though see Lévinas' comments in 'L'Autre dans Proust', 118, 120). Proust in fact described Ribot disparagingly as a 'philosophe de 25e ordre': letter to Walter Berry, 14 March 1919, *Corr.*, XVIII, 140-142 (140).

not only on intellect but on impression and intuition, and exploring the perspectival, situational, embodied and temporal aspects of psychology and intersubjectivity as subjectively experienced.

2. German idealism in *fin-de-siècle* France: Leibniz and Schopenhauer

Sabrina Martina has traced in detail the *fin-de-siècle* 'Leibniz-Renaissance' which occurred in philosophy in France and elsewhere, spurred by (amongst other things) the publication in the 1880s of French editions of two of Leibniz's key works, *La Monadologie*[77] and *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*,[78] by two prominent 'spiritualistes', Émile Boutroux and Henri Lachelier.[79] Aspects of this philosophy are addressed in **Chapters 1** and **2** (in particular) of this study, where relevant to the narrator's commentary on the problem(s) posed by other minds, and their spatial representation in the novel.

French philosophical and literary circles at the end of the nineteenth century were profoundly influenced by German romanticism, the transcendental idealism of Kant and the particular brand of neo-Kantism presented with such potency in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1819). This culminated in what Anne Henry described as 'la vogue de Schopenhauer'[80] that saw his magnum opus seduce writers across Europe.[81] At the very core of this idealism was the distinction between appearance and reality or, in Kantian terms, between knowable *phenomenon* and unknowable *noumenon*, foregrounding

[77] (Paris: Delagrave, 1881).

[78] (Paris: Hachette, 1886).

[79] *Proust et Leibniz* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), 89 et seq.

[80] *Marcel Proust: théories pour une esthétique*, 76.

[81] Anne Henry, *Proust* (Paris: Balland, 1986), 60; Arnaud François, 'Schopenhauer's French Reception', in *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, ed. by Sandra Shapsay (Cham: Springer, 2017), 473-483.

at the most fundamental level, the limits of human knowledge. From the time that his work was first properly introduced by Ribot's *La Philosophie de Schopenhauer*,[82] he was also associated in France with pessimism.

The epithets central to the argument that other minds in the *Recherche* are 'unknowable' ('inconnaissable' and 'inaccessible', or the more graphic alternative, 'impénétrable')[83] tap into this *fin-de-siècle* zeitgeist. While the terms were apt to be used interchangeably, *inconnaissable* may be said to emphasize the passive aspect of psychological remoteness, while the terms *inaccessible* and *impénétrable* may be said to connote its active aspect, suggesting that the other is 'impossible à atteindre' (II, 213). In her extensive conspectus of idealism in late nineteenth-century French literature, Sandrine Schiano-Bennis describes the word *inconnaissable* as 'le terme fort prisé de l'époque', attached to the literary treatment of all manner of epistemological subject-matter, not merely other minds, but the external world (and even the self).[84] The term *inaccessible* was also common currency in idealist circles, enshrined in Remy de Gourmont's pithy summary of the *Weltanschauung*: 'le monde est ma représentation, c'est-à-dire le monde est tel qu'il me paraît; s'il a une existence en soi, réelle, elle m'est inaccessible'.[85]

Numerous critics have identified Schopenhauerian influences on the *Recherche*.[86] Anne Henry even advanced the controversial argument that Proust merely transposed into

[82] (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1874).

[83] See, for example: I, 84, 140, 387, 399; II, 152, 155, 199, 227, 329, 659; III, 570, 612, 886-887, IV, 15, 197.

[84] *La Renaissance de l'idéalisme à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), 354.

[85] 'Les Racines de l'idéalisme', in *Promenades philosophiques*, 1e série, 12th edn (Paris: Mercure de France, 1925 [1905]), 79-105 (80).

[86] The roll call includes: Anne Henry (works cited below); Beckett, *Proust*; Harold March, *The Two Worlds of Marcel Proust* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948; repr. 2016), 16-17; Milton Hindus, *The Proustian Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 78-121; Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible*, 450-468 (465); Fraisse, 'Du côté de Schopenhauer?', in *L'Éclectisme*, 735-845; Michael Forster, 'Proust and Romanticism', in *The Proustian Mind*, 363-383 (367).

novelistic form the aesthetic elements of Schopenhauer's philosophy (and that of Schelling).[87] Henry's reading has been disputed cogently by Fraisse (amongst others), showing the relationship to be asymptotic rather than coincident.[88] Indeed, Duncan Large argues to the contrary that Proust reacted *against* Schopenhauer,[89] with the narrator appearing to overcome the Schopenhauerian pessimism apparent in earlier statements with an affirmative, Nietzschean 'pessimism of strength' at the end of the novel.[90]

So far as concerns intersubjectivity, the narrator's famously gloomy pronouncement on the subject in *Albertine disparue* is almost certainly the *fons et origo* of the 'unknowability' argument:

> Les liens entre un être et nous n'existent que dans notre pensée. La mémoire en s'affaiblissant les relâche, et, malgré l'illusion dont nous voudrions être dupes et dont, par amour, par amitié, par politesse, par respect humain, par devoir, nous dupons les autres, nous existons seuls. L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi, qui ne connaît les autres qu'en soi, et, en disant le contraire, ment. (IV, 34)

Such theoretical articulations of the difficulties and deceptions of human connection had a strong philosophical pedigree in the works of Leibniz and of Schopenhauer and other idealist thinkers whom he inspired, works that Fraisse has shown to be essential parts of Proust's *culture philosophique*. It is not worth dwelling on the question how such influence made its way to the *Recherche*, since there are multiple possibilities without it being possible

[87] Henry, *Marcel Proust: théories pour une esthétique*; *Proust romancier: le tombeau égyptien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983); *Proust* (1986); 'Proust du côté de Schopenhauer', in *Schopenhauer et la création littéraire en Europe* ed. by Christian Berg & Anne Henry (Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1989), 149-164.

[88] *L'Éclectisme*, 313 et seq., and 762. See, to similar effect, Jean-Yves Tadié, *Proust* (Paris: Belfond, 1983), 209-210; David Bather Woods, 'Proust and Schopenhauer', in *The Proustian Mind*, 384-396.

[89] *Nietzsche and Proust: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 12-13.

[90] Ibid., 31-32.

or necessary to adjudicate between the philosophical[91] or literary/critical vehicles[92] potentially involved. More will be said in **Chapter 2** about this passage and its (over-) promotion by the proponents of Proustian pessimism regarding other minds. In the meantime, it suffices to note that, while Descombes ascribes it to a subjective idealism said to be expressed in Schopenhauer's magnum opus,[93] on its face the passage quoted above does not appear to go so far, and Schopenhauer's form of transcendental idealism did not in fact involve radical scepticism, subjective idealism or solipsism; to the contrary, he abjured such thinking as 'theoretical egoism'.[94] Instead, and more pertinently, Schopenhauer highlighted the lack of direct, unmediated access to the outside world or others, and a concomitant lack of immediate certainty about them.[95] The notion of a distinction between *direct* knowledge (perceptual or otherwise) and *indirect* knowledge (mediated, inferential and/or analogic) is one that affects knowledge not only of other minds but of the external world generally, and is a recurring theme of the *Recherche*.

[91] For example, the introductory section of *Essai sur le génie dans l'art*, a work by Proust's philosophy and aesthetics professor at the Sorbonne, Gabriel Séailles: 'On ne sort pas de soi, on ne devient pas la conscience d'un être étranger à soi. [...] Le monde est ma représentation, ses phénomènes sont mes idées, il n'existe pour moi que par ma pensée, dont il doit prendre la forme' (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1883), 12.

[92] Literary/critical works bemoaning the 'monadic' aspect of the human condition were manifold, but include those of Anatole France, one of Proust's favourite authors: for example, *Le Jardin d'Épicure* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1895), 77, or the preface to *La Vie littéraire*, 1[e] série (Paris: Calmann-Lévy: 1888), iv; and Maurice Barrès' *Les Déracinés*: 'nous ne connaissons en soi ni les corps, ni les esprits, mais seulement nos rapports avec les mouvements d'une réalité inconnue et à jamais inconnaissable' (Paris: Charpentier, 1897), 192.

[93] *Proust*, 54.

[94] *The World as Will and Representation*, tr. by E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols (New York: Dover, 1969), I, 104, discussed by Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 148-149.

[95] 'Il est évident en effet que personne ne peut sortir de soi pour s'identifier immédiatement avec des choses différentes, et que tout ce dont nous sommes sûrs, tout ce dont nous avons une conscience immédiate, réside dans notre conscience. En dehors ou au-dessus d'elle, il ne peut y avoir de certitude immédiate' (*Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation*, trans. by Auguste Burdeau, 2 vols (Paris: Alcan, 1889), II, 141 (the particular French translation of the work that Proust is believed to have consulted)).

3. The 'problem of other minds'

One of the distinctive characteristics of the *Recherche* is, as Antoine Compagnon has observed, that 'tout dans l'œuvre est mixte, hybride, intermédiaire'.[96] The treatment of other minds is no exception. It blends elements of idealist thinking about the mysteries of the mind (and the limitations felt to circumscribe the acquisition of knowledge) with a more ambitious, optimistic and modern concern for the transcription and analysis of observable or inferable facts. It identifies and explores the paths or obstacles to intersubjectivity falling under the rubrics of what would be designated in more modern times as the 'problem of other minds', 'theory of mind', and mind-reading. It would be several decades before such issues would become the focus of detailed, systematic psychological inquiry in the cognitive sciences. In the meantime, they remained within the purview and at the periphery of Western philosophical thought and, even then, only in the most rarefied and elementary form.

The so-called 'problem of other minds' is one which has periodically vexed philosophers, especially since Descartes divided knowledge of our conscious mind or subject from that of all else.[97] But, while philosophers have long discussed the subject, there has not been agreement on precisely what the 'problem' is or whether it may be resolved. One distinction has usefully been drawn between a so-called 'epistemological' problem and a 'conceptual' problem. Anita Avramides identifies the *epistemological* problem as sub-dividing into two separate questions: how can we know that another human being has a mind at all (and thinks, feels etc)? how can we know (or be justified in our belief as to) what the other thinks, feels etc?[98] Søren Overgaard helpfully formulates the *conceptual* problem

[96] *Proust entre deux siècles*, 13.

[97] For a detailed historical (philosophical) account, see Avramides, *Other Minds* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[98] *Other Minds*, 218-219.

as 'the conceivability of mental states that aren't mine'.[99] In addition, there is the practical issue of how one actually goes about reading other minds (the methods and cognitive mechanisms involved) – something that Overgaard calls the 'empirical' problem of other minds.[100] While the narrator in the *Recherche* does not concern himself with the question of whether others have a mind at all,[101] he repeatedly raises the *empirical* question of what methods may be used to acquire knowledge of others' thoughts, emotions etc, and the *epistemological* question of whether he can truly know (or be justified in believing) what they think or feel. Less frequently but no less importantly, he comes to raise the *conceptual* problem of how we can have a conception of mind applicable not only to our own, but to the minds of others.

4. Navigating the empirical problem of other minds: modern 'theory of mind' and mind-reading

Precise counterparts to what are today termed 'philosophy of mind' and 'theory of mind' did not exist at the time when Proust was writing, being the product of later twentieth-century developments in a multitude of disciplines.[102] While the (in)accessibility and content of other minds had long been a staple of literature in France and elsewhere, the topic

[99] 'Other Minds Embodied', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 50 (2017), 65-80 (67). Philosophical consideration of this topic in recent years is often traced back to Wittgenstein, especially his proposition that 'to imagine someone else's pain on the model of one's own […] is none too easy a thing to do: for I have to imagine pain which I *do not feel* on the model of pain which I *do feel*' (*Philosophical Investigations* (New York: MacMillan, 1958), Part I, §302, 101). See the discussion in Anil Gomes, 'Is There a Problem of Other Minds?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 111.3 (2011), 353-373 (354, 362).

[100] Ibid., 68.

[101] The issue was raised in passing by the neo-Kantian, Jules Lachelier, in *Du fondement de l'induction*, 2nd edn (Paris: Alcan, 1896), 50-51, a work with which Proust was familiar: Lachelier advocated the rejection of subjective idealism or scepticism, in favour of the objective idealism of Kant (ibid., 53, 86). In *La Doctrine de la réalité chez Proust*, Alain de Lattre seeks to demonstrate that the 'relativité psychologique' at work in the *Recherche* means that it does not move beyond subjective idealism: II, 175-176. However, this appears unsustainable: subjective idealism is both mocked by the narrator (II, 501; III, 315) and plainly rejected (for example, II, 857 & IV, 492).

[102] Mark Micale, 'The Modernist Mind: A Map', in *The Mind of Modernism*, ed. by Mark Micale (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1-20 (10). See also the overview in Kemp, *Writing the Mind*, 4-13.

was one that attracted relatively limited and occasional attention from philosophers (or psychologists) until the 'explosion' of interest in the middle decades of the twentieth century.[103] The limited forays into the topic included that of Malebranche, who opined that knowledge of others' thoughts and feelings may only be acquired 'par conjecture' based on inference from one's own, not through *direct* consciousness of them,[104] providing an exposition of the classic argument from analogy which is the forebear of modern inductive models of mind-reading.

Nor had matters developed significantly by the late nineteenth century. The philosophy manual written by Élie Rabier, *Leçons de philosophie*,[105] that was used to teach lycéens including Proust, touched upon the issue of other minds when explaining the impetus behind the new experimental, scientific psychology. In the volume entitled 'Psychologie' (1884), the need for an outward-looking approach which eschews pure introspection is framed in philosophical, almost metaphysical terms, casually appropriating (if not caricaturing) the monadology of Leibniz in order to dramatize the pitfalls of relying exclusively upon inward contemplation and simple extrapolation as the basis for a rigorous discipline of psychology:

> La conscience est absolument individuelle; la conscience de chacun lui apprend ce qui se passe en lui-même, non ce qui se passe chez autrui. Rien au monde d'aussi bien clos que les consciences: elles n'ont pas, disait Leibniz, de fenêtres par où l'on puisse voir du dehors dans leur for intérieur. Ainsi ma conscience ne me parle que de moi-même: or il n'y a pas de science de l'individu. […] Voudrai-je, par hasard, ériger en loi générale ce que j'aurai

[103] Avramides, *Other Minds*, 4-5, 15.

[104] Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité*, ed. by Francisque Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1880 [1674-1675]), I, Book III, Pt 2, Ch. VII, §V, 339-340. See also: John Locke, who held that, unless and until thoughts and feelings are communicated (by words or conduct), they are 'invisible': *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 [1689]), Book III, Ch. II, §1, 404-405; John Stuart Mill, who argued that knowledge of other minds comes through inference, from observation of 'acts and other manifestations' by the other's body, based on 'personal knowledge' of one's own: *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy and of the Principal Philosophical Questions Discussed in His Writings*, 6th edn (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), 242-245.

[105] 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1884-1886).

> trouvé en moi-même? Alors cette prétendue science pourra pécher par deux endroits: *par excès* ou *par défaut*.[106]

In his discussion of Leibniz's influence on the treatment of intersubjectivity in the *Recherche*, Fraisse quotes part of this passage, and an equivalent passage in the exercise book of one of Proust's near contemporaries which transcribes lessons given by his philosophy teacher, Alphonse Darlu.[107] The role that the monadology has to play is considered in subsequent chapters, but it is noteworthy that the teaching of psychology at this time should take as its starting point the proposition that nothing in the world is as closed to others as the human mind, framing the issue as one of constraint (a point explored in **Chapter 1**). It is also notable that the psychology being developed and discussed during this period was focused upon the formulation of general laws applicable to any mind as a subject, rather than the particular issues or laws applicable to the empirical (cognitive) process of any one such mind attempting to read another.

The pioneering research in developmental psychology by the Swiss polymath Jean Piaget from the 1920s laid the foundations for more modern work on cognitive development in infants and young children, exploring (amongst other things) the stage at which they are able to see others as agents whose actions are driven by causal mental states (such as intentions, desires, beliefs).[108] But, it was not until the 1970s that the expression 'theory of mind' was coined in cognitive science and philosophy of mind to refer to the ability of an

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[106] Ibid., I, 37.

[107] 'Par suite de tous les liens qui unissent chacun de nous à nos semblables, notre esprit reconnaît dans les corps vivants qui ressemblent au nôtre des êtres de même nature, et il suppose en eux des consciences. Mais ces consciences lui sont insaisissables, invisibles; de même ce qui se passe dans sa conscience est fermé aux autres' (Alphonse Darlu, *Cours de philosophie professé au lycée Henri IV (1884-1885)*, transcribed by J. Delamarre, Bibliothèque numérique de la Sorbonne, MS 1787, fol. 8^{r-v}; quoted in Fraisse, *L'Éclectisme*, 722).

[108] Henry Wellman, 'Understanding the Psychological World: Developing a Theory of Mind', in *Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Cognitive Development*, ed. by Usha Goswami (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 167-187 (168). More will be said in **Chapter 3** about Piaget's assumption that cognitive development takes place in successive 'stages'.

individual to impute mental states to others (or oneself), and to interpret and predict their behaviour.[109] This more contemporary research has explored the development and functioning of this 'mentalistic' reading of others in great depth, identifying the central factor as the understanding of the *representational* nature of mental intentional states.[110] One of two dominant theoretical approaches has traditionally been taken to account for this 'mind-reading' ability: first, the so-called *theory theory* of mind, which posits that an individual applies basic theoretical rules or laws of 'folk psychology' (acquired innately or developed) to infer the other's state of mind;[111] secondly, the s*imulation theory* of mind, an heuristics by which one 'puts oneself into the other's shoes', using one's own mind as a model to impute state of mind.[112] A hybrid theory has also been propounded, in which simulation works with assistance from theory.[113] All these theories presuppose that the other's mind and mental states are hidden and not *directly* observable or accessible. By contrast, a further theory (sometimes labelled *interaction theory*) has also been proposed, a phenomenological and situational approach according to which 'the mind of the other is not entirely hidden or private, but is given and manifest in the other person's embodied comportment'.[114] That is, only some aspects of mind are 'inaccessible', while others may be manifest. Important limitations on this theory – particularly germane to mind-reading in

[109] The expression originated in a paper by David Premack and Guy Woodruff, 'Does the Chimpanzee have a Theory of Mind?', *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1.4 (1978), 515-526 (515).

[110] György Gergely, 'The Development of Understanding Self and Agency', in *Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Cognitive Development*, ed. by Usha Goswami (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 26-46 (43-44).

[111] No system of formal rules has actually been articulated: the psychologist Ian Apperly supposes that this is because mind-reading is not codifiable, but as open-ended as linguistic discourse processing: *Mindreaders: The Cognitive Basis of "Theory of Mind"* (Sussex: Psychology Press, 2011), 123.

[112] Alvin Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

[113] Gregory Currie & Ian Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50-54. Note that there are widely divergent views on what each theory entails and how it operates in practice: ibid., 49-52.

[114] Shaun Gallagher, 'Understanding Interpersonal Problems in Autism: Interaction Theory as an Alternative to Theory of Mind', *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology*, 11.3 (2004), 199-217 (204).

the *Recherche* – are that, first, the significance of such manifestations may not be self-evident but require them to be deciphered;[115] and, secondly, even this phenomenological approach does not go far as to suggest that we can experience the other's mental state in the same way that she does or that her mind is accessible in precisely the same way as our own.[116]

Elements of all these theories find equivalents in the narrator's various dicta about, and in his practice of, mind-reading, without them being drawn into anything like a single theory. However, a thread common to all (in the *Recherche* just as in modern theory) is the fundamental requirement that the mind-reader must appreciate not only that the other's behaviour is motivated by mental states, but that those mental states may not correspond representationally with reality or truth, i.e. they may hold false beliefs, and that those beliefs may differ from those of the mind-reader himself (or others) regarding the same subject matter.[117] The idea that the separation of minds gives rise to such discrepancies is one of the principal motifs in the *Recherche*, richly exploited to stage countless scenes of misunderstanding.

As Overgaard explains, one is confronted by a tension between competing intuitions when considering whether other minds are 'accessible'.[118] On the one hand, the visible manifestation of mental states (such as pain, embarrassment) which are expressed in universal form suggest that it is too categorical to assert that the other's mind is entirely

[115] This aligns with the reading of the *Recherche* espoused by Anne Simon: 'Autrui […] est bien opaque, et les signes qu'il émet sont donc à décrypter en permanence' (*Trafics de Proust* (Paris: Herman, 2016), 99).

[116] Shaun Gallagher & Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2020), 209-210 (drawing on the works of Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Lévinas).

[117] The use of 'false belief' tests has been an important feature of modern work in cognitive science on the development of theory of mind ever since a landmark paper published by Heinz Wimmer and Josef Perner in 1983. More will be said in **Chapter 3** about the nature of such tests, and the use of equivalents in the *Recherche*.

[118] 'Rethinking Other Minds: Wittgenstein and Levinas on Expression', *Inquiry*, 48.3 (2005), 249-274.

closed off. On the other, the conception of the body as shielding at least some aspects of psychological activity or characteristics from view has some intuitive validity since they may either be incapable of manifestation or not in fact manifested. It will be argued that, in the *Recherche*, the narrator's pronouncements on accessibility (and the spatial imagery that he employs) reflect this tension and are labile, but that his experience demonstrates – and his commentary acknowledges – that, even in some of the most challenging cases, the affective and conative states of the other are often visibly available and the same is true of her thoughts.

As the *Recherche* shows time and again, however, mere accessibility does not of itself guarantee mind-reading success. Not only does the evidence have to be interpreted, but the interpretation may have to be authenticated: the contents of a mind may be accessible without the protagonist necessarily being able to say whether his particular reading is accurate.[119] While the adoption of third-person narration for *Un amour de Swann* offers an ostensibly authenticated view of insights provided as to Swann's mental states, the same cannot generally[120] be said of the readings performed or reported elsewhere in the first person, requiring confirmation either from the other herself or from some third party acting as 'un narrateur informé' (IV, 131).

Entangled with this process of authentication is the issue of objectivity or reliability. Mind-reading involves both a selective process of evidence gathering and a prismatic

[119] David Herman, 'Introduction', in *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*, ed. by David Herman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 1-40 (10-11), citing Lubomir Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[120] Some scenes at which the protagonist was not even present, such as the death of Bergotte (III, 692), involve the narrator transgressively slipping into omniscience to report the thoughts of others, as Genette pointed out: 'Discours du récit', in *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 67-273 (221). Such instances, where context shows the situation not to involve mind-reading in a face-to-face situation (or anything like it), are *sui generis* and will be left out of account in this study because they shed little or no light on the perceived limits of mind-reading as such.

approach to interpretation, something shown to be just as true of the protagonist as any third party. But, as this study will seek to demonstrate, the inherent fallibility of the exercise does not preclude it from offering valuable, often critically material information.

IV. Overview: the ambit and structure of this study

As Adam Watt has observed, the novel is 'obsessively concerned with interpretation of every sort', giving rise to a temptation to 'sweep all interpretive activity into one big net and call it "reading"'.[121] The temptation applies almost as strongly to mind-reading, because all acts involving communication with, and interpretation of, others might be brought under its umbrella. To keep the exercise within reasonable bounds, I will focus instead upon situations where an individual is led to ask himself whether he has been able accurately to represent the other's propositional thought, memory, sensation or emotion (including their belief, intention, desire, fear, etc), or other mental state or process. This serves to bracket off those interactions in which characters are able to converse without ostensibly questioning whether they are accurately reading their interlocutor. Further, the focus will be upon mind-reading by the protagonist, for two reasons: first, his experiences are those that the narrator is best placed to recount and evaluate; secondly, it is in relation to those experiences that the narrator makes particularly salient general statements that have been taken to represent his and, according to some, even Proust's view of the problem of other minds.

Despite the drag effect of the enthralling Albertine volumes, the depiction of mind-reading is far from doom-laden. The challenge that the protagonist faces varies according to the complexity and unpredictability of the other, the type of relationship that they have,

[121] *Reading in Proust's À la recherche: 'Le Délire de la lecture'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 9.

and the situation. This study will show that it is erroneous to maintain that 'all considerations of motive remain hypothetical', that 'Proust's form of subjective idealism rejects the possibility of working out the psychology of other men',[122] or (therefore) that 'Proust […] appears to agree with Marcel about the predicament of insular subjectivity, forever locked out of other minds'.[123]

In the first edition of his groundbreaking *Proust et les signes* (published in 1964), Gilles Deleuze made the bold and original observation that the central thread of the *Recherche* is not memory or time, but an apprenticeship or apprenticeships in the interpretation of signs spanning four domains (high society, love, impressions, and art), and a 'recherche de la vérité'.[124] Deleuze's study cemented the conception of the *Recherche* as a *Bildungsroman* and of the protagonist as an Egyptologist learning to decipher and interpret hieroglyphic signs, including those emitted by other people.[125] According to this reading, the novel is oriented towards 'les progrès de l'apprentissage', with the protagonist learning progressively in multiple domains regarding a multiplicity of subjects (though not without setbacks) until he achieves 'une révélation dernière'.[126] Thus, Deleuze described the core of the *Recherche* to be 'le signe et la vérité', opining as follows.

> Les notions de la *Recherche* sont: le signe, le sens, l'essence; la continuité des apprentissages et la brusquerie des révélations. Que Charlus est homosexuel, c'est un éblouissement. Mais il fallait la maturation progressive et continue de l'interprète; puis, le saut qualitatif dans un nouveau savoir, nouveau domaine de signes. Les *leitmotive* de la *Recherche* sont: je ne savais pas encore, je devais comprendre plus tard; et aussi je ne m'intéressais plus dès que je cessais d'apprendre. Les personnages de la *Recherche* n'ont

[122] John Houston, 'Literature and Psychology: The Case of Proust', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 5.1 (1965), 3-13 (5).

[123] Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 21.

[124] *Proust et les signes*, 10, 23.

[125] Patrick Bray charts the movement, accomplished through sections added in subsequent editions (between 1970 and 1976), by which 'Deleuze shifts his emphasis from the narrator as an interpreter of signs and a distiller of essences, to the novel itself as a machine producing signs' and finally to the conception of the novel as 'an ever-expanding web of connections relaying the external stimuli of signs, woven blindly and unconsciously by a narrator-spider' ('Deleuze's Spider, Proust's Narrator', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 16.5 (2012), 703-710 (704, 707).

[126] *Proust et les signes*, 36.

> d'importance que pour autant qu'ils émettent des signes à déchiffrer, sur un rythme du temps plus ou moins profond. La grand-mère, Françoise, Mme de Guermantes, Charlus, Albertine: chacun ne vaut que par ce qu'il nous apprend.[127]

While the notion that the protagonist 'progresses' albeit imperfectly from error to truth (however perspectival)[128] has been called into question,[129] it will be a central part of the argument in this study that there is often a discernible progression in the protagonist's reading of others. The errors, misunderstanding and even suffering that are shown to bedevil intersubjectivity are the spurs to developing mind-reading skills, acquiring knowledge and discovering the truth (over time) on material questions, however aporetic and painful.

The study begins (and ends) by evaluating the role and significance of the spatial imagery used by the narrator in connection with mind-reading, a poetic aspect forming an essential part of the arc given by Proust to the subject. **Chapters 1** and **2** address key aspects of this spatial representation of other minds, including its relation to the philosophy of Leibniz in particular. That philosophy has sometimes been invoked by scholars in aid of pessimistic interpretations of intersubjectivity in the *Recherche*, with traces of *La Monadologie* (in particular) used as the scaffolding for a view of the human condition as 'emprisonnement monadique' or 'clôture monadique'[130] and the protagonist characterized as embodiment of 'la monade de Leibniz'.[131] **Chapter 1** takes issue with such a narrow approach to the philosophy of Leibniz and its influence on the *Recherche*, showing that figures of containment or closure are frequently pregnant with or offset by more positive connotations of interrelation or accessibility, and putative bodily or material barriers to

[127] Ibid., 111.

[128] For example, Germaine Brée, *Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), 39-41; Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Binoculars: A Study of Memory, Time, and Recognition in À la recherche du temps perdu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 97-99, 113, 119; Raimond, *La Crise du roman*, 336; Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars*, 188.

[129] For example, Walter Kasell, *Marcel Proust and the Strategy of Reading* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1980).

[130] Anne Henry, *Proust romancier*, 127, and, *La Tentation de Marcel Proust*, 11, 31, 34.

[131] *L'Éclectisme*, 654.

cognitive interpenetration are figured as being, or having the potential to be, communicative interfaces. **Chapter 2** will consider what the novel has to say, through spatial representation, about the protagonist's imaginative desire and attempts to access other minds, and the bonds and causal inter-relation that exist between them. Both chapters will advance the argument that the relation with Leibniz is more nuanced than is commonly suggested, offering both positive and negative elements, and laying the groundwork for the overarching contention that, while the monadology may be used to figure the problem of other minds, it will form an integral part in the representation of the solution to perhaps its most intractable conundrum.

Having started with imagery in Part I, the focus moves in Part II to salient elements of the protagonist's 'apprentissage' in theory of mind and mind-reading. **Chapter 3** focuses on key steps in his acquisition of a so-called 'theory of mind', and certain formative scenes where he attempts to read certain characters (including Legrandin, Gilberte and Charlus), unpacking the salient lessons learned. **Chapter 4** examines the extent to which his mind-reading efforts are resisted by Albertine – the figure rightly taken by critics to represent the most formidable challenge. Finally, the study turns to consider what solutions art might be said (and figured) to provide to any problem of accessibility.

PART I: THE SPATIAL REPRESENTATION OF OTHER MINDS

CHAPTER 1: FIGURING THE LIMIT SITUATION

> La distance, pour Proust, ne peut donc être que tragique. Elle est comme la démonstration visible, inscrite dans l'étendue, du grand principe de séparation qui affecte et afflige les hommes. L'on est ici. L'être aimé est là. Entre ces deux endroits il n'y a pas de pont, pas de communication, rien qu'une espèce de refus tacite, universel et anonyme, opposé par l'espace à ce que les êtres se rapprochent et se joignent.
>
> Georges Poulet[1]

> Et ainsi chaque fois que j'arrivais à explorer un peu de cette zone mystérieuse qui s'étendait autour de moi, je ne faisais qu'en reculer l'horizon, qui s'étendait toujours aussi loin de moi, poétique d'ailleurs, comme l'air et la mer deviennent bleus quand ils sont vides, étendus et distants, et faisait autour de mon lit douloureux un «fond» bleuâtre, plus mystérieux que celui qui encadre telle figure de martyr dans les tableaux des primitifs, car il était cette grande région insondable, d'inconnaissable, qu'est pour nous – quand par hasard nous nous la représentons en profondeur – la vie d'une autre personne. Ce n'est pas que sur ces régions inconnues je n'eusse quelques lueurs comme celles qui nous viennent d'une comète qui passe dans la voie lactée.
>
> Marcel Proust[2]

Proust declared himself to be keenly interested in conveying the multi-dimensional, changing and unpredictable aspects of human psychology, as experienced in different places and over time. Highlighting some salient features of the *Recherche* in an interview on the eve of the publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*, he stated: 'Vous savez qu'il y a une géométrie plane et une géométrie dans l'espace. Eh bien, pour moi, le roman ce n'est pas seulement de la psychologie plane, mais de la psychologie dans le temps.'[3] These words are echoed by the narrator in *Albertine disparue* (IV, 137). Later, in the aesthetic coda in *Le Temps retrouvé*, he emphasizes more explicitly the spatial component of the psychology that he advocates, one that employs 'par opposition à la psychologie plane dont on use

[1] *L'Espace proustien*, 61.

[2] *Cahier 71 ('Dux')*, fols. 81ᵛ-82ᵛ, BnF, NAF 18321 (a more expansive draft of the passage appearing at III, 570).

[3] 'À la recherche du temps perdu', interview with Élie-Joseph Bois, *Le Temps*, 13 November 1913, repr. in *Essais*, 1168-1172 (1170). See also Proust's letter to Jacques Rivière, 28/29 April 1919, *Corr.*, XVIII, 193-195, in which he underlines the importance of avoiding 'la psychologie plane' in the *Recherche* (193).

d'ordinaire, [une] sorte de *psychologie dans l'espace*' (IV, 608, emphasis added). While this comment refers to the need for his novel to give a dynamic spatio-temporal account of others and his relations with them, the *psychologie dans l'espace* in fact practised in the novel involves the double demonstration that the encounter with other minds is most powerfully conveyed when figured in spatial terms, just as it is invariably experienced, recalled and recounted as tied indissociably to place.[4]

One of the characteristic features of the representation of other minds and mind-reading in the *Recherche* is the use of imagery which maps spatial concepts onto the intangible aspects of the other's mind and their (in)accessibility. Spatial metaphor adds a visuospatial aspect to the representation of thought, affect and other mental processes, or intersubjectivity, which makes them more 'cognitively tractable'.[5] As the narrator explains, the use of spatial metaphor to this end is a common occurrence when expressing the abstract concept of time (IV, 504). Like Henri Bergson, who alluded (albeit in deprecating terms) to the 'habitude profondément enracinée' of conceiving of time (as experienced) in spatial terms,[6] he acknowledges that it is natural that, only having a spatialized language with which

[4] In a curious turn of events, the phrase *psychologie dans l'espace* appeared in a letter purportedly written by Proust to Antoine Bibesco in November 1912, published in *Lettres de Marcel Proust à Bibesco* (Lausanne: Clairefonte, 1949), 174-177 (175). The letter contained explanatory comments, intended to be passed on to André Gide and Jacques Copeau (with the typed manuscript of *Du côté de chez Swann*) at the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, including the following variant of what Proust later told *Le Temps*: 'Il y a une géométrie plane et une géométrie dans l'espace. Eh bien, pour moi, le roman, ce n'est pas seulement la psychologie plane, mais *la psychologie dans l'espace et le temps*' (emphasis added). However, according to Philip Kolb, the letter published by Bibesco showed signs of doctoring, leading Kolb to deem it suspect and label it 'une lettre apocryphe': *Marcel Proust: Choix de lettres*, ed. by Kolb (Paris: Plon, 1965), 19 (fn. 1); *Corr*., II, xviii. See also: Kolb, 'Lettres inédites aux Bibesco, présentées et éditées par Philip Kolb', in *Études proustiennes IV: Proust et la critique anglo-saxonne*, ed. by Jacques Bersani, Michel Raimond & Jean-Yves Tadié, Cahiers Marcel Proust, n.s., 11 (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 189-238 (191). Accordingly, unless and until the original letter is found, no reliance may be placed on this epistolary reference to *psychologie dans l'espace*.

[5] Elizabeth Crawford, 'Conceptual Metaphors of Affect', *Emotion Review*, 1.2 (2009), 129-139 (137-138). See also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; rev. edn, 2003), 58; Stephen Levinson, *Space in Language and Cognition: Explorations in Cognitive Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.

[6] *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, ed. Frédéric Worms & Arnaud Bouaniche, 10th edn (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1889; Quadrige, repr. 2013), vii, 91.

to express thoughts, we resort to spatial comparisons. The conventional figures used in everyday speech are, however, simple 'orientational metaphors' derived from bodily interaction with the environment, and so hard-wired into linguistic usage that they are barely noticeable.[7] When used to convey the momentous experience and effects of time, they are impoverished, 'comparaisons […] vaines', which, regardless of whether 'nous les orientons dans le sens de l'élévation, de la longueur ou de la profondeur, ont comme seul avantage de nous faire sentir que cette dimension inconcevable et sensible existe' (IV, 504).

Just as Proust reinvigorated spatial metaphor in support of narratorial diegesis and commentary to convey the passage and effects of time,[8] he transformed the use of such metaphor to explore the common equation or confusion in human intersubjectivity between physical proximity/remoteness and psychological intimacy/indifference. He exploits a breathtaking array of images taken from space, place, landscape or astronomy to allow his narrator to test the connection between minds with relational figures drawn from formal and natural sciences alike. The metaphors (and other spatial tropes including metonymy, simile and personification) are highly original, weaving creative variants of existing conceptual metaphor into the wrought literary imagery employed in a particular scene, or comprising novel metaphor sparked contiguously by context.[9]

For Martha Nussbaum, Proust's text 'states in its form exactly what it states in its paraphrasable philosophical content', and does so within a literary narrative which is the

[7] See Lakoff and Johnson's discussion of such metaphors as cognitive tools in thought and everyday language: *Metaphors We Live By*, 14.

[8] For discussion of the spatialization of time in the *Recherche*, see (for example) Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, 133-136, and Simon Kemp, 'The Inescapable Metaphor: How Time and Meaning Become Space When We Think about Narrative', *Philosophy & Literature*, 36.2 (2012), 391-403 (397).

[9] Liza Gabaston's discussion of the spatialization of love in the *Recherche* emphasizes the revitalisation of worn analogies 'telles la femme-paysage, la géographie de la séparation, ou encore l'incorporation de l'être aimé': 'Les Formes spatiales de l'amour dans *À la recherche du temps perdu*', *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 54 (2004), 159-180 (176).

most powerful means of communicating its truths.[10] The architectonic question addressed in this study is what these truths are so far as concerns mind-reading. The spatial representation of other minds forms an essential part of Proust's exploration of the following, related issues: Are others open or closed, transparent or opaque? Does the body, as corporeal 'enveloppe', act only as a barrier, or also as an interface or gateway to intersubjectivity? Are some minds more 'accessible' than others? Although numerous critical studies have touched upon one or more aspects of the treatment of space or its connection with others in the *Recherche,*[11] there has been no detailed consideration of the spatial representation of other minds as such, or the bearing of such spatial treatment upon issues concerning the (in)accessibility of other minds, and such critical consideration as has been given to the topic has tended to be pessimistic.[12]

I. Leibnizian kernel of the imagery

At the root of this spatial imagery are unmistakable elements of the philosophy of Leibniz, especially *La Monadologie*. As Luc Fraisse explains in his wide-ranging study, Leibnizian philosophy formed an important component of Proust's academic studies, at the

[10] *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.

[11] See, in particular: André Ferré, *Géographie de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Sagittaire, 1939); Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*; Gérard Genette, 'Proust palimpseste', 60; Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, 144-146, 167-168; Gérard Genette, 'Métonymie chez Proust', in *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 41-63 (46); Jean-Pierre Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), 210-213; Nicola Luckhurst, *Science and Structure in Proust's À la recherche du temps perdu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 82; Joshua Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*; Patrick Bray, *The Novel Map: Space and Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 189-227; Pierre Macherey, 'Proust et la question de la spatialité', elec., 26 May 2015; Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2018), 161-199.

[12] Elizabeth Jackson refers to 'la technique typiquement proustienne qui consiste à introduire des dimensions spatiales dans la description des phénomènes psychologiques': *L'Évolution de la mémoire involontaire*, 26. Gabaston also touches upon the subject in *Le Langage du corps*, 212-213, highlighting 'les métaphores qui signalent la difficulté à accéder à la pensée d'autrui'; and, see too her discussion of the metaphorical spatialization of love in the *Recherche* in 'Les Formes spatiales de l'amour'. Katherine Brook's study of the relation between Proust and the avant-garde includes consideration of his use of spatial metaphor to express 'ways of being and interacting with the world' (including other people); she concludes that, appearing 'as a collection of cubistic, analytic surfaces', Albertine, 'in her very unfathomability, asserts herself as an avant-garde [subject]': *Proust and the Avant-Garde: Perception, Knowledge, Representation* (doctoral thesis, Kings College London, 2018), 192-233 (233).

lycée Condorcet and at the Sorbonne, where he was taught by luminaries such as Émile Boutroux (an editor of *La Monadologie*); in turn, it had a profound influence on the *Recherche*, as Fraisse and other scholars have noted.[13] At the heart of Leibnizian metaphysics is the concept that each individual substance is a 'monad'. Monads are the building-blocks of the universe,[14] and the human mind itself is a monad.[15] Some of the following tenets of the monadology shape the imagery and commentary used by the narrator when discussing other minds.[16]

(1) No two monads are exactly alike (§9): the so-called 'principe des indiscernables'.

(2) Each monad expresses or represents the whole universe (though it only clearly represents part of it, the detail of the remainder being confused), including other individuals (§§56, 60, 77, 83),[17] and does so to infinity (§§60-61).

(3) Each monad has a unique qualitative point of view: 'il y a comme autant de différents univers, qui ne sont pourtant que les perspectives d'un seul selon les différents points de vue de chaque Monade' (§57). Leibniz often describes this qualitative aspect of

[13] Fraisse, *L'Éclectisme,* 268, 699-700, 711-733. See also: Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, 57; Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, 54-55, 196; Louis Bolle, *Marcel Proust; ou, Le Complexe d'Argus* (Paris: Grasset, 1967), 29-31; Jacques Rolland de Renéville, 'Thèmes métaphysiques chez Marcel Proust', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 90.2 (1985), 218-229 (221-223); Anne Henry, *Proust* (1986), 81; Vincent Descombes, *Proust*, 51-57; Maël Renouard, 'Proust et Leibniz – Points de Vue et Mondes', *La Polygraphe*, 24-26 (2002), 247-264; Anthony Uhlmann, 'Deleuze, Leibniz, Proust and Beckett: Thinking in Literature' in *Beckett's Proust/Deleuze's Proust* ed. by Mary Bryden & Margaret Topping (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 73-86; Jean-Claude Dumoncel, *La Mathesis de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015); Sabrina Martina, *Proust et Leibniz* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), 273-325.

[14] Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz* (London: Routledge, 2005), 67.

[15] Leibniz, *La Monadologie*, ed. by Émile Boutroux, (Paris: Delagrave, 1881), 141 (fn. 1); *Principes de la nature et de la grâce fondés en raison; Principes de la philosophie, ou Monadologie*, ed. by André Robinet (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1954), 27 (§1).

[16] *La Monadologie*, 143-144 (§7), 145 (§9), 146 (§11), 148-149 (§15), 173 (§§56-57), 174-178 (§§59-62), 183-184 (§§77-78), 186-187 (§83); *Principes*, 31 (§3).

[17] As Donald Rutherford explains: 'In making representation an essential feature of a monad's states, [Leibniz] commits himself to two points. First, the states of a monad have content or are information bearing. Second, by virtue of this content, monads "express" each other. Although monads are physically isolated from one another, there are well-defined relations between the contents of their states': 'Monads', *The Oxford Handbook of Leibniz*, ed. by Maria Rosa Antognazza (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 356-380 (364).

the monad in spatial terms as a 'view of the universe, as looked at from a certain position'.[18]

(4) The monad passes from one representation or 'perception' of the universe to another (the principle of change or 'appétition') (§§14-15).

(5) No monad can transfer its perceptual state to another or causally influence the internal state of the other – in the words of the oft-cited dictum, 'Les Monades n'ont point de fenêtres, par lesquelles quelque chose y puisse entrer ou sortir' (§§7 & 11), a maxim whose substance is recited by the narrator (IV, 34) and is almost universally taken by scholars to be the keystone of a Proustian philosophy of mind.[19]

(6) Although monads cannot interact causally, their representations are harmonized and their actions given the appearance of causal relation by 'l'harmonie préétablie' which ensures that the monads 'sont toutes les représentations d'un même univers' – a law of concomitance that Leibniz attributed to God (§§60 & 78). This divine underpinning does not feature in the novel and its omission by Proust is an understandable one on the part of an agnostic,[20] amounting as it does to pure *deus ex machina*.[21]

As Bertrand Russell observed, Leibniz's monadology may come across as 'a kind of fantastic fairy tale', though it has a rigorous philosophical logic.[22] When applied to the

[18] Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686) in *Philosophical Texts*, ed. & trans. by Richard Francks and R.S. Woolhouse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 66.

[19] This particular argument is given detailed consideration (and challenged) in **Chapter 2**.

[20] In his discussion of 'la question religieuse', Gilbert Romeyer Dherbey notes that Proust is generally considered an agnostic: *La Pensée de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), 148.

[21] Deleuze labels it a 'réponse truquée', incompatible with what he sees as Proust's strategy of fragmentation in the *Recherche*: *Proust et les signes*, 196.

[22] *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1937; repr. 1992), xxi-xxii.

human mind, the philosophy has an inherently metaphorical quality, conferring a spatial, cosmological dimension upon the immaterial and distinguishing feature of the monad: its point of view. The narrator in the *Recherche* captures the essence of a monadological philosophy of mind in a number of metaphysical propositions, expressed at various stages of his *Bildung.*[23] By translating these and other (related) propositions into a network of images which are deployed and developed as the protagonist experiences the difficulties (and/or joys) of reading other minds in practice, the issue is given a metaphorical dimension which powerfully complements, at a graphic and intuitive level, the narratorial diegesis or analysis.

There is a danger, however, of treating the narrator's use of Leibnizian imagery or language in relation to other minds as signifying radical scepticism about intersubjectivity (save when it comes to art). This is a discernible thread in Proustian scholarship. The leading and most learned proponent of the argument in recent years is Fraisse, who puts the case as follows:

> La situation chez Proust de l'artiste dans le monde sensible relève en partie d'une adaptation à l'esthétique de la monadologie – à commencer par la monade même, qui est dans la *Recherche* à la fois les prémisses de tout individu et la condition première du créateur. L'incommunicabilité *a priori* entre les êtres procède de la séparation *a priori* des monades. […] dans le cycle romanesque, l'incommunicabilité entre les êtres est l'envers de l'originalité des artistes.[24]

[23] See, for example: 'comme Leibniz admet que chaque monade en reflétant tout l'univers y ajoute quelque chose de particulier' (II, 769); 'comment le monde eût-il pu durer plus que moi, puisque je n'étais pas perdu en lui, puisque c'était lui qui était enclos en moi' (II, 286); 'par nature le monde des possibles m'a toujours été plus ouvert que celui de la contingence réelle' (III, 533); 'l'univers est vrai pour nous tous et dissemblable pour chacun' (III, 694); 'ce n'est pas un univers, c'est des millions, presque autant qu'il existe de prunelles et d'intelligences humaines, qui s'éveillent tous les matins' (III, 696); 'je m'étais […] servi d'un télescope pour apercevoir des choses, très petites en effet, mais parce qu'elles étaient situées à une grande distance, et qui étaient chacune un monde' (IV, 618). See also, for example, II, 152, 623; III, 762, 888; IV, 27, 34, 260 (discussed elsewhere in this study).

[24] *L'Éclectisme*, 722, 729. See, to substantially the same effect: Henry, *Proust*, 81; Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, 54-55, 195-203; Martina, *Proust et Leibniz*, 9.

This type of reading is contested in the following section, on the grounds that it involves too narrow a reading of Leibniz's monadology and of its role in the *Recherche*, which in both cases involve elements of positivity counterbalancing the negative.

The congruence between some of the imagery used by the narrator and that of Leibniz makes it important to emphasize certain broader aspects of the philosopher's thinking that have particularly relevant connotations for mind-reading. First of all, Leibniz challenged the orthodox 'container' model of space, which dominated Western thought (following Descartes and Newton) and which characterized space as absolute, a field of pure extension which 'contains' all material objects.[25] As social theorist Henri Lefebvre observed, the container model promotes a logic of separation between container and contained objects.[26] As Proust will have been aware (from lessons given by Darlu, if nothing else),[27] Leibniz was the most famous proponent of an alternative theory according to which space consists of *relations* between co-existing monads, determined not by their distance from one another, but by 'the relation of situation' which any one bears or might possibly bear to any other.[28] By the middle of the nineteenth century, it had become clear that the (container) model of space as absolute is 'useless in physical practice' since all human

[25] See Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 50-71; Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 27. See also: Albert Einstein's Foreword to Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), xiii.

[26] *La Production de l'espace*, 2nd edn (Paris: Anthropos, 1981), 198.

[27] The exercise book of Proust's near contemporary (J. Delamarre), *Cours de philosophie professé au lycée Henri IV (1884-1885)*, contains a transcription (at fols 32^{r}-38^{v}) of Darlu's lesson regarding the concept of space, including (at fols 36^{r}-^{v} in particular) Leibniz's conception of space as the relation of situation.

[28] Richard Arthur, 'Leibniz's Theory of Space', *Found Sci*, 18 (2013), 499-528 (500); Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 168.

knowledge of time and space is relative,[29] and Leibniz's relational view of space had in effect been vindicated.[30]

While Leibniz's monadology involves a form of spatialized 'containment', it is one with an inherently reversible character: monads are containers with no windows, but they each mirror and contain the infinite universe including all other monads. Moreover, the monadology is topological[31] and it rejects the concept of a limit between inside and outside. Instead, as Peg Rawes explains, his metaphysics conceives of the monad as a plenum in which 'the finite geometric identities of the whole and part become a continuous plenitude of irreducible singularities', involving a continuum of internal/external relations, and which 'therefore represents a kind of topological figure, through which the relationship between the internal structures are continuous with the external form'.[32] As part of his topological notion of relations, Leibniz proposes a series of evolving forms: in particular, the net, plenum, the envelope and the fold[33] (images which will be discussed in connection with the *Recherche* below).

Although at first sight Leibnizian monads might appear to be synonymous with enclosure and isolation, their supposed separation is therefore more apparent than real; even their innermost defining quality (their singular point of view) is subject to the harmonizing effects of a law of concomitance (since there is only one world of which each has a non-

[29] Jammer, *Concepts of Space*, 140.

[30] The 'container' model was quickly supplanted by the Einsteinian theory that holds the spatial character of reality to comprise the four space-time dimensions of the field: Einstein, ibid., xv. The question whether Proust knew or was influenced by Einstein's theories is discussed by Fraisse and Anna Guiche in 'Proust et Einstein', *Alliage*, 84 (2024), hal-04765773.

[31] Leibniz indicated the importance of topological relation between monads: *Principes*, 29 (§2). Indeed, he is credited with having inspired the modern science of topology: Arthur, 'Leibniz's Theory of Space', 500.

[32] *Space, Geometry and Aesthetics: Through Kant and Towards Deleuze* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 93.

[33] *Space, Geometry and Aesthetics*, 120.

transferable view), and each enfolds the entire universe. These aspects of the monadology have implications for the adoption of a 'monadic' model in the *Recherche* for the figuring of the difficulties associated with other minds. While Sabrina Martina rightly describes Leibniz as 'le pôle négatif de la *Recherche*' for, amongst other things, the intellectualism, relativism and subjective idealism with which his writings are often associated,[34] the argument advanced in this chapter is that such imagery has both positive and negative connotations. So far as it connotes enclosure and isolation, it represents a *situation-limite*, a general situation endemic to the human condition which constrains experience, causes suffering, and against which one struggles.[35] But, so far as it connotes topological relations of situation between monads, it is a source of inspiration and optimism, just as much as anxious frustration and pessimism or despair, stimulating the protagonist's endeavour to overcome barriers, and rewarding his successes with a sense of joy. Anticipating what will be said in conclusion, the monadology is a vehicle used not only to depict the problems posed by other minds, but also to portray possible solutions.

To connote the challenges but also the potential rewards and indeed the attainment of intersubjectivity, the other's personality, thoughts, emotions or cognitive processes and the very process of mind-reading are figured in the *Recherche* with a range of multi-valent topological images including containment, enveloping, folding, proximity, connection, separation, (inter)penetration, expansion, extension, intersection, contiguity, boundary, barrier, path, road, and so on. The topology employed is mereotopology, a *qualitative* approach to the representation of space, combining topology (the study of mathematical

[34] *Proust et Leibniz*, 333.

[35] Gabriel Marcel, borrowing the concept from Karl Jaspers, described the *situation-limite* as a 'réalité à laquelle un sujet est intéressé *als Dasein*, et qui marque à la fois ses limites et son champ d'action […] [et] qui est une chance ou une prison, ou les deux à la fois': 'Situation fondamentale et situations limites chez Karl Jaspers', *Recherches philosophiques*, 2 (1932-1933), 317-348 (330).

relations not involving measurement) and mereology (the study of the relation between part and whole, and associated concepts), a discipline that may be applied to common relational experience.[36] By and large, all of the protagonist's experience of his own mind and the minds of other characters (or *vice versa*) is analysed or figured by the narrator in terms of the presence or absence of desired or undesired reciprocal and/or causal relations which draw heavily upon such topology.

While many of the most striking images appear to bear wholly negative connotations for the accessibility of other minds, many do not, and even those that appear at first glance to suggest that the other mind is a closed container often turn out to be pregnant with or offset by more positive connotations of interrelation or accessibility, while putative bodily or material barriers to cognitive interpenetration are figured in some cases as being, or having the potential to be, communicative interfaces.

II. Mind as Container or Contained?

The starting point for the novel's network of spatial cognitive imagery is the traditional conception of the body as an 'enveloppe corporelle' (I, 19) enclosing the mind (IV, 613), and the brain itself being a container or 'réceptacle' (I, 79). The narrator summarizes this conventional conception when addressing the vagaries of involuntary memory:

> C'est sans doute l'existence de *notre corps, semblable pour nous à un vase où notre spiritualité serait enclose,* qui nous induit à supposer que tous nos biens intérieurs, nos joies passées, toutes nos douleurs sont perpétuellement en notre possession. (III, 153-154, emphasis added)

[36] Barry Smith, 'Mereotopology: A Theory of Parts and Boundaries', *Data & Knowledge Engineering*, 20.3 (1996), 287-303 (288).

The dichotomous pairing of container/contained (and, relatedly, inside/outside, part/whole) is one of the oldest in literature and iconography, and reflective of the bodily experience of containment.[37] The body, here figured as a vase, encloses the mind and its contents, the noun 'spiritualité' denoting the immaterial aspects of mind (in contradistinction to the material body or organs including the brain), a 'machine spirituelle' (III, 688).

Jean-Pierre Richard refers to a 'thématique proustienne si riche de la contenance, de l'enveloppement et du développement'.[38] The imagery of containment or enclosure is widespread in the *Recherche*, takes numerous forms and is applied to a wide range of tangible or intangible phenomena. Among its most powerful applications are to the body or the mind of the other, including those of the *être aimé*.[39] The body of the *femme désirée* encloses the mystery of her mind (her thoughts, feelings, memories, personality, and so forth).[40]

Proust's use of such imagery is extensive and highly creative. In *Le Côté de Guermantes*, spurred by the reflection that 'nous localisons dans le corps d'une personne toutes les possibilités de sa vie, le souvenir des êtres qu'elle connaît et qu'elle vient de quitter, ou s'en va rejoindre', the encasement of the other's life and mind is poetically rendered by the image of Mme de Guermantes as an invertebrate within a shell, transporting within her the past, present and potential experience of the faubourg Saint-Germain (II, 336). In *Sodome et Gomorrhe,* the narrator returns to the image, using the shell to convey the link habitually formed in his imagination between a woman and her home (III, 138).

[37] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 148, 152, 214; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999, 266.

[38] *Proust et le monde sensible*, 25 (fn. 1); see also: 176-179.

[39] Not only the *être aimé*; Charlus is also so described: 'ce personnage peinturluré, pansu et clos, semblable à quelque boîte de provenance exotique et suspecte qui laisse échapper la curieuse odeur de fruits auxquels l'idée de goûter seulement vous soulèverait le cœur.' (III, 429)

[40] For example: Gilberte (I, 399); Mlle de Stermaria (II, 49); Rachel (II, 456); Albertine (III, 888).

The shell as container of the *femme aimée*'s life and mind is a pertinent spatial encapsulation of the challenge that they represent, functioning as both a mobile or static enclosure, simultaneously containing space, place and being, with the beauty of its pearl or enamel inner surface hidden within and fortified against the outside.

While the imagery of containment is used for its connotations of enclosure and exclusion, it is also used to connote interaction and inclusion. Swann and Odette appear to 'contain' the inner mystery of Gilberte, together with alluring mysteries of their own (I, 399). Access to the Swann family circle seems to offer the prospect of entry to the private world of Gilberte (I, 411, 471) and, through Swann and Odette, of privileged insight into her personality and predilections (I, 519, 526-527). Contrariwise, through his experience of her family, the protagonist comes to see that, 'dans le corps de cette Mélusine' (I, 555), Gilberte contains and combines elements of both her parents' personalities. Such containment imagery operates to figure intersubjectivity as the interrelationship of experience and personality between minds akin to that of intersecting sets, like a dynamic Venn diagram.

The imagery of containment also lends itself naturally to the formation of nested series of containers. The metaphorical treasure contained within a person (I, 405) is itself enclosed within her body and her clothing, which is encased within a home or room[41] or surrounded by an outdoor enclosure.[42] The levels of nesting do not stop there. Individuals are shrouded in an envelope of mystery and charm by dint of their association with a particular geographical, hereditary or social milieu, whether real or imagined. The reverse

[41] 'simple contenant de notre existence actuelle et nous préservant seulement du froid, de la vue des autres' (II, 381)

[42] For example, Gilberte at Tansonville, within a hedge enclosure which 'laissait voir à l'intérieur du parc' (I, 138).

is also true: the Swanns' apartment is a container imbued with the mystery and unique charm that the protagonist attributes to the inner experience of Gilberte and her parents: 'cet appartement qui était pour le temps quotidien de leur vie ce que *le corps est pour l'âme*, et qui devait en exprimer la singularité' (I, 530, emphasis added). Nesting is a motif that Roxanne Hanney treats as negatively charged: '[t]he nest in one form or another imprisons the narrator for the rest of his life'.[43] But, it also has positive aspirations or connotations. The containment involved in nesting is one imagined to involve a qualitative transfer of singular properties between container and contained. The belief that access to that singularity will come with access to its natural place or habitat is found to be naive idealism (something discussed further in **Chapter 2**), but the protagonist is not wholly misguided to regard the family home as offering *some* insight into personality traits, as does that of Odette for Swann in *Un amour de Swann*. More fundamentally, whenever and wherever the nesting process occurs in the first person sections of the novel, it entails that each encounter with the other occurs within the 'container' of place, the protagonist reading (and remembering) them consciously as sited, part of an emplacement that enfolds him and the other(s), framing and influencing his interpretation – that is the very core of what he describes as 'une sorte de psychologie dans l'espace' (IV, 60-61, 608).

The blurring of boundaries between psychological container/contained and inside/outside begins with the mind of the subject. According to the logic of traditional Cartesian dualism, the mind is inside, whereas the world is outside, so that, as David Herman says, 'others' minds remain sealed off from me in a separate, interior domain'.[44] But, for the protagonist, while one may have the sensation of being encircled by one's own mind (I,

[43] *The Invisible Middle Term in Proust's 'À la recherche du temps perdu'* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 30.

[44] 'Introduction', in *The Emergence of Mind*, 8.

85), so that the mind is appropriately figured as enclosure ('ce jardin intérieur où nous sommes forcés de rester toujours' (III, 334)), it is not 'une prison immobile' (I, 85). On the contrary, engagement with the world involves 'incessants mouvements du dedans au dehors' (I, 83), part of 'un perpétuel élan pour la dépasser, pour atteindre à l'extérieur' (85). The difference between mind and world is not neatly dichotomous. Consciousness or thought, though operating from *inside* the mind, is felt to interpose itself (*outside*) between mind and object, while simultaneously enclosing the self:

> Quand je voyais un objet extérieur, la conscience que je le voyais restait entre moi et lui, le *bordait* d'un *mince liséré spirituel* qui m'empêchait de jamais toucher *directement* sa matière; elle se volatilisait en quelque sorte avant que je prisse contact avec elle, comme un corps incandescent qu'on approche d'un objet mouillé ne touche pas son humidité parce qu'il se fait toujours précéder d'une *zone* d'évaporation. (I, 83, emphasis added)

The internal/external aspect of consciousness and thought (or perception) is powerfully conveyed by the image of the 'mince liséré spirituel' or 'zone d'évaporation' which prevents *direct* contact or, as it is later described, 'la mise en contact *absolue* de la réalité et de l'esprit' (IV, 553).[45] On the one hand, this is a figuration of the self-conscious awareness of the human mind that it is a subject perceiving the outside world – a phenomenon that Leibniz called 'aperception'[46] – and, therefore, of a gap between self and other or object. When viewed negatively, the 'halo of evaporation is used as a symbol of our inability completely to grasp the outside world' (as Stephen Ullmann states).[47] However, more positively, it also symbolizes the ability of the mind to stand outside the confines of its supposed physical containment, an idea that Henri Bergson expressed as the 'conscience qui déborde

[45] This is the spatial figuration of the ancient idea that we are separated by our senses from the physical world. As Elisabeth Czoncizer explains, this idea was catalysed by the likes of Taine and Ribot (though their emphasis was on the physiological explanation for that predicament): *Quelques antécédents*, 61-62.

[46] *Principes*, 37 (§4).

[47] *The Image in The Modern French Novel: Gide, Alain-Fournier, Proust, Camus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 151-152. Nicolas Grimaldi goes further – 'la réalité […] est inaccessible' and the very act of perception renders 'toute réalité si étanche qu'elle en est impénétrable': *Proust*, 12-13. See also: Leo Bersani *Marcel Proust*, 15.

l'organisme'.[48] In the case of intersubjectivity, such a subjective, qualitative *liséré* is likewise supposed to exist, interposed between the *other's* mind and the world (II, 18).

While the general ramifications of the container/contained scheme for the (in)accessibility of other minds are not explored directly in the very early stages of the novel, the narrator compares the access afforded to the minds of people encountered in real life unfavourably with that available with the fictional characters in a novel. Being careful not to show his hand prematurely, he comments that real people are perceived 'pour une grande part' through our senses and 'par l'intermédiaire d'une image' of what they feel (that is, not directly), thereby remaining 'opaque' and offering 'un poids mort que notre sensibilité ne peut soulever', so that we may only have a relatively limited appreciation of their thoughts and emotions (I, 84). By contrast, the accomplishment of the novelist is to replace 'ces *parties impénétrables à l'âme* par une quantité égale de *parties immatérielles*, c'est-à-dire que notre âme peut s'assimiler' (emphasis added). By the very terms of the comparison, the opacity of real people is only supposed to be partial. While any access to their minds may not be anything like as extensive as that offered by the novelist whose genius is to engineer a situation where the reader may produce a character's emotions within himself, the nature and extent of those 'parts' of real people that are *not* said to be 'impénétrables' is an issue left for later exploration.

The inside/outside dichotomy is further complicated by confusion between the elements of 'content' believed to be contained within the mind of the other and those which emanate from the mind-reading subject in the form of preconceptions or judgements. In the context of social personality, this phenomenon is described comically as inflating the corporeal container ('enveloppe') of Swann (I, 19). Later, it will take on a more serious

[48] *L'Énergie spirituelle: essais et conférences* (Paris: Alcan, 1919), 88.

aspect in the context of love. Citing the cases of Rachel, Albertine and Morel, the narrator opines that love involves placing 'dans une personne ce qui n'est que dans la personne qui aime' and 'tout est dans l'esprit' (IV, 491). But even this absolute distinction cannot be steadfastly maintained, and the narrator is inconsistent regarding the boundary between self and other, and whether the lover's impression or perception is wholly subjective (ibid.) or causally connected to the qualities of the beloved (IV, 22, 470), an issue considered further in **Chapter 2**.

Building on the study of containment by Gilles Deleuze in *Proust et les signes*,[49] Hanney explores the container/contained motif and some of its many representations in the text, concluding that 'the line of demarcation between *contenant* and *contenu* is fundamentally ambiguous'.[50] At the heart of this conclusion is the short but poignant scene involving the *carafes dans la Vivonne* (I, 166) which, as Richard earlier suggested,[51] is closely bound up with the theme of containment (whatever its form or context) in the novel. The description of the glass containers within the 'plus grand contenant' comprising the water they are intended to contain, while water evades containment, calls into question the dichotomy between '«contenant»' and '«contenu»' (that the narrator ironizes with quotation marks). However, what is significant about the ambiguity, for present purposes, is that, while the 'image de la fraîcheur' evoked by this spatial complication of the *contenant*/*contenu* relation induces (as Richard argues) a frustrating paradox or 'effet de vertige',[52] it is not permitted to override the positivity of the complementarity connoted by

[49] Ibid., 140-157. Deleuze sub-divides the figures into two overlapping schemes: (1) *contenant/contenu* and (2) *partie-tout*, stating that, with the first 'l'activité du narrateur consiste à *expliquer*, c'est-à-dire à déplier, développer le contenu incommensurable au contenant', whereas with the second '[l]'activité du narrateur consiste alors à *élire*, choisir' (ibid., 141).

[50] *The Invisible Middle Term*, 27-48 (45).

[51] *Proust et le monde sensible*, 26 (fn. 1).

[52] Ibid.

the ‘allitération perpétuelle’ that the scene is stated to involve.[53] There is a duality to the frustration: it is ‘irritante’, but also ‘délicieuse’. The scene offers an apt metaphor for the paradox of Leibniz’s monadic mind and his dissolving of the limit between inside and outside into a continuous plenum (while maintaining a formal distinction between interior/exterior which avoids the collapse into solipsism): the container of a point of view representing the universe within which the mind is itself contained.[54]

When considered by the reader with hindsight, the *carafes* passage has particularly powerful symbolic resonance for the challenges faced by the protagonist in reading the mind of the archetypal *être de fuite*, the ‘fraîcheur en fuite’ of the running water representing the elusive thoughts felt to be ‘sans consistance où les mains ne pouvaient la capter’.[55] The analogy of the female body with the container has long-standing connotations which are particularly pertinent to the figuration of mind in the *Recherche*. In Greek art and literature, vases, jars and other vessels and their contents were used as metaphors for a woman’s body, with connotations of concealment or sexual withholding, hidden or stored treasure and mystery.[56] The body of the *femme aimée* is occasionally likened by the narrator to a vase

[53] Genette interprets the ‘allitération perpétuelle’ as Proust’s label for the reciprocal metaphor involving the exchange of analogous qualities between the contiguous glass and water (e.g. transparency, inclusion): ‘Métonymie chez Proust’, 54.

[54] Paul de Man describes the scene as the *locus classicus* of metonymy: *Allegories of Reading*, 70 (fn. 17). However, while containing elements of metonymy, it is plainly intended to have broader metaphorical significance, not least because, as de Man states, figures ‘polarized around systems of light/dark and inside/outside, are so frequent that they could be said to make up the entire novel’: 60 (fn. 5). Significantly, as de Man says, such apparently incompatible polarities transpire to be reconciled by a system of metaphorical ‘relays’ or ‘relational links’: 60 et seq.

[55] Brook sees in the scene ‘a metaphor for a mode of sexual partnership that runs counter to that observed by his own narrator, who brings Albertine to live with him precisely so that he might “capture” and “penetrate” her’ (*Proust and the Avant-garde*, 227).

[56] Ellen Reeder, ‘Women as Containers’, in *Pandora’s Box: Women in Classical Greece* (Baltimore: Trustees of Walters Art Gallery & Princeton University Press, 1995), 195-197; Page DuBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 40, 47-49. Richard analyses the sexual symbolism of the vase and other containers in the *Recherche*: *Proust et le monde sensible*, 72-73 (fn. 3).

(enclosing all the mysteries of her life and mind),[57] an object considered in ancient iconography to be anatomically similar to the female form.[58] But, while the descriptive language used by the narrator at various junctures may imply that the protagonist *feels* the body of the *femme aimée* to be a container enclosing her mind,[59] he avoids describing it in spatial terms that preclude opening, access and communication.

By contrast, the container image which *is* framed in *Du côté de chez Swann* as the very paradigm of inaccessibility and non-communication is that of the 'vases clos' symbolizing the protagonist's experience of the *deux côtés*, Méséglise/Swann and Guermantes, that, for a long time, he believes to be both spatially and epistemically discrete: 'loin l'un de l'autre, *inconnaissables l'un à l'autre, dans les vases clos et sans communication entre eux*, d'après-midi différents' (I, 133, emphasis added). The phrase *vase clos*, while capable of being applied to the ornamental vase in ordinary usage, also bears other scientific or idiomatic senses that connote or denote closure. In common idiom, it may connote a vacuum, so that 'en vase clos' means 'sans communication avec l'extérieur, en milieu fermé'.[60] In chemistry or physics, the *vase clos* is a closed vessel used for laboratory experiments, as distinct from *vases communicants* which are vessels 'qui communiquent entre eux par des tubes ou des ouvertures, et qui servent à l'étude de l'équilibre des liquides'.[61] These two different types of vessel constitute an oppositional pair

[57] II, 335 (the mysterious life of Mme de Guermantes 'se déplaçait […], protégé par une cloison, enfermé dans un vase, au milieu des flots de la vie de tous'). See also: IV, 65 (Albertine). The vase is also used to figure the conventional body/mind distinction more generally: e.g. I, 466; III, 153-154.

[58] François Lissarrague, *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet: Images of Wine and Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 56-57.

[59] e.g. Mlle de Stermaria ('contenait *enclose* en son corps'), II, 49; la belle pêcheuse ('cet être intérieur de la belle pêcheuse semblait m'être *clos* encore'), II, 76; Mme de Guermantes ('*enfermé* dans un vase') II, 335; Rachel ('*enfermée* dans un corps comme dans un Tabernacle'), II, 456; Albertine asleep ('elle s'était réfugiée, *enclose*, résumée, dans son corps'), III, 578; touching Albertine ('je touchais seulement l'enveloppe *close* d'un être qui par l'intérieur accédait à l'infini'), III, 888 – this passage is considered further below.

[60] Entry 'en vase clos', *Dictionnaire Larousse*.

[61] Entry 'Vases communicants', *Dictionnaire Larousse*.

of the sort routinely called into question in the *Recherche*, making the ambiguity inherent in using the vase to figure the other's mind particularly poignant. It is notable that, when applied to the *femme aimée*, the phrase *vase clos* is not used. Moreover, in the case of Albertine, the vase serves not (or not only) as a symbol of psychological separation, but of intersubjective mediation: in the immediate aftermath of her death, the narrator reflects that her presence was a necessary condition for the fulfilment of any desires (for Venice or anything else), seeming to be an 'obstacle interposé entre moi et toutes choses, parce qu'elle était pour moi leur contenant et que c'est d'elle, comme d'un vase, que je pouvais les recevoir' (IV, 65).

In the event, even the supposed non-communicability between the paradigmatic *vases clos* (*deux côtés*) proves to be illusory, when Gilberte reveals in *Albertine disparue* that one route may be accessed from the other (IV, 268). Deleuze disputes the notion that the *deux côtés* are revealed to be interconnected and unified, contending that there exists instead a multiplicity of 'transversales'[62] allowing one to jump from one monadic world or part to another but preserving them as separate, non-communicating *vases clos*.[63] However, not only does this deprive Gilberte's revelation of what the narrator describes as its 'bouleversant' effect (IV, 268), it is premised on its very negation, since Deleuze's argument begins with the declaration: 'Impossible de faire comme dit Gilberte'.[64] Nor is it necessary to go so far: it does not follow from the revelation of inter-accessibility that either side/part need lose its integrity to a subsuming whole. Each may be separately preserved as such, while allowing for communication. Several other such spatial precedents are offered in the novel. For example, the Curé comments that, from the belltower of Saint-Hilaire, 'on

[62] *Proust et les signes*, 150, 152.

[63] Ibid., 152 ('entre toutes ces parties closes, il existe un système de passage, mais qu'on ne doit pas confondre avec un moyen de communication directe ni de totalisation').

[64] Ibid., 150.

embrasse à la fois des choses qu'on ne peut voir habituellement que l'une sans l'autre' (I, 105),[65] a panoramic option out of reach to the mind-reader in the *Recherche* (excepting the occasional lapse into omniscience). An analogy that fits more with the narrator's *psychologie dans l'espace* (IV, 608) is that of the protagonist running from window to window on the train 'pour rentoiler les fragments intermittents et opposites' of his views of landscape 'et en avoir une vue totale et un tableau continu' (II, 16). This is a scene that Georges Poulet highlights as encapsulating the Proustian view of reality: every person, place, object manifests multiple contrasting aspects when seen in opposition with others and when viewed from different angles, but all such aspects may be brought together as a totality or into continuity without losing their differences.[66] The protagonist's *Bildung* reveals that, while there may not generally be a *direct* means of reading the other's mind (at least in the sense of reading it as one would read one's own mind) or guaranteeing *total* access to its contents, its supposed enclosure and inaccessibility is often chimerical, just as the advent of car travel allows access in the space of a single day to towns previously felt to be 'prisonniers aussi hermétiquement enfermés jusque-là dans la cellule de jours distincts que jadis Méseglise et Guermantes, et sur lesquels les mêmes yeux ne pouvaient se poser dans un seul après-midi' (III, 385-386).

[65] The image of the tower, from which the viewer can obtain a single unified view of the town which would offer an almost infinite number of perspectives to travellers approaching it from different directions below, is one famously used by Leibniz: Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 303-305, 337-338.

[66] *L'Espace proustien*, 101-105.

III. Gateways or Barriers to Desired Psychological Spaces

While the protagonist experiences an overwhelming sense of cognitive oppression when confronted, physically, with the unfamiliar space and objects contained in strange bedrooms, he is positively drawn to discover the unknown spaces that he associates with the minds of (female) others. The desired 'access' is figured variously as either enabled or obstructed by the other's body or external objects.

1. Body: Skin and Eyes

As a corporeal container, the human body may act and is sometimes figured as a barrier, 'devant l'âme comme un obstacle opaque qui empêche de l'apercevoir' (II, 348). In his study of the 'semiotic function of bodies' in the *Recherche,* Richard Saunders observes that, while the narrator often uses the assumptions and terminology of nineteenth-century realism in the pursuit of the truth that may be revealed by the body, 'he no longer inhabits a world where an unequivocal, deterministic relation exists between the envelope of physical signifiers and a single, continuous personality who is thus signified'.[67] Others change over time, as does the protagonist and his knowledge of them which is only ever distorted and fragmentary. Thus, the protagonist's 'youthful idea of the transparent body [becomes] hedged with a more guarded adult skepticism: the body is a medium that imperfectly signals possibilities rather than absolutes'.[68] Saunders concludes that 'the body is both a privileged instrument of knowledge and a potent creator of illusions', concealing as much as it reveals.[69] Likewise, in her detailed study of body language[70] – something the

[67] *Metamorphoses of the Proustian Body: A Study of Bodily Signs in À la recherche du temps perdu* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 26.

[68] Ibid., 221.

[69] Ibid., 235-236.

[70] Gabaston specifies that, by body language, she means 'l'ensemble des manifestations physiognomiques, gestuelles ou vocales qui font l'objet d'une activité herméneutique interne au récit': *Le Langage du corps,* 13.

narrator calls ‘langage muet’ (II, 721; III, 62, 80; IV, 530) – Liza Gabaston charts a similar ambivalence in the *Recherche* towards the nineteenth-century tradition, exemplified by Balzac and followed by Zola, of treating the body as perfectly readable.[71] She observes that, while Proust does allow for the immediate decipherability of the body in some instances (especially social situations), he prefers situations where its interpretation is uncertain or ends in failure (especially in love),[72] and ‘[l]es signes corporels, loin de pénétrer de plain-pied dans l’intériorité de divers personnages, met en scène la difficulté d’entrer dans les consciences’.[73]

It should therefore be taken as uncontroversial that the body is shown in the *Recherche* to offer *some* epistemological ‘access’ to the true content of the other’s mind, even if not total and not invariably the same for all minds, or even uniform in the case of a particular individual. As Anne Simon observes, there is ‘une expressivité essentielle de la corporalité’ by which the other’s body becomes (in Deleuzian terms) ‘un texte à déchiffrer’ by means of an ‘alphabet intime’, making the gap between mind and body smaller than might appear.[74]

Such access is always mediated by the mind-reader’s senses, subjectivity and ‘intelligence’, entailing that it is not the same as that available to the other herself, and its significance is often far from certain. The degree of access is situational, as is what the mind-reader may derive from it. In both respects, that depends on such variables as: the nature of his relationship with the other; their respective mental dispositions; the willed or involuntary nature of the bodily sign; the matrix against which it is to be interpreted

[71] Ibid., 22-28, 46, 122, 144, 198.

[72] Ibid., 22, 122, 197, 201-202.

[73] Ibid., 23.

[74] ‘Proust ou le corps expressif malgré lui’, 53-54. For the broader point regarding *déchiffrage*, Simon refers back in this regard to Deleuze’s *Proust et les signes.*

(comprising acts, utterance, hearsay from others, broader events, etc); and, the capricious workings of chance and time.

Considering the question of accessibility more generally, not only as regards bodies but material objects, Richard opines that 'la prise visuelle, auditive, et même tactile se définit ici par l'extrême limitation de son pouvoir; elle semble le plus souvent condamnée à s'arrêter au bord de l'objet visé. L'effort de la perception tend à atteindre certes à un en-deçà rêvé de la surface, mais il lui faut s'en tenir à sa couche la plus épidermique.'[75] With the human body, he considers the position to be even more extreme: 'sur les corps contemplés aussi le regard n'appréhende jamais que des surfaces'.[76] But, to the contrary, as Anne Simon argues (focusing on bodily betrayal of the act of lying), despite the protagonist's error-strewn experience, 'la chair des autres lui parle directement de leur être profond', even if only intermittently.[77]

Most often, the skin does provide a means of psychological access, and is figured spatially as an expressive surface or interface offering a gateway to the other mind even if only momentarily or intermittently, and though the protagonist may lack the contextual knowledge to decipher its signs with certainty (a topic considered in **Chapter 3**). The treatment of skin as part of the spatial figuration of intersubjectivity in the *Recherche* may usefully be divided according to three broad categories of mind-reading targets, as set out below.

[75] *Proust et le monde sensible*, 47.

[76] Ibid., 51. Elsewhere, Richard moderates the position, acknowledging that 'le regard réussit à transgresser quelquefois la règle de non-pénétration', 54 (fn. 2).

[77] 'Proust ou le corps expressif malgré lui', 56.

(i) Secondary characters: mere surface

In the case of persons whom the protagonist does not desire or who fall outside his close family circle, the superficial contact of vision is often sufficient: 'Les hommes, les jeunes gens, les femmes vieilles ou mûres avec qui nous croyons nous plaire, ne sont portés pour nous que sur une plane et inconsistante superficie parce que nous ne prenons conscience d'eux que par la perception visuelle réduite à elle-même' (II, 246). Skin, like the rest of the body, is no barrier to the mental accessibility of most secondary characters: to the contrary, it acts physiologically to enhance access. The gamut of such secondary characters includes Mme de Villeparisis, Mme Verdurin, the Duc de Guermantes and the Princesse de Parme (e.g. II, 720-721), individuals whom the protagonist has comparatively little difficulty reading. However, not all such characters are easily read, especially if adept at masking their thoughts, like the Marquis de Norpois, Charlus or even Françoise; in such cases, more is required than mere physiognomy.

(ii) Mother / Grandmother: gateway and symbiosis

With the mother or grandmother, it is physical contact through skin that appears to guarantee optimum intersubjectivity. Most emblematically, the desired contact is in the form of the goodnight kiss (I, 13-38).[78] On an evening when his mother is too busy entertaining downstairs to allow him a kiss, the note that he sends to her via Françoise is engineered and imagined (in spatial terms) to re-establish their connection:

> mon petit mot allait [...] me faire du moins entrer invisible et ravi dans la même pièce qu'elle, allait lui parler de moi à l'oreille; puisque cette salle à manger interdite, hostile [...] s'ouvrait à moi et, comme un fruit devenu doux qui brise son enveloppe, allait faire jaillir, projeter jusqu'à mon cœur enivré l'attention de maman tandis qu'elle lirait mes lignes. Maintenant

[78] The 'Primal Scene' in Combray (I, 37-43) with which the kiss is associated has been discussed by others: see, e.g., Adam Watt, *Reading in Proust's À la recherche*, 12, 17-44.

> je n'étais plus séparé d'elle; les barrières étaient tombées, un fil délicieux nous réunissait. (I, 29-30)

The imagery has arrestingly profane overtones, but, more significantly, it depicts mother/son intersubjectivity in terms of nested container/contained relations which involve separation, barriers and a thread capable of reuniting them. Given spatial agency by personification, the note containing the protagonist's words bodies forth his mind and enables it invisibly to enter the forbidden space of the dining room containing his mother, securing her attention as she reads, and causing it to burst from its container and flow into him like the juice contained within the enveloping skin of a soft fruit. As the protagonist imagines it, his mother's act of reading the note (and, by implication, his mind) collapses the cognitive separation and barriers between mother and son, establishing the 'fil délicieux' which reunites them like an umbilical cord.[79] Though the ruse fails, the scene reproduces, in figurative rather than physical-psychical form, the conjunction achieved by skin contact in the goodnight kiss, which connotes wholesale (albeit temporary) possession of the mother's mind. This is something that the narrator wistfully remarks no mistress has subsequently been able to provide because of his doubts about their minds, which entail that 'on ne possède jamais leur cœur comme je recevais dans un baiser celui de ma mère, tout entier, sans la réserve d'une arrière-pensée, sans le reliquat d'une intention qui ne fût pas pour moi' (I, 183). Although there will prove to be misunderstandings (something discussed in **Chapter 3**), the mother remains an icon of intersubjectivity and, on occasions where the cognitive possession offered by the kiss is not available, mere facial expression may suffice for a reliable reading: 'on pouvait toujours lire dans son visage, sans crainte de se tromper, si l'on prenait comme clef le désir de faire plaisir aux autres' (IV, 147).

[79] For a psychoanalytical reading of this scene, see (for example) Brook, *Proust and the Avant-Garde*, 208-209.

When his mother is unable to accompany him to Balbec, the protagonist's grandmother assumes the maternal role. Upon first entering his hotel room, he feels oppressed and constricted, but the entrance of his grandmother has a dramatic, salutary effect: 'Alors ma grand-mère entra; et à l'expansion de mon cœur refoulé s'ouvrirent aussitôt des espaces infinis' (II, 28). Instead of being two contiguous, separate containers, the minds of the protagonist and his grandmother are subject to a process of psychological symbiosis, figured in spatial terms:

> je savais, quand j'étais avec ma grand-mère, *si grand chagrin qu'il y eût en moi, qu'il serait reçu dans une pitié plus vaste encore*; que tout ce qui était mien, mes soucis, mon vouloir, serait, en ma grand-mère, *étayé sur un désir de conservation et d'accroissement de ma propre vie* autrement fort que celui que j'avais moi-même; et *mes pensées se prolongeaient en elle sans subir de déviation parce qu'elles passaient de mon esprit dans le sien sans changer de milieu, de personne*. Et […] trompé par l'apparence du corps comme on l'est dans ce monde où nous ne percevons pas directement les âmes, je me jetai dans les bras de ma grand-mère et je suspendis mes lèvres à sa figure *comme si j'accédais ainsi à ce cœur immense qu'elle m'ouvrait*. (II, 28, emphasis added)

Nothing could be further from hermeticism or unknowability. The protagonist's sorrow is 'reçu' by the grandmother's mind; his concerns are propped up on ('étayé sur') her maternal care. Most strikingly, his thoughts extend from his own mind into hers ('se prolongeaient en elle') without undergoing any deviation, because their minds are felt to be spatially and cognitively coincident ('elles passaient de mon esprit dans le sien sans changer de milieu, de personne').[80] The protagonist's naive pairing of physical with psychological proximity ('*trompé par l'apparence du corps comme on l'est dans ce monde où nous ne percevons pas directement les âmes*' (emphasis added)), something suggested by the narrator to be generally misplaced, is in fact represented as justified in relation to the grandmother, whose heart opens up to him without reserve. In throwing himself into her arms, he not only seeks,

[80] The spatial concept of 'prolongement' is discussed further in **Chapter 2**. Cf. Note that, when it comes to the *être aimé*, the emphasis is, instead, upon the *deviation* of thought caused by the interference (interposition) of a mind which is different from his own: I, 601 (Gilberte).

but feels that he has realized intersubjective re-enclosure within the envelope of maternal care and attention: 'Quand j'avais ainsi ma bouche collée à ses joues, à son front, j'y puisais quelque chose de si bienfaisant, de si nourricier, que je gardais l'immobilité, le sérieux, la tranquille avidité d'un enfant qui tète' (II, 28).

The scene is an enactment of the primordial illusion or phantasy of infancy. The narrator's description of the effect of applying his lips to her face treats her skin as 'Moi-peau', not mere physical surface but psycho-physical interface.[81] The grandmother's cheeks and forehead represent and provide open access to the fixed inner core of maternal care, and kissing her cheeks is the psychical equivalent of breastfeeding. However, it is not only skin contact that seems to enable such access, and the mind-reading ramifications of the interaction are easy to miss, due to the compression of ideas expressed or obliquely raised by the narrator's parenthetical observation about the body/mind divide. The stated premise is that, unlike her body, the other's mind is not capable of being *directly* perceived.[82] Yet, the protagonist feels that he *is* able to see into and access his grandmother's mind, as directly if it were his own, and to perceive – from her facial expression – her tenderness towards him (29). As is frequently the case, her emotion is embodied and manifest in her behaviour,

[81] The conceptual phrase coined by the psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu: *Le Moi-peau*, 2nd edn (Paris: Dunod, 1995). For Anzieu, skin forms the basis for a psychical envelope and, through the skin, '[l]'espace psychique et l'espace physique se constituent en métaphores réciproques; le Moi-peau est une de ces métaphores': *L'Épiderme nomade et la peau psychique* (Paris: Apsygée, 1990), 58. Using Anzieu's concept for a psychoanalytical reading of knowledge-acquisition in the *Recherche*, Geneviève Henrot explains that, according to such theory, skin and *Moi-peau* 'figurent concrètement l'interface plus ou moins perméable, opaque ou transparent, sur l'axe dedans/dehors de la contenance': 'Proust et les savoirs archaïques', in *Proust et les moyens de la connaissance*, ed. by Annick Bouillaguet (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2008), 127-137 (130). For a further reading of the *Recherche* 'through Anzieu', see Brook's *Proust and the Avant-Garde*, 214-218 (contrasting the 'fluid interchange of selves via a permeable *peau commune*' found in the protagonist's relationships with his mother and grandmother, with what she characterizes as the 'opaque impenetrability' of Albertine's skin); in applying Anzieu's concept of the *peau commune* to these maternal relationships, Brook follows Thomas Baldwin's analysis in *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust* (Oxford: Lang, 2005), 155-157, 160.

[82] Josée van de Ghinste takes the reference to the mistaken belief in direct perception of the mind to mean that the narrator considers himself not to have attained 'le sommet de communication', something reserved to art: *Rapports humains et communication*, 128. But, this downplays the significance of the scene and what the narrator derives from it.

not hidden within her body; moreover, it is read immediately and instinctively, 'felt' by the protagonist ('on sentait rayonner la tendresse') without the need for any inference, simulation or other conscious reasoning. Thus, in this instance, 'l'apparence du corps' is not at all misleading as expressive of her state of mind.

This short but central scene ends with the grandmother's act of removing his shoes (and leads into the inauguration of the *cloison* between their bedrooms as means of communication, something discussed later in this chapter). It is the memory of the grandmother's act which will, on the first night of his return to Balbec after her death, bring home the ramifications of his loss: the first *intermittence du cœur* that rocks his entire being, the 'Bouleversement de toute ma personne' (III, 152-154) at the immensity of loss, now felt through instant cognitive recreation, of 'un amour où tout trouvait tellement en moi son complément, son but, sa constante direction' (III, 155). In that moment of grief, the narrator expresses the nature of their intersubjectivity, as he experienced and conceived of it, in the most powerful psychological and spatial terms: while alive and specifically on that first night in Balbec, she was 'moi et plus que moi (le contenant qui est plus que le contenu et me l'apportait)' (III, 153). Instead of closure, her corporeal 'container' brought him the relational, cognitive plenitude of intersubjectivity, providing him with unimpeded access to unalloyed, boundless love, attention, and concern, and although the incident concerning the photograph showed that there was some room for misunderstanding (II, 144-145), it was the exception that proved the rule. The sense of psychological closure that comes with the appreciation that she is dying and withdrawing from symbiosis is, therefore, immense, their minds separated and the contents closed off into their respective containers:

> Elle, au cœur de qui je me plaçais toujours pour juger la personne la plus insignifiante, elle m'était maintenant fermée, elle était devenue une partie du monde extérieur […] Elle venait de me restituer les pensées, les chagrins, que depuis mon enfance je lui avais confiés pour toujours. (II, 609)

Jean Rousset sees the relations between the protagonist and his mother and grandmother as the only representations of love in the novel as perfect, continuous, ready-formed and exempt from all contingency, and the only instances of love to achieve 'le miracle de la communication, qui s'y fait pleinement, jusqu'à la communion: elle «était moi et plus que moi»'.[83] In stark contrast, Phillip Bailey treats the first hotel scene as suggesting only 'limited, one-way […] communion of thoughts taking place', involving at most the migration of the protagonist's thoughts into the grandmother's mind, and the protagonist's intense happiness based on self-delusion: the mere 'impression of totally possessing his grandmother's soul'.[84] This reading, advanced in discussion of the narrator's so-called 'solipsist manifesto' (IV, 34),[85] cuts across the very scheme of this central *intermittence du cœur*. However, it also raises an important issue regarding the 'unknowability' argument: if the most positive descriptions and declarations of intersubjectivity are to be dismissed as mere 'impression', can the same not be said of the bleak statements to contrary effect concerning Albertine? The so-called 'solipsist manifesto' is considered in detail in **Chapter 2**, and here it need only be said that it would be doing violence to the portrayal of relations with the mother and the grandmother to describe them as involving illusory bonds existing only in the mind of the protagonist and, to the contrary, the spatial representation of the intersubjectivity occurring by physical contact with the mother and grandmother is predominantly optimistic, connoting openness, accessibility, connection, possession and symbiosis.

That is not to say that the ramifications are all positive, for the relationship with the mother also has a less salutary aspect: the scene of the goodnight kiss instils in the

[83] *Forme et signification: essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel* (Paris: Corti, 1964), 167-168.

[84] *Proust's Self-Reader*, 63-67.

[85] Ibid., 61.

protagonist a 'terrible besoin d'un être' which results in a compulsive 'effort […] pour se combiner et ne faire qu'un élément unique avec l'autre' (III, 130) that marks all his amorous attachments.

(iii) Femmes désirées: barriers and penetration

With each of the unknown girls or women whom the protagonist desires, what he seeks is not mere physical possession but psychological mastery, and what he imagines that to require is cognitive penetration.[86] The initial step in any encounter is, therefore, to cast a desiring look or gaze that seeks to probe and acquire, 'le regard qui voudrait toucher, capturer, emmener le corps qu'il regarde et l'âme avec lui' (I, 139). As Richard astutely observes, since every hermeneutical object in the *Recherche* is conceived within a schema of containment, '[c]omprendre, cela revient à tous les sens du mot, à pénétrer'.[87] But, that observation may be extended from material objects to other minds. The protagonist suffers, in short, from compulsive 'epistemophilia' and 'scopophilia', the eroticized drive for knowledge through the desiring gaze,[88] or as Richard labels it, 'l'effort de pénétration oculaire'.[89]

The encounter with the 'belle pêcheuse' offers a clear exposition of the immaterial, cognitive penetration that he practises (II, 75-76). His gaze first alights on her skin, but it is her mind that he wishes metaphorically to kiss or touch, penetrating it with his own image: 'ce n'est pas seulement son corps que j'aurais voulu atteindre, c'était aussi la personne qui vivait en lui et avec laquelle il n'est qu'une sorte d'attouchement, qui est d'attirer son

[86] I, 99 (Gilberte).

[87] *Proust et le monde sensible*, 211.

[88] For discussion of the terms, see Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 98-99.

[89] *Proust et le monde sensible*, 53.

attention, qu'une sorte de pénétration, y éveiller une idée' (II, 75).[90] That 'être intérieur' *seems* to be initially closed off to him, spurring the desire cognitively to enter the enclosure of her mind and, like the reciprocal pleasure of a kiss, not only to receive pleasure but give it, by hanging a positive image of himself, attracting her attention, admiration and desire, and forcing her to retain a positive image of him until such time as he comes back to find her (II, 76). However, the moment that he feels that he has achieved his aim – that '[i]l me semblait que je venais de toucher sa personne avec des lèvres invisibles et que je lui avais plu' – his desire for a 'prise de force de son esprit, cette possession immatérielle' is sated and she loses all mystery for him.

The process becomes more overtly sexual with the young girls in the *petite bande*. What the protagonist desires from them physically are 'les contacts interdits', but he is forced to rely instead on his sense of sight and content himself with gazing at the skin of their cheeks and chests (II, 246-247). It is not long, however, before the quest for cognitive possession of Albertine progresses beyond the ocular to the tactile. During the 'partie de furet' in Balbec, the soft flesh of her hands seems to offer a promising means of penetration to her sensual inner being:

> plus grasses, les mains d'Albertine cédaient un instant, puis résistaient à la pression de la main qui les serrait, donnant une sensation toute particulière. La pression de la main d'Albertine avait une douceur sensuelle qui était comme en harmonie avec la coloration rose, légèrement mauve de sa peau. Cette pression *semblait vous faire pénétrer dans la jeune fille, dans la profondeur de ses sens*, comme la sonorité de son rire, indécent à la façon d'un roucoulement ou de certains cris. (II, 272, emphasis added)

[90] See also: I, 139 (Gilberte); II, 17 (coffee seller), 72 (*passantes*), 153 (Albertine and the *petite bande*), 279 (Albertine).

But, the protagonist misreads what her hand and finger movements on his are intended to signify, mistaking them for a declaration of feelings, and the dream of haptic communication is shattered by Albertine's angry outburst over his momentary stupor (II, 274).

The protagonist's ardour for skin contact becomes focussed instead on Albertine's sensuous pink cheeks. Their carnal symbolism is made plain (II, 283-286). What they also offer is a sensual analogue of his grandmother's cheeks, as expressive surfaces. But, with Albertine (as with all 'belles filles' (II, 72)), they represent the potential gateway to a world of psychological mystery, something powerfully but negatively expressed in a discarded draft of text for *Sodome et Gomorrhe* infused with pseudo-monadological imagery:

> Parfois, venant de l'abîme, inexplorable pour autrui, où, en tout être, roulent en silence comme des mondes inconnus, ses joies mortes et ses aspirations vers l'avenir, *tout d'un coup passaient sur les joues d'Albertine le reflet ardent ou l'ombre de quelque pensée invisible*, rapide comme un éclair de chaleur, comme une étoile filante, ou prolongée comme une éclipse. (III, 1482, emphasis added)

In practice, her cheeks act as involuntary physiological telltales, part of a range of verbal or bodily manifestations or signifiers (including utterance, acts, facial expression, etc) in the *Recherche* that express her complex 'monde inconnu' for the protagonist, the decipherability of which is complicated and impeded by the discontinuity and mutability of character that her behaviour seems to suggest, and by his own changeable disposition towards her (II, 299). On some occasions, the colouring in her cheeks suggests the presence of concealed desires, the pinkness associated with her sensuality appearing on their translucent surface: 'ses joues mates comme une blanche cire à la surface étaient *roses par transparence*, ce qui donnait tellement envie de les embrasser, d'atteindre ce teint différent qui se dérobait'. On others, they are as expressive of her state of mind as eyes: 'D'autres fois le bonheur baignait ses joues d'une clarté si mobile que *la peau, devenue fluide et vague, laissait passer comme des regards sous-jacents* qui la faisaient paraître d'une autre couleur,

mais non d'une autre matière que les yeux' (II, 298, emphasis added). Their expressivity is, however, counterbalanced with opacity by a two-part simile likening her face and eyes to 'un œuf de chardonneret' or 'une agate opaline', connoting simultaneously the enclosure of mind within body and the external colouring of the shell or the polished surface of the gemstone reflecting or at least hinting at what lies within.

Albertine's cheeks are the sensual and epistemological focal point of their first kiss, but the protagonist's hope that kissing them will allow him to penetrate to her inner being is crushed by the realisation that his lips are ill-equipped for the task and bound to remain on the surface: 'sans comprendre leur erreur et sans avouer leur déception, de vaguer à la surface et de se heurter à la clôture de la joue impénétrable et désirée' (II, 659). The implication is plain: the 'closure' of this first kiss is the very antithesis of the symbiotic access offered by the mother or grandmother's kiss. But, while they do not offer straightforward psycho-physical interconnection, Albertine's cheeks remain important reflectors of the mysterious contents of her mind (III, 583), a topic considered further in the context of mind-reading scenes in **Chapter 4**.

Ironically, it is Albertine's kiss that appears to achieve penetration through skin contact. In a play on the inside/outside dichotomy inherent in the topos of containment, it is her caressing tongue that represents the exteriorisation of her interior (flesh) – 'caresses superficielles mais en quelque sorte faite par l'intérieur de sa chair, extériorisé comme une étoffe qui montrerait sa doublure' - and therefore 'comme la mystérieuse douceur d'une pénétration' (IV, 79).[91] It is therefore a penetration in reverse, revealing her desire in the moment forcefully and on her terms, and a sacrilegious equivalent to the symbiosis between

[91] Richard picks up these nuances in his commentary: *Proust et le monde sensible*, 92-93 (fn. 3).

mother and child ordinarily associated with breast/mouth contact, or the goodnight kiss.[92] It is another form of reverse penetration, this time intensely painful, that occurs at a pivotal juncture in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, with Albertine's revelation of her relationship with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend. As she moves to leave the train carriage:

> ce mouvement qu'elle accomplissait ainsi pour descendre me déchirait intolérablement le cœur comme si, contrairement à la position indépendante de mon corps que à deux pas de lui semblait occuper celui d'Albertine, cette *séparation spatiale*, qu'un dessinateur véridique eût été obligé de figurer entre nous, n'était qu'une apparence et comme si, pour qui eût voulu, selon la réalité véritable, redessiner les choses, il eût fallu placer maintenant Albertine, *non pas à quelque distance de moi, mais en moi*. (III, 501, emphasis added)

Through the distorted optics of sexual jealousy, the greater the 'séparation spatiale', the greater the (reverse) penetration.[93] As Nussbaum observes, the imagery conveys this abstract cognitive, emotional and epistemological process with more potency than any literal paraphrasing could.[94] Albertine's revelation inflicts on the protagonist an emotional wound like an 'incision en pleine chair', rending his psychical skin and allowing her psychological 'double' to enter his heart (III, 757). For the protagonist, this is the experience of alterity at its most acutely painful, as unexpected penetration *by* the other.[95] Henceforth, it is deep *within him* that her thoughts and actions will be modelled and scrutinized (about which much more is said in **Chapter 4**). The conventional equation of physical proximity with psychological proximity, which was earlier noted to be flawed save in the case of the

[92] For extended discussion of the protagonist's affective association between his mother and Albertine, see Inge Crosman Wimmers, *Proust and Emotion*, 64-83.

[93] Christopher Prendergast, building on Girard, notes 'the process whereby distance is overcome, in the triangular format of Proustian desire within which our knowledge (or suspicion) of the desired one's desire for another (here Mlle de Vinteuil) instantly abolishes distance in the mode of a painful introjection; the body of the other comes close, is experienced as moving "inside us," only, however, to wreak emotional havoc.' (*Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 165)

[94] *Love's Knowledge*, 256-257. See also: 246-247, 252.

[95] Leo Bersani reads the scene as a metaphor for the protagonist's pursuit of his own desire, offering an explanation of 'Albertine's sudden displacement from outside Marcel to inside Marcel as the internalization of an impenetrable otherness' which is valuable, regardless of whether one subscribes to his psychoanalytical analysis: 'Death and Literary Authority: Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein', in *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 7-28 (24).

most unquestionable emotional bond (II, 28), is here not merely falsified but inverted, psychological separation being equated figuratively with physical ingestion:

> Comme la vue est un sens trompeur! Un corps humain, même aimé comme était celui d'Albertine, nous semble, à quelques mètres, à quelques centimètres, distant de nous. Et l'âme qui est à lui de même. Seulement, que quelque chose change violemment la place de cette âme par rapport à nous, nous montre qu'elle aime d'autres êtres et pas nous, alors aux battements de notre cœur disloqué, nous sentons que c'est, non pas à quelques pas de nous, mais en nous, qu'était la créature chérie. (III, 512)

Internalizing the other, having her 'fourvoyé dans notre cœur' (III, 621) occurs due to 'une erreur de localisation' (IV, 79), collapsing the distinction between container/contained but giving rise to a spatial ambiguity with epistemological connotations: it may connote the deep-seated intuition that comes with intimate familiarity, the compromised judgement born of emotional investment or sexual jealousy, or both. Where the paranoia of sexual jealousy has the upper hand, Albertine's body, as incorporated within the protagonist, becomes the locus of a potentially boundless array of treacherous acts and thoughts in an infinite spatio-temporal field ('l'extension de cet être à tous les points de l'espace et du temps que cet être a occupés et occupera' (III, 607-608)), of which he may acquire at least *some* knowledge, 'interne, immédiate, spasmodique, douloureuse' (III, 887).

Just as the skin may be psychologically permeable, the eyes also operate as involuntarily expressive interfaces. As Christopher Prendergast observes, 'Proust returns obsessively to the eyes of his characters'.[96] According to the well-worn topos, while the body is a container of the other's mind, her eyes and the look or gaze that acts as their 'porte-parole' (I,139) are the window or mirror of the soul illuminated by or projecting the thoughts contained and concealed behind them.[97] In the *Recherche*, and as corroborated by modern

[96] *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 163.

[97] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 13. See Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Binoculars* for discussion of the science and art of optics in the *Recherche.*

cognitive science on theory of mind, eye detection plays a key role in mind-reading, both for discerning the other's state of mind and, from the direction of her gaze, 'the target of that person's desire or goal'.[98] Correspondingly, the eyes play a central role in the spatial representation of other minds. Nowhere is this more powerfully apparent than in the context of concealment and lying; for, as Anne Simon remarks, operating involuntarily, '[l]e regard […] exhib[e] les secrets profonds d'autrui – sinon leur contenu, du moins leur existence'.[99]

The protagonist is, from the outset, almost unnaturally adept at observing the microscopic movements and changes of colour in the eyes that register changes in mental state, though deciphering the content of the thoughts or emotions requires 'un indice de réfraction' (II, 76) more easily acquired with some minds than others. Even with Norpois, a diplomat with a near perfect ability to suppress facial expressions (I, 444), the young protagonist is able to detect and interpret the facial and ocular expressions that give away at least some of his thoughts. When he is overly effusive in his gratitude to Norpois for proposing to pass on compliments to Mme Swann, the young mind-reader detects from the diplomat's micro-behavioural response that it has had the opposite of the desired effect, observing:

> passer sur le visage de l'ambassadeur une expression d'hésitation et de mécontentement et dans ses yeux ce regard vertical, étroit et oblique (comme, dans le dessin en perspective d'un solide, la ligne fuyante d'une de ses faces), regard qui s'adresse à cet interlocuteur invisible qu'on a en soi-même, au moment où on lui dit quelque chose que l'autre interlocuteur, le monsieur avec qui on parlait jusqu'ici – moi dans la circonstance – ne doit pas entendre. (I, 470)

The unobservable process of cognition is conveyed as a spatial extension to its external counterpart, figuring the Marquis' look in three-dimensional geometric terms as a solid, part

[98] Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; 1995), 40-50, 97-120 (106).

[99] 'Proust ou le corps expressif malgré lui', 60.

of which is visible but part of which extends beyond view. Translating these manifestations into propositional thought, the protagonist deciphers them as Norpois,

> pensa[nt] que le désir, normal en apparence, que j'avais exprimé, devait dissimuler quelque pensée différente, quelque visée suspecte, quelque faute antérieure à cause de quoi, dans la certitude de déplaire à Mme Swann, personne n'avait jusqu'ici voulu se charger de lui transmettre une commission de ma part. (I, 470-471)

The centrality of eye detection to mind-reading and of obtaining the information necessary to decipher what the eyes reveal is neatly exemplified in the uncovering of the Princesse de Guermantes' love for M. de Charlus (III, 112-114). Disbelieving gossip that she is in love with the Baron, the protagonist notices that her interest is suddenly piqued at the mention of his name and, at the suggestion that the Baron had feelings for a certain someone, he observes,

> avec étonnement s'insérer dans les yeux de la princesse ce trait différent et momentané qui trace dans les prunelles comme le sillon d'une fêlure et qui provient d'une pensée que nos paroles à leur insu ont agitée en l'être à qui nous parlons, pensée secrète qui ne se traduira pas par des mots, mais qui montera des profondeurs remuées par nous, à la surface un instant altérée du regard. (III, 113)

The momentary change apparent within her eyes opens up a slight crack ('le sillon d'une fêlure') into her mind, revealing the existence of a concealed thought or feeling. The nature of that feeling is only disclosed later, and with the assistance of that other expressive surface, her skin, when she blushes at the thought that her feelings have been revealed to the protagonist by her momentary reluctance to hand over a letter addressed to the Baron (III, 114).

With the mother, the eyes and their look are not merely readily decipherable by the protagonist but the materialization of, and a bridge to her love: 'elle envoyait vers moi, du fond de son cœur, son amour qui ne s'arrêtait que là où il n'y avait plus de matière pour le soutenir, à la surface de son regard passionné qu'elle faisait aussi proche de moi que

possible' (IV, 204). However, once again, the psychological access that the eyes or look offer is more variable when it comes to the *femme désirée*, depending upon the nature of the mental content that he seeks and the other contextualizing information that he is able to obtain. What the protagonist desires of Gilberte (I, 139-140, 484), each young 'passante' in Balbec (II, 72), Albertine (II, 152) or the midinettes in the Bois (III, 675) is access to the 'individualité, âme vague, volonté inconnue' behind the look in her eyes, including 'les images, les souvenirs, les attentes, les dédains qu'il porte'. The eyes of the *femme désirée* are more desirable than mere mineral or even precious stone ('mica', 'opale', 'agate') because each 'disque réfléchissant' is illuminated by and projects[100] the rays of a mysterious interiority that is the very motor for his desire (II, 152, 298-299; III, 677):

> le petit rayon qui les irise ou les grains de brillant qui les font étinceler sont tout ce que nous pouvons voir d'une pensée, d'une volonté, d'une mémoire où résident la maison familiale que nous ne connaissons pas, les amis chers que nous envions. Arriver à nous emparer de tout cela, qui est si difficile, si rétif, c'est ce qui donne sa valeur au regard bien plus que sa seule beauté matérielle. (III, 677)

During the protagonist's infatuation with Mme de Guermantes, deciphering the 'regard souriant' that she directs to friends at the Opéra seems to call for knowledge of her high society milieu in order to 'en décomposer le prisme, en analyser les cristallisations' (II, 353), something that, in time, he acquires. But, it is Albertine, once more, who represents the greatest challenge. While recognizing that, despite the conventional misconception, her eyes may not offer more insight into her thoughts than other expressive parts of her body such as her cheeks ('les yeux où la chair devient miroir et nous donne l'illusion de nous laisser plus qu'en les autres parties du corps, approcher l'âme' (II, 298)), he intuits that he will only ever truly possess her if he possesses the interiority that manifests itself in her eyes (II, 152). The difficulty inherent in the task is symbolized by the elusiveness and duplicity

[100] A play on the ancient theory of extramission, the belief in the emanation of light rays from the eyes: Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 13.

conveyed by her eyes which, metonymically representing her thoughts, only *appear* to be present, static and passive, but are in fact remote, mobile, trained on a rendezvous elsewhere:

> Au reste, à quoi bon m'attacher à ce que disaient les prunelles en ce moment? Comment n'avais-je pas depuis longtemps remarqué que les yeux d'Albertine appartenaient à la famille de ceux qui (même chez un être médiocre) semblent faits de plusieurs morceaux à cause de tous les lieux où l'être veut se trouver – et cacher qu'il veut se trouver – ce jour-là? Des yeux – par mensonge toujours immobiles et passifs – mais dynamiques, mesurables par les mètres ou kilomètres à franchir pour se trouver au rendez-vous voulu, implacablement voulu, des yeux qui sourient moins encore au plaisir qui les tente, qu'ils ne s'auréolent de la tristesse et du découragement qu'il y aura peut-être une difficulté pour aller au rendez-vous. (III, 599)

It is only in sleep, with her eyes closed, that Albertine's fugitive thoughts appear to be corporeally enclosed and immobilized: 'Son moi ne s'échappait pas à tous moments, comme quand nous causions, par les issues de la pensée inavouée et du regard. Elle avait rappelé à soi tout ce qui d'elle était en dehors, elle s'était réfugiée, enclose, résumée, dans son corps' (III, 578).[101] But, in this dormant state, she represents the very antithesis of the desired possession, because as Prendergast says, 'in the passivity of sleep, Albertine is dispossessed of her complex and difficult humanity', becoming little more than an *object* of sexual self-gratification.[102] Yet, the passage is illuminating for what it seems to connote, optimistically, about the possibility of reading Albertine when she is conscious: as much as she may resist voluntary disclosure, her thoughts are constantly escaping, through 'issues de la pensée inavouée'; though they may often seem to be barriers (III, 886), her eyes and

[101] For discussion of the significance of Albertine sleeping, see (for example), Erika Fülop, *Proust, the One, and the Many*, 65-81, where the tranquillity experienced by the protagonist is said to result from 'the neutralization of the troubling otherness in her, which makes it possible for him to forget the rift between himself and what is beyond the limits of his subjectivity' (84).

[102] *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 166. To similar effect, see Katja Haustein, 'Proust's Emotional Cavities: Vision and Affect in *À la recherche du temps perdu*', *French Studies*, 63.2 (2009), 161-173 ('Albertine as petrified surface now forms the perfect screen onto which he can project his images of ideal love. […] Albertine becomes the object of an act of solitary satisfaction […]. While their bodies are pressed together their minds remain wide apart' (169-171)).

other facial features are gateways by which her unspoken thoughts make their way out of their bodily containment.

Where he is able to witness Albertine's behaviour in the presence of other women who desire her or whom she desires, the look in her eyes betrays her state of mind in a manner that leaves the protagonist in no doubt because the index of refraction is immediately available. Where she is the object of desire, her eyes disclose her pleasure by a 'regard atone et heureux' that, when read with her distant smile and a change in colouring of her face, radiates her awareness of the attraction that she has inspired, despite the indifference that she seeks to convey by a show of passivity: 'Elle avait beau essayer de voiler la conscience qu'elle en avait, celle-ci la baignait, l'enveloppait, vaporeuse, voluptueuse, faisait paraître sa figure toute rose' (III, 656). Where she is the active agent of desire, the evidence is even more compelling: 'son regard étroit et velouté se fixait, se collait sur la passante, si adhérent, si corrosif qu'il semblait qu'en se retirant il aurait dû emporter la peau' (655-656). The impediment to reading her mind is therefore not so much one of access, since her body is constantly emitting signs that reveal thoughts or desires, but of contextualized interpretation.

2. Cognate metaphorical barriers or interfaces

The body is not the only barrier or gateway interposed in the *Recherche* between the mind-reader and the other's mind, whether of a physical or purely figurative nature. The *cloison* separating the bedrooms of the grandmother (or, later, mother) and protagonist at the hotel in Balbec, or between his bathroom and that of Albertine in Paris, is striking for the simple but powerful spatial representation that it provides of the very different levels of intersubjectivity in these relations and for the aptness of the image within the metaphorical scheme of containment. Looking first at the word *cloison* and the nature of the barrier that

it denotes, one starts with Ingrid Wassenaar's observation that the noun *cloison* originally signified an *enceinte fortifiée*, deriving from the Latin word for an enclosure.[103] Wassenaar explains that the word evolved from designating 'what *surrounded* and protected the whole' to the designation of internal division within *inside* spaces, with a corresponding move from the denotation of a solid, permanent barrier to a semi-permeable partition or screen of a temporary, flimsy or (re)movable nature.[104] Whereas Wassenaar's discussion of the *cloison* in the *Recherche* is wide-ranging,[105] this section will focus on its role in the spatial figuration of the relation with other minds.

As between the protagonist and grandmother, the *cloison* separating their bedrooms in Balbec functions as a very thin communicative interface facilitating their psychological symbiosis (II, 29-30), the material equivalent of the grandmother's cheeks in the scene described above (of which this is a continuation). Each morning begins with a symphony of knocks on the *cloison*, a 'dialogue rythmé de mes trois coups auquel la cloison pénétrée de tendresse et de joie, devenue harmonieuse, immatérielle, chantant comme les anges, répondait par trois autres coups, ardemment attendus, deux fois répétés'. The *cloison* is figured as an instrument through which the grandmother's mind itself is transported ('elle savait transporter l'âme de ma grand-mère tout entière et la promesse de sa venue') with 'une allégresse d'annonciation et une fidélité musicale'. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says, the partition is 'as eloquent a membrane as if it demarcated the chambers of a single ear, or heart'.[106] It is almost certainly no coincidence that the narrator uses musical analogies to

[103] *Proustian Passions*, 100.

[104] Ibid., 29, 100-101.

[105] See, in particular, 97-129, 204-205, Appendix III (though Wassenaar does not address the significance of the *cloison* separating the bathrooms in Paris).

[106] 'The Weather in Proust', in *The Weather in Proust*, ed. by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 1-41 (14), echoed by Brook in *Proust and the Avant-Garde*, 214. See also: Baldwin, *The Material Object*, 157 (using Anzieu's concept of the *peau commune* to interpret the *cloison* as

describe the intersubjectivity attained with his grandmother: in the theories that he later expounds, music is, par excellence, the medium allowing 'la communication des âmes' (III, 762-763),[107] by which a composer is able to convey to another 'cette qualité inconnue d'un monde unique' (III, 877). The analogies are, therefore, entirely apposite to describe the intersubjective communion between the protagonist and his grandmother.

On the second visit to Balbec, following the grandmother's death, it is the previously communicative function of the *cloison* which makes it such an unbearable reminder of the fact that their cognitive link has been broken (III, 159-160). On this occasion, it is his mother on the other side of the *cloison* (III, 501) and, following the devastating revelation by Albertine about Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, the sound of his crying (transmitted through the partition) wakes her up and, the degree of intersubjectivity with the two women being identical, he confuses her with his grandmother (III, 513).

While the 'mince' *cloison* separating the two bathrooms used by the protagonist and Albertine in the Paris apartment is described in more prosaic terms (III, 521) and does not constitute an instrument for perfect thought transference, nor does it connote complete or disabling psychological separation or enclosure. Rather, it places them in a relation of intimacy through close albeit mediated proximity that allows them to continue their conversation.[108] There are, however, occasions on which the narrator uses other figurative

'a common skin that, from the narrator's perspective, permits an unmediated connectedness between himself and his grandmother').

[107] By contrast, Bailey draws the same link, but characterizes the communication as vague, non-reciprocal and 'monologic', with the reality of exchange existing 'in Marcel's mind alone': *Proust's Self-Reader*, 65-68. As Beckett states, '[a] book could be written on the significance of music in the work of Proust' (*Proust*, 70). The topic of music in the *Recherche* has, since then, been extensively addressed elsewhere: see, for example, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Proust musicien*, 3rd edn (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, rev. edn, 2023); Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars*, 68-125; Jennifer Rushworth, *Proust's Songbook: Songs and Their Uses* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024). The role of music will be addressed later in this study, but only insofar as relevant to the topic of reading minds.

[108] By contrast, Brook describes the *cloison* as a 'barrier' that 'hinders' their conversation: *Proust and the Avant-Garde*, 217-218.

barriers to represent what the protagonist feels, at times, to be the difficulty or impossibility of reading Albertine. The static image of the curtain ('ce rideau tiré sur les mobiles d'autrui') is used, for example, to connote the separation of the observable (actions) from the unobservable (motivating thoughts, feelings etc) which lie 'dans un plan plus profond' (IV, 197). But, this is too static a figure to capture the essence of the mind-reading challenge posed by Albertine, with whom the problem is not merely the mind and its contents being shielded from view by the body, but the mind seeking to dissemble, and whose thoughts, memories, desires, ruses and plans change from one moment to the next. The difficulties are correspondingly figured in more elaborate, dynamic terms in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, when the narrator describes the intense (separation) anxiety induced by Albertine's failure to show up at his apartment after the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée as agreed, and the sense that she is lying about misunderstanding what had been agreed (III, 123-131):

> je commençais à comprendre que la vie d'Albertine était située (non pas matériellement sans doute) à une telle distance de moi qu'il m'eût fallu toujours de fatigantes explorations pour mettre la main sur elle, mais de plus, organisée comme des fortifications de campagne et, pour plus de sûreté, de l'espèce de celles que l'on a pris plus tard l'habitude d'appeler «camouflées». (III, 130-131)

The military metaphor of incessant, tiring 'explorations' for a quarry organised behind mobile, camouflaged fortifications that are difficult to locate is apt to convey the protracted battle of wits involved in the attempt to read Albertine, who actively guards her fluid mental content against conquest. The metaphor is taken a step further: her life is spread over several fallback lines (an existence laid out 'sur cinq ou six lignes de repli'), entailing that, even as the protagonist is able to learn some facts, they are so mixed with lies, that he will struggle to learn the truth (III, 131). In a hint at what is to come in *La Prisonnière*, the protagonist has a sense of foreboding at the thought that the campaign will be interminable unless he is able to incarcerate and thereby immobilize Albertine, and even then, as the narrator notes in an aside (attributable either to the protagonist, the mature narrator, or both), 'on s'évade'.

IV. L'enveloppe close?

The psychological isolation that the protagonist feels reaches its nadir when, in moments of physical intimacy with Albertine during her supposed captivity in Paris, his sexual jealousy is triggered and he is made painfully aware of his lack of complete epistemological and psychological possession. At such moments, her body seems, and is figured most potently as, a barrier, separating him from 'spectacles intérieurs' (III, 886-888). Yet, inversely and reflecting the aesthetic value to be derived from the experience, the descriptive treatment of the desired 'penetration' reaches its spatial and rhetorical zenith, poeticizing the motif that, for the jealous lover, physical proximity to (and even intimate contact with) the body of the *femme aimée* is not to be confused with the immobilisation of, and mastery over, her mind.[109]

Having reasoned that his love is sustained by the very pursuit of 'quelque chose d'inaccessible', the narrator expresses the anguish engendered by what he feels to be his inability to read her mind in a lyrical, image-laden passage, which begins:

> Par instants, dans les yeux d'Albertine, dans la brusque inflammation de son teint, je sentais comme un éclair de chaleur passer furtivement dans des régions plus inaccessibles pour moi que le ciel et où évoluaient les souvenirs, à moi inconnus, d'Albertine. Alors cette beauté qu'en pensant aux années successives où j'avais connu Albertine, soit sur la plage de Balbec, soit à Paris, je lui avais trouvée depuis peu, et qui consistait en ce que mon amie se développait sur tant de plans et contenait tant de jours écoulés, cette beauté prenait pour moi quelque chose de déchirant. (III, 887)

While able intermittently to luxuriate in the joys of his experiences with Albertine – his 'plus vaste amour' (III, 756-757) – when not preoccupied by what she may be concealing, a momentary look in her eyes or blush is all that it takes to trigger the feeling that secret memories are developing in parts of her mind beyond reach. At such moments, the beauty

[109] Expressed by the narrator in more prosaic terms much earlier, in the context of the Rivebelle restaurant: 'on peut être près de la personne qu'on aime et cependant ne pas l'avoir avec soi' (III, 404), and in more emotional and frustrated terms when describing events in Paris: III, 607-608.

in Albertine's embodiment of change, time and memory turns from a source of joy to pain and sadness, as her body involuntarily signals that she contains not merely the memories of their shared experience, but 'sous ce visage rosissant […] comme un gouffre l'inexhaustible espace des soirs où je n'avais pas connu Albertine'. The experience is subjectively elongated in the narrative by use of the imperfect, the tense that signified for Proust 'cet éternel imparfait' – '[u]n état qui se prolonge'[110] – and 'une source inépuisable de mystérieuses tristesses'.[111]

At such moments, the regions of her mind from which the animating 'éclair de chaleur' emanates are felt not merely to be inaccessible, but to be an endless gulf separating her from him. Having the liberty to caress or possess her physically – something that the use of repetition and parataxis causes the reader to dwell upon ('Je pouvais bien prendre Albertine sur mes genoux, tenir sa tête dans mes mains, je pouvais la caresser, passer longuement mes mains sur elle') – provides no solution, as he feels it keeps him on the outside of her mind:

> comme si j'eusse manié une pierre qui enferme la salure des océans immémoriaux ou le rayon d'une étoile, je sentais que je touchais seulement l'enveloppe close d'un être qui par l'intérieur accédait à l'infini. (III, 888)

Touching her skin seemingly offers only contact with the protective outer surface of a cognitive container. But, two sets of imagery are used to represent the container, one more ambiguous than the other. First, an impermeable barrier of stone separating him from the desired but enclosed inner space imagined to contain the taste of the oceans (the image of the sea connecting Albertine to their shared experience in Balbec but also connoting her

[110] 'À propos du «style» de Flaubert', an article published on 1 January 1920 (in the *La Nouvelle Revue française*), repr. in *Essais*, 1220-1233 (1223).

[111] 'Journées de lecture', in *Pastiches et mélanges* (1919), repr. in *Essais*, 562-594 (572).

endless variability)[112] or the ray of light from a star (an astral image that the narrator elsewhere associates with lesbianism). Secondly, the closed envelope enclosing a space which extends to infinity. The spatial image of the body as container of the infinite (mind) is redolent of the monadology,[113] but treating that of the *femme aimée* in particular as container of infinite sensual mystery has a literary pedigree in, for example, Barbey d'Aurevilly's *À un dîner d'athées*.[114] While capable of being read negatively as connoting inaccessibility,[115] the image of the envelope also bears more positive connotations. Though as a geometric figure it may constitute a boundary and limit, in Leibniz's topological monadology it constitutes instead a fold or continuum of relations that encompasses both the internal and external.[116] The monad is an 'enveloppe close' in the sense that, while it has no doors or windows, it enfolds and envelopes all others.[117]

As applied to Albertine and the protagonist, the envelope is used not only to connote Albertine's differentiation from him in moments of what he feels to be emotional/psychological separation (III, 888), but her enfolding of him (IV, 140). Didier

[112] See, for example, III, 577-578; III, 612.

[113] *La Monadologie*, 176-177 (§§60-61). Renouard makes the link: 'Proust et Leibniz', 255.

[114] Rosalba is, for Mesnilgrand, both 'impénétrable comme le sphinx' and '[d]ans la sensation, qui est fini, comme disent les philosophes en leur infâme baragouin, elle transportait l'infini!': 'À un dîner d'athées', in *Les Diaboliques* (1874), in *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, ed. by Jacques Petit, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1966), II, 173-228 (216). According to Brian Rogers, this was one of Proust's favourite works by the author: *Proust et Barbey d'Aurevilly*, 15, 86.

[115] See, for example, Hanney, *The Invisible Middle Term*: 'It is fitting that Albertine remains "closed" to him throughout their relationship' (33).

[116] Rawes, *Space, Geometry and Aesthetics*, 120. See also: *La Monadologie*, §13-14. The fold is also used in Leibniz's writing to connote the infinite complexity of the universe contained within the monad: Leibniz, *The Labyrinth of the Continuum: Writings on the Continuum Problem, 1672-1686*, ed. and trans. by Richard Arthur (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 185-187, 211. In Leibnizian terms, to read the other's mind exhaustively would be to unfold it to infinity: Leibniz, *Principes*, 52 (§13). Renouard refers to this passage, citing Morel as an example of infinite complication that the other may present: 'Proust et Leibniz', 255; III, 421-422.

[117] Gilles Deleuze explains that this 'condition de clôture ou de fermeture' is a necessary part of the inflection by which, in the monadology, the mind represents the world internally and from its particular point of view, something that takes place only in the mind that envelops it: *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), 31.

Anzieu's 'psychoanalysis of skin' also offers a useful analogy in this connection, conceiving of the bodily skin as a protective but permeable container and interface, and as constitutive of both a 'skin ego' (by which the mind acquires a mental skin modelled on the bodily skin) and 'psychic envelopes'.[118] Marc Lafrance explains that Anzieu's psychic envelopes are 'sensory experiences that have been transposed from the somatic plane onto the psychic plane; once transposed, they are structured like and function as the envelopes, or skins, of the psyche'.[119] In the protagonist's experience of Albertine, there are numerous occasions on which this process operates in reverse, her mental state being at least partially transposed outwards from her psychic plane or envelope onto the very surface of her skin, and becoming visible (and available for interpretation). In this way, the manifestation of Albertine's mental state becomes a sensory experience for the protagonist, in turn transposed inwardly onto his own psychic envelope. As we have seen, with the contact of Albertine's tongue on his body in her kiss, the intensity of the experience is such that this process is keenly felt by the protagonist as a form of psycho-physical 'pénétration' (IV, 79).

Moreover, even in its more prosaic everyday form, the 'enveloppe close' is apt to connote both enclosure and prospective opening; in ordinary usage, the envelope is a container designed to be sealed only temporarily, but then unfolded, opened. It is a container whose contents may even be accessed *through* its surface, as Swann discovers with Odette's letter to Forcheville: 'à travers le vitrage transparent de laquelle se dévoilait à lui […] un peu de la vie d'Odette, comme dans une étroite section lumineuse pratiquée à même l'inconnu' (I, 278).

[118] Marc Lafrance, 'From the Skin Ego to the Psychic Envelope: An Introduction to the Work of Didier Anzieu', in *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Sheila Cavanagh, Angela Failler, & Rachel Hurst (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 16-44 (16).

[119] Ibid., 31.

The combination of anaphora and parataxis ('dans ... dans ...', 'soit ... soit ...', 'cette beauté ... cette beauté ...', 'Alors ... Alors ...', 'Je pouvais ... je pouvais ...', etc) gives the first few sentences of the paragraph a plaintive and rhythmic quality, culminating in an expression of anguish at the lack of total intersubjectivity ('interpénétration des âmes') which neatly encapsulates the limit situation felt most acutely with Albertine:[120]

> Combien je souffrais de cette position où nous a réduits l'oubli de la nature qui, en instituant la division des corps, n'a pas songé à rendre possible l'interpénétration des âmes! (III, 888)

With this exclamation, the pace of the passage slows further as the narrator works through his predicament over the remaining sentences, fused together in one extended block by conjunctions: 'Et ... Et ... Sans doute ... Mais ...'. Possessing and enclosing Albertine physically in his home has never made of her the 'merveilleuse captive' that he imagined (cf. III, 680-681); she has never been truly immobilized, or enclosed ornamentally like the legendary Princess of China within a bottle, 'car si son corps était au pouvoir du mien, sa pensée échappait aux prises de ma pensée'. In this graphically spatial usage of personification, Albertine's mind has remained an elusive quarry, leading the protagonist's own on an excruciating and interminable search across time and space for the facts about her activities: 'm'invitant sous une forme pressante, cruelle et sans issue, à la recherche du passé, elle était plutôt comme une grande déesse du Temps'. Obliterating the traditional,

[120] Note that the putative 'interpénétration' would, unlike even telepathy, be bidirectional. In her novella, *The Lifted Veil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1859]), George Eliot depicts telepathy (and the knowledge of other minds that it brings) not as a gift but a curse. Her protagonist, Latimer, acquires a 'superadded consciousness' which brings about 'the obtrusion on [his] mind of the mental process' of each person with whom he comes into contact (13), including (eventually) Bertha – the woman he loves, but who despises him. This involuntary ability is a source of intense pain and grief, subjecting Eliot's telepath to others' thoughts 'in all their naked skinless complication', including 'all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent make-shift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap' (14, 15, 18). Knowledge of Bertha's thoughts extinguishes the passion that ignorance and imagination had ignited. Considering the 'interpénétration' posited by the narrator in the *Recherche* in the light of Eliot's cautionary tale leads one to wonder: how much worse would the telepathic lover's predicament be if the process operated both ways?

gendered dichotomy that equates the female with passivity and space and the male with activity and time,[121] Albertine evades all spatio-temporal immobilization.

But, though her resistance to total psychological possession is emotionally wounding ('déchirant') – an image that originates in the revelation of her past with Mlle Vinteuil and is thereby associated with sexual jealousy – it is presented in dual terms. The experience of trying to access her inner experience is both painful and pleasurable, a recurring and dominant motif in the novel. Proust's internal note in *Cahier 54* (concerning the draft text in *Cahier 71* relating to *La Prisonnière*) highlights the positive aspect of the *déchirure* as an opening that *enables* communication with another mind:

> il faudra que je dise que l'amour c'est comme une petite déchirure (mot médicale [*sic*] ce qu'on fait pour laisser suppurer) qui nous permet de communiquer du moins par la curiosité et le désir avec la personnalité d'un autre être.[122]

In *Cahier 55* (in 1915), Proust clarified the dual nature of the *blessure* inflicted by sexual jealousy, in a passage which did not make the final cut:

> C'était toute une partie de l'univers qui était entrée dans mon cœur, que je percevais non par les yeux froids de l'intelligence, non par les yeux charmés mais indifférents du souvenir, mais *une sensation cardiaque à la fois voluptueuse et douloureuse*. (III, 1126, emphasis added)

This omitted text spells out the nature of the duality which is conveyed in only slightly less explicit terms at III, 888, but also later at IV, 34 (discussed in **Chapter 2**).

The nature of the pleasure is epistemological and aesthetic. The pain of jealousy is the necessary condition, 'comme la petite blessure qui se cicatrisait assez vite', to open his own (psychic) skin, sharpening his wits and senses and permitting 'accès sur cette issue hors

[121] For discussion of the convention, see Martina Löw, 'The Social Construction of Space and Gender', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13.2 (2006), 119-133 (126).

[122] BnF, NAF 16694, fol. 10^{v}.

de soi-même'. Pain is thus the prerequisite to accessing an intersubjective pathway ('chemin de communication privé') by which the lover attempts to join the larger highway ('la grande route') of alterity represented by others' lives (III, 888-889). The effort to attain the desired intersubjectivity is akin to a journey, not merely offering the prospect of an enticing destination, but rewarding in its own right.

The *enveloppe close* passage as a whole successfully combines spatial imagery and ecphonesis into a lyrical piece of prose with poetic qualities that counterbalances the negative with positive, amplifying and implementing the narrator's dictum, trailed in the story of Swann and Odette, that:

> les êtres nous sont d'habitude si indifférents que, quand nous avons mis dans l'un d'eux de telles possibilités de souffrance et de joie pour nous, il nous semble appartenir à un autre univers, il s'entoure de poésie, il fait de notre vie comme une étendue émouvante où il sera plus ou moins rapproché de nous. (I, 232)

This chapter started with consideration of the Leibnizian inspiration for the spatial representation of other minds, positing that it is used to figure a limit situation. What the discussion has endeavoured to show is that the conception of the mind as essentially 'monadic' in the *Recherche* does not, of itself, connote definite psychological isolation. Moreover, all the dichotomies conventionally associated with such a notion are challenged in the *Recherche* and shown not only to be recursive or nested but reversible: container/contained; inside/outside; open/closed; mind/body. The spatial figures used to figure intersubjectivity suggest that there is a spectrum of psychological proximity or separation between minds depending upon the nature of the relationship between them. Moreover, as connoted by the *enveloppe close* passage, at least some parts of even the most seemingly remote mind are accessible, something that will be explored in some detail in **Chapter 4** (in relation to Albertine). However, it remains to consider whether the imagery used by the narrator to figure the mind of the *femme désirée/aimée* as a space or place (as

part of a process by which he seeks to ‘sortir de soi’) suggests that he succumbs to the subjective idealism, radical doubt and pessimism about intersubjectivity that some have taken to link Proust with Leibniz and/or Schopenhauer.

CHAPTER 2: L'ÊTRE QUI VEUT SORTIR DE SOI

Mon enfant, ma sœur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traîtres yeux,
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

Baudelaire[1]

While topological figurations may convey the perceived (in)accessibility of other minds, they do not map the entire terrain so far as concerns the *femme désirée/aimée*. First, the mind of the desired other is not merely figured spatially as, or as affected by, containers (corporeal or not), but given topographical treatment as associated with place, landscape or astral phenomena. The fact that the protagonist has a tendency to link women with landscape has been sufficiently canvassed in existing criticism, but the motivation behind it and its significance for mind-reading call for further exploration, especially on the question of (in)accessibility. At the heart of this inquiry is the question of what, if anything, the protagonist is aiming to achieve, and whether he is successful. Secondly, it remains to consider whether the weight commonly placed on a particularly gloomy, spatialized pronouncement about other minds in *Albertine disparue* (IV, 34) in support of the 'unknowability' argument is justified when considered in context, and whether it is supported or undermined by what the novel has to say and show, spatially, about the ties between the lover and his *femme aimée*, not merely those between the protagonist and

[1] 'L'Invitation au voyage', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-1976), I, 53.

Albertine, but those between (for example) Saint-Loup and Rachel. Common to both lines of inquiry is the protagonist's desire to 'sortir de soi' and the question of what that objective might entail in relation to the desired other.

I. The Other's Mind as Desired Space

1. Place

Across a number of episodes, the narrator develops the topos of the *femme désirée* as part of, or offering the key to, the beauty of a particular place or landscape, and vice versa, weaving woman, place and sexual desire together, and combining dreams of travelling with amorous fantasy, in reveries that feature each of the women (real or imagined) whom he desires.[2] Several explanations have been advanced to explain the reciprocal relation in the *Recherche* between what André Ferré characterized as *désir physique* and *désir géographique*.[3] None of the alternatives are in fact mutually exclusive. As Alison Finch remarks, Proust's eroticizing treatment of the association between woman and place both honours and ironically deflates the age-old literary tradition of comparing landscape to the woman's body and vice versa.[4] However, the tentacles of that tradition extend far beyond literature per se. Janet Beizer describes a whole conceptual tradition of perceiving space as feminine and a concomitant anxiety of the male patriarchy in nineteenth-century France regarding spatial processes and conventionally dichotomous relationships (presence/absence, mobility/immobility, distance/fusion, interior/exterior, boundaries,

[2] Gilberte (I, 99, 527 & 624; IV, 567); the Roussainville *paysanne* (I, 154); the coffee seller (II, 16-18); Mlle de Stermaria (II, 49-50, 680-681); Mme de Guermantes (I, 169-170; II, 310-316, 785, 793; IV, 567); the *petite bande* (II, 189, 301); Albertine (II, 646-647, 658; III, 501, 605, 886-887).

[3] *Géographie de Marcel Proust*, 24-33.

[4] 'Love, Sexuality and Friendship', in *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*, ed. by Richard Bales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 168-182 (174).

conquest, possession, separation, and loss).[5] This anxiety entailed that male approaches to female space were shot through with ambivalence, so that, in Beizer's view, one should 'more specifically speak about the bounding, dividing, invading, sealing (and so on) of space than of space per se, for it is by means of such representational strategies that woman is spatialized and the resultant regions ambivalently confronted'.[6] Just such an ambivalence marks the *Recherche*: as discussed in **Chapter 1**, the narrator attacks or, at lowest, problematizes such dichotomies by various topological means, but, equally, both the protagonist and narrator are obsessively under the thrall of, and preoccupied with, the urge and anxiety to possess, penetrate and conquer.[7]

Joshua Landy is right to observe that women are treated as a means of attaining the mysterious essence of a place.[8] The necessary (but illusory) premise is that the woman is 'un produit nécessaire et naturel de ce sol', her kiss offering the means of satisfying the eroticized desire for place and accessing its hidden treasure and inner beauty (I, 154-155). The metonymic relation between woman and place is, as Ferré says, one of 'simple contiguité subjective': the protagonist associates her with the place in which he has first met her or where he has imagined an idyll or dalliance with her.[9] At the most elementary level, this association reflects the truism that, as pioneering social psychologist Kurt Lewin observed, '[a]ll representations of psychological life space are based on the fundamental

[5] 'Reading Women', in *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 55-73 (65).

[6] Ibid., 67.

[7] e.g. 'Je sentais qu'une partie de la vie d'Albertine m'échappait. L'amour, dans l'anxiété douloureuse comme dans le désir heureux, est l'exigence d'un tout. Il ne naît, il ne subside que si une partie reste à conquérir. On n'aime que ce qu'on ne possède pas tout entier.' (III, 614) See also: III, 648-649, 677.

[8] *Philosophy as Fiction*, 72, 74, 175 (fn. 65).

[9] *Géographie de Marcel Proust*, 29. See, to like effect: Georges Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, 34-39; Gérard Genette, 'Proust palimpseste', 60, and 'Métonymie chez Proust', 45-46; William Carter, *The Proustian Quest* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 23-37.

conception of a particular person in a particular environment'.[10] However, in the *Recherche*, it also has an artistic dimension, and as Georges Poulet and Jean-Yves Tadié have noted, the reciprocal relation creates a poetic frame or space by which the *femme désirée/aimée* is aesthetically individuated, given an associative charm according to the protagonist's subjective, emplaced vision of her.[11]

But, the relation is also intended to achieve much more than poeticization: in effect, it aims to secure easy access to the thoughts, feelings and, most of all, the unique perspective of the *femme désirée/aimée*. Gilles Deleuze expressed the matter in characteristically cogent if somewhat compressed terms:

> Aimer, c'est chercher à *expliquer*, à *developper* ces mondes inconnus qui restent enveloppés dans l'aimé. […] C'est pourquoi aussi les femmes aimées sont souvent liées à des paysages, que nous connaissons assez pour souhaiter leur reflet dans les yeux d'une femme, mais qui se reflètent alors d'un point de vue si mystérieux que ce sont pour nous comme des pays inaccessibles, inconnus.[12]

In the later development of this line of argument, he alluded to the complicating factor that the protagonist is himself implicated in the process, 'pris dans le monde inconnu exprimé par l'être aimé', so that '[l]'association du paysage et de l'être aimé dans l'esprit du narrateur est donc rompue au profit d'un Point de vue de l'être aimé sur le paysage, où le narrateur est lui-même pris'.[13] These insights open up an important further dimension of the spatialized association, but one that neither Deleuze nor Maël Renouard explores. To understand the protagonist's objective and what he achieves, it is necessary to examine the

[10] *Principles of Topological Psychology*, trans. by Fritz Heider & Grace Heider (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), 41. In Lewin's psychological field theory, the 'life space' or 'psychological field' encompasses all the events, people, objects, places, etc that influence the behaviour of an individual at any time, a concept equivalent to what the narrator describes compendiously as 'faits psychologiques' (IV, 9).

[11] See, to this effect: Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, 37-38, 43; Tadié, *Proust et le roman*, 103.

[12] *Proust et les signes*, 14 (echoed by Maël Renouard in 'Proust et Leibniz', 254).

[13] *Proust et les signes*, 145 (capitalization in the original).

basis for, scope and ramifications of the exercise, not least because the protagonist's view of the association evolves during the novel.

A key motivation behind the spatialisation of the *femme désirée* is declared by the narrator in *Du côté de chez Swann*: 'on ne pense qu'à *sortir de soi*' (I, 155, emphasis added); that is, to transcend the limitations of his own subjectivity – a thread that runs through the narrator's philosophy of mind from beginning to end of the *Recherche*. For the young protagonist, this means overcoming what Proust described in a sketch in *Cahier 29* as the 'petit liséré intellectuel qui nous empêche de sortir tout à fait de notre pensée, de toucher tout à fait la chose' (I, 752). But, as the narrator concedes, the knowledge that he naively hoped to obtain is not of brute reality but of person, place or object imbued with the charm of the image with which he has presumptively associated them:

> si on a la sensation d'être toujours entouré de son âme, ce n'est pas comme d'une prison immobile; plutôt on est comme emporté avec elle dans un perpétuel élan pour la dépasser, pour atteindre à l'extérieur avec une sorte de découragement, entendant toujours autour de soi cette sonorité identique qui n'est pas écho du dehors mais retentissement d'une vibration interne. On cherche à retrouver dans les choses, devenues par là précieuses, le reflet que notre âme a projeté sur elles, on est déçu en constatant qu'elles semblent dépourvues dans la nature, du charme qu'elles devaient, dans notre pensée, au voisinage de certaines idées; parfois on convertit toutes les forces de cette âme en habileté, en splendeur pour agir sur des êtres dont nous sentons bien qu'ils sont situés en dehors de nous et que nous ne les atteindrons jamais. (I, 85-86)

The predicament depicted is not that of the hermetically sealed monad: to the contrary, it is the experience of an idealist who struggles with the gap between his florid imagination and the disappointing reality of the other, and compensates by attempting to project into her a reassuring image, 'un état de notre âme' (II, 189). The association of woman and landscape is an integral aspect of the recurring theme that the most mysterious and alluring people, just like places, tend to be disappointing when experienced in reality (II, 229, 793), so that, as the mature narrator later says: 'la déception du voyage, la déception de l'amour n'étaient pas des déceptions différentes' (IV, 456).

The focus of place-related desire is not the woman's body but her mind. The figuring of a woman's mind as associated with place is of a piece with the Leibnizian conception of other minds as containing a qualitatively different vision of the world, which itself constitutes *a* world. Both Proust and Leibniz exhibit a fondness for using architectural metaphor to express core concepts concerning difference of perspective (e.g. II, 228, 660 & IV, 188 (Albertine)). For Leibniz, the world differs between individual minds only *modally*;[14] using the town analogy of which he was particularly fond,[15] there is only one town, but there are different modes or ways of seeing it, so that *qualitatively* the town exists separately for each individual, and correspondingly, there is an infinite multiplicity of universes:

> Et, comme une même ville regardée de différents côtés paraît toute autre, et est comme multipliée perspectivement; il arrive de même, que par la multitude infinie des substances simples, il y a comme autant de différents univers, qui ne sont pourtant que les perspectives d'un seul selon les différents points de vue de chaque Monade.[16]

Likewise, for the mature narrator in the *Recherche*, there is a single world or universe,[17] but differentiated as between individuals by virtue of their unique points of view: 'L'univers est vrai pour nous tous et dissemblable pour chacun' (III, 694). Thus, in a qualitative sense, echoing Leibniz, there *is* a different world for everyone: 'ce n'est pas un univers, c'est des millions, presque autant qu'il existe de prunelles et d'intelligences humaines, qui s'éveillent

[14] '[T]hings differ only modally, just as the town seen from a high point differs from the town seen from a plain' (*De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers, 1675-76*, ed. & trans. by George H. R. Parkinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 93-95. Leibniz defines a mode as 'a means by which something is thought' (quoted in Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, 429).

[15] Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, 303-309, 426, 429.

[16] *La Monadologie*, ed. by Émile Boutroux (Paris: Delagrave, 1881), 173 (§57). There is a trace of this Leibnizian thinking in another treatise with which Proust was very familiar, Gabriel Séailles' *Essai sur le génie dans l'art*: 'Chaque esprit est un point de vue original sur le monde; il y a autant de mondes qu'il y a d'esprits', 57.

[17] The narrator pokes fun at the Leibnizian theory of infinite monadic universes when mocking his 'imaginations enfantines' that each spectator in the theatre has, in effect, a separate world, rather than (as he later appreciates) merely a separate, central point of view on one: I, 72 & 438.

tous les matins' (III, 696).[18] These points of view are not extrinsic to the world, but an integral part of it: as the narrator observes (by way of comical aside) in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, 'Leibniz admet que chaque monade en reflétant tout l'univers y *ajoute* quelque chose de particulier' (II, 769, emphasis added) – that addition being of an immaterial, qualitative nature (as made clear especially in the later volumes).

Underpinning the association between woman and place or landscape is the conceit that positioning oneself in the same place or landscape as the mind-reading target would allow one to grasp her unique qualitative perspective. Whereas the maternal mental space of the grandmother offers the prospect of 'espaces infinis' in which the protagonist's thoughts may be echoed, extended and prolonged (II, 28), the allure of the coffee seller, for example, is that she offers the possibility of 'une autre tonalité' to what he perceives of the world, introducing him 'comme acteur dans un univers inconnu et infiniment plus intéressant' (II, 18). The strategy is one by which he would become familiar with her surroundings, immersing himself in an universe 'où les sensations qu'éveillaient les objets n'étaient plus les mêmes' (ibid.).

The rationale is expanded upon in relation to Mlle de Stermaria – the protagonist fantasizes about walking with her on her family estate as a means of accessing 'cette vie si poétique qu'elle menait en Bretagne […] [qu'] elle contenait enclose en son corps' (II, 49), for that poetic existence is not merely contained within her, but reciprocally within Brittany. Situating himself within the locale that generated and is imbued with her memories is presented as the key to total possession – not merely physical but psychological:

[18] Leibniz, *Considérations sur la doctrine d'un esprit universel* (1702) in *Œuvres philosophiques de Leibniz*, ed. by Paul Janet, 2 vols (Paris: Alcan, 1900), I, 681-690: 'chaque âme est un miroir de l'univers à sa manière sans aucune interruption, et qui contient dans son fond un ordre répondant à celui de l'univers même, que les âmes varient et représentent d'une infinité de façons, toutes différentes et toutes véritables, et multiplient pour ainsi dire l'univers autant de fois qu'il est possible' (689-690).

> Car il me semblait que je ne l'aurais vraiment possédée que là, quand j'aurais traversé ces lieux qui l'enveloppaient de tant de souvenirs – voile que mon désir voulait arracher et de ceux que la nature interpose entre la femme et quelques êtres […] afin que trompés par l'illusion de la posséder ainsi plus entière ils soient forçés de s'emparer d'abord des paysages au milieu desquels elle vit et qui plus utiles pour leur imagination que le plaisir sensuel, n'eussent pas suffi pourtant, sans lui, à les attirer. (II, 50)

Jean-Claude Dumoncel regards the equivalences, 'telle femme, tel site' / 'une femme, un pays', as representing a Leibnizian *logique du possible*, whereby '[e]n termes leibniziens, la femme enferme un monde possible où être heureux à ses côtés'.[19] The potted fantasy created around Mlle de Stermaria bears this out. However, at the level of intersubjectivity, what the narrator also appears to contemplate is a means of short-circuiting the separation of minds, of accessing the other's Leibnizian *monde* or *univers* (unique perspective) through a process of 'triangulation'[20] akin to that formulated by philosopher Donald Davidson: that is, by creating a three-way relation between two individuals and a common world enabling one to ascertain and understand the other's propositional attitude through mutual responses of both parties to 'common distal stimuli and to one another's responses'.[21] The triangulation under discussion here is not to be confused with René Girard's notion of mimetic or triangular desire,[22] which concerns the mediation of a subject's desire for a particular woman by a third party mediator or model whose desire he imitates. The triangulation envisaged idealistically by the young protagonist, and the triangulation actually put into operation in the mind-reading endeavours of the protagonist have a broader remit than the mere anatomy of desire. Such triangulation concerns the cognitive process involved in attempting to read another's mind (whatever the subject

[19] *La Mathesis de Marcel Proust*, 103, 289.

[20] Triangulation is a method of ascertaining the location of a point or feature, as in surveying or navigation, by making it one vertex of a triangle, the other two being known.

[21] *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), Introduction (xv), and the essays, 'Rational animals', 95-105 (105), and 'The Second Person', 107-121 (119). Note: a 'distal stimulus' is an object of triangulation which is located *away* from the centre of each individual's body rather than proximal (i.e. close to or at the centre of the body).

[22] *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

matter of their thoughts) and, as I will demonstrate elsewhere in this chapter, its application is not confined to the mind of the *femme désirée* (or, for that matter, the use of place or landscape).

The association of the desired woman with place or landscape therefore serves a multiplicity of intended objectives, including access to and enhancement of the beauty of the desired place (associated with the *femme désirée*) via the sharing of her *possible* life in that milieu, but also access to her perspective: 'j'imaginais toujours autour de la femme que j'aimais, les lieux que je désirais le plus alors, [...] j'eusse voulu que ce fût elle qui me les fît visiter, qui m'ouvrît l'accès d'un monde inconnu' (I, 86).

Proust himself promoted a similar exercise in relation to John Ruskin (in *Pastiches et mélanges*), urging readers to visit the places which were the (material) object of and incarnated Ruskin's thought: '[sa pensée] nous embellit davantage l'univers, ou du moins certaines parties individuelles, certaines parties nommées, de l'univers, parce qu'elle y a touché, et qu'elle nous y a initiés en nous obligeant, si nous voulons les comprendre, à les aimer.'[23] The protagonist entertains the same notion regarding Bergotte, fantasizing that an opinion on those things that he could see for himself, especially ancient French monuments and maritime landscapes, would compensate for his 'perception infirme' of the universe (I, 94), overcoming the monadological predicament whereby all monads perceive the same universe but each with a different point of view of greater or lesser clarity. In anticipation of the epiphanies that culminate in the narrator's formulation of a solution to at least part of the problem of other minds, such a fantasy is unintentionally realized when the protagonist rides on horseback into a landscape used by Elstir as backdrop in two of his watercolours,

[23] 'John Ruskin' (part III of 'En mémoire des églises assassinées'), in *Pastiches et mélanges* (1919), repr. in *Essais*, 510-544 (541).

causing the objects of his perception to become charged with the 'fragments d'un autre univers' (III, 416). Merging such an epiphany with the romantic reverie of touring cathedrals with Gilberte so that she may enlighten him with views that she has acquired through discussion with Bergotte (I, 99), would achieve a double triangulation.

In the case of Albertine, the prime questions are couched in monadological terms: 'Si elle m'avait vu, qu'avais-je pu lui représenter? Du sein de quel univers me distinguait-elle?' (II, 152) What he wants to possess is the full gamut of 'idées que cet être fait, relativement aux gens et aux lieux qu'il connaît […]; […] [s]es projets […]; […] ses désirs, ses sympathies, ses répulsions, son obscure et incessante volonté'. Knowledge of the ideas that she has formed of places pairs desire of mind and place, 'pelouses des hippodromes, sable des chemins où, pédalant à travers champs et bois, m'eût entrainé cette petite Péri, plus séduisante pour moi que celle du paradis persan'. The epistemological desire that the ambitious quest ignites is analogous in intensity to the thirst of parched earth ('dont brûle une terre altérée'), or the burning desire for territorial annexation, further spatial figurations of the attempt to escape from the constraints of the self:

> c'était par conséquent toute sa vie qui m'inspirait du désir; désir douloureux, parce que je le sentais irréalisable, mais enivrant, parce que ce qui avait été jusque-là ma vie ayant brusquement cessé d'être ma vie totale, n'étant plus qu'une petite partie de l'espace étendu devant moi que je brûlais de couvrir, et qui était fait de la vie de ces jeunes filles, m'offrait ce prolongement, cette multiplication possible de soi-même, qui est le bonheur.

Where the mental 'prolongement' provided by the grandmother comprised a reassuring psychological harmony, that seemingly represented by Albertine (and the other girls in the *petite bande*) is the tantalizing and challenging 'multiplication' of *different* experience and subjectivity.

In the event, and despite the protagonist having alluded obliquely to the possibility (II, 152), neither place nor landscape are used as the triangulating vertex or key to reading

Albertine, though location will have a more traditional, prosaic role to play in the protagonist's epistemological pursuit of her. While that pursuit will be considered in detail in **Chapter 4**, it is no spoiler to reveal that, despite the pronouncement that true possession of Mlle de Stermaria would necessitate immersion in her habitat, the protagonist attempts no such thing with Albertine and, to the contrary, he resorts to transplanting her to his environment in Paris where, by taking the role of partial recluse, he refrains from taking advantage of any topographical potential for reaching common ground. The association of Albertine with Balbec is little more than a thumbnail image of what he romantically imagines to be her 'irréductible essence' (II, 680) *for him* (a mysterious 'rose inconnue', and 'la plage et le déferlement du flot', II, 647, 659; IV, 36), and a symbol of the immaterial possession of Balbec that he imagines achieving through physical possession of her (II, 647, 658). The image is unilaterally generated by reference to where he first caught sight of her.[24] It is the localisation of his emotion, which proves itself susceptible to displacement, if only temporarily, by whatever different spatial image encapsulates his latest anxiety about Albertine's sexual mores: the association with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend (the image of *la chambre de Montjouvain* – III, 501); her childhood with them in Trieste (III, 499, 505-506); her promenades and nights out in Holland (the image of night lights in Amsterdam – III, 887).

Aiming to reduce the other's mind to an associative snapshot (or two) in spite of all her complexity and dynamism, and, moreover, attempting to do so in the manner of *his* selective choosing, is an entirely self-serving and futile exercise and, by the time of the second trip to Balbec, the failures of experience to live up to his images of a charming

[24] There is a difference in this regard between the image of milieu (which acts as backdrop) and that of Albertine herself, 'la fille orgiaque surgie et devinée, le premier jour, sur la digue de Balbec', which is the product of intuitive first impression and may very well prove to capture material aspects of her mind: 'les proportions vraies [indiquées par] la perspective du premier coup d'œil' (IV, 188).

'rapport nécessaire' between place and person (or between image, place and person) have led him to appreciate the adventitious and subjective nature of the process (III, 151). Indeed, the association is not only unedifying, but a hindrance to reading the other. As Pierre Macherey observes, it provides a profile of the other which renders 'incompréhensibles leurs transformations ultérieures; il les immobilise en n'en proposant que des instantanés partiels qu'il est difficile de raccorder les uns aux autres'.[25] The tendency forms part of what Gérard Genette labels a 'fétichisme du lieu', one of the childhood errors that the narrator later identifies as an 'illusion à perdre', though it remains deeply embedded as 'une donnée première de la sensibilité proustienne'[26] (e.g. II, 396).

The narrator's vatic self-diagnosis is that the habit of entwining women he loved with the places that he desired the most at the time was not reducible to mere 'association de pensée' between two separate experiences or fantasies (travel and love), but of a unitary psychological drive powered by his imagination, 'un même et infléchissable jaillissement de toutes les forces de ma vie' (I, 86). That drive, and the 'associations de rêveries' (II, 3) that it generates, involve figuring the mind as topological, qualitative space, equating the quest for knowledge of the woman's mind with the voyage to an unknown city due to the 'similitudes [...] du désir et du voyage'(III, 677): principally, the sensuous luxuriation of the journey necessary to cover the distance between him and the coveted destination.

Nicolas Grimaldi ascribes the protagonist's 'désir d'exotisme' to the wish to break 'la morne clôture de son ego'.[27] While this explanation is consistent with at least one of the motives to which the narrator ascribes it, there is also a countervailing, more powerful motive at work: the naively idealistic nature of the procedure and the limited effort to engage

[25] Pierre Macherey, 'Proust et la question de la spatialité'.

[26] 'Métonymie chez Proust', 46.

[27] *Proust*, 113.

with the real habitat of the *femme désirée* are aspects of a *refusal* to know her real mind. This topic is discussed in detail in **Chapter 4** in relation to Albertine. But, it may be observed here that the association of women with place is primarily concerned with underpinning the protagonist's subjectivity and sparing him the effort and anxiety of reading them in earnest, something which, by converting mystery to familiarity, would risk reducing the intersubjective 'écart entre une femme aperçue et une femme approchée, caressée' (III, 648) and collapsing the very fantasy that fuels his desire. In other words, picturing women in an unfamiliar place or landscape is part of a strategy for engendering or enhancing a sense of inaccessibility, by deliberately associating them with a location 'où entre elles et soi on sent quelque chose d'infranchissable, où […] on se sent séparé d'elles par l'impossible' (IV 566-567).

2. The 'astronomie passionnée' of other minds

Harnessing perhaps the most poetic aspect of the monadology, the mind of each *femme désirée*[28] or artist or stranger whose inner life captivates the protagonist is 'un univers inconnu et infiniment plus intéressant' (II, 18) or 'chacun un monde' (IV, 618) on which, in a compulsive 'astronomie passionnée', he trains his analytical and imaginative telescope, attempting to read thoughts (II, 152), discern patterns of behaviour enabling prediction of future conduct (II, 188), and formulate general psychological laws (IV, 618). The rich seam of astral imagery stemming from the mind as other world trope[29] encapsulates all those cognitive and intersubjective potentialities that the protagonist finds so alluring in the other: mystery of unknown acts, thoughts, emotions, desires, plans, memories; infinite possibilities

[28] See, for example, Gilberte (I, 94-99) ; Odette (I, 232); coffee seller (II, 18); passantes (II, 72); Albertine (II, 152, 302; III, 583; III, 887-888); the *petite bande* (II, 188, 302).

[29] The array of Proustian figures includes: *univers inconnu*; *univers spécial*; *blanche et vague constellation*; *nébuleuse indistincte et lactée*; *planète*; *monde inconnu*; *radiations délicieuses*; *signes astraux*; *rayons d'un autre univers*.

of psychological singularity and difference; incalculable potential remoteness and inaccessibility; and, the epistemological, affective, artistically-enriching journey or quest.

However, as stated above, the defining and singular characteristic of the monad that makes it appear to be a different world in the philosophy of Leibniz is, specifically, its qualitative point of view. It is that specific, individuating quality which, according to Leibnizian metaphysics, is incommunicable from one monad to another, as Renouard highlights.[30] But, the subject-matter of the point of view is quite another matter: it is made available (actually or potentially) by the divine law of concomitance, which ensures harmony between, but not identity of all monads' individual representations, by granting each monad perception of the entire universe and everyone in it, though that perception is only clear as to part, and confused as to the rest. And it is that same law that overcomes the limitation imposed by the monad's windowless condition by making human interaction immanent while giving the appearance of causal influence between monads.

The astral imagery used in the *Recherche* to figure the protagonist's experience of interacting with and attempting to 'access' other minds reflects and represents the attempt to grapple with the implications of the monadology for intersubjectivity, in its wondrous and optimistic aspects just as much as, if not more than its potentially pessimistic aspects. As becomes increasingly clear over the course of his apprenticeship in mind-reading (and increasingly prominent in the figuration that it entails), the other's qualitative point of view on the world, and the question of its (in)accessibility, is distinguishable from, though intertwined with the events in her life, her acts, words, thoughts and so on, and interpersonal causation. Thus, while (as Malcolm Bowie notes) the protagonist prides himself as a '"modeller of nebulae" […] whose self-appointed task is to elicit intelligible structure from

[30] 'Proust et Leibniz', 252-257.

the diffuse and inconstant raw materials provided by experience', with Albertine being 'one such nebula',[31] the assessment of his success or failure to 'know' needs to be nuanced and to distinguish between these different but overlapping aspects of intersubjectivity if it is to be faithful to the scheme of the novel. Bowie's qualified (or playfully mischievous) proposition that 'Albertine cannot be known' by 'modelling' unless all conventional notions of 'what it is to know' are abandoned (ibid.) is therefore one that will be considered and challenged on such a basis in **Chapter 4**, together with others' contentions that she is 'unknowable'.

II. L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi … mais qui tient ouverte la porte de communication

It is at the very height of the protracted Albertine-induced angst that the narrator utters dicta in *Albertine disparue* that have become the despondent anthem of the 'unknowability' argument. Albertine has fled and, in a maelstrom of negative emotions, panic and uncertainty, the protagonist has sent Saint-Loup to Touraine and anxiously awaits news. The protagonist's febrile self-examination as to why the urgent return of Albertine should be so indispensable when her actual person and qualities may be so unremarkable and forgettable is proving to offer no way out of the turmoil. According to strict precedent, voluntary renunciation and the prospect of gradual indifference ought to be an option for him as it was with Gilberte, but, with Albertine, the intense entanglement of 'vie commune' (IV, 13) has allowed a whole 'processus d'émotions, d'angoisses' to operate over time that make it impossible to imagine life without her (IV, 16, 30-31).

The whole relationship and 'bonne vie de tendresse' (IV, 82) with Albertine is marked by constantly (r)evolving duality: congress versus conflict, pleasure versus pain,

[31] *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, 59.

need versus indifference, appearance versus reality, confidence versus suspicion, ignorance versus knowledge, pessimism versus optimism (e.g. IV, 71). The passage at IV, 34 is no exception. The protagonist is caught on the horns of a dilemma and between competing impulses and *croyances*: on the one hand, the belief that love is entirely subjective, with no necessary connection to its object, and intersubjectivity a beguiling lure, so that it should be or become a matter of indifference whether Albertine returns; on the other, the conviction that his love of Albertine is not only an essential part of his self, but inextricably linked to and dependent upon her, opening him up (for better or worse) to all that her life and mind have to offer. The predicament is described in the following passage, which is set out with numbered sections for ease of reference and quoted *in extenso* because of its centrality to the critical debate about other minds:

> [**1**] Les liens entre un être et nous n'existent que dans notre pensée. La mémoire en s'affaiblissant les relâche, et, malgré l'illusion dont nous voudrions être dupes et dont, par amour, par amitié, par politesse, par respect humain, par devoir, nous dupons les autres, nous existons seuls. L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi, qui ne connaît les autres qu'en soi, et, en disant le contraire, ment. [**2**] Et j'aurais si peur, si on avait été capable de le faire, qu'on m'ôtat ce besoin d'elle, cet amour d'elle, que je me persuadais qu'il était précieux pour ma vie. Pouvoir entendre prononcer sans charme et sans souffrance les noms des stations par où le train passait pour aller en Touraine m'eût semblé une diminution de soi-même (simplement au fond parce que cela eût prouvé qu'Albertine me devenait indifférente). [**3**] Il était bien, me disais-je, qu'en me demandant sans cesse ce qu'elle pouvait faire, penser, vouloir à chaque instant, si elle comptait, si elle allait revenir, je tinsse ouverte cette porte de communication que l'amour avait pratiquée en moi, et sentisse la vie d'une autre submerger, par des écluses ouvertes, le réservoir qui n'aurait pas voulu redevenir stagnant. (IV, 34)

The initial part [**1**] of this reflection represents the negative and pessimistic pole. But, reading the passage as a whole, the weight of emphasis is on the more affirmative perspective in the final part [**3**], with the narrator driven to that more positive position by his concern, articulated in the middle part [**2**], at the emotional cost of the alternative.

Part [**1**] is often quoted or paraphrased by commentators as embodying the view of the narrator, or even Proust himself, that other minds are unknowable.[32] For Grimaldi for example, the passage shows the psychology of the novel to be one of 'infrangible solipsisme'[33] or, in other words, '[e]n nous séparant du réel, toute représentation nous enclôt dans son solipsisme comme en quelque solitude', and love does nothing more than reinforce how enigmatic and inaccessible the other's mind is.[34] Likewise, Landy, reading the first part in conjunction with part of a much later pronouncement, that 'par l'art seulement nous pouvons sortir de nous' (IV, 474),[35] takes 'Proust […] to agree with Marcel about the predicament of insular subjectivity, forever locked out of other minds'.[36]

Part [**1**] owes much to the idealism expressed by Schopenhauer and echoed in various forms by nineteenth-century figures including Jules Lachelier and Gabriel Séailles (to the effect that one cannot know anything in the external world as it is *en soi*, only as mediated representation or projection), but perhaps most of all to Leibniz's famous monadological tenet that: 'Les Monades n'ont point de fenêtres, par lesquelles quelque chose y puisse entrer ou sortir'.[37] It is the likely Leibnizian inspiration which is the most illuminating, because, like the narrator's plaintive declaration, the proposition that monads are windowless comprises two related aspects: there are no direct, genuine causal relations

[32] See, for example, Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, 49; Charles Blondel, *La Psychographie*, 68; Alain de Lattre, *Le Personnage proustien* (Paris: Corti, 1984), 89; Martha Nussbaum, 'Love's Knowledge', 271; Carter, *The Proustian Quest*, 37; Nicolas Grimaldi, *La Jalousie*, 46, and *Proust*, 13; Gaëton Picon, *Lecture de Proust* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 89; Phillip Bailey, *Proust's Self-Reader*, 61; Anne Henry, *La Tentation de Marcel Proust*, 113; Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 21; Erika Fülop, *Proust, the One, and the Many*, 156; Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust*, 242; Christopher Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 37.

[33] Grimaldi, *La Jalousie*, 46.

[34] Grimaldi, *Proust*, 13.

[35] The full passage (and its significance) will be considered later.

[36] *Philosophy as Fiction*, 21.

[37] Renouard describes the phrase, '[l]'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi, qui ne connaît les autres qu'en soi, et, en disant le contraire, ment' as 'une sorte de vulgate leibnizienne, puisque tout ce qui arrive à la monade, elle le tire de son propre fonds, tous ses événements sont le déroulement du programme stocké en elle par Dieu (ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'elle soit seule au monde': 'Proust et Leibniz', 258.

between monads because a monad cannot be changed internally by anything external to it, and the unique qualities of one may not transfer into another.[38] And because, quite to the contrary, the monads in the *Recherche* are shown to have doors through which important intersubjective exchange may occur (in some cases so perfect as to be symbiotic, while in others more aporetic), and causal relations shown to be painfully real.

There is certainly no shortage of dicta from the narrator articulating the negative view of love as one-sided, subjective and mere projection (e.g. II, 189; IV, 78), or characterizing all relationships as based on a fallacy or lie that we are not 'irrémédiablement seuls' (II, 261; II, 614). There can be no doubt that such bleak pronouncements stem from and reflect his often dispiriting experience with Albertine or the illness and loss of his grandmother (II, 609, 612). Whatever their context or motivation, such lapidary statements stand out from the dense weave of prose and seize the reader's attention. Expressed in an universalizing aphoristic form, they create an almost irresistible pull towards extraction and compilation under the heading 'lessons learnt', and some readers have even decanted apparent maxims into free-standing books of wisdom that they attribute to Proust himself.[39]

However, it is a serious mistake to decouple the would-be maxims from their context: their particular place in the scheme of the novel, the particular scene, the particular passage. As various commentators have noted, they are generally (though not always) situational, being as Nicola Luckhurst says, 'unstable formulations, dynamically sprung within the text, subject to interaction with the *récit*, enunciated from various narrative positions'.[40] One must therefore heed René Girard's warning: 'Il faut prendre garde de ne

[38] Donald Rutherford, 'Monads', in *The Oxford Handbook of Leibniz*, ed. by Maria Rosa Antognazza (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 356-380 (363-364).

[39] See, for example, Justin O'Brien, *The Maxims of Marcel Proust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

[40] *Science and Structure*, 3.

pas juger Proust sur un terme isolé, et surtout sur le sens particulier auquel tel ou tel philosophe limitera ce terme. Il faut dépasser les mots vers la substance romanesque.'[41] Purportedly universal maxims are often contradicted by what happens in the text, and are themselves frequently subject to internal contradiction or supersession, something discussed by Landy[42] amongst others. Indeed, as Vincent Descombes has observed, the rectification of erroneous opinions is an intrinsic part of the protagonist's apprenticeship and part of the very fabric of the novel.[43] In fact, Proust himself alluded to this very aspect of the *Recherche* in a letter to Rivière regarding the first volume: 'Je suis donc forcé de peindre les erreurs, sans croire devoir dire que je les tiens pour des erreurs: tant pis pour moi si le lecteur croit que je les tiens pour la vérité'.[44]

Moreover, though issued by the narrator rather than the protagonist and often in a form suggesting the detached wisdom of the sage, the narrative is filtered through a particular consciousness. Thus, as Katja Haustein has observed, 'the ways in which he perceives the external world and his social interactions with others are inherently linked to his emotional states'[45] and, as various commentators have emphasized, he is prey to uncertainty and inconsistency, the intensity of which modulates according to the protagonist's emotional stakes.[46]

To the list of cautionary caveats, one must add narratorial reliability. The *Recherche* is not merely a novel, but largely consists of first-person narrative, and where the

[41] *Mensonge romantique*, 200.

[42] *Philosophy as Fiction*, 33-35.

[43] *Proust*, 20-21, 92, 259, 264-265.

[44] 6 February 1914, *Corr.*, XIII, 98-100 (99-100).

[45] 'Proust's Emotional Cavities', 161.

[46] Arnaud Dandieu, *Marcel Proust*, 44-45; Jean-François Revel, *Sur Proust*, 150; Tadié, *Proust et le roman*, 422-423; Luckhurst, *Science and Structure*; Bersani, *Marcel Proust*, 179, 234-235.

generalisations about the knowability or accessibility of other minds derive from the Albertine episode, the question of reliability becomes acute. Like factual narrative, the formulation of maxims is just as susceptible to the distortions of deliberate or unwitting manipulation as it is to those of simple error. That is a lesson about the purported confessional mode and its vulnerability to misuse that Albert Camus' self-styled *juge-pénitent*, Clamence, administered with acerbic force in *La Chute*:

> insensiblement, je passe, dans mon discours du «je» au «nous». Quand j'arrive au «voilà ce que nous sommes», le tour est joué, je peux leur dire leurs vérités. Je suis comme eux, bien sûr, nous sommes dans le même bouillon. J'ai cependant une supériorité, celle de le savoir, qui me donne le droit de parler. […] Plus je m'accuse et plus j'ai le droit de vous juger. Mieux, je vous provoque à vous juger vous-même, ce qui me soulage d'autant. [47]

Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* will have provided Proust and his readers with a literary precedent, and one directly concerning the treatment of a lover.

Without having to suspect such dark cynicism, the slip from self-directed first-person singular to universalizing first person in the *Recherche* is a rhetorical move that begs for maxim-like pronouncements to be assessed against the substance of the *récit* when judging whether they are adequate and reliable. As Lisa Zunshine says in her work on the reader's cognitive approach to fictional texts, phrases announcing purportedly universal truths 'alert us to the possible metarepresentational nature of the information that they introduce. […] They seem to hint that somebody wants to manipulate us into doing something that would benefit him or her by having us take a certain precept as a "universal" truth.'[48] So triggered, the reader's metarepresentational capacity allows her to take account not only of the content, but of the source and context of such maxim-like statements, processing them 'under advisement' while inference is used to weigh other information

[47] (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), 146.

[48] *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 62.

about the source in order to weigh their truth-value.[49] When viewed with this in mind, the sense of guilt that the protagonist occasionally expresses for the incarceration, inquisition, baiting, surveillance, flight and death of his greatest love should at least give one pause when considering whether universalized pronouncements may be taken at face value.[50] *A fortiori* where the maxims are pronounced by a narrator whose words are often 'contradiegetic'[51] and whom the reader is elsewhere obliquely cautioned by the implied author *not* to assume to be Proust himself, signalling fallibility and distance from authorial 'truth'.

Luckhurst has rightly placed the initial part of the passage [**1**] (and the first sentence of the second part [**2**], 'Et j'aurais eu si peur …') into the category of dangerous 'therapeutic maxims', highlighting the apparent solipsism and threat of indifference that it entails.[52] However, approached with appropriate circumspection, the narrator's expression of pessimism in [**1**] is reducible to the attempted rationalisation by that *part* of a mind in turmoil that seeks to negate and move beyond its suffering, beckoning the indifference and forgetting that will act as suture and salve. Moreover, the *récit* and commentary upon it are produced with the benefit and burden of hindsight, coloured not only by the emotions of the protagonist but those of the narrator, and influenced by a sense of responsibility for the tragedy that ensued, traces of guilt coming closer to the surface as the account moves closer to its emotional epicentre (the death of Albertine), and most explicit when similar maxims

[49] Ibid.

[50] For the clearest expressions or traces of guilt, see IV, 78, 83, 607. Cf. Ingrid Wassenaar excludes guilt as a prime motivation for the act of self-justification in her study: *Proustian Passions*, 10.

[51] The term is that of Per Krogh Hansen, referring to the factual evidence in a narrative which can be seen by the reader to contradict the narrator: 'Reconsidering the Unreliable Narrator', *Semiotica*, 165 (2007), 227-246 (237).

[52] *Science and Structure*, 217.

are articulated in the immediate aftermath of her death, e.g. 'La compréhension des autres est indifférente et leur amour importun' (IV, 78).

The intellectual theorizing is emotionally compromised, alternating between the pessimism of part [**1**] and the more affirmative and optimistic thirst for intersubjectivity encapsulated in part [**3**] that strives to keep the wound open. There is not merely the hope of opening a communicative gateway to Albertine's 'vie' (shorthand for everything: actions, thoughts, desires), but the desire to *keep open* an existing gateway: 'Il était bien, me disais-je, [que] *je tinsse* ouverte cette porte de communication que l'amour avait pratiquée en moi' (emphasis added). Keeping that *porte de communication* open, so far as concerns not only what she has been doing and intends to do but what she may be thinking or wanting at any given moment, will allow his mental *réservoir* to be replenished by the further influx of facts and matters comprising her life, flowing in *par des écluses ouvertes*. This is the very antithesis of a depiction of life with Albertine as that of hermetically sealed, windowless monads, or of universal solipsism.

The *porte de communication* is the self-same 'issue hors de soi-même' described in the *enveloppe close* passage of *La Prisonnière* (III, 888-889). Proust's internal editorial note in *Cahier 54* regarding the latter passage makes plain that the passage of *Albertine disparue* here under discussion constitutes its post-separation pendant.[53] Furthermore, the note makes explicit what is implicit in the published version: the 'open' part of the passage is palpably in tension with the 'closed' pronouncements that 'Les liens entre un être et nous n'existent que dans notre pensée. […] nous existons seuls. L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi'. In neither version is the communicative gateway offered by love depicted as one immanent and confined within the self, mere subjective projection and causally unconnected

[53] BnF, NAF 16694, fol. 10^{v}.

to the other. Rather, it opens onto the real life of Albertine, allowing the inflow of information about what she is doing, thinking, wishing, however much it may pain him, and inducing the desired feeling of escape from and expansion of the self:

> Ah! je le comprenais mieux encore maintenant, où j'en sentais du reste d'une façon permanente la brûlure dans mon cœur que l'amour est une petite porte ouverte sur la vie infinie d'un autre. Et cet afflux perpétuel en moi de ce qui faisait la vie d'un autre être, s'il était douloureux, pourtant me donnait la sensation de m'être évadé de moi-même, la sensation d'un réservoir à qui ses écluses levées permettraient d'être en communication constante avec la mer. Et si l'on me l'avait offert, je sentais tellement mon moi étendu, jusqu'à elle hors de ma personne, que je n'aurais pas voulu qu'on le rétrécît en l'y renfermant de nouveau, à clefs comme autrefois. (*Cahier 54*)[54]

To determine whether the negative maxims in part [**1**] are nonetheless authoritative, the reader is left to weigh them against the evidence offered by the *récit* itself, an exercise performed in some detail in **Chapter 4**. In the meantime, while considering the significance of the narrator's dicta and the spatial figuration that they involve, it suffices to note and endorse Descombes' generalized observations that the narrator's most isolationist expressions of idealism concern episodes in his love life which do not truly signify a descent into solipsism, but rather lament that we do not take account of a reality which is entirely accessible,[55] love being expressed as 'un exemple frappant du peu qu'est la réalité pour nous' (IV, 146), and that passion has obscured what elsewhere proves to be his near perfect clairvoyance about others.[56] This is borne out by the imagery and theorisation here under consideration.

[54] Ibid.

[55] *Proust*, 37.

[56] Ibid., 53.

III. Coups et Contrecoups: causal (intersubjective) relations

In the face of intolerable anxiety caused by Albertine's departure, the protagonist's desperate attempt to shelter behind the assertion that love is nothing more than projection, and all human connection is illusory, is vitiated by the workings of both narratorial explication and figuration. Despite all his protestations and theorizing to the contrary, the links between the protagonist and Albertine are shown by the *récit* and expressed to be painfully real. His love and anxiety are sustained by the very fact that his 'subjective' view of her must constantly be interrogated and adjusted as her actions, thoughts and desires continually call it into question. This relation of cause and effect between Albertine and his emotions is so direct that he asks himself whether it is mathematically calculable:

> quelle table de logarithmes [son corps] constituait pour que toutes les actions auxquelles il avait pu être mêlé, depuis un poussement de coude jusqu'à un frôlement de robe, pussent me causer, étendues à l'infini de tous les points qu'il avait occupés dans l'espace et dans le temps, et de temps à autre brusquement revivifiées dans mon souvenir, des angoisses si douloureuses, et que je savais pourtant déterminées par des mouvements, des désirs d'elle qui m'eussent été, chez une autre, chez elle-même, cinq ans avant, cinq ans après, si indifférents. (III, 862)

It is no use that he is indifferent to others, or may become indifferent to Albertine in time, because, for so long as his love endures, his happiness or suffering is dependent on her alone. While he may contend love to bear only 'proportions minuscules' to the face of the *femme aimée* (IV, 17) and that it is explicable as the mere habit of associating emotions experienced *with* her rather than inspired *by* her (IV, 16, 85), in the same breath he acknowledges that Albertine is the '*cause* pourtant d'un tel bouleversement dans mon être' (IV, 16, emphasis added; 49).

The whole tract of introspective anguish at her departure and death is a desperate and futile attempt to substitute the brutal reality of unique causation with the palliative of potentially transferable association. His characterization of love as subjective does nothing

to undermine the intensity of the causal connection; it merely increases its effect, making her seem 'unique en soi et […] prédestinée et nécessaire' regardless of how the connection came about, whether its occurrence was necessary or contingent, or whether it is justified 'objectivement' by her physiology, physiognomy or 'valeur intrinsèque' (IV, 77-85).

Albertine is living proof that the *femme aimée* is not fungible but 'compacte, indestructible […], irremplaçable' (IV, 85), and the lesson that one man's Sphynx-like and desired *être de fuite* may be another's 'simple petite grue' is provided in the Saint-Loup/Rachel-Albertine/Protagonist diptych (II, 456-459; IV, 19-24), which illustrates in unmistakable terms the limited use of objectivity when analysing causation in this domain. While for Saint-Loup Rachel's unknown thoughts and actions are an hallowed enigma, 'mystérieusement enfermée dans un corps comme dans un Tabernacle' (II, 456) and the object of hopes, doubts, suspicions and dreams, the protagonist is the indifferent *narrateur informé* in a position to provide his friend with the painful, elusive truth that he has been seeking if he so chooses. The Rachel episode is another illustration of triangulation, but one taking as the single object of the two men's perspective not landscape but the *femme aimée*, a perspective-taking exercise forming part of the more fundamental mind-reading leitmotif that other minds may see person, place or object qualitatively in a different light, and that this may depend critically on the circumstances in which they were first encountered, a matter of chance. In a comic deflation of the literary tradition in which romantic love is underwritten by description of the love object's beautiful physiognomy (synecdoche for her inner beauty), Saint-Loup's anxious infatuation with Rachel provides the abject lesson of 'tout ce qu'une imagination humaine peut mettre derrière un petit morceau de visage', of how much the lover's conception of a woman as 'un être inconnu, curieux à connaître, difficile à saisir, à garder' may owe to imagination and happenstance (II, 457). The profound, alluring mystery that the besotted lover believes her to enclose is reduced to the

two-dimensional, unexceptional, mere surface, and the product of overactive imagination and compromised perspective. Though both men behold 'le même mince et étroit visage', they have, in spatial terms, approached it from different starting points, and thereby conceived of what lies behind it in radically different ways; having arrived at it (qualitatively) 'par les deux routes opposées qui ne communiqueraient jamais, […] nous n'en verrions jamais la même face'.

The dominant perspective in the Rachel scene is that of the detached observer, stupefied at the apparent lack of physical and moral connection or proportion between the lover's view of the woman and the objective vacuity of the perceived mystery. For the protagonist, unlike Saint-Loup, Rachel is the common, static antithesis of the *être de fuite*, a difference of perspectives rendered in terms spatially oriented in favour of his own: Rachel is deprived of all depth and (in stark contrast with the lyrical treatment of Albertine as *enveloppe close* (III, 888)) the extension of infinity reserved to the minds of the beholders:

> L'immobilité de ce mince visage, comme celle d'une feuille de papier soumise aux colossales pressions de deux atmosphères, me semblait équilibrée par les deux infinis qui venaient aboutir à elle sans se rencontrer, car elle les séparait. (II, 458)

But, as with many dichotomies in the *Recherche* that appear at first to be wholly irreconcilable, the protagonist is able later that same day to narrow the gap when he sees Rachel on stage, to conceive of what has captivated Saint-Loup, and to understand something of the causation involved (II, 472-475). At a distance, her face becomes 'une nébuleuse, une voie lactée', a projector of wondrous interiority: 'un domaine merveilleux – celui où elle vivait – d'où émanaient des radiations délicieuses mais où [Saint-Loup] ne pourrait pénétrer' (II, 472).

However, the protagonist remains an outsider, able (as he acknowledges) only to glimpse in part how Saint-Loup's perspective could be so different from his own (II, 472).

The shoe is on the other foot when it comes to Albertine. Saint-Loup has not undergone the process of emotions and anxieties (IV, 16) that, over time, have led him to see Albertine as he does. Having learnt from the equivalent exercise of triangulation involving Rachel, the protagonist immediately understands what lies behind his stupefaction, for Saint-Loup now occupies the position of 'spectateur indifférent' (IV, 21, 23). When contemplating how to overcome their 'différence d'optique', the protagonist considers but abandons as futile attempting to convey how he sees Albertine or, conversely, to understand how she must seem to Saint-Loup when represented without his 'apport cardiaque et mental' (IV, 22-24), a putative reversal of Stendhal's process of *cristallisation*.[57]

Since they met in Balbec, Albertine has given rise to a whole 'stratification de sensations', an accretion of sensations that, in the following series of spatial figures, the narrator represents as anything but mere projection or encasement of her (IV, 22):

> Bref Albertine n'était, comme une pierre autour de laquelle il a neigé, que le centre générateur d'une immense construction qui passait par le plan de mon cœur.

Far from being entirely subjective or illusory, the causal connection between the 'immense construction' and Albertine is direct: she is the causative *centre générateur* who has shaped all his sensations or emotions.

> [Q]uand il est arrivé au degré où il cause de tels maux, la construction des sensations interposées entre le visage de la femme et les yeux de l'amant, l'énorme œuf douloureux qui l'engaine et le dissimule autant qu'une couche de neige une fontaine, est déjà poussée assez loin pour que le point où s'arrêtent les regards de l'amant, le point où il rencontre son plaisir et ses souffrances, soit aussi loin du point où les autres le voient qu'est le soleil véritable de l'endroit où sa lumière condensée nous le fait apercevoir dans le ciel.

[57] *De l'amour* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 2014 [1822]). The process of adorning the loved one with romantic illusions was elaborated at length by Stendhal in the definitive text, and more succinctly described in a posthumously published fragment: 'vous ne la voyez plus *telle qu'elle est réellement*, mais telle qu'il vous convient qu'elle soit. Vous comparez les illusions favorables que produit ce commencement d'intérêt à ces jolis diamants qui cachent la branche de charmille effeuillée par l'hiver, et qui ne sont aperçus […] que par l'œil de ce jeune homme qui commence à aimer' (359).

The lover's feelings are not mere interposition, but the delicate, ephemeral and prismatic covering or sheath simultaneously veiling and revealing the face of the beloved: the shell of an *œuf douloureux* that not merely encases its contents, but is precisely fitted to them like the layer of snow on a fountain. As the narrator says elsewhere: 'toute impression est double, à demi engainée dans l'objet, prolongée en nous-même par une autre moitié que seul nous pourrions connaître' (IV, 470).[58] This qualitative addition to the visible object of perception, with its dual internal/external aspect, is something that, as the narrator here explains in relation to the *femme aimée*, the art of a painter like Elstir can convey (IV, 23-24), unlocking an enigma which otherwise guarantees that the sights of lover and onlooker will each be trained on a different target.

> Et de plus, pendant ce temps, sous la chrysalide de douleurs et de tendresses qui rend invisibles à l'amant les pires métamorphoses de l'être aimé, le visage a eu le temps de vieillir et de changer.

Like the chrysalis of the butterfly, the protagonist's emotions are not extrinsic to Albertine but an integral part of her own pupal transformation. That experiential and affective envelope is, however, invisible to Saint-Loup, who is only able to perceive 'un résidu': the photograph and the distress of the protagonist. But, contrariwise, that same envelope prevents the lover from seeing his beloved as others do. As for the alternative, of reversing the *cristallisation* so that the protagonist may picture Albertine as Saint-Loup does, it is declared to be pointless: not only does it leave their minds far apart, it achieves no purpose ('quelle importance cela a-t-il?'). Visual aspects of the *femme aimée* have no importance in themselves; they are only important insofar as they identify her as the woman with whom

[58] The narrator abjures 'pur relativisme' (IV, 492), and those of his comments suggesting that 'everything is in the mind' must be set against the intrusion of brute reality that shows it to be inadequate to account for experience, prompting the recognition that the mere subjectivity of a thought does not deprive it of grounding in 'quelque réalité objective' (e.g. II, 857; IV, 492).

he has shared ‘le temps perdu ensemble’ (IV, 24) that has formed his qualitative view of her.

In the wake of her death and the throes of grief, self-recrimination and the pain of permanent loss further sap the strength of those proclaimed beliefs necessary to transition into indifference and forgetting. The narrative circles back to the distorting egoism of love and the lack of intrinsic value of the beloved when judged objectively, seeking to reduce her to a mere canvas, ‘un lieu immense et vague où extérioriser nos tendresses’ (IV, 77). But, analogies backfire: the sweet taste of fruit, to which his appreciation of Albertine’s intelligence is likened, does not arise by mere ‘association’ – it is part of and derived from its source: as the narrator stated much earlier, it involves fruit ‘qui brise son enveloppe’, creating ‘un fil délicieux nous réuniss[ant]’ (I, 30). Nor do maxims provide the convincing means for displacing his sense of guilt. The attempt to explain his treatment of Albertine by invoking a universalized tendency of lovers to ignore the true nature and (de)merits of a woman because of what is said to be the subjectively projective nature of love and the chimeric hope of knowing her ‘en elle-même’ (IV, 77-79) are at odds with the facts (discussed in more detail in **Chapter 4**).

The answer to the question put in the refrain, ‘Pourquoi ne m’avait-elle pas dit: «J’ai ces goûts»?’ (IV, 88, 90), is not that it would never have been possible, but that his own behaviour – a violent expression of disgust at lesbianism – may have forestalled it (IV, 91; 136). Even confining oneself to the narrator’s own consideration of the matter, the Albertine story contradicts the bald isolationism in the negative propositions at IV, 34 (part [**1**]). As he is at pains to point out, the protagonist’s thoughts about Albertine, translated into words and actions, have in turn acted causally upon her mind and thus her actions, and *vice versa* (IV, 81-82): ‘les êtres ont un développement en nous, mais un autre hors de nous […] et qui

ne laissent pas d'avoir des réactions l'un sur l'autre'. The tragedy is one that was mapped out by Proust concisely in *Cahier 71* in about 1913-1914 as a chain of causation: 'cette curiosité amènera enquête, enquête méfiance, méfiance départ, départ mort en q.q. semaines'.[59] The then anticipated factual details changed over the course of writing and the chain of causation became more complicated, but the essential conception remains the same in the definitive *histoire*.

However, in an analysis which once more wrestles with possible responsibility for her death, the narrator sows the seeds of the defence: although his actions, actuated by jealousy, elicited unfortunate reactions from her, the chain begins with *her* motivation for being interested in him (perhaps his fortune and a brilliant marriage) and passes to the jealousy which sustained his interest in her, but it is *her* kindness, intelligence, sense of culpability or wiles that are said not only to have induced her to accept her captivity but also to have led *him* to make it increasingly unbearable (IV, 81). Through the workings of causation, intersubjectivity not only exists, but has operated in the most dramatic fashion:

> une captivité forgée simplement par le développement interne de mon travail mental, mais qui n'en avait pas moins sur la vie d'Albertine des contrecoups, destinés eux-mêmes à poser par choc en retour des problèmes nouveaux et de plus en plus douloureux à ma psychologie, puisque de ma prison elle s'était évadée pour aller se tuer sur un cheval que sans moi elle n'eût pas possédé. (IV, 81)

By now it is not only the *récit* but also extradiegetic commentary itself which is very far from the pseudo-solipsism expressed at IV, 34, as made plain by the narrator's conclusion concerning the chain of events:

> Si bien que cette longue plainte de l'âme qui croit vivre enfermée en elle-même n'est un monologue qu'en apparence, puisque les échos de la réalité la font dévier, et que telle vie est comme un essai de psychologie subjective spontanément poursuivi, mais qui fournit à quelque distance son «action» au roman purement réaliste, d'une autre réalité, d'une autre

[59] Fol. 24^{v}.

> existence, et duquel à leur tour les péripéties viennent infléchir la courbe et changer la direction de l'essai psychologique. (IV, 82)

However psychologically isolated he may have felt at times, his love and psychological connection with Albertine have not been mere chimera, a monologic exercise in introspection – an 'essai de psychologie subjective' – but part of a real, intersubjective relationship in which each has causally influenced the mind and thereby the conduct of the other – a 'roman purement réaliste', the novel of his love with Albertine (II, 268, 657; III, 852, 854; IV, 136-137). Thus, the illusion is not that, contrary to the claims of love, friendship, politeness, respect or duty, there are no true bonds between individuals, we exist alone and cannot know or be known by others. Instead, it is the claim of monadic hermeticism which turns out to be the illusion.

IV. Conclusion to Part I

Reflecting in his account of the *Bal de têtes* upon the 'sentiment de mystère' that attracted him to each of the women whom he has desired or loved, the narrator reaffirms that the association that he imagined between each and a particular place was arbitrary, a strategy to enhance the sense of mystery surrounding them and fuel his desire. However, in this moment of clear-eyed introspection, the narrator acknowledges the ambit of any unknowability to be far more circumscribed than he may have periodically suggested, for (over time) with each of Gilberte, Mme de Guermantes, Albertine (and myriad other women), '[s]ans doute l'inconnu, et presque l'inconnaissable, était devenu le connu, le familier, indifférent ou douloureux, mais retenant de ce qu'il avait été un certain charme' (IV, 566-567).

The study moves next to consider the protagonist's apprenticeship in both theory of mind principles and mind-reading practice, assessing whether at least qualified optimism is

justified, first in **Chapter 3** which undertakes close readings of scenes involving a handful of characters other than Albertine, and then in **Chapter 4** which examines in some detail the boundaries between what is *unknowable* and merely *unknown* in relation to Albertine herself.

PART II: READING OTHER MINDS

CHAPTER 3: FORMATIVE STEPS

> Oserais-je exposer ici la plus grande, la plus importante, la plus utile règle de toute l'éducation? ce n'est pas de gagner du temps, c'est d'en perdre. […] Le plus dangereux intervalle de la vie humaine est celui de la naissance à l'âge de douze ans. C'est le temps où germent les erreurs et les vices, sans qu'on ait encore aucun instrument pour les détruire; et quand l'instrument vient, les racines sont si profondes, qu'il n'est plus temps de les arracher. Si les enfants sautaient tout d'un coup de la mamelle à l'âge de raison, l'éducation qu'on leur donne pourrait leur convenir; mais, selon le progrès naturel, il leur en faut une toute contraire. […] La première éducation doit donc être purement négative. Elle consiste, non point à enseigner la vertu ni la vérité, mais à garantir le cœur du vice et l'esprit de l'erreur.
>
> Jean-Jacques Rousseau[1]

> Mais cette évolution d'une pensée, je n'ai pas voulu l'analyser abstraitement mais la recréer, la faire vivre. Je suis donc forcé de peindre les erreurs, sans croire devoir dire que je les tiens pour des erreurs; tant pis pour moi si le lecteur croit que je les tiens pour la vérité. Le second volume accentuera ce malentendu. J'espère que le dernier le dissipera.
>
> Marcel Proust[2]

> Apprendre, c'est d'abord considérer une matière, un objet, un être comme s'ils émettaient des signes à déchiffrer, à interpréter. Il n'y a pas d'apprenti qui ne soit «l'égyptologue» de quelque chose. […] L'œuvre de Proust est fondée […] sur l'apprentissage des signes.
>
> Gilles Deleuze[3]

From the very first social interactions depicted in the novel – the visits paid by Swann to the protagonist's family in Combray and their comical misreading of his 'personnalité sociale' and tastes (I, 13-34) – the narrator shows himself to be keenly attentive to how we think of other minds, their relation to our own and to the external world, and how we go about (mis)reading them. This gives the *Recherche* a metacognitive 'dominant':[4] the narrator's preoccupation with the processes of acquiring and evaluating

[1] *Émile; ou, De l'éducation* (Paris: Garnier frères, rev. edn, 1904 [1762]), 77.

[2] Letter to Jacques Rivière, 6 February 1914, *Corr.,* XIII, 98-100 (99-100).

[3] *Proust et les signes*, 10-11.

[4] Roman Jakobson defined the *dominant* as 'the focusing component of a work of art [which] rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components': 'The Dominant', in *Roman Jakobson: Selected Writings*, ed. by Stephen Rudy, 6 vols (The Hague: De Gruyter Mouton, 1981), III, *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, 751-756 (751).

knowledge regarding cognitive phenomena, and their fallibility, shapes his *récit* and pervades his extradiegetic commentary. The metacognitive treatment given to mind-reading in the *Recherche* is an important part of its distinctive and original character. The narrator does not merely set out his accounts of others' thoughts or his general sense of their (in)accessibility; he also addresses, explicitly and often with fine-grained detail, the cognition involved (on the part of both parties).

The breadth and depth of the treatment given to mind-reading is enhanced by its diachronic dimension. The (psychological) action unfolds over several decades and, although the narrator eschews straightforward linear chronology in his *récit*, there are three key aspects of the *psychologie dans le temps* that play a central role in the depiction of mind-reading. First, as Gilles Deleuze observed, the *Recherche* is the 'récit d'un apprentissage'.[5] However, the protagonist's apprenticeship involves not only his epistemological progression in reading signs in the four domains identified by Deleuze (high society, love, impressions, art), but – more broadly – his cognitive development. Secondly, the experience of others over time will reveal them to be different than they first appear, the *Recherche* depicting 'les divers aspects qu'un même personage aura pris aux yeux d'un autre'.[6] For example, when announcing that the protagonist's future experience (in a later volume) will have a revelatory impact upon his earlier encounters, Proust explained that, in *Du côté de chez Swann*, 'M. de Charlus [apparaît] un instant, on verra qu'il me regarde fixement, et alors on comprendra pourquoi'.[7] Conversely, the passage of time also introduces difficulties: both the protagonist and individuals whose minds he is most curious to read

[5] *Proust et les signes*, 11.

[6] Interview for *Le Temps*, 13 November 1913, repr. in *Essais*, 1168-1172 (1170).

[7] Letter to Henry Ghéon, 2 January 1914, XIII, 22-31 (26). This is explained in detail below.

undergo psychological changes, and the fact that mind-reading must take place over extended, discontinuous periods will place his cognitive faculties under strain.

This chapter will focus upon the first and second of these mind-reading issues (while the challenges posed by time will be addressed in **Chapter 4**). The discussion will start by examining certain core lessons that the protagonist learns (or comes to appreciate), through social interaction during childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, regarding the metarepresentational issues posed by other minds: that is, while he is developing his 'theory of mind'. Having considered the significance of these general lessons for his developing skillset, the study will move on to consider the further lessons that the narrator singles out from particularly formative mind-reading scenarios with a handful of characters, ranging from the secondary to the pivotal: Legrandin, Gilberte, the Marquis de Norpois, Françoise, Robert de Saint-Loup, and the Baron de Charlus. What these lessons generally disclose is that understanding that other minds represent the world differently from our own is a necessary but far from sufficient condition for successful mind-reading. Proust's staging of mind-reading episodes, and the narrator's diegesis and commentary pointedly emphasize that, in order for the protagonist to ascertain the mental states that explain (or allow the prediction of) others' conduct, he must assemble a contextual grid enabling him to make sense of the totality of their relevant behaviour (verbal or non-verbal), he must learn to discriminate judiciously between different types of available evidence, and he must judge when to give priority to intuition over intellect (and vice versa).

Taking as its lodestar the proposition that, as Peter Jones points out in *Philosophy and the Novel*, 'the philosophical scepticism about knowledge contrasts markedly with the

nature of the judgements made about the characters portrayed',[8] this chapter will show, with reference to a sample of the protagonist's experiences, the qualified optimism exhibited by the narrator about reading other minds. Owing to the avowedly conceptual nature of his account, Jones focuses upon the high-level, abstract propositions articulated by the narrator relevant to the issue of knowledge and does not explore the 'judgements' expressed about other characters, their foundations or context, the circumstances in which they are formed or the evidential means by which they are reached. Such an examination is necessary to understand the conditions for such knowledge (including the cognitive processes involved) and assess the degree to which the protagonist is able, over time and despite formidable obstacles, to achieve what the narrator on occasion pronounces to be impossible.

I. '[L]e cerveau des autres [n']était [pas] un réceptacle inerte et docile' (I, 79): Developing a Theory of Mind

At various stages during the first half of the novel, the narrator describes the protagonist learning or understanding, from his experience of reading minds, certain abstract generalizations about the process of mental state attribution that he puts forward in the form of governing rules or laws. This metacognitive articulation of theoretical tenets of 'folk psychology' that the young mind-reader is shown to have *actively* formulated and deployed as part of the development of his maturing theory of mind reflects a stance on psychological development which bears some similarity to the modern *theory theory* of mind promoted by some modern psychologists.

This is not to say that the narrator exhibits a preference for any particular paradigm to account for the development and application of his mind-reading ability. To the contrary,

[8] *Philosophy and the Novel: Philosophical Aspects of Middlemarch, Anna Karenina, The Brothers Karamazov, À la recherche du temps perdu, and of the Methods of Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 173.

his vast and diverse commentaries display what may be termed a 'pluralist' approach which does not posit any single, default cognitive process.[9] At times, he implies (like *theory theory*) that sophisticated social cognition involves the correction and refinement of a basic or 'naive' framework theory in the light of experience and evidence accumulated over time.[10] The protagonist himself, like the narrator, exults in the formulation and correction of the abstract rules or laws forming his framework theory of mind, and of the general 'lois psychologiques' (encompassing theory of mind and other cognitive phenomena) that he is able to derive from his actual mind-reading (IV, 296-297). However, his mind-reading does not merely involve theorizing. On some occasions, the narrator foregrounds the capacity to 'stand in the other's shoes' as enabling or assisting the protagonist to model her mental state (like *simulation theory*).[11] In this regard, the protagonist displays (and the narrator cites) an innate predisposition towards empathy – a 'disposition à me mettre à la place des gens et à recréer leur état d'esprit' (II, 44; see also IV, 564)[12] – and a heightened sensitivity to the signs emitted by others that make him a strong mind-reader from childhood, qualities contrasted with the intersubjective myopia of his direct contemporary, Bloch, who 'imaginait peu la vie des autres' (II, 572). On other occasions, neither theorizing nor simulation appear necessary, the narrator emphasizing instead the accessibility of the other's

[9] The 'pluralist' approach to social cognition advocated by Anika Fiebich and Max Coltheart adopts a holistic view by which 'individuals expect, predict or explain the behavior of other people in everyday life in various ways depending on the contextual features of the particular situation of social understanding in which they find themselves and also depending on their cognitive competencies […] individuals are prone to make use of whatever procedure is cognitively least effortful in a given context of social understanding': 'Various Ways to Understand Other Minds: Towards a Pluralistic Approach to the Explanation of Social Understanding', *Mind and Language*, 30.3 (2015), 235-258 (236).

[10] This description of *theory theory* draws on the accounts given in (for example) Alison Gopnik & Henry Wellman, 'Why the Child's Theory of Mind really is a Theory', *Mind and Language*, 7.1-2 (1992) 145–171; Henry Wellman, *Making Minds: How Theory of Mind Develops* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[11] For example, see, in relation to Albertine: III, 225, 887; IV, 98, 125.

[12] See the discussion of the notion of empathy by Maria Scott in *Empathy and the Strangeness of Fiction: Readings in French Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 4-5.

emotions or thoughts (and so on) from her utterance, conduct, facial expression or demeanour, and/or their context (like *interaction theory*).

Despite the plurality of cognitive methodologies involved, *theory theory* offers a useful yardstick for analysing the narrator's treatment of his developing theory of mind. It reflects his own bias towards theorizing and, in the 'constructivist' or 'empiricist' form that allows for naive theory to be modified or falsified by experience,[13] it aligns at a general level with his presentation of social cognitive ability as a *Bildung.* According to one leading theory of mind 'scale' (promoted by psychologist Henry Wellman), an individual's theory of mind develops, in infancy and early childhood, through the following key milestones, scaled by difficulty (each of which will be considered further below): (1) 'Diverse Desires'; (2) 'Diverse Beliefs'; (3) 'Knowledge-Ignorance'; (4) 'False Belief'; (5) 'Hidden Minds'.[14] While the *Recherche* does not track this precise sequence or form, and the protagonist's cognitive development has already progressed to at least early childhood by the time that the *histoire* commences,[15] the narrator marks the criticality of similar factors in the development of the protagonist's theory of mind.

Scales of the sort described by Wellman for the usual progression of theory of mind are the product of intense empirical research that has taken place over recent decades, but the idea that there are stages in cognitive development is not a new one. Jean Piaget famously formulated 'stages' of development in his work on child psychology in the 1920s

[13] See the distinction between the constructivist/'empiricist' and 'nativist' forms of *theory theory* drawn by Fiebich and Coltheart in 'Various Ways to Understand Other Minds', 236. See also: Gopnik & Wellman, 'Why the Child's Theory of Mind really is a Theory', 168.

[14] Henry Wellman (with Karen Lind), *Reading Minds: How Childhood Teaches Us to Understand People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 52-53.

[15] Though any chronology can only be very approximate, Gérard Genette estimates that the events in *Combray* might date from 1883-1892, with the protagonist aged 5-14: 'Discours du récit', 126. Even assuming this to be approximately accurate, the temporal parameters are very broad.

and 1930s[16] and, long before him, the 'armchair psychology' articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Émile; ou, De l'éducation* (1762) had loosely anticipated Piaget's findings by postulating a natural progression in a child's cognitive development.[17] As psychologist John Flavell explains, the Piagetian sequence of successive stages in cognitive development are strictly discontinuous (though the age at which a given stage occurs may vary from individual to individual), with each superseding the previous stage.[18] However, more modern empirical research has displaced any such rigid cognitive structuralism: very young children do not lack the ability to think in representational and theoretical terms.[19] Encapsulating the more modern position on the development of social cognition, psychologist Philippe Rochat describes it as:

> the successive piling up of new layers of awareness, each opening up new possible ways for the child to cognize self and world. Each layer of awareness adds up, like geological layers, to the preceding without eliminating any of them. Cognitive development is an addition of new possible ways of being aware of things, self, and others in the world.[20]

This description is particularly apposite to the developing theory of mind depicted in the *Recherche*. The protagonist does not experience discrete *stages* in the general development of his mind-reading ability, with each superseding its predecessor. His *Bildung*, from early childhood to early adulthood, does involve a progression in his mind-reading capabilities, but, while he isolates (for emphasis) particular lessons or illustrative examples derived from particular social interactions, they are not presented as marking entirely new stages in a strictly sequential development of his theory of mind. Instead, they are metacognitive

[16] See, for example, 'Psycho-pédagogie et mentalité enfantine', *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, 25 (1928), 31-60.

[17] John Darling and Sven Erik Nordenbo, 'Progressivism', in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education*, ed. by Nigel Blake and others (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 288-308 (290).

[18] *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1963), 20, 85-87.

[19] Wellman, *Making Minds*, 47-50.

[20] 'The Evolution of Developmental Theories since Piaget: A Metaview', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 19.6 (2024), 921-930 (928).

generalizations that sensitize him to particular challenges posed by reading minds, sharpening and enhancing his mind-reading skillset. Thus, much like psychologist Ian Apperly's description of theory of mind as a web-like 'conceptual domain', they cohere into a collection of 'interrelated notions that combine together in explanations, predictions, and justifications of behaviour [and] it is this interrelatedness that puts the "theory" into "theory of mind"'.[21] As Apperly acknowledges, it is nonetheless informative to consider the emergence of particular concepts in the development of an increasingly sophisticated theory of mind. Since that is also the course adopted by the narrator in the *Recherche* when describing the milestones in his own cognitive development, it is important to consider some (if not all) of those that he indicates to have been significant.

The first milestone (*Diverse Desires*) in the modern scale is the simple understanding that two people may not share the same desire for an object. In the *Recherche*, the scene of the goodnight kiss is the first notable occasion on which the protagonist is forced to recognize that others may not share his desire for something precious to him: the presence of his mother in his bedroom after dinner with Swann is something that he acknowledges to be 'en opposition avec […] le vœu de tous' (I, 42). However, his first *metacognitive reflection* that other minds form their own independent, divergent mental states concerns judgement rather than desire as such. As a 'petit garçon',[22] the protagonist's presumption is that other people will form the same judgements of others and their actions as he does. It is his parents' and grandfather's unexpectedly negative reaction to his glowing report of the visit to see his uncle Adolphe and his introduction to 'la dame en rose' that teach him that others may not share our particular disposition towards a particular object,

[21] 'What is "Theory of Mind"? Concepts, Cognitive Processes and Individual Differences', *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 65.5 (2012), 825-839 (828).

[22] Proust's description of the protagonist (at the time of this incident) in his letter to Louis de Robert shortly after 28 October 1912: *Corr.*, XI, 265-270 (267).

event, person or action (and vice versa). The narrator reproduces the cognitive correction of this naive view in an ironic, comic tone:

> Je ne croyais pas ainsi causer d'ennuis à mon oncle. Comment l'aurais-je cru, puisque je ne le désirais pas. Et je ne pouvais supposer que mes parents trouveraient du mal dans une visite où je n'en trouvais pas. […] Je m'imaginais, comme tout le monde, que le cerveau des autres était un réceptacle inerte et docile, sans pouvoir de réaction spécifique sur ce qu'on y introduisait; et je ne doutais pas qu'en déposant dans celui de mes parents la nouvelle de la connaissance que mon oncle m'avait fait faire, je ne leur transmisse en même temps comme je le souhaitais, le jugement bienveillant que je portais sur cette présentation. Mes parents malheureusement s'en remirent à des principes entièrement différents de ceux que je leur suggérais d'adopter, quand ils voulurent apprécier l'action de mon oncle. (I, 78-79)

It is not long before love and desire become the subject-matter of such theoretical reflections. The protagonist's infatuation with Gilberte leads him to find every aspect of the Swanns' existence imbued with charm (I, 399-409), something that he notes his parents cannot comprehend because, not sharing his emotions, they lack the cognitive ability to perceive that 'qualité inconnue analogue dans le monde des émotions à ce que peut être dans celui des couleurs l'infra-rouge' (408). This emotional, cognitive divergence forms part of the larger leitmotif that love is subjective, a theme that has two-party and three-party ramifications for mind-reading. Between the lover and his *être aimé,* it imposes obstacles that complicate the dispassionate attribution of mental states (something considered in **Chapter 4**). Between the lover (including Swann, Saint-Loup, the protagonist, Charlus) and third parties, cognitive divergence may prevent the third party from standing – qualitatively, at least – in the shoes of the lover because, as experience demonstrates, there are 'peu de gens qui puissent trouver naturelles les proportions énormes que finit par prendre pour nous un être qui n'est pas le même que celui qu'ils voient' (I, 460). Conversely, the divergence of desire may affect the lover's reading of the third party: one of the salient aspects of the first encounter with M. de Norpois to which the narrator draws attention is that it made him appreciate 'd'une façon nouvelle, combien les sentiments éveillés en moi par tout ce qui

concernait Gilberte Swann et ses parents différaient de ceux que cette même famille faisait éprouver à n'importe quelle autre personne' (I, 430) – something just as true of the unflattering remarks made about the Swanns by Bergotte (I, 561) as those made by Norpois (I, 456-464, 467-470).

The next stage in the modern scale is understanding that others may not share our belief regarding a situation (*Diverse Beliefs*). For this particular milestone, the mind-reader will not know the true facts about the situation, and therefore not be able to judge which belief or opinion is correct. In the *Recherche,* the challenge posed by diverse beliefs or opinions is one that arises in its most socially divisive and 'kaleidoscopic' form in relation to the Dreyfus Affair (I, 508; II, 487) – that is, prior to the advent of World War I. In the first instance, identifying – or, more often, misidentifying – the other as *dreyfusarde* or *antidreyfusarde,* and (which does not necessarily follow (II, 767)) the belief that Dreyfus is innocent or guilty, imposes a hurdle not only liable to make neighbours like Mme Sazerat stumble, but to induce hesitation even within the protagonist's family (II, 450). Into which camp someone falls is not something that they advertise, and their beliefs are not necessarily the sort capable of being inferred from behaviour: 'Si un monsieur croit ou non à l'Immaculée Conception, ou à l'innocence de Dreyfus, ou à la pluralité des mondes, et veuille s'en taire, on ne trouvera dans sa voix ni dans sa démarche, rien qui laisse apercevoir sa pensée.' (III, 356)

At the protagonist's first visit to the salon of Mme de Villeparisis (II, 486-581), he watches Bloch's misguided attempt to draw Norpois out on where he stands (516, 530-545), reading his friend's mind as he attempts to read that of the evasive ambassador in the search for *his* belief on the ultimate question of substance ('question de fond') – innocence or guilt. Steadfastly refusing to express his views on serious matters of controversy – regarding it as

anathema for a diplomat to exhibit 'une âme de cristal' (I, 452)) and adopting instead a practised circumlocution to avoid being proven wrong by subsequent events (IV, 361) – Norpois forces Bloch to swing from pole to pole. As for what the protagonist infers to lie at the root of Bloch's persistence, his naive belief that Norpois must know the *truth* of the Affair – that 'la vérité politique peut être approximativement reconstituée par les cerveaux les plus lucides' (II, 538) – betrays a failure to appreciate that even so-called facts or events (being related to human conduct) are themselves matters of interpretation, opinion and belief.[23]

The Dreyfus Affair is once more a centre of intrigue (for the protagonist) at the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée. While Swann's views are well-known, he is mistaken in assuming Saint-Loup's declared allegiance to remain the same (III, 97), but what he learns from the Prince de Guermantes (and reports to the protagonist) reveals that such confusion over the divergence of beliefs is capable of inducing misunderstanding between even husband and wife (103-104, 109-110). The Prince – originally an *antidreyfusard*, known by his wife to be such, and understanding her to be in the same camp – came to suspect serious illegality in the Dreyfus trial, and secretly changed his allegiance only to discover from a third party that his wife had earlier done the same. As the protagonist learns, having to find and keep one's bearings amidst the profusion of conflicting and shifting beliefs is a perilous business.

[23] For a detailed discussion of Proust's use of the Dreyfus Affair as a means of depicting 'la toute puissance de la subjectivité', see Émilien Carassus, 'L'Affaire Dreyfus et l'espace romanesque: de *Jean Santeuil* à *la recherche du temps perdu*', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 71.5/6 (1971), 836-853 (848-849). As for the narrator's own views, Malcolm Bowie makes the convincing case for him being a *dreyfusard*: *Proust Among the Stars*, 137-141 ('Proust's narrator offers us his own version of Zola's "J'accuse"' (141)). See also: Jacqueline Rose, *Proust Among the Nations: From Dreyfus to the Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 73-74 ('However foolish or even ridiculous they may appear at times, the Dreyfusards are never as repellent as the repeatedly ridiculed anti-Dreyfusards').

Ascertaining the other's belief or opinion is, however, only part of the problem: if it diverges from the protagonist's own, he must decide how to weigh it. Norpois once more provides a valuable lesson (I, 450, 464-466). At their first meeting, the 'critérium' that the diplomat applies to distinguish good political discourse from bad eludes the protagonist. Worse still, confronted with the narrow, utilitarian views of this supposed 'sage Mentor' about what counts as worthy literature – disparaging of both Bergotte and the protagonist's own, lesser prose poem – he feels cognitively constricted, 'consterné, réduit […] comme un fluide qui n'a de dimensions que celles d'un vase qu'on lui fournit', losing (even more) faith in his literary ability and left with a sense of 'nullité intellectuelle'. However, at the subsequent dinner at the Swanns', Norpois' views on art, his mode of expression, and his very approach to discussion – when measured against the salutary offerings of Bergotte himself (I, 550-552) – are exposed as those of someone whose artistic judgement rests upon a 'néant de goût véritable' (II, 471), lacking any 'sens artistique' (IV, 461). It is therefore Norpois' views that are, in this domain, instead to be treated as a nullity:

> idées qui ne sont pas, à proprement parler, des idées, […] idées qui, ne tenant à rien, ne trouvent aucun point d'appui, aucun rameau fraternel dans l'esprit de l'adversaire […] Les arguments de M. de Norpois (en matière d'art) étaient sans réplique parce qu'ils étaient sans réalité. (I, 552)

Encountering a cognitive smorgasbord of other minds at high society gatherings in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, the protagonist learns that beliefs or opinions about all manner of facts are as richly diverse as the many different minds that must be read. Exploration of that difference stems from and reflects a singularity which stimulates, even seduces the protagonist, acting as 'compensation' for whatever unpleasant views or traits they may present. Contemplating the persuasive power that each exerts on his own mind when he is in their presence, he reflects on the difficulty that he experiences in attempting to rank one as 'supérieur' to the other (on matters other than art):

> Les formes d'esprit sont si variées, si opposées, non seulement dans la littérature, mais dans le monde, qu'il n'y a pas que Baudelaire et Mérimée qui ont le droit de se mépriser réciproquement. Ces particularités forment, chez toutes les personnes, un système de regards, de discours, d'actions, si cohérent, si despotique, que quand nous sommes en leur présence il nous semble supérieur au reste. (II, 858)

Equivalents of each of the remaining developmental stages in the scale are richly exploited by Proust and his narrator, both in the *récit* and the accompanying narratorial commentary, as the basis for countless misreadings, misunderstandings, disputes, and emotional suffering, but also seismic, sometimes epiphanic discoveries about other minds and their secrets. This is something that will be explored in the second part of this chapter and, so far as concerns Albertine, in **Chapter 4**.

Knowledge-Ignorance is the understanding that the target of mind-reading may be ignorant of something that others know. The developmental stage that follows it, *False Belief*, is premised upon such a cognitive divergence, and has commonly (though not universally) been taken in modern empirical research to be the paradigmatic test of social cognition[24] – it involves understanding that others may not merely be ignorant of facts about the world, but may hold a belief about them which is known by the mind-reader to be false. This accomplishment is usually regarded as proof of 'metarepresentational competence';[25] that is to say, the subject is able to produce mental representations of others' mental representations of the world, and possesses the conceptual understanding that the relation of minds to the world is representational, with there being no unmediated causal link between a state of affairs in the world and our belief about it. More will be said about this later when considering the Baron de Charlus.

[24] Apperly, 'What is "Theory of Mind"?', 826.

[25] The term used by Dan Sperber in his introduction to *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. by Dan Sperber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-13 (5).

Finally, the development of theory of mind is said to progress to theoretical comprehension of the most complex challenge of all – *Hidden Minds* – understanding that the other's utterance or observable behaviour may not accurately correspond with her mental state, and indeed that the discrepancy may be deliberate. The narrator is at pains to point out that, until an incident that occurs when Françoise is living with his family in Paris (and probably takes place in his late adolescence), the protagonist remains under the naive misapprehension that the other's words faithfully and transparently reflect their thoughts, though he also understood that, even where unspoken, those thoughts may be manifested and read reliably from her body language or acts (something that he learnt from the example of Françoise herself, though it is only later, with Albertine, that he appreciates the significance and utility of the lesson: see III, 596, discussed in **Chapter 4**). Reflecting on that period of cognitive innocence, the narrator says:

> à cette époque-là je me figurais encore que c'était au moyen de paroles qu'on apprend aux autres la vérité. Même les paroles qu'on me disait déposaient si bien leur signification inaltérable dans mon esprit sensible, que je ne croyais pas […] possible que quelqu'un qui m'avait dit m'aimer ne m'aimât pas […] Mais la première, Françoise me donna l'exemple (que je ne devais comprendre que plus tard quand il me fut donné de nouveau et plus douloureusement […]) que la vérité n'a pas besoin d'être dite pour être manifestée, et qu'on peut peut-être la recueillir plus sûrement, sans attendre les paroles et sans tenir même aucun compte d'elles, dans mille signes extérieurs, même dans certains phénomènes invisibles. (II, 365)

This era is brought to an abrupt end by Jupien's report of disparaging comments said to have been made by Françoise (II, 365-367), the nature and effect of which (on the protagonist's reading of Françoise) are discussed later in this chapter. Their importance for present purposes is that the report is said to have had a transformative effect on the protagonist's theory of mind, instilling in him a new and deep distrust of words and actions, and a despondency (that, as we shall see, is intermittent) about the ability to read minds pellucidly: 'je compris l'impossibilité de savoir d'une manière *directe et certaine* si Françoise m'aimait ou me détestait' (emphasis added). At the heart of the lesson is the conceptual insight that

verbal and behavioural signs (*appearance*) may be contrary to the other's true thought (*reality*), and, worse still, the available evidence (words and actions) may be laconic, lacking in consistency, and liable to be distorted by one's own subjective beliefs and emotions:

> ce fut elle qui la première me donna l'idée qu'une personne n'est pas, comme j'avais cru, claire et immobile devant nous avec ses qualités, ses défauts, ses projets, ses intentions à notre égard […], mais est une ombre où nous ne pouvons jamais pénétrer, *pour laquelle il n'existe pas de connaissance directe, au sujet de quoi nous nous faisons des croyances nombreuses à l'aide de paroles et même d'actions*, lesquelles les unes et les autres ne nous donnent que des renseignements insuffisants et d'ailleurs contradictoires, une ombre où nous pouvons tour à tour imaginer avec autant de vraisemblance que brillent la haine et l'amour. (II, 367, emphasis added)

The terms in which the lesson is couched by the narrator are characteristically inflected by their bleak emotional context, the incident being a low point in his relationship with Françoise and its narration triggering a proleptic reference to all the mind-reading challenges that lay ahead with Albertine.

However, the protagonist's own experience (both before and after the incident) contradicts the assertion that other minds are impenetrable, and the narrator himself proves to be inconsistent on the point. Notwithstanding his (intermittent) tone of epistemological despair, more than once the narrator expresses the opacity of others' mental states to be *partial*. As the narrator remarks in *Du côté de chez Swann*, social interaction allows penetration to at least 'une partie' of the other's inner life (I, 84), though deficiencies in the evidence often seem to stand in the way of indubitable conclusions about her thoughts, the narrator advancing plausible alternative interpretations, each qualified according to his level of conviction (on a scale ranging from 'peut-être … peut-être …' or 'soit que … soit que …' to 'sans doute' or 'certainement').[26] Even when reflecting, at the nadir of his relations

[26] Various explanations for this habit of the narrator have been advanced by Proustian scholars. One of the most compelling is Jean-Yves Tadié's view that the narrator's citation of alternative suppositions is a means of simultaneously preserving 'les chances de l'explication rationnelle et le mystère du personnage' (though this must depend on the circumstances): *Proust et le roman*, 125-126.

with Albertine, on the complex of challenges and misunderstandings that this appearance/reality divide and (particularly) its manipulation may involve, the narrator does not entirely lose faith in reading the other's mind from her words and conduct, though he expresses serious doubts about the *respects* in which and *extent* to which they allow him to do so (a mind-reading issue considered closely in **Chapter 4**):

> Ainsi nous présentions-nous l'un à l'autre *une apparence qui était bien différente de la réalité*. Et sans doute il en est toujours ainsi quand deux êtres sont face à face, puisque *chacun d'eux ignore une partie de ce qui est dans l'autre, même ce qu'il sait il ne peut en partie le comprendre*, et que *tous deux manifestent ce qui leur est le moins personnel* […] Mais dans l'amour ce malentendu est porté au degré suprême parce que, *sauf peut-être quand on est enfant, on tâche que l'apparence qu'on prend, plutôt que de refléter exactement notre pensée, soit ce que cette pensée juge de plus propre à nous faire obtenir ce que nous désirons.* (III, 846-847, emphasis added)

Although there is a degree of congruence with the developmental stages disclosed by modern empirical research (a striking testament to the depth of Proust's insight), the cognitive milestones that the narrator highlights as breakthrough discoveries are more densely textured than, and extend beyond those described in the modern scale for infants and young children. A salient example, and one that was particularly important to Proust,[27] is the general rule that minds may operate in an asynchronous manner. Not only might the other possess a different emotion, desire or thought to our own, just as the good mood induced by the weather on a walk in Combray is not shared by the passing 'paysan', each mind may independently have the *same* emotion, desire or thought, but at a different time:

> j'appris que les mêmes émotions ne se produisent pas simultanément, *dans un ordre préétabli*, chez tous les hommes. Plus tard chaque fois qu'une lecture un peu longue m'avait mis en humeur de causer, le camarade à qui je brûlais d'adresser la parole venait justement de se livrer au plaisir de la conversation et désirait maintenant qu'on le laissât lire tranquille. Si je venais de penser à mes parents avec tendresse et de prendre les décisions les plus sages et les plus propres à leur faire plaisir, ils avaient employé le même temps à apprendre une

[27] The mutual misunderstanding and the sense of injustice, even cruelty, to which the asynchronous operation of minds may give rise, and the reflection that 'Hélas! les heures n'apportent pas à chacun les mêmes pensées', were central to the narration of heated family quarrels depicted in *Jean Santeuil*, 234-236, and 411-423 (412). The narrative cross-over was noted by Francine Goujon in the Pléiade edition of the *Recherche* (I, 1172).

> peccadille que j'avais oubliée et qu'ils me reprochaient sévèrement au moment où je m'élançais vers eux pour les embrasser. (I, 153-154, emphasis added)

In a text that Proust would almost certainly have seen quoted in Paul Janet and Gabriel Séailles' *Histoire de la philosophie*, Leibniz famously used the analogy of two synchronized clocks or watches keeping the same time to explain his concept of *harmonie préétablie* – that, while one might assume that one is influencing the other, their synchronization is due to the fact that they were divinely created, wound and set in such a way as to give them that appearance.[28] By contrast, the narrator's observation is that there is no pre-established harmony between minds; rather, as he later observes, in a thinly veiled riposte to Leibniz (couched in appropriately horological terms):

> comme je m'en étais déjà aperçu à Combray quand mes parents me faisaient des reproches au moment où je venais de prendre à leur insu les plus louables résolutions, *les cadrans intérieurs qui sont départis aux hommes ne sont pas tous réglés à la même heure.* (IV, 564, emphasis added)

II. Pragmatic mind-reading

Proust's staging of formative mind-reading scenes in varying socio-cultural domains in the *Recherche* shows him to have been keen to explore and demonstrate just how challenging and rewarding (epistemologically, if not emotionally) the process may be. The development of an appropriate *conceptual* understanding of other minds provides an essential framework for sophisticated mind-reading, but the *récit* illustrates that, in practice, effective mind-reading requires the protagonist to implement an holistic approach towards

[28] *Histoire de la philosophie*, 793 (citing Leibniz's *Système nouveau de la nature et de la communication des substances*).

the evidence available about another's thoughts, similar in its concern with context to the modern, pragmatic approach to linguistics and verbal communication.[29]

As explored below, five general aspects of this cognitive pragmatics are foregrounded by the narrator, expressly or by implication, as critical elements of the mind-reading apprenticeship. First, evidence of what someone thinks or feels comes in different forms (speech, facial expression, acts, gestures, and so on). The protagonist must learn judiciously to gather, weigh and interpret evidence germane to a particular act, event or mental state, discriminating between evidence of different types and from different sources, ranging from autoptic evidence (such as a self-explanatory act seen by the protagonist with his own eyes), oral or written testimony (whether first-hand or hearsay), to more oblique circumstantial evidence (such as demeanour).[30]

Secondly, long before he learns that he should not necessarily treat what people say as the most reliable evidence of what they think, the protagonist is shown to be almost preternaturally alive to other people's visuo-auditory micro-behaviour, and, especially when the signs are emitted involuntarily, their revelatory potential as 'confidences' (II, 365) or 'témoignages qui ne sont pas une expression rationnelle et analytique de la vérité' (III, 596). Deleuze emphasized that, in the *Recherche*, the truth is not given, or even sought, willingly: 'La vérité ne se trouve pas par affinité, ni bonne volonté, mais *se trahit* à des signes

[29] One general definition of *pragmatics*, recognizing that there are many alternatives, is 'the study of language use in context': Yan Huang, 'Introduction: What is Pragmatics?', in *The Oxford Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. by Yan Huang (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-18 (1). The 'relevance theory' espoused by pragmatists Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson treats utterance as only a piece of evidence about the speaker's meaning which must be inferred not only from the utterance but also its context: *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 9-64.

[30] 'Demeanour' is shorthand for the non-verbal, observable behaviour of the face or body, or paralinguistic audible (vocal) cues 'which do not by themselves have meaning but which serve to modify verbal meaning': Olin Guy Wellborn III, 'Demeanor', *Cornell Law Review*, 76.5 (1990-1991), 1075-1105 (1078), citing John Hocking and others, 'Detecting Deceptive Communication from Verbal, Visual and Paralinguistic Cues', *Human Communication Research*, 6.1 (1979), 33-46 (45).

involontaires. […] La vérité dépend d'une rencontre avec quelque chose qui nous force à penser, et à chercher le vrai.'[31] Mind-reading does not occur in a vacuum, but in a particular situation, subject to particular constraints. It is the pressure of that situation, acting on the other and with particular force where she attempts to conceal the truth, that gives involuntary signs – a form of cognitive leakage – their forensic heft.

In 'Proust et le langage indirect', Gérard Genette provided a taxonomy of accidents of language-use in the *Recherche* that involuntarily reveal the speaker's true thought or emotion, and also touched upon Proust's 'attention toute particulière […] aux occurrences où la parole (dis)simulatrice est démentie par l'expression mimique ou gestuelle'.[32] Anne Simon has subsequently demonstrated that these 'brèches charnelles' are 'concrétions du moi profond', and argues that the momentary access that they seem to provide to the true personality of the other does not contradict those aspects of the novel that (in her view) seem to 'ériger clôture monadique en règle générale', because such access stems from 'une ambivalence fondamentale du procès sensoriel'; that is, it is at the very moments when the other seeks to hide her secrets, that the body unmasks them.[33] Anne Simon's analysis is particularly important for its positive demonstration that 'le décalage entre l'esprit et le corps sur lequel Proust met parfois l'accent est moins total qu'il n'en a l'air'.[34] However, the ramifications are more significant than she appears to allow. For, in most instances (and leaving the particular issues arising with Albertine to one side), what matters to the protagonist is not knowledge of the other's mental life or personality in the abstract, but knowledge which is *material*, in the sense that it enables him to explain (or predict) the

[31] *Proust et les signes*, 24.

[32] In *Figures II* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 223-294 (267-268).

[33] 'Proust ou le corps expressif malgré lui', 53; 'La même et pourtant autre', *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 50 (2000), 128-140 (138).

[34] 'Proust ou le corps expressif malgré lui', 54.

other's state of mind on a particular subject or their behaviour in a particular situation. As Proust himself made plain, the narrator only describes others' acts 'pour faire signifier à ces actes quelque chose d'intérieur'.[35] It is for the psychological motivation behind and/or meaning of the other's acts that the protagonist searches, and they are quite capable of being offered by a 'brusque échappée […] sur le monde réel' (II, 366), making the real issue for the protagonist one of opportunity (whether as a matter of inquisitorial endeavour or the workings of chance) and interpretation, not one of total cognitive interpenetration.

Thirdly, the protagonist never becomes so disillusioned with (deliberate) utterance as to distrust it entirely. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator reflects that: 'Dans mon adolescence […] je croyais exactement ce qu'on me disait […] mais depuis longtemps je savais que nos pensées ne s'accordent pas *toujours* avec nos paroles' (IV, 353, emphasis added). Instead, he learns that, in order to optimize the accuracy of a particular reading, all available evidence – verbal and non-verbal – must be read *together* as a composite whole, ascertaining the implications of one aspect for another, using its contradictions or aporia to read between the lines of an utterance or against it.[36] In this manner, the very lacunae and contradictions in others' words or actions that the narrator decries (II, 366-367) become, in the protagonist's hands, powerful instruments if not necessarily for ascertaining their thoughts then at least for detecting that they are lying or concealing their true thoughts or feelings.

[35] Letter to Henri Ghéon, 2 January 1914, *Corr.*, XIII, 22-31 (25).

[36] Valuable analysis, focusing on the communicative aspects of either utterance or body language, has been done by Proustian scholars. Body language is the focus of Liza Gabaston's *Le Langage du corps*, while oral speech and its behavioural accompaniments (intonation, facial expression, style) are the focus of Josée van de Ghinste's damning autopsy of communication in *Rapports humains et communication*, 139-195, and the indexicality of 'language-in-use' in the *Recherche* is the subject of Michael Lucey's *What Proust Heard*. This chapter focuses instead on mind-reading and the holistic approach to available evidence that the protagonist adopts.

Fourthly, he also comes to appreciate that, in weighing such evidence, intuited truth ('la réalité pressentie' or 'la vérité pressentie') is usually to be preferred over the more abstract and deliberate work of analytical inference, which can be an instrument for distortion by the rational faculty of 'intelligence'[37] as much on the part of the mind-reader as his target. Taking stock (in *Albertine disparue*) of what he has learnt from his mind-reading experiences (both past and remaining to be narrated), the mature narrator highlights the cognitive and epistemological lesson that 'l'intelligence n'est pas l'instrument le plus subtil, le plus puissant, le plus approprié pour saisir le vrai' and that 'ce qui est le plus important pour notre cœur, ou pour notre esprit, ne nous est pas appris par le raisonnement mais *par des puissances autres*' (IV, 7, emphasis added). These unspecified powers are those falling within the domains of what Malcolm Bowie described as 'the intuitive faculty and its satellites'[38] or memory: namely, 'pressentiments', 'impressions', 'sensations'. *Intelligence* still has an important part to play as 'collaboratrice' and 'servante' of these other faculties, avoiding the lapse into 'un intuitivisme par l'inconscient'. However, the cardinal lesson when reading others is, as the narrator later says, not to allow 'aucune parole, juste en apparence, […] *tromper mon instinct*, qui devinait ce que machinait chacun d'eux' (IV, 350, emphasis added; a statement repeated at IV, 353).

This privileging of intuition over *intelligence* reflects a strong current of *fin-de-siècle* thought which became particularly popular in France in the form advocated by Henri

[37] The French term is used here to reflect the fact that, as observed by Zakir Paul, it need not always mean intellect, and Proust's use of the term in the *Recherche* does not always denote the faculty of reason: *Disarming Intelligence: Proust, Valéry, and Modern French Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 57-59.

[38] *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, 59. This catch-all must be sufficient to encompass instinct, sensibility, the unconscious – concepts that Joshua Landy observes to be 'used more or less interchangeably' with intuition by the narrator, and constituting (at most) 'separate aspects of a single component of the mind': *Philosophy as Fiction*, 12, 164 (fn. 19).

Bergson[39] (whose work Proust acknowledged to be 'la philosophie régnante',[40] while rejecting any suggestion of direct influence on the *Recherche*). However, before Bergson, the primacy of intuition was already being championed by other thinkers and, as Michael Finn observes, Théodule Ribot had alluded in 1874 to the general tendency in nineteenth-century metaphysics 'to explain the world by the notion of will (or intuition), and to downplay the importance of the rational intelligence',[41] and Ribot's own work made 'an essential distinction that will form the basis of Proust's argument that intuition must precede intellectual efforts'.[42] The priority accorded, in reading other minds, to intuition over *intelligence* (or intellect) also had illustrious literary precedents, including the work of Barbey d'Aurevilly. Brian Rogers has demonstrated that promotion of '[l]a lecture instinctive des signes physiologiques' was a point of common ground between the two authors, each of whom regarded the instinctive reading of others as the means of gaining access 'aux seules vérités importantes, c'est-à-dire aux mystères qui sont inaccessibles à l'intelligence',[43] and the narrator himself highlights this characteristic aspect of Barbey d'Aurevilly's work, in discussion with Albertine (III, 877).

Finally, since the significance of verbal or non-verbal signs in the *Recherche* is usually far from obvious, the task for the mind-reader's intellect is one of 'déchiffrage' (II, 155, 300, 353; III, 598). For Deleuze, the message that Proust conveys through his novel is

[39] For a discussion of the *fin-de-siècle* reaction against empiricism in favour of a more intuitive, non-empirical (qualitative) approach to consciousness and knowledge in France between 1900-1914, see Donald Maxwell, *The Abacus and the Rainbow: Bergson, Proust and the Digital – Analogic Opposition* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999). See also *Disarming Intelligence*, which addresses the 'demoting' of intelligence in the works of Bergson, Proust, Paul Valéry and the writers of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*.

[40] Interview for *Le Temps*, 1170.

[41] Michael Finn, *Proust, the Body, and Literary Form*, 47 (citing Théodule Ribot's *La Philosophie de Schopenhauer* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1874), 150).

[42] Finn, *Proust, the Body, and Literary Form*, 49 (citing Ribot's *Les Maladies de la volonté* (Paris: Alcan, 1883)).

[43] *Proust et Barbey d'Aurevilly*, 61.

that truth betrays itself through signs emitted in 'un alphabet pour les initiés', hieroglyphics that one must learn to decipher as an 'égyptologue'.[44] It follows that another core aspect of the apprenticeship is the search for the key necessary to decipher the other's words or conduct. It is in such terms that, in a draft of the scene immediately preceding the tussle with Gilberte behind 'le massif de lauriers' (I, 482-485), the narrator describes the mind-reading lesson that the young protagonist derives from the failure of his earnest letter to have the desired effect of persuading Swann of his 'noble sentiments' towards him and, by implication, Gilberte:

> Ces mots qui n'étaient que l'ombre exacte de mes sentiments pour lui devaient, il me semblait, lui permettre de les reconstituer tout entier. Ce fut la première notion que j'eus de l'inutilité des mots et *combien ils ne nous aident à lire dans l'âme des autres que si nous en possédons en nous le même chiffre*'. (*Cahier 21*: I, 1011, emphasis added)

Ironically, as the ensuing tussle illustrates, Swann has of course understood what motivates the protagonist even more clearly than he does himself.

As will be explored in the next part of this chapter, a central part of the protagonist's *Bildung* is the search for the relevant key, in each situation and referential domain in which the other's signs must be interpreted. The key may consist of a particular emotion, desire or other psychological factor that drives the other's behaviour. However, it may also have a broader ambit, calling for a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural background that affects (or even controls) the manner in which the other chooses or feels constrained to act. In this respect, the narrator's appreciation of the broad empirical demands of mind-reading overlaps with the recognition, in *interaction theory*, of the fundamental importance of context to social cognition. As philosophers Shaun Gallagher and Anika Fiebich observe, mental state attribution does not take place in a vacuum; rather, '[u]nderstanding others is

[44] *Proust et les signes*, 112-113.

mediated by their (and our joint) worldly actions, embedded in varying contexts that are pragmatic, social, cultural and normative'.[45]

1. M. Legrandin: 'cette confidence involontaire, elliptique et presque irrésistible de votre défaut ou de votre vice' (II, 501)

The discovery that snobbery is the key to deciphering what lies behind M. Legrandin's invective against the aristocracy and indeed against snobbery itself (I, 67), involves the careful staging by Proust of a controlled test of social cognition. The conditions that produce his discourteous behaviour following one Sunday Mass in Combray, at first misinterpreted by the protagonist's family (I, 118), are repeated a few weeks later and result, albeit not directly or immediately, in them having to 'définitivement changer d'opinion' (I, 122). Although the corrective reinterpretation is something of a collective effort by 'le conseil de famille' which attempts to ascribe a motive for Legrandin's behaviour, the nature of the narrator's account suggests that it is to be credited in no small part to the mind-reading accomplishments of the young protagonist.

After the Mass, Legrandin's caricaturally obsequious body language in the presence of local aristocrats gives the family a good idea of what may motivate behaviour that seems both out of character and incongruous with his choice of clothing, a 'tenue toute simple qui n'est guère celle d'un mondain'. His execution of an exaggerated bow strikes the protagonist as lacking any 'expression de spiritualité', even animalistic in its physicality, baseness, and urgent unctuosity, conjuring 'tout d'un coup dans mon esprit la possibilité d'un Legrandin tout différent de celui que nous connaissions' (I, 123). While Legrandin is able to minimize the social awkwardness of an initial passing encounter with the protagonist's family as they

[45] 'Being Pluralist about Understanding Others: Contexts and Communicative Practices', in *Knowing Other Minds*, ed. by Anita Avramides & Matthew Parrott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 63-78 (67-73).

leave the church by adopting a distant stare, a second encounter requires that he acknowledge them if he is to avoid obvious impoliteness. This is something that, with comically exaggerated but silent effusiveness, he achieves in silence:

> Il passa contre nous, ne s'interrompit pas de parler à sa voisine et nous fit du coin de son œil bleu un petit signe en quelque sorte intérieur aux paupières et qui, n'intéressant pas les muscles de son visage, put passer parfaitement inaperçu de son interlocutrice; mais, cherchant à compenser par l'intensité du sentiment le champ un peu étroit où il en circonscrivait l'expression, dans ce coin d'azur qui nous était affecté il fit pétiller tout l'entrain de la bonne grâce qui dépassa l'enjouement, frisa la malice; il subtilisa les finesses de l'amabilité jusqu'aux clignements de la connivence, aux demi-mots, aux sous-entendus, aux mystères de la complicité; et finalement exalta les assurances d'amitié jusqu'aux protestations de tendresse, jusqu'à la déclaration d'amour, illuminant alors pour nous seuls d'une langueur secrète et invisible à la châtelaine, une prunelle énamourée dans un visage de glace. (I, 124)

Genette justifiably describes Legrandin's behaviour as his 'chef-d'œuvre' in '[l']art de la mimique et de l'expression muette'.[46] However, the report is equally notable for the hyperacuity that it requires on the part of the young protagonist to perceive the ocular expression of Legrandin's affection for his bourgeois friends, appearing only within the most minute visible field (in the corner of his eye) in a face focused on conversation with his aristocratic interlocutor.

Construed in the light of Legrandin's florid verbal display of amity the previous evening, even the protagonist's father – the family member most irritated by his behaviour – is left in doubt as to whether it is the product of snobbery.

> Elle était comme *toute attitude ou action où se révèle le caractère profond et caché de quelqu'un*: elle ne se relie pas à ses paroles antérieures, nous ne pouvons pas la faire confirmer par *le témoignage du coupable qui n'avouera pas*; nous en sommes réduits à celui de nos sens dont nous nous demandons, devant ce souvenir isolé et incohérent, s'ils n'ont pas été *le jouet d'une illusion*; de sorte que de telles attitudes, les seules qui aient de l'importance, nous laissent souvent quelques doutes. (I, 125, emphasis added)

[46] 'Proust et le langage indirect', 288-289.

While conveying the protagonist and narrator's confidence (significantly) that demeanour or conduct *are* capable of revealing the other's true nature even if he actively seeks to conceal it, the hermeneutical difficulty faced by the mind-reader is likened to that engendered by the (purportedly exculpatory) testimony of a criminal who will not confess to his crime in the face of circumstantial evidence of his guilt.[47]

Having created the conditions for doubt, through the unfolding of the episode in the dinner that follows (I, 125-127) Proust stages the mind-reading that resolves it. It is Legrandin's response to an innocuous question from the protagonist about the Guermantes that confirms, once and for all, that he is a snob. When asked, '«Est-ce que vous connaissez […] les châtelaines de Guermantes?»', Legrandin's immediate answer is simple: '«Non, je ne les connais pas […]»'. However, when interpreted in the light of his demeanour, his flimsy verbal elaboration on the answer and his behaviour after Mass, this anodyne utterance becomes the involuntary confession of his secret. Pained facial expressions, microscopic alterations in his eyes, overly emphatic tone and head movements, together with an illogical explanation for *not wanting* to know the Guermantes and his conduct outside the Church, are drawn into an hermeneutic grid used by the protagonist not only to determine that he is not being honest, but, reading Legrandin's utterance between the lines and *à rebours*, to divine his true thoughts, fears and desires.

> Je ne comprenais pas bien que pour ne pas aller chez des gens qu'on ne connaît pas, il fût nécessaire de tenir à son indépendance, et en quoi cela pouvait vous donner l'air d'un sauvage ou d'un ours. Mais *ce que je comprenais c'est que Legrandin n'était pas tout à fait véridique* quand il disait n'aimer que les églises, le clair de lune et la jeunesse; *il aimait beaucoup les gens des châteaux et se trouvait pris devant eux d'une si grande peur de leur déplaire qu'il n'osait pas leur laisser voir qu'il avait pour amis des bourgeois*, des fils de notaires ou d'agents de change. (I, 126-127, emphasis added)

[47] The analogy between mind-reading and the detection of crime and, more particularly, the judicial process and the reluctance of the criminal to confess, is a leitmotif addressed in more detail in **Chapter 4** when considering the challenges posed by Albertine.

The narrator distinguishes between the willed, florid utterance of Legrandin, and his non-verbal behaviour, as if there are two Legrandins (*le causeur* and *le snob*), each with his own mode of communication.[48] To the question of whether he knew the Guermantes, the verbal response of 'Legrandin le causeur' is, ultimately, '«Non, je n'ai jamais voulu les connaître.»' However, he has been beaten to the punch by 'un autre Legrandin' who has already 'répondu par la blessure du regard, par le rictus de la bouche, par la gravité excessive du ton de la réponse, par les mille flèches dont notre Legrandin s'était trouvé en un instant lardé et alangui, comme un saint Sébastien du snobisme' (127), which contradict his oral utterance with the non-verbal exclamation: '«Hélas! que vous me faites mal, non, je ne connais pas les Guermantes, ne réveillez pas la grande douleur de ma vie.»'

The dichotomy that the narrator draws, when explaining the scene, between 'le joli langage' of Legrandin's spoken discourse and 'le verbe infiniment plus prompt, composé de ce qu'on appelle «réflexes»' is one that goes to the root of the protagonist's developing theory of mind. Proust himself alluded, in an early essay, to the critical role of involuntary behaviour (tone of voice, laughter, etc), which offers a more *direct* and certain route to the other's mental state than the propositional content of their oral discourse: 'ce langage, figuré comme une image mais rapide, *direct*, surprenant comme une réplique et que nous appelons le jeu de la physionomie […] [traduisant] par une expression appropriée chaque pensée, chaque émotion de l'âme' (emphasis added).[49]

It is not only the prioritizing of ostensibly unwilled body language over the willed aspects of utterance that is significant in this scene. The deciphering and translation of facial

[48] The ironic process by which Legrandin's false personality and discourse involuntarily betray the true is aptly described by Georges Piroué as 'l'authenticité du faux': *Par les chemins de Marcel Proust: essai de critique descriptive* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1955), 91, something to which Genette and Bersani also allude in, respectively, 'Proust et le langage indirect', 291, and *Marcel Proust*, 95-96.

[49] 'Chardin et Rembrandt' (1895), repr. in *Essais*, 164-174 (170).

expression and other aspects of body language into speech implies that there is or might be a grammar of body language at work – part of what neuroscientist Beatrice de Gelder describes as 'a specialized system of [facial and] whole-body perception'.[50] Gelder observes:

> Faces and whole bodies are among the most salient biological stimuli and they continuously provide us with precious information on gender, age, identity, mood, emotions, actions, and intentions of other people. […] The ability to perceive the visual signals in our social environment is one of the cornerstones of successful social interaction.[51]

If there is any such grammar, it is not something that the narrator seeks to codify. While it may therefore be misleading to describe behavioural signs as a language ('signes extérieurs du langage muet' (II, 721)) in any conventional or formal sense, they are nonetheless decipherable contextually by the application of what Guillemette Bolens describes as 'kinesic intelligence' – that is, 'a higher-order intellectual competence that allows human beings to interact and grow cognitively and intersubjectively through sensorimotricity and interpersonal movement'.[52] The protagonist's interactions with Legrandin show him to be adept at the perception and interpretation of gesture and other expressive behaviour, relying on and even parsing the various facial, vocal and bodily cues from which his mental state may be inferred, either conjunctively with or disjunctively from utterance (or in the absence of any utterance at all).

The protagonist's conclusion that it is indeed snobbery that actuates Legrandin answers the material question of mental state attribution with which the episode is

[50] *Emotions and the Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 73, 80.

[51] Ibid., 91.

[52] 'Introduction', in *Kinesic Intelligence in the Humanities*, ed. by Guillemette Bolens (New York: Routledge, 2023), 1-21 (1). Bolens provides an analysis of the role that kinesic expressivity and intelligence play in the first part of the scene in '«Une prunelle énamourée dans un visage de glace»: Marcel Proust et la reconnaissance des visages', in *Visages: histoire, représentations, créations*, ed. by Laurent Guido and others (Lausanne: BHMS, 2017), 155-167.

concerned. With the family no longer under any illusion about Legrandin's snobbery, he is reduced to the status of petty criminal, an 'escroc érudit' whose oral discourse consists of false and deceptive texts – 'faux palimpsestes' – beneath which one must read his true thoughts, and whom they revel in catching 'en flagrant délit', torturing with oblique questions about his family connection in Balbec, something that they know he will never willingly confess.

As the pattern established by depictions of Legrandin's snobbery demonstrates, authentication of the protagonist's reading will almost never come by way of *direct* verbal confession, but instead be obtained more obliquely. Following a fleeting encounter during which Legrandin hypocritically accuses the protagonist of succumbing to snobbery (II, 452), the protagonist catches him red-handed attempting to ingratiate himself, through 'flatteries', with Mme de Villeparisis (II, 497-501). The discourtesy and angry tone with which he rebukes the protagonist when he mistakenly believes that he is being teased for his hypocrisy are, when construed in conjunction with his conduct, tantamount to an admission that his sole preoccupation is with obtaining 'une bonne position'. As the narrator reflects, this involuntary behaviour – unmanipulated by intellect – was all the confession ('aveu') required:

> «Vous pourriez avoir la politesse de commencer par me dire bonjour», me répondit-il sans me donner la main et d'une voix rageuse et vulgaire que je ne lui soupçonnais pas et qui, nullement en rapport rationnel avec ce qu'il disait d'habitude, en avait un autre plus immédiat et plus saisissant avec quelque chose qu'il éprouvait. C'est que, ce que nous éprouvons, comme nous sommes décidés à toujours le cacher, nous n'avons jamais pensé à la façon dont nous l'exprimerions. Et *tout d'un coup, c'est en nous une bête immonde et inconnue qui se fait entendre et dont l'accent parfois peut aller jusqu'à faire aussi peur à qui reçoit cette confidence involontaire, elliptique et presque irrésistible de votre défaut ou de votre vice, que ferait l'aveu soudain indirectement et bizarrement proféré par un criminel ne pouvant s'empêcher de confesser un meurtre dont vous ne le saviez pas coupable*. (501, emphasis added)

Though no further authentication is required, the ultimate confirmation of Legrandin's true ambition comes, eventually, in the form of his social apotheosis as the self-

styled Comte 'Legrandin de Méséglise' (IV, 243). However, while the particular mental state that explains Legrandin's behaviour towards the protagonist and his family is successfully elucidated, it does not exhaust the mysteries of his personality. For, as with almost all the characters in the *Recherche*, Legrandin's mind is not a fixed target: though the narrator's description of him as the Saint Sebastian of snobbery offers a cryptic clue,[53] the secret or development that he is also an homosexual lies ahead (IV, 243, 278-279).

2. Gilberte: 'la radiographie au moins sommaire de la réalité insoupçonnable' (I, 577)

First impressions of Gilberte in Tansonville (I, 139-141) prime the protagonist and reader alike to recognize the formidable mind-reading challenge that she presents. Her posture is one of deliberately managed but carefully guarded mystery and mischief. Turning her head, to place her face outside the (grand)parental field of vision, she casts her eyes in the protagonist's direction, 'sans avoir l'air de [le] voir, mais avec une fixité et un sourire dissimulé', and 'laissant filer sur [lui] de longs regards sournois et inexpressifs'.

However, the scene is concerned just as much with the missed opportunity that it represents. Observing her with the naive eyes of a child, and lacking the relevant socio-cultural/sexual key, the protagonist is constrained to apply inapt 'notions' of common courtesy to her movements, demeanour, and 'geste indécent' (a sexual emblem intended, it transpires, to communicate her desire),[54] misconstruing them as 'une preuve d'outrageant mépris' and an 'intention insolente'. Proust's drafting of the scene (and its sequels) reflects a concerted effort not only to shroud Gilberte's character in some mystery, but to underscore

[53] Richard Kaye discusses the representation of Saint Sebastian as an homosexual emblem in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and literature: 'Losing his Religion: Saint Sebastian as Contemporary Gay Martyr', in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, ed. by Peter Horne & Reina Lewis (London: Routledge, 1996), 86-105.

[54] An 'emblem' is a gesture which has a precise meaning, known to everyone within a cultural group: Paul Ekman, 'Movements with Precise Meanings', *Journal of Communication*, 26.3 (1976), 14-26.

the semiological, temporal and contingent aspects of the protagonist's apprenticeship in reading *femmes désirées/aimées*. As Akio Wada explains, while in the first draft Gilberte's expression is readily comprehensible as a sexual invitation,[55] in the subsequent drafts Proust makes it opaque and 'pousse finalement l'incompréhension du jeune héros jusqu'à l'interprétation à contresens',[56] pairing her enigmatic look with the 'geste indécent', and deferring the revelation of its true meaning until the end of the novel.

In the meantime, the narrator's labelling of the (undescribed) gesture as 'indécent' conveys, to the reader, both that it has a likely sexual connotation and that the protagonist's 'petit dictionnaire de civilité' has led him to misinterpret it. It falls instead to Bloch, with a revelation that the narrator says 'bouleversa [s]a conception du monde', to open his eyes to (and overstate) the reality of female sexual desire (I, 565). Such enlightenment comes too late, however, to be actionable in his initial encounter, and it is only years later that he learns, from Gilberte herself, of the sexual desire behind her crude gesture (intended as an invitation) and of the activities in Roussainville that reveal her to have been far more precocious than his naive theory of mind permitted him to grasp at the time (IV, 269-271).

> Seulement j'avais cru, à cause du geste grossier dont [son long regard] était accompagné, que c'était un regard de mépris parce que ce que je souhaitais me paraissait quelque chose que les petites filles ne connaissaient pas et ne faisaient que dans mon imagination, pendant mes heures de désir solitaire. Encore moins aurais-je cru que, si aisément, si rapidement, presque sous les yeux de mon grand-père, l'une d'entre elles eût eu l'audace de le figurer. (IV, 271)

The unbridgeable divergence of desire ('abîme infranchissable') that he had imagined to lie between them is revealed to have been illusory, 'aussi imaginaire que l'abîme de Pascal'

[55] In this draft, her expression (unaccompanied by any gesture) involves 'quelque chose d'aimable dans les yeux [qui] […] semblaient dire: "mais si vous voulez ce sera pour vous"' (*Cahier 4*, fol. 31^{r}, BnF, NAF 16644). The essential genetic chronology of the scene is described by Wada in 'La Création romanesque de Proust: étude génétique sur la première apparition de Gilberte', *Études de langue et littérature françaises*, 54 (1989), 126-140.

[56] Wada, 'La Création romanesque de Proust', 132.

(ibid.). While Elisabeth Ladenson cautions against relying upon Gilberte's explanation of her earlier behaviour, postulating that it might be mere flattery and that the gesture must remain 'foncièrement indéchiffrable',[57] it is notable that, in response to the protagonist merely declaring that he had loved her in Combray, it is Gilberte who singles out the two incidents (at Tansonville and Paris) as proof of her desire, and with a deal more compromising detail than would be necessary simply to flatter his ego. On balance, it would seem that the remaining mystery is not as to the meaning of her gesture, but its nature, a gap left for the reader to fill.

Nonetheless, if all that were involved in deciphering her signs were the definitive interpretation offered by Gilberte herself, the pedagogical value of the changes made by Proust would be reduced to the mere happenstance of the other confessing her true intentions. There is, however, an intermediate sequel to the original scene, in which chance operates to give him a fresh opportunity to read her correctly. Encountering her momentarily as she is leaving his building in Paris, the more mature protagonist is better equipped to decipher Gilberte's demeanour, taking her two furtive glances towards him – shielded from her companions and 'presque en me souriant' – as signs of desire (IV, 142-145), albeit encouraged in this reading by his mistaken belief that she is the Mlle d'Éporcheville (whom Saint-Loup has described as being easy):

> Dans l'esprit de celle-ci, entre elle et moi il y avait d'avance de commun les heures que nous aurions pu passer ensemble, si elle avait la liberté de me donner un rendez-vous. N'était-ce pas ce que son regard avait voulu exprimer avec une éloquence qui ne fut claire que pour moi? (IV, 143)

When the older Gilberte offers her reading of both episodes, she confirms not only that he had chronically misinterpreted her look and gesture at Tansonville, but *correctly* interpreted

[57] 'Le Geste indécent de Gilberte', *Revue d'études proustiennes*, 2 (2015), 171-183 (182-183).

her glances in Paris, authenticating the substance of his assessment of her desire, sexual mores and mischievousness. As he concludes: ‘je ne m’étais pas tout à fait trompé sur la signification de son regard, ni sur l’espèce de femme qu’elle était et m’avouait maintenant avoir été’ (IV, 272). On both occasions, the ‘vraie Gilberte’ had deliberately manifested herself (without uttering a word), the interval between the episodes tracing an arc in the protagonist’s apprenticeship in reading the signs of desire.

If, as the narrator observes, he managed to scotch any prospect of further candour from Gilberte, during their relationship, with ‘tout un entre-deux de sentiment’ (IV, 269-270), it is because it was a period when his innocent romantic objective was to ‘faire l’aveu réciproque’ of mutual love (I, 393), an idyll that he pursues doggedly in spite of her evasiveness. Embedded in this desire is a naive belief in the sanctity of utterance as the unequivocal expression of state of mind. Throughout their time together at the Champs-Élysées (I, 387-401 and I, 481-490), their interactions fall far short of his ideal. There is a conspicuous dearth of dialogue and those statements that Gilberte does make are either perfunctory or fall far short of any profound expression of feeling. More problematically for the lover searching for signs of ‘progrès décisifs’ in their relations, her statements are riven with contradictions which see her blowing hot and cold about their friendship, ‘marques d’amitié’ offset by ‘marques [...] de la peine’. Nor is the problem confined to mutually inconsistent statements. It extends to internally contradictory statements, compounded by dissonant behaviour, the starkest example being her response to his request that she come early the next day for a frank discussion, ‘sautant de joie’ while mixing earnest affection with indifference: ‘Demain, comptez-y, mon bel ami, mais je ne viendrai pas! j’ai un grand goûter’.

Anne Simon captures the blend of characteristics in Gilberte which entail that, while the protagonist is able to grasp her propensity for wilfulness, mischief and dissimulation but also earnest tenderness in her 'caractère profond' (a cocktail of those inherited from her parents (I, 554-556; IV, 267-268)), he cannot rely on the signs that she emits 'pour décrypter ses intentions' precisely because of those character traits which make her so unpredictable.[58] As Simon contends elsewhere, '[a]u désir de tout découvrir, de tout montrer, de tout dire du narrateur s'opposent l'essentielle sournoiserie de Gilberte, Mélusine indécryptable'.[59]

However, I would qualify this general assessment with the important caveat that, while Gilberte successfully resists the drive for *total* knowledge, the protagonist *is* able in time, and with greater experience to decipher signs of her desire (as I describe above), and, in the meantime, he learns during the course of their relationship to read her body language in a manner that leaves little room for doubt about her feelings towards him. While the evidence reported by the narrator becomes exiguous, the more that their relationship develops, the less reliable Gilberte's utterances appear to be as a guide to her state of mind, requiring more weight to be placed on demeanour. In the period leading up to the end of their relationship, the protagonist is able to detect 'certains signes d'impatience' that Gilberte has 'laiss[é] échapper' when he is invited over by Swann, seemingly against her wishes, and the account of his last 'visite' during this period (the 'brouille') shows him to be highly adept at reading her state of mind, ironically just when her emotional detachment is as good as complete (I, 572-574). When Odette announces that the protagonist has come to see her, indicating that she should stay with him rather than going to a dance lesson,

[58] 'La même et pourtant autre', 136-139.

[59] 'Méconnaissance de Proust (Foucault)', *LINKs series*, 7-8 (2023), 72-80 (78).

Gilberte's immediate response provides the key that he uses – accurately, as it transpires (IV, 270) – to decipher that she has tired of him:

> *au haussement d'épaules que fit Gilberte en ôtant ses affaires, je compris que* sa mère avait involontairement accéléré l'évolution, peut-être jusque-là possible encore à arrêter, qui détachait peu à peu de moi mon amie. (I, 572, emphasis added)

This shrug of the shoulders when taking off her coat appears to signify both indifference and resignation, and her facial expression unambiguously conveys her discontent at having to forego what, in contrast to his company, is a pleasure:

> le visage de Gilberte, dépouillé de toute joie, nu, saccagé, sembla tout l'après-midi vouer un regret mélancolique au pas de quatre que ma présence l'empêchait d'aller danser, et défier toutes les créatures, à commencer par moi, de comprendre les raisons subtiles qui avaient déterminé chez elle une inclination sentimentale pour le boston. (I, 573)

In the dialogue that ensues, all meaningful propositional content is evacuated from their utterances. While they exchange banalities of an 'insignifiance paradoxale' about the weather and time, the real conversation is taking place through the emotions that each of them is incapable of withholding and are manifested by their cold demeanour and the very banality of their discourse. When, after several hours of hoping that her mood will lighten, he puts to Gilberte (in exasperation) that she is not being kind to him, and rebuffs the suggestion that it is he who is being unkind, she responds with sarcasm ('«Naturellement, vous vous trouvez gentil!»') and with a long laugh. Reading her laughter instinctively and in context, the protagonist understands her to have seen through his pretence at coldness and indifference, deciphering it as the chain of thought: '«Non, non, je ne me laisse pas prendre à tout ce que vous me dites, je sais que vous êtes fou de moi, mais cela ne me fait ni chaud ni froid, car je me fiche de vous.»' However, momentarily allowing intellect to undermine intuition, he reflects on the inherent indeterminacy of laughter as 'langage'. Gilberte's laughter – often 'en désaccord avec les paroles' (I, 481-482) – is painful precisely because

it expresses a different plane of her thought than direct discourse ('un autre plan, une surface invisible') and in a form of non-propositional language that does not guarantee comprehension, making it seem 'plus insaisissable' (574).

Pausing to observe that, despite her laughter, Gilberte's words themselves seem affectionate (she claims – he later reveals – to love him (604)), he becomes concerned that she might after all doubt his feelings, his resolve crumbles and he changes tack with a capitulatory declaration of the pain that she is causing him. Her reaction only corroborates his instinctive reading of her physiology: far from being overjoyed at the confirmation that he loves her, she is irritated. Realizing his strategic error, he resolves 'à ne plus tenir compte de ses paroles', but it is too late.

Although his reading of Gilberte at this fateful visit concerns only *part* of her 'obscure personnalité' (IV, 84), it provides the protagonist with all the information that he needs on the material question of how she feels about him. However, after the encounter, his *intelligence*, while purporting to attempt an '«objectif»' interpretation of her past conduct in order to provide him with a 'vision juste des choses', is in fact operating in service of his emotions, looking for any sign of love that suggests a happy resolution may be available, and mangling the evidence (I, 576-577). The result is intellectual disorientation and incoherence in the performance of compromised calculations ('calculs') that, 'soit par obéissance à la réponse des nombres, soit que je leur eusse fait dire ce que je désirais', are bound to give him the false encouragement he craves. Having persuaded himself that reconciliation is possible, however, it is his *intuitive* reading which is validated when he caves in, going to pay her a visit. Just as the tone and language of the doorman who informs him that Gilberte is not home 'prouvaient que dans l'entourage de Gilberte on avait l'impression que je lui étais importun', so too have the involuntary aspects of her behaviour

provided him with ‘la radiographie au moins sommaire de la réalité insoupçonnable que cacherait un discours étudié’. That reading is later corroborated by her chambermaid’s report that she had been infatuated with someone else (III, 641-642) and, eventually, by Gilberte’s confession that she found him smothering.

In the meantime, contemporaneously, it is the intuitive knowledge that she has tired of him which (setting an unfortunate habit-forming precedent) triggers off a series of oblique strategies intended to (re)ignite her love for him, as he succumbs to the temptation to substitute ‘à la douceur de l’aveu la simulation de l’indifférence’ (I, 393). Although he continues to persuade himself that Gilberte might still love him, the conviction is only intermittent, disrupted by haunting ‘images désagréables’ of her *ennui*: her expressive shrug and her sullen features (I, 615). As he reflects in the aftermath of their *brouille*, the die has been cast; any attempt to win her over is doomed because she has confidently read his true feelings, and simply does not share them (I, 597-602).

Looking back on events, the narrator invokes basic theory of mind principles to justify his failure to adopt a simple, direct approach: it would have been futile, he argues, to give her a written or oral warning of the real indifference that her conduct will catalyse, because the evident divergence of desire between them would have led her to misconstrue any such declaration as a ploy, any prospect of indifference being chimerical, forcing him instead to act it out:

> j’aurais eu beau parler à Gilberte, elle ne m’aurait pas entendu. Nous nous imaginons toujours quand nous parlons, que ce sont nos oreilles, notre esprit qui écoutent. Mes paroles ne seraient parvenues à Gilberte que *déviées*, […] méconnaissables, rendant un son ridicule. (I, 601, emphasis added)

Although the *deviation* of (communicated) thought is in fact far from universal, as the description of the intersubjective link with his grandmother makes plain (II, 28), it is index-linked to manipulation and deception, and in this instance with Gilberte, self-induced.

The *brouille* with Gilberte raises the question as to whether the knowledge that the protagonist derives from his intuitive reading of her 'signes' amounts to a form of *connaissance directe* of her mind or mental state (II, 367), even if not precisely what the narrator contemplates when he declares direct perceptual knowledge to be unobtainable, with the generalization that 'nous ne percevons pas directement les âmes' (II, 28). After all, it is behaviour falling into the same epistemological category as Andrée's use of the word 'justement', on which the narrator later places weight as being '*de la famille de certains regards, de certains gestes, qui, bien que n'ayant pas une forme logique, rationnelle, directement élaborée pour l'intelligence de celui qui écoute*, lui parviennent cependant avec leur signification véritable' (II, 280, emphasis added). Although they are not 'affirmations directes', such indicia are prized by the protagonist as '*les débris informes et reconstituables de cette pensée* [qu'il a] fait exploser, en la heurtant' (II, 281, emphasis added). The narrator posits, therefore, that the other's thought or emotion may be forced out of her, in a manner which is oblique but allows accurate reconstruction. He also positively avers that it is possible to achieve a form of intuitive knowledge; Françoise is able, after prolonged experience of the protagonist's family, to read them with '[une] sorte de connaissance instinctive et presque divinatoire' (II, 653-654), using a faculty that is either the same as or akin to the *intuition directe* on which he personally places considerable weight (IV, 266). Is knowledge obtained by such means not, in a real sense, *directe* even if (owing to possible errors of interpretation) not always *certaine* (cf. II, 366-367)?

It is often said that we cannot enjoy a *direct* understanding of others' mental states because we do not have the same kind of access to their minds as we do to our own. The narrator expresses the asymmetry in perceptual terms that reify thought as 'objet': 'nous ne voyons pas notre corps, que les autres voient, et nous «suivons» notre pensée, l'objet invisible aux autres, qui est devant nous' (III, 687); this object is one, it is said, that 'parfois l'artiste […] fait voir dans son œuvre' (a point reiterated at III, 847). As philosopher Dan Zahavi explains, it is obvious that access to *other* minds must be asymmetrical with access to our own (otherwise they would not be 'other' minds), though, as we have seen, the description of intersubjectivity achieved with the grandmother appears to suggest that exceptions may (to some degree at least) be possible. Zahavi argues, however, that it is fallacious to assume that only our own experiences are given to us, and that, to the contrary, experiencing the intentional and expressive behaviour of the other can be 'direct', at least in the sense that it is the mind-reader's 'primary intentional object'.[60] Although there is a risk of the debate circling endlessly around the definitional issue of what is meant by 'direct', the narrator's valorization and reliance upon seemingly unfiltered micro-behavioural evidence appears consistent (if not entirely coterminous) with Zahavi's phenomenological view of social cognition, though the nuances or boundaries of what is or is not accessible (directly), and how, will become the subject of greater scrutiny when he comes to deal with Albertine (see **Chapter 4**).

[60] 'Empathy and Direct Social Perception: A Phenomenological Proposal', *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 2.3 (2011), 541-558 (548-549).

3. Norpois, Françoise & Saint-Loup: '[la] valeur psychologique [du « potin »]' (III, 435)

On a number of occasions the narrator foregrounds the *general* cognitive and *particular* epistemological value and complications of gossip, a form of hearsay evidence which is prolific in the social settings navigated by the protagonist. Halfway through the novel, the narrator declaims its psychological value in challenging the complacent but erroneous view that one may form of the mental state of others (including their view of us) based on misleading appearances:

> cette chose universellement décriée […] *«le potin»*, lui aussi, soit qu'il ait pour objet nous-même et nous devienne ainsi particulièrement désagréable, soit qu'il nous apprenne sur un tiers quelque chose que nous ignorions, *a sa valeur psychologique*. *Il empêche l'esprit de s'endormir sur la vue factice qu'il a de ce qu'il croit les choses et qui n'est que leur apparence. Il retourne celle-ci avec la dextérité magique d'un philosophe idéaliste et nous présente rapidement un coin insoupçonné du revers de l'étoffe*. (III, 435, emphasis added)

What prompts these reflections is the salacious gossip circulating within the Verdurin clan about M. de Charlus, about which he is (through blissful self-delusion) as yet ignorant. Gossip that displays (to comic effect) others' ignorance, confusion, or misplaced belief in rumour about another character is considered below, looking at the particular case of the Baron. What concerns us here is instead the gossip that brings the *protagonist* new information about another's mental state.

A handful of pieces of gossip are highlighted by the narrator for the shocking impact that they have on his reading of the person whose words or actions are the subject-matter of a third party's report. The first concerns the report, several years after his first encounter with M. de Norpois (I, 426-432, 443-477), that the diplomat had noticed the expression of gratitude that the young man had gone to execute but interrupted (while still inchoate), in response to his offer to pass on compliments to Mme Swann:

> j'eus peine à me retenir de ne pas embrasser ses douces mains blanches et fripées […] J'en ébauchai presque le geste que je me crus seul à avoir remarqué. (I, 468)

The narrator reports that he was stunned not only to learn that Norpois had noticed the gesture, but mentioned it in unflattering terms (at a dinner held by the Princesse de Guermantes) with the observation that 'il avait «vu le moment où j'allais lui baiser les mains»' (469). The fact that this vatic report is inscribed (and discussed) in the account of the incipient gesture itself underscores its seismic effect on the protagonist's theory of mind:

> Il est difficile en effet à chacun de nous de calculer exactement à quelle échelle ses paroles ou ses mouvements apparaissent à autrui […] je fus stupéfait d'apprendre qu'étaient si différentes de ce que j'aurais cru, non seulement la façon dont M. de Norpois parlait de moi, mais encore la composition de ses souvenirs. Ce «potin» m'éclaira sur les proportions inattendues de distraction et de présence d'esprit, de mémoire et d'oubli dont est fait l'esprit humain. (I, 468-469)

The narrator's later account of the gossip itself, which took the form of Odette passing on a report given to her by Charlus (double hearsay), emphasizes his sense of stupefaction both that a minor action should have become news at a high society gathering, and that someone who purported to be a family friend – 'le père Norpois' – should have described him to others as 'un flatteur à moitié hystérique' (II, 568). Uttered in the absence of the protagonist, these reported words have the impact of an unguarded confession. As the narrator observes, the shocking effect of such a report lies in the violence that it does to the image that one believes the other to have formed of us, unexpectedly confronting mistaken inferences drawn from appearance with a very different reality:

> Si on a autant de surprises qu'à visiter une maison d'apparence quelconque dont l'intérieur est rempli de trésors, de pinces-monseigneur et de cadavres quand on découvre la vraie vie des autres, l'univers réel sous l'univers apparent, on n'en éprouve pas moins si, au lieu de l'image qu'on s'était faite de soi-même grâce à ce que chacun nous en disait, on apprend par le langage qu'ils tiennent à notre égard en notre absence, quelle image entièrement différente ils portaient en eux de nous et de notre vie. (II, 102)

A subsequent report from Mme de Guermantes reveals Norpois to have expressed affection for the protagonist (II, 818). However, his disobliging conduct towards the protagonist's father in his attempt to secure endorsement for a chair at the Académie des sciences morales et politiques – 'un manque absolu de serviabilité' (II, 523) – has manifested his Janus-like 'duplicité dans l'obligeance' (II, 292). The episode involving the Prince de Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen makes plain that the 'chiffre' necessary to decode his discourse, and 'la bonne clef' with which to unlock 'la serrure' of his endorsement for the chair, are not friendship but whatever he most desires in the advancement of his own interests (personal or professional) (II, 552-559). Thus, reports of the Marquis' displays or declarations of amity and solicitude ring hollow, and the protagonist's evaluation is balanced but damning:

> La vérité est qu'étant moqueur et même assez malveillant, ceux qui s'étaient laissé prendre comme moi à ses apparences de saint Louis rendant la justice sous un chêne, aux sons de voix facilement apitoyés qui sortaient de sa bouche un peu trop harmonieuse, croyaient à une véritable perfidie quand ils apprenaient une médisance à leur égard venant d'un homme qui avait semblé mettre son cœur dans ses paroles. Ces médisances étaient assez fréquentes chez lui. Mais cela ne l'empêchait pas d'avoir des sympathies, de louer ceux qu'il aimait et d'avoir plaisir à se montrer serviable pour eux. (II, 818)

The spotlight that gossip may shine on the other's true view is more painful, however, when it concerns Françoise. Jupien's report that she has disparaged him (with the comments that 'je ne valais pas la corde pour me pendre et que j'avais cherché à lui faire tout le mal possible') cuts through the flattering image that he has complacently formed over time:

> Ces paroles de Jupien tirèrent aussitôt devant moi, dans une teinte inconnue, une épreuve de mes rapports avec Françoise si différente de celle sur laquelle je me complaisais souvent à reposer mes regards et où, sans la plus légère indécision, Françoise m'adorait et ne perdait pas une occasion de me célébrer […] Telle qu'elle fut, cette brusque échappée que m'ouvrit une fois Jupien sur le monde réel m'épouvanta. Encore ne s'agissait-il que de Françoise dont je ne me souciais guère. En était-il ainsi dans tous les rapports sociaux? (II, 366)

The revelation is characterized as so momentous that (as described in the previous section of this chapter) it is said to mark a watershed in his developing his theory of mind, something that he reiterates explicitly in the final volume: IV, 350, 353.

However, the particular questions to which Jupien's report gives rise go to the heart of the problem posed by hearsay evidence (where it is the *only* evidence of a particular action or utterance):

> Pensait-elle sincèrement ce qu'elle avait dit à Jupien? L'avait-elle dit seulement pour brouiller Jupien avec moi, peut-être pour qu'on ne prît pas la nièce de Jupien pour la remplacer? (II, 366)

The protagonist was not present to observe Françoise's demeanour when she made the disparaging comments, and there is no evidence of their context. Accordingly, as the narrator notes, he cannot assess whether they are to be taken at face value. Moreover, Jupien's motive for relaying this corrosive gossip is unknown, further undermining its reliability.

In the result, the protagonist is left with two theoretical alternatives, so that, as Duncan Large puts it, he 'now has to live with two irreconcilable perspectives on Françoise, neither of which can be assumed to be the correct one'.[61] Without seeking to resolve this conflict, the most that can perhaps be said is that the narrator's depiction of Françoise suggests that he is inclined to believe (and would prefer the reader to understand) that she will merely have been venting frustration: her behaviour has long exhibited a duality making her both affectionate and adversarial, mixing 'son amour excessif pour nous, [et] le plaisir qu'elle avait à nous être désagréable' (II, 56), with conduct showing her to be both devoted and resentful.

[61] *Nietzsche and Proust*, 143.

The doubts that may result from questions about the reliability and credibility of hearsay evidence become an important general leitmotif in the *récit*, given particular consideration by the protagonist when the gossip represents unwelcome news about someone dear to him. The issue arises in acute form with Albertine, but also, within a narrower compass, regarding Saint-Loup. It is once again Jupien who provides the gossip – in this case granted the status of 'vérité' (IV, 256) – that Saint-Loup has been having an affair with Morel. On the question whether Saint-Loup's homosexuality (or, rather, bisexuality) is a recent development, Aimé's report that he had attempted to seduce the lift-operator at the Grand-Hôtel during the protagonist's first trip to Balbec is news that he is instinctively inclined to dismiss as a lie by either the operator or Aimé himself (IV, 259-266). Nonetheless, it prompts a wide-ranging evaluation of Saint-Loup's past behaviour, which proves insufficient to allow the protagonist to draw a firm conclusion. The epistemic problem posed by the hearsay report is that it is too remote temporally from events to permit a reliable evaluation of its accuracy, lacking the impact of a discovery made by *direct* intuition from the evidence of his own senses at the time:

> ce dont nous n'avons pas eu *l'intuition directe*, ce que nous avons appris seulement par d'autres, nous n'avons plus aucun moyen, l'heure est passée de le faire savoir à notre âme; ses communications avec le réel sont fermées; aussi ne pouvons-nous jouir de la découverte, il est trop tard. Du reste, de toutes façons, pour que j'en pusse jouir spirituellement celle-là me faisait trop de peine. (IV, 266, emphasis added)

In the result, the report leaves him in a position of doubt which casts a pall over the whole arc of their friendship, because, if it is correct, who knows how many of his readings of Saint-Loup may prove to be retrospectively falsified by 'une première méprise sur les prémisses'?

The following discussion of the Baron de Charlus details another cautionary tale of hearsay's capacity to lead the mind-reader astray with an initial error 'sur les prémisses',

where the subject-matter of the report is the very person whose mind must be read, and where the information has been provided in advance of any face-to-face encounter by seemingly reliable sources, a scenario commonly encountered in the *Recherche*.

4. '[D]e la fenêtre de l'escalier, découv[rant] un Charlus que je ne soupçonnais pas' (IV, 353): 'le pédéraste *viril*'[62]

Deleuze describes Charlus as 'le plus prodigieux émetteur de signes, par sa puissance mondaine, son orgueil, son sens du théâtre, son visage et sa voix'.[63] In this regard, he is the polar opposite of Norpois, who excels in the suppression of signs (I, 444). Besides Albertine, the Baron occupies the greatest place, presents one of the most formidable challenges and arguably plays the most significant role in the protagonist's apprenticeship in mind-reading.

With the deliberately managed sequencing and *mise en scène* of the protagonist's discovery of the key to his behaviour (and its aftermath), Proust placed Charlus at the heart of a carefully orchestrated demonstration of the difficulties, not only for the young protagonist but all those from whom he chooses to shield his secret, of deciphering the signs emitted by someone driven by his sexuality to become the consummate dissembler. As Proust was at pains to point out from as early as 1912-1913, prior to publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*, this demonstration was pivotal to the structure of the protagonist's apprenticeship, and to the deeper compositional and thematic structure of the *Recherche* as a whole; but, it also posed what he regarded as the greatest threat to the novel's publication (while representing its most audacious feature and one of some originality). In correspondence written by Proust to potential publishers, or those who might advance his

[62] Letter to Eugène Fasquelle, 28 October 1912, *Corr.*, XI, 255-259 (256).

[63] *Proust et les signes*, 12.

efforts to achieve publication (at a stage when the novel was projected to comprise two or three volumes), he explained that characters '«préparés»' in the first part would proceed in the second to do precisely the opposite of what one expects[64] – 'comme ils se présentent dans l'ouvrage comme dans la vie, c'est-à-dire fort mal connus d'abord et souvent découverts longtemps après pour le contraire de ce qu'on croyait'[65] – and that, whereas the first volume would be 'très chaste', the second would be 'fort scandaleux'.[66] The character singled out as embodying both aspects of the novel was the Baron, then named 'le baron de Fleurus' or 'de Gurcy', who appears first as a supposed lover of Mme Swann, but:

> comme dans la vie où les réputations sont souvent fausses et où on met longtemps à connaître les gens, *on verra dans le deuxième volume seulement* que ce vieux monsieur n'est pas du tout l'amant de Me Swann mais un pédéraste. C'est un caractère que je crois assez neuf, le pédéraste viril, épris de virilité, détestant les jeunes gens efféminés, détestant à vrai dire tous les jeunes gens comme sont misogynes les hommes qui ont souffert par les femmes.[67] (emphasis added)

As is apparent from this *précis*, it was (and remained)[68] central to Proust's conception of the composition and structure of the novel that the protagonist should at first be misled, through hearsay, but (in time) duly uncover the Baron's secret, and that this discovery should also come as a surprise to the reader. In the event, Proust's subsequent work on the novel entailed that his demonstration of the mind-reading difficulties engendered by the Baron's behaviour would be more wide-ranging and complex than this simple binary scheme (secret/revelation) suggests.

[64] Letter to René Blum, 23 February 1913, *Corr.*, XII, 90-92 (92).

[65] Letter to Fasquelle, 28 October 1912, ibid., 256.

[66] Letter to Fasquelle, 28 October 1912, ibid., 255.

[67] Letter to Fasquelle, ibid., 256, and the letter to Gaston Gallimard dated about 6 November 1912, *Corr*., XI, 285-291 (287).

[68] See, for example, the letter to Paul Souday, 1 January 1920, *Corr.*, XIX, 36-40 (38).

The Baron's (false) reputation precedes him. The first mention of his name occurs when the protagonist overhears his family discussing Swann and 'sa coquine de femme qui vit au su de tout Combray avec un certain monsieur de Charlus' (I, 34), a rumour echoed by what he hears from their neighbour, Mme Sazerat (I, 98), and evoked when he makes a cameo appearance at Tansonville by the grandfather, who exclaims that it is indeed him, lamenting that Gilberte should be 'mêlée à toute cette infamie!' (I, 140). While the Baron's presence barely registers for the young protagonist, he reports one aspect of his demeanour – '[il] fixait sur moi des yeux qui lui sortaient de la tête' – planted by Proust as a behavioural clue, and left without comment (from the mature narrator) to avoid having to '«annoncer» une chose que je suis alors censé ne pas savoir'; the Baron's stare is supposed to pass 'inaperçu' at the time, leaving its significance to be appreciated by the reader only once he has been outed by the protagonist as 'un vieil homosexuel'.[69]

First impressions

The protagonist's first encounter with the Baron in Balbec is once more prefaced by a misleading hearsay account, this time from a source supposedly well placed to provide a biographical summary – Saint-Loup (II, 107-110). The portrait that he paints of Charlus – 'un vieux coureur de femmes', and a mixture of virile masculinity, high and haughty nobility, and violent homophobia, but also refinement, discretion, artistic talent, and kindness – itself derives almost entirely from hearsay rather than direct evidence, something on which the protagonist will test Saint-Loup later (once in a better-informed position).

When Charlus appears outside the casino the very next morning, he does so incognito, the protagonist – and the reader – encountering him as they would a stranger (II,

[69] Letter to Henri Ghéon, 2 January 1914, *Corr.*, XIII, 22-31 (25-26).

110-112).[70] The theatricality of the Baron's demeanour, his attention focused on the protagonist but transparently pretending to direct it elsewhere (with simulated gestures calculated to 'faire voir'), gives the young mind-reader the impression that he may be a criminal hatching a plan and attempting to allay suspicions, while the aggressive intensity and insolent turns in his behaviour suggest that he may instead be suffering from a personality disorder: 'la singularité de son expression me le faisait prendre tantôt pour un voleur et tantôt pour un aliéné', or a spy.[71] The possibility that Charlus may indeed be mad is kept alive throughout the novel.[72] Thus, from the outset, the protagonist intuits, from the Baron's demeanour, that (unless he is simply mad) his appearance and behaviour are intended to disguise his true thoughts or intentions.

The ensuing scenes of interaction between the protagonist and Charlus centre upon what Deleuze describes as '*Trois grands discours*', in which the Baron attempts to position himself as 'maître du logos', but in which his discourse is disrupted by 'des signes involontaires qui résistent à l'organisation souveraine du langage'.[73] Each of the scenes involves Charlus flouting the 'cooperative principle' that governs orderly conversation, as he attempts to make coded preliminary advances on the protagonist without expressly revealing his intent.[74] The narrator paints male same-sex desire / homosexuality (which he

[70] Proust's technique of making certain characters *appear* (as the protagonist would have experienced them) rather than *presenting* them through the eyes of the older narrator (with the benefit of subsequently-acquired knowledge) is addressed by Gaëton Picon in *Lecture de Proust* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 66-71.

[71] The analogy between Charlus's concealment of his secret and the 'coupable'/'criminel' seeking to conceal his crime is a recurring one: see, for example, III, 113, 116, 356, 437.

[72] See the discussion in Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, 205-219; Philippe Berthier, *Charlus* (Paris: Fallois, 2017), 58-71, and Anne-Aël Ropars, 'Rire et folie chez Proust: le cas du baron de Charlus', in *Proust et le rire*, ed. by Sjef Houppermans and others (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 97-112.

[73] *Proust et les signes*, 208-209. The scenes are at II, 124-126; II, 581-592; II, 842-854.

[74] Namely, that an interlocutor may expect a speaker to be informative, truthful, relevant and clear: H. Paul Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', in *Speech Acts*, ed. by Peter Cole & Jerry Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 41-58. For further discussion of the subversion of the cooperative principle in the *Recherche*, see Lucey, *What Proust Heard*, 31-37, 148. Lucey remarks that 'Proust (and/or his narrator) seems to delight in the representation of verbal exchanges in which one or the other (or both) of the principles of reciprocity or

analyses as 'inversion')[75] as 'une franc-maçonnerie', whose members 'se reconnaissent à des signes naturels ou de convention, involontaires ou voulus […] tous obligés à protéger leur secret, mais ayant leur part d'un secret des autres que le reste de l'humanité ne soupçonne pas' (III, 18-19). As Mireille Rosello argues, homosexuals cannot openly speak of their sexuality in society in the *Recherche,* forcing homosexuality itself to become a 'langage, un système de signes, un code' expressed by and through figures like the Baron, in whose language (save for the initiated) 'le sens immédiat des paroles devient secondaire'.[76] While, as Rosello contends, this confers on Charlus's speech something of a poetic (non-literal) quality, it also entails that it is often incomprehensible, even incoherent, and difficult for the young protagonist to attribute, causally, to an intelligible thought or emotion. Moreover, while intuition enables the protagonist to detect that there is more to the Baron than meets the eye, he lacks the key that would enable him to unlock his secret.

Proust uses these scenes, all of which precede the revelatory opening section of *Sodome et Gomorrhe I,* to build dramatic tension as the Baron becomes increasingly frustrated at his young interlocutor's failure to get the message by reading between the lines,

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of cooperation is not in operation.' (32) As Geneviève Henrot demonstrates, Charlus's conversation (across the *Recherche*) is replete with infractions of the principle – 'toute une gamme de déviances discursives': 'Déviances discursives: portrait de Charlus en haut-parleur', *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes*, 32 (2001), 120-136.

[75] As Elisabeth Ladenson explains, 'Proust preferred the term "invert" [*inverti*] to "homosexual" [*homosexuel*] both because of the latter's hybrid Greek-Latin provenance and, notably, because his conception of the phenomenon in question is predicated not on the idea of same-sex attraction per se but rather on the *anima muliebris in corpore virili inculsa* (the soul of a woman trapped in the body of a man) model first theorized in *Memnon*, the 1868 manifesto of the German sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs.' ('Sexuality', 118). For further discussion of the association between Proust's conception of the gay male as 'homme-femme' and the 'commonplace of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexology to regard homosexuals as spiritual hermaphrodites', see Julius Rivers, 'The Myth and Science of Homosexuality in *À la recherche du temps perdu*', in *Homosexualities and French Literature*, ed. by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 262-278 (265). See also Luckhurst, *Science and Structure*, 170-173, describing the *Recherche* as 'a repository of *idées reçues* on male homosexuality' (170).

[76] 'L'Embonpoint du baron de Charlus', *French Forum*, 10.2 (1985), 189-200 (193).

and as the escalation in Charlus's erratic, irascible conduct causes the protagonist to lose his patience. Each scene is considered in turn.

At the Grand-Hôtel

The first proper test of the protagonist's ability to read the Baron comes with his invitation to the young man and his grandmother to take tea in Mme de Villeparisis' apartment at the hotel (II, 117-126). The episode falls into four parts: (i) the Baron's invitation; (ii) the tea; (iii) Charlus's visit to the protagonist in his room that evening; (iv) the scene on the beach the following morning.

While his invitation is unequivocal, the Baron's conversation and demeanour at the tea are dominated by falsity and attempted misdirection, opening with his suggestion that the pair have shown up unexpectedly, and the charade that he has not seen and is not interested in looking at the young man. The protagonist is able to detect the signs of concealment, but unable to discern what lies at their root. Having learnt the Baron's identity, initial speculation that he might be a petty criminal now seems implausible, as does the notion (at least according to what the protagonist has heard of his conversation at the tea) that he is simply a madman. He intuits, however, that Charlus's eyes, whose movements and expressions seem causally disconnected from his utterance, are animated by and project destructive psychological forces that he seeks to disguise and struggles to control:

> ce visage, auquel une légère couche de poudre donnait un peu l'aspect d'un visage de théâtre, M. de Charlus avait beau en fermer hermétiquement l'expression, les yeux étaient comme une lézarde, comme une meurtrière que seule il n'avait pu boucher et par laquelle, selon le point où on était placé par rapport à lui, on se sentait brusquement croisé du reflet de quelque engin intérieur qui semblait n'avoir rien de rassurant, même pour celui qui, sans en être absolument maître, le portait en soi, à l'état d'équilibre instable et toujours sur le point d'éclater. (II, 120)

In a suitably medieval image that develops, by *gradatio*, from comparing his eyes to a crack in an exterior façade ('une lézarde') that contains and conceals his thoughts, the simile takes as its tacit ground the comparison between a face concealing a harmful secret and a castle containing a penetrative weapon: his eyes are like a *meurtrière* (an arrow loophole) in its exterior that he has been unable to block, which risks allowing his secret to explode forth at any moment, his look menacing its object with the 'reflet de quelque engin intérieur' – an unstable device that threatens both the target of vision and Charlus himself, that he lets loose with the evasiveness of a Parthian shot (I, 111), but the invasiveness of a probe (I, 113). At the same time, the furtive and concerned look in his eyes ('l'expression circonspecte et incessamment inquiète de ces yeux'), set within his tired features, and constantly scanning in all directions, give him the look of a hunted man ('faisait penser à quelque incognito, à quelque déguisement d'un homme puissant en danger, ou seulement d'un individu dangereux, mais tragique'). These two contradictory aspects of his demeanour confer upon him a duality of (ocular) expression – aggressive and defensive – which, read as signs of a composite mental state, suggest that he must be harbouring some exceptional secret:

> J'aurais voulu deviner quel était *ce secret que ne portaient pas en eux les autres hommes* et qui m'avait déjà rendu si énigmatique le regard de M. de Charlus quand je l'avais vu le matin près du casino. (II, 120, emphasis added)

The Baron's eyes and voice are, as Philippe Berthier diagnoses, the two principal elements of a 'symptomatologie physique',[77] part of a broader repertoire of a 'mimique, chaotique et désordonné […] intrinsèquement truquée et détraquée par le tabou qu'un irrépressible tropisme de sa nature enfreint, tout en essayant par tous les moyens de le respecter pour ne pas donner prise au scandale, d'où des affiches contradictoires'.[78]

[77] *Charlus*, 36-47.

[78] Ibid., 42.

The feminine qualities of the Baron's voice and laughter, and the 'délicatesses, […] sensibilité féminines' that he exhibits when holding forth on Mme de Sévigné, serve as potentially more telling clues to the secret itself, and are compounded by his reflexive, prudish attempt to conceal a handkerchief that betrays a bit too much colour:

> À ce moment, apercevant que le mouchoir brodé qu'il avait dans sa poche laissait dépasser des lisérés de couleur, il le rentra vivement avec la mine effarouchée d'une femme pudibonde mais point innocente dissimulant des appas que, par un excès de scrupule, elle juge indécents. (II, 123)

While the naive protagonist notes (with a degree of irony) the incongruity of these ladylike characteristics with the Baron's professed hatred of effeminacy, he is not yet able to discern their significance. Nor is he any better at deciphering the Baron's coded propositioning when he visits him in his room that evening. Charlus's statement of desire – 'pour un temps du moins, vous avez la jeunesse et c'est toujours une séduction' – is reported by the narrator without any comment or mark of salience, mirroring the protagonist's naivety (124). Lacking the appropriate key to decipher the Baron's coded utterances, he is likewise unequipped to understand how his own ingenuous statements will in turn be construed, earning himself a stiff reprimand from Charlus on the beach the following morning, which (in the circumstances) is just as incomprehensible.

Salon de Mme de Villeparisis

Their next encounter, at the salon of Mme de Villeparisis (II, 566-592), is marked by the deepening of mutual misunderstanding. As Charlus tells the protagonist, the 'proposition' (582) that he wishes to make is 'assez compliqué[e]' (574). Though the nature of the complication cannot be stated, it lies in the need to convey the 'proposition' in sufficiently guarded terms that its true nature will not expose the Baron to censure and yet achieve his aim of obtaining the young man's consent to his (sexual) propositioning in

grateful exchange for tutelage. The scene may be traced back to a draft contained in the very first of the cahiers for the *Recherche* in 1909, *Cahier 7*, where it was followed by a scene in which Charlus's homosexuality (then named M. de Guercy) was revealed.[79] In the published version, the revelation of the Baron's true nature is deferred, leaving room for the mystery surrounding his erratic behaviour, and his 'proposition', to be built to the point of crescendo.

In this first of two significant encounters between Charlus and the protagonist in Paris, the Baron's utterances in the conversation which takes place as they leave the salon, far from fulfilling their stated purpose of explanation ('j'aimerais mieux vous expliquer cela'), worsen his ambiguity. Although it is clear that the 'proposition' involves an offer of tutelage, what motivates the offer and what it will entail remain shrouded in mystery. The faintly ironic tone adopted by the narrator when describing the younger man's reactions, and the omission of any report of what he understood the Baron to be proposing, accentuate his state of total incomprehension. Instead of explaining what he has in mind, the Baron offers only the *potential* for the communication of such information: 'Ah! voilà, en effet, j'avais certaines choses à vous dire, mais je ne sais trop si je vous les dirai'. The 'choses' to which he alludes remain vague, the Baron alluding cryptically to the *pre-conditions, value* and *effects* of their communication rather than clarifying their *content*. The question (repeatedly) posed by the Baron is whether the protagonist is worthy of the effort ('En valez-vous la peine ou non?') involved in imparting 'un trésor d'expérience' and initiating him into 'une franc-maçonnerie'. The question of value is one which, through a failure to make clear that it is intended to be measured in the currency of sexual rather than social gratification, necessarily misdirects the protagonist, whose naive response ('quant à mon

[79] For a detailed account of its genesis, see Laurence Teyssandier, 'Proposition de M. de Gurcy / Charlus au héros à la sortie de l'hôtel de Guermantes', *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes*, 36 (2006), 37–46, which builds on the work done by Anthony Pugh in *The Growth of À la recherche du temps perdu: A Chronological Examination of Proust's Manuscripts from 1909 to 1914*, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), I, 305-314.

plaisir, croyez bien que tout ce qui me viendra de vous m'en causera un très grand. Je suis profondément touché que vous veuillez bien faire ainsi attention à moi et chercher à m'être utile') can only serve in turn to mislead the Baron. The Baron's effusive response leaves the young man baffled, despite two clues in particular that might (but do not) arouse a degree of suspicion in the more worldly-wise: Mme de Villeparisis expresses alarm at the news that he is to leave her salon with Charlus (in what might, if he knew better, signal a sense of offended *pudeur*, though the narrator hastens to say that 'cette hypothèse ne se présenta même pas à mon esprit' (580)), and the Baron cannot resist affectionately touching his chin (591). But, the Baron's behaviour is by now sufficiently riddled with inconsistencies to make attribution of a sexual motive seem like little more than speculation.

After dinner chez les Guermantes: 'M. de Charlus continue de me déconcerter'

The final encounter (prior to *Sodome et Gomorrhe*) witnesses the climax of the Baron's frustration at the protagonist's failure to grasp and engage with his coded messages: first, the bestowing of a volume of Bergotte as a gift, with forget-me-knots inscribed in its binding; then, in Paris, the 'proposition', to which (as Charlus emphasizes in a tearful rebuke) he has not even taken the trouble to respond (II, 840-854). The Baron's behaviour and discourse – switching between imperious, angry, indignant and vulgar accusation, and plaintive, lachrymose protestation – appears to lack any grounding in reality and when, in an eruption of anger, he sits bolt upright in his chaise longue to launch a vituperative attack, the young man is unable to contain his rage at the injustice of facing an onslaught of invective for a slander that he never committed.

> Depuis un moment, au désir de persuader M. de Charlus que je n'avais jamais dit ni entendu dire de mal de lui, avait succédé une rage folle, causée par les paroles que lui dictait uniquement, selon moi, son immense orgueil. *Peut-être étaient-elles du reste l'effet, pour une partie du moins, de cet orgueil. Presque tout le reste venait d'un sentiment que j'ignorais encore et auquel je ne fus donc pas coupable de ne pas faire sa part*. J'aurais pu au moins, *à défaut du sentiment inconnu*, mêler à l'orgueil, si je m'étais souvenu des paroles

> de Mme de Guermantes, un peu de folie. Mais à ce moment-là l'idée de folie ne me vint même pas à l'esprit. Il n'y avait en lui, selon moi, que de l'orgueil, en moi il n'y avait que de la fureur. (II, 846-847, emphasis added)

While he ascribes the Baron's immediate and most provocative declaration – that neither he nor any other lowly bourgeois of his ilk could ever hope to offend a man of his august stature – solely to pride, what motivates the rest of his angrily indignant and plaintive (contradictory) discourse is an enigma. From his experience and knowledge of the Baron to date, he identifies a range of possible motives that might lie behind any verbal onslaught:

> de quelques belles paroles qu'il colorât toutes ses haines, on sentait que, même s'il y avait sous son discours tantôt de l'orgueil offensé, tantôt un amour déçu, ou une rancune, du sadisme, une taquinerie, une idée fixe, cet homme était capable d'assassiner et de prouver à force de logique et de beau langage qu'il avait eu raison de le faire. (II, 844)

The protagonist is unable to determine what, on this particular occasion, lies 'sous son discours', though he is able to intuit that it is motivated by some *sentiment inconnu* which is not being clearly articulated. In a deftly ambiguous comment which preserves the protagonist's naivety and sense of mystification at the time, while gesturing almost imperceptibly to the revelation to come, the narrator observes that the *sentiment* behind most of Charlus's outpouring was one that he was not yet aware of and could not therefore be blamed for not taking into account. The ignorance put in play here is polyvalent. Taken most straightforwardly, it may connote that the protagonist simply did not yet know what particular *sentiment* in fact lay behind the Baron's words, but would subsequently discover what it was. Alternatively, it may signify that it was not a *sentiment* that he had *ever* encountered previously, and/or was wholly unknown (*inconnu*) to him.

The narrator chooses to disclose only *after* the revelation of the Baron's secret in *Sodome et Gomorrhe I* that, shortly beforehand, his parents had criticized him for failing to write to Charlus, and that he had reproached them violently for trying to have him accept

'des propositions déshonnêtes' (III, 40). He is at pains to point out that this was a purely disingenuous suggestion, made in anger, to offend them: 'En réalité, je n'avais rien imaginé de sensuel, ni même de sentimental, sous les offres du baron.' (III, 40). While this instance of what Genette describes as paralipsis, or 'comblement rétrospectif',[80] serves the purpose of filling a gap in the narrative, it also shows Proust attempting to orchestrate the reading of the Baron not only by the protagonist (whose sense of naive incomprehension is notionally maintained, however implausible it may appear to any particular reader of the *Recherche*) but by the reader himself (in avoiding too direct a suggestion of a sexual motive on the part of the Baron).

'Découverte de la vraie nature de M. de Charlus'

Proust's development of the sequence of events culminating in the discovery of the Baron's secret shows him to have been keen to accentuate the difficulties of detection. At the inception of the *Recherche* in *Cahier 7* in 1909, his homosexuality was to be revealed by his physiognomy, when the protagonist sees him asleep in the Princesse de Parme's box at the Opéra. The scene was elaborated by Proust in *Cahier 49* in about 1910/1911.[81] The sexuality of the Baron (then M. de Gurcy), and the key to his words and conduct, becomes apparent involuntarily through 'ses traits, son regard, son expression, son réveil même' which give him 'l'air d'une femme':

> chaque trait de son visage et chaque trait de son caractère, chaque manière d'être de sa peau, de ses yeux, tous les épisodes de nos relations, tous les mots qu'il m'avait dits et tous les mots qu'il m'avait tus, tout cela qui bizarre, discordant, incompréhensible était inutilisable à ma pensée, tout cela en un instant se composa l'un avec l'autre *comme les lettres d'une énigme dont on vient de trouver la clef.* (III, 945, emphasis added)

[80] 'Discours du récit', 93.

[81] See the discussion in Teyssandier, 'Proposition de M. de Gurcy', 39.

However, this would have been too caricatural a basis for the revelation, more befitting a novelist like Balzac who put far greater store on physiognomy as indicative of character.[82] In the published text, while the Baron's features continue to offer ambiguous clues to his 'vice' – a label used by the narrator 'pour la commodité du langage' (III, 15) but said to be misplaced (19) – its revelation will require something unequivocal.

As the novel grew, the scenes involving Charlus came to occupy an increasingly significant place, but Proust's development of the character remained remarkably faithful to the portrait drafted at its inception.[83] In particular, the salient characteristic of his behaviour in all the various encounters with the protagonist in the first half of the *Recherche* is the duality that makes him an 'abîme de contradiction' (as the narrator put it in a draft in *Cahier* 7 (II, 923)). As the narrator says cryptically in *Le Côté de Guermantes* (of the Baron's behaviour towards Bloch), it is 'une de ces curieuses contradictions dont on va trouver l'explication à la fin de ce volume (*Sodome I*)' (II, 677). In the meantime, the protagonist's ability to read Charlus is hamstrung by the density and apparent incoherence of the evidence, and an epistemological blindness to homosexuality.

In the definitive version, the anagnorisis takes place at the beginning of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (III, 3-33), not only so that it may be used as the basis for a disquisition on the nature of the invert or 'l'homme-femme' which sets the tone for this pivotal volume of the novel, but also to permit the development of the extended encounters with the Baron in which his 'vice' is 'invisible' to the protagonist and, subsequently, to allow him to apply his newly acquired knowledge at the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée (discussed below). In

[82] See, in particular, Régine Borderie, *Balzac, peintre de corps: 'La Comédie humaine' ou le sens des détails* (Paris: SEDES, 2002), 194-209. Gabaston discusses the similarities and differences in approach to physiognomy (and body language) between Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* and the *Recherche* in *Le Langage du corps*, 39-45, 406-408.

[83] See Laurence Teyssandier, *De Guercy à Charlus: transformations d'un personnage de 'À la recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013) for a detailed (genetic) exploration of this point.

Cahier 7, the discovery of Charlus's homosexuality takes place only *after* the soirée,[84] and, in *Cahier 49*, which elaborated on this initial sketch, it takes place at the Opéra and only shortly after the Baron makes his 'proposition' to the protagonist as they leave the soirée.[85] In the definitive text, that conversation is brought forward to the episode at Mme de Villeparisis' salon, while the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée only occurs after the scene that reveals the Baron's sexuality. This distancing between Charlus's 'proposition' and the discovery of what lies behind it are part of what Laurence Teyssandier describes as 'l'effet de brouillage des pistes' which marks the genesis of the novel after 1912.[86] Moreover, the recasting of the chronology transforms the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée into an occasion which marks the protagonist's successful overcoming of two significant, intertwined challenges: the admission to the highest circle of the faubourg Saint-Germain, and the deciphering – in real time – of its most sophisticated and difficult member.

In the final version of the text, it is direct rather than circumstantial evidence that enlightens the protagonist, purely by chance (III, 3-33). The Baron's relaxed countenance, free of the 'vitalité factice' and tension brought on by conversation, gives him a feminine appearance (III, 5-6). Of itself, this does not lead the protagonist to infer his sexuality, even when first witnessing the two men's mating ritual in the courtyard, described as a 'mimique, d'abord incompréhensible pour moi' (III, 31). It is only the overhearing of *la conjonction Jupien-Charlus* a few minutes later that, together with what he has just witnessed visually, opens his eyes. This more explicit means of exposing the Baron's secret serves multiple pedagogical purposes. First, it introduces the protagonist to *male* homosexuality and the

[84] III, 923-924. See also: III, 1203 (Notice).

[85] III, 943-960. See also: III, 1215 (Notice).

[86] *De Guercy à Charlus*, 85; for a more detailed account of the genesis of the soirée, see 336-390.

male homosexual act.[87] Secondly, such autoptic evidence puts the sexuality of the Baron beyond doubt, where inference from less direct evidence left more scope for interpretation. As the narrator says, the effect of witnessing the scene is transformative on his ability to read – '[s]es yeux dessillés' – the signs of male homosexuality manifested by the Baron: 'parce que je n'avais pas compris, je n'avais pas vu' (III, 15). Mere physiognomy and other body language were insufficient to reveal a 'vice' said (emphatically and repeatedly) to be 'invisible pour les hommes tant qu'ils ignoraient sa présence' (III, 15) (see also III, 9, 16). Thirdly, by allowing for an unguarded, unambiguous conversation with a sexual partner which is overheard (concerning, amongst others, the protagonist himself, 'un étrange petit bonhomme, un intelligent petit bourgeois, qui montre à mon égard une incivilité prodigieuse'), it grants privileged access to utterance in which the Baron does not seek to dissemble but to lay bare his designs, including those aimed at the protagonist (III, 13-14). In the midst of his densely-packed and energetic outpouring of learning on the topic of homosexuality, the narrator expresses, with a sense of enraptured wonder, the magically transformative effect that the scene – nothing short of an epistemological 'révolution' – has had upon his perception and reading of Charlus, in a passage with echoes of his discovery of Legrandin's *bête immonde*:

> En M. de Charlus un autre être avait beau s'accoupler, qui le différenciait des autres hommes, comme dans le centaure le cheval, cet être avait beau faire corps avec le baron, je ne l'avais jamais aperçu. Maintenant l'abstrait s'était matérialisé, l'être enfin compris avait aussitôt perdu son pouvoir de rester invisible et la transmutation de M. de Charlus en une personne nouvelle était si complète que non seulement les contrastes de son visage, de sa voix, mais rétrospectivement les hauts et les bas eux-mêmes de ses relations avec moi, *tout ce qui avait paru jusque-là incohérent à mon esprit, devenait intelligible, se montrait évident comme une phrase, n'offrant aucun sens tant qu'elle reste décomposée en lettres disposées au hasard, exprime, si les caractères se trouvent replacés dans l'ordre qu'il faut, une pensée que l'on ne pourra plus oublier*. (III, 16, emphasis added)

[87] He has long ago witnessed female same-sex relations at Montjouvain.

No longer ignorant as to the *sentiment inconnu* that explains the Baron's behaviour towards him, the protagonist is able to approach the task of mental state attribution with clarity. Read with the appropriate cipher, their last encounter was itself a (verbal) *conjonction* in which the Baron sought to purge his desire 'grâce à une violente semonce [qu'il] jetait à la figure du visiteur' (III, 30), and the significance of the protagonist's intuitive sense of incongruity, at the sight of the Baron's relaxed demeanour in the courtyard, also becomes clear:

> je comprenais maintenant pourquoi tout à l'heure, quand je l'avais vu sortir de chez Mme de Villeparisis, j'avais pu trouver que M. de Charlus avait l'air d'une femme: c'en était une! (III, 16).

It is an open question whether some contemporary readers at least may have appreciated, before publication of *Le Côté de Guermantes II* / *Sodome et Gomorrhe I* in May 1921, what motivated Charlus's behaviour. Some modern Proustian scholars hold that Charlus's sexuality has been unambiguously revealed in *Un amour de Swann* (I, 310),[88] creating the conditions, as Richard Terdiman contends, for the 'uninformed' characters in the novel (the naive protagonist first and foremost) to become the object of irony.[89] This does not seem to be the experience of all modern readers[90] and, in any case, while such a reader may well develop strong suspicions at a comparatively early stage (based on the series of clues identified by Terdiman), such a reading takes place in an age when society is highly attuned to the presence of same-sex relations and the ways that they may inflect

[88] Luckhurst, *Science and Structure*, 192; Sophie Duval, 'Un amour de Charlus: relire la *Recherche* à partir de ses discours dévalués', *Romanic Review*, 105.3-4 (2014), 161-174 ('Proust ne dévoile pas grand-chose en annonçant l'homosexualité de Charlus' (173)).

[89] *The Dialectics of Isolation*, 126-128.

[90] For example, Genette, describing the effects of narrative focalization in the *Recherche*, states that 'l'homosexualité […], malgré la scène prémonitoire de Montjouvain, restera pour le lecteur comme pour le héros, jusqu'aux premières pages de *Sodome*, un continent cent fois rencontré mais jamais reconnu': 'Discours du récit', 215-216.

individual and collective behaviour, in public or private spaces.[91] It is debatable whether Proust's contemporaries will have been quite so perspicacious on the matter of Charlus's sexuality, or the particular question of what actuates his behaviour towards the protagonist. In her study of the critical reception of the *Recherche*, Eva Ahlstedt observes that:

> Jusqu'à la publication de *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, le sujet de l'homosexualité avait, à un certain nombre d'exceptions près, été confiné surtout aux ouvrages médicaux, aux procès verbaux des tribunaux et aux livres pornographiques. Le grand public ne s'attendait certes pas à voir un tel sujet traité par un romancier qui se voulait «sérieux».[92]

As regards the impact of direct treatment of the subject in *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, Ahlstedt observes that 'pour la grande majorité de lecteurs, la surprise est complète'.[93] Whether or not this was so is difficult to judge. Readers will, on any view, have known by the time that *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* was published in 1919 that *some* revelation about Charlus lay in store because the outline of instalments to come (printed in its half-title) stated that the first chapter of a forthcoming volume would be entitled, 'Révélation soudaine de ce qu'est M. de Charlus', and the title then given to that volume ('Sodome et Gomorrhe – I') may have been all that they needed to guess the nature of the revelation.[94] As Paul Souday later noted (in May 1922), the title – borrowed from a verse of Alfred de Vigny's poem 'La Colère de Samson' – 'annonce un sujet assurément des plus scabreux'.[95]

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[91] Antoine Compagnon gives a candid account of his experience of reading the *Recherche* for the first time, aged 17-18, during which, despite his own inexperience, he suspected the motives of Charlus long before the protagonist, whose 'ingénuité insensée' left him baffled: 'La Dernière Victime du narrateur', *Critique*, 598 (1997), 131-146.

[92] *La Pudeur en crise: un aspect de l'accueil d'À la recherche du temps perdu de Marcel Proust, 1913-1930* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1985), 10. As Ahlstedt notes, exceptions included (perhaps most notably) Gustave Binet-Valmer's *Lucien* (1910). Michael Finn discusses some literary antecedents (of which Proust was aware), including *Lucien*, in 'Proust and Ambient Medico-Literary Homosexualities 1885-1922', *French Forum*, 37.3 (2012), 49-64.

[93] Ibid., 52.

[94] The content of the table is set out in Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: biographie*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), II, 311-312.

[95] 'Marcel Proust: *À la recherche du temps perdu*, T. V: *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, *II*', *Le Temps*, 12 May 1922, 3 (rev. and repr. in *Marcel Proust* (Paris: Kra, 1927), 55).

At all events, for the purposes of Proust's compositional and thematic plan, a distinction must be drawn between those mind-readers whose reading he could control entirely, and those he could not. Even if he could not throw readers entirely off the scent until ready to uncover the Baron's secret, he could ensure both that the protagonist remains in the dark until the peripeteia that finally frees him from the misapprehensions stemming from 'le potin', and that the ability of *others* in the same social circles to read the Baron is variegated, depending upon the evidence that they have at their disposal at any given stage of events. It is to the protagonist's reading of those other people that the narrative now pivots: the protagonist reading others (mis)reading the Baron.

M. de Charlus dans le monde: 'une erreur dissipée nous donne un sens de plus'

The opportunity to apply his newly-acquired knowledge is provided by the soirée held that very evening by the Princesse de Guermantes (III, 34-119). The protagonist wastes no time in reading the minds of others whom he is now able unequivocally to identify as homosexual, and the scene opens with a strikingly implausible, omniscient reading of the Duc de Châtellerault and the usher concerning their encounter a few days earlier on the Champs-Élysées (III, 35 & 37) before moving on to a more granular reading of the Marquis de Vaugoubert (III, 43-45).

As for the reading of Charlus himself, the protagonist being invested with a new-found confidence, the narrator is correspondingly able, as Geneviève Henrot Sostero remarks, to offer the reader greater 'transparence interprétative' in his commentaries of the Baron's behaviour, now that he possesses 'la clé de la lecture […] qui lui permet de décoder les comportements gestuels, expressifs, proxémiques et pragmatiques du personnage'.[96]

[96] 'Un concerto dé-concerté: histoire conversationnelle du baron de Charlus', in *Marcel Proust au début du troisième millénaire: actes du colloque de l'Université de Babes-Bolyai*, ed. by Yvonne Goga and Corina Moldovan (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2002), 196-208.

However, the interest of the soirée episode lies as much, if not more, in highlighting the apparent ignorance or doubts of others regarding what the protagonist *knows* to be the Baron's secret. The exploration of this epistemic divergence takes place through the lens of cognitive processes at work in the protagonist that are akin to *false belief* tests.

When assessing a person's theory of mind (that is, his general ability to attribute mental states to others), a *false belief* task involves informing him of a fact (*y*), concealing that fact from a third party and asking the subject to predict whether the third party will believe (*x*) when the subject *knows* that the truth is (*y*). The classic *false belief* test involves having the subject consider a scene witnessed by a third party in which an object is placed in one location, but moved to a different location in the absence of the third party, and asking the subject whether, upon the third party's return to the room, she will think that the object remains in its original location.[97] The subject's ability to understand that the third party holds a mistaken belief about a situation, which differs from that held by the subject himself, is an important component of theory of mind, most often studied in developmental contexts where it may be impaired, such as autism.[98] It is commonly taken to establish the ability of the subject to discern the difference between his own knowledge of reality and the other's (inaccurate) mental representation of reality, and to comprehend that the other is driven by her beliefs about and (mis)representations of reality, rather than reality itself.

[97] The *locus classicus* is the exercise described by Heinz Wimmer and Josef Perner in their paper, 'Beliefs about Beliefs: Representation and Constraining Function of Wrong Beliefs in Young Children's Understanding of Deception', *Cognition*, 13.1 (1983), 103-128 (106).

[98] Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen was (amongst others) at the vanguard of research in this area from the mid-1980s, using the *false belief* exercise as a paradigm for testing for functional 'theory of mind' (the attribution of higher order mental states): see, for example, Simon Baron-Cohen, Alan M. Leslie & Uta Frith, 'Does the Autistic Child have a "Theory of Mind"?', *Cognition*, 21.1 (1985), 37-46, and 'Mechanical, Behavioural and Intentional Understanding of Picture Stories in Autistic Children', *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 4.2 (1986), 113-125.

Proust's staging of such tests at the soirée involves a more complicated variant. Whereas the most basic test targets the third party's *first-order* beliefs about objects, actions or events (i.e. the subject's representation of the other's thoughts about an object, etc), the type of exercise staged by Proust concerns *second-order* beliefs, what the third party believes about another's beliefs (i.e. the subject's representation of a third party's thoughts about a fourth party's thoughts).[99] As psychologists Josef Perner and Heinz Wimmer explain, the attribution of second-order (and higher-order) beliefs is central to social cognition and interaction: 'Interaction between people is to a large degree based on an interaction of minds which can be properly understood only when one takes into account what people think about other people's thoughts […] and even what people think that others think about their thoughts, etc'.[100]

The Princesse de Guermantes' soirée – the apogee of aristocratic, high society interaction – provided Proust with the perfect opportunity to put his protagonist's multiple order mind–reading capabilities to the test and display the wider ramifications of the discovery about Charlus. The protagonist (as subject) sets about ascertaining whether, and which others also possess the key to decoding the Baron's behaviour. To start, a number of minor interactions take place (under the watchful eye of the protagonist) between Charlus and attendees who, sharing the Baron's 'vice', either detect it immediately (M. de Sidonia, 39-40) or remain uncertain (M. de Vaugoubert, 64-66, 74), and with the Baron's cousin,

[99] This 'ordering' of levels of mental state attribution was proposed by Perner and Wimmer in their paper, '"John *Thinks* That Mary *Thinks* That …" Attribution of Second-Order Beliefs by 5- to 10-Year-Old Children', *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 39.3 (1985), 437-471 (438). Since the reader of the *Recherche* is also involved in the mind-reading instigated by Proust (something of which he was keenly aware), he will have been factoring a further level of embedment into the stage managing of the episode. This type of complication is addressed by Lisa Zunshine in her work on the role of theory of mind in the reading of fiction, and will not be explored here since it is not directly germane to the protagonist's mind-reading. See Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction*, 28-34; but, see also *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 112-114, where Terence Cave warns against overstating the length of any such 'string of intentionalities', and posits that reading of fiction may involve instead considering and assembling 'a series of elided shifts between one character's perspective and another's' (113).

[100] Ibid., 438.

Mme de Gallardon, who merely harbours ‘des doutes sur ses mœurs’ (53). These short scenes are, however, merely the prelude to a more significant, extended mind-reading exercise centring upon Charlus’s interaction with Mme de Surgis-le-Duc and her two sons (III, 87-117).

The subject-matter of the tests is the Baron’s sexual interest in Victurnien, the young Marquis de Surgis (and his brother, Arnulphe). The protagonist comes across Charlus, in the games room, mesmerized by the young man’s face, ‘les yeux lui sort[ant] de la tête’. When the Baron sees that he is being watched by the protagonist, he blushes – a physiological telltale in the *Recherche* suggesting shame or culpability at the sudden appreciation that an observer has detected an illicit desire or design (a topic discussed in connection with Albertine in **Chapter 4**). Having established the nature of the Baron’s interest in the Marquis (and his brother), this *true* belief about his motivation becomes the yardstick against which to test others’ reading of his behaviour around the boys.

As luck would have it, the first candidate is Saint-Loup – the person most responsible for implanting the false premise that has until now led the protagonist astray. To heighten the sense of irony, Proust makes his first comments (at the sight of Charlus) complaints about what he sees as the hypocrisy of strictures about licentiousness coming from an inveterate ladykiller. Annoyed that Saint-Loup, ‘ne connaissa[nt] pas les goûts véritables de son oncle’, should persist in putting forward an account that the protagonist knows to be fallacious and yet do so ‘avec tant de certitude et de suffisance’, he challenges the basis for his false belief. However, the question, ‘Mais es-tu sûr que M. de Charlus ait eu tant de maîtresses?’, elicits nothing more than a dismissive shrug of the shoulders.

The entrance of Mme de Surgis creates the perfect conditions for Saint-Loup’s mistaken (general) belief about his uncle’s nature in turn to induce his (specific) misreading

of the Baron's amicable solicitousness towards the boys' mother as a sign of his desire (for her): '«Tu vois que je n'exagérais pas […]. Regarde un peu l'empressement de mon oncle auprès de Mme de Surgis. Et même là, cela m'étonne. […]»' This is, of course, precisely what Charlus would have observers believe. Alive to the Baron's true motivation, the protagonist sees his strategem: 'l'air d'indifférence absolue ou de raillerie que M. de Charlus manifestait à l'égard d'un jeune homme n'était pas plus sincère que l'admiration toute superficielle qu'il témoignait à une femme n'exprimait le vrai fond de sa nature'. As he observes, the Baron's interest in Mme de Surgis is purely a cloak and vehicle for advancing his designs on the boys, and the admiration that he expresses for her appearance (the portrait painted by Jacquet) is merely the 'plaisir inverse mais aussi vif à retrouver [leurs] charmes réunis en faisceau chez leur mère'. The protagonist is able to track the steps by which the Baron achieves the misdirection and leads both Mme de Surgis and Saint-Loup to interpret his behaviour back-to-front. Mme de Surgis – delighted by the attention and flattery that Charlus unexpectedly lavishes upon her and her sons – misinterprets 'les motifs de [son] attitude', believing that *she* is the cause of his interest in the boys, while Saint-Loup is no wiser: '«Voilà le tour des fils, maintenant, me dit Robert. C'est à mourir de rire. Jusqu'au chien du logis, il s'efforce de complaire. […]»'

The importance that Proust attached to the Mme de Surgis scenes (interspersed throughout the soirée) in having the protagonist debunk, practically and in real time, the falsity of Saint-Loup's reading of the Baron, and with it the whole myth of Charlus 'coureur de femmes', is underlined by its genesis. The published version represents a very significant departure from the short, original draft of 1909, and the more developed drafts in which Charlus (then called M. de Guercy and M. de Gurcy respectively) remained an enigma at

the soirée.[101] Although Proust introduced a description of Mme de Surgis' sons at the soirée in *Cahier 43*,[102] at this stage of the draft they were not used for an exploration of homosexuality or to showcase the protagonist's mind-reading prowess, and they do not interact with Charlus at all. For, in that draft, the protagonist has not yet discovered the Baron's secret: the scenes in which Charlus makes his 'proposition' and in which his homosexuality is revealed (at the Opéra) come *after*, not before the soirée.[103] It was in 1915 (in *Cahier 52*), when Proust located the *conjonction Jupien-Charlus* between the visit to the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée,[104] that the Surgis boys are introduced to the Baron.[105] It was when editing the fair copy of the manuscript ('manuscrit au net') of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* in 1915-1916 that Proust openly introduced the theme of the Baron's homosexuality to the soirée, and included the scene in which Charlus is captivated by the boys.[106] Moreover, it was at this juncture that Saint-Loup's role, previously confined to the discussion of literature and 'maisons de passe',[107] was expanded to include discussion (and misreading) of the Baron's behaviour and sexual identity.

Proust's development of the tests in the Mme de Surgis scenes, woven into the soirée, shows that he made a concerted effort to highlight the cognitive and epistemological

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[101] For the 1909 draft, see III, 923 (*Cahier 7*). In the subsequent drafts (*Cahier 43* and *49*), it is *after* the soirée that the Baron (then called M. de Gurcy) makes the cryptic invitation to the protagonist which, in the published version, will be made at the earlier juncture of their departure from the salon of Mme de Villeparisis (II, 573-574): see the account given by Antoine Compagnon at III, 1205-1206, 1209 (Notice).

[102] *Cahier 43*, fols. 53[r]-54[r], BnF, NAF 16683. See III, 973 (*Cahier 43*), and III, 1208 (Notice).

[103] See *Cahier 43*, fol. 64[r], and *Cahier 49*, fols. 42[r]-47[r], BnF, NAF 16689. See III, 943-946, and 983 (*Cahier 49*) and more detailed discussion in Teyssandier, *De Guercy à Charlus*, 45, 341. Thus, as Teyssandier says, 'l'une des caractéristiques marquantes de la version de 1912 du roman réside dans la révélation tardive de l'inversion de Gurcy' (ibid., 46).

[104] III, 943 (*Cahier 52*).

[105] *Cahier 52*, fols. 20[r]-22[r], BnF, NAF 16692: see the helpful transcription provided by Laurence Teyssandier in *La Genèse de Charlus dans les cahiers de Marcel Proust*, 2 vols (doctoral thesis, Université Paris IV Sorbonne, 2009), II, 256-258.

[106] The scene commences at *Cahier II*, fol. 61[r], BnF, NAF 16709, which is materially the same as the published version from III, 87.

[107] III, 973-975 (*Cahier 43*).

variegation of readings engendered in other minds by Charlus, laying bare the strategies used by the Baron to manipulate appearances, while demonstrating the potency of the protagonist's new-found ability to see the reality through 'un sens de plus'. The scenes form part of a general lesson, articulated later by the mature narrator, that experience and perspective may affect the reading of a particular mind: 'j'avais vu les personnes varier d'aspect selon l'idée que moi ou d'autres s'en faisaient, une seule être plusieurs selon les personnes qui la voyaient' (IV, 491). But the scenes are designed to provide much more than a mere lesson in relativism or perspectivism: they witness the practical application of the protagonist's knowledge of the *truth* about Charlus's 'goûts spéciaux' – and about *Sodome* more broadly – which forms a thematic foundation stone of this central volume (together with, later, the question of Albertine's sexuality and *Gomorrhe* that form its pendant).

Able to read the behavioural and cognitive effects of Charlus's sexuality 'à livre ouvert' (III, 731), and with particular intuitive immediacy, from those two features whose coded messaging had hitherto eluded decryption (his eyes and his voice), the protagonist now becomes a guardian of the secret, known 'à peine de quelques intimes' (III, 294) and one that the protagonist chooses not to reveal even to Saint-Loup. And so it is that, with this discretion, he joins the ranks of Swann, the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duc de Guermantes and others, a loyal coterie who, as he discovers, will never voluntarily disclose Charlus's sexual identity whatever suspicion or incriminating knowledge they have.

However, the soirée is also significant in marking a turning point in the Baron's fortunes as, increasingly in thrall to his 'vice', his psychological trajectory moves increasingly and openly in the direction of moral degeneration, effeminacy and caricature, a downward spiral only accelerated by his relationship with Morel. Following the inception

of his relationship with Morel, the Baron's femininity rapidly gains ascendancy over his intellectual capacity to dissemble, as the femininizing role that his sexuality plays in dictating his words and actions becomes progressively more prominent, his body language and his body itself becoming synecdochic ('en marche et se dandinant, balançant un ventre qui bedonnait et un derrière presque symbolique' (III, 254)). By the time of his introduction to the Verdurin clan at La Raspelière, the process appears to have become wholly uncontrollable, so that 'bien qu'il eût demandé à son corps de rendre manifeste [...] toute la courtoisie d'un grand seigneur, ce corps qui avait bien compris ce que M. de Charlus avait cessé d'entendre, déploya [...] toutes les séductions d'une grande dame' (III, 300). Interpreted with knowledge of his sexuality, even the most innocuous utterance involuntarily signals his sexual identity. Simply declining Mme Verdurin's offer of orangeade with the words '«Non, j'ai préféré sa voisine, la fraisette»', delivered in 'cette voix aiguë et avec ce sourire [gracieux et avec mille moues de la bouche] et ces gestes de bras [et déhanchements de la taille]', is easily decipherable: '«Tiens, il aime le sexe fort»' (III, 356-357). Although the narrator's assessment is coloured by familiarity, matters have reached a stage where reading the Baron's sexuality from the signs does not now even require 'tant de science' due to the 'rapport plus direct entre le signe révélateur et le secret', a link within easy grasp of intuition: '*Sans se le dire précisément on sent que* c'est une douce et souriante dame qui vous répond' (emphasis added).

What sows the seeds of the Baron's eventual downfall in the Verdurin clan, however, is ironically the very form of evidence that has hitherto assisted him in concealing his secret: *le potin*. On this occasion, it is hearsay which though factually false is substantially correct: in bourgeois and artistic circles, Charlus has been confused with a comte Leblois de Charlus who shares the same 'vice' – 'ajout[ant] à la fausseté des commentaires […] un fait vrai (les goûts du baron)' – a confusion that the sculptor, Ski, imports into the clan (III, 294-295).

As false hearsay in the faubourg Saint-Germain circle has enabled the Baron to operate with relative stealth, it now operates to contrary effect within the clan to disable his powers of deception.

This is not to say that *knowing* the Baron's sexuality offers the key to *all* his behaviour. The multi-faceted and often contradictory aspects of his personality continue to unfold, and the protagonist notes much later that there were *at least* 'deux M. de Charlus, sans compter les autres' (IV, 440). One of these others is the sadomasochist observed by the protagonist at Jupien's 'hôtel', a man torn between his sexuality and delusions of male aristocratic virility, 'son rêve de virilité, attesté au besoin par des actes brutaux, et toute l'enluminure intérieure, invisible pour nous, mais dont il projetait ainsi quelques reflets, de croix de justice, de tortures féodales, qui décorait son imagination moyenâgeuse' (IV, 419). Proust's correspondence indicates that, but for his untimely death, other revelations may well have been forthcoming, in the interests of adding even more to the Baron's psychological cornucopia: following publication of *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, he informed Gaston Gallimard that he was keen to 'enrichir ça et là le personnage de M. de Charlus de traits qui le diversifieront, et en augmentant l'intérêt de [*Sodome II*], ajoutera surtout dans les suivants à la complexité du personnage'.[108]

III. Conclusion

Owing to the often negative tone and moments of despondency in the Albertine volumes, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the *Recherche* is (amongst other things) a *celebration* of the skill and mental dexterity involved in learning to read minds competently, of the manifold challenges that they present, and of the enlightenment that may be achieved

[108] Letter to Gaston Gallimard, 18 January 1922, *Corr.*, XXI, 38-41 (38).

(such as it may be). The narrator touches upon this in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* when alluding to the challenges that lay ahead with Albertine, his most elusive quarry (though what he says amounts to a general mission statement):

> quelques déceptions inévitables qu'elle doive apporter, *cette démarche vers ce qu'on n'a qu'entrevu*, ce qu'on a eu le loisir d'imaginer, cette démarche est la seule qui soit saine pour les sens, qui y entretienne l'appétit. De quel morne ennui est empreinte la vie des gens qui par paresse ou timidité, se rendent directement en voiture chez des amis qu'ils ont connus sans avoir d'abord rêvé d'eux, sans jamais oser *sur le parcours* s'arrêter auprès de ce qu'ils désirent! (II, 229, emphasis added)

It is the hard-won insights, glimpses, into the other mind, in and of themselves but also for what they appear to promise (especially in the case of desire), that he considers to make social cognition so salutary and rewarding; it is a 'parcours' – a journey of, quest for, and route to discovery – in which each step counts.

The narrator is equally clear in stating that there is no hope of ever achieving an encyclopaedic reading of the other, a snapshot which encompasses every aspect of her inner life. As he says (and the *récit* shows), one is able over time to correct one's metarepresentational errors ('les erreurs d'optique du début'), but the process of mind-reading can never cease:

> tandis que *se rectifie la vision que nous avons de lui*, lui-même qui n'est pas un objectif inerte change pour son compte, nous pensons le rattraper, il se déplace, et, croyant le voir enfin plus clairement, *ce n'est que les images anciennes que nous en avions prises que nous avons réussi à éclaircir, mais qui ne le représentent plus*. (II, 229, emphasis added)

However, the glimpses, though intermittent and circumscribed when measured against the *totality* of the other's inner life, may yet prove to answer the protagonist's most material questions (if not immediately, then in time) and prove cognitively and epistemologically beneficial even if emotionally painful (IV, 475) – for, as the narrator declares, in

idiosyncratically dolorist fashion: 'le bonheur seul est salutaire pour le corps; mais c'est le chagrin qui développe les forces de l'esprit' (IV, 484).[109]

It is beyond question that the protagonist derives intellectual satisfaction, even joy, from the general psychological lessons ('un ensemble de lois psychologiques' (IV, 297)) that he is able to extract from the experience of social interaction, despite the pain or mediocre pleasure involved (IV, 477): an art of turning even disastrous interactions to good account. However, this is only one aspect of the cognitive radiography that he finds satisfying, even pleasurable, regardless of what the X-ray reveals – 'une vive joie, mais d'intelligence' (II, 96) even if not a joy of love or friendship; for, first and foremost, he is concerned with discovering, from the other's conduct, 'la réalité insoupçonnable' (I, 577) – the cognitive, experiential or affective kernel that allows him to explain (or predict) her state of mind on a particular subject or her behaviour in a particular situation. Nowhere is this more pressing than with Albertine, and, since she tests the very limits of his mind-reading capabilities while challenging his motives and determination, it is to her that this study now turns.

[109] As the narrator reflects, he is 'un être si mal conformé […] qu'il ne puisse aimer sans souffrir, et qu'il faille souffrir pour apprendre des vérités' (IV, 488), but the suffering and the insights that it brings are grist to his artistic mill.

CHAPTER 4: (UN)KNOWABLE ALBERTINE?

> Tout le récit des relations avec Albertine est le chant, non de la connaissance, mais de l'ignorance, imprégné du lyrisme de l'inconnaissable: «Combien peu […] je savais, je saurais jamais de cette histoire d'Albertine, la seule histoire qui m'eût particulièrement intéressé […]»
>
> Jean-Yves Tadié[1]

I. Albertine: emblem of the (un)knowable être aimé

The trope of the *femme aimée* as mysterious and even potentially unknowable, her gaze reflecting 'd'insaisissables pensées' (IV, 141), was well-hallowed in French literature by the time that Proust began writing the *Recherche*. Baudelaire cast woman as 'cet être terrible et incommunicable comme Dieu',[2] and in 'Les Yeux des pauvres' captured a lover's exasperation at the lack of synchronicity with his loved one, 'le plus bel exemple d'imperméabilité féminine'.[3] Sully Prudhomme addressed the same theme in 'Les Caresses'[4] and, in the short story, 'Solitude' (1884), Maupassant presented a particularly bleak picture of the human condition as involving an isolation and mutual incomprehension felt most intensely with the loved one as 'le trou noir entre nous'.[5]

It is, above all, the enigmatic nature of the heroines in Barbey d'Aurevilly's novellas, their bodies tantalizingly suggestive of hidden passions, that made a particularly powerful

[1] *Proust et le roman*, 40.

[2] 'La Femme', in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1868), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-1976), II, 683-724 (713).

[3] In *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-1976), I, 317-319 (317).

[4] The refrain is applied to all human relations: 'Les caresses ne sont que d'inquiets transports, | Infructueux essais du pauvre amour qui tente | L'impossible union des âmes par les corps. | Vous êtes séparés et seuls comme les morts, | Misérables vivants que le baiser tourmente!', *Les Solitudes* (1869), in *Poésies de Sully Prudhomme* (Paris: Lemerre, 1872), 186-187.

[5] In *Contes et nouvelles*, ed. by Louis Forestier & Armand Lanoux, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1974-1979), I, 1255-1259 (1259).

impression on Proust (as Brian Rogers has illustrated),[6] something evident from his notes in *Le Carnet de 1908*[7] and the protagonist's discussion with Albertine in *La Prisonnière* (III, 877-878). However, even the narrators of Paul Bourget's *romans d'analyse* repeatedly concede defeat in the face of 'cette chose si impossible à jamais comprendre tout à fait, un cœur de femme',[8] as Jean-Marie Seillan points out;[9] and that is so notwithstanding the author's claims of scientific rigour for works purportedly 'exécuté[s] avec les données actuelles de la science de l'esprit'.[10]

In the works of the 'Decadent' authors Barbey d'Aurevilly, Remy de Gourmont and Rachilde, the portrayal of women (particularly *femmes fatales*) as mysteries to be penetrated, but who refuse to be truly 'known' by their male lovers, is said by Helen Craske to be part of a 'playful, and often subversive' aesthetic strategy, generating paradox, irony and self-parody.[11] Whatever the strategy of a particular author, the representation of female (sexual) otherness, inaccessibility and unknowability in French nineteenth-century literature was, to borrow a phrase from Peter Brooks, plainly a potent 'narrative motor'.[12] Among the most powerful literary precedents for the sexually available but psychologically 'impenetrable' woman was Zola's sphinx-like courtesan, *Nana*, described by Naomi Schor as 'l'objet énigmatique, c'est-à-dire herméneutique, par excellence',[13] a figure who exemplifies the resistance of female sexual identity and desire to the male gaze and mastery.

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[6] *Proust et Barbey d'Aurevilly*.

[7] *Le Carnet de 1908*, ed. by Philip Kolb (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 94-95 and (especially) 106-107.

[8] *Un cœur de femme* (Paris: Lemerre, 1890), 409.

[9] *Le Roman idéaliste dans le second XIXe siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), 243-244.

[10] See Bourget's dedication of his novel *André Cornélis* to Hippolyte Taine ((Paris: Lemerre, 1887), 4).

[11] 'Desire and the *Demi-Vierge*: The Impenetrable Ideal in Decadent Fiction', *Dix-Neuf*, 22.1-2 (2018), 23-38.

[12] 'Nana at Last Unveil'd? Problems of the Modern Nude', in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 123-161 (160).

[13] 'Le Sourire du sphinx: Zola et l'énigme de la féminité', *Romantisme*, 13-14 (1976), 183-196 (186).

However, the pessimism regarding intersubjective 'interpénétration' was as much philosophical as it was literary and/or (insofar as reflective of patriarchal or simply male anxieties, or just bitter personal experience) psychological – a pessimism which was, commonly if not invariably, the product of a transcendental idealism reinvigorated by Schopenhauer, which had become popular in late nineteenth-century France as an antidote to remorselessly materialist or positivist thinking.[14]

Against this background, and infused by an abundance of negatively charged adjectives or metaphors, often paired with plaintive and sometimes lyrical exclamations or aphorisms, the narrator's treatment of Albertine taps into a tradition of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism about intersubjectivity. While it can no longer be said that Albertine has been neglected by Proustian criticism,[15] the assessments produced have been largely bleak; more often than not, Albertine is cited as proof that the narrator (or, more surprisingly, Proust himself) believes other minds to be unknowable or, expressed more categorically, 'the fundamental unknowability of other people in general [is] represented by the case of Albertine'.[16] This is little surprise since it is precisely what the narrator says, repeatedly.

Odette, Rachel, Gilberte, Albertine, Morel each pose challenges for the lover in their evasiveness and duplicity. For some commentators, these problem cases are taken to reflect a universal law of Proustian love. Thus, for Nicolas Grimaldi, Proustian love is irredeemably

[14] See, for example, Remy de Gourmont's 'Mécanismes': 'Ainsi, l'on ne sait presque jamais ce qui se passe exactement dans les autres, et surtout dans l'être qu'on aime le plus, parce que, au lieu de ressentir le fait directement, on ne le perçoit qu'à travers un appareil déformateur' (in *Lettres à l'Amazone* (Paris: Crès, 1914), 143-152 (147)). The idealism and pessimism 'in the air' are discussed by Schiano-Bennis in *La Renaissance de l'idéalisme* and Joseph Acquisto in *Debates on Pessimism in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Springer, 2021).

[15] A refrain from at least the time that Malcolm Bowie gave his landmark lecture, 'Proust, Jealousy, Knowledge' in 1978: *Proust, Jealousy, Knowledge* (London: Queen Mary College, University of London, 1978), 3.

[16] Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 21, 169 (fn. 40). See also: Beckett, *Proust*, 65; Adam Watt, *The Cambridge Introduction to Marcel Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

monadic.[17] According to this view, love is a lure or illusion, merely holding out (but ultimately frustrating) any hope of intersubjectivity. Conversely, for Emmanuel Lévinas, love in the *Recherche* is precisely 'la lutte avec l'insaisissable'.[18] However, neither characterization fits all of the love relationships in the *Recherche.* While love with Albertine is described as a 'torture réciproque' (III, 617), there is no suggestion that, in fact, all relationships are blighted by egotism, mutual misunderstanding, fantasies, deception and infidelity, and the relationships between the protagonist's parents, Norpois and Mme de Villeparisis, Elstir and Gabrielle, the Verdurins and the Cottards appear to show the contrary.[19] Of itself, this gives grounds to question, from evidence within the *Recherche* itself, not only those narratorial proclamations made in universal terms about the 'unknowability' of other minds (premised for the most part on his own, but also others' experience of love), but to probe the long-hallowed critical tradition of declaring Albertine herself 'inaccessible'. Indeed, when one broadens the scope of the inquiry to include those characters whose minds the protagonist is himself demonstrably able to read in material respects, even if only intermittently or imperfectly (including those considered in **Chapter 3**, but also his mother and grandmother), the case for a close examination of the Albertine question becomes compelling. For, construed against this backdrop of *practical experience* of mind-reading, the narrator's general statements of monadic cognitive isolation, however well-wrought, begin to look like *over*statement.

[17] *La Jalousie*, 11. See also Grimaldi, *Proust*, 14. Nussbaum takes a similar view of Proustian love in her article 'The Window: Knowledge of Other Minds in Virginia Woolf's "*To The Lighthouse*"', *New Literary History*, 26.4 (1995), 731-753 (750). In 'Love and Transience in Proust', *Philosophy*, 91.4 (2016), 541-557, Robbie Kubala disputes such views, contending that the narrator advances, but abandons a 'non-solipsistic view of love'.

[18] 'L'Autre dans Proust', in *Noms propres*, 117-123 (123).

[19] The position is *a fortiori* in the case of familial love: e.g. the grandmother's love for the protagonist.

From an evidential perspective, the critical approaches to Albertine's (un)knowability may be divided into two main categories: on the one hand, those engaging in a degree of examination of the textual evidence for and against Albertine's would-be inaccessibility[20] and, on the other, those adopting a high level assessment which cites little (if any) evidence and, especially in more recent years, takes the proposition to be well known and well-established,[21] assembling the narrator's negative pronouncements as the final word(s).[22] Most often, the subject-matter of this 'unknowability' is taken (either expressly or by implication) to be her sexuality, but that is not always apparent. There are too many critical writings touching upon the difficulties encountered with Albertine to address them all, but the following representative samples will suffice to identify the issues.

Samuel Beckett's early reading takes the tragedy of the relationship with Albertine as the embodiment of pessimism on the part of Proust.[23] His summary of this tragedy characterizes her as the epitome of 'impenetrability', though it is far from clear what aspect(s) of Albertine is concluded ultimately to elude the protagonist: her virtue or promiscuity, her infidelity, her sexuality, or a combination of these inner and outer aspects of her mental life. The epistemic focus is more dilated in Richard Terdiman's account of the

[20] See, in particular: Bersani, *Marcel Proust*; Bolle, *Marcel Proust*; Tadié, *Proust et le roman*; Carol de Dobay Rifelj, 'Circumscription: Proust's The Captive and the Problem of Other Minds', *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, 8.2 (1984), 211-232, and the revised version in Rifelj, *Reading the Other*, 133-162; Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*; Gray, *Postmodern Proust*; Dubois, *Pour Albertine*; Chabot, *L'Autre et le moi chez Proust* (Paris: Champion, 1999); Rogers, *Proust et Barbey d'Aurevilly*, 237-262; Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*; Haustein, 'Proust's Emotional Cavities'; Gabaston, *Le Langage du corps*; Takami Suzuki, *La Croyance proustienne: de l'illusion à la vérité littéraire* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), 41-45 et seq.

[21] See, for example, Lévinas, 'L'Autre dans Proust', 117-123; Rivers, *Proust and the Art of Love*, 249; Kristin Ross, 'Albertine; or, the Limits of Representation', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 19.2 (1986), 135-149; Sedgwick, 'Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet', 236; Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 69; Luckhurst, *Science and Structure*, 162, 188; Erika Fülop, *Proust, the One, and the Many*, 103-135, 186; Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*; Simon, 'La même et pourtant autre', 134; Adeline Soldin, 'Seeing Feeling: Queer Voyeurism in *À la recherche du temps perdu*', *French Studies*, 69.3 (2015), 318-332.

[22] See, for example, Grimaldi, *La Jalousie*, or Large, *Nietzsche and Proust*, 147-151, where, having cited a number of the narrator's negative evaluations, Large concludes that the Albertine episode brings one to 'degree zero for truth', 'the convergence of desire and knowledge [being] destined to remain for ever deferred' (151).

[23] Beckett, *Proust*, 30-46.

novel, which takes '*La Fugitive*' to be the most fully realized example of a tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literary pessimism: 'Proust's brilliant, bitter witness to the catastrophic hostility of the world outside the self, and to the irreducible isolation of the individual'.[24] For Terdiman, Albertine is 'invisible' and 'her personality, seen through Marcel's obsession, is almost completely diffuse'.[25] In a similar vein, Lévinas characterizes the Albertine story as 'un récit du surgissement de la vie intérieure à partir d'une insatiable curiosité pour l'altérité d'autrui, à la fois vide et inépuisable', presenting her as psychologically 'insaisissable' and as an 'altérité totale', but not one whose inaccessibility proves the impossibility of love; to the contrary, an alterity which nourishes love through a 'relation directe avec ce qui se donne en se refusant, avec autrui en tant qu'autrui, avec le mystère'.[26] The nature of what is considered inaccessible remains undefined, but Lévinas' reference to 'l'incommunicabilité foncière de la personne' suggests that it is not merely factual, but more deep-seated and qualitative. Taking up Lévinas' inquiry, Jacques Chabot portrays the protagonist's 'insatiable désir d'une connaissance ontologique d'autrui' as doomed to failure because of his inability to step outside his own point of view; Albertine has her own experience and memory, comprising her (ontological) 'essence', which the narrator struggles to accept is 'hermétiquement close à toute investigation extérieure, en tant que telle, c'est-à-dire en sa qualité de vie intérieure'.[27]

In a more granular account, Leo Bersani accepts that certain aspects of Albertine's personality are clear: her sensuality, her envy of the rich, her intellectual pretensions, her admiration and tenderness for the protagonist; but her lesbianism is only part-revealed, 'a

[24] *The Dialectics of Isolation*, 199.

[25] Ibid., 236.

[26] 'L'Autre dans Proust', 121-122.

[27] *L'Autre et le moi chez Proust*, 277-278.

side of which Marcel can never quite be sure', some of her desires and attitudes remaining 'wholly mysterious'.[28] The reader 'can never be completely sure', he says, whether the protagonist's suspicions about her lesbianism are justified.[29] Though Bersani subscribes generally to the view that, in the novel, knowledge of others is impossible where that other is desired, ultimately he shows himself to be unsure whether the protagonist was, in fact, unable to ascertain the truth about her lesbianism; speaking of the mature narrator *qua* narrator with the maximum degree of insight into the events he is narrating, he says: 'With the *possible* exception of Albertine's Lesbianism, Marcel now seems to know everything important there is to know about the other characters' (emphasis added).[30]

In 'Proust, Jealousy and Knowledge', an essay important in valorizing the complex and challenging Albertine volumes and rejecting a naive reading of the narrative arc, Malcolm Bowie takes issue with overly simplistic readings which focus disproportionately on the uplifting conclusion to the novel.[31] He highlights the novel's particular fascination with the predicament of the jealous lover who, driven by 'an imperious call to *know*', is 'summoned to the limits of what is thinkable, and to risk everything for a glimpse of what lies beyond'.[32] However, there is a danger that, in attempting to provide a corrective to the 'opulently affirmative ending' of the *Recherche* by emphasizing some of the equally remarkable negative elements, Bowie might be taken to suggest that it is negativity which prevails (in the domain of the jealous lover). This may be a mistake. For, while he expressly focuses upon *La Prisonnière*, there are glimmers of positivity in his allusion to some of the more pessimistic notions being 'confuted elsewhere', to inconsistencies forming part of the

[28] *Marcel Proust*, 63.

[29] Ibid., 116.

[30] Ibid., 187.

[31] See *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, 45-65.

[32] Ibid., 49.

'argumentative [and contrapuntal] texture of the whole',[33] and to the narrator being guilty of committing 'errors of proportion'[34] when it comes to the 'trifling goals' of the jealous lover. Nonetheless, he concludes the discussion of the 'negative' states and activities of the jealous lover's mind with a pessimistic assessment, albeit one which does not purport to be definitive; jealousy, in view of the epistemological inquiry presented in the more 'negative' passages of *La Prisonnière*, is 'an appetite for knowledge, but knows nothing',[35] entailing that:

> by the end of *La Prisonnière* the crucial questions about Albertine – has she had lesbian relationships in the past? is she having, or contriving to have, such relationships now? how can truth be distinguished from falsehood in her reports on her actions and feelings? – are still unanswered. Whereas 'the truth' about Odette is eventually revealed to Swann and confirmed by fresh evidence from all directions, Albertine's sexuality remains an enigma.[36]

This agglomeration of questions (echoing the narrator) highlights an issue which surfaces time and again in accounts of the would-be inaccessibility of Albertine: while there are several facets to the knowledge that the protagonist seeks to acquire, they are often blurred when the question of accessibility comes to be evaluated, or, in accounts which tend to the pessimistic, one facet may be treated as determining that question. Each must be considered in order to confront Bowie's proposition that, in light of the series of models that the protagonist builds, 'Albertine cannot be known, unless [the] interminable passage from structure to structure is itself knowledge and our other notions of what it is to know are the

[33] Ibid., 48, 59.

[34] Ibid., 61.

[35] See also Nussbaum, 'Love's Knowledge', and Robert Pippin, 'The Shadow of Love: The Role of Jealousy in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*', in *Philosophy by Other Means: The Arts in Philosophy & Philosophy in the Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 197-217 (203).

[36] *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, 58-59.

products of a lingering infantile wish for comfort or mastery'.[37] And it must be considered what, in the *Recherche,* it means *to know*.

The characterization of Albertine as 'unknowable' reaches its zenith in the account given by Margaret Gray in *Postmodern Proust*, who declares the protagonist's efforts to unravel the 'Albertine mystery' to be 'futile'.[38] Central to this account is Albertine's 'eternal undecidability',[39] a reference primarily to her sexuality and past activity; for Gray, well before her death 'Albertine has always already, in *La Prisonnière*, overturned all attempts to derive a coherent narrative that would explain her mysterious sexual past and inclinations, confining her within a history.'[40] In a similar vein but more generally, for Elisabeth Ladenson, lesbianism in the *Recherche* itself represents a 'specifically female unknowability' and, more particularly, 'impenetrability only to those who wish to penetrate, that is, to men who desire such women'.[41] Albertine is 'essentially characterized by unknowability', and what makes her and Odette 'eternally inaccessible' is their very status as desiring subjects whose desire is always elsewhere.[42]

Common to all such accounts is, at the very least, the reduction of Albertine to a symbol of successful resistance to mind-reading endeavour. On the other hand, though few

[37] Ibid., 59.

[38] *Postmodern Proust,* 57-64. Grimaldi is also a keen proponent of the view that Albertine (and indeed any other mind) is an 'enveloppe close': *La Jalousie* and *Proust*. See also Rifelj, 'Circumscription' ('his attempted intrusions into her mind are met with walls impossible to penetrate', 218); and Hanney, *The Invisible Middle Term,* 33.

[39] *Postmodern Proust*, 97.

[40] Ibid.

[41] *Proust's Lesbianism*, 8, 45.

[42] Ibid., 69 (fn. 17), 48. Similarly, in 'Reading Albertine's Sexuality', Wilson argues that '[i]t is perhaps not only Albertine's otherness but also her unknowability which is inherent in the narrator's desire for her', and the text 'ceaselessly denies the desperate narrator and his doubling reader any security, or hope in the search for proof [of lesbianism]' (66, 93). For Brook too, 'Albertine is doubly unknowable […] since even if the narrator could be certain of her lesbianism, her lesbianism would nonetheless remain on the margins of visibility' (*Proust and the Avant-Garde,* 217 (fn. 56)).

and far between, there are proponents of a more positive interpretation. One such reading is to see the protagonist failing in his efforts to ascertain the truth in *La Prisonnière* but succeeding after her death in *Albertine disparue*. For example, for David Ellison, the Albertine of *La Prisonnière* is the 'allegorical sign of […] unreadability', but, in *Albertine disparue*, 'true knowledge of Albertine's wayward activities comes in an ironical series of retrospective telegrams and messages'.[43] The potential for a more nuanced approach is offered by Jacques Dubois' *Pour Albertine: Proust et le sens du social*. While his overall assessment is that she is an 'énigme permanente et redoublée', Dubois acknowledges that the protagonist perceives 'quelques pans' of her conduct and 'bref aperçus' of her subjectivity, and suggests that the very elusiveness and duplicity may signify and characterize the very secret that she seeks to conceal.[44] However, one infers from such readings that the protagonist's insights are considered insufficient to tip the scales sufficiently to qualify as knowledge. Robbie Kubala addresses the evidence within the novel of a 'non-solipsistic view of love […] as a relation to a partially knowable other',[45] a romantic conception of love which he considers to be abandoned by the protagonist not because he believes that knowledge of Albertine is impossible but due to fear that love lacks permanence. Whether or not one subscribes to this theory (which does not engage with the substance of the bleak pronouncements about intersubjectivity), its anti-solipsist premise – that Albertine is at least partially knowable – is noteworthy, though Kubala's consideration

[43] *The Reading of Proust* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 176, 182. See also: Morris Weitz, *Philosophy in Literature*, 86; Carl Black, 'Albertine as an Allegorical Figure of Time', *Romanic Review*, 54.3 (1963), 171-186 (185).

[44] *Pour Albertine*, 24, 31, 179, 157-158.

[45] 'Love and Transience in Proust'. However, Martijn Buijs summarily dismisses such a reading of the relationship with Albertine as 'little more than defending the indefensible', albeit without consideration of what is meant by 'knowability' or its precise subject-matter: 'Proust and the Philosophy of Love', in *The Proustian Mind*, 382-405 (390).

of ‘knowable’ aspects of Albertine is confined to her personality and does not address those most material to the protagonist.

There is a risk of going too far in the direction of either ‘unreadability’ or complete and categoric decoding. To contend that Albertine is unreadable appears to attach little or insufficient weight to those insights that the protagonist *is* able to proclaim in or prior to *La Prisonnière*.[46] Contrariwise, it would be going too far to suggest that, in *Albertine disparue*, the protagonist achieves ‘definitive’ knowledge in a sense which is particularly extensive let alone exhaustive in scope and allows for no penumbra of doubt. Indeed, there are certain core, fugitive elements of Albertine that may safely be taken as baked-in: her mutability, complexity, duplicitousness, deviousness, and so on.[47] It is precisely such features, making of her ‘plusieurs Albertine en une seule’ (III, 580), that both fuel the protagonist’s feelings towards her and entail that (for reasons attributable to both parties) her character, identity and background are amongst the slowest and most piecemeal to emerge in the narrative, and, despite the sheer volume of narrative afforded to the account, ultimately with a paucity of detail or definition matched only by that of the other epitome of the protean, Morel.

As the narrator reflects (with the benefit of hindsight) in *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* when considering the particular case of Albertine, not only is total knowledge of the other obviously unachievable, it is undesirable: while everchanging moods, feelings, appetites, and desires may prevent epistemological snapshots of the other from providing ‘la connaissance *exacte* d’un être’ (emphasis added), in the sense of rendering them ‘un

[46] Into the same category falls the assessment that the protagonist ‘never truly *knows*’ Albertine because ‘Albertine is practically the only character Proust’s narrator never possesses omniscient powers over or privileged information on, hence limiting his knowledge of her significantly’: Soldin, ‘Seeing Feeling’, 318-319. See also: Dubois, *Pour Albertine*, 171.

[47] These elements are what make her character ‘réfractaire à toute approche classique et répugne à s’encadrer dans un portrait stable’ (Dubois, *Pour Albertine*, 12) or symbolize ‘aspects of the flux of time and human experience’ (Black, ‘Albertine as an Allegorical Figure of Time’, 175).

objectif inerte', the process of mind-reading in the *Recherche* is one that draws its very power and excitement from the ceaseless spatio-temporal, psychological dynamism ('déplace[ment]') of the other, and of the mind-reader himself, that makes it an invigorating quest or journey: for, 'quelques déceptions inévitables qu'elle doive apporter, cette démarche vers ce qu'on n'a qu'entrevu […] est la seule qui soit saine pour les sens, qui y entretienne l'appétit' (II, 229). This conception of mind-reading, as a process for not merely yielding epistemological insight but serving other needs, must be kept firmly in mind when judging any issue of knowledge or (un)knowability.

Whatever the general impression that the reader may form, the critical issue when evaluating the mind-reading endeavour is whether the evidence and information required reasonably to answer the questions forming the subject-matter of the protagonist's inquiries have been obtained and, if so, to what extent (and why) the protagonist has nonetheless considered the matter inconclusive. Proceeding to interrogate the narrator's pessimistic pronouncements against what Proust labelled the Albertine 'épisode' necessarily leads one to ask a series of core questions.

(1) What cognitive, affective or experiential *information* is sought but considered by the protagonist to be unobtainable?

(2) What probative *evidence* is available to the protagonist on such matters?

(3) With what *comprehensiveness* and to what *degree of conviction* would the protagonist need to be satisfied by the evidence in order for him to consider that he *knows* what he wishes to?

(4) What factors might explain his *attitude* towards (and inhibit) the satisfaction of that evidential burden?

Such an inquiry also opens the floodgates to numerous consequential questions, including: Is the desired information merely *unknown* (rather than unknowable)? Is the information in fact *known*? If unknown, does the protagonist bear any responsibility for the information deficit and is any shortcoming on his part innocent, deliberate or simply negligent? Does the protagonist have reason *not* to want the information? For his part, does the narrator, in his account of the search for knowledge, overstate the difficulties and, if so, why? These questions are the concern of this chapter.

The epistemic target(s) of the protagonist's desire-oriented mind-reading

The epistemic target is not a fixed one; it roves depending on the demands of the situation, but it also moves according to the general nature of the protagonist's preoccupation with Albertine, and the *Recherche* suggests that knowledge of some things may be harder to acquire than of others. With this in mind, it is useful to distinguish between the two broad phases of their relationship, separated approximately by the 'danse contre seins' scene in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (III, 190-192), which marks the beginning of a sexual jealousy that transforms the objects of the protagonist's mind-reading activities. While Proust himself was content to treat the whole Albertine story as a single 'épisode' (albeit one comprising several parts),[48] its roughly symmetrical structure and narrative arc call for an examination reflecting what has been called the 'cycle d'Albertine'.[49] For the present analysis, two broad cycles are relevant: one comprising the first trip to Balbec and the time subsequently spent with Albertine in Paris; the next consisting of the second trip to Balbec

[48] See, for example, I, lxxxv (Jean-Yves Tadié's General Introduction to the Pléiade edition); Proust's letters to Mme Scheikévitch, 2-3 November 1915 (*Corr.*, XIV, 273-274 & 280-286); *Cahiers 72*, *53* and *73* (each bearing the crossed-out title, 'Deuxième partie de l'Épisode').

[49] The phrase 'cycle d'Albertine' was first used by Kazuyoshi Yoshikawa: *Études sur la genèse de «La Prisonnière» d'après des brouillons inédits*, 2 vols (doctoral thesis, Université Paris IV Sorbonne, 1976), I, 34.

and her cohabitation with the protagonist in Paris, but developing up to and beyond her death.

In the first cycle, the protagonist's epistemological focus is Albertine's receptivity to *his* sexual desire. While he is interested in her personality traits and psychology generally, the questions that preoccupy him are: how does she see him? how can he know whether she will accept his sexual advances? As regards her sexuality, the question is not (yet) as to its nature, but her position on the scale of sexual pudeur. By contrast, in the second, the focus moves to her sexual orientation and (in)fidelity, the target(s) of *her* desire, her sexual activities (past, present and future), and the experiential, qualitative nature of her sexuality. This cycle dominates the second half of the novel, with a volume of narrative and psychological analysis of Albertine which dwarfs the treatment given to reading her mind in the first. Correspondingly, while my analysis will address both, it will be weighted much more heavily on the second cycle, in which jealousy raises the epistemic stakes and triggers a far more forensic and exacting approach to mind-reading.

II. First cycle: 'Que peut-on affirmer?'

As with many other aspects of the *Recherche*, the first half sows the seeds for what happens in the second. While the particular epistemological focus may alter from the first cycle to the second, the narrator uses his account of the initial stages of the relationship with Albertine to identify important gateways or barriers (apparent or real) to successful mind-reading, the ramifications of which will assume much greater importance later.

The first hermeneutic difficulty that Albertine presents is her resistance to straightforward social decoding, something that the protagonist characteristically uses to get his bearings for an initial reading (though it often proves to be misplaced). As a milieu,

Balbec is wont to induce social misreading,[50] but, in the case of the *petite bande* (II, 146-156), the protagonist is also wrongfooted by their appearance, behaviour and insolence towards the wealthy crowd on the sea wall, (mis)categorizing them as working class rather than 'petite bourgeoisie fort riche' (II, 200). However, the basic 'suppositions' with more far-reaching implications for the reading of Albertine concern the sexual morality of the group, and it is her appearance and demeanour, pushing a bicycle and uttering 'des termes d'argot si voyous et criés si fort', that lead him to conclude that they are not innocent and virtuous *jeunes filles* (II, 151), but incarnations of 'la frénésie du plaisir, le vice' (IV, 189), girls who frequent velodromes, and the mistresses of 'coureurs cyclistes'. His first impression of Albertine is that she is 'une jeune fille très libre' (III, 886), and his foundational image of her is as a 'bacchante' (II, 228), debauched object of sexual desire.[51]

The initial encounter with Albertine foregrounds two very different aspects of mind-reading. One is the immediate and intuitive judgement about her sexual *mores*, one of those 'déchiffrages rapides d'un être qu'on voit à la volée' (II, 155), based on the signs that she emits but embellished and complicated by imagination (and susceptible to error); the other is more deep-rooted and ambitious in scope, representing a quest oriented towards conquest. While his immediate epistemological concern is whether she has perceived him and, if so, what inner representation she has formed of him (II, 152), this is only part of a broader array of requirements that he feels to be prerequisites to psychological possession. As with 'passantes sur la route', the key to decoding what is transmitted in Albertine's look is to

[50] Balbec is, as Edward Hughes points out, a site of social 'misrecognition', where different classes are 'drawn into contiguity': *Proust, Class, and Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.

[51] As Marie-Agnès Barathieu explains, the term 'bacchante' not only connotes intoxication but alludes to 'la lubricité, à un érotisme maximum, à des plaisirs sexuels débridés' (*Les Mobiles de Marcel Proust: une sémantique du déplacement* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2002), Ch. II, 157-218). Albertine's bicycle adds a symbolism whose potential significance lies latent until later in the novel, but is likely to have been appreciated by contemporary readers because, as Barathieu says, the female cyclist at the end of the nineteenth-century represented 'le doigt pointé sur Gomorrhe'.

access her psychological and experiential kernel, encompassing all aspects of her environment, past experiences, plans for the future, but more fundamentally her drives – desires, likes, dislikes, and so on (II, 152).

Despite the emerging challenges, the introduction to Albertine at Elstir's matinée inaugurates a process of acquiring knowledge which, while 'subtracting' from the protagonist's pre-conceived modelling, amounts to real knowledge of her 'dans le domaine de la vie' (II, 228). He is surprised not only to discover her bourgeois family relation with the Bontemps, but to infer from her relatively elevated diction and her appearing to be 'plus comme il faut que mal élevée' that she possesses a degree of sophistication and culture at odds with his first impressions of her as a 'bacchante à bicyclette' or 'muse orgiaque du golf'. Despite her mutability, through an accumulation of direct and circumstantial evidence, he creates a model of aspects of her mind during this first cycle which is shown to be tolerably reliable as regards some of her principal characteristics, even if in other respects it may represent little more than 'une poupée intérieure à [son] cerveau' (II, 665) fabricated by memory and imagination. He comes to know more of 'l'éducation […] les penchants, les lectures, les principes' that had seemed so elusive (II, 236), and he discovers her intelligence, her 'goût du divertissement', her taste regarding dress, painting and fashion, and her general enthusiasm to learn (II, 239-240, 248, 252-254, 262, 265-268). He also becomes familiar with some of her more negative traits, such as the utilitarian practice of 'mensonge spécial' that involves ascribing more than one motive to a single action in order to please while misdirecting attempts to read her true intentions (II, 290).

Conversely, Albertine's precise origins and parentage remain obscure, resisting the reduction of her to a general social or hereditary type or mind-set of the sort in which the protagonist habitually indulges (with Saint-Loup, for example, II, 97). While, in a nod to

Gabriel Tarde's theory of imitation, he is able to pinpoint certain sociological influences, such as her conditioned antisemitism (II, 257) and expressions that she has picked up from her aunt's friends (II, 263, 652), there is no simple aetiology for the 'cryptogame' of her mind (II, 246);[52] instead, she is actuated by a cornucopia of possible causal factors, described (much later) as '[d]es races, des atavismes, des vices repos[ant] sur son visage' (III, 580).

Within this first cycle of their relationship, the narrator lays bare and emphasizes key psychological features of his own that will inhibit his acquisition of the desired information just as much as anything peculiar to Albertine. The first hurdle in the quest for knowledge is one of will, since it is the very elusiveness ('fugacité') of the *femme aimée* that makes her attractive:

> Il faut que l'imagination, éveillée par l'incertitude de pouvoir atteindre son objet, crée un but qui nous cache l'autre, et en substituant au plaisir sensuel l'idée de pénétrer dans une vie, nous empêche de reconnaître ce plaisir, d'éprouver son goût véritable, de le restreindre à sa portée. (II, 154)

This epistemological bind appears to be less one which afflicts all lovers in the novel than one peculiar to the protagonist or, at least, to the paradoxical form of desire that he develops, and it lies at the very centre of his mind-reading difficulties. The motor for his infatuation with Albertine and the other members of the *petite bande* is that they are 'imprégné d'autant d'inconnu' and '*vraisemblablement* inaccessible' (II, 155) (emphasis added): they are not necessarily inaccessible, but credibly *appear* likely to be so. His nascent love for Albertine requires 'tout un processus d'angoisses', in which she is imagined to be inaccessible

[52] The 'cryptogame' is a plant, such as a fern or moss, that does not produce seeds and reproduces by spores. Defined in the *Encyclopédie Larousse* as a 'plante dont les organes reproducteurs, cachés ou peu visibles, ne se regroupent pas en cônes ou en fleurs', it is the element of mystery and secrecy surrounding the origin and reproduction of the cryptogam that makes the metaphor apposite to the *jeunes filles en fleurs* and Albertine in particular.

(‘impossible à atteindre’), and by which ‘on pense moins à la femme […] qu’aux moyens de la connaître’ (II, 213). Thus, coming to know the *femme aimée* would defeat the very desire that motivates the quest for knowledge; instead, the quest must be pursued but remain unfulfilled.

Subjective bias, beliefs and preoccupations, subsumed under the umbrella term ‘la croyance’ (II, 212) also stand in the way of straightforward mind-reading. *Croyance* plays a multi-faceted role in the *Recherche*.[53] Belief, as applied to such data as Albertine’s acts, past, sexuality, thoughts or feelings, is a distorting lens (‘optique’), skewing the exercise according to the protagonist’s particular informational, affective and perspectival disposition (II, 229, 299). Moreover, the applicable lens varies depending on his reading of Albertine, multiplying the complexity of the hermeneutics as he becomes ‘un personnage autre selon celle des Albertine à laquelle je pensais’ (II, 299). *Croyance* not only affects mind-reading retrospectively, when evaluating the *memory* of her behaviour, it works in real time interactions, and even prospectively as the generator of an imaginary model of Albertine, directing his thoughts and driving ‘tout un entretien intérieur où je la faisais questionner, répondre, penser, agir, et dans la série indéfinie d’Albertines imaginées qui se succédaient en moi heure par heure’ – a network of readings of a simulacrum (‘ce que j’appelais elle’) superimposed on ‘l’Albertine réelle’ (II, 213-214). The simulation theory of mind enacted by this cognitive process resembles less stepping into Albertine’s shoes than war-gaming.

Croyance has an equally important effect on his attentiveness as mind-reader. Periodic belief that Albertine may be moving beyond his reach impels the protagonist to

[53] Proust’s uses of the term *croyance* are the subject of a detailed study by Suzuki in *La Croyance proustienne* and by Fraisse in the chapter, ‘La croyance et la loi’, in *L’Éclectisme*, 445-509.

scrutinize her behaviour in almost microscopic detail, while the contrary conviction that she has been captured dilates his focus. Herein lies a further mind-reading paradox: on the one hand, when desiring Albertine, he feels himself lacking the objectivity necessary for confidence in his reading of others (that which he would apply to 'le caractère des indifférents' (II, 248)); but it is precisely when in the grip of desire that he is most closely attentive to the evidence. Even then, *croyance* modulates and may misdirect attention; as he later observes, believing her likely to misbehave with one woman takes his focus off what she says or does concerning another (III, 655), and attention is vulnerable to misjudgement: 'distraite devant ce que nous ignorons être important pour nous, attentive à ce qui ne l'est peut-être pas' (III, 654). To the challenges of wavering attention, one may add the vagaries of memory ('mémoire errante') and a tendency to speculate tirelessly about her motives, in the production of 'd'anxieuses hypothèses, perpétuellement remaniées' (II, 230, 248-249).

The protagonist's reading of Albertine during this opening phase of their relationship at Balbec betrays a lack of nuance when it matters most. While grasping that her personality and mood are variable (II, 299-300), he nonetheless takes her moral character to be fixed and readily ascertainable: in 'suppositions' which lurch from extreme to extreme, she must either be 'dévergondée' or 'absolument vertueuse' (II, 286, 292). Hamstrung by binarism, he struggles to get a clear reading of her sexual mores, finding certain looks and smiles ambiguous: 'Ils pouvaient signifier mœurs faciles, mais aussi gaieté un peu bête d'une jeune fille sémillante mais ayant un fond d'honnêteté' (II, 236). A simile from the narrator aptly pairs the challenge of reading her mind with the difficulty faced by the inexperienced translator of Greek text: 'Une même expression, de figure comme de langage, pouvant comporter diverses acceptions, j'étais hésitant comme un élève devant les difficultés d'une version grecque' (II, 236-237). Expressions being multivalent, the other's psycho-sexual and experiential background, her general mores, her drives and her motives

may be key ciphers. Without such information, it takes only the slightest encouragement for the protagonist naively to magnify and misread the signs in his favour and he does so notably on two occasions.

First, he comically misconstrues her gestures during the 'partie de furet' (II, 271-274). He mistakes her coded glances ('les sous-entendus du regard'), a veiled wink, and finger movements on his hand, executed for the purposes of a trick, as signs of her affection ('«Elle profite du jeu pour me faire sentir qu'elle m'aime bien»'), an *over*-reading rebutted in an instant by an angry Albertine remonstrating with him for failing to play properly. In the scene of the 'baiser refusé' (II, 284-292), he compounds his misfortune by grossly overinterpreting the invitation to a clandestine rendez-vous in her bedroom at the Grand-Hôtel, taking it as the culmination of 'tant d'actes différents, tous de gentillesse' and 'langage de la tendresse', consistent only with an invitation to consummate their relationship. The signs had at least been more auspicious on this occasion, leading him to believe that the 'Albertine réelle' may after all be the 'Albertine imaginaire' that he has modelled, willing unless restrained to act on desire behind her aunt's back rather than 'pleine de préjugés bourgeois'. In the aftermath of the debacle, the protagonist is given the opportunity to understand, from Albertine herself, why she did not allow him to kiss her, and the answer – adherence to conventional morality ('Je me demande quelles jeunes filles vous avez pu connaître pour que ma conduite vous ait surpris') – appears to confirm Andrée's 'protocolaire' prediction (II, 293-295). In sum, without the necessary cipher, he is as much at a loss with Albertine in Balbec as he is with Charlus, the scene in her bedroom being the mirror image of that in which Charlus visits the protagonist in his hotel bedroom, with roles reversed. The ironic symmetry hints that, as with Charlus, there may be an aspect to Albertine's sexuality which offers the key to her conduct, and might imply (at least with

the benefit of hindsight) that, while 'protocolaire' in a more or less conventional setting, she may indeed be 'dévergondée' in others.

If this first cycle in their relationship presents some of the difficulties posed for the protagonist in reading Albertine, it also provides a glimpse of some means by which they may be overcome. At their next encounter in Paris, after an interval of several months, Albertine shows encouraging signs of having matured psycho-sexually since their last encounter (II, 648-665).[54] The protagonist picks up on changes in her physiology, intelligence and demeanour but especially on a different vocabulary and linguistic usage now marked by a 'nubilité plus accentuée' and 'révélateur sinon d'une initiation extérieure, au moins d'une évolution interne' that he interprets as likely signs of (sexual) experiences and maturation, and on which he bases a predictive 'hypothèse optimiste' that she will be amenable to his physical desire. As Michael Lucey observes, 'the narrator's metapragmatic reflections [are] closely tied to the moment at which the scene in question is taking place. […] The analytic process is represented as occurring in the mind of the narrator/hero while he is in the room with Albertine'.[55] Indeed, the protagonist's actions become closely synchronized with her usage of salient terms, each taken progressively to signal her amenability: 'dès les mots «à mon sens», j'attirai Albertine, et à «j'estime» je l'assis sur mon lit'. Finally, it is her use of the exotic term *mousmé* to describe one of the other girls in the *petite bande* – '«elle a l'air d'une petite mousmé»' – that operates as the trigger ('ce qui me décida fut une dernière découverte philologique') finally inducing him to act upon and express his desire clumsily with an invitation to Albertine to tickle him. *Mousmé* was a word

[54] This scene has been the subject of a great deal of commentary: see, for example, Pierre-Quint, *Marcel Proust*, 171-172; Beckett, *Proust*, 33; Gérard Genette, 'Proust et le langage indirect', 225; Tadié, *Proust et le roman*, 324-325; van de Ghinste, *Rapports humains et communication*, 182; Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars*, 222; Lucey, *What Proust Heard*, 77-82.

[55] *What Proust Heard*, 78.

that, as Thierry Laget and Brian Rogers note, had recently been introduced to the French language from Japanese by Pierre Loti in his novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), in which it is said to mean a young girl or very young woman.[56] However, it is the contextual connotations of the term that operate, at the level of mind-reading intuition and/or sensibility, to give them what the narrator would describe as 'signification […] au second degré' (II, 281). As Gérard Genette notes, it is the connotative power of the word that acts as 'aphrodisiaque',[57] a suggestive dimension of the term in use that Malcolm Bowie captures when he describes it as bringing 'an exotic micro-climate with it […] When used by Albertine it connotes not simply the Orient but the tantalising cross-currents of homo-erotic feeling that are in play among Albertine's female friends'.[58]

As this scene demonstrates (like many others), successful mind-reading may turn upon the 'indexical penumbra'[59] of language. Lucey's work, *What Proust Heard* usefully presents this aspect of 'language-in-use' as part of a broader sociological programme of linguistic anthropology, though it illustrates that language may just as easily point to the (idiosyncratically) personal and sexual. Here the indexical aspect of utterance is sophisticated or esoteric vocabulary or turns of phrase that connote enhanced sensuality; later (in a crucial mind-reading scene analysed below), it is the language of utmost sexual vulgarity. As we have seen in relation to other characters in **Chapter 3**, these indexical aspects of language-in-use are part of a panoply of (predominantly involuntary) signs relied upon by the protagonist, often at variance with and more reliable than the (ostensibly) intended substance of the utterance. However, at this juncture (prior to the onset of sexual

[56] II, 1715 (Notes to *Le Côté de Guermantes*).

[57] 'Proust et le langage indirect', 225.

[58] *Proust Among the Stars*, 222.

[59] A term borrowed from Michael Silverstein, 'Translation, Transduction, Transformation: Skating 'Glossando' on Thin Semiotic Ice', in *Translating Cultures: Perspectives on Translation and Anthropology*, ed. by Paula Rubel & Abraham Rosman (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 75-105 (89).

jealousy), it is the *consonance* between what her diction connotes and her behaviour which validates the protagonist's detection of loosened morals and informs his successful prediction that she is willing to satisfy his desire (II, 656-657).

The scene represents more than gratifying sexual conquest, however. It induces 'une confrontation d'images' (II, 656) of Albertine, spatializing her sexual mores with three successive snapshots (a 'richesse de plans découverts l'un après l'autre') which, because of their apparent inconsistency, 'aboutissait *provisoirement* à l'agnosticisme' (emphasis added) and prompt the narrator's quizzical pronouncement:

> Que peut-on affirmer, puisque ce qu'on avait cru probable d'abord s'est montré faux ensuite, et se trouve en troisième lieu être vrai? (II, 657)

The explicitly *provisional* nature of this assessment is significant, since the qualification is inserted by a narrator writing with the benefit of hindsight, and knowledge of future 'découvertes avec Albertine'. While, as Marcel Muller says, he is generally 'un Narrateur qui consent à abdiquer son savoir' in order not to give away the course of events or undermine the progressive enlightenment of the protagonist,[60] this does not prevent him occasionally betraying such knowledge either expressly or obliquely. There is room here for the implication that, while his initial intuition about her having a 'facilité amoureuse' was correct, it did not justify the inference at the Grand-Hôtel that she would be easy *with him* (at least before her sexual maturation); time and experience of Albertine will show that there is no necessary inconsistency. As appears to be signalled by the narrator's reflections, the lesson to be drawn from this experience is not necessarily one of endless epistemological reversal, but that, for all the complications that it may entail, the effluxion of time may enable or facilitate a reliable reading, whether through the cumulative acquisition of greater

[60] *Les Voix narratives dans la Recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Droz, 1965), 46.

knowledge of the other or through the happenstance of the other suddenly rendering herself decipherable. It is this temporal dimension of knowledge acquisition – 'cet *enseignement* d'une plus grande richesse de plans découverts l'un après l'autre *par la vie*' (ibid., emphasis added), so challenging with the mutable *femme aimée* – that makes such difficult women the only ones worth pursuing (II, 658).

However, in this first cycle, there are already signs that the protagonist has formed a habit that works to undermine his pursuit of truth, and in turn raises an issue central to Albertine's (un)knowability. Albertine's failure to be at his home at the expected hour after the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée (III, 123-136) triggers an anxiety about her *emploi de temps* which will become especially acute when his sexual jealousy is later engaged: 'un sentiment douloureux […] un besoin anxieux de savoir où, avec qui, elle passait son temps' (III, 127). Yet, instead of doggedly pursuing the facts, the protagonist refrains from pursuing cross-examination or other modes of inquiry. He senses that she is lying when she says that she had not properly read his note about coming to see him after watching *Phèdre* (III, 129), and indeed he puts to her that there was no basis for misunderstanding (III, 129-130), but he does not press her about her movements. When she arrives in his room, all inquisitorial spirit evaporates:

> Je renonçai à poser à Albertine des questions sur sa soirée, je sentais que je lui ferais des reproches et que nous n'aurions plus le temps, vu l'heure qu'il était, de nous réconcilier suffisamment pour passer aux baisers et aux caresses. (III, 135)

The mind-reading endeavour is shut down before it has any prospect of gaining traction.

III. Second cycle: jaloux et juge

Whereas the first part of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* offered an unambiguous *mise en scène* of Charlus's homosexuality, the second takes a more oblique approach to Albertine's sexuality. The stakes are greater for the protagonist and, in the search for the truth, he will not be afforded the direct evidence and privileged insight of a voyeur; instead, he will have to work with the indirect, and form judgement by inference. It will be the aim of this section to establish that, while she does not confess or get caught visibly (or aurally) *in flagrante delicto*, the protagonist is afforded ample circumstantial evidence, over time, that Albertine is a lesbian (or, more accurately, bisexual) and unfaithful, and that he most often *chooses* not to elicit a full(er) account or, in many cases, to accept and apply the inferences that any impartial judge would form. As with much in the *Recherche*, his reasons for doing so are multi-faceted: they stem not only from the protagonist's particularly pathological brand of love[61] (alternating with indifference) and his morbidly destructive but often myopic sexual jealousy, but from emotional self-preservation and, quite feasibly, even a desire for self-justification and exculpation.

The knowledge sought by the protagonist as jealous lover in the second cycle of the Albertine episode is composite and formulated in different ways, but at its core is: 'Vouloir connaître à tout prix ce qu'Albertine pensait, qui elle voyait, qui elle aimait' (III, 604). It is knowledge not only of present thought, feeling and desire, but of past and present conduct and experience, memories, plans for the future and, of course, character and sexuality. Nor will such knowledge necessarily suffice, as the search will extend to the qualitative. Such

[61] The negative vision of love as anguish-ridden, painful struggle, strewn with obstacles interposed by imagination, desire, self-delusion, disappointment, misunderstanding, deception and infidelity, had ample precedents in French literature predating the *Recherche*, including Racine's tragedies or Constant's *Adolphe*. What marks the *Recherche* out is the depth, density and volume of the introspections eclipsing any glimmers of amorous happiness.

multi-aspectual knowledge falls into various categories, each of which presents different challenges, and the exercise of mind-reading involves grappling with all of them, in the hope of forming a cohesive and holistic 'jugement général' (IV, 95). While boundaries are often blurred in practice, keeping in mind the distinctions between informational categories provides some means of measuring mind-reading success or failure, and the reasons for it.

(1) First of all, there are *facts in the world* regarding her 'emploi du temps', past and present. This encompasses Albertine's upbringing (as member of the 'moyenne bourgeoisie'),[62] but also her sexual history and any acts of infidelity. When his sexual jealousy is engaged, this information is often the immediate concern of the protagonist : 'la curiosité douloureuse, inlassable, que j'avais des lieux où Albertine avait vécu, de ce qu'elle avait pu faire tel soir, des sourires, des regards qu'elle avait eus, des mots qu'elle avait dits, des baisers qu'elle avait reçus!' (III, 887) The template is offered by Swann, who, in *Un amour de Swann*, is singularly incurious about Odette's activities until jealousy (and a concomitant desire for possession and mastery) induces an emotional need to know '[s]es actions […], ses relations […], son passé' (I, 269).

(2) Secondly, there are *mental states*: thoughts, memories, intentions, perceptions, emotions, sensations, beliefs, desires (and so on). This category encompasses affect or sensations (percepts and somatic feelings), but also intentional mental states that involve propositional attitudes about a person, place, state of affairs, etc (such as believing, wishing, intending, hoping). They are the 'idées que cet être se fait, relativement aux gens et aux lieux qu'il connaît […], des projets qu'elle forme ou

[62] For a discussion of this sociological aspect of her background, see Dubois, *Pour Albertine*, 33-35, 48, 92, 117.

qu'on a formés pour elle; et surtout […] ses désirs, ses sympathies, ses répulsions, son obscure et incessante volonté' (II, 152).[63]

(3) Thirdly and clearly overlapping with the foregoing, there is her *sexuality*: 'savoir si […] elle aimait les femmes' (IV, 95). For many readers, Albertine is the very epitome of sexual ambiguity,[64] and her sexuality has long been taken to be the central preoccupation of the protagonist from *Sodome et Gomorrhe* onwards. For Nicola Luckhurst, 'the Albertine volumes might be described as one single relentless hypothesis about the nature of Albertine's sexuality' and what she describes as 'the binary hypothesis':[65] Is Albertine lesbian or not? On Luckhurst's reading, '[t]he narrator recognizes the impossibility of establishing as fact either of the hypotheses' and, though in *La Prisonnière* the odds are that she is a lesbian, this being the 'more compelling' of the two hypotheses, the speculation about her sexuality is 'irresolvable' and the two hypotheses 'ultimately insoluble'.[66] At the heart of this analysis is, it seems, acceptance of the narrator's contention that it is *impossible* to establish as a fact which of the hypotheses is correct. Against this background, the question of whether Albertine's sexuality is left in doubt (for the protagonist, narrator or the reader) must be a central part of the analysis which follows. In this connection, I will not address the question, considered by others, whether Albertine's gender or sexuality is illuminated by the fact that Proust's male lover, Alfred Agnostelli, was a, or the, model for the character, or whether she is 'in fact'

[63] For a discussion of intentionality (as 'aboutness'), see Daniel Dennett and John Haugeland, 'Intentionality', *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, ed. by Richard Gregory (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004).

[64] For example, Rivers writes: 'And Albertine? Is she "a lesbian"? Although the narrator engages in some of the most careful detective work in literature, he never finds out for certain, and neither does the reader', *Proust and the Art of Love*, 44. See also: Maurice Sachs, *Le Sabbat: souvenirs d'une jeunesse orageuse* (Paris: Corrêa, 1946), 282; Dubois, *Pour Albertine*, 24, 30.

[65] *Science and Structure*, 81, 83.

[66] Ibid., 105-107, 200.

a man;[67] for, this quasi-biographical approach self-evidently does violence to the depiction of Albertine as a *female* character and to the obstacles of gender/sexual difference encountered by the protagonist and, as Harry Levin explained, creates more issues than it aims to resolve.[68] For good measure, the suggestion was rejected by Proust himself as 'une hypothèse insensée'.[69] Likewise, I shall leave aside the question whether the protagonist is intended to be a closet homosexual (and representative of Proust),[70] or even, as Kaja Silverman would have it, a lesbian.[71]

(4) The fourth and most challenging category is *qualia*:[72] 'à savoir non seulement ce qu'elle a fait, mais ce qu'elle ressentait en le faisant, quelle idée elle avait de ce qu'elle faisait' (IV, 107) – the singular, unique and qualitative aspect of Albertine's experience, what it feels like *for her* to desire or experience what she does.

In addressing the evidence available to the protagonist when appraising his mind-reading endeavours on the issues falling within one or more of these categories, one is not 'seek[ing] to answer questions which Proust's narrator appears to find insoluble' and 'attempt[ing] to hold Albertine captive' as Emma Wilson puts it;[73] one is addressing what questions he feels

[67] Justin O'Brien, 'Albertine the Ambiguous: Notes on Proust's Transposition of Sexes', *PMLA*, 64.5 (1949), 933-952.

[68] 'Proust, Gide and the Sexes', *PMLA*, 65.4 (1950), 648-652. See also Sedgwick, 'Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet', 232-234; Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism*, 10-27 (emphasizing the narrator's preoccupation with lesbianism).

[69] Letter to Jean Schlumberger, 16 July 1922, *Corr.*, XXI, 355-358 (356) (though Proust was keen to avoid fuelling any speculation about his own sexuality).

[70] For the refutation of such a theory, see for example, Antoine Compagnon, 'La Dernière Victime du narrateur'.

[71] 'A Woman's Soul Enclosed in a Man's Body: Femininity in Male Homosexuality', in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1992), 386.

[72] *Qualia* may be defined as the subjective, phenomenal character of experience, 'the distinctive way it is like – from inside as it were – to undergo experiences of its type i.e. how the experience presents itself to introspection' (Uriah Kriegel, 'Phenomenal Content', *Erkenntnis*, 57.2 (2002), 175-198 (175)).

[73] 'Reading Albertine's Sexuality', 61. See also: Gray, *Postmodern Proust*, 94-114; Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism*, 69.

or finds ‘insoluble’ and why that might be so, engaging critically with the text as its quasi-inquisitorial/judicial warp and weft encourage the reader to do.

1. ‘Préoccupations du côté de Gomorrhe’: Albertine’s sexuality

The scene that Proust labelled ‘danse contre seins’ (III, 190-192) comprises, together with the Montjouvain scene, a formative part of the protagonist’s introduction to ‘reading’ lesbianism and inaugurates a period of suspicion which increasingly dominates the Albertine volumes. The protagonist’s ‘cruelle méfiance’ towards Albertine originates in Cottard’s remarks at the sight of her dancing with Andrée that, with breast contact, the girls are ‘certainement au comble de la jouissance’. However, before the doctor has uttered a word, the protagonist feels compelled to watch Albertine when he hears her laughter ‘âcre, sensuel et révélateur’, a sound that hints at concealed pleasures and serves as the involuntary signifier of what is implied to be female same-sex desire.[74] Thanh-Vân Ton That sees in their laughter an element of scatological commonality between Gilberte, Albertine and Odette, being that of ‘l’ancienne cocotte’, associated with betrayal and possible homosexuality, and at odds with otherwise innocent physical appearance.[75] But, the link between female laughter and same-sex relations extends even further back in the narrative to Montjouvain itself, where Mlle Vinteuil and her friend pursue one another ‘gloussant et piaillant comme des oiseaux amoureux’ (I, 160). In a draft, the link between the lesbianism witnessed in Montjouvain and the actions of Albertine and Andrée (then named Claire) would have been more explicit, based upon Andrée kissing her neck and smiling in a manner reminiscent of Mlle Vinteuil, prompting the narrator to pose the questions whether ‘les

[74] The unmasking role of laughter, revealing a concealed aspect of the other, is a notable psychological, semiotic feature that the *Recherche* shares with the literature of Dostoevsky, of which Proust was a fervent admirer. See: Karen Haddad-Wotling, *L’Illusion qui nous frappe: Proust et Dostoïevski. Une esthétique romanesque* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995), 382-383.

[75] ‘Des Rieurs à la limite de la folie, de la volupté et de la mort: les intermittences du rire chez Proust’, in *Proust et le rire*, ed. by Sjef Houppermans and others (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 113-125 (115).

passions et les vices usent d'une écriture fixe et qu'on puisse lire sans erreur possible' and whether the same gesture/demeanour enabled him to 'conclure avec assurance qu'ils ne pouvaient être interprétés que comme un signe des mêmes habitudes'.[76] Instead, the link between Albertine and Montjouvain is left latent until, in the immediate aftermath of the bombshell which closes *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the protagonist pictures her in Montjouvain falling into the arms of Mlle Vinteuil 'avec ce rire [voluptueux] où elle faisait entendre comme le son inconnu de sa jouissance' (III, 501-502), the culmination of *Les intermittences du cœur II*.

Whereas the acts witnessed in Montjouvain offered the young protagonist easily decipherable direct evidence of female homosexuality behind closed doors, Albertine's behaviour at the casino requires the explanation provided by Cottard in order for him to understand its significance (III, 227). It is also right to acknowledge the obvious asymmetry in treatment between male and female homosexuality in the *Recherche*.[77] The taxonomy of the former is not matched by any equivalent for the latter and there is no excursus on lesbianism. As between the homosexual desires of Charlus and Albertine, there is an undeniable imbalance of visibility: to use Sedgwick's phrase, they are 'violently incommensurable'.[78] Elisabeth Ladenson notes the ease with which the protagonist is able to witness scenes of male homosexuality, whereas his efforts to observe lesbianism end 'with the blinds being drawn at the crucial moment'[79] – though I would take issue with the suggestion that this is so in *all* cases. But it does not follow that lesbianism is always 'inaccessible to the desire for knowledge' (*pace* Luckhurst)[80] and Ladenson herself remarks

[76] *Cahier 71 ('Dux')*, fol. 7[r] (contrast with the definitive text at III,199).

[77] Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism*, 11-13, 30-50; Luckhurst, *Science and Structure*, 159, 169-189.

[78] 'Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet', 231.

[79] *Proust's Lesbianism*, 63, 67.

[80] *Science and Structure*, 180.

that lesbians in the *Recherche* have a proclivity for exhibitionism.[81] Once decoded, the 'danse contre seins' opens the protagonist's eyes to the existence (if not the detailed lexicon) of a micro-behavioural semiotics of female homosexuality that most often hides in plain sight, sensitizing him to the presence of female same-sex desire in much the same indiscriminate and causally disproportionate manner as *la conjonction Jupien-Charlus* in the case of male homosexuality.

Conceived as far back as 1913 (prior to the publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*), the scene was intended by Proust to play a key role not only thematically but structurally;[82] notations in *Cahier 61* confirm the status of the casino as the locus of lesbianism, and counterpart to the foundational scene of male homosexuality.[83] The casino is the locus of what Ladenson describes as 'exhibitionistic [female sexuality flaunting itself]'.[84] The site of scandalous misbehaviour by Bloch's sister and a lesbian actress (III, 236, 244), it is an observation chamber for the close reading of conduct that provides indirect (circumstantial) evidence of Albertine's sexuality. The presence of recognizable lesbianism at the casino allows the protagonist to read signs of Albertine's same-sex desire in real time in a form of naturalistic psychological observation by which she is observed in what might be her natural habitat, though her awareness of his presence as observer inevitably causes a degree of subject bias that manifests itself in the adoption of oblique behaviours. Albertine's behaviour in the presence of Bloch's sister and cousin (III, 197-198), both 'filles de mauvais genre', makes such an impression on the protagonist that it is still etched in his mind as

[81] *Proust's Lesbianism*, 64.

[82] Kazuyoshi Yoshikawa, 'Remarques sur les transformations subies par la "*Recherche*" autour des années 1913-1914 d'après des cahiers inédits', *Bulletin d'informations Proustiennes*, 7 (1978), 7-28 (15-16).

[83] 'Faire pour les femmes pendant de la scène de Charlus dans l'établissement de Jupien. Ce sera Gomorrhe. Bals. Levages. Léa au casino rira en me voyant avec Albertine tout en chatouillant dans le cou une cousine de Bloch. Albertine se retournera vers moi sans les regarder, d'un air impénétrable' (III, 1478).

[84] *Proust's Lesbianism*, 7.

evidence of her lesbianism when they are living together later in Paris (III, 655-657). It is her demeanour which first arouses suspicion, the protagonist observing that, on first catching sight of the girls and before turning her back on them, 'avait passé dans les yeux de mon amie cette attention brusque et profonde qui donnait parfois au visage de l'espiègle jeune fille un air sérieux, même grave, et la laissait triste après' (197-198). Even when she turns her gaze towards him, he notes that she remains distracted, 'ses regards […] singulièrement immobiles et rêveurs' (198). Her utterances only serve to fuel suspicion: first, the obviously implausible proposition that she did not notice whether one of them had fair hair, purportedly not having looked at them at all; secondly, the sudden revelation and self-contradiction, prompted by provocative denegation from the protagonist ('Elles n'ont pas l'air de nous regarder beaucoup non plus'), that she was spying on them in the mirror the whole time. It is only a short step to his realization that, while talking to him, Albertine's eyes had been glued to the girls' reflection in the mirror.

It is through ocular 'signes astraux' that the dispersed community of 'Gomorrhe' tends to communicate (when not indulging in more exhibitionistic displays). The incident of the 'belle jeune femme' from the beach (III, 244-247), whose gaze is spatially poeticized as the rays of projected 'appétits et […] désirs' unmistakably trained on Albertine in the casino, offers non-verbal allusion to past sexual liaison. The protagonist reads the particularly insistent looks, 'chargés de mémoire', that the young lesbian directs at Albertine and the latter's unnaturally stiff reaction, as signifying that they had previously been intimate. However, the evidence is too oblique and laconic, *of itself*, to ground little more than suspicion. The same is true of what he witnesses of Albertine's behaviour with other members of the *petite bande*; though consistent with same-sex attraction, it is insufficient to amount to proof (III, 199), and is sufficiently ambiguous to be countered by Albertine's assertion that she and Andrée are appalled by such things (III, 227). It is the obliqueness of

its multifarious manifestations that makes it apt to say that 'Albertine's sexuality resists visualization'.[85]

Doubts regarding Albertine's sexuality are kept alive for some time at Balbec by a mistaken *croyance* about homosexuality (or, more accurately, bisexuality) of which he will later be disabused. Jealousy towards other women is displaced abruptly due to a false dichotomy between same-sex and opposite-sex desire, her apparent interest in Saint-Loup (III, 258) or the waiter at Rivebelle (III, 406) seeming 'inconciliable' with the idea that she likes women, a simplistic binarism later debunked by Charlus (III, 809-811). However, of more far-reaching structural significance for the evaluation of mind-reading evidence is the protagonist's episodic rather than cumulative assessment of her sexuality, which swings from one scene to the next according to the comparative potency of the image to which he reduces it. On this approach, the inference that the protagonist draws is on each occasion necessarily provisional, susceptible to being supplanted by the impression made by the next relevant episode: fear of lesbianism displaced by fear of attraction to Saint-Loup (III, 268), fear of relations with Mlle Vinteuil or her friend later 'aboli' by fear of Léa (or vice versa) (III, 730), and so on. This is not to say that the effect of each episode or anecdote is wholly superseded by the next, since the emblematic and psychological potency of images such as Montjouvain, the 'danse contre seins' or 'l'image d'Albertine au casino près des deux jeunes filles', is sufficiently powerful for them to intrude when the protagonist's sexual jealousy is aroused in relation to other women. However, the psychological discontinuity of thought, memory and attention inherent in his jealousy 'à localisations intermittentes' (III, 730) results in a fragmentation of the evidence (often but not always equivocal), precluding its assembly into a coherent if composite whole:

[85] *Proust's Lesbianism*, 62.

> je ne possédais dans ma mémoire que des séries d'Albertine séparées les unes des autres, incomplètes, des profils, des instantanés; aussi ma jalousie se confinait-elle à une expression discontinue, à la fois fugitive et fixée, et aux êtres qui l'avaient amenée sur la figure d'Albertine. (III, 655)[86]

What is often patently lacking is an holistic evaluation of the totality of the evidence gathered up to the point at which the protagonist makes a particular pronouncement, a 'travail de modelage [des nébuleuses'] in which he contentedly engages when listening to novel musical pieces and seeking to 'rejoindre les unes aux autres'. (III, 874)

It therefore takes a seismic discovery to advance the protagonist significantly in his quest for the truth about her sexuality, and concentrate the intuitive impacts of earlier mind-reading scenes that appear to offer incriminating, though highly circumstantial evidence.[87] Whereas the epistemological pivot for the relationship with Charlus came at the beginning of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, with Albertine confirmation of her 'vice' comes in most powerful form at the end (III, 497-515). The bombshell regarding Mlle Vinteuil and her best friend (seen by the protagonist as a 'pratiquante professionnelle du saphisme') is presented by the narrator with the status of 'vérité' (III, 499) and its lesbian connotation with (at a minimum) that of 'quasi-certitude' (III, 506). Albertine does not merely reveal that she knows the two women, but identifies the best friend as the very 'amie' whom she has previously mentioned as one of those closest to her, and whom she plans to see in Cherbourg (III, 499). This revelation, consistent with what she has previously told the protagonist about her past, and uttered unguardedly to enhance her standing, has the ring of truth. That is *a fortiori* because Albertine has no idea how incriminating the revelation is: unbeknownst to her, the pre-

[86] See also: IV, 71-72.

[87] Whether specific one-off incidents such as that involving Bloch's sister and cousin at the casino (III, 197-198), specific scenes like the 'dame d'Infreville' incident (III, 194-197 and – subsequently – III, 616) or generalized instances of behaviour such as those where Albertine involuntarily turns to look at a beautiful young woman (III, 247), which are reported or indicated (by use of the imperfect) to have been repeated in various forms.

emptive exclamation that the pair are 'pas du tout le genre de femmes que vous pourriez croire' is something that the protagonist *knows* to be untrue. The impact of the disclosure on the protagonist is profound, signifying an indubitable (homo)sexual intimacy and forging an instant connection between Albertine and the image of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend at Montjouvain. The 'truth' of the involuntary revelation is underwritten by it being beyond even the protagonist's imagination (III, 500),[88] while consistent with his intuitions about her.

The revelation also has a purportedly universal dimension, illuminating the core of the narrator's dolorist epistemology in the realm of love, 'la voie funeste et destinée à être douloureuse du Savoir'. The capitalization at this juncture is important, for, if the *Recherche* is (as Proust maintained) a 'recherche de la Vérité'[89] then the insight about Knowledge is that, in some circumstances, it must come at the price of pain.[90] While 'la réalité' may be intuited by 'timides et infimes suppositions' themselves grounded in fragments of evidence, the protagonist repeatedly demonstrates that knowledge of the most profound truths is very often not the product of a painstaking gathering of evidence and of ratiocination, but something that arrives involuntarily, arbitrarily and painfully from outside the *intelligence* and, by these means, gratifyingly 'fait faire un bond' (III, 500). Especially where the mind-reader has enclosed himself within a carapace of self-protective or complacent *croyance*, knowledge of the truth – in this case about the sexuality of Albertine (or, before her, Odette in the case of Swann, or, after her, Saint-Loup in the case of the protagonist) – arrives suddenly and unpredictably with a penetrating utterance or other event which 'nous fait son affreuse piqûre et nous blesse pour toujours' (III, 499). Yet, as the narrator is also careful to

[88] The narrator reiterates this point at IV, 18.

[89] Letter to Jacques Rivière, 6 February 1914, *Corr.*, XIII, 98-101 (99).

[90] For a detailed exploration of 'souffrance' as part of a 'theory of affective epistemology' in the *Recherche*, see Luckhurst, *Science and Structure*, 200-224.

point out, where it validates (in unexpected form) long-held suspicions and suppositions, the sudden flash of truth – however unwelcome emotionally – may be not merely a source of pain, but of intellectual satisfaction and pleasure: knowledge of 'la réalité la plus terrible donne en même temps que la souffrance la joie d'une belle découverte, parce qu'elle ne fait que donner une forme neuve et claire à ce que nous remâchions depuis longtemps sans nous en douter' (III, 500).

At least in the moment, the epistemological value of the revelation from Albertine appears nearly absolute:

> La vérité de ce que Cottard m'avait dit au casino de Parville ne faisait plus doute pour moi. Ce que j'avais redouté, vaguement soupçonné depuis longtemps d'Albertine, ce que mon instinct dégageait de tout son être, et ce que mes raisonnements dirigés par mon désir m'avaient peu à peu fait nier, c'était vrai! (III, 501)

This expulsion of doubt about her sexuality is either complete ('[s]on vice maintenant ne faisait pas de doute pour moi' (III, 512)) or as good as: 'une quasi-certitude' (III, 506). The residue of doubt connoted by the term, *quasi-certitude*, is at variance with the weight of his emotional and cognitive response to the information, both at the time and long thereafter, and reflects a handling of knowledge about his jealous suspicions of Albertine which is at best dual, at worst schizophrenic in that he both knows and does not know the fact (or, to give the disclosure its true revelatory heft, *vérité*) inferable from the circumstantial evidence. His processing of evidence is subject to 'un dérivé de l'instinct de conservation' allowing the jealous lover to form the darkest suspicions (on the most threadbare, innocent facts) 'à condition, devant la première preuve qu'on lui apporte, de se refuser à l'évidence' (III, 593). With this 'système pour ne pas souffrir' (III, 728-729), doubt is forced to give way to competing reasons to believe in the *être aimé*: when faced with incriminating evidence, the protagonist both *accepts* and *refuses* what it signifies, but, as this episode

demonstrates (and as reinforced by its repeated resurgence), the knowledge is seared into the protagonist's mind regardless.

However, with certain, or near certain knowledge of her sexuality at the end of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* comes the seed of a new challenge: sexual jealousy concerning Albertine's relations with other women is of a different order of magnitude to jealousy of Saint-Loup, and it creates an anxiety that threatens to open an avenue of inquiry extending into Albertine's *qualia*:

> ici le rival n'était pas semblable à moi, ses armes étaient différentes, je ne pouvais pas lutter sur le même terrain, donner à Albertine les mêmes plaisirs, ni même les concevoir exactement. (III, 504-505)

But, such a qualitative inquiry cannot proceed meaningfully in the abstract, it must be grounded in fact and it is to the facts that the focus of the narrative moves.

2. 'Préoccupé de l'emploi de son temps': factual details of her infidelities

In *La Prisonnière*, the protagonist's preoccupation with Albertine's activities is given free rein. In substance, the nature of her sexuality is no longer the central question; jealousy takes as its object primarily her actions, and the focus is on disrupting her previous habits (III, 503), and breaking 'ses mauvaises relations' (III, 531). The principal issue is to know and control what Albertine is doing when she is not with him, 'savoir ce qu'elle faisait, l'empêcher de reprendre ses habitudes avec Mlle Vinteuil' (IV, 18).

Upon their return to Paris, the account takes on a quasi-judicial hue, the protagonist – 'jaloux et juge' – subjecting Albertine to periodic interrogations that (according to the narrator) confer on their engagement 'une allure de procès' (III, 566). Albertine is cast in the role of wrongdoer, and the narrative in this section of the novel is replete with cognate terms or metaphors of criminality, guilt, inquisition, inquiry, confession, trial and judgment,

together with carceral terms or images that signify the condemnation of her behaviour. Female same-sex relations are treated by the narrator not merely as a sinful transgression of normative gender boundaries (a 'vice' or 'mal') but as a crime, an approach to lesbianism that bears traces, in this and other respects, of its representation in male-authored literature prior to World War I. Lesbians, in works such as Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, Baudelaire's 'Femmes damnées', Zola's *Nana* and Catulle Mendès' *Méphistophéla*, are represented as (variously) sinful, criminal, pathological, enigmatic, perfidious, libidinous, perverse and unstable.[91] Albertine's actual or suspected transgressions are manifold: lesbian liaisons, debauchery, concealment, deceit, unfeminine behaviour, and so on.

As Bersani percipiently observes, the protagonist's 'activity of loving turns out to be something like a compulsive intellectual investigation' in which the consideration of Albertine's 'crimes' (real or imagined) creates a 'detective-story atmosphere'.[92] The recurring analogies with crime and judicial process are significant not only for the value-judgement that they imply regarding her behaviour, but for what they connote about the mind-reading process. The *femme aimée* withholding a secret from her lover ('la pensée inavouée' (III, 578)) is treated as a perpetrator concealing a crime that she will not confess and, much as with crime fiction, a central element of *La Prisonnière* is the attempted detection of facts and the reading of minds in the search for culpable thoughts, memories and feelings, and for motive. It stages a classic struggle in which the mind-reading protagonist occupies, or aims to occupy the role of sleuth or judge, and Albertine is cast in the role of '[le] coupable qui n'avouera pas'.

[91] See Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Damned Women: Lesbians in French Novels, 1796-1996* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) for a survey of works during the period including those depicting the lesbian as 'a monster, unnatural, vicious, and deadly, because unregulated by men or by reproduction' and, by nature, 'a transgressive body, subversive of patriarchal order' (214).

[92] *Marcel Proust*, 61. The epistemological aspect of the protagonist's jealousy is also highlighted in (amongst others) Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, and Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*.

Judicial metaphor is only one of many comparators from the realms of purportedly objective investigation that the narrator sets up as a yardstick for his inquiry as jealous lover,[93] and, as Kristin Ross observes, in light of the hermeneutic dominant in *La Prisonnière*, it is 'no accident that the predominant metaphor […] is one which links the anxious investigations of the jealous lover to the intellectual activities of the scientist'.[94] But, it is equally poignant that he should be placed (or purportedly aspire to be placed) in the position of judge and especially that of the *juge d'instruction*, the professional mind-reader *par excellence*, with all that such a role customarily entails not only in the gathering and weighing of evidence, but in its cumulative assessment and the dispassionate application of a conventional standard of proof.[95] For, nothing could be further from the protagonist's affect-biased approach to reading Albertine. While he is quite content to adopt a detached approach to individuals like the Baron de Charlus, whose mere declaration of a preference for 'la fraisette' grounds the 'certitude […] qui permet de condamner, pour un juge un criminel qui n'a pas avoué' (III, 356), he demands a higher degree of conviction in the case of Albertine's suspected guilt, but the ambiguity of her utterances often puts him in the more precarious position of the judge who is only able to 'tirer des conclusions incertaines d'imprudences de langage' (III, 566).

Unlike the prototypical crime story, the protagonist's investigation is anything but rigorously scientific or even entirely rational, lacking the sleuthing impetus of 'les enquêtes d'un juge d'instruction […] sur les dessous d'un crime' (IV, 7). Rather than spend his energy

[93] In *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, Bowie lists numerous similes that the narrator applies to his epistemological activities, drawn from a wide 'range of scientific and scholarly disciplines' (50). See also Reino Virtanen, 'Proust's Metaphors from the Natural and Exact Sciences', *PMLA*, 69.5 (1954), 1038-1059; Victor Graham, *The Imagery of Proust* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

[94] 'Albertine; or, the Limits of Representation', 138.

[95] The judge is the paradigmatic figure of one engaged in what Alvin Goldman describes as 'social veritistic epistemology', a truth-oriented pursuit of knowledge: *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 5. As Goldman observes, one of the distinguishing features of Continental judicial systems is that the judge 'doubles as investigator and as trier of fact' (290).

on ‘causeries investigatrices’ (III, 533), he prefers to let his imagination run wild and short-circuit the need for extended cross-examination with a quick, surprise interrogatory (‘à brûle-pourpoint’) which fizzles out in the face of the most threadbare response (III, 533), or with simple bluffs intended to trick Albertine into revealing her intentions. Even when it comes to specific facts, thoughts, feelings, or plans, there are grounds to question whether they are quite as elusive as the narrator periodically maintains. The short scene (or, rather, scenes) in which, despite having the opportunity to do so, the protagonist refrains from examining the letters that Albertine keeps in the pocket of her kimono (III, 581-582) reveals the underlying tension apparent in the protagonist’s whole quest for her truth. The kimono, with letters concealed in an inner pocket, is a metonymic (and personified) representation of all the inner mystery that she appears to keep from him: ‘ce kimono qui peut-être m’eût dit bien des choses’. His deliberate self-restraint when knowledge is within grasp is symptomatic of a trait or drive that Landy convincingly parallels with Nietzsche’s ‘will to ignorance’, something that, in the *Recherche*, ‘make[s] our pursuit of knowledge serve a deeper project of self-protective ignorance’: in this case, avoidance of the pain that conclusive proof of specific acts of infidelity would entail.[96] However, this feature of the protagonist’s inquiry has implications beyond the self-protective tendency identified by Landy; it bears directly on the key epistemological issues posed by Albertine. At least so far as concerns the information capable of being communicated in writing, this scene demonstrates that some elements of her mysterious inner world are not necessarily beyond reach; if so inclined, the protagonist could read the letters, just as Swann read Odette’s letter to Forcheville. Furthermore, as we have already seen (and will see below), the protagonist’s ‘will to ignorance’ is not confined to Albertine’s letters: time and again, he chooses not to

[96] Landy, ‘Nietzsche, Proust, and Will-To-Ignorance’, *Philosophy and Literature*, 26.1 (2002), 1-23 (5, 11). See Landy’s close analysis of the kimono scene in *Philosophy as Fiction*, 85-100.

pursue the truth doggedly during would-be interrogation of Albertine or to organize effective surveillance.

However much the narrator may attempt to universalize the difficulties, the protagonist's actions as the novel proceeds increasingly suggest his predicament to be peculiar to him or those with a similarly neurasthenic condition or predisposition to avoid painful truths in love, for he shows himself to be at best a lethargic and wilfully ineffectual sleuth, 'le plus apathique quoique le plus douloureux des policiers' (IV, 18).[97] Delegation of surveillance to third parties places him at one remove from the evidence on the ground. Moreover, as he later acknowledges, it relaxes and dulls his ability to read Albertine's intentions:

> l'apathie [en laissant à Andrée ou au chauffeur] le soin de surveiller Albertine, ankylosait en moi, rendait inertes tous ces mouvements imaginatifs de l'intelligence, toutes ces inspirations de la volonté qui aident à deviner, à empêcher ce que va faire une personne. (III, 533)

Worse still, the choice of agents is highly questionable. It is an act of likely self-sabotage so far as concerns Andrée, whom he has long suspected of sexual impropriety with Albertine, and whom he knows to possess a streak of malevolent dishonesty; indeed, the protagonist recognizes that the two may be acting in concert (III, 569). Use of the chauffeur is equally misguided, though more excusable until 'l'incident de Versailles' since (until then) he lacks reason to distrust 'la perspicacité de sa vigilance' if not his honesty and motives (638-643); but, even after that incident, the only precaution that he takes is to send them out with Andrée. However, the incident itself reveals a lack of proper instructions, a reluctance to make plain that he wants her kept under surveillance: 'je ne voulais pas paraître faire positivement surveiller Albertine, ce qui eût été humiliant pour moi, et doublement, puisque

[97] In the initial plan for the Albertine story (sketched in *Cahier 71 ('Dux')* in 1914), Proust envisaged a more diligent inquiry which would include using the police (III, 1654).

cela eût signifié qu'elle me cachait ses actions' (639). It is difficult for the reader to avoid the inference that, as Landy observes, the protagonist's spies are never intended to ascertain the truth in the first place, not to confirm suspicions but to allay them.[98] Whatever its motivation, [99] the ramifications of this apparent 'will to ignorance' for mind-reading (not addressed by Landy) are that one cannot take absolute proclamations of unknowability at face value, in relation to Albertine let alone all *êtres aimés* or indeed *any* other mind.

Le projet qu'Albertine avait formé (d'aller chez les Verdurin)

It is all too easy to extract the countless pronouncements by the narrator about the challenges (if not impossibility) of reading Albertine's mind and to assemble them into a bleak, admonitory compendium. But distilling expressions of pessimism ignores the cognitively penetrative workings of the narrative – the instances of mind-reading praxis which belie the despondent commentary – or the (admittedly sporadic) articulations of faith that at least some material aspects of the fugacious mind may be open even to the jealous lover. There is no better test for a nuanced view (and its limits) than the series of scenes clustered around the 'soirée Verdurin' in *La Prisonnière*, in which the increasing strain placed on their relationship by the protagonist's behaviour culminates in the most intense, lyrical expression of anguish regarding intersubjectivity[100] and the departure of Albertine. This section will therefore investigate more closely the following selection of scenes: the protagonist's discovery of Albertine's plan to visit Mme Verdurin, together with the consequences of his persuading her not to do so (III, 595-620 and III, 626, 650-671); and,

[98] *Philosophy as Fiction*, 96-97.

[99] Richard Moran, building on Landy's work, dissects the motivation as part of a thematics of epistemological self-defeat which equates knowledge with possession and in which the jealous lover's desire to avoid a painful truth produces a determination to avoid certainty: 'The Pursuit of Uncertainty: Knowledge, Deferral, and Self-Defeat in Proust', in *The Proustian Mind*, 120-146.

[100] See the discussion of the 'enveloppe close' passage in **Chapter 1**.

the set-to upon his return from the *soirée Verdurin* (III, 834-872), along with the further confrontation regarding Mlle Vinteuil (III, 896-904).

(i) Plan to visit Mme Verdurin

The evening that Albertine evinces an intention to visit Mme Verdurin marks the beginning of an episode as significant as the mother's denial of the goodnight kiss, not merely because it involves the withholding of the 'baiser habituel' but because the narrator uses it to provide a concrete illustration of the potentially overwhelming difficulties that he fears in seeking to determine the truth about her activities. Without her having to say a word and before she has even taken off her hat, the protagonist reads in Albertine's demeanour a 'désir inconnu, rétif, acharné, indomptable' to carry out 'quelque projet' the next day that she wishes to conceal (III, 595).

The primacy given to Albertine's demeanour over utterance as a guide to her intentions is conveyed by the precedence that it is given in the narrator's account of that evening and the sheer volume of commentary that he attaches to his initial impression before reporting (3 pages later) the first of a handful of short statements that she makes that evening: '«Il serait possible que j'aille demain chez les Verdurin, je ne sais pas du tout si j'irai, je n'en ai guère envie»' (III, 598). Albertine's announcement, couched in terms which diminish the prospect of the planned visit happening from mere possibility to improbability and appear designed to marginalize its importance, serves as the trigger for an eloquent encapsulation of the protagonist's hermeneutics of verbal distrust:

> moi qui pendant tant d'années n'avais cherché la vie et la pensée réelles des gens que dans l'énoncé direct qu'ils m'en fournissaient volontairement, par leur faute j'en étais arrivé à ne plus attacher, au contraire, d'importance qu'aux témoignages qui ne sont pas une expression rationnelle et analytique de la vérité; les paroles elles-mêmes ne me renseignaient qu'à la condition d'être interprétées à la façon d'un afflux de sang à la figure d'une personne qui se trouble, à la façon encore d'un silence subit. (III, 596)

Confession would provide a sure basis for knowledge of Albertine's thoughts, plans and activities. But, in a marked change in their relations following the 'danse contre seins', her cautious reserve in the face of his eagerness to uncover her secrets means that it is the one thing she can be counted on to avoid (III, 566). As for those 'aveux' that she does make, they are either false misrepresentations of a reality that she attempts to depict in innocent terms but are denounced by her tone as lies (III, 567), misdirection (III, 599), even pure invention (III, 696-697) or, at best, the most exiguous admissions of the truth. The laconic nature of any truthful statements creates 'de grands intervalles tout en blanc' about her past (III, 605) that leave him feeling little better off than the lies. Short of eliciting a satisfactory confession or catching her in some culpable act, the task of uncovering Albertine's activities is both complicated and advanced by his distrust of *voluntary* utterance, demeanour and gesture, requiring him to seek probative circumstantial evidence in the *involuntary*, irrational phenomena that he prizes as 'aussi décisives qu'un flagrant délit' (III, 659).

In this instance, what the protagonist gleans from Albertine's micro-behaviour – the 'air négligent' and 'hésitation apparente' that she adopts to describe her potential visit to Mme Verdurin – is an attempt to downplay its importance and slip it by him. Her 'ton dubitatif', something he recognizes as a habitual telltale of firm plans that she has formed, unwittingly switches the modality of her disclosure from improbability to absolute certainty. Her true intention is, therefore, the inverse of what she announces. Read *à rebours*, the statement '«Il serait possible que j'aille demain chez les Verdurin, je ne sais pas du tout si j'irai, je n'en ai guère envie»' is decoded as '«*J'irai demain chez les Verdurin, c'est absolument certain, car j'y attache une extrême importance*»' (III, 598) (emphasis added). The attempt to ascertain whether her plan involves some act of betrayal involves a painstaking reconstruction of the scene even as it continues to unfold, requiring him to recall:

> si elle avait dit ceci ou cela, de quel air, à quel moment, en réponse de quelles paroles, de reconstituer toute la scène de son dialogue avec moi, à quel moment elle avait voulu aller chez les Verdurin, quel mot de moi avait donné à son visage l'air fâché. (III, 603)

That her plan involves the satisfaction of same-sex desire is suggested by the use of astronomical imagery (associated with Gomorrah in the casino scenes) to figure what he sees in her eyes ('j'en voyais jaillir des étincelles'), but it lacks specificity. The scene provokes an extended discussion of the frustrations presented by the *être de fuite*, whose eyes disclose what is desired, but not with whom, and with which '[l]e champ infini des possibles s'étend' (III, 600). Without a confession, the details are not readily available and the scope for speculation is boundless.

The scene reveals that not all testimony is to be distrusted, however, especially where there is no time for dissimulation. In an impromptu phone call to Andrée, the protagonist obtains simple verbal confirmation that Albertine's plan is concrete, but it is her involuntary expression of annoyance and fear ('«Ah!»'), in response to his bluff that he will accompany them, which provides the more important confirmation that the planned visit to Mme Verdurin involves something from which he must be excluded (III, 609). In turn, Albertine's expression of shock at his mention of the call, by its very emotional excess, provides unreflective involuntary corroboration that such a plan has been made, something only compounded by her pre-emptive admission that they had met Mme Verdurin. Albertine's explicit abandonment of the plan, in response to the bluff, confirms to him, inferentially, that it involves the satisfaction of a desire that must be concealed (III, 614). But, just as the general knowledge that Albertine is a lesbian is inadequate to satisfy a compulsive curiosity driven by sexual jealousy, the revelation that the planned visit is intended to fulfil some unspoken desire is insufficiently fact-specific. What he wants at this stage are details ('les faits particuliers' (III, 596)) of her infidelity, but instead he is left feeling that 'une partie de la vie d'Albertine m'échappait' (III, 614), though he does not ask

Albertine a single question about what she planned to do at Mme Verdurin's and, when she unwittingly reveals that she had lied in Balbec about the 'dame d'Infreville', he does not follow up: 'Je ne lui rappelai pas son mensonge' (III, 616-617).

The details of Albertine's plan are not therefore elicited during this encounter, though at least some are discovered later. In the meantime, the scene raises the question of what information would satisfy the protagonist's factual inquiry. The answer, given at the centre of the scene in an observation which echoes Swann (I, 340), has monumental implications for the goal set for mind-reading:

> Et je comprenais l'impossibilité où se heurte l'amour. Nous nous imaginons qu'il a pour objet un être qui peut être couché devant nous, enfermé dans un corps. Hélas! Il est l'extension de cet être à tous les points de l'espace et du temps que cet être a occupés et occupera. Si nous ne possédons pas son contact avec tel lieu, avec telle heure, nous ne le possédons pas. Or nous ne pouvons toucher tous ces points. Si encore ils nous étaient désignés, peut-être pourrions-nous nous étendre jusqu'à eux. Mais nous tâtonnons sans les retrouver. (III, 607-608)

The inquiry does not occur in a vacuum; it is driven by a sexual jealousy which requires *total* possession (IV, 79), itself demanding *total* knowledge and allowing no room for doubt (III, 608). Any epistemological limitation implies a limit to the protagonist's power over Albertine and, like Swann with Odette, the relationship is Hegelian in its struggle for mastery. What he seeks is, therefore, an omniscience of the sort only found in the likes of Balzac (or granted to the narrator of *Un amour de Swann*) – that of a 'narrateur informé' (IV, 131), a well-informed third party able to reel off a list of Albertine's lovers, as Charlus lists those of Odette, with 'la précision de l'histoire' (III, 803-804). In this sense, the Albertine episode demonstrates and expounds, over and again, the proposition stated by the narrator in Proust's favourite George Eliot novel, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860): 'Jealousy is

never satisfied with anything short of an omniscience that would detect the subtlest fold of the heart'.[101]

According to this metric, the issue is not so much that Albertine is unknowable, as that she is not denuded of *all* mystery, and that, 'en explorant une parcelle de la grande zone qui s'étendait autour de [lui]', the protagonist feels that he has succeeded only in pushing back the boundary of (but not eliminating) the unknown, elevated to the status of the unknowable: 'recul[ant] cet inconnaissable qu'est pour nous, quand nous cherchons effectivement à nous la représenter, la vie réelle d'une autre personne' (III, 570). It is the unknown that exercises the protagonist in disproportion to the knowable: like Charlus with Morel, once suspicion arises, 'il n'[a] plus un moment de calme, tant le nombre est grand, en effet, des choses que nous vivons sans les connaître, et des réalités intérieures et profondes qui nous restent cachées' (III, 461), resulting in endless 'suppositions'.

Viewed in this light, the stark proposition that Albertine is 'unknowable' comes to appear, at best, highly questionable on the narrator's own analysis. First, it confuses encyclopaedic knowledge with adequate knowledge of particular thoughts or feelings, or of sufficient facts to validate one or other of the protagonist's rival hypotheses. In this respect, the problems of knowing Albertine's thoughts, plans and activities have something in common with the difficulties attending the acquisition of knowledge generally in the *Recherche*. The text calls into question whether total knowledge of *anything* is achievable (or, according to the narrator's epistemology, whether anything is 'knowable'), and leads one to question what, if any, unique epistemological problem is presented by other minds.

[101] *The Mill on the Floss* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 [1860]), 411. See Proust's letters to Simone de Caillavet, 28/29 January 1910 (*Corr.*, X, 41-44 (42)), Robert de Billy, March 1910, (*Corr.*, X, 54-56 (55)), and Lucien Daudet, 10 June 1916 (*Corr.*, XV, 168-171 (169)) and 18 February 1920 (*Corr.*, XIX, 124).

The general topic of knowledge in the *Recherche* is too broad to discuss in detail,[102] but for present purposes, the pertinent features include the following.

(1) A recurring theme in the narrator's epistemology is that inadequacies beset *all* knowledge of the external world:

> Nous n'avons de l'univers que des visions informes, fragmentées et que nous complétons par des associations d'idées arbitraires, créatrices de dangereuses suggestions. (IV, 154)

It has become trite to refer to the 'perspectivism' or 'relativism'[103] of the *Recherche*, of which there are countless examples and statements (negative, positive or mixed).[104] Perspectivism is undeniably a core feature of the narrator's *Weltanschauung* and one with epistemological significance for mind-reading since, as Duncan Large has observed, it affects not only aesthetic contemplation or narratology but cognition itself, being synonymous with the constraints upon knowledge and therefore with error.[105] And, relatedly, the workings of subjectivity distort even perceptual knowledge, since '[l]e témoignage des sens est lui aussi une opération de l'esprit où la conviction crée l'évidence' (III, 694). Such thinking formed an integral part of *fin-de-siècle* idealism[106] and, in these respects, the *Recherche* reflects the loss of confidence in absolute objectivity which had prompted

[102] Indeed, Adam Watt memorably describes the *Recherche* as constituting one 'vast and complex knowledge economy': 'Knowledge', in *The Proustian Mind*, 107-119 (107).

[103] See, for example, Ernst Robert Curtius, *Marcel Proust*, trans. by Armand Pierhal (Paris: Revue Nouvelle, 1928); Beckett, *Proust*, 11; Brian Rogers, *Proust's Narrative Techniques* (Geneva: Droz, 1965); Muller, *Les Voix narratives*; Bolle, *Marcel Proust*; Tadié, *Proust et le roman*, 34-60; Genette, 'Discours du récit', 203-224; Doubrovsky, *La Place de la Madeleine*, 197; Henry, *Proust* (1986), 201-206; Descombes, *Proust*, 47-66; Large, *Nietzsche and Proust*, 110-160.

[104] For example, 'ce n'est pas un univers, c'est des millions, presque autant qu'il existe de prunelles et d'intelligences humaines' (III, 696).

[105] *Nietzsche and Proust*, 21, 130 et seq.

[106] Schiano-Bennis, *La Renaissance de l'idéalisme*, 55-72. As Fraisse observes, the narrator's observation is in the vein of Kant and Jules Lachelier: *L'Éclectisme*, 158.

a ‘crisis’ in European thought from the end of the nineteenth century, and saw positivism eschewed by some in favour of acknowledging ‘the limitations of human knowledge and the subjective character of all cognition’.[107]

(2) These constraints induce error in *all* facets of experience ‘ne donn[ant] pas ses mille formes seulement à l’univers visible et à l’univers audible, mais à l’univers social, à l’univers sentimental, à l’univers historique, etc’ (IV, 154). More specifically, Jupien’s report of Françoise’s disparaging remark about the adolescent protagonist induces the shocking realization that this self-same limitation applies to other minds, so that:

> ce n’est pas le monde physique seul qui diffère de l’aspect sous lequel nous le voyons; que toute réalité est peut-être aussi dissemblable de celle que nous croyons percevoir directement et que nous composons à l’aide d’idées qui ne se montrent pas mais sont agissantes. (II, 366)

(3) However, while the partial, perspectival perception of an object, place or person may prevent their appreciation as ‘une chose à aspect défini’, each insight adds to knowledge of the object etc., allowing it to be ‘les cent autres choses qu’elle est tout aussi bien, puisque chacune est relative à une perspective non moins légitime’ (II, 660). In this respect, the narrator draws the analogy[108] between the effects of spatial perspective on the appearance of monuments in Venice and the various aspects of Albertine manifested over time across ‘diverses rencontres’, but it is equally applicable to the various perceptions by Swann of Odette, or by Saint-Loup of Rachel, no one of which invalidates the others. It is therefore overstating the ramifications to conclude that the protagonist is left with nothing but a

[107] Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, 2nd edn (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968; rev. edn, 1983), 124.

[108] The Leibnizian analogy comparing Albertine to a town is drawn repeatedly: e.g., II, 228; II, 660; IV, 188.

'perspectivistic collage' of Albertine (*pace* Large),[109] because this ignores both the insights of intuition which seemingly go to her core and those aspects of his mind-reading over time (at least intermittently involving a cumulative approach) which either establish material facts or might do so if pursued rather than abandoned.

(4) Conversely, *exhaustive* knowledge is unachievable in relation to anything, not merely minds, but objects, places, events:[110]

> L'inconnu de la vie des êtres est comme celui de la nature, que chaque découverte scientifique ne fait que reculer mais n'annule pas. (III, 893)

This is the very 'paradox of knowledge'.[111] As the narrator is at pains to point out time and again in his metacognitive analyses, the effect of jealousy (in its negative aspect) is to foreground and magnify the lacunae in knowledge and encourage speculation about the other's mind (IV, 100), or indeed about one's own mind and motivations (III, 850). But, while exhaustive knowledge of anything may be beyond reach, the *Recherche* does show faith that the error which pervades knowledge-acquisition (IV, 154) is capable of being corrected, something most dramatically instantiated by what Barthes calls the 'pandémie de l'inversion, du renversement'

[109] *Nietzsche and Proust*, 158.

[110] Indeed, the logic of the monadic interpretation of the *Recherche* is that other minds may merely constitute one aspect of 'the unfathomable otherness of the world': see, for example, Fülop, *Proust, the One, and the Many*, 14, 84, 133, 140, 186. In a similar vein, Edmund Wilson wrote, much earlier, that '[t]he conviction that it is impossible to know, impossible to master, the external world, permeates [the] whole book. It is reiterated on almost every page, in a thousand different connections' (*Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (London: Flamingo, 1984 [1931]), 129). His list of examples includes objects, places and 'Albertine's lies'.

[111] A.C. Grayling, *The Frontiers of Knowledge: What We Know about Science, History and the Mind* (UK: Viking, 2021), 1.

(by which, in particular, those believed heterosexual are *discovered* to be homosexual).[112]

(5) In relation to both external objects and other people, scepticism is directed to the ability to transcend one's own intelligence or subjectivity in the attempt *directly* and/or *immediately* to behold the thing-in-itself (*Das Ding an sich*).[113] A 'liséré' (comprising both cognitive and adventitious factors) separates the subject from 'un objet extérieur' just as it lies 'entre nous et les êtres', thereby precluding 'la mise en contact absolue de la réalité et de l'esprit' (I, 83 ; II, 366; IV, 553). But this does not mean the objective reality, or more specifically, the singular aspects of the other, do not exist (II, 857), or even that the mind-reader's subjective assessment may not accurately grasp them by perception or intuition (IV, 492).

(6) Despite the difficulties in reading the mind of the *femme aimée*, there are glimmers of hope that intersubjectivity may develop just like natural science, even if only to shed *some* light on the unknown:

> Devant les pensées, les actions d'une femme que nous aimons, nous sommes aussi désorientés que le pouvaient être devant les phénomènes de la nature, les premiers physiciens (*avant que la science fût constituée et eût mis un peu de lumière dans l'inconnu*). (I, 576, emphasis added).

There is, therefore, some overlap between the treatment of knowledge in the *Recherche* and Fred Dretske's argument that there is no *special* problem of other minds, in that the epistemological difficulties of a deeply sceptical nature about knowing states of mind or

[112] 'Une idée de recherche' (1971), in *Marcel Proust: Mélanges*, ed. by Bernard Comment (Paris: Seuil, 2020), 45-50 (49).

[113] This is the sense of: 'seule la perception grossière et erronée place tout dans l'objet, quand tout est dans l'esprit' (IV, 491), something Proust characterized elsewhere as the Kantian 'révolution de vision, de représentation du monde […] déplaçant le centre de la connaissance du monde dans l'âme' ('À ajouter à Flaubert', in *Essais*, 1098-1101).

thoughts based on the perception of others' behaviour and appearance have their parallels regarding perceptual knowledge of physical objects;[114] in particular, knowledge of objects is mediate and indirect, most obviously on the basis of how they *appear* to the perceiver, and acquisition of knowledge of specific mental states proceeds incrementally as does knowledge of the properties of objects and their relations inter se.

The *Recherche* makes plain, however, that there are important differences, some of which make it harder to acquire knowledge while others make it easier, and in this respect, it demonstrates that (as Avramides has argued) a perceptual model of mind-reading of the sort posited by Dretske is too simplistic insofar as it fails to acknowledge the asymmetries between the epistemological value that may be attached to the appearance of objects and that of persons.[115] While, in principle, the prism of perspective or subjectivity applies to reading minds just as it does to the perception of any other aspect of external reality, the issue is more acute when it comes to other minds not only because the mental content of the other mind represents a constantly moving target, but because (as the narrator is at pains to point out) it is not *directly* observable at least *in the same manner* as the properties of other aspects of the external world:

> une personne n'est pas, comme j'avais cru, claire et immobile devant nous avec ses qualités, ses défauts, ses projets, ses intentions à notre égard (comme un jardin qu'on regarde, avec toutes ses plates-bandes, à travers une grille), mais est une ombre où nous ne pouvons jamais pénétrer, pour laquelle il n'existe pas de connaissance directe. (II, 367)

The difficulties are made particularly evident in the case of the *femme aimée*. The Albertine episode illustrates, with even greater force than the Swann/Odette story, that mind-reading is exponentially more difficult where the other actively *resists* the lover's acquisition of

[114] 'Perception and Other Minds', *Noûs*, 7.1 (1973), 34-44.

[115] 'Perception, Reliability and Other Minds', in *Knowing Other Minds*, ed. by Anita Avramides & Matthew Parrott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 107-126.

knowledge insofar as it would conflict with her interests. In this connection, parallels with the physical world remain apposite, but only to suggest that in some respects mind-reading presents (or is felt to present) issues of a different order of magnitude:

> le monde des astres est moins difficile à connaître que les actions réelles des êtres, surtout des êtres que nous aimons, fortifiés qu'ils sont contre notre doute par des fables destinées à les protéger. (III, 696)

The difficulties are only aggravated by the self-defeating complexities involved in what Luckhurst characterizes as 'the arena of affective epistemology'.[116] Conversely, however, what external objects cannot provide is *témoignage* – utterance – or gesture, physiognomy or demeanour, which may offer at least *some* of the desired knowledge (whether voluntarily or otherwise).

The proposition that Albertine is unknowable also seems to give little weight to the protagonist's mind-reading paradox that, on the one hand, '[l]'amour […] est l'exigence d'un tout', while, on the other, '[o]n n'aime que ce qu'on ne possède pas tout entier' (III, 614). Even assuming total knowledge to be achievable, his code of amorous conduct entails that effort must be made never to achieve it. In what amounts to a tacit acknowledgement of the hopeless impossibility of the mind-reading goal that he has set, these propositions are merely reformulated and recited over and again by the narrator, without them being reconciled. As Sedgwick has observed, the protagonist's theory of mind is shown in *La Prisonnière* to be 'deeply imbricated with affect', making of mind-reading a sustained psychological torture.[117]

[116] *Science and Structure*, 202.

[117] 'Affect Theory and Theory of Mind', in *The Weather in Proust*, ed. by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 144–163 (153-154).

Moreover, while the narrator laments that, unlike the historian or judge, the jealous lover lacks the detailed or any documentary evidence from which to make findings of fact (III, 653), or to hold a properly informed confrontation with Albertine (III, 598, 898), even the possession of such evidence would not guarantee possession of an indisputable, exhaustive and objective account of the truth. In most cases, documents offer only a snapshot of the facts and one that requires interpretation: 'un simple élément d'appréciation qui se joindra à beaucoup d'autres sur lesquels s'appliquera le raisonnement' (II, 538). There is no fact which may be *known* 'sans interprétation' (IV, 493), and this applies to all human affairs, even where documented.[118]

In any case, one of the principal difficulties that bedevils the protagonist's interpretation of those facts that he does know (and those he imagines) is that he posits scenarios and motives on the basis of mere possibilities, to each of which he gives equal weight regardless of (im)plausibility, 'non d'après une probabilité' (III, 534). Implicitly, it is not therefore probability (i.e. moral certainty) which will suffice to dispel doubt and suspicion based on possibilities and prove a fact to his satisfaction, but only absolute certainty.[119] Such an approach, akin to the scepticism of Hume,[120] threatens to limit the term 'savoir' to a realm (like mathematics) where matters are known *a priori* and indubitably, or may be established *a posteriori* with scientific exactitude. Applying such a narrow conception of knowledge, and such a high degree of conviction to other minds is a recipe for unresolvable scepticism in anything but the simplest case, since total certainty will

[118] Something made even clearer in a variant of the narrator's reflections on the Dreyfus Affair (II, 1642).

[119] More than one hypothesis and conclusion may be derived from evidence based on mere possibilities. Thus, the protagonist's pursuit of knowledge foregrounds *all* three core generators of 'error possibility' that Alvin Goldman identifies as prominent in sceptical philosophy: '(1) the fallibility of our cognitive faculties, (2) the relation between the mind and the objects of cognition, and (3) the logical relation between hypothesis and evidence' (*Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 31).

[120] *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch & Sir Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978 [1739-1740]), 180-187.

nearly always be elusive.[121] However, it self-evidently involves applying an unduly exacting standard to the meaning of 'savoir'.[122] Even for the judge, the knowledge sufficient to ground a judgment is largely based upon probabilities and plausibility rather than absolute certainty.[123] It may involve abductive inference – i.e. the inference to the best explanation – to weigh and interpret circumstantial evidence (often the *only* type of evidence available), adopting the explanation of empirical data which seems the most coherent. This is also a methodology sometimes used by the detective, doctor or scientist.[124] It offers an explanation intended to be descriptively adequate, even if it is possible that it is not the true explanation.[125] In short, it may yield knowledge which is *defeasible* (in light of further information, for example), not total or irrefragable, but nonetheless excludes less plausible hypotheses and satisfies the requirement that the holistic consideration of all the available evidence leads to the irresistible conclusion of guilt.[126]

Finally, the case for the 'unknowability' of Albertine's sexuality and general infidelity is fatally undermined by the accumulation of circumstantial evidence that mounts up with increasing intensity and probative weight across the Albertine volumes. The Léa

[121] In *Reading the Other*, Rifelj rightly observes that the aim of acquiring (total) knowledge of Albertine with absolute certainty raises questions of scepticism about other minds, and is presented as doomed to failure (134). But, one may add that it is precisely because the objective is shown (and conceded) to be chimerical that assertions of her 'unknowability' must be called into question.

[122] See Wittgenstein's discussion of this point: 'If *we are using the word "to know" as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain*. – Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself.' (*Philosophical Investigations*, ed. and trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, MacMillan, 1958), Part I, §246, 89 (emphasis added)).

[123] The epistemology of legal fact-finding and the question of what it involves in terms of knowledge, belief and subjective/objective probabilities, is itself controversial, as indicated by the discussion by H.L. Ho in 'Epistemology of Legal Fact-Finding', in *A Philosophy of Evidence Law: Justice in the Search for Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85-172. However, as Ho notes, an exculpatory hypothesis which is unreasonable or 'entirely speculative and lacking in evidential support is treated in law as irrelevant, posing no obstacle to a conviction' (158).

[124] Gilbert Harman, 'The Inference to the Best Explanation', *The Philosophical Review*, 74.1 (1965), 88-95.

[125] Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (London: Routledge, 2004), 145.

[126] Douglas Walton, *Legal Argumentation and Evidence* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 119-120.

episode (III, 650-671), prelude to the confrontation which takes place after the *soirée Verdurin*, provides yet more circumstantial evidence of Albertine's sexuality and acts of infidelity, while illustrating the difficulty of eliciting specific details. Léa is the very embodiment of Gomorrah (III, 720) and every facet of the association between the two women serves to corroborate the hypothesis of guilt. Albertine's claim that Léa 'n'est pas du tout une femme comme ça' (III, 651), delivered with 'un ton de componction particulier' that the protagonist recognizes as a signal of deceit, is the first in a series of ad hoc, mutually inconsistent lies.

However, Albertine's mendacity poses two sets of interrelated attention and memory challenges for the protagonist's attempt to elicit facts. The first is synchronic, contemporaneous. When concerned with utterance, mind-reading occurs (at least initially) in real time, requiring hermeneutic adjustments to be made on the fly. As Terence Cave puts it, 'potential phonological and syntactical patterns are reinforced or discarded, reference-assignments may be updated, lexical meanings may shift, and ad hoc concepts are formed as new items in the linear auditory flow become available for processing.'[127] Albertine's slippery syntax, used to twist potentially damning testimony about potentially culpable acts with other women away from self-inculpation, severely tests the protagonist's ability to keep hold cognitively of her 'assertion première' which, in the linear auditory flow, appears to be at variance with an 'affirmation contradictoire'.[128] The relation between the two is obscured by 'brusques sautes de syntaxe', and, in the result, the significance of the earlier utterance, heard without an appreciation of its significance, passes him by (III, 659) making

[127] 'Cognitive Figures', in *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 83-105 (93).

[128] Paul de Man addresses anacoluthon, the rhetorical/syntactic label applied by analogy to Albertine's rhetorical stratagem, in *Allegories of Reading*, 289-290 (fn. 12). See also J. Hillis Miller, 'The Anacoluthonic Lie', in *Reading Narrative* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 149-157.

it difficult to ascertain the contradiction with precision. The challenge is one of attention and short-term memory leaving him 'anxieux de sa pensée vraie, de son souvenir véridique'.

The second issue is diachronic. Trying to recall whether, in Balbec, Albertine had mentioned knowing Léa, the protagonist is defeated by a deficit in his long-term memory. Memory does not record every detail of interactions with the other, and there are 'mille petits faits qui ne sont pas tombés dans cette virtualité de la mémoire' (III, 653). Central to the narrator's characterization of voluntary memory is the concept of salience and the role of attention. If it is be recalled at will, the fact must have registered as relevant at the time. If not, it will remain 'à jamais incontrôlable', and the 'rétrospective' inductions of the jealous lover faced with an evidential void. The difficulty is one which plagues his interrogations, making them liable to be thrown off course by distraction at any moment (III, 608).

(ii) Argument after the soirée Verdurin

While it is true that, as Dubois observes, Albertine is rarely seen in action and, when she is, only partially and through the eyes of the narrator,[129] the argument scene that follows the *soirée Verdurin* is powerfully dialogic, containing an uncharacteristically lengthy account of Albertine's utterance at its most (intermittently) combative and energized. The emotional and epistemological shockwaves caused by the protagonist's revelation that he has been to the Verdurins' provoke a series of verbal and behavioural responses from Albertine which more than confirm his suspicions, exposing crucial information about her sexuality, thought and feeling, as well as facts regarding her deceit and (albeit inferentially and exiguously) her sexual activity. Earlier, at the soirée, Charlus had supplied the facts that

[129] *Pour Albertine*, 12.

appear to provide the key to Albertine's plan: the 'deux demoiselles Vinteuil', whose terrible reputation the Baron declares to be 'archi-connu' (III, 799), had been due to attend a rehearsal at Mme Verdurin's that afternoon (728). This apparent explanation fits entirely with her behaviour and, though later called into question by additional information supplied by Andrée about Mme Bontemps and Octave (IV, 193-202), it forms part of the immediate context for the episode that follows.

Albertine's angrily explosive response to the news that the protagonist has been to the Verdurins – '«Je m'en doutais»' (III, 835) – is involuntarily expressive of frustration at her plans having been disrupted only for the protagonist to pursue an inquisition with those whom she was due to meet. In evidential terms, it constitutes *res gestae* (a statement made by a person so emotionally overpowered that the possibility of concoction or distortion can be disregarded) or, as the narrator describes the cognitive phenomenon elsewhere, an instance where 'parfois dans la vie, sous le coup d'une émotion exceptionnelle, on dit ce que l'on pense' (II, 796). Assisted by demeanour, the protagonist is able to reconstitute the thought behind the words, and it betrays a deep current of discontent:

> au moment où j'avais annoncé à Albertine que j'étais allé chez les Verdurin, j'avais vu se superposer à son visage une apparence d'énigmatique irritation, qui n'y affleurait pas du reste pour la première fois. Je savais bien qu'elle n'était que la cristallisation dans la chair de griefs raisonnés, d'idées claires pour l'être qui les forme et qui les tait, *synthèse devenue visible mais non plus rationnelle, et que celui qui en recueille le précieux résidu sur le visage de l'être aimé essaye à son tour, pour comprendre ce qui se passe en celui-ci, de ramener par l'analyse à ses éléments intellectuels*. L'équation approximative à cette inconnue qu'était pour moi la pensée d'Albertine m'avait à peu près donné: *«Je savais ses soupçons, j'étais sûre qu'il chercherait à les vérifier, et pour que je ne puisse pas le gêner, il a fait tout son petit travail en cachette.»* (III, 850-851, emphasis added)

As is so often the case in the *Recherche*, intellect, building on the insights of 'intuition directe', is able to achieve the purportedly impossible: withheld thought, it transpires, *is* capable of being known even if only approximately. That thought is enough to reveal not only that she suspected his sexual jealousy but at least the makings of her intention to leave

him (III, 851), vaguely intuited by the protagonist on the back of other visible or otherwise discernible manifestations including 'certains regards tristes, certaines impatiences, des phrases qui ne voulaient nullement dire cela' (848). While the credulous lover is content to live on the surface of her utterance, under the power of his 'raison compatissante' (IV, 6), the sophisticated, jealous mind-reader cannot resist modelling a darker reality (from the more granular behavioural detail) of an Albertine who is contemplating departure:

> une Albertine pourtant pas absolument inventée, puisqu'elle était comme un miroir intérieur de certains mouvements qui se produisaient chez elle, comme sa mauvaise humeur que je fusse allé chez les Verdurin. (III, 848-849)

Albertine's unprompted revelation that she expected Mlle Vinteuil to be at the soirée ('«Est-ce qu'ils ne devaient pas avoir Mlle Vinteuil?»' (III, 836)) unwittingly confirms the protagonist's suspicion that she had planned to meet her at the Verdurins earlier that day. Her utterance – converted into the positive proposition, '«*Je crois qu'ils ont Mlle Vinteuil ce soir*»' (III, 849, emphasis added) – strikes the protagonist as even more serious than her angry outburst for the corroboration that it provides of her culpability, in attempting to get ahead of an anticipated accusation and stage a cover-up (III, 864). When construed with her initial outburst, the inference is that she is angry at the subordination of the independence that she needs to conduct a life 'dirigée vers la satisfaction de son vice' (III, 864).

In the course of dialogue replete with dubious utterance, a succession of oblique confessions (made in the mistaken belief that the protagonist must already know the general facts from others) add some specifics to the damning circumstantial evidence of her sexuality and likely infidelity. She had fabricated the trip to Balbec that she is supposed to have made under the surveillance of the chauffeur, having instead spent the three days with a female friend in Auteuil (III, 836); contrary to her earlier denial, she knew Esther and with sufficient intimacy to have given her a photograph of herself (III, 845); and, worst of all,

despite having denied that very morning knowing Léa at all, she admits having concealed that she had gone on a three week trip with her (III, 852) and knowing her so well that Léa had (un)dressed in front of her and friends after a performance the previous year (III, 858).

Revealed under duress, these facts are, as he recognizes, merely representative of a potentially bottomless reservoir of incriminating evidence (III, 852) and are more than sufficient to corroborate the 'vérité pressentie'; but, he continues his pursuit of *exhaustive* knowledge that would require him to 'occuper tous les points de l'espace et du temps' (III, 859). Moreover, caught in an epistemological double bind, he will neither accept the intuition as sufficient, nor pursue the factual detail that would prove its validity beyond peradventure ('entouré de pressentiments que je n'ose approfondir' (III, 866)). Worse still, his episodic approach to evidence entails that the inquiry and speculation must be never-ending, since each relation must be interrogated in isolation from the last – as he exclaims:

> Combien de personnes, de villes, de chemins, la jalousie nous rend ainsi avides de connaître! Elle est une soif de savoir grâce à laquelle, sur des points isolés les uns des autres, nous finissons par avoir successivement toutes les notions possibles. (III, 593)

On the other side of the scales, Albertine purportedly confesses to having grossly exaggerated her relationship with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend (III, 839). Gérard Genette takes this would-be confession at face value (rendering the notion of illicit relations between Albertine and Mlle Vinteuil's friend 'pure invention').[130] But, the protagonist's surprise at this claim, which would have seismic effect if believed to be true (since it would offer an antidote to the Montjouvain/Vinteuil 'Sésame'), is so muted that it barely registers (III, 840), and he continues to (meta)represent her 'débauches' with Mlle Vinteuil (III, 894). It is plain that he does not believe it and, to the contrary, her refusal to swear that the desire to see Mlle Vinteuil and her friend had nothing to do with her desire to go the Verdurins (III, 897)

[130] 'Discours du récit', 99.

and her blushing when denying that she had 'ces relations' with Mlle Vinteuil's friend (IV, 90) are taken by the narrator as confessions of her lesbianism. Indeed, the narrator reflects that her mere desire to go to the Verdurins' ought to have provided him with '*une preuve suffisante*' (III, 898, emphasis added), if he had stopped to think about it: 'Mais je n'y avais plus assez pensé'.

Albertine's attempt to downplay her association with Mlle Vinteuil is in any case immediately eclipsed by perhaps the most obliquely revealing confession of all: her intemperate, elliptical outburst that, rather than hosting the Verdurins at a dinner, she would prefer to '[se] faire casser …' (III, 840).[131] Her emotional state is such that the higher-order brain function which ordinarily commands her utterance momentarily loses control, a confluence of involuntary verbal and micro-behavioural acts betraying her true feeling and (as interpreted by the protagonist) not only the nature of her sexuality but its lasciviousness, so powerfully that it brings tears to the protagonist's eyes. Despite the self-interruption, the protagonist is able to fill in the blanks once he has managed to 'devin[er] sa pensée' through a combination of her utterance and actions. A shrug of the shoulders and 'un regard excédé' signal her indifference to the proposal of a dinner with the Verdurins, but her deep blushing, the verbal and physical acts of self-interruption ('elle mit sa main devant sa bouche'), and her confession that what she had been about to say was 'affreusement vulgaire', lead him to the 'affreuse expression' referring to anal intercourse: 'me faire casser le pot', a phrase that even the most debased lesbian would use only with another woman in order to excuse male penetration (III, 843). Distracted, she had started to speak as if in the company of another woman, but was forced into aposiopesis when abruptly remembering whom she was

[131] The scene has been the subject of much commentary, some concerning the treatment of sexuality (for example: Sedgwick, 'Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet', 237-240; Luckhurst, *Science and Structure*, 188; Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism*, 104-108) and, more recently, language-in-use or, more specifically, loss of control over speech (Lucey, *What Proust Heard*, 152-168).

addressing, ‘rouge de honte’ (III, 843) and gesturing as if attempting to force her words back into her mouth (III, 840).[132]

It is in this scene that the ‘afflux de sang’, so central to the protagonist’s hermeneutics, acquires its most potent significance for the reading of Albertine. If those ‘grosses joues’ that so attract him to Albertine are ‘réfléchissantes comme des yeux’ (III, 583), it is because blushing plays a prominent role as an involuntary sign of her sexual shame and culpability (III, 596).[133] The blush had a clear literary pedigree, both in French libertine novels where it was associated with the presence of and offence to ‘la pudeur féminine’ and sexual shame[134] and (as acknowledged by the narrator in discussion with Albertine herself) in the works of Barbey d’Aurevilly where it acts as a physiological indicator that a moral secret is being concealed (‘une réalité cachée révélée par une trace matérielle, la rougeur physiologique’ (III, 877)) and as a sign of desire or ‘pudeur’.[135]

Albertine’s blush is taken as one of shame, not at the vulgarity of the truncated sexual argot, but at what it reveals of her sexuality. Though it is right to observe (with Brian Rogers and Liza Gabaston) that the blush connotes a concealment without *of itself* disclosing the truth, it is the context that gives the physiological response its hermeneutic heft: for, Albertine’s blush occurs in scenes where her sexuality is in issue (III, 840, 897, 898, 903; IV, 73, 180-181). It is the oblique and non-propositional nature of the physiological

[132] The sexual act in question is, as Sedgwick suggests, difficult to understand as a sign of Albertine’s lesbianism (‘Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet’, 239). However, I would suggest that it is not the act, but the unguarded reference to the act – its very utterance – that has connotative significance, for it is taken as so vulgar as only fit to be expressed by one lesbian to another.

[133] In draft variants of an earlier passage in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, more was said about the involuntarily communicative nature of Albertine’s cheeks, a ‘rougeur mystérieuse’ revealing the presence (if not the content) of thoughts, memories and desires that she would rather conceal: III, 1482. See also III, 1087-1088.

[134] Jean-Christophe Abramovici, ‘Libertinage et construction de la pudeur à l’âge classique’, in *Femmes et libertinage au XVIIIe siècle ou les Caprices de Cythère*, ed. by Anne Richardot (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 89-95 (93).

[135] See Gabaston, *Le Langage du corps*, 99-117; Rogers, *Proust et Barbey d’Aurevilly*, 159-177.

response which both acts as contextual confession of guilt and preservation of (factual) secret, capable of satisfying the protagonist's intuition if not his *intelligence*. In assigning such significance to the blush, Proust was reflecting not only a literary convention but the more recent thinking of philosophers and natural scientists. For example, writing in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1893, Camille Mélinand argued that the other's attention is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the blush, demonstrating that the essential psychological factor is 'le sentiment que quelque chose de secret va être dévoilé'.[136] As for the general nature of that secret, some twenty years earlier, in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin had famously singled out blushing as the 'most peculiar and most human of all expressions', highlighting its involuntariness and attributing it, physiologically, to the effect of the other's attention and a mental state of shame (or guilt).[137]

While unable (due to a lacuna in his memory) to establish whether the first evidence of the link between Albertine's blushing and her same-sex desire could have been when, at Balbec, he had forcefully expressed his disgust for 'ce genre de mœurs' (IV, 91), the link becomes firmly established by his contextual readings of her. In the result, by the time of the analeptic account in *Albertine disparue*, the narrator is confident that her blushing 'confesses' the relations with Mlle Vinteuil's friend that she swears not to have indulged in (IV, 90) (though the narrator later questions whether there was an innocent explanation, involving Octave (IV, 201)). If confirmation were required that this is the appropriate (general) cipher, it is provided by Andrée's revelation that, at the mere mention of

[136] 'Pourquoi rougit-on? Étude sur la cause psychologique de la rougeur', *Revue des deux mondes*, 119.3 (1893), 631-646 (645).

[137] *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. by Francis Darwin, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890, repr. 2009), Chapter XIII, 328-367 (first published in 1872).

'seringas', Albertine would blush deeply at the reminder of the incident where they were almost caught *in flagrante* (IV, 181).

Drawing on a further, long-standing literary practice for the representation of sexual shame, this time at the rhetorical level of the text, Albertine's self-interruption is recorded with ellipsis, a figure used not only to denote a thought incompletely expressed or a secret suppressed,[138] but substitution for sexual content.[139] As Julien Rault explains, though originating in the theatre of the seventeenth century, ellipsis came into prominence with the libertine novels of authors such as Crébillon fils, Mirabeau and Sade, used as 'un ponctuant palimpseste' to signify (amongst other things) the transgressive, erotic and sexual.[140] Ellipsis is therefore the textual equivalent (in the reporting of direct speech) of a blush. In this instance, it signifies Albertine's refusal to express her female homoeroticism out loud, in a verbal act that leaves her lesbianism both textually revealed and unsaid.

3. 'L'envers des prunelles tristes et soumises': her intention to leave

The protagonist's focus switches to the ramifications of Albertine's outburst, attempting to detect and snuff out any intention that she may have to leave him with a 'comédie de rupture' (III, 843-862). What he believes to be true ('la vérité subjective') is, at the time, clouded both as regards her intentions and his own: what even the mature narrator finds difficult to determine is whether he had correctly intuited her intention to leave him or, instead, placed an otherwise contented Albertine on such a course (III, 850). Both hypotheses are maintained as he attempts to understand 'le véritable état d'esprit

[138] See, for example, Michael Hawcroft, 'Points de suspension chez Racine: enjeux dramatiques, enjeux éditoriaux', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 106.2 (2006), 307-335 (313).

[139] For a discussion of such usage in Restoration French literature, see Andrew Counter, *The Amorous Restoration: Love, Sex, and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16.

[140] 'Le Point de suspension, idéogramme libertin du XVIII[e] siècle', *Linx*, 75 (2017), 57-76.

d'Albertine', that which relies on her demeanour and that which relies on her words, but the equivocation ('Laquelle des deux hypothèses était la vraie?' (863)) is one which side-lines his own hermeneutical code of privileging the involuntary. Mounting behavioural evidence suggests to the protagonist that she is planning to leave him: 'certains mécontentements mystérieux, […] certaines paroles, certains gestes, dont cette idée [de mauvaise liberté] était la seule explication possible' (III, 865) (see also: III, 894; IV, 7, 11-12, 18). Discernible signs indicating an intention to leave him are eclipsed by her verbal assurances, not because they are convincing but because it suits the protagonist to believe that she would tell him if she intended to leave. His desire predisposes him to believe her reassuring words of contentment, just as his jealousy corrupts his instinct into finding evidence of 'les vices d'Albertine' at every turn (III, 869-870).

Once again, it is the job of sudden and intense pain, a 'blessure' (IV, 3) – brought about by her abrupt departure – to provide an epistemological jolt, and leap forward. It appears almost overwhelmingly to confirm the truth intuited in the second hypothesis and to open his eyes, finally, to the cumulative weight of evidence about her sexuality, infidelity and intention to leave:

> Or je sentais bien que c'était l'autre hypothèse qui n'avait jamais cessé d'être vérifiée. Sans doute, cette deuxième hypothèse n'aurait jamais été assez hardie pour formuler expressément qu'Albertine eût pu être liée avec Mlle Vinteuil et son amie. Et pourtant, quand j'avais été submergé par l'envahissement de cette nouvelle terrible, au moment où nous entrions en gare d'Incarville, c'était la seconde hypothèse qui s'était trouvée vérifiée. Celle-ci n'avait pas ensuite conçu jamais qu'Albertine pût me quitter d'elle-même, de cette façon, sans me prévenir et me donner le temps de l'en empêcher. Mais tout de même *si après le nouveau bond immense que la vie venait de me faire faire, la réalité qui s'imposait à moi m'était aussi nouvelle que celle en face de quoi nous mettent la découverte d'un physicien, les enquêtes d'un juge d'instruction ou les trouvailles d'un historien sur les dessous d'un crime ou d'une révolution, cette réalité dépassait les chétives prévisions de ma deuxième hypothèse, mais pourtant les accomplissait*. (IV, 6-7, emphasis added)

The mind-reader's discoveries, though arriving via sense data and intuition ('appris' not 'par le raisonnement mais par des puissances autres' (IV, 7)), are given not merely

emotional or impressionistic but epistemological weight by placing them on an equal footing with those of a triumvirate of professional, objective fact-finders: the scientist (doctor), the *juge d'instruction*, the historian.

4. 'Ces plaisirs d'Albertine': *Qualia*

The 1989 Pléiade version of '*Albertine disparue*' sees the 'innocent' hypothesis about Albertine's sexuality and (in)fidelity contradicted by increasingly potent and direct accounts of her licentious, homosexual activities that progress from the threadbare circumstantial report from Saint-Loup of his surveillance in Touraine (IV, 56), to the graphic double hearsay reports from Aimé of ongoing betrayals gleaned from the 'doucheuse' (IV, 98) and 'la petite blanchisseuse' (IV, 105-106), and finally, the 'aveux' by Andrée of not only her own lesbianism and relations with Mlle Vinteuil (IV, 127) but treacherous sexual relations with Albertine, and her hearsay account of Albertine's debauched arrangements with Morel and her 'folie criminelle' (IV, 180).[141] These accounts provide 'faits particuliers' of the sort that the protagonist had so desperately both desired and feared while Albertine was alive, and force him to recognize the self-deception that had enabled that hypothesis to survive despite its increasing implausibility. Knowledge of her 'guilt' (via evidence confirming his suspicions) had hitherto been scotomized, suppressed by a denial mechanism driven by a 'croyance préservatrice' biased in favour of her innocence, but receipt of Aimé's letter leaves the belief in tatters:

> je compris que si je n'avais pas jusque-là souffert trop cruellement de mes doutes sur la vertu d'Albertine, c'est qu'en réalité ce n'était nullement des doutes. Mon bonheur, ma vie avaient besoin qu'Albertine fût vertueuse, ils avaient posé une fois pour toutes qu'elle

[141] Andrée speculates that this 'folie criminelle' may even have led Albertine to commit suicide. Such a negative spiral, through debauchery to death, was a recognizable feature of other fictional depictions of lesbians. See Gretchen Schultz's account of French nineteenth-century lesbian literature, '*La Rage du plaisir et la rage de la douleur*: Lesbian Pleasure and Suffering in Fin-de-siècle French Literature and Sexology' (in *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Evans & Kate Griffiths (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 175-186), focusing on Catulle Mendès' *Méphistophéla*. Associating Albertine with such a trope is a further signal, albeit by Proust rather than the narrator per se, of her true sexuality.

> l'était. Muni de cette croyance préservatrice, je pouvais sans danger laisser mon esprit jouer tristement avec des suppositions auxquelles il donnait une forme mais n'ajoutait pas foi. Je me disais: «Elle aime peut-être les femmes», comme on se dit: «Je peux mourir ce soir»; on se le dit, mais on ne le croit pas, on fait des projets pour le lendemain. C'est ce qui explique que me croyant à tort incertain si Albertine aimait ou non les femmes, et par conséquent qu'un fait coupable à l'actif d'Albertine ne m'apporterait rien que je n'eusse souvent envisagé, j'aie pu éprouver devant les images, insignifiantes pour d'autres, que m'évoquait la lettre d'Aimé, une souffrance inattendue. (IV, 95-96)

With each 'incriminating' account of specific facts, the protagonist's instinct is nonetheless to undermine its authenticity or accuracy by seeking to discredit the credibility and reliability of its sources, in order 'peu à peu à me défaire de la douloureuse certitude que je m'étais donné tant de mal à acquérir' (IV, 102). In each case (Saint-Loup, the *doucheuse*, Aimé, Andrée), the basis for doing so is too generalized, indirect and flimsy to diminish the weight of the evidence and its (cumulative) impact on the protagonist, and now it is 'la certitude de sa culpabilité' that moves into the ascendant, eclipsing vestigial doubts (IV, 116-117). The epistemological refrain, 'je ne saurai jamais', has been stretched beyond reasonable bounds on the questions whether she was a lesbian and indulged in same-sex relations, something made explicit in a draft in *Cahier 54*.[142]

In the face of these accounts of her active lesbianism, the focus of the protagonist's inquiry gradually moves therefore to the last remaining aspect of Albertine that retains an element of true love-sustaining mystery, her *qualia*. The key issue now becomes a composite epistemological and ontological 'question d'essence'.[143] He is forced to shift his target from the factual to the qualitative (IV, 107): more specifically, to know not only 'avec quelle femme elle avait passé cette nuit-là, mais quel plaisir particulier cela lui représentait, ce qui se passait à ce moment-là en elle' (IV, 125). Bersani summarizes the protagonist's

[142] *Cahier 54 ('Vénusté')*, fol. 37^{v}, BnF, NAF 16694 ('Peut'être trouvera-t-on que les faits que j'avais appris suffisaient et que l'enquête pouvait être close. Mais j'espérais toujours que ceux qui lui étaient défavorables pouvaient être suspectés et que les autres lui donneraient raison').

[143] i.e. 'en son fond qu'était-elle, à quoi pensait-elle, qu'aimait-elle, me mentait-elle, ma vie avec elle avait-elle été aussi lamentable que celle de Swann avec Odette?' (IV, 97-98)

mind-reading predicament crisply: 'lesbianism is a relation of sameness which Marcel is condemned to see as an irreducibly unknowable otherness. He shares Albertine's love for women, but not her point of view'.[144]

While there is an element of voyeurism within his desire to read Albertine qualitatively (IV, 135-136), its psychological roots are more profound. Lesbian desire is something that he will never be able to satisfy but yearns to understand from within and, in a sense, to share. The motivation is clear: to be able to determine what sensations satisfy Albertine's desire and, though not able to provide them himself, at least to understand what they represent for her 'other' than him, 'par leur configuration, leur image, leurs façons' (IV, 126).[145] Knowledge is once more sought as a means of mastery, since comprehension is a prerequisite to possession (IV, 132) and all his other inquiries therefore become tributary to this overriding epistemic objective:

> Toutes les curiosités que j'avais eues autrefois de sa vie quand je ne la connaissais encore que de vue, et d'autre part tous mes désirs de la vie se confondaient en *cette seule curiosité, la manière dont Albertine éprouvait du plaisir, la voir avec d'autres femmes, peut-être parce qu'ainsi, elles parties, je serais resté seul avec elle, le dernier et le maître*. (IV, 135-136, emphasis added)

However, knowledge of the other always derives from what is externalized; it is not the very knowledge that the other herself possesses of her thoughts and feelings (or her experience of them), but must instead be derived intuitively or inferentially and egocentrically from his own, and in this sense, 'il n'est de connaissance […] que de soi-même' (III, 887). *Qualia* are not accessible, the narrator suggests, from Albertine's acts or utterance, which constitute mere 'abréviations quasi algébriques', offering nothing of the

[144] 'Death and Literary Authority', 24.

[145] For Silverman, in a reading predicated on his love for Albertine deriving from the possibility of entertaining *a same-sex* relationship with her, the protagonist's concern is rather that, in order 'to establish a same-sex relationship with Albertine, the threat posed by his own anatomical otherness must somehow be neutralized' ('A Woman's Soul Enclosed in a Man's Body', 384).

qualitative experience (IV, 109). In a passage that shows Proust concerned with the very process of simulation mind-reading, its complications and its limits, the narrator says:

> Quelquefois à Balbec, Françoise était allée la chercher, m'avait dit l'avoir trouvée penchée à sa fenêtre, l'air inquiet, chercheur, comme si elle attendait quelqu'un. Mettons que j'apprisse que la jeune fille attendue était Andrée, quel était l'état d'esprit dans lequel Albertine l'attendait, cet état d'esprit caché derrière le regard inquiet et chercheur? Ce goût, quelle importance avait-il pour Albertine, quelle place tenait-il dans ses préoccupations? Hélas, *en me rappelant mes propres agitations chaque fois que j'avais remarqué une jeune fille qui me plaisait, quelquefois seulement quand j'avais entendu parler d'elle sans l'avoir vue, mon souci de me faire beau, d'être avantagé, mes sueurs froides, je n'avais pour me torturer qu'à imaginer ce même voluptueux émoi chez Albertine* […] Mais l'importance même que ce désir devait avoir pour elle et les réserves qui se formaient autour de lui ne pouvaient pas me révéler ce que, qualitativement, il était, bien plus, comment elle le qualifiait quand elle s'en parlait à elle-même. (IV, 125-126, emphasis added)

In yielding its inductive interpretation of the signs, the simulation model necessarily contains a significant limitation; in the mind-reading equation, 'l'observation compte peu' (III, 887) because one draws on one's own experience to model what is in the other's mind. Knowledge of other minds is necessarily grounded in and takes the form of one's own experience of (for example) pleasure. As the narrator reflects in the earlier Bois de Boulogne episode with Albertine, such knowledge involves an egocentric bias (III, 887), something intrinsic to 'projective' knowing,[146] though the protagonist's continuous meta-examination of that very bias (and the other forms of presumption at work in his imputation of thoughts and feelings to others) often operates as a heuristic to calibrate his reading, even if only after initial error. While the projection of the protagonist's own heterosexual desires gives him some *approximation* of her same-sex desires (IV, 98), it cannot replicate her experience qualitatively *from within*. Nor does his position as voyeur observing the sexual intimacy of two 'blanchisseuses' give him any better insight.

[146] See Raymond Nickerson, 'The Projective Way of Knowing: A Useful Heuristic That Sometimes Misleads', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10.5 (2001), 168-172 (citing John O'Mahony, 'Knowing Others through the Self – Influence of Self-Perception on Perception of Others: A Review', *Current Psychological Research & Reviews*, 3.4 (1984), 48-62).

Finally, with the fading of love and loss of desire comes the crumbling of the *croyance préservatrice*, and recognition that his judgement had been compromised by a will *not* to know, his conviction of Albertine's 'culpabilité' and 'vice' displaced by credulous belief in her innocence:

> À tant de preuves qui corroboraient ma version première, j'avais stupidement préféré de simples affirmations d'Albertine. Pourquoi l'avoir crue? […] J'avais d'abord cru Albertine coupable, et seul *mon désir employant à une œuvre de doute les forces de mon intelligence m'avait fait faire fausse route*. […] S'il faut le dire, si triste malgré tout que je fusse des paroles d'Andrée, *je trouvais plus beau que la réalité se trouvât enfin concorder avec ce que mon instinct avait d'abord pressenti, plutôt qu'avec le misérable optimisme auquel j'avais lâchement cédé par la suite. J'aimais mieux que la vie fût à la hauteur de nos intuitions.* (IV, 189, emphasis added)

The fault-line opens up clearly between the protagonist's sadness and pessimism about the substance of what he was able to read intuitively in Albertine – a mental reality falling far short of conventional romantic love (let alone his more extreme variant) – and his contentment that his intuitions should prove to be *verified*.

Though Andrée's testimony calls into question the true nature of Albertine's motives for wanting to visit Mme Verdurin's and for leaving him, so that an element of doubt creeps back in regarding the factual details,[147] her confession of 'relations avec Albertine' is difficult to explain away (IV, 202) even if exaggerated, especially in the case of the *seringas* incident (180). The narrator's final reservation – 'sur Albertine étais-je *sûr* de savoir *quelque chose*?' (IV, 228, emphasis added) – is one that appears to treat anything less than total knowledge (with absolute certainty) as no knowledge; yet, on the basis of what the protagonist does know, Albertine is, in Venice, the yardstick of the 'femme qui aime les femmes' even if the exhaustive detail of her acts and qualitative nature of her desire remain beyond reach. Thus, despite the rather anaemic seeds of doubt, even the Albertine episode

[147] 'Combien peu d'ailleurs, je savais, je saurais jamais de cette histoire d'Albertine' (IV, 193); 'quel rideau […] épais […] est tiré entre les actions d'elle que nous voyons et ses mobiles!' (IV, 197); 'combien il est difficile de savoir la vérité dans la vie' (IV, 199).

discloses the familiar movement from error to truth, something that Proust appears to confirm in correspondence:

> le mouvement de vie qui fait qu'on ne connaît dans mes livres les personnages que comme on le fait dans la vie, c'est-à-dire qu'on se trompe d'abord sur eux, mouvement au cours duquel une autre révolution s'accomplit, celle du personnage autour de lui-même. Le personnage qui dit «je» […] se trompe du tout au tout pendant deux volumes sur M. de Charlus, *sur Albertine*, sur M[e] de Villeparisis […] Mais les personnages eux-mêmes vont en s'aggravant, en déviant parfois tout à fait.[148] (emphasis added)

5. Albertine inachevée: the 1986 manuscript

Thus far, the analysis has focused on the Albertine episode as it appears in the Pléiade edition, including the version of *Albertine disparue* published in 1989. However, some consideration of its evolution is warranted for two related reasons. First, the changes made by Proust to his manuscripts after publication of the first volume in 1913 shed light on a deliberate authorial complication of the protagonist's attempts to read Albertine. Secondly, it is well-established that the Pléiade edition cannot be taken to represent the final form of the volumes remaining unpublished at the time of his death, and that he may have intended to publish a radically abbreviated version of *Albertine disparue*. This has implications for the mind-reading endeavour.

(i) Manuscripts 'au net', typescripts, proofs held by the Bibliothèque Nationale[149]

The early pioneer of genetic Proustian criticism, Albert Feuillerat, famously characterized the changes to the shape and style of the *Recherche* (after 1913) which

[148] Letter to the critic Jean de Pierrefeu, shortly after 15 January 1920, *Corr.*, XIX, 73-81 (78). In this letter, Proust sought to rebut the claim made by Pierrefeu in the *Journal des Débats* (2-3 Jan 1920) that his originality 'réside en ceci qu'il s'est évadé de la vision du sens commun pour se réfugier dans la contemplation subjective pure' (quoted in a note to the letter: ibid., 80 (fn. 18)). Proust's pointed response was that, in his novels, 'l'analyse psychologique y aboutit toujours à la vérité objective' (ibid., 77).

[149] Excluding the annotated typescript of *Albertine disparue* found in 1986.

resulted from the vast expansion of the Albertine episode and of the story of Charlus's 'vice' as 'deux énormes excroissances' attributing such importance to homosexuality that it comes to dominate the novel.[150] However, while it is undeniably the case that the changes put Charlus's homosexuality beyond doubt, the question is whether they tend to clarify or obscure (amongst other things) the sexuality of Albertine. Lesbianism was, of course, always bound to play an important role in the novel, as presaged by the narrator's vatic comment about the Montjouvain scene (I, 157). That comment was an addition to the novel made by Proust in Summer–Autumn 1913, and appears to mark the point at which he had decided to introduce lesbianism, including the 'danse contre seins' which was mentioned in *Cahier 13* at this time.[151] Anthony Pugh remarks that the idea of linking Albertine and Mlle Vinteuil came to Proust in time for him to add to the last proofs of *Du côté de chez Swann* the allusion to the importance that Montjouvain will have for the protagonist later in his life.[152]

The broader genesis of the *Recherche* is marked by two opposing forces so far as concerns Albertine's sexuality, infidelity and duplicity, as is clear from Alison Finch's meticulous examination of the *additions* to the novel (between 1914 and 1922). On the one hand, Proust added much material designed to elaborate and thicken the enigmas surrounding her character and behaviour (some of which were potentially exculpatory).[153]

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[150] *Comment Proust a composé son roman*, 256. For the powerful view that the Albertine episode fulfils, draws together and develops plans to introduce a new female character and develop the theme of lesbianism already in place as at 1913 (though the actual sketching of the 'roman d'Albertine' probably dates from around spring 1914, in *Cahiers 54* and *71*), see, for example, Antoine Compagnon, 'Ce qu'on ne peut plus dire de Proust', *Littérature*, 88.4 (1992), 54-61 (57-58). See also the compendious account given by Christine Cano in *Proust's Deadline* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 59-82, and the detailed account given by Anthony Pugh in *The Growth of À la recherche du temps perdu*, II, 750-769.

[151] See Compagnon's 'Notice' to *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (III, 1236-1237), and Compagnon, 'Ce qu'on ne peut plus dire de Proust', 57-58.

[152] *The Growth of À la recherche du temps perdu*, 750.

[153] Alison Finch (formerly Winton), *Proust's Additions: The Making of 'À la recherche du temps perdu'*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), I, 43, 45-48, 52-53, 63, 210-213, 267-283.

On the other, many additions comprised further instances of lying (or conduct more obliquely suggestive of guilt), 'suspicious incidents' involving other young women, and other 'apparent proofs' of Albertine's lesbianism.[154]

However, as I have sought to show above, much of the difficulty stems from the protagonist's own forensic inertia and other shortcomings, his unrealistic standard of proof, and his reluctance to learn the truth. These entail that what is often taken to be the key aspect of Albertine's 'unknowability' appears answerable with reference to the cumulative weight of the incriminating evidence and to the relative paucity of countervailing exculpatory evidence. This analysis appears, if anything, to be supported by Finch's work which makes plain that, while Proust sought to increase the uncertainty and ambiguity regarding specifics, the additions tending to incriminate Albertine tip the balance in favour of 'guilt' more than the original manuscript draft, both by enhancing the general atmosphere of duplicity and conspiracy, and by adding instances of potentially culpable conduct while only supplying 'a small minority of neutralising explanations'.[155] Finch's conclusion about the relevant additions is that: 'the least one can say is that Proust wishes to bring a fundamental ambiguity into greater prominence'.[156] I would go further by suggesting that the additions involve such an accumulation of incriminating evidence in favour of the protagonist's intuitive judgment against Albertine that his 'innocent' alternative hypothesis would become stretched to the point of straining to keep ambivalence alive. The intensity of the psychological drama to which this inner conflict gives rise could only be sustained by avoiding recourse to direct evidence of the sort provided in the case of Charlus, and, therefore, there is only circumstantial evidence, but the preponderance of that evidence

[154] *Proust's Additions*, 45, 213, 254, 267-283.

[155] Ibid., 276.

[156] Ibid., 284.

strongly suggests guilt and corroboration of 'la vérité pressentie', while a negligible amount is consistent with 'innocence'.

(ii) Albertine inachevée: la dactylographie disparue/retrouvée

However, the version of the novel containing all such additions may not represent what Proust would ultimately have published if he had survived. The text of *Albertine disparue* published in the Pléiade edition of 1989 may be traced to a number of Proust's cahiers of the manuscript 'au net'. However, the route to publication in that form was far from straightforward. The first edition, published in 1925 and entitled *Albertine disparue*, was based largely on a typescript found in 1924 (rather than the 'cahiers'), which had been posthumously corrected by Robert Proust, and by Jacques Rivière and Jean Paulhan (of the publishers, *Nouvelle Revue Française*).[157] The subsequent Pléiade edition of 1954, published under the title *La Fugitive*, was instead based on Proust's manuscript 'au net'. But, for the 1989 Pléiade version, the editors took an approach which combined those adopted for the two earlier editions, largely using the 1924 typescript for the first three chapters and the manuscript 'au net' for the fourth.[158] The belated discovery, in 1986, of the original typescript of *Albertine disparue* as revised and annotated by Proust just days before he died only complicated matters, but, in view of the dramatic changes that it made to the earlier draft, the editors of the 1989 Pléiade edition used it principally as variant(s).[159]

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[157] IV, 1040. See Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, 'Les Mirages du double. *Albertine disparue* selon la Pléiade (1989)', *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 40 (1990), 117-153 (118), and *Proust inachevé. Le dossier «Albertine disparue»* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 217.

[158] IV, 1041.

[159] For a detailed attempt at reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding Proust's annotation of the manuscript, see Mauriac Dyer, *Proust inachevé*. Note that Robert Proust, who led the monumental task of originally editing the text, was aware of the revised manuscript but chose not to adopt the revisions wholesale (including the extended deletions) – he did, however, adopt the title *Albertine disparue* and some of the textual changes made by the author.

The revised (1986) text has implications not only at the macro level for the intended arrangement and content of the volumes remaining unpublished as at November 1922, but, more pertinently, at the micro level for the detail and conclusion of the Albertine episode. For, one of the principal editorial changes was the brutal excision or crossing out of some two thirds of the draft volume,[160] including a large number of passages concerning the investigations and ruminations regarding Albertine's sexuality and betrayals. All that remains of the Albertine episode in this volume is her escape, the attempts to bring her back, her death, the beginnings of grief, and the gradual sinking of love and jealous passion into forgetting and indifference.

The lack of clarity regarding Proust's authorial intention prevents a definite conclusion being reached as to whether the abbreviated and revised text represented what Proust intended to be the final or substantially final text of '*Albertine disparue*',[161] whether the deleted material was part of '*un couper-coller qui s'est interrompu*',[162] or, one might add, whether materially different text may subsequently have been written. The various theories advanced by the critics are susceptible to a degree of overlap and are, at least pending any further serendipitous discoveries, impossible to validate, though the argument

[160] 250 pages were 'ôtées' [corresponding to IV, 67-202] and a further 44 [IV, 235-272] crossed out. See also Proust's editorial injunction to Céleste Albaret (itself only found in 1990) concerning the annotated typescript: 'Barrez tout (sauf ce que nous avons laissé dans *Albertine disparue* – jusqu'à mon arrivée avec ma mère à Venise' (*Corr.*, XXI, 515-516 (515)).

[161] See, in particular, Mauriac Dyer, 'Les Mirages du double', 117-119, and 'Le Cycle de *Sodome et Gomorrhe*: remarques sur la tomaison d'*À la recherche du temps perdu*', *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 41 (1991), 133-146 (134).

[162] Luc Fraisse, 'Introduction', in *La Fugitive* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017), 9. Tadié speculates that 'il s'agit d'une version expérimentale, d'une expérience tragiquement interrompue, et menée par un créateur déjà à demi inconscient', by which Proust cut from *Albertine disparue* 'quelques-unes de ses plus belles pages pour les donner à un hypothétique «Sodome IV ou V»' (*Marcel Proust: biographie*, II, 482-483). A number of other scholars, including Jean Milly, Mauriac Dyer, Anne Chevalier and Pierre-Edmond Robert, agree that, at the time of his death, Proust intended to publish *La Prisonnière* and *Albertine disparue* as two parts of a single volume, *Sodome et Gomorrhe III*, to be followed by one or more additional volumes in the *Sodome et Gomorrhe* series, before the concluding volume of the novel, *Le Temps retrouvé*: see, for example, *Albertine disparue*, ed. by Jean Milly (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1992; rev. edn, 2003), 27-29. But, they do not agree (amongst themselves) as to the likely content.

in favour of some retention of deleted text[163] has in its favour that, in particular, the deletions do some violence not only to the continuity between *Albertine disparue* and *Le Temps retrouvé* (and the development of important themes) but to aspects of the Albertine episode alluded to in the earlier volumes.[164] The fact that Proust made his annotations when in terrible health and in the grip of death itself make it even more difficult to draw reliable inferences. Ultimately, as Michael Finn has remarked, '[t]here is no answer to this dilemma, except to remark that a considerable anxiety about length, tempo and closure accompanied Proust until his death'.[165]

Accordingly, any interpretation of the Albertine episode must, so far as possible on available materials, take account of the alternative possibilities of permanent excision *and* retention. The impact of the latter is addressed above, by reference to the text of the Pléaide (1989) version. As for the former, and basing the analysis on the edition of *Albertine disparue* reflecting the revised typescript,[166] the changes are consistent with recognition by Proust that what was already conveyed about Albertine's sexuality and infidelity by the evidence set out across the two preceding volumes was sufficient and might be more elegantly confirmed with a final twist. While a great deal of text was excised from the

[163] The principal explanation advanced for Proust's radical abbreviation of *Albertine disparue* is that – so it is contended – the revised typescript was only intended for the collateral purpose of publishing a more self-contained version of Albertine's death by way of extract in a recently-established literary review, *Les Œuvres libres* or in *La Nouvelle revue française*. See Pierre-Edmond Robert, 'L'Édition des posthumes de *À la recherche du temps perdu*', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust*, 38 (1988), 95-101 (97); Fraisse, 'Introduction', in *La Fugitive*, 48-53. See, however, the arguments against the theory advanced by (for example) Jean Milly in 'Introduction' to *Albertine disparue* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1992; rev. edn, 2003), 7-73 (45-46); 'Les Nouvelles Éditions des parties posthumes d'*À la recherche du temps perdu*', *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 44 (1994), 141-148 (147), and 'Problèmes génétiques et éditoriaux à propos d'*Albertine disparue*', in *Marcel Proust. Écrire sans fin*, ed. by Rainer Warning & Jean Milly (Paris: CNRS, 1996), 51-77 (54-55, 58, 69); and by Mauriac Dyer, '"Sur une enveloppe souillée de tisane", un plan pour la suite d'*Albertine disparue*', *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 42 (1992), 19-28.

[164] Such as the oblique proleptic reference to the association between Albertine, the chauffeur and Morel, of which the narrator says, 'tout cela se retrouvera dans l'histoire d'Albertine' (III, 419; see also 420); or, to only understanding later 'la cruelle signification' of the *seringas* incident (III, 563).

[165] *Proust, the Body and Literary Form*, 152.

[166] *Albertine disparue*, ed. by Nathalie Mauriac (now Mauriac Dyer) & Étienne Wolff (Paris: Grasset, 1987; rev., 2013).

volume, some very important text was added, including two significant revisions, the first concerning the location of Albertine's death (revealed in her aunt's letter) and the second containing the protagonist's interpretation of its significance:

> 'Elle a été jetée par son cheval contre un arbre pendant une promenade qu'elle faisait au bord de la Vivonne'[167]

> 'Ces mots au bord de la Vivonne ajoutaient quelque chose de plus atroce à mon désespoir. Car cette coïncidence qu'elle m'eût dit dans le petit tram qu'elle était amie de Mlle Vinteuil, et que l'endroit où elle était depuis qu'elle m'avait quitté et où elle avait trouvé la mort fût le voisinage de Montjouvain, cette coïncidence ne pouvait être fortuite, un éclair jaillissait entre ce Montjouvain raconté dans le chemin de fer et cette Vivonne involontairement avouée dans le télégramme de Mme Bontemps. Et c'était donc le soir où j'étais allé chez les Verdurin, le soir où je lui avais dit vouloir la quitter, qu'elle m'avait menti!'[168]

In light of the pairing of the Montjouvain scene and Albertine's revelation of her closeness to Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, the addition of the detail that Albertine dies on a ride that she was embarked on 'au bord de la Vivonne' and in 'le voisinage de Montjouvain', not Touraine (cf. IV, 58), is final (circumstantial) *confirmation* of her sexuality and suggests a monumental last act of betrayal. This interpretation is underscored by the deletion in the revised typescript of the protagonist's extended investigations, which become surplusage if the symmetry of falsity/revelation (truth) is to be emphasized and resolved in favour of a dénouement more simply (albeit inferentially) categorical as to her 'guilt'; in a stroke, subjective knowledge of her guilt replaces further fact-finding. While it is possible that Proust may have cut the inquiry dead as he did only to re-start it in a subsequent volume, it is inherently unlikely, not only because it would deprive the radical changes to the Albertine episode of utility and effect, but because the impetus will have been lost following the trip to Venice.

[167] Ibid., 100.

[168] Ibid., 101.

Dissatisfied with an interpretation of Proust's late annotations that would settle the question of Albertine's sexuality and sexual past, Gray holds that, whatever version of *Albertine disparue* one considers, 'Albertine has always already, in *La Prisonnière*, overturned all attempts to derive a coherent narrative that would explain her mysterious sexual past and inclinations'.[169] If an encyclopaedic account were necessary to explain Albertine's sexuality and infidelity, it is right to say that the protagonist falls short. However, this is to fall into the same trap as the protagonist sets for himself. There is more than enough probative circumstantial evidence in the Pléiade version. The additional detail regarding the place of her death merely confirms what the protagonist already accepted to be overwhelmingly probable in the earlier volumes and (ultimately) in the earlier draft of *Albertine disparue*.

IV. Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest unknown but potentially resoluble mystery is how Albertine actually feels about the protagonist, creating more common ground with stories of romantic intrigue than the abundant speculation about same-sex appetites might lead one to suppose. Lack of candour from both sides leaves it in doubt: did she see truly love him, or did she see him as a respectable cloak for indulging her true passions and a source of funds? The account of Albertine's character and conduct means that none of these are mutually exclusive, but perhaps the greatest, most tragic testament to what seems to be true love comes from her desperate, heart-rending letter begging him to allow her to return (IV, 60).

[169] *Postmodern Proust*, 97. Reginald McGinnis' reading of the revised text also seeks to preserve some element of unknowability, despite acceptance of 'le caractère décisif de ce dénouement' (decisive, that is, on the issue of her sexual identity), by positing that 'savoir la fuite d'Albertine "du côté de Gomorrhe", ce n'est ni s'insinuer à Gomorrhe ni éclaircir la vérité sur sa vie': 'L'Inconnaissable Gomorrhe: à propos d'*Albertine disparue*', *Romanic Review*, 81.1 (1990), 92-104 (101). However, on this revised text, the impetus for factual inquiry is spent, leaving the real question of knowability to be that concerning *qualia*.

While the novel swings rhythmically between sexual jealousy provoked by the unknown and boredom borne of familiarity and physical possession, the nature of Albertine's sexuality is left in no real doubt, and the same is true (even if only in general terms) of her infidelity and promiscuity: all aspects of the novel, whether narratological (*histoire*, *récit* and *narration*) or rhetorical (e.g. ellipsis), coalesce and cooperate to convey the truth of the second hypothesis, and not one relayed by an omniscient outsider but by the mature narrator/protagonist himself. Many of the lurid details may or may not be ascertainable on proper inquiry, but it is one that the protagonist only half-heartedly pursues and, in any case, the goal of exhaustive knowledge was only ever chimerical and (epistemologically if not emotionally) unnecessary. With Andrée's confession of relations with Albertine (something that stubbornly resists denial), the final piece of evidence falls into place:

> En somme si ce que disait Andrée était vrai, et je n'en doutai pas d'abord, l'Albertine réelle que je découvrais, après avoir connu tant d'apparences diverses d'Albertine, différait fort peu de la fille orgiaque surgie et devinée, le premier jour, sur la digue de Balbec et qui m'avait successivement offert tant d'aspects, comme modifie tour à tour la disposition de ses édifices jusqu'à écraser, à effacer le monument capital qu'on voyait seul dans le lointain, une ville dont on approche, mais dont finalement, quand on la connaît bien et qu'on la juge exactement, les proportions vraies étaient celles que la perspective du premier coup d'œil avait indiquées, le reste, par où on avait passé, n'étant que cette série successive de lignes de défense que tout être élève contre notre vision et qu'il faut franchir l'une après l'autre, au prix de combien de souffrances, avant d'arriver au cœur. (IV, 188)

The truth about Albertine (*la vraie Albertine*) would have been much more readily forthcoming if only the protagonist had been willing and able to take her for who she was, instead of interposing 'tout un entre-deux de sentiment' and schemes that led her to obfuscate (IV, 269-270). As he wistfully reflects, 'ç'avait peut-être été mon tort de ne pas chercher davantage à connaître Albertine en elle-même', and:

> j'aurais dû chercher à comprendre son caractère comme celui d'une personne quelconque et peut-être, m'expliquant alors pourquoi elle s'obstinait à me cacher son secret, j'aurais évité de prolonger entre cet acharnement étrange et mon invariable pressentiment ce conflit qui avait amené la mort d'Albertine. (IV, 77-78)

Even so, and leaving aside the fact that such a course may have extinguished the very desire that motivated his search for knowledge, it offers no answer to the deeper inquiry: whether, how and in what respect can one ever access the *qualitative* kernel of the other's experience? This is an aspect of mind pronounced to be beyond reach in the case of Albertine, but not so in the privileged realm of art, propositions examined in the Conclusion.

CONCLUSION

L'artiste nous prête ses yeux pour regarder le monde.

Schopenhauer[1]

> Le style d'un artiste est aux mouvements de son esprit ce que la courbe que donne le cardiographe est aux battements du cœur. […] Le style, c'est la pensée visible dans son expression.

Gabriel Séailles[2]

I. Art as 'transposition de la profondeur' (III, 761)

If there is one epiphany that even the most hardened or 'wearied' reader of the *Recherche* should find it difficult to regard as 'falling flat',[3] it is that art is the means by which the qualitative aspect of mind may be expressed and communicated; namely, the part of one's mental content described by the narrator as 'le petit sillon […] creusé en nous' (by external stimuli), 'la racine personnelle de notre propre impression' (IV, 470). The aim of this section is not to re-examine the well traversed topic of the narrator's lengthy excursus on his literary vocation.[4] It is instead to offer, first, a demonstration that, on the topic of other minds, Proust held fast to the affirmative outlook signalled by his declaration to Jacques Rivière, following publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*, that its despondent ending was merely 'une étape, d'apparence subjective et dilettante, vers la plus objective et croyante des conclusions' and in the 'évolution d'une pensée', which was not to be mistaken

[1] *Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation*, trans. by Auguste Burdeau, 2 vols (Paris: Alcan, 1888-1890), I, 201.

[2] *Essai sur le génie dans l'art*, 215, 217.

[3] That is, regardless of whether such a reader is justified in considering the breakthrough of involuntary memory as an unpersuasive anticlimax entailing that 'the revelation at the end of the *Recherche* falls flat': Terdiman, *Present Past*, 152-153, citing numerous 'negative opinions' from the likes of William Empson. See also Christopher Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 3.

[4] The redemptive view of art promulgated by the narrator (as the means by which life is most truly realized) has long been questioned, both in terms of the *Recherche* itself and more generally: see, for example, Bersani, 'Death and Literary Authority'; Terdiman, *The Dialectics of Isolation*, 234-248; Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*.

for ‘un scepticisme désenchanté’.[5] That is so notwithstanding that, as Christopher Prendergast notes, much of the ‘long trajectory [was] compositionally yet to come [and] in 1914 lay for Proust in the sphere of the unknown’.[6]

During the course of recounting Swann’s explanation of the evocative beauty of the *petite phrase* in Vinteuil’s sonata, inextricably linked with the charm that he experienced when hearing it on certain nights in Paris, the narrator comments that Odette could not have enlightened Swann on the nature of that charm despite being by his side at the time. When doing so, he makes an aside which signposts an important aspect of the error-correcting *Bildung* that lies ahead:

> Odette était seulement à côté de lui alors (non en lui comme le motif de Vinteuil), ne voyant donc point – Odette eût-elle été mille fois plus compréhensive – *ce qui, pour nul de nous (du moins j’ai cru longtemps que cette règle ne souffrait pas d’exception), ne peut s’extérioriser*. (I, 524, emphasis added)

It is significant that this reference to the element of the other’s inner life (that the narrator long believed to be inexpressible and therefore unknowable) should be made when discussing the power of art, and the music of Vinteuil in particular. For, it prefigures a corresponding scene in *La Prisonnière* where the protagonist, at the keyboard playing the sonata in Paris while Albertine is out (III, 664-668), reflects on the expressive capabilities of art:

> *Comme le spectre extériorise* pour nous la composition de la lumière, l’harmonie d’un Wagner, la couleur d’un Elstir *nous permettent de connaître cette essence qualitative des sensations d’un autre où l’amour pour un autre être ne nous fait pas pénétrer*. (III, 665, emphasis added)

[5] Letter to Jacques Rivière, 6 February 1914, *Corr.*, XIII, 98-100 (99). It is plain from Proust’s letter that the movement from error to truth which structures ‘la recherche de la Vérité’ in the *Recherche* encompasses mind-reading, because he cites the case of Charlus to make the point that ‘[t]out est ainsi construit’ (99).

[6] *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 81.

The element of the other's mind that art is able to express ('extériorise') is the *qualia* that seemed to elude him in the case of Albertine, elsewhere described as '*la partie seule réelle et incommunicable (autrement que par le moyen de l'art) de nous-même*' (II, 689, emphasis added).

This scene is itself the prefiguring of a longer narratorial disquisition prompted by the experience of hearing Vinteuil's septet at the Verdurins' (III, 753-768), a work that transports the protagonist to 'un monde inconnu' (III, 754), 'un univers insoupçonné' (III, 759). While the adequacy of the narrator's descriptive attempts to render the ineffable dimension of music has been questioned by some scholars,[7] his description of its expressive power leaves the reader in no doubt that he considers it to offer the mind-reader that element which eludes him in everyday interactions: the other's transformative perspective, a differentiating 'accent unique' unfiltered and unencumbered by the formal, analytical constraints of reasoning, and instead 'inanalysé'. He poses the rhetorical question:

> Mais alors, n'est-ce pas que ces éléments [composants de l'âme du musicien], tout ce résidu réel que nous sommes obligés de garder pour nous-mêmes, que la causerie ne peut transmettre même de l'ami à l'ami, du maître au disciple, de l'amant à la maîtresse, *cet ineffable qui différencie qualitativement ce que chacun a senti et qu'il est obligé de laisser au seuil des phrases* où il ne peut communiquer avec autrui qu'en se limitant à des points extérieurs communs à tous et sans intérêt, *l'art, l'art d'un Vinteuil comme celui d'un Elstir, le fait apparaître, extériorisant dans les couleurs du spectre la composition intime de ces mondes que nous appelons les individus, et que sans l'art nous ne connaîtrions jamais?* (III, 762, emphasis added)

The spatial (astral) imagery inspired by the monadology, used pervasively to figure the intersubjective limit-situation and the tantalizing allure of elusive minds, now becomes the vehicle to convey the epiphanic euphoria induced by the septet:

[7] Bersani sees the narrator's attempt to convey the particular world expressed in Vinteuil's music (for example) as doomed to failure: *Marcel Proust*, 195. For a balanced evaluation of scholarship on the point, see Jennifer Rushworth, 'Proust's Notes to the Imaginary Music of Vinteuil: *À la recherche du temps perdu* and the Programme Music Controversy', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 48.1 (2012), 30-45 (43).

> Des ailes, un autre appareil respiratoire, et qui nous permissent de traverser l'immensité, ne nous serviraient à rien. Car si nous allions dans Mars et dans Vénus en gardant les mêmes sens, ils revêtiraient du même aspect que les choses de la Terre tout ce que nous pourrions voir. *Le seul véritable voyage, le seul bain de Jouvence, ce ne serait pas d'aller vers de nouveaux paysages, mais d'avoir d'autres yeux, de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d'eux voit, que chacun d'eux est; et cela nous le pouvons avec un Elstir, avec un Vinteuil, avec leurs pareils, nous volons vraiment d'étoiles en étoiles*. (III, 762, emphasis added)

As Prendergast observes: 'This is Proust at his most genuinely appealing, and only the churlishly flat-footed would look askance at his star-spangled celebration of the plurality of universes and its artistic promise.'[8]

Faced with such positivity, it is little surprise that at least some of those who are sceptical of the knowability of minds or of interpersonal communication in the *Recherche* make an exception in the case of art. Gilles Deleuze, declaring that, in the *Recherche* 'il n'y a d'intersubjectivité qu'artistique',[9] cites a central passage from the narrator's extended discussion of aesthetic theories, which describes the intersubjective access granted by art in the most exclusive, absolute terms:

> *Par l'art seulement nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n'est pas le même que le nôtre* et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu'il peut y avoir dans la lune. Grâce à l'art, au lieu de voir un seul monde, le nôtre, nous le voyons se multiplier, et autant qu'il y a d'artistes originaux, autant nous avons de mondes à notre disposition, plus différents les uns des autres que ceux qui roulent dans l'infini et, bien des siècles après qu'est éteint le foyer dont il émanait, qu'il s'appelât Rembrandt ou Ver Meer, nous envoient encore leur rayon spécial. (IV, 474, emphasis added)

However, it is of critical importance that, when stating that it is only through art that 'nous pouvons sortir de nous', the narrator makes plain that he is only using this phrase to denote

[8] *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 10.

[9] *Proust et les signes*, 55. See also, for example, van de Ghinste, *Rapports humains*, 256-257; Nussbaum, 'Love's Knowledge', 274 (fn. 18). By contrast, Bailey remains unconvinced, considering the narrator's claims regarding the communicative capability of literature to 'ring […] hollow', though it should be noted that the stated premise of his ambivalence is that those claims are made 'against the backdrop of communicative failure' on the part of the protagonist: *Proust's Self-Reader*, 7, 13. Shattuck expressed the similar view in his *Proust* (London: Fontana, 1974), 160-161. The breadth of such a generalized premise is, of course, challenged by the present study.

access to the *qualitative* aspect of the other's mind ('savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers'). It is not used, therefore, to suggest that one cannot read the *other aspects* of minds that he has found so mysterious, a conclusion which (as we have seen) would be contradicted by his own mind-reading successes with the likes of Charlus, Albertine and others, let alone his mother or grandmother.

Although the composition of *Le Temps retrouvé* predates by some margin Proust's work on *La Prisonnière* in 1922, the encapsulation of the narrator's position in the final volume is entirely consistent with the reflections contained in that earlier volume, and there is no reason to doubt that it would have remained intact had Proust lived long enough to finish the project. It signals at least qualified optimism even in relation to the most challenging aspect of mind-reading and, in allowing that the qualitative aspect of the other's mind *is* expressible and communicable, the narrator diverges, as Maël Renouard remarks, very significantly, from Leibniz.[10] The divergence is, one should note, an entirely positive one.

As for what the experience entails, despite couching his epiphany about intersubjectivity in visual and optical terms, the narrator cannot be suggesting that the work of art permits a substitution of perspectives, in the sense that one adopts the very perspective of the artist, because, as Renouard contends, that perspective is inextricably bound up with the artist's singular experience and identity.[11] Art does not allow others to have the very experience or impression of the artist. Rather, the work of art makes apparent for others,

[10] 'Proust et Leibniz – Points de Vue et Mondes', *La Polygraphe*, 24-26 (2002), 247-264 (258).

[11] Descombes condemns the narrator's theory regarding art as incoherent, but assumes that it involves the confusion between perspective and subjectivity, with the other's perspective representing their unique and incommunicable subjectivity so that the vision of an Elstir cannot be communicated without assuming the subjectivity of Elstir, yet art being supposed to allow just that: *Proust*, 47-65. However, as Landy comments, this takes 'rather too literally' the figurative language used to describe seeing the world through Elstir's eyes: *Philosophy as Fiction*, 191 (fn. 32).

'extériorisant dans les couleurs du spectre' (III, 762), an equivalent of the artist's experience or impression ('un équivalent spirituel' (IV, 457)). As Joshua Landy puts it:

> we do not simply surrender our own perspective and replace it with another's, do not literally "become the man himself." Art merely grants us the opportunity to "see the universe through the eyes of another […]", and not through our own transformed eyes: we will always remain aware of the disjunction between what is innate and what is borrowed vision.[12]

The motif of art as the means of expressing the otherwise ineffable is applied to all forms of art and artists, not merely the music of a Vinteuil (III, 763), but the literature of a Bergotte (I, 93-94, 540-543) and other writers such as Barbey d'Aurevilly, Thomas Hardy, Dostoevsky (III, 877-883), the paintings of an Elstir (II, 192-198, 712; III, 416, 759; IV, 23-24), and, more dynamically, plays and the performance of actors like La Berma (in the role of Phèdre). Such theatrical performance offers two qualitative visions (that of dramatist and performer), each translucently enveloping and expressed refractively through the other:

> tout cela, voix, attitudes, gestes, voiles, n'était, autour de ce corps d'une idée qu'est un vers (corps qui au contraire des corps humains n'est pas devant l'âme comme un obstacle opaque qui empêche de l'apercevoir mais comme un vêtement purifié, vivifié, où elle se diffuse et où on la retrouve), que des enveloppes supplémentaires qui au lieu de la cacher ne rendaient que plus splendidement l'âme qui se les était assimilées et s'y était répandu. (II, 348)

While music may be the medium with the greatest (unrealized) potential to achieve 'la communication des âmes' (III, 763),[13] painting is a constant point of reference for the cognitive process that the narrator envisages for accessing the ineffable, qualitative element within the artist's mind. As implied by his repeated recourse to optical analogies, visual art offers the most apt and tractable demonstration. Elstir's paintings offer 'les fragments de ce

[12] *Philosophy as Fiction*, 64-65. See, similarly, Shattuck, *Proust*, 160.

[13] Anne Henry sees in the primacy attributed to music Proust's adherence to the aesthetics of Schopenhauer: see, for example, *La Tentation de Marcel Proust*, 192. Jean-Jacques Nattiez also makes strong claims regarding the musical influence of Schopenhauer in *Proust musicien*, 3rd edn (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, rev. edn, 2023), 121, 125-140. However, other scholars have disputed the thesis that the *Recherche* reflects or embodies Schopenhauer's theory of music: see, for example, David Bather Woods, 'Proust and Schopenhauer'.

monde aux couleurs inconnues qui n'était que la projection de la manière de voir particulière à ce grand peintre et que ne traduisaient nullement ses paroles' (II, 712), the projection of an unique 'lanterne magique'. As exemplified by the 'Port de Carquehuit' (II, 192-198), Elstir's art does not purport to provide a mere reproduction of the outside world, but a visual metaphor conveying his impression of it, his method being precisely *not* to 'exposer les choses telles qu'il savait qu'elles étaient, mais selon ces illusions optiques dont notre vision première est faite' (II, 194).

Visual art in turn provides the precedent that defines the potential basis on which literature may offer access to that most elusive cognitive element of another mind. It is not the propositional content of the text (as such) which is conceived by the narrator as the means of accessing the qualitative aspect of mind, but the author's style, conveying it obliquely rather than directly:

> car le style pour l'écrivain aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre est une question non de technique mais de vision. Il est la révélation, qui serait impossible par des moyens directs et conscients, de la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde, différence qui, s'il n'y avait pas l'art, resterait le secret éternel de chacun. (IV, 474)

The promotion of art, in all its forms, as a means of accessing the other's 'moi profond' is not only a continuous thread within the narrator's commentary in the *Recherche*, but an integral part of Proust's own theory of art,[14] expressed consistently on a number of platforms, including his interview with *Le Temps* in November 1913 (on the eve of the publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*),[15] and his critical appraisals of the art of Gustave

[14] That theory was strongly influenced by the views of his aesthetics professor, Gabriel Séailles (especially those set out in *Essai sur le génie dans l'art*), a topic examined in detail by Fraisse in the chapter 'Séailles et la maîtrise esthétique', in *L'Éclectisme*, 883-957.

[15] 'À la recherche du temps perdu', *Le Temps*, 13 November 1913, repr. in *Essais* (2022), 1168-1172 (1172).

Moreau (in about 1899)[16] and of Flaubert's style (in 1920).[17] Similarly, his preface for Paul Morand's *Tendres stocks* (in 1921), praising Morand's novel style as the mark of a great artist, relied once more on optical analogy and painting to illustrate his point:

> Pour y réussir, le peintre original, l'écrivain original, procèdent à la façon des oculistes. Le traitement – par leur peinture, leur littérature – n'est pas toujours agréable. Quand il est fini, ils nous disent: Maintenant regardez. Et voici que le monde qui n'a pas été créé une fois, mais l'est aussi souvent que survient un nouvel artiste, nous apparaît – si différent de l'ancien – parfaitement clair.[18]

The cognitive process that Proust conceived to be at the heart of reading worthwhile literature – one that he described in notes to his French translation of Ruskin's *Sésame et les lys* as a 'mode' of communication superior to conversation, and inducing a far more valuable introspective mental state – is a form of mind-reading:

> Notre mode de communication avec les personnes implique une déperdition des forces actives de l'âme que concentrent et exaltent au contraire ce merveilleux miracle de la lecture qui est la communication au sein de la solitude. Quand on lit, *on reçoit une autre pensée*, et cependant on est seul, on est en plein travail de pensée, en pleine aspiration, en pleine activité personnelle: *on reçoit les idées d'un autre, en esprit, c'est-à-dire en vérité, on peut donc s'unir à elles, on est cet autre et pourtant on ne fait que développer son moi avec plus de variété que si on pensait seul, on est poussé par autrui sur ses propres voies*. Dans la conversation, même en laissant de côté les influences morales, sociales, etc., que crée la présence de l'interlocuteur, la communication a lieu par l'intermédiaire des sons, le choc spirituel est affaibli, l'inspiration, la pensée profonde, impossible. Bien plus, la pensée, en devenant pensée parlée, se fausse, comme le prouve l'infériorité d'écrivain de ceux qui se complaisent et excellent trop dans la conversation. (*Malgré les illustres exceptions que l'on peut citer*, malgré le témoignage d'Emerson lui-même, qui lui attribue une véritable vertu inspiratrice, on peut dire qu'*en général* la conversation nous met sur le chemin des expressions brillantes ou de purs raisonnements, *presque jamais* d'une impression profonde.) (emphasis added)[19]

On this basis, Proust prized the reading of literature written in language and with a style faithfully reflecting the author's thought for offering up 'l'inflexion unique d'une

[16] 'Le Monde mystérieux de Gustave Moreau', repr. in *Essais* (2022), 198-206 (200-201).

[17] 'À propos du «style» de Flaubert', an article published on 1 January 1920 (in *La Nouvelle Revue française*), repr. in *Essais* (2022), 1220-1233 (1225).

[18] 'Préface de «Tendres stocks»', repr. in *Essais* (2022), 1208-1217 (1216).

[19] Note forming part of the selection '*Sésame et les lys*. [Choix de] notes du traducteur' [1906], repr. in *Essais* (2022), 668-684 (671-672).

personnalité';[20] that is, a book offering access to what the narrator calls 'notre personnalité véritable' (III, 664). Thus, to this extent at least, even the most hardened reader must allow that the 'swooners' are justified in swooning, irrespective of whether the redemptive pretensions of literary vocation may be taken at face value.[21]

However, they may have even greater cause for celebration than the narrator lets on. For, while he repeatedly proclaims the qualitative aspect of the other's mind to be accessible or communicable *only* through art (I, 524; II, 689; IV, 474), it is noteworthy that (as set out above) Proust himself did not entirely rule out the possibility of conversation having suitably expressive power, allowing for '*illustres exceptions*' and contending that conversation provides access '*presque jamais* [à] une impression profonde' (emphasis added).

II. Causes for (mind-reading) optimism

The neat aesthetic solution to gaining access to the qualitative aspect of other minds suffers from one obvious and significant limitation: it is only granted by artists through their works of art. As the narrator observes, although everyone has the inner life that might be expressed through art, not everyone is cut out for the necessary labour of introspection (IV, 474). Taking his statements at face value, not even the conversation of a Swann or Charlus, both erudite speakers and conversationalists but mere amateurs – 'célibataires de l'art' (IV, 470) – would suffice to convey their impressions.

There is, however, an intermediate possibility, whereby the oral utterance of conversation may have some degree of expressive quality, something acknowledged in the

[20] 'Journées de lecture', repr. in *Essais* (2022), 562-594 (587).

[21] Prendergast is hard on the 'Proust-cult, historically dominated by the swooning tendencies of that unhappily influential coterie bent on construing *À la recherche* as a storehouse of delicate epiphanies laced with a strong dose of class-bound aestheticism', *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 1. But, his ridicule is directed to the 'redemptive or reparative aspect of Proust's view of artistic "symbolization"' (ibid., 13).

account of the protagonist's first face-to-face encounter with an artist, Bergotte (I, 540-546). The narrator gives an extended account of the conversational speech of the writer, whose tone, prosody, timbre and pronunciation occasionally manifest his unique 'style' – 'un débit prétentieux, emphatique et monotone' which is 'le signe de la qualité esthétique de ses propos' (I, 540). At least in such moments, conversation offers 'une exacte correspondance' with his novels, and its form becomes 'poétique et musicale'. Thus, the material qualities of the voice, if used artistically to 'contenir de la pensée', may be the complement of style necessary to convey the speaker's qualitative vision. This is something that the narrator considers Bergotte to do purposefully, as an extension of his art:

> il voyait dans ce qu'il disait une beauté plastique indépendante de la signification des phrases, et comme la parole humaine est en rapport avec l'âme, mais sans l'exprimer comme fait le style, Bergotte avait l'air de parler presque à contresens, psalmodiant certains mots et, s'il poursuivait au-dessous d'eux une seule image, les filant sans intervalle comme un même son, avec une fatigante monotonie. (I, 540)

Likewise, the particular subtlety of Bergotte's approach to a topic under discussion offers an oblique means by which 'la qualité toujours rare et neuve' of his written work is translated through his conversation (I, 542).

Michael Finn observes that Proust struggled to form a conclusive view on the relationship between the uniqueness of oral tone or speech patterns and the 'fuller individuality' expressible through a literary work, something that strongly marks the narrator's discussion of Bergotte.[22] As Finn argues, the Bergotte episode illustrates that '[t]here *is* a relationship […] between oral and prose voice; it is simply coded, not

[22] *Proust, the Body, and Literary Form*, 91-101. For a detailed study of the voice in the *Recherche*, see Béatrice Athias, *La Voix dans À la recherche du temps perdu de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021).

transparent'.[23] That is a link that Proust intended, in a discarded draft from *Cahier 1*, to describe even more explicitly, equating oral tone with literary style:

> je vis qu'avec la transposition de la voix au style, c'était au fond la même chose, et que ce perpétuel raisonnement qu'il faisait sur tout était justement la démarche, la progression, l'âme vivante de ses livres. (I, 1033)[24]

Finn remarks that '[t]he idea that speech and writing may not be so qualitatively different remains resident in the text, attached to long-held views about the unique quality and character of the creative person's nervous makeup'.[25] However, whereas Finn's focus is upon the question of unity between oral and literary voice (and Proust's stated or implied views on the matter) and what the meditation on orality, language, reading and literature may reveal about neuroses, the focus of the present study is upon the ramifications (for the accessibility of qualitative aspects of the other's mind) of the statements or interactions within the *Recherche* that call into question the supposed dichotomy between the different 'modes' of mind-reading offered by conversation and reading respectively.

While a single exception is sufficient to disprove the supposedly universal rule, it is not only Bergotte whose oral speech is qualitatively expressive. When conversing with a member of the *petite bande*, their voices (and facial expressions) provide the protagonist with a revelatory 'tableau' of their unique personalities:

> Quand je causais avec une de mes amies, je m'apercevais que le tableau original, unique de son individualité, m'était ingénieusement dessiné, tyranniquement imposé aussi bien par les inflexions de sa voix que par celles de son visage et que c'était deux spectacles qui traduisaient, chacun dans son plan, la même réalité singulière. […] la voix de ces jeunes filles accusait déjà nettement le parti pris que chacune de ces petites personnes avait sur la vie. (II, 261-262)

[23] Ibid., 95.

[24] Quoted by Finn: ibid., 97.

[25] Ibid., 101.

From this observation, the narrator extrapolates the general proposition that: 'nos intonations contiennent notre philosophie de la vie, ce que la personne se dit à tout moment sur les choses' (262). The position is *a fortiori* where the other uses evocative and original metaphor to express her perspective orally. The scene where, much later, Albertine eloquently eroticizes her desire for ice-creams, employing a (homo)sexually charged 'géographie pittoresque' (III, 636-638) which is articulated with a 'volupté cruelle', offers an important demonstration of this expressive potential of oral speech, underpinned by the material contribution of her erotic 'rire profond'.[26] Its full intersubjective potential is, however, deliberately left unrealized by the protagonist who cuts her monologue short at the mention of Montjouvain and Mlle Vinteuil for fear of how it might develop, preferring to stop her speaking at a point when he considers it still possible to take it as 'une preuve que j'avais du pouvoir sur elle, qu'elle m'aimait'.

As the protagonist's experience with Bergotte shows, while access may be granted, through conversation, to the qualitative aspect of the other's mind, a significant impediment for the mind-reader is the laborious work of transposition or decoding (I, 1033) necessary to discern 'l'armature de son style' in '[l]es paroles méconnaissables' of his spoken discourse (I, 542-543). The process is more haphazard and arduous than reading his books, which, 'si le livre mérite ce nom' (as Proust says elsewhere),[27] offer a greater degree of concentrated stylistic illumination (through 'accent') than conversation, in which the artist is more focused on the other and serving his own ends, than on his inner depths.

[26] The sexual connotations of Albertine's imagery (and its orality) have been the subject of much analysis: see, for example, Emily Eells, 'Proust à sa manière', *Littérature*, 46 (1982), 105-123; Sedgwick, 'Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet', 235-237; Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism*, 107-108. For Gray, Albertine's discourse on ice-creams is an instance of a subversive 'écriture féminine' that confounds the protagonist's pursuit of mastery through figurative 'undecidable' ambiguity: *Postmodern Proust*, 95-114. However, the salient aspect of the scene for present purposes is that the protagonist deliberately prevents Albertine from elaborating just so that he may avoid obtaining definitive confirmation of the tenor that unlocks the imagery.

[27] 'Journées de lecture', repr. in *Essais* (2022), 562-594 (587).

Irrespective of whether the narrator is justified, from his own experience, in writing off the qualitatively expressive potential of conversation, the pursuit of this unique element of mind is far removed from the everyday exigencies of mind-reading, let alone any notion that other minds are 'unknowable' or that the human condition is one of irremediable solitude. This study has placed the spotlight on those aspects of the protagonist's mind-reading endeavours (and the narrator's *explications*, generalizations and imagery) that reflect a striving and *appétit* for psychological access which, for so long as the other remains an object of curiosity or he genuinely pursues the truth, refuse to be beaten into submission by setbacks, and which produce valuable results.

While the mind-body divide makes it natural instinctively to conceive of other minds as 'monadically' encased in an *enveloppe close*, inaccessible or unknowable at least by perceptually 'direct' and 'immediate' means, that is a limit situation often shown to be overcome by the protagonist when suitably determined (or merely fortunate), with all such conventional dichotomies challenged by the *Recherche* at every level of the text (diegesis, extradiegetic commentary, and imagery). Other minds, ceaselessly transmitting verbal or behavioural signals, frequently prove to be amenable to readings that are grounded in the direct insights of intuition but developed and authenticated by the work of the *intelligence*.

Getting to 'know' others – reading their minds – is depicted as a nuanced process, involving the development of a sophisticated theory of mind and its practical application (over time) in a stimulating and enriching series of 'démarche[s] […] sur le parcours' (II, 229). Crucially, as this study has shown, the question of whether the protagonist 'knows' another's mind is not one that arises in the abstract, but in the context of explaining, understanding and predicting their words, behaviour, thoughts, desires, wishes or beliefs in relation to a particular subject. Driven by and learning from the experiences and exigencies

of particular mind-reading encounters, the protagonist learns to approach available information holistically, discriminating between evidence of different types and from different sources, and weighing it accordingly. That evidence more often than not yields (or would yield, if pursued in earnest) information that – even if it proves to be intermittent, less than exhaustive and untimely – is sufficient to constitute or ground what (on any reasonable basis, and having regard to the narrator's own approach to epistemology across all domains of human experience) amounts to *knowledge* of the other's mind.

However, the *Recherche* is also a vivid demonstration that mind-reading does not merely pose an 'objective' epistemological challenge; it is complicated and compromised by the 'subjective' factors that intervene and are 'interposed' in our attending to others (emotion; desire; mistaken belief; deception; imagination). The protagonist's achievements are to be measured *against* these limiting forces, making their scale all the more remarkable. Although any aspiration of trammelling the most challenging target – the *femme aimée* – within an all-encompassing psychological snapshot is shown and acknowledged to be hopelessly unachievable (by design), as we have seen, all aspects of the novel cooperate to demonstrate the wrong-headedness of this approach to intersubjectivity (from both an epistemological and an emotional perspective), calling into question the extreme generalizations about other minds that it produces.

While the protagonist's persistent pessimism regarding the conventional romantic love that has eluded him is presented by the narrator as justified by his particular experience (however idiosyncratic and pathological his behaviour may be), neither of them succumbs to bleak epistemological scepticism regarding the (un)knowability of other minds. To conclude otherwise would be to confuse the 'knowability' of minds with the (un)willingness to approach the task of mind-reading with the rigour and detachment of which the

protagonist is otherwise shown to be more than capable. Even in the most challenging encounter and ‘quelques déceptions inévitables qu’elle doive apporter’, the protagonist (and narrator) betrays an irrepressible if heavily qualified optimism about the ability of the mind-reader, in time, to ascertain the substance (if not the detail) of even the darkest secrets that the other tries their best to conceal.

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