SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis aims not only to set Proust's treatment of childhood in the context of his work as a whole, but also to set that work in the context of contemporary writing about childhood.

Chapter 1 reveals the existence of a fashion in Proust's time for literature devoted to childhood. This genre has a tendency towards technical innovation, despite repetition of the same subject matter, or 'myths'. One particularly important myth, that of the 'child-artist', is seen to be influential - not only on Proust's work but also on contemporary scientific attitudes to childhood.

Chapter 2 traces the origins of the genre to the earlier literary form of the Pastoral. It examines residual elements of the Pastoral, or the myth of the pastoral childhood, in later works which may have influenced Proust. *Combray*, it is concluded, both affirms and questions this myth. Chapter 3 examines the mythology of play. Although play generally has a significant role in the genre, it is peculiarly absent from *Combray*. In Proust's novel, the usual functions of play are fulfilled by reading, while apparent examples of play that remain are in reality strategies for obtaining sexual gratification. Chapter 4 shows how Proust's use of metaphor represents a partial return to the syncretism characteristic of childhood impressions and the essentialism of the child's beliefs about proper names.

The final chapter verifies the impressions of earlier chapters that Proust's work simultaneously affirms and denies the child-artist myth, and that his hero can only become a narrator when a process of fusion between child and adult is complete. This process permits a reinterpretation of *A la recherche*, its structure, and themes (such as society and love) in terms of childhood. Thus, the importance of childhood and its associated genre to Proust's work as a whole is confirmed.

LONGER ABSTRACT

Aims and Methods

This thesis has two main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to set Proust's treatment of childhood in the broader context of his work as a whole. Secondly, it aims to set that work in the even broader context of contemporary writing about childhood.

Although the second of these aims necessitates what is broadly speaking a comparative approach, Proust remains the focus of attention throughout the thesis. Particular writers are considered less in their own right than as representatives of a trend, and individual influences on Proust are accorded less importance than the collective influence of the literary or intellectual climate in which he was writing. Much has been written about Proust's treatment of childhood, but with little reference to contemporary writing on this theme. Whenever Proust's treatment of childhood has been set alongside that of other writers, detailed comparison has tended to take precedence over more historical concerns. Conversely, much has been written about the history of childhood in literature, but with comparatively little reference to Proust. This thesis aims to fill in the gaps left by earlier work. It is therefore neither detailed Proust criticism, nor comparative criticism, nor literary history, but wends its own cautious way between all three. This path was not the course originally intended. An initial interest in Proust's treatment of childhood gave way to a plan for a thesis on its treatment by a range of other authors. However, the project increasingly seemed to lead back to my original starting point in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. This movement, both away from and back to Proust, was not an arbitrary one, but, I believe, reflects the facts in some sense. Though Proust may have an unrivalled place in the history of the literary theme of childhood, the history of the theme also has an important place within his writing. Thus, while the thesis may at first give the impression of covering familiar ground, it in fact aims to answer previously unasked questions. And while the compromise between general and particular concerns may at first appear a weakness, it is in fact a great strength and certainly the source of any originality in the thesis that follows.

In addition to comparison of Proust's treatment of childhood with that of other authors, this thesis is also concerned with evaluating the importance of childhood within Proust's work, that is, with the first of the two aims set out above. Clearly, the claim that

childhood is important to understanding *A la recherche du temps perdu* is not at all original. Indeed, it would be difficult to argue otherwise. However, the comparative approach described above reveals aspects of *Combray*, which give new weight to the arguments of those critics who have asserted the vital importance of childhood to Proust's overall project. The comparative approach also leads beyond thematic discussions to technical questions: the use of metaphor, elements of characterisation, and the structure of the novel as a whole can all be interpreted in terms of childhood. Thus, this thesis aims to cast a certain amount of new light on the role of childhood *within* Proust's work, as well as offering an alternative *external* vantage point from which to view *A la recherche du temps perdu.*

Finally, something should be said about the theoretical bias of the work that follows - or rather, the lack of it. Just as there is no single criterion for selection of the other authors included in this study (Proust's friends and favourites stand alongside those he positively disliked and even those he ignored), so this thesis fails to conform to any single critical method. Though structuralist and post-structuralist critics such as Barthes, Genette and De Man have provided much inspiration and material, the comparative and historical elements of my research have led to a more straightforward - yet more eclectic - approach. For example, references to Freud and psychoanalytic criticism are also included, together with biographical anecdotes, related by Proust's friends or contemporaries, and relevant extracts from early child psychologists. This variation, both in methods and in sources, has, I hope, made this thesis more interesting than would otherwise have been the case.

Synopsis

Chapter 1 is mainly concerned with the first objective set out above, that is to set Proust's treatment of childhood in the context of the literature of his time. It also establishes the terminology for the discussion in later chapters, defining a genre, the *récit d'enfance*, covering much of the vast quantity of literature produced about childhood around this time, and setting out a method of characterising the contents of the genre by means of 'myths', or recurring attributes. Many of these myths were rather well-worn by the time Proust began to write. That might suggest that the genre had very little to offer him in the way of positive models. But its tendency towards stagnation in subject matter is offset by an equally prominent tendency towards technical innovation, and it is this latter which may explain

Proust's initial attraction to and continued interest in the theme of childhood. Another source of appeal to Proust may have been one of the well-worn myths of the *récit d'enfance*, that of the 'child-artist', which, it is argued, is the *dominant* myth of the genre, at least around this time. Indeed, the image of the child as an artist is the motivation not only for much modern literature about childhood, but also for scientific attitudes to childhood at the turn of the century.

Finally, Chapter 1 looks at specific writers - early child psychologists as well as novelists or autobiographers - who may have influenced Proust. It must be stressed that this influence is often indirect rather than direct, and collective rather than individual. Among those discussed are: Alain-Fournier, Audoux, Bordeaux, Boysleve, the Daudets (Alphonse, Lucien and Léon), France, Larbaud, Léautaud, Loti, Renan, Renard and Stendhal. The two appendices are also of particular relevance to Chapter 1, the first showing the extent of writing about childhood before and during Proust's lifetime, and the second showing the extent of the similarities between Proust's work and many of the *récits d'enfance* in the first.

The three subsequent chapters turn from general concerns to more specific points of comparison between Proust's work and the genre. Chapter 2 looks at nature, or the myth of the pastoral childhood glimpsed in Chapter 1. This myth is another very important one, because it has its roots in the very origins of the *récit d'enfance*, which can be seen as evolving from the much earlier literary form of the Pastoral. Chapter 2 traces the residual elements of these beginnings in the work of more modern writers who may have influenced Proust: Audoux, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand, Loti, Nerval, Rousseau, and particularly, George Sand. Indeed, it is argued, the presence of *François le Champi* in *A la recherche* represents the continuation of the pastoral myth of childhood in Proust's work. Nevertheless, *Combray* does not offer whole-hearted approval to the myth, which it simultaneously affirms and denies. In so doing, it is claimed, Proust also resolves the opposition between art and nature, which is central to the Pastoral form, into a relation of interdependence. In these respects, *Combray* represents an advance on *Jean Santeuil*, which conforms more to the myth of the pastoral child than does the later novel. Finally, it is suggested that *François le Champi* is much more than the representative of a tradition in Proust's work, but also, among other things, offers a model for a narrative that will combine

child and adult in some way. This formula again marks an advance on *Jean Santeuil* and, more importantly, introduces the myth of the child-artist into the discussion. If the narrator of *Combray* is somehow both child and adult, then the image of the child-artist is another myth of the genre that is simultaneously affirmed *and* denied by Proust.

Chapter 3 turns to the mythology of play. Play is important, not only because of its omnipresence in the *récits d'enfance* of Proust's contemporaries, but also because it seems to be a necessary part of the child-artist myth around this time. As confirmed by many early child psychologists, it is particularly when the child is at play that he is considered to demonstrate artistic ability.

The first half of this chapter contrasts the presence of the myth of artistic play in the work of Proust's contemporaries with its marked absence from *Combray*. Again, *Combray*'s lack of conformity to the norms of the contemporary genre will be seen as one of its major differences from the childhood sections of *Jean Santeuil*. However, in this case *A la recherche* does not just omit the myth of the child at play. The apparent games in the Champs-Elysées of *Noms de pays: le nom* in fact turn out to be strategies for sexual gratification and not play at all. Thus, they represent what could almost be called a desecration of the myth.

The second half of the chapter is concerned with a more positive side of this story and demonstrates how the usual functions of play in the *récit d'enfance* are taken over by reading in *Combray*. Reading, it is maintained, is a closer analogy to writing, in the Proustian scheme, than play, and is literally a more literary activity. Thus, by substituting reading for play, the presence of the myth of the child-artist in *Combray* is reinforced - even if the child remains for the most part a *metaphor* for the artist, complete with differences as well as similarities.

Chapter 4 looks at the mythology of metaphor. Metaphor, like play, has traditionally been used in the *récit d'enfance* to support the notion of the child's artistic abilities. Chapter 4 begins by examining the various links that have been perceived between the child and metaphor by literature and psychology. Each of these relationships is found to be present, to a greater or lesser degree, in *A la recherche*. This fact is clearly of fundamental importance to

a writer whose style depends so heavily on metaphor. Indeed, it is argued, Proust's use of metaphor represents a return to the fusion characteristic of childhood impressions - while also expressing the separation of adult experience. This supports the suggestion of Chapter 2 that Proust's narrator is really a combination of two interdependent elements: adult and child. Indeed, the findings of Chapter 4 suggest that this double narrative continues throughout *A la recherche*, and is not just confined to *Combray*.

The last part of Chapter 4 is devoted to an investigation of Proust's interest in proper names. The issue of naming clearly has a stronger thematic link with childhood than does metaphor in *Combray*, *Noms de pays: le nom* and *Noms de pays: le pays*. Although similar remarks are made about proper names in the work of other writers, Proust appears to be the only author of his time to elevate these observations into a literary theme of great importance. In this respect, Proust's work can be considered to foreshadow the psychology of Piaget, rather than reflecting the mythology of the genre. More importantly, an examination of *A la recherche* as a whole suggests that the child's beliefs about naming are partially reinstated as the novel draws to a close. Finally, this partial reinstatement can be seen to link up with the issue of metaphor, which represents a return to the essentialism expressed by the child's beliefs in proper names, as well as to the syncretism of his impressions.

Chapter 5 is devoted exclusively to the first aim set out above, that is, to determine the place of childhood in *A la recherche* as a whole. It nonetheless draws on the conclusions of earlier chapters, which concentrate more on *Combray* and its connections with other *récits d'enfance* of the day. Chapter 5 shows how childhood gradually fades out of the literal text of Proust's novel as the narrator passes through adolescence into adulthood, yet remains present throughout the middle sections of *A la recherche* as a term of comparison in much of Proust's imagery. This phenomenon not only projects *Combray*, along with the characteristics of childhood detailed in earlier chapters, into the rest of the novel, but also allows glimpses of different, more conventional ways of writing about the theme. More importantly, it permits interpretations of other Proustian themes, such as society and sexual love - generally considered as the provinces of adulthood, in terms of childhood. The theme of sexual love in fact prepares the ground for the gradual re-emergence of a more literal interest in childhood, as the novel reaches its final volumes. First the child reappears as the

object of adults' sexual attention, then M. de Charlus experiences a particularly literal second childhood, and later, in the Guermantes matinée, the narrator's own childhood self is resurrected by *François le Champi*. However, the fusion of adult and child, which must take place if the hero is to become a narrator, is only completed by the appearance of the all-important figure of Mlle de Saint-Loup in the final pages of the novel.

Thus, it is concluded, the omni-presence and all-importance of childhood in *A le recherche du temps perdu* as a whole is confirmed, and in ways that might not be recognised without an understanding of the *récit d'enfance* genre or its central myth of the child-artist.

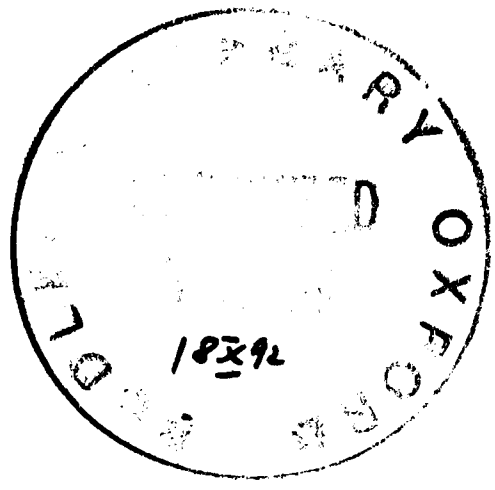
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THE CHILD, LANGUAGE AND LIT E:
THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD IN T K
AND TIMES OF MARCEL PR

ELIN WILLIAMS

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE
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Elin Williams
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Oxford
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C: Marcel Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. by Philip Kolb, [21 vols] (Paris: Plon, 1970 -)
(Roman numerals denote volumes, Arabic numerals denote page numbers)

CS: Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* précédé de *Pastiches et Mélanges* et suivi de *Essais et articles* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)

JS: Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil* précédé de *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)

Roman numerals followed by Arabic numerals (with no preceding letters) denote volume numbers and page numbers respectively of Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1987-1989).

INTRODUCTION

The thesis that follows has two main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to set Proust's treatment of childhood in the broader context of his work as a whole. Secondly, it aims to set that work in the even broader context of contemporary writing about childhood. These twin goals may sound quite straightforward, but in the case of a writer with Proust's reputation and a novel with the intricacy of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, they inevitably raise controversial issues. A certain amount of advance explanation and preparation is therefore required.

First there is the question of the theme of childhood and its place in Proust's writing. Fernand Gregh, friend of Proust and contemporary writer, once wrote of *A la recherche du temps perdu*:

> Tout y est: l'amour tout court, l'amour qui ne dit pas son nom, la tendresse filiale, l'enfance, la jeunesse, la maladie, la mort, les lettres, le théâtre, les vers, la musique, la peinture, l'esthétique, l'étymologie, les cathédrales, les grands hôtels, la province, Paris, le «grand monde», la bourgeoisie, les duchesses, le peuple, la médecine, la stratégie, l'affaire Dreyfus, que sais-je?[1]

Perhaps, to single out any one of these for special attention is to upset the balance of Proust's work. To a certain extent, it is to misrepresent his novel. For this there is no real excuse, except that in the course of the subsequent chapters, it is to be hoped that the vital links between childhood and some of the other themes treated by Proust will emerge. Eventually too, it should become clear that the particular theme of childhood was selected with good reason. Nevertheless, warning is hereby given that what follows may at first *appear* to be a one-sided view - if not a distortion - of Proust's work.

Perhaps it is the very complexity of the web linking childhood to the countless other themes explored by *A la recherche* that accounts for its peculiar status in previous criticism. On the one hand, anyone who writes about the novel inevitably devotes some space to childhood. It is one of the most 'obvious' themes of the novel, standing as it does, at the very beginning of Proust's narrative, and is impossible to overlook. Moreover, *Combray* is the section of the book that is read by the most people, so that, to the casual reader at least,

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[1] Fernand Gregh, Mon Amitié avec Marcel Proust (Souvenirs et lettres inédites) (Paris: Grasset, 1958), p.18.

'temps perdu' partly *signifies* 'childhood'. It is therefore hardly surprising that so much has been written about the subject, so much in fact, that it sometimes seems as if there might be very little to add.

On the other hand, there is very little criticism that is *entirely* devoted to the theme of childhood. Grandsaigne's *L'Espace combraysien* is an exception to this rule, though it perhaps pays slightly more attention to Combray and its social structures than to childhood in its own right.[2] Similarly, Manfred Schneider's *Subversive Ästhetik. Regression als Bedingung und Thema von Prousts Romankunst* is more concerned with putting forward a theoretical method based on Freudian and sociological criticism, than with the theme of childhood in *A la recherche*.[3] Another German work, *Das Kind und Combray*, by Friedrich Krotz, makes a fascinating analysis of the goodnight kiss scene, but mainly in terms of German language philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychiatry and psychology (particularly Schopenhauer, Kant and Freud).[4] Two articles, 'Le Thème de l'enfance dans la *Recherche du temps perdu*' by Michel Erman, and 'The Adult World and Childhood in *Combray*' by Rosalie Taylor, prove equally useful, even if they both tend to underplay the importance of childhood in Proust's novel to some extent.[5] More interesting for the purposes of this thesis is an article by Claude Vincenot, 'Les Procédés littéraires de Marcel Proust et la représentation du monde chez l'enfant'.[6] This article not only stresses the thematic importance of childhood in *A la recherche*, but also uses the psychology of Piaget to underline its *stylistic* importance. There will be cause to return to and build on Vincenot's findings later, especially in Chapter 4.

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[2] Jean de Grandsaigne, *L'Espace combraysien. Monde de l'enfance et structure sociale dans l'œuvre de Proust* (Paris: Minard, 1981). The introduction contains a good survey of earlier Proust criticism dealing with childhood (pp.5-27, especially p.21).

[3] Manfred Schneider, *Subversive Ästhetik. Regression als Bedingung und Thema von Prousts Romankunst* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1975).

[4] Friedrich Krotz, *Das Kind und Combray in Marcel Prousts "A la recherche du temps perdu"* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990).

[5] Michel Erman, 'Le Thème de l'enfance dans la «Recherche du Temps perdu»', *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, n.s. 25 (1984), 281-84 and Rosalie Taylor, 'The Adult World and Childhood in *Combray*', *French Studies*, 22 (1968), 26-36.

[6] Claude Vincenot, 'Les Procédés littéraires de Marcel Proust et la représentation du monde chez l'enfant', *Revue des Sciences humaines*, 33 (1968), 5-28.

Among more general critics, we find a greater divergence of opinion. The Freudian critic, Fernandez, remarks on the lack of space or importance accorded to childhood by Proust:

> On est stupéfait de constater que l'écrivain non seulement a glissé sur cette époque capitale de la vie du narrateur (le calcul des dimensions respectives des diverses parties de *la Recherche* confirme l'exiguïté du rôle reconnu à l'enfance, deux cents pages contre trois mille!), mais ne semble même pas avoir eu le soupçon qu'elle était capitale.[7]

Despite the accuracy of his statistics, very few critics would agree with such an interpretation of them. Far more representative are Tadié, who writes that '*tout* est né du regard qu'un enfant avait un jour jeté sur un couple de lesbiennes inconnues' (my italics), and Poulet, who claims that a certain 'primauté de la personne enfantine se retrouve invariablement dans l'œuvre de Proust'[8]. And if the balance of critical opinion were not enough to establish the importance of childhood in *A la recherche*, we also have Proust's own remarks, outside the novel, about the structure of his work and the *Combray* 'sadism scene':

> J'ai si soigneusement bâti cet ouvrage que cet épisode du premier volume est l'explication de la jalousie de mon jeune héros dans le[s] quatrième et cinquième volumes, de sorte qu'en arrachant la colonne au chapiteau obscène j'aurai fait plus loin tomber la voûte. (C,XVIII,404-405)

Within the text too, it is clear that visits to Balbec, the Guermantes and Venice all, in some sense, represent the fulfilment of childhood wishes. Furthermore, at several points Proust's narrator is quite explicit about the fact that his childhood was indeed an 'époque capitale' - despite Fernandez's claim to the contrary. This happens not only when the significance of the scene at Montjouvain is finally revealed (III,514-15), but also at the very end of the novel, when the narrator is transported back to the 'drame du coucher':

> C'était de cette soirée, où ma mère avait abdiqué, que datait, avec la mort lente de ma grand-mère, le déclin de ma volonté, de ma santé. Tout s'était décidé au moment où, ne pouvant plus supporter d'attendre au lendemain pour poser mes lèvres sur le visage de ma mère, j'avais pris ma résolution, j'avais sauté du lit et étais allé, en chemise de nuit, m'installer à la fenêtre par où entrait le clair de lune jusqu'à ce que j'eusse entendu partir M. Swann. (IV,621)

Thus, the *causal* importance of childhood in *A la recherche* has been well documented over the years, by critics, author and narrator alike. However, this is not to say that Proust's

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[7] Dominique Fernandez, *L'Arbre jusqu'aux racines: psychanalyse et création* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), p.308.

[8] Jean-Yves Tadié, *Proust et le roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p.225 and Georges Poulet, *Mesure de l'instant (Études sur le temps humain*, IV) (Paris: Plon, 1968), p.305.

novel has the simple linear structure of a *roman fleuve*, such as Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe*, or of a Naturalist 'case history', such as Bonnetain's *Charlot s'amuse*, where the story of the hero's later life progresses logically out of the events of his childhood. Just as commonly recognised by critics of *A la recherche*, is a phenomenon which might be called the *metaphorical* importance of childhood, that is the way in which the elements of *Combray* recur, often in an inverse form, and somehow come to represent later incidents. To take the example of the scene at Montjouvain once again, the young Marcel's voyeurism is repeated when he witnesses the scene of male homosexual love at the beginning of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. The latter incident is simultaneously repeated and reversed when M. de Charlus and Jupien themselves observe Morel in the heterosexual brothel at Maineville. Finally, the escapade at the heterosexual brothel in turn metamorphoses into the sadism scene at the homosexual brothel of *Le Temps retrouvé* - once again witnessed by the hero. Bersani in fact claims that the narrator fails to distinguish this kind of repetition from causation, that he 'sees patterns of similarity in his behavior rather than the causes behind the patterns'. On this basis, the causal and the metaphorical importance of childhood would merge into one.[9]

Whether or not Bersani is right, these metamorphoses of childhood events suggest that, in some way, childhood carries on throughout the seven volumes of *A la recherche*. Indeed, as we read on, it begins to seem that there are few incidents that cannot be interpreted as the repetition or transformation of something that happened during the narrator's childhood. There is thus a sense in which *A la recherche du temps perdu* is *Combray* - endlessly rewritten. No doubt such a claim is exaggerated, but it is true that the novel as a whole *contains* another form of perpetual rewriting of its childhood sections, that is, the process of constant addition and alteration which *Combray* retrospectively undergoes as the novel progresses. This itself happens in several ways. Sometimes, entirely new incidents are inserted, the most notable being the example of the little cousin who initiates Marcel into the world of sexual pleasure on Léonie's couch (I,568). Sometimes, elements of life at Combray are described in more detail much later in the text, such as the plates painted with scenes from *The Thousand and One Nights* (II,257). Elsewhere, and perhaps most commonly, the impressions of *Combray* are overturned. The pathetic figure of Vinteuil is, for instance,

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[9] Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust. The Fictions of Life and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.114.

transformed into a great composer and M. de Charlus turns out to be an unlikely lover for Mme Swann, as well as much else. Frequently, these corrected childhood impressions are themselves later corrected. For example, Gilberte's eyes become as variable as Emma Bovary's, first in their colour (I,139) and then in their intent: they are originally interpreted as expressing scorn and indifference(I,139); this is next remembered as a 'regard «en dessous», rêveur et fourbe' (I,484) and then as a 'regard attentif et souriant' (I,519); and finally, in middle age, Gilberte claims that her eyes were in fact burning with desire for Marcel (IV,269-70). By the time the reader reaches this final amendment, he has probably lost all hope of reaching the truth. Indeed, the truth has come to seem less interesting than the process of ceaseless rewriting of the same incident.

Again, however, this is an aspect of *A la recherche* which has been much discussed by critics of Proust and needs no further coverage. The thesis that follows will therefore take for granted a certain all-importance and omnipresence of childhood in the novel. Instead of going over this old ground it will look at other, perhaps more straightforward ways of evaluating the importance of the theme of childhood and the extent of its presence in *A la recherche*. It is to be hoped that this will support and further explain the conclusions of those critics who have rightly recognised the great significance of childhood to Proust's work.

However, only the final chapter will be devoted exclusively to this project. Chapter 1 and parts of the three remaining chapters will also be concerned with the second aim set out above. As will be seen, any attempt to evaluate the importance of childhood *within* Proust's work cannot be entirely separated from the question of his own position with respect to contemporary writing about childhood. This second project is not motivated by any philosophical or critical belief that writers *should* be set in their time. Nor is it driven by a conviction that those who write about childhood particularly benefit from such an approach - although many have claimed that this is the case. For example, Victor Toursch, one of the first literary critics to take an interest in childhood, writes: 'Quelles qu'aient été les séductions du sujet, qui [...] tentait les romanciers par les intérêts nombreux et divers qu'il présentait, la préoccupation de ces écrivains correspond à une préoccupation de leur temps.'[10] The thesis

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[10] Victor Toursch, *L'Enfant français à la fin du XIXe siècle d'après ses principaux romanciers* (Paris: Presses modernes, 1939), p.163. See also Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris:

that follows is motivated by a far narrower belief, which is simply that a comparative study of Proust's treatment of childhood should prove interesting, given the vast quantity of literature produced about the same theme by his contemporaries. Furthermore it is an approach which has been neglected. Proust, it seems, has increasingly assumed the proportions of a literary giant whose similarities with many less important writers of his time are all too often ignored. His friend, Jacques de Lacretelle, once wrote: 'Proust, par la fraîcheur et l'authenticité de son souvenir, s'est fait l'historien inégalable de cette patrie intérieure [l'enfance].'[11] He may well be correct, but even if Proust is *unequalled* in his portrayal of childhood, he can still be contrasted and even compared with his contemporaries, many of whom are now forgotten or even shunned.

Two potential candidates for comparison have already been mentioned: Fernand Gregh and Jacques de Lacretelle, himself. Gregh published *La Maison de l'enfance*, a collection of poetry, in 1896, prompting Proust to write him a letter in praise of what he called 'ce morceau de vie intérieure qu'est ton livre', 'une œuvre [...] importante, consistante et transparente à la fois' (C,II,155-56). Similarly, when Lacretelle published his novel *La Vie inquiète de Jean Hermelin* in 1920, Proust wrote to him:

> Des morceaux comme ceux qui décrivent cette enfance dont la richesse de vie intérieure est si peu soupçonnée autour de vous, le premier baiser, l'effroyable effort pour «rejoindre» et l'analyse des scrupules qui le dictent, voilà entre tant d'autres les pages qui dépassent ce que, avec toute ma prédilection pour votre pensée et votre forme, je pouvais attendre de vous.[12]

Indeed, both works turn out to have interesting points of contact with *A la recherche*. *La Maison de l'enfance*, though written in verse, describes a childhood of flowers and long walks, which is tied as much to a single place as *Combray* is to Combray. *La Vie inquiète de Jean Hermelin*, though only partly about childhood (it is much more concerned with the difficulties of 'fitting in', to which Proust refers in his letter) has a similar content to Gregh's poetry, but includes further Proustian elements: delicate health, a passion for reading and a kind of 'drame du coucher'. The first two chapters, in particular, are like a condensed

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Éditions du Seuil, 1973) for a discussion of the radical changes in attitudes to childhood throughout the course of history.

[11] Jacques de Lacretelle, *Les Maîtres et les amis. Études et souvenirs littéraires* (Namur: Wesmael-Charlier, 1959), p.82.

[12] Quoted by Lacretelle, p.117.

rearrangement of *Combray* and *Noms de pays: le nom.*[13] Proust, it seems, might just as well have written a letter of complaint as one of praise.

Very little more will be said about either of these works in the course of the subsequent thesis. Indeed, there is very little more that can be said. *La Vie inquiète de Jean Hermelin*, in particular, is not of great interest for our purposes, since it was written several years after *Combray* was published. Proust's treatment of childhood is therefore more part of the context in which Lacretelle's was written than vice versa. The main point is that Gregh and Lacretelle provide examples of the *potential* comparisons that can be made between Proust's interest in childhood and that of his contemporaries. Both are now largely overlooked, yet Proust moved in their circles, read them, wrote to them and clearly admired them. Though they and other minor writers of their time may seem largely irrelevant to the modern reader and critic, it is still worth linking their names to that of Proust. After all, they were very much connected in the gossip columns, literary journals and book shelves of the early twentieth century. This thesis will thus re-establish what are perhaps some of Proust's more ignoble literary ties.

Of course, such a comparative approach to Proust and childhood is not one which has been *entirely* neglected, especially with respect to the more enduring writers of his time and earlier. In fact, several general studies of childhood in literature, which include references to Proust, give space to 'forgotten authors' and 'literary greats' alike. Among the most useful of these critical works are: Richard Coe's wide-ranging account of autobiographies of childhood in many languages, *When the Grass Was Taller*; Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe's somewhat narrower exploration of the mythology surrounding childhood in French literature, *Un Monde autre: l'enfance*; and Francine Dugast's *L'Image de l'enfance*, which narrows the field down even further to French prose published between 1918 and 1930.[14] Marina Bethlenfalvay's 'typology' of children in nineteenth century French literature, *Les Visages de l'enfant*, is also interesting, but this thesis has perhaps been most influenced and inspired by George Boas's history of the interest shown in childhood across all intellectual and artistic

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[13] Jacques de Lacretelle, *La Vie inquiète de Jean Hermelin* (Paris: Fayard, 1928), pp.9-26.

[14] Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1984); Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Un Monde autre: l'enfance. De ses représentations à son mythe* (Paris: Payot, 1971); and Francine Dugast, *L'Image de l'enfance dans la prose littéraire de 1918 à 1930*, 2 vols (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1981).

fields, *The Cult of Childhood.*[15] The very earliest critics to look at the literary theme of childhood, now even less remembered than many of the writers they deal with, have turned out to be another source of historical interest. Jean Calvet's *L'Enfant dans la littérature française*, Aimé Dupuy's *Un Personnage nouveau du roman français, l'enfant*, and Victor Toursch's *L'Enfant français à la fin du XIX^e siècle d'après ses principaux romanciers*, provide not only vital bibliographical material, but also greater insight into attitudes to childhood at a time not much later than that of Proust.[16]

Several theses have also included Proust in a more detailed comparative study of the theme of childhood. Among them are: Jane Missner Barstow's investigation of the similarities between Proust, Dickens and Grass; R.A.H. Jones's similar exploration of *Combray*, Nerval's *Sylvie* and Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*; and Helen F. Constantine's review of the theme in the work of Colette, Gide, Larbaud and Alain-Fournier.[17] There are also many articles - far too numerous to list - which make direct comparisons between Proust and a remarkably diverse set of authors who have also written about children: Alain-Fournier, Chateaubriand, George Eliot, Gide, Larbaud, Loti, Nabokov, Nerval, Rousseau, Ruskin, and George Sand, to name just a few.[18] However, most of these give equal space to Proust and those writers compared with him. Indeed, in some cases, the approach is often dictated by a greater interest in the author or authors in question than in Proust himself. They therefore differ greatly from the project set out in the following chapters, which aims to keep Proust as a constant focal point. Furthermore, though there will be cause to return to the individual writers mentioned above and many more besides, this thesis is not driven by any *particular* relationship, but rather by a *collective*

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15 Marina Bethlenfalvay, *Les Visages de l'enfant dans la littérature française du XIX^e siècle: Esquisse d'une typologie* (Geneva: Droz, 1979) and George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: University of London Press, 1966).

16 Jean Calvet, *L'Enfant dans la littérature française*, 2 vols (Paris: Lanore, 1930); Aimé Dupuy, *Un Personnage nouveau du roman français, l'Enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1931); and Victor Toursch, *L'Enfant français à la fin du XIXe siècle d'après ses principaux romanciers* (Paris: Presses modernes, 1939).

17 Jane Missner Barstow, 'Childhood revisited and revised: Perspective in the first person novels of Dickens, Grass and Proust' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973); R.A.H. Jones, 'The Theme of Childhood recalled as it finds expression in *Sylvie, Le Grand Meaulnes* and *Combray*' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1965); and Helen F. Constantine, 'Some Accounts of Childhood in Modern French Literature (unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Newcastle, 1980).

18 See the Bibliography for further details of some of these articles.

comparison and contrast of Proust with those writing about childhood during or, where relevant, before his lifetime. Conversely, the chapters that follow do not aim to cover *all* those who might usefully be compared to Proust in this respect, but concentrate on particularly illuminating or representative writers and their works.

Thus it can be seen that this is, in some ways, a compromise between three theses. It is neither whole-heartedly detailed Proust criticism, nor literary history, nor comparative criticism, but treads a cautious path between all three. If this compromise position could be construed as a weakness of the work that follows, it is also its great strength - and certainly the source of any originality that may lie therein. The research of which it is the culmination began with an interest in Proust's treatment of the theme of childhood, which then inspired a plan for a more general thesis on the literary theme of childhood or, at least on its treatment by several *other* authors. However, this increasingly seemed to lead back to the original starting point in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The route taken by this research was, I believe, neither accidental nor unduly directed by personal taste. Proust may have an unrivalled place in the history of the literary theme of childhood, but the history of this theme also has an important place within his writing. At the very least then, the pages that follow should fill in the gaps left by the various critics listed above. They are, however, intended to go beyond such an aim. This thesis offers an alternative angle from which to look at Proust's treatment of childhood in *Combray*, and even, I hope, goes so far as to cast new light on his work considered as a whole.

CHAPTER 1: THE GENRE OF THE *RECIT D'ENFANCE*: ITS FORM, CONTENT AND CONNECTIONS WITH PROUST

Je crois même que les phrases que
je viens d'écrire sont des réminiscences
de bouquins que j'ai lus.[1] *(Jules Vallès)*

Childhood: a literary vogue

The most important fact to be considered before making any comparative study of childhood in *A la recherche du temps perdu* is that writing about childhood was a major literary industry in Proust's time. Although this may not be immediately apparent to present-day critics, Calvet, writing in 1930, concludes his account of childhood in French literature as follows: 'Je reviens à mon sujet, *l'Enfant dans la littérature*. Il y tient depuis trois quarts de siècle une place considérable, si bien que les livres d'enfants constituent un véritable genre littéraire.'[2] This chapter aims to evaluate the extent and nature of such writing in Proust's time, to identify its main preoccupations and to establish whether it can indeed be said to form 'un véritable genre littéraire'. In so doing, it will attempt to determine whether contemporary writing about childhood had any obvious collective appeal to the writer of *A la recherche du temps perdu* - in terms of either form or content. This chapter will also look at contemporary scientific attention to childhood and its relationship with literature, in particular, their shared interest in the notion of the child *as* artist. Finally, it will attempt to show how particular writers, both literary and scientific, may have had direct or indirect influence on Proust's treatment of childhood. The three subsequent chapters will proceed to explore more specific points of comparison between Proust and many of these writers.

The most conclusive proof of our initial fact is statistical. The evidence is presented in Appendix 1, an inventory (arranged by date of publication) of French literature which deals with the theme of childhood from 1700 to 1922, the year of Proust's death. Despite its inevitable incompleteness, Appendix 1 proves definitively not only that there were many authors writing about childhood during Proust's lifetime, but that the most prominent literary figures of his day were among them. From a narrower perspective, Dupuy, another early

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[1] Jules Vallès, *L'Enfant*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975-90), II (1990), 139-388 (p.275).

[2] J. Calvet, *L'Enfant dans la littérature française*, 2 vols (Paris: Lanore, 1930), II, 229.

critic of literature about childhood, claims that 1913, when *Du côté de chez Swann* was published, was the most 'fruitful' year of the period covered by his study (1876-1926).[3] Jacques de Lacretelle also tries to analyse the literary climate of 1913, asking himself the question, 'Que lisions-nous alors?' He answers with the names of France, Loti, Barrès, Bourget, Hermant, Mirbeau, Gide and Alain-Fournier, all of whom appear in Appendix 1.[4] Thus, what is true of Proust's lifetime seems doubly true of the vital year 1913.

Childhood and literature: mythology

What exactly was the nature of this literary fashion for childhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Several answers are possible. Francine Dugast points out that a certain kind of portrayal of the child tends to be associated with a certain literary school: Romanticism generally idealises both the child and childhood; Realism and Naturalism deal principally with the 'unhappy child'; a certain kind of popular novel makes use of the simple concrete language it associates with children; Symbolism exploits the 'correspondances' and distortions of memory it perceives to be part of the child's vision; and Surrealism takes this appreciation of the child's irrational qualities to new extremes.[5] This model is satisfactory up to a point, but it seems to plot a linear chronological development that does not entirely fit the facts. For example, some present-day writers idealise childhood, while others continue to emphasize its unhappier aspects. Bethlenfalvay's refinement of the linear system into a 'typologie' is therefore more appealing.[6] She classifies the children of French literature into four specific 'types' each characterised by certain qualities: 'l'enfant venu d'ailleurs' (associated with death, beauty and purity); 'l'enfant victime' (casualty of poverty and brutality); 'l'enfant du monde' (defined by animal vitality and harmony with his environment)

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[3] Aimé Dupuy, *Un Personnage nouveau du roman français, l'Enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1931), p.14. Appendix 1 appears to show otherwise, although it is not really clear whether Dupuy is talking in terms of quality or quantity.

[4] Jacques de Lacretelle, *Les Maîtres et les amis* (Namur: Wesmael-Charlier, 1959), p.78.

[5] Francine Dugast, *L'Image de l'enfance dans la prose littéraire de 1918 à 1930*, 2 vols (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1981). See especially Chapter XII, 'La Tradition littéraire dans les textes évoquant l'enfance' (II,567-635).

[6] Marina Bethlenfalvay, *Les Visages de l'enfant dans la littérature française du XIXe siècle: Esquisse d'une typologie* (Geneva: Droz, 1979).

and 'l'enfant de l'autre' (characterized by his inauthenticity). Each of these may initially be associated with a certain literary school (the first with Romanticism, the second and third with Realism and Naturalism, the fourth with twentieth century intellectualism and a more modern conception of the self), but Bethlenfalvay claims that once a given type is established it remains on the literary scene. Thus, she claims, *Le Grand Meaulnes* (also of 1913), with its hero, who is literally an 'enfant venu d'ailleurs, and its beautiful, childlike heroine, who dies an early death, makes Alain-Fournier a twentieth century romantic - perhaps what Toursch (another early critic of literature about childhood) would call a 'romantique attardé'.[7] On a much wider scale, we must not forget the divergence in the development of this literary cult according to differences in culture as well as differences in time. Richard Coe points out that, while the dominant preoccupation, or as he calls it 'myth', of English literature about childhood is education, and for Russian writers the major interest is in the revered mother figure, that of the French tradition is language.[8]

One of the problems with Bethlenfalvay's system is that her four 'types' seem insufficient and rather arbitrary. Another obvious category might be the 'pastoral child' or the 'child of nature'. Such a child might again have a tendency to belong to a particular literary school - to a George Sand 'roman champêtre' or similar. To this we might also add 'the naughty child', common enough in the popular novel of the turn of the century for Calvet to entitle one of his chapters 'Charmants mal élevés'.[9] Similarly, it might be worth including a 'provincial, small-town child', characterised by the the 'romans provinciaux et régionalistes' of Boylesve or Bordeaux.[10] However, adding further types means adding further problems. Bethlenfalvay admits the original four are not mutually exclusive. And the more types we have, the more difficult it becomes to assign a given child to a type. This probably would not

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[7] Bethlenfalvay, pp.44-45 and Victor Toursch, *L'Enfant français à la fin du XIXe siècle d'après ses principaux romanciers* (Paris: Presses modernes, 1939), p.168. He applies the term to Loti and Daudet.

[8] Richard N. Coe, 'Reminiscences of childhood. An approach to a Comparative Mythology', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society. Literary and Philosophical Section*, 19 (1984), 221-321.

[9] Calvet, II, 103. The main perpetrator of this type is Gyp, a writer of popular, sentimental novels about children.

[10] The term 'roman provincial et régionaliste' is used by René Lalou in his *Histoire de la littérature française contemporaine (1870 à nos jours)* (Paris: Crès, 1922), p.587. The main examples of this 'type' are: Henry Bordeaux, *La Maison* (1912-13); René Boylesve, *La Becquée* (1901); and René Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la balustrade* (1903). There will be cause to return to these below.

matter, if it was a case of only a few exceptions, but even the most obvious, water-tight categorisations tend to break down. Vallès's Jacques Vingtras (of *L'Enfant*, 1879), for example, is most clearly an 'enfant victime', but he often exhibits the vitality of the 'enfant du monde' and even has a hint of 'l'enfant de l'autre' before he finally asserts his personality in an act of rebellion. When he is sent on holiday to the country he takes on the oneness with nature of the typical 'pastoral child', and some of his exploits with his mother have a touch of harmless 'naughty child' comedy - even though this generally degenerates into black humour. The novel also contains a typical 'romantic child' in the figure of Louisette, complete with purity, beauty and death. Of course, she too is a child victim, since this is a 'Naturalist' death at the hands of her brutal father.[11]

Another problem is that any such system of classification tends to undermine its own *raison d'être*, bringing together authors and works more notable for their differences than their similarities. Calvet's chapter on 'Rebelles et tourmentés' contains the expected duo of defiant victims found in Vallès's *L'Enfant* and Renard's *Poil de Carotte* (1894), but also includes Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt* (1926) - strange bed-fellows indeed.[12] Quite apart from being more autobiographical, the 'torment' described by Gide is of a far more metaphysical nature than that related by Vallès and Renard. Perhaps then, another model might be preferable. A possible alternative is suggested by Coe's talk of 'myths'. Although he is never entirely explicit about what he means, his 'myths' can be interpreted as recurring attributes of the literature of childhood, often constituent features of Bethlenfalvay's 'types': goodness, purity, innocence, beauty, vitality, poverty, brutality, victimisation, inauthenticity, love of nature, love of books, mischievousness, rebelliousness, torment and so on. Each novel, story, autobiography or poem about childhood will contain different combinations of these myths. Of course, we could equally well choose to call them 'motifs' or simply 'characteristics', but the term 'myth' is particularly satisfying insofar as it suggests the idea of an archetype or recurring feature *and* a certain disregard for the truth, both of which fit the literary theme of childhood rather nicely. Indeed several critics of the literature of childhood

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[11] See Vallès, pp.312-18 for the portrayal of Louisette.

[12] Calvet, II, 53 and following pages.

have used this label, if with varying meaning.[13] One advantage of Coe's small-scale myths over Bethlenfalvay's large-scale types is that the former allow us to separate certain concepts which do not necessarily belong together: animal vitality and poverty, death and purity or innocence, physical torment and mental torment. Thus, Gide no longer has to sit side by side with Vallès.

Secondly, this model allows us to highlight the *differences* as well as the similarities of those who really do seem to merit being categorised as the same 'type'. Balzac's Pierrette, in the novel of the same name (1840), and Hugo's Cosette, in *Les Misérables* (1862), may both start out as archetypal 'child victims', but their destinies diverge. Pierrette's culminates in a particularly angelic death, worthy of the 'Romantic child', while Cosette is eventually rescued into relative happiness and prosperity. She may share the central child role of the novel with Gavroche, the ultimate 'enfant du monde', who does die, but his death is certainly not associated with romantic purity or beauty and has more to do with Vallèsian revolution. Similarly, Alain-Fournier may be a 'romantique attardé' in his attitude to childhood, but the death of the heroine, for all her childlike beauty and moral purity, is also associated with decay and ugliness. Emma Bovary, it seems, left her mark, even on the literature of childhood.

One final advantage of this model is that it allows us to pin-point more detailed attributes - mini-myths, as it were - which do not belong to any type necessarily and could be found in all of them. Some examples are: the almost ubiquitous old man or woman kindred spirit (found in the work of Alain-Fournier, Henry Bordeaux, Darien, Malot, Renard, Vallès, to name just a few); the first experience of death (described by Loti and Boylesve); excessive mother-love (in Loti, Stendhal, and France); excessive mother-hatred (documented by Renard and Vallès); or even both at once (found in Léautaud).[14] Significantly, it could be argued that all of these are included in Proust's depiction of childhood.

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[13] See especially Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe (*Un Monde autre: l'enfance. De ses représentations à son mythe* (Paris: Payot, 1971)), who interprets the term rather more broadly than Coe. See also Max Primault, Henry Lhong and Jean Malrieu (*Terres de l'enfance. Le Mythe de l'enfance dans la littérature contemporaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961)), who interpret the term rather less negatively than Coe.

[14] Those not already referred to are: Georges Darien, *Bas les cœurs!* (1889); Hector Malot, *Sans Famille* (1878); Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d'un enfant* (1890); Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard* (1890, but written 1835-36); Anatole France, *Le Petit Pierre* (1918); and Paul Léautaud, *Le Petit ami* (1903).

Childhood and literature: genre

We will return to the question of mythology and its potential application to Proust later in this chapter. In the meantime, it is worth asking further questions about the works listed in Appendix 1. For instance, what *kind* of writing is most common in the literature about childhood of Proust's time? The facetious answer to such a question is 'bad writing'. There is more than a grain of truth in this, however. While devoting an entire thesis to childhood in the French novel, Godfrey admits that the sample in question consists mainly of 'third-rate' works, worthy more of sociological than literary interest.[15] Such negative conclusions are partially confirmed by a quick survey of the proportion of works in Appendix 1 which are now out of print - and this is a list which is inevitably biassed in favour of those considered worth remembering by somebody. The writer and critic, Robert Liddell, claims that 'children in fiction have been more sentimentalized, lied about and betrayed than any other class of being'. Nevertheless, he continues, 'the more intelligent the writer, the better he treats them. Henry James and Proust have written better about them than anyone.'[16] Unfortunately, despite the good supporting examples, the latter generalisation is not entirely accurate (even allowing for the fact that sentimentality, lies and betrayal can still produce good literature). If some of the titles in the list are best forgotten, others are wrongly remembered. The most obvious disappointment is Anatole France and his prolific but unmemorable autobiographical novels. Calvet's praise suggests a possible reason for this:

> Pour parler de cet enfant, auquel il s'intéresse pour tant de motifs, Anatole France donne à son style des inflexions tendres. Au fond, cet éternel railleur était un sentimental qui a laissé la vieillesse étouffer son cœur et enfler son scepticisme.[17]

Could it be that France's treatment of childhood is dominated by the literary or intellectual climate of his age, to the point that he loses his own cynical voice, and lapses into an alien sentimentality? And is this a danger for *anyone* who attempts to write about children?

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[15] A.O. Godfrey, 'The Child in French Literature 1866-1910. Victim or rebel in a hostile or neglectful environment' (unpublished M. Litt. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1975). See particularly the conclusion.

[16] Robert Liddell, *A Treatise on the Novel*, quoted by W. Hildick in *Children and Fiction. A critical study in depth of the artistic and psychological factors involved in writing fiction for and about children* (London: Evans, 1974), p.11.

[17] Calvet, II, 36. The main novels that France wrote about childhood are: *Le Livre de mon ami* (1885); *Pierre Nozière* (1899); *Le Petit Pierre* (1918); and *La Vie en fleur* (1922).

If so, then it is overcome by some. It would clearly be wrong to write off *all* Proust's contemporaries and predecessors as 'bad writers of childhood'. The disappointments (France's four main contributions to the list in Appendix 1, Alphonse Daudet's even more excessively sentimental *Le Petit Chose* (1868), Renan's apparently misnamed *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* (1883)) are more than compensated for by such finds as Darien's *Bas les cœurs!*, Audoux's *Marie-Claire* (1910), Boylesve's *L'Enfant à la balustrade* or Léautaud's *Le Petit ami*. Yet even in some of the 'good' examples, the theme of childhood gives rise to what can objectively be called monotonous and unoriginal writing. Calvet, who clearly enjoys reading many of the works selected for his study, nevertheless asks, 'Quel est l'avenir de ce genre? Il paraît un peu fatigué. [...] Ceux qui les racontent répètent fatalement ceux qui les ont racontés, et je m'en suis bien aperçu à la monotonie de mon analyse.'[18] It is probably sufficient to read just a handful of the works listed in the appendix, to confirm his impressions. Before long, the amusing anecdotes of Loti and France begin to merge into one, and it becomes difficult to distinguish between the provincial trivialities of Bordeaux and Boylesve - or, to mention an obvious pairing once again, between the maternal tortures of Vallès and Renard.

A more serious interpretation of the question: 'What *kind* of writing predominates?' is to ask which genre is most common in the literature of childhood. At this point, it is worth noting that Proust himself had strong views about the category to which his novel should be assigned. In 1912, before publishing *Du côté de chez Swann*, he produced some preliminary articles for *Le Figaro*, which seem to have had an undesired effect on one reader at least. Montesquiou wrote, in a letter of congratulation, 'Votre page est *charmante*. C'est un fragment de *Mémoires, souvenirs d'enfance*, pas trop *à sa place* en un lieu voué aux coups de poings politiques et *rasoirs* académiques' (C,X,83). Proust seems to have taken the compliment badly. He wrote in reply:

> Quant à ce que vous dites du côté *Souvenirs d'Enfance*, hélas c'est la condamnation de l'idée d'écrire ces articles qui vont d'avance créer un malentendu au sujet de mon livre si composé et concentrique et qu'on prendra pour des *Mémoires et Souvenirs d'Enfance*. (C,XI,90)

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[18] Calvet, II, 229-230.

This retort certainly shows that Proust recognised the existence of a genre roughly equivalent to the 'véritable genre littéraire' mentioned by Calvet, and that he considered *A la recherche* not to conform to it.[19] However, it is difficult to make out precisely what he is objecting to. Is it the autobiographical implications of the terms 'Mémoires' and 'Souvenirs', or the fact that the novel will go on to contain much more than 'Enfance'? Poor Montesquiou could not have known that the finished novel would also make room for 'coups de poings politiques' and 'rasoirs académiques'. The term 'concentrique' also hints that *Combray* will be of great importance, more than just an overture, made up of 'pages charmantes', to something much bigger and better. Or maybe the key to Proust's displeasure lies in the word 'composé', which suggests that his novel will not have the shapelessness of a series of childhood anecdotes, such as those of France or Loti. Alternatively, Proust, like Calvet, might be alluding to the sentimentality, monotony and lack of individuality that this genre had already come to signify. It thus becomes increasingly difficult to see what promise the literary theme of childhood held for Proust, unless it was a chance to rectify the mistakes of earlier manifestations of the 'genre'.

Even if this type of literature offered only a *negative* model for *A la recherche*, how precisely is the genre to be defined? Without venturing into modern theoretical answers to such a question, it is probably safe to point out that Appendix 1 is biassed towards prose and, more precisely, towards the novel or autobiography. On the other hand, if we take a closer look at some of these works, we find not so much an association with a single genre so much as a *crossing* of genres. After all, a great deal of literature about childhood comes under the headings of 'roman autobiographique' (Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*, Renard's *Poil de Carotte*, Vallès's *L'Enfant*, Audoux's *Marie-Claire*) or 'autobiographie romancée' (Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*, Sartre's *Les Mots*), rather than 'roman' or 'autobiographie' *tout court*. Even those works that remain safely outside the no-man's-land between novel and autobiography retain some ambivalence.[20] Coe neutralizes this ambivalence by defining an entirely new genre, the 'Childhood', roughly speaking a

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[19] Calvet, II, 229-30.

[20] See Richard N. Coe, *When the grass was taller. Autobiography and the experience of childhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp.1-10, for a discussion of this problem that is specifically linked to childhood.

narrative of childhood events, *most of which* correspond to biographical fact.[21] Though the comments of Proust and Calvet, quoted above, seem to justify the definition of a genre covering much literature about childhood, Coe's characterisation of the 'Childhood' has certain drawbacks - even if it provides him with a useful framework for his discussion of autobiography. The proportion of biographical fact is a criterion that proves difficult to apply in practice. And more importantly, by simply moving the boundary between novel and autobiography, so that most of the works in his sample fall on the side of the latter, Coe's definition fails to do justice to one of the most interesting - if paradoxical - characteristics of his chosen genre, that is a certain disrespect for the limitations imposed by the concept of genre in general.

Another obvious, but less discussed, case of genre-crossing is uncovered by the difficulties in distinguishing between writing *for* children and writing *about* children. The solution tends to have little to do with authorial intention and much more to do with market forces. From the list in Appendix 1, it is worth considering the number of titles published by the same company in *two* editions, one for adults and another for children: *Le Grand Meaulnes*, *Poil de Carotte*, and *Le Petit Chose*, for example. Of course, in some instances the ambivalence was intended all along. Henry Bordeaux introduces his *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants* (1914) as follows: 'C'est un conte pour les petits enfants qui ont reçu notre tradition, pour les petits enfants et pour les grandes personnes aussi.' He continues by referring us to yet another genre, the folk song: 'Je souhaiterais qu'il ressemblât à ces chansons d'autrefois qu'on psalmodiait aux veillées en filant la quenouille.'[22] The story, when it emerges after this interesting introduction, turns out to be rather disappointing - excessively sentimental and too religious for today's tastes. It is difficult to see how it fulfils the aims set out in its introduction or how it could possibly appeal to any 'grande personne', even at the turn of the century. Yet *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants* seems to have pleased one 'grande personne' at least, that is, Proust. Shortly after its publication he wrote to Bordeaux, congratulating him: 'Pardonnez-moi de ne pas vous avoir encore dit mon admiration pour votre merveilleuse *Croisade*' (C,XIII,243). We can only speculate as to

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[21] Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller*, pp.8-9.

[22] Henry Bordeaux, *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants* (Paris: Flammarion, 1914), p.21.

what exactly he admired, but it seems reasonable to assume, from the writer whose narrator professes to be both the Scheherezade and the Saint-Simon of his time (IV,620-21), that it is, at least in part, the desire to cross the boundaries of genre. After all, this same narrator says of his own work that 'pour en donner une idée, c'est aux arts les plus élevés et les plus différents qu'il faudrait emprunter des comparaisons' (IV,609).

The above examples of genre-crossing are far from being the most extreme in Appendix 1. Is *Émile* (1762) fiction or educational treatise? Is Schwob's *Le Livre de Monelle* (1894) a collection of 'contes' or an anthology of Symbolist prose poems - with more than a disturbing hint of child pornography? Renard's *Poil de Carotte* occasionally lapses into dramatic form, especially in the chapter, 'Coup de théâtre', which comes complete with five 'scenes'.[23] Renard's novel even strays into the 'genre' of the photograph album, the final chapter taking the form of fragments of prose which are supposed to replace the missing photographs of the child in the family collection.[24] Read in terms of its considerable autobiographical content (which *is* easily verifiable in this case), Renard is probably seeking revenge for his own tortured childhood. But the fact that he draws on so many genres in so doing also contributes to a more literary kind of subversion. *Poil de Carotte* may remain a novel, if only for want of a better term, but it is sufficiently fragmentary and formless to be described as an '*anti*-novel'. Significantly, this is a term that is equally applicable to *A la recherche*, though for different reasons, such as the refusal to respect the conventions of plot or characterization.

Of course, it is all too easy to see fragmentation and lack of overall design as avant-garde. Perhaps the most obvious examples of formlessness are France's *Livre de mon ami* and Loti's *Roman d'un enfant*, which are hardly the work of anti-novelists. France and Loti have simply chosen an anecdotal style and structure for their autobiographies - perhaps in the interests of 'truth'. After all, life rarely comes with a ready-made novelistic shape. But in *Poil de Carotte*'s case the lack of structure has a literary motivation, and the instability of genre is clearly deliberate. Two other notable examples are Vallès's *L'Enfant* and Darien's *Bas les cœurs!* Vallès, who plays off literary language against the language of the child (or at least a

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[23] Jules Renard, *Poil de Carotte*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-70), II (1970), 633-771 (pp.741-42). Indeed, Renard later transformed the novel into a play.

[24] Renard, pp.763-71.

kind of pastiche/parody of it), and Darien, who adopts a child as his narrator, are not simply political revolutionaries, but also literary innovators. The child is chosen as narrator or semi-narrator precisely because of his potential to rebel against the genre of the novel and its associated discourse. These novels thus have a certain degree of *modernity* in common. Most readers are surprised to find that *Poil de Carotte*, the latest of the three to be published, first appeared as early as 1894. Perhaps it is this tendency to produce technical innovation, even in the work of more conventional writers such as Loti or France, that most explains the appeal of the theme of childhood to Proust. Though there are comparatively few examples of what might be called 'great literature' in Appendix 1, the models offered to Proust by literature about childhood are thus not all negative ones.

Naturally, there are many exceptions to innovation and modernity, to genre-crossing and genre-defying. Renan's *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* are comparatively traditional memoirs, for instance, and Larbaud's *Enfantines* (1908-14) are straightforward short stories. But in general, to summarise the preceding discussion, there seems to be more variation in the *form* of literature about childhood than in the *content*. Childhood is not the province of any one genre but lends itself to many. The child's fanciful and unfettered imagination may suggest poetry, but the notion of his experience as a closed, coherent world, different and separate from reality - to which Richard Coe so often refers - also makes childhood an apt symbol for the novel.[25] And the natural rebelliousness or defiance of childhood, exploited by such as Darien, Renard and Vallès, makes it an ideal theme for refusing the constraints of both (or indeed any) literary forms. Thus, it is hardly surprising that we find genres crossing (or breaking down) at a point of intersection that is the child. Claude Bonnefoy is quite right to suggest that one of the many attractions of the child to the novelist is his potential for creating novels that are essentially *un*-novelistic:

> Dans le goût des romanciers pour l'enfance, surtout s'ils ne croient plus aux vertus de l'intrigue, il y a encore ceci: plus que d'autres thèmes, elle permet les cheminements sinueux, les ruptures brusques, la liberté de l'imaginaire, elle offre la possibilité de conter quelque chose, une et mille histoires ensemble, sans tomber dans les poncifs du romanesque.[26]

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[25] Richard Coe, *When the grass was taller*, p.204 and p.241, for example.

[26] Claude Bonnefoy, 'Un Thème privilégié: l'enfance', *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 83 (1969), 6-8 (p.8).

Could the theme of childhood, then, have helped Proust in the formulation of a novel so rich in 'cheminements sinueux', 'ruptures brusques', flights into the imaginary, a thousand and one stories worthy of Scheherezade herself and so lacking in traditional 'vertus de l'intrigue' or 'poncifs du romanesque'?

On a more practical level, however, this leaves us without a convenient blanket term, such as 'novel of childhood' or 'childhood autobiography' to describe the works we will be dealing with. 'Mémoires' or 'Souvenirs d'enfance' seem equally undesirable, given Proust's hostility towards them. For these reasons, it seems permissible to define an artifical genre, or at least redefine another French term, 'récit d'enfance', to mean, very loosely, the story or partial story of a childhood, fact or fiction, poetry or prose - or any combination of these. This is obviously not totally satisfactory. Larbaud's *Enfantines*, for example, relate several 'enfances' not just one. More problematically, how much of a work must consist of childhood episodes before it qualifies as a 'récit d'enfance'? *A la recherche du temps perdu* itself or Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* (1904-12), for example, are vast novels with comparatively small sections devoted to childhood. As with Coe's 'biographical facts', it is difficult to offer a precise percentage as a criterion. Suffice it to say that both works devote a sizeable number of pages to childhood, enough to merit the title of 'novel' in their own right. Even if they did not, we would still be free to say that they *contain* a 'récit d'enfance' rather than *being* one. Anyhow, in keeping with the realisation that the theme of childhood has a certain incompatibility with the notion of genre, this thesis will probably not stick rigidly to such terminology, using the French term loosely, Coe's likeable term 'the Childhood' less precisely (and less autobiographically than he means it), and other even vaguer expressions, such as 'literature of childhood' for variety.

Childhood and Science

A second important fact to be considered before making any comparative study of childhood in *A la recherche* is that by no means all the writing about childhood around the turn of the century was literary. Much of it was scientific. Calvet, writing about the child in 1930, notes that 'la toute dernière mode consiste à lui appliquer des instruments et des méthodes scientifiques, et à découvrir en lui des abîmes'.[27] The reference to 'abîmes'

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[27] Calvet, I, p.x.

suggests that Calvet is talking largely about psychoanalysis. Indeed, over the years, there has been much speculation about possible influence on Proust by Freud. To summarise the resulting picture very briefly, Freud was already writing in Proust's life-time but, while it is probable that Proust had heard of psychoanalysis, there is no proof that he had ever read Freud.

A less well known story is that Proust's life-time coincided with the slightly earlier birth of another science, child psychology. Piaget (1896-1980), the most well-known and first truly scientific child psychologist, was already writing before Proust's death - though chronology makes it even less likely that Proust was aware of his findings than of Freud's.[28] However, Piaget was himself part of an intellectual movement, which began early enough to have some possible influence on Proust. Child psychology was certainly an influence on the intellectual climate of his time. Even Proust's own father, who was really more of a medical man, touched on the subject in the book he wrote with Gilbert Ballet, *Hygiène du neurasthénique* (1897). Although this is supposedly a work of psychiatry, which purports to set out a method of treatment for children and adults with a specific psychological problem, it strays into a more general discussion of the ways in which such problems can be avoided - by a certain type of upbringing. Indeed, Proust senior and Ballet make recommendations about the education of *all* children, that have points of contact with *Combray* and *Noms de pays: le nom*. Great emphasis is placed on will-power as a cure not only for neurasthenia but also for hypochondria. Over-emotionalism and excessive reading are also seen as dangers, especially insofar as they lead to insomnia and 'nocturnal terrors'.[29] Indeed, it is advocated that children be kept apart from society, as far as possible:

> In other words, children should not be associated early with the life of those about them. They must be removed from all surroundings where causes of excitement and agitation abound. In towns they should be forbidden to attend parties, dramatic spectacles or the theatre until the twelfth or fifteenth year of their age.[30]

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[28] Piaget's first papers on child psychology, containing his findings about children's intelligence, were published around 1921. His first major work was *Le Langage et la pensée chez l'enfant* (1923), which will be referred to, along with other works by Piaget, in Chapter 4.

[29] A. Proust and Gilbert Ballet, *The Treatment of Neurasthenia*, trans. by Peter Campbell Smith (London: Kimpton, 1902), pp.106-10 and p.35. Unfortunately, I have only been able to obtain the English translation. See Milton L. Miller, *Nostalgia. A Psychoanalytic Study of Marcel Proust* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), pp.149-52 for further details of Proust and Ballet's book.

[30] Proust and Ballet, p.110.

In fact, between the ages of three and twelve, they are better off away from towns altogether:

> The country is the ideal place of residence for children of this age: the calm life of the fields, without theatres or concerts or social gatherings, but with pure air, simple food, incessant commerce with the inanimate and animate objects of nature, that have so much attraction for them; this life has a gently educating effect.[31]

Once these similarities with the son's work have been noted, there is very little more to be said about the father's. No doubt, biographers and psychoanalytic critics would also have a great deal to add about the son's responses to the father's theories in his *own* work. Marcel demonstrates how children deprived of the theatre may find other ways of seeing actresses, how children deprived of parties may still become obsessed with high society. Furthermore, though the 'deux côtés' do have 'a gently educating effect', they are also sources of 'agitation and excitement'. But the important point for our purposes is that the presence of such ideas, in the work of both Prousts, reflects the currents of thought to be found in the more openly psychological writings of the day. Whether or not the theories shared by Dr. Proust and the early child psychologists influenced the upbringing of his own sons, the above extracts suggest that they had an indirect influence on the education of the child in *A la recherche*. Those who seem to have considered themselves responsible for propagating these theories are: Egger (*Observations et réflexions sur le développement de l'intelligence et du langage chez les enfants*, 1879); Perez (*Les Trois premières années de l'enfance*, 1878 and *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant*, 1888); Queyrat (*L'Imagination et ses variétés chez l'enfant*, 1893); and Compayré (*L'Évolution intellectuelle et morale de l'enfant*, 1896). Although these men claimed to be the first French child psychologists, most of them are now forgotten and are not generally held to have had any significant influence on the development of their own science, let alone on today's non-specialized attitudes to childhood.[32] Yet in their day, they seem to have gone through several editions and translations. Moreover, the English psychologist, Sully (*Studies of Childhood*,1895), who *is* considered to have been influential on the progress of child psychology refers to the above

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[31] Proust and Ballet, p.94.

[32] Binet is probably the most well-known of early French child-psychologists. He also had some influence on Piaget, but his *Idées modernes sur les enfants* (1911) was perhaps slightly too late to have had an effect on the intellectual climate in which *Combray* was written. Binet's work certainly has fewer points of contact with *Combray* than that of the less well-known psychologists listed above.

widely. In fact, mutual quotation seems to suggest that he and the French psychologists listed above formed a common intellectual community. So, indirectly at least, it appears that these French psychologists, who feature in this and later chapters, were instrumental not only in the continuation of the science of which they claim to be the pioneers, but also in shaping the work of Proust.[33]

Childhood: literature and science

Nevertheless, to call any of the above *scientists* does seem rather generous. Compayré claims to be contributing to the developing subject of child psychology, but his book received its prize from the Académie Française.[34] Perez announces he is practising the less scientific science of 'psychologie esthétique' and Egger seems proud to say that he is writing not as a 'philosophe' but as a father, with no mention of science whatsoever.[35] Even Sully admits that he is a long way from a truly scientific account of child psychology and that 'pretty anecdotes of children which tickle the emotions may or may not add to our insight into the peculiar mechanism of children's minds'.[36] However, 'anecdotal' is precisely the word that springs to mind when reading Sully himself and his French contemporaries - just as it does when reading Anatole France or Loti. The only difference is that in the former case it is more a matter of writing about 'a child I once knew' than 'a child I once was'. Perhaps the closest we get to real scientific data is Perez's use of actual children's compositions and letters.[37] But even this is interspersed with sentimental and unscientific remarks about the child, or references to, for example, 'sa petite personne agitée en tous sens'.[38] Similarly,

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[33] Egger will reappear in Chapter 4; Perez in Chapters 2 and 4; Queyrat in Chapter 4; Compayré in Chapters 3 and 4; and Sully in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

[34] See the preface to the second edition, where he also claims that the first edition was much 'lu, commenté, critiqué' not only in France, but also abroad (Gabriel Compayré, *L'Évolution intellectuelle et morale de l'enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p.v).

[35] Bernard Perez, *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant* (Paris, 1888), p.v and Émile Egger, 'Observations et réflexions sur le développement de l'intelligence et du langage chez les enfants', *Compte-rendu de l'Académie des Sciences morales et politiques*, n.s. 11 (1879), 209-45 and 479-511 (p.209).

[36] James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (London: Longmans, 1895), pp.10-11.

[37] For example, Perez, p.288.

[38] Perez, p.147.

alongside Compayré's claims to be the harbinger of a new science, we find clichéd descriptions of childhood as 'le berceau de l'humanité' or flowery pieces such as the following:

> Nous serions satisfaits, quant à nous, si nous avions pu réussir à faire passer dans les pages de ce livre quelque chose de ce doux charme de l'enfant, et communiquer à nos lecteurs un peu du plaisir que nous avons trouvé à l'étudier avec amour.[39]

Nevertheless, if such idealisation of the child detracts from the scientific validity of these books, it also seems to indicate that they are quite close to the non-scientific literature of their time. Their lack of statistics and specialist terminology would certainly have made them more *accessible* to novelists and poets than later, more respectable psychology. Perhaps then, these now discredited writers reflect the general ideas about childhood of their time more than modern-day child psychologists do of our own. So what exactly is the link between the fact that there was a great deal of literature about childhood towards the end of the nineteenth century and the fact that psychologists were also beginning to show a 'scientific' interest in the child? Here we must leave facts behind and start to speculate. The first fact is certainly historically prior to the second, that is, there were many *récits d'enfance* in existence before psychology ever dreamt of taking up with the child. This suggests that, far from society in general, including psychologists, taking an interest in the child and prompting novelists and poets to do the same, the converse is true. It thus seems safe to hypothesize that literature, not science, 'discovered' the child.

Such a speculation is not without its supporters. Toursch, in summing up progress in the history and literature of childhood, remarks that 'il n'est pas invraisemblable de supposer que ces écrivains ont influencé le mouvement d'opinion en faveur de l'enfance [...] en ce dernier quart de siècle?'[40] But it is more than just 'not improbable'. Sully offers more evidence for a causal relationship between literature and science than simple temporal priority. He writes, 'Indeed, the grace of childhood may almost be said to have been discovered by the modern poet.' Furthermore:

> With the growth of a poetic or sentimental interest in childhood there has come a new and different kind of interest [...], so it has happened that not merely to the perennial baby-worshipper, the mother, and not merely to the poet touched with the mystery of

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[39] Compayré, p.xxiv.

[40] Toursch, p.171.

> far-off things, but to the grave man of science the infant has become a centre of lively interest.[41]

The particular poets whose influence he acknowledges are Wordsworth and Hugo, but he later refers to two writers of prose who have been particularly associated with Proust, quoting from Ruskin's autobiography, *Praeterita*, and devoting a whole chapter to George Sand's account of her own childhood in *L'Histoire de ma vie*. His French contemporaries show an equal if less explicit debt to artists. Perez also appeals to Sand's autobiographical observations about childhood and even to a novel, Vallès' *L'Enfant*. Of the latter he writes, 'Whoever is inclined to doubt the powerful effects of tactile imagination, has only to read the retrospective memoirs of a child, now almost an old man, who has not forgiven his mother the "thrashings" of old days.'[42] Compayré even goes so far as to take his 'evidence' from *popular* literature, quoting Droz, a best-selling writer of the time:

> Observez l'enfant [...] et vous découvrirez en lui une richesse d'imagination qui tient du prodige et qu'on ne retrouve à aucun âge de la vie. Il y a plus de poésie vraie dans la cervelle de ces chers amours que dans vingt poèmes épiques.[43]

And so, we come full circle. If we assume that Proust was indirectly influenced by contemporary or earlier psychology, we find that this in turn was influenced by contemporary or earlier literature about childhood. Thus the links between Proust and the literature of his time are strengthened.

The Child-Artist: a literary, scientific and critical myth

There is, however, another connection between art and science which will prove to be of fundamental importance in looking at Proust. In the work of the early child psychologists we find not only a recurring fascination with the artist's portrayal of the child, but what is almost an obsession with the artistic potential of the child himself, that is with the notion of *the child as artist*. This is in fact the title of one of Sully's chapters. Here he announces: 'We are wont to say that children are artists in embryo, that in their play and their whole activity they manifest the germs of an art-impulse.'[44] Perez makes similar claims not for play, but for

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[41] Sully, p.2 and p.6.

[42] Bernard Perez, *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant* (Paris, 1888), p.64 and Bernard Perez, *The First Three Years of Childhood*, trans. by Alice M. Christie (London: Sonnenschein, 1895), p.155, respectively.

[43] Quoted by Compayré, p.148.

[44] Sully, p.318. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

dreams ('Dreams are the poems of children, who, even when awake, are always more or less poets'), although in the same book he shows a certain degree of cynicism about what he obviously considers a commonplace: 'their creative or poetic force is much weaker than is commonly supposed.'[45] However, all his doubts seem to have evaporated by the time of the later *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant*, which is entirely devoted to the idea of the child not just as a poet but also as a musician (chapter V), painter (chapter VI) and dramatist (chapter VII). Compayré appears to agree, writing, 'Si l'on entend par faculté esthétique le pouvoir de combiner simplement des images, de créer dans une certaine mesure, on ne saurait le refuser à l'enfant', and he regrets that imagination tends to diminish with age, 'du moins chez le commun des hommes, chez tous ceux qui ne sont ni artistes, ni poètes'.[46] Binet, who remains a respected figure in the history of child psychology, waxes equally lyrical in this respect:

> Le roman et surtout la poésie ne supposent-ils pas la survivance partielle, chez le poète, d'une âme d'enfant avec son impressionnabilité, sa curiosité, son goût pour le mystère et son imagination concrète? On ne porte nullement ombrage à la poésie, en lui rappelant ses origines.[47]

Again, this fascination seems to be derived from literature itself. Perhaps the most regularly quoted exposition of the idea is Baudelaire's remark, made in 1863, about the painter Constantin Guys: 'Le génie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée à volonté.'[48] But there are hints of it everywhere. Indeed, it appears that the predominant - if not dominant - myth of the French *récit d'enfance* is that of the child-artist. From the primitive pantomime acted out in *Paul et Virginie* (1787) to Nathalie Sarraute's homework in *Enfance* (1983), as in the early psychologists, the idea of the child as artistic creator becomes increasingly prominent.[49] This is not necessarily to disagree with Coe's claim that the predominant myth of the French Childhood is the encounter with the French language. For in many cases, the apprenticeship

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[45] Perez, *The First Three Years of Childhood*, p.151 and p.278.

[46] Compayré, p.151 and p.154.

[47] Binet, *Les Idées modernes sur les enfants* (Paris:Flammarion, 1955), p.288.

[48] Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne: L'Artiste, homme du monde, homme des foules et enfant', in *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976), II, 687-694 (p.690).

[49] See particularly Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris: Garnier, 1989), pp.124-25. This seems to be one of the earliest manifestations of the myth.

of language is *part* of the apprenticeship of literature. When Milou (in Larbaud's short story, 'Le Couperet') finds that 'les mots, tous les mots de la langue française sont là, rangés comme une armée qui lui barre la route,' he is not simply trying to express himself in an everyday situation. Milou is in fact trying - if failing - to write his first poem.[50] There are many more more successful examples of child-poets in the works listed in Appendix 1. Daudet's 'Petit Chose' is the author of a verse epic, 'Les Aventures d'un papillon bleu', even if it is quite possibly one of the worst poems ever written.[51] And Renard's 'Poil de Carotte' composes letters to his prosaic father in verse, even if they turn out to be a further source of tragi-comic incomprehension between the child and his parents:

> Ta lettre de ce matin m'étonne fort. [...] Ce n'est plus ton style ordinaire et tu y parles de choses bizarres qui ne me semblent ni de ta compétence ni de la mienne. [...] A propos de quoi, s'il te plaît, cette sortie sur le printemps quand nous sommes en hiver? Que veux-tu dire? As-tu besoin d'un cache-nez? [...] La forme même de ton écriture me paraît modifiée, et la disposition des lignes, la quantité de majuscules me déconcertent.[52]

More metaphorically, Hugo's Gavroche 'était au courant de tout le fredonnement populaire en circulation, et il y mêlait son propre gazouillement. Farfadet et galopin, il faisait un pot-pourri des voix de la nature et les voix de Paris [...]. Gavroche était gamin de lettres.' Nor is he meant to be an exception: 'Le gamin de Paris n'est pas sans quelque intuition littéraire [...]. Le Gamin de Paris, c'est Rabelais petit.'[53]

The child is no more limited to any one genre than the artist who creates him. Far from sticking to Rabelaisian farce, he moves into the non-literary arts: Alain-Fournier's Frantz is a circus-performer and mime-artist; Malot's Rémi is also a travelling player; Loti's narrator shows early promise in music and drawing; Romain Rolland's Jean-Christophe is a musical child prodigy; and France's Pierre Nozière paints, acts and writes at various points in his career. The child's eye view is even occasionally compared to photography: 'Au début,

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[50] Valery Larbaud, *Enfantines*, in *Œuvres* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), pp.395-535 (p.418).

[51] Alphonse Daudet, *Le Petit Chose*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1986-90), I (1986), 1-242 (pp.150-59).

[52] Renard, p.722.

[53] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 3 vols (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), III, 98 and II, 106-107.

ma tête toute neuve et encore obscure pourrait être comparée à un appareil de photographe rempli de glaces sensibilisées,' writes Loti.[54]

Often the myth of the child-artist takes a more indirect form, when the narrator adopts a child's viewpoint - with or without the photographic qualities described by Loti. This is the case in Boylesve's *La Becquée*, as is confirmed by the opening page of the sequel *L'Enfant à la balustrade*, which quotes from Sainte-Beuve: 'Il se trouve, dans les trois quarts des hommes, comme un poète qui meurt jeune, tandis que l'homme survit.'[55] Darien goes one step further in choosing a child's *voice* for the narrator of *Bas les cœurs!*, and Vallès uses a child as a partial narrator in *L'Enfant*.[56] In other works, though the adult narrator adopts neither their vision nor their voice, it is children who control the narrative in a different sense. Bordeaux's introduction to *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants* acknowledges the influence of his three daughters' literary creativity: 'Je suis seul, mais je sens qu'elles tirent les ficelles.'[57] As will become clear in later chapters, this 'presence' of a childhood force in Bordeaux's narrative might be a further source of Proust's admiration for *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants*.

More tenuously, the myth may take the form of child characters trying to *re*create the world of the books they have read within their own lives. Audoux's Marie-Claire, for example, at first finds refuge from unhappiness in reading, but 'récits de voyages' are finally insufficient, and she sets out to seek her own fortune in Paris, a Paris that belongs more to books than reality, 'avec ses hautes maisons toutes semblables à des palais et dont les toits étaient si hauts qu'ils se perdaient dans les nuages'.[58] Similarly, Stendhal's Henry Brulard writes, 'Je me figurais le monde à treize ans uniquement d'après les *Mémoires secrets* de Duclos et les *Mémoires* de Saint-Simon en sept volumes. Le bonheur suprême était de vivre à Paris faisant des livres avec cent louis de rente.'[59] Ten pages later, he leaves for Paris and

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[54] Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d'un enfant* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1988), p.44.

[55] René Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la balustrade* (Paris: Nelson, 1951), title page.

[56] See Philippe Lejeune, 'Vallès et la voix narrative', *Littérature*, 23 (1976), 3-20.

[57] Bordeaux, *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants*, p.20.

[58] Marguerite Audoux, *Marie-Claire* (Paris: Charpentier, 1935), p.252 and p.259.

[59] Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, in *Œuvres intimes*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1981-82), II (1982), 523-959 (p.859).

inevitable disappointment. Alternatively, the myth of the child-artist may appear in negative guise: Rousseau's insistence that Émile must be an art*isan*, not an art*ist* or Vallès's hilarious Latin composition on the death of a parrot.[60] Both these cases suggest a natural tendency towards art on the part of the child, which is stunted by the influence of the adults around them.

The *motivations* for individual instances of the myth are equally many and various - even contradictory. Vallès's 'death of a parrot' may be the antithesis of art, but other writers, such as Anatole France, find poetic inspiration and great value in a classical education.[61] Similarly, both Pierre Nozière's and Jacques Vingtras's viewpoints give rise to striking imagery, worthy of the adult narrators who tell their stories. But, while the flights of Pierre's animistic imagination (clearly meant as a sign of his artistic potential) create monstrous ogres out of shadows, Jacques's similes are reductive, cutting people down to the size of animals or even objects, and often appear as a simple vehicle for Vallès's satire.[62] Furthermore, whereas Vallès seems to prize all that is *un*adult in children's language, Poil de Carotte's letters and poetry show a maturity which surpasses the understanding of his parents. In fact, Poil de Carotte seems to exemplify the poet's painful separation from society and family summed up in Baudelaire's *Bénédiction*:

> Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes,
> Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé,
> Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes
> Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié.

By contrast, Boylesve's art depends on his child character Riquet's integration with both family and wider society. Boylesve, like Darien, exploits the accuracy of observation and penetration of a child who glides unnoticed in adult circles. As Bethlenfalvay so rightly puts it, the child is a 'symbole polyvalent', even within the single myth of the child-artist.

Thus, what we constantly see is the child used as a model for the artist, or a way of working out the author's own problems - with language, society or anything else. To sum

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[60] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou De l'éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 4 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-69), IV (1969), 239-868 (p.470), and Vallès, p.330-31.

[61] Anatole France, *Le Livre de mon ami*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1984-), I (1984), 431-583 (p.511).

[62] See France, p.483 and Vallès, p.177 for two relevant examples.

up, the child appears throughout the literature of childhood of this time as an image of the artist (or even *literally* as an artist) and for a multitude of reasons. The fact that this myth remains constant, while the reasons used to justify it vary, suggests that it comes first in some sense, whether in time or importance. Furthermore, it is a myth that is certainly not limited to psychology or literary practice, but figures frequently in literary criticism and psychoanalysis. As might be expected, the early and rather sentimental critics of the *récit d'enfance* help to perpetuate it. Calvet, for instance, maintains that 'en réalité, ce don de l'illusion et de l'évasion qui est commun à tous les enfants, n'est pas autre chose, quand il arrive à une certaine puissance, que le don de poésie'.[63] Many later critics seem to echo such remarks. Primault, Lhong and Malrieu conclude their literary study of childhood with poems literally written by children, which Primault describes as 'ces chefs-d'œuvre ingénus, cette toute pure rosée de poésie naturelle.'[64] Even that great iconoclast of childhood Freud makes a similar point: 'Might we not say that every child at play behaves as a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or rather, rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?'[65] Nevertheless, some fifty years later we do find some scepticism. André Thérive writes:

> Il paraît entendu que les enfants sont poètes [..] ce ne sont pas les enfants qui s'en trouvent responsables: ils ont trop la vocation de grandir. C'est plutôt la philosophie des adultes, que bien des déceptions poussent à regretter l'âge d'ignorance et de liberté. Nos muses enfantines sont donc filles d'une psychasthénie générale.[66]

Despite Thérive's obvious disrespect for the notion of the child-poet, his remark makes the myth of the child-artist sound not only wide-spread, but also somehow *inevitable*, deeply rooted in the human psyche. Indeed, Barthes goes so far as to claim that 'l'image d'un(e) enfant-poète [...] est à la fois surprenante et nécessaire' to society - whether we like it or not.[67] The particular child-poet he is attacking, Minou Drouet, may now be forgotten, but we

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[63] Calvet, II, 28. See also Calvet, II, 210.

[64] Max Primault, Henry Lhong, Jean Malrieu, *Terres de l'enfance. Le Mythe de l'enfance dans la littérature contemporaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), p.14.

[65] Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming', in *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and other works*, ed. by Albert Dickson, The Pelican Freud Library: 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp.129-141 (pp.131-132).

[66] André Thérive, 'L'Enfant et les Muses', *La Table ronde*, 114 (1957), 170-174 (pp.173-174).

[67] Roland Barthes, 'La Littérature selon Minou Drouet', in *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), pp.153-60 (p.153).

only have to think of Malrieu's child poets and the mythology surrounding such figures as Chatterton or Rimbaud to see the truth in what he is saying.

If it is necessary to society, then the image of the child-artist seems, on the evidence above, even more necessary to the *récit d'enfance* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although critics such as Coe, Bethlenfalvay, Chombart de Lauwe and Dugast note the existence of the myth, perhaps they do not sufficiently underline its ever-presence and all-importance in the genre during this period of literary history. Indeed, as has been argued, the child-artist can be considered the dominant myth of the French *récit d'enfance* of Proust's lifetime.The notion of the child-artist is so dominant, in fact, that it seems as if it could be the motivating force for much modern writing about childhood and a possible reason for the sheer volume of it at the turn of the century. Wherever and whenever it originated, the myth's existence appears to be taken for granted by this time. Those who perpetuate the myth, whether poets or psychologists, rarely feel the need to acknowledge any previous models, whether the particular examples in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's fiction or the generalisation in Baudelaire's non-fictional profile of Guys. Nevertheless, the child-artist metaphor only really seems to take off in popularity after Baudelaire's 1863 formula for genius as childhood regained. More importantly perhaps, the literary vogue for childhood itself only seems to take off around this time.[68] Here, it is worth recalling earlier remarks about genre, the transcending of its barriers and the 'modernism' that such developments imply. Indeed, the growth in popularity of the *récit d'enfance* seems to correspond historically to an increasing awareness in literature of itself, a link that may be explicable by the rise of the child-artist myth. Perhaps then, given the omnipresence of the image of the child-artist in modern examples of the genre, to write about the child is simply another way of writing about writing. This is clearly of particular relevance to Proust and will provide much of the focus for the following chapters.

Thus, to sum up and re-order much of what has been said so far, the modern history of childhood can be seen as beginning with a metaphor - that of the child-artist. This metaphor influenced writers, who, seeing the child as a mirror-image of themselves, took up

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[68] We will return to a historical perspective in Chapter 2, which will discuss the reasons for the *existence* of a literary interest in childhood which preceded this late nineteenth century surge in its popularity.

his cause and wrote about him. Their interest in childhood in turn influenced sociologists, politicians, educationalists and psychologists, spawning a century of reforms, and even the birth of new sciences.[69] Such is the power of a single metaphor to change the world.

More specific connections between Proust and the genre

The chapters that follow are not an attempt to fill in this historical sketch, but they do aim to examine Proust's place in its framework. Before going on to look at particular influences, whether minor or major, it is worth clarifying the nature of their potential links with Proust.

Above all, the discussion that follows does not aim to question Proust's *originality* in any way - even if it has been challenged by some. Gide is reported to have made the following comment (though not with reference to the theme of childhood):

> It is erroneous to suppose that Proust was an innovator. It is purely that he did what had often been done before, but he did it with infinite pains and inexhaustible cunning. That's what matters, precision and cunning, not audacity and braggadocio. One hears in Proust frequent echoes of Benjamin Constant and Saint-Simon and even a hint of the *Confessions* of Rousseau.[70]

More specifically, Georges Piroué's comparison of the autobiographical element in *Combray* with other accounts of childhood, results in the conclusion that 'à y regarder de près [...] la destinée de Proust est beaucoup moins originale qu'on ne croit'.[71] It thus begins to seem that Gide's remark (that Proust did the same as everyone else but 'better') may have a degree of relevance to the treatment of childhood in *A la recherche*. It becomes all the more relevant, if we consider that comparatively few of the writers in Appendix 1 have the stature of Constant, Saint-Simon and Rousseau. Proust's originality in this respect may well consist of taking old ingredients, which had a tendency to produce 'bad' - if innovative - literature, and creating a masterpiece from them.

The above use of the word *influence* is not particularly rigorous. Of course, literary influence is notoriously hard to trace and critics generally lapse into using the term *affinity*

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[69] See Dupuy (pp.3-30) for a good summary of these historical changes.

[70] Reported and presumably translated into English by Frederic Prokosch, *Voices. A Memoir* (London: Faber, 1983), p.227.

[71] Georges Piroué, 'L'Enfance chez Proust et quelques autres', *La Table ronde*, 114 (1957), 159-64 (p.159).

(or, with broader meaning, *intertextuality*) when there is no concrete proof. Although Proust openly acknowledges several influences, for example Nerval, Baudelaire and Chateaubriand (IV,498), it is such proof that tends to be lacking in his case, and for several reasons.[72] Firstly, there is what has been called the 'blatant toadying' of his letters to friends and contemporaries, including writers of 'récits d'enfance'. Laurent LeSage writes, '"Un des écrivains pour qui j'ai la plus profonde admiration" is a qualifier that Proust lavishes on all sorts of second-rate authors. It is impossible to interpret such praise as anything other than politeness.'[73] Politeness is not the only option, however. It is quite possible that Proust greatly admired second rate authors, and even 'bad novels' can be 'good influences'. In order to evaluate the influence of Proust's correspondents on his work, we therefore have to be able to distinguish between his 'politeness' and his 'bad taste', a far from simple task. A second problem is that highlighted by Marie Miguet when she talks of the way in which Proust tends to hide his sources of inspiration.[74] The many literary allusions in Proust's novel are, in fact, but a chosen few. The early drafts of *A la recherche* are full of references to writers, whose names disappear from the final versions, yet whose influence may nevertheless remain. Thirdly, we have the difficulty that many of Proust's preparations for the work he was finally to start publishing in 1913, have their origins at a much earlier date in his development. As Czoniczer writes,

> Son œuvre semble entourée de vide si l'on ne tient pas compte du fait que les impressions autour desquelles elle s'est cristallisée datent, non pas de 1919, ni même de 1913, mais de la fin du siècle dernier, où il faut la remplacer pour la bien comprendre.[75]

For these three reasons, when the rest of this thesis singles out particular authors and works for comparison with Proust, rather than trying to *prove influence*, it will often simply be highlighting *similarity* (which is probably even lower on the scale than *affinity*). To

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[72] Though Proust's recognition is of the precedents set by Nerval, Baudelaire and Chateaubriand with regard to involuntary memory, all three made significant contributions to the literature of childhood. See their entries in Appendix 1 for further details.

[73] Laurent LeSage, *Marcel Proust and his Literary Friends* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), p.5.

[74] Marie Miguet, 'De la lecture de «Sylvie» à l'écriture de la «Recherche»', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust*, 34 (1984), 199-215 (p.201).

[75] Elizabeth Czoniczer, *Quelques antécédents de «A la recherche du temps perdu»* (Geneva: Droz, 1957), p.11. However, she puts her case for this perhaps a little too strongly. Proust was also very much in touch with the contemporary literary scene.

illustrate the sheer extent of the similarity, a second appendix is included. This sets out an alternative *Combray*, made up of similar incidents to those of the original, but in the form of a patchwork of excerpts from many contemporary or earlier *récits d'enfance*. The passages selected do not necessarily relate to major myths, but often to smaller motifs: the details that made up the framework of *Combray* before the literature was added, as it were.

The selection of the writers referred to in Appendix 2 and the rest of this thesis is itself reluctantly influenced by Proust's expression of admiration. But then he did write to Mme Alphonse Daudet, 'Vous savez que c'est bien modestement que je crois qu'admiration est un peu certificat de ressemblance' (C,XII,272) - although this could well be another piece of sycophancy. It has, in fact, proved impossible to justify the inclusion of all the relevant and interesting material in this and later chapters by any one rigorous system of selection. That said, certain authors are obvious cases for comparison, because there is already a wealth of secondary literature documenting their relationship with Proust: Sand, Chateaubriand and Nerval, to name the most common.[76] The volume of this comparative criticism is probably proportional to the frequency with which Proust alludes to these writers. Conversely, other authors included in Appendix 2, such as Vallès and Darien, may never have been compared with Proust, who never refers to them by name.[77] There is little justification for including them, except that they are important as technical innovators in the genre and represent the 'end of the nineteenth century', where Czoniczer claims Proust must be set.

Two other representatives of the late nineteenth century are Pierre Loti and Anatole France.[78] These are particularly important, because Proust acknowledged their influence on his early tastes in literature. A questionnaire filled in by the twenty-year-old Proust lists 'mes auteurs favoris en prose' as 'aujourd'hui Anatole France et Pierre Loti' (JS,337). Quite apart from his general veneration for them (see especially a lovely lycéen's letter to France, expressing solidarity, respect and even love (C,I,123)), we know he had read *récits d'enfance* by both. Letters and a sketch for *A la recherche* (III,1169) refer to details from *Le*

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[76] See Chapter 2 for detailed discussion of Sand, Chateaubriand and Nerval. See also Appendix 2, extract 2 for Chateaubriand and Appendix 2, extract 18 for Nerval.

[77] See Appendix 2, extract 48 for Vallès. See Appendix 2, extracts 5, 21 and 24 for Darien. Both writers also figure in Chapter 4.

[78] See Appendix 2, extracts 9, 11, 12, and 14, for Loti, who also appears in Chapter 2. France is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Livre de mon ami and there were even rumours of marriage between the young Proust and the real life Suzanne, France's daughter ('Le Livre de Suzanne' is the second part of *Le Livre de mon ami*).[79] Similarly, Proust and his mother exchanged letters about Loti's *Roman d'un enfant*, which the son had recommended to the mother. 'Je suis, mon chéri, tout imprégnée de Loti', writes Mme Proust, quoting extensively from *Le Roman d'un enfant*, 'Tu m'as fait du bien [...] en me trouvant cette lecture' (C,I,136). Proust also claimed that Alphonse Daudet was a childhood favourite.[80] In a letter of 1895 to the great man himself, he wrote, 'Mes plus beaux rêves quand j'étais enfant n'auraient rien pu me promettre d'aussi invraisemblable et d'aussi délicieux que d'être aussi gracieusement reçu un jour par le Maître qui m'inspirait déjà une admiration et un respect passionnés' (C,I,367-68). However, there appears to be no specific evidence of him ever having read *Jack* or *Le Petit Chose*. Perhaps no such evidence is needed. These would have been accepted 'classics' during Proust's childhood and we can assume a certain degree of knowledge of them, as indeed we can of the *récits d'enfance* of other 'greater' and earlier writers: Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Rousseau's *Confessions* or *Émile*, Balzac's *Pierrette*. (There is also an explicit reference to the last of these in the sketches for *A la recherche* (II,1022)).[81] One further interesting case is Stendhal, whose *récit d'enfance*, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, though written in 1835-36, was not published until 1890, only a few years before Proust himself first went into print. Thus some of the similarities between *Vie de Henry Brulard* and *Combray* might be accounted for by the fact that Stendhal and Proust were in a sense contemporaries.[82]

Another important category of writers for our comparative purposes consists of less well-known chroniclers of childhood with whom Proust corresponded - among them Alphonse Daudet's sons. Lucien Daudet was a particularly close friend of Proust and though

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79 See a letter to Montesquiou dated December 19th 1904 (C,IV,401) and a letter to his mother of October 2nd 1889 (C,II,357).

80 Alphonse Daudet will be alluded to briefly in Chapters 2 and 3.

81 The only one of these to be discussed in any detail later on is Rousseau, who appears in Chapter 2 and briefly in Chapter 4. Hugo and Balzac, like Daudet, are perhaps most important as *general* influences on the *récit d'enfance* genre. They are mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in this capacity.

82 See Appendix 2, extracts 10, 20, 25 and 35 for a few specific similarities. Stendhal is also quoted in Chapter 2.

his novels came too late for any influence, he makes the strange claim that Proust 'borrowed' one of his own childhood memories for inclusion in *Du côté de chez Swann*:

> Il est en effet question dans Swann [...] d'une rencontre de Mme la Princesse Mathilde au Jardin d'Acclimatation et j'avais rappelé à Marcel Proust un de mes plus lointains souvenirs d'enfance, un après-midi où ma mère avait rencontré au Jardin d'Acclimatation la Princesse habillée d'un «saute-en-barque» en chinchilla et coiffée d'une «capote» à brides blanches qui, même pour des yeux d'enfant, en faisaient une personne hors du temps.[83]

As far as Léon Daudet is concerned, his didactic novel about divorce, *Le Partage de l'enfant* (1905) is probably most remembered today for the mention it receives on the dedication page of *Le Côté de Guermantes* (II,307). But the lonely imaginative child, immersed in the world of books, whom it describes is himself a point of contact with Proust's work.[84] Fernand Gregh, as was seen in the Introduction, was also a close friend of Proust, who goes far beyond simple praise in a letter congratulating him on six new sonnets about childhood for inclusion in a later edition of *La Maison de l'enfance*:

> Je vais te dire quelque chose qui te déplairait (si tu n'étais pas au-dessus de ce sentiment) comme il déplaît à une femme très belle qu'on lui dise: «Je trouve que vous avez ceci ou cela qui ressemble à Mme X ... (un laideron)». Mais quand tu liras ce livre (si jamais j'arrive à l'écrire tout à fait) que j'ai commencé à mettre en ordre, tu verras à quel point, par des chemins absolument différents, nous arrivons à nous poser des questions identiques. Il y a même des mots que je suis obligé de changer. (C,X,107)

In addition to this, it has been pointed out that there are striking similarities between *Combray* and one of Gregh's short stories, 'Mystères'.[85] There will be no cause to return to *Mystères*, as it is not, strictly speaking, *about* childhood. Gregh's narrator does, however, make the following remark, which appears particularly Proustian:

> Je suis fasciné par mon enfance. Comme elle est de toute ma vie la partie la plus éloignée, elle m'apparaît la plus belle. Je ne puis dire la tendresse attristée de regrets que j'ai au cœur pour le petit garçon trop sensible et trop sage que je fus et comme il me semble que j'ai déchu depuis.[86]

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[83] Lucien Daudet, 'Autour de soixante lettres de Marcel Proust', *Les Cahiers Marcel Proust*, 5 (1929), pp.145-46.

[84] See Appendix 2, extract 23.

[85] See René de Messières, 'Un Document probable sur le premier état de la pensée de Proust. *Mystères* par Fernand Gregh', *Romanic Review*, 33 (1942), 113-31. The similarities are dealt with fully by Messières, whose main point is that Proust's interest in involuntary memory might have been influenced by Gregh's concept of 'une montée de souvenirs inconscients'.

[86] Quoted by Messières, p.119.

Other correspondents who wrote about childhood include René Boylesve. His *L'Enfant à la Balustrade* was described by Proust as a 'sublime roman' in a letter to someone quite unconnected with Boylesve, which suggests that his praise was not simply a matter of 'politeness'.[87] Proust also wrote to Lucien Daudet that Boylesve was one of his 'favoris dans les vivants' (C,IX,17). In fact, the early drafts of *A la recherche* contain several references to Boylesve (I,637; II,1613; and IV,672), although these disappear from the final version. A similar case is provided by Marguerite Audoux. Despite the fact that Proust's allusions to her *Marie-Claire* (IV,859 and IV,1388) are erased from the definitive text of *A la recherche*, the resemblances between the two novels imply that Audoux's influence remained.[88] Returning to those who actually corresponded with Proust, we find that Proust also expressed great admiration for Bordeaux's *La Maison* (C,XII,142), the content of which bears even more striking similarities to *Combray* than do the novels of Boylesve or Audoux - although here, there can be no question of influence since *La Maison* was published more or less simultaneously with *Du côté de chez Swann*.[89]

As well as those *to* whom Proust wrote, there are those *through* whom he wrote - in pastiche. One of these is Renan (CS,31-38), whose *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* is referred to several times in Proust's correspondence. For example, in a letter of 1912 (C,XI,113-14), he talks of Renan's metaphor for childhood memories, the submerged 'ville d'Is' of Breton legend, an image worthy of Proust himself:

> On montre, à divers endroits de la côte, l'emplacement de cette cité fabuleuse, et les pêcheurs vous en font d'étranges récits. Les jours de tempête, assurent-ils, on voit, dans le creux des vagues, le sommet des flèches de ses églises; les jours de calme, on entend monter de l'abîme le son de ses cloches, modulant l'hymne du jour. Il me semble souvent que j'ai au fond du cœur une ville d'Is [...]. Aux approches de la vieillesse surtout, j'ai pris plaisir, pendant le repos de l'été, à recueillir ces bruits lointains d'une Atlantide disparue.[90]

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[87] The letter (of May 15th or 16th 1903) is to Antoine and Emmanuel Bibesco (C,III,318). See Appendix 2, extracts 8, 16, 17, 28, 30, 33, 36, 38 and 44 for examples from *L'Enfant à la Balustrade*, and the novel to which it is a sequel, *La Becquée*.

[88] See Chapter 2 for further discussion of Audoux's influence and Appendix 2, extract 4 for a minor similarity.

[89] See Appendix 2, extracts 6, 8, 13, 19, 22, 26, 27, 29, 31 and 42, which are taken from *La Maison*. See also the beginning of this chapter for Proust's interest in another of Bordeaux's novels, *La Nouvelle Croisade des enfants*.

[90] Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* (Paris: Folio, 1983), p.1. See also Appendix 2, extract 39.

Those authors he wrote *about* in his criticism, also prove worthy of comparison to Proust: Jules Renard, whom he clearly admired (CS,396) and Romain Rolland, whom he did not (CS,307).[91] The writer about whom he wrote most (and through whom he wrote most, insofar as he translated his work) was of course Ruskin, who was the author of an autobiography with a long childhood section, *Praeterita* (1885-89). Similarities with Proust's account of childhood are often noted. Dana Brand particularly draws attention to their treatments of reading and Henri Lemaître underlines the proximity of their 'poetic temperaments', but neither pays much attention to Ruskin's indubitable influence.[92] Lemaître even claims that Proust did not know *Praeterita* at all. A letter to Robert de Billy of 1908 suggests quite the contrary. Here, Proust even states that he has started translating it, though for health reasons, he seems grudgingly happy for some other candidate to take over the task:

> Dans l'état actuel de ma santé il est si improbable que je puisse mener à bien un si long travail qu'il est préférable que ce soit votre ami. Mais est-il un poète? *Praeterita*, c'est écrit avec des «couleurs passées», quel évocateur il faut être pour traduire cela. A-t-il un peu de sortilège au bout de sa plume? (C,VII,102)

Proust obviously considers himself to have the same capacity for poetry as Ruskin, even if he lacks the stamina for further translation of his work.

Ruskin was not the only Anglo-Saxon author of childhood admired by Proust. It is well known that Proust had a particular affection for English literature. In a letter to Robert de Billy he goes so far as to make the following remark:

> C'est curieux que dans tous les genres les plus différents, de George Eliot à Hardy, de Stevenson à Emerson, il n'y a pas de littérature qui ait sur moi un pouvoir comparable à la littérature anglaise et américaine. L'Allemagne, l'Italie, bien souvent la France me laissent indifférent. Mais deux pages du *Moulin sur la Floss* me font pleurer. Je sais que Ruskin exécrait ce roman-là, mais je réconcilie tous ces dieux ennemis dans le Panthéon de mon admiration. (C,X,55)

Indeed, Proust once referred to *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), which, of course, contains one of the most celebrated accounts of childhood in the English language, as 'le livre que j'ai le

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[91] Both have already been mentioned in connection with their importance to the genre as a whole. Only Renard will figure prominently in later discussions (see Chapter 4) - not in deference to Proust's tastes, but because Rolland proves less relevant.

[92] Dana Brand, 'A Womb with a View: The "Reading" Consciousness in Ruskin and Proust', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 18 (1981), 487-502 and Henri Lemaître, 'De *Jean Santeuil* à *la Recherche du temps perdu* : la méditation ruskinienne', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust*, 3 (1953), 58-71. See Appendix 2, extracts 15, 32 and 34 for specific extracts from *Praeterita* which may have influenced Proust. Ruskin will also figure in Chapter 3.

plus aimé' (C,XV,169).[93] Another interesting link to follow up might be his interest in Henry James. René de Chantal relays Walter Berry's claim that Proust 'demandait des détails sur les *novels* anglais, et surtout sur la manière de Henry James, c'est-à-dire du roman *vu*, complètement vu, par un de ses personnages, un *seul* des personnages, comme notamment dans *What Maisie Knew*'.[94] If this was the case, then the consequences for *Combray* could be considerable. The character whose viewpoint dictates James's novel (published in 1897) is in fact a child.

For better or for worse, several writers, whom Proust himself might have preferred to see omitted, are included in Appendix 2 and later chapters. First, there is the strange case of Alain-Fournier, an exact contemporary, the brother-in-law of one of Proust's close friends, Jacques Rivière, *and* a major literary figure of the time, yet whom Proust completely - perhaps pointedly - ignores. It is certainly difficult to believe that he did not read - or at least read of - *Le Grand Meaulnes*, when both he and Alain-Fournier were in the running for the Goncourt Prize of 1913.[95] Another example is Léautaud, to whom Proust does refer, but whom he seems to have despised. Léautaud nevertheless paints a picture of mother love in *Le Petit ami*, which is as obsessive as that of Proust's child - if much more sordid and openly sexual. Could it be that Proust's dislike of this contemporary's work has something to do with the more sinister aspects that it reveals in his own?[96] By contrast, a third writer Valery Larbaud seems far less dangerous. His *Enfantines* seem entirely free from such undertones. Indeed, Larbaud recorded in his journal of 1919 (in English) the receipt of a copy of *Pastiches et mélanges* 'with kind dedicatory remarks. [Proust] wants to meet me; my tale *Le Couperet* caused him such an impression that «après plus d'une année, il en est encore un

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[93] See Appendix 2, extracts 3 and 37, which Proust might have loved most of all. George Eliot also appears briefly in Chapter 4.

[94] René de Chantal, *Marcel Proust. Critique littéraire*, 2 vols (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1967), II,471. Although interesting, this link is perhaps too tenuous to merit further discussion. There is certainly very little in the *content* of *What Maisie Knew* that can be compared with *Combray*.

[95] See Appendix 2, extracts 1 and 7, which are taken from *Le Grand Meaulnes*. Alain-Fournier also proves relevant to the discussions of Chapters 2 and 3.

[96] See a letter of 1907 to Léo Larguier for Proust's scathing attack on Léautaud. Although this is not precipitated by *Le Petit ami* but by another book, *Amours*, the editor's note suggests that it is the latter's cynicism about family relationships which is at the root of Proust's general dislike for his work (C,VII,28-32). See also Appendix 2, extracts 40, 41, 45, 46 and 47, for the similarities between *Le Petit ami* and *A la Recherche*.

peu malade»!'[97] Lacretelle confirms that this is not a case of 'politeness', but adds an interesting qualification:

> [Proust] aimait aussi les livres de Valery Larbaud. Mais non au point, toutefois qu'on les comparât aux siens. J'en fis l'expérience un jour où je lui dis qu'un recueil de Larbaud, *Enfantines*, me rappelait un peu sa vision des choses. [...] je vis alors [la figure] de Proust se rembrunir. «Vraiment ... Vous trouvez ... » me dit-il avec contrariété.[98]

Intertextuality within the *récit d'enfance* ... and Proust?

In singling out the above writers, the aim is not to make a full and detailed comparison between Proust and individual contemporaries or predecessors, let alone to do justice to these authors in their own right. Nor is the element of comparison that is present in later chapters entirely systematic: a writer may seem relevant in one chapter, but not in another. Wherever a specific work does appear relevant, it is included less in its own right than as a representative of the *récit d'enfance* in general or of a particular trend within that genre. Other examples could equally well have been chosen - maybe even from works or authors not covered in this study. Moreover, the aim to prove *influence* is no more specific than the attempt to draw comparisons. Indeed, as has already been pointed out, several of the works mentioned above could not have influenced *Combray* in any way. *Le Grand Meaulnes* and *La Maison* are exact contemporaries of Proust's *récit d'enfance*, and the last of the *Enfantines* was not published until 1914. The similarities between *Combray* and these or other works may nevertheless indicate common or collective influence, resulting from a shared literary background or simply the intellectual and social climate of the age. Of course, the intention is not merely to pin-point illuminating *resemblances* between Proust and his predecessors or contemporaries in the genre. As in the case of metaphor, *difference* is as important as similarity. Only when we have compared the similarities can we begin to contrast the differences - and thus mark out what characterizes Proust's individuality. On the other hand, dissimilarity can be as much a sign of influence as resemblance. As suggested at

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[97] Quoted by Tsutomu Iwasaki, 'Valery Larbaud et Marcel Proust: contrastes et similitudes', in *Valery Larbaud et la littérature de son temps* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978), pp.218-23 (p.220).

[98] Lacretelle, p.104. Larbaud appears again in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Appendix 2, extract 43.

the beginning of the chapter, the *récit d'enfance* form has numerous negative models to offer Proust. Where there are myths, there will always be room for *de*mythification.

Indeed, returning to our starting point in the general characteristics of the *récit d'enfance*, we find that a certain degree of intertextuality, whether explicit or implicit, negative or positive, seems almost as necessary a part of the modern genre as the image of the child-artist itself or the inevitable autobiographical element. Writing about or even rewriting others seems almost as unavoidable as writing about oneself. Of course, intertextuality is inevitable within any genre or tradition, up to a certain point. The extent to which the *récit d'enfance* goes beyond that point can perhaps be explained by an ambiguity of the genre that was mentioned above. Because such works are *about* children, they are often considered suitable reading *for* children. This means that the child characters of *récits d'enfance*, whether fictional or autobiographical, are often readers of other *récits d'enfance*. Furthermore, the impressionable nature of many of these children leads them to confuse what they read with reality. Sometimes, in the more autobiographical cases, this can go beyond simple intertextuality, as the child begins to model his own life on that of the children he reads about. The possibility of such 'real life' influence is illustrated by the albeit fictional case of Jacques de Lacretelle's Jean Hermelin (the early chapters of whose 'vie inquiète' (1920) seem to have been particularly influenced by *A la recherche*):

> Je me plaisais au mélange de pathétique et du réalisme; et en particulier certains récits d'enfance mélancoliques m'avaient puissamment frappé. Je m'étais délecté à y trouver quelque analogie avec mon état.
>
> Déjà, à onze ans, ma tête était pleine du souvenir de mes lectures, et ces souvenirs, s'ils ne me fermaient pas encore à la nature et au vrai, étaient assez prépondérants pour s'y mêler. [...] Bien plus, je vivais sous une sujétion si constante de certains romans, histoires d'orphelins et d'enfants abandonnés, qu'il m'arrivait volontiers d'anticiper mon avenir sous le jour le plus funeste. Je rêvais à ce que serait ma vie d'orphelin et ces plans, il faut que je l'avoue, me procuraient une mélancolie voluptueuse.[99]

This intertextual tendency would help to explain Coe's findings about the special similarities between Childhoods written in the same language. The most common specific references to appear in modern French *récits d'enfance* are, as might be expected, to much earlier French *récits d'enfance*. Nerval makes frequent allusions to Rousseau in *Sylvie*, and in Bordeaux's *La Maison* the child's grand-father not only reads Rousseau, but is a fervent

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[99] Jacques de Lacretelle, *La Vie inquiète de Jean Hermelin* (Paris: Fayard, 1928), pp.24-25.

disciple of Jean-Jacques. The most common acknowledgement of Rousseau is indirect, maybe unconscious, via another novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, which appears in some guise in a large proportion of the works listed above (*Le Grand Meaulnes*, *Le Petit Chose*, *L'Enfant*, *Charlot s'amuse*, *Le Partage de l'enfant*, *Le Livre de mon ami*, *Le Roman d'un enfant* and others). Among the reasons for *Robinson Crusoe*'s huge popularity in France is the fact that it was the only book that Rousseau's Émile was allowed to read.[100] Modern French *récits d'enfance* also contain frequent allusions to *Paul et Virginie*, but these are far from straightforward and tend to be made in a context of sacrilege or parody. In *Charlot s'amuse* (1883) by Bonnetain, the child asks his homosexual lover if Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's children 's'aimaient comme eux', and Cocteau turns *Les Enfants terribles* (1925) into a macabre rewriting of *Paul et Virginie*.[101] Other instances of 'intra-genre' allusion are less clear cut. Similarities have been noted between the name of Alain-Fournier's Aunt Moinelle/Moinel, the old lady of the 'domaine sans nom' in *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and that of Monelle, the delicate and beautiful child prostitute, around whom Schwob's *Le Livre de Monelle* is composed. But, even if it could be proved that the resemblance is deliberate, is Alain-Fournier acknowledging Schwob's positive influence? Or is it a perverse attempt to force Monelle to grow old and ugly? At the very least, this example does introduce the idea of explicitly writing *against* - as an alternative to writing within - a given tradition or myth of the genre. The most well-known case of all is perhaps *Poil de Carotte*. Renard's defence of his unprepossessing child character is quoted by nearly all critics of the *récit d'enfance*:

> L'enfant, Victor Hugo et bien d'autres l'ont vu ange. C'est féroce et infernal qu'il faut le voir. Il faut casser l'enfant en sucre que tous les Droz nous ont donné à sucer. L'enfant est un petit animal nécessaire. Un chat est plus humain.[102]

And so, in the context of the *récit d'enfance* genre and its mythology, what precisely was Proust doing? Is the child of *Combray* a literary descendant of Renard's devils or Hugo's angels, of both or neither? More importantly, in the face of one particular tradition, the metaphor of the child-artist, central myth of the modern *récit d'enfance*, does Proust

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[100] Rousseau, pp.454-55. We will return to *Emile* and *Robinson Crusoe* in Chapter 2.

[101] Paul Bonnetain, *Charlot s'amuse* (Paris: Slatkine, 1979), p.106.

[102] Jules Renard, *Journal 1887-1910* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1960), p.54 (February 18th 1890).

conform or rebel? The chapters that follow will attempt to answer these questions, and thus reinterpret Proust's work in the light of the *récit d'enfance* tradition, its mythology and the particular myth that underpins both the genre and its mythology: the image of the child-artist.

CHAPTER 2: THE ORIGINS OF THE *RÉCIT D'ENFANCE* AND THE MYTH OF THE PASTORAL CHILDHOOD: 'LES ROMANS CHAMPETRES DE MARCEL PROUST'?

Nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand,
And made me love them [...]
Meanwhile, my hope has been, that I might fetch
Invigorating thoughts from former years;
Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,
And haply meet reproaches too, whose power
May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
To honorable toil.
(Wordsworth)[1]

From *François le Champi* to *A la recherche du temps perdu*

This chapter will examine the myth of the pastoral childhood in the work of Proust and some of those who may have influenced him. The myth of the pastoral child, glimpsed in Chapter 1, is of particular importance, because it goes back to the very origins of the *récit d'enfance*, which lie in the much earlier literary form of the Pastoral. The residual elements of these beginnings in *A la recherche du temps perdu* are, it will be argued, largely represented by the presence of *François le Champi* in the novel. In addition to this, Sand's novel suggests the possibility of a conflict of myths in *A la recherche* - between the child-artist and the child of nature. It will also be claimed that the pastoral myth is of further significance to Proust's work, since it reveals major differences between *Jean Santeuil* and his later novel. Finally this chapter will sketch out another, more technical interpretation of *François le Champi*'s importance to the status of childhood in *A la recherche du temps perdu.*

Indeed, *François le Champi*, which first appeared in 1846-47, is probably as good a place to start looking at the origins of the *récit d'enfance* as any. This may seem a rather arbitrary and late point of departure to some. Philip Stewart, for example, sees Rousseau as the true originator of literature about childhood and writes, 'It was only after the middle of the eighteenth century that children began to find a place in the world of serious fiction.'[2] For others, *François le Champi* is too early. Calvet claims that the first fictional child of any significance is Hugo's Gavroche (of *Les Misérables*, 1862), while Toursch and Dupuy date

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[1] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp.64-66 and p.70.

[2] Philip Stewart, 'The Child Comes of Age', *Yale French Studies*, 40 (1968), 134-41 (p.134).

the true appearance of the child in the novel even later, at 1876 precisely, with Alphonse Daudet's *Jack*.[3] They are all right, in a way. Though the child first played a serious role in literature in the eighteenth century, though he only achieved stardom towards the end of the nineteenth century and though that stardom only reached its height at the beginning of the twentieth, his popularity really began to take off around the middle of the nineteenth - at the time when both Hugo and Sand were writing.

For Proustian purposes, at any rate, we might as well begin with *François le Champi*. There is by now a vast body of criticism which tells us that George Sand's novel stands at the very source of Proust's writing, in more ways than one.[4] There is the mother's kiss, the Madeleine, the incest factor and the ability of both novels to evoke a 'temps perdu', to name but a few points of contact. As Enid Marantz sums it up, Sand's work is 'à la fois catalysateur et mise-en-abyme du futur roman'.[5] But one of the most interesting links between the two authors is a technical one. Marantz suggests that one particular character, Françoise, owes her very voice to a pastiche of Sand's technique of translating peasant dialect into correct French.[6] In the final version of the text, this debt is acknowledged, but in the case of a duchess, rather than a humble servant:

> Mme de Guermantes, malheureusement spirituelle et Parisienne et qui, quand je la connus, ne gardait plus de son terroir que l'accent, avait du moins, quand elle voulait peindre sa vie de jeune fille, trouvé pour son langage (entre ce qui eût semblé trop involontairement provincial, ou au contraire artificiellement lettré) un de ces compromis qui font l'agrément de *La Petite Fadette* de George Sand ou de certaines légendes rapportées par Chateaubriand dans les *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. (III,544-45)

The full importance of Sand's 'compromise' will only become clear in the final pages of this chapter, but already this extract brings us straight to the heart of the matter in question

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[3] J. Calvet, *L'Enfant dans la littérature française*, 2 vols (Paris: Lanore, 1930), I, 176; Victor Toursch, *L'Enfant français à la fin du XIXe siècle d'après ses principaux romanciers* (Paris: Presses modernes, 1939), p.3; and Aimé Dupuy, *Un Personnage nouveau du roman français, l'Enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1931), p.13. As seen in Chapter 1, Baudelaire's account of the genius of Constantin Guys (1863), though not itself a *récit d'enfance*, is a good starting point for looking at the *modern* history of the genre.

[4] See, for example: Hiroshi Iwasaki, 'Le Côté de Madeleine. «François le Champi» dans «A la Recherche du Temps perdu»', *Littérature*, 37 (1980), 86-99; and Volker Roloff, '«François le Champi» et le texte retrouvé', *Les Cahiers Marcel Proust*, 9 (1979), 259-87. Others are to be found in the notes that follow.

[5] Enid G. Marantz, 'Le Rôle de George Sand dans la genèse de la *Recherche*: Modèle, Carrefour et Agent catalysateur', *Bulletin d'Informations proustiennes*, 14 (1983), 7-16 (p.7).

[6] Enid G. Marantz, 'Les Romans champêtres de George Sand dans la «Recherche»: intertextes, avant-textes et texte', *Bulletin d'Informations proustiennes*, 13 (1982), 25-36 (pp.26-27).

in the previous chapter. The first important point it raises is that Proust actually had other celebrated accounts of childhood in mind while writing his novel. More specifically, the narrator is, at this late point in the novel, acknowledging his debt to Sand's *other* evocations of rural childhood, referred to only collectively in *Combray*. Marantz's investigations of the 'avant-textes' show that both *La Petite Fadette* and *La Mare au diable* figured significantly in earlier versions, but were systematically eliminated in favour of *François le Champi*. The initial *mise-en-abyme* of the 'drame du coucher' was, for example, 'la nuit enchantée' of *La Mare au diable*.[7] This suggests an affirmative answer to Marie Miguet's question: 'Mais Proust n'a-t-il pas l'habitude d'effacer au moins partiellement la trace de ceux qui lui fournissent ses références textuelles et ses sources d'inspiration les plus profondes?'[8] It begins to seem that *François le Champi* is itself a means to the covering of such tracks, firstly with respect to Sand's other 'romans champêtres', and secondly, perhaps, representing *all* writing about childhood. As Pierre-Edmond Robert suggests, it is somehow a 'synthesis of youth novels'.[9] Behind *François le Champi*, then, lies a vast web of intertextuality, even the whole literary tradition of the *récit d'enfance*.

The above extract about Mme de Guermantes points to another, equally important issue, this time a particular trail leading back to *François le Champi* itself. When the narrator talks of a compromise between literary and provincial French in the duchess's language, he is acknowledging Sand's avowed intentions, intentions that are stated quite clearly in one of her prefaces to *La Petite Fadette*. However, rather than spelling them out in detail, Sand's narrator refers us back to their initial exposition in *François le Champi*: 'C'est ici que tu me racontas l'histoire du *Champi*, et que je te conseillai de l'écrire dans le style familier dont tu t'étais servi avec moi.'[10] Sure enough, if we turn back to the preface of the earlier novel, we find the plan to tell the story 'naïvement pour le paysan', but at the same time, 'clairement

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[7] George Sand, *La Mare au diable* (Paris: Folio, 1973), pp.75-114. For further examples, see Marantz, 'Les Romans champêtres de George Sand dans la «Recherche»', pp.33-36.

[8] Marie Miguet, 'De la lecture de «Sylvie» à l'écriture de la «Recherche»', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray*, 34 (1984), 199-215 (p.201).

[9] Pierre-Edmond Robert, 'George Sand's presence in Proust's «A la Recherche du Temps perdu»', in *West Virginia George Sand Conference Papers*, ed. by Armand E. Singer and others (Morgantown: West Virginia University Department of Foreign Languages, 1981), pp.54-60 (p.56).

[10] George Sand, *La Petite Fadette* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p.33.

pour le Parisien'.[11] This is the conclusion of a long aesthetic dialogue which aims to find out 'par quel rapport l'art, sans cesser d'être l'art pour tous, peut entrer dans le mystère de la simplicité primitive, et communiquer à l'esprit le charme répandu de la nature'.[12]

Thus, we find another unexpected complexity lurking behind the apparently simplistic facade of *François le Champi* - here, a philosophical argument about the relative merits of nature and art, an argument that goes back to Plato and beyond, and which continues, through Kant and Hegel, up to the present day. Sand's preface starts out on this debate tentatively, but finally becomes dogmatic:

> Je révoque en doute la puissance de l'art. Je la méprise, je l'anéantis, je prétends que l'art n'est pas né, qu'il n'existe pas, ou bien que, s'il a vécu, son temps est fait. Il est usé, il n'a plus de formes, il n'a plus de souffle, il n'a plus de moyens pour chanter la beauté du vrai.[13]

Yet, in the midst of such dogma, there is a hint of doubt. Rhetoric undoes philosophy, as it seems that the only means open to Sand's narrator for expressing the absolute superiority of nature is through the metaphor of art: 'La nature est une œuvre d'art, mais Dieu est le seul artiste qui existe, et l'homme n'est qu'un arrangeur de mauvais goût.'[14] Finally, however, rhetoric is reconciled with philosophy:

> Je voudrais [...] anéantir dans ma mémoire les enseignements et les formes de l'art; [...] ne jamais penser à la peinture quand je regarde le paysage, à la musique quand j'écoute le vent, à la poésie quand j'admire et goûte l'ensemble. Je voudrais jouir de tout par l'instinct [...].
> - Tu te plains d'être homme en un mot?
> - Non; je me plains de n'être plus l'homme primitif [...] car le paysan le plus simple et le plus naïf est encore artiste; et moi je prétends que leur art est supérieur au nôtre.[15]

Thus, it is concluded that the aim is to create a kind of modern pastoral, which will not subvert its end (the glorification of nature) by its means (art/literature). Significantly, this compromise is reached through the figure of primitive man.

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[11] George Sand, *François le Champi* (Paris: Folio, 1973), p.53.

[12] *François le Champi*, p.41.

[13] *François le Champi*, p.44.

[14] *François le Champi*, p.41.

[15] *François le Champi*, pp.46-47.

The philosophical and somewhat tortured preface could therefore be another reason why Proust singled out *François le Champi* for special attention in *Combray*.[16] Marantz's manuscript investigations certainly show that Proust was familiar with this part of the book.[17] In some ways, Sand's preface bears a rather troubled relationship to the rest of her *own* text. What starts out as a text in its own right, complete with characters and an idyllic setting, appears to turn into a grand exposition of the author's aesthetic, but by the end reduces to a simple explanation of a technique that will combine literary French and peasant dialect in the main narrative. But, whatever its function in *François le Champi*, Sand's preface does seem to offer a programme for a certain thematic reading of *Combray*, one link between the two texts that has been neglected. If we substitute Proust's child for Sand's 'paysan le plus naïf', we perhaps find the same drama - the struggle for supremacy between art and nature, mediated by a primitive, symbolic figure - played out between the lines of *Combray*. We will return to the difficulties inherent in such a reading of Proust's *récit d'enfance* later in this chapter. In the meantime, it is worth noting that there is, in general, no problem in the substitution of the child for primitive man. It is a comparison that Sand herself makes elsewhere. In the introductory chapters to *La Mare au diable* she remarks that rural man is 'condamné à une éternelle enfance'.[18] The narrator of *La Petite Fadette* makes the same point, talking of:

> L'attrait qu'ont éprouvé de tout temps les esprits fortement frappés des malheurs publics, à se rejeter dans les rêves de la pastorale, dans un certain idéal de la vie champêtre d'autant plus naïf et plus enfantin que les mœurs étaient plus brutales et les pensées plus sombres dans le monde réel.[19]

Prehistory of the *récit d'enfance* genre

This historical remark sends us even further afield from Proust. It begins to seem that Sand (and therefore Proust) was writing under the influence of a much older tradition than

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[16] The prefaces to the other 'romans champêtres' deal with the same issue, but to a lesser degree. As we have seen, in *La Petite Fadette* we are simply referred back to *François le Champi*. *La Mare au Diable* introduces the same opposition between nature and art, but seems slightly less pessimistic about the latter.

[17] Marantz, 'Les Romans champêtres de George Sand dans la «Recherche»', p.33.

[18] *La Mare au diable*, p.43.

[19] *La Petite Fadette*, p.37.

the *récit d'enfance*. Sand herself disclaims any originality: 'Je n'ai rien fait de neuf en suivant la pente qui ramène l'homme civilisé aux charmes de la vie primitive.'[20] Indeed, the above comparisons between the child and primitive man show Sand's theoretical grasp of the tradition she is acknowledging. According to Boas, what he terms 'The Cult of Childhood' is entirely derived from 'primitivism' and an earlier interest in such archetypes as the noble savage. This in turn is seen as part of a more general anti-intellectualism which grew steadily from the sixteenth century onwards. 'The anti-intellectualist', he writes, 'has gone for his exemplar to primitive man, to the peasant, to woman, to the Unconscious, and [...] to the child, each of whom is supposed to possess untaught wisdom.'[21] This may be an equation about which Boas himself is rather sceptical, but the point is that, rightly or wrongly, people *believed* in such a parallel. Perhaps they still do. Certainly, in 1931, several years after *Combray*, Dupuy claims that 'comme celle du primitif, la mentalité de l'enfant est en effet de caractère prélogique'.[22]

Other literary historians view Boas's post-sixteenth-century chain of anti-intellectualism, which culminates in the child, as itself part of an even older tradition, that of the Pastoral. According to Peter Marinelli, 'we have begun to transfer the aspects of the pastoral golden age into the time of innocence that every individual can remember, and to speak of a pastoral childhood'.[23] Although, under his scheme, the child's role has been to *replace* knights and shepherds, Marinelli acknowledges that he was present in the very earliest manifestations of the genre - before 250 B.C., in the work of Theocritus, for example. No doubt, this idea of 'The Child as Swain' means that there is no longer any need for the beauties of nature, for the country versus town opposition, in the new 'Version of Pastoral'.[24] As Marinelli points out, 'residing in a definite landscape, the shepherd needed an external world of lovely fresh nature in which to appear; residing only in time, the child can

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[20] *La Mare au diable*, p.27.

[21] George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: University of London Press, 1966), p.20.

[22] Dupuy, p.52.

[23] Peter V. Marinelli, *The Pastoral*, (London: Methuen, 1974), p.4.

[24] See William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto &Windus, 1950). 'The Child as Swain' is the title of a chapter on *Alice in Wonderland.*

survive as an emblem of innocence without it'.[25] Yet we only have to look at Sand's 'romans champêtres' (where primitive rural man is always accompanied by child characters) and indeed *Combray* (where Proust chooses to set a predominantly Parisian childhood in the country town of school holidays) to see that the child of the modern novel and the rustic environment of his literary ancestors are not necessarily separate. The myth of the 'enfance pastorale' that was glimpsed in Chapter 1 thus represents in some sense a double dose of the pastoral.

To sum up, whether the retreat is from a place (town, society) or from a time (adulthood), or both, the essence of both the pastoral and the *récit d'enfance* is a search for simplicity away from life's complexities. More interestingly, some critics also see a conflict between Nature and Art as another necessary ingredient. Kermode, in trying to define the Elizabethan poets' concept of Nature, concludes:

> The chief meaning [...] may best be expressed as 'the antithesis of Art', the wild or savage as opposed to the cultivated, the material upon which Art works. And this opposition is nowhere so evident and acute as in Pastoral, for in this 'kind' the cultivated, in their artificial way, reflect and describe for their own ends, the natural life.[26]

This conflict may not be *part* of the definition of the pastoral, modern or ancient, but it seems an inevitable consequence of any attempt to write in the genre, as Sand sensed. Her prefaces contain all the ingredients: town versus country, art versus nature, with primitive man and the child allied in a final compromise. Yet, as we saw, beneath the surface of her writing, the tension remains. It is as if the myth of the child artist, which so dominates the French *récit d'enfance*, is in conflict with another myth, that of the pastoral childhood. Thus the mythology of the genre is far from straightforward. Art and Nature become shifting poles, both vying for custody of the child.

Art and nature in two early examples of the *récit d'enfance*

This can be seen clearly if we look at shorter term literary history and the two works that are most generally considered to have influenced the portrayal of the child in modern

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[25] Marinelli, p.82.

[26] *English Pastoral Poetry. From the beginnings to Marvell*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Harrap, 1952), p.12.

French literature: Rousseau's *Émile* and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, both classic cases of 'enfances pastorales'.[27] Rousseau's refrain, 'Vis selon la nature', which punctuates *Émile* in various forms, seems to have an implicit footnote, 'at the expense of art'.[28] Émile, brought up in the country and modelled on 'le petit paysan', is to be allowed no books before the age of twelve. 'La lecture est le fléau de l'enfance et presque la seule occupation qu'on lui sait donner,' writes Rousseau critically.[29] Even after the age of twelve, he gives only grudging approval to only one book. This may be a novel, but it is to be read as a syllabus for Émile's continuing natural education:

> Puisqu'il nous faut absolument des livres, il en existe un qui fournit à mon gré le plus heureux traitté d'éducation naturelle. Ce livre sera le premier que lira mon Emile; seul il composera durant longtems toute sa bibliotheque, et il y tiendra toujours une place distinguée. [...] c'est *Robinson Crusoë*.[30]

Even when Rousseau appears to encourage the pursuit of one art, his approval is much qualified. 'Les enfants, grands imitateurs, essayent tous de dessiner: je voudrois que le mien cultivât cet art, non précisément pour l'art même, mais pour se rendre l'œil juste et la main flexible,' he writes.[31] It thus comes as no surprise that Émile is being brought up to be an art*isan* rather than an art*ist*.[32] As far as his creator is concerned, there may be conflict between art and nature, but there is no contest. Nature, allied with the child, wins every time.

This may have more than a little to do with the simple fact that *Émile* does not purport to be a work of art itself. *Paul et Virginie*, by contrast, does. Nevertheless, 'L'Histoire scandaleuse de la société' is again the great enemy from the very outset, and is one of the

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[27] Boas suggests that *Émile*'s influence was even wider and that the work introduced 'a more radical appraisal of childhood into European thought' (Boas, p.29). Bethlenfalvay, while singling out *Paul et Virginie* as the archetype of the pastoral childhood, would also like to include the English 'lakistes'. Unfortunately, she can find no evidence of any direct influence on French Romantic poets, but Sainte-Beuve's interest in Wordsworth and his friends allows for indirect influence on later French literature of childhood. (Marina Bethlenfalvay, *Les Visages de l'enfant dans la littérature française du XIXe siècle: Esquisse d'une typologie* (Geneva: Droz, 1979), pp.23-24 and pp.49-50).

[28] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'Éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 4 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-69), IV (1969), 239-868 (p.306).

[29] Rousseau, p.357.

[30] Rousseau, pp.454-55.

[31] Rousseau, p.397.

[32] Rousseau, p.473.

main contributing factors in the final tragedy.[33] Similarly, the two children are just as much in harmony with nature as Émile, if not more so. Indeed, 'les périodes de leur vie se réglaient sur celles de la nature [...]. Leur vie semblait attachée à celle des arbres, comme celle des faunes et des dryades.'[34] And nature is still the standard by which all else is judged. Paul does not like geography, for example, because, 'au lieu de nous décrire la nature de chaque pays', it 'ne nous en présente que les divisions politiques'.[35] Yet his education differs from that prescribed by Rousseau in one important respect - art is allowed to play its part. He loves literature, which consoles him in his separation from Virginie. In particular, 'aucun livre ne lui fit autant de plaisir que *Télémaque*, par ses tableaux de la vie champêtre et des passions naturelles au cœur humain'.[36] The two children are also artists in their own right. For example, 'Virginie chantait le bonheur de la vie champêtre et les malheurs des gens de la mer', and she acts out stories with Paul, a 'pantomime', 'si naturelle et si expressive', which is 'le premier langage de l'homme'.[37] Thus, while nature remains the standard by which art is judged, there is now the possibility of some kind of harmony between them, *through the mediating influence of the child*, who once again appears the ideal figure for a compromise. This much is hinted at from the very outset, when the old man who recounts the story to the narrator is found symbolically engraving lines from Horace on the trees that once belonged to the two children.[38]

Some later examples of pastoral and anti-pastoral *récits d'enfance*

We will return to the conflict between art and nature later. In the meantime, it is worth looking at the way in which the pastoral origins of the *récit d'enfance* can still be seen in later examples of the genre, particularly those which may have influenced Proust. In fact, the belief in the child's association with nature endures into the twentieth century, most

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[33] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris: Garnier, 1989), p.108.

[34] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, pp.129-30.

[35] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, pp.159.

[36] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, p.159.

[37] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, p.125.

[38] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, p.114.

obviously in the work of Colette or Alain-Fournier, whose evocations of rural childhoods are more or less contemporary with *Combray*. As was seen in the preceding chapter, literary history does not operate on a perfectly linear model, with the Pastoral giving way to the pastoral *récit d'enfance*, or the *récit d'enfance tout court*, before moving on to new ground once again. Claude Bonnefoy makes the following point about two distinct strains of literary childhoods in novels written as recently as 1969:

> Il y a une enfance relativement libre, heureuse, naturelle, généralement campagnarde où l'on s'enivre de longues courses, où l'on se barbouille de mûres, où l'on comprend la langue des fleurs et des bêtes, et une autre, difficile, pénible, génératrice de souffrance ou de révolte, où l'on se heurte aux parents, aux conventions sociales, voire [...] à l'incompréhensible cruauté du monde.[39]

(Of course, these two myths are not mutually exclusive. On the face of it, Bonnefoy's remark could apply to the two parts of *Combray*, as will be illustrated later in this chapter.)

Conversely, openly *anti*-pastoral children appeared on the literary scene, surprisingly early. Flaubert's decision to name the two children of *Un Cœur simple* after their literary predecessors, Paul and Virginie, is an obvious jibe against romantic novels and those who read too many of them. Similarly, Charles Bovary's father's 'idéal viril de l'enfance' and his attempt at an education 'à la spartiate' are as good a criticism as any of Rousseau's pedagogical programme.[40] (It is also interesting that Jean Santeuil's parents aim to 'l'élever virilement' (JS,202), possibly setting up another chain of intertextuality that links Proust, via Flaubert, to Rousseau.) Going back even further, Stendhal's autobiography shows a similar disrespect for such archetypes:

> Mes parents me vantaient sans cesse, et à la nausée, la beauté des champs, de la verdure, des fleurs, etc., des renoncules, etc.
>
> Ces plates phrases m'ont donné pour les fleurs et les plates-bandes un dégoût qui dure encore.[41]

This may be more a disgust with 'ces plates phrases' than with nature itself, but the upshot is the same: the narrative shows a pointed reluctance to describe the child's encounters with nature, even where appropriate.

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[39] Claude Bonnefoy, 'Un Thème privilégié: l'enfance', *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 83 (1969), 6-8 (p.6).

[40] Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951-52), I (1951), 325-645 (p.331).

[41] Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, in *Œuvres intimes*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1981-82), II (1982), 523-959 (p.745).

Nevertheless, many of those who are held to have most influenced Proust, such as Loti, Chateaubriand and Nerval, appear to give their whole-hearted approval to the pastoral myth of childhood. Loti's *Roman d'un enfant*, despite being a comparatively modern manifestation of the genre, conforms perfectly to the pastoral archetype. The work is full of lyrical outbursts about nature and, as with the young Marcel, the child's relationship with the natural world is itself intimately linked to a single place, the scene of holidays:

> Je n'ai pas assez parlé de cette Limoise, qui fut le lieu de ma première initiation aux choses de la nature. Toute mon enfance est intimement liée à ce petit coin du monde, à ses vieux bois de chênes, à son sol pierreux que recouvrent des tapis de serpolet, ou de bruyères.[42]

It thus comes as little surprise when Toursch claims that Loti marks no advance on Rousseau: he is a 'romantique attardé', because of his love for the child as an 'être simple naïf, primitif, non encore déformé par l'éducation et la vie'.[43] Perhaps, however, he shows a more modern interpretation of the child-nature cult. Richard Coe claims that in the nineteenth century the 'passionate involvement in the minute detail of the natural world often crystallized for the child in the form of an obsessive interest in the natural sciences'.[44] Loti's child conforms to this shift of emphasis, but his narrator makes it quite clear that such an interest amounts to the same poetic harmony with nature as in earlier literary childhoods. Those who predict his hero's future as a naturalist are quite wrong: 'Non, ce qui m'attirait si puissamment était derrière ces choses glacées, derrière et au delà; - était la nature elle-même, effrayante, et aux mille visages, l'ensemble inconnu des bêtes et des forêts.'[45] Thus, not only is there no *denial* of the pastoral childhood; there is also little modification of it.

Chateaubriand and Nerval are in fact not even 'romantiques attardés', but Romantics in their day. Yet, despite their nostalgia for the green grass of childhood, they introduce some ambiguity into the pastoral myth. Although Chateaubriand acknowledges the importance of his early life at Combourg, the childhood section of his memoirs takes up a comparatively small fraction of the work, and the passages dealing with the beauty of nature an even smaller

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[42] Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d'un enfant* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1988), p.136.

[43] Toursch, pp.168-69.

[44] Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass was Taller: Autobiography and the experience of childhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.128.

[45] Loti, p.118.

fraction of this. Often such descriptions are very factual, more a list of flora and fauna than poetry, until they are tinged with adult nostalgia and regret: 'Notre enfance laisse quelque chose d'elle-même aux lieux embellis par elle, comme une fleur communique un parfum aux objets qu'elle a touchés.'[46] And if there are no signs of *disagreement* with Rousseau, there is no whole-hearted bias towards the pedagogy of *Émile*:

> Aurait-on mieux développé mon intelligence en me jetant plus tôt dans l'étude? J'en doute: ces flots, ces vents, cette solitude qui furent mes premiers maîtres, convenaient peut-être mieux à mes dispositions natives; peut-être dois-je à ces instituteurs sauvages quelques vertus que j'aurais ignorées. La vérité est qu'aucun système d'éducation n'est en soi préférable à un autre système.[47]

The case of *Sylvie* is more interesting. Its importance in Proust's work is probably greater too. A section of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (CS,233-42) is devoted to Nerval, and Miguet even goes so far as to claim that in describing the Vivonne and its banks, Proust was rewriting his favourite pages of *Sylvie*.[48] Nerval also resurrects the art versus nature debate. For him, the two seem to be in true harmony. As if to challenge Rousseau's doctrines, the narrator writes, 'Je continuai à réciter des fragments de l'*Héloïse* pendant que Sylvie cueillait des fraises.'[49] In fact, nature seems to be valued for its resemblance to the very work of literature that denies the importance of art and affirms the supremacy of nature: the landscape is described as the 'réalisation pittoresque' of *Émile* itself.[50] Sometimes the disagreement is more open. 'Rousseau dit que le spectacle de la nature console de tout', writes the narrator, but the places he once loved have no such effect: 'Vous n'avez rien gardé de tout ce passé! Quelquefois j'ai besoin de revoir ces lieux de solitude et de rêverie. J'y relève tristement en moi-même les traces fugitives d'une époque où le naturel était affecté.'[51] This bears a striking resemblance to Marcel's disillusioned address to the trees in *Le Temps retrouvé*:

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[46] Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951), I,67.

[47] Chateaubriand, p.38.

[48] Miguet, p.203. Her arguments and comparisons are convincing. The only obvious objection to them is that Proust may have been 'rewriting' many other works at the same time.

[49] Gérard de Nerval, *Les Filles du Feu*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952-56), I (1952), 261-93 (p.273).

[50] Nerval, p.281.

[51] Nerval, p.292.

> «Arbres, pensai-je, vous n'avez plus rien à me dire, mon cœur refroidi ne vous entend plus. Je suis pourtant ici en pleine nature, eh bien, c'est avec froideur, avec ennui que mes yeux constatent la ligne qui sépare votre front lumineux de votre tronc d'ombre. Si j'ai jamais pu me croire poète, je sais maintenant que je ne le suis pas. Peut-être dans la nouvelle partie de ma vie, si desséchée, qui s'ouvre, les hommes pourraient-ils m'inspirer ce que ne me dit plus la nature. Mais les années où j'aurais peut-être été capable de la chanter ne reviendront jamais.» (IV,433-34)

According to Walter Kasell, Nerval was not simply an influence on Proust, but the latter was one of the few readers/critics of his time who truly understood *Sylvie*. In an analysis of the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* piece on Nerval, he points out that the place to which Gérard returns is already fictional and that 'Proust recognises the narrative itself as a disjunction of realities; *Sylvie* is a disturbing work in the *guise* of a pastoral idyll'.[52] Clearly, this is an *interpretation* of Proust's essay on Nerval (otherwise Kasell's own article would be superfluous), but it seems reasonable to assume that *Sylvie* appealed so much to the author of *A la recherche* because of the uneasy, disturbing light the former casts on an apparently archetypal nostalgia for a pastoral childhood and because of its treatment of the conflict between art and nature.

For similar reasons, it is also worth drawing on another writer, a contemporary of Proust's, who is acknowledged only in the early manuscripts of *A la recherche*. When discussing the way in which one author unconsciously carries on the work of another after a gap of many years, the narrator talks of 'la bergère justement admirée par Bloch' and her rewriting of an episode from Sand's *François le Champi*'. But, he continues, 'entre la façon dont il est traité dans son livre et dans cet autre qu'elle n'a pas lu la distance est juste celle que la sensibilité humaine a parcouru entre George Sand et elle, [...] Marguerite Audoux' (IV,859). The work he is referring to is *Marie-Claire*, Audoux's autobiographical novel of childhood.[53] The thematic similarities between the two works are striking: both *Marie-Claire* and *François le Champi* are tales of rural orphanhood. The technical similarities are even more obvious: Audoux takes the simple, childlike narrative to much greater extremes than Sand. But 'la sensibilité humaine' has indeed covered many miles between the two. For if any work *ought* to be a stereotypical pastoral childhood, full of idealisation of nature, it is *Marie-Claire*. Not only is Audoux's central character a child, but she is also a shepherdess -

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[52] Walter Kasell, 'Proust as a Reader of Nerval', *Romanic Review*, 68 (1977), 165-74 (p.168).

[53] Marguerite Audoux, *Marie-Claire* (Paris: Charpentier, 1930).

apparently the ultimate fusion of the *récit d'enfance* and the Pastoral. And although Marie-Claire starts out in life as an (equally stereotypical) late nineteenth century child-victim, suddenly she is thrown out of the orphanage into what appears to be a Romantic novel, with the words, 'Vous serez bergère'.[54] In fact, this is what she seems to think herself:

> J'imaginais un pays très éloigné où il n'y avait que des plaines toutes fleuries. Je me voyais la gardienne d'un troupeau de beaux moutons blancs, et j'avais deux chiens à mes côtés qui n'attendaient qu'un signe pour faire ranger les bêtes.[55]

Reality does not materialise quite as imagined. The work turns out to be cold, hard and far too demanding for a mere child. Nature is more a hostile force than a solace, consisting of a dense wood in which the young shepherdess gets lost, then fog, snow and even wolves. Only art provides any relief, in the form of a battered old copy of *Télémaque*.[56] Yet just when the reader is beginning to think that this is an anti-pastoral childhood, Marie-Claire, still nothing but a child, falls in love with her employer's brother. Their secret meeting place is an abandoned garden which has all the desired characteristics of a rural idyll: 'Et maintenant j'étais dans ce jardin sans clôture, tout entourée de genêts fleuris, le désir me venait d'y vivre toujours. [...] Ce jardin plein de fleurs et d'eau claire me paraissait le plus beau jardin de la terre.'[57]

Now at least, the child is at one with nature and both are in harmony with art, as the lovers bring books into their Eden: 'Henri Delois apportait des livres que nous lisions, assis sur les rondelles de bois, dans la pièce qui donnait sur le jardin.'[58] But as with all Edens, this bliss is short-lived. The cottage with its overgrown garden is symbolically sold off, social pressures intervene to put an end to the relationship and Marie-Claire returns to her status as child-victim for whom no pastoral idyll is possible. Nevertheless, even if it is withdrawn and desecrated almost immediately, the novel has still offered us a tantalising glimpse of the

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54 Audoux, p.82.

55 Audoux, p.90.

56 'J'aimais ce livre, il était pour moi comme un jeune prisonnier que j'allais visiter en cachette' (*Marie-Claire*, p.158). Proust (mis)quotes this in another version of the 'chaîne des poètes', where this time Audoux is linked to Chateaubriand and France (IV,1388). He might equally have connected her to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in whose work *Télémaque* plays a similarly consolatory role (see note 37 above).

57 Audoux, p.207.

58 Audoux, p.214.

pastoral myth of childhood. Thus, in setting *Marie-Claire* on an equal footing with *François le Champi*, Proust seems to be doing two things: firstly, he is underlining its own (maybe unconscious) intertextuality and secondly, he is suggesting its possible importance to *his* work. If we put these two elements together, we find ourselves asking what bearing the simultaneous affirmation and denial of the pastoral myth, as expressed in *Marie-Claire*, has on Proust's *récit d'enfance*, *Combray*.

An apparent digression into child psychology

Before measuring the progress of 'la sensibilité humaine' in the short time between Proust and Audoux, one brief excursion into child psychology is worthwhile. A survey of child-psychologists writing just before Proust reveals the same mixture of scepticism and lyricism, regarding the child's harmony with nature, as in the work of their literary colleagues. Perhaps it is a tribute to the influence of these poets and novelists that such an unscientific matter is on the psychological agenda at all, even when it is in a rather negative form. One of the cynics, Perez, writes that 'a gaudy picture book will drive children wild with delight [...], while the paintings of a master do not appeal to them at all' and that 'children appreciate rural scenery as little as they do pictorial or sculpturesque beauty'.[59] Two reasons are given for this. Firstly, in infancy the child confuses the *beautiful* with what he likes, that is with sensory pleasure; secondly, the child's vision is fragmentary, that is, 'the child has not yet got beyond isolated perceptions, and is incapable of conceptions of *wholes* or masses'.[60]

Curiously, what appears to be a digression brings us straight back to Proust. For readers of *Combray* all this has a familiar ring. Towards the end of the *récit d'enfance*, the narrator talks of his early love for the moon in the following terms:

> J'aimais à retrouver son image dans des tableaux et dans des livres, mais ces œuvres d'art étaient bien différentes [...] de celles où la lune me paraîtrait belle aujourd'hui et où je ne l'eusse pas reconnue alors. C'était, par exemple, quelque roman de Saintine, un paysage de Gleyre [...], de ces œuvres naïvement incomplètes comme étaient mes propres impressions et que les sœurs de ma grand-mère s'indignaient de me voir aimer. (I,144-45)

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[59] Bernard Perez, *The First Three Years of Childhood*, trans. by Alice M. Christie (London: Sonnenschein, 1895), p.274.

[60] Perez, p.272.

Perez and Marcel's great-aunts may disapprove, but Proust and his narrator make no such value judgements. Indeed, the incompleteness of the child's impressions of nature is probably of positive value to Proust, insofar as it forms the technical basis for many of his most celebrated descriptions - the 'mille petits détails inutiles' of the lime tea (I,51), for example, or the 'petites places plus blondes' which the young Marcel discovers on the hawthorns (I,112). But if we do a little work ourselves and put certain fragments of *Combray* together, we find that whilst agreeing with Perez up to a point, Proust's narrator integrates this view into an altogether more complex psychological scheme: the child's senses may not yet be capable of synthesized, organic apprehension of nature, but his imagination is. As he remarks in the incident of the amazing musical flies, 'cette obscure fraîcheur de ma chambre [...] offrait à mon imagination le spectacle total de l'été dont mes sens, si j'avais été en promenade, n'auraient pu jouir que par morceaux' (I,82).[61]

An even more striking similarity between psychologist and novelist is found if we return to Perez's first point about the child's confusion of natural beauty and sensory pleasure. This comes up explicitly on at least two occasions in *Combray*.[62] First, there are the pink hawthorns:

> Et justement ces fleurs avaient choisi une de ces teintes de chose mangeable, ou de tendre embellissement à une toilette pour une grande fête, qui parce qu'elles leur présentent la raison de leur supériorité, sont celles qui semblent belles avec le plus d'évidence aux yeux des enfants, et à cause de cela, gardent toujours pour eux quelque chose de plus vif et de plus naturel que les autres teintes, même lorsqu'ils ont compris qu'elles ne promettaient rien à leur gourmandise et n'avaient pas été choisies par la couturière. (I,138)

Again the difference between the psychologist and the novelist is the lack of condemnation in Proust's tone. In fact, on the second appearance of the phenomenon in *Combray*, Perez's point is once more integrated into a wider scheme, where the child's realisation that the buttercups on the banks of the Vivonne offer no sensory pleasure actually brings him an understanding of purely aesthetic pleasure (what Kant would call 'disinterested' pleasure), at a very young age:

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[61] We will return to this question of the fragmentariness or the oneness of the child's impressions and its relation to Proust's technique in Chapter 4.

[62] It probably turns up on innumerable occasions, again as the basis for technique, in synaesthetic imagery. There is a great deal of this in *Combray*. See Stephen Ullmann, 'Transpositions of Sensations in Proust's Imagery', *French Studies*, 8 (1954), 28-43. Again, see Chapter 4 for the continuation of this debate.

> Ils étaient fort nombreux à cet endroit [...], jaunes comme un jaune d'œuf, brillants d'autant plus, me semblait-il, que ne pouvant dériver vers aucune velléité de dégustation le plaisir que leur vue me causait, je l'accumulais dans leur surface dorée, jusqu'à ce qu'il devînt assez puissant pour produire de l'inutile beauté; et cela dès ma plus petite enfance. (I,165-66)[63]

Another, less sceptical, early psychologist, James Sully, takes up Perez's question, asking: 'How far can children be said to have the germ of a feeling for nature [...]?'[64] His answer, while accepting Perez's reservations to a certain extent, is that children do have an aesthetic feeling for nature, especially as far as flowers are concerned. 'Perhaps the nearest approach to a pure aesthetic enjoyment in these first experiences is the love of flowers,' he writes.[65] As we have just seen, nothing could be more applicable to the young Marcel. When Perez, in his later work, *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant*, also comments on this tendency, or the lack of it, there is another ring of familiarity: 'Je connais, en effet, très peu de jeunes garçons aimant les fleurs; ceux qui les aiment passionnément en ont reçu l'exemple de leur mère, et ont presque toujours été élevés à l'écart, comme des filles.'[66] As the title of this work suggests, Perez has now reached a far less sceptical position. Indeed, he even goes so far as to base the whole of his aesthetic of childhood on what he calls 'le sentiment de la nature', something which he now claims the true artist possesses in childhood and never loses: 'Le véritable artiste a la religion tendre ou passionnée de la nature, il va droit à elle d'un élan presque enfantin, auquel l'enfant peut d'ailleurs s'associer dans une certaine mesure.'[67] Again then, it seems that the literary climate of Proust's day was inseparable from the intellectual or scientific climate. The interest in the child's relationship with nature (and, in turn, the place of art in this scheme) is only one of their common preoccupations.

Combray: 'roman champêtre'?

Putting literary and psychological history behind us, we finally come to Proust himself. The above extracts from *Combray* already show that nature is on the thematic

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63 See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.42-50.

64 James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (London: Longmans, Green, 1895), p.306.

65 Sully, p.305.

66 Bernard Perez, *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant* (Paris, 1888), p.86.

67 Perez, *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant*, p.47.

agenda for Proust, but does he make any *particular* link between childhood and the natural world? If so, how important is it and how far does *Combray* fit the model of the pastoral childhood? The first question is relatively easy to answer. If we think of the great celebrations of nature in *A la recherche*, the most striking, such as the hawthorns or the banks of the Vivonne, occur during the hero's childhood. The hawthorns reappear briefly in the Balbec of his adolescence, but, as one critic's survey shows, they fade out with his youth.[68] Annie Barnes also produces statistics to show that *Combray* contains more species of flowers than the rest of the novel and that in Balbec there is a marked lack of literal flowers: 'Les fleurs qui étaient la grande réalité du paradis de Combray, ne servent plus maintenant qu'à des métaphores.'[69] Furthermore, by the time we reach *Le Côté de Guermantes* there are hardly any left, either literally or metaphorically. Thus, it seems that Marcel broke his childhood promise to the hawthorns:

> «O mes pauvres petites aubépines, disais-je en pleurant, ce n'est pas vous qui voudriez me faire du chagrin, me forcer à partir. Vous, vous ne m'avez jamais fait de peine! Aussi je vous aimerai toujours.» Et, essuyant mes larmes, je leur promettais, quand je serais grand, de ne pas imiter la vie insensée des autres hommes et, même à Paris, les jours de printemps, au lieu d'aller faire des visites et écouter des niaiseries, de partir dans la campagne voir les premières aubépines. (I,143)

This suggests that the child himself associates growing up with separation from the natural world. The famous lament in *Le Temps retrouvé*, 'Arbres [...] vous n'avez plus rien à me dire' (IV,433), quoted above, implies that he was right. The child, on the face of it, was simply far closer to nature than the adult narrator who writes: 'Soit que la foi qui crée soit tarie en moi, soit que la réalité ne se forme dans la mémoire, les fleurs qu'on me montre aujourd'hui pour la première fois ne me semblent pas de vraies fleurs' (I,182).

But *how* close was he? The above address to the hawthorns has the same sickly, sentimental tone as much popular literature about children of that time, which suggests a rather superficial connection between the child and nature. Talking to flowers may be something we expect from a Paul or a Virginie, from a young Pierre Loti even, but it is somehow rather disappointing in the future narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu.* There is something more noble, less sugary, however, about the way in which the young Marcel

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[68] Ginette Michaux, 'Les Aubépines dans la recherche proustienne', *Les lettres romanes*, 39 (1985), 59-72.

[69] Annie Barnes, 'Le Jardin de Marcel Proust: pour le cinquantenaire des «jeunes filles en fleurs»', *Modern Language Review*, 64 (1969), 546-54 (p.549).

runs with the wind (I,143), about his greeting to the river (I,164), or about his attempt to mimic the gestures of the hawthorns in the church (I,111). This sounds as if it could be part of something much grander, the proclamation of the child's organic unity with the forces of nature, of his sympathy with a primitive power diametrically opposed to the narrow adult society in which he is constrained to live. At the height of his distress in the 'drame du coucher', nature at least is in tune with the young Marcel:

> J'ouvris la fenêtre sans bruit et m'assis au pied de mon lit; je ne faisais presque aucun mouvement afin qu'on ne m'entendît pas d'en bas. Dehors, les choses semblaient, elles aussi, figées en une muette attention à ne pas troubler le clair de lune. (I,32)

It is precisely this fragment which prompts Chombart de Lauwe to conclude, 'L'enfant et la nature participent aux mêmes rythmes, l'enfant là aussi est nature.'[70] The narrator himself talks about the flowers of his childhood being 'immédiatement en communication avec mon cœur' (I,183), so it is hardly surprising if critics indulge in a similar kind of romanticism. 'Entre son âme et celle de la fleur il s'est fait un échange', writes Costil of the child Marcel and the hawthorns. His remark may sound extravagant, but he is only echoing the narrator's own words.[71]

Combray: anti-pastoral?

Despite a considerable body of critical opinion supporting the 'roman champêtre' characterisation of *Combray*, this is only one side of the story. Proust may adopt a certain way of writing about childhood, conforming to the stereotype of 'l'enfance pastorale', but his approval of the genre is not whole-hearted. In fact, such modes of writing are parodied in Legrandin's speech, to the point of satire (admittedly, also self-satire). The idea of being at one with nature begins to seem rather absurd, when the arch-snob of Combray declares, 'J'ai des amis partout où il y a des arbres blessés' (I,130). And it is clearly a certain precious style (Proust's own?) used for writing about the child's relationship with nature that is being ridiculed in the following classic piece of Legrandin:

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[70] Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Un Monde autre: l'enfance de ses représentations à son mythe* (Paris: Payot, 1971), p.262.

[71] Pierre Costil, 'Proust et la poésie de la fleur', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray*, 13 (1963), 20-41 (p.29).

> Venez tenir compagnie à votre vieil ami, m'avait-il dit. Comme le bouquet qu'un voyageur nous envoie d'un pays où nous ne retournerons plus, faites-moi respirer du lointain de votre adolescence ces fleurs des printemps que j'ai traversés moi aussi il y a bien des années. Venez avec la primevère, la barbe de chanoine, le bassin d'or, venez avec le sédum dont est fait le bouquet de dilection de la flore balzacienne, avec la fleur du jour de la Résurrection, la pâquerette et la boule de neige des jardins qui commence à embaumer dans les allées de votre grand-tante [...]. (I,124)

Thus, the influence of a work like *Marie-Claire* begins to look quite important. Proust too is writing *against* a certain myth, as well as *within* it. When Bethlenfalvay talks of his 'chemins qui croisent parfois ceux de Wordsworth, the operative word is 'parfois'.[72] Even if we look at some of the most celebrated pieces of the Proustian pastoral childhood, we find ambiguities. Coe's analysis of the hawthorn incident, for example, presents it as a failure:

> The hawthorn passage is a perfect example of the problem Proust has set himself: to intuit the essential realities of the child-self, its world and experience, in such a way that language, as it were, becomes transparent, and the reader is made one with the immediate presence, in all its dimensions, of the flowering arcades of the hawthorn path. And incautious as the assertion may appear, Proust, for all his mastery fails, and perhaps even recognizes that he has failed. In his aim to extend his *apprehension* of the flowering mass through language into a total experience, he achieves a totality, but somehow just misses the innermost secret of the experience.[73]

Yet if we look more closely at the excerpt, we find that the explicit element of failure is very much in the past tense: 'Mais j'av*ais* beau rester devant les aubépines', 'elles m'offr*aient* indéfiniment le même charme avec une profusion inépuisable, mais sans me laisser approfondir davantage', 'puis je reven*ais* devant les aubépines', 'mais j'av*ais* beau me faire un écran de mes mains pour n'avoir qu'elles sous les yeux, le sentiment qu'elles éveill*aient* en moi rest*ait* obscur et vague, cherchant en vain à se dégager, à venir adhérer à leurs fleurs' (I,136-37) (my italics). Whether or not this description is unsuccessful on Proust's part therefore remains a matter of opinion. What is clear is that there is a failure on the child's part - a failure to conform to the literary stereotype of oneness with nature.

At other points too, Marcel's desire to merge with nature is thwarted, if not by his own limitations, by those imposed upon him. He is not allowed to stop and embrace Swann's lilacs (I,134), for example. Elsewhere, it is this desire itself that is lacking. In the garden reading scene, the last and most superficial of the states of consciousness to be

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[72] Bethlenfalvay, p.50. However, the 'type' to which she would most like to consign the child of *Combray* is quite different, the almost exclusively twentieth century 'enfant des autres', moulded and masked by the adult society around him.

[73] Coe, p.124.

analysed is the awareness of the real world around the child. It is the scenery of the books he is reading that appears far closer to him and more real. Furthermore, if he had been allowed to visit the real life counterparts of these landscapes, the child could not have derived any more pleasure from them. Nature, the narrator claims, only produces disappointment (I,85-86). Even when Proust is affirming the importance of nature to the child most strongly, there are ambiguities:

> Car en ce temps-là tout ce qui n'était pas moi, la terre et les êtres, me paraissait plus précieux, plus important, doué d'une existence plus réelle que cela ne paraît aux hommes faits. Et la terre et les êtres je ne les séparais pas. (I,155)

Marcel may not separate 'la terre et les êtres' from *each other*, but the implication is that they only have such great value for him because they are so separable from *his self*: nature is part of 'tout ce qui n'était pas moi'.

The point is, therefore, that the importance of nature in *Combray* is often over-estimated. To see it as the proverbial 'vert paradis', as so many critics have done, is a misinterpretation; to see it as a 'roman champêtre' of childhood is an over-simplification. That Proust was consciously and deliberately writing against a certain stereotype of the *récit d'enfance*, as well as acknowledging it, is confirmed by the very structure of *Combray*. Pierre Costil writes, 'Ce qui surgit d'abord du passé, ce sont, dit le narrateur, «toutes les fleurs de notre jardin, et celles du parc de M. Swann, et les nymphéas de la Vivonne», les personnages et les maisons ne venant qu'ensuite.'[74] From this, he derives a 'rôle privilégié des fleurs'. However, if we look at the sentence in question more closely, we find that the final clause reverses these roles: 'tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, ville et jardins de ma tasse de thé' (I,47).[75] Obviously, it would be wrong to read too much into a sentence, but similar processes seem to be going on in the structure of *Combray* as a whole. For, having announced the basic fact that the childhood section of the novel is to be set in the small country town of the school holidays, rather than the Paris where the child clearly spends most of the year ('j'étais à la campagne chez mon grand-père' (I,6)), the narrator finds surprisingly little to say about the joys of rural living. Thus led to expect an 'enfance

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[74] Costil, p.23.

[75] Barnes presents the title Proust once proposed for his novel, 'Jardins dans une tasse de thé' as further proof of the privileged role of nature (Barnes, p.547). It is difficult to believe that Proust was being entirely serious, however.

pastorale', the reader is, like Audoux's shepherdess, puzzled at the sort of novel in which he finds himself. First, we have the woes of the 'drame du coucher'; then descriptions of the town; vast expanses of Léonie, Françoise and the kitchen maid, not to mention Swann, Bloch and 'la dame en rose'; even some details about life in Paris. There are several false starts amidst all this, though. The garden scene has some snippets of rural bliss, but is, as we have seen, more concerned with the layers of consciousness involved in the process of reading. Then, some one hundred pages in, we finally encounter the hawthorns we have been waiting for: 'C'est au mois de Marie que je me souviens d'avoir commencé à aimer les aubépines' (I,110). But even these are the tamed hawthorns of the church and they simply seem to provoke yet another digression, this time on Vinteuil and his daughter. It is only another twenty pages later that the 'roman champêtre' of Combray really begins, with the descriptions of the walks along both 'côtés' and more hawthorns. Even the celebrated set piece on the Vivonne lasts barely five pages, five very intense pages granted, before giving way to the obsession with the Guermantes family. If anything, arguments about the priority of nature in *Combray* must be based on its coming last rather than first, since it is the final few pages with their nostalgia for the flowers of childhood which most conform to the model of the 'enfance pastorale'. But even this would be to distort the picture. Nature still plays a comparatively small part in the scheme of *Combray* as a whole, and it remains more acceptable to talk of its 'importance condensée' as does Lucien Daudet, than to slip into the 'vert paradis' cliché.[76]

The child-artist versus the pastoral child: a clash of myths in *Combray*?

At this point, it is tempting to return for a moment to the origins of the *récit d'enfance* and the struggle between art and nature that is so central to the pastoral form. Could it be that *Combray* fails to be a whole-hearted 'roman champêtre', by making art finally defeat nature? Certainly, just as there is no shortage of critics to support the 'vert paradis' hypothesis, so there are many to claim the supremacy of art over nature in *A la recherche*. Hindus, for example, underlines the importance of Proust's 'art similes', in which nature is compared to works of art with, he claims, 'a tone almost of apology for nature':

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[76] Lucien Daudet, 'Autour de soixante lettres de Marcel Proust', in *Les Cahiers Marcel Proust*, 5 (1929), p.33.

> There seems to me no aspect of Proust which makes him more 'modern' than this elevation of art to a position superior to nature. One must have traveled very far indeed away from the romantic poets in terms of aesthetic theory if one is to think of a pastoral landscape as *humble* when compared with certain paintings. Is it possible to conceive of Wordsworth or Shelley valuing a work of art above nature? For these poets, the highest aspiration of the artist was to produce something which merited comparison to nature, while for Proust it seems to be the highest praise of natural beauty that it suggests a work of art.[77]

Yet to give priority to this one aspect is to ignore a wealth of conflicting data again. Graham draws our attention to the fact that there is a great deal of *reciprocal* imagery linking art and nature and that the statistics for *A la recherche* as a whole point to nature as the most frequent source of imagery, rather than art.[78] If there is a higher percentage of imagery that illuminates nature by means of art in *Combray* than in the rest of the novel, this is easily explained by the greater *literal* interest in nature during the childhood section.

What is beyond doubt is the importance of some kind of tension between art and nature throughout Proust's work and specifically in *Combray*. From the very beginning it is in evidence. First, Marcel's grand-mother argues with his father 'parce qu'il m'envoyait lire dans ma chambre au lieu de rester dehors' (I,11). More importantly, on the same page, the Combray garden makes its first appearance, with its 'allées [...] trop systématiquement alignées à son gré par le nouveau jardinier dépourvu du sentiment de la nature' (I,11). Such a remark might easily be overlooked and dismissed as the worthless opinion of an eccentric grand-mother, if the point was not stressed several more times in the course of *Combray* (see I,14 and I,63), and if the grand-mother herself did not have such a privileged role in the child's development. The over-artificial garden is also seen to contribute to the child's own belief that the landscape depicted in the book he is reading is more real than the landscape in which he is reading it:

> Par le choix qu'en avait fait l'auteur, par la foi avec laquelle ma pensée allait au-devant de sa parole comme d'une révélation, ils [ces paysages] me semblaient être - impression que ne me donnait guère le pays où je me trouvais, et surtout notre jardin, produit sans prestige de la fantaisie du jardinier que méprisait ma grand-mère - une part véritable de la Nature elle-même, digne d'être étudiée et approfondie. (I,85)

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[77] Milton Hindus, *The Proustian Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.50.

[78] V.E. Graham, *The Imagery of Proust* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), p.14 and p.109.

Here it is almost as if there is some ideal higher than nature, called 'Nature', which only art (or Art) can attain. Yet elsewhere, in Swann's garden, where Léonie's gardener has no influence, nature is seen to be stronger than Art:

> Dans ses créations les plus factices, c'est toujours sur la nature que l'homme travaille; certains lieux font toujours régner autour d'eux leur empire particulier, arborent leurs insignes immémoriaux au milieu d'un parc comme ils auraient fait loin de toute intervention humaine (I,134-35)

We can conclude from these remarks that the garden has a privileged place in Proust's work, as a space where some kind of opposition between art and nature is brought to a head and possibly resolved. The priority of the garden in writing about childhood is nothing new, of course. Any writer with a nostalgic 'paradis perdu' attitude to childhood is likely to introduce a garden that is either explicitly or implicitly compared to Eden. Pierre Loti's child character, for example, has a courtyard which plays this rôle, as do the children in Larbaud's story 'La Grande Époque'.[79] Normally, however, the gardens in such cases seem to be classified on the side of nature rather than art, even if it is a tamed version of nature. Francine Dugast, writing of the childhood in French prose of 1918 to 1930 makes the following generalisation:

> Entre le jardin et la campagne, on peut noter à la fois une relation étroite et une différence essentielle: ils sont tous deux le lieu du contact avec la nature; mais dans l'un c'est une nature policée, humanisée, alors que l'autre se rapproche de cette absence de civilisation que l'enfant redoute ou souhaite.[80]

Thus, it seems that writers of childhood have come to recognise the garden as a meeting place of society and nature. Nor is it any wonder that this privileged space is placed in a special relationship to the child, since this is a formula that is equally applicable to him, held half way between the natural being he is born and the socialised being he will become. But for Proust, as we have seen, the formula of the garden is slightly different. It is not so much the point of intersection of nature and *society* as the space where nature and *art* are brought together. Of course, this is not unique to Proust either. What is unusual and important, however, is the way in which he introduces the child into this space. For Proust, the garden is also the meeting place of two myths, the myth of the child-artist and the myth of the

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[79] Loti, p.93 and Valery Larbaud, 'La Grande Époque', in *Enfantines*, in *Œuvres* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), pp.395-535 (pp.409-430).

[80] Francine Dugast, *L'Image de l'enfance dans la prose littéraire de 1918 à 1930*, 2 vols (Lille: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1981), I, 179.

pastoral childhood. Certainly, in this guise it is a space of confrontation, but is it a place of conflict?

Yes, according the the 'vert paradis' critics and the 'art reigns supreme' critics, even if this is as far as their agreement goes. But the very coexistence of such opposing camps suggests that the answer cannot be quite so simple. Sometimes apparently contradictory statements appear disconcertingly side by side in *Combray*. The church, for example, another privileged piece of *Combray*, plays a similar - if more condensed - role to the garden in the nature versus art debate:

> Il y avait un endroit où la route resserrée débouchait tout à coup sur un immense plateau ferme à l'horizon par des forêts déchiquetées que dépassait seule la fine pointe du clocher de Saint-Hilaire, mais si mince, si rose, qu'elle semblait seulement rayée sur le ciel par un ongle qui aurait voulu donner à ce paysage, à ce tableau rien que de nature, cette petite marque d'art, cette unique indication humaine. (I,62)

Yet if we were to conclude here that nature is enhanced by the presence of art, the grand-mother's opinion of Saint-Hilaire throws all this into doubt. What is most valued in the church is its very resemblance to nature, its 'air naturel' (I,63). This may of course simply be the grand-mother's belief and not that of the narrator, but the point is that the apparent conflict extends to even the grand-mother's opinion, for tacked on to the list of qualities that the tower shares with nature, we find the words 'et les œuvres de génie' (I,63). Thus, the great Proustian goddess of nature herself seems to put art, or at least great art, on an equal footing with nature.[81] Elsewhere, it is from a child's eye view that the superiority of nature over art seems to be asserted - only to be swiftly withdrawn. The 'musique de chambre' of the flies, for example, is seen as superior to music of human creation (I,82), only a few pages before the Nature of Marcel's book is perceived as more real than the nature of Combray (I,85-86).

We can accept all this as a contradiction, or at least an oscillation, inherent in Proust's writing and his characters' viewpoints. Such an oscillation could be seen as the modern version of the tension which is often considered essential to the pastoral form. As we have

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[81] We have already seen this in her attitude to the influence of literature on children: 'si elle jugeait les lectures futiles aussi malsaines que les bonbons et les pâtisseries, elle ne pensait pas que les grands souffles du génie eussent sur l'esprit même d'un enfant une influence plus dangereuse et moins vivifiante que sur son corps le grand air et le vent du large' (I,39).

seen, a similar conflict characterises the thinking of George Sand and was probably of direct influence on Proust. This model of tension and contradiction is proposed by Michael Finn:

> Even though the Narrator is almost painfully aware of having an artistic and intellectual mission in life, he is still subject [...] to a strong instinctive attachment to Nature [...]. This special place accorded to nature [...] is a real Achilles heel for an artist in search of a general theory that will link up and somehow justify all parts of his life.[82]

But this is not the only possible interpretation. We can also see Proust as expressing a relationship of *interdependence* between art and nature - and thus between the two myths in question: the child-artist and the pastoral child. What both Marcel and his grand-mother seek (and what the gardener at Combray denies) is some kind of *interactive harmony* between the natural world and artistic creation. This may not always be clear, by the very nature of the attempt to communicate it. Having separated the layers of the reading child's consciousness, and thus having given apparent priority to nature over art, the narrator then goes on to explain that at the time they were inseparable - the two experiences were in fact one: 'états simultanément juxtaposés dans ma conscience', 'que je sépare artificiellement aujourd'hui comme si je pratiquais des sections à des hauteurs différentes d'un jet d'eau irisé et en apparence immobile' (I,86). There is always some kind of interdependence lurking beneath the surface. If the 'musique de chambre de l'été' of the flies is superior to human music, then, as Sand found in the preface to *François le Champi*, the expression of that superiority still depends on using art as a metaphor. If the grand-mother recognises that great art works on the soul in the same way as natural beauty, then the grand-son goes further and shows that the appreciation of the one enhances the appreciation of the other: 'Mes promenades de cet automne-là furent d'autant plus agréables que je les faisais après de longues heures passées sur un livre' (I,152). Conversely, there is the 'fille des champs' in the church porch, who seems 'destinée à permettre, par une confrontation avec la nature, de juger de la vérité de l'œuvre' (I,150). Similarly, if the resemblance between another part of this carving and Théodore gives the work of art an unexpected 'douceur' (I,150), then 'ce garçon qui passait et avec raison pour si mauvais sujet' (I,149) also receives from the statue a certain nobility and historical significance that he would otherwise lack.

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[82] Michael R. Finn, '*Jean Santeuil* and *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*: Instinct and Intellect', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 11 (1975), 122-132 (p.128).

Perhaps this is only to be expected. All resemblances work in two directions. To talk of art metaphors expressing the superiority of art over nature, as does Hindus, is to misunderstand the way in which metaphor functions. Although any metaphorical relationship is to some extent *asymmetrical*, this does not mean it is *non-reciprocal*. For if nature is like art in some sense, then art is also like nature, if only in that particular sense. Graham's talk of 'reciprocal imagery' only underlines this fact. The vision of Proust's child and his grandmother, as seen above, also highlights the reciprocity of the art-nature/ nature-art metaphor. Certainly they both see that there is a bad kind of art that interferes with and works against nature, thus diminishing it to 'la nature [...] rapetissée' (I,63) of the gardener, but they recognise that great art works *with* nature, magnifying its beauty and transforming it, capitalizing it even, into the 'Nature' of the book the child reads in the garden (I,85).

The interdependence of art and nature can be seen on another level too. The child's and the adolescent's experience of nature is also important as an apprenticeship for the adult's art. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the hero, who will soon become the narrator, asks himself:

> La nature ne m'avait-elle pas mis elle-même, à ce point de vue, sur la voie de l'art, n'était-elle pas commencement d'art elle-même, elle qui ne m'avait permis de connaître, souvent longtemps après, la beauté d'une chose que dans une autre, midi à Combray que dans le bruit de ses cloches, les matinées de Doncières que dans les hoquets de notre calorifère à eau? (IV,468)

But if this extract from the final volume (which for the most part discovers the superiority of art over just about everything) suggests the dependence of the adult's art on the child's experience of nature, there is a parallel and opposing remark at the other end of the novel, in the closing pages of *Combray*:

> Certes, quand ils étaient longuement contemplés par cet humble passant, par cet enfant qui rêvait - comme l'est un roi par un mémorialiste perdu dans la foule -, ce coin de nature, ce bout de jardin n'eussent pu penser que ce serait grâce à lui qu'ils seraient appelés à survivre en leurs particularités les plus éphémères. (I,181)

Nature, then, is almost entirely dependent on art for its survival. As Barnes points out, it is no accident that the 'raidillon' is destroyed, hawthorns and all. 'Ce qui ressort [...] de cette destruction,' she writes, 'c'est ce qui peut résumer toute l'œuvre de Proust: *Vita brevis, ars longa.*'[83] And so the scope widens yet further: from nature, so to other elements of life. This is a transition at which the narrator himself hints in *Le Temps retrouvé*, when he talks about

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[83] Barnes, p.553.

involuntary memory: 'il n'y avait pas de raison pour que je ne reçusse des sensations de ce genre dans le monde aussi bien que dans la nature' (IV,497). And of course, the ultimate relationship of interdependence is between the narrator's life and his art: without his life the artist has no apprenticeship and his art has no subject matter; without his art his life has no meaning and dies with him. If the latter side of the equation is over-emphasized in *Le Temps retrouvé*, it is because the former has been over-emphasized up to this point. Yet, curiously enough, the narrator with the over-enthusiasm for art is implicit as early as *Combray*, in the doubly central reading scene and the by now familiar figure of the gardener. The following dialogue between him and Françoise is surely no accident:

> «C'est beau n'est-ce pas, madame Françoise, de voir des jeunes gens qui ne tiennent pas à la vie?» disait le jardinier pour la faire «monter».
>
> Il n'avait parlé en vain:
>
> «De ne pas tenir à la vie? Mais à quoi donc qu'il faut tenir, si ce n'est pas à la vie, le seul cadeau que le Bon Dieu ne fasse jamais deux fois [...].» (I,87-88)

The answer is obviously 'art'. There is something almost biblical about this gardener for the *re*-reader, to whom he begins to appear as the over-aesthetic narrator of *Le Temps retrouvé* resurrected.[84]

The important point to emerge here is that, via the theme of nature, the figure of the child and the traditional link between them, Proust in *Combray* works his way through a problem that is to have a major role throughout the rest of his work. In so doing, he not only breathes new life into an old story, but also sketches out a solution to the nature-art conflict that has a certain degree of philosophical respectability. Plato believed that art was but a shallow imitation of nature. Hegel claimed the opposite: 'We may, however, begin at once by asserting that artistic beauty stands *higher* than nature'.[85] But the modern philosopher, Mary Mothersill, finds a compromise position that is strangely Proustian:

> There is an affinity between natural and artistic beauty, as appears in the fact that when trying to explain, that is, to justify, our feelings about one of them, we are drawn to analogies with the other. A work of art can seem - not a *copy* of nature - but rather an interesting enlargement of nature. To discover Dickens or Haydn is to discover a new land.[86]

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[84] 'Thinking he was the gardener, she said...' (John 20.15) (New International Version).

[85] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art* (quoted in Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.384).

[86] Mothersill, pp.397-98.

This not only reminds us of the narrator's later references to the private 'patrie' of the artist, but also recalls the child's early and instinctive grasp of the inevitability of comparing nature with art:

> Et certes, je l'avais tout de suite senti, comme devant les épines blanches mais avec plus d'émerveillement, que ce n'était plus facticement, par un artifice de fabrication humaine, qu'était traduite l'intention de festivité dans les fleurs, mais que c'était la nature, qui spontanément, l'avait exprimée avec la naïveté d'une commerçante de village travaillant pour un reposoir surchargeant l'arbuste de ces rosettes d'un ton trop tendre et d'un pompadour provincial. (I,138)

At first, art is elevated by *contrast* with human craft, only to be finally validated by *comparison* with it.

Jean Santeuil: a more unambiguous 'enfance pastorale'?

Was such a balance between art and nature already present in Proust's earlier writings on childhood? It is certainly hard to find a unified front on *any* issue in the fragmented text of *Jean Santeuil*, but in many respects, the unfinished novel conforms more to the pastoral model than its successor. Jean is a child who appears to be at least as at one with nature as Marcel. Just as the latter was consoled by the sympathetic presence of nature in his mother's absence, so Jean's sadness about Marie Kossichef is echoed by his surroundings: 'Et alors il s'étonnait qu'une tristesse en lui vint s'unir au chagrin du ciel, comme petit enfant il s'était étonné que le ciel parût soucieux, puis désolé comme lui' (JS,217). Like Marcel too he bids a tearful farewell to the hawthorns (JS,326) and, just as his successor treats the wind and river of Combray like old friends, so the sun and the breeze that momentarily distract Jean from his homework are described as 'amis délicieux' (JS,234). The difference is, however, that our attention is more often *explicitly* drawn to this tendency in the case of Jean, for whom 'son irrévocable enfance' is equated to 'sa vie au grand air', without doubt or qualification (JS,248):

> Jean était en joyeuse communication avec le soleil et le vent imprégné de l'odeur du bois, car tous deux allaient déposer lentement en sang riche, au creux de ses joues, quelques parcelles de leur éternelle vie et santé, et au fond de son cœur une gaieté qui, au plus charmant des beaux jours lui faisait oublier sa tristesse. (JS,247)

Sometimes, he appears so close to nature that the relationship is not even mediated by his senses or his consciousness:

> Les premières années de vacances à Sargeau [...] de ses yeux pas observateurs, de son esprit paresseux, il ne distinguait rien dans la nature au printemps et ne ressentait

> qu'une sensation confuse qui lui faisait ôter son paletot, désirer se promener, boire de la crème dans les fermes, s'asseoir à l'ombre, tremper ses mains dans l'eau du canal. (JS,331)

This is a long way from the child Marcel of whom it is said, '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' (I,83). Moreover, Jean's affinity with nature is clearly meant to place a barrier between him and certain *adults* around him, particularly his own father, to whom 'la mer sans bateau [...] parut morne' (JS,213).[87]

More importantly, it is stressed that Jean's instinctive closeness to nature prevents him from appreciating even the art that celebrates its beauty. In fact, his mother fails to get him to enjoy any great literature:

> Pourtant, elle avait fait lire à Jean les vers qui disent les choses les plus grandes et les plus simples, l'été, le vent, le coucher du soleil, le son des cloches, la mer. Mais parlant de ces choses, ces vers ne s'adressaient pas à Jean parce que [s']il en avait déjà obscurément joui ou souffert, il n'avait jamais pris conscience de leur beauté heureuse ou triste. (JS,247)

The impossibility of trying to derive a coherent message from *Jean Santeuil* is illustrated, however, by a diametrically opposed statement during the school chapters, where M. Beulier criticises the clichéd descriptions of nature in the child's essays. Now, it seems, Jean is a completely reformed character, who 'ne s'était jamais promené dans les jardins qu'en lisant des vers, sans regarder, sans respirer les fleurs' (JS,263). Yet, there is a hint of agreement even in this blatant contradiction. In both instances, it seems to be suggested that art - the greatest poetry as well as Jean's copied clichés - is a poor substitute for nature.

The Illiers/Éteuilles fragments are less inclined to such value judgements. If they are more typical of the genre of the pastoral childhood, with their long walks and multiple gardens, they are also much closer to the *Combray* we know so well. Many of the passages from *Combray* quoted above appear here in embryonic form - the flies and their 'musique de chambre' (JS,293) and a garden where art and nature meet:

> Ce jardin vide d'habitants et où pourtant les fleurs massées avec une abondance et une variété symétriques, les arbustes disposés selon un dessin limité et saisissable, tout semble avoir été préparé par des hommes. Les allées où aucune herbe ne pousse et où

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[87] Jean himself seems to retain his oneness with nature long into adulthood. See especially JS,492-93. On the other hand, there is often a degree of temporal ambiguity. Jean's pleasure in this example is set in the context of an experience which 'faisait penser à la jeunesse'.

> tous les cailloux sont pareils, semblent avoir été préparées par des hommes, par des hommes ingénieux et moins simples que la nature. (JS,323-24)[88]

The germ of the *Combray* reading scene is also present, with *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Here too we find the same kind of harmony between art and nature as in *A la recherche*. On one page reading is chosen before a country walk, but later provokes 'l'envie d'aller au parc' (JS,284); on another, tiredness after a long walk leads to the intense mental activity of reading (JS,309). Perhaps, however, the reading that is described at this point in Proust's development fits a model of *oscillation* rather than the one of fusion and interdependence that we see in *Combray*. The child not only lets his mind wander from book to chestnut tree and back again, but actually gets up and walks from one to the other (JS,309). Indeed, Michael Finn hints that the gap between this passage and the *Combray* equivalent is even greater, claiming that the tree and other external sensations actually take *priority* in *Jean Santeuil*. Here, he writes, 'the body's contact with external sensations, even during reading is the primary awareness'.[89]

Perhaps this is overstating the case slightly. In the Illiers/Éteuilles sections of the unfinished novel, in this and many other respects, we really can trace the outlines of *Combray*. Yet Finn goes on to make the following valid and vital point: 'If we look carefully, we see that for Jean the involuntary memory is a circumscribed experience, the explanation of it an 'earthy' one. Nature and natural settings are both the trigger and *locus* of these inspired moments.'[90] We see this confirmed throughout the novel. The flies of Paris remind the aging Jean of the flies of Éteuilles, to the point that he is 'ni en dehors de la nature ni en dehors de l'été', despite the city and despite his age (JS,293-94). Later the variety of flowers 'que notre enfance était habituée à voir pulluler dans les jardins' make it 'comme si les années passées vivaient encore et les plates-bandes d'autrefois persistaient' (JS,473), especially in the case of lilacs, which 's'étaient penchées dès son enfance sur Jean' (JS,476). The mechanism of involuntary memory according to *Jean Santeuil* is summed up as follows:

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[88] Elsewhere, there is more of a value judgement, when the narrator refers to 'ce sentiment mystérieux que leur plantation dans un jardin, leur disposition dans un bouquet ôte aux fleurs' (JS,301). On the other hand, there are points where garden flowers are described in an unequivocally positive light, 'donnant à qui les regarde un bonheur inouï, l'idée que le jardinier est un bienheureux, que ce jardin est un paradis' (JS,298). Nothing could be further from the gardener of *Combray*.

[89] Finn, pp.124-25.

[90] Finn, p.125.

> De ces choses qui nous charmèrent autrefois et qu'il nous est donné de revoir, est-il bien vrai qu'il n'y en ait pas certaines dont la présence nous rende avec une volupté pareille et peut-être plus rêveuse encore le charme mystérieux d'autrefois [...] qu'est-ce donc que tout cela sinon des témoins de nos premiers printemps, des reliques des souvenirs de nos premières émotions en face de la nature, mais qui n'ont rien perdu de leur pouvoir sur nous [...], qui nous font échapper aux années pour nous rendre à la nature. (JS,772-73)

Nor is it simply that most of the examples of involuntary memory in the earlier novel just happen to be connected with experiences of nature. At one point, the narrator explicitly and emphatically claims that nature is the *only* source of such memories:

> La nature sait où en sont ces vérités. Et elle le sait seule. Seule, en nous faisant sentir ce que nous avons senti une fois, elle nous mène droit à quelque point de ce monde fabuleux de nos souvenirs qui est devenu le monde de la vérité. (JS,397)

Nothing could be further from *Le Temps retrouvé* where none of the involuntary memory experiences which finally provoke the writing of the novel are 'natural' ones. Furthermore, only one of these, the *François le Champi* incident, takes Marcel back to his childhood, whereas in the earlier work, it seems to go without saying that the only memories worth having are those which resurrect childhood. All this suggests that not only does nature play a more important role altogether in *Jean Santeuil* than in *A la recherche*, but that the links between childhood and nature in the former are also much stronger.

Indeed, after the comparative harmony of the Illiers sections, value judgements that set nature above art become more frequent. In the Beg-Meil passages, the same kind of harmony and interdependence as in *Combray* may initially be suggested:

> Car les œuvres humaines à force d'être fixées dans un endroit de la nature finissent par en faire partie, de sorte qu'il nous attire par une sorte de personnalité à demi humaine et elles par une sorte de charme local. (JS,366)

But the final word is given in favour of nature, which takes the art out of art, as it were: 'Il semble que la beauté d'art se soit enracinée et soit peu à peu devenue, comme le lieu où elle adhère, quelque chose d'unique et qui ne dépend pas de l'homme' (JS,366). Later, the narrator becomes even more categorical:

> Car une belle église ne témoigne que de la beauté de l'imagination d'un architecte, tandis qu'une vieille église abandonnée [témoigne] des lois suivant lesquelles la pluie et le soleil jaunissent la pierre, le vent y sème des poussières, suivant lesquelles la pierre se fend, lois qui sont plus belles que les plus belles choses du monde. (JS,514)[91]

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[91] Similarly, when Jean is at Réveillon, the narrator comments that 'la nature serait une pauvre chose, si elle n'était qu'une suite de tableaux qu'on ferait preuve de goût en allant admirer' (JS,497). Or when the princesse

Thus nature has the edge over art in *Jean Santeuil* and an importance that it is to lose in the mature novel. As one critic points out, nature is one of the 'thèmes traités de façon plus optimiste dans *Jean Santeuil*'.[92] The balance of *Combray* is not yet achieved and art has a greater dependence on nature than nature on art. There are moments when this dependence becomes almost fetishist: 'Et ce n'est guère que la nature qui nous dicte par moments des révélations dont nous sentons qu'il est essentiel de les écrire' (JS,447). Or:

> Tant la nature sait où est ce que nous avons à exprimer et nous y conduit à coup sûr, vérité exprimée en disant que le poète travaille mieux à la campagne qu'à la ville ou qu'il est plus inspiré dans la solitude que dans la société. (JS,396)

In fact, artistic vocation is almost always associated with experiences of nature, whether in the case of the narrator (the Belgian beach (JS,397), for example) or more rarely in Jean himself: 'La poésie, l'inspiration, ce vent semblait la réveiller en Jean' (JS,535). Perhaps, it is hardly surprising that Jean feels this way, since his mother seems to have brought him up in the belief that artistic appreciation depends on appreciation of nature: '«Tu aimes aussi beaucoup la nature! dit Mme Santeuil [...] Je crois par là que Jean tiendra beaucoup de toi s'il aime les vers' (JS,213).

So does all this represent *too much* faith in the powers of nature? After all, Jean himself never metamorphoses into a writer and appears to remain a rather bored civil servant, despite the few bursts of inspiration noted above. The point is that a handful of such privileged moments is not enough to produce a great writer. And the ability to appreciate the beauties of nature is no guarantee of the ability to produce great art - indeed, it could be argued that art which aims only at reproducing the sensations or emotions associated with nature can never be great. What is really interesting here is that, if the central character of the novel does not attain the status of writer, then neither, strictly speaking, does its author, who eventually abandoned his manuscript. Clearly, *Jean Santeuil* does attempt to do more than reproduce a few privileged moments, but its fragmentary form, its lack of an ending or structure and its failure (or refusal) to achieve thematic unity all suggest that certain of Jean's limitations are equally applicable to the Proust of *Jean Santeuil*, if to a lesser degree. Marc-

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de Durheim sees a Monet in the sunset, it becomes 'quelque chose de froid, de brillant, d'ennuyeux comme une robe, n'ayant pas plus de profondeur qu'une robe' (JS,496).

92 Mireille Marc-Lipiansky, *La Naissance du Monde proustien dans «Jean Santeuil»* (Paris: Nizet, 1974), p.153.

Lipiansky implies that Jean's excessive worship of nature is precisely what prevents his author from finding the voice or form of his future novel: 'Il aime trop la nature pour pouvoir se pencher sur les profondeurs du cœur humain.'[93]

If this is so, then the corollary is that both Jean and his creator are also both too attached to childhood. For as we have seen, childhood in *Jean Santeuil* is the time of maximum identification with nature. Even when nature and writing are mediated by involuntary memory, in the early novel involuntary memory is itself almost always associated with childhood. Nature, childhood and involuntary memory are thus inextricably linked in a formula on which writing in *Jean Santeuil* comes to depend. Again, Marc-Lipiansky offers this *excessive* attachment to childhood as a cause of the simultaneous failure of Proust himself:

> Tant qu'il s'agissait de ses souvenirs d'enfance, son inspiration était assez riche pour compenser le manque de forme. [...] Il s'y attarde le plus longtemps possible. Il multiplie les évocations de la nature, les détails sur la vie quotidienne à Illiers. Mais il faut bien qu'il en sorte et c'est alors que son indécision se fait jouer, que son récit se perd peu à peu en une poussière de chapitres isolés.[94]

Conclusion

It is only in *A la recherche* that Proust, his narrator and his hero manage to get beyond this fetishism to the secret of their writing. In some ways, Proust's novels thus mirror the march of literary history: from the pastoral to the pastoral childhood to a *récit d'enfance* which both includes and questions the pastoral form - indeed, to a *récit d'enfance* which perhaps questions the value of childhood itself. For in *Combray* Proust recognises that just as art cannot be nature, so the child cannot truly be an artist, or at least, that his art cannot be subordinate to either the figure of the child or the beauties of nature. Nowhere is this realisation more apparent than the page where the young Marcel discovers 'ce désaccord entre nos impressions et leur expression habituelle' (I,153) and can only exclaim multiple 'zut's' in his frustration. And yet, this discovery is to some extent invalidated at the same time as it is presented to the reader. The adult narrator, at least, is able to articulate the very feelings the child finds so inexpressible, translating and integrating the helpless 'zuts' into his complex

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[93] Marc-Lipiansky, p.216.

[94] Marc-Lipiansky, pp.215-16.

narrative. Thus, it is as if there are two writers in *Combray* - one that is adult and literary, another that is a child of sensations or exclamations - and that their narratives are overlaid or intermingled.

Of course, at every point in Proust's novel there is, to some extent, what Rogers calls 'double vision', resulting from the dual perspectives of hero and narrator, past and present.[95] Muller even goes so far as to claim that at any given point in the novel there are seven narrative voices at work in varying proportions - hero, narrator and five others.[96] In *Combray*, such an effect is bound to be at its most striking, since the chronological gap between hero and narrator is at its greatest. But as we have seen, the child is more than just another viewpoint. Like *François le Champi*, he not only stands at the origins of Proust's narrative, but is also an *image* of the artist himself, the figure through whom the writer works out his own problems. To borrow Marantz's description of Sand's novel, the child is 'à la fois catalysateur et mise-en-abyme' of the adult narrator.[97] His role in *Combray* is maybe less a narrative 'viewpoint' or 'voice', than something much harder to identify or isolate - a presence or a guiding hand. This is best summed up by the narrator himself, when he writes of the 'drame du coucher':

> Mais depuis peu de temps, je recommence à très bien percevoir si je prête l'oreille, les sanglots que j'eus la force de contenir devant mon père et qui n'éclatèrent que quand je me retrouvai seul avec maman. En réalité ils n'ont jamais cessé; et c'est seulement parce que la vie se tait maintenant davantage autour de moi que je les entends de nouveau, comme ces cloches de couvents que couvrent si bien les bruits de la ville pendant le jour qu'on les croirait arrêtées mais qui se remettent à sonner dans le silence du soir. (I,36-37)

'On dit qu'en vieillissant nos sensations affaiblissent' (JS,476), we read in *Jean Santeuil*, but it is only with age that the ability to give voice to our sensations develops. Furthermore, as the above extract from *Combray* suggests, it is only with age that we actually begin to remember these sensations with any accuracy. This is not to say that the adult narrator of *Combray* is simply the humble transcriber of the child's heightened awareness, passively taking down the dictation of a child narrator whose experience orders

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[95] B.G. Rogers, *Proust's Narrative Techniques* (Geneva: Droz, 1965), p.103.

[96] Marcel Muller, *Les Voix narratives dans «la Recherche du Temps perdu»* (Geneva: Droz, 1965), p.9 and following pages.

[97] See note 6 above.

the text. Nor, conversely, is the adult writer a superior intelligence, who is simply making use of a primitive being in order to display his own literary talent in its full glory. Muller may claim that 'ces souvenirs deviennent l'objet d'un travail de l'Écrivain qui a lu les symbolistes et qui excelle à exploiter littérairement ces impressions en prêtant au Héros une sensibilité qui surenchérit sur la réceptivité naturelle de l'enfant'.[98] But this, though it gets close to the truth, is not strictly accurate, suggesting, as it does, some kind of value judgement. It is precisely because of the adult's poetic virtuosity that he is able to do justice to the intensity of the child's experience. And it is only because of the intensity of the child's experience that the adult writer has a story to tell and the poetic virtuosity with which to tell it. The anguished 'zuts' may be a failed narrative in some sense, but the series of impressions they fail to express, along with the many that the child does not even attempt to verbalise or even understand, form the basis for the adult's narrative. Thus, as with art and nature, the model is one of interdependence and even fusion. The adult penetrates, verbalises and and re-orders the child's sensations or privileged literary moments, in the same way that Proust finally recognises that artistic beauty must go beyond natural beauty, despite their intimate connection. This much is glimpsed in *Jean Santeuil* again, curiously, through the figure of the child. Jean's rare moments of poetic inspiration, we read, do not consist of 'ces folles idées [...] que les enfants d'imagination [...] ont indéfiniment [...], idées creuses, qui [...] imitent la réalité en s'y substituant, mais sans la dépasser'. Instead, they involve the creation of a reality 'que nous répandons tandis que nous écrivons des pages qui sont la synthèse des divers moments de la vie' (JS, 535-36).

There will be cause to return, in later chapters, to more specific ways in which the child of *Combray* can be considered as joint creator - or even partial narrator - of the text. For the moment, however, it is worth asking why exactly these rare glimpses in *Jean Santeuil* become sustained insight in *Combray*? One possible and tempting explanation is the appearance of *François le Champi* in Proust's work. For was not the technique of the compromise narrative, combining the simple and the primitive with the sophisticated and the literary, developed in Sand's novel and set out in its preface? In many ways, Proust is merely confirming the results of Sand's experiment, which 'cherche par quel rapport l'art, sans

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[98] Muller, p.61.

cesser d'être l'art pour tous, peut entrer dans le mystère de la simplicité primitive, et communiquer à l'esprit le charme répandu dans la nature'.[99] Thus, the preface to *François le Champi* sets down not simply a possible thematic reading of *Combray* but also, in the end, a technical one - just as it does for its own novel. This is a much neglected aspect of the importance of George Sand for understanding Proust, although, in a way, it serves to reaffirm the findings of those who have previously insisted on other aspects of that importance. Perhaps, then, for all our excursions into literary history, the origins of child psychology, influences on Proust by his contemporaries, we have only succeeded in presenting a new proof of an old point, if a vital one. This is the Proustian law of gravity, which is also the story of *A la recherche du temps perdu*: what starts with *François le Champi* must end with *François le Champi*.

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[99] *François le Champi*, p.53.

CHAPTER 3: PLAY AND FOREPLAY, READING AND WRITING

'No toys of any kind were at first allowed'
(Ruskin) [1]

Play as art and art as play?

This chapter will examine the mythology surrounding play and reading in the *récit d'enfance*, and their connections with the child-artist myth. The first half of the chapter will contrast the omni-presence of play in the work of Proust's contemporaries with its marked absence from *Combray*. Again, this lack of conformity to the norms of the contemporary genre will be seen as one of the major differences between the portrayal of childhood in *Jean Santeuil* and that in the finished novel. Even the games in the Champs-Elysées of *Noms de pays: le nom*, it will be argued, are less examples of play than attempts at sexual gratification. The second half of the chapter will be concerned with a more positive side of this story, and will demonstrate how the usual functions of play are taken over in *Combray* by reading. Reading, it will be maintained, is a closer analogy to writing in the Proustian scheme than is play. Thus, by substituting books for games, the presence of the myth of the child-artist in *Combray* is reinforced.

If this profile of Proust's opinion is correct, then few would agree with him. Indeed, so great is our belief in play as the fundamental activity of childhood that the use of the term 'myth' sounds quite inappropriate. Moreover, unlike nature and art, the myths of play and art are traditionally in harmony. Richard Coe even goes so far as to see in the concept of play the key to all autobiographical and perhaps all literary interest in childhood. Following the theories of Huizinga and Caillois, he asserts that childhood is a world characterised by its otherness, a 'play dimension', 'where acts are wholly gratuitous, and generate no direct consequences which affect in any way the well-being of the performer in the "real world", but which are nevertheless felt to be at least as valuable and in every sense as serious as their counterparts in the dimension of reality'.[2] What is more, 'the standard by which it is evaluated is, in a very broad sense, the *aesthetic*', so that play creates 'a second poetic world

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[1] Ruskin, *Praeterita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.11.

[2] Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass was Taller. Autobiography and the experience of childhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.241. See also Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens. A study of the play element in culture* (London: Paladin, 1970) and Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et les Hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958).

alongside the world of nature'.[3] This, he goes on to claim, is what all the autobiographers in his sample believed, either consciously or unconsciously, and their aim is to recreate this play domain, principally by means of poetic language.

Thus, a fundamental link is made between childhood and poetry, or more generally between child and artist, but with play as the vital intermediate concept. Coe is, to some extent, simply reiterating a comparison that had already become a cliché by Proust's time, albeit adding greater refinement, subtlety and late-twentieth-century theoretical respectability. The most famous exposition of the connection between children's play and adult artistic creation is probably that of Freud in the paper *Creative Writing and Daydreaming* of 1907 ('the creative writer does the same as the child at play'), but as early as 1895, the English child psychologist Sully comments, 'To say that play is art-like has almost become a commonplace.'[4] Of course, he admits, a child gifted in play does not necessarily become a great artist, but 'it may, however, be thrown out as a suggestion to the investigator of the first manifestations of artistic genius that he might do well to cast his eye on the field of imaginative play'.[5]

Some examples from Proust's contemporaries

Sully's advice certainly seems to have been taken up by writers of Proust's time. As Chombart de Lauwe notes, play not only has a major role in their work, but also tends to be of a certain type: 'En majorité, les auteurs ont préféré décrire les jeux d'imagination.'[6] Significantly, most of the examples are taken from Proust's contemporaries: Anatole France, Valery Larbaud, Gide or Romain Rolland.[7] Anatole France seems particularly absorbed in

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[3] Coe, p.241-42, and, quoting Huizinga, p.244.

[4] Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming', in *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and other works*, ed. by Albert Dickson, The Pelican Freud Library: 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp.129-141 (p.132) and Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1895), p.321.

[5] Sully, p.328.

[6] Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Un Monde autre: l'enfance. De ses représentations à son mythe* (Paris: Payot, 1971), p.127.

[7] As seen in Chapter 1, Proust would have been familiar with the work of all of these. Gide's *récit d'enfance*, *Si le grain ne meurt*, was not published until after Proust's death, however.

Sully's quest to trace the origins of art back to play. When Pierre Nozière receives a toy drum, for example, he imagines himself in the midst of military splendours, prompting the adult narrator to comment, 'Je voyais, je *créais* tout cela. Et présent dans mon *œuvre*, j'étais moi-même tout cela, les hommes, les chevaux, les canons, les poudrières et le ciel embrasé et la terre ensanglantée' (my italics).[8] France's constant attempts to derive art from play sometimes mean that he encounters a problem highlighted by Coe, that is, the difficulties inherent in describing the 'child's little world' in a way that is entertaining for adults.[9] After entering into endless details of Pierre Nozière's games, he apologises: 'Excusez mes lenteurs: c'est tout un art que j'expose.'[10] A less protracted evocation of the kind of creative, imaginative play described as 'art' by France is to be found in Larbaud's *Enfantines*. In the short story, 'La Grande Époque', about idyllic summer holidays, art is not explicitly traced back to play, but the metaphoric and literary potential of the children's ludic transformations is clear: 'Le bassin était une mer intérieure; la serre, avec ses plantes grasses et sa chaleur humide était une espèce de Canada et le réservoir était un important bras de mer.'[11]

For both these Proustian contemporaries, then, play seems not only 'la grande affaire de la vie enfantine', as the French child psychologist Compayré puts it, but is also somehow analogous to adult art.[12] And for our purposes, these beliefs, like 'the child of nature', become myths of the *récit d'enfance*, to be perpetuated, dispelled or ignored by Proust. Various similarities and differences between Proust and his contemporaries are immediately evident. Certainly Marcel is, like Pierre Nozière, an 'enfant unique', often 'enfoncé dans le monde des songes'.[13] Certainly *Combray* is, like the garden of 'La Grande Époque', the site of school holidays. But while Pierre assuages his nocturnal distress and loneliness in play, transforming the fingers of his right hand into pantomime characters which distract him from his misery, Marcel's young and equally active imagination exacerbates the solitary despair of

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[8] Anatole France, *Le Petit Pierre* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, [n.d.]), p.63.

[9] Coe, p.211.

[10] France, p.72.

[11] Valéry Larbaud, *Enfantines*, in *Œuvres* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), pp.395-535 (p.444).

[12] Jules Gabriel Compayré, *L'Évolution intellectuelle et morale de l'enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p.278.

[13] France, pp.54-55.

the 'drame du coucher'.[14] Similarly, from the very outset of 'La Grande Époque', Larbaud creates an atmosphere which could not be more different from that of Combray:

> Des grandes vacances qui sont toujours à leur commencement, quand elles paraissent si grandes, si longues et si neuves, qu'on ne sait pas encore ce qu'on en fera; des fontaines où on peut se mouiller sans jamais s'enrhumer, et *des soirs où nulle grande personne ne dit jamais: Il est l'heure d'aller se coucher les enfants.* (my italics)[15]

France and Larbaud, together with Freud and Sully, represent typical attitudes to the importance of play in Proust's lifetime. One other, more ambiguous example, Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*, is also particularly worthy of note. There is perhaps no better case of an alternative dimension, characterised by play and childhood, than that described in this curious mixture of adventure story, fairy tale and *récit d'enfance*. This is a world governed, if temporarily, by children and devoid of the practical concerns of everyday life (although its tragic outcome is a direct consequence of the hero's childish irresponsibility). It is therefore hardly surprising that Marie Maclean chooses to entitle her interpretation of the novel *Le Jeu suprême. Structure et thèmes dans «Le Grand Meaulnes»*. As she shows, it is possible to analyse all aspects of the novel, its themes, techniques and structure, in terms of Caillois' theory of play. For our purposes, the most interesting point is the distribution of the characters according to the concept of play:

> Meaulnes et Frantz ont été «meneurs du jeu», mais François transforme le jeu en art; et en fin de compte il n'y a que l'artiste qui joue «le jeu suprême». C'est François qui fait revivre «l'univers clos» et qui referme le jeu, le souvenir et l'amour chacun dans leur cercle magique.[16]

By contrast, 'Frantz, poète à l'état virtuel [...] est impuissant à changer sa nostalgie de l'enfance en force créatrice.'[17] Such an interpretation seems to suggest that art might be either qualitatively or quantitatively different from play, despite the numerous parallels that have come to be drawn between the two activities. Or perhaps the two processes are actually incompatible precisely because they are so similar. Frantz cannot transform his ludic gifts

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[14] France, p.72.

[15] Larbaud, p.442.

[16] Marie Maclean, *Le Jeu suprême. Structure et thèmes dans «Le Grand Meaulnes»* (Paris: Corti, 1973), p.168.

[17] Maclean, p.164. Compare with remarks about the narrator and writer of *Jean Santeuil* at the end of Chapter 2.

into art as he is too immersed in the game; François cannot fully enter the game with Meaulnes, since he is already destined to write. Read in this way, *Le Grand Meaulnes* can be seen as a long battle between play and art where, for Meaulnes at least, it is the seductive and dangerous power of the former that wins. Thus the myth of play is given a new slant and *Combray* is offered an alternative model.[18]

A diversion via play theory

In order to look at *Combray* in the light of the mythology of play, a theoretical basis may prove useful. After all, though many consider play to be the defining feature of childhood, the concept of play itself is notoriously difficult to define. 'Jeu est un terme fort inexact', as Cocteau put it.[19] Nevertheless, some attempts have been made to characterize it. Sully, for example, maintains that true play is solitary ('Perhaps, indeed, one may say that the play-instinct is most vigorous and dominant when a child is alone, or at least self-absorbed'), whereas Caillois, some sixty years later claims that play tends towards the communal: 'On dirait qu'il manque quelque chose à l'activité du jeu, quand elle est réduite à un simple exercice solitaire [...] les différentes catégories du jeu [...] supposent, non la solitude, mais la compagnie.'[20] France's Pierre Nozière comes down on the side of Sully, proving that, for fictional children at least, play can be a solitary activity. As his narrator remarks, 'Aussi bien, je me passais aisément d'un compagnon de jeux. Sans trouver les heures aussi courtes qu'elles me semblent aujourd'hui, je m'ennuyais rarement, pour la raison que, dès lors, j'avais une vie intérieure très active.'[21]

This remark opens up a further theoretical debate. If we accept that play can be solitary, can it not also be purely interior, nothing more than daydreaming? Answers again vary across the disciplines and the decades. Caillois' insistence on the communal tendencies

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[18] However, as seen in Chapter 1, *Combray* and *Le Grand Meaulnes* were both published in the same year, so it is unlikely that either of them influenced the other.

[19] Jean Cocteau, *Les Enfants terribles* (Paris: Grasset, 1925), p.19. Nevertheless, he does go on to explain how one of his characters defines it: 'mais c'est ainsi que Paul désignait la demi-conscience où les enfants se plongent; il y était passé maître. Il dominait l'espace et le temps; il amorçait des rêves, les combinait avec la réalité, savait vivre entre chien et loup [...].'

[20] Sully, pp.37-38 and Caillois, pp.97-98.

[21] France, p.121.

of play seems to rule out such an equation. And while Huizinga's various definitions of play do not preclude such a possibility, elsewhere he clearly states, 'Where there is no visible action there can be no play.'[22] Chombart de Lauwe agrees, defining 'le jeu' as 'la rêverie en action'.[23] A similar point is made by Sully, for whom play, like art, is essentially *expression* of an inner idea:

> [The] impulse to invent imaginary surroundings, and more especially to create mythical companions, is very common among lonely and imaginative children [...]. But such purely imaginative make-believe, which derives no help from actual things, is perhaps hardly 'play' in the full sense, but rather an active form of day-dreaming or romancing.[24]

To take an example from another *Enfantine*, 'Le Couperet', Milou's imaginary world peopled by invisible friends falls short of this criterion for play. Yet its inhabitants are not entirely without some kind of physical presence:

> Il se recule un peu sur le banc, où il est assis, pour faire place à Dembat et la petite Rose, qui ne sont pas des êtres visibles, mais qui sont bien plus dignes d'intérêt que Devincet et tous les amis de papa.[25]

The physical activity somehow seems to mark the point at which rêverie passes over the border and into the world of play. Milou thereby demonstrates how rêverie can so easily be transformed into play and perhaps that the two activities fulfil similar functions, even if they are not identical. After all, Freud does describe daydreaming as taking over in adulthood where play left off in childhood.

Freud's essay also suggests another criterion for identifying play, that is, a break with reality. He writes, 'The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously - that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion - *while separating it sharply from reality*' (my italics).[26] One of the best possible literary illustrations of these differences - between imagination, play and reality - and the different functions of each of these realms in human life can be found in *Combray* itself.

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[22] Huizinga, p.191.

[23] Chombart de Lauwe, p.92.

[24] Sully, pp.39-40.

[25] Larbaud, p.410.

[26] Freud, p.132.

Curiously however, this has nothing to do with the child Marcel, but instead concerns the old lady Léonie and her famous 'spectacle dans un lit':

> Françoise entendit peut-être parfois dans la chambre voisine de mordants sarcasmes qui s'adressaient à elle et dont l'invention n'eût pas soulagé suffisamment ma tante s'ils étaient restés à l'état purement immatériel, et si en les murmurant à mi-voix elle ne leur eût donné plus de réalité. Quelquefois, ce «spectacle dans un lit» ne suffisait même pas à ma tante, elle voulait faire jouer ses pièces. (I,115-116)

Léonie passes from the plane of an imaginary betrayal, invented as a diversion during her long bed-ridden days, to the playing out of that betrayal, and from there on to the plane of reality (or at least, what appears to be reality for the victim Françoise), as each state becomes successively insufficient for her needs. Had this episode not been conceived before France's *Le Petit Pierre*, it could almost be read as a parody of Pierre Nozière's own 'spectacle dans un lit' (referred to above), where his bed is turned into a pantomime stage. Nevertheless, as we glimpsed in the previous chapter, it is surely no accident that so much of Proust's evocation of childhood centres so perversely on the antics of a tyrannical, bad-tempered, house-bound old woman. In this extract, the fact that she plays while the child stands silently by, watching and listening merely adds to an already established hint of subversion of the genre of the *récit d'enfance* - and perhaps of the myth of play?[27]

Perhaps too Proust is anticipating the interest of later twentieth-century theorists in adults at play. Huizinga's and Caillois' works are, after all, entitled *Homo ludens* and *Les Jeux et les Hommes* respectively. For Huizinga, however, the child remains a paradigm case: 'Child-play possesses the play-form in its veriest essence, most purely.'[28] Most of the remaining details of his theory need not concern us, but broadly speaking, Huizinga like Caillois belongs to a kind of romantic or idealistic school of thought (made up mainly of anthropologists, historians and literary critics), for whom play is essentially fun, art-like and divorced from reality. This contrasts with a more practical, or simply just cynical, school (made up mainly of psychologists and educators), for whom play is a practical, learning experience grounded in the real world. Clearly, this is an oversimplification and the two trends need not necessarily be mutually exclusive, as Freud shows. For him the child indeed perceives a strict demarcation between the imaginary and artistic world of play on the one

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[27] We will return to the regressive tendencies of older Proustian characters, including Léonie, in Chapter 5. (See p. 200).

[28] Huizinga, p.36.

hand and reality on the other, yet in some sense is very much aware of its real life role. He claims that 'a child's play is determined by wishes: in point of fact by a single wish - one that helps in his upbringing - the wish to be big and grown-up'.[29] Thus, the child at play is serving out an apprenticeship for adulthood and the world of work.

Before finally moving on to set *Combray* in this theoretical background, one definition, that of Huizinga, together with its subsequent modifications by Caillois, is worth recording:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play, we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.[30]

Unlike Coe, another disciple of his, Huizinga does not fully or explicitly assert the identity of the aesthetic with the ludic, although he comes close, claiming that, 'to understand poetry we must be capable of donning the child's soul like a magic cloak and of forsaking man's wisdom for the child's'.[31] It is only poetry and elsewhere certain performing arts that he associates with play. Caillois' modification of what has become an almost excessively rose-tinted theory introduces a welcome voice of reason into the debate. He underlines the differences between the categories of play and art, whilst acknowledging their similarities: 'C'est en effet une caractéristique du jeu qu'il ne crée aucune richesse, aucune œuvre. Par là, il se différencie du travail ou de l'art.'[32] (Perhaps this is the lesson learnt by François in *Le Grand Meaulnes*.) On the other hand, Caillois' adaptation of Huizinga's concept of play as necessarily rule-governed introduces the decidedly literary term of fiction:

> Beaucoup de jeux ne comportent pas de règles. Ainsi, il n'en existe pas, du moins de fixes et rigides pour jouer à la poupée, au soldat, aux gendarmes et aux voleurs, au cheval, à la locomotive, à l'avion [these are significantly all children's games], en général aux jeux qui supposent une libre improvisation et dont le principal attrait vient du plaisir de jouer un rôle, de se conduire *comme si* l'on était quelqu'un ou même

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[29] Freud, p.133.

[30] Huizinga, p.32.

[31] Huizinga, p.141.

[32] Caillois, p.35.

> quelque chose d'autre [...]. Malgré le caractère paradoxal de l'affirmation, je dirai qu'ici la fiction, le sentiment du *comme si* remplace la règle et remplit exactement la même fonction.[33]

And from fiction it is but a small linguistic step to falsehood. Eric Berne adds a greater degree of cynicism to Freud's notion that play is a practical part of everyday life. For him, a game is simply one of several categories of series of human transactions, characterised by its lack of spontaneity, its recurrence and particularly by its falsehood, ulterior motives and 'pay-offs' - very real, practical advantages to be gained from playing.[34]

Who is right? Perhaps there is very little real debate anyway. After all, only Huizinga and Caillois are arguing in the same field and on the same terms, and they are, broadly speaking, in agreement. What is really interesting here, is the light that a combination of these theories casts on Proust's literary practice - and ultimately, the light that Proust's version might cast on the various theoretical positions.

Play - or the lack of it - in *Combray*

> C'est un autre genre de vie qu'on mène à Tansonville, chez Madame de Saint-Loup, un autre genre de plaisir que je trouve à ne sortir qu'à la nuit, à suivre au clair de lune ces chemins où je jouais jadis au soleil. (I,7)

These nostalgic words at the outset of *A la recherche du temps perdu* appear to suggest that play was an integral part of the narrator's early life. Yet when we come to search the text for some other evidence of these sun-kissed games, we find, in short, nothing. As is the case for nature, such initial comments so full of promise for the conventions of the *récit d'enfance* only serve to make their subsequent absence all the more noticeable. It may be difficult to find examples of the *absence* of anything in a novel, but certain features of *Combray* provide some degree of verification.

Firstly, there is the fact that, until *Noms de pays: le nom*, Marcel remains for the most part a solitary and sedentary child. As Grandsaigne points out, 'Le héros est enfant unique (ni frères, ni sœurs), et unique enfant (ni cousins, ni cousines, ni camarades). C'est un enfant qui ne joue avec personne, à qui la fréquentation de Gilberte et de Bloch est

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[33] Caillois, p.40.

[34] Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The psychology of human relationships* (London: Deutsch, 1966), p.48. However, the 'romantic' myth of the child-artist lives on to some extent, even in the midst of all this cynicism: 'In the Child reside intuition, creativity and spontaneous drive and enjoyment' (p.27).

interdite.'[35] Thus, on Caillois's communal scheme, play is ruled out altogether. Even when Marcel is still allowed to mix with Bloch, who is several years older, the pretentious teenager can hardly be described as a *play*-mate. There is, however, a hint that their relationship takes place on a level of linguistic play:

> C'est sur un ton sarcastique qu'il m'avait demandé de l'appeler «cher maître» et qu'il m'appelait lui-même ainsi. Mais en réalité nous prenions un certain plaisir à ce jeu, étant encore rapprochés de l'âge où on croit qu'on crée ce qu'on nomme. (I,89)

But even this is double-edged and of a greater complexity than more conventional evocations of childhood play. Although both characters are shown to be enjoying playing at being eminent adults, Bloch at least is also playing at *not* enjoying the game, directing his sarcasm at its very childishness.

Bloch is not the only child with whom Marcel comes into contact in *Combray*. A solitary reference is also made to 'camarades' in Paris. Yet the only pleasure they seem to indulge in together is conversations about the theatre. And unlike *Le Petit Pierre*, rather than love of the stage leading to a ludic re-enactment of theatrical events, for Marcel it encourages the apparently unplayful activity of making lists of actors:

> Et d'après ce que l'on m'avait dit d'eux, je les classais par ordre de talent dans des listes que je me récitais toute la journée, et qui avaient fini par durcir dans mon cerveau et par le gêner de leur inamovibilité. (I,73)

Back in Combray, there is also the striking example of the gardener's daughter. Although her role is small, it turns out to be as important as that of her father (see Chapter 2). There may be a sociological explanation for the fact that Marcel does not play with her, but there is also no doubt that he would simply prefer to sit alone with his book in the little sentry box. Meanwhile, for two brief moments, a more conventional child character invades the text in a whirlwind of activity:

> Quelquefois j'étais tiré de ma lecture, dès le milieu de l'après-midi, par la fille du jardinier, qui courait comme une folle, renversant sur son passage un oranger, se coupant un doigt, se cassant une dent et criant: «Les voilà, les voilà!» (I, 88)

And:

> Alors, tout d'un coup, sa fille s'élançait comme d'une place assiégée, faisait une sortie, atteignant l'angle de la rue, et après avoir bravé cent fois la mort, venait nous rapporter, avec une carafe de coco, la nouvelle qu'ils étaient bien un mille qui venaient sans arrêter, du côté de Thiberzy et de Méséglise. (I,88)

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[35] Jean de Grandsaigne, *L'Espace combraysien. Monde de l'enfance et structure sociale dans l'œuvre de Proust* (Paris: Minard, 1981), p.208.

Thus, she appears as the personification of Caillois's play category, *ilinx* (thrill, danger):

> Chaque enfant connaît aussi bien, en tournant rapidement sur lui-même le moyen d'accéder à un état centrifuge de fuite et d'échappée, où le corps ne retrouve qu'avec peine son assiette et la perception de sa netteté. Il n'y a pas de doute que l'enfant ne le fasse par jeu et qu'il ne s'y complaise. [...] Crier à tue-tête, dévaler une pente, le toboggan, le manège, pourvu qu'il tourne assez vite, la balançoire, si elle s'élève assez haut, procurent des sensations analogues.[36]

If so, then Marcel is an exception. For the exuberant little girl also serves as a flash of illumination about the bookish, sedate little boy in the sentry box, as well as a glimpse of an entirely different *récit d'enfance.*

It could, however, be argued that the fact Marcel does not play with these other children does not preclude play altogether. As seen in the case of Pierre Nozière, solitary play is quite possible - indeed the gardener's daughter plays alone. But her extreme example reveals Marcel's lack of physical action not only in the garden scene, but elsewhere. What he appears to lack is the ability - or the inclination - to transform his frequent rêverie into play by means of the physical activity noted by Huizinga and others. This is no Pierre Nozière who delights in re-enacting his favourite scenes of everyday life: 'Ayant du goût pour les magasins, il était bien naturel, que, rentré à la maison, j'essayasse dans mes jeux l'imitation des scènes que j'avais observées.'[37] Of course, Marcel sometimes appears to indulge in a similar kind of imitation, for example, with the hawthorns: 'En essayant de mimer au fond de moi le geste de leur efflorescence, je l'imaginais comme si ç'avait été le mouvement de tête étourdie et rapide, au regard coquet, aux pupilles diminuées, d'une blanche jeune fille' (I,111). But clearly, something quite different is happening here. Marcel's imitation is not the physical mimicry of play, but takes place 'au fond de moi'. It is the *physical* gesture of the flowers that is being converted into a purely *imaginary* internal gesture, rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, there are moments when Marcel's 'vie intérieure', as France would call it, is given physical expression. The obvious example is the series of exuberant actions which culminate in the famous exclamations of 'Zut! zut! zut! zut!' (I,153). But again, if we look closely, we find that these are concerned less with the possibilities of ludic expression

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[36] Caillois, p.69.

[37] France, pp.54-55.

than the difficulties of *verbal* expression and finally express the child's *frustration* more than the rêverie or contemplation with which the episode began.

Perhaps then, Marcel does not play because he does not need to play, so great are his powers of rêverie. According to Huizinga, the very word 'illusion' is derived from '*in lusio*' or 'in play', and Marcel certainly has illusions in abundance - about the Guermantes, about Balbec and about Parma.[38] But even if rêverie performs the same function as play in general, these particular examples are not simply games without action. They are not *deliberate* illusions and do not entirely conform to Freud's criterion of separation from reality. For Marcel, Balbec really is a world of Gothic churches and tempests, Parma really is filled with violets and 'douceur stendhalienne', and even if he does not seriously believe that the Guermantes glow with the colours of stained glass or tapestry, these rosy hues express his very real belief in their visible superiority - hence so many later disappointments. Maybe then, it is more on the basis of Freud's other criterion - the desire to grow up - that Marcel does not need to play. Certainly, the second section of *Combray* is unusual among *récits d'enfance* in that it paints a picture of a child who is in tune with the adults around him and even quite integrated into their society. Marcel speaks in Léonie's euphemisms, the official language of the household, and dines alone with Legrandin. The real outsiders of Combray are the 'barbares' who do not know that lunch takes place one hour earlier on a Saturday, not the child who remains firmly part of the community of 'nous' that laughs so cruelly at the hapless visitor.[39] And when Marcel does show signs of wanting to grow up a little, it is hardly in the context of activities that can be imitated through play, as when the narrator talks of Bergotte's philosophy: 'Elle me rendait impatient d'arriver à l'âge où j'entrerais au collège, dans la classe appelée Philosophie' (I,96). Playing at soldiers or doctors and nurses may be quite common, but who has ever heard of playing at philosophers?

This cannot, however, be the whole story. *Combray I* shows a child who would like above all to be allowed to participate fully in adult life. Even in *Combray II* such incidents as 'la dame en rose' show that he has a long way to go. And still, Marcel does not play. Such references as there are to other children, toys and games in *Combray* turn out to be

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[38] Huizinga, p.30

[39] See Rosalie Taylor, 'The Adult World and Childhood in *Combray*', *French Studies*, 22 (1968), 26-36, for a more detailed argument to this effect.

insignificant or one step removed from the child at the centre of the novel: Léonie's surmise that there is 'quelque enfant de malade' (I,54) or her mention of having seen 'Madame Goupil avec une fillette que je ne connais point' (I,55). The only toys that we see are those of Gilberte (I,135 or I,139) and it is Mlle Vinteuil who is invited to play at Tansonville, not Marcel (I,147). Marcel may wish to visit Roussainville to join in with the other children's 'games', but he does not. And while 'les enfants de l'école des frères' play on the banks of the Vivonne, the hero's fun is only second hand: '*Je m'amusais à regarder* les carafes que les gamins mettaient dans la Vivonne pour prendre les petits poissons' (I,166) (my italics). Other more substantial references occur in the imagery rather than in the 'plot'. For example, the great-aunt's behaviour towards Swann has 'pour manier cet être ailleurs si recherché, la naïve brusquerie d'un enfant qui joue avec un bibelot de collection, sans plus de précautions qu'avec un objet bon marché' (I,18). Or there is the famous comparison of the emergence of Combray from the tea-cup with Japanese water flowers (I,47). Similarly, the cheeks of Giotto's envy are likened to those of a child blowing up a balloon (I,80) and the peas in the kitchen are 'alignés et nombrés comme des billes vertes dans un jeu' (I,119) The buttercups beside the river 'étaient fort nombreux à cet endroit qu'ils avaient choisi pour leurs jeux sur l'herbe' (I,165) and Madame de Guermantes in the church is 'assise comme une mère qui semble ne pas voir les audaces espiègles et les entreprises indiscrètes de ses enfants qui jouent et interpellent des personnes qu'elle ne connaît pas' (I,174). Thus, references to play are retained in the metaphorical text of *Combray*, while they are, for the most part, banished from the literal. Marcel himself does not play, but such images, like the gardener's daughter, serve to introduce visions and fragments of a conventional *récit d'enfance*, filled with fun and games, into a text that to some extent defies the genre. At the very least, they acknowledge an abstract idea of childhood where play is indeed the principal activity.[40]

Play in *Jean Santeuil*

Again we find that *Jean Santeuil* conforms more to these conventions than the later novel. Compared with *Combray*, the Éteuilles sections of *Jean Santeuil* positively teem with literal references to other children: cousins who persecute Jean in his quest for a quiet place to

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[40] We will return to the functions of such images in other parts of the novel in Chapter 5.

read, but in whose expeditions he frequently and willingly participates. However, none of these children are ever given names. Nor do we ever know how many of them there are or how old they are. All we know is that they are there - and less as characters than as background detail. For example, 'on rentrait en se dépêchant, les petits courant la ligne sur l'épaule (qui par moments se mêlait et qu'il fallait rajuster) pour rattraper les grands' (JS,286). Moreover, just as other children never develop into characters, so play never fully develops into a theme, despite many more literal references to it than in *Combray*: 'Jean avant le déjeuner pêchait au parc plutôt que d'aller marcher' (JS,302); 'On jouait aux cartes' (JS,303); 'des chambres éclairées tout à l'heure, où l'on lira, où l'on jouera' (JS,352); the mother's promise, 'Ce soir nous ferons une partie de dames, si tu es sage' (JS,329); the ability of voluntary memory to 'retrouver les jeux, le jardin, les espérances' of childhood (JS,299); or Jean frolicking with the elements: 'Malgré la présence du soleil, d'une brise molle et d'une senteur nouvelle, il eut le courage de s'arracher à la conversation et aux jeux de ces amis délicieux pour faire son thème et monta l'escalier en courant' (JS,234). But these are only isolated references. Not one of these games is ever described in any detail, let alone with the precision of France or Larbaud.

Hence, in contrast to Marcel, there is certainly evidence that Jean participates in 'normal' childhood play, either alone or with other children, but at the same time, in anticipation of Marcel, neither play nor other children are accorded much importance. In fact, *Jean Santeuil* contains a number of striking pictures of the child excluded from the game, or voluntarily standing aside:

> Le lendemain, à l'heure où tous les autres jouaient dans la cour, Jean dans la classe faisait tout seul du mot à mot. [...] La classe étant située au rez-de-chaussée de plein-pied avec la cour, et la fenêtre étant grande ouverte, Jean entendait les cris et les sauts de ses camarades. (JS,254-55)

Similarly, 'par la fenêtre ouverte sur le petit jardin de son cabinet de toilette, il voyait son oncle et ses cousins partir, faisant sonner au passage la clochette de la porte, portant des lignes ou des bêches' (JS,284). There is something here of the Marcel who lies in his darkened bedroom at the end of *A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, only indirectly aware of the brilliant summer day and the children playing outside (II,306), or of the younger Marcel who looks on at the other children playing with the 'carafes de la Vivonne' (I,166). Perhaps then, the image of the child watching a game from which he is excluded plays an

important part in the Proustian imagination. Indeed, it is almost symbolic of a *récit d'enfance* (*Combray*) that refuses to participate in the conventions of its genre and of an author who refuses his child character the right to join in with the 'normal' activities of childhood. Michel Erman may write: 'L'enfant, qui depuis le XIX^{e} siècle est reconnu dans son intimité et son individualité spécifique, ne fait [...] pas l'objet dans la «Recherche du Temps perdu» d'une quelconque étude psychologique ou sociale.'[41] But perhaps he is not so much denying the presence or importance of childhood in *A la Recherche du Temps perdu* as discovering Proust's refusal to conform to the norms of his day. Residual elements of many conventions of the genre remain in the unfinished work, *Jean Santeuil*, only to be eliminated from the final version that is *Combray* - as we have already seen to some extent in Chapter 2.

Therefore, as for nature, we begin to see some kind of a pattern emerging from the chaos that *Jean Santeuil* often appears to be. This may be less evident in the case of play, which already has a relatively small role in the unfinished work, but becomes much more obvious in the case of that other major institution of childhood, glimpsed in some of the above quotations: school - where many of the games in *Jean Santeuil* take place. School may not be the *dominant* myth of the French *récit d'enfance*, as Coe claims it is for the British autobiography of childhood, but it is hard to find an example of the genre where it is so systematically ignored as in *Combray*.[42] In *Jean Santeuil*, by contrast, large sections of the novel are devoted to school (JS,253-70),[43] even though the very young Jean foreshadows Marcel in this respect too:

> Aussi Jean n'alla pas d'abord au collège et quand il était à Paris, les jambes nues pour se laisser brunir, il restait toute la journée aux Champs-Elysées sans que l'invitation des petits garçons, les avances des petites filles, ou les menaces de sa bonne, pussent

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[41] Michel Erman, 'Le Thème de l'Enfance dans la «Recherche du Temps perdu»', *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, n.s. 25 (1984), 281-284 (p.284).

[42] See Richard N. Coe, 'Reminiscences of childhood. An approach to a Comparative Mythology', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society. Literary and Historical Section*, 19 (1984), 221-321.

[43] Here, as so often with the themes of *Jean Santeuil* there is some ambiguity, if not downright contradiction (see again Chapter 2). There is no doubt about the fact that the older Jean attends school, but one moment we are given a picture of him as surrounded by 'camarades' (JS,231), even when he cannot play with them (JS,254-55), and the next he appears to be hated by everyone in his class (JS,253) (except for Henri de Réveillon (JS,258)), to the extent that he is bullied and beaten up (JS,258). Perhaps this early oscillation confirms the picture of Proust as a writer unable to decide which myths of the genre to perpetuate: unhappy Vallès-style school days or the largely contented classrooms of *le Grand Meaulnes*.

> le décider à rompre son silence désespéré et à quitter le banc où il se réfugiait la tête cachée contre l'appui. (JS,216)

Play in the Champs-Elysées

The above example points towards what *appears to be* a very large gap in our analysis of *Jean Santeuil* so far: the very obvious and very literal examples of games in the Champs-Elysées with Marie Kossichef. Again, these sketches turn out to be less interesting than their adaptation for *A la recherche du temps perdu.* In the latter, the equivalent games with Gilberte are banished from the *récit d'enfance* that is *Combray* and placed in what we assume to be the adolescent sections of the novel. Of course, we are never actually given Marcel's age, but the insertion of *Un Amour de Swann* between country and town, non-play and play, seems to indicate something more than a simple geographical change.[44] Now, too, Marcel is indulging in more adult pursuits, such as submitting articles to *Le Figaro*, even if the next minute he is playing childish games in the Champs-Elysées. Perhaps then, it can be conjectured that adolescence in *A la recherche* consists of wild oscillations between the characteristics of childhood and those of adulthood. This would not be without historical support. Apparently, at the end of the nineteenth century puberty took place some two years later than now, so that it would not have been unusual to see boys of sixteen playing in parks, no matter how accelerated their intellectual development.

Even in *Jean Santeuil* the games of the Champs-Elysées mark a *change* from Jean's normal behaviour patterns. He is described as a decidedly sickly and solitary child before he meets Marie Kossichef, when, we are told 'tout changea' (JS,216). And we do not have to look very closely to see that Jean (like Marcel after him) is not participating in Huizinga's non-purposive type of play. In fact, their activities bear more resemblance to Berne's adult games with their 'payoffs' and 'ulterior motives'. The sudden change in Jean is mediated not by a sudden discovery of the joys of the game, but by his amorous desires to be close to Marie: 'Bientôt, depuis le matin il ne pensait plus qu'au moment où il allait la voir sourire et jouer. Et pendant tout le temps qu'elle était là, il restait près d'elle, jouant aux barres, à cache-cache, à glisser' (JS,216). Nor does Jean play when she is not there (JS,218). Or if he does, it is only half-heartedly, as he keeps one eye fixed on her potential point of arrival. When she

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[44] See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of Marcel's age at this point and the 'oscillations' of adolescence.

finally turns up, however, he does experience something approximating to the pleasures of the game, as described by Huizinga, or even to the frenzy of activity as practised by the gardener's daughter at Combray:

> Il se mit à jouer avec les autres et courait de toutes ses forces pour s'étourdir [...], on fait des glissades, des boules de neige. Jean maintenant joue avec la neige, il n'en est plus opprimé, il frappe en sautant de ses pieds vainqueurs le jardin saccagé, la neige elle-même morte [...]. Et il est content d'avoir froid, d'avoir chaud, il prend la neige avec bonheur pour en apporter à Marie. (JS,251-52)

But he still remains to some extent *outside* the game, held at bay by his love for Marie, to the extent that he actually breaks the rules which for Huizinga define play: 'Il triche pour qu'elle gagne, il en jette dans le cou à quelqu'un qu'elle n'aime pas, pour lui faire plaisir' (JS,252). The game then, for Jean Santeuil, is little more than a means to an end, 'un prétexte pour se rapprocher' (JS,252), as the narrator calls one of his ruses, rather than play in its pure, 'disinterested' sense.

These incidents are repeated by Marcel and Gilberte in *Noms de pays: le nom*. We find the same details about not playing in her absence, the same games, the same winter's day, the same ulterior motives. But the theme develops further. Marcel lingers longer on the fringes of the closed world of the game; the change in the child is less abrupt:

> Je tournais tout le temps autour de l'endroit où elle jouait avec ses amies, si bien qu'une fois où elles ne se trouvèrent pas en nombre pour leur partie de barres, elle me fit demander si je voulais compléter leur camp, et je jouai désormais avec elle chaque fois qu'elle était là. (I,388)

In fact, it is questionable whether Marcel really does change. Whereas Jean finally experiences something akin to the pleasure of play, as defined by Huizinga, the only kind of happiness that concerns Marcel is the 'bonheur immédiat par excellence, le bonheur de l'amour' (I,389). And even when he is not cheating, he still appears outside the closed world of the game, as Gilberte herself points out when she sums up Marcel as 'un bon camarade avec qui elle jouait volontiers quoique trop distrait, *pas assez au jeu*' (I,396) (my italics).

Another development from the parallel scenes of *Jean Santeuil* is the way in which this ironic gap - between Gilberte's unquestioning presence in the closed structure of the game and Marcel's unstable existence on its fringes - is constantly exploited. Marcel appears to join in, but really inhabits another imaginary world where he and Gilberte are lovers:

> Mais au moment même, je ne pouvais apprécier la valeur de ces plaisirs nouveaux. Ils n'étaient pas donnés par la fillette que j'aimais, au moi qui l'aimait, mais par l'autre, par celle avec qui je jouais, à cet autre moi qui ne possédait ni le souvenir de la vraie

> Gilberte, ni le cœur indisponible qui seul aurait pu savoir le prix d'un bonheur, parce que seul il l'avait désiré. (I,394)

Unfortunately for him, Gilberte's is literally a different ball game:

> Comme le philosophe idéaliste dont le corps tient compte du monde extérieur à la réalité duquel son intelligence ne croit pas, le même moi qui m'avait fait la saluer avant que je l'eusse identifiée, s'empressait de me faire saisir la balle qu'elle me tendit (comme si elle était une camarade avec qui j'étais venu jouer, et non une âme sœur que j'étais venu rejoindre). (I,394)

This reaches comic proportions when Marcel blindly receives Gilberte's snowballs in the neck as a mark of favouritism and fidelity (I,392).

Sometimes, there is even a suggestion that it is not simply the closed world of play that Gilberte is trying to initiate Marcel into, but also the world of quite a different kind of literature about childhood. When the two children go off to spend their pocket money:

> Gilberte me montrait en riant deux petits garçons qui étaient comme le petit coloriste et le petit naturaliste des livres d'enfants. Car l'un ne voulait pas d'un sucre d'orge rouge parce qu'il préférait le violet et l'autre, les larmes aux yeux, refusait une prune que voulait lui acheter sa bonne, parce que, finit-il par dire d'une voix passionnée: «J'aime mieux l'autre prune, parce qu'elle a un ver». (I,395)[45]

After the heavy irony and profound psychological analysis of Proust's writing, such a light-hearted and sentimental anecdote sounds strangely out of place (although it too might have a certain symbolism). The tone is closer to that of France or Larbaud. Thus Marcel is also hovering on the fringes of a more conventional *récit d'enfance*, one where such anecdotes are interspersed with descriptions of imaginative, art-like play.

As *Noms de pays: le nom* progresses, there are hints that Proust is not simply deviating from the norms of the genre, by leaving these myths out of *Combray*, but is actively subverting them in his 'récit d'adolescence'. As early as Marie Kossichef, it had become apparent that the Proustian child was attracted to what was *different* from him, 'une jeune fille russe [...] qui brillait de cette santé, de cette vie, de cette joie qui manquaient à Jean' (JS,216) But with Gilberte, this love of difference becomes a *sexual* attraction. The ironic gap between boy and girl widens as it becomes clear that the 'bille d'agate' is not a toy for Marcel, but a sex toy:

> Je baisais la bille d'agate qui était la meilleure part du cœur de mon amie, la part qui n'était pas frivole, mais fidèle, et qui bien que parée du charme mystérieux de la vie de Gilberte demeurait près de moi, *habitait ma chambre, couchait dans mon lit.* (I,403) (my italics)

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45 Unfortunately, there is no indication whether this is a reference to a particular 'livre d'enfant'.

The connection between play and sex becomes even more marked in the first part of *A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, where, 'derrière le massif de lauriers' in the Champs-Elysées, Gilberte and Marcel are supposed to be playing hide-and-seek, but the boy entices the girl into grappling for the possession of a letter. 'Je me sentais si attiré par son corps', writes the narrator, 'que je lui dis: «Voyons, empêchez-moi de l'attraper, nous allons voir qui sera le plus fort».' (I,485) But grappling turns into groping and play quite literally into foreplay:

> Nous luttions, arc-boutés. Je tâchais de l'attirer, elle résistait; ses pommettes enflammées par l'effort étaient rouges et rondes comme des cerises; elle riait comme si je l'eusse chatouillée; je la tenais serrée entre mes jambes comme un arbuste après lequel j'aurais voulu grimper; et au milieu de la gymnastique que je faisais, sans qu'en fût à peine augmenté l'essoufflement que me donnaient l'exercice musculaire et l'ardeur du jeu, je répandis, comme quelques gouttes de sueur arrachées par l'effort mon plaisir auquel je ne pus pas même attarder le temps d'en connaître le goût; aussitôt je pris la lettre. (I,485)

Thus the climax of the game coincides with Marcel's sexual climax.

It begins to seem then that there is as little play in *Noms de pays: le nom* as there is in *Combray*, at least from Marcel's point of view. Gilberte and her friends may fulfil all Huizinga's and Caillois' conditions for play, but even when the young hero joins in, his own behaviour fails to live up to the theorists' high standards. What *appears to be* play on his part is in reality a means to obtaining sexual gratification and even, in the last example, constitutes sexual satisfaction. Interestingly, Huizinga considers but then dismisses this possibility:

> Caresses as such do not bear the character of play, though they may do on occasion; but it would be erroneous to incorporate the sexual act itself, as love-play in the play-category [...]. All in all, therefore, [...] we feel compelled to regard the erotic use of the play-term, universally accepted and obvious though it be, as a typical and conscious metaphor.[46]

While Huizinga is willing to accept the affinity between poetry and play as *literal*, the link between play and sex is *just a metaphor*. It is as if he cannot accept such a debasement of the concept on which he claims all of society's institutions are founded. Proust, on the other hand, is quite prepared to de-mythicize an activity that plays such a sacred part in the *récits d'enfance* of his day. Even if Proust himself recognises the value of these early sexual experiences that masquerade as games, from a comparative point of view, the Champs-

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[46] Huizinga, pp.63-64.

Elysées episodes can only be interpreted as subversion of the genre - subversion that increasingly seems to turn into *per*version.

For 'play' continues to be a means to a sexual end throughout *A la recherche du temps perdu.* Marcel's desire for the members of 'la petite bande' leads him to participate in games which, it is hinted, would have seemed too childish for him even as a child: 'nous jouions à des jeux qui jusque-là m'eussent paru ennuyeux, quelquefois aussi enfantins que «La Tour prends garde» ou «A qui rira le premier», mais auxquels je n'aurais plus renoncé pour un empire' (II,258). Just as the games with Gilberte were a literary reworking of those of Jean with Marie Kossichef, so these at Balbec are a real-life repetition for Marcel of the former. We find the same ulterior motives, the same cheating and the same timidity as earlier. And the ironic gap between the girl's absorption in the game and the boy's amorous intent is increased even further, leading to actual ridicule and embarrassment for Marcel, rather than simple disappointment. Here he actually attributes the same sexual designs to Albertine, only to find that the fondling and winking were just part of the game. And her reaction is really far more childish than that of little Gilberte: '«On ne joue pas quand on ne veut pas faire attention et pour faire perdre les autres. On ne l'invitera plus les jours où on jouera, Andrée, ou bien moi je ne viendrai pas»' (II,274). Inevitably, the game ends with the opposite outcome to that desired by Marcel.

But this is not the last word. In *Le Côté de Guermantes* Marcel finally attains the same sexual satisfaction as with Gilberte, engineered in much the same way through the pretext of a game. 'Imaginez-vous que je ne suis pas chatouilleux du tout, vous pourriez me chatouiller pendant une heure que je ne le sentirais même pas,' he tells Albertine (II,661-62). There is a similarly sexual charade, set in Doncières, but only 'remembered' at a later point in the text, where the hero encourages a serving girl to rummage in his pockets, ostensibly to find a tip (II,690). Such incidents hint that Marcel can no longer contemplate sexual pleasure independently of the trappings of play. From now on, play reappears only as a euphemism (rather than Huizinga's metaphor) not just for sexual but also for *homo*sexual activities. For example, 'Albertine incitait Andrée à des jeux qui, sans aller bien loin, n'étaient peut-être pas tout à fait innocents' (III,804) and later, Marcel finds it hard to believe that 'ses jeux avec une amie fussent la même chose que les relations immorales qu'elle flétrissait chez les autres'

(III,899). Indeed, this tendency is noticeable as early as *Combray*, where Mlle Vinteuil's 'sadism' is described in terms of play (I,163).

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'But the garden-meditations never ceased'
(Ruskin) [47]

The Positive Side of the Story

Perhaps it is just as perverse to have dwelled for so long on something that is perceived to have been absent from Proust's work. There is, however, a less negative aspect to this issue. As seen in the case of nature, *Combray* is far from being an anti-Childhood. Sex may itself turn out to be of positive value to the narrator's art, even if it is hard to see any of the sordid skirmishes engineered through play as making any aesthetic contribution.[48] Moreover, even if play is left out (or provides a convenient disguise for sex), many other 'normal' everyday activities of the *récit d'enfance*, such as eating, falling in love, walking in the country and reading, are left in. In fact, the last of these provides the key to the omission of play. If we look more closely at Proust's treatment of childhood, we find that reading and games are constantly played off against one another, as it were. In *Journées de Lecture*, Proust's introduction to his translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, he writes: 'Il n'y a peut-être pas de jours de notre enfance que nous ayons si pleinement vécus que ceux que nous avons cru laisser sans les vivre, ceux que nous avons passés avec un livre préféré.' And among 'tout ce qui [...] les remplissait pour les autres, et que nous écartions comme un obstacle vulgaire à un plaisir divin', we find 'le jeu pour lequel un ami venait nous chercher au passage le plus intéressant' (CS,160). Although the adult narrator of this essay now perceives things very differently, the point is that the child he once was only seems to play when he is forced to, and even then returns to his book as quickly as possible:

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[47] Ruskin, pp.51-52.

[48] Chapter 5 discusses the possible relationship between art and sex in greater detail.

> Je n'étais pas depuis bien longtemps dans ma chambre qu'il fallait aller au parc, à un kilomètre du village. Mais après *le jeu obligé* j'abrégeais la fin du goûter apporté dans des paniers et distribué aux enfants au bord de la rivière, sur l'herbe où le livre avait été posé avec défense de le prendre encore. (CS,168) (my italics)

In *Jean Santeuil* too, reading can be seen as usurping the role of play. Instead of going out with the other children at Éteuilles, Jean often stays at home to read (JS,284), and his copy of *Le Capitaine Fracasse* seems a perfect replacement for a playmate. Indeed, 'c'était l'ami à qui on pense sans cesse, dont la société rend délicieuses les heures où on en jouit, que ce soient des heures de pluie ou de neige ou de soleil' (JS,314).

Yet the relationship between the two pastimes is more than just one of substitution. On the few occasions when we are given descriptions of play, it is usually described as the *metamorphosis* of the activity of reading. When, in *Jean Santeuil*, the other children eventually return home, Jean flees with his book from one hiding place to another, so that reading is transformed into what amounts to an impromptu game of hide-and-seek. And though Jean begins by hiding for real, he soon becomes absorbed in 'l'amusement et la sécurité de sa cachette' (JS,311). Elsewhere, reading is described in the vocabulary of play. In *Journées de Lecture*, clandestine bed-time reading is referred to as 'la course éperdue des yeux et de la voix qui suivait sans bruit, s'arrêtant seulement pour reprendre haleine, dans un soupir profond' (CS,169). In fact, we find constant emphasis that reading is a mental activity in the same way that play is a physical one. When Jean Santeuil returns exhausted from a walk, he is overjoyed to be able to pick up his book and 'goûter comme une jouissance profonde, en suivant sans bouger les aventures pressantes des héros du roman, la fatigue de son corps et l'agilité de son esprit' (JS,309). What is more, there seems to be a permanent possibility of transforming this mental energy back into physical, ludic energy:

> Jean, quand sonnait quatre heures et demie, l'esprit fatigué de lire et le corps réveillé, fermait son livre et descendait goûter. Mais ivre du bonheur qu'il avait à immobiliser dans un repos absolu son esprit lassé et à rassasier de mouvement son corps dispos pour aller à la salle à manger, il descendait l'escalier dans un mouvement fou, et faisait deux ou trois fois le tour du jardin, secouant la tête, fendant l'air les bras tendus, se figurant qu'il était cheval dans une prairie, mouette au ras des flots, fou de joie. (JS,312)

This is perhaps play at its most intense, a mixture of Caillois's categories of *ilinx* (thrill, danger), which has already been exemplified by the gardener's daughter at Combray, and *mimicry* as the child transforms himself into all manner of other life-forms. But it is significant that this is play mediated by reading, reading which seems to stand somehow on the interface of mind and body. This episode is reworked in *Combray* itself - perhaps the

only time when we see Marcel engaged in pure disinterested play that would satisfy Huizinga's conditions:

> Quand j'étais fatigué d'avoir lu toute la matinée dans la salle, jetant mon plaid sur mes épaules, je sortais: mon corps obligé depuis longtemps de garder l'immobilité, mais qui s'était chargé sur place d'animation et de vitesse accumulées, avait besoin ensuite, comme une toupie qu'on lâche, de les dépenser dans toutes les directions. (I,152)

Thus reading is a kind of *potential* play, which only requires the right conditions to be transformed into physical, ludic activity, just as potential energy may be converted into kinetic energy.

The fact remains that this transformation very rarely takes place in *Combray*. If we look back to Huizinga's definition of play we can perhaps see why.[49] With only very few modifications it can be fitted perfectly to the pastime of reading as described in the Sunday afternoon garden scene. Reading is certainly a 'free activity' insofar as Marcel enters into it of his own volition. In fact, his mother has to restrain him from reading immediately after lunch (I,71). He is also 'standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life' in this passage. Not only does he take precautions not to be disturbed by the events and characters of everyday existence (I,85), but he has the sensation of leaving the real world, which is displaced by that of the book: 'le paysage où se déroulait l'action [...] exerçait une bien plus grande influence sur ma pensée que l'autre, que celui que j'avais sous les yeux quand je les levais du livre' (I,86-87). In fact, it absorbs him so 'intensely and utterly' that he loses all sense of time or of the hours chiming from the church tower (I,82-83). This kind of reading, unlike the games in the Champs-Elysée, certainly seems to be 'connected with no material interest' or 'profit'. Furthermore, Marcel's reading takes place within closed well-defined spaces, such as the the darkened bedroom or the little shed in the garden, so that 'it proceeds within its own proper boundaries of [...] time', even if its circumscription in time is determined by the rigorous schedules of Combray meal-times and walks. And if we allow 'social groupings' of one (which presumably Huizinga does, since he supports the idea of solitary play), then the child clearly attempts to 'surround' himself 'with secrecy', if not 'by disguise', by this very withdrawal into closed spaces, where he is 'caché aux yeux des personnes qui pourraient venir faire visite' (I,82-83). Characteristics described by Huizinga elsewhere also fit the

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[49] Huizinga, p.32. The definition is also quoted above (p 90).

pattern of the child's reading. For instance, the remark that 'at any moment "ordinary life" may reassert its rights,'[50] is exemplified by the oscillation of the text between the internal world of the book and the external one of the senses. Perhaps there is only one major problem in accepting such a scheme, that is, the idea of reading as a rule-governed activity. Yet if we accept Caillois' modification to Huizinga's theory and replace the concept of 'rules' with that of 'fiction', the solution to the problem is ready made. What better term could there be for the world of the novel in which the young Marcel sets himself?

So far, however, all we have is an explanation of why this child does not *need* to play. Reading can apparently perform exactly the same functions. But why does he play so *rarely*? After all, the above example shows that he is capable of real play. Perhaps we have to look once again to the all-important character of Léonie for the answer. For her, reading is the exact equivalent of play. In fact, 'un jour de semaine, elle m'aurait dit «comment tu t'amuses encore à lire, ce n'est pourtant pas dimanche» en donnant au mot amusement le sens d'enfantillage et de perte de temps' (I,99). Though nothing more is said on the subject in *Combray*, the narrator eventually hints that Léonie's equation was wrong. Not only is his novel an attempt to regain such 'temps perdu', but he also makes an explicit remark about the precise nature of her mistake: 'elle avait été la seule personne de la famille qui n'eût pu encore comprendre que lire, c'était autre chose que de passer le temps et «s'amuser»' (III,586). Thus there is an implication that reading is somehow qualitatively different from play. It performs the same functions, but more fully perhaps. Or maybe it performs others as well. In any case it appears to be *better* in some sense, but how?

Proust's Theory of Reading

The answer to such a question possibly lies away from childhood altogether in Proust's general theory of reading. One of the earliest manifestations of this is in *Les plaisirs et les jours* of 1893, when Honoré's books talk to him:

> DES LIVRES: Tu nous as tenus dans tes mains enfantines. Tes yeux encore purs s'étonnèrent en nous contemplant. Si tu ne nous aimes pas pour nous-mêmes, aime-nous pour tout ce que nous te rappelons de toi, de tout ce que tu as été, de tout ce que tu aurais pu être, et avoir pu l'être, n'est-ce pas un peu, tandis que tu y songeais, l'avoir été? (JS,49)

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[50] Huizinga, p.40.

Thus we are sent straight back to childhood. At this stage, neither the theme of childhood nor that of reading have attained the proportions they reach in Proust's later works, but in this fragment, we find the raw materials of his later treatments of the theme and its elevation into a theory: reading has a fundamental link with childhood, and *adult* reading of childhood books is seen as a method of regaining the lost days of youth. These elements will only reach their full Proustian fruition in the the final version of the 'drame du coucher', the long bookish Sundays of *Combray*, and the sudden reunion of Marcel with *François le Champi* in *Le Temps retrouvé*, but already we have a 'petite phrase' which will undergo several variations and modulations in the course of Proust's intervening works.[51]

The power of reading to resurrect childhood is picked up again in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Notre mère sourit en nous voyant partir pour la plage en emportant toujours un volume de Stevenson. Elle nous trouve encore enfant, et écrivant à Paris pour avoir une vie de Stevenson, son portrait, elle retrouve comme nous la vivacité des goûts de notre enfance. (JS,367)

As seen in Chapter 2, *Jean Santeuil* also contains the germ of the *Combray* reading scene, especially in the sections entitled 'Lectures' and 'Le Capitaine Fracasse' (JS,309-16). Reading already takes place in a serious of enclosed spaces, which consolidate and protect the child's solitude. The key words of these early reading passages are to recur repeatedly in later versions: 'solitude', 'repos', 'bonheur' and 'sécurité'. But, as usual, it is hard to integrate the fragments of *Jean Santeuil* into a consistent treatment of the theme, let alone anything approaching a theory of reading. This too has already been seen with respect to nature in Chapter 2, where we saw Proust apparently unable to decide whether Jean is a bookish child or a Rousseau-esque child of nature, and unable to find a suitable compromise between them. Furthermore, the theme of reading in *Jean Santeuil* has yet to acquire the complex web of thematic associations of the later novel. For example, there is nothing to correspond to *François le Champi* with all its Freudian undertones. Nor has the passage describing the 'musique de chambre de l'été' of the flies in the child's bedroom (JS,292-95), which Paul de Man finds so important, yet been integrated into the activity of reading.[52]

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[51] See Chapter 5 for a full discussion of the *François le Champi* incident in *Le Temps retrouvé*.

[52] Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp.62-67.

Perhaps this underdevelopment of the theme has something to do with the fact that the events of *Jean Santeuil* take place in an atmosphere that is largely masculine and generally hostile to all things literary. Throughout Proust's work, reading tends to appear as an essentially *female* pastime. During Marcel's childhood, it is mainly his mother and grandmother who read, and everywhere in *Jean Santeuil* we have the impression that the feminine is equated with the artistic and sensitive, while the masculine is nearly always Philistine and insensitive. This is taken to extremes in the case of M. and Mme Lepic (JS,226-28). Mme Lepic is an old friend of Mme Santeuil, who starts out in married life as a lively and creative young woman, only to have all life and art drained out of her by a brutally insensitive, but much loved, husband. Jean's parents provide a similar, if far more moderate, example. M. Santeuil has 'l'indifférence de son sexe pour les illusions et la sensibilité' (JS,283), whereas his wife is frequently to be found reading or encouraging Jean to read. The remark to her husband, 'Je crois que [...] Jean tiendra de toi, s'il aime les vers' (JS,213), which brings such an outburst of indignation from her father, is clearly meant ironically, after the portrait we have just been given of M. Santeuil. Maybe it is only when this unliterary grandfather is transformed into an almost obsessively literary grandmother, male servant into female and uncle into several aunts in *Combray* that the theme of reading is fully allowed to flower.[53]

Prior to this, however, Proust wrote his preface to Ruskin, now known as *Journées de Lecture*. Here the reading child becomes the focus of attention and what Proust calls 'l'acte psychologique appelé *Lecture*' (CS,172) is analysed at length. The long poetic section, which recalls the reading sections of *Jean Santeuil* and previews those of *Combray*, eventually gives way to a longer philosophical section which really does purport to elevate a literary theme into a theory of reading and has a prescriptive ring entirely uncharacteristic of Proust. This 'theory' is mainly directed against Ruskin's claim that 'la lecture est exactement une conversation avec des hommes beaucoup plus sages et plus intéressants que ceux que nous pouvons avoir l'occasion de connaître autour de nous' (CS,174). According to Proust, such an attitude is nothing more than 'idolatry', which, he would have us believe, is fraught

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[53] The connection between the literary and the female may have further significance, for example, with respect to the 'hommes-femmes' of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. This, however, is a speculation that leads far away from childhood, so it is not one that will be followed up in later chapters.

with dangers, especially for those with an 'esprit paresseux' (CS,179), who substitute the writer's work for their own thought and creativity. This tendency had already been implicitly criticised through the figure of Jean Santeuil, who learns poems by heart and indiscriminately copies phrases into his homework compositions, largely to impress teachers with his vast literary knowledge (JS,230). Now, in *Journées de Lecture*, Proust even goes so far as to define the bad reader explicitly:

> Pour lui, le livre n'est pas l'ange qui s'envole aussitôt qu'il a ouvert les portes du jardin céleste, mais une idole immobile qu'il adore pour elle-même, qui, au lieu de recevoir une dignité vraie des pensées qu'elle éveille, communique une dignité factice à tout ce qui l'entoure. (CS,183)

This hints that reading also has a positive side, which can only be acknowledged if its limitations are recognised: 'Les limites de son rôle dérivent de la nature de ses vertus' (CS, 174). One of these virtues may indeed be 'la communication d'une autre pensée', but the communication process takes place 'tout en restant seul, c'est-à-dire, en continuant à jouir de la puissance intellectuelle qu'on a dans la solitude et que la conversation dissipe immédiatement, en continuant à pouvoir être inspiré, à rester en plein travail fécond de l'esprit sur lui-même' (CS,173-74) - hence Proust's new 'formula' for reading: 'ce miracle fécond d'une communication au fond de la solitude' (CS,174). This formula also accounts for his insistence on withdrawal and enclosure in his more literary treatments of the theme. However, the description of childhood reading, which is supposed to illustrate the albeit limited value of the activity ('Et ces vertus, c'est [...] aux lectures d'enfance que je vais demander en quoi elles consistent' (CS,174)), marks a subtle change from the equivalent passages in *Jean Santeuil*. As was seen in Chapter 2, the section 'Lectures' of the unfinished novel oscillates between the internal world of the book and the external world of nature, between the adventures of *Le capitaine Fracasse* and the banality of everyday life:

> Par moments, il interrompait sa lecture [...]. Puis il reprenait sa lecture [...]. Quelquefois, ayant besoin de se délasser un peu plus, il allait jusqu'à la fenêtre [...]. Mais bien vite, Jean retombait dans la lecture et l'anéantissement de son corps [...] l'odeur fraîche de sa peau suffisait à l'enivrer du sentiment de son repos et de son bonheur. Puis pris peu à peu dans l'action du livre [...] il perdait par moments tout sentiment du reste des choses. (JS,309-10)

In *Jean Santeuil*, we know precious little about the nature of this 'action', but the intensity of experiencing it is acknowledged by the narrator, who also gives some indication about which novel is being read at the time. Now, in *Journées de Lecture*, the book plays an even smaller

role, to the extent that its title and even its author (Stevenson? Gautier? Bergotte?) are suppressed. Proust, in his new and strangely one-sided guise as theorist, only recounts the events and landscapes that happened to coincide with the process of reading, concluding:

> Tout cela, dont la lecture aurait dû nous empêcher de percevoir autre chose que l'importunité, elle en gravait au contraire en nous un souvenir tellement plus précieux à notre jugement actuel que ce que nous lisions alors avec amour que, s'il nous arrive de feuilleter ces livres d'autrefois ce n'est plus que comme les seuls calendriers que nous ayons gardés des jours enfuis, et avec l'espoir de voir reflétés sur leurs pages les demeures et les étangs qui n'existent plus. (CS,160)

On the face of it then, Proust would have us believe that the *content* of what we read has no importance, except insofar as it provokes personal memories or reflections. This aspect of reading will be acknowledged in *Le Temps retrouvé* with *François le Champi*, of course, but in the novel it will not be claimed that this is the *sole* value of reading. Indeed, the previous chapter shows the extent of Proust's debt to Sand's 'roman champêtre'. Clearly therefore, the early, curiously un-Proustian, dogmatic stance must be set in its context. *Journées de Lecture* is in some ways self-referential. Proust is taking issue with one of his literary mentors, refusing to be idolatrous towards the text whose translation once followed this essay. On top of this there are autobiographical elements, even a hint of self-castigation. Perhaps Proust's reference to 'l'esprit paresseux' has some link with his own failure to produce his great novel at this stage in his life?

Reading in *Combray*

Certainly, when Proust does produce his great novel, many of the apparent claims of *Journées de Lecture* are overturned. Idolatry returns to the fore in Marcel's worship of Bergotte, even if it is not condoned. 'J'aurais voulu posséder une opinion de lui, une métaphore de lui, sur toutes choses,' (I,94) writes the narrator of the child, who also asks Swann, 'Est-ce que vous pourriez me dire quel est l'acteur qu'il préfère?' (I,96). Moreover, in one sentence at the centre of the *Combray* reading passage we even find a curious reversal of the position set out in the preface to Ruskin:

> Beaux après-midi du dimanche sous le marronnier du jardin de Combray, soigneusement vidés par moi des incidents médiocres de mon existence personnelle que j'y avais remplacés par une vie d'aventures et d'aspirations étranges au sein d'un pays arrosé d'eaux vives, vous m'évoquez encore cette vie quand je pense à vous et vous le contenez en effet pour l'avoir peu à peu contournée et enclose - tandis que je progressais dans ma lecture et que tombait la chaleur du jour - dans le cristal

> successif, lentement changeant et traversé des feuillages, de vos heures, silencieuses sonores, odorantes et limpides. (I,87)

Thus, the days of childhood now evoke the adventures of the novel, instead of the novel evoking the hitherto lost days of childhood (although, in retrospect, that childhood was itself a life of 'aspirations' and the Vivonne's 'eaux vives'). Yet the structure of the *Combray* reading scene seems to imply the reverse of this thematic message. Of course, the reading scene is contained in the wider narrative of Combray and its Sunday afternoons in the garden. But so too is the reading scene used as a device to incorporate other aspects of Combray and even the child's life at Paris into the narrative. In fact, the entire description of Sunday afternoon at Combray can be seen as such a device - a way of incorporating disparate anecdotes of childhood into a single coherent text.[54] Although Paul de Man defines the 'reading text' as the handful of Sunday afternoon pages that dissect the child's consciousness as he reads in the garden (I,79-87 approximately), this state of mind has its origins several pages earlier with the mother's postprandial command, 'Voyons, ne reste pas ici indéfiniment, monte dans ta chambre si tu as trop chaud dehors, mais va d'abord prendre l'air un instant pour ne pas lire en sortant de table' (I,71).[55] This leads not only to the description of the one-time refuge of reading, Uncle Adolphe's den, but also to the anecdote of 'la dame en rose', which itself contains the account of Marcel's obsession with the theatre. This double digression over, Marcel returns to the point of himself and his book (I,79), only to embark upon the tale of 'La Charité de Giotto'. This takes him conveniently up to the scene in his bedroom, where the description of reading, as in *Journées de Lecture*, lapses into description of its setting.

Finally, Marcel is coaxed into the garden by his grand-mother and the full analysis of the 'acte psychologique appelé lecture' can begin in earnest (I,82). As in *Jean Santeuil*, there is a *physical* movement - here, from indoors to outdoors to the sentry box somewhere in between - which mirrors the apparent mental movement from book to self to world and back again. This section, with its unfolding of the layers of the child's mind, might be called the reading-rêverie panel of the Combray reading text - roughly equivalent to the active reading of *Journées de Lecture*. After the brief interruption from the gardener's daughter and the

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54 See Claudine Vercollier, 'Le long dimanche de Combray', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray*, 31 (1981), 361-66.

55 See De Man, p.58

soldiers (I,87-89), the anecdote of another interruption, this time by Swann, leads to what might be seen as the 'idolatrous' panel of the text about Marcel's worship of Bergotte. Thus, idolatry, the social rather than solitary, passive rather than active aspect of reading is partially reinstated. Though its new status is more that of a theme than that of an ideal, the hilarious misadventures of Bloch at Combray, which are incorporated into this section do seem to make fun of Proust's former philosophical position about reading. If we look back to *Journées de Lecture* we find a description of a dangerous conception of the truth, that is:

> Quand la vérité n'apparaît plus comme un idéal que nous ne pouvons réaliser que par le progrès intime de notre pensée et par l'effort de notre cœur, mais comme une chose matérielle, déposée entre les feuillets des livres comme un miel tout préparé par les autres et que nous n'avons qu'à prendre la peine d'atteindre sur les rayons des bibliothèques et de déguster ensuite, passivement dans un parfait repos de corps et d'esprit [...]. (CS, 180-81)

This seems very close to what Marcel believes in the *Combray* reading scene:

> Malheureusement, je ne pus pas apaiser [...] le trouble où il [Bloch] m'avait jeté quand il m'avait dit que les beaux vers (à moi qui n'attendais d'eux rien moins que la révélation de la vérité) étaient d'autant plus beaux qu'ils ne signifiaient rien du tout. (I,90)

Yet it is Marcel who now sounds reasonable, while Bloch sounds absurd:

> Je dois confesser, d'ailleurs, que lui [Musset] et même le nommé Racine, ont fait chacun dans leur vie un vers assez bien rythmé, et qui a pour lui, ce qui est selon moi le mérite suprême, de ne signifier absolument rien. (I,89)

Finally, both rêverie and idolatry fade away as the text drifts away from the theme of reading altogether, as if giving in to Léonie's disapproval (I,99). Even here, the activity of reading is used as a stepping stone for the next section of *Combray*, but with an impression of simultaneity that suggests it goes on forever: 'Tandis que je lisais au jardin [...], ma tante Léonie devisait avec Françoise, en attendant l'heure d'Eulalie' (I,99). This can be matched with the 'enfin' (I,72) with which our analysis of the reading scene began and which implies that we had always been waiting for it to start. Thus, the point that Combray both contains and is contained by the child's reading and that *Combray* both contains and is contained by the reading-text, is reinforced.

To sum all this up, Proust is no longer as one-sided as he had claimed to be in *Journées de Lecture*. The relationship of childhood to reading is now both 'contenant' and 'contenu' - like the notorious 'carafes de la Vivonne'. And where once Proust had emphasized the limitations of reading's virtues (even if he acknowledged the virtues of its

limitations), now all limitations are swept aside, as the two apparently contradictory sides of reading - passive idolatry and active rêverie - are set side by side. It is small wonder that Paul de Man dubs *A la recherche* and particularly the Combray reading scene 'the narrative of its own deconstruction.'[56]

The obvious explanation for this is that Proust, now that he is writing successfully himself, is more charitably disposed to idolatry. Perhaps he has come to recognise the part that his former idolatrous tendencies played in his own development as a writer. After all, it is but a small step from 'idolatry' to 'influence'. He may have begun by *translating* Ruskin, but is now writing a passage about reading that seems as if it could have been influenced by the English writer's *récit d'enfance* in his autobiography, *Praeterita.* As Dana Brand points out, among the many similarities between the two accounts of childhood, is the description of delight in withdrawing into small, closed spaces to read.[57] Or perhaps, in *Combray*, Proust is simply recognising that idolatry is an unavoidable part of the complex activity that is reading, whether we like it or not. Maybe reading oscillates inevitably between the passive and the active, the self-effacing and the self-projecting, as exemplified by Marcel in the garden.

However, if we look more carefully at the section of the text that unfolds the layers of the child's mind, we find the following remark:

> Ce qu'il y avait d'abord en moi, de plus intime, la poignée sans cesse en mouvement qui gouvernait le reste, c'était ma croyance en la richesse philosophique, en la beauté du livre que je lisais, et mon désir de les approprier, quel que fût ce livre. (I,79)

This belief, so similar to the 'dangerous' conception of the truth of *Journées de Lecture* is now the driving force in the child's active reading-rêverie, 'cette croyance centrale qui, pendant ma lecture exécutait d'incessants mouvements du dedans au dehors' (I,83). It now begins to seem not only that idolatry is inevitable, or even that it has certain advantages, but that the ideal, active kind of reading extolled in the preface to Ruskin paradoxically *depends*

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56 De Man, p.77.

57 Dana Brand, 'A Womb with a View: The "Reading" Consciousness in Ruskin and Proust', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 18 (1981), 487-502. See also C,VII,102, for the letter in which Proust claims to have started translating *Praeterita* (quoted in Chapter 1).

on it. The very intensity and variety of the psychological experience of reading is actually *due to* the child's belief that the book contains all the keys to life.

Conversely, we find that the 'idolatry' panel of the *Combray* reading text also contains elements of personal reflection, of the type extolled in *Journées de Lecture*. One particular passage from Bergotte gives Marcel an even greater joy than the others, but it is 'une joie que je me sentis éprouver *en une région plus profonde de moi-même*, plus unie, plus vaste, d'où les obstacles et les séparations semblaient avoir été enlevés' (I,93) (my italics). Again we find that the two faces of reading go beyond this simple relation of coexistence to one of dependence. Marcel may be so 'persuadé que (ses) pensées eussent paru pure ineptie à cet esprit' that he has 'fait table rase de toutes' (I,94-95), but when he finds one of his own personal reflections in Bergotte ('Il arrivait parfois qu'une page de lui disait les mêmes choses que j'écrivais souvent la nuit à ma grand-mère et ma mère quand je ne pouvais pas dormir' (I,94-95)), his idolisation of Bergotte is magnified and his idolatry given new force.

Thus, as was the case for the relationship between art and nature in Chapter 2, the relationship between reading-rêverie and reading-idolatry becomes one of interdependence when mediated by *Combray*. Yet in retrospect, was not this interdependence lurking beneath the surface of Proust's prose in *Journées de Lecture*? If the child is really mentally recording the scenes of his youth for posterity, this is not what he thinks he is doing at the time. He believes he is effacing himself and all personal activity before a much-loved book. These are days which 'nous avons cru laisser sans les vivre' (CS,160). And later, when describing the room in which the child goes to read, he implies that there is a great deal of pleasure to be derived from this kind of self-effacement. This can only be ironic in the context of an article that elevates 'la vie personnelle de l'esprit' (CS,167) to such a high status:

> Pour moi, je ne me sens vivre et penser que dans une chambre où tout est la création et le langage de vies profondément différentes de la mienne, d'un goût opposé au mien, où je ne retrouve rien de ma pensée consciente où mon imagination s'exalte en se sentant plongée au sein du non-moi. (CS,167)

Journées de Lecture is therefore self-referential in another sense. Far from writing a passive *reading* of Ruskin (albeit with arguments against him), Proust is actively writing a first draft of his own novel and the all-important garden scene. Nevertheless, this hint at the future developments of *Combray* remains very much beneath the surface. Whether or not Proust

was consciously undermining what he wrote, as he wrote it, the reader of *Journées de Lectures* has to work at digging out a hidden message - only to find that it contradicts the apparent message. (Thus, if we are looking for a revelation of the truth, of the kind sought by the young Marcel, we are inevitably disappointed and Proust's preface to Ruskin becomes self-referential in yet another sense - the text that is impossible to read passively.)

It is only really when we reach *Combray*, therefore, that both aspects of reading are given equal space, placed on an equal footing and their interdependence is recognised. Here too, Proust's tendency to undermine as he writes is easier to accept. After all, self-contradiction (self-deconstruction?) may be inappropriate in traditional philosophy, but can enhance modern literature. Or perhaps, Proust's acknowledgement that reading-rêverie depends on reading-idolatry and vice versa, means that self-contradiction has been transformed into a logically more complex chicken-and-egg style paradox. Whatever the case, it is only in *Combray* that the fusion between the two facets of reading becomes complete. In fact, 'fusion' (again as for art and nature in Chapter 2) would appear to be the key term here. In the section of the reading scene which deals with the layers of the child's consciousness, it is eventually revealed that the oscillations between various levels of the internal and external, the imaginary and the real, the book and the world belong to the *narration* of the child's experience rather than the experience itself. They were 'états simultanément juxtaposés dans ma conscience' (I,86). Two of these states, in particular, the dreams of travel and love occasioned by the book are singled out:

> C'est que mes rêves de voyages et d'amour n'étaient que des moments - que je sépare artificiellement aujourd'hui comme si je pratiquais des sections à des hauteurs différentes d'un jet d'eau irisé et en apparence immobile - dans un même et infléchissable jaillissement de toutes les forces de ma vie. (I,86)

This might be another way in which to interpret Paul de Man's claim that the Combray reading passage is the text of its own deconstruction, for in order to bring out the full value of the child's impressions, the adult narrator has to break them down, quite literally deconstructing them. There can be few other parts of *Combray* where the complex relationship (glimpsed at the end of Chapter 2), between the child 'presence', whose experience dictates the text, and the adult narrator, who has to convey it, is more in evidence. It is almost as if the latter has to break down, even destroy, the impressions of the former in order to give an impression of their full worth.

Reading as an Image of Writing

It is this final unqualified recognition of the value of the child's experience as a reader in *Combray* that ultimately provides an answer to our original question about the superiority of reading to play. Obviously, reading is literally more literary than play - and thus puts the child reader one step closer to the adult writer than the child at play. For this reason alone, Marcel's mother seems justified in recommending that, if he cannot write in Balbec, he should at least be reading: 'Nous reparlions de Combray. Ma mère me dit que là-bas du moins je lisais et qu'à Balbec je devrais bien faire de même, si je ne travaillais pas' (III,230). But for Proust and his narrator, reading is more than just a worthy but inferior substitute for writing. In *Albertine disparue*, when the narrator describes his tragic *mis*reading of the telegram from Gilberte, he remarks, 'On devine en lisant, on *crée*' (IV,235) (my italics). No doubt, taken out of context, this comment takes on more significance than was actually intended. To say that the narrator is thereby claiming an equal status for reading and writing, is itself an *over*-reading. The idea remains nonetheless a valid one. As Paul de Man would have put it, in *Combray* at least, reading becomes an 'allegory of writing' and is certainly an *image* of writing, on several counts. The child's idolatrous search for the truth is, for example, analogous to the writer's quest for the truth underlying experience, the 'essence des choses' of *Le Temps retrouvé*. The child's struggle to interpret that truth (which itself has an analogy within the reading passage in the difficulties of interpretation when encountering the 'dame en rose' or 'la Charité de Giotto') is precisely the process of deciphering accomplished successfully for the 'clochers de Martinville', and not at all for the 'arbres de Hudimesnil'.[58] In fact, in one of his *Essais et Articles*, Proust had quite literally used a young person reading as an image of the poet at work:

> Il est devant les choses comme l'étudiant qui relit sans cesse le texte du problème qu'on lui a donné et qu'il ne trouve pas. Il peut relire sans cesse le texte, il ne changera pas sous les yeux. Ce n'est pas du texte même qu'il peut espérer la solution. (CS,418)

Similarly, just as in *Le Temps retrouvé* the narrator arrives at a conception of art which will defy time in some sense, so too the child's reading takes away all conventional notions of the

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[58] See Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les Signes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1976) for a prolonged discussion of this process.

passing of time; 'l'intérêt de la lecture, magique comme un profond sommeil, avait donné le change à mes oreilles hallucinées et effacé la cloche d'or sur la surface azurée du silence' (I,86). It is not simply a matter of time. The stultifying effects of habit, which inhibit creation, are also defeated as the Combray afternoons are 'soigneusement vidés [...] des incidents médiocres' and filled instead with 'une vie d'aventures étranges' (I, 87).

But the main point is that these everyday incidents are not completely effaced. For, as Dana Brand puts it, all the enclosed spaces where Proustian children go to read are 'wombs with a view'. Whether the withdrawal is into boxes, bedrooms or bathrooms, the emphasis is equally on the fact that all of these look out on to the world. The lofty 'petit cabinet aux senteurs d'iris' in some ways allows a superior view of Roussainville-le-Pin, just as enclosure within the cool dark bedroom permits a paradoxically better vision of the summer day:

> Cette obscure fraîcheur de ma chambre était au plein soleil de la rue, ce que l'ombre est au rayon, c'est-à-dire aussi lumineuse que lui, et offrait à mon imagination, le spectacle total de l'été dont mes sens si j'avais été en promenade, n'aurait pu jouir que par morceaux. (I,82)

It is perhaps this characteristic that marks the greatest advantage of reading over the activity of play. Huizinga admits that the real world can reassert its presence at any point in the game, but apart from this possibility the withdrawal to play is total. It does not allow simultaneous experience of the everyday world, let alone a superior vision of it. Withdrawal in order to read may share with play the curious property of making what is there absent - a quality of infinite value to the Marcel who will later say:

> Tant de fois, au cours de ma vie, la réalité m'avait tant déçu parce qu'au moment où je la percevais, mon imagination, qui était mon seul organe pour jouir de la beauté, ne pouvait s'appliquer à elle, en vertu de la loi inévitable qui veut qu'on ne puisse imaginer que ce qui est absent. (IV,450-51)

Yet, by contrast with play, reality is still very much there. Total subjective fantasy is never allowed to take over in Proust.[59] Withdrawal to read allows the child to see the beauty in reality, without necessarily interfering with his awareness of the reality of reality, as it were: 'Assis dans le petit salon, où j'attendais l'heure du dîner en lisant, j'entendis l'eau dégoutter

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[59] Dana Brand, on the other hand, claims that it does, that this separation from a world which is nevertheless so near allows the child to see it as he wants to see it rather than how it is (Brand, pp.492-93). I see no reason to be so uncharitable and prefer to believe that it permits him to see it as he wants to see it, *at the same time as* seeing it as it really is.

de nos marronniers, mais je savais que l'averse ne faisait que vernir leurs feuilles et qu'ils promettaient de demeurer là comme des gages d'été' (I,150).[60]

This then, is the 'le plaisir du texte', as Barthes recognises, acknowledging the example of Proust:

> Le plaisir du texte peut se définir par une pratique (sans aucun risque de répression): lieu et temps de lecture: maison, province, repas proche, lampe, famille là où il faut, c'est-à-dire au loin et non loin (Proust dans le petit cabinet sentant l'iris), etc.[61]

But it is also 'le plaisir du texte' from the point of view of the writer. Perhaps this had been implicit as early as *Journées de Lecture*, where the formula for reading, 'communication au fond de la solitude', could have been equally applicable to writing (reading thus becoming a *mirror* image, as well as an analogical image of writing). However, it only finally becomes explicit in *Le Temps retrouvé*, where in another confined space from which society is held at a slight distance, the prince de Guermantes's anti-chamber, Marcel will experience the sudden revelation of the nature of his vocation as an artist. Like the child of Combray, he too will have to withdraw in order to see the world better. His art will be cut off from reality, yet will be intimately connected with it, a point that is made, significantly in terms of reading, at the beginning of the final volume:

> Car peut-être j'aurais pu conclure [...] que la vie apprend à rabaisser le prix de la lecture et nous montre que ce que l'écrivain nous vante ne valait pas grand-chose; mais je pouvais tout aussi bien en conclure que la lecture au contraire nous apprend à relever la valeur de la vie, valeur que nous n'avons pas su apprécier et combien elle était grande. (IV,298)

For in *A la recherche*, Proust arrives at a broader conception of writing, as well as a broader conception of reading: his novel is not only to contain the imaginary and fantastic, the *Arabian Nights* of the twentieth century, but the mundane and real, the Saint-Simon *Mémoires* of Marcel's time. Interestingly, the limitations of a purely imaginative approach to writing are glimpsed in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Le poète adolescent maudit les qualités positives quand il ne les connaît que par un père qui à des heures qu'il ne connaît pas, lui, vient l'arracher durement à des occupations sublimes au moment même où elles l'élèvent si haut au-dessus de cette terre pour le ramener aux occupations vulgaires de la vie quotidienne [...]. Mais plus

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[60] Perhaps this proves the point in the preceding note. The child does not lose his grasp of the fact that it is simply a wet summer's day, but he is also able to see the trees as idealised 'gages d'été'.

[61] Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), p.82.

> tard quand la paresse, le désordre, l'inexactitude, la distraction, la fièvre ont donné peu à peu à sa vie la figure chaotique d'un enfer sublime, combien il goûte ces natures positives et avisées, dont la vie a l'harmonie paisible d'une chose à sa place, d'un mouvement parfait, la monotone douceur des heures qui sonnent régulièrement!' (JS,409)

But it is as if he as yet fails to acknowledge that these (adult) qualities also have a specific place in *writing* - perhaps, indeed, they are the very qualities that would have transformed the fragments of *Jean Santeuil* into a finished novel. In the reading scene of *Combray*, by contrast, Marcel's parents, at least, know that 'le respect des obligations morales, la fidélité aux amis, *l'exécution d'une œuvre*, l'observation d'un régime, ont un fondement plus sûr dans des habitudes aveugles que dans des transports momentanés ardents et stériles' (I,91-92) (my italics) - even if the child himself is yet to discover this. Thus the writer needs to be an artisan as well as an artist, someone firmly embedded in the realities of the world, as well as excessively aesthetic flights of the imagination. It is for these reasons that *A la recherche* is to incorporate salon scenes and rich metaphorical composition into a single text, just as the adventures of Marcel's book and the gardener's daughter or the kitchen maid are incorporated into a single summer afternoon's activity, just as idolatry and rêverie, internal and external are fused in the single experience of reading.

Once we begin to see the child's reading at *Combray* as an image of writing, the points of comparison begin to proliferate. The kitchen maid and the gardener's daughter are themselves digressions of the kind that the child so enjoys when reading Bergotte ('J'étais déçu quand il reprenait le fil' (I,94)), along with his 'philosophical idealism'. Indeed, the Bergotte section of the text follows close on the heels of a piece of the narrator's own 'philosophical idealism':

> Car 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 l'extérieur, avec une sorte de découragement, en entendant toujours autour de soi cette sonorité identique qui n'est pas écho du dehors mais retentissement d'une vibration interne. (I,85-86)

But it is not simply that Bergotte's work has influenced or encouraged the narrator to write as he does. Reading is no longer simply an *incitement* to personal creativity. This philosophical idealism like the 'digressions' from book to world and back again, also characterise the child's *experience* of the passage. Now the process of creation, activity and movement is simultaneous with, even part of, the process of reading. Thus, Lloyd James Austin's remark about the child writer of 'Les Clochers de Martinville' might be better applied to the child

reader of the garden scene: 'Pour la première fois, [...] l'enfant accomplit son devoir d'artiste.'[62]

The reading scene also provides glimpses of an aesthetic theory that is to emerge as we progress through the novel. Just as the child in his idolatry is not doing what he thinks he is doing, so too in *A la recherche* he is right for the wrong reasons or at least, without knowing why. 'D'après ses livres, j'imaginais Bergotte comme un vieillard faible et déçu qui avait perdu des enfants et ne s'était jamais consolé' (I,95), remarks Marcel. Socially, the child is later proved wrong. But these early illusions are, in another way, eventually reinstated. They prove to be an early manifestation of the theory put forward in *Le Temps retrouvé* that the writer's 'vraie vie', as opposed to his social personality, is to be deduced from his work. Similarly, the fusion of the two faces of reading - idolatry and personal creation - previews the eventual conclusions of the narrator that his readers are to be 'les propres lecteurs d'eux-mêmes' as well as travelling into the 'secret world' of another man to see the world through his eyes. 'Lire, [...] c'est mettre en œuvre son esthétique' (I,752), as Proust wrote in one of the preliminary versions of the *Combray* reading scene.

And so finally, Proust not only fuses rêverie and idolatry, solitude and society, imagination and reality, but also, in the reading-writing metaphor of *Combray*, author and reader - and even literary theorist. The traditional edges between these categories are blurred, just as reading Bergotte breaks down the divisions within the child Marcel ('les obstacles et les séparations semblaient avoir été enlevés' (I,93)). This is only to be expected in a writer whose work brings together intertextuality and pastiche, which are both, in a sense, a way of blurring the edges between reading and writing. Furthermore, as Leslie Hill points out, this blurring of categories has been going on from the very first page of *Du Côté de chez Swann*:

> It is no accident that the novel opens with a long meditation on the limits of recognition. From the first lines of the text a new posture of reading is sketched out by the narrator. It is a posture of reading that relinquishes the specular relation between subject and aesthetic object and which begins to explore reading as a mode of affective fusion and self-injection. The polarity between subject and aesthetic object loses its pivot as the initial words reveal.[63]

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[62] Lloyd James Austin, 'Proust et la poétique de la réminiscence', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray*, 22 (1972), 1338-45 (p.1342).

[63] Leslie Hill, 'Proust and the art of reading', *Comparative Criticism*, 2 (1980), 167-85 (p.174). He is of course talking of the famous passage of *A la Recherche* : 'je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de lire, mais ces réflexions avaient pris un tour un peu particulier; il me

Reading as an image of childhood

Reading thus provides Proust with an image of writing in endless different ways and reader and writer begin to merge into one. But what of the specific relationship between reading and childhood? As we have seen, Proust seems unable to write about reading, even to theorise about reading, without appealing to examples from childhood. Conversely, he seems unable to write about childhood without devoting pages on end to reading. The idea of a necessary connection between childhood and reading is certainly not unique to Proust. Francine Dugast, historian of the literary theme of childhood, writes:

> Le livre se trouve obligatoirement lié à l'enfance dans une civilisation où le savoir se transmet par l'écrit, médium privilégié aussi bien pour l'acquisition des connaissances nécessaires à l'insertion sociale que pour le déclenchement du rêve et fonctionnement de l'imaginaire.[64]

Hence so many other self-portraits with a book in other *récits d'enfance*. Some writers bear a particular resemblance to Proust in this respect: Alain-Fournier, Stendhal, Léon Daudet, as well as Ruskin.[65] But few devote quite the same amount of attention to childhood reading as does Proust. Curiously, many writers show reading constantly metamorphosing back into play. This is a tendency noted by Chombart de Lauwe, who points out that 'bien des imitations de personnages ou de situations décrites dans des journaux ou romans servent de point de départ à une aventure collective'.[66] The obvious examples of this are the way in which Daudet's 'Petit Chose' or Vallès's Jacques Vingtras transform their reading of *Robinson Crusoe* into endless games. Thus reading has a general tendency to give way to the essential activity of the literary childhood, play.

But, as has already been seen, this transformation takes place only once in *Combray* (I,152). For the most part, reading requires no such transformation to become the essential activity of Marcel's childhood. It takes on all Huizinga's characteristics and functions of play and has many more besides. Furthermore, the central position of the reading scene in

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semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage: une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François premier et de Charles Quint.' (I,3)

[64] Francine Dugast-Portes, 'Le Livre dans le récit d'enfance', *Interférences*, 12 (1981), 63-77 (p.64).

[65] See Appendix 2, extracts 7, 20, 23 and 32, respectively.

[66] Chombart de Lauwe, pp.127-28.

Combray and its potentially infinite length, containing *Combray* as well as being contained by it - plus the fact that critics keep returning to it as if it was somehow the key to Proust's work - reinforce the idea that reading is the central and single most important activity of Marcel's early life. If *Combray* is a kind of distilled essence of his childhood, then reading appears as the essence of that essence.

But it is even more than this. Even in Proust's early works, reading tends to imply an intensification of certain aspects of childhood. For the young Jean Santeuil, 'les choses n'étaient pas encore l'une de beaucoup de choses du même genre mais des personnes dont l'équivalent n'existait pas' (JS,334). This seems particularly true of books. *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, for example, is 'quelque chose d'unique et nullement un roman sur les comédiens' (JS,315). Indeed, for Jean, all experience is a little like fiction; he is 'à cet âge où la terre n'est pas devenue quelque chose de parfaitement connu et réel, où l'on ne serait pas étonné qu'un endroit planté d'arbres et où on peut marcher donnât accès sur le monde irréel' (JS,305). The similarities between childhood experience in general and reading in particular are made more explicit at one point, where it is claimed that 'beaucoup de choses que nous ne comprenons pas font des événements des livres, comme des événements de la vie à cet âge-là, des sortes de rêves où certaines parties restent obscures' (JS,315-16). This is the case even when *François le Champi* is being read aloud to the young Marcel: 'L'action s'engagea; elle me parut d'autant plus obscure que dans ce temps-là, quand je lisais, je rêvassais souvent pendant des pages entières, à tout autre chose' (I,41). And here it is exacerbated by the mother's deliberate omission of certain morally dubious passages.

This brings us to an even more striking source of similarity between childhood and reading. For the notion of withdrawal into a 'womb with a view' also characterises Combray itself. The child is kept in a closed, protective little world, but is nevertheless allowed glimpses of a wide world beyond: Swann and the Jockey Club, uncle Adolphe and his 'actresses', Legrandin's relatives and Balbec, Mlle Vinteuil and homosexuality, various members of the Guermantes family. As Dana Brand puts it, 'the experience of reading is analogous to the childhood worlds we have seen in that it involves imaginative contact with what one is not able to experience'.[67] But again, it is not completely imaginative contact. The

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[67] Brand, pp.491-92.

child is allowed to experience fragments of the realms of Legrandin, Swann, Mlle Vinteuil and the Guermantes. The problem is that he is cushioned from complete knowledge of these supposedly dangerous worlds, forcing him to fill in the gaps with his own, often erroneous, imagination.

Nor is this without sociological interest. Within the enclosure of Combray, there is that of the family, self-sufficient, yet, like the invalid aunt at her window, intensely watchful of the world beyond. In fact, the end of the nineteenth century saw the growth of a concept of the bourgeois family as such a protective enclosure, shielding the child from many of the vicissitudes of the outside world, in order better to facilitate its eventual entry into that world.[68] The spiral inwards continues with the child's attempts to withdraw from the family, yet keeping comfortingly close, in the garden scene. And finally there is the cradle of his own consciousness, which prevents him from complete knowledge of even what he is allowed to experience: 'Et ma pensée n'était-elle pas comme une autre crèche au fond de laquelle je sentais que je restais enfoncé, même pour regarder ce qui se passait au-dehors?' (I,83). Proust is clearly very much aware of creating a nest of enclosures, each an image and intensification of the last.

Conclusions

Thus, reading features as an image of childhood throughout Proust's work, and the reading-text of *A la recherche* as a mise en abyme of *Combray*. But if reading is also an image of writing, then the potential consequences for Proust's treatment of childhood are enormous. For this implies that childhood could also be a metaphor (or allegory, or parable) for writing, and the child an image of the writer. The child who reads is certainly an image of Proust himself. The prematurely ageing, sickly writer's notorious cork-lined room is the ultimate 'womb with a view', so that he is actually drawing a self-portrait when he evokes the young, healthy child of the idyllic garden scene.[69] Thus the central myth of the *récit*

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[68] See Priscilla Robertson, 'Home as a Nest: Middle Class Childhood in Nineteenth Century Europe', in *The History of Childhood*, ed. by Lloyd de Mause (London: Souvenir Press, 1976), pp.407-31.

[69] If this is hard to accept, we are also given the 'intermediate' image of Léonie as it were, who in her sick room binds together the fragments of the outside world in her imagination, the same outside world that is experienced by the child from his sentry box. Furthermore, as seen above, the 'spectacle dans un lit' reveals her to be more childlike than Marcel.

d'enfance, the image of the child-artist is upheld - if through the mediation of the image of the reader-writer. This is later vindicated by more modern, pedagogical commentators such as Georges Jean:

> Qu'est-ce qu'un créateur, au demeurant? J'estime qu'un enfant qui sait lire se révèle créateur autant qu'un enfant qui deviendra écrivain. [...] La lecture consiste à récréer au départ de cet objet mort qu'est un livre sur les rayons d'une bibliothèque.[70]

But Jean, like Coe, insists on the mediation of play between child and creation: 'Cette création, au niveau du langage ou du graphisme, c'est cette activité à la fois grave et gratuite, profondément ancrée chez l'enfant: le jeu.'[71] Proust, as has been seen, removes this intermediary term in the equation and replaces it with one that is more literary, so that, perhaps, his child is a much sharper image of the writer.

Or maybe for Proust the child is not simply an image for the writer? At the end of the first section of *A la recherche*, reading does give way to writing, even if it does not directly cause (or incite?) it. This then, is the essential difference between Marcel and many of his contemporaries in the *récit d'enfance*. Where the likes of Pierre Nozière or the children of 'La Grande Époque' play, Marcel is already literary, immersed in reading and ultimately writing. Perhaps we can now see only too well why Proust disliked comparisons between *Combray* and such works as Larbaud's *Enfantines*.[72] Iwasaki draws attention to the similarities between two passages which describe the child's experience of the opacity of words and the resulting difficulties of verbal expression, the famous 'Zut! zut! zut! zut!' of Marcel (I,153) and the following extract from 'Le Couperet', where Milou tries to compose a poem:

> Mais les mots, tous les mots de la langue française sont là, rangés comme une armée qui lui barre la route. [...] Il tente un dernier assaut: Oh! se rendre maître d'une centaine de mots seulement et les forcer à dire cette chose importante qu'il a à dire! Un dernier effort tend son esprit, cela se gonfle à éclater, c'est un muscle désespérément raidi qui fait mal... Il succombe soudain, et abandonne l'entreprise; accablé, avec une sorte d'écœurement, et la sensation d'un vide immense en lui-même.[73]

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[70] Georges Jean, 'L'Enfant et la culture vécue: psychopédagogie de l'acte de lire', *Marche romane*, 26 (1976), 5-19 (p.10).

[71] Jean, p.10.

[72] See Chapter 1, where Jacques de Lacretelle remembers Proust's dislike of such comparisons.

[73] Larbaud, pp.418-19.

The comparison is fair enough as far as it goes. But it fails to recognise the fundamental difference between Marcel and Milou. Where the latter gives up, the former goes on to write his (prose) poem, and the sense of exaltation he feels in so doing could not be further from Milou's sense of failure.

However, if we look more closely at the closing pages of *Combray*, we find that Marcel's success is qualified ever so slightly. The narrator may present the 'clochers de Martinville' as 'le petit morceau suivant que j'ai retrouvé depuis et auquel je n'ai eu à faire que peu de changements' (I,179), but this implies that it *has* been altered, however little. Even here then, there are two narrators, even if their normal roles in the rest of *Combray* are reversed. The child, it seems, cannot exist as an artist entirely on his own. Perhaps the fact that the myth of the child-artist has to be mediated at all, whether by play or by reading, suggests that it is not to be taken too literally - even in Proust. And Aristotle taught us that any metaphor depends on differences as well as similarities. Caillois saw this clearly in the play-art comparison, when he wrote, 'En effet, le jeu ne produit rien: ni biens ni œuvres. Il est essentiellement stérile.'[74] This is foreshadowed in *A la recherche*, as Proust gradually comes to use play as a euphemism for necessarily non-reproductive, non-procreative homosexual activities.[75] Reading may be better insofar as it is a productive, creative activity, in the loosest sense of these terms, but ultimately, like play and unlike art, it neither produces nor creates a finished product. Reading may mimic writing more closely than play, it may be a form of rehearsal for writing or a form of encouragement - and childhood may bear the same relationship to art. But reading is not equal to writing (any more than the child is actually an artist), as Proust so dogmatically set down in *Journées de Lecture*.

The positive point to be gleaned from this discussion is nonetheless vital to our understanding of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The fact remains that, through the figure of the child and especially the reading child, Proust and his narrator discover, express and possibly solve their problems as writers. Moreover, the closest Marcel gets to actually being a writer before the discoveries of *Le Temps retrouvé* is in *Combray*, especially in the reading scene and the incident of the Martinville spires. In fact, it is the only point in the whole novel where Proust's hero and eventual narrator is caught in the act of narrating. Proust is thus

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[74] Caillois, p.35.

[75] See the end of the section, 'Play in the Champs-Elysées', above.

questioning those who interpret the myth of the child artist too literally more than he is questioning the myth itself.

And so, to summarise the story so far, in the case of nature we find a myth of the *récit d'enfance* simultaneously affirmed and denied by Proust; in the case of play we find a myth very much denied, even desecrated; and in the case of the child-artist we find a myth to some extent perpetuated, but in a way that could not be better fitted to a writer with Proust's style - that is, metaphorically. The next chapter will examine the precise relationship that holds between childhood and this particularly Proustian phenomenon of metaphor.

CHAPTER 4: METAPHOR, NAMING AND NECESSITY

'Où trouverai-je à présent des mots
assez frais, des mots assez jeunes?'
(Loti) [1]

Metaphor and Childhood - the argument against

'C'est un garçon qui aimera toujours mieux écrire «fusil» qu'*arme qui vomit la mort*, laments young Jacques Vingtras's teacher in *L'Enfant* by Jules Vallès.[2] We can be fairly sure that Proust's teachers never had cause to make the same complaint, but the general point made by Vallès is of direct relevance to the status of the child-artist myth in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Jacques Vingtras is being used to show that the simple language of childhood is incompatible with the intricacies and detours of literary style, particularly metaphor. And Proust, rightly or wrongly, is generally held to be one of the most 'literary' writers of all, particularly in his use of metaphor. This chapter will first sketch out the traditional - and as suggested by Vallès, not always entirely untroubled - relationship between metaphor and childhood in the *récit d'enfance*. It will then look at the precise links that have been perceived between the two throughout the history of the genre and will try to determine the extent to which each of these connections is present in *A la recherche*. Most importantly, however, it will examine the implications of all this for Proust's own highly metaphorical style. Finally, this chapter will look at Proust's interest in the phenomenon of naming, its links with childhood in his work and, once again, the light that it throws on his use of metaphor.

The example of Jacques Vingtras does not mean that the links so far uncovered between child and artist in the *récit d'enfance* are necessarily weakened by the introduction of style and technique into the equation. As Francine Dugast-Portes points out:

> Beaucoup de procédés de création, plus ou moins explicités, prennent [...] leur source dans l'enfance: transcriptions de réminiscences, de synesthésies, d'hyperesthésies; le jeu sur les signifiants - apparent dans les citations de comptines, dans les créations de mots et de noms de personnage, dans les 'mots d'enfance' [...].[3]

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[1] Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d'un enfant* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1988), p.41.

[2] Jules Vallès, *L'Enfant*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975-90), II (1990), 139-388 (p.344).

[3] Francine Dugast-Portes, 'Le Livre dans le récit d'enfance', *Interférences*, 12 (1981), 63-77 (p.75). See also her much fuller discussion of this in Francine Dugast, *L'Image de l'enfance dans la prose littéraire de 1918 à 1930*, 2 vols (Lille: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1981), especially Chapter XI, 'L'Enfance dans le style de l'œuvre'.

The list could be extended to include, for example, Vallès's own parataxis or puns. And Darien makes a particular link between the child and irony, claiming that 'l'ironie n'est pas rare chez lui; et il se venge par la moquerie, toujours juste du personnage ou de la doctrine qui cherche à peser sur lui'.[4]

Yet the case of metaphor is more complicated and controversial. The bitterness of Vallès's satire may be rare, but many of Proust's literary predecessors and influences denounce the connection between childhood and metaphor with equal strength. In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot praises the practical intelligence of the child and criticises his teacher's pompous preference for metaphor, exclaiming:

> O Aristotle! if you had had the advantage of being 'the freshest modern' instead of the greatest ancient, would you not have mingled your praise of metaphorical speech as a sign of high intelligence, with a lamentation that intelligence so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor, - that we can so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else.[5]

Similarly, for the sake of his model child, Émile, Rousseau condemns all such perversions of rhetoric, in favour of a clear, transparent language in which a spade is without fail called a spade.[6] Closer in time to Proust, but again in the name of childhood, Alain-Fournier warns against 'les mots, les théories, et les phrases tricolores' which place a screen between the author and the world:

> Exprimer la vie comme s'il n'y avait pas entre vous et elle les mots, l'exprimer comme aux premiers jours du monde [...] ; l'exprimer comme aux premiers étonnements extasiés de l'enfance; l'exprimer plus simplement peut-être, tout simplement comme on vous a appris à la voir.[7]

Later in the twentieth century it would be precisely this kind of opacity that Todorov would isolate as the defining feature of figurative language.[8] Around the same time, Barthes would

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[4] Georges Darien, *Le Voleur* (Paris: Folio, 1987), p.52. This is put into practice by the narrator of his earlier novel, *Bas les cœurs!*

[5] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.209.

[6] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou De l'éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 4 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-69), IV (1969), 239-868. See especially p.498, where the 'detours' of adult language are particularly associated with sexual matters.

[7] Alain-Fournier in a letter to his sister of September 1906, quoted by Stephen Ullmann, *The Image in the Modern French Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p.99.

[8] Tzvetan Todorov, 'Tropes et Figures', in *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, 3 vols (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), III, 2006-23.

echo George Eliot's scorn for metaphor and those who behave as if 'il suffisait de mal nommer les choses pour les poétiser'.[9] What is more, the 'necessary connection' that he claims is wrongly perceived between childhood and poetry is mediated by an equally misguided necessary connection between childhood and metaphor:

> La métaphore, l'image, les concetti sont mis au crédit de l'enfance comme signes d'une pure spontanéité, alors que consciemment ou non, ils sont le siège d'une forte élaboration, supposent une «profondeur» où la maturité individuelle a une part décisive.[10]

This suggests that Vallès, Alain-Fournier and even perhaps Rousseau are also writing against - and thus in some sense acknowledging - a long tradition which connects childhood to metaphor. Historically, Barthes implies, there is some kind of necessary connection between the two, even if for some it is a negative one. Perhaps then, this link merits the status of a literary 'myth' of the *récit d'enfance* and, insofar as it confirms the existence of such a tradition, the argument against is just a special case of the argument for.

Metaphor and Childhood - the argument for

The claim that there is a link between metaphor and childhood in fact appears in many different guises across the ages and the disciplines. Firstly it appears to be a fact of modern psychology that children both enjoy and understand metaphor. According to Ellen Winner, 'preschoolers seem to delight in metaphoric renamings', and though older children often dismiss the metaphors addressed to them as nonsensical, they appreciate the more explicit comparison of analogy.[11] What is more, the comprehension of metaphor and analogy is now held to be essential to children's learning processes: 'they help the child make sense of the universe'.[12] Interestingly, the same point is made by Jean Mouton, an early critic of Proust: 'Toute une partie de la pédagogie repose sur l'emploi des images: la terre sera comparée à un

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[9] Roland Barthes, 'La Littérature selon Minou Drouet', in *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), pp.153-60 (p.158).

[10] Barthes, p.155.

[11] Ellen Winner, *The Point of Words: Children's Understanding of Metaphor and Irony* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp.103-106.

[12] Winner, p.106.

ballon, la péninsule italienne à une botte.'[13] Thus Alain-Fournier's aim to express life as he was originally taught to see it is perhaps best achieved through metaphor after all.

Secondly, it is claimed by some that the child's mind and vision actually work by metaphoric processes (which would explain why teaching by analogy is so successful). Winner concludes: 'Metaphor comprehension calls on the child to categorize objects in a new way, on the basis of similarity. This comes naturally to children. They cannot help doing this.'[14] Indeed, this discovery had been made by psychologists before Proust wrote *A la recherche*. The observation that, unlike the adult, the child sees and thinks analogically sends Compayré into his own flights of metaphoric fancy:

> Pour passer d'une idée à une autre, un rien lui suffit, une analogie quelconque, si vague qu'elle soit. [...] Où nous ne voyons que des différences, ils aperçoivent, eux, des rapports; ils établissent des rapprochements qui nous déconcertent. La pensée de l'enfant est ailée et légère; elle traverse des ponts invisibles et fragiles, que la réflexion, si elle y appuyait, ferait crouler, mais sur lesquels glisse doucement l'imagination enfantine, comme l'araignée sur le fil ténu de sa toile.[15]

This could be interpreted, as another early psychologist Perez suggests, as the power of habit, the desire to reduce the potentially frightening unknown to the known.[16] The idea is given literary illustration by Henry Bordeaux, a contemporary of Proust, when the child characters of *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants* encounter an aeroplane for the first time:

> - Ce ne peut être qu'un oiseau puisqu'il vole et qu'il a des ailes.
> - C'est un char, car il y a des roues.
> - C'est une machine: il y a un homme.[17]

Alternatively, seeing things as other things, could simply be due to the literally different perspective of childhood, as suggested by Renard's *Poil de Carotte*: 'Quelques grêles orties

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[13] Jean Mouton, *Le Style de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Nizet, 1969) (first published in 1941), p.66.

[14] Winner, p.188.

[15] Gabriel Compayré, *L'Évolution intellectuelle et morale de l'enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1896), pp.173-74.

[16] Bernard Perez, *The First Three Years of Childhood*, trans. by Alice M. Christie (London: Sonnenschein, 1895), p.138.

[17] Henry Bordeaux, *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants* (Paris:Flammarion, 1913), p.185. See Chapter 1 for evidence of Proust's interest in this work.

en parent le seuil, et si Poil de Carotte les regarde à plat ventre, elles lui semblent une forêt.'[18]

A third common claim about the connection between childhood and metaphor is that not only are children's thought processes metaphoric, but their language, both written and spoken, also tends to be metaphoric - or at least often appears to be. The process of reduction of the unfamiliar to the familiar, some say, takes place on a linguistic as well as conceptual level. Winner claims that 'over half of a child's early words may be overextended, that is applied too broadly'.[19] Early psychologists also seem to have been aware of this tendency, even if they are rather too ready to accept this symptom of a limited vocabulary as metaphor. Compayré, for example, quotes cases of such overextensions, concluding, 'insuffisance de langage, dira-t-on, et pure métaphore'.[20] Or perhaps it is an insufficiency of our own adult language that we see such examples as mere overextension at all. Malrieu, critic and cultivator of child poets, makes the following point:

> Ce qui parfois, disons-le, peut paraître poétique, n'est qu'une maladresse de langage. Parfois nous leur prêtons un sens plus profond qu'ils n'en ont; mais n'oublions pas qu'ils sont directement transcrits d'une langue vive et que nous les traduisons en langue morte, en langue adulte. Les mots sont les mêmes et autres.[21]

This remark, opens up another possibility, namely that those involved in encouraging children to write, such as Malrieu, impose the rule of metaphor on them. That is, even where children's thought processes are not naturally metaphoric, their written language can be made to be so. This would seem to be part of Barthes's complaint about the now-forgotten child-poet, Minou Drouet, in his tirade against the connection between childhood and metaphor. Jacques Vingtras's teacher, with whom the discussion began, provides a fictional example of the same phenomenon.

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[18] Jules Renard, *Poil de Carotte*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-70), II (1970), 633-771 (p.723).

[19] Winner, p.90.

[20] Compayré, p.146.

[21] Max Primault, Henry Lhong and Jean Malrieu, *Terres de l'Enfance. Le Mythe de l'Enfance dans la littérature contemporaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), p.194.

Nevertheless, there are many who believe that children are capable of both deliberately and spontaneously using metaphor. The early child-psychologist, Egger, admits that children, with their limited vocabulary have a tendency to let one word do for several uses, but gives examples of what he calls 'véritable raisonnement analogique'. Of one particular case, he comments:

> Il fait une vraie figure de rhétorique, ce qu'il apprendra plus tard à nommer un *trope*: c'est la substitution, très naturelle, si l'on veut, mais réfléchie, d'un terme à un autre, d'une périphrase à un nom propre. Il est intéressant de voir ainsi pondre ce sentiment de la variété dans l'expression, qui est une des richesses du langage humain.[22]

On a more literary level, one particular kind of image, which might be called the 'naïve simile', is associated with the child's voice, from Jacques Vingtras to *Le Petit Nicolas*. The following description from Darien's *Bas les cœurs!* is typical: 'Il a les yeux en boules de loto, des narines poilues, des oreilles en feuilles de chou et un gros menton rasé de près, tout piqué de trous, qui ressemble à une pomme d'arrosoir.'[23] This tendency is often contrasted with adult voices which are characterised by cliché. 'Tout est bien qui finit bien, mais je te préviens que l'argent ne fait pas le bonheur', recites Poil de Carotte's mother, adding, 'Non, les bons comptes font les bons amis.'[24] Renard, in fact, seems to have shared Vallès' dislike for unnecessarily flowery and poetic language, criticising those who confuse 'l'image vaguement belle' with 'l'image exacte, bien supérieure'.[25] Proust, in his criticism of Sainte-Beuve, seems to present the opposite point of view, when he expresses a dislike of 'images [...] justes, [...] qui expliquent au lieu de suggérer, qui ne se subordonnent à aucun but de beauté et d'harmonie' (CS,270). Yet the two opinions are not entirely incompatible. The distance between the rustic imagery of Vallès or Renard and the extended comparisons or striking, learned metaphors of more 'literary' writers such as Proust is not necessarily so great. Of course, literary use of metaphor goes well beyond the reductive or explicative

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[22] Émile Egger, 'Observations et réflexions sur le développement de l'intelligence et du langage chez les enfants', *Compte-Rendu de l'Académie des Sciences morales et politiques*, n.s. 11 (1879), 209-45 and 479-511 (pp.493-94).

[23] Darien, *Bas les cœurs!*, p.23. Examples could have been taken equally from the works of Vallès, Audoux, Boylesve or Renard.

[24] Renard, p.752-53.

[25] Renard, quoted by Henri Bouiller, 'Jules Renard, l'écrivain qui prit peur', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 83 (1983), 427-38 (p.434).

analogies of childhood, but the underlying principle of similarity within difference is the same. The sophisticated techniques of the former could at least be *derived* from the humble simplicity of the latter and the literary gulf between the young Jacques Vingtras and his teacher is perhaps one of quality or originality rather than degree.

The fourth possibility is that the metaphoric workings of the child's mind might be expressed by means other than language. The early psychologist, Sully, finds a symbolism analogous to 'the symbolism of language' running through children's drawings, as does his French colleague Passy, who remarks, 'Il y a là comme un rudiment d'écriture symbolique.'[26] Similarly, metaphor can be viewed as the linguistic equivalent of certain types of play. In fact, Henriot, a modern play theorist sees metaphor as the defining characteristic of *all* play, devoting a whole book to the analysis of 'le procès métaphorique' which he claims constitutes play.[27] The metaphoric potential of play is certainly exploited by writers of the *récit d'enfance* (as we glimpsed in the previous chapter). The naïve simile is not the only kind of imaginative metamorphosis accepted by Vallès, for instance:

> Et voilà que je me mets à bondir! Je me fais l'effet d'un animal dans un champ, qui aurait cassé sa corde; et je grogne, et je caracole comme un cabri, au grand étonnement de mon petit camarade, qui me regarde gambader, et s'attend à me voir brouter.[28]

In a similar way, the children in the *récits d'enfance* of Anatole France and Valery Larbaud transform or rename elements of their surroundings to fit in with their games.[29] Clearly then, there is a metaphoric element in imaginative play, but as Winner points out, in what she calls 'symbolic play metaphors' 'the object is transformed on both a verbal and a gestural level'. Furthermore, in these 'symbolic play metaphors', one object becomes a simple tool for imagining another, rather than revealing some new aspect of it.[30] Thus the imaginative

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[26] James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (London: Longmans, Green, 1895), p.334, and Passy, 'Note sur les dessins d'enfants', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 192 (1891), 614-21 (p.614).

[27] Jacques Henriot, *Sous couleur de jouer: la métaphore ludique* (Paris: Corti, 1989). See especially pp.262-63 and p.300.

[28] Vallès, p.165.

[29] See, for example, Valery Larbaud, 'La Grande Époque', in *Enfantines*, in *Œuvres* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), pp.395-535 (pp.441-72). This is quoted in the previous chapter, as are examples from Anatole France.

[30] Winner, pp.96-98.

transformations of play have something more and something less than true metaphor, despite their metaphoric content.

The final connection commonly made between childhood and metaphor is perhaps the most interesting and paradoxical. Certain late-twentieth-century writers and critics suggest that whether or not the child speaks, writes or even thinks metaphorically, metaphor might still be a way of *translating* the child's non-linguistic and non-metaphoric experience into language. As Richard Coe points out:

> For the writer, the paradox is an obvious one. More than any other factor in human experience, it is the use of rational language which destroys the child's 'intuitive' relationship with the world. [...] On the other hand, the writer has no tool other than language at his disposal - hence the tendency [...] to use language to a greater or lesser degree *irrationally*.[31]

The concept of irrationality might account for the high metaphorical density of the *récit d'enfance*, noted by, among others, Dugast: 'De très nombreuses métaphores, en effet, apparaissent sous la plume des écrivains qui évoquent l'enfance.'[32] This phenomenon need not necessarily be interpreted in terms of irrationality. Returning to Todorov's characterisation of figurative language as *opaque*, we might see metaphor as restoring to language some of the opacity it has for the child - the kind of opacity encountered by Larbaud's Milou, when he finds an army of words barring his way to writing poetry.[33] According to Georges Jean, it is this opacity that accounts for children's enjoyment of poetry: 'Par la poésie, l'enfant redécouvre l'usage premier, primitif, archaïque de sa langue maternelle dans son opacité de matériau sonore et expressif.'[34] Alternatively, we might seek an explanation through the notion of *irresponsibility*. Lacan writes, 'La parole admirable de l'enfant est peut-être transcendante, révélation du ciel, oracle de petit dieu, mais il est évident qu'elle ne l'engage à rien.'[35] The same might be said of the writer who calls a spade a

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[31] Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass was Taller: Autobiography and the experience of childhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.253.

[32] Francine Dugast, *L'Image de l'enfance*, II, 544.

[33] Larbaud, pp.418-19. This is quoted fully in the preceding chapter.

[34] Georges Jean, 'L'Enfant et la Poésie', *Europe*, 607-608 (1979), 158-165 (p.162).

[35] Lacan, *Le Séminaire I: Les Écrits techniques de Freud* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p.235.

teaspoon. This has no repercussions in the 'world of work' which Lacan calls the domain of adults.

Whatever the case, this final connection between childhood and metaphor, the self-conscious literary artifice of the latter translating the naïve impressions of the former, is probably best summed up by the modern writer, Nathalie Sarraute, in her autobiography of childhood *Enfance*:

> - Des images, des mots qui évidemment ne pourraient pas se former à cet âge-là dans ta tête...
> - Bien sûr que non. Pas plus d'ailleurs qu'ils n'auraient pu se former dans la tête d'un adulte ... C'était ressenti, comme toujours, hors des mots, globalement ... Mais ces mots et ces images sont ce qui permet de saisir tant bien que mal, de retenir ces sensations.[36]

Possible implications for Proust

'L'expressivité d'une langue est toujours régressive', at least according to Piaget, the most influential child psychologist of the twentieth century.[37] If this is the case, then no aspect of Proust's style - or anyone else's for that matter - escapes the kinds of connections made between childhood and metaphor above. According to Vincenot, however, this remark is *particularly* applicable to Proust. In what appears to be an attempt to establish some kind of Piagetic critical theory, he applies three aspects of the child's vision - as characterized by Piaget - to Proust's style: firstly, 'le réalisme enfantin' (unawareness of the existence of the self or its boundaries with the outside world and thus a tendency to take one's own viewpoint as immediately objective and absolute); secondly, 'l'animisme enfantin' (a tendency to attribute life to inanimate objects); and finally, 'l'artificialisme enfantin' (a tendency to assign an artificial origin to natural objects).[38] It is the last two of these that are metaphoric in nature, or at least, Vincenot claims they lie at the root of many of Proust's metaphors. Indeed, his analysis of a selection of Proustian metaphors as 'animistic' or 'artificialist' is irrefutable. (The latter phenomenon was glimpsed in Chapter 2, where we looked at Proust's art metaphors.) What is less certain, is the extent to which this justifies Vincenot's much

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[36] Nathalie Sarraute, *Enfance* (Paris: Folio, 1983), p.17.

[37] Piaget, quoted by Claude Vincenot, 'Les Procédés littéraires de Marcel Proust et la représentation du monde chez l'enfant', *Revue des Sciences humaines*, 33 (1968), 5-28 (p.6).

[38] Vincenot, p.5.

bigger claim that throughout *A la recherche*, not just in *Combray*, Proust's images are drawn directly from 'le fond commun de l'expression littéraire et enfantine'.[39] The rest of the chapter will be largely concerned with this question.

Another issue is the extent to which Proust was himself *aware* of the mythology linking childhood to metaphor and his own position with respect to it. If his is indeed 'une mentalité infantile miraculeusement retrouvée dans l'effort d'expression littéraire', was this a conscious aim on his part?[40] Vincenot shows some ambivalence towards this question, but at one point he does describe Proust as a child psychologist 'sans le savoir'.[41] This need not necessarily be the case. The examples quoted above show that writers and psychologists before and around the time of Proust were showing a specific and detailed interest in the relationship between metaphor and childhood. Though Proust could not possibly have read Piaget's *Représentation du monde chez l'enfant*, both men could have been influenced by mutual predecessors, both in the field of psychology and the field of literature. Sully, for example, talks explicitly of the child's animistic tendencies, as does Perez: 'Ainsi fait le poète, cet enfant sublime: il aime à faire tout vivre.'[42]

Before going on to a detailed analysis of Proust himself, one other fact is worth noting, namely that the earliest critics of *A la recherche* show a particular fascination with the importance of childhood to the Proustian metaphor. Arnaud Dandieu, writing in 1930, refers to even earlier critics, who, 'prenant prétexte de cette substitution de la *magie* à la science, de l'analogue à *l'identique*, [...] taxent Proust de primitivisme ou même d'*infantilisme*'. Significantly, the remark is made in a chapter which aims to explain 'La Signification de la métaphore' in the context of a book entitled *Marcel Proust. Sa révélation psychologique.*[43] Dandieu finally concedes that Proust's metaphoric infantilism is at once his great strength and his great weakness.

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[39] Vincenot, p.6.

[40] Vincenot, p.12.

[41] Vincenot, p.19.

[42] Sully, p.30 and Perez, *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant* (Paris, 1888), p.45.

[43] Arnaud Dandieu, *Marcel Proust. Sa révélation psychologique* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930), pp.27-75 (p.44).

Perhaps then, Proust was not simply writing during the heyday of the *récit d'enfance* and the rise of child psychology, but also in an age when the relationship of childhood to metaphor was a burning intellectual, psychological and literary issue.

A detailed examination of *Combray* and *Jean Santeuil*

'Qui parle?', asks Philippe Lejeune of Vallès's *L'Enfant*. 'Est-ce la voix d'un adulte? d'un adulte mimant la voix d'un enfant?'[44] Clearly, this is not quite such a relevant question to ask of *Combray*. As was seen in Chapter 2, even if the narrator of Proust's *récit d'enfance* can be seen as a combination of child and adult, the child's contribution is not really a verbal one. Muller claims that 'les éléments dûs à la sensualité enfantine' are nevertheless easily distinguishable at certain points of synaesthesia in the text.[45] Yet even at such moments, it is generally impossible to unravel two visions, let alone two narrative voices. The child's sensation is inseparable from the adult memory of it and certainly from the adult rendering of it in a sophisticated synaesthetic figure. Nor is the matter any simpler for less sophisticated figures. Even in the comparatively straightforward case of *L'Enfant*, there is much ambiguity: should we classify the narrative voice as the child's whenever a naïve simile reduces the unfamiliar to the familiar, the extraordinary to the ordinary, or do such reductive images only appear to belong to the child because other stylistic features around them cannot easily be attributed to an adult?

Thus it is often neither easy nor desirable to unravel either viewpoints or voices. The ambiguity can itself be challenging and productive. When we read in *Jean Santeuil* of the forget-me-nots lifting 'leur petite fleur d'un bleu profond comme un petit morceau bleu de ciel tendu vers lui' (JS,298), our instinct may be to assume that the rather sentimental simile belongs in some sense to the child's vision, but this is not necessarily so at all. Similarly, if 'les fleurs *semblaient* comme les innombrables anges d'une sorte de Jour, comme ceux qu'ont représentés les grands peintres de la Renaissance' (my italics) (JS,298), it may be natural to ask, 'Seemed to whom?' But, despite the learned quality of this simile, there is no answer. It cannot be definitively attributed to child or adult or anyone in between.

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[44] Philippe Lejeune, 'Vallès et la voix narrative', *Littérature*, 23 (1976), 3-20 (p.3).

[45] Muller, *Les Voix narratives dans la Recherche du Temps perdu* (Geneva: Droz, 1965), p.60.

Nevertheless, there are some clear-cut cases where Proust explicitly links metaphor to the child in one of the five ways detailed above. The analysis which follows is an attempt to identify such examples and to set them beside more interesting and ambiguous cases. It does not amount to a claim that *Combray* and the childhood sections of *Jean Santeuil* have a greater metaphoric density than the rest of Proust's work, or that their metaphors are any more worthy of study - although, along the way, it is to be hoped that Proust's *récits d'enfance* might shed some light on his use of metaphor elsewhere.[46]

Certainly, on the level first examined above, whether or not they indulge in metaphor themselves, Proust's children *enjoy* metaphor in the work and speech of others. Thus the conclusions of post-Piagetic commentators, such as Winner, are foreshadowed. Marcel, for example positively relishes hearing Legrandin hold forth. Furthermore, this tendency seems to be particularly associated with childhood and its naïve, undeveloped critical sense. The young Jean Santeuil prefers 'la *Picciola* de Saintine à la *Colomba* de Mérimée où à tous moments une facétie venait empêcher la vague poésie des images de le ravir' (JS,307-308) and it comes as a shock, if a pleasant one, that there is more to poetry than philosophy and imagery (JS,240). Similarly, what Marcel first prizes in Bergotte is the fact that 'il exprimait toute une philosophie nouvelle [...] par de merveilleuses images dont on aurait dit que c'était elles qui avaient éveillé ce chant de harpes qui s'élevait alors et à l'accompagnement duquel elles donnaient quelque chose de sublime' (I,93). Again too, there is a hint that this infatuation with imagery is rather naïve or inappropriate, that the child does not quite understand metaphor as he should, as shown by his desire to possess 'une métaphore de lui sur toutes choses' (I,94).

As far as Proust's *own* metaphors are concerned, a favourite technique seems to have been the choice of comparison according to the experience of the character in question - often leading to another kind of naïvety. Françoise has a bonnet 'dont le tuyautage éclatant et fixe avait l'air d'un biscuit' (I,53) and M. Beulier's maid in *Jean Santeuil* has an 'étroite cervelle' which is 'bosselée comme une marmite' (JS,265). That this is a deliberate procedure on

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[46] Ullmann, in fact, presents statistics which show that *Combray* is fairly rich in imagery, though not significantly more so than the rest of the novel (Ullmann, p.129).

Proust's part becomes clear early in *Combray*, when he reveals Swann's elevated social position:

> Cela eût paru aussi extraordinaire à ma tante qu'aurait pu l'être pour une dame plus lettrée la pensée d'être personnellement liée avec Aristée dont elle aurait compris qu'il allait, après avoir causé avec elle, plonger au sein des royaumes de Thétis, dans un empire soustrait aux yeux des mortels et où Virgile nous le montre reçu à bras ouverts; ou - pour s'entenir à une image qui avait plus de chance de lui venir à l'esprit, car elle l'avait vue peinte sur nos assiettes à petits fours de Combray - d'avoir eu à dîner Ali-Baba, lequel quand il se saura seul, pénétrera dans la caverne éblouissante des trésors insoupçonnés. (I,17-18)

Evidently, this is not Léonie's comparison, but the expressed aim, is to create one that *could* have been, had she known about Swann's double life. Proust's imagery thus shows a tendency to mimic his characters' potential thought processes.

Nor is this a tendency from which his child characters escape. Many of the images of *Combray* draw on common elements of childhood experience for their vehicles. The young Marcel sees the kitchen at Combray in terms of fairy-tales and toys, 'Françoise, commandant aux forces de la nature devenues ses aides, comme dans les féeries où les géants se font engager comme cuisiniers' (I,119) and the peas on the table 'alignés et nombrés comme des billes vertes dans un jeu' (I,119).[47] Similarly, the apparently learned, biblical simile, comparing Marcel's father to Abraham during the 'drame du coucher', turns out to be based on an engraving that the child knows well:

> Il était encore devant nous, grand dans sa robe de nuit blanche sous le cachemire de l'Inde violet et rose qu'il nouait autour de sa tête depuis qu'il avait des névralgies, avec le geste d'Abraham dans la gravure d'après Benozzo Gozzoli que m'avait donné M. Swann, disant à Sarah qu'elle a à se départir du côté d'Isaac. (I,36)

Clearly, this is not an example of the analogical and metaphoric thought processes that the novelists and psychologists quoted above were attributing to the child around the time of Proust. We cannot attribute such comparisons to the child simply on the basis that he could have made them had he wanted to. However, at one point in the kitchen at Combray, the use of the imperfect tense together with a personal pronoun in describing the effects of asparagus suggests that the fairy-tale imagery just might belong to the child's mind and thus that the child's imagination might have provided the impetus for the adult narrator's technique. Somewhere behind the text, it is as if there is a child dictating:

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[47] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the absence of literal references to toys in *Combray*.

> Il *me* sembl*ait* que ces nuances célestes trahissaient les délicieuses créatures qui s'étaient amusées à se métamorphoser en légumes et qui, à travers le déguisement de leur chair comestible et ferme, laissaient apercevoir en ces couleurs naissantes d'aurore, en ces ébauches d'arc-en-ciel, en cette extinction de soirs bleus, cette essence précieuse que je reconnaissais encore quand, toute la nuit qui suivait un dîner où j'en avais mangé, elles jouaient dans leurs farces poétiques et grossières comme une féerie de Shakespeare, à changer mon pot de chambre en un vase de parfum. (I,119) (my italics)

Not that this is entirely without ambiguity. The image certainly becomes increasingly learned as it progresses, and it is unlikely that the child would have seen the humour (which the adult narrator so obviously relishes) in his own comparison. But there are other more explicit hints in Proust's work that the child's mind works according to metaphoric principles. In trying to identify the duchess in the church, the young Marcel does not simply seek resemblance with the portrait he has already been shown, but 'parcelles d'analogie' (I,172). And in *Jean Santeuil*, the narrator enquires about Jean's love for the pink-flowered thorn bush:

> Était-ce qu'ayant vu auparavant de l'épine blanche, la vue d'une épine rose et dont les fleurs ne sont plus simples mais composées, le frappa à la fois de ces deux prestiges de l'analogie et de la différence qui ont tant de pouvoir sur notre esprit? (JS,331)

Although the question is left unanswered as far as Jean is concerned, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it would be answered in the affirmative for Marcel. The latter manifests great pleasure in uncovering sameness within difference in *Combray*, whether when recognising the blacksmith in his church finery or when looking at Léonie's tea:

> Les feuilles, ayant perdu ou changé leur aspect, avaient l'air des choses les plus disparates, d'une aile transparente de mouche, de l'envers blanc d'une étiquette, d'un pétale de rose [...]. Mille petits détails inutiles [...] me donnaient, comme dans un livre où on s'émerveille de rencontrer le nom d'une personne de connaissance, le plaisir de comprendre que c'était bien des tiges de vrais tilleuls, comme ceux que je voyais avenue de la gare, modifiées, justement parce que c'étaient non des doubles, mais elles-mêmes et qu'elles avaient vieilli. Et chaque caractère nouveau n'y étant que la métamorphose d'un caractère ancien, dans de petites boules grises je reconnaissais les boutons verts qui ne sont pas venus à terme. (I,50-51)

There is, therefore, a body of evidence to suggest that Proust considered the child capable of metaphoric thought. One extract from *Jean Santeuil* seems to take this further, implying that these kinds of imaginative transformation have a particular link with childhood, even that metaphoric thought diminishes with age. Here, at the entrance to the public baths in Paris, it is openly stated that the image belongs to the child's vision of the world:

> Il avait eu le sentiment que sans doute [...] là était l'entrée des mers glaciales dont les pôles étaient renfermées dans cet étroit espace, et dont la puissance irritée se soulevait entre ces pilotis qui permettaient d'y arriver, mais sous lesquels on sentait qu'elle s'étendait bien loin dans un monde probablement parallèle à l'autre et au-dessous, et où on ne voyait pas la lumière du ciel. (JS,305-306)

And the explanation for this is that 'Jean était à cet âge où la terre n'est pas devenue quelque chose de parfaitement connu et réel, où l'on ne serait pas étonné qu'un endroit nouveau, un endroit bien réel [...] donnât accès sur un monde irréel' (JS,305). Of course, it may be objected that this does not truly qualify as metaphor, insofar as the child does not seem *aware* of what he is doing. Indeed, there is almost an implication that such beliefs about the world are born of *mistakes*. But in *Combray*, the young Marcel seems conscious that some of his imaginative transformations of reality are just that - even if he continues to project them on to the Guermantes family:

> Je savais qu'ils étaient des personnages réels et actuellement existants, mais chaque fois que je pensais à eux, je me les représentais tantôt en tapisserie, comme était la comtesse de Guermantes, dans le «Couronnement d'Esther» de notre église, tantôt de nuances changeantes comme était Gilberte le Mauvais dans le vitrail [...], tantôt tout à fait impalpables comme l'image de Geneviève de Brabant, ancêtre de la famille de Guermantes, que la lanterne magique promenait sur les rideaux de ma chambre ou faisait monter au plafond - enfin toujours enveloppés du mystère du temps mérovingien et baignant comme dans un coucher de soleil dans la lumière orangée qui émane de cette syllabe: «antes». (I,169)

Even left unverbalised by the child, this example is important, insofar as it appears to form the basis for one of the adult narrator's characteristic techniques, the multiple transformation of a single object or character in a series of metaphors. Similarly, the sophisticated system of recurring metaphors in *A la recherche* could also have some of its origins in the child's vision. When Marcel meets the hawthorns, one of the most frequently repeated metaphors, that of young girls as flowers (and vice versa) is born:

> En essayant de mimer au fond de moi le geste de leur efflorescence, *je l'imaginais comme si* ç'avait été le mouvement de tête étourdi et rapide, au regard coquet, aux pupilles diminuées, d'une blanche jeune fille, distraite et vive. (I,111) (my italics)[48]

Despite this body of evidence for the child's pleasure in metaphor and his own metaphoric thought processes in both *Combray* and *Jean Santeuil*, metaphors are rare in both Proustian children's speech. But then, direct speech in the child's voice is itself rare, especially in *A la recherche*. In one of the few examples from *Combray*, there may be a hint of Piagetic animism. 'O mes pauvres petites aubépines,' sobs the young Marcel, 'ce n'est pas vous qui voudriez me faire du chagrin, me forcer à partir. Vous, vous ne m'avez jamais fait

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[48] See V.E. Graham, *The Imagery of Proust* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) for details of its recurrence and reciprocity.

de peine! Aussi je vous aimerai toujours' (I,143). But this does not amount to much. It certainly does not constitute a metaphor as such and we cannot trace the style of the adult narrator back to such a solitary and unremarkable example. On the contrary, Marcel's grandmother hints (like George Eliot and Rousseau) that metaphor is actually incompatible with a child's voice and that no self-respecting school boy would ever adopt Legrandin's self-conscious, flowery style of speech:

> Ma grand-mère lui reprochait seulement de parler un peu trop bien, un peu trop comme un livre, de ne pas avoir dans son langage le naturel qu'il avait dans ses cravates lavallière toujours flottantes, dans son veston droit presque d'écolier. (I,67)

There is no doubt that Legrandin not only overuses metaphor in everyday speech to the point of absurdity, but that he also *mis*uses it, with snobbish intent. When Marcel's father enquires about Balbec on his son's behalf, Legrandin resorts to metaphor as a conversation blocker, maintaining that 'ce pays de pure fiction est d'une mauvaise lecture pour un enfant' (I,130). In fact, it often seems that Legrandin and Bloch, who displays similar tendencies, are being used to show that metaphor is entirely inappropriate in ordinary spoken language. The poet Rustinlor, Jean Santeuil's teacher, fulfils a similar function - with a degree of satire that would not be out of place in Vallès's *L'Enfant*.[49]

However - and again not unlike Vallès - Proust appears more charitably disposed towards a certain type of comparison that appears in the speech of his humbler characters. There is no hint of satire for the simple, amusing 'naïve simile' described at the beginning of this chapter. Françoise, particularly, is a fund of such analogies: about Marcel's mother, 'Madame sait tout, Madame est pire que les rayons X [...], qu'on a fait venir pour Mme Octave et qui voient ce que vous avez dans le cœur' (I,53); or about the soldiers, 'ce n'est pas des hommes, c'est des lions [...]. Pauvre jeunesse, qui sera fauchée comme un pré' (I,88). According to Edward Hughes, the primitive consciousness of such characters was something highly prized by Proust, particularly in his earlier work, and this interest played a formative role, not only in his own development as a writer, but also in that of his narrator in *A la recherche*.[50] In fact, the latter writes of Marie Gineste and Céleste Albaret:

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[49] See, for example, JS,237. There is also, as suggested in Chapter 2, where Legrandin's flowery language is discussed, a hint of self-satire in the portrayal of such characters.

[50] Edward J. Hughes, *Marcel Proust. A Study in the Quality of Awareness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See particularly Chapter 1.

> Je n'ai jamais connu de personnes aussi volontairement ignorantes, qui n'avaient rien appris à l'école, et dont le langage eût pourtant quelque chose de si littéraire que sans le naturel presque sauvage de leur ton, on aurait cru leurs paroles affectées. (III,240)

Thus, we once again meet the possibility that the kind of picturesque simile used by such characters as these and Françoise is not so far from metaphors more literary. Their language may even represent the foundation on which the sophisticated figurative style of the narrator is built.

Indeed, there is no need for the mediation and influence of such figures as Françoise in Proust's 'primitivism'. For the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* and for *Jean Santeuil* alike, the ultimate 'primitives' are the children they once were. And though these children rarely speak in metaphor, they seem incapable of writing without it. Unfortunately, in Jean's case his own use of metaphor is as naïve, undiscerning and inappropriate as his pleasure in other people's imagery. M. Beulier, his philosophy teacher and antidote to Rustinlor, tells him:

> Il faudra soigneusement bannir toutes ces métaphores, toutes ces images qui, mieux choisies que les vôtres, peuvent plaire au poète, mais que même alors la philosophie ne tolère pas. Mais même pour le professeur de lettres, ne grossissez pas la voix pour dire des banalités. «Les rouges incendies du couchant», comment osez-vous écrire cela? C'est de la couleur pour un petit journal d'où, voyons, de province, non plus même, des côlonies. (JS,263)

Thus Jean Santeuil is diametrically opposed to Jacques Vingtras. Furthermore, though many of the clichéd images in his compositions are far from spontaneous, being copied straight out of his favourite poets (JS,230), his love of and desire to use metaphor are. Here there is no teacher - or mentor such as Malrieu - standing behind him, holding a metaphoric gun at his head. This is no Minou Drouet.

In *Combray*, as in *Jean Santeuil*, we do not know much more about the child's writing than that it is studded with imagery and metaphors. However, somewhere along the way between Jean's homework and Marcel's voluntary 'prose poem' about the Martinville steeples, the child's predilection for metaphor takes on a more positive character. In the latter, the metaphors become original and, even if their quality is as hard to evaluate as the extent of the adult narrator's intervention, the little set piece (I,179-80) is seen as a landmark in the development of Marcel's artistic vocation. For once, the child's metaphoric mode of thought becomes an original and metaphoric mode of *expression*, even if the child cannot fully realise its importance.

As might be expected from the conclusions of Chapter 3, there appears to be very little in the way of *other* metaphoric expression, such as play, either in *Jean Santeuil* or in *Combray*. Only occasionally does Jean practise the kind of self-metamorphosis described by Vallès: for example, when he runs downstairs 'dans un mouvement fou' and around the garden, 'secouant la tête, fendant l'air les bras tendus, *se figurant* qu'il était cheval dans une prairie, mouette au ras des flots, fou de joie' (JS,331) (my italics). Hughes seems to imply that such behaviour is not metaphoric, but metaphor *tout court*.[51] If this is the case, then it may be significant that in the equivalent passage from *Combray* (I,152), the 'mouvement fou' is retained, but the element of conscious self-transformation is removed. Perhaps then, metaphor belongs elsewhere in *Combray* - in more literary activities, such as reading and writing.

The fact remains that the examples mentioned so far represent only a tiny percentage of the metaphors used in *Combray* and the early sections of *Jean Santeuil* - even if the rest do turn out to be ultimately inspired by the 'metaphoric' childhood experiences they describe. Nevertheless, in *Jean Santeuil* many of the images that cannot be directly attributed to the child, seem to be held in some special relationship to him. In the opening pages, there is very little figurative language until the narrative focuses on the child and his feelings. Then we are at once plunged into the striking Classical imagery used to describe the early version of the mother's kiss:

> Ce baiser-là, c'était le viatique, attendu si fiévreusement que Jean s'efforçait de ne penser à rien en se déshabillant, pour franchir plus vite le moment qui l'en séparait, la douce offrande de gâteaux que les Grecs attachaient au cou de l'épouse ou de l'ami défunt en le couchant dans sa tombe, pour qu'il accomplît sans terreur le voyage souterrain, traversât rassasié les royaumes sombres. (JS,205-206)

Such a metaphor is obviously too learned and too sustained for a mere child to formulate in his hour of distress, but after several such metamorphoses of the kiss, it is suggested that this densely figurative language is an attempt at the *translation* into words of the emotional and sensory intensity of the child's experience: 'C'était cela qui allait lui manquer' (JS,206). Indeed, in the course of the childhood chapters of *Jean Santeuil* a kind of formula develops: a

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[51] Hughes, p.23.

long description heavy with metaphor, culminating in a hint of attribution to the child. After a prolonged poetic description of 'Lilas et Aubépines' we find the question, 'Qu'est-ce que c'est?' from Jean, as if he is trying to identify the stimulus that produced such a powerful experience (JS,280). Or when Jean awakes to the anticipation of a morning in the garden, the description, which is rich in imagery, ends with the comment, 'C'est tout cela que Jean avait ressenti quand il avait vu le reflet du soleil sur la table' (JS,299). This seems to work in reverse too. Sometimes we even have the suspicion that Proust only sends the child out for a walk so that he can indulge in a little metaphoric narration. Clearly, not all the metaphors of the *récit d'enfance* within *Jean Santeuil* give the impression of an adult translating a child's obscure feelings into language, but this phenomenon accounts for a good many of them.

We are now dealing with the final type of link between metaphor and childhood documented above: the paradoxical attempt to express the inexpressible experience of childhood, or put even more extremely, to create what could almost be called a non-linguistic form of language through metaphor. That this was an ideal of Proust's narrator in *A la recherche*, is clear from his comments about Vinteuil, which again betray a form of 'primitivism':

> Et de même que certains êtres sont les derniers témoins d'une forme de vie que la nature a abandonnée, je me demandais si la Musique n'était pas l'exemple unique de ce qu'aurait pu être - s'il n'y avait pas eu l'invention du langage, la formation des mots, l'analyse des idées - la communication des âmes. Elle est comme une possibilité qui n'a pas eu de suites; l'humanité s'est engagée dans d'autres voies, celle du langage parlé et écrit. (III,762-63)

Of course, metaphors that come close to achieving this ideal cannot be so easily discerned in *Combray*, where the use of a first person narrator means that nearly every description is filtered through the child's viewpoint as well as through adult memory. But there are moments when figurative language is used to differentiate between what the child believes and what an adult would have thought, as in the following example from the 'dame en rose' incident. As far as Marcel is concerned,

> [Elle] avait pris quelque propos insignifiant de mon père, elle l'avait travaillé avec délicatesse, lui avait donné un tour, une appellation précieuse et y enchâssant un de ses regards d'une si belle eau, nuancé d'humilité et de gratitude, elle le rendait changé en un bijou artiste en quelque chose de «tout à fait exquis». (I,77)

It is doubtful whether his father would have seen Odette's transformation of the 'propos insignifiant' in the same way. Similarly, the extended death imagery, describing the bed that awaits Marcel in the 'drame du coucher' (I,28), translates his over-reaction in a situation that

has little importance to the adults around him. It is possible too that the famous 'double tintement timide, ovale et doré de la clochette pour les étrangers' (I,14) transmits to the reader the child's confused reactions to the arrival of Swann, who brings with him both interest and pain. Maybe, as Muller claims, synaesthesia does appear at moments of the child's most heightened sense experience, as in the 'fraîcheur transparente et fragile' (I,85) of the bedroom reading scene. This might well come close to the 'language barely separable from sensation' that one critic attributes to the child narrator of Nathalie Sarraute's *Portrait d'un inconnu*.[52]

Nevertheless, the degree to which the adult narrator of *Combray* is embellishing his 'translations' remains, as was pointed out above, unverifiable. Furthermore, it is impossible to ascertain whether his images have any particular relevance to translating *childhood* experience, since metaphor is one of the conventions by which poets have come to indicate all moments of intense emotion or sensation. The only certainty is the uncertainty of the respective parts played by child and adult in the narrative. When the narrator describes the similarity between the colours of the hawthorns and the strawberries crushed in cream, is the child's own gluttony *responsible* for the adult's analogy between flowers and food? Or is the metaphoric potential of childhood gluttony and desire exploited only because of the adult narrator's analogical skills?

> Moi-même, j'appréciais plus le fromage à la crème rose, celui où l'on m'avait permis d'écraser des fraises. Et justement ces fleurs avaient choisi une de ces teintes de chose mangeable, ou de tendre embellissement à une toilette pour une grande fête, qui, parce qu'elles leur présentent la raison de leur supériorité, sont celles qui semblent belles avec le plus d'évidence aux yeux des enfants, et à cause de cela, gardent toujours pour eux quelque chose de plus vif et de plus naturel que les autres teintes, même lorsqu'ils ont compris qu'elles ne promettaient rien à leur gourmandise et n'avaient pas été choisi par la couturière. (I,138)[53]

Whatever the answer, one important point emerges from this example, namely that these childhood associations are not destroyed by adult hindsight or rationalisation. On the contrary, it often seems that only adult metaphor can express such states of mind. Despite the many metaphors that emerge from the child's pen in Proust's work, attention is frequently

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52 Valerie Minogue, 'The Imagery of Childhood in Nathalie Sarraute's *Portrait d'un Inconnu*', *French Studies*, 27 (1973), 177-86 (p.179).

53 Here, as was seen in Chapter 2, Proust appears to be showing an awareness of the child's tendency towards artificialism, later to be documented by Piaget.

drawn to children's inability to express themselves, not only in the famous case of the 'zuts' of *Combray*, but also in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Maintenant Jean pouvait lire *La Tristesse d'Olympio* et bien d'autres poèmes. Les poètes qui lui avaient été le plus étrangers, le plus distants, se tenaient tout à côté de lui pendant qu'il lisait, comme un homme plus habile, l'aidant pour ainsi dire à prononcer quelque chose qui lui pesait depuis longtemps sur le cœur, trouvant les mots pour lui, comprenant son obscure et faible pensée mieux que lui-même, et la lui renvoyant pleine de lumière et de force, déroulant en paroles claires ses regrets, d'une tristesse et d'une douceur jusque-là inexprimables. (JS,229)

As these poets are to Jean, so, we must assume, the adult narrator of *Combray* is in his metaphors to the child he once was.

Metaphor or Metonymy?

Thus Proust makes the same links between childhood and metaphor as psychologists, novelists and critics before as well as since - often explicitly. He is therefore something of a child psychologist himself and not 'sans le savoir'. However, it still remains to determine whether he goes so far as to see childhood as the *root* of metaphor, despite the many hints seen above that this is the case. The answer turns up via the now obsolete debate over the respective merits of metaphor and metonymy, first suggested by Roman Jakobson, and in the framework of which many of the most penetrating analyses of Proust's metaphors have been made.[54] For this reason alone, it is worth applying the distinction to childhood. Does the child, therefore, in Proust's work and elsewhere, think metaphorically or metonymically?

Indeed, our analysis has so far ignored all distinctions between metaphor and other tropes such as metonymy and synaesthesia or, in the terms of another debate, between metaphor and simile. There is, however, some justification for such vagueness in the fact that Proust himself rarely makes such distinctions. He never refers to metonymy by name and never presents a real definition of metaphor, which he uses and praises so much. One of the above examples does talk of the twin principles of analogy and difference (JS,331), which allows for metaphor, simile and possibly synaesthesia, but rules out metonymy. Yet this can

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[54] See Roman Jakobson, 'Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances', in *Studies on Child Language and Aphasia* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp.49-73. See also Gérard Genette, 'Métonymie chez Proust, ou la naissance du Récit', in *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp.41-63 and Paul de Man, 'Reading (Proust)', in *Allegories of Reading: Figural language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp.57-78. These are two of the most important analyses of Proust according to Jakobson's distinction. We will have cause to return to them below.

hardly be construed as a definition of metaphor, which is not even mentioned by name at this point. In fact the closest Proust ever gets to such a definition is couched in the vaguest possible of terms:

> La vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport, analogue dans le monde de l'art à celui qu'est le rapport unique de la loi causale dans le monde de la science, et les enfermera dans les anneaux d'un beau style. Même, ainsi que la vie, quand en rapprochant une qualité commune à deux sensations, il dégagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'une et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps dans une métaphore. La nature ne m'avait-elle pas mis elle-même à ce point de vue, sur la voie de l'art, n'était-elle pas commencement d'art elle-même, elle qui ne m'avait permis de connaître, souvent longtemps après, la beauté d'une chose que dans une autre, midi à Combray que dans le bruit de ses cloches, les matinées de Doncières que dans les hoquets de notre calorifère à eau? (IV,468)

At first, the *type* of relationship is unspecified. Then it becomes clear that the narrator is talking about metaphor. But the subsequent examples given are of metonymic relations. The only explanation seems to be that Proust's concept of metaphor is a very loose one, consisting simply of seeing things in terms of other things and including metonymy, simile, synaesthesia *et al.* Therefore, we cannot hope to find a very explicit answer to our question in Proust's work.

Just as Proust never refers to metonymy as such, neither do the child psychologists of his day. Nevertheless, they are interested in the question of whether the child thinks metaphorically or metonymically, even if their answer is couched in different terms from Jakobson's - those of empiricist philosophy, with its 'association of ideas'. Compayré, for example, claims that, though most of the child's associations are made on the basis of resemblance (metaphor), other traditional categories of association, such as contiguity, cause and effect, means and end (all of which have been listed as types of metonymy at various points in the history of rhetoric) also play a part in the child's thought.[55] Indeed, according to Perez, 'nearly all the forms of association called logical exhibit themselves [...] in young infants'.[56] Queyrat in fact shows more interest in what might be considered the metonymic workings of the child's mind than its metaphoric functioning. He singles out 'la *loi d'association*, en vertu de laquelle tous les *faits simultanément ou successivement conscients* ont la propriété de se souder les uns aux autres' and claims that 'cette loi qui domine tous les

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[55] Compayré, p.175.

[56] Perez, *The First Three Years of Childhood*, p.139.

faits psychiques est d'une importance capitale'.[57] Perhaps significantly for Proust, among these 'faits psychiques' is a process that bears a curious resemblance to involuntary memory:

> C'est ainsi que la vue d'un coin même du paysage que j'ai vu tout d'abord, et du parterre qui a flatté mon odorat, me rappellera l'odeur des plantes que j'ai agréablement senties et même les émotions dans lesquelles je me trouvais à ce moment précis; et, inversement, ces parfums, perçus plus tard accidentellement, évoqueront en moi d'une façon automatique le souvenir des lieux, du parterre où ils auront été simultanément perçus.[58]

Sully comes up with an interesting example, which could conceivably have influenced Proust, since it is taken from Ruskin's *Praeterita*:

> There is another way in which imagination may combine with and transform sensible objects, *viz.*, by what is commonly called association. Mr. Ruskin tells us that when young he associated the name 'crocodile' with the creature so closely that the long series of letters took on something of the look of its lanky body.[59]

This seems to start out as metonymy, yet turns into metaphor. Sully also shows an interest in synaesthesia, or at least in one of its forms, 'audition colorée' which he claims is 'a new field of investigation'. This, it seems, was commonly viewed as having a special connection with childhood ('This "coloured hearing", as it is called, is always traced back to the dimly recalled age of childhood') and again is both metaphor and metonymy in some sense ('It is highly probable that both analogy and association play a part here').[60] Thus, even where early child psychologists distinguish between metaphor and metonymy, they tend to see no real opposition between them, and some, such as Sully, see them as working together in the child's mind.

Among those to criticize Jakobson's opposition *after* he made it, is Albert Henry, who claims that metonymy and metaphor are actually interdependent. Significantly he takes his cue from Proust:

> Souvenons-nous qu'on a dit et répété: pas de métaphore qui ne soit toujours plus ou moins métonymique; pas de métonymie qui ne soit quelque peu métaphorique [...]. Les meilleurs esprits ne se méprennent-ils pas? Proust, si sensible, pourtant au langage indirect... On se souvient des fameux catleyas.[61]

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[57] Frédéric Queyrat, *L'Imagination et ses variétés chez l'enfant. Étude de psychologie expérimentale appliquée à l'éducation intellectuelle* (Paris, 1893), p.17 and p.19.

[58] Queyrat, p.19.

[59] Sully, p.32.

[60] Sully, pp.33-34.

[61] Albert Henry, *Métonymie et Métaphore* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), p.50.

Proust indeed refers to Swann's euphemism, 'faire catleya' as a metaphor, prompting Henry to exclaim, 'Mais c'est une locution métonymique! La rhétorique classique aurait dit: l'antécédent pour le conséquent.'[62]

This confirms earlier remarks about Proust's lack of distinction between metaphor and metonymy. Genette also verifies Henry's general theoretical point in the particular practical case of Proust. His analysis of some of the most famous Proustian metaphors reveals a metonymic core or inspiration. These he calls 'métaphores diagétiques' and eventually concludes:

> Il y a [...] chez Proust une collusion très fréquente de la relation métaphorique et de la relation métonymique, soit que la première s'ajoute à la seconde comme une sorte d'interprétation surdéterminante, soit que la seconde, dans les expériences de «mémoire involontaire», prenne le relais de la première pour en élargir l'effet et la portée.[63]

Thus the above remarks by Sully (about metonymy that turns into metaphor) and Queyrat (about the place of metonymy in involuntary memory) take on a special significance. But in what sense does Genette's claim about collusion between metaphor and metonymy apply to childhood? Certainly, some of his most convincing examples, including the notorious brioche-tower metaphor-metonym are taken from *Combray*, even if others are not. Nevertheless, as far as the child himself is concerned, metonymy frequently seems to be the predominant mode of thought. Perhaps the most obvious instance is in *Journées de Lecture* (CS,160-94), where the child unwittingly substitutes his experience of all that happens to surround his reading for the experience of the books themselves. Numerous details of *Combray* point to similar conclusions. Marcel's imaginative colouring of the Guermantes in the hues of stained glass and magic lanterns (I,169), quoted earlier, appears to be a case of metonymic thought, as does the child's transfer from his emotions to his sense impressions during the 'drame du coucher':

> Cet escalier détesté où je m'engageais toujours si tristement, exhalait une odeur de vernis qui avait en quelque sorte absorbé, fixé, cette sorte particulière de chagrin que je ressentais chaque soir et la rendait peut-être plus cruelle encore pour ma sensibilité parce que sous cette forme olfactive mon intelligence n'en pouvait plus prendre sa part. (I,27)

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[62] Henry, p.50.

[63] Genette, p.59.

Similarly, he appears to substitute the physical for the moral (another traditional category of metonymy) in Léonie's bedroom, which is full of the 'mille odeurs qu'y dégagent les vertus, la sagesse, les habitudes, toute une vie secrète invisible, surabondante et morale que l'atmosphère y tient en suspens' (I,49).

On the other hand, we cannot ignore some of the other examples quoted earlier, such as the famous hawthorn passage (I,111), Marcel's fairy-tale transformation of the asparagus (I,119), or Jean Santeuil's metamorphosis of the public baths into another, divine world (JS,305-306). These are more unambiguously metaphoric, as is the child's own writing about the Martinville steeples. After all, too, Jean Santeuil is told by an aging teacher, 'Quand vous aurez mon âge, vous en serez bien revenu: vous verrez qu'à côté de la poésie il y a la prose' (JS,274). And according to Jakobson's extension of his confrontational scheme, this is equivalent to the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, respectively.[64]

Finally there are many cases of Genette's combinations of metaphor and metonymy that can be attributed to the child's vision or thought. If Sully is to believed, then synaesthesia might well be due to just such a union, but there are also many non-synaesthetic examples in *Combray*. Sometimes, what is phrased as a mere metonymic association, reveals a relation of resemblance at its heart:

> Au commencement de la saison, où le jour finit tôt, quand nous arrivions rue du Saint-Esprit, il y avait encore un reflet du couchant sur les vitres de la maison et un bandeau de pourpre au fond des bois du Calvaire, qui se réflétait plus loin dans l'étang, rougeur qui, accompagnée souvent d'un froid assez vif, s'associait, dans mon esprit, à la rougeur du feu au-dessus duquel rôtissait le poulet qui ferait succéder pour moi au plaisir poétique donné par la promenade, le plaisir de la gourmandise, de la chaleur et du repos. (I,131)

Conversely, metaphor is sometimes justified by means of metonymy. When the saint carved into the porch of the church reminds Marcel of a country girl, he remarks, 'cette ressemblance qui insinuait dans la statue une douceur que je n'y avais pas cherchée, était souvent certifiée par quelque fille des champs, venue comme nous se mettre à couvert' (I,150). There are, it seems, no simple oppositions to be made between metaphor and metonymy, poetry and prose in *Combray*, and Proust certainly does not distinguish between child and adult thought on this basis. Indeed, much of his portrayal of the child's vision and thought processes confirms the theoretical claims of Genette and Henry.

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[64] Jakobson, p.27.

However, according to Paul de Man, Proust's own theoretical position in *Combray* is quite different. He claims that the garden reading scene 'contains statements claiming the priority of metaphor in a binary system that opposes metaphor to metonymy' and takes as his example the flies' 'musique de chambre de l'été':

> Elle ne l'évoque pas à la façon d'un air de musique humaine, qui, entendu par hasard à la belle saison, vous la rappelle ensuite; elle est unie à l'été par un lien plus nécessaire; née des beaux jours, ne renaissant qu'avec eux, contenant un peu de leur essence, elle n'en réveille pas seulement l'image dans notre mémoire, elle en certifie le retour, la présence effective, ambiante immédiatement accessible. (I,82)[65]

Such an interpretation depends on a further claim that 'metonymy is distinguished from metaphor in terms of necessity and contingency (an interpretation of the term that is by no means illegitimate)'.[66] Thus, Paul de Man is able to deconstruct the passage as follows:

> In a passage that abounds in successful and seductive metaphors and which, moreover, explicitly asserts the superior efficacy of metaphor over that of metonymy, persuasion is achieved by a figural play in which contingent figures of chance masquerade deceptively as figures of necessity.[67]

Quite apart from the argument over whether chance really does masquerade as necessity at this point, is the necessity/contingency - metaphor/metonymy equation really as 'legitimate' as Paul de Man makes out? One dictionary definition of metonymy suggests quite the reverse: 'Figure de rhétorique, et *par ext.* Procédé de langage par lequel on exprime un concept au moyen d'un terme désignant un autre concept qui lui est uni par une relation nécessaire.'[68] And one of Henry's distinctions between the two terms makes metaphor sound contingent and arbitrary:

> La métonymie exploite des rapports qui existent réellement dans le monde extérieur et dans notre monde de concepts. La métaphore, elle, se fonde sur des relations qui surgissent dans l'intuition même qui lance la métaphore en question. La métaphore fixe des équivalents d'imagination.[69]

Of course, 'rapports qui existent réellement dans le monde extérieur' can be either necessary or contingent, and if some of the traditional categories of metonymy, such as cause and effect

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[65] Paul de Man, p.62

[66] Paul de Man, p.63.

[67] Paul de Man, p.67.

[68] *Le Petit Robert* (Paris: Le Robert,1986).

[69] Henry, p.63.

are based on 'necessary' connections, others, such as proximity in time or space are not. Similarly, if metaphor is seen in the traditional terms of resemblance, it seems almost irrelevant to ask whether a similarity is *necessary* or not. The two oppositions simply do not coincide, but rather overlap. 'Necessity', then, is not a good metaphor for 'metaphor' in this traditional sense.

However, it may be possible to preserve Paul de Man's reading without referring to metaphor or metonymy, that is in terms of 'necessity' and 'contingency' - terms in which his argument was partially set. The reading passage does indeed seem to rely on chance associations, which it then tries to justify, making them sound perhaps more necessary than they really are:

> Aussi, si j'imaginais toujours autour de la femme que j'aimais les lieux que je désirais le plus alors, si j'eusse voulu que ce fût elle qui me les fît visiter, qui m'ouvrît l'accès d'un monde inconnu, ce n'était pas par le hasard d'une simple association de pensée; non, c'est que mes rêves de voyage et d'amour n'étaient que des moments - que je sépare artificiellement aujourd'hui comme si je pratiquais des sections à des hauteurs différentes d'un jet d'eau irisé et en apparence immobile - dans un même et infléchissable jaillissement de toutes les forces de ma vie. (I,85)

Yet, as we saw when we looked at this passage and Paul de Man's interpretation of it in Chapter 3, (p.115) it is possible to read this deconstruction itself in terms of adult and child working against one other, but somehow also in harmony. What the child perceived as necessary connections, may now seem to the adult as contingent as Swann's link between 'la petite phrase' and his love for Odette, but he nonetheless has a duty to express the experiences of childhood. As he remarks, at a later stage in *Combray*, 'la passante qu'appelait mon désir me semblait être non un exemplaire quelconque de ce type général: la femme, mais un produit nécessaire et naturel de ce sol [...]. Et la terre et les êtres, je ne les séparais pas' (I,154-55).

Indeed, in the reading passage, as elsewhere, what the narrator appears to be attributing to the child's vision and thought, is neither metaphor nor metonymy, but some kind of unity and fusion. This happens constantly in *Combray*: whether in the presence of the hawthorns which seem 'inséparables des mystères à la célébration desquels elles prenaient part' (I,110) or of Gilberte:

> Je la regardais, d'abord de ce regard qui n'est pas que le porte-parole des yeux, mais à la fenêtre duquel se penchent tous les sens, anxieux et pétrifiés, le regard qui voudrait toucher, capturer, emmener le corps qu'il regarde et l'âme avec lui. (I,139)

Again, as with metaphor and metonymy, synaesthesia does not seem an adequate term for this, since it is less an exchange of sense properties or substitution of one for another, than a

fusion of the senses - not even a *con*fusion, since there is no hint of any mistake here. Perhaps too, it is a unification due more to the unconscious work of the imagination than the senses, if the following remark from the reading scene is to be believed:

> Cette obscure fraîcheur de ma chambre était au plein soleil de la rue, ce que l'ombre est au rayon, c'est-à-dire aussi lumineuse que lui, et offrait à mon imagination le spectacle total de l'été dont mes sens si j'avais été en promenade, n'aurait pu jouir que par morceaux. (I,82)

Moreover, this tendency towards fusion is something that the narrator explicitly attributes to childhood, even if he uses the example of decidedly adult pleasures to do so:

> J'étais pour longtemps encore à l'âge où l'on n'a pas encore abstrait ce plaisir de la possession des femmes différentes avec lesquelles on l'a goûté, où on ne l'a pas réduit à une notion générale qui les fait considérer dès lors comme les instruments interchangeables d'un plaisir toujours identique. Il n'existe même pas, isolé, séparé et formulé dans l'esprit (I,154-55)

At first sight, it may seem that the adult is the one effecting some kind of unification, of distinct instances of pleasure into 'une notion générale', 'un plaisir toujours identique'. But this identification is entirely dependent on the adult's ability first to *separate*, that is to break down his experience into its individual components, to abstract the idea of pleasure from the idea of the woman with whom it occurs. The child, by contrast, has to resort to artificial means of abstraction, which, as the example of the hawthorns shows, are not always successful: 'j'avais beau me faire un écran de mes mains pour n'avoir qu'elles sous les yeux' (I,137).

To sum up, what Proust appears to be saying, is that his child characters do not always need to *find* links between ideas and perceptions, because such ideas and perceptions are not experienced as separate in the first place. That is, they have a necessary connection that goes beyond either metaphor or metonymy - or synaesthesia. Interestingly, this is echoed by a Piagetic doctrine that Vincenot omits to mention, 'le syncrétisme enfantin', even if the psychologist construes this in more negative terms than the novelist: 'des perceptions confuses, globales et mal analysées dans le détail'.[70] Later this appears to be confirmed - if tentatively - by a question from Ellen Winner: 'The ability of infants to match visual and auditory events appears to be metaphoric [...]. But are they in fact overriding a boundary between modalities, or are their primary categories amodal to begin with?' If so, she goes on,

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[70] Jean Piaget, 'La Pensée symbolique et la pensée de l'enfant', *Archives de Psychologie*, 18 (1923), 273-304 (p.292).

'this would not be an act of metaphoric perception'.[71] If we look at pre-Proustian psychologists, there already appears to be some debate about 'le syncrétisme enfantin'. Although Perez sees children's drawings as characterised by, above all, 'la réduction ou concentration des formes, la simplicité linéaire, l'évolution vers l'intégrité', Passy claims that 'ils dessinent les détails sans se préoccuper de l'ensemble; en réalité l'ensemble n'existe pas pour eux'.[72] This is echoed by Binet, who claims that, 'l'enfant [...] peut être frappé par un détail que nous n'aurons pas remarqué, mais il ne verra pas un ensemble, un panorama des choses'.[73] But this argument is to some degree resolved by the above examples from Proust, who shows that what the child is really unable to do is *abstract* the detail from the whole, even though he might perceive the detail in its own right quite clearly. Conversely, as Piaget points out, what the child's drawings show is the inability to *synthesize*, 'l'incapacité synthétique'. They grasp the object in its totality and its constituents, but are unable to find the links that make the latter into the former: 'L'enfant juxtapose ces pièces, il a le sentiment qu'elles sont liées et que leurs mouvements s'entraînent les uns les autres suivant des liaisons causales, mais la synthèse ne va pas plus loin.'[74] Perhaps it is only then that he resorts to metaphor and/or metonymy, as in the examples more explicitly attributable to the child with which our analysis of Proust began. These cases are born of a *desire* for unity, to return to the syncretism which is the child's natural state.

What happens when the child becomes an adult? Despite a remark to the contrary ('je ne savais pas alors, ni l'ai appris depuis, réduire en ses éléments objectifs une impression forte' (I,139)), we know that the narrator does partly grow out the child's unified vision of the world - if only because he can admit it eventually leads to mistakes and disappointments:

> Sans doute pour avoir à jamais indissolublement uni en moi des impressions différentes rien que parce qu'ils me les avaient fait éprouver en même temps, le côté de Méséglise ou le côté de Guermantes m'ont exposé, pour l'avenir, à bien des déceptions et bien des fautes. (I,183)

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71 Winner, p.69.

72 Perez, *L'Art et la Poésie chez l'enfant*, p.179 and Passy, p.620.

73 Alfred Binet, *Les Idées modernes sur les enfants* (Paris: Flammarion, 1955), p.120.

74 Piaget, p.298.

Thus the revelation that the necessary connections of childhood were in reality contingent can be a painful one. In fact, as already glimpsed in Chapter 3, many of the gaps in the child's experience, which his imagination tries to bridge, are not simply due to a lack of understanding, but are imposed on him by the adults around him. The obvious example of this is the reading of *François le Champi*, where Marcel's lapses of concentration are compounded by his mother's censorship (I,41). In *Jean Santeuil*, too, though in a different sense, an adult is seen to be responsible for the pain of separation, when Jean's mother throws away the flowers that he was to have taken back to Paris: 'Jean pleurait de la séparation d'avec ces chères créatures qu'il aurait voulu emmener avec lui à Paris, et de la méchanceté de sa mère' (JS,326). Thus, for Proust, as for a great many psychologists, the child comes to stand for fusion, unity, syncretism and the adult for separation, fragmentation and analysis.

However, the story does not end there. Piaget (writing only a year after Proust's death) makes the following remark:

> L'imagination artistique [...] consiste avant tout à voir les objets non pas analytiquement, comme fait l'intelligence, mais syncrétiquement, c'est-à-dire par perceptions d'ensemble: l'art dégage les *Gestaltqualitäten* des choses et l'effort d'intropathie que fait l'artiste revient à faire revivre cette perception primitive et totale.[75]

Piaget's comment sounds very close to Proust's description of Elstir:

> Une de ses métaphores les plus fréquentes [...] était justement celle qui comparant la terre à la mer, supprimait entre elles toute démarcation. C'était cette comparaison, tacitement et inlassablement répétée dans une même toile qui y introduisait cette multiforme et puissante unité. (II,192)

This, he goes on, is 'l'effort d'Elstir de ne pas exposer les choses telles qu'il savait qu'elles étaient, mais selon ces illusions optiques dont notre vision première est faite' (I,194). Of course, Proust does not talk explicitly about childhood at this point. But taken to its logical extremes, 'notre vision première', is that of childhood and the 'espèce de fondu' which is attributed to Elstir here is precisely what characterises Proust's portrayal of the child's vision. Henry uses this passage on Elstir, as he does with the 'catleyas' to question Proust's use of the term metaphor:

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[75] Jean Piaget, *Le Langage et la pensée chez l'enfant* (Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1923), p.208.

> Passant à des considérations sur les tableaux d'Elstir, il identifie comparaison et métaphore, substituant même l'un à l'autre les termes correspondants à ces concepts; mais ses propres commentaires démontrent avec éloquence que le phénomène en question est essentiellement fusion.[76]

Yet this is surely the whole point. What Paul de Man says of synecdoche is true of all kinds of rhetorical devices in Proust's work: they create (or rather *re*create) 'the illusion of a synthesis by totalization'.[77] Metaphor, simile, metonymy, synaesthesia, and so on are, paradoxically, among the only tools at the *writer's* disposal to reproduce the albeit illusory fusion that the child experiences - paradoxically, because these techniques also involve asserting the separation and difference that characterise the adult's vision of the world. Certainly, without similarity there can be no metaphor, but this is equally true for difference. It is impossible to either create or recognise or understand metaphor or metonymy without being aware that a substitution has taken place. In the same way, simile depends on the gap between the two terms for the force of its comparison. Again then, as in Chapters 2 and 3, we return to the notion of a compromise narrator, part adult and part child, both working in harmony, yet the former somehow destroying or breaking down the work of the latter, so that it can be communicated. As Proust's own narrator says of the task he has set himself, his old impressions will have to be transformed in order to be better understood: 'La recréation par la mémoire d'impressions qu'il fallait ensuite approfondir, éclairer, transformer en équivalents d'intelligence, n'était-elle pas une des conditions, presque l'essence même de l'œuvre d'art telle que je l'avais conçue tout à l'heure dans la bibliothèque?' (IV,621).

As well as this fusion of adult and child visions *within* metaphor and metonymy, there is also a frequent fusion *between* metaphor and metonymy, as we saw earlier, in Genette's diagetic metaphors. These now turn out to be particularly relevant, for if both metaphor *and* metonymy are brought into play, then the closer we get to the 'necessity' of the connections of the child's vision. The same might be said for Proust's tendency to use simile and metaphor in conjunction.[78] And if we accept Sully's suggestion that both resemblance and 'association' are at work in synaesthesia, then perhaps this is a similar technique. At this

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[76] Henry, p.61

[77] Paul de Man, p.63.

[78] As Mouton points out, 'assez souvent la comparaison est précédée d'une métaphore qui la prépare' (Mouton, p.104).

point, it might not be inappropriate to refer to the philosopher, Hume, who distinguishes between three categories of 'association of ideas': resemblance (metaphor?), contiguity in time and space (metonymy?) and cause/effect. Only the third, which is founded on the compound action of the other two is described as *necessary* connection.[79] Proust may rather misrepresent this argument, when he alludes to it in *Albertine disparue*, but he does acknowledge the power of habit (that is, Hume would say, the recognition of a *resemblance* between repeated instances of *contiguous* events) to produce illusory impressions of necessity (just like those of childhood): 'l'habitude donne à la simple association d'idées entre deux phénomènes, à ce que prétend une certaine école philosophique, la force, la nécessité illusoires d'une loi de causalité' (IV,85). And if we look back to Proust's 'definition' of metaphor, quoted above (p.148), we find that his vague, metonymy-encompassing metaphor is analogous in art to precisely this law of cause and effect in science (IV,468). Perhaps after all, then, 'necessity', illusory or real, turns out to be a perfect metaphor for 'metaphor' - but only in the broad Proustian sense of the word.

As well as eighteenth-century empiricism, and maybe more obviously, twentieth-century psychoanalysis has a degree of relevance here. As Kristeva says, 'it might [...] be possible to posit as "object" of analysis not "childhood language" but rather "infantile language", in the sense that Freud speaks of infantile sexuality - a *telescoping of parent and child*' (my italics).[80] This notion of a linguistic telescoping of adult and child seems to sum up Proust's use of metaphor perfectly. However, there is one essential difference between Proust's return to childhood through metaphor and the regressive processes that are usually described by psychoanalysis, that is, the 'telescoping' of adult and child in *A la recherche* is not entirely unconscious. Like Proust's child psychology it is not 'sans le savoir'. Furthermore, the simultaneous fusion and opposition of child and adult in metaphor is not simply a simultaneous confirmation and denial of the mythology linking childhood to metaphor. It also, once again, represents a deliberate confirmation and denial of the myth of the child-artist, so prevalent in Proust's day. If metaphor is the key to Proust's art, then

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[79] David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.23-24 and pp.60-79.

[80] Julia Kristeva, 'Place Names', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp.271-94 (p.278).

neither child nor adult alone is sufficient to unlock it. As will be seen in the final chapter, this fact is not without major consequences for *A la recherche du temps perdu* as a whole.

Naming: a bigger linguistic issue in Proust's account of childhood

Just as no discussion of Proust's style would be complete without an examination of his use of metaphor, so no discussion of childhood and language in *A la recherche du temps perdu* would be complete without an examination of names and naming. Indeed, names, from the priest's etymologies to the rêveries surrounding Venice, Balbec and the Guermantes, play a much more important thematic role in *Combray* than does metaphor. Moreover, the disillusionments of *A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* imply that names also have a more explicit link with the child's imagination.

Nevertheless, the question of naming is not entirely distinct from the question of metaphor and figurative language. Firstly, in Proust's account of childhood, names are intimately linked to synaesthesia, for example, in the 'audition colorée' of the 'la lumière orangée qui émane de cette syllabe: «antes»' (I,169) or of'la sonorité mordorée du nom de Brabant' (I,9). Secondly, another of the traditional categories of metonymy is the substitution of the name for the thing named. This corresponds to the third element of the child's vision of the world isolated by Vincenot: Piaget's realism and more precisely, the *nominal* realism that he attributes to the child. In fact, Piaget claims that until the age of ten or eleven 'there is confusion between the sign and the thing signified'.[81] Furthermore, when children ask, as they often do, 'What is that?', 'careful examination of these questions shows that in learning the names of things, the child at this stage believes it is doing much more. It thinks it is reaching to the essence of the thing and discovering a real explanation.'[82] It is precisely this kind of nominal realism that the narrator attributes to the child of *Combray*, when he writes that he and Bloch were 'encore rapprochés de l'âge où on croit qu'on crée ce qu'on nomme' (I,89), or to the adolescent of *Noms de pays: le nom*, when Gilberte pronounces his Christian name:

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[81] Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World*, trans. by Joan and Andrew Tomlinson (London: Kegan Paul, 1929), p.60.

[82] Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World*, p.61.

> Et me souvenant plus tard de ce que j'avais senti alors, j'y ai démêlé l'impression d'avoir été tenu un instant dans sa bouche, moi-même, nu, sans plus aucune des modalités sociales qui appartenaient aussi, soit à ses autres camarades, soit, quand elle disait mon nom de famille, à mes parents, et dont ses lèvres [...] eurent l'air de me dépouiller, de me dévêtir, comme de sa peau un fruit dont on ne peut avaler que la pulpe (I,396).

Naming: another excursion into psychology and the *récit d'enfance*

Perhaps the theory of names and naming is more relevant to modern Anglo-Saxon philosophy than pre-Proustian French literature or child psychology, but there is a little if limited evidence that Proust was not the only writer of his day to show some interest in the matter. Both Bordeaux and Boylesve write about children whose dreams of Italy are inspired by the sounds of its place names, although this is not developed into a real theme in either case.[83] And though Larbaud's Milou shows no interest in proper names as such, he fills the opaque vocabulary of the adults around him with imaginative meaning, just as the young Marcel does for place names. For him, 'l'usufruit est une pomme qui est tombée dans l'herbe et qui pourrit, toute ratatinée et fendue, sous les pluies de novembre. Les hypothèques sont d'affreux échafaudages noirs qu'on met devant les façades blanches des maisons.'[84]

Early child psychologists show a little more concern about the issues connected with naming than contemporary novelists. As has been seen, Sully notes a general interest in children's 'audition colorée' and Perez claims that the child has a special aptitude for finding links between sound and meaning:

> Un secret instinct l'avertit que les mots les plus sonores, les plus colorés, les plus amples, sont aussi les plus propres à exprimer les sentiments intenses. Il sait, sans l'avoir apprise de personne, la logique intime qui relie les sons aux images et aux émotions.[85]

Taine makes a similar remark sound particularly Proustian:

> L'enfant invente et découvre incessamment de lui-même; il n'y a pas d'époque dans sa vie où son intelligence soit si créatrice. Les noms que lui suggèrent ses parents et les personnes environnantes ne sont que des points de départ pour ses innombrables élans: de là sa joie et son sérieux.[86]

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[83] See Appendix 2, extracts 13 and 38 for examples.

[84] Larbaud, p.410.

[85] Perez, *L'Art et la poésie chez l'enfant*, p.133.

[86] H. Taine, *De l'intelligence*, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1870), II, 250.

This is echoed by Sully, who claims that 'a child in his "concreting" fashion tries to get sensible realities out of names'. Children, he goes on, 'build up quaint speculations about meanings, and try their hand bravely at definitions'.[87] There is also a hint here of Piaget's nominal realism, as there is in Egger's observation about the child: 'Il prend à chaque instant le signe pour la chose signifiée.'[88]

Thus, though perhaps to a lesser degree than for metaphor and the 'association of ideas', Proust - and indeed Piaget - have some potential sources of influence regarding naming, in both literature and psychology. Interestingly, however, there are no precedents set for Proust's treatment of names in *A la recherche* within his *own* earlier work. *Jean Santeuil* contains no hint of the theme that would play such a large role in the later account of childhood. Indeed, according to Barthes, once Proust had built up his system of names during the period 1907-1909, the whole vast novel virtually wrote itself.[89]

The Proustian system of proper names

Naming was at this time intended to play a much greater role in *A la recherche* and its structure than it does in the final version. At one point in its conception, Proust planned to divide his novel into just three sections, entitled 'L'âge des noms', 'l'âge des mots' and 'l'âge des choses' respectively.[90] Whether this corresponds to childhood-adolescence-adulthood, childhood-adulthood-artisthood or some other division, we cannot tell, owing to the abandonment of this project. Nor can we say exactly why Proust gave up the scheme, although, as will be seen, this may have had something to do with the difficulties in keeping the three stages entirely distinct from one another.

Nevertheless, the blurred outlines of these three phases can still be made out in the final version. What Proust seems to have done is abandon a rigorous system of proper names for the documentation of a non-linear process of apprenticeship, but this does not mean that

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[87] Sully, p.184.

[88] Egger, p.240.

[89] Roland Barthes, 'Proust et les Noms', in *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, 3 vols (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), I, 150-58 (p.152).

[90] See, for example, Gérard Genette, 'Proust et le langage indirect', in *Figures II* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), pp.223-94, for details.

the theme of naming loses all its importance. Naming not only plays a considerable part in *Combray* and the two comparatively small sections of the novel that retain it in their titles - *Noms de pays: le nom* and *Noms de pays: le pays*, but it also appears in the genealogy of *Le Côté de Guermantes* (particularly II,829-33), the etymology of *La Prisonnière* (particularly III,280-329) and scattered yet significant remarks in *Le Temps retrouvé*. Detailed examination of these parts of the novel leads to some interesting results.

L'âge des noms

Whatever the characteristics of 'l'âge des noms', the narrator certainly implies that it coincides with the late childhood/early adolescence depicted in *Noms de pays: le nom*. Here he describes his early rêveries about Norman towns, based on the sounds of their names, and about Italian cities, based on their associations with art. These are 'fausses' images (I,382) which only become problematic because of the reality invested in them by the child - in other words, Piaget's nominal realism ('ne pensant pas aux noms comme à un idéal inaccessible mais comme à une ambiance réelle' (I,383)). The narrator even claims that his erroneous beliefs in names *define* this period of his life: 'Ces images irréelles, fixes, toujours pareilles, remplissant mes nuits et mes jours, différencièrent cette époque de ma vie de celles qui l'avaient précédée' (I,383). They clearly mark out this segment of his life from the subsequent disillusionment of *Noms de pays: le pays*, but the difference between this age and the earlier childhood of *Combray* is perhaps only one of degree. There the name Guermantes functions in the same sonorous way as Bayeux, Vitré, Lamballe and Coutances, and the child's nominal realism, together with the belief in the magical power of names described by Piaget, is evident as early as the brief encounter with Gilberte at Tansonville: 'Ainsi passa près de moi ce nom de Gilberte, donné comme un talisman qui me permettrait peut-être de retrouver un jour celle dont il venait de faire une personne et qui, l'instant d'avant, n'était qu'une image incertaine' (I,140). Thus, all childhood, to a greater or lesser extent, is for Proust an 'âge des noms'.

Moreover, the child's realism is itself a consequence of a more general feature of the Proustian childhood, a profound belief in - and desire to grasp - the individuality of things: 'ces noms [...] exaltèrent l'idée que je me faisais de certains lieux de la terre, en les faisant plus particuliers, par conséquent plus réels' (I,380). This again was evident in the earlier

'moi' of *Combray*, 'qui considérais un livre nouveau non comme une chose ayant beaucoup de semblables, mais comme une personne unique, n'ayant de raison d'exister qu'en soi' (I,41). It was even present in the young Jean Santeuil, who, deprived of Proust's discoveries about names, makes do with definite descriptions to express such beliefs:

> Pour Jean les choses n'étaient pas encore l'une de beaucoup de choses du même genre, mais des personnes dont l'équivalent n'existait pas [...]. Il ne disait pas qu'il y avait dans le canal des cygnes mais «les» cygnes, et dans le terrain un camélia mais «le» camélia, qui étaient des choses probablement aussi uniques dans leur genre et en tout cas aimées et connues en tant qu'elles étaient bien celles-ci, celui qui avait voulu lui donner un coup de bec, et celui qui était en fleurs à gauche du chemin de la grotte, personnes distinctes et n'ayant pas plus vraisemblablement leur double au monde que son oncle, sa maman, le jardinier et leur maison d'Éteuilles. (JS,334)

This links up with the preceding discussion of metaphor and 'syncrétisme'. It is the child's inability to analyse, that is to break down, his perceptions that means he is unable to see people, books and many things as anything but individuals. He simply cannot isolate the properties they share with other individuals (whether swans, camelias or Swanns) and which make them examples of a *kind* - hence the young Marcel's tendency to privilege the proper name over the common name:

> Les mots nous présentent des choses une petite image claire et usuelle comme celles que l'on suspend aux murs des écoles pour donner aux enfants l'exemple de ce qu'est un établi, un oiseau, une fourmilière, choses conçues comme pareilles à toutes celles de même sorte. Mais les noms présentent des personnes - et des villes qu'ils nous habituent à croire individuelles, uniques comme des personnes - une image confuse qui tire d'eux, de leur sonorité éclatante ou sombre la couleur dont elle est peinte uniformément. (I,380)

Thus, despite a certain degree of 'confusion', proper names are believed to get at whatever makes people and places individual, that is, their *essences* - another feature shared with Piaget's psychology. 'Toute cette vie séparée de la mienne' is, writes the narrator 'condensée dans le nom de Gilberte' (I,388). In other words, to return to the terminology of our discussion of metaphor, names reach out to the properties that *necessarily* belong to an individual.

Of course, we now find ourselves on a philosophical rather than psychological plane. But then, curiously, Proust's narrator presents the above distinction between common names and proper names as a philosophical generalisation, rather than a belief confined to the child (even if he makes it clear at the same time that this leads to problems of 'images confuses' and illusions). According to Barthes, the narrator, and indeed the child more dimly, have grasped fundamental truths about the differences between names and other words. Barthes

claims that 'si le Nom [...] est un signe, c'est un signe volumineux, un signe toujours gros d'une épaisseur touffue de sens, qu'aucun usage ne vient réduire, aplatir, contrairement au nom commun, qui ne livre jamais qu'un de ses sens par syntagme'.[91] What is more, he goes on, Proust is correct to underline that for the proper name at least, the relationship between 'signifiant' and 'signifié' is a 'rapport motivé'.[92]

However, is this really what Proust means or has another structuralist binary opposition (like metaphor and metonymy) been imposed on his thought? Barthes does admit that other philosophical currents view the proper name differently: 'Le Nom propre est lui aussi un signe, et non bien entendu, un simple indice qui désignerait, sans signifier, comme le veut la conception courante, de Peirce à Russell.'[93] But in a way, this remark fails to do justice to Russell, who could be construed as a potential ally of Barthes. The English philosopher's belief that names have no 'sense', finally led him into his notorious 'theory of descriptions', which claimed that names were simply short-hand for a set of definite descriptions.[94] Barthes thus rules out a tempting possibility that what the young Marcel learns is the lesson of certain post-Russellian philosophers: proper names do not signify by means of the simple descriptive force of common names. In fact, as critics of Russell point out, the 'theory of descriptions' fails, among other reasons, because definite descriptions cannot guarantee uniqueness of reference, the very characteristic that Proust and his child value so highly in names. Moreover, the fact that Marcel is so able to fill names with meaning at will may well be due to the lack of *set* descriptive content - even if he is not always entirely successful in his attempts to give names meaning: 'les noms ne sont pas très vastes; c'est tout

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[91] Barthes, 'Proust et les Noms', pp.152-53.

[92] Barthes, 'Proust et les Noms', p.157.

[93] Barthes, 'Proust et les Noms', p.152.

[94] See *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards, 8 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1967), VI, 489, for a summary of the doctrine 'accepted and elucidated by Russell in his logical atomism period': 'What in ordinary language we consider to be proper names are not proper names at all because the existence of their bearers is a contingent fact and in no ways follows from the status of the expressions in the language. This is a somewhat ironical and unfortunate consequence for the no-sense theory, which starts out as a common-sense account of ordinary proper names and when followed out on this track ends with the startling and implausible conclusion that ordinary proper names are not really proper names (not "logically proper names") at all but disguised definite descriptions.'

au plus si je pouvais y faire entrer deux ou trois des «curiosités» principales de la ville' (I,382).

When he does succeed in investing names with meaning, the child is still faced with the painful discovery of the chasm separating his vision from that of the adults around him. As he obsessively repeats the name of the street where Gilberte lives, his father can only remark on its lack of distinction (I,405). Even etymology fails to provide names with an absolute, invariable meaning, as the derivations of place names belonging to the Combray priest and Brichot eventually cancel each other out. We are close here to the 'nominal essences' of Locke, superficial features which characterise our subjective *ideas* of things, as opposed to 'real essences' or hidden properties which make a thing objectively what it is. In fact, this seventeenth-century distinction seems much more appropriate to Proust's treatment of names than the comparatively modern structuralist opposition between 'signifiant' and 'signifié'. Barthes may be right that the relationship between 'signifiant' and 'signifié' is a 'rapport motivé' (by sonority among other things), but what Proust really appears to be interested in is the relationship between 'signe' and 'chose', between 'nominal essence' and 'real essence'. Even before the disillusionment of *Noms de pays: le pays*, much of the young Marcel's distress is caused by the fact that, having filled names with a personal descriptive content, these words actually cease to designate the thing, or even the idea of the thing, but something quite different. Of the pages where he endlessly writes Gilberte's name it is said, 'je me sentais découragé parce qu'elles ne me parlaient pas de Gilberte qui ne les verrait même pas, mais de mon propre désir qu'elles semblaient me montrer comme quelque chose de purement personnel, d'irréel, de fastidieux et d'impuissant' (I,393).

Whatever we choose to make of the psychological or philosophical debate, however, Proust is probably more interested in the *aesthetic* potential of naming and thus of childhood. As noted above, the child's nominal realism can be regarded as metonymy in one of its most basic senses. And, as Barthes points out, the motivated relationship between 'signifiant' and 'signifié' (or nominal and real essences) is often a kind of poetic correspondence between sound and sense. Similarly, the 'douceur stendhalienne' of Parma is based on a literary connection, and images of Venice or Florence are founded on associated works of art. Even if many of the child's illusions have more to do with sexual desire than anything else, as in

the above example about Gilberte, this can inject a new poetry into old names, to the point of uncovering sonorities that were not originally there:

> Je m'arrangeais à tout propos à faire prononcer à mes parents le nom de Swann; certes je me le répétais mentalement sans cesse; mais j'avais besoin aussi d'entendre sa sonorité délicieuse et de me faire jouer cette musique dont la lecture muette ne me suffisait pas. Ce nom de Swann d'ailleurs que je connaissais depuis si longtemps, était maintenant pour moi, ainsi qu'il arrive à certains aphasiques à l'égard des mots les plus usuels, un nom nouveau. (I,405)

In a similar way, there may be nothing intrinsically bronze about the name, Brabant, but the phrase, 'la sonorité mordorée du nom de Brabant' (I,9), achieves a certain poetic validity by virtue of the assonance created by the addition of the word 'sonorité' itself.

L'âge des mots

The next stage in the Proustian child's development is of course the disillusionment created when these poetic imaginings come up against the harshness of reality. This progression is implicit as early as *Combray*, when the child first sets eyes on the duchess whom he had enveloped in Merovingian mystery. 'Ma déception était grande' (I,172), remarks the narrator, who describes her body as 'ignorant du nom qu'on lui appliquait' (I,173). Nevertheless, he persists in most of his illusions about names until the revelations of *Noms de pays: le pays*, when he travels to Balbec for the first time, experiencing the reality not only of the seaside resort itself, but of the towns *en route*, whose names figure on the railway timetable and which have been the subject of much imaginative elaboration. The departure of the train also coincides with a final separation from the mother, which can in turn be seen as signifying the loss of childhood: 'Pour la première fois je sentais qu'il était possible que ma mère vécût sans moi, autrement que pour moi, d'une autre vie' (II,9). As the journey progresses into adulthood, so the ordinariness of reality invades the domain of names:

> Mais pour Balbec, dès que j'y étais entré, ç'avait été comme si j'avais entr'ouvert un nom qu'il aurait fallu tenir hermétiquement clos et où, profitant de l'issue que je leur avais imprudemment offerte, en chassant toutes les images qui y vivaient jusque-là, un tramway, un café, les gens qui passaient sur la place, la succursale du Comptoir d'Escompte, irrésistiblement poussées par une pression externe et une force pneumatique, s'étaient engouffrés à l'intérieur des syllabes qui, refermées sur eux, les laissaient maintenant encadrer le porche de l'église persane et ne cesseraient plus de les contenir. (II,21)

Nevertheless, this stage is not described without a certain wistful regret for the old illusions about names. Moreover, a high regard for the mediocre, everyday truth, now revealed about the places and people whose names had once imbued them with magic, is not a characteristic we can readily attribute to the narrator who finally prepares to write in *Le Temps retrouvé*. Even at this stage, the young Marcel does not dwell on flat, external reality for long, soon putting his imagination back to work, though this time on things themselves (whether the hotel dining room or the restaurant at Rivebelle), rather than names. Perhaps then, this stage is less the final seal of disillusionment than a turning point, a hint that the fantasies of childhood were not so bad after all, even if they were erroneous? If we hold that childhood is not a time of life to be thrown off as quickly as possible, if we think that the child's vision is somehow aesthetically privileged as well as practically misguided, then we are likely to be less 'ambiguous' than Genette about 'l'âge des noms':

> La croyance en la vérité des noms est un privilège ambigu de l'enfance, une de ces «illusions à détruire» que le héros devra l'une après l'autre dépouiller pour accéder à l'état de désenchantement absolu qui précède et prépare la révélation finale.[95]

Could not such a revelation consist of a return to the old illusions, however? At this point in *A la recherche*, it is not possible to tell. But is it really so philosophically absurd that a name should somehow be attached to an essence, a '*real* essence' in Locke's terminology, as opposed to a 'nominal essence'? Vendryès implies that Proust certainly did not think so:

> Proust croyait à l'étymologie comme à un moyen rationnel de pénétrer le sens caché des noms et par la suite de se renseigner sur l'essence des choses. C'est une conception qui remonte à Platon, mais qu'aucun savant ne soutiendrait aujourd'hui.[96]

But, as Genette points out, if Proust's experiences coincide with those of his narrator, it is doubtful that etymology played such a role for him. Brichot's dry explanations are so rational that, far from revealing the essences of things to the narrator, they lead him to lose interest in the places in question altogether:

> Ainsi ce n'était pas seulement les noms des lieux de ce pays qui avaient perdu leur mystère du début, mais ces lieux eux-mêmes. Les noms déjà vidés à demi d'un mystère que l'étymologie avait remplacé par le raisonnement, étaient encore descendus d'un degré. (III,494)

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[95] Genette, 'Proust et le langage indirect', pp.246-47.

[96] Vendryès, quoted by Genette in 'Proust et le langage indirect', p.244.

After all, Brichot's derivations are just another way of trying to give names meaning by virtue of descriptions, just as the child's illusions were. At this point, it is worth quoting a remark by the modern American philosopher Kripke, in support of the narrator's disappointment with etymology:

> Perhaps we should say that a name such as 'Dartmouth' *does* have a 'connotation' to some people, namely, it *does* connote (not to me - I never thought of this) that any place called 'Dartmouth' lies at the mouth of the Dart.[97]

However, he continues, 'It is not part of the *meaning* of the name 'Dartmouth' that the town so named lies at the mouth of the Dart. Someone who said that Dartmouth did not lie at the Dart's mouth would not contradict himself.'[98] And though Kripke cuts the link between *describing* and naming, he eventually reinstates that between naming and *essences*, one that philosophers, as Vendryès points out, had long since rejected - and one that Proust's child had so resolutely believed in, if possibly for the wrong reasons. For Proust too, the flat surface reality of *Noms de pays: le pays* and the rational historical truth of *La Prisonnière* is not the final picture. After all, in *Le Temps retrouvé*, he will condemn so-called realist literature for trying to paint this superficial, descriptive picture of reality (IV,463) and sets out his own aims to penetrate 'l'essence des choses' - through metaphor rather than proper names.

Before going on to look at this 'âge des choses' in more detail, it is worth considering exactly what Proust might have meant by 'l'âge des mots'. The first stage of illusory beliefs is quite clearly linked with 'noms', but what does the disillusionment of the second have to do with 'mots'? Genette rightly suggests that this has less to do with the division between proper names and ordinary names, than with a division between private child-language, 'le solipsisme verbal de l'enfance', as he calls it, and the public, socialised language of adults.[99] As Piaget has taught us, this is one of the main differences between the ways in which children and adults use language.[100] The one thing that Marcel seems to be doing in the second stage of his development is learning to see the world, including the places and people

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97 Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), p.26.

98 Kripke, p.26.

99 Genette, 'Proust et le langage indirect', p.249.

100 Piaget, *Le Langage et la pensée chez l'enfant*, p.53.

designated by his favourite names, as everybody else sees it. Nevertheless, this might itself have something to do with the difference between the proper name and the common name (or ordinary 'word'). After all, in originally making the distinction, Marcel's complaint had been that 'les mots nous présentent une petite image claire et *usuelle* des choses' (I,380). It is as if these parts of speech had never been privileged and special at all. With the experiences of the first glimpse of the duchess or the first visit to Balbec, proper names seem to join common names in their mediocrity. This is the reverse of the procedure carried out by Elstir, who appears to give common names, that is the names of things as opposed to the names of people or places, the status of proper names:

> Si Dieu le Père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur donnant un autre, qu'Elstir les récréait. Les noms qui désignent les choses répondent toujours à une notion de l'intelligence, étrangère à nos impressions véritables, et qui nous forcent à éliminer d'elles tout ce qui ne se rapporte pas à cette notion (II,191)

It thus appears to be the artist's duty to turn common names and indeed all language, into proper names, not only by making them reach out to essences, in the same way as the child believed that proper names did, but also by giving them the individual and subjective quality of the child's use of proper names.

L'âge des choses

But is this really the narrator's final position about proper names and childhood? Certain critics claim that *Le Temps retrouvé* actually devalues much of the child's sense of wonder or immediacy of impression, by reducing it to lack of knowledge or experience.[101] This much is at least *partly* true of his rêveries about names. Eventually, even the fantastic name of Guermantes stretches to incorporate the once Mme Verdurin and the narrator himself is forced to admit:

> Non seulement je savais que les pays n'étaient pas tels que leur nom me les peignaient, et il n'y avait plus guère que dans mes rêves, en dormant, qu'un lieu s'étendait devant moi fait de la pure matière entièrement distincte des choses communes qu'on voit, qu'on touche, et qui avait été la leur quand je me les représentais. (IV,455)

Thus, in the third stage, the lessons learned during the second are retained, but not without a certain scorn for their mediocrity - 'les choses communes qu'on voit, qu'on touche', or

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[101] See, for example, Rosalie Taylor, 'The Adult World and Childhood in *Combray*', *French Studies*, 22 (1968), 26-36 (p.35).

without a certain regret for the mistakes of the first, which are now restored only in sleep. In fact, elsewhere it becomes clear that, simultaneously to the disillusionment, the initial illusions have also been regained; the name Guermantes has something of its old power again:

> Lu sur la carte d'invitation, il reprit pour moi le charme et la signification que je lui trouvais à Combray quand, passant, avant de rentrer, dans la rue de l'Oiseau, je voyais du dehors comme une laque obscure le vitrail de Gilbert le Mauvais, sire de Guermantes. [...] J'avais eu envie d'aller chez les Guermantes comme si cela avait dû me rapprocher de mon enfance et des profondeurs de ma mémoire où je l'apercevais. (IV,435)

Thus the name brings about an effect close to the all-important involuntary memory. The narrator simply cannot escape the early power of names. Nor is it simply the association with involuntary memory that makes the kind of imagination originally associated with naming so desirable. The old illusions are not just regained by accident, the effect of a fleeting moment; they are to be actively recreated: 'Il me fallait rendre aux moindres signes qui m'entouraient (Guermantes, Albertine, Gilberte, Saint-Loup, Balbec, etc.) leur sens que l'habitude avait fait perdre pour moi' (IV,476).

It begins to seem then that the old ideas about names are rather like the old ideas about, say, Bergotte. Intelligence and experience may have dispelled the illusion of the 'doux chantre aux cheveux blancs' derived from his works, but in the end, this turned out to be just as correct as the vulgar social personality derived from dinner parties. Similarly, the child's initial fantasies about the Guermantes have as much validity, at least aesthetically, as the truth of everyday reality. Just as the child in the church compensates for his initial disappointment by forcing his admiration for the duchess to new heights, so the older narrator finds compensation for his social disappointment and justification for his previous poetic beliefs in genealogy:

> D'ailleurs, ma curiosité historique était faible en comparaison du plaisir esthétique. [...] Le nom même de Guermantes recevait de tous les beaux noms éteints et d'autant plus ardemment rallumés auxquels j'apprenais seulement qu'il était attaché, une détermination nouvelle, purement poétique. (II,831-32)

The only fault, it seems, was to expect such poeticisations to coincide with everyday reality.

However, this is again to oversimplify. In the case of names there is no *full* resurrection of the purely poetic. We have to insist on the importance of retaining the *dis*illusionment as well as the illusion, even if the latter has more intrinsic beauty than the former. 'Ainsi, à tous les moments de sa durée, le nom de Guermantes, considéré comme un

ensemble de tous les noms qu'il admettait en lui, autour de lui, subissait des déperditions, recrutait des éléments nouveaux' (IV,548), writes the narrator of the Guermantes's ever-changing social circle. In a similar way, so the name finally brings together both child and adult. Only when both the initial stages of the narrator's development are combined to make the third can names truly have the power the child had believed in, the power to reach out to real essences rather than to *describe* surface detail. For it is of the essence of essences not only to give what is individual, but also to be *hidden*. Furthermore such essences are defined by the properties that are *necessarily* its own, as opposed to the contingent ones of everyday reality. As the narrator says of the Guermantes, daily contact 'm'avait empêché de connaître leur essence' (IV,553). Yet in the end, this not only contributes reality to his final vision of them, but also paradoxically adds poetry, creating an essence that is *more* poetic than the purely imaginary:

> Mais peut-être cela même me rendait-il la vie plus poétique, de penser que la race mystérieuse aux yeux perçants, au bec d'oiseau, la race rose, dorée, inapprochable, s'était trouvée si souvent, si naturellement par l'effet des circonstances aveugles et différentes, s'offrir à ma contemplation. (IV,554)

The essence that the narrator's work will strive to create may be 'en partie subjective et incommunicable' (IV,464), but only 'en partie'. And past illusions may appear to supplant present realities, but only 'pour un instant':

> Le souvenir de ce qui m'avait semblé inexplicable dans le sujet de *François le Champi* tandis que maman me lisait le livre de George Sand, était réveillé par ce titre (aussi bien que le nom de Guermantes, quand je n'avais pas vu les Guermantes depuis longtemps, contenait pour moi tant de féodalité - comme *François le Champi* l'essence du roman -) et se substituait pour un instant à l'idée fort commune de ce que sont les romans berrichons de George Sand. (IV,462)

Conclusion

One final excursion into philosophy is perhaps worthwhile. Kripke, whose main interest lies in the names of people and places, concludes not only that names and essences are inextricably linked, but that common names for 'natural kinds' - and potentially all language - can only be used because of a belief that they apply to some kind of real essences. Kripke's essences may be scientific and Proust's poetic, but both affirm a link between language and reality, not just the flat dull reality of everyday life, but something hidden and exciting beneath the surface. For Proust too, the domain of proper names is the arena where a drama with much wider consequences is played out. The child's essentialist beliefs about the

names of people and places are finally vindicated and come to represent a paradigm for all language and all art. Like Kripke, but through metaphor, Proust also makes the names of things fit this paradigm. As was seen earlier in this chapter, it is finally by using metaphor that 'il dégagera leur essence' (IV,468).

Thus metaphor marks a partial regression to childhood in several interconnected ways, reflecting the child's subjective if poetic illusions ('le solipsisme verbal de l'enfance'), along with his beliefs in harmonious unity ('le syncrétisme enfantin'), individuality and real essences. But at the same time, another aspect of language is recognised: that of 'l'âge des mots', socialised, adult and objective, reflecting the ability to classify into kinds and to see separation, however painful, in the world around us. Only when the limitations of the child's language and imagination have been recognised can the aesthetic potential of the vision they represent be explored. Elstir, for example, can only paint the world as he does, the world as it really is, because he knows it is not usually seen in this way. What he gives us is 'quelque image singulière d'une chose connue, image différente de celle que nous avons l'habitude de voir, singulière et pourtant vraie' (I,194). Furthermore, no matter how aesthetically superior the 'solipsistic' imagination of childhood may appear, the socialised language of adulthood has to be grafted on to it, simply in order to communicate it. Or, in terms of an old Proustian pairing, the child's *vision* can only be conveyed by the adult's *style*.

The main component of that style, metaphor, is of course present throughout *A la recherche*, not just the childhood sections. However, the partial reinstatement of the child's vision that it represents, both in terms of the necessary connections the child perceives in the world around him and the necessary or essential properties the child attributes to the things around him in naming, suggests that childhood is much more important and omnipresent in the novel than is commonly recognised. The next and final chapter will look at the thematic evidence for these stylistic conclusions. Perhaps when the full story of childhood in *A la recherche du temps perdu* is known, we might well find ourselves echoing the prophetic words of Saint-Loup: 'Maintenant je sais bien qu'il y a tant de choses qu'on annonce à tort, qu'on dément, et puis qui plus tard deviennent vraies' (IV,317).

CHAPTER 5: CHILDHOOD THROUGHOUT *A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU*

Mais le génie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée *à volonté, l'enfance douée maintenant, pour s'exprimer d'organes virils et de l'esprit analytique qui lui permet d'ordonner la somme de matériaux involontairement amassés.*
(Baudelaire)[1]

Childhood in *A la recherche*: where, how and why?

Where exactly does childhood appear in *A la recherche du temps perdu*? What form do these appearances take? How important are they? So far, we have been concerned with the answers to these questions specifically with respect to *Combray*, in comparison and contrast with other *récits d'enfance* of its day. However, as suggested in the introduction and confirmed in the preceding chapter, childhood is of a much wider significance to Proust's novel *as a whole*. Not only are early beliefs, such as those about naming, partially restored as the novel progresses, but the use of metaphor suggests the constant presence of a child in the narrative throughout - albeit fused with an adult. It therefore becomes important to answer the above questions from a stand-point situated somewhere within Proust's novel, but largely outside *Combray*. Such is the task undertaken by this fifth and final chapter, which will show how childhood has a tendency to fade out of the literal text of Proust's novel, only to remain in its metaphors. This phenomenon, it will be argued, not only projects *Combray*, along with the characteristics of childhood detailed in earlier chapters, into the rest of the novel, but also allows glimpses of different, more conventional ways of writing about childhood. More importantly, it permits interpretations of such themes as society and sexual love - generally considered as the provinces of adulthood - in terms of childhood. Thus, the ground is prepared for the gradual re-emergence of a more literal interest in children as the novel reaches its final volumes, an interest which will confirm the vital importance of childhood to understanding *A la recherche du temps perdu.*

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[1] Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne: L'Artiste, homme du monde, homme des foules et enfant', in *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976), II, 687-694 (p.690).

Adolescence

Nevertheless, the most obvious answer to the question, 'Where is childhood in *A la recherche*?' remains 'In Combray and in *Combray*'. There is perhaps room for a little debate here, but only a very little debate indeed. Although Legrandin refers to Marcel as an 'adolescent' at Combray (I,124) and the narrator himself lapses into talking of his 'adolescence' at this point (I,133), in general he refers to Combray as the place where he spent his childhood. It is, for example, 'cette sombre ville [...] où s'était passée mon enfance' (I,435). On the other hand, Genette claims that, during the long Combray Sunday, 'les occupations de Marcel semblent être le matin celles d'un enfant et l'après-midi celles d'un adolescent'.[2] This inconsistency could simply be a consequence of using the narrative device of a Sunday which is meant to encompass the repeated events of several years. Other critics have complained that *Combray* is not so much an inconsistent picture of childhood, as an *incomplete* one, insofar as it leaves out all details of birth, infancy and early childhood.[3] Again, this can be seen as a simple consequence of Proust's narrative technique with its first person viewpoint. In fact, later in the novel, Marcel does speculate about his first encounter with the name 'Guermantes' in the cradle, but is forced to admit: 'Ces années de ma première enfance ne sont plus en moi, elles me sont extérieures, je n'en peux rien plus apprendre que, comme pour ce qui a eu lieu avant notre naissance, par les récits des autres' (II,313). Thus it seems that, for the narrator at least, a 'récit de première enfance' is necessarily a third person one.

Combray therefore remains very much a *récit d'enfance*, even if it does not stretch to include the beginning of that *enfance* and even if its *récit*, as was seen in the Introduction, carries on throughout the rest of the novel in some sense. Indeed, in many ways, Combray comes to represent a *time* - presumably corresponding to childhood - rather than a *place*. As the narrator says, at the very outset of the novel, 'bien des années ont passé *depuis* Combray' (my italics) (I,7). It is thus hardly surprising that he cannot place the little town on a map: 'Mais Combray avait pour moi une forme si à part, si impossible à confondre avec le reste,

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[2] Genette, *Figures* III (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p.168.

[3] See, for example, J.-Francis Reille, *Proust: le temps du désir* (Paris: Les Éditeurs Français Réunis, 1979), p.41. His psychoanalytical explanation for this is that the 'drame du coucher' functions as a 'souvenir écran'.

que c'était un puzzle que je ne pouvais jamais arriver à faire rentrer dans la carte de la France' (IV,532).

However, at what point in Proust's novel does the narrator's childhood end? If the *récit d'enfance* permeates the whole of *A la recherche*, might not childhood itself continue outside and after Combray? As was seen in Chapter 3, Marcel continues to play in the Champs-Elysées long after the break in chronology represented by *Un Amour de Swann*. And as was seen in Chapter 4, the first long separation from the mother in Balbec also seems to signify the end of childhood. These are not the only candidates. Other turning points in the narrator's young life are his first visit to the theatre, a pleasure that had been considered too adult throughout *Combray*, or even his final entry into the highest of society in *Le Côté de Guermantes*. Similarly, the father's remark that Marcel 'n'est plus un enfant' (I,473), could almost be described as a self-fulfilling prophecy, since it brings about two very mature realisations:

> Le premier c'était que (alors que chaque jour je me considérais comme sur le seuil de ma vie encore intacte et qui ne débuterait que le lendemain matin) mon existence était déjà commencée [...]. Le second soupçon, qui n'était à vrai dire qu'une autre forme du premier, c'est que je n'étais pas situé en dehors du Temps, mais soumis à ses lois [...]. (I,473)

Yet, after each of these landmarks, however decisive, the narrator continues to behave and be treated as if a child. After *Un Amour de Swann*, he continues to be referred to as 'cet enfant' (I,406) and after the father's proclamation that he is no longer a child, the mother continues to address him as 'mon petit enfant' (I,565) or 'mon petit loup' (II,9), although the reader knows he is already visiting brothels by this time (I,565). After the train journey to Balbec, Marcel plays childish games with 'la petite bande'. He also describes his own and Saint-Loup's devoted admiration of Elstir as childlike, to the point that he proclaims, 'nous étions des enfants' (II,184). Even in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, Marcel's father continues to believe that he is too young to move in high society, although he later admits, 'tu seras bientôt un homme' (II,447) (but only 'bientôt). And when Marcel finally does enter the Guermantes circle, M. de Charlus suggests he is not quite grown up, caressing him on the chin and remarking that he will soon have to shave (II,591).[4]

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[4] There will be cause to return to M. de Charlus's sexual interest in young people later in this chapter.

Although the narrator's parents and M. de Charlus are not the most objective or reliable of witnesses, these examples confirm the speculations of Chapter 3 to the effect that adolescence in Proust's novel consists of wild but deliberate oscillations between the characteristics of childhood and those of adulthood. Of course, this is part of a more general and equally deliberate ambiguity about ages that permeates the whole of *A la recherche*, so that we cannot be entirely sure that the events of *Noms de pays: le nom*, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* and much of *Le Côté de Guermantes* do belong to adolescence. In fact, most attempts to establish a definitive chronology complete with the ages of characters tend to fail - and were probably intended to by Proust.[5] To establish a merely coherent chronology, certain assumptions have to be made, for example, that Marcel's age is more consistent with his games and teas with Gilberte or their exchange of childlike gifts than his visit to a brothel during a supposedly temporary break in this relationship.[6] Even when we are given precise figures, it is in the vaguest of terms. M. de Norpois may say Gilberte is fourteen or fifteen years old, but this is only an estimation of the age of a child, whom we can only assume to have been born around the same time as the narrator himself.

Nevertheless, adolescence is itself a vague term, and the assumption that the oscillatory early volumes deal with this time of life is probably a fairly safe one. It is clearly the case for the middle sections of *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, where the narrator talks quite explicitly of his adolescence (II,89-90 and II,113-14). Indeed, it could almost be argued that all save the first and last volumes of *A la recherche* are about adolescence. After all, Hachez claims Marcel is only twenty-two, when he makes the final journey to Combray in *Le Temps retrouvé*![7] Certainly, most of the novel is set somewhere between childhood and adulthood. As Jane Missner Barstow says, 'most of the novel deals with the no-man's land between the magic of childhood and the sterility of maturity'.[8]

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[5] See, for example, Willy Hachez, 'La Chronologie et l'âge des personnages de *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray*, 6 (1956), 198-207. This has to be amended in 'Retouches à une chronologie', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray*, 11 (1961), 392-98, and once again in 'Fiches biographiques de personnages de Proust', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray*, 15 (1965), 289-303.

[6] Hachez, 'Fiches biographiques de personnages de Proust', p.301.

[7] Hachez, 'La Chronologie et l'âge des personnages', p.202.

[8] Jane Missner Barstow, 'Childhood Revisited and Revised: Perspective in the First Person Novels of Dickens, Grass and Proust' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973), p.100.

This remark obviously does not square with the argument set out in the preceding chapters to the effect that artistic sterility can only end when child and adult are fused. However, Barstow is right to hint that adolescence is connected with the question of artistic production - or the lack of it. Indeed, the oscillations between childhood and adulthood which constitute adolescence in Proust's novel may have links with the child-artist myth of the *récit d'enfance*. No doubt, they also represent the *reality* of adolescence up to a certain point, but Proust seems to go well beyond that point. It is almost as if Marcel's teenage years consist of an alternation between the very qualities of the child and the very qualities of the adult that he will need to write, but the formula that will combine them has not yet been found. In other words, the hero has not yet stabilised into the 'homme-enfant' by which Baudelaire defines artistic genius and which will finally transform him into a narrator.[9]

Proust and Baudelaire: a brief digression

In fact, it is difficult to believe that Proust did not have Baudelaire's celebrated account of the painter Constantin Guys (where this definition occurs) in mind when writing *A la recherche du temps perdu*. For if Baudelaire was responsible for spawning the myth of the child-artist, as some have claimed, then he was also responsible for *demythicizing* it at the same time. Although his profile of Guys in 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' may emphasise that 'le génie n'est que l'*enfance retrouvée* à volonté', it does not omit to mention that the 'organes virils' and the 'esprit analytique' of adulthood are also indispensable.[10] Thus, Proust's own simultaneous affirmation and denial of the myth of the child artist by means of a narrator who is neither adult nor child, but both at once, is not entirely original.

Of course, we cannot be certain that Proust had read Baudelaire's praise of Guys. There do not appear to be any concrete references to it in either his work or his correspondence, but among the many critics who have applied this passage by Baudelaire to the narrator and his concept of art is Jacques de Lacretelle, a close personal friend of Proust's.[11] And the one reference to Guys in *A la recherche*, where Mme Swann in her

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[9] Baudelaire, p.691.

[10] Baudelaire, p.690.

[11] Jacques de Lacretelle, *Les Maîtres et les amis. Études et souvenirs littéraires* (Namur: Wesmael-Charlier, 1959), pp.82-83. Others include Francine Dugast, *L'Image de l'enfance dans la prose littéraire de 1918 à 1930*,

carriage is likened to one of his drawings (I,411), suggests that Proust might have read a later chapter of 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', 'Les Voitures'. Furthermore, Proust was well acquainted with Baudelaire's work in general, so it seems unlikely that he was not familiar with the piece on Guys or at least another version of the same idea in 'Les Paradis artificiels':

> Ne serait-il pas facile de prouver, par une comparaison philosophique entre les ouvrages d'un artiste mûr et l'état de son âme quand il était enfant, que le génie n'est que l'enfance nettement formulée, douée maintenant pour s'exprimer, d'organes virils et puissants?[12]

This could be seen as the very project set out by Proust in *A la recherche*. As was seen in earlier chapters, the child of *Combray* is the closest the hero gets to being a narrator before the antechamber of *Le Temps retrouvé*. Now perhaps we can add another sense in which this is true. For until the oscillations of adolescence lead him astray, Marcel, in a curious and characteristically complicated kind of way, is very close to the Baudelairian 'homme-enfant' who will eventually sit down to write. The second section of *Combray* is, after all, unusual among *récits d'enfance*, insofar as it paints a portrait of a child who is very much integrated into adult life.[13] Unfortunately for Marcel, however, the process of fusion cannot be complete until he has fully experienced adulthood for himself. Nevertheless, this shadow of the hybrid narrator introduces a pleasing degree of symmetry into the novel, the adult projected into childhood of the beginning mirroring the child projected into adulthood of the end - and perhaps explains why the young Marcel is able to produce a brief fragment of art about the Martinville steeples.

General Remarks and Imagery

According to Michel Erman, the intimate connection between the child of *Combray* and the adult narrator's art in some sense diminishes the status of the theme of childhood in the novel. He claims that Proust's only interest is in the aesthetic sensibilities of a single

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2 vols (Lille: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1981), II, 519 and M. Mein, 'Le Thème de l'enfance chez Mauriac et Proust', *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 11 (1984), 261-274 (p.262).

[12] Baudelaire, 'Les Paradis artificiels', in *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975), I, 399-520 (p.498).

[13] See Rosalie Taylor, 'The Adult World and Childhood in *Combray*,' *French Studies*, 22 (1968), 26-36 for a detailed account of this. See also Chapter 3, above, where this is discussed in relation to Marcel's reluctance to play.

child, who does not reflect psychological realities: 'il suffit de prendre en compte l'ensemble du texte pour pouvoir affirmer qu'il n'est presque jamais question de psychologie enfantine non plus que de l'enfant comme personnage de fiction.'[14] Erman maintains in particular that this one child is only a function of Proust's ideas about his art and points out that there are very few generalisations about childhood in *A la recherche*.[15] There is certainly a core of truth here. Previous chapters have confirmed that Proust's analysis of childhood is confined mainly to that of his narrator and - as with so many of his themes and characters - he is predominantly concerned with the bearing this childhood has on the narrator's development as a writer. It could even be argued that all Proustian themes are subordinate to their own connections with the central theme of art. Furthermore, Erman is correct to note that there are no long philosophical digressions about childhood, as there are about, say, love/jealousy, society or art. General remarks about childhood are few, far between and brief.[16]

However, as Hildick points out, 'fiction is full of special cases, is indeed largely *about* special cases', so Proust is hardly unusual in this respect.[17] Nor does the fact that he is dealing with a particular case preclude an interest in the general. Anatole France makes the point that the story of one child may not only be that of many others, but of the whole human race - hence perhaps the success of the *récit d'enfance*:

> Ne pouvant connaître les commencements de la pensée humaine, on se plaît à suivre du moins l'éveil de l'intelligence chez un enfant. Et si l'enfant ne présente rien de singulier ni d'extraordinaire, il en offre un sujet plus précieux d'observation, puisqu'il représente à lui seul une multitude d'enfants.[18]

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[14] Michel Erman, 'Le Thème de l'Enfance dans la «Recherche du Temps perdu»', *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, n.s. 25 (1984), 281-84 (p.281).

[15] Erman, pp.283-84.

[16] They are not non-existent, however. Children prefer certain colours (I,138); Bloch and the young Marcel are at 'l'âge où on croit qu'on crée ce qu'on nomme' (I,89); the narrator is still not old enough to have lost the desire either to please or to possess people (II,34); children are not able to disguise or hide their emotions, enthusiasm and desires (II,94, II,182 and III,847); nor can they suppress their capacity for unqualified admiration (II,126 and II,183 - see above); on the other hand, in childhood, one's personality has not yet left its mark on one's face (II,180). Also, children are unable to abstract, as was seen in Chapter 4, and they do not like the books that are written especially for them (IV,467).

[17] W. Hildick, *Children and Fiction. A critical study in depth of the artistic and psychological factors involved in writing fiction for and about children* (London: Evans, 1974), p.24.

[18] Anatole France, *Le Petit Pierre* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, [n.d.]), p.31.

And though the young Marcel often appears *different* from other children and is sometimes even 'singulier' and 'extraordinaire', he is not meant to be *unique*, as the narrator suggests when he carries away his first vision of Gilberte 'comme premier type d'un bonheur inaccessible *aux enfants de mon espèce*' (my italics) (I,141). What is more, though Proust may be guilty of aestheticizing child psychology in some sense, picking out only the elements related to his ideas about art, these are among the aspects of childhood that (as has been seen in previous chapters) interested the psychologists of his day. Of course, these theories do not necessarily correspond to *reality*. After all, child psychology was itself in its infancy. But the point is that Proust - albeit selectively - reflects contemporary, *general* ideas about children and even, in the case of naming, foreshadows the later discoveries of Piaget.

The fact remains that the narrator rarely puts forward any such theories about childhood and rarely makes any comments about it in general terms - especially in *Combray*. The reasons for this might lie to some extent in literary history. Proust would have been well aware of the stereotypical pronouncements about innocence, purity and freshness of vision that characterized the *récits d'enfance* of his day - perhaps painfully so after his failure to achieve publication.[19] Indeed, in such times of widespread interest in children, literary, popular and psychological, to make any general statement about childhood would have been, in some sense, a cliché. That Proust is rejecting certain *idées reçues* is suggested by the way in which some of his characters make stereotypical remarks about what is or is not good for children: for example, the grand-mother's ideas about suitable reading for a child (I,39), echoed by her sisters (I,145), or received opinion about the effects of the Champs-Elysées (I,486). And the strongest indication that Proust is deviating from a certain kind of discourse about childhood comes with Legrandin's ridiculously extravagant nostalgia for the flowers of his youth (I,124).[20]

Yet, if this is parody, it is also to some extent self-parody. After all, it is the narrator himself who lapses into clichéd nostalgia of precisely this kind at the end of *Combray*, where

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[19] Bardèche hints that his lack of conformity to certain norms was the reason for such difficulties: 'Et comme on comprend que le malheureux directeur littéraire de la puissante maison Fasquelle, habitué à Boylesve ou à Marcel Prévost, ait renvoyé avec horreur ces cauchemars incompréhensibles d'un enfant nerveux qui ne parvient pas à s'endormir. Car c'est dans un monde nouveau que cet enfant hypernerveux nous entraîne.' (Maurice Bardèche, *Marcel Proust Romancier*, 2 vols (Paris: Les Sept Couleurs, 1971), 1, 248).

[20] See Chapters 2 and 4 for a discussion of Legrandin's language.

he laments, 'Les fleurs qu'on me montre aujourd'hui ne me semblent pas de vraies fleurs' (I,182). It is also clear that Proust recognises the existence of some abstract quality called 'childhood' which we all possess at some time or another. The very first reference to childhood in the whole novel is not to 'mon enfance', but to 'les belles joues de l'oreiller qui, pleines et fraîches, sont comme les joues de *notre* enfance' (I,4). As the novel progresses, we find that there is no lack of terms such as 'enfantin', 'puéril', 'enfantillage' or 'faire l'enfant' in Proust's vocabulary.[21] And we are also given tantalising fragments of information about the childhood of other characters - although, as Erman would be quick to point out, this does not mean they can be described as 'child characters'.[22] Perhaps then, Erman's doubts about the status of childhood as a theme of *A la recherche* are caused by the fact that Proust and his narrator continually seem to be treading an uncertain path between the general and the particular, tradition and innovation, cliché and experiment. This process, which has been documented throughout the preceding chapters, is summed up in a single sentence from *Combray*: 'Car en ce temps-là tout ce qui n'était pas *moi*, la terre et les êtres, *me* paraissait plus précieux, plus important, doué d'une existence plus réelle que cela ne paraît *aux hommes faits*' (my italics) (I,155). The narrator seems unsure whether he is making a point about his own individual tendencies or a generalisation about all children.

The same procedure can be seen in Proust's use of images that have children or childhood as their vehicle. To talk about the innocence of childhood or the child's inability to grasp adult values, may sound like empty *idées reçues*, but in the context of a famous Proustian image about Swann and one of the great-aunts of Combray, old clichés are given new value:

> Elle lui faisait pousser le piano et tourner les pages les soirs où la sœur de ma grand-mère chantait, ayant pour manier cet être ailleurs si recherché, la naïve brusquerie d'un enfant qui joue avec un bibelot de collection sans plus de précautions qu'avec un objet bon marché. (I,18)

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[21] See, for example: I,202; I,224; I,438; I,502; II,144; II,556; III,10; III,546.

[22] For example: Odette, who was 'sold by her own mother when nothing but a child (I,361); Bergotte and his rowdy siblings, hence his manner of speaking (I,544); the hotel manager, who had an 'enfance co smopolite', hence his way of speaking too (II,23); Mme de Villeparisis (II,68 and II,571); 'la petite bande' collectively (I,180-81); Morel (II,561); M. de Charlus (I,178); Octave 'dans les choux' (IV,185); the young marquis de Cambremer (IV,252); and Rachel - 'elle a eu une enfance très dure', says Saint-Loup by way of excuse (II,575).

There are several other references to the innocence of childhood in the imagery of *A la recherche*, which seem to suggest that Proust took the validity of this clichéd notion for granted. For example, Saniette's speech impediment is 'comme un reste de l'innocence du premier âge qu'il n'avait jamais perdu' (I,200), and in a similar way M. d'Argencourt is compared to a child as he advances into old age: 'c'est parce qu'il avait retrouvé l'innocence du premier âge, il n'y avait plus aucun souvenir des notions méprisantes qu'il avait pu avoir pour moi' (IV,502). In fact, if we examine the numerous images of the novel that draw on childhood, we find that many of them function to a lesser or greater degree as general remarks, or at least, replace the apparently missing digressions about the nature of childhood. Of course, the above examples are similes more than they are expositions of a doctrine about childhood, but in certain instances, such as the following, it is the idea about childhood that somehow takes over - the vehicle becoming momentarily more important than the tenor:

> Quand nous parlons de la «gentillesse» d'une femme, nous ne faisons peut-être que projeter hors de nous le plaisir que nous éprouvons à la voir, comme les enfants quand ils disent: «Mon cher petit oreiller, mes chères petites aubépines.» (IV,78)

Although, in each of the above cases, there is no question of the particular child Marcel, but instead, of 'un enfant', 'le premier âge' and 'les enfants' in general, the final example inevitably reminds the reader of the young Marcel's passion for hawthorns (I,473). This turns out to be another function of the metaphors of childhood in *A la recherche*. Through imagery, the characteristics of the (doubly) only child of *Combray* not only become philosophical or psychological generalisations, but are also transferred, one by one, to particular adult characters in the rest of the novel, including the grown up hero. It is of Marcel and Bergotte that we immediately think, when Aimé, ever alert to other employees' tips, is described as having 'l'air attentif et fiévreux d'un enfant qui lit un roman de Jules Verne' (III,413), and of the 'dame en rose' incident, when M. de Charlus, in the inferior Verdurin salon, is compared to 'un collégien qui entre pour la première fois dans une maison publique et a mille respects pour la patronne' (III,298). Similarly, when the narrator remarks, 'je m'en allais déçu comme on l'est souvent dès l'enfance après la messe de minuit' (II,519), the reader is reminded not only of the disappointment caused by the first glimpse of the duchess in the church at Combray, but of all the subsequent inevitable disillusionments to which the illusions of Marcel's childhood gave way. In similar but more general terms, Graham's observation that Proust's images reveal an ambivalent attitude to the experience of

childhood can be equated to *Combray*'s division into two parts: the hell of the 'drame du coucher' and the 'paradis perdu' of the walks along the 'deux côtés'.[23]

Thus, the novel's imagery not only provides a potential glossary of the Proustian childhood's general characteristics, but also serves to keep *Combray* alive in the metaphorical text - even though childhood gradually disappears from the *literal* text, as the hero slowly wends his way through adolescence. This is similar to the much documented mechanism (seen earlier in the Introduction), by which the events of *Combray* metamorphose and merge into the action of the subsequent sections of *A la recherche*. But if many of these images of childhood prolong the *récit d'enfance* in an intratextual sense, some also represent the presence of the *récit d'enfance* in an *intertextual* sense. As was seen in Chapter 3, the comparison of the two small boys in the Champs-Elysées (I,395) to the characters of children's books functions, like the gardener's daughter, as the injection of a an entirely different way of writing about childhood into Proust's text. Mme Swann's 'jardin d'hiver' also projects us into into a contrasting kind of *récit d'enfance*:

> Il faisait penser en plus grand, dans les hôtels d'alors, à ces serres minuscules et portatives posées au matin du premier janvier sous la lampe allumée - les enfants n'ayant pas eu la patience d'attendre qu'il fît jour - parmi les autres cadeaux du jour de l'An, mais le plus beau d'entre eux, consolant avec les plantes qu'on va pouvoir cultiver, de la nudité de l'hiver; plus encore qu'à ces serres-là elles-mêmes, ces jardins d'hiver ressemblaient à celle qu'on voyait tout auprès d'elles, figurée dans un beau livre, autre cadeau du jour de l'An, et qui, bien qu'elle fût donnée non aux enfants, mais à Mlle Lili, l'héroïne de l'ouvrage, les enchantait à tel point que devenus maintenant presque vieillards, ils se demandent si dans ces années fortunées l'hiver n'était pas la plus belle des saisons. (I,582)

Elsewhere, it is as if the reader is being referred back to Proust's own earlier novel and its *récit d'enfance*. When Saint-Loup quarrels with a petulantly childish Rachel, she bears far more resemblance to the young Jean Santeuil in the stormy relationship with his parents than to the child of *Combray*:

> Car elle était de mauvaise humeur, trépignait, pleurait, pour des raisons aussi incompréhensibles que les enfants qui s'enferment dans un cabinet noir, ne viennent pas dîner, refusant toute explication, et ne font que redoubler de sanglots quand, à bout de raisons, on leur donne des claques. (II,419-20)

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[23] See V.E. Graham, *The Imagery of Proust* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), p.198.

Sometimes it even seems as if a whole alternative *récit d'enfance* is condensed into a single image. In the following example, Marcel's despair about girls is embellished into a tragic Naturalist case history:

> Et dussé-je, maintenant que j'étais souffrant et ne sortais pas seul, ne jamais pouvoir faire l'amour avec elles, j'étais tout de même heureux comme un enfant né dans une prison ou dans un hôpital et qui ayant cru longtemps que l'organisme humain ne peut digérer que du pain sec et des médicaments, a appris tout d'un coup que les pêches, les abricots, le raisin, ne sont pas une simple parure de la campagne, mais des aliments délicieux et assimilables. (II,71)

Similarly, certain striking omissions from *Combray* are retained in the imagery of the rest of the novel. Play, games and toys may be peculiarly absent from Marcel's childhood, but they turn out to be strikingly present in Proust's imagery.[24] Bolle, for example, points out that 'le recours à la métaphore du vitrail, variante de la lanterne magique, la référence à la toupie et ailleurs au kaléidoscope, aux fleurs japonaises, aux bulles de savon, aux puzzles, marquent la prédilection de Proust pour l'usage symbolique des jouets enfantins'.[25] Only the first of these, the magic lantern, also has a *non-symbolic* use. Another obvious example of this phenomenon is school, described in so much detail in the pages of *Jean Santeuil* and the *récits d'enfance* of other writers of Proust's day, yet deliberately excluded from the holiday world of *Combray*. There are, however, enough images that draw on school and schoolboys for Graham to comment, 'Teachers, lessons and examinations are unpleasant enough and Proust uses them to characterise unpleasant situations.'[26] Although such an attitude may account for the conscious suppression of such experiences in *Combray*, the matter is not quite that simple. School-days are not exempt from the ambivalence exhibited in *A la recherche* to childhood in general. Some of Proust's 'schoolboy' images even take on a tone of wistful nostalgia:

> C'était le temps où de grand matin élèves et professeurs vont dans les jardins publics préparer les derniers concours sous les arbres, pour recueillir la seule goutte de fraîcheur que laisse tomber un ciel moins enflammé que dans l'ardeur du jour, mais déjà aussi stérilement pur. (IV,60-61)

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[24] See Chapters 3 and 4 for further discussion of these two points.

[25] Louis Bolle, *Marcel Proust ou le complexe d'Argus* (Paris: Grasset, 1967), pp.207-208. Graham also draws attention to this feature of Proust's style (Graham, pp.199-202).

[26] Graham, p.202.

Indeed, others are used to characterize some of the thought processes and experiences that the narrator values most highly, memory and aesthetic contemplation, for example: 'à l'égard des œuvres qu'on a entendues deux ou trois fois, on est comme le collégien qui a relu à plusieurs reprises avant de s'endormir une leçon qu'il croyait ne pas savoir et qui la récite par cœur le lendemain matin' (I,520).

It might, however, be claimed at this point that one highly significant image is missing from Proust's metaphoric catalogue of childhood. Although children might be used to elucidate the process of artistic contemplation, why does childhood so rarely appear in direct comparisons with artistic *creation*? Certainly, we are given a literal image of a child-artist in the composition about the Martinville spires, but elsewhere, the reader has to put two and two together, linking later references to 'le temps heureux de ma croyante jeunesse' (I,416) with earlier ones to 'la foi qui crée' (I,182). Granted too, there is a fleeting comparison between Andrée's youth and primitive art (II,247). And in *Le Temps retrouvé* we find the remark that 'ce n'est pas que l'éducation des enfants, c'est celle des poètes qui se fait à coups de gifles' (IV,410). Furthermore, the dying Bergotte is compared to a child (III,692). Or, more cryptically, Marcel's initial illusions about him as a 'vieillard faible et déçu qui avait perdu des enfants et ne s'était jamais consolé' (I,95) are later partially reinstated. These, however, remain brief and isolated observations whose significance is not developed. On the other hand, if the image of the child-artist rarely appears explicitly, one other *scientific* image of childhood is repeated - and at length:

> Naturellement les choses n'ont pas en elles-mêmes de pouvoir et, puisque c'est nous qui le leur conférons, quelque jeune collégien bourgeois devait en ce moment avoir devant l'avenue du Bois les mêmes sentiments que moi jadis devant l'ancien hôtel du prince de Guermantes. C'est qu'il était encore à l'âge des croyances, mais je l'avais dépassé, et j'avais perdu ce privilège, comme après la première jeunesse on perd le pouvoir qu'ont les enfants de dissocier en fractions digérables le lait qu'ils ingèrent. Ce qui force les adultes à prendre, pour plus de prudence le lait par petites quantités, tandis que les enfants peuvent le téter indéfiniment sans reprendre haleine. (IV,436)

This is the third appearance of the image of the lost gland of childhood. It is first used in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* to describe the narrator's and Saint-Loup's exaggerated admiration for Elstir (II,183) and then the musical voices of the 'petite bande' (II,262). By means of this metaphor, Proust repeatedly emphasizes the point that growing up involves the loss of certain abilities.

Even here, however, it is not obvious that the lost faculty of childhood is equivalent to artistic genius. So, if Proust really was deeply interested in the myth of the child-artist, why is the parallel, as Taylor puts it, so 'lightly drawn' in his novel?[27] The reason, as she rightly hints, is that Proust only partially affirms the myth of the child-artist. As has been stressed throughout this thesis, he also insists on the abilities of the adult and their necessity for artistic creation to succeed. Taylor, however, is hardly fair on Baudelaire, whose formula for artistic genius as 'l'enfance retrouvée à volonté' has, she claims, only a limited application to *A la recherche*.[28] For, as seen above, Baudelaire himself qualifies the parallel at the same time as he draws it, so that, in fact, nothing could be more applicable to Proust's treatment of the themes of art and childhood. The relevance of the article about Guys is also evident in some of the novel's images. 'L'enfant voit tout en *nouveauté*; il est *toujours* ivre. Rien ne ressemble plus à ce qu'on appelle l'inspiration, que la joie avec laquelle l'enfant absorbe la forme et la couleur', writes Baudelaire[29], and Odette shakes her head in a gesture of almost parodic defiance, 'comme ferait un ivrogne, un enfant, comme font certains poètes qui ne tiennent pas compte de ce qui les entoure' (IV,529). The sculptor Ski, who is virtually a two-headed monster, is an even more obvious parody of Baudelaire's Guys, 'homme-enfant':

> Il avait à quarante-cinq ans et fort laid, une espèce de gaminerie, de fantaisie rêveuse qu'il avait gardée pour avoir été jusqu'à dix ans le plus ravissant enfant prodige du monde, coqueluche de toutes les dames [...]. Ses mouvements de tête, de cou, de jambes, eussent été gracieux s'il eût eu encore neuf ans, des boucles blondes, un grand col de dentelles et de petites bottes de cuir rouge. (III,266-67)

And the 'clochers de Martinville', written in childhood, touched up and despatched to *Le Figaro* in adolescence, but apparently published some eleven puzzling years later, may be a subtly ironic comment on the narrator's own similar tendencies.[30] Thus Proust gives the myth of the child-artist a final twist, simultaneously affirming and denying it, yet questioning his own questioning, as it were, as he adds a hint of irony or parody.

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[27] Taylor, p.35.

[28] Taylor, p.35.

[29] Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', p.690.

[30] See Hachez, 'La Chronologie et l'âge des personnages', pp.205-206.

Clearly, such an attempt, however incomplete, to construct a Proustian theory of childhood from a handful of images is a fairly hypothetical procedure. Perhaps these literal interpretations of metaphors of childhood even constitute an act of critical bad faith, given the narrator's comments on the magical powers of metaphor, which would seem to go beyond such 'translation' (IV,468). But, if nothing else, this procedure reveals the number and variety of images in *A la recherche* that draw on childhood. Statistically, they may be difficult to quantify, depending on the classification system adopted and the chosen definition of 'imagery'. Graham, for example, counts only fifty-eight images from the source of childhood, but if we add to these the number taken from games, around seventy, and the thirty or so drawn from school, college and academic institutions, the number is considerably higher and childhood becomes one of the most frequently tapped sources of imagery.[31] Moreover, Graham's statistics ignore the *extent* of the images he isolates. *Un Amour de Swann* can be interpreted as a two-hundred page expansion of one such 'image', the comparison of the young Marcel's plight in the 'drame du coucher' to Swann in love, even if this becomes explicit just occasionally (for example: I,291 and I,292). At the very least then, the omnipresence of childhood in the imagery of the novel serves to underline its importance to Proust's project as a whole, an importance which, given the nature of this project, can be viewed only in relationship to the theme of art.

Society

Thus imagery provides some indications of where, how and why childhood appears in *A la recherche*. It is worth going one step further, however, and asking where exactly these metaphors tend to appear or what exactly childhood is a vehicle for. Graham provides one answer, when he points out that images comparing adults to children crystallise around scenes with a social significance. As seen above (p.182), for example, it is in the Verdurin salon that the pathetic Saniette is described as childlike (I,200). It is clear too, that this is no mere stylistic embellishment, but expresses a very real and sadistic need on the part of his hosts:

> Aussi de peur qu'il lâchât, avait-on toujours soin de l'inviter avec des paroles aimables et persuasives comme en ont au lycée les vétérans, au régiment les anciens

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31 Graham, p.263. Some of those from the second and third categories would have to be eliminated, where they refer to adulthood.

> pour un bleu qu'on veut amadouer afin de pouvoir s'en saisir, à seules fins alors de le chatouiller et de lui faire des brimades quand il ne pourra plus s'échapper. (III,293)

It is also 'chez les Verdurin', that M. de Charlus, now moving in a social class inferior to his own, is described as a schoolboy in a brothel (III,298). Yet, in the same salon, just before his sudden fall from grace, it is he who ironically treats the rest of the party as if nothing more than children:

> M. de Charlus [...] prit une expression de prophète et regarda l'assemblée avec un sérieux qui signifiait que ce n'était pas le moment de rire, et dont on vit rougir brusquement le visage de plus d'une invitée, prise en faute comme un élève par son professeur en pleine classe. (III,752)

The increased dimensions of superiority and snobbery of his own family's social circles lead to similar levels of condescension, which can only be compared to the relationship between adult and child. When the Duke is confronted with Swann's position on the Dreyfus affair, for example, 'il en ressentait l'affliction d'un père voyant un de ses enfants, pour l'éducation duquel il a fait les plus grands sacrifices, ruiner volontairement la magnifique situation qu'il lui a faite' (III,78). Indeed, 'mon enfant' becomes a term of patronizing endearment in the Guermantes salon. This is at its most excruciating in the incident of the red shoes, where the Duke's farewell to Swann and Marcel is a kindly but cruel 'Adieu mes petits enfants'.[32]

The same device appears to be used on a narrative level for the narrator to express the inferiority of society life. Madame Verdurin may preside over her salon like a matriarch, but she is also like 'un enfant qui joue à cache-cache' (III,345) when she laughs. Even the duchess speaks in a 'voix d'écolière' (III,77) or, in her earlier manifestation as the princesse de Laumes, adopts 'un ton puéril' (I,333). Sometimes the narrator directly accuses high society of 'enfantillage' (II,556) or describes it as 'puéril' (III,546). Graham's explanation for this phenomenon is straightforward. For him it is purely a form of satirization of society, a way of cutting it down to its true size and expressing its fundamental unpleasantness. More particularly, he writes, 'Proust sees in the supposedly mature social world analogies with academic institutions and the rather unpleasant experiences of students in study and examinations and their relations with their teachers.'[33] However, it is possible that things are not quite this simple. Marcel returns to all these salons after his apparent disenchantment with

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[32] See also, for example: II,872; III,107; III,477; III,727.

[33] Graham, p.202.

them, suggesting that, in some sense at least, he might prize them for their very 'enfantillage'.

In another sense too, salon life represents a return to childhood. In the long reflection on the name 'Guermantes' at the beginning of *Le Côté de Guermantes*, the narrator presents his social ambitions almost as if they were the logical conclusion of his poetic childhood beliefs about the noble family, and even speculates on their origin in the songs he heard as a baby (II,312-13). There are also analogical links between society and childhood. Several critics have drawn attention to the fundamental similarities between the closure of family life at Combray and the sealed world of the social salon.[34] This is something which Proust himself explicitly underlines in the figure of Mme Verdurin and her reference to 'les fidèles de mes mercredis' as 'mes enfants' (III,319). Indeed, 'elle [...] haïssait les familles (ce dissolvant du petit noyau)' (III,301). Furthermore, very occasionally, the narrator's excursions into society preview the involuntary memory experiences of *Le Temps retrouvé*, which finally precipitate his writing. In one social episode, we find the following remark:

> Le plaisir que j'avais à voir la statuette, parce qu'elle me faisait penser à un petit jardinier en plâtre qu'il y avait dans un jardin de Combray, n'était rien auprès de celui que me causaient le grand escalier humide et sonore, plein d'échos, comme celui de certains établissements de bains d'autrefois, les vases remplis de cinéraires - bleu sur bleu - dans l'antichambre, et surtout le tintement de la sonnette, qui était exactement celui de la chambre d'Eulalie. (III,147-48)

Thus, the final discovery that the hero's social aspirations are not simply 'temps perdu', representing the antithesis of his artistic vocation, is also foreshadowed. Within all Proustian difference, there lurks a substantial degree of similarity and there is an ironic possibility that, had the hero only known what he was looking for, and had he been ready to find it, society could have opened the door to artistic success, the key to which increasingly appears to be a certain combination of childhood and adulthood.

Nevertheless, on a more superficial level, Combray and high society remain poles apart. As J. Murray points out, the narrator 'seems drawn by an almost pathological curiosity toward social domains different from his own'.[35] Yet even this can be interpreted as an unconscious quest for childhood, synonymous with an unrecognised desire to write. The

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34 See, for example, René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961), pp.202-203.

35 Jack Murray, 'The Mystery of Others', *Yale French Studies*, 34 (1965), 65-72 (p.67).

preceding chapter suggests that, for Marcel, growing up consists of learning to use language as others do. In fact, at one point, the narrator explicitly suggests that reaching adulthood is equivalent to a more general process of socialization. In praise of adolescence he claims, 'plus tard on voit les choses d'une façon plus pratique, en pleine conformité avec le reste de la société, mais l'adolescence est le seul temps où l'on ait appris quelque chose' (II,90). (This again hints that adolescence comes tantalisingly close to the combination of child and adult needed to write.) But if growing up means becoming part of society, then entering a *new* segment of society where one does not belong becomes a way of reliving childhood. That this is so can be seen in the fact that many of the narrator's 'social' child images apply to himself, when he is in salons that are supposedly out of his league. For example:

> On ne cessa pas non plus de me faire des compliments dont je compris qu'ils étaient encore moins une récompense pour le passé qu'une indication pour l'avenir, à la façon de celle délicatement fournie à ses élèves par le directeur d'un établissement d'éducation: «N'oubliez pas, mes chers enfants, que ces prix sont moins pour vous que pour vos parents, afin qu'ils vous renvoient l'année prochaine.» (III,63)

Or when he mentions Poussin in front of Mme de Cambremer senior,

> En entendant ce nom, à six reprises que ne séparait presque aucun intervalle, elle eut ce petit claquement de la langue contre les lèvres qui sert à signifier à un enfant qui est en train de faire une bêtise, à la fois un blâme d'avoir commencé et l'interdiction de poursuivre. (III,206)

Perhaps this can be traced back to Marcel's very first brush with high nobility, which takes place at Balbec long before his official social baptism and affords a similar example in the princesse de Luxembourg's smile, bestowed 'avec cet embryon de baiser qu'on ajoute au sourire quand celui-ci s'adresse à un bébé avec sa nourrice' (II,59).

There is in fact a traditional Freudian explanation for this in the phenomenon known as the 'Family Romance'. According to Freud, after an initial stage of adulation of his parents, the child begins to feel some disappointment:

> His sense that his own affection is not being fully reciprocated then finds a vent in the idea, often consciously recollected later from early childhood, of being a step-child or an adopted child. [...] The child's imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of a higher social standing.[36]

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36 Sigmund Freud, 'Family Romances', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), IX (1959), 235-41 (pp.238-39).

At the same time, Freud notes the similarity between the imaginative faculty of the neurotics who continue to cling to this childhood fantasy and that of highly gifted individuals. It thus comes as no surprise that Marthe Robert should see this tendency and its various stages as the key to the origin of the novel - all novels it would seem - as well as being in some sense a 'novel of origins'. Indeed, she claims that it particularly applies to *A la recherche* 'avec son obsession des titres, des filiations et des généalogies'.[37] Of course, there is very little chance that Proust was influenced by Freud in this respect, so that the telling of the 'family romance' in his novel is almost certainly unconscious. There is, however, another potential influence who might explain Proust's conscious depiction of his narrator's unconscious quest for childhood - and hence 'artisthood' - in society, that is Baudelaire. If we return to his account of Constantin Guys once again, we find that Guys is not only an artist, genius and 'homme-enfant', but also 'un homme du monde', 'un homme des foules' and even 'un *dandy*'.[38] Thus, in its social sections, *A la recherche* begins to look even more like an intricate rewriting of Baudelaire's piece on Guys than before.

Love and sex

Ultimately, perhaps because of the hero's very unconsciousness in this respect, salon life fails as a method of regaining childhood. Or perhaps, in metaphoric terms, the differences outweigh the similarities. As the narrator explicitly states at one point, 'Rien, moins que notre société de Combray, ne ressemblait au monde' (I,561). There is, however, another area where metaphors of children and childhood increasingly appear as Proust's novel progresses. This is, of course, in the sections of the novel which deal with love, mainly - though not exclusively - the relationship between Marcel and Albertine in *La Prisonnière*. Much has been made of this by many critics, especially of the Freudian variety, but it is still worth citing a few examples. Albertine's strategies for duping Marcel often appear childish (III,598 and III,659). 'Elle est très enfant', as the narrator tells Saint-Loup (III,254). This impression is reinforced particularly when she is asleep, perhaps the only moments when Marcel is happy with her:

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37 Marthe Robert, *Roman des origines et origines du roman* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), p.361.

38 Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', p.691.

> Elle avait posé sa main sur sa poitrine en un abandon de bras si naïvement puéril que j'étais obligé, en la regardant, d'étouffer le sourire que par leur sérieux, leur innocence et leur grâce nous donnent les petits enfants. (III,580)

Or:

> Ce sommeil si calme me ravissait comme ravit une mère, qui lui en fait une qualité, le bon sommeil de son enfant. Et son sommeil était d'un enfant, en effet [...]. Mais sa grâce enfantine était plus forte. Comme une mère encore je m'émerveillais qu'elle s'éveillât de si bonne humeur. (III,622)

Eventually, the narrator comes to refer to her as 'Albertine, ma petite enfant' (III,758) and her final departure is also described as 'un enfantillage' (III,15).

The most extreme example of Albertine's childlikeness had occurred long before this in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, when she was neither asleep nor being difficult, but was actually indulging in sexual relations with Marcel for the first time. Here, the impression of youth goes beyond her own childhood even, stretching back into the very origins of humanity:

> Déjà, au moment où je l'avais couchée sur mon lit et où j'avais commencé à la caresser, Albertine avait pris un air que je ne lui connaissais pas de bonne volonté docile, de simplicité presque puérile. Effaçant d'elle toutes préoccupations, toutes précautions habituelles, le moment qui précède le plaisir, pareil en cela à celui qui suit la mort, avait rendu à ses traits rajeunis comme l'innocence du premier âge. [...] Mais dans cette expression nouvelle du visage d'Albertine il y avait plus que du désintéressement et de la conscience, de la générosité professionnelles, une sorte de dévouement conventionnel et subit; et c'est plus loin qu'à sa propre enfance, mais à la jeunesse de sa race qu'elle était revenue. (II,661)

So could it be that Marcel's initial attraction to Albertine had been founded on her very childlikeness? Certainly, going back even further to *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, it seems that much of the 'petite bande's' charm consisted of a kind of collective immaturity. With typical Proustian vagueness about age, they are first described as 'fillettes', as well as 'jeunes filles' (II,147). Furthermore, their main appeal, as in the case of Gilberte when Marcel himself was a child, appears to lie somewhere in their childish games:

> Elles ne pouvaient voir un obstacle sans s'amuser à le franchir en prenant leur élan ou à pieds joints, parce qu'elles étaient toutes remplies, exubérantes de cette jeunesse qu'on a si grand besoin de dépenser que même quand on est triste ou souffrant, obéissant plus aux nécessités de l'âge qu'à l'humeur de la journée, on ne laisse jamais passer une occasion de saut ou de glissade sans s'y livrer consciencieusement. (II,149)

It it thus not without irony that Proust makes Andrée drag Marcel away from their games 'pendant que ces folles font les enfants de huit ans' (II,274), as this is where he would really like to be and precisely for that reason. But even Andrée, in trying to sound like an adult, only serves to exemplify a classic trait of childhood:

> Plus tard ces jeunes filles perdraient cet accent de conviction enthousiaste qui donnait du charme aux choses les plus simples, soit qu'Albertine sur un ton d'autorité débitât des calembours que les plus jeunes écoutaient avec admiration jusqu'à ce que le fou rire se saisît d'elles avec la violence irrésistible d'un éternuement, soit qu'Andrée mît à parler de leurs travaux scolaires, plus enfantins encore que leurs jeux, une gravité essentiellement puérile. (II,262)

Sure enough, such a time does come and 'la petite bande' loses all its attraction and mystery for the narrator, 'parce qu'elles avaient cessé d'être des enfants', among other reasons (III,68).

Perhaps then, Marcel's eventual selection of Albertine from their midst is partly due to her ability to retain something of her childhood, as is so visible in the imagery of *La Prisonnière*. Yet this suggests an increasingly sinister use of imagery on Proust's part. If Albertine in Marcel's bed is so much *like* a child, then in some sense, she legalises the illegal and masks the desire to have sex with a more literal child. Maybe too, this also explains much of Proust's ambiguity and vagueness about age. The oscillation between childhood and adult traits which characterises the shadowy years of the narrator's adolescence, when applied to others, becomes less a method of mimicking Baudelaire's artist than a sophisticated moral cover-up. In a way, the narrator's behaviour is an inverted image of the actions of those who make their charges appear deceptively childlike. Odette supposedly makes Gilberte wear plaits so that she appears 'plus longtemps enfant, afin de se rajeunir elle-même (I,485) and Mme Bontemps is accused of a similar trick with a much older Albertine: 'Qu'Albertine en ayant l'air d'un enfant fasse paraître Mme Bontemps plus jeune, c'est tout ce que celle-ci demande' (III,698). This can itself be read as a strategy on the part of the narrator, who, in the case of Gilberte, is thereby able to make her appear *older* than she actually is, and in the case of Albertine, manages to divert attention from one of her most desirable characteristics.

Of course, this is rather convoluted. *A la recherche* is not an obvious case of paedophile literature and there is nothing morally disturbing in the narrator's relationship with Gilberte, or even in the explicitly sexual discoveries with his cousin, for at this point he is still a child himself. In legal terms too, Albertine is very much a consenting adult. Yet it is not without reason that Nabokov included Proust's narrator in a series of allusions to literary precursors of Humbert Humbert.[39] For, as the novel reaches its final volumes, the child

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39 Referred to by J.E. 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), p.46.

emerges from the metaphorical text of the novel into the literal - no longer in the guise of what might be called the 'poetic subject' of *Combray*, but increasingly as a sexual object. Suspicions about Albertine's sex appeal are finally confirmed when she leaves the narrator, who comforts himself by bringing home what is literally a little girl. Now that Albertine is absent, a child proves the only substitute, even if she does not give full satisfaction:

> Devant la porte d'Albertine je trouvai une petite fille pauvre qui me regardait avec de grands yeux et qui avait l'air si bon que je lui demandai si elle ne voulait pas venir chez moi, comme j'eusse fait d'un chien au regard fidèle. Elle en eut l'air content. A la maison je la berçai quelque temps sur mes genoux, mais bientôt sa présence, en me faisant trop sentir l'absence d'Albertine, me fut insupportable. Et je la priai de s'en aller après lui avoir remis un billet de cinq cent francs. Et pourtant, bientôt après, la pensée d'avoir quelque autre petite fille près de moi, de ne jamais être seul sans le recours d'une présence innocente, fut le seul rêve qui me permit de supporter l'idée que peut-être Albertine resterait quelque temps sans revenir. (IV,15-16)

This has serious repercussions, resulting in Marcel's near prosecution for corrupting a minor (IV,27) and, because of a comic misunderstanding between concierge and policeman, the house is placed under surveillance. This comedy, however, like the ambiguity and imagery noted above, has a sinister lining. No doubt, the misunderstanding results in an unfair exaggeration of Marcel's reputation and partly misguided suspicion. But, by only presenting the absurd, exaggerated side of the situation, the narrator manages to gloss over the fact that these suspicions were not entirely unfounded. Whatever the 'truth', the police presence not only prevents him from satisfying potentially illegal desires, but also denies the possibility of a whole new novel, a turn-of-the-century *Lolita*.

Nevertheless, this is not quite the end of the story. Throughout the streets of Venice in *Albertine disparue*, the narrator continues to pursue dubiously young women (IV,205) - just as he had done in Paris, before Albertine's departure even. Now he is free to do what he had then wished:

> Cette attention, d'ailleurs, qui m'eût semblé criminelle de la part d'Albertine (et tout autant si elle avait eu pour objet des jeunes gens), je l'attachais, sans me croire un instant coupable - et en trouvant presque qu'Albertine l'était en m'empêchant par sa présence de m'arrêter et descendre - sur toutes les midinettes. (III,675-76)

Even at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, he is asking Gilberte to introduce him to young girls, apparently oblivious to his own advanced years.

As so often in *A la recherche*, this is a tendency that is not confined to the narrator himself. His speculations about Albertine in this respect may never be confirmed, but they are for a multitude of other characters. M. Nissim Bernard experiences a sudden stab of desire for 'un jeune enfant de chœur' working in the hotel at Balbec (III,237) and, though many other homosexuals turn their heads away in shame when they see young boys (III,33), many of those who visit Jupien's brothel openly request 'un enfant de chœur' (IV,402). Proust goes into slightly more detail about two nameless lesbians, who mix paedophilia and sadism with their homosexuality:

> Elles devinrent très amies, se promenaient ensemble, l'une habillée en homme et qui levait des petites filles et les ramenait chez l'autre, les initiait. L'autre avait un petit garçon, dont elle faisait semblant d'être mécontent, et le faisait corriger par son amie, qui n'y allait pas de main morte. (III,853)

But the most striking example is the policeman who ironically comes along with the 'abducted' little girl's parents to investigate their complaints against the narrator:

> Mais dès qu'ils furent partis, le chef de la Sûreté, qui aimait les petites filles, changea de ton et, me réprimandant comme un compère: «Une autre fois, il faut être plus adroit. Dame, on ne fait pas des levages aussi brusquement que ça ou ça rate. D'ailleurs vous trouverez partout des petites filles mieux que celle-là pour bien moins cher. La somme était follement exagérée.» (IV,27-28)

Another significant but sadder example is Bergotte, who, when dying, becomes generous 'surtout avec des femmes, des fillettes pour mieux dire' (III,688). To all these, we might add Saint-Loup (III,92-93), Brichot, about whom M. de Charlus sows suspicions (III,799), and, as such suspicions begin to take root, Elstir. When we learn that he once painted a small boy in the nude on a secluded beach near Balbec, we find ourselves speculating about whether he belongs to some 'child pornography ring', which seems to be widening to include an increasing number of Proust's characters.

What meaning or importance do these appearances of children in *A la recherche*, both literal and figurative, have? Clearly, there is an element of demystification here. The child's progress from the poetic subject of *Combray* to the sexual object of the final volumes to some extent represents a progressive degradation of the sugary values of the *récit d'enfance* genre. This is not to say, of course, that *A la recherche* is unique in this respect. As early as Rousseau's *Confessions*, the child appears as the sexual prey of adults. And closer in time to Proust, we have Bonnetain's Charlot (in *Charlot s'amuse*) or Schwob's child-prostitute, Monelle (in *Le Livre de Monelle*). But, as Chombart de Lauwe points out, this remains the

exception, rather than the rule.[40] In fact, where such relations do appear, they are often used to demystify or satirise earlier literary archetypes.Charlot asks his male adult lover whether Paul and Virginie loved each other in the same way, and, in comedy worthy of Proust's paedophile policeman, Balzac calls the little girl seduced with toys and sweets by the elderly baron Hulot in *La Cousine Bette* 'Atala'.[41] Indeed, many individual images of childhood in *A la recherche* function in just this demystifying way, from that which so plausibly presents Albertine's sexual pleasure as childlike innocence to the following glorious example, describing the young employees of the palatial brothel near Balbec: 'les voix des jeunes bonnes répétaient en plus bas, sans se lasser, l'ordre de la sous-maîtresse, comme ces catéchismes qu'on entend les élèves psalmodier dans la sonorité d'une église de campagne' (III,465).

Perhaps too, there is an autobiographical or confessional element in all this. Bardèche claims that 'le goût de Proust pour les jeunes filles est aussi vérifiable dans sa vie que dans ses œuvres'.[42] Rivers also presents anecdotes about Proust's sexual attraction to young girls and a specific case involving a sixteen-year-old.[43] He is, however, more usually credited with a taste for young boys. According to Miller:

> In real life, Proust fell in love with young boys; he was emotionally like a domineering young woman with a younger one; he was a seducer - like Albertine and Morel, when they seduced younger people. Love affairs of this type caused him the least anxiety. [...] But more subtly, in his unconscious, it seems, he feared the overwhelming nature of complete submission to a virile man.[44]

Much of the evidence for this remains obscure. The full story of the Plantevignes affair, for example, never seems to have emerged. Whatever he was, Proust was not a Gide whose journal shamelessly details a night of passion with a fifteen-year-old boy at the age of

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[40] Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Un Monde autre: l'enfance. De ses représentations à son mythe* (Paris: Payot, 1971), p.369.

[41] Paul Bonnetain, *Charlot s'amuse* (Paris: Slatkine, 1979), p.106, and Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, in *La Comédie humaine*, 12 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976-81), VII (1977), 1-451 (p.440).

[42] Bardèche, II, 52.

[43] Rivers, p.45.

[44] Milton L. Miller, *Nostalgia. A Psychoanalytic Study of Marcel Proust* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p.170.

seventy-three.[45] If *A la recherche* is such a confession, it remains shrouded in mystery and doubt.

Psychoanalysis offers alternative explanations for both Proust's hypothetical sexual tastes and those of the narrator. Freud puts forward the same 'faute de mieux' reason as Proust for M. de Charlus in war-time and the same 'cowardice' explanation that Miller attributes to Proust himself:

> It is only exceptionally that children are the exclusive sexual objects in such a case. They usually come to play that part when someone who is cowardly or has become impotent adopts them as a substitute, or when an urgent instinct (one which will not allow of postponement) cannot at the moment get possession of any more appropriate object.[46]

But neither of these explanations seems to fit the pattern of the narrator's behaviour entirely. He does not seem to be impotent or particularly daunted by women and moves in circles where mature women are in plentiful supply. More interesting and relevant, however, is the account that Reille offers for Marcel's sexual tastes:

> Dans des données de fixation à la mère, très généralement, celui qui adolescent et jeune homme a été attiré par des femmes plus âgées que lui, reproduira, avançant en âge, le rapport répondant au désir incestueux pour la mère en inversant le rapport d'âge; il sera attiré par les très jeunes filles, dans lesquelles, de plus, il pourra fantasmer la mère avant le père, dans lesquelles il pourra se retrouver lui-même enfant et qu'il traitera comme il aurait voulu que sa mère le traitât.[47]

This seems to fit the narrator's pattern perfectly. Not only is his childhood love for his own mother excessive, but he is also obsessed by the much older duchess and Odette throughout his early years. Furthermore, Albertine is not the only lover in their relationship to be compared to a child. The narrator writes of himself, 'Je l'embrassais aussi purement que si j'avais embrassé ma mère pour calmer un chagrin d'enfant que je croyais alors ne pouvoir jamais arracher de mon cœur' (III,508). Separation from her is also compared to the anguished separation of the child at *Combray* from his mother (for example, II,895). Thus, throughout the affair with Albertine, there is a constant oscillation between the state of

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[45] In turn described by Henri Bonnet, *Les Amours et la Sexualité de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Nizet, 1985), p.93.

[46] Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), VII (1953), 123-243 (p.148).

[47] Reille, p.59. See also Philippe Lejeune, 'Écriture et Sexualité', *Europe*, 502-03 (1971), 113-43.

Albertine as child with Marcel as parent and the state of Marcel with Albertine as parent, an oscillation for which a psychoanalytic model seems the operative one.

Once again, such elaborate accounts may prove superfluous. The narrator himself seems to hint at reasons which, though they do not contradict the more Freudian explanations, possibly go beyond them. After all, the narrator, who is certainly no psychoanalyst, is quite explicit about - and therefore conscious of - this oscillation: 'maintenant je parlais à Albertine, tantôt comme l'enfant que j'avais été à Combray parlant à ma mère, tantôt comme ma grand-mère me parlait' (III,586-87). And if this only becomes conscious *after* the event, the idea of 'une présence innocente', of a little girl, any little girl, as a substitute for his former lover, is very much in his mind at the time of Albertine's departure. If we now turn back to *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, we find further clear indications of the precise nature of this need. Here, it sometimes appears that sexual desire for Albertine is itself secondary to a more fundamental desire 'de pénétrer sa vie, de la suivre dans les pays où elle avait passé son enfance, d'être initié par elle à une vie de sport' (II,286). It is as if the intimacy of sexual relations will allow him to *become* Albertine in some sense, with all her youth and vitality. Even earlier, Marcel's attraction to 'la petite bande' had been connected with nostalgia for his own youth: 'l'aurore de jeunesse dont s'empourpraient encore les visages de ces jeunes filles et hors de laquelle je me trouvais déjà, à mon âge, illuminait tout devant elles' (II,256). Clearly, the narrator wishes to be part of that 'tout' which is lit up by their presence, a presence which seems to have taken on the power of an elixir of youth. And the closer he can get to one of them, the greater its potency: 'j'eusse pénétré en devenant l'ami d'une d'elles [...] dans une société où régnaient la santé, l'inconscience, la volupté, la cruauté, l'inintellectualité et la joie' (II,186).

However, as with his attempt to penetrate *high* society, might not these qualities themselves be a means to an end, that is the resurrection of the poetic subject of *Combray*, without which the narrator will not be able to write? In this, of course, he fails. For one thing, he does not achieve the required intimacy with Albertine, and for another, the 'petite bande's' youth is expressed in a form which Marcel's never was, perhaps incompatible with art: childish games and 'une vie de sport', which only result in embarrassment and humiliation when he tries to participate. But the important point is that he tries (had he succeeded too soon, *A la recherche* would have been a disappointing five volumes shorter),

and that his method, here at least, is sexual contact with these 'jeunes filles en fleurs', symbols of youth and childhood.

Does this method have any more success in *La Prisonnière* with Albertine alone? According to Bardèche, the narrator's self-imprisonment with Albertine, surrounded by the furniture and the Françoise he had known as a child, mimics the eventual withdrawal that he will need to write - and indeed Proust's own self-inflicted imprisonment:

> Il était allé s'installer, au début d'octobre 1919, dans l'appartement plus petit de la rue Hamelin, où, sur le lit de fer de son enfance, entouré de ses cahiers et enveloppé de ses fumigations, il mit au point ses derniers tomes.[48]

Furthermore, the oscillation between child and parent ego states, noted above, suggests that sexual relations with a person who symbolises youth and childhood can, to some extent, resurrect the child in the narrator and that identification with the loving parent can result in identification with the loving child. At the very least, his sexual desire for the very young seems a good stimulus to remembering the sexual desires of childhood that were also for the very young:

> Certes, il m'arrivait souvent de me rappeler, avec une violence de désir inouïe, telle fillette de Méséglise ou de Paris, la laitière que j'avais vue au pied d'une colline, le matin dans mon premier voyage vers Balbec. [...] ce que je devais chercher, ce n'était pas celles qui avaient seize ans alors, mais celles qui avaient seize ans aujourd'hui. (IV,207)

The fact remains that ultimately, Albertine's presence and his obsessive jealousy actually prevent the narrator from writing. Imprisonment with Albertine may mimic withdrawal in order to write, but in the end it is *only* mimicry and a poor substitute. Although Bersani insists that the Albertine of *La Prisonnière* is partially 'Combray-ized', as he puts it, that she recreates the domestic bliss and harmony of the day-time at Combray, the overall impression of this volume is the same as that of the night-time section of the *récit d'enfance*: the anguished side of love.[49] No doubt, the initial attraction of Albertine may have much to do with her recreation of the appeasement of the mother's kiss (III,508 and III,585), but torment seems to take over as the relationship progresses:

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[48] Bardèche, II, 207.

[49] Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust. The Fictions of Life and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.81.

> Ce n'était plus l'apaisement du baiser de ma mère à Combray, que j'éprouvais auprès d'Albertine ces soirs-là, mais au contraire, l'angoisse de ceux où ma mère me disait à peine bonsoir, ou même ne montait pas dans ma chambre. (III,618) (cf. III,895)

Thus life with Albertine, child-figure, mother-figure, is only successful up to the same point as voluntary memory had been at the very beginning of the novel. She only resurrects *Combray* I, not *Combray* II. Perhaps too, much of this failure is due to the hero's own failure to realise, as in the case of society, that the recreation of the relationship with the mother is only a means to a further end - of recreating childhood within adulthood so that writing can begin. The other great problem in the self-imprisonment with Albertine is that, though the narrator often breathes new life into the child he once was, this state is rarely fused with adulthood in the required way. As we have seen, the model is mainly one of oscillation between child and adult, just like adolescence. Only very occasionally does Marcel achieve 'la douceur d'une tendresse *à la fois* filiale et maternelle' (III,587) (my italics) (cf. III,619) and even then, such moments are unstable, soon giving way to alternation between the two.

M. de Charlus

At this point, one vital character who does eventually seem to achieve such a balance deserves some space of his own. No doubt, M. de Charlus is not unique in this respect. Many of Proust's characters tend to regress as they grow older. In *Le Temps retrouvé* the ageing M. d'Argencourt (IV,502), Odette (IV,529) and La Berma (IV,574) are all compared to children. More strikingly, both the narrator's grand-mother (II,640) and Bergotte (III,692) regain their youthfulness on their death beds. And Grandsaigne even speculates that Léonie's mysterious illness is regression.[50] As the narrator quite explicitly says at one point, 'quand nous dépassons un certain âge, l'âme de l'enfant que nous fûmes et l'âme des morts dont nous sommes sortis viennent nous jeter à poignée leurs richesses et leurs mauvais sorts' (III,587). This theory may have an autobiographical explanation. For someone whose childhood was plagued by illness, it seems fairly reasonable to compare sick or dying people to children. Or the idea may simply be a case of breathing life into language's own tired metaphor, 'en enfance'. Alternatively it may be seen in intertextual terms. The *récit d'enfance*

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[50] Jean de Grandsaigne, *L'Espace combraysien. Monde de l'enfance et structure sociale dans l'œuvre de Proust* (Paris: Minard, 1981), p.148.

in fact has a tradition of linking the very young with the very old. Vallès's Jacques Vingtras, Renard's Poil de Carotte, Darien's Jean Barbier, Rolland's Jean Christophe all find love and understanding, perhaps the only love and understanding of their tortured childhoods, in the company of old people. Thus, an affinity between childhood and old age becomes one of the myths of the genre. Indeed, it is a notion that can be traced back to Romanticism's association between childhood and death and maybe even further, to *ancient* mythology, as Jung and Kerenyi suggest in their essays on the myth of the divine child.[51]

Yet M. de Charlus seems to go beyond all this. No doubt, he behaves fairly childishly throughout the novel, but in *Le Temps retrouvé* he is so repeatedly compared to a child that Proust appears to be labouring the point. To start with, it is simply noted that M. de Charlus 'arrivait à d'extraordinaires enfantillages' (IV,365) and that his reflexions about the war are 'puériles' (IV,367). Soon it is Jupien who remarks that 'le baron, voyez-vous, c'est un grand enfant' (IV,409). This metaphor is soon picked up and extended by the narrator, who does not at first recognise him, propped up in his carriage on their next meeting: 'Un homme, les yeux fixes, la taille voûtée, était plutôt posé qu'assis dans le fond, et faisant pour se tenir droit les efforts qu'aurait faits un enfant à qui on aurait recommandé d'être sage' (IV,437-38).

There is clearly an element of the conventional mythology noted above in all this. In the same breath as remarking that 'Jupien prenait soin de lui comme d'un enfant', the narrator observes, 'j'y vis plutôt une sorte de douceur quasi physique, de détachement des réalités de la vie, si frappants chez ceux que la mort a déjà fait entrer dans son ombre' (IV,438-39). But what M. de Charlus also seems to be doing is creating an image of childhood and its developments *within* Proust's novel. Inevitably, since he appears to be moving backwards through time, much of this occurs in reverse. If growing up is a process of socialisation, as we have seen, then regression consists largely of a loss of social values or codes. This can be seen when the baron greets Mme de Sainte-Euverte, who would once have been considered his social inferior: 'il saluait peut-être par ignorance du rang de la personne qu'il saluait (les

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51 See Marina Bethlenfalvay, *Les Visages de l'enfant dans la littérature française du XIXe siècle: Esquisse d'une typologie* (Geneva: Droz, 1979) for more details about the Romantic myth. See Jung and Kerenyi, *Science of Mythology. Essays on the myth of the divine child and the mysteries of Eleusis* (London:Ark, 1985), especially the section entitled 'The Child as beginning and end' (pp.96-98), for a discussion of the ancient myth.

articles du code social pouvant être emportés par une attaque comme toute autre partie de la mémoire)' (IV,439). At the same time, just as the child emerges from the imagery of Proust's novel and takes on an increasingly literal role (albeit that of a sex object), so childhood ceases to be simply a *metaphor* for M. de Charlus's new state: 'Il la salua avec cette politesse des enfants venant timidement dire bonjour aux grandes personnes, sur l'appel de leur mère. Et un enfant, sans la fierté qu'ils ont, c'était ce qu'il était devenu' (IV,439).

Moreover, it is difficult to believe that this literal return to childhood has nothing to do with the baron's own increasing sexual interest in children. Surely it is no mere coincidence that M. de Charlus begins to turn into a child at the very point when his sexual tastes turn towards little boys. Certainly, it is not the former fact that causes the latter. Jupien's hilarious account of the now blind baron's sexual adventures with a ten-year-old, whose voice is singularly deep (IV,442-43), implies accident rather than design. Moreover we are explicitly told that it is only because of the war that 'il avait par nécessité d'abord pris l'habitude, puis le goût des petits garçons' (IV,349), while earlier in the novel, it is said of the young hotel employees at Balbec, that 'ces jeunes enfants n'avaient pas encore atteint l'âge où le sexe est entièrement formé et qui plaisait à M. de Charlus' (III,376). This is supported by a letter from Proust to his publisher, where he is quite categorical about the baron's initial sexual orientation, writing, '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.'[52] Nevertheless, though it is not until the events of the final volume that the baron's role as the arch Proustian child molester reaches its full fruition, his sexual interest in children may be traced back to the time of his wife's death: 'il eut l'ignominie de laisser entendre que, pendant la cérémonie funèbre, il avait trouvé le moyen de demander son nom et son adresse à l'enfant de chœur. Et c'était peut-être vrai' (III,344). It also seems that his latent leanings towards paedophilia had always had an outlet in his speech. It is through the baron, for example, that we learn that homosexuals call their 'friends' 'mômes' and his pillow talk with Jupien is studded with such phrases as 'Oui, va grand gosse' (III,12) or 'Non, mon bébé' (III,13).

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[52] Quoted by Bardèche, I, 242 (note).

Indeed it is through his language that M. de Charlus' further importance in this respect emerges. When he himself compares Morel to a child, there is more than a hint of complicity on the narrator's part:

> «Il n'a que la permission de minuit. Il faut qu'il rentre se coucher comme un enfant bien obéissant, bien sage», ajouta-t-il d'une voix maniérée, insistante, comme s'il trouvait quelque sadique volupté à employer cette chaste comparaison. (III,355)

As we have seen, many of the narrator's own images function in just such a way, showing not only verbal but literary sadism towards the whole genre of the *récit d'enfance*. Among them are, of course, those which compare M. de Charlus at his most debauched and deviant to a child, such as in the following example, this time of his masochism in Jupien's brothel:

> Ce fou savait bien, malgré tout, qu'il était la proie d'une folie et jouait tout de même dans ces moments-là, puisqu'il savait bien que celui qui le battait n'était pas plus méchant que le petit garçon qui dans les jeux de bataille est désigné au sort pour faire le «Prussien», et sur lequel tout le monde se rue dans une ardeur de patriotisme vrai et de haine feinte. (IV,417)

That M. de Charlus provides not only an image of childhood, but also of the narrator, is to some extent obvious. As Rousset has shown us, if all the characters of the novel are, up to a point, images of the narrator, then M. de Charlus, who inherits this role from Swann, is the main *alter ego*.[53] Furthermore, the loss of social values and partial withdrawal from society involved in his regression, will, at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé* become necessary preconditions for writing. But now, with the introduction of childhood into the equation, it becomes clear that the baron's behaviour is also an image of the *act* of narration. Indeed, M. de Charlus - and perhaps the ten-year-old with the bass voice - is, like the sculptor Ski, beginning to turn into another grotesque parody of Baudelaire's artistic genius, who has the eyes of a child and the intelligence of an adult. On one page, Marcel may remark that the baron has turned into a child (IV,439), but on the next he is forced to admit that 'le malade gardait absolument intacte son intelligence' (IV,440). More than this, however, his method of reaching this state mimics the literary techniques of Proust's narrator. By destroying the innocence of the children he seduces, somehow appropriating it for himself, does he not bear a certain resemblance to the adult narrator of *Combray*, who, as we have seen, destroys the impressions of the child he once was, in order better to recreate them?

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[53] J. Rousset, *Forme et Signification. Essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel* (Paris: Corti, 1962), pp.145-49.

If so, then sadly for M. de Charlus, it is *only* a resemblance. It is as if he has somehow achieved the privileged situation necessary to write, only to fail at the final hurdle. Perhaps he errs a little too much on the side of childhood. Or perhaps, like the narrator during the relationship with Albertine, he cannot see beyond the goal of sexual pleasure and possession. Alternatively, he may be simply too old. Whatever the reason, it is all the sadder because the baron gets so close to the esteemed Proustian state of artisthood. Significantly, it is at this regressive point in his development that the narrator exclaims, 'Quel malheur que M. de Charlus ne soit pas romancier ou poète' (IV,410). The baron, it seems, is condemned to an eternal state of parodic artistry.

Before leaving M. de Charlus behind, it is worth speculating about an element of *self*-parody in the creation of his character. Could it be that, whether or not he was influenced by Baudelaire in this respect, Proust saw *himself* as some kind of horrible hybrid, a grotesque 'homme-enfant' and, furthermore, that this was the key to his artistic genius? Many critics have remarked on the childlike quality of his prose in letters to his mother, a tendency of which Proust was probably aware.[54] He certainly wrote to Montesquiou, 'J'avais toujours quatre ans pour elle.'[55] Furthermore, numerous contemporary or eye-witness accounts draw attention to Proust's childlikeness. Maurice Sachs writes that *A la recherche* was 'l'œuvre d'une sorte d'enfant monstre, dont l'esprit aurait toute l'expérience d'homme et l'âme dix ans'.[56] And the early Proust critic, Dandieu, to support his claims for Proust's 'infantilism' quotes Reynaldo Hahn on 'cette douceur enfantine et un peu triste qu'il conserva toujours dans le ton et dans la voix'.[57] Miller claims that Proust's friends generally referred to him as 'le petit Marcel'.[58] Whether or not this was the case, Proust himself wrote to Fernand Gregh, praising his work in such terms:

> Je viens de recevoir ton livre et je te remercie infiniment d'avoir bien voulu me l'envoyer. Je vais y chercher avec délices comme de vieilles connaissances ton

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[54] For example, see Martine Saegert, 'Marcel Proust et André Gide: l'image autobiographique de la mère', *Revue de Sciences humaines*, 50 (1985), 107-30 (p.124).

[55] Quoted by Jean-Louis Baudry, *Proust, Freud et l'Autre* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984), p.27.

[56] Maurice Sachs, *Le Sabbat. Souvenirs d'une jeunesse orageuse* (Paris: Éditions Corrêa, 1946), p.286.

[57] Arnaud Dandieu, *Marcel Proust. Sa révélation psychologique* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930), p.32 (note).

[58] Miller, p.31.

> intelligence, ton orgueil, ta sensibilité, ta défiance, ta confiance, une âme d'enfant où s'éveillait certainement déjà un esprit d'homme, ton esprit d'homme qui baigne encore - par parties dans une âme d'enfant.(C,I,153)

Though the letter was never sent, this rather dubious compliment is one that Gregh returned posthumously, referring to Proust as 'cher Marcel, homme de génie dans un vieil enfant malade et anormal'.[59] And Lucien Daudet makes a similarly double-edged remark: 'Il y avait en Marcel Proust tous les éléments d'un enfant gâté, et, à partir de la trentaine, d'un vieil enfant gâté: jamais il n'en fut un, parce que son génie dissociait à mesure ces éléments.'[60]

The extent to which such remarks were made during Proust's lifetime and to his face remains, however, in the realms of speculation, as does his own opinion of them. Nevertheless, on the above evidence, it seems reasonable to assume that the author was used to compliments of the kind proffered by the fictional Céleste Albaret to his narrator: 'On devrait bien tirer son portrait en ce moment. Il a tout des enfants. Est-ce boire du lait comme eux qui vous a conservé leur teint clair? Ah! jeunesse! ah! jolie peau! Vous ne vieillirez jamais' (III,242).

Combray, Venice and *Le Temps retrouvé*

But age he does, and as the novel reaches its final volumes, the only guarantee that the narrator is any more of an artist than M. de Charlus is the fact that it was written at all. So what exactly happens between the despair of Albertine's departure and the elation of the duc de Guermantes's antechamber, and when?

The most obvious place to plot the turning point seems to be the trip to Venice that the narrator undertakes with his mother. Here, as many critics have previously remarked, *Combray* does seem to be resurrected. The narrator once again has his mother's undivided attention, certain *Combray* characters, such as Mme Sazerat and Legrandin (now Legrandin de Méséglise), reappear, and there is a prolonged two page comparison of the two towns, so far apart and yet so near, which opens with the following observation:

> Comme il peut y avoir de la beauté aussi bien que dans les choses les plus humbles, dans les choses les plus précieuses - j'y goûtais des impressions analogues à celles

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[59] Fernand Gregh, *Mon Amitié avec Marcel Proust (Souvenirs et lettres inédites)* (Paris: Grasset, 1958), p.155. See also p.17 and p.38, where he talks of Proust in similar terms.

[60] Lucien Daudet, 'Autour de soixante lettres de Marcel Proust', *Les Cahiers Marcel Proust*, 5 (1929), p.45. See also p.24.

> que j'avais si souvent ressenties à Combray, mais transposées selon un mode entièrement différent et plus riche. (IV,202)

Of course, this has to some extent been happening throughout the novel, in the many incidences of *Combray* reworked. Grandsaigne, for example, claims that there are five *Combrays* in all: *Combray* I, *Combray* II, Doncières, Venice and the final visit to Tansonville.[61] These are themselves, however, only intensifications of a far more widespread tendency. We could add Balbec to such a list, or the opening pages of *Le Côté de Guermantes*, along with the numerous minor incidents which mimic those of the narrator's childhood. But Venice somehow involves an intensification of this intensification. Furthermore, it also represents the hero's growing awareness of his need to regain childhood. Lloyd Austin talks of the irony involved in the young Marcel's ambitions to become a writer:

> C'est que l'enfant ne se rend pas compte que le vrai sujet de son livre serait tout simplement les riches impressions de la nature et des hommes qu'il est en train d'éprouver sans s'en rendre compte et surtout sans pouvoir les exprimer.[62]

It is only in Venice, the place which this child had so longed to visit and yet which, when that ambition is fulfilled, satisfies him largely by its ability to resurrect Combray, that the hero becomes conscious of the force of this irony.

Proof that he now has some inkling that what he seeks lay in Combray, comes at the end of *Albertine disparue* and the beginning of *Le Temps retrouvé*, when he literally returns to Combray. Ostensibly, this is in order to see Gilberte, but the fact that he is seeking something else becomes apparent when he does not find it. 'J'étais désolé de voir combien peu je revivais mes années d'autrefois' (IV,267), he writes. Thus, this return to the little town turns out to be a false lead. As the illusions of childhood about the separation of the 'deux côtés' or the 'sources de la Vivonne' are stripped away one by one, and even its landmarks are destroyed, the narrator begins to realise what the reader has known from the beginning of the novel, that the Combray he is looking for is a time rather than a place:

> Car bien des années ont passé depuis Combray, où dans nos retours les plus tardifs c'étaient les reflets rouges du couchant que je voyais sur le vitrage de ma fenêtre. C'est un autre genre de vie qu'on mène à Tansonville, chez Mme de Saint-Loup, un

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[61] Grandsaigne, pp.41-44.

[62] Lloyd James Austin, 'Proust et la poétique de la réminiscence', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et de Combray*, 22 (1972), 1338-45 (p.1340).

> autre genre de plaisir que je trouve à ne sortir qu'à la nuit, à suivre au clair de lune ces chemins où je jouais jadis au soleil. (I,7)

The gradual dawning of this realisation in the final volumes also coincides with a general, if qualified, reinstatement of childhood beliefs and values. Chapter 4 shows how this happens in the case of naming and via metaphor, but the phenomenon is more widespread. Paul de Man may write that the 'formulation "plus tard, j'ai compris" [...] punctuates the entire novel like an incantation', but as *A la recherche* draws to a close, this is increasingly accompanied and replaced by an alternative refrain 'déjà à Combray' (or words to this effect).[63] Now, in *Le Temps retrouvé*, this is specifically linked to the kind of artistic contemplation which, when followed to its logical conclusion, led to the creation of 'Les Clochers de Martinville':

> Déjà à Combray, je fixais avec attention devant mon esprit quelque image qui m'avait forcé à regarder, un nuage, un triangle, un clocher, une fleur, un caillou, en sentant qu'il y avait peut-être sous ces signes quelque chose de tout autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir. (IV,457)

Unfortunately, in the first half or so of *Le Temps retrouvé*, this realisation is itself accompanied by a growing sense of despair about the enormity of the task now facing the narrator. It is now that he exclaims: 'Arbres, [...] vous n'avez plus rien à me dire, mon cœur refroidi ne vous entend plus [...]. Mais les années où j'aurais peut-être été capable de chanter ne reviendront jamais' (IV,433-34). As he had remarked earlier, in *La Prisonnière*, about sleep: 'Il ressemble à la jeunesse et aux amours, on ne le retrouve plus' (III,632). Yet, earlier still, it was sleep that had offered hope in this respect. The disruption of habit involved in sleeping in a strange bedroom, resurrects ' ce «moi» que je ne retrouvais qu'à des années d'intervalles, mais toujours le même, n'ayant pas grandi depuis Combray' (II,381). Furthermore, it is this experience at Doncières that, in retrospect, foretells the failure of the future return to Combray:

> Les poètes prétendent que nous retrouvons un moment ce que nous avons été en rentrant dans telle maison, dans tel jardin où nous avons vécu jeunes. Ce sont là pèlerinages fort hasardeux et à la suite desquels on compte autant de déceptions que de succès. Les lieux fixes, contemporains d'années différentes, c'est en nous-même

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63 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.78. Some examples of the converse of Paul de Man's observation are: 'lâche comme j'étais déjà dans mon enfance à Combray [...]' (III,812); 'dès mon enfance' (III,65); 'dès Combray' (IV,247); 'depuis mon enfance' (IV,505); 'comme je m'étais déjà aperçu à Combray [...]' (IV,564).

> qu'il vaut mieux les trouver. [...] le jardin où nous avons été enfant [,] il n'y a pas besoin de voyager pour le revoir, il faut descendre pour le retrouver. (II,390)

Sleep, however, offers only a momentary and largely unconscious descent route. If the state of adulthood within childhood is to be maintained long enough and consciously enough to write, some other method must be found. At one point in *Le Temps retrouvé*, it looks as if the narrator has found the definitive solution, a way of stripping away the superfluous layers that everyday life has built up over the years:

> Ce travail qu'avaient fait notre amour-propre, notre passion, notre esprit d'imitation, notre intelligence abstraite, nos habitudes, c'est ce travail que l'art défera, c'est la marche en sens contraire, le retour aux profondeurs où ce qui a existé réellement gît inconnu de nous, qu'il nous fera suivre.
>
> Et sans doute c'était une grande tentation que de recréer la vraie vie, de rajeunir les impressions. Mais il y fallait du courage de tout genre, et même sentimental. (IV,475)

But it will take more than courage to remove the layers of cultural conditioning. For if art is the only method of rejuvenating himself and his impressions in order to reach the privileged state which, as has been argued, will allow him to write, the narrator is now caught in a seemingly insoluble paradox. He is not only confronted with the difficult task of regaining his childhood, but also with the impossible problem of breaking this paradox of an end which turns out to be its own means.

To find Proust's most explicit treatment of this problem we have to go back as far as *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. The extract, as will be seen, is of double importance, insofar as it is also his most explicit discussion of both the double child-adult 'narrator' and the connection between childhood and metaphor. Indeed, he begins with the latter, remarking, 'C'est souvent quand je suis le plus malade, que je n'ai plus d'idées dans la tête ni de force, que ce moi que je reconnais parfois aperçoit ces liens entre deux idées' (CS,303). It soon becomes clear that this 'moi' has much in common with the narrator's 'moi' 'n'ayant pas grandi depuis Combray' (II,381 - see above), for in the following sentences it is described as 'ce garçon qui joue ainsi en moi sur les ruines' or 'le garçon qui en moi s'amuse à cela' (CS,303-304). Unfortunately, however, the paradox of end and means also comes into play. The 'child within' not only *finds* this harmony 'entre deux impressions', but is also, in some sense, discovered *by* this 'harmonie si fine': 'Mais s'il crée en quelque sorte ces harmonies, il vit d'elles, aussitôt il se soulève, germe, grandit de tout ce qu'elles lui donnent de vie et meurt ensuite, ne pouvant vivre que d'elles' (CS,304). Proust is nevertheless optimistic about this situation, quickly qualifying his observation: 'il ne meurt pas, ou plutôt il meurt

mais [peut] ressusciter si une autre harmonie se présente' (CS,304). He even goes on to write, 'Il n'y a que lui qui devrait écrire mes livres' (CS,304). One can only assume that he felt rather differently as the years continued to roll by, with only one whole book, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, published (precociously), in such a fragmentary form that it can easily be read as the product of an intermittent being. If the Proust of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* has little need to worry about the problem of breaking the paradox, of *sustaining* the life of this authorial child within his own adulthood, then the hero of *A la recherche du temps perdu* does - at least, if he is to turn into the narrator of the multi-volume work we have so far been reading.

One solution, however, is so simple that Miller expresses some surprise at its absence from the narrator's account of his life: 'The founding of a family, the recapture of nostalgic joys by living one's childhood anew with one's growing children, is not part of his story.'[64] After all, having sex in order to *create* children is a far simpler method of regaining childhood than having sex *with* them, not to mention more conventional and more legal. But if the failed relationship with Albertine and then the police prevent the narrator from succeeding by the latter method, Albertine's departure and subsequent death mean that the chances of success by the former method are also reduced. What possibility of finding a wife and starting a family remains, is thwarted by the years of bad health and hospitalization that follow close on the heels of Albertine's 'disappearance'. That the functions of procreation are taken over by writing for the narrator is emphasized by an image comparing the child to the book, an image that is repeated more often by Proust than that of the extra gland of childhood. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, we find the remark that 'les vrais livres doivent être les enfants non du grand jour et de la causerie mais de l'obscurité et du silence' (IV,476). Here too there is the realisation that, among other things, the narrator will have to 'suralimenter' his newly planned novel 'comme un enfant' (IV,610). But the most striking manifestation of the parallel appears much earlier, in the sad case of the dying Bergotte:

> Il remuait encore, bien que péniblement, tandis que ses œuvres, bondissantes comme des filles qu'on aime mais dont l'impétueuse jeunesse et bruyants plaisirs vous fatiguent, entraînaient chaque jour jusqu'au pied de son lit des admirateurs nouveaux. (II,622)

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64 Miller, p.265.

And the notion of the book as child is devoted most space, earlier still in Proust's career, at the beginning of *Jean Santeuil*, where it is extended for over a page:

> Certes le poète est reconnaissant à toutes les choses qui lui ont alors prêté leur appui, leur charme, comme la pauvre accouchée remercie le médecin qui lui a été si dévoué, garde un bon souvenir de la pêche dont la fraîcheur a été si douce à son gosier altéré et des hirondelles qu'elle aimait à voir voler en cercles autour de sa fenêtre pendant qu'elle accomplissait dans son sein un travail mystérieux: elle enverra une photographie de son enfant à ce médecin qui l'a le premier soigné, comme B. envoyait à l'aubergiste un exemplaire du roman qu'il avait écrit à C*** [...]. (JS,194-95)

Of course, as Bersani points out, this is a conventional, even clichéd, image, especially in the sense that children, like books, ensure some kind of life after death.[65] Characteristically, therefore, as well as giving it new life and validity in the Bergotte simile, Proust also shows some cynicism about the idea. The very first such comparison in *A la recherche* is infused with comedy, as the child-poet of Combray is transformed into a smugly clucking hen:

> Je me trouvai si heureux, si parfaitement débarrassé de ces clochers et de ce qu'ils cachaient derrière eux, que, comme si j'avais été moi-même une poule et si je venais de pondre un œuf, je me mis à chanter à tue-tête. (I,180)

However, elsewhere there is also a hint that procreation is not as effective as art. If Bergotte is sad, then Swann, 'célibataire de l'art' is tragic. He may tell Gilberte, 'C'est bon, ma chérie, d'avoir une fille comme toi; un jour, que je ne serai plus là, si on parle encore de ton pauvre papa, ce sera seulement avec toi et à cause de toi' (IV,171). But this is an illusion that the reader is not allowed to share. Even before marrying, Gilberte first disguises her surname by changing its pronunciation and then takes the name of her mother's new husband. As the narrator points out, 'les illusions de l'amour paternel' are just as great as those of romantic love: 'bien des filles ne considèrent leur père que comme le vieillard qui leur laisse sa fortune' (IV,171). Ironically, if Swann and his name survive beyond his death at all, it is because of art, not his own, but that of the narrator:

> Et pourtant cher Charles Swann, que j'ai si peu connu quand j'étais encore si jeune et vous près du tombeau, c'est déjà parce que celui que vous deviez considérer comme un petit imbécile a fait de vous le héros d'un de ses romans, qu'on recommence à parler de vous et que peut-être vous vivrez. (III,705)

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[65] Bersani, p.55.

Yet perhaps, in some sense, this only serves to strengthen the link between procreation and art. For the case of Swann hints that, as for play and art, the two might be similar to the point of incompatibility. Just as M. de Charlus achieves the state of adulthood within childhood through sex, but is unable to make use of it because he is so obsessed with sexual gratification, so Swann, having achieved the state of parenthood, remains a 'célibataire de l'art', partly because he believes his name will live on through Gilberte. It is worth considering Proust's successful artists in the light of this possibility. Elstir and Bergotte, for example, do not have any children, at least as far as we are aware. But curiously, the most concrete hint that art and offspring are incompatible comes with Vinteuil, a Proustian artist who *does* have a child, if late in life. Firstly, further procreation is denied because of his daughter's lesbianism. Secondly, her very existence ultimately involves the renunciation of art. Not only is his daughter 'sa seule passion' in his last years (I,112), but we are also told that this is finally *at the expense of* his art:

> Il avait renoncé à jamais à achever de transcrire au net toute son œuvre des dernières années, pauvres morceaux d'un vieux professeur de piano, d'un ancien organiste de village dont nous imaginions bien qu'ils n'avaient guère de valeur en eux-mêmes, mais que nous ne méprisions pas parce qu'ils en avaient tant pour lui dont ils avaient été la raison de vivre avant qu'ils les sacrifiât à sa fille. (I,158)

If his daughter has anything to do with the survival of Vinteuil's name, it is as much through the musical ability of her lover, who eventually completes this transcription (hence the septet of *La Prisonnière*), as through herself.

Returning to the case of the narrator, how *does* he eventually break the means-end paradox which he discovers in *Le Temps retrouvé* to achieve the same artistic status as Vinteuil, Elstir and Bergotte? Certainly, as the final volume progresses, his case begins to look far less bleak. The first glimmer of hope comes with his emergence from the sanatorium into a state of convalescence. To return to Baudelaire and Guys once again, this can be seen as a first step on the return journey to childhood: 'la convalescence est comme un retour vers l'enfance [...]. Le convalescent jouit au plus haut degré, comme l'enfant, de la faculté de s'intéresser vivement aux choses, même les plus triviales en apparence.'[66] The narrator's convalescence lasts throughout the final volume, but its effects are compounded by the appearance of involuntary memory. Of course, there are several examples of this in *Le*

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[66] Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', p.690.

Temps retrouvé, but the final, most prolonged and most important one, is that which takes us back to *Combray* and *François le Champi*:

> Je m'étais au premier instant demandé avec colère quel était l'étranger qui venait me faire mal. Cet étranger, c'était moi-même, c'était *l'enfant* que j'étais alors, que le *livre* venait de susciter en moi, car de moi ne connaissant que cet *enfant*, c'est cet *enfant* que le *livre* avait appelé tout de suite, ne voulant être regardé que par ses yeux, aimé que par son cœur, et ne parler qu'à lui. (IV,462-63) (my italics)

The extent to which this resolves the means-end paradox can be seen in the repetition of the words 'livre' and 'enfant', the book resuscitating the child whose continued co-existence with the adult will lead to the writing of the book that we are reading.

Yet the story is still not complete. Involuntary memory is still by definition a momentary phenomenon and cannot sustain the life of this child who has just been reborn. Although the narrator now knows exactly what his problem is, the ability and the will to solve it are only gained with the entrance of the very last character of the novel to appear. Indeed, this appearance is also the very last 'event' of *A la recherche*, since the few pages that remain are filled by philosophy. Furthermore, unlike the child resurrected by *François le Champi*, this character's entry is not followed by an exit. And though it is a non-speaking part, it is perhaps the most important of the whole novel, the 'alter ego' of the narrator that even surpasses the role of Swann and M. de Charlus. It is, of course the part of Mlle de Saint-Loup, who, as the narrator realises before he even meets her, draws together all the threads of his life:

> N'était-elle pas comme sont dans les forêts les «étoiles» des carrefours où viennent converger des routes venues, pour notre vie aussi, des points les plus différents? Elles étaient nombreuses pour moi, celles qui aboutissaient à Mlle de Saint-Loup et qui rayonnaient autour d'elle. (IV,606)

And the next few pages, before her actual introduction to the narrator, are taken up with a detailed account of this web of interwoven and multiple connections, which, starting and finishing with Gilberte's daughter, also serves as a summary of the 'plot' of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Thus, when her beauty and her power over time are also taken into account, Mlle de Saint-Loup symbolises the work of art that the narrator is about to begin. But more than this even, she is the sixteen-year-old that Marcel realised he had to seek out as early as Venice (IV,207), in order to regain his lost childhood. She is also, in this respect, the child he never had, a child who, not being truly his own, allows him to achieve fatherhood without the obsessive and ultimately non-creative love this entails for such as Vinteuil or the laziness

it involves for such as Swann. All this the narrator sums up in a single sentence, perhaps the most important of his whole novel: 'Je la trouvais bien belle: pleine encore d'espérances, riante, formée des années mêmes que j'avais perdues, elle ressemblait à ma jeunesse' (IV,609).

Conclusion

Thus the all-importance and omni-presence of childhood throughout Proust's novel are confirmed. Perhaps it can even be concluded that the role of childhood in *A la recherche* is more significant than critics of Proust, especially modern critics of Proust, generally admit. It is often assumed that the frequent references and allusions to *Combray* in *Le Temps retrouvé* are explained by the fact that these two sections of the novel were written around the same time.[67] It now seems that, rather than explaining the importance of childhood in the final volume, this fact is *explained by* the vital part that Proust intended childhood to play in his work from the outset, a role which culminates in *Le Temps retrouvé* with the appearance of Mlle de Saint-Loup. The story of the double narrator, 'homme-enfant', which begins and ends at this point, may simply be the old story of the combination of imagination and intelligence or involuntary and voluntary memory, so beloved of Proustian critics over the years, expressed in new terms. This was suggested before Proust or his novel were even conceived, by Baudelaire in the study of Guys. For him the child represents 'sensibilité' and the adult 'raison' together with 'l'esprit analytique', which allows him to order 'la somme de matériaux *involontairement* amassée' during a childhood regained '*à volonté*' (my italics).[68] But the point is that the combinations of imagination and intelligence, voluntary and involuntary memory lie at the very heart of Proust's aesthetic. Even if the fusion of childhood and adulthood is nothing more than a synonym for either or both of these, then it too is absolutely central to Proust's art and our understanding of his work.

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[67] See Bardèche (especially II,270) for further details about the composition of the work.

[68] Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', p.690.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began by setting out its two main goals: to determine how far Proust's treatment of childhood corresponds to contemporary interest in the theme and to determine the extent of the role played by childhood *within* his work. We now find ourselves in a position to present some solutions to the initial problems set by the Introduction.

Firstly, from an intertextual point of view, the novel owes a great deal to other works that deal with childhood. Indeed, it apparently returns to an old formula, such as that of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* or Rousseau's *Confessions*, by making childhood only a small introductory part of a much more important whole. Furthermore, as seen in Chapter 2, the even earlier Pastoral origins of the genre can still be made out in the 'roman champêtre' element of *Combray*. Proust's *récit d'enfance* also shares the preoccupations of contemporary examples of the genre, many of which he knew well. Despite his scorn for the '*Mémoires et Souvenirs d'Enfance*' of his day, *Combray* has a great deal of subject matter in common with works that can be thus described. Just as important are the *formal* characteristics offered by contemporary treatments of the theme, such as the refusal to conform to conventional restraints of genre or chronology seen in Chapter 1. Writers particularly worthy of comparison include: Loti, France, Larbaud, Audoux, Alain-Fournier, Bordeaux and Boylesve. In addition to these, Proust's work bears striking similarities to that of the first child psychologists, also his contemporaries, not to mention the discoveries that Freud was making at roughly the same time. Nevertheless, *A la recherche du temps perdu* also looks forward, to the theories of Piaget and the continuing vogue for psychoanalysis, as well as anticipating later *récits d'enfance*, such as Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*, Sartre's *Les Mots*, or Sarraute's *Enfance*. Proust's influence on later examples of the genre would in fact be an interesting area for further research.

Yet, as has been seen throughout the preceding chapters, neither his originality nor his individuality is called into question. Both in looking backward and in looking forward - indeed largely because of this simultaneously retrospective and prospective vision (which plays such a major role in the novel in so many senses) - *and* in looking around him, Proust goes beyond not only those who influenced him, but also those whom he influenced.

Chapter 5 shows how childhood in *A la recherche* is far from being a simple or insignificant overture to more important *Mémoires* or *Confessions*. And Chapter 2 demonstrates how far removed *Combray* is from the pastoral origins of the genre, which it nonetheless acknowledges. Furthermore, the minor preoccupations of contemporary *Mémoires et Souvenirs d'Enfance* and the observations of psychology or psychoanalysis are taken by *A la recherche* and elevated from the status of amusing anecdote and dry scientific theory to all-permeating literary theme. The most obvious example is that of naming, detailed in Chapter 4. In this case, Proust reiterates the remarks of such as Bordeaux and Boylesve, and previews the discoveries of Piaget, weaving both into a theme which lies at the very heart of his aesthetic. The more major preoccupations of the *récit d'enfance* or myths are constantly questioned, a process which was documented for the important case of the 'pastoral childhood' in Chapter 2, and for the case of play in Chapter 3. As seen in Chapter 5, the general process of 'désacralisation' is carried on, long after *Combray* is over, in various images of childhood. Yet this is an oversimplification. For Proust, *de*mythicization soon leads to *re*mythicization. Residual elements of the myth of the pastoral childhood remain alongside its denial, the mythology of play is in some sense reinstated through reading, and for every image that questions a myth, there is an image that confirms one. Another striking example is the increasing appearance of the child as a sex object, both literally and metaphorically. This may at first appear to be a 'désacralisation' of the child in general, of all the myths that had come to be attached to childhood by Proust's time, but as argued in Chapter 5, this phenomenon also proves to be another form of expression for the myth of the child-artist.

Perhaps this double movement of demythicization and remythicization is what marks Proust's advance, as it were, on many later treatments of the theme of childhood. Clearly, this speculation goes beyond the scope of the above thesis. Indeed, it suggests an interesting area for further research - Proust's influence, or lack of it, on the development of the genre. A few later examples are nevertheless relevant to this discussion. 'A cet âge innocent où l'on voudrait que toute l'âme ne soit que transparence, tendresse et pureté', writes Gide in *Si le grain ne meurt* (1926), 'je ne revois en moi qu'ombre, laideur, sournoiserie'.[1] It is hard to

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[1] André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt* (Paris: Folio, 1955), p.10.

imagine Proust being quite so categorical. In *A la recherche*, one can safely guess, 'ombre, laideur, sournoiserie' and 'transparence, tendresse et pureté' would not only have become compatible with one another, but also interdependent in some way. Later in the century with Sartre's *Les Mots* (1963), the demythicizing element becomes even stronger, much of the work being devoted to a critique of the child-artist myth. No doubt, much of the bitterness of his attack is justified. It was probably much more difficult to *be* a child of a literary family at the time when Proust was putting the finishing touches to *Combray*, than to write about one. Sartre quotes Cocteau's rather Baudelairian claim that all children have a certain degree of genius, and adds, 'En 1912, ils en avaient tous sauf moi: j'écrivais par singerie, par cérémonie, pour faire la grande personne.'[2] Proust, by contrast, seems to bear no personal grudge against such mythology. He takes the myth of the child-artist, complicates it to the state of paradox, simultaneously affirms and denies it, and through such grotesque parodies as M. de Charlus, adds a final twist, questioning his own simultaneous affirmation and denial.

Jacqueline Rose writes in her account of the mythology of literature for children, 'If something is too often presented as true, then it starts to look false.'[3] This is a problem in many early twentieth century *récits d'enfance*. Conversely, if something is too often presented as false, then it starts to look true again. This is a problem in many later examples of the genre. Proust, however, somehow manages to perform mythicization and demythicization, falsification and verification, at once, thus dissolving the problems associated with both. In so doing, he makes one of the outstanding contributions to the genre, but from the raw ingredients with which many other *récits d'enfance* construct their mediocrity.

This is the conclusion to only the first of the objectives reiterated above, that is the attempt to set *Combray* in the context of the contemporary *récit d'enfance*. The second main point to emerge from the preceding chapters is that Proust's treatment of childhood is vital to understanding his work from within. However, as seen in the Introduction, it is only one of

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2 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.120.

3 Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.137.

many themes that make up the vast interlocking web of *A la recherche du temps perdu.* Louis Bolle writes:

> Pour la première fois les thèmes de l'apparence et de la réalité, du rêve, de l'inconscient et de l'involontaire, de l'imagination et de l'enfance, de la relativité des points de vue, des variations de la personnalité, - thèmes vivifiés par une passion au feu sourd, modulés par une voix blanche, insistante, continue, sont entrés dans un roman français, ont été orchestrés avec une maîtrise sans précédent.[4]

Even these are just a few of the themes and modulations in the Proustian symphony. Childhood is joined by old age, death and illness; literature is linked to music, painting and architecture; filial love is transformed into romantic love, not to mention sexual love of all imaginable varieties; society is dissected on all its levels and knowledge is exhibited in all its forms, from military strategy, medicine or politics to philosophy, etymology and aesthetics - complete with pronouncements about the techniques such as metaphor that are used to convey these themes. What is more, as Paul de Man remarks, 'everything in this novel signifies something other than what it represents, be it love, consciousness, politics, art, sodomy, or gastronomy: it is always something else that is intended'.[5] Taking this argument to its logical conclusions, we might even claim that each one of the elements so far listed stands as a metaphor for all the others.

Thus, to say that childhood, or more specifically the myth of the child-artist, is vital to our understanding of everything else in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, is less a distortion or an excessively one-sided account of Proust's work (as suggested in the Introduction), than a simple truism. It now seems that the same could be said for every one of the novel's myriad themes. In fact, Chapter 5 shows how childhood provides an alternative route into the old Proustian debates of metaphor versus metonymy, intelligence versus intellect, voluntary versus involuntary memory. This thesis has, I hope, proved why childhood is of special interest - even if this is not *uniquely* special interest. Paul de Man claims that the central 'something else' signified by all the rest is reading.[6] Jaeck disagrees:

> I propose that the metaphorical process more accurately corresponds to the underlying mechanism of Proust's fictional technique - the reading process, as described by

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[4] Louis Bolle, *Marcel Proust ou le complexe d'Argus* (Paris: Grasset, 1967), pp.14-15.

[5] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.77.

[6] Paul de Man, p.77.

> Proust and as experienced by the reader, being but one link (albeit one of the most essential ones) in the interplay of macrometaphors which constitute the text.[7]

For my own part, I am inclined to see this central term, designating and designated by everything else as, neither reading nor metaphor nor even childhood, but art. Nevertheless, in the hierarchy of Proustian themes, both reading and metaphor are very close to the pinnacle represented by art. More importantly for our purposes, childhood is also up there with them. As we have seen, childhood has an especially intimate relationship with each of these three terms in Proust's work. This was demonstrated for reading in Chapter 3, metaphor in Chapter 4 and for art throughout the above thesis. Furthermore, Chapter 5 demonstrates how childhood is given arguably the most privileged positions in the novel: at the beginning in *Combray* and at the end in Mlle de Saint-Loup.

The early Proustian narrator, of *Jean Santeuil*, describes an involuntary memory experience in which the adult Jean suddenly sees 'sa grande ombre de petit enfant' (JS,248) through a screen of nostalgic tears. The vision turns out to be prophetic. For, it is precisely such a child, along with the genre he represents, who casts a vast thematic and stylistic shadow over Proust's finished novel. The metaphor is not to be interpreted in its conventional, negative sense. This is after all a Proustian shadow, which defies not only convention and time, but also the laws of physics. In the all-important reading scene of *Combray* we find the remark: 'cette obscure fraîcheur de ma chambre était au plein soleil de la rue, ce que l'ombre est au rayon, c'est-à-dire aussi lumineuse que lui' (I,82). Combining the two extracts, we thus have the perfect description of the role played by childhood and the genre of the *récit d'enfance* in *A la recherche du temps perdu*: a small child who casts a great shadow as luminous as the sun itself.

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[7] Lois Marie Jaeck, *Marcel Proust and the Text as Macrometaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p.4.

APPENDIX 1
FRENCH LITERATURE DEALING WITH THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD 1700-1922

1725	Mme de Sévigné, *Lettres.*
1762	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation.*
1782-89	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions* (written 1767-70).
1787	Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie.*
[1793?]	Marmontel, *Mémoires.*
1796-97	Nicolas-Edmé Restif de la Bretonne, *Monsieur Nicolas, ou Le Cœur humain dévoilé.*
1801	Jean-Baptiste Pollin, *De l'enfance, de la puberté, des études, des premières amours de Jean-Baptiste Pollin.*
1807	Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian, *La Jeunesse de Florian ou Mémoires d'un jeune Espagnol* (posthumous).
1826	P. Mérimée, *Matéo Falcone*, in *Mosaïque.*
1832	Balzac, *Louis Lambert.*
1832	Charles Nodier, *Souvenirs de jeunesse. Mémoires de Maxime Odin.*
1832	Rodolphe Töpffer, *La Bibliothèque de mon oncle.*
1836	Balzac, *L'Enfant maudit*, in *Etudes philosophiques* Vol. XV and XVI.
1836	Balzac, *Le lys dans la Vallée.*
1836-37	Mme Tastu, *Le Livre des enfants* (poetry).
1837	Victor Hugo, *Les voix intérieures.*
1840	Balzac, *Pierrette.*
1840	Victor Hugo, *Les rayons et les ombres.*
1842	Balzac, *Albert Savarus.*
1844	Mme Anaïs Ségalas, *Les Enfantines* (poetry).
1846	Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple.*
1846	George Sand, *La Mare au diable*
1846-47	George Sand, *François le Champi*
1849	Lamartine, *Les confidences.*
1848-49	George Sand, *La Petite Fadette*
1849-50	Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe.*
1851	Lamartine, *Geneviève, histoire d'une servante.*
1853	Gérard de Nerval, *Sylvie. Souvenirs du Valois*, in *Les Filles du Feu.*
1853-55	Victor Hugo, *A propos d'Horace* (written 1831) (extended lyric poem).
1854-55	George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie.*
1862	Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables.*
1863	Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*

1863 Ferdinand Fabre, *Julien Savignac.*

1865 Erckmann-Chatrian, *L'Histoire d'un homme du peuple.*

1865 Xavier Marmier, *Mémoires d'un Orphelin.*

1866 Gustave Droz, *Monsieur, Madame et Bébé.*

1866 Alexandre Dumas fils, *L'Affaire Clémenceau. Mémoire de l'accusé.*

1867 Gustave Droz, *Entre nous.*

1867 Mme Jules Michelet, *Mémoires d'une enfant.*

1868 Paul Arène, *Jean-des-Figues.*

1868 Alphonse Daudet, *Le Petit Chose. Histoire d'un Enfant.*

1869 Sully Prudhomme, *Solitudes* (poetry).

1871 Erckmann-Chatrian, *Histoire d'un sous-maître.*

1874 Alphonse-Joseph-Auguste Gratry, *Souvenirs de ma jeunesse.*

1874 Victor Hugo, *Quatre-vingt Treize.*

1875 Jean Aicard, *La Chanson de l'enfant* (poetry).

1875 Ferdinand Fabre, *Barnabé.*

1876 Alphonse Daudet, *Jack (Mœurs contemporaines).*

1876 Victor de Laprade, *Le Livre d'un père* (poetry).

1877 G. Bruno, *Le tour de la France par deux enfants.*

1877 Alphonse Daudet, *Le Nabab (Mœurs parisiennes).*

1877 Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir.*

1878 Ernest Legouvé, *Nos fils et nos filles* (memoirs).

1878 Hector Malot, *Sans famille.*

1878 Émile Zola, *Une page d'amour.*

1879 Alphonse Daudet, *Les rois en exil, roman parisien.*

1879 Edmond and Jules Goncourt, *Les frères Zemganno.*

1879 Jules Vallès, *L'Enfant.*

1881 Guy de Maupassant, *Le papa de Simon*, in *La Maison Tellier* (short story).

1882 Anatole France, *Les désirs de Jean Servien.*

1882 Gyp, *Petit Bob.*

1883 Paul Bonnetain, *Charlot s'amuse.*

1883 Mme Alphonse Daudet, *L'Enfance d'une Parisienne.*

1883 Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse.*

1884 Ferdinand Fabre, *Mon Oncle Célestin.*

1884 Jules Michelet, *Ma Jeunesse* (written c.1820).

1885 Anatole France, *Le Livre de mon ami.*

1885 Émile Zola, *Germinal.*

1886 Jean Aicard, *Le Livre des petits* (poetry).

1886 Arthur Rimbaud, *Enfance* (written c.1873) in *Les Illuminations.*

1886 Émile Zola, *L'Œuvre.*

1887 Paul Bourget, *André Cornélis.*

1887 Léon Hennique, *Pœuf* (short story).

1888 Alphonse Daudet, *Souvenirs d'un homme de lettres.*

1889 Paul Bourget, *Le Disciple.*

1889 Georges Darien, *Bas les cœurs!*

1889 Gyp, *Petit Bleu.*

1889 Prévost, *Mademoiselle Jaufre.*

1890 Ferdinand Fabre, *Xavière.*

1890 Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d'un enfant.*

1890 Octave Mirbeau, *Sébastien Roch.*

1890 Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard* (written 1835-36).

1892 Paul Bourget, *La terre promise.*

1892 Alphonse Daudet, *Rose et Ninette, Mœurs du jour.*

1892 André Lichtenberger, *Mon Petit Trott.*

1892 André Lichtenberger, *La petite sœur de Trott.*

1893 Paul Adam, *Les images sentimentales.*

1893 Hector Malot, *En famille.*

1894 Batisto Bonnet, *Vie d'enfant*, trans. from the Provençal by Alphonse Daudet.

1894 Jules Renard, *Poil de Carotte.*

1894 Marcel Schwob, *Le Livre de Monelle.*

1896 E. Estaunié, *L'Empreinte.*

1896 Fernand Gregh, *La Maison de l'enfance* (poetry).

1896 M. Schwob, *La Croisade des enfants.*

1897 Jean Aicard, *L'Ame d'un enfant.*

1897 Georges Darien, *Le Voleur.*

1897 P. and V. Margueritte, *Poum, aventures d'un petit garçon.*

1898 Jules Renard, *Bucoliques.*

1899 Anatole France, *Pierre Nozière.*

1899 E. Le Roy, *Jacquou le Croquant.*

1899 Émile Zola, *Fécondité.*

1900 Colette, *Claudine à l'école.*

1900 Alphonse Daudet, *Premier voyage, premier mensonge.*

1900 Flaubert, *Mémoires d'un fou* (written 1838).

1900 Louis-Honoré Fréchette, *Mémoires intimes.*

1900 Charles-Louis Philippe, *La Mère et l'enfant.*

1901 Jean Aicard, *Tata.*

1901 René Boylesve, *La Becquée.*

1901	E. Brieux, *Les Remplaçantes.*
1902	Juliette Adam, *Le Roman de mon enfance et de ma jeunesse.*
1902	Paul Adam, *L'Enfant d'Austerlitz.*
1902	René Bazin, *Donatienne.*
1903	Barrès, *Les Amitiés françaises.*
1903	René Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la Balustrade.*
1903	Abel Hermant, *Confession d'un enfant d'hier (Mémoires pour Servir à l'Histoire de la Société).*
1903	Paul Léautaud, *Le Petit Ami.*
1903	P. and V. Margueritte, *Zette.*
1903	Émile Zola, *Vérité.*
1904	Léon Frapié, *La Maternelle.*
1904	Judith Gautier, *Le Collier des Jours. Souvenirs de ma vie.*
1904	G. Geffroy, *L'apprentie.*
1904-12	Romain Rolland, *Jean-Christophe.*
1905	Léon Daudet, *Le Partage de l'enfant, roman contemporain.*
1906	G. Chérau, *Champi-Tortu.*
1906	P. Margueritte, *Les Pas sur le sable.*
1906	Frédéric Mistral, *Mes Origines. Mémoires et récits.*
1907	Constant, *Le Cahier rouge. Ma vie ... 1767-1787* (written 1811).
1907	Léon Frapié, *La Boîte aux gosses.*
1908	R. Béhaine, *Alfred Varambaud, Céline Armelle, Michel Varambaud* (later published as *Histoire d'une société. Les Nouveaux venus*, 1928).
1908	Henry Bordeaux, *Les Yeux qui s'ouvrent.*
1908	Colette, *Les Vrilles de la vigne.*
1908	Maeterlinck, *L'oiseau bleu.*
1908-14	Valery Larbaud, *Enfantines* (but first published as a collection in 1918)
1909	Lucie Delarue-Madrus, *Le Roman de six petites filles.*
1909	M. Epuy, *Petite Ame.*
1909	André Gide, *La Porte étroite.*
1909	J. Giraudoux, *Provinciales.*
1909	E. Jaloux, *Le reste est silence.*
1909	Albert Thierry, *L'homme en proie aux enfants.*
1910	Marguerite Audoux, *Marie-Claire.*
1910	Francis Jammes, *Ma fille Bernadette.*
1910	Saint-John Perse, *Pour fêter une enfance* (cycle of poems).
1910	Taine, *Etienne Mayran* (started 1860) (posthumous).
1911	André Gide, *Isabelle.*

1911	Valéry Larbaud, *Fermina Marquez.*
1911	Pierre Mille, *Caillou et Tili.*
1911-14	A. Machard, *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une bande de gamins sous la III^e^ République*, *L'Épopée au faubourg*, *Petits romans parisiens* (short stories).
1912	André Lafon, *L'élève Gilles.*
1912	L. Pergaud, *La Guerre des boutons, roman de ma douzième année.*
1912-13	Henry Bordeaux, *La Maison.*
1913	Alain-Fournier, *Le Grand Meaulnes.*
1913	François Mauriac, *L'enfant chargé de chaînes.*
1913	Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann.*
1913	Charles-Louis Philippe, *Charles Blanchard* (posthumous).
1913-26	Francis Jammes, *Souvenirs d'enfance* (written around 1895).
1914	Henry Bordeaux, *La Nouvelle croisade des enfants.*
1914	Franc-Nohain, *Le journal de Jaboune.*
1914	Myriam Harry, *La petite fille de Jérusalem.*
1914	Marius and Ary Leblond, *Le miracle de la race.*
1914	F. Mauriac, *La robe prétexte.*
1916	Pol. Neveux, *La douce enfance de Thierry Seneuse.*
1916-18	A. Machard, *La Guerre des mômes*, *Bout-de-Bibi, enfant terrible*, *Trinque, gamin de Paris*, *Popaul et Virginie* (short stories).
1918	Anatole France, *Le Petit Pierre.*
1919	J. Galzy, *La Femme chez les garçons.*
1919	André Gide, *La Symphonie pastorale.*
1919	E. Mazaud, *Lettres de gosses.*
1919	Rachilde, *L'animale.*
1920	Paul Bourget, *Anomalies.*
1920	Louis Chadourne, *L'inquiète adolescence.*
1920	Jacques de Lacretelle, *La vie inquiète de Jean Hermelin.*
1920	A. Lichtenberger, *Biche.*
1920	H. Montherlant, *La relève du matin.*
1920	André Obey, *L'enfant inquiet.*
1920	Jérôme et Jean Tharaud, *A l'ombre de la Croix.*
1921	P. Cazin, *Décadi, ou la Pieuse Enfance.*
1921	Benjamin Crémieux, *Le Premier de la classe.*
1921	Lucien Daudet, *Les Yeux neufs.*
1921	Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *État civil.*
1921	Giraudoux, *Suzanne et la Pacifique.*
1921	Emile Henriot, *Les Temps innocents.*

1921	Francis Jammes, *De l'âge divin à l'âge ingrat.*
1921	François Mauriac, *Préséances.*
1921	Séverine, *Line.*
1922	H. Bataille, *L'Enfance éternelle. Souvenirs.*
1922	Julien Benda, *Les Amorandes.*
1922	Magali Boisnard, *L'Enfant taciturne.*
1922	Colette, *La Maison de Claudine.*
1922	Georges Duhamel, *Les plaisirs et les jeux.*
1922	André Dumas, *Ma petite Yvette.*
1922	Anatole France, *La Vie en Fleur.*
1922	Francis Jammes, *L'Amour, les Muses et la Chasse.*
1922	Michel Leiris, *L'Age d'homme.*
1922	Edmond Rocher, *L'âme en friche.*
1922	Jean Sarment, *Jean-Jacques de Nantes.*
1922	A. Thierry, *Le Sourire blessé.*
1922	A. Gilbert de Voisins, *L'enfant qui prit peur.*

(The above list is, of course, far from complete, being biassed towards novel and autobiography. It is also theoretically limited to literature *for* adults, but some children's literature has crept in, especially where its status is at all ambiguous. Furthermore, the list is artificially confined to works whose existence and dates of publication are verifiable. Some discrepancies may have occurred in cases where a novel was serialised before its publication in a single volume. Finally, many titles belong to works which are not strictly speaking *about* childhood, but where, it could be argued, childhood plays a very important part. I do not claim any particular knowledge of the works listed above, except for those which appear in the bibliography. The appendix was compiled from a variety of sources, but mainly from the early critics, Toursch, Dupuy and Calvet, and the bibliographies of the later critics, Bethlenfalvay, Chombart de Lauwe, Coe and Dugast.)

APPENDIX 2
A LA RECHERCHE DU SENTIER PERDU OR *LE PASSÉ, PEUT-IL RENAITRE?*

(Alain-Fournier)[1]

Combourg (Chateaubriand)[2]

'Ah, my arms are really benumbed. I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcotte Mill as it looked one February afternoon many years ago.' (George Eliot) (cf. *A la recherche du temps perdu*, I,3-9)[3]

'Mon père [...] me mettait debout [...] pour me faire chanter la complainte de Geneviève de Brabant.' (Marguerite Audoux) (cf. I,9)[4]
'Et puis, décidément, mon père a le chic pour montrer la lanterne magique. [...] C'est à peine si, dans le va-et-vient rapide des personnages qui s'égorgent sur le drap blanc, on arrive à distinguer les formes humaines, à voir autre chose qu'une effrayante mêlée, une masse informe et bariolée, éclaboussée de boue rouge.' (Georges Darien) (cf. I,9-10)[5]

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[1] Alain-Fournier, *Le Grand Meaulnes* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1971), p.142 and p.208. The former is a chapter title and the latter a question asked by the heroine, Yvonne de Galais.

[2] Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951), I,42-46 and I,50-106. The similarity between the names 'Combray' and 'Combourg' (where much of Chateaubriand's evocation of childhood is set) is frequently pointed out.

[3] George Eliot, 'The Mill on the Floss' (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.55. The similarity between the 'prologues' of *A la Recherche* and Eliot's novel is another which is often remarked upon.

[4] Marguerite Audoux, *Marie-Claire* (Paris: Charpentier, 1936), p.6. Of course, here it is the child who sings the legend, rather than the Combray presentation via magic lantern and grand-mother's narrative. The point is simply that the legend which has such an effect on the young Marcel, is also placed at a crucial point in a 'récit d'enfance' where its thematic connections to the rest of the text can be seen as clearly as in *A la Recherche*.

[5] Georges Darien, *Bas les cœurs!* (Paris: 10/18, 1957), p.15. It is hardly surprising that magic lanterns should figure so widely in the literature of childhood of Proust's time and before. Therefore, it may at first seem odd that the example chosen is Darien's. Nothing could be more different from the aesthetic and historical malaise caused by Marcel's magic lantern, than the war-mongering frenzy of Jean Barbier and his fellow spectators - even if the Proustian pictures are equally barbaric in their own way. What makes the case of Darien so interesting and worthy of note is the fact that he, like Proust, introduces the magic lantern in an early part of his novel to represent the techniques of the whole. In Proust's case, the multi-faceted symbolism of the magic lantern is well-known. In Darien's case, it is somewhat cruder. There is really only one technique: the setting of the atrocities of war and bourgeois cowardice in the viewpoint of a child in the same way that Jean Barbier's father places the slides of wartime brutality in the magic lantern, essentially a *child's* toy.

'Cet enfant a besoin de grand air. Il faut, avant tout, lui refaire une santé [...]. Les enfants, il faut qu'ils vivent dehors.' (Henry Bordeaux) (cf. I,10-11 and I,82)[6]

'Je restais [...] enfermé dans le Cabinet [...] ... et je lisais assis sur une vieille bascule, auprès d'une fenêtre qui donnait sur le jardin.' (Alain-Fournier) (cf. I,12)[7]

Tante Dine 'tenait pour les différences des classes' (Henry Bordeaux). 'On ne se déclasse pas, c'est impossible ... surtout en descendant.' (René Boylesve) (cf. I,16)[8]

'C'était le début de ces terreurs des soirs [...] qui, dans cette maison pourtant si aimée, ont beaucoup assombri mon enfance.' (Pierre Loti) (cf. I,23 or I,9 and the whole of the build up to the 'drame du coucher') 'C'était toute une affaire de me coucher. Il y fallait des supplications, des larmes, des embrassements.' (Anatole France) (cf. I,27-36)[9]
'J'étais amoureux de ma mère.' (Stendhal) (cf. I,27 and the whole of the 'drame')[10]

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6 Henry Bordeaux, *La Maison* (Vienna: Larousse, [n.d.]), pp.115-17. In Bordeaux's novel, these pronouncements belong to a grand-father, rather than a Proustian grand-mother. But this pair of literary grand-parents are well-matched. Both are nature lovers who are considered slightly mad by the rest of the family. Both too are literary disciples, Bordeaux's grand-father of Rousseau (once again testifying to the far-reaching influence of the latter) and Proust's grand-mother to female models, George Sand and Mme de Sévigné.

7 Alain-Fournier, p.14. Here, of course, it is the 'Cabinet des Archives' 'au fond de la Mairie', not the 'petit cabinet sentant l'iris', but the principle is the same, minus perhaps the Proustian 'volupté': withdrawal to read and reflect in solitude, or, as Dana Brand puts it, into a 'womb with a view'. (Dana Brand, 'A Womb with a View: The 'Reading' Consciousness in Ruskin and Proust', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 18 (1981), 487-502). An extract from Ruskin's *Praeterita* could equally well have been chosen here. See Chapter 4, for further discussion of reading and of Ruskin. See also below (extracts 15, 32 and 34) for examples from *Praeterita* which illustrate further similarities with Proust.

8 Bordeaux, p.52 and René Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la Balustrade* (Paris: Nelson, 1951), p.172. Proust makes the same simple fact about provincial nineteenth century life more interesting with a metaphor or two and the inverse example of Swann. These brief extracts also make the point that Proust was not alone in writing an account of childhood in a small provincial town overseen by an eccentric great-aunt: a 'sub-genre' of the récit d'enfance, perhaps?

9 Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d'un enfant* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1988), p.49 and Anatole France, *Le Livre de mon ami*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1984-), I (1984), 431-583 (p.438). Despite the intensity of this child's emotions, Loti's is a far more conventional 'drame du coucher', where the child's over-active imagination peoples the night with various monsters. Certainly, excessive mother-love is also a part of Loti's story (see pp.55-56), but it took a Proust to weave this sickly idolisation with an Œdipal drama worthy of Freud into his bed-time trauma scene, to link this with 'un amour de Swann' and *François le Champi*, to resurrect it in the affair with Albertine and finally to bring all this into the Guermantes matinée. Similarly, what for Proust and Loti is a 'drame', is for France just an 'affaire'.

10 Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, in *Œuvres intimes*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1981-82), II (1982), 523-959 (p.555). This is never quite so explicit in Proust's case. Stendhal's description of kissing his mother (p.556) is also much more blatantly sexual than Proust's.

'Entre elle[s] et moi, il y avait les escaliers obscurs, les escaliers que je devinais pleins d'ombre et qui me faisait frémir...' (Loti) (cf. I,27)[11]
'Elle se pencha sur mon lit pour m'embrasser, et alors je n'eus plus envie de rien, ni de pleurer, ni de me lever, ni de sortir; elle était là, et cela me suffisait; je me sentais entièrement consolé, tranquillisé, changé, par sa bienfaisante présence...' (Loti) (cf. I,27 and I,23)[12]

'Est-ce la magie de ce nom de ville inconnue [...]: je n'imaginais pas dès lors de plus beau voyage que de s'en aller dans cette Venise dont on m'avait montré les gondoles au stéréoscope. J'ai longtemps hésité, crainte d'une déconvenue, à réaliser ce projet.' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,40 and I,380-86)[13]

'Il est étrange que mon enfance si tendrement choyée m'ait surtout laissé des images tristes.' (Loti) (cf. I,44)[14]

The 'sculptured churches' of the small French town of Abbeville: 'For here I saw that art [...], religion and present human life, were yet in perfect harmony. [...] Outside, the faithful old town gathered itself, and nestled under their buttresses like a brood beneath the mother's wings; the quiet, uninjurious aristocracy of the newer town opened into silent streets, between self-possessed and hidden dignities of dwellings, each with its courtyard and richly trellised garden. The commercial square, with the main street of traverse, consisted of uncompetitive shops, such as were needful, of the native wares.' (Ruskin) (cf. I,47-48 and I,58-64)[15]

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[11] Loti, p.47. Compare specifically with Proust's reference to 'cet escalier détesté' (I,27).

[12] Loti, p.56. In Proust's case, however, the kiss is rarely described without the negative shadow of its absence (see I,13).

[13] Bordeaux, p.41. While it is striking that Proust was not the only writer to notice the effect of names - and especially that of Venice - on the child's imagination, Bordeaux certainly gets less mileage out of the observation. In *A la recherche* the issue recurs again and again, culminating in the journey that Bordeaux's character declines to make. This eventual visit to Italy may confirm Bordeaux's suspicions about the faulty impressions of childhood, but it is far from disappointing. The failure to follow up Venice and the child's relationship with proper names is almost symbolic of the difference between Bordeaux and Proust. What remains simple *subject matter* for Bordeaux is elevated by Proust into an all-permeating *theme*, integrated into a vast literary plan that goes far beyond childhood. See Chapter 4 for further discussion of proper names in *A la recherche.*

[14] Loti, p.77. But, like Proust's Marcel, Loti's narrator also succeeds in evoking the happier side of childhood, thus combining two distinct genres of the récit d'enfance. Curiously too, it is via the mechanism of involuntary memory that these more idyllic memories are conjured up (p.61 and p.154).

[15] John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.146. As in Proust's first description of Combray (I,47), Abbeville is described in terms of arrival by train. Although there are several churches in Ruskin's piece, their central situation is the same as that of Saint-Hilaire, which is described by means of a different, but very similar simile - a shepherdess with her ewes (I,47). It is this focal position that Proust will

Great-Aunt Félicie: 'Le jour elle buvait une infusion de feuilles de noyer: une grande bouillotte [...] à distance répandait dans la pièce ce parfum familier des routes de Courance, qui rappelait nos promenades d'été.' (Boylesve) (cf. I,50-51)[16]
'Comme on observe, en province, le moindre manquement aux habitudes, Félicie fit remarquer:
-Madame François n'est pas sous l'auvent.' (Boylesve) (cf. I,54-55)[17]

'Je n'avais pas encore songé à m'informer de ce qu'elle pouvait être d'ailleurs [...], un de mes oncles [...] m'ayant prévenu de bonne heure que les actrices n'étaient pas des femmes, et que la nature avait oublié de leur faire un cœur.' (Nerval) (cf. I,74)
Uncle Philibert: 'Sa vie était un mauvais exemple, et il habitait Paris.' (Boylesve) (cf. I,71)[18]
'La dame à la rose me retenait aussi: j'avais beau tourner autour d'elle, je recevais de tous les côtés sa fleur et son sourire.' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,75-77)[19]

'La découverte de ce livre, lu sous le second tilleul de l'allée du côté du parterre dont le terrain s'enfonçait d'un pied, et là je m'asseyais, est peut-être la plus grande époque de ma vie. [...] Troublé même dans la lecture [...], je me cachai dans les charmilles, petite salle de

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refer to in subsequent descriptions of the church (I,58-64), along with his own observations on the lessons it teaches about art and its relationship to life.

16 René Boylesve, *La Becquée* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, [n.d.]), p.77. This corresponds mainly to the second reference in *Combray* to Léonie's tea, where Marcel uses visual details rather than smell to recall the lime trees around the little town. But in some ways, the idea of a tea whose 'parfum familier [...] rappelait nos promenades d'été' is a rather good understatement of the famous section on involuntary memory (I,44-47), which eventually leads to the story of the walks along the 'deux côtés'. Courance is the small provincial town in which Boylesve's novel is set, a town which has much in common with Combray.

17 Boylesve, *La Becquée*, p.57. There are many such incidents in Léonie's life at Combray. Just as Bordeaux's grand-father bears a striking resemblance to Proust's grand-mother, so Boylesve's Félicie has much in common with Proust's Léonie. Both are great-aunts, the matriarchal heads of their provincial tribe (see *La Becquée*, p.53), with a profound interest in the trivial details of small-town life. Furthermore, they both succeed in combining this with a permanent state of dying.

18 Gérard de Nerval, 'Sylvie', in *Les Filles du feu*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952-56), I (1952), 261-93 (pp.261-62), and Boylesve, *La Becquée*, p.16. Philibert is, like Adolphe, another exiled uncle, black sheep of the family.

19 Bordeaux, p.27. Bordeaux's 'dame à la rose' may be a painting, and Proust's 'dame en rose' a real 'actress', but the effect on the child is much the same. In fact, 'la dame en rose' does later reappear as a painting, in the guise of Miss Sacripant/Odette. Perhaps the point here is less that no insignificant detail is superfluous in Proust, than that the trivial incidents of childhood can be *given* a quite unexpected scope and meaning. Bordeaux's anecdote leads nowhere.

verdure à l'extrémité orientale du *clos* (petit parc), enceinte de murs.' (Stendhal) (cf. I,82-89)[20]

'Ce n'est pas bien drôle, le parc: avec ses allées montantes, ses balustrades, ses escaliers, ses vases, ses boulingrins, ses terrasses, il me fait l'effet d'une grande pièce montée. [...] Je ne comprends pas qu'on puisse arranger de cette façon des végétaux qui ne vous ont rien fait.' (Darien) (cf. I,85 and I,11)[21]

'Quel élan recevait d'un seul coup tout mon être sensible! Les contours de la terre, sans cadre, ne m'avaient pas frappé. Maintenant que transcrits, ils tenaient sur un carré de papier, voici que je les voyais, non seulement sur la page immobile, mais en plein air, et vivants. La maison avec ses grosses pierres, le jardin clos de murs, je les touchais, je les comprenais, je les possédais, et d'ailleurs, ils m'appartenaient. Mais, au delà, commençait l'univers dont le manque de limites m'avait rebuté, de sorte que je ne lui attribuais pas de formes précises. Et ces formes, elles étaient là devant moi.' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,82-85)[22]

'En même temps que le plaisir de la page présente, je savourais l'espoir de la page à venir. Je m'enfonçais littéralement dans les aventures [...], ne conservant de la réalité extérieure que le fouet du grésil sur la vitre et le cher tic-tac de la pendule. Un bruit de voix [...] me fit tressaillir.' (Léon Daudet) (cf. I,86-87 and I,150-51)[23]

'- V'là l'régiment! crie Léon.' (Darien) (cf. p.87)[24]

'J'avais eu auparavant une petite passion: l'amour des épinaux, bâtons noueux pris dans les haies d'aubépines.' (Stendhal) (cf. I,110-12)[25]

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[20] Stendhal, pp.618-19. Proust's child shows an identical desire to withdraw from possible intruders when reading outside.

[21] Darien, p.105. Strictly speaking, this child's opinion of the great gardens of Versailles corresponds more to the grand-mother's of the humble garden at Combray. But during the Sunday reading scene, it is suggested that Marcel shares the old lady's dislike of gardens where man's art triumphs over nature.

[22] Bordeaux, p.105. The pages in question are the illustrations in Gustave Doré's Bible, so, strictly speaking, this should not be compared to the Proustian *reading* scene. However, like that section of *Combray*, Bordeaux's passage shows how a book can not only seem more real than reality to a child, but also how it can bestow a hitherto unknown reality on the real world.

[23] Léon Daudet, *Le Partage de l'enfant. Roman contemporain* (Paris: Charpentier, 1905), p.79. This passage echoes the interplay between the internal and external which is so characteristic of Proustian descriptions of reading. This is most fully developed in the *Combray* garden reading scene before the final interruption by the gardener's daughter, but the Daudet passage is perhaps more similar to the indoor reading scene set in the year of Léonie's death.

[24] Darien, p.35. Here, Léon corresponds to the gardener's daughter, who disturbs Marcel's afternoon reading with the cry, «Les voilà, les voilà!» (I,87), 'les' being the troops stationed near Combray.

[25] Stendhal, p.715.

The kitchen: 'Là gouvernait alors Mariette la cuisinière. Son pouvoir était absolu. Meubles et gens, tout tremblait sous son despotisme.' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,120-121 and similar remarks about Françoise elsewhere)
'Plus d'une fois, aussi, j'ai suivi avec curiosité les mouvements de Mariette quand elle étouffait la volaille. Sa dextérité, comme son indifférence, était extrême. Tel le bourreau le plus exercé, elle décapitait les canards qui continuaient de courir sans leur tête, ce qui me frappait d'admiration. Un jour, elle me demanda de maintenir pendant l'opération un de ces volatiles récalcitrants. Comme je refusais mon concours d'une voix indignée, elle me dit avec la brusquerie qui lui était familière:
- Eh! faites le dégoûté: vous en mangez bien!' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,120)[26]

'Cette période de ma vie est toute lumineuse dans mon souvenir. [...] Je me promenais matin et soir [...], j'affermissais mes rapports avec la nature.' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,131-32 and indeed the whole of the following section on the 'deux côtés')[27]

'La fenêtre donnait sur des touffes de lilas humides: les grappes fleuries venaient si près, qu'en se penchant on pouvait s'y mouiller la figure.' (Boylesve) (cf.I,134)[28]

'Un de ces fromages blancs qu'on arrose avec la crème du lait': 'Un bol de fraises des bois accompagnait ce mets frugal et innocent. Nous en fîmes un mélange si savoureux que je fus incliné à croire aveuglement désormais au bonheur universel.' (Bordeaux) (cf.I,138)[29]

'Derrière une haie vive, soigneusement taillée, on voyait, sous les tilleuls, un corsage bleu, une gerbe de cheveux blonds, un chapeau de paille très vaste, dont les bords ondulaient, au gré des pas, sous une couronne de bleuets.' (Boylesve) (cf. I,138-39)[30]

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26 Bordeaux, p.15 and pp.17-18. The differences are certainly as noticeable as the similarities here. The execution clearly has a much less profound effect on the sensibilities of Bordeaux's child, but the lesson is much the same ('ce lâche calcul' (I,120) that every non-vegetarian has to make), even if Proust's child deduces it for himself. Perhaps the main difference here, though, is that Bordeaux's anecdote remains just that and is not part of the characterisation of a major character, nor does it contain the implications for human nature in general of the Proustian incident.

27 Bordeaux, p.128.

28 Boylesve, *La Becquée*, p.9. In Marcel's case a similar communion with the lilacs of Tansonville is desired, but not allowed: 'Malgré mon désir d'enlacer leur taille souple et d'attirer à moi les boucles étoilées de leur tête odorante, nous passions sans nous arrêter' (I,134).

29 Bordeaux, p.136. The strawberry and cream cheese mixture appears several times in Proust's work, including *Jean Santeuil* (JS,332).

30 Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la balustrade*, p.46. This is remarkably similar to Marcel's first glimpse of Gilberte through the hawthorn hedge.

'Une voix gutturale appela tout à coup;
- Nazzarena.
[...] J'en fus très affecté: du moins je savais son nom.' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,140)[31]

'I cannot analyse, at least without taking more trouble than I suppose any reader would care to take with me, the mixed good and evil in the third rate literature which I preferred to the Latin classics.' (Ruskin) (cf. I,144-45)[32]

'Je donnais de grands coups de baguette contre les buissons. [...] Je sentais contre mon front quelque chose de trop gros, qui ne parvenait pas à se loger dans ma cervelle d'enfant.' (Boylesve) (cf. I,152-53)[33]
'The living inhabitation of the world - the grazing and nesting in it, - the spiritual power of the air, the rocks, the waters, to be in the midst of it, and rejoice and wonder at it, and help it if I could, - happier if it needed no help of mine, - this was the essential love of *Nature* in me, this the root of all that I have usefully become, and the light of all that I have rightly learned.' (Ruskin) (cf. I,153-55)[34]

'Je retrouvai la réalité bien au-dessous des folles images de mon imagination.' (Stendhal) (cf. I,172)[35]

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[31] Bordeaux, p.198. In both cases, it is the name of the loved one that produces the effect, despite the rather unpleasant tones in which it is pronounced - in Gilberte's case 'd'une voix perçante et autoritaire' (I,140). Again, we find that in Proust's work the same incident is part of a much wider treatment of the theme of naming and its place in the imagination of the child (See Chapter 4).

[32] Ruskin, p.130. Proust shares a similar tolerance for his child's lack of taste and preference for 'œuvres naïvement incomplètes' (I,144-145).

[33] Boylesve, *La Becquée*, p.13. The equivalent passage from *Combray* reads as follows: 'Les murs des maisons, la haie de Tansonville, les arbres du bois de Roussainville, les buissons auxquels s'adosse Montjouvain, recevaient des coups de parapluie ou de canne, entendaient des cris joyeux, qui n'étaient, les uns et les autres, que des idées confuses qui m'exaltaient et qui n'ont pas atteint le repos dans la lumière, pour avoir préféré à un lent et difficile éclaircissement, le plaisir d'une dérivation plus aisée vers une issue immédiate.' (I,152-53) In the case of Riquet, Boylesve's narrator, the emotion, grief on his mother's death, is very different from the elation of the Proustian version, despite the fact that the incident is set in the context of Léonie's death. Furthermore, Riquet's aim is far less ambitious; he merely seeks to *feel* his emotion rather than to express it. Yet, for both children it is a matter of converting a difficult mental activity into a simple physical one.

[34] Ruskin, pp.155-56. Although Ruskin is more clearly a worshipper of *nature* than Marcel and although lust for a 'paysanne de Méséglise' comes to complicate the corresponding Proustian passage, the exaltation in solitude is the same, along with the debt that is acknowledged to such childhood experiences: what Proust is describing here is a similar attempt to 'faire le compte de ce que je dois au côté de Méséglise, des humbles découvertes dont il fut le cadre fortuit ou nécessaire' (I,153).

[35] Stendhal, p.745. Here, this is compared specifically to the child's disappointment on seeing Mme de Guermantes for the first time, but the idea runs, like a refrain, throughout the early volumes of *A la recherche* (as in so much literature of this period).

'Cependant, au moment où le cabriolet s'ébranla [...], j'eus une singulière émotion heureuse [...]. Je croyais être rempli d'une substance diffusible et lumineuse qui tendait à s'évader en me suffoquant. Je sentais frémir des ailes destinées à me soulever dans l'air du printemps, au-dessus des petites villes, des routes et des rivières. Dans ce moment, il me sembla que j'embrassais par avance non seulement la promenade que nous allions faire, mais tout un avenir où de grandes choses retentissaient. [...] Qui n'a connu de ces instants d'ardent désir où le cœur franchit le temps, l'espace et toutes les bornes des lois physiques, pour donner foi à je ne sais quel rêve de beauté. Mais je n'étais qu'un enfant: je faisais bon marché des lois physiques et des humaines.' (Boylesve) (cf. I,176-79)[36]

'We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it, - if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather [...]. These familiar flowers, these well remembered bird-notes, this sky with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows - such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep bladed grass today, might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years, which still live in us and transform our perception into love.' (George Eliot) (cf. I,181-83)[37]

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[36] Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la Balustrade*, pp.11-12. This passage bears a remarkable similarity to the 'Clochers de Martinville' incident - minus the writing of the prose poem in which the Proustian version culminates. Perhaps then, it could be described as an *embryonic* 'Clochers de Martinville', identical to the experiences described by Marcel on the preceding pages (I,176-77), which are simply 'privileged moments', intimations of beauty analogous to involuntary memory. As with these, Boylesve's passage leads nowhere, except perhaps to justification of his choice of the child's viewpoint for this tale of provincial pettiness. Riquet, Boylesve's child character, does, however, repeat this experience towards the end of the book (pp.357-58), when he begins to turn to the statue of Alfred de Vigny as compensation for his many disappointments. Thus, indirectly at least, it seems as if Boylesve's privileged moments also lead to some kind of artistic endeavour.

[37] Eliot, p.94. If *The Mill on the Floss* provides a good prologue for an alternative version of *Combray* (see note 3 above), it also contains a fitting epilogue. If this sounds more straightforwardly nostalgic than Proust, it is worth noting that the corresponding pages (I,181-83), where he sums up the two 'côtés', have an uncharacteristically excessive rose-tinted glow: 'les fleurs qu'on me montre aujourd'hui ne me semblent pas de vraies fleurs' (I,182).

'Rome, et les seuls noms des villes anciennes de l'Italie, le nom de l'Italie même, ont une magie qui transpose d'avance et agrandit dans l'œil de la jeunesse ardente toutes les images qu'il pourra rencontrer.' (Boylesve) (cf. I,380-86)[38]

'Très tôt, le goût des jeunes filles fut vif en moi. Je les préférais de beaucoup aux petits garçons. Ceux-ci ne m'aimaient pas; mon air délicat les agaçait.' (Renan) (cf. I,387 and indeed, the young Marcel's behaviour throughout)[39]
'J'ai joué des après-midi entières avec un troupeau de petites filles charmantes' [...] 'Quelle compagnie délicieuse elles me faisaient.' (Paul Léautaud) (cf.I,387 and the following section on the games of the Champs-Elysées)[40]
'C'est la vérité que je n'ai jamais su jouer aux billes ni à la balle ni à tous les jeux.' (Léautaud) (cf. I,394 and II,271-74)[41]
'J'étais tourmenté du désir de lui donner quelque chose [...]. Le choix seul m'embarrassait. Or, je cachais dans un tiroir une collection de billes en cornaline auxquelles j'étais attaché comme à des bijoux. [...] Un instant, j'hésitai devant un sacrifice aussi considérable et pensai du moins y soustraire cette agate couleur de feu où la lumière transparaissait et qui était ma favorite. Il m'apparut que si je conservais celle-là mon offrande ne valait plus rien.' (Bordeaux) (cf. I,395 and III,135-37)[42]

This 'novel' could continue as follows:

'Il repousse le souvenir des belles étrangères de Riveclaire qui sourient dans leurs cheveux pleins de fleurs.' (Valery Larbaud) ('L'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs' again?)[43]

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38 Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la Balustrade*, p.83. See note 13, above and Chapter 4. The same remarks apply as to Bordeaux.

39 Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* (Paris: Folio, 1983), p.72. Marcel never says this of himself explicitly, but it is always understood. The only little boys he mentions are some vague 'camarades' (I,73) and Bloch, who is much older.

40 Paul Léautaud, *Le Petit ami* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1964), p.32 and p.44.

41 Léautaud, p.43. For Marcel, what starts more as misinterpretation of his games with Gilberte, ends with embarrassing failure in the game of 'furet' with Albertine. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of this.

42 Bordeaux, p.200. Here it is the narrator who gives the 'bille d'agate' to the girl he loves, unlike Marcel who receives it from Gilberte. Yet in both cases, the gift is much more precious and momentous to the little boy. Eventually, Marcel himself passes this symbol of love on to Albertine, but only when it has lost all such value.

43 Valery Larbaud, *Enfantines*, in *Œuvres* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), pp.395-535 (p.425).

'Tout à coup, d'un coin du salon partit comme un cyclone, la farandole des cinq petites Capdevielle. Elles se tenaient par la main et glissaient avec une vitesse d'ouragan entre les sièges semant le bruit et la terreur.' (Boylesve) (cf. the characterisation of la 'petite bande', II,146-50)[44]

'Le petit garçon que j'ai été se réveillait en moi et j'aurais voulu à la fois embrasser cette créature comme il l'eût embrassée [...], cette créature auprès de laquelle je passais des heures à la fois filiales et amoureuses.' (Léautaud) (cf. III,584-87)[45]

'Ces [...] soirées [...] n'étaient pas du tout du temps perdu pour ma littérature' (Léautaud) (An apt summary of some of the discoveries made in *Le Temps retrouvé*?)[46]

'Mais les livres qu'on lit quand on est enfant ne s'oublient jamais. L'impression qu'ils nous ont laissée peut changer, on ne cesse pas pour cela de se les rappeler quelquefois. Qui sait même s'ils ne laissent pas en nous plus que les grands livres que nous lirons plus tard, avec scepticisme ou avec envie.' (Léautaud) (cf. IV,464-65)[47]
'Je vois encore le volume cartonné de vert, d'un vert marbré qui blanchissait sous le pouce et poissait les mains, avec un dos de peau blanche, s'ouvrant mal, imprimé sur papier à chandelle.' (Jules Vallès) (cf. IV,464)[48]

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[44] Boylesve, *L'Enfant à la Balustrade*, p.58. 'La petite bande' may operate on the beach and the Capdevielles indoors, but both have the same energy and indivisibility.

[45] Léautaud, pp.78-80. Léautaud's novel/autobiography in many ways sketches out the lines of *La Prisonnière* and is indeed an explicit version of the whole of the incestuous strain of *A la Recherche*. The mother-lover ambivalence begins at the very outset, when a motherless childhood is offset by the presence of the father's 'actress' friends (p.51). When the adult narrator finally gets to know his mother, he tells her, 'Enfin je sens bien, ce n'est pas tout à fait comme une mère que je vous embrasse' (p.136) - a comment that a more lucid Marcel might have made during the 'drame du coucher.' Finally, when she leaves, her place and her ability to resurrect the child that once was (p.142), are once again taken over by prostitutes.

[46] Léautaud, p.187. See also p.86. Proust's narrator eventually comes to similar conclusions about his social life and, of course, it is during one such occasion, the Guermantes matinée, that what seems like 'temps perdu' is definitively transformed into 'temps retrouvé'.

[47] Léautaud, p.17. The most obvious comparison is to be made with Proust's *François le Champi* incident in *Le Temps retrouvé*.

[48] Jules Vallès, *L'Enfant*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975-90), II (1990), 139-388 (p.160). Proust shares a similar interest in what we might call the contingent aspects of books: 'les livres se comportent en cela comme des choses, la manière dont leur dos s'ouvrait, le grain du papier peut avoir gardé en lui un souvenir aussi vif [...] que les phrases mêmes des livres. Plus vif même, car celles-ci gênent parfois' (IV,464).

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