



100 Years After Proust

Saturday,
November 19, 2022
The New York
Society Library

Laisse à blanc
(5 ou 6 lignes)

^{chez elle après}
 J'arrivais ^{avec} onze heures, ^{d'une} ^{heure} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail}
 pu venir plutôt, mais elle se plaignait que ce
 fut ^{très} ^{très} ^{très} tard, l'orage lui avait fait mal aller
 de tantôt mal à la tête ^{et} ^{le} ^{petit} ^{peu} ^{de} ^{peu} ^{de} ^{peu}
 garderait pas ^{une} ^{seule} ^{heure} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail}
^{elle} ^{le} ^{remercier}, et en effet, ^{après} ^{peut} ^{être} ^{dit}
 se sentit fatigué et ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail}
 attendait ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer}
 du lit ^{elle} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer}
 mais au moment comme il venait de rentrer
 l'idi lui vint brusquement que ^{l'idi} ^{l'idi} ^{l'idi} ^{l'idi}
 avait fait ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer}
 à habiter le lit ^{parce} ^{qu'} ^{il} ^{attendait} ^{quelq'} ^{un} ^{de} ^{la} ^{soir}
 que ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail}
 seulement si mal le fatigue et que ^{de} ^{travail} ^{de} ^{travail}
 surtout Swan parti elle avait rallumé la
 lumière et fait entrer celui qui ^{avait} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer}
^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer} ^{le} ^{reposer}

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This event is co-sponsored by the New York Society Library
and the Proust Reading Group.

**ABOUT
THE PROUST READING GROUP**

The Proust Reading Group was formed in 1971 by some well-educated but decidedly non-scholarly people to read *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which was then *Remembrance of Things Past* as translated by Scott Moncrieff. That was our goal and, when we finished, we we decided that we did not want to be finished. Proust had convinced us that it was worthwhile reading the great books. If we could not be creative artists ourselves like the hero of *Recherche*, we could at least regard reading itself as a creative act. So, we went on... and on.

**ABOUT
THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY**

Founded in 1754, the Library is open to all for reading, reference, and many events. Circulation and other services are available to members. Our landmark building houses over 300,000 volumes, reading rooms, study spaces, a children's library, and an exhibition gallery. The Library is a not-for-profit organization supported in part by tax-deductible contributions.

THE PRESENTERS

Christine M. Cano is an Associate Professor of French at Case Western Reserve University. She holds a Ph.D. from Yale University. She is the author of *Proust's Deadline* (University of Illinois Press) and has published articles on book reception histories, journalism and the French press, and political travel writing.

Antoine Compagnon is the Blanche W. Knopf Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He was Professor of Modern and Contemporary French Literature at the Collège de France from 2005 to 2020. In February 2022, he was elected to the Académie française. Professor Compagnon is the author of some twenty-five books, including several works on Marcel Proust, most recently *La Vie derrière soi*, about the relationship between creativity and old age, and *Proust du côté juif*.

Elisabeth Ladenson is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and General Editor of the *Romanic Review*. She is the author of *Proust's Lesbianism* (Cornell University Press, 1999) and *Dirt for Art's Sake: Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita*, and has published essays on a wide range of subjects. She is working on a book called *Proust in the Margins: Jew, Homosexual, Snob*.

Edmund White is the author of many novels and essays, including *Forgetting Elena*, *A Boy's Own Story*, *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*, and, most recently, *A Previous Life*. He has published biographies of Marcel Proust and Jean Genet. He was named the 2018 winner of the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction and received the 2019 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation.

Noam Scheindlin holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the Graduate Center, CUNY, and teaches at the City University of New York. He has published articles on Proust and Georges Perec, and other literary topics, and regularly teaches the Proust Seminar at the 92nd Street Y in New York. He is at work on a study of Proust's early drafts of *In Search of Lost Time*.

THE SELECTIONS

All selections from *In Search of Lost Time*, translated by Moncrieff, Kilmartin, Enright and Mayor (Modern Library)

Introduction: The novel's first lines

Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure. Parfois, à peine ma bougie éteinte, mes yeux se fermaient si vite que je n'avais pas le temps de me dire : « je m'endors. » Et, une demi-heure après, la pensée qu'il était temps de chercher le sommeil m'éveillait ; je voulais poser le volume que je croyais avoir encore dans les mains et souffler ma lumière ; je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de lire, mais ces réflexions avait pris un tour un peu particulier ; il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage.

For a long time I went to bed early. Sometimes, the candle just barely out, my eyes closed so quickly that I did not have time to tell myself, "I'm falling asleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to look for sleep would awaken me; I would make as if to put away the book which I imagined was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had gone on thinking, while I was asleep, about what I had just been reading, but these thoughts had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book.

1. The apartment of tante Léonie:

My grandfather's cousin—by courtesy my great-aunt—with whom we used to stay, was the mother of [my] aunt Léonie who, since her husband's (my uncle Octave's) death, had gradually declined to leave, first Combray, then her house in Combray, then her bedroom, and finally her bed, and now never 'came down,' but lay perpetually in a state of grief, physical debility, illness, obsession, and piety[...]My aunt's life was now practically confined to two adjoining rooms, in one of which she would rest in the afternoon while the other was being aired. They were rooms of that country order which—just as in certain climes whole tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or scented by myriads of protozoa which we cannot see—enchants us with the countless odours springing from the virtues, wisdom, habits, a whole secret system of life, invisible, superabundant and profoundly moral, which their atmosphere holds in solution; smells natural enough indeed, and weather-tinted like those of the neighbouring countryside, but already humanised, domesticated, snug, an exquisite, skilful, limpid jelly, skilfully blended from all the fruits of the year which have left the orchard for the store-room, smells changing with the year, but plenishing and homely, offsetting the sharpness of hoarfrost with the sweetness of warm bread, smells lazy and punctual as a village clock, roving and settled, heedless and provident, linen smells, morning smells, pious smells, rejoicing in a peace which brings only additional anxiety, and in a prosaicness which serves as a deep reservoir of poetry to the stranger who passes through their midst without having lived among them. The air of those rooms was

THE SELECTIONS CONTINUED

saturated with the fine bouquet of a silence so nourishing, so succulent that I never went into them without a sort of greedy anticipation, particularly on those first mornings, chilly still, of the Easter holidays, when I could taste it more fully, because I had just arrived in Combray...

...I would go in and kiss her; Françoise would be making her tea; or, if my aunt felt agitated, she would ask instead for her tisane, and it would be my duty to shake out the chemist's little package on to a plate the amount of lime-blossom required for infusion in boiling water. The drying of the stems had twisted them into a fantastic trellis, in the interlacings of which the pale flowers had opened, as though a painter had arranged them there, grouping them in the most decorative poses. The leaves, having lost or altered their original appearance, resembled the most disparate things, the transparent wing of a fly, the blank side of a label, the petal of a rose, which had all been piled together, pounded or interwoven like the materials for a nest. A thousand trifling little details—a charming prodigality on the part of the chemist—details which would have been eliminated from an artificial preparation, gave me, like a book in which one reads with astonished delight the name of a person one knows, the pleasure of finding that these were sprigs of real lime-trees, like those I had seen, when coming from the train, in the Avenue de la Gare, altered indeed precisely because they were not imitations but themselves, and because they had aged.

From the madeleine

Terrible uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that. Create. It is face to face with something which does not yet exist, which it alone can make actual, which it alone can bring into the light of day.

2. The bedtime scene

Mamma spent that night in my room: when I had just committed an offence so deadly that I was waiting to be banished from the household, my parents gave me a far greater concession than I could ever have won as the reward of a good deed.

I ought to have been happy; I was not. It struck me that my mother had just made a first concession which must have been painful to her, that it was a first abdication on her part from the ideal she had formed for me, and that for the first time she who was so brave, had to confess herself beaten. It struck me that if I had just won a victory it was over her; that I had succeeded, as sickness or sorrow or age might have succeeded, in relaxing her will, in undermining her judgment; and that this evening opened a new era, would remain a black date in the calendar. And if I had dared now, I should have said to Mamma: "No, I don't want you to; you mustn't sleep here." But I was conscious of the practical wisdom, of what would nowadays be called the realism with which she tempered the ardent idealism of my grandmother's nature, and I knew that now the mischief was done she would prefer to let me enjoy the soothing pleasure of her company, and not to disturb my father again. Certainly my mother's beautiful features seemed to shine again with youth that evening, as she sat gently holding my hands and trying to check my tears; but, just for that reason, this was just what I felt should not have been; her anger would have saddened me less than this new gentleness, unknown to my childhood experience; I felt that I had with an impious and secret finger traced a first wrinkle upon her soul and brought out a first white hair on her head. This thought redoubled my sobs, and then I saw that Mamma, who had never allowed herself to go to any length of tenderness with me, was suddenly overcome by my tears and had to struggle to keep back her own. Then, as she saw that I had noticed this, she said to me, with a smile: "Why, my little chick, my little canary-boy, he's going to make Mamma as silly as himself if this goes on. Look, since you can't sleep, and Mamma can't either, we mustn't go on in this stupid way; we must do something; I'll get one of your books." But I had none there. "Would you like me to get out the books now that your grandmother is going to give you for your birthday? Just think it over first, and don't be disappointed if there is nothing new for you then."

3. Elstir's painting of the harbor at Carquethuit

Naturally enough, what [Elstir, the painter] had in his studio were almost all seascapes done here, at Balbec. But I was able to discern from these that the charm of each of them lay in a sort of metamorphosis of the objects represented, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which designate things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with that notion.

...It was, for instance, for a metaphor of this sort—in a picture of the harbour of Carquethuit, a picture which he had finished a few days earlier and which I stood looking at for a long time—that Elstir had prepared the mind of the spectator by employing, for the little town, only marine terms, and urban terms for the sea. Whether because its houses concealed a part of the harbour, a dry dock, or perhaps the sea itself plunging deep inland, as constantly happened on the Balbec coast, on the other side of the promontory on which the town was built the roofs were overtopped (as they might have been by chimneys or steeples) by masts which had the effect of making the vessels to which they belonged appear town-bred, built on land, an impression which was strengthened by the sight of other boats, moored along the jetty but in such serried ranks that you could see men talking across from one deck to another without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec which, in the distance, surrounded by water on every side because you saw them without seeing the town, in a powdery haze of sunlight and crumbling waves, seemed to be emerging from the waters, blown in alabaster or in sea-foam, and, enclosed in the band of a variegated rainbow, to form an ethereal, mystical tableau. On the beach in the foreground the painter had arranged that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between land and sea. The men who were pushing down their boats into the sea were running as much through the waves as along the sand, which, being wet, reflected their hulls as if they were already in the water. The sea itself did not come up in an even line but followed the irregularities of the shore, which the perspective of the picture increased still further, so that a ship actually at sea, half-hidden by the projecting works of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing through the middle of the town.

4. Kissing Albertine

I could not help saying to myself: "Now at last, after failing at Balbec, I am going to discover the fragrance of the secret rose that blooms in Albertine's cheeks. And, since the cycles through which we are able to make things and people pass in the course of our existence are comparatively few, perhaps I shall be able to consider mine in a certain sense fulfilled when, having taken out of its distant frame the blossoming face that I had chosen from among all others, I shall have brought it into this new plane where I shall at last have knowledge of it through my lips." I told myself this because I believed that there was such a thing as knowledge acquired by the lips; I told myself that I was going to know the taste of this fleshly rose, because I had not stopped to think that man, a creature obviously less rudimentary than the sea-urchin or even the whale, nevertheless lacks a certain number of essential organs, and notably possesses none that will serve for kissing. For this absent organ he substitutes his lips, and thereby arrives perhaps at a slightly more satisfying result than if he were reduced to caressing the beloved with a horny tusk. But a pair of lips, designed to convey to the palate the taste of whatever whets their appetite, must be content, without understanding their mistake or admitting their disappointment, with roaming over the surface and with coming to a halt at the barrier of the impenetrable but irresistible cheek. Moreover at the moment of actual contact with the flesh, the lips, even on the assumption that they might become more expert and better endowed, would doubtless be unable to enjoy any more fully the savour which nature prevents their ever actually grasping, for in that desolate zone in which they are unable to find their proper nourishment, they are alone; the sense of sight, then that of smell having long since deserted them. At first, as my mouth began gradually to approach the cheeks which my eyes had recommended it to kiss, my eyes, in changing position, saw a different pair of cheeks; the neck, observed at closer range and as though through a magnifying glass, showed in its coarser grain a robustness which modified the character of the face.

...so now, during this brief journey of my lips towards her cheek, it was ten Albertines that I saw; this one girl being like a many-headed goddess, the head I had last seen, when I tried to approach it, gave way to another. At least so long as I had not touched that head, I could still see it, and a faint perfume came to me from it. But alas—for in this matter of kissing our nostrils and eyes are as ill placed as our lips are ill-made—suddenly my eyes ceased to see, then, my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any odour, and, without thereby gaining any clearer idea of the taste of the rose of my desire, I learned, from these obnoxious signs, that at last I was in the act of kissing Albertine's cheek.

5. The accursed race

I now understood... how, earlier, when I had seen him coming away from Mme. de Villeparisis's, I had managed to arrive at the conclusion that M. de Charlus looked like a woman: he was one! He belonged to that race of beings, less paradoxical than they appear, whose ideal is manly simply because their temperament is feminine and who in ordinary life resemble other men in appearance only; there where each of us carries, inscribed in those eyes through which he beholds everything in the universe, a human form engraved on the surface of the pupil, for them it is not that of a nymph but of an ephebe. A race upon which a curse is laid and which must live in falsehood and perjury, because it knows that its desire, that which constitutes life's dearest pleasure, is held to be punishable, shameful, an inadmissible thing; which must deny its God, since its members, even when Christians, when at the bar of justice they appear and are arraigned, must before Christ and in His name refute as a calumny what is their very life; sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie even in the hour when they close her dying eyes; friends without friendships, despite all those which their frequently acknowledged charm inspires and their often generous hearts would gladly feel—but can we describe as friendships those relationships which flourish only by virtue of a lie and from which the first impulse of trust and sincerity to which they might be tempted to yield would cause them be rejected with disgust, unless they are dealing with an impartial or perhaps even sympathetic spirit, who however in that case, misled with regard to them by a conventional psychology, will attribute to the vice confessed the very affection that is most alien to it, just as certain judges assume and are more inclined to pardon murder in invertes and treason in Jews for reasons derived from original sin and racial predestination? ...Had the paradox not been hidden from their eyes by the very illusion that made them see and live—lovers who are almost precluded from the possibility of that love the hope of which gives them the strength to endure so many risks and so much loneliness, **since** they are enamoured of precisely the type of man who has nothing feminine about him, who is not an invert and consequently cannot love them in return; with the result that their desire would be for ever unappeased did not their money procure for them real men, and their imagination end by making them take for real men the invertes to whom they had prostituted themselves. Their honour precarious, their liberty provisional, lasting only until the discovery of their crime; their position unstable, like that of the poet one day fêted at every drawing room and applauded in every theatre in London, and the next driven from every lodging, unable to find a pillow upon which to lay his head...

6. Time regained

The idea of Time was of value to me for yet another reason: it was a spur, it told me that it was time to begin if I wished to attain to what I had sometimes perceived in the course of my life, in brief lightning-flashes, on the Guermantes way and in my drives in the carriage of Mme de Villeparisis, at those moments of perception which had made me think that life was worth living. How much more worth living did it appear to me now, now that I seemed to see that this life that we live in half-darkness can be illumined, this life that at every moment we distort can be restored to its true pristine shape, that a life, in short, can be realised within the confines of a book! How happy would he be, I thought, the man who had the power to write such a book! What a task awaited him! To give some idea of this task one would have to borrow comparisons from the loftiest and the most varied arts; for this writer—who, moreover, must bring out the opposed facets of each of his characters in order to show its volume—would have to prepare his book with meticulous care, perpetually regrouping his forces like a general conducting an offensive, and he would have also to endure his book like a form of fatigue, to accept it like a discipline, build it up like a church, follow it like a medical regime, vanquish it like an obstacle, win it like a friendship, cosset it like a little child, create it like a new world without neglecting those mysteries whose explanation is to be found probably only in worlds other than our own and the presentiment of which is the thing that moves us most deeply in life and in art. In long books of this kind there are parts which there has been time only to sketch, parts which, because of the very amplitude of the architect's plan, will no doubt never be completed. How many great cathedrals remain unfinished! The writer feeds his book, he strengthens the parts of it which are weak, he protects it, but afterwards it is the book that grows, that designates its author's tomb and defends it against the world's clamour and for a while against oblivion. But to return to my own case, I thought more modestly of my book and it would be inaccurate even to say that I thought of those who would read it as "my" readers. For it seemed to me that they would not be "my" readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician at Combray used to offer his customers—it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves. So that I should not ask them to praise me or to censure me, but simply to tell me whether "it really is like that," I should ask them whether the words that they read within themselves are the same as those which I have written...

cette voix, ce sont, ces notions que nous regardons que nous sentons, que nous entendons; Dès lors le personnage est définitivement créé, mais cette création la est surtout mentale. Sans doute dans le Sévère qu'il s'était constitué, mes parents avaient mieux de faire entrer une foule de particularités de sa vie mondaine qui ^{il avait connu} ~~finissant~~ que d'autres personnes ^{le monde de William, voyant} ~~laissent~~ les élégances régner dans ^{leur} ~~un~~ ^{visage de femme} ~~un~~ comme dans ~~leur~~ ^{leur} ~~visage~~ et s'arrêter à son nez busqué comme à leur frontière. Sans doute Sévère se rendait compte de ces omissions, et si à Cambridge, la conversation tombait sur les papiers de la maison de France, un grand taub disait: "Des gens que ni vous ni moi ne connaîtrons jamais, M. Sévère, et nous nous en passons, n'est-ce pas?" et le faisait de tirer le piano; ces paroles lui rappelaient qu'il avait oublié de mettre à la poste sa réponse pour Trobachof où le Comte de Chambord l'avait invité à venir

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Upcoming at the Library

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@nysoclib On the 150th anniversary of his birth, a definitive
Facebook new biography of a pivotal figure in American
Twitter literary history.

Instagram **Relive the Harlem Renaissance**

LinkedIn with the Library and the Harlem Writers Guild

Thursday, December 1, 6:00 PM

Members' Room | open to the public | free of charge
registration required

Relive the Harlem Renaissance and Roaring Twenties
at a festive tribute to Harlem literary artists and the
work they created or inspired - hosted by the Library
and the Harlem Writers Guild.

Caroline Rennolds Milbank

Inside *Couture*

Monday, December 12, 6:00 PM

Members' Room | open to the public | \$15 per person
registration required

In connection with our *Fabulous Fashion* exhibition
(open through January 15, 2023), an evening with
the author of the definitive classic *Couture: The
Great Designers*.