

COMBRAY

What Cyril Connolly said of Scott Fitz is surely true of the best of the XXth century pessimistic mainstream writers: their style sings of promise, their message is of disillusion. So with MP: ^{MP} Du Côté de chez Swann ~~and in particular Combray~~ ^{and Nous de pays are the} ~~is the~~ catalogue ^{of} the child's dreams and fancies about the world outside his family circle and beyond his age, about everything unknown to him yet, and so he imagines, creates the world as it were for himself in his imagination: ^{the theatre,} the delights of knowing the Swanns, the impossibility of ever coming to look on the Duchesse de Guermantes, this godlike, mythical, Merovingian figment that he invents from her name and a glimpse of her in the church, to look on her as a real, ordinary human; ^{magic} the world of women and love; the enchanted distances beyond Combray where lie the fabulous Balbec, the impossible Venice; the real meaning of beauty and reality. And, in time, the child grows up and comes to fulfil each one of these impossible dreams, he ^{goes to theatre > disappointment} comes to know the Swanns, and they are not wonderful at all, but nasty or boring or empty or failures; the Guermantes, spiteful, futile, boorish, perverted, ^{or} mad, mean; the world of women and love, and it is a hell of egotism and jealousy and suffering and futility; Balbec becomes in reality a perfectly unremarkable Breton seaside resort, and Venice, ^{too} in its way is a let-down, a disappointment. So, in time, he comes to fulfil each of the vague longings that he describes in Combray, and in each case the reality destroys his dream, fails

to live up to the perfection of his own creations; he finds that each of these delights he'd imagined is senseless, a waste of self and time, they turn to dross as soon as he possesses them, lose all value and charm and meaning — all except one: beauty and the real meaning of life, the roots of self, the kernel of existence, for these he will find nourishing and, in them, through art, he will glimpse a possibility of redemption

comme la promesse qu'il existait autre chose,
réalisable par l'art sans doute, que le néant
que j'avais trouvé dans tous les plaisirs et
dans l'amour même, et que si ma vie me semblait
si vaine, du moins n'avait-elle pas tout accompli.

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Combray has often been called an overture. The comparison is apt: just as an overture contains undeveloped and touches on them and leaves them in a tantalizing manner all the major themes of the work to come which will develop them at times beyond recognition and give them quite different meanings and orchestrations, so in Combray MP states his themes, introduces most of his major characters. He does this in such a way with such unapparent skill that it is amazing, on reflection, to realize that most of the matter of the book and most of the people we are to meet, have been introduced or touched on by the end of Combray, which is only about $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 200 \text{ (in l. de p.)} \\ 150 \text{ long.} \end{array} \right.$ And another similarity is that if someone asks you if you know a certain work and you say o yes you know the overture, then the same is true of $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} Swann \\ \text{Combray} \end{array} \right.$ by reading it you will be glimpsing Proust, catching a snatch of him (and not a very representative snatch at that).

this is true of Combray, not of Swann

Alors recherche du temps perdu

2.1

The book is vast and seemingly endless — notice I say the book, not books — MP considered it as a single novel and so should we, the division into various parts and volumes with separate titles being dictated by the exigencies of publishers' practice and the facts of book-size. ^{No doubt} One of the longest novels ever written, perhaps 1½ million words, but by no means outsize for its time. * There was a vogue in the first ¼ of the XXth century for vast panoramic works in many vols, romans fleuves as they were called. Of course, ^{in the preceding siglo} Balzac's Com Hum and Zola's Rougon-Macquart series had set a precedent, although they are in that they are collections of quite distinct novels different in that they do not deal with the same set of characters, and above all do not have the same central character. Nor, of course, do some of these more modern romans fleuves: Duhamel's

#8 perhaps brief if compared to some of the interminable epistolary novels of the XVIII^e.

Chronique des Pasquier, 10 vols, 1933-45, has as its narrator one of the Pasquier children Laurent, and deals with each of them in turn, but no central character. Jean-Christophe, Romain Rolland, 10 vols, 1906-12, does have a central character, the title one, and what's more he's an artist, we'll come back to that in a minute. Les hommes de bonne volonté, Jules Romains, 27 vols, 1932-47, no central figure, vast collection of temporary characters, vast fresco of XXth century. Les Thibault, 7 parts, Roger Martin du Gard, came out between 1922 and 1940, follows the story of a father and his two sons. These four the best known and it is no doubt from them that the XXIst century students of French will glean what knowledge they need to pass exams with of XXth century France and Europe. They all resemble MP's book in some thing or other, if only in length. Notice, from the dates, that only one of them precedes MP, and that is Jean-Christophe, which as I said traces the career of an artist, a musician and composer, very Beethovenish in certain aspects.

Jean-Christophe, once very pop, now not very highly regarded, is an example of not only the fashion of ^{the}roman-fleuve (also sometimes called roman-cycle), but also of another strange literary vogue that appeared like a rash over Europe ^{in different languages} in those same years, roughly the first $\frac{1}{4}$ of the XXth. I speak of the autobiographical ^{childhood} novel, the apprenticeship novel, what the Germans I believe call the Bildungsroman, the growth novel, the development novel. And here we come back to Proust's book. For this A la recherche

du temps perdu, like so many other novels from that period, and good ones, is the account of a writer's apprenticeship; it could bear as its subtitle either: An Examination of How I became a Writer; or the title that James Joyce chose for his Bildungsroman A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. As the recent book by Howard Moss says on its first page: "It is the story of how a little boy becomes a writer" (p. 2 The Magic Lantern of MP).

The Bildungsroman of the early XXth shows us usually a young man growing out ~~of~~ his environment, in the sense of growing out ~~of~~ clothes, out of his background, his family, the values of his upbringing, his religion perhaps, and having painfully formed through experience his own values, found himself and the truths by which he wants to live henceforth, usually in contradiction or defiance of family, religion and even country, steps out on the last page to become himself, an artist, a writer. ~~(Sons and Lovers)~~
 1903: Way of all flesh, Butler; 1903: Tonio Kröger, Mann; 1906-12, Jean-Christophe, Rolland; 1913, Sons and Lovers, Lawrence; 1915: Of Human Bondage, Maugham, yes even Maugham, surprisingly enough, and if you haven't read it that's your loss; 1916: Portrait of the Artist, Joyce; as late as 1927, Look Homeward Angel across the Atlantic, Wolfe, wordy old Wolfe. What a galaxy, even without MP; but we must add him too, because Swann came out in 1913 like Sons and Lovers, (like another book about childhood that must be mentioned though it's not by any means a Bildungsroman, a Portrait of the Artist: Le grand Meaulnes, Alain-Fournier.) Not all of

these books are autobiographical, ^{but} most are at least semi-autobiographical; not all are in fact stories of artists; but ~~all~~ ^{most} have in common that they tell the story of a youth reacting against his upbringing, usually to become a writer in exile from his background, and that they were all produced in the first 25 or so years of this century, a crop about the same time, deriving perhaps from a common ancestor, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, 1795-6, of Göthe, which may well look back in its turn to Rousseau and the Confessions. MP's book is the biggest, most ambitious, ~~least~~ ^{most} ~~difficult to~~ ^{difficult to} read ~~but~~ ^{but} most rewarding of them all. ~~For~~ Cyril Connolly, for whom you may have noticed I have a liking and respect, ~~MP's~~

~~book is~~ MP had this to say about MP:

one of the colophons of literature, one of those great writers who put full stop to a form of art, was MP. The form whose consummation he brought about was the autobiographical novel (...) and such autobiographical novels as appear now are not by great writers. They are the green shoots which continue to put forth from a tree that has been cut down..."

Enemies, Penguin 145

and the book is exhaustive in its scope, does take the form to its/ extreme
The child whom we read of in Combray we shall call Marcel, ^{man}
although Proust gives him no name in this part of the book — and
notice, ^{again} that when I talk of MP's book, I mean not Combray, a mere ^{Duc de la S}
splinter, but the entire work A la recherche — no name in ^{Swann} Combray,
then, and only named twice in the whole course of the book and
only when it was unavoidable, getting himself into irritating
situations in order to avoid naming him on several occasions.

(Another deliberate omission is his age; we are never told how

* despite the attempt by ^{in the previous generation} Heubert in Leben. Sent. to rubbish and demolish the genre

old he is, as a child or a man). We follow the life of this child from the magic land of his childhood ~~xxxxxxx~~ in Paris and at holidaytime in the quiet dusty village near Chartres in the unstated seventies and eighties of the XIXth; ~~xxxx~~ to the Champs-Élysées to play with GS and taste the tortures of lovefirst, seaside at Balbec, where he meets the first members of the Guermantes family, makes the acquaintance of an artist or two, breaks his heart on a girl Albertine; back to Paris where he rubs shoulders with ^{leading artists &} the highest society in France, wastes away his life on Albertine and turns a deaf ear to the small voice of his most secret self reminding him now and then that he has more important things to make of his life, where he discovers the world of homosex and watches it undermine the Faubourg, sees the First War come along to hasten the departure of the old order, and witnesses its final disintegration ~~xx~~ in the last vol when GS's daughter, through the marriage of her mother, is the heir to the Guermantes, and thus the magic circle of Marcel's childhood is broken as he realizes again the gap between his childhood imaginings and the reality he sees under his eyes - for had he not believed, all those years ago, that it was an absurdity to talk of going to Guermantes by Swann's way, and now here the heir to Swann and the heir to the Guermantes is the same girl, the child of the GS ~~with~~ whom he'd ~~played~~ glimpsed through the hedge on that walk with his father and grandfather.

At this point, Marcel is ageing, ailing, solitary, unattached, disenchanted about all the wonders he'd looked forward to so

greedily, so trustingly as a child, his life is empty and useless, unfulfilled, a mere decay and growing old and waiting for the pointless end. It is then ^{in that final volume} that he has his revelations of a truth and a book he'd been carrying inside him unawares, for as he sits in the library of the Guermantes, waiting for the music to finish and the doors to open for him to go in to yet another soirée or matinée or gathering quelconque of these empty, boorish, spiteful ^{itled} /idiots among whom he has spent his life, as he sits there he fingers a book from the shelf : François le champi by Georges Sand, which brings back to overwhelm him, ~~the~~ by the process which he calls mémoire involontaire, the whole forgotten fragrance and texture and meaning of the bedtime scene which begins the novel fourteen vols before, and it is from this experience and a couple more of the same sort that he draws the certainty that he has in him something of worth, something that time has not destroyed as it destroyed his illusions and his friendships and his love even ^(was family of all) his suffering, something indestructible then, something of value, of meaning, worth rescuing from the annihilation of time, some possibility of redeeming his own wasted life and of making some sense of it, of giving meaning to what had had no meaning. And so it is that we come back to the beginning of the book, his discovery by chance of the Sand being the spring from which the whole enormous work will flow. And there in that library at the end of his odyssey he takes the decision to write it all down, to set out to find the time he's

Proust

8.1.

If it can be said that Marcel makes important discoveries about himself & others on the 2 walks, then they are these:

1 that Swann is Swann, Guermantes Guermantes, & never the twain shall meet;

2 that a) (on Swann's way) he is tantalized & perplexed by beauty without knowing how to use it ('just, just etc') ~~never~~ or even realizing that it needs to be written about; & that b) (on G's way) he ^{in himself} discovers the appalling lack of ability to be a writer.

On a) he's found his subject without realizing it;

on b) he's realized he needs a subject & that his life constantly persuades him that he will never find one.

Indeed, this is one more mystification of the reader, one more surprise for Marcel & the reader: see p. 178 where he actually puts them side by side!!

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lost, or if you like to interpret the perdu of the title in another just as meaningful way, think of the expression: C'est du temps perdu. And so he comes to this decision to unravel the tangled skein of his ^{own} self, to go back to the beginning and reexplore his experience, give it sense by giving it shape and permanence and thus saving his own life from the empty dark of oblivion, realizing that for him this is the only book he could write, his own life, since this is his purpose, to foil time and the absurdity it makes of men, and since it is his own life he doesn't have to invent anything, he simply has to remember, to take the undeveloped film of memory and print what he finds on it

je m'apercevais que ce livre essentiel, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer, puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire. Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur

He thus discovers the key to an enigma that III, 890 he has perpetuated & entangled his reader in one vol after vol. for
 And this may be the moment also, while on the subject, of the writer's not inventing his novel but simply noting it at the dictation as it were of memory, to ^{in fact} ~~point out~~ two things 1: that the novel of Proust is semi-autobiographical, his own life is thinly disguised by the life of Marcel and shows through in all sorts of ways; nonetheless there is a great deal of invention in the book; whether it is a novel or an autobiography though is not important, the characters are so credible and recognizable as ourselves, their fate affects us as much as any character's *and the artistry of the book* in any book, the psychological finds that MP makes for us, are all

excellent ,regardless of the genre of the work. 2: the events that MP has incorporated in his narrative,whether invented or remembered,are not the important thing in this novel — a strange novel,you may say,in which the things that happen~~ed~~ and especially the~~x~~ things that happen to the hero have no importance. The point is that their only importance is in their inner effect on Marcel,that the real events of the story are not the things that people do to one another so much as what repercussion these things have on the mind of the narrator; the really exciting things do not happen between the characters,for a large part,but in the heart and mind^{of Marcel; the real meat} and matter of this book is not simply behaviour but a constant wonder at behaviour,analysis of feeling,dissection of tone of voice and gesture,an unremitting hunt for the real meaning behind the false appearances of life,people and experience. What I'm saying can be illustrated perhaps by La fugitive: very little action,Albertine leaves him,he is horribly upset by this although he was on the point of leaving her himself,he tries in various ways to give ~~himself~~ her the impression that he couldn't care less althoughhe feels like dying of it,and then gets a letter telling him she's been thrown from a horse and killed. These are the events,but the real story of La fugitive is not these,it is what happens inside the mind of Marcel; it takes him over 100 pages to describe the effect,the emotional effect ~~on~~ on himself of the death of the girl. The death of the girl is

merely the excuse the pretext the peg on which he hangs the real business of his writing: deciphering what he really felt about the death of Albertine. ^{Same could said about Amor did; create few reactions many;} And so with most of the events of the narrative, their importance is largely that of supports, of demonstrations of some point that MP wants to make about the way ^{Marcel's} ~~his own~~ mind works or how he or someone else reacted to certain situations, they are the examples that he uses to bring home the points he has to make, the slide as it were that in his scientific method he slips under his microscope to study for our benefit and instruction. (It has been said of MP, and rightly, that he sets down with ^{all} the precision and exactness of the man of science the ~~basic~~ staple material of all feeling and art.] ~~And this is Art~~

And this is one aspect, one of the most important, one feature that stamps his work unmistakably as from that generation which matured about 1900, which allies him obviously with V Woolf and J Joyce, and which makes of him, like them, ^{a descendant of Flaubert and a milestone in the history of the novel:} a forbear of the so-called nouveau roman: for his most passionate interest is no longer so much with psychological analysis of the traditional French moraliste sort, the Lafayette, Constant, Gide sort, of the sort which shows a) surface behaviour & b) the secret motives underlying it (though he does this too), but more with the simple act of perception, the minute mechanisms of the process of being aware, of feeling, of thinking. (Cf Ulysses, 24 hours in the - not so much life as the - head

of a man in 1906, an exhaustive catalogue of the contents of the mind of an average man; a minutely detailed map of the way a man thinks, daydreams, drowns, wonders, remembers, feels; an attempt to translate into print what consciousness is like.). Writers in that first $\frac{1}{4}$ of our century rediscovered, in all its pristine simplicity and difficulty, the real task of the artist, which had been neglected by all artists ever since the beginning of words: ^{not about the artist:} to focus, and to make US focus, on the basic facts of experience, of what it is like to be alive and to be aware of it — seen to be more important, more exciting, more inexhaustibly adventurous than the grand scenarios of Tolstoy or ^{the meticulous realism of} the XIXth century novel. And much more difficult to focus on, because so much more familiar — who of us would not find it easier to describe the Loch Ness monster/^{or the battle of Waterloo} than one of our own hands?

This ^{development} ~~movement~~ of sensibility may have been a reaction against ^{the} XIXth realism, ^{who were} ~~which was~~ ^{convinced of the empty, tasteless, pointlessness of the contingencies of life in reality. Proust reaffirms a} ^{lost of beauty, a loss of spiritual content in reality that realism had denied.}

CHARACTERIZATION

MP's way of presenting his characters. As AG says:

vous ne nous présentez vos personnages
qu'incidemment et par raccroc (by a fluke (lit.))

Incidences 47

And this is true, he does present them ^{by the way,} haphazardly as though he ^{in passing,} had just come across them by accident while following a fleeting memory, and to mention them ~~perhaps the first time~~ not for themselves and whatever interest they may present, but simply like stageprops or ^{because} a mention of ~~them~~ is essential to a proper understanding of the moral or psychological discourse of the sentence in which they appear. The reason behind his introduction of these characters is never obvious, indeed such is the rambling quality of the narrative, so abundant is the apparently redundant detail, so many the ^{apparent} digressions, that the reader, at first sight, is usually misled into thinking that there is no reason for bringing in a certain character at a certain point other than the gratuitous contingencies of the narrator's unsystematic, unchronological memories. This is just a deliberate red herring on the part of Proust. He knows where he's going, he lays traps for and surprises for the unwary reader, and every one of these characters is necessitated by the story he has to tell although they may not reappear ⁺ for another five hundred pages, each is brought in for good reason and is the forerunner of a world or a theme which will be magnified later in the book: Bloch: ^{So with} the Jewish ^{apparently introduced ambiguously, yet} communities and the Dreyfus Affair; Charlus: the world of homosex ^{pederasts}

make them lead → * 0.5. p 525 le monde poche: Nouv. de Voltaire, p. 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000

the decadence of the Faubourg and the uniting of Swann's way with the côté de Guermantes; Vinteuil: the world of art, the other artists Bergotte and Elstir who have their part to play in the development of the artist in Marcel; the Duchesse de G, glimpsed in the church only ^{in Combray}, Mme de Villeparisis mentioned only in passing, to be the people who usher Marcel into high society with which so much of the book is to deal; Mlle ^{and also de Guermantes is in Anjouville, but - mother was over the eyes - under another name! and I didn't tell!!} Vinteuil and the [expurgated] scène de sadisme at Montjouvain, to ^{Princes des Hummes p. 323 / 44 1321 Adèle} be the tiny spring setting off the action of two whole vols later on, and to determine the nature of the poison which will rot away Marcel's love ~~for~~ Albertine and bring him to the conclusion that love is ~~one of the~~ ^a worthless hobbies he has wasted his life on; Gilberte: his introduction to the world of love, to the longing to belong to the world of Swann; and as for Swann himself, MP points out near the end of the work the importance of this character:

Eh somme, si j'y réfléchissais, la matière de mon expérience, laquelle serait la matière de mon livre, me venait de Swann, non pas seulement par tout ce qui le concernait lui-même et Gilberte; mais c'était lui qui m'avait dès Combray donné le désir d'aller à Balbec, où sans cela mes parents n'eussent jamais eu l'idée de m'envoyer, et sans quoi je n'aurais pas connu Albertine, mais même les Guermantes, puisque ma grand'mère n'eût pas retrouvé Mme de Villeparisis, moi fait la connaissance de Saint-Loup et de M de Charlus, ce qui m'avait fait connaître la duchesse de Guermantes et par elle sa cousine, de sorte q ma présence même en ce moment chez le prince de Guermantes, où venait de me venir brusquement l'idée de mon oeuvre (ce qui faisait q je devais à Swann non seulement la matière

mais la décision), me venait aussi de Swann.

III, 915

And Swann is important in another way for the work of Marcel: for Swann is an ^{example to M, an} example to him of the person he too could become if he does not take heed of the hints he receives from his own creative urge; for Swann too had all his life felt intermittent urges to create something too, but had forever put it off until some more favourable occasion, and preferred to it the ^{written} pursuit of ^{the broader} Odette and the company of his ^{empty} highly placed friends of the faubourg.

So, the meaning and necessity of the themes and characters touched upon in this overture are not apparent and do not become so perhaps for hundreds of pages. Here ^{is explained} ~~by~~ the incomprehension with most readers greeted the work on first appearance, and also the accusations of shapelessness and incoherence.

2 Not only by accident, par raccroc as AG says, but also with consummate cunning and in misleading ways: in a bracket, an aside, a piece of village tittle-tattle that may or may not be true; as in life itself, MP does not warn the reader which of his people ~~is~~ going to be important, which minor; so that the reader lives out for himself the very experience of the narrator, more immediately than in conventional presentation of people, being as much in the dark about them as the narrator. ^{*} eg the first two or three times that ^aOdette Swann or ^bCharlus are

mentioned, the normal hasty reader, accustomed to looking for ^{good} ~~the~~ example is I, 104 (dep = 125) to mislead you (like Marcel) into believing his grandmother's story in believing that the Duchesse de G is related to Mme de Villeparisis - which she is! But you don't find out for a long time!

obvious clues, barely notices them, because they're being talked of by a village gossip who professes pity for Swann and scandal at O and C for carrying on together au su de tout Combray, ~~155~~,
 17 *l. de p.*
 I, 13: *ce mauvais mariage*, as though we'd heard of it before and could be expected to know of it already, ~~162~~, I, 20, *presque une cocotte*. Yet when we meet Odette for the first time ourselves she is la dame en rose, 119, I, 76, *92 = 94 Felix* and even then the narrator doesn't even tell us that this is the same person he'd mentioned all those pages before. Why? Because his purpose is to re-explore his own life, to recreate it as he had lived it, and so, since he was not to learn this about Odette until much later, to put two and two together for himself and reach, with shock, the conclusion that they were one and the same person, so he makes his reader go through the same process of long ignorance, sudden discovery, immediate, painful, radical change in outlook; instead of saying: "I went through a period of misconceptions about various people and eventually discovered my errors", he shows us, he communicates his errors to us so that we live out over a space of dozens or hundreds of pages his own ^{*extreme*} way of looking at the world. And so, with Odette, it is not until ~~the end~~
 II 267 *Alambredes jeunes filles en fleurs*
~~of Du côté de chez S~~ that we learn that she was the dame en rose; *not until end of Journa that we learn that Odette & Mme S are the same person, and this and again in an aside overheard by the youth as walks in the park — again we learn in an aside overheard by the youth as he walks in the park —* and here another terrible shock for the reader, because at the end of Amour de S, S had ended his affair with Odette his mistress, worn out his love for her and started life without her,

dismissed her as
 une femme qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était
 pas mon genre I, 382
 456

these being the last words of Amour and last we hear of Odette until, ⁵⁰40 pages later, in the aside overheard by the boy in the Bois, we learn that ^{despite his indifference to her,} she had gone on to become Mme Swann, ^{his wife,} b Charlus is a better example still. He too is mentioned once or twice in passing as ^(which in fact she never is - this is deliberate red herring) a lover of Odette. Marcel glimpses a man through the hedge and we assume it to be C, which it is (though MP doesn't say so), ¹⁷⁰ I, 141:

un monsieur habillé de coutil et q je ne
 connaissais pas, fixait sur moi des yeux qui lui
 sortaient de la tête

he seems a mere extra, someone put in simply to fill in the décor, yet he is to become one of the most outsize and important characters in the novel, and one of the most successful from the point of view of MP's method. 2nd appearance at I, 751, i.e. +600 pages, and even then only the queer enigmatic glances he casts at the boy strike the latter, making him think of C:

l'air d'un fou ou d'un espion

or even of un escroc d'hôtel 751-2; ^{here we discover he's a Guermantes} and only after another 800 pages will the reader learn, having believed C a fool and a playboy, perhaps also dangerously insane, discover that he is ^{all of which underestimates the reader's share with Marcel} neither a fool, a spy, a lover of Odette nor a criminal, but the most gigantic homosexual character in print. ^{about 14} Nearly ~~half~~ the ^{like de la} novel elapses before the narrator discovers that C is a Guermantes,

or Vertereil: Swann doesn't believe that the V who wrote the petite phrase would be
his V from Combray ~ got it is, of course! But must let us take Swann's 16

and half before he discovers he is queer!

3 No portrait usually; those which he gives are ^{point of view} rather sketches than portraits. This ^{the full-length portrait,} is the technique which was so dear to the hearts of the nineteenth ^{century} novelists, cf Balzac

or any trad novelist's technique, as soon as any new character appears the story waits while he is described in detail, ^{sometimes} even if he's only a walk-on. ^{MP not alone, in fact times, can gain Flaubert had demolished this convention.} (Cf AG's FM). The technique has been compared to the convention of the cinema, the close-up which picks out the hero or the villain from a crowd scene and tips off the audience that this is the person to watch, Guichard, 55.

Legrandin is described ⁸¹⁻⁸² in some detail, but the details of his dress and features are by no means many and most of them are mentioned not from any maniac compulsion such as Balzac's to mention everything, but simply because they give some insight into the character of the man and can in some way be taken as guides to his behaviour, ^{in general} and ⁸¹⁻⁸² once again MP is deliberately leading us astray ¹⁸ with regard to this Legrandin, 110, I, 67. As for Swann, he is sketched very effectively in the shadow, p56, I, 14, how apt how effective how brief these two lines of description, on distinguait mal son visage, and four pages later, this character, so pregnant with meaning, whose name is the title, all our eyes and all the eyes of the others characters are on him as he comes across the lawn under the twilit trees, he is mysterious to the boy, inscrutable to the boy's family and just as strange to us who have never met him before à l'obscur et incertain

personnage qui se détachait, suivi de ma grand'mère, sur un fond de ténèbres, et qu'on reconnaissait à la voix ²⁴ 60, 19.

Françoise and aunt Léonie and the grandmother: details scattered, sprinkled over several small scenes, so as not to hold up the flow of the narrative and so as the better to imitate what happens in life itself where none of us notices the encyclopaedic details about another's face that we find in Dickens or Balzac. Best example of MP's method in this respect is Bloch, and not only best example but most effective presentation, here is a character whose rôle at the moment is to give a series of sudden shocks to the narrator's comfy little world, and so it is apposite that he should burst in without warning ^{(109-113 ldes} ¹³⁴⁻⁷ ^{111-115 folios} in this outrageously comical scene, preceded only by his name and his rire bruyant comme une trompette the only things we know about him before he assaults us and the prejudices and tranquillity of the narrator's little life with his slang and iconoclasm his pose of aesthetic decadence and unworldliness. A most ^{effective} ^{masterfully done,} telling scene, he bounces in demolishes ^{Moriel's} idols, ^{his father's} good tempers and ^{his own's} reputation and bounces out again apparently unaware of the effect of his irruption, ^{and the} ^{lythtime} reader knows more important things about him than the colour of his eyes ~~and~~ the cut of his coat.

4 Not only no portrait of physical features, but also no tipping-off of reader about what to expect from the characters by way of behaviour. ^{'s characters are always unpredictable, even those who seem the most consistent.} Once again an example of the sort of thing I mean, again from Balzac, Cousine Bette, p39 of

^{when Cottard, the huffon of}
^{Amour de S. is to become one of the}
 most eminent & infallible men of his generation

livre de poche ed, ie about ^{the XX page} ~~page~~, ie about the first appearance of the title-character, we are told:

La jalousie formait la base de ce caractère
 plein d'excentricités (B's underlining)

and we know from then on that all that Bette will do is live up to this prescription, this recipe, this clue, this ready reckoner which the author has given us so that we will never be perplexed by her behaviour, a method of characterisation as gross and unsubtle as that of the Victorian melodrama where everyone knew what was what almost from the very names given to the characters, they imitate the image that the writer places in the mind beforehand, and sure enough this is what Bette does. Reminds one of what Cyril Connolly said of most English novelists: S-S-Smith s-s-story, see, here he comes now, what'd I tell you?

So, this is what Proust does not do; he tells us very little about the characters he presents; he shows them and, for the most part, leaves us to make up our minds about them, to get to know them as if they were real people, in the same way as his narrator got to know them in his life. MP gives us no rule no guide no handbook wherewith to translate the actions of his personnages, what motives we must ascribe their acts to. We usually see them in action, we react to them in our own way, uninfluenced (or rather, apparently uninfluenced) by what the writer wants ~~us~~ us to see, he doesn't prejudice us against ^{or for} them to begin with. This because MP was no doubt a better psychologist, a less convention-ridden artist, and when I say a better psychologist, I mean he was more lucid, and

saw human beings as much more complicated things than Balzac did, with much less black and white, their motives much more mixed and unexplainable than the XIXth ever suspected, more inconsistency in them, much more than meets the eye, except perhaps by Stendhal and Constant, ^{to Flaubert} not black and white like Balzac and Zola. *Also because he was writing after Flaubert*

And even Legrandin bears this out 110-1, I, 67, MP seems to be telling us about him at first when he describes him, and explains his flowery speech with its literary flavour and presents him, recommending him to us as hautain, méprisant, amer, consciencieux, disabused, unstarry-eyed about other people and society at large, an homme d'élite above it all, all artificiality who holds forth against l'aristocratie, la vie mondaine, le snobisme ⁸² 111, I, 68. But of course ^{as I said} MP is leading us astray, not really telling us about the man, because when we meet him again he turns out to be the greatest bootlicker hypocrite ^{144, 149-159} arriviste, social-climber you could imagine 163-4, 169 (I, 125-132). So even he is not true to type, not in character — abominable expressions! that a good reading of such as MP should lead anyone to see the meaninglessness of, or at least the misleadingness of.

(All this is untrue ^{however,} of the grand'mère, ¹⁵ p53 (I, 12), he gives us his formula and never deviates from it:

elle était si humble de coeur et si douce
que sa tendresse pour les autres et le peu

de cas qu'elle faisait de sa propre personne
et de ses souffrances..etc...

she is now as she will ever become throughout the work, the
most humanly warm and likeable of all MP's characters.]

5 Showing Swann and Françoise at different times
of their lives, Odette too, in an unchronological way, unsequential
way an unnarrative way so to speak; sketches of the various
different Swanns which existed at various times of his life,
bring out the simplicity of the child's worldview, his naïve
surprise at how different the same people can become; and also
gives us glimpses of depths and strangeness to be found in
everyday people. * The difference between this technique, which
is constant throughout the other vols, and the usual sequential
as it were numerical sort of narrative, the one in normal time
sequence where action b follows action a, where stage 2 of any
character necessarily precedes stage 3 which will develop
naturally into stage 4, the difference between these two
methods is comparable to that between a) a documentary film on
the one hand ie narrative; and b) on the other ~~an old eccentric
showing you~~ a collection of family snaps that are out of order.
In both cases you have a series of pictures telling you a
story and giving you certain information; in a) the film is
coherent, consecutive, tells a tale, shows a face, fixes it and
proceeds to the next piece of time or event in chronological

* technique comparable to that of contemp. of M.P. - Cubism in painting: a portrait showing 3-4 different views of same face simultaneously -
exactly what M.P. does with the village church: describes it from every possible angle (H 71-81 & de P.)

order, that is necessary for the story, the history to be followed; b) is not straightforward, his snaps are jumbled, some are missing, some overexposed or smudged ~~and he wants to show you the ones that interest him not to tell a story, and he passes them over to you~~ in great numbers without apparent rhyme or reason. Why is this difference? Again, I feel, the answer must be, not in any incompetence or gratuitous perversity of the nature of MP, but in his purpose, what he's trying to do — to to recreate his own experience, as it happened to him and not as his intelligence ^{*} later came to tell him it must have happened or should have happened, that life and perception are chaotic things which do not present themselves in logical order; and because he was more interested in states of mind & impressions than in narrations.

** cf. what he says of the charm of Elster's paintings: they caught the first impression of things. Before the intelligence has had time to order them.*

6 Sans dire, that good or bad people are not in the world of MP, he is too clear-sighted for that, too honest in his pessimism. These characters are among the realest that one can find in books, full of contradictory impulses: even Léonie, so whimsical, so childlike, so apparently tongue-in-cheek on the part of MP, so Walt Disneyish and quaint and lovable, she can be vicious and spiteful, suspicious of Françoise, vindictive 161. Françoise too is shown honestly: fidelity, generosity, cunning, tolerance, meanness, sympathy, narrow-mindedness, cruelty in her treatment of the fille de cuisine, moved by the description to tears of her ailment but ruthlessly unaffected

by the reality.

Even the beloved grand'mère who is presented as so angelic and dear to the narrator, the love he has for her does not blind him to her appearance, there's a sketch of her on p 54⁹ which mingles pitiless lucidity and tenderness; the description of her death too later in the book is a ~~block~~ shocking page or two in which the dear granny crawls about on her bed, unrecognizable, compared (to an animal, disgustingly).

In this respect, the presentation of believable people without sentimentality, a reading of MP can be a salutary experience, especially for those of us who are still hampered, like the Antient Mariner by his albatross, by the traditional Sunday-school psychology of angels or devils.

of thinking < metaphysics of psychology: Freud's personality = static, spiritual, static, monolithic > same set of unchanging character 'states'; for MP's presentation, reacting against determinism (of Freud) personality much more fluid, changeable, unidentifiable, contradictory & unpredictable. Method of characterization: existentialist psychology

Yet, for all this honesty, there is dishonesty, *personally = acts*

or at least distortion in the way that MP looks at people. *via Proust*
 There could be a lot to say on the way MP tries to bias us, by dint of presenting character after nasty character in all their pettiness and silliness and spite, that everybody in the world is like this, because it must be pointed out that these are the conclusions on human behaviour that one is forced to after a reading of Proust: that all humans are empty idiots, *worth nothing,* nasty, ~~perverted~~, unhappy monsters of selfishness *pervertion* and deceit. MP is very persuasive on this, he writes so convincingly, shows his people in such a believable way that for the duration of the

patter, sprinkled incongruously with slang, giving an impression of airy familiarity ^{with} and contempt for letters, ancient and modern. The whole speech 134 is of course far too long, too perfect, too contrived to be real or for MP to have meant us to take it for real. In this very funny couple of pages MP ridicules Bloch's pose, his anti-bourgeois attitude, his fin de siècle other-worldly decadence and aestheticism. *his sort of caricature by verbal style & P's postiche*

Same with Legrandin, ~~a~~ his manner of speaking, his whole style is overdone grossly, ~~the~~ fine attitudes he strikes, his flowery tirades, sprinkled with literary allusions and pervaded with literary emotions of melancholy and resigned unworldliness, these speeches are also far too long, we gasp for breath for him then hurry along the line to catch him up again. MP here pushes to the extreme of absurdity the pose of Legrandin, building up an incredible façade which he will later take pleasure in destroying for us and exposing Legrandin for what he is, a pitiful poseur who tries to disguise from everyone and even from himself that he is not what he professes in such elegant terms to be. (170; 174-5; 176-7).

Cottard: his faux-pos, nose of humor, always putting his great foot in it; Brichot's affectation of belittling his condition, his nonchalant erudition in swarms of speech - reminiscent of Babas's Cole. try. but more forgivable in MP, since he doesn't repeat these people for sept, but as caricatures & differentially speech.

As well as MP as a caricaturist, of which there are few examples in Combray, this fragment of the novel offers evidence of another sort of humour in Proust.

The couple of Léonie and Françoise are a sort of double act, like Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello, a pair of stooges going calmly through an unconsciously-hilarious and well-
to the V - one trait magnified to ludicrous proportions - her fear of losing father to other women, her caricature of mother, etc.

rehearsed routine. In their conversations — or rather their conversation, because Combray's backbone as it were is a Sunday morning chat between these two, as though MP had begun writing only ^{this one} ^{as a short story} scene, which had grown in his usual manner through digression and interpolation into the section known to us as Combray, a chat which is interrupted here and there as he fits in a long section on the church, or deserts Combray for a dozen pages and resets the scene in Paris to give us the episode of the dame en rose ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~, and then comes back ^{again} to Françoise and Léonie where he'd left them without explanation, giving incidentally a strong impression in this way of the changelessness the eternalness of the life of the village and its people — in this conversation, Proust reduces to the absurd the life of boredom and gossip of the village people, the great events of the day being un homme q grand-père ne connaissait point, le petit de chez Galopin qui passait avec une tarte, and Mme Goupil late for mass so that Léonie is worried to death whether she got there in time for the elevation. This reduction ad absurdum most apparent in that scene where they discuss the possible identity of a dog qu'elle ne connaissait point ¹⁰¹ ~~100~~, and they give as much time and interest and preoccupation to the elucidation of this enigma as they would if it were a person une de ces apparitions stupéfiantes 100, and they even talk of it as though it were a person, une bête bien affable says F spirituelle comme une personne, tjrs de bonne humeur, tjrs aimable

toujours quelque chose de gracieux.
 C'est rare qu'une bête qui n'a que
 cet âge-là soit déjà si galante (sociable)
 101-2

This humour that MP draws from the dusty monotony of Léonie's little routine, from her jigsaws and her Ali Baba plates, her pretence of never sleeping, her indignation on the one hand at being thought too ill and her pique on the other at being not sympathized enough with, her rambling double-talk with Françoise, all this is very subtly and delicately done. There is affectionate irony in it and the fun that MP pokes at the calm boredom, ~~and~~ the unselfconscious foibles and harmless pettiness of this life of his own childhood, this fun is without malice, however acrimonious and corrosive his satire was to become in the later vols. The presentation of this world is sympathetic, no doubt to arouse the sympathy of the reader, and surely it is successfully done? It raises a smile, no belly-laughs, no guffaws, but a mild, grateful amusement.

The harmless freakishness of the other members of this isolated ingrowing family is presented with the same gentle irony, this cast of extras who appear here at the beginning of Marcel's long journey in search of time and himself, and who for the most part ^(Save grandmother) never reappear in the novel except for a brief reminiscence now and then.

The grandmother, her mania for ^{improving pastimes (readings, kindly exercise; reproductions of works of art;} walking in the rain); the grandfather, his habit of always telling the same story about le père Swann, even his thoughtless unspiteful antisemitism,

27.1.



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Cure 147: somewhat naïve philistine

put out that his porch (medieval) is "sale et antique",
that his old church is "la seule de tout le diocèse qu'on
n'ait pas restaurée" (!) and that some painters
should set up his easel inside to copy a vitrail —
ridiculous old things, quite useless — replace them by
Entrée de Louis, Philippe à Combray a XIX^e s.

on p56 and 135; even his mother's gasp of admiration at his father's ability to lead them back to the garden's back gate in the moonlight after a walk 159; the other double-act of his grandmother's sisters Céline and Flora, the ~~the~~ ludicrous grotesquerie of the two old maids, their efforts, so disconcerting to Swann, to make their gratitude to him plain without being so crude and unladylike as to draw attention to the fact that he has made them a gift and to say thank you for it, to make it plain that they know he's been mentioned in Le Figaro without being so indelicate as to say that they'd actually read it; their attempts to steer the conversation towards their favourite topics ^{of} education, art, virtuous works. → 27.1.1 Curt

~~When~~ The narrator himself raises a smile ^{at his own expense} with his description of his falling in love with Gilberte Swann: he falls in love with her eyes of blue only to find out later that they are not blue but black; ^{*} feels ^{love and a denial} ~~he wants~~ to shriek at her 187 *comme je vous trouve laide, grotesque, comme vous me répugnez!* This reaction strikes one as being funny, laughable, but it is perfectly good psychology and a hint of the knowledge of human behaviour one can find evidence of in A la recherche du temps perdu, as well as a good example of MP's way of dealing with the very ordinary events of life, showing their drama and importance, anyone else would have shown us him falling in first love in a line or two, but this trite subject is not treated in a trite manner but in the Proustian manner which

is to extract

* he smiles gratefully and sadly to himself (Nandi page) ^{the attention} of his beloved, the gangleader Gilberte, ^{she} says to him: she stuffs snowballs down his neck!

is to extract from the trite the remarkable, or rather to show that what we took as trite is really interesting and full of much more complexity and strangeness than we are accustomed to believing about it.

MP took Kambert at his word: "Pour qu'une chose soit intéressante, il suffit de la regarder longuement" (Com. I, 192)

All the family background and village life, then, is done in humorous vein, but without unkindness. And this is worth remarking upon, since MP is often deplored for his one-eyed pessimistic bias, for drawing attention to the nastiness of people, their wilful stupidity and viciousness. For all his characters, except the grandmother and mother, ~~as~~ the book develops all the other characters turn out to be snobs and weaklings, liars, bores, cheats, poseurs, insensitive boot-lickers and backstabbers: ^{the 'lecturing', Forester's, etc., and the 'spen-sante's' crowd (St. Eustache), Odette, Lucile, etc.} Whether the gentleness of these opening scenes is a result of a) the fact that they were written earlier, much earlier than ~~the~~ later parts of the book, and the later inveterate pessimism of Proust an effect of age and illness and loneliness and disillusion; or b) simply another effect of his soft spot, his nostalgia for the cosy cottonwool world of his childhood, of being tucked up at night and kissed goodnight and drowsing over a book in the sun after a copious lunch and the bright ~~fire~~ hearth after dinner on a winter's day.

on other point of time of writing: Combray & its relation (to the other parts) into MP's own; Combray & Remembrance; says, see piece (with 'Remembrance' beginning).

Waste: (That very nostalgic is characteristic of course - the novel is (cf. Remembrance) a search for a lost paradise, and this Combray is part of that paradise)

Later in the book, too, the Baron de Charlus develops, on a vast scale, as a wonderfully, bitterly comic character, le don Quichotte de l'homosexualité as (is it?) Guichard calls him, not rumbustious or bawdy or Tom Jonesy or Rabelaisian

social satire as ^{another} source of humour (Anou de S.)

1) Odette's misconceptions about society, her lack of experience ~~about~~ in high society, her poor taste in furnishing, decor, language, judgment of people

2) Odette's ^{rehearsed} ~~trite~~ ^{coquettishness} & Swann's ^{spontaneous} ~~imitation~~ of it as glamour ;
black comedy

3) ^{very} stupidity & boorishness of all the fiduciers at the 'charity' Le Devin's, the malicious vs themselves; black humour almost.

4) Mme V's ignorance of real upper crust. = se, she calls them. (similar to gond-tante in Combray's early pp., her brash ignorance of Swann's true exalted soc. status)

5) ¹⁾ description of servants (as factotums) at beginning of Seigneur des Merveilles, Erneste { linguistic fun: punning, preciosity, & mock heroic incongruity of imagery

²⁾ mockery section
c) pettiness & silliness of aristocratic guests, Mme de Cambremer, e.g. Madame des Lauriers (young Duchesse de G) - laughable yet poignant; one laughs yet is saddened by such energy spent on being bitchy, yet it is accurate self-esteem

d) social satire in rivalry bet. ancienne noblesse & noblesse de l'Empire the spibles of snobishness, pettiness & hypocrisy - a rich source of humour in MP.

~~no slaps on the belly with a wet fish, but a corrosive irony, a piercing ruthless psychology in the way MP's humour lays the man bare for us, shows his secret springs, his public masks and his private blindness to himself and the real effect he makes on people. One of the most memorable and at times funniest characters in fiction.~~

MP is ^{Sometimes} often accused of solemnity, of having had no sense of humour. This is surely a travesty of the truth, witness Swain Combray; and if you did not laugh once at this book may I suggest that you have missed something and that you might laugh at it the second time through.

*In gen., MP's caricatures, his char-
acters by style of speech; Fraunce's voice & style totally different from Black, who is different from Cottard, who
from Elstir, who from Septimus, who from Odette. This admission in Swain, to be constant passion
Rebucke.
→ here 29.1.*

The writing:

I use this word on purpose — style is a word fraught with misconception, a loaded word, a word which frightens most of us, which most misunderstand, reading much more into it than is there. All it means is surely ~~the~~ the way a man writes about ~~the~~ what he has to write about; and no appreciation of the way a man writes can be effective if it leaves out of account one of those two things. Just another way, a simpler way of saying ~~that~~ what all handbooks of lit appreciation say: content determines style, and the one is meaningless without the other.

One must always remember ^{also} ~~also~~ that the way a man writes is conditioned, it's obvious, by three ~~other~~ things:

a the sort of person he is: colour-blind, sanguine, well-off, asthmatic, Jewish, angry, homosexual, etc

b what he writes about, his subject: the words of Charlotte Brontë in describing Jane Eyre's genteel emotions when she rediscovers her blinded protector Rochester, will necessarily differ from those of, say, Hemingway describing Harry Morgan sitting bitter in a bar in Havana;

c the effect he's trying to work on the reader.

a the sort of person he was: one of the most complete writers, the best endowed writers of all time: extraordinary power of response, sensitivity is the word I want, (cf his reactions to flowers or smells); a gift for minute observation of things and people; a lucid eye for seeing through ^{the} surface behaviour to the secret springs of action; an immense power of concentration; vast erudition ^{wide reading & culture} (cf his images drawn from all sorts of fields, illness, ^{architecture} medicine, art, classical lit, natural sciences etc) and of necessity a vast vocabulary since he was so widely read; part of his apprenticeship had been spent as a parodist, remember, Pastiches et mélanges, Saint-Simon, ^{Balzac} Chateaubriand, Flaubert, Renan, most adept and clever ^{& funny} and convincing parodies of other ~~men's~~ men's styles; he had also dabbled in symbolist streams, and no doubt had picked up much from these early exercises. As a person, he was, as we've already said: part-Jewish, of the idle rich, asthmatic and

nervous and introverted, these three things making the fatal psychomatic tangle of the adolescent MP out of which the adult homosexual was to grow. And so, not surprising that he should write about himself especially, about the idle rich, ^{homosexuals,} some Jews and especially the effect on them of the Dreyfus Affair in which he was involved in a small way as a young man, about the things he had known and loved: art, flowers, the house and horizons of his lost childhood, and also about his long-beguiled desire to become a writer.

(He was also, it may be worth noting in passing, a great and committed atheist, of which the most noticeable sign in his work is not any antireligious feeling, but simply, à la longue, the cumulative effect of so many words, so many characters, and not one thought of religion. As Mauriac says: "Dieu est terriblement absent de l'oeuvre de MP". This does not show in the overture, ~~voire~~ there is even an affection for the homeliness of the church, the building that is, its tombs and bell-tower, the sound of its bell, the stained glass. No mention of enjoyment of what goes on inside the church, ~~of~~ and the 'most of Combray takes place on Sundays, no religious atmosphere about this part of the book).

b what he writes about: themes, materials, subject. Well, as we know, he writes about his own experiences as a child, and in particular about certain fancies and longings about

places and people, certain desires about love and the real meaning of things; about certain discoveries about these people and places. Also his impressions of people, the memory of loved things, smells etc, trying to set down difficult, fleeting impressions which do not lend themselves to words, to see deeply and with clarity into experiences which we are accustomed to take for granted and never to examine because they are so frequent and well-known to us ^{as} to have lost all meaning. And this, for Proust, was the real function of the artist, to make people see meaning and freshness in things which, because common, are insignificant:

Ce travail de l'artiste, de chercher à apercevoir sous de la matière, sous de l'expérience, sous des mots quelque chose de différent, c'est exactement le travail inverse de celui que, à chaque minute, quand nous vivons détourné de nous-même, l'amour-propre, la passion, l'intelligence et l'habitude aussi accomplissent en nous, quand elles amassent au-dessus de nos impressions vraies, pour nous les cacher entièrement, les nomenclatures, les buts pratiques que nous appelons faussement la vie. En somme, cet art si compliqué est justement le seul art vivant. Seul il exprime pour les autres et nous fait voir à nous-même notre propre vie, cette vie qui ne peut pas s'"observer", dont les apparences qu'on observe ont besoin d'être traduites et souvent lues à rebours et péniblement déchiffrées

III, 896

And one can see here ^{an} ~~the~~ affiliation between Proust and his time, especially between him and his symbolist apprenticeship, for herein is a fair statement of one of their main artistic tenets which one finds in their predecessors

Schopenhauer and Baudelaire. Two things here a) the hidden innerness of true reality, the kernel of truth being disguised from us by ^{misleading} ~~an~~/exterior; and b) that the artist is the one, and this is his real job, to penetrate that mask on reality and translate it as it were for others.

cf Schopenhauer: "we can never get at the inner nature of things from without. However much we may investigate, we obtain nothing but images and names. We are like a man who goes round a castle, looking in vain for an entrance, and sometimes sketching the façades"

Will, trans. Payne, 1958, p99

Mammon & Phenomenon : one of perennial problems of philosophy, modelled by Proust to find the poetic novel.
ie the kernel of truth; as for the artist, or as Schopenhauer calls him the Genius, he it is as Proust also says ^{wh} has the ability and the function to find this truth and reveal it:

the true Genius (...) by recognizing in the individual thing its IDEA, (...) UNDERSTANDS NATURE'S HALF-SPOKEN WORDS. He expresses clearly what she merely stammers.

p222

This image of stammering almost exactly echoed by Baudelaire in his sonnet Correspondances, when he says that nature is a temple out of which come now and again de confuses paroles. And the common ^{new Platonic} idea of the artist as an interpreter of the ideal essences hidden by misleading forms one can find

in many poets and writers of the symbolist period, eg in the theory of Rimbaud about the poet as voyant, a seer, a (PTO) young Gide: les imaginations des poètes font mieux saillir les vérités idéales

AW 35

Or again in Gide's Narcisse, p9: Le Poète, lui, qui sait qu'il crée, devine à travers chaque chose — et une seule lui suffit, symbole, pour révéler son

archétype; il sait que l'apparence n'en est que le prétexte, un vêtement qui la dérobe et où s'arrête l'oeil profane, mais qui nous montre qu'Elle est là

Romans, 9

but also talks of his (same page) "vision" does he not, his ability to see through reality.

So this to show how Proust retained from his symbolist days of the 90s their idealist aesthetic as well as their pessimism-via-Schopenhauer. ^{The phrase MP uses is not self, negant, but explorateur de l'impossible 418-419, about Vermeer who, as artist, reveals truth & beauty, reveals a small part of the futility of existence} ~~deep~~ = 414 Folio 35 / Bleade

So ^{one of} the real subjects of MP's book is to find the real texture of life hidden by the business of every day, the real meaning in things and experience and relations between people, and at the end of his long quest the only salvageable sense he can find in the life he has lived and almost lost ~~is~~ is his desire to perpetuate it in a work of art. Comparable in this respect to a ^{another} ~~very~~ ^{you'll} book you've read this year, very different in appearance and apparent intent: La nausée. For Roquentin makes much the same discovery as Marcel, expressed in very different language, and comes to much the same conclusion about writing it down. ^{Sentences result} A sort of latter-day Proust, a middle-class, post-1914 Proust. ^{also a modification}

MP's book is a novel, being superiorly, to the greatest masterpiece to have employed symbols, techniques & tactics, which are at head of postmodern & multi-media total conclusions of the book, ~~summary~~

Marcel

c the effect he's trying to work on the reader: to transmit to the imagination of the reader as intact as possible, as immediate as possible as alive as possible, the experience he has had, to make the reader feel for himself what Marcel felt, trying to plug the reader in as it were to the powerpoint of his own emotion or memory, so that what we experience is not

a mere pale reflection of what he once felt but an undiluted feeling-transfusion, ^{as it were} Also, as I've said, he wanted to make people to see clearly and profoundly into themselves and find there what habit has blinded them to. He wanted to deprive us of what he himself called the anaesthetic of habit.

Because of who he was; the nature of his matter; the effect he was seeking to work, the book is one of the most difficult to read. It is composed of dense poetic prose, interminables sentences, laden with esoteric words, ^{information} information and ^{musings} musings, with daring, mind-teasing similes culled from a vast range of topics, with complicated construction and clause upon tortuous subordinate clause, ^{here & there} a jungle of syntax ^{messy, primary} and conceit; to the unaccustomed reader it is an apparently aimless wordy ramble, an endless night of obscurity suddenly shot through, ^{and} lit up, now ~~and~~ and then by the brilliant shaft of a striking image, a sparkling metaphor, an acute perception of human motive, an evocative line or two.

There are many great passages where the complexity is worthy of the emotion expended on it, where very subtle and difficult truths are presented in language that could only express them if difficult and subtle

Connolly, 62

What are the most noticeable features of this prose? And here I am not trying to cover all its aspects, see Mouton, but simply to draw attention to certain things, make you aware of

certain things which you might miss, **help** you to understand and enjoy him more.

1 Prolonged investigations into the aforementioned fleeting impressions which habit makes us take for insignificant, eg the madeleine scene ⁵³⁻⁵⁸ } 86-90, 1) a common enough experience, we've all known it, trying to remember something that's on the tip of the tongue yet won't let itself be remembered; 2) an experience common enough in another way, the way it resurrects a part of life which had been below the threshold of conscious memory, to all intents and purposes forgotten and which by the accident of smell or taste is suddenly brought back to immediacy as though it had happened yesterday. This he calls, (though not in Combray) Mémoire involontaire, and in Le temps retrouvé, III, 919-920, he even gives a catalogue of other writers who, before him, had described the same phenomenon of smell or taste > memory: Chateaubriand, Nerval, Baudelaire. He even quotes Chateaubriand, 8 lines, say 100 words — it takes MP himself 10 or 12 times as long to analyse his experience of it in the madeleine scene, 10 or 12 times as many words. Does this mean his is diffuse and prolix, wasteful of words, full of redundancy? I think not. Full of imagery, yes, some of it beautiful and ^{moving} ~~breath-taking~~, but especially noticeable is a sort of scientific exactitude, as though he had ~~xx~~ that moment on a slide under his microscope and were watching its behaviour for minutes on end and jotting down its slightest feature; certainly,

the details he brings to our attention are minute but as soon as we see them we realize that they are not thereby unimportant simply because tiny. So there is a doggedness and precision in his dissection and analysis of momentary experiences that lay bare the slightest springs and fibres of objects and mental and emotional events, which magnifies the world for us, letting us see it for a moment through the magic of his lens.

I've mentioned the madeleine. See also the start of a shower of rain 146; anyone else would say "It began to rain", not so MP

again, because he's giving the 1st impression before with you tells him to rain, who needs 6 lines

Or reading/bed, waking and dozing fitfully, opening pages ~~46-50~~, the same things are evident: choice of an insignificant event, transmutes it into something meaningful and ^{dense} beautiful by his microscopic attention. Or meeting a person we know p61, analyses this moment to reduce it to what it's really made of, ~~the meaning~~

the psychological meaning of it that we overlook normally. This magnifying, this cutting in four of what we and other writers are used to glance over cf Gide's little article in Incidences where he tells the story of Mme B who got to teenage without her bad eyesight being discovered, her amazement when, on first putting on glasses, she saw the pebbles on the path that she'd never seen before though she'd walked over them every day of her life.

MP's style is a magnifying-glass through which we see the minutiae of our own experience, our own lives more clearly
Analysis of smell, sound, taste etc sensory awareness: new to analytical novel, perception not psychology (not just like any layer) > perception in mod. novel, < Flaubert

2 long explanations of small features of people's behaviour. See especially Legrandin's admission that he doesn't

as I said in a footnote
Flaubert: "Pour qu'une chose soit intéressante, il suffit de la regarder longuement"
(Cort, I, 192)