

Marcel Proust

Swann's Way

Translated with an Introduction
and Notes by Lydia Davis

GENERAL EDITOR:
CHRISTOPHER PRENDERGAST



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SWANN'S WAY

MARCEL PROUST was born in Auteuil in 1871. In his twenties, following a year in the army, he became a conspicuous society figure, frequenting the most fashionable Paris salons of the day. After 1899, however, his chronic asthma, the death of his parents, and his growing disillusionment with humanity caused him to lead an increasingly retired life. From 1907 on, he rarely emerged from his cork-lined room in his apartment on boulevard Haussmann. There he insulated himself against the distractions of city life and the effects of trees and flowers—though he loved them, they brought on his attacks of asthma. He slept by day and worked by night, writing letters and devoting himself to the completion of *In Search of Lost Time*. He died in 1922.

LYDIA DAVIS, a 2003 MacArthur Fellow, is the author of a novel, *The End of the Story*, and three volumes of short fiction, the latest of which is *Samuel Johnson Is Indignant*. She is also the translator of numerous works by Maurice Blanchot, Michel Leiris, Pierre Jean Jouve, and many others and was recently named a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government. Her essay on a close translation of Proust appeared in the April 2004 issue of the *Yale Review*.

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Introduction

Many passages from Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* are by now so well known that they have turned into clichés and reference points and occupy a permanent place in contemporary Western culture. Scenes and episodes are familiar even to many who have not actually read the book: say "Proust" and they will immediately think "madeleine" and "tea," if not "cork-lined room." Yet confronting the book itself is an entirely different, and individual, experience. One will have one's own way of visualizing the narrator's childhood bedtime scene with his mother, his visits to his hypochondriac aunt, his teasing of the servant Françoise, his embrace of the prickly hawthorns, his vision of the three steeples, and his first piece of serious writing. Swann's agonizing love affair with Odette and the narrator's youthful infatuation with Swann's daughter Gilberte will be colored by the personal associations of each reader, who will likewise have unexpected memories, recalled by unexpected stimuli, that will enable him or her to identify with the narrator in the most famous scene of all, which the taste of a tea-soaked madeleine suddenly incites his full recollection of his childhood in the village of Combray and, from this, leads to the unfolding of all the subsequent action in the three thousand-page novel.

One will find, too, that the better acquainted one becomes with this book, the more it yields. Given its richness and resilience, Proust's work may be, and has been, enjoyed on every level and in every form—as quotation, as excerpt, as compendium, even as movie and comic book—but in the end it is best experienced, for most, in the way it was meant to be, in the full, slow reading and rereading of every word, in complete submission to Proust's subtle psychological analyses, his precise portraits, his compassionate humor, his richly colored and lyrical landscapes, his extended digressions, his architectonic sentences, his symphonic structures, his perfect formal designs.

Swann's Way is divided into three parts: "Combray," "Swann in Love," and "Place-Names: The Name." "Combray," itself divided into two parts, opens with the bedtime of the narrator as a grown man: he describes how he used to spend the sleepless portions of his nights remembering events from earlier in his life and finally describes the episode of the madeleine. A second and much longer section of "Combray" follows, containing the memories of his childhood at Combray that were summoned by the taste of the "petite madeleine" and that came flooding back to him with unprecedentedly minute and sensuous detail. This first part of the book, having opened at bedtime, closes—itsself like a long sleepless night—at dawn.

"Swann in Love," which jumps back in time to a period before the narrator was born, consists of the self-contained story of Swann's miserable, jealousy-racked love for the shallow and fickle Odette, who will one day be his wife; the narrator with whom we began the book scarcely appears at all.

The third and last part, "Place-Names: The Name," much shorter than the rest of the volume, includes the story of the narrator's infatuation, as a boy, with Swann's daughter Gilberte during the weeks they play together on the chilly lawns of the Champs-Élysées and ends with a sort of coda, which jumps forward in time: on a late November day, at the time of the writing, the narrator, walking through the Bois de Boulogne, muses on the contrast between the beauties of the days of his childhood and the banality of the present, and on the nature of time.

The story is told in the first person. Proust scholars have identified a handful of slightly different *I*'s in the novel as a whole, but the two main *I*'s are those of the rather weary, middle-aged narrator as he tells the story and the narrator as a child and young man. The first person, however, is abandoned for

shorter or longer intervals in favor of what is in effect an omniscient narrator, as when, in “Combray” we witness conversations between his aunt Léonie and the servant Françoise which the boy could not have heard; and most remarkably during nearly the whole of “Swann in Love.”

The story is told in the first person, the protagonist is referred to several times in the course of *In Search of Lost Time*, though not in *Swann’s Way*, as “Marcel,” and the book is filled with events and characters closely resembling those of Proust’s own life, yet this novel is not autobiography wearing a thin disguise of fiction but, rather, something more complex—fiction created out of real life, based on the experiences and beliefs of its author, and presented in the guise of autobiography. For although Proust’s own life experience is the material from which he forms his novel, this material has been altered, recombined, shaped to create a coherent and meaningful fictional artifact, a crucial alchemy—art’s transformation of life—which is itself one of Proust’s preoccupations and a principal subject and theme of the book.

The episode of the madeleine, for instance, was based on an experience of Proust’s own, but what Proust apparently dipped in his tea was a rusk of dry toast, and the memory that then returned to him was his morning visits to his grandfather. The scene of the goodnight kiss was set, not in a single actual home of Proust’s childhood, but in a melding of two—one in Auteuil, the suburb of Paris where he was born, and the other in Illiers, a town outside Paris where he spent many summers. Similarly, the characters in the novel are composites, often more perfectly realized ideals or extremes, than characters in his own life: the annoying Mme. Verdurin is based closely on a certain Mme. X of Proust’s acquaintance, but to avoid offending her by too blatantly describing her, Proust attributed her habit of incessantly painting pictures of roses to another character, Mme. de Villeparisis.

What is introduced in this inaugural volume of *In Search of Lost Time*? As Samuel Beckett remarks in his slim study *Proust*, “The whole of Proust’s world comes out of a teacup, and not merely Combray and his childhood. For Combray brings us to the two ‘ways’ and to Swann, and to Swann may be related every element of the Proustian experience and consequently its climax in revelation. . . Swann is the cornerstone of the entire structure, and the central figure of the narrator’s childhood, childhood that involuntary memory, stimulated or charmed by the long-forgotten taste of a madeleine steeped in an infusion of tea, conjures in all the relief and colour of its essential significance from the shallow well of a cup’s inscrutable banality.”

Through Charles Swann, the faithful friend and constant dinner guest of the narrator’s family, we are led, either directly or indirectly, to all the most important characters of *In Search of Lost Time*. As Proust himself says, describing the book in a letter to a friend: “There are a great many characters they are ‘prepared’ in this first volume, in such a way that in the second they will do exactly the opposite of what one would have expected from the first.” Nearly all, in fact, are introduced in *Swann’s Way*: the young protagonist, his parents and his grandmother; Swann, his daughter Gilberte and Odette, whose is both the mysterious “lady in pink” early in the book and later the lovely Mme. de Swann; Françoise, the family servant; the narrator’s boyhood friend, the bookish Bloch; and the aristocrat Mme. de Villeparisis. Stories are told about them that will be echoed later by parallel stories, just as the story of the young protagonist’s longing for his mother is echoed within this volume by the story of Swann’s longing for Odette and the narrator’s, when he was a boy, for Gilberte. Stories are begun that will be continued, hints are dropped that will be picked up, and questions are asked that will be answered in later volumes; places are described that will reappear in greater detail. “Combray,” which contains some of the most beautiful writing in the novel, sets the stage for the rest, and in its first pages introduces the principal themes which will be elaborated in subsequent volumes: childhood, love, betrayal, memory, sleep, time, homosexuality, music, art, manners, taste, society,

historic France. The later volumes, in turn, give “Combray” an ever richer meaning, and reveal more fully the logical interrelation of its parts. As Proust himself, again, in the same letter, says: “And from the point of view of composition, it is so complex that it only becomes clear much later when all the ‘themes’ have begun to coalesce.”

In the narrator’s recovery of his early memories through the tasting of the tea-soaked madeleine, for instance, we first learn of Proust’s conception of the power of involuntary memory: the madeleine is only the first of a number of inanimate objects that will appear in the course of *In Search of Lost Time*, each of which provides a sensuous experience which will in turn provoke an involuntary memory (the uneven cobblestones in a courtyard, for instance, or the touch of a stiffly starched napkin on the lips). The incident of the madeleine will itself be taken up again and revealed in a new light in the final volume.

In the narrator’s early passion for his mother and Swann’s for Odette, we are introduced to the power of love for an elusive object, the obstinate perversity with which one’s passion is intensified, not in fact created, by the danger of losing one’s beloved. The narrator’s infatuation with Gilberte in the present volume will be echoed by his more fully developed passion, as an adult, for Albertine in the subsequent volume. In the very first pages of *Swann’s Way*, the notion of escape from time is alluded to, and the description of the magic lantern which follows soon after hints at how time will be transcended through art. The wistful closing passage in the Bois de Boulogne introduces the theme of the receding, in time, and the disappearance, of beloved places and people, and their resurrection in our imagination, our memory, and finally our art. For only in recollection does an experience become fully significant, as we arrange it in a meaningful pattern, and thus the crucial role of our intellect, or imagination, in our perception of the world and our re-creation of it to suit our desires; thus the importance of the role of the artist in transforming reality according to a particular inner vision: the artist escapes the tyranny of time through art.

In one early scene, for example, the young protagonist sees the object of his devotion, the Duchesse de Guermantes, in the village church. He has never seen her before; what he has loved has been his own image of her, which he has created from her name and family history, her country estate, her position and reputation. In the flesh, she is disappointing: she has a rather ordinary face, and a pimples beside her nose. But immediately his imagination goes to work again, and soon he has managed to change what he sees before him into an object once again worthy of his love. Similarly, later in the novel Swann finds that his love of Odette is wonderfully strengthened, even transformed, the moment he realizes how closely she resembles a favorite painting of his: he now sees the painting, as well when he looks at her. The power of the intellect, and the imagination, have come to transform the inadequacy or tediousness of the real.

Proust began writing *Du côté de chez Swann* when he was in his late thirties, sometime between the summer of 1908 and the summer of 1909, as near as we can make out from references in his letters and conversations. His mother, with whom he had lived, had died in 1905, and following a stay of some months in a sanatorium, he had moved into an apartment at Versailles while friends searched for a suitable place for him to settle. This place turned out to be an apartment at 102, boulevard Haussmann, which was already familiar to him since the building had been in the possession of his family for some years; his uncle had died in the apartment and his mother had often visited it. The building is now owned by a bank, but one can still view Proust’s high-ceilinged bedroom with its two tall windows and marble fireplace. In this room, of modest dimensions, Proust spent most of the re-

of his life—slept, rested, ate, received visitors, read, and wrote. It was here that most of *À la recherche du temps perdu* came into being.

In a sense, the book had already been in preparation for several years before it began to take the form of a novel. It was never destined to be composed in a neatly chronological manner in any case, and elements of it had been emerging piecemeal in various guises: paragraphs, passages, scenes were written and even published in earlier versions, then later reworked and incorporated into the novel. The famous description in *Swann's Way* of the steeples of Martinville, for example, had an earlier incarnation as an article on road travel; and versions of many scenes had appeared in Proust's first unfinished, and unpublished novel, *Jean Santeuil*, which juxtaposed the two childhood homes that Proust would later combine to form the setting of the drama of the goodnight kiss.

Proust had been projecting a number of shorter works, most of them essays. At a certain point he realized they could all be brought together in a single form, a novel. What became its start had immediately before, begun as an essay contesting the ideas of the literary critic Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, a work which he conceived as having a fictional opening: the mother of the main character would come to his bedside in the morning and the two of them would begin a conversation about Sainte-Beuve. The first drafts of this essay evolved into the novel, and at last, by midsummer 1909, Proust was actually referring to his work-in-progress as a novel. Thereafter the work continued to develop somewhat chaotically, as Proust wrote many different parts of the book at the same time, cutting, expanding, and revising endlessly. Even as he wrote the opening, however, he foresaw the conclusion, and in fact the end of the book was completed before the middle began to grow.

A version of the present first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*, was in existence by January 1912, and extracts including "A Ray of Sun on the Balcony" and "Village Church" were published that year in the newspaper *Le Figaro*.

Although the publisher Eugène Fasquelle had announced that in his opinion "nothing must interfere with the *action*" in a work of fiction, Proust nevertheless submitted to him a manuscript of the book in October 1912. At this point, admitting that his novel was very long but pointing out that it was "very concise," he proposed a book in two volumes, one called *Le Temps perdu* (Time Lost) and the other *Le Temps retrouvé* (Time Found Again), under the general title *Les Intermittences du coeur* (The Intermittences of the Heart). (He had not yet found the title *Du côté de chez Swann*.)

He received no answer from Fasquelle and, in November 1912, wrote to the Nouvelle Revue Française, a more literary publisher which had developed from a literary journal of the same name, founded by André Gide and was later to take the name of its director, Gaston Gallimard. Now he was considering three volumes.

In December 1912, Gallimard and Fasquelle both returned their copies of the manuscript. Fasquelle did not want to risk publishing something "so different from what the public is used to reading." Gide later admitted to Proust: "The rejection of this book will remain the most serious mistake ever made by the NRF—and (since to my shame I was largely responsible for it) one of the sorrows, one of the most bitter regrets of my life."

At the end of December 1912, Proust approached another publisher, Ollendorff. He offered not only to pay the costs of publication but also to share with the publisher any profits that might derive from it. Ollendorff's rejection came in February and included the comment: "I don't see why a man should take thirty pages to describe how he turns over in bed before he goes to sleep." At last Proust submitted the manuscript to the energetic young publisher Bernard Grasset, offering to pay the expenses of publishing the book and publicizing it, and Grasset accepted.

By April 1913, Proust was beginning to work on proofs. He said in a letter to a friend: "M

corrections so far (I hope this won't continue) are not corrections. There remains not a single line of 20 of the original text. . . . It is crossed out, corrected in every blank part I can find, and I am pasting papers at the top, at the bottom, to the right, to the left, etc. . . ." He said that although the resulting text was actually a bit shorter, it was a "hopelessly tangled mess."

During this time, he made final decisions about titles. Ideally, he would have preferred simply the general title, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, followed by "Volume I" and "Volume II" with no individual titles for the two volumes. However, his publisher wanted individual titles for commercial reasons. Proust decided the first volume would be called *Du côté de chez Swann* and the second probably *Le Côté de Guermantes*. He explained several times what these titles meant, that in the country around Combray there were two directions in which to take a walk, that one asked, for example: "Shall we go in the direction of M. Rostand's house?" (His friend Maurice Rostand had in fact suggested the title of the first volume.) *Du côté de chez Swann* would, most literally translated, be the answer: "in the direction of Swann's place" or "toward Swann's."

But the title also had a metaphorical signification. *Chez Swann* means not only "Swann's home" or "Swann's place," but also "on the part of Swann, about Swann"; i.e., the title refers not just to where Swann lives but to the person Swann is, to Swann's mind, opinions, character, nature. And by extension the first volume concerns not just Swann's manner of living, thinking, but also Swann's world, the worldly and artistic domain, while *Le Côté de Guermantes* (now the third volume of the novel) concerns the ancient family of the Guermantes and their world, the domain of the aristocracy. And it is true that the character of Swann gives the volume its unity. (By the end of the novel, the two divergent walks are symbolically joined.)

Proust's friend Louis de Robert did not like the title, and Proust mentioned a few others—rather idly, as it turns out, since he was not really going to change his mind: "Charles Swann," "Gardens in a Cup of Tea," and "The Age of Names." He said he had also thought of "Springtime." But he argued: "I still don't understand why the name of that Combray path which was known as 'the way by Swann's' with its earthy reality, its local truthfulness, does not have just as much poetry in it as those abstract and flowery titles."

The work of the printer was finished by November 1913—an edition of 1,750 was printed—and the book was in the bookstores November 14. Reviews by Lucien Daudet and Jean Cocteau, among others, appeared. Not all the reviews were positive. The publisher submitted the book for the Prix Goncourt but the prize was won, instead, by a book called *Le Peuple de la mer* (The People of the Sea), by Marcel Aymé.

A later edition was published in 1919 by Gallimard with some small changes. A corrected edition was published by Gallimard in its Bibliothèque de la Pléiade series in 1954 and another, with further corrections and additions, in 1987.

The first English translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, C.K. Scott Moncrieff's *Swann's Way*, was done in Proust's lifetime and published in 1922. Sixty years later, a revision of Scott Moncrieff's translation by Terence Kilmartin, based on the corrected edition of the French, brought the translation closer to the original, cutting gratuitous additions and embellishments and correcting Scott Moncrieff's own misreadings, though it did not go as far as it could have in eliminating redundancies and also introduced the occasional grammatical mistake and mixed metaphor; in addition, Kilmartin's ear for the English language was not as sensitive as Scott Moncrieff's. In 1992, after Kilmartin's death and after the publication of the still-more-definitive 1987 Pléiade edition, the translation was further revised by D. J. Enright. The two revisions of Scott Moncrieff's *Swann's Way* retain so much of his original work that they cannot be called new translations. Thus, there existed, until the present

volume, only one other translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, and that was *Swann's Way* (Canberra 1982) as translated by James Grieve, a writer and professor of French literature in Australia. Grieve's approach was not to follow the original French as closely as possible, as had been Scott Moncrieff, but to study the text for its meaning and then re-create it in a style which might have been that of an author writing originally in English. He therefore brings to his version a greater degree of freedom in word choice, order, and syntax.

If Proust has been reputed by some to be difficult reading, this can be attributed perhaps to several factors. One is that the interest of this novel, unlike that of the more traditional novel, is not merely in the plot or even most of all, in the story it tells. (In one letter, Proust himself describes the work as a novel, but then, having second thoughts, qualifies that description with typical subtlety and precision by adding that, at least, "the novel form" is the form from which "it departs least.") In fact it does not set out to tell a linear, logically sequential story, but rather to create a world unified by the narrator's governing sensibility, in which blocks of a fictional past life are retrieved and presented, in roughly chronological order, in all their nuances. A reader may feel overwhelmed by the detail of this nuance and wish to get on with the story, and yet the only way to read Proust is to yield, with a patience equal to his, to his own unhurried manner of telling the story.

Another factor in Proust's reputed difficulty for Anglophone readers in particular may be that in the Scott Moncrieff translation, which has been virtually the only one read hitherto by readers of Proust in English, Proust's own lengthy, yet concise, expatiations were themselves amplified by a certain consistent redundancy which makes the translation at all points longer than the original. Proust's single word "strange" is rendered in English by Scott Moncrieff, for the sake of euphony or rhythm, as "strange and haunting"; "uninteresting" becomes "quite without interest"; "he" becomes "he himself." At the same time Proust's prose was heightened by Scott Moncrieff, by the replacement throughout of a plain word such as "said" by a more colorful one such as "remarked," "murmured," "asserted," etc. he was given, regularly, a more sentimental or melodramatic turn: the "entrance to the Underworld" in the original French, becomes "the Jaws of Hell." The effect of all these individual choices was to produce a text which, although it "flows" very well and follows the original remarkably closely in word order and construction, is wordier and "dressier" than the original. It remains a very powerful translation, but, as with many of the first translations of seminal literary works, somewhat misrepresents the style of the original, which was, in this case, essentially natural and direct, and far plainer than one might have guessed.

Yet another factor in Proust's "difficulty" may be his famously long sentences. Proust never felt that great length was desirable in itself. He categorically rejected sentences that were artificially amplified, or that were overly abstract, or that groped, arriving at a thought by a succession of approximations, just as he despised empty flourishes; when he describes Odette as having a *sourire surnois*, or "sly smile," the alliteration is there for a purpose, to further unite the two words in one mind. As he proceeded from draft to draft, he not only added material but also condensed. "I prefer concentration," he said, "even in length." And in fact, according to a meticulous count of the sentences in *Swann's Way* and the second volume of the novel, reported by Jean Milly in his study of the Proustian sentence, *La Phrase de Proust*, nearly forty percent of the sentences in these two books are reasonably short—one to five lines—and less than one-quarter are very long—ten lines or more.

Proust felt, however, that a long sentence contained a whole, complex thought, a thought that should not be fragmented or broken. The shape of the sentence was the shape of the thought, and every word was necessary to the thought: "I really have to weave these long silks as I spin them," he said. "If I shortened my sentences, it would make little pieces of sentences, not sentences." He wished

“encircle the truth with a single—even if long and sinuous—stroke.”

Many contemporaries of Proust's insisted that he wrote the way he spoke, although when *Du côté de chez Swann* appeared in print, they were startled by what they saw as the severity of the page. Where were the pauses, the inflections? There were not enough empty spaces, not enough punctuation marks. To them, the sentences seemed longer when read on the page than they did when they were spoken, and his extraordinary hoarse voice: his voice punctuated them.

One friend, though surely exaggerating, reported that Proust would arrive late in the evening, walk him up, begin talking, and deliver one long sentence that did not come to an end until the middle of the night. The sentence would be full of asides, parentheses, illuminations, reconsiderations, revisions, addenda, corrections, augmentations, digressions, qualifications, erasures, deletions, and margin notes. It would, in other words, attempt to be exhaustive, to capture every nuance of a piece of reality to reflect Proust's entire thought. To be exhaustive is, of course, an infinite task: more events could always be inserted, and more nuance in the narration, more commentary on the event, and more nuance within the commentary. Growing by association of ideas, developing internally by contiguity, the long sentences are built up into pyramids of subordinate clauses.

These sentences are constructed very tightly, with their many layers, the insertion of parenthetical remarks and digressions adding color and background to the main point, and delaying the outcome, the conclusion of the sentence, which is most often a particularly strong or climactic word or pair of words. They are knit together using a variety of conscious and unconscious stylistic techniques that become fascinating to observe and analyze: repetition, apposition, logical contrast, comparison, extended metaphors; nuanced qualifications within the metaphors themselves; varieties of parallel structures; balanced series of pairs of nouns, adjectives, or phrases; and lavish aural effects—as in the alliteration of this phrase: *faisait refluer ses reflets*; or the ABBA structure of vowel sounds in this one: *lâcheté qui nous détourne de toute tâche*; or the cooing of the dove at the end of this paragraph: *Et son faîte était toujours couronné du roucoulement d'une colombe*. And yet Proust's economy prevails, and extends even to his punctuation, with in particular a marked underuse of the comma. The punctuation, with in particular a marked underuse of the comma. The effect of this light punctuation is, again, that the whole thought is conveyed with as little fragmentation as possible, and that it travels more quickly from writer to reader, has a more noticeably powerful trajectory. The punctuation, of course, in part determines the pace and the breath span of the prose. If, as occasionally and conspicuously happens in *Swann's Way*, a sentence is chopped into a succession of short phrases separated by commas which halt its flow, the prose gasps for air; whereas the very long sentence, relatively unimpeded by stops, gives the impression of a headlong rush to deliver the thought in one exhalation. In this translation I have attempted to stay as close to Proust's own style as possible, in every aspect, without straying into an English style that is too foreign or awkward; with particular attention to word order and word choice, his punctuation, too, can often be duplicated in English, and commas which might have seemed necessary can quite happily be eliminated or reduced.

One last comment concerning word choice: often the closest, most accurate, and even more euphonious equivalent may be a word more commonly used decades ago than it is now: for instance the French *chercher* means both “to look for” and “to try,” so its perfect equivalent in English is not “seek,” still current today but rarer and more specialized than its equivalents. Or, to go further back in time, for the French *corsage*, the part of a woman's dress extending from the neck to the hips and also known as the “waist” or “body” of the dress, the perfect equivalent is “bodice,” which in fact means the same thing. I have chosen to use both of these and many other close equivalents. Other perfect identical English equivalents have simply receded too far into the past by now and will be too obscure

to be understood: Proust's *solitude*, which in French can mean "a lonely spot," has that meaning in English, too, but will no longer be understood in that sense. A couple of centuries ago, we referred, in English, to a "piece of water" just as Proust does to *une pièce d'eau*, and meant, like him, an ornamental pool or pond. And then there are some borderline cases, some perfect equivalents which may not convey as much to the contemporary reader as a close approximation, so that what one gains in exactness one loses in expressive power; some of these I have reluctantly bypassed (such as "parvis," identical to the French, which means the area in front of a sacred building and is the name neatly given by Proust to the part of the garden outside Françoise's "temple" and for which I have substituted "temple yard"); but others I have used because they were too perfect to give up. One of these was "aurora" for *aurore*: it is the rosy or yellow-gold light in the sky just before the sun rises and it follows *aube*, the first appearance of light in the sky.

A Note on the Translation

The present translation came into being in the following way. A project was conceived by the Penguin UK Modern Classics series in which the whole of *In Search of Lost Time* would be translated fresh on the basis of the latest and most authoritative French text, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, edited by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Pléiade, Gallimard, 1987-89). The translation would be done by a group of translators, each of whom would take on one of the seven volumes. The project was directed first by Paul Keegan, then by Simon Winder, and was overseen by general editor Christopher Prendergast. I was contacted early in the selection process, in the fall of 1995, and I chose to translate the first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*. The other translators are James Grieve, for *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*; Mark Treharne, for *The Guermantes Way*; John Sturrock, for *Sodom and Gomorrah*; Carol Clark, for *The Prisoner*; Peter Collier, for *The Fugitive*; and Ian Patterson, for *Finding Time Again*.

Between 1996 and the delivery of our manuscripts, the tardiest in mid-2001, we worked at different rates in our different parts of the world—one in Australia, one in the United States, the rest in various parts of England. After a single face-to-face meeting in early 1998, which most of the translators attended, we communicated with one another and with Christopher Prendergast by letter and e-mail. We agreed, often after lively debate, on certain practices that needed to be consistent from one volume to the next, such as retaining French titles like *Duchesse de Guermantes*, and leaving the quotations that occur within the text—from Racine, most notably—in the original French, with translations in the notes.

At the initial meeting of the Penguin Classics project, those present had acknowledged that a degree of heterogeneity across the volumes was inevitable and perhaps even desirable, and that philosophical differences would exist among the translators. As they proceeded, therefore, the translators worked fairly independently, and decided for themselves how close their translations should be to the original—how many liberties, for instance, might be taken with the sanctity of Proust's long sentences. And Christopher Prendergast, as he reviewed all the translations, kept his editorial hand relatively light. The Penguin UK translation appeared in October 2002, in six hardcover volumes and as a boxed set.

Some changes may be noted in this American edition, besides the adoption of American spelling conventions. One is that the UK decision concerning quotes within the text has been reversed, and all the French has been translated into English, with the original quotations in the notes. We have also replaced the French punctuation of dialogue, which uses dashes and omits certain opening and closing quotation marks, with standard American dialogue punctuation, though we have respected Proust's paragraphing decisions—sometimes long exchanges take place within a single paragraph, while in other cases each speech begins a new paragraph. Last, I have gone through the text of the British edition and made whatever small changes seemed to me called for when I read it freshly in print.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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PART I



Combray

FOR A LONG TIME, I went to bed early. Sometimes, my candle scarcely out, my eyes would close so quickly that I did not have time to say to myself: "I'm falling asleep." And, half an hour later, the thought that it was time to try to sleep would wake me; I wanted to put down the book I thought I still had in my hands and blow out my light; I had not ceased while sleeping to form reflections on what I had just read, but these reflections had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was what the book was talking about: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This belief lived on for a few seconds after my waking; it did not shock my reason but lay heavy like lead scales on my eyes and kept them from realizing that the candlestick was no longer lit. Then it began to grow unintelligible to me, as after metempsychosis do the thoughts of an earlier existence; the subject of the book detached itself from me, I was free to apply myself to it or not; immediately I recovered my sight and I was amazed to find a darkness around me soft and restful for my eyes, but perhaps even more so for my mind, to which it appeared a thing without cause, incomprehensible, a thing truly dark. I would ask myself what time it might be; I could hear the whistling of the trains which, remote or nearby, like the singing of a bird in a forest, plotting the distances, described to me the extent of the deserted countryside where the traveler hastens toward the nearest station; and the little road he is following will be engraved on his memory by the excitement he owes to new places, to unaccustomed activities, to the recent conversation and the farewells under the unfamiliar lamp that follow him still through the silence of the night, to the imminent sweetness of his return.

I would rest my cheeks tenderly against the lovely cheeks of the pillow, which, full and fresh, are like the cheeks of our childhood. I would strike a match to look at my watch. Nearly midnight. This is the hour when the invalid who has been obliged to go off on a journey and has had to sleep in an unfamiliar hotel, wakened by an attack, is cheered to see a ray of light under the door. How fortunate it's already morning! In a moment the servants will be up, he will be able to ring, someone will come to help him. The hope of being relieved gives him the courage to suffer. In fact he thought he heard footsteps; the steps approach, then recede. And the ray of light that was under his door has disappeared. It is midnight; they have just turned off the gas; the last servant has gone and he will have to suffer the whole night through without remedy.

I would go back to sleep, and would sometimes afterward wake again for brief moments only, long enough to hear the organic creak of the woodwork, open my eyes and stare at the kaleidoscope of the darkness, savor in a momentary glimmer of consciousness the sleep into which were plunged the furniture, the room, that whole of which I was only a small part and whose insensibility I would soon return to share. Or else while sleeping I had effortlessly returned to a period of my early life that had ended forever, rediscovered one of my childish terrors such as my great-uncle pulling me by my curls—a terror dispelled on the day—the dawn for me of a new era—when they were cut off. I had forgotten that event during my sleep, I recovered its memory as soon as I managed to wake myself up to escape the hands of my great-uncle, but as a precautionary measure I would completely surround my head with my pillow before returning to the world of dreams.

Sometimes, as Eve was born from one of Adam's ribs, a woman was born during my sleep from the cramped position of my thigh. Formed from the pleasure I was on the point of enjoying, she, I imagined, was the one offering it to me. My body, which felt in hers my own warmth, would try to find itself inside her, I would wake up. The rest of humanity seemed very remote compared with the

woman I had left scarcely a few moments before; my cheek was still warm from her kiss, my body aching from the weight of hers. If, as sometimes happened, she had the features of a woman I had known in life, I would devote myself entirely to this end: to finding her again, like those who go off on a journey to see a longed-for city with their own eyes and imagine that one can enjoy in reality the charm of a dream. Little by little the memory of her would fade, I had forgotten the girl of my dream.

A sleeping man holds in a circle around him the sequence of the hours, the order of the years and worlds. He consults them instinctively as he wakes and reads in a second the point on the earth he occupies, the time that has elapsed before his waking; but their ranks can be mixed up, broken. Toward morning, after a bout of insomnia, sleep overcomes him as he is reading, in a position quite different from the one in which he usually sleeps, his raised arm alone is enough to stop the sun and make it retreat, and, in the first minute of his waking, he will no longer know what time it is, he will think he has only just gone to bed. If he dozes off in a position still more displaced and divergent after dinner sitting in an armchair for instance, then the confusion among the disordered worlds will be complete, the magic armchair will send him traveling at top speed through time and space, and, at the moment of opening his eyelids, he will believe he went to bed several months earlier in another country. But it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was deep and allowed my mind to relax entirely; then it would let go of the map of the place where I had fallen asleep and, when I woke in the middle of the night, since I did not know where I was, I did not even understand in the first moment who I was; I had only, in its original simplicity, the sense of existence as it may quiver in the depths of an animal; I was more destitute than a cave dweller; but then the memory—not yet of the place where I was, but of several of those where I had lived and where I might have been—would come to me like help from on high to pull me out of the void from which I could not have got out on my own, crossed centuries of civilization in one second, and the image confusedly glimpsed of oil lamps, the collars of wing-collar shirts, gradually recomposed my self's original features.

Perhaps the immobility of the things around us is imposed on them by our certainty that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our mind confronting them. However that may be, when I woke thus, my mind restlessly attempting, without success, to discover where I was, everything revolved around me in the darkness, things, countries, years. My body, too benumbed to move, would try to locate, according to the form of its fatigue, the position of its limbs so as to deduce from this the direction of the wall, the placement of the furniture, so as to reconstruct and name the dwelling in which it found itself. Its memory, the memory of its ribs, its knees, its shoulders, offered in succession several of the rooms where it had slept, while around it the invisible walls, changing place according to the shape of the imagined room, spun through the shadows. And even before my mind, hesitating on the thresholds of times and shapes, had identified the house by reassembling the circumstances, it—my body—would recall the kind of bed in each one, the location of the doors, the angle at which the light came in through the windows, the existence of a hallway, along with the thought I had had as I fell asleep and that I had recovered upon waking. My stiffened side, trying to guess its orientation, would imagine, for instance, that it lay facing the wall in a big canopied bed and immediately I would say to myself: "Why, I went to sleep in the end even though Mama didn't come to say goodnight to me," I was in the country in the home of my grandfather, dead for many years; and my body, the side on which I was resting, faithful guardians of a past my mind ought never to have forgotten, recalled to me the flame of the night-light of Bohemian glass, in the shape of an urn, which hung from the ceiling by little chains, the mantelpiece of Siena marble, in my bedroom at Combray, my grandparents' house, in faraway days which at this moment I imagined were present without picturing them to myself exactly and which I would see more clearly in a little while when I was full

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