

# Proust as Translator of Ruskin

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## RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article décrit le dévouement de Proust à Ruskin en tant qu'autorité morale de son siècle et l'influence marquée de ce dernier sur les œuvres originales de Proust par l'intermédiaire de l'apprentissage de la traduction. L'étude examine les traductions de Ruskin par Proust (*La Bible d'Amiens* et *Sésame et les lys*) comme des transformations de l'allégorie en symbole influençant ses propres romans, *Du côté de chez Swann* au commencement de sa carrière et *Le temps retrouvé* à la fin. Elle conclut que Proust réussit à intégrer l'abstrait et le concret. L'allégorie, le «trope rhétorique» de la cathédrale d'Amiens (selon De Man) aussi bien que le style ampoulé d'un bâtiment public victorien, équivaut à cette abstraction, et le symbolisme concret gisant sous l'écorce du trope existe en fonction de la réalisation chez Ruskin et Proust. Tous deux réalisent et le sacré et le non-sacré ensemble.

## ABSTRACT

This article deals with the commitment of Proust to Ruskin as the moral authority of his time and, consequently, as a main influence on his own original work through the apprenticeship of translation. It examines these renderings (*La Bible d'Amiens* and *Sesame et les lys*) as transformations of allegory into symbol, foreshadowing his early *Du côté de chez Swann* and his final *Le temps retrouvé* with the conclusion that Proust managed to realize the unity of abstract and concrete. Allegory, a Proustian “rhetorical trope” on the Cathedral of Amiens (according to De Man) and the Victorian public building, is such an abstraction opposite the concreteness and privacy of symbolism, the reality behind the trope as realized behind the styles of both Ruskin and Proust.

## MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

vector, remembrance, reality, allegory, symbol

## 1. Proust as Translator of Ruskin: preparations

André Maurois (1949) dates Proust's “entrance into literature”<sup>1</sup> in 1900, just when he was most absorbed in becoming a French disciple of John Ruskin, a preacher of “Beauty and Truth” from the pulpit of the Slade Professorship of the Arts at Oxford University (133). At the time, he read everything with relevance to Ruskin's main subjects, medieval architecture and painting, especially the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and including the craftsmanlike ethos of the past in comparison to the present: Milsand's study of *L'esthétique anglaise* (1864), Taine's *Notes sur l'Angleterre* (1890) and, at the forefront, the turn of the century *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté* by Robert de la Suzeranne. He even dreamed of outdoing de la Suzeranne by becoming the “canonized” translator and expert on Ruskin and he at first disparaged a potential translator's aide, Marie Nordlinger, for writing a wooden French and not possessing a complete knowledge of the master's works. Nevertheless, he later found, on a joint trip to Venice, that she was fully versed in Ruskin's ideas, perhaps as much as

he was, and together they studied the *Stones of Venice*, which, more than a guide-book, was a comprehensive and hands-on discussion of architectural detail. Ruskin was his eyes, both morally and physically: this, the main thrust of the following article, compels the conclusion that his translation activity, his immersion in Ruskin's expressive world, was to strongly influence his own works, starting from *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913) and ending with *Le temps retrouvé* (1927).

Superficially, Proust's mastery of English was very weak. However, in depth, he mastered his subject (though not the tool) completely, even gaining trust for expertise in such specialized matters as recent biography. Moreover, he knew much more than his friends (or himself) credited and Reynaldo Hahn, perhaps his lover and a cousin of Marie Nordlinger, was surprised by the learned osmosis and called it "supernatural divination" (Prestwich 1999: 122). But it was no miracle, as proved by Cynthia Gamble in her *Proust as Interpreter: the Seven Lamps of Translation* (2002). After turning up a partial draft translation of Ruskin by the authoritative Suzeranne, he rushed to the British lady companion, to his friend, the Marquise de Brantes, and this Mrs. Higginson, his "devoted amanuensis" nicknamed "Maman," furnished him with abridged French versions of *The Bible of Amiens* (1885) and *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) – his own versions came out in 1904 and 1906, respectively – and he "either retained or amended [these], seldom abandoning them completely" (Baldwin 2005: 420-421). In other words, linguistic support came from three sources: his mother Jeanne Weil Proust, "Maman," and the more thorough and acknowledged aid of Marie Nordlinger.

Of course, it was necessary to "Gallicize" Marie Nordlinger's French; his task was to render communication with the translation's audience more natural. His chief identification, then, was culturally substantive rather than merely formal and he confessed, rather surprisingly, to Georges de Lauris: "English and American literature [is] closer to my heart than even the French" (de Billy 1927: 32). We know about his admiration for Emerson from Jean-Yves Tadié, making the "Oversoul" and "Self-Reliance" as almost as much a part of him as Ruskin's blue gentian, embodied in religion and nature. Moreover, we know about Proust's symbiosis with George Eliot, particularly *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch*, works that coincided with his "mercilessly moralistic" side (Edmund Wilson's insight from *Axel's Castle* 1969: 162). But even more relevant was his feeling for Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the story of a doomed cathedral builder.

## 2. Cathedral Realities

In fact, cathedral building, the work of a bygone day, was doomed; after all, Proust's was an age when even Baudelaire's Parisian Arcades, the scene of his "spiritual *flânerie*," were marked for demolition. In their stead was the erector set miracle of the Eiffel Tower plus the "hypocrite lecteur" of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris and the "grad-grind" of late Victorian London. The personality of the Gothic builder, vulnerable in his pious belonging to the world of the medieval spire, was almost irretrievable in what Ruskin called "the Storm-Cloud of the 19<sup>th</sup> century" (Wedderburn 1908: xix) whose architecture was petty and ridiculous. The London Army and Navy Club, for example, "[had] upon it an enormous quantity of sculpture representing the gentlemen of the Navy as little boys riding upon dolphins, and the gentlemen of the Army

– I couldn't see as what – nor can anybody” (Ruskin 1959: 262). But the dashes were serious despite the joking; they were free-wheeling outbursts as if staggered and discomposed by the loss of catholic and feudal solidity. Gone was the world of *François le Champi* by George Sand (1843) as read to him by his mother and restored through the semi-mystical technique of “remembrance of things past.” Left only were Verlaine's nostalgic words of the 1870s about the Middle Ages – “*Il fut gallican, ce siècle, et janséniste*” (Hartley 1958: 223) – and the future novelist sank into memories of “*grandeur*.”

These could be revived by pilgrimages to the shrines of Amiens, Rheims, Notre Dame and Chartres and, subsequently, the translation of their meaning for modern life and art. This is what Pre-Raphaelitism, the return to medieval spirituality as envisioned by Dante Gabriel Rossetti with Ruskin's sponsorship, meant. Its artistic current was like the reflection in the water of a cathedral (a “Tintern Abbey”) and its reflex action as this gazed down onto a Lake Country river – Brantwood, Ruskin's final estate, was in this region – made one think of the “*correspondances of vivants piliers*.” The natural imagery mirrored both the flow of time and the “stains” of human contact on the buildings (Ruskin 1918: 188).

Man and nature, thus, were in constant communication – not “pathetically,” in an undisciplined or “fallacious” manner – and the “gentian's sensory blue” when pierced by the artist-sightseer-visionary could bestow a permanent blueness akin to the objectivity (*pensée*) of a Platonic idea (Ruskin 1918: 115). In the enlightened, empowered and objectified subjectivity of a Proust, the flower could reach the transcendence of liberated self.

That cathedrals built this transcendence became clear in each detail. Amiens, for one, dominated its city without however cancelling the steps toward it. On the way, according to Ruskin, was a railroad station and “these little patisseries” (Wedderburn 1908: 128) where Marcel could have bought himself a “Petite Madeleine” and afford himself the pleasure and insight of a cake melted in tea, of a self loosed from its conventional moorings. As he approached, Proust gave a very faithful account of the cathedral's body in the preface to his translation. There were “saints, prophets, kings, sinners, judges and angels” all presiding over salvation, and in a 14 line, emotion-driven and un-Baedeker-like description, he further specified that these...

were looking down from their placement on the heights of their niches...[and] higher still, removed from anything beneath the blurred and dazed glances of men at the front..., elevated to a position close to the echoes and emanations of the bells, [so that] you will doubtless feel the rising warmth of your emotions [at] this giant... ascendance.”(Proust 1947: 33, my emphases and additions as well as translation)

Proust reproduces the skyward direction of a “giant ascendance” (*ascendance géante*) for *all* men, not just an “ascension” for believers only (as in “Ascension Day”), giving rise to a sentential semantic vector “mounting toward the heavens” (*monter vers le ciel*) in which every lexical item, prepositions as well as nominal, participates. Thus, the *chaleur de vos émotions* is an inwardly rising warmth and the *effluves*, the pealing echoes and emanations, make up an outward victory. And the “passion” is simultaneously Christian and generally human, transforming everyone into what Ruskin termed as an “iron glow, white perhaps, but still strong” (Ruskin 1918: 120). Through the agency of divine sincerity – faithful intentions – the communion is made flesh.

Such was the basis of Proust's first novelistic communion in which Marcel's grandmother appears. Though "ignorant of architecture," "she would absorb herself so utterly in the effusion of the spire [overlooking Combray] that her gaze seemed to leap upward to it [*s'élançer avec elle*, Proust has in *Chez Swann* (Proust 1965: 78)]." The English (Proust 1981: 69) continues in the staggered rising of a *cadence mineure* (Crawshaw/Tusting 2000: 55): "...the topmost pinnacle...seemed to have mounted suddenly far higher [from *montées bien plus hauts* (Proust 1965: 78)], to have become truly remote, like a song taken up again in a head voice, an octave above." It should be underscored that the minor cadence, rising, is one with the ascending scale of the sentence's high mystical experience, even though the *cadence majeure* at the climax is falling (Crawshaw/Tusting 2000: 56)<sup>2</sup>. It was therefore natural and important that his work be read as intended, intonation and rhythm as well as pronunciation. It came from "the center of his being" (Cocteau 1927: 76-79) and there formed a "magic scrawl" or code (Proust 1981b: 993).

This writing in the sky constituted a doctrinal grace-note or "note of Grace." Thus, Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens* constituted a "History of Christendom for Boys and Girls Who Have Been Held at its Fonts," (Ruskin 1908: title page) for people like Proust whose mother, though born a Jewess, baptized and raised him as a Catholic with the promise of salvation. The book, then, was part of a projected description of Christian heroism to be entitled "Our Fathers Have Told Us" but complete in itself, especially when Proust presents notes commenting on the rough and ready heroes with "Patristic Models" like Saint Augustine or citations from the New Testament.

It is likewise expected that Ruskin should choose for his frontispiece the iconic and expressionless Madonna of Cimabue (1250?-1302), the famous *Vièrge dorée* (Wihl 1985: 130). However, Ruskin understands with his non-allegorical side that the gold is a trinket as well as a ritual bullion in that she presides over the cathedral as...

no more than a French Madonna...whose nimbus [is] switched aside..., like a becoming bonnet [Proust has the highly fashion-conscious *un chapeau seyant*, Proust 1947: 260]...A Madonna in decadence [*de decadence*, stressing the decline, *La Bible* 1947: 260] with her gay soubrette's smile. (Ruskin 1908: 128)

Proust notes the seriousness of this "new look":

This Madonna, with the statues surrounding her [as if to pay court to redemption], represents the culminating high point of Gothic Art in the thirteenth century. In fact, architectural sculpture has progressed steadily in the interim, becoming more sincere, tender and suggestive. (Proust 1947: 261).

She became more real, more human; for this reason, Ruskin called a much despised "Mariolatry" "one of Catholicism's noblest and most vital *graces*" (my emphasis, Wedderburn 1908: lxiii).

### 3. From Public to Private: Allegory and Symbol

But this Grace (and grace) was available only if one proved oneself by honing one's artistic, moral and religious craft to create a sum of goodness and self-discipline through a general Christian work ethic. It was the result of a widely accepted truth in which the public descends – gracefully – to the private. As Ruskin had it in the 1871 *Preface to Sesame and Lilies*:

If there is any one point which, in six thousand years of thinking about right and wrong, wise and good men have agreed upon, or successively by experience discovered, it is that God dislikes idle and cruel people more than any others:--that His first order is, 'work while you have light'; and His second, 'Be merciful while you have mercy.' (Ruskin 2002: 13).

In a letter to Georges de Lauris, Proust promised to live by these "*grands commandements de Dieu, une chose sublime*" (Maurois 1949: 115).

Along with such public Christian rules to live by, Proust could fall back on his own Classical and Neo-Classical tradition, a formalistic stranglehold for many of his generation because of the strict Jansenist morality behind their backs, one which featured a "hidden God" whose intentions had to be guessed (see Goldmann 1955). However, Classicism could also offer balance and harmony through aesthetic restraint and there emerged a school of "Parnassians" led by Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894), a translator of Greek tragedy in the original – not merely the Neo-Classical *Phèdre* Marcel admired. Leconte de Lisle was also a poet in his own right and was followed by Henri de Régnier (1864-1936), poet, society novelist and a relative of the Parnassian poet José-Maria de Hérédia who died in 1905 in the thick of Proust's translation activity.

In fact, he had paid Régnier the compliment of a *Pastiche* full of adhesive coordinators like *telle... que* and *plus... que* (Proust 1971: 21-22). For that matter, he had also praised Flaubert's Neo-Classical side, his "grammatical genius" (Proust 1971: 520) shown not only in the expressive use of literary tenses but in the mobilization of cohesive devices to rein in the impetuosity of remembrance. Such need for control must have been what motivated Jean Moréas (1865-1910) to defect from the *Symboliste* ranks of a Verlaine to join a Classically pellucid *Ecole romane*. Likewise, it was behind Proust's diary notation that he regretted that *Lamartine et Hugo* were there "*et n'aient pas été Boileau et Racine*" (Proust 2002: 82). Their 18<sup>th</sup> century matrix would have guided his hand more surely.

At the same time but in the opposite direction, specific memory and experience served Proust as a springboard to general and public relevance, much as Wordsworth (1770-1850) jumped from the individualized contemplation of nature to the "still, sad heart of humanity" in the towns. This is the causation of the "contemplative," Ruskin's categorization of Wordsworth in contrast to the vatic, "emotionally imperialistic" Shakespeare (Ruskin 1918: 117/note) – and it could also be conceived of as Ruskin's posthumous characterization of Proust. Reynaldo Hahn describes this private search become public:

During our stroll in the garden, Marcel lingered before a rosebush to sniff it...He was silent and lost in thought and then broke free from his trance to join me...How many times had I observed Marcel in these mysterious moments of communion with nature! (Hahn 1927: 33-34)

Each inhalation of the rose – simultaneously allegorical and public while symbolical and private – signified the full dimensions of courtly and intimate love, as "overflowing" as the "rose-window of a cathedral" (Macksey 1962: 119). He was expressing what Mouton calls "a total submission to the seen viewed as understood" (1975: 203).

Such submission signified a steady interiority like that of a Stendhal who saw sincerity as the most important trait of the novelist – or even of a Rousseau who related

all exterior events to his ego (see Mouton 1975: 90, 76-79). It meant an importation of all public objects into the realistic territory of the inner self in order to tease immanence and transcendence out of often refractory and transitory objects – just like the internalization of Ruskin's gentian. Accordingly, Proust recommended “a greater closeness between the artist and the object to be expressed. As long as the closeness of the one to the other is not complete, the task is unfinished” (Peyre 1962: 41).

This linkage was further analyzed in *Time Regained*:

...what we call reality is a certain connection between immediate sensation and *the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them* – a unique connection which the writer has to *rediscover* in order to *link* forever in his phrase the two sets of phenomena which reality joins together. (Proust 1981b: 924, my emphases)

In order to work, the stabs of salience released in a sentence by function as well as content words, semantic high points accompanied by connectors, cannot be merely synapses and conjunctive joints (to repeat the neurolinguistic insights of Bartsch (2005: 13, 93). They constitute moments in a plot of self expressing a relationship to one's identity and to that of others, all to be packed into one long, expressive, all-inclusive and seemingly idiosyncratic sentence (so that Reynaldo Hahn scolded his friend for being inconsiderate to the average reader). Difficulty was in fact the price to pay for wanting to combine the public and the private, the voluntary and the involuntary.

Voluntary memory could mean anything from the willed craftsmanship of placing the pastry shops before the cathedral to the fictional location of the Prince de Guermantes library just before the aristocratic party in *Time Regained* (Proust 1981b: 919, 924). Involuntary memory, on the other hand, was the melting of this pastry in the mouth and the consequent recall of Combray with its stream, church spire and Monet-like water lilies in Proust's first novel – or the solitary experience of examining George Sand's *François le Champi* in his last.

These fictional experiences can be traced to the preceding discussion of reading in the preface to *Sésame et les lys* originally delivered as a series of public lectures devoted to “King's Treasuries” (on reading, Dec. 8, 1864) and “Queen's Gardens” (on the education of girls, Dec. 14, 1864) at the Rusholme Town Hall near Manchester – serendipitously, Marie Nordlinger's British postal zone.

Elevated “rhetorical tropes” (De Man's expression 1979: 6) had to be unquestioned and unquestionable in their imposition of meaning from on high (“top-down”). This is the brunt of Proust's criticism in an extended note on “sesame.” He writes that Ruskin both confuses and seems to ignore the two meanings of “sesame” as the “open Sesame” of Ali Baba's cave and its public meaning of “grain,” thus “superimposing allegory upon allegory” (Proust 1987: 101). Moreover, at the end he further makes the counterpoint unclear by returning to one side of the “tonality of the beginning” (Proust 1987: 102).

In other words, Ruskin had the tendency of over-rating the allegorical side of things, their widely accepted and somewhat simplistic resonance. As such he seemed to prefer the voluntary and fabricated white hawthorn or *aubépine* over the real one, Proust's private gentian (also beloved by D. H. Lawrence in his poem “Bavarian Gentians”). It was one with “the freshness of the morning,” a natural symbol rather than an allegory which, as he worded it, “*humilie la beauté devant le devoir*” (Proust 1971: 240 and Wihl 1985: 111).

What was needed was some discursive public way to satisfy the need for allegory, for emblematic and plain explanation, while presenting private significance through symbol: he found it in the conclusive commentaries of Anatole France (1844-1924) in which discourse was coordinated with plot and character. As Proust records in his Notebook, France (Bergotte in two novels, *Swann's Way* and *Within a Budding Grove* [1919] ) was a master of “extricating events and emotions from chaos,” thereby saving them from the exaggerated privacy of symbol. Even more important, this “*raisonnement*” added the charm of attraction to a narrative or “*l'inimitable sourire d'un visage qu'on voit pour la première fois*” (Proust 2002: 129).

In this mixture of the public and the private, there is a non-hermetic but nonetheless intimate “private Sesame” such as is enjoyed by Jupien, the male madam of a homosexual warehouse visited by Baron de Charlus in *Time*. The latter gives this manager of private pleasure the very public gift of *Sésame et les lys* in Proust's version (see *Temps* 1954: 833). Meanwhile, the bombs of WWI fall outside, not disturbing the customers in their private quest and giving rise to a light-hearted pseudo-proverbial encapsulation in the spirit of La Rochefoucauld and Aesop: “A man may be afraid of not sleeping and not in the least afraid of a serious duel, afraid of a rat and not of a lion” (Proust 1981b: 862-863; Proust 1954: 834). In fact, the bombs constitute a “fortunate Fall” in which they “permit *us* to enter without impediment into a region of caress into which *we* normally gain access only after a certain delay” (my emphases on the generalizing pronouns, *Time* 1981: 862). De Man concludes (1979: 60) that such a typically Proustian contextualization produces an extremely convincing sense of relevance, the line that the good translator should always follow, so that the road travelled from *Sésame et les lys* to *Le temps retrouvé* is in fact like that of the inspired experience of reading, the ultimate “region of caress.” Involved in the very personal act of intimacy (more spiritual than physical), it is surrounded both by the idiosyncratic portrait of Prince Eugene of Savoy and the “chapel-like sunlight” streaming through the private window (Proust 1987: 45-49). Unlike the dry “functionalism” of Pre-Raphaelites like William Morris, it contains books like *François le Champi* which trigger remembrance and propel a return to personal contexts: *On est poussé sur ses propres voies*, as Proust concluded in *Sésame* (Proust 1987: 66). The author of the book then addresses him from the outside, from the sunlight, and awakens his inner being to receive a confirmation and response to the invitation to “loaf and be at ease with him” (as Walt Whitman would say).

Authorial “companionship” is willed and initiated from within. The author is the equal of the self, itself an author. This is the secular reality of equality, not the relationship of greater and lesser in a divine hierarchy. Of course, the Manchester tradesmen in the audience of “Queen's Gardens” maintained the illusion of “a Christian lily, a figure of the ‘incorruptible’ moral authority of the pure woman, but this image stood against “Manchester negligence and greed,” writes a realistic Elisabeth Helsinger (2002: 133). Ruskin, however, was disillusioned while holding firmly to a “lovely and cherished” (as well as undeniably secular) flower of nature named Lucy, to be educated in the spirit of Rousseau and breathing the wilds of Wordsworth. And Proust, overcome by her folk poetry and the appeal of her untamed reality, translates her prosaically and soberly, as if afraid to “try out his own wings” in her precious presence. Nevertheless, with exertion, he manages to capture the immanence of the “overseeing power” –or Oversoul? – standing beside her and urging her to “kindle or restrain”

(Ruskin 2002: 79), to become both enthused and obedient, *tantôt exciteur et tantôt reprimant*, Proust writes with rather flatfooted correctness (Proust 1987: 275). The point is that restraint, unlike liberty, is pedestrian, and Proust, for all of his dislike of convention, recognized the value of boundaries.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century terms of Ruskin, this made Wordsworth into a moralist (as was Proust's beloved George Eliot, for that matter), and an existentialist and modern Proust in De Man's view (1979: 125-126) saw the great Romantic as "a poet of the self-reflective consciousness" who "urged others to look at the whole steadily and comprehensively" as he did himself. Moreover, he was unflinching. When Ruskin interpreted a heraldic figure on the body of Amiens as "giving a mantle to a naked beggar" (Ruskin 1908: 155), Proust saw through the moralism: "The figure on the west porch... does nothing more altruistic than clothe a beggar with fabric of local manufacture." (Proust 1947: 260). He was, likewise, unmoved by Ruskin's Fundamentalist denunciation of man as "too egotistical" before the moral muddle of a Manchester audience which blew everything up into congratulatory and "enlightened self-interest" (2002: 111). In sum, the smoke of Ruskin's indignation clouded and blurred the mixed colors of secular man while insisting on unrealistic blacks and whites. In fact, Ruskin never completely overcame the simplistic colors of his Fundamentalist background and his disciple never completely forgave him.

But respect for the secular self and condensation of this respect (*Dicht-ung*) into symbol was never so expressive as in the fictional presentation of the kitchen maid "Caritas" in *Swann's Way*. She was, for one, a non-altruistic "Charity" (or "Compassion" without an object) compared to the redemptive figure represented by Giotto in the Arena Chapel of Padua as described in Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*. Proust, in a note to his translation of *The Bible of Amiens*, presents her as a pious model, nevertheless to be integrated into life: "She is distinguished from all other virtues by a crown of glory and a cross of fire" (Proust 1947: 302-303). However, the novelized Caritas is only a slatternly maid who, set beside Françoise the Proust family cook, humorously equals Error opposite Truth (see De Man 1979: 73 and Proust 1965: 100). Proust may be allowed this spoof of allegory because he had so internalized its suggestiveness that its descent from moral abstraction became an integral part of his view of character. He had committed to his notebook, for example, that allegorical "Vice" (also lowercase) was a "seal of reality," imposing its stamp on the real.

Thus, she is on the one hand a comic embodiment of the trait of "Servitude" carrying the "humble basket of pregnancy" rather than elevated virtue. On the other, she is a whiff of the scent of allegory, "transcending the singularity of...particular incarnations" (De Man 1979: 73-74). Proust expressed such an incarnation in the following style (with connectors marked):

*De même que l'image de cette fille était accrue par le symbole ajouté qu'elle portait devant son ventre, sans avoir l'air d'en comprendre le sens, sans que rien dans son visage en traduisit la beauté et l'esprit, comme un simple et pesant fardeau, de même c'est sans paraître s'en douter que la puissante ménagerie qui est représentée à l'Aréna au-dessous du nom 'Caritas' et dont la reproduction au mur de ma salle d'études, à Combray, incarne cette vertu [not capitalized], c'est sans que aucune pensée de charité [once again, not capitalized] semble pu avoir été exprimée par son visage énergique et vulgaire.* (Proust 1965: 98)



Of primary importance is the upward vector of the sentence despite its final tug downwards –*énergique* rises at the very moment that *vulgaire* pulls Caritas into the mud. The *et* (and the *en*, for one) bind the soaring to the staying, the dynamic to the static, thus literally completing the picture.

This climactic vitality (akin to the *vitalité* of Wordsworth's Lucy) is, in fact, the best definition of everyday energy. Caritas is lively largely because of the solid burden in her belly, symbolizing the fraught uncertainty of the future and a stolid, impassive reaction to it. Moreover, she is too humanly recognizable to stand above mankind as an icon or to radiate the blurred rays of Verlaine's "*chanson grise*," the title of Hahn's musical medley of the *Symboliste*. But she does correspond to a line in its chief poem (or *Lied*) – *Le bleu fouillis des claires étoiles* (I emphasize the yoking of "blue disorder" in Hartley's 1958 translation: 224). The blue gentian, lovely and real though still mildly ambiguous, is doing its actualizing work and Caritas herself becomes a vessel of diffracted sunlight – not by any "pathetic fallacy" though fallible. She remains in Proust's words (1965: 99) "*comme réel...donnant à la signification...quelque chose de plus littéral et plus précis.*" This reality produces the aura of symbol, a defining unity of simultaneously public and private awareness.

#### NOTES

1. All translations, except those otherwise noted (standard editions, for example) are by the author of this essay.
2. This rhythm was tested in the first place by listening to a cassette recording of "*Un Amour de Swann*" as read by actors of Radio Français (1982), [winners of the Prix des textes français for the same year, and secondly by listening to the excellent reading of *Du côté de chez Swann* and *Le temps retrouvé* by Jean-Louis Trintignant in the Bibliothèque des voix de Paris (1986).

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