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LOWER SOCIAL LEVELS
IN MARCEL PROUST'S
A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU

by
ha Marc
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INTRODUCTION

The greater part of A la Recherche du temps perdu deals with the aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie. This lopsided treatment of the whole of society has been a frequent cause for complaint from those critics who apparently are not content to accept the vision de l'artiste as valid. However, the novel is an accurate reflection of Proust's personal social experience.

Because representatives of the lower levels are scattered throughout the novel and because they are not consistently grouped together as are the aristocrats in their salons, their presence is less noticeable, their role more subtle. Yet, if one goes through Proust's novel, page by page, and jots down every passage dealing with a member of a lower level, or with lower levels in general, it is surprising to discover how well they are represented. Greater focus of attention on the aristocracy does not render invalid Proust's portrayal of these social groups. A presentation of them can be credible without being complete or extensive.

Treatment of the various lower level groups is admittedly uneven. The worker is practically non-existent. The peasantry and the theatrical world are mentioned time and again, but without a great deal of elaboration; the petite bourgeoisie is very definitely in the background.

It is the domestic servants who enjoy the most extensive treatment among the lower level groups. They

function as counterpart and counterpoint to the haut monde, and the parallels drawn between scenes in the drawing room and those in the kitchen are like original and parody, portrait and caricature. Ramon Fernandez sums it up very well:

Les domestiques, dans le Temps perdu, forment un genre défini, avec leurs espèces et leurs sous-espèces, aussi précis et aussi nuancé que le genre des Guermantes mais alors que les Guermantes sont liés par la race et l'état civil, les domestiques le sont par leur profession et par une sorte de franc-maçonnerie. Ils représentent l'envers du décor, de la bourgeoisie, du décor du monde, du décor du vice aussi. 1

and Léon Pierre-Quint adds:

C'est par son ample peinture de la domesticité que Proust, plus qu'aucun moraliste peut-être, après avoir fait briller devant vos yeux tous les attrails du monde, laisse voir son vide. 2

Not every critic would agree that Proust's portrayal of the servant class is ample. Lester Mansfield considers the domestics of A la Recherche du temps perdu "l'apparat luxueux et nécessaire du monde des riches." 3 They are that, of course, but their role is not limited strictly to being an accessory.

Germaine Brée contends that "If through Françoise and her daughter, Jupien, or Morel, we catch a glimpse of other classes, it is only in passing." 4 On the contrary. The majority of Proust's lower level characters, in spite of their often brief appearances, have been so skillfully presented that they are vital and credible and have more than a passing claim to existence. Through them, the reader gains an awareness of the lower level way of life. To quote

from Robert Redfield's A Little Community:

The characterizations of the artist and of the sensitive reporter are of course not precise at all; but very much of the whole is communicated to us. We might call them all portraits. They communicate the nature of the whole by attending to the uniqueness of each part, by choosing from among the part of them for emphasis and by modifying them and rearranging them in ways that satisfy "the feeling" of the portrayer. 5

André Maurois maintained that "Le peuple est insuffisamment représenté." 6 But why must their representation be considered insufficient? Was Proust's purpose to present a balanced social picture, or did he not, as Maurois later stated, "cherche moins à décrire tel milieu donné qu'à découvrir et à formuler les lois générales de la nature humaine." 7 The role of le peuple in A la Recherche du temps perdu is clearly sufficient for Proust's purposes.

Proust's deliberate and careful scrutiny of society eventuates in a clearer understanding of human nature and behavior that transcends class distinctions. Often the aristocrat can be even more enlightening than his social inferior. Pierre-Quint clarifies Proust's point of view in this way:

Le romancier, dit Proust, qui préfère dépeindre un mouvement ouvrier plutôt que quelques oisifs cède presque toujours à l'attrait de la facilité; il faut un effort autrement intense pour analyser une petite émotion qui se cache dans le fond obscur de notre inconscient que pour agiter des idées humanitaires ou des problèmes syndicaux; chacun, dans la conversation, peut aisément se livrer à cet exercice intellectuel, à ce jeu aisé...Le romancier social aboutit finalement à de pures descriptions, à des nomenclatures de faits. Certains critiques admireront son objectivité. Proust l'appelle du "faux réalisme". 8

The question of the extent of representation of the lower levels is moot; the important consideration is how well Proust comprehended and presented the lower level mentality in those characters who do appear. Critics who are satisfied with the amount of lower level representation agree that Proust has succeeded remarkably well in his presentation of them. Léon Pierre-Quint states that "Personne n'est peut-être entré aussi profondément dans la conscience du domestique."⁹ Margaret Moore Goodell concurs that the servants in the novel have received "a more masterly and detailed psychological analysis than in almost any other writer."¹⁰ André Ferré, Ramon Fernandez and Henri Peyre can also be numbered in this group.

Curiously enough, not one of these critics has devoted more than a few pages to the lower levels, and no one has bothered to examine the characters in detail, with the exception of Françoise. There is much to be said about them and about how they are presented and developed in the course of the novel; such is the purpose of the balance of this study.

Because of the extremely autobiographical overtones in the novel, a logical first step toward determining the extent and importance of the lower social levels is to examine what constituted Proust's personal experience with them: who the people were and what they were like. It was from these various personal contacts that he drew much of the material later used to depict the lower levels in his

novel.

From his own experience he formed opinions about social classes and class distinctions which are echoed by Marcel; these social attitudes determined in what light the lower level characters would be presented. How they are presented is yet another question. Proust's favorite method of depicting minor lower level characters was by the use of metaphor and image. Some of these are quite elaborate and greatly enhance the novel; all of them succeed in succinctly conveying the exact nuance the author had in mind. Several other methods of character presentation are also used, though not as extensively.

The characters themselves are presented by milieu (Combray, Balbec, the theater and Paris). It is a convenient means of organizing them for discussion, but the primary reason for such grouping is that the milieu exerts a strong influence to which these characters are particularly susceptible. Only the principal lower level characters are discussed in this context--i.e. those who either make several appearances in the novel or those whose unique appearance is of some consequence. Françoise is found in more than one milieu and is so treated.

She, in particular, is ubiquitous. Her role spans the entire novel, and her characterization is of great consequence, both in terms of the novel and in terms of the lower levels. Not only can she stand alone as a highly individualized--and highly amusing--character, but from her characterization generalizations can be made about the ideas

and attitudes of her peers. Because many of the other servants and peasants presented in the novel are not treated in depth, these insights are invaluable to the reader.

Some characters are presented primarily in terms of their relationship with Françoise. She fits the definition for what Clive Bell called "observed characters," those who are "brought into the picture not so much for their own emotions as to provoke emotion and commotion in others." ¹¹ Certainly Françoise does her share of provoking.

Other aspects of Françoise are logically presented within the context of the various milieus (she functions in three of the four). To have devoted a chapter to a discussion of her characterization would have been redundant.

A careful study of the lower level characters of A la Recherche du temps perdu will reveal the invaluable contribution they make individually and as a group to the novel. They do exist in their own right, as well as being necessary adjuncts to the existence of the aristocrats they serve. Not to be discounted are the unforgettable metaphors they inspire.

CHAPTER I
PROUST'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH
LOWER SOCIAL LEVELS

Proust, like his literary counterpart Marcel, was not born into the aristocracy but managed nevertheless to penetrate into its ranks. In this upper stratosphere of society, his contacts with the lower social levels would have been limited to those who served him and his friends had he not gone out of his way to establish more extensive and more personal contacts at these levels. His relationships with servants, whether his own or those he met elsewhere, were a very real part of his social experience.

His attitude toward his social inferiors was never overbearing. Though demanding at times, he was always most liberal and generous with servants; the extravagance of his tips was legend. One of his contemporaries, the Princess Bibesco, remarked with regard to Proust's way with servants that he "usait de circonlocutions infinies quand il s'adressait aux gens de service, à ceux en qui sa conscience se refusait à voir des 'inférieurs'." 12

Perhaps Proust was so completely at ease with servants because he was always surrounded by them at home and when he was travelling. Not only could he afford the luxury of offering himself servants to attend to his every whim, but, because of his illness and the many special attentions which he required, their presence was a necessity. Every-

where he went, whether to the salons of his friends or to various resort hotels, he soon became acquainted with the servants and became a great favorite with them. Certainly his tipping was not without its effect, but his empathy with the "little people" was undeniable. During the late summer of 1899, Proust vacationed on the south shore of the lake at Evian and immediately became a favorite with the hotel staff. In a letter to his mother, Proust describes the bus driver's reaction to his departure:

L'homme de l'omnibus...à qui j'ai donné 10 francs s'est approché de moi avec beaucoup de feu, me disant que depuis qu'il va dans les hôtels il n'a jamais connu quelqu'un d'aussi bon pour les employés (euphémisme charmant) que moi, que tous les "employés" m'adoraient et que cela lui faisait bien de la peine "que je sois si souffrant parce que si quelqu'un ne le méritait pas c'était moi" et finalement il m'a demandé la permission de me serrer la main. 13

Hotel personnel became a source of information for Proust. He would make a brief social appearance, then go directly to the head porter's office where he would take copious notes. Waiters and valets became his confidants, answering his detailed questions about the background and habits of the clientele.

The Ritz was the place where Proust felt most at home. By the spring of 1917, it had become such an integral part of his social activities that he was known as "Proust of the Ritz." There he entertained his friends with lavish dinner parties, and the head-waiter, Olivier, always saw that things went smoothly. Explaining Proust's fondness

for the Ritz, Princess Bibesco comments: "L'attrait que Marcel Proust éprouvait pour l'hôtel de la place Vendôme venait de multiples raisons, dont l'une des principales était la gentillesse du personnel. Formé à l'école de Ritz, Olivier menait alors la cohorte." ¹⁴ Proust writes in a letter to the Duc de Guiche: "j'espère que nous pourrons dîner tous les deux dans cet hôtel [the Ritz] ...où le personnel est si complaisant que je m'y sens comme chez moi et que j'y ai moins de fatigue."¹⁵

Olivier was chiefly responsible for Proust's high opinion of the Ritz. He was "tall, handsome, distinguished, and slightly sinister; in his devoted genius for his profession he displayed the sanctity of a high-priest, the tact of a diplomat, the strategy of a general, and the sagacity of a great detective." ¹⁶ Olivier was a sort of secret agent for Proust, discovering whatever information about the other habitués Proust requested. His information was invaluable, and much of it was used in A la Recherche du temps perdu. ¹⁷ Olivier himself contributed to the characterization of Aimé, head waiter at the Grand-Hôtel at Balbec.

Olivier also numbered among Proust's devoted friends. Sydney Schiff, writing under the pseudonym of Stephen Hudson, quoted Céleste Albaret as saying that "Monsieur Olivier, the premier maître d'hôtel at the Ritz, was what Monsieur called a great friend of his and he had, it is true, the quality of admiring my dear master, and, however capricious his wishes or whims, would do his utmost to carry them out." ¹⁸

Proust found a certain satisfaction in such relationships which Emilien Carassus explains by noting that Proust "trouvait un aliment à sa rêverie autour des domestiques, qu'il transformait tout aussi mythiquement que les Guer-mantes--avec un peu d'ironie cependant--en divinités, en anges, etc." ¹⁹ He enjoyed acceptance into what he would call, with reference to Charlus, le snobisme de la canaille. It is difficult to imagine that the same man who went to great lengths to secure an introduction to the Comtesse Greffuhle would speak with pride of his friendships with valets and waiters, yet such associations constituted another reason why Proust felt so at home at the Ritz.

A l'hôtel Ritz, tout en satisfaisant son snobisme mondain, il s'égare volontiers dans les corridors et les offices, dans les "détours du sérail"; il écrit à des employés, charge Schiff de faire parvenir à Olivier un message pour tel "commis blond", explique à un garçon le rôle de Soïe, engage divers secrétaires, s'intéresse à plusieurs filleuls de guerre. ²⁰

Proust also became well acquainted with society servants. He would go to a friend's salon and then spend a good part of his time talking with the servants. This juxtaposition of two such different worlds within a same time period seems difficult to imagine, but, as Proust himself points out in A la Recherche, the domestic servant and the aristocrat have more in common than one might expect. Carassus observes that perhaps "la fréquentation des domestiques sert-elle de contrepoids et de justification à son goût pour les relations mondaines (les domestiques constituant d'ailleurs cette classe très particulière où

s'unissent de façon assez factice les caractéristiques populaires et les préjugés aristocratiques)." ²¹

Louis, the butler, and Fifine, the chambermaid, two of Mme Poquet's servants, became Proust's particular favorites. He was especially fond of the latter, even though she had refused to steal a photograph of Jeanne Pouquet for him. Another good friend was Pietro, the Italian valet of Alphonse Daudet. Proust once became very angry when Lucien Daudet prevented him from carrying a heavy package for Pietro. Another time, he invited the Daudets' aged maidservant to go to the theater. These were not, according to his contemporaries, acts of condescending kindness, but sprang from a genuine sympathy and interest. Elisabeth de Clermont-Tonnerre noted that "Il alla...jusqu'à demander un rendez-vous et en quelque sorte une interview au valet de pied de la vieille comtesse de Durfort (née Courcelles), personnage qu'il présentait ensuite à ses amis comme des plus intéressants." ²² Undeniably, part of the motivation for these associations must also be ascribed to Proust's ever-conscious awareness of his vocation: the writing of his novel.

The servants with whom Proust had the most sustained contact and whom he came to know best were the family servants, and later his own. As a child, he made frequent visits to Illiers to see his Uncle Amiot. There he encountered the formidable Ernestine Gallou, housekeeper and devoted servant of Aunt Elisabeth Amiot. Although devoted

to her mistress, habit had made Ernestine less deferential to others, with the exception of the visiting Prousts.

The Françoise of Combray is strikingly similar to Ernestine Gallou. Ernestine was a marvelous cook whose cuisine was every bit the equal of that ascribed to Françoise in A la Recherche: she even procured the raw materials in the same manner, crying out "Filthy beast" as she chased her prey about the yard. She was no less menacing to her inferiors in the household, with an extra measure of her wrath reserved for a hapless kitchen maid. Her colorful speech was cluttered with archaic words and expressions. Consequently, it comes as no surprise to find a "vieille servante d'Illiers" included in Proust's formula for the characterization of Françoise (discovered by André Maurois in Proust's unpublished notebooks):

(Félicie + une certaine Marie + une autre
vieille servante d'Illiers = Françoise) 23

The "Félicie" Proust mentions is Félicie Fitau, who served as Proust's parents' housekeeper while they were still living. It was she who reluctantly made the move with the Proust family in 1900 from 9, boulevard Malesherbes to a more fashionable address at 45, rue de Courcelles; and, like Françoise, she was quite discomfited by the move. Félicie was already up in years, and she was not the easiest person to get along with. Nonetheless she devotedly tended to Proust's dying mother, and she later related to him how his mother, although in a coma, reacted to the sound of his

bell. This incident as well as the sickbed relationship of Félicie and Mme Proust are recreated in A la Recherche in the scenes between Françoise and Marcel's dying grandmother.

While Félicie served the Prousts as housekeeper, another servant named Marie was in charge of the cooking. Little is known about her, but she is apparently the "Marie" to whom Proust refers in his notebook. In a letter to his mother, Proust indicates that Marie was not much of a comfort to him. While he and Félicie did not always have a harmonious relationship, Proust did find her kindnesses soothing. During a lonely time in Paris he wrote:

La paix et fort affectueuse est revenue
entre moi et Félicie et dans ces cas-là
je la préfère infiniment à toute autre.
Marie plus lettrée est moins littéraire
dans son langage. Et surtout l'affection
de Félicie est charmante et simple. 24

Proust himself was becoming difficult to live with, and after the death of his mother in 1905, things became very strained between Proust and the aged housekeeper. Finally, in the summer of 1907 when he was making plans to leave for Cabourg, Proust dismissed her and hired Nicolas Cottin and his wife, Céline, who would remain in his service for seven years.

Nicolas Cottin, a stout peasant, was "tall and rotund, thicklipped and clean-shaven, with low forehead, narrow eyes, and an expression of crafty stupidity." 25 His wife Céline has been described as "une Bourguignonne au nez retroussé, aux cheveux blonds, jeune et étourdie." 26

They were both in their late twenties. Proust had moved again, in 1906, to 102, boulevard Haussmann, and it was here that the Cottins found themselves installed. Proust was a generous employer--they were given double wages--but a demanding one. Céline would go to bed at 9:30 p.m. in order to be up for Proust's dawn coffee ritual; Nicolas would stay up until 4:00 a.m. with his master, driving him wherever he wanted to go or, on occasion, taking down notes. Céline was not pleased by the strange hours her husband was compelled to keep, but she had to admit that the pay was good and that Proust was extremely kind. As Henri Bonnet noted, "Il est d'une extrême gentillesse avec ses domestiques, ne leur parlant qu'en termes extrêmement polis. Ce sont les principaux compagnons de sa vie...Proust a l'art de se faire servir et aimer." ²⁷

The Cottins were not as respectful of Proust as they might have been. Nicolas had a habit of getting drunk when things got difficult. Céline rebelled to some extent against the kind of life they were forced to lead and could never overcome her amazement at the way Proust lived: "cette vie de cloître." His cork-lined bedchamber had an ambivalent effect on her: "ce cachot qui l'a terrifiée et qui, en même temps, lui donnait envie de rire." ²⁸ When the triple peal of Proust's bell sounded, Nicolas would remark to his wife: "There's your pal Valentin ringing" using Proust's baptismal first name with irony and some disrespect. ²⁹

Proust sometimes wrote out his orders; when he

discovered that Nicolas was making a practice of keeping his notes, he began writing them in verse. When he was feeling well, he amused himself by trying to educate the Cottins. He copied verse for Céline, talked to her at length on various subjects and had her reading Chateaubriand.

In spite of their necessarily close relationship, Céline was always intimidated by Proust. Paul Guth, who interviewed her for Le Figaro littéraire, found her to be "médusée devant l'élégance de Proust." She could never become accustomed to the extreme politeness in his manner toward her: "Il nous disait toujours: 'Veuillez avoir l'obligeance de...' Ah! ce n'était pas comme les patrons de maintenant." She lacked the perception and intelligence of Céleste Albaret and was consequently unable to fully appreciate Proust's sensitivity. Guth remarked that she seemed "encore effrayée par la finesse des sens de Proust. Comme si elle s'était trouvée en présence d'un animal aux réactions fabuleusement imprévues. Une espèce de tatou de l'Amazone ou de tarsier de Malaisie." 30

It was Céline who served Proust tea and toast on a cold January evening in 1909. His unexpected reaction became the basis for the celebrated episode of the madeleine in A la Recherche. It was Céline also who, jealous of her successor in Proust's household, referred to Céleste as the enjoleuse, the same expression later used by Françoise to refer to the courrières at Balbec and to Mlle Albertine. Otherwise, Céline contributed little to the characterization

of Françoise, but her name was used for one of Marcel's two great-aunts at Combray.

The relationship between Céline and her employer had gone from bad to worse in the years between 1907 and 1913. Finally Proust dismissed her, although he kept Nicolas in his service. Céline's place was filled by Céleste Albaret, the wife of Proust's chauffeur, who came in from the suburbs to perform small household chores and run his errands. This was early in 1914.

When the war broke out in June, Odilon Albaret and Nicolas were both called up, and Céleste moved into Proust's apartment. Nicolas contracted pleurisy at the front and died in 1916. Céline bitterly accused Proust of being responsible for his demise, maintaining that years of service in the suffocating atmosphere of Proust's room had given Nicolas a weak chest. In spite of her accusations, Proust did what he could to help the destitute widow and her infant son. By the time Guth interviewed her in 1954, Céline's bitterness had doubtless been tempered somewhat by the celebrity of her former employer. Guth writes: "Elle voudrait qu'on sache combien Monsieur était bon et quelle reconnaissance elle lui garde." 31

In 1907, when Proust went to Cabourg for a vacation, he had hired a cab and three chauffeurs: Jossien, Alfred Agostinelli and Odilon Albaret. Odilon, like Nicolas, had a peasant quality about him; he is described by Mina Curtiss as "a short, ruddy, plump little man" with rather rough

speech often slurring into his native patois.³² Mme Scheikévitch remembered that Proust would say to Odilon: "You are not an interesting subject of study for me, for you always tell me the truth" and then he would describe someone he did find interesting and send his chauffeur to fetch him. ³³

On one occasion Odilon was sent after André Gide. Gide was struck by the way the chauffeur phrased his request, and in his Journal he records his impressions of the couple.

Et sa phrase est beaucoup plus longue et plus compliquée que je ne la cite; je pense qu'il l'avait apprise en route, car, comme je l'avais d'abord interrompu, il l'a reprise pour la réciter d'une haleine. Céleste, de même, lorsqu'elle m'avait ouvert la porte l'autre soir, après avoir exprimé les regrets qu'avait Proust de ne pouvoir me recevoir, ajoutait: "Monsieur prie Monsieur Gide de se convaincre qu'il pense incessamment à lui." (J'ai noté la phrase aussitôt.) ³⁴

While Odilon dutifully served his master, he lacked the spiritual devotion that his wife brought to the task. The relationship between Proust and Céleste was remarkable for its closeness, its depth and its mutual respect.

Proust took a paternal interest in the affairs of the Albarets. Their violent quarrels distressed him; Céleste was known to have a temper and he was amazed that Odilon could tolerate it. He was also interested in improving their minds, and the Albarets (including Céleste's sister, Marie Gineste, and Odilon's niece, Yvonne Albaret) received lessons in French history.

They, in turn, provided Proust with a ready source of information on rural life. As Céleste explained to Sydney Schiff, who translated her remarks as follows,

He was always interested in the homes and families of those who served him. He could describe the country and the village where I was born, the mountains, and bend of the river where my father's little farm stood, and the great golden boughs showering their autumn leaves into the stream. 35

But Céleste's contributions went far beyond mere information. She became an essential part of Proust's existence and a major factor in his being able to complete A la Recherche before his death.

Céleste was a tall, beautiful, stately woman. When Proust sent her in his place to call on the Princess Soutzo, the Princess was very impressed by her appearance: "très grande, très blanche, serrée dans une jaquette de loutre ajustée à la taille comme celle de la reine Alexandra, un minuscule manchon de loutre à la main, des tresses blondes coiffées très plat, très serré autour de la tête. Céleste avait l'allure étonnante d'une dame de Bastien Lepage qui aurait été la confidente de Charles Haas." 36

Equally impressed was Jacques Porel, son of the director of the Odéon and the celebrated actress Réjane, who discovered Céleste in his antichamber upon returning home late one evening (Céleste, like her husband, and Nicolas Cottin before them, was often sent on nocturnal errands since Proust's schedule reversed night and day). Porel saw before him "une longue dame assise, mais comme

ceux qui ont quelque chose à obtenir, et qui, à tout instant, vont se lever." And when Céleste rose to meet him, he took note of her appearance: "un long corps fragile, surmonté d'une petite tête penchée - Un peu comme un ange de cathédrale. Un sourire d'une surprenante fixité. Elle était habillée comme le sont les provinciales, dans les romans. C'était Céleste Albaret. Céleste, sans qui la vie eût été, pour Marcel Proust, un problème insoluble." After having conveyed Proust's message, "Céleste se retira avec toutes sortes de gestes gracieux et humbles comme on en voit à certaines dames en noir dans les sacristies, les jours d'enterrement." 37

Céleste was an excellent cook though she rarely had the opportunity to utilize her talent; Proust could not abide cooking odors in the house. When he could get out, he ate at the Ritz or Larue's, and when he was indisposed, Odilon brought him ice cream and beer. It was Céleste's spiritual, rather than her domestic, qualities that Proust prized. She was far more intelligent than Céline, though she had had little education. Proust wrote in a letter to André Gide: "ma femme de chambre qui est d'une ignorance invraisemblable (je lui ai appris récemment que Bonaparte et Napoléon étaient une même personne; je n'ai pas pu arriver à lui apprendre un peu d'orthographe et elle n'a jamais eu la patience de lire une demie-page de moi), mais qui est remplie de dons extraordinaires." 38

Chief among her gifts were a certain poetic diction

and a talent for mimicry. She adopted Proust's tournure de phrase and the rhythm and intonation of his speech. She also made her own his long, carefully constructed sentences. One example of her way of expressing herself is a note she wrote to Jacques Rivière while Proust was ill:

Monsieur Rivière,
 Monsieur Marcel Proust ne se rend
 compte de rien, c'est pour qu'il ne sait
 encore pas que vous lui avait envoyer votre
 livre. Mais s'il se rendra croyez bien que
 rien ne pourra le captiver autant que la
 lecture de votre livre, ainsi qu'il s'était
 tant jouit à lire jadis.

Céleste 39

She continually delighted Proust with her imitations of his visitors and friends, and Proust inscribed the following in her copy of Pastiches et mélanges: "A la Reine de pastiche, reine qu'on voudrait un peu moins impérieuse, un peu plus majestueusement et doucement reine, son humble imitateur et pasticheur, Marcel Proust." 40

In temperament, Céleste was a decided improvement over her predecessor, but she was by no means a weak personality. She had a temper which occasionally got the best of her, and she could be every bit as imperious as old Françoise. Proust once wrote some verses to describe her:

Grande, fine, belle, un peu maigre,
 Tantôt lasse, tantôt allègre,
 Charmant les princes et la pègre,
 Lançant à Marcel un mot aigre,
 Rendant pour le miel le vinaigre,
 Spirituelle, agile, intègre,
 C'est la presque nièce de Nègre. 41

(Nègre, Archbishop of Tours, was her brother's uncle by marriage.)

Another inscription offers further insight into what Proust thought of the personality of Céleste. In her presentation copy of A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs he set down a double-edged assessment of his Céleste:

A la jeune femme en fleurs (pas des fleurs sans épines, hélas!) mais, au-dessus de nos vêtements ensanglantés sourit paisiblement avec ses yeux miroirs-de-ciel une Jeanne d'Arc-Récamier-Botticelli, qui semble, en effet, nous sourire, mais quelle erreur! Son mari, le cher Odilon, se penche comme le Titien dans le tableau de Laura Dianti. Mais elle, miroir devant un miroir, ce n'est ni à Odilon ni à moi qu'elle sourit, mais à elle-même. 42

Céleste's life with Proust was an exacting one. She was completely devoted to him and would obey his every wish. She confided to Sydney Schiff that "I had long ago learnt that whatever order he gave me, it was my business to carry it out blindly. He exacted obedience from everyone because he was born to rule. And who would not have accepted his tyranny with joy?" ⁴³ Admittedly, it would take a special sort of person to conform happily to Proust's strange existence and to be willing to act on his every whim, but in spite of the demands made upon her, Céleste did not rebel. She willingly gave up her own activities to serve him. The first time she prepared to leave for mass after entering his employ, Proust protested, and she never went again while he was alive. She strictly observed all the orders he gave her and spent her waking hours seeing to his comforts much as a mother would care for her child.

Céleste gourmandait souvent ce grand enfant gaspilleur et sans nul sens pratique; elle raillait sa phobie des microbes. Parfois, elle essayait de gouverner, de remettre de l'ordre. Elle remplaçait auprès de lui la sollicitude maternelle: "Je n'ai pas davantage aimé ma propre fille que Monsieur Marcel," déclare-t-elle avec une simplicité émouvante. 44

Among her duties were making the café au lait for Proust at dawn, running his errands and telephoning his food orders to a restaurant (which involved leaving the apartment because Proust did not have a phone). It was forbidden to enter his room until he rang. Once he did not ring for two days, but in spite of her anxiety, she dared not disturb him without permission. During the almost ten years she was in his house, she never saw him become angry. When he was unhappy with her, he would raise his head and ask to be left alone.

Céleste protested when asked by Mina Curtiss if she had ever wanted to leave Proust's service: "No, Madame, no matter how difficult it was, how imprisoned I sometimes felt in that strange house, I was attached to him by the very peculiarities of his nature. I could not leave Monsieur Proust. He was so good." 45 Proust's great need for her cemented the bond, and he became so dependent upon Céleste that she was essential to his very existence: "Céleste me soigne mieux que personne et je ne veux qu'elle auprès de moi." 46 Céleste was aware of the role she played in Proust's life and justifiably proud of it. She could never be accused of having capitalized on his celebrity; though

genuinely proud of his accomplishments, her attachment to him was motivated by deep respect and affection.

Proust was quite content to live among the Albarets, who were becoming more numerous in his household. Céleste's sister Marie lived with them intermittently, and Odilon's niece Yvonne, whom Proust had first met in the summer of 1919, came to live with them early in 1922. Yvonne took dictation from Proust, and she also typed his formal correspondence as well as the typescripts of La Prisonnière and Albertine disparue. She had a large slang vocabulary which contrasted sharply with the beautiful French of Céleste. Françoise's daughter with her predilection for argot was inspired by Yvonne.

The increased number of people in the household put a strain on both Céleste and her master. Proust comments on the situation in a letter to Princess Soutzo in July, 1919:

L'hôtel me semble en ce moment difficile du fait de la multiplication des Albaret (nom du mari de Céleste). Mais d'autre part il peut devenir d'un jour à l'autre possible [il pense à déménager] car Céleste est exténuée, ce qui se comprend, puisqu'au lieu de faire le service de quelqu'un qui prend une tasse de café au lait, elle fait celui d'une famille qui fait deux repas substantiels, se lève, etc. 47

Throughout her years of service to Proust, Céleste was most helpful to him in his work. He felt that he could talk to her about things and people he had seen, and he sensed that she understood. Mme Scheikévitch relates that

once he remarked: "Jamais Céleste, non jamais je n'aurais pu croire que vous vous mettriez tellement bien au courant de mon travail." 48

After returning home from an evening out, he would keep Céleste up until dawn relating what all had taken place and asking for her comments. As Proust began to press harder and harder to finish A la Recherche before his death, Céleste's help became invaluable. He depended upon her to take down his corrections and to carefully assemble the valuable scraps of paper upon which he scribbled random phrases and ideas. A few hours before he died he was dictating a passage destined to amplify Bergotte's reaction to approaching death and based upon his emotions in view of his own imminent demise. Céleste faithfully took down his words, although she was later unable to fulfill his final request: "Je compte sur vous. Ne manquez pas d'ajouter ceci à mon manuscrit où cette partie doit faire suite." 49

When he died, Céleste was overcome. Mme Scheikévitch quotes her as saying: "My world centered around him. I couldn't believe my world could stop so soon--only when he was dying did he really start trusting me." 50 She avowed that she would never forget Proust and would always be grateful for the role she had been allowed to play in his life. She told Sydney Schiff that she had never known anyone like him: "Monsieur resembled no one. He was incomparable--composed of two parts--mind and heart--and what heart!" 51

After his death, Céleste carefully preserved all the notes he had written her and the things of his that were now hers to keep. When Mme Scheikévitch, who had known Proust well, met Céleste for the first time, she was struck by the devotion the servant had for the memory of her former employer. The French government also realized and publicly recognized the great contribution Céleste Albaret had made to Proust's work and to the perpetuation of his memory. On July 10, 1953, at Cabourg where she had accompanied Proust in years past, Céleste was awarded the "médaille de la qualité française," having been selected by the jury as the person "qui a le mieux servi la mémoire de Marcel Proust." One reporter summed up her role as "à la fois la femme de charge et la femme de confiance, la gardienne aussi bien que la gouvernante, la secrétaire à l'occasion et, au besoin, l'infirmière de l'écrivain." 52

This remarkable young woman was one of the most essential elements in Proust's daily existence. Repeatedly she has been designated by critics as the primary, if not sole, model for the characterization of Françoise. Marie Scheikévitch, who knew both Proust and Céleste, is adamant in her insistence that Céleste and Françoise have very little in common. Having known the principals as well as she did, she is certainly qualified to comment. She felt that to anyone who knew them both, "il est de toute évidence qu'aucun des traits physiques ou moraux de Françoise

ne correspond à ceux de Céleste." ⁵³ She points out that Françoise is never a young woman in A la Recherche, while Céleste entered Proust's service when she was twenty-one and was only thirty-one when he died.

Mme Scheikévitch considered Céleste to be a unique and remarkable young woman whose comments were often quoted or transcribed in the novel, particularly in the courrières episode. The temperament and imperiousness of Céleste are definitely present in Françoise however. In particular, Céleste contributes heavily to the characterization of Françoise in the final pages of Le Temps retrouvé where Marcel speculates about how helpful Françoise will be to him in the composition of his novel.

Céleste was many things to Proust, not the least of which was a representative example of the common people. Everything about her background and her way of life genuinely intrigued Proust, and he was continually asking her questions in an effort to comprehend a social level so different from his own.

His contacts with le peuple had not always been limited to the servant class. During his army service at Orléans, he had met many peasants. The same was true of the early idyllic days spent at Illiers. In all of his encounters, Proust found himself drawn to them by a natural sympathy and understanding, and he admired many of their traits. Jacques Porel, who knew Proust well, remarked

that "Il avait, pour le bon sens populaire, fait de simplicité et d'obstination, un culte véritable." 54

Proust seemed to feel more secure among the common people, perhaps in part because he knew he was superior to them and perhaps also because his generosity insured their continued loyalty. Proust was extremely considerate and polite toward those of lower social station and probably would have enjoyed their affection and loyalty without having had to pay for it.

For Proust, the female representatives of the lower classes consisted primarily of chambermaids, cooks, an occasional marchande or laitière, and most particularly, his own household servants. He did, however, have a passing acquaintance with the ladies of the night. At least one instance has been recorded by Paul Léautaud, according to whom Proust would have himself driven to a brothel. Once there, he would have the chauffeur bring him the entremetteuse. He would then ask her to send out three or four women whom he would invite to accompany him in his taxi. He would spend several hours thus ensconced, drinking milk and asking them what they thought about all sorts of things. 55

With these exceptions, his contacts with the lower classes gravitated toward its masculine representatives. The manual laborer held a particular attraction for him. Because of his own weakened physical condition, "il éprouvait une sorte d'excitation devant le travail de l'homme du commun." 56 Proust would have Albert Le Cuziat drive him

into the poorer sections of Paris because "il aimait à faire la connaissance de jeunes gens du peuple, qu'il interrogeait pendant de longues heures sur tout ce qu'il ne faisait qu'imaginer." ⁵⁷ Occasionally, he would have a worker brought to his apartment so he could talk to him. It seems hardly surprising that during the war he was deeply concerned about the deaths of those soldiers drawn from the ranks of the common people. In a letter to Lucien Daudet written during the war he observed that "je crois que les 'gens bien' sont quelquefois très bien. Mais leur mort ne peut pas me faire plus de peine que celle des autres. Et le hasard de mes amitiés fait qu'elle m'en a causé jusqu'ici beaucoup moins." ⁵⁸

After 1907, Proust's homosexual interests gravitated toward the lower classes. At first, he had maintained his two so different kinds of associations in proper perspective: he had sought his intimate friends among his social peers or among the young aristocrats he knew, while maintaining many amicable, but less personal, contacts with those members of the lower classes with whom he logically came into contact: waiters, valets and servants. As Carassus remarks:

Or Proust, avant guerre, équilibre encore les deux snobismes, se justifiant même auprès de Misia Godebska du reproche de snobisme en arguant de ses relations avec des amis valets de chambre ou chauffeurs d'automobile: "Les valets de chambre sont plus instruits que les ducs et parlent un plus joli français, mais ils sont plus pointilleux sur l'étiquette et moins simples, plus susceptibles." ⁵⁹

When Proust despaired of finding a meaningful and satisfying relationship among his social peers, he turned to social inferiors for solace and companionship. Now he sought the affections of members of the working class, beginning with Robert Ulrich. Ulrich was the first of Proust's several male secretaries and the first of a succession of young men from the lower classes who would, whether as servant, secretary or protégé, share his home and his sexual proclivities.

After the death of his mother in September, 1905, Proust had found himself free to follow his inclinations more openly. Ulrich entered his service in January, 1907, and served intermittently as his secretary for the next several years. He was not very interested in men, and he kept a mistress; Proust was aware of the situation and seemed to give it his approval. Ulrich accompanied Proust to Cabourg in 1909 but left Proust's employ shortly thereafter. In August, 1913, he reappeared on Proust's doorstep looking for work, and Proust did his best to find him employment.

In the winter of 1911, Albert Nahmias became Proust's occasional secretary. Proust had met him at Constantine Ullmann's and had thought of taking him to Cabourg in July; at the last minute he had discovered a substitute at the hotel, a lady shorthand-typist, so he had decided against taking Nahmias along. Soon he had second thoughts, sent Albert 300 francs and invited him to come anyway, offering

a salary, a food allowance and a room in his apartment. Nahmias declined, but he entered Proust's employ that winter. His primary responsibility was supervising the typing of the manuscripts.

The following summer, Nahmias finally accompanied Proust to Cabourg, and this was to be the high point of their relationship. Proust was already becoming interested in another young man. Nahmias continued to be of service to Proust on occasion, particularly in connection with his relationship with Agostinelli. He once asked Nahmias for information on private detectives, presumably with an eye to having Agostinelli followed, and after Agostinelli's unexpected flight to the Riviera, Nahmias went on Proust's behalf, much as Marcel sent Saint-Loup to intercede for Albertine's return in A la Recherche, to persuade the errant Agostinelli to return to Paris. The mission was a failure.

The Agostinelli who caused Proust such mental anguish and necessitated Nahmias' sudden journey was the same Alfred Agostinelli who was hired by Proust, along with Odilon Albaret, at Cabourg in 1907 to serve as his chauffeur. At that time, Agostinelli was eighteen years old, a young man "whose round face, large, dark-ringed eyes and black mustache gave him a curious, fleeting resemblance to the master to whom he was later to cause such suffering...his features show intelligence and ingratiating charm, with a perhaps deceptive hint of softness and indolence, but no sign of evil." ⁶⁰ Attired in his black rubber cape and

peaked cap, he evoked the poetic images which appeared in an article Proust published in Le Figaro that fall, "Impressions de route en automobile," an amalgam of his travels in the Cabourg region: "mon mécanicien avait revêtu une vaste mante de caoutchouc et coiffé une sorte de capuche qui, en serrant la plénitude de son jeune visage imberbe, le faisait ressembler, tandis que nous nous enfoncions de plus en plus vite dans la nuit, à quelque pèlerin ou plutôt à quelque nonne de la vitesse." ⁶¹ Even the steering wheel of the automobile contributes to his description: "Mais la plupart du temps il tenait seulement dans sa main sa roue...assez semblable aux croix de consécration que tiennent les apôtres adossés aux colonnes du coeur dans la Sainte-Chapelle de Paris." ⁶² These same metaphors are used to describe Marcel's chauffeur at Balbec in A la Recherche.

After the summer at Cabourg in 1907, Proust returned to Paris and did not see Agostinelli again until the following summer when he once more served as Proust's chauffeur. This time Agostinelli accompanied Proust back to Paris, where Proust settled temporarily in the Hôtel des Réservoirs at Versailles until his new apartment at 102, boulevard Haussmann could be made ready. Agostinelli remained in his service for a time, but Proust lost touch with him in 1909.

In January, 1913, Agostinelli reappeared in search of work. He asked to be Proust's chauffeur, but Proust already had one (Odilon Albaret), so Agostinelli was hired as his secretary. He informed Proust that he was now married, so

Proust permitted him to bring along his wife. Anna, the new Mrs. Agostinelli (and in reality, only his mistress), was unattractive and boring. She didn't like Proust (perhaps she was jealous), and the feeling was mutual. Proust's main problem with Agostinelli was women, and this included Anna, with whom he had no way to compete. Agostinelli was unfaithful to them both. The situation was becoming quite impossible, but there was no satisfactory solution. Proust would not let Agostinelli out of his sight, and he admitted to Emile Straus "que lui et sa femme sont devenus partie intégrante de mon existence." 63

That summer (1913) Proust decided, on an hour's notice, to leave for Cabourg, after having previously decided that he would not go that year. He took Agostinelli with him and left poor Anna to follow with Nicolas Cottin. After only a few days on the coast, Proust just as suddenly decided to return to Paris, and once again Anna and Nicolas were left to bring up the rear. The cause of this erratic behavior remains unknown, and the only explanation that Proust gave--i.e. that he had left behind a woman in Paris and that when he got to Cabourg, he became anxious about her and had to return--was, curiously enough, the same story Marcel told Albertine to explain his sudden desire to leave Balbec.⁶⁴

It was after their return to Paris that Proust thought about hiring a detective, and he became generally more possessive and repressive. Agostinelli was becoming

restive, and he began to think of leaving. His fascination with automobiles had waned with the passing of the novelty and excitement they had generated. What now caught his eye was aviation, and he began to frequent nearby airfields. Suddenly one day in the first week of December, 1913, Agostinelli was gone. Proust learned that he had returned to his native Riviera and dispatched Nahmias to undertake what proved to be unsuccessful efforts to secure his return. When flying season began, Agostinelli signed up for lessons, using the name of Marcel Swann. On his second solo flight on May 30, 1914, his plane crashed into the sea, and his body was recovered eight days later. He was dead at twenty-five, and Proust was profoundly grieved.

Belatedly, Proust had discovered Agostinelli's intellectual qualities and had declared that the letters he had received after Alfred's flight were those of a great writer (which is reminiscent of Charlus' statement that Morel "écrit comme un ange"). He had written to André Gide of "un garçon d'une intelligence délicieuse...J'ai découvert en lui ce mérite si merveilleusement incompatible avec tout ce qu'il était, je l'ai découvert avec stupéfaction."⁶⁵ After Agostinelli's death, Proust became even more convinced of his qualities and two months after the tragic accident, he wrote to Emile Straus: "je vous aurais apporté des lettres du pauvre Agostinelli et je pense que vous auriez été stupéfait de lire sous la plume de ce chauffeur

des phrases dignes des plus grands écrivains." ⁶⁶ In another letter to Straus he avowed that: "C'est qu'Agostinelli (ce que je n'avais pas supposé à Cabourg où je ne l'avais connu que comme chauffeur, et ensuite j'étais resté des années sans le revoir) était un être extraordinaire possédant peut-être les dons intellectuels les plus grands que j'ai connus!" ⁶⁷

The impact of the young pilot's death continued to be felt, and almost one year later Proust would write to Clément de Maugny of "un ami qui j'ai perdu il y a un an, et qui avec ma mère, mon père, est la personne que j'ai le plus aimée." ⁶⁸ (It is interesting to note that he does not include his brother Robert in this group.) And two years later, fully three years after Agostinelli's death, he wrote to René Blum that "un peu avant la guerre j'avais perdu la personne que j'aimais le plus." ⁶⁹

In his bereavement, Proust had not forgotten the "widow" whom he had so disliked. In his characteristically generous way, he invited her to stay with him for a while, and she accepted. He also attempted to help Agostinelli's family. Emile Agostinelli served as Proust's secretary for several months following his brother's death, and Proust later used his influence to help him obtain another job.

After Agostinelli's sudden and tragic demise, Proust's sexual predilections led him down a rung or two on the social ladder. Emilien Carassus notes that the "tares sexuelles de Proust furent en partie orientées par le milieu où il vécut

vers cette curiosité encore factice, d'une pègre à l'usage de la 'haute'." ⁷⁰ Nonetheless Proust was not a thrill-seeker looking for something different or for something to amuse himself. He began to frequent the lowest levels of society as a last resort, seeking always to fulfill the need he felt so strongly for a satisfying relationship. Proust comments on his circle of friends in a letter to Misia Sert: "Si, dans les très rares amis qui continuent par habitude à venir demander de mes nouvelles, il passe ça et là encore un duc ou un prince, ils sont largement compensés par d'autres amis dont l'un est valet de chambre et l'autre chauffeur d'automobile et qui je traite mieux." ⁷¹

This predilection was assured by Proust's association with the man who would be his partner and accomplice in his descent into the social depths. Albert Le Cuziat, a Breton by birth, had been a footman at Count Orloff's when Proust first met him in 1911. Previously, he had served as first footman for Constantin Radziwill, and while in his employ, Albert had an experience with a young nobleman which parallels that of the huissier with the Duc de Châtellerauld in A la Recherche. After leaving Radziwill's service and prior to entering Orloff's Albert had served a succession of noblemen, and he had become passionately interested in the nobility per se.

Albert avait le goût domestique; il aimait servir comme d'autres aiment commander. On n'eut sans doute pas beaucoup de peine à le faire servir de plus d'une façon. Et c'est ainsi, qu'ébloui par ces princes, il se passionna pour cette noblesse à laquelle il ouvrait chaque soir les portes des salons. Peu d'hommes à notre époque la connurent aussi bien que lui. Il savait toutes les origines, toutes les alliances, vous disait pourquoi l'ainé s'appelait Adhéaume chez les C*** ou Bazin chez les Guermantes. Il savait les faits d'armes, les maladies, les adultères de trois générations et sans doute avait-il découvert que le service du vice est ce qui établit la plus sûre intimité, la seule possible entre un grand seigneur et un petit paysan. Je crois qu'il se fit confident, giton et pourvoyeur par snobisme, puis il y prit goût. 72

When Proust first met Albert, he was attracted to him intellectually. Albert was quite witty and extremely well versed on the nobility. Proust called him his Almanach de Gotha (a social and diplomatic register) and delighted in posing hypothetical questions about who should be given precedence over whom, etc. Proust was so pleased with his clever answers that he assured Albert he possessed "le savoir de Pic de la Mirandole et l'esprit de Mme du Deffand."⁷³ Proust sent for him often and always paid him with a check for his conversation.

From these first meetings until the spring of 1917, Proust was still preoccupied with thoughts of the late Agostinelli. About this time, Albert decided to open a male brothel, and with the financial backing of Proust, he took over the Hôtel de Marigny at 11, rue de l'Arcade in Paris. At thirty-six Le Cuziat was no longer able to serve his beloved nobility as he had in the days of his youth, but through his new establishment he could insure that they

would be able to pursue their inclinations under the best of circumstances. Maurice Sachs, who visited Albert's subsequent establishment, "Les Bains du Ballon d'Alsace," refers to Le Cuziat as "un homme d'une très grande distinction."⁷⁴ "C'était quand je le connus un homme d'une cinquantaine d'années, chauve, aux tempes blanches, les lèvres très minces, les yeux très bleus, le profil très aigu, avec une certaine clarté bretonne dans le regard." ⁷⁵

The Jupien of Le Temps retrouvé is easily recognizable in the Albert of the Hôtel de Marigny, and Proust could in some ways be compared to Charlus. It was during this period that Proust experimented with various forms of sexual degradation and sadism. The slaughter of animals excited him, and Albert would bring him butchers whom he could quiz incessantly about their métier. The butcher and the homme des abattoirs of Le Temps retrouvé found their models here. (RTP, III, pp. 824-27)

There has been considerable debate about the extent of Albert's contribution to the characterization of Albertine. He had an affair with a man named André, who has therefore been considered as a possible key to the characterization of Andrée. It seems doubtful that either made any significant contribution to these characters, though it is quite likely that their names were used. It is also true that the relationship between Albert and André caused Proust to become jealous and that it was the reason for his eventual separation from Albert in 1921.

During their brief association, Albert had been most useful to Proust. He claimed no other role than that of confidant and procurer. This in itself provided Proust with, as Georges Cattau observed, "une abondante documentation sur certaines mœurs scabreuses et certaines formes de perversion."⁷⁶ Albert had no imagination, but he did possess keen gifts of observation. When Céleste reproached Proust for associating with Albert, he replied: "Vous avez bien raison, ma chère Céleste, mais que voulez-vous? il m'est indispensable en raison des renseignements qu'il me fournit."⁷⁷ As was so often the case in the course of Proust's life, his choice of intimates seemed dictated by a conscious--or perhaps subconscious--consideration of the furtherance and amplification of his novel.

The relationship between Proust and Albert was primarily an association for mutual benefit. Together they had opened the Hôtel de Marigny in 1917, but by 1919 Proust was already involved with the last love of his life, a young Swiss employee of the Ritz named Henri Rochat. He hired Rochat as his secretary, and then made him a captive much as Agostinelli had been. Rochat was a taciturn young man in whom Proust found an amazing gift for painting; their relationship was destined to be of short duration. Henri fled from Proust in the summer of 1920, but returned soon after and was once again taking dictation that fall. When he got into serious trouble over a broken engagement to a concierge's daughter (reminiscent of Morel's engagement

to Jupien's niece), he had little choice but to leave the country. Proust wrote to several of his friends to obtain a position for Rochat. In a candid letter to Horace Finaly he explained: "Sans doute je dois vous confier que ce jeune homme est un peu paresseux, et je dois ajouter qu'il n'aime pas beaucoup les chiffres." ⁷⁸ In spite of these dubious qualifications, a job was finally found in a bank in the United States, and Henri sailed out of Proust's life on June 4, 1921.

This same year his association with Albert Le Cuziat ended, and there were to be no more young men in Proust's life. His last remaining year was spent in a race with death to finish his lengthy novel--the masterpiece to which all of his associations had contributed, no matter how degrading some of those associations had been.

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Another segment of what was at the time considered to be the lower classes also left its mark on A la Recherche. The bohemian atmosphere of the theatrical world is found throughout Proust's long novel, and the theater was a strong influence in his own life. As early as age fourteen, in answer to some questions in English in Antoinette Faure's notebook, he named his favorite occupations: "la lecture, la rêverie, les vers, l'histoire, le théâtre" and when asked to describe his idea of happiness, he wrote: "Vivre

près de tous ceux que j'aime avec le charme de la nature, une quantité de livres et de partitions et, pas loin, un théâtre français." 79

In the fall of 1890, after his release from the army, Proust enrolled in the Faculté de Droit and soon became a close friend of Gaston de Caillavet, later to become a well-known writer of comedy. That winter, Gaston wrote a revue for his friends to present, and Proust was asked to serve as prompter. It was a disastrous choice; he became so caught up in the play that all he did was laugh uproariously and shout loud bravos at the cast. Later, they asked him to take a role in a one-act play Gaston had written, but he refused. His future theater experience would be limited to that of an enthusiastic patron and critic.

He wrote some notes on the theater for the Revue lilas, a magazine published by a group of students at the Lycée Condorcet. In 1897, he collaborated on La Revue d'art dramatique. In 1903 he was planning to accept a post as literary and theater critic for Renaissance latine, and probably would have, if Constantin Brancovan had made good his promise to offer it to him. Proust continued to be an active theatergoer and also attended operas and ballets. Within two years of his death, he was still following theatrical activities and attending in person whenever his health permitted.

He had the opportunity to observe at closer hand some of the better known actors and actresses of his day in

the salons to which he was invited. Mme Aubernon presented theatrical performances with her own private company. The great Réjane and Antoine occasionally performed there, as did Robert de Flers. Mme Lemaire hosted Sarah Bernhardt, Coquelin and Mounet-Sully in addition to Réjane. Through Robert de Montesquiou and Reynaldo Hahn, Proust met the incomparable Sarah who performed at Montesquiou's soirées from time to time.

Of the great actresses of his day, none could equal Sarah Bernhardt in tragedy and Réjane in light comedy roles. Of the two, it was Réjane that Proust came to know more personally, in spite of a near disastrous first encounter. It was at Cabourg, in 1914, and the war with the Germans had just begun. Proust and Réjane were both at Mme Straus' Clos des Mûriers, and Proust was loudly complaining of the wartime ban on the playing of Richard Wagner's music. Réjane, insensed at this apparent lack of patriotism, reacted accordingly: "She called me a Boche and nearly pushed me into a rosebush," Proust later related.⁸⁰

Her son, Jacques Porel, in his memoirs Fils de Réjane, recounted his first meeting with Proust in 1917. As he entered the cork-lined bedchamber on boulevard Haussmann, the first words spoken by his host were: "Cette femme que j'admire follement m'a traité de Boche chez Mme Straus... Quelle merveille d'être traité de Boche par Mme Réjane. Cela vaut tellement mieux que l'indifférence."⁸¹

In June, 1919, when Proust suddenly found himself homeless, Porel invited him and Céleste to come live in

an empty apartment in his mother's house at 8, bis, rue Laurent-Pichat. Proust foresaw some of the disadvantages of the move, and Céleste had no illusions whatever about the success of the venture. Nonetheless, they went. They stayed for six months, and conditions were worse than they had imagined. Proust described what things were like in a letter to Mrs. Sydney Schiff in July, 1919:

Seulement le déménagement m'avait déjà aux trois quarts tué, la maison de Mme Réjane a consommé le dernier quart. Elle est à côté du Bois ce qui m'a rendu l'asthme des foins, et ses cloisons sont tellement minces qu'on entend tout ce que disent les voisins, qu'on sent tous les courants d'air, que les gothas, qui ne m'ont jamais fait descendre une fois à la cave pendant la guerre, faisaient beaucoup moins de bruit, même quand ils tombaient dans la maison voisine, qu'un coup de marteau frappé ici à l'étage au-dessous. Aussi je n'ai pas encore dormi une minute..." 82

There were some compensations however. Proust was exhilarated by his proximity to the great actress, who at that time was already ill. Occasionally they would meet in the elevator and exchange a few words. In her honor, Proust would tap loudly three times on the floor, as is done in the French theater, whenever he wished to summon Jacques Porel, who lived at the same address. The intrigues of the servants also provided a few light moments for the ever observant Proust.

In October, Proust left rue Laurent-Pichat and moved into what would be his last lodging: 44, rue Hamelin. The following month he was awarded the Prix

Goncourt with six votes out of ten. After this event, Proust became better acquainted with Réjane, who was impressed by the accomplishments of her son's friend and wished to give him a congratulatory gift. She asked her son to find out what Proust would like as a present; he requested a photograph of her en travestie as the Prince de Sagan. This particular photograph had always fascinated him because the actress was in male attire but did not remove her earrings.

The great actress died in June, 1920, and Proust was deeply grieved. He had offered to write a piece about her for the Nouvelle revue française but discovered that he simply could not find the words to express what he felt. Later he would find the words to immortalize her in the characterization of Berma in A la Recherche. Even his treasured photograph found its way into the novel as the portrait by the painter Elstir of Odette as "Miss Sacripant."

A more intimate relationship existed between Proust and Louisa de Mornand. Her theatrical career had begun with walk-on parts, but she eventually became an established actress. Louisa had had a long affair with one of Proust's young aristocratic friends, the Marquis d'Albuféra, who had introduced her to Proust.

Subsequently, Louisa's relationship with Proust ripened into a deep personal friendship, and they continued

to be close friends until Proust's death. Twenty years later Louisa described how she had viewed her relationship with Proust in an article in Candide. George Painter translated her comments as follows:

Ours was an amitié amoureuse in which there was no element of a banal flirtation nor of an exclusive liaison, but on Proust's side a strong passion tinged with affection and desire, and on mine an attachment that was more than comradeship and really touched my heart. 83

Proust was never ashamed of the actresses he knew; he was proud to claim them as his friends. The same held true for the many valets, waiters, secretaries and servants that were a part of his life. The sympathy and affection he sincerely felt for them was expressed by Jacques Porel: "Mais on sent très bien que son coeur va à certains humbles ou à certaines intelligences, et, pour finir, à certains artistes. C'est à ceux-là qu'il en revient toujours." 84

CHAPTER II
PROUST'S SOCIAL ATTITUDE AND HIS TREATMENT
OF
LOWER SOCIAL LEVELS IN A LA RECHERCHE

The length, the extreme complexity and the many interwoven themes of A la Recherche have generated several different critical approaches to the novel. Proust himself has been variously viewed as memorialist, philosopher, psychologist, moralist, diarist--and much less frequently, sociologist. Although he could not qualify in any scientific sense as a sociologist--his observations are extremely subjective, he considers only certain portions of the social picture and nowhere does he study social structures such as church and state, he does possess a definite "social sense." To quote Lucien Daudet, "Le sens social était pour lui ce qu'est pour certains oiseaux le sens de la direction." 85

This social sense was a sine qua non in the creation of A la Recherche. It enabled Proust, while focusing admittedly on the aristocracy in particular, to transcribe a vision of contemporary society which, in spite of its subjective nature, is of undeniable value for the detail of its analysis and for the basic truths of human behavior which it reveals.

Proust thought of himself as detached from society.

His lack of involvement left him free to criticize all facets of the social scene. John J. Spagnoli, in his book The Social Attitudes of Marcel Proust, maintains that Proust's detachment also kept him from perceiving many of society's values, and that as a result, Proust depicted aristocrats as vapid snobs, the bourgeoisie as mercenary social climbers and the lower class as greedy and ambitious have-nots.⁸⁶ These conclusions are not entirely correct for they do not reflect the total picture. Proust is indeed highly critical, particularly of the aristocracy, but he does point out occasional redeeming factors at all levels.

Certainly many of the lower-class characters of A la Recherche are far from being socially ambitious. Françoise, for example, accepts her lot without question as being an eternal status quo: "Tant que le monde sera monde, voyez-vous, disait-elle, il y aura des maîtres pour nous faire trotter et des domestiques pour faire leurs caprices." (RTP, II, p. 27) The other servants and peasants likewise accepted the existing social structure; the Morels and the Rachels are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Among the bourgeoisie, whose fortunes often exceeded those of the highborn aristocrats, the social climber was not the exception. Yet in this group are also numbered Marcel's mother and grandmother as well as Charles Swann, whose acceptance into higher circles was not due to calculated efforts on his part.

Even among the much maligned aristocracy one finds the truly cultivated Charlus, whose flaws may be ascribed to physical weakness rather than to intellectual aridity.

Yet, on the whole, Proust is without illusions about the base motives behind human behavior, and he realizes the hollow values which determine class distinctions. He prefers to recognize a social elite transcending such artificial distinctions and permitting inclusion of the deserving members of any social class: "Les classes d'esprit n'ont pas égard à la naissance." (RTP, III, p. 733) Margaret Moore Goodell, in her book Three Satirists of Snobbery, elaborates on this theme:

Proust believes in an elite, but it is an elite that has laws of its own, one of which is that its members, though they may have sprung from any class, must have left behind them the trammels of their group, whether the elegant superficiality of the nobility, the prejudices and conventionality of the bourgeoisie, the plebeian resentments of the people, or the equally hampering conventions of bohemian and intellectual groups. 87

Because he was an observer of human nature, Proust always considered the role of class and class consciousness in analyzing his characters. Because of the precise way Proust studied individuals in relation to groups, he was compared by Lucien Daudet to an entomologist collecting and classifying insects:

Il y avait en Marcel Proust un généalogiste, et plus encore, un entomologiste. Il rangeait les êtres par groupes et par familles, avec une délicatesse et des scrupules de savant, comme s'il avait eu une pince et une loupe, mettant chacun à

sa place spéciale, s'inquiétant d'une erreur possible, rectifiant quand il le fallait un premier classement. Une anecdote intéressait surtout si elle l'aidait à qualifier une personne et à la situer exactement, soit par ce qu'elle disait, soit par ce qu'on disait d'elle. 88

Proust was not a social reformer. Whether he agreed with the "arbitrary" composition of social classes, their existence was undeniable. The class structure exerted pressure and influence upon class members who either conformed to the peer ethic or strove to transcend it. Inevitably, their preoccupation with the question of class would leave its mark; hence general similarities among characters of a given social level are to be found in addition to individual traits.

Dividing society into three classes--aristocracy, bourgeoisie and the working class--categorized people too definitively for Proust. He attributes social vices such as hypocrisy, snobbery and social climbing to the acceptance of such artificial divisions, but he notes that in historical perspective, they become blurred to the point of disappearance. In Sodom et Gomorrhe Proust writes:

...les différences sociales, voire individuelles, se fondent à distance dans l'uniformité d'une époque. La vérité est que la ressemblance des vêtements et aussi la réverbération par le visage de l'esprit de l'époque tiennent, dans une personne, une place tellement plus importante que sa caste, qui en occupe une grande seulement dans l'amour-propre de l'intéressé et l'imagination des autres, que, pour se rendre compte qu'un grand seigneur du temps de Louis-Philippe est moins différent d'un bourgeois du temps de Louis-Philippe que d'un grand seigneur du temps de Louis XV,

il n'est pas nécessaire de parcourir
les galeries du Louvre. (RTP, II, p. 682)

As a writer Proust felt compelled, to quote Spagnoli, "to be conscious of class, if the truth is to be discovered. He must respect class distinctions and depict each class differently." ⁸⁹ Once again Spagnoli goes too far. Certainly class plays an important part in the motivations of members of a society that values the concept, and it must, therefore, be considered. Its distinctions need not necessarily be respected, however. As each character is developed, he is found to possess traits in common with those of other social levels, and the accepted prerequisites for situating a character within the aristocracy, bourgeoisie or lower classes are not entirely valid.

In A la Recherche Proust exposes the growing decadence of the Faubourg and the concurrent social ascendancy of members of the middle, and to some extent the lower, classes. The question arises as to whether society is really changing or whether the change has occurred in Proust's and/or Marcel's vision of it. Actually both changes are involved.

The influence of the aristocracy had steadily declined during the Third Republic, and la belle époque was its swan song. During this period the working classes were organizing, and their power was slowly increasing. The bourgeoisie in particular was finding itself in a more advantageous position. Initially, the aristocracy had held

the keys to the Faubourg Saint-Germain and other symbols of haute société, admittance to which was essential to ultimate social success. Aware that the wealthy bourgeois desperately yearned for social acceptance, the aristocrat tenaciously clung to his leverage and used his power to exclude in order to retain his social domination.

Inevitably this power became the only force the aristocracy retained with which to combat the strengthened economic and political position of the bourgeoisie, and it was forced to yield in the face of economic necessity. Marriage became a sure avenue to the inner circles because bourgeois money was the most acceptable way to bolster the sagging fortunes of the great noble houses of France. Movement between the two levels increased accordingly. Vicomte d'Avenel, describing this particular time in history, noted that:

La société actuelle ressemble donc très fort à l'ancienne, en ce qu'aujourd'hui comme autrefois elle se compose de classes distinctes. Elle lui ressemble en ce que ces classes, autrefois comme aujourd'hui, étaient mobiles...Où la différence s'accuse entre le passé et le présent, ce n'est pas dans les faits, c'est dans les idées. Entre la tradition et l'instabilité, toutes deux inhérentes aux choses humaines, nos pères avaient une forte tendresse pour la première et nous avons un goût prononcé pour la seconde. 90

While social changes were on the increase, their presence was nothing new, but the change that occurred in Proust's social optic was. His family was part of the haute bourgeoisie, and his father was a celebrated doctor

with considerable influence. Their wealth provided Proust with a ready means to penetrate Faubourg bastions, but Proust was not interested in marriage. He did have other advantages--intelligence, urbanity, an artistic flair, a keen wit and a gift for flattery--which facilitated his entry into drawing room society. Thus "le petit Proust", like Marcel, gained acceptance into Faubourg society primarily by his wits.

As his proximity to the haut monde increased, Proust's appraisal of society sharpened. Marcel experienced the same transformation in A la Recherche, and Roger Shattuck, in his perceptive book Proust's Binoculars, relates this modification of viewpoint to optical images, where the effect varies with changes in perspective, revealing hidden aspects of the object:

The social ordering of the novel will bring this out most readily. At first the social classes appear to Marcel and to the reader as clearly defined layers; and, of necessity, perception from one level to the next, or to a level several times removed, entails severe refraction and distortion. Marcel, looking up toward the higher circles, misjudges everyone in the beginning...Gradually these simple images of distorted perception yield to figures which contain an expression of social mobility...The social levels lose their hierarchy, and by the end we lose sight even of the two côtés whose originally opposed perspectives are fragmented and crossed in both social and subjective upheaval. 91

The salons of the Faubourg eventually came to admit even the most unworthy, providing they could make some show of having the proper credentials. An immense

déclassement resulted, based upon what Martin Turnell chooses to call "the action of an interior principle." 92 The "interior principle" which exercised such force in fusing the diverse social groups of A la Recherche was the sexual force of the "cities of the plain," and Charlie Morel is the most important key to this transformation. Saint-Loup's marriage to Gilberte, daughter of the bourgeois Swann and his wife Odette, former cocotte and demi-mondaine, provided him with the additional money he needed to keep Morel. Albertine was also linked with Morel, the Prince de Guermantes rivaled his cousin Charlus for the violinist's affections and the Verdurins adored him. This son of a valet got his boost into society from his first admirer, the Baron de Charlus, whose own social prestige declined accordingly. And it was Morel's one-time fiancée, Jupien's niece, who, adopted by Charlus and given a noble name, became an outstanding example of déclassement, rivaled only by that of the new Princesse de Guermantes, formerly the conniving Mme Verdurin.

Marie-Antoinette Jupien, once a seamstress, was readily accepted into the most elegant society, and her humble origin was obscured by the brilliance of her new social position. Likewise obscured was the real reason for her sudden change in fortune.

Si on avait analysé l'élégance de la jeune Mme de Cambremer, on y eût trouvé qu'elle était la fille du marchand de notre maison, Jupien, et que ce qui avait pu s'ajouter à cela pour la rendre brillante, c'était que

son père procurait des hommes à M. de Charlus. Mais tout cela combiné avait produit des effets scintillants, alors que les causes déjà lointaines, non seulement étaient inconnues de beaucoup de nouveaux, mais encore que ceux qui les avaient connues les avaient oubliées, pensant beaucoup plus à l'éclat actuel qu'aux hontes passées, car on prend toujours un nom dans son acception actuelle. (RTP, III, p. 993)

The social ascendance of Jupien's niece was exceptional because of her adoption by Charlus. Some of her peers also climbed the social ladder, but by other means. Morel and Rachel were accepted for their talent. The brother and sister of the chasseur at Balbec attracted the notice of wealthy men, and the successes of Mme Verdurin and of Gilberte Swann were due to their fortunes.

There is something rather sad about the slow crumbling of the once impregnable ranks of the nobility, and when the last bastion falls, it is with some nostalgia that one sees that "Le faubourg Saint-Germain, comme une douairière gâteuse, ne répondait que par des sourires timides à des domestiques insolents qui envahissaient ses salons, buvaient son orangeade et lui présentaient leurs maîtresses." (RTP, III, p. 957)

The transformation of the social structure within a given temporal span is quite similar to Proust's concept of the personality as a succession of states or moi. In A la Recherche the transformation of society like the transformation of character is shown to take place by infinite degrees dans la durée. Benjamin Crémieux very accurately

observed:

Proust n'a pas voulu peindre la fusion du noble faubourg et de la bourgeoisie riche, il a voulu montrer la transformation d'une société dans la durée, son épuisement et son renouvellement pareils à ceux des individus. Il y a donc bien dans A la Recherche du temps perdu le roman d'une société considérée en soi et non pas seulement par rapport à la prise de conscience du "narrateur" qui est le noyau premier et la raison d'être de l'oeuvre. 93

Marcel becomes aware of the transformation of society as he matures, and he perceives a pattern of successive change that had not been apparent to him as a child.

Au temps de ma petite enfance, tout ce qui appartenait à la société conservatrice était mondain, et dans un salon bien posé on n'eût pas pu recevoir un républicain. Les personnes qui vivaient dans un tel milieu s'imaginaient que l'impossibilité de jamais inviter un "opportuniste", à plus forte raison un affreux "radical", était une chose qui durerait toujours, comme les lampes à huile et les omnibus à chevaux. Mais pareille aux kaléidoscopes qui tournent de temps en temps, la société place successivement de façon différente des éléments qu'on avait crus immuables et compose une autre figure. (RTP, I, pp. 516-17)

But society, like the human personality, retains a fixed substratum or foundation, even in the midst of change. Proust discovered the basic social structure to be far more complex than a tripartite class division would indicate, for within each group exists a tendency to form subgroups with their own particular behavior patterns. Such differentiation is inherent in man's nature and inevitable in a social context.

Each little subgroup had its own particular brand

of snobbery, for while snobbery per se is universal, its manifestations are variable. The lower levels inevitably mimicked the haut monde, and their affectations are even more transparent. In A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs Proust observes that "Au fur et à mesure que l'on descend dans l'échelle sociale, le snobisme s'accroche à des riens qui ne sont peut-être pas plus nuls que les distinctions de l'aristocratie, mais qui, plus obscurs, plus particuliers à chacun, surprennent davantage." (RTP, I, p. 845)

In spite of their differences on a vertical social scale, there are certain similarities among these subgroups. Some of the same characteristics distinguish snobbery at all levels. Striking examples of cruelty are evident in all groups: the Duchesse de Guermantes' reaction to the news of Swann's imminent demise is annoyance at having discovered she had put on the wrong shoes; Mme Verdurin deliberately and frequently persecutes the hapless Saniette who seems to have been invited to her salon for that purpose alone; Françoise, with cruel deliberation, aggravates the allergy of her kitchen maid and capitalizes on any opportunity to render her life more miserable. The little circles of each level place great value on meaningless distinctions, and they all display the same vulgarity and arrogant pride.

...dès qu'une société se forme en France, quels que soient le rang et les idées politiques de ses membres, elle reproduit les traits plus ou moins modifiés, plus ou moins caricaturés, de cette société du faubourg Saint-Germain qu'elle affecte parfois, comme le "petit clan", de mépriser...

La fréquentation du faubourg Saint-Germain permet de reconstruire dans sa perspective et sa hiérarchie vraies l'ensemble des salons français, y compris la boutique de Jupien et la loge du concierge. 94

The tyranny which Charlus and his cousin Oriane impose upon the Faubourg is duplicated by Mme Verdurin vis-à-vis her fidèles, of whom she requires absolute obedience and loyalty. Tante Léonie rules over her coterie of confidantes (Eulalie and Françoise) as surely as Françoise dominates the other household servants. The ruling head of each group enjoys the plaudits and praises of his subordinates and exercises at will the advantage he holds over them.

Of the three main social classes, the bourgeoisie is of least interest to Proust; the other two groups are associated together in Proust's mind with France's historical past. Both had been closely tied to the land, one by ownership, the other by servitude, and centuries later, the land still remained a common interest: "Les grands seigneurs sont presque les seules gens de qui on apprenne autant que des paysans; leur conversation s'orne de tout ce qui concerne la terre, les demeures telles qu'elles étaient habitées autrefois, les anciens usages, tout ce que le monde de l'argent ignore profondément." (RTP, II, p. 550) Despite their great social distance, their characteristics were often similar. Proust remarks that the lower classes even "au point de vue de la grossièreté ressemble si souvent au grand monde." (RTP, I, p. 781)

The private life of the Baron de Charlus incorporates a close association of these two groups. A Guermantes, he is linked to Combray and to Marcel's reveries of the past. Extremely talented, knowledgeable in the arts and a gifted pianist, Charlus is the epitome of what one expects of an aristocrat. Appropriately, he rules the Faubourg with an absolute hand, and those who dare to oppose him tremble at the thought of his revenge. This same man becomes a depraved inhabitant of Sodom who goes to extravagant lengths to court the most inconspicuous valet. His snobbery at the social level which is his by birth is no more powerful than that which he acquires at the social level to which he has fallen through his sexual deviations. The lowest and highest levels of the social structure combine in this one character: "Sans doute le snobisme de la canaille peut se comprendre aussi bien que l'autre. Ils avaient d'ailleurs été longtemps unis, alternant l'un avec l'autre, chez M. de Charlus qui ne trouvait personne d'assez élégant pour ses relations mondaines, ni de frisant assez l'apache pour les autres." (RTP, III, p. 830)

The canaille to which Charlus is ultimately attracted is at the bottom of the social barrel, but the interval between this lowest level and the first levels of bourgeois society is peopled with a variety of characters belonging to many different groups who together play a substantial role in A la Recherche.

These petits gens held a particular fascination for

Proust. He appreciated their naturalness, untainted by the artificiality and hypocrisy which plagued the aristocracy. The lower classes did not dissimulate their reactions. For example, Proust notes that "on fait semblant de ne pas voir les pleurs des autres. On, c'est-à-dire le monde; car le peuple s'inquiète de voir pleurer, comme si un sanglot était plus grave qu'une hémorragie." (RTP, II, p. 954) Such candor has its disadvantages; for example, Françoise's reaction to the sight of Marcel's grandmother after her first attack. Here Françoise typifies the indiscretion of her class, so far removed from the glacial superficiality of the Guermantes.

Despite their lack of formal education, Proust often speaks of le peuple as intellectually superior to the social elite, once again affirming his belief that social station bears little relationship to individual ability and merit. One such observation is found in a discussion of art populaire in Sodome et Gomorrhe:

L'idée d'un art populaire comme d'un art patriotique, si même elle n'avait pas été dangereuse, me semblait ridicule. S'il s'agissait de le rendre accessible au peuple, en sacrifiant les raffinements de la forme, "bons pour les oisifs", j'avais assez fréquenté de gens du monde pour savoir que ce sont eux les véritables illettrés, et non les ouvriers électriciens. (RTP, III, p.888)

Marcel also shows a preference for the lower levels of society:

...je n'avais jamais fait de différence entre les ouvriers, les bourgeois et les grands seigneurs, et j'aurais pris indifféremment les uns et les autres pour amis. Avec une certaine préférence pour les ouvriers, et après cela pour les grands seigneurs, non par goût, mais sachant qu'on peut exiger d'eux plus de politesse envers les ouvriers qu'on ne l'obtient de la part des bourgeois, soit que les grands seigneurs ne dédaignent pas les ouvriers comme font les bourgeois, ou bien parce qu'ils sont volontiers polis envers n'importe qui... (RTP, II, p. 1026)

In A la Recherche the lower levels, with the exception of the theatrical world, receive generally fair treatment. Proust is not particularly kind to any social group and readily probes their weaknesses, but many of the faults of le peuple can be explained to a great degree by their inferior economic and social position. Vicomte d'Avenel commented on the attitude of the lower classes during this period: "Autrefois, ils supportaient d'être d'une condition modeste; ils en souffrent aujourd'hui, parce qu'ils ont décidé que toute supériorité de naissance était injuste. Ils en souffrent, mais ils continuent à croire à ces supériorités." 95

Inevitably the lower classes are put in the position of catering to the rich; judging a man by his wealth is a totally predictable result. Proust nonetheless considered their materialistic standard to be a major fault of the lower levels. In A la Recherche Marcel is repelled by the liftier's behavior when he (Marcel) inadvertently fails to tip him. Proust speaks condescendingly of the naive

assumption of this group that the very rich and the very prominent are always discernible by their appearance:

Il n'y a guère que les garçons de restaurant pour croire qu'un homme excessivement riche a toujours des vêtements nouveaux et éclatants et qu'un monsieur tout ce qu'il y a de plus chic donne des dîners de soixante couverts et ne va qu'en auto. Ils se trompent. Bien souvent un homme excessivement riche a toujours un même veston râpé; un monsieur tout ce qu'il y a de plus chic, c'est un monsieur qui ne fraye dans le restaurant qu'avec les employés et, rentré chez lui, joue aux cartes avec ses valets. Cela n'empêche pas son refus de passer après le prince Murat. (RTP, III, p. 50)

Yet the servant class can hardly be expected always to perceive the subtleties of a social level so far above its own, the more so when the livelihood of the class in question very often depends upon the generosity of the rich, regardless of whether they were part of the gratin. This does not preclude the existence of snobbery vis-à-vis the upper class in some instances: the two different points of view of the hotel personnel at Balbec provide a good example:

A ce point de vue le personnel se divisait en deux catégories; d'une part, ceux qui faisaient des différences entre les clients, plus sensibles au pourboire raisonnable d'un vieux noble...qu'aux largesses inconsidérées d'un rasta qui décelait par là même un manque d'usage que, seulement devant lui, on appelait de la bonté; d'autre part, ceux pour qui noblesse, intelligence, célébrité, situation, manières, était inexistant, recouvert par un chiffre. (RTP, II, p. 827)

Not only opinions but also moral values were vulnerable to the corrupting influence of money. Many, like Aimé, did

not hesitate to oblige social superiors in whatever capacity required, no matter how perverse.

When Proust makes such general observations on lower class mores, he is thinking primarily in terms of the servant class. In fact, except for this group, the rest of the lower class remains in the background with only an occasional representative coming under the author's scrutiny. These scattered specimens arouse Proust's curiosity and serve as focal points for the elaboration of his poetic sensibilities.

"The servant class, on the other hand," as Harold March notes in his The Two Worlds of Marcel Proust, "excites in the author a constant curiosity, sometimes speculative, sometimes amused, sometimes--particularly in the added passages--irritated, but always somewhat superior. His attitude is that of the master of servants; they exist to serve him and his kind." ⁹⁶ Mr. March is quite correct in pointing out the "constant curiosity" with which Proust regarded servants. "Curiosity" is an excellent word to use, because he was truly intrigued by their way of life, so different from his own. Like Marcel, he occasionally became irritated at his own servants, and he did exercise his prerogatives as "master." Yet he never treated them as inferiors, and, on the contrary, he made every effort to make them feel at ease around him.

In A la Recherche Proust depicts the existence of what Fernandez calls the "choeur surnois qui commente dans

l'ombre" by establishing parallels and contrasts between them and the milieu in which they live and work.⁹⁷ Nevertheless the reader is left with the definite impression that these characters do exist in their own right. Henri Bonnet observes that "Ces domestiques ne jouent pas le rôle abstrait de confident comme dans la tragédie classique. Ils sont étudiés pour eux-mêmes et vivent d'une vie propre comme la Martine de Molière." ⁹⁸

Their world is as complex and as steeped in tradition as that of the Guermantes, their own circle as closed and as impenetrable as that of the most elegant salon. Their tradition of service, as Proust chose to see it, was as sacred and as ancient as that of noblesse oblige.

The analogies and differences Proust points out between servants and their masters provide a clearer picture of both groups. The servants have a strong code of conduct (witness the code de Françoise). They represent a subgroup hierarchy: deferential to superiors, haughtily condescending to inferiors, they can as easily be cruel and slanderous as devoted and loyal. The servant espouses the same opinions as his master, claims his prestige and position and when referring to him, uses nous instead of the more impersonal third person pronouns.

The great social distance separating them enables servants to become perceptive, almost scientific, observers of their employers. Though their conclusions are often erroneous, their powers of divination far exceed those of

their social superiors. At Balbec, Marcel watched the lift appraise the situation when he and Albertine entered the elevator to go to his room:

Nous prîmes l'ascenseur; elle garda le silence devant le lift. L'habitude d'être obligé de recourir à l'observation personnelle et à la déduction pour connaître les petites affaires des maîtres, ces gens étranges qui causent entre eux et ne leur parlent pas, développe chez les "employés" (comme le lift appelait les domestiques) un plus grand pouvoir de divination que chez les "patrons"...Aussi le lift avait-il compris et comptait-il raconter à ses camarades que nous étions préoccupés.

(RTP, II, pp. 824-25)

The difference in economic positions further polarizes the two groups; one is the employer, the other the employed. To quote Swann:

Et puis comment ne pas supposer que nos domestiques, vivant dans une situation inférieure à la nôtre, ajoutant à notre fortune et à nos défauts des richesses et des vices imaginaires pour lesquels ils nous envient et nous méprisent, se trouveront fatalement amenés à agir autrement que des gens de notre monde? (RTP, I, p. 358)

The covert hostility of the servant toward his employer is overtly manifested by a persistence in adopting attitudes and habits that exactly compensate for the latter's weaknesses. The result is a predictable negative copy of the employer, certain to be reproduced in any servant he hires.

[l'existence]...des domestiques est sans doute d'une étrangeté plus monstrueuse encore et que seule l'habitude nous voile. Mais c'est jusque dans des détails encore plus particuliers que j'aurais été condamné, même si j'avais renvoyé Françoise, à garder

le même domestique. Car divers autres purent entrer plus tard à mon service; déjà pourvus des défauts généraux des domestiques, ils n'en subissaient pas moins chez moi une rapide transformation. Comme les lois de l'attaque commandent celles de la riposte, pour ne pas être entamés par les aspérités de mon caractère, tous pratiquaient dans le leur un rentrant identique et au même endroit; et, en revanche, ils profitaient de mes lacunes pour y installer des avancées. Ces lacunes, je ne les connaissais pas, non plus que les saillants auxquels leur entre-deux donnait lieu, précisément parce qu'elles étaient des lacunes. Mais mes domestiques, en se gâtant peu à peu, me les apprirent. Ce fut par leurs défauts invariablement acquis que j'appris mes défauts naturels et invariables, leur caractère me présenta une sorte d'épreuve négative du mien. Nous nous étions beaucoup moqués autrefois, ma mère et moi, de Mme Sazerat qui disait en parlant des domestiques: "Cette race, cette espèce." Mais je dois dire que la raison pourquoi je n'avais pas lieu de souhaiter de remplacer Françoise par quelque autre est que cette autre aurait appartenu tout autant et inévitablement à la race générale des domestiques et à l'espèce particulière des miens. (RTP, II, pp. 64-65)

Such mental combat between master and servant separates them still more. And yet, servants prided themselves on their loyalty and faithful service. Such an ambivalent attitude only served to further mystify their employers and to preclude any hope of arriving at a mutual understanding.

Nous ne nous mettons pas assez dans le coeur de ces pauvres femmes de chambre qui ne peuvent pas nous voir pleurer, comme si pleurer nous faisait mal... nous avons tort, nous fermons ainsi notre coeur au pathétique des campagnes, à la légende que la pauvre servante, renvoyée, peut-être injustement, pour vol, toute pâle, devenue subitement plus humble comme si c'était un crime d'être accusée, déroule en invoquant

l'honnêteté de son père, les principes de sa mère, les conseils de l'aïeule. Certes ces mêmes domestiques qui ne peuvent supporter nos larmes nous ferons prendre sans scrupule une fluxion de poitrine parce que la femme de chambre d'au-dessous aime les courants d'air et que ce ne serait pas poli de les supprimer. Car il faut que ceux-là mêmes qui ont raison, comme Françoise, aient tort aussi, pour faire de la Justice une chose impossible. Même les humbles plaisirs des servantes provoquent ou le refus ou la raillerie de leurs maîtres. Car c'est toujours un rien, mais niaisement sentimental, anti-hygiénique... Mais il faut savoir aussi ne pas rester insensible, malgré la banalité solennelle et menaçante des choses qu'elle dit... (RTP, II, pp. 777-78)

In the quiet, country setting of Combray, the servant had identified with the family with which he lived and worked, but in the more populous centers, his allegiance shifted; class consciousness and an increasing awareness of his own interests developed. Fellow servants commanded his first consideration, often to the detriment--and without question, to the annoyance--of his employer.

The growing lack of respect for time-honored traditions of service and absolute obedience reflects the changing attitudes of the times. While worker movements were slowly gaining force and the lower classes were awakening to a sense of class consciousness, domestic servants were beginning to chafe under the yoke of a type of employment which more than any other so clearly revealed its dependent and servile nature. d'Avenel notes the following:

Le service domestique, qui était le plus noble de tous, est aussi devenu le plus méprisé, quoique la besogne dont il se compose soit demeurée identique, et que, de

plus, elle soit beaucoup mieux rétribuée, les gages des serviteurs ayant sensiblement plus augmenté que tous les autres salaires, précisément en raison du peu d'estime dont jouit leur fonction.

De deux hommes qui ont exactement le même emploi, l'un pour le compte du public, l'autre pour le compte d'un maître unique, comme le cocher de fiacre et le cocher de "bonne maison", le premier, pour injurier le second, le qualifiera de "valet" et l'autre s'en trouvera en effet blessé. 99

This change was not to Proust's liking as he was basically tradition-oriented. So often when he uses the word peuple, he is thinking in terms of the peasant/servant of Combray. While he spent most of his life in Paris, he was genuinely fond of rural living and felt much closer to the historical past in such a setting. The mass exodus of peasants from rural to urban centers where they hired out as domestics accounts in part for Proust's preoccupation with servants. Françoise, for example, is both a peasant and a domestic servant, although in the Paris milieu she begins to lose the peasant traits which Marcel had so admired in her. The peasantry nonetheless has its strongest representative in Françoise.

The courrières at the Grand-Hôtel, because of their distinctly rural flavor yet definitely superior gifts, are almost super-peasants. Many of the êtres de fuite who attract Marcel's eye are peasant girls. Assorted laitières and cremières, an occasional farmer and the "little people" of Combray also are from the ranks of the peasantry. The peasantry does not, as a group, play any definite role in

A la Recherche. It is rather their characteristics and qualities which Proust continually points out in other characters. Examples are not limited to the lower levels; peasant traits are also evident in the speech of Charlus and his cousin Oriane.

Je mentirais en disant que, ce côté terrien et quasi paysan qui restait en elle, la duchesse n'en avait pas conscience et ne mettait pas une certaine affectation à le montrer. Mais, de sa part, c'était moins fausse simplicité de grande dame qui joue la campagnarde et orgueil de duchesse qui fait la nique aux dames riches méprisantes des paysans qu'elles ne connaissent pas, que goût quasi artistique d'une femme qui sait le charme de ce qu'elle possède et ne va pas le gâter d'un badigeon moderne. (RTP, III, p.35)

J'écoutais sa conversation comme une chanson populaire délicieusement française... (RTP, III, p. 34)

In contrast to the impression they usually evoke, the peasants and other petits gens who have assembled to gape at the diners in the Grand-Hôtel seem sinister, if not menacing.

...les sources électriques faisant sourdre à flots la lumière dans la grande salle à manger, celle-ci devenait comme un immense et merveilleux aquarium devant la paroi de verre duquel la population ouvrière de Balbec, les pêcheurs et aussi les familles de petits bourgeois, invisibles dans l'ombre, s'écrasaient au vitrage pour apercevoir, lentement balancée dans les remous d'or, la vie luxueuse de ces gens, aussi extraordinaire pour les pauvres que celle de poissons et de mollusques étranges (une grande question sociale, de savoir si la paroi de verre protégera toujours le festin des bêtes merveilleuses et si les gens obscurs qui regardent avidement dans la nuit ne viendront pas les cueillir dans leur aquarium et les manger). (RTP, I, p. 681)

This passage was added later by Proust and is a unique example in A la Recherche where the situation is reversed, and Proust sees his position through the eyes of le peuple. His peers momentarily become the object of their sullen curiosity, and he speculates on what the future might portend. Usually Proust refrains from making such sociological reflections.

Socialistically oriented writers and critics (Jean-Paul Sartre in particular) have taken Proust to task for neglecting almost to the point of exclusion another segment of the lower classes, the manual laborer. What they fail to consider is that Proust, unlike Balzac, did not presume to give a realistic account of French society. He recorded his personal view of the transformation of the society around him, which necessarily limited what he would depict. Since he rarely had any contact with the manual laborer, he seems hardly aware of their existence in his novel.

From one point of view such an omission seems strange, for the rise of the worker movement from 1870 to 1914 spans almost the whole of Proust's lifetime (1871-1922). It was during this period that labor gradually evolved into a political force. There were many strikes that culminated in 1895 in the formation of the powerful Confédération Générale du Travail. Any yet, there is no mention, even obliquely, of the workers' struggle, although A la Recherche contains page after page devoted to the Dreyfus Affair which occurred at almost exactly the same time. It might

be argued that the worker movement was overshadowed by the Dreyfus Affair, but it would be more correct to say that the former had far less significance for Proust than the latter.

What he saw through the Dreyfus Affair was the haut monde divided against itself by a crisis that brought into play anti-semitism and anti-militarism. What better background for observing the interaction of the people of this milieu. Being half-Jewish himself, he was inevitably more sensitive to this issue than most.

The workers' struggle did not penetrate the upper echelons of society because the aristocrats were not owners of factories or corporation executives like today's elite; they were gentlemen of leisure. Labor problems simply did not come up in salon conversation. Moreover, Paris was not the Paris of today: "Paris 1900 had little industry in the city itself and even today the industrial complexes are outside the city. Paris is still a city of shopkeepers and a commercial center, and Proust is not wrong in recording a city not yet attuned to 'modern industrial living'." 100 And, though the workers were restive, there was some accommodation to their demands, and the situation never approached the critical point.

There are a very few members of the working class present in A la Recherche. Most notable of these is the electrician, that "knight of the proletariat" in whose honor Françoise forsakes the bedside of Marcel's dying

grandmother. The electrician had much to recommend him: "très ancien dans sa maison, beau-frère de son patron, estimé dans notre immeuble où il venait travailler depuis de longues années, et surtout de Jupien." (RTP, II, p. 330) There are also various blanchisseuses, one who was Brichot's mistress and several who were involved with Albertine at different times. Nowhere to be found is the manual laborer à la Zola; the Lantiers and the Copeaus played no part in Proust's world.

Included also among the lower levels of A la Recherche are characters who belong to the petite bourgeoisie, or, as Harold March expressed it, "the white collar poor." 101 Most notable of these is Jupien, who advances from the tailor shop to a small position at a ministry and who eventually becomes the manager of Charlus' "hotel." Because of the increasing influence of sexual deviation in his life, the role of class in Jupien's characterization rapidly becomes a secondary consideration. More valid as representatives of this peripheral group of shopkeepers and small merchants are the directeur d'hôtel, a restaurant manager in Paris and the Combray grocer (M. Borange).

Another peripheral group whose status was somewhat ambivalent was the theatrical world. Although actors and actresses were frequently intimate friends of members of the social elite, they were still not considered to be quite comme il faut. Henri Calvet in his study of contemporary French society refers to this group as "les professionnels

des plaisirs" and makes the following comment about their acceptance by society:

Mais la fragilité de l'engouement populaire, la nature un peu factice de pas mal de réputations acquises en ce domaine de plaisirs...font de cette catégorie moins une classe durable par la solidité, la cohésion et l'acquisition d'une situation reconnue, que le ressembllement d'éléments fugitifs...Moins une classe donc, par elle-même, qu'une sorte de bourgeonnement parasitaire dont les rapports avec l'aristocratie de fortune, en dépit de l'espèce d'égalité apparue dans les relations mondaines, sont des rapports de dépendance qui ne sont pas sans rappeler ceux qui existaient au XVIII^e siècle, entre l'aristocratie et les gens de lettres ou de théâtre. 102

Roger Gaillard, a French actor of the period about which Proust was writing, recalls in his memoirs his difficulty in obtaining parental consent to pursue a career in the theater: "Ce n'est pas sans mal que j'obtins de tenter ma chance et d'essayer cette carrière d'acteur dont les risques épouvantaient les familles 'comme il faut' avant 1914." 103

The social situation of the actors and actresses at the turn of the century is best summed up by Gaston Maugras in his book, Les Comédiens hors la loi: "La vérité est que la société civile n'a pu se décider encore à considérer la profession dramatique comme honorable et à rompre irrévocablement la barrière qui sépare le comédien du citoyen." 104

The theater plays a small but ubiquitous role in A la Recherche. When it is not a center of action in itself, it is frequently the basis for metaphors. John

G. Linn, who has written a definitive study, The Theater in the Fiction of Marcel Proust, counts several hundred metaphors based upon the theater in the novel. Proust quotes from at least six different plays in his text, mentions thirty dramatists, twenty-five actors and fifty plays. Such statistics have little importance except insofar as they illustrate that the theater, which was so much a part of Proust's life, was likewise an important part of his novel.

The plot involves several actresses, notably Berma, Rachel, Léa and Odette (who began as an actress), as well as others mentioned in particular anecdotes. These artists, as interpreters of artistic works, rank below the creative artists (Bergotte, Elstir, Vinteuil). The interpreter's ideal was to become the transparent medium for the work of art; hence Marcel's disillusionment upon seeing Berma for the first time. She had so completely identified with her role that to an untrained eye she appeared to have no talent. Yet, because of her great ability, she transcends a merely interpretive function to become a sort of aesthetic ideal. There is nothing in her character to inspire unfavorable sentiments. For Rachel and Morel, on the other hand, their saving grace is their talent, for they are base, shallow-minded and vulgar. Because they place such a high premium upon their artistic accomplishments, to the point of sacrificing anything for them, they are partly redeemed in Proust's estimation.

Linn notes that the term "actress" was a "convenient nom de guerre, covering a multitude of sins and availabilities." ¹⁰⁵ In A la Recherche the implications of sexual decadence are prevalent in Proust's presentation of actors and actresses.

In his treatment of all these lower-level groups, Proust has no grievances to air and no theories to prove. He was an artist in prose: his purpose was to observe, to examine in depth and to record. It was people who interested him, and he believed in the universality of human nature, conditioned to some extent by social position and environment. By exploring the existences of a few representative types, he could draw conclusions not only about particular social groups but also about human motivation in general. At one point he observes that:

Les niais s'imaginent que les grosses dimensions des phénomènes sociaux sont une excellente occasion de pénétrer plus avant dans l'âme humaine; ils devraient au contraire comprendre que c'est en descendant en profondeur dans une individualité qu'ils auraient chance de comprendre ces phénomènes. (RTP, II, p. 330)

Thus, by examining comparatively few lower-level characters Proust is able to present a relatively complete picture of their way of life and values. Because he believed that many behavioral characteristics transcend class boundaries, his observations of other social levels contribute to this presentation.

Sartre strongly objects to such presumptions on

human nature and considers Proust's method invalid. In Situations, II he takes Proust to task for daring to suppose that individuals of different social milieus could possibly have the same reactions.

...nous nions que l'origine, la classe, le milieu, la nation de l'individu soient de simples concomitants de sa vie sentimentale. Nous estimons au contraire que chaque affection, comme d'ailleurs toute autre forme de sa vie spychique, manifeste sa situation sociale. Cet ouvrier, qui touche un salaire, qui ne possède pas les instruments de son métier, que son travail isole en face de la matière et qui se défend contre l'oppression en prenant conscience de sa classe, ne saurait en aucune circonstance sentir comme ce bourgeois, d'esprit analytique, que sa profession met en relation de politesse avec d'autres bourgeois. 106

Sartre attributes Proust's error to the fact that Proust has identified with the bourgeoisie and is therefore committed to propagation of what he called "le mythe de la nature humaine." He takes a completely opposite position: "Pour nous, ce que les hommes ont en commun, ce n'est pas une nature, c'est une condition métaphysique...Pour le reste, ils constituent des totalités indécomposables, dont les idées, les humeurs et les actes sont des structures secondaires et dépendantes, et dont le caractère essentiel est d'être situées et ils diffèrent entre eux comme leurs situations diffèrent entre elles." 107

In Sartre's opinion, not only does Proust fail to include the essential ingredient of society, the worker, but his whole method of character presentation and

psychology is invalid. Sartrian criticism is particularly inapplicable to Proust because of the extremely limited definition of literature expressed in Qu'est-ce que la littérature? A la Recherche hardly conforms.

It is not within the scope of this study to delve into the pros and cons of littérature engagée. Suffice it to say that engagé Proust is not, at least not in Sartrian terms. The wide breach that separates them can in some part be explained by the life Proust led. Though the turn of the century was marked by domestic turmoil and though in his lifetime he would see the First World War, Proust remained essentially detached from the trauma these events generated. His physical frailty and recurring asthma attacks forced him into seclusion, and his assured income freed him from ever having to seek employment. His social situation determined the content of his novel. André Ferré notes that "L'expérience sociale de Proust est limitée à la bourgeoisie aisée d'où il est issu, au Monde (qu'appellent 'grande monde' ceux qui n'en sont pas), aux milieux du théâtre, de la littérature et de l'art." ¹⁰⁸ With rare exceptions, and those primarily during the later years of his life, Proust did not seek to enlarge his social experience but rather to explore it in depth.

CHAPTER III
PROUST'S METHOD
OF
PRESENTATION OF LOWER LEVEL CHARACTERS

Proust's characters, whether of major or minor importance, are never presented in a purely descriptive fashion. The reader is permitted to infer from the character's behavior in different situations what his personality is like. The effect of durée, the character's attitude toward his social class and the hidden psychological motivations for his behavior gradually become apparent in the course of the novel. It is as if both reader and author were simultaneously engaged in a step by step exploration of each character.

Not to be discounted is the indelible stamp of the creator. Proust's approach, his vision de l'artiste, is extremely subjective and analytical. Edmond Buchet best expressed this by saying that Proust "intérieurise naturellement les personnages." ¹⁰⁹ The reader in his search for the essence of a given character benefits greatly from Proust's sensitivity which adds new dimensions to what might otherwise have been simple observation and description. Coupled with an exceptionally keen perception of human psychology, such an approach to character development gives the reader a multitude of impressions from which to sift out the essence of a given personnage. José Ortega y

Gasset refers to this approach as impressionistic psychology and explains it as follows:

...[il] nie ce qu'on appelle communément le caractère, qui est comme le profil sculptural de la personne; il voit dans la personne une perpétuelle mutation, une suite d'états diffus, une articulation toujours différente d'émotions, d'idées, de douleurs, d'espoirs. 110

The Proustian personnage is not a two-dimensional character but a many-faceted personality; an analogy could be made with a gem which refracts different patterns of light from the individual facets as it is turned. Such a stone has three dimensions, but Proust's characters add a fourth dimension of prime importance--that of time. Not only is the character seen to react differently in different situations like the varied refractions of light from the stone, but he is also observed over a period of time or durée. Thanks to what Charles Du Bos called the "coexistence toujours maintenue des différents plans" Proust gives us an intimate knowledge of his major characters; they are seen in all aspects of their existence.¹¹¹

Of the lower level characters one finds in A la Recherche however, only a few--Françoise, Jupien, Morel, Berma and Rachel--are treated at sufficient length to be studied in terms of durée. The other representatives of the lower levels appear only once or twice; consequently few facets of their personality are revealed.

What catches Proust's eye varies from character to character. In some cases it may be a particular gesture,

a mannerism or a linguistic eccentricity. Or perhaps a metaphorical association inspired by their appearance. In every instance there is a noticeable attention to detail because, as Robert Honnert astutely observed, to Proust "ce qui est peut-être le plus intéressant, c'est cette infinité de choses qui sont particulières à l'individu, et qu'on néglige parce qu'on les croit irrémédiablement particulières." 112

Almost invariably a touch of the comic is present, whether it be comedy of character or comedy of manners. Proust was able to combine emotion and laughter by a skillful blend of comedy and realism. Lester Mansfield in his study of the comic element in Proust's work defined comic as the mockery and satire one finds "lorsque l'homme est observé de si près que son absurdité est éclatante." 113 In contrast to upper level characters where the basis for comedy is primarily matière (comique moral according to Mansfield), much of the comic aura surrounding lower level characters is based upon manière and is more general and less personal. Frequent examples are attempts by characters like the directeur, the lift and Victor to give themselves class.

While lower level characters are presented from the viewpoint of a social superior, for Marcel was just that, they are not treated as if they were no more than means to an end. Occasionally there is a deliberate tone of mock seriousness, as when the directeur carved the turkeys, but

nowhere on the part of either Marcel or the Narrator (or Proust, for that matter) is there any feeling of cold condescension; in fact, as Jacques Porel explains, Proust's attitude was quite the contrary.

S'il rendait les chefs-d'oeuvre et la gloire plus accessibles, il faisait un travail inverse pour le commun des mortels, il les élevait, en faisait des personnages de ce grand roman, la vie. On prenait un plaisir plus vif à les envisager alors que grâce à lui, ils étaient--nous étions--devenus des types, des héros. On était deux; celui qu'on croyait être, celui qu'on était, selon lui. 114

Proust may gently poke fun at the lower classes from time to time--and occasionally level some criticism at their attitudes and actions--but his dominant motive in observing them is a genuine fascination with their mannerisms, motivations and way of life. Where the major lower level characters are concerned, his observations lead to commentaries on behavioral motivation and on human nature in general. His limited treatment of minor lower level characters generally embellishes the novel with moments of picturesqueness, poetry and humor. He delights in pointing out linguistic peculiarities and little pretenses, he is intrigued by their relationship with the past (what he calls the tradition de Saint-André) and more than any other group they continually inspire him to make elaborate metaphorical associations.

Proust was especially adept at achieving verbal realism in his portrayals of lower level characters; this

was due to his general interest in speech and speech mannerisms, at whatever level, on which he elaborated in Le Temps retrouvé.

Comme un géomètre qui, dépouillant les choses de leurs qualités sensibles, ne voit que leur substratum linéaire, ce que racontaient les gens m'échappait, car ce qui m'intéressait, c'était non ce qu'ils voulaient dire, mais la manière dont ils le disaient, en tant qu'elle était révélatrice de leur caractère ou de leurs ridicules. (RTP, III, p. 718)

He was quick to note faulty pronunciation, cuirs, mistakes in gender and wrong usage of words. More picturesque were the colloquial expressions such as "Cela reviendrait du pareil au même" that dotted the speech of Françoise. (RTP, I, p. 866) The role of language assumes capital importance in the development of the old servant's character. Her linguistic eccentricities are seen to be reflections of her personality. For example, she seems deaf to any corrections of her pronunciation:

Nous avons vu bien des fois le sens de l'ouïe apporter à Françoise non le mot qu'on avait prononcé, mais celui qu'elle croyait le vrai, ce qui suffisait pour qu'elle n'entendît pas la rectification implicite d'une prononciation meilleure. (RTP, III, p. 190)

She persistently pronounced estoppeuse for stoppeuse, Alger for Angers and jambon de Nev'York for jambon d'York. Unlike Victor, Marcel's maître d'hôtel, Françoise did not always mispronounce words and names deliberately as an exercise of her rights; she simply pronounced them the way she heard them. Take the case of Mme Sazerat, whom she un-

failingly called Mme Sazerin:

...Françoise continua à dire Mme Sazerin, non par cette volontaire et orgueilleuse persévérance dans ses erreurs qui était habituelle chez elle, se renforçait de notre contradiction et était tout ce qu'elle avait ajouté chez elle à la France de Saint-André-des-Champs des principes égalitaires de 1789 (elle ne réclamait qu'un droit du citoyen, celui de ne pas prononcer comme nous et de maintenir qu'hôtel, été et air étaient du genre féminin), mais parce qu'en réalité elle continua toujours d'entendre Sazerin. (RTP, III, p. 573)

Françoise also frequently misused words: je balançais for j'hésitais or journaliste for newspaper vendor. When necessary she created words of her own. In the same spirit that gave chanoine a feminine counterpart in chanoinesse, Françoise unhesitatingly created feminine forms of words to facilitate her expression. Hence the origin of charlatante. Or her unforgettable comment when Victor showed her a photo of Kaiser Wilhelm's wife: "Voilà la Guillaumesse!" (RTP, III, p. 846)

Her speech was cluttered with archaic words and expressions "aussi curieux que ces animaux survivants des époques lointaines, comme la baleine ou la girafe, et qui nous montrent les états que la vie animale a traversés." (RTP, II, p. 737) Françoise's speech continually bears evidence of her peasant origin and his historical heritage, two qualities especially prized by Marcel.

C'est ainsi que Françoise disait que quelqu'un restait dans ma rue pour dire qu'il y demeurerait, et qu'on pouvait demeurer deux minutes pour rester, les fautes des gens du peuple consistant seulement très

souvent à interchanger--comme a fait d'ailleurs la langue française--des termes qui au cours des siècles ont pris réciproquement la place l'un de l'autre. (RTP, III, p.515)

Her speech was a perfect marriage of the rustic picturesqueness of the peasant with the spirit and mind of the people. Even her intonation was indicative:

(Et le ton presque chanté sur lequel elle déclamaait cette invocation eût pu, chez Françoise, autant que l'arlésienne pureté de son visage, faire soupçonner une origine méridionale et que la patrie perdue qu'elle pleurait n'était qu'une patrie d'adoption. Mais peut-être se fût-on trompé, car il semble qu'il n'y ait pas de province qui n'ait son "midi", et combien ne rencontre-t-on pas de Savoyards et de Bretons chez qui l'on trouve toutes les douces transpositions de longues et de brèves qui caractérisent les méridionaux!)

(RTP, II, pp. 17-18)

Unfortunately Françoise's French was not destined to retain its peasant purity. Under the corrupting influence of Paris, Françoise's speech began to suffer. Much to Marcel's distress, "elle se mit à parler avec sa fille un français qui devint bien vite celui des plus basses époques." (RTP, III, p. 155) In her admiration for those who were inferior to her, she adopted "leur vilain tour de langage." (RTP, III, p. 749)

Assimilation had always been a factor in Françoise's speech, but the assimilation of the patatipatali et patatatipatala's and other au courant expressions that marked her daughter's discourse amounted to linguistic treason. Distasteful though they were to Marcel, the daughter's expressions at least reflected her way of life. "La fille

de Françoise, au contraire, parlait, se croyant une femme d'aujourd'hui et sortie des sentiers trop anciens, l'argot parisien et ne manquait aucune des plaisanteries adjointes." (RTP, II, p. 728)

Françoise's nieces, also in Paris, somehow remained unaffected by modern expressions and usage. Though they did not get along well with each other, when they conversed, the harmony of their conversation revealed their common origin:

Tel était, en dehors de beaucoup d'honnêteté et, quand ils parlaient, d'une sourde obstination à ne pas se laisser interrompre, à reprendre vingt fois là où ils en étaient si on les interrompait, ce qui finissait par donner à leurs propos la solidité inébranlable d'une fugue de Bach, le caractère des habitants dans ce petit pays qui n'en comptait pas cinq cents et que bordaient ses châtaigniers, ses saules, ses champs de pommes de terre et de betteraves.

(RTP, II, pp. 727-28)

The rustic, yet somehow poetic, expressions associated with Françoise recur in the speech of the two courrières of the hotel at Balbec. Like Françoise, Céleste and Marie represent the solid traditional background of the French peasant. Their verbal skills (and particularly those of Céleste whose words are verbatim those of the real Céleste Albaret) are quite impressive. Their elaborate speech "eût pourtant quelque chose de si littéraire que, sans le naturel presque sauvage de leur ton, on aurait cru leurs paroles affectées." (RTP, II, p. 846)

No less striking was Jupien's mastery of the language.

His French recalls the classic beauty of the tongue and his speech is pure perfection. His innate intelligence, "une des plus naturellement littéraires qu'il m'ait été donnée de connaître" explains the tailor's linguistic ability. Marcel's grandmother takes the credit for having been the first to appreciate his gifts; enchanted with his reply to her question, she exclaimed: "Sévigné n'aurait pas mieux dit!" (RTP, I, p. 20) The Narrator later comments that "Bien qu'il n'eût pas fait ses classes, Jupien respectait aussi naturellement la syntaxe que M. de Guermantes, malgré bien des efforts, la violait." (RTP, II, p. 308)

Jupien's superior use of language adds little to his overall characterization, but it does set him apart, along with Françoise and the courrières, from characters such as the directeur and the lift, whose speech is lacking in natural elegance and is contrived to create a favorable impression. In Le Côté de Guermantes, Proust gives the following "law" of language usage: "on s'exprime comme les gens de sa classe mentale et non de sa caste d'origine." (RTP, II, p. 236) Since these characters are all of the same social class, the differences in their speech can be attributed to attitude.

Proust is lavish in his praise of the speech of Jupien, the courrières and Françoise, although the old servant is frequently the subject of amusing commentaries. In contrast, Proust is cutting in his satire of the directeur

teur and the lift. As Mansfield explains, "Le génie comique de Proust, à la manière d'un bistouri, fouille dans un personnage pour découvrir ce qu'il a de faux, de truqué."¹¹⁵

Certainly the directeur's speech habits are anything but natural. In a continual effort to favorably impress his auditors, "il employait toujours des expressions qu'il croyait distinguées, sans s'apercevoir qu'elles étaient vicieuses." (RTP, I, p. 666) Inevitably his carefully selected expressions were the opposite of what he wished to convey. A veritable Monsieur Malaprop, he constantly erred in his use of words: consommée for consumée, reconnaissant for reconnaissable, intolérable for inexorable, sous la coupole for sous la coupe, etc. His absurd errors prompted Marcel to remark that "au fur et à mesure qu'il apprenait de nouvelles langues, il parlait plus mal les anciennes." (RTP, II, p. 751) Even more amusing was his total unawareness of how ridiculous he actually appeared to those he sought to impress.

The lift was less pompous, but he did go to extravagant lengths to glorify his situation. His most notable talent was finding euphemisms for the more mundane aspects of his employment. Fellow employees became collègues, his uniform a tunique, his salary a traitement; other servants were circumspectly referred to as employés and old Françoise was carefully denoted as "cette dame qui est je crois employée chez vous." (RTP, I, p. 800)

The lift's speech revealed his efforts to disguise

his rather base employment and to assert his independence.

On one occasion he discussed a new position with Marcel:

...il eût quelques jours à lui, avant de "rentre" dans sa nouvelle place. "Rentre" et "nouvelle" n'étaient du reste pas des expressions contradictoires, car pour le lift "rentre" était la forme usuelle du verbe "entrer". La seule chose qui m'étonnât était qu'il condescendît à dire "place", car il appartenait à ce prolétariat moderne qui désire effacer dans le langage la trace du régime de la domesticité...Et comme, par une contradiction absurde, le vocabulaire a, malgré tout, chez les "patrons", survécu à la conception de l'inégalité, je comprenais toujours mal ce que me disait le lift. (RTP, I, pp. 799-800)

Like Françoise, the lift persisted in mispronunciation: Camembert for Cambremer and accenseur for ascenseur. Marcel's butler was also quite conscious of the need to assert his independence linguistically; persisting in his error became something of a cause célèbre when Marcel corrected his pronunciation of envergure. Subsequently Victor availed himself of every opportunity to use the word, pronounced incorrectly, in Marcel's presence, "heureux de montrer à son maître que, bien qu'ancien jardinier de Combray et simple maître d'hôtel, tout de même bon Français selon la règle de Saint-André-des-Champs, il tenait de la Déclaration des droits de l'homme le droit de prononcer 'enverjure' en toute indépendance." (RTP, III, p. 842)

The tradition de Saint-André-des-Champs is another aspect of the people which is frequently mentioned. It is not limited to class but rather reflects the basic qualities and traditions Proust associates with the French and which

are somehow summed up in the carvings and in the atmosphere of the little church of Saint-André. Saint-Loup reflects this spirit through his "charmante ouverture d'esprit et de coeur." (RTP, II, p. 409) Oriane's speech, when it was without affectation, was "un vrai musée d'histoire de France par la conversation." (RTP, III, p. 35) In Marcel's mind, the aristocrat and the peasant are inextricably linked by "une tradition à la fois antique et directe, ininterrompue, orale, déformée, méconnaissable et vivante." (RTP, I, p. 151) Jacques Madaule expresses it well:

Le Monde et le peuple sont les conservatoires inconscients de très anciennes coutumes. Lorsque le souvenir passe de la duchesse de Guermantes à Françoise, franchissant tout l'entre-deux de cette bourgeoisie, petite ou grande, qui s'est peu à peu déformée en successives étapes, il retrouve sous les coutumes d'aujourd'hui les vieilles classes sociales, les Ordres d'avant 1789, le Seigneur en face du Paysan, issus de la même terre qui porte des légumes et des fleurs. 116

While the Guermantes do indeed reflect the tradition de Saint-André, it is Françoise who can truly be said to sum up all that this tradition represents. She is the very essence of France--a figure in the stained glass window of the tiny church or a living model of the statues that grace its entry. A symbol of the past living in the present, she is in perfect harmony with the spirit that animated the medieval artist who decorated the church.

Théodore, Camus' grocery boy, is also represented among the sculpted countenances adorning the church's facade.

Or ce garçon, qui passait et avec raison pour si mauvais sujet, était tellement rempli de l'âme qui avait décoré Saint-André-des-Champs et notamment des sentiments de respect que Françoise trouvait dûs aux "pauvres malades", à "sa pauvre maîtresse", qu'il avait pour soulever la tête de ma tante sur son oreiller la mine naïve et zélée des petits anges des bas-reliefs, s'empressant, un cierge à la main, autour de la Vierge défaillante, comme si les visages de pierre sculptée...n'étaient qu'un ensommeillement, qu'une réserve, prête à reflleurir dans la vie en innombrables visages populaires... (RTP, I, p. 151)

Likewise a peasant girl seeking shelter from the rain on the church's steps resembles the carvings.

The tradition de Saint-André is not primarily an aesthetic preoccupation for Proust. There is more emphasis on the qualities of character that it signifies, the simple peasant virtues. Though there is no reason why aristocrats like the Guermantes cannot equally well be cited as examples of the tradition, they less seldom are because the kind of life they lead tends to preclude the basic simplicity which is one of its essential ingredients. Saint-Loup is the exception; not only his political republicanism but his fundamental attitude toward society sets him apart from his peers.

In medieval times, that epoch so dear to Proust's heart, the seigneurs would have been as much a part of the tradition as the peasants because their lives were of necessity very closely linked. The advent of the First World War served as a means to once again fuse the destinies of the two classes as they fought side by side in a common

cause. Saint-Loup who went to the front of his own volition proved himself to be:

...plus profondément français de Saint-André-des-Champs, plus en conformité avec tout ce qu'il y avait à ce moment-là de meilleur chez les Français de Saint-André-des-Champs, seigneurs, bourgeois et serfs respectueux des seigneurs ou révoltés contre les seigneurs, deux divisions également françaises de la même famille, sous-embouchement François et sous-embouchement Morel, d'où deux flèches se dirigeaient, pour se réunir à nouveau, dans une même direction, qui était la frontière. (RTP, III, p. 739)

Some wealthy cousins of François, the Larivières, also reveal their true worth during the stress of wartime and can therefore claim their rightful place among the best of their countrymen. Already in retirement, they unhesitatingly returned to work in a café from six in the morning until nine at night in order to aid the widow of their nephew who had been killed in the fighting. Those who sought to evade their responsibilities "sont rachetés par la foule innombrable de tous les Français de Saint-André-des-Champs, par tous les soldats sublimes auxquels j'égale les Larivière." (RTP, III, p. 846) It is in homage to their magnanimity that Proust reveals that he has used, in this one instance, a real name.

Once again, reference to the tradition de Saint-André in the presentation of lower level characters requires, as did the commentaries on speech habits, a more extensive acquaintance with the character than is so often the case. A great many lower level characters appear only a few times, some only once. They are often viewed from a distance and

are noteworthy because something about their mien or appearance has caught the Narrator's eye. Here the image or metaphor is most frequently the means by which they are depicted.

Metaphor is a stylistic device basic to Proust's style. He once observed that "seule la métaphore peut donner une sorte d'éternité au style."¹¹⁷ Through the metaphor Proust establishes an effective rapport between two objects. It is a means by which to apprehend experience and to arrive at a greater truth through the juxtaposition of two apparently unrelated things.¹¹⁸ His metaphors are frequently elaborated and extended almost to the point of allegory. They are characterized by "unclassical mixtures" juxtaposing the abstract and the concrete, the noble and the ignoble, etc. with the result that their respective qualities are exchanged --the abstract is rendered concrete, the commonplace ennobled, etc.

Metaphoric associations with members of the lower classes fall into several general categories. Since Proust was a connoisseur of the beaux arts, inevitably they are the basis for a number of comparisons. Painting was a particularly common source for Proust to draw from, and he did so with such regularity that Jean-Françoise Revel remarked on "la façon salonnarde dont il utilise les grands peintres, incapables qu'il est de voir un beau visage sans parler de Mantegna ou de Carpaccio."¹¹⁹

When Charles Swann arrived at a soirée given by Mme

de Sainte-Euverte, a renaissance scene unfolded before him. On every hand he saw brightly costumed grooms standing "comme des jardiniers auraient été rangés à l'entrée de leurs parterres." (RTP, I, p. 323) Their lavish attire and majestic demeanor would have done credit to a Florentine court.

Upon entering the vestibule he encountered a group of valets who reminded him of a pack of hounds pricking up their ears at the sound of a stranger. One in particular who came forward to take his hat called to mind the executioner frequently found in Renaissance paintings, but the valet took his hat with such gentleness that "il semblait témoigner du mépris pour sa personne et des égards pour son chapeau." (RTP, I, p. 323) Martin Turnell considered this remark significant because it showed "the importance which the world he is entering attaches to externals and its disregard for the serious, human feelings which are the source of Swann's distress."¹²⁰ This is overdoing things a bit, but the observation does reveal Proust's extraordinary sensitivity.

It was Mantegna's fresco of the Martyrdom of St. James which inspired a well-known metaphor: Swann's attention was drawn to "un grand gaillard en livrée... immobile, sculptural, inutile, comme ce guerrier purement décoratif qu'on voit dans les tableaux les plus tumultueux de Mantegna...aussi résolu à se désintéresser de cette scène, qu'il suivait vaguement de ses yeux glauques et cruels, que

si c'eût été le massacre des Innocents ou le martyre de saint Jacques." (RTP, I, pp. 323-24) Others recalled works of Dürer or Cellini and are elaborately described. These vivid descriptions have much in common with the paintings they suggest; every work is like a brushstroke. Charles Du Bos observed that "Proust opère par accumulation, mais, ainsi que les touches successives du peintre, chacun des termes employés est choisi pour rendre pleinement et de façon à n'y plus revenir un des aspects, un des modes d'apparition de l'objet en cause." 121

At the base of the enormous staircase leading to the salon, Swann is once again dazzled by the spectacle before him. The valets standing on the ascending stairs reminded him of the "Escalier des géants" of the Ducal Palace. Followed by a servant who could have passed for "un sacristain de Goya," Swann mounted the stairs, encountering on his way a living version of a Cellini statue "avec une impassibilité militaire ou une foi surnaturelle...d'épier, ange ou vigie, d'une tour de donjon ou de cathédrale, l'apparition de l'ennemi ou l'heure du Jugement." (RTP, I, pp. 325-26) In the salon everything seemed drab, even ugly, by comparison.

The numerous images growing out of the simple act of entering the Hôtel Sainte-Euverte are evidence of the elaborate workings of Proust's imagination, which, coupled with his aesthetic awareness, provides the reader of A la Recherche with an unforgettable mental spectacle. Such art-inspired metaphors are far superior to mere description.

The conjunction of the servile and the mundane with masterpieces of art leads to a rediscovery of the former. The little kitchen maid at Combray becomes a reincarnation of Charity from Giotto's Virtues and Vices of Padua. Her full, pregnant form suggests the sturdy, mannish figures in the painting:

...on s'étonnait même que Françoise lui laissât faire tant de courses et de besogne, car elle commençait à porter difficilement devant elle la mystérieuse corbeille, chaque jour plus remplie, dont on devinait sous ses amples sarraux la forme magnifique. Ceux-ci rappelaient les houppelandes qui revêtent certaines des figures symboliques de Giotto dont M. Swann m'avait donné des photographies. (RTP, I, p. 80)

The resemblance is based purely on appearance, for "c'est sans qu'aucune pensée de charité semble avoir jamais pu être exprimée par son visage énergique et vulgaire." (RTP, I, p. 81) The flowers entwined in the basket recall the buds of the asparagus to which Françoise so cruelly exposes her:

La pauvre charité de Giotto, comme l'appelait Swann, chargée par Françoise de les "plumer", les avait près d'elle dans une corbeille, son air était douloureux, comme si elle ressentait tous les malheurs de la terre; et les légères couronnes d'azur qui ceignaient les asperges au-dessus de leurs tuniques de rose étaient finement dessinées, étoile par étoile, comme le sont dans la fresque les fleurs bandées autour du front ou piquées dans la corbeille de la Vertu de Padoue. (RTP, I, p. 121)

Françoise is not compared to a particular work of art but to creative artists in general. Marcel was extremely appreciative of her gastronomic talents and was especially

impressed by her efforts in honor of the Marquis de Norpois who was to be a dinner guest. "Ce jour-là...Françoise avait la brûlante certitude des grands créateurs," and in the tradition of great artists she personally selected all the meats and vegetables with the same care and demanding requirements used by Michelangelo in choosing his marbles. (RTP, I, p. 445) The guest of honor was duly impressed and "Françoise accepta les compliments de M. de Norpois avec la fière simplicité, le regard joyeux et--fut-ce momentanément --intelligent, d'un artiste à qui on parle de son art." (RTP, I, p. 484)

Françoise was not only a creative artist but an interpretative artist as well. Like Berma she could utilize her body to express herself. Fond of making entrances that smacked of the theatrical, she relished the idea of the "perfect setting." Her finest hour was whenever she felt particularly put upon by those whom she served; in such moments she was a veritable genius at transforming herself into an appropriately pitiable and mistreated figure. The importunate midnight arrival of Albertine roused her from a comfortable sleep and occasioned one of her most memorable performances. Marcel was greeted by the sight of a feeble but faithful Françoise standing in his doorway to announce Albertine's arrival:

...capable de rivaliser avec la Berma elle-même dans l'art de faire parler les vêtements inanimés et les traits du visage, Françoise avait su faire la leçon à son corsage, à ses cheveux dont les plus blancs avaient

été ramenés à la surface, exhibés comme un extrait de naissance, à son cou courbé par la fatigue et l'obéissance. Ils la plaig-
naient d'avoir été tirée du sommeil et de la moiteur du lit, au milieu de la nuit, à son âge, obligée de se vêtir quatre à quatre, au risque de prendre une fluxion de poitrine...Celle-ci, sans proférer aucune plainte, ayant même l'air d'étouffer de son mieux une toux irrésistible, et croisant seulement sur elle son châle comme si elle avait froid,,. (RTP, II, p. 735)

Françoise's resemblance to the celebrated Berma was not the only example of a comparison made between lower level characters and theatrical performers. The numerous grooms and valets of the Grand-Hôtel were likened to the choruses of Racine's religious plays, Esther and Athalie. The interior lobby of the hotel "qui correspondait au narthex, ou église des cathéchumènes, des églises romanes" was the perfect setting for "des choristes qui, même quand ils ne servent à rien, demeurent en scène pour ajouter à la figuration...Du moins, entre le déjeuner et le dîner, entre les sorties et les rentrées des clients, remplissaient-ils le vide de l'action, comme ces élèves de Mme de Maintenon qui, sous le costume de jeunes Israélites, font intermède chaque fois qu'Esther ou Joad s'en vont." (RTP, I, p. 706)

On a subsequent visit Marcel was struck by the vastness of the spectacle confronting him, a spectacle worthy of a palace or of Solomon's temple:

Bien que le client ne fût qu'une sorte de spectateur, il était mêlé perpétuellement au spectacle...comme si la vie du spectateur se déroulait au milieu des sumptuosités de la scène...En bas, c'était l'élément masculin qui dominait et faisait de cet hôtel, à cause de l'extrême et oisive jeunesse des serveurs, comme une sorte de tragédie judéo-

chrétienne ayant pris corps et perpétuellement représentée...car dès le hall, ce qu'au XVIIe siècle on appelait les portiques, "un peuple florissant" de jeunes chasseurs se tenait, surtout à l'heure du goûter, comme les jeunes Israélites des chœurs de Racine...et, à moins que ce ne fût l'instant d'une détente contemplative, tous entrelaçaient leurs évolutions inutiles, respectueuses, décoratives et quotidiennes. Car, sauf leur "jour de sortie", "loin du monde élevés" et ne franchissant pas le parvis, ils menaient la même existence ecclésiastique que les lévites dans Athalie, et devant cette "troupe jeune et fidèle" jouant aux pieds des degrés couverts de tapis magnifiques, je pouvais me demander si je pénétrais dans le grand hôtel de Balbec ou dans le temple de Salomon. (RTP, II, pp. 773-75)

Donzé criticized this particular analogy because while he agreed that comparing the dissimilar is acceptable, he felt that in this instance the dissimilarity was inordinately great. And yet how effective such a comparison is. A mental picture immediately comes to mind. Such a vast but carefully ordered spectacle needs an equally vast and impressive analogy to convey its full impact to the reader. As for the dissimilarity, surely it can be no greater in this metaphor than in many others Proust employs, e.g. the butcher boy-turned-angel. The basic demands of Proust's definition are met, and his novel is the richer for it.

Another elaborate comparison appears when Marcel likens the noise and singing of the people selling their wares in the street to some sort of medieval liturgy. Their raucous cries become euphonious, and a hidden rhythm and harmony in them emerges. Leaning from his window to take in the scene before him, Marcel is first reminded of the

merchants who paraded their wares and displayed their goods in the square in front of the church. From this initial reference he proceeds to the realization that their cries resemble the pattern of the old liturgical chants: "Car l'appel amusant qu'ils lançaient aux petites maisons voisines n'avait, à de rares exceptions près, rien d'une chanson... mais d'autre part rappelait la psalmodie d'un prêtre au cours d'offices dont ces scènes de la rue ne sont que la contre-partie bon enfant, foraine, et pourtant à demi liturgique." (RTP, III, p. 116)

Each voice seemed to be a different instrument "depuis la corne du raccommodeur de porcelaine, ou la trompette du rempailleur de chaises, jusqu'à la flûte du chevrier." (RTP, III, p. 116) Each had his particular variation on the main theme:

Certes, la fantaisie, l'esprit de chaque marchand ou marchande, introduisaient souvent des variantes dans les paroles de toutes ces musiques que j'entendais de mon lit... Dans sa petite voiture conduite par une ânesse... le marchand d'habits, portant un fouet, psalmodiait: "Habits, marchand d'habits, ha...bits" avec la même pause entre les deux dernières syllabes d'habits que s'il eût entonné en plain-chant: "Per omnia saecula saeculo...rum" ou: "Requiescat in pa...ce", bien qu'il ne dût pas croire à l'éternité de ses habits et ne les offrît pas non plus comme linceuls pour le suprême repos dans la paix. (RTP, III, p. 118)

Certainly Proust had a powerful imagination, but the comparison is not beyond reason. The imagination is in the choice of the other element of the metaphor, but the point of departure is always situated in reality. And by com-

paring what Marcel sees to what is already in some measure familiar to the reader, he communicates far more effectively than would be the case had he resorted to simple descriptives. Moreover the communication occurs at a sensorial level as well; the reader is able not only to form a mental picture of the spectacle in the street but also to virtually hear the merchants extolling their wares.

By using religious liturgy as the other element of the metaphor Proust also hits upon what to him is a basic element in the makeup of the people: their close ties to the medieval past, and, by extension, to the church of that period.

...le marchand de chiffons, reproduisant sans le savoir une de ces brusques interruptions de la sonorité, au milieu d'une prière, qui sont assez fréquentes dans le rituel de l'Eglise... Sans irrévérence, comme le peuple pieux du moyen âge, sur le parvis même de l'église, jouait les farces et les soties, c'est à ce "dicere" que fait penser le marchand de chiffons, quand, après avoir traîné sur les mots, il dit la dernière syllabe avec une brusquerie digne de l'accentuation réglée par le grand pape du VIIe siècle... (RTP, III, p. 127)

The metaphor goes on for many pages, making it impossible to quote in entirety, but in spite of its length, it is not redundant.

The ritual of the church is used in the description of that extraordinary day when the directeur himself condescended to carve the turkey. Proust likens him to a priest whose every gesture is meaningful and who is conscious of his high function:

...il découpât lui-même les dindonneaux. J'étais sorti mais j'ai su qu'il l'avait fait avec une majesté sacerdotale, entouré à distance respectueuse du dressoir, d'un cercle de garçons qui cherchaient, par là, moins à apprendre qu'à se faire bien voir et avaient un air béat d'admiration. Vus d'ailleurs par le directeur (plongeant d'un geste lent dans le flanc des victimes et n'en détachant pas plus ses yeux pénétrés de sa haute fonction que s'il avait dû y lire quelque augure), ils ne le furent nullement. Le sacrificateur ne s'aperçut même par de mon absence. (RTP, II, p. 1084)

The church ritual is also compared to the murmur of maids' voices in a house of prostitution at Maineville, which might seem inappropriate, but is nonetheless effective: "les voix des jeunes bonnes répétaient en plus bas, sans se lasser, l'ordre de la sous-maîtresse, comme ces catéchismes qu'on entend les élèves psalmodier dans la sonorité d'une église de campagne." (RTP, II, p. 1079)

Marcel's chauffeur at Balbec reminds his passenger of an apostle. As explained earlier, this was in reality Alfred Agostinelli, whom Proust hired at Cabourg in 1907 to drive him about the countryside. In an article about these excursions in Le Figaro, the metaphors Proust uses to describe the chauffeur parallel those found in A la Recherche. In the novel Marcel remarks that the chauffeur "s'exprimait si simplement qu'on eût toujours dit paroles d'Évangile." (RTP, II, pp. 1027-28) He refers to him as "le jeune apôtre" and twice compares the car's steering wheel to a cross.

It was the physical appearance and pose of the

chauffeur that triggered the religious association in Proust's mind.

Similarly the face of a young waiter at Doncières stood out among the diners at what seemed like "un repas de l'Evangile figuré, avec la naïveté du vieux temps et l'exagération des Flandres."

...ce serviteur dans lequel je crus reconnaître un personnage qui est de tradition dans ces sujets sacrés et dont il reproduisait scrupuleusement la figure camuse, naïve et mal dessinée, l'expression rêveuse, déjà à demi presciente du miracle d'une présence divine que les autres n'ont pas encore soupçonnée... (RTP, II, p. 99)

The juxtaposition of the lowly with the divine is a frequent occurrence in A la Recherche. It is one of Proust's favorite ways of describing minor lower-level characters. He had always sensed something extraordinary in the common folk and often their features or physical agility suggested some ethereal being.

By virtue of this process, a butcher boy weighing meat is metamorphosed into an angel weighing the Good against the Bad on Judgement Day:

...un garçon boucher, très grand et très mince, aux cheveux blonds, son cou sortant d'un col bleu ciel, mettait une rapidité vertigineuse et une religieuse conscience à mettre d'un côté les filets de boeuf exquis, de l'autre de la culotte de dernier ordre, les plaçant dans d'éblouissantes balances surmontées d'une croix, d'où retombaient de belles chaînettes, et-- bien qu'il ne fût ensuite que disposer, pour l'étalage, des rognons, des tournedos, des entrecôtes--donnait en réalité beaucoup plutôt l'impression d'un bel ange qui, au jour du Jugement dernier, préparera pour

Dieu, selon leur qualité, la séparation
des Bons et des Méchants et la pesée des
âmes. (RTP, III, p. 138)

The filles du peuple to whom Marcel was invariably attracted when he caught a glimpse of them in passing were terrestrial incarnations of the goddesses of mythology. They abounded in the poorer sections of Paris: "l'érection d'une Vénus ancillaire derrière chaque comptoir faisait de lui comme un autel suburbain au pied duquel j'aurais voulu passer ma vie." (RTP, III, p. 168) There was something in every salesgirl, crémière and laitière that transcended her lowly station:

L'émotion dont je me sentais saisi...
était l'émotion qu'on a à reconnaître
des déesses. Depuis que l'Olympe n'existe
plus, ses habitants vivent sur la terre.
Et quand, faisant un tableau mythologique,
les peintres ont fait poser pour Vénus ou
Céres des filles du peuple exerçant les
plus vulgaires métiers, bien loin de com-
mettre un sacrilège, ils n'ont fait que
leur ajouter, que leur rendre la qualité,
les attributs divins dont elles étaient
dépouillées. (RTP, III, p. 167)

Like the peasant girls of Balbec, the elusive, evanescent
quality of these êtres de fuite only added to their allure.

...les rues, les avenues, sont pleines de
Déesses. Mais les Déesses ne se laissent
pas approcher. Ça et là, entre les arbres,
à l'entrée de quelque café, une servante
veillait comme une nymphe à l'orée d'un
bois sacré, tandis qu'au fond trois jeunes
filles étaient assises à côté de l'arc
immense de leurs bicyclettes posées à côté
d'elles, comme trois immortelles accoudées
au nuage ou au coursier fabuleux sur lesquels
elles accomplissent leurs voyages mytholo-
giques. (RTP, III, pp. 169-70)

In contrast to the elusory, teasing quality of the

young girls-turned-goddesses, the male incarnations of the deities tended to display a more austere demeanor. Swann's concierge, Legrandin, reminds the timorous Marcel of a Euménide " [qui] prit l'habitude, quand je lui demandais si je pouvais monter, de m'indiquer, en soulevant sa casquette d'une main propice, qu'il exauçait ma prière." (RTP, I, p. 503) The same uneasiness plagued Marcel upon his arrival at Balbec when he encountered the hotel personnel: "Et en même temps le regard de Minos, Eaque et Rhadamante ...me fut jeté sévèrement par des messieurs qui, peu versés peut-être dans l'art de 'recevoir', portaient le titre de 'chefs de réception'." (RTP, I, pp. 663-64) By comparing the three chefs de réception to the three judges of Hell, Proust conveys without endless streams of adjectives, precisely the nature of the stare they directed at the timid young man.

More graceful and less austere was "le dieu courer aux cheveux noirs", a young waiter whom Marcel notices while at Rivebelle dining with Saint-Loup. This agile young man darted about like a celestial sprite: "on l'apercevait tantôt ici, tantôt là, comme des statues successives d'un jeune dieu courant, les unes à l'intérieur, d'ailleurs bien éclairé, d'une demeure qui se prolongeait en gazons verts, les autres sous les feuillages, dans la clarté de la vie en plein air." (RTP, II, p. 1016)

A more unusual association of pagan deities with plebeian folk is found in the comparison of the demoiselles

de téléphone to distant implacable goddesses. Here Proust has found something poetic in one of the most unpoetic devices of modern civilization, and he succeeds admirably in translating what he considers to be the multiple and hidden reality behind this object. The telephone operators, by virtue of their detachment, being voices without bodies, and by virtue of the mysteries of the invention of which they are, by extension, a part, assume an ethereal quality for the Narrator. His comparison is at once effective and amusing.

...je me saisis du récepteur du téléphone, j'invoquai les Divinités implacables, mais ne fis qu'exciter leur fureur qui se traduisait par ces mots: "Pas libre."

and when his connection was finally obtained,

Mais déjà une des Divinités irascibles aux servantes vertigineusement agiles s'irritait non plus que je parlasse, mais que je ne dise rien.

Before hanging up, he is careful to pay them proper respect:

Je ne quittai pas le téléphone sans remercier en quelques mots propitiatoires Celle qui règne sur la vitesse des sons, d'avoir bien voulu user en faveur de mes humbles paroles d'un pouvoir qui les rendait cent fois plus rapides que le tonnerre. (RTP, III, pp. 99-102)

Not only is this analogy conspicuous for the poetic imagination it manifests, but it is a delightful example of Proust's subtle humor.

The continual, almost scientific observation which Proust directed at every experience and at every person he saw led to a group of metaphors based upon fauna and

flora. The celebrated analogies of the Saint-Euverte salon to an aquarium and of the meeting of Jupien and Charlus to the relationship of a bee to a flower come immediately to mind. The choice of the object for the second element in the metaphor had no social significance. The Guermantes reminded Marcel of birds but so did a waiter at Rivebelle who scurried about frantically like a brightly colored parrot running about in his cage.

On several occasions Proust employed comparisons with a dog to illustrate his point. A well-known example is the description of the valets at Mme de Saint-Euverte's who remind Swann of a pack of greyhounds stirring from their sleep at the sound of a stranger: "la meute éparse, magnifique et désœuvrée des grands valets de pied qui dormaient ça et là sur des banquettes et des coffres et qui, soulevant leurs nobles profils aigus de lévriers, se dressèrent et, rassemblés, formèrent le cercle autour de lui," (RTP, I, p. 23)

Françoise by her very nature invites analogies to animals. She works like a horse, acts by instinct and has very acute senses. Marcel attributes to her "le regard intelligent et bon d'un chien." (RTP, I, p. 650) On another occasion he is not so kind, discerning in the old servant a refined animal cruelty which reminds him of a certain specie of wasp.

Et comme cet hyménoptère observé par Fabre, la guêpe fouisseuse, qui, pour que ses petits après sa mort aient de la viande fraîche à manger, appelle l'anatomie au secours de sa cruauté et, ayant capturé des charançons et des araignées, leur perce avec un savoir et une adresse merveilleux le centre nerveux d'où dépend le mouvement des pattes, mais non les autres fonctions de la vie, de façon que l'insecte paralysé près duquel elle dépose ses oeufs, fournisse aux larves, quand elles éclosent, un gibier docile, inoffensif, incapable de fuite ou de résistance, mais nullement faisandé, Françoise trouvait pour servir sa volonté permanente de rendre la maison intenable à tout domestique, des ruses si savantes et si impitoyables que, bien des années plus tard, nous apprîmes que si cet été-là nous avions mangé presque tous les jours des asperges, c'était parce que leur odeur donnait à la pauvre fille de cuisine chargée de les éplucher des crises d'asthme d'une telle violence qu'elle fut obligée de finir par s'en aller. (RTP, I, pp. 123-24)

Another hymenopteron, the bumblebee, is central to one of the most memorable comparisons of the novel, the one used to depict the first meeting of Jupien and Charlus. Initially their movements upon seeing one another resembled the courting dance of two birds: "on eût dit deux oiseaux, le mâle et la femelle, le mâle cherchant à s'avancer, la femelle--Jupien--ne répondant plus par aucun signe à ce manège, mais regardant son nouvel ami sans étonnement, avec une fixité inattentive." (RTP, II, p. 606) Marcel, who happened to be an inadvertent observer of their encounter, suddenly saw an association between their movements and the movement of a bee about a flower: "je venais de voir Jupien tourner autour de M. de Charlus comme l'orchidée faire des avances au bourdon." (RTP, II, p. 631) Metaphorically but

effectively Marcel is introduced to the strange rites of the "cities of the plain."

Botanical images also abound, inspired particularly by the hotel personnel at Balbec. One chasseur stationed in front of the hotel was so totally lacking in movement that he seemed to be some sort of shrub planted by the porch: "devant le porche où j'attendais, était planté comme un arbrisseau d'une espèce rare un jeune chasseur qui ne frappait pas moins les yeux par l'harmonie singulière de ses cheveux colorés que par son épiderme de plante." (RTP, I, p. 706). He must have been a prize plant rather than a shrub, because each evening he was carefully placed inside for protection against the night air. The "immobilité végétale" of the young groom is complemented by "la tige souple de sa taille et la coloration curieuse de sa chevelure." (RTP, II, p. 773)

A last main category of metaphors applicable to lower-level characters involves professions. Jacques Nathan (La Morale de Proust) was especially preoccupied with the question of Proust's treatment of professions. In his book he quotes Eméric Fiser as saying: "Dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust, les personnages n'apparaissent presque jamais en plein exercice de leur profession. La réalité vivante de la personnalité profonde ne se manifeste en aucune manière dans l'exercice d'une profession qui est une suite interminable d'habitudes." ¹²² This is certainly the case, because in Proust's milieu few were professional men and, as Fiser

noted, the very things that interested Proust would not have been found within the scope of the professional life of his characters.

Nathan concurs and concludes that in Proust's eyes, one métier was as good as another, which Proust illustrates by comparing the difficult trades to the simpler ones. But the fact is that Proust is not primarily concerned with the basis for comparison--here a profession--but rather with the effect it will achieve. When he compares the maîtres d'hôtel in a Paris restaurant to academicians, he is not trying to equate the two professions but instead hopes to convey to his reader the exact nature of the critical gaze they directed at the diners.

...ils avaient l'air d'académiciens aussi; arrêté devant un buffet, l'un examinait des poires avec la figure et la curiosité désintéressée qu'eût pu avoir M. de Jussieu. D'autres, à côté de lui, jetaient sur la salle les regards empreints de curiosité et de froideur que les membres de l'Institut déjà arrivés jettent sur le public tout en échangeant quelques mots qu'on n'entend pas. C'étaient des figures célèbres parmi les habitués. (RTP, II, p. 168)

It is characteristic of Proust to find that often members of the lower levels have a more distinguished appearance than their social superiors.

The lift reminds Proust of an organist: "jeune organiste, artisan de mon voyage et compagnon de ma captivité, lequel continuait à tirer les registres de son instrument et à pousser des tuyaux." (RTP, I, p. 665)

Proust customarily attributes to a character

feelings which he does not actually experience but which his expression might presuppose. Like the waiters/academicians, for example. Similarly, a huissier encountered by the diffident Marcel upon his arrival at the home of the Prince de Guermantes seems to be the reincarnation of an executioner.

Absorbé dans la contemplation de la maîtresse de maison...je n'avais pas songé aux fonctions terribles pour moi ...de cet huissier habillé de noir comme un bourreau, entouré d'une troupe de valets aux livrées les plus riantes, solides gaillards prêts à s'emparer d'un intrus et à le mettre à la porte. (RTP, II, p. 637)

Marcel's anxiety stemmed from his fear that although he had received an invitation, he had not actually been invited. Since the huissier's function was to announce each new arrival by name, Marcel was understandably shaken.

"L'huissier me demanda mon nom, je le lui dis aussi machinalement que le condamné à mort se laisse attacher au billot." (RTP, II, p. 637)

Among the valets at the Saint-Euverte soirée Swann saw some who reminded him of notaries because of the meticulous way they wrote down each guest's name. Françoise also receives a metaphoric profession. Designated by an appreciative Norpois as chef de premier ordre, Françoise received the news from Marcel's mother who went to present the ambassador's compliments "comme un ministre de Guerre, les félicitations d'un souverain de passage après 'la Revue'." (RTP, I, p. 484)

Françoise is repeatedly involved in metaphoric associations because of her extensive role in the novel and because the many facets of her character seem to invite such comparisons. Because of her superior culinary talents, Marcel associates her with food; her cap is like spun sugar and the savory smell of her roast chicken is the quintessence of her being: "l'arôme de cette chair...n'étant pour moi que le propre parfum d'une de ses vertus." (RTP, I, p. 121) She carefully guarded her gastronomic secrets with the same determination as "une grande élégante pour ses toilettes, ou une grande cancatrice pour son chant." (RTP, I, p. 485)

Even her appearance as she leaves for Balbec inspires a metaphor. Her reserved yet elegant attire brings out her natural nobleness and she is reminiscent of Anne de Bretagne.

Françoise, dans le drap cerise mais passé de son manteau et les poils sans rudesse de son collet de fourrure, faisait penser à quelqu'une de ces images d'Anne de Bretagne peintes dans des livres d'Heures par un vieux maître, et dans lesquelles tout est si bien en place, le sentiment de l'ensemble s'est si également répandu dans toutes les parties que la riche et désuète singularité du costume exprime la même gravité pieuse que les yeux, les lèvres et les mains.
(RTP, I, p. 649)

These and the many other comparisons to which Françoise is subject add immensely to her characterization.

Two other extended metaphors deserve mention. They add a great deal to the atmosphere of that magical evening when Marcel and Saint-Loup went to Rivebelle to dine.

Marcel's dominant impression as he looked about the dining room was of harmonious and synchronized movement.

To the imaginative young man, the dining room was transformed into a miniature solar system; the round tables represented planets with the waiters revolving about them. The long metaphor which follows is a masterpiece of poetic imagination. To quote only in part:

Toute cette activité vertigineuse se fixait en une calme harmonie. Je regardais les tables rondes dont l'assemblée innombrable emplissait le restaurant, comme autant de planètes, telles que celles-ci sont figurées dans les tableaux allégoriques d'autrefois...L'harmonie de ces tables astrales n'empêchait pas l'incessante révolution des servants innombrables, lesquels parce qu'au lieu d'être assis, comme les dîneurs, ils étaient debout, évoluaient dans une zone supérieure...leur course perpétuelle entre les tables rondes finissait par dégager la loi de sa circulation vertigineuse et réglée.

(RTP, I, pp. 810-11)

As Marcel took in the spectacle before him, his eye was drawn to two hideously ugly cashiers who were engrossed in their calculations; he was reminded of two astrologers pouring over their charts.

Assises derrière un massif de fleurs, deux horribles caissières, occupées à des calculs sans fin, semblaient deux magiciennes occupées à prévoir par des calculs astrologiques les bouleversements qui pouvaient parfois se produire dans cette voûte céleste conçus selon la science du moyen âge. (RTP, I, p. 81)

Albert Feuillerat notes that this long passage was added later by Proust. It succeeds admirably in conveying the impression of complex movement among the many different people and objects in the dining room. His choice of metaphor is not only memorable, but adds another dimension

to the scene he is describing.

A la Recherche is much the richer for Proust's skillful, imaginative and effective application of the metaphor. And the majority of the lower-level characters are indebted to it for their literary existence.

CHAPTER IV

THE MILIEU OF COMBRAY

The social institution (in the sociological sense, it is defined as a well-established, structured pattern of behavior or relationships) plays a fundamental role in A la Recherche. It is within social institutions that Proust is able to focus his attention on the overt mannerisms of his characters so indicative of covert motivation. Each milieu is a little world unto itself, though each is connected to the others by many carefully woven ties. The resort at Balbec is as unique in its way as the rural paradise of Combray or the elegant salons of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The milieu exercises certain influences on those who move within it; it can be characterized by certain accepted attitudes and defined modes of behavior which are considered de rigueur.

The social institutions of A la Recherche are, with the exception of the bohemian world of the theater, oriented toward the upper classes. The lower-class characters, whether major or minor, are essentially auxiliaries rather than prime movers in these milieus and are consequently quite susceptible to the predominating attitudes and affectations. It therefore seems logical to present principal lower level characters by milieu rather than individually. This particularly applies to Françoise, whose behavior depends to a definite degree upon the milieu in which she

is functioning.

The first milieu to which the reader of A la Recherche is introduced is that of the little village of Combray where Marcel spent some of his childhood. Modeled on the village of Illiers where Proust visited his aunt and uncle Amiot, Combray is the typical French village where everyone knows everyone else, and "une personne 'qu'on ne connaissait point' était un être aussi peu croyable qu'un dieu de la mythologie." (RTP, I, p. 57)

The tiny populace of Combray had very definite ideas about "ce qui se doit" to which all classes of their society conformed. This is the esprit de Combray; it is based on a rigid conception of social hierarchy in which financial status plays a decisive role. The serving class is imbued with the tradition of service to one's master and the upper classes feel a sense of responsibility for their social inferiors. Movement either up or down within the class structure is frowned upon. Marcel's aunts would have been shocked to discover that their neighbor, Charles Swann, frequented the Faubourg Saint-Germain. By the same token, Swann's wife Odette, a former cocotte, was totally unacceptable in Combray society.

The snobbery that existed in Combray was based upon principle. The good bourgeois of the little village were perfectly willing to admit to the existence of merit and worthiness at any social level; but they had been raised in the tradition of "castes," and it was the departure

from that tradition which they feared and to which they objected. Tante Céline, discussing a quote from Saint-Simon, posed the question: "est-ce qu'un homme n'est pas autant qu'un autre? Qu'est-ce que cela peut faire qu'il soit duc ou cocher, s'il a de l'intelligence et du coeur?" (RTP, I, pp. 26-27) to which one is tempted to add "pourvu qu'il reste à sa place." For this was the crux of the matter. Regardless of what qualities and talents one might possess, regardless of how charming or successful he might be, it was the will of Combray that he remain in terms of social classification within that level to which he was born. The comparison with the hereditary social organization of India is particularly apt; social rank in Combray was also hereditary.

Marcel's grandmother is a good illustration of the traditional approach to movement within the social structure. Much like Proust himself, she made a sharp distinction between worth and social rank. Her lavish praises of Jupien and his niece were quite in character: "Ma grand'mère avait trouvé ces gens parfaits...Car pour elle, la distinction était quelque chose d'absolument indépendant du rang social." (RTP, I, p. 20) But, when it became a question of associating with someone of another social level, she was adamant. It was for this reason that despite their mutual affection, she did not wish to associate with the Marquise de Villeparisis and therefore avoided meeting her at Balbec for as long as she could. She thought somewhat less of the

Marquise for associating with Swann, whom she considered to be of lower social status; Swann's esteem also suffered, because for her, as for Marcel's great aunt, "quelqu'un qui choissait ses fréquentations en dehors de la caste où il était né, en dehors de sa 'classe' sociale, subissait à ses yeux un fâcheux déclassement." (RTP, I, p. 21)

Marcel's mother inherited the same attitude. While she was infinitely kind and solicitous of those of other, inferior social levels, while she would not have questioned their personal worth or basic equality with their social superiors, at any evidence of a breach in the social obligations which were her due, her displeasure was evident. It was the emphasis on social ceremony and protocol that gave the society of Combray its rigidity and its traditional tone.

Je ne peux, du reste, pas dire que cette façon que j'avais de mettre les gens du peuple sur le pied d'égalité avec les gens du monde, très bien admise de ceux-ci, satisfît en revanche toujours pleinement ma mère. Non qu'humainement elle fît une différence quelconque entre les êtres, et si jamais Françoise avait du chagrin ou était souffrante, elle était toujours consolée et soignée par maman avec la même amitié, avec le même dévouement que sa meilleure amie. Mais ma mère était trop la fille de mon grand-père pour ne pas faire socialement acceptation des castes. Les gens de Combray avaient beau avoir du coeur, de la sensibilité, acquérir les plus belles théories sur l'égalité humaine, ma mère, quand un valet de chambre s'émancipait, disait une fois "vous" et glissait insensiblement à ne plus me parler à la troisième personne, avait de ces usurpations le même mécontentement qui éclate dans les

Mémoires de Saint-Simon chaque fois qu'un seigneur qui n'y a pas droit saisit un prétexte de prendre la qualité d'"Altesse" dans un acte authentique, ou de ne pas rendre aux ducs ce qu'il leur devait et ce dont peu à peu il se dispense. Il y avait un "esprit de Combray" si réfractaire qu'il faudra des siècles de bonté (celle de ma mère était infinie), de théories égalitaires, pour arriver à le dissoudre.
(RTP, II, p. 1027)

The déclassement in Le Temps retrouvé occurs in Paris society, but it has some of its roots in Combray. Combray itself does not change, but when Marcel's mother learns of the marriage of the young Cambremer to Jupien's niece, her remarks illustrate the extent to which this union crossed class boundaries: "Le fils de Mme de Cambremer pour qui Legrandin craignait tant d'avoir à nous donner une recommandation, parce qu'il ne nous trouvait pas assez chic, épousant la nièce d'un homme qui n'aurait jamais osé monter chez nous que par l'escalier de service!" (RTP, III, p. 659) Her one satisfaction is to recall that her own mother had first remarked on the innate quality of the humble giletière.

The unchanging Combray is the nucleus about which the rest of A la Recherche is formed; it is the overture to the symphony, introducing all of the themes and many of the principal characters that will later be combined and recombined in social relationships throughout the novel. The esprit de Combray initially sets the tone and leaves its mark on many of the characters and events of A la Recherche:

Ce n'est pas de la tasse de thé, mais de Combray qu'est issue l'humanité d'A la Recherche du temps perdu; tous, les plus "distingués" comme les plus modestes, proviennent de la paysannerie de Combray admirablement figurée dans les bas-reliefs de Saint-André-des-Champs, et tous sont plus ou moins tributaires de cet esprit de Combray dont Proust a subtilement décélé l'existence et qui est en quelque sorte l'âme ancestrale de la petite cité. 123

Certainly Françoise is one of the principal characters associated with Combray. Like Combray, she remains basically unchanged. To Marcel she represents an element of stability and continuity and shares in the medieval aura of the little village. She seems beyond the destructive touch of time, a living reincarnation of the past which time is powerless to alter in any fundamental way.

She typifies the rural peasant-servant and is (at least while still in Combray) imbued with all due respect for her employer. "Elle était de ces domestiques de Combray sachant la valeur de leur maître et que le moins qu'elles peuvent est de lui faire rendre entièrement ce qu'elles jugent qui lui est dû." (RTP, III, p. 15)

Her own personal code of behavior echoes past traditions and exemplifies all that the esprit de Combray signifies:

Elle possédait à l'égard des choses qui peuvent ou ne peuvent pas se faire un code impérieux, abondant, subtil et intransigeant sur les distinctions insaisissables ou oiseuses...Ce code...semblait avoir prévu des complexités sociales et des raffinements mondains tels que rien dans l'entourage de Françoise et dans sa vie de domestique de village n'avait pu les lui suggérer; et

l'on était obligé de se dire qu'il y avait en elle un passé français très ancien, noble et mal compris... (RTP, I, pp. 28-29)

True to the principles of Combray, Françoise entertained no thoughts of improving her social station and accepted the rigid class structure without question.

Marcel first encountered the formidable servant in the house of his Tante Léonie, a garrulous old hypochondriac; Françoise was her cook, housekeeper and general confidante. She appears for the first time in A la Recherche standing in the shadows of Tante Léonie's antechamber; peering into the obscurity, Marcel described what he saw:

...sous les tuyaux d'un bonnet éblouissant, raide et fragile comme s'il avait été de sucre filé, les remous concentriques d'un sourire de reconnaissance anticipé. C'était Françoise, immobile et debout dans l'encadrement de la petite porte du corridor comme une statue de sainte dans sa niche...on distinguait sur son visage l'amour désintéressé de l'humanité, le respect attendri pour les hautes classes qu'exaltait dans les meilleures régions de son cœur l'espoir des étrennes.
(RTP, I, p. 53)

This description reveals a good deal about Françoise for an initial encounter. One is immediately made aware of her respect for her social superiors and of her expectations of grateful reward. Juliette Monnin-Hornung, in her book Proust et la peinture, interprets this description as indicative of Françoise's greed and of Proust's contempt for servants:

Mais les sentiments lus sur la figure de Françoise sont détaillés avec des nuances, qui révèlent, autant que celle de son héroïne, la vie intérieure, ou du moins

(mépris d'autrui en général, malgré tout son vouloir de bonté, et des domestiques en particulier, mépris qui se manifestait journellement par ses riches et "scandaleux" pourboires). 124

If one believes that Proust's tipping was a measure of his contempt for servants, then her conclusions could be considered valid. However, based upon all the evidence relating to his own personal contacts with the serving class, who would have been the first to discern his contempt had it been present, it must be concluded that Proust, while a social superior, felt no contempt for them at all. The gratuities were a manifestation of his overwhelming generosity which Céleste Albaret described as "magnifique mais fantaisiste,"¹²⁵

As for Françoise's motives, what servant would not be concerned about the special rewards she might receive for her labors? She can no more be blamed for thinking of New Year's étrennes than can a child for speculating on Christmas presents. Detailing with such accuracy the nuances of Françoise's facial expressions is a tribute to Proust's perspicacity rather than a measure of his contempt.

Marcel comments again much later on Françoise's appearance and what it reveals of her background:

Françoise en un sens était moins domestique que les autres. Dans sa manière de sentir, d'être bonne et pitoyable, d'être dure et hautaine, d'être fine et bornée, d'avoir la peau blanche et les mains rouges, elle était la demoiselle de village, dont les parents "étaient bien de chez eux", mais, ruinés, avaient été obligés de la mettre en condition.
(RTP, II, p. 64)

Françoise was indeed an extraordinary person. Marcel's mother had been most impressed by "cette bonne si intelligente et active, qui était aussi belle dès cinq heures du matin dans a cuisine, sous son bonnet dont le tuyautage éclatant et fixe avait l'air d'être en biscuit, que pour aller à la grand'messe." (RTP, I, p. 54)

So long as Léonie lived, Françoise remained in her service and in the Combray milieu. Along with Eulalie, whose Sunday visits were Léonie's means of keeping abreast of local gossip, she enjoyed a relationship with her mistress much like that of a courtier to a king. Both she and Eulalie vied for Léonie's favor, and Léonie amused herself by playing them off one against the other.

Eulalie had a counterpart in reality. Proust's aunt Elisabeth, a malade imaginaire of sorts, had a weekly visitor in the person of a widowed servant who was a companion for Proust's grandmother. She would come every Sunday to report the latest happening in Illiers and, like Eulalie, would receive a little gratuity, much to the disgust of the family servant, Ernestine Gallou.

Similarly, Eulalie spent much of her time visiting the sick to whom she recounted "ce qui s'était passé à la messe ou aux vêpres." (RTP, I, p. 69) She knew better than anyone how to amuse and entertain Léonie, and she was rewarded for her efforts with a coin, accepted "avec la même hésitation et le même embarras, chaque fois, que si c'était la première, et avec une apparence de mécontente-

ment qui égayait ma tante mais ne lui déplaisait pas." (RTP, I, pp. 106-07) Françoise scornfully referred to these gratuities as "des trésors follement gaspillés pour une ingrate." (RTP, I, p. 107)

Françoise's attitude toward Eulalie's weekly gratuity was determined by her code. She was not jealous of the money as such, for in her position as Léonie's servant, she knew that her mistress' wealth reflected favorably upon her. If Léonie had given the money to others of her own social standing, Françoise would have been perfectly agreeable, but bestowing money upon members of the old servant's own class was more than she could bear:

Mais il n'en allait plus de même si les bénéficiaires de la générosité de ma tante étaient de ceux que Françoise appelait "des gens comme moi, des gens qui ne sont pas plus que moi" et qui étaient ceux qu'elle méprisait le plus, à moins qu'ils ne l'appelassent "Madame Françoise" et ne se considérassent comme étant "moins qu'elle".
(RTP, I, pp. 107-08)

Françoise soon began to find the money she received from Léonie far from sufficient and imagined that Eulalie, on the other hand, was the recipient of prodigious sums. Eulalie had the same impression of Françoise's financial state, and neither lost an opportunity to say something cutting about the other. Later, after Eulalie's death, Françoise's attitude toward her changed: " [elle] avait complètement oublié qu'elle l'avait peu aimée durant sa vie, comme elle aimait peu toute personne qui n'avait rien à manger chez soi, qui 'crevait la faim' et venait

ensuite, comme une propre à rien, grâce à la bonté des riches, 'faire des manières'." (RTP, II, p. 26) Françoise had little sympathy for those who did not know their place.

For young Marcel, Françoise was at once a friendly spirit and a formidable presence. He quickly learned the powerful influence of her code, which governed what she would and would not do for him. When once he dared to send a message by Françoise to his mother, he despaired of its being delivered because he knew how much value Françoise placed on the tradition of hospitality and consequently how reluctant she would be to disturb a dinner "où le caractère sacré qu'elle conférait...avait pour effet qu'elle refuserait d'en troubler la cérémonie." (RTP, I, p. 29)

Françoise's ideas of "ce qui se doit" were rigidly ingrained. Reacting with savage sorrow to Léonie's demise, Françoise nonetheless managed to convey her extreme displeasure at the omission of certain details which she considered absolutely essential to funerals. There was supposed to be a repast and people were to speak in hushed tones. Marcel's humming was totally unacceptable, and the Scottish plaid cape he insisted on wearing on his walks was sacrilege. In Françoise's mind the color of mourning clothes was inextricably associated with sorrow, and one could not exist without the other.

Marcel soon became aware of another, more ominous aspect of Françoise's character: her cruelty. One day he happened upon her in the act of slaughtering a chicken,

and the degree of her fury and violence frightened him.

Quand je fus en bas, elle était en train, dans l'arrière-cuisine qui donnait sur la basse-cour, de tuer un poulet qui, par sa résistance désespérée et bien naturelle, mais accompagnée par Françoise hors d'elle, tandis qu'elle cherchait à lui fendre le cou sous l'oreille, des cris de "sale bête! sale bête!", mettait la sainte douceur et l'onction de notre servante un peu moins en lumière qu'il n'eût fait, au dîner du lendemain, par sa peau brodée d'or comme une chasuble et son jus précieux égoutté d'un ciboire. Quand il fut mort, Françoise recueillit le sang, qui coulait sans noyer sa rancune, eut encore un sursaut de colère, et regardant le cadavre de son ennemi, dit une dernière fois: "Sale bête!" Je remontai tout tremblant; j'aurais voulu qu'on mît Françoise tout de suite à la porte. (RTP, I, pp. 121-22)

More subtle, yet more cruel, was Françoise's treatment of the kitchen maid. Ever the tyrant, Françoise considered the house her private preserve and resorted to whatever means necessary to keep it that way. Singling out the hapless fille de cuisine as a possible challenge to her domination, Françoise, with no regard for the poor girl's pregnant condition, aggravated her asthma by continually exposing her to asparagus until she finally took her leave. It comes as no surprise when Marcel remarks with regard to kitchen maids in general that "nous n'eûmes jamais la même deux ans de suite." (RTP, I, p. 80)

An interesting aspect of Françoise's personality is that she was affected by pain and suffering only when it was remote or abstract, her own family excepted. The kitchen maid's agony following the birth of her child had

no direct effect on Françoise, but when she read about it in a medical book, she became quite upset. Marcel concluded that "les humains excitaient d'autant plus sa pitié par leurs malheurs qu'ils vivaient plus éloignés d'elle." (RTP, I, p. 122)

Notable among Françoise's other associations at Combray was Théodore, the grocery boy at Camus'. Since he gave Françoise no cause for jealousy, theirs was an excellent relationship. The ubiquitous Théodore, "à qui sa double profession de chantre ayant une part de l'entretien de l'église, et de garçon épicier donnait, avec des relations dans tous les mondes, un savoir universel." was Françoise's main source of information." (RTP, I, p. 68) His counterpart in Illiers was Victor, the errand boy at Légue's grocery; Victor was also a choirboy at Saint-Jacques church.

Although not a major character in A la Recherche, Théodore is one of the relatively few lower-level characters who reappears from time to time throughout the novel. In Combray he is the typical village boy who attracts Marcel's attention because of his resemblance to some of the carvings on the façade of Saint-André. Much later, in Le Temps retrouvé Marcel learns from Gilberte that he played with other children in the ruins of an old donjon at Roussainville and that they "profitaient de l'obscurité." Gilberte, who participated in these secretive amusements, casually mentioned it to Marcel: "L'enfant de chœur de l'église de Combray, Théodore, qui, il faut l'avouer, était bien

gentil (Dieu qu'il était bien!) et qui est devenu très laid ...s'y amusait avec toutes les petites paysannes du voisinage." (RTP, III, p. 694)

These sexual overtones to the character do not appear until Le Temps retrouvé. Initially there is no indication that he will join the growing population of the cities of the plain, but eventually the elusive chambermaid of Baronne Putbus is discovered to be his sister, he has become the coachman of one of Charlus' friends and his former involvement with Legrandin, Combray's chief snob (now known after much manipulation as Count Legrandin de Méséglise), comes to light.

This same Théodore was the author of one of the two letters which Marcel received after his first article appeared in Le Figaro. "C'était une écriture populaire, un langage charmant." (RTP, III, p. 591) The letter was signed "Sanilon" and it was some time before Marcel learned that Sanilon and Théodore were one. (Proust had received a similar letter from Agostinelli following the publication of his article in Le Figaro on their motor trips around Cabourg) By the end of the novel, Théodore has left Combray for the Midi and has become a pharmacist.

His employer at Combray, the grocer Camus, was in reality M. Légué, whose store was next door to the Amiot house in Illiers. There was also a grocer named Camus, but his store was further from the Amiots; in A la Recherche it becomes the épicerie Borange, "trop distante de la mai-

son pour que Françoise pût s'y fournir comme chez Camus, mais mieux achalandée comme papeterie et librairie, retenu par des ficelles dans la mosaïque des brochures et des livraisons qui revêtaient les deux vantaux de sa porte plus mystérieuse, plus semée de pensées qu'une porte de cathédrale." (RTP, I, p. 84)

Other details such as the conversation among the servants watching passers-by on a Sunday afternoon or the self-satisfied expression of the little grocer rubbing his hands together add to the ambience of quiet, easy-going village life. Proust here succeeds admirably in bringing out what Donzé so aptly termed "le détail gracieux des coutumes." ¹²⁶ Combray appears as a unified little world, the one non-variable in an atmosphere of change. It is the past materialized in the present, a living embodiment of centuries of tradition. As Marcel notes, "Rien, moins que notre société de Combray, ne ressemblait au monde." (RTP, I, p. 571)

CHAPTER V

BALBEC

The aura of stability that surrounds the world of Combray is reinforced by its central role in the development of the rest of A la Recherche. The resort milieu of Balbec does not have a necessary structural function, but it does provide an important and special type of setting for character observation and interaction. In contrast to Combray, the resort population is characterized by its transience. None of the characters has his roots there; when the season has ended, they depart for Paris and points east. The lower-level characters of this milieu are quite logically the hotel personnel with the passing mention of an occasional Norman peasant. Unlike the servants of Combray, who were imbued with a sense of tradition and were attached by long years of personal service to one family, the personnel of the Grand-Hôtel were obliged to serve a great many different people in a necessarily more impersonal manner. Being constantly surrounded by the wealthy and the pretentious, they respond by manifesting pretensions of their own. A constant preoccupation is the impression they wish to make upon the clientele, and their sincerity suffers accordingly.

This then was the ambience of Balbec: a transient, changing world with uncertain values inhabited by the wealthy and by the subservient--totally different from the

stable, established milieu of Combray.

The Grand-Hôtel is an ideal context for grouping lower-level characters; it is a little world unto itself. Since Proust often frequented hotels, he was attuned to the general ambience and well qualified to discern the nuances of the servants' behavior vis-à-vis the hotel guests. When he presents aspects of this milieu to his readers, he invariably offers a spectacle of interacting elements. The synchronization of so many different activities directed toward the unique purpose of client satisfaction coupled with lavish decor and costuming assumes the aspects of a colossal production. In contrast to other milieus, the Grand-Hôtel has an aura of the fantastic about it, Marcel refers at one point to "toute une frise de personnages de guignol sortis de cette boîte de Pandore qu'était le Grand-Hôtel." (RTP, I, p. 666)

A number of undesirable traits are manifested in the actions of the hotel personnel Proust presents and can be traced directly to the influence of the milieu. Obsequious behavior was commonplace, and the directeur, who was the one most responsible for client satisfaction and consequently the one most desirous of creating a favorable impression, excelled in practicing the art. His affected mannerisms and obvious superficiality bear blatant witness to his shallow pretensions. He confidently assumed that only those who had money made a great display of it, and offered proper respect only to them. Inevitably he made capital

errors of judgement.

When the Marquis de Cambremer entered the Grand-Hôtel and, like the well-bred gentleman that he was, immediately removed his hat, the directeur assumed that the marquis was "un homme 'sortant de l'ordinaire'" and did not even deign to tip his own hat for such an inconsequential visitor. Here he is typical of his class, evaluating the nobleman's attitude in his own terms, which are those of the nouveau riche he longs to become; nowhere is there the slightest recognition of noblesse oblige, let alone common courtesy. He presumes that wealth and position open the door to condescension and disdain. "La situation sociale était la seule chose à laquelle le directeur fît attention, la situation sociale, ou plutôt les signes qui lui paraissaient impliquer qu'elle était élevée." (RTP, I, p. 663)

Since Marcel and his grandmother were not impressively attired, the directeur was initially something less than cordial. Predictably he did not remove his hat in the presence of Marcel's grandmother, reserving his obsequiousness for those who could pay for it. Marcel's first impression of the directeur was, not surprisingly, unfavorable:

...[une] sorte de poussah à la figure et à la voix pleines de cicatrices (qu'avait laissées l'extirpation sur l'une, de nombreux boutons, sur l'autre des divers accents dûs à des origines lointaines et à une enfance cosmopolite), au smoking de mondain, au regard de psychologue prenant généralement, à l'arrivée de l'"omnibus", les grands seigneurs pour des râleurs et les rats d'hôtels pour des grands seigneurs!

Oubliant sans doute que lui-même ne touchait pas cinq cents francs d'appointements mensuels, il méprisait profondément les personnes pour qui cinq cents francs ou plutôt, comme il disait, "vingt-cinq louis" est "une somme" et les considérait comme faisant partie d'une race de parias à qui n'était pas destiné le Grand-Hôtel. (RTP, I, pp. 662-63)

The directeur's faults can be attributed as much to his milieu and to his position therein as to his personality. He felt it necessary to "give himself class" in order to relate to the clientele, but given his background, he was limited in his efforts to only the more obvious, superficial mannerisms.

Aimé, the head waiter at the hotel, was susceptible to the same influence. His friendliness and gregarious manner were conditioned by the hotel milieu and were most helpful to him in his position. What was initially inspired by the desire to impress soon became easy familiarity with a sufficient amount of discretion added to make his manner acceptable without appearing to be presumptuous. Less obsequious than the directeur, Aimé was no less conscious of the need to please. An expert on nuances of expression, he could affect the appropriate countenance for any situation: "un air attendri et fier, montrant qu'il ressentait l'honneur et comprenait la plaisanterie" when the pompous bâtonnier boasted of his friendship with the head waiter and of his superiority over him, or an expression of gratitude and pleasure occasioned by a large gratuity from the Princesse de Parme which satisfied his need for a

proper, polite response and flattered her feeling of benevolence. (RTP, I, p. 690)

His keen psychological perception of the weaknesses and wants of the clientele placed Aimé a notch above his fellow employees, who lacked his sensitivity. The lift's attempts to ingratiate himself with the hotel guests fell far short of his goal. Oblivious to whether his passenger were interested or annoyed, he continually prattled on, littering his conversation with errors and redundant expressions. Typical of many menials, his interests lay wholly within his own limited experience.

Nevertheless, the lift was not totally unaware of his subservient position and of the necessity of pleasing guests. When he was repeatedly corrected for pronouncing Cambremer as Camembert, he finally relented, yet remained convinced that the mistake was Marcel's and not his own:

Néanmoins, comme il voyait que je ne voulais pas avoir l'air de m'être trompé et qu'il savait que les maîtres aiment à voir obéir leurs caprices les plus futiles et acceptés leurs mensonges les plus évidents, il me promit, en bon domestique, de dire désormais Cambremer. (RTP, II, pp. 825-26)

It was Aimé who was the embodiment par excellence of the tradition of service. Marcel pictures him as belonging to an ancient and historic race of servants to whom devoted service was of utmost importance:

Comme tous les chefs d'étage de l'hôtel de Balbec, comme plusieurs valets de chambre du prince de Guermantes, Aimé appartenait à une race plus ancienne que celle du prince,

donc plus noble. Quand on demandait un salon, on se croyait d'abord seul. Mais bientôt dans l'office on apercevait un sculptural maître d'hôtel, de ce genre étrusque roux dont Aimé était le type, un peu vieilli par les excès de champagne et voyant venir l'heure nécessaire de l'eau de Contrexéville. Tous les clients ne leur demandaient pas que de les servir...Sérieux, lui l'était. Il avait une femme et des enfants, de l'ambition pour eux. Aussi les avances qu'une étrangère ou un étranger lui faisaient, il ne les repoussait pas, fallût-il rester toute la nuit. Car le travail doit passer avant tout. (RTP, II, p. 990)

Aimé's identification as a character is strongly tied to his occupation. Jacques Nathan comments on the role of métier in the development of characters like Aimé: "Mais Proust, qui fait peu de confiance à l'individu, admet que celui-ci s'enrichit et s'affermir quand il peut s'approprier les traditions d'un métier, c'est-à-dire l'apport de prédécesseurs inconnus et innombrables." ¹²⁷ His devoted service knew no bounds, and he is shown to be an unscrupulous, amoral tout-à-tous:

...il appartenait à cette catégorie de gens du peuple soucieux de leur intérêt, fidèles à ceux qu'ils servent, indifférents à toute espèce de morale et dont (car ils se montrent, si nous les payons bien, dans leur obéissance à notre volonté, aussi incapables d'indiscrétion, de mollesse ou d'improbité que dépourvus de scrupules) nous disons: "Ce sont de braves gens." (RTP, III, p. 492)

These first references to Aimé's amorality lay the groundwork for the elaboration of this aspect of his character in the second volume of the Grasset edition, explaining, to quote Feuillerat, "le rôle qu'il va jouer plus tard dans

les additions sur la sodomie." 128

Not only morals but also speech was affected by the Balbec milieu. Those in subservient positions felt the need to adopt the speech mannerisms of those they served; unfortunately, they lacked the background to utilize the speech they emulated. The directeur frequently used an incorrect, albeit orthographically similar, word remaining comically unaware that his intended meaning was often reversed, thereby underscoring his own lack of education.

The lift's speech was carefully contrived to give the best possible impression of the various aspects of his employ. When Marcel asked if he could get off work to go look for Albertine, the lift replied: "Je vais voir à me faire remplacer par mon collègue." (RTP, II, p. 790) Workers were addressed directly as "Monsieur" and referred to indirectly as employés, an appellation which, as Marcel recalled, "est, comme le port de la moustache pour les garçons de café, une satisfaction d'amour-propre donnée aux domestiques." (RTP, I, p. 800) (When Proust had stayed at the Hôtel Splendide at Evian-les-bains near Lake Geneva, there was a lift boy who ran errands for him and who referred to the other servants as employés.)

Wishing to establish a certain amount of independence vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, the lift took his leave of Marcel on one occasion with the explanation: "Je me sauve à cause de mes chefs." (RTP, II, p. 855) Another time he referred to his superior, the concierge, as "Mon concierge"

with the same tone "qu'un homme possédant à Paris ce que le chasseur eût appelé 'un hôtel particulier' eût parlé de son portier." (RTP, II, p. 791)

The desire to compare favorably with the clientele, resulting in what Proust considers artificial and hypocritical behavior, is also manifest in the lift's attitude toward his appearance. He had a definite aversion to thinking of himself in terms of his proletarian employment, and when he was off work and dressed up for an evening out, he considered himself the equal of those whom he served during the day.

Marcel describes the transformation:

Bien vite, le lift, ayant retiré ce que j'eusse appelé sa livrée et ce qu'il nommait sa tunique, apparaissait en chapeau de paille, avec une canne, soignant sa démarche et le corps redressé, car sa mère lui avait recommandé de ne jamais prendre le genre "ouvrier" ou "chasseur"...grâce au canotier et à la paire de gants, l'élégance devenait accessible au lift qui, ayant cessé pour la soirée, de faire monter les clients, se croyait, comme un jeune chirurgien qui a retiré sa blouse, ou le maréchal des logis Saint-Loup sans uniforme, devenu un parfait homme du monde.

(RTP, II, p. 791)

The particular nature of the diverse services rendered by Aimé gave him a more personal contact with the hotel guests, and he consequently felt less compelled to underscore his own importance when he was around them. However, with members of his own class, whether he knew them, he unfailingly used the familiar form "sans qu'on sût trop si c'était de sa part dédain aristocratique ou fraternité populaire." (RTP, II, p. 996)

In an atmosphere of wealth and leisure, inevitably the hotel personnel developed a materialistic streak. Their livelihood was directly dependent upon the hotel guests, and as Aimé amply demonstrates, one had to be prepared to comply with whatever request in order to get ahead. Each new arrival was evaluated by the personnel in terms of his potential gratuities: "Ce petit groupe de l'hôtel de Balbec regardait d'un air méfiant chaque nouveau venu, et, en ayant l'air de ne pas s'intéresser à lui, tous interrogeaient sur son compte leur ami le maître d'hôtel." (RTP, I, p.676)

The extent to which services rendered were a direct reflection of gratuities received was made clear to Marcel one evening when he and Albertine were riding the elevator up to his hotel room. The lift was not his usual self; in fact, he looked stricken. Only as Marcel was leaving the elevator did he realize the cause of his distress: he had neglected to give the lift his customary tip. The real reason for the lift's usual amiability was all too clear.

...je me demandais si, nos conditions sociales se trouvant respectivement changées, au lieu de manoeuvrer gentiment pour moi l'ascenseur, le lift, devenu bourgeois, ne m'en eût pas précipité, et s'il n'y a pas, dans certaines classes du peuple, plus de duplicité que dans le monde où, sans doute, l'on réserve pour notre absence les propos désobligeants, ~~mais~~ où l'attitude à notre égard ne serait pas insultante si nous étions malheureux.

(RTP, II, pp. 826-27)

If this discovery disillusioned Marcel about the motives of a class of people whom he had admired for their candor and ingenuousness, he saw some redeeming virtues in

the courrières. Admittedly, the courrières are somewhat atypical of hotel personnel and likewise somewhat atypical of the peasant stock from which they sprang. They appear only once, but in that one instance are treated at some length. Jacques Nathan called this small episode "une nouvelle qui constitue une curieuse expérience de laboratoire." It was his opinion that Proust was using the two courrières in order to illustrate the importance of holding to traditions and that while they might possess the same traits as Françoise, here those traits were exaggerated to the point that Céleste and Marie become almost like symbols: "elles tiennent le milieu entre les créatures réelles et des symboles, et...elles vivent d'une vie mythologique." And he concludes: "Marie et Céleste sont à la noblesse naturelle des serviteurs une sorte de cas-limite, comme Pangloss est le cas-limite de l'optimisme leibnizien." 129

Admittedly the long conversation which Proust attributes primarily to Céleste seems too well-turned to be that of a simple courrière, although it is unquestionably almost verbatim the speech of the real Céleste Albaret. Some years after Proust's death, Céleste was being interviewed by Marie Scheikévitch, who had been one of Proust's friends. When she was shown the passage in Sodome et Gomorrhe where Marcel is talking to the courrières, she immediately recognized a conversation that she had had with Proust and was astonished to discover "That Monsieur had put it straight into his book...It wasn't just once

that I said all that to Monsieur, he has put everything in." 130

While Nathan may certainly have a point in maintaining that Céleste and Marie are too good to be true as lady's maids, it seems highly unlikely that Proust would have been making any sort of literary experiment here. Sodome et Gomorrhe was written after Céleste came into Proust's service, and it is logical for Proust to have put her into his novel. Much of what she represented to Proust can be found in the character that bears her name.

The two courrières are of peasant stock from the heart of France:

Nées au pied des hautes montagnes du centre de la France, au bord de ruisseaux et de torrents...elle semblaient en avoir gardé la nature. Marie Gineste était plus régulièrement rapide et saccadée, Céleste Albaret plus molle et languissante, étalée comme un lac, mais avec de terribles retours de bouillonnement où sa fureur rappelait le danger des crues et des tourbillons liquides qui entraînent tout, saccagent tout.
(RTP, II, p. 846)

Céleste the courrière has the same physical attributes of the real Céleste and the same volatile temperament.

On prétend que le liquide salé qu'est notre sang n'est que la survivance intérieure de l'élément marin primitif. Je crois de même que Céleste, non seulement dans ses fureurs, mais aussi dans ses heures de dépression, gardait le rythme des ruisseaux de son pays. Quand elle était épuisée, c'était à leur manière; elle était vraiment à sec. Rien n'aurait pu alors la revivifier. Puis tout d'un coup la circulation reprenait dans son grand corps magnifique et léger. L'eau coulait dans la transparence opaline et sa peau bleuâtre. Elle souriait au soleil et devenait plus bleue encore. Dans ces moments-là, elle était vraiment céleste. (RTP, II, p. 850)

Not only were the courrières talented mimics but their articulations bordered on the poetic. "Elles étaient pourtant aussi douées qu'un poète, avec plus de modestie qu'ils n'en ont généralement." (RTP, II, p. 849) Like the real Ginestes, the courrières had no education. They never read anything, not even a newspaper. Yet their speech belied the lack of formal education, and Marcel comments:

Je n'ai jamais connu de personnes aussi volontairement ignorantes, qui n'avaient absolument rien appris à l'école, et dont le langage eût pourtant quelque chose de si littéraire que, sans le naturel presque sauvage de leur ton, on aurait cru leurs paroles affectées. (RTP, II, p. 846)

The other employees of the hotel receive notice only in passing; most were young men who served as valets, pages and stewards. Most of Proust's comments about them are directed at aspects of their appearance which suggest metaphoric associations and vivid images. Some of them attracted not only Marcel's attention but that of the several Sodomites that frequented the hotel. Such intimacy with hotel guests occasionally affected the attitude of these young men toward their peers. The valet of Mme de Chevrigny, who dined often with Charlus, scorned such associations: "je ne fréquente personne de ma classe. Je ne leur parle que pour le service." (RTP, II, p. 987) None of the diners suspected a thing, but the hotel personnel were not deceived. With an animal instinct they immediately detected the impostor:

En revanche, si les hommes du monde s'y

..
 trompèrent et le prirent pour un Américain très chic, à peine parut-il devant les domestiques qu'il fut deviné par eux, comme un forçat reconnaît un forçat, même plus vite, flairé à distance comme un animal par certains animaux...Et même notre vieille Françoise, dont la vue baissait et qui passait à ce moment-là au pied de l'escalier, leva la tête, reconnut un domestique là où des convives de l'hôtel ne le soupçonnaient pas--comme la vieille nourrice Euryclée reconnaît Ulysse bien avant les prétendants assis au festin. (RTP, II, p. 988)

When Françoise arrived at the Grand-Hôtel, she found herself for the first time in the midst of a sizeable number of her social peers. In Combray her friends had been servants of particular families; here she was confronted by a large number of servants attached to no one in particular. Their allegiance was primarily to each other, and their attitude began to influence Françoise's own attitude toward Marcel and his grandmother.

During the first days of their stay, Françoise's main concern had been for the comfort of her "family:"

...comme elle ne connaissait encore personne, [elle] sonnait à tort et à travers pour la moindre chose, à des heures où ma grand'mère et moi nous n'aurions pas osé le faire, et, si nous lui en faisions une légère observation, répondait: "Mais on paye assez cher pour ça", comme si elle avait payé elle-même... (RTP, I, p. 693)

Once she became acquainted with the other servants, there was an abrupt about-face. Not only was she no longer primarily concerned with the needs of Marcel and his grandmother, but she adamantly refused to ask for anything that might disturb one of her friends. As a result, Marcel

had no more hot water because Françoise had become friends with the maid whose job it was to heat it.

Often she was late in performing her own tasks because she had been invited by one of her friends "et que leur refuser eût été impossible et de ces choses qui ne se font pas." (RTP, I, p. 692) Arguing their plight with her was hopeless; Françoise always managed to have the final word, and at their expense: "Et elle finissait par une locution qui, malgré la façon incertaine dont elle la prononçait, n'en était pas moins claire et nous donnait nettement tort...Nous n'insistions pas, de peur de nous en faire infliger une, bien plus grave." (RTP, I, pp. 693-94)

As the milieu's influence began to erode Françoise's loyalty to her family, her peer associations assumed greater importance in her life. One of the more interesting aspects of her stay at Balbec was the manifestation of her protocol in these associations. In the eyes of the chambermaids, who became her close friends, she commanded a certain prestige, due in part to her imposing appearance and majestic bearing.

...devant son beau bonnet de dentelles et son fin profil, [elles] la prenaient pour quelque dame, noble, peut-être, réduite par les circonstances ou poussée par l'attachement à servir de dame de compagnie à ma grand'mère. (RTP, I, p. 693)

Her frequently haughty manner did nothing to alter their impressions. For example, she had nothing but "dédain bienveillant" for a chambermaid who was an orphan, the

explanation being that "elle ne pouvait pas considérer comme son égale une déracinée." (RTP, I, p. 693) On the other hand, the courrières, to whom she jealously referred as enjoleuses, earned her grudging respect because their brothers were married to relatives of prominent prelates,

Quickly adapting to the situation in which she found herself, Françoise developed complicated rules of protocol for her behavior toward her peers. When she inadvertently forgot to bid a proper farewell to the gouvernante upon her departure from Balbec, she was horrified at the oversight--and furious when Marcel would not allow her to return and set aright this serious breach of her Code.

Car, selon le Code de Françoise tel qu'il est illustré dans les bas-reliefs de Saint-André-des-Champs, souhaiter la mort d'un ennemi, la lui donner même n'est pas défendu, mais il est horrible de ne pas faire ce qui se doit, de ne pas rendre une politesse, de ne pas faire ses adieux avant de partir, comme une vraie malotruë, à une gouvernante d'étage. (RTP, III, p. 16)

Another new element injected into Françoise's life was the opportunity for her first contacts with the nobility. There was Mme de Villeparisis, a former school friend of Marcel's grandmother, Françoise's initial reaction was hostility. Margaret Moore Goodell in her study on snobbery concludes that Françoise's snobbery is much more genuine and spontaneous than that of the socially ambitious Mme Verdurin. "In both cases the basis of the dislike of the nobility is the same--the unavowed envy of a greater prestige than one's own." The difference is that Françoise

is not hypocritical and "the conflict in her feelings is the primitive conflict between the admiration and resentment aroused in us by the possessors of a prestige we do not share in." 131

Even more, Françoise's attitude toward Mme de Villeparisis is indicative of her peasant heritage. Coupled with an automatic distrust she feels a profound sense of awe and respect.

Sans doute le culte de la noblesse, mêlé et s'accommodant d'un certain esprit de révolte contre elle, doit, héréditairement puisé sur les glèbes de France, être bien fort en son peuple. Car Françoise, à qui on pouvait parler du génie de Napoléon ou de la télégraphie sans réussir à attirer son attention...si seulement elle apprenait ces particularités et que le fils cadet du duc de Guermantes s'appelait généralement le prince d'Oléron, s'écriait: "C'est beau ça!" et restait éblouie comme devant un vitrail. (RTP, II, p. 35)

Eblouie though she might be, Françoise only liked the nobility if they showered her employers with attention, in which case, she would come to prefer them to others. Initially, however, she had to be convinced, and Mme de Villeparisis already had one strike against her.

Pour Françoise, Mme de Villeparisis avait donc à se faire pardonner d'être noble... Françoise, obéissant à la tendance des domestiques qui recueillent sans cesse sur les rapports de leurs maîtres avec les autres personnes des observations fragmentaires dont ils tirent parfois des inductions erronées--comme font les humains sur la vie des animaux--, trouvait à tout moment qu'on nous avait "manqué", conclusion à laquelle l'amenait facilement, d'ailleurs, autant que son amour excessif pour nous, le plaisir qu'elle avait à nous être désagréable. (RTP, I, p. 696)

When she saw what regard the Marquise had for Marcel's grandmother, Françoise weakened, and when Mme de Villeparisis inquired after their health, "Françoise était naturellement très touchée de ces attentions." (RTP, I, p. 697)

When Mme de Villeparisis' grand-nephew, the Marquis de Saint-Loup, came to Balbec to visit, Françoise liked the young man immediately in spite of herself, but when she discovered his republican sentiments, she was totally disillusioned. A monarchist of the old school, she found it inconceivable that a member of a noble family could have defected from the royalist sentiments that were his birth-right.

Or, bien qu'en parlant par exemple de la reine de Portugal, elle dît avec cet irrespect qui dans le peuple est le respect suprême "Amélie, la soeur à Philippe", Françoise était royaliste. Mais surtout, un marquis, un marquis qui l'avait éblouie, et qui était pour la République, ne lui paraissait plus vrai. Elle en marquait la même mauvaise humeur que si je lui eusse donné une boîte qu'elle eût crue d'or, de laquelle elle m'eût remercié avec effusion, et qu'ensuite un bijoutier lui eût révélé être en plaqué. Elle retira aussitôt son estime à Saint-Loup, mais bientôt après la lui rendit, ayant réfléchi qu'il ne pouvait pas, étant le marquis de Saint-Loup, être républicain, qu'il faisait seulement semblant, par intérêt, car avec le gouvernement qu'on avait, cela pouvait lui rapporter gros. De ce jour, sa froideur envers lui, son dépit contre moi cessèrent. Et quand elle parlait de Saint-Loup, elle disait: "C'est un hypocrite", avec un large et bon sourire qui faisait bien comprendre qu'elle le "considérât" de nouveau autant qu'au premier jour et qu'elle lui avait pardonné. (RTP, I, p. 779)

Once Françoise could justify in her own mind Saint-Loup's

seemingly inconsistent behavior--albeit by assuming that he was a materialistic hypocrite--she forgave all, and probably respected him all the more for the "cunning." She interprets his statements in her own terms, and in these terms, his attitude is understandable. It never occurred to her that his republican sentiments might be based upon sincere conviction.

The Françoise of Balbec is not the Françoise of Combray. Although the basic aspects of her character are unchanged and will remain so throughout A la Recherche, there has been a transformation in her mannerisms and attitude, particularly with regard to Marcel and his family. Albert Feuillerat notes that several additional pages on Françoise were added in Nom de pays: le nom (which deals with the first trip to Balbec):

La fidèle servante de Du côté de chez Swann commence à subir une transformation qui n'est pas à son avantage...C'est le commencement d'une série de remarques malveillantes qui vont au cours des volumes suivants dégrader considérablement ce caractère, jusqu'ici assez sympathique. 132

Marcel had resigned himself to not being able to understand what motivated Françoise's actions and concluded that "certaines idées sociales de Françoise me resteraient toujours impénétrables." (RTP, I, p. 778)

While the ambience of Balbec did little to bring out Françoise's peasant traits (other than through her contact with certain of the nobility), it did provide Marcel with the opportunity to appreciate other represen-

tatives of this group. Fleeting glimpses of young Norman peasant girls left his imagination free to embroider upon reality, and these êtres de fuite were thus transformed into the most tantalizing of creatures. Even upon closer observation, the social distance that separated their respective ways of life made them appealing.

The peasant girl who brought morning coffee to the passengers on the train beckoned the young man to another way of life and to an awakening of sensation:

...la belle fille me donna aussitôt le goût d'un certain bonheur (seule forme, toujours particulière, sous laquelle nous puissions connaître le goût du bonheur), d'un bonheur qui se réaliserait en vivant auprès d'elle ...cette belle fille que j'apercevais encore, tandis que le train accélérât sa marche, c'était comme une partie d'une vie autre que celle que je connaissais...elle serait toujours absente de l'autre vie vers laquelle je m'en allais de plus en plus vite...

(RTP, I, pp. 655-57)

A mere glimpse of one of these girls sufficed to evoke all sorts of fantasies in the young man's mind.

Pour peu que la nuit tombe et que la voiture aille vite, à la campagne, dans une ville, il n'y a pas un torse féminin, mutilé comme un marbre antique par la vitesse qui nous entraîne et le crépuscule qui le noie, qui ne tire sur notre coeur, à chaque coin de route, du fond de chaque boutique, les flèches de la Beauté, de la Beauté dont on serait parfois tenté de se demander si elle est en ce monde autre chose que la partie de complément qu'ajoute à une passante fragmentaire et fugitive notre imagination surexcitée par le regret. (RTP, I, p. 71)

Once Marcel approached a young fisherwoman, drawn by a combination of fascination and curiosity. "...ce n'est pas seulement son corps que j'aurais voulu atteindre,

c'était aussi la personne qui vivait en lui et avec laquelle il n'est qu'une sorte d'attouchement, qui est d'attirer son attention, qu'une sorte de pénétration, y éveiller une idée." (RTP, I, pp. 715-16)

But his verbal contact with her broke the spell; "Il me semblait que je venais de toucher sa personne avec des lèvres invisibles et que je lui avais plu. Et cette prise de force de son esprit, cette possession immatérielle, lui avait ôté de son mystère autant que fait la possession physique." (RTP, I, p. 717)

There were few other occasions when Marcel had any contact with the peasantry. Prior to his trip to Balbec, he had pictured the inhabitants of the region as incarnations of medieval fables. His preconceptions seemed justified by his passing glimpses of the country folk. The personnel of the Grand-Hôtel had no folkloric appeal, but they likewise did not seem very real. In both instances the lower-level characters served as catalysts for his exceptionally active imagination. No matter how mundane their employment, how low their social station, there was always some basis for Marcel's seeing them in a poetic, albeit less than realistic, light. Rarely did he gain any insight into the vicissitudes of their daily existence.

Although the hotel personnel and the peasantry of Balbec were not treated in depth, the aspects of their existence that attracted Proust's notice were transformed into some of the most memorable descriptions and images of A la Recherche.

CHAPTER VI

BOHEMIA: THE WORLD OF THE THEATER

While the domestic servants' world was a difficult one for a rich bourgeois to penetrate, the peripheral milieu of the theater invited fraternization with actors and actresses. They were not generally recognized socially but privately they were well acquainted with some of society's best. Theater was quite popular during la belle époque, and with the creative talents of such men as Jacques Copeau, Lugné-Poe and Georges Pitoëff, it was soon to make great strides forward. Sarah Bernhardt was in her prime. It seems only natural that the leisure classes should have become enamoured of the theater, and, by extension, of its actors and actresses.

For some years young Marcel was limited to an amour platonique for the theater because his parents would not permit him to attend. As a result, his initial conception of this art form was somewhat in error. He thought of the theater as a place where "chaque spectateur regardait comme dans un stéréoscope un décor qui n'était que pour lui, quoique semblable au millier d'autres que regardait, chacun pour soi, le reste des spectateurs." (RTP, I, p. 73)

His whole life at this point revolved around the theater; every morning he ran to the colonne Morris to check the announcements of new plays. He kept up with the careers of individual actors and made endless lists

classifying them according to what he had read or what others had told him. Actresses fascinated him more than actors, and he often speculated that some passing woman was one of this mysterious company.

...la vue du visage d'une femme que je pensais être peut-être une actrice, laissait en moi un trouble plus prolongé, un effort impuissant et douloureux pour me représenter sa vie! Je classais par ordre de talent les plus illustres: Sarah Bernhardt, la Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne Samary, mais toutes m'intéressaient. (RTP, I, pp. 74-75)

Though his immediate family expressed no particular interest in the theater and in its performers, his uncle Adolphe was known to consort with several different actresses, among them Odette de Crécy, the future Mme Charles Swann. Because his parents made it clear to Marcel that these were not the sort of people whom they would consider meeting, actresses assumed added allure in the young boy's mind. One day when he unexpectedly dropped in to call on Uncle Adolphe, he found him in the company of Odette. Here at last was one of those mysterious and forbidden creatures, but once again reality was disillusioning. The young lady not only was not mysterious; she was no different from any other young lady he had seen. "Mieux habillée seulement, l'amie de mon oncle avait le même regard vif et bon, elle avait l'air aussi franc et aimant. Je ne lui trouvais rien de l'aspect théâtral que j'admirais dans les photographies d'actrices, ni de l'expression diabolique qui eût été en rapport avec la vie qu'elle devait mener...une personne

qui avait l'air si simple et comme il faut." (RTP, I, p. 77)

This was not his only deception at the hands of the theater. The greatest actress in the Paris of Marcel's youth was Berma, a tragedienne most celebrated for her portrayal of Phèdre. His first personal theatrical experience was seeing this great actress as Racine's heroine, and, because he had expected something quite different, he was very disappointed. "Je l'écoutais comme j'aurais lu Phèdre, ou comme si Phèdre elle-même avait dit en ce moment les choses que j'entendais, sans que le talent de la Berma semblât leur avoir rien ajouté." (RTP, I, p. 449) When the audience wildly applauded, Marcel joined in with enthusiasm, persuading himself that he must have seen her at her best. Only years later would he come to realize the measure of her greatness.

Berma, Rachel and the other actresses that appear in A la Recherche are only indirectly connected with Marcel but they do have real life counterparts in Proust's social experience. Berma, for example, has been drawn from the lives of two great ladies of the theater of Proust's era: Sarah Bernhardt and Réjane. Most critics insist that she was modeled on Bernhardt, who was celebrated for her portrayal of Phèdre. She is mentioned by her real name six times in A la Recherche, although more often than not Proust juxtaposes a real name and a character name, seemingly precluding their being linked.

Bernhardt's domination of the French theater parallels Berma's. Paul Morand in 1900 noted that "Sarah était alors le Théâtre, et le Théâtre était Paris." ¹³³ And another contemporary, Reynaldo Hahn, described her performance in Phèdre: "Phèdre, interpreted by Sarah, will always remain one of the most perfect things given to our hearing and sight on earth." ¹³⁴

The actress Réjane has also been mentioned as a model for the characterization of Berma, although she never did tragedy or classic theater. Proust first saw her in Germinie Lacerteux; she later became as supreme in comedy as Bernhardt in tragedy.

In A la Recherche Marcel admired Berma from a distance but did not know her personally. He saw Rachel at much closer hand because of his close friendship with Saint-Loup. However, he first met her in a house of prostitution. He had promptly dubbed her "Rachel quand du seigneur," a name taken from one of Fromental Halévy's operas, La Juive.

Cette Rachel, que j'aperçus sans qu'elle me vît, était brune, pas jolie, mais avait l'air intelligent, et, non sans passer un bout de langue sur ses lèvres, souriait d'un air plein d'impertinence aux michés qu'on lui présentait... Son mince et étroit visage était entouré de cheveux noirs et frisés, irréguliers comme s'ils avaient été indiqués par des hachures dans un lavis, à l'encre de Chine. (RTP, I, pp. 576-77)

What impressed Marcel about this young Jewish girl was her vulgarity; he could not forget the evening he overheard her tell the madam that she would be free if someone wanted her.

Et ces mots m'avaient empêché de voir en elle une personne, parce qu'ils me l'avaient fait classer immédiatement dans une catégorie générale de femmes dont l'habitude commune à toutes était de venir là le soir voir s'il n'y avait pas un louis ou deux à gagner. (RTP, I, p. 577)

Marcel never enjoyed her favors and forgot about her. He was shocked to discover some years later that Saint-Loup's beloved was none other than "Rachel quand du Seigneur." The lengthy treatment accorded their relationship and Rachel's ultimate destruction of Berma give Proust the opportunity to expose all of the negative qualities of her character, many of which can be attributed to the Bohemian milieu.

Again Proust had encountered a similar situation in his own experience. One of Proust's friends, the Marquis Louis d'Albuféra, was passionately in love with a rising young actress named Louisa de Mornand. Louisa, like Rachel, had begun with only walk-on parts. Later, as she became better known, she had larger roles although she never attained the heights of a Réjane. Tall, willowy and strikingly beautiful, she specialized in light comedy, first playing the soubrette and later the leads. Like Rachel, she was of Jewish birth, and, interestingly enough, had a maid named Rachel.

Proust was a good friend of Albu's, and it was through him that he met Louisa. The stormy relationship between the marquis and his actress occasioned many public quarrels, and they were so exactly mirrored by the quarrels between Saint-Loup and Rachel that when Le Côté de Guer-

mantes appeared in May, 1921, Albuféra severed relations with Marcel.

Suzanne Normand in her article on Louisa for Nouvelles littéraires describes her as having a spontaneous, almost child-like charm and a simple nature. Mlle Normand is emphatically negative about the possibility of Louisa's having been a model for the characterization of Rachel. There is, she notes, "rien de moins exact. Seule, l'évolution de la carrière théâtrale de Rachel peut être mise en parallèle avec celle de l'interprète d'Henri Bataille. Côté très extérieur, on le voit, d'une vie dont Proust suivait la courbe avec un tendre intérêt." 135

Mlle Normand is perhaps a bit hasty in her conclusions, for it seems most likely that Louisa did contribute to the characterization of the Rachel who was amorously involved with Saint-Loup. There is no indication, however, that the other, extremely negative, aspects of Rachel's character can be attributed to her.

Besides Berma and Rachel, there are only minor appearances by other actresses. There was Léa, whose sexual versatility and baseness were second only to those of Morel; a sister of Bloch's, whose public displays jolted the resort population of Balbec; and the bizarre foursome, who in many ways resembled the Alfred and Misia Edwards group that Proust encountered during his vacations at Cabourg. In every instance, these minor characters reveal sexual aberrations and baseness, contributing substantially to the

generally negative picture of the theatrical world painted by Proust.

From these minor characters, and more particularly from the characterizations of Berma and Rachel, certain definite and negative aspects of the theatrical milieu become apparent, branding its inhabitants as shallow, ambitious, amoral and unfeeling. These are offset to some degree by some positive qualities which Proust admires--most notably genuine talent. When Bohemia is juxtaposed with Faubourg society, and more particularly, when Rachel is accepted by the haut monde, Proust is able to illustrate the empty values of the latter.

Most apparent, however, are the negative aspects of the theatrical world. The demands of the theater help to create them and the life style of the milieu assures their continuation. Success seemed linked to debts which in turn drove an actress to continue performing even when she was no longer physically able to do so. Bernhardt's later years were marred by financial worries, and her creditors followed her from performance to performance. Hahn observes that in 1896 "Sarah has acute nervous exhaustion and often faints, as this evening." Still she resolved to take the play on an exhausting tour of the provinces, and he observed that "I guess what she does not say; she needs money." 136

Berma was likewise faced with having to work in spite of illness. When Marcel describes the aging Berma making her last appearances on stage, his account of the change

that comes over her in front of an audience could be a description of Bernhardt at the end of her career as observed by Albert Keim:

Elle y apparaît, une fois de plus, radieuse, bien que lasse, infirme, avec sa jambe de bois, terrassée par le mal, devant les salles en délire...Contre la lassitude, la rébellion de sa mémoire, elle multiplie les souffleurs qu'elle cache astucieusement derrière des pans de décor. Elle prend des temps d'arrêt dont le public ne peut guère se rendre compte, tant elle ose les adapter à des gestes, à un jeu ralenti. 137

Berma's situation is made even more pitiable because not only is she forced to continue working to pay her own debts but those of her ungrateful daughter as well. Much of the money she earned was used to remodel her daughter's apartment, and the construction noises deprived her of the sleep so essential to easing her suffering. The ravages of illness etched her face:

La Berma avait, comme dit le peuple, la mort sur le visage. Cette fois c'était bien d'un marbre de l'Erechtéion qu'elle avait l'air. Ses artères durcies étant déjà à demi pétrifiées, on voyait de longs rubans sculpturaux parcourir les joues, avec une rigidité minérale. Les yeux mourants vivaient relativement, par contraste avec ce terrible masque ossifié, et brillaient faiblement comme un serpent endormi au milieu des pierres. (RTP, III, p. 998)

She made tours with her plays in order not to be overshadowed by Réjane (and here again Proust juxtaposes character and model). Because of her weakened physical state "on était obligé de la piquer à la morphine, ce qui pouvait la faire mourir à cause de l'état de ses reins." (RTP, III, p. 997)

Both Berma and Bernhardt died as a result of such excessive physical efforts.

Given the kind of life the milieu dictated, the personal lives of the Bohemians were quite often unhappy. Berma, for example, found herself in old age at the mercy of her daughter, for whom she consented to give a gôûter although she no longer was a social figure in the Faubourg. When no one came, the daughter did not hesitate to desert her dying mother and humble herself before Berma's arch rival in order to attain the social acceptance she so desperately sought,

The tragic family situation of Berma is to some degree based upon that of Réjane. But Proust reverses the details. It is Réjane's son and daughter-in-law who live in Réjane's own house, as opposed to Berma's daughter and son-in-law who lived next door. The hammer blows that kept the great actress from getting her sleep were actually an amalgam of the noises at rue Laurent-Pichat that kept Proust from his slumbers. Jacques Porel and his wife were in no way like the daughter and son-in-law of Berma; they were neither snobbish nor mercenary, and Porel adored his mother. Perhaps the bitterness of Proust's tone in relating this episode is linked to the many annoyances he suffered while living under Réjane's roof.

An actress' way of life undeniably did not permit her to enjoy a normal family life; more often than not, she had no family whatsoever, as was the case with Rachel.

Ambitious and devoted to her talent, Rachel exhibited a common trait among citizens of the theatrical world: jealousy. In such a milieu, competition is a way of life. With fame as the prize, they would stop at nothing to rise to the top. One did not need to be well-known to be jealous; the bitter actress whom Marcel observed could not have been more vitriolic. Never having known Berma's success, her comments were all the more biting.

Rachel, however, went one step further. She was determined to claim her place at the top of both society and the theater and would stop at nothing to attain it. Berma was her main obstacle. Berma had always considered Rachel to be "une grue qu'on laissait figurer dans les pièces où elle-même, la Berma, jouait le premier rôle, parce que Saint-Loup lui payait ses toilettes pour la scène." (RTP, III, p. 995) But Berma did not have Rachel's youth and Rachel's ambition—not to mention Rachel's cruelty.

With no hesitation, Rachel presided at her rival's downfall, humiliating Berma through her daughter's social ambition and then delivering with great relish the final blow to Berma herself. Still she had no mercy, and when asked for her opinion of Berma, she replied: "Pauvre femme, il paraît qu'elle est dans la dernière misère. Elle n'a pas été je ne dirai pas sans talent, car ce n'était pas au fond du vrai talent, elle n'aimait que des horreurs, mais enfin elle a été utile, certainement..." (RTP, III, p. 1002)

The milieu has taken its toll on both: Berma has

been drained physically and emotionally and has lost her social position. But, in the minds of Marcel, Proust and the reader, Berma has transcended her milieu. Although she exhibits some of the negative aspects of the theatrical world, she comes to symbolize what is most admirable in this milieu: genuine artistic talent.

By the time Marcel had had a second opportunity to attend one of her performances, he was far better prepared to perceive and appreciate her talent. He had, in the intervening years, lost some of his enthusiasm for the theater, but when Berma walked onto the stage, Marcel understood in a flash of comprehension what real talent was:

...le talent de la Berma qui m'avait fui quand je cherchais si avidement à en saisir l'essence, maintenant, après ces années d'oubli, dans cette heure d'indifférence, s'imposait avec la force de l'évidence à mon admiration...ce talent que je cherchais à apercevoir en dehors du rôle, il ne faisait qu'un avec lui...l'interprétation de la Berma était, autour de l'oeuvre, une seconde oeuvre vivifiée aussi par le génie.

(RTP, II, pp. 47-49)

His appreciation widened with her second presentation, and he suddenly grasped the relationship between the artist and the material. The analogy Proust makes between Elstir and Berma underscores the creative power of the actress which she possesses in addition to her interpretative genius; it could equally well serve as a definition of Proust's own art:

Je compris alors que l'oeuvre de l'écrivain n'était pour la tragédienne qu'une matière, à peu près indifférente en soi-même, pour la création de son chef-d'oeuvre d'interprétation, comme le grand peintre que j'avais connu à Balbec, Elstir, avait trouvé le motif de deux tableaux qui se valent, dans un bâtiment scolaire sans caractère et dans une cathédrale qui est, par elle-même un chef-d'oeuvre. Et comme le peintre dissout maison, charrette, personnages, dans quelque grand effet de lumière qui les fait homogènes, la Berma étendait de vastes nappes de terreur, de tendresse sur les mots.... (RTP, II, p. 51)

Berma, in effect, transcends her role and comes to represent an aesthetic ideal.

Rachel, on the contrary, presents the other extreme, which would seem to predominate in the theatrical milieu. She has succumbed to all the temptations that her milieu offers and merits examination in detail to appreciate the extent to which she was influenced by it.

Initially a prostitute, Rachel was nevertheless not without talent. In spite of her inauspicious beginning, she had managed to get a few small roles and thereby crossed the path of Robert de Saint-Loup. In an effort to launch her career, Saint-Loup arranged for her to recite at one of his aunt's parties. The selection, taken from Maeterlinck's Pelléas et Mélisande, was totally incomprehensible to the guests, and they literally laughed her out of the room. It was a humiliation that Rachel neither forgave nor forgot.

The Faubourg's impression of the struggling young actress was not helped by her liaison with Saint-Loup, upon

which they frowned with disapproval. They saw in her what they wanted to see--i.e. someone far beneath their social station. Proust comments that this must surely have been their only objection to her, since if she had had enough money, she would have been readily accepted. "Certes, du point de vue moral, Rachel était en effet peu satisfaisante. Mais il n'est pas certain que si une personne ne valait pas mieux, mais eût été duchesse ou eût possédé beaucoup de millions, Mme de Marsantes n'eût pas été favorable au mariage." (RTP, II, pp. 450-51)

Proust has no illusions about the validity of the standards set by the haut monde. In some ways he considers Rachel superior to Faubourg society. She is, after all, genuinely talented and deadly serious about perfecting her art. None of the salonnards had such a sense of purpose. Moreover, they were incapable of appreciating real talent when given the opportunity. Rachel was admittedly a calculating social climber, but she was not awed by society nor would she let it compromise her art. And, in addition to her talent, she had several other redeeming features--eventually eroded by the influence of her milieu--which initially put her a notch above those who criticized her so freely.

She was surprisingly well-read, and from her comments, it became apparent that she had a clear understanding of what she read. Generous by nature, she had little regard for money for herself but enjoyed giving it to those in

need. She had also exercised a salutary influence on Saint-loup, teaching him to value real friendship. She had easily discerned which of his friends were truly friends and had encouraged him to prefer their company. She had also refined his sensibilities and his values:

La maîtresse de Saint-Loup--comme les premiers moines du moyen âge, à la chrétienté--lui avait enseigné la pitié envers les animaux, car elle en avait la passion...en lui faisant trouver ennuyeuse la société des femmes du monde et considérer comme une corvée l'obligation d'aller dans une soirée, l'avait préservé du snobisme et guéri de la frivolité.

Sa maîtresse avait ouvert son esprit à l'invisible, elle avait mis du sérieux dans sa vie, des délicatesses dans son coeur, mais tout cela échappait à la famille en larmes qui répétait: "Cette gueuse le tuera, et en attendant elle le déshonore."
(RTP, I, pp. 781-82)

The positive aspects of Rachel's character were unfortunately not destined to prevail. After she had tasted the bitter humiliation handed her by Faubourg society, she began to think of nothing else but seeking revenge for her hurt and conquering the Faubourg to allow for the greater elaboration of her talent. Driven by the double motives of ambition and revenge, Rachel is transformed from the intelligent and generous young woman of the first part of A la Recherche to the ruthless and cruel Rachel of Le Temps retrouvé. Small wonder that when Marcel attends the *matinée* of the *Princesse de Guermantes* he does not recognize in "cette immonde vieille" the "Rachel quand du Seigneur" of his youth.

Albert Feuillerat notes that Proust elaborated extensively on this aspect of her characterization in the additions to the Grasset edition. Instead of continuing to bring out her intellectual qualities, he emphasized her vulgarity, her cruelty and her lower-class sentiments to the point that eventually little that was favorable remained. Feuillerat comments that "Après toutes ces retouches, il ne reste pas grand'chose dans l'esprit du lecteur de la première Rachel, la Rachel esthète, récitant du Maeterlinck, dans les poses à la Rosetti, un lis à la main." 138

The new Rachel becomes a means for Proust to indict the Faubourg for its false pretensions. Rachel's second appearance before the haut monde would have been as catastrophic as her first had not the Verdurin in the new *Princesse* manifested itself in enthusiastic bravos throughout the recitation. Oriane decided the victory by voicing her admiration in the middle of a poem. From an artistic and literary point of view, society had no better understanding of her than before, when she had been as talented and had had, in fact, some positive character traits. Now that she had become famous, however, it did not matter whether she were talented or whether she were understood; she was accepted.

Her unbridled cruelty toward her dying rival gives some indication of how much she had deteriorated--a fact also mirrored in her changed physical appearance. Her determination had paid off because she had succeeded in becoming the intimate of the queen of the Faubourg, Oriane de

Guermantes. "La duchesse hésitait encore, par peur d'une scène de M. de Guerमantes, devant Balthy [chanteuse de music-hall] et Mistinquette [chanteuse de café-concert] qu'elle trouvait adorables, mais avait décidément Rachel pour amie." (RTP, III, p. 993)

The duchesse seemed to be at ease among these people, and through the association acquired some of their coarseness. Proust implies that perhaps she had found her own level at last: "Mais cette intimité avec Rachel pouvait signifier aussi que l'intelligence était, en réalité, chez la duchesse, médiocre, insatisfaite et désireuse sur le tard, quand elle était fatiguée du monde, de réalisations..." (RTP, III, p. 994)

Rachel had beat the Faubourg at its own game and her social triumph shows the haut monde for what it really is. She makes them look ridiculous for not having appreciated her talent from the first and for having eventually preferred her to Berma, a far superior artist. She has succeeded in lowering society to her level.

The theater thus becomes a basis for comparison with society. Proust uses the positive qualities of his theatrical characters to demonstrate how blind society is to genuine merit. In turn, all that is negative and undesirable in this milieu is accepted by society without question. Actresses vis-à-vis their art have standards much higher than those of the aristocracy vis-à-vis themselves. Except for the pages on Berma, the material on the theater, as

Linn asserts, "assimilates this concept of falsity attached to Rachel, whose portrait here symbolizes the conventionally 'theatrical' rather than the dramatic, literary or aesthetic."¹³⁹

By the end of Le Temps retrouvé the theater's performers have left their mark on the society of the Faubourg and in the mind of the reader. To quote Linn once more, "What is best in the theater is neglected; what is worst in the life of the theater has triumphed."¹⁴⁰

CHAPTER VII

THE LOWER LEVELS OF THE PARIS MILIEU

In contrast to the rigidly stratified society of Combray, the Parisian social structure is flexible; there is a social hierarchy at every level, itself subject to change. There is none of the aspect of permanence found in Combray; one's future is not irrevocably decided by one's birth. Were that true, Le Temps retrouvé could not have been written; Odette, Rachel and Morel would have never improved their lot, Gilberte could not have married a Guermantes and Mme Verdurin's influence would never have extended beyond her petit noyau. Artistic talent and/or wealth made these characters far more likely candidates for social advancement than the serving classes, who cannot easily be imagined in any peer association with the aristocracy (excluding here the homogeneity of the Sodomites). Though hierarchies exist in the lower levels, they tend to give way to class unity vis-à-vis other classes. This class consciousness, apparent to some extent at Balbec, is much more prevalent in Paris where considerably larger numbers of servants and workers are massed together.

Among the domestic servants of Paris the tradition of service to one's employer still existed, but it did not imply a complete devotion to duty. The servant's loyalties were divided between his master and his peers in contrast to Combray, where loyalty was exclusively to the master.

Like any other servant, the Parisian domestic took great pride in his employer's prestige and position and considered where he lived and how he was accepted to be of the greatest import. Hence Françoise's undisguised dismay when Marcel's family planned to move to a new apartment in part of the Hôtel de Guermantes.

... [Françoise] navrée d'avoir eu à quitter un immeuble où l'on était "si bien estimé de partout", avait fait ses malles en pleurant, selon les rites de Combray, et en déclarant supérieur à toutes les maisons possibles celle qui avait été la nôtre... l'installation dans une maison où elle n'avait pas reçu du concierge qui ne nous connaissait pas encore les marques de considération nécessaires à sa bonne nutrition morale, l'avait plongée dans un état voisin de dépérissement. (RTP, II, p. 9)

Since the servant's status among his peers was largely determined by the relative prestige of his employer, he was not disinterested in the various aspects of his employer's existence. It also gave him an opportunity to vicariously participate in a world far removed from his own.

Again Françoise provides an example with her frustration over the fact that Marcel's family did not have a carriage like the Guermantes. Thanks to Jupien, who had perceived the source of her anguish, she learned to overcome her distress.

Elle lui montrait la calèche attelée en ayant l'air de dire: "Des beaux chevaux hien!" mais tout en murmurant: "Quelle vieille sabraque! et surtout parce qu'elle savait qu'il allait lui répondre, en mettant la main devant la bouche pour être entendu tout en parlant à mi-voix: "Vous aussi vous pourriez en avoir si vous vouliez, et même peut-être plus qu'eux, mais vous n'aimez pas tout cela." (RTP, II, pp. 18-19)

Françoise quickly learned to get her point across and no deliveryman left the apartment without being completely convinced that "si nous n'en avons pas, c'est que nous ne voulions pas." (RTP, II, p. 21)

A servant like Françoise was also a potentially powerful figure in that he could control to some degree access to his master. Charlus' servants, in particular, were fiercely loyal to him and were, for all practical purposes, more like bodyguards. Françoise was known to turn away more than one friend of the family, but more out of perversity than anything else.

The examples of servant loyalty go from the extreme of Charlus' servants to Mme de Cambremer's gardener, who did not hesitate to criticize his mistress when he knew it could do him no harm. Marcel had marveled at how a servant could be so devoted and yet so open about his employer's shortcomings.

...par ce morcellement bizarre de l'opinion des gens du peuple, où le mépris moral le plus profond s'enclave dans l'estime la plus passionnée, laquelle chevauche à son tour de vieilles rancunes inabolies, il disait souvent de Mme de Cambremer..."Ce qu'on a beaucoup reproché à Madame la Marquise, c'est pendant la guerre, d'avoir pris le parti des Prussiens et de les avoir même logés chez elle. A un autre moment, j'aurais compris; mais en temps de guerre, elle n'aurait pas dû. C'est pas bien." De sorte qu'il lui était fidèle jusqu'à la mort, la vénérât pour sa bonté et accréditait qu'elle se fût rendue coupable de trahison.

(RTP, II, p. 918)

A more substantial grievance against an employer

could have been claimed by one of the valets of the Guer-
mantes whose personal life--i.e. his meetings with his
fiancée--was deliberately and for no reason made all but
impossible by the duchesse, whose primary motivation was
her jealousy of his happiness. Never once did he denounce
his mistress, although loyalty must not be given all the
credit. The prudent valet doubtless had a healthy respect
for the ubiquitous concierge, who was a spy for the duchesse.

Peer loyalty was as strong--and stronger, when a
choice had to be made--as loyalty to one's master. When
Françoise and her fellow celebrants, Victor and Joseph,
decided it was time for their noontime ritual, no emergency
could deter them. By banding together in their adamant
insistence on this privilege, they succeeded admirably in
immobilizing the household during the noon hour. "Seule-
ment quand arrivait l'heure de la messe, et l'heure du
premier déjeuner, ma grand'mère eût-elle été agonisante,
Françoise se fût éclipsée à temps pour ne pas être en re-
tard." (RTP, II, p. 321) To disturb them during this
period for any reason whatsoever was to flirt with disaster:

...mon père lui-même ne se fût pas permis
de les sonner, sachant d'ailleurs, qu'aucun
ne se fût pas plus dérangé au cinquième
coup qu'au premier, et qu'il eût ainsi commis
cette inconvenance en pure perte, mais non
pas sans dommage pour lui. Car Françoise
(qui, depuis qu'elle était une vieille femme,
se faisait à tout propos ce qu'on appelle
une tête de circonstance) n'eût pas manquée
de lui présenter toute la journée une figure
couverte de petites marques cunéiformes et
rouges qui déployaient au dehors, mais d'une
façon peu déchiffrable, le long mémoire de

ses doléances et les raisons profondes de son mécontentement. Elle les développait d'ailleurs, à la cantonade, mais sans que nous puissions bien distinguer les mots. Elle appelait cela--qu'elle croyait désespérant pour nous, "mortifiant", "vexant",-- nous dire toute la sainte journée des "messes basses". (RTP, II, p. 17)

Her indignation with regard to the duchesse's concierge Antoine was primarily due to his incessant spying on his peers: "c'est un vrai feignant que cet Antoine, et son "Antoinette" ne vaut pas mieux que lui." (RTP, II, p. 23) Of course the fact that Antoine did not show her the proper respect ("...on dirait qu'on lui a coupé la langue ou qu'il a oublié d'apprendre à parler. Il ne vous fait même pas réponse quand on lui cause.") (RTP, II, p. 23) may have had some bearing on her opinion.

Lower-level society was as complicated as the haut monde it imitated. It had its own code of protocol and behavior, its own do's and don't's. Duty to an employer was secondary to self-interest, and the servants considered themselves entitled to their share of the amenities of life. They, too, observed time-honored traditions, as for example, Françoise's respect for the laws of hospitality. When offered a glass of wine by Jupien, she feels compelled to accept although she is not thirsty; to refuse would be discourteous.

Françoise, quand elle avait cru, sans avoir soif, devoir accepter avec une gaîté décente le verre de vin que Jupien lui offrait, n'aurait pas osé partir aussitôt la dernière gorgée bue, quelque devoir impérieuse qui l'eût rappelée...je reconnus en elle la courtoisie envers l'hôte et l'étranger, la décence, le respect de la couche. (RTP, II, p. 367)

Their conversation was frequently on important topics such as politics and the war, although more often than not, the results were an amusing pastiche of similar conversations at higher levels. Victor, Marcel's butler, and the Guermantes' butler were involved in a dispute over the outcome of the Dreyfus affair that provides an excellent counterpoint to a discussion between M. de Norpois and Bloch on the same subject:

...à peine rentré à la maison, j'y retrouvai le pendant de la conversation qu'avaient échangée un peu auparavant Bloch et M. de Norpois, mais sous une forme brève, invertie et cruelle: c'était une dispute entre notre maître d'hôtel, qui était dreyfusard, et celui des Guermantes, qui était anti-dreyfusard. Les vérités et contrevérités qui s'opposaient en haut chez les intellectuels de la Ligue de la Patrie Française et celle des Droits de l'homme se propageaient en effet jusque dans les profondeurs du peuple...En entendant quelqu'un, au milieu d'une causerie qui s'écartait volontairement de l'Affaire, annoncer furtivement une nouvelle politique, généralement fausse mais toujours souhaitée, on pouvait induire de l'objet de ses prédictions l'orientation de ses désirs. Ainsi s'affrontaient sur quelques points, d'un côté un timide apostolat, de l'autre une sainte indignation. Les deux maîtres d'hôtel que j'entendis en rentrant faisaient exception à la règle. Le nôtre laissa entendre que Dreyfus était coupable, celui des Guermantes qu'il était innocent. Ce n'était pas pour dissimuler leurs convictions, mais par méchanceté et âpreté au jeu. Notre maître d'hôtel, incertain si la révision se ferait, voulait d'avance, pour le cas d'un échec, ôter au maître d'hôtel des Guermantes la joie de croire une juste cause battue. Le maître d'hôtel des Guermantes pensait qu'en cas de refus de révision, le nôtre serait plus ennuyé de voir maintenir à l'île du Diable un innocent. (RTP, II, pp. 296-98)

Victor also talked of the war, particularly to

Françoise whom he could easily upset with dire tidings. He interpreted the latest events of the conflict so as to excite the greatest possible reaction from his listener. His exaggerated accounts made her quite nervous. "Elle ne dormait plus, ne mangeait plus, se faisait lire les communiqués auxquels elle ne comprenait rien, par le maître d'hôtel qui n'y comprenait guère davantage." (RTP, III, p. 750)

Her vague notions were not enlightened by Victor's garbled interpretations. A typical proletarian, he perused his newspaper with gloomy distrust of the powers that be and the certainty that he was being subjected to some sort of bureaucratic brainwashing. Far removed from any connection with government, he finds it automatically suspect. His distrust of his superiors is countered by his cunning vis-à-vis his equals. In his discussions with the Guermantes' butler, he foresees the possibility, if not the probability, of defeat of his side in the Dreyfus case and wants to cover all his bets. Convictions are not the important thing; whatever happens, he must not allow his opposition to have the upper hand. Saint-Loup's sincere republicanism would have been as incomprehensible to him as it was to Françoise.

Sometimes the counterpoint provided by the lower levels bordered on the ridiculous. This was one of the evils which came from trying to give oneself class. There was, for example, the aunt of the pianist who played at the Verdurins' Wednesdays. Habitually garbed in black because

she thought it more distinguished, she had the dignity of a former servant and a tendency to become quite red in the face, especially after eating. She had devised a way to disguise her lack of education--or so she thought:

Comme elle n'avait aucune instruction et avait peur de faire des fautes de français, elle prononçait exprès d'une manière confuse, pensant que, si elle lâchait un cuir, il serait estompé d'un tel vague qu'on ne pourrait le distinguer avec certitude, de sorte que sa conversation n'était qu'un grailonnement indistinct, duquel émergeaient de temps à autre les rares vocables dont elle se sentait sûre.

(RTP, I, p. 204)

Amusing though it may be, this is precisely the sort of attitude Proust despises. Catering to what she thinks society expects, the pianist's aunt refuses to be herself and in her efforts to make a more favorable impression by affecting what is foreign to her, she only makes herself ridiculous.

The owner of a restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne was no less concerned with putting his best foot forward. He had a "mentalité de professeur de récitation" which he applied to a select number of political pronouncements on the Dreyfus affair. If his catch phrases were not echoed by what he read or by what his clientele said, then the articles were boring and the diners hypocrites.

His critical faculties were called into play when Marcel, always at his worst in strange situations, ineptly navigated the revolving door and fell heir to the patron's glaring disapproval.

Ce soir-là le patron, n'osant pas se mouiller en allant dehors ni quitter ses clients, restait cependant près de l'entrée pour avoir le plaisir d'entendre les joyeuses doléances des arrivants tout illuminés par la satisfaction de gens qui avaient eu du mal à arriver et la crainte de se perdre. Pourtant la rieuse cordialité de son accueil fut dissipée par la vue d'un inconnu qui ne savait pas se dégager des volants de verre. Cette marque flagrante d'ignorance lui fit froncer le sourcil comme à un examinateur qui a bonne envie de ne pas prononcer le dignus est intrare. (RTP, II, p. 401)

The pretentious patron fades into insignificance by comparison to the tenancière, who had made a whole little world for herself out of a hopelessly menial situation. She presided over the public restrooms of the Champs-Élysées with the authority of a Duchesse de Guermantes. Françoise was properly impressed by the "vieille dame à joues plâtrées et à perruque rousse" and was convinced that she was in fact a marquise of the Saint-Ferréol family. "Françoise la croyait 'tout à fait bien de chez elle'. Sa demoiselle avait épousé ce que Françoise appelait 'un jeune homme de famille', par conséquent quelqu'un qu'elle trouvait plus différent d'un ouvrier que Saint-Simon un duc d'un homme 'sorti de la lie du peuple'." (RTP, I, p. 492)

The tenancière was always there and personally supervised access to her cabinets:

Au contrôle, comme dans ces cirques forains où le clown, prêt à entrer en scène et tout enfariné, reçoit lui-même à la porte le prix des places, la "marquise", percevant les entrées, était toujours là avec son museau énorme et irrégulier enduit de plâtre grossier, et son petit bonnet de fleurs rouges et de dentelle noire surmontant sa perruque rousse. (RTP, II, p. 309)

Proust, in an incomparable satiric parody of salon snobbery, gives the tenancière the same expressions and the same haughty pride found in the upper social strata. Describing her little world, the spurious marquise remarks: "Et puis toujours du va-et-vient, de la distraction; c'est ce que j'appelle mon petit Paris: mes clients me tiennent au courant de ce qui se passe." (RTP, II, pp. 309-310) One of the "clients", a magistrate, caused the tenancière particular concern when, after eight years of appearing punctually at three o'clock, he missed a day. Relieved to see him reappear the following afternoon, she later learned the reason for his singular absence: his wife had died. Like Mme Verdurin, she expected her fidèles to be just that.

Very selective about whom she would admit, she reveals that "je choisis mes clients, je ne reçois pas tout le monde dans ce que j'appelle mes salons." (RTP, II, p. 310) She had an opportunity to prove her point with the arrival of a woman who, she felt, "a une tête de mauvais payeur... Ce n'est pas le genre d'ici, ça n'a pas de propreté, pas de respect." (RTP, II, p.311) Such undesirables were sent away immediately with the excuse that there was nothing available. Marcel's grandmother, who had overheard the tenancière's conversation, was quite amused by her grandiose airs and remarked to her grandson as they left: "C'était on ne peut plus Guermantes et petit noyau Verdurin." (RTP, II, p. 312)

Joseph, the young valet in Marcel's household,

harbored no social ambitions, but he did have visions of improving his mind. Unfortunately, however, he did not have the necessary background to properly assimilate the books of poetry that he was continually borrowing from Marcel. He dilligently copied verses to put into his letters to his family, much to the latter's mystification. The choice of the lines and the point of their insertion were apparently based solely on whim, although the intention was unquestionably to create a good impression. Imagine some peasant's surprise and confusion upon receiving the following letter:

J'espère que la santé va toujours bien et qu'il en est de même pour toute la petite famille particulièrement pour mon jeune filleul Joseph dont je n'ai pas encore le plaisir de connaître mais dont je preffère à vous tous comme étant mon filleul, ces relique du coeur on aussi leur poussière, sur leurs restes sacrés ne portons pas les mains. Dailleurs cher ami et cousin qui te dit que demain toi et ta chère femme ma cousine Marie, vous ne serez pas précipités tous deux jusqu'au fond de la mer comme le matelot attaché en aut de grand mât, car cette vie nest quune vallée obscure...etc.
(RTP, II, p. 566)

Fortunately he did not incorporate Musset et al into his daily conversation.

Although Françoise was ambitious for Marcel's family, she was from the old school of Combray, and had no personal ambitions and aspirations. She was perfectly happy within her own class, and she enjoyed a certain prestige in the eyes of her peers, which for her was the ultimate compliment. She knew how to keep her place and would have considered any other attitude unthinkable.

Marie-Antoinette Jupien likewise was not ambitious, but circumstance gave her the Baron de Charlus for an adoptive father and bestowed upon her one of the nobler titles of France.

In contrast, there was Morel, who was ambition incarnate and who went about his upward climb with a calculated cruelty that put even Rachel to shame. Morel's asset was his talent, and sex was his weapon.

The prevalence of homosexuality in the haut monde provided a servant with the opportunity to become the intimate of a noble and thereby gain a substantial measure of control and influence over his lover. There is a disproportionate emphasis in A la Recherche on the male servant. This is, according to Germaine Brée, a reflection of Proust's own homosexuality. She has a perfectly valid point of view. It is true that in salons or hotels more men servants would be visible to the habitué than their female counterparts, who were chambermaids, cooks, cleaning women, etc. Nonetheless Proust's deviation does account for his continual observation and description of waiters, valets, et al, as well as for his obsession in much of the novel with the theme of homosexuality.

Two of the three characters who are brought into sharp focus in the Paris milieu, Jupien and Morel, advanced their lot through homosexuality although by different means and with entirely different attitudes. The third, Françoise, has a place in the novel all her own. All three are

accorded lengthy treatment by comparison with other lower-level characters, and the successive changes they undergo in durée are what interest their creator. As René Girard noted in Deceit, Desire and the Novel: "The novelist is interested neither in the petty reality of the object nor in that same object transfigured by desire; he is interested in the process of transfiguration." 141

Jupien, first of the three to be considered at some length, began as a tailor whose shop was in a part of the Hôtel de Guermantes. When Proust had lived with his family at 9, boulevard Malesherbes, the tailor shop of a M. Eppler was located on the ground floor. Next door was still another tailor's shop, that of Sandt and Laborde. One, if not both, of these probably accounts for Jupien's occupation. In earlier typescripts, Jupien is a concierge, called variously Julliot or Joliot.

Albert Feuillerat reports that in the Grasset edition, Jupien is referred to as Meslet or Borniche and that his original role was insignificant. In the placards he becomes a florist, and in the additions to Grasset his character assumes much greater importance and he becomes definitively a giletier. "Jupien est un des personnages qui ont reçu un rôle plus important que celui qui leur avait été premièrement destiné; il va être par la suite élevé à la situation inattendue d'ami intime et de confident de M. de Charlus. De là le soin que prend l'auteur de tirer cette figure de l'ombre." 142 As the character of Jupien evolves in the

novel, it is distorted by increasingly homosexual tendencies; his representativeness as a member of his social class suffers accordingly.

In the later stages of the evolution of this character, the models are several. As the close companion of the aging Baron de Charlus, he is suggested by Montesquiou's ever-faithful secretary, Yturri; as proprietor of Charlus' infamous hotel/brothel, he is Albert le Cuziat, who performed the same service for Proust; as the nurse-companion to the ailing Charlus, he is reminiscent of Miniguishi, the Japanese valet of Comte Joachim Clary, an aged old man, half-blind and paralyzed, whom Proust had met.

This versatile character definitely had his positive qualities. His first contact with Marcel's family, in the person of Marcel's grandmother, had produced a most favorable impression: "Ma grand'mère avait trouvé ces gens parfaits, elle déclarait que la petite était une perle et que le giletier était l'homme le plus distingué, le mieux qu'elle eût jamais vu." (RTP, I, p. 20)

By the time Marcel and his family had moved into the Hôtel de Guermantes, Jupien was an employee of one of the ministries. The young man records his first impressions:

...ses yeux débordés par un regard compatissant, désolé et rêveur, faisaient penser qu'il était très malade ou venait d'être frappé d'un grand deuil...mais dès qu'il parlait, parfaitement bien d'ailleurs, il était plutôt froid et railleur. Il résultait de ce désaccord entre son regard et sa parole quelque chose de faux qui n'était pas sympathique...je discernai vite, en effet, chez lui une intelligence rare et l'une

des plus naturellement littéraires qu'il m'ait été donné de connaître, en ce sens que, sans culture probablement, il possédait ou s'était assimilé, rien qu'à l'aide de quelques livres hâtivement parcourus, les tours les plus ingénieux de la langue...Il avait de la bonté, de la pitié, les sentiments les plus délicats, les plus généreux.
(RTP, II, pp. 20-21)

As Marcel came to know Jupien better, his intellectual gifts became even more apparent:

D'autre part, je connaissais peu d'hommes, je peux même dire que je ne connaissais pas d'homme qui, sous le rapport de l'intelligence et de la sensibilité fût aussi doué que Jupien; car cet "acquis" délicieux qui faisait la trame spirituelle de ses propos ne lui venait d'aucune de ces instructions de collège, d'aucune de ces cultures d'Université qui auraient pu faire de lui un homme si remarquable, quand tant de jeunes gens du monde ne tirent d'elles aucun profit. C'était son simple sens inné, son goût naturel, qui, de rares lectures faites au hasard, sans guide, à des moments perdus, lui avait fait composer ce parler si juste où toutes les symétries du langage se laissaient découvrir et montraient leur beauté.
(RTP, III, p. 838)

Françoise, who had no basis for appreciating Jupien's finer points, was thoroughly convinced of his worth: she equated him with the most elegant man she knew: the Baron de Charlus: "Il y a beau avoir des riches et les pauvres misérables, ça ne fait rien pour la nature. Le baron et Jupien, c'est bien le même genre de personnes." (RTP, II, p. 630) Little did she know how close to the truth she had come.

It was not his finer points, however, that made Jupien attractive to Charlus. It was an arrangement that

worked to the benefit of both. Charlus set Jupien up as the manager of his "Temple de l'Impudeur" which catered to his particular pleasures. Jupien was by no means ashamed, but rather pleased with with his unusual employment, explaining to an astonished Marcel that "elle est le goût de ma vie." Somewhat reminiscent of the tenancière, he viewed his situation as highly desirable:

...sans doute le directeur d'un établissement de ce genre, comme une grande cocotte, ne reçoit que des hommes, mais il reçoit des hommes marquants dans tous les genres et qui sont généralement, à situation égale, parmi les plus fins, les plus sensibles, les plus aimables de leur profession. Cette maison se transformera vite, je vous l'assure, en un bureau d'esprit et une agence de nouvelles.
(RTP, III, pp. 831-32)

This episode, with its strong autobiographical overtones, illustrates how one lower-level person attained a position of some influence among the men of the haut monde. Jupien, rather exceptionally, was neither ambitious nor unfeeling and was devoted to Charlus. When, by the end of Le Temps retrouvé, Charlus has become old and feeble, Jupien is still found by his side, catering to his every need much as one might treat a child. Here was an instance of a genuine attachment which withstood the test of time and the stress inherent in homosexual society.

Morel, in contrast, provides an example of perversion, cruelty and ambition not equalled in A la Recherche. Jack Murray in an article entitled "The Mystery of Others," comments that "The vast majority of lower class personages are presented as being extraordinary liars, completely

untrustworthy, and willfully evasive" he is certainly describing Morel.¹⁴³ While some of the other lower-level characters may have undesirable qualities, none reaches the depths plumbed by Morel and I must therefore take exception to a general application of Mr. Murray's remark. Nowhere near a "vast majority" of the lower-level characters exhibit the unfavorable qualities he mentions.

The unlikely model for this paragon of baseness was a nineteen-year-old pianist named Léon Delafosse. In earlier drafts of the novel, the character who would become Morel was named Bobby Santois and was a pianist. Delafosse, like Morel, won a first prize at the conservatory where he studied. Also an arriviste, he was searching for a wealthy patron when Proust arranged for him to meet Count Robert de Montesquiou, the primary model for the characterization of Charlus. Their relationship lasted for about three years and ended when Montesquiou became angry because Delafosse flirted with a spinster. Unlike Charlus, Count Robert was in complete control of the situation; he dismissed the pianist with delight and thereafter missed no opportunity to speak ill of the young musician. The suffering which Morel caused Charlus is patterned after the relationship between Baron Doasan and his Polish violinist.

Physically and temperamentally Morel and Delafosse had much in common: Painter notes that Delafosse was "a thin, vain, ambitious, blond young man, with icy blue eyes and diaphanously pale, supernaturally beautiful features."

When he was playing, "this little face, with its silly laugh, became transfigured with superhuman beauty, and took on the pallor and remoteness of death." ¹⁴⁴ Proust referred to him as the "Angel." In A la Recherche mention is made on several occasions of the angelic beauty of Morel's face while he is playing.

From his first appearance in the novel, Morel's ambition is evident. Marcel immediately perceived that Morel was set on disassociating himself from his origins:

...un beau garçon de dix-huit ans, habillé plutôt richement qu'avec goût, mais qui pourtant avait l'air de tout, excepté d'un valet de chambre. Il tint du reste, dès l'abord, à couper le câble avec la domesticité d'où il sortait, en m'apprenant avec un sourire satisfait qu'il était premier prix du Conservatoire. (RTP, II, p. 264)

He was so determined to erase the class boundary between them that he addressed Marcel as a social equal. "Il avait à dire 'vous', et le moins souvent possible 'Monsieur', le plaisir de quelqu'un dont le père n'avait jamais employé, en s'adressant à mes parents, que la 'troisième personne' ...Je me rendis vite compte que le fils de Morel était très 'arriviste'." (RTP, II, pp. 264-65)

When next they met at the Verdurins rented summer home at La Raspelière, Morel's ambition again was ill-disguised. Perceiving immediately that Marcel was well received by the Verdurins, he donned his most obsequious manner and requested that Marcel not divulge his origins and that he treat him as a social equal. No sooner had Marcel complied than Morel's haughtiness returned.

Je gardai de son caractère la vilaine
idée que m'en avait fait concevoir la
bassesse que ce jeune homme m'avait
montrée quand il avait eu besoin de moi,
suivie, tout aussitôt le service rendu,
d'un dédain jusqu'à sembler ne pas me
voir... (RTP, II, p. 1032)

Morel's ambition was all-consuming. He was determined to be accepted by high society, but his driving purpose was not the shallow social success sought by many. He was seeking the best medium in which his talent could flourish and be rewarded. This was his attribute, and the talent was genuine. To his credit, it was the one thing he refused to compromise. Nothing could erase from his mind the significance of the first prize that he had won:

Ce garçon qui, pour peu qu'il y trouvât
de l'argent, eût fait n'importe quoi, et
sans remords...qui eût, s'il y trouvait son
intérêt, plongé dans la peine, voire dans
le deuil, des familles entières, ce garçon
qui mettait l'argent au-dessus de tout et,
sans parler de bonté, au-dessus des senti-
ments de simple humanité les plus naturels,
ce même garçon mettait pourtant au-dessus de
l'argent son diplôme de 1er prix du Con-
servatoire et qu'on ne pût tenir aucun pro-
pos désobligeant sur lui à la classe de
flûte ou de contrepont. (RTP, II, p. 1033)

His talent was the foothold he needed and under the aegis of Charlus, his rise was rapid. Some of his lower-class traits inevitably left their mark however. As he sought to acclimate himself to the upper social stratosphere, he naturally imitated his only model, Charlus. He assiduously adopted the baron's opinions and mannerisms and "jugait les choses comme s'il était lui-même un Guermantes." (RTP, II, p. 1090) Inevitably, he made himself look ridiculous:

"Aveuglement et follement, car non seulement les enseignements de M. de Charlus étaient faux, mais encore, eussent-ils été valables pour un grand seigneur, appliqués à la lettre par Morel ils devenaient burlesques." (RTP, II, p. 1089)

The servant's habit of verbal prudence interposed itself in his conversations with Charlus, whom at first he feared to offend. In moments of anger, however, vulgar expressions came quite naturally to his lips. This was particularly true in his relationship with Marie-Antoinette, which pointed up the worst aspects of his character.

His intentions had been something less than honorable: "trouver une jeune fille bien pure, de m'en faire aimer et de lui prendre sa virginité...L'épouser? des nêfles. Je le promettrais, mais, dès la petite opération menée à bien, je la plaquerais le soir même." (RTP, II, p. 1008) He hesitated momentarily in following through with his sinister design, but when the young girl refused to procure others for him to seduce, he abandoned her as planned. His one regret was for the sums of money he had spent.

The great gap between his class origin and the social and artistic acceptance he sought had generated Morel's all-consuming ambition. However, he refused to compromise his artistic reputation, even to the detriment of fulfilling his social ambition. Charlus was completely nonplussed when the violinist refused the noble title he offered him, but Morel would never relinquish the surname that was linked to his triumphs at the Conservatory.

... [Charlus] rencontrait chez Morel quelque velléité plébéienne d'indifférence momentanée. Malheureusement pour M. de Charlus, il ne comprenait pas que, pour Morel, tout cédait devant les questions où le Conservatoire et la bonne réputation au Conservatoire...entraient en jeu. Ainsi, par exemple, les bourgeois changent aisément de nom par vanité, les grands seigneurs par avantage. Pour le jeune violoniste, au contraire, le nom de Morel était indissolublement lié à son 1er prix de violon, donc impossible à modifier. (RTP, II, p. 1062)

Morel's refusal was costly in the sense that had he accepted the title, his social position would have been assured. One cannot overlook the fact that in spite of his ambition, he preferred genuine artistic achievement to social distinction.

Morel soon eclipsed his patron, upon whom years of deviation were taking their toll. Morel was in his prime, and when they were seen together, "M. de Charlus passait pour un vieux domestique ruiné et Morel, qui avait mission de payer les notes, pour un gentilhomme trop bon." (RTP, II, p. 1006)

When Morel was convinced by Mme Verdurin that Charlus' usefulness was at an end and that his association with him was doing his "career" more harm than good, he opted for the nephew, Robert de Saint-Loup. Jupien, ever faithful to Charlus, was indignant:

...Non, que ce misérable musicien ait quitté le baron comme il l'a quitté, salement, on peut bien le dire, c'était son affaire. Mais se tourner vers le neveu! Il y a des choses qui ne se font pas." Jupien était sincère dans son indignation: chez les personnes dites immorales, les indignations morales sont tout aussi fortes que chez les autres et changent seulement un peu d'objet. (RTP, III, p. 678)

With such a history of malevolence and corruption, one would expect Morel to come to a bad end. Marcel was understandably astonished to encounter Morel at the Guer-
mantes matinée and have him pointed out as "un homme consi-
dérable qui venait, dans un procès fameux, de donner un
témoignage dont la seule valeur résidait dans sa haute
moralité...C'était Morel." (RTP, III, p. 956)

At last Morel's highest ambitions had been realized. He had conquered Parisian society and the salonnards were at his feet. Society had accepted the immoral and the base with no qualms whatsoever, once given sufficient superficial justification for doing so. Like Rachel, Morel serves as a touchstone for evaluation of the haut monde; like her, he lowers society to his level.

In contrast to Jupien and Morel, Françoise, the principal lower-level character of the novel, never pene-
trates into the upper social echelons. The effect of durée can best be observed in her characterization. From Combray, through Balbec, to Paris there are changes in her character, attitude and mannerisms but she is not essentially altered. She seems beyond the destructive touch of time, and Wallace Fowlie observes that "She resists time better than anyone else in the novel. In fact, she remains almost as impene-
trable as time itself. She is more the force of time than a character affected by it." 145

In Paris she still reigned tyrannically over the

household as she had in Combray. Then as now, she refused to allow any other servant to help her or to supplement her in her work.

Mais, à Combray aussi, Françoise avait contracté--et importé à Paris--l'habitude de ne pouvoir supporter une aide quelconque dans son travail. Se voir prêter un concours lui semblait recevoir une avanie, et des domestiques sont restés des semaines sans obtenir d'elle une réponse à leur salut matinal... pour la seule raison qu'ils avaient voulu faire un peu de sa besogne un jour qu'elle était souffrante. (RTP, II, pp. 321-22)

She retained from her peasant background her unfailing mistrust of those with seemingly good intentions.

Without surrendering any of her rightful privileges, she had managed to develop a good relationship with her peers, a definite must in Paris where ties with peers tended to be stronger than ties to families. The more extensive and sustained contact with her peers led to the elaboration of her protocol to meet the demands of her new situation. Dictated in great part by her ever enigmatic code, her rules of protocol would have done credit to the most conscientious diplomat but they left something to be desired as far as Marcel's family was concerned.

Son vieux code lui enseignait qu'elle n'était tenue à rien envers les amis de ses maîtres, qu'elle pouvait si elle était pressée envoyer promener une dame venue pour voir sa grand'mère. Mais envers ses relations à elle, c'est-à-dire avec les rares gens du peuple admis à sa difficile amitié, le protocole le plus subtil et le plus absolu réglait ses actions. (RTP, I, p. 692)

Nowhere are her priorities better illustrated than in her attitude toward the electrician who arrived to make repairs at a time when Marcel's grandmother was critically ill. Devoted servant that she was, Françoise had no qualms about leaving the dying woman to chat a few minutes with the repairman. Seemingly inconsistent behavior in Marcel's eyes, it was clearly an obligation for Françoise, the least that she could do under the circumstances. It would have been unthinkable not to apologize in person to "ce bon ouvrier électricien qui avait pris tant de dérangement." (RTP, II, p. 331)

She retained her peasant-inspired attitude toward death, and even when the much despised Albertine died, Françoise was not unaffected: "Mais les lois non écrites de son antique Code et sa tradition de paysanne médiévale qui pleure comme aux chansons de geste étaient plus anciennes que sa haine d'Albertine." (RTP, III, pp. 480-81)

She also retained, in spite of the corrosive influence of her Parisian environment, a sincere devotion to her "family." The family context was very necessary to Françoise: "elle avait pour les liens invisibles que noue entre les membres d'une famille la circulation d'un même sang, autant de respect qu'un tragique grec." (RTP, I, p. 53) Marcel compares the relationship between his family and Françoise to symbiosis, a biological term meaning the co-existence of two dissimilar organisms for mutual benefit.

The comparison is apt.

...sauf pour certains plaisirs d'amour-propre purement personnels (comme celui, quand elle toussait sans arrêter et que toute la maison avait peur de prendre son rhume, de prétendre avec un ricanement irritant qu'elle n'était pas enrhumée), pareille à ces plantes qu'un animal auquel elles sont entièrement unies nourrit d'aliments qu'il attrape, mange, digère pour elles et qu'il leur offre dans son dernier et tout assimilable résidu, Françoise vivait avec nous en symbiose; c'est nous qui, avec nos vertus, notre fortune, notre train de vie, notre situation, devions nous charger d'élaborer les petites satisfactions d'amour-propre dont était formée--en y ajoutant le droit reconnu d'exercer librement le culte du déjeuner suivant la coutume ancienne comportant la petite gorgée d'air à la fenêtre quand il était fini, quelque flânerie dans la rue en allant faire ses emplettes et une sortie le dimanche pour aller voir sa nièce--la part de contentement indispensable à sa vie. (RTP, II, p. 19)

To Marcel and his parents Françoise's behavior often bordered on the perverse, and was consistently within the limits of the annoying. She is most assuredly not without faults, but it is precisely these faults coupled with her consistent inconsistency that make her so believable to the reader. Her mysterious code is all but incomprehensible to everyone but herself; the resulting idiosyncracies in her behavior are what make her the amusing and unforgettable character she is.

She had unlimited methods for annoying her employers. She seemed to have a sixth sense that enabled her to know exactly what they were trying to keep from her, and she had a way of making her knowledge maddeningly apparent.

"Elle excellait à régler ces mises en scène destinées à instruire si bien le spectateur, Françoise absente, qu'il savait déjà qu'elle savait tout quand ensuite elle faisait son entrée. Elle avait, pour faire parler ainsi un objet inanimé, l'art à la fois génial et patient d'Irving et de Frédérick Lemaître." (RTP, II, p.360)

Even when repeating a message from a friend, "si courtes qu'elles fussent [leurs paroles] , elle s'arrangeait généralement, au besoin grâce à l'expression, au ton dont elle assurait qu'elles avait été accompagnées, à leur donner quelque chose de blessant." (RTP, II, p. 735) Marcel was forced to conclude that "les 'inférieurs' qui nous aiment comme Françoise m'aimait ont du plaisir à nous froisser dans notre amour-propre." (RTP, III, p. 192)

He felt particularly sensitive on this point, as he was often ill and Françoise reacted to illness with ill-concealed dismay. Her despairing remarks and her general air of foreboding seemed deliberately designed to discomfit, although her devoted service was a testimonial to her true affection for him. Her lack of discretion in this regard made him think of her in terms of her class.

Enfin, comme les domestiques que nous aimons le plus--et surtout s'ils ne nous rendent presque plus les services et les égards de leur emploi--restent, hélas, des domestiques et marquent plus nettement les limites (que nous voudrions effacer) de leur caste au fur et à mesure qu'ils croient le plus pénétrer dans la nôtre, Françoise avait souvent à mon endroit ("pour me piquer", eût dit le maître d'hôtel) de ces propos étranges qu'une personne du monde n'aurait pas: avec une

joie dissimulée mais aussi profonde que si c'eût été une maladie grave, si j'avais chaud et que la sueur--je n'y prenais pas garde--perlât à mon front: "Mais vous êtes en nage", me disait-elle, étonnée comme devant un phénomène étrange, souriant un peu avec le mépris que cause quelque chose d'indécent... prenant pourtant la voix préoccupée qui est chargée d'inquiéter quelqu'un sur son état.
(RTP, III, p. 749)

Marcel and his mother had both noticed a similar reaction earlier when Marcel's grandmother was dying, and Marcel outlined two sources for her undisguised reactions:

...le manque d'éducation des gens du peuple qui ne cherchent pas à dissimuler l'impression, voire l'effroi douloureux causé en eux par la vue d'un changement physique qu'il serait plus délicat de ne pas paraître remarquer, et la rudesse insensible de la paysanne qui arrache les ailes des libellules avant qu'elle ait l'occasion de tordre le cou aux poulets et manque de la pudeur qui lui ferait cacher l'intérêt qu'elle éprouve à voir la chair qui souffre. (RTP, II, pp. 319-20)

Françoise always acted by instinct; she could sniff out conversations that were designed to be overheard and she ignored them. But the moment one of the family had some private business to discuss, she could be counted on to magically appear. She was also adept at opening doors at compromising moments. All the more exasperating was the fact that her words and actions were so indirect and subtle that the family was left with no tangible basis for its complaints. They soon learned that reproaching her in any event was ill advised. There was never an open rebuttal: "Françoise, ne pouvant nous répondre d'une façon explicite, parlait comme Tirésias et eût écrit comme Tacite. Elle

savait faire tenir tout ce qu'elle ne pouvait exprimer directement, dans une phrase que nous ne pouvions incriminer sans nous accuser, dans moins même qu'une phrase, dans un silence, dans la manière dont elle plaçait un objet."
(RTP, II, p. 359)

Utterly defeated by her cunning, Marcel and his family resigned themselves to Françoise and her faults. They learned to cater to her sensitive pride and renounced all hope of teaching her to answer the phone or tell time. Her presence was a constant reminder of the fresh country air of Combray and her devotion to them was unquestioned.

The Françoise of the Paris milieu is an older, more irascible Françoise. The influence of her peers can in large part explain the change.

...dès qu'elle était entrée à Paris à notre service, elle avait partagé les idées, les jurisprudences d'interprétation des domestiques des autres étages, se rattrapant du respect qu'elle était obligée de nous témoigner, en nous répétant ce que la cuisinière du quatrième disait de grossier à sa maîtresse, et avec une telle satisfaction de domestique que, pour la première fois de notre vie, nous sentant une sorte de solidarité avec la détestable locataire du quatrième, nous nous disions que peut-être, en effet, nous étions des maîtres. Cette altération du caractère de Françoise était peut-être inévitable. (RTP, II, p. 64)

The Paris experience had brought sharply into focus the relationship between employer and servant.

Age was another factor in the developing of unpleasant aspects of her personality. Françoise was no longer young. She had become more nervous with age, and

with the garrulousness of the elderly, made known her every ache and pain. She was paradoxically more possessive toward her family, and the presence of Albertine was a constant source of irritation. Not to be discounted was the fact that through long association with Marcel and his family, mutual differences inevitably had become more apparent. Feuillerat underscores this point:

Cette servante apparaît de plus en plus à son maître comme pleine de défauts et l'acharnement avec lequel celui-ci poursuit ces défauts, outre qu'il trahit chez Proust une irritation grandissante contre une domestique ayant réellement existé, nous apporte une preuve de plus de l'intérêt que l'auteur prend maintenant à relever l'antagonisme qui existe entre maîtres et serviteurs. 146

The facts are that Françoise is a fictional character and that her alteration in personality, albeit logically motivated to some degree within the context of the novel, is engineered by her creator. Numerous additions to the Grasset edition account for passages unfavorable to Françoise in the first half of A la Recherche. Feuillerat notes that "La plupart des additions se rapportent à Françoise et à ses relations avec les autres domestiques" and he adds: "Toutes ces additions, qui peuvent paraître bien triviales, ont un but, le même que nous avons déjà signalé dans le chapitre précédent: faire ressortir les ridicules et les mauvais côtés de Françoise." 147

Given this impetus in the first half of A la Recherche the characterization of Françoise gradually emphasizes

more of her faults. Coupled with the events of the latter half of the novel, the change is logically accomplished in the reader's mind. Roland Donzé finds this typical of Proust's character development: "L'appauvrissement graduel d'un type comme celui de la servante de Combray, est un trait caractéristique du comique de Proust." ¹⁴⁸ It is a point well taken.

Françoise is no less believable for having changed in some respects; the evolution of her character does not seem either unusual or deliberately negative to the reader. Jacques Zéphir in his La Personnalité humaine dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust makes a realistic appraisal of the flexibility of the moi social which applies to the characterization of Françoise:

L'instinct d'imitation, les nécessités de l'adaptation, la puissance, par ailleurs, des conventions et des préjugés sociaux, finissent par ébranler les personnalités, même les plus fortes, et par les entraîner dans le sillage commun, en les modifiant et en les transformant selon ses propres caprices et ses propres fluctuations. ¹⁴⁹

While Françoise's personality change will not seem like a non sequitur to the reader, Proust's motives may have been more deliberate than they seem. All the additions relating to Françoise are unfavorable. When she turns her back to some degree on tradition as it relates to servants, she would invite more criticism from her tradition-oriented creator. Jacques Nathan justly remarks that Proust "prend bien soin de distinguer les défauts,

somme toute pardonnables, inhérents à la condition, et ceux, délibérément odieux, qu'acquièrent ceux qui manquent aux traditions." 150

What is surprising in the evolution of Françoise's character is the turn it takes at the very end of Le Temps retrouvé. After the matinée at the Princesse de Guermantes', Marcel's literary vocation suddenly crystallized in his mind. He envisioned a supportive role for Françoise in its realization. Certainly the possibility of collaboration with a faithful but cantankerous servant seems surprising to the reader, but in one sense, at least, it is fitting and appropriate. Throughout the entire novel, Françoise alone of all the myriad characters has been the single continuous element in Marcel's life, and now with his life's work about to begin, she would once again play her part. She has been the most substantial human force and the most realistic element in his existence, and it is to her that he now turns for aid and support.

He visualized putting together his novel as Françoise would put together a dress, and assumed that she would be able to help with the problem of assemblage. She would be able to understand his frustration when he could not find the certain little scrap of paper that he had in mind. She would have an instinctive understanding of his work: "Et puis parce qu'à force de vivre de ma vie, elle s'était fait du travail littéraire une sorte de compréhension instinctive, plus juste que celle de bien des gens

intelligents, à plus forte raison que celle des gens bêtes." (RTP, III, p. 1034)

This is not the same Françoise of a few pages back, always grumbling at her employers and complaining of her every ache and pain. This is a Françoise reborn into a role of greater dimensions; this cannot be the Françoise so skillfully drawn in the pages of A la Recherche. That Françoise, the only Françoise with a literary existence, would never have had any real understanding of what Marcel was doing and why. That Françoise remains first, last and always a family servant, a role she never transcends but one to which she adds new dimensions, making her one of the most unforgettable characters in modern literature.

* * * * *

The dominant element of the Parisian milieu is change. Not only does society itself undergo an upheaval in its structure, but the characters moving within its context are substantially affected. Even the stability of Françoise is shaken under its influence.

The reader of A la Recherche is exposed to the Paris milieu to a far greater extent than to the other three put together. Logically, many significant character developments occur in these pages, not all of which can be attributed to the milieu's influence. The effect on the lower level characters is unmistakable, however.

It is in Paris that Morel and Rachel set their sights on crashing the inner sanctums of the Faubourg, in Paris that valets can consort with noblemen in the twilight world of the "cities of the Plain" and in Paris that proximity to greater numbers of their peers excites the class consciousness of servants. Proust is harsh on those who neglect their traditional responsibilities in favor of new-found fraternalism.

The deliberate disregard for tradition which surfaces in the Paris milieu rapidly begins to spread to all social levels. Proust is compelled to recognize these changes whether he wants to accept them. Le Temps retrouvé is his recognition and his own brand of acceptance.

CONCLUSION

The germs of change are always present in society, and some degree of transition is constantly taking place. The society which Proust observed was in the midst of a transformation which was only beginning to make its repercussions felt. The overnight social ascendance of Jupien's niece was still the exception rather than the rule, but Proust could see the handwriting on the wall. "Il viendra peut-être un jour où les couturières, ce que je ne trouverais nullement choquant, iront dans le monde. La nièce de Jupien, étant une exception, ne peut encore le laisser prévoir, une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps." (RTP, III, p. 48)

The haut monde of A la Recherche was under siege, but although some of the bastions had fallen, there had not been a total surrender. The aristocrats still dominated the Faubourg, and they consequently dominate in A la Recherche. Here was the world that Proust knew best, the world in which he moved. It is only logical that he could, and would, depict this group in more detail and at greater length than any other. Proust defends his predilection by observing that "les ouvriers sont aussi curieux des princes que les princes des ouvriers." (RTP, III, p. 888) He had elaborated on this point of view earlier in Chroniques:

Un artiste ne doit servir que la vérité et n'avoir aucun respect pour le rang. Il doit simplement en tenir compte dans ses peintures, en tant qu'il est un principe de différenciation, comme par exemple la nationalité, la race, le milieu. Toute condition sociale a son intérêt et il peut être aussi curieux pour l'artiste de montrer les façons d'une reine, que les habitudes d'une couturière. 151

He even affirms that the lower levels are not without their interest: "il y a peut-être du mystère dans la vie de tous les jours." (RTP, III, p. 220) Critics who have reproached Proust for not having dealt with the working classes at greater length or for not having had anything to say of positive social value would do well to reread Le Temps retrouvé. Proust did not write, nor did he intend to write, a roman à thèse. "Une oeuvre où il y a des théories est comme un objet sur lequel on laisse la marque du prix." (RTP, III, p. 882) He sought the essence of things, truths which transcended class lines and social distinctions, and aristocrats were not the only instructive objects to study.

Anyone who crossed his path might reveal through his actions or words some basic truth of human behavior or experience. "Les êtres les plus bêtes, par leurs gestes, leurs propos, leurs sentiments involontairement exprimés, manifestent des lois qu'ils ne perçoivent pas, mais que l'artiste surprend en eux." (RTP, III, p. 901) The people could be equally as indicative of the hidden truths of human experience as their social superiors. Speaking in terms of generalized human behavior, it would not matter

which group were studied. Proust observed them both.

And he not only observed, he recorded. In recording he recreated the reality of what he saw in his own terms. He was adept at painting with words precise nuances of behavior and appearance. Many lower-level characters benefit from his talent. Without lengthy episodes and numerous reappearances to strengthen them as characters, they nonetheless manage to become viable, credible people within the context of A la Recherche. This is to Proust's credit as an artist in the true sense of the word.

The treatment of the lower-level characters is a qualitative, not a quantitative, issue, and for what they may lack in numbers, and to some extent in variety, they more than compensate through the skillful and intelligent portrayal Proust accords them. It is his gift for deft delineation of these minor characters that endows them with a claim to existence.

Why should they be included at all, if the same basic laws of psychological motivation and the same truths of human existence can be discovered in the upper social levels? The lower social levels are there (in A la Recherche) because they were there--in Proust's social spectrum and in Marcel's. The amount of representation accorded them is an accurate reflection of their presence in both cases. Their numbers were neither deliberately augmented nor deliberately reduced; Proust did not aspire to presenting a perfectly balanced social picture.

He did aspire to arriving at basic human truths, and the lower levels served him not only as subjects for observation in this regard but also as bases for comparison with their social superiors. Through such comparisons--and contrasts as well--the haut monde is seen in clearer light. Each lower-level group functions as a touchstone for Faubourg society, and through each, one aspect of that society is revealed.

The peasantry is continually identified with the tradition de Saint-André, the essence of medieval peasant virtues. The aristocrats who are compared with this tradition gain by the comparison. The peasant virtues of Saint-Loup and Oriane are what is best about them.. Through this comparison, they are also linked to France's medieval past which, in Proust's optic, is another point in their favor.

The comparisons and contrasts with the servants, on the other hand, have little positive effect on the character of the aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie. What they do with pomp and ceremony within the confines of their salons is imitated in all seriousness by servants in their kitchens. The imitation becomes a mockery, and the hollow values of these groups are made glaringly apparent. The tenancière, were she a real marquise, would have been quite at home in Faubourg society.

Comparisons with the theater are the most devasta-

ting for the upper levels. After the truly base character of Rachel has been explicated at some length, she is seen enjoying the attentions of her new friend, Oriane de Guermantes, and of those who had formerly maligned her without mercy. But Rachel's character has not improved; it is, rather, that the true nature of the aristocrats has been exposed. After the petite bourgeoisie begins to invade its ranks, the aristocracy is left with nothing of value to call its own. Through juxtaposition and assimilation with lower-level groups in the novel, they have been shown to be no different, and in some cases, inferior.

The lower levels exist in their own right as well; as such, they complete the picture of society as it impinged upon Proust and Marcel. Their presence adds a note of comedy and picturesqueness without which A la Recherche would seem incomplete.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Ramon Fernandez, A la Gloire de ...Proust (Paris, 1943), p. 133.
2. Léon Pierre-Quint, Marcel Proust: Sa vie, son oeuvre (Paris, 1925), p. 202.
3. Lester Mansfield, Le Comique de Marcel Proust (Paris, 1953), p. 120.
4. Germaine Brée, Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1955), p. 77.
5. Seth Leslie Wolitz, "The Proustian Community: An Essay in Literary Anthropology," unpublished dissertation (Yale, 1965), p. 56.
6. André Maurois, A la Recherche de Marcel Proust (Paris, 1949), p. 298.
7. Marcel Proust: A World Symposium, Adam: International Review, no. 260 (1957), p. 55.
8. John J. Spagnoli, The Social Attitude of Marcel Proust (New York, 1936), p. 157.
9. Pierre-Quint, p. 203.
10. Margaret Moore Goodell, Three Satirists of Snobbery: Thackeray, Meredith, Proust (Hamburg, 1939), p. 207.
11. Clive Bell, Proust (New York, 1929), p. 72.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 1

12. Princesse Marthe Bibesco, Le Voyageur voilé (Geneva, 1949), p. 76.
13. Marcel Proust, Correspondance avec sa mère (Paris, 1953), pp. 157-58.
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115. Mansfield, pp. 73-74.
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118. Proust's well known definition of the metaphor is found in volume III on page 889 and reads as follows:
 On peut faire se succéder indéfiniment dans une description les objets qui figuraient dans le lieu décrit, la vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport, analogue dans le monde de l'art à celui qu'est le rapport unique de la loi causale dans le monde de la science, et les enfermera dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style; même, ainsi que la vie, quand, en rapprochant une qualité commune à deux sensations, il dégagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'une et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore.
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