

H-France Salon

Volume 13, Issue 13, #1

Proust at Home: A Centenary Celebration of Le Côté de Guermantes

**Patrick Bray and Jennifer Rushworth
University College London**

Marcel Proust published *Le Côté de Guermantes* in two volumes in 1920 and 1921. To celebrate this twin anniversary, *H-France Salon* is publishing a special issue dedicated to the theme of “Proust at Home.” The third volume of Proust’s *Recherche* begins with the narrator’s family moving into the Hôtel de Guermantes, marking a changed sense of domesticity in the novel as characters from vastly different social spheres cohabit in close proximity. Other major themes of this volume also resonate today, such as the Doncières episode, the first descriptions of the Affaire Dreyfus, Swann’s illness, and the grandmother’s death.

Contemporary readers of Proust have just experienced months of lockdown, confined to our homes, close to but separated from neighbours and family. At this time, we might particularly envy aspects of the protagonist’s social life, such as his attending a performance of La Berma at the Opéra, dining with Saint-Loup and friends at Doncières, watching Saint-Loup’s mistress Rachel on stage, or being invited to dinner with the Guermantes. And yet, like the narrator, we have had to come to terms with new ways of living at home, some by compulsive Zooming (the narrator’s telephone call to his grandmother), some by cooking (Françoise’s *déjeuner* or the society *dîner*), others by taking up craft projects (Mme de Villeparisis painting), and others still by rereading Proust. How do we engage with Proust at home, as opposed to at the office or in the library?

The essays of this Salon are organized loosely by the episodes they discuss in the novel. We start with Laurence Miens’s “Le Théâtre dans *Le Côté de Guermantes*,” which analyzes the narrative’s tension between theatre and illness and which may mirror our own conflicting desires to return to the theatre. Chiara Nifosi’s “Geography and Psychology” looks at the spatial representation of the Doncières episode, in opposition to the social landscapes of Paris. Isabelle Perreault’s “Le jeu du téléphone proustien” reminds us of the importance of listening in Proust, particularly when mediated by technology. The ambivalent notion of “home” (in English as in Proust’s novel) is the subject of Katherine Elkins’s “Proust’s Family at Home”; Elkins reminds us that for a lifelong homebody, Proust’s narrator is rarely “at home.” Although *Le Côté de Guermantes* may be the most urban of Proust’s volumes, Olivia Meehan’s enchanting essay, “Seaside Mountain Cherries in Full Bloom,” explores the representations of nature within interior spaces in this volume through the lens of her own courtyard garden. Igor Reyner also offers an intimate and powerful reading of Proust in his essay “My Present Illness,” which explores the many insights on illness and death present in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, as well as literature’s therapeutic potential to give us a recognizable image of suffering. Ralph Sarkonak’s

“The Grandmother’s Visit to the Champs-Élysées” reveals the tragic and the comic aspects of the scene of the grandmother’s stroke. Through a brilliant *explication de texte*, Sarkonak reads the whole of *La Recherche* in the image of a *chalet d’aisances*. Now that cultural sites are promising to open up again, we may reflect on the virtuality of our imaginary museums à la Malraux. Maury Bruhn’s “The Guermantes’s Elstirs and Proust as Virtual Museum” looks at our “hunger for visual art” and takes inspiration from the narrator’s reveries on Elstir’s paintings. Adeline Soldin’s “Charlus at Home” examines the comically disturbing final scene of *Le Côté de Guermantes* when Charlus attempts to seduce the narrator at his home. More than a seduction, Soldin argues that this is about self-seduction, auto-erotica on the part of Charlus.

The final contribution of this Salon is by Jennifer Rushworth, “Song at Home.” Using the full potential of *H-France Salon* as a digital platform, Rushworth investigates the five interconnected moments of songs in *La Recherche* with special attention to “Schubert”’s “Adieu” in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, concluding with an original piano performance by Rushworth alongside baritone Matthew Salisbury.

Finally, we would like to thank Jessica Rushton (PhD student in French at Durham University, UK) for the vivid cover image for “Proust at Home.” For more information about her work, see <https://www.instagram.com/happyfewportraits/>.

Patrick Bray
Jennifer Rushworth

University College London

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ISSN 2150-4873

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