

H-France Salon  
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### Seaside Mountain Cherries in Full Bloom<sup>1</sup>

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The courtyard faces north-west. Although it has a small footprint I have managed to plant a range of ornamental seasonal delights to evoke memories of my favourite places and people. Time spent in this space has never felt more important or significant than now, during lockdown. The characteristics that most resonate with me, of interior life described in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, are descriptions of nature and flowers: the lilac clusters, the white pear trees, the pink apple-blossom trees by the seashore in Normandy unfolding like a Japanese screen painting. They demonstrate, for me, Proust's capacity for embroidering delicate imagery into dialogue and narrative. His imaginative power and intellect are so compelling that I find myself inspired to hunt down and invest in a forty-year-old bonsaied Himalayan Cedar tree. My quest recalls that Proust's desire to cultivate a miniature forest in his bedroom with a collection of bonsai makes its way in to *La Prisonnière*. Pottering around my small courtyard, taking tea in between teaching online, I inspect the progress of azalea buds and the rambling Rosa Albertine. It occurs to me that I have planted chapters and characters; an accidental tribute to the meandering sentences and life force of this influential novel. I retreat to my library and comb through all the volumes in search of descriptions of trees and flowers, the sky, seasons; there are plenty. I continue to work on an essay about illustrated editions of late eighteenth-century Japanese poetry books and am drawn to thinking about imagination and what a gift it has been to be able to travel so far whilst living under a "work from home order." In this reflective essay I will focus on the way in which nature is rendered in *Le Côté de Guermantes*; how it has found its way into my tiny courtyard, and its curious links and intersections with my work on Japanese art.



The view from the veranda at Henley Beach looks over the sand dunes to the waters of St Vincent's Gulf, an inlet on the southern coast of Australia. As the sun began to set on January 1, 2020, she was veiled in smoke haze from the nearby bushfires on Kangaroo Island, her magenta reflection bounced on the indigo waves. For days the sky glowed superb pink, a beautiful sight yet dreadful sign of unimaginable devastation in the distance. The shark plane circled above sounding its loud siren, a signal to swimmers to step out and wait for the bronze whaler to be shepherded to deeper waters. "Poor thing, where else does he have to go?" I think to myself as I watch the bathers standing in the midday sun. This time the previous year we were in Paris for an extended break. I love swapping the harsh peak of an Australian summer for a cold, dark

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<sup>1</sup> A line from a poem by Buddhist nun and waka poet Ōtagaki Rengetsu 太田垣 蓮月 (1791–1875).

European winter. When in Paris we stay at Tim and Jacques house in the 19<sup>th</sup>, near the Parc des Buttes Chaumont. Cosy mornings are usually spent eating croissants, drinking tisane, and padding around on the parquet floor whilst listening to Radio Classique before rugging up and heading out for a stroll or museum visit. During winter the marble statues in gardens are carefully wrapped in taupe cloth to protect them from frost, snow, and leaf deposits. We work hard to picture *La Seine et la Marne* under their special coat as they sit high on a pedestal in the Jardin des Tuileries.<sup>2</sup> In Paris there is a Dreamtime story painted on the roof of the Musée du quai Branly, “Barramundi Scales Dreaming” *Daiwul Lirlmim Ngarranggarni* by Gija woman Lena Nyadbi. The story belongs to the Gija people of the Eastern Kimberley region of Western Australia and tells of three Dreamtime women using an ancestral fish trap made of spinifex grass to catch a barramundi. The fish jumped out of the water, soaring high above the ranges, scattering his scales on the landscape below. The scales then became the pink diamonds now found in the Argyle Diamond mines.<sup>3</sup> This monumental black and white painting sits alongside the River Seine and is visible from the first and second floors of the Eiffel Tower. Imagine a Dreamtime story airborne in the Paris sky, what a magical gift! I like that the story is hidden from plain sight, it requires a vantage point from above to be read. The sensation of seeing *Barramundi Scales Dreaming* from on high is exhilarating. The bathers waiting to re-enter the water at Henley Beach have no idea of the scale of the shark that lurks in the shallows, unlike those peering from the circling shark plane over head: they have quickly measured him up. The swimmers and beachgoers rely only on the image of a shark that’s deeply embedded in their mind’s eye, along with the rush of fear and excitement that accompanies the sound of the shark plane’s siren.

I returned home to Melbourne for the start of the academic year. The city was engulfed in bushfire haze, I had never experienced this before. Our house smelt of the *Bush* on fire – smoking eucalyptus. Proust’s housekeeper Céleste Albaret described the first time she walked into his bedroom upstairs:

The smoke was so thick you could have cut it with a knife. Incredible. Nicolas had warned me that sometimes, when he woke up, M. Proust, who suffered terribly from asthma burnt fumigation powder — but I wasn’t prepared for this dense cloud [...]. The only light was from a bedside lamp, and that gave just a little glow, through a green shade, I saw a brass bedstead and a bit of white sheet with the green light falling on it. All I could see of M. Proust was a white shirt under a thick sweater and the upper part of his body propped against two pillows [...]. Fortunately, there was the gleam of the silver tray and coffeepot on the table by the bed. I made for these without looking at anything else. When I left the room, I would’ve been incapable of describing any of the furniture that

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<sup>2</sup> *Houssages* are the waterproof fabrics placed on outdoor statues, both original and replica made of resin and marble powder. These protective covers are made to measure and installed by conservation and curatorial teams at the end of Autumn.

<sup>3</sup> “Aboriginal works on the roof and ceilings”. Accessed June 17, 2021.

<https://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/public-areas/aboriginal-works-on-the-roof-and-ceilings/>.

became so familiar to me afterward — everything was so confused in the half-light, and I was too intimidated by those eyes I couldn't see.<sup>4</sup>

On the walk from the tram stop to my office on campus, I noticed the steady stream of students shuffling along in silence, their faces lit by the warm glow of their smartphones. My heart began to sink; they gave off an air of indifference towards the bushfire smoke, that unequivocal sign that our land was on fire, in the hills nearby. And I could only assume their clever earbuds cancelled the noise of the smoke alarms involuntarily responding in the neighbouring buildings. Looming elsewhere, out of sight, was something equally destructive that would occupy a different space in our minds and demand something else of our imaginations; a contagion whose first symptoms came disguised as the common cold. It would close our campus doors within weeks of the last bushfire slowly burning out. When we were ordered to work from home, I gathered the library books and potted plants from my desk. At home, I am fortunate to have a room for books, a writing table, and an armchair for reading. The room looks out to a weeping cherry tree we planted a few years ago, and a young wisteria that hasn't yet produced flowers but has managed to enthusiastically twist itself around the iron lacework that frames the veranda. In Australia the international border closed early on, research trips were cancelled, and gradually interstate borders closed. Melburnians endured extended periods of confinement that included limited movement from one's home (within a 5 km [3 mile] radius) and an 8 pm nightly curfew, amongst other restrictions. The bushfires disappeared from view, although I recall hearing of volunteer groups who were knitting pouches for the surviving koalas and kangaroos in animal rescue centres in New South Wales. And on the evening news I saw a beekeeper standing in the scorched landscape on Kangaroo Island. An elegant and articulate man, he broke down in tears as he attempted to describe the loss and utter devastation that surrounded him.

The year prior to the commencement of the pandemic I had started reading the Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition translations of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (general editor Christopher Prendergast), whilst also dipping into other translations, mostly the Moncrieff, as I went along, and of course the Gallimard French edition. I had only just finished *Le Côté de Guermantes* when restrictions came into place and I headed straight for *Sodome et Gomorrhe*.<sup>5</sup> But at this point momentum in my reading project was gravely interrupted. I savoured any opportunity to pick up a book, but my reading habits had changed, along with so many routines. A year on and I am yet to recover my reading fully. I reread Virginia Woolf's novels, essays, and letters.<sup>6</sup> I reached for the natural history writing on my bookshelves; Neil Ansell's memoir detailing five years in the Welsh Hills, Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*, and Roger Deakin's books on

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<sup>4</sup> Céleste Albaret, *Monsieur Proust*, translated by Barbara Bray (New York: New York Review, 2004), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> From Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, ed. by Christopher Prendergast, 6 vols (New York: Penguin Books, 2005): *The Guermantes Way*, trans. by Mark Treharne and *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. by John Sturrock.

<sup>6</sup> Especially Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume I: The Common Reader, First Series* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002) and *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume II: The Common Reader, Second Series* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002).

trees.<sup>7</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Rêveries* and a recent translation of Japanese hermit monks Kenkō and Chōmei *Essays in idleness and Hōjōki* proved to be excellent lessons in secluded thought and isolation.<sup>8</sup> By this time I recognize that I have arrived at a unique moment of pause: I revisit Edmund de Waal's family memoir *The Hare with the Amber Eyes* and think some more of Charles Swann.<sup>9</sup> These books and novels are, to a degree, an extension of my reading Proust. I am inclined to immerse myself completely in reading projects and prefer books full of rich description. I take extra time to leaf through volumes, editions, and translations, finding them good company in confinement. I tend to the two small patches of garden that bookend our house.

In Japan, small gardens like ours might be called *tsubo-niwa* 坪庭/壺庭 an enclosed courtyard like space filled with plant containers and acting like a garden room.<sup>10</sup> When we consider the concept of “smallness” or of the “miniature” through a Daoist lens we find the object is given greater value; a seaside landscape can be rendered in the arrangement of a rock and tiny pebbles.<sup>11</sup> I am no gardener but do take pleasure in plotting the changing seasons in these two outdoor spaces to ensure there is always something of interest taking place: either growing, blooming, or falling, throughout the year. Time is carved into micro-seasons, much like the way the ancient Japanese calendar was divided into twenty-four seasons, with each season having three clear parts which resulted in a total of seventy-two micro-seasons in a year. I realize this concept is nothing new or revolutionary, especially for those who appreciate the more complex naming and classifying of changing weather systems and seasonal shifts, such as those in traditional First Nation cultures. From a young age I have drifted between the Southern and Northern hemispheres, in mind and spirit, and body too when travel permits. Without doubt my preference for certain flowers and plants reflects this dual focus. In autumn I turn my attention to the courtyard out back. I tidy and clean the space and decide to plant some spring bulbs in containers. Early on in lockdown I started an enjoyable and enlightening email correspondence with my uncle Kevin, a retired teacher-librarian and talented gardener with a sustainable and climate-friendly vision. We discuss online teaching, history, gardens, and books. I send him some of my writing on Japanese gardens and he responds with generous and uplifting words. I feel buoyed by his enthusiasm for my essays. He laments the novice gardeners who, during

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<sup>7</sup> Neill Ansell, *Deep Country: Five Years in the Welsh Hills* (London: Penguin Books, 2011); Nan Shepherd, Robert Macfarlane, and Jeanette Winterson, *The Living Mountain* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2019); Roger Deakin, *Wildwood: A Journey Through Trees* (London: Penguin Books, 2008); Roger Deakin, Alison Hastie, and Terence Blacker, *Notes from Walnut Tree Farm* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, translated by Russell Goulbourne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kenkō Yoshida and Kamo Chōmei, *Essays in Idleness and Hōjōki*, translated with an introduction and notes by Meredith McKinney (London: Penguin, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (London: Vintage, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> A note on translation: *tsubo* 坪 refers to the measurement of a tatami mat. *tsubo* 壺 refers to container or pot and *niwa* 庭 means garden.

<sup>11</sup> Rolf A. Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought*, translated by Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 54–55.

lockdown have purchased all available vegetable seeds and garden supplies. I can see his point, but also take heart that people are thinking about gardens and growing things. I am not ambitious to grow my own food, rather my planting is far more sentimental and designed to satisfy my taste for European, and Japanese, gardens. The containers and pots that decorate my courtyard are filled with roses, camellia, maple, azalea, rhododendron, seaside daisies and, of course, the bulbs.

For the most part *Le Côté de Guermantes* concentrates on interior spaces, on the salons and theatres. The images and scenes from nature intrigue me: I am inspired to revisit the descriptive passages captured in courtyards or even the mind's eye. The poor quarters of Paris described in the following passage:

in the morning, with their tall, widening chimneys turned to the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds by the sunlight, a white garden flowering above the houses, and flowering in such a variety of shades of colour as to suggest the garden of a tulip fancier in Delft or Haarlem planted above the city. And then the close proximity of the houses, with their windows facing one and another across a common courtyard, makes each window into a frame.<sup>12</sup>

At times the outdoors is brought inside; for example, through the representation of nature in painting. I am struck by the reaction to Mme de Villeparisis's flower painting. After a lively discussion about the timing of apple-blossom season the Duchess de Guermantes says, "even around Paris they are very early. [...] In Normandy, you know, at his father's place," she added, pointing to the Duc de Châtellerauld, 'there are some magnificent apple trees near the sea, like a Japanese screen. They never turn really pink until after the twentieth of May.'<sup>13</sup> I am instantly drawn to Proust's picture of the Japanese screen unfolding in the landscape. For me, it evokes a passage that can be found in Yukio Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (金閣寺, *Kinkaku-ji*):

On spring evenings when I returned from school, I would sit in my study on the second floor of my uncle's house and gaze at the hills. The rays of the sinking sun shone on the young leaves that covered the hillside and it looked as though a golden screen had been set up in the midst of the fields.<sup>14</sup>

The golden screen appears to Mishima's narrator; it is a mirage that surfaces due to the reflective properties of the gold temple set in the foothills of Kyoto. Similarly, Proust animates his Normandy landscape with a folding screen painting and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of Japanese visual expression. It was writer and socialite Robert de Montesquiou who first introduced Proust to Japanese culture. Montesquiou, inspiration for the character Baron de Charlus, was a devoted collector of Japanese art, decorated his apartment with folding screens, and employed Japanese gardener, Hata Wasuke, who also worked for the Rothschild and

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<sup>12</sup> Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, pp. 569–70.

<sup>13</sup> Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, translated by Ivan Morris (New York: Knopf, 1959), p. 4.

the Camondo families.<sup>15</sup> In his book *Letters to Camondo* (May 2021) Edmund de Waal does not reference a Japanese gardener, but of course Proust appears here and there.<sup>16</sup> Proust had many other encounters with Japan; the bonsai experiment in his bedroom and exchanges with his friend Marie Nordlinger who worked for gallerist Samuel Siegfried Bing, an importer of Japanese wares to Europe. Proust was also familiar with Edmond de Goncourt's writings and the catalogue of Japanese objects sold in 1887.<sup>17</sup> Proust appears to understand the mechanism of the folding screen as a dynamic object. He elevates the painter Elstir by associating him with Japanese art, suggesting that the influence sets him apart from other artists of his time. I enjoy the way in which Proust includes playful vivid metaphor throughout the novel. One memorable passage is about the private sleep garden:

in which various kinds of sleep, so different from one another, grow like unknown flowers: sleep induced by datura, by Indian hemp, by multiple extracts of ether, the sleep of belladonna, of opium, of valerian, flowers that remain closed until the day when the predestined stranger comes to touch them open and to let loose for long hours the aroma of their special dreams upon an amazed and unsuspecting being.<sup>18</sup>

Or when Saint-Loup returns to Paris and they take off to a suburban village to visit Saint-Loup's mistress and the narrator is stopped by the sight of pear blossom:

On our way to her house we passed a row of gardens, and I had to stop and look, for they were full of pear and cherry blossoms; yesterday no doubt, they were as empty and un-lived in as an unlet house, but now they were suddenly inhabited and embellished by these newcomers, who had arrived the evening before, and whose lovely dresses could be seen through the railing along the garden paths.<sup>19</sup>

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe* when the narrator has returned to Balbec and is rekindling his feelings for Albertine he describes the apple trees in full flower as:

unimaginably luxuriant, their feet in the mud but wearing their ballgowns, not taking any precautions so as not to spoil the most marvellous pink satin that you can ever set your eyes on, made to shine in the sunlight, the far-off horizon of the sea provided the apple trees with what was in effect a background from a Japanese print; if I raised my head to

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<sup>15</sup> Junji Suzuki, "Le jardinier japonais de Robert de Montesquiou — ses évocations dans les milieux littéraires," in *Cahiers Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* no. 18: *Sœur Philomène — Autour du japonisme* (2011): 103–12; Kazuyoshi Yoshikawa, "Le Japonisme dans *À la recherche du temps perdu*," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 120.2 (2020): 435–50; Jan Hokenson, "Proust's 'Japonisme': Contrastive Aesthetics," *Modern Language Studies* 29.1 (1999): 17–37.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund de Waal, *Letters to Camondo* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* (Paris: Charpentier, 1881); Edmond de Goncourt, *Objets d'art japonais et chinois: Peintures, estampes composant la collection des Goncourt*, ventes à l'Hôtel Drouot, mars 1897.

<sup>18</sup> Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, pp. 150–51.

look at the sky between the flowers, which made its blue appear the more cloudless, almost violet, they seem to draw aside so as to display the depth of that paradise.<sup>20</sup>

Proust sidles emotions against dynamic pictures from nature, which are both wild and restrained. In this case a rich cultural landscape of trees and art are conjured with textiles found in the salon.

In my tiny courtyard I consider the relationships between plants, trees, and flowers. The roses congregate in the sunniest spot and have been selected for colour and fragrance. In late Spring the rambling Rosa “Albertine” presents a soft pink double flower with a lingering spicy scent. René Barbier (1870–1930) first bred the cultivar in 1921 by combining the rosa lucieae (Wichurana rose) from Japan with a hybrid tea rose.<sup>21</sup> Nearby this beauty I grow a young and bushy English shrub rose called “The Poet’s Wife.” It is a repeat flowerer throughout Spring and Summer in bright yellow with a fruity fragrance. The “Olivia Rose Austin,” gifted to me by my mother, is another English shrub rose. I have placed it near the French doors that open onto the courtyard; the delicate fragrance from the cupped pink rosettes floats inside from time to time when the doors are open. The sweetbriar rose that sits next to “Olivia” flowers profusely and lives up to its name (brier) with thickets covered in fine razor-sharp thorns. When in full fragrant bloom the roses appear to arrange themselves to form a Fantin-Latour bowl of cascading roses; bowing their weighty double petalled yellow and pink heads to neighbouring plants as they relish an extended flowering. A couple of years ago I planted a Rosa “Cécile Brunner” in the front garden, to mark the centenary year of my late grandmother Joan’s birth. The same cultivar was gifted to Nan, by her father, to mark the milestone moment of Nan and Pop’s first home purchase. She planted the rose in the front garden in 1951.

Beneath the established olive tree in our courtyard, wild violets grow in the shape of a rolling green hillside and in winter there are enough sweet tiny flowers for a nosegay. The shallow turquoise blue ceramic dish, that acts as a bird bath, is frequented by a blackbird. His arrival is heralded by a burst of high notes that pierce the air now free from the sounds of traffic and other activities due to lockdown. The musical phrase of his song is soothingly familiar and stands out amid the chorus of vocal Australian birds residing in nearby eucalypts and acacia. Adjacent to this lively little bathing corner is a camellia, a Japanese maple, and a rhododendron all performing (and resting) in their allotted seasons. In the centre of the courtyard the expanding forest of bonsaied cedars and conifers delivers a distinctly Japanese silhouette and a spark for the imagination.

Early on in confinement I set about writing an essay about Japanese reader imagination in the Edo period (late eighteenth century) by looking at three luxury poetry books *Picture Book of Crawling Creatures*, *Gifts of the Ebb Tide*, and *Myriad Birds* (1788–90) illustrated by Utamaro Kitagawa 喜多川 歌麿 (1753–1806) for the renowned publisher Tsutaya Jūzaburō 蔦屋 重三.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, pp. 178–79.

<sup>21</sup> René Barbier, son of family nursery founder Albert Barbier of Barbier Frères & Compagnie (1894–1972). Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix, *The Quest for the Rose* (London: Random House, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> The Folio Society produced limited-edition high-quality facsimiles of the three books complete with printing details such as blind embossing. John T. Carpenter, *Kitagawa Utamaro*:

The reflective properties of mica (silver) ink and blind embossing techniques give the impression of a multidimensional object. The printmaker appears masterfully to sculpt the surface of the paper to create the illusion of rippling water or the delicate overlapping of bird's feathers. These special effects unite with the poetry by the witty *Kyōka* 狂歌 poets to animate the subject matter, with the whole yielding a total environment; one full of sound, visual delight, and sensation. This network of ideas is activated by the reader who in turn continues the creative process by reciting, reading, and imagining the world inside the book. The book, as an object that one connects and communes with, remains appealing to many readers today.

We take daily strolls along the local foreshore, drinking in the sight of heavy grey clouds rolling above choppy waters. It would seem few people are keen to walk on the beach during inclement weather, so we luxuriate in having this vast space to ourselves. We collect seashells as we walk along and leave them by the water's edge before retreating to the house. The *Kyōka* poets wrote about seashells and seaside. The frontispiece illustration to *Gifts of the Ebb Tide* Shiohi no tsuto 潮干のつと (1789) expands across two pages to accompany Shirazu's poem:

Hoping to pick up a shell  
like the one used as a sake cup  
at the "Welling Tide" Inn,  
we stroll along the strand stretching out at ebb tide.<sup>23</sup>

Under close examination, and by moving the pages of the book ever so slightly, it is possible to see the subtle effect of waves lapping the seashore. This is achieved with blind embossing of tiny peaks pressed into the paper, a slight dusting of mica for a shimmery effect alluding to sun glitter, and the soft blue wash of colour against the otherwise colour-free water. The final image in this book illustrates a scene of women gathered indoors playing a shell-matching game which was commonly played with half shells painted and inscribed with poetry. The accompanying poem by Mataka no Fushikage is painted inside a stylized cloud formation:

Everyone comes to watch  
a shell-matching game in spring,  
when, like the "wedded rocks"  
of Futami Bay, the two parts  
of a pair are reunited.<sup>24</sup>

This splendid glimpse inside a mansion setting is packed full of nature. The women are surrounded by a folding screen painting of peonies by a rocky stream; the screen is decorated with a dust of brass to give the illusion of painted golden clouds. Utamaro accentuates elegant forms as we find the shape of the mountain rose and the pine tree in the foreground is a near match for the gathered women around the shells. The kimono fabric is decorated with brilliant detail, all of which indicates an expensive and delicate printing process. The connection between

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*Studies from Nature*, translations and commentary by John T. Carpenter; essays by John T. Carpenter, Alfred Haft, Alex Kerr (London: The Folio Society, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Poem translated and interpreted by John T. Carpenter in Carpenter, *Kitagawa Utamaro*.

<sup>24</sup> Poem translated and interpreted by John T. Carpenter in Carpenter, *Kitagawa Utamaro*.

the group of women playing with shells and the circle of poets composing in nature does not go unmissed.<sup>25</sup> In Japan the invisible threshold between interior spaces and the outdoors is well articulated in both illustration and prose. There is a synergy between the unflinching poets and Proust's talent for innuendo that collides with images from nature.

I resist making comparisons between Proust's intense fear of germs and aversion to noise, and my own.<sup>26</sup> Living in proximity to others, I suffer terribly from the intrusion of unwelcome sound such as the thumping bass from our neighbour's powerful stereo system. Their taste in music is not compatible with mine and the vibration hurts my heart. At some point we make a bold move and despatch a well-mannered letter requesting an adjustment to the EQ to eliminate the bass, at very least during these ultra-confined months. Our friend, renowned Australian conductor and composer Richard Mills, grows the most splendid orchids in the courtyard of his converted warehouse in suburban Melbourne. He's a serious gardener and for some time I contemplate the benefits of his piano playing on his plants, meanwhile mine must endure the bass from next-door. All of the microclimates and environments we create for ourselves exist within a bigger picture and although Proust was confined to the indoors he manages to illustrate a vivid and detailed picture of life in the salon, in harmony with views of nature both tamed and wild. As the seasons come around again, and I watch the pink moon rise above our garden room the "stay at home" order has been lifted and there is even talk of teaching on campus next semester. Once again, the sound of traffic fills the airwaves, the blackbird seldom visits anymore but the "Fizzy Rose Picotee" cosmos I planted from seed is now flowering and the bees are happy. I am not entirely ready to let go of my new and productive at-home routine, but I suspect I will be compelled to relinquish it to give way to the sweeping big-city desire around me to "return to normal."



This paper is dedicated to the memory of Associate Professor Jane Dixon (1951–2021) a keen observer of life and a passionate devotee of French culture.

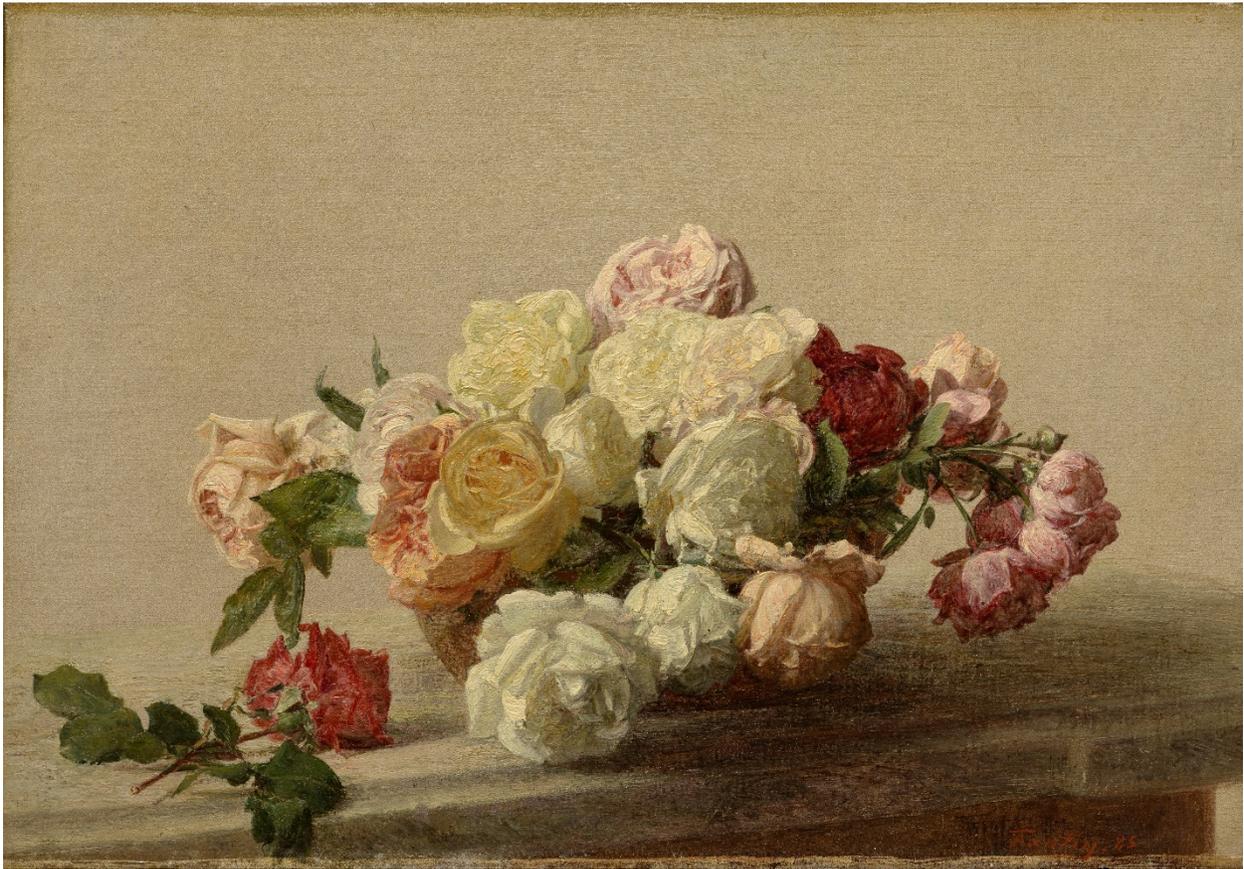
I respectfully acknowledge the Yaluk-ut Weelam Clan of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which I have written this paper, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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<sup>25</sup> Olivia Meehan, *The Deluxe Edition: Utamaro Kitagawa's Design and Poetical Fancy* selected for the Gordon Duff Prize, Cambridge University Library, 2020 (under review for publication 2021).

<sup>26</sup> See, for examples, Marcel Proust, *Letters to the Lady Upstairs*, translated by Lydia Davis (London: 4th Estate, 2019).



Henri Fantin-Latour, *Bowl of Roses on a Marble Table*, 1885. Image credit: Clark Art Institute.



Kitagawa Utamaro (ca. 1753–1806), *Gifts from the Ebb Tide (The Shell Book) (Shiohi no tsuto)* 潮干のつと, 1789, woodblock printed book; ink and colour on paper. Image credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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