The Human Landscape in Proust - A Study in Flower Symbolism

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The Lilacs, Dove and Storm in Proust's Vision of the Orient
As with the hawthorns, the lilacs, which Proust considered particularly Oriental flowers, introduce a pattern of images which eventually survive them in the novel. This pattern of imagery — flower, bird (dove), storm and colour imagery — belong to the two Orients which fascinated Proust, one the Orient of the Arabian Nights' fairy tales, the other the Orient of Sodom and Gomorrah. If the former lends an element of comfort to Marcel's childhood, an early enchantment to young love, a suitable background to the poet, and a sense of adventure spiced with humour to Marcel's later life, the latter emphasizes a sense of guilt through the symbol of the punishing storm. Marcel's childhood is haunted by an underlying guilt for his obsessive dependence on his mother, but, by the time of his maturity, the cloud under which he lives is occasioned by the storms of jealousy he suffers; finally, the destructive storm, the sense of guilt which expects and invites punishment, moves away from Marcel to its natural target in biblical terms, the world of homosexuality which thrives in wartime Paris. And Marcel himself regains his childhood appreciation for the much preferable Orient of the One Thousand and One Nights or The Arabian Nights' Entertainment as it was first known in English, since he, like Scheherezade, must seek his salvation through art. Thus, with the lilacs as with the red and violet flowers, we enter the realm of fairy tale which Proust could evoke to such good effect, since he understood so well its ambiguous and even cruel aspects as well as its tremendous charm. The lilacs, as befits their fairy tale nature, seem to undergo various metamorphoses, along with the storm and dove symbols so closely associated with them. Thus,
the storm clouds are purple or lilac coloured, the pigeon is the lilac of the bird kingdom, and the storm speaks with the voice of the dove. In fact, we come to realize that these three symbols are really just different manifestations of love depending on the state of innocence or experience from which Marcel views them. Here, we must mention Jauss' excellent criticism on the dove and lilac imagery. Not only was he the first critic to see the connection between the two images, but he also analyzed them in the context of Proust's private symbolism. The dove, he explains, is for Proust, as in tradition, a symbol of innocence. The storm is a 'premonition of future vices' - or, as we have remarked elsewhere, a sign of experience (often sexual) and suffering. The lilacs themselves, according to Jauss, illustrate three stages in Marcel's development; the peace and innocence of childhood, marked by the ever-present dove and the lilacs only just in bloom; the awakening of Marcel's sensual desires, expressed in the fully blooming lilacs, which remind Marcel of houris; and the end of childhood, when, just after the lilacs have faded, Marcel meets Gilberte and focuses his desires on her (1).

Jauss' analysis, thorough though it is, is incomplete on two counts. Lacking a study of lilac/dove/storm imagery in the earlier works of Proust, it cannot show us how the lilacs develop as symbols with Proust's growing maturity as an artist. And, by not following the dove and storm imagery especially through to the end of A la Recherche du Temps

Perdu, Jauss leaves us with the usual misconception of a nostalgic Marcel (or Proust) longing for a lost childhood. In fact, the dove imagery does continue well into *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, but, as is usual, it has undergone a further slight metamorphosis. The dove has become a common city pigeon, which, since the dove symbolized love to Marcel, gives us an idea of how our young hero's attitude towards love has modified. The lilac/bird imagery, moreover, has a happy ending, as the cock of Vinteuil's septet, joyfully celebrating the triumph of art, will take over from the innocent dove of Marcel's childhood and Vinteuil's sonata. As with the hawthorns, as we have mentioned, the lilacs, introducing the theme of the Orient and the symbols of dove/pigeon and storm, become superseded by a pattern larger than themselves. Again, the colour imagery associated with the lilacs is particularly important, and marks Marcel's progress towards wisdom. Here, to some extent, white is the colour of innocence and mauve the colour of experience, but more important than that dichotomy is the one which Ninette Bailey points out between the two faces of love, the permissible one, symbolized by the colour pink and the inadmissible one, symbolized by violet or purple, being lilac colours. The purple, especially, Marcel considered evocative of the Orient of the *Arabian Nights*.

But, in Proust's earlier works, it is not to the Orient of the often amoral fairy-tale world of chance and happy coincidence (2) that he

turns, but rather to the very strict world of the Old Testament, where the storm (the flood or the rain of fire from heaven) was a manifestation of the wrath of God the Father. Yet it is evident in these passages that the loving or forgiving mother, symbolized by the helpful dove, is every bit as important as the angry father. Thus the first type of love that the dove is asked to symbolize is maternal love, a pattern which holds true for *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* as well. Of course, childhood is a time usually of rights and wrongs, of black and white, of rules set down by parents for children, and this would be specially true of families such as Marcel's at the turn of the century. To such a child, the world of fairy tale might come as a relief, but Marcel, of course would not experience its ambiguities in his own life until he was much older. Thus, the young heroes or heroines of Proust's earlier works never have time to progress beyond the Old Testament morality which was probably still very relevant to Proust's life.

In *A Mon Ami Willie Heath*, Proust vividly suggests the young author during an illness finding shelter from the storm, from the dangers of the outside world and of his own internal 'evil propensities', in the comforting love of his (now dead) friend and his mother:

Quand j'étais tout enfant, le sort d'aucun personnage de l'histoire sainte ne me semblait aussi misérable que celui de Noé, à cause du déluge qui le tint enfermé dans l'arche pendant quarante jours. Plus tard, je fus souvent malade, et pendant de longs jours j'eus aussi rester dans "l'arche". Je compris alors que jamais Noé ne put si bien voir le monde que de l'arche, malgré qu'elle fût close et qu'il fût nuit sur la terre. Quand commença ma convalescence, ma mère, qui ne m'avait pas quitté, et, la nuit même restait auprès de moi, "ouvrit la porte de l'arche" et sortit. Pourtant comme la colombe "elle revint encore ce soir-là". Puis je fus tout à fait guéri, et comme la colombe "elle ne revint plus". Il
fallut recommencer à vivre, à se détourner de soi ... à entendre des paroles plus dures que celles de ma mère; bien plus, les siennes, si perpétuellement douces jusque-là, n'étaient plus les mêmes, mais empreintes de la sévérité de la vie et du devoir qu'elle devait m'apprendre. Douce colombe du déluge, en vous voyant partir comment penser que le patriarche n'ait pas senti quelque tristesse se mêler à la joie du monde renaisant? Douceur de la suspension de vivre, de la vraie "Trêve de Dieu" qui interrompt les travaux, les désirs mauvais. "Grâce" de la maladie qui nous rapproche des réalités d'au-delà de la mort - et ses grâces aussi, grâces de "ces vains ornements et ces voiles qui pèsent", des cheveux qu'une importune main "a pris soin d'assembler" suaves fidélités d'une mère et d'un ami qui si souvent nous sont apparus comme le visage même de notre tristesse ou comme le geste de la protection imploree par notre faiblesse, et qui s'arrêteront au seuil de la convalescence, souvent j'ai souffert de vous sentir si loin de moi, vous toutes, descendance exilée de la colombe de l'arche.

Later in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Marcel will blame his loss of will power on the fact that his mother gives up her principles and spends the night comforting him; later still, he enjoys reverting to using Albertine as a shelter from the storm, but of course, at this point of Marcel's life, the shelter becomes a prison. Here, however, he seems to enjoy the peace, the love, the innocence (though a very contrived one) involved in this haven of illness, this long night which his mother spends with him. Yet, even here, Proust realizes the necessity, expressed by Marcel's grandmother in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, of facing both the external storms - the hardships life will offer him - as well as the temptations which arise from his personal flaws.

The dove and the storm are thus found together early in Proust's work. In a later passage in Les Plaisirs et les Jours, much analyzed in terms

of Proust's own life, *La Confession d'une Jeune Fille*, we meet the lilacs as a symbol of innocence and maternal love (Proust's mother-figures are always innocent or ignorant to such a degree that they cannot recognize 'evil' in others). The heroine of this story, like the author of *A Mon Ami Willie Heath*, fears her 'evil desires' - here, her desire for her profligate cousin. At the age of fourteen, on the verge of being seduced by this cousin, she rushes back to the love and comforting innocence (which leads to a total lack of real understanding) of her mother:

> je pleurai longtemps en lui racontant toutes ces vilaines choses qu'il fallait l'ignorance de mon âge pour lui dire et qu'elle sut écouter divinement, sans les comprendre ... Une divine douceur émanait de ma mère et de mon innocence revenue. Je sentis bientôt sous mes narines une odeur aussi pure et aussi fraîche. C'était un lilas dont une branche cachée par l'ombrelle de ma mère était déjà fleurie et qui, invisible, embaumait. (4)

The fact that one of Proust's characters can credit her mother with "une divine douceur" must make us look twice at the symbolism of the Virgin Mary in *Jean Santeuil* and *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Here, the lilac's perfume, too, is as disembodied as the virtue which emanates from the young girl's mother. In fact, even the verb 'embaumer' suggests perfume or balm used to keep away corruption. But, even in this passage, with his semi-religious vocabulary and his assumption of moral judgements, Proust is beginning to question the real worth of total ignorance, here a liability to the mother, for if she had not been so far above her daughter's problems, she might have been able to understand them better. In the circumstances, she can offer forgiveness, (absolution?) but no

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practical advice that could actually save her daughter from the temptation to which she does eventually succumb. For this story makes clear the fact that the daughter, too, is encumbered by her lack of experience. As it is, the worst happens, for, in a very bizarre scene, the mother actually witnesses her daughter's transgression and dies of a heart attack - perhaps ironically, since she seems to have lacked experience of the heart anyway. In *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Proust has thankfully purged his work of this tendency towards melodrama and has added a great deal of humour, but it is still interesting to see the consistency of his symbolism even in these early works.

Thus, as early as *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, Proust questioned the values of innocence and ignorance, associated the lilacs with the storm (the lilacs only give off their perfume after a storm) and the dove with the storm. Proust was always very careful about exact details in his flower imagery, since he had been subjected to the criticism pointed at Jean Santeuil for describing the mingled odours of lilac and heliotrope - lilacs exude their perfume after rain, heliotropes only in strong sunlight (5). Perhaps it is a measure of Proust's sophisticated and aesthetic moral sense that lilacs figure largely in his work, whereas fairweather heliotropes do not.

In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust adds to the lilacs the important dimension of colour symbolism. He also emphasizes for the first time the association of the lilacs with the Orient of the fairy tales, here described as

enchantingly sensual:

Partout, nées de la terre, sorties de l'écorce, posées sur l'eau, de molles créatures (the lilacs) vivaient dans leur parfum, laissant flotter leur ravissante couleur. Cette douce couleur mauve qui, après la pluie, dans un arc qui semble tout voisin mais qu'on ne saurait approcher, se montre à nous dans le ciel, entre les branches, métamorphosée en molles et fines fleurs, on pouvait la regarder, l'approcher, respirer son odeur fine comme elle aux branches du lilas, l'emporter avec soi. Les Orientaux n'ont pas pu donner à un vase une couleur plus précieuse. Et c'est l'Orient du reste qui a donné sa vie à ces beaux lilas, de sang persan, mauve ou d'une blancheur d'anis, sveltes Shéhérazades immobiles entre les branches, dans leur nudité de précieuse étoffe, toutes limpides encore des parfums dont elles semblent sortir et qu'elles exhalent violemment.

What a difference in atmosphere between these lilacs and the ones in La Confession d'une Jeune Fille! Here, all that is left of the storm is the perfume it releases from the lilacs, (which, however, could be said to resemble a storm cloud in shape) and a general feeling of acceptance of things sensual pervades the imagery and symbolism. The colours of the flowers, evocative of flesh tones and of the rainbow which was the sign of God's forgiveness after the flood, are more precious even than the colours the Orientals used for their vases, their works of art. In the context of the novel, nonetheless, this description coincides with the time during which Jean feels most at home with his mother, "Jean pensait vaguement qu'on était arrivé enfin à ces jours où rien ne changerait plus, à partir desquels sa mère resterait éternellement jeune et lui éternellement libre et gai" (7). The mention of Scheherazade must, however, bring some uneasy associations with it, overshadowed as her tales are by the figure of the husband-executioner.

Still, this part of her story Proust will keep for *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, and thus the Orient here is a much pleasanter place than that evoked by the Old Testament imagery. Apart from their colour, of course, the important asset of the lilacs is their perfume. Here, it is a sensual detail, but in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, flower perfumes will be given much greater significance. Just as the lilacs in *La Confession d'une Jeune Fille* by association with the young girl's mother exude an odour of sanctity, in the later novel, music will seem to evoke "un parfum", embodied in a recurring phrase in Vinteuil’s work which Swann also calls "une déesse protectrice" (C. S., p. 348) and "une fée" (C. S., p. 352). But it is Marcel who will discover the most from the 'perfume' of a cup of herb tea, from the essence of Vinteuil's septet and from those moments out of time, until he can say "Une heure n'est pas qu'une heure, c'est un vase rempli de parfums, de sons, de projets et de climats" (T. R., p. 889). Conversely, those characters who cannot tolerate perfumes in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* betray their flaws - Andrée and Albertine their lesbianism, the Duke de Châtellerault his homosexuality.

In various other early works amongst *Essais et Articles*, Proust enlarges on the enigma posed to the poet by the perfume of the lilacs - an enigma similar to that of Moreau's *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort* (*La Poésie ou les Lois Mystérieuses*), on the ambiguous nature of the Orient to which Moreau's poet belongs (*Les Eblouissements*), and on the mystic tie between the poet, a bird which follows him and a flower in
another of Moreau's paintings (Notes sur le Monde Mystérieux de Gustave Moreau). Moreau's Orient is, of course, partly the Orient of the Old Testament (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is one of his themes), partly that of the Persian fairy tales, hence his 'péri', and very much a product of a luxurious sensuality which appealed to the Aesthetes and Decadents. However, we will discuss this particular Orient in more detail in the passages in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu which seem to show evidence of its influence.

In Proust's earlier works, then, we have seen the lilac/bird/storm imagery move from the guilty atmosphere evoked by reference to Sodom and Gomorrah to the happier more sensual ambiance of the fairy tale with, in Jean Santeuil, its particularly 'domestic' aura (8). Only in one reference to a character whose secret life is like an underground cell in an Oriental palace (9) and in some of the ambiguous sensuality of Moreau's works do we find a hint of the rich and mysterious homosexual Orient of wartime Paris in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. In Proust's final novel, the young hero follows much the same maturing of attitude as we can trace in the young author. The strict, moral Combray of his parents gives way to the sensual promise of Swann's park with its lilacs, the hopeful mystery of Balbec with its part Persian church, and the enchantment of love which turns into an imprisonment, enlivened only by storms of jealousy; but, when Marcel is released magically by the death of Albertine (a very Oriental solution, as sultans from

Mohamet 11 to Scheherazade's husband chose this way to escape the chains of love) he can return to an Orient of rebirth (symbolized by the phoenix) and, finally, to the second Orient of his childhood, that of the Arabian Nights, in which he can now appreciate the fairy tale sense of humour and adventure, its picaresque quality. In these changing Orient, the lilac, storm and dove all play their part.

Marcel's family illustrates as well as anyone in Combray the strict codes of this small provincial society. With her usual imaginative flair, overwhelming to the young Marcel but amusing to the mature narrator, Françoise manages to give Combray conventions the authority of "un code impérial" or "ces lois antiques qui, à côté de prescriptions féroces comme de massacrer les enfants à la mamelle, défendent avec une délicatesse exagérée de faire bouiller le chevreau dans le lait de sa mère" (C. S., p. 28). Thus, the theme of infanticide which culminates in the image of Marcel's father as an executioner is introduced early into the book. Marcel's grandmother worries that her grandson is too weakly and her suggestion for a cure is that he go out in stormy weather. When he stays indoors, she worries that "Ce n'est pas comme cela que vous le rendrez robuste et énergique ... surtout ce petit qui a tant besoin de prendre des forces et de la volonté" (C. S., p. 11). On the other hand, to balance this praise of hardship, Marcel also has the example of his aunt, who, we have seen, takes to her bed to live out the self-imposed martyrdom of her illness or hypochondria. Actually,
Aunt Léonie enjoys all the laziness and small luxury of this way of life, as well as the benevolent despotism she wields over her household. Thus the comparison with a Persian prince regarding his domain from the bed is not at all inappropriate (C. S., p. 52). She prefers her little luxuries served on her favourite plates illustrated with scenes from the Arabian Nights (C. S., p. 57). Thus, whilst the grandmother is revelling in the freedom of the storm, as her comment shows, "Enfin on respire!" (C. S., p. 11) Aunt Léonie is enjoying her self-imposed imprisonment just as much. In a similar fashion, Albertine will long for fresh air and Marcel will feel that he has become very like his old Aunt Léonie in delighting in building a prison for the two of them (P., p. 78). But this fairy-tale world of luxury, of love that enchants, and of imprisonment will have more significance for Marcel in the future; here, the Old Testament themes of the wrathful father and the storm are more important, evoking a much more sombre Orient. The storm image, however, is moderated by the image of the dove, which we have seen associated with the author's mother at her most loving. The storm and the dove are symbols of love, of Marcel's first and most enduring affair of the heart, a 'triangle' from which he never quite recovers, centered around himself, his mother and his father.

The first mention of the lilac and dove is quite idyllic. Marcel, at his mother's instigation, goes outside for a breath of air:

J'allais m'asseoir près de la pompe ... sur le banc sans dossier ombragé d'un lilas, dans ce petit coin du jardin ... de la terre
Venus, the goddess of love, is, here, a rather maternal figure, concerned as she is with so much in the way of food offerings. These offerings Françoise will, like some priestess, prepare and submit to Marcel's mother for her approval. Yet, as a mother (to Aeneas), Venus is also keen to help her son through his adventures; by means of her doves she shows Aeneas the way through the 'sacred grove' to the 'golden bough'. Marcel's mother may not have similar knowledge (we have seen that she is rather low on worldly experience), but, at least, she is keen to encourage Marcel to get out of the house and to use his own initiative. He does, in fact, do this, with (as far as his parents are concerned) unhappy consequences, as the anecdotes concerning Marcel's Uncle Adolphe show. Marcel used to be fascinated by many things connected with his uncle; his study, his mistress (Odette), "la dame en rose", and the engravings on the walls of his Paris residence. These engravings are of goddesses, one in particular "charnue et rose conduisant un char" (C. S., p. 73), which reminds us both of Odette and of a goddess of love. However, the Pompeian air which endears these engravings to Second Empire Parisians will, by the end of the novel, carry a distinct warning of danger to Marcel. Here, however, in his
childhood, it is Odette who worries Marcel's parents and causes a breach between them and Uncle Adolphe.

The next lilac passage introduces the image of the storm just after Marcel has described the frequent downpours over the forest of Roussainville-le-Pin in the starkest biblical symbolism, not at all far removed from the reference to Pompeii. The dark forest of Roussainville-le-Pin, peopled by Marcel's erotic fantasies (partly because this is the scene - quite explicit, as we shall see in a later chapter - from the water-closet which Marcel can see while he masturbates) is quite alien to the charming grove of the kitchen nook. And the storm which descends on it and the keep where the village children play their erotic games Marcel can only describe in terms which express the guilt he feels for both fantasies and masturbation, for to him it is the punishment of God the Father. Thus Roussainville is "châtié comme un village de la Bible par toutes les lances de l'orage qui flagellaient obliquement les demeures de ses habitants, ou bien était déjà pardonné par Dieu le Père qui faisait descendre vers lui ... les tiges d'or effrangées de son soleil reparu" (C. S., p. 152). (This particular Old Testament story will be associated even more closely with the lilacs, emphasizing the theme of punishment, in Sodome et Gomorrhe.) Here, however, the images of forgiveness are just as important as those of punishment. The flood of A mon Ami Willie Heath is made quite enjoyable by the dove, the sustaining love of his mother and his friend. Also, in
Jean Santeuil, the lilacs are associated with that most obvious symbol of God's forgiveness, the rainbow. Thus, the theme of forgiveness is continued in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* when the storm thunders gradually dwindle into dove-like cooings and the good weather gradually raises "ses pavillons de soie violette ou blanche", the lilacs.

Assis dans le petit salon, où j'attendais l'heure du dîner en lisant, j'entendais l'eau dégoutter de nos marronniers, mais je savais que l'averse ne faisait que vernir leurs feuilles ... qu'il avait beau pleuvoir, demain, au-dessus de la barrière blanche de Tansonville, ondulerait, aussi nombreuses, de petites feuilles en forme de cœur; et c'est sans tristesse que j'apercevais le peuplier de la rue des Perchamps adresser à l'orage des supplications et des salutations désespérées; c'est sans tristesse que j'entendais au fond du jardin les derniers roulements du tonnerre roucouler dans les lilas (C. S., pp. 152,3).

Despite the happy tone of this text, it is difficult to forget that the storm has been described in terms of the punishing storm of the Bible on the very same page. God the Father, in this passage, as a personification of the weather, seems a very capricious deity - but, then, Marcel feels that his own father, too, is a rather capricious being; divine and domestic justice seeming to depend on "une humeur passagère" (C. S., p. 152), as with the weather. Sheltered in the house from the bad weather, optimistic about good weather to come, Marcel can forget that this very garden with its chestnut tree and its lilacs was the scene of his mother's betrayal of him, her refusal to give him his good-night kiss. This scene, in fact, contains the most explicit images of the wrathful father, and associates the colours of the lilacs, the pink and the mauve, with the most important drama of Marcel's young life "le drame de son coucher" (C. S., p. 44).
We have already mentioned one quality that Marcel's household has in common with the Old Testament Jews - a deep regard for various (family) rites, rituals and codes of behaviour. However, on the night in question, Marcel's world turns upside down as his father disregards all his childhood rules. To begin with, he terms the goodnight kiss "ces rites absurdes" (C. S., p. 13) and sends Marcel to bed without it. Françoise, however, will not redress the wrong by disregarding "l'article du code" (C. S., p. 29) which forbids disturbing Marcel's mother while she is entertaining a guest. Marcel waits up for his mother, who, for once, is not forgiving, but his father, impressed by the sight of Marcel's misery, allows the mother to spend the night with her unhappy son, saying "voyons, nous ne sommes pas des bourreaux" (C. S., p. 36). However, Marcel is even more disappointed that his father does not play the role of executioner as he ought; Marcel feels he has deserved punishment and refuses to see his father in any other role:

On ne pouvait pas remercier mon père; on l'eût agacé par ce qu'il appelait des sensibleries. Je restai sans oser faire un mouvement; il était encore devant nous, grand, dans sa robe de nuit blanche sous le cachemire de l'Inde violet et rose qu'il nouait autour de sa tête depuis qu'il avait des névralgies, avec le geste d'Abraham dans la gravure d'après Benozzo Gozzoli que m'avait donnée M. Swann, disant à Sarah qu'elle a à se départir du côté d'Isaac ... Il y a bien longtemps aussi que mon père a cessé de pouvoir dire à maman : "Va avec le petit". La possibilité de telles heures ne renaîtra jamais pour moi. Mais depuis peu de temps, je recommence à très bien percevoir, si je prête l'oreille, les sanglots que j'eus la force de contenir devant mon père et qui n'éclatèrent que quand je me retrouvai seul avec maman. En réalité ils n'ont jamais cessé (C. S., pp. 36,7).
Marcel sees his father as Abraham of the Old Testament, willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Neither 'sacrifice' is carried through, and Marcel is shocked at this disregard of the system of punishments and rewards to which he is accustomed, "Maman passa cette nuit-là dans ma chambre; au moment où je venais de commettre une faute telle que je m'attendais à être obligé de quitter la maison, mes parents m'accordaient plus que je n'eusse jamais obtenu d'eux comme récompense d'une belle action" (C. S., p. 37). He blames his subsequent lack of will power on this leniency. However, the whole incident has other interesting ramifications. The detail of Marcel's father's turban is extremely significant in more ways than one. Apart from anything, it is an obvious sign of the father's weakness, his neuralgia. Perhaps Marcel even inherited his nervous weakness from his father. Painter tells us that, in real life, Proust inherited his nervous weakness from his father's side (10). Then, too, in the reference to Abraham and Isaac, it emphasizes to Marcel the cruel nature of this Old Testament East. And it adds a significance to the pink and purple colours which they never entirely lose, even in their association with the lilacs. Ninette Bailey has expressed this significance most succinctly, "à la figure du père ... figure par elle-même symbolique du châtiment, Proust prend soin d'ajouter - comme un emblème des deux faces de la sensualité, la première heureuse et avouable, l'autre défendue et criminelle - les deux couleurs du rose et du violet" (11). This purple, by the way, is

the colour Marcel associates with stormy skies, re-emphasizing the
association of storms and punishment (C. S., p. 63).

Thus, we must agree with Jauss that the lilac/storm/dove imagery does
represent various stages in Marcel's life, especially in his love life.
But this first stage, centred around his parents is by no means innocent
in Marcel's mind, as his important comment on the story of Geneviève de
Brabant (the virtuous wife) and Golo (the villainous seducer) seems to
show: "j'avais hâte de courir ... et de tomber dans les bras de maman
que les malheurs de Geneviève de Brabant me rendaient plus chère, tandis
que les crimes de Golo me faisaient examiner ma propre conscience avec
plus de scrupules" (C. S., p. 10). The peacefulness of the doves in
the lilac-shaded kitchen nook, where the only homage or sacrifice exacted
is the fruit of the fields and dairies, where the goddess of love seems
a motherly, sustaining figure is shattered by various storms Marcel
associates with God the Father's quite justified wrath on sinners. The
lilacs and the dove, even associated as it is with mother-love, always
still survive the storm; and the pattern of love set up in Marcel's
childhood also, as we shall see, survives well into Marcel's later life,
peace and guilt warring with each other in his love affairs.

Still, such love is far in the future for Marcel; at the next stage in
his life, he is very idealistic, full of hope that love with a young
girl will be a joyous sensual adventure, as the lilac/storm images show.
(After all, a young girl is a much more permissible object for his affections.) Thus, in the lilac passage describing the heart-shaped leaves of the lilacs, the hope of good weather and the storm receding with the voice of the dove which we have already quoted, we see Marcel at his most optimistic, and Proust's fairy tale Orient at its most sensual:

l'on sortait de la ville par le chemin qui passait le long de la barrière blanche du parc de M. Swann. Avant d'y arriver, nous rencontrions, venue au-devant des étrangers, l'odeur de ses lilas. Eux-mêmes, d'entre les petits coeurs verts et frais de leurs feuilles, levaient curieusement au-dessus de la barrière du parc leurs panaches de plumes mauves ou blanches que lustrait, même à l'ombre, le soleil où elles avaient baigné. Quelques-uns, à demi cachés par la petite maison en tuiles appelée maison des Archers, où logeait le gardien, dépassaient son pignon gothique de leur rose minaret. Les Nymphes du printemps eussent semblé vulgaires, auprès de ces jeunes houris qui gardaient dans ce jardin français les tons vifs et purs des miniatures de la Perse. Malgré mon désir d'enlacer leur taille souple et d'attirer à moi les boucles étoilées de leur tête odorante, nous passions sans nous arrêter, mes parents n'allant plus à Tansonville depuis le mariage de Swann (C. S., pp. 135, 6).

Here, Marcel's wish to embrace the lilacs reminds us of various scenes in which he embraces the hawthorn bushes, climbs Gilberte as though she were a tree, wanting to touch, but, more often having to be content with looking, as we will see in 'l'arbuste' chapter.

The lilacs suggest their association with love in their heart-shaped leaves (pigeon breasts are also heart-shaped, as we find Proust pointing out later). The blossoms evoke feathers (another link with pigeons or doves) and locks of hair - metaphors which will have some meaning for
Swann himself at his last soirée. The East here, then, seems a very positive ambiance. Only the mention of Swann's ostracism because of his marriage presents any overt suggestion of unacceptable love. However, there is perhaps a covert suggestion of the possible wounds of love in the fact that Swann's keeper watches over the lilacs from a lodge called the Archers' lodge. After all, Proust was impressed by a friend's suggestion that certain doves with a red spot on their heart - or lilac leaf - shaped breasts were nymphs who had killed themselves for love (12). In terms of mythology, the association of the archer with love is apt, as Cupid is supposed to carry love darts. Even in Combray, the theme of birds wounded is appropriate as the town boasts "la vieille hôtel de l'Oiseau flesché" (C. S., p. 166).

Still, the overall tone of the passage is so unashamedly sensual as to bode well for Marcel's falling in love. Both with Gilberte and Albertine, he approaches love with the highest hopes and ideals - and both times he is disappointed. Both times, moreover, just as he is on the point of falling in love, Marcel is confronted with flowerless bushes - the lilacs past their prime in Gilberte's case and the bare hawthorn bush in Albertine's. As Marcel approaches his first encounter with Gilberte he notes that: "Le temps des lilas approchait de sa fin; quelques-uns effusaient encore en hauts lustres mauves les bulles délicates de leurs fleurs, mais dans bien des parties du feuillage où déferlait, il y avait seulement une semaine, leur mousse embaumée, se flétrissait,

diminuée et noircie, une écume creuse, sèche et sans parfum (C. S., p. 136). Indeed, with real and human flowers, Marcel's sense of timing is terrible - when he wishes to visit his favourite flowers, they are out of season; when he loves his flower-maidens inordinately, they cannot return his love, and vice-versa. Even when he and Gilberte are mutually attracted, Marcel cannot recognize the fact.

The next time Marcel and Gilberte meet, both families have moved to Paris for the winter, and Marcel alienates Gilberte by his frantic devotion. At this point, the narrator draws a comparison between Odette and her daughter, which, considering Odette's influence on Swann, bodes ill for Marcel. "C'était une nouvelle variété de Mme Swann qui était obtenue là, à côté d'elle, comme un lilas blanc près d'un lilas violet" (J. F., p. 56). If we can assume that the colour white still means a certain innocence to Marcel, no matter how flawed, whilst the colour purple suggests sensuality (sometimes even depravity, as we shall see), then Gilberte is still a rather inexperienced version of her mother. However, this innocence is either a façade or a figment of Marcel's still chivalrous imagination, as an incident in the park shows. Marcel struggles with Gilberte, ostensibly to wrest a letter from her, but the tussle becomes a source of sensual pleasure:

Je tâchais de l'attirer, elle résistait; ses pommettes enflammées par l'effort étaient rouges et rondes comme des cerises ... je la tenais serrée entre mes jambes comme un arbuste après lequel j'aurais voulu grimper; et, au milieu de la gymnastique que je faisais ... je répandis ... mon plaisir auquel je ne pus pas même m'attarder le temps d'en connaître le goût; aussitôt je pris la
Alors, Gilberte me dit avec bonté : - Vous savez, si vous voulez, nous pouvons lutter encore un peu.

Peut-être avait-elle obscurement senti que mon jeu avait un autre objet que celui que j'avais avoué (J. F., p. 494).

The whole incident revolves around the question of parental approval, as the letter in question is one that Marcel wrote Swann expressing the purity of his intentions regarding Gilbert, a letter Swann refuses to believe. "Si Swann était arrivé alors avant même que je l'eusse reprise, cette lettre de la sincérité de laquelle je trouvais qu'il avait été si insensé de ne pas s'être laissé persuader, peut-être aurait-il vu que c'était lui qui avait raison" (J. F., p. 493). Thus, although the central image is of a bush or tree, presumably a cherry tree rather than a lilac, we find Marcel, not as chivalrous as he thought, and his girlfriend not as innocent as he believed, involved with the same issue of guilt and fatherly disapproval usually associated with the lilacs.

In fact, Marcel never has a chance to overwhelm Gilberte with his chosen token of his love - daily baskets of lilacs (his flowers of sensuality) and roses (the traditional flower of love). Even the theme of the Orient is involved here, as Marcel sells "une grande potiche de vieux Chine" (J. F., p. 623) to pay for the flowers, the vase being a legacy from Aunt Léonie, Marcel's first link with the Arabian Nights. The tribute of flowers, as we have said, however, is never delivered, for, on paying a visit to Gilberte, Marcel sees her leaving the house with what seems to be a young man, the two shadows being difficult to
distinguish in the dusk and "l'ombre élyséenne" (J. F., p. 623).

Much later, he learns that the 'young man' was really a well-known lesbian, an inhabitant of the other less happy Orient of Gomorrah.

From now on we shall find the lilacs turning increasingly towards the East of Sodom and Gomorrah as Marcel watches this world reveal itself before his increasingly experienced eyes. Proust, however, insists that in this world Marcel is only a spectator. On the other hand, his attempt at an active role in the heterosexual world does not end when Gilberte disappears into the shadows. His relegation from hopeful to disappointed lover, from idealism to a certain amount of disillusionment is expressed in the lilac/pigeon imagery. Already pigeons seem to be less romantic birds than doves. However, as we have seen in association with the image of the 'maison des Archers', Proust was impressed by a friend's suggestion that certain doves with a red spot on their breasts were nymphs who had killed themselves for love. Originally, Proust had intended to emphasize the unhappiness of Marcel's first love affair by calling Les Jeunes Filles en Fleurs Les Colombes Poignardées (13).

Even the pedestrian city pigeons do show some affinity to this idea of metamorphosis through love "les pigeons dont les beaux corps irisés ... ont la forme d'un coeur et sont comme les lilas du règne des oiseaux" (J. F., p. 408). If their metamorphosis does not quite measure up to the tragic one of the nymphs, neither does Gilberte live up to the early sensual promise of the lilacs, nor does she succeed in breaking Marcel's heart as thoroughly and as tragically as he at first imagines.

All the 'tragic' overtones will be reserved for his love for Albertine. The image of the self-mutilated dove - or, actually, pigeon, will first introduce the period of his infatuation for Mme de Guermantes, whose seeming martyrdom fascinates Marcel, and will next be associated with the poet who creates despite personal suffering (in Musset's view) or even because of suffering (in Proust's view). Before he decides to fall for Mme de Guermantes instead of for a young girl, Marcel makes his first trip to Balbec and meets Albertine. Marcel goes to Balbec on Swann's recommendation, hoping to experience at the same time a storm at sea and the opportunity to see the famous Balbec church which Swann says is almost Persian. On windy days, Marcel feels that "le vent ... mêlait en moi le désir de l'architecture gothique avec celui d'une tempête sur la mer" (C. S., p. 385). His two wishes will be frustrated, but at least the best of the Orient of the fairy tales and the sunny weather at Balbec as a background for his encounter with Albertine seem to hold out great promise for his love for her. Yet, once again (as the hawthorns have shown us) Marcel falls in love with the unknown which he can twist into the shape of his own dreams. These feature the erotic Eastern images first suggested by the lilacs - "ces jeunes houris qui gardaient dans ce jardin français les tons vifs et purs des miniatures de la Perse". Marcel describes the mystery of Albertine thus:

Si nous pensions que les yeux d'une telle fille ne sont qu'une brillante rondelle de mica, nous ne serions pas avides de connaître et d'unir à nous sa vie. Mais nous sentons que ce qui luit dans ce disque réfléchissant n'est pas dû uniquement à sa composition matérielle; que ce sont, inconnues de nous, les noires ombres des idées que cet être se fait, relativement aux gens et
aux lieux qu'il connaît - pelouses des hippodromes, sable des chemins où, pédalant à travers champs et bois, m'a entraîné cette petite péri, plus séduisante pour moi que celle du paradis persan - , les ombres aussi de la maison où elle va rentrer, des projets qu'elle forme ou qu'on a formés pour elle; et surtout que c'est elle, avec ses désirs, ses sympathies, ses répulsions, son obscure et incessante volonté. Je savais que je ne possèderais pas cette jeune cycliste, si je ne possédais aussi ce qu'il y avait dans ses yeux (J. F., p. 794).

Yet Marcel is still not entirely past the idealistic stage of his life, the one in which he can think of himself and Gilberte in terms of Tristan and Isolde (J. F., p. 610). Moreover, Marcel's emphasis on girl's eyes (which we have seen as well in the hawthorn chapter) suggests the spiritual devotion of courtly tradition. His loyalty to his old ideal at first stops him from being totally attracted to the seemingly more sensual, more accessible Albertine. "A vrai dire, cette brune n'était pas celle qui me plaisait le plus, justement parce qu'elle était brune et que, depuis le jour où dans le petit raidillon de Tansonville, j'avais vu Gilberte, une jeune fille rousse à la peau dorée était restée pour moi l'idéal inaccessible" (J. F., p. 795).

Indeed, Marcel is still something of a child, for one of his main pleasures, once he becomes better acquainted with the band of girls, is to sit on the cliff-top, and to eat sticky, sickly sweet cakes which remind him of his childhood and its colourful, Oriental aspect:

Mais les gâteaux étaient instruits, les tartes étaient bavardes. Il y avait dans les premiers des fadeurs de crème et dans les secondes les fraîcheurs de fruits qui en savaient long sur Combray, sur Gilberte, non seulement la Gilberte de Combray, mais celle de Paris aux goûters de qui je les avais retrouvés. Ils me rappelaient ces assiettes à petits fours, des Mille et une Nuits, qui distraient tant de leurs "sujets" ma tante Léonie.
quand Françoise lui apportait, un jour, **Aladin ou la Lampe Merveilleuse**, un autre, **Ali-Baba, le Dormeur éveillé ou Sinbad le Marin** embarquant à Bassora avec toutes ses richesses. J'aurais bien voulu les revoir, mais ma grand'mère ne savait pas ce qu'elles étaient devenues et croyait d'ailleurs que c'était de vulgaires assiettes achetées dans le pays. N'importe, dans le gris et champenois Combray, leurs vignettes s'encastraient multicolores, comme dans la noire Eglise les vitraux aux mouvantes pierreries, comme dans le crépuscule de ma chambre les projections de la lanterne magique, comme devant la vue de la gare et du chemin de fer départemental les boutons d'or des Indes et les lilas de Perse, comme la collection de vieux Chine de ma grand'tante dans sa sombre demeure de vieille dame de province (J. F., p. 904).

It is just as well that Marcel derives such pleasure from eating, which he also associates with the sensual and adventurous world of Eastern fairy tale, for Albertine allows him no other gratifications, not even a kiss, and Marcel returns to Paris convinced that his first impression of her was wrong. Notice that Marcel also mentions Gilberte's tea parties - thus, the image of Venus as a goddess well pleased with food offerings holds true for all three of the women Marcel has loved - his mother, Gilberte and Albertine. In the paragraph, the lilacs add an Eastern colour to the greyness of Combray. We shall see later that grey for Proust is the colour of captivity, of half-life. The china that Marcel mentions is, of course, the china that Aunt Léonie finally leaves him and that he sells to buy Gilberte lilacs and roses.

Perhaps because he has now been rejected by two young girls - Gilberte and Albertine - Marcel turns to an older woman, hopelessly inaccessible since she is married, is old enough to be his mother (we have already seen that there is some justification for calling her Marcel's spiritual mother), and belongs to a much more aristocratic sphere than he. The
duchess is also a descendant of Geneviève and comes close to replacing Marcel's mother in that role in the triangle of Golo, Geneviève and her husband. Dove, lilac and storm, when associated with the duchess all take on a harshness, and express a certain cruelty. Even the duchess's favourite colours of red and purple can be seen as violent versions of the lilac, pink and mauve.

But, at this point in Marcel's life it is the symbol of the dove which has changed so much. He has moved to Paris and the gentle dove (perhaps a country wood dove) is now replaced by the city pigeon. Apart from this practical explanation why 'les colombes' are superseded by 'les pigeons', the reader cannot help but think that the more romantic bird has flown. Combray tended to foster Marcel's dreams, whilst Paris will destroy them. Once again, it is Françoise who acts as the foil. Marcel, seeking in the Guermantes' salon a comradeship as holy as the Last Supper, or as chivalrous as the comradeship of the Holy Grail, does not realize that the closest approximation to his ideals, a comic one at that, is to be found in the system Françoise imposes on her fellow servants "Les derniers rites achevés, Françoise, qui était à la fois, comme dans l'église primitive, le célébrant et l'un des fidèles, se servait un dernier verre de vin, détachait de son cou sa serviette" (C. G., p. 17). She also punctures Marcel's nostalgic pretensions by her sentimental eulogy on the lilacs and hawthorns of Combray, now lost to her. These flowers are brought to her mind by the pigeons cooing,
"des pigeons pareils à ceux qui roucoulaient dans sa cuisine, à Combray" (C. G., p. 17). Symbolically, however, these birds are quite different to the ones which cooed cosily around Françoise's domain in Combray. They become symbols of martyrdom, that of Mme de Guermantes to her unfaithful husband, that of Marcel to love, although we shall see that the image also evokes the burden of the poet. Before we study the passage in question, we might add that, as usual, it is Françoise who destroys Marcel's false view of love. Not only does he come to know through her how much the duchess dislikes him, but also what a burden she, the seemingly faithful servant, finds him. Her rigid views (a duchess could, indeed should, never love a commoner) on social order help more than anything else to destroy Marcel's own dependence on order.

Marcel is awoken one morning by a pigeon announcing the coming of spring. But spring does not seem to have the same magic here as it had in Combray:

Cependant l'hiver finissait. Un matin, après quelques semaines de giboulées et de tempêtes, j'entendis dans ma cheminée - au lieu du vent informe, élastique et sombre qui me secouait de l'envie d'aller au bord de la mer - le roucoulement des pigeons qui nichaient dans la muraille : irisé, imprévu comme une première jacinthe déchirant doucement son cœur nourricier pour qu'en jaillit, mauve et satinée, sa fleur sonore, faisant entrer, comme une fenêtre ouverte, dans ma chambre encore fermée et noire, la tiédeur, l'éblouissement, la fatigue d'un premier beau jour
(C. G., p. 142).
Proust (or Marcel) may be revelling in the poetic images the bird song here provokes, but, nonetheless, the allusions are not good omens for Marcel. To begin with, the hyacinth reminds us of the ill-starred love of Apollo and Hyacinthus whom he accidentally kills, and from whose blood springs the hyacinth—a blood flower. The fatigue and dullness of a first warm day presages, perhaps, the boredom Marcel will find in love. Although the metaphor is at one remove, the bird tearing open its heart to release the nourishing life-blood is definitely the most important image of all. In Iconography, the pelican feeding his young thus was a symbol of Christ, redeemer and martyr, whose suffering and resurrection have already been associated with the quest of the artist through the symbol of the hawthorn.

However, the French reader would be more likely to be acquainted with this bird symbol from Musset's *La Nuit de Mai*, in which the muse urges the poet to emulate the pelican and to give his heart's blood, his experience of betrayal in love, to others through his poetry. Marcel, we shall see, will be the one character to follow this role of the poet, and, in his imagination the Duchess of Guermantes, from his childhood dreams in which she teaches him the name of the red and violet flowers and urges him to write poetry, takes on the role of the Muse. Certainly she seems to offer him an example of martyrdom. However, Marcel, with unconscious cruelty, seems to be comforted by the spectacle of her suffering. Later, of course, the duchess herself sets an example in almost unthinking cruelty which would be hard for even Marcel to follow.
Here, according to Marcel, her dress "semblait la matérialisation autour d'elle des rayons écarlates d'un coeur ... que j'aurais peut-être pu consoler" (C. G., p. 145). Marcel does fleetingly wonder if his own attentions are perhaps part of the Duchess' martyrdom - "Alors j'avais honte d'affliger par ma vue cette marty" - but he concludes on a rather childish note, "Mais après tout, la rue est à tout le monde".

At this point, we must agree with Jauss that Marcel has left behind the simple lilacs of childhood, with their promise of sensual pleasure which is never fulfilled. The duchess, who is, herself, a 'blood flower', as we have seen, and whom Marcel always credited with a knowledge of flowers, comments on the lilacs' passing and the imminent storm in a very matter of fact way which still does not hide the symbolism behind such a state of affairs for Marcel. As usual, the context of this remark is most important. Marcel has gone to see the Duke and Duchess of Guermantes to verify the invitation he has had from the Prince and Princess of Guermantes. However, the duke and duchess think that he, and Swann, who also arrives on the scene, are actually angling for invitations, and they show the quality of their friendship by denying that the party is worth going to, instead of offering to help:

Qu'est-ce qu'il y a chez la princesse? demanda Swann. -Presque rien, se hâta de répondre le duc à qui la question de Swann avait fait croire qu'il n'était pas invité. - Mais comment, Basin? C'est-à-dire que tout le ban et l'arrière-ban sont convoqués. Ce sera une tuerie, à s'assommer. Ce qui sera joli,
ajouta-t-elle en regardant Swann d'un air délicat, si l'orage qu'il y a dans l'air n'éclate pas, ce sont ces merveilleux jardins. Vous les connaissez. J'ai été là-bas, il y a un mois, au moment où les lilas étaient en fleurs, on ne peut pas se faire une idée de ce que ça pouvait être beau. Et puis le jet d'eau, enfin, c'est vraiment Versailles dans Paris (C. G., p. 584).

The lilacs are, as we have said, truly over for Marcel, and the storm has already arrived, for at the time that the duchess was enjoying the prince's gardens, at lilac-time, her nephew, Saint-Loup, was introducing Marcel to his first adult experience of the world of homosexuality and of the fire from heaven. Saint-Loup has taken Marcel to meet his girl-friend in a Paris suburb. The fresh young lilacs, with their past promise of young love, give Marcel no warning of what is to come; in fact, they form an ironic contrast to the revelation about the identity of Saint-Loup's girl-friend. The only clue that these lilacs guard the entrance to a much more dangerous Orient than Marcel ever experienced in Combray is that these lilacs are mauve, rather than pink or white:

cà et là, souples et légères, dans leurs fraîche toilette mauve, suspendues dans les feuillages, de jeunes touffes de lilas se laissaient balancer par la brise sans s'occuper du passant qui levait les yeux jusqu'à leur entresol de verdure. Je reconnaissais en elles les pelotons violets disposés à l'entrée du parc de M. Swann, dans les chauds après-midi du printemps, pour une ravissante tapisserie provinciale (C. G., p. 157).

Note, once again, that Marcel likens the lilacs to a work of art - here a tapestry, in Jean Santeuil, a vase, in Essais et Articles, a picture by Gustave Moreau - and usually, of course, against the background of the Arabian Nights. However, we will not insist on the aesthetic dimensions as we have already discussed the theme of flowers and art in the hawthorn chapter.
Marcel goes on to describe a neighbouring pear tree, then, "Tout à coup, Saint-Loup apparut, accompagné de sa maîtresse, et alors, dans cette femme qui était pour lui tout l'amour, toutes les douceurs possibles de la vie ... dans cette femme je reconnus à l'instant "Rachel quand du Seigneur" " (C. G., pp. 157,8) . This revelation that Saint-Loup's mistress is a prostitute that Marcel himself once rejected changes the atmosphere of the whole scene. The lilacs now guard the entrance of Saint-Loup's private hell (C. G., p. 161). The pear trees become angels warning the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah that the storm of God's wrath is imminent; indeed, it seems already to have occurred, for the houses "avaient l'air d'avoir été brûlées par une pluie de salpêtre" (C. G., p. 161). Both Rachel and Saint-Loup turn out to belong to Sodom and Gomorrah, as various incidents show, but Marcel will gain his first real insight into a homosexual love affair from the duchess' garden. Indeed, the duchess makes her comment about the storm just after Marcel has watched the liaison between Jupien and Charlus. Proust describes their meeting in terms of flower imagery, Jupien being the flower and Charlus the bee, but, at the same time they open Marcel's eyes completely to the fact that Paris is full of descendants of Sodom and Gomorrah who survived the storm from heaven. They create a new Orient for themselves in Paris, an Orient which they feel sure is under the same sentence of destruction as Sodom
and Gomorrah, but which Marcel himself can watch with humour and compassion, realizing that, probably, such people would be more at home in the ambiguous world of fairy tale or in the amoral flower and insect kingdom.

Indeed, in M. de Charlus, the symbol of the storm becomes a strange travesty of paternal wrath and punishment, a humorous symbol on the whole despite the way in which it illustrates the sexual perversions as well as the social snobbishness of the world that he inhabits. Once again, the theme of the forbidden or difficult to enter garden recurs with the duchess's comment about the beautiful ones on view at the Prince de Guermantes' party. Marcel is especially puzzled by his invitation, because M. de Charlus has warned him that he can never find the entrance into such select society without his patronage. As Charlus says, once he gets Marcel on his own, he alone holds "Le"Sésame" de l'hôtel Guermantes et de tous ceux qui valent la peine que la porte s'ouvre grande devant vous" (C. G., p. 293). However, not only has Marcel not encouraged Charlus, he has deliberately rejected his advances. Charlus has already made known his tastes to Marcel. When Marcel wishes to present M. Bloch to him, Charlus demurs - "Tout au plus, si on me donne un jour le spectacle asiatique que j'esquissais, pourrai-je adresser à cet affreux bonhomme quelques paroles empreintes de bonhomie. Mais à condition qu'il se soit laissé copieusement rosser par son fils" (C. G., p. 289). We can see, thus, that Charlus at least, considers such perversions Oriental, hence his phrase "le spectacle asiatique". 
If this seems to add a twist to the impression that Marcel had in his childhood that fathers ought to be strict disciplinarians, that his own father looked like Abraham ready to sacrifice his son, and that God himself was a strict Father to his people, there are stranger scenes yet to come, culminating in Marcel's first visit to the Prince and Princess of Guermantes.

The first scene occurs when Marcel, mindful of Charlus' cautionary advice about the need to accept his patronage, goes home with M. de Charlus after the duchess's soirée. To Marcel's complete astonishment, Charlus stages a quarrel, "son visage convulsé et bland différait autant de son visage ordinaire que la mer quand, un matin de tempête, on aperçoit, au lieu de la souriante surface habituelle, mille serpents d'écume et de bave" (C. G., p. 554). Then, calming himself somehow, Charlus states, "qui aime bien châtie bien" (C. G., p. 559) - a perverse parallel, perhaps, to Marcel's childhood expectations of his father. Charlus has even orchestrated the entire scene, for Marcel hears in the background the strains of that part of Beethoven's Symphonie Pastorale called La Joie après l'orage. Needless to say, this does not influence Marcel to spend the night at Charlus'.

Thus, since he has gained entrance into the exclusive salon of the Prince de Guermantes without Charlus' 'open sesame', Marcel, no less than the duchess, can expect a storm to break - in his case, the storm of Charlus' displeasure. It is with some trepidation, then, that Marcel
approaches Charlus at the soiree to seek his introduction to the prince:

Mais ce qui le rendait furieux, c'est que ma presence ce soir chez la princesse de Guermantes, comme depuis quelque temps chez sa cousine, paraissait narguer la declaration solennelle : "On n'entre dans ces salons-la que par moi." Faute grave, crime peut-etre inexpiable, je n'avais pas suivi la voie hierarchique. M. de Charlus savait bien que les tonnerres qu'il brandissait contre ceux qui ne se pliaient pas a ses ordres ... commengaient a passer, selon beaucoup de gens ... pour des tonnerres en carton (S. G., pp. 639, 40).

This passage, of course, is a parody of Divine Wrath, as gods from Thor to Zeus have brandished lightning as their weapon. And Charlus' words "On n'entre ... que par moi" may even be an ironic allusion to Christ's advice as to the way to enter heaven, especially as he demands "qu'on abandonnât pour lui femme, frère, enfants".

Actually, M. de Charlus is more helpful than Marcel hoped:

D'une part, au cours de ses vingt dernières années, ce Don Quichotte (Charlus) s'était battu contre tant de moulins a vent ... il avait avec tant de frequence interdit "comme une personne impossible a recevoir" d'etre invité chez tels ou telles Guermantes, que ceux-ci commengaient a avoir peur de se brouiller avec tous les gens qu'ils aimaient, de se priver jusqu'a leur mort de la frequetation de certains nouveaux venus dont ils etaient curieux, pour épouser les rancunes tonnantes mais inexplicées d'un beau-frère ou cousin qui aurait voulu qu'on abandonnât pour lui femme, frère, enfants (S. G., p. 653).

Indeed, Marcel's expectations of a storm come to a humorous anti-climax. The only thunder he hears is the 'thunder' of laughter of the Greek duke as he enjoys the spectacle of Mme d'Arpajon soaked by the famous fountain the duchess mentioned in conjunction with the storm and the lilacs (S. G., p. 658). The 'storm' of God's wrath - the rain of fire -
has proved as ineffective as the 'storm' of M. de Charlus' anger, for, in the party scenes, Marcel can see how many homosexuals and lesbians must have survived the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to create, indeed, their own 'cities of the plain' in Paris. We have moved away from the noble world of chivalry of Marcel's daydreams — hence Charlus resembling Don Quixote Cervante's main character in his parody of the chivalrous Romances — to a world which might have come out of the Arabian Nights. Over the party shines the moon, "comme un symbole oriental" (S. G., p. 633). M. de Charlus and M. de Vaugoubert belong to Sodom, and the ambassadress to Turkey to Gomorrah (C. G., p. 659). Poor Mme de Vaugoubert, having married such an effeminate man, becomes more masculine herself, perpetuating the theme of the similarities between the human and the plant world, so that fairy tale metamorphoses such as the Jupien/flower one become common occurrences. "Mme de Vaugoubert, c'était un homme. Avait-elle toujours été ainsi, ou était-elle devenue ce que je la voyais, peu importe, car dans l'un et l'autre cas on a affaire à l'un des plus touchants miracles de la nature et qui, le second surtout, font ressembler le règne humain au règne des fleurs" (S. G., p. 645). Thus, the 'flowers' at the Princess de Guermantes' party are very strange ones indeed! Flowers, storms, the East — all seem in their comic details an anti-climax after the Duchess of Guermantes' warning Swann of the storm to come, during the incident of the red shoes.
But, then, Marcel ought to be used to anti-climaxes by now. Even his first trip to Balbec held many. He chose Balbec because "quand je voulais aller à Balbec, ce qui me poussait à partir c'était le désir d'une église persane, d'une tempête à l'aube" (S. G., p. 1120). But Marcel is twice disappointed; he fails to recognize the Oriental influence on the church, and his holiday is passed in almost unrelieved good weather. Only one picture warns him (although he doesn't realize it himself at the time) of the unhappiness he will find when the East - the Orient of Sodom and Gomorrah - becomes involved in his own life, releasing a storm of jealousy much more destructive than any sea storm. This picture, another example of the ambiguity which Elstir so much loves, is of the sexually ambiguous "Miss Sacripant", her clothes fitting her as well as feathers fit a dove (J. F., pp. 848,9); Odette, like the band of young girls, evidences a bird-like freedom of choice in her love life which crosses the usual barrier of the sexes. She, too, likes Oriental flowers (chrysanthemums), materials, and ornaments. But Albertine, in her resemblance to a 'péri' and her mercurial nature, will be the East to Marcel, will be a bird, free or with wings clipped, as he wills.

By now we must realize that the delightful, comforting, slightly sentimental Orient associated with the lilacs most especially in Jean Santeuil, has been replaced by a more sinister one which, paradoxically, can also be much more humorous. This adult version of the Arabian Nights also introduces the theme of art or creativity that keeps the
artist alive, a theme absent from Jean Santeuil, where Scheherazade is only associated with the sensuality of the East, in certain lilac passages. "ces beaux lilas", as Jean calls them, "de sang persan, mauve ou d'une blancheur d'anis, sveltes Schéhérazades" (14) or "de jeunes lilas qui se tenaient devant la porte et donnaient bon air et bonne odeur à la maison, domesticité d'ailleurs comme seule aurait pu en fournir dans un conte oriental une fée pleine de poétiques pouvoirs" (15).

However, there is one hint in Jean Santeuil that a great deal may be hidden beneath the surface of this Orient:

Alors Henri avait raconté à Jean ce qu'avaient caché au monde pendant quarante années de l'attachement profond et la fidélité apparente de M. de Lomperolles à sa femme.

Il éclaira brusquement la vie souterraine si bien gardée, aujourd'hui sans défense, qui s'étendait sous son autre vie, comme ces palais d'Orient au fond desquels il y a des cachots, où celui qu'hier on croyait le maître de la Turquie est le prisonnier d'un janissaire qui ne tarde que trop à le frapper.

Indeed, we shall see M. de Charlus, once a leader of society, reduced to such circumstances in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Nor can Marcel, despite his higher status as a poet, completely dissociate himself from this underground life beneath the surface of the fairy tale.

The whole idea of the poet or writer in the Orient is introduced by Marcel's unsuspecting mother. She wishes to give him a birthday present of books to read on his second trip to Balbec. Marcel, enchanted still by Aunt Léonie's plates illustrated with themes from the Arabian Nights, asks for a copy of the fairy tales:

ma mère me fit venir à la fois les Mille et une Nuits de Galland et les Mille et Une Nuits de Mardrus. Mais, après avoir jeté un coup d'œil sur les deux traductions, ma mère aurait bien voulu que je m'en tinsse à celle de Galland, tout en craignant de m'influencer, à cause du respect qu'elle avait de la liberté intellectuelle, de la peur d'intervenir maladroitement dans la vie de ma pensée, et du sentiment qu'étant une femme, d'une part elle manquait, croyait-elle, de la compétence littéraire qu'il fallait, d'autre part qu'elle ne devait pas juger d'après ce qui la choquait les lectures d'un jeune homme (S. G., p. 836).

Thus, the lilacs are not the only element of the Combray version of the fairy tales missing from these adult versions; the simplicity and innocence, the very domesticity of the old plates have gone, but a certain humour and some of their vulgarity remain. To begin with, Marcel's mother is wasting her time with her scruples over the books, for, on this second trip to Balbec, Marcel knows enough to recognize the teeming, secret life that goes on beneath Balbec's respectable surface; in the large hotel where they are guests, Marcel and his mother are living on top of a world which might as well have come out of les Mille et Une Nuits - or, more unhappily in its later connotations, out of the Old Testament, for the hotel also reminds him of the Temple of Solomon (S. G., p. 775). Marcel especially enjoys watching the antics of M. Nissim Bernard, a Jew and a homosexual:

Il aimait d'ailleurs tout le labyrinthe de couloirs, de cabinets secrets, de salons ... de galeries qu’était l’hôtel de Balbec. Par atavisme d'Oriental il aimait les sérails et, quand il sortait le soir, on le voyait en explorer furtivement les détours.

Tandis que, se risquant jusqu'aux sous-sols et cherchant malgré tout à ne pas être vu et à éviter le scandale, M. Nissim Bernard, dans sa recherche des jeunes lévites, faisait penser à ses vers de la Juive :

361
O Dieu de nos pères,
Parmi nous descends,
Cache nos mystères
A l'oeil des méchants!
(S. G., p. 845)

Such quotations were Marcel's great-uncle's favourite way of poking
fun at Jews, and it seems that Marcel, here, is carrying on the family
brand of humour, especially as Marcel associates M. Bernard with Scribe's
Jewess. Although, as an observer Marcel is no longer naïve, he still
seeks to dissociate himself from this Oriental microcosm; he feels
himself above it. Thus, a page after describing M. Nissim Bernard
scurrying about in the hotel corridors and basement, looking for illicit
affairs with hotel workers, Marcel climbs up to the room of two provincial
servants with whom he has (and he doesn't care who knows it) "une amitié
très vive, quoique très pure" (S. G., p. 847). Even their names, Marie and
Céleste (perhaps Proust is thinking of his own servant and friend here) (17)
point out their spiritual nature. Like two angels of the annunciation -
a pleasant contrast to the warning angels of Sodom and Gomorrah - these
two women insist on treating Marcel like a poet and a Persian prince,
not at all an incongruous mixture in Proust's idea of the Orient. But,
most of all, Céleste insists that Marcel resembles a dove, reminding
us of Proust's image of the pigeon wounding its breast, as does the
pelican in Musset's poem. "Regarde, ses cheveux se hérissent, ils se
boursouffent par la colère comme les plumes des oiseaux" (S. G., p. 847).
The bird, of course, the sign of the Son, is the dove - "Votre pyjama,

(17) Albaret, Céleste, trans. Barbara Bray: Monsieur Proust, (as told
to Georges Belmont), Collins and Harvill Press, London,
1976, p. 115.
en ce moment, tout blanc, avec vos mouvements de cou, vous donne l'air d'une colombe" (P., p. 18). Perhaps here, we can make a certain claim that Marcel is something of a Christ figure, recognized by the sign of the dove, or Holy Spirit, whilst Swann, even although his name promised more, is a John the Baptist, a precursor lost in the desert, for, when he is confronted with the sign of the dove at the last soirée at Mme de Saint-Euverte's, he can only think in terms of other peoples' works of art and of his own love life. Thus, works by Mantegna, Dürer, or the Greek sculptors, famous epic paintings of the Day of Judgement occur to Swann when he is confronted with a servant whose hair evokes an apocalyptic mixture of metaphors - "un paquet d'algues ... une nichée de colombes ... un bandeau de jacinthes ... une torsade de serpents" (C. S., p. 324). Of course, it is Swann's own Day of Judgement, although he does not realize it, his last chance to become an artist, inspired by Vinteuil's work, the Sonata with its "Merveilleux oiseau" like "un arc-en-ciel" (C. S., p. 352), the fascinating motif which, finally, Swann comes to regard solely as the 'anthem' of his love for Odette.

Already, however, Marcel seems closer to the dove than Swann, if we can believe Céleste, closer also to that East which is the true home of poets according to the young Proust. Marcel 'receives' the two women whilst still in bed in the morning, evoking the image of a Persian prince, which does not elude Céleste. "Mais ce n'est rien (his princely clothes) à côté de son immense majesté ... Ah! front qui a l'air si pur et qui caches tant de choses, joues amies et fraîches comme l'intérieur d'une amande" (S. G., p. 848). This description of Céleste's bears certain
resemblances to descriptions of Proust himself and also to Proust's mystic ideal of the Poet inspired by certain paintings of Gustave Moreau. A recent critic has used words very similar to Céleste's in regard to Jacques-Émile Blanche's portrait of Proust, "Marcel nous est représenté comme un jeune prince assyrien légèrement joufflu, le visage en amande, une orchidée à la boutonnière" (18). This comment would probably have delighted Proust almost as much as the portrait did. Perhaps, however, he would have preferred to have been called a Persian prince, not only in reference to the Arabian Nights, but also after the correspondance with a friend which they termed 'Lettres de Perse et ailleurs' - no doubt alluding to the famous satirical letters of Montesquieu. Proust may have cultivated an Oriental air, or he may have felt a kinship with the East because of his mother's Jewish background and "l'air un peu oriental" which both he and his brother possessed (19). But, most of all, the East was to Proust, because of his study of Moreau, the proper background for the poet - a background, by the way, which explains the ambiguities or mysteries which Céleste sensed behind Marcel's straightforward exterior:

Gustave Moreau a souvent, dans ses tableaux et ses aquarelles, essayé de peindre cette abstraction : le Poète. Dominant sur un cheval harnaché de pierreries ... la foule agenouillée où l'on reconnaît les diverses castes de l'Orient, tandis que lui n'appartient à aucune, enveloppé de blanches mousselines, la mandore au côté, respirant avec une gravité passionnée le parfum de la fleur mystique qu'il tient à la main, le visage empreint d'une douceur céleste, on se demande, à le bien regarder si ce poète n'est pas une femme. Peut-être Gustave Moreau a-t-il voulu


The poet, like Marcel, is aloof; on his horse, the poet dominated those around him just as Marcel frequents the upper regions at Balbec. The poet transcends the caste system - and Marcel, after the strict system of Combray, makes friends outside his own class. The poet, like Marcel, is 'too beautiful for a male' (C. S., p. 414), in French society, at least. He belongs to that world of ambiguities which only other artists, Elstir, Moreau, Scheherazade herself, even Marcel (and, of course, Proust), seem able to appreciate totally. All these artists, fictional or actual, find the perfect background for sexual or social ambiguities in myth or fairy tale. Like Marcel, the Poet loves flowers and their perfumes - he, like Heinrich von Ofterdingen, has found his 'mystic flower'. We don't know what particular flower this is, but one page at least in Proust's Essais et Articles describes 'the poet' savouring the perfume of the lilac with the same wish to understand which he feels regarding Moreau's paintings:

Ce peut être aussi sur l'incessant parfum que distille le lilas dans chacune de ses tourelles mauves que se penche le poète; il se retire un instant pour le mieux sentir tout à l'heure, le sent de nouveau, mais le lilas ne lui donne toujours que le même parfum sans lui dire plus. Et il a beau regarder le Jeune Homme et la Mort de Gustave Moreau, le jeune homme ne lui dira rien de plus.

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(21) Ibid, La Poésie ou les Lois Mystérieuses, p. 418.
Thus, in discussing 'the poet', we return full circle to the lilacs. And, indeed, a poem (a popular song, actually) about lilacs figures largely in the scenes in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu between Marcel and the two 'celestial' servants, Céleste and Marie, scenes which are based on incidents in Proust's life. Marcel puts down to stubbornness the fact that the two sisters will not acknowledge the merit of certain admirable but obscure poems, whilst enjoying a somewhat banal popular song Ici-bas tous les lilas meurent. He remarks that the sisters "étaient pourtant aussi douées qu'un poète, avec plus de modestie qu'ils n'en ont généralement" (S. G., p. 849). It seems that Marcel is a bit sceptical of the 'flowery' praise of the two sisters, treating it as flattery, not conceding that they might indeed be recognizing a fellow, but much greater, poet. In the description of the tearful farewell scene, Marcel suggests, for no obvious reason, that they will forget him; however, he does them the favour of comparing them to the lilacs, although the tone is generally amusing:

(Marie, du reste, faisait entendre le sanglot pressé d'un torrent; Céleste, plus molle, lui recommandait le calme; mais Marie ayant murmuré les seuls vers qu'elle connaît : Ici-bas tout les lilas meurent, Céleste ne put se retenir et une nappe de larmes s'épandit sur sa figure couleur de lilas; je pense, du reste, qu'elles m'oublièrent dès le soir même) (S. G., p. 1125).

However sceptical Marcel may be about the two sisters, they are only repeating, through the medium of the only poem they know, the message that all such flowers as the lilacs have for the poet. Nor was Proust's

(22) Albaret, Céleste : Monsieur Proust, p. 115. I am also indebted to Dr. Jones for access to the recording of an interview with Céleste Albaret.
pessimism about the real Céleste justified, for she does eventually, despite his prediction 'answer' some of the accusations and insinuations made about Proust in her immensely loyal book *Monsieur Proust* (23). Even if she were not the annunciatory angel that the Céleste in the novel sometimes seemed to be, she did at least witness his books arranged three by three like angels of his resurrection in a neighbourhood bookshop, a tribute, no doubt by the bookseller, who remembered the description of Bergotte's books in Proust's novel (24).

However, we jump ahead here in Proust's own life. The point at which Marcel enjoys a bit sceptically the adulation of Céleste and her sister still belongs to that part of his life when he can play the role of the uninvolved observer, the poet who is above the throng, enjoying the mystic flower, the avid reader who can see the Arabian Nights come alive in Balbec, the youngster who watches, amused, M. Nissim Bernard's adventures in the hotel basement whilst he carries on his 'pure' friendship with the two sisters in the upper regions of the same hotel. However, Marcel is soon to fall from the heights, to become involved himself in the hell of Gomorrah. Ironically, the indirect agent of this fall is M. Nissim Bernard, who gives his protection to Mlle Bloch, a lesbian, but also a relative of M. Bernard. Made aware of the existence of lesbianism at Balbec by the scandal in which Mlle Bloch is involved and of Albertine's possible involvement by certain remarks of Cottard,

(23) Ibid, p. 11
Marcel is shocked, but not really surprised, when a comment of Albertine's, like the fairy tale 'open sesame', opens up a whole new world of suspicions and jealousies to him. Albertine, to impress Marcel with her knowledge of music, claims to know Mlle Vinteuil well. Before this comment, Albertine seemed to Marcel a creature from a delightful Orient, her only real association with music arising through her likeness to the peri, or Persian fairy, "la Péri, la petite musicienne des dieux ... élévant devant elle une fleur sacrée" (25). Now, however, the band of young girls in flower seem far from mystical - their sensuality is becoming all too obvious to Marcel, a type of sensuality from which he wishes to save Albertine.

In the hope of cutting her off from the hothouse atmosphere of Balbec, with its strange passions and intrigues, Marcel brings Albertine back to Paris. "En réalité, en quittant Balbec, j'avais cru quitter Gomorrhe, en arracher Albertine; hélas! Gomorrhe était dispersée aux quatre coins du monde" (P., p. 23). With this comment, Marcel admits himself to be well and truly involved in the unsavoury Orient of Balbec. Whereas before the lilacs added an air of freshness, of acceptable sensuality, of bright colour to the 'Orient' Marcel enjoyed so much in fairy tales, in the section of the book concerned with his imprisonment of Albertine, the lilacs disappear. Moreover, Albertine, the 'human flower' loses her freshness, her appeal, and her colour. The dove which before Marcel

(or Proust) associated with mother-love is now the pigeon of a duller, more domesticated, love - yet Marcel still tries at times to fit Albertine into the old pattern presided over by the maternal dove, the pattern which always contains the fear that the bird will fly away, for, of course, a son cannot stay with his mother, nor a mother with her son, forever. The storm which Marcel used to associate with paternal wrath, becomes even more abstracted; it represents the turmoil of jealousy which accompanies a far from perfect love. And, of course, symbolically, the storm theme keeps the idea of Albertine's possible lesbianism always present in the novel.

Even the old fairy tales take on sinister meanings. At one point, Marcel, perhaps partly in the spirit of Proust's essay on Moreau's womanly poet, likens himself to Scheherazade. But, whereas in Jean Santeuil it is the sensual aspect of Scheherazade that Proust emphasizes, in this part of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu it is her imprisonment and fear of imminent death with which Marcel sympathizes. Indeed, by an ironic twist, he feels that he is hastening his own death through his ingenuity:

Une fois Albertine sortie, je sentis quelle fatigue était pour moi cette présence perpétuelle, insatiable de mouvement et de vie qui ... me forçait - pour trouver des prétextes qui justifiassent de ne pas l'accompagner, sans pourtant paraître trop malade, et d'autre part pour la faire accompagner - à déployer chaque jour plus d'ingéniosité que Shéhérazade. Malheureusement si, par une même ingéniosité, la conteuse persane retardait sa mort, je hâtais la mienne (P., p. 131).
Marcel has been so influenced by the story of Scheherazade that he feels that all Oriental poet-princesses, such as a cousin of Saint-Loup's, ought to have "un esprit de princesse d'Orient recluse dans un palais des Mille et une Nuits" (C. G., p. 107). When this cousin proves a very modern disappointment, Marcel does not give up the idea. Charlus' tale of a man "qui croyait tenir dans une bouteille la princesse de la Chine" (C. G., p. 291) reminds Marcel of himself:

The comparison between Albertine and a princess is used most ironically by, as usual, Françoise, who "recommanda ironiquement aux autres domestiques de ne pas "éveiller la Princesse" " (P., p. 360). But, of course, Marcel's dilemma over keeping Albertine bottled up, yet still not knowing her, is very real to him. In fact, his reaction when he first met Albertine should have warned him; here, too, he referred to fairy tale and to magic. But the magic from which he expected so much turns against him as he grows older. "Au moment où notre nom résonne dans la bouche du présentateur, surtout si celui-ci l'entoure comme fit Elstir de commentaires élogieux - ce moment sacramental, analogue à celui où, dans une féeerie, le génie ordonne à une personne d'en être
soudain une autre - celle que nous avons désiré d'approcher s'évanouit" (J. F., p. 372). If such a metamorphosis occurs on exchange of names, how much more must occur after physical possession; indeed, Proust talks of "la métamorphose qui suit la nuit de noces" (C. G., p. 356).

We will notice more and more changes in Albertine as Marcel becomes more like Bluebeard, restraining his love, denying her the one door she wants to open, even, indirectly killing her, parallels which Michel Butor points out in his article, *Les Sept Femmes de Gilbert le Mauvais*. Proust mentions in a letter to Lauris at one point that he understands Bluebeard, who was a man who loved young (and presumably curious) girls (26). Yet, after Albertine's death, there is a case for regarding Marcel himself as the young wife, for he continues to try to open the door on to the skeletons of Albertine's past.

Already, Albertine in Marcel's mind is a fairy tale creature, a peri, an enchanting captive, part flower, part bird. But, even the flower and dove imagery (especially the latter) mark the 'fairy tale gone wrong', the ugly or unhappy metamorphoses in Albertine because of her captivity. Though he is proud to have plucked one of the most beautiful human flowers to be found at Balbec, he finds that, once transplanted to Paris, Albertine proves "une bien pauvre rose" (C. G., p. 352). In general, Marcel calls the band of young girls "ces créatures ailées et tourbillonnantes" (C. G., p. 354). However, the type of birds they evoke are the wild, free sea birds, not the commonplace domestic pigeon

which Albertine will come to resemble. At first, however, Albertine's association with the pigeon, dressed in its sensual lilac colours, seems a promise of happiness in young love, although one adjective will betray Marcel's unease:

Mais, plus grasses, les mains d'Albertine cédaient un instant, puis résistaient à la pression de la main qui les serrait, donnant une sensation toute particulière. La pression de la main d'Albertine avait une douceur sensuelle qui était comme en harmonie avec la coloration rose, légèrement mauve, de sa peau. Cette pression semblait vous faire pénétrer dans la jeune fille, dans la profondeur de ses sens, comme la sonorité de son rire, indécent à la façon d'un roucoulement ou de certains cris. Elle était de ces femmes à qui c'est un si grand plaisir de serrer la main qu'on est reconnaissant à la civilisation d'avoir fait du shake-hand un acte permis entre jeunes gens et jeunes filles qui s'abordent (J. F.*, p. 919).

Here, the pink and mauve lilac colours, with the 'permissible' pink most obvious, emphasize Albertine's sensuality in one of the rare descriptions where Proust actually uses tactile details. In the context of Balbec, mauve also is the colour of the autumn sea and pink that of seaside flowers (S. G.*, p. 733). The 'cooing' of Albertine's laugh evokes the dove at its most loving. The only ominous touch is the fact that Marcel finds Albertine's laugh as indecent as cooing or as 'certain cries' - obviously the same cries as "les cris intermittents et réguliers qu'avait l'habitude de pousser sa maîtresse (Saint-Loup's) aux instants de volupté" (C. G., p. 123). Before the fateful confession that links Albertine with Gomorrah Marcel describes her thus:

En effet, croisant sur sa jupe de crêpe de chine gris, sa jaquette de cheviotte grise laissait croire qu'Albertine était tout en gris. Mais me faisant signe de l'aider, parce que ses
manches bouffantes avaient besoin d'être aplaties ou relevées pour entrer ou retirer sa jaquette, elle ôta celle-ci, et comme ces manches étaient d'un écossais très doux, rose, bleu pâle, verdâtre, gorge-de-pigeon, ce fut comme si dans un ciel gris s'était formé un arc-en-ciel. Et elle se demandait si cela allait plaire à M. de Charlus. "Ah! s'écria celui-ci ravi, voilà un rayon, un prisme de couleur!"


Once again we find versions of the lilac (in colour, anyway), dove, storm imagery—here, in terms of Albertine, very positive indeed. The grayness which will vanquish her as a prisoner, here is vanquished by the lilac colours—the pink (as in early lilacs) and green—of her sleeves. The sleeves themselves, voluminous and dove-coloured, remind us of wings, a most important comparison in terms of the next 'pigeon' passage we will discuss, for Marcel comes to despise Albertine once she 'loses her wings'. Perhaps an even happier omen, in terms of the dove (or pigeon)/storm imagery occurs in the reference to the rainbow, Biblical symbol of forgiveness. Even in Proust's private symbolism, a grey sky is relieved by a sudden revelation of the colours of the rainbow, is a most positive symbol. Only one small point is disturbing. Charlus' taste in clothes is impeccable, but his taste in love affairs is most suspect. His approval of Albertine evokes a parallel between Swann and Odette and Marcel and Albertine, in both of which relationships he may have played very ambiguous roles. Swann, too, started his affair with a certain amount of hope, even with the half-expectation of rejuvenation. Yet, he finishes by using Charlus as a chaperone for Odette, before—and perhaps even after—his marriage, for, the first
time that Marcel sees Charlus is when he is keeping Odette company while her husband is on a journey away from Combray. Odette, also, likes "ces taffetas gorge-de-pigeon" in "rose" and "lilas" (J. F., p. 619). Charlus may have none of the complicity with Albertine which he had with Odette, but, nonetheless, Swann and Marcel seem to share so many experiences that the appearance of an approving Charlus in Marcel's affair, too, seems like just another parallel between the failed and the finally successful artist apprentice.

In any case, another, very similar, passage shows in almost the same imagery, how far the affair between Marcel and Albertine has deteriorated:

En enfermant Albertine, j'avais du même coup rendu à l'univers toutes ces ailes chatoyantes qui bruissent dans les promenades, dans les bals, dans les théâtres, et qui redevenaient tentatrices pour moi, parce que, elle, ne pouvait plus succomber à leur tentation. Elles faisaient la beauté du monde. Elles avaient fait jadis celle d'Albertine. C'est parce que je l'avais vue comme un oiseau mystérieux, puis comme une grande actrice de la plage, désirée, obtenue peut-être, que je l'avais trouvée merveilleuse. Une fois captif chez moi l'oiseau que j'avais vu un soir marcher à pas comptés sur la digue, entouré de la congrégation des autres jeunes filles pareilles à des mouettes venues on ne sait d'où, Albertine avait perdu toutes ses couleurs, avec toutes les chances qu'avaient les autres de l'avoir à eux. Elle avait peu à peu perdu sa beauté. Il fallait des promenades comme celles-là, où je l'imaginais, sans moi, accostée par telle femme ou tel jeune homme, pour que je la revisse dans la splendeur de la plage, bien que ma jalousie fût sur un autre plan que le déclin des plaisirs de mon imagination. Mais, malgré ces brusques sursauts ou, désirée par d'autres, elle me redevenait belle, je pouvais très bien diviser son séjour chez moi en deux périodes : la première où elle était encore, quoique moins chaque jour, la chatoyante actrice de la plage; la seconde où, devenue la grise prisonnière, réduite à son terne elle-même, il lui fallait ces éclairs où je me ressouvenais du passé pour lui rendre des couleurs (P., p. 173).
Albertine is no longer a wild sea-bird. Her wings and her freedom no longer belong to her. Marcel lets her use them occasionally to revive his jealousy and interest:

Or ce genre d'anxiété a une grande affinité pour les corps. Il leur ajoute une qualité qui passe la beauté même ... À ces êtres-là, à ces êtres de fuite, leur nature, notre inquiétude attachent des ailes. Et même auprès de nous, leur regard semble nous dire qu'ils vont s'envoler ... Et bien entendu si nous disons : êtres de fuite, c'est également vrai des êtres en prison, des femmes captives (P., p. 93).

However, this uncertainty that 'the bird might fly' is not always a tantalizing feeling, but a very uncomfortable one. In fact, a study of the bird imagery in terms of Marcel's fear of being rejected or deserted leads us, at the same time, back to the pattern of love set by Marcel's mother and forward to bird and colour imagery associated with Albertine's lesbianism. We will return to the original passage describing Albertine as a wingless, colourless, prisoner after we have explored the bird imagery as it is also important in terms of colour and storm imagery (note that Marcel at this point courts the 'storm' of jealousy to revive his love).

Proust first associated the dove, the symbol of love, with maternal love, as in A mon Ami, Willie Heath; in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, we have seen a similar association of ideas. Now that Marcel links Albertine with the pigeon (if not the dove), she is supposed to fulfil the role Marcel's mother once performed. ('Role', here, is a particularly
apt word, for Marcel keeps on insisting on the idea of Albertine's being an actress, and, to a fatal degree, she tries to live up to other people's expectations of her). The pattern of the gradual withdrawal of love which is reasonable in the case of a mother trying to make her child more independent is now what Marcel expects in a mistress. In his love affair with Albertine, Marcel cannot help reliving the 'dramas' associated with his mother - the incident of the goodnight kiss, her 'betrayal' of him when she decides to stay in the garden with Swann. At first, Albertine, like Marcel's mother, brings him the kiss of peace:

Et pourtant, à ce désir honorant d'un "ex-voto" la jeunesse, aux souvenirs aussi de Balbec, se mêlait dans le besoin que j'avais de garder ainsi tous les soirs Albertine auprès de moi, quelque chose qui avait été étranger jusqu'ici à ma vie, au moins amoureuse, s'il n'était pas entièrement nouveau dans ma vie. C'était un pouvoir d'apaisement tel que je n'en avais pas éprouvé de pareil depuis les soirs lointains de Combray où ma mère penchée sur mon lit venait m'apporter le repos dans un baiser*. Certes, j'eusse été bien étonné dans ce temps-là si l'on m'avait dit que je n'étais pas entièrement bon et surtout que je chercherais jamais à priver quelqu'un d'un plaisir. Je me connaissais sans doute bien mal alors, car mon plaisir d'avoir Albertine à demeure chez moi était beaucoup moins un plaisir positif que celui d'avoir retiré du monde où chacun pouvait la goûter à son tour, la jeune fille en fleurs (P., pp. 76, 77).

Soon Marcel begins to lose this peace as Albertine escapes from him more and more. "Ce n'était plus l'apaisement du baiser de ma mère à Combray que j'éprouvais auprès d'Albertine, ces soirs-là, mais, au contraire l'angoisse de ceux où ma mère me disait à peine bonsoir, ou même ne montait pas dans ma chambre, soit qu'elle fût fâchée contre moi ou retenue par des invités" (P., p. 111). His mother's betrayal

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takes place in the garden whose lilacs and summer storms Marcel remembers so well, and the main 'rival' is Swann. If Marcel 'loses' his mother to Swann, ironically he fears losing Albertine to lesbianism, which he associates with the image of the swan (Swann would of necessity remind Proust of the English bird, for, as we have seen, he makes the definite point that Swann's name is of English origin).

Albertine's leg, at one point reminds Marcel of the curve of a swan's neck, a curve similar to that of the entwined limbs of two nude females in two of Elstir's paintings. He keeps Albertine from seeing these pictures because he finds them too suggestive:

Me souvenant de ce qu'elle (Albertine) était sur mon lit, je croyais voir sa cuisse recourbée, je la voyais, c'était un col de cygne, il cherchait la bouche de l'autre jeune fille. Alors je ne voyais même plus une cuisse, mais le col hardi d'un cygne, comme celui qui dans une étude frémissante cherche la bouche d'une Léda qu'on voit dans toute la palpitation spécifique du plaisir féminin (F., p. 528).

Yet, when the bird does fly away, when Albertine leaves him, Marcel tries to lure her back with the promise of a boat called 'le Cygne' (F., p. 455), a promise which seems to offer her a certain amount of sexual freedom.

Although so different from the maternal or rather dull and domestic dove, the swan, too, has been associated with the lilacs, in an earlier work of Proust's, which talks of "les frêles lilas ... inclinant gracieusement leur tête violette ou blanche de cygne" (27).

(27) Proust: Essais et Articles, Voici la Semaine, p. 414. Here we might add a further level of interpretation to the group of symbols surrounding Albertine, one that is now commonly accepted amongst Proust critics. Albertine in Proust's own life corresponded to his chauffeur, Agostinelli, who chased girls on night-time excursions in Paris, whom Proust tried to keep with him, but who finally, literally, flew away, escaped (with Proust's blessing, however, and financial aid) to the South of France where he joined a flying school. He signed on as 'Swann', and he died (Albertine's 'Sapphic death') when his plane plunged into the sea.
But, the main difference between the dove and the swan is that the dove returns every night to the ark; Proust's mother returns to him when he is ill, as does Marcel's mother when her son suffers from nerves. Albertine, once she flies is not like the bird in the poem Marcel quotes - "Hélas, l'oiseau qui fuit ce qu'il croit l'esclavage, /Le plus souvent la nuit/ D'un vol désespéré revient battre au vitrage" (F., p. 452). She does not return, realizing all the fears that Marcel felt first about his mother. Marcel hears Albertine opening the window, fears she is going to leave, and wait in the corridor as he did in the incident of the good night kiss. "Dans une agitation comme je n'en avais peut-être pas eue depuis le soir de Combray où Swann avait dîné à la maison, je marchai toute la nuit dans le couloir" (P., p. 402). In the morning, Françoise (it would be Françoise) tells him that Albertine has left, and Marcel, perhaps unconsciously, resorts to the illness that always brought his mother running back - "Je sentis se soulever en moi comme dans un coup de vent mille inquiétudes que je ne savais pas tenir en suspens dans ma poitrine. Le tumulte y était si grand que j'étais à bout de souffle comme dans une tempête" (P., p. 403). Of course, symbolically, Marcel is in the middle of a storm - a theme we will pick up again later. Here, even the attack of asthma does not bring Albertine back.

No wonder Albertine flees her captivity, for, as we have seen, she not only loses her 'wings', her freedom, but also 'all her colours', that is, the sensuality that Marcel associates with the lilac hues of pink.
and mauve. Indeed, all the colours that seem left to Albertine, the 'grey prisoner' are those linked with lesbianism and with the storm, rather than, as with the pigeon-breast colours, with the rainbow. Actually, since the phrase 'gorge-de-pigeon' in French suggests the shimmering quality of the pigeon's breast, or throat, we are faced with another symbol of ambiguity - colours which change according to the light or the motion of the bird. In comparison to "la dame en rose" (C. S., p. 79), who is perpetually seeking out men, Albertine, the grey prisoner, seeks other pleasures with "une blanchisseuse" (F., p. 528), with swan-white limbs, or, even more sinister, with "la dame en gris" (F., p. 515), a lesbian who, Marcel suspects, is Léa (F., p. 491). As usual, all Proust's images and characters are related; Gilberte, who was compared to a white lilac, missed Marcel when she walked out into the shadows of the Champs-Élysées with Léa. Even Mlle Vinteuil, who is behind the 'open sesame' to Gomorrah, is compared to a white flower (the hawthorn) and to a bird in her affair with her girl friend. Whether Albertine's lesbianism is real or exists in Marcel's imagination, she does drift apart from him, as the colour symbolism, especially in terms of the storm imagery, shows. Instead of wearing a dress with colours which make it seem "comme si dans un ciel gris s'était formé un arc-en-ciel" (S. G., p. 1055), Albertine dresses sombrely, so that Marcel says "nous remarquons un air d'ennui, de nostalgie, de tristesse pendant que nous parlons, nous remarquons comme un ciel noir les robes négligées qu'elle met quand elle est avec nous,
gardant pour les autres celles avec lesquelles, au commencement, elle nous flattait" (P., p. 103).

At this point, Marcel is like a person in the middle of a storm. We have already seen that Albertine's leaving provokes an attack of the same type of breathlessness Marcel feels in a storm. However, the most prevalent 'storm' is that of jealousy, an electrical storm, the retributive fire from heaven, so that, even after Albertine dies Marcel is still consumed by its flames "Par instants la communication était interrompue entre mon coeur et ma mémoire ... mais cent fois par heure le courant interrompu était rétabli et mon coeur était brûlé sans pitié par un feu d'enfer" (F., p. 528). For, if one is jealous, "la pluie imprévisible de soufre et de poix tombe après les moments les plus riants" (P., p. 80).

However, before we pity or applaud this purgatory on earth, this tempering of the poetic blade, we must remember that Marcel felt he needed "ces éclairs" (P., p. 173) of jealousy to revive his love for Albertine. Moreover, like the cosseted young Proust, Marcel really often quite enjoyed the spectacle of a storm from the safe vantage-point of a house, or the storms of love from the supposedly safe vantage-point of an invalid (like his Aunt Léonie) who must not be disturbed - a caution followed by his mother, but not by Albertine. Perhaps even a certain dullness in his life with Albertine enamours Marcel of this symbolic change of skies, stormy to sunny and back again, as he seems
to say in a passage which evokes the childhood Combray garden:

Or si, au cours de cet ouvrage, j'ai eu et j'aurai bien des occasions de montrer comment la jalousie redouble l'amour, c'est au point de vue de l'amant que je me suis placé ... Dissipe-t-elle (the mistress), au contraire, d'un mot adroit, de tendres caresses, les soupçons qui le torturaient bien qu'il s'y prétendît indifférent, sans doute l'amant n'éprouve pas cet accroissement désespéré de l'amour où le hausse la jalousie, mais cessant brusquement de souffrir, heureux, attendri, détendu comme on l'est après un orage quand la pluie est tombée et qu'à peine sent-on encore sous les grands marronniers s'égoutter à longs intervalles les gouttes suspendues que déjà le soleil repaît colore, il ne sait comment exprimer sa reconnaissance à celle qui l'a guéri (P., p. 192).

But, for a great deal of the time, Marcel, like the other 'Oriental prince' in his family, Aunt Léonie, enjoys a passive life, wrapped up in himself, in which most of the storms occur outside his haven:

Ma paresse elle-même, sous les formes nouvelles qu'elle revêtait, comment l'eusse-je reconnue? Tantôt, par des jours irrémédiablement mauvais, disait-on, rien que la résidence dans la maison située au milieu d'une pluie égale et continue, avait la glissante douceur, le silence calmant, tout l'intérêt d'une navigation; une autre fois, par un jour clair, rester immobile dans mon lit, c'était laisser tourner les ombres autour de moi comme d'un tronc d'arbre. D'autres fois encore ... blanchissant à peine le ciel sombre de leurs giboulées incertaines que fondait et dispersait le vent tiède, j'avais discerné une de ces journées tempétueuses, désordonnées et douces, où les toits, mouillés d'une ondée intermittente que sèche un souffle ou un rayon, laissent glisser en roulant une goutte de pluie et, en attendant que le vent recommence à tourner, lissent au soleil momentané qui les irise leurs ardoises gorge-de-pigeon; une de ces journées remplies par tant de changements de temps, d'incidents aériens, d'orages, que le paresseux ne croit pas les avoir perdues parce qu'il n'est intéressé à l'activité qu'à défaut de lui l'atmosphère, agissant en quelque sorte à sa place, a déployée (P., p. 82).

We have quoted the whole passage to show how easily the images of storm and pigeon cling together, evoking, even here, some of Marcel's childhood sense of security. Actually, the whole paragraph is reminiscent
of the theme of *Amon Ami Willie Heath*, with its central image of the ark. However, Marcel is here really only realizing a childhood ambition which he expressed in his contemplation of the water-lilies; that he could drift easily through life once he is an adult - "Remontant paresseusement de jour en jour comme sur une barque" (P., p. 84), Marcel is in danger of falling in love with his captivity.

This alternation of wild emotional storms and sloth is exactly what Marcel must overcome in order to work. The image of the poet as the pelican (or pigeon) giving its life-blood is obscured by two other bird images - that of the cozy self-contained pigeon which we have just quoted, and that of jealousy, like an eagle, devouring Marcel's heart. In two ruby rings engraved with an eagle, Marcel thinks he has found evidence of Albertine's infidelity. "Atterré, les deux bagues à la main, je regardais cet aigle impitoyable dont le bec me tenaillait le coeur" (F., p. 464).

The antidote which Marcel needs is that of a spiritual bird, a bird which will remind him of his artistic vocation. And these are just what he finds in Vinteuil's music - the gentle dove to remind him of the worth of art, and the cock to awaken him, as it does all heroes in fairy tales, from enchantment, in Marcel's case, the spell of love. "Aimer est un mauvais sort comme ceux qu'il y a dans les contes, contre quoi on ne peut rien jusqu'à ce que l'enchantement ait cessé" (T. R., p. 706).
Ce qui était devant moi (the septet) me faisait éprouver autant de joie qu'aurait fait la Sonate si je ne l'avais pas connue; par conséquent, en étant aussi beau, était autre. Tandis que la Sonate s'ouvrait sur une aube liliale et champêtre, divisant sa candeur légère mais pour se suspendre à l'embranchement léger et pourtant consistant d'un berceau rustique de chèvrefeuilles sur des géraniums blancs, c'était sur des surfaces unies et planes comme celles de la mer que, par un matin d'orage, commençait, au milieu d'un aigre silence, dans un vide infini, l'oeuvre nouvelle...

...Et un chant perçait déjà l'air, chant de sept notes, mais le... plus différent de tout ce que j'eusse jamais imaginé, à la fois ineffable et criard, non plus roucoulement de colombe comme dans la Sonate, mais déchirant l'air, aussi vif que la nuance écarlate dans laquelle le début était noyé, quelque chose comme un mystique chant du coq, un appel, ineffable mais suraigu, de l'éternel matin. L'atmosphère froide, lavée de pluie, électrique - d'une qualité si différente, à des pressions tout autres, dans un monde si éloigné de celui, virginal et meublé de végétaux, de la Sonate (P., p. 250).

The dove here, then, is much the same as the dove of innocence which presided over Marcel's childhood. It is also the peaceful dove to which Marcel is compared, the symbol of the poet who has not yet been through the storm, who lives above the sometimes ugly but always interesting dramas of the 'underworld' of the emotions. The cock, however, is the voice of Vinteuil's music after its composer has gone through the storm. Marcel can find double inspiration in the 'call' of the cock, which wakes him from his love-induced stupor, his night-like life, because the suffering that Vinteuil went through, like his own, was caused by Mlle Vinteuil and her lesbianism. In Vinteuil's case, as we have already mentioned, the rewards of suffering are two-fold; it tempers his work, the unpublished part of which is finished by Mlle Vinteuil's friend.
There is more than enough in this encounter with Vinteuil's Septet to reconvince Marcel of the worth of art and to make him dissatisfied with the prison he has created around himself and Albertine, as the following passage, using many of the symbols of the previous description shows:

Tout d'un coup nous entendîmes la cadence régulière d'un appel plaintif. C'étaient les pigeons qui commençaient à roucouler. "Cela prouve qu'il fait déjà jour", dit Albertine; et le sourcil presque froncé, comme si elle manquait en vivant chez moi les plaisirs de la belle saison : "Le printemps est commencé pour que les pigeons soient revenus". La ressemblance entre leur roucoulement et le chant du coq était aussi profonde et aussi obscure que, dans le septuor de Vinteuil, la ressemblance entre le thème de l'adagio ... et le dernier morceau ... Tel, ce mélancolique morceau exécuté par les pigeons était une sorte de chant du coq en mineur, qui ne s'élevait pas vers le ciel, ne montait pas verticalement, mais, régulier comme le braiment d'un âne, enveloppé de douceur, allait d'un pigeon à l'autre sur une même ligne horizontale, et jamais ne se redressait, ne changeait sa plainte latérale en ce joyeux appel qu'avaient poussé tant de fois l'allegro de l'introduction et le finale. Je sais que je prononçai alors le mot "mort" comme si Albertine allait mourir ... Quand je vis que d'elle-même elle ne m'embrassait pas ... que ce n'était qu'à partir du baiser que commenceraient les minutes calmantes et véritables, je lui dis : "Bonsoir, il est trop tard", parce que cela ferait qu'elle m'embrasserait, et nous continueraient ensuite. Mais après m'avoir dit : "Bonsoir, tâchez de bien dormir", exactement comme les deux premières fois, elle se contenta d'un baiser sur la joue. Cette fois je n'osais pas la rappeler. Mais mon cœur battait si fort que je ne pus me recoucher. Comme un oiseau qui va d'une extrémité de sa cage à l'autre, sans arrêter je passais de l'inquiétude qu'Albertine pût partir à un calme relatif (P., pp. 400, 401).

This passage, with its explicit reference to Vinteuil's works, shows us how much Marcel resents feeling tied to the earth along with the clumsy melancholy pigeons who now symbolize love to him. When he noticed flowers fading, Marcel realized that Albertine would grow old and ugly; here he realizes that she will die. (Or is this thought wishful thinking

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on his part?) In any case, the earthbound pigeons, the opposite of
the soaring works of the intellect, point out that love leads to death,
a work of art to an after-life of some sort. Not even the pleasures of
love can recompense Marcel for his loss of spiritual heights; if he
used to think Albertine's laughter "indécent à la façon d'un roucoulement
ou de certains cris" (J. F., p. 919), now he can see that he has not
even got this compensation for giving up the transcendent joy of the
artist, for Albertine, as unhappy as Marcel, has ceased to laugh. We
can see here once again, Marcel's old fear from the days of his childhood
that the denial of a kiss means the withdrawal of all love, perhaps
even the departure of the loved one or the banishment of the lover.
This expectation even seems to become self-fulfilling, for Marcel
involves Albertine in so many stormy scenes that she does finally
leave him. Much later, when he divulges that he is keeping yet another
young girl prisoner in Paris, Marcel says "Car un amour a beau
s'oublier, il peut déterminer la forme de l'amour qui le suivra" (F., p. 677).
Little does he realize, however, that the love to which he ought to
be referring, the one that truly set the pattern, was his love for
his mother. This comment, by the way, is made in reply to Gilberte,
for, now that he is no longer in love with her, Marcel feels free to
visit her. Not only has his love for Gilberte, his love for Albertine,
and Albertine herself, died, but Marcel also seems to have lost his
special feeling for the lilacs in Swann's park. They now represent
only a pleasant view from a guest room. It is the church spire, pointing
the way upwards, which really interests Marcel (T. R., pp. 697, 8).
Lacking other commitments, Marcel is now free to answer the joyous appeal of Vinteuil's septet.

Albertine's death marks Marcel's revival and the resurrection of Art in his life, a personal Renaissance after a personal Dark Ages, or dark night of the soul. The 'winter day' of his love, "le soir prématuré de ma vie ... aussi brève qu'un jour d'hiver" (F., p. 112) gives way to springtime and sunshine. Marcel is now free to fulfil an old ambition, to visit Venice, which is, for him, the City of Spring - the city above all which loves spring flowers, and the city in which the Arts reflowered after the Dark Ages. In the context of his trip, the flower and bird imagery take on a new life. Marcel associates most particularly with Venice the lily (the flower of Christ's resurrection) (C. S., p. 387) and the anemone (that of Adonis' death and rebirth) (C.S., p.394). The young girls of Venice remind him that it is their youth that "f. - dminic cueillir, si je voulais vraiment moissonner la jeunesse et la fleur de l'année!" (F., p. 628). In fact this phrase must remind us of the best known of Renaissance poems, Ronsard's Mignonne, allons voir, as we shall see in greater detail in the rose chapter. The birds of Venice are even more symbolic, for these are the phoenixes which decorate its buildings, and which, like Marcel are supposed to be able to rise again from the ashes of the fire which consumed them - "les oiseaux orientaux qui signifient alternativement la mort et la vie" (P., p. 394).
Indeed, these 'Oriental' birds seem to signify not only the rebirth of Marcel, but also of his childhood conception of the Orient based on the Arabian Nights. Venice retains all the charm of the East. "Ma gondole suivait les petits canaux; comme la main mystérieuse d'un génie qui m'aurait conduit dans les détours de cette ville d'Orient" (F., p. 627). Only occasionally will something remind him of darker aspects of the East, of his own 'thousand and one nights' with Albertine - "Parfois au crépuscule...je sentais que l'Albertine d'autrefois, invisible à moi-même, était pourtant enfermée au fond de moi comme aux "plombs" d'une Venise intérieure, dont parfois un incident faisait glisser le couvercle" (F., p. 639). "Et ces mots [that remind him of Albertine]...furent jouer comme un Sésame les gonds du cachot" (F., p. 641). The charm and dream-like quality of his 'magical' night-time walks and the sight of the golden angel of Saint Mark glistening in the sun every morning, an angel of the resurrection rather than an angel of warning, do much to heal the wounds of that other Orient of Gomorrah.

Vinteuil's septet and Venice have both urged Marcel towards Art through their symbols of eternal joy (the cock crow theme) and of resurrection (the phoenix, the Renaissance, the Golden Angel). However, like Swann, Marcel ceases to search for their significance at the first emotional blow, here the departure of his mother. He still cannot work, so, the novel starts to place before him images of that other Orient, the Orient of Sodom and Gomorrah. Dedicated to love (sinful love according to the Bible) this Orient was doomed to destruction. Thus, images of fires destroying brothels and wars destroying the old aristocratic
hierarchy seem to urge Marcel, not just towards Art, but away from Love and social snobbishness. Marcel, however, has much more sympathy right from the beginning, however bizarre, for the Orient of Sodom. His revived childhood delight in the fairy tale world of the Arabian Nights furnishes the ideal background, part comic, part sinister, part foreign, for the homosexual sub-culture of Paris which he observes in his evening walks. Thus, although the lilacs never really play a significant role henceforth in the novel, the Orient they introduced lives on, with human characters playing the strange fairy tale roles. Marcel has a great advantage over the people he watches; he has escaped the enchantment of love, Vinteuil's music and the aesthetic atmosphere of Venice can, if he will, lead them show him the vertical perspective of the poet. Thus, whilst he can see, like Scheherazade, life being perpetuated by art, the comic viewpoint, M. de Charlus, still trapped, literally enchained, by his love-life, can only see the tragedy of things ending - the old aristocracy being superceded by the nouveaux riches, Paris being destroyed by bombs, his own talents being squandered on nocturnal adventures based on obsession. Charlus'is still the Orient of the Bible, based on the story of the retributive fire from heaven, gaining life not just from a sense of guilt, but also from the actual bombardment of wartime Paris.

Thus, the wartime encounter between Marcel and Charlus is particularly rich in images of the East. Following "un dédale de rues obscures" in amongst a crowd of soldiers in foreign costumes "des Africains en
jupe-culotte rouge, des Hindous enturbannés de blanc", Marcel easily imagines Paris to be "toute une imaginaire cité exotique, dans un Orient à la fois minitieusement exact en ce qui concernait les costumes et la couleur des visages" (T. R., p. 763). The colour of Charlus' face is particularly startling, for it is the lilac colour, mauve.

"un homme grand et gros, en feutre mou, en longue houppelande et sur la figure mauve duquel j'hésitai si je devais mettre le nom d'un acteur ou d'un peintre également connus d'innombrables scandales sodomistes". Turbans and the colour mauve can only recall Ninette Bailey's comment on the colours of love in the incident of the goodnight kiss. It warrants quoting here, as the incident of M. de Charlus and his search for "un délicieux bourreau" (T. R., p. 776) holds strong parallels with Marcel's own 'drama'. "A la figure du père" says Ninette Bailey, "figure par elle-même symbolique du châtiment, Proust prend soin d'ajouter - comme un emblème des deux faces de la sensualité, la première heureuse et avouable, l'autre défendue et criminelle - les deux couleurs du rose et du violet" (28). The need which Marcel felt to be chastised is perhaps behind the pleasure Charlus feels when he is chained and beaten in Jupien's male brothel. Here, however, he becomes "l'Homme enchaîné (T. R., p. 821), that is, literally and figuratively enchained by his erotic fantasies. Marcel admits some heroism to Charlus' role when he likens him to "Prométhée sur son rocher" (T. R., p. 815). And there is no doubt that Charlus believes that he and

(28) Bailey, Ninette: *Symbolisme et Composition dans l'Oeuvre de Proust*, p. 255.
others like him are responsible for bringing fire down from heaven, but as a punishment rather than a gift. "Si je pense que nous pouvons avoir demain le sort des villes du Vésuve, celles-ci sentaient qu'elles étaient menacées du sort des villes maudites de la Bible. On a retrouvé sur les murs d'une maison de Pompéi cette inscription révélatrice : Sodoma, Gomora" (T. R., p. 807). Marcel adds "Je ne sais si ce fut ce nom de Sodome et les idées qu'il éveilla en lui, ou celle du bombardement, qui firent que M. de Charlus leva un instant les yeux au ciel". And, as though to prove Charlus right, the male brothel he frequents is later hit by a bomb. Saint-Loup also regards the war as an apocalyptic event. He sees the aviators as "Walkyrie" (T. R., p. 759). Yet, although Saint-Loup does die a hero's death, he also loses his croix de guerre in Jupien's brothel.

It is details like this that determine Marcel's judgement of the scenes surrounding the brothel as something definitely out of the Arabian Nights, and perhaps even, especially taking into consideration Jupien's sense of humour, from one of the more amusing tales. "Ce ne fut pas l'Orient de Decamps ni même de Delacroix qui commença de hanter mon imagination quand le baron m'eut quitté, mais le viel Orient de ces Mille et Une Nuits que j'avais tant aimées, et me perdant peu à peu dans le lacsis de ces rues noires, je pensais au calife Haroun Al Raschid en quête d'aventures dans les quartiers perdus de Bagdad" (T. R., p. 809). And later, at the brothel, he comments:
"En attendant, dis-je à Jupien, cette maison est tout autre chose, plus qu'une maison de fous ... c'est un vrai pandemonium (sic). J'avais cru comme le calife des Mille et Une Nuits arriver à point au secours d'un homme qu'on frappait, et c'est un autre conte des Mille et Une Nuits que j'ai vu réalisé devant moi, celui où une femme, transformée en chienne, se fait frapper volontairement pour retrouver sa forme première. Jupien paraissait fort troublé par mes paroles, car il comprenait que j'avais vu frapper le baron. Il resta un moment silencieux ... puis tout d'un coup, avec le joli esprit qui m'avait si souvent frappé ... "Vous parlez de bien des contes des Mille et Une Nuits, me dit-il. Mais j'en connais un qui n'est pas sans rapport avec le titre d'un livre que je crois avoir aperçu chez le baron (il faisait allusion à une traduction de Séasme et les Lys de Ruskin que j'avais envoyée à M. de Charlus). Si jamais vous étiez curieux, un soir, de voir si je suis venu, qu'on peut entrer, cela veut dire que je suis venu, qu'on peut entrer; c'est mon Séasme à moi. Je dis seulement Séasme. Car pour les Lys, si c'est eux que vous voulez, je vous conseille d'aller les chercher ailleurs" (T. R., pp. 832-3).

With lending the baron books (on Charlus' side, at least, an excuse to get to know someone), and taking over the role of caliph of Bagdad which Charlus previously assigned to himself (S. G., p. 610), we can see that Marcel may not be as uninvolved with this Orient as he claims. However, he still has the objectivity which enables him to view it with humour and with his childhood fascination. Thus, Marcel seems to have recaptured his childhood Orient. However, there is a difference, for Marcel now knows its more sinister aspects, whereas before, he was made uneasy by certain guilt feelings which he could not always quite understand. Thus, behind the Combray doves and lilacs linked with his love for his mother lurked the image of the punishing storm, symbol of parental wrath, and the picture of his father as an executioner. (Perhaps Marcel is so affected by his father's refusal to punish him because he
is hurt that his father will not recognize him as a rival, as per Golo, and quite a successful one, for his mother's love.) Even behind the 'acceptable' face of love presented by the lilacs in their pink colouring lie various ambiguous images and the history of a family quarrel. The lilac-shaded kitchen corner is associated in Marcel's mind with the adjacent small office which used to belong to his Uncle Adolphe. Uncle Adolphe is just the character to be linked with sacred groves, love temples and doves, not to mention pink lilacs, for he has liaisons with the fascinating lady in pink (Odette, we find out later). Marcel's family blames the uncle (quite wrongly) for the precocious interest Marcel takes in such things, and sever connections with him. But not before Marcel has gained a glimpse into the world of the patrons of such women as the lady in pink. Uncle Adolphe has, on his wall, "ces gravures représentant sur fond noir une déesse charnue et rose conduisant un char, montée sur un globe, ou une étoile au front, qu'on aimait sous le Second Empire parce qu'on leur trouvait un air pompeien" (C. S., p.73). Thus, even at this early stage in the novel, the acceptable, rosy side of love, presided over by various goddesses, contains a reference to Pompei. We do not have to be too imaginative to see in the image of the goddess in the chariot a resemblance to a later Mme Swann, who inadvertently caused Swann's lack of success as an artist, nor to see in the goddess with the star on her forehead (as well as the goddess driving a chariot) an image similar to that of the Valkyry which Saint-Loup uses to describe the wartime planes which bomb Paris. However,
only in his interlude with Albertine shall the Orient be one of almost unremitting unhappiness. Once through the tempering fire of Gomorrah, Marcel is ready to meet with equanimity anything that the East has to offer him. Therefore, although his childhood Orient may have been on the surface more comforting, more domesticated, Marcel the child, filled with doubts, cannot enjoy the Arabian Nights' world so much as the more confident, more experienced Marcel. As he says, "Rien n'est plus limité que le plaisir et le vice" (T. R., p. 827), but, to mitigate the ennui of this sentiment, he still shows a great deal of curiosity and amusement at the insane combination of well-worn components that people will try.

By this time in the novel, Marcel recognizes the magic of the Orient mainly in moments out of time and in the works of art which they inspire. He has learned the lesson of Céleste's lilac song; the wounded dove has become a harbinger, in Albertine's case, of death; the storm he now recognizes as a purgatory on earth for tempering the artist. All that is left as far as the Orient is concerned is for Marcel to emulate Schirazade and write the book which will ensure the continuation of his life, which will cheat death and capture time. Marcel understands all these messages finally after a 'magic' moment out of time at the Guermantes' last reception:

Alors on a dit que les signes qui devaient, ce jour-là, me tirer de mon découragement et me rendre la foi dans les lettres, avaient à coeur de se multiplier ... je m'essuyai la bouche avec la serviette qu'il m'avait donné; mais aussitôt, comme le
personnage des Mille et une Nuits qui sans le savoir accomplissait précisément le rite qui faisait apparaître, visible pour lui seul, un docile génie prêt à le transporter au loin, une nouvelle vision d'azur passa devant mes yeux; mais il était pur et salin, il se gonfla en mamelles bleuâtres (T. R., p. 368).

The napkin the servant has given Marcel has reminded him of an incident on his arrival at Balbec. No longer associated with Albertine the prisoner, even the sea has recovered its magic, its essential nature as the all-embracing mother. Marcel, by the way, has in some ways returned to his mother, having made the trip to Venice with her and found that he could not stay on without her. (Of course, the whole Guermantes' matinée is introduced by Marcel's final 'moment out of time', when he is momentarily transported back to Venice by the sensation caused by the uneven paving stones.) Marcel is further reminded of "le plumage d'un océan vert et bleu comme la queue d'un paon" - an exotic, colourful, oriental bird far more interesting than the pigeon, which, by now, represents Marcel's disillusionment with love. It is no coincidence, then, that the last reference to the pigeons is one which shows a lack of understanding and sensitivity on the part of society people. Rachel, Saint-Loup's unfaithful love, who was earlier linked to the lilacs and to Marcel's discovery that his friend was in love with a prostitute, recites La Fontaine's poem on lasting love, Les Deux Pigeons. Rachel may now be a famous actress, but she is quite ugly and, all the time she is reciting the poem she is thinking of ways to attract Marcel. The audience do not understand the poem, but the new Princess of Guermantes (Mme Verdurin transformed, but still as stingy),
gives the actress the appropriate tribute, five roses, not out of deference to the subject matter of the poem, but out of meanness (T. R., p. 1000). Marcel, somewhat repulsed, turns his thoughts to his work, and to Scheherazade:

Moi, c'était autre chose que j'avais à écrire, de plus long, et pour plus d'une personne ... Si je travaillais, ce ne serait que la nuit. Mais il me faudrait beaucoup de nuits, peut-être cent, peut-être mille. Et je vivrais dans l'anxiété de ne pas savoir si le Maître de ma destinée, moins indulgent que le sultan Sheriar, le matin quand j'interromprais mon récit, voudrait bien surseoir à mon arrêt de mort et me permettrait de reprendre la suite le prochain soir. Non pas que je prétendisse refaire, en quoi que ce fût, les Mille et une Nuits ... Ce serait un livre aussi long que les Mille et une Nuits peut-être, mais tout autre (T. R., p. 1043).

Thus, A la Recherche du Temps Perdu has a 'fairy tale' ending, a happy one, for since the reader understands that the novel is a self-contemplating one, the end returning to the beginning, he realizes as soon as he sees the magic word 'FIN' that Marcel has been granted the time he asked for. The author and hero, as we have often pointed out, cannot always be equated, but here the parallel holds true. The real-life Céleste, in her book, tells us of Proust's relief when he wrote the words 'la fin' after many years of night-time work on his novel. And Céleste's book ends with Ici-bas tous les Lilas Meurent in Proust's writing. As we have already mentioned, she also witnesses Proust's novels, three by three, standing like resurrection angels in a bookseller's window, the final angels of the series which included the warning angels of Sodom and Gomorrah.
Oriane’s Garden
Up until now, we have discussed flowers associated with Marcel's childhood, flowers which are rooted in a certain innocence, although they may blossom into experience darker than Marcel ever expects. The water-lilies and the lime-blossoms belong mainly to Combray, and the apple blossoms, even in Balbec, retain a youthful joy. The pear tree, however, and the hawthorns, which offer the young poet such a positive message in Combray, do become associated with some often bitter experiences in Paris and Balbec. Even more ominous in their colour, their association with Mme de Guermantes and with the East (becoming predominately the East of Sodom and Gomorrah), the red and violet flowers and the lilacs of Combray begin to prepare us for the secret, passionate and devious life Marcel will find in Paris. We are moving away from innocence (a qualified innocence, as we have seen in the earlier chapters) to experience, from childhood to maturity, from dawn to night (although a further new dawn awaits Marcel if he chooses the role of the artist), from white to pink to purple flowers (the rose which Albertine resembles is so deep a red as to be almost black), from nature to society - a movement which coincides in terms of the private geography of the novel, with the journey from Combray to Paris (and to Balbec later with the experience gained in Paris).

Whilst in Combray the flowers that Marcel loved flourished in gardens, fields, estates and parks, in Paris the flowers - often in some way rare, decorative and infertile - are cultivated or cut to satisfy some
human motive in salons, small gardens, or courtyards. They belong to
the sophisticated world of Paris society, which makes its own rules,
rather than to the cycle of nature. Thus, the types of love with which
they are associated are also rare, decorative and infertile - the love
of homosexuals with special tastes and courtesans - blooming in the
hothouse atmosphere of exclusive Paris salons. Indeed, if Charlus had
his way, he would make the sharing of his own (homosexual) tastes in
love the 'open sesame' of the Guermantes' salons. His nephew, on the
other hand, associates homosexuality with death, perhaps because of his
own guilt feelings, perhaps because of the impossibility of producing
offspring from this type of love.

The two main salons we shall study are those of Odette, a courtesan who
becomes Mme Swann and of the Duchess of Guermantes. In her salon,
Odette chooses as one of her favourite flowers the orchid, for its
suggestive and artificial look. Odette wishes to create a seductive,
stylish atmosphere from the use of the orchid as decoration. However,
instead, Swann is aware of the impression of obscenity produced by the
objects of the salon, and Marcel of the poisonous nature of such flowers,
which, once again, carry with them a hint of death. Another orchid
grows in the salon of the Duchess of Guermantes, where it fulfils the
function of a conversation piece, inspiring some of the Guermantes' 
famous wit. In fact, when the duchess talks of the orchid having, like
some women, a bad reputation because of its smell (being in bad odour
we would probably say), we cannot help but be reminded of Odette. The duchess also has a rare unnamed tree or bush which furnishes her with a topic of conversation, and furnishes Proust, as we shall see, with a strange, ambiguous, teasing symbol in his 'human landscape'. However, whilst Odette is completely absorbed in using flowers to her own advantage as a hostess and courtesan, the duchess regards her orchid and bush with more sympathy than she expends on the love-life of her servants (which, jealous because of her own unhappy marriage, she tries to thwart). She attempts to 'matchmake' for the orchid and shrub, putting the orchid alternatively in the window overlooking the garden and that overlooking the courtyard, whose high wall emphasizes the exclusive nature of her salon, and, more practically, keeps the tree or shrub from being pollinated by the wind.

We will devote a chapter each to Odette's cattleya, or orchid, and to the orchid and bush of Mme de Guermantes. Whilst Proust tends to develop the symbolism of the Combray flowers throughout the length of the novel, these city plants are often introduced abruptly into the novel, where they play their part in a setting of particularly human interest and then disappear (the bush, 'l'arbuste', being the only possible exception to this rule). Proust does, however, carefully prepare the actual settings, presenting them early in the novel and describing Marcel's growing understandings of them. The gardens that Paris has to offer Marcel are, indeed, very strange, although the themes associated
with them - Marcel's thirst for knowledge and for social acceptance - are familiar. Marcel frequents Mme Swann's winter garden (which we will discuss in the conclusion in our analysis of the progression of the psychological seasons in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu), a logical conclusion to her earlier salon with its orchids and chrysanthemums which so fascinated Swann, now entering the winter of his life. Marcel also admires the way in which Mme Swann treats the Bois de Boulogne as though it were her own garden: "Mme Swann ... évoquait cet appartement où elle avait passé une matinée si longue et où il faudrait qu'elle rentrât bientôt déjeuner; elle semblait en indiquer la proximité par la tranquillité flâneuse de sa promenade, pareille à celle qu'on fait à petits pas dans son jardin" (J. F., p. 637). But, most of all Marcel is fascinated with the garden and courtyard of Mme de Guermantes. Since this is Paris, the centre of society rather than nature, the duchess must make do with a very small garden, a contrast to her vast Combray estates, which interests her nonetheless because of the microcosm of natural life it offers her. Marcel, country-lover that he is, obviously assumes that some of the most important lessons Paris will have to offer him will occur in this garden. On it he focuses his curiosity as a natural scientist, and, since this is a Proustian garden, his social ambitions as well. Thus, he lies in wait one afternoon, hoping (according to the first version of the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe) that "Peut-être avant le dîner, quand Mme de Guermantes serait rentrée et que j'irais la voir, consentirait-elle à
me mener dans son jardin" (1). In the more cynical second version of the introduction, Marcel, keen though he is to see the pollination of the orchid and bush, keeps the courtyard under observation mainly to catch the duchess alone for a minute before she goes out and to confirm, through her, his invitation to a party at the Princess de Guermantes.

Marcel still clings, then, to his Combray dreams of having the duchess as instructress and patroness. In one sense, nothing could be more natural, as the duchess will then be able to pass on the lessons Swann gave her in natural history. However, the duchess herself has proved rather a bad pupil, never learning the most important lesson of all, the one that is the point of Marcel's long wait overlooking the garden and courtyard, that the human landscapes are the ones that count. The duchess can watch with interest the bizarre marriages between flowers and insects in her garden - yet she drops Swann as a friend when he makes a sociably unacceptable marriage. She can observe the life and death dramas in nature with concern - yet refuses to accept the fact that Swann is dying, as the knowledge would upset her social schedule. Far from being a wise pupil and then teacher of the lessons Marcel wants to learn, on the human scene the duchess is very much involved herself in the 'human landscape' of her garden and courtyard, for it is here that she plays the cruel role of the great red blood flower, which we

have already mentioned in a previous chapter.

Since this is Paris, Marcel must anyway seek the knowledge he wishes from the city, which becomes a sort of garden itself, the colourful rooftops reminding Marcel of tulips in Holland:

C'est à ses quartiers pauvres que font penser certains quartiers pauvres de Paris, le matin, avec leurs hautes cheminées évasées auxquelles le soleil donne les roses les plus vifs, les rouges les plus clairs; c'est tout un jardin qui fleurit au-dessus des maisons, et qui fleurit en nuances si variées qu'on dirait, planté sur la ville, le jardin d'un amateur de tulipes de Delft ou de Haarlem (C. G., p. 572).

The real garden of the city, however, occurs in places such as the duchess' courtyard, which offers Marcel the sight he wants above all, "un paysage non plus turnérien mais moral" (C. G., p. 573). In this garden (hence the word 'moral') Charlus plays the part of the 'human bee', pollinating Jupien, the 'human orchid'. Charlus also definitely wants Marcel to play the part of a 'human bush', "un arbuste humain" (C. G., p. 285). In fact, it is very tempting indeed to regard Marcel as akin to the duchess' bush in the courtyard scene, thus providing all the actual plants with a human equivalent and drawing a parallel between the fertilization of the bush and that of the orchid, an exercise in symmetry such as is dear to Proust's heart. Moreover, voyeurism, which can provide sexual satisfaction (it is in this sense that Proust uses the word 'fertilization' in physically infertile types of love) when the voyeur is at some distance from the source of his pleasure seems a reasonable metaphorical equivalent of wind pollination. Marcel
also, to continue the metaphor, feels that Charlus has used him for his own satisfaction as certain flowers use the unsuspecting insect for pollination (S. G., p. 629). And, through the elements it unites - Swann's way and the Guermantes' way, through the botany lessons Swann gave Oriane (the duchess); the past and the present, Marcel sharing the interest in botany which brought the other two together in the past; homosexual and heterosexual love, natural history and human behaviour - the courtyard could be termed a sort of crossroads, a symbol which Proust associates with a choice of sexual ways (S. G., p. 624). Charlus himself, not long before the courtyard scene, suggests that Marcel is at a crossroad, with one road leading towards social acceptance but only if Charlus is the guide. The unspoken price is reasonably obvious even to Marcel.

We will keep a full discussion of the bush and crossroads symbolism, however, for the orchid and bee and the bush chapters. Here, we will concentrate on the Romantic and social dreams which Marcel focuses both on the Guermantes' garden and their courtyard. At first, Marcel is very disappointed that the gardens are so small and that no self-respecting tournament could be held in the courtyard. However, his interest revives when he hears that at the centre of the prestigious Faubourg Saint-Germain lies the duchess' salon and at the centre of it lies her garden, entrance to which, highwalled as it is, Marcel badly wants. As usual, the goal, once attained, disappoints him. But then, no wonder the garden does not fulfil his expectations, for, around the
name of Guermantes Marcel has built impossible dreams originating from a golden age of youthful belief and drawing on the images of a golden age of chivalry. Marcel tries his best to transform the Guermantes and all that surrounds them in the same way that his magic lantern would transform all the objects in his room at Combray, the golden glow of the lantern evoking the tale of Geneviève de Brabant, supposed ancestor of Mme de Guermantes. All that is truly golden about the duchess is her name. Her first name, 'Oriane', contains the French word for gold in it, whilst Marcel feels that the last syllable of 'Guermantes' has an orange sound to it. In reality, Marcel, at the duchess's party must content himself with such mundane 'golden' things as the orangeade and the clouds of pollen (which, however, will become a very important symbol... indeed).

The courtyard, too, has many lessons to teach Marcel about the passing of various golden ages. The flood of democracy is carrying away the aristocracy, threatening even the imaginary yellow tower which Marcel associates with the Guermantes, and which survived the first flood. The golden age of Greece (which was the golden age of homosexuality) is over. The pollen which introduces in earnest the theme of the destructive rain from heaven, the punishment of homosexuality, becomes in Charlus' mind by the end of the book synonymous with the bombs which, in wartime Paris, are putting an end to an era.
Such details of colour imagery and pollen symbolism will be one of our main topics in the ensuing chapters. We will devote a chapter each, then, to the cattleya orchid, the courtyard orchid and the bush. Such themes as the loss of golden dreams and Romantic gardens, however, allow us to treat in this section two flowers which do not belong to Paris, but which share with the Parisian flowers the weight of Marcel's disillusionment. The forget-me-not, too, is associated with Marcel's dreams of the glory of the Guermantes, an illusion shattered by Charlus' rather ridiculous behaviour. Here, the image of gold is that of a flood of delusive light from the window with the stained glass figure of Gilbert le Mauvais. This light evokes in Marcel's mind the image of a carpet of golden forget-me-nots, which cover the paving stones under which rest the noble dead of the Guermantes' family, stored in the church vault like honey in a honeycomb (C. S., p. 174). The forget-me-not is essentially a humorous symbol, the mature narrator laughing good-naturedly at the awkward situations Marcel experiences for the sake of his Romantic imaginings and his snobbery. But the rose symbol contains the sadness which can arise from illusions and false beliefs in love. Albertine is the rose of Balbec, whom Marcel believes as inaccessible as the heroine of Le Roman de la Rose. Much like the magic lantern, Marcel projects onto Albertine all his beliefs, illusions and desires. However, here, the colour which is produced is black, caused by the shadow of the person who is operating the magic lantern (F., p. 539).
Now that we have sketched in the background (psychological as well as tangible) against which the orchids, bush, forget-me-not and rose appear, let us trace in detail the duchess' garden and courtyard as they develop throughout _A la Recherche du Temps Perdu_. This is an important task, as the orchid and bush which belong to the garden and, especially, courtyard, are not well developed throughout the novel. A point to keep in mind is the possibility, which Gide first raised, that Proust's attitude towards homosexuality led to unnecessary ambiguities in his novel; hence the overworked symbol of the orchid and the ill defined symbol of the bush in the passage describing Marcel's first recognition of the existence of homosexuality. When we realize that the (to Marcel) evocative name 'Guermantes' supplies so much of the atmosphere of the garden and courtyard, it is doubly important that the bush lacks a name. Of course, homosexuality in those days was 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Perhaps, too, the missing name symbolizes the desire for anonymity of the 'ashamed' homosexuals who survived the destruction of Sodom. In fact, Proust treats this desire with much humour in the case of the Duke de Châtellerault, who picks up a young man but carefully keeps his identity from him, only to find, when he arrives at a party, that the young man is a servant of his host and that his job is to announce the name of all the guests, the duke's as well. Another point to keep in mind is the difference in tone between the first, unpublished, version of the introduction to _Sodomeet Gomorrhe_ (which we include almost in its entirety, as it is not easy to find) and the second, published
version. The former emphasizes Marcel's sensual enjoyment of a hot summer day, the sunlight, and various evocative images and allusions associated with the idea of fertilization, altogether a more accepting atmosphere than that of the second version, bristling with facts rather than with images, emphasizing the link between actual physical inability to produce offspring and death, as well as the shame felt by homosexuals. The reader of this thesis must of course make up his or her mind, but, as a personal opinion, the first version seems to read like poetry whilst the second resembles a sermon or apologia.

To take the Paris gardens, then, one by one, Odette's salon, which introduces the orchid, is described very early in the novel and is crucial to Un Amour de Swann. The winter garden, even the Bois de Boulogne which Mme Swann seems to make her own, recur throughout the novel (C. S., pp. 219-223; J. F., pp. 636-641; C. S., pp. 417-421; C. S., pp. 423-427), enabling us to follow the progression of various psychological seasons of Marcel, Swann and Odette, as we shall see in the conclusion. But the gardens which truly introduce the concept of the 'human landscape', the small garden of the duchess' town house and the courtyard which is part of the larger 'garden' of Paris, are mentioned at the beginning of Du Côté de Chez Swann in the context of a visit Marcel's grandmother makes to Mme de Villeparisis who lives in the Guermantes' Paris house (Charlus, too, is making a visit to Mme de Villeparisis when he meets Jupien). Marcel's grandmother's opinion
of the inhabitants of the Guermantes' place is very interesting, as she is one of Proust's 'pure fools', Parsifal figures, as we have seen in the hawthorn chapter. Her one guide to good taste is the works of Mme de Sévigné, thus she can ignore prevalent public opinion. She meets Jupien and his niece in the courtyard and decides that he is a real gentleman, whilst the future Duke of Guermantes is a boor:

Car pour elle, la distinction était quelque chose d'absolument indépendant du rang social. Elle s'extasiait sur une réponse que le giletier (Jupien) lui avait faite, disant à maman: "Sévigné n'aurait pas mieux dit!" et, en revanche, d'un neveu de Mme de Villeparisis (the future Duke of Guermantes) qu'elle avait rencontré chez elle: "Ah! ma fille, comme il est commun!" (C. S., p. 20).

Thus, a certain ambiguity (here social) is introduced with the courtyard.

Unencumbered with Marcel's Romantic dreams, his grandmother also finds 'l'hôtel de Guermantes', with its view over the small city gardens delightful.

Marcel is certainly not so easily satisfied. When his family moves to an appartment off the Guermantes' courtyard, Marcel expects the latter to have all the chivalric trappings. Thus, we next see the garden and courtyard through the eyes of the naive Marcel at the beginning of Le Côté de Guermantes. The magic of the Guermantes' name leads him to associate 'l'hôtel de Guermantes' with fairy tales and myths:

À l'âge où les Noms, nous offrant l'image de l'inconnaissable que nous avons versé en eux, dans le même moment où ils désignent aussi pour nous un lieu réel, nous forcent par là à identifier l'un à l'autre, au point que nous partons chercher dans une cité une âme qu'elle ne peut contenir mais que nous n'avons plus le
pouvoir d'expulser de son nom, ce n'est pas seulement aux villes et aux fleuves qu'ils donnent une individualité ... chaque château, chaque hôtel ou palais fameux a sa dame ou sa fée (C. G., p. 11).

Marcel mentions especially "le reflet d'un verre de lanterne magique et d'un vitrail d'église" which is now beginning to lose its colours, and the narrator sounds a note of warning : "Cependant, la fée dépérît si nous approchons de la personne réelle à laquelle correspond son nom". As usual, it is Françoise who finally spoils Marcel's dreams :

Malgré l'air de morgue de leur maître d'hôtel, Françoise avait pu, dès les premiers jours, m'apprendre que les Guermantes n'habitaient pas leur hôtel en vertu d'un droit immémorial, mais d'une location assez récente, et que le jardin sur lequel il donnait du côté que je ne connaissais pas était assez petit et semblable à tous les jardins contigus; et je sus enfin qu'on n'y voyait ni gibet seigneurial, ni moulin fortifié, ni sauvoir, ni colombier à piliers, ni four banal, ni grange à nef, ni châtelet, ni ponts fixes ou levés, voire volants non plus que pêagers, ni aiguilles, chartes murales ou montjoies (C. G., p. 28).

However, Marcel at this point seems to have a real need to worship something, and, despite the fact that "le flot montant de la démocratie" (C. G., p. 15) is eroding the aristocratic pretensions of the Guermantes' courtyard (hence the presence there of Jupien), Marcel is delighted when a stray remark of a friend of his father's enables him to daydream about the Guermantes again :

ainsi le nom de Guermantes avait vu mourir sous les coups de Françoise la dernière demeure issue de lui, quand un vieil ami de mon père nous dit un jour en parlant de la duchesse : "Elle a la plus grande situation dans le faubourg Saint-Germain, elle a la première maison du faubourg Saint-Germain". Sans doute le premier salon, la première maison du faubourg Saint-Germain, c'était bien peu de chose auprès des autres demeures que j'avais successivement rêvées. Mais enfin celle-ci encore, et ce devait être la dernière, avait quelque chose, si humble ce fût-il, qui était, au-delà de sa propre matière, une différenciation secrète (C. G., p. 28).
Soon the duchess' salon attains sacred stature in Marcel's mind:
"la présence du corps de Jésus-Christ dans l'hostie ne me semblait
pas un mystère plus obscur que ce premier salon du Faubourg" (C. G.,
p, 30). However, as we have seen in the lime-blossom tea chapter, the
'communion' which takes place in the exclusive salon, once Marcel is
part of it, despite the fact that the duchess tries to invite only
talented people, the 'communion' is far from perfect. This point is
particularly emphasized in Mme de Guermantes' attitude towards her
garden. One of the more kindly guests knows that the only way to
distract the duchess when she is sharpening her tongue on one of the
more stupid members of her little gathering is to comment on her flowers.
The duchess immediately airs her considerable knowledge of botany,
showing at the same time a great deal of concern for flowers (she is
very fond of her rare orchid) and a great lack of sympathy for human
beings. Note all the themes and symbols in this passage which foreshadow
the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe:

Quelle jolie fleur, je n'en avais jamais vu de pareille, il n'y
a que vous, Oriane, pour avoir de telles merveilles! dit la
princesse de Parme qui, de peur que le général de Monserfeuil
n'èût entendu la duchesse, cherchait à changer de conversation.
Je reconnus une plante de l'espèce de celles qu'Elstir avait
peintes devant moi.

Je suis enchantée qu'elle vous plaise; elles sont ravissantes,
regardez leur petit tour de cou de velours mauve; seulement,
comme il peut arriver à des personnes très jolies et très bien
habillées, elles ont un vilain nom et elles sentent mauvais.
(This must remind us of Odette, with her beautiful velvet clothes
and her bad reputation.) Malgré cela, je les aime beaucoup.
Mais ce qui est un peu triste, c'est qu'elles vont mourir ... 
ce sont des dames. C'est une espèce de plantes où les dames et
les messieurs ne se trouvent pas sur le même pied ... Il me
faudrait un mari pour mes fleurs. Sans cela je n'aurai pas de petits ... Tenez, c'est comme ce bel arbre qui est dans la cour, il mourra sans enfants parce que c'est une espèce très rare dans nos pays. Lui, c'est le vent qui est chargé d'opérer l'union, mais le mur est un peu haut (C. G., pp. 515, 516).

Here, we can see the theme of infertility and death and the emphasis on the rarity of the plants. We cannot help but wonder if the duchess, not having a happy marriage and having no children, identifies with the orchid ("je n'aurai pas de petits"). The orchid, of course, reminds us of Odette, but, as well, the duchess of Guermantes' salon is filled with "ces filles fleurs" (C. G., p. 544) whom Marcel considers rather dangerous, and whom he describes "en fixant sur moi ses beaux yeux caressants, tout en redressant la guirlande d'orchidées qui contournait sa poitrine" (C. G., p. 544).

Most of the duchess' misanthropy comes out in her description of the garden:

Je dirai à Votre Altesse que c'est Swann qui m'a toujours beaucoup parlé de botanique. Quelquefois, quand cela nous embêtait trop d'aller à un thé ou à une matinée, nous partions pour la campagne et il me montrait des mariages extraordinaires de fleurs, ce qui est beaucoup plus amusant que les mariages de gens, sans lunch et sans sacristie ... Ah! Madame, la vie est une chose affreuse, on passe son temps à faire des choses qui vous ennuienient, et quand, par hasard, on connaît quelqu'un avec qui on pourrait aller en voir d'intéressantes, il faut qu'il fasse le mariage de Swann. Placée entre le renoncement aux promenades botaniques et l'obligation de fréquenter une personne déshonorante, j'ai choisi la première de ces deux calamités. D'ailleurs, au fond, il n'y aurait pas besoin d'aller si loin. Il paraît que, rien que dans mon petit bout de jardin, il se passe en plein jour plus de choses inconvenantes que la nuit ... dans le bois de Boulogne! Seulement cela ne se remarque pas parce qu'entre fleurs cela se fait très
simplement, on voit une petite pluie orangée, ou bien une mouche très poussiéreuse qui vient essuyer ses pieds ou prendre une douche avant d'entrer dans une fleur. Et tout est consommé! (C. G., pp. 516,7).

Here, the colour of the pollen, the image of the rain, even the association of washing and sex lead us to the introduction of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. To Marcel it sounds as though Charlus and Jupien try to wash away their act of love, as though purifying themselves according to some strange rite from Leviticus: "j'aurais pu croire qu'une personne égorgeait une autre à côté de moi et qu'ensuite le meurtrier et sa victime ressuscitée prenaient un bain pour effacer les traces du crime" (S. G., p. 609). Proust also adds that this washing ritual is not made from fear of having children "ce qui ne pouvait être le cas ici, malgré l'exemple peu probant de la Légende dorée" (S. G., p. 609). This allusion to the famous collection of the lives of saints, incorporating the colour golden in its most positive sense, is most ironic. All these details, then, foreshadow the meeting between Charlus and Jupien, which is fast approaching. In fact, the next major garden/courtyard scene is the first version of the introduction to *Sodome et Gomorrhe* which we include here as it is not to be found in the published versions of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Note how positive the whole scene seems to be, how sensually aware Marcel is, so that one might expect him to be sympathetic to the act of love no matter who or what the participants:

Le lendemain, je résolu d'aller avant dîner voir la duchesse pour qu'elle pût séance tenante faire demander à sa cousine. J'éprouvais un vif plaisir; c'est qu'il faisait une insupportable chaleur; d'eux-mêmes, mes nerfs, ma peau, toute ma sensibilité s'était mise au régime d'été. Jadis à Combray, dans ma chambre aux volets
fermés, il me suffisait des coups de marteau de l'emballeur pour voir le soleil dans la rue. Maintenant de nouveaux tableaux, selon les jours, venaient autour du moindre indice composer un spectacle invisible au milieu duquel se passait ma vraie vie. 

A l'extrémité torride de la rue, le souvenir de Balbèc avait attaché une aile immense, rafraîchissante et couleur bleu paon, qui était la mer. Je l'avais tout le temps sous les yeux, et le dessin que, comme une mélodie hésitante, traçait en moi mon incertitude relativement à la soirée Guermantes, était accompagné en sourdine par une brise de mer continue qui balançaient des roses. 

Si alors j'écrivis à Albertine en lui envoyant des places pour Phèdre et en lui demandant de venir, maintenant qu'elle avait un appartement séparé et pouvait rentrer comme elle voulait, de sortant du théâtre, comme je rentrerais de la soirée Guermantes, cette lettre me fut peut-être dictée par les rumeurs marines, entendues par moi, mais qui mettaient devant mes yeux, tandis que je pensais à la soirée Guermantes, une poussière d'émeraude et des tiges de roses, par ces basses que je ne distinguais pas, mais qui toujours soutiennent nos désirs nouveaux et souvent d'une inspiration moins noble, en y solidarisant un passé négligé mais précieux et qui détermine leur couleur et la qualité de leur harmonie ... (Here, Marcel thinks of making a date with one of the other girls in the band of "les jeunes filles en fleurs"). Peut-être si j'écrivis à celle-ci (Albertine) fût-ce aussi un peu par la lâcheté. Chez la princesse de Guermantes je désirerais sans doute bien des femmes ... Trouver en rentrant une femme qui ne serait pas de celles qui m'auraient inspiré des désirs dans une soirée, mais qui, par la satiété du plaisir, me les ferait oublier, était sans doute un peu lâche, tout à fait en opposition avec les principes de Swann qui n'éménait pas de maîtresse en voyage pour ne pas se distraire de poursuivre la conquête des inconnues qu'il rencontrerait. C'était commode ... en préparant comme le physicien qui met en train plusieurs expériences, des plaisirs si différents pour une soirée si courte, où, disposés d'avance, ils m'attendaient sans que j'eusse, occupé ailleurs, le temps de les désirer ... j'aurais le sentiment, tout opposé aux longues et vides attentes de ceux que la réalité ne récompense d'aucun retour, d'une richesse de réalisations complexes, d'une plénitude ne laissant, comme une musique substantielle, une place pour aucun creux.

Disposés d'avance et pressés les uns contre les autres dans une soirée si courte ... je n'aurais pas le temps ... de penser à ceux (the pleasures) ... qui ... m'attendaient sans que j'eusse eu plus d'instant à les désirer qu'une abeille sortant gorgée d'une fleur qu'elle vient de visiter et qui trouve tout de suite à côté d'elle la fleur ouverte d'avance où elle va trouver un
Depuis qu'elle m'avait intéressé à la fécondation des fleurs j'avais lu les livres de Darwin, j'étais allé demander à un professeur de botanique au Musée des échantillons de diverses sortes de pollen; je n'espérais guère pouvoir reconnaître celui que les thrips, les abeilles, les bourdons, les papillons porteraient sur eux, et savoir si c'était celui qui pouvait féconder la fleur où ils allaient s'arrêter. Mais je savais que le pollen est souvent plus abondant chez les plantes qui le font transporter par des agents physiques comme le vent (car une grande quantité de grains de pollen risquent alors d'être perdus) ou qui le lancent par propulsion mécanique.

Pour tout dire, par cette chaude journée, ce que j'étais altéré de voir, plus que des fleurs, plus que le ciel avec ses nuées, c'était les autres nuages colorés qui presque à ras du sol voyagent de fleurs (en fleurs), pareils à ces gerbes prismatiques d'eau que lancent les tuyaux d'arrosage pour rafraîchir les jardins; peut-être dans celui de Mme de Guermantes pourrais-je...
voir de vraies fusées de pollen projetées par des fleurs améthophiles, la pluie de soufre qu'ágoutent, abondante, fine et serrée, les fleurs du pin, les nuages d'or qui voyagent entre les genêts d'Espagne, tout ce monde aussi inconnu de moi, presque aussi invisible pour mon œil qui n'avait su le remarquer, que les ondes électriques qui nous entourent, et dont j'aurais tant voulu qu'un Elstir, de son regard subtil et révélateur qui avait bien su percer le crépuscule et capter les vapeurs, eût fixé pour m'apprendre à les reconnaître, champ encore inexploré de la peinture, brumes errantes et colorées, les averse décisif, providentielle et fécondes comme la pluie d'or de Danaë.

Mais en attendant que Mme de Guermantes rentrât, et après m'être assuré qu'il était impossible d'aller chez elle - ce que je ne pouvais faire en son absence - d'avoir vue dans son jardin, comme je m'étais aperçu que l'orchidée avait été placée à l'air sur le rebord de la fenêtre de son antichambre donnant sur la cour, je résolus, plus soucieux de satisfaire mes curiosités de ces jours-là que les convenances, de passer l'après-midi caché derrière les volets à la fenêtre du grand escalier, d'où je pourrais, de bien loin hélas, épier (avec) un battement de cœur si entraînaient dans la cour les insectes qui bien invraisemblablement, et du reste sans que je puisse distinguer ni reconnaître ce qu'ils apporteraient, apporteraient de si loin, par une chance si peu probable, le seul pollen sans lequel l'arbuste et la plante resteraient vierges. M'enthousiasmant pas à pas, je descendis jusqu'à la fenêtre du rez-de-chaussée, ouverte aussi et dont les persiennes étaient à demi closes; de la boutique de Jupien contiguë à la cage de l'escalier, je l'entendais se préparer à partir, mais il ne pouvait me voir derrière mon store, et je restais scrupuleusement immobile.

Je fis pourtant un brusque mouvement pour ne pas être vu quand j'aperçus, vieilli à voir ainsi en plein jour, grisonnant, bedonnant, d'une rougeur qu'ils (sic) estomaquait d'un peu de poudre fort facile à distinguer dans cette lumière crue, M. de Charlus. Il avait fallu la grave indisposition de la marquise pour que son neveu fit (sic) une visite, peut-être pour la première fois de sa vie à cette heure-là. Car avec cette singularité des Guermantes...

We will quote this version of the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe extensively in the orchid and bush chapters. Note here, in general, however, that Marcel is reminded of music, as he was with the hawthorns,
a very positive sign. The main passage concerning the garden and courtyard, the encounter between Charlus and Jupien as described in the published version of the introduction to *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, is a far more sombre affair. The little rain from heaven which the duchess mentions, the golden rain of the first version, for example, has definitely become the rain of fire from heaven, the divine punishment for homosexuals. However, we will keep our detailed analysis of this later passage, too, for the orchid and bush chapter.

Finally, Marcel mentions Oriane's garden once again at the last Guermantes' matinée, a most positive symbol amidst the ruin of a whole social system and of Marcel's youthful dreams. Marcel has been shocked, as we shall see, by the 'winter forest' of white haired friends, the sterile old age of would-be artists at this last party. Other people now are experiencing a 'social springtime', for he watches new faces taking over from the old, as flowers in a garden push the fading ones aside. The fact that the old aristocracy is dying is illustrated by the Prince of Guermantes' marriage to the tasteless old harpy, Mme Verdurin, who thus becomes the new Princess of Guermantes. But, somehow, the duchess survives, gaining more and more inspiration from the company of artists and less from that of socialites as she grows older. Her garden, too, survives, much improved through her increased interest in art, centre of a salon that Marcel, less idealistic than he used to be, recognizes as the closest approximation he will find to a gathering
of the elect, a golden company. Of course, this garden will finally owe its immortality to his book, for the duchess, unlike Mme de Villeparisis, is not a writer, and thus capable of ensuring her own fame. Marcel will ensure that she lives on beyond her death, which may be fast approaching:

Mme de Guermantes, au déclin de sa vie, avait senti s'éveiller en soi des curiosités nouvelles. Le monde n'avait plus rien à lui apprendre. L'idée qu'elle y avait la première place était aussi évidente pour elle que la hauteur du ciel blanc par-dessus la terre. Elle ne croyait pas avoir à affirmer une position qu'elle jugeait inébranlable. En revanche, lisant, allant au théâtre, elle eût souhaité avoir un prolongement de ces lectures, de ces spectacles; comme jadis, dans l'étroit petit jardin où on prenait de l'orangeade, tout ce qu'il y avait de plus exquis dans le grand monde venait familièrement, parmi les brises parfumées du soir et les nuages de pollen, entretenir en elle le goût du monde, de même maintenant un autre appétit lui faisait souhaiter savoir les raisons de telles polémiques littéraires, connaître les auteurs, voir les artistes ... En réalité, elle, la seule (Guermantes) d'un sang vraiment sans alliage ... le pur du pur, maintenant sacrifiant sans doute à ce besoin héraéditaire de nourriture spirituelle qui avait fait la décadence sociale de Mme de Villeparisis, elle était devenue elle-même une Mme de Villeparisis, chez qui les femmes snobs redoutaient de rencontrer telle ou tel (T. R., pp. 1003,4).

However much Mme de Guermantes may have fallen in the estimation of snobs, it is obvious here, that, by giving up her social position for art (although those 'in the know' still realize her worth), Mme de Guermantes has restored herself in Marcel's eyes almost to that exalted stature he gave her as a boy. She is as far above the socialites as the blue sky; her golden aristocratic nature is without alloy; her salon finally dispenses the one thing needed for a true communion - a spiritual nourishment (which is a hereditary need with her) resulting from the companionship of genius. She, like Marcel, has gained
immortality through art, and her garden now meets his expectations, we would imagine.

Now that we have followed Oriane's garden and courtyard, and to a lesser degree Odette's winter garden and use of the Bois, throughout the novel, let us study in detail the flowers found there. As usual we will study them in chronological order, starting with Odette's orchid, which plays an important role in Swann's love affair with her. The duchess' orchid, of course, to which we devote another chapter, belongs almost entirely to the courtyard scene, but the bush, a somewhat ambiguous symbol, we can trace throughout the novel.
The Cattleya
In the Combray and Balbec countrysides, then, the flowers are alive with meaning. Their rich colours, their fresh perfume after a storm, and their fertile profusion are signs from which Marcel, with effort and self-discipline, can decipher a message of creation through suffering, and a final joy which encourages him on his artistic apprenticeship. In direct contrast the flowers in society are dead (cut) or infertile and are placed in artificial settings to create an atmosphere in which to enjoy the 'ephemeral pleasures' of the salons. Odette, a courtesan, uses them to help her to seduce people such as Swann, who eventually incorporates her orchid into his euphemism for making love ('faire cattleya'), as though he recognized a precious language of flowers in her salon. Thus, the cattleya is a major symbol in Un Amour de Swann. We might add that Marcel meets similar flowers and similar dangerous women later in the novel, but he somehow manages to evade their embrace. Swann, whose habitual gesture of passing his hand across his eyes (a gesture inherited, along with "cette lourdeur d'esprit qui s'appesantissait sur son père" (C. S., p. 242) and "une paresse d'esprit qui était chez lui congénitale" (C. S., p. 268) ) expresses a wish not to see unpleasant truths, seems fated to fall under Odette's spell. After all, this inability to recognize and face the truth is the classic tragic flaw, linked, as it is in Oedipus Rex with blindness and (perhaps) symbolic castration, themes not entirely out of place, as we shall see, in Un Amour de Swann. Proust himself makes use of the myth of Orpheus (which also associates death and love, as well as a taboo against looking at one's love) in the main
cattleya passage. In fact, the word 'orchid' itself comes from the Greek word for testicles, a point that we shall explore later in this chapter.

To return, however, to Proust's time, rare tropical flowers, especially the orchid, were very popular in fashionable society at the turn of the century. The Countess Grefuhle, a well known hostess and a personal friend of Proust's, was very fond of 'les mauves cattleyas' (1), and Proust himself often used to wear an orchid in his buttonhole, as we can see in Jacques-Émile Blanche's portrait of him (2). In *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, however, Proust describes a young man with an orchid buttonhole whose pursuit of worldly pleasures approaches real decadence, and, moreover, causes his parents' death (a symbolic linking of orchid and death which Proust would find particularly poignant in terms of his own guilt feelings):

Peut-être y avait-il aussi un peu de ce même ennui d'être par erreur crus moins "chic" et de ne pouvoir expliquer qu'ils l'étaient davantage, au fond du "Joli Monsieur!" dont ils qualifiaient un jeune homme gommeux, fils poitrinaire et fétard d'un grand industriel et qui, tous les jours, dans un veston nouveau, une orchidée à la boutonnière, déjeunait au champagne, et allait, pâle, impassible, un sourire d'indifférence aux lèvres, jeter au Casino sur la table de baccara des sommes énormes "qu'il n'a pas les moyens de perdre", disait d'un air renseigné le notaire au premier président duquel la femme "tenait de bonne source" que ce jeune homme "fin de siècle" faisait mourir de chagrin ses parents (J. F., p. 677).

The dissolute way of life of "ce jeune homme fin de siècle" with his dandyism, his (perhaps assumed) air of indifference, his consumption, his impulse towards self-destruction or love of danger (as evinced in his gambling), and, most of all, his orchid buttonhole must remind us of that of the aesthetes and decadents, who, inspired by Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal, showed a marked preference for exotic flowers with a rather dangerous or unhealthy air (3). Proust, too, as we have seen in the hawthorn chapter, was influenced by Les Fleurs du Mal to such an extent that the title A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs may well refer to a line in Baudelaire's poetry, which talks of "ses (Lesbos's) vierges en fleurs" (4). Whilst A la Recherche du Temps Perdu faithfully describes the decadent atmosphere that may have predominated in some salons and watering places, and acknowledges a debt to some turn-of-the-century poets, Proust's Les Plaisirs et les Jours can be seen, arguably,

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(3) Beckson, in his introduction to Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890's has this to say about common themes and images (very similar to those Proust associates with Odette) in their work: "Though Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du mal is largely responsible for the strange, exotic flowers that grow in decadent literature - hothouses and orchids becoming central images of the Decadents' disdain of nature - Gautier's Fortunio (1837) anticipates both Baudelaire's and Huysmans' works. The hero, who resembles Des Esseintes, lives in a windowless house with a greenhouse of tropical plants in the courtyard. In 1878, George Moore's feeble attempt to imitate Baudelaire resulted in Flowers of Passion, which one critic has called "infantile diabolism". Maurice Maeterlinck titled a volume of verse Les Serres chaudes (1890) or "Hothouses", and in the nineties Theodore Wratislaw wrote highly derivative decadent verse with such titles as "Orchids" and "Hothouse Flowers" ... See also Symons' "Violet" which restates the decadent devotion to hothouses. (Beckson, Karl: Introduction to Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890's, Vintage Books, New York, 1966, p. xxvii).

as a true product of such an atmosphere, hence the aptness of Anatole France's remark in the introduction to the book: "Il nous attire, il nous retient dans une atmosphère de serre chaude, parmi des orchidées savantes qui ne nourrissent pas en terre leur étrange et maladive beauté" (5). By the time of his final novel, however, Proust had full control of this ambience of decadence rather than any hint of the other way around, and we are left with the magnificently evocative symbol of the cattleya, associated with Odette, who may well be "une orchidée savante", a human flower, as we see later in the novel, whilst the salons do seem to resemble hothouses for forcing human, as well as real, blooms.

Apart from using classical myths and observing closely the society of his time, Proust also carried out detailed research into the actual nature of the real flower. From Pelt, the naturalist, he learned that orchids solve the problem of overpopulation by starving the embryo (6). From Darwin, he discovered that these flowers are hermaphroditic, and thus suitable for a symbol of sexual ambiguity (7). Moreover, for the orchids, self-fertilization, he found, is the rule. Thus, methodically and imaginatively, Proust furnished himself with an excellent symbol for his 'human landscape'.


The first time orchids are mentioned in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is in connection with the love affair of Swann and Odette. Now, as W. S. Bell points out, their relationship illustrates the principle of self-fertilization, since the beloved is a subjective creation, a mental projection, of the lover's. Swann avoids making love to Odette in order not to lose his ideal of her as a Botticellian maiden, a youthful sylph from the Primavera or "La Vierge du Magnificat" (C. S., p. 618). He transmits his fear to Odette, who sighs (referring to Swann) that "c'est un être idéal, qu'elle a peur de défloiser le sentiment qu'elle a pour lui" (C. S., p. 227). Certainly by now Odette can only be deflowered of a virginity of the mind or emotions. Swann emphasizes the sterility, both physical and emotional, of this relationship when, as an excuse to touch Odette, he brushes from her lap some probably imaginary pollen which, he says, has fallen from the cattleyas pinned to her dress. In another excuse for contact, he arranges the cattleyas on Odette's bosom. Later, "faire cattleya" (C. S., p. 234) becomes his euphemism for making love. The need for such a 'metaphor', as Proust puts it, shows Swann's evasiveness, coyness, perhaps even fear of confronting love and calling it by its name. Indeed, Odette, not Swann, finally precipitates the romance with a kiss:

Et ce fut Swann qui, avant qu'elle le laissât tomber, comme malgré elle, sur ses lèvres, le retint un instant, à quelque distance, entre ses deux mains ... Peut-être aussi Swann attachait-il sur ce visage d'Odette non encore possédée, ni même encore embrassée par lui, qu'il voyait pour la dernière fois, ce regard avec lequel, un jour de départ, on voudrait emporter un paysage qu'on va quitter pour toujours (C. S., p. 233).

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Swann will not find in his love for Odette the creative goad of suffering which Marcel finds in the 'tempest' of his love for Albertine. But, then, Marcel is freed from his love, left to pursue his artistic apprenticeship by Albertine's death. Swann will wish for such a freedom himself later in his love affair: "Et Swann sentait bien près de son coeur ce Mahommet il dont il aimait le portrait par Bellini et qui, ayant senti qu'il était devenu amoureux fou d'une de ses femmes, la poignarda afin, dit naïvement son biographe vénitien, de retrouver sa liberté d'esprit" (C. S., p. 355). But, at the beginning of the love affair, Proust makes it quite clear that Swann resembles Orpheus by following his beloved, whom he fears he has lost, into a world like the Underworld, the world of the dead which seems peopled with fantoms, and which bodes very ill for his own future creative life:

On more than one level, Odette belongs to this setting. She is, indeed, more respectable than the women who ask Swann to take them home with him, but she, too, is a 'kept' woman. In fact, Swann has not been able to find her because she has had an assignation with one of her other lovers. She has just come from "la Maison Dorée" (C. S., p. 231),

(9) The underlining is my own.
an ironic name considering the frequency with which Proust associates the dreams of his characters (Saint-Loup as well as Marcel, as we saw in the pear blossom chapter) with the colour gold. Moreover, the detail of "sa fanchon de dentelle" in the following passage may be associated with women of easy virtue through the woman who gave her name to this headscarf. More important, Odette is, symbolically speaking, Swann's Eurydice. The Odette he loves is a fantom of his imagination. Like Orpheus, Swann cannot look at her too closely, or he will see the real Odette, and lose forever the idol he adores.

Odette suddenly materializes before Swann. She is dressed, as befits a creature of the Underworld, in black velvet. In her hand, in her hair, and on her bosom, she carries cattleyas:

Elle tenait à la main un bouquet de catleyas et Swann vit, sous sa fanchon de dentelle, qu'elle avait dans les cheveux des fleurs de cette même orchidée attachées à une aigrette en plumes de cygnes. Elle était habillée, sous sa mantille, d'un flot de velours noir qui, par un rattrapé oblique, découvrait en un large triangle le bas d'une jupe de faille blanche et laissait voir un empiècement, également de faille blanche, à l'ouverture du corsage décolleté, où étaient enfoncées d'autres fleurs de catleyas (C. S., p. 232).

Odette makes a very striking and stylish figure in this description (10).

(10) Notice the expert eye with which Proust can discern the details of a costume which makes a pronounced aesthetic impression on him. We are reminded of the beautifully gownned ladies in Beardsley's drawings. Marcel himself, thinking of Odette's salon, uses to describe it the striking, but somewhat unnatural image "un papillon noir aux ailes feutrées de neige" (S. G., p. 750). No matter how much symbolism a scene may contain, Proust is always aware of the aesthetic dimension, too. Thus, in the all-white decorations of Odette's salon a type of flower called "des "boules de neige" " remind him of "les arbustes linéaires des préraphaélites" (J. F., p. 635).
But, the more we study the symbols involved, the more we see her as a menacing figure too. Let us look at the orchids first. The cattleyas she uses as decoration are cut, and therefore dead. They have an artificial air (a quality which recommends them to the aesthetes and decadents) and look as though they had never lived, but had been fashioned out of black velvet. Swann, who knows a great deal about flowers, remembers that cattleyas often have no smell, the verification of which fact affords him yet another excuse to come closer to Odette. This small scientifically exact point about orchids (and we are not forgetting here that some orchids smell bad, which becomes significant later), this detail is of much greater symbolic importance than it first seems. Remember that Proust considers perfumes to be one of the best agents for recalling the past, associated with taste, as in the tea and madeleine:

C'est ainsi que je restais souvent jusqu'au matin à songer au temps de Combray, à mes tristes soirées sans sommeil, à tant de jours aussi dont l'image m'avait été plus récemment rendue par la saveur - ce qu'on aurait appelé à Combray le "parfum" d'une tasse de thé et, par association de souvenirs ... d'un amour que Swann avait eu avant ma naissance (C. S., p. 186).

The past which perfumes evoke is the true past, and thus a source of inspiration to the artist, as is "une brise chargée de l'odeur de réséda" (T. R., p. 728) to Chateaubriand. Because of their evocative, elusive quality, perfumes are associated with the 'essence' or true meanings of flowers, such as the hawthorns, or of works of art, such as Vinteuil's sonata. In the latter, one particular phrase has 'une
essence mystérieuse' (C. S., p. 237) which evokes for Swann "une réalité supérieure aux choses concrètes". Thus, at first, love seems to enhance the magic of music, but when we look at the passage more closely, we see that Swann uses music to prop up his illusions. Even his attitude towards perfumes (which he, too, associates with music) is that of the amateur, the experimenter or dilettante who seeks deeply into nothing beyond the pleasures that sensations bring. "Et le plaisir que lui donnait la musique ... ressemblait en effet ... au plaisir qu'il aurait eu à expérimenter des parfums" (C. S., p. 237). (Swann here shares a hobby, that of experimenting with perfumes, which was dear to the hearts of the aesthetes and decadents, as we can see in the character of Des Esseintes.) The music, in fact, has the same message of suffering for him as it has for the future artist, Marcel, but, safe in the illusion of his love, Swann will not recognize it: "Il commençait à se rendre compte de tout ce qu'il y avait de douloureux, peut-être même de secrètement inapaisé au fond de la douceur de cette phrase, mais il ne pouvait pas en souffrir. Qu'importait qu'elle lui dît que l'amour est fragile, le sien était si fort!" And he goes on to describe this hopeful first love in terms of positive flower imagery: "Ah! dans ces premiers temps où l'on aime, les baisers naissent si naturellement! Ils foisonnent si pressés les uns contre les autres; et l'on aurait autant de peine à compter les baisers qu'on s'est donnés pendant une heure que les fleurs d'un champ au mois de mai" (C. S., p. 238).
But Swann is fooling himself; his face, and especially his eyes, betray to the onlooker his spiritual impotence, which enables him to avoid the uncomfortable, true message (the essence, or perfume) of the Sonata, and to pick for his beloved a woman who chooses flowers without perfume: "A voir le visage de Swann pendant qu'il écoutait la phrase, on aurait dit qu'il était en train d'absorber un anesthésique ... Grand repos ... pour lui dont les yeux, (once again his eyes, the focal point of his habitual gesture of avoiding unpleasantness, give him away) quoique délicats amateurs de peinture, dont l'esprit, quoique fin observateur de moeurs, portaient à jamais la trace indélébile de la sécheresse de sa vie" (C. S., p. 237).

Love, then, helps to blind Swann as to the true nature of art; it will, later, complete the aridity, the lack of artistic creation, in his life. It is in this context that, returning to the portrait of Odette in the 'Underworld' of night-time Paris, we wonder if Proust was making use of the Greek derivation of the word orchid. The Greeks named the flower after the male organ its roots (to their mind) resembled in shape, the testicles. How ominous, then, that Odette is carrying cut orchids; we are reminded of the fact that Proust used the phrase "cueillir la fleur" for making love (11). If this seems too far fetched, we are still left with the symbolism of Odette's headdress, which is made out of swan

feathers. Even if she is not going to make Swann artistically infertile through 'plucking the flower', she is going to clip his wings; the significance of the swan feathers is all the more important in the face of Proust's knowledge of Mallarme's poem Le vierge, le vivace (F., p. 456), "souvent nommé le sonnet du cygne" (12), in which the swan who cannot fly is the symbol of the poet's artistic frustration. We have, of course, already mentioned that Proust was aware of the English meaning of Swann's name. We will see in the conclusion the way in which Swann, like the bird of the poem, gets trapped in a spiritual winter. Finally, the fact that Odette is wearing black (with some white, the colour of snow) makes her a suitable denizen of the kingdom of the dead, and reminds us that Proust thought of death as a woman dressed in black (13).

We might add here that Swann, in direct contrast to the narrator, hopes for some idyllic pleasure in love, invoking the original terrestrial paradise (scene of man's fall, of course), so that we remember that the Underworld was also in Greek tradition, the Elysian Fields, much beloved, later by French Renaissance poets. In fact, these poets used to associate the love-swoon with death:

Il espérait en tremblant, ce soir-là (mais Odette, se disait-il, si elle était la dupe de sa ruse, ne pouvait le deviner), que c'était la possession de cette femme qui allait sortir d'entre leurs larges pétales mauves; et le plaisir qu'il éprouvait déjà et qu'Odette ne tolérait peut-être, pensait-il, que parce qu'elle ne l'avait pas reconnu, lui semblait, à cause de cela - comme il


put paraître au premier homme qui le goûta parmi les fleurs du paradis terrestre - un plaisir qui n'avait pas existé jusque-là, qu'il cherchait à créer, un plaisir - ainsi que le nom spécial qu'il lui donna en garda la trace - entièrement particulier et nouveau (C. S., p. 234).

There are so many contradictions and illusions in this passage that we can see why the narrator remarks that "Swann ... avait était amateur de fantômes" (S. G., p. 1013). To begin with, the narrator is quite cynical about Swann's idealized concept of 'possessing' a woman, even giving love a new name : "la métaphore "faire cattleya", devenue un simple vocable qu'ils employaient sans y penser quand ils voulaient signifier l'acte de la possession physique - où d'ailleurs l'on ne possède rien - survécut dans leur langage" (C. S., p. 234) (14). Such an unthinking use of metaphor, which is an essential part of great works of art, is a black mark against Swann, the possible artist. But then, (14) Swann and Odette are not the only courtesan and friend to have a secret language of flowers; remember La Dame aux Camélias. Indeed, Proust very often gives us a clue as to the worth of his characters by the figures of speech, habitual phrases, or inspired metaphors they use. The Verdurin 'clan', to which Odette introduces Swann, contains examples going from the ridiculous to the sublime. At one extreme, there is Cottard, pompous and lacking a sense of humour, whose search for new expressions, and quibbling over the meaning of old ones more often than not lead to embarrassing non-sequiturs and meaningless puns. Saniette, on the other hand, with his true individuality and simplicity of nature, comes up with remarkable turns of phrase which are as little appreciated by the Verdurin's as Cottard's 'wit' is over-praised. But the most original of all the Verdurin 'clan', of course, is M. Biche, or Elstir, whose visual metaphors in painting Marcel rightly sees as a proof of genius.
love is a sort of fate, "(un) mal sacré" (C. S., p. 230), and the act of love, according to the narrator "un besoin absurde ... le besoin insensé et douloureux de le posséder" (C. S., p. 231) ("le" referring to the being one loves). Even without the benefit of the experienced narrator's comments, we can see in the main passage describing Swann's desires in terms of orchid imagery various ominous details. To begin with, Swann wants his love for Odette to retain some sort of freshness, innocence; he wishes to believe that she is "une femme difficile" whereas she is quite surprised by his formal behaviour, being very experienced in such matters. In addition to showing a lack of understanding of Odette's nature, Swann wants to overcome her by cunning - shades of the youthful Marcel. Their love is thus doubly based on falsehood. Then, too, whilst Swann is imagining some fresh new earthly paradise, the symbol that he uses for the possession of a woman is a very knowing carnal one, in shape and, perhaps, congested colour suggesting the woman's sex.

Nor is Swann the only person to associate the orchids with sex. Odette, far from inexperienced, chooses them for their suggestiveness, as we see when she invites Swann to her apartment:

En lui montrant tour à tour des chimères à langues de feu décorant une potiche ou brodées sur un écran, les corolles d'un bouquet d'orchidées, un dromadaire d'argent niellé aux yeux incrustés de rubis qui voisinaient sur la cheminée avec un crapaud de jade, elle affectait tour à tour d'avoir peur de la méchanceté,
ou de rire de la cocasserie des monstres, de rougir de l'indécence des fleurs et d'éprouver un irrésistible désir d'aller embrasser le dromadaire et le crapaud qu'elle appelait: "chérêis" (C. S., p. 221).

Marcel himself, when he is finally invited to the Swanns, realizes the danger, as well as the 'indecency' of such flowers and jewels (remember how important rubies were in the red and violet chapter):

je restais seul en compagnie d'orchidées, de roses et de violettes qui ... gardaient un silence que leur individualité de choses vivantes rendait plus impressionnant et recevaient frileusement la chaleur d'un feu incandescent de charbon, précieusement posé derrière une vitrine de cristal, dans une cuve de marbre blanc où il faisait écrouler de temps à autre ses dangereux rubis ... Et, certes, j'eusse été moins troublé dans un antre magique que dans ce petit salon d'attente où le feu me semblait procéder à des transmutations, comme dans le laboratoire de Klingsor (J. F., p. 527).

Young though he is, Marcel is most perceptive, and very apt in his choice of allusions, for Klingsor (as Proust would know from Wagner's Parsifal) was tempted, succumbed, and was castrated. Swann, by the way, has been warned of the 'dangerous' side of Odette's nature, but sees in her, instead, a resemblance of expression to his mother:

Pour l'instant, en la comblant de présents, en lui rendant des services, il pouvait se reposer sur des avantages extérieurs à sa personne, à son intelligence, du soin épuisant de lui plaire par lui-même ... Un jour que des réflexions de ce genre le ramenaient encore au souvenir du temps où on lui avait parlé d'Odette comme d'une femme entretenue, et où une fois de plus il s'amusait à opposer cette personification étrange : la femme entretenue - chatoyant amalgame d'éléments inconnus et diaboliques, serti, comme une apparition de Gustave Moreau, de fleurs

(15) The underlining is my own.
vénéneuses entrelacées à des joyaux précieux - et cette Odette sur le visage de qui il avait vu passer les mêmes sentiments de pitié pour un malheureux, de révolte contre une injustice, de gratitude pour un bienfait, qu'il avait vu éprouver autrefois par sa propre mère, par ses amis ... il se trouva que cette dernière image du banquier lui rappela qu'il aurait à y prendre de l'argent. En effet, si ce mois-ci il venait moins largement à l'aide d'Odette dans ses difficultés matérielles ... il ne renouvellerait pas en elle cette admiration qu'elle avait pour sa générosité ... Alors, tout d'un coup, il se demanda si cela, ce n'était pas précisément l'"entretenir" ... et si on ne pouvait pas appliquer à Odette ... ce mot qu'il avait cru si inconciliable avec elle, de "femme entretenue". Il ne put approfondir cette idée, car un accès d'une paresse d'esprit qui était chez lui congénitale ... vint à ce moment éteindre toute lumière dans son intelligence ... il retira ses lunettes, en essuya les verres, se passa la main sur les yeux (C. S., pp. 267-8).

Swann, then, has many flaws, is a victim of various 'fates'. He seems fated to love Odette just as he is 'fated' to die at the same age as his mother, and from the same disease, as we saw in the red and violet flowers chapter. Women may bring him ill-fortune, then, but his intellectual or spiritual flaw, his inability to confront the truth as shown in the gesture of wiping his eyes, comes from his father. Heredity, then, to Proust, is the modern fate. Swann, despite realizing the possible poisonous nature of the orchid and of Odette, seems powerless to save himself.

The critics have concentrated on an analysis of the colour of Odette's flowers to reveal her nature in the novel. Butor says : "Quant à la couleur de mauve, caractéristique de l'époque, de l'art de 1900, elle a alors une signification toute particulière, couleur de l'ombre ... de
This comment is very true, for, as we have already seen in the lilac chapter, and will see in the orchid and bee chapter, mauve is particularly associated with homosexuality and with the Orient. Odette's strange Chinese monsters show a taste for the bizarre and for the Orient. And, true to form, she has had some lesbian experience (C. S., p. 362) as though it were particularly apt for her to carry the orchids which symbolized the male sex to the Greeks.

Cattleyas are not the only flowers which hint at Odette's sensual nature. Ninette Bailey suggests that: "C'est en effet le plus souvent dans un contexte qui suggère la liberté de ses moeurs que le mauve apparaît" (17). Again, Odette's violets have "une couleur délavée, mauve, liquide et dissolue" (J. F., p. 594) an admirable transfer, as Ninette Bailey says, of the morals of Mme Swann onto the flowers which surround her (18). Moreover, we have already seen Proust associate unnatural desires with purple pansies in La Confession d'une Jeune Fille. To the eyes of the worshipping young Marcel watching Mme Swann flirting with past, present and future lovers in the Bois de Boulogne, Odette seems to have turned herself into a suggestive, slightly

(18) Ibid, p. 255.
indecent human flower, "dans la nudité de ses tendres couleurs, comme l'apparition d'un être d'une espèce différente, d'une race inconnue, et d'une puissance presque guerrière" (J. F., p. 636). Once again, Marcel sees the menace behind the beauty; Jews and homosexuals are also mysterious races to Proust (as we shall see in the next chapter), and Odette is obviously an aggressive woman, though a stylish and beautiful one.

As we can see, then, one of Odette's main preoccupations is her appearance, and, apart from their 'suggestiveness', the cattleya's main attraction for her is its artificiality:

Elle trouvait à tous ses bibelots chinois des formes "amusantes", et aussi aux orchidées, aux cattleyas surtout, qui étaient, avec les chrysanthesmes, ses fleurs préférées, parce qu'ils avaient le grand mérite de ne pas ressembler à des fleurs, mais d'être en soie, en satin. "Celle-là a l'air d'être découpée dans la doublure de mon manteau", dit-elle à Swann en lui montrant une orchidée, avec une nuance d'estime pour cette fleur si "chic", pour cette soeur élégante et imprévue que la nature lui donnait, si loin d'elle dans l'échelle des êtres et pourtant raffinée, plus digne que bien des femmes qu'elle lui fit une place dans son salon (C. S., p. 221).

We are reminded of the velvet orchid of the duchess, nor is this the last time we will notice the resemblance between Odette and the orchid. Odette, most of all, wishes to create an atmosphere around herself; artifice is second nature to her:

Les choses que chez une honnête femme on voit et qui certes peuvent lui paraître, à elle aussi, avoir de l'importance, sont celles, en tous cas, qui pour la cocotte en ont le plus. Le point culminant de sa journée est celui non pas où elle s'habille pour le monde, mais où elle se déshabille pour un homme ...
D'autres femmes montrent leurs bijoux; elle, elle vit dans l'intimité de ses perles. Ce genre d'existence impose l'obligation, et finit par donner le goût, d'un luxe secret, c'est-à-dire bien près d'être désintéressé. Mme Swann l'étendait aux fleurs (J. F., p. 594).

For Swann, the sad part comes when he becomes just one of the interesting objects with which Odette surrounds herself, part of a framework (if we can see a pun or double meaning in the following quotation) for Odette as a work of art, a human flower:

Tout d'un coup, sur le sable de l'allée, tardive, alentie et luxuriente comme la plus belle fleur ... Mme Swann apparaissait (avec) ... le pavillon de soie d'une large ombrelle de la même nuance que l'effeuillaison des pétales de sa robe. Toute une suite l'environnait; Swann quatre ou cinq hommes de club qui étaient venus la voir ... et leur noire ou grise agglomération obéissante, exécutant les mouvements presque mécaniques d'un cadre inerte autour d'Odette, donnait l'air à cette femme qui seule avait de l'intensité ... d'un être d'une espèce différente (J. F., p. 636).

In the conclusion, we shall follow Odette with her ability to create settings or to shine in natural settings, in more detail; here, however, we see an ironic fate at work as Swann and the other men 'frame' Odette, whom Swann always wished to regard as a work of art. In contrast to her, he is lacking life, mechanical. And Odette, parading through the Bois, accepting the salutes of the noblemen who can never introduce her to their sisters and mothers, reminds us once again of the duchess' orchid: "elles (the orchids) sont ravissantes, regardez leur petit tour de cou de velours mauve; seulement, comme il peut arriver à des personnes très jolies et très bien habillées, elles ont un vilain nom et elles sentent mauvais" (C. G., p. 515).
Thus, the cattleyas seem to emphasize all that is superficial, infertile, and artificial in the love of Swann and Odette, and, to a certain extent, in Society. Marcel, somehow (or, at least, the mature narrator) does seem to see through Odette whilst at the same time worshipping her. Swann refuses to recognize the truth and contents himself with a blindness which will have become almost a spiritual death by the end of the book, as we shall see in the conclusion. The orchids, with their secret colour, their association with the male sex, and their artificial appearance, can be very menacing flowers indeed.
The Orchid and the Bee

The orchid and the bee, as we have already mentioned, are the instance and the development of a certain type of behavior which is intermediate between the first (spermatogenesis) and the second (gametogenesis). The introduction to the study of this particular type of behavior was made possible by the experimental manipulation of the orchid and the bee, before which no such possibility existed.
Now that we have discussed the orchid of Odette's salon, the courtesan's and dilettante's orchid, chosen for its artificial air, we turn to the orchid of the Guermantes' courtyard, the orchid of homosexuality, prized, in this context, for its association with natural beauty. Whilst Odette, when she was likened to a human flower seemed reduced to a vegetable level, Jupien as the 'human flower' and Charlus as the 'human bee', gain an element of naturalness and beauty from Proust's metaphor in a definitely human landscape. The orchid, when associated with heterosexual love is, as we have seen, rather sinister. As a symbol of homosexual love, it becomes more sympathetic, although, as we will see, Proust confuses the issue by insisting on Marcel's initial 'repulsion' in the second version of the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe.

The orchid and the bee of which Jupien and Charlus are the human equivalents are really only important symbols, as we have already mentioned, in the courtyard scene. Their development, therefore, cannot be traced throughout the novel. However, we can see a development of Proust's treatment of the orchid especially between the first (unpublished) and the second (published) version of the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe. In the first version, Marcel is fascinated with the knowledge which nature seems about to offer him. He experiences suspense and curiosity in waiting for the bee to arrive much as he did before meeting Gilberte at Tansonville. By the second version, the possibility of the fertilization of the rare flower seems so remote
that Marcel refers to it as a miracle (he used the same word to describe the possible appearance of Gilberte in Swann's park). In the first version, Marcel emphasizes the profusion of pollen, drifting in clouds around the garden and courtyard, and mentions that these clouds would make a good subject for an artist, such as Elstir:

peut-être dans celui (the garden) de Mme de Guermantes pourrais-je voir de vraies fusées de pollen ... tout ce monde aussi inconnu de moi ... et dont j'aurais tant voulu qu'un Elstir, de son regard subtil et révélateur qui avait bien su percer le crâpuscule et capturer les vapeurs, est fixé pour m'apprendre à les reconnaître, champ encore inexploré de la peinture, brumes errantes et colorées. (1)

By the second version, the clouds of pollen as images have disappeared, and Proust, instead, emphasizes the theme of the degeneracy, the sterility, even death which may accompany self-fertilization in nature. "Si la visite d'un insecte, c'est-à-dire l'apport de la semence d'une autre fleur, est habituellement nécessaire pour féconder une fleur, c'est que l'autofécondation, la fécondation de la fleur par elle-même, comme les mariages répétés dans une même famille, amènerait la dégénérescence et la stérilité" (S. G., p. 603). Moreover, instead of forming a good subject for the artist, the homosexuality which Proust now associates with the orchid makes it a dangerous topic: "Le poète est à plaindre, et qui n'est guidé par aucun Virgile, d'avoir à traverser les cercles d'un enfer de soufre et de poix, de se jeter dans le feu qui tombe du ciel pour en ramener quelques habitants de Sodome" (P., p. 206) (2). Note the allusion to Sodom here, for it is in the use of


(2) The young Marcel is being cowardly here, for a great artist like Bergotte can accept Charles' homosexuality (note the emphasis on colour): "Quant au vice de M. de Charlus, il ne le partageait à aucun degré, mais y trouvant plutôt un élément de couleur dans le personnage, le fas et le nefas, pour un artiste, consistant non dans des exemples moraux, mais dans des souvenirs de Platon ou du Sodoma" (P., p. 222).
religious and mythological symbolism that the two versions differ the most. The first version, with its allusions to Greek myths and its abundant golden imagery evokes the Golden Age of Greece, which was also the golden age of homosexuality. By the second version, Proust seems to feel irritation with those homosexuals who seek to glorify their sexual tastes with references to the past:

tout en niant qu'ils soient une race (dont le nom est la plus grande injure), ceux qui parviennent à cacher qu'ils en sont, ils les démasquent volontiers, moins pour leur nuire, ce qu'ils ne détestent pas, que pour s'excuser, et allant chercher, comme un médecin l'appendicite, l'inversion jusque dans l'histoire, ayant plaisir à rappeler que Socrate était l'un d'eux, comme les Israélites disent de Jésus qu'il était juif, sans songer qu'il n'y avait pas d'anormaux quand l'homosexualité était la norme, pas d'antichrétiens avant le Christ, que l'opprobre seul fait le crime, parce qu'il n'a laissé subsister que ceux qui étaient réfractaires à toute prédiction, à tout exemple, à tout châtiment, en vertu d'une disposition innée tellement spéciale qu'elle repugne plus aux autres hommes (encore qu'elle puisse s'accompagner de hautes qualités morales) que de certains vices qui y contredisent comme le vol, la cruauté, la mauvaise foi, mieux compris, donc plus excusés du commun des hommes (S. G., pp. 616-617).

Not only does Proust here deny homosexuality the dignity it was given in the Golden Age of Greece, but he also likens it to illness (4) (appendicitis here) and homosexuals to a persecuted race, like the Jews. Once again we can see Proust's sophisticated moral viewpoint in which virtues mix with 'vices'; indeed, Proust goes farther and says that homosexuality is a 'crime' solely because society defines it so. Nowadays few societies do so define it. However, Proust, in nineteenth-century France, ran the risk of being overwhelmed by this

(3) The underlining is my own.
(4) At worst he calls it "une maladie inguérissable" (S. G., p. 616).

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strong prevalent social condemnation, and the second version of the introduction to *Sodome et Gomorrhe* seems more concerned with society's rejection (of which the destruction of Sodom is an excellent symbol) than with nature's acceptance of sexual ambiguities.

In fact, whilst Proust allows Marcel to express his thoughts, fears and jealousies quite unselfconsciously in the first version, in the second version he feels that he must insist on Marcel's heterosexuality and his revulsion at the sight of homosexuality, as though the one necessarily followed the other. Now, to begin with, as we have seen, Proust admitted to Gide that Marcel's supposedly heterosexual experiences at Balbec were transpositions of his own homosexual experiences (5). Here, too, he pleads the homosexuals' need to lie: "Race sur qui pèse une malédiction et qui doit vivre dans le mensonge et le parjure" (*S. G.*, p. 615). Thus, Proust's one temptation to betray his quest for truth comes, not from nostalgia, but from social pressures against homosexuality, as this second version of the introduction (but not the first) witnesses. We will discuss later the way in which Proust expresses unconsciously or at least in covert rather than overt language his guilt and fear in this introduction. But, for the moment, let us see if the symbol of the orchid is in any way damaged by the shadowy presence here of the condemnatory reader whom Proust seemed to fear would pick up his novel. Marcel, to begin with, feels he must justify his

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voyeurism, which he does rather unconvincingly as a test of courage. Then he describes (very convincingly) the ridiculous, perhaps even ugly, aspect of this 'human' flower and bee, thus undermining his subsequent simple affirmation of their beauty:

Face à face, dans cette cour où ils ne s'étaient certainement jamais rencontrés ... le baron, ayant soudain largement ouvert ses yeux mi-clos, regardait avec une attention extraordinaire l'ancien giletier sur le seuil de sa boutique, cependant que celui-ci, cloué subitement sur place devant M. de Charlus, enraciné comme une plante, contemplait d'un air émerveillé l'embrasement du baron vieillissant. Mais, chose plus étonnante encore, l'attitude de M. de Charlus ayant changé, celle de Jupien se mit aussitôt, comme selon les lois d'un art secret, en harmonie avec elle. Le baron, qui cherchait maintenant à dissimuler l'impression qu'il avait ressentie, mais qui, malgré son indifférence affectée, semblait ne s'éloigner qu'à regret, allait, venait, regarder dans le vague de la façon qu'il pensait mettre le plus en valeur la beauté de ses prunelles, prenait un air fat, négligent, ridicule. Or Jupien, perdant aussitôt l'air humble et bon que je lui avais toujours connu, avait - en symétrie parfaite avec le baron - redressé la tête, donnait à sa taille un port avantageux, posait avec une impertinence grotesque son poing sur la hanche, faisait saillir son derrière, prenait des poses avec la coquetterie qu'aurait pu avoir l'orchidée pour le bourdon providentiellement survenu. Je ne savais pas qu'il pût avoir l'air si antipathique ... Cette scène n'était, du reste, pas positivement comique, elle était empreinte d'une étrangeté, ou si l'on veut d'un naturel, dont la beauté allait croissant (S. G., pp. 604-605).

At first, then, despite his statement that the scene has naturalness and beauty, Marcel finds it ridiculous and repulsive. Then, too, the metaphor is not botanically exact, the behaviour of Jupien resembles, rather, a female animal, presenting itself to the male. Thus, having scarcely shown us the beauty of this homosexual encounter, Marcel goes on to deny its naturalness which Proust hoped to prove through the orchid and bee analogy, or metaphor:
J'avais perdu de vue le bourdon, je ne savais pas s'il était l'insecte qu'il fallait à l'orchidée, mais je ne doutais plus, pour un insecte très rare et une fleur captive, de la possibilité miraculeuse de se conjoindre, alors que M. de Charlus (simple comparaison pour les providentiels hasards, quels qu'ils soient, et sans la moindre prétention scientifique de rapprocher certaines lois de la botanique et ce qu'on appelle parfois fort mal l'homosexualité), qui, depuis des années, ne venait dans cette maison qu'aux heures où Jupien n'y était pas, par hasard d'une indisposition de Mme de Villeparisis, avait rencontré le giletier (S. G., p. 607).

Now, as we see later, one of the things Proust does want to do is suggest parallels between the vegetable kingdom and the human race. And, despite the fact that any type of love can be regarded from a comic viewpoint, and that Marcel, with his keen observation of Charlus' poses and mannerisms, has successfully established the comic atmosphere, the narrator now takes over and changes the mood entirely, emphasizing the tragedies which can follow the persecution of homosexuality, as though each homosexual in turn may fear a private destruction, a personal rain of fire from heaven, when his secret escapes. It is as though we are witnessing a debate in Proust's mind, with an argument, a counter-argument and a resolution. The argument and counterargument are confusing, but the resolution, which discusses homosexuality from the viewpoints of botany, Greek myth and biblical symbolism (which introduces the concept of the Orient) is very rewarding to study, and we will discuss it in detail, with references to the first version. The mixture of Marcel's supposed revulsion and the narrator's sympathy, however, remind us of A. L. Rowse's contention that Proust's obsession with homosexuality was the one flaw of his novel (6), and Gide's accusation of bad faith.

However, Proust's seeming inability totally to accept his own sexual nature, though it may have made the symbols associated with this problem, the orchid and bush, less successful than others, does present us with a fascinating mixture of often conflicting ideas and symbols.

Before we study the obvious, overtly expressed symbolism associated with the orchid, then, let us follow Marcel's example, and allow the flower symbolism to reveal to us an unconscious level in literature, covert feelings of guilt and fear on Proust's part, expressed, often, in now familiar themes and images. Marcel says: "Mes réflexions avaient suivi une pente que je décrirai plus tard et j'avais déjà tiré de la ruse apparente des fleurs une conséquence sur toute une partie inconsciente de l'oeuvre littéraire" (S. G., p. 603). Although Proust does not explain his theory here, in the context, it obviously has something to do with self-fertilization and with attracting others by seeming to be something different from what you are, which all fits in well with Proust's theory of a reader reading his own experience into his (Proust's), helpfully sexually transposed, novel. Nonetheless, we can still see undercurrents, a regret at not being able to reproduce physically (seen in the frequent image of the pregnant woman) and a fear of death (seen in the references to murder and suicide associated with homosexuality) which seem to go with 'self-fertilization'. To begin with the theme of pregnancy, we have already seen that Proust mentions that the ritual
washing which follows the act of love between Charlus and Jupien is not a contraceptive measure, as the only man to have a baby existed only in the pages of the Golden Legend. Next, he likens Charlus' 'secret' to that of a pregnant woman:

Jusqu'ici je m'étais trouvé, en face de M. de Charlus, de la même façon qu'un homme distrait, lequel, devant une femme enceinte dont il n'a pas remarqué la taille alourdie, s'obstine, tandis qu'elle lui répète en souriant : "Oui, je suis un peu fatiguée en ce moment", à lui demander indiscrètement : "Qu'avez-vous donc?" Mais que quelqu'un lui dise : "Elle est grosse", soudain il aperçoit le ventre et ne verra plus que lui. C'est la raison qui ouvre les yeux; une erreur dissipée nous donne un sens de plus (S. G., p. 613).

Remember, here, that Marcel in Le Temps Retrouvé becomes 'pregnant' with his book. Also, the naïve homosexual (including the angels of Sodom) accepts paternity as a proof of heterosexuality. Death, too, is associated with homosexuality in a covert manner, (as well as an obvious one, as we have seen in the emphasis on the sterility of self-fertilized plants). Jupien and Charlus, making love, sound like a murderer and his victim. Later, the narrator likens a homosexual who returns to this form of love to a would-be suicide who exhausts all his ingenuity in returning to make more attempts on his life (S. G., p. 624). He also mentions that some judges will accept more easily the crime of murder in a homosexual, as though they could already see in his sexual proclivities the working of original sin (S. G., p. 615).

Other themes and symbols crop up which have been associated with Marcel or with other characters. We find the likening of homosexuality to a
lost jewel (lost only temporarily, however), reminding us of Mlle
Vinteuil and her inherited tendencies, handed on like a family jewel,
or of Marcel finding jealousy and uncertainty along with Albertine's
ring. Once again, we find the image of the crossroads (S. G., p. 624)
and of the loved one imprisoned (S. G., p. 621) and the captive flower
(S. G., p. 607) which we will discuss later. The theme of the basilisk
gaze returns and that of Beethoven's music (S. G., p. 605). We even
find a transposition of Marcel's dawn experience with the milkmaid
in the story of the homosexual who rises early each morning to receive
the milk from the hands of the milkman's boy (S. G., p. 625). But
perhaps the most poignant recurring symbol, however, is that of the
mirror, a mirror which offers to the person contemplating himself,
not beauty, but blemishes. Remember how Marcel sees in one mirror a
great resemblance between himself and Andrée and how, at the last
Guermantes' party, the faces of others show him how much he himself has
aged. Similarly, homosexuals who are 'found out' are "exclus même ...
de leurs semblables, auxquels ils donnent le dégoût de voir ce qu'ils
sont, dépeint dans un miroir qui, ne les flattant plus, accuse toutes
les tares qu'ils n'avaient pas voulu remarquer chez eux-mêmes" (S. G.,
p. 616).

These, then, are the underlying facts, the hereditary 'defects' of
homosexuality. Now, however, that we have sketched in the background
and attempted to define the tone of the introduction as a whole, let us
return to the flower of homosexuality, the orchid, and the way in which it introduces symbols from the natural sciences, from myth, from the Bible, even from fairy tale (although we have already covered this ground pretty thoroughly in the lilac chapter). In any discussion of Proust's use of the orchid as a symbol we must make special mention of Rina Viers' excellent article *Evolution et Sexualité des Plantes dans 'Sodome et Gomorrhe'*. Here, she tells us that Proust "croyait trouver l'explication du phénomène de l'homosexualité dans les traités de sciences naturelles de Darwin" (7) and that he chose flower rather than animal imagery because, according to J.-M. Felt, one of his favourite naturalists, for flowers alone is hermaphroditism a sign of evolutionary sophistication rather than a primitive regression. Certainly, the young Marcel of the first version of the introduction has read Darwin, obviously knows a great deal about botany, and has even sought after samples of the different types of pollen. The real pollen here is abundant, golden, and as necessary to life as rain - but its human equivalent, Charlux' face powder is rather comic. Although not all orchids are hermaphroditic, those that are, provided Proust with an excellent symbol in the second version of the introduction for the sexually ambiguous invert who, no matter how solitary, longs for some satisfying relationship with others. For, according to Darwin, although such flowers can fertilize themselves, they need a union with another orchid in order to be completely fertilized (8). In the following


chapter, we will see that Proust associates 'self-fertilization' with the solitary pleasures Marcel guiltily enjoys in the Combray water-closet. The solitary homosexual, too, risks loneliness and a type of emotional infertility if he cannot find someone to share his special tastes.

"Alors le solitaire languit seul ... il s'attarde sur la plage, telle une étrange Andromède qu'aucun Argonaute ne viendra délivrer, comme une méduse stérile qui périsra sur le sable" (S. G., p. 626). However, if he does find another sexually ambiguous creature, the solitary invert will find a form of fertilization:

Méduse! Orchidée! Quand je ne suivais que mon instinct, la méduse me répugnait à Balbec; mais si je savais la regarder, comme Michelet, du point de vue de l'histoire naturelle et de l'esthétique, je voyais une délicieuse girandole d'azur. Ne sont-elles pas, avec le velours transparent de leurs pétales, comme les mauves orchidées de la mer? Comme tant de créatures du règne animal et du règne végétal, comme la plante qui produirait la vanille, mais qui, parce que, chez elle, l'organe mâle est séparé par une cloison de l'organe femelle, demeure stérile si les oiseaux-mouches ou certaines petites abeilles ne transportent le pollen des unes aux autres ou si l'homme ne les féconde artificiellement, M. de Charlus (et ici le mot fécondation doit être pris au sens moral, puisqu'au sens physique l'union du mâle avec le mâle est stérile, mais il n'est pas indifférent qu'un individu puisse rencontrer le seul plaisir qu'il est susceptible de goûter, et "qu'ici-bas tout être" puisse donner à quelqu'un "sa musique, sa flamme ou son parfum"), M. de Charlus était de ces hommes qui peuvent être appelés exceptionnels, parce que, si nombreux soient-ils, la satisfaction, si facile chez d'autres, de leurs besoins sexuels dépend de la coïncidence de trop de conditions, et trop difficiles à rencontrer (S. G., pp. 627,8).

Note here how well all Proust's symbols fit together. The medusa jellyfish is appropriate in this setting not only because it is a hermaphroditic creature, but also because it resembles, in colour and texture, an orchid, and is, thus, the orchid of the sea. Moreover, it
reminds us of the Greek myth, which Marcel has already used to describe Charlus (C. G., p. 554). Indeed, Charlus wishes to transfix the objects of his interest with his eyes, and is himself, here, described as being "pâle comme un marbre" (S. G., p. 603), the fate of those who look back to Sodom and Gomorrah being, in biblical terms, petrifaction, the same fate, as Proust mentions, as Lot's wife (S. G., p. 631). (However, we will discuss the biblical allusions in detail later.) Of those animals which do not differentiate between the sexes, Proust is particularly interested in the protozoa. Here, he likens Charlus to an infusorium (S. G., p. 629). An earlier allusion to protozoa is very positive, Proust alluding to their ability to give off light and perfumes (here Charlus and Jupien exchange light and perfume with each other):

C'étaient de ces chambres de province qui - de même qu'en certains pays des parties entières de l'air ou de la mer sont illuminées ou parfumées par des myriades de protozoaires que nous ne voyons pas - nous enchantent des mille odeurs qu'y dégagent les vertus, la sagesse, les habitudes, toute une vie secrète, invisible, surabondante et morale que l'atmosphère y tient en suspens (C. S., p. 49).

However, a later allusion to this light, or phosphorescence, is not so positive, and reminds us of the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Souvent, quand, dans la salle du Casino, deux jeunes filles se désiraient, il se produisait comme un phénomène lumineux, une sorte de trainée phosphorescente allant de l'une à l'autre" (S. G., p. 852).
Proust, here, has obviously decided that homosexuality is a 'natural' phenomenon, governed by the rules of nature:

Enfin, l'inversion elle-même, venant de ce que l'inverti se rapproche trop de la femme pour pouvoir avoir des rapports utiles avec elle, se rattache par là à une loi plus haute qui fait que tant de fleurs hermaphrodites restent infécondes, c'est-à-dire à la stérilité de l'autofécondation ... tant de fleurs hermaphrodites ... comme l'escargot, ... ne peuvent être fécondés par eux-mêmes (S. G., p. 629).

Charlus, like other hermaphroditic creatures, then, runs the risk of infertility because he is exceptional. But, given an immense amount of luck, such as he experiences in meeting Jupien, and he, too, can be 'fertilized' (although Proust emphasizes unnecessarily that the 'fertilization' is not physical). In fact, when we compare the symbolism of this orchid of homosexuality with Odette's orchid, the love between Jupien and Charlus with that between Swann and Odette, the former seems far more positive. Here, Jupien is 'fertilized', whilst Swann brushed away the pollen from Odette's orchid. The vanilla orchid, with its lovely perfume is invoked here, whilst Odette's orchid has no smell or a bad one. Swann ceases to truly appreciate perfumes, the essence of things, and music, anyway, once he meets Odette; Charlus and Jupien, on the other hand, share their essence - their love, their perfume, music and fire with each other. Swann, far from gaining warmth from Odette, is soon trapped in a cold winter world, as we shall see in the conclusion.
However, even if the homosexual encounter can be sometimes providential and happy, the guilt that accompanies it can lead to a foreboding of death, such as Saint-Loup, Charlus' nephew, feels (Saint-Loup's name illustrates his double nature; he is a good fighter, like the chivalric warrior-saints who were his ancestors, but he is also a homosexual who seeks to hide his nature, but is forced, through hunger, to return to Sodom: "Ils n'iraient à Sodome que les jours de suprême nécessité, quand leur ville serait vide, par ces temps où la faim fait sortir le loup du bois" (S. G., p. 632):

Robert m'avait souvent dit avec tristesse, bien avant la guerre: "Oh! ma vie, n'en parlons pas, je suis un homme condamné d'avance". Faisait-il allusion au vice qu'il avait réussi jusqu'alors à cacher à tout le monde mais qu'il connaissait, et dont il s'exagérait peut-être la gravité, comme les enfants qui font pour la première fois l'amour, où même avant cela cherchent seuls le plaisir, s'imaginent pareils à la plante qui ne peut disséminer son pollen sans mourir tout de suite après? Peut-être cette exagération tenait-elle, pour Saint-Loup comme pour les enfants, ainsi qu'à l'idée du péché avec laquelle on ne s'est pas encore familiarisé, à ce qu'une sensation toute nouvelle a une force presque terrible qui ira ensuite en s'atténuant; ou bien avait-il, le justifiant au besoin par la mort de son père enlevé assez jeune, le pressentiment de sa fin prématurée? (T. R., p. 850).

Once again, sin, death, and heredity are associated with pollen imagery and with homosexuality, as well as with the solitary pleasures which Marcel himself enjoys, as we shall see in the next chapter, where this quotation will once again be important. But, on an even more obvious level, Marcel is involved in the insect/flower imagery, for Charlus is capable of playing the flower's role as well, and Marcel, watching the scene in the courtyard (as we have already hinted) suspects that in the
last encounter between himself and Charlus he has been made to play the role of the unsuspecting insect:

Parfois, ainsi que cela lui était sans doute arrivé pour moi le soir où j'avais été mandé par lui après le dîner Guermantes, l'assouvissement avait lieu grâce à une violente semonce que le baron jetait à la figure du visiteur, comme certaines fleurs, grâce à un ressort, aspergent à distance l'insecte inconsciemment complice et décontenancé. M. de Charlus, de dominié devenu dominateur, se sentait purgé de son inquiétude et calmé, renvoyait le visiteur, qui avait aussitôt cessé de lui paraître désirable (S. G., p. 629).

Actually, Marcel is present, probably, in spirit as well as in fact, at this encounter, for Charlus insists on telling Jupien about a young, intelligent, but very rude (after all, Marcel stamped on Charlus' hat) bourgeois with whom he (Charlus) is much taken (S. G., p. 612).

The scene between Marcel and Charlus, however, goes against Charlus' own 'moral' code in such things, for Charlus insists that the definition of permissible love is a love which is returned: "Et puis c'est une tendresse permise, je veux dire une tendresse payée de retour. Il y en a tant dont on ne peut pas dire cela!" (J. F., p. 766). Charlus is right. In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu most of the love affairs are one sided, especially where Marcel is concerned, as we shall see in the next chapter. In fact, the next time that Proust uses the metaphor of the insect fertilizing a flower, it is in the context of heterosexual desire, and is not positive, but basically ridiculous because it concerns a casual fancy, not returned:

Mais, presque sans dissimulation, qu'une vie déjà avancée lui en eût été soit la volonté morale par l'indifférence à l'opinion, ou le pouvoir physique par l'exaltation du désir et l'affaiblissement
des ressorts qui aident à le cacher, dès que Swann eut, en serrant la main de la marquise, vu sa gorge de tout près et de haut, il plongea un regard attentif, sérieux, absorbé, presque soucieux, dans les profondeurs du corsage, et ses narines, que le parfum de la femme grisait, palpitèrent comme un papillon prêt à aller se poser sur la fleur entrevue. Brusquement il s’arracha au vertige qui l’avait saisi, et Mme de Surgis elle-même, quoique gênée, étouffa une inspiration profonde, tant le désir est parfois contagieux (S. G., p. 707).

(Notice in passing how often Proust uses the word 'moral' in describing these scenes. Jupien and Charlus enjoy a 'moral fertilization' - Swann has lost his 'moral will-power'.)

In the published version of his introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe, then, Proust relies a great deal on his metaphors from natural science to produce some insights into homosexuality. In fact, he shows his bias in the following quotation:

Par là les invertis, qui se rattachent volontiers à l'antique Orient ou à l'âge d'or de la Grèce, remonteraient plus haut encore, à ces époques d'essai où n'existiaient ni les fleurs dioïques ni les animaux unisexués, à cet hermaphroditisme initial dont quelques rudiments d'organes mâles dans l'anatomie de la femme et d'organes femelles dans l'anatomie de l'homme semblent conserver la trace (S. G., p. 629).

Allusions to Greek myths do not, however, disappear from Proust's introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe. In the first version, Marcel describes the clouds of pollen thus:

Pour tout dire, par cette chaude journée, ce que j'étais altéré de voir, plus que des fleurs, plus que le ciel avec ses nuées, c'était les autres nuages colorés qui presque à ras du sol voyagent de fleurs (en fleurs), pareils à ces gerbes prismatices d'eau que lancent les tuyaux d'arrosage pour rafraîchir les
This detail of the water from the garden hose forming rainbows must remind us of the idyllic scene associated with Marcel's first encounter with Gilberte. The golden colour of the pollen accords well with Marcel's first impression of the Guermantes, especially Saint-Loup and his uncle Charlus, both of whom he sees as sun gods. Saint-Loup, with the same type of beauty and grace his uncle had when young (along with "un air efféminé" (J. F., p. 729), has the air of a young god - "un jeune homme aux yeux pénétrants et dont la peau était aussi blonde et les cheveux aussi dorés que s'ils avaient absorbé tous les rayons du soleil" (J. F., pp. 728-9). This description, however, belongs to, as Marcel says, "l'âge ridicule que je traversais - âge nullement ingrat, très fécond - ... on n'y consulte pas l'intelligence et ... les moindres attributs des êtres semblent faire partie indivisible de leur personnalité. Tout entouré de monstres et de dieux, on ne connaît guère le calme" (J. F., p. 730). This golden Saint-Loup, in fact, belongs to the Balbec days which Marcel is remembering in this first version of the introduction. Saint-Loup also tells him about the young Charlus who used to wear raincoats striped with blue and orange and use utensils made for him by a goldsmith (he also savagely beat a man who made a homosexual proposal to him). However, by the second version of the introduction, Charlus, as we shall see, is described as an aged and ill

god, and Marcel, in the courtyard scene, seems surrounded by more monsters than gods.

Before we discuss this second version, however, let us look at the symbol of the storm here. The pollen forms providential, fertile showers, intermittent, like the emotional 'storms' Marcel experiences throughout the novel - 'les intermittences du coeur'. In the manuscript, Proust wrote 'la pluie d'or de Sénélé', as far as the presenter of the text could read, which the latter corrected to 'Danaé'. Now, it seems as though we are actually confronted here with two myths, concerning Zeus in his guise as sky (or rain) god (11). In the myth of Danaé, Zeus appears to her in the form of a golden rain, and impregnates her. In the myth of Sémélé (or Semele in English), whose name is certainly much closer to the one Proust chose (and a written 'm' and 'n' do look similar), this particular mistress of Zeus is persuaded by the jealous Hera to demand that her lover appear in his true form, to prove that he is a god and not a monster. Of course, as a mere mortal, Semele can not survive the sight of Zeus as a storm, complete with thunder and lightening. She dies, but her sexually ambiguous son, Dionysus, is kept alive. Perhaps Proust himself confused the two myths, for certainly, in them both, he has both sides of love, love as a summer shower, golden and life-bringing, and love as a destructive storm, especially when, through jealousy one confronts one's lover.

Just before the second version of the introduction to *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, in the 'seduction' scene between Charlus and Marcel, we can see that the former is quickly tarnishing the golden image which his nephew presented to him. "Je regardais M. de Charlus. Certes sa tête magnifique, et qui répugnait, l'emportait pourtant sur celle de tous les siens; on eût dit un Apollon vieilli; mais un jus olivâtre, hépatique, semblait prêt à sortir de sa bouche mauvaise" (C. G., p. 555). This, then, is an ageing god (we have seen that his social dictums now are no more than cardboard lightning bolts (S. G., p. 640), who exudes an evil yellow effluvium. In the introduction to *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, there is just one hint that Charlus and Jupien might have something in common with gods - a difference which is only discernible to one of their own kind: "les dieux sont immédiatement perceptibles aux dieux" (S. G., p. 613). They have, as though engraved on their foreheads, "le mot cher aux anciens Grecs" (S. G., p. 614). But this does not save them from being considered rather more like monsters in nineteenth-century France. Charlus is likened, as we have seen, to Medusa, also to a centaur: "En M. de Charlus un autre être avait beau s'accoupler, qui le différenciait des autres hommes, comme dans le centaure le cheval" (S. G., p. 614). This, at least, is a more noble monster, celebrated, apart from anything else, in Elstir's painting of an encounter between a poet and a centaur (Marcel and Charlus here). Of course, in art, Proust (or Marcel) loves the juxtaposition of different entities as though they were one, the metaphors of painting. From the
point of view of society, however, he feels that he must describe sexual ambiguity thus: "chez certains de ces nouveaux venus, la femme n'est pas seulement intérieurement unie à l'homme, mais hideusement visible" (S. G., p. 620). Even when the young man who looks like a woman is beautiful, the consequences are unhappy, an imprisonment perhaps presaged in the image of "la fleur captive" (S. G., p. 607). "on s'émerveille que la jeune femme, la jeune fille, Galatée qui s'éveille à peine dans l'inconscient de ce corps d'homme où elle est enfermée, ait su si ingénieusement, de soi-même, sans l'avoir appris de personne, profiter des moindres issues de sa prison" (S. G., p. 621). This allusion is particularly interesting, for Pygmalion was an artist and Galatea his own creation, a statue of a woman whom the goddess of love brought to life. Here, we are reminded of Marcel feeling that a new Eve has been created from his body (that is his dreams are taking actual form): "Quelque fois, comme Eve naquit d'une côte d'Adam, une femme naissait pendant mon sommeil d'une fausse position de ma cuisse" (C. S., p. 4). And, of Albertine he says, at one point: "Nous sommes des sculpteurs. Nous voulons obtenir d'une femme une statue entièrement différente de celle qu'elle nous a présentée" (P., p. 142). In fact, Marcel here does not live up to the misogyny of that earlier sculptor, Pygmalion, of whom Zimmermann says:

A king of Cyprus and a sculptor. Thoroughly disgusted with the debauchery of females, he developed an aversion for women and resolved never to marry. He bestowed his affection upon a marble
statue of a lovely girl, fell in love with the statue, and prayed to Aphrodite to give it life. Aphrodite changed the statue into a woman, Galatea, whom Pygmalion married. They had a daughter, Paphos.

But, most of all, this story illustrates the idea of the self-sufficient artist, who carries within him both male and female elements which help him with his creations. Even the idea of the statue is rather ominous in terms of the story of Sodom and Lot's wife. The female element, though, in a man's body feels imprisoned, unless it is released in a work of art. Is that one reason why Proust told the story of Albertine imprisoned in Marcel's house (a symbol, as we have seen, for his mind)? Philip seems to have a similar thought when he says:

"Albertine recovers her lost masculine half and incarnates for the reader - and certainly for the writer - the ideal hermaphrodite that the author felt was his own true essence" (13). However, the story of the imprisoned lover is presented here on a down to earth level, too. The mistress of the beautiful young boy, realizing that he is going to keep on pursuing other men, locks him up, much as Marcel does with Albertine (S. G., p. 621). In fact, in a final ironic use of the gold colour imagery, Marcel, looking up at his room one night, where Albertine has put the light on, says: "il me sembla voir le lumineux grillage qui allait se refermer sur moi et dont j'avais forgé moi-même, pour une servitude éternelle, les inflexibles barreaux d'or" (P., p. 331).

Charlus, too, later in the novel, is associated with the ultimate Greek image of imprisonment from the myths. A slave to his emotions, paying to be chained up and beaten in a homosexual brothel, "ce Prométhée consentant s'était fait clouer par la Force au rocher de la pure Matière" (T. R., p. 838). Now Prometheus, too, brought down fire from heaven, which fits in very well with the biblical allusions which we are going to discuss next. The final theme, then, associated with the Greek symbolism, is one of imprisonment, the female part of a man locked within himself, the lover kept a prisoner through jealousy, the homosexual a slave to his sexual desires.

However, at least Galatea was beautiful and the golden rain of Zeus could be fertile, and Prometheus noble; when we come to discuss the biblical imagery, storm and stone present a message of doom for the homosexual. As Rina Viers points out, the Jewish religion, with its injunction to increase and multiply, was bound to be anti-homosexual hence the story of the destruction of Sodom by the rain of fire from heaven. In this second version, we have come a long way from "une petite pluie orangée" (C. G., p. 517) which the duchess describes and from "la pluie de soufre" mentioned only once in the first version. Here, we have the real beginning of the symbolism of the rain of fire from heaven which will culminate in the encounter between Marcel and Charlus in wartime Paris:

Si je pense que nous pouvons avoir demain le sort des villes du Vésuve, celles-ci sentaient qu'elles étaient menacées du sort des villes maudites de la Bible. On a retrouvé sur les murs d'une maison de Pompéi cette inscription révélatrice : Sodoma, Gomora. "Je ne sais si ce fut ce nom de Sodome et les idées qu'il éveilla en lui, ou celle du bombardement, qui firent que M. de Charlus leva un instant les yeux au ciel, mais il les ramena bientôt sur la terre. "J'admire tous les héros de cette guerre ... ce sont tout simplement des athlètes de la Grèce ... ce sont les jeunes gens de Platon" (T. R., p. 807).

Thus, even although the war here seems like some evidence of divine wrath, even although Charlus is on his way to Jupien's brothel to become "l'Homme enchaîné" (T. R., p. 821), revelling in his chastisement, Charlus cannot resist an allusion to a happier aspect of homosexuality, that presented by "l'Âge d'or de la Grèce" (S. G., p. 629), whereas Marcel, perhaps remembering Charlus' statement that he roams around Paris at night "comme le calife qui parcourait Bagdad" (S. G., p. 610), cannot help evoking "l'antique Orient" (S. G., p. 629). "Ce ne fut pas l'Orient de Decamps ni même de Delacroix ... mais le vieil Orient de ces Mille et une Nuits que j'avais tant aimées" (T. R., p. 809). And Marcel finds himself even more deeply involved with Charlus and his night-time Paris when he follows him to Jupien's brothel, where Jupien quotes to him the title of Ruskin's Sésame et Lys (which Marcel lent Charlus), doubly ironic because, so many years ago, Charlus tried to make Marcel believe that homosexuality was the magic password which would open all the doors of society to him. Indeed, in this night-time Paris, we find a Marcel very similar to that of the first version of the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe, a curious voyeur, who, because
of the great heat, feels a strong thirst, but a thirst for knowledge as well as a physical thirst.

It does not take long for these more comic and happy aspects to be destroyed, for Jupien's brothel, along with "Les peintures pompéiennes de la maison de Jupien" (T. R., p. 837) is in great danger of being hit by a bomb. Saint-Loup, in the confusion, loses his croix de guerre; so much for the heroes of the war. Pompeii and Sodom are Paris, its inhabitants risk the same fate. The death of the Pompeiians is particularly apt, for they are petrified, like Lot's wife looking back at Sodom. The rain of fire from heaven (how strange now to think that it started its metaphorical life as golden clouds of pollen), the rain of fire from heaven not only destroys, it imprisons the body, finally, forever in an immutable form of stone; hence Albertine, a lesbian, being likened to Medieval sculptures of the dead "Ce fut une morte en effet que je vis ... avec ... une rigidité de pierre ... comme dans certains Jugements Derniers du moyen âge" (P., p. 359).

A strange irony comes to light, however, when we study a further metaphor in Proust's discussion of the lack of freedom which is associated with homosexuality. Homosexuals, Proust says, are imprisoned by their own tendencies, "la fatalité de la race" (S. G., p. 615), "une véritable prédestination préparée par les harmonies de leur tempérament, non pas seulement par leur tempérament propre, mais par celui de leurs ascendants,
par leur plus lointaine hérédité" (S.G., p. 627). However, the irony, in terms of the story of Sodom, occurs in that, if homosexuals are a race, the race they most resemble because of their persecution, is the Jews: "comme les Juifs encore...rassemblés à leurs pareils par l'ostracisme qui les frappe...ayant fini par prendre, par une persécution semblable à celle d'Israël, les caractères physiques et moraux d'une race, parfois beaux, souvent affreux" (S.G., p.616). And so, we end with the theme which obviously obsesses Proust in this section, where the pollen of flowers presages the fire from heaven, where the laws of inheritance of the vegetable kingdom become associated with the inherited tendencies of a tormented race, we return to the theme of persecution which adds the element of crime and of danger to a phenomenon which may be regarded as perfectly natural in botany. Finally, although we may find the symbol of the orchid slightly more difficult to analyze than some of Proust's less complex flowers, the task, once accomplished, is doubly rewarding because of the wealth of botanical detail and the mythological and biblical allusions which Proust uses in discussing it lends a particular fascination to the introduction to Sodom et Gomorrhe.
The Bush and Related Symbolism,

including the Pine Tree
Now we move from Proust's most elaborate and detailed symbol - the orchid - to his vaguest - 'le petit arbuste'. For, of course, Marcel is as interested to see the fertilization of the bush as he is to see that of the rare plant, or orchid. Both orchid and bush are associated with the homosexual encounter between Charlus and Jupien, and they seem to illustrate two ways of dealing with a subject which involves and worries. The person involved can dissect the subject completely, analyse it out of existence and justify it in as many ways as possible - always, of course, saying that it is the problem of a 'friend' - as Proust seems to do with the orchid, or he can play it down, let it almost disappear, try, even, not to name it - as Proust seems to do with the bush. However, before we follow the imagery of the bush (and the pine tree which is mentioned in close association with it) and its link with various incidents in Marcel's life of which he is not very proud, let us look at what the critics say, remembering always that the question of Proust's involvement in a symbol is important only in as much as it enhances or destroys the poetic impact of that symbol. We have only one example of the difference between the first and second draft of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu at our disposal, that of the first version of the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe. Feuillerat who had the opportunity to compare both versions has this to say:

Toutes les fois que l'auteur adopte une attitude passive, expectante, un tantinet naïve, ne retenant que des sensations et des impressions, qu'il s'exprime en un style chargé d'images
et d'originales suggestions, souple et nuancé comme une étoffe de soie, on pourra être sûr qu'il s'agit d'un passage appartenant à la première version.

This opinion certainly seems fair when we remember Marcel waiting expectantly for an act of fertilization to occur, allowing images to flow through his mind at the same time, in the first version of the introduction. The second version, on the other hand, relies heavily on the hindsight of the narrator. Feuillerat goes on to say that he sees a movement towards lucidity in the second draft, "une analyse logique d'une extrême rigueur", as well as an added pessimism, which seems, again, to fit in well with Proust's treatment of the orchid in the second introduction. On the other side of the fence, Ullmann specifically praises Proust's use of the semi-technical language in order to gain an "air of detached, scientific objectivity".

In any case, we are grateful for the first version of the introduction of Sodome et Gomorrhe for the clues it gives us as to the identity, and thus the fascination for Marcel, of "le petit arbuste", clues almost entirely missing from the second version. We learn that the bush (or tree - "ce bel arbre qui est dans la cour" (C. G., p. 516) as the duchess calls it), along with other interesting plants, must be wind-pollinated, and hence needs no other living creature to help it in its

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(2) Ibid, p. 8.
fertilization - an excellent symbol for Marcel's 'solitary pleasures': "peut-être ... pourrais-je voir de vraies fusées de pollen projetées par des fleurs aménophiles, la pluie de soufre qu'égouttent, abondante, fine et serrée, les fleurs du pin, les nuages d'or qui voyagent entre les genêts d'Espagne" (4). (Note the pine, it will be an important symbol later on in this chapter.) Then, too, bushes are often 'trained' or cut into a special shape. Thus, Marcel can say of Albertine that she is a "rosier à qui j'avais fourni le tuteur, le cadre, l'espalier de sa vie" (P., p. 382). Marcel, then, is not following the example of his beloved grandmother, who preferred roses to grow naturally. These two qualities once observed, along with the bush's possible death without offspring (again the theme of infertility and death) and we are left with a very vague symbol indeed. So much so that we wonder if the vagueness is one of the most important qualities of the bush. After all, Marcel hoped the bush would be fertilized at the same time as the orchid, and, in human terms, he, to whom Charlus has referred as a 'human bush', (C. G., p. 285) is the only human equivalent available for this second part of the parallel fertilization. Perhaps Proust, realizing how much the bush linked his hero to homosexuality, kept the image purposely ill-defined. In any case, we notice that, whenever Marcel is involved in solitary pleasures, masturbation or voyeurism which might be termed the human equivalent for wind-pollination and which often carries with it a fear of death, whenever he is bending

another human being to his will (often sexual) or is being so bent, whenever he particularly fears parental disapproval, and thus wishes to dissociate himself from the act, in all these cases, we find the image of the bush (or the pine tree associated with the bush in the Guermantes' courtyard). These incidents include Marcel's sojourns in the Combray water-closet, from which he can see Roussainville-le-Pin, his day dreams in the forest (presumably pine) around Roussainville, his watching Mlle Vinteuil and friend from a bushy hill overlooking Montjouvain, his trying to bend the duchess to his will and Charlus trying to shape him to his, his wrestling match with Gilberte, and, of course, the encounter which he watches between Charlus and Jupien. They continue, then, throughout the novel, and they do mark a certain progression in Marcel, as he comes more and more out of himself. After all, he starts out hiding in a cowardly fashion at the top of the house at Combray, and he progresses to actually touching Gilberte, who seems half an accomplice. In the courtyard scene, he abandons his vantage point at the very top of the house, and descends to ground level to see what is going on.

The first example of those 'solitary pleasures' which Marcel enjoys, then, and whose consequences he fears, occurs at the very beginning of Du Côté de Chez Swann. The same symbols recur - not the bush exactly, but the pine associated with it, the punishing storm (symbol of parental disapproval), and even later, the snail which we saw associated with the
Note, most of all, that Marcel, like the young Jean, has retreated into one distant room because he cannot stand watching his great aunt 'torturing' his grandmother:

Ce supplice que lui infligeait ma grand'tante, le spectacle des vaines prières de ma grand'mère et de sa faiblesse ... me causaient alors une telle horreur que j'aurais aimé battre ma grand'tante. Mais ... déjà honte par la lâcheté, je faisais ce que nous faisions tous, une fois que nous sommes grands, quand il y a devant nous des souffrances et des injustices : je ne voulais pas les voir; je montais secrètement tout en haut de la maison à côté de la salle d'études, sous les toits, dans une petite pièce sentant l'iris ... Destinée à un usage plus spécial et plus vulgaire, cette pièce, d'où l'on voyait pendant le jour jusqu'au donjon de Roussainville-le-Pin, servit longtemps de refuge pour moi, sans doute parce qu'elle était la seule qu'il me fût permis de fermer à clef, à toutes celles de mes occupations qui réclamaient une inviolable solitude : la lecture, la rêverie, les larmes et la volupté. Hélas! je ne savais pas que ... mon manque de volonté, ma santé délicate ... préoccupaient ma grand'mère (C. S., p. 12).

This passage must surely act as an antidote to those people who believe that Du Côté de Chez Swann was a nostalgic exercise on Proust's part. By the end of the novel, Marcel has learned to face unpleasant truths, unlike, for example, Swann. Here, however, he is obviously quite unhappy, and begins to associate sex (here masturbation) with unhappiness, cowardice, his grandmother's concern (at least slightly better than paternal disapproval), and the indignity (as well as the odour, as we shall see later in the scene between Gilberte and Marcel on the Champs Elysées) of this water-closet "Destinée à un usage plus spécial et vulgaire", which, at this point Proust does not wish to elaborate on; later, in the passage on the Champs Elysées, however, he delights in showing us a microcosm of snobbery concerning the 'Duchess'
of the public toilets, who lets her favourites relieve themselves without paying. Before we discuss the various associations which could be made with the symbol of Roussainville-le-Pin, let us look at a later more explicit scene of the same nature:

Hélas, c'était en vain que j'implorais le donjon de Roussainville, que je lui demandais de faire venir auprès de moi quelque enfant de son village, comme au seul confident que j'avais eu de mes premiers désirs, quand au haut de notre maison de Combray, dans le petit cabinet sentant l'iris, je ne voyais que sa tour au milieu du carreau de la fenêtre entrouverte, pendant qu'avec des hésitations héroïques du voyageur qui entreprend une exploration ou du désespéré qui se suicide, défaillant, je me frayais en moi-même une route inconnue et que je croyais mortelle, jusqu'au moment où une trace naturelle comme celle d'un colimaçon s'ajoutait aux feuilles du cassis sauvage qui se penchaient jusqu'à moi. En vain je le suppliais maintenant. En vain, tenant l'étendue dans le champ de ma vision, je la drainais de mes regards qui eussent voulu en ramener une femme. Je pouvais aller jusqu'au porche de Saint-André-des-Champs; jamais ne s'y trouvait la paysanne que je n'eusse pas manqué d'y rencontrer si j'avais été avec mon grand-père et dans l'impossibilité de lier conversation avec elle. Je fixais indéfiniment le tronc d'un arbre lointain, de derrière lequel elle allait surgir et venir à moi... mon attention s'attachait... à ce sol stérile... je frappais les arbres du bois de Roussainville d'entre lesquels ne sortait pas plus d'êtres vivants (C. S., p. 158).

Note here so many of the themes and symbols that we will see again in the courtyard scene, the symbol of the hermaphroditic snail, the symbol of the dangerous way (at every crossroad there is an easy and a dangerous way), and the risky voyage (such as Marcel undertakes when he wants to keep Charlus and Jupien under observation). Most of all, notice the theme of death, here very reminiscent of the passage in which Marcel describes Saint-Loup's fear of death: "Faisait-il allusion au vice qu'il avait réussi jusqu'alors à cacher à tout le monde... et
dont il s'exagérait peut-être la gravité, comme les enfants ... qui cherchent seuls le plaisir, s'imagine pareils à la plante qui ne peut disséminer son pollen sans mourir" (T. R., p. 850). His grandfather, here, represents the paternal disapproval which prevents Marcel from finding a girl. But notice how closely Marcel's dreams are fixed on the phallic tower of the Roussainville keep which he can see from the window of the water-closet, and how closely he associates girls with the (pine?) trees of the Roussainville wood. This choice of associations is very apt, for it is to Roussainville that the Combray youngsters go to experiment with sex. And the keep — already hinting at the imprisonment of love — is at first a fortress that Marcel feels he must penetrate (like a girl?), but that later he will wish to escape from. It is also, as we have already seen in the following quotation which we will requote, the symbol of paternal disapproval on a divine scale:

Devant nous, dans le lointain, terre promise ou maudite,
Roussainville, dans les murs duquel je n'ai jamais pénétré,
Roussainville, tantôt, quand la pluie avait déjà cessé pour nous, continuait à être châtifié comme un village de la Bible par toutes les lances de l'orage qui flagellaient obliquement les demeures de ses habitants, ou bien était déjà pardonné par Dieu le Père qui faisait descendre vers lui, inégalement longues, comme les rayons d'un ostensoir d'autel, les tiges d'or effrangées de son soleil reparu
(C. S., p. 152).

(5) The underlining is my own.
Not far from this passage, Marcel describes his initiation into the facts of lesbianism, another voyeur scene, which he watches from a bushy hill, a scene made all the more poignant because Mlle Vinteuil's father is a strict old man in moral issues. "C'était par un temps très chaud ... je m'étais étendu à l'ombre et endormi dans les buissons du talus qui domine la maison" (C. S., p. 159). Once again, we see the image of bushes, the element of heat, the high vantage point. Later, the memory of this scene encourages him to continue watching Charlus and Jupien in the Guermantes' courtyard (S. G., p. 608).

The next passage in which a bush (unspecified) appears describes a struggle for a letter between Marcel and Gilberte, a struggle which Marcel prolongs in order to reach a sexual climax. "Je la tenais serrée entre mes jambes comme un arbuste après lequel j'aurais voulu grimper" (J. F., p. 494). Once again, Marcel feels very guilty, thinking that now he merits the bad opinion that Swann had expressed of him. The whole scene is followed by one of Marcel's moments out of time, introduced by, of all things, the musty smell of the toilets in the park, which remind him of the smell of his uncle's 'refuge' at Combray, and, no doubt, to some extent, of his own. Marcel is dismayed that such a common odour, rather than a grand idea can resurrect the past and bring him such happiness, for he has not yet learned that insignificant things can provide the artist with his strongest inspiration. Gilberte, by the way, initiates the struggle with one of her famous glances which Marcel, for some reason, can never quite understand.
One other episode uses the image of the bush to illustrate Marcel's managing to get in touch with a woman against her will. In it, Saint-Loup finally succeeds in engineering a conversation between his aunt, the duchess, and Marcel, who is infatuated with her:

Elle laissa pleuvoir sur moi la lumière de son regard bleu, hésita un instant, déplia et tendit la tige de son bras, pencha en avant son corps qui se redressa rapidement en arrière comme un arbrisseau qu'on a couché et qui, laissé libre, revient à sa position naturelle. Ainsi agissait-elle sous le feu des regards de Saint-Loup qui l'observait et faisait à distance des efforts désespérés pour obtenir un peu plus encore de sa tante (C. G., pp. 254-255).

Once again, this passage deals with a coercion, with Marcel's demands on Saint-Loup and Saint-Loup's demands on his aunt. There may even be a sexual undertone in the phrase "un arbre qu'on a couché". In any case, most important here is the theme of the glance described in words suitable for a storm, and indeed reminiscent of Proust's personal use of storm symbolism, rain and light and fire being associated with these two Guermantes. Marcel has always linked the duchess' eyes with the light that floods through the Combray church, the former emitting "un flot de lumière bleue" (C. S., p. 177), the latter "le flot bleu et doux" "une pluie flamboyante" (C. S., p. 60), both examples of light and rain imagery expressing the nobility of the Guermantes. However, in the context of Saint-Loup's homosexuality and the theme of the rain of fire from heaven, "le feu des regards de Saint-Loup" becomes a rather ironic phrase, suggesting, if anything, the future destruction of the Guermantes. Marcel here seems an almost passive observer of this clash between water and fire, but his will initiates the whole scene.
In a similar fashion, in the next, and most important, 'bush' episode, Marcel may be more involved than he seems to be, and his involvement is betrayed by the theme of the 'human bush'. In the courtyard scene, as we have already mentioned, the bush lacks a name, a significant lack, as the whole courtyard is dominated by a name - Guermantes. In the second version of the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe, in direct contrast to the orchid, Proust spares us any botanical details at all concerning the bush. If we trace the bush imagery and the character of Charlus up to this scene, however, we can see that "l'arbuste humain" (C.G., p. 285) is far more important than "le petit arbuste" (S.G., p. 601), and, as far as Charlus is concerned, he wants Marcel to be his human bush.

In fact, many of the images of the courtyard scene are introduced along with Charlus at Balbec. At first sight, Marcel feels that M.de Charlus has "les yeux ... comme une lézarde, comme une meurtrière" (J.F., p. 761). His grandmother finds in Charlus "des délicatesses, une sensibilité féminines" (J.F., p. 762). Charlus, too, gives a clue as to his tastes when he says: "Mais l'important dans la vie n'est pas ce qu'on aime ... c'est d'aimer" (J.F., p. 763) and he cites maternal love and even the example of Phèdre, as admirable; later, talking of the young violinist, Morel, whom he is helping, Charlus calls himself one of "les vieilles Maman-gâteau du Conservatoire" (P., p. 227). Most important of all, he mentions his wish for a worthwhile protégé,
a 'human bush' that he could train and shape to perfection:

Il n'y a rien de plus agréable que de se donner de l'ennui pour une personne qui en vaille la peine. Pour les meilleurs d'entre nous, l'étude des arts, le goût de la brocante, les collections, les jardins, ne sont que des Ersatz, des succédanés, des alibis... Nous cultivons les bégonias, nous taillons les ifs, par pis aller, parce que les ifs et les bégonias se laissent faire. Mais nous aimerions mieux donner notre temps à un arbuste humain, si nous étions sûrs qu'il en valût la peine. Toute la question est là; vous devez vous connaître un peu. En valez-vous la peine ou non? (C. G., p. 285).

He further offers Marcel "Le "Sésame" de l'hôtel Guermantes" (C. G., p. 293) (6), which links him to "l'antique Orient" (S. G., p. 629) much beloved of self-justifying homosexuals, mentions "une franc-maçonnerie" (C. G., p. 290), also associated with homosexuality (S. G., p. 617), and says that, like a good genie, he will initiate Marcel into knowledge as important as the laws of steam and electricity (C. G., p. 291), in other words, into that 'unknown' world "presque invisible pour mon oeil... que les ondes électriques... les vapeurs" (7) which Marcel comes to associate with the clouds of pollen surrounding the bush in particular (it being wind-pollinated). Finally, Charlus introduces the idea of the crossroad, saying that Marcel is "au carrefour de deux routes" (C. G., p. 296), a symbol which comes to its climax in the introduction to Sodome et Gomorrhe, where a man who has married returns to his old friend (male) at their old trysting place, a crossroads.

(6) Rina Viers in her excellent article Fleurs Blanches et Sacrilegë, l'Europe, Centenaire de Marcel Proust 1971, points out Proust's 'sacriligious' (as he himself says) use of Ruskin's magic sesame and lilies of virginity in Jupien's comments to Marcel in the brothel scene.

Just in case Marcel hasn't got the message, and does not realize the honour Charlus is doing him, the latter puts him to the test, emphasizing that only rare individuals can pass it:

Je vous ai soumis à l'épreuve que le seul homme éminent de notre monde appelle avec esprit l'épreuve de la trop grande amabilité et qu'il déclare à bon droit la plus terrible de toutes, la seule qui puisse séparer le bon grain de l'ivraie. Je vous reprocherais à peine de l'avoir subie sans succès, car ceux qui en triomphent sont bien rares (C. G., p. 556).

Now, we have already seen the emphasis Proust puts on the rarity of the bush, the rarity of the flower, and, even, the rarity of the insect which will fertilize the flower (S. G., p. 607). He leaves us in no doubt that this quality is sexual and that, in human terms it corresponds to homosexuality. We can easily see, then, the type of test Marcel has failed (even if he cannot), the test to qualify as Charlus' 'human bush'. Even if Marcel then must suffer the storm of Charlus' anger, (a travesty, as we have seen in the lilac chapter of the theme of paternal wrath expressed in Charlus' motto "qui aime bien châtie bien" (C. G., p. 559) ) he at least is spared the infertility and death that goes with such plants, as the Duchess of Guermantes makes clear in discussing "ce bel arbre dans la cour" - "il mourra sans enfants parce que c'est une espèce très rare dans nos pays" (C. G., p. 516).

Since Marcel has misunderstood or rebuffed Charlus so often, we would expect him to regard the bush as well as the orchid with repulsion, but this is not the case. In fact, just as there is some justification for
regarding Marcel as the 'bush' in the human landscape, so there is also some evidence that the bush is fertilized. As we have already mentioned, Marcel's tone in the first version of the introduction to *Sodome et Gomorrhe* is quite positive. The heat and the pollen remind him of sunny Balbec days and "les jeunes filles en fleurs" which he wished to enjoy in the same fashion as a bee moving from flower to flower. Immediately a bond of shared symbols is laid down between Marcel and Charlus, also likened to a bee, also wishing as much variety as possible in love. In fact, as we have seen, it is possible that Marcel has already been, without knowing it, the insect to Charlus' flower. Here, too, the pollen reminds Marcel of the electric currents whose secrets Charlus wished to teach him. (Proust used this image for emotions more than once. Marcel says at one point: "Comme par un courant électrique qui vous meut, j'ai été secoué par mes amours" (*S. G.*, p. 1127). But, most of all, Marcel seems to acknowledge a certain bond in this courtyard scene formed between him and Charlus by the bush when he says: "À partir de ce jour, M. de Charlus devait changer l'heure de ses visites à Mme de Villeparisis, non qu'il ne pût voir Jupien ailleurs et plus commodément, mais parce qu'aussi bien qu'ils l'étaient pour moi, le soleil de l'après-midi et les fleurs de l'arbuste étaient sans doute liés à son souvenir" (*S. G.*, p. 630).

Even if Marcel is not directly involved in this encounter, this is the first time that, as a voyeur or in enjoying solitary pleasures, he
descends to the level of those who are having a love affair, he comes
down to earth, he does not absolutely dissociate himself from others.
This point is important, for, usually, Marcel watches love scenes
through a window, from some high vantage point, instead of participating
in them. Thus, he gazes at Roussainville through the panes of glass
of the water-closet, watches Mlle Vinteuil through an open window, and
decides, as he says, to spend the afternoon "caché derrière les volets
à la fenêtre du grand escalier, d'où je pourrais, de bien loin hêlas,
époque (avec) un battement de coeur si entraient dans la cour les insectes
qui ... apporteraient ... le seul pollen sans lequel l'arbuste et la
plante resteraient vierges" (8). For once, however, Marcel does get
a good close view of one type of love. In fact, he admits in general
that the suffering that love brings may be salutory, the storm necessary,
as he is often unable otherwise to see life as an artist ought, as
though he were watching from a badly placed window:

Mais je me rendais compte aussi que cette souffrance ... que
notre amour ... est salutaire, accessoirement comme moyen (car,
si peu que notre vie doive durer, ce n'est que pendant que nous
souffrons que nos pensées, en quelque sorte agitées de mouvements
perpétuels et changeants, font monter comme dans une tempête, à
un niveau d'où nous pouvons la voir, toute cette immensité réglée
par des lois, sur laquelle, postés à une fenêtre mal placée, nous
n'avons vue, car le calme du bonheur la laisse unie et à un
niveau trop bas
(T. R., p. 897).

However, let us end with the symbol of the pollen. We have seen how
abundant and golden it is in the first version of the introduction to
Sodome et Gomorrhe, despite the fact that it is likened, ominously, to

"la pluie de soufre" which we discussed in the orchid chapter. In
the final version of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, however, its
association with love is also an association with shame and with illness.
Albertine and Andrée pretend to be allergic to seringa in order to hide
their attraction for each other from Marcel. The homosexual Duke de
Châtellerault is a victim of hay-fever, and, as a final link between
Marcel and this world, he, too, can be made ill by flowers (J. F., p.
782).

The symbol of the human bush, then, always seems associated with love,
usually when one person is bending another to his will, or, further
back still in the novel, when Marcel is solitary, indulging in daydreams
and practices which he feels may even lead to death. Nearly always
vague, this symbol seems to illustrate an involvement in certain types
of love which Proust did not always want to acknowledge on behalf of
his hero. Thus, more than anything else, the bush gives us a certain
insight into the attitudes of Proust. Love, in *A la Recherche du Temps
Perdu* often 'dare not speak its name', or is seen from a difficult
vantage-point, as the bush shows us.
The Forget-me-not

So far, our study must close the investigation that most of France's imagery is extremelybaring in form, although we have pointed out various ways some scenes involving the March, including Verdi's melodrama Don Carlos to three favourite Couray flowers and Emanuel's scenes for them. Such imagery shows a strong element of self-preservation, a quality in France which has not escaped the critic. Hence F. W. Fabre's comments on Albertine's conception of the world, an excellent example of Narco's faultless, perfect love imagery. However, however, it is true to evident in his Flora imagery as in Fouché's treatment of the forget-me-nots. Of course, of other flowers, we even by beauty, we must go closely associated through popular tradition, literary allusion, and colour symbolism, with various ideas of perfection. In a survey of flowers, the forget-me-not was noted for longevity, "joy called the other, the eternal" (from which we have spent all of the ideal for March) and truthfully. And the colour blue, as we have already noted, was given in yet another lotus, has often been associated with things spiritual or with purity. Thus, the wine associated with the Virgin Mary in "Isaac" of Beethoven. As in France's personal symbolism, the forget-me-not, whose

the cheek flowers used to dress, represent, for Narco, the nobility and shrines of the mothers, the sire of the town of Conway and the church. We have already seen similar visual expression Narco's childhood noted in terms of other Flower symbolism, but notice in the

...
So far, this study must give the impression that most of Proust's imagery is extremely serious in tone, although we have pointed out various humorous scenes involving the hawthorn, including Marcel's melodramatic farewell to these favourite Combray flowers and Françoise's lament for them. Both scenes show a strong element of self parody, a quality in Proust which has not escaped the critics, hence V. E. Graham's comments on Albertine's description of ice-moulds, an excellent pastiche on Marcel's fanciful, often overblown imagery (1). Nowhere, however, is irony so evident in his flower imagery as in Proust's treatment of the forget-me-nots. Of course, no other flower, not even the hawthorn, is quite so closely associated through popular tradition, literary allusion, and colour symbolism, with various ideals of perfection. In the sentimental language of flowers, the forget-me-nots stand for constancy. They remind us also, of the mystical blue flower which was the symbol of the ideal for Heinrich von Ofterdingen. And the colour blue, as we have already noticed, and will discuss in yet more detail, has often been associated with things spiritual or with purity, from the blue associated with the Virgin Mary to "l'azur" of Mallarmé. And in Proust's personal symbolism, the forget-me-nots which the church windows seem to evoke, represent, for Marcel, the nobility and chivalry of the Guermantes, who are the lords of Combray and its church. We have already seen disillusionment superseding Marcel's childhood belief in terms of other flower symbolism, but nowhere is the

lesson of experience expressed with more humour or irony than with the forget-me-nots. There is the broad humour of Charlus trying to trap Marcel into a sentimental situation by giving him books engraved with forget-me-nots. (Marcel expresses his opinion of the whole scene by stamping on Charlus' hat.) Then there is the wry social comment in the detail of the German soldiers, fresh from killing and despoiling the countryside, asking Gilberte if they may pick forget-me-nots to send to their girl-friends. Marcel, too, does not escape Proust's subtler humour; despite that fact that he has been thinking of forget-me-nots, he meets, but does not recognize, Gilberte, whom he has forgotten. Of course, the most ironic comment of all, occurs in Proust's first description of the forget-me-nots. Here, Proust emphasizes that, no matter what significance human beings may put on these flowers, they belong to their own particular empire, a message which he expresses in terms of none of the other flowers, all of whom seem to belong on one level or another, to the human landscape almost more than they belong to Nature.

We feel especially with the forget-me-nots that the flux of nature can survive catastrophes of human history - thus the German soldiers pick forget-me-nots despite the war - and the forgetfulness of the human heart and mind, even the disillusionment of the poet. All these latter themes are associated with the forget-me-not through Gilberte, whose advent they seem to herald much as the fishing pond imagery does in the
Before we discuss Gilberte and Marcel's love for her, let us just notice that Marcel talks here as though the pond were some noble being; also note the association of the periwinkle and forget-me-not, flowers which recur in Marcel's description of the blue eyes of the supposedly noble Mme de Guermantes. Note, too, that Proust uses here the botanical name for the flowers, rather than the more evocative, in human terms, name 'les ne m'oubliez pas'. The choice is apt here, as Proust wishes to emphasize the autonomy of these flowers, irrespective of the human qualities which may be associated with them.

We have already seen in the hawthorn chapter the importance of names, especially Gilberte's. Marcel is greatly impressed by Gilberte when he first sees her, shortly after having scrutinized the Tansonville pond. Her name becomes a talisman to him. Yet, years later, in Paris,
when she has changed her name, he does not recognize her. As though
to emphasize the fickleness of Marcel's memory, Proust mentions that,
just before his glimpse of her, Marcel has been thinking of Gilberte
and of the forget-me-nots, here called 'les ne m'oubliez pas':

Une fois de plus, comme quand j'avais cessé de voir Gilberte,
l'amour de la femme s'élevait de moi, débarrassé de toute
association exclusive avec une certaine femme déjà aimée, et
flottait comme ces essences qu'ont libérées des destructions
antérieures et qui errent en suspens dans l'air printanier, ne
demandant qu'à s'unir à une nouvelle créature. Nulle part il
ne germe autant de fleurs, s'appellent-elles "ne m'oubliez
pas", que dans un cimetière.

(F., p. 561).

Here, then, the forget-me-nots are associated with love and with death
(Albertine has died and the Marcel who loved Gilberte is now 'dead').
But the incident of this later glimpse of Gilberte is one of those
absurd examples of mistaken identity which often seem to plague the
questing Marcel (that is, when the object of his quest is a woman).

A good case, however, can be made for regarding the forget-me-nots of
the first Tansonville scene as the mystic blue flower of the poet, a
flower most seriously associated with love and death, as Rina Viers
points out:

Le vieux mythe de la femme-fleur, la fleur qui représente la
femme, la femme qui devient fleur semble avoir intéressé Proust,
celui qui apparaît dans Henri d'Ofterdingen de Novalis. La
femme-fleur liée à cette couleur bleue, symbole de l'infini, de
la nostalgie et de la mort, est en quelque sorte sous-entendue
dans la description de l'apparition de Gilberte dans le parc de
Swann. En visitant le parc de Swann, on est moins frappé par
la quantité de fleurs que par le côté mystérieux du parc, où
plusieurs allées enrobent une pièce d'eau cernée de myosotis.

(2) Viers, Rina: La Signification des Fleurs dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel
But even this most serious of allusions has a rather absurd ending, as we have already mentioned in the hawthorn passage. Marcel finally gains his ideal, in the sense that he gains Gilberte's affection and friendship, perhaps even her love. He may visit Tansonville as her guest as often as he wishes. But now, of course, he has ceased to worship Gilberte, and, as we have seen, his visits to Tansonville seem just to destroy his former beliefs in Combray. It is hard not to see the following phrase as part of the 'mysterious blue flower' symbolism: "au moment de descendre dans le mystère d'une vallée parfaite et profonde que tapissait le clair de lune, nous nous arrêtâmes un instant, comme deux insectes qui vont s'enfoncer au coeur d'un calice bleuâtre" (T. R., p. 693).

Here we have Marcel the poet descending into the mystery of a perfect valley lit by moonlight with the woman he loved - but the romance of the scene is shattered when he and Gilberte are likened to insects. And the mysteries which Gilberte imparts finally destroy all Marcel's dreams about her and about Combray, as we have seen in the hawthorn chapter.

It is hard to know whether to laugh at or to have sympathy with Marcel's insect-like stature in the face of his dreams of love. The destruction of his dreams of chivalry associated with the forget-me-nots, the Combray church and the Guermantes is rather more obviously amusing. Marcel himself links the forget-me-nots to the noble family of the Guermantes, an association which reaches its comic climax or anti-climax in the scene between him and Charlus. For, Marcel imagines forget-me-nots
in "le flot bleu" of light shining through the stained glass window in the chapel of Gilbert le Mauvais, the family chapel of the Guermantes. "et, même à nos premiers dimanches quand nous étions arrivés avant Pâques, il (le flot bleu) me consolait que la terre fût encore nue et noire, en faisant épanouir, comme en un printemps historique et qui datait des successeurs de saint Louis, ce tapis éblouissant et doré de myosotis en verre" (C. S., p. 60). Now, this passage could be taken as a glorification of the work of art (the window) or the artist's eye (Marcel's) which could create a spring superior to that of nature for not being bound by time. However, we have already seen the image of the window used to represent the limitations of the individual's point of view, and, progressively in the novel "le flot bleu" representing a woman's glance and "le flot bleu" cast by the window of Gilbert le Mauvais come to represent a deceptive light, associated with Marcel's illusions. Even this first time, Marcel is not sure if the carpet of flowers is a natural phenomenon caused by the sunlight, or a trick of "son regard en bougeant" (C. S., p. 60). Later still in the book, we find that one other person at least associates the windows with optical illusions, the curé (3):

Mais qu'on ne vienne pas me parler des vitraux! Cela a-t-il du bon sens de laisser des fenêtres qui ne donnent pas de jour et trompent même la vue par ces reflets d'une couleur que je ne saurais définir, dans une église où il n'y a pas deux dalles qui soient au même niveau et qu'on se refuse à me remplacer sous prétexte que ce sont les tombes des abbés de Combray et des seigneurs de Guermantes, les anciens comtes de Brabant? (C. S., p. 103-4).

(3) The curé is something of a comic character, but he is a shrewd critic of points of view. He recommends the view from the top of the bell tower to Aunt Léonie (C. S., p. 105-6) which, of course, is just what she needs to give perspective to her own narrow 'one-room' outlook on life.
We might add here that the curé shows a remarkable lack of imagination in terms of Proust's personal symbolism in the novel, for it is two uneven paving stones which will evoke Marcel's final moment out of time, and bring back the inspiration of Venice, city of the Renaissance, of golden angels and blue waters.

In the context of eye symbolism, the forget-me-nots, of course, are sometimes called "les yeux de Marie". Certainly, Marcel seems to worship Mme de Guermantes in the wedding scene in the Combray church. He likens her eyes to blue flowers (periwinkles, previously associated with the forget-me-nots in Swann's park) and her glance to "un flot de lumière bleue". However, the narrator's description of the duchess trying to appear the benevolent suzerain without being patronizing does contain a certain humour. The theme of the glance and the use of the word "distraite" which emphasized the underlying sexuality in the hawthorns, as well as Marcel's obvious snobbishness, all foretell a disillusionment in the future. Note, too, that the duchess here wears purple, a colour which has negative connotations in Proust's private symbolism, and that the evil Gilbert le Mauvais is mentioned:

Aussi, ne pouvant émettre ces regards volontaires, chargés d'une signification précise, qu'on adresse à quelqu'un qu'on connaît, mais seulement laisser ses pensées distraites s'échapper incessamment devant elle en un flot de lumière bleue qu'elle ne pouvait contenir, elle ne voulait pas qu'il pût gêner, paraître dédaigner ces petites gens qu'il rencontrait au passage, qu'il atteignait à tous moments. Je revois encore, au-dessus de sa cravate mauve, soyeuse et gonflée, le doux étonnement de ses yeux auxquels elle avait ajouté, sans oser le destiner à personne, mais pour que
tous puissent en prendre leur part, un sourire un peu timide de suzeraine qui a l'air de s'excuser auprès de ses vassaux et de les aimer. Ce sourire tomba sur moi qui ne la quittais pas des yeux. (Poor Mme de Guermantes!) Alors me rappelant ce regard qu'elle avait laissé s'arrêter sur moi, pendant la messe, bleu comme un rayon de soleil qui aurait traversé le vitrail de Gilbert le Mauvais, je me dis : "Mais sans doute elle fait attention à moi!" Je crus que je lui plaisais, qu'elle penserait encore à moi quand elle aurait quitté l'église, qu'à cause de moi elle serait peut-être triste le soir à Guermantes ... Ses yeux bleuissaient comme une pervenche impossible à cueillir et que pourtant elle m'eût dédiée. (C. S., pp. 177-178).

Marcel, we see, practices that sin in Proust's eyes - idolatry - which, however, can be easily cured by a good dose of reality. This first meeting with a flesh and blood Guermantes is, in fact, for Marcel, a great disappointment, which he combats as best he can with all his youthful 'croyances', so that he wavers between believing in and doubting the romance of the legend of the Guermantes. As though nature reflects his mood, the day is changeable; the church is lit by "le soleil intermittent et chaud d'un jour de vent et d'orage" (C. S., p. 177).

Now, the next time we meet the image of the forget-me-not associated with the theme of the storm, Proust has completely taken over the comic mask. Again, we are concerned with the Guermantes, and with a Guermantes who in his personal life, will illustrate perhaps best of all the way in which nobility, of character or of birth, can be gradually eroded by the flux of time or "le flot" of historical circumstance. Charlus has invited Marcel to visit him, and Marcel, thrilled with his opportunities to meet the modern descendants of the Brabants, rushes
from a party at the duchess' to a rendezvous with Charlus. On his way there, Marcel's feeling that he has chosen the wrong path of action reminds us of Charlus' statement that Marcel is at a crossroads. Says Marcel:

Nous pouvons à notre choix nous livrer à l'une ou l'autre de deux forces, l'une s'élève de nous-même, (sic) émane de nos impressions profondes, l'autre nous vient du dehors. La première porte naturellement avec elle une joie, celle que dégage la vie des créateurs. L'autre courant, celui qui essaye d'introduire en nous le mouvement dont sont agitées des personnes extérieures, n'est pas accompagné de plaisir; mais nous pouvons lui en ajouter un, par choc en retour, en une ivresse si factice qu'elle tourne vite à l'ennui, à la tristesse (C. G., p. 547).

Marcel has surrendered to the 'current', the drifting, easy 'way', but the 'le flot' is carrying him towards a storm, which, comic though it may be, is kin to 'les agitations' caused by others which are eventually to harden him.

Charlus' storm breaks over Marcel's head almost as soon as the young innocent crosses his threshold. Drawing on the same popular and sentimental meaning which the forget-me-nots conveyed to the German soldiers, Charlus accuses Marcel of not having understood the message of the flowers twined around the book he lent him:

Comment! s'écria ... (M. de Charlus) avec colère, et en effet son visage convulsé et blanc différait autant de son visage ordinaire que la mer quand, un matin de tempête, on aperçoit, au lieu de la souriante surface habituelle, mille serpents d'écumé et de bave, vous prétendez que vous n'avez pas reçu mon message - presque une déclaration - d'avoir à vous souvenir de moi? ... Un de ces jours vous prendrez les genoux de Mme de Villeparisis pour le lavabo, et on ne sait pas ce que vous y ferez. Pareillement, vous n'avez même pas reconnu dans la
Even the ingenuous Marcel begins to wonder if Charlus has not 'staged' this storm (C. G., p. 559). He describes Charlus' voice changing from the 'forte' of a piano to the 'fortissimo' of an orchestra (C. G., p. 558). After resembling "une tempête assourdissante et déchaînée" (C. G., p. 558), Charlus' voice drops to a scherzo "aimable idyllique" (C. G., p. 560). Marcel does not have to wait long for Charlus to divulge exactly which piece of music the whole scene was based on—the most dramatic suitable piece of German Romanticism he could find—'La Symphonie Pastorale' (C. G., p. 562). For, as Charlus' rage subsides, a hidden orchestra starts to play the third part of the symphony, "la joie après l'orage" (C. G., p. 562). Surely Proust here has a more than slightly self-mocking tongue in cheek, for, not only does he consistently link flower and storm imagery but he also links flower, storm, and music imagery, as we have seen in the chapter on the hawthorns. It is as though, as we suggested in the introduction, Charlus represents qualities in the immature Jean Santeuil or, even, the early Proust.

This passage is very comic on its own, but it also gains effect from being sandwiched between two episodes which display Marcel in a rather ironic light. Marcel has just finished playing the innocent Parsifal "au milieu des filles fleurs" (C. G., p. 423) in the Guermantes' salon; now, he understands even less the ritual of Charlus' seduction scene,
and can only respond by stamping on Charlus' hat, a symbolic (and amusing) rejection of Charlus' advances. Obviously, he has failed this second 'test', the one Charlus calls "la plus terrible de toutes", "l'épreuve de la trop grande amabilité" (C. G., p. 556). Then, when Marcel returns home, he picks up a letter written by a servant who boasts in ludicrous (but highly amusing) terms of his intimacy with literature and with the Guermantes and vaunts his common pursuit of both - a vain illusion shared by Marcel.

But, of course, the bitter irony still remains in the storm and forget-me-nots passage. Charlus degrades a flower which is associated with a sacred work of art (the lintel of the church at Balbec) and his own family tradition (as seen by Marcel in the Combray church) and an artist in whom Marcel believes (Bergotte). As though Charlus has little faith in his personal attractions, he baits his hook to lure Marcel with his famous connections in society and with art, in the form of lending him books, whereas the best use he could have made of art would have been to fulfil his own considerable potential as an artist. Even the 'storm' seems a slightly sick parody of the celestial punishment meted out by 'God the Father'; Charlus' eyes spark thunder and lightning, he repeats at least twice "qui aime bien châtie bien" (C. G., p. 559, p. 560) and touches Marcel "paternellement" (C. G., p. 562) on the shoulder.
We definitely return to Proust's serious side when we analyze the colour of the forget-me-nots. To begin with, the 'myosotis', by their association with the blue window in the Guermantes' chapel in the church at Combray, are linked three times with the colour gold or yellow. "Le flot bleu et doux" of "ce tapis éblouissant et doré de myosotis en verre" (C. S., p. 60) washes the uneven paving stones of the chapel; "Ses pierres tombales, sous lesquelles la noble poussière des abbés de Combray, enterrés là ... n'étaient plus elles-mêmes de la matière inerte et dure, car le temps les avait rendues douces et fait couler comme du miel hors des limites de leur propre équarrissure qu'ici elles avaient dépassées d'un flot blond ..." (C. S., p. 59). This strong and beautiful metaphor of death's honey, sweet produce of corruption and of flowers, images of time's flux, is repeated at least once more in connection with 'le flot bleu'. Mme de Guermantes sits in the chapel of Gilbert le Mauvais, over "les plates tombes ... dorées et distendues comme des alvéoles de miel" under which "reposaient les anciens comtes de Brabant" (C. S., p. 174). Now, 'doré' and 'blond' are adjectives frequently associated with the Guermantes, just as the word 'le flot' suggests the idea of change. Gold is also associated with Marcel's illusions, built around the Guermantes, of a Golden Age - and we find that the illusory forget-me-nots in the Combray chapel themselves form a golden carpet. The blue of the forget-me-nots also suggests many of the dreams Marcel has woven around the Guermantes, especially the duchess. It is the colour of innocence and purity, as the duchess
herself would realize, being one of the few people left who remembers the old custom of "des enfants voués aux bleu" (C. G., p. 551) (4).

In Marcel's magic lantern reflections, Geneviève de Brabant wears "une ceinture bleue" (C. S., p. 9) symbol of the chastity behind her struggle with Golo. Thus, it is fitting that the duchess, whom Marcel considers "la descendante de Geneviève de Brabant" (C. S., p. 177) should have the blue eyes which remind him of the nobility of her race. However, as we have seen in another chapter, when Marcel really sees the duchess 'in her true colours', in the incident of the duchess' red shoes, she is wearing a deep red and purple which suit her personality much better than does the blue.

The forget-me-nots, then, are associated with both 'ways' in Combray. They bloom naturally in Swann's garden, and they are conjured up in the reflections in the chapel of the Guermantes. Later, they become part of the 'precious' language of the salons, and are used by Charlus to express his feelings for Marcel. Although sometimes ambiguous in tone, especially in the first church scene in Combray, they show the excellence of Proust's sense of humour as well as his sense of poetry, thus becoming examples of symmetry in style as well as in context in the novel.

(4) This passage refers to 'dedicating' children to the Virgin Mary, very apt in the context of this passage as the forget-me-nots are sometimes called "les yeux de Marie".
The Rose
The rose, then, is the last flower of experience in love which we will discuss. Of course, it is the traditional symbol of love, having behind it a wealth of use in popular songs and in literature, from the roses and lilies which suggest the beauty of a woman's complexion in medieval songs, to the rose which represents the beloved in *Le Roman de la Rose*, from the rose symbolizing the fleeting nature of love and youth to the Renaissance poets, to the white rose of Dante's spiritual love for Beatrice. Proust, we must make clear, never does actually mention *Le Roman de la Rose*. However, he does allude to other medieval tales of love - the story of Geneviève de Brabant, and the Romance of Tristan and Isolde. He also mentions in general the *chansons de geste*. The pattern of Marcel's love, in fact, fits so well into the general tradition of courtly love that, with his penchant for seeing art in life, a tendency of which the rose will give us many examples, with his constant likening of Albertine to a rose, we feel sure that Marcel realizes that he has taken on a role similar to that of the lover in *Le Roman de la Rose*. As we have seen with those other flowers of love, the cattleya and the orchid, however, the personal level of Proust's symbolism is very important. In fact, with the rose, Proust's psychological analysis of his young hero's youthful love - romantic, subjective and idealistic - is particularly fascinating. Even in the title of the *volume* which introduces them (*A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*), Proust insists on the shadow cast by these young girls in bloom. Thus we are not surprised when Marcel describes Albertine's face as, sometimes, of a fevered red deep enough to be almost black.
He insists, moreover, that these flowers, the band of young girls, are silhouettes in front of the sea; for, always, Marcel seeks the inaccessible, the idea behind an object, here, the sea beyond the young girls whom Marcel prizes (especially once Albertine has proved accessible) because they evoke Balbec memories in him.

In fact the pattern of courtly love, the medieval background which well suits the symbol of the rose, is established long before the rose appears in *A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*, continuing into *Le Côté de Guermantes*, to fade and almost disappear in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, *La Prisonnière* and *La Fugitive*. Amongst the most important passages we will study are those describing Marcel's dreams of medieval romance (*J. F.*, p. 689), the young girls as roses against the sea (*J. F.*, p. 798), Marcel's attempt to kiss Albertine's rosy cheeks (*J. F.*, pp. 933, 4), his continued dreams of romantic love (*C. G.*, pp. 384, 5), the disillusionment of the kiss achieved (*C. G.*, pp. 350-70) and the final kiss refused (*P.*, pp. 399-403). However, after establishing the background to the rose, we will be better able to place these and other main passages into Proust's general pattern of courtly love. In the meantime, let us study this general pattern, especially as it continues our themes of chivalry suggested by the courtyard and garden of the Duchess of Guermantes.
The garden and the courtyard of the Duchess of Guermantes, then, the pollen of the little bush and of the orchid, even the forget-me-not in its association with the Combray church in which are interred the ancestors of the Guermantes evoke in Marcel dreams of a golden age of chivalry. The duchess and her garden and Charlus to a certain extent survive the inevitable destruction of Marcel's illusions, which occurs when he realizes how much shame and danger, how much persecution, is suggested by the image of the rain of fire from heaven associated with the pollen and with homosexuality. On a larger scale, the old aristocracy, the old order, is being destroyed by the wartime rain of bombs over Paris. Yet this war enables Saint-Loup to recover his former medieval nobility in death (T. R., p. 851). (The association of the Middle Ages and death we will see recurring many times in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu.*) But, of course, the tale of the Middle Ages which fascinates Marcel most in his childhood, which seems to apply to his own behaviour and which he associates with the Duchess of Guermantes, is the love story of her supposed ancestress, Geneviève de Brabant. As we have already seen, Marcel identifies with the villain of this tale projected by his magic lantern: "j'avais hâte de ... tomber dans les bras de maman que les malheurs de Geneviève de Brabant me rendaient plus chère, tandis que les crimes de Golo me faisaient examiner ma propre conscience avec plus de scrupules" (C. S., p. 10). Later, in a similar Merovingian atmosphere caused by the light cast by the stained glass window of the Combray church, Marcel casts the
Duchess of Guermantes in the role of her ancestress (C. S., p. 176). Thus, the first two loves of his life are recorded in terms of the chivalric legends of the Middle Ages. Moreover, the magic lantern which projects the images of this story onto his room and transforms the objects in it offers Proust a powerful symbol of the way in which dreams or the projection of one's ideals, not to mention the shadow of the person operating the magic lantern (F., p. 539), can alter reality, a metaphor which he uses particularly in the context of Marcel's love for Albertine. Before we discuss Albertine (and the rose, with its association with Le Roman de la Rose), however, we can see in Marcel's unhappy, unconsummated love for Gilberte that he has carried his fascination with courtly tradition and Medieval Romances over into his love for girls his own age. Adoring Gilberte (who sends him letters stamped with her own heraldic motif), Marcel carries around with him "par une sorte de fidélité chevaleresque" (C. S., p. 413), a street plan on which is located Gilberte's house. But, the more serious themes of illness, fate, death, and betrayal (the latter two themes to be more important later on) associated with love are introduced in Marcel's allusion to Tristan and Isolde:

A cause de la violence de mes battements de cœur on me fit diminuer la caféine, ils cesserent. Alors je me demandai si ce n'était pas un peu à elle qu'était due cette angoisse que j'avais éprouvée quand je m'étais à peu près brouillé avec Gilberte, et que j'avais attribuée, chaque fois qu'elle se renouvelait, à la souffrance de ne plus voir mon amie ou de risquer de ne la voir qu'en proie à la même mauvaise humeur. Mais, si ce médicament avait été à l'origine des souffrances que mon imagination est alors faussement interprétées (ce qui n'aurait rien d'extraordinaire, les plus cruelles peines morales ayant souvent pour cause chez
les amants l'habitude physique de la femme avec qui ils vivent),
c'était à la façon du philtre qui, longtemps après avoir été
absorbé, continue à lier Tristan à Ysault. Car l'amélioration
physique que la diminution de la caféine amena presque
immédiatement chez moi n'arrêta pas l'évolution du chagrin
que l'absorption du toxique avait peut-être sinon créé, du
moins sa rendre plus aigu
(J. F., p. 610).

However, we find Proust's most profound analysis of love in the context
of Marcel's affair with Albertine. Once again we see various themes
of courtly love recurring. Yet courtly love transferred to nineteenth
century France and subjected to Proust's psychological scrutiny
becomes a very uneasy love indeed. In the tradition of the chansons
de geste or the Medieval Romances, the lover usually seeks an ideal
which he can never possess. At least, Boase tells us that three-
quarters of the troubadour poems celebrate a mutual passion, unhappy
and unsatisfied (1), and C. S. Lewis suggests that Guillaume de Lorris
meant to end his Romance (Le Roman de la Rose, of course) in accordance
with the usual pattern of stories of courtly love, the lover never
possessing the rose, and having to content himself with more truly
spiritual rewards (2). In fact, the lover builds so many dreams
about an allegorical figure that the whole Romance could perhaps be
termied "un amour de tête" although not necessarily "les amours de
tête" (S. G., p. 622) which Proust mentions as the only ones which
homosexuals can enjoy with women. In any case, the lover worships
his beloved (indeed often in those days of arranged marriage, the

(2) Lewis, C. S.: The Allegory of Love, Oxford University Press,
woman could not be his beloved, being the wife of another man) (3) or pays homage to the reigning lady of the court from afar.

In Proustian terms, the young Marcel projects an ideal of perfection onto Albertine (or any other woman he meets at this susceptible age).

Just before meeting the band of young girls, Marcel says:

J'étais dans une de ces périodes de la jeunesse, dépourvues d'un amour particulier, vacantes, où partout - comme un amoureux, la femme dont il est épris - on désire, on cherche, on voit la Beauté. Qu'un seul trait réel - le peu qu'on distingue d'une femme vue de loin, ou de dos - nous permette de projeter la Beauté devant nous (remember the magic lantern), nous nous figurons l'avoir reconnue, notre cœur bat, nous pressons le pas, et nous resterons toujours à demi persuadés que c'était elle, pourvu que la femme ait disparu : ce n'est que si nous pouvons la rattraper que nous comprenons notre erreur (J. F., p. 787).

Around Albertine, Marcel builds a system of beliefs (which he calls 'les croyances') which prevent him from ever really getting to know her:

Mais je sentis à ce moment que certaines modifications dans l'aspect, l'importance, la grandeur d'un être peuvent tenir aussi à la variabilité de certains états interposés entre cet être et nous. L'un de ceux qui jouent à cet égard le rôle le plus considérable est la croyance (ce soir-là, la croyance, puis l'évanouissement de la croyance, que j'allais connaître Albertine, l'avait, à quelques secondes d'intervalle, rendue presque insignifiante, puis infiniment précieuse, à mes yeux; quelques années plus tard, la croyance, puis la disparition de la croyance, qu'Albertine m'était fidèle, amené des changements analogues)... Variation d'une croyance, néant de l'amour aussi, lequel, préexistant et mobile, s'arrête à l'image d'une femme simplement parce que cette femme sera presque impossible à atteindre. Dès lors on pense moins à la femme, qu'on se représente difficilement, qu'aux moyens de la connaître. Tout un processus

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d'angoisses se développe et suffit pour fixer notre amour sur elle, qui en est l'objet à peine connu de nous. L'amour devient immense, nous ne songeons pas combien la femme réelle y tient peu de place. Et si tout d'un coup, comme au moment où j'avais vu Elstir s'arrêter avec les jeunes filles, nous cessions d'être inquiets, d'avoir de l'angoisse, comme c'est elle qui est tout notre amour, il semble brusquement qu'il se soit évanoui au moment où nous tenions enfin la proie à la valeur de laquelle nous n'avons pas assez pensé. Que connaissais-je d'Albertine? Un ou deux profils sur la mer, moins beaux assurément que ceux des femmes de Véronèse que j'aurais dû, si j'avais obéi à des raisons purement esthétiques, lui préférer. Or, est-ce à d'autres raisons que je pouvais obéir, puisque, l'anxété tombée, je ne pouvais retrouver que ces profils muets, je ne possédais rien d'autre? Depuis que j'avais vu Albertine, j'avais fait chaque jour à son sujet des milliers de réflexions, j'avais poursuivi, avec ce que j'appelais elle, tout un entretien intérieur où je la faisais questionner, répondre, penser, agir, et dans la série indéfinie d'Albertines imaginées qui se succédaient en moi heure par heure, l'Albertine réelle, aperçue sur la plage, ne figurait qu'en tête, comme la "créatrice" d'un rôle, ne paraît, dans une longue série de représentations, que dans les toutes premières. Cette Albertine-là n'était guère qu'une silhouette, tout ce qui s'y était superposé était de mon cru, tant dans l'amour les apports qui viennent de nous l'emportent - à ne se placer même qu'au point de vue de la quantité - sur ceux qui nous viennent de l'être aimé (J. F., pp. 857-858).

Before we look more closely at this almost totally subjective kind of love, let us just point out here that Marcel has once again created a little 'drama' - the first was "le drame de son déshabillage" or "le drame de son coucher" (C. S., p. 45), the second was the scene in the Combray church, in which Marcel likens the Duchess of Guermantes to an actress playing the role he has given her, that of the 'good fairy' of the Guermantes (C. S., p. 175). Here it is Albertine who is likened to the star who 'makes' a role; but it is Marcel, once again, who actually creates the drama. Note, too, Proust's use of the symbols of silhouettes and profiles seen against the sea to express
his lack of real knowledge of Albertine, for the roses to which Marcel likens the young girls are also silhouettes against the sea.

As we can see in this passage, which is prophetic of the course of Marcel's love for Albertine as a whole, Marcel seems to have cast himself in the role of idealistic lover and Albertine in the role of the inaccessible object of his love, no matter what she may be like personally. In fact, Marcel's love depends on the idea of never knowing his beloved; it feeds on the anguish the resulting jealousy and uncertainty causes. Marcel also feels that he, too, should remain unknown to his mistress, as though she would not be able to love him if she knew him: "L'amour commence, on voudrait rester pour celle qu'on aime l'inconnu qu'elle peut aimer, mais on a besoin d'elle, on a besoin de toucher moins son corps que son attention, son coeur" (J. F., p. 927). Marcel may perhaps even be thinking here of his first love for Gilberte (he freely admits that his loves follow the same pattern), the latter representing "comme premier type d'un bonheur inaccessible aux enfants de mon espèce" (C. S., p. 142), a secretive girl, of whom her father says: "Vous n'avez pas idée de ce qu'est son coeur, car elle le cache" (J. F., p. 536). In any case, this wish to come closer to the girl he loves, indeed to possess her, involves Marcel in a conflict of desires far more complex than that of the lover of Le Roman de la Rose who may well have been content with worshipping his love from afar and dedicating poems to her. For, behind his curiosity about these young girls, Marcel discovers a
desire to possess them - "il y avait un désir de possession à l'origine de ma curiosité" (J. F., p. 788). Yet, if he does possess them, he dispels their mystery, loses his curiosity and thus his love for them. For "les femmes un peu difficiles, qu'on ne possède pas tout de suite, dont on ne sait même pas tout de suite qu'on pourra jamais les posséder, sont les seules intéressantes" (C. G., p. 362). Perhaps here, as we have seen before, and as is hinted in Proust's use of the word 'la proie' in the main passage on beliefs which we have quoted, Marcel is saying that in love the pursuit is worth more than the goal. Later, however, when the anguish of jealousy proves too much for him, he tries to possess Albertine completely (P., p. 70), and, as he says "je parvenais à expulser tout mystère" (P., p. 75). Albertine then becomes a grey uninteresting prisoner in his eyes. But not for long, because he soon reminds himself that he does not, cannot, possess her: "je m'ennuyais bientôt auprès d'elle, mais ces instants-là duraient peu : on n'aime que ce en quoi on poursuit quelque chose d'inaccessible, on n'aime que ce qu'on ne possède pas, et bien vite je me remettais à me rendre compte que je ne possédais pas Albertine" (P., p. 384). Indeed, no wonder Marcel does not possess Albertine, for to do so according to his own definition, he would have to know her completely, would have almost to become her, and their souls would have to come together as well as their bodies: "Combien je souffrais de cette position où nous a réduits l'oubli de la nature qui, en instituant la division des corps, n'a pas songé à rendre possible
l'interpénétration des âmes!" (P., p. 386). However, like the
courtly lovers of the songs and Romances, Marcel does not even
completely possess Albertine physically (P., p. 97). Nor, in
another parallel with the troubadour paying court to a noble's wife,
does he possess her socially, for we learn that she is being groomed
for an arranged marriage (F., p. 614).

Thus, we can see that the broad tendencies of courtly love, the
emphasis on the perfection and unattainable nature of the beloved,
the worship from afar (when Albertine offers to kiss Marcel, he loses
interest in her, and talks of an emotional 'agnosticism' (C. G., p. 361)
provide Proust with his most intense psychological themes of subjective
love (C. G., p. 370). Even the form - allegory - of the most famous
Romance of love, Le Roman de la Rose, offers Proust a concept which
he uses in his treatment of love. As we have seen in the introduction,
Proust soon outgrew the use of allegory as such. However, he transposed
the idea of allegory, in which one thing is discussed under the
guise of another, where one thing becomes the emblem of another, into
a 'law' of love - the law that the love of a person is always the
love of something else for which that person is an emblem : "C'était
la mer que j'espérais retrouver, si j'allais dans quelque ville où
elles (les jeunes filles en fleurs) seraient. L'amour le plus exclusif
pour une personne est toujours l'amour d'autre chose" (J. F., p. 833).
Moreover, looking at "cette tête rose d'Albertine" (S. G., p. 1020),
Marcel feels that "C'était tout un état d'âme, tout un avenir d'existence qui avait pris devant moi la forme allégorique et fatale d'une jeune fille" (S. G., p. 1021). For, by now, Marcel realizes that he falls in love according to a consistent pattern, and any girl he chooses plays the same role in this pattern. More in keeping with the tone of the old Romance, Marcel says, on catching sight of the same expression on his face that Gilbert used to inspire, that: "je remplissais les devoirs d'un dévotion ardente et douloureuse dédiée comme une offrande à la jeunesse et à la beauté de la femme" (P., p. 76). Thus, it is significant that Albertine at one point resembles to Marcel's eyes the allegorical figure 'Idolatry' by Giotto (J. F., p. 886), because she encourages this 'sin' in Marcel. On two levels, she resembles an 'allegorical' figure in Marcel's life; every part of her love affair with him is like an allegory of other ones he has had or will have "Ma séparation d'avec Albertine ... était comme une allégorie bien affaiblie de tant d'autres séparations" (F., p. 506), and she contains within her, "dans la plénitude de son corps, préparés pour que je continuasse à les vivre ... les jours passés dans ce Balbec où je n'étais jamais retourné" (C. G., p. 350-1). In fact, she is associated with these days so closely, that, in Marcel's mind, she almost becomes Balbec: "Il me semblait que j'aurais, sur les deux joues de la jeune fille, embrassé toute la plage de Balbec" (C. G., p. 363). When Albertine finally tells Marcel how she has been deceiving him, he becomes utterly confused. Watching Albertine as she sleeps, he
is able as usual to think of her as representing something else, for her own personality does not show in sleep. This time, however, he cannot divine her precise allegorical significance: "Ainsi je restais, dans la pelisse que je n'avais pas encore retirée depuis mon retour de chez les Verdurin, devant ce corps tordu, cette figure allégorique de quoi? de ma mort? de mon amour?" (P., p. 360). But, with Albertine's death and the return of his artistic vocation, Marcel seems to have found many answers, one of which is: "Et quelle large étendue de mer avait été réservée dans mon amour même le plus douloureux, le plus jaloux, le plus individuel semblait-il, pour Albertine!" (T. R., p. 839). The young girls, too, as roses, derive most of their charm from being silhouetted against the sea - "ces jeunes filles, tiges de roses dont le principal charme était de se détacher sur la mer" (J. F., p. 944). Thus, when Marcel is in love with Albertine, when he thinks of roses, he is to a certain extent, in love with love, and in love with the sea.

But Proust's use of the term 'allegorical' is not the only clue which suggests that Marcel, even before he puts pen to paper, is tempted to treat Albertine as a work of art, part of an allegory or a romance or novel. At one point he says: "Mais ma chambre ne contenait-elle pas une œuvre d'art plus précieuse que toutes celles-là? C'était Albertine" (P., p. 382). And he introduces the image of the rose tree here, too: "elle ... rosier à qui j'avais fourni le tuteur, le cadre, l'espalier de sa vie" (P., p. 382). As for what type of work of art Marcel might
choose, we have already mentioned the way in which Marcel regards Albertine as a statue, but he also regards her as 'son roman' in all senses of the word. At first, Marcel just means that his romantic affair will be with Albertine rather than with any of the other young girls because she has said she loves him: "je me disais que c'était avec elle que j'aurais mon roman" (J. F., p. 915). Then he talks of life revealing "le roman de cette petite fille" (C. G., p. 362) in a passage in which Albertine imbues kisses with "le sentiment dont ils eussent été le signe pour un chevalier et sa dame tels que pouvait les concevoir un jongleur gothique" (C. G., p. 370). And then, finally, when Albertine admits to knowing a lesbian well, Marcel says: "Je regardais une flambée brûler d'un seul coup un roman que j'avais mis des millions de minutes à écrire" (P., p. 350). Thus, it is just as well that Marcel, knowing the example of Swann, finally decides not to treat Albertine as a work of art: "Albertine n'était nullement pour moi une œuvre d'art. Je savais ce que c'était qu'admirer une femme d'une façon artistique, j'avais connu Swann" (P., p. 383). It seems that negative examples impress Marcel more than positive ones, for, despite the example of his grandmother, who always wished the roses in her garden to grow as naturally as possible, Marcel continues to try to mould Albertine into a certain form. His final comment on Albertine (similar to Swann's on Odette) is a retrospective regret: "Et ç'avait peut-être été mon tort de ne pas chercher davantage à connaître Albertine en elle-même" (F., p. 495). Such, however, is not the fate
of allegorical figures in Romances, or ideals in a subjective
love.

In his love for his mother, and to some extent his infatuation for
Mme de Guermantes, Marcel feels himself to be part of the magic lantern
story of Geneviève de Brabant, sharing the villainy of Golo. In his
love for Gilberte and the real pain and illness it brings, reminder,
moreover, of his lack of will power, he alludes to the Romance of
Tristan and Isolde, in which love itself is a fateful poison. In his
love for Albertine, he exhibits the wish for perfection, the attraction
to the unattainable, the worship from afar and creation of a system of
false beliefs, even a psychological form of allegory, which makes him
resemble the lover in Le Roman de la Rose, at least the part of this
Romance written by Guillaume de Lorris, but with some of the conflicting
physical desire belonging to the part by Jean de Meung. In fact, the
story line of Le Roman de la Rose has much in common with the development
of Marcel's love. The lover in the Romance wishes to enter a garden
protected by a hedge. Once inside, he loves the fairest rose he sees.
He tries to pick her, but is rebuffed. He suffers many hardships,
undergoes a true martyrdom of love, but finally reaches the centre of
the garden, where he finds the Fountain of Narcissus. The crystals in
the fountain are supposed to represent the Beloved's eyes. Now Marcel
and Jean before him have both longed to enter forbidden or exclusive
gardens, as we have seen. In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Marcel
likens the girls to a garden (J. F., p. 910), and, specifically, to a rose garden (J. F., p. 893). We have already traced in the hawthorn chapter the link between martyrdom and love, and have studied in detail the theme of the glance and the narcissistic element in Marcel's relationships with women. However, one particular quotation shows us that Marcel looking into a woman's eyes must resemble the lover gazing into the Fountain of Narcissus: "Et cet être intérieur de la belle pêcheuse semblait m'être clos encore, je doutais si j'y étais entré, même après que j'eus aperçu ma propre image se refléter furtivement dans le miroir de son regard" (J. F., p. 716). It comes as no surprise, then, when Marcel likens Albertine to a rose. Indeed, in kissing her, he is trying to capture, to taste, the roses of her cheeks "je vais savoir le goût de la rose inconnue que sont les joues d'Albertine" (C. G., p. 364) he says when Albertine finally lets him kiss her, after a first rebuff. The rebuff fits in better with Marcel's concept of love, and the kiss is a disappointment. However, later, he talks of her as the fairest of the young girls in bloom: "Elles étaient devenues pour moi, obéissantes à mes caprices, de simples jeunes filles en fleurs, desquelles je n'étais pas médiocrement fier d'avoir cueilli, dérobé à tous, la plus belle rose" (P., p. 68). This sentiment is so uncharacteristically positive for Marcel that we almost feel here as though he is regarding a prize he has won in love, an object he has gained which justifies the effort, and we are reminded of the passage in which Rachel gives him a rose:
Après avoir regardé l'heure pour voir si elle ne se mettrait pas en retard, Rachel m'offrit du champagne, me tendit une de ses cigarettes d'Orient et détacha pour moi une rose de son corsage. Je me dis alors : "Je n'ai pas trop à regretter ma journée; ces heures passées auprès de cette jeune femme ne sont pas perdues puisque par elle j'ai, chose gracieuse et qu'on ne peut assez payer, une rose, une cigarette parfumée, une coupe de champagne." Je me le disais parce qu'il me semblait que c'était douer d'un caractère esthétique, et par là justifier, sauver ces heures d'ennui.

(C. G., pp. 170-171).

Notice here, that Marcel has changed the order of Rachel's gifts (drink, cigarette, rose) into one which expresses their relative aesthetic importance to him (rose first, then cigarette and drink).

As with Albertine, moreover, Marcel has the ability to see himself from the outside; once again he sees his face in a mirror. "Or, étant alors à ce moment-là ce buveur, tout d'un coup, le cherchant dans la glace, je l'aperçus, hideux, inconnu, qui me regardait" (C. G., p. 171).

Thus, too, when Albertine no longer evokes the sea for him, when she is plucked from her proper setting, and Marcel is forced to regard her objectively, she seems "une bien pauvre rose" (C. G., p. 352). Later still, Marcel comes to regard this exclusive love for one girl as something for which the poet does pay too high a price, and he talks of nourishing the poetic impulse on a diet of light affairs (note again the association of love and food) as though on a regimen of roses:

Mais enfin, quand des intervalles de repos et de société me seraient nécessaires, je sentais que, plutôt que les conversations intellectuelles que les gens du monde croient utiles aux écrivains, de légères amours avec des jeunes filles en fleurs seraient un aliment choisi que je pourrais à la rigueur permettre à mon imagination semblable au cheval fameux qu'on ne nourrissait
que de roses. Ce que tout d'un coup je souhaitais de nouveau, c'est ce dont j'avais rêvé à Balbec, quand sans les connaître encore, j'avais vu passer devant la mer Albertine, Andrée et leurs amies (T. R., p. 987).

In this last sentence of the quotation, in fact, we have a clue as to the other main difference between Marcel and the courtly lover of Le Roman de la Rose, the first difference being the way in which his lack of understanding of Albertine, his 'rose', worries Marcel. The lover of course, is not bothered by his surface knowledge of his beloved. The lover, too, chooses one rose and remains faithful to her in the tradition of chivalrous love. Marcel wants to love all the young girls, all the roses he sees against the sea. He wishes he were "une abeille sortant gorgée d'une fleur qu'elle vient de visiter et qui trouve tout de suite à côté d'elle la fleur ouverte d'avance où elle va trouver un nouveau nectar. C'est à de telles fleurs que m'avait toujours fait penser Albertine et ses amies se détachant sur le plan lumineux et incliné des eaux" (4). Not only is Marcel attracted to all the young girls in the band, but he also desires another type of woman entirely, Mlle de Stermaria, of an ancient Breton family, whom he associates with the briar rose (she seems to be a type of sleeping beauty) and the water lily (roses and lilies, together were often used in medieval and renaissance love poetry as a conceit for the complexion of the beloved). In fact, virginal owner of a family castle, Mlle (later, after her divorce called Mme) de Stermaria seems better suited

to fulfill Marcel's dreams, "Mes rêves de jeune vierge féodale" (C. G., p. 393), as he says. Moreover, an element of snobbery is introduced here. We have already seen an ironic example of the snobbery of roses when Charlus tries to interest Morel in a title, though he knows that even roses lose their charm when they are named after aristocratic families whom he knows almost too well: "Je suis assez sensible aux noms; et dès qu'une rose est un peu belle, on apprend qu'elle s'appelle la Baronne de Rothschild ou la Maréchale Niel, ce qui jette un froid" (S. G., p. 1007). And, for many centuries, roses have been named after the nobility. Thus, Marcel feels that, if he ever had had the choice (and he narrowly misses it), he would have chosen the more noble rose, Mme de Stermarié. Albertine, in fact, comes of the class that least interests him, the class to which he belongs, the bourgeoisie. "Cette fois, j'avais situé dans un milieu interlope des filles d'une petite bourgeoisie fort riche, du monde de l'industrie et des affaires. C'était celui qui, de prime abord, m'intéressait le moins, n'ayant pour moi le mystère ni du peuple, ni d'une société comme celle des Guermantes" (J. F., p. 844). Although he cannot give Albertine the nobility of the aristocracy, however, Marcel can, if he tries, liken her to the peasant class which, as the sculptures of the church of Saint-André-des-Champs shows, form a direct line of descent from the Middle Ages. "Albertine - et c'était peut-être, avec une autre que l'on verra plus tard une des raisons qui m'avaient à mon insu fait la désirer - était une des incarnations de
la petite paysanne française dont le modèle est en pierre à Saint-André-des-Champs" (C. G., p. 367). No wonder Marcel sometimes seems to suggest that instead of loving the princess, he has chosen the peasant. For, preceding the main rose passage, the one in which he sees the young girls against the sea, and the three which revolve around the question of whether Albertine will give him a kiss (she does not at Balbec, is willing on her Paris visit, and refuses once again just before she leaves him), we find the theme of Mlle or Mme de Stermaria, as the young feudal aristocrat, whom Marcel feels might have been his mistress. In each passage in which the kiss is so important, moreover, we also find the theme of death.

Proust was also aware of the use of the rose as a symbol of the passing of youth and love for the Renaissance poets. In *À l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*, Marcel says: "Hélas! dans la fleur la plus fraîche on peut distinguer les points imperceptibles qui pour l'esprit averti dessinent déjà ce qui sera, par la dessiccation ou la fructification des chairs aujourd'hui en fleur, la forme immuable et déjà prédéterminnée de la graine" (J. F., p. 891). He also uses that other Renaissance symbol of the passing of time and youth, the dawn, "l'aurore de jeunesse dont s'empourprait encore le visage de ces jeunes filles et hors de laquelle je me trouvais déjà, à mon âge, illuminait tout devant elles ... il est si court, ce matin radieux" (J. F., p. 905). Even more aptly, he says, in Venice, city of the Renaissance, "ce que j'aimais,
c'était la jeunesse. Je savais que la jeunesse de celles que j'avais connues n'existait plus que dans mon souvenir brillant, et que ce n'est pas elles, si désireux que je fusse de les atteindre quand me les représentait ma mémoire, que je devais cueillir, si je voulais vraiment moissonner la jeunesse et la fleur de l'année" (F., p. 628). Thus it is, of course, that Marcel finds Gilberte's daughter, who reminds him of his youth, so tempting at the last Guermantes' salon.

However, Proust as usual has an intricate personal level to his symbolism. To begin with, in the title of the book in which Marcel meets Albertine, A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs, Proust mentions not only the girl-flowers, but also their shadow. At first, the roses definitely predominate, but, later in the book, as Marcel's love for Albertine becomes more and more unhappy, the images of shadows, silhouettes and phantoms become more important. Indeed, barbarous and extrovert as they are, the young girls do seem to put Marcel in the shade. However, broody romantic that he is at first, seeking storms and melancholy at Balbec, Marcel probably needs their shade to make the brilliant summer sunshine bearable, indeed, much desired, because only in the sunshine can he fully enjoy the company of these healthy, young girls with athletic outdoor tastes. However, Albertine's glance warns him that he will experience storms with her, but emotional rather than meteorological ones: "Un instant ses regards croisèrent les miens, comme ces cieux voyageurs des jours d'orage" (J. F., p. 856).
We have already seen in other chapters, of course, the storms of jealousy which Marcel comes to experience later because of Albertine. Even in this positive description of a happy summer holiday by the sea in the company of some pretty girls there are some hints of the unhappiness to come. At first sight, Marcel calls the girls "une même ombre chaude" (J. F., p. 793). Albertine, or any other woman Mardel loves, is to some extent, at this point in his life, 'a phantom', a product of his own imagination: "je ne portais pas seulement en moi un idéal physique de beauté qu'on a vu que je reconnaissais de loin dans chaque passante assez éloignée pour que ses traits confus ne s'opposassent pas à cette identification, mais encore le fantôme moral — toujours prêt à être incarné — de la femme qui allait être éprise de moi, me donner la réplique dans la comédie amoureuse que j'avais tout écrite dans ma tête depuis mon enfance" (J. F., p. 890). Thus, 'les amours de tête' which Marcel creates are not just tragedies (as with Tristan and Isolde) or Romances. Nevertheless, in hoping that these Platonic ideals or 'phantoms' will come to life and be recognized in his own experience, Marcel runs the risk of resembling Swann "qui avait été amateur de fantômes" (S. G., p. 1013). Thus it is apt that, just before Albertine leaves him, Marcel enjoys a moment of union with her as important to him as the union of their bodies, when their two shadows intermingle; maybe by now, when he has destroyed so much of Albertine and of himself by denying her freedom, they are both shadows of themselves. "Et je trouvais un charme plus immatériel sans doute,
mais non pas moins intime qu'au rapprochement, à la fusion de nos corps, à celle de nos ombres" (P., p. 175). After Albertine's death, when she is really a shade, Marcel meets again her memory in his dreams (as he seeks the truth about her in his waking life). In his dreams and in his detective work about Albertine's past, Marcel is hindered by yet another shadow, his own:

Parfois, par un défaut d'éclairage intérieur lequel, vicieux, faisait manquer la pièce, mes souvenirs bien mis en scène me donnant l'illusion de la vie, je croyais vraiment avoir donné rendez-vous à Albertine, la retrouver; mais alors je me sentais incapable de marcher vers elle ... de rallumer pour la voir le flambeau qui s'était éteint : impossibilités qui étaient simplement dans mon rêve l'immobilité, le mutisme, la cécité du dormeur, comme brusquement on voit dans la lanterne magique une grande ombre qui devrait être cachée, effacer la projection des personnages, et qui est celle de la lanterne elle-même, ou celle de l'opérateur (F., p. 539).

Marcel, of course, has been, all through the novel, the operator of the magic lantern of his dreams. If the symbol of the magic lantern becomes negative, however, the flower symbolism becomes more negative still. Marcel's delving into Albertine's past comes up with the unhappy possibility of Albertine's many infidelities, some of them lesbian, as for example, her intimacies with Andrée:

quelque temps après la mort d'Albertine, Andrée vint chez moi. Pour la première fois elle me sembla belle, je me disais que ces cheveux presque crépus, ces yeux sombres et cernés, c'était sans doute ce qu'Albertine avait tant aimé, la matérialisation devant moi de ce qu'elle portait dans sa rêverie amoureuse, de ce qu'elle voyait par les regards anticipateurs du désir le jour où elle avait voulu si précipitamment revenir de Balbec. Comme une sombre fleur inconnue qui m'était par delà le tombeau rapportée d'un être où je n'avais pas su la découvrir, il me semblait, exhumation inespérée d'une relique inestimable, voir devant moi le Désir incarné d'Albertine qu'Andrée était pour moi (F., p. 546).
We should not wonder, however, at the image of the sombre flower, for, even on his first trip to Balbec, Marcel found that Albertine could be a dark flower, a rose that changed its colour from an inviting sensual pink to a somewhat sinister congested red:

quelquefois ses joues étaient silisses que le regard glissait comme sur celui d'une miniature sur leur émail rose ... il arrivait que le teint de ses joues atteignît le rose violacé du cyclamen, et parfois même, quand elle était congestionnée ou fiévreuse, et donnant alors l'idée d'une complexion maladive qui rabaisssait mon désir à quelque chose de plus sensuel et faisait exprimer à son regard quelque chose de plus pervers et de plus malsain, la sombre pourpre de certaines roses d'un rouge presque noir (J. F., p. 947).

Note that Marcel seems to prefer to see Albertine as an aesthetic object (such as a miniature) and becomes uneasy, mentioning fever, and a perverse desire when she appears more carnal than aesthetic (perhaps a similar fear inspires Swann's idolatry). Here, we catch a glimpse of what Marcel calls "la profondeur derrière la couleur des choses" (J. F., p. 804). A black (or almost black) rose is most unusual symbolism indeed, and must be the opposite of the white rose which represented Dante's spiritual love for Beatrice. As C. S. Lewis points out, "Evil and misery were dark from the first. Pain is black in Homer" (5). We must remember, however, that with Proust the black of the roses silhouetted against the sea signifies the shallowness of the way in which Marcel regards them, mere images in the visual memories of Balbec. He prefers to see them as profiles lacking depth, but is

(5) Lewis, C. S.: The Allegory of Love, p. 44.
fated to know some of the shadows behind Albertine's eyes without really knowing her.

"Les jeunes filles en fleurs", then, first appear in the brilliant summer sunshine of Balbec. The whole trip is introduced by the scene on the train in which Marcel meets the rosy young girl whom he treats almost as a personification of the dawn. But summer leads to winter and dawn to evening and night, a progression which Marcel notes in his love affair with Albertine. Albertine comes to spend the winter with Marcel. Eventually, he feels that he is experiencing a spiritual or emotional winter too. He is "dans le soir prématuré de ma vie, qui semblait devoir être aussi brève qu'un jour d'hiver" (F., p. 112). In this sentence, as we have seen in the lilac chapter, Marcel links many of the cycles of the novel - Marcel's movement from dawn to night, from summer to spring, even his movement towards what he thinks is an imminent death (we shall see much more of this theme of death in the main rose passages). Indeed, Marcel feels that he has lived the equivalent of "une sorte d'année sentimentale" (F., p. 487) with Albertine. And he mentions one more cycle - a movement from the Dark or Middle Ages towards the Renaissance. He has always thought of Albertine as a medieval person, but now he thinks of her as "une morte ...

On eût dit comme dans certains Jugements Derniers du moyen âge, que la tête seule surgissait hors de la tombe, attendant dans son sommeil la trompette de l'Archange" (F., p. 359). Marcel is tired with the Middle Ages now, he wants an entire new world. "La résignation à la
paresse, la résignation à la chasteté ... à ne pas voyager, tout cela était possible dans l'ancien monde ... le monde vide de l'hiver, mais non plus dans cet univers nouveau, feuillu" (P., p. 404). And he yearns to visit Venice, city of the Renaissance (and of sunshine and spring). Now he tries to turn Albertine into a Renaissance woman, dressing her in gowns designed by Fortuny to evoke the Renaissance and also the sunshine and blue skies of Venice. But Albertine never makes the step from winter to spring, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance successfully. She leaves Marcel and is soon dead. At least, as Marcel says in Venice, she, the rose, never has the chance to fade.

Here, then is the background against which we must study the roses of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Marcel, in never being able to possess Albertine, in not even being sure if he wants to possess her, is a modern equivalent of the courtly lover. But, unlike the lover in Le Roman de la Rose, he falls in love with all the flowers in the garden, and even one that is not. He, too, like the Renaissance poets, laments the passing of youth in his rose and dawn symbols. But the colour symbolism he associates with the roses, black, the colour of shadows and silhouettes, is far more unorthodox and personal. Albertine, with her baggage like coffins, seems to bring death into the house (P., p. 13). Marcel enters the night, the winter, the Dark Ages of his life. And, after Albertine dies, he is left with the sombre flower of her love for Andrée. The pattern of which the roses are part,
then, extends throughout the whole novel. However, our discussion of the general pattern must leave the impression that the rose symbolism is widespread and 'bitty'. Such is not the case, for Proust also devotes very important main passages to the roses. The passages we will study in _A l'Ombre des Jeune Filles en Fleurs_ are those in which Marcel introduces his dreams of medieval romance through the character of _Mlle_ (later _Mme_) de Stermaria (J. F., p. 689), where he describes the band of young girls as roses against the sea (J. F., p. 798) and where he tries to kiss Albertine's rosy cheeks (J. F., pp. 933-4). In _Le Côte de Guermantes_, Marcel once again daydreams of _Mme_ de Stermaria in a setting as close to her domain in Brittany as he can find in Paris, with autumn leaves glowing like a last rose (C. G., p. 384-5), imaginings which make Albertine's kiss seem like a very ordinary event in a scene which is the opposite of the one at Balbec (C. G., pp. 350-370). In _La Prisonnière_, a key passage shows that Albertine has, in a special way, become the sea for Marcel (the rosy young girls of Balbec were important to Marcel by virtue of their association with the sea) (P., pp. 70-75) and she is likened to various flowers and plants less noble than the rose, or the rose without its romance and nobility. Albertine refuses Marcel a kiss in another key passage (P., pp. 399-403) which, like the other scenes with the kiss as a central theme, marks another turning point in their love. In _La Fugitive_, the shadows have taken over, and the flower imagery becomes less frequent and more scattered. _Françoise_, as so often happens, has the final word to say about Marcel's approximation to Medieval Romances in his own life (F., p. 480).
The young Marcel, as we have seen so many times, has an imagination at the same time poetic and sensual. Thus, his dreams of love, or any aesthetic experience of note are associated with food and with poetic metaphors or scenarios. Thus, it is fitting that he meets Mlle de Stermaria in the restaurant of the hotel. Since it is an exclusive hotel, Marcel also becomes aware of her social worth when her father refuses to share a table with Marcel and his grandmother. Marcel immediately becomes fascinated with this beautiful young girl "d'une obscure mais très ancienne famille de Bretagne" (J. F., p. 679).

(This fascination never wanes for Marcel, as she always remains tantalizingly out of reach.) Brittany itself has associations for Marcel of Medieval Romances, Arthurian legends and Romantic poetry, so much so that he fears to go there: "On m'avait conseillé ... de ne pas aller en Bretagne, parce que c'était malsain pour un esprit déjà porté au rêve" (J. F., p. 843). Some of Marcel's dreams can be seen in the following passage:

Mais à certains regards qui passaient un instant sur le fond si vite à sec de sa prunelle et dans lesquels on sentait cette douceur presque humble que le goût prédominant des plaisirs des sens donne à la plus fière ... à certaine teinte d'un rose sensuel et vif qui s'épanouissait dans ses joues pâles, pareille à celle qui mettait son incarnat au cœur des nymphéas blancs de la Vivonne, je croyais sentir qu'elle s'est facilement permis que je vinsse chercher sur elle le goût de cette vie si poétique qu'elle menait en Bretagne ... Et, un mois où elle serait restée seule sans ses parents dans son château romanesque, peut-être aurions-nous pu nous promener seuls le soir tous deux dans le crépuscule où lui-rais plus doucement au-dessus de l'eau assombris les fleurs roses des bruyères, sous les chênes battus par le clapotement des vagues. Ensemble nous aurions parcouru cette île empreinte pour moi de tant de charme parce qu'elle avait enfermé la vie habituelle de Mlle de Stermaria et qu'elle reposait dans la mémoire de ses yeux (J. F., pp. 688-9).
Notice that Marcel talks of tasting, or savouring Mlle de Stermaria's life. She is that fascinating mixture for him, a person at once sensual and proud. Then, too, the type of roses with which she is associated, the briars, are the most romantic of all, the roses of the sleeping beauty. There is also a castle (remember Marcel's fantasies about the keep at Roussainville) and, most of all, the sea. In fact, Marcel, with his delight in etymologies, finds out that "C'est l' "eau", qui en breton se dit Ster, Stermaria, Sterlaer, Sterbouest" (S. G., p. 933). And so, even in her name (as well as in her possession of a castle by the sea), Mlle de Stermaria is more likely to embody Marcel's desire for the sea.

The very first appearance of the young girls in flower emphasize Marcel's love for the sea. They also show, especially in Proust's use of the idea of projecting one's ideals, evocative of the magic lantern, some of the retrospective scepticism of the narrator who has managed to come close to one of the roses:

Ni parmi les actrices, ou les paysannes, ou les demoiselles de pensionnat religieux, je n'avais rien vu d'aussi beau, imprégné d'autant d'inconnu, aussi inestimablement précieux, aussi vraisemblablement inaccessible. Elles étaient, du bonheur inconnu et possible de la vie, un exemplaire si délicieux et en si parfait état, que c'était presque pour des raisons intellectuelles que j'étais désespéré de ne pas pouvoir faire dans des conditions uniques ... l'expérience de ce que nous offre de plus mystérieux la beauté qu'on désire, et qu'on se console de ne posséder jamais en demandant du plaisir - comme Swann avait toujours refusé de faire, avant Odette - à des femmes qu'on n'a pas désirées, (Does Marcel console himself in this fashion for the inaccessibility of Mlle de Stermaria with Albertine? It certainly seems so in
We will pass over Proust's use of the word 'délicieux' here, because he may be using it in its precious sense, and besides, we will find much better examples of Proust's association of food and love later on. Here, however, we must note in Proust's rather charming use of perspective, that Marcel seems to be looking beyond the girls to the sea (although he is also fascinated by the butterfly, because he would like to play the role of the human insect going from flower to flower in this little band, one of whom is even called Rosemonde). Indeed, later Marcel says: "Mais quand, même ne le sachant pas, je pensais à elles, plus inconsciemment encore, elles, c'était pour moi les ondulations montueuses et bleues de la mer, le profil d'un défilé devant la mer" (J. F., p. 833). In fact, Marcel prefers to know Albertine as a profile or silhouette, because, as soon as he begins to feel deeper emotions.
for her, he runs the risk of being hurt (J. F., p. 942). Moreover, the young girls represent for Marcel something of the continuous flux which he likes so much in the sea. "Mais l'adolescence est antérieure à la solidification complète et de là vient qu'on éprouve auprès des jeunes filles ce rafraîchissement que donne le spectacle des formes sans cesse en train de changer, de jouer en une instable opposition qui fait penser à cette perpétuelle récréation des éléments primordiaux de la nature qu'on contemple devant la mer" (J. F., p. 906). Marcel's description of Albertine as a medieval representation of the dead in stone is doubly significant in terms of this quotation. In fact, the next time that Marcel uses the image of projection, he also alludes to the story of Faust, who, seeking knowledge at the end of the Middle Ages, when such pursuits were considered dangerous, ran the risk of discovering evil:

je ramenais Elstir vers sa villa, quand tout d'un coup, tel Méphistophélès surgissant devant Faust, apparurent au bout de l'avenue - comme une simple objectivation irréelle et diabolique du tempérament opposé au nien, de la vitalité quasi barbare et cruelle dont était si dépourvue ma faiblesse, mon excès de sensibilité douloureuse et d'intellectualité - quelques taches de l'essence impossible à confondre avec rien d'autre, quelques sporades de la bande zoophytique des jeunes filles, lesquelles avaient l'air de ne pas me voir, mais sans aucun doute n'en étaient pas moins en train de porter sur moi un jugement ironique ... je tournai le dos comme un baigneur qui va recevoir la lame (J. F., p. 855).

However, Marcel makes most of these observations on the young girls before he actually knows them. When he does pluck up the courage to ask Elstir to introduce him to Albertine, many of his happier, more down to earth, more sensual imaginings come true, linking the rose and
food. Just before buying himself an éclair and enjoying it while watching the world go by on the beach, Marcel says:

C'est un grand charme ajouté à la vie dans une station balnéaire comme était Balbec, si le visage d'une jolie fille, une marchande de coquillages, de gâteaux ou de fleurs, peint en vives couleurs dans notre pensée, est quotidiennement pour nous dès le matin le but de chacune de ces journées oisives et lumineuses qu'on passe sur la plage. Elles sont alors, et par là, bien que désœuvrées, alertes comme des journées de travail, aiguillées, aimantées, soulevées légèrement vers un instant prochain, celui où tout en achetant des sablés, des roses, des ammonites, on se délectera à voir, sur un visage féminin, les couleurs étalées aussi purement que sur une fleur (J. F., p. 830).

We have already seen the way in which Marcel likens the female organ to a shell, and Marcel later talks of Albertine as a souvenir of a holiday, a shell one no longer pays attention to, but which can still evoke the beauty of the sea (F., p. 453). Here, however, it is the cakes and the roses which interest us. Marcel is so shy on first meeting Albertine, that, at the party Elstir has instigated for him to be introduced to her, he puts off the actual moment by talking to an old gentleman and making him a present of his rose buttonhole, and by picking up and eating an éclair. Therefore, much later, Marcel's memory of this first introduction is linked inextricably with the éclair and the rose (J. F., p. 875). Soon, he is enjoying picnics with the girls, savouring their company along with the sticky delight of sweet cakes, as we have already seen.

Much later, Marcel attempts to taste the rosy fruit of Albertine's cheeks. However, before we look at the passage describing this scene, let us
just study the element of confusion and childish games in this love of Albertine and Marcel. Marcel joins in a game of ferret with the young girls, the object of which is to hide a ring, passed on from person to person, from the 'ferret' in the middle. Marcel is hopeless and gets caught because he takes all Albertine's ruses and deceptions aimed at the ferret for flirting. Yet his friendship with the girls is much like this game of ferret. He is not sure when they are playing, and he is not sure when he is serious over any one of them. Their parents are trying to make sure that they catch good husbands, but Marcel himself can never decide if he should give his affection, let alone a ring, to any one of them, to all of them, or to none of them. He is obviously more mature than they, and reads all sorts of implications into Albertine's invitation to come to her room and to play any games with her he likes. Poor Marcel cannot see the comic element which the reader can discern in the whole passage, and feels that he could die without regret at the moment of kissing Albertine:

Elle me regardait en souriant. A côté d'elle, dans la fenêtre, la vallée était éclairée par le clair de lune. La vue du cou nu d'Albertine, de ces joues trop roses, m'avait jeté dans une telle ivresse ... que cette vue avait rompu l'équilibre entre la vie immense, indestructible qui roulait dans mon être, et la vie de l'univers, si chétive en comparaison. La mer, que j'apercevais à côté de la vallée dans la fenêtre, les seins bombés des premières falaises de Maineville, le ciel où la lune n'était pas encore montée au zénith, tout cela semblait plus léger à porter que des plumes pour les globes de mes prunelles qu'entre mes paupières je sentais dilatés, résistants, prêts à soulever bien d'autres fardeaux, toutes les montagnes du monde, sur leur surface délicate ... Je me penchai vers Albertine pour l'embrasser. La mort eût dû me frapper en ce moment que cela m'eût paru indifférent ou plutôt impossible, car la vie n'était pas hors de moi, elle était en moi; j'aurais souri de pitié si un
philosophie eût émis l'idée qu'un jour, même éloigné, j'aurais à mourir, que les forces éternelles de la nature me surviendraient, les forces de cette nature sous les pieds divins de qui je n'étais qu'un grain de poussière; qu'après moi il y aurait encore ces falaises arrondies et bombées, cette mer, ce clair de lune, ce ciel! Comment cela eût-il été possible, comment le monde eût-il pu durer plus que moi, puisque je n'étais pas perdu en lui, puisque c'était lui qui était enclos en moi, en moi qu'il était bien loin de remplir, en moi où, en sentant la place d'y entasser tant d'autres trésors, je jetais dédaigneusement dans un coin ciel, mer et falaises? "Finissez ou je sonne", s'écria Albertine ... dans l'état d'exaltation où j'étais, le visage rond d'Albertine, éclairé d'un feu intérieur comme par une veilleuse, prenait pour moi un tel relief qu'imitant la rotation d'une sphère ardente, il me semblait tourner, telles ces figures de Michel-Ange qu'emporte un immobile et vertigineux tourbillon. J'allais savoir l'odeur, le goût, qu'avait ce fruit rose inconnu. J'entendis un son précipité, prolongé et criard. Albertine avait sonné de toutes ses forces (J. F., pp. 933-4).

Here, Marcel reaches such a subjective or idealistic peak, that he feels as though the whole world is contained in him. However, Albertine, by ringing the bell to get rid of him, proves otherwise. She does not belong to his subjective world; she will not fit in with his plans. Nonetheless, Marcel comes very close to possessing, engulfing all of Balbec in kissing Albertine. We have seen in other chapters the importance of the symbol of 'le tourbillon'. In this passage, Marcel picks the grandest association possible from art. Of course, the final effect is comic, for the seemingly omnipotent Marcel is routed by Albertine. The rosy fruit is not for tasting. Even Marcel's mention of death and love is, thus, grossly exaggerated.

The next time that we meet Marcel and Albertine in a similar situation, Marcel has made contact with Âlle (now Mme, divorced after three months.
of marriage) de Stermaria. He has given her an invitation to dine, and now, builds around her acceptance, dreams with which Albertine cannot hope to compete. Marcel chooses to dine in a restaurant in the Bois, in the sort of place where one would wander hoping to meet a girl one has fallen in love with at a ball, a girl who is leaving Paris for the winter, and whom one will not see again until the spring:

Se sentant à la veille, peut-être au lendemain du départ de l'être aimé, on suit au bord de l'eau frémissante ces belles allées où déjà une première feuille rouge fleurit comme une dernière rose, on scrute cet horizon où, par un artifice inverse à celui de ces panoramas sous la rotonde desquels les personnages en cire du premier plan donnent à la toile peinte du fond l'apparence illusoire de la profondeur et du volume, nos yeux passant sans transition du parc cultivé aux hauteurs naturelles de Meudon et du mont Valérien ne savent pas où mettre une frontière... Entre la dernière fête de l'été et l'exil de l'hiver, on parcourt anxieusement ce royaume romanesque des rencontres incertaines et des mélancolies amoureuses (C. G., p. 354).

Here, everything is artifice. The rose is not really a rose. It is difficult to distinguish the natural from the artificial in the setting. Marcel has imagined a whole little drama which, linked with this setting is like a scene from Watteau's paintings or Verlaine's poems of Les Fêtes galantes. But more is to come, for Marcel feels that the Bois is ideal for recreating the atmosphere of Mme de Stermaria's home in Brittany and thus aiding his fantasies about her:

Mais dans cette île (in the Bois), où même l'été il y avait souvent du brouillard, combien je serais plus heureux d'emmener Mme de Stermaria maintenant que la mauvaise saison, que la fin de l'automne était venue! ... l'espoir de posséder ... Mme de Stermaria eût suffi pour faire se lever vingt fois par heure un rideau de brume dans mon imagination monotonement nostalgique ... le brouillard ... me faisait songer sans cesse au pays natal de
la jeune femme ... je pensais qu'il ferait pour moi de l'île des Cygnes un peu l'île de Bretagne dont l'atmosphère maritime et brumeuse avait toujours entouré pour moi comme un vêtement la pâle silhouette de Mme de Stermaria. Certes quand on est jeune ... notre désir, notre croyance confèrent au vêtement d'une femme une particularité individuelle, une irréductible essence ... On commence à dégager, à connaître ce qu'on aime, on tâche à se le procurer, fût-ce au prix d'un artifice. Alors, à défaut de la croyance disparue, le costume signifie la suppléance à celle-ci par le moyen d'une illusion volontaire. Je savais bien qu'à une demi-heure de la maison je ne trouverais pas la Bretagne. Mais en me promenant enlacé à Mme de Stermaria dans les ténèbres de l'île, au bord de l'eau, je ferais comme d'autres qui, ne pouvant pénétrer dans un couvent, du moins, avant de posséder une femme, l'habillent en religieuse (C. G., pp. 385-6).

Marcel has grown more sophisticated since Balbec days, to the extent that artifice now, rather than belief, creates the illusions, the dreams around women. The woman, however, remains a silhouette. Proust even uses the word 'nostalgic' to describe Marcel's imagination. Of course, Marcel realizes that actually possessing Mme de Stermaria would destroy these dreams, "mes rêves de jeune vierge féodale" (C. G., p. 393). In fact, the only woman that Marcel loves who fulfills Marcel's high ideals and who remains necessarily inaccessible is his grandmother, now dead: "Sur ce lit funèbre, la mort, comme le sculpteur du Moyen Age, l'avait couchée sous l'apparence d'une jeune fille" (C. G., p. 345).

In the face of Marcel's dreams of inaccessible women, Albertine is bound to alienate Marcel when she offers to kiss him. It is, as Marcel says, "la scène inverse de celle de Balbec" (C. G., p. 365), and Marcel, ever jealous, wonders if he owes "son changement d'attitude à quelque
bienfaiteur involontaire" (C. G., p. 366), that is, to another lover. Marcel tries to see in Albertine "une rose au bord de la mer" (C. G., p. 351), but decides she is, away from Balbec "une bien pauvre rose" (C. G., p. 352). "Certes je n'aimais nullement Albertine" he goes on to say "fille de la brume du dehors, elle pouvait seulement contenter le désir imaginatif que le temps nouveau avait éveillé en moi" (C. G., p. 354). And he talks of Albertine as "une simple projection" (C. G., p. 361), or "simple image dans le décor de la vie" (C. G., p. 362), with "sa minceur de silhouette" (C. G., p. 363). But he admits that "Mon surplus de science sur la vie ... aboutissait provisoirement à l'agnosticisme" (C. G., p. 361), and that this might account, too, for the fact that she no longer has "l'attrait romanesque". He certainly looks her over very carefully, scrutinizes her as though through "un stéréoscope" (C. G., p. 362), "un instrument optique", "la loupe" (C. G., p. 364). When he comes to kiss Albertine he hesitates, unable to make the leap from Albertine as an 'unknown' rose to a 'carnal' one, even although he hopes, that "sur les deux joues de la jeune fille" he can embrace "toute la plage de Balbec" (C. G., p. 363). After all, in the Balbec scene, he felt as though he had become one with all the world outside Albertine's hotel room. Here, however, he shows the disappointment, even the repulsion, of an idealist who comes too close to the object of his desire:
Mais en laissant mon regard glisser sur le beau globe rose de ses joues, dont les surfaces doucement incurvées venaient mourir aux pieds des premiers plisements de ses beaux cheveux noirs qui couraient en chaînes mouvementées ... je dus me dire :
"Enfin, n'y ayant pas réussi à Balbec, je vais savoir le goût de la rose inconnue que sont les joues d'Albertine ... j'allais connaître le goût de cette rose charnelle ... au contact même de la chair, les lèvres ... ne pourraient sans doute pas goûter davantage la saveur que la nature les empêche actuellement de saisir, car, dans cette zone désolée où elles ne peuvent trouver leur nourriture, elles sont seules, le regard, puis l'odorat les ont abandonnées depuis longtemps ... Du moins tant que je ne l'avais pas touchée, cette tête, je la voyais, un léger parfum venait d'elle jusqu'à moi. Mais hâle! - car pour le baiser, nos narines et nos yeux sont aussi mal placés que nos lèvres, mal faites - tout d'un coup, mes yeux cessèrent de voir, à son tour mon nez, s'écrasant, ne perçut plus aucune odeur, et sans connaître pour cela davantage le goût du rose désiré, j'appris à ces détestables signes, qu'enfin j'étais en train d'embrasser la joue d'Albertine
(C. G., pp. 363 365).

This passage marks the turning point in Marcel's love for Albertine, the moment at which it ceases to be a fantasy and starts to be 'carnal'. The rose and food symbolism mark Marcel's disappointment. Once again, Marcel links love, or the climax of physical love, and death. Here, it seems to restore a certain innocence to Albertine's features. "Effaçant d'elle toutes préoccupations, toutes prétentions habituelles, le moment qui précède le plaisir, pareil en cela à celui qui suit la mort (is he thinking of his grandmother here, whose face, ravaged by illness, regained its youth in death?), avait rendu à ses traits rajeunis comme l'innocence du premier âge" (C. G., p. 366). In any case, now that Marcel regards the whole proceedings as rather repulsive, Albertine has decided to lend them an aura of Romance, "Albertine avait cru devoir improviser et ajouter momentanément aux baisers que nous avions échangés sur mon lit, le sentiment dont ils eussent été le signe pour
un chevalier et sa dame tels que pouvait les concevoir un jongleur gothique" (C. G., p. 370).

From now on, the rose fades in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. We find out that Marcel has rose fever, that is, an allergy to roses (S. G., p. 813). Marcel also undergoes a very real martyrdom of jealousy over Albertine, as we have already seen in the hawthorn chapter. The only times that the rose regains its nobility is when it is associated with art, hence the following description of Elstir's roses:

les roses encore vivantes et leur portrait a demi ressemblant. A demi seulement, Elstir ne pouvait regarder une fleur qu'en la transplantant d'abord dans ce jardin intérieur où nous sommes forcés de rester toujours. Il avait montré dans cette aquarelle l'apparition des roses qu'il avait vues et que sans lui on n'èft connues jamais; de sorte qu'on peut dire que c'était une variété nouvelle dont ce peintre, comme un ingénieux horticulteur, avait enrichi la famille des Roses (S. G., p. 943).

Only once more is Albertine associated with the rose in a positive sense, and this is on the second trip to Balbec when she tries to become an artist "Albertine ... peignait devant l'église toute en clochetons, épineuse et rouge, fleurissant comme un rosier" (S. G., p. 1013). Of course, it is the church and not Albertine who is likened to a rose here. When he imprisons her, Marcel prefers to think of Albertine as "(un) rosier à qui j'avais fourni le tuteur, le cadre" (P., p. 382). In a similar image, he likens Albertine, when asleep and therefore most under his control, to "une plante grimpante, un volubilis" (P., p. 113). This latter image is a little unfortunate, for Proust
has already associated it with the effeminate homosexual (S. G., pp. 621-22). However, in the same context of Albertine asleep, Proust introduces a very tender and well known passage which shows that, however much the rose may have faded, Marcel can still associate Albertine with the sea:

Il me semblait posséder non pas une, mais d'innombrables jeunes filles. Sa respiration peu à peu plus profonde soulevait régulièrement sa poitrine et, par-dessus elle, ses mains croisées, ses perles, déplacées d'une manière différente par le même mouvement, comme ces barques, ces chaînes d'amarre que fait osciller le mouvement du flot. Alors, sentant que son sommeil était dans son plein, que je ne me heurterais pas à des écueils de conscience recouverts maintenant par la pleine mer du sommeil profond, délibérément je sautais sans bruit sur le lit, je me couchais au long d'elle, je prenais sa taille d'un de mes bras, je posais mes lèvres sur sa joue et sur son cœur, puis, sur toutes les parties de son corps, ma seule main restée libre et qui était soulevée aussi, comme les perles, par la respiration de la dormeuse; moi-même, j'étais déplacé légèrement par son mouvement régulier : je m'étais embarqué sur le sommeil d'Albertine (P., p. 72).

This is a rare moment of calm for Marcel, however. Storms are gathering on the horizon. To Marcel's horror Albertine, like his mother before, refuses to kiss him. This incident is the final of the three scenes revolving around kisses. In it, Albertine makes no effort to put on the clothes which always make her appear rosy in Marcel's eyes; she will not wear the costume of dreams, the illusions in which he wishes to envelope her, as he used to with Mme de Stermaria:

Quand elle put me dire bonsoir et que je l'embrassai, elle ne fit pas comme d'habitude, se détourna, et - c'était quelques instants à peine après le moment où je venais de penser à cette douceur qu'elle me donnât tous les soirs ce qu'elle m'avait refusé à Balbec - elle ne me rendit pas mon baiser ... Je l'embrassai alors une seconde fois ... Mais une seconde fois, elle,
au lieu de me rendre mon baiser, s'écartera avec l'espèce
d'entêtement instinctif et néfaste des animaux qui sentent
la mort ... Il me semblait que si j'avais pu la faire déshabiller
et l'avoir dans sa chemise de nuit blanche, dans laquelle elle
semblait plus rose, plus chaude, où elle irritait plus mes
sens, la réconciliation eût été plus complète. Mais j'hésitai
un instant ... Je sais que je prononçai alors le mot "mort"
comme si Albertine allait mourir
(P., pp. 399,401).

And, not long after this, Albertine leaves Marcel; not long after
leaving him, she is dead. It remains to Françoise, the character
who acts so often as a foil to Marcel to have the last word to say
on his 'Romance' (After all, she is the person who first introduced
the rose and the idea of illusions in love in the crude phrase "Qui
du cul d'un chien s'amoureuse,/Il lui paraît une rose" (C. S., p. 123).)
Françoise hated Albertine, but, since she too is like the reincarnation
of a medieval peasant, she can understand the chivalric, epic, even
Romantic undertones of Marcel's affair with Albertine : "Françoise
devait être heureuse de la mort d'Albertine, et il faut lui rendre la
justice que par une sorte de convenance et de tact elle ne simulait pas
la tristesse. 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" (F., p. 480).

After Albertine's death, the roses that Marcel encounters seem very
meagre tokens indeed. Rachel, who treated Saint-Loup so badly in
love recites La Fontaine's poem about the faithful love of the two
doves, receives a stingy recognition of five roses from Mme Verdurin
(now the Princess of Guermantes), and casts a glance at Marcel which

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is a horrible grimace of desire. Mme Swann, as we have seen in many chapters, seems like "une rose stérilisée" (T. R., p. 950), and Marcel himself decides to treat young girls and the romances they bring as a light diet suitable for a poet. The courtly lover has given way to the writer. Marcel no longer needs to find art in life.

We can see, then, that the rose is one of the most evocative of Proust's flower symbols, enriched, as it is by literary tradition and by his own personal symbolism. Indeed, in its use as a flower of love we can say of Proust as he said of Elstir, that the rose symbol, the study of love which we see before us resembles the old courtly love, but is made new by Marcel's conflicting desire to worship and yet to know, never to touch and yet to possess his beloved. Truly, if this analysis of love can be likened to entering a rose garden, then Proust has added to this garden, as Elstir added to the family of roses, a new type of rose.
By now, we hope that this chapter has proved the existence of a very definite plan in Proust's novel, and has reduced the criticism to the contrary which we mentioned in the introduction. Most of the chapters are, however, with the possible exception of the last, as in most of the individual flower images, such is not the case. To begin with, we have seen, Proust is particularly interested in the human landscape, in universality a "human botanist". Thus the, time injection of life, the distant of time and the development last in large descriptive volumes. Thus, we are not at all surprised to notice that Proust was to build many of his books with entire passages devoted to human landscape, in which we can follow a certain sequence through a cycle of "human seasons": for example, go from a "social springtime" to a "human summer", then golden by belief, a subsequent autumnal mood in the land of flowers and a final winter forest, but we also see a scale scientifically itself then fade, the aristocracy of the "memory Saint-Germain Lovers" period ends by never becoming (1) at the end of the novel, certain free moments as the individual phenomenon were the fiction of "the inner conviction of absent psychological sensations" in A la recherche du temps perdu (2) and found no meaning anywhere in the general that can be above us that the phenomena, by their very mere aspect a reality that

The Conclusion:

The Seasons in Proust's Human Landscape

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(1) [ cites source ]
(2) [ cites source ]
By now, we hope that this thesis has proved the existence of a very definite plan in Proust's novel, and has refuted the criticisms to the contrary which we mentioned in the introduction. Most of the chapters so far, however, with the possible exception of the hawthorn chapter, must leave the reader with the impression that the basic pattern of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu depends to some extent on a number of individual flower images. Such is not the case. To begin with, as we have seen, Proust is particularly interested in the human landscape, is primarily a 'human botanist'. Then, too, time fascinated him, and the element of time can be developed best in large descriptive scenes. Thus, we are not at all surprised to notice that Proust began or ended many of his books with entire passages devoted to human landscapes, in which we can follow a number of his characters through a cycle of 'human' seasons. In fact, not only do we see individual characters, like Marcel for example go from a 'social springtime', to a summer scene made golden by belief, a subsequent autumnal scene on the loss of belief and a final winter forest, but we also watch a whole society bloom then fade, the aristocracy of the Faubourg Saint-Germain being pushed aside by newer blossoms (T. R., p. 970) at the end of the novel. Germaine Brée comments on the individual phenomenon when she talks of 'the inner succession of almost psychological seasons' in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu (1) and Louis de Beauchamp suggests the general one when he shows us that the Guermantes, by their very name suggest a family that

is reaching a social sunset (2), the last syllable of the family name and the first syllable of the duchess' name (Oriane) suggesting the gold of summer sun or autumn leaves. Mme Verdurin, however, who replaces the former Princess of Guermantes, carries in her name the green of her social springtime. There remains, still, a great deal to say on the subject of the 'human seasons' in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.

The main passages we will study are those concerned with Mme Swann's winter garden, as seen through Swann's eyes (C. S., pp. 219-223) and later through Marcel's (J. F., pp. 636-641), with the Swann entourage in an early summer or late spring setting in the Bois de Boulogne (C. S., pp. 417-21 and J. F., pp. 636-641) and with a contrasting companion piece when Marcel is losing his youthful childhood beliefs, describing the Bois in autumn (C. S., pp. 423-7). The series also includes Swann's disquieting final impression of "le Bois de Boulogne tombé en catalepsie" (J. F., p. 533) evoked by Vinteuil's sonata. Finally, all these themes draw together (as we have seen to some extent in the hawthorn chapter) in the panorama of the winter forest of the Guermantes' last reception (T. R., pp. 918-941). Here, of course, in the happiness of his new vocation as an artist, Marcel feels the first stirring within him of a new life (his novel) and, thus, a new spring.

(2) de Beauchamp, Louis: La Vie Sociale à l'époque et dans l'oeuvre de Proust, Bulletin no. 7, p. 627.
Before we study the metaphors of the seasons (we are more interested in them as they apply to the individual characters - Swann, Marcel and Odette especially - than as to society on a whole), let us look once again at Proust's letter to Jacques Rivière, in which his comments express his dismay at the way in which one of his large scenes (C. S., pp. 423-7) describing Marcel's disenchantment with society has been misunderstood:

Enfin je trouve un lecteur qui devine que mon livre est un ouvrage dogmatique et une construction ... J'ai trouvé plus probe et plus délicat comme artiste de ne pas laisser voir, de ne pas annoncer que c'était justement à la recherche de la Vérité que je partais, ni en quoi elle consistait pour moi. Je déteste tellement les ouvrages idéologiques où le récit n'est tout le temps qu'une faillite des intentions de l'auteur que j'ai préféré ne rien dire. Ce n'est qu'à la fin du livre, et une fois les leçons de la vie comprises, que ma pensée se dévoilera. Celle que j'exprime à la fin du premier volume, dans cette parenthèse sur le Bois de Boulogne que j'ai dressée là comme un simple paravent pour finir et clôturer un livre qui ne pouvait pas pour des raisons matérielles excéder 500 pages, est le contraire de ma conclusion. Elle est une étape, d'apparence subjective et dilettante, vers la plus objective et croyante des conclusions. Si on en induisait que ma pensée est un scepticisme désenchante, ce serait absolument comme si un spectateur, ayant vu, à la fin du premier acte de Parsifal, ce personnage ne rien comprendre à la cérémonie et être chassé par Gurnemanz, supposait que Wagner a voulu dire que la simplicité de cœur ne conduit à rien.

Considering the shape of Proust's novel, whose end leads us back to the beginning, it is apt that we begin both introduction and conclusion with this quotation. In the introduction, we wished to point out the evidence in this letter that Proust planned a definite pattern for his

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novel; now we are in a position to see the exact type of pattern Proust chose (a chance denied his contemporaries, as we have seen, for they had to judge the novel in sections, as it came out). To begin with, Proust himself talks of the progression of the stages in the novel in terms of the loss and the regaining of faith (we have already seen Marcel move from adoration of various women in the novel—often women with a high social status—to disillusionment, to a final faith in art). And significantly, Proust alludes to the quest legend with his reference to Parsifal, the quest, as we have seen in the hawthorn chapter, being a major influence on the pattern of Proust's symbolism. Here, too, Proust emphasizes the position in the novel of the misunderstood scene. The other general scenes that we are going to study nearly all occupy key positions at the beginning and end of books inside the novel as a whole. And, if the passage to which Proust refers is only 'une parenthèse', then we must agree with Rina Viers that Proust had a habit of putting the most important things in parentheses (4). Most important of all in the context of the accusation of excessive nostalgia sometimes levelled at Proust, is his own comment on the dilettantish nature of this passage at the end of Du Côté de chez Swann, for, in all these landscapes which cover the entire range of the 'human seasons', a quality of longing and loss permeates only those scenes described by the immature Marcel. The mature Marcel recaptures everything, especially time, at the end of his novel through his art.

There are three major characters whose development unfolds in terms of the metaphors of the seasons; Swann, Marcel and Odette. Their particular 'seasons', of course do not coincide, Marcel being much younger than the other two, yet Proust is very adept at making any particular passage applicable to, if necessary, all three characters. Thus, for example, in the winter garden scene which brings all three together, although Swann is only indirectly involved, we find Swann trapped in the sterile winter part of his life, while Marcel can see the hope of spring in the new blossoms. He is, indeed, in that part of his life he calls his 'social springtime'. Odette, as usual, is the scene arranger, and is in command of the situation, and is thus not so affected by the psychological winter in her salon, seeming, indeed, to want to retain it. Since the seasons are different for each character, we will discuss these human landscapes in terms of each of these three characters.

The logical one to begin with is Swann, as he is Marcel's precursor, although Marcel will eventually surpass him. We have seen the essence of Swann's 'spring' and 'summer' in the hawthorn chapter. It is that time in his life when he seems full of energy for chasing women, for visiting his neighbours with baskets full of the produce of his land, and, even, for exciting Marcel's jealousy as a rival for the time and affection of his mother. At this point in his life, as we have seen, Swann is closely associated with Tansonville and with the hawthorns,
even to the extent of physically resembling these flowers because of his bristly haircut, green eyes, and reddish hair (C. S., p. 195). He and his hawthorns become the last real symbol of life that Aunt Léonie gives up when she retires to her room to die. Also, at this time, Swann is working on a study of Vermeer, artistic creativity being synonymous with the physical vigour of his life. He does, however, exhibit "une certaine muflerie" (C. S., p. 193) as well as a laziness and a tendency towards escapism which makes him abandon his work and become an easy prey to destructive love.

Then, one autumn or winter, (we can't quite tell which) he meets Odette. Proust tells us of Swann that "La profondeur, la mélancolie de l'expression, glaçaient ses sens, que suffisait au contraire à éveiller une chair saine, plantureuse et rose" (C. S., p. 192). Indeed, this former is just the type of beauty which Odette possesses and which at first repels, then, perversely, attracts, Swann. As we shall see, many aspects of his character and life, not just his senses, will be frozen when he totally surrenders to Odette. At this point, Odette's face seems "malgré sa jeunesse, si fané" (C. S., p. 197). But she blooms again with Swann as her lover, as though she saps his energy to her own advantage. Certainly, she ruins his social standing, introducing him to the bourgeois Verdurins, whilst his former associates were to be found amongst the nobility. Yet, as we shall see, the Verdurins, like Odette, are on the ascendency and the aristocratic
Guermantes, Swann's friends, are on the decline. At the Verdurins, Swann hears Vinteuil's sonata, which gives him the hope of "la possibilité d'une sorte de rajeunissement" (C. S., p. 210). He feels himself an old man, though in years he is quite young, and the music gives him the same sensation as that of a spontaneous regression of the illnesses which age brings. Love, too, at first, seems a rejuvenating influence. We can infer, then, that at the point in his life when he meets Odette, Swann's powers are already waning because of his own weaknesses. Yet he is still capable of rejuvenation and redemption by art, so long as love does not take over his life. This, however, is just what does happen, and we will note throughout the pages we wish to discuss, a deterioration in Swann's conception of the meaning of 'la petite Phrase' of the sonata as love engulfs him, until it becomes little more than "l'air national de leur amour" (C. S., p. 218).

Thus, the scene is set for the first description of Odette's winter garden:

L'isolement et le vide de ces courtes rues (faites presque toutes de petits hôtels contigus, dont tout à coup venait rompre la monotonie quelque sinistre échoppe, témoignage historique et reste sordide du temps où ces quartiers étaient encore mal famés), la neige qui était restée dans le jardin et aux arbres, le négligé de la saison, le voisinage de la nature, donnaient quelque chose de plus mystérieux à la chaleur, aux fleurs qu'il avait trouvées en entrant ... une rangée de ces gros chrysanthèmes encore rares à cette époque, mais bien éloignés cependant de ceux que les horticulteurs réussirent plus tard à obtenir. Swann était agacé par la mode qui depuis
l'année dernière se portait sur eux, mais il avait eu plaisir, cette fois, à voir la pénombre de la place zébrée de rose, d'orange et de blanc par les rayons odorants de ces astres éphémères qui s'allument dans les jours gris. Odette l'avait reçu en robe de chambre de soie rose, le cou et les bras nus... quand le valet de chambre était venu apporter successivement les nombreuses lampes qui, presque toutes enfermées dans des potiches chinoises, brûlaient isolées ou par couples, toutes sur des meubles différents comme sur des autels et qui dans le crépuscule déjà presque nocturne de cette fin d'après-midi d'hiver avaient fait reparaître un coucher de soleil plus durable, plus rose et plus humain - faisant peut-être rêver dans la rue quelque amoureux arrêté devant le mystère de la présence que décelaient et cachaienL à la fois les vitres rallumées, elle avait surveillé sévèrement du coin de l'œil le domestique pour voir s'il les posait bien à leur place consacrée (C.S., pp. 219-21).

The introduction to the winter garden scene shows us that, socially, Swann is definitely going down in the world by visiting Odette, entering a 'social winter' reflected in the dreariness of the wintry surroundings. Despite the fact that Swann considers this fad for chrysanthemums in 'low taste', the flowers do seem to lighten the grey winter day. In fact, at first, they seem to offer a message of hope and warmth, in keeping with their significance in the East, where they are the flowers of the sun, associated, for example, in Japan with the emperor, supposed descendant of the sun goddess. Moreover, in Japanese custom, a mistress offers a white chrysanthemum to her lover. The chrysanthemums also signify old age, but in the sense of longevity in a society which honours the old. The presence of these flowers at funerals suggests the continuity of life despite the death of the individual. White, too, suggests mourning in the East. Here, however, the promise of the chrysanthemums proves illusory. Marcel waits in vain for the pleasures they seem to herald, and Swann receives from Odette, along with a last chrysanthemum from her garden (Has she given so many away already, or is this just a sign of approaching winter?), a stultifying love and a premature and sterile old age. Anyway, Swann prizes the flower,
which he keeps until it fades, then locks away in his desk. Odette's love for Swann later seems to wane. To Swann, "ce changement c'était sa profonde, sa secrète blessure" (C.S., p. 321). (Is this too an echo of the grail legend and the unhealing wound of the Fisher King?) Moreover, Swann removes the chrysanthemum and love letters from their original place in his writing desk, which he presumably used to store his unfinished work on Vermeer, to a chest of drawers which, from that time onwards, he avoids looking at when entering or leaving his room. Actually, the fact that none of the characters in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu ever share a 'season' with another is just a specific example of a common law of human isolation in Proust, which is also illustrated by these love letters. When Swann was in love with Odette, she was very cool to him, and when he was indifferent to her, she wrote him (seemingly) very loving letters which he prized in that painful period when she no longer wanted his love. Later again, the little phrase in Vinteuil's sonata, instead of reawakening Swann to art, can only bring to his mind "les refrains oubliés du bonheur" "Les pétale neigeux et frisés du chrysanthème" and "l'adresse en relief de la 'Maison Dorée' " (C.S., p.345). Apart from anything else, the detail of 'la Maison Dorée' shows how illusory was Swann's happiness with Odette, for while he was searching for her in the restaurants of Paris, to find her eventually at this 'Maison Dorée', she was deceiving him with someone else. The snowy chrysanthemum with 'les pétales neigeux', evoked by Vinteuil's sonata, seems
a very good symbol of the wintry, sunset quality of Swann's life.

Even the beautiful impression the chrysanthemums make of a human and permanent sunset is illusory; the sunset in nature will return while the flowers, these particular flowers at any rate, will fade. Marcel later finds out that the pleasures that these blooms seem to offer are just as illusory and ephemeral. Odette, however, keeps up the pretence, retaining a perpetual air of expectancy (C. S., p. 607). The chrysanthemums also introduce the idea of arranging flowers, and sometimes not just flowers, for their effect (5). Now in many salons, the flowers lack stylized arrangements to such an extent that they seem to show on the part of the hostesses nothing more nor less than a simple love of flowers. With Odette, however, as Proust tells us time and time again, such is not the case. As a courtesan, she must place herself against a flattering and suggestive backdrop. Even here we notice that she oversees the placing of the lamps very carefully indeed, as though they were altar flames, "faisant peut-être rêver dans la rue quelque amoureux arrêté devant le mystère de la présence que décelaient et cachaienl à la fois les vitres rallumées" (C. S., p. 221). Thus Proust introduces the theme of Odette as a goddess or priestess (reminiscent of those priestesses of the earth goddess or the goddess of love whose temple was really a sort of sacred brothel). We shall see the theme of Odette's supposed divinity recurring in many of these general pages on the cycle of the human seasons.

The other flowers which Odette cherishes show the sensual, even obscene (to the narrator) side of her nature:

Elle trouvait à tous ses bibelots chinois des formes "amusantes", et aussi aux orchidées, aux catleyas surtout, qui étaient, avec les chrysanthèmes, ses fleurs préférées, parce qu'ils avaient le grand mérite de ne pas ressembler à des fleurs, mais d'être en soie, en satin. "Celle-là a l'air d'être découpée dans la doublure de mon manteau", dit-elle à Swann en lui montrant une orchidée, avec une nuance d'estime pour cette fleur si "chic", ... En lui montrant tour à tour des chimères ... un dromadaire ... un crapaud de jade, elle affectait tour à tour d'avoir peur de la méchanceté, ou de rire de la cocasserie des monstres, de rougir de l'indécence des fleurs (C. S., p. 221).

This quotation really speaks for itself; we will do well to remember it when we discuss Odette's use of flowers to evoke certain seasons in the section of this chapter devoted to her.

Swann here is at much the same stage as Marcel will be when he meets Gilberte. Odette, too, could be called 'une femme fleur'. Swann, like Marcel, is a bit of an idealist, a 'Fal parsi', or pure fool, as Wagner used the term. (Odette, quite aptly as it turns out, calls Swann a madman for following her to the Maison Dorée.) He tries as hard as he can to find Odette's figure pretty, to prefer her cheeks to fresh rosy ones, but her blemishes (a common theme in Proust, as we have seen) offends against his concept of the ideal: "les joues qu'elle avait si souvent jaunes, languissantes, parfois piquées de petits points rouges, l'affligéait comme une preuve que l'idéal est inaccessible et le bonheur, médiocre" (C. S., p. 222). Odette explains
to the Verdurins the reason why she and Swann have not become intimate thus: "c'est un être idéal (Swann), qu'elle a peur de déflorer le sentiment qu'elle a pour lui" (C. S., p. 227). Judging by her room full of suggestive ornaments and flowers, Odette is not exactly an idealist, but is simply attributing to herself Swann's feelings. Again, the colour scheme, for Odette is 'la dame en rose', foreshadows Marcel's encounter with Gilberte near the rose hawthorns. Like mother, like daughter.

Swann falls deeper in love with Odette as the real winter, and his psychological winter progresses. In his feverish obsession with Odette, he misses out on all the joys of the following spring. "c'était tout un printemps dont il n'avait pu jouir autrefois, n'ayant pas, fiévreux et chagrin comme il était alors, assez de bien-être pour cela" (J. F., p. 533). It is, anyway, a most wintry spring, "un printemps pur et glace" (C. S., p. 235). This woman who can give him such a fever, can, at a word, as though she were Hans Andersen's Snow Queen, freeze his whole being: "Mais cet avenir intérieur, ce fleuve incolore et libre, voici qu'une seule parole d'Odette venait l'atteindre jusqu'en Swann et, comme un morceau de glace, l'immobilisait, durcissait sa fluidité, le faisait geler tout entier" (C. S., p. 355). The one word, of course, is the name of the lover with whom she is betraying him. He gives up Combray entirely, convincing himself that the spring in the countryside around Paris is even better (C. S.,
p. 270). If he is a Fisher King figure, then this is a serious sin, deserting his land. In fact, in his final soirée at the Marquise de Saint-Euverte's, which, we saw in the hawthorn chapter, makes such an interesting contrast to Marcel's last matinée, he makes the unhappy comment to his Combray neighbour, Oriane, on her invitation to the Guermantes' estate: "Je crois bien, c'est admirable, répondit Swann, c'est presque trop beau, trop vivant pour moi, en ce moment; c'est un pays pour êtres heureux" (C. S., p. 342) (6).

At this point, Swann has not entirely given in to the winter. He tries to recapture spring in Odette's countenance. Time and time again, he likens her to the figures in Botticelli's painting called Primavera (or spring) (C. S., p. 280). So much so that he has a dress made for her which is the exact copy of those the Botticelli figures wear. He also buys her a shawl like that which the Virgin in the Magnificat wears, but Odette refuses to use it, for, despite Swann's obsession with the idea, she is far from virginal. Perhaps, too, she resents his compulsion to pin her down, to frame her, to make her one of his masterpieces in his art collection.

For this is Swann's tragic flaw, which Proust calls idolatry - the worship of an image. And, ironically, it turns against him. In one of the main passages describing the Bois de Boulogne, Odette is like

(6) The underlining is my own.
a colourful living flower, and Swann and his friends form "(une) noire ou grise agglomération obéissante, exécutant les mouvements presque mécaniques d'un cadre inerte autour d'Odette" (J. F., p. 636). Now, although the word 'un cadre' may well mean on one level a corps or an escort, it also evokes the idea of a picture frame around the beautiful work of art that Odette undoubtedly is in Swann's mind.

Odette is very much a part of the teeming life of the Bois which seems alien to Swann, as we will see when we discuss her social seasons. Much later, once he has given in to his spiritual winter, he gives us a description of the Bois as evoked by Vinteuil's sonata which proves once and for all that he has opted out of that creative flux, that movement and development of all things which one must accept (in Proust's view) to become an artist:

Si je ne compris pas la Sonate, (says Marcel), je fus ravi d'entendre jouer Mme Swann. Son toucher me paraissait, comme son peignoir, comme le parfum de son escalier ... comme ses chrysanthèmes, faire partie d'un tout individuel et mystérieux, dans un monde infiniment supérieur à celui où la raison peut analyser le talent. "N'est-ce pas que c'est beau, cette Sonate de Vinteuil?" me dit Swann. Le moment où il fait nuit sous les arbres, où les arpèges du violon font tomber la fraîcheur. Avouez que c'est bien joli; il y a là tout le côté statique du clair de lune, qui est le côté essentiel. Ce n'est pas extraordinaire qu'une cure de lumière comme celle que suit ma femme agisse sur les muscles, puisque le clair de lune empêche les feuilles de bouger. C'est cela qui est si bien peint dans cette petite phrase, c'est le Bois de Boulogne tombé en catalepsie. Au bord de la mer c'est encore plus frappant, parce qu'il y a les réponses faibles des vagues que naturellement on entend très bien puisque le reste ne peut pas remuer. A Paris, c'est le contraire; c'est tout au plus si on remarque ces lueurs insolites sur les monuments, ce ciel éclairé comme par un incendie sans couleurs et sans danger, cette espèce d'immense fait divers
deviné. Mais dans la petite phrase de Vinteuil, et du reste dans toute la Sonate, ce n'est pas cela, cela se passe au Bois, dans le gruppetto on entend distinctement la voix de quelqu'un qui dit : "On pourrait presque lire son journal". Ces paroles de Swann auraient pu fausser, pour plus tard, ma compréhension de la Sonate, la musique étant trop peu exclusive pour écarter absolument ce qu'on nous suggère d'y trouver. Mais je compris par d'autres propos de lui que ces feuillages nocturnes étaient tout simplement ceux sous l'épaisseur desquels, dans maint restaurant des environs de Paris, il avait entendu, bien des soirs, la petite phrase. Au lieu du sens profond qu'il lui avait si souvent demandé, ce qu'elle rapportait à Swann, c'était les feuillages rangés, enroulés, peints autour d'elle ... c'était tout un printemps dont il n'avait pu jouir autrefois, n'ayant pas, fiévreux et chagrin comme il était alors, assez de bien-être pour cela (J. F., pp. 532-533).

There is a strong element of humour in this passage, as there is in almost all the interludes describing the Bois de Boulogne (the winter garden passages, on the other hand, tend to be more serious in tone). Right at the beginning, we find Marcel cheerfully admitting that he does not understand the sonata at all, but that he rather admires Mme Swann. At one point, Swann has confessed that Odette is rather a mediocre pianist (C. S., p. 236). Then, too, his ridiculous comments on moonlight affecting leaves much as a heat cure affects the muscles, evokes the picture of a pompous old man trying to impress a young person. But, beneath the humour, there is a great deal of sadness which is scarcely hidden at all. As we have said, in his image of the cataleptic Bois, Swann has denied the creative force of flux. Instead of gaining strength and purity through the purgatory of suffering, Swann prefers the moonlight, as a fire without colour or danger, just, in fact, like his life. Marcel is astute enough to

(7) The underlining is my own.
realize that Swann's concept of the sonata is neither more nor less than a nostalgic remembering of Swann's past. Here, indeed, we have the essence of nostalgia - a longing for the past, incorrectly remembered, with a wish to fix time, rather than accept its flow. For Swann does have a bad memory for the past. The moonlight interludes he now recalls were both vulgar, and, at the time, very painful to him. Mme Verdurin delighted in forcing her guests to listen to the moonlight sonata "dans l'obscurité" supposedly "pour mieux voir s'éclairer les choses" (C. S., p. 284), but actually so that she could matchmake amongst her guests by seating certain people side by side. And, finally, when Mme Verdurin placed de Forcheville next to Odette, Swann "trouvait du bon à la sévérité contre les arts, de Platon, de Bossuet, et de la vieille éducation française" (C. S., p. 287). In fact, seriously, as we have already stated in the introduction, moonlight is the light of illusion.

We can see in this passage that Marcel is in some danger of falling under the spell of Mme Swann's charm. In a passage which links the seasons of Marcel's life with those of Swann and with Odette's manipulations, we catch a glimpse of what Marcel called "l'époque où fleurit dans l'imagination tout un printemps social" (S. G., p. 750). For him, this is a time of youthful beliefs, to be followed by a period of doubt, leading to an acquisition of more mature beliefs. Some of this development is illustrated by Marcel's attitude to Odette's
winter garden. However, before we look at Odette's particular winter garden, with its emotional undercurrents, let us first quote a passage which shows us what the ordinary winter garden meant to the casual observer; this positive description of life and beauty prolonged into winter marks a contrast to Odette's attempts to perpetuate winter, as we shall see:

Le "jardin d'hiver" que dans ces années-là le passant apercevait d'ordinaire, quelle que fût la rue, si l'appartement n'était pas à un niveau trop élevé au-dessus du trottoir, ne se voit plus que dans les héliogravures des livres d'étrennes de P.-J. Stahl où, en contraste avec les rares ornements floraux des salons Louis XVI d'aujourd'hui - une rose ou un iris du Japon dans un vase de crystal à long col qui ne pourrait pas contenir une fleur de plus - il semble, à cause de la profusion des plantes d'appartement qu'on avait alors et du manque absolu de stylisation dans leur arrangement, avoir dû, chez les maîtresses de maison, répondre plutôt à quelque vivante et délicieuse passion pour la botanique qu'à un froid souci de morte décoration. Il faisait penser, en plus grand, dans les hôtels d'alors, à ces serres miniatures et portatives posées au matin du premier janvier sous la lampe allumée - les enfants n'ayant pas eu la patience d'attendre qu'il fût jour - parmi les autres cadeaux du jour de l'an, mais le plus beau d'entre eux, consolant, avec les plantes qu'on va pouvoir cultiver de la nudité de l'hiver (J. F., pp. 592-3).

However, we learn on the same page that Odette's salon is not ordinary, nor is Odette an ordinary hostess:

Il y avait une autre raison que celles données plus haut et pour laquelle les fleurs n'avaient pas qu'un caractère d'ornement dans le salon de Mme Swann, et cette raison-là ne tenait pas à l'époque, mais en partie à l'existence qu'avait menée jadis Odette. Une grande cocotte, comme elle avait été, vit beaucoup pour ses amants, c'est-à-dire chez elle, ce qui peut la conduire à vivre pour elle ... Ce genre d'existence impose l'obligation, et finit par donner le goût, d'un luxe secret, c'est-à-dire bien près d'être désintéressé. Mme Swann l'étendait
aux fleurs. Il y avait toujours près de son fauteuil une immense coupe de cristal remplie entièrement de violette de Parme ou de marguerites effeuillées dans l'eau ... ces fleurs qui n'avaient pas été préparées pour les visiteurs d'Odette ... avaient eu et auraient encore avec elle des entretiens particuliers qu'on avait peur de déranger et dont on essayait en vain de lire le secret, en fixant des yeux la couleur délavée, liquide, mauve et dissoute des violettes de Parme (J. F., pp. 593-594).

We have already mentioned Minette Bailey's acknowledgement of the way in which Proust manages to convey a judgement of Odette's morals by crediting her qualities to her flowers. Already, flowers that were a token of spring in winter, a new year's gift, are starting to convey a sinister impression. This mixture of seasons lends Odette's clothes a further sensuality:

Les jours où Mme Swann n'était pas sortie du tout, on la trouvait dans une robe de chambre de crêpe de Chine, blanche comme une première neige, parfois aussi dans un de ces longs tuyautages de mousseline de soie, qui ne semblent qu'une jonchée de pétales roses ou blancs et qu'on trouverait aujourd'hui peu appropriés à l'hiver, et bien à tort. Car ces étoffes légères et ces couleurs tendres et ces couleurs tendres donnaient à la femme ... le même air frileux qu'aux roses qui pouvaient y rester à côté d'elle, malgré l'hiver, dans l'incarnat de leur nudité comme au printemps (J. F., p. 595).

There remains one context in which to situate the main winter garden passage that we are going to discuss, that of the mythological symbolism in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, specifically that referring to the Grail legend. Marcel, still in the grip of his beliefs, finds the winter frost, the bare trees, the cold and the winter sunlight "comme une patine, un rose et frais glacis ajoutés au revêtement de cette chapelle mystérieuse qu'était la demeure de Mme Swann et au
coeur de laquelle il y avait au contraire tant de chaleur, de parfums et de fleurs" (J. F., p. 526).

But this is almost as much a 'chapel perilous' (see the hawthorn chapter) as the one in the grail legend. The flowers - orchids, roses and violets, bask in a room in which a fire, placed behind glass, gives forth a reflection of 'dangerous rubies'. We have already seen the importance of the symbol of the rubies in the red and violet flowers chapter. The biggest clue as to the mythological significance of Swann's house occurs in Proust's allusion to Parsifal. "Et, certes, j'eusse été moins troublé dans un antre magique que dans ce petit salon d'attente où le feu me semblait procéder à des transmutations, comme dans le laboratoire de Klingsor" (J. F., p. 527).

Now, in Wagner's Parsifal, Klingsor is the impotent and evil magician who uses Kundry, his female attendant, to lure knights to a fate worse than death. Swann is hardly an epic figure of evil, but he does seem to connive at some pretty obvious infidelities on the part of his wife. "Et comme il était resté neuro-arthritique et devenu un peu ridicule, avoir une femme si inexacte qui rentrait tellement tard du Bois, qui s'oubliait chez sa couturière, et n'était jamais à l'heure pour le déjeuner, cela inquiétait Swann pour son estomac, mais le flattait dans son amour-propre" (J. F., p. 527). Swann must enjoy Odette's flirting (or more) vicariously, for that, almost certainly,
judging from later Bois passages, is how she spends her time at the Bois. And we are told that Swann's love for Odette feeds on jealousy (J. F., pp. 524, 5).

The passage describing the main winter garden is concerned with various types of magic, from the spell Odette seems to weave to the overpowering enchantment of the miracle of the recurring spring:

Quand le printemps approcha, ramenant le froid, au temps des Saints de glace et des giboules de la Semaine Sainte, comme Mme Swann trouvait qu'on gelait chez elle, il m'arrivait souvent de la voir recevant dans des fourrures, ses mains et ses épaules frileuses disparaissant sous le blanc et brillant tapis d'un immense manchon plat et d'un collet, tous deux d'hermine, qu'elle n'avait pas quittées en rentrant et qui avaient l'air des derniers carrés des neiges de l'hiver plus persistants que les autres, et que la chaleur du feu ni le progrès de la saison n'avaient réussi à fondre. Et la vérité totale de ces semaines glaciales mais déjà fleurissantes, était suggérée pour moi dans ce salon, où bientôt je n'irais plus, par d'autres blancheurs plus envirantes, celles, par exemple, des "boules de neige" assemblant au sommet de leurs hautes tiges nues, comme les arbustes linéaires des préraphaélites, leurs globes parcellés mais unis, blancs comme des anges annonciateurs et qu'entourait une odeur de citron. Car la châtelaine de Tansonville savait qu'avril, même glacé, n'est pas dépourvu de fleurs, que l'hiver, le printemps, l'été, ne sont pas séparés par des cloisons aussi hermétiques que tend à le croire le boulevardier qui jusqu'aux premières chaleurs s'imagine le monde comme renfermant seulement des maisons nues sous la pluie. Que Mme Swann se contentât des envois que lui faisait son jardinier de Combray et que, par l'intermédiaire de sa fleuriste "attitrée", elle ne comblât pas les lacunes d'une insuffisante évocation à l'aide d'emprunts faits à la précocité méditerranéenne, je suis loin de le prétendre et je ne m'en souciais pas. Il me suffisait, pour avoir la nostalgie de la campagne, qu'à côté des nêvés du manchon que tenait Mme Swann, les boules de neige (qui n'avaient peut-être dans la pensée de la maîtresse de la maison d'autre but que de faire, sur les conseils de Bergotte, "symphonie en blanc majeur" avec son ameublement et sa toilette) me rappellassent que l'Enchantement du Vendredi Saint figure un miracle naturel.
auquel on pourrait assister tous les ans si l'on était plus sage, et, aidées du parfum acide et capiteux de corolles d'autres espèces dont j'ignorais les noms et qui m'avais fait rester tant de fois en arrêt dans mes promenades de Combray, rendissent le salon de Mme Swann aussi virginal, aussi candide et fleuri sans aucune feuille, aussi surchargé d'odeurs authentiques, que le petit raidillon de Tansonville.

Mais c'était encore trop que celui-ci me fût rappelé. Son souvenir risquait d'entretenir le peu qui subsistait de mon amour pour Gilberte (J. F., pp. 634-635).

This passage shows an interesting confrontation between the natural and the artificial, between spring and winter; Marcel's comments, and the relative power of Mme Swann's charm and the Good Friday enchantment, show the level of development represented in his 'social spring time'.

Even Mme Swann's dress emphasizes her resemblance to the Snow Queen, and we cannot deny that Swann must be living in a permanent winter. Odette also seems to have taken over his land to provide her salon with flowers. Despite her penchant for spring flowers to decorate her salon, Odette seems the focal point of a certain reluctance for her salon to shake off the winter. Her clothes remind us of the last stubborn traces of winter snow. She is obsessed with the colour white, the colour of snow, of mourning in the Orient, of the moonlight and the snowy chrysanthemum which the Sonata now evokes for Swann. Her salon exudes an aura of virginity ironic in the context of her former profession (8). The whiteness reminds Marcel of the little pathway of hawthorns at Combray. These hawthorns, of course, were used to

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pay homage to the Virgin Mary. All of a sudden we can see a strange rather thought-provoking parallel between the Virgin Mary and Odette, whom Marcel later elevates to the rank of goddess, worshipping her as the mother of Gilberte, and in whom Swann wishes to see an image of virginity. It is as though she has taken their expectations of her and twisted them. Once again, as with Mlle Vinteuil (and we will remember what kind of 'virgin' she was), whom Proust also associated with the hawthorns, Proust emphasizes the detail of the unusual and strong smell, the acid scent of some unknown flowers. But we must remember as well that this colour white which Proust connects with virginity, also has associations for Odette, although it is never quite clear if she has fully understood all their connotations. She has created an artificial setting out of living things in order to make her salon into "une symphonie en blanc majeur" on the advice of Bergotte. The reference to music associated with the colour white may be an ironic comment on Swann and the visual images of moonlight and snowy flowers which he connects with Vinteuil's sonata, but, of course, first of all the term refers to a poem by Théophile Gautier. If Mme Swann does not realize the implications of using her salon to evoke that particular poem (after all the idea was originally Bergotte's), Proust certainly did. The allusion to this particular poem must suggest the destructive role that Odette is playing in Swann's life:
De leur col blanc courbant les lignes,
On voit dans les contes du Nord,
Sur le vieux Rhin, des femmes-cygnes
Nager en chantant près du bord.

Ou, suspendant à quelque branche
Le plumage qui les revêt,
Faire luire leur peau plus blanche
Que la neige de leur duvet.

De ces femmes il en est une,
Qui chez nous descend quelquefois,
Blanche comme le clair de lune
Sur les glaciers dans les cieux froids;

Conviant la vue enivrée
De sa boréale fraîcheur
A des régals de chair nacrée,
A des débauches de blancheur!

Even the opening image of the swan maidens is quite in keeping for Odette. In the first 'winter garden' episode, she could certainly be called "une femme-fleur", since she uses her flowers, which Proust calls her sisters, to seduce Swann. The swan maidens of the Nordic myths could also be such temptresses. Ironically, Odette has even changed her name to Swann by marriage, and, as we have already seen, Proust, who insisted that the name was English in origin (F., p. 585), realized its meaning in English. If Swann resembles any mythological 'swan' character, it is Lohengrin, the hero dispossessed from his land by his wife. However, we have discussed the swan imagery in detail in a previous chapter. Odette, as we have seen in the catleya chapter, does, on occasion, wear a swan feather headdress. Other images in the

poem are applicable to Odette and the atmosphere she creates; the moonlight, the cold, the snow, the intoxicating effect of the whole scene, and, later in the poem, "l'aubépine de mai qui plie/Sous les blanches frimas de ses fleurs", and "les mains ... comme les papillons blancs". We have already seen that the salon reminds Marcel of the hawthorn pathway at Combray, and, at one point in the novel he comments that the phrase "salon Swann" always evokes in him the image of "un papillon noir aux ailes feutrées de neige" (S. G., p. 750). Most of all, there seems a parallel in Gautier's poem when he uses the term "la Madone des neiges" to describe the woman. Thus, by association with the poem, Mme Swann gains an aura of mystery, beauty and cruelty which she may or may not deserve. However, it fits in with one of the first impressions that Marcel has of her in his encounter through the Tansonville hedge with her, with Gilberte and with Charlus. There, too, she is wearing white and she impresses Marcel with her power, her authoritarian voice; in fact, Gilberte's obedience to her mother diminishes her in Marcel's eyes. Similarly, here, Mme Swann attracts Marcel by "toute sa mystérieuse poésie de mère de Gilberte" (J. F., pp. 595-6), (notice here, once again, Odette associated with poetry) but she soon fascinates Marcel in her own right. Nonetheless, in reminding him of "le petit raidillon de Tansonville" the salon "risquait d'entretenir le peu qui subsistait" as Marcel says, "de mon amour pour Gilberte". Perhaps from Swann himself Marcel has learned that one type of magic can cancel out the other. Now that he is almost free of
the 'spell' of love he can appreciate (as Swann cannot) the real magic of spring "l'enchantement du Vendredi Saint", the resurrection in nature which the flowers witness. Here, the spell of love is still strong, as must be expected close to, as Marcel puts it, Klingsor's laboratory. Despite the fact that Marcel's awe at the miracle of Good Friday is quite sincere, and that "des anges annonciateurs" may have a message for him, Marcel, like Swann before him, contents himself with a gentle nostalgia for the country which he could so easily see were he not spending the time in Odette's salon. Thus, Marcel at the end, and Swann at the beginning, of a love affair, can, before love completely entraps them, see a promise of some sort of spiritual renewal in the flowers Odette uses in her winter gardens. Odette, on the other hand, seems to wish to prolong the winter.

Right after this winter garden passage, Proust places another general description, this time of the Bois de Boulogne at its most beautiful at midday in May, perhaps not too far away from Midsummer's day. Most of the passage is interesting for the way in which it shows us how Odette has reached the peak of her power, her 'glorious summer', at the expense of Swann, so we will discuss it later when we study Odette's 'seasons'. The final sentence, anyway, shows us that Marcel is very conscious of the aesthetic appeal of this scene representing Mme Swann's finest hour. Later, of course, in Le Temps Retrouvé, Marcel will acknowledge his debt to the sorrows of life, rather than to any scenes in his life which seemed, by their impact, to rival art:
Et, comme la durée moyenne de la vie - la longévité relative - est beaucoup plus grande pour les souvenirs des sensations poétiques que pour ceux des souffrances du cœur, depuis si longtemps que se sont évanouis les chagrins que j'avais alors à cause de Gilberte, il leur a survécu, le plaisir que j'éprouve, chaque fois que je veux lire, en une sorte de cadran solaire, les minutes qu'il y a entre midi un quart et une heure, au mois de mai, à me revoir causant ainsi avec Mme Swann, sous son ombrelle, comme sous le reflet d'un berceau de glycines.

This, in fact, is not the only such scene in which Marcel wants to 'stop the clock', or even set it back; Odette seems to have this effect on men, and Swann's vision of the Bois static, rigid, "tombé en catalepsie", his rejection of time, is a sign that he can never become an artist. In two other scenes, one summer and one autumn, Marcel worships Mme Swann from afar and, subsequently, mourns her loss, wishing that the Bois could stay as it was in the past. In fact, this autumnal scene is one of the most nostalgic in the book, and, as it is the one at the end of Du Côté de Chez Swann, it is the one which Proust himself, in his letter to Jacques Rivière called "une étape, d'apparence subjective et dilettante". However, before we discuss this scene, let us look at the summer one just preceding it. Even here, with Marcel full of youthful beliefs, we can see many rather sinister touches concerning Odette; Marcel even makes the quality of veneration rather sinister, for, at this point still in love with Gilberte, he comments that one venerates those who have the most power to hurt us :
futale d’où surgit tout à coup dans sa souple fourrure, avec les beaux yeux d’une bête, quelque promeneuse rapide — il était le Jardin des femmes ; et — comme l'allée de Myrtes de l'Enéide —, plantée pour elles d'arbres d'une seule essence, l'allée des Acacias était fréquentée par les Beautés célèbres ... bien avant d'arriver à l'allée des Acacias leur parfum ... faisant sentir de loin l'approche et la singularité d'une puissante et molle individualité végétale, puis, quand je me rapprochais, le faite aperçu de leur frondaison légère et mièvre, d'une élégance facile, d'une coupe coquette et d'un mince tissu, sur laquelle des centaines de fleurs s'étaient abattues comme des colonies ailées et vibratiles de parasites précieux, enfin jusqu'à leur nom féminin, désœuvré et doux, me faisaient battre le cœur, mais d'un désir mondain, comme ces valses qui ne nous évoquent plus que le nom des belles invitées que l'huissier annonce à l'entrée d'un bal. On m'avait dit que je verrais dans l'allée certaines élégantes que, bien qu'elles n'eussent pas toutes été épousées, l'on citait habituellement à côté de Mme Swann, mais le plus souvent sous leur nom de guerre ... Pensant que le Beau ... était régi par des lois occultes ... j'acceptais d'avance comme une révélation l'apparition de leur toilette, de leur attelage, de mille détails au sein desquels je mettais ma croyance comme une âme intérieure qui donnait la cohésion d'un chef-d'œuvre à cet ensemble éphémère et mouvant. Mais c'est Mme Swann que je voulais voir, et j'attendais qu'elle passât, ému comme si ç'avait été Gilberte, dont les parents, imprégnés, comme tout ce qui l'entourait, de son charme, excitaient en moi autant d'amour qu'elle, même un trouble plus douloureux ... et enfin ... ce sentiment de vénération que nous vouons toujours à ceux qui exercent sans frein la puissance de nous faire du mal (C. S., pp. 417-8).

Marcel goes on to say that he loves Mme Swann's carriage, "emportée par le vol de deux chevaux ardents", a sight at which he feels "une nette et épuisante blessure". At the back of this incomparable carriage:

reposait avec abandon Mme Swann, ses cheveux maintenant blonds avec une seule mèche grise ceints d'un mince bandeau de fleurs, le plus souvent des violettes, d'où descendaient de longs voiles, à la main une ombrelle mauve, aux lèvres un sourire ambigu où je ne voyais que la bienveillance d'une Majesté et où il y avait surtout la provocation de la cocotte, et qu'elle

(10) The underlining is my own.
inclinait avec douceur sur les personnes qui la saluait. Ce sourire en réalité disait aux uns : "Je me rappelle très bien, c'était exquis!"; à d'autres : "Comme j'aurais aimé! ç'a été la mauvaise chance!"; à d'autres : "Mais si vous voulez! Je vais suivre encore un moment la file et dès que je pourrai, je couperai" (C. S., p. 419).

We must first point out the obvious fact that the beliefs of the young Marcel are here presented from the point of view of a rather cynical narrator. We will find more of the truly adoring young Marcel in the summer Bois section in the part of this chapter devoted to Odette. In this second section, she is no longer just a queen, but a priestess, or even a goddess. And, in the second Bois passage, the impression of beauty which Odette creates affects Marcel much more than what lies behind it; the seductive, enveloping and disturbing vegetative nature, the lurking animal quality, the manipulation, even the infidelity which we can read between the lines of this first description of the Bois and its denizens.

To begin with, as we can see, the Bois and the Allée des Acacias is a garden of women, based on the phrase "Jardin des Plantes", in the sense that one can stroll through it admiring the different 'animals' of the species courtesan, much as one might spend an enjoyable afternoon at the zoo. (Marcel later says that the Bois de Boulogne is "dans le sens zoologique ou mythologique du mot, un Jardin" (C. S., p. 421).) But, even more than that, this magnificent wood of trees which seem to have a life of their own is the natural setting for these courtesans.
As we can see from Proust's first image of the young woman wrapped in lissom furs appearing from the shrubberies, the animal quality of these women suit them for such surroundings; we feel them to be predators with the Bois as their hunting ground. Even the powerful feminine mass of vegetation seems to mirror some of their qualities. This particular description of the acacias as "une puissante et molle individualité végétale" brings to mind the hero of Sartre's La Nausée, observing the vegetation of the park and suddenly feeling that reality is just a soft, enveloping, feminine mass; "la diversité des choses, leur individualité n'était qu'une apparence, un vernis. Ce vernis avait fondu, il restait des masses monstrueuses et molles, en désordre - nues, d'une effrayante et obscure nudité" (11). Of course, Marcel does not share this horror at the thought of an essentially feminine dominion; yet some unease seems to lie behind his obvious admiration of feminine strength and beauty, as in the parallel between the courtesans and beautiful, precious parasites, the former living off trees in nature, the latter living off men in society. Some of the negative aspects of the 'kept woman' as a dangerous blood flower Proust expressed (as we have already seen) in his red and violet flower imagery. Here, however, the young Marcel is mainly enchanted by the sight of these women, whom he admires as a work of art, as initiates into the mysteries of a religion of beauty, and as successful socialites. Still, the idea that these women have "un nom de guerre" suggests that they compete for men, and prepares us for the later image of Mme Swann as

a warrior, alive and vital, in contrast to Swann and friends, with their mechanical movements. Marcel is quite ready to worship any of them, though he keeps his particular devotion for Mme Swann, who, through her daughter, gives him the most pain. Here, of course, he is repeating history; the sight of Odette causes him the same sharp pain that Swann feels on thinking of the faded chrysanthemums, Swann, of course, being the wounded Fisher King. It must be obvious by now that, in this passage we have the benefit of two contrasting points of view, that of the young dilettante Marcel, dazzled into worship of beauty and social success and courting sorrow, and that of the narrator who has found a far happier and more satisfactory vocation in art. In fact, Proust's comment to Jacques Rivière proves as much. Even without recourse to this letter, we can see that the young Marcel wants to enjoy the sight of Mme Swann as though she were part of a work of art. Whilst Swann chooses to compare Odette to works by Botticelli, Marcel picks Constantin Guys, whose pictures evoke so well this particular age of elegance. The narrator, to whose retrospective objectivity we owe the odd sinister image or wry comment in this passage, still obviously retains a strong impression of Mme Swann's ability to create beauty. Thus he can write a description of Mme Swann which expresses at the same time an appreciation of her appearance, and a shrewd analysis of her coquettishness (a quality which, as we have seen in the hawthorn chapter, attracts Marcel a great deal). Proust significantly chooses violets for Odette's nosegay, since these flowers (as we have seen earlier in this chapter) are special witnesses to Odette's loose ways.
Immediately after this passage, Proust places another description of the Bois which illustrates the next stage in Marcel's life after 'sa croyante jeunesse' - a period full of doubts, which accords well with the autumnal setting of the Bois:

Cette complexité du Bois de Boulogne qui en fait un lieu factice et, dans le sens zoologique ou mythologique du mot, un Jardin, je l'ai retrouvée cette année comme je le traversais pour aller à Trianon, un de ces premiers matins de ce mois de novembre où, à Paris, dans les maisons, la proximité et la privation du spectacle de l'automne qui s'achève si vite sans qu'on y assiste, donnent une nostalgie, une véritable fièvre des feuilles mortes qui peut aller jusqu'à empêcher de dormir (C. S., pp. 421-422).

Note the narrator's insistence on the different meanings of the symbol of the garden - a sort of zoological garden where the most interesting animals are the women (as we have already mentioned in the context of the first passage) and a garden of temptation which fits well with the story of Genesis. The Elysian Fields and Myrtle Ways which we find a little later in this description were often alluded to in love poems of the French Renaissance, although in the sense of a promise of sensual pleasures, whereas here, the Elysian Fields signify death. Then, too, notice the emphasis on the quality of nostalgia provoked by the Romantic image of the fallen leaves; nostalgia does belong to this stage of Marcel's development, but not, as we have said in the introduction, to the book as a whole.

The narrator goes on to describe the Bois as being more complex than usual, since it exhibits traces of summer green amongst autumn reds and,
even, some bare outlines of winter trees. It offers unobstructed vistas to the eye. One tree in particular catches his eye. "Ailleurs encore c'était le premier éveil de ce mois de mai des feuilles, et celles d'un ampelopsis, merveilleux et souriant comme une épine rose de l'hiver, depuis le matin même étaient tout en fleur". Marcel's own frame of mind is as ambiguous as the in-between seasons Bois, which he visits in the morning half-light. But the image of the tree resembling the hawthorn seems a sign that Marcel is still on the correct road to his artistic vocation. In any case, this description of the mixture of seasons in the Bois between day and night is another example of a mixture of elements, such as Marcel finds in Elstir's paintings (sea merging into land, male and female mingling in the portrait of Odette as Miss Sacripant) and which he needs to lead him away from the rigid concept of world order of his childhood Combray.

Marcel then enlarges on the significance of the Bois:

On sentait que le Bois n'était pas qu'un bois, qu'il répondait à une destination étrangère à la vie de ses arbres; l'exaltation que j'éprouvais n'était pas causée par l'admiration de l'automne, mais par un désir. Grande source d'une joie que l'âme ressent d'abord sans en reconnaître la cause, sans comprendre que rien au dehors ne la motive. Ainsi regardais-je les arbres avec une tendresse insatisfaite qui les dépassait et se portait à mon insu vers ce chef-d'oeuvre des belles promeneuses qu'ils enferment chaque jour pendant quelques heures. J'allais vers l'allée des Acacias ... Car les arbres continuaient à vivre de leur vie propre et, quand ils n'avaient plus de feuilles, elle brillait mieux sur le fourreau de velours vert qui enveloppait leurs troncs ou dans l'œil blanc des sphères de gui ... Mais, forcés depuis tant d'années par une sorte de greffe à vivre en commun avec la femme, ils m'évoquaient la dryade, la belle mondaine rapide et colorée qu'au passage ils couvrent de leurs
branches et obligent à ressentir comme eux la puissance de
la saison; ils me rappelaient le temps heureux de ma croyante
jeunesse, quand je venais avidement aux lieux où des chefs-
d'œuvre d'élegance féminine se réalisaient pour quelques
instants entre les feuillages inconscients et complices. Mais
la beauté que faisaient désirer les sapins et les acacias du
Bois de Boulogne, plus troublants en cela que les marronniers
et les lilas de Trianon que j'allais voir, n'était pas fixée
en dehors de moi dans les souvenirs d'une époque historique,
dans des œuvres d'art, dans un petit temple à l'Amour au pied
duquel s'amourcillent les feuilles palmées d'or ... L'idée de
perfection que je portais en moi, je l'avais prêtée alors à la
hauteur d'une victoire, à la maigreur de ces chevaux furieux et
légers comme des guêpes, les yeux injectés de sang comme les
cruels chevaux de Diomède, et que maintenant, pris d'un désir
de revoir ce que j'avais aimé, aussi ardent que celui qui me
poussait bien des années auparavant dans ces mêmes chemins,
je voulais avoir de nouveau sous les yeux, au moment où l'énorme
cocher de Mme Swann, surveillé par un petit groom gros comme le
poing et aussi enfantin que saint Georges, essayait de maîtriser
leurs ailes d'acier qui se débattaient effarouchées et palpitantes.
Hélas! il n'y avait plus que des automobiles conduites par des
mécaniciens moustachus ... Au lieu des belles robes dans
lesquelles Mme Swann avait l'air d'une reine, des tuniques
grec-saxonnnes relevaient avec les plis des Tanagra ... Et
toutes ces parties nouvelles du spectacle, je n'avais plus de
croyance à y introduire pour leur donner la consistance, l'unité,
l'existence; elles passaient éparse devant moi, au hasard, sans
vérité, ne contenant en elles aucune beauté que mes yeux eussent
pu essayer comme autrefois de composer. C'étaient des femmes
quelconques ... Mais quand disparaît une croyance, il lui survit,
et de plus en plus vivace, pour masquer le manque de la puissance
que nous avons perdue de donner de la réalité à des choses
nouvelles, un attachement fétichiste aux anciennes qu'elle avait
animées, comme si c'était en elles et non en nous que le divin
résidait et si notre incrédulité actuelle avait une cause
contingente, la mort des Dieux
(C. S., pp. 423-5).

(Marcel goes on to mourn Mme Swann's violets and her chrysanthemums,
although we have seen that both of these flowers have sinister
connotations. And he concludes, remembering some of the courtesans
of former times, now, undoubtedly grown old):
Et il m'eût fallu aussi que ce fussent les mêmes femmes, celles dont la toilette m'intéressait parce que, au temps où je croyais encore, mon imagination les avait individualisées et les avait pourvues d'une légende. Hélas! dans l'avenue des Acacias - l'allée de Myrtes - j'en revins quelques-unes, vieilles, et qui n'étaient plus que les ombres terribles de ce qu'elles avaient été, errant, cherchant désespérément on ne sait quoi dans les bosquets virgiliens. Elles avaient fui depuis longtemps, que j'étais encore à interroger vainement les chemins désertés. Le soleil s'était caché. La nature recommençait à régner sur le Bois d'où s'était enveloplée l'idée qu'il était le Jardin élyséen de la Femme ... de gros oiseaux parcouraient rapidement le Bois, comme un bois, et poussant des cris aigus se posaient l'un après l'autre sur les grands chênes qui, sous leur couronne druidique et avec une majesté dodonéenne, semblaient proclamer le vide inhumain de la forêt désaffectée ... et m'aidaient à mieux comprendre la contradiction que c'est de chercher dans la réalité les tableaux de la mémoire, auxquels manquait toujours le charme qui leur vient de la mémoire même et de n'être pas perçus par les sens. La réalité que j'avais connue n'existait plus. Il suffisait que Mme. Swann n'arrivât pas toute pareille au même moment, pour que l'Avenue fut autre ... Les lieux que nous avons connus n'appartiennent pas qu'au monde de l'espace où nous les situons pour plus de facilité. Ils n'étaient qu'une mince tranche au milieu d'impressions contiguës qui formaient notre vie d'alors; le souvenir d'une certaine image n'est que le regret d'un certain instant; et les maisons, les routes, les avenues, sont fugitives, hélas! comme les années (C. S., p. 427).

Here is nostalgia indeed. And we can see that it is very closely linked to that 'sin' of idolatry which Proust so disliked, here "un attachement fétichiste" of Marcel's towards Mme Swann, a feeling that the divine resides in the things one worships rather than in oneself. Indeed, Marcel has made Mme Swann the centre of his personal worship of an idealized 'garden of women'. But, when we look at the mythological allusions and insect imagery associated with her horses (and as we have seen with the flower imagery, objects surrounding Odette tend to take on her qualities), when we study these horses, we realize that if Mme
Swann is the goddess of this scene, she is certainly a cruel one.

Her horses Marcel likens to those of Diomedes, which were man-eaters, and again to dragons. Medea, scarcely a gentle soul, was supposed to have a chariot drawn by dragons. Proust's allusion to the wasp-like thinness of the horses reminds us of another metaphor which he used once to describe Françoise's cruelty towards the pregnant kitchen maid:

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 œufs, fournisse aux larves, quand elles écloront, un gibier docile, inoffensif, incapable de fuite ou de résistance, mais nullement faisan dé, Françoise trouvait pour servir sa volonté permanente de rendre la maison intenable à tout domestique, des ruses ... savantes et ... impitoyables (C. S., pp. 123-124).

In any case, this twilight autumn scene witnesses the twilight or death of the Gods, that is, really, the death of Marcel's belief in them, since the divine, this passage seems to say, is found within oneself. But what kind of religion did Marcel believe in? He mentions a little temple of love, and is careful to emphasize the allusion to a myrtle path in the Aeneid. Now we learn in the Aeneid that the myrtle is sacred to Venus, the goddess of love (12). Moreover, when we study a detail of Aeneas' trip to the underworld, we find a passage which was probably Proust's inspiration for describing the acacia pathway as a myrtle pathway where certain old courtesans wander like terrible

shades, searching an unknown goal in the Virgilian groves. The passage from the _Aeneid_ goes thus:

The vale of mourning - such is the name it bears: a region where those consumed by the wasting torments of merciless love Haunt the sequestered alleys and myrtle groves that give them cover; death itself cannot cure them of love's disease.

The mistletoe, in close conjunction to this reference to Virgilian groves, Elysian fields, and Druidic rites suggests that Proust read his _Aeneid_ every bit as carefully as Frazer did. (Anyway the emphasis on the idea of a parasite, reminding us of the first Bois passage is important.) In _The Golden Bough_, Frazer sets forth the argument that various ancient religions believed that the life of the King of the wood, or as Proust might say here, of the dryad of the wood, survived in the mistletoe; hence its qualities as a talisman to guide Aeneas safely, whilst still alive, through the underground. The relevant passage from the _Aeneid_ is this:

    Swiftly they (the doves of Venus, perhaps in other times, of Astarte) soared,  
    Went gliding through the soft air and settled,  
    The pair of them, on a tree, the wished-for place, a tree  
    Amid whose branches there gleamed a bright haze, a different colour - Gold. Just as in the depth of winter the mistletoe blooms  
    In the woods with its strange leafage, a parasite on the tree,  
    Hanging its yellow-green berries about the smooth round boles:  

We need not concern ourselves with questions of ancient religions too much (15), but it seems obvious that Proust, even without the aid of

(13) Ibid, p. 142.  
(15) G. S. Kirk, in his book _The Nature of Greek Myths_ is quick to point out that modern (or relatively modern) interpretations of myths can all too easily follow one level of meaning in a myth whilst disregarding the others, thus denying the complexity and richness which made it fascinating in the first part. This criticism he levels, not totally unfairly, at Frazer.
Frazer, had a very good grasp of the various mythological meanings of the symbols he used. We can assume, then, that he is describing the beginning of Marcel's descent into that underworld of doubt and sterility which he must experience before he can climb once more into the sunlight (represented in the joyous theme of Vinteuil's septet) to regain his belief in art.

This autumnal scene, then, marks the loss of Marcel's youthful beliefs, the end of his regarding the people about him as godlike figures; the metaphors which Proust uses to illustrate this step are the coming on of winter and the descent into the underworld. However, before we discuss this fast approaching winter, let us just recapitulate the steps in Marcel's loss of belief that the autumn passage shows us in relation to some experiences of the mature Marcel. To begin with, Marcel's first thoughts on walking through the woods are of "sa croyante jeunesse", when he imagined every tree with a dryad and when every beautiful woman was a work of art to him (shades of Swann's idolatry). He imbued everything with a concept of perfection, although, as we have seen from reading in between the lines of some of Marcel's descriptions, his veneration depended on the cruelty of his beloved, and women of the type which he saw in the Bois could be very dangerous and cruel, warriors and parasites. Even in this passage, Odette's wasp-like horses, dragons or man-eaters, give her away. In themselves, these people are not beautiful; Marcel begins to realize that he is wrong to suppose that "c'était en elles et non en nous que le divin
résidait", and that "la mort des Dieux" occurs anywhere but in oneself. Even more, he realizes that memories which are not perceived by the senses will always clash with reality:

However, perhaps these trees, these birds are an omen (and trees often seem to offer omens in this novel), for Marcel will recapture time — he will recapture it through his senses, with the help of various sensations which act as catalysts for the involuntary memory. Then, too, if we need any ironic little comment to show us that Marcel still has far to go, it is in his dislike, here, of the automobile, and his nostalgia for carriages. Later, at Balbec, we will find Marcel revelling in the superior perspective one gains from a fast car. Time and space must be regarded from a forward-moving, not a static or backward-looking, point of view. We ourselves, however, are moving ahead rather fast, for, at this point in the novel, these lessons are in the future; Marcel is entering a part of his life in which his love and jealousy for Albertine physically and mentally immobilize him.

The ensuing period represents the winter, the dark night of his soul, as we have seen in the hawthorn chapter. The next great set-piece which involves Marcel is the winter forest at the Guermantes' last
matinée. As we have seen, even the fact that it is a matinée is significant for Marcel. For Marcel, as we shall see, there is hope of creativity and a new spring accompanying his faith in art, regained in one of his special moments out of time. But for most of the other characters there awaits only death. The scene also describes a full cycle in the social pattern, for Marcel discovers that the new Princess of Guermantes is Mme Verdurin. Louis de Beauvamp has astutely pointed out that within Mme Verdurin's name we can find the green of spring, whilst the last syllable of Guermantes, plus the duchess' name, Oriane, has always evoked the colour gold to Marcel, the colour of the midday sun at its peak, sunset and autumn leaves in its decline. In other words, even in their names, these females signify the cycle from social springtime to social decline or autumn. We might point out that, whilst men seem to dominate the arts, the dominion of the eternal morning, the women dominate the social scene, so that the salons are rather matriarchal.

Marcel has been away from Paris through illness for some time. Thus, when he sees his old friends again, at the Guermantes' matinée, he is shocked by the way some of them have aged. "Alors la vie nous apparaît comme la fée où on voit d'acte en acte le bébé devenir adolescent, homme mûr et se courber vers la tombe" (T. R., p. 926). "Les parties de blancheur de barbes jusque-là entièrement noires rendaient mélancolique

(16) Beauvamp, Louis de : La Vie Sociale à l'époque et dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust, Bull. no. 7, p. 627.
le paysage humain de cette matinée, comme les premières feuilles jaunes des arbres alors qu'on croyait encore pouvoir compter sur un long été, et qu'avant d'avoir commencé d'en profiter on voit que c'est déjà l'automne" (T. R., p. 926). The Prince of Guermantes is associated with the theme of magical change and the winter forest:

"Le prince avait encore en recevant cet air bonhomme d'un roi de fée ... Ses moustaches étaient blanches aussi, comme s'il restait après elles le gel de la forêt du Petit Poucet" (T. R., p. 920). The amount of physical change, or ripeness, seems to indicate the amount of spiritual or artistic maturity in various characters:

En plusieurs, je finissais par reconnaître, non seulement eux-mêmes, mais eux tels qu'ils étaient autrefois, et par exemple Ski pas plus modifié qu'une fleur ou un fruit qui a séché. Il était un essai informe, confirmant mes théories sur l'art ... D'autres n'étaient nullement des amateurs, étaient des gens du monde. Mais eux aussi, la vieillesse ne les avait pas mûris et, même s'il s'entourait d'un premier cercle de rides et d'un arc de cheveux blancs, leur même visage poupin gardait l'enjouement de la dix-huitième année. Ils n'étaient pas des vieillards, mais des jeunes gens de dix-huit ans extrêmement fanés (T. R., p. 936).

And, again Marcel says "Comme pour la neige d'ailleurs, le degré de blancheur des cheveux semblait en général comme un signe de la profondeur du temps vécu" (T. R., p. 940). For Marcel, as for Swann at the Marquise de Saint-Euverte's, "les trompettes du Jugement" (T. R., p. 927) are sounding. Swann does not realize that his 'moment of truth' has come, but Marcel does, as we have seen in the hawthorn section. He has been confronted with a choice of trying to relive his youth with Gilberte's daughter as his mistress, or choosing the
creative role that the pregnant new Mme de Saint-Euverte represents, accepting the cradle of Time Past, his Time Past, recaptured as the womb for his novel. Now his confrontation with death is imminent; he fears he will not have time to finish his book. For the first time, he faces death, acknowledges its existence, accepts the cycle of creativity and destruction based on nature's pattern, realizing that in Art, at least, he has the possibility of a resurrection, as fragile, or as durable, as the worth of his book, just as it was before him, for Bergotte. "Moi je dis que la loi cruelle de l'art est que les êtres meurent et que nous-mêmes mourions en épuisant toutes les souffrances, pour que pousse l'herbe non de l'oubli mais de la vie éternelle, l'herbe drue des œuvres fécondes, sur laquelle les générations viendront faire gaîment, sans souci de ceux qui dorment en dessous, leur "déjeuner sur l'herbe"" (T. R., p. 1038). And, to finish the pattern, the cycle or circle of the novel, we find the novel beginning and ending on variations of the same word - 'le temps' - "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure" (C. S., p. 3). "Ils touchent simultanément; comme des géants plongés dans les années, à des époques 'si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer - dans le Temps" (T. R., p. 1048).

We have followed, now, the seasons in Swann's and in Marcel's lives. One great difference between them, their attitude to time, determines whether they will become artists, capable of producing something new and experiencing some sort of rebirth, a spring after the long winter
without creativity. Swann refuses to confront the truth, and wishes to regard people as though they were static, already works of art. Marcel, at first, is a rebel against time, horrified that the young girls in bloom can wither and fade. Later, however, he sees this ageing process as a sign of maturity, and a necessity for the artist. He is on his way to a new spring, and feels his book stirring like a new life within him. There is, however, one final attitude that can be taken towards time and its expression in nature's seasons; one can use nature as an ally, become so close to it as to be almost a part of it (thus risking a loss of humanity), and manipulate it, and through it, other people to one's own ends. This is the choice which Odette makes. At her best, she is a priestess, even a goddess of nature, at her worst, another animal or parasitic flower in the Bois. We have already seen how she arranges props seductively in her winter garden, and how she watches her servant place the lamps in her salon as carefully as though they were sacred flames lighting altars. Whilst Swann likes to regard others as works of art, she likes to be one; the centre of attraction, the most beautiful part of a composition that she herself has carefully arranged. As such, she is appreciated to a certain extent by the young Marcel, who is very much attracted to the aesthetic level of any scene. Thus, before he realizes the dangers of being, in any way, an artist in life, and before he becomes aware of the dangerous side of such a manipulative person, Marcel describes Odette's role thus:
Il m'a semblé plus tard que c'était un des côtés touchants du rôle de ces femmes oisives et studieuses, qu'elles consacrent leur générosité, leur talent, un rêve disponible de beauté sentimentale - car, comme les artistes, elles ne le réalisent pas, ne le font pas entrer dans les cadres de l'existence commune - et un or qui leur coûte peu, à enrichir d'un tissage précieux et fin la vie fruste et mal dégrossie des hommes (C. S., p. 78).

Even though Marcel mentions Odette's talent and generosity here, he emphasizes that an artist in life is essentially a lazy person. Charlus, Swann and Odette to a certain extent have chosen to be artists in life because it requires much less effort than to be a real artist, creating works of art, often out of suffering. Odette, too, has the incentive of gaining wealth, social success (from de Forcheville), a certain respectability (from Swann), and a frame for her beauty through taking on this role. For, as we shall see in the late spring or early summer Bois scene, she stops making a frame for the lives of men, and, instead, incorporates her admirers into a frame around her, a foil for her own vitality. She also, as we shall see in the final Guermantes' scene, manages to stay young looking, much as she always was, but at the price of seeming very artificial. Artifice, in dress and manner, however, has always been a strong point with her, even when it made her look most natural. Thus, it is much more difficult to trace the seasons in Odette's life, as she has cunningly found a way of circumventing them. There is a further reason, too, why it is not easy to trace any development on the part of Odette, and that is that we very rarely see inside her mind, or watch life from her point of

(17) The underlining is my own.
view as we do with Swann and Marcel. We always see her through others' eyes, usually Marcel's.

Such is certainly the case in the May Bois scene, and Marcel's viewpoint is sympathetic (although there are some ominous details) because he is searching for a focal point for his adoration:

Tout d'un coup, sur le sable de l'allée, tardive, alentie et luxuriante comme la plus belle fleur et qui ne s'ouvrirait qu'à midi, Mme Swann apparaissait, épanouissant autour d'elle une toilette toujours différente mais que je me rappelle surtout mauve; puis elle hissait et déployait sur un long pédoncule, au moment de sa plus complète irradiation, le pavillon de soie d'une large ombrelle de la même nuance que l'effeuillaison des pétales de sa robe. Toute une suite l'envoyait; Swann, quatre ou cinq hommes de club qui étaient venus la voir le matin chez elle ou qu'elle avait rencontrés : et leur noire ou grise agglomération obéissante, exécutant les mouvements presque mécaniques d'un cadre inerte autour d'Odette, donnait l'air à cette femme qui seule avait de l'intensité dans les yeux, de regarder devant elle, d'entre tous ces hommes, comme d'une fenêtre dont elle se fut approchée, et la faisait surgir, frêle, sans crainte, dans la nudité de ses tendres couleurs, comme l'apparition d'un être d'une espèce différente, d'une race inconnue, et d'une puissance presque guerrière, grâce à quoi elle compensait à elle seule sa multiple escorte. Souriante, heureuse du beau temps, du soleil qui n'incommodait pas encore, ayant l'air d'assurance et de calme du créateur qui a accompli son œuvre et ne se soucie plus du reste, certaine que sa toilette - dussent des passants vulgaires ne pas l'apprécier - était la plus élégante de toutes, elle la portait pour soi-même et pour ses amis, naturellement, sans attention exagérée, mais aussi sans détachement complet ... et même, sur son ombrelle mauve que souvent elle tenait encore fermée quand elle arrivait, elle laissait tomber par moment, comme sur un bouquet de violettes de Parme, son regard heureux et si doux que, quand il ne s'attachait plus à ses amis mais à un objet inanimé, il avait l'air de sourire encore

(13) We can see from this description how Odette seems to have gained vitality at the expense of Swann, part of the inert setting or frame

(13) The underlining is my own.
around her. She fits into nature; she seems the most beautiful flower in the Bois, and yet her beauty is the result of artifice. She, like Jews or homosexuals, comes from an unknown race, and she, rather than the men about her, is a warrior. A further quotation shows how she makes the Bois her own, and becomes, in Marcel's eyes, more natural than nature itself. He sees her as a priestess or even a goddess in Nature's ritual:

Non moins que par la cour qui l'entourait et ne semblait pas voir les passants, Mme Swann, à cause de l'heure tardive de son apparition, évoquait cet appartement ... où il faudrait qu'elle rentrât bientôt déjeuner; elle semblait en indiquer la proximité par la tranquillité flâneuse de sa promenade, pareille à celle qu'on fait à petits pas dans son jardin; de cet appartement on aurait dit qu'elle portait encore autour d'elle l'ombre intérieure et fraîche. Mais, par tout cela même, sa vue ne me donnait que davantage la sensation du plein air et de la chaleur. D'autant plus que, déjà persuadé qu'en vertu de la liturgie et des rites dans lesquels Mme Swann était profondément versée, sa toilette était unie à la saison et à l'heure par un lien nécessaire, unique, les fleurs de son flexible chapeau de paille, les petits rubans de sa robe me semblaient maître du mois de mai plus naturellement encore que les fleurs des jardins et des bois ... Car ces rites, s'ils étaient souverains, mettaient leur gloire, et par conséquent Mme Swann mettait la sienne, à obéir avec condescendance au matin, au printemps, au soleil, lesquels ne me semblaient pas assez flattés qu'une femme si élégante voulût bien ne pas les ignorer et eût choisi à cause d'eux une robe d'une étoffe plus claire (J. F., p. 637).

Even her costume has more life in it than her menfolk have, and she pays it more attention than she pays Swann. "La nudité de ses tendres couleurs", the mention of the violets, and the contrast between her frail appearance and her warlike attitude (remember all those courtesans of former times who, in the Bois, had only 'les noms de guerre') all proclaim her former occupation. Yet, Proust's humour (referring to
the big favour Odette is, in Marcel's eyes, doing Nature) is quite evident in this quotation.

We meet further humour in the passage pointing out that Odette is at the height of her powers and her beauty, her glorious summer:

"Or, autant que du fait de sa noble richesse, c'était du comble glorieux de son été mûr et si savoureux encore, que Mme Swann, majestueuse, souriante et bonne, s'avancant dans l'Avenue du Bois, voyait comme Hypatie, sous la lente marche de ses pieds, roulier des mondes" (J. F., p. 639). We have already seen the serious and rather sinister side of Odette's seeming virginity in the winter garden passage, associated with Gautier's poem Symphonie en blanc majeur. Seznec believes that this reference to the virginial heroine of Leconte de Lisle's poem in conjunction with Odette is an example of Proust's humour (19). At the very least, it is a highly ironic comment, for, although the gentlemen in the Bois can show appreciation for her essential femininity, her past reputation denies Odette entry into the social circles they frequent:

Et, en effet, le prince, faisant comme dans une apotheose de théâtre, de cirque, ou dans un tableau ancien, faire front à son cheval, adressait à Odette un grand salut théâtral et comme allégorique, où s'amplifiait toute la chevaleresque cortoisie du grand seigneur inclinant son respect devant la Femme, fût-elle incarnée en une femme que sa mère ou sa soeur ne pourraient pas fréquenter (J. F., p. 640).

Nonetheless, despite the role Odette plays as a substitute for, or a delusive replica of, Nature, diverting Marcel and Swann from the reality of the seasons to their artificial substitute, Marcel at this stage in his development, as we have seen, pays her the final tribute of his faithful adoration, and guarantees her, in his novel, at least as much immortality as he granted Swann:

Et comme la durée moyenne de la vie - la longévité relative - est beaucoup plus grande pour les souvenirs des sensations poétiques que pour ceux des souffrances du cœur, depuis si longtemps que se sont évanouis les chagrins que j'avais alors à cause de Gilberte, il leur a survécu, le plaisir que j'éprouve, chaque fois que je veux lire, en une sorte de cadran solaire, les minutes qu'il y a entre midi un quart et une heure, au mois de mai, à me revoir causant ainsi avec Mme Swann, sous son ombrelle, comme sous le reflet d'un berceau de glycines (J. F., p. 641).

Nature, however, has her own revenge on Odette the usurper. In the winter forest of the last Guermantes' reception, she, amongst all the creatures untouched by time and therefore lacking in life, is perhaps most to be pitied:

Pour Mme de Forcheville au contraire, c'était si miraculeux, qu'on ne pouvait même pas dire qu'elle avait rajeuni, mais plutôt qu'avec tous ces carmins, toutes ses rousseurs, elle avait refluer. Plus même que l'incarnation de l'Exposition universelle de 1878, elle eût été, dans une exposition végétale d'aujourd'hui, la curiosité et le clou. Pour moi, du reste, elle ne semblait pas dire: "Je suis l'Exposition de 1878", mais plutôt: "Je suis l'allée des Acacias de 1892". Il semblait qu'elle eût pu y être encore. D'ailleurs, justement parce qu'elle n'avait pas changé, elle ne semblait guère vivre. Elle avait l'air d'une rose stérilisée ... Cette voix (Odette's) était restée la même, inutillement chaude, prenante, avec un rien d'accent anglais. Et pourtant, de même que ses yeux avaient l'air de me regarder d'un rivage lointain sa voix était triste, presque suppliante, comme celle des morts dans l'Odyssée (T. R., p. 950). (20)

(20) This allusion to the Odyssey is, in itself, rather sinister. The ghosts called up by Odysseus all need a taste of blood before they can talk with the living, and Odysseus is looking for his dead mother.
Despite her role as perhaps the most blatant 'femme fleur' in all of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Proust still has some sympathetic points to make on Odette's part on the few occasions he lets us see her thoughts. As we have said already, Proust does betray a certain lack of sympathy in general for Odette in that he presents so very little from her point of view. She is supposed to have been sold into prostitution by her mother (C. S., p. 367), also to have tried to shoot Swann (P., p. 300). Yet, we learn in the final section of the novel that she considered Swann the one great love of her life. And she is not really so terribly unlike Proust's male characters who can never understand their mistresses. She expresses her difficulty in understanding Swann thus: "Si je pouvais savoir ce qu'il y a dans cette tête-là!" And her very Proustian idea of a possible solution is "Ah! si je pouvais changer, rendre raisonnable ce qu'il y a dans cette tête-là" (C. S., p. 320).

Thus, Marcel, the young artist, is the only character really to fulfil the cycle of the seasons of his life. Swann starts in the right direction, but gets lost in his love for Odette. Odette, an artist in life, (a title which Swann, and later Charlus, appropriate for themselves) a manipulator of others' seasons, cannot hope to experience the development of the artist proper. Even the novel itself, as we have already mentioned, has its own cycle to fulfil, for, of course, when we read *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, we are reading the matured embryo which Marcel conceived at the last Guermantes'
reception, the winter matinée. Only Marcel accepts death and winter, but with the hope of a new spring which his book will see even if he will not. Yet he, like Vinteuil, can expect his share of immortality, of the eternal morning. His suffering inspires his book, which, as with Bergotte, leads to his resurrection. The past is the field in which his book grows, but it is not a past for which he yearns with the nostalgia of his younger days and his former immaturity. He has found his vision of truth, and it is a comic vision, in the same sense as that of Dante's *Divine Comedy* - a tortuous road, including a journey to the underworld, leading to a final ascent, and a spiritual goal, a journey very much in the quest tradition. And all the patterns of his book mark out this progression. The flowers of Combray which offer the other inhabitants a (gratefully accepted) lazy, ordered, passive life, Marcel eschews for the hawthorn, with its promise of suffering and of dawn at the end of darkness, the flower of Vinteuil's white sonata and red septet, the flower of uneasy virginity and painful experience. Yet, Marcel does not surrender to the tempting flowers of sensuality (with the exception of an interlude with Albertine as his rose) to the extent that the other, less successful, characters do - Swann with his cattleya, Odette; Charlus with his orchid, Jupien. He, like Swann and Charlus, comes upon a moment of truth, an apocalyptic foretaste of the trumpets of the Day of Judgement amongst the destruction of the old world. He alone seems to await the birth of the new. Charlus almost revels in the holocaust, the wartime bombardment of Paris which reminds him of the Walkyrie and the
death of the gods, the destruction by fire of Pompeii and the overwhelming of Sodom by the fiery wrath from heaven. Swann chooses to ignore the Judgement trumpets (Odette, of course, never even hears them) to disregard any fear of fire in his life, accepting, instead a vision of "le Bois de Boulogne tombé en catalepsie" and moonlight "un incendie sans couleurs et sans danger". Considering the importance colour has in this novel, as well as the concept of a sort of purgatory, this image of a fire without colour or danger is very negative. Marcel, after some hesitation, accepts the purgatory of his suffering and reaches a level on which he can enjoy the blazing, masculine, noon-day sun, the overwhelming joy of the bells in Vinteuil's septet which remind us of the bells which herald Christ's resurrection, which ring in the eternal morning. Proust, then, has borrowed with great effect from Christian and other religions and mythologies to create a pattern and a vision in this novel which transcend the sorrows of love and overcome nostalgia to reach a final acceptance of time and a creativity which is based on truth and which brings with it a great joy and new life.
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