

Proust, Self-Censorship and the Representation of Homosexuality

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À la recherche du temps perdu is a difficult read. If Proust initially had a great deal of trouble finding a publisher for the first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913), this was not because of the work's "indecent" aspects, but because the form and style of the narrative were unlike anything that had come before, and posed a challenge — indeed, this is still the case — to the casual and even to the committed reader. In his correspondence with publishers, critics and friends, before and after the publication of the first section, however, the author repeatedly emphasized the indecency of the volumes to come. It is often unclear to what degree he was worried about censorship; these warnings sometimes seem designed to be taken as a boast, or an advertisement. Proust was writing during an era when governmental censorship of literary works was relatively rare in France. At the same time, one of the central themes of his work as he planned it, and the main source of "indecent," was both a considerable subject of interest and one that remained taboo; it had never directly been addressed in mainstream literature.

By focusing on his case, I hope to demonstrate some of the contradictions of the history of censorship, and the ways in which it

operates most effectively, and most consistently, from within rather than from without. Since for obvious reasons the bulk of the literature on censorship concentrates on instances in which works have actually been banned or expurgated, the extent to which censorship functions through self-censorship is an aspect of this history that has been relatively neglected.¹ We are, in effect, our own best censors, and the history of literary censorship tacitly attests to this.

One of the driving concerns behind this essay, moreover, is a scepticism about the idea that the history of censorship is that of an ongoing, univalent movement toward complete freedom of thought and expression: what might be termed a progressive fallacy. The case of Proust's efforts at self-censorship is particularly illuminating because of the thorny subject about which he hesitated to express himself clearly: homosexuality. His work, which was one of the first serious literary efforts to address this topic directly, would for this very reason seem to provide a perfect demonstration of the familiar notion of progressively increasing freedom of artistic expression that gradually, especially over the course of the twentieth century, allowed creative minds to explore all sorts of topics that had previously been taboo. To a great extent, of course, this is accurate: Proust's groundbreaking account of same-sex love would have been unthinkable only a few years previously, and it struck chords that continue to resonate even today.

At the same time, however, the freedom to depict same-sex love as such, like all such freedoms, came at a great price. For one thing, the impetus to take on this subject in the first place was hardly the product of a spontaneous outpouring of some early form of gay pride; it arose from a historically specific climate of scandal and suspicion. Proust's own relation to this topic was, moreover, deeply conflicted, as can be discerned in his struggles with self-censorship. Finally, the very cultural conditions that allowed for the publication of his explicit account of

1 My own recent work on the subject, *Dirt for Art's Sake: Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2007) is a prime example of this neglect. This book explicitly deals with the question of how works initially viewed as "obscene" become "classics," and therefore necessarily deals with those that have actually been suppressed. In the process of writing it, I began to realize that the history of literary censorship entails a sort of shadow-history of self-censorship. This effect was most obvious in terms of the literature of homosexuality (dealt with in *Dirt* in a chapter on *The Well of Loneliness*), hence the subject of the present essay.

same-sex love — in particular, a growing interest in these matters due to the advent of sexology — by the same token restricted the possibilities for other sorts of narrative. In Proust's case, this meant that his ongoing and ultimately successful attempts to find a way openly to discuss configurations of sexual desire his predecessors had approached only with great reticence not only had to pass through a process of energetic disavowal in terms of his first-person narration, but also resulted in the removal of all traces of the positive representation of male friendship that had characterized his earlier work.

Homosexuality, as a subject of literary discourse at least, is unlike other problematic topics — such as adultery, to take the most evident counterexample — for a number of reasons, chief among them the fact that for a very long time, and indeed until quite recently, homosexuality was viewed as so aberrant as well as so dangerous that the mere acknowledgment of its existence was illicit. The Catholic Church, for instance, at various times hesitated to make proclamations proscribing same-sex behaviors the very mention of which was suspected of tending to serve as an incitement to experimentation. Adulterous sex, on the other hand, involving as it does the extension outside marriage of an activity licit and even encouraged within that institution, has always been too obvious and widespread to be seen as something that could be stamped out by mere silence.

In terms of adultery the efforts of censors have for the most part been confined to making sure that the representation of adulterous intrigue is sufficiently condemnatory. Works centrally featuring adultery got into trouble in the 19th and early 20th centuries, for instance, on two basic grounds: insufficiently clear moral condemnation (*Madame Bovary*, 1857), and explicit rendering of sex and use of improper language (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 1928); *Ulysses* (1922) left itself open to both accusations, as well as a host of others. This same period saw very little in the way of allusions to male homosexuality in literary works at all; it remained an almost entirely taboo subject outside pornographic works circulating in clandestine form — and even there, even in the works of Sade, sodomy tended to feature as one illicit activity among others. The representation of lesbianism was a different story, becoming something of a fad, especially in France. The French government responded by Baudelaire's trial in 1857 and the suppression of six of the poems in his *Les Fleurs du mal*, largely the result of his clear and emphatic depictions

of sex between women. Male homosexuality, however, was manifestly present in mainstream literature in the 19th century only in the works of Balzac, who created in his character Vautrin a protean master-criminal whose downfall is caused by his weakness for pretty young men.

By the early 20th century, things had changed greatly. Sex between men had become an object of public discourse in the wake of the sexological movement sparked by 19th-century scientism and a renewed interest in formerly suppressed aspects of the classical heritage (e.g. Plato's *Symposium*) emanating from German philology. And, in particular, the trials of Oscar Wilde in England in the mid 1890s had made homosexuality an inevitable topic of current events, the sexual equivalent of the Dreyfus Affair in France during the same period. It became inevitable that literature would take on this subject; the question remained as to how authors would approach it and how censors would react.² In 1900 the Belgian writer Georges Eeckhoud published *Escal-Vigor*, a novel that contained a thinly disguised apologia for homosexuality; he was brought to trial in Brussels, but eventually acquitted, and the novel was forgotten. In France during the first decade of the 20th century several novels featuring love between men were published: Achille Essebac's *Dédé* (1901); Francis Carco's *Jésus-la-Caille* (1907); and Binet-Valmer's *Lucien* (1910); but these works, featuring, variously, tragic plots and lowlife settings, were considered to be genre fiction rather than actual literature and as such received neither serious literary consideration nor official censure.³

Proust had something very different in mind. In May 1908, he wrote a letter to his friend Louis d'Albufera in which he outlined his literary plans. Among the projects for articles on Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert,

2 Although he has since become a central figure in queer culture, although many of his works contain a great deal of veiled allusions to such matters, and although the fairly evident queer subtext in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1895) became a focus of the trials, Wilde himself did not write openly about homosexuality until after his condemnation, in *De Profundis*, which was not published in unexpurgated form until fifty years after his death.

3 Both *Dédé* and *Lucien* have slipped into an enduring obscurity, but Carco's name has been retained as an important if marginal figure in early 20th-century literary circles, and *Jésus-la-Caille* has recently been republished. Binet-Valmer, in his capacity as critic, later expressed moral indignation over Proust's depiction of homosexuality in the *Recherche*. See Eva Ahlstedt, *La Pudeur en crise* (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, and Paris: Touzot, 1985), 87.

and women, among other subjects, he lists “an essay on Pederasty (not easy to publish).”⁴ His interest in writing about “Pederasty,” although arising out of a deep personal investment in the subject, had been inspired in the immediate by the Eulenburg Affair, a political scandal in Germany (1906-7) that had propelled the topic of same-sex relations back to the forefront of current events, where it had earlier occupied place of honor, or rather infamy, as a result of the Wilde trials.

The piece on “Pederasty” that Proust worried about placing in a newspaper or journal was never written, or at least never published, as a freestanding essay. Instead, along with all his other projects, it was eventually incorporated into the *Recherche*, throughout the narrative fabric of which a great many miniature expository articles are scattered. Among these, the novel contains one fully developed essay, and it is precisely this one; it forms the opening section of the middle volume, entitled *Sodome et Gomorrhe* and devoted in the main to an examination of what Proust’s narrator prefers to call “inversion.” Between 1908, when in the wake of the Eulenburg Affair he began to think seriously of writing about same-sex love, and 1921, when the first part of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* was published (appended to the end of the previous volume, *Le Côté de Guermantes II*, as something like the literary equivalent of a film preview), his views do not seem to have changed very much. There exist a great many preliminary versions of what eventually became *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, and they all contain variations on the same themes, often using the same language, always using the same examples, with increasing degrees of elaboration. What changed in the interim, it seems, was not the author’s thoughts on the subject itself, but rather his thoughts about publishing on the subject.

When Proust tells Louis d’Albufera that he is thinking of writing an essay on Pederasty and adds parenthetically that it will not be easy to publish, he appears to mean that he fears publishers will be reluctant to take on such an incendiary topic. Homosexuality may have been all over the news at the time, but that did not mean that it was easy to deal with directly as a subject in itself. To gauge the extent to which it was difficult to address this topic directly, especially in terms other than the strictly condemnatory, it is instructive to recall the case of the English writer E. M. Forster’s *Maurice*.

4 Marcel Proust, *Correspondance*, vol. VIII, 112-113; this and all other translations are my own.

Forster began this novel in 1913, the year *Du côté de chez Swann* appeared, and finished it not long after. He dedicated it “to a happier year,” by which he meant a time when it would be possible to publish such a work. *Maurice* is the story of a young man who is absolutely normal, to the point of mediocrity, in all respects except one: he is attracted to boys rather than girls. This characteristic, which is depicted as simply innate, leads to a certain inevitable amount of trouble and heartbreak in his life. The novel is not, however, a cautionary tale, and the author deliberately flouted the conventions of convention-flouting by giving it a relatively happy or at least optimistic ending: we leave Maurice trying to achieve a stable relationship with a working-class youth, an employee of his former boyfriend.

The unhappy ending had long been a staple of literature dealing with morally sensitive issues such as adultery. As long as the wages of sin were displayed in all their sordid exemplariness, it was felt, moral probity could be claimed for the work as a whole, since immoral behavior would have been displayed in the context of a warning rather than an incitement. This is why Flaubert could plausibly maintain that he was shocked by the legal proceedings against his first published novel, since Emma Bovary not only grows disenchanted by her adulterous escapades, but eventually dies in appropriately unpleasant circumstances, of self-inflicted arsenic poisoning. But it did not escape the public prosecutor’s notice that she remains as disenchanted with marriage as with adultery, and in any case the mores of the time demanded that she not be allowed to control her own fate. In order fully to abide by novelistic convention, she should have died of syphilis contracted through prostitution, as did any number of female characters in 19th-century French fiction, from Balzac’s Madame Marneffe (*La Cousine Bette*, 1847) to Zola’s Nana in his novel of the same name (1880). The unhappy ending, which added an explicitly cautionary dimension to the work, was a standard and indeed inevitable move on the part of authors wishing to deal with illicit sexuality while avoiding censorship.

Maurice was the first serious novel in English to address the issue of homosexuality, and certainly the first to feature both unconventional sexuality and a happy ending.⁵ What is especially remarkable about it,

5 By “serious” I mean viewed by critics as belonging to the category of literature-as-art rather than literature-as-diversion, a distinction made increasingly throughout

though, is that Forster wrote the book without attempting to have it published. He knew that no reputable publisher would touch it, and that even if he managed to persuade one to do so, it was highly likely that both of them would end up in prison, and the work itself would be immediately suppressed. He therefore circulated the book among his friends, and left instructions in his will that it be published after his death; it did not see print until 1971, which was indeed, in these terms at least, a happier year. In the interim, though, change had come about slowly. The first serious novel about homosexuality to be published in English was Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*, written some fifteen years after *Maurice*. As its title indicates, Hall's novel about lesbianism does not end happily, but this did not prevent the British government from prosecuting its publisher in 1928. The book was banned in England for twenty years, with the result that no one else attempted anything of the sort for a very long time (a similar verdict in the US was overturned on appeal).

No such precedent weighed on Proust as he contemplated writing about "Pederasty," and it should also be noted that homosexual acts had been decriminalized in France under the Napoleonic Code, whereas the 1885 Labouchere Amendment in England, under which Wilde had been prosecuted, had added acts committed in private to the extant laws against acts between men in public (i.e. in public toilets). In England, therefore, as opposed to France, the author of a work sympathetically depicting male homosexuality might conceivably leave himself open to prosecution on extra-literary grounds as well as under the Obscene Publications Act. For this reason as well as the enormous disincentive provided by the Wilde trials, the publication of novels like *Dédé*, *Lucien* and *Jésus-la-Caille* was unthinkable in England at the turn of the century. In France, though, the conditions were much more propitious, or at least less forbidding.

Not only had the aforementioned proto-pulp novels appeared unmolested, 1902 had also seen publication of André Gide's

the 19th century, a period during which exploding literacy rates among women and the working classes combined with the development of cheap paper and printing techniques, leading to what eventually became known as pulp fiction; by the early twentieth century the distinction between serious and unserious fiction was firmly established, at least as an abstract division.

L'immoraliste, a short narrative that today clearly reads as a coming-out story, somewhat like Mann's *Death in Venice* (1911). It features not merely the narrator's realization that he is more interested in young Arab boys than in his wife, but also long discussions with a character manifestly based on Oscar Wilde. But the work never addresses its subject directly, with the result that at the time of its publication it was greeted as a philosophical parable, like Mann's novella in Germany a few years later. Gide later revisited the same events he had couched in fictional form in an unmistakably explicit memoir, *Si le grain ne meurt* (1926), which he wrote in the early 20s and even had printed, but hesitated to publish — thousands of copies languished in his basement — until after Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe* had appeared. He also wrote *Corydon*, an apologia for homosexuality in the form of a Socratic dialogue, which he circulated only privately for many years. In his correspondence Gide expresses bitter resentment over having waited until Proust had published the first (serious) literary work directly addressing homosexuality.⁶ It was clear that the moment had arrived for someone to do this, but for several years no one was willing to take the step.

When Proust writes to Albufera that the essay he contemplates is “not easy to publish,” it therefore seems he does not merely mean that he might have trouble finding a publisher, but further that he himself might experience difficulty publishing, that is to say making public, what he has to say on the subject. The form eventually taken by the first mainstream work in French dealing centrally with homosexuality is unlike any other treatment of this (or for that matter any) subject. *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (the two parts of which have been published together after the first edition), is the fifth section of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. From the start Proust intended to incorporate the theme of homosexuality as an important aspect of his vast novel, but a number of factors set the work apart in this regard (as in all others).

To begin with, unlike *Escal-Vigor* or *Lucien* or *Maurice* or *The Well of Loneliness*, or even the more reticent *Immoraliste* or *Death in Venice*, Proust's *Recherche* does not center on homosexuality, except in the (important) structural sense that its central volume is *Sodome et Gomorrhe*.

6 Gide had earlier had occasion to express regret over turning down *Du côté de chez Swann*, in his editorial capacity at the *Nouvelle revue française*.

The work does therefore literally have homosexuality at its center, but in order to get there, readers have to get through the four earlier volumes, and some eight years separated the initial publications of *Du Côté de chez Swann* and *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*. The first volumes contain a few suggestions of what is to come, notably a strange scene of voyeurism in “Combray,” the first part of *Swann* (that is, the section containing the famous “Madeleine” passage, and as a result the author’s most frequently read and anthologised text), in which the young protagonist stumbles upon two women engaged in a peculiar foreplay ritual. This passage was criticized when the book was published, as much for its incongruity as for its disturbing sexual overtones. Proust answered these objections by asserting that the scene would be fully justified by what was to come in later volumes.

In 1913, when he was responding to such criticism, Proust planned to publish the novel in three volumes, and it is clear that he intended to include homosexuality as an important theme. The work as it eventually emerged, however, was not only much longer but also thematically different from what he envisioned at this point. Since he already had the ending planned, he spent the years of World War I elaborating on various themes, among them homosexuality, which played an increasingly important role as he continued writing. By this time, the generally positive reception of *Swann*, along with the enforced quasi-solitary confinement brought about by his health and the war, encouraged Proust to overcome his initial reticence about writing on the subject, and it gradually took over the latter volumes of the *Recherche*.

Escal-Vigor, *Maurice*, *The Well of Loneliness* and other novels dealing with this subject, including *L’immoraliste* and *Death in Venice*, are all third- or first-person narratives centering on the experience of the homosexual protagonist. Proust’s *Recherche*, in contrast, is a first-person narrative recounted from the point of view of a heterosexual narrator increasingly surrounded by homosexual characters, whose behavior he observes and comments on. With the possible exception of the two eccentric lesbians in the brief voyeurism scene in *Swann*, however, before *Sodome et Gomorrhe* he seems resolutely oblivious to the meaning of what he recounts. Once the observation of an assignation between the Baron de Charlus and Jupien the tailor explicitly reveals to the protagonist — and thus to the reader — the existence of same-sex tendencies, the entire narrative becomes suffused with this knowledge. For the entire

remainder of the volume, and indeed the rest of the work as a whole, the narrator becomes something of an expert on homosexuality, or inversion, as he prefers to call it. The reader is offered, among other things, a protracted guided tour of Sodom and Gomorrah as they exist as a sort of shadowy underworld, invisible to the untrained eye, in the midst of the world we have already been shown.

Proust's precedent for this narrative unveiling of an underground network operating in plain view and yet opaque to the uninitiated is Balzac, and the Baron de Charlus, himself a great reader of Balzac, is manifestly something of a latter-day Vautrin, his criminality now confined to his weakness for young men. The question of how Proust's protagonist goes from complete ignorance of homosexuality to expertise in the matter merely by observing a single pick-up remains an open one, and by the same token a strain on verisimilitude. Balzac himself never had to face this problem, since his technique is that of the selectively omniscient narrator. But Proust had chosen both to foreground homosexuality and to do so from the outside, within the context of a first-person narrative. His narrator is heterosexual, and it was perhaps in an attempt to make sure there would be no mistake about this — that is, to avoid above all the suspicion that the largely autobiographical narrator-protagonist, and thus the author himself, knew a bit too much about homosexuality not to be implicated in it — that the Gomorrah part of the novel, the representation of love between women, focuses on the hero's suspicions of his girlfriend's taste for women.⁷

Here too Balzac provided an example: the novella *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, which one of Proust's female characters reads in the book, scandalized readers in 1835 with a plot culminating in a woman's bloody vengeance on her young female lover because the latter had slept with the male protagonist. Balzac is a frequent point of reference in the *Recherche*, often in terms of the representation of same-sex love, but perhaps the most telling allusion to his works occurs outside the novel, in a notebook entry dating from around the same time Proust wrote the latter to Albufera mentioning his essay project on Pederasty. Having decided to write about same-sex relations, he is ruminating on how the subject can be approached, and in particular on the thorny issue of

7 See my *Proust's Lesbianism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

vocabulary. He rejects the word “homosexual” as being “too Germanic and pedantic,” having entered common parlance through translated news reports during the Eulenburg Affair; he will therefore have to settle for “invert,” because he cannot use the one term that truly fits his needs: *tante*.⁸

Tante, which literally means “aunt,” is a slang term for effeminate homosexual, roughly corresponding to “queen” in English (Proust’s original English translator, C.K. Scott Moncrieff, rendered it with charming literality as “Auntie”). In his notes Proust regretfully details the power of this “skirt-wearing” word (“ce mot qui porte jupes”) to convey all by itself the full range of femininity he wishes to suggest for his inverts. He cannot use it because this would violate the conventions of literary decency: “Mais le lecteur français veut être respecté” (“But the French reader demands respect”), he writes with some irony, citing a line from the 17th century writer Boileau’s *Art Poétique* on what may decently be expressed in French as opposed to what must pass through the filter of Latin. Finally he adds: “and not being Balzac I am obliged to make do with invert.”⁹

Balzac uses the term *tante* in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1842), a work referred to a number of times in the *Recherche*. This novel from the *Comédie humaine* functions as something of a touchstone of homosexual representation in mainstream literature before *Sodome et Gomorrhe* itself. In the latter, Charlus alludes to Oscar Wilde’s famous comment, lent to a character in “The Decay of Lying,” that the greatest tragedy in his life was the death of Lucien de Rubempré in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Proust had cited this same statement in various contexts, among them a letter to his friend Robert Dreyfus in 1908,

8 The vocabulary of same-sex relations was in flux during this period; “homosexuality,” which has since come to dominate, etymologically implies desire for sameness, which was not what Proust had in mind; this, along with what he saw as the word’s teutonic overtones, was why he chose “inversion” as his preferred term. He wished to convey the notion, borrowed from 19th-century sexology, that a man who desires another man is in some essential sense a woman, which is what the word “inversion” implies. For a full discussion of these distinctions see *Proust’s Lesbianism*, chapter 1.

9 This entire passage from Proust’s Cahier 49 is cited in Antoine Compagnon’s preface to *Sodome et Gomorrhe* in the Pléiade and Folio editions (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), xv.

this time adding that Wilde was to find life held greater sorrows.¹⁰ The baroque plot of *Splendeurs* hinges on the love of Vautrin for Lucien de Rubempré, but the word *tante* actually appears only briefly in the novel, in the course of a sociological disquisition on prison mores.

When Proust laments the fact that he is not Balzac and therefore cannot use the term that best fits his purposes, he does not explain exactly what he means by this. It seems unlikely he thought he would encounter legal difficulties as a result, especially since *Jésus-la-Caille*, published not long before he wrote this, had featured abundant slang of this sort, starting with the title (*caille*, literally “quail,” meaning an effeminate boy). But Proust was not targeting Carco’s minority audience; instead, he aimed to rival Balzac himself. No doubt part of his anxiety over not being Balzac and therefore having to censor his terms — to watch his language — involved the awareness that because he was not established as a writer he could not afford his predecessor’s freedom of expression. It is also, certainly, likely that he was afraid of being implicated as a *tante* himself if he used the term, whereas Balzac had been not merely a famous author but a famous heterosexual as well. A closer look at *Splendeurs et misères* and its companion volume, *Illusions perdues*, though, provides a further answer to what Proust meant when he complained that he had to censor himself because he was not Balzac.

Illusions perdues, which precedes *Splendeurs* in terms of plot, begins with the tender friendship between Lucien and his schoolmate David Séchard, who eventually becomes his brother-in-law, and whom he betrays in his ambitious quest for glory. Their friendship is described in terms that would have seemed equivocal by the end of the century. It is explicitly compared to a love affair, with Lucien basking in the admiration of his friend much like a beautiful woman assured of the love of a man. Lucien’s great beauty is foregrounded throughout both novels, and it is described in feminine terms, much like those used to describe the beauty of Julien Sorel in Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le noir* (1830). Beautiful young men in fiction during this period are often overtly described in feminine terms as an index of aristocratic or artistic sensibility carrying no necessary overtones of homosexuality (much to the confusion of later readers). Balzac’s Lucien goes on to

10 Proust, *Correspondance*, vol VIII, 123.

have a number of love affairs with women in this volume and the next; his beauty makes him irresistible to them, but also to Vautrin, whom he encounters at the end of *Illusions perdues* as he is about to commit suicide. Vautrin, disguised as a Spanish priest, convinces him not to kill himself, and *Splendeurs* takes up the narrative as Lucien, while at the same time involved with a woman, is comfortably ensconced as his beloved protégé. Their association eventually leads to Lucien's suicide in prison, in accordance with the unhappy ending rule (Vautrin, however, becomes chief of the secret police).¹¹

It is, I would argue, the plot of *Illusions perdues* that Proust had in mind when he wrote that not being Balzac he was unable to use the word *tante*. Balzac, writing during the first half of the 19th century, before the invention of “homosexuality,” enjoyed a freedom of expression in terms of relations between men that was no longer available to Proust, writing in the age of sexology.¹² In the 1890s, long before beginning the *Recherche*, he had written hundreds of pages of a novel that would be published only in the 1950s, under the title *Jean Santenil*. This amorphous early proto-novel, written in the third person, contains many of the elements of his magnum opus, but Sodom is almost entirely absent. In one sense, however, *Jean Santenil* is a much more gay book than the *Recherche*, as it contains the extended account of a passionate friendship between Jean and an aristocratic schoolmate, Henri de Réveillon, an evident avatar of Robert de Saint-Loup in the later book. In both works it is the other boy who pursues friendship with the protagonist, but by the time he wrote the *Recherche* — and indeed by the time he wrote the 1908 notebook entry — things had changed. The Wilde trials and the Eulenburg Affair had propelled homosexuality into the forefront of public scrutiny, and the writer clearly felt he could no longer afford to celebrate friendship among boys, especially not in an ostensibly heterosexual novel centrally concerned with homosexuality.

This is doubtless why school stories, which occupy a prominent place in *Jean Santenil*, disappear entirely from the later novel, which is

11 Vautrin's triumph is not only one of Balzac's more provocative inventions; it is also based on the real-life career of François Vidocq, a notorious criminal who pulled off a similar coup.

12 This analysis of *Illusions perdues* indebted the work of Foucault, especially *Histoire de la sexualité*, tome I. *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), but I believe the evidence also speaks for itself.

surely alone among bourgeois autobiographical or semi-autobiographical narratives in its schoollessness (the narrator mentions going to school in passing once or twice, but the sole vestige of his experiences there is his vulgar and pretentious friend Bloch). As for Saint-Loup, this handsome aristocrat ardently pursues the hero's friendship, and the two do become close, but it is almost against the latter's will, the narrative of their friendship accompanied by a severe disquisition against friendship in general. According to the protagonist, friendship is a pointless diversion from more important matters, notably love and writing. His acquiescence to Saint-Loup's friendly overtures is emphatically reluctant, and it also finds justification in his discovery that the young man's aunt is the Duchesse de Guermantes, with whom he (no doubt prophylactically) insists he has become obsessed.

Saint-Loup is also the nephew of Charlus, and is, thousands of pages later, revealed to have inherited the latter's sexual predilections. The novel's arguments against friendship are the legacy of Proust's realization that he is not Balzac: that the age of Balzac is over. Loving friendship between boys, as in *Jean Santeuil*, can no longer innocently coexist with homosexuality. In other words, the very conditions that allowed homosexuality finally to be spoken of openly in mainstream fiction also shut the door on another sort of narrative, as well as another sort of reading. Not only was Proust not Balzac in the sense that the word *tante* seemed off-limits to him because too compromising; it had also become impossible, and has only become more impossible in the interim, to read passages such as the love between Lucien and David, or the description of Lucien's feminine beauty in *Illusions perdues*, without seeing them in the light of sexology, psychoanalysis, and, more recently, queer theory. And something has been lost as a result, something more than an illusion.

The history of literary censorship has often been written about in terms of progressive liberation, a casting off of the repressive bonds of prudery. There is, again, a great amount of truth to this, as Proust's own case demonstrates: only a few years earlier, *Sodome et Gomorrhe* had been unthinkable, and the world is immeasurably richer for its existence and that of the many works it inspired. At the same time, it came at a great cost, one that is often neglected in the service of progress-narratives designed to celebrate the freedoms of the present. The possibility of explicit discussion of homosexuality had been opened, but this very

openness closed off another avenue of exploration. Same-sex love became a legitimate subject of discourse, but in the process friendship became suspect. No one would trade the extravagant perversity of *À la recherche du temps perdu* for the relative decorousness of *Jean Santeuil*, and yet there is something awful in the knowledge that the great work was possible only at the price of tender friendship between schoolboys.

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Summary

This essay arose out of the observation that while censorship is, for obvious reasons, most often studied in terms of works actually censored, it has always worked most consistently and most effectively through self-censorship. Taking Marcel Proust's groundbreaking depiction of homosexuality in his Sodome et Gomorrhe — a work that was never censored — as an example, the essay attempts both to contextualize it within the burgeoning representation of male homosexuality in early 20th-century fiction and to demonstrate the ways in which Proust felt that he was less free to depict male friendship than his early 19th-century predecessor Balzac.

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