

# PROUST SAID THAT

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Issue No. 4

December 1995



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In This Issue: Proust's Life, and Mine, Rejection, The Proust Questionnaire, Burning Man, Florence, Coffee, Sviatoslav Richter, A Visit to Combray and Bouillabaisse



# Letters.... and Email



Thanks for the lovely third issue of PST..  
"When I went to Venice I found my dream had turned—  
incredibly but quite simply— into my address."  
I'm still interested in a Proust list. Anybody else?  
annie@garnet.berkeley.edu

*At last, someone has proposed setting up the Proust list. It may take a while, but it's coming!*

What can I say, I love dogs. Proust was the cutest dog I ever did see. They say that a human's best friend is the dog, but I think they're wrong. A man's best friend is Proust. Not all Prousts can be dogs, but you knew that.

Love,  
aasgaard@well.com

*Hmmm. That was the most eccentric Proust letter I've received yet.*

Binging on madeleines...

A good friend of mine termed his condition as "Prousticide." In other words, he didn't leave his bed for days because he was so determined to finish. He did.

A few weeks later I also bit the cookie. My great fear, however, was that it would take me forty years to finish. I didn't know if I could commit prousticide. Forty years to finish Proust seems to me a bit like drawing a life size map. Somewhat startling in likeness, but definitely a bitch to fold.

Severine

*To Miss Severine I wrote that The Marcel Proust Support Group recommends a mere ten pages a day, not a month or more in bed, and that we are here to cheer her on through eleven months of mini-Prousticide.*

What in the name of Mt. Tamalpais does an old timer/mountain biker know about Marcel Proust... not much, I reckon, but there he is down there on that red bike a-pedlin' up the dirt road woven through the tapestry of redwoods and pines ... Marcel Proust (1871-1922),

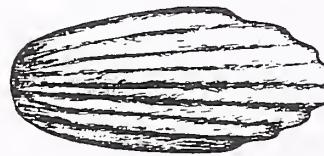
**Proust Said That** is the highly unofficial organ of the totally unofficial, utterly unacademic Marcel Proust Support Group of San Francisco. We primarily devote these pages to the subjects, enthusiasms and insights that appear in Proust's work, and because we are so very unofficial, we might inject a piece or two with only the slimmest connection to Marcel P.

To receive issues by mail, please send \$3 per issue in CASH to me, P, at 1907 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, CA, 94115 USA. If you wish to subscribe for a series of issues, please send multiples of \$3 in CASH. Orders from outside the US must, I regret, include an extra \$2 per issue for postage and handling.

You can find us on The World Wide Web at the following address:  
<http://www.net.com/www/vision/proust/>  
E-mail address: psegal@well.com

Special thanks in this issue to Dean Gustafson, who has done another grand cover, on the computer using Fractal Painter Version 3. and many of the drawings within, to J. Patrick Kelley for his piece and photos of Combray, to Peter Field for photographs (and belatedly, for photographing the covers of issues 1 and 2), to Alex Segal for the portrait of Richter and other elegant embellishments that appear in this issue and all the others, to Larry Harvey for taking the Proust Questionnaire, to Lance Alexander for his help in the appearance of this issue.

Thanks as always to Jeffrey Gray and Cynsa Bonorris for bringing us to the World Wide Web, and to Susan Radcliff for printing the actual copies.



wait, how did I know that? Must have been that PST magazine someone inadvertently left near my bed. That means Proust and my Dad were the same age when they died. Hey, Pop, I'm still down here riding a bike, thinking of the day you taught me to ride my two-wheeler under the warmth and redolence of the sun, long ago under suburban blue skies. (By the way, have you met in the heavenly hereafter an intellectual type name of Marcel, perchance?) Merely a superficial *continued on page 23*

# The Life of Proust, and Some of Mine

Reading the biographies of Proust, after reading *Remembrance*, made it clear to me why this writer has appealed to me more than any other. It is because I am more like him, in many ways, than any other writers I have loved. Our similarities explain my obsession, the reason for this publication.

One of the editors at *Cups Magazine* asked me to do a brief biography of Proust for their November issue, something I'd intended to do for this issue as well. *Cups* got the Proust-only version; this one contains P as well.



The Franco-Prussian War had ravaged Paris when Dr. Andrien Proust, a celebrated Catholic physician, married a young, cultured Jewish woman, Jeanne Weill. Their first son, Marcel, was conceived in war-torn Paris, but born in Anteuil a few months after the Paris Commune devastated the German troops, on July 10, 1871. Two years later, a second son, Robert, was born.

Marcel was a fragile and sickly child; his mother had considerable guilt about his condition, which she guessed to be the result of an anxious pregnancy. She coddled Marcel until her death, a habit which taught him the ironic quality of strength in weakness, particularly after his first attack of asthma when he was nine.

He was a good student, winning occasional prizes in composition, but his illness kept him out of school for long periods of time, during which he was tutored by his mother. He knew at an early age that he wanted to be a writer. His parents, however, wanted him to learn a profession, and so he went on to get degrees in philosophy and law, pursued with the sole intent of staying out of the job market.



I knew at an early age that I wanted to be a writer; I wrote my first short story at the age of seven. In high school I became enchanted by journalism, edited the award-winning newspaper at Lowell High, and won numerous scholarships. Never, however, did I really learn to type. If I must have a profession, it would not

be that of secretary. My parents were certain that I wouldn't need a job; they had every expectation that I would marry some nice Italian doctor, and spend my life cooking and throwing grand parties in the family tradition. In some ways I didn't disappoint them. I have spent my life cooking and throwing grand parties, and I stayed out of the job market. Graduating from UCLA with a degree in screen writing, I earned a reasonable living as a ghostwriter for many years, but refused to marry a nice Italian doctor.



The high society of the Faubourg Saint-Germaine captivated Proust in his late adolescence, and he devoted most of his attention to admittance to the salons and social functions of the very rich. His father's reputation, friends from school, his sparkling wit and conversation and what some called an Italianate, or an Oriental, beauty provided the opportunity. He had a reputation early in his social life for perfect imitations of his fellow guests, a skill that amused his hosts and indicated his amazing observation of others.

At 18 he took advantage of the French army's enlistment program, soon to be discontinued. University-educated recruits could sign up for a one-year stint, and be considered minor officers, as long as they would pay for their own uniforms. Among the other privileges of this enlistment was having someone to clean your clothing, attending frequent champagne parties in the local hotels, and getting several leaves. Proust used his to return to Paris, where he attended soirees and salons in uniform.

Back to civilian life, he delved once again into society. He had developed, however, the unrelenting proclivity to the late night hours, rising late in the afternoon, and by the time he was dressed and ready to attend a social function, most of the guests were gone. His conversation kept his yawning hosts from ejecting him, or from not inviting him, and he continued to meet and charm members of the aristocracy, like Montesquiou, the subject of Whistler's great portrait that hangs in the Frick Museum in New York, the model for des Essientes in Huysmann's *A Rebours*, and for Charlus, the Baron in *Remembrance*.



In my first issue I wrote a piece in defense of nocturnalism. I grew up in a family that had a decided late-night bent; when I left home at seventeen, I became increasingly bent in that direction, I took the latest classes of the quarter's offerings; when forced to enroll in early afternoon sessions, I showed up to take exams during my 36th hour of awakeness, and learned the material at home. Academic concerns took little of my time; what I really learned to do was socialize.

My friends, too, are members of an aristocracy. They are the royalty of the oddly creative.



Proust flirted lavishly with women, particularly the society hostesses whose favor he curried, but his romances were solely with young men. Homosexuality has always been a factor in human interaction, but was frowned upon in European society in Proust's time. Oscar Wilde, imprisoned in England for his homosexual relations with Lord Alfred Douglas, fled to Paris and became friends with the young Marcel. Their association remained somewhat secretive, like Proust's relationships with the pianist and composer Reynaldo Hahn, and Lucien Daudet, son of a markedly anti-Semitic family; Proust fought a duel when accused of a homosexual relationship with Daudet.



My own relationships have been of the solely heterosexual variety, although many of the people I love are not. In the manner of Proust, though, I prefer to keep my personal life personal.



His parents badgered him to get a career and keep normal hours. In spite of his degree, he absolutely refused to accept a career in law; "In my days of greatest desperation," he wrote in a letter to his father, "I have never conceived of anything worse than a lawyer's office." He was accepted for an unpaid position with the Mazarine Library, that offered short hours as little as two days a week, but the job itself was uninteresting; before it began, Proust applied for a leave, which was continually renewed for four years. He began writing for magazines and newspapers, and on one occasion, was well paid, an event that impressed his parents enough to keep their badgering at bay. He spent as much time as possible travelling,

staying in the country homes of friends, attending social events in Paris, and throwing grand dinner parties to maintain his social obligations.



Proust never had a job in his life. I wish I could say that, too, but I did not have a wealthy family, nor would I stay at home until they died. I can say that I've had very few jobs in my life, mostly during my college years, with a few others here and there. During the many years I lived in North Beach, freelancing as a journalist, I frequently survived by throwing rent dinners for the Beach's bohemian elite. A writer I knew got an assignment from *Attenzione*, a magazine for and about Italian-Americans, to write about the intellectual and cultural life of North Beach; he wrote a third of it about the rent dinners at my apartment.



Proust's primary interest was the nature of humanity. For the most part, he remained unconcerned with politics, but the Dreyfus Affair was a matter of serious concern. This issue, covered in PST #2, raised a heated anti-Semitic furor in France. The half-Jewish Proust rose from bed in the daylight hours to attend the trials, wrote letters and gathered signatures in defense of Dreyfus, and dealt with this injustice deeply in *Remembrance*.



I also have few interests more compelling than the human condition; as for politics, I have some opinions, but I know too little about the subject to indulge in heated debate. Only one political issue got me out of bed early enough to attend a protest: the ninety-something trial of Keith McHenry, the leader of Food Not Bombs, arrested so many times in San Francisco for feeding the poor without a license.

My friend Peter Doty, aka Pierre, Le Marquis de Gateau, the brilliant prankster who created the Let Them Eat Cake event, has talked many of us into acquiring 18th century costumes and giving out cake in front of City Hall every Bastille Day for several years. For the last ten years I've earned my living as a caterer; if there is any political issue I feel strongly about it is the politics of food. Giving away food is not a crime, and it seems so pointless to waste a fortune in city funds trying, prosecuting and jailing a person who does it.

I got arrested at the McHenry demonstration in my 18th century gown and hoop skirt; my crime was holding in my hand a tiny poodle tray containing not food, but pastry crumbs. I spent a day in jail, along with my friend Lisa, who also had a tray of crumbs. We might have spent the night, because the computer system in the Hall of Justice was down, and people not booked before 3pm are kept until morning. Fortunately, Peter had called everyone we know and found a savvy friend willing and able to come down and bail us out.



Proust's first book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, is a small collection of hothouse stories of the idle rich, finished when he was in his mid-twenties. The book was illustrated by the society hostess and painter, Madeleine Lemaire, who dabbled along at a snail's pace, prolonging the publication, and featured a preface by Anatole France, a literary hero of the young Marcel and a friend made in the salon life of his later years. Lavishly decorated and printed, the book was expensive, and sold few copies.

Proust continued to write for magazines and *Le Figaro*, and began work on his first novel, *Jean Santeuil*, a practice run for *Remembrance*. Although this novel was quite long, and, like *Remembrance*, had a definite autobiographical quality, it was never published in his lifetime. A fascination with Ruskin led him to undertake a translation of *The Bible of Amiens*, and write articles about him which he had difficulty publishing.



I have written for many magazines over the years, and started more than one novel. Magazines have asked me to write pieces for them, but the subjects that have mattered most to me are the ones that no one has wanted to buy.



Proust's health continued to deteriorate, although he primarily used it as an excuse to avoid unwanted social obligations, and to justify his night-into-day existence. He continued to stay in bed all day, waking in the late afternoon, and entertaining guests in his bedroom in the evening, leaving the house late at night to patronize the grand Parisian cafes.

The death of his father in 1903, and his mother in 1905, gave Proust the luxury to devote his time to writing, and to begin the work for which he'd spent his youth in the careful observation of French society. His friendships with aristocrats and infrequent publications gave him the reputation as a snob and a dilettante, but after the deaths of his parents he moved to his most famous address, 102 Boulevard Haussmann, where his life's real work would begin.

Most of the next 13 years would be spent in the cork-lined bedroom on Boulevard Haussmann, with far fewer appearances in society. When Proust did rise to attend a function, he barraged others with questions about their lives, lineage, clothes, and numerous other details that would fill in the holes of his work in progress. Proust retained a staff in his household, a succession of male secretaries and a driver who would convey him to events, to the location of a subject about which he was currently writing, or to dine at the Ritz. Although he saw friends more infrequently than before, he maintained his relationships through active and effusive correspondences. One biographer suggested that Proust's correspondences, often requiring numerous exchanges before an engagement could be determined, put off the necessity of leaving home and socializing.



The years of my life spent in North Beach, and the years in Los Angeles, were notoriously social. In Santa Monica, it was my house that functioned as a social meeting place, but in North Beach it was the cafe life that established my social presence. When I moved to this grand old house in the middle city, built by a family of architects for themselves in 1902, I no longer felt the need to socialize so much. My household, six charming and talented friends, provides so much good company that I feel little need to seek it out. For years we threw at least one huge party every few months; now we have cut back to a social season from Halloween to Twelfth Night, with the annual Proust Wake in between, and a few birthday celebrations scattered through the year. I attend less and less social events, preferring often to stay in the redwood paneled back parlor of home, staring at the computer.

I have several beloved friends who live within a few miles from my door, but the obligations of work, families, creative endeavors and other concerns keep us from many visits. Several of us are more likely to

put a letter in the mail than to play tag-you're-it on the answering machines, or to stay perfectly in touch via email.



By 1912, Proust had finished the first 800 pages of *Remembrance*, the two books entitled *Swann's Way* and *Within a Budding Grove*, and began to seek a publisher. The details of this part of his life are covered on page 7, the tale of *Rotten Rejections*.

During the last nine years of his life, Proust was attended by Celeste Albaret, the wife of his driver, Odilon. Celeste's function was to stand by Proust's bedside frequently through the night to converse, to deliver messages, to paste together the scraps of writing that comprised his untyped manuscripts, to deal with the visitors who came to Boulevard Haussmann, and to bring him his coffee, one of the few things he consumed in the last years of his life, and the only thing he permitted to be prepared in the kitchen.

Proust had a chronic distrust of doctors, and rarely took their advice. He refused to enter a clinic for treatment, insisting that Celeste was the only person he would allow to care for him, and that his own curative measures were more appropriate than the doctor's prescriptions. He died on November 18, 1922. A few hours before the end, he asked someone to get him a cold beer from the Ritz, but it arrived too late; his last meal was a cup of coffee.



I was born on November 18, although not in 1922. I share Proust's attitude towards doctors, even though one of them has saved me from a nasty incident earlier this year. On the whole, I have found the care of my beloved acupuncturist, Carol Francois, considerably more valuable. When I first became her patient, a series of medicos had told me that surgery alone could cure an annoying and recurrent disorder. Carol made it go away, with funny cupping glasses, painless needles, and inexpensive Chinese pills. I only wish Proust had met an acupuncturist; he might have lived to write again.



*in La Buhoreche  
in Shoe Perdu  
by andy Warhol*



*Shoe Poems by ralph ramsey*

*A fashionable milieu is one in which everybody's opinion is made up of the same opinion of all the others. Has everybody a different opinion? Then it is a literary milieu.*

*-Pleasures and Regrets*

# Even Proust Got Rejected

Nearly everyone who has ever attempted to have their writing published has received one of those unattractive letters of rejection. The hardy will try again, and no doubt get another, and another, and another, if not for the quality, then for the subject, or their timing.

Disgust at the opening of rejection letters can go on for so long, and then some of us decide that there is an alternative to these tiresome postal expenses resulting in disagreeable variations on the no. We print our own work, and go through the slightly less painful process of finding venues that will take it. I am very proud of one aspect of my self-publishing attempts; I have yet to show PST to a bookstore that refused to carry it.

A few months back. I found a small book called *Rotten Rejections*. In it are letters of rejection (or sections thereof) received by some of the world's most famous writers, not the least of whom is our Marcel. His biographers had, of course, mentioned the difficulty Proust experienced in finding a willing publisher for the beginning books of *Remembrance*, and Proust's decision to self-publish, information that inspired me to stop sending out manuscripts and start printing this instead.

The editor who assembled *Rotten Rejections*, André Bernard, included the following delightful bit about Proust's difficulties with the world of publishing:

*"In 1911 Marcel Proust had 800 pages of what was ultimately to become the huge complex of novels called *Remembrance of Things Past* ready for publication. Where? Who would accept such an actionless, plotless sprawl of innerness revisited? He approached the house of Fasquelle and was rejected. He went to the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and was rejected again, by a very special rejecter—the celebrated André Gide. After a third publisher, Ollendorf, had refused his manuscript ... Proust decided to pay for publication himself.*



A LITERARY COMPANION

EDITED BY ANDRÉ BERNARD  
INTRODUCTION BY BILL HENDERSON

Eugene Grasset published *Du Cote de chez Swann (Swann's Way)* in November 1913. Gide read it, and the following January wrote to Proust apologizing for the rejection, which he called the 'gravest error of the N.R.F.... one of the most burning regrets, remorses, of my life.' He explained that he had considered Proust a 'snob' and a 'social butterfly,' had only glanced at his manuscript, and had been unimpressed by what he had glimpsed. He asked pardon and the two became good friends."

Here are excerpts from two of the rejection letters received by Proust:

*"My dear fellow, I may be dead from the neck up, but rack my brains as I may I can't see why a chap should need thirty pages to describe how he turns over in bed before going to sleep."*

*"I only troubled myself so far as to open one of the notebooks of your manuscripts; I opened it at random, and as ill luck would have it, my attention soon plunged into the cup of camomile tea on page 62— then tripped, at page 64, on the phrase... where you speak of the 'visible vertebra of a forehead.' "*

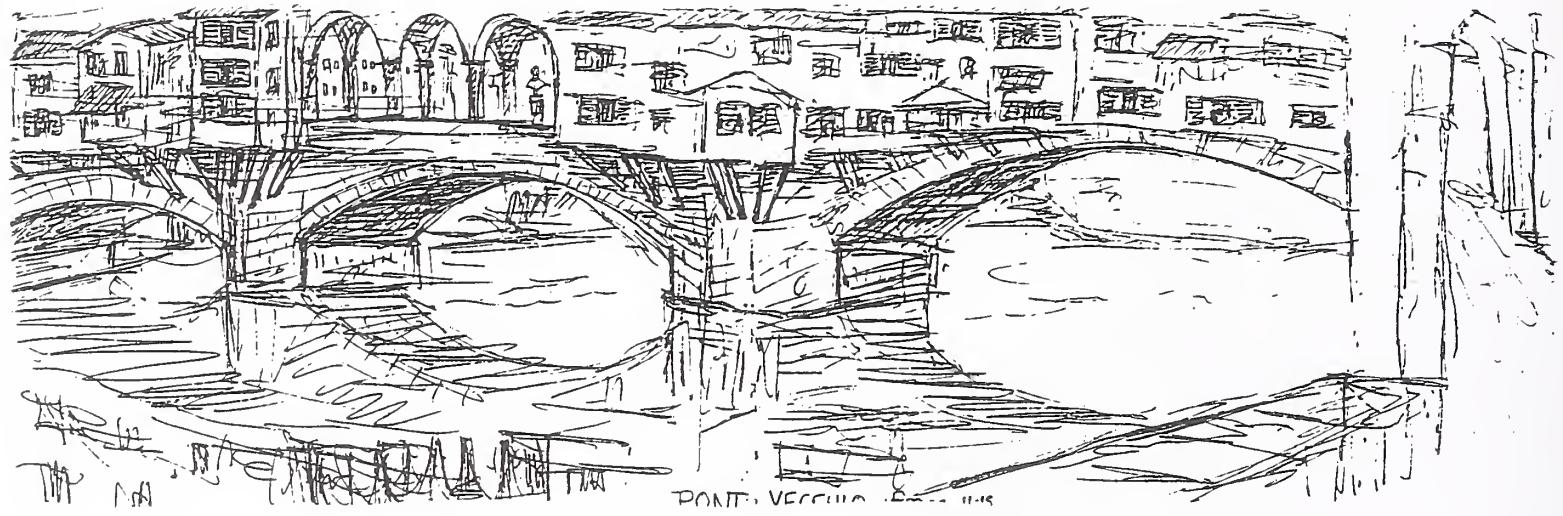
*Rotten Rejections* is a most amusing read for anyone who has ever attempted to get their writing published; few of its contents were more amusing, though, than the rejection memo to an undisclosed author from a Chinese economic journal, clearly an indication of a cultural adherence to politeness, unknown in the world of western publishing:

*"We have read your manuscript with boundless delight. If we publish your paper, it would be impossible for us to publish any work of lower standard. And as it is unthinkable that in the next thousand years we shall see its equal, we are, to our regret, compelled to return your divine composition, and to beg you a thousand times to overlook our short sight and timidity."*



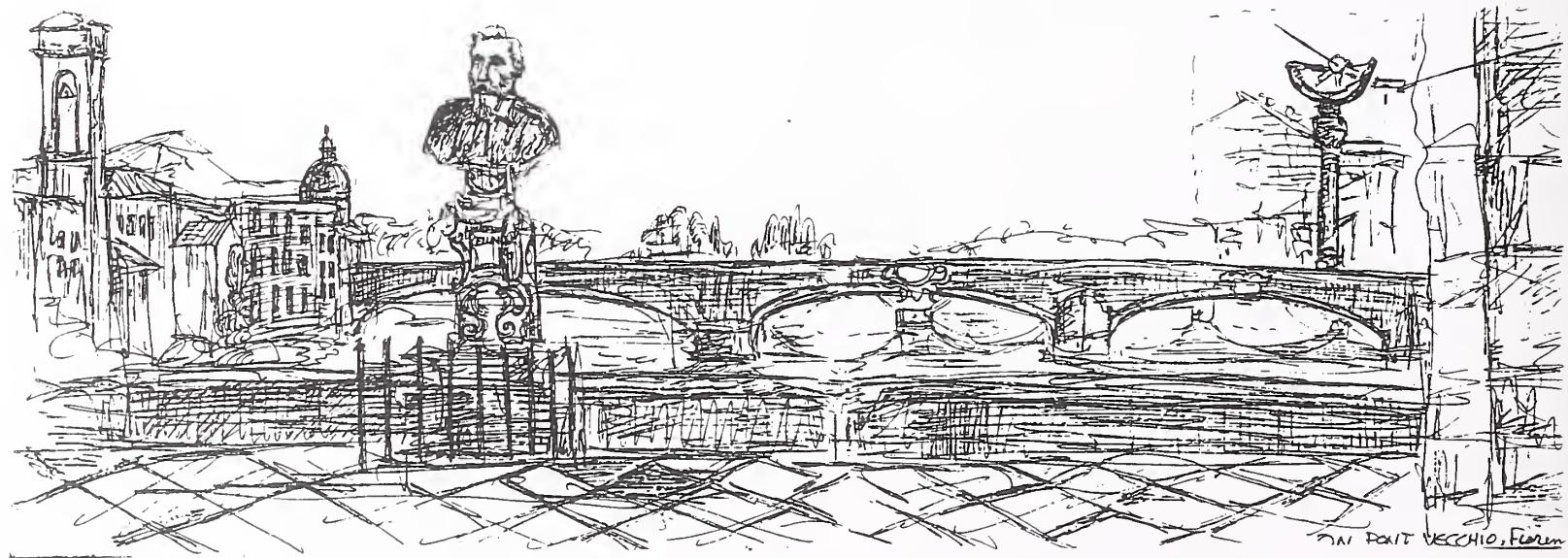
# The Narrator Dreams of Florence

Drawings by Dean Gustafson



*"I reflected that already the Ponte Vecchio was heaped high with an abundance of hyacinths and anemones.."*

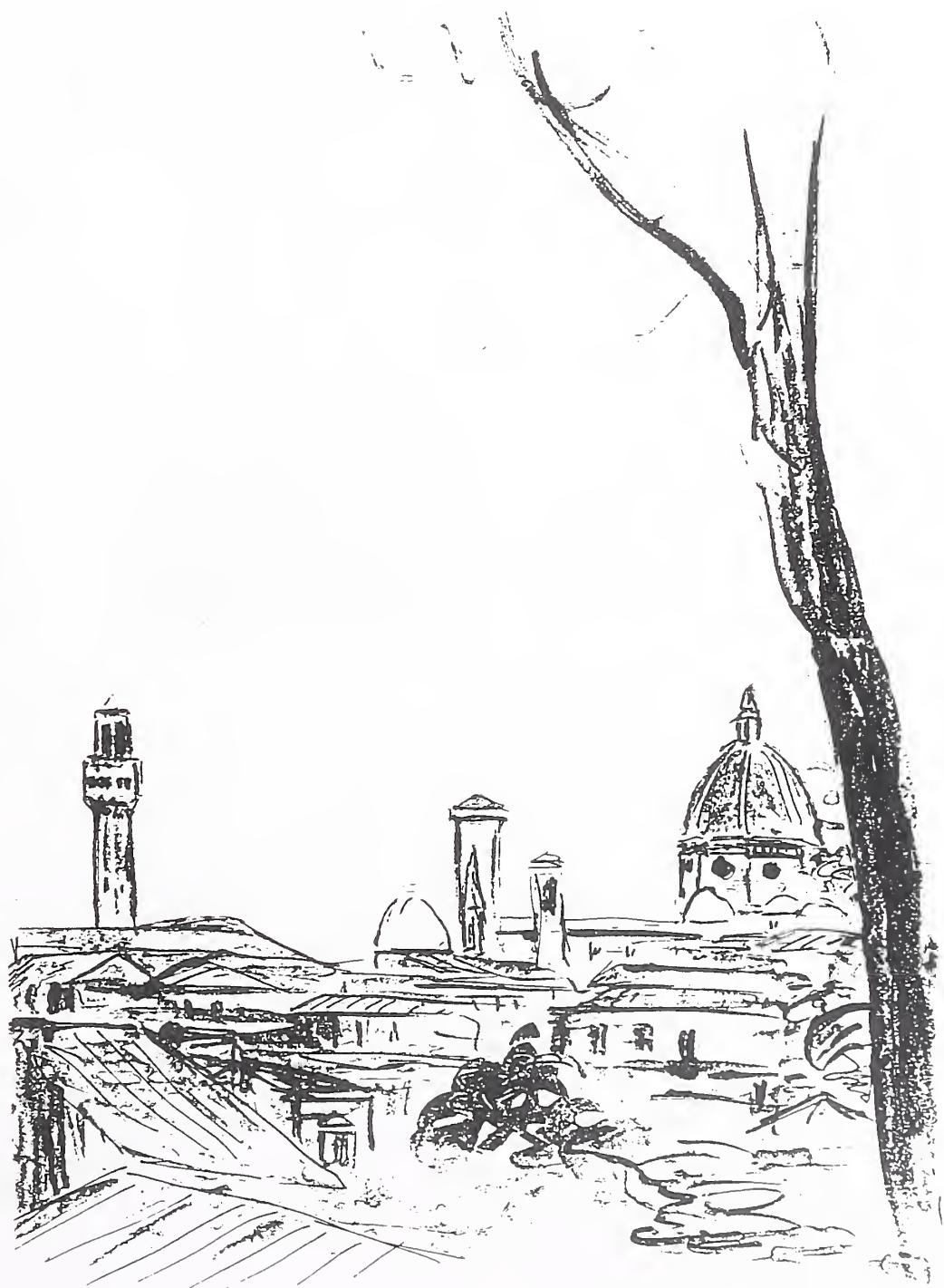
*-Swann's Way*





*...these visions of Florence, of which the desire they excited in me retained something as profoundly personal as if it had been love, love for a person...*

*-Swann's Way*



# The Infamous Proust Questionnaire

In the back pages of *Vanity Fair* each month, readers find The Proust Questionnaire, a series of questions posed to famous subjects about their lives, thoughts, values and experience. A regular reference to Proust in such a major publication struck me as remarkable, and it was only until I'd read Andre Maurois's *Proust: Portrait of a Genius* that I understood what this was all about.

The young Marcel was asked to fill out questionnaires at two social events. one when he was 13, another when he was 20. Proust did not invent this party game; he is simply the most extraordinary person to respond to them. At the birthday party of Antoinette Felix-Fauré, the 13-year-old Marcel was asked to answer the following questions in the birthday book, and here's what he said:

What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

*To be separated from Mama*

Where would you like to live?

*In the country of the Ideal, or, rather, of my ideal*

What is your idea of earthly happiness?

*To live in contact with those I love, with the beauties of nature, with a quantity of books and music, and to have, within easy distance, a French theater*

To what faults do you feel most indulgent?

*To a life deprived of the works of genius*

Who are your favorite heroes of fiction?

*Those of romance and poetry, those who are the expression of an ideal rather than an imitation of the real*

Who are your favorite characters in history?

*A mixture of Socrates, Pericles, Mahomet, Pliny the Younger and Augustin Thierry*

Who are your favorite heroines in real life?

*A woman of genius leading an ordinary life*

Who are your favorite heroines of fiction?

*Those who are more than women without ceasing to be womanly; everything that is tender, poetic, pure and in every way beautiful*

Your favorite painter?

*Meissonier*

Your favorite musician?

*Mozart*

The quality you most admire in a man?

*Intelligence, moral sense*

The quality you most admire in a woman?

*Gentleness, naturalness, intelligence*

Your favorite virtue?

*All virtues that are not limited to a sect: the universal virtues*

Your favorite occupation?

*Reading, dreaming, and writing verse*

Who would you have liked to be?

*Since the question does not arise, I prefer not to answer it. All the same, I should very much have liked to be Pliny the Younger.*



Proust at 13

This questionnaire tells us much about two things, the character of petit Marcel, and the amusement of the young in the Belle Epoque. We see Marcel as a sweet and dreamy Mama's boy, brainy, aesthetic, a young citizen of the world with much sympathy for the feminine. What he sees in Pliny the Younger, famous only for speaking and writing letters, is hard to grasp.

What is fascinating about this questionnaire is that it was considered so great an amusement to very young people in Proust's time. It is hard to imagine a party of 13-year-olds in these times being quizzed about their favorite

virtues, painters or characters of fiction and history. If the questionnaire were not to smack of exam, it would have to ask "what's your favorite TV show?" or "what's your favorite band?"

Seven years after the first questionnaire, Proust was asked, at another social event, to fill out another; the questions are much the same, but the answers somewhat different, indicative of his traits at 20:

Your most marked characteristic?

*A craving to be loved, or, to be more precise, to be caressed and spoiled rather than to be admired*

The quality you most like in a man?

*Feminine charm*

The quality you most like in a woman?

*A man's virtues, and frankness in friendship*

What do you most value in your friends?

*Tenderness—provided they possess a physical*

charm which makes their tenderness worth having

What is your principle defect?

*Lack of understanding; weakness of will*

What is your favorite occupation?

*Loving*

What is your dream of happiness?

*Not, I fear, a very elevated one. I really haven't the courage to say what it is, and if I did I should probably destroy it by the mere fact of putting it into words.*

What to your mind would be the greatest of misfortunes?

*Never to have known my mother or my grandmother*

What would you like to be?

*Myself—as those whom I admire would like me to be*

In what country would you like to live?

*One where certain things that I want would be realized—and where feelings of tenderness would always be reciprocated.*

(Proust's underlining)

What is your favorite color?

*Beauty lies not in colors but in their harmony*

What is your favorite flower?

*Hers—but apart from that, all*

What is your favorite bird?

*The swallow*

Who are your favorite prose writers?

*At the moment, Anatole France and Pierre Loti*

Who are your favorite poets?

*Baudelaire and Alfred de Vigny*

Who is your favorite hero of fiction?

*Hamlet*

Who are your favorite heroines of fiction?

*Phedre (crossed out) Bérénice*

Who are your favorite composers?

*Beethoven, Wagner, Shuhmann*

Who are your favorite painters?

*Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt*

Who are your heroes in real life?

*Monsieur Darlu, Monsieur Boutroux (professors)*

Who are your favorite heroines of history?

*Cleopatra*

What are your favorite names?

*I only have one at a time*

What is it you most dislike?

*My own worst qualities*

What historical figures do you most despise?

*I am not sufficiently educated to say*

What event in military history do you most admire?

*My own enlistment as a volunteer!*

What reform do you most admire?

(no response)

What natural gift would you most like to possess?

*Will power and irresistible charm*

How would you like to die?

*A better man than I am, and much beloved*

What is your present state of mind?

*Annoyance at having to think about myself in order to answer these questions*

To what faults do you feel most indulgent?

*Those that I understand*

What is your motto?

*I prefer not to say, for fear it might bring me bad luck.*



Proust in his early 20's

The second set of questions and answers give us Proust as a young man, mad for conquest, drawn to love crossing conventional sexual lines, still fixated on Mama. His aesthetic

sensibilities have grown more serious (I, however, would not give up Mozart for Schumann, with all his interminable faux endings.) In these responses are early threads of character found in the narrator of *Remembrance*.

## The Vanity Fair Story...

When the editors of *Vanity Fair* gathered to discuss a regular interview format for coming issues, one staff member suggested creating a "Vanity Fair Questionnaire." The magazine's London editor, Henry Porter, and Editor-in-Chief Graydon Carter, brought up the idea of the Proust Questionnaire, which met with the hearty approval of the numerous Proust afficianados on the staff. Senior Editor Aimée Bell, a fan herself, took on the task of researching and producing this feature, with the assistance of the University of Kansas professor Theodore Johnson, a noted authority on Proust. Since July of 1993, a major celebrity has responded to a version of the questionnaire, found in the back pages of each issue.

I mentioned to Ms. Bell that I had not dared to contact Professor Johnson, or any of the other university Proustians, because my own work was so unacademic. "Why?" she said, "Proust would have liked it."



# The Burning Man Responds...

I've always wanted to write about my friend Larry Harvey, who I often introduce, to his embarrassment, as Mr. Burning Man. The Burning Man, when we met, was an arty attraction of San Francisco's creative underground; Larry and his friend Jerry James had begun, four years before, constructing a human figure from scrap wood, taking it to Baker Beach on the summer solstice, and burning it against the ocean sunset. The first Burning Man captivated an audience of unexpecting passers-by, and so a second, larger Man was burned the next summer solstice for the delight of friends. The third year drew a bigger crowd for a Man of forty feet, but oddly engineered, and for the fourth year, a perfected structure was devised.

In the late summer after the third burning, I met Jerry James at another curious event, the clever Mel Fry's Wind Sculpture Festival in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, the largest empty space in North America, 400 square miles of absolutely nothing but sky and the cracked clay floor of an ancient lake, devoid of vegetation, water, pebbles, beasts or bugs. The price of admittance to the festival was an entry, something that moved in the wind. My party, my housemates Kevin and Miss Dawn, our friend Cyndy and I, created a PVC, chicken wire and fabric canopy bed on wheels, with canopy sails to propell it across the flat expanses of the massive site. People laughed when they saw us building it, but were suitably impressed when it moved almost as well as the beautiful works of Mel Fry.

We spoke to Jerry about the Burning Man; we'd heard of it, but never been, and on the next solstice the four of us made a definite point of showing up, along with a few hundred others. So, unfortunately, did the police. There would be no more burnings at Baker Beach. The crowd grew frenzied with disappointment, but all of us who'd been to the Black Rock approached

Harvey immediately with the same idea: *let's take it out there..*

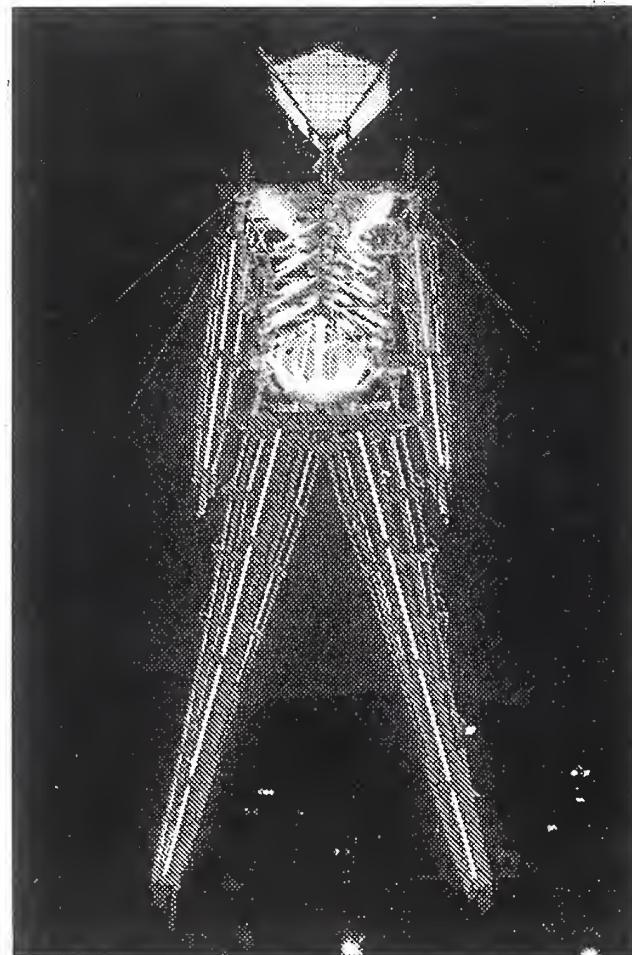
My friends in the San Francisco Cacophony Society made it possible to transport the elegant 40' figure to this other-worldly site 100 miles north of Reno.

Cacophony has staged numerous events with the aid of Ryder trucks, relentless labor and derring do; the Man was stored and hauled out on Labor Day weekend that year, followed by less than 100 of us, armed with ourtuxedos and cocktail dresses, gin and vermouth, a full drum set for Dean Gustafson's sophisticated solo as the Man approacheddemise, tents, sleeping bags, and the Winnebago Cyndy got for us, in which I catered for the fledgling staff.

We went again the second year with twice as many others, and the third year with twice that, and a Man with a glorious blue neon skeleton fashioned by the extraordinary John Law. Each year, the crowd exponentially doubled, more musicians brought their instruments, more

artists brought installations, more entertaining events were added to the schedule; word of this still underground extravaganza made it across the world, bringing a wicker sculptrress from England, a journalist from Europe, film crews from South America, Australia and America from the second year on. Last year's event was filmed for documentaries by PBS and HBO, and the PBS film was nominated for an academy award.

We know of nearly a hundred articles that have been written about this desert experience; I wrote one of the first for a now defunct magazine, *The City*, which was plagiarized from the press kit by dozens of others. We were immensely gratified by a beautiful piece that appeared in last October 1994's *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, but it took until this fall for any of the local publications to write about it at all, and most of them still have not.



# To the Proust Questionnaire

This year there were between 4000 and 5500 people in this instant community in the desert, depending on who you ask. If you ask the BLM, the government agency that will collect a fee for every head they counted in their helicopter surveillance, it was more. If you ask Larry Harvey, who requests an admission fee to cover the construction, insurance, BLM fees, potties, newsletters, preliminary exhibitions in San Francisco, phone calls across the world and so on, it was less.

Out there, a good drive from the tiny town of Gerlach (population 250, 5 bars), we recreate society for ourselves, casting aside a refreshing percentage of the rules we must observe in ordinary life. Some kind of artistic anarchy prevails here, but with a few necessary rules: don't irritate anyone, don't discharge firearms in camp, don't dig holes in the playa, pick up your trash, and have a sense of humor.

The desert atmosphere, when the wind doesn't blow, or lightning isn't striking, bakes you in fabulous serenity. It is like being in a gigantic room with a cracked clay floor and very blue, or starry black, ceiling; we, our vehicles, tents and installations, are the furniture. If you walk alone a mile from the farthest reaching suburbs of camp, especially under moonlight, you feel suddenly, absolutely, alone with the powers that be, absorbing magic from the cosmos.

Civilization, out there, retains the best of city life: radio stations, art, a daily newspaper created on computers and xerox machines in tow, and this year's coffee house which I operated in the center of the great circle marked out by the advance team. The circle was ringed by theme camps created by participants from all over the country: the Bigfoot Mall brought by Portland Cacophony, Toyland and Halloween Camp from LA Cacophony, the Twin Towers camp installed by escapees from The Big

Apple, our wild friend Flash's bar and grill, McSatan's Beefstro, a gathering of art cars, including Harrod Blank's "OHMYGAWD!", a massive structure of twigs housing Dream Circus, a band of mimes and exotic fire dancers, the wonderful Mangrums' Tiki Camp, where the bar's blenders ran day and night serving anyone who brought a contribution, and nearly a dozen others.

Passing through the amusements of central camp were the citizens of Burning Man City, persons of varying ages and appearances, many of whom would look normal enough anywhere else, others in outrageous guises, plenty in no guises at all beyond body paint, or maybe a slight strip of cheesecloth, a man in nothing more than a gun holster, cowboy boots and hat. Many of us meet again each year out here, and meet many newcomers, painted, costumed, naked or not.

A thousand or more campsites appeared around the great circle, housing an instant town with more inhabitants than the entire Nevada county. In it were the Black Rock Rangers, our peace-keepers and problem-

solvers, the lamplighters who illuminated the lanterns on avenues marked by tall wooden spires, a medical team, radio crew, newspaper staff and numerous others who manned the gate, kept the power going, organized the camp and the function at the burn, installed and prepared the Man, and the Man itself, this year embellished with an ornate blue neon skeleton on the camp side, and a red neon, feminine equivalent on the other. Leading out to the Man, the Avenue of Art began with the large pyramid housing a camera obscura, one of eight in the world, developed and brought by our friends Chris DeMonterrey and Dave Warren.

Throughout the day and night, performers appear on the cabaret stage next to the cafe, a lot of fire, drums, Magenta of the Wickett Museum of Exotica( classical belly dancer balancing an illuminated candelabra on

*...I found myself once more in an unknown world, and everything that followed only confirmed my knowledge, that this world was one of those which I had never even been capable of imagining...*

*-The Captive*

her head), and other exotic forms. Polkacide. The unbelievable Three Day Stubble.

On the Sunday night of the weekend, the Man and his neon exoskeletons glows in the haloes of fireworks, raises its arms to the heavens, falls immolated, reduced to a massive heap of cinders, not one of which will remain on the desert floor, nor any other shred of evidence that we were there. Much of the crowd is drawn by the burn into neo-pagan whooping and prancing, then moves to the torching of Pepe Ozan's gorgeous lingam, a massive, virtually erotic sculpture made of chicken wire and clay for more of same, and goes on to party all night.

Several years ago, Harvey related the spectacle of the Burning Man to the mystery religions of 5th century Greece and other civilizations. These mysteries were not about a teaching, he said, they were about a shared experience. Like Burning Man, the mysteries involved encampment, fire, sacrifice, a visionary spectacle, an egalitarian organization, revelry, and the recruitment of an urban population. They were about a direct experience, not a doctrinal belief, and based on a myth of death and rebirth.

The staff of Burning Man has grown to hundreds; I no longer know and love all of them, as in our first trip out there, nor can I, in this short piece, credit very many. I can't help but mention, however, the curious development in this year's organizational effort: a large percentage of the major organizers was women. My charming friend Harley Biermann-Werwe brought together the camp's center, and the remarkable Vanessa Kummerle relieved the mythic Danger Ranger of heading this year's Rangers. The endless entertainments were managed by the exotic Crimson Rose, the battery of media reps by the capable Eileen Hoyt.

I can't fail to credit the people who brought Burning Man to the world's attention on the World Wide Web, my fabulous friends Cynsa Bonorris and Jeffrey Gray, who have done the same favor for *Proust Said That*. Half their time at the desert was spent at a computer in a motel room in Gerlach, keeping the world apprised of developments. Many other Web sites feature the Burning Man, but Cynsa and Jeffrey's was voted best site on the Web.

Every year, even before we pack up and eliminate the traces of Burning Man City, most of us begin to live, to some degree, in the days of the future Man, engaged in visions of what we can manifest in the next year. Mine is for a perfect cafe, which in the late night hours, is filled with flamenco musicians, and the desert, like Larry's dream, becomes an al fresco museum of exquisite arts. Already the theme of the coming year rises for planning and creation: we are going to enter Dante's Inferno.



I decided that I could bring the exploits of Larry Harvey into *Proust Said That* by asking him to take the Proust Questionnaire. So a few weeks after we'd gotten back from the desert and had some time to decompress, attending numerous events at which we gathered to hear the stories of everything we'd missed, see the photos, slides and videos, and relive the experience, he came over to Proust Headquarters, and we sat at the kitchen table to get on with it. I had copies of both questionnaires, and started with the one Proust answered at 13.



Larry Harvey's Hat

P: What do you consider the greatest depth of misery?  
Larry: To suffer alone without faith.  
P: Where would you like to live?  
Larry: I'd love to live on another planet for a while.

P: What is your idea of earthly happiness?  
P: (Giving up after minutes of unexpected silence) Your most marked characteristic?  
Larry: My hat.

Mercedes has been making dinner: she offers us some, and I get up to throw together a salad. Larry picks up the lists of questions and goes through them on his own.

Larry: My favorite hero of fiction? Decoud in *Nostromo*. Favorite occupation? ...Smoking and talking. ... Oh, thanks. ..What would I have liked to be? ....Everything. Dream of happiness? ...A warm place on a cold night.  
Mercedes: Some gravy?  
Larry: Thanks. My principle defect? The competition is too fierce among my many defects.

I'd rather not take sides. My favorite flower is the lupin; a survivor. It grows at sea level and timberline. Favorite bird? Ravens, bluejays and crows. The swallow is sweet, too. Prose writers... John Updike, Conrad, Henry James and William James, Darwin for the last page of *Origin of the Species*, Freud on melancholy, Tom Wolfe, George Elliot. Dickens...

P: Have you read Thomas Mann?

Larry: Oh, yes, Mann for Felix.... Felix... Mendelsohn. No... Felix... the cat! Felix...

P: Krull.

Larry: Yes. Nathaniel West for *Day of the Locust*, Flannery O'Connor. This is stupid, there are plenty more... Poets? Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Harte Crane, Robinson Jeffers, Shakespeare... and I'm haunted by two poems by Empson... He was the weirdest guy in the world, had a very long beard that grew only under his chin. He was an Oxford don. Let's see....

P: Salad? ...Your favorite composer?

Larry: I have many tastes but few opinions. I wouldn't dignify them as but they don't have the quality of opinions.

P: Your favorite painters?

Larry: Corot, Beckmann... Hopper...

P: How about you, Mercedes?

Mercedes: That German... Marc.

P: I love Franz Marc.

Larry: Oh, yeah. Add Marc. I apologise to all the painters I've overlooked.

Paul: (our glassblower roommate who's just joined us) William Wegman.

Larry: I think we can make Hiroshige count... There ought to be a question about filmmakers.

P: O.K.... Who's your favorite filmmaker?

Larry: Orson Welles, Sidney Lumet, early and middle Hitchcock, early and middle Fellini... early and middle... what's his name... there's another one...

Paul: I saw Werner Herzog at the Roxie last week...

Larry: Kubrick!

P: Mercedes?

Mercedes: Wim Wenders... Kurosawa...

Larry: Early and middle Bergman... early and middle Antonioni, seems to be a pattern, doesn't it? Let's see... Who are my heroes in real life? Increasingly, as time goes on, my friends. Heroines of history? It's hard to say. I don't want to create ill will, so I'll do it by category... Congeniality: Doris Day. Joan of Arc, failed congeniality, but she filled a

suit of armor. And to all those I've slighted for this title, I apologise. Favorite names? I love all names. There, I've offended no one. What is it that I most dislike? Smothering and abandonment. I just don't seem to be able to get comfortable...

P: This is delicious. Thanks!

Larry: Which historical characters do I despise? Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger praying. I admire? Those that require more than admiration.... What natural gift would I most like to possess? I'd like to dance like Fred Astaire.... How would I like to die??? No, thank you! What is my present state of mind? When I know, I am it, then I forget. To what faults do I feel most indulgent? All my own. Is that it?

P: What is your motto?

Larry: Jump while you can.

P: What qualities do you like in a woman?

Larry: Eyes, ears, nose and face in general. Brain, butt, thighs, spirit, skin, all kinds of connections, but chiefly... (he smiles) wait a minute, I haven't finished... two principle organs that pump blood.

P: In a man?

Larry: Beards.

Larry thought the Proust Questionnaire was fun, and so very French. "They loved the bon mot," he said, "they're good at it. This is like training."



Larry Harvey by Harley Biermann-Werwe

# Sviatoslav Richter: The World's Greatest Pianist Travels With Proust

The wonderful person and superb painter I married when I was very young, Alex Segal, has been telling me since we met about his musical idol, the Russian pianist Sviatoslav Richter, and his portrait of Richter has hung for years at the entrance to Marcel Proust Support Group Headquarters.

Richter's artistry is well known throughout the world. The Soviets were so proud of him that he was allowed to tour as much as he desired. He came a few times to the United States, beginning in the early 60's, playing in several cities. Unfortunately, during a tour in the early '70s, his performance was heckled by angry demonstrators protesting certain policies of the Soviet government. This bizarre rudeness so annoyed Richter that he refused to perform in the United States again.

We do have hundreds of records, tapes and CDs available of Richter's work, a treasure, playing of an impeccable, unmannered profundity. This issue of PST has been produced largely while listening to the new Richter Bach CD (Sonate, Toccata, Fantasie, Capriccio, Duette, Italianische Konzert) a rare import on the German Classics Live label; of all composers I know, I find Bach most conducive to thought, and Richter's Bach is strong, for strong thought.

I've always known that Richter has a particular attraction for French culture; for the last 30 years, even under the thumb of the USSR, he has produced

an annual summer music festival in Tours, in the rambling, medieval Grange de Mesley. When Richter found this place in 1963, it was used as a storage place for corn grown in the fields of Touraine, and it remains, between the annual events, an agrarian storehouse. Performers from around the world have played with Richter there to international audiences.

Recently, in the liner notes of two Classics Live releases, the Bach and another with works by Chopin and Scriabin, we've come to find out that Richter, besides being one of the world's most revered musicians, is extremely knowlege-able about French literature, and particularly a fan of Proust. In the liner notes to the Bach CD I found a charming piece entitled "On Concert Tour With Maestro" by Konstanze Hortnagel. "We covered large distances," she writes, "from Constance to Kiel, using bumpy cobble-stone roads... Time was ours and our tempo was the

leisurely one of the '30s. Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann were our companions..."

The second telling CD, which includes four Chopin Polonaises and four works by Scriabin, also has reference to Richter's knowledge of Proust in the liner notes. The author, George Schneider, published a book about Richter, *Sviatoslav Richter, eine Reise durch Sibiren* in 1992, and the liner notes culled from his introduction tell us this: "He is familiar with the most significant pages of the world's literature. His knowledge, or even more, his understanding of French

*...his playing is that of so fine a pianist that one is no longer aware that the performer is a pianist at all, because his playing has become so transparent, so imbued by what he is interpreting, that one no longer sees the performer himself—he is simply a window opening upon a great work of art.*

*-The Guermantes Way*



Alex Segal's portrait of Richter

literature (Montaigne, Racine, or Proust) even leaves a French discussion partner dumbfounded..."

Very recently, Phillips produced a major 22-CD set of previously unreleased Richter performances (not the greatest, perhaps, but a must-have for Richter fans.) The set is accompanied by a beautiful book of photos taken at Tours, of the Grange, and of Richter playing there, and text of a most laudatory sort. By curious coincidence, this book was photographed by a person named Gérard Proust.



Cynsa Bonorris made this new Proust stamp based on the cover of *Proust Said That* #3 by Lance Alexander.

## A CHARMING REVIEW FROM THE ON-LINE UTNE READER

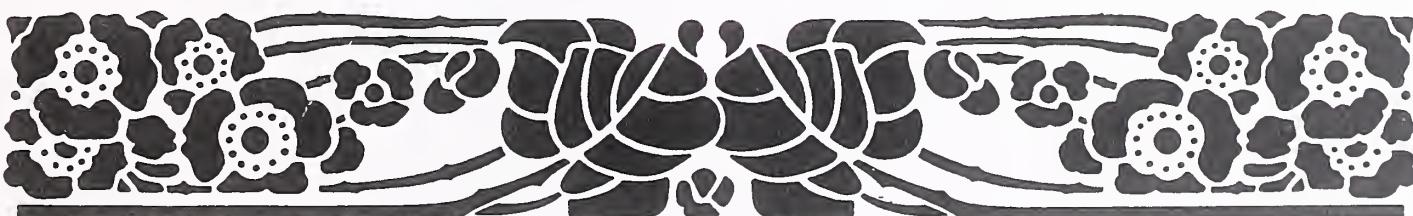
From the Utne Lens, the on-line version of the *Utne Reader*, September 1995

If you've ever attempted, for love or for scholarship, to wade through a volume of Proust, you'll understand the impulse of "P," and her San Francisco art-house friends: They organized The Marcel Proust Support Group, and slogged through *Remembrance of Things Past* at the rate of ten pages a day. Be glad they did, for the resulting off-shoot, P's fanzine *Proust Said That*, is one of the most entertaining and clever zines to come churning out of Kinko's.

P sprinkles her newsletter with brief historical footnotes illuminating Proust's work (and with delightful pen-and-ink drawings by Dean Gustafson—of Madeleines, of course, and of Proustian scenes in Paris). Democratically intended for both Proustians and "fans of serious literature who shrug him off as ... a prissy purveyor of purple prose," **PROUST SAID THAT** ends up being much more, and much better than a mere author's fan club.

Over the course of several issues, as P almost daintily explores and uncovers her obsession with her literary hero, the zine becomes — as the best do — a confessional, and does so — as few do — with an elegant style. P, though somewhat flowery, is a capable writer: Her account of preparing candied orange peel is as interesting and enjoyable as the tale of her spelunking excursion into the sewers of San Fran; through her fine eye, she transforms her rag-tag San Francisco set (which includes a covey of "Cacophonists") into characters in a neo-Edwardian adventure.

— Joseph Hart



# Looking For Combray

text and photographs by J. Patrick Kelley

In June 1994 I visited the small town in central France that Proust used as a model for Combray, one of the most important of the narrator's childhood vacation homes in *A la Recherche du temps perdu*. Originally called Illiers, the village was renamed Illiers-Combray during the Proust centennial in 1972.

Illiers-Combray today does not pretend to be more than it is, a small village two hours south-west of Paris that, if the train didn't stop there, would be lost in a sea of wheat and corn. The excitement of the Proust centennial is barely detectable now, and the town is struggling to make the transition from agriculture to light industry. The buildings in the center of town are old and pleasingly foreign to the suburban American palate with a taste for the exotic, and the pace of village life is pleasant and calming after two weeks of having sensibilities bruised by the attractions and pace of Paris. But these old buildings are inscrutable and forbidding too. On many of the narrow streets the house facades look worn and anonymous, and have been built using plans and materials that are no longer in sync with the rest of the mechanized world—the cars parked up on the sidewalks.

Hard to say what I was looking for, visiting the Combray of *A la Recherche*. Some closeness to the artist perhaps, just like the pilgrims to Graceland or Jim Morrison's grave or Monet's garden at Giverny. You think that if you stand in the actual place, perhaps some of the artist's magic will touch you, and a small fraction of their creative insight will somehow be yours. The motivation may also be very similar to what brings us to visit a place like the cathedral at Chartres, where I'd stood just the day before and felt the power of the past in the arching twelfth-century stone and sculpture and glass. The strong sense of place, and the beauty of the art and architecture, allowed me to feel, if only briefly, that many of the things we worry

about—trivial things like lost luggage or how to buy a watch battery in French, as well as more important things like death, aloneness, and existential dread—didn't matter, couldn't touch me.

As it turns out, there are actually two trips to Illiers-Combray to talk about: one that I made that day, a hot day in late June, the pilgrim's journey: camera, map, guidebook, curiosity, fatigue; and the second journey that I make now as I write and revisit, without really trying to, many of the themes in Proust's novel: memory, creativity, time, love.

In some ways both of these journeys are part of a hopeless but unavoidable trick that we frequently like to play on ourselves. Proust evokes a childhood that is so vivid and moving and familiar. We walk along the streets of Illiers-Combray to look for some of what the artist has evoked in us. We don't find it. Just as the places of our own childhood seem impossibly small and flat, lacking in some important dimension when we revisit them, so too does this town of the narrator's

childhood. What we're looking for is inside us of course, and not in this strange place, which explains the inevitability of the disappointment, although not entirely why we're continually surprised by it.

For even when Proust was writing, Combray the place did not exist except as a creative reconstruction of experiences and emotions the author himself was struggling to recreate and understand. Proust only spent Easter vacations in Illiers, even though many of the Combray passages have the psychic volume turned up so high that the narrator makes it sound like he spent his entire childhood in those houses, streets, and gardens. And some of the details of the fictional Combray were taken from other places Proust lived. My spouse and I have arrived by chance on market day, and the small town square is jammed with trucks and wagons selling produce, meat, and clothes. The



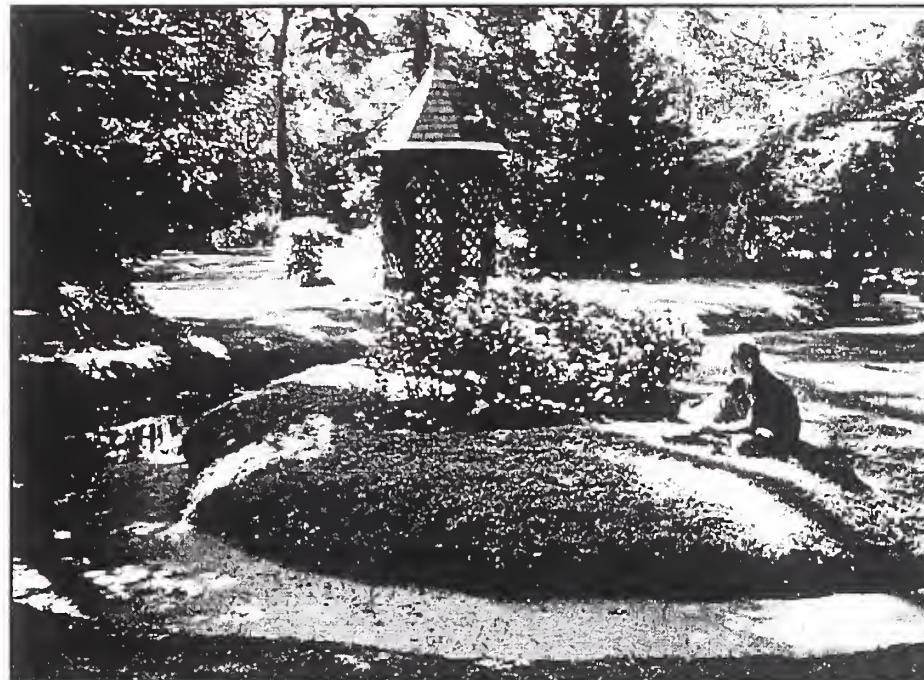
Illiers-Combray

guidebook says you can find a map, an *Itinéraire Proustien*, at the local booksellers. But it is crudely printed and only marginally helpful, with ads for what must be every business in town on the back. I want something more, and the woman who owns the shop reassures me gallantly about my fractured college French while urging that I part with 40 francs for a French-language volume called *Le Parfum de Combray*. The book, subtitled “a Proustian Pilgrimage,” is an appreciation of the town of Illiers written in the 1940s by P.L. Archer. Archer’s writing style has something of the same poetic and incantatory quality as the prose of the master himself, and the book has well-chosen quotes from *A la Recherche* on almost every page.

It may have been the heat; it may have been that the buildings and streets didn’t reverberate with meaning as I had expected them to; but for whatever reason we headed straight for the little green park-like blotches on the map, going Swann’s way, south from the center of town and then west along the Promenade de la Fontaine, to the Pré Catalan.

The Pré Catalan, a small park originally built by Proust’s uncle, is landscaped in formal English style and named after a section of the Bois de Boulogne. This modest garden was transformed in *A la Recherche* into the somewhat larger and grander park of the Swann estate, and renamed Tansonville. I’d like to believe that it wasn’t just a romantic weakness for anything green and growing that made me feel something as we entered there. Certainly it was more visibly well-tended and welcoming than the worn narrow streets of the anonymous town.

I sat in a shady place near a little bridge, and asked my friend to take my picture. As she composed the shot and worked with the camera, I posed with the book I’d just bought. A quoted phrase from *A la Recherche* caught my eye and I let the beautiful words sing in my mind.



*The Pré Catalan*

Now, a year later, I really don’t remember what phrase it was I read with such interest, nor can I recall exactly what it was that I felt so strongly at that moment. But as I sit and write about it, the details fill themselves in, with such force and certainty that I want to trust it: The phrase I’m reading from *A la Recherche* describes how Gilberte appeared to the narrator in the garden like an apparition, strange and familiar and frightening all at once. And this red-haired girl triggers something in the narrator, just as a powerful and energetic young woman triggers something in the modern mid-life male, a whole lifetime of the suppressed and unintegrated feminine, along with a terrible longing for nurturing and solace that must come from someone else, mustn’t it? It certainly can’t come from within.

*Suddenly I stood still, unable to move, as happens when we are faced with a vision that appeals not to our eyes only but requires a deeper kind of perception and takes possession of the whole of our being. A little girl with fair, reddish hair, who appeared to be returning from a walk... was looking at us, raising towards us a face powdered with pinkish freckles... I gazed at her, at first with that gaze which is not merely the messenger of the eyes, but at whose window all the senses assemble and lean out, petrified and anxious, a gaze eager to reach, touch, capture, bear off in triumph the body at which it is aimed, and the soul with the body.*

*- Swann’s Way*

I let Proust’s words take hold of me (is it now I’m hearing the words? is it then?) and the music of the language triggers in my mind another passage in French. It’s the first stanza of a Baudelaire poem, only now the words are not just in my head, they’re being spoken by R., my first lover. R. is leaning against me on the grass as I sit and read in the garden of the Pré Catalan, her lips so close I can feel her hot breath on

my cheek as she recites, low and seductive, like an incantation:

Voici venir les temps oe vibrant sur sa tige,  
Chaque fleur s'evapore ainsi qu'un ecensoir;  
Les sons, et les parfums, tournent dans l'air du soir;  
Valse melacholique, et langoureux vertige!

[The first stanza of "Night Harmony" (Harmonie du soir) by Baudelaire:

Spring comes, flowers tremble on the stem,  
Breathing scent into the air like incense smoke;  
Sounds and smells swirl in the night air;  
Melancholy waltz and languorous vertigo!

—tr. JPK]

Am I hallucinating? I can't be sure if it is now that I'm hearing R.'s voice, or then, or both. But there's an even greater possibility: that as I write, I'm making a sort of fiction, just as Proust wrote about and transformed his life and feelings in an attempt to understand them.

Actually, this small fiction of mine about a young woman in a garden is not totally unfamiliar. It's part of an emotional landscape that I've been exploring elsewhere, in other ways, over the past few years. And this is not the first time that R. has appeared in my writing without my necessarily asking her to—nor will it, I'm sure, be the last. So I am content to hold on to

the intoxicating French poem and the heart-rending closeness I have summoned up, and keep it as the possible seed of a story for another time.

While I can't be sure where my own story will go, I am certain about Proust's art, which evoked for me a very personal version of his *Gilberte*. Proust wrote as part of a search for self-knowledge, but the result was to pass on an enormous gift of creativity and insight to his readers. In *A la Recherche du temps perdu*—literally, "in search of lost time"—the narrator's thoughts and emotions reverberate together and illuminate aspects of life that become more important to us the more that we, in this affectless and ironic post-you-name-it world, try to pretend that they're irrelevant: love, yearning, aloneness, and the possibility of comfort.



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*...adolescents who survive  
for a sufficient number of  
years are the material out of  
which life makes old men.*

*-Time Regained*

## Remembrance: A Coffee Achievement

In these days of our anti-vice society, only one drug remains fully sanctioned, even at meetings of AA: a fine cup of coffee. San Francisco, an all-too well-behaved place built on crumbling remains of that wonderfully wild town, 'Frisco, once had more bars than any city in the country; now it has more cafes, and an unrepentant mass of coffee achievers.

Proust made it clear in *Remembrance* that he investigated and loved the qualities of many drugs, but his biographers say that the one he abused most regularly was the easily obtainable, and utterly delicious, caffeineated coffee. In his last years, he ate little, surviving on a diet of cafe au lait, which brought him to the end of his massive literary achievement. References to Proust's coffee habit appear in several works. Here are a few.



"Hot coffee helped him breathe more easily and he was inclined to drink a great deal of it." (*Marcel Proust: A Biography* by Richard H. Barker)

"...he had to prepare himself by drinking coffee—seventeen cups of it, he said..." (*Marcel Proust: A Biography* by Richard H. Barker)

"Previously he'd dosed himself with caffeine only in preparation for an outing, but now he started using it when he wanted to write..." (*Proust: A Biography* by Ronald Hayman)

"Why had coffee survived as his only food? I never asked him. I didn't like to ask questions." (*Monsieur Proust: A Memoir* by Celeste Albaret)



# A Fraternity of Fish Soup: Bouillabaisse

Thinking about this issue's food feature, I contemplated a main dish with more panache than the last, that ordinary fried sole, but a bit less than that boeuf in aspic dish, clearly a two day affair. Leafing once again through the two beautiful Proust cookbooks, I found myself fixated upon a glorious dish from the French Mediterranean, so good that it impressed the most pretentious Parisians in the Belle Epoque: bouillabaisse.

Bouillabaisse, pronounced somewhat like booy-uh-bess, is a rich broth swimming with a variety of seafood. It is a visual feast as well as a gustatory one, a riot of colors and shapes. The soup itself is made yellow with saffron, dotted with the bright red of tomato, and garnished with a sprinkle of bright green over shellfish of black, red-orange tints, and pearly-gray, and of course, the fish which is predominantly white. Twiddling with the presentation, I rested salmon-colored shrimp upon the black mussels for a stunning effect.

Both cookbooks, *Dining With Proust* and *Dining With Marcel Proust*, come from writers of another continent, one on which fishmongers are apt to have other wares. Some of the fish listed in their choices of ingredients are virtually impossible to find here, even in the exotic markets of Chinatown, like John Dory or conger eels. Fortunately, both recipes lists numerous choices in five or six different categories; I made the bouillabaisse shown here, in the drawing by Dean Gustafson, with clams, mussels, scallops, prawns, crab, sole, red snapper and halibut. My own fishmonger took my order and shook his head. "You're going to have a nice dinner tonight," he said, and he was right.

According to both recipes, much of this process can be done well in advance, leaving the last bits of preparation right before serving. In retrospect, I wish I'd done it this way, but didn't; the total preparation time, including scrubbing the clams and mussels, deveining the prawns and washing and chopping the other fish was about an hour and a half, and I only made a half-recipe.

According to the directions in *Dining With Marcel Proust: A Practical Guide to French Cooking of the Belle Epoque*, you must get six types of fish: 1) firm

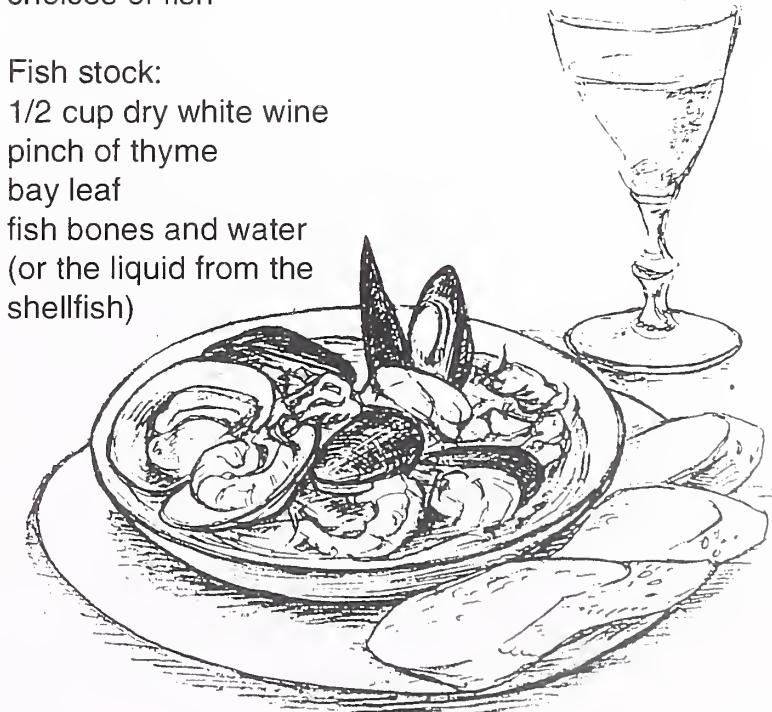
white ones, or filets of sole or flounder, 2) eel, 3) squid, 4) red mullet or snapper and 5) and 6) two kinds of shellfish. I personally can't deal with cooking eel, because the dead, long things look too much like snakes, even though they taste great when someone else cooks them, so I didn't stress about not finding them. I also left out squid, even though it is possible to buy it conveniently stripped of its gross innards these days, but I'd already eaten squid twice that week. A foodie snob might have chided me for these omissions, but would have enjoyed this bouillabaisse anyway.

## Bouillabaisse

1 cup olive oil  
1/2 stick butter  
2 medium onions  
4 small leeks  
4 medium tomatoes  
3 cloves garlic, crushed  
3 Tbsp. chopped fresh fennel bulb  
salt, pepper  
cayenne  
large pinch of saffron  
2 large slivers orange peel  
1 large sliver lemon peel  
5 sprigs of parsley, chopped  
French bread  
choices of fish

### Fish stock:

1/2 cup dry white wine  
pinch of thyme  
bay leaf  
fish bones and water  
(or the liquid from the shellfish)



Clean the fish, scrubbing the shellfish free of external skudgewomp, and rinse it well. Cook the mussels and clams in a covered saucepan over medium heat for 5-10 minutes, until they open; lobster and crab should be boiled in salted water for 20 minutes, cooled and cut into pieces. Throw away any clams or mussels that didn't open, and reserve the cooking liquids.

To make the fish stock, add the wine, thyme, bay leaf and reserved liquids (or fish bones covered with water) to a pan; boil, then cover, simmering for 45 minutes.

Pour boiling water over the tomatoes and let them sit for a minute, then skin and seed them, and chop them into 1/2" chunks. Chop the whites of the leeks roughly, and the onions and fennel finely. Cut the remaining fish in 2" pieces.

Heat the butter and oil in a large pan, add onion and fry over medium heat without browning for 10 minutes. Add the leeks and garlic and cook for another 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes, fennel, citrus peels, wine and stock (strain stock well to get out all the sand, bones and other unsavory bits.) Season with salt, pepper, two pinches of cayenne and the saffron.

Bring the soup to a boil; add the fish, beginning with the kinds that need the most cooking. Boil for 2 minutes, during which the oil and water will amalgamate, then add the rest of the fish and cook for 10-15 minutes. I may have omitted squid from this dish, but I have cooked it often enough to know, if you decide to use it, that it should be among the last additions; it may have a rubbery quality, but less so if not overcooked. Serve in bowls garnished with a bit of chopped parsley, and French bread on the side.

This recipe says that the French bread can be fried in butter or rubbed with garlic and toasted, two lovely ways to gild the lily, especially here in San Francisco where the climate makes for perfect French bread. I have heard that a superb Parisian restaurant has bread flown in from San Francisco daily. This may be apochrypha, but well deserved.

It is advisable to use a good dry white wine in this recipe; only a small amount of it goes into the bouillabaisse, and the rest makes a fine beverage with your dinner. You can buy a cheap white swill for cooking wine, but unless you frequently cook with it, you will have a large unpotable remainder taking up space in the refrigerator. This half recipe makes four first course servings, in the European culinary style, or a hearty dinner for two Americans, best accompanied by a simple green salad with vinaigrette.

*"Come along, my dear  
Brichot, get your things  
off quickly. We have a  
bouillabaisse which  
musn't be kept waiting."*  
-Cities of the Plain



Napkin drawing done by Alex Segal

# More letters and email

brush with a few mosquitos has got me remembering things from my past in a most curious and beautiful way.

Rich Di Giulio

*If there is a heaven, and a St. Peter at the gate, I can see MP seated beside him, assisting with the examination of the new recruits.*

Academic treatises... No. But the inclusion of recipes strikes me as cloying...

Phil Ehrens

*What bona fide Proust reader would fail to see the importance of food in Remembrance?*

Your Proust pages are wonderful. I feel the warmth and love for him emanating from the screen (and mine isn't even color!). Wonder if you can advise on following: I'm a composer who has just completed a large song cycle, mostly inspired by Primo Levi and using all original texts. Only in the last movement do I quote briefly from various pillars of civilizations, from The Bible through Goethe to Lorca and Mann, including two lines from "La Prisonier"... The quote is in the original French. Do you know what the copyright status of the text is? public domain? My use would be a "fair use" anyway, and be gratis %99.9, but I want to use the lines in liner notes for a planned recording of the composition, and want to do this right.

What do you think?

Sincerely,  
Ari Frankel

*I couldn't answer this question... Does anyone have the answer?*

I simply cannot say how delighted I am to see that a Proust homepage is in existence... reading Proust matured me as a student, a reader and as a person capable of loving... what is Proust about, friends often ask... I tell them it's about everything and nothing, just living and loving and being hurt an awful lot... Swann's Way became to me what Odette became to Swann... a possession, yes, an obsession, most definitely... the greatest, most looked forward to hours of my day were the hours I could be with Proust... Swann's Way taught me that it's not the characters one becomes attached to but rather the text and the writer... his words and his style still echo in my mind.

How did Proust Said That actually come about? It's a great idea, by the way, and discovering it on the net was a lot like the discovery of Proust was to my life... it made me extremely happy and put me in the best mood that I've been in all summer..

Amy Johnson

*To hear that this project, which makes me so happy, should make an unknown reader so happy, was positively thrilling. On the other hand, it was distressing that she should not have more to please her. Seeing her return address was in Wisconsin, it reminded me of my visit to Madison about ten years ago. When I arrived, my darling friend Miss Linnie wore a t-shirt with a cartoon woman in tears, with a man saying, "You're not depressed, it's just Wisconsin."*

*On The Possibility of Untortured Love, in issue #3:  
You are writing about whoremonging, not about love.*

Andreas Von Arx, Pratteln, Switzerland

I'm a member of what I assume is a pretty rare breed, a mechanical engineer who has read all of RTP. As much as I (sometimes) enjoy my job, it's pretty much of a cultural vacuum, more so for being in South Florida. I just wanted to let you know what a pleasant surprise it was finding Proust Said That. Sometimes I forget how much fun it is to be around witty, literate people.

I've only found a few authors who have completely personal styles and yet who can bring characters and events to life in totally convincing and enlightening ways... and Proust combined that ability with the most beautiful and haunting imagery that I've ever read. And with so much out-and-out smut! Amazing.

Chris Zucker

Proust is one of those authors that I've always meant to read, but never have gotten around to it. Your wonderful and quirky zine has persuaded me to begin today.

Bob Conway



