

PROUST'S GENRE PAINTING AND THE
REDISCOVERY OF VERMEER

from *Dutch Painting and the Realist Novel*
Ruth Bernard Yeazell
Princeton University Press, 2008.

Dutch realism in the novel is a realism of the past. The art of the Golden Age was nearly two centuries old, after all, by the time that novelists took it as a model; and if such art could still figure the real for them, that was because they saw the everyday life they were depicting as itself a form of history. "Realism is nothing if not urban," Peter Brooks has recently contended;¹ but while French realism in particular has long been associated with the rise of the modern city, it is important to remember that each of the novelists we have thus far examined originally hailed from the provinces—and each of them partly looked to Dutch pictures as a way of looking backward. There is no doubt a realist tradition that descends from Balzac's *Illusions perdues* to the works of Zola and Gissing, as Brooks clearly demonstrates. But on both sides of the Channel, the novel's pictures of familiar objects and domestic routines were usually painted by memory.

For both George Eliot and Hardy, the representation of rural English life was at once a mode of fictional autobiography and a means of evoking the lives of the generation that had preceded them. From the *Scenes of Clerical Life* to the *Mill on the Floss*, the early fiction of George Eliot is famously suffused with recollections of her childhood. If "Amos Barton" was by her own account a Dutch painting, the original who had posed for it was sufficiently familiar to her Warwickshire neighbors to present the first threat to the secret of her pseudonym.² The hero of *Adam Bede* might not have been the writer's father, any more than Dinah Morris was her aunt; but her journal candidly acknowledged that they owed their fictional existence to an anecdote told by that aunt "from her own experience."³ Recalling the origins of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Hardy likewise claimed to have invented

many of its people and incidents—"the choir as such" having "end[ed] their office when he was about a year old"—but he also made clear that the novel was inspired by the music-making of his father and grandfather, and that "Thomas Hardy the Third" was thus paying tribute to the "time-honoured observances" of Thomas Hardy the First and the Second.⁴ Subsequent commentators have confirmed that the tranter's house strongly resembles the cottage in which Hardy was born, and that even Mellstock's topography closely conforms to the village landscape of his childhood.⁵

Balzac's case is more complicated—his most autobiographical fiction, *Louis Lambert*, is nearer to mystical treatise than to realism—but whether he actually sets his bourgeois interiors in provincial towns, like Saumur or Douai, or encloses them in the decaying old buildings that once lingered in the corners of Paris, virtually all his Dutch pictures in the *Comédie humaine* are strongly associated with the customs and objects of the past. The quest for the Absolute, we might recall, takes place in "a house whose physiognomy, interior arrangements and details have, more than those of any other building, preserved the character of those old Flemish structures, so naively appropriate to the patriarchal customs of that good country"—a house itself partly modeled on the Flemish buildings that the author had known in his native Tours.⁶ As for the Dutch picture that opens the *Comédie humaine*: on his mother's side, Balzac was descended from a family of haberdashers who plied their trade on the very street in the Marais where he locates *La maison du chat-qui-pelote*; and his great-uncle was a draper whose commercial history evidently suggested the time-honored practices of its fictional shopkeepers.⁷ Beginning the *Comédie humaine* with "one of those valuable houses that enable historians to reconstruct old Paris by analogy" (*CH* 1:39), Balzac thus also begins by imaginatively reconstructing some history of his own. And even in the course of the tale itself, its Dutch painting recedes further into the past, as Sommervieux's famous picture metamorphoses from an image of daily reality to a catalyst of memory. Having turned over their business to the next generation, the Guillaumes retire to another house, where the artist's interior scene holds the "place of honor" and affords them their chief "consolation" by recalling their former way of life. While Monsieur Guillaume had once been baffled by the appeal of a painting that simply appeared to duplicate "what one encounters every day in our street," he and his wife now turn their eyes "twenty times a day . . . toward this image of their former existence, for them so active and amusing" (*CH* 1:57, 80–81).

By the 1840s, something like this backward look would in turn be replicated by Balzac's critics, as they wistfully recalled his Dutch pictures in

order to attack the recent development of his fiction. Nostalgically evoking the scenes of private life—which they routinely identified with the scenes of provincial life—such reviewers typically deplored Balzac's penchant for melodrama and mysticism, even as they contended that his true gift was for genre painting. "It is still the *Scenes of Provincial Life* that form the most beautiful flower in M. de Balzac's crown," as one put it in 1841: "there above all one finds those pictures of interiors in the Flemish style that he excels in painting."⁸ Another suggested that Balzac's mistaken ambition for history painting had betrayed the spirit—and even, by implication, the chastity—of Eugénie Grandet, while depriving his readers of "those moments of oblivion and sweet repose" they had all enjoyed "in examining those charming interior scenes . . . of the Flemish school."⁹ Like those who would wishfully recall George Eliot's own pictures of provincial life a few decades later, such readers compounded a response already built into the novels, as they looked with nostalgia toward an art that was itself grounded in the past.

In a brief meditation entitled "Tableaux de genre du souvenir" ("Genre Paintings of Memory"), the young Marcel Proust hinted at yet another explanation for the nostalgia his predecessors so often associated with Dutch art. Collected under the rubric of "Regrets, rêveries couleur de temps" and appearing in his first published book, *Les plaisirs et les jours* (1896), the piece is only two paragraphs long; but as so often with Proust, this early fragment adumbrates concerns to which he would return again and again over the following decades. The first paragraph reads in full:

We have certain recollections that resemble the Dutch painting of our memory, genre pictures in which the figures are often in an ordinary [médiocre] condition, caught at a very simple moment of their existence, without solemn events, sometimes without events at all, in a setting without grandeur and in no way extraordinary. The nature of the characters and the innocence of the scene make for its charm; its distance from us interposes a soft light that bathes it in beauty.¹⁰

If Balzac's tale implies that art resembles memory by capturing images of our past lives in paint, Proust's essay reverses the direction of the comparison and suggests that memory itself sometimes works like a Dutch painter. And what we remember at such times are not distinctive scenes but typical ones: while the decisive moments in our histories are presumably memorable by virtue of their difference from our customary routines, we can only preserve the dailiness of the past, the essay implies, by both selecting and

generalizing—fusing a number of similar scenes or acts in the representative images that constitute "the Dutch painting of our memory." These are the genre paintings in the mind's picture gallery because they are "without solemn events, sometimes without events at all"—representations of ordinary people in ordinary settings, whose temporal distance from us nonetheless bathes them in the beautifying light of nostalgia.¹¹ Had Proust not gone on to indicate otherwise, in fact, we might well imagine that he was thinking here quite directly of a longing for home—especially for those familiar scenes that in nineteenth-century France, as in seventeenth-century Holland, were associated with the daily rituals of the bourgeois household. Recall the remarkably similar language with which Thoré-Bürger had compared Balzac's domestic interiors to the paintings of Pieter de Hooch, as he evoked a scene where "the people . . . are inseparable from the place," everything is "created for them, especially the light that animates and enlivens them," and peace is constituted by an analogous *diminuendo* of significant action: "It's all a harmonious milieu, in which one goes to live as if at home—a place to do something, nothing much, perhaps nothing at all."¹²

As it happens, the *tableaux de genre* of Proust's own memory here are not domestic but vaguely military in character: scenes based, presumably, on his year of service in the army—he had volunteered at eighteen—and later recreated, also with allusions to Dutch painting, in the Doncières episodes of *Le côté de Guermantes* (1920). We know relatively little about Proust's experience in the army,¹³ but 1889–90 was clearly not a time for actual combat duty; and the very routine of garrison life—what the essay calls "the calm of a life in which occupations are more regulated and the imagination less enslaved than in any other"—apparently encouraged the association with genre painting. Perhaps we are to think of these "little pictures full of happy truth and charm" as resembling all those Dutch paintings of soldiers whiling away their time in barracks or inns, engaged in peaceable activities like drinking, gambling, letter-writing, or flirting. No doubt an element of selectiveness has entered into the arrangement: the essay concedes that the series of little pictures is "broken by gaps, it is true";¹⁴ and though Proust was later to recall his year in the army as a "paradise,"¹⁵ his biographer confirms that both the softening effect of time and a measure of forgetfulness were required in order to stock this particular wing of the novelist's mental picture gallery with nothing but happy images.¹⁶ But from the perspective of the present study, what is most striking is not so much the inevitable distortions of Proust's memory as his assimilation of Dutch painting to a mental activity. Indeed, memory's powers of selecting and generalizing are very much to the point: "la peinture hollandaise de notre mémoire" may

only be a metaphor, but it is one far removed from the slavish copying of material appearances.

Whether it is far removed from the novelists we have been examining is another question, however. Theirs was always an art of words, after all; and insofar as they chose to reflect on it, the old division between the work of the hands and that of the mind, between the mere craft of the low genres and the literary "ideas" of the high, could never have had much bearing on their kind of Dutch picture. The most theoretically self-conscious of the three may have chosen to begin her career by paying tribute to manual craft, but even as she spoke of being "obliged to creep servilely after nature and fact," George Eliot knew full well that the mirror with which she worked was a mental instrument. "I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind," says the narrator in the seventeenth chapter of *Adam Bede*.¹⁷ In a formula that Proust would adapt more than once to uses of his own, Leonardo had famously contended that all painting is *cosa mentale*; and despite the tendency of classical theorists to question whether Dutch art really met that standard, "Tableaux de genre du souvenir" drives home the fact that the novelists' Dutch pictures had always been constructs of the mind.

Though it is a long way from *Adam Bede*'s ekphrasis of a little-known painting by Gerrit Dou to the climactic encounter with Vermeer's *View of Delft* that constitutes one of the most celebrated episodes of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27), the modernity of Proust's masterwork—and of his taste in Dutch art—should not obscure the continuities that he himself repeatedly acknowledges. Only the shallowly up-to-date Madame de Cambremer imagines that admiring Monet's water-lilies means jettisoning that "old hack" Poussin.¹⁸ "There are bits of Turner in the work of Poussin, phrases of Flaubert in Montesquieu," as the narrator observes in correcting her (3:211; 4:248), and more than a little Proust—as he makes us recognize—in Balzac, George Eliot, and Hardy as well. In relation to Dutch painting as to so much else, I shall argue, this last of the realists does not so much break with his precursors as help us to see them anew.

To begin with, of course, there was also more than a little Balzac, George Eliot, and Hardy in Proust—not to mention, for the moment, the crucial presence of Ruskin, whose profound influence on the novelist did not preclude the latter's strong attraction to the very painting his English mentor anathematized. Whether or not Proust was thinking of Balzac's *Recherche de l'absolu* when he chose the title of his own multivolume work in 1913, as Jean-Yves Tadié has speculated,¹⁹ it is clear that the author of *À la recherche*

du temps perdu had thoroughly assimilated the work of his predecessor. "To read Balzac was to speak the family language," Tadié observes;²⁰ and Proust continued to speak that language when he composed a pastiche of the novelist, among other writers, in the first decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, well before Baron de Charlus was to hold forth on the subject in *Sodome et Gomorrhe 2* (1922), his creator had drafted a more extended tribute to Balzac's achievement in the abandoned work now known as *Contre Saint-Beuve*. Like Charlus, who irritably counters an attack on the novelist's style by praising his knowledge of "life" (3:438; 4:520), Proust invokes the "lifelike reality of Balzac's novels," even as he characteristically suggests that it is "the life of his novels" rather than "real life" that is the "only true one for the writer."²¹ (Hence to find something in one's experience "very Balzacian"—as characters repeatedly do in *À la recherche*—is to feel an essentially aesthetic pleasure.) Though *Contre Saint-Beuve* wryly concedes both the earlier novelist's vulgarity and the faults of his prose, the intensity with which it defends "the very vastness" of his design anticipates the imaginative excitement with which the narrator of *À la recherche* reconstructs Balzac's exhilarated discovery of the fundamental coherence of the *Comédie humaine*.²² "Casting over his books the eye at once of a stranger and of a father," and belatedly registering their "ulterior unity," Balzac "touch[es] up his work with a swift brush-stroke, the last and most sublime"—his "retrospective illumination" clearly serving as a model for the analogous vision with which Proust's own multivolume novel will end (3:666-67; 5:176-77).²³ Yet when Charlus declares himself equally fond of Balzac's "tiny miniatures" and his "large frescos" (3:437; 4:520), he also appears to speak for his creator, who more than once divided up the oeuvre in similar terms.²⁴ Though there is no evidence that Proust consciously identified those "miniatures" with Dutch painting, a similar resistance to aesthetic hierarchy, as we shall see, repeatedly drew him to the work of the Dutch.

The English writers appear to have affected Proust most deeply.²⁵ George Eliot, he told one correspondent, was the "cult of my adolescence";²⁶ while Ruskin, to whom he devoted more than half a decade at the turn of the century, was pronounced "one of the greatest writers of all times and of all countries."²⁷ Though Proust's encounter with Hardy was later and less consequential, he was still declaring himself both "Eliotiste" and "Hardyste" two years before his death.²⁸ Indeed, "it is strange," as he himself declared in 1910,

that among all the most different genres, from George Eliot to Hardy, from Stevenson to Emerson, there is no literature that has on me a power comparable to that of English and American literature.

Germany, Italy, very often France leave me indifferent. But two pages of *The Mill on the Floss* make me cry.

"I know that Ruskin execrated that novel," he immediately added, "but I reconcile these hostile gods in the Pantheon of my admiration."²⁹ The remark testifies not only to Proust's impressive knowledge of Ruskin, but to a capacity for imaginative reconciliation that would govern his approach to Dutch painting as well.

An analogous impulse had already prompted a long note to his translation of Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens* (1904), in which he compared the latter's portrait of a cheerful and kindly Saint Martin—"companionable even to the loving-cup"³⁰—with the novelist's affectionate representations of her more secular clerisy: "M. Irwine dans *Adam Bede*, M. Gilfil dans les *Scènes de la vie du Clergé*, M. Farebrother dans *Middlemarch*, etc."³¹ Quoting at length from the *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, including chapter 17, the note emphasizes the ordinary humanity of figures like the pipe-smoking and gin-drinking Gilfil, whose evident kinship with Ruskin's "patron of honest drinking" might tempt us to wonder yet again why the author of *Modern Painters* could not also share George Eliot's sympathy for a Dutch tavern scene.³² Though Proust himself never directly associates her interest in Dutch painting with his own, an undated notebook entry that constitutes his fullest statement on the novelist makes the connection all but explicit.³³ "What strikes me in *Adam Bede*," the entry begins, "is the attentive painting, detailed, respectful, poetic and sympathetic, of the most hard-working and the most humble life. To keep one's kitchen thoroughly clean is an essential duty, nearly a religious duty and a duty full of charm." From this brief evocation of Mrs. Poyser's housekeeping, the entry moves on to the moral resonance of the early fiction, repeatedly comparing *Adam Bede* to *Silas Marner* ("a sincere feeling for the concerns of a carpenter, of a weaver, etc.") and identifying both with the author's capacity to make humble things the signs of hitherto unobserved feeling: "Novelty of images coming from a tender and new view of things, which discovers in them unnoticed feelings and can then paint them as symbols of analogous sentiments."³⁴

Even more than George Eliot, it was Ruskin, ironically, whom Proust chose to identify with his own love of the Dutch. In 1898, a year or more after he had first discovered the English critic,³⁵ Proust traveled to Holland in order to view the great Rembrandt exhibition then mounted in Amsterdam. Though the essay that resulted never appeared in his lifetime, its fantasy of an aging Ruskin who ventures from his deathbed to pay tribute to the painter is both an early attempt to reconcile "hostile gods" in the "Pantheon"

of his admiration and a forerunner of one of the most celebrated episodes in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the death of Bergotte.³⁶ More than two decades before that novel would send another dying writer for a last look at Vermeer, Proust was already associating Dutch art with the only form of immortality he ever chose to contemplate.

The 1898 trip was hardly Proust's first encounter with Rembrandt, whose work he had admired on frequent expeditions to the Louvre ever since his late adolescence.³⁷ Nor was this his first attempt to write on the subject. Three years earlier, he had composed a "short essay on the philosophy of art," as he tentatively characterized it, in which observations on Rembrandt supplemented and partly transformed an argument originally dedicated to the work of Chardin.³⁸ In that piece, he had imagined how a young man of "humble means and artistic tastes" might be awakened to the beauty of everyday scenes and objects by seeing their equivalents sumptuously rendered in genre painting and still life. In terms that Thoré-Bürger would have appreciated, the essay describes a Chardin who initiates us into "the unknown life of *nature morte*"—teaching us that "a pear is as alive as a woman, that a vulgar piece of pottery is as beautiful as a precious stone."³⁹ Though this essay, too, remained unpublished, Proust would later incorporate something very like its tribute to still life into his novel, when the narrator learns his own lesson about the beauty of ordinary things and "la vie profonde des 'natures mortes'" from another admirer of Chardin, the fictive painter, Elstir (2:224; 2:519).⁴⁰ But while Chardin "makes us leave behind a false ideal" and "opens the real world to us," with Rembrandt, as the essay puts it, "even reality itself is to be outdone." With him we see, paradoxically, that "beauty does not lie in objects, since then it would certainly not be so profound and so mysterious." The great Dutch painter reveals "that objects are nothing in themselves" and that it is rather light that constitutes "the principle" of their existence—that light "which we will never know and which we know so well; which is the beauty of everything we have ever seen, and which is also its mystery and unknowability."⁴¹

Something like this dialectic between objects and light, between material reality and the ineffable medium of perception, will repeat itself throughout Proust's work, as beauty alternately inheres or can be discovered in the most ordinary of things. In the Rembrandt essay, he imagines the painter's development as itself following a similar trajectory: beginning by representing things that appeal to him, this Rembrandt ends by representing "the very light [jour] of his thought"—"the kind of individual light in which we see things when we are thinking in an original way." While Rembrandt's early pictures "may bear more resemblance to nature than to

himself," his later work, by this account, resembles nothing so much as his own way of seeing—a power of vision somehow conveyed by the golden light that has now become "the whole of reality for him." The essay opens by announcing boldly that "museums are dwellings that house only thoughts"; and by the time it turns to Ruskin, it has imagined a Rembrandt who triumphantly succeeded in capturing his "thought" on canvas. Not fame, but this, the essay declares, is the end for which artists are made.⁴²

In 1895, Proust had pronounced Rembrandt and Leonardo his favorite painters;⁴³ and in thus emphasizing that Rembrandt's work was also *cosa mentale*, he was implicitly assimilating the Northern artist to a standard that had long been identified with the achievement of the South. Yet for all its stress on the mental character of Rembrandt's art, the essay nonetheless approaches him more like a painter of genre or still life than as a history painter or even a portraitist—which is to say that it associates his "thoughts" not with the titular subjects of individual works but with the familiar scenes and objects that he painted over and over again. "When one looks at a picture by Rembrandt," according to Proust,

one sees an old woman cutting a young woman's nails, a string of pearls gleaming obscurely on some fur, red carpets or some reddish Indian fabrics, a fire that is being kindled and lights up the back of a dark room, while the evening light entering by the window lights up the doorway, a young woman's long silky hair that an old woman combs out, a burst of sunlight on the lock of a river on whose bank some horsemen are passing, while some windmills turn in the background; and one thinks that all these things are a part of nature and that Rembrandt painted them as he would have painted any others. But if you look at Rembrandt's pictures one after the other, near one young woman you will again find another old one who is getting ready to cut the other's nails, on another piece of fur you will again see the same somber glow of pearls. Now it is no longer Rembrandt's wife, it is *The Woman Taken in Adultery*, it is *Esther*, but she, too, has the submissive and sad face, she, too, has the golden brocades or the red cashmere under the pearls. It is no longer the house of a philosopher, it is a carpenter's workshop, it is the room of a young man who is reading, but in the depths that are scarcely illuminated except in places by the daylight still remaining outside, a kindling fire throws a livelier reflection. Here is a bullock in a butcher's shop; it is no longer the one where a kneeling woman on the left washes the floor, but the one where a woman on the right is looking back as she leaves;

so that these old nail-cutters, combers of fine hair, the sad and modest woman under her furs and her pearls, the house where the fire kindles in the shadow of the dark rooms, these are not things that Rembrandt has painted, they are the tastes of Rembrandt, those ideas that for each great man are himself [ces idées qui pour chaque grand homme sont lui-même].⁴⁴

Though some of these things gradually take on a specifiable identity—Rembrandt's wife, say, or the biblical Esther—for Proust they are first and foremost the sort of things this artist sees, their repetitiveness inhering not so much in the generic character of what is represented as in the singular character of the painter's vision. As Marcel will later lecture Albertine about his beloved Vermeers, "they are fragments of an identical world": "it's always, however great the genius with which they have been re-created, the same table, the same carpet, the same woman, the same novel and unique beauty" (3:879; 5:430).

If this is not quite to praise either artist for his skill as a genre painter—let alone as a realist—it is nonetheless to insist that the artist's "ideas" cannot be separated from the material that he represents and to associate that material with the typical scenes and subjects of genre painting. Apart from the belated allusion to Esther, Proust scarcely acknowledges that Rembrandt's "old nail-cutters" and "combers of fine hair" almost invariably figure in history paintings, like the *Toilet of Bathsheba* (fig. 6-1) that he would have seen in Amsterdam, or the variation on the subject that he surely knew at the Louvre (plate 14).⁴⁵ The only exception of which I am aware is an image of a solitary woman cutting her nails that was in fact among the well-known paintings exhibited at Amsterdam but that is now generally attributed to one of Rembrandt's followers (fig. 6-2). While a contemporary review of the exhibit that specifically singles out this picture may have contributed to Proust's mental collection of the artist's "old nail-cutters," he himself never directly refers to it.⁴⁶ Indeed, he hardly needed this nineteenth-century addition to the small number of Rembrandt's genre paintings in order to subordinate the biblical subject of a picture to "the observed thing," in his phrase. So he evokes another picture by writing only of "the bucket, that descends in the silence of the evening, in the last scattered gleams of a sun-long set, in front of the house where the Good Samaritan's life of service ended" (fig. 6-3).⁴⁷ Even as he hints at a figurative relation between the descent of the bucket and the death of the Samaritan, Proust refuses to detach any such tenor from his vehicle. Unlike Ruskin, whom he would later criticize for declaring a painting beautiful "in so far as the ideas



Figure 6-1. Rembrandt van Rijn: *The Toilet of Bathsheba*, 1643. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.651). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

which it translated into images were independent of the language of images," Proust insisted that "painting could attain the very reality of things, and thus rival literature, only on the condition of not being literary."⁴⁸

The audacious fiction with which the essay concludes sounds a related note. By imagining that the dying Ruskin has journeyed to Amsterdam to pay his final respects to the painter, Proust simultaneously pays his own tribute to both artist and critic and manages to identify the mind's continuing life with its persistent attachment to beloved images. For rather than suppose that the English critic has belatedly come to recognize Rembrandt's greatness, Proust chooses to pretend, still more wishfully, that Ruskin has loved the Dutch painter all along. "He was in his last days and yet he had come from England to see these Rembrandts, which at twenty had already seemed something essential to him and which were no less a reality for him now, in these last days."⁴⁹

Conjuring up a doddering old man with wrinkled face and broken legs—a figure who anticipates, as Jean-Yves Tadié has noted, the tottering forms who gather in the last pages of *Le temps retrouvé* (1927)⁵⁰—Proust hints at a



Figure 6-2. Style of Rembrandt: *Old Woman Cutting Her Nails*, 1655–60. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.609). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

final divorce between spirit and body, mind and matter, even as he characteristically identifies the mind's survival with its recovery of the past. Despite the near-impossibility of reconciling this "groping" old man with his "idea" of Ruskin, "that immaterial thing," the narrator concludes that they are one and the same—their continuity guaranteed precisely by the elderly critic's return to the pictures about which he had written so ardently in his youth.



Figure 6-3. Constantijn Daniel van Renesse (pupil of Rembrandt): *The Good Samaritan*, c. 1650. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo Credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, N.Y.

As Proust stages it, Ruskin's final encounter with these pictures is a kind of recognition scene, in which the critic, himself "blackened like a Rembrandt by the shade of twilight, the patina of time, the effacement of the years," at once mirrors and confirms the artist's achievement:

It suddenly seemed as if Rembrandt's canvases had become something worthier of being visited, since Ruskin, come from so far, had entered the room; it seemed also as if it was for Rembrandt like a reward that could have been sweet for him, and that, if Rembrandt's gaze, which seemed to consider us from the depths of his completed canvases, had been able to see Ruskin, the master would have approached him like a king who recognizes a king in the crowd. Yes, the canvases of Rembrandt seemed to us more worthy of admiration since Ruskin had entered, or rather painting itself, in that which it had the power to do best, seemed to us something more essential, since we had seen such an exalted spirit, so near death, considering it again.⁵¹

The essay no sooner reaches this apparent climax than it abruptly descends to humbler analogies, as the meeting of kings dissolves into scenes of daily life, and the apotheosis of art gives way to the operations of habit and "the attachment of our senses" to accustomed objects. Rather than contemplate the verdict of a great critic, we are invited to consider how Ruskin's love of Rembrandt resembles anyone's affection for "old notions, familiar likings, and habitual pleasures"—a grandfather's delight in the sight of his little granddaughter, for example, or a regular card-player's fondness for a game of bezique: "perhaps his housekeeper led him to the Rembrandts as she would have led another old man to watch a game of cards or brought him a bunch of grapes."⁵² Though the real Ruskin would no more have acknowledged his affinity to an old card-player than he would have recognized himself in the long-time admirer of Rembrandt, Proust's fiction has other ends in view. What looks like the triumph of painting quietly dissolves into something more like the genre painting of memory.

In 1902, some four years after the Rembrandt exhibit, Proust returned to the Netherlands for another look at Dutch painting—the last artistic expedition abroad, as it happens, that he would make in his lifetime. Armed with copies of Fromentin's *Maitres d'autrefois* and Taine's *Philosophie de l'art dans les Pays-Bas*, as well as a Baedeker that quoted generously from Thoré-Bürger, Proust and a friend spent several weeks wandering through the art capitals of Belgium and Holland.⁵³ Though he would later declare that Vermeer had been his "favorite painter" since the age of twenty, it was on this trip that he saw a number of the pictures themselves for the first time, including the *View of Delft* that he would call "the most beautiful painting in the world."⁵⁴ By the time he wrote those words, Vermeer had become for him the very epitome of artistic originality: the painter whose name, together with Rembrandt's, would serve to designate the distinctiveness of vision that he identified as the fundamental contribution of art. That the Delft painter could figure in that role suggests how much had changed since Thoré-Bürger set out to distinguish one "Van der Meer" from another; and I shall shortly return to the implications of that change for Proust's own art as well as that of the Dutch.

But Proust was also drawn, as we have seen, to what might be called the generic idea of Dutch painting; and like his predecessors, he sometimes chose to imagine Dutch pictures less as a collection of individual works than as a category. "The Dutch painting of our memory" is one such instance; and so is the repeated sequence in which the protagonist of *À la recherche*

compares the ongoing life of those around him to a display of Dutch pictures. The sequence appears, with variations, three times in the novel: at Doncières, the garrison town where he has gone to visit his friend Saint-Loup; in the Hôtel de Guermantes, where his parents have recently moved into a new apartment; and at Venice, where he wanders through the streets as a tourist. On each occasion, the protagonist is himself an outsider, who often looks through windows and doorways at scenes into which, as he says of Doncières, "I might not penetrate." In the garrison town, he walks through the streets at night, pausing before windows that reveal to him now a "crimson tableau" of some card-playing officers, now a little curio shop, where a half-spent candle and a large lamp "made in fact of the whole hovel, in which there was nothing but pinchbeck rubbish, a marvellous composition by Rembrandt" (2:395; 3:104). From Dutch genre, the protagonist's mental images imperceptibly give way to Flemish history painting, as the reddened countenances of the soldiers he glimpses in the wintry streets recall "the rubicund faces which Breughel gives to his merry, junketing, frostbound peasants," and the crowds who gather at the hotel for the season's festivities suggest "some *Numbering of the People at Bethlehem* such as the Old Flemish masters used to paint" (2:397; 3:105, 106)—presumably the well-known version, also by Breughel, in which the biblical town figures as a snowy Flemish village (fig. 6-4).⁵⁵ As if prompted by the way Breughel's image hovers between the mundane and the sacred, genre painting and history, Proust's own evocation of the scene wittily plays on an analogous border—turning the very abundance of the feast being piled up in the hotel dining room into a sign of more than bodily appetites:

And similarly, in the big dining-room which I passed through on the first day before coming to the little room where my friend was waiting for me, it was of some Biblical repast portrayed with old-fashioned naïvety and Flemish exaggeration that one was reminded by the quantity of fish, chickens, grouse, woodcock, pigeons, brought in dressed and garnished and piping hot by breathless waiters who slid along the polished floor for greater speed and set them down on the huge sideboard where they were carved at once, but where—for many diners were finishing when I arrived—they piled up untouched, as though their profusion and the haste of those who brought them were inspired far less by a desire to meet the requirements of the diners than by respect for the sacred text, scrupulously followed in the letter but naïvely illustrated with real details borrowed from local custom, and by an aesthetic and religious anxiety to make evident to the



Figure 6-4. Pieter Breughel the Elder: *The Numbering of the People at Bethlehem*, 1566. Musée d'Art Ancien, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. Photo Credit: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

eye the splendour of the feast by the profusion of the victuals and the assiduity of the servers. (2:397; 3:106)

Having momentarily substituted the agency of an imaginary artist for that of the waiters, Proust continues to make sophisticated comedy from the confusion, as others rush about dangling their napkins like wings and the protagonist flees to the room Saint-Loup has reserved for his dinner.

The evocations of Dutch painting in Paris and Venice are at once briefer and more generic—so generic, in fact, that the passages in question are virtually identical. In the first of these, the protagonist vainly watches for the return of the Duke and Duchess de Guermantes from a look-out post in his parents' apartment:

As a matter of fact I had made a singularly bad choice of observatory, for I could scarcely see into our courtyard, but I caught a glimpse of several others; and this, though of no practical use to me, diverted me for a time. It is not only in Venice that one has these views on to several houses at once which have proved so tempting to painters; it is just the same in Paris. Nor do I cite Venice at random.

It is of its poorer quarters that certain poor quarters of Paris remind one, in the morning, with their tall, splayed chimneys to which the sun imparts the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds—like a garden flowering above the houses, and flowering in such a variety of tints as to suggest the garden of a tulip-fancier of Delft or Haarlem planted above the town. And then the extreme proximity of the houses, with their windows looking across at one another over a common courtyard, makes of each casement the frame in which a cook sits dreamily gazing down at the ground, or, further off, a girl is having her hair combed by an old woman with a witchlike face, barely distinguishable in the shadow: thus each courtyard provides the neighbours in the adjoining house, suppressing sound by its width and framing silent gestures in a series of rectangles placed under glass by the closing of the windows, with an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings juxtaposed. (2:860; 3:661–62)

At Venice—which the language above obviously anticipates—the protagonist wanders through alleyways instead of looking down from a window, it is the light of evening rather than morning that turns the pinks and reds of the chimneys into a garden of tulips, and the pervading silence is no longer attributed to the breadth of courtyards or the presence of glass; but the pictures themselves have scarcely altered. Perhaps because she, too, is now at ground level, the dreamy cook no longer looks down; and even slighter verbal changes characterize the description of the figures in the hair-combing scene—itsself so reminiscent of the images once attributed to Rembrandt. But if these are not the “same” pictures—what would that mean?—they unmistakably represent the same kind of vision. “Nor do I cite Venice at random,” the narrator says of the view from the Hôtel de Guermantes; yet even as he gestures at specificity, the very recurrence of the scenes—not to mention their shared resemblance to the tulip gardens of Delft and Haarlem—tends to generalize them. So, too, does the temporal ambiguity, whereby the poor quarters of Paris in the earlier episode are said to “remind” one of Venetian scenes that the protagonist himself has yet to visit. (The much-anticipated trip to Italy does not take place until *Albertine disparue* [1925].) Just particularized enough to conjure an effect of the real—the cook is dreamy, the old hair-comber witchlike—“a hundred Dutch paintings-juxtaposed”—is less an account of actual scenes glimpsed in Paris or Venice than a representation of ongoing life, external to the viewer.

It is also, according to Georges Poulet, a vital clue to the novelist's method. For Poulet, who sought to counter the received idea of *À la recherche*

by highlighting Proustian space rather than time, those “juxtaposed” paintings summed up Proust's habit of “eliminating duration” and “suppressing distance,” so that successive moments in the protagonist's history, each identified with a distinct image, are simultaneously available to our view. Nothing could be further from Bergsonian duration, he argues, than the novelist's practice of localizing time in particular places and of triumphing over its passage by eliding the gaps between them. “The hundred Dutch pictures perceived in the framework that gives out upon the House of Guermantes are a figuration of the hundred other pictures juxtaposed, which, when the reader comes, he also, to hoist himself up to a certain point of view, are disclosed to him there, not less simultaneously disposed, in the whole of the Proustian novel.”⁵⁶ Poulet says nothing about the Dutchness of these paintings, but the long association of such art with picture rather than narrative would only serve to drive home the argument.

And so, too, as I have already intimated, would Proust's affinity for the habitual and the recurrent. Though Proust's is an art of landscape and still life as well as of genre, what Gérard Genette has called his “*intoxication with the iterative*” (the emphasis is Genette's) is fundamental to the design of his novel. Unlike earlier fiction, in which “the iterative sections provide a sort of informative frame or background” for the narrative—Genette aptly instances the daily life of the miser's household in the opening pages of *Eugénie Grandet*—*À la recherche* refuses to subordinate the recurrent event to the singular.⁵⁷ Even when Proust chooses to forgo the imperfect tense, as in the line that famously opens his novel—“Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure” (“For a long time I went to bed early”)—he characteristically turns his text into a representation of what used to happen or what happened typically rather than a record of what happened once.⁵⁸ A singular event or scene may be precipitated out of recurrent ones, as a particular dinner in the hotel at Doncières gradually emerges out of scenes the protagonist “often” witnessed in the lighted windows of the town (2:395; 3:103), or a specific Breughel out of the anonymous genre paintings that preceded it; but Proust so manages these transitions as to blur rather than emphasize the difference. (Note that he merely invokes “some” *Numbering of the People at Bethlehem* such as the old Flemish masters “used to paint” [2:397; 3:106]: even the identification of a particular image is only an inference from the earlier allusion to Breughel.) In perhaps the most determinative of the novel's episodes, the protagonist's mother acquiesces in a bedtime kiss; yet it is not this singular act—memorable precisely because it violates all custom—that is recalled by the taste of a madeleine, but something more like the fullness of daily life: those details and impressions, otherwise evanescent, whose return

to consciousness enables him to reconstitute the world he has lost. "Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, except what lay in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me," the narrator reports, when his mother unwittingly offers him the cup of tea that conjures up the scenes and rhythms of his childhood (1:44; 1:51). Though Genette rightly observes that Proust's iterative style is not always based, as it is in "Combray," on the "actually repetitive and routine aspect" of provincial life,⁵⁹ the combined effects of that style and the rituals of village domesticity—not to mention the simple fact of coming first—give the opening chapters a particular weight for the novel that follows. The household order at Combray, in Germaine Brée's words, has "the reassuring stability of enduring reality."⁶⁰

Like other novelists drawn to Dutch painting, Proust could be said to ground his narrative in such provincial reality—a figure of speech that he makes quite explicit. "It is pre-eminently as the deepest layers of my mental soil [comme à des gisements profonds de mon sol mental], as the firm ground on which I still stand [comme aux terrains résistants sur lesquels je m'appuie encore], that I regard the Méséglise and Guermantes ways," the narrator says toward the close of "Combray" (1:182; 1:220–21). So persuasive is that grounding, in fact, that we tend to forget that Combray is not the protagonist's native town but only the place where his maternal relatives live and where his family arrives each Easter for an extended holiday. Proust himself was actually born in the Parisian suburb of Auteuil, though he, too, spent his holidays with his mother's relatives in the country; and if it is true, as Tadié suggests, that Auteuil in those days still resembled a rural village, its fusion with the provincial Illiers in the making of "Combray" was still an act of the fictive imagination. (According to Tadié, "the whole drama of the bedtime scene," for example, almost certainly took place at Auteuil, rather than the country town that the novel encourages us to imagine.)⁶¹ As if acknowledging that novels begin in the provinces even if writers do not, Proust subtly alters the facts to suit his fiction. Beginning with Combray, in other words, may be as much a way of looking back at his predecessors as it is a retrospect on the self.

In opening his novel with a rural childhood—or rather, more strictly speaking, with the narrator's memories of such a childhood—Proust was influenced especially by George Eliot, to whose *Mill on the Floss* in particular the opening pages of *A la recherche* are indebted.⁶² Yet for all their shared emphasis on the power of recollection, the writer who suggests that "reality takes shape in the memory alone" (1:182; 1:221) can seem very far removed

from the one who dedicated herself to the sort of realism she identified with Dutch painting. Proust's narrator says many things, not all of them consistent with one another; but it is hard to imagine his ever declaring himself "obliged to creep servilely after nature and fact," even in the ironic spirit with which the narrator of *Adam Bede* issues that challenge.⁶³ In the extended meditation that is triggered by the uneven paving-stones in the Guermantes courtyard, the narrator of *Le temps retrouvé* explicitly repudiates "so-called realist art [l'art prétendu réaliste]"—an art that is later identified with "the kind of literature which contents itself with 'describing things.'" Yet the fact that such art only "pretends" to realism while being "the furthest removed from reality" suggests that matters are still more complicated (4:460, 463; 6:235, 241). For even as Proust locates everything in the mind, down to the very "soil" on which he grounds himself (1:182; 1:221), his doctrine of involuntary memory accords to some mental experiences an epistemological privilege over others. Unlike memories that can be deliberately summoned to consciousness, the reminiscences that come flooding back with the bite of a madeleine or a stumble on a paving-stone prove their truthfulness, according to the narrator of *Le temps retrouvé*, precisely because he is not free to choose them. "Such as they were," in his words, "they were given to me":

And I realised that this must be the mark of their authenticity. I had not gone in search of the two uneven paving-stones of the courtyard upon which I had stumbled. But it was precisely the fortuitous and inevitable fashion in which this and the other sensations had been encountered that proved the trueness of the past which they brought back to life, of the images which they released, since we feel, with these sensations, the effort that they make to climb back towards the light, feel in ourselves the joy of the real rediscovered [la joie du réel retrouvé]. And here too was the proof of the trueness of the whole picture formed out of those contemporaneous impressions which the first sensation brings back in its train, with those unerring proportions of light and shade, emphasis and omission, memory and forgetfulness to which conscious recollection and conscious observation will never know how to attain. (4:457–58; 6:232–33)

At once thoroughly subjective and yet somehow independent of the self, what returns at such moments is not a singular act but a "whole picture": the Combray of the novel's opening, or the Venice that now resurfaces with a stumble in a Paris courtyard. Proust loved Dutch painting; but both the assimilation of such a picture to *cosa mentale* and its paradoxical identification

with the real—not to mention the joy of rediscovery—begin to suggest why he was drawn above all to the art of Vermeer.

Long before he extravagantly pronounced Vermeer “the greatest painter in the world,” Proust had already turned his name into a touchstone of aesthetic judgment.⁶⁴ As early as *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913), the Delft painter figures as the subject of a work-in-progress that testifies to the sensibility—as well as the ultimate failure—of one of the novelist’s principal alter-egos, Charles Swann. Tadié has suggested that Proust projected onto his character not only his own dream of writing about Vermeer but his fear of never completing his masterwork;⁶⁵ and the very first allusion to Swann’s essay—“in reality . . . abandoned years ago”—tends to confirm that hypothesis. At the moment in question, Swann has invoked his work as a pretext for declining an invitation from Odette; and Proust amuses himself with imagining how the former *demimondaine* misapprehends the painter she chooses to treat as a rival. “You’re going to laugh at me,” she says to Swann,

“but this painter who stops you from seeing me” (she meant Vermeer), “I’ve never even heard of him; is he alive still? Can I see any of his things in Paris, so I can picture for myself what you love, understand a little what’s going on behind that great brow which works so hard, in that head which one feels is always puzzling away about things; to be able to say ‘There, that’s what he’s thinking about!’ What a joy it would be to be able to help you with your work.” (1:195; 1:237)

The joke will be repeated in the case of Albertine, who responds to a question about a trip to Holland by imagining that the Vermeers she is expected to “know” are people outside her social circle (3:209; 4:246), and, with a variation, in the Duke de Guermantes’ complacent failure to recall whether he has admired the *View of Delft* on a visit to The Hague. “If it’s to be seen, I saw it!” he says (2:813; 3:606). As for Odette, she will soon betray her aesthetic ignorance in another sense, by losing all interest in the painter when Swann tells her that we know nothing about his private life. (She has asked whether a woman inspired him.) For Proust, who had argued strenuously against Saint-Beuve’s method of identifying a writer’s work with the man who created it, the very lack of biographical information that disappoints Odette only clarifies what “Vermeer” really signifies. To know Vermeer is to know not his history but his visual signature, his characteristic way of representing the world. That Swann should be imagined as hoping to visit The Hague in order to verify his belief that “a *Toilette of Diana* which had been



Figure 6-5. Johannes Vermeer: *Diana and Her Companions (Toilet of Diana)*, c. 1653–56. Mauritshuis, The Hague. Photo Credit: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

acquired by the Mauritshuis at the Goldschmidt sale as a Nicolaes Maes was in reality a Vermeer” suggests just how closely Proust himself had tracked recent connoisseurship on the artist (1:347–48; 1:425). The picture, now known as *Diana and Her Companions* (fig. 6-5), was not securely attributed to the Delft painter until the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶⁶

Proust’s fictive art-lover, who never makes it to The Hague, can take no credit for that discovery. But Swann is not the only character in *À la recherche* whose unrealized ambition is identified with Vermeer. I am referring, of course, to the imaginary writer Bergotte, whose fatal encounter with “a little patch of wall” in the *View of Delft* (plate 15) was partly inspired by Proust’s own view of the same picture at an exhibit of Dutch painting mounted by the Jeu de Paume in the spring of 1921 (3:692; 5:207).⁶⁷ In the novel as originally planned, Bergotte was to have survived through the war;

but while the evidence indicates that Proust had already intended to kill the character off before he himself visited the exhibit, the scene as published clearly drew on that experience.⁶⁸ The unnamed article that prompts Bergotte to leave his sickbed is one of a sequence by Jean-Louis Vaudoyer that had similarly inspired the ailing Proust; and phrases from the article—whose author was a friend of the novelist as well as a poet and art critic—are echoed, almost verbatim, in *La prisonnière* (1923).⁶⁹ Proust had written enthusiastically to Vaudoyer when the first installment appeared; and though he almost never attempted museums any longer—he made only three trips to the Louvre in his last quarter-century—he finally determined on the expedition.⁷⁰ “Corpse that I am,” he wrote to Vaudoyer, “would you take me there?”⁷¹ More than twenty years after he had imagined a dying Ruskin paying a similar tribute to Rembrandt, Proust thus set out for his own final encounter with Vermeer. The “corpse” would survive another year and a half; but the photographs taken on this occasion are the last we have of him alive.⁷²

Recent attempts to dispel the myths that have surrounded this incident should not obscure how deeply Proust was engaged with Bergotte’s final vision.⁷³ As Thierry Laget has shrewdly noted, the rare omniscience that the narrator permits himself in recording it—Bergotte having died in front of the picture, his final meditations are perforce unknowable—just drives home the fact that it is Proust who is thinking for him.⁷⁴ And what Bergotte is thinking, famously, is that nothing in his own work measures up to that “little patch of yellow wall” in Vermeer’s painting:

At last he came to the Vermeer which he remembered as more striking, more different from anything else he knew, but in which, thanks to the critic’s article, he noticed for the first time some small figures in blue, that the sand was pink, and, finally, the precious substance of the tiny patch of yellow wall. His dizziness increased; he fixed his gaze, like a child upon a yellow butterfly that it wants to catch, on the precious little patch of wall. “That’s how I ought to have written,” he said. “My last books are too dry, I ought to have gone over them with a few layers of colour, made my language precious in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall.”

Though Bergotte “adored” the *View of Delft* and “imagined that he knew [it] very well,” he had not remembered this little patch of color until the critic called it to his attention; but it now becomes the standard-by-which his own achievement is judged. The last words he speaks before sinking down on the settee, ignominiously muttering about a touch of indigestion

from undercooked potatoes, are: “Petit pan de mur jaune avec un auvent, petit pan de mur jaune”—“Little patch of yellow wall, with a sloping roof, little patch of yellow wall” (3:692; 5:207, 208).

To say that Proust thinks for his character here is not to say that he identifies with Bergotte’s sense of failure. Like Swann (whose own death will be reported just ten pages later), the imaginary writer primarily serves as a model to be left behind, though like Swann, too, he may also carry with him anxieties not unfamiliar to his creator. On Bergotte, in any case, the narrator hedges his bets, by going on to hint at the possibility that the writer’s works may not die with the writer: “They buried him, but all through that night of mourning, in the lighted shop-window, his books, arranged three by three, kept vigil like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection” (3:693; 5:209). But whatever the ambivalence with which the novelist represents his characters, on Vermeer himself Proust was unequivocal. More than a year later, he was still recalling “the luminous memory” of that morning when Vaudoyer guided his tottering steps “toward that Vermeer where the gables of the houses are like precious Chinese objects.”⁷⁵ And when the narrator of *Le temps retrouvé* compares the work of “original artists” to worlds whose light still reaches us “centuries after the extinction of the fire from which their light first emanated,” the names he gives those distant stars are Rembrandt and Vermeer (4:474; 6:254).

Though Proust told a friend beforehand that he knew the three Vermeers at the exhibit “by heart,”⁷⁶ the evidence suggests that the little patch of yellow came to him, too, as a revelation—or perhaps rather as a forgotten detail restored to consciousness. Just which detail he meant to conjure up with his incantatory phrase, however, has been far from clear to his commentators: though Bergotte speaks of a “petit pan de mur jaune,” some critics have been persuaded that he could only mean the yellow roof that appears to the left of the Rotterdam gate in the painting, while others have pointed to one or more of the yellow walls on the right (plate 16).⁷⁷ But what seems most salient from our perspective is not so much the location of the detail as the kind of detail it is. Vaudoyer had written, tellingly, of “those brick houses, painted in a material so precious, so heavy, so full, that *if you isolate a small surface of it, forgetting the subject*, you believe you have ceramic before your eyes as much as paint” (emphasis mine); and Proust similarly focuses attention less on the wall itself than on the layers of paint that go to make up its surface.⁷⁸ That such a passage in the *View of Delft* would have been rendered newly visible by the eye-level hanging and uncluttered walls of the postwar museum is only one of the ways in which a modern aesthetic

conspired with the revival of interest in the artist.⁷⁹ Not quite a piece of abstract art—it does, after all, still represent an object—Vermeer's yellow patch is nonetheless far removed from the sort of details with which Balzac, for example, ambivalently identified his work. What might be called the apotheosis of the Dutch detail paradoxically testifies to the modernity of novelist and painter alike.

There seems little question that Proust identified his own art with the ideal to which Bergotte belatedly aspires.⁸⁰ When the dying man concludes that he ought to have made his language "precious in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall" (3:692; 5:207), he draws an analogy between the writer's style and the painter's color on which the narrator too will rely in the extended revelation of *Le temps retrouvé*. "Style for the writer, no less than colour for the painter, is a question not of technique but of vision," he announces, before going on to invoke the light that still reaches us from the "special radiance" of Rembrandt and Vermeer (4:474; 6:254). Though the narrator of *À la recherche* may not always speak for the novelist, in this case he says very much what Proust had already said in his own voice on more than one occasion.⁸¹ Vaudoyer, too, had identified the artist's color as a kind of language—"for Vermeer," he had written, "colors . . . are at once words of a physical vocabulary and words of an ideal vocabulary"—and his emphasis on how those colors transform "the most everyday and commonplace sights" was very much, I would argue, in the spirit of Proust's analogy.⁸²

This is not the only reason why the novelist would have been moved to incorporate the *View of Delft* into his narrative. In evoking the picture, Vaudoyer had specifically emphasized its power to stamp itself on the memory—to make you "see again," in his repeated phrase, so that "the remembrance that you keep of it transfigures any reproduction":

You see again that stretch of rose-gold sand, which makes up the foreground of the canvas and where there is a woman in a blue apron who creates around her, by this blue, a wonderful harmony; you see again the dark, moored barges; and those brick houses. . . . You see again, especially, that immense sky, which, from the town's roofs to the zenith, gives an impression of almost vertiginous infinity. Finally you savor that odor, that breath of the climate, exhaled toward you by the canvas, and which penetrates you like the unexpected perfume of water and the sudden sensation of air when, after you have spent a long time traveling in a closed compartment, you lower the

window and receive from nature, though invisible, the physical evidence of a change of scenery.⁸³

If it is hard to believe that the *View of Delft* appeared in Paris because Proust wished to see it, as another friend claimed,⁸⁴ it is not at all hard to imagine that this account of the picture was written for the novelist. Even the allusion to a landscape unexpectedly sensed from a passing train—not to mention the reiterated "see again" and the synaesthesia of his metaphors—reveal a writer thoroughly familiar with the first volumes of *À la recherche*.⁸⁵

While Proust himself gives the experience of seeing the picture again to Bergotte rather than the narrator, his writing of the episode characteristically summons up still further echoes. Christiane Hertel has suggested that the *petit pan de mur jaune* recalls the *pan lumineux* that for a long time figures the narrator's only memory of Combray—the scene of his mother's kiss standing out like a "sort of luminous panel, sharply defined against a vague and shadowy background" (1:43; 1:49).⁸⁶ Yet closer, perhaps, is the *pan de château* projected by the protagonist's magic lantern for the story of Geneviève de Brabant—a vivid patch of yellow in front of which stands Geneviève herself, dressed, like Vermeer's small figures, in blue (1:9; 1:9).⁸⁷ One might think also think of *le même pan de soleil plié à l'angle du mur extérieur* ("the same patch of sunlight folded in the corner of the outer wall") that the protagonist repeatedly sees from his window in the final paragraph of *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (1918)—although in this case its "immutable colour" appears "less moving as a sign of summer than dismal like that of an inert and artificial enamel" (2:306; 2:618). But more important than these distant echoes is how Vermeer's vividly recollected townscape conjures up the narrator's own representations of Combray—representations themselves often couched in the language of painting, as when the steeple of Saint-Hilaire appears "so slender, so pink, that it seemed to be only scratched on the sky by a finger-nail that would have liked to give to this landscape, this painting that is pure nature, that little mark of art" (1:62; 1:74). Though the protagonist's first piece of writing represents the steeples of Martinville in motion rather than as a static tableau, it too is partly inspired by a vision of sunlight on stone.

The same consciousness of the picture plane that invites us to see the steeple of Saint-Hilaire as a mark scratched by a finger-nail—or the representation of a wall in the *View of Delft* as a vivid patch of color—figures in another passage that may profitably be compared to these, a passage that more directly addresses the pictorial experiments of Proust's contemporaries.

The narrator is describing some Elstirs that he has asked to see on his first visit to the Guermites—paintings, as the context makes clear, that represent the artist's latest and least "realistic" manner:

Among these pictures, some of those that seemed most absurd to people in fashionable society interested me more than the rest because they re-created those optical illusions which prove to us that we should never succeed in identifying objects if we did not bring some process of reasoning to bear on them. How often, when driving, do we not come upon a bright street beginning a few feet away from us, when what we have actually before our eyes is merely a patch of wall glaringly lit [un pan de mur violemment éclairé] which has given us the mirage of depth! This being the case, isn't it logical, not from any artifice of symbolism but from a sincere desire to return to the very root of the impression, to represent one thing by that other for which, in the light of a first illusion, we mistook it? Surfaces and volumes are in reality independent of the names of objects which our memory imposes on them when we have recognised them. Elstir sought to extract what he already knew from what he had just felt; he had often been at pains to dissolve that compound of reasoning that we call vision. (2:712-13; 3:484)

Though this may appear the opposite of the effect created by Bergotte's view of Vermeer, where a piece of wall is identified with layers of paint rather than a mirage of depth, what they have in common is a peculiarly modern attentiveness to the artifice of pictorial illusion. With its account of how the painter defers our knowledge of what things are for a representation of our initial impression, it is also another analogue for Proust's own art of the novel.

Proust himself never associates his modern painter with the Delft artist, but his account of Elstir's practice notably anticipates some of the terms in which subsequent commentators would seek to characterize the modernity of Vermeer's art.⁸⁸ In his influential study of the painter, Lawrence Gowing, for example, suggests that "Vermeer seems almost not to care, or not even to know, what it is that he is painting. What do men call this wedge of light?"—he asks rhetorically—"A nose? A finger? What do we know of its shape? To Vermeer none of this matters, the conceptual world of names and knowledge is forgotten, nothing concerns him but what is visible, the tone, the wedge of light." Unlike the formal ordering of his pictures, Gowing contends, Vermeer's representational vocabulary "is the kind which abhors preconception and design and relies entirely on the retina as its guide, the kind

which in contrast to conceptual representation we know as impressionism."⁸⁹ Daniel Arasse makes a related point, when he associates Vermeer's modernity with his apparent inversion of the classical doctrine according to which the painter's knowledge of an object took precedence over the seemingly unmediated perception of the eye.⁹⁰ At the same time, if paradoxically, Vermeer's optical effects do not always correspond to an observed reality. The best-known example of this is his so-called *pointillé*—those little drops of luminous color that suggest the play of light in an unfocused camera obscura but that increasingly appear at places where the represented materials should preclude them. Both *The Lacemaker* (a picture Proust thought "exquisite")⁹¹ and the *View of Delft* are especially notable for these glowing drops: dotting the young woman's collar and the rug in the former picture (plate 12) and "coruscating like dewdrops," as Harry Berger has observed, over the latter (plate 15), they simultaneously evoke an impression of light and call attention to themselves as marks of the artist's brush.⁹² But even when that brush seems merely to be rendering an observable effect—as in the blurred appearance of the threads that spill out of the cushion in the foreground of *The Lacemaker* (plate 17)—it also draws our eyes to the abstract patterns it has created. "The textures Vermeer creates with his painting techniques continually remind the viewer that he is viewing a painting of nature and not nature itself," Arthur Wheelock has written of the *View of Delft* in particular;⁹³ and a number of commentators have agreed—remarking, as Berger does, for example, how its monocular perspective subtly flattens the city's façades and renders them impalpable, so that "brickwork and patchwork metamorphose before the eyes into pure esthetic patterns."⁹⁴ There is no need to imagine that such metamorphoses directly influenced Elstir's experiments in order to see why Proust was so enthusiastic a participant in the continuing moment of Vermeer's recovery.

Strictly speaking, Vermeer had never been entirely lost. Much admired by discerning collectors in his own day, he still appeared from time to time in later catalogues of Dutch art, like the *Galerie des peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands* issued by Jean Baptiste Pierre Lebrun in the 1790s, or the *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters* published by John Smith in the 1830s. But if it is something of a myth that Vermeer was altogether unknown before Thoré-Bürger rescued him from "oblivion" (the word is Thoré-Bürger's),⁹⁵ there is no question that the latter's pioneering work marked the decisive turning point in his reputation.⁹⁶ By the time Proust saw his paintings for the last time more

than fifty years later, several important studies had followed in Thoré-Bürger's wake—one of which, a 1908 work by Gustave Vanzype, Proust himself acquired as a sort of *aide memoire* after his visit to the exhibit. (With its numerous reproductions, he told Vaudoier, the book permitted him “to recognize in different paintings the identical accessories”—thus presumably confirming his protagonist's remarks to the same effect in his lecture to Albertine.)⁹⁷ Like others of his generation, including Proust himself, Vanzype eagerly welcomed Vermeer as a contemporary. “We go to him,” he wrote, “because a sort of mysterious prescience made him see as we see, made him discern, divine, anticipate a sensibility that would not develop until two centuries after him.”⁹⁸ Vaudoier, too, spoke of Vermeer's “modern feeling”—his example, perhaps surprisingly, was the Italianate *Diana*—and made clear how much had changed in the half-century since Thoré-Bürger patiently strove to identify the painter's corpus. It was “beyond imagination,” Vaudoier declared, that anyone could have ever confused a Vermeer with the work of another artist.⁹⁹

Yet the aura of the unknown that continued to surround Vermeer was as much a part of his appeal as the distinctiveness of his vision. Nearly fifty years after Thoré-Bürger had introduced his “sphinx,”¹⁰⁰ the Delft painter was still figuring as “un inconnu” (Vanzype) and “le mystérieux Vermeer” (Vaudoier) in the sources Proust consulted;¹⁰¹ and what had been forgotten or could never be recovered of the artist's history remained the constant ground against which his achievement was articulated. Indeed, despite the assiduous research of John Michael Montias and others, this is still to a great extent the idea of the artist we have inherited; and if there are good reasons for this—the very small output of completed work, the narrow circle of patrons among which it circulated, the relative provinciality of Delft, even perhaps the necessary reticence of a Catholic convert in Protestant Holland—the aura of mystery nonetheless remains.¹⁰² In Proust's case, the effect of the unknown, or the partially known, was intensified by his inability to see a number of the paintings for himself, as his repeated allusions to those at Dresden and Vienna suggest. “And still I know almost nothing of Vermeer,” he had written to Vaudoier in the same letter that called the *View of Delft* “the most beautiful painting in the world”; and even as he yearned to know more, he continued to revel in the mystery.¹⁰³ He more than once attacked Fromentin for never having “even named” Vermeer, though this was not in fact true, as if the utter absence of the painter from *Les maîtres d'autrefois* would only heighten his allure.¹⁰⁴ To Vaudoier, he wrote of “ce maître inoui,” the adjective nicely hovering between what is unheard of in this master and what is extraordinary.¹⁰⁵ And in the meditation

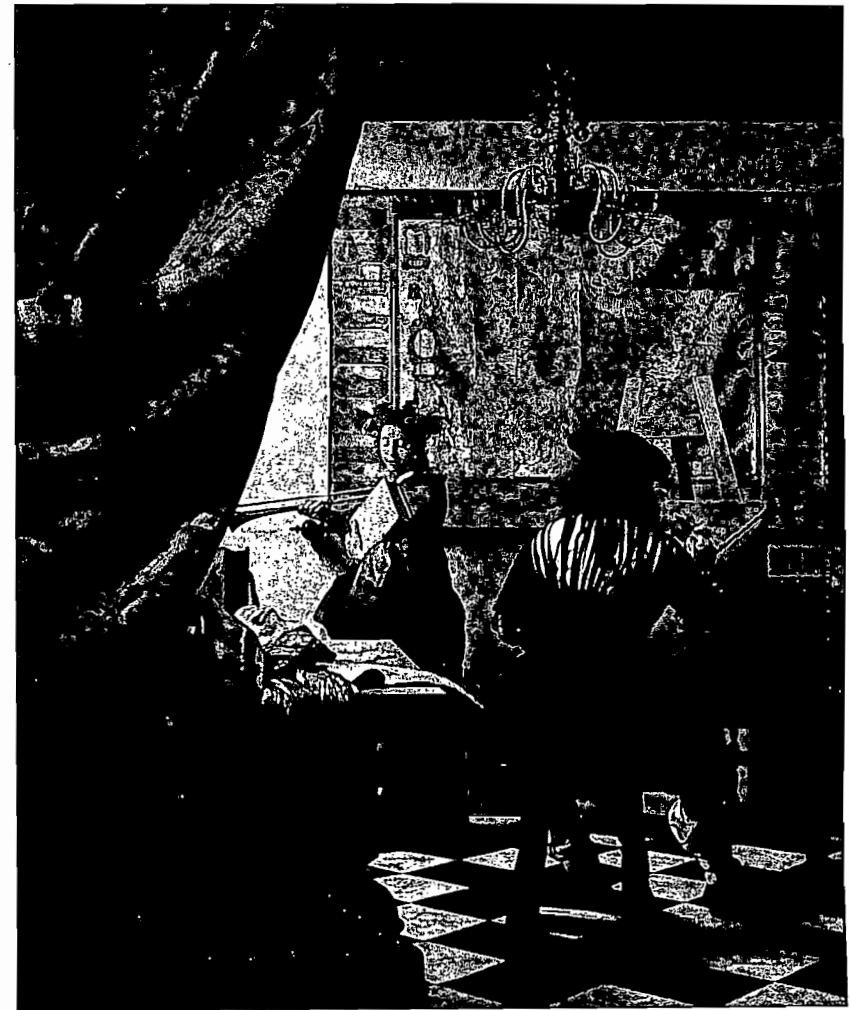


Figure 6-6. Johannes Vermeer: *The Art of Painting*, 1665–66. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, N.Y.

that follows Bergotte's death, it is “an artist forever unknown [un artiste à jamais inconnu] and barely identified under the name of Vermeer” who ambiguously serves as the figure of artistic afterlife (3:693; 5:208).

“This painter turns his back on us,” Vaudoier had written in the evocative description of *The Art of Painting* (fig. 6-6) that closes his article; and Proust had responded by finding the idea both “admirable” and “poignant.”¹⁰⁶ Though the painting was among those he only knew through

reproductions, its image of the artist who refuses our gaze and turns instead to his work clearly spoke to the novelist who argued that the writer's true self "is manifested in his books alone."¹⁰⁷ Vaudoyer had also observed that most of Vermeer's figures, too, seem to be unaware of the viewer; and while he did not expand on this point, one might suggest that the oft-remarked elusiveness of the painter's human subjects would likewise have resonated with a novelist whose own art repeatedly demonstrates that the subjectivity of others remains unknowable. The protagonist of *À la recherche* may imagine that he will arrive at the truth about Albertine, but all he can know is a series of different aspects or impressions, none of which gives him the reality of the woman herself. The more obsessively he concentrates on her, the more elusive she becomes. Vermeer, too, simultaneously focuses our attention on his women and heightens their mystery: closing off the space of a painting (even as Proust's protagonist seeks to confine Albertine) and often eliminating all intruders, he tantalizes us with the nearness of figures who refuse to acknowledge our presence. The solitary subjects of pictures like *The Milkmaid* (plate 11) or *The Lacemaker* (plate 12), for example, are women wholly absorbed in their tasks, their expressions unreadable—women who retain their reserve even as they invite us to intimacy.¹⁰⁸ (The former was among those paintings Proust claimed to know "by heart" before he saw them again at the 1921 exhibit.)¹⁰⁹ But if we are denied access to the women themselves, what we can know, as the narrator of *À la recherche* implicitly argues, is how the artist saw them.¹¹⁰ This is the burden of the passage from *Le temps retrouvé* that compares the writer's style to the painter's color—and identifies both with the "revelation" that alone enables us to escape our subjectivity. Only in art, the narrator argues, can we glimpse "the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain for ever the secret of every individual." Albertine retains her secret, but by the close of *À la recherche*, Proust—not the man, but the novelist—has allowed us to share his. "Thanks to art," the narrator goes on to declare, "we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists" (4:474; 6:254). Though a number of these, from Giotto to Debussy, have been invoked in the course of the narrative, the only names who figure in this crucial passage are those exemplary originals, Rembrandt and Vermeer.

In one sense, the rediscovery of Vermeer did little to transform the idea of Dutch painting the nineteenth century had inherited. "Vermeer of Delft resembles no one," Vanzype had written in his study of the artist;¹¹¹ and there

is some evidence that Proust, too, increasingly wished to mark the artist's difference from his compatriots. If he had his way, he wrote to Vaudoyer in 1920, he would demand that the Louvre not hang *The Lacemaker* with other pictures from the same country, but "as a masterpiece, apart."¹¹² (It was then the only Vermeer in the museum.) The following year, more Dutch pictures briefly appeared on view in Paris, but in Proust's fictional version of the exhibit, Bergotte has no use for anything but his beloved *View of Delft*. "He walked past several pictures and was struck by the aridity and pointlessness [inutilité] of such an artificial kind of art, which was not worth the air and sunlight of a Venetian palazzo, or of a simple house by the sea. At last he came to the Vermeer . . ." (3:692; 5:207). Though neither "an artificial kind of art"—Proust's adjective is "factice"—nor the comparison to a Venetian palazzo would ordinarily seem to point at Dutch painting, the context implies that here, too, Vermeer is being set apart from his countrymen. Indeed, even within the artist's very small oeuvre, Proust appears to single out a few works from the others. The only two Vermeers that figure by name in the course of *À la recherche* are not, after all, those "fragments of the same world" about which the narrator lectures Albertine (3:879; 5:430) but relative anomalies in the artist's career—the one a mythological subject, whose very difference from the domestic interiors had long rendered its attribution doubtful, and the other a rare townscape (fig. 6-5, plate 16). Neither the *View of Delft*—so remote and quiet that it has frequently been likened to still life—nor the classically elegant *Diana* is a genre painting. And neither bears much resemblance to those "faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence" with which George Eliot had identified her art of the novel.¹¹³

I have been arguing that Proust responded to the protomodernity of Vermeer, yet the *Diana* reminds us that there is another, arguably less anachronistic, way of understanding the formal abstraction of his art, which is by looking to the Italians. Though there is no evidence that Vermeer ever traveled to Italy, scholars have often been tempted to speak of his "classicism" and to think of his bringing to bear on the typical subjects of the North the clarifying and idealizing impulses historically identified with the South.¹¹⁴ Montias has suggested that in certain respects, Vermeer comes closer to Raphael than to any of his Northern contemporaries.¹¹⁵ This is not the place to explore such connections; but to the extent that Vermeer is indeed "profoundly different from the Dutch art of his time," as Vanzype contended,¹¹⁶ Proust's own affinity for the Delft painter might be understood as yet another turn away from the low materialism with which other Dutch artists had long been associated. It is that, of course—but only

because Proust had always believed that "museums are buildings that house only thoughts," even if those thoughts take the guise of still life or genre.¹¹⁷ "I didn't dare to hope that you would render such justice to this extraordinary master," he wrote to Vaudoyer after the first installment of "Le mystérieux Vermeer," "because I know your ideas (very true) on hierarchy in Art, and I feared him a little too Chardin for you."¹¹⁸ As late as 1920, Vaudoyer was still prepared to assert that "the 'hierarchy' of subject," in his words, "implies the 'hierarchy' of genius";¹¹⁹ but despite the polite concession of Proust's letter, nothing in *À la recherche* suggests that its author concurred. It is only the Duke of Guermantes, we might recall, who stubbornly "refuse[s] to swallow" Elstir's *Bundle of Asparagus* (2:791; 3:578)—a picture that owes its immediate inspiration to Manet, but traces its more distant lineage, by way of Chardin, to the humble still life of the Dutch. When Swann compares the sudden appearance of the "little phrase" in Vinteuil's sonata to the revelation of "a different colour, velvety with the radiance of some intervening light" in a distant doorway by Pieter de Hooch (1:215; 1:262), the connection, at once sensory and abstract, cuts across all hierarchies of subject and genre. And though Proust's novel never directly alludes to Vermeer's *Lacemaker*, it is easy to imagine that he would have sympathized with those who have sensed some covert identification between the painter and his subject, as she bends, utterly absorbed, to her work.¹²⁰ When the narrator of *À la recherche* finally gets down to his own work, it is not to Bergotte or even Elstir that he turns for a model, but to Françoise, his seamstress and cook: "I should construct my book, I dare not say ambitiously like a cathedral, but quite simply like a dress" (4:610; 6:432).

For all his affinities with seventeenth-century painting, Proust's very taste in Dutch art identifies him as a modern. Rather than Teniers or Gerrit Dou, he invokes de Hooch and Vermeer, even as his Anglo-Irish contemporary George Moore had called on the same painters two decades earlier in order to praise the artful selection of Flaubert. "Every detail contributes to enforce the unity of the picture," to quote Moore again: "For beauty of selection, for beauty of drawing, for beauty of colour, the Dutchmen have not done better."¹²¹ Unlike Balzac, George Eliot, and Hardy, each of whom was a writer before turning to the Dutch for a model, Proust had no need to counter a tendency toward sensational plotting or philosophical abstraction by attending closely to pictures of daily life. Nor did he share their impulse to chafe at the model after they had adopted it. Alone among the novelists studied here, Proust began with an idea of Dutch painting that did not require him to choose between the everyday detail and the aspirations of high art.

CHAPTER ONE
THE NOVEL AS DUTCH PAINTING

Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own, though I have taken the liberty of consulting English editions when available. Except where noted, all authors of anonymous articles in nineteenth-century periodicals are identified in the *Wellesley Index of Victorian Periodicals* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 2005).

1. [Walter Scott], review of *Emma*, in *Quarterly Review* 14 (1815-16); rpt. in *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 230, 231, 235.

2. *Ibid.*, 231.

3. *An Account of All the Pictures Exhibited in the Rooms of the British Institution from 1813 to 1823 . . .* (London: Priestley and Weale, 1824), 200. It may be that Scott was thinking of the rather idealized images of rural life for which Teniers, as Vivian Atwater has recently shown, was chiefly popular in mid-eighteenth-century France: at one point he absent-mindedly refers to the "cornfields and cottages and meadows" that supposedly constitute Austen's world as opposed to the grounds of a "show mansion" or the "rugged sublimities" of a mountain landscape (Scott, review of *Emma*, 235). As we shall see, this would not be the only instance in which a nineteenth-century viewer approached Netherlandish painting both as a realistic representation of ordinary life and as a nostalgic image of a simpler past. But Austen's well-known tribute to "English verdure" in the "sweet view" of Abbey-Mill Farm notwithstanding, it remains difficult to identify her fiction with Teniers's pastoral images of the Flemish countryside. For Teniers in France, see Vivian Lee Atwater, "Les graveurs et la vogue néerlandaise dans le Paris du XVIII^e siècle," *Nouvelles de l'estampe*, nos. 142-43 (1995): 3-12.

4. Cf. Max J. Friedländer, *Landscape, Portrait, Still-Life: Their Origin and Development*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Schocken, 1963): "The pictorial idea, as an end, leads the genre-painter to the type, while observation, as the means, leads him to the individual" (191).

5. The very ubiquity of the allusion makes claims for priority hazardous. In his important article on the subject, Peter Demetz, for example, contends that Scott's

54. Oliver Bonard, *La peinture dans la création Balzacienne: Invention et vision picturales de "La maison du chat-qui-pelote" au "Père Goriot"* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1969), 144-54. Ever since Balzac's time, critics have understandably been tempted to invoke the name of Daumier as well; but Bonard contends that very little is known of Daumier's influence on the novelist and argues instead for a convergence of styles between them (125-27).

55. Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts*, 48-50.

56. Bonard, *Peinture dans la création Balzacienne*, 123-54, 165-78.

57. Bullen, *Expressive Eye*, 50-52.

58. See Michael Squires, *The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1974), 114; and Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career*, 44-49. It is Squires who notes the echoes of "And so am I for Phebe," etc. (*As You Like It*, 5.2), in the sequence that begins with the tranter's "and so do everybody, my sonnies" (*Under the Greenwood Tree*, 188-89).

59. To Samuel Chew, 17 September 1922, *Letters of Thomas Hardy*, 6:155.

60. The comparison was not always in Hardy's favor. "Shakespeare also has his metaphysical clowns," an anonymous review of *Far from the Madding Crowd* conceded, "but neither his clowns, nor George Eliot's rustics, nor Scott's peasants, rise to anything like the flights of abstract reasoning with which Mr. Hardy credits his cider-drinking boors" (*Saturday Review*, 39 [1875]: 57).

61. For general observations about the echoes of Shakespearean low-life in novelistic realism, see Alexander Welsh, "Contrast of Styles in the Waverley Novels" (1973), rpt. in *The Hero of the Waverley Novels: With New Essays on Scott* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. 180-81, 190.

62. Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, ed. Alan Manford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 225, 228.

63. Hardy, *Return of the Native*, 17, 244.

64. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Juliet Grindle and Simon Gattrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 100, 140. Compare the novel's description of the "fever of mobility" that afflicts the work-folk on Old Lady-Day with the related account in "The Dorsetshire Labourer." Like the essay—and in virtually the same words—the novel argues that the increasing depopulation of the villages is compelled as much as willed: "the process, humorously designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns,' being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery" (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 372-73). Cf. "The Dorsetshire Labourer," in *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice*, 56.

65. Thomas Hardy, *Two on a Tower*, ed. Suleiman M. Ahmad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13.

66. See Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts*, 50-64; Shelagh Hunter, *Victorian Idyllic Fiction: Pastoral Strategies* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1984), 186-94; and Bullen, *Expressive Eye*, esp. 169-222.

67. Hardy, *Life*, 52.

68. Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, ed. Dale Kramer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9-10, II. A coffin-stool is a stand or support for a coffin.

69. *Ibid.*, II. For related observations on this scene, see Bullen, *Expressive Eye*, 180-82.

70. Hardy, *Life*, 191. The emphasis is Hardy's.

71. See Kramer's note to this passage in *The Woodlanders*, 368. By "post-Raffaelite," Hardy presumably means a style of painting that came after the Pre-Raphaelites.

72. Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 162.

73. Notebook entry of 13 February 1887 (Hardy, *Life*, 192).

74. Cf. George Levine's fine discussion of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, significantly subtitled "Reversing the Real," in *The Realistic Imagination*, 229-51. If the author of *The Mayor* is still a realist, in Levine's capacious understanding of the term, he nonetheless abandons or reverses many of the assumptions on which English realists before him had proceeded—not least, as Levine notes, those of the early George Eliot.

75. Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 308, 333.

76. Hardy, *Life*, 183. The phrase comes from a notebook entry of 4 March 1886.

77. *Ibid.*, 192.

78. "Turner's water-colours," he recorded in his notebook after a visit to the Royal Academy in January of 1889: "each is a landscape *plus* a man's soul. . . . What he paints chiefly is *light as modified by objects*" (Hardy, *Life*, 225; the ellipses as well as both emphases are the novelist's). For the argument that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in particular is much influenced by the late Turner, see Bullen, *Expressive Eye*, 191-222.

79. Hardy, "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (1888), rpt. in *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice*, 82. See also "The Science of Fiction" (1891), which adduces the case of "an accomplished lady," who "once confessed to the writer that she could never be in a room two minutes without knowing every article of furniture it contained and every detail in the attire of the inmates, and, when she left, remembering every remark" in order to argue that such a person was not in fact "a born novelist." Rather than Dutch painting, however, the paradigm for such "complete copyism" has now become photography (*Thomas Hardy's Public Voice*, 109).

80. Hardy, *Life*, 239.

81. Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career*, 66.

82. Hardy, *Life*, 154, 268. Cf. another variant on these remarks, which dates from 1891: "Howells and those of his school forget that a story *must* be striking enough to be worth telling. Therein lies the problem—to reconcile the average with that uncommonness which alone makes it natural that a tale or experience would dwell in the memory and induce repetition" (251; emphasis Hardy's).

CHAPTER SIX

PROUST'S GENRE PAINTING AND THE REDISCOVERY OF VERMEER

1. Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 131.
2. For excellent accounts of this complicated history and its implications for the novelist's career, see especially Alexander Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 113-31; and Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Her Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 119-60.

3. See "History of 'Adam Bede'" (30 November 1858), in *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 296.

4. Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 17.

5. See Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (New York: Random House, 1971), 57. Simon Gattrell observes that the resemblance between the tranter's cottage and Hardy's childhood home was not really noticeable until the novel was revised for the Wessex edition of 1912. Gattrell, "Wessex," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.

6. Honoré de Balzac, *La recherche de l'absolu*, in Balzac, *La comédie humaine*, ed. Pierre-Georges Castex, 12 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 10:657. Subsequent references to the *Comédie humaine* are given by volume and page number, preceded by *CH*, in the text.

7. For these and other links between Balzac's family history and *La maison du chat-qui-pelote* (including the argument that its unhappy marriage was inspired by that of the novelist's sister Laurence), see Anne-Marie Meininger's introduction to her edition of the tale (*CH* 1:25-38).

8. [Louis de Loménie], "M. de Balzac," in *Galerie des contemporains illustres, par un homme de rien*, vol. 3 (Paris: René et Cie, 1841): 33.

9. Hippolyte Babou, review of *La muse du département*, in *Revue de Paris* 22 (1843): 53. (On *Eugénie Grandet* and female chastity, see esp. 55, 58.)

10. Marcel Proust, "Tableaux de genre du souvenir," in *Les plaisirs et les jours* (1896). I quote from Proust, *Jean Santeuil précédé de Les plaisirs et les jours*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 130.

11. Cf. Christiane Hertel, *Vermeer: Réception and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): "Pictorial remembrance pertains here only to a certain part of the faculty of memory, that part which deals with regularity, the everyday, the only slightly varied or plainly repetitive aspects of life." While I agree with Hertel that the passage relies on "commonplaces about Dutch art" (122), I am less prepared to take for granted its governing comparison of the memory to a genre painter.

12. W. Bürger [Théophile Thoré], *Musées de la Hollande*, 2 vols. (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1858-60), 2:58-59.

13. Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, trans. Euan Cameron (New York: Penguin, 2001), 94-95.

14. Proust, "Tableaux de genre du souvenir," 130-31.

15. To Maurice Duplay [toward the end of May 1905], Marcel Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. Philip Kolb, 21 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1970-93), 5:183.

16. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 95-97. Cf. Hertel, who rightly calls attention to the self-consciousness of Proust's sentimentality in the essay, even as she somewhat exaggerates his irony at his own expense by tendentiously translating "coupée de lacunes" as "with many blanks" (*Vermeer*, 123).

17. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 175.

18. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89), 3:206. I generally adopt the English translation of C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, as revised by D. J. Enright, *In Search of Lost Time*, 6 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), though I have made some silent alterations from time to time. For the convenience of the reader, volume and page references to this edition appear parenthetically after those to the Pléiade edition in the text. (The reference here is to 4:243.)

19. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 292, 591.

20. *Ibid.*, 291.

21. Marcel Proust, *Contre Saint-Beuve, précédé de Pastiches et mélanges et suivi de Essais et articles*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 276, 266. Translations from this volume are my own, though I have gratefully consulted Sylvia Townsend Warner's English versions in *Marcel Proust: On Art and Literature*, 1896-1919 (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1997).

22. *Ibid.*, 275.

23. The Pléiade editors suggest that in comparing his future work to the *Thousand and One Nights* at the close of *Le temps retrouvé*, the narrator may also be thinking of Balzac, who "prided himself on being the author of the 'Thousand and One Nights of the West'" (4:1316).

24. See the letters to Mme Carman-Chimay [20 July 1907 or a little after] and René Boylesve [a little before 25 October 1917] in *Correspondance*, 7:226 and 16:266, respectively.

25. With the partial exception of Ruskin, whom he translated with considerable assistance from his mother and Marie Nordlinger, Proust appears to have depended on French editions for his acquaintance with the English. Though he clearly knew both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* (in addition to *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, and *Middlemarch*), there is no evidence that he ever read *Under the Greenwood Tree*, which did not appear in French until the year after his death. Robert Fraser's helpful *Proust and the Victorians: The Lamp of Memory* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994) includes a list of the relevant French editions (293-99). For other accounts of Proust's relation to English writers, see P.-E. Robert, *Marcel Proust: Lecteur des Anglo-Saxons* (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1976); and Emily Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea: Homoeroticism and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot, Hant's: Ashgate, 2002).

26. To Jacques Rivière [18 February 1920], *Correspondance*, 19:124.

27. Marcel Proust, "Préface du traducteur," in John Ruskin, *La Bible d'Amiens*, trans. Proust (Paris: Mercure de France, 1926), 85. *La Bible d'Amiens* was first published in 1904. Cf. also the Pléiade *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 134, which reproduces

Proust's preface and notes as he later revised them for inclusion in his 1919 *Pastiches et mélanges*.

28. To Jacques Rivière [18 February 1920], *Correspondance*, 19:124.

29. To Robert de Billy [March 1910], *Correspondance*, 10:55. Cf. an earlier letter to another friend, which follows up an admonitory quotation from Ruskin by observing: "That doesn't prevent the works of Ruskin from often being stupid, fanatical, irritating, false, ridiculous; but they are always laudable and always great. He was, you know, very admired by George Eliot" (To Georges de Lauris [8 November 1908], *Correspondance*, 8:286-87).

30. John Ruskin, *The Bible of Amiens*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903-12), 33:44.

31. Proust, note to *La Bible d'Amiens*, 132. The note also includes "les prophètes de Carlyle" in this comparison (131). Cf. Proust, "Mélanges," in *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 73n.

32. Ruskin, *The Bible of Amiens*, in *Works*, 33:44.

33. Cf. both Fraser, *Proust and the Victorians*, 96-97, and Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea*, 82, who likewise assume that Proust is thinking of Dutch painting in these notes on George Eliot.

34. Proust, [Sur George Eliot], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 656-57.

35. Just when Proust first encountered Ruskin remains unclear. Tadié attributes the future novelist's discovery of the English critic to an article by Robert de La Sizeranne on "Ruskin et la religion de la beauté" in the *Revue des deux mondes* of 1 March 1897 (*Marcel Proust*, 279). But according to Diane R. Leonard, Marie Nordlinger recalled that when she first met Proust in the winter of 1896, he had already read everything by Ruskin then translated into French. Leonard herself notes that brief extracts from Ruskin's work had been appearing in the *Bulletin de l'union pour action morale* since 1893. See Leonard, "Ruskin and the Cathedral of Lost Souls," in *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*, ed. Richard Bales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 43.

36. For passing comments on how the Rembrandt essay anticipates the death of Bergotte, see Helen Borowitz, "The Rembrandt and Monet of Marcel Proust," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 70 (1983): 73, 77; Fraser, *Proust and the Victorians*, 83-85; Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 312; Hertel, *Vermeer*, 117-18; and Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea*, 177. Only Fraser and Eells (157-58) remark the wishful character of Proust's fiction about Ruskin. In addition to this undated and unpublished essay, Proust also wrote a brief official obituary of Ruskin that appeared in January 1900 (*Contre Saint-Beuve*, 439-41).

37. On Proust and the Louvre, see Antoine Compagnon, "Proust au musée," in *Marcel Proust: L'écriture et les arts*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié and Florence Callu (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 67-79. According to Compagnon, from the late 1880s to the early 1890s "Proust a vécu au musée" (68).

38. To Pierre Mainguet [toward the end of November 1895], *Correspondance*, 1:444. The editors of the Pléiade *Contre Saint-Beuve* speculate that the pages on Rembrandt may have been added to the essay after its initial composition (885).

39. Proust, [Chardin et Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 372, 380.

40. On the echo of the essay in the novel, see the editors' note to the Pléiade edition, 2:1451.

41. Proust, [Chardin et Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 380, 381.

42. Proust, [Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 660, 659, 662.

43. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 205.

44. Proust, [Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 659-60. The ms. originally read, "ces idées qui pour chaque grand homme est lui-même"; but the Pléiade editors have replaced Proust's singular verb with a plural (967).

45. Though the essay refers explicitly to the Amsterdam exhibit, the evidence makes clear that Proust was drawing on his memories of the Louvre as well: the *Good Samaritan* to which he alludes, for example, did not apparently travel from Paris, nor did the museum's version of *The Slaughtered Ox*—"the one," as Proust says, "where a woman on the right is looking back as she leaves" (*Contre Saint-Beuve*, 660). For the nineteenth-century exhibition history of these pictures—including works no longer securely attributed to Rembrandt—see C. P. Hofstede de Groot, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century* . . . , trans. and ed. Edward G. Hawke, vol. 6 (London: Macmillan, 1916).

46. For the history of this painting, see Walter Liedtke et al., *Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Aspects of Connoisseurship*, 2 vols. (New York: Abrams, 1995), 2:125-28. For the suggestion that Proust's essay was inspired by Émile Michel's review of the Amsterdam exhibit in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* (November and December 1898), which specifically remarked how Rembrandt "transforms" and "poetizes" common types like *The Old Woman Cutting Her Nails*, see Borowitz, "The Rembrandt and Monet of Marcel Proust," 74.

47. Proust, [Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 661. As it happens, this image, too, has now been demoted to a school piece. For a helpful account of the nineteenth century's radical expansion of the Rembrandt corpus, see Catherine B. Scallen, *Rembrandt, Reputation, and the Practice of Connoisseurship* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004).

48. Proust, "Préface," *Bible d'Amiens*, 57. Cf. Proust, "Mélanges," *Contre-Saint-Beuve*, 112.

49. Proust, [Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 663.

50. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 312.

51. Proust, [Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 663-64.

52. *Ibid.*, 664.

53. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 392-93, 859.

54. To Jean-Louis Vaudoyer [14 May 1921]; To Jean-Louis Vaudoyer [1 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:263, 226.

55. For the identification of this picture, see the editors' note to the Pléiade edition (2:1569).

56. Georges Poulet, *Proustian Space*, trans. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 99, 100. *L'espace proustien* was first published in 1963.

57. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 123, 117. The French text originally appeared as part of Genette's *Figures III* in 1972.

58. For the "paradoxical presence of an iterative" in Proust's *passé simple* or *passé composé*, see *ibid.*, 132. According to the notes to the Pléiade edition, earlier drafts of the novel's opening did resort to the imperfect (1:1085-86).

59. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 123.

60. Germaine Brée, *The World of Marcel Proust* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 152.

61. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 6. On Auteuil and Illiers more generally, see 1-12.

62. One line in an early notebook for *À la recherche* reads simply, "1^{re} page du *Moulin sur la Floss*." See Marcel Proust, *Le carnet de 1908*, ed. Philip Kolb (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 94. For commentary on the connection, see L. A. Bisson, "Proust, Bergson, and George Eliot," *Modern Language Review* 40 (1945): 104-14; Robert, *Marcel Proust*, 62-65; and Fraser, *Proust and the Victorians*, 107-11.

63. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 175.

64. To Walter Berry [10 July 1919], *Correspondance*, 18:321. For virtually the same formula, see his letter to Fernand Vandérem [4 or 5 May 1921], *ibid.*, 20:245. Proust was not always quite so extravagant. In 1895, as we have seen, he still counted Leonardo and Rembrandt as his favorite painters; while a letter of 1907 pronounces the *View of Delft* "the painting that I most admired [j'ai le plus aimé] in Holland" before going on to declare, somewhat bafflingly, "Obviously, there are at Amsterdam three or four Rembrandts that I admire still more. But this *View of Delft* seems to me one of the five or six most beautiful paintings that I know in the whole world, likewise a woman by the same Vermeer at The Hague, and (less beautiful but charming) a street in Delft by the same hand, at the Maison Six in Amsterdam" (To the Princess Alexandre de Caraman-Chimay [a little before June 28 1907], *Correspondance*, 21:615). If pictures could serve as war reparations, he wrote in 1920, he would prefer the Vermeers at Dresden and Vienna to additional Watteaus—only to add, "All this doesn't mean that I prefer Vermeer to Watteau" (To Jean-Louis Vaudoier [first days of February 1920], *Correspondance*, 19:108). Cf. also To Walter Berry [10 July 1919], *Correspondance*, 18:321.

65. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 323.

66. Originally identified as the work of Maes when it entered the Mauritshuis in 1876, the *Diana* was tentatively assigned to Vermeer in 1885, only to be reattributed to Jan Vermeer van Utrecht in the 1890s. It was not until the identification of another early history painting by the Delft artist, the *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* now in Edinburgh, that the *Diana's* attribution was securely settled. For the history of the painting, see the catalogue entry by Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., and Ben Broos in *Johannes Vermeer*, ed. Frederick J. Duparc and Wheelock (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 100. For Proust's knowledge of the disputed attribution, see the note to the Pléiade edition (1:1243-44).

67. This scene may have inspired almost as much commentary as the mother's kiss or the tasting of the madeleine. For some relevant discussions, see René Huyghe, "Affinités électives: Vermeer et Proust," *L'amour de l'art*, January 1936, 7-15; Hélène Adhémar, "La vision de Vermeer par Proust, à travers Vaudoier," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 68 (1966): 291-302; Giovanni Macchia, *L'ange de la nuit: Sur Proust*, trans. Marie-France Merger, Paul Bédarida, and Mario Fusco (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 185-96; and Hertel, *Vermeer*, 116-36.

68. For the history of this episode and its composition, see Pierre-Edmond Robert's "Notice" to *La prisonnière* (3:1683-84); and Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 756-57. This history also explains the oft-remarked fact that Bergotte still appears to be alive in some later, and presumably unrevised, passages of *La prisonnière* and *Le temps retrouvé*.

69. For some relevant excerpts; see the editor's note to the Pléiade edition, 3:1740. Vaudoier's article originally appeared in *L'opinion* of 30 April, 7 and 14 May 1921: 487-89, 514-16, 542-44. An English translation, on which I have partly relied, is given as an appendix to Daniel Arasse, *Vermeer: Faith in Painting*, trans. Terry Grabar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 87-97.

70. Compagnon, "Proust au musée," 67. On the afternoon of his visit to the Jeu de Paume, Proust did, however, also take in an Ingres exhibit—the last paintings he apparently ever went to see (Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 745-56).

71. To Jean-Louis Vaudoier [between 18 and 24 May 1921], Proust, *Correspondance*, 20:289.

72. William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 753.

73. Following Philip Kolb's argument in his introduction to vol. 20 of the Proust *Correspondance* (x-xii), both Tadié (*Marcel Proust*, 745) and Carter (*Marcel Proust*, 753) are concerned to correct the story circulated by the novelist's brother, according to which Proust was inspired to kill off Bergotte when he himself was taken ill at the exhibition.

74. Thierry Laget, "Le vernis d'un autre maître: Proust et la peinture ancienne," in *Marcel Proust: L'écriture et les arts*, 27. The effect is perhaps closest to the *style indirect libre* by which Proust records the thoughts of "Swann in Love," but in that case, at least, there is always the possibility that the narrator has somehow learned these from Swann after the fact. That Proust was still dictating fragments about Bergotte's death on his own deathbed only confirms the intensity with which he had imagined the episode (Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 776).

75. To Jean-Louis Vaudoier [a little after 17 June 1922], *Correspondance* 21:291-92.

76. To Fernand Vandérem [4 or 5 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:245.

77. Proponents of the roof include Huyghe, "Affinités électives," 14; Adhémar "La vision de Vermeer," 291; Jeffrey Meyers, "Proust and Vermeer," *Art International* 17, no. 5 (1973): 69; and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Vermeer and the Art of Painting*

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 76. Those who argue for the wall (or walls) to the right include Jean Pavans, *Petit pan de mur jaune* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1986), 41-45, and the editors of the Pléiade edition (3:1740). In a recent study of the question, *Proust e Vermeer: Apologia dell' imprecisione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), Lorenzo Renzi contends that Proust deliberately kept the allusion vague.

78. Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, "Le mystérieux Vermeer II," *L'opinion*, 7 May 1921, 515.

79. Compagnon, "Proust au Musée," 77.

80. Given Proust's own letter to Vaudoyer about the gables "like precious Chinese objects" (see note 75, above), I am not persuaded by the argument that the novelist implicitly criticizes Bergotte here for detaching a part of the work from its context: the yellow patch seems to me rather to operate as a synecdoche for the whole. For the critique of Bergotte, see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 229; and Joshua Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 82, 220. Cf. also Vincent Descombes, *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), who argues, to the contrary, that at every stage of Marcel's aesthetic education, he learns to accentuate "a part at the expense of the whole" (108; emphasis in original). Among other cases in point, Descombes cites both the Bergotte episode and the famous "little phrase" from the sonata of Vinteuil.

81. "Style is in no way an embellishment, as certain people think, it is not even a question of technique; it is—like color with certain painters—a quality of vision, a revelation of a private universe which each of us sees and which others do not see. The pleasure an artist gives us is to make us know an additional universe" (To Antoine Bibesco [November 1912], in *Lettres de Marcel Proust à Bibesco*, ed. Thierry Maulnier [Lausanne: Guild du Livre, 1949], 177; and [Swann expliqué par Proust], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 559). (The latter is an interview which essentially recycles the language of the letter.) I am indebted to Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 36, for alerting me to these lines.

82. Vaudoyer, "Le mystérieux Vermeer III," *L'opinion*, 14 May 1921, 543, 542.

83. Vaudoyer, "Le mystérieux Vermeer II," 515.

84. Paul Morand to Marcel Proust, 1 May 1921, *Correspondance*, 20:222-23.

85. Adhémar, "La vision de Vermeer," 294. Vaudoyer had been reading Proust at least since 1910, when the future novelist sent him a copy of *Les plaisirs et les jours* (Carter, *Marcel Proust*, 493).

86. Hertel, *Vermeer*, 123. For Hertel, this belongs to a series of metaphorical panels, gates, and thresholds that are both summoned up and obscurely criticized by the novel's representation of the *View of Delft*.

87. By translating *pan de château* as "the wing of a castle" (rather than a wall), Moncrieff et al. muffle this echo (1:9).

88. Though the novel never directly names Vermeer in this connection, it does tell us that Elstir recognizes in Chardin, among others, "attempts of the same kind, anticipatory fragments, so to speak, of works of his own" (2:713; 3:484-85).

89. Lawrence Gowing, *Vermeer* (1952; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 19.

90. Arasse, *Vermeer*, 53-54.

91. "Exquisite," Proust wrote, "but not enough," since *The Lacemaker* was, he complained, the only Vermeer in the Louvre (To Walter Berry [10 July 1919], *Correspondance*, 18:321).

92. Harry Berger, Jr., *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 484. On the general subject of Vermeer's *pointillé*, I am especially indebted to Arasse, *Vermeer*, 69-75.

93. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., review of Albert Blankert, *Johannes Vermeer van Delft 1632-1675*, in *The Art Bulletin* 59 (1977): 440. In a subsequent study, Wheelock and C. J. Kaldenbach have shown through x-rays and infrared reflectography how Vermeer altered the picture to reinforce its two-dimensional effect. See their "Vermeer's *View of Delft* and his Vision of Reality," *Artibus et Historiae* 3, no. 6 (1982): 9-35.

94. Berger, *Second World and Green World*, 484.

95. W. Bürger [Théophile Thoré], "Van der Meer de Delft," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 21 (1866): 297.

96. For summaries of the relevant evidence, see Albert Blankert et al., *Vermeer of Delft: Complete Edition of the Paintings* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1978), 61-69; and Ben Broos, "Un celebre Peintre nommé Verme[e]r," in *Johannes Vermeer*, ed. Duparc and Wheelock, 47-65. For a cogent response to Broos, which argues that he tends unduly to minimize Thoré-Bürger's contribution, see Frances Suzman Jowell, "Vermeer and Thoré-Bürger: Recoveries of Reputation," in *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 1998), 35-57.

97. To Jean-Louis Vaudoyer [a little after 17 June 1922], *Correspondance*, 21:292.

98. Gustave Vanzype, *Vermeer de Delft* (Brussels: G. Van Oest, 1908), 65. Proust apparently read a revised and augmented edition of 1921; see *Correspondance*, 21:293n9.

99. Vaudoyer, "Le mystérieux Vermeer II," 515; "Le mystérieux Vermeer I," *L'opinion*, 30 April 1921, 488.

100. Bürger, "Van der Meer de Delft," 299.

101. Vanzype's phrase is the title of his first chapter (*Vermeer de Delft*, 3).

102. See John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). To emphasize what we do not know is not in any way to diminish Montias's achievement: it is thanks to his work in the archives that we have a much clearer picture both of the world from which Vermeer came and of the reasons why other kinds of information appear to be unrecoverable.

103. To Jean-Louis Vaudoyer [1 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:226.

104. Proust, [Préface], *Contre-Saint Beuve*, 580. This is a preface to Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Propos de peintre* (1919); see also the letter to Blanche [toward the middle of October 1918], *Correspondance*, 17:390. Despite this insistence that Vermeer was never even mentioned in *Les maîtres d'autrefois*, Fromentin had in fact

suggested that a wish to be well informed about "this singular presence [particularité] in Dutch art" might be one reason for visiting Holland, since the painter was almost unrepresented in France (Eugène Fromentin; *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Guy Sagnes, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade [Paris: Gallimard, 1984], 685). Presumably it was after reading the first installment of Vaudooyer's article, which quotes these lines, that Proust realized his mistake: a subsequent letter chides Fromentin for "citing the name scarcely and without praise" (To Fernand Vandérem [4 or 5 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:245). One wonders whether the novelist also knew that in some notes on Dutch and Flemish art published posthumously in the *Revue de Paris* (1911-12), Fromentin had called the *View of Delft* "very charming" and "altogether modern" (*Oeuvres complètes*, 1140).

105. To Jean-Louis Vaudooyer [1 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:226.

106. Vaudooyer, "Le mystérieux Vermeer III," 544; To Jean-Louis Vaudooyer [14 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:263.

107. Proust, "La méthode de Saint-Beuve," *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 225.

108. My reading of these paintings is particularly indebted to Arasse, *Vermeer*, 63-69. Like Gowing before him (*Vermeer*, 34), Arasse also draws attention to Vermeer's practice of placing a barrier or barriers between such women and the viewer, as if to collude with their privacy: note how the still life partly bars our way to the milkmaid, for example, or the cushions and work table obtrude between us and the lacemaker.

109. To Fernand Vandérem [4 or 5 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:245.

110. Joshua Landy has observed how "the human adventure" in Proust "is a matter of repeatedly bumping up, in increasing frustration, against the variably colored, translucent 'barrier' between mind and world . . . only to realize that the glass itself—our individual perspective—is far more interesting than any aspect of external reality, however accurately grasped, could be." Though he is not writing of the novelist's relation to Vermeer, that "variably colored, translucent 'barrier,'" more interesting than reality itself, comes very close to Proust's view of the artist (Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 51).

111. Vanzype, *Vermeer de Delft*, 23.

112. To Jean-Louis Vaudooyer [first days of February 1920], *Correspondance*, 19:108. Cf. Giovanni Macchia, who reads these lines as affirming Proust's fundamental agreement with Ruskin's view of Dutch painting (*L'ange de nuit*, 192).

113. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 177.

114. See, e.g., Gowing, *Vermeer*, 62-64; Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu*, 106; and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., "Vermeer of Delft: His Life and His Artistry," in *Johannes Vermeer*, ed. Duparc and Wheelock, 27. For a subtle reading of the *Art of Painting* that shows how Vermeer lays claim to the realm of *cosa mentale* even as he criticizes the classical conception of such mental work, see Arasse, *Vermeer*, 40-58.

115. Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu*, 197.

116. Vanzype, *Vermeer de Delft*, 23. A few pages later, it should be noted, Vanzype radically modifies this claim, by declaring that it is Vermeer's very resemblance to

other Dutch painters that demonstrates his difference—a position that seems to me much closer in spirit to Proust's. In this paradoxical formula, Vermeer "is superior to the painters of his time in resembling them; he is superior to his country in completely belonging to that country. . . . He paints the most ordinary things, the same things as Pieter de Hooch, ter Borch; Nicolaes Maes or Metsu. . . . [H]e looks only at everyday life, like Ostade, Brouwer or Jan Steen. And he does not resemble one of them" (28-29).

117. Proust, [Rembrandt], *Contre Saint-Beuve*, 659.

118. To Jean-Louis Vaudooyer [1 May 1921], *Correspondance*, 20:226.

119. For the article by Vaudooyer to which Proust was alluding, see the editor's note, *Correspondance*, 20:227-28.

120. See, e.g., Berger, *Second World and Green World*, 473-75; and Svetlana Alpers, "Picturing Dutch Culture," in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. Wayne Franits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 67.

121. George Moore, "A Tragic Novel," *Cosmopolis* 7 (1897): 43.