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## The Myth and Science of Homosexuality in *A la recherche du temps perdu*

Of the many different traits Proust assigns to homosexuals in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, one of the most broadly suggestive is the concept of the homosexual as "homme-femme," or "man-woman." And yet this idea has received very little attention in Proustian criticism. Critics either tend to accept it automatically as universally valid truth; or they tend to reject it as an absurdity easily disproved by the most cursory consideration of historical, cultural, and anthropological research on homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Both reactions treat Proust, wrongly, as if he were primarily a theoretician of sex and only secondarily a creative artist. But Proust's concept of the man-woman is much more than an attempted theoretical explanation of homosexuality. It is also an artistic strategy which helps articulate and unify three important dimensions of the novel—the mythological, the scientific, and the aesthetic.

1. For the former case see Dr. Robert Soupault, *Marcel Proust du côté de la médecine* (Paris: Plon, 1967), p. 195 and *passim*; for the latter see J. Z. Eglinton, *Greek Love* (New York: Oliver Layton Press, 1964), p. 407 and *passim*, and André Gide, *Corydon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 9, n. 1 and *passim*.

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe I* (II, 601–32),<sup>2</sup> where Proust first explicitly introduces the theme of homosexuality, he also undertakes an elaborate mythopoeia of the homosexual personality. Among other things, he rewrites the biblical story of Sodom to create his own etiological myth of homosexuality. In Proust's version of the story, some of the Sodomites were able to escape the judgment of heaven and people the earth with their descendants—and these descendants are the present-day homosexuals. Further, the epigraph that stands at the beginning of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* presents the men-women and the descendants of the ancient Sodomites as two interrelated aspects of the same mythography: "Introducing the men-women, descendants of those of the inhabitants of Sodom who were spared by the fire from heaven." In this way Proust establishes the mythic tone. And throughout *Sodome I* he maintains that tone with appropriate mythological allusions. The female spirit coming to life in a homosexual is like the slow vivification of Pygmalion's statue. The lonely homosexual, waiting on the beach for an unknown lover, is "a strange Andromeda whom no Argonaut will come to free." And Jupien and Charlus recognize each other as men of similar tastes because "the gods are immediately perceptible to one another, as quickly like to like, and so too had M. de Charlus been to Jupien."

But, side by side with this carefully planned myth-making, we find the recurrent suggestion that what we are reading is not myth but science—an attempt to observe the homosexual in an objective, almost clinical way, and formulate the general laws of his personality and conduct. The narrator watches Charlus and Jupien in the same way that a naturalist would study plant life. And, in fact, he is waiting to see whether a bee will come to pollenate the rare orchid of the Duchesse de Guermantes when

2. References are to *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré, 3 vols. (Paris: Pléiade, 1954). Quotations in English are from *Remembrance of Things Past*, tr. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1934), with quotations from the last volume from *The Past Recaptured*, tr. Andreas Mayor (New York: Vintage, 1971). My occasional alterations of the standard translations are enclosed in brackets. Original translations from the French are marked with my initials (JER).

the drama of homosexuality begins to unfold before him. Having just reflected that "the laws of the vegetable kingdom are themselves governed by other laws, increasingly exalted," he realizes that Charlus and Jupien are conducting themselves according to a similar set of laws and rituals. The devices Jupien uses to signal to and attract the Baron are, the narrator points out, not unlike the special adaptations which help orchids attract bees. And then, in a famous *morceau de bravoure*, Proust metaphorically transforms Jupien into the beckoning, coquettish flower and Charlus—noticing, approaching, happily whistling—into the curious and questing bee. The narrator, observing and interpreting all this, is like a botanist of human nature. "Failing the geologist's field of contemplation," he says, "I had at least that of the botanist." And he concludes that Jupien represents a sub-variety of homosexual which "every collector of a human herbary, every moral botanist can observe in spite of their rarity."

So the language of myth and the language of science run parallel in *Sodome I*. But how, precisely, do myth and science conjoin in the image of the man-woman? They do so partly because this concept is of ambiguous provenance, partaking at once of the mythic and the scientific traditions. A very likely mythological source for the image is Plato's *Symposium*, a dialogue Proust knew well.<sup>3</sup> In the *Symposium* Aristophanes expounds a half-comic, half-serious myth to account for the origin of homosexual, heterosexual, and lesbian love. The first humanity, according to Aristophanes, was composed of three sexes. Each gender was circular in form and endowed with two faces, four hands, four legs, four ears, and two sets of sexual organs, back to back. Some of these twofold beings were male-male, some female-female, and some male-female. They were creatures of prodigious strength and great pride, who challenged the sovereignty of the gods, causing Zeus to weaken them by splitting them in half. This, says Aristophanes, explains the three varieties of love. Men formed from a cutting of the male-male gender seek out a male complement in an attempt to regain

3. For Proust's knowledge of the *Symposium* see George Painter, *Proust: The Early Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1959), pp. 140-41.

their original state; women formed from a cutting of the female-female gender seek out female partners; and men and women who are cuttings from the original androgyne are heterosexuals.

One of the points of Aristophanes' myth is playfully to confuse the whole concept of gender and sexual identity. Aristophanes is careful to point out, for instance, that before the three dual genders were split down the middle there was no sexual intercourse and propagation as we know it. Instead, primal humanity "[begot] and brought forth not with each other but with the ground." The point, of course, is that when gender is interwoven, duplicated, and reduplicated to such a degree, the concept of partial and separate sexual roles simply does not exist. The sexual division of the primal beings is really Aristophanes' version of the Fall of Man. Gender and sexual separation are punishments, inflictions that make humanity imperfect, incomplete, and less happy than it once was and would like again to be. This is why love of all sorts is such a potent force. It arises, says Aristophanes, from man's constant desire for "bringing together the parts of the original body" in order to "heal the natural structure of man."

We shall see in a moment that the treatment of the man-woman in *A la recherche*—and, indeed, the treatment of sexuality in general—follows in several ways the pattern and spirit of Aristophanes' myth. But first we should notice that the concept of the man-woman, in addition to its mythic resonance, is also the basis of a particular scientific attitude toward homosexuals to which Proust alludes in the novel. It was a commonplace of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexology to regard homosexuals as spiritual hermaphrodites. The idea seems to have originated in the work of the German jurist, Latinist, and pioneering sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, now little known, but one of the most significant influences on the great outpouring of sexological research which characterized the last decades of the nineteenth century. Ulrichs's most important work was *Memnon* (1868), in which he defined the male homosexual character in the Latin formula "anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa" ("the soul of a woman enclosed in the body of a man"),

and the converse for female homosexuals—"anima virilis muliebri corpore inclusa."<sup>4</sup> Now the imagery with which Proust describes the blending of the masculine and feminine in the homosexual temperament makes it evident that he was familiar with Ulrichs's ideas, whether directly, by reading the texts themselves, or indirectly, through their survival in Magnus Hirschfeld, Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and practically every other important sexologist who came after Ulrichs. The interior psychology of Mlle Vinteuil, a conflict between "a shy and suppliant maiden" and an "old campaigner, battered but triumphant" (I, 161), recalls Ulrichs's theory. And Morel is said to have a "girlish air enshrined in his masculine beauty" (II, 1007). In other sections of the novel the echo of Ulrichs's formula is direct and explicit. The narrator speaks of "the woman whom a mistake on the part of Nature had enshrined in the body of M. de Charlus" (II, 908). He attributes the effeminacy of homosexuals to the fact that "for long years a certain number of angelic women have been included by mistake in the masculine sex" (II, 908, 967). And he states that in practically every aging homosexual one can discern "beneath all the layers of paint and powder, some fragments of a beautiful woman preserved in eternal youth" (III, 991).

This background allows us, I think, to understand something of why Proust chose to advocate the man-woman theory in his novel. He wanted, as the imagery of *Sodome I* plainly shows, to be mythically suggestive and scientifically precise at the same time. And the man-woman theory (also called the "*Zwischenstufen*," the "third sex," or the "intermediate sex" theory) was in Proust's time the most widely accepted theory of homosexuality. It was, of course, not the only theory. Even in Proust's day there were those who held that homosexuality is a natural and universal component of human sexuality. There was, in fact, an early homosexual rights movement under way in Germany which, in 1907, underwent a split between those who advocated the popular man-woman view and those who had decided that this view

4. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *Memnon: Die Geschlechtsnatur des mannliebenden Urnings* [*Memnon: Sexual Nature of the Man-Loving Urning*], Part II (Schleiz: C. Hübsch'sche, 1868), p. vii and *passim*.

had little to do with the facts. Benedict Friedländer led the splinter group; and John Lauritsen and David Thorstad describe Friedländer's position as follows:

The *Zwischenstufen* theory was attacked by Friedländer as "degrading and beggarly . . . pleading for sympathy." He ridiculed the notion of "a poor womanly soul languishing away in a man's body, and of the 'third sex.'" Friedländer insisted upon a historical approach which also took into account anthropological evidence; he wrote, "A glance at the cultures of countries before and outside of Christianity suffices to show the complete untenability of the [*Zwischenstufen*] theory. Especially in ancient Greece, most of the military leaders, artists, and thinkers would have had to be 'psychic hermaphrodites.'"<sup>5</sup>

Now Proust's correspondence shows that he was aware that there was more than one way of understanding homosexuality. But it also shows that he had decided, by the time he wrote *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, that the most widely accepted theory—that of the psychologically disordered man-woman, men who should have been women, and women who should have been men—was also the true one. And part of his mission as an artist, he thought, was to communicate the truth in his art, no matter how unpleasant it might seem or whom it might offend. In a letter to André Gide, Proust said of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*: "Unfortunately, the attempt at objectivity I made there, and everywhere, will render this book particularly hateful. In the third volume, in fact, where Monsieur de Charlus . . . plays an important role, the enemies of homosexuality will be revolted by the scenes I shall depict. And the others will not be any more pleased at seeing their ideal of virility presented as the consequence of a feminine temperament."<sup>6</sup> And he wrote to Louis de Robert of his obligation in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* to "dissect" homosexuality and report the results "with the good faith of a chemist."<sup>7</sup>

5. John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement, 1864-1935* (New York: Times Change Press, 1974), p. 50.

6. Marcel Proust, *Lettres à André Gide* (Neuchâtel and Paris: Ides et Calendes, 1949), p. 40. (JER)

7. Louis de Robert, *Comment débuta Marcel Proust* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 64, 66. (JER)



Myth and science, science and myth, revolve around each other in Proust's conception as if they, too, were two halves of some primal whole. But how do they bear upon and interrelate within the aesthetic dimension of the novel? What, in other words, does the man-woman have to do with the central theme of time and the overarching scheme of the narrator's development as an artist?

Most basically, the homosexual as described in *A la recherche* serves as a prototype and model for the narrator's developing creative personality. For in order to create, the narrator has to become in a certain sense androgynous, to become like those men-women who make their appearance at the midpoint of his novel and stand in every sense at its symbolic center. Since the publication of Carolyn Heilbrun's *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973), we have, of course, been hearing a great deal about "androgynous literature" and the "androgynous vision." Indeed, now that these labels have become fashionable, we often find them attached to works which offer very little explicit justification for them—books as unlikely and diverse as *The Odyssey* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

But in all the talk about androgyny Proust—one of the most clearly and unmistakably androgynous of all writers—has been strangely ignored. Heilbrun says he is "marvelously androgynous," but this is, quite literally, all she says about him.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, Gilles Deleuze and Lisa Appignanesi have made some perceptive comments about the androgynous implications of *A la recherche*.<sup>9</sup> But there remains a great deal to be said, especially with regard to the aesthetic and cultural reverberations of Proust's portrait of the man-woman. For the idea of androgyny, as I shall try to show, underlies some of the most fundamentally important aspects of Proust's understanding of life and art.

As was suggested above, the narrator, in order to write his book, has to recapture and exploit the feminine side of his per-

8. Carolyn Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973; rpt. New York: Harper Colophon, 1974), p. 87.

9. Gilles Deleuze, *Marcel Proust et les signes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 144ff.; Lisa Appignanesi, *Femininity and the Creative Imagination: A Study of Henry James, Robert Musil, and Marcel Proust* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), pp. 205ff.

sonality. I say recapture, because the separation of his personality into masculine and feminine parts is one of the first examples of the fragmentation of the self we witness in the novel. On the fourth and fifth pages of the Pléiade edition, in the narrator's famous description of his half-waking, half-sleeping state, we read:

Sometimes, too, just as Eve was created from a rib of Adam, so a woman would come into existence while I was sleeping, conceived from some strain in the position of my limbs. Formed by the appetite that I was on the point of gratifying, she it was, I imagined, who offered me that gratification. My body, conscious that its own warmth was permeating hers, would strive to become one with her, and I would awake. The rest of humanity seemed very remote in comparison with this woman whose company I had left but a moment ago; my cheek was still warm with her kiss, my body bent beneath the weight of hers. If, as would sometimes happen, she had the appearance of some woman whom I had known in waking hours, I would abandon myself altogether to the sole quest of her. . . . And then, gradually, the memory of her would dissolve and vanish, until I had forgotten the maiden of my dream.

In a certain sense this is a précis of all the love affairs to follow, in which the narrator thinks he is loving outside himself but is mainly loving projections of his own imagination and sensibility. In other words, throughout most of the novel he looks outside and beyond himself for the feminine complement to his personality, when actually it has been within all along.

His love for Albertine is a desperate and disappointing attempt to reconstruct in life a version of the primal mythic unity which obtained before Adam and Eve were separated, before man and woman became separate beings and separate concepts. Now there is a rabbinical tradition with which Proust may have been familiar which holds that Adam was in fact a hermaphroditic creature, half man and half woman, and that God created woman by simply dividing his original bisexual creation. It was even thought by one ancient writer that Plato had read the creation account in Genesis and thereby got his idea for the myth of the primal, twofold beings he assigns to Aristophanes in the

symmetry Darwin and other nineteenth-century naturalists were continually pointing out in the fertilization patterns and mating rituals of nature, words through which the narrator, in turn, invites us to see a unique formal beauty in the laws of yet another kind of "marriage-arrangement." Proust intends our reaction to *Sodome I* to follow the same course as the narrator's changing feelings about the jellyfish. When he saw the animal at Balbec, the narrator says, he was instinctively repelled by it; but if he looked at it, as did Michelet, "from the standpoint of natural history, and aesthetic" it became a thing of wonder—"an exquisite wheel of azure flame" (II, 626). Similarly, the narrator says of the scene of homosexual courtship between Charlus and Jupien that "this scene was not, however, positively comic, it was stamped with a strangeness, or if you like a naturalness, the beauty of which steadily increased" (II, 605). *Etrange beauté*, strange beauty—Proust is here fulfilling one of the most basic duties of the artist, to reveal beauty where little has been thought to exist, and in places where we have been previously ill inclined to look for it.

But Proust insists on preserving the strangeness as well as the beauty. His comparison of homosexual love to the larger processes of nature is not aimed, as some have thought, at showing that, contrary to the opinion of conventional morality, homosexuality is natural and good rather than unnatural and evil. This Gidean argument is foreign to Proust's whole tenor of thinking. What interests Proust about homosexuality is the paradox by which, in homosexual love, that which is natural and that which is against nature constantly reflect each other, the dialectic of *physis* and *antiphysis*.<sup>17</sup> In Proust's realization the homosexual is the nexus, at once repugnant and fascinating, hideous and beautiful, grotesque and harmoniously conceived, of all the unnamed and dimly imagined potentialities of nature. Speaking of the comparisons drawn in *Sodome I* between the courtship of Charlus and Jupien and the courtship rituals of nature, the narrator remarks that "the multiplicity of these analogies is itself all the more natural in that the same man, if we examine him for a few minutes, appears in turn as a man, a

17. Cf. Marcel Muller, "Sodome I ou la naturalisation de Charlus," *Poétique*, 8 (1971), 476.

man-bird, [a man-fish, a] man-insect, and so forth" (II, 606). In a similar vein, the narrator later compares the homosexual to a centaur (II, 614).

These passages make it plain that, while Proust's vision is clearly androgynous, it cannot be reduced to androgyny alone. Androgyny for Proust is simply one aspect of the overall coalescence of ontological planes which characterizes his artistic vision. Man-woman, man-bird, man-fish, man-horse, man-insect—the vision is of a piece. It suggests and constantly illustrates man's cosmic potential for recapitulating within his own life the totality of the biological and the mythological history of the race.

This is the sense in which the narrator strives toward androgyny. His futile attempts to contain Albertine in the same way Adam contained Eve are, as we have seen, partly attempts to find and strengthen the feminine element within himself. But they are more: they are also attempts to absorb and understand the world at large, the "infinity of all the points . . . in space and time" symbolized by Albertine and the other *êtres de fuite* in the novel (III, 360). The love affair with Albertine fails. But Albertine as a symbol, as a source of inspiration, as an impetus toward the penetration of the limitless, remains a constant presence in the narrator's final act of creation.

In *Le temps retrouvé* the narrator suggests that in order to carry his project through he will need the combined powers of man, woman, and god. In creating his book, he will have to "accept it like a discipline, build it up like a church, follow it like a medical regime, vanquish it like an obstacle, win it like a friendship, cosset it like a little child, create it like a new world" (III, 1032). He feels himself grown big with "this work which I bore within me. . . anxiously embraced with the fragile protection of its own pulpy and quivering substance" (III, 1036–1037). And Leo Bersani has pointed out that "there is, in fact, a process suggesting the stages of pregnancy: the joyful conception of the idea at the Guermantes *matinée*, the weakness and dizziness on the staircase sometime later, and a painful delivery."<sup>18</sup> For the artistically pregnant narrator of *Le temps retrouvé*, the most pressing appointment is no longer an appointment with Albertine, or with

18. Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 55.

*Symposium*.<sup>10</sup> Though there is no explicit reference to a hermaphroditic Adam in *A la recherche*, something like this idea is certainly implied in Proust's fascination with the symbol of Adam and Eve as the masculine and feminine modalities of a single personality. In the narrative of the Albertine affair, Proust reverts three times to the Adam-Eve image of the opening of "Combray," underscoring the narrator's perpetual desire to recreate a situation like that which existed before the first division of the sexes, a situation in which the feminine constantly infuses the masculine, and the masculine the feminine. At first the allusion is in the comic mode. Proust prepares for the visit of Albertine in *Le côté de Guermantes* by having the narrator describe his frame of mind on the chilly day as that of "a shivering Adam in quest of a sedentary Eve" (II, 346). But later on in this section the language takes on a tone of high seriousness. The narrator says that his desire for Albertine "made me dream . . . of mingling with my flesh a substance different and warm, and of attaching at some point to my outstretched body a body divergent, as the body of Eve barely holds by the feet to the side of Adam, to whose body hers is almost perpendicular, in those romanesque bas-reliefs on the church at Balbec" (II, 354). Later the rhetoric becomes even more rhapsodic, as the act of sex with Albertine is explicitly presented as an attempt to undo the work of the Creator by rejoining the sexes: "O mighty attitudes of Man and Woman, in which there seeks to be reunited, in the innocence of the world's first age and with the humility of clay, what creation has cloven apart" (III, 79).

This semi-blasphemous attempt to compete with God as creator, even to undo and remake God's creation, is, for Proust, one of the traits of the successful artist. Elstir's studio strikes the narrator as "the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world"; and he says of Elstir's use of visual metaphor that "if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew" (I, 834-35). In this regard it is surely no

10. Marie Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Antiquity*, tr. Jennifer Nicholson (London: Studio Books, 1961), pp. 72-74.

accident, as Justin O'Brien has pointed out,<sup>11</sup> that when the narrator discovers the secret of metaphor in Elstir's studio, he discovers at the same time a portrait of ambiguous sex, *Miss Sacripant*, depicting a young woman dressed in such a way as to appear simultaneously male and female. It is a portrait, the narrator says, in which Elstir has raised the intermingling of sexes in the dress and demeanor of the model to the level of an aesthetic principle, "[fastening] upon those ambiguous points as on an aesthetic element which deserved to be brought into prominence, and which he had done everything in his power to emphasize" (I, 849).

The suggestion of androgyny in *Miss Sacripant* touches something fundamental to the way people have felt about art and inspiration throughout the ages. In the ancient world, cross-dressing was a common feature of religious rites and rituals. Through it, the powers peculiar to each sex were symbolically combined to make for a fuller, a total humanity. Marie Delcourt comments that "transvestism . . . had power to promote health, youth, strength, longevity, perhaps even to confer a kind of immortality."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the concept of androgyny was closely associated in classical times with the origins of art. The Dionysian revels from which tragedy and comedy developed featured an exchange of dress between the sexes; and Dionysus himself, the god of the theater, was sometimes represented as an androgynous deity.<sup>13</sup> In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus descends into Hades in search of a *gonimon poiēten*, a "fecund poet," one who incarnates the spirit of true artistic creativity. Significantly, the costume Aristophanes thinks appropriate to such a quest is a mixture of masculine and feminine garb: he has Dionysus appear wearing the lion-skin of Heracles over a saffron gown.<sup>14</sup>

In *A la recherche* the relation of the primitive dream of an-

11. Justin O'Brien, "Albertine the Ambiguous: Notes on Proust's Transposition of Sexes," *PMLA*, 64 (1949), 950.

12. Delcourt, p. 22.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 12; Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, tr. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 176.

14. Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 45ff.; 96ff. And see Cedric Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 236.



drogyny to the creative power of the artist and the truthful illusions embodied in art is reflected not only in *Miss Sacripant*: it also materializes in the art of the heavily made-up, effeminate dancer the narrator notices rehearsing backstage at Rachel's theater: "a young man in a black velvet cap and hortensia-coloured skirt, his cheeks chalked in red like a page from a Watteau album, who with his smiling lips, his eyes raised to the ceiling, as he sprang lightly into the air, seemed . . . entirely of another species than the rational folk in everyday clothes, in the midst of whom he was pursuing like a madman the course of his ecstatic dream." The movements of the dancer, the total freedom of his body, are examples of pure theater, recalling at once the origins and the highest achievements of the art. Simultaneously Apollonian and Dionysian, they are ecstasy and madness carefully structured and controlled. They seem both to break free of the laws of nature and to fuse the natural and artificial in "winged capricious painted oscillations." Rachel comments: "Isn't he too wonderful with his hands. A woman like me couldn't do the things he's doing now" (II, 177-79).

But perhaps the most significant thing about the performance of the effeminate dancer and its relation to Proust's men-women is that it represents a recapturing of lost time, evoking the idea of something "anterior to the habits of . . . civilisation" (II, 177). Here and throughout *A la recherche* androgyny functions as a means of reversing, or escaping from, the forward thrust of chronological time. Dreams, for Proust, are a means of access to our atavistic past, a way of contacting the phylogenetic history of the race. And dreams, appropriately, are inhabited by a "race [that] . . . is, like that of our first human ancestors, androgynous. A man . . . appears a moment later in the form of a woman" (II, 981). We see an example of this primal, oneiric androgyny when, in Swann's famous dream toward the end of *Un amour de Swann*, Mme Verdurin suddenly sprouts a mustache. Similarly, speaking of homosexuals who would trace their ancestry to the ancient orient or to classical Greece, the narrator states that "inverts . . . might be traced back farther still, to those experimental epochs in which there existed neither dioecious plants nor monosexual animals, to that initial hermaphroditism of which certain rudiments of male organs in the anatomy of the woman

and of female organs in that of the man seem still to preserve the trace" (II, 629).

Here Proust is drawing once again on the science of his day, on the Darwinian concept that the ancestors of the vertebrates were hermaphroditic and on the several attempts which were made to explain homosexuality with reference to this idea. Proust's immediate source may be the summary of this type of work in Krafft-Ebing, who writes as follows:

Later researches . . . proceeding on embryological (onto- and phylogenetic) and anthropological lines seem to promise good results.

Emanating from *Frank Lydston* ("Philadelphia Med. and Surg. Recorder," September, 1888) and *Kiernan* ("Medical Standard," November, 1888), they are based (1) on the fact that bisexual organization is still found in the lower animal kingdom, and (2) on the supposition that monosexuality gradually developed from bisexuality. *Kiernan* assumes in trying to subordinate sexual inversion to the category of hermaphroditism that in individuals thus affected retrogression into the earlier hermaphroditic forms of the animal kingdom may take place at least functionally. These are his own words: "The original bisexuality of the ancestors of the race, shown in the rudimentary female organs of the male, could not fail to occasion functional, if not organic reversions, when mental or physical manifestations were interfered with by disease or congenital defect."<sup>15</sup>

So, in order to recapture lost time in art, in order to make his work a history of the race as well as a history of an individual life, the narrator must rediscover and exploit in his book something of, on the mythic level, the androgyny of primal humanity, and, on the scientific level, the hermaphroditism of the first plants and animals. And then he must show how the two relate. This he does in *Sodome I*, in the famous comparisons of the homosexual courtship of Charlus and Jupien, those two androgynous inhabitants of the mythical city of Sodom, to the processes of mating and fertilization which occur in nature. Jupien has been placed

15. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, tr. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Bell, 1965), p. 226. See also Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion* (1896), in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1936), I, 311ff.

on earth for the specific purpose of serving the needs of older homosexuals, just as certain hermaphroditic flowers exist for the sole purpose of fertilizing other hermaphroditic flowers which otherwise would be doomed to sterility, "remaining as indifferent to [the advances] of other young men as the hermaphrodite flowers of the short-styled *primula veris* so long as they are fertilised only by other *primulae veris* of short style also, whereas they welcome with joy the pollen of the *primula veris* with the long styles."

Technically, of course, the love of the two homosexuals, unlike the mating of the flowers, is sterile. But according to the narrator a special kind of fertilization can occur in homosexual love, a spiritual fecundity comparable, though he does not directly draw the comparison, to the impetus toward the quest for ideal beauty which homosexuality inspires in Plato's *Symposium*: "here the word fertilise must be understood in a moral sense, since in the physical sense the union of male with male is and must be sterile, but it is no small matter that a person may encounter the sole pleasure which he is capable of enjoying, and that every 'creature here below' can impart to some other 'his music, or his fragrance or his flame.'" One homosexual supplies what the other lacks, and together they form a unit more complete and productive than either represents separately. Later in the novel, for instance, the talents of Charlus as an accompanist are viewed as the perfect complement to the musical genius of Morel (II, 953). And of Saint-Loup and Morel the narrator says: "It is possible that Morel, being excessively dark, was necessary to Saint-Loup in the way that shadow is necessary to the sun-beam" (III, 705). One thinks immediately of the partial beings of Aristophanes' myth, of the quest of each half for the other and thus for the primal union that will "heal the natural structure of man."

In Proust's vision, of course, there is the additional complication that in homosexual love each of the two men who come together to form the union is himself androgynous. This means that the Proustian combination of male with male simultaneously involves a combination of male (Charlus—bee—seed) with female (Jupien—flower—egg). It also involves a combination of female with female, since both homosexuals, as the narrator

points out, have female souls, carrying within themselves an embryo of the feminine sex which they cannot fertilize themselves but which can be fertilized by another androgynous man. At this point the concept of separate and polarized genders becomes so fluid and ambiguous as practically to vanish altogether. We are surrounded once again by the spirit of Aristophanes' myth, which depicts primal humanity, humanity in its strongest and most perfect state, as a kind of triply-reflecting mirror in which we see, simultaneously, man-man, woman-woman, and androgyne.

But Proust's statements on the cross-fertilization of hermaphrodites are not simply a product of the mythic imagination. They are, as we have already seen, also based on processes which exist in nature and can be scientifically described. The union of Charlus and Jupien reproduces a situation "such as we find in so many hermaphrodite flowers, and even in certain hermaphrodite animals, such as the snail, which cannot be fertilised by themselves, but can by other hermaphrodites" (II, 629). Indeed, the process by which Jupien finds himself attracted only to older homosexuals is "a phenomenon of correspondence and harmony similar to those that precede the fertilisation of heterostyle trimorphous flowers like the *lythrum [salicaria]*" (II, 628). Proust alludes here, as in the reference to the pollination of the *primula veris* quoted earlier, to Darwin's treatise on *The Different Forms of Flowers on Plants of the Same Species*. Describing in that work the manner in which the three hermaphroditic forms of the *lythrum salicaria* pollinate each other, Darwin expresses a similar sense of wonder at the complexity and perfection of a "marriage-arrangement" involving "a triple union between three hermaphrodites." The scheme, Darwin concludes, "is perfect; there is no waste of pollen and no false co-adaptation."<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the Darwinian allusion, this section of *Sodome I* is rife with words such as "miracle," "marvellous," "beauty," "correspondence," "harmony," words evocative of the intricate

16. Charles Darwin, *The Different Forms of Flowers on Plants of the Same Species* (New York: D. Appleton, 1896; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1972), p. 138. Rina Viers has previously pointed out Proust's debt to this work in "Evolution et sexualité des plantes dans *Sodome et Gomorre*," *Europe*, nos. 502-503 (1971), pp. 105ff.



any of the other women he has pursued. It is "a supremely important appointment with myself" (III, 986). Androgyny and the ontological expansiveness it implies have become a state of mind, an inner resource, a quality of vision.

According to certain mystical traditions, Adam was not only androgynous in the garden of Eden, before the creation of Eve and the Fall; he will regain the androgyny of his original state at the end of time, when all things are restored to their original perfection. This is the doctrine, as Marie Delcourt phrases it, of "androgyny both initial and final"; and it is one of the most important of the several mythic patterns attached to the narrator's development as an artist, moving as it does from the initial splitting of his personality into a symbolic Adam and Eve, through the long and painful quest to find that Eve again, to the recovery of the androgynous feeling and vision in *Le temps retrouvé*. In *Le temps retrouvé* the narrator is like the Adam of the mystical tradition, who regains his androgyny in Paradise at the end of time. But he is simultaneously like those bisexual creator gods who unite with their feminine halves and from that union create the universe at the beginning of time.<sup>19</sup> In the cyclical Proustian myth, the end is the beginning, and the ripening of experience is the inception of creation. So, once the masculine and feminine aspects of the narrator's personality reunite, he is able to begin dividing himself once again, this time to create the world of the novel and people it with characters some of whom are male, some of whom are female, and some of whom are male-female—like those novelists who, as the narrator says in discussing the doubling which occurs in Swann's dream, distribute their own personality among all the personalities they create (I, 379). From the perspective of *Le temps retrouvé* the narrator presides over his work in the same dual role the poet Valerius Soranus assigned to Zeus: *Progenitor genetrisque*.<sup>20</sup> And in this way he is able to realize something of what he calls early in the novel "that possible multiplication of oneself which is happiness" (I, 794).

19. On these myths see Delcourt, pp. 67ff.; 82-83; 101. See also Edward Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk* (New York: Mitchell Kinnerley, 1914), pp. 71-72.

20. Quoted in Delcourt, p. 71.