

Byzantine, Jewish, and Catholic varieties), its images harbor a life of their own. In the Saint Mark baptistry, for instance, we find a harpy beneath a seraph,<sup>521</sup> and the Christ of Amiens, which supports the entire written history of this architectural Bible, is Himself supported by David. Giving Christian statues a Hebrew foundation and an esoteric support creates a polyphony that breathes new life into the stones. "It was at this point that I began to find that the stones of Amiens had the dignity of the stones of Venice, that I suddenly understood in what sense it was so, that these things were not what they seemed, that these sculpted images were words and that these silent apostles reminded me of something . . . the Bible as it was when it was still truth and life in the heart of men and a solemn beauty in their works."<sup>522</sup>

#### Ruskin Absorbed into the "Cornerstone" and the "Paving-stone" of the Saint Mark Baptistry

Ruskin clearly "had a hold on" Proust's imagination,<sup>523</sup> although Proust was constantly trying to free himself from his master's grip. By accusing Ruskin of "idolatry" and an "inner dilettantism," Proust cast doubt on Ruskin's religiosity, portraying him as a fetishist enamored of external forms. Ruskin appears to be the victim of his critic's bad faith. On the other hand, perhaps Proust used Ruskin as a way to settle scores with "aesthetes" who were much more respected and influential than those in Proust's Parisian world, aesthetes like Robert de Montesquiou (who gave Proust a book in which Ruskin chastises Whistler, entitled *The Art of Making Enemies*). Proust continues his attack on Ruskin in a letter to G. de Lauris dated November 8, 1908.<sup>524</sup> In this letter, Proust claims that Ruskin's writings are often "stupid, cranky, exasperating, wrong, and presumptuous" even though their author is "great." Another letter, addressed to Robert de Montesquiou in the early part of November 1912, states the following: "Furthermore, my admiration for Ruskin was accompanied by an extreme skepticism, whose scope I was always aware of."<sup>525</sup>

What really upset Proust was not Ruskin's "idolatry" but his humanist universalism and belief in a "culture" that would be open to all. Proust, who was more personal and solitary than Ruskin, did not believe that people could be saved by books. Instead, he believed in the chosen few, in the truth of intermittence, however painful or ecstatic. Proust thus treated Ruskin with affection, for Ruskin reconciled him to the sensuality of incarnate art. At the same time, Ruskin's political excesses steered

Proust away from his naturalist and universalist optimism. The translator had already begun to distance himself from Ruskin's thinking.

From the beginning, Ruskin's theoreticism (and not his idolatry) was supplemented by Emile Mâle and his cult of the symbolic detail in medieval art as inserted in the liturgy. Mâle believed that a biblical logic or metaphysics exists in the people before the artisan ever shapes it with his hands. Mâle's erudition, which has since been challenged, greatly impressed Proust, who was completely unfamiliar with the subject. To complement Ruskin, Proust returned with sensual pleasure to the architectural or liturgical examples offered in Emile Mâle's book<sup>526</sup> while interpreting each stone and its corresponding gesture as a Proustian "metaphor," that is, as a bringing together of two ideas, images, or sensations taken from the Old and New Testaments.

Proust mentions an element of the Holy Saturday celebration as described by Emile Mâle: "And then, the celebrant blesses the new flame, which is a figure of the new Law. He causes it to spark from the flints, which reminds us that Christ, as it is said by Saint Paul, is the cornerstone of the world. At that point, the bishop and the deacon move toward the choir until they reach the Easter candle."<sup>527</sup>

This passage will prove to be extremely important. The symbolism of the "cornerstone," which is transferred from Amiens to Venice and then to Paris in the commonplace form of a "paving-stone," functions in Proust as a source of happiness, as an ecstatic "burst of light." Secretly, unconsciously, or simply as a secular transposition, Proust shifts from using religious symbols to using the differential signs of everyday experience. Strengthened by this syncretism, Venice becomes the privileged link in a metamorphosis that turns sacred beauty into an everyday detail shimmering with promises.

The symbolism of the "cornerstone," described by Mâle and taken up again by Proust, is worthy of note, for we discover it once more in Venice. The Bible refers to it: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalms 118:22-23). This is followed by a song of joy, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalms 118:24). The same motif returns in the New Testament: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Matthew 21:42). The cornerstone, which, like Jesus himself, is set aside and yet a building block, is also a stumbling block: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame" (Romans 9:33).

Tripping on the stone and then stumbling—which the narrator himself does so often—would thus be a way of have faith in the sacred. Indeed, the sacred is made of stone: a “living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:4–5). There are other possible symbolic relationships (especially Masonic ones) that Proust does not mention explicitly but that describe the “rough” stone or the “hewn” stone as a symbol of spiritual initiation.

The cornerstone, along with its manifestations in Proust’s writings, is thus presented as a sign of the cult of Jesus, as the real presence of essence. The cornerstone appears to have been Proust’s underlying motif, for between the cathedrals and the Mass and between Ruskin and Mâle, Proust wished to fathom the mystery of “transubstantiation.” He managed to do so by detaching himself from these erudite masters, by clearing his own path through everyday sensations, and by acknowledging an eroticism that influenced and increasingly overwhelmed the future narrator’s involuntary memory.

Proust’s reservations concerning his British guide had become pure hostility by the time he wrote his 1906 preface to *Sésame et les Lys*.<sup>528</sup> Say farewell to Ruskin! This preface is about the adventure of reading, described as the privileged threshold of experience between the sensible and the intelligible. The adventure of reading comes about naturally, *all alone*. This criticism of Ruskin appears first in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and then in *In Search of Lost Time*.

Even so, Ruskin-Mâle and Amiens-Venice do not disappear. They discreetly merge into a new text in which the author “feels” freely without relying on a translation teacher. The theme introduced in the preface to *La Bible d’Amiens* that nourishes *Jean Santeuil* before becoming one of the main themes of *In Search of Lost Time* is present in the earliest versions of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. One must search for “an object” in which “each hour of our life hides.” “Very likely we may never happen on the object (or the sensation) that it hides in; and thus there are hours of our life that will never be resuscitated.”<sup>529</sup> Proust immediately gives two examples of such objects: a bit of toast that will become a “madeleine”<sup>530</sup> and a Venetian paving stone.

Maurice Bardèche believes that this memory of the Saint Mark paving-stones was registered in Proust’s mind “several months before the incident with the cup of tea and the madeleine.”<sup>531</sup> Proust wrote the following in 1908: “We find the past / to be mediocre because we / contemplate it, but the past / is not that, it is like / the unequal

paving-stones of the St. Mark baptistery (photograph of the *St. Mark’s Rest*) that / we did not think of, the blinding sun on the canal.”<sup>532</sup> All the elements of the “paving-stone” episode can be found here: the unequal stones, the baptistery, the blinding light, the unexamined past. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust writes: “Crossing a courtyard I came to a standstill among the glittering uneven paving-stones. . . . In the depth of my being I felt the *flutter* of a past that I did not recognize; it was just as I set foot on a certain paving-stone that this feeling of *perplexity* came over me. I felt an invading *happiness*, I knew that I was going to be enriched by that *purely personal thing, a past impression, a fragment of life in unsullied preservation* {Suddenly, *I was flooded by a stream of light.*} It was the sensation underfoot that I had felt on the smooth, slightly uneven pavement of the baptistery of Saint Mark’s.”<sup>533</sup>

Between the ordinary paving-stone and the baptistery paving-stone (without forgetting Saint Paul’s “cornerstone” that deepens the meaning of this threshold), the narrator’s foot gets caught on something. The foot, which is the equivalent of the body and of its most sensitive part (the sexual organ), is placed in contact here with an unexpected difference: “glittering uneven paving-stones” {“*pavés inégaux et brillants*”}. The definitive version of the novel calls them “irregularly shaped paving-stones” {“*pavés mal équarris*”}.<sup>534</sup> The adjectives *unequal* and *irregularly shaped* recall the “rough” stones (and not the “hewn” stones) that the Bible says should be used to build an altar (Exodus 20:25). In the Middle East, altars for worship were usually made of rough stones.

The obstacle induces some “perplexity” that reaches “the depth of my being,” which “flutters.” The same terms are used to describe the oral pleasure when the mouth makes contact with the little madeleines.<sup>535</sup> Here, the pleasure is more external but no less absolute; it is a flood of light, a shimmering, Jesus sprung from the flint: “Let us rejoice and be glad in it,” *Exultet*. Secretly phallic and explicitly sacred, this pleasure still remains commonplace, absorbed into the insignificance of a paved courtyard. What could be more ordinary than a paving-stone! The pleasure it affords is less childlike and more differentiated than that of the madeleine, for the paving-stone is geometry in motion. This Venetian pleasure depends on technique (art as technique) as well as on an autonomous body—standing, walking, desiring. Jesus’ “cornerstone,” “stumbling block,” “living stone” is subjected here to a new metamorphosis. The narrator bumps against it, but in the same motion, by believing in it, he valiantly manifests both his sin and his transcendence.

In contact with the "living stone," he himself becomes a "living stone," a "stream of light," a participant in the sacred, in "transubstantiation." Hence the paving-stone of the baptistery resembles the madeleine episode because it serves as a fundamental element of involuntary memory. Does the Proustian imaginary contain two pillars? There are two columns in front of Saint Mark's in Venice.<sup>536</sup>

This fact is especially important since Ruskin's name all but disappears from *In Search of Lost Time*.<sup>537</sup> Even so, Venice continues to orient the narrator's aesthetic theory when he is in the Guermantes library at the end of the novel. In *Time Regained*, the "paved" stones return, leading this time to the Champs-Élysées and to the Guermantes' new residence in the Bois de Boulogne. They induce a "sensation of extraordinary physical comfort," "gliding" toward the "silent heights of memory."<sup>538</sup> The author tries in vain to extract a few "snapshots," particularly of Venice, from his memory. He finds the word itself to be as lackluster as a photography exposition. At this point, the episode from the *Carnet de 1908* reappears.<sup>539</sup> Marcel "put[s] {his} foot on a stone which was slightly lower than its neighbor."<sup>540</sup> The contact between the foot and the obstacle created by the geometric or spatial difference elicits "that same happiness" that the narrator experiences at Balbec, Martinville, and Combray: "the same as that which I had felt when I tasted the madeleine." Once again, he speaks of a "dazzling and indistinct vision," a sparkling flint. "And almost at once I recognized the vision: it was Venice . . . two uneven stones in the baptistery of St. Mark's."<sup>541</sup> This sets off a series of "connecting links" superimposed onto memories of mornings beside the sea or afternoons in Venice. These links create a strange reality of "new and distinct material," an "extra-temporal" being, "the essence of things."<sup>542</sup> The Guermantes paving-stones are superimposed onto those of Saint Mark.<sup>543</sup> Aunt Léonie's bedroom, a railway carriage, and the baptistery of Saint Mark's form a trio of places recalled<sup>544</sup> alongside Combray, Venice, and Balbec.<sup>545</sup> Indeed, the unevenness of the two paving-stones (which signifies the trial of difference through the foot) "had extended in every direction and dimension the desiccated and insubstantial images which I normally had of Venice and St. Mark's and of all the *sensations which I had felt there*."<sup>546</sup> The difference sensed by the foot unleashes a flood of sensations: the image becomes flesh. Truth is no longer an external "image" that calls for "travel," for it is "within myself,"<sup>547</sup> within "the domain of what is for each one of us the sole reality, the domain of *his own sensibility*."<sup>548</sup>

In the prince de Guermantes's library, the narrator comes across a book he knows well: George Sand's *François le champi*.<sup>549</sup> The novel itself becomes Venetian. "The grain of a particular paper may have preserved in itself as vivid a memory of the fashion in which I once imagined Venice."<sup>550</sup> A volume of Bergotte calls to mind the snow that accompanied its first reading. When reading this passage, the reader has the impression that another book has been omitted. But which book is it? The answer to this question may be found in the drafts. For the moment, memory saturates the visions, making it so that the imaginary is no longer a mere appearance. The imaginary becomes a condensation of "vast illuminations representing the church of Saint-Hilaire or the gondola moored at the foot of San Giorgio Maggiore and the Grand Canal encrusted with sparkling sapphires . . . illustrated bibles or books of hours."<sup>551</sup> The polymorphous, Venetian image is an "image presented to us by life" because it brings with it "sensations which are in fact multiple and heterogeneous." "An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase [is it the 'Venetian vase' that Jean Santeuil broke?]<sup>552</sup> full of scents and sounds and projects and climates . . . *reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations*."<sup>553</sup>

Proust's credo, which is announced at the very end of the book, includes Venice, an engulfed city whose fundamental power is fleetingly claimed by the narrator. Notebook 51 from 1909 (the last one for *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and the first for *Time Regained*) and Notebooks 57 and 58 from 1911 (which were edited by Henri Bonnet and Bernard Brun)<sup>554</sup> restore some of the Venetian "secrets" that are omitted in the novel's final version. In the notebooks, the "Perpetual Adoration" section returns to Ruskin, and the "modern" book, which contains a whiff of Venice even in the Guermantes library, would perhaps be the old master's text that Proust endeavored to translate for seven years without knowing English, as if in an attempt to facilitate the invention of his own language: "I thought of Ruskin who made me believe in Venice before I ever saw it, like a master who teaches us when we are children the elements of religion on which we will perhaps depend later in life. And when I recited to myself one of these historical pages, I realized that the essence of Venice rested upon it. I felt that when I would re-read the book, I would move about in a gondola, that the text would give my eyes a rest as does the deep blue of the canal, and that the pink columns of St. Mark's would catch my eye and take hold of my hand."<sup>555</sup>

Once Venice has infiltrated the book, the text partakes of sensation. As an imaginary presence that for Proust is immediately sensual, Venice

vibrates in the air that surrounds the book, which is transformed into a deep blue, into pink columns. Just as the city of Venice shows that man-made beauty may coexist with nature, so, inversely, a book can become nature itself. A book, then, is life.

Proust proved this to be true in *The Fugitive*, whose disparate, lost, or excessively concise pages continue to be reissued and recopied. He had already made this point, however, in Notebook 57 of 1911. A Bergotte book will give a similar impression of a "light, bright, soft fluidity": "I sang the entire book by reading it both too slowly and too softly."<sup>556</sup> Since this book mentions the Reims cathedral<sup>557</sup> and snow,<sup>558</sup> one might believe it is a book by Ruskin rather than by Bergotte: "Great books are written in a foreign language that is much less pure than one might think."<sup>559</sup> Is it the "foreign language" of interlocked sensations culminating in the shimmering of each cathedral and woven into the pleasurable seduction of Venice? Or is it the "foreign" language of the Proustian sentence itself?

Ruskin makes one final appearance in the *Notes pour Le Temps retrouvé*: "It is important when I speak of *François le Champi* if I speak of it (and even if it is inspired by *St. Mark's Rest*,—I could—without mentioning *St. Mark's*, and I join Combray and Venice)."<sup>560</sup> Note the omission: "without mentioning *St. Mark's*." "*François le Champi*" replaces it and serves as a metaphorical metonymy of Ruskin's work. Here, Proust offers an example of a book that is childlike and imaginative, maternal and sensitive, full of "illumination" and of images that bring the body to life: "Were these illuminations where the sapphire of the Grand Canal {was} really only paintings? It was not simply a painting before us, for *it bathed me in all the sensations*."<sup>561</sup> In this way, "Champi" may very well mask "Saint Mark's."

#### Intermittencies of Venice

Although Venice plays a compact and concealed (if not occult) role in the aesthetic of *In Search of Lost Time*, it still flows freely throughout the entire novel.

Even during the darkest moment of the night, Venice blinds us with its light and offers hope of travel and desire: "[I] used to spend the greater part of the night recalling our life in the old days at Combray with my great-aunt, at Balbec, Paris, Doncières, Venice."<sup>562</sup> The idea of walking along the lagoon on Easter eve puts the narrator in "a sort of ecstasy" that is followed by an altered quotation from Ruskin and a feeling of "mirac-

ulous disincarnation." Is he sublimating his own desires, departing from his body to seek a faraway beauty? Ambition will inevitably show you your limits—as well as your repulsive body. Indeed, Marcel's ecstasy is immediately "accompanied by that vague desire to vomit."<sup>563</sup>

In other words, the lovely Venice arouses a desire hidden deep in the pit of your stomach. The city of Titian, Giorgione, and Carpaccio, Venice is also the city of dukes as "admirable and fearsome" as Saint-Simon.<sup>564</sup> This proves that historical and feminine beauty really does exist, as do the gowns that Venice inspires Fortuny to make for Mme de Guermantes or for Albertine.<sup>565</sup> Venice is presented as an alternative to jealousy. At first, the Venetian Republic is compared to jealousy itself. Swann's suspicions, like the Venetian mosquito that stings you on your return to Paris,<sup>566</sup> are more amusing than his pride. Yet once Albertine enters the picture, Venice serves as a counterweight to an exhausting form of love. Albertine or Venice: that is our hero's version of Hamlet's question. He hesitates between his desire to go to Venice and his desire to marry Albertine, trembles at the very thought of the advances the gondolier may make at her, and eventually chooses to leave Albertine and return to Venice—that is, to become an anti-Swann. Since Venice is the essence of art, is there any way to stop being "promised to art" other than by returning to it? Yet his beloved is the one who leaves, and his incomplete grief delays his voyage to the lagoon. Albertine does not cease to be an obstacle until two entire chapters have gone by: "Grief and Forgetting" and "Mlle de Forcheville." At that point, Venice has become a bridge between a novel of social and sexual initiation and *Time Regained*, a bridge that has been quietly present since the beginning of the book but never revealed before now.

#### Venetian Eros: Between Mamma, Who Is Always There, and the Baronne Putbus's Maid, Who Disappears

The text of what is commonly known as *The Fugitive* dates from 1916. Proust made no changes between 1917 and 1919. In 1919–20, he returned to the "trip to Venice" section, and in 1921–22, he added the series of marriages. From November 6, 1922, until November 17 (that is, until a few days before his death,) he finished making corrections to the final typescript. It seems that the writer wanted to abridge this text as much as possible. Following *The Captive*, it was to be entitled *The Fugitive* and to contain an intricately composed second chapter concerning the trip to Venice.<sup>567</sup>

This *Trip to Venice*, which follows Albertine's death, opens with the golden angel on Saint Mark's campanile, "glittering in a sunlight which made it almost impossible to keep one's eyes upon it," beckoning with "outstretched arms," promising "a joy more certain than any that it could ever in the past have been bidden to announce to men of good will."<sup>568</sup> This is clearly a Christlike symbol, and Venice (like the narrator's art) hopes to go beyond it with a promise that is even "more certain." Furthermore, some earlier versions (like Notebook 3 of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*) provide a foretaste of the Venetian theme and add an element of irony. The narrator's gaze is directed not toward an angel but toward a weathervane: "While looking at the reflection of the sun in the weathervane in front of me, what it whispered to me was like a promise I wanted to be fulfilled immediately, the promise of the golden angel of St. Mark."<sup>569</sup> The "paving-stone," the "familiar thing," the "historical thing," and the image of Mamma under the window are already present in this version.

Several themes that are tightly woven into this relatively short chapter<sup>570</sup> reaffirm Proust's notion of art as transubstantiation. Combray and Venice are linked once again, uniting childhood and adulthood, France and Italy, and two distinct sensations condensed into a metaphor. Death plays a role in this condensation. A reference to the grandmother's death<sup>571</sup> echoes Albertine's more recent disappearance, which is now ready to be internalized and transformed into the innermost depths of writing: "I felt that the Albertine of long ago, invisible to my eyes, was nevertheless enclosed within me as in the Piombi of an inner Venice, the tight lid of which some incident occasionally lifted to give me a glimpse of that past."<sup>572</sup>

The city of Venice represents a backdrop, the lure of a secret, and the most civilized exteriority—nature seized by the human imagination and domesticated, but without banality, and as delightful in everyday life as in luxury. On the one hand, then, "I had an impression which was affirmed by my desire that I was not on the outside, but getting closer and closer to *the essence of something secret*."<sup>573</sup> Yet on the other hand, there are the palaces, the monuments, the "chain of marble cliffs" lining the Grand Canal that "made one think of objects of nature, but of a nature which seemed to have created its works with a human imagination."<sup>574</sup> This naturalness has no relation to a decadent or decaying Venice, an image that Proust (foreseeing what Venice represents to some modern minds) unabashedly derides. He has no intention "to make Venice look like Aubervilliers."<sup>575</sup> "Yet there are wonderful things that

are intended to give us understandable and familiar impressions."<sup>576</sup> Our hero sets off in search of small alleyways. He admires the workers he sees not because he pities them, but because they give him the sense of a sacredness deprived of adornments yet granted a secret splendor.

Even Christ is an "equivocal and slightly drab Christ" in this "sprawling, multicolored tableau-vivant" held up by "lovely Oriental columns" and brushing up against "a force of the past." "We spent a long time there after we left the baptistery."<sup>577</sup>

The mystery of this incarnate Venice resides, however, in the mother's presence: "Mamma would read me Ruskin's delightful descriptions of Venice which compared it to rocks of Indian sea-coral and to an opal."<sup>578</sup> This passage evokes the memory of the years they spent together translating, and it paves the way for the incorporation of mother and city that occurs in the definitive version of the novel. A strange fusion is established between the mother's body and Venice's body. Sitting and reading underneath the pointed arches of an ogival window, the mother inscribes herself in the beautiful stones of Saint Mark's. The window is identified with "a love which stopped only where there was no longer any corporeal matter to sustain it, on the surface of her impassioned gaze. . . . It says to me the thing that touches me more than anything else in the world: 'I remember your mother so well.'<sup>579</sup> Through the magic of this infiltration, the Venetian window becomes the matter sustaining maternal love—the window *is* love for the mother. The same process applies to the baptistery, where we find devoted women who appear to have been taken right out of a Carpaccio painting: "She [the mother] has her place reserved there as immutably as a mosaic."<sup>580</sup>

As the city absorbed the mother, the city absorbs her son. We realize, then, that for the narrator, Saint Mark's represents not only a church or an inanimate object but "the terminus of a voyage on these vernal, maritime waters, with which, I felt, St. Mark's formed an indivisible and living whole."<sup>581</sup> It is the final stop of an initiatory voyage between "The Death of the Cathedrals" and *Time Regained*, a voyage toward a *living* meaning. Proust chooses this path so that he can lose himself in it more easily, as in the "distention" process by which matter is crystallized into a "beautiful exiled *piazza*" in Venice.<sup>582</sup> He loves it so much that he is unable to find it again, which is what happened to Freud when he became lost in the uncanniness of seedy Venetian neighborhoods. . . .

When the mother decides to leave, and the hero, on learning that Mme Putbus has arrived, makes a dramatic display of independence by

deciding to stay, "the town that I saw before me had ceased to be Venice." Venice is now deceitful, artificial, a mere pile of stones that are further depreciated by *O sole mio*, a second-rate song of despair. The narrator's impressions stand in direct contrast to the golden angel of the promise at the beginning of the chapter: "the bronze voice of the singer in an equivocal, unalterable and poignant alloy."<sup>583</sup> Yet it is time to return to the train station, to go back to the train—and to Mamma.

The purity of this incestuous Venice is the only one that Proust will retain in the "recopied" version of 1916. Yet because of his predilection for ambiguity and blasphemy, he adds the marquis de Norpois and the antediluvian and horribly ugly Mme de Villeparisis, both of whom offer the spectacle of a humanity tainted by absurd political and matrimonial concerns. A telegram announces that Albertine is still alive. Gilberte writes a letter to the narrator concerning her marriage to Robert de Saint-Loup, although this letter does introduce a certain hypocrisy into the picture. She is the one who wrote the telegram, and her ornate writing is responsible for the confusion. An incarnate and maternal Venice is also a bogus and derisive Venice. Still, its sparkle endures.

The drafts Proust did not retain are extremely cryptic. The pre-texts add a touch of scandal to the idyllic trail of an incarnation founded on the love between a son and his mother. The two protagonists argue with one another: "one evening, after arguing with Mamma, I cruelly . . ." But it gets even worse, and the more extreme versions are also omitted. Mme Bontemps, for instance, informs the narrator that Albertine fled to marry a wealthy American!<sup>584</sup>

The most outrageous draft, which carves out erotic abysses underneath the theme of the Venetian incarnation, discusses the episode of the baronne Picpus or Putbus's maid.<sup>585</sup> The hero has only one idea in mind: "to go to Venice" to be with the baronne again and "to go to her home to see her maid," "scorning that insolent women" "and joining with her against my better instincts while waiting to see what ensues."<sup>586</sup> This maid is well known to readers of *In Search of Lost Time* for her lesbian loves and the dangers she presents to Albertine. It is said that her face was burned in a steamship fire. Although she is "permanently disfigured" and "horrible to see," "forgetting her face, I threw myself upon her and had the impression that I was no longer myself, that I was a young peasant that a young peasant woman tougher than I am had made into hay."<sup>587</sup> Another variation, however, has the author dreaming that he will meet a wonderful woman in Venice. Here, the maid is of a "special, feminine race" superior to that of the duchesses and

"the healthy and strong." She is "one of the common people," her body has a "popular strength where I found more true, pictorial, sculptural beauty, all the more since she was of rough stock."<sup>588</sup> In other places, Marcel imagines (and fears) that he will find in Venice the woman he possessed in Padua: "to touch her, kiss her, shape her," "how much more could we prolong this contact created by our will alone at such an opportune moment," "something even more lustful."<sup>589</sup>

Originally from Combray, the young maid tells the narrator on the way to Padua about the erotic games that children used to play in the dungeon.<sup>590</sup> When the name of Albertine first appeared in 1913–14, Proust conceived of a ménage à trois among the hero, Gilbertine and then Albertine, and the maid. In a footnote, he foresaw replacing the maid with Gilberte: "If it's not Putbus, her dynamism will be given to Gilberte, who will tell me that she saw little girls and boys playing in the dungeon."<sup>591</sup>

This vulgar character is clearly in close contact with the Verdurins, who share her triumphant bad taste. Is moral decline not a precondition for incarnation? Proust clearly envisioned this hypothesis, yet his formal concerns caused him to reject some story lines and to replace them with other plot developments concerning Albertine or Charlus. He thus shortened the trip to Venice that at one point he had wanted to expand.<sup>592</sup>

Yet even though Proust felt hurried by his illness, he was guided by his formal concerns and aesthetic credo more than by protocol and pain. As a result, he chose to emphasize the interpenetration between Venice and his mother, between the angel's light and the body. This choice will endure until the final typescript, and the trip to Venice can thus be read as an apotheosis of the madeleine and paving-stone episodes.

As Jo Yoshida has indicated,<sup>593</sup> sensuality prevails over the church and over Ruskin as Proust nears the end of his novel. Indeed, the plot (which is increasingly dominated by the mores of *Sodom and Gomorrah*) and the often obscene complexity of characters like Swann, Odette, Albertine, and Charlus both show how an aesthetic bildungsroman is transformed into an exploration of sexual dramas masked in social convention. Yet the opposite also holds true, especially if we consider the shocking story lines omitted in *The Fugitive* and the integration of the spiritual theme with the sensual theme, which includes the love for the mother in the celebration of Venice.

Hence the introduction of a sexual problematic is counterbalanced by the sublimating tone that characterizes the end of the novel (which

was already planned in the final notebooks of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and confirmed by the final revisions made to *The Fugitive*). Venice truly functions as a delicate bridge between two currents.

Indeed, Venice and Saint Mark's are far from being "stony, meager, purely visual" images. Between the first evocations of Ruskin and the final phantasmagoria of the dying writer, they have become "like seeds that had been frozen for years that are suddenly exposed to moisture and begin to blossom."<sup>594</sup>

This gives us a new perspective with which to view Proust's decision to include the Venice episode after having made substantial cuts to the recently found typescript of *The Fugitive*. These omissions, which are one aspect of the complete recasting of the novel's later volumes, were most likely made in response to the demands of publicity or finances—concerns that are mentioned in Proust's correspondence.<sup>595</sup> These constraints did not prevent him, however, from focusing on an initiatory journey toward a sensual and symbolic Orient, toward a Venice that becomes maternal and thus stresses its own incarnation. On his deathbed, Proust wrote the following message to Céleste Albaret: "Cross out everything (besides what we left in *The Fugitive*) that occurs before my arrival with my mother in Venice."<sup>596</sup>

We are still faced with the problem of the cuts Proust made in the "Venice" version of his final typescript. They may well have been based on more than just the technical requirements of the manuscript. If a "turn of events" is what places Albertine's death "on the banks of the Vivonne," then the cuts must concern Albertine as well as what she recalls and what she becomes—the narrator's desires for young Venetian girls, for two women from Australia, for Mme Putbus. Similarly, Proust cut the passages on the grandmother that depict remorse and recall Albertine's grief. He omits the Guermantes family saga along with their many marriages (which have nothing to do with Venice). He adds a few "manglings" of narrative rhythm.<sup>597</sup> His desire to focus the chapter on Venice-me-Mamma and to give it a blinding light may be responsible for all these condensations.

This still does not explain why Proust eliminated the scene at Saint Mark's baptistery where the mother becomes merged with the Carpaccio painting and the mosaics.<sup>598</sup> It is true that this fusion between the city and the mother had already taken place in the window scene and that it makes an inconveniently erotic reference to Albertine. Most important, Proust succumbed to his desire to minimize Christ's role in the baptismal ritual, just as he had discreetly reserved all the incestuous references to Madeleine Blanchet in the madeleine episode.

The final typescript thus retains the purity of a cautious psalm: it is sparse despite all its richness. The presence of the typescript, however, does not allow us to ignore the "recopied" version as well as the drafts, and we would be mistaken to refer to it as the "last word." Those who specialize in Proust's manuscripts will decide which edition of this controversial section is the "real" one, yet this is not my goal here. Instead, by delineating the various stages in the text's development, I hope to draw attention to the "cornerstone" of Proust's aesthetic. "Venice was like a world within a world."<sup>599</sup> Venice is this cornerstone, the very character of time embodied. The City of the Doges crystallizes the link between the erotic bildungsroman and the final pensive pages of *Search*.