



VOLUME I

Swann's Way

The Mother (detail), Pieter de Hooch, c. 1670

The Narrator's grandmother has bought the young boy the pastoral novel of George Sand as a birthday gift, claiming that she could not bring herself to give him 'anything that was not well written'. She felt keenly the moral responsibility to expose her grandson only to elevated ideals.

She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of ancient buildings or of beautiful places. But at the moment of buying them, and for all that the subject of the picture had an aesthetic value, she would find that vulgarity and utility had no prominent part in them, through the mechanical nature of their reproduction by photography. She attempted by a subterfuge, if not to eliminate altogether this commercial banality, at least to postpone it, to supplant it to a certain extent with what was an art, to introduce, as it were, several 'thicknesses' of art: instead of photographs of Chartres Cathedral, of the Fontaine of Saint-Cloud, or of Vesuvius, she would inquire of Swain whether some great painter had not depicted them, and preferred to give me photographs of 'Chartres Cathedral' after Corot, of the 'Fontaine of Saint-Cloud' after Hubert Robert, and of 'Vesuvius' after Turner, which were a stage higher in the scale of art.



View of a Park and a Water Fountain
Hubert Robert, 1781



View of Vesuvius, Joseph Mallord William Turner, 1811

The Narrator remembers his walks along the 'Goumantes way', a path that begins just beyond his aunt Léonie's little garden gate, in the narrow, street now called the Rue des Perchamps. A village school has been built in the 1900s, in the square near his childhood, but it does not stand in his way as he retraces the route in his memory.

But in my dream of Combray... I leave not a stone of the modern edifice standing, but pierce through it and 'revisit' the Rue des Perchamps. And for such reconstruction memory furnishes me with more detailed guidance than is generally at the disposal of historians: the pictures which it has preserved – perhaps the last surviving in the world today, and soon to follow the rest into oblivion – of what Combray looked like in my childhood days, pictures which, because it was the old Combray that traced their outlines upon my mind before it vanished, are as moving – if I may compare a humble landscape with those glorious works, reproductions of which my grandmother was so fond of loaning on to me – as those old songs of the Last Supper or that painting by Gerfille Bellini, in a state in which they no longer exist, the masterpiece of Leonardo and the portrait of Saint Mark's.



Procession in the Piazza San Marco, Marco Gherardo Bellini, 1490.



St. George Preaching to the Infidels, Giorgione, Venice, c.1510.

The Narrator catches a glimpse of the Duchesse de Guermantes at the wedding of Dr Percepied's daughter in Combray, and he is overwhelmed to be seeing a flesh and blood incarnation of the 'Goumantes way'. He believes their eyes meet; he feels in love and confesses himself that the Duchesse courts for love.

His eyes were blue as a pansy-like flower, impossible to pluck, yet deflected by her to mine, and she was, barring not again from behind a threatening cloud and daring the full force of my eyes on to the Square and into the sacristy, that a geranium glow over the red-carpet laid-down for the wedding, across which Marie de Guermantes was smiling advancing, and covered its wooden texture with a nap of lion velvet, a bloom of happiness, this sort of tenderness, its solemn sweetness in the grasp of a joyful celebration, which characterise certain pages of *L'Amour*, certain paintings by Carpaccio and his like in candlelit low Baroque way able to apply to the world of the remnant the aptest 'delusion.'

One afternoon, Ariosto puts an unaccounted call upon Odette. He believes her to be at home – indeed he hears her footsteps just behind the door – but when he knocks, there is no response. When he realises that she is lying in low he is not especially troubled. However, Odette begins to appear resentful.

At the same, it was a matter of so little importance that her air of unbelieved sorrow began at length to assume form. She reminded him, even more than usual, of the face of some of the women treated by the parter of the Primavera! She had at this moment that desolate, heart-broken expression, which seems ready to succumb beneath the burden of a grief too heavy to be borne when they are merely allowing the infant Jesus to play with a pomegranate or launching Moses' poor water into a trough....

Indeed he would have devoted to the reconstruction of the petty details of social life in the City of Astar at those days, if it could have helped him to understand something of Odette's smile and the look in her eyes – candid and simple though they

were – as much as those of the architect who ransacks the extant documents of fifteenth-century Florence to unlock its penetrable further into the soul of the Primavera, the fat Venus of the Villa of Boncaldi.



Venus of Boncaldi (1470-1480)
 Commissioned by the Grand Duke of
 Tuscany, Boncaldi, 1470



Domestic, by Botticelli, 1470-1480



Domestic, by Botticelli, 1470-1480



VOLUME II

*Within a
Budding Grove*

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If just one ever 'chū' is not 'tricky'. Miss Austin is a creature of fashion. She is passionately devoted to her aesthetic ideals, even if they are continuously changing.

N owadays it was rarely in Japanese kimonos that Odette received her visitors, but rather in the bright and billowing silk of a Western frockcoat whose flowing lines she would make as though to rub gently over her bosom, and in which she looked, indeed, disported herself with such an air of well-being of good freshness, taking such deep breaths, that she seemed to look on these garments not as something decorative, a mere setting for herself, but as necessary, in the same way as her 'rule' or her daily 'constitutional', to satisfy the requirements of her physiology and the wishes of Jagers. She used often to say that she would go without bread rather than give up air and cleanliness, and that the burning of the 'Giocardi' would distress her infinitely more than the destruction, by the same element, of the 'willow' of people she knew.



Miss Lisa La Gioconda
Lorenzo di Piero, 1503-4



The Palace Interior, Francesco Albani, 1713

Mme de Villapartiz proves to be an remarkable companion to the Narrator's grandmother, making all the resources she has to offer available to her old friend. Increasingly, she is subjected to the Narrator's scrutiny. He is surprised and impressed by her poise and her erudition.

One got the impression that for her there were no other persons than those that have been mentioned. She was pleased that my grandmother liked a cockade which she wore, and which hung over her dress. It appeared to a portrait of an ancestress of hers, in Tuscany, which had never left the family. So that one could be certain of its being genuine.



Portrait of a Lady in White, Titian, 1511



Lady Young in a Black Dress, Thomas Gainsborough, 1784

After lavishing on them such devoted attention, Mme de Villapartiz announces she will set her off to the Narrator and his grandmother in the coming weeks, as she has a nephew coming to stay with her. And so Robert, the Marquis de Saint-Loup—his name gives their line and reveals his direct connection to the Guermantes family.

But what they have got at Guermantes, which is a little more interesting, is quite a touching portrait of my aunt by Garnier. It's as fine as Whistler or Velasquez, I seem to think. I say, who in his sceptre and was not always very exact about degrees of greatness.



Milkmaid by J.M.W. Turner (1868, Tate Gallery, London)

Under the guise of standing with him to look at some beach maps, the Narrator hopes to see the presence of "Eliot to draw a group of young women like a magnet." In this endeavor he is disappointed, and with a momentary exchange of glances with Albertine, the "Milkmaid" whom he has been admiring from a distance, a "whole series of agonies" upon befalls him.

What did I know of Albertine? One or two glimpses of a profile against the sea, less beautiful, certainly, than those of Veronique's woman whom I sought, had I been guided by purely aesthetic reasons, to have preferred to her. By what other reasons could I be guided, were, my anxiety having subsided, I could recapture only those mute profiles, possessing nothing else?

Having the privileged opportunity of observing Eliot at work in his studio makes the Narrator's understanding more fully how an artist sees. Meanwhile, on his own, he sketches complex portraits using time instead of paint as his medium.

In a portrait, it is not only the manner the woman then bid of dressing that dares her, it is also the manner the arrival of painting. And this, Eliot's earliest manner, was the most devastating of both certainties for Odette because it not only established her, as did her photographs of the same period, as the younger sister of various well-known courtesans, but made her portrait contemporary with the countless portraits that Manet or Whistler had painted of all those vanished models, models who already belonged to oblivion or to history.



The Milkmaid by J.M.W. Turner (1868, Tate Gallery, London)

The Narcissus is intoxicated by the possibilities of love, whether his thoughts are fixed upon Audrey or Rosewood or Albertine seems almost irrelevant. We are not exclusively attached to the object, he convinces himself, but rather to 'the desire to love'. He is continually absorbed in finding himself amongst the girls.

N o doubt this attachment is to some extent due to the fact that the other person on such occasions presents some new facet; but so great is the individuality of each individual, so absolute the wealth of lines of face and body, so few of which leave any trace, even we are no longer in the presence of the other person, not the arbitrary simplicity of our recollection, since the memory had selected some distinctive feature that had struck us, has isolated it, exaggerated it, making of a woman who has appeared to us but a sketch in which her figure is elongated out of all proportion, or of a woman who has seemed to be pink-shocked and golden-haired a pure 'Harmony in Pink and Gold', that the moment that woman is once again standing before us, all the other forgotten qualities which balance that one remembered feature or come usual to, in their contrasted complexity, diminishing her height, paler her cheeks, and substituting for what we else continually seek other features which we remember having noticed the first time and fail to understand why we so little expected to find them again. We remembered, we anticipated a peacock, and we find a parrot.



Anthony van Dyck: Queen and Poet; John Everett Millais: The Queen of Sheba; James Whistler: Mr. and Mrs. Arthur W. Franks (1871)



The Source, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1844

Some time later, at the same dinner party, the Narrator asks the Doc if he knows the identity of the man pictured twice in his Eliza's picture. M. de Guermantes cannot remember, but does not hesitate to announce his dislike for the painter:

But tell me, you seem quite good on art pictures. If I'd only known, I should have had it all in my fingertips. Now that there's much food to tick one's brains to get to the bottom of M. Eliza's work, as there would be for Ingres's *Source* or the *Princess in the Forest* by Paul Delacroix. What one appreciates in his work is that it's thoroughly observed, amusing, Parisian, and then one passes on to the next thing. One doesn't need to be an expert to look at that sort of thing. I know of course that they're merely sketches, but still, I don't feel myself that he puts enough work into them.



The Chamber of Madame de Merteuil, Eugène Delacroix, 1825

*Detail of *Talk with James of London*, Paul Delacroix, 1825*