
William C. Carter. *Proust in Love*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
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In his widely acclaimed biography, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (Yale University Press, 2000), William Carter had already documented Proust's tumultuous relationships with artists Reynaldo Hahn and Lucien Daudet, his infatuations with young men he employed, and his fascination with the darkest side of sexuality. Carter's new book, *Proust in Love*, is a chronicle of Proust's sentimental and sexual life that examines specific ways in which the writer transposes personal experiences into his work, thus revealing the complex and destructive nature of Proustian love, which is ultimately transcended through art. Carter draws from a wide array of sources, such as Proust's voluminous correspondence, his works, and testimonies from his friends and contemporaries. He also exploits two new documents, *The Memoirs of Ernest Forssgreen*, *Proust's Swedish Valet*, and the recently published diary of Paul Morand, a close friend of Proust at the end of his life.

Carter shows that Proust was always enthralled by androgynous beings, and that, at the heart of his conception of sexuality is the belief that people are bisexual in nature, and that ideally love, whether it be heterosexual or homosexual, is the reunification of any two complementary parts of the original Hermaphrodite. Yet love, which is subjective, is also exposed to what Proust calls "the destructive forces of time that obliterate even the memories of those we hold dearest" (132), and to the metamorphoses of our successive selves. Furthermore Proust, his narrator and his characters, in particular Swann and Saint-Loup, are trapped in failed relationships because of their excessive jealousy and need for exclusive possession, demonstrating "their incapacity for happiness" (131).

Carter underlines Proust's ambivalence about his own homosexuality. While *In Search of Lost Time* depicts homosexual and bisexual as well as heterosexual love, and while Proust "was to make society's unfair treatment of homosexuals a major theme of his novel" (96), he never publicly admitted to his own homosexuality and resented any attacks on his masculinity. Yet he courageously refused to follow some of his friends' and publishers' advice to delete several potentially shocking scenes from the *Search*, invoking his objective to probe the truth in its entirety.

Carter's thought-provoking chapter, "Love is divine," examines the concept of transcendence of personal experiences and sufferings through art, the "perpetual sacrifice of sentiment to truth" (186), by which Proust achieves the expression of his cosmic aesthetic vision. In this section, Carter eloquently discusses the redemptive

power of the writing process that transforms “egotism into altruism,” and vices into what Proust calls “the moral law that is binding upon us all” (193).

In his introduction to *Proust in Love*, Carter warns the reader that the content of this new book sometimes overlaps with the material of his previous, exhaustive biography. Although this is true, the focus of the first book is mainly factual, while that of the second is more analytical and critical. Carter makes a convincing case for concentrating on Proust’s conception of love, which is at the core of the *Search*, and on the way the author transposes his personal experiences into his novel. He stresses that this transposition goes beyond the mere substitution of female characters for male counterparts. Often a particular character in the *Search* can be traced back to several different models. Such is the case of Albertine, who is not drawn solely from Agostinelli, and who existed in the writer’s plans well before he met his secretary.

Carter’s approach is rigorous, and despite the nature of the subject matter he never gives in to the sensational. He dispels commonly accepted but erroneous allegations about Proust and cautions us as to the veracity of certain unproven statements made by different authors, including Forssgreen. William Carter’s *Proust in Love* is an elegantly written and well-documented book that will be of interest to both biography lovers and Proust scholars. ✱