

*“A ‘cup of tea’ as our friends across the Channel say”:
Marcel Proust Reads Carlyle intime*

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The following article is a revised version of a talk given at the Carlyle Conference, University of Edinburgh, 10–12 July 2012. All translations are the author’s, unless otherwise indicated.

TOWARDS THE END OF JANUARY 1908, THE YEAR HE began writing *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27), Marcel Proust tore out the final letter from the recently published *Carlyle intime, Lettres de Thomas Carlyle à sa mère* (CI; 1907), edited by Émile Masson, and sent it to Reynaldo Hahn. Still in mourning for his own mother who had died just over two years before, Proust scribbled one sentence on the top of the page: “I am sending you the letter of another sick man written a week before the death of his mother on the 25th of December 1853” (*Correspondance* 8: 38). Around the same time Proust added another comment on his reading of these letters on the first page of his new notebook: “Letter from Carlyle to his mother: ‘I am not as sick as I say’” (*Carnet de 1908* 47). This exact sentence does not appear in *Carlyle intime*. It may be as Philip Kolb suggests in his note to the entry that Proust has an imperfect memory of a phrase used by Carlyle in a letter that he wrote one month or so after his marriage, in which he complains of “uncertainty” and of being off his “accustomed habitudes,” but assures his mother that “I have been far worse in health than I am” (*CLO*; *CL* 4: 156; *CI* 87–88). As Michael Finn remarks, it seems to represent for Proust “a one-line synopsis of his own brooding about his delicate health and the

effect that it may have had on his mother's life" (159). Given the way both of Proust's statements on Carlyle's letters focus on health, it is worth concentrating on one particular aspect of this shared preoccupation with well-being: the salutary "cup of tea." Significantly, it turns out that this very British motif in *À la recherche* has its origin in the Carlyle correspondence.

Carlyle's correspondence with his mother is punctuated with numerous references to the ritual of the "cup of tea." Proust as a French reader would surely have been struck by the thirty or so references to tea-drinking, particularly concentrated in letters of the early 1820s. Besides the unsurprising references to the cup of tea as part of the daily routine for the wandering Carlyle, the beverage features prominently among the many health prescriptions that this anxious son is fond of giving his mother. The tendency is especially notable in the letters of the early 1820s when Carlyle, obviously still traumatized by his mother's relatively recent episode of psychological ill-health, is struggling to find a career in Edinburgh. Margaret Carlyle evidently shares her son's digestive difficulties since Carlyle frequently advises tea as an antidote for a "weak stomach." For instance, he extols the benefits of tea on 10 January 1821: "I advise you to use it [tea] frequently: it is excellent for weak stomachs" (*CLO*; *CL* 1: 308–09; *CI* 23). On 16 November 1821, he advises her again: "Go down the house *every* night, and make yourself a comfortable *dreg*" (*CLO*; *CL* 1: 392–95; *CI* 31). In a letter written on 29 August 1824, he suggests "some improvements in your diet and mode of life" and cites [Dr. John] Badams's recommendations of "food nourishing and small in bulk, with warm liquids" (*CLO*; *CL* 3: 140–44; *CI* 69–70). Proust, who could read English, may even have found in Norton's *Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle* (248–50) further anxious imprecations to initiate "the tea-system" (*CLO*; *CL* 2: 234–36).

"Do you get tea—the weary tea—alone now?"

For Carlyle, however, the cup of tea is more than a recommended prophylactic. In the letters of the early 1820s particularly, it is also a symbol of the exiled son's longing for reunions with his mother. On 10 January 1821, Carlyle conjures up an image of his mother "alone now" drinking her solitary tea:

"How are you? Tell me largely when you write. I fear your health is feeble: I conjure you be careful of it. Do you get tea—the weary tea—*alone* now? By the little table *ben* the house?" (CLO; CL 1: 308–09; CI 23). The impact of this image on Proust may have been reinforced by a similar reference in a subsequent letter (21 July 1821): "I am to see you very soon, when we shall meet over a savoury dish of tea *down-the-house*; and discuss in concert all that has happened to each of us since we parted" (CLO; CL 1: 374–75; CI 24–25). Carlyle adds that a chat together over a cup of tea is "a much finer method than the tardy plan of exchanging letters—which however copious are always a very unfaithful and inadequate emblem of the truth." On 29 June 1822, he looks forward once again to returning home "to have a cup of tea & a whiff together, and talk over all our mutual concerns" (CLO; CL 2: 140–42; CI 42). Proust may even have read in the *Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle* the following extract written from Edinburgh on 22 March 1823, which evokes most movingly the transformative power of Margaret Carlyle's company on her care-worn son: "I still hope to find you whole and well when we meet and to have our tea and smoke and small talk together down the house, many, many happy times as heretofore. There are no moments when I can forget all my cares as in these. I seem to lose twenty of my years when we are chatting together, and to be a happy, thoughtless urchin of a boy once more" (CLO; CL 2: 307–09; ELTC 267–69). For Carlyle, the cup of tea taken with his mother is a sacred motif encapsulating the joy he felt being with her. As such, it stands out in relief in these letters as a Wordsworthian "spot of time." Proust who as a fifteen year old had equated his "idea of misery" with being "separated from *maman*" would have empathized with Carlyle's great attachment to his mother (*Contre Sainte-Beuve* [CSB] 335–36). He might well have known from *Reminiscences*, should he have read them in English, that the "earliest terror" of Carlyle's childhood was the fear that he might lose his mother, a fear he says he kept all his life.

Proust's "cup of tea" Episode

The famous madeleine episode in *À la recherche* seems to echo Carlyle's use of the maternally charged motif of the "cup of tea" in *Carlyle intime*. Just as Carlyle in his final letter (the

one Proust ripped out and sent to Hahn) pays homage to the voice of his mother echoed through him—"It was *your* voice essentially that was speaking thro' me" (*CLO*; *CL* 28: 333-34; *CI* 308)—so too does Proust honor the concept of maternal spiritual nourishment in this key symbolic episode of *À la recherche*. Later in the novel, Proust's playful aestheticization and profanation of the salutary "cup of tea" motif becomes more complex, suggesting he has absorbed the voice of both Thomas and Jane Carlyle.

Proust carefully positions the "cup of tea" episode in *À la recherche*. The passage in which he extols the power of involuntary memory follows the recounting of a restricted obsessive memory of the Narrator's childhood situated in Combray, the paternal village where family holidays were spent. All that the middle-aged Narrator can now remember is "the drama of my undressing for bed" ("le drame du coucher") when the arrival of a neighbor, Monsieur Swann, traumatizes the child who imagines that he now will be deprived of his mother's usual goodnight kiss. Calm is restored when, in a scene of almost primal intimacy, *Maman* spends the night in the child's bedroom reading to him from George Sand's *François le Champi* [*The Country Waiif*]. The Narrator dates his lack of willpower from this haunting and transgressive night (*SLT* 1: 35-38; *ARTP* 1: 41-43).¹

The Narrator's memory frees up soon after he arrives home frozen from a walk, feeling burdened by his usual "dispirited" self. His mother offers him a cup of tea and a "*petite madeleine*" pastry. Although it is not now usual for him to drink tea ("*contre mon habitude*," he says), he dunks the pastry in the infusion and the resulting taste causes the euphoric resurgence of a long-buried memory. Through a great effort of will he eventually remembers having tasted as a child a *petite madeleine* pastry dunked in a lime-blossom infusion in the Combray bedroom of his great Aunt Léonie. The result is that Aunt Léonie's house and the neighboring Monsieur Swann's estate are, as if architecturally, re-constructed in the "edifice of memory" and Combray is resurrected from a "cup of tea" (*SLT*

¹ Hereafter, references from *In Search of Lost Time* (*SLT*) precede those from *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*ARTP*).

1: 60–64; *ARTP* 1: 44–47). Critics no longer view this scene of illumination through involuntary memory as autobiographical.² Instead, they tend to regard it as a creative discovery that Proust realized could both anchor and expand his work in the same way that the Narrator's previous fixation on the traumatic bedtime experience is replaced with uninhibited memories of rustic village holidays. The careful positioning and laborious rewritings of the episode show that there is a guiding idea behind the piece.³ It centers on the capacity to recapture the past, not through factual retelling, but rather through the "phenomenon" of involuntary memory based in the senses. "Where does the Past hide?" Proust seems to be asking. For the Narrator it is "hidden . . . in some material object," or rather "in the sensation that this material object would give us" when chance overrides habit and this sensually stimulating entity is stumbled upon (*SLT* 1: 59–60; *ARTP* 1: 44).

The episode weighs the relative importance of both the hermeneutic object and the self as containers of the past. Not only is the world of Combray resuscitated, but a mental state is recovered as the Narrator identifies the locus of truth in the self: "It is plain that the truth I am seeking lies not in the cup, but in myself" (*SLT* 1: 61; *ARTP* 1: 45). This realization marks a juncture on the Narrator's journey towards the "lesson of idealism" presented in *Le Temps retrouvé*.⁴ But it also marks a reconnection with his vital artistic self, a self that resists all "multiplicity" and creates its own truth by re-tuning involuntarily to long deposited perceptions forgotten over time. This portrait of the re-energizing of the Narrator's present self by the resurgence of his past identity has traces of Carlyle's "vitalist" perspective on Shakespeare in "The Hero as Poet" (1840): "Man's spiritual nature, the vital Force which dwells in him, is essentially one and indivisible" (*Heroes* 90; *Héros* 167).⁵

² See, for example, Anthony R. Pugh: "Few [Proust scholars] seem to believe nowadays in the tea-cup theory" (131).

³ See Luzius Keller, 137.

⁴ Proust notes, "I had realised before now that it is only a clumsy and erroneous form of perception which places everything in the object, when really everything is in the mind" (*SLT* 6: 323; *ARTP* 4: 491).

⁵ See Christopher Prendergast 112–13 who feels the passage shows Proust's familiarity with late nineteenth century "vitalist" philosophy.

Indeed, Proust's very choice of such preoccupations (memory, intelligence, sensibility, self) suggests that he may have been conducting a dialogue with Carlyle, who shared his concern with re-capturing the past. The "cup of tea" episode's central sentence insists that the past can only be *imaginatively* recreated: "Seek? More than that: create" (*SLT* 1: 61; *ARTP* 1: 45).⁶ This emphasis on imaginative creation over research methodology has resonances with Carlyle's essay "On History" (1830), which as David Sorensen claims, "defined the connection between intellect and imagination in the recovery of the past" (446).

Besides such shared aesthetic and epistemological concerns, affinities, and divergences, Proust may be implicitly acknowledging Carlyle in emphasized traits of the Narrator who is more a recording consciousness than a coherent character. His intellectual nature is foregrounded in the first page of the novel with his quite arcane bedtime history book detailing the rivalry between François I and Charles V. Similarly emphasized is his melancholic nature; the would-be writer is "dispirited," feels particularly "mediocre, contingent, mortal," and is prone to "sad thoughts." This specific expression "sad thoughts" is a privileged motif in *À la recherche*, appearing again in the final illumination of the book, which as a pendant to the cup of tea and *madeleine* episode, resurrects Venice.⁷ It is also a phrase that occurs frequently in Carlyle's correspondence and is present in the final letter to his mother where it conveys his grief at her fast declining health (*CLO*; *CL* 28: 333-34; *CI* 307). Equally reminiscent of Carlyle is Proust's stress on the Narrator's recovery of the past through breaking a habit when "contre mon habitude" he takes tea. In his writings, Carlyle considers habit, or custom, as a dulling force, yet in his life he clung to his "accustomed habitudes" as he confided to his mother. Another Carlylean characteristic may be encoded in the reconstruction of Combray through memory. This re-creation demonstrates the characteristic architectonic sensibility of the Proustian Narrator: he perceives people, things, and even the shape of his imagined book through architectural figures.⁸ From

⁶ The French word "chercher" means "to research" as well as "to seek."

⁷ Cf. "Revolving the gloomy thoughts which I have just recorded, I had entered the courtyard of the Guermites mansion. . . ." (*SLT* 6: 257); see also his formulation "En roulant les tristes pensées" (*ARTP* 4: 445).

⁸ See Sjeff Houppermans, *Proust constructiviste*.

1895 the image of the book-cathedral appears in Proust's writings most probably as a result of his reading *Heroes*.⁹ But perhaps the most telling parallel is Proust's Carlyle-like resurrection of "a happy thoughtless urchin of a boy once more" in his world-weary Narrator.

"How nice it would be . . ."

The shade of Carlyle detected at both aesthetic and ontological levels in the "cup of tea" episode may also color Proust's playful desecration of the motif. There are many other "cups of tea" in *À la recherche*. These are what Carlyle would call "aesthetic teas" and are generally associated with the extravagantly anglomaniactal Odette Swann, a former *cocotte* whose *mésalliance* with Charles Swann shocks society. When the reader first meets her, she is Odette de Crécy, presumably the mistress of the young Narrator's Uncle Adolphe. For the impressionable and puzzled young hero she is "the lady in pink" who affects a British accent and invites him to tea: "Couldn't he come to me some day for a 'cup of tea,' as our friends across the Channel say?" (*SLT* 1: 107; *ARTP* 1: 77).

In the interpolated third person novella, *Un Amour de Swann*, which follows the evocation of Combray, the "cup of tea" forms an important element in Odette and Charles Swann's courtship. The refined Charles Swann frequently "participates" in Odette's "opération capital," the "ceremony . . . of afternoon tea." Swann is so impressed with her tea that "all the way home in his brougham, . . . he kept repeating to himself: 'How nice it would be to have a little woman like that in whose house one could always be certain of finding, what one can never be certain of finding, a really good cup of tea'" (*SLT* 1: 313; *ARTP* 1: 218). When eventually, in the first part of *À l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* entitled "Autour de Mme Swann" (originally entitled "Chez Madame Swann"), Odette de Crécy becomes Mme. Swann, her invitations to "five o'clock tea" are a calculated attempt to found a salon *à la* Mme. Verdurin,¹⁰ which would however be "freer" or "*senza rigore*, as she liked to say." The reader knows by this

⁹ See "The Hero as Poet," in which Carlyle describes Dante's *Divine Comedy* as "a great supernatural world-cathedral" (*Heroes* 78). Jean-Yves Tadié associates Proust's book-cathedral image with Carlyle; see 415.

¹⁰ A socially ambitious hostess.

point of Mme. Swann's previous life as a "great courtesan," and so her continuing invitations to "tea," to which she still attaches "great importance," retain a certain ambiguity: "When she said to a man: 'you'll find me at home any day, fairly late; come to tea,' [she] would accompany with a sweet and subtle smile these words which she pronounced with a fleeting trace of an English accent" (*SLT* 2: 230; *ARTP* 2: 583). There follows a portrait of Odette "at home" which amounts to a fantasy on the intimate life of a *cocotte* as imagined by a hypothetical visitor interrupting "some preferred . . . occupation as perhaps the cup of tea that Mme Swann would have drunk alone for her pleasure." Because the Narrator compares Mme Swann to an imagined "respectable woman" in whose house such solitary activities are less ambiguous, Proust's languorous description of her supposed "pleasure" in drinking tea has a disturbingly voyeuristic tone¹¹ and an almost hallucinatory sensuality reminiscent of the "lady in pink" episode. The imagined "respectable woman" who is implicitly contrasted with Odette evokes a wife for whom a cup of tea is more innocent and recalls Swann's strange fantasy—suggesting more a mother than a lover—of having "a little woman like that" who could provide him with "a really good cup of tea."

Chez Mrs. Swan

Through reading *Carlyle intime*, Proust would have encountered a very respectable Mrs. Swan who featured in Carlyle's difficult early days in Edinburgh. The embodiment of goodness she is frequently referred to by him as "a little woman" and "a good lady." On 16 November 1821, he describes to his mother "the weary duty of seeking lodgings" in Edinburgh and mentions that Provost Swan has put him in touch with "Mrs David Swan," a "good lady [who] undertook the task" to find him accommodation. Having already met the "the good Mrs. Swan" who "seems to be a most amiable little woman" he resolves "visiting her whenever I have an opportunity." Admiring her "fortitude and humble patience" in the face of adversity, he tells his mother that she's a "cheery little body"

¹¹ Particularly if one remembers Carlyle's repeated evocations of his mother drinking her tea "all *alone* now."

(*CLO*; *CL* 1: 392–95; *CI* 28–30). Proust may have known that Carlyle would later use a similar term for Jane. Throughout the correspondence, his “Goody” is variously a “dear,” “brave,” “poor,” “good,” and “much suffering . . . little woman” (*CLO*).¹²

The correspondence between the names of Mme Swann and Mrs David Swan could result from sheer coincidence or at best indicate the pleasing resonance in Proust’s mind of an attractive Scottish surname which occurs frequently in Carlyle’s life. However, not only is there an emphasis on Odette Swann’s “good” nature despite what people say about her, but in addition both the “good” Mrs. Swan and the “bad” Mme Swann are tutelary figures in two young men’s attempts to find their way in the world. The irreproachable Mrs. Swan helps young Carlyle in his early days in Edinburgh; Odette Swann looms large in the hero’s first steps into a world separate from that of his parents. The antithetical symmetry of the young men’s trajectories suggests counter-writing: the path towards work and duty for one and towards languid diletantism for the other.

“*Getting under Way*” and “*Aesthetic Teas*”

Once in Mme. Swann’s social orbit, the Narrator receives many invitations to tea from both Odette and her daughter Gilberte. The latter inherits her mother’s sociable nature, and encourages her young friend’s unhealthily excessive tea-drinking: “Meanwhile, Gilberte was making ‘my’ tea. I would go on drinking it indefinitely, although a single cup would keep me awake for twenty-four hours. As a consequence of which my mother used to say: ‘What a nuisance it is; this child can never go to the Swanns’ without coming home ill’” (*SLT* 2: 108; *ARTP* 1: 497). The comic element is enhanced when Mme. Swann, escaping momentarily from her own visitors looks in on the *goûter*, and extends yet more invitations to tea: “‘But you must come along one of these days,’ she turned to me, ‘and take “your” tea with Gilberte. She’ll make it for you just as you like it, as you have it in your own little “den,” she added . . . and as if it had been something as familiar to me as my own habits (such

¹² I am grateful to Claudia Fitzherbert for her interesting comments on Jane’s pet names in the question session following my presentation at the 2012 Carlyle Conference in Edinburgh.

as the habit I might have had of drinking tea, had I ever done so; as for my “den,” I was uncertain whether I had one or not) that I had come to seek in this mysterious world. ‘When can you come? Tomorrow?’” (*SLT* 2: 109–10; *ARTP* 1: 499).

The comedy turns on the frivolity of the context. The headless insouciance of Odette’s proposed “Tomorrow?” suggests that such frivolous tea-parties will be incessant, initiating the Narrator into the social world of “wasted time.” In addition, the young Narrator, once again mystified by Odette’s declamations is comically “uncertain”¹³ as he struggles to understand the puzzling references to “his” tea, his “habits,” and “his ‘den.’” Odette evokes the image of a strange young boy precociously habituated to the rather grown-up routine of drinking tea “just as[he] like[s] it,” apart from others “dans [son] petit studio.” Proust’s choice of the word “studio,” which designated at the end of the nineteenth century an artist’s *atelier* or a study¹⁴ suggests that for Odette the young hero is already an artist of sorts, a species for which she has a particular liking. The reader familiar with Carlyle’s life and letters knows that he has from his young days dreamt of a “special apartment” of his own in which to write. Without necessarily reading Froude or any other biographical elements, Proust would have known of the “silent apartment” from *Carlyle intime*, since in the final (torn) letter, Carlyle tells his mother that progress on “that weary ‘room’ of which you have heard so much” is well underway (*CLO*; *CL* 28: 333–34).

Using a formulation acquired from his German studies, Carlyle would undoubtedly call the Swanns’ teas “aesthetic teas.”¹⁵ He was introduced to this social rite in 1822 when he met the Buller family. In a letter to his mother written on 23 September 1822, which is quoted in Froude’s biography but not included in *Carlyle intime*, he compares the humble tea-drinking of his mother to the “grandeur” of his employers’ splendid tea ceremony (Froude *First Forty Years* 1: 168). Mrs. Buller’s “beau monde” will inspire Teufelsdröckh’s invitation to “tea with the

¹³ Note the play on the word “certain” in Swann’s ideal of the little woman who could provide “a really good cup of tea.” See also Carlyle’s remark, “The chief thing I have to complain of is uncertainty,” in the letter that Proust may be referring to in his notebook annotation (*CLO*; *CL* 4: 156–59; *CI* 87–88).

¹⁴ See *ARTP* 1: 1368n.

¹⁵ See *Sartor Resartus* 329.

Countess" in the chapter "Getting under way" of *Sartor Resartus*. There, Carlyle confronts his proclaimed anti-aestheticism with his susceptibility to temptations of the elegant. Despite the Editor's claims that Teufelsdröckh would most appreciate "solid pudding" instead of "a wash of quite fluid Aesthetic Tea," a note of Teufelsdröckh's has him subsequently gaze upon the "heavenly" women "flitting past, in their many-coloured angel-plumage; or hovering mute and inaccessible on the outskirts of Aesthetic Tea" (*Sartor Resartus* 96; 102). There is no documented evidence that Proust read *Sartor*; however, it is unlikely that he restricted himself to the reading of *Heroes* and the first volume of *Carlyle intime*.¹⁶ There are parallels between the life progress of Proust's aesthetically impressionable hero (very susceptible also to idealized "heavenly" women) and Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh.¹⁷ Proust's choice of the epithet "supernatural" is striking in his descriptions of the Swanns' world. The young Narrator's "aesthetic teas" are among the many "supernatural delights" bestowed upon him in this "enchanted kingdom," which itself is contained within the "supernatural existence" that the Swann family led (*SLT* 2: 111).¹⁸ Charles Swann is often perceived as a "supernatural" figure (421); even Gilberte Swann's hair plaits seem to the young hero "in the fineness of their grain, at once natural and supernatural" (103).¹⁹

"Tea-bibbers and such like hereditary encumbrances"

We have already seen an echo between Swann's imagined "little woman" who could provide tea and Carlyle's pet names for Jane. Should Proust have read some of Jane's letters, he would have seen the motif of a "cup of tea" equally present in her life. Since he lost no time in obtaining *Carlyle intime* on its release, it is likely that he continued to read the other three volumes in the series: two volumes translating the *Love Letters* and the final volume translating Carlyle's account of Jane in

¹⁶ *Sartor Resartus* was translated by Edmond Barthélemy in 1899. A "definitive edition" was published in 1904.

¹⁷ See for example the Narrator's perception of the "jeunes filles en fleurs" as "créatures surnaturelles" (*ARTP* 2: 301).

¹⁸ See *ARTP* 1: 499.

¹⁹ See *ARTP* 1: 407.

Reminiscences.²⁰ It is probable, however, that long before 1908 Proust was already familiar with English language biographical and epistolary data relating to the Carlyles, aided when necessary by his linguistically proficient mother and members of his circle of anglophone and Anglophile friends. And as an avid reader of French literary journals, Proust may also have been familiar with the extensive and sustained coverage of the Froude controversy.²¹

Proust would have learned from reading James Crichton-Browne's introduction to *New Letters and Memorials* that both Thomas and Jane were "addicted to excessive tea-bibbing" (lvii). "A really good cup of tea," as Mme. Swann would say, was important for both. It was also a recurring motif in their accounts of stressful journeys, with Thomas in particular lamenting the quality of the very substandard French tea.²² "Tea parties" became an important part of Carlyle's world after he was introduced to Jane and her mother. In that world "aesthetic teas" were far removed from "dishes" of tea in the back kitchen in Annandale. Grace Welsh's penchant for tea parties frequently exasperated her studious daughter. On 6 December 1822, she complains to Carlyle of being "hard pressed with callers, tea-bibbers and such like hereditary encumbrances" (*CLO*; *CL* 2: 220–22; *Love Letters* 1: 113–17; *Lettres d'amour* 1: 104). Jane's study time is wasted as she has to dress for "strangers," "silly people," or "professional Callers," especially since the tea parties are long protracted affairs that run "according to Haddington etiquette" (*CLO*; *CL* 3: 54–56; *Love Letters* 1: 350–54; *Lettres d'amour* 1: 315–16). She soon became known for her more intellectual tea-parties, which started with the "Wednesday nights" in Comely Bank. Thomas described these dinner parties as "at homes" with "talk for two hours with no other entertainment but a cordial welcome and a cup of innocent tea" (*ELTC* 1: 29).²³

There are echoes of Jane's voice and presence in Proust's account of his "aesthetic teas." Proust's choice of a small word

²⁰ *Carlyle intime. Lettres d'amour de Jane Welsh et de Thomas Carlyle* (1910); *Carlyle intime. Jane Welsh Carlyle. "Réminiscences"* (1913).

²¹ See Taylor, 242–56, for a survey of French coverage of the affair from 1881 to 1913.

²² See *Last Words* ("Futile Excursion"), 151–55.

²³ See also *ELTC* 157.

can reveal much. Odette Swann's affectation for peppering her conversation with foreign language phrases, mostly in English, is a trait she shares with Jane, whose linguistic pretentiousness in contrast is ironically and humorously assumed. Odette's conception of her tea-party salon as "*senza rigore*" echoes Jane's witty Italian letter of 26 October 1835, in which her repetition of the preposition "*senza*" shows her pride in being able to speak Italian: "Questa bellissima Italiana è scritta senza dizionario, senza studio, con penna corrente . . . and to you, dear, kisses senza misura" (*CLO*; *CL* 8: 242–47; *LM* 1: 40–47).

There are additional signs of Jane's influence in the "supernatural" Mother and Daughter *gôûter* in the Swann household, where Gilberte takes on her particular "hereditary encumbrances" with aplomb.²⁴ Odette's puzzling remarks about the hero's "habits," little "den," and "his" tea, could be elucidated by Jane's comments on her husband's "habits," and his problematic "silent apartment" that became "the noisiest apartment in the house" (*CLO*; *CL* 28: 367–69; *LM* 2: 238–42). As for the constant emphasis on the possessive adjective qualifying "tea," Proust may be thinking of Jane's exasperated remark to Carlyle of 1 July 1824, when she reports her latest skirmish with her mother about being "allowed" to read her suitor's letter only after she finishes her tea: "I was requested to *finish my tea* . . . my tea indeed! I gulped it down like as much senna, which I abominate" (*CLO*; *CL* 3: 98–100; *LL* 1: 381; *Lettres d'amour* 2: 342). In his celebration of female cultural transmission in *À la recherche*, Proust often echoes Jane's vivacious expressivity.

Dunking and "*want of elegance*"

The Narrator's illumination results not only from the "cup of tea" but from the dunking of a pastry into it. From the early drafts onwards, through the variations of the immersed object (toast or "*biscotte*"), the gesture of "dunking" remains constant, despite the fact that it is a less understandable reflex when eating a soft sponge *madeleine*.²⁵ As with the "cup of tea," the gesture of "dunking" may also have a Carlyle connection. Once again, Jane's

²⁴ The theme of "inheritance" is very often associated with Gilberte.

²⁵ Dunking is also an element in Proust's *Jean Santeuil* (1895), in which he describes the writer "C" "sipping his coffee and crumbling a roll into the cup" (9).

voice seems to surface. There is a resonance with her account in *Early Letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1889) of Carlyle's ill-starred visit to Haddington.²⁶ On 15 January 1822, Jane complains to Eliza Stodart about her suitor's "want of elegance" exemplified in his manner of drinking a cup of tea. She playfully claims that such inelegant behavior underlines the gap between Carlyle and the hero of the French novel she is now reading: "St Preux never kicked the fire irons—nor made puddings in his teacup—Want of Elegance—Want of Elegance—Rousseau says is a defect which no woman can overlook" (*ELJWC* 34; *CLO*; *CL* 2: 16–19).²⁷ If indeed a trace of Carlyle is present in the Narrator's illumination scene not only in its "cup of tea" motif but in the gesture of dunking, then it follows that Jane's voice may also be inscribed in the central episode of *À la recherche*. Moreover her voice may resonate elsewhere in the novel since there are other instances of pastries being dunked.²⁸ One such example is the strange episode in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* where Proust's housekeeper Céleste Albaret visits the Narrator in his seaside hotel room. As she teases him for his "clumsiness", his impossible housekeeping demands, and his "grand gentleman" notions, the Narrator nonchalantly breakfasts in bed, dunking croissants into his milk all the while (*SLT* 4: 331; *ARTP* 3: 240–41).

"Soft food"

Proust would know that Carlyle's habit of dunking is related to his digestive problems. His liking for "soft food" (which he often recommends to his mother) exasperated Jane when she became his wife.²⁹ The disputed account of her night vigil

²⁶ I am very grateful to Mark Cumming for reminding me of this crucial reference at the 2012 Carlyle Conference in Edinburgh.

²⁷ See *La Nouvelle Héloïse*: "La privation des grâces est un défaut que les femmes ne pardonnent point" (Letter 45).

²⁸ For another parody, see *SLT* 6: 120–21; *ARTP* 4: 352. Mme. Verdurin's "quiet satisfaction" as she tastes her specially "prescribed" croissant dunked in coffee seems much stronger than any distress she may feel for the *Lusitania* tragedy about which she is reading.

²⁹ On 11 July 1859, Jane described the Carlyles' lodgings in Fife to Mary Russell: "Rooms enough . . . command of what Mr. C. calls 'soft food,' for both himself and horse. As for *me*, *soft food* is the last sort that I find useful" (*CLO*; *CL* 35: 145–46; *NLM* 2: 215).

over the baking of a digestible loaf later became an element in the Carlyle biography wars, both in England and in France. In October 1884 the *Revue des deux mondes* published Arvède Barine's Froude-inspired article entitled "La femme d'un grand homme," which vehemently attacked Carlyle for his treatment of his wife.³⁰ Barine is particularly fascinated with Jane's "lettre du *pain*," in which she describes in mock-heroic terms her first bread baking feat (*CLO*; *CL* 32: 70–73; Froude, *First Forty Years* 2: 29–30). For Barine, Jane's letter, which she reproduces in her article, rivals "through its naturalness and grace of expression" Mme. de Sévigné's famous "Letter about the horse."³¹

It seems that Proust was thinking of Jane's heroic vigil, and particularly of Barine's severe critique of Carlyle's behavior, when during a holiday with Reynaldo Hahn in Brittany in 1895 (during which Proust read *Heroes*), he wrote a piece describing the sufferings of Mme. Lepic, the maltreated wife of an "excellent" socially conscious man who, in Proust's suspiciously neat equation, is a "terrible" husband.³² Proust's portrait of this unhappy *ménage* verges on parody. It combines a *Beauty and the Beast*-type fairy tale atmosphere with a pastiche of Barine's caustic style. Proust describes an innocent young woman who marries "an abominable creature." He is dyspeptic, hypochondriacal, hypersensitive to noise, and aggressive. The "stormy atmosphere" that he creates eventually reduces his once "high-spirited" wife to the condition of a housemaid whose "constant routine of household cares" takes a heavy toll on her mental health.³³ One of Proust's rather pointed examples of Lepic's tyranny is his limitation of his wife's reading matter to the cookery book *La cuisinière bourgeoise*, which recalls Jane's parody of *Cobbett's Cottage Economy* in the context of catering for her dyspeptic husband at Craigenputtock.

The motif of "soft food" celebrated in the tea and *madeleine* passage radiates throughout *À la recherche* not only in the Narrator's

³⁰ See Arvède Barine, *Portrait de femmes* (1887), 380.

³¹ Madame de Sévigné's letters are particularly beloved by the Narrator's mother and grandmother.

³² Cf. Proust's description in *Jean Santeuil*: "Mais cet homme excellent était un mari terrible" (226).

³³ The piece has long been considered to be based on the *ménage* of Anatole France.

preference for gastronomic *tendresse* but also in the expansion of his “fantasies of alimentary quietism” into stylistic and moral manifestations of *douceur* (Richard 22–25).³⁴ The prevalence of such thematic devices as the “cup of tea,” “soft food,” “*pâtisserie*,” bread-baking, and digestion suggests the deep impact that the Carlyles’ lives and letters exerted on Proust’s imagination. Like Proust, the Carlyles were preoccupied with matters of health, self-expression, creativity, and a deep attachment to the past.

In the same year that Proust read *Carlyle intime* he conceived the subject of *À la recherche* and began by composing *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, a part essay and part fictional narrative built around the idea of a “conversation with mother.” Its critique of the biographical method of literary criticism practiced by Sainte-Beuve continues in *À la recherche*, which has at its core the subject of literary biography.³⁵ The earlier work’s prefatory dunking scene stresses that sensation rather than intellect reconnects the individual with “the intimate essence of ourselves,” which is the true sense of the “past” (*CSB* 215). It was an important qualification that Jane Carlyle would have endorsed, having distinguished in her *Journal* between herself, a Sandian woman “all about feelings,” and her alienated husband, who was preoccupied with “the fact of things” (*CLO*; *CL* 30: 199).

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³⁴ As a stylistic trait it is manifest in Bergotte’s writing style. As a character trait it is exemplified by the Narrator’s much loved grandmother.

³⁵ See Anne Jefferson 233.

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