

Marcel Proust goes to a wedding

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This article was first published in French, under the title « Marcel Proust est de mariage », in the *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 2018, by Société des Amis de Marcel Proust.

Its translation has benefited from the invaluable help of Chris Taylor and "Marcelita Swann". I would like to thank them for that.

“Thus, it can be only after one has recognized, not without having had to feel one’s way, the optical illusions of one’s first impression that one can arrive at an exact knowledge of another person, supposing such knowledge to be ever possible. But it is not; for while our original impression of him undergoes correction, the person himself, not being an inanimate object, changes in himself, we think that we have caught him, he moves, and, when we imagine that at last we are seeing him clearly, it is only the old impressions which we had already formed of him that we have succeeded in making clearer, when they no longer represent him.” (*In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, Marcel Proust)

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Early 2017, a scoop was put into circulation which purported to reveal a fleeting appearance of Marcel Proust in a short film taken at a wedding that was being celebrated at church of la Madeleine in Paris in 1904¹. The film, gifted by Mr. Henri de Gramont, shows much of the wedding procession of Armand de Gramont, Duc de Guiche and Éleine Greffulhe, as they are leaving the church. It has been restored by the *Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée* (CNC) and is conserved at Bois-d'Arcy. The scoop surrounding the appearance of Proust was instigated in the article "Un spectre passa... Marcel Proust retrouvé" by Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan - professor at the University of Laval in Canada². The figure identified as Marcel Proust is a young man with a thin mustache, running down the stairs next to the bridal procession, and whose eyes and forehead are hidden.

It is wonderful to see the way "high society" presented itself, bringing alive our mental image of the characters of *In Search of Lost Time*, and let us be grateful to all those who have made it available to us. However, the proof of Proust's presence claimed by Sirois-Trahan's article merits some discussion, and provides us with an opportunity to widen the field of our study.

First of all we should confine ourselves to the study of the images, carefully fixing their date. Indeed when we study photographs of Proust over different periods of time, we quickly come to realize that the young man cannot be Proust in 1904. So how do we explain the furore surrounding Sirois-Trahan’s hypothesis? Theoretical studies about the social perception of images helps us to understand such an outcome, but we will go beyond stating merely that an erroneous thesis has been propagated as we build up a richer analysis of the film, based on an original investigation and a large body of sources. It will be an opportunity to enter into high society at the beginning of the twentieth century, and to penetrate its rituals. The filmed moments of the wedding are indeed part of a long temporal sequence of preparations and negotiations between a whole series of actors, and their reconstitution leads to the revelation of a set of factual and methodological errors in Sirois-Trahan’s article, or in earlier Proustian historiography.

It is therefore necessary to remind ourselves of the social dynamic leading up to this wedding. The objective of our research, the understanding of the day of November 14, 1904 and the ancient nuptial rites of Society is based on several types of documents: the press - no less than 140 titles report on this marriage -, the guides on social etiquette, the public and es-

¹ *Film de famille Greffulhe : mariage d'Armand de Guiche et Éleine Greffulhe*, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, 1904. Can be seen for example on the web page <http://poleproust.hypotheses.org/1483#more-1483>.

² Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, « Un spectre passa... Marcel Proust retrouvé », *Revue d'études proustiennes*, n° 4, 2016-2, p. 19-30.

pecially private archives besides the film - in particular the Greffulhe and Gramont archives that we were able to consult thanks to the support and the benevolence of the Duchesse de Gramont -, the memories of contemporaries, literature, painting, as well as the correspondence of Marcel Proust. These sources are of different degrees of status and do not always say the same thing; it is therefore indispensable to cross-reference them in any work of history.

The union of Éleine and Armand is then a case study of the Society weddings of the Belle Époque through the analysis of which we are able to discuss Sirois-Trahan's assertions. It is also an opportunity to enter Proust's world in a very real way. In the following statements we will focus our presentation on the aspects that concern the author directly.

The announcement of the appearance of Proust

The scoop in itself is a success. The first rumors about the article begin to ripple across social networks on February 13th, 2017, in the form of a tweet by Jérôme Bastianelli at 12:20 pm. On the 14th the Classiques Garnier editions put the film online. On the 15th the French media publish it and an AFP dispatch at 7 pm extends the broadcast to all continents³. Mr. Sirois-Trahan will be interviewed many times and the director of the magazine will acknowledge that the film has been viewed several hundred thousand times.

Some claim a pre-discovery of Proust had been published in 2014⁴ or proof had been provided - in fact an article of *Liberation* as early as 2003 described the research on the famous icon at the CNC: "Difficult to see. But dumbstruck Proustians make the trip to Bois-d'Arcy just in the hope of recognizing the novelist on these shaky images⁵. "The success of this scoop attests to the interest, at least for intellectual promotion, of making use of what could be called the "heritage value" attached to Proust - even the "Proust brand". We can also note that the notoriety of the writer and his patrimonial appropriation significantly exceed his readership, measurable for example in the sales tables of classic authors: he is 38th out of 50⁶."

If the media want to be up to the minute while the scoop is in the spotlight, they cannot afford the time for critical analysis, and so, true or false, the diffusion of the news release is assured. At the same time, many specialists have questioned the news of Proust's appearance, comparing in particular the filmed figure and the known portraits of the writer.

The proof by the portrait⁷

Around seventy photographs in which Marcel Proust appears can be referenced⁸ - sometimes they are series taken at the same time, to which we can add a dozen paintings, drawings or sketches as well as literal descriptions. Twenty or so are from childhood and adolescence up to military service in 1890; the dandy youth of the end of the century is represent-

³ Jean-Christophe Antoine, « La Madeleine sans Proust », *L'Histoire*, January 2018, p. 22-23.

⁴ Laure Hillerin, *La comtesse Greffulhe : l'ombre des Guermantes*, Paris, Flammarion, 2014, p. 78.

⁵ Ange-Dominique Bouzet, « Un mariage du côté de chez Proust », website *Libération.fr*, 11/08/2003.

⁶ According to « Le top 50 des auteurs classiques les plus vendus », 2012, in website *Le Figaro.fr*.

⁷ Title of a blog column of Patrice Louis's *Le Fou de Proust*, which is the first publication of this counter-argument, February 24th, 2017, based on an idea of the blogger "Marcelita Swann".

⁸ Can be seen for example in the web page <http://www.yorktaylor.free-online.co.uk/gallery.xhtml> .

ed by about thirty, of which ten for the series by Otto constitute the now iconic portrait of the future writer of the *Search...*; after which are seven dating from the beginning of the twentieth century - which are chronologically closest to the wedding film; then four taken in May 1921 and finally ten on his deathbed, in November 1922. This body of photographs clearly shows a mustache thickening more and more⁹ while its wearer seems more and more tired, the turning point exactly coinciding with the twentieth century.

On February 2nd, 1903, Marcel Proust is best man at the wedding of his brother Robert. His cousin Valentine takes the collection with him, and describes him wrapped in his three overcoats, his neck surrounded by several woolen scarves, having a "his Lazarus-like face with its melancholy moustache rising like surprise out of his wooly black garments"¹⁰. Léon Daudet¹¹, René Peter¹² or Fernand Gregh provide similar descriptions for the beginning of the century: "[...] At Weber, where he sometimes appeared around midnight as a specter, in overcoat at the height of summer, the neck reinforced by a wadding that escaped in tatters from under his collar"¹³. Lucien Daudet warns against any systematization: "Making him a kind of bohemian *always* dressed inappropriately, *always* wearing snow boots over his boots, with bits of cotton wool *always* sticking out of his collar for fear of cold: it is inaccurate"¹⁴.



April 1903, abbey of Saint-Leu-d'Esserent, in the center at the bottom. Detail

⁹ Jean-Christophe Antoine, "La Madeleine sans Proust", op. cit. The correspondence also shows bearded episodes, especially from 1905 (*Correspondence*, V, pp. 252, 259, 299).

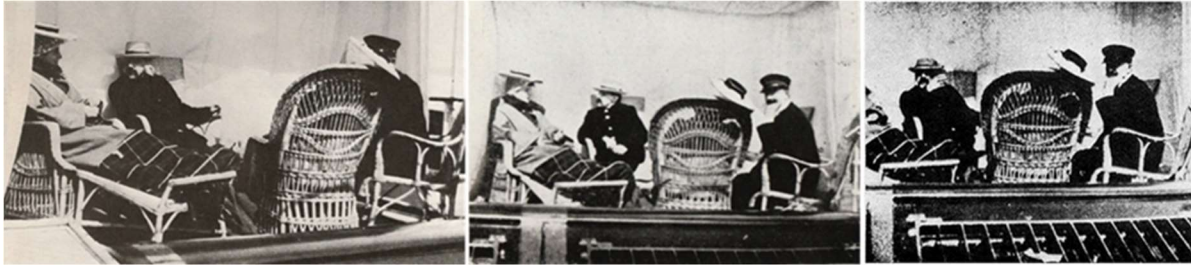
¹⁰ Valentine Thomson, "My Cousin Marcel Proust", *Harper's Magazine*, May 1932, p. 717.

¹¹ Léon Daudet, *Souvenirs des milieux littéraires, politiques, artistiques et médicaux : Salons et Journaux*, Paris, Nouvelle Librairie nationale, 1920, p. 638.

¹² René Peter, *Une saison avec Marcel Proust*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, pp. 53, 60.

¹³ Fernand Gregh, *L'Âge d'airain*, Paris, Grasset, 1951, p. 256.

¹⁴ Lucien Daudet, *Autour de soixante lettres de Marcel Proust*, Paris, Gallimard, 1929, p. 24.



August 1904, on the yacht *Hélène*.



Septembre 1905, Hôtel Splendide, Évian-les-bains



Let us now examine the passage where Sirois-Trahan seeks to prove that the young man with the bowler hat is Marcel Proust:

“We recognize his slender figure, his black mustache, small at the time, the perfect oval of his ivory face. In a still image we can see his profile and the characteristic curvature of his nose. On another, the hat lowered over the eyes, one could imagine it was Henri Bergson, his cousin by marriage¹⁵.”



Young man of the church of la Madeleine (cited film, 1904)

As we can see above "at the time", that is around 1904, Marcel Proust does not seem particularly slender, his face has thickened and his mustache is rather bushy: the article "Un spectre passa..." does not give any other reference, which would testify perhaps to a severe trim of the writer's mustache. As for the ivory color of his face, it can hardly be made out in a black and white film. No other detail of the face can be seen clearly, given the low quality of the images. The only certainty that everybody can agree upon is that we are looking at a young man with a small mustache. The third sentence quoted above admits, moreover, that the young man might just as easily resemble Henri Bergson, who has no blood ties with Proust; and in fact his unclear image, with no clear glimpse of the upper face, resembles that of many young people of the time.

Marcel Proust was certainly no longer a young man with a small mustache at the time of the film, so it is not him. This demonstration through his portrait largely invalidates the thesis defended by Sirois-Trahan.

¹⁵ Sirois-Trahan, « Un spectre passa... », *op. cit.*, p. 19.

The scoop created by Proust's cinematic appearance in February 2017 is not an isolated incident: other famous writers, like Rimbaud in Aden, have been "recognized" on certain images, and controversies have raged over them. These cases were objects of study by a researcher at the EHESS, André Gunther, into the way that images are perceived in the age of the internet; he describes the way an error can be built up: "A family likeness and the desire to see are the main foods of fantasy¹⁶", and also:

"... we may be surprised that nobody emphasizes the poor legibility of the sources. As in [the film] *Blow-Up*, where the use of enlargement is aimed at rendering obscure forms interpretable, the fuzzy portrait in Aden or the imprecise image of the 1904 film does not give a distinct view of the faces. This ambiguity, which should have led observers to be cautious, has, on the contrary, countenanced the effects of projection."

Gunther insists on the compression of time through iconic images:

"A point common to both cases is a paradoxical knowledge of the writer's face. This face is at the same time famous and little known: famous through the imagery of certain portraits, always the same, ritually reproduced to identify the products of bookstores which exploit its symbolic capital - but also little known, because this iconography freezes a stereotyped aspect - Rimbaud at 17, or Proust at 20 - which then places a screen in front of the rest of the biography¹⁷."

Let's return to the wedding by focusing on the presence of Proust at its different stages.

The engagement: with or without Proust

The projected marriage between Armand de Gramont and Éleine Greffulhe had been developing from April 1904, after the failure of her previous projected marriage to the Prince de Beauvau-Craon conducted under the mediation of Abbé Mugnier. The anti-Semitism of Armand's future father-in-law, the bride's mother having been born a Rothschild, yields under the determination and open-mindedness of his wife Comtesse Greffulhe towards the end of June¹⁸. The engagement took place in July 1904, a beautiful sapphire, symbolic of fidelity, being offered¹⁹.

We have no record of the formal engagement, which is not inconceivable according to our Society guides²⁰. "It may happen that one does not celebrate the engagement. This does not preclude the giving of the ring²¹." From the next day the parents of the future couple on each side announce the event to members of their respective families and friends who are not invited on the actual day.

¹⁶ André Gunther, « Voir Proust », website *L'Image sociale*, 21/02/2017.

¹⁷ André Gunther, « L'effet « Blow up » », website *L'Image sociale*, 22/02/2017.

¹⁸ Letter July 2, 1904 (Archives nationales [from now on AN], fund Greffulhe, AP/101(II)/32).

¹⁹ Letter September 4, 1904 (AN, fund count Greffulhe, AP/101(I)/24 and composition of the wedding presents in *Le Figaro* 15/11/1904).

²⁰ Parisette, *Le Protocole mondain*, Paris, Montgredien, 1899; Baronne Staffe, *Usages du Monde*, Paris, Flammarion, 1899; Comtesse de Tramar, *L'étiquette mondaine*, Paris, Victor Havard, 1905.

²¹ Baronne Staffe, *Usages du Monde*, *op. cit.*

And indeed, Marcel Proust, who was a friend of the fiancé and was invited with thirty guests to the Gramont's château, wrote to Bertrand de Fénelon about a dinner on July 14th: "I found out about Guiche's marriage one night, when I went to dinner at Vallière²²." Marcel Proust was to suffer two blows to his self-esteem: to have looked ridiculous arriving during the afternoon in the park "in white tie and tails, whereas everyone else was in country clothes²³", and to have been asked not to inscribe "a thought" on the guest-book by the Duc de Gramont, Armand's father²⁴.

The news of the engagement is "made official" in the press on July 28th; the Society chronicles, on the other hand, do not evoke an engagement dinner or its equivalent.

On about September 18th²⁵, the Comtesse Greffulhe proposes to her husband the dates for the civil and religious marriages - November 12th and 14th. It is therefore quite normal that Proust had not heard the news sooner, and the day before, in a hurry, he asks both his mother and Louis d'Albufera about the date of the wedding²⁶.

An original gift

Élaine and her fiancé received a profusion of gifts, some of which were very luxurious: 1250 objects exhibited in the family salons, of which several Society chronicles draw endless lists, over several columns, also mentioning the donors. *Le Cri de Paris* (7/08/1904), *La Petite Gironde* (18/11/1904), *La Vie parisienne* (19/11/1904) drew ironic attention to the lack of imagination of the Society people's choice of gifts. This Belle Époque version of the native potlatch feast is also, sometimes, found to be in bad taste by the Society guide writers.

The publication of these lists had been organized, like the rest of the essential information, for the Society chronicles. Ferrari, a journalist from *Le Figaro* returned to his correspondent, probably the family secretary, an envelope containing the list of gifts and donors, the orderly composition of the incoming bridal party, the names of witnesses, of mendicants, of officiating clergy. The envelope is accompanied by a note asking for further details such as "... the musical program; the description of the presents; some of the ladies' outfits if possible. The names of some well-known personalities who attended the wedding ceremony²⁷."

The list of gifts "approved by the young lady", in ten handwritten pages, includes modifications: changes of order of precedence, material or stylistic corrections. Thus, an im-

²² *Correspondance de Marcel Proust, établie par Philip Kolb* [now on *Corr.*]. 21 vols. Paris: Plon, 1970-1993, IV, p. 198. Kolb's annotation of this letter creates a little confusion, calling it "an engagement dinner." From all the sources quoting the evening, Society journals as well as correspondence or memories -including those from the Duc de Gramont at the time only Duc de Guiche, only the letter of Marcel Proust to Fénelon incidentally contains the word "engagement", in the expression "The beginnings of the engagement period", without associating it with the dinner of the 14th. Finally, dated July 8, 1904, a letter from the Duc de Gramont, wishing to invite Count Greffulhe to Vallière, warns that among other impediments, "On the 14th we have quite a few guests" (those for the dinner Proust attended to), and the two men will agree to meet on July 16 (AN, AP/101(I)/30): the formulation excludes the presence of Count Greffulhe on the 14th, and we cannot imagine the engagement dinner without the fiancée's parents!

²³ Duc de Gramont, « Proust as I knew him », *The London Magazine*, 11/1955.

²⁴ *Corr.*, IV, p. 198.

²⁵ Letter without date, presumably September 18th (AN, AP/101(I)/22).

²⁶ *Corr.*, IV, pp. 265, 269.

²⁷ AN, AP/101(II)/37.

probable "Mlle de la Robertsau" is crossed out and replaced by "Ctesse Ed. de Pourtalès", who owned the château de la Robertsau, in Strasbourg. The revolver offered by Proust and mentioned at the end before the complementary list, is no longer "superb". Its description still mentions "in a box painted by Madame Madeleine Lemaire²⁸", which turns out to be an error made in the Greffulhe mansion, rue d'Astorg, an error corrected by Madame Madeleine Lemaire in a letter to Marcel Proust²⁹: the case was painted by Frédéric "Coco" de Madrazo. The same error may have arisen over the painted fan given by Robert de Montesquiou. About the reason for such a gift, Armand remembers: "... Proust asked me what I should like as a present. I replied, with a laugh, that the thing I most needed was a revolver³⁰." Proust therefore personalized the object by having the box decorated by Frédéric de Madrazo, surrounding some verses composed by the child Éleine³¹, a personalization which - he claimed - had been expensive³².

Le Figaro would faithfully report every elements of the list; it would also be the only paper to mention Marcel Proust, but only in the list of donors. On the other hand, *Le Gaulois*, as in other articles, gives some approximations, even provoking reaction from the Greffulhe family, despite the good opinion of the Count. Éleine wrote to her mother on November 19th, 1904: "Tell Daddy that we should put an end to the stupid articles in *Le Gaulois* which upset the G. [Gramonts] and look like sales advertisements³³."

A wedding procession reserved for the family

We have already mentioned the wedding procession above. Some peculiarities of wedding scenarios in la Madeleine will require us, for the discussion of the film of 1904, to focus attention on one hand on this ritual, and on the other hand on the parade of the guests.

In order to stage the alliance of a couple before the eyes of society of course, but also to stage the alliance of two families, the formation of the bridal procession is composed in advance. Its order of ceremony changes from entering the church to leaving it. The incoming bridal party is formed at the bride's home so as to arrive at the church in carriages, along with the page boys and bridesmaids. They then assemble as close as possible to the door of the church. Guests who are not included in the procession are already inside the church to watch it pass³⁴.

The wedding procession is made up of couples, men on one side and women on the other³⁵, belonging to the immediate family, the prospective spouses being kept separate: only the Duc de Guiche gives his wife his arm, while leading the procession out of the church. For

²⁸ No dated list issued on 13 November 1904 (AN, AP / 101 (II) / 37).

²⁹ *Corr.*, IV, p. 350.

³⁰ Duc de Gramont, « Proust as I knew him », *op. cit.*

³¹ Princesse Bibesco, *Le Voyageur voilé*, Marcel Proust, Genève, La Palatine, 1947.

³² *Corr.*, IV, p. 331.

³³ AN, AP/101(II)/34.

³⁴ Comtesse de Tramar, *L'Étiquette mondaine*, *op. cit.* and Baronne Staffe, *Usages du Monde*, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Normally women on the left and men on the right, except in the case of the presence of a member of the military wearing a sword (Comtesse de Tramar, *L'Étiquette mondaine*, *op. cit.*, and Baronne Staffe, *Usages du Monde*, *op. cit.*). The Greffulhe - de Gramont wedding pictures show that the women were on the right, probably because of the presence of Capitaine Tinan in Dragoon's uniform (private photograph).

entry and exit, two lists of 21 numbered couples are thus established³⁶, and of course Marcel Proust is not part of them.

In the film, one can see or catch sight of a dozen couples from the outgoing procession, and by calculating the film speed, one can determine that this procession lasts about two minutes.

The New York Herald (15/11/1904) reports that the religious ceremony lasted until half past two local time, which is attested by the shadow of the people going down the steps, slightly towards the east³⁷. We can also deduce from the shadows, if it were necessary, that the procession of 1904 was filmed south of the church and not behind, which would have been contrary to normal practice; Sirois-Trahan says it was filmed at the back³⁸.

Finally, the press photographs and their comments on the exit from the church show that the members of the procession went directly to their carriages, without stopping to converse with the guests³⁹, so as to go directly to 10 rue d'Astorg⁴⁰.

³⁶ Undated lists for wedding preparations, November 14th, 1904 (AN, AP/101(I)/21).

³⁷ We used the *Solartopo* website for time correlation of shadows.

³⁸ Sirois-Trahan, « Un spectre passa... », *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³⁹ “[..]. the spouses pass without stopping. They climb alone in their coupé decorated with flowers. [...] Everybody hastens to return to the house of the bride for lunch” (Comtesse de Tramar, *L'Étiquette mondaine, op. cit.*). So at this moment there is no social opportunity for a discussion between an ordinary wedding guest and the Comtesse Greffulhe, contrary to what is said in a biography “Down the steps, the journalists feverishly note all the names [...]. Who is this young man who talks almost familiarly with her and succeeds on two occasions in making her burst into peals of laughter? It's Marcel Proust ... » (Hillerin, *La comtesse Greffulhe ..., op. cit.*).

⁴⁰ According to Sirois-Trahan, “The man seems to be wondering what Proust is doing here. The couple had to meet him at the evening, rue d'Astor” (Sirois-Trahan, “Un spectre passa...”, *op. cit.*, p 27). But it is not a social evening, just a lunch in the early afternoon. Moreover, the error on the name of rue d'Astorg is systematic of his article, not being rigorous with Parisian toponymy.

The parade at the sacristy: a great social moment



Albert Guillaume, « Vers la sacristie », *Femina*, 15/12/1904

After the religious ceremony strictly speaking, according to the custom of the time, the spouses go to the sacristy to sign the parish register. They are joined by all those who attended the ceremony, who come to congratulate them and their families⁴¹. This Society moment, less strictly organized after the formality of the ritual, called the "parade of the guests", allows free voice to the guests who have remained silent since the entry of the engaged couple, and allows some very formal socialising with the families of the newlyweds; however, in front of the latter, "[one] must not start long conversations and thus delay the parade, which is always quite long for grand weddings. People usually meet at lunch⁴², and there one can be more expansive⁴³." and "When the guests have fulfilled their duty, they have every opportunity to return to their place in the nave to wait and see the newlyweds on their bridal procession, or to leave the church if they are in a hurry⁴⁴."

The layout of the church of la Madeleine is not very well adapted for certain customs, especially for dresses with long trains. Émile Zola describes the solution for ensuring the circulation of large numbers of people: "... in the sacristy, begins an endless parade. The acquaintances, the guests, even strangers, enter by one door, and quit by another⁴⁵, after shaking hands with the spouses and their two families⁴⁶."

⁴¹ Baronne Staffe, *Usages du Monde*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁴² The *lunch* [word used in the French references] is the meeting that follows a Society wedding, accompanied by the display of gifts where appropriate, with a buffet but without a ball.

⁴³ Comtesse de Tamar, *L'Étiquette mondaine*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ The door leading to the side corridor which serves the nave.

⁴⁶ Émile Zola, « Comment on se marie », *Вестник Европы* [*Europe Messenger*], January 1876.

For the Greffulhe - de Gramont wedding, twelve press titles report the signing of the registers or the parade of the guests, lasting an hour and a quarter, in the sacristy. The weekly *La Vie Parisienne* (19/11/1904) notes: “[...] the parade at the sacristy, through those aisles and steps that you all know, and the darkness which makes them so ill-suited for the gala that fills them, was somewhat unseemly.” From all the titles, only *Le Gaulois* (15/11/1904) which did not show much rigor elsewhere, and the *Revue Illustrée* (1/12/1904) which resumes its article, situate the parade in a tent at the back of the church. Because of the narrowness of the cloister, this tent could only be erected at the bottom of the north staircase, on the rue Tronchet. The lack of an accessible door at the rear makes any round-trip scenario of the wedding participants between the front and the back, up and down the stairs between the choir stalls and this tent, incomprehensible. However, this scenario has been endorsed without apparent scrutiny by Sirois-Trahan⁴⁷.

How to dress: the constraints on Proust

At that time Proust was living with his mother at 45 rue de Courcelles, his father having died on November 26th, 1903. Just as every circumstance relating to marriage, in the Belle Époque, obeys strict rules, so does mourning. These rules relate to clothing, letters and envelopes, social outings⁴⁸. The known mail sent by Proust at certain periods of time has black borders, especially during the mourning for his father Adrien, and later of his mother Jeanne born Weil, who died on September 26th, 1905. Marcel Proust “devotedly complied” with the rigors of his father’s mourning instituted by his mother, and his correspondence was still framed in black at the time of the Greffulhe – de Gramont marriage.

Male dress code is meticulously described in our Society guides. The ordinary guests, not members of the wedding procession, wear elegant city attire, as used for ceremonial visits: frock coat, light trousers, top hat, light gloves, with exceptions made for the military (uniform), or the less well-off men (jacket⁴⁹)... The chronicler of *Le Figaro* even notes: “The ordinary guests would be looked upon unfavorably if they showed up wearing dress suits⁵⁰.” Gabriel-Louis Pringué lays down very strict dress code for Society:

“In the morning until noon, unless you went to a wedding or a funeral, you could go out in a dark jacket and bowler hat. For the afternoon, from 1 pm, the Society gentleman wears his jacket and his top hat⁵¹...”

The parades of the guests at the sacristy, drawn or painted by Albert Guillaume, confirm these descriptions of men's dress⁵².

⁴⁷ Sirois-Trahan, « Un spectre passa... », *op. cit.*, p. 20. The same article quotes on page 28 *Le Figaro* which writes “the parade at the sacristy”, without noting the inconsistency between the two places.

⁴⁸ The 1904 *Almanach Hachette* produced a table on the rules and lengths of mourning according to the degree of kinship.

⁴⁹ Comtesse de Tramar, *L'Étiquette mondaine*, *op. cit.* and Baronne Staffe, *Usages du Monde*, *op. cit.* In an interview with the website *L'Obs*, Sirois-Trahan said: “It should be pointed out that it was not fashionable to dress in a frock coat for a wedding, but it was not forbidden. Another guest can be seen wearing one. It’s not necessarily bad taste, just a mismatch.” (Sirois-Trahan, “Vêtements, correspondances, presse : comment j’ai identifié Proust dans un film de 1904”, 2017). As a matter of fact, except for a member of the procession, it is normal to wear a frock coat and a top hat when attending a wedding.

⁵⁰ Parisette, *Le Protocole mondain*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁵¹ Gabriel-Louis Pringué, *30 ans de dîners en ville*, Paris, Édition Revue Adam, 1948, p. 42.

⁵² Sketch in *Le Journal amusant* 17/01/1903, and painting *Vers la sacristie* noticed at the 1904 Salon.

November 14th, 1904 was a sunny day, but the meteorological archives⁵³ record a maximum temperature of 11 °C and a minimum of 3 °C, lower than on the previous days. The maximum temperatures are a little higher than the average, the minimum temperatures are colder. The newspapers of the time that Proust could have read published the same observations and forecasts: *Le Gaulois* thus declares on that morning in its column “Our Information”: “In France fine weather is expected; the temperature is falling and will get closer to normal. Yesterday in Paris, a very fine day. Thermometer, 12 °C.” *Le Figaro* in its column “Les Échos” provides substantially the same information, *Gil Blas* is less precise.

Conforming to circumstances - Society wedding, mourning, meteorology - and to his habits already observed, especially at his brother’s wedding the previous year, Proust has no reason to deviate from it, and surely wore warm and dark outdoor clothes, a top hat with his cane, which creates a silhouette very different from that of the young unknown man in the film.

How Marcel Proust spent the day

Society protocol accepted, certainly for notoriously busy people, that they merely attend lunch as participation at a wedding⁵⁴. Several letters or memoirs attest to Proust’s presence “at the wedding”. Only “*Le Voyageur voilé*” by Marthe Bibesco seems to precisely describe him as attending the religious ceremony: “On November 14th, 1904, at the church of la Madeleine, was blessed the marriage of Armand d’Aure, Duc de Guiche, and Éleine Greffulhe. Marcel Proust was present⁵⁵”; this later account is, however, a tenuous source. Other sources, contemporary or otherwise, do not make it clear which part of the wedding Proust attended: ceremony or lunch. Thus, the letter of Marcel Proust to Armand November 27th, 1904 indicates only: “The day of your wedding Mme Greffulhe recited some sublime verses by her daughter to me⁵⁶”. The general formula “his wedding” is used in a letter from Proust to Madame de Noailles⁵⁷. In the same way, the Comtesse Greffulhe thinks she recalls during an interview in April 1949: “The last time I saw him was at my daughter’s wedding⁵⁸”.

Proust did not arrive in advance “at the wedding”, mentioning to Francis de Croisset things “which I expected [...] to talk to you about at Guiche’s wedding if I could have got there in time⁵⁹.” It is difficult to determine the extent and consequences of this delay: simple conversation made impossible by the distance to the church, by the crowd at lunch, quick departure of the interlocutor or actual delay of Proust until after the beginning of the ceremony⁶⁰?

If he attended all or part of the religious ceremony, he would have paraded to the sacristy, then have gone out after the wedding procession, in order to get to the reception. Or maybe he took French leave before the procession, if, which is unlikely, his conversation with

⁵³ Cf. the website <https://www.infoclimat.fr>.

⁵⁴ Parisette, *Le Protocole mondain*, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

⁵⁵ Princess Bibesco, *Le Voyageur voilé...*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁵⁶ *Corr.*, IV, p. 350.

⁵⁷ *Corr.*, V, p. 210.

⁵⁸ Mina Curtiss, *Other People's Letters*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978, p. 176. But it was not the last time they meet.

⁵⁹ *Corr.*, IV, p. 343.

⁶⁰ Sirois-Trahan opts without discussion for the delay, to infer that Proust did not see the arrival of the procession (Sirois-Trahan, « Un spectre passa... », *op. cit.*, p. 20).

the Comtesse took place at the sacristy. But he would not have come out rudely overtaking the procession; this characteristic impoliteness of the film's young stranger seems to have been noticed by one of the members of the procession who stares at him⁶¹.

He was not part of the wedding procession. Now Sirois-Trahan writes, getting confused between bridal procession (2 min) and parade of guests (1 hr 15 min):

“We are lucky to find Proust in this 'family film'. The nuptial procession, according to *Le Gaulois*, lasted more than an hour; the cinematographic film only shows the beginning of the procession. We are lucky because Proust, who should, if we trust the order of precedence, find himself at the end, sneaks around without waiting his turn⁶².”

Proust's correspondence once again makes it possible to refine the hypotheses. He did indeed chat with the Comtesse Greffulhe and made her laugh prettily. According to a letter to Armand, Duc de Guiche⁶³, one could imagine thus the short exchange:

- My respects, Madam, what a beautiful wedding!
- Monsieur Proust, do you know that my daughter also writes charmingly:
The smell of flowers that you pick,
Rise up tonight beside me;
And the scent of their leaves
Is impregnated in your fingers⁶⁴.
- Wonderful. I believe that the Duc de Guiche regarded his marriage (in one way) as an opportunity to have your photograph!
- Ah ah ah ah ah!

Such a thirty second conversation does not seem consistent with the brevity of the many congratulations given during the parade at the sacristy, but it could well have taken place during the reception at the Greffulhe's mansion, rue d'Astorg.

Proust was ill before and after the wedding, according to several letters⁶⁵, and he wrote to Robert de Montesquiou on November 25th: “It's been a fortnight since I last got up⁶⁶”, an exaggeration that contradicts his presence at the wedding on November 14th. On November 9th he also announced that he wanted to see his doctor on the day of the wedding⁶⁷, but it is quite possible that he did not do so.

He paid a visit to Lucien Daudet's mother and sister⁶⁸, perhaps on the day of the wedding, but perhaps also the next Tuesday, the reception day of Mme Alphonse Daudet at the time⁶⁹.

⁶¹ *Film de famille Greffulhe...*, *op.cit.*

⁶² Sirois-Trahan, « Un spectre passa... », *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁶³ *Corr.*, IV, p. 350.

⁶⁴ Poem « La chanson du fiancé » (Élaine Greffulhe, *Les Roses tristes*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1923).

⁶⁵ *Corr.*, IV, p. 330.

⁶⁶ *Corr.*, IV, p. 353.

⁶⁷ *Corr.*, IV, p. 331.

⁶⁸ *Corr.*, IV, p. 337.

⁶⁹ According to 1904 *Bottin mondain*, 1905 *Tout Paris* and *L'Écho de Paris* 15/12/1905. It was the Thursday when Alphonse Daudet was still alive.

He went tramping up to the editor of the *Mercure de France*, between five and seven o'clock in the evening⁷⁰.

From half past midnight at least he was at home the night of Monday the 14th to Tuesday the 15th of November⁷¹.

He read *Le Gaulois*, whose errors he noted in a letter to Léon Daudet on Tuesday evening⁷². In particular, he scrutinised the list of gifts and found no mention of his revolver. It was the painter Madeleine Lemaire who informed him that it was mentioned in the press, and he reacts: "I don't know which newspaper it was in, *Le Gaulois* that I saw didn't mention this superb gift⁷³!" Mme Lemaire probably read it in *Le Figaro* dated 15/11/1904, the only newspaper to our knowledge to list Proust, as a donor. Proust, therefore, probably did not read *Le Figaro*, contrary to what Sirois-Trahan claims, without foundation⁷⁴.

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Our case-based micro-sociological approach, relying on sources from the main participants of the marriage, has allowed us to build an alternative interpretation of the short film of a "grand society wedding" at the church of la Madeleine in 1904. A wide ranging investigation, both in terms of the quantity of materials collected and their diversity, systematic criticism through their comparison, contradictory examination of hypotheses, establishment of a detailed chronology, description of the interactions between individuals in a reconstructed social context, have turned out to be not detours, but a necessity for fuelling literary discussion.

The initial object of our research, the presence of Proust or not, has led us to respond on several levels. The absence of the writer at the engagement and during the shooting of the outgoing nuptial procession, his presence on the day of the religious wedding service - at the ceremony or lunch, the presence too of his friends, his relatives and generally the same Society that he will describe in *In Search for Lost Time*. These answers may be supplemented by further subsequent information, which, like that gathered for our study of the marriage of Éleine and Armand from which we have extracted those elements most directly affecting Proust, by going beyond the level of anecdote, open up a real object of study, Society marriages during the Belle Époque.

In addition, this enquiry is a modest step in the vein of studies that address the question of the sources of inspiration, and methods of investigation by Proust, relating to the society described in the *Search...*

⁷⁰ *Corr.*, IV, p. 338 and 340. According to Sirois-Trahan, "...we know that he went to the *Mercure de France* to meet the editor, without success, and that he then spent the evening at the 'Chimay' mansion (with the Comtesse Greffulhe, née Élisabeth de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay, and her sisters, but the press speaks rather of a reception on rue d'Astor at the dowager Comtesse Greffulhe's)" (Sirois-Trahan, "Un spectre passa...", *op. cit.*, p 21). Proust may have telephoned the Chimay mansion, where the Comtesse Greffulhe was not present as she was at lunch, actually rue d'Astorg (and not Astor).

⁷¹ *Correspondance...*, IV, p. 337.

⁷² *Correspondance...*, IV, p. 338.

⁷³ *Correspondance...*, IV, p. 350.

⁷⁴ Sirois-Trahan, « Un spectre passa... », *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Finally, the theme of the emergence of a weakly based scoop was only sketched out by this case study. At the time of the massive presence of the Internet as a research and dissemination tool, and of questions about fake news, the exchange of ideas between researchers leads the way for an essential critical position based on rigorous methodology.