Proust, Typical Novelist: Literary Context as Type

> She surpassed every fair woman in the world and broke every heart,
> as the poet said, of one like her, "…
> — *The Arabian Nights*, tr. Haddawy

Marcel, the narrator of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, first encounters literature in the form of George Sand's novel *François le Champi*, a gift from his grandmother, read to him in boyhood by his mother, at the unexpected behest of his father, after hours of anguish waiting for her goodnight kiss as the family entertains their friend Charles Swann downstairs.

> Je n'avais jamais lu encore de vrais romans. J'avais entendu dire que George Sand était le type du romancier. Cela me disposait déjà à imaginer dans *François le Champi* quelque chose d'indéfinissable et de délicieux. Les procédés de narration destinés à exciter la curiosité ou l'attendrissement, certaines façons de dire qui éveillent l'inquiétude et la mélancolie, et qu'un lecteur un peu instruit reconnaît pour communs à beaucoup de romans, me paraissaient simplement — à moi qui considérais un livre nouveau non comme une chose ayant beaucoup de semblables, mais comme une personne unique, n'ayant de raison d'exister qu'en soi — une émanation troublante de l'essence particulière à *François le Champi*. (1.41)

> I had not then read any real novels. I had heard it said that George Sand was a typical novelist. This predisposed me to imagine that *François le Champi* contained something inexpressibly delicious. The narrative devices designed to arouse curiosity or melt to pity, certain modes of expression which disturb or sadden the reader, and which, with a little experience, he may recognise as common to a great many novels, seemed to me—for whom a new book was not one of a number of similar objects but, as it were, a unique person, absolutely self-contained—simply a troubling emanation of the peculiar essence of *François le Champi*. (1.44) [1]

In the expression "le type du romancier" lies a quibble. Those from whom Marcel has heard it meant by it that Sand was a "typical novelist," as Scott Moncrieff translates it; in other words, that her novels are ordinary, undistinguished, characterized by the same features as those of other authors, representative of the class of novels as she is of novelists. But Marcel understands it to mean rather, as Lydia Davis translates the phrase, an "exemplary novelist," distinguished as the best of her kind, the excellent essence of novelists, in whose work can be seen the character of the novel raised to perfection. The double meaning is intrinsic not only to the French word *type*—which the *Trésor de la Langue Française* defines as "Ensemble d'images, de traits qui correspond à un modèle générique, à un modèle idéal" ("A group of images or characteristics that correspond to a generic model, to an ideal model"), as if a generic model and an ideal model were the same—but to the English *type*, as well as *example* (whence *exemplary*), *standard*, *ideal*, and other words. That is, it appears to be an ambiguity baked into the very notion of taking one member to represent its group, which we do either because it is like the other members, or because they ought to be more like it. Sometimes we want both at

[1] The French text is taken from Proust 1987–89; the English translations are from Proust 1981, lightly tweaked in places.

once: for instance, we seek (however futilely) political representatives who are like us in our beliefs or in our diversity, but atypically competent at the same time.

In the case of *François le Champi* the ambiguity is important, because it marks the division between the young Marcel, who in his innocence assumes that the novel is "unique," with an individual "essence," and the adult world around him, or, more acutely, his older self, who knows that the novel is quite ordinary and its features merely typical. Right from the start, Proust implies that experience is a contextualising process by which we learn to realize how commonplace are the things we first believed unique: maturity as disillusionment. It is fitting, then, that at the novel's climax, when Marcel discovers a copy of *François le Champi* in the Guermantes library, the same paradox is reawakened: Sand's novel is *not*, he now admits, a very extraordinary book, even though it once contained for him the essence of the novel (4.462 / 3.919), and he is unable to reconcile his memory of its mystique with his present awareness of its mediocrity. As usual, he expresses this by saying that he had two selves.

The function of typical patterns in Proust has received some scholarly attention, though little by comparison to the adjacent problems of metaphor and analogy. The voice of experience quoted above seems to reinforce the dominant view—originating in still more explicit statements in the novel—that types, rather than individuals, motivate Proust's final interest (e.g. Deleuze 2000: 81–2, Ferraris 1987: 102). However, as we shall see, one of the earliest comments on the novel reached the opposite conclusion, and some recent critics have sought to nuance the dichotomy, for instance by distinguishing Marcel from Proust.

This essay pursues the latter project from a different angle; it argues that alongside the usual type-concept, that is, a class abstracted from particulars to which it is contrasted, the novel stages the emergence of a different type-concept which prioritizes the *act* of typifying, an act that does not sacrifice but rather discloses, or even constitutes, the individual. In this respect, as I will suggest towards the end, it has something in common with the old notion of biblical typology. But the main thrust of this essay is to demonstrate the broader relevance of such a type-concept to a particular impasse of modern literary study.

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Thinking about type is another way of thinking about context, which I take to be in essence a pattern of typicality adduced to clarify an object's meaning or purpose. Thus historical context, to take one example, denotes a set of acts, objects or phenomena sharing a type with the text insofar as they belong to the same time and place (however broadly construed) and are judged to shed light on it. The importance of context for the historical understanding of texts has long been a contentious problem in literary study, as in other areas (see e.g. Skinner 1969, Rorty 1984, Burke 2002). It has recently been retroubled by Rita Felski in a widely-cited 2011 polemic, "Context Stinks!", part of a larger broadside against the methods of New Historicist critique. That critique had typically sought to anchor past works of literature in contemporary economic, political, social and cultural conditions, in an effort to expose their complicity in, or subversion of, networks of power. In response, Felski, suspicious of Historicist suspicion, attacks the idea of historical context as a sort of "box" that limits the significance of a text to the time of its production, and criticizes acts of contextualization for failing to capture the text's "autonomy," which she glosses as its "distinctiveness and specialness" (2011: 584, and cf. 576).[2] Felski is concerned to protect the emotions that books produce in their later readers, and

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[2] Compare also Felski 2015: 153 and 165, now referring only to "distinctiveness."

which historicist analyses cannot explain. Even anti-contextual models of meaning, she adds, put their 'emphasis on exemplarity and abstraction, on the logic of "the" realist novel, or women's poetry, or Hollywood movies' (585), an emphasis that cannot account for why some works more than others of a given type excite or amuse or horrify. But Felski does not want a New Critical return to formalist analysis of works considered in their own right, outside of context; rather, she advocates an understanding in which the text's 'autonomy' and 'agency' are bound up with its interconnectedness to other texts, and to the world itself.[3] After all, the process by which a work reaches out of history to us is unthinkable without the agency of innumerable others in a network: "publishers, advertisers, critics, prize committees, reviews, word-of-mouth recommendations," all the way down to "the desires and attachments of ourselves and our students" (589).

How should criticism reflect this "actor-network"? Felski does not make this clear, but early in her essay she refers to "the messy, mundane, empirical details of how and why we read" (574), implying that she favors something like a cultural and intellectual history of readerships. Indeed, this is an exciting and growing field; one thinks of Katrin Ettenhuber's close study of John Donne's St Augustine, or Hazel Wilkinson's cartography of *The Faerie Queene* in the eighteenth century. Studies like these, however, are not theoretical but, in Felski's words, "empirical," that is, historically descriptive—as well as deeply contextual. For all their excellence, they cannot provide a model for what *we* are doing as readers.

By contrast, in the present essay, after tracing some of the genealogy of Felski's concerns, I will propose one way in which Proust's novel might give us such an answer. Felski herself acknowledges her predecessors rather offhandedly, gesturing to critiques of contextualization by the Russian Formalists, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and unnamed "deconstructive thinkers." But her critique is especially close in spirit to Leo Spitzer's review of Ernst Robert Curtius's 1948 monograph, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. This extraordinary book seeks to demonstrate the continuing vitality of ancient literary figures, devices, motifs, images, ideas, metaphors—all instances of what Curtius calls *topoi*, borrowing Aristotle's word for a rhetorical commonplace—through the Middle Ages, Renaissance and even down to modernism, here represented by Curtius's correspondent T. S. Eliot, whose *Waste Land* he had translated into German as early as 1927. The method is disassembly: works of literature are broken apart into their *topoi*, whose journeys across ages are then charted. Using a metaphor perhaps inspired by a similar figure in Eliot's essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Curtius insisted that philology "has to develop analytical methods, that is, methods which will 'decompose' the material (after the fashion of chemistry with its reagents) and make its structures visible." (2013: 15) And so we read of the soul's eye, or catalogues of authors, or the conceit of life as a stage-play, in a dazzling range of literary manifestations.

Curtius's analysis seemed to free his authors from their historical and geographical boxes, to allow them to address each other across the centuries, and across borders—a timeless literary counterpart to the heavenly *saeculum* imagined by St Augustine, and, as many critics have pointed out, a vision of a unified Europe in the troubled years after the War. Or, as Curtius put it: "The 'timeless present' [*zeitlose Gegenwart*] which is an essential characteristic of literature means that the literature of the past can always be active in that of the present." (2013: 15)

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[3] I note in passing the remarkable passage in *À l'ombre* (3.130) in which Proust describes the operations of great works on their subsequent audiences very much in terms of the work's agency.

At first glance, such a vision seems much like what Felski advocates in her article. But if Curtius freed books from their temporal prison, he imprisoned them in another, binding them by chains of similarity with works before and after. It was no longer that Dante used a particular image because of the Florentine politics of his day, but now that he used it because it had already been used in all the books he'd read—a different "context" or pattern of typicality, but a pattern nonetheless, and one that diminished the individuality of Dante's work. It was on just these grounds that Spitzer criticized *European Literature* in his review for the *American Journal of Philology*. Curtius had forgotten, Spitzer charged (1949: 429), that "the great work of art is always unique and that art strives for uniqueness," for "the unrepeatable and unparalleled;" the commonplace *topos* was merely "the prepoetic, that which has been dissolved and reworked into a new, the poet's idiom."[4] Likewise, at Harvard, the philologist Robert Politzer (1954: 174) argued in his own review: "A presentation which is primarily concerned with the demonstration of continuity is in danger of losing sight of the fact that it is after all the characteristically individual which accounts for really living literature." Peter Dronke (1970: 19) later commented that the study of *topoi* would not even serve, as Curtius had claimed, "to make possible a distinction between what is individual and what is typical," since it may well be the case that "the individuality lies precisely in the way that the typical is used." These responses all betray a dissatisfaction with the emaciated results of Curtius's de-individuating analyses.

But from where did such comments come? It is difficult to imagine such a conversation taking place in the nineteenth century, and it would have been unintelligible earlier. Nobody in the Renaissance asserted that great works of art were "always unique," nor did historians produce contextual accounts of them, except, now and then, to point to standard facts about their authors' biographical circumstances, such as Vergil's relationship to Augustus. Above all, early modern readers treated classical literature not as works to be appreciated by close historical study, but as eloquent sources of moral teaching and entertainment.

It would be far beyond the scope of this essay to fully examine the intellectual trajectory that made the Curtius-Spitzer polarity possible. But we can get at part of the answer by considering some related concerns arising in different settings at the end of the nineteenth century. On May 4, 1894, the neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband delivered the annual rectorial address at Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität, Strasbourg; this address is now widely known to historians for its attempt to divide the sciences and the humanities not by the object of their investigation, as with Dilthey and others earlier, but by their methodology. The sciences, Windelband declared, were *nomothetic*, that is, they sought universal rules and dealt with any given particular only as a "type" (*Typus*) of those rules, whereas the humanities (*Geistes-wissenschaften*) were *idiographic*, centred on individual facts, persons, events and artefacts. This distinction has had a resounding afterlife, but the address itself, rather than being an impartial analysis of each side, is much more concerned with (and for) humanism. Windelband takes the importance and meaning of science almost for granted, seeking instead to carve out space for a distinctively historical mode of thought:

> The historian's task… is to breathe new life into some structure of the past in such a way that all of its concrete and distinctive features acquire an ideal actuality or contemporaneity [*Gegenwärtigkeit*]. His task, in relation to what really happened, is

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[4] It is worth comparing this piece to Spitzer 1944, a critique of Arthur Lovejoy's methodology that rails, in defence of context, against a diachronic approach comparable to that of Curtius.

similar to the task of the artist, in relation to what exists in his imagination. (1980: 178; for the original see 1894: 30)

The Aristotelian thought that both historiography and poetry are essentially mimetic is here repurposed into a defence of history as fine writing, close to the literary in its transmutation of dead historical matter into something living, ideal, and always-present. (This is also the notion of *enargeia* or *evidentia* in classical rhetoric.) Whereas Felski would associate context with suffocating typicality, for Windelband context is what brings the past alive in its individuality, as it brings a story alive. The threat of typicality comes not from history but from science, which is why we must resist scientific generalization in the moral realm:

Every living value judgment [*lebendige Wertbeurteilung*] is dependent upon the uniqueness of its object. It is, above all, our relationship to personalities that demonstrates this. Is it not an unbearable idea that yet another identical exemplar of a beloved or admired person exists? (1980: 182 [tweaked] / 1894: 36)

Windelband's address is thus a plea for the particularity of humanist thought. It seems to have been motivated by an anxiety that scientific and quantitative methods, which had become so powerful in the nineteenth century, would diminish modern man's grasp of authentic moral and historical reality, the reality of "Persönlichkeiten."[5] It is, I think, a precursor to the fear of estrangement and alienation animating the responses to Curtius, whose crime would be to elide particularity in his search for the trans-historical universal. Ironically, Windelband would be a key part of Curtius's intellectual formation. He was a close colleague of Curtius's mentor and dedicatee, Gustav Gröber, to whose masterpiece, the *Grundriss der romanischen Philologie*, he had contributed in the 1880s. He collaborated with Curtius's grandfather Ernst on a high-school textbook in 1895 (Biese 1895). And after Windelband moved eighty miles north to Heidelberg in 1903, he numbered Curtius himself among his students; indeed, Windelband's *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, with its conception of the history of Western philosophy as a "coherent and interconnected whole," provided an early model for *European Literature*, as Curtius's annotated copy indicates (Baum 1994: 556–7). We may even hear an echo of the philosopher's "ideal actuality" in his student's "timeless present."

Windelband's fear of alienation from essential, particular reality is typical of late nineteenth-century literary thought. It is seen also in the writings of the cultural *avant-garde* that went on to beget modernism, of which I will give two examples here. At the end of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach (2003: 550–1) described modernism as a transition away from a "clearly formulable and recognized community of thought and feeling," and from "reliable criteria" for "representing reality"—the community and criteria he had described over the course of the book—to the "predilection for ruthlessly subjectivistic perspectives." He noted Flaubert as a canary down the mine, a realist writer who "already suffered from the lack of valid foundations for his work." But if we consider one early critical comment on Flaubert, we find the revolution he seemed to augur expressed in a very different way. Guy de Maupassant, who contributed an essay to the first edition of the Flaubert-Sand correspondence (Maupassant 1884: lxi), wrote of the author's almost theological belief in the realization of style:

Il n'imaginait pas des "styles" comme une série de moules particuliers dont chacun porte la marque d'un écrivain et dans lequel on coule toutes ses idées; mais il croyait

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[5] On the intellectual context, see now Hayot 2021: 21–5.

au *style*, c'est-à-dire à une manière unique, absolue, d'exprimer une chose dans toute sa couleur et son intensité. … Le style devait donc être, pour ainsi dire, impersonnel et n'emprunter ses qualités qu'à la qualité de la pensée et à la puissance de la vision.[6]

He did not imagine "styles" as a series of particular molds, each of which carries the mark of a writer, and into which one pours all of one's ideas. Rather, he believed in *style*, that is, a unique, absolute manner of expressing something in all its color and intensity. … The style should therefore be impersonal, so to speak, taking its characteristics only from the thought and power of the writer's vision.

In this passage is a self-conscious, even slightly precious, effort to distinguish Flaubert's notion of style from the common one, the latter characterized as a fixed "mold," that is, as an artificial manner that a writer or artist might adopt for a particular purpose: classical, Gothic, romantic, like a choice of suit for an occasion, or a choice of tool for a job. This was an idea of style as a *type*, with recognisable and ordinary features, not far from the sort of novel represented by *François le Champi*. But it could only be perceived as such in contrast to the idea of style embodied, for Maupassant, by Flaubert, not a readymade type, one of many, but singular and objective.[7] Whereas to Auerbach literary modernism looked like an abandonment of accepted criteria in favor of subjectivism, to Maupassant—and later to Eliot and all the rest—it looked like a shucking off of clichés, of subjective and sentimental stylistic excrescences, a return to a true realism of the thing itself, and therefore always "unique," a word importantly common to Maupassant, Windelband and Spitzer. If, as Maupassant believed, a writer's style answers only to the unique reality of its subject, then the historian's contextualising analysis will be little help for understanding or evaluating it.

Modernism was the heir to this thought, insofar as it insisted, as Vincent Descombes (1992: 124) has put it in his study of Proust, on "the demand for individual originality in art;" it is therefore almost impossible to isolate definitive formal traits, typical features, of modernist writing. As Descombes shows, this problem is revealed and analysed by Proust's novel itself. With great writers, Marcel comments, "la beauté de leurs phrases est imprévisible… elle est création puisqu'elle s'applique à un objet extérieur auquel ils pensent—et non à soi—et qu'ils n'ont pas encore exprimé" ("the beauty of their sentences is unforeseeable… it is creative, because it is applied to an external object which they have thought of—as opposed to thinking about themselves—and to which they have not yet given expression," 1.541 / 1.593). (This attitude to art is cemented for Marcel by hearing Morel play Vinteuil's septet in *La prisonnière* [3.759–61 / 3.257–9], a meditation that has much in common with Maupassant's portrait of Flaubert.[8]) The beauty is unforeseeable because not readymade; it responds to the reality of the individual object rather than the writer's fancy. The notion of responsiveness is significant, and Proust is observant throughout the novel of unresponsive language, from Norpois's commonplaces to Albertine's mechanical repetitions (3.531 / 3.13), just as *Bouvard et Pécuchet* was to have been followed by the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, and just as Joyce plays with cliché in the Nausicaa and Eumaeus chapters of *Ulysses*. Such moments give us

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[6] Walter Pater made liberal use of this piece for his own essay on "Style" (1888), referring to Maupassant as "our French guide" and "Flaubert's commentator."

[7] In a late essay, Proust claims to dislike Flaubert's style for its poverty of metaphors, but he admits its radical novelty in grammar and rhythm; notably, he refers (1920: 80) to great style as exhibiting "l'obéissance absolue à l'idéal intérieur" ("absolute obedience to an inner ideal").

[8] The association is clarified firmly by Marcel's answer to Albertine's question at 3.877 / 3.382.

glimpses of the typical language and thinking against which modernist writers sought to elevate an ideal of the literary work—not just untraditional, but unrepeatable.

We have since internalized the belief in the unrepeatability of literature. It is what makes us uncomfortable with, or uninterested in, or both, the notion of a "typical novelist" or "typical novel," at least as literature. Perhaps we share the intuition of L. P. Hartley (1931: 630): "Every age has its typical novel, which is seldom its very best novel. For were it enormously superior to its contemporaries it would not be typical." In 2006 George W. Bush was mocked for claiming that he had recently "read three Shakespeares," precisely because Shakespeare's plays are not thought of as typical, but as unique and particular, uncountable as a class.[9] On a more serious note, a similar thought animates the perennial modern contention (e.g. De Man 1970, Wellek 1979, Bahti 2001) that literary history, as practised in the nineteenth century, is now impossible: all that can be historicized are the outward lineaments and "empirical data" of literature, or, as with Curtius, its *topoi*, and not its inner nature, which will always remain intractable to generality.

Felski's intuition is the eventual result of this literary trajectory, but the title of her article derives instead from an architectural debate about the degree to which contextual considerations ought to guide the design of an urban building. Likewise, it is to architecture that I would like to turn briefly for an instructive parallel to the problem of style in literary modernity. The year after Maupassant's essay, the celebrated art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1999: 42) noted that, because buildings were slow and expensive to produce, architectural styles were particularly unresponsive to changes in the popular mood or spirit of the age; this led to *Entfremdung*, alienation, and meant that a style became only a "lifeless schema, supported by tradition alone." In 1902 Hermann Muthesius made the same idea a foundation of his hostility to the styles of the nineteenth century, that is, to the historicism that he dismissed as *Stilarchitektur* and *Formalismus*; "today," he wrote, "architecture is not free from the appearance of a certain ossification and alienation from life" (1994: 81; for the original see 1902: 54).[10] When the origin myths of modernism came to be written, by, among others, Wölfflin's student Siegfried Giedion, Muthesius's rejection of the styles was canonized as a pivotal early moment.

But Muthesius's answer to the styles, and the answer eagerly borrowed by French and German modernists after the First World War, was a *more* typical architecture: *Typisierung*, in the slogan he adopted in his debate with Henry van de Velde at the Werkbund convention of 1914 (Anderson 2000: 214–16). It had to be more typical, less whimsical, in order to meet the demands of *Sachlichkeit*, of realism; that is, to be more responsive to the needs of the specific site. Le Corbusier, who studied at the Werkbund in 1910–11, later reprised the notion of types in the articles collected in *Vers une architecture* (1923); he held up the Parthenon alongside contemporary automobiles as instances of the product "type" (or "standard," in Frederick Etchells' influential translation) refined to beautiful perfection (Le Corbusier 1963: 123–38).[11] In other words, unlike the typical styles that the Victorians had applied *a priori* to their buildings, these types would evolve out of use without anything extraneous, like the form of a car or aeroplane, or a fork, or any machine adapted for function. For this reason Sir John

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[9] Carter 2006:82: "Three Shakespeares—I mean, who talks like that?" For a linguist's explanation of this reaction, see Nunberg 2006.

[10] Cf. Muthesius 1912: 24: "Wenn irgendeine Kunst, so strebt die Architektur nach dem Typischen."

[11] This intellectual trajectory is eloquently traced by Banham 1977: 206–19, who nonetheless sees in it a retrograde classicism.

Summerson, looking back on modernism in 1957, identified it as that which found its unity not in past precepts or canons, but in the building's "programme," defined as "a description of the spatial dimensions, spatial relationships and other physical conditions required for the convenient performance of specific functions" (1990: 263–4).

The result was that modernist architecture, despite its machine-made repetitions and approximation to type, could also be seen as *less* typical than works of literature. Thus the *émigré* architect Berthold Lubetkin, interviewed in 1951, declared that "the modern English novel" was "a stock product if ever there was one," whereas the "modern building" ought to be "a contribution to modern architecture, and through it to social progress" (1951: 136). The generalized results of aesthetic investigation, so long as they were controlled by the specific context of the job—by its real particulars—would not degenerate into formula: individual and type could be reconciled, at least in theory. But this was not the only means to do so. As the next section will argue at some length, another method, with different ends and in a totally different sphere, emerges out of a close reading of *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

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One of the earliest critical discussions of Proust's novel was written by Ernst Robert Curtius in 1925, before the final volume had even been published, and over twenty years before his own masterpiece. Curtius emphasizes the work's focus on the individual; unlike classical literature, which "typifies and symbolizes. . . simplifies and stylizes, abstracts and concentrates" the infinite plurality of the world, Proust presents everything in its particularity (1952: 104). By contrast to the mass production of "item types" in Germany and America—the world embraced by Muthesius and his heirs, as we have just seen—French culture, embodied in Proust, is one of refined individual taste (97). Above all, Proust seeks to preserve, against *Naturwissenschaft*, "the existence of the individual as an irreducible fact that cannot be further analysed into general relationships" (82); in other words, he gives us an idiographic picture of the world. Oddly, Curtius uses the same metaphor he later applied to his own work: "the novelist analyses an event as a chemist analyses a substance; he decomposes it into its elements" (63).

Curtius's reading is at odds with the now-dominant approach mentioned earlier, which focuses instead on the novel's patterns of typicality and generalization; as Proust himself puts it, "on ne devrait pas s'intéresser aux faits particuliers autrement qu'à cause de leur signification générale" ("one ought not to take an interest in particular facts except in relation to their general significance," 3.657 / 3.147). But *À la recherche* exhibits far more ambivalence on the subject than either side acknowledges; it is no coincidence that it was composed during precisely the period when modernists were wrestling with the threat and promise of typicality, for the problem of the typical, above all in people and in art, runs through the entire novel and connects most of its principal themes.[12] One critic to acknowledge this ambivalence is Christopher Eagle (2006), who explains it by assigning the typological impulse to Marcel—under the influence of Balzac and represented by the recurrent phrase "one of those"—but the particularising instinct to Proust; the latter, Eagle argues, parodies and subverts the former. He does not extend his analysis to the more oblique deictic *en être*, "to be one of them" or "one of us," a *leitmotiv* of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* that prompts a moment of alarm when M. Verdurin warmly tells the

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[12] Although it would take us too far from the direct concerns of this essay, one might find an antecedent to this aspect of the novel in the discussion of "idolatry"—loving something for its literary resonances rather for the thing itself—in Proust's preface to Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens* (Ruskin 1910: 78–87).

Baron de Charlus: "j'ai compris que vous «en étiez»" ("I understand you are *one of us*," 3.332 / 2.973). For Charlus there is a confusion of type: is he being embraced as likeminded, or outed as "one of those," a homosexual?

This moment is only one of many anxious negotiations in the novel of overlapping schemata of class, gender, race, sexuality, political allegiance, cultural temperament and so on; these are what most critics are likely to think of on the subject of "types" in the work. They are indeed very rich, and an entire monograph could be written, and perhaps has been, just on the 845-word sentence from *Sodome* (3.17–19 / 2.638–40) comparing the secret identities of Jewish and homosexual types in French society. Elsewhere Proust offers an astonishing petri dish for the typologies of character developed in and around the nineteenth-century novel, the evocation of which György Lukács (1974: 6–9) posited as an essential project of realist fiction, insofar as the social type could bridge the communal and private selves sundered by bourgeois life.[13] The word "type" in the novel frequently denotes such recognisable characters; for instance, when Marcel says of the snob Legrandin, "il était aux yeux de ma famille qui le citait toujours en exemple, le type de l'homme d'élite" ("he was in the sight of my family, who never ceased to quote him as an example, the very pattern of a gentleman," 1.67 / 1.73), or when Swann describes the Bontemps-Chenut family as "le type de la bourgeoisie réactionnaire, cléricale, à idées étroites" ("typical of the old-fashioned bourgeoisie, reactionary, clerical, tremendously straitlaced," 1.503 / 1.551).

As Rita Felski (2000: 93) points out elsewhere, drawing on the work of Agnes Heller and others, such typological thinking is already the preserve of everyday life, which depends on "preexisting schema that may not be supported by empirical evidence."[14] In other words, such types (or stereotypes) are readymade, like the artistic styles objected to by Maupassant and Muthesius. Moreover, because they originate in an abstractive process by which particularities are whittled away, they alienate us from real individuals, who must inevitably fulfil those types only partially: none of us likes being categorized. This is most obviously true of character, but Marcel, characteristically, is more attentive to it as a problem of *beauty*. When, *en route* to Balbec for the first time, his train stops at a rural station, he watches a local girl passing down the carriages to offer the passengers milk and coffee; struck by her beauty, he comments that every pretty face, like every good book, is special and individual. But he also laments that we forget this, substituting for them in our minds an abstract "type de convention" (2.16 / 1.705).[15]

The study of social types in Proust, their equivocations and their transgressions, could profitably be pursued at much greater length. But the remainder of this essay has a different focus, considering the type as a more basic category of experience, encompassing not just people but also objects, and especially artworks. Furthermore, it considers a type-concept in the novel that differs from the social stereotype in being neither readymade nor injurious to the individual; rather than being abstracted from particulars, this kind of type is effected by particular acts of framing. It is just such a concept that Proust offers as a response to alienation, and to the literary conversation outlined in the second section of this essay.

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[13] On the development of character typologies in novels, see Frow 2014: 107–48.

[14] For an interesting study of literary characters as an analogue to what the author calls the "social person," see Fowler 2003.

[15] Compare 1.566 / 1.620 on the "individual charm" of women, and 2.72 / 1.764–5 on unique peasant girls.

Towards the end of *À l'ombre*, Marcel finds himself in Elstir's studio at Balbec and notices an old portrait of an actress, "pas jolie, mais d'un type curieux" ("by no means beautiful but of a curious type," 2.203 / 1.906). Her male attire gives her a "caractère ambigu," and at first he is unsure of the sitter's sex, but eventually he realises that it is Odette. This leads him into a consideration of types. Women like Odette, he says, compose their appearance and even their personality into a "type," which serves as a protective and quasi-regal aura around them; he thus refers to "son propre type où elle trônait invulnérable" ("her own type in which she sat unassailably enthroned," 2.217 / 1.921). He had earlier described Odette making herself look younger for her salon, not only by physical styling and by adopting a more relaxed air, but by discovering or inventing "une physionomie personnelle, un «caractère» immuable, un «genre de beauté»" ("a physiognomy of her own, an unalterable 'character', a 'style of beauty'"), or again, a "type fixe" (2.606 / 1.664)—that is, we might say, a sort of hieroglyph of herself, by which she arranges her disordered, corruptible features into an immortal youth, and through which others are invited to witness her, like Cleopatra in the lapidary reminiscence of Enobarbus. This type is also shaped by Odette's clothing, which carries echoes of past fashions unified by an "individualité vestimentaire," analogous to a writer's "beau style," in the Flaubertian sense (2.609 / 1.666–7). The word "type" in these passages is striking because it does not seem to denote any mark by which the object can be judged as belonging to a class, such as the literary features by which *François le Champi* is categorized as the work of a "type du romancier." If it is a type, it is not at all like the off-the-shelf templates by which we navigate social experience. Rather it is a sort of branding, or a persona, by which Odette is recognized and to which she conforms.

But in fact there is a typical group, namely the sequence of Odette's selves; the function of the type is to maintain identifiable external continuity despite internal fluctuations, expressed elsewhere, in Montaignian terms, as "la difficulté de présenter une image fixe… d'un caractère" ("the difficulty of presenting a fixed image of a character," 3.830 / 3.332). The *caractère* or *type* she erects has an intercessory quality, like an idol, representing the hidden self to her adorers; it protects her because it prevents her from being judged, or even observed, as a flawed individual. Swann dislikes it, presumably for that very reason; he keeps an old, uncomposed daguerreotype of her so as to perceive her according to his preferred type, since the image reminds him of Botticelli's women—Zipporah, the Flora of the *Primavera*, the Madonna of the *Magnificat*. (It is poignant that the artist whose faces Swann finds in Odette's is among the most type-bound of the Italian Renaissance.[16])

The portrait Marcel sees dates, as it happens, from a period before Odette had created her type, although, as noted above, she already is of a "curious type" in it. Nevertheless, he muses, artists like Elstir have a specific answer to female types, one that resembles Swann's choice of photograph; Marcel then goes on to describe a hypothetical portrait of Odette done by Elstir in the face of her current persona-type. Elstir responds to the type, he says, by dismantling it and recomposing his sitter in a new type instead. It is an act of translation, or rather alchemy, one step further than Curtius's image of chemical decomposition:

> Le génie artistique agit à la façon de ces températures extrêmement élevées qui ont
> le pouvoir de dissocier les combinaisons d'atomes et de grouper ceux-ci suivant un
> ordre absolument contraire, répondant à un autre type. (2.216)

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[16] As Aby Warburg (1999: 136) refers to it, "the usual Botticelli facial type [*Frauentypus*]." On Botticelli's Zipporah and its significance for Proust and Ruskin, see Smith 2007: 145–54.

> Artistic genius acts in a similar way to those extremely high temperatures which have the power to split up combinations of atoms which they proceed to combine afresh in a diametrically opposite order, corresponding to another type. (1.920)

The artist will expel her from the ideal she has created, unthrone her from her type, not giving into her demands for visual flattery and instead emphasising her ugly features because they have "character." She becomes at once more like herself, more individual, and, paradoxically, more ordinary, "une femme quelconque," like everyone else.[17] But she also resembles the artist's other sitters, for we recognize in the portrait his own typical traits, that is, the lineaments of his style.[18] The painting, like Odette's persona-type, is representative, in the intercessory as well as the mimetic sense, but instead of coming to us solely on her behalf, it comes to us also on Elstir's behalf, and even on behalf of humanity in general. This special sort of *type* reveals her individuality as itself something entirely typical (or characteristic) of all people. We have found our way back to a paradox illustrated by Catherine Gallagher in her analysis of types in *Middlemarch*; as she shows, Dorothea approximates a generalized womanhood not in having a "specifiable new set" of qualities, but in the particularity of her love. Total individuality is what is most universal: Gallagher calls this "absurd," but it is a necessary absurdity (2005: 72, 67).[19]

In the Elstirian type, by contrast to the social stereotype, commonality and individual identity are not opposed but, to borrow a theological idiom, consubstantial. This aspect is the result of the painter's art, which, by putting two images into a relation, seems to break the alienation threatened by Odette's persona-type and give us access to a reality underneath. It is essential to stress the artistic act, because Odette is *not*, in any natural sense, representative of humanity, or indeed of anything: the act makes her so, just as a different act, such as Marcel's reverie with the milkmaid, would make her a monad, isolated, straightforwardly unique.

The Elstir portrait—the hypothetical one, not the actual one of the androgynous young actress—is the type of the Proustian type. It can help make sense of many other episodes and relationships in the book, and, as I will argue at the end of the essay, points a way out of Felski's quandary about context. If the portrait counteracts alienation, it may helpfully be compared to the one moment of true alienation in the novel, which Marcel experiences in Venice after his mother has left for the station in *Albertine disparue* (4.231–32 / 3.667). Alone on the terrace overlooking the canal, he seems to see the splendid city around him dissolve into its constituent material elements, marble, hydrogen, oxygen:

> La ville que j'avais devant moi avait cessé d'être Venise. Sa personnalité, son nom, me semblaient comme des fictions menteuses que je n'avais plus le courage d'inculquer aux pierres… Tels les palais, le canal, le Rialto, se trouvaient dévêtus de l'idée qui faisait leur individualité et dissous en leurs vulgaires éléments matériels.

> The town that I saw before me had ceased to be Venice. Its personality, its name, seemed to me to be mendacious fictions which I no longer had the will to impress upon its stones… So it was with the palaces, the canal, the Rialto, divested of the idea that constituted their reality and dissolved into their vulgar material elements.

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[17] On Proust's use of the word *quelconque*, see most recently Freed-Thall 2009: 889–91.

[18] Compare Marcel's comments on Berma's stage rôles at 2.351 / 2.41.

[19] On the typicality of the unique, compare Proust's remarks in Ruskin 1910: 18: "personne n'est original. . ."

Fredric Jameson (2007: 200) describes this scene as an instance of the "negative sublime," and wonders if it is "the closest literature can ever come to the Real itself"—an echo of the old anxiety about our alienation from the untypifiable particular. But the passage itself is highly treacherous in this respect. At first it seems to stage a stripping away of the particular, of the "personnalité" and "individualité" of Venice, revealing beneath a wholly typical world of material elements. However, the city's individuality is in fact constituted by an "idée," that is, by "Venice," "Rialto," "Palazzo Ducale," comparable to the regal "Odette" type. Rather than an approach to the Real, then, we ought to see here an Elstirian process of recomposition whereby one type is transmuted into another; just as Odette there became a "femme quelconque," so here Venice becomes a "lieu quelconque." Neither type is real; both are equally "étrange." The despairing vision is like that of the painter's, but involuntary and with inverted results.

A similar type-logic is found throughout the novel, on a variety of scales, and often with the same key terms invoked. For instance, much of Proust's salon comedy centred on the Verdurins is captured by a remark of Marcel's in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* that "le petit clan ayant façonné tous les « habitués » sur le même type" ("the little clan had moulded all its regular members after the same type," 3.259 / 2.895)—in other words, that the grotesque hosts have fashioned their guests in the same image, forestalling in this instance the threat to individual recognition posed by the passage of years, like Elstir's portrait. This gives an ironic slant to M. Verdurin's ambiguous question later in the volume: by contrast to the ashamed secrecy and clandestine signals of the "invert," membership in the clan, and especially the elevated belonging denoted as *en être*, is outwardly transformative. Subsequently, the Verdurins' summer house at La Raspelière has the effect of transmuting an encounter with ordinary *mondains*, even those Marcel would avoid in Paris, into something special, changing its "caractère," like an actor's name discovered in an unforeseen "contexte" (3.389 / 2.1033)

Type, *character*, *style*, and now *context* are revealed as inextricable terms. The last appears in only one other place in the entire novel, a passage that expounds the principles of historicist literary interpretation, but under the (again rather Montaignian) guise of a theory of warfare, outlined at length by Robert de Saint-Loup in *Le Côté de Guermantes*. Saint-Loup starts by explaining that the facts of a battle are only the outward signs of an inner idea that the scholar must uncover; to do this one must study not only the nature and history of the soldier corps involved, but also the position, the routes, the railways and the supply-lines controlled by either side—or as he puts it, "tout le contexte géographique" ("the whole geographical context," 2.409 / 2.110). The novelist draws our attention to that word, *contexte*, for Saint-Loup is so pleased with this expression, Proust tells us, that he laughs every time he says it from that moment on: the laugh betrays a self-satisfaction, but also an anxiety about the decorum of importing into warfare the pedantry of philology. By a further analogy to iconography, the trained eye knows how to read signs that appear confused or irrelevant to others. Moreover, like the iconographer and the philologist, what the military historian studies is not only the local, synchronic context of the site and combatants, but the diachronic context of previous battles, for all battles "sont, si tu veux, comme le passé, comme la bibliothèque, comme l'érudition, comme l'étymologie, comme l'aristocratie des batailles nouvelles" ("represent, so to speak, the past, the literature, the learning, the etymology, the aristocracy of the battles of today"). Battles are copied on the model of other battles; Saint-Loup's word is *calquée*,

brilliantly invoking both images and words.[20] He adds that he is speaking of the "type de bataille," and it is this idea of seeing an older battle beneath the lineaments of a modern one, of seeing the *type*, that Marcel finds so "esthétique." Why? Because the revelation of types is the act by which the artist individualizes his world. This is what makes Saint-Loup's vision of contextualising history so potent a counter to the object of Felski's critique.

The alchemical process of Elstir also suggests a way of thinking about the most complex relationship in the book, between Marcel and Albertine. Whereas young Marcel had seen Gilberte, like the Duchesse de Guermantes, as a unique creature set apart from the typical world around her, the older man views Albertine in much more ambivalent terms. A recurrent figure for her is the mediaeval statue, for instance when Marcel sees in her "une des incarnations de la petite paysanne française dont le modèle est en pierre à Saint-André-des-Champs" ("one of the incarnations of the little French peasant whose type may be seen in stone at Saint-André-des-Champs," 2.662 / 2.381, and cf. 2.647 / 2.364, 2.684 / 2.404, and 3.862 / 3.366). This triple relationship (Albertine–*paysanne*–statue) is reminiscent of the "triptychs" Gallagher (2005: 62–3) finds in *Middlemarch*, by which a character is understood in terms of a type that is in turn grounded in another, putatively real individual. In this instance Albertine is put into a complex typological relationship with both an abstract spiritual figure and its stone "model," for which Proust must surely have had in mind the Vierge dorée at Amiens that he eulogized in his 1900 preface to Ruskin. The Vierge, Proust wrote, is not so much a work of art as an individual person, with "son sourire si particulier" ("her smile, so particular"); but at the same time she is an intercessory idol, with a "sourire de maîtresse de maison céleste" ("smile of a mistress of the heavenly mansion," Ruskin 1910: 26).

Like the Vierge, Albertine partakes of both the individual and the universal. In other words, she is a type, not the sort of static sexual "type" ("genre") on which Swann and Charlus fixate, but something closer to the Odette-type created by Elstir, which, in this amatory context, is equivalent to that "personne supplémentaire" (1.459 / 1.503) whom every lover loves, and whose constituent elements originate not in the beloved but in the lover himself. Just as Elstir's Odette-type is an answer to Odette's self-type, so Marcel's Albertine-type is a corrective to Albertine's own defences, to her "fortifications" (3.131 / 2.759), which make her the type of person who—to truncate a splendidly Byzantine analogy—constantly evades discovery.

That Albertine remains a cipher is obvious, but it is less often observed that her distinctiveness as a character, and not as a human being, lies precisely in the type-making that goes on around her, starting with her emergence into individuality from the "petite bande." Marcel places her into typical relationships not just to statuary, but also to peasant girls, to Gilberte, to Andrée, to his mother kissing him goodnight—the moment with which this essay began—and to the women Marcel meets after Albertine's death, but who can only ever remind him of her (4.133–36 / 3.565–6). She is also typed with herself, in a process by which Marcel recontextualizes her against his memory of her at the beach (3.679 / 3.171–2), and which begets an "amphibious" love. Like Odette in the painting, Albertine is going to end up as "une femme ordinaire" (2.647 / 2.365) and at the same time as the object of pathological obsession, the standard by which all other women are judged. This duality is expressed with particular clarity in a passage from *Albertine disparue*, where Marcel imagines that he was fated to desire a woman like Albertine, but not necessarily Albertine herself: "quelque chose de plus vaste qu'un

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[20] In a dazzling moment at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, 4.559 / 3.1029, Proust traces Saint-Loup's idea to the real-life war correspondent Henry Bidou (1873–1943), quoting Bidou's comments in *La Revue hebdomadaire* on the historical antecedents of the 1918 Spring Offensive.

individu… un genre de femmes” (“something more considerable than an individual… a type of woman,” 4.84 / 3.513). For Jörg Theis (2004: 111), this perception of typicality implies a “disillusionment,” just as elsewhere in the novel with the Guermantes and so on. But that judgement seems to be belied by what follows. For if there are countless Albertines, there is one only:

> Unique, croyons-nous? elle est innombrable. Et pourtant elle est compacte, indestructible devant nos yeux qui l'aiment, irremplaçable pendant très longtemps par une autre. C'est que cette femme n'a fait que susciter par des sortes d'appels magiques mille éléments de tendresse existant en nous à l'état fragmentaire et qu'elle a assemblés, unis, effaçant toute lacune entre eux, c'est nous-même qui en lui donnant ses traits avons fourni toute la matière solide de la personne aimée. De là vient que, même si nous ne sommes qu'un entre mille pour elle et peut-être le dernier de tous, pour nous elle est la seule et vers qui tend toute notre vie.

> Unique, we suppose? She is legion. And yet she is compact and indestructible in our loving eyes, irreplaceable for a long time to come by any other. The truth is that this woman has merely raised to life by a sort of magic countless elements of tenderness existing in us already in a fragmentary state, which she has asssembled, joined together, bridging every gap between them, and it is we ourselves who by giving her her features have supplied all the solid matter of the beloved object. Whence it arises that even if we are only one among a thousand to her and perhaps the last of them all, to us she is the only one, the one towards whom our whole life gravitates.

Agency is mutual: Albertine magically assembles the elements of Marcel's feeling, while Marcel furnishes the substance of his beloved-type. Theis comments that Albertine acquires “individuality” here by grouping and incarnating his desires, that is, by serving as a screen for Marcel's own projections; he contrasts it to the contextualising perspective that draws our attention towards her “general attributes” (*allgemeine Merkmale*). In this account, Albertine is either projected and individual, or contextual and typical, depending on one's perspective: duck or rabbit but never both. But Proust's type-concept implies that she is both together.

The consubstantiality in the type of individuality and generality is made still more explicit in the climactic meditation of *Le Temps retrouvé*, when Marcel observes that, to depict even one fictional church in its specificity, the writer needs to have seen many, and so with feelings, people, love. We are most faithful to the individual lover when we represent her as a type: “Tout au plus, à cet amour celle que nous avons tant aimée a-t-elle ajouté une forme particulière, qui nous fera lui être fidèle même dans l'infidélité.” (“At most our faculty of loving has received from this woman whom we so loved a particular stamp, which will cause us to be faithful to her even in our infidelity,” 4.487 / 3.946.)

Deleuze and Ferraris are thus correct to say that Proust is after general propositions, but Curtius (1952: 81) is right to point out that this occurs without “Abstraktion.”[21] Proust's typologising—at least, the particular variety I have sketched here, which sits alongside the more usual kind—arises not from a classification of individuals, but from acts of framing and transformation that locate uniqueness within networks of similarity and resemblance. The corollary is that uniqueness is not independent of context and perspective. Odette is not, in and of herself, either

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[21] The process Curtius proposes as a substitute, “ein Zusichselbstkommen des Geistes,” is unashamedly (and unpersuasively) Hegelian.

unique or generic, but in Elstir's imaginary portrait she is inseparably both. Venice is at once a particular place and the accumulation of shared archetypes. The battle is uniquely located by context and revealed to be an eternal palimpsest of other battles. Albertine is both person and *paysanne*, one and many. In each instance the discovery of type is accretive rather than abstractive, not merely borrowed from custom but the work of an individual.

In these respects Proust's type-concept is closer to the mediaeval model of biblical typology, whereby Christian readers could look back at Old Testament history and discover in it τύποι, signs, of their own story; thus Isaac, to take one of the most famous examples, was a type of Christ in being an 'only son' (Gen 22:4) designated for sacrifice on a hill, made to carry his own sacrificial wood, and miraculously saved.[22] This idea found its prooftext in Galatians 4:24, but was developed more fully by the early Church Fathers, and it went hand-in-hand with an increased attention to the immediate, literal context of verses; after all, as in Saint-Loup's military theory, both typology and context are patterns of typicality (Burke 2002: 153). Critics such as Georges Cattaui (1958) and Richard Goodkin (1991: 40–44) have already pointed to Christian typological parallels in *À la recherche*, for instance in the prefiguration of the (Christian) Marcel–Albertine story by the (Jewish) Swann–Odette narrative. By contrast, I adduce the typological analogy here in a less specifically religious sense, for what we find throughout the novel, as in the hermeneutic tradition, is the type as transfiguring lens—Elstir's portraits, the Verdurin salon, Marcel's narration itself—one that preserves the individual's uniqueness by locating it in a particular configuration of similars. At stake here is a type-making that entrenches the individual in the world, rather than alienating it with readymade, ill-fitting categories. It marks not an escape from the social world, but an attitude that encompasses the social in the realm of art, with all that entails.

This type-concept is thus unlike not only the abstractive stereotype, but also contextual acts such as the older Marcel's comments on *François le Champi*: it asks us to think of typicality not as a locked box, the model that Felski critiques, but as a means of organization—a "dreamed role-pattern," to quote John Ashbery—or a porous circle of interlocutors. It is the task of the Proustian writer or artist to generate new types, in an effort to overcome alienation and touch the thing itself, or the person herself. And most importantly for the present argument, this is the task not only of artists, but of readers and critics as well. Proust himself seems to see this when he likens his own interpretation of Ruskin to an art critic comparing Rembrandt portraits in order to find the commonalities between them: he can reach Ruskin's "singulière vie spirituelle" only by discovering patterns of formal self-similarity (Ruskin 1910: 9–10).

<div align="center">(4)</div>

Felski insists that getting rid of context is the only way to preserve our appreciation for an artwork's "distinctiveness." But the above analysis implies that contextualization need not, by any means, serve to undermine the work, and need not detract our attention from its distinctiveness. Quite the contrary: the act by which one posits the work's context—its types— is the act that reveals its individuality. Unlike Felski I privilege that act, seeing it not as just one more node in the vast actor-network, but as constitutive and normative. Here Proust's type-concept serves the reader better than the restrictive language of context, because it indicates something broader about what we should do, and in fact do, as interpreters, whether or not our aim is careful historical description. Whereas Maupassant, Windelband and Spitzer were anxious, each in his own way, to protect the individual from any encroachment of typicality,

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[22] The specialist literature on this topic is large, but for a good introduction see Auerbach 1984.

Proust seems to reconcile the two, and he does this by suggesting that to understand objects or persons is always to figure them in a type. The pessimistic reading of this is simply to say that we can never, in fact, get to other individuals at all, for we are always trapped in the types produced by our own mental categories. The more interesting interpretation is that the binary is a false one: that the uniqueness or individuality of the object is never type-independent, but always the function of an act of framing, like Elstir's portrait.

Just as that image made Odette simultaneously more individual and more like any other woman, so an appropriate act of criticism will make a work of literature both more distinctive and more typical. The point here is not that, as Dronke put it, "individuality lies precisely in the way that the typical is used"—a claim about writerly technique. Rather, it is that the process of situating a text, whether of the synchronic sort targeted by Felski or the diachronic sort exemplified by Curtius, will expand as much as reduce it. Even the discovery of plagiarism, the ultimate example of reduction by context, leaves open the question of the plagiarist's unique aims, choices and circumstances, and the distance between the original and copied works; the individuality of the one is again dependent on its typical relations.

Proust says that one needs to have seen many churches to depict one accurately; likewise, one needs to have digested many novels, many books of the 1920s, many French texts, many modernist artworks, to understand just one. This is not just the old hermeneutic circle, for it posits the reading as constitutive: we establish these and other types so as to represent the individual, for it is our only way to do so. Appearing in a novel itself, and obliquely at that, the claim does not aspire to philosophical rigor. Nonetheless, it contains the rudiments of an answer to the idiographism of humanist enquiry prevailing at the turn of the twentieth century—an idiographism still with us today—for what we have said about types may be said, *a fortiori*, about context. In this respect Proust's type-concept, with its emphasis on the perspective of an artist, a lover, a reader, approaches the model of uniqueness and exemplarity proposed by Eric Hayot in his recent book on humanist reason. For Hayot (2021: 92, and cf. 99–104), the "singularity" of an object of study is not intrinsic to it, but rather "chosen for a specific purpose by a specific person, sometimes institutionalized in various social forms;" this singularity is, moreover, the product not only of "attention" but, as in Proust, of "affection."

Hayot purports to be describing what humanists have long done. Likewise, the hermeneutic type sketched in this essay is intended not as a new theory of reading, but as a better description of what we already do. Critics never feel that they are locking a work of literature in a box when they contextualize it; rather than trying to convince them that they are in fact doing so, it would be better to see in such practices a construction of the individual object as a new, or at least newly perceived, type. Curtius thought he was liberating his poets into a timeless present, and from a distance his *European Literature* looks like an excellent example of the Elstirian type: a coherent and programmatic portrait of the Western tradition. The greater a work of literature, the more it has to tell us about the world around it, a world that includes contemporary political and social settings, but also inherited traditions of literary and other *topoi*. It may even include the work's future readers. We seek the world in it not despite its literary distinctiveness, but by virtue of it—for, like Windelband's historian, it breathes life into the past "in such a way that all of its concrete and distinctive features acquire an ideal actuality or contemporaneity."

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