

Cambridge University Press  
0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
Michael R. Finn  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

This study examines the connections between Proust's *fin-de-siècle* 'nervousness' and his apprehensions regarding literary form. Michael Finn shows that Proust's anxieties both about bodily weakness and about novel-writing were fed by a set of intriguing psychological and medical texts, and were mirrored in the nerve-based afflictions of other writers including Flaubert, Baudelaire, Nerval and the Goncourt brothers. Finn argues that once Proust cast off his nervous concerns he was free to poke fun at the supposed purity of the novel form. Hysteria – as a figure and as a theme – becomes a key to the Proustian narrative, and a certain kind of wordless, bodily copying of gesture and event is revealed to be at the heart of a writing technique replete with pranks undermining many of the conventions of fiction.

Michael Finn is Professor of French at Ryerson Polytechnic University, Toronto. He has published on Proust in a wide variety of journals, has served in Bordeaux and Paris with the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, and for some years has written on food for *Toronto Life* magazine.

Cambridge University Press  
0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
Michael R. Finn  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN FRENCH 59

**Proust, the Body and Literary Form**

Cambridge University Press  
 0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
 Michael R. Finn  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN FRENCH

GENERAL EDITOR: Michael Sheringham (*Royal Holloway, London*)  
 EDITORIAL BOARD: R. Howard Bloch (*Columbia University*),  
 Malcolm Bowie (*All Souls College, Oxford*), Terence Cave (*St John's College, Oxford*),  
 Ross Chambers (*University of Michigan*), Antoine Compagnon (*Columbia University*),  
 Peter France (*University of Edinburgh*), Christie McDonald (*Harvard University*),  
 Toril Moi (*Duke University*), Naomi Schor (*Harvard University*)

*Recent titles in this series include*

JEFFREY MEHLMAN

*Genealogies of the Text: Literature, Psychoanalysis, and Politics in Modern France*

LEWIS C. SEIFERT

*Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender in France 1690–1715: Nostalgic Utopias*

ELZA ADAMOWICZ

*Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*

NICHOLAS WHITE

*The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction*

PAUL GIFFORD AND BRIAN STIMPSON (EDS.)

*Reading Paul Valéry: Universe in Mind*

A complete list of books in the series is given at the end of the volume.

Cambridge University Press  
0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
Michael R. Finn  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

# PROUST, THE BODY AND LITERARY FORM

MICHAEL R. FINN



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
 Michael R. Finn  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>  
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>  
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Michael R. Finn 1999

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in 11/12.5pt Baskerville [CE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Finn, Michael R.

Proust, the body, and literary form / Michael R. Finn  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 64189 6

1. Proust, Marcel, 1871-1922 - Criticism and interpretation.
  2. Neuroses in literature.
  3. Hysteria in literature.
- I. Title.

PQ2631.R63Z593 1999

843'.912-dc21 98-35829 CIP

ISBN 0 521 64189 6 hardback

Cambridge University Press  
0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
Michael R. Finn  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*In memory of my parents,  
enthusiastic students of language both,  
Clara Mary Elizabeth Raeburn  
and Carroll Bernard Finn*

## *Contents*

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1 Proust between neurasthenia and hysteria	10
Nervous precursors	
The novel of the neurasthenic	
Writing and volition	
Involution's way	
Neurasthenia: diagnosis and response	
2 An anxiety of language	65
Speaking the Other	
The language hysteria of Sainte-Beuve	
Voicing Bergotte	
3 Transitive writing	102
Correspondence	
Journalism	
Literary criticism	
The pastiche: 'notre voix intérieure'	
4 Form: from anxiety to play	142
Closure	
Openness and incompleteness	
Structure as iteration	
Marcel's voice: the recurring author	
Conclusion	178
<i>Notes</i>	181
<i>Bibliography</i>	198
<i>Index</i>	205

## *Acknowledgements*

The debts I acknowledge here have been accumulated over many years, and in many different circumstances. The first is both academic and human, and is to W. M. (Brick) Frohock, who tempted me to come to Harvard as a graduate student many years ago, and to his wife Nathalie, who helped to socialize a rag-tag, disparate group of us. My thanks go as well to Susan Read Baker and her sister Cathey for their friendship, advice and intellectual support over a period much longer than that of the writing of this manuscript. I have fond memories too of the encouragement received from my friend Joseph Hoare, scholar and Food Editor at *Toronto Life* magazine until his death in 1997.

Some hard-headed comments from Richard Terdiman regarding an early idea for this book helped to nudge it in a more fruitful direction. Barbara Bucknall made a number of useful observations about the manuscript. But my warmest thanks go to my colleague Kathleen Kellett-Betsos for her thorough inspection of this study, and for her unblinking, sensible advice on many aspects of the text. Ryerson colleagues John Cook, Errol Aspevig, Margaret MacMillan, Ingrid Bryan and Thomas Barcsay encouraged me, at various times and in various ways, to persevere. Maureen MacGrogan and Joseph Duggan helped to orientate me in the world of publishing. I owe a debt of gratitude to the reference librarians at that wonderful facility, the University of Toronto Library; and I thank particularly Perry Hall, who assisted me on a number of occasions. The research for parts of this study would not have been possible without access to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the assistance of its staff. I thank Bernard Brun of the Proust research group (ITEM) at the Ecole Normale Supérieure for putting the resources of his Proust collection at my disposal, and Anne Borrel, Secrétaire générale of the Société des Amis de Marcel Proust, for her help at various times.



Cambridge University Press  
0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
Michael R. Finn  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Two travel and research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada were an important impetus in getting this study airborne. I would like to thank the editors of *French Studies*, of *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* and of *French Forum* for permission to draw on articles already published in those journals for my chapter 1 (*FS*, 51, 3, July 1997; *RHL*, 2, March–April 1996) and chapter 3 (*FF*, 10, 2, May 1985). It has been a pleasure to work with my upbeat, straight-shooting editor Linda Bree at Cambridge University Press. I appreciated very much, as well, the opportunity to react to a set of even-handed and perceptive criticisms from the two readers who assessed the manuscript for Cambridge. Through many Canadian winters and a few Parisian summers, I talked out the points in this book with Elizabeth Park. I thank her for those exchanges, for the occasions on which she challenged me, and for her patience in putting up with my work habits.

Cambridge University Press  
 0521641896 - Proust, the Body and Literary Form  
 Michael R. Finn  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## *Abbreviations*

Double page references are provided (parenthetically, with volume and page number) for all quotations from *A la recherche du temps perdu*, except for those taken from Proust's manuscript sketches (*esquisses*). Here the translations are my own. The first reference is to the translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright, 6 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), and the second to the most recent Pléiade edition, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987–9). I have, on occasion, modified the English translation when it did not illustrate adequately a point I was making in my own text. *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays* (below) does not contain all the material that figures in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Quite a few of the translations from the latter volume (those without the abbreviation *ASB*) are therefore my own.

<i>ASB</i>	<i>Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays</i> , trans. John Sturrock, Penguin
<i>BIP</i>	<i>Bulletin d'informations proustiennes</i>
<i>BMP</i>	<i>Bulletin Marcel Proust</i> (formerly <i>BSAMP</i> , <i>Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust</i> )
<i>CSB</i>	<i>Contre Sainte-Beuve</i> , Pléiade
<i>Corr.</i>	<i>Correspondance</i> , 21 vols., Philip Kolb (ed.), Plon
Esquisse	One of the sketches published in the appendices of <i>A la recherche du temps perdu</i> , Pléiade, 1987–9, 4 vols.
<i>JS</i>	<i>Jean Santeuil</i> , Pléiade