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Proust's Lesbianism

Elisabeth Ladenson

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Proust's Lesbianism Elisabeth Ladenson
For decades, Elisabeth Ladenson says, critics have misread or ignored a crucial element in Marcel Proust's fiction--his representation of lesbians. Her challenging new book definitively establishes the centrality of lesbianism as sexual obsession and aesthetic model in Proust's vast novel A la recherche du temps perdu. Traditional readings of the Recherche have dismissed Proust's "Gomorrah"--his term for women who love other women--as a veiled portrayal of the novelist's own homosexuality. More recently, "queer-positive" rereadings have viewed the novel's treatment of female sexuality as ancillary to its accounts of Sodom and its meditations on time and memory. Ladenson instead demonstrates the primacy of lesbianism to the novel, showing that Proust's lesbians are the only characters to achieve a plenitude of reciprocated desire. The example of Sodom, by contrast, is characterized by frustrated longing and self-loathing. She locates the work's paradigm of hermetic relations between women in the self-sufficient bond between the narrator's mother and grandmother. Ladenson traces Proust's depictions of male and female homosexuality from his early work onward, and contextualizes his account of lesbianism in late-nineteenth-century sexology and early twentieth-century thought.

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