

waning. But even today, with the exception of Episcopalians, Unitarians, and Quakers, and of course the Metropolitan Community Church founded in 1968 by Troy Perry as part of the gay movement, many American Protestants tend to be as homophobic as Orthodox and Roman Catholics, the last now in full retreat from Vatican II liberalism and reaffirming as perennially valid the thirteenth-century doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas.

As has been noted, most American denominations have acquired gay/lesbian affinity groups, which provide a sense of fellowship and press for change within the denomination. Perhaps paradoxically, the most successful of these groups in the 1970s and early 1980s was Catholic Dignity, whose membership once reached 7,000, by 1989—after the devastation of two antihomosexual Vatican pronouncements and expulsion from church premises—counted only half as many. Integrity, the Episcopalian counterpart, has had difficulties, though these are less serious. As a rule, these affiliates are found only in English-speaking countries. In 1976, however, Pastor Joseph Doucé, a gay Belgian Baptist, founded the Centre du Christ Libérateur in Paris; its mission subsequently spread to a number of other European countries.

See also Churches, Gay; Clergy, Gay.

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William A. Percy

## PROUST, MARCEL (1871-1922)

French novelist. Born to wealthy bourgeois parents at the beginning of the Third Republic, he suffered from delicate health as a child and was lovingly tended by his mother. Despite his partly Jewish origins he aspired to mingle in the high society of a Paris that had entered the *belle époque*, and in 1896 he published his first work, *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (Pleasures and Days), in which an astute reviewer discerned "a depraved Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and an ingenu Petronius."

Plagued by asthma, after the deaths of his parents he increasingly withdrew from social life, and after 1907 lived mainly in a cork-lined room where at night he labored on a monumental novel, unfinished at his death, and ultimately published in 16 volumes between 1913 and 1927, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past). If the first part went unnoticed, the second, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (Within a Budding Grove) won the Goncourt Prize for 1919. The semi-autobiographical novel is superficially an account of the hero's account through childhood and through youthful love affairs to the point of commitment to literary endeavor. It is less a narrative than an inner monologue; alive with brilliant metaphor and sense imagery, the novel is rich in sociological, philosophical, and psychological understanding. A vital theme is the link between outer and inner reality found in time and memory, which mock man's intelligence and endeavor; if memory synthesizes past experience, it also distorts it. Most experience produces only inner pain, and the objects of desire are the causes of suffering. In Proust's thinking man is isolated, society is false and ridden with snobbery, and artistic endeavor is elevated to a religion

and judged superior to nature. His ability to interpret man's innermost experience in terms of such forces as time and death gives the novel transcendent literary power, assuring its place as one of the great works of the twentieth century.

Proust was the first major novelist to deal extensively with the theme of homosexuality, and more than any other writer, he bears the responsibility for introducing the topic into the mainstream of modern literature, ending the centuries of spoken and unspoken taboo on mentioning it in other than a subtle and oblique manner. Yet so strong was the negative attitude in the 1920s and later that the adjective *Proustian* served in literary circles as a euphemism for *homosexual*, and critics who grasped the full importance of homosexuality in Proust's life and art avoided the subject out of shame, embarrassment, prejudice, and the tendency in academic circles to suppress the realistic and erotic sides of French literature when addressing undergraduate audiences or the general public. Only in the late 1940s did critics begin to evaluate in print the homosexual element in Proust's novel, and then with biases and superficial generalizations. Even later work was marred by an exclusively **psychoanalytic** approach to Proust's psyche or a vulgar **Freudian** attitude toward sexuality as a whole. The novelist's sexual orientation could be written off as a fixation, a dead-end of psychological development, rather than as the logical and inevitable maturation of a psychic nucleus inseparable from the constitution of the subject and from his artistic experience of self and the world.

Homosexuality is an integral part of Proust's literary creation. Many of the major and minor characters of the novel—Saint-Loup, Morel, the Prince de Guermantes, Jupien, Legrandin, Nissim Bernard, and of course the immortal Baron de Charlus—prove to have homosexual inclinations. And lesbianism is no less one of Proust's preoccupations: the narrator spends much of the novel pondering the

implications of female homosexuality and trying to discover whether Albertine has ever loved other women. The role of homosexuality in Proust's work was not accidental; it was to him a theme of capital importance on which he lavished a great deal of reflection and painstaking craftsmanship. When the novelist began to write, the theme was so shocking and unacceptable that he had to approach his publisher, Gaston Gallimard, rather diplomatically to assure him that the subject would not be treated in a sensational manner, but integrated into the narrative.

The crucial date in Proust's career was April 30, 1921, on which the *Nouvelle Revue Française* issued a book containing the second part of *Le Côté de Guermantes* (Guermantes' Way) and the first part of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (Cities of the Plain). In the latter, the narrator discovers the homosexuality of the Baron de Charlus (modeled on the real-life Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac) and presents his famous essay on the nature of homosexual love, seen by many critics as an indirect confession of Proust's own orientation and an oblique plea for understanding and tolerance of the homosexual and his way of life. The novelist's own sexual life, as far as can be judged, was marred by pain, rejection, and unrequited love—which is often the bitter experience of the homosexual attracted to a heterosexual man who cannot return his affection. Proust's relationship with his dashing secretary—chauffeur Albert Agostinelli partook of this character; it was cruelly disappointing, because it not only went unrequited but was cut short by the tragedy of unexpected death. (Agostinelli perished while piloting an airplane Proust had given him.)

The mature Proust also witnessed two scandals: the Dreyfus case that divided France—and the salon society of which the writer was a part—into irreconcilable camps, and the Harden-Eulenburg affair in which the favorite of Kaiser Wilhelm II was pilloried for his homosexual

proclivities. These current events sank into his mind, and the former plays no slight role in the novelist's depiction of the evolution of French society from the early years of the Third Republic down to 1919. At the same time Proust was conscious of the complex, Protean quality of homosexuality itself, of the nuances and contradictions that invalidate any formula which movement apologists were promoting as the politically correct understanding of the matter in their effort to reform public opinion. Sometimes Proust created homosexual stereotypes in order to shatter them, utilizing the artist's freedom to project an image and then reshape it. Internalized self-hatred was not alien to his personality, and from time to time it irrupts into the novel. But the total picture of homosexuality combines great structural and expressive beauty with unprecedented insights into human nature, and the overall artistry of the novel resisted the tendency of a still intolerant Western society to relegate the work to the "memory hole" of literary oblivion. Proust was thus a trailblazer who made the literary treatment and analysis of homosexuality possible, and reached an audience that would never have read a medical study or a movement brochure. In the emancipation of homosexuality from post-medieval taboos, Marcel Proust played a central and incomparable role.

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Warren Johansson

**PRZHEVALSKY, NIKOLAI  
MIKHAĬLOVICH  
(1839-1888)**

Russian army officer, geographer, and explorer. Descended from a small

Cossack landowner, Przhevalsky finished school at Smolensk in 1855 and entered military service, becoming an officer in the following year. In the summer of 1866 he met Robert Koecher, a young Pole of German ancestry who was to be the first of his traveling companions. Each of Przhevalsky's expeditions into Central Asia was planned with the presence of a young male traveling companion between sixteen and twenty-two. On these protégés he lavished expensive gifts, he sponsored their educations, and arranged for them to be commissioned as army officers; in return they had to shun women, share his tent, and give him unquestioning obedience. In the village of Sloboda (today Przheval'skoe) in the northern part of the government of Smolensk he acquired a remote country estate where he was surrounded by a retinue of male visitors. Throughout his life he basked in an all-male ambience from which the presence of women was rigorously excluded. His biographers ascribe his loathing of the coarseness and debauchery of the towns in which he resided to the cultured side of his personality; more likely he had little use for the interests and preoccupations of the heterosexual men who would otherwise have been his boon companions.

Przhevalsky led four major expeditions: in 1870-73 to Mongolia, China, and Tibet, in 1876-77 to Central Asia (Lobnor and Dzhungar), in 1879-80 to Tibet, and in 1883-85 a second to Tibet. At the start of a fifth expedition in the fall of 1888 he died not far from Lake Issyk-Kul', where today his grave and museum are found in the city of Przheval'sk.

During his lifetime Przhevalsky's travels and the books in which he recorded them captured the imagination of a worldwide audience. His books were translated into English at a time when the classics of nineteenth-century Russian literature were barely glimpsed in Great Britain and the United States. He discovered species of wild plants and animals that still bear his name: poplar, rose, and rhododendron;