

MARCEL PROUST AND JMW TURNER?

I've been greatly enjoying the part of "A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles En Fleurs" at Balbec (fictionalising the Grand Hotel de Cabourg, where I took Vicki nearly 2 years ago as a birthday treat), where Proust (or Proust's narrator) - who has recently caught sight of an animated bunch of girls with whom he has 'fallen in love' - with *all of them*, without having even met them, though a girl called Albertine Simonet is one of those, we suspect, who has made the deepest impression on him.

Proust (or rather his narrator) interrupts his routine (rather irritably, since he has been quite enjoying mooning around trying to spot the girls on the beach or in the streets) because his grandmother has wanted him to visit the studio of Elstir, the local painter. So, slightly grumpily, he takes a tram to the rather modern end of the town and finds the place - it's not a particularly interesting apartment though it does have a large studio. Elstir greets him and continues to paint a seascape with a sunset, giving 'Marcel' time to wander around, noticing as he does so, the artist's gift for ambiguously painting land *as* sea, and sea *as* land - the boundaries becoming interestingly blurred.

Here is his reflection (I'm still ploughing through the *oeuvre* in French but I will be merciful and give you the English afterwards):

Parfois à ma fenêtre, dans l'hôtel de Balbec, le matin quand Françoise défaisait les couvertures qui cachaient la lumière, le soir quand j'attendais le moment de partir avec Saint-Loup, il m'était arrivé grâce à un effet de soleil, de prendre une partie plus sombre de la mer pour une côte éloignée, ou de regarder avec joie une zone bleue et fluide sans savoir si elle appartenait à la mer ou au ciel. Bien vite mon intelligence rétablissait entre les éléments la séparation que mon impression avait abolie. C'est ainsi qu'il m'arrivait à Paris, dans ma chambre, d'entendre une dispute, presque une émeute, jusqu'à ce que j'eusse rapporté à sa cause, par exemple une voiture dont le roulement approchait, ce bruit dont j'éliminais alors ces vociférations aiguës et

discordantes que mon oreille avait réellement entendues, mais que mon intelligence savait que des roues ne produisaient pas. Mais les rares moments où l'on voit la nature telle qu'elle est, poétiquement, c'était de ceux-là qu'était faite l'oeuvre d'Elstir. Une de ses métaphores les plus fréquentes dans les marines qu'il avait près de lui en ce moment était justement celle qui comparant la terre à la mer, supprimait entre elles toute démarcation. C'était cette comparaison, tacitement et inlassablement répétée dans une même toile qui y introduisait cette multiforme et puissante unité, cause, parfois non clairement aperçue par eux, de l'enthousiasme qu'excitait chez certains amateurs la peinture d'Elstir.

C'est par exemple à une métaphore de ce genre – dans un tableau représentant le port de Carquethuit, tableau qu'il avait terminé depuis peu de jours et que je regardai longuement – qu'Elstir avait préparé l'esprit du spectateur en n'employant pour la petite ville que des termes marins, et que des termes urbains pour la mer. Soit que les maisons cachassent une partie du port, un bassin de calfatage ou peut-être la mer même s'enfonçant en golfe dans les terres ainsi que cela arrivait constamment dans ce pays de Balbec, de l'autre côté de la pointe avancée où était construite la ville, les toits étaient dépassés (comme ils l'eussent été par des cheminées ou par des clochers) par des mâts, lesquels avaient l'air de faire des vaisseaux auxquels ils appartenaient, quelque chose de citadin, de construit sur terre, impression qu'augmentaient d'autres bateaux, demeurés le long de la jetée, mais en rangs si pressés que les hommes y causaient d'un bâtiment à l'autre sans qu'on pût distinguer leur séparation et l'interstice de l'eau, et ainsi cette flottille de pêche avait moins l'air d'appartenir à la mer que, par exemple, les églises de Criquebec qui, au loin, entourées d'eau de tous côtés parce qu'on les voyait sans la ville, dans un poudroisement de soleil et de vagues, semblaient sortir des eaux, soufflées en albâtre ou en écume et, enfermées dans la ceinture d'un arc-en-ciel versicolore, former un tableau irréel et mystique. Dans le premier plan de la plage, le peintre avait su habituer les yeux à ne pas reconnaître de frontière fixe, de démarcation absolue, entre la terre et l'océan. Des hommes qui poussaient des bateaux à la mer couraient aussi bien dans les flots que sur le sable, lequel, mouillé, réfléchissait déjà les coques comme s'il avait été

de l'eau. La mer elle-même ne montait pas régulièrement, mais suivait les accidents de la grève, que la perspective déchiquetait encore davantage, si bien qu'un navire en pleine mer, à demi caché par les ouvrages avancés de l'arsenal, semblait voguer au milieu de la ville ; des femmes qui ramassaient des crevettes dans les rochers, avaient l'air, parce qu'elles étaient entourées d'eau et à cause de la dépression qui, après la barrière circulaire des roches, abaissait la plage (des deux côtés les plus rapprochés des terres) au niveau de la mer, d'être dans une grotte marine surplombée de barques et de vagues, ouverte et protégée au milieu des flots écartés miraculeusement. Si tout le tableau donnait cette impression des ports où la mer entre dans la terre, où la terre est déjà marine et la population amphibie, la force de l'élément marin éclatait partout ; et près des rochers, à l'entrée de la jetée, où la mer était agitée, on sentait, aux efforts des matelots et à l'obliquité des barques couchées à angle aigu devant la calme verticalité de l'entrepôt, de l'église, des maisons de la ville, où les uns rentraient, d'où les autres partaient pour la pêche, qu'ils trottaient rudement sur l'eau comme sur un animal fougueux et rapide dont les soubresauts, sans leur adresse, les eussent jetés à terre. Une bande de promeneurs sortait gaiement en une barque secouée comme une carriole ; un matelot joyeux, mais attentif aussi la gouvernait comme avec des guides, menait la voile fougueuse, chacun se tenait bien à sa place pour ne pas faire trop de poids d'un côté et ne pas verser, et on courait ainsi par les champs ensoleillés, dans les sites ombreux, dégringolant les pentes. C'était une belle matinée malgré l'orage qu'il avait fait. Et même on sentait encore les puissantes actions qu'avait à neutraliser le bel équilibre des barques immobiles, jouissant du soleil et de la fraîcheur, dans les parties où la mer était si calme que les reflets avaient presque plus de solidité et de réalité que les coques vaporisées par un effet de soleil et que la perspective faisait s'enjamber les unes les autres. Ou plutôt on n'aurait pas dit d'autres parties de la mer. Car entre ces parties, il y avait autant de différence qu'entre l'une d'elles et l'église sortant des eaux, et les bateaux derrière la ville. L'intelligence faisait ensuite un même élément de ce qui était, ici noir dans un effet d'orage, plus loin tout d'une couleur avec le ciel et aussi verni que lui, et là si blanc de soleil, de brume et d'écume, si compact, si terrien, si circonvenu de maisons, qu'on pensait à quelque chaussée de pierres ou à un

champ de neige, sur lequel on était effrayé de voir un navire s'élever en pente raide et à sec comme une voiture qui s'ébroue en sortant d'un gué, mais qu'au bout d'un moment, en y voyant sur l'étendue haute et inégale du plateau solide des bateaux titubants, on comprenait, identique en tous ces aspects divers, être encore la mer.

Here's an English translation:

Sometimes in my window in the hotel at Balbec, in the morning when Françoise undid the fastenings of the curtains that shut out the light, in the evening when I was waiting until it should be time to go out with Saint-Loup, I had been led by some effect of sunlight to mistake what was only a darker stretch of sea for a distant coastline, or to gaze at a belt of liquid azure without knowing whether it belonged to sea or sky. But presently my reason would re-establish between the elements that distinction which in my first impression I had overlooked. In the same way I used, in Paris, in my bedroom, to hear a dispute, almost a riot, in the street below, until I had referred back to its cause—a carriage for instance that was rattling towards me—this noise, from which I now eliminated the shrill and discordant vociferations which my ear had really heard but which my reason knew that wheels did not produce. But the rare moments in which we see nature as she is, with poetic vision, it was from those that Elstir's work was taken. One of his metaphors that occurred most commonly in the seascapes which he had round him was precisely that which, comparing land with sea, suppressed every line of demarcation between them. It was this comparison, tacitly and untiringly repeated on a single canvas, which gave it that multiform and powerful unity, the cause (not always clearly perceived by themselves) of the enthusiasm which Elstir's work aroused in certain collectors.

It was, for instance, for a metaphor of this sort—in a picture of the harbour of Carquethuit, a picture which he had finished a few days earlier and at which I now stood gazing my fill—that Elstir had prepared the mind of the spectator by employing, for the little town, only marine terms, and urban terms for the sea. Whether its houses concealed a part of the harbour, a dry dock, or perhaps the sea itself came cranking in among the land, as constantly happened on the Balbec coast, on the other side of the promontory on which the town was built

the roofs were overtopped (as it had been by mill-chimneys or church-steeple) by masts which had the effect of making the vessels to which they belonged appear town-bred, built on land, an impression which was strengthened by the sight of other boats, moored along the jetty but in such serried ranks that you could see men talking across from one deck to another without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec which, in the far distance, surrounded by water on every side because you saw them without seeing the town, in a powdery haze of sunlight and crumbling waves, seemed to be emerging from the waters, blown in alabaster or in sea-foam, and, enclosed in the band of a particoloured rainbow, to form an unreal, a mystical picture. On the beach in the foreground the painter had arranged that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between earth and ocean. The men who were pushing down their boats into the sea were running as much through the waves as along the sand, which, being wet, reflected their hulls as if they were already in the water. The sea itself did not come up in an even line but followed the irregularities of the shore, which the perspective of the picture increased still further, so that a ship actually at sea, half-hidden by the projecting works of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing across the middle of the town; women who were gathering shrimps among the rocks had the appearance, because they were surrounded by water and because of the depression which, after the ringlike barrier of rocks, brought the beach (on the side nearest the land) down to sea-level, of being in a marine grotto overhung by ships and waves, open yet unharmed in the path of a miraculously averted tide. If the whole picture gave this impression of harbours in which the sea entered into the land, in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian, the strength of the marine element was everywhere apparent; and round about the rocks, at the mouth of the harbour, where the sea was rough, you felt from the muscular efforts of the fishermen and the obliquity of the boats leaning over at an acute angle, compared with the calm erectness of the warehouse on the harbour, the church, the houses of the town to which some of the figures were returning while others were coming out to fish, that they were riding bareback on the water, as it might be a swift and fiery animal whose rearing, but for their skill, must have unseated

them. A party of holiday makers were putting gaily out to sea in a boat that tossed like a jaunting-car on a rough road; their boatman, blithe but attentive, also, to what he was doing, trimmed the bellying sail, every one kept in his place, so that the weight should not be all on one side of the boat, which might capsize, and so they went racing over sunlit fields into shadowy places, dashing down into the troughs of waves. It was a fine morning in spite of the recent storm. Indeed, one could still feel the powerful activities that must first be neutralized in order to attain the easy balance of the boats that lay motionless, enjoying sunshine and breeze, in parts where the sea was so calm that its reflexions had almost more solidity and reality than the floating hulls, vaporised by an effect of the sunlight, parts which the perspective of the picture dovetailed in among others. Or rather you would not have called them other parts of the sea. For between those parts there was as much difference as there was between one of them and the church rising from the water, or the ships behind the town. Your reason then set to work and made a single element of what was here black beneath a gathering storm, a little farther all of one colour with the sky and as brightly burnished, and elsewhere so bleached by sunshine, haze and foam, so compact, so terrestrial, so circumscribed with houses that you thought of some white stone causeway or of a field of snow, up the surface of which it was quite frightening to see a ship go climbing high and dry, as a carriage climbs dripping from a ford, but which a moment later, when you saw on the raised and broken surface of the solid plain boats drunkenly heaving, you understood, identical in all these different aspects, to be still the sea.

Proust is clearly interested in the process of interpreting what is going on in the painting: *Your reason then set to work and made a single element of what was here black beneath a gathering storm,...* and as we have no picture before us, Proust sets out to paint the scene for us himself. But is it a ‘real’ painting or is he (wily artist that he is) making it up as he goes along?

The note in my book helpfully directs me to several works which *might* be referenced here, including Monet’s picture of “Honfleur”, Turner’s of “Portsmouth Harbour” or “Scarborough” (see below). But the one I love most of all (new to me) and which seems

to have some at least of those fleeting details Proust picks upon, is Turner's 'The Harbour of Dieppe'. Here it is in all its glory (and apparent tranquillity).



When you study it in detail, you begin to see just what a busy scene he is depicting. There are all the 'masts', with the sea merging with the sky, the bustle of fisherwomen, the houses mingling with the masts, and the lovely church of St Jacques with its cupola hovering diaphanously in the distance. It may be the Saturday market with throngs of indistinguishable people busily buying but there are lots of small personal scenes going on undisturbed on both sides of the painting. Plus lobster pots, baskets and all sorts of bric-a-brac. The scene is interesting because it appears both statically timeless, bathed in a golden light reminiscent of Claude 'Le Lorrain', *as well as* being ferociously active.

Clearly, this picture lacks many of the details mentioned in Proust's description, but is it the inspiration for at least *part* of Proust's artistic reflections derived from the Normandy coast? Turner said, "I don't paint what I see but what I feel" and Proust tells us that Elstir also painted according to his feelings (see below). Turner painted this in 1826, leaving out the modern steam ferry that was in operation then. The full title is interestingly subtitled "The Harbour of Dieppe: Changement de Domicile", perhaps referring to the



couple on the right loading or unloading their personal effects. He clearly wanted to romanticise the view and it is suffused with light in exactly the manner of the great French painter Claude 'Le Lorrain' who had inspired picturesque landscape painting throughout Europe with his classical and pastoral scenes (eg see left).

Here is Proust again on Elstir's luminous qualities:

"Or, l'effort d'Elstir de ne pas exposer les choses telles qu'il savait qu'elles étaient, mais selon ces illusions optiques dont notre vision primaire est faite, l'avait précisément amené à mettre en lumière certaines de ces lois de perspective, plus frappantes alors, car l'art était le premier à les dévoiler."

.....

"Les joies intellectuelles que je goûtais dans cet atelier ne m'empêchaient nullement de sentir, quoi qu'ils nous entourassent comme malgré nous, les tièdes glacis, la pénombre étincelante de la pièce, et au bout de la petite fenêtre encadrée de chèvrefeuilles, dans l'avenue toute rustique, la résistante sécheresse de la terre brûlée de soleil que voulait seulement la transparence de l'éloignement et de l'ombre des arbres. Peut-être l'inconscient bien-être que me causait ce jour d'été venait-il agrandir, comme un affluent, la joie que me causait la vue du "Port de Carquethuit".

Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him exactly to this point; he gave special emphasis to certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since his art had been their first interpreter....

...The intellectual pleasures which I enjoyed in this studio did not in the least prevent me from feeling, although they enveloped us as it were in spite of ourselves, the warm polish, the sparkling gloom of the place itself and, through the little window framed in honeysuckle, in the avenue that was quite rustic, the resisting dryness of the sun-parched earth, screened only by the diaphanous gauze woven of distance and of a tree-cast shade. Perhaps the unaccountable feeling of comfort which this summer day was giving me came like a tributary to swell the flood of joy that had surged in me at the sight of Elstir's Carquethuit Harbour.

Moments later, who does he see roll up with her bike, greeting Elstir as she passes (he evidently knows her and the band of girls) but Albertine Simonet in person! What a 'coincidence': such a congruence, emotionally, aesthetically and spiritually!

I think that what we are to sense is that the narrator is stirred by ambiguous ideas and feelings. One idea that occurs to him (comically) is that 'falling in love' with a whole group of girls might be quite a useful precursor to falling in love with just one of them, because he thinks it might give him a certain, reassuring freedom *not* to fall in love with just one girl.

Mon hésitation entre les diverses jeunes filles de la petite bande, lesquelles gardaient toutes un peu du charme collectif qui m'avait d'abord troublé, s'ajouta-t-elle aussi à ces causes pour me laisser plus tard, même au temps de mon plus grand – de mon second – amour pour Albertine, une sorte de liberté intermittente, et bien brève, de ne l'aimer pas ? Pour avoir erré entre toutes ses amies avant de se porter définitivement sur elle, mon amour garda parfois entre lui et l'image d'Albertine un certain « jeu » qui lui permettait comme un éclairage mal adapté de se poser sur d'autres avant de revenir s'appliquer à elle ; le rapport entre le mal que je ressentais au

coeur et le souvenir d'Albertine ne me semblait pas nécessaire, j'aurais peut-être pu le coordonner avec l'image d'une autre personne. Ce qui me permettait, l'éclair d'un instant, de faire évanouir la réalité, non pas seulement la réalité extérieure comme dans mon amour pour Gilberte (que j'avais reconnu pour un état intérieur où je tirais de moi seul la qualité particulière, le caractère spécial de l'être que j'aimais, tout ce qui le rendait indispensable à mon bonheur), mais même la réalité intérieure et purement subjective.

« Il n'y a pas de jour qu'une ou l'autre d'entre elles ne passe devant l'atelier et n'entre me faire un bout de visite », me dit Elstir, me désespérant aussi par la pensée que si j'avais été le voir aussitôt que ma grand-mère m'avait demandé de le faire, j'eusse probablement depuis longtemps déjà fait la connaissance d'Albertine.

My hesitation between the different girls of the little band, all of whom retained something of the collective charm which had at first disturbed me, combined with the reasons already given to allow me later on, even at the time of my greater — my second — passion for Albertine, a sort of intermittent and very brief liberty to abstain from loving her. From having strayed among all her friends before it finally concentrated itself on her, my love kept, now and then, between itself and the image of Albertine a certain 'play' of light and shade which enabled it, like a badly fitted lamp, to flit over the surface of each of the others before settling its focus upon her; the connexion between the pain which I felt in my heart and the memory of Albertine did not seem to me necessary; I might perhaps have managed to co-ordinate it with the image of another person, which enabled me, in a momentary flash, to banish reality altogether, not only external reality, as in my love for Gilberte (which I had recognised to be an internal state in which I drew from myself alone the particular quality, the special character of the person whom I loved, everything that rendered her indispensable to my happiness), but even the other reality, internal and

purely subjective. "Not a day passes but one or the other of them comes by here, and looks in for a minute or two," Elstir told me, plunging me in despair when I thought that if I had gone to see him at once, when my grandmother had begged me to do so, I should, in all probability, long since have made Albertine's acquaintance.

It's quite *comical* stuff, with our conceptions of art and its connection to "reality" all jangling around simultaneously. The question of ambiguity, however, consistently recurs in the scene we are given and the pictures lying all around the studio, which stimulate the narrator's awareness of how incomplete is our awareness of, and our memory of, significant events in our lives.

We haven't to forget that all of the novels that make up the sequence of "A La Recherche du Temps Perdu" suggest that events are happening in the *present*, but they are all, in fact, a dredging of 'deceptive' memories of the *past* that are overlaid with a constant re-evaluation in the light of looking back with hindsight and the knowledge of what is to come.

Is this girl, whose social position and background he misjudges to begin with (until he realises that the Simonets and the other girls of the group are solidly bourgeois and solidly wealthy) really going to become the substitute for his earlier 'amour' - Gilberte, the daughter of his parents' acquaintance, Swann? (He somewhat absurdly wonders how attached Albertine's family might be to the single 'n' in their name, where one might have expected a double "nn", and how much of a class thing *that* might be!).

Looking at another of Elstir's studies, a watercolour of an actress who might be a boy and whose promiscuity is hinted at in Elstir's portrait (which is quickly put aside when his wife enters the room) Proust's narrator ponders again on Elstir's ability to suggest ambiguity.

Mais surtout on sentait qu'Elstir, insoucieux de ce que pouvait présenter d'immoral ce travesti d'une jeune actrice pour qui le talent avec lequel elle jouerait son rôle avait sans doute moins d'importance que l'attrait irritant qu'elle allait offrir aux sens blasés ou dépravés de certains spectateurs, s'était au contraire attaché à ces

traits d'ambiguïté comme à un élément esthétique qui valait d'être mis en relief et qu'il avait tout fait pour souligner. Le long des lignes du visage, le sexe avait l'air d'être sur le point d'avouer qu'il était celui d'une fille un peu garçonnière, s'évanouissait, et plus loin se retrouvait, suggérant plutôt l'idée d'un jeune efféminé vicieux et songeur, puis fuyait encore, restait insaisissable. Le caractère de tristesse rêveuse du regard, par son contraste même avec les accessoires appartenant au monde de la noce et du théâtre, n'était pas ce qui était le moins troublant. On pensait du reste qu'il devait être factice et que le jeune être qui semblait s'offrir aux caresses dans ce provocant costume avait probablement trouvé piquant d'y ajouter l'expression romanesque d'un sentiment secret, d'un chagrin inavoué. Au bas du portrait était écrit : Miss Sacripant, octobre 1872. Je ne pus contenir mon admiration. « Oh ! ce n'est rien, c'est une pochade de jeunesse, c'était un costume pour une revue des Variétés. Tout cela est bien loin. – Et qu'est devenu le modèle ? » Un étonnement provoqué par mes paroles précéda sur la figure d'Elstir l'air indifférent et distrait qu'au bout d'une seconde il y étendit. « Tenez, passez-moi vite cette toile, me dit-il, j'entends Mme Elstir qui arrive et bien que la jeune personne en melon n'ait joué, je vous assure, aucun rôle dans ma vie, il est inutile que ma femme ait cette aquarelle sous les yeux. Je n'ai gardé cela que comme un document amusant sur le théâtre de cette époque ». Et avant de cacher l'aquarelle derrière lui, Elstir qui peut-être ne l'avait pas vue depuis longtemps y attacha un regard attentif.

« Il faudra que je ne garde que la tête, murmura-t-il, le bas est vraiment trop mal peint, les mains sont d'un commençant. » J'étais désolé de l'arrivée de Mme Elstir qui allait encore nous retarder.

But above all one felt that Elstir, sublimely indifferent to whatever immoral suggestion there might be in this disguise of a young actress for whom the talent with which she would play her part on the stage was doubtless of less importance than the irritant attraction which she

would offer to the jaded or depraved senses of some of her audience, had on the contrary fastened upon those ambiguous points as on an aesthetic element which deserved to be brought into prominence, and which he had done everything in his power to emphasise. Along the lines of the face, the latent sex seemed to be on the point of confessing itself to be that of a somewhat boyish girl, then vanished and farther on reappeared with a suggestion rather of an effeminate youth, vicious and pensive, then fled once more to remain uncapturable. The dreamy sadness in the expression of her eyes, by the mere fact of its contrast with the accessories belonging to the world of love-making and play-acting, was not the least disturbing element in the picture. One imagined moreover that it must be feigned, and that the young person who seemed ready to submit to caresses in this provoking costume had probably thought it effective to enhance the provocation with this romantic expression of a secret longing, an unspoken grief. At the foot of the picture was inscribed "Miss Sacripant: October, 1872." I could not contain my admiration. "Oh, it's nothing, only a rough sketch I did when I was young; it was a costume for a variety show. It's all ages ago now." "And what has become of the model?" A bewilderment provoked by my words preceded on Elstir's face the indifferent, absent-minded air which, a moment later, he displayed there. "Quick, give it to me!" he cried, "I hear Madame Elstir coming, and, though, I assure you, the young person in the billycock hat never played any part in my life, still there's no point in my wife's coming in and finding it staring her in the face. I have kept it only as an amusing sidelight on the theatre of those days." And, before putting it away behind the pile, Elstir, who perhaps had not set eyes on the sketch for years, gave it his careful scrutiny. "I must keep just the head," he murmured, "the lower part is really too shockingly bad, the hands are a beginner's work." I was miserable at the arrival of Mme. Elstir, who could only delay us still further.

We learn later that Proust suddenly realises that the sad-looking model is, in fact, Odette de Crécy, Swann's mistress who became what she is now, Madame Swann!

Amongst the comic desperation of the narrator's hunt for the girls and Albertine, art (through Elstir and by implication Proust's exposition of his own scenes and views) seems to be the driving force for revealing and analysing masses of accumulating ambiguities. Turner's painting of Dieppe is already full of ambiguity on its own terms: is the 'changement de domicile' a departure or an arrival? Are the crowds busily starting the day, or are they finishing up and beginning to relax as evening draws on? Are the buildings of the town and the boats in the port, *part* of the natural environment (water, sunlight, misty sky) or are they separate?

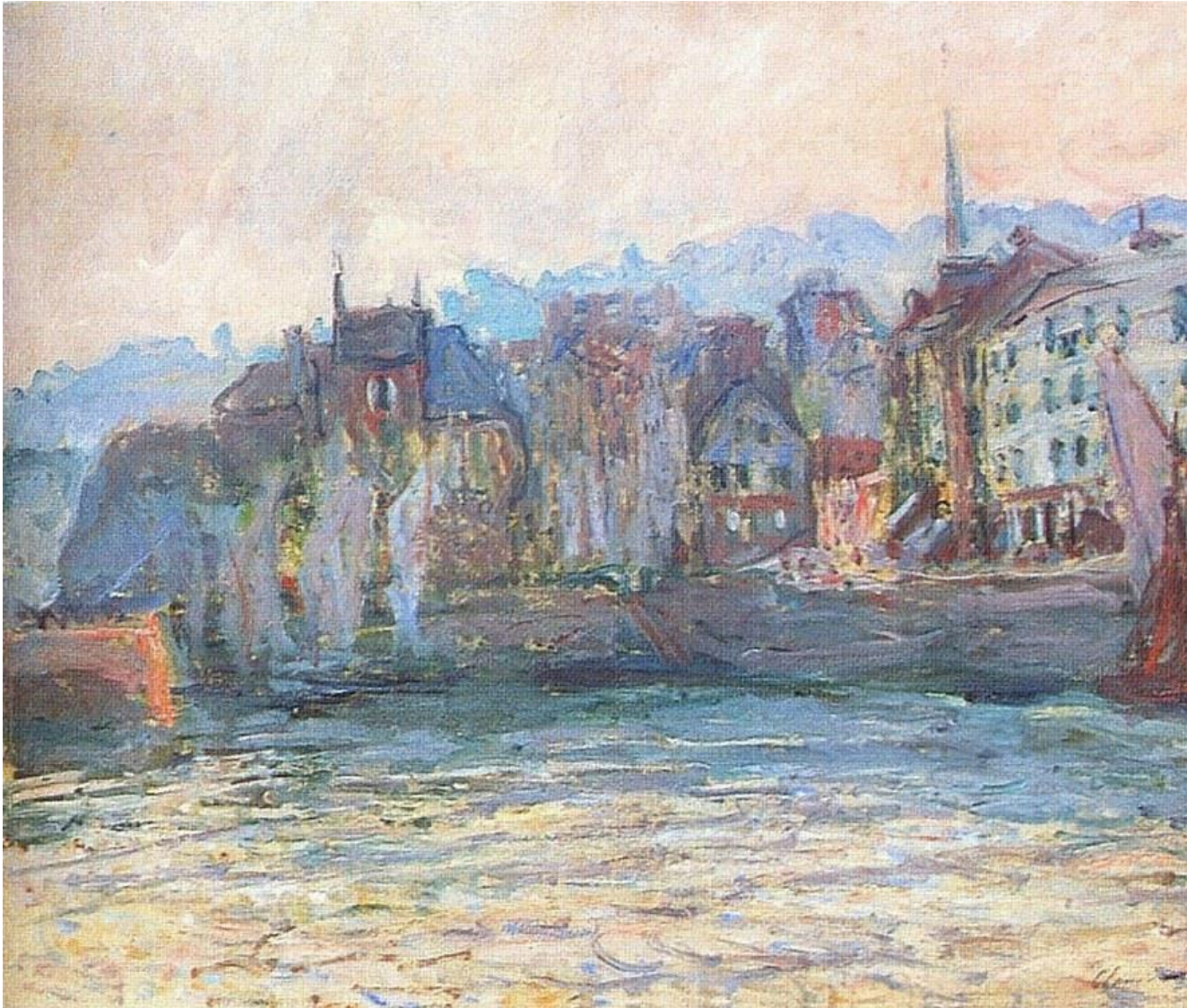
In spite of the fact that Proust later mentions "rocks", fishermen, boats leaning over and holidaymakers setting out in a boat they have to balance as features of the Carquethuit painting, my money is still on *this* painting (Turner's "Dieppe Harbour") as the probable inspiration behind Elstir's "Port de Carquethuit". And I sense that Proust is trying to explore an important reflection here about how comically ironic, how ambiguous, and how 'contingent' our lives and recollections are, and how art (both pictorial and literary) pushes us to sense and respond to these ambivalences.

Art revels in ambiguity and so should we. It is not a new idea that Time in the novels is presented as a series of *discontinuities*, fragments, scenes and conversations seemingly unrelated and at times totally disparate - and it is through the senses (the tilleul infusion and the madeleines set us off, of course) and the creative imagination (of the artist and by implication, of course, Proust) which tries to order our experience of the world, that Time is *reorganised* into something meaningful and comprehensible.

Meanwhile, on I plunge through Proust's dizzying journey with his finely graduated 'worlds' and scenarios emerging from deep (SUCH long sentences!) inside his memory and his boundless (SUCH long paragraphs!) imagination...

APPENDIX

Here, for the record, is Monet's beautiful 'Honfleur'



and here, too, is Turner's "Portsmouth Harbour". This, too, is rich with ambiguities and critics have seen it as a battle between disorder and control - Ruskin noticed that the jib sail in front was NOT set the correct way for a ship sailing BEFORE the wind (Ruskin *would* notice details like that!). Perhaps Turner was not well versed in sailing technique..?

The woman is apparently signalling to the ship (or simply waving), and right above her head is Portsmouth's Signalling Tower - a reminder, Turner may be suggesting, that



communication at sea is primordial. The elements (wind and waves) are dangerous, though the man o' war seems to be gliding effortlessly (with its sails set wrongly!) out to sea. In perfect control, apparently! Are the 4 people rowing in the boat, rowing towards danger? And is the woman, in fact, desperately trying to signal to them that they are on course for a collision? Ambiguity!

And, lastly, here is one further contender for the 'Turner Prize' (?): "Scarborough"



No rocks again, here, but some fishermen, masts, boats and some of that same dissolution: the melting of sea into sky and sky into sea. People are working and occupied, but peacefully, - there's no sense of urgency. Instead, the sea seems to have a calming, dissolving effect on the world. People, boats and animals appear caught in a moment of stillness and beauty. The girl in the foreground, if she is shrimping, seems to be working almost desultorily while the dog waits patiently. Is the fishing boat stuck, while the tide goes out further? If so, no one seems alarmed. It is 1825. All is as it should be. The castle on the hill is not needed but watches over a simple, peaceful world 'Claudian' scene.

I want to reflect further upon both the *dissolving* power of art AND its *unifying* power. Modernism (think TS Eliot, Ezra Pound, Picasso, Matisse, jazz, even going as far back as Baudelaire) shows us the *fragmentation* that the modernists felt was so typical of the modern world. Art, on the other hand, even fragmented art (think of Eliot's *The Wasteland* - 1922), also tries to find correspondences and links, and it offers a unifying force of the imagination as it tries to recombine and rediscover what might have been lost.

All of this is very close to the concerns and investigations of "A La Recherche du Temps Perdu".