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INTRODUCTION

Disarming Intelligence

DISARMING INTELLIGENCE CHARTS a trajectory linking two moments in European thought through modern fiction and literary criticism. In Third Republic France, "intelligence" was a contested object for the sciences, one that differentiated the normal from the pathological. Around World War I, it emerged as a politically charged watchword in tense cultural polemics. Focusing on texts by Henri Bergson, Marcel Proust, Paul Valéry, and the critics of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (*NRF*), this book shows how these writers questioned and transformed the values and meanings attached to intelligence. The reader will follow distinct steps in the struggle to control the signification of intelligence from the emergence of the term after its consecration by Hippolyte Taine and its reversal in Bergson, to its partial abdication in Proust's fiction, its crisis as faculty and class in Valéry, and its criticism in the pages of the *NRF*. Forays into essays by German thinkers extend this trajectory by emphasizing how the term was gradually displaced, almost vanishing from critical theory and literary criticism.

The book argues that a theoretical archive not often considered is central to the evolution and reception of modern French literature, thought, and criticism. Its aim will be to draw attention to how this literature negotiates a term whose banality and universality lend it much of its lasting fascination. The representation of intelligence in the works discussed necessarily differs, even as the concerns they express about the capacities and limits accorded to conscious rationality (especially in the creation and reception of literary works) endure. Many of the texts examined grapple with the difficulty of language to grasp and reveal the conscious and marginal workings of the mind. The belated temporalities of such recognition, that dilate and inverse the logical relation of cause and effect, will also be an underlying theme of analysis. Whether or not such representations can be

mobilized to promote a national agenda or betray class interests becomes a politically divisive question. Constantly obliged to collaborate with other forces, to test its mettle and measure its worth, intelligence remains an embattled concept. These works do not always nor explicitly philosophize about intelligence but wrest new literary forms and critical attitudes from its demands for cogency.

Rather than considering intelligence to be an ideologically neutral or conceptually stable basis for understanding the operations of mind and matter, self and other, tradition and rupture, the writers and critics studied lay out its analytic excess and cultural overdetermination. In differing ways, Henri Bergson, Marcel Proust, Paul Valéry, the critics of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, and Walter Benjamin suspend and reconfigure what the role and limits of intelligence might be. Shifting the emphasis from the anxious intelligence of subjectivity to the disarming intelligence of literary form, these writers and critics imply that "intelligence" is both less advantageous a faculty than it is usually taken to be and one that it is increasingly difficult to renounce.

From chapter to chapter, intelligence comes to light as the object of different types of knowledge, study, evaluation, engagement, and experiment. It moves among various fields—philosophy, psychology, literature, and critique—as it becomes a point of contention among competing assessments of cultural life and national character. Within this redistribution of the faculty, literature claims a manner of relating to intelligence capable of outstripping the insights of more methodic ways of thinking.

The literature of this period, roughly between 1870 and 1930, attempts to negotiate and displace the meanings of intelligence it inherits from the thought of the Third Republic, while also electing intelligence as a topic for narrative and analysis. Intelligence spurred the casting of a poetics and politics that did not simply abdicate analysis in favor of the irrational. Rather, these forms altered the place of literature within a wider range of discursive practices from the natural sciences and emerging social sciences to nationalist and partisan rhetoric.

The first chapter tracks how philosophers from Taine to Bergson sought to define intelligence as a semiotic faculty, while psychologists invented scales to measure its variation. Intelligence both separated individuals from one another and made them comparable. The reigning concept of mind was mechanical and prone to error, before it came to be contested by the emphasis spiritualism and vitalism lent to intuition. The second chapter analyzes Proust's novel arguments for demoting the faculty in favor of an experimental combination of intuition with intelligence. We then

turn to Valéry's essays and notebooks, which serve as a testing ground for literature's pretensions to intelligence. Valéry recognized that the crisis in intelligence unleashed by World War I was not ephemeral, since cognitive faculties were assailed by technological and economic changes that came with the mechanization of everyday life. Yet he insisted that existing literary genres, especially the novel, failed to respond to these changes, thus creating the need for untried forms. The next chapter reconstructs the debate concerning the national and ethical character of intelligence in literary and cultural criticism around the First World War. The final chapter examines Walter Benjamin's critical essays on French writers in contrast with a dismissive relegation of intelligence to the free-floating literati by German thought. An epilogue briefly recasts the crises of intelligence by considering contemporary discourses about artificial intelligence.

Taken together, these studies argue that early twentieth-century French literature appropriated the category of "intelligence" from psychological and philosophical attempts to redefine an otherwise vague notion of understanding. The conceptual armature of Third Republic thought was disarmed in literary figuration, especially in works by Proust and Valéry, who displaced intelligence through formal, stylistic, and critical experiments. During this period, literature previously construed as the most distinguished use of language came under attack as only one of many forms of discourse, and an unproductive one at that. Challenged by new claims to objectivity—from the social and experimental sciences to the new media of photography and film—novelists and poets were forced to justify their intellectual existence in economies of intelligence. Although the poetics of the authors and critics studied here differ to the point of antithesis, they share a concern to negotiate a new stance toward thinking within literature and vice versa.[1] Studying the ambivalent senses of "intelligence" in French thought, along with its countering in early twentieth-century literature, offers a crucial corrective to apolitical views of modernism by revealing an ignored literary and aesthetic dimension to enduring cognitive, rhetorical, and political debates.

In French studies, the literary period roughly between the fin-de-siècle and the Front Populaire tellingly lacks a name. Often rejecting the umbrella term of "modernism," French-language critics use periodizations such as *l'avant-guerre*, *la grande guerre*, or *l'entre-deux-guerres*, invariably dividing the literary battlefield between an *avant-garde* and an *arrière-garde*. Such martial metaphors raise larger questions concerning the "bourgeois" status of literature and the tension between technique and commitment in a period in which writers seemed to have forfeited their right to exist.

Moreover, they implicitly recall the reciprocal entanglement of literature and combat in the French imaginary from Balzac, Baudelaire, and Flaubert onward. As Paris consolidated its economic power and cultural centrality in the "post-Napoleonic, proto-capitalist Restoration," it came to resemble a battlefield where "the way you win in its struggle is not by arms [. . .] but by insinuation, charm, gathering information, possessing social secrets."[2] By the interwar period, a committed left-wing writer like Paul Nizan could simply declare that the "culture of intelligence was an arm," one whose use-value was the object of intense class conflict.[3] In this context, the writers I study sought to disarm intelligence by dissociating it from its established regimens and associations.

The turbulent era studied here began with the Siege of Paris, leading to the French defeat to the Prussians in 1871 and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by the German empire; a spate of anarchist bombings and political assassinations followed as the political landscape was divided into competing doctrines of Boulangism, socialism, republicanism, xenophobia, revanchism, and nationalism; mass strikes, the experiment of the Commune, and its brutal suppression by Thiers, led to MacMahon's "republic of moral order"; the Panama Canal scandal and the Boulanger and Dreyfus affairs divided public opinion and spurred the appearance of the intellectual; peasants were transformed into Frenchmen through technological innovation, Hausmannization, the development of railroad networks, universal military conscription, and secularized school reforms; the aestheticized consumerism and café culture of Belle Epoque Paris, the separation of church and state in 1905, and the expansion of colonialism, and its *mission civilisatrice*, all became part of the identity of the Third Republic.[4]

The scientific moment, which largely displayed a positivist investment in experimental and empirical methods to capture the real, was soon challenged by a literary and philosophic culture that expressed increasing skepticism about the sovereignty of the intellect, as it pastiched the precision of laboratory culture and experimental protocols. When the Dreyfus affair introduced the figure of the "intellectual"—a kind of generalist of the intellect with public politics—the term was soon held in contempt. Much of the postwar pamphleteering across the political spectrum in 1919 constituted an attempt to reclaim some of the lost glory attached to the figure of the intellectual.[5] While this book is not a history of the intellectual, some discussion of the term is necessary at the outset, especially to frame many of the literary polemics discussed below.

On January 13, 1898, *L'Aurore* published Zola's open letter to President Félix Faure reproving the military state apparatus that falsely condemned

Alfred Dreyfus for counterintelligence on behalf of the Germans. A wave of right-wing outrage and anti-Semitic protests against Dreyfus and his defenders followed immediately, while the category of the "intellectual," called to co-sign the petition in his favor, was introduced, discussed, and immediately critiqued. Ferdinand Brunetière, the editor of the *Journal des deux mondes,* described the emergent class as "a kind of nobility, people who live in labs and libraries, this very facet is enough to denounce one of the most ridiculous deviations of our time, by which I mean the pretention to elevate writers, scholars, professors, philologists into supermen. Intellectual aptitudes, for which I certainly do not show contempt, only have relative value."[6] The very same day, *Le Temps* published a list of protestors, signed by scientists, academics, and writers, including Zola and Proust. For future prime minister Georges Clemenceau, such a disinterested movement of public opinion was a hopeful sign. For Maurice Barrès, Zola and the intellectuals were "rootless" (*déracinés*), lacking intuition, any sense of territorial belonging, not to say fully "French" blood.[7]

Lalande's influential dictionary of philosophy tellingly lists the pejorative implications of "intellectualism" as 1) a "reproach about thinking of things in a verbal, superficial way while imposing on reality, artificial, rigid frameworks which deform it as they claim to represent it; 2) the reproach of sacrificing 'life' that is, the natural prudence and fertility of instinct to the pleasure of critical thinking, which is a force for inertia, destruction, and inhibition."[8] Despite the vilification of their tendency toward excessive abstraction, intellectuals found a symbolic place in the public sphere. The left-wing intellectual, writes Foucault, became someone who had the right to speak as "the master of truth and justice [. . .] to make himself heard, as the representative of the universal [. . .] the conscience of everyone."[9] In the period between the fin-de-siècle and the Second World War—often intensified by the outbreak and aftermath of the First World War—contempt toward "intelligence" (and intellectuals as a class) resurged in waves of anti-intellectualism. At the time, many of the writers and intellectuals discussed below could neither successfully lay claim to the universal authority of their fin-de-siècle counterparts nor approximate the specialized domains of knowledge that emerged around World War II. The figure of the universal intellectual faded in favor of the specific intellectual, whose expertise in a precise field, no longer depended upon writing, but instead a shared ability to connect and politicize forms of knowledge.

The two defining events of the period, for the purposes of this study, remain the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the "Great War" of 1914–1918. The Franco-Prussian War often seems forgotten in descriptions of the

ostensible hundred years of peace in Europe between the 1815 Treaty of Vienna and the First World War. While the war of 1870 spurred the reorganization of French society on every imaginable level to combat its perceived lack of precision, discipline, and order, and anxieties about a demographic decline in relation to Bismarck's newly consolidated Germany, the Great War unleashed an intense technical acceleration as trench, gas, and air warfare, shell shock, mutilation, and mass death created a traumatic break in narratives of positivism, rationalism, and scientific and cultural progress. In a passage that creates a complex analogy between obsession in love and war, Proust describes the Franco-Prussian War as a preoccupation that dominated the consciousness of the generation that lived through it, blinding them to its reality:

> People who were alive during the war of 1870, for instance, say that the idea of war ended by seeming to them natural, not because they did not think enough about the war, but because they thought of it all the time. And in order to understand how strange and momentous a fact war is, it was necessary that, something else wrenching them out of their permanent obsession, they should forget for a moment that a state of war prevailed and should find themselves once again as they had been in peacetime, until all of a sudden, against the momentary blank, there stood out clearly at last the monstrous reality which they had long ceased to see, since there had been nothing else visible.[10]

Only through forgetting and distraction does reality come into focus to the preoccupied mind, this passage suggests. Through his incorporation of World War I into his novel, Proust articulates the insight that just as modern war is not strategic but unforeseeable, truth is the accidental outcome of rectified error rather than methodic thinking. Proust's German translator, Benjamin, makes a not unrelated remark about the aftershock of the war which seemed to be less a naturalized obsession, than a devaluation in experience itself:

> Experience [*die Erfahrung*] has fallen in value, amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world. [. . .] For never has experience been belied [*Lügen gestraft worden*] more thoroughly: strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by the inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experience, by the ruling powers.[11]

Between these disasters, the status and role of the literary writer fluctuated from the decadent aesthete, the dilettante, the intellectual, and the

anarchist to the anti-Semitic pamphleteer and the wartime nationalist, to name just a few of the more startling stances.[12] Although nearly none of the figures in this study were combatants, the conflicts of their time warped how they conceived of the act of writing itself.

Tracing the emergence of literary and critical discussions in this period allows us to better grasp the paradoxical heritage of contemporary theoretical discourse. Modern French literature, often dismissed as having purely formal concerns, deviates from models of criticism prevalent today. Reevaluating its literary–theoretical insights helps address a larger series of vexed questions: Who or what is deemed intelligent? What role does intelligence—whether understood as a mixture of will and conscious reason or studied intellectualism—play in the genesis of the literary work of art? How did these authors reconcile their creative vocations with fears that conscious intelligence might be an inimical force that kept them from writing such work, whose true sources remained unconscious? Should a literary intelligentsia work in the service of a national agenda? We cannot understand how French literature and thought conceptualizes literary creation and its psychic and political situation if we fail to grasp the innovative role and radical limits it lent to intelligence.

The Sword and the Mirror

In an essay on the nineteenth-century philosopher Théodore Jouffroy, the critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve distinguished between two aspects of intelligence, reflection and action, comparing them to a sword and a mirror:

> Relative to objects of the intelligence one can behave in two ways. Every mind is more or less armed, in the presence of ideas, with the shield or mirror of reflection, and the sword of invention, of penetrating and restless action: reflecting and daring. Genius consists in the proportioned alliance of the two means, with the prevalence of daring.[13]

Sainte-Beuve suggests that everyone is "more or less armed" with intelligence, toward which one can adopt either of these two attitudes. Either one brandishes the reflective shield or mirror, or one wields the "sword of invention," using it to perform bold, penetrating feats. Genius does not choose between the two. As the image implies, intelligence can be martial, divisive, and aggressive, seeking to prevail against any obstacles or rivals. But it can also be reflective and defensive, returning an image of its surrounding environment without necessarily acting on it. The sword cuts, while the mirror

exposes. Perhaps it was the seductive allusion to the story of Perseus, or else the neat dichotomy it offers, but Sainte-Beuve's aside about intelligence took on a life of its own. In the early twentieth century, writers as different as Benjamin and Julien Benda quoted the remark. For Benda, modern thinkers exalted *l'intelligence-glaive* and belittled *l'intelligence-miroir*.

Today, intelligence fills a different lexical space. In English, one thinks first and foremost of digital surveillance networks that gather and store massive amounts of information about individuals and collectives. Both sword and mirror, such "intelligence" purports to predict, protect, and respond preemptively to the moves of unnamed (internal and external) enemies. In French, these networks are referred to as *services de renseignements*, although the language of intelligence is increasingly used. Despite the importance of spying and military maneuvering around the Dreyfus affair, the current project does not address this aspect of intelligence due to the difference in lexical fields.[14] Secondarily, intelligence is artificial, the dream of an interactive mind-machine capable of maneuvering and supplementing, if not supplanting, the human body and its limited sensorium in increasingly seamless ways. On a pedagogical level, intelligence is the testing site that distinguishes between the innately gifted and talented, and those deemed unable to learn. Recent psychology invariably discusses conceptions of intelligence through metaphors rather than definitions. Its major currents—from Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology to Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences—rely on geographic, computational, biological, epistemological, anthropological, sociological, and systems metaphors.[15] The borders between these levels are rendered increasingly porous by contemporary regimes of artificial intelligence, data harvesting, and "societies of profiling."[16]

Notably absent from such military, artificial, pedagogical, and psychological registers is the literary. While one readily speaks about the intelligibility of a work, or the unintelligibility of a theory, it is rare to consider literary works themselves as possessing and affecting intelligence.[17] In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France, as I have been arguing, intelligence became a key category for examining the creation and reception of literary works in their syntactic, semantic, social, affective, and political modes.[18] The literary historian Jean David notes that in the early twentieth century intelligence enjoyed a role comparable to *raison* in eighteenth-century thought. During the Enlightenment, however, reason was used as a "weapon" (*instrument d'attaque*) against existing belief systems, whereas in the early twentieth century, "intelligence" was a hastily cobbled levy against a rising tide (*une défense contre une*

marée montante) of inimical forces. As the historian of science Lorraine Daston notes, the general, quantitative, and putatively morally neutral notion of intelligence is "brashly modern."[19] While the term remains difficult to define, and even harder to measure or locate, its deleterious social effects as a regime of power are all too real. Recalling Alfred Binet's tautology that "intelligence is what is measured by intelligence tests," Pierre Bourdieu identifies a "racism of intelligence" as "the means through which the dominant class" produce a justification for their own privilege while excluding various others from power in the name of intelligence.[20]

French thought ascribes two modes of knowing to intelligence: knowledge as "potential or ability" and knowing as "simple possession of knowledge."[21] Littré's 1874 dictionary offers eight definitions of intelligence: these include the faculty or act of understanding; spiritual substance; an artist's capacity to produce effects; a rhetorical capacity to achieve certain results; communication among like-minded people; and a secret accord or unity or feeling.[22] While many of these meanings date back to the seventeenth century, the concept became "socially charged" in the post-Revolutionary period: as the intellectual historian John Carson writes, "champions of the Enlightenment and practical revolutionaries alike" used intelligence as a partial basis for social distinction that was no longer explicitly guaranteed by class.[23] Ceasing to refer to knowledge, it described either a shared or a personally possessed intellectual ability. From the nineteenth century onward, the concept shifted "from referring to a general faculty to [. . .] an individual attribute," from plural talents to a singular intelligence, and from limited to expansive cultural significance.[24] Even as man became an object of knowledge for the human sciences that targeted life, labor, and language, intelligence unraveled discourses of human exceptionalism and dignity.[25] In a more antihumanist vein, Georges Bataille declares: "The moment arrived, in the 19th century, when human intelligence brought to its highest degree of acuity stopped taking itself for the center and realization of the world. The feeling of infinite dignity was outstripped by those of distress and abandonment. Irony lay waste to dignity, hunger and passion made it hateful."[26] A Copernican revolution in intelligence led to the marginalization, not to say the abjection of the human.

The difficulty late nineteenth-century thinkers encountered in translating ancient terms that designate the capacity to think and know reflects the history of mind–body, human–machine, and nature–culture dualisms, as well as the consequent development of epistemology and metaphysics into national philosophical traditions. For Étienne Balibar,

the Latin word *mens* is paradigmatic: during the early modern period it translates both *esprit* and *âme*, creating an epistemological and a theological current in French thought.[27] Intelligence, by contrast, stems from *intellegere*, suggesting that we are dealing with the ability to link or read otherwise disconnected elements together (*inter-legere* or *-ligere*).[28] Yet "etymology offers no protection," writes Maurice Blanchot, adding, not without irony:

> *Intelligere* alerts us to its dependency with regard to *legere* and the prefix *in*, and *legere* in turn opens onto the *logos* which, before it signifies language (speech, mark) expresses the gathering into itself of what has been dispersed inasmuch as it must remain dispersed. Dispersion and gathering in, such could be said to be the respiration of the mind, the dual movement that does not become unified, but which intelligence tends to stabilize so as to avoid the dizzying prospect of an ever-deepening investigation.[29]

This stabilizing force weakens the connection between intelligence and the spiritual dimension proper to *esprit*. While the association with divinity endured in the notion of a higher intelligence that could ground human thought, nineteenth-century "intelligence" largely adhered to the movement of life, rather than divine inspiration. Burdened with theological, revolutionary, and Idealist connotations, *esprit* increasingly designated collective historical consciousness, while the more malleable "intelligence" became a watchword in science and aesthetics.[30]

From 1870 to 1930, intelligence dominated the *esprit du temps*.[31] Scientists employed the term to locate pathologies before the wave of positivist psychological studies that culminated in the invention of intelligence testing.[32] The Ministry of Public Instruction chose Alfred Binet, an eclectic psychologist and a student of Jean-Martin Charcot, to devise a test to identify those unable to profit from compulsory education in a "normal" manner because of the state of their intelligence. Popularized and distorted beyond their original application, intelligence tests furnished a scale to evaluate and rank individuals according to mental fitness and adaptability, drawing attention to their supposedly innate qualities at the expense of their ability to learn.[33] Thinkers in fields from physiology and evolutionary biology to experimental psychology and philosophy fought to control the meaning of a term that paradoxically appeared at once universal and particular, republican and elitist, innate and acquired, measurable and incalculable.[34] Perhaps for this very reason, it promised to clarify the enigmatic nature of subjectivity and the movement of life itself.

The history of conceptions and regimes of intelligence is in many ways the history of exclusion. Part of the larger history of the subjectivization and naturalization of reason in modernity, Daston argues in the study alluded to above, "intelligence" in the nineteenth century became general, biological, innate, and unequal. Since well before the invention of intelligence testing, anyone who did not correspond to the neurotypical, adult, able-bodied European male was implicitly classed as less capable of freedom, citizenship, and made the object of the French republican *mission civilisatrice*, among other such regimes. Women, children, racialized and colonized minorities, the neurodivergent, and the working poor were excluded in varying ways that corresponded to and were naturalized by a host of categories invented by law, medicine, criminal anthropology, demography, biopolitics, and psychology. Naturalization here names "ways of fortifying various social, cultural, political, or economic conventions by presenting them as part of the natural order." Daston's work on the "naturalization of the female intellect" from Aristotle to Darwin provides a model for processes according to which norms of exclusion are reified through appeals to biological and physiological determinism, instead of acknowledging the socially constructed forces often at work behind such matrices.[35] Over time, women, as well as female animals, were cast as nurturing, mischievous, cunning, deceptive, emotive, curious, and malleable. At stake was the causal connection between sex and physiology, on the one hand, and mental and natural capacity, on the other.

> Eighteenth-century naturalizers distinguished sharply between the natural and the conventional but permitted the moral to pass freely between both realms, mingled the psychological with the somatic in both causal directions, and invoked education to correct or corrupt nature; nineteenth-century naturalizers barred the moral from the natural, made the body the causal substratum of character and intellect, and opposed obdurate nature to pliable nature.[36]

The ways that intelligence has been exploited as grounds for violent prejudice and domination has been extensively studied by scholars of this period, upending narratives—from positivism to contemporary neoliberalism—about the melioristic paths to realizing conditions of political equality given cognitive and epistemic diversity.[37] There would be many reasons for abandoning discussions of intelligence altogether, were it not for its persistent use and allure.

Critical discourse was not immune to the seductions of intelligence either. The cubist painter and art-critic Amédée Ozenfant speculates

on the senses of "intelligence" in the early twentieth-century French critical idiom:

> What do they mean by intelligence? Many seem to confuse it with reason or logic, or with these two tools of intelligence. Or else does it refer to that clarity of mind, which some inspired people and idiots lack? Or else the faculty that "understands" the play of antecedents and consequences, and that educates you to anticipate, to handle causes lucidly in order to attain the effects one intends to produce? Certainly, a good, clear intelligence understands very well that its power is limited; it knows that it needs other faculties, like intuitive intelligence, to become global intelligence.[38]

Rather than settling on a definition of intelligence, Ozenfant worries over the shades of possible meaning that the term contains: reason, logic, lucidity, the ability to grasp premises and outcomes, the power of anticipating cause and effect. As we have seen, these nuances were fought over by nineteenth century psychology and philosophy.[39] Art criticism, like Ozenfant's, continues in this tradition and "intersects only erratically with English meanings of the same words."[40] Distinctions are upheld in English between intelligence and the narrower ambit of intellect, while the French tends to use the first term exclusively. Even when it is translated by its homonym, the slippery connotations of intelligence are often misplaced—a tendency that justifies our sustained examination of a single term.

This book explores the epistemic shift in which intelligence was used to transform the world of things into the world of signs. Contemporary to this metamorphosis, modernist literature is often considered a privileged nexus for thinking about the vexed relations between literature and philosophy. Critics have described the history of modern narrative form as undergoing an "inner turn," involving the collapse of outer space into inner psychic life.[41] Others evoke the "end of interiority." Rather than turning away from the real to the life of the mind, for Laurent Jenny, literature becomes a privileged space for the projection of inner life back onto the world.[42] The question remains how the perceiving mind and the perceived world are in turn represented in words, as literary artifacts, and whether such representation promises any knowledge about the nature of the mind or the world that is unavailable to other forms of thinking. The period under scrutiny further inquires whether literature is a form of

thinking beholden to the kinds of agency, rationality, and cognitive structures as they were described by natural and social sciences or whether its singularity placed it on the side of inspiration and intuition.

Proust and Valéry both rejected the false dichotomies between intellect and intuition in their efforts to negotiate a place for intelligence within literary form. Proustian intelligence functions as the developing agent that makes the negative essence of experience available, leading up to the discovery of lost time and the apotheosis of art. But we should not charge Proust with his narrator's enthusiasms, nor conflate *À la recherche du temps perdu* with the fulfillment of a dogmatic aesthetic vocation. From the beginning, Proust sought to write a novel that acknowledged the fragility of intelligence, its manic overreach and diminished returns, in the hope of making its readers capable of desiring more than bedtime stories about redemption. Valéry's relation to flashes of insight were predominantely melancholic. For the poet, intelligence remains exposed to the passage of time and to political and technological crises, which would soon make literature unintelligible. Yet he, too, suggests that we may have no way of foregoing intelligence. Valerian intelligence transforms philosophical problems about embodied consciousness into linguistic performances across genres. Both the novelist and the poet-critic remind the "theoretical intelligence" of its bodily, finite, discontinuous condition, installing "a disorganizing sense of flux into its models of itself."[43] As French thought shifted its emphasis away from the nineteenth-century discourse on intelligence, contemporary writers folded intellectual analysis into literature, while polemicists projected it outward onto the world as a way of defending ultra-conservative values.

Charles Maurras—critic, politician, and theorist of the far-right monarchist movement *Action française*—offers a polemical, potted history of the course of French literature that divides up the centuries according to their reaction to the idea that literature possesses intelligence. In the seventeenth century, French writers were *la parure du monde* (the finery of the world) and lay no claim to specialized knowledge, let alone power. That disastrous conflation only occurred when royal authority was supplanted by the *homme de lettres*. Whether or not literature could offer any knowledge about the world, Europe fell under its tutelage during the age of revolution. The following century of failed revolutions, industrial and political, further divided the republic of writers into "hysterics"—who shut themselves in nonsense, and "industrialists"—willing to recreate any social milieu through a highly polished technical realism. Literature's desire for knowledge became increasingly anarchic, leading criticism to

elevate intelligence over judgment, the latter understood as a discerning form of reason: "Intelligence was considered explosive, and anyone who lived by their intelligence appeared as a born enemy of real order."[44] In Maurras's conspiratorial account, the relation between the real and the imaginary was soon suppressed by the political confrontation between intelligence and sovereignty, democracy and monarchy. From the Dreyfus affair to World War I, writers were increasingly forced to pick a political faction. The refusal of the *NRF* critics to place literary criticism at the service of postwar French hegemony, as demanded by Maurrasians, led to an enduring transformation in criticism, critique, and literary paradigms.

However skeptically we consider Maurras's genealogy, underwritten as it is by his impenitent anti-Semitic and antidemocratic bent, it signals a distinction between intelligence, knowledge, and judgment.[45] Intelligence concerns the drive to apply teleological, cognitive thinking to singular situations in which origin and goal are not given. The writers and critics I study reveal how the relation between knowing and thinking is not simply a cognitive one, but rather a vacillation within and between judgments understood as a critical activity, and flair, an intuitive capacity to distinguish and discern. Setting literary works against the discourse on intelligence makes it possible to track not only how preconceived notions of intelligence are disarmed in literary figuration, but also how literature bears its own disarming notion of intelligence.

In this vein, the constellation of Proust, Valéry, and the critics of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, as well as the thinkers from Taine to Bergson, to a lesser extent, might be read as elaborating a category of intelligent form. Their works do not always explicitly philosophize about intelligence but wrest new literary forms and critical attitudes from its demands for cogency. In doing so, they shift the emphasis from the world of the intelligent subject to the disarming intelligence of the literary. These writers and critics finally imply that "intelligence" is both less advantageous a faculty than it is usually considered to be and one without which it is difficult to narrate, describe, analyze, or relate to the world.

Disarming Intelligence

"Disarming Intelligence" should be understood in at least two ways, namely as a critical and a creative impulse. First, the armature or the weaponry of intelligence is taken apart in literary practice since literature, unlike logic, can play with alternatives that are not in contention.[46] The basic principles

of non-contradiction, cause and effect, identity and difference that dictate logical thinking are suspended, opened to doubt, and free to be reassembled. The second sense of "disarming intelligence" is this literary play on possibility, which bears its own kind of knowledge. While philosophers must deal with the specter of necessity, literature, like rhetoric, can revel in modes of possibility.[47] This book thus aims to show how early twentieth-century French literature not only negotiates a specific place for "intelligence" in relation to other faculties, but also how it redefines and crafts its own understanding of "intelligence."

Attempts to reconcile historical and philological approaches to modern literature appeal to the notion of a distinctly artistic and literary intelligence, which would not be duped by language: "By teaching us not to be duped by language, literature makes us more intelligent, or intelligent in other ways. The dilemma of social art or art for art's sake becomes obsolete in front of an art that covets an intelligence of the world freed from the constraints of language."[48] Such claims, in this instance by Antoine Compagnon, do not, however, entertain the possibility that literature eradicates the fantasy of intelligence as a personal quality, property, or possession. Becoming more intelligent or altering one's intelligence demands a transformation or dissolution of existing relations to language. In a study on philology, Werner Hamacher emphasizes a "disarmed" technical apparatus that enables philology not to answer literary questions once and for all, but to seek answers other than the pre-existing ones: "Philology, where it deserves this name, responds to the questions, provocations, and attacks organized by literature *not* when it has an adequate technical arsenal at hand but rather when it is disarmed and must seek for other responses than those at hand."[49] Elsewhere he distinguishes between the history of literary and phenomenal events, noting: "History—namely, aestheticized history—is suspended in literary texts. And these texts articulate their historicality precisely by exposing the form of their speaking and the relation to their own prehistory as contingent [. . .]. Literature is the elucidation of the impossibility of writing literary history."[50] While my study draws on the history of ideas, its primary focus remains on the questions raised by the figural language of a constellation of literary and literary critical texts. In response to the questions, provocations, and attacks literature aims at intelligence, it seeks "other answers" than the ones offered by pre-existing arsenals, theories, and histories.

The puzzle remains that while literature exploits the expressive and affective potentials of language, it stays bound to the letter. A philosophical thesis can be rephrased in other words; a poem, as any critic soon

discovers, cannot. In "The Perfect Critic," T. S. Eliot calls criticism the "disinterested exercise of intelligence." It is when we do not know enough that we tend "to substitute emotions for thoughts." Eliot declares that, ever since Aristotle, the critic has had "no method except to be highly intelligent, but of intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition."[51] What, one might ask, becomes of the world beyond the text and the critic? How do debates about the intelligibility of rhetorical and figural language bear upon ways of being? What are the interpersonal relational modes that literary intelligence enables, and more crucially, disarms?[52]

Literature, in this account, does not necessarily make us more intelligent, nor does it concern the irrational or unconscious primarily as surrealism and psychoanalysis might contend. Rather, it offers different ways of relating to intelligence, finding ways of questioning its falsely definitive categories, so that we can forget and rediscover what it is we thought we already knew, as well as what we failed to consider in the first place. This affordance is perhaps what makes it suspect.

Intelligence has a special place in the vaunted quarrel between literature and philosophy. "It is fair to say that since Plato's famous decision [to expel poets from the city] there has been consistent association of the poetic with a peculiar, mysterious, and even dangerous form of knowledge."[53] Although Stathis Gourgouris, like many others, describes this ancient contest in terms of a claim to knowledge, intelligence may precede the very division of poetry and philosophy into distinctive modes of knowing (whether *nous*, *epistemē*, *phronesis,* or *logos*). Poetry does not draw its aura of danger from knowledge as idea.[54] The idea belongs to the philosopher. The poet's knowledge is the knowledge of language, and her danger is the danger of traversing language without a reference either to the word or the world as a guarantor. Before Platonic philosophy invented the idea, and its dialectical machine counting out sophists and poets, it first repressed a certain kind of ruse. As Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant argue, the Greek word *mētis* (often translated as "intelligence") names a range of qualities from sophistry to the guile of Odysseus, from Oedipus' solution of the Sphinx's enigma to fishing and carpentry.[55] This *savoir-faire* or know-how was not knowledge or just knowingness, hence its preemptive exclusion from philosophy, unlike *sophia* or *nous*. The cunning deity rejected by philosophers was left to artisans, while rhetoricians and poets—from Homer to Oppian—founded the "stability of its terminology."[56] Metis, the forgotten goddess of intelligence, was soon replaced by her daughter: the regal, martial, and terrifying Pallas Athena, who gifted

the mirroring shield to Perseus, allowing him to defeat the Medusa without meeting her petrifying gaze.

Modernity repeatedly returned to the category of intelligence in times of crisis when systematic philosophies faltered. The outbreak of the First World War triggered an acute interest in repressed forms of intelligence in relation to ethical questions across the West. In his influential 1915 essay, "The Moral Duty to be Intelligent," the American critic John Erskine discussed the ethical necessity of overcoming deeply entrenched Anglo-American cultural stigmas opposing intelligence and goodness: "The disposition to consider intelligence a peril is an old Anglo-Saxon inheritance."[57] The closer one came to Athens, Erskine suggested, the closer the good and the smart seemed to be. Meanwhile, the Dadaist Hugo Ball penned a wide-ranging polemic, *The Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, launching an attack on what he considered morally bankrupt currents in German thought from Reformation theology to his paranoic conspiracy of a "German-Jewish conspiracy to destroy morality," to which he opposed a pacifist, pietistic Rousseauist tradition.[58] While Erskine and Ball turned to the intelligentsia and their intelligence to defend the threatened moral fabric of the West, in France the debate took on an added accent of difficulty by being bound to the political and cognitive concerns particular to the Third Republic.[59] The crisis of values can be described as triple crisis of aesthetic value, cognitive faculties, and political ethos.

The earlier debate in nineteenth-century France concerned the divide between the empirical and natural sciences, on the one hand, and the "human" sciences, on the other.[60] The contested place of language was a key to understanding this rift. Any truth that could be expressed only through discourse was necessarily subject to the inherent relativity and ambiguity of speech. Thinkers after Étienne Bonnot de Condillac attacked the doctrine of faculties and innate ideas prevalent since Descartes, in order to argue that the origin of thought was speech and experience, rather than innate forms.[61] Taine took up Condillac's project to elaborate a theory of the sign, which was simultaneously a critique of the subject as imagined by post-Cartesian philosophy. The spiritualist tradition would, in turn, attack Taine, until his intellectualist realism was completely reversed by Bergson. It seems obvious that Proust and Valéry would be much closer to Bergson, rather than his now largely unread predecessors.

Yet the very idea that the truth about our selves is hidden from conscious investigation belongs not to Bergsonism, but to this longer tradition that speculates on the nature and limits of intelligence in language.

Alongside Taine's ambitions to adapt the methods of natural sciences to literature and philosophy, Sainte-Beuve attempted to derive the meaning of the work from the life of the author. Captured by the formula *tel fruit, tel arbre*, Sainte-Beuve's premise was that if one gathered enough "intelligence" about the life of a writer, their habits, experiences, and proclivities, then the secret structure of the work would be laid bare. Proust objected to this idea in the drafts for an early critical essay, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, arguing that it was not the biographical, social self that wrote but a nocturnal, asocial other. This is one way to read the scandalous opening gambit of his preface, which announces a depreciation of intelligence and the kinds of truth it affords: "Each day I attach less value to intelligence" (*Chaque jour j'attache moins de prix à l'intelligence*).[62] Depreciating intelligence seems surprising for readers of Proust's novel because his narrative voice is identified with the hypertrophy of interpretive intelligence. Yet, as Deleuze notes, what matters in the *Recherche* is not so much what the characters think, but what forces them to think. Involuntary intelligence—trigged by memory, sickness, suffering, insignificance, the body, and random objects—is thus prized over the products of pure reason.

The Proustian narrator defers the time of writing in the hope that life will epiphanically reveal itself to him, thus keeping death at bay. And this fantasy is so powerful that what we call a Proustian experience still refers to the synesthesia that unleashes involuntary memory and restores a sense of being in and across time, otherwise occluded by the interested, analytic drive of intelligence. Likewise, the figure of Monsieur Teste incarnates Valéry's comparable fantasy of a power that renounces itself, having assured that it exists without entering the realm of art, action, or writing. Proust has often been read as elevating art over life, and Valéry as valuing art only when it renounces any likeness to the human. Yet their writing does not merely elevate or depreciate life in relation to literature. Rather they argue that life—full of belated, disarming intelligence—has a textual structure that begs for literary understanding. They use interpretation of the represented world as the central technique of narrative, which remains essentially conceptual, reflexive, and directed toward embodied consciousness, sensation, and feeling.

The "Absence" of French Modernism

Readers may justifiably wonder why this book does not relate its arguments about intelligence to the category of French modernism. After all, most of the works studied here are commonly deemed "modernist" in anglophone criticism. Yet my focus on intelligence puts pressure on the availability, if not the very existence, of French modernism as an explanatory category, which tends to occlude the narrative reconstructed here. As one commenter on the topic notes, "In France the word *modernisme* does appear during the twentieth century but generally refers to painting, the Catholic church crisis of 1907, tourist amenities that are not completely primitive, or [. . .] writers like James Joyce and William Faulkner."[63] While *modernisme* can characterize anything from Joyce to hotel plumbing, it does not delimit a literary period, genre, or movement, although it occurs occasionally in Huysmans's art criticism, or dismissive asides by Proust and Gide.[64] Bergson's works were placed on the Catholic index in 1914 when Pope Pius X condemned them for "philosophical modernism," recalling its theological use as a response to threatened dogma. French-language criticism, it is worth noting, largely eschews the category, preferring to speak either in terms of centuries, schools—symbolists, naturalists, surrealists, Dada, *esprit nouveau*, etc.—or to use military metaphors as periodization (*avant-garde* or *arrière-garde*, *avant-guerre* or *entre-deux guerres*).[65] The changing of the century is generally held to be more significant. One of the standard reference works in the crowded field of Proust studies is thus simply called *Proust entre deux siècles*.[66]

The *Recherche* is widely considered a quintessentially modern novel, which, to risk tautology, could only have been written when it was. Here modernity is construed less as an artistic phenomenon than an ensemble of factors effecting everyday life in the French Third Republic: expanded democracy, the reign of technical innovation and secular republicanism, experiments in painting and poetics.[67] Critics also emphasize the novel's devotion to style, its meta-theoretical bent, and the possible differences between the book the narrator intends to write and the one we read as traits of modernist textuality.[68]

While the terms *moderne*, *modernité*, and *moderniste* all exist in French, they refer to independent and distinct debates, as Vincent Descombes notes in a helpful lexical discussion. *Moderne* roughly indicates post-Cartesian thinking, an enlightenment alliance between natural science and human emancipation, the era of liberated subjectivity that the Germans refer to as *Neuzeit*. *Modernisme* refers to the Catholic

theologians of the *Syllabus*, for whom it indicates "an attempt to reformulate dogmas to render them compatible with the modern 'mentality.'" Drawing on Anglo-American usage, he suggests *moderniste* may indicate an artist who feels the need to overturn traditional art forms, through a militant devotion to style (and perhaps Greenbergian medium specificity) as a will to break with the past, whereas Baudelairean *modernité* is opposed to antiquity and refers primarily to the conditions of life (*la vie moderne*) rather than a particular kind of art.[69] The *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire's essay on the paintings of Ingres and Delacroix, defines *modernité* as the moment when the site of "heroism" shifts from officious civic and public life to the private and subjective sphere. Where does Proust belong on such a grid? Indifferent to the advent of the "modern," he seems to attach "no moral significance to historical evolution"; bound to modernity, historical events almost always appear as refracted private experiences in his novels; technically innovative, he does not commit to "modernist" style.[70] It is perhaps in his belated decision to include the First World War in his novel that Proust comes closest to the cyclical impulse of modernist historiography which finds renewal in decline.[71] As the Baron de Charlus mockingly notes, the very public that resisted "modernists in literature and art followed those of war."[72]

Contrast the absence of French modernism with the uncanny persistence of "discourses of modernity and modernism" which "have staged a remarkable comeback" in Anglo-Germanic criticism in the guise of "second modernity, liquid modernity, alternate modernity, countermodernity."[73] To this one might add the phenomenon of "death by prefix": "From Transpacific to Mediterranean, Pragmatic to Revolting, Digital to Slapstick, hardly a region, concept, technology, category of being, or historical movement has been excluded as a possible type of modernism."[74] Such designations seem caught at once in "the afterlife" and the arbitrariness of modernism. As Frederic Jameson argues, "any theory of modernism capacious enough to include Joyce along with Yeats or Proust, let alone alongside Vallejo, Biely, Gide, or Bruno Schulz, is bound to be so vague and vacuous as to be intellectually inconsequential."[75] While often understood as a crisis of temporality (a becoming time of space and vice versa), modernism also names a series of conundrums in the order of tradition and transmissibility: at once the triumph of the new, a way of discussing the now and the contemporary, it also denotes a desire for novelty that emerges as a reaction to the exhaustion of tradition and experience, for which antiquity suddenly seems to paradoxically incarnate the most intense form of infancy and novelty. Modernism instead reflects (and tries

to distance itself from) fin-de-siècle decadence as it becomes cognizant of its own essential belatedness and unsustainable bid for actuality.[76]

The notion of the modern—or *modernus*—refers both to a break with the ancients, and to a "now" of writing.[77] "One is soon forced to resort to paradoxical formulations such as defining the modernity of a literary period as the manner in which it discovers the impossibility of being modern," writes Paul de Man.[78] Modernism, on the other hand, pulls together a host of -isms, as Daniel Albright suggests: Impressionism, Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism, Abstractionism, Primitivism, Imagism, Neoclassicism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Aestheticism, and Corporealism.[79] Derived from modernity, modernism—at once a reaction to and intensification of the modern—raises more objections than its usage has been able to resolve.[80] With various definitions dating back to the Reformation, the French Revolution, or the age of capital and industry, modernity has no reliable birth certificate either. In France, it can refer equally to the break with the ancients during the renaissance (the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* that pit Boileau against Perrault), the political and social upheavals of the 1789 revolution (later consecrated by Benjamin Constant's distinction between the freedom of the ancients and the moderns), or Baudelaire's transcription of modernity as a "transient, fleeting, contingent" impulse split between art and the eternal. The failure of the category to prevail may be one of its most distinctive traits. "The belief in the heroic negativity of the new and the newest," writes Hamacher, "has become so much part of the theoretical and literary–theoretical investigation in modernity that no one who repeats this axiom, no one who says that the foundation of modernity is failure, could ever risk failing."[81] In other words, when it comes to modernism and modernity, failure is the best bet: *qui perd gagne*.

Naturally, there are exceptions to the observation that modernism is an absent term in the French context. Valéry noted that any conventional periodization like "symbolism" may have been largely a retrospective projection.[82] Yet he used the term "modernism" to distinguish the zeitgeist in 1914 from the interwar period:

> Europe in 1914 had perhaps reached the *limit of modernism* in this sense. Every mind of any scope was a crossroads for all shades of opinion; every thinker was an international exposition of thought [. . .]. In a book of that era [. . .] we should have no trouble in finding: the influence of the Russian ballet, a touch of Pascal's gloom, numerous impressions of the Goncourt type, something of Nietzsche, something of Rimbaud, certain effects due to a familiarity with painters, and sometimes the

> tone of a scientific publication [. . .] the whole flavored with an indefinably British quality difficult to assess![83]

Valéry's use of the word modernism responds to its classicist traces, which have become increasingly difficult to preserve from the destructive forces of modernity.[84] Albert Thibaudet, the leading critic of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, too refers to modernism extending its reach to artistic form and criticism:

> Since Baudelaire and the Goncourt Brothers, there has existed in French literature a "modernism" which falls into none of the usual categories of classicism, romanticism, realism, or symbolism but which cuts across them all, combining sometimes the last three [. . .] opposing them at other times. Whatever the artistic form taken by such modernism, it bases such form on the avowed and potential principle that what is modern—the most modern possible and the most different from the traditional—should be sought and esteemed as a most desirable artistic aim, and that this modern, like the traditional which it opposes, is capable of formulating an ensemble, a system, a theoretic order, a complete and fertile formula for art. Thus, it affirms itself not only by its works but by its criticism based on those works.[85]

For Thibaudet writers from Baudelaire onward drew the hatred of professional criticism "because of the fact that they are not only moderns but theorists of modernism." Yet he adds that in 1920 the "passionate interest of such discussions" has past, leaving only minor skirmishes in its wake. What is noteworthy for the present discussion is the way in which "modernism" remains a speculative category that must be perennially reconstructed against more traditional periods and movements in the French context.

Recent studies and monographs speculate that if French modernism existed it was in 1913.[86] Excepting for a moment any reference to the *avant-garde*, who could count as a French modernist seen through the blurred lens of hindsight over a century later? Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Dujardin, Huysmans, Proust, Valéry, Jarry, Apollinaire, Gide, Segalen, Cendrars, Saint-John Perse, Larbaud, Cocteau, Colette, Cahun, Artaud, or Céline come to mind. Yet such a brief roster rings like a false totality to those attuned to the minor schisms of French literary history.[87] "The danger in attempting to open trade lines in both directions," that is, between modernity and modernism, "is, of course, that the institutional force behind modernism as something akin to a literary brand is so great that it risks swallowing the *NRF* as a whole," as

Anna-Louise Milne suggests. The specificity of the aesthetic and political positions and thick contexts of the journal equally suggest the facile nature of simply claiming it as a "modernist review."[88]

Proust, in this sense, is closer to the "classicisme moderne" of the *NRF*, and Valéry a post-Mallarméan symbolist, while Bergson represents the culmination of a Spiritualist and a Vitalist tradition of which he becomes the most famous exponent and critic. Yet one would be hard pressed to deny that Proust is a canonical modernist in the Anglophone world, just as Valéry (studied by critics from Edmund Wilson and T. S. Eliot to Wallace Stevens and Geoffrey Hartman) remains a key figure for modernist poetics.[89] More recently, Todd Cronan sets up Bergson and Valéry as key figures in a dialogue between the visual arts and affective critiques of representation.[90] Similarly, Hannah Freed-Thall brings together the figures in her innovative study of spoiled aesthetic categories from Proust to Ponge and Sarraute under the heading of French modernism, which is "particularly concerned with relations among art, social distinction, and everyday life."[91] It is worth recalling how readily Proust seems to find his place in comparative studies of modernist fiction, set somewhere between James, Woolf, Joyce, Mann, Musil, and Kafka. It is perhaps this critical, ironic tenor of modernism in English that its French cognate seems to lack. E. M. Forster—who does not really qualify as a modernist despite belonging to the Bloomsbury set—interrupts his discussion of the novel in English to declare that "no novelist anywhere has analyzed the modern consciousness as successfully as Marcel Proust."[92] This "success" we later learn, has to do with his "tricks with his clock," the "ravishing of the reader's memory," "flat" and "round characters," but above all the "internal stitching" of the novel which is bound together by its "waxing and waning" rhythms. The way Proust repeatedly fuses fiction and commentary, poetry and prose, focalization and montage make him the exemplary modern writer for Bloomsbury and beyond.

To be sure, the period Anglophone criticism calls "modernism" is deeply impressed by literature in French from Flaubert to Beckett, while the history of post-revolutionary France becomes an allegory of modernity, with its cycles of revolt and repression, and its antinomies of universality and particularity, classicism and romanticism, positivism and cultural imaginaries, rhetoric and terror. Compagnon suggests modernity is riven by five paradoxes: the superstition of the new, the religion of the future, a theoretical mania, the appeal to mass culture, and the passion for renunciation.[93] The *arrière-garde*, he adds, refuses the metaphysics of progress that underlies modernity. Turning from an avant-garde critique of language to philology, from Bergson's suspicion that the mind is oppressed

by language to his conviction that only poetry could express *durée*, the *anti-modernes* incarnate anxiety toward modernity when it becomes institutional.

"French modernism" might be comprised by formal experimentation, new subject matter inspired by modernity, self-referentiality, and resistance to modernization.[94] Yet isn't such "French modernism," like "French theory," an auxiliary invention of translators and critics writing in other languages? The complicity of the two terms is suggested further by the anachronistic predilection of theorists writing in the postwar period for a prewar and interwar literary corpus. The absence of modernism as a heuristic category in French literary criticism, until quite recently, has meant that critics need to bring other contexts to bear on the period stretching from the Commune and the Belle Epoque to World War I, the Front Populaire, and Vichy.[95] The necessity of delimiting a context to read a corpus of writing that is not presided over by a concept like modernism means that criticism of French literature is perennially looking for alternative descriptive categories and periodizations, from the *style classique moderne* prized by Jacques Rivière's *Nouvelle Revue Française* to the *anti-modernes* and *arrière-garde* theorized by Compagnon and William Marx respectively.

Rather than rushing to find correspondences that would make certain writers in French look like modernists the present study leaves this literary space open. Worth tracking instead are the senses in which different thinkers used the word intelligence, and why they kept referring to such a mercurial category, at once overdetermined and underspecified, when other terms promised greater clarity and stability. It is tempting to conclude that the category of "intelligence" may be more pertinent than modernism for understanding the literary and critical experimentations of the period. Yet raising "intelligence" to a category that could rival, if not potentially supplant, modernism in its current classificatory and descriptive capacity is an undertaking beyond the limits of this study.

In a brief essay on Leopardi, Benjamin quotes Sainte-Beuve's distinction between the sword and the mirror, with which this introduction began. Putting a characteristic twist on the original citation, Benjamin recalls both arm and mirror, adding a piece of armor—a cuirass—to the pair:

> In a famous passage, Sainte-Beuve opposes *l'intelligence-miroir* and *l'intelligence-glaive*. This young man lost his sword at times. But he

> stood fast, cased in armor. In this armor, the world is reflected, inverted and golden: *intelligence-cuirasse*.[96]

Noting that the poet tends to drop his sword, or his ability to make cutting distinctions, the critic disarms the poet of his *intelligence-glaive*. Yet, one remains dazzled by the overturned image of the world reflected in his armor—an image that demands to be read. Rather than limiting ideas of intelligence to reflection and invention, as Sainte-Beuve does, Benjamin gilds and inverts them. Neither merely acting nor reflecting, *intelligence-cuirasse* troubles the distinction by adding a defensive aspect to it. Gazing at the poet's armor the fascinated viewer sees an inverted world anew.

This introduction offered a series of interlocking frames for the main argument of my project: literature during the period "disarms" intelligence as a near synonym for a normalizing, logical form of thinking, and explores other versions of intelligence that introduce elements of uncertainty, possibility, and potentiality. In the pages that follow, readers will encounter ways of gathering, measuring, abdicating, testing, mobilizing, and situating intelligence. Chapter 1 studies the gradual emergence and consolidation of the term, subsequently contested by Bergson. Chapter 2 reads Proust's novel and criticism for the ways it both rejects and mobilizes the category. Chapter 3 turns to Valéry to analyze his abandonment of the literary to test its preconditions and pretensions to intelligence. While Proust seems to renounce intelligence, he cannot quite conceive of the literary without its involvement; the opposite holds in Valéry, for even as he tests it, his analytic bent keeps returning to lyrical, counterrealist, and quasi-political forms. Chapters 4 and 5 turn respectively to the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and Benjamin's essays to show how a neutral and political understanding of the French intelligentsia emerged during this period.

At this point, it is worth noting some issues this book does not address at any length. Readers may wonder how the lines of influence from figures like Taine and Bergson, who were in dialogue with considerably different sets of interlocutors, connect to Proust, Valéry, and the *NRF* in terms of empirical influence. Or else how the nineteenth-century novel, which was repeatedly claimed as a genre to rival and outdo other forms of institutionalized kinds of knowledge (science included), related to its twentieth-century iterations within and beyond France. Futhermore, what were the consequences in public discouse, so to speak, of the ways Proust and Valéry took up the discussions of intelligence, beyond those to be found in the reading of their work? As these lines of inquiry imply, intelligence as

a topic, a quality of writing, and potential of literature and criticism raises more questions than any one study can hope to answer.

The fractured paths the present volume takes do not provide a definitive grasp on intelligence, which is less a concept in any fulsome philosophical sense than an enduring contest over the ways in which the fluctuating term is used. The accounts offered below are fractured and winding by design, mirroring the metamorphic quality of intelligence that drifts from psychology into literary–critical fields onward to the posthuman and artificial architectures, discussed briefly in the epilogue. Such a frame, this book wagers, could stand between the sword and the mirror, allowing for a less hostile, exclusive, and specular kind of intelligence.

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