



## Marcel Proust (Critical Lives)

*Adam Watt*

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Marcel Proust (1871–1922) spent fourteen years creating *A la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time), his seven-volume magnum opus. He died when only half was in print, unable to see it become one of the most important literary works of the twentieth century. Over eighty years later, the work still garners extraordinary levels of critical attention, and Proust's habits, health, and sexual preferences keep commentators and fans occupied to this day. In this concise biography, Adam Watt explores the life of a writer whose every experience was stored, dissected and redeployed within a vast fictional work.

Proust's narrator speaks of desire, of love and loss, the contemplation of beauty, memory, ageing and the possibility of happiness, his experiences intensified through a sensibility heightened by long periods of ill health and isolation. After a consideration of Proust's early years of personal and aesthetic experiment, Watt provides an engaging account of two intertwined processes taking place against the vibrant backdrop of the Belle Époque and the coming of the First World War: the growth of *A la recherche* and the coterminous decline of its author. Drawing on Proust's immense correspondence, the accounts of his contemporaries and the insights of recent scholarship, *Marcel Proust* offers a rewarding new portrait of the novelist once described as 'the most complicated man in Paris'.

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