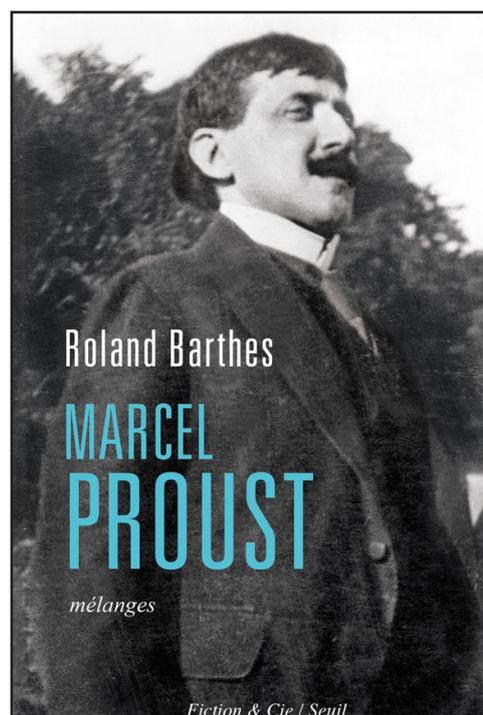
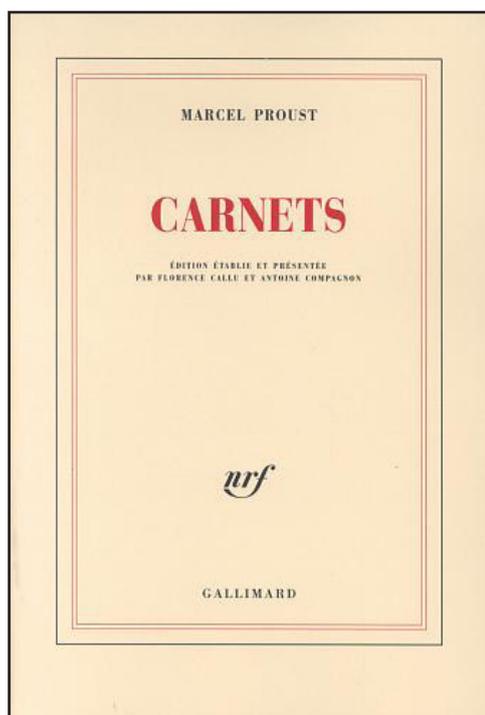
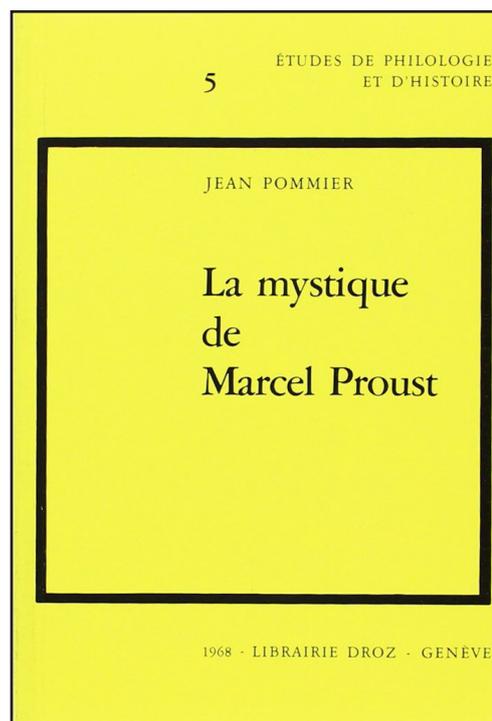
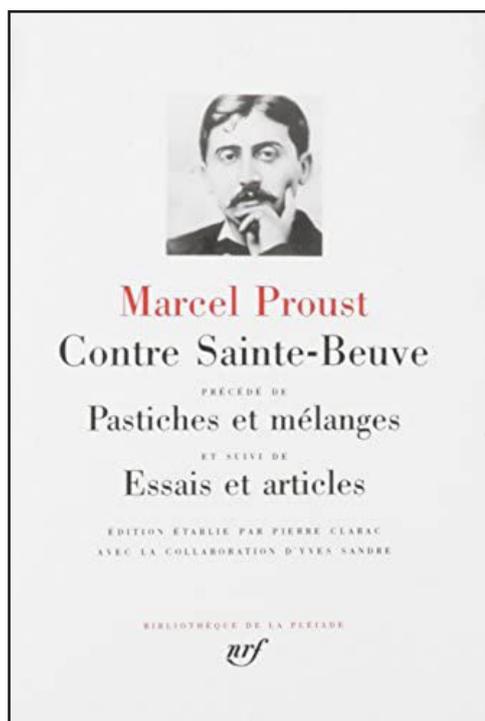
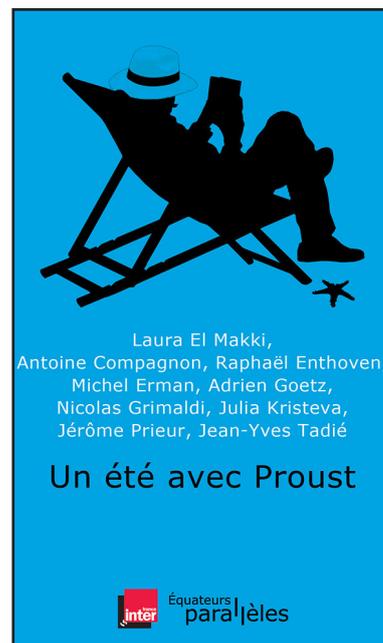
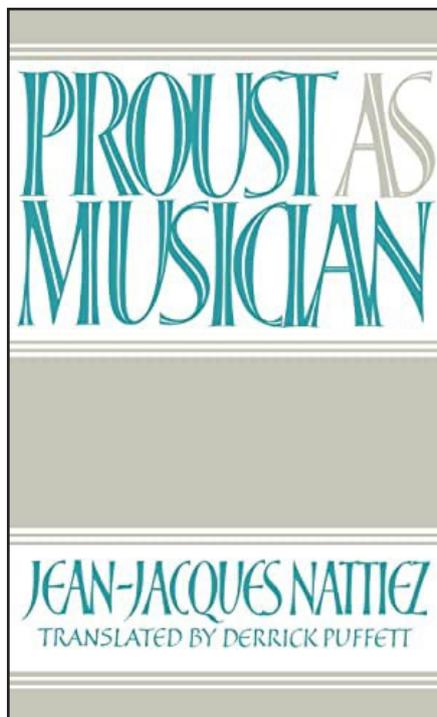
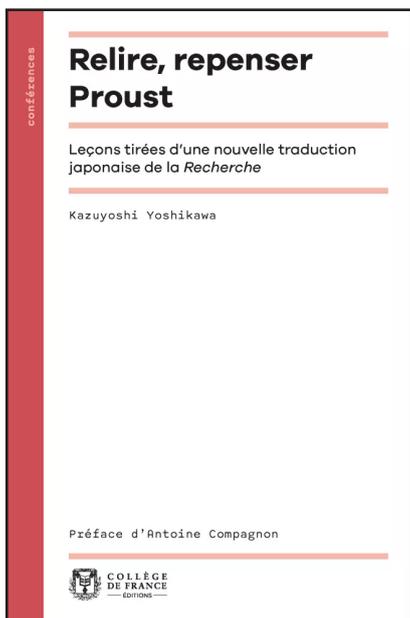
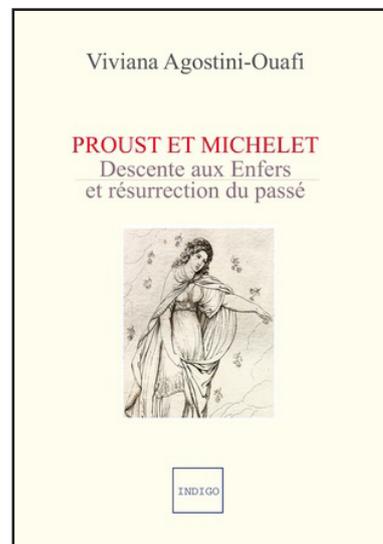
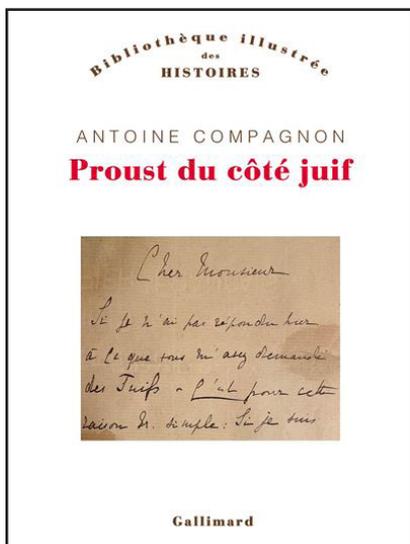
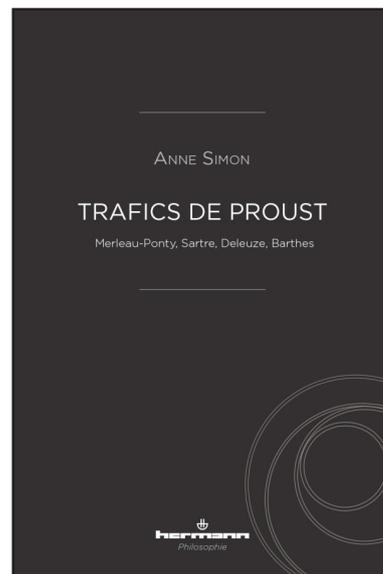
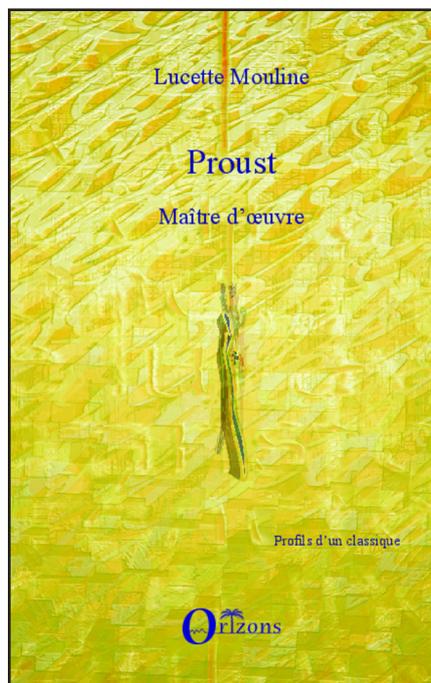
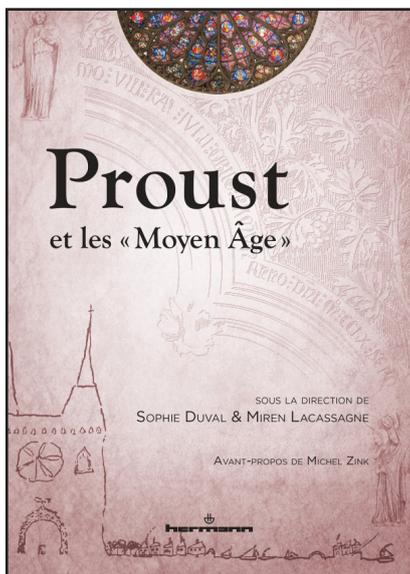
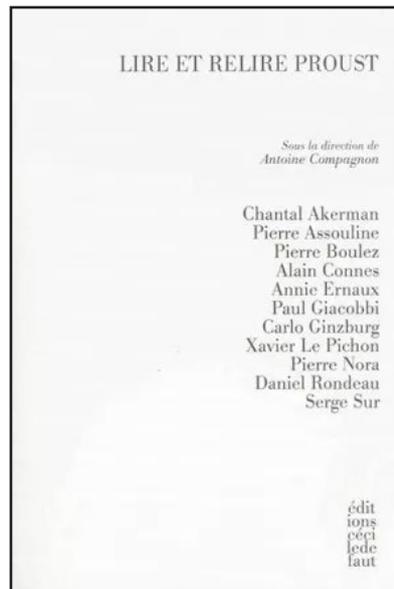
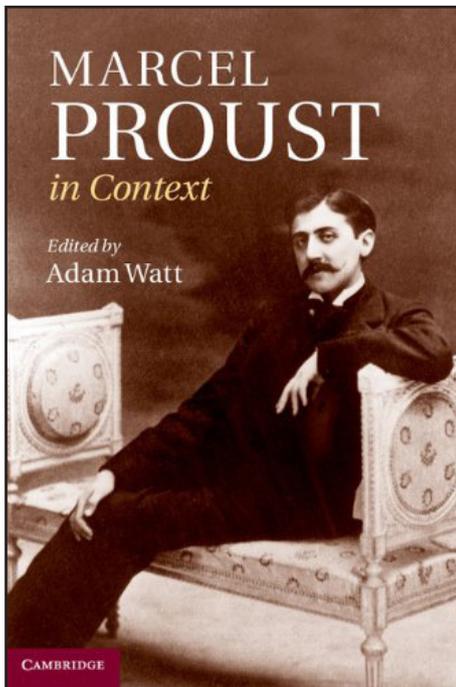


# COLLOQUE PROUST

A L'OCCASION DU COLLOQUE «PROUST ÉCRIVAIN»,  
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'PENSER COMMENCE PEUT-ÊTRE LÀ':  
PROUST AND DERRIDA ON  
ANIMALS, ETHICS, AND MORTALITY

*The Human Animal*

In *A la recherche du temps perdu* animal features are frequently ascribed to humans.<sup>1</sup> Already in the *ouverture*, the narrator compares his state of somnolence to 'le sentiment de l'existence comme il peut frémir au fond d'un animal' (I (1987), 5), and it is this 'simplicité première' (I, 5) of the animal-like state of liminal self-awareness that becomes the receptacle for the experience of involuntary memory. Moreover, hardly any of the other characters in the novel make it to the end of *Le Temps retrouvé* without having been associated with particular animals. The Guermantes family is repeatedly compared to birds,<sup>2</sup> Françoise reminds the narrator of 'une guêpe fousseuse' (I, 122), and when Albertine lives with the narrator, he comments on her annoying habit of entering 'par toutes les portes ouvertes chez moi comme un chien' (IV (1989), 488). In *Le Temps retrouvé* the aged members of the faubourg Saint-Germain remind the narrator of 'balènes' (IV, 521), and he himself is described as an 'étrange humain' who is, when awaking, 'immobile comme un hibou' (III (1988), 372). The limits between human and animal are fluid. A writer is compared to an 'amateur d'ichtologie humaine' (II (1988), 42), and in *Sodome et Gomorhe* the narrator observes that a human can undergo constant transformation into 'un homme, un homme-oiseau, un homme-poisson, un homme-insecte' (III, 8). These zoological comparisons are also often presented as caricatures that emphasize particular character traits and thereby allow the narrator to classify others as part of a larger biological species, such as, for example, when he and his grandmother are introduced to the snobbish Princesse de Luxembourg, who treats them like 'des bêtes sympathiques qui eussent passé la tête vers elle, à travers un grillage, au jardin d'Acclimation' (II, 59).<sup>3</sup> This zoomorphism frequently produces an undeniably comic effect that is often linked to an underlying social commentary,<sup>4</sup> but there is also another undertone to the Proustian human/animal relation.

<sup>1</sup> Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Yves Tadié and others, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89); references to this edition are hereafter integrated into the text.

<sup>2</sup> Bird imagery is also applied to Gilberte, Albertine, and the *petite bande*. See Victor E. Graham, *The Imagery of Proust* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), pp. 115-18.

<sup>3</sup> André Benhaïm's article 'Proust's Singhaiese Song (A Strange Little Story)', in *The Strange M. Proust*, ed. by André Benhaïm (London: Legenda, 2009), pp. 17-20, relates this episode to Mme Blatin's revealing exchanges with a Singhaiese man in the *Jardin d'Acclimation* (II, 125-26) and thereby contributes to a discussion of ethics, alterity, and animal imagery in Proust, without, however, relating this to questions of mortality and physical suffering.

<sup>4</sup> See most recently Pascal Irfi 'Humour et métaphores animales chez Proust', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 4 (2012), 535-42. Irfi explores the comic effect of attributing

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