1. Proust, Inversion and Sexology

In spite of Marcel Proust’s (1871–1922) famous dictum that a ‘work in which there are theories is like an object which still has its price-tag on’,¹ his magnum opus, *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–27), which traces the evolving consciousness of the narrator Marcel and his development into a writer, abounds with theories and has been subjected to numerous analyses of these under the headings of time, identity, memory, class, art, love, politics, psychology and metaphysics. *In Search of Lost Time* is, however, also replete with references to the so-called perversions, most explicitly to male and female homosexuality, as well as to sadism, fetishism and voyeurism. Surprisingly, these themes and motifs have been less well explored. J.E. Rivers, one of the few critics who has analysed Proust’s representations of homosexuality in some detail, writes that there is evidence to suggest that *In Search of Lost Time* ‘began as a nonfiction essay on homosexuality, which
gradually grew into a novel, as Proust saw broader and broader implications in his subject. As both Rivers and Lucille Cairns have convincingly demonstrated, Proust’s representations of homosexuality are clearly influenced by standard medical and psychological theories of his time, including those of Magnan and Charcot, whom Proust mentions explicitly in *The Guermantes Way*, and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’ theory of female souls enclosed in male bodies. Moreover, Proust’s father and brother were physicians. His father studied with Charcot and was a colleague of Ambroise Tardieu and Paul Brouardel, both respected experts on homosexuality at that time. Proust also took a keen interest in a number of homosexual scandals that were discussed at great length in the French press, often with references to the latest sexological theories. The German Eulenburg affair, as a particularly powerful example of a political instrumentalization of homophobic sentiments, is directly echoed in Proust’s depiction of the Baron Charlus’ social fall from grace. There is evidence that Proust was familiar with Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Ellis’ works. In *In Search of Lost Time*, Rivers writes, is thus, ‘among other things, a sort of summa of the sexual theory of Proust’s day, and Proust’s reading in that theory obviously did not stop with Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis’.

It is worthy of note that the narrator’s morbid jealousy, and his suspicion that his lover Albertine might be a lesbian, is first stirred by a remark made by Dr Cottard, the moronic but celebrated medical man who is a member of the Verdurin clan. Dr Cottard comments on the way in which Albertine waltzes with her friend Andrée, observing that their breasts are