

Proust, the Body and Literary Form



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This study examines the connections between Proust's fin-de-siecle 'nervousness' and his apprehensions regarding literary form. Michael Finn shows that Proust's anxieties both about bodily weakness and about novel-writing were fed by a set of intriguing psychological and medical texts, and were mirrored in the nerve-based afflictions of earlier writers including Flaubert, Baudelaire, Nerval and the Goncourt brothers. Finn argues that once Proust cast off his concerns about being a nervous weakling he was freed to poke fun both at the supposed purity of the novel form. Hysteria - as a figure and as a theme - becomes a key to the Proustian narrative, and a certain kind of wordless, bodily copying of gesture and event is revealed to be at the heart of a writing technique which undermines many of the conventions of fiction.

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