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From *Belle Epoque* to First World War

the first excitement is over, it must be a real headache' (II, 211/250)], as well as the luxury it affords of being able to place an order for delivery without going out. In *Le Côté de Guermantes*, there is a reference to the Narrator's parents having had a private telephone at home for a short while (II, 422; III, 136/160). Without the telephone at home, to which one subscribed, and of course electricity, Proust would not have been able to have a 'théâtrophone' enabling him to hear live performances of works such as Chabrier's *Gwendoline*, or Wagner's *Meistersinger* from the Paris Opera, or Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, libretto by Maeterlinck, from the Opéra-Comique (Corr. XI, 294; Corr. X, 250). A théâtrophone network, operated by the 'Compagnie du théâtrophone' with its main exchange in the rue Louis-le-Grand, analogous to the telephone network, connected some Paris theatres, in particular the Opéra, Opéra-Comique and Le Théâtre Français, with individual subscribers' homes. Powerful microphones and horn-shaped loudspeakers placed on the stage transmitted the performance via telephone lines. In London a similar device called an electrophone was used to transmit theatre performances to subscribers, but the service was not successful and was short-lived.¹³

Tensions and upheavals

The *salons* were, to some extent, a microcosm of the tensions in French society at the time. In particular, the Dreyfus affair which had repercussions throughout France, and beyond, created conflict within the small social groups of the *salons*, thus reflecting the national situation.

The reverberations of the Dreyfus affair continued after Dreyfus's acquittal, as Proust himself observes: 'l'affaire Dreyfus était pourtant terminée depuis longtemps, mais vingt ans après on en parlait encore' (III, 548) ['The Dreyfus case was long since over, but twenty years later people would still talk about it' (v, 36/42)]. Proust underestimated its impact, for Eric Cahm has demonstrated in the epilogue to his study of the Affair that it is still a sensitive topic today:¹⁴ Winock also maintains that 'the Affair has produced a phenomenon of remanence lasting to our own time'.¹⁵

The Dreyfus affair is extremely complex: secrecy, suspicions, hatred, prejudice and some unexplained deaths helped to conceal the truth. In brief, an army officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a wealthy Jew, originally from Mulhouse, in Alsace, was wrongly accused of releasing secret information concerned with national defence to the German military attaché in Paris in the form of a written document known as the *bordereau*. He was arrested in 1894 as a spy, and sentenced by court martial to be deported to the remote Devil's Island (L'Île du Diable), off the coast of French Guyana, in South