

Martin Robertson

Time's Reach

Who so firmly set in time and place
as the Empress Eugénie?
High nineteenth-century
Paris. Rich, squalid, whirling Paris:
Winterhalter, Gounod, Offenbach, Guys,
Viollet-le-Duc, Dumas fils,
red velvet drapes, glittering chandeliers
(and dark past draped glass, *Les Misérables*).

Then, 1870.

Sedan, Paris besieged, France lost,
exile, chilled in English Chislehurst,
widowhood, soon to mourn
her killed, her only, son,
fighting a foreigners' war in a far country.
Darkness.

But Time has tricks.

The old lady

who in this century
took her cliff-top walk at Cap Martin
with a clever little boy, Kenneth Clark,
how many lifetimes earlier,
a fourteen-year-old countess from proud Spain,
exchanged letters, friendship, with the aging author
of *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *La Chartreuse de Parme*.