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## The Novel Map

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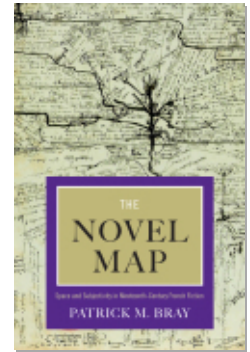
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## CHAPTER FOUR

### Unfolding Nerval

The *Voyage en Orient* reveals that the presence of the subject is constantly shifting, avoiding any definitive reading, escaping the fatalism of narrative. If the subject can be compared to any character and substituted in any text, if there are no limits either to metaphor or to the metamorphosis of language, then the subject loses all coherence and becomes a floating signifier. The power of this universal subject is that it is adaptable to any context, and it can write and erase its own context. Gérard literally writes himself as Oriental during the Druse wedding, and just as soon writes himself out of the text, when he exchanges his role with Soliman and Adoniram. The price of universality is the dissolution of the self. The ruse of literature is to combine the powers of the universal with the essence of the particular, to become *causa sui*. Nerval's mystical and poetic dilemmas converge and, as a result, force the writing both to explore the nature of the subject and to usurp the mystery of the divine. Nerval's final works offer compelling, if not always complementary, techniques to fix the subject in space, to draw a map around the textual subject, and at the same time they attempt to alter the boundaries of language and identity.

The aim of this chapter is to trace the development of subjectivity through three texts by Nerval (the "Généalogie fantastique," *Sylvie*, and *Aurélia*). Gérard de Nerval attempted to redefine the boundaries of his own subjectivity through a remapping and enveloping of both internal and external space. Through a crossed reading of Nerval's little known "Généalogie" and one of his most illustrious works, *Sylvie*, the liberating possibilities as well as the eventual dangers (at least to the sanity of the author) of a spatial conceptualization of the subject are revealed. The juxtaposition of the "Généalogie" and *Sylvie* uncovers the centrality of the fold to Nerval's spatial and textual imagination. In these two texts, he abandons the logical, modernist Cartesian grid in favor of the ambiguous curved fold, as the distinction between inside and outside disappears in

the pleats of his convoluted narrative. Nerval's folds manipulate space itself to envelop the subject in the world.

The fold, according to Gilles Deleuze in *Le Pli*, is the philosophical and aesthetic figure that structures the work of Leibniz and the baroque. Deleuze's reading of the baroque proposes that "le propre du Baroque est non pas de tomber dans l'illusion ni d'en sortir, c'est de *réaliser* quelque chose dans l'illusion même, ou de lui communiquer une *présence* spirituelle qui redonne à ses pièces et morceaux une unité collective" (170) ("what is unique to the Baroque is not falling into the illusion nor leaving it, but rather to *achieve* something within the illusion itself, or to give to it a spiritual *presence* which would return a collective unity to its pieces and bits").

In this sense, we could call the folds of Nerval's texts baroque; the "Généalogie" and *Sylvie* realize through folds in the text the illusion of the unity of the subject, a unity based on the inextricability of folds in matter to the folds of the perceiving or hallucinating subject. Inside and outside, memory and reality are confused and hallucinated in the fold, which is the site of a perpetually shifting subject. Nerval's quixotic quest is to unify his visions, create his illusions at will, to make the world conform to his desire. Space folded in on itself pulls the subject out of time, thereby sparing the subject from change. The folded narrative subject replicates the world in its own image. *Aurélia*, by contrast to *Sylvie*, narrates the struggle to overcome the solipsistic structuring of the fold. Space is opened outward, and as a result, the subject embraces time and alterity.

### The Fantastic Genealogy

The document commonly referred to as Nerval's "Généalogie fantastique"<sup>1</sup> condenses a wide variety of spatial and thematic concerns onto one manuscript page (figure 2.1). Probably composed at the end of March 1841 during his first internment in the clinic of Dr. Esprit Blanche (Richer, *Nerval: Expérience vécue & Création ésotérique*, 47), the "Généalogie" predates the voyage to the Orient and previews the obsessions of *Les Filles du feu* (1854) and *Aurélia* (1855). According to Richer, the first version of *Aurélia* (also from 1841) presents remarkable similarities to the "Généalogie," which suggests that 1841 may indeed be the defining moment in Nerval's imagination (Richer, 51). Richer and Richard (*Microlectures*) have done considerable work to situate the "Généalogie" within Nerval's opus and to interpret the development of the inner logic of the

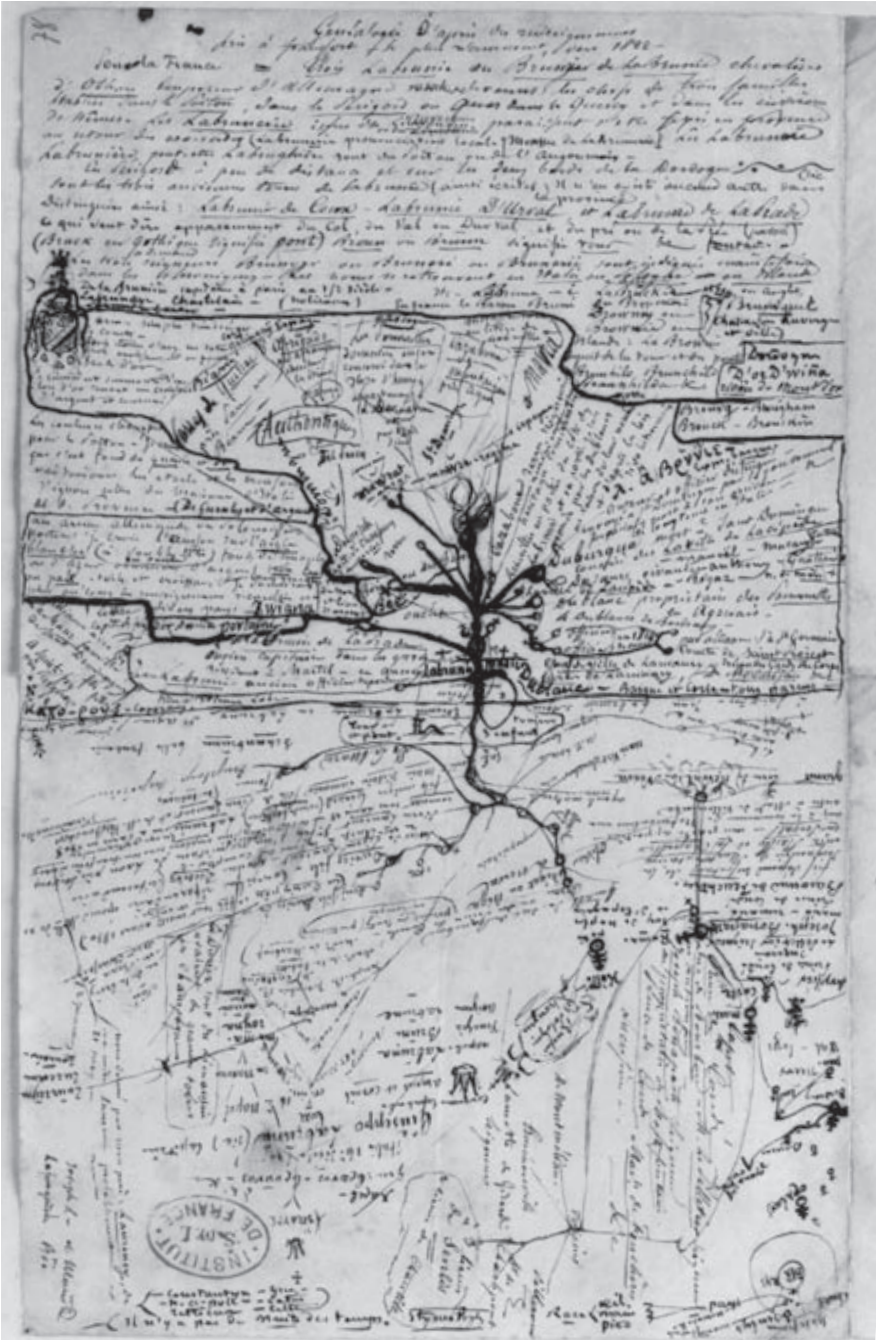


Figure 2.1. Nerval's Fantastic Genealogy. Courtesy of Institut de France, in the Collection Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, D 741, folio 78.

manuscript. However, the form of the “Généalogie,” its quality as image, has literally been overlooked, as the function of the visible is key to the interpretation of this labyrinthine text.

The manuscript page is divided into three uneven regions of Nerval’s self: his father’s family (Labrunie), his mother’s family (Laurent), and his literary pseudonym (Nerval). As many critics have remarked, Nerval is the anagram of his mother’s maiden name (LAVREN), a partial anagram of his father’s name (LAbRVNiE), and the name of his uncle’s property, the *clos de Nerval*. Nerval claims that the property near Senlis was an ancient Roman camp and he traces the name back to the twelfth Roman emperor, Nerva. The literary and textual name Nerval links the two families and situates them in space and epic time. The “Généalogie” sets out to create the matrix from which Gérard Labrunie de Nerval emerges. The goal of the drawing and the lineage is to make sense (both as meaning and as direction) of the disparate origins of the self.

The “Généalogie” is divided exactly in half, as if folded in the center. The top half begins, with Nerval’s characteristically precise and orderly writing, with a description of his paternal origins. The bottom half, devoted mainly to the maternal side, marks a distinct change, since the writing is the reverse of the top half, the page rotated 180°. Connecting the two halves is a peculiar mass of lines vaguely resembling a tree trunk. The “trunk” of a traditional family tree is here inverted with its roots pointed upward, which suggests that it is not a tree at all. This plant is composed only of roots that branch out from what appears at first to be a center. A closer examination reveals lines in every direction, which stem from multiple centers. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “rhizome” is a particularly tempting explanation for the “Généalogie fantastique,” as they define a rhizome as an “anti-genealogy” (*Mille plateaux*, 32). They affirm the possibilities of “rhizomatic systems” (decentered, without origin, spreading out horizontally like grass) over “arborescent systems” (vertical, hierarchical, centered on meaning and truth). Connections are made, in the “Généalogie,” to apparently unrelated names and places that bridge great spatial and temporal distances and create new meaning. The “Généalogie” is not, however, a purely rhizomatic system; the borders of the page mark an outer limit and the main root, or trunk, draws the corners toward the center, the location of Gérard Labrunie. The “Généalogie” could be described as a hybrid between the arborescent and the rhizomatic.<sup>2</sup>

These two systems, each with their own functions, find their expression in the “Généalogie,” not only through the ambiguous plant, but also in an inscription and rebus at the center of the text, drawn over the plant:

“Tour—et pont [a drawing of a tower and a bridge] toujours 3 enfants” (“Tower—and bridge always 3 children”). The meaning of the inscription is explained in the top (paternal) half, of the text, where Nerval claims that three Labrunie brothers, knights of the emperor Othon, founded three families in Poitou, Périgord, and Quercy. Nerval’s branch would be from Périgord, where there are three “anciennes tours de Labrunie” (“ancient towers of Labrunie”) (in his poem “El Desdichado,” he is “le Prince d’Acquitaine à la Tour abolie”). He then gives an etymology which links his name to the tower and to the bridge: “(Bruck en gothique-allemand signifie pont) Brown ou Brunn signifie tour . . . La Brownie, esprit de la tour et des ponts” (“(Bruck in Gothic German signifies bridge) Brown or Brunn signifies tower . . . La Brownie, spirit of the tower and bridges”). The geographical and etymological musings of the name Labrunie unite two very different symbols, the tower and the bridge. Towers connote elevation, hierarchy, surveillance, and stability, having the same symbolic function as trees. Bridges are already double, connecting two or more places; they, by definition, imply movement and change (and therefore could be considered “rhizomatic”). In the *Voyage en Orient* we have seen the fascination with the dangerous heights of Mont Blanc and with the liminal space of the Hellespont, in Constantinople. Michel de Certeau proposes that narrative delimits the borders of places as a practice of space. He conceives of frontiers and bridges as the two contradictory mechanisms of narrative: “Les récits sont animés par une contradiction qu’y figure le rapport entre la frontière et le pont, c’est-à-dire entre un espace (légitime) et son extériorité (étrangère)” (*L’invention du quotidien 1: Arts de faire*, 185) (“Narratives are animated by a contradiction which the relationship between border and bridge figures, namely between a (legitimate) space and its (foreign) exteriority”). Nerval’s genealogy similarly transgresses the frontiers it draws and invokes the other that lies in the self. A reading of the “Généalogie” through the lens of the metaphors of the Tower/tree and Bridge/rhizome will frame the tensions of control and metamorphosis.

The most salient aspect of the “rhizomatic” is the etymological frenzy of the text. On the bottom of the maternal half of the manuscript, the word “étymologies” is boxed and set apart, as if an invocation of the transformative powers of language. As any reader of Proust knows, etymology and toponymy are very imaginative “sciences,” which seek to find the origins of a lexical unit, and connections are invented when needed. A combination of fanciful etymology and creative genealogy subverts “arborescent” linguistic structures and paternalistic lineages. Instead of finding one origin, the text’s etymologies spread out over all human-



ity, encompassing families from France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Africa, America, ancient Rome, and elsewhere. Two branches from his father's side, Labrunie (brown or burnt) and Dublanc can encompass the entire page, uniting the white space of the blank page with the dark blots of ink. The most bewildering etymologies are Nerval's Greek inventions. Besides transforming Orléans (a virtual homonym with his mother's Laurent) into the "Greek" Ὀρλέανς, he suggests another Greek root for Labrunie: Λαμβ-βρωνος-βρούνος (Lamb-Bronos-Brounos). Richer gives the translation as "qui saisit le tonnerre" ("he who seizes the thunder"), linking Labrunie to the heroic race of Prometheus (Richer, 49), and by extension, the heroes of the Oriental myths of the *Voyage* and *Aurélia*.

Nerval's etymologies steal the fire from the "Name of the father," displace origins, and produce subversive connections. In the bottom half, the words "Bourgogne 16e—Origine Dordogne—Joseph B[onaparte]—Joséphine B[onaparte]" form two triangles around the word/name Montaigne. The rebus that results is a visible figure and a readable allusion to Montaigne. Nerval seems to link himself to Montaigne, the original introspective writer of the Renaissance who was also famous for his tower in Aquitaine. If the connection between Mountain/Montaigne/Tower were not obvious enough, Nerval draws a line from the "a" of Montaigne to the edge of the page where he writes "Toūrrēyne, Turenne, Touraine." Once again, Nerval combines different symbols (here tower and queen) to produce the name of a famous "ancestor" and a place of origin (Richard, 16). The metamorphosis of "Tour" undermines the semiotic stability of the mountain. He plays with his (literary and spiritual) fathers' names, creating chance relationships, substituting an official lineage with a spiritual affiliation. Writing and drawing take the place of the father's name and question the authority of order. On the maternal side of the text, there is less of a need for etymology, as any association will suffice to tie a name and person to Nerval. Near the toponym "Senlys" (Senlis), the town where his mother was born, Nerval places the word "voisins" ("neighbors") out from which stem the names of all the lords who owned property in the region. The names and the myths that nourished Nerval's childhood are just as influential in his vision of identity as any genetic link.

Folded space provides a surrogate order for the domination of the father, as it performs the same control over lineage and identity as language. The two folds of the page channel the excess of etymology and link the bridges. The borders of the manuscript page prevent a run-off of the text; an incredible amount of information is condensed, like in a dream, into a small paginal area. Consequently, no space is left blank; everything has

its place. Dividing branches of the family into distinct segments are very thick lines, especially on the paternal half, that find their way back to the main “trunk.”

The metaphorical “tours” have corresponding visual markers that anchor the names to places: a Count’s coat of arms, the points of a Lombard crown, a map of the Dordogne river valley and its three towers, and numerous crosses indicate geographical locations. Next to the toponym “Terre de Nerval ou Nerva” is the word “granit,” which provides a solid foundation. Under the “Terre de Nerval” is a thick horizontal line out of which grow vertical lines that lead to the city Roma. These lines literalize the etymology of granite (“grain”) and sprout another genealogical plant that links Nerval (or the emperor Nerva) to Rome.

The map in the lower right-hand corner offers a totalizing view that grafts genealogy onto geography. The top of the map is labeled “Isle de France” under which is a small circle—Barrys (Paris)—inside a larger circle, Senlys (home of the Valois dynasty and Nerval’s maternal family). The circles render Paris an island, separating Nerval’s native city from the rest of the world. South of Barrys/Paris are Ὀρλέανς, Mont d’Or, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Marseille, Roma, and Corte. The cities are connected by a line to emphasize the absolute relationship between them: Nerval’s ascendance. The correspondence between family, body, and place is revealed by a diagram placed next to the map of the “Isle de France”:<sup>3</sup>

oeil  
Race < main >—pays  
pied

The physical self is caught between the determining factors of race (used by Nerval as synonymous with family or clan) and country, genealogy, and space. The body itself is divided into three symbolic parts and functions: the eye, the hand, and the foot. In the “Généalogie” the diagram brackets the subject between two hierarchical concepts (race and country) and, by extension, the city space of Paris (Race–Pays: Parys/Paris). The subject of the “Généalogie” is contained within and disciplined by the lines of space and race that it drew for its own expansion.

The necessary focal point of the “Généalogie” reveals and obscures the controlling mechanisms of the text: the fusion of the two halves into Gérard Labrunie de Nerval. On the maternal half of the main trunk stems a branch linked to Étienne Labrunie (Nerval’s father) where, in relatively small letters, is written “fils unique Gérard (nom de baptême) Labrunie (nom patronymique) né à Paris en 1808” (“only son Gérard (Christian name) Labrunie (family name) born in Paris 1808”). If one were not aware of the author of the “Généalogie,” the inscription of Gérard’s name



would not be readily apparent. And yet, it appears at exactly halfway between the two ends of the genealogical plant, providing the keystone that supports the entire structure of the text. The extraordinary wanderings across time and space are supplanted by the simple facts of place and date of birth. All other events in the genealogy are subsumed under the relatively modest assertion of Nerval's official identity. However fantastic the rest of the genealogy might be, Gérard's own place in the text is absolutely serious; he avoids his pseudonym and clearly affirms the fact that he is his father's son. Underneath Gérard Labrunie's "birth" is written "Et[ienne] L[abrunie] marié à Marie Victoire Laurence fille de Pierre Laurent et de M. Vict[oire] Boucher d'Ermenonville" ("Et[ienne] L[abrunie] married to Marie Victoire Laurence daughter of Pierre Laurent and of M. Vict[oire] Boucher of Ermenonville"). Nerval's mother appears only in this line (the father's name is written numerous times), but erroneously; her actual name was Marie Antoinette Laurent, and was often called Laurence. The text repeats the grandmother's name twice (Marie Victoire), and feminizes the grandfather's name, in order to inscribe a sort of matriarchy into the genealogy. Moreover, the mother's actual name is absent, escaping the direct representation of language (which is reminiscent of Stendhal's inability to describe his mother). Curiously, this is the only line of the "Généalogie" that Richer does not transcribe, as if he were obeying the text's own erasure of the mother.

Time itself is arrested by the inscription of Gérard Labrunie. His birth date, 1808, is one of only three exact dates (one being the date of the genealogical "research" mentioned in the text's heading). Throughout the "Généalogie" time is spatialized by placing a very vague chronological order to the spatial lists of family members; yet everywhere unexpected juxtapositions of names emerge from vastly different places and epochs. Indeed, the fantastic etymologies work to question the idea of chronological progression, temporal cause and effect. The manuscript's towers watch over time, seeing into the past and fusing it with the present. "Tour," in the masculine, is also "turn" or "return," as in the expression "tour à tour"; the eternal return of genealogy, etymology, and space guarantee the continuation of the subject. At the bottom of the page, near the word "étymologies" and the diagram linking "race" to "pays," is the phrase "Il n'y a pas de Nuits des temps" ("There are no mists of time," the French expression is literally the "nights" of "times"). This ambiguous affirmation may suggest that nothing is lost in time, that through the proper lens (memory, etymology, or geography) the past can be observed and spatialized. The inscription of time onto the page, the end of time's progression, represents the ultimate control over the subject's identity. All

possible links with the past and future coexist with the subject in the text; the subject is all being and no becoming.

The “Généalogie fantastique” is the totalizing representation of Gérard de Nerval’s identity. The carnivalesque overturning of the traditional genealogical family tree upsets paternal hierarchy; and yet, other structures of perception and control are left in place to inscribe and delimit the subject. Instead of sketching a purely arborescent structure that constructs truth based on value and order, Nerval draws a rhizomatic plant that stretches across time and space to subsume everything under the momentous birth of Gérard Labrunie.

The space of the manuscript page reinforces both the control of the subject and the control over the subject. The borders of the page limit the expanse of writing, the extent of metaphor. The two folds of the text (the horizontal fold separating the paternal from the maternal, and the vertical fold formed by the genealogical “plant”) divide space and time into quadrants (Nerval’s “quartiers de noblesse”). The page is in effect folded in on itself, pulling the disparate elements together into the location of Gérard’s birth. The etymological derivations serve as an incantation that invokes all of Nerval’s virtual selves in order to trap them in the folds of the “Généalogie.” The world is re-created in Nerval’s image, the subject is mesmerized by its own reflection.

### The Dénouement Escapes You

Nerval’s 1853 novella, *Sylvie, souvenirs du Valois* (later included in the collection *Les Filles du feu*), expresses and extends the tensions of the “Généalogie fantastique” in narrative form. The textual subject, which in the “Généalogie” was able to anchor all possibility, is no longer able to be its own foundation, nor that of the objective world. A persistent fear of solipsism in *Sylvie* drives the narrator to search for a foundational referent. The fold, as had been the case for the “Généalogie,” structures the text, channels and focuses all experience on the subject. The subject in *Sylvie* depends both thematically on the isolation of the Valois region (the subtitle is *souvenirs du Valois*) and structurally on the mirroring of the chapters.

Caught in a hallucinatory world of his own creation, the Nervalian subject struggles to regain control of his illusions. As he becomes progressively lost in a (post)modern labyrinth, devoid of inside and outside, he must, as Nerval says in his introduction to *Les Filles du feu*, “saisi[r] le fil d’Ariane, et dès lors toutes mes visions sont devenues célestes” (*Oeuvres*

I, 158) (“seize Ariadne’s thread, and from then on all my visions will become heavenly”) The seamstress Sylvie plays the role of Ariadne for Nerval’s Theseus; by way of her narrative thread, she leads the narrator out of his psychic labyrinth and exchanges the preeminence of space and simulacrum for that of time and difference.

*Sylvie* is the story of salvation through narrative, yet the exact genre of the text is indeterminable. In a letter to Maurice Sand asking him to illustrate the work (November 6, 1853), Nerval describes the text as “un petit roman qui n’est pas tout à fait un conte” (“a little novel which is not quite a fairy tale”) in which he tried to set down on paper his memories of the Valois region (Kofman, 11). *Sylvie* is thus somewhere between a first-person novel, an autobiography, and a fairy tale. The places and events reflect vaguely the life of the author, but the form and style evoke the mystical setting and timeless nature of a fairy tale. The play of genre will have repercussions on the formation of the subject, as the narrator exploits the tensions between the repetition and illusion of the tale and the progress and realism of linear narrative.

In *Sylvie* the power of the subject to surpass its temporal and spatial limitations (offered by intertextuality in the *Voyage* and by etymology in the “Généalogie”) is everywhere put into question. The confusion of perception and memory, of author and narrator, instead of allowing the textual subject to rewrite the world in its image, undermines the faith in the subject’s ability to organize and control its relationship with the outside. Christopher Prendergast has argued that mimesis in *Sylvie* is internalized, and that each part of the story, linked to other parts of the story, prevents any representation of a world outside the text (*The Order of Mimesis*). Consequently, there prevails an absence of a stable referent to fix the subject and object: “The psychological and affective drama of *Sylvie* is also an epistemological drama; it operates what we might call an ‘epistemological suspension,’ whereby both the knowing subject and the object of knowledge remain irreducibly uncertain entities” (Prendergast, 150). The textual subject, which in the “Généalogie” was able to anchor all possibility, is no longer able to be its own foundation, nor that of the objective world.

A persistent fear of solipsism in *Sylvie* drives the narrator to search for a foundational referent. Space, as had been the case for the “Généalogie,” structures the text, mapping and focusing experience on the subject. The ordering of space substitutes for the dissolution of the subject and the uncertainty of perception, simulating unity and stability and abating the changes wrought by time. The subject in *Sylvie* depends both thematically on the isolation of the Valois region (the subtitle is *souvenirs du Valois*) and structurally on the mirroring of the chapters.

Most critics and readers have taken the novel for a nostalgic and enchanting tale of the French countryside. This interpretation is encouraged in Nerval's letter to Maurice Sand: "C'est une sorte d'idylle . . . J'ai voulu illustrer aussi mon Valois" (cited in Kofman, 11) ("It's a sort of idyll . . . I wanted to illustrate as well my Valois"). The use of the Valois is not, however, as innocent as it appears. The evocative and memorable Valois landscape provides the propulsion that drives the narrative and defines the narrator. The first half of the text tells the tale of a cultivated Parisian who begins to fall in love after a long obsession with an actress named Aurélie. While musing about the actress, he reads in a newspaper that he has become rich again in the stock market, perhaps allowing him to obtain his love. In his words "je touchais du doigt mon idéal. N'était-ce pas une illusion encore, une faute d'impression railleuse?" (*Oeuvres I*, 244) ("I had my ideal in my grasp. Was it not still an illusion, a mocking typographical error?"). It soon becomes clear that her material reality does not interest him. In the same newspaper, he notices an announcement for a village fete in the Valois region, which recalls tender childhood memories. Half dreaming, his entire youth unfolds before him. He remembers his love for a mysterious noble girl named Adrienne who became a nun, and the jealousy of his other love, Sylvie. The love for the actress Aurélie is suddenly explained by her uncanny resemblance to the nun Adrienne, but this is deeply troubling for the narrator: "Aimer une religieuse sous la forme d'une actrice! et si c'était la même!—Il y a de quoi devenir fou!" (*Oeuvres I*, 247) ("To love a nun in the form of an actress! And if it were the same woman!—It's enough to become crazy!"). He decides to go to the village fete in the hope that Sylvie can save him from the "dangerous passion" (dangerous, presumably, since it could lead to madness), and in the hope that he can take a foothold in reality ("Reprenons pied sur le réel," 247). In the carriage ride to the countryside in the middle of the night, he "recomposes the memories" from the time he used to frequent the Valois. Other memories ensue, leading the narrator further into a dream-state.

The purpose of the voyage is to find the solution to an unsettling enigma: whether Aurélie is the same woman as Adrienne. The answer is to be found within the narrator's memory, triggered by his presence in the Valois and his discussions with Sylvie. Space does not offer more objective evidence for the identity of the two women, but instead plunges the narrator deeper into his own self-centered memories.<sup>4</sup> The exclusively subjective character of the Valois is made possible by its unique geographical location: as Nerval writes in other texts such as *Promenades et souvenirs* and *Les Nuits d'octobre*, the Valois is relatively close to Paris, and yet there is no easy transportation to the region (to this day, the mod-

ern traveler has to take a bus from Chantilly). Cut off from the modern world, Nerval and his narrator imagine that the Valois is hermeneutically sealed off from time. In *Sylvie*, the voyage to Senlis at night from Paris allows for the narrator to write, “to recompose,” the text through memory, creating a virtual Valois and the illusion of a stable subject.

The spatial isolation of the subject is reproduced by the structure of the text. The chapters do not follow a strictly chronological order, but, rather, correspond transversally with each other. The fourteen chapters of *Sylvie* reflect upon each other like a mirror, with a complex double symmetry. Chapters from the beginning and the end echo each other in concentric circles and share parallel themes. An episode of representation, reenactment, or remembering occurs in each chapter of the first half, which effectively brings to life a memory or an ancient tradition (similar to the revival of the narrator’s desire). The second half of the text marks the narrator’s disillusion as he chases after the ideals sprung from the memories or dreams of the first half, each one proving to be a “chimera.” The narrator will literally try to reinscribe himself into the past in order to recreate and restage the visions of his memory (as evoked in the first half) into text. If he can prove that Aurélie and Adrienne are the same person, and if he can win Sylvie’s love, time will be stopped, the “I” of the past will be identical to the “I” of the present. Léon Cellier has meticulously catalogued the correspondences (episodes, themes, and recurring objects) of the chapters in order to propose a diagram of the overall structure (Cellier, 28):

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc} & & i & ii & iii & / & iv & v & vi & vii & / & xii & xiii & xiv \\ & & & & & & & & & & & / & viii & ix & x & xi & / \\ a & & & & & & & & & & & & & & & & & a \end{array}$$

According to Cellier, the first three chapters are repeated in the last three, but inversely (“123 . . . 321”), indicating a closed structure, as opposed to the open structure of *Aurélia* (35). The central eight chapters also replicate each other, creating a separate configuration. These eight chapters, in fact, are where the memories of the Valois are most concentrated. Like the two axes of the “Généalogie fantastique” formed by the horizontal fold in the page and the vertical fold of the genealogical plant, the arrangement of the chapters creates a space in which the enveloped Valois is coextensive with the narrating subject.

The pivotal moment of the novella lies in the seventh chapter (the final chapter of the first half), “Châalis,” which reproduces in miniature the mechanisms of the fold found in the rest of the work. Within the nar-

rative, it marks the transition between the memories and dreams of the Valois, and the harsh present reality experienced in the second half. At the center of the text, the chapter folds space inward, such that the narrator/subject is imprisoned within the Valois. The first sentence of the chapter literalizes the enveloping of the narrator as he approaches the region: “Il est quatre heures du matin; la route plonge dans un pli de terrain; elle remonte. . . . Nous nous arrêtons à la maison du garde, à l’ancienne abbaye de Châalis.—Châalis, encore un souvenir!” (256) (“It is four o’clock in the morning; the road dips in a fold in the terrain; it climbs back up. . . . We stop at the guardhouse, at the former Abbey of Châalis.—Châalis, another memory!”). The fold in the terrain announces the complete enfolding of space, in which the Valois and the narrator are enclosed. The transition from the present to memory or dream is revealed in the repetition of the Abbey of Châalis, the first instance being the real, the second the memory/dream. There is a further repetition within the word itself, the very unusual double “a” that smoothes over differences. The fold creases space into two seemingly identical halves. Châalis evokes the English word “chalice” and the French “calice,” simultaneously reinforcing the function of containment (the chalice as cup) and the sacred space of the Valois (the “chalice abbey”).

The space of Châalis produces the most dense and hallucinatory experience of *Sylvie*, as the narrator’s desires are confirmed by his memory or dream. The narrator, along with Sylvie’s brother (another double), observes a private party that happened some point in the past. The uncanny quality of the event is induced by the mix of the abbey’s architectural styles (Byzantine, Gothic, Italian Renaissance) and the sense that the two (modern) observers are intruders (257). An allegorical play is performed by the young girls of the neighboring convent. Adrienne, the narrator’s first love whom he suspects later to be the actress Aurélie, plays the role of a holy spirit who incites angels to admire Christ. The scene, as the narrator remembers it, realizes his desire to fuse the spiritual nun with the heartless actress. The vision is so perfect that the narrator wants to doubt that it ever happened: “En me retraçant ces détails, j’en suis à me demander s’ils sont réels, ou bien si je les ai rêvés” (257) (“Retracing these details, I wonder if they are real or indeed if I have dreamed them”); “Mais l’apparition d’Adrienne est-elle aussi vraie que ces détails et que l’existence incontestable de l’abbaye de Châalis?” (257–58) (“But was Adrienne’s apparition as true as these details and as the incontestable existence of the Abbey of Châalis?”). The realism and vividness of memory’s details correspond to the accuracy of perception, either substantiating the memory/dream or questioning the sanity of the narrator.



In the last sentence, another fold in the terrain brings him out of his illusions into reality: “Ce souvenir est une obsession peut-être!—Heureusement voici la voiture qui s’arrête sur la route du Plessis; j’échappe au monde des rêveries, et je n’ai plus qu’un quart d’heure de marche pour gagner Loisy par des routes bien peu frayées” (258) (“This memory is an obsession perhaps!—Luckily here the carriage came to a stop on the Plessis road; I escaped the world of dreams, and I only have a quarter of an hour to get to Loisy by rather untrodden paths”). Plessis is a common toponym in France that has its origins in the Latin stem *plecto* (to fold or to plait) and comes from *ples*, a terrain enclosed with hedges that have branches folded over each other. The fold at the beginning of the chapter is mirrored at the end, setting the chapter apart from the rest of the work (as the text is detached from the outside, and the Valois cut off from modernity). The folds form a spatial envelope outside of time, where everything corresponds and repeats and where distinctions are broken down.

The hallucination ends when the narrator leaves the fold. Daylight comes to the Valois, and the narrator/Nerval slowly comes to realize that the region no longer reflects his nocturnal reverie. The second half of the text marks the narrator’s disillusion as he chases after the ideals sprung from the memories or dreams of the first half. The narrator tries to reinscribe himself into the past in order to restage the visions of his memory (as evoked in the first half) into text. If he can prove that Aurélie and Adrienne are the same person, and if he can win back Sylvie’s love, the “I” of the past (or of his hallucination) will be identical to the “I” of the present. The narrator proceeds by coaxing both Sylvie and Aurélie into revisiting the Châalis Abbey and reenacting the hallucinated scene of chapter 7, with the hope that the young women will confirm the identity of Adrienne. Sylvie refuses to reveal all that she knows. At the end of the penultimate chapter, Aurélie, however, becomes enraged that the narrator loves her only because of an empty resemblance to another woman, declaring, “Vous ne m’aimez pas! Vous attendez que je vous dise: ‘La comédienne est la même que la religieuse’; vous cherchez un drame, voilà tout, et le dénouement vous échappe” (271) (“You do not love me! You expect me to say to you: ‘The actress is the same as the nun’; you are looking for a play, that’s all, and the dénouement escapes you”).

The dénouement does not, in fact, come about through the efforts of the narrator, but rather through a last-minute disclosure from Sylvie. Following Aurélie’s rebuttal, the final chapter of the novel jumps forward to the present, a number of years after the main events of the rest of the text (indicated by the use of the present tense instead of the simple past). The overwhelming desire in the first thirteen chapters to repeat the past,

to celebrate ancient traditions and songs, to find harmony in nature, and to root identity in space is resolutely denied in this last chapter. Space is no longer the container of memory, of the self; as the narrator declares, “Châalis—que l’on restaure—vous n’avez rien gardé de tout ce passé!” (272) (“Châalis, which is being restored, you have not kept anything of this past!”) He recounts that he often travels to visit Sylvie, who is now married with children.

In the final lines of the text, he confesses that he forgot to include an important detail; he had taken Sylvie to see Aurélie’s theater troupe and had asked her if there was any resemblance between the actress and the nun Adrienne. Sylvie laughs at the idea, and then, more seriously, pronounces the last words of the text, “elle est morte au couvent de Saint-S . . . , vers 1832” (273) (“she died at the Saint-S convent . . . around 1832”). Sylvie’s revelation turns the repetitive tale into a linear novel. She has fulfilled her role as the actual narrator of the novel; her profession as lace-maker or seamstress implies that it is she who ties and unties the narrative knot. This dénouement evokes the first date in the text, thus rupturing the timelessness of the tale, and connecting narrative to death. At the same time, however, Adrienne has become a real person through her death; the narrator no longer doubts whether she ever existed (and thus can be sure of his own sanity), because of Sylvie’s confirmation. A narrative thread offers a way out of solipsism, away from the endlessly obsessive repetition of the past, and toward an acceptance of time and of the difference it engenders.

Gérard de Nerval’s experiments with textual space, the “Généalogie” and *Sylvie*, revolt against the Cartesian mapping of space that produces rational, homogenized subjects. Instead, external and internal, social and psychic space are folded into each other, are literally complicated and multiplied, with the result that the subject occupies the ever-changing line of the fold. As the “Généalogie” so graphically illustrates, enfolded spaces proliferate connections and possibilities, upset borders, and deliver to the subject an almost limitless power to redefine itself in time and language. However liberating this new spatial model may seem, it creates a labyrinthine world in which the subject can no longer distinguish inside from outside, past from present, self from other. The rhizomatic roots of the “Généalogie” structure and control space even more effectively and insidiously than the Cartesian grid, since they pull and manipulate everything in space toward the subject.

*Sylvie* exposes the dangers of and offers a tentative solution to Nerval’s textual folds. The narrator of the novel confuses memory and identity with the space of the Valois as he searches for a foundation upon which to

base his sense of self. The text is structured not according to chronological narrative, but rather according to spatial contiguity. The narrator only regains his sanity after he abandons control over the outside and accepts the inherent difference of others revealed by time, and not space. Subjects change over time, in a sense they are because of what they become. A text based solely on the association of place would tend to confuse time periods, negating the temporal progression of narrative, and therefore any progression of the self. The distinction of subject and object, inside and outside, self and other can only occur through the introduction of time, not necessarily of chronological time or of a “grand narrative,” but rather through the true time that makes possible becoming and difference. The real narrator of the novel would be Sylvie herself; she is the only character who changes substantially over the course of the text, from peasant seamstress to a modern industrial worker, from a young innocent girl to a proud mother. It is she who introduces time, through the date of Adrienne’s death, and thereby imposes her difference on the narrator. As long as the dénouement escapes him, as long as he is unable to grasp the narrative thread, the narrator is destined to wander the labyrinth of his own illusion.

### Aurélia’s Double

Nerval’s final work, *Aurélia ou le rêve et la vie*, breaks from his previous first-person narratives in its dissection of the novel subject. The *Voyage en Orient* sought to inscribe the subject in the text and spaces of the “Orient” through the ruse of intertextuality, exploiting the ambiguities between a fictional and a real Gérard de Nerval. *Sylvie* rooted the subject within the uncanny spaces of the Valois and depended on an “outside”/heterodiegetic *narratrice* to sew together the ends of the text, allowing Gérard to remain within the concentric circles of solipsism. Whereas these texts relentlessly repeat the same motif of the subject defined by space and text, continually fleeing the menace of alterity and temporality, *Aurélia* directly counters the textual mechanisms that had anchored the subject and seeks a new definition for subjectivity based on time and communication with the other.

Instead of assimilating the narrated “je” and the narrating “je,” instead of erasing the difference between the past/written Gérard and the present/writing Gérard, *Aurélia* unravels the autobiographical simulacrum (as defined in relation to Stendhal). The text explores with astounding clarity the division of the subject by its inscription in text. As the analyses

of the previous texts have shown, the narration of the self can only lead to death. Nerval's final text draws the implications of textual subjectivity to their extreme consequences through an investigation of "death" itself (which Nerval, following an ancient tradition, associates with dream and insanity) and the possibilities of writing about it.

Within its first few sentences, *Aurélia* announces the inscription of the narrating subject and the exploration of life beyond death:

Le Rêve est une seconde vie. Je n'ai pu percer sans frémir ces portes d'ivoire ou de corne qui nous séparent du monde invisible. Les premiers instants du sommeil sont l'image de la mort; un engourdissement nébuleux saisit notre pensée, et nous ne pouvons déterminer l'instant précis où le *moi*, sous une autre forme, continue l'oeuvre de l'existence. C'est un souterrain vague qui s'éclaire peu à peu, et où se dégagent de l'ombre et de la nuit les pâles figures gravement immobiles qui habitent le séjour des limbes. Puis le tableau se forme, une clarté nouvelle illumine et fait jouer ces apparitions bizarres;—le monde des Esprits s'ouvre pour nous.

Swedenborg appelait ces visions *Memorabilia*; il les devait à la rêverie plus souvent qu'au sommeil; *L'Âne d'or* d'Apulée, *La Divine Comédie* du Dante, sont les modèles poétiques de ces études de l'âme humaine. Je vais essayer, à leur exemple, de transcrire les impressions d'une longue maladie qui s'est passée tout entière dans les mystères de mon esprit; et je ne sais pourquoi je me sers de ce terme de maladie, car jamais, quant à ce qui est de moi-même, je ne me suis senti mieux portant. Parfois, je croyais ma force et mon activité doublées; il me semblait tout savoir, tout comprendre; l'imagination m'apportait des délices infinies. En recouvrant ce que les hommes appellent la raison, faudra-t-il regretter de les avoir perdues? . . . Cette *Vita nuova* a eu pour moi deux phases. Voici les notes qui se rapportent à la première.<sup>5</sup> (*Oeuvres I*, 359)

This extraordinary passage proceeds by a series of complex substitutions, metaphors, and citations that propose an understanding of death by means of transcribing experiences in which the mind loses consciousness of the body. Dream, as we saw in relation to the *Voyage en Orient*, is taken by Nerval as a higher plane of existence, a second life. The text valorizes the Dream as a second life, with the ambiguous connotation of a double life or an afterlife. The second sentence evokes the narrator's emotion or fright while entering "the invisible world" of sleep, referring to Homer's *Odyssey* (book 19): there are two gates of Sleep, one of horn and one of ivory. The horn gate opens onto the real shadows of the underworld; the ivory gate, however, reveals only illusory phantoms.<sup>6</sup> The

text elides the difference between the two gates, collapsing dream, illusion (madness), and the underworld into the same “invisible” world of the unconscious. The first moments of sleep are the “image” of death, disturbing the thought process, and separating the “moi” or ego from the new, otherworldly, existence of the self. The new subject has shed the materiality of the “moi” just as the subject of autobiography must be reborn as text; the voyage through dark subterranean landscapes into the clear light of the spiritual world literalizes the rebirth.

What the narrator describes here is reminiscent of Stendhal’s rebirth through the textual cogito (“after so many general remarks, I am going to be born”) and Descartes’s cogito, where the anonymous “je” feigns to ignore everything but pure consciousness and the revelation of God through the clarity of thought. Nerval, of course, reverses Descartes’s ontological proof based on reason to propose another based on Dream (or hallucination). This new proof requires not the single perspective of a universal Cartesian subject (a subject that only realizes the truth through the negation of its own uniqueness), but rather the dual perspective of the dreamer (who is grounded in the place and time of the dreaming body, and yet also present in the Dream, outside of time and space). The presence of a narrating subject (necessarily in the material world) excludes the assimilation of a subject in the “other” world; the narrator of *Aurélia* claims to separate the two, thus allowing for a dual perspective. Proust will also begin “Combray” with the metaphysically troubling experience of a dreamer who awakens without being able to “reenter” the body.

The text then proceeds to inscribe the narrator’s endeavor into the well-worn path of previous writers (Swedenborg, Dante, Apuleius), who by citation guarantee the validity and sanity of the project. Their example justifies the transcription of the apparently irrational delusions of the narrator, who admits to his mental illness, while he simultaneously undercuts the diagnosis of his doctors. The questioning of the “illness” itself reinforces the foundation of Nerval’s new ontology: disdaining vulgar “reason,” the narrator valorizes the knowledge he has gained, the “doubled” strength (of the dual perspective) and activity of his mind.

The goal of *Aurélia* is thus to transcribe the world of dream/death/madness into the language of reason (or more generally the “other” world, or the world of alterity, into the understanding of the self). Shoshana Felman, in *La Folie et la chose littéraire*, has studied the relationship of *Aurélia* to the discourse of madness in the wake of Jacques Derrida’s critique of Michel Foucault. As Derrida argues in *L’Écriture et la différence*, any defense of madness amounts to a “praise of reason,” since there is no “outside” of reason’s discourse; if the insane have been silenced, as Fou-

cault claims, for Derrida writing as silent speech would be a mad form of reason. Nerval breaks the silence about his own madness through his writing even as writing itself is “mad.” Felman links the split of the narrating subject into (insane) hero and (sane) narrator to the problem of reading and writing signs. Nerval’s illness can only be cured by the process of becoming a writer: “Si l’hallucination était une lecture de signes, un déchiffrement du *réel*, l’écriture, en revanche, s’efforcera d’être un déchiffrement du *rêve*. L’écrivain deviendra, de la sorte, l’interprète, le lecteur de sa propre folie” (77) (“If hallucination were a reading of signs, a deciphering of the *real*, writing, on the other hand, would try to be a deciphering of the *dream*. The writer would become, consequently, the interpreter, the reader of his own madness”).

Similarly Ross Chambers, in *Mélancolie et opposition*, argues that Nerval uses contemporary medical discourse about madness to overturn it from within, creating a textual madness to heal the narrator’s madness: “La guérison narrative ne va donc point sans une certaine forme de ‘folie’ textuelle, et c’est dans cette folie d’un texte radicalement décentré que nous pouvons reconnaître le signe le plus sûr de son modernisme” (127) (“Textual healing does not proceed without a certain form of textual ‘madness,’ and it is in this madness of a radically decentered text that we can recognize the surest sign of its modernism”). Whereas most critics have focused, with good reason, on the discourse of madness within *Aurélia* as it is related to Nerval’s own mental illness, I base my reading of the text on the constant movement between the metaphors of dream, madness, and death, which are inseparable from their “other,” which is reason.

As Théophile Gautier said of his friend: “On dit d’*Aurélia* que c’était le poème de la Folie se racontant elle-même. Il eût été plus juste encore de l’appeler la Raison écrivant les mémoires de la Folie sous sa dictée” (cited in Chotard, 147) (“*Aurélia* has been said to be the poem of Madness told to itself. It would have been more apt still to call it Reason writing the memoirs dictated by Madness”). Gautier’s description of Nerval’s writing process as dictation is perhaps more apt than Nerval’s own characterization of his project as transcription, since dictation implies the simultaneous physical presence of the other.

*Aurélia* is the story of this dictation and transcription of the two opposing halves of the self (according to the narrator, each man is double and “Il y a en tout homme un spectateur et un acteur”—“there is in each man a spectator and an actor” (380). The “spectator”/narrator/sleeper listens as the “actor”/dreamer dictates. They necessarily occupy the same space in the text, and yet are in two different places and times. In a rewriting of the first paragraph near the end of the text, the narrator declares:



Le sommeil occupe le tiers de notre vie. . . . Après un engourdissement de quelques minutes une vie nouvelle commence, affranchie des conditions du temps et de l'espace, et pareille sans doute à celle qui nous attend après la mort. Qui sait s'il n'existe pas un lien entre ces deux existences et s'il n'est pas possible à l'âme de le nouer dès à présent?<sup>7</sup> (412)

Sleep once again describes a separation with the body linked with the experience of death, while also freeing the subject from the conditions of time and space. The goal of the text is to allow consciousness ("the soul" or perhaps the subject) to combine the existence of everyday life (confined by a particular time and place) with the perspective of the "other" life that overcomes space and time. This synthesis can only be accomplished by palimpsest, where the experience of the dreamer is written over that of the sleeper.

The first psychotic episode of the text (a recounting of Nerval's own first documented illness shortly before his trip to the Orient) introduces the coexistence of "real" place with oneiric space. The narrator describes being led through the streets of Paris by his friends. Suddenly he sees a giant star in the sky indicating his destiny. Deciding to follow the star, the city streets transform before him: "Je croyais voir le lieu où nous étions s'élever, et perdre de ses formes urbaines; sur une colline, entourée de vastes solitudes, cette scène devenait le combat de deux Esprits et comme une tentation biblique" (363) ("I thought I saw the place where we were rise up, and lose its urban forms; on the hill, surrounded by vast solitudes, this scene became the combat between two Spirits, like some biblical temptation"). The actual place and time of the incident (Paris, 1840) are given by the narrator and can also be inferred from the presence of Gérard's friends who try to convince him to return home. At the same time, the city streets are transformed into a psychic space (a theatrical "scene") somewhere between dream and text (it is a scene of "biblical temptation," and Gérard voices his intention to go "Vers l'Orient"—"Towards the Orient," which refers to the introductory chapter to the *Voyage*). The reader is aware of the reality and validity of the two very different spaces occupied by the narrator and is not forced to decide which of the two is more "real" than the other.

The key to Nerval's textual vision is revealed in the narrator's analysis of the scene in the next chapter, where he describes a dual perspective:

Ici a commencé pour moi ce que j'appellerai l'épanchement du songe dans la vie réelle. A dater de ce moment, tout prenait parfois un aspect

double, et cela, sans que le raisonnement manquât jamais de logique, sans que la mémoire perdît les plus légers détails de ce qui m'arrivait.<sup>8</sup> (363)

The overflowing of dream into real life proceeds with complete lucidity; it follows its own logic (one familiar to any reader of Nerval's other works) and yet is able to coexist with the observations of the real world, creating a "double aspect."

The logical consequence of this dual perspective would be to allow the narrator to see himself as other. Indeed, the presence of the "double" or *Ferouër* (which Nerval uses in the *Voyage*) is first thematized and then eventually literalized in the text as a threat. At the end of chapter 3, the narrator elaborates upon the effects of the dream state and the ensuing double perspective after he is taken in by a group of soldiers:

Couché sur un lit de camp, j'entendais que les soldats s'entretenaient d'un inconnu arrêté comme moi et dont la voix avait retenti dans la même salle. Par un singulier effet de vibration, il me semblait que cette voix résonnait dans ma poitrine et que mon âme se dédoublait pour ainsi dire, distinctement partagée entre la vision et la réalité. Un instant, j'eus l'idée de me retourner avec effort vers celui dont il était question, puis je frémis en me rappelant une tradition bien connue en Allemagne, qui dit que chaque homme a un *double*, et que, lorsqu'il le voit, la mort est proche.<sup>9</sup> (364–65)

This scene reverses the habitual "dictation" in the text where the rational narrator in the real world observes the dreamer; instead, the dreamer/madman describes the physical sensation of the separation of "vision and reality." Here the narrator is able to render the familiar "real world" mad, while at the same time describing the alienation of an out-of-body experience. Though he feels the physical presence of the double in his chest, it becomes other to him, announcing impending death (just as the autobiographical form had already done).

Nerval's palimpsest of dreamed experience reproduces the liberation of time and space he associates with death. The writing self thus has the ability to be at once grounded in material reality and to occupy a position of universality beyond the constraints of time. The "double aspect" of dream's pouring into real life functions the same way as Stendhal's bird's-eye view of Rome, where the narrator, situated at the edge of the city, is able to see all of time projected onto the space in front of him. Stendhal's spiritual state, provoked by the heights of the Gianicolo Hill,

allows him to tap in to his own memory and to that of the entire city. His state conjures up the ghosts of the past, and an idea of his whole life (death included). Bergson's metaphor, that seeing the past in present space has the same effect as seeing a ghost (Bergson, 161), seems as appropriate to Nerval as to Stendhal. In the majority of dreams in Nerval's text, the narrator is visited by the ghosts of his family, or of all humanity, coming to him to tell the story of the human race.

The observation of the progress of time and metamorphosis, as opposed to the halting of time and the obsession with stability in *Sylvie*, forces the narrator to take account of his actual place in time. Nowhere is the role of time better expressed than in a dream in the fourth chapter that prefigures Proust's famous "bal de têtes" at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*:

J'entrai dans une vaste salle où beaucoup de personnes étaient réunies. Partout je retrouvais des figures connues. Les traits des parents morts que j'avais pleurés se trouvaient reproduits dans d'autres qui, vêtus de costumes plus anciens, me faisaient le même accueil paternel. Ils paraissaient s'être assemblés pour un banquet de famille.<sup>10</sup> (367)

Time itself is seen in the changing faces of his relatives, recognizable as the "same" person, and yet the faces occupy different times. The narrator's uncle reveals to him that "notre passé et notre avenir sont solidaires. Nous vivons dans notre race, et notre race vit en nous" (368) ("Our past and our future are in solidarity. We live in our race, and our race lives in us"). Instead of identity being rooted in one place and one instant in time (as the narrator of *Sylvie* feared), identity is the actualization of an essence that exists across time.

The concentric circles and enclosed spaces of *Sylvie* that sought to freeze time and banish difference have given way to the eccentric spaces of *Aurélia*. Dreams and visions are filled with forms that constantly change nature, growing enormous or shrinking, metamorphosing into apparently different objects or persons, though recognizable by their essence. The folds in the "Généalogie" and in *Sylvie* that defined the subject, locking it in one place and time, are now in *Aurélia* opened outward, unfolding a world of endless possibilities from the unconscious of a text written from two perspectives.