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The Novel Map

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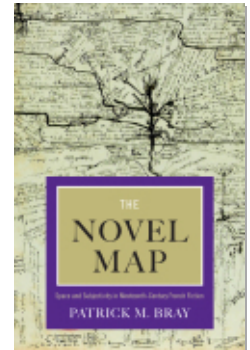
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CHAPTER TEN

Creating a Space for Time

Proust Paradox

The end of the *Recherche* leaves the reader with an unanswerable question. Is the novel the narrator is about to write the novel the reader is about to finish, or is it a virtual novel, existing somewhere beyond the reader's imagination and the theoretical projections of the aging narrator? Many indications within the text itself favor one or the other interpretation: Proust's text most often calls itself a story or "récit," which distinguishes it from the "ouvrage" ("work") that the narrator will write (Landy, 127); on the other hand, the *Recherche* is so unquestionably a masterpiece that it would be difficult to label it a simple *mémoire*, and perhaps even more difficult for the reader who has finished many thousands of pages to accept that the narrator does not succeed in his vocation. Critics have tended to make a clear choice for one or the other possibility.¹

As I noted in chapter 9, the experience of confusion upon waking (and later of involuntary memory) suspends the narrator's consciousness between different times, places, and identities. Perhaps the reader of the *Recherche* can and should find the same joy in indecision and suspend decision not only about her or his own identity upon reading (as the text seems to solicit), but also about the identity of the very text that is read. At any one moment the reader could interpret the narrative *je* as either the narrator of a story about a writer (who may or may not ever finish a novel) or as a meta-narrator, one who narrates the story of his own coming into narration. Paul Ricoeur, in *Temps et récit II*, argues that throughout the *Recherche*, until the very last moments of revelation at the "bal de têtes," the voice of the narrator is practically indiscernible from that of the hero, or narrated *je*; at the end of the novel, the two voices become one (or rather the narrator drowns out the hero), as they were the same presumably in the first few pages when the narrator floats between time,

space, and multiple identities (Ricoeur, 252–53). The functions of the two narrative voices are distinct, but it is difficult at any one instant to declare which voice speaks through the *je*.

Gérard Genette in “Proust Palimpseste” (*Figures I*) argues that since the *Recherche* is a double text, the reader feels an imperative to reread:

En effet chaque moment de l'oeuvre est en quelque sorte donné deux fois: une première fois dans la *Recherche* comme naissance d'une vocation, une deuxième fois dans la *Recherche* comme exercice de cette vocation; mais ces “deux fois” nous sont données ensemble, et c'est au lecteur, informé *in extremis* que le livre qu'il vient de lire reste à écrire . . . qu'il échoit de remonter jusqu'à ces pages lointaines . . . et qu'il doit maintenant relire.² (62–63)

But if the *Recherche* is a “practice of this vocation” the careful reader will be capable of reading the text for the elements of its style that reflect or anticipate the final revelation about time, even if the reader is not informed in extremis of the dénouement. Paul Ricoeur argues that there are signs in the text that hint to the final revelation. He compares the *Recherche* to an ellipsis with “deux foyers” (“two foci”): one the apprenticeship of signs, as described by Deleuze, and the other the final revelation of the narrator's vocation. The *Recherche* tells a “fable about time” because it relates these two incompatible “foci.” Ricoeur's focus on the structural level of the novel leads him to emphasize only the aspects of time that reveal the extra-temporal and the past. As will be seen later in this chapter through a close reading of the image of time itself, time in the *Recherche* is not only what reveals the past, but what allows us to see the work of time through text.

The *Recherche* is a work that projects backward from the final revelation to the beginning of the novel, a sort of “futur dans le passé” (Ricoeur, 257). The conditional mode is nothing other than a verbal form of the future in the past; the novel itself can be taken as a conditional text. If the reader chooses to read for the plot that leads toward the final revelation of the narrator's vocation, then, as in chapter 9, the novel ends as a failed autobiography that looks toward the future and the creation of a literary work not yet written. However, if the reader chooses to read (presumably in a second reading of the *Recherche*) as if the work itself were the novel written by the narrator, then, as in chapter 10, the text appears to be the writing of its own past, its own becoming. In this second conditional statement, the literary theories of the eventual narrator or the diegetic author of the novel would be apparent, not in what the narrated *je* says

(since he is not yet the writer of the novel), but rather in the form and style of the writing itself.

À *la recherche du temps perdu* is both a work about the role of place, where time is kept at bay, and a novel about the role of time against the stability of places. It is both a work obsessed by places where time appears, literally, as an afterthought only in the last two hundred pages, and a novel where the image of time is infused in every single sentence. The *Recherche*, because of the very impossibility of deciding one absolute condition for its reading, becomes a virtual text, actualized differently with every successive reading.

Spatial Time: Movement and Metaphor

If the *Recherche* may be read (also) as a novel about time, then it can only be so despite its own plot. As chapter 9 demonstrated, the novel portrays the narrator as a character obsessed with the connection of places, names, and identity, to the exclusion of time. The novel form, while possessing an element of time (one reads over time), is structured by the places of proper names and the spaces of the written page.³ The narrator, in his literary apprenticeship, spends the greater part of the novel (all but the last few hundred pages) deceived by these spatial elements of his textual world. In the same way as he becomes aware, retrospectively, of the role time has played in his life, the enlightened reader of the *Recherche*, who presumably reads the novel for a second time, perceives time everywhere in the text. Time must be in some relation to place and to space, and yet also must remain hidden to the narrator until the end of the novel. The act of reading the *Recherche* (as the novel about time) becomes a search for the time lost in the text. Such a reading requires a willful inattention to the troubles of the narrator and the plot, and necessitates an active focus on the language of the text and in particular metaphors as manifestations of the creative force of time revealed by involuntary memory.

Time, on the level of each sentence, in the *Recherche* is expressed through a relation to or a practice of place. As I argued in chapter 9, the law of place relies on the stability of ordered relations represented in one moment of time. A unified system of places, such as that imposed by the father's law, would negate time and becoming because it would prevent movement across places and across the instants of time. The negotiation of place, the practice of place (by a walker, by narrative, or by transgression) constitutes space, "space is a place put into practice" (Certeau, 173). Space is at the crossroads of mobile place ("l'espace est un croisement

de mobiles”—“space is a crossing of moving objects/motives,” 173), and forms destabilized, and therefore temporalized, place. Time manifests itself in space as movement since it is the motion of places that make up space. Once places are set in motion, the ordered, fragmented, and chronological time expressed in the law of place yields to the flux of true time experienced as duration. The *Recherche* is a novel about time and duration because it is a novel about movement.

The text creates movement through narrative, through metaphor, through involuntary memory, and through literal representations of motion (such as the description of automobiles). Narrative inscribes movement in the text because it describes the changing relationships of places to each other and to the characters. The narrator as character distinguishes himself from the narrator as writer of the novel because he is subject to the law of places while the writing narrator continually upsets the law of places. The narration of the novel is a transgression of the (father's) law of places, a creation of space, and a revelation of time through motion. However, a reading that strictly analyzed the plot would follow the first-person character's attempts to fix identity in place and would consequently miss the more fundamental revelation of time through the movement of metaphors, which threaten his sense of immobile places. Metaphors bridge the distance between places; they translate impressions and shuttle meaning.

Movement in the form of metaphor exists at every level of the text, from individual words, to sentences, and to entire episodes. The monumental scale of Proustian sentences multiplies the possible implications of a metaphor, sometimes over many pages. The narrator's world becomes increasingly complex and marked by speed as technological advances (the telegram, the telephone, the train, the automobile, and the airplane) allow movement and communication to cross previously impossibly distant places in ever shorter time increments; in a literal way movement is a sign of the times, an indication of a changing society.⁴ The technological analogy of harnessing movement would be the ordered regulation of train schedules that attempts to neutralize any unexpected event; both Swann and Marcel in their jealousy use train schedules to trace the flight of their elusive beloveds (Carter, 26). Though metaphor takes two different objects and “les enferm[e] dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style” (*TR IV*, 468) (“encloses them in the necessary links of a fine style”), the movement of metaphor, as a function of time, invariably creates something new and unexpected. An accelerated cycle of movement occurs where a dangerous movement necessitates the control of metaphors, which in turn create a new movement requiring even

more metaphors. The play of meaning in a text cannot be stopped by the writing of more text.

The “moments bienheureux” (“happy or felicitous moments”) caused by involuntary memory, the most famous of which is of course the madeleine scene in “Combray,” provide the inspiration for literary creation at the end of the novel by revealing the role of metaphor, and so any analysis of movement in the text must account for movement in the various “moments bienheureux” scattered throughout the novel. Roger Shattuck’s classification of these episodes in *Proust’s Binoculars* remains the most complete analysis. He counts eleven “moments bienheureux,” but notes that Samuel Beckett names them “fétiches” and includes a few other, incomplete, episodes; Shattuck also writes that Howard Moss names them “mnemonic resurrections” and counts eighteen of them (*Proust’s Binoculars*, 149–50). Shattuck recognizes six stages in a basic but variable pattern: (1) a preexisting state of mind (usually depression), (2) an intense sensation (like the taste of the madeleine), (3) an inner feeling (pleasure, exaltation, or sadness), (4) recognition of a past sensation, (5) presentiment of the future, and (6) some result (like the revelation of Marcel’s literary vocation) (*Proust’s Binoculars*, 70). Shattuck’s most original insight is the role of the fifth stage, that of presentiment. Involuntary memory not only recalls a past sensation, but very often announces the future, or at least the future of the text: the madeleine scene announces the composition of the episode of Combray; the steeples of Martinville announce “la réalité pressentie” (“a premonition of reality”) (*Proust’s Binoculars*, 75) and also another “moment bienheureux,” the three trees in Hudimesnil; Vinteuil’s septet announces the possibility of joy in the afterlife; and the sequence of five episodes in *Le Temps retrouvé* announces Marcel’s vocation and the future composition of his book (70–75). The involuntary memory of a past sensation calls forth images of the future and therefore creates a movement between the individual instants of the past and the text as a whole. Involuntary memory does not arrest time, but sets in motion images that manifest time. The images describe the past of a sensation, the present, and a future in a block of time where creation (the literary text) can emerge.

Movement also exists in the emergence of the sensation of involuntary memory. In the madeleine episode, the narrator, after tasting the madeleine soaked in tea and undergoing an intense sensation, attempts to repeat the sensation by drinking more tea, to no effect. He understands finally that the sensation is not in the object, but within himself. He must force his mind to travel deep into his memory in order to find the original sensation. Finally, after emptying his consciousness and tasting the mad-

eleine again, the past sensation is unleashed and moves to the surface of the present:

Je sens tressaillir en moi quelque chose qui se déplace, voudrait s'élever, quelque chose qu'on aurait désancré, à une grande profondeur; je ne sais ce que c'est, mais cela monte lentement; j'éprouve la résistance et j'entends la rumeur des distances traversées. Certes, ce qui palpite ainsi au fond de moi, ce doit être l'image, le souvenir visuel, qui lié à cette saveur, tente de la suivre jusqu'à moi.⁵ (*CS I*, 45)

The narrator attempts a few more times to re-create the sensation and search his memory, always using a vocabulary of movement: "arrivera-t-il jusqu'à la surface?" ("will it arrive all the way to the surface?"), "l'attraction d'un instant identique" ("the attraction of an identical instant"), "soulever tout au fond de moi" ("to lift up everything from deep within me"), "il est arrêté, redescendu peut-être; qui sait s'il remontera jamais de sa nuit?" ("it stopped, went down again perhaps; who knows if it will ever ascend again out from its darkness?") (46). The image or visual memory attached to the taste of the tea-soaked madeleine moves upward from the depths of his memory and causes another sensation of shivering, different from that of taste. He is unable at first to make out the image since it becomes confused in the "insaisissable tourbillon des couleurs remuées" (46) ("the elusive whirlwind of shifting colors"). The image of memory is in movement as it translates the time of the original sensation to the present.

The episodes of involuntary memory, while describing motion, often portray the narrator himself in motion, a "movement of movements" as Bergson would say (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 37). Shattuck counts five of the eleven episodes where the narrator moves while experiencing a "moment bienheureux": at Martinville and at Hudimesnil he is in a carriage; in Paris with Saint-Loup he descends a staircase; after a dinner at the Duc de Guermantes's he again travels in a carriage and "[il s'agitait] dans la voiture, comme une pythonisse" (*CG II*, 840) ("[he wiggled about] in the car, like a prophetess"); he is on a train going to Paris in an episode at the beginning of *Le Temps retrouvé*. The narrator's movement multiplies perspective and destabilizes place. His privileged perspective becomes a-centered, which seems to disrupt his habitual repression of the past and obsession with immobile places.

The first and quintessential episode of a "mobile" "moment bienheureux" is that of the "steeple of Martinville" near the end of "Combray." During a family walk on a late afternoon, he despairs, already as an ado-

lescent, that he has no talent for letters. As it is getting late, his family accepts a ride home in a neighbor's carriage; the narrator takes the seat next to the coachman. The unusual speed of the coach, the winding turns in the road, and the changing light of sunset provoke in him "ce plaisir spécial qui ne ressemblait à aucun autre" ("this special pleasure that resembled no other"); the two Martinville steeples appear to change places and then seem to be right next to the Vieuxvicq steeple, which is separated from them by a hill and a valley (*CS I*, 177–78). The experience so preoccupies the narrator that he borrows pencil and paper, and, without sensing the analogous relation between the pleasure of this new perception and "une jolie phrase" (179) which he will understand much later, he decides to compose a short prose description right in the carriage, despite the rattling motion. The young narrator's passage is cited directly in the text, but the details are more vivid and the metaphors more startling than in the first description. The steeples are now anthropomorphized, and their apparent motion is given intentionality. At one point they remind him of three legendary young girls. He is very attentive to the passing of time, as if the scene were a race between the steeples and the coach: "Les minutes passaient, nous allions vite et pourtant les trois clochers étaient toujours au loin devant nous . . . Puis le clocher de Vieuxvicq s'écarta, prit ses distances . . . je pensais au temps qu'il faudrait encore pour les atteindre" (179) ("The minutes passed, we traveled quickly and yet the three steeples were always far ahead of us . . . Then the Vieuxvicq steeple moved away, took its distance . . . I thought about the time still needed to catch up with them"). The movement in this "mobile shot" changes the relationships the steeples have between each other and with the observer: first there are two steeples, then a third; for a while they are immobile, then one moves away; they wave a sign of good-bye, and return again only to be transformed into three painted flowers and then three girls; finally, after the sun sets, they close in on one another to compose one black form that disappears into the night (179–80). The movement of the carriage ride changes the spatial relationships of the steeples and thereby creates changing perspectives and changing images. In these images each steeple expresses duration and transformation in a unique manner, just as time, in the form of old age, expresses itself differently in the faces of the "bal de têtes." Though the narrator is unaware of it when he composes his sketch, the joy he feels upon observing the movement of the steeples is related to an experience of true time expressed through the succession of transformed steeples. He is so relieved to have rid himself of the intense moment through writing, that after singing like a chicken who has just laid an egg (180), he promptly forgets about the whole episode.

This early writing experiment contains all the elements of involuntary memory and metaphor that will appear a few thousand pages later in *Le Temps retrouvé*. The episode at Martinville illustrated early that movement proliferates perspectives and images of change. While the young narrator's writing of the episode converted his experience into metaphor, and thus textual movement, it also immobilized the experience through this very writing. He quickly forgets about the episode and the passage because the act of writing temporarily captured or immobilized the moment. Because the narrator forgets the "steeple of Martinville" episode, the significance of the role of time and writing remains hidden to him throughout his long apprenticeship. He continues to wander the progressively more mobile places of the novel but cannot navigate his increasingly changing social world. After the places of Combray and the social relations of Paris are both transformed by the war, he again falls into a state of despair about his literary career much greater than he had felt at Martinville.

The five final episodes of involuntary memory, which occur before the narrator enters the Princesse de Guermantes's "matinée," serve a crucial role in that they teach Marcel how to convey his experience through art. Only metaphor can bridge the distance between two distant images in the way that involuntary memory bridges two distant times. Metaphor is spatial and temporal since it sets places in motion and therefore changes their relation to each other. Metaphors are the textual replacement of involuntary memory, since they fill the void between intermittent "moments bienheureux" and ensure that perceptions remain unstable.

Yet the narrator expresses hints of doubt about the supplemental nature of metaphor in the novel. He observes that in the work of art which he is ready to create there are nevertheless "great difficulties," since it would have to consist of "une matière en quelque sorte différente" ("a material in some sort different") from that of memory (*TR IV*, 449). Literary metaphors as the "spiritual equivalent" (458) of involuntary memory can only work by the transference of the quality of one object into another; however, the presence of metaphors does not guarantee anything about the work itself: "le rapport peut être peu intéressant, les objets médiocres, le style mauvais, mais tant qu'il n'y a pas eu cela, il n'y a rien" (468) ("the relationship may be of little interest, the objects mediocre, the style bad, but without it [metaphor], there is nothing"). Metaphor, and by extension movement, have limits that involuntary memory does not have: an uninteresting comparison, mediocre objects (could there be anything more mediocre than a madeleine?), and bad style. Movement, as an expression of time and not time itself, can express duration in varying

degrees. The degrees vary so much that the narrator himself is incapable of perceiving the true nature of time in movement until the very end. The length of the *Recherche* extends metaphors to their limit and reveals that, while metaphor and movement consistently express time, they also can lead dangerously astray as the narrator tries to rein in their excess.

Movement presents an indirect representation of time mediated by space. Marcel's book of places represents time through movement in space. Yet time is indivisible, as Bergson proposes, whereas space can always be measured and divided into separate places. If the text narrates, or sets in motion, stable and isolated places, does it not also reproduce the spatialization of time (time as measured and divisible) present in Stendhal's ichnographic maps, Nerval's portrayal of the Valois, and the system of signs laid down by Marcel's father? According to Georges Poulet's *L'espace proustien*, the various, divisible episodes of the text would thus not depict a continual movement, but rather juxtaposed moments without any connection (135). For Poulet, since the *Recherche* describes a fragmented space, it cannot accurately be considered a book about time.⁶

The Image of Time

Movement and metaphor consistently present an indirect image of time as duration throughout the *Recherche*. Through metaphor and movement, the novel can claim to be the book about time and of time that the narrator decides to write at the end of his literary apprenticeship. The momentum of movement and metaphor accelerates after the death of Albertine with an increase in the appearance of telephones, telegrams, automobiles, and airplanes. The First World War invades Paris with warplanes and total mobilization, in the literal and metaphorical sense. Though he has intellectualized the relation between time and psychology after the death of Albertine, the narrator continues to fear the effects of time and tries to insulate himself from it at the "maison de santé." His complete desperation forces him to abandon his isolation, to return to Paris, and to accept the princesse de Guermantes's invitation at a "matinée." As we have already seen, the five miraculous "moments bienheureux" allow the narrator to regain his faith in his literary career and to learn the valuable lesson that metaphor translates time through a textual movement.

But the series of five involuntary memories, in notable contrast to the madeleine scene, prevents the metonymic reflection of place that persisted in many of the other episodes and forces the narrator to focus on the temporal aspect of the experience. As with the earlier "moments bien-

heureux,” movement displaces memories that then rise to the surface of consciousness: in the first moment he trips over stones in a courtyard, literally jogging his memory; in the second moment a servant strikes a spoon against a plate; in the third he wipes a starched napkin over his mouth; in the fourth water moves in a pipe; and in the fifth the opening of George Sand’s *François le Champi* creates a chain of countless memories that “sautaient légèrement d’eux-mêmes” (*TR IV*, 463) (“jumped lightly from one to the other”). The succession, or as Poulet would say the juxtaposition, of these moving images brought on by involuntary memory finally compel the narrator to investigate within himself not just the particular moment of the past linked to a particular sensation, but the more pressing issue of why this experience should cause him so much joy.

The narrator concludes that the “moments bienheureux,” because they force a past moment to coexist for an instant with a present one, offer the experience of being extra-temporal or outside of time (450). However, the meaning of “extra-temporal” is qualified a page later when he elaborates on his thesis of memory; an involuntary memory satisfies the imagination because it is a past and absent sensation, and satisfies the imagination further because it is also a present sensation which provides “un peu de temps à l’état pur” (451) (“a little bit of time in a pure state”). The images set in motion by involuntary memory allow Marcel to isolate a fragment of pure time, duration itself. The new self glimpsed for “la durée d’un éclair” (451) (“the duration of a lightning flash”) is extra-temporal because it is outside of habitual or chronological time, although very much in the true or pure time of duration. As Maurice Blanchot writes: “Proust . . . a pressenti que ces instants où, pour lui, brille l’intemporel, exprimaient cependant, par l’affirmation d’un retour, les mouvements les plus intimes de la métamorphose du temps, étaient le ‘temps pur’” (*Le livre à venir*, 33) (“Proust . . . had a premonition that these instants, when, for him, the extra-temporal [or “intemporal”] shines, expressed however, by the affirmation of a return, the innermost movements of the metamorphosis of time, they were ‘pure time’”). The isolated moments of involuntary memory manifest two different aspects of time, since the extra-temporal is both outside of (the chronological flow of) time and the heightened image of time itself (“extra” temporal), where the work of time as metamorphosis can finally be glimpsed in an instant.

Instead of the “impure” time of metaphor and juxtaposition where the effects of time are seen indirectly through spatial configurations, this image of “pure” time appears directly as a return of a past coinciding exactly with the present, the enfolding of the total subject across time, and therefore the superposition of two impossible states of the same

subject (because occurring in two different moments in time) reveals in an instant the work of time that produces difference and change. This image of time, which occurs in involuntary memory, functions like Nerval's double perspective: the imagination grasps the past, and thus absent sensation, while the senses can add to the imagination "l'idée d'existence" (*TR IV*, 451) ("the idea of existence"). The "trompe-l'oeil" effect of the dual perspective only lasts a moment and leads the narrator to doubt his very existence, though without the anguish of the opening pages of the novel in the bedroom scene (452). The involuntary memory does not bring back an echo or a memory of the past sensation, but the very sensation itself, and the sensation, in turn, causes one place to erupt into another:

La sensation commune avait cherché à recréer autour d'elle le lieu ancien, cependant que le lieu actuel qui en tenait la place s'opposait de toute la résistance de sa masse à cette immigration dans un hôtel de Paris d'une plage normande ou d'un talus d'une voie de chemin de fer . . . Toujours, dans ces résurrections-là, le lieu lointain engendré autour de la sensation commune s'était accouplé un instant, comme un lutteur, au lieu actuel. Toujours le lieu actuel avait été vainqueur; toujours c'était le vaincu qui m'avait paru le plus beau . . . Et si le lieu actuel n'avait pas été aussitôt vainqueur, je crois que j'aurais perdu connaissance; car ces résurrections du passé, dans la seconde qu'elles durent, sont si totales qu'elles n'obligent pas seulement nos yeux à cesser de voir la chambre qui est près d'eux pour regarder la voie bordée d'arbres ou la marée montante. Elles forcent nos narines à respirer l'air de lieux pourtant lointains, notre volonté à choisir entre les divers projets qu'ils nous proposent, notre personne tout entière à se croire entourée par eux, ou du moins à trébucher entre eux et les lieux présents, dans l'étourdissement d'une incertitude pareille à celle qu'on éprouve parfois devant une vision ineffable, au moment de s'endormir.⁷ (453–54)

The law of places, what Certeau called "la loi du 'propre'" (173), the law instilled by the father in "Combray," unravels through the force of a past sensation breaking through the present. The consciousness occupies two places simultaneously, outside of chronological time and fixed identity; places are not put into "practice" to form a space, as with metaphor, but occupy the same position in the consciousness as if coupled, not just playing with but obliterating the specificity inherent to the law of places and also of identity. For a brief moment, the past place resurrects the past (and thus dead) self, inhabiting the present self not only with the sensations of

the past (the smell of the air, the visual aspect of the surroundings) but with an entire state of mind (the “projects” or plans one had in the past).

The “I” of the present and the “I” of the past grapple with each other, never quite fusing, but occupying the same position. That the narrator seems to substitute places for the self throughout the passage (it is after all the places that grapple with each other) seems to emphasize the inability of consciousness to comprehend the work of time. The effect of a prolonged “moment bienheureux” would make someone “lose consciousness,” as the barrage of contradictory choices of moments in time and of identities surpasses the ability of the conscious mind to process the information.⁸ Similarly, the text itself forces the narrator as writer of the novel and the narrator as first-person character to occupy the same subject position, the paradoxical *je* whose indeterminacy allows the work to be read as either (simulated) autobiography or novel. Thus the passage theorizes or renders visible (“theory” originally meaning a mental viewing) the image of time, which functions in a text as an impossible coincidence of origin and final result, in the same way that Zola’s genealogy of the Rougon-Macquart family was the supplemental image of the novel’s absent origin in the dossiers.

Just as the past returns to haunt the present and the consciousness, when experiencing an involuntary memory, turns within itself, the passage near the end of the novel marks a return to the beginning and the inscription of the novel self within the bedrooms of the past. By connecting the multiple experiences of “moments bienheureux” to the moment of falling asleep, Proust’s narrator brings the reader back to the first page of the *Recherche*, where it seems to him “que j’étais moi-même ce dont parlait l’ouvrage” (“that I was myself what the work was talking about”). At the beginning of the text, the cause of the waking sleeper’s confusion is replaced by a “deep sleep”; the impact of literature on the self is repressed until it resurfaces here near the very end of the text. The narrator, now outside of space and time, inhabits literature as a writer and as a textual subject. As Nerval’s double perspective bridged the distance between the conscious and the unconscious self, the Proustian narrator decides to write a book that would prolong his experience about time and offer the possibility of sharing it with others through art.⁹

The theoretical moment of insight becomes exteriorized, rendered into narrative, and confirmed by the “bal de têtes” scene. After his five “moments bienheureux,” Marcel is led into the Guermantes salon, what he calls the “bal de têtes,” where his newfound perspective on time is challenged. There, through a series of recognitions and discoveries, he is able to see the image of time itself, unmediated by movement, not just within

himself during an involuntary memory but in the faces of long-forgotten acquaintances. He struggles to recognize many faces because time has transformed their features. Even names are unable to aid him because they no longer refer to the same people: names and titles are passed down across generations, while social hierarchies are in constant upheaval. The “loi du ‘propre’” of names, as with places, has no jurisdiction over him: “les noms avaient perdu pour moi de leur individualité” (*TR IV*, 510) (“names lost for me their individuality”). Eventually the recognition of old acquaintances forces Marcel to change his perspective on himself; for the first time he understands that he is no longer a young man. Blinded by habit, he had not been able to notice the passing of time within himself:

Et maintenant je comprenais ce c'était que la vieillesse—la vieillesse qui de toutes les réalités est peut-être celle dont nous gardons le plus longtemps dans la vie une notion purement abstraite, regardant les calendriers, datant nos lettres, voyant se marier nos amis, les enfants de nos amis, sans comprendre, soit par peur, soit par paresse, ce que cela signifie . . . Je comprenais ce que signifiaient la mort, l'amour, les joies de l'esprit, l'utilité de la douleur, la vocation, etc. . . . Sans doute la cruelle découverte que je venais de faire, ne pourrait que me servir en ce qui concernait la matière même de mon livre. Puisque j'avais décidé qu'elle ne pouvait être uniquement constituée par les impressions véritablement pleines, celles qui sont en dehors du temps, parmi les vérités avec lesquelles je comptais les sertir, celles qui se rapportent au temps, au temps dans lequel baignent et changent les hommes, les sociétés, les nations, tiendraient une place importante.¹⁰ (*TR IV*, 510)

The discovery of the meaning of old age, or the visible effects of time on the body, has finally allowed Marcel to grasp the role of the work of time as change in death, love, and life. This “cruel discovery” tempers the joy of his recent extra-temporal experience, but is infinitely more valuable. His book project is modified to incorporate this new understanding of time as it is really lived. Instead of a work based solely on the rare moments of involuntary memory, his novel will also comprise the time in which men, societies, and nations are immersed.¹¹

The culmination of the novel, the final image of time that leads the narrator finally to begin his novel, occurs at the end of the “bal” when the narrator meets Gilberte and Robert's daughter, Mlle de Saint-Loup-en-Bray. Because she comes both from the “côté de Méséglise” and from the “côté de Guermantes,” she synthesizes all the other characters and events in the novel. With a remarkable thoroughness, the narrator links her to

every place, every major person, and every event in his life. He reasons that the effect of any one acquaintance has repercussions on every other aspect of our lives: “Quels êtres avons-nous connus qui, pour raconter notre amitié avec eux, ne nous obligent à les placer successivement dans tous les sites les plus différents de notre vie?” (*TR IV*, 607) (“What beings have we known who, in order to tell the story of our friendship with them, oblige us to place them successively in all the most different sites of our lives?”). Mlle de Saint-Loup holds a special place in the narrative, as she unites the two “côtés” and therefore recalls, in a youthful form, all of the now-destroyed Combray. Instead of being a unique individual, with a unique name and from a unique place, she has both her father’s and mother’s features. She is not fixed in any one place, but is rather a crossroads of places:

Comme la plupart des êtres, d’ailleurs, n’était-elle pas comme sont dans les forêts les “étoiles” des carrefours où viennent converger des routes venues, pour notre vie aussi, des pointes les plus différents? Elles étaient nombreuses pour moi, celles qui aboutissaient à Mlle de Saint-Loup et qui rayonnaient autour d’elle. Et avant tout venaient aboutir à elle les deux grands “côtés” où j’avais fait tant de promenades et de rêves.¹² (606)

She offers an allegory of identity across places, based on intersections and not barriers. The stable places that structured the novel have given way to a practice of place, an identity of movement like in the metaphorical movement of a changing identity and the literal movement across space. Not only is Mlle de Saint-Loup the model for a new conception of place and identity, she also presents a youthful counterpoint to the aging faces at the “bal.” The narrator’s past is reincarnated in the sixteen-year-old girl, as she is the very image of himself in time: “pleine encore d’espérances, riante, formée des années mêmes que j’avais perdues, elle ressemblait à ma jeunesse” (609) (“still full of hope, cheerful, formed from the very years I had lost, she resembled my youth”). Quite literally she embodies both the lost time the narrator has been looking for and the very material of his future novel, since “tous ces matériaux de l’oeuvre littéraire, c’était ma vie passée” (478) (“all the material of my literary work was in my past life”). The novel he plans to write at the end of the text and which the reader is about to finish incorporates the vision of time and identity offered by Mlle de Saint-Loup.

With Mlle de Saint-Loup’s appearance, the narrator vanishes from the “matinée.” He offers no account of leaving the Hôtel de Guermantes; he simply disappears. His lack of place realizes his new vision that identity is

in time. The remaining fifteen or sixteen pages are devoted to the composition of his future novel and to the fear that imminent death will prevent him from its completion. The novel to be written in the future or that has just come to a close, as the translation of the narrator's "inner book," disseminates the metaphors created from the "moments bienheureux" and therefore allows others, as readers, to experience life in two places, intermittently outside of chronological time. The apparent danger of the excess of metaphors, embodied by Albertine's incessant movement, has now been harnessed into a cyclical text, which sets the narrator himself in motion.

At the end of the novel, the narrator returns to the state in which he found himself at the beginning of the text, where he floats in an indeterminate place and where he is free to move across time and space. The passage from the end of the text to its beginning shuttles the reader to alternative interpretations of the text. The narrator of the end of the novel becomes the writer of the book at the start of a second reading, just as the novel obsessed with space becomes the book about time. The two "opposing" sides of a hypothesis or a paradox (the book about time/place, the narrated/narrating *je*) occupy the same space, the text of the *Recherche*, but take place in two different times of reading. Proust's novel is a book about time because it forces the reader to experience time through the cycles and apparent paradoxes of the text. The metaphors and the circular structure ensure perpetual movement and continual change as time manifests itself in the novel with each new reading. The *Recherche* transforms both its author and its readers by revealing that we *are* because we are in time.

