

comes the final narrative unit, II, 988–1140,⁵ the *Matinée Guermantes*.⁶

With respect to chronology, the task is slightly more delicate, since in its details the chronology of the *Recherche* is neither clear nor coherent. We have no need here to join in an already old and apparently insoluble debate, whose chief documents are three articles by Willy Hachez and the books by Hans Robert Jauss and Georges Daniel, which readers can refer to for a detailed account of the discussion.⁷ Let us recall only the two main difficulties: on the one hand, the impossibility of connecting the external chronology of *Un amour de Swann* (references to historical events requiring the episode to be dated near 1882–1884) to the general chronology of the *Recherche* (putting this same episode about 1877–1878);⁸ on the other hand, the disagreement between the external chronology of the episodes *Balbec II* and *Albertine* (references to historical events that took place between 1906 and 1913) and the general internal chronology (which puts them back between 1900 and 1902).⁹ So we cannot establish an

⁵ [Translator's note.] The corresponding Pléiade page numbers are: (1) I, 3–186; (2) I, 188–382; (3) I, 383–641; (4) I, 642–955; (5) II, 9–751; (6) II, 751–1131; (7) III, 9–623; (8) III, 623–675; (9) III, 675–723; (10) III 723–854; (11) III, 854–1048. Omitted in the English translation are P III, 673–676.

⁶ We see that the only two times when narrative articulations and external divisions coincide are the two ends of visit to Balbec (the end of *Jeunes Filles* and the end of *Sodome*); we can add the times when articulations and subdivisions coincide: the end of “Combray,” the end of “Amour de Swann,” and the end of “Autour de Mme. Swann.” All the rest is an overlapping. But of course my carving up is not sacrosanct, and it lays claim to a value that is no more than operational.

⁷ Willy Hachez, “La Chronologie et l'âge des personnages de A.L.R.T.P.,” *Bulletin de la société des amis de Marcel Proust*, 6 (1956); “Retouches à une chronologie,” *BSAMP*, 11 (1961); “Fiches biographiques de personnages de Proust,” *BSAMP*, 15 (1965). H. R. Jauss, *Zeit und Erinnerung in A.L.R.T.P.* (Heidelberg, 1955). Georges Daniel, *Temps et mystification dans A.L.R.T.P.* (Paris, 1963).

⁸ Added to this chronological disagreement is the one resulting from the absence in *Un amour de Swann* of any mention (and of any likelihood) of Gilberte's birth, which is nonetheless required by the general chronology.

⁹ We know that these two contradictions result from external circumstances: the separate writing of *Un amour de Swann*, integrated after the fact into the whole, and the late projection onto the character of Albertine of facts linked to the relations between Proust and Alfred Agostinelli. [Translator's note: Agostinelli was a young man for whom Proust developed an extremely deep affection in 1913. In 1914 he died in the crash of the plane he was learning to fly, an event Genette refers to on p. 99.]

approximately coherent chronology except by eliminating these two external series and adhering to the main series, whose two fundamental guide marks are, for *Guermantes*, autumn 1897–spring 1899 (because of the Dreyfus affair) and, for *The War*, naturally 1916. Given these reference points, we establish an almost homogeneous series, but it still has a few partial obscurities. These are due, in particular, to: (a) the blurred nature of the chronology of *Combray* and its poorly defined relationship to the chronology of *Gilberte*; (b) the obscurity of the chronology of *Gilberte*, not allowing us to ascertain whether one or two years pass between the two “New Years” mentioned;¹⁰ (c) the indeterminate length of the two stays in a clinic.¹¹ I will make short work of these uncertainties by establishing a purely indicative chronology, since our purpose is only to form an overall idea of the major rhythms of the Proustian narrative. Our chronological *hypothesis*, within the limits of exactitude we have thus settled on, is therefore as follows:

Un amour de Swann: 1877–1878
 (Births of Marcel and Gilberte: 1878)
Combray: 1883–1892
Gilberte: 1892–spring 1895
Balbec I: summer 1897
Guermantes: autumn 1897–summer 1899
Balbec II: summer 1900
Albertine: autumn 1900–beginning 1902

¹⁰ RH I, 372 and 462/P I, 486 and 608.

¹¹ The length of the first, between *Tansonville* and *The War* (RH II, 890/P III, 223), is not specified by the text (“the long years . . . which I spent far from Paris receiving treatment in a sanatorium, until there came a time, at the beginning of 1916, when it could no longer get medical staff”), but it is fairly precisely determined by the context: the *terminus ab quo* is 1902 or 1903, and the *terminus ad quem* is the explicit date of 1916, with the two-month trip to Paris in 1914 (RH II, 900–919/P III, 737–762) being only an interlude within that stay. The length of the second (between *The War* and *Matinée Guermantes*, RH II, 988/P III, 854), which can begin in 1916, is equally indefinite; but the phrase used (“many years passed”) prevents us from taking it to be very much briefer than the first, and forces us to put the second return, and therefore the *Guermantes* matinée (and a fortiori the moment of the narrating, which comes later by three years at least) after 1922, the date of Proust's death—which is an inconvenience only if one claims to identify the hero with the author. That wish is obviously what obliges Hachez (1965, p. 290) to shorten the second stay to three years at the most, in defiance of the text.

Venice: spring 1902
 Tansonville: 1903?
 The War: 1914 and 1916
 Matinée Guermantes: about 1925

According to this hypothesis, and some other temporal data of secondary importance, the main variations of speed in the narrative work out approximately like this:

Combray: 140 pages for about ten years.
 Un amour de Swann: 150 pages for some two years.
 Gilberte: 200 pages for about two years.
 (Here, ellipsis of two years.)
 Balbec I: 225 pages for three or four months.
 Guermantes: 525 pages for two and one-half years. But we must specify that this sequence itself contains very wide variations, since 80 pages tell about the Villeparisis reception, which must last two or three hours; 110 pages tell about the dinner at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, lasting almost the same length of time; and 65 pages tell about the Princess's soirée: in other words, almost half the sequence is for fewer than ten hours of fashionable gatherings.
 Balbec II: 270 pages for nearly six months, 80 of which are for a soirée at La Raspelière.
 Albertine: 440 pages for some eighteen months, 215 of which are devoted to only two days, and 95 of these are for the Charlus-Verdurin musical soirée alone.
 Venice: 35 pages for some weeks.
 (Indefinite ellipsis: at least some weeks.)
 Tansonville: 30 pages for "some days."
 (Ellipsis of about twelve years.)
 The War: 100 pages for some weeks, the main part of which is for a single evening (stroll in Paris and Jupien's male brothel).
 (Ellipsis of "many years.")
 Matinée Guermantes: 150 pages for two or three hours.

It seems to me, from this very sketchy list, that we can draw at least two conclusions. First, the range of variations, going from 150 pages for three hours to three lines for twelve years, viz. (very roughly), from a page for one minute to a page for one century. Next, the internal evolution of the narrative in proportion as it advances toward its end, an evolution that we can summarily describe by saying that we observe on the one hand a

gradual slowing down of the narrative, through the growing importance of very long scenes covering a very short time of story; and on the other hand, in a sense compensating for this slowing down, a more and more massive presence of ellipses. We can easily synthesize these two aspects with the following phrase: the *increasing discontinuity* of the narrative. The Proustian narrative tends to become more and more discontinuous, unconnected, built of enormous scenes separated by immense gaps, and thus it tends to deviate more and more from the hypothetical "norm" of narrative isochrony. Let us remember that we are not by any means dealing here with an evolution over time that would refer us to a psychological transformation in the author, since the *Recherche* was not by any means written in the order in which it is arranged today. On the other hand, it is true that Proust, who we well know tended unceasingly to inflate his text with additions, had more time to increase the later volumes than the earlier ones; the bulkiness of the later scenes thus partakes of that well-known imbalance that the publication delay imposed by the war brought about in the *Recherche*. But circumstances, if they explain the "stuffing" with details, cannot account for the overall composition. It certainly seems that Proust wanted, and wanted from the beginning, this ever more abrupt rhythm, with a Beethovenian massiveness and brutality, which contrasts so sharply with the almost imperceptible fluidity of the early parts, as if to compare the temporal texture of the older events with that of the more recent ones—as if the narrator's memory, while the facts draw nearer, were becoming both more selective and more enormously enlarging.

This change in rhythm cannot be accurately defined and interpreted until we connect it to other temporal treatments that we will study in the next chapter. But from now on we can and should examine more closely how the more or less infinite diversity of narrative speeds is in fact distributed and organized. Theoretically, indeed, there exists a continuous gradation from the infinite speed of ellipsis, where a nonexistent section of narrative corresponds to some duration of story, on up to the absolute slowness of descriptive pause, where some section of narra-