

from *Narrative Discourse, An Essay in Method*.  
Gérard Genette  
Cornell University Press, 1980.

## 2 Duration

### Anisochronies

At the beginning of the last chapter I recalled what difficulties the very idea of "time of the narrative" runs up against in written literature. It is obviously apropos of duration that these difficulties are so strongly felt, for the data of order, or of frequency, can be transposed with no problem from the temporal plane of the story to the spatial plane of the text: to say that episode A comes "after" episode B in the syntagmatic arrangement of a narrative text or that episode C is told "twice" is to make statements that have an obvious meaning and that can be clearly compared with other assertions such as "event A is earlier than event B in the story's time" or "event C happens only once." Here, therefore, comparison between the two planes is legitimate and relevant. On the other hand, comparing the "duration" of a narrative to that of the story it tells is a trickier operation, for the simple reason that no one can measure the duration of a narrative. What we spontaneously call such can be nothing more, as we have already said, than the time needed for reading; but it is too obvious that reading time varies according to particular circumstances, and that, unlike what happens in movies, or even in music, nothing here allows us to determine a "normal" speed of execution.

The reference point, or degree zero, which in matters of order

was the concurrence between diegetic sequence and narrative sequence, and which here would be rigorous isochrony between narrative and story, is now therefore absent—even if it be true, as Jean Ricardou notes, that a scene with dialogue (supposing it unadulterated by any intervention of the narrator and without any ellipsis) gives us "a sort of equality between the narrative section and the fictive section."<sup>1</sup> It is I who emphasize "sort," in order to insist on the unrigorous, and especially unrigorously temporal, nature of this equality. All that we can affirm of such a narrative (or dramatic) section is that it reports everything that was said, either really or fictively, without adding anything to it; but it does not restore the speed with which those words were pronounced or the possible dead spaces in the conversation. In no way, therefore, can it play the role of temporal indicator; it would play that role only if its indications could serve to measure the "narrative duration" of the differently paced sections surrounding it. Thus a scene with dialogue has only a kind of *conventional* equality between narrative time and story time, and later we will utilize it in this way in a typology of the traditional forms of narrative duration, but it cannot serve us as reference point for a rigorous comparison of real durations.

We must thus give up the idea of measuring variations in duration with respect to an inaccessible, because unverifiable, equality of duration between narrative and story. But the isochronism of a narrative may also be defined—like that of a pendulum, for example—not relatively, by comparing its duration to that of the story it tells, but in a way that is more or less absolute and autonomous, as *steadiness in speed*. By "speed" we mean the relationship between a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension (so many meters per second, so many seconds per meter): the speed of a narrative will be defined by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length

<sup>1</sup>Jean Ricardou, *Problèmes du nouveau roman* (Paris, 1967), p. 164. Ricardou contrasts *narrating* to *fiction* in the sense in which I contrast *narrative* (and sometimes *narrating*) to *story* (or *diegesis*): "narrating is the manner of telling, fiction is what is told" (p. 11).

(that of the text, measured in lines and in pages).<sup>2</sup> The isochronous narrative, our hypothetical reference zero, would thus be here a narrative with unchanging speed, without accelerations or slowdowns, where the relationship duration-of-story/length-of-narrative would remain always steady. It is doubtless unnecessary to specify that such a narrative does not exist, and cannot exist except as a laboratory experiment: at any level of aesthetic elaboration at all, it is hard to imagine the existence of a narrative that would admit of no variation in speed—and even this banal observation is somewhat important: a narrative can do without anachronies, but not without *anisochronies*, or, if one prefers (as one probably does), effects of *rhythm*.

Detailed analysis of these effects would be both wearying and devoid of all real rigor, since diegetic time is almost never indicated (or inferable) with the precision that would be necessary. The analysis is relevant, therefore, only at the macroscopic level, that of large narrative units, granting that the measurement for each unit covers only a statistical approximation.<sup>3</sup>

If we want to draw up a picture of these variations for the *Recherche du temps perdu*, we must decide at the very beginning what to consider as large narrative articulations, and then, to measure their story time, we must have at our disposal an approximately clear and coherent internal chronology. If the first datum is fairly easy to establish, the second is not.

So far as narrative articulations are concerned, we must observe first that they do not coincide with the work's visible divisions into parts and chapters supplied with titles and numbers.<sup>4</sup> If for our demarcating criterion, however, we adopt the

<sup>2</sup> This procedure is proposed by Gunther Müller, "Erzählzeit," and Roland Barthes, "Le Discours de l'histoire," *Information sur les sciences sociales*, August 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Metz (pp. 119 ff.) calls this "the large syntagmatic category" of narrative.

<sup>4</sup> We know, besides, that only external constraint is responsible for the existing break between *Swann* and the *Jeunes Filles en fleurs*. The relations between external divisions (parts, chapters, etc.) and internal narrative articulations have not—up until now, in general and to my knowledge—generated all the attention they deserve. These relations, however, are what mainly determine the rhythm of a narrative.

presence of an important temporal and/or spatial break, we can establish the separation without too much hesitation, as follows (I give some of these units titles—purely indicative ones—of my own making):

(1) I, 3–142, leaving out the memory-elicited analepses studied in the preceding chapter, is the unit devoted to the childhood in Combray: we, like Proust himself, will obviously name it *Combray*.

(2) After a temporal and spatial break, *Un amour de Swann*, I, 144–292.

(3) After a temporal break, the unit devoted to the Parisian adolescence and dominated by love with Gilberte and the discovery of Swann's milieu, occupying the third part of *Du côté de chez Swann* ("Noms de pays: le nom") and the first part of the *Jeunes Filles en fleurs* ("Autour de Mme. Swann"), I, 293–487: we will name it *Gilberte*.

(4) After a break that is both temporal (two years) and spatial (the movement from Paris to Balbec), the episode of the first stay at Balbec, corresponding to the second part of the *Jeunes Filles* ("Noms de pays: le pays"), I, 488–714: *Balbec I*.

(5) After a spatial break (return to Paris), we will take as one and the same unit everything coming between the two visits to Balbec, occurring almost entirely in Paris (with the exception of a short visit to Doncières) and in the Guermantes milieu, thus the complete *Côté de Guermantes* (I, 719–1141) and the beginning of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (II, 3–109): *Guermantes*.

(6) The second visit to Balbec, after a new spatial break, in other words, all the rest of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, II, 110–378: we will christen this unit *Balbec II*.

(7) After a new change of place (return to Paris), the story of Albertine's confinement, flight, and death, up to II, 820, in other words, the entire *Prisonnière* and most of *La Fugitive*, up to the departure for Venice: *Albertine*.

(8) II, 821–856, the visit to Venice and the trip back: *Venice*.

(9) II, 856–889, straddling *La Fugitive* and *Le Temps retrouvé*, the stay at *Tansonville*.

(10) After a break that is both temporal (stay in a clinic) and spatial (return to Paris), II, 890–987: *The War*.

(11) After a final temporal break (again a stay in a clinic),

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

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.<sup>7</sup> 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);<sup>8</sup> 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).<sup>9</sup> So we cannot establish an

<sup>5</sup> [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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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;<sup>10</sup> (c) the indeterminate length of the two stays in a clinic.<sup>11</sup> 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

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

<sup>11</sup> The length of the first, between *Tansonville* and *The War* (RH II, 890/P III, 723), 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, syncopated, 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-

tive discourse corresponds to a nonexistent diegetic duration.<sup>12</sup> In fact, it turns out that narrative tradition, and in particular the novel's tradition, has reduced that liberty, or at any rate has regulated it by effecting a selection from all the possibilities: it has selected four basic relationships that have become—in the course of an evolution that the (as yet unborn) *history of literature* will some day start to study—the canonical forms of novel *tempo*, a little bit the way the classical tradition in music singled out, from the infinitude of possible speeds of execution, some canonical movements (*andante*, *allegro*, *presto*, etc.) whose relationships of succession and alternation governed structures like those of the sonata, the symphony, or the concerto for some two centuries. These four basic forms of narrative movement, that we will hereafter call the four narrative *movements*, are the two extremes that I have just mentioned (*ellipsis* and descriptive *pause*) and two intermediaries: *scene*, most often in dialogue, which, as we have already observed, realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story; and what English-language critics call *summary*<sup>13</sup>—a form with variable tempo (whereas the tempo of the other three is fixed, at least in principle), which with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range included between scene and ellipsis. We could schematize the temporal values of these four movements fairly well with the following formulas, with *ST* designating story time and *NT* the pseudo-time, or conventional time, of the narrative:

<sup>12</sup> This formulation can occasion two misunderstandings that I wish to dissipate at once. (1) The fact that a section of discourse corresponds to no duration in the story does not in itself characterize description: it may also characterize those commentarial excursions in the present tense which, ever since Blin and Brombert, we have generally called *author's intrusions or interventions*, and which we will meet again in the last chapter. But what is distinctive about these excursions is that they are not strictly speaking narrative. Descriptions, on the other hand, as constituents of the spatio-temporal universe of the story, are *diegetic*, and thus when we deal with them we are involved with the *narrative discourse*. (2) Every description is not necessarily a pause in the narrative, which we will observe in Proust himself. So we are not concerned here with description, but with *descriptive pause*, which is therefore not to be confused either with every pause or with every description.

<sup>13</sup> [Translator's note.] I have omitted from the text a brief statement on French terminology.

pause:  $NT = n$ ,  $ST = 0$ . Thus:  $NT \infty > ST$ <sup>14</sup>

scene:  $NT = ST$

summary:  $NT < ST$

ellipsis:  $NT = 0$ ,  $ST = n$ . Thus:  $NT < \infty ST$ .

A plain reading of this chart reveals an asymmetry, which is the absence of a form with variable tempo symmetrical to the summary, and whose formula would be  $NT > ST$ . This would obviously be a sort of scene in slow motion, and we think immediately of the long Proustian scenes, the reading of which often seems to take longer, much longer, than the diegetic time that such scenes are supposed to be covering. But, as we shall see, big scenes in novels, and especially in Proust, are extended mainly by extranarrative elements or interrupted by descriptive pauses, but are not exactly slowed down. And needless to say, pure dialogue cannot be slowed down. So there remains detailed narration of acts or events told about more slowly than they were performed or undergone. The thing is undoubtedly feasible as a deliberate experiment,<sup>15</sup> but we are not dealing there with a canonical form, or even a form really actualized in literary tradition. The canonical forms are indeed restricted, in fact, to the four movements I have enumerated.

### Summary

Now, if we examine from this point of view the narrative pacing of the *Recherche*, what we are first compelled to note is the almost total absence of summary in the form it had during the whole previous history of the novel: that is, the narration in a few paragraphs or a few pages of several days, months, or

<sup>14</sup> This sign  $\infty >$  (infinitely greater), as well as the inverse one  $< \infty$  (infinitely less), are not, I am told, mathematically orthodox. I am retaining them, however, because they seem to me, in this context and for anyone of good will, as transparent a means as there is to designate an idea that is itself mathematically suspect, but very clear here.

<sup>15</sup> This is somewhat the circumstance with *L'Agrandissement* by Claude Mauriac (1963), which devotes some two hundred pages to a period of two minutes. But there again, the lengthening of the text does not arise from a real expansion of the time period, but from various insertions (memory-elicited analepses, etc.).

years of existence, without details of action or speech. Borges quotes an example of this, taken from *Don Quixote*, which seems to me fairly typical:

In the end it seemed to [Lothario] necessary to take full advantage of the opportunity which Anselmo's absence gave him, and to intensify the siege of the fortress. So he assailed her self-love with praise of her beauty; for there is nothing which reduces and levels the embattled towers of a beautiful woman's vanity so quickly as this same vanity posted upon the tongue of flattery. In fact, he most industriously mined the rock of her integrity with such charges that Camilla would have fallen even if she had been made of brass. Lothario wept, beseeched, promised, flattered and swore, with such ardour and with such signs of real feeling, that he overcame Camilla's chastity and achieved the triumph which he least expected and most desired.<sup>16</sup>

"Chapters like [this one]," comments Borges, "form the overwhelming majority of world literature, and not the most unworthy." He is thinking here, however, less of relations of speed as such than of the contrast between classical *abstraction* (here, despite the metaphors or perhaps because of them) and "modern" *expressivity*. If one has one's eye more on the contrast between scene and summary,<sup>17</sup> one obviously cannot maintain that texts of this type "form the immense majority of world literature," for the simple reason that the very brevity of summary gives it almost everywhere an obvious quantitative inferiority to descriptive and dramatic chapters, and that therefore summary probably occupies a limited place in the whole corpus

<sup>16</sup> Cervantes, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, Part I, chap. 34, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 300; quoted in J. L. Borges, *Discussions* (Paris, 1966), pp. 51-52. The comparison with a more flippant (but motivated) summary on an analogous subject, in Fielding, is unavoidable: "Not to tire the Reader, by leading him thro' every Scene of this Courtship, (which, tho', in the Opinion of a certain great Author, it is the pleasantest Scene of Life to the Actor, is, perhaps, as dull and tiresome as any whatever to the Audience) the Captain made his Advances in Form, the Citadel was defended in Form, and at length, in proper Form, surrendered at Discretion" (Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book I, chap. 11 [New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1973], p. 52).

<sup>17</sup> See Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (London, 1921).

of narrative, even of classical narrative. On the other hand, it is obvious that summary remained, up to the end of the nineteenth century, the most usual transition between two scenes, the "background" against which scenes stand out, and thus the connective tissue par excellence of novelistic narrative, whose fundamental rhythm is defined by the alternation of summary and scene. We must add that most retrospective sections, and particularly in what we have called complete analepses, belong to this type of narration, of which the second chapter of *Birotteau* gives an example as typical as it is admirable:

A cotter, Jacques Birotteau by name, living near Chinon, took unto himself a wife, a domestic servant in the house of a lady, who employed him in her vineyard. Three sons were born to them; his wife died at the birth of the third, and the poor fellow did not long survive her. Then the mistress, out of affection for her maid, adopted the oldest of the cotter's boys; she brought him up with her own son, and placed him in a seminary. This François Birotteau took orders, and during the Revolution led the wandering life of priests who would not take the oath, hiding from those who hunted them down like wild beasts, lucky to meet with no worse fate than the guillotine.<sup>18</sup>

Nothing of the kind in Proust. With him, narrative cutting is never accomplished by this sort of acceleration, even in the anachronies, which in the *Recherche* are almost always genuine scenes, earlier or later, and not offhand glances at past or future. In Proust cutting either arises from a quite different kind of synthesis, which we will study more closely in the next chapter

<sup>18</sup> Garnier, p. 30; *César Birotteau, Béatrix, and Other Stories*, trans. E. Marriage and J. Waring (Philadelphia, 1899), p. 22. After Lubbock, the functional relationship between summary and analepsis was clearly indicated by Phyllis Bentley: "One of the most important and frequent uses of the summary is to convey rapidly a sketch of *past* life. The novelist, having excited our interest in his characters by telling a scene to us, suddenly whizzes his pageant back, then forward, giving us a rapid summary of their past history, a retrospect" ("Use of Summary," from *Some Observations on the Art of Narrative*, 1947; rpt. in Philip Stevick, ed., *The Theory of the Novel* [New York, 1967], p. 49).



under the name of iterative narrative,<sup>19</sup> or else it pushes acceleration so far as to cross the limits separating summary from ellipsis pure and simple. An example is the way in which the narrative sums up Marcel's years of retirement that precede and follow his return to Paris during the war.<sup>20</sup> The confusion between acceleration and ellipsis is, moreover, all but obvious in Proust's famous commentary on a page of the *Education sentimentale*:

Here there is an implied "silence" of vast duration,<sup>21</sup> and suddenly, without the hint of a transition,<sup>22</sup> time ceases to be a matter of mere successive quarters of an hour, and appears to us in the guise of years and decades, . . . this extraordinary change of tempo, for which nothing in the preceding lines has prepared us.<sup>23</sup>

Now, Proust has just introduced that passage with these words: "The finest thing, to my mind, in the whole of *Education sentimentale*, is to be found, not in words at all, but in a passage where there comes a sudden moment of silence," and he will go on as follows: "in Balzac, . . . the change of tempo has an active and documentary character." So we do not know whether his

<sup>19</sup> Which the classical novel, by no means ignorant of it, integrated into summary; example, *Biorotteau* (Garnier, pp. 31–32; Marriage and Waring, pp. 23–24): "He used to cry sometimes when the day was over and he thought of Touraine, where the peasant works leisurely and the mason takes his time about laying a stone, and toil is judiciously tempered by idleness; but he usually fell asleep before he reached the point of thinking of running away, for his morning's round of work awaited him, and he did his duty with the instinctive obedience of a yard dog."

<sup>20</sup> RH II, 890/P III, 723: "These ideas, tending on the one hand to diminish, and on the other to increase, my regret that I had no gift for literature, were entirely absent from my mind during the long years—in which I had in any case completely renounced the project of writing—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"; and RH II, 988/P III, 854: "The new sanatorium to which I withdrew was no more successful in curing me than the first one, and many years passed before I came away."

<sup>21</sup> It is the change of chapter between " . . . and Frédéric, gaping, recognized Sénéchal" (III, chap. 5) and "He traveled . . ." (III, chap. 6).

<sup>22</sup> As if the change of chapter were not, precisely, a transition. But probably Proust, who is quoting from memory, forgot this detail.

<sup>23</sup> *Essais et articles*, Pléiade, p. 595; "About Flaubert's Style," in *Marcel Proust: A Selection from His Miscellaneous Writings*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (London, 1948), pp. 234–235.

admiration here is for the *sudden silence*, that is, the ellipsis separating the two chapters, or for the *change of tempo*, that is, the summary in the opening lines of chapter 6. No doubt the truth is that the distinction matters little to him, so true is it that, addicted to a kind of narrative "all or nothingness," he himself can accelerate only (according to his own expression) "wildly,"<sup>24</sup> even at the risk of (let us dedicate this metaphor from mechanics to the spirit of the unfortunate Agostinelli) *lifting off*.<sup>25</sup>

### Pause

A second negative finding concerns descriptive pauses. Proust is customarily viewed as a novelist lavish in descriptions, and no doubt he owes that reputation to an acquaintance with his work that is apt to be from anthologies, where apparent digressions like the hawthorns at Tansonville, the seascapes of Elstir, the Princess's fountain, etc., are inevitably isolated. In fact, the clear descriptive passages are, relative to the scope of the work, neither very numerous (there are scarcely more than about thirty) nor very long (most do not exceed four pages): the proportion is probably lower than in some of Balzac's novels. In addition, a large number of these descriptions (undoubtedly more than a third)<sup>26</sup> are the iterative type, that is, they are not connected to a particular moment in the story but to a series of analogous moments, and consequently cannot in any way contribute to slowing down the narrative but, indeed, the reverse: for example, Léonie's room, the church at Combray, the "views

<sup>24</sup> "And to make [Time's] flight perceptible novelists are obliged, by wildly accelerating the beat of the pendulum, to transport the reader in a couple of minutes over ten, or twenty, or even thirty years" (RH I, 369/P I, 482).

<sup>25</sup> The *Contre Sainte-Beuve* contains this very allusive criticism of the Balzacian use of summaries: "There are his recapitulations where, without allowing a moment's breathing-space, he tells us everything we ought to know" (Pléiade, p. 271; *Marcel Proust on Art*, p. 173).

<sup>26</sup> These figures might seem vague; but it would be absurd to look for precision apropos of a corpus whose boundaries are themselves very uncertain, since obviously pure description (purified of any narration) and pure narration (purified of any description) do not exist, and since the counting of "descriptive passages" necessarily omits thousands of sentences, portions of sentences, or descriptive words set among scenes where narrative is dominant. On this matter, see my *Figures II*, pp. 56–61.

of the sea" at Balbec, the hotel in Doncières, the scenery of Venice,<sup>27</sup> so many pages all synthesizing several occurrences of the same sight into one single descriptive section. But most important is this: even when the object described has been met only once (like the trees at Hudimesnil),<sup>28</sup> or when the description concerns only a single one of its appearances (generally the first, as with the church at Balbec, the Guermantes fountain, the sea at La Raspelière),<sup>29</sup> that description never brings about a pause in the narrative, a suspension of the story or of (according to the traditional term) the "action." In effect, Proustian narrative never comes to a standstill at an object or a sight unless that halt corresponds to a contemplative pause by the hero himself (Swann in *Un amour de Swann*, Marcel everywhere else), and thus the descriptive piece never evades the temporality of the story.

Of course, such treatment of description is not in itself an innovation; and, for example, when the narrative in *Astrée* describes at length the pictures displayed in Céladon's room at the château d'Isoure, we can assume that that description more or less accompanies Céladon's gaze as he discovers these pictures on waking up.<sup>30</sup> But we know that the Balzacian novel, on the contrary, established a typically extratemporal descriptive canon (furthermore, more in conformity with the model of epic *ecphrasis*),<sup>31</sup> a canon where the narrator, forsaking the course of the story (or, as in *Le Père Goriot* or *La Recherche de l'absolu*, before arriving there), makes it his business, in his own name and solely for the information of his reader, to describe a scene that at this point in the story no one, strictly speaking, is looking at. For example, as the sentence in the *Vieille Fille* that opens the scene at the Cormon townhouse certainly indicates: "Now, however, it will be necessary to enter the household of that elderly spinster toward whom so many interests converge, and

<sup>27</sup> RH I, 37-38/P I, 49-50; RH I, 45-51/P I, 59-67; RH I, 510-511/P I, 672-673; RH I, 605-608/P I, 802-806; RH I, 784-785/P II, 98-99; RH II, 821-823/P III, 623-625.

<sup>28</sup> RH I, 543-545/P I, 717-719.

<sup>29</sup> RH I, 500-502/P I, 658-660; RH II, 43/P II, 656-657; RH II, 212/P II, 897.

<sup>30</sup> Honoré d'Urfé, *Astrée*, Vaganay ed., I, 40-43.

<sup>31</sup> Except for the shield of Achilles (*Iliad*, Book XVIII), described, as we know, at the time of its construction by Hephaestus.

within whose walls the actors in this Scene are to meet this very evening."<sup>32</sup> This "entering" is obviously the doing of the narrator and reader alone, who are going to wander over the house and the garden while the real "actors in this Scene" continue to attend to their business elsewhere, or rather wait to go back to their business until the narrative agrees to return to them and restore them to life.<sup>33</sup>

We know that Stendhal always avoided that canon by pulverizing the descriptions, and by almost systematically integrating what he allowed to remain of them to the level of his characters' actions—or daydreams. But Stendhal's position, here as elsewhere, remains marginal and has no direct influence. If we wish to find in the modern novel a model or a precursor of Proustian description, we should much rather think of Flaubert. Not that the Balzacian type is completely foreign to him: see the scene of Yonville that begins the second part of *Bovary*. But most of the time, and even in descriptive passages of a certain extent, the general movement of the text<sup>34</sup> is governed by the step or the gaze of one (or several) character(s), and the unfolding of that movement corresponds exactly to the length of the trip (Emma's inspection of the house at Tostes, Frédéric's and Rosanette's walk in the forest)<sup>35</sup> or of the motionless contemplation (sight of the garden at Tostes, gallery with colored panes of glass at la Vaubyessard, view of Rouen).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Garnier, p. 67; *The Old Maid*, trans. W. Walton (Washington, D.C., 1898), p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> Gautier will use this technique to the point of a flippancy that "bares" it, as the Formalists would say: "The Marquise inhabited a separate suite, which the Marquis did not enter unless he was announced. We will commit this impropriety that authors of all times have allowed themselves, and without saying a word to the buttons who would have forewarned the lodger, we will penetrate into the bedroom, sure of disturbing no one. The writer of a novel naturally wears on his finger the ring of Gyges, which makes him invisible" (*Le Capitaine Fracasse*, Garnier ed., p. 103). Later we will again meet this trope, the *metalepsis*, with which the narrator pretends to enter (with or without his reader) into the diegetic universe.

<sup>34</sup> Setting aside certain *descriptive intrusions* of the narrator, generally in the present tense, very brief, and as if unintentional: see my *Figures*, pp. 223-243.

<sup>35</sup> *Bovary*, Garnier ed. (edited by Gothot-Mersch), pp. 32-34; *L'Education*, edited by Dumesnil, II, 154-160.

<sup>36</sup> *Bovary*, Pommier-Leleu version, pp. 196-197 and 216; Garnier, pp. 268-269. The latter is iterative as well.



Proustian narrative seems to have turned this principle of concurrence into a rule. We know what characteristic habit of the author himself is reflected in the hero's capacity to come to a stop for long minutes before an object (hawthorns at Tansonville, pond at Montjouvain, trees at Hudimesnil, apple trees in bloom, views of the sea, etc.)—an object whose power to fascinate derives from the presence of a secret not disclosed, a message still illegible but insistent, a rough sketch and veiled promise of the ultimate revelation. The duration of these contemplative halts is generally such that it is in no danger of being exceeded by the duration of the reading (even a very slow reading) of the text that "tells of" them. So it is, for example, with the gallery of the Elstir paintings at the Duc de Guermantes's, the evocation of which takes up less than four pages<sup>37</sup> and which itself—Marcel notices after the event—has delayed him for three quarters of an hour, during which time the famished Duke leads some respectful guests, including the Princesse de Parme, in being patient. In fact, Proustian "description" is less a description of the object contemplated than it is a narrative and analysis of the perceptual activity of the character contemplating: of his impressions, progressive discoveries, shifts in distance and perspective, errors and corrections, enthusiasms or disappointments, etc. A contemplation highly active in truth, and containing "a whole story." This story is what Proustian description recounts. Suppose we reread, for example, the few pages devoted to Elstir's seascapes at Balbec.<sup>38</sup> We will see how jammed they are with terms designating not what the painting of Elstir is, but the "optical illusions" that it "recreates," and the false impressions it arouses and dissipates in turn: *seem, appear, give the impression, as if, you felt, you would have said, you thought, you understood, you saw reappear, they went racing over sunlit fields, etc.* Aesthetic activity here is not repose at all, but this characteristic is not due only to the sleight-of-hand "metaphors" of the impressionist painter. The same *labor* of perception, the same struggle or play with appearances, occurs again in the presence

<sup>37</sup> RH I, 1017-1020/P II, 419-422.

<sup>38</sup> RH I, 629-632/P I, 836-840.

of the slightest object or landscape. Here is the (very) young Marcel grappling with Aunt Léonie's handful of dried lime-flowers: "*as though a painter,*" "the leaves . . . *assumed [the appearance] . . . of the most incongruous things imaginable,*" "A thousand trifling little details . . . gave me . . . the pleasure of *finding that these were indeed real lime-blossoms,*" "I recognized," "the rosy . . . glow *shewed me that these were petals which,*" etc.:<sup>39</sup> a whole precocious education in the art of seeing, of going beyond false appearances, of discerning true identities, giving this description (which, furthermore, is iterative) a story duration that is packed full. There is the same labor of perception in front of Hubert Robert's fountain, the description of which I reprint in its entirety, merely emphasizing the terms that mark the duration of the scene and the activity of the hero, who is hidden here by a falsely generalizing impersonal pronoun (a little like Brichot's "one") that multiplies his presence without abolishing it:

In a clearing surrounded by fine trees several of which were as old as itself, set in a place apart, *one could see it in the distance*, slender, immobile, stiffened, allowing the breeze to stir only the lighter fall of its pale and quivering plume. The eighteenth century had refined the elegance of its lines, but, by fixing the style of the jet, *seemed to have arrested its life; at this distance one had the impression of a work of art rather than the sensation of water.* The moist cloud itself that was *perpetually* gathering at its crest preserved the character of the period like those that in the sky assemble round the palaces of Versailles. But *from a closer view one realised that*, while it respected, like the stones of an ancient palace, the design traced for it beforehand, it was *a constantly changing stream of water* that, springing upwards and seeking to obey the architect's traditional orders, performed them to the letter only by *seeming to infringe them*, its thousand separate bursts succeeding only *at a distance in giving the impression of a single flow.* This was in reality as often interrupted as the scattering of the fall, whereas *from a distance it had appeared to me unyielding, solid, unbroken in its continuity.* *From a little nearer, one saw that this continuity, apparently complete, was assured, at every point in the ascent of the jet,*

<sup>39</sup> RH I, 39/P I, 51.

wherever it must otherwise have been broken, by the entering into line, by the lateral incorporation of a parallel jet which mounted higher than the first and was itself, at an altitude greater but *already* a strain upon its endurance, relieved by a third. *Seen close at hand*, drops without strength fell back from the column of water crossing on their way their climbing sisters and, *at times*, torn, caught in an eddy of the night air, disturbed by this *ceaseless* flow, floated awhile *before* being drowned in the basin. They teased with their *hesitations*, with their *passage* in the opposite direction, and blurred with their soft vapour the vertical tension of that stem, bearing aloft an oblong cloud composed of a thousand tiny drops, but *apparently* painted in an unchanging, golden brown which rose, unbreakable, constant, urgent, swift, to mingle with the clouds in the sky. Unfortunately, a gust of wind was enough to scatter it obliquely on the ground; *at times* indeed a single jet, disobeying its orders, swerved and, had they not kept a respectful distance, would have drenched to their skins the incautious crowd of gazers.<sup>40</sup>

We meet this situation again, developed much more extensively, in the course of the Guermantes matinée. Its first twenty-five pages at least<sup>41</sup> are based on this activity of recognizing and identifying, an activity forced on the hero by the aging of an entire "society." At first glance these twenty-five pages are purely descriptive: the sight of the Guermantes salon after a ten-year absence. In fact, we are definitely dealing instead with a narrative: how the hero, passing from one to another (or from some to others), must each time make the effort—sometimes a fruitless one—to recognize, in this little old man, the Duc de Châtellerauld; under his beard, M. d'Argencourt; the Prince d'Agriente, dignified by age; the young count of——, as an old colonel; Bloch, as poppa Bloch, etc.—revealing at each encounter "the mental effort that made [him] hesitate between three or four people," and that other "mental effort," the even more disturbing one of identification itself:

<sup>40</sup> RH II, 43/P II, 656.

<sup>41</sup> We are dealing here with the first twenty-five pages of the reception as such (RH II, 1039-1064/P III, 920-952), once Marcel has entered the salon, after the meditation in the library (RH II, 997-1039/P III, 866-920).

For to "recognize" someone, and, *a fortiori*, having failed to recognize someone to learn his identity, is to predicate two contradictory things of a single subject, it is to admit that what was here, the person whom one remembers, no longer exists, and also that what is now here is a person whom one did not know to exist; and to do this we have to apprehend a mystery almost as disturbing as that of death, of which it is, indeed, as it were the preface and the harbinger.<sup>42</sup>

A painful substitution, like the one he must effect at the church of Balbec, of the real for the imaginary: "my mind . . . was astonished to see the statue which it had carved a thousand times, reduced now to its own apparent form in stone," a work of art "transformed, as was the church itself, into a little old woman in stone whose height I could measure and count her wrinkles."<sup>43</sup> A euphoric superimposition, by contrast: the one setting up a comparison between the memory of Combray and the scenery of Venice, "impressions analogous . . . but transposed into a wholly different and far richer key."<sup>44</sup> Finally a difficult, almost acrobatic juxtaposition: the pieces of the "countryside at sunrise" perceived alternately through the two opposite window panes of the railroad car between Paris and Balbec, and requiring the hero to be "running from one window to the other to reassemble, to collect on a single canvas the intermittent, antipodean fragments of [his] fine, scarlet, ever-changing morning, and to obtain a comprehensive view of it and a continuous picture."<sup>45</sup>

So we see that in Proust contemplation is neither an instantaneous flash (like recollection) nor a moment of passive and restful ecstasy; it is an activity—intense, intellectual, and often physical—and the telling of it is, after all is said and done, a narrative just like any other. What we are compelled to conclude, therefore, is that description, in Proust, becomes absorbed into narration, and that the second canonical type of

<sup>42</sup> RH II, 1054/P III, 939.

<sup>43</sup> RH I, 501-502/P I, 659-660.

<sup>44</sup> RH II, 821/P III, 623.

<sup>45</sup> RH I, 497/P I, 654-655.

movement—the descriptive pause—does not exist in Proust, for the obvious reason that with him description is everything *except* a pause in the narrative.

### Ellipsis

Absence of summary, absence of descriptive pause—on the roster of Proustian narrative, then, only two of the traditional movements still exist: scene and ellipsis. Before examining the temporal pacing and the function of scene in Proust, we will say a few words about ellipsis. Obviously we are dealing here only with ellipsis as such, or *temporal* ellipsis, leaving aside those lateral omissions for which we have reserved the name *paralipsis*.

From the temporal point of view, the analysis of ellipses comes down to considering the story time elided, and here the first question is to know whether that duration is indicated (*definite* ellipses) or not indicated (*indefinite* ellipses). Thus, between the end of *Gilberte* and the beginning of *Balbec* a two-year ellipsis occurs that is clearly definite: "I had arrived at a state almost of complete indifference to Gilberte when, *two years later*, I went with my grandmother to Balbec";<sup>46</sup> on the other hand, we remember, the two ellipses relating to the hero's sojourns in a clinic are (almost) equally indefinite ("long years," "many years"), and the analyst is reduced to sometimes difficult inferences.

From the formal point of view, we will distinguish:

(a) *Explicit* ellipses, like those I have just quoted. They arise either from an indication (definite or not) of the lapse of time they elide, which assimilates them to very quick summaries of the "some years passed" type (in this case the indication *constitutes* the ellipsis as textual section, which is then not totally equal to zero); or else from elision pure and simple (zero degree of the elliptical text) plus, when the narrative starts up again, an indication of the time elapsed, like the "two years later" quoted just above. This latter form is obviously more rigorously elliptical, although quite as explicit, and not necessarily shorter; but in this form the text expresses the perception of narrative void or gap

<sup>46</sup> RH I, 488/P I, 642.

more analogically, more "iconically" (in Peirce's or Jakobson's sense).<sup>47</sup> Both of these forms, in addition, can supplement the purely temporal indication with a piece of information having diegetic content, such as "some years of happiness passed," or "after some years of happiness." These *characterizing* ellipses are one of the resources of novelistic narration. In the *Chartreuse* Stendhal gives an example that is memorable, and moreover ingeniously contradictory, after the nocturnal reunion of Fabrice and Clélia: "Here, we ask for permission to pass over, *without saying a single word about it*, a space of three years. . . . After three years of *divine happiness* . . ." <sup>48</sup> Let us add that a negative characterization is a characterization just like any other: an example is when Fielding, who with some exaggeration flatters himself on being the first to vary the rhythm of the narrative and to elide the dead spaces of the action,<sup>49</sup> leaps over twelve years in the life of Tom Jones, asserting that "nothing worthy of a Place in this History occurred within that Period."<sup>50</sup> We know how much Stendhal admired and imitated this flippant manner. In the *Recherche*, the two ellipses that frame the episode of the war are obviously characterizing ellipses, since we learn that Marcel spent those years in a clinic, being cared for without being cured, and without writing. But almost equally characterizing, although retrospectively, is the ellipsis opening *Balbec I*, for to say "I had arrived at a state almost of complete indifference to Gilberte when, two years later . . ." amounts to say-

<sup>47</sup> See Roman Jakobson, "Quest for the Essence of Language," *Diogenes*, 51 (Fall 1965), 21-37.

<sup>48</sup> Garnier, p. 474.

<sup>49</sup> See Book II, chap. 1, of *Tom Jones*, where he attacks the dull historians who "fill up as much Paper with the Detail of Months and Years in which nothing remarkable happened, as [they employ] upon those notable Æras when the greatest Scenes have been transacted on the human Stage," and whose books he compares "to a Stage-Coach, which performs constantly the same Course, empty as well as full." In opposition to this somewhat imaginary tradition, he boasts of inaugurating "a contrary Method," sparing nothing to "open [any extraordinary Scene] at large to our Reader," while on the contrary ignoring "whole Years [that] pass without producing any Thing worthy [of] Notice"—like the "[sagacious] Registers of [the Guild-hall] Lottery" who announce only the winning numbers (Norton Critical Edition, pp. 58-59).

<sup>50</sup> Book III, chap. 1 (Norton, p. 88).

ing, "for two years, I was detaching myself from Gilberte little by little."

(b) *Implicit* ellipses, that is, those whose very presence is not announced in the text and which the reader can infer only from some chronological lacuna or gap in narrative continuity. This is the case for the indefinite time elapsing between the end of the *Jeunes Filles en fleurs* and the beginning of *Guermantes*: we know Marcel had returned to Paris, to "[his] own room, the ceiling of which was low";<sup>51</sup> we meet him next in a new apartment attached to the Guermantes townhouse, which presumes the elision of at least a few days, and perhaps considerably more. It is also the case, and in a more puzzling way, for the few months following the grandmother's death.<sup>52</sup> This ellipsis is perfectly mute: we left the grandmother on her deathbed, most likely at the beginning of the summer; the narrative takes up again in these terms: "Albeit it was simply a Sunday in autumn . . ." The ellipsis is apparently definite, thanks to this indication of date, but it is very imprecisely so, and will soon become rather confused.<sup>53</sup> Above all it is not characterized, and it will remain not characterized: we will never, even retrospectively, know anything of what the hero's life has been during these few months. This is perhaps the most opaque silence in the entire *Recherche*, and, if we remember that the death of the grandmother is to a great extent a transposition of the death of the author's mother, this reticence is undoubtedly not devoid of significance.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> RH I, 712/P I, 953.

<sup>52</sup> Between chapters 1 and 2 of *Guermantes II* (RH I, 964-965/P II, 345).

<sup>53</sup> "First it is an indefinite Sunday in autumn [RH I, 965/P II, 345] and soon it is the end of autumn [RH I, 994/P II, 385]. However, shortly thereafter [RH I, 999/P II, 392] Françoise says, 'It's the end of "Sextember" already. . . .' In any case, it is not a September atmosphere, but a November or even a December one that the restaurant is deep in where the narrator dines the day before the first invitation to the Duchesse de Guermantes's. And on leaving her reception, the narrator asks for his *snowboots*" (Daniel, *Temps et mystification*, pp. 92-93).

<sup>54</sup> Let us remember that Marcel himself has the habit of interpreting certain words "in the same way as . . . a sudden silence" (RH II, 439/P III, 88). The hermeneutics of narrative must also take on these sudden silences, by accounting for their "duration," their intensity, and naturally their *placement*.

(c) Finally, the most implicit form of ellipsis is the purely *hypothetical* ellipsis, impossible to localize, even sometimes impossible to place in any spot at all, and revealed after the event by an analepsis such as those we already met in the preceding chapter:<sup>55</sup> trips to Germany, to the Alps, to Holland, military service. We are obviously there at the limits of the narrative's coherence, and for that very reason at the limits of the validity of temporal analysis. But the *designation of limits* is not the most trifling task of a method of analysis; and we may say in passing that perhaps the main justification for studying a work like the *Recherche du temps perdu* according to the traditional criteria of narrative is, on the contrary, to allow one to establish with precision the points on which such a work, deliberately or not, goes beyond such criteria.

### Scene

If we consider the fact that ellipses, whatever their number and power of elision may be, represent a practically nonexistent portion of text, we must surely come to the conclusion that the whole of Proust's narrative text can be defined as *scene*, taking that term in the temporal sense in which we are defining it here and setting aside for the moment the iterative nature of some of those scenes.<sup>56</sup> Thus the traditional alternation summary/scene is at an end. Later we will see it replaced by another alternation, but now we must note a change in function which in any case modifies the structural role of the scene.

In novelistic narrative as it functioned before the *Recherche*, the contrast of tempo between detailed scene and summary almost always reflected a contrast of content between dramatic and nondramatic, the strong periods of the action coinciding with the most intense moments of the narrative while the weak periods were summed up with large strokes and as if from a great distance, according to the principle that we have seen set forth by Fielding. The real rhythm of the novelistic canon, still

<sup>55</sup> P. 51.

<sup>56</sup> On the dominance of scene, see Tadié, *Proust et le roman*, pp. 387 ff.

very perceptible in *Bovary*, is thus the alternation of nondramatic summaries, functioning as waiting room and liaison, with dramatic scenes whose role in the action is decisive.<sup>57</sup>

One can still grant that status to some of the scenes in the *Recherche*, like the "drama of bedtime," the profanation at Montjouvain, the evening of the cattleyas, Charlus's deep anger at Marcel, the grandmother's death, Charlus's exclusion, and naturally (although there we are dealing with a completely internal "action") the ultimate revelation,<sup>58</sup> all of which mark irreversible stages in the fulfillment of a destiny. But clearly such is not the function of the longest and most typically Proustian scenes, those five enormous ones that all by themselves take up about 450 pages: the Villeparisis matinée, the Guermites dinner, the soirée at the Princess's, the soirée at La Raspelière, the Guermites matinée.<sup>59</sup> As we have already observed, each of these has inaugural importance: each marks the hero's entrance into a new place or milieu and stands for the entire series, which it opens, of similar scenes that will not be reported: other receptions at Mme. de Villeparisis's and in the Guermites milieu, other dinners at Oriane's, other receptions at the Princess's, other soirées at La Raspelière. None of these inaugural social gatherings merits more attention than all the analogous ones that succeed it and that it represents except by being the first in each series, and as such arousing a curiosity that habit will immediately after begin to blunt.<sup>60</sup> So we are not dealing

<sup>57</sup> This assertion should obviously be taken with qualifications: for instance, in the *Souffrances de l'inventeur*, the most dramatic pages are perhaps those where Balzac sums up with the sparseness of a military historian the procedural battles waged against David Séchard.

<sup>58</sup> RH I, 16-36/P I, 21-48; RH I, 122-127/P I, 159-165; RH I, 173-179/P I, 226-233; RH I, 1110-1119/P II, 552-565; RH I, 956-964/P II, 335-345; RH II, 537-606/P III, 226-324; RH II, 996-999/P III, 865-869.

<sup>59</sup> RH I, 846-920/P II, 183-284; RH I, 1016-1106/P II, 416-547; RH II, 27-89/P II, 633-722; RH II, 190-269/P II, 866-979; RH II, 997-1140/P III, 866-1048.

<sup>60</sup> The status of the final scene (the Guermites matinée) is more complex because it involves as much (and even more) a farewell to the world as an initiation. But the theme of *discovery* is nonetheless present there, in the form, as we know, of a rediscovery, a recognition made difficult by the mask of aging and transformation—a reason for curiosity as powerful as, if not more so than, the reason animating the earlier scenes of entry into society.

here with dramatic scenes, but rather with *typical* or illustrative scenes, where action (even in the very broad sense one must give this term in the Proustian universe) is almost completely obliterated in favor of psychological and social characterization.<sup>61</sup>

This change of function entails a very appreciable modification in temporal texture: contrary to the earlier tradition, which made scene into a place of dramatic concentration almost entirely free of descriptive or discursive impedimenta, and free even more of anachronic interferences, the Proustian scene—as J. P. Houston has said<sup>62</sup>—plays in the novel a role of "temporal hearth" or magnetic pole for all sorts of supplementary information and incidents. It is almost always inflated, indeed encumbered with digressions of all kinds, retrospections, anticipations, iterative and descriptive parentheses, didactic interventions by the narrator, etc., all intended to collect in a syllepsis around the gathering-as-pretext a cluster of events and considerations able to give that gathering a fully paradigmatic importance. A very approximate breakdown bearing on the large scenes in question reveals fairly well the relative weight of these elements that are external to the gathering being told about but thematically essential to what Proust called his "supernourishment": in the Villeparisis matinée, twenty-five pages out of seventy-five; in the Guermites dinner, forty-three out of ninety; in the Guermites soirée, seventeen out of sixty-two; in the last Guermites matinée, finally—the first forty-two pages of which are taken up with an almost indistinguishable mixture of internal monologue by the hero and speculative discourse by the narrator, and the remainder of which is handled (as we will see later) chiefly in an iterative mode—the proportion is reversed and it is the strictly narrative moments (barely forty pages out of one hundred and forty) that seem to emerge from a sort of

<sup>61</sup> B. G. Rogers (*Proust's Narrative Techniques* [Geneva, 1965], pp. 143 ff.) sees in the unfolding of the *Recherche* a gradual disappearance of dramatic scenes, which, according to him, are more numerous in the early parts. His main argument is that Albertine's death is not cause for a scene. Not a very convincing proof; the proportion hardly varies in the course of the work, and the relevant feature is much rather the steady predominance of nondramatic scenes.

<sup>62</sup> Houston, pp. 33-34.

descriptive-discursive magma very remote from the usual criteria of "scenic" temporality and even from all narrative temporality—like those melodic scraps that one perceives in the opening measures of "La Valse," through a mist of rhythm and harmony. But here the haziness is not inceptive, like Ravel's or like that of the opening pages of *Swann*, but the contrary: as if in this final scene the narrative wanted, at the end, to dissolve gradually and to enact the intentionally indistinct and subtly chaotic reflection of its own disappearing.

Thus we see that Proustian narrative does not leave any of the traditional narrative movements intact, and that the whole of the rhythmic system of novelistic narrative is thereby profoundly affected. But we still have one last modification left to understand, undoubtedly the most decisive one: its emergence and diffusion will give the narrative temporality of the *Recherche* a completely new cadence—a perfectly unprecedented rhythm.

### 3 Frequency

#### Singulative/Iterative

What I call *narrative frequency*, that is, the relations of frequency (or, more simply, of repetition) between the narrative and the diegesis, up to this time has been very little studied by critics and theoreticians of the novel. It is nonetheless one of the main aspects of narrative temporality, and one which, at the level of common speech, is well known to grammarians under the category precisely of *aspect*.

An event is not only capable of happening; it can also happen again, or be repeated: the sun rises every day. Of course, strictly speaking the *identity* of these multiple occurrences is debatable: "the sun" that "rises" every morning is not exactly the same from one day to another—any more than the "8:25 P.M. Geneva-to-Paris" train, dear to Ferdinand de Saussure, is made up each evening of the same cars hooked to the same locomotive.<sup>1</sup> The "repetition" is in fact a mental construction, which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself, in order to preserve only what it shares with all the others of the same class, which is an abstraction: "the sun," "the morning," "to rise." This is well known, and I recall it only to specify once and for all that what we will name here "identical events" or "recurrence of the same event" is a series of several similar events *considered only in terms of their resemblance*.

<sup>1</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 108.