

Proust's sentence, which follows the rules of grammar meticulously although it bends them through the syntactic devices I have just mentioned, attains a polyphony of the mind. Prolific as it is, his sentence brings to mind the indiscernible syntax of Mallarmé. Gide was not mistaken, then, when he said: "I should read out loud to you these never-ending sentences. Everything falls into place! The different levels build upon one another! The terrain of the mind becomes clearer and clearer! . . . I picture a page taken from *The Guermantes Way* laid out like Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*: my voice lays stress on the key words; I organize what occurs to suit my taste; I shape it by speeding up or slowing down my delivery; and I shall prove to you that everything in the sentence is there for a reason."¹⁷ Several factors are intrinsic to Proust's syntax and constitutive of its body: the *voix* as well as the *act of writing* serve as didactic tools, and the support of the written text determines memory and allows us to return to it visually. The musical phrase, which relies on sounds as well as writing and which affects Bergotte's style as much as Vinteuil's variations, was a source of inspiration for Proust's syntax. Indeed, we could describe the sentence containing the kinetoscope of seven rooms by using the same words Proust uses to describe Chopin's musical phrases: "She {Mme de Cambremet} had learned in her girlhood to fondle and cherish those long sinuous phrases of Chopin, so free, so flexible, so tactile, which begin by reaching out and exploring far outside and away from the direction in which they started, far beyond the point which one might have expected their notes to reach, and which divert themselves in those fantastic by-paths only to return more deliberately—with a more premeditated reprise, with more precision, as on a crystal bowl that reverberates to the point of exquisite agony—to clutch at one's heart."¹⁸

Fleeting, broken apart, and far-reaching, the Proustian sentence is the *structure* of such intermitencies of the heart, whose meaning emanates from its form and content.

The Final Sentence

Here is the final sentence of *Time Regained* as it appears in the first posthumous edition of the text and in the current Pléiade edition:

Aussi, si elle méritait laissée assez longtemps pour accomplir mon œuvre, ne manquerais-je pas d'abord d'y décrire les hommes, cela dût-il les faire ressembler à des êtres monstrueux, comme occupant une place si considérable, à côté de celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une place au contraire

prolongée sans mesure puisqu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années à des époques vécues par eux si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer—dans le Temps.¹⁹

That is, if strength were granted me for long enough to accomplish my work, I should not fail first and foremost to describe men, even if the results were to make them resemble monstrous beings, as occupying a place, a very considerable place compared with the restricted one which is allotted to them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure, for they touch simultaneously, like giants plunged into the years, epochs that they experience as immensely far apart, between which many, many days have acquired a place—in Time.²⁰

The Notebooks of the text point to two circumstances surrounding the status of this final sentence. First, it is spread out over a page and a half in the original, and second, nearly the entire sketch is crossed out line by line and then with an X placed over a large part of the page. The author retained or added only a few words: "even if the results were to make them resemble monstrous beings, as occupying a place," which is followed by the following intact fragment: "a very considerable place compared with the restricted one which is allotted to them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure in Time." When Proust writes "*Fin*," he uses the same handwriting he used in these segments. And then, in a different handwriting—a smaller, straighter, and more compressed one—he inserts one final addition after having crossed out "in Time."²¹ He adds the following phrases: "for they touch simultaneously <like giants plunged into the years> epochs that they experience as immensely far apart, between which many, many days have acquired a place—in Time." Proust writes "The End" after this "Time." The published version retains *some* fragments that Proust eliminated in order to construct a coherent sentence, yet we cannot know why the editors made the specific choices they did. Reconstructing the *sections crossed out by Proust* enables us to decide on other variations that might be offered in future editions of Proust's work. More important, though, it gives us insight into the complex whole of Proust's creative process, reaching from the tentative and unfinished outlines of the beginning of the sentence to the intricately structured second part of this final sentence.

In analyzing these documents, we are drawn to the crossed-out words and are thus made aware of the successive stages of Proust's syntax. Proust, who never departed from the logical processes of the embedded

intermittencies he depicted in the kinoscope sentence, remained loyal to his style until his dying day. He works with unfinished sequences that are implicitly subordinated one to another and logically coordinated to the subtext that directly precedes them. The writer refines each of these embeddings, leaving them in a suspended state. He then develops two or three series of themes, retains their most important elements, and abandons them. Finally, he weaves the definitive form of the finale, using as material the offshoots of a few abandoned sequences. His thought process remains under erasure, eradicated. If we reconstruct it, we enter into the darkness of its elaboration, which does not seem muddled but of a lucid clarity that the dying man pressed into a definitive crystal through a display of extraordinary mastery.

Let us attempt to trace the logic of this final synthesis. Here is a transcription in French and a literal translation into English of the final sentence, a facsimile of which can be found on the previous two pages.

[124] . . . *C'est au moment où / Du moins <Aussis> si elle [la force] m'était assez donnée pour laissée assez longtemps pour accomplir mon œuvre, [cette crainte même ferait ses do] <la crainte même> je ne manquerais pas de la marquer du sceau de ce temps dont <aujourd'hui> l'idée s'imposait. Aujourd'hui encore / Aujourd'hui l'23*

[125] simple image du risque l'ignardit de / donne <en> multiplie en un instant la grandeur, si je ne pouvais apporter *tous* ces changements dans la transcription d'un univers et bien d'autres (dont la nécessité <nécessité, si l'on veut comprendre le réel>, a pu apparaître au cours de ce récit), dans la transcription trompeuse d'un univers qui était à redessiner *tout* en entier, du moins *étais-je décidé* / <commenterai-je ne manquerais-je pas d'aborder> avant toutes choses *dy* <par> décrire les hommes²⁴ {comme ayant la longueur démesurée / sans mesure <non de leur corps mais> de leurs années comme devant—tâche de plus en plus énorme et qui finit par les accabler—les traîner avec eux *et non pas seulement les corps* quand ils se déplacent *puisque nous avons en réalité* le temps que nous avons vécu reste nôtre, puisque nous avons la longueur des années, que c'est elles et non pas seulement notre corps que nous devons] avons à déplacer; tâche toujours croissante et qui finit par nous accabler à déplacer avec] ²⁵ et cela dû-t-il leur donner la forme d'un être / d'êtres monstrueux / monstrueusement et indéfiniment prolongés comme occupant une place plus importante / infini-ment] / une / infiniment plus / <autrement> considérable que celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une

place dans le Temps. Ce / et, cela dû-t-il leur donner la / une forme monstrueuse / une place indéfiniment prolongée <les faire ressembler à des êtres hideusement fabuleux monstrueux> d'être hideux <comme occupant> une <place / étendue> place <place> prolongée sans mesure dans le Temps. / autrement considérable que <si> considérable <à côté de> celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une place au contraire prolongée sans mesure dans le Temps, puisqu'il peu[vent] touchent simultanément à / à des <comme des géants plongés dans les années> des époques si distantes vécues par eux, si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer—dans le Temps.

Fin

It is the moment when / At least <That is> if enough strength were granted me to for long enough to accomplish my work, [this very fear would make] <the very fear> I would not fail to mark it with the seal of the time of which <today> the idea is vital. Today still / Today the

[125] simple image of the risk extends it with given / to increase <them> in an instant the greatness, if I could not carry out all these changes in the transcription of a universe and many others (whose necessity <necessity, if you wish to understand the real>, appeared within the narrative), in the misleading transcription of a universe that had to be reworked in its entirety, at least *I had decided* / <I should begin I should not fail first and foremost> to <by> describe men (as if they had a length unmeasured / without measure <not of their bodies but> of their years, as if having to— an increasingly difficult task that overwhelms them in the end—to drag them with them *and not only the bodies* when they are displaced, since we have in reality the time we have experienced remains ours, since we have the length of our years, that they and not only our bodies are what we must] have to displace, a task that is always growing and that overwhelms us in the end, to be displaced with) and even if the results were to make them in the form of a being, / of monstrous beings / monstrously and indefinitely prolonged as occupying a place more substantial / infinitely] / a / infinitely more / <far more> considerable than the restricted one that is allotted to them in space, a place in Time. This / and even if the results were to give them the / a monstrous shape / a place indefinitely prolonged <make them resemble beings that were hideously fantastic monstrous> hideous beings <as occupying> a <place / spawning> place <place> prolonged past

measure in Time. / a very considerable place, a <very> considerable place <compared with> the very restricted one that is allotted them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure in Time, for they [can] touch simultaneously some <like giants plunged into the years> the far apart epochs that they experience, immensely far apart, between which many, many days have acquired a place—in Time.

The End

The sentence consists of several unfinished sequences that Proust wrote down as they came to him, corrected, and then abandoned, although he retained both their key words and the essence of their meaning. We can trace the movement of his thought and syntax by simplifying and arranging the parts of the draft that are crossed out in order to focus on the unities of meaning and to visualize their interrelationships more easily:

- It is the moment when
- At least if ~~through~~ strength were granted me to
- That is if it were granted me for long enough to accomplish my work
- this very fear would make
- the very fear I would not fail to mark it with the seal of the time of which today the idea is vital today still
- Today the simple image of the risk extends it with given to increase them in an instant the greatness

- If I could not carry out all these changes in the transcription of a universe and many others (whose necessity
- necessity, if you wish to understand the real, appeared within the narrative
- in the misleading transcription of a universe that had to be reworked in its entirety,

- at least I had decided I should begin I should not fail first and foremost
- to describe men
- as if they had a length unmeasured without measure
- not of their bodies but of their years, as if having to
- an increasingly difficult task that overwhelms them in the end—
- to drag them with them and not only the bodies when they are displaced,
- since we have in reality the time we have experienced remains ours,
- since we have the length of our years, that they and not only our bodies are what we m[ust] have to displace with,
- a task that is always growing and that overwhelms us in the end, to be displaced with
- and even if the results were to make them in the form of a being, of monstrous beings monstrously and indefinitely prolonged
- as occupying a place more substantial infinitely more far more considerable than the restricted one that is allotted to them in space, a place in Time
- This and *Even if the results were to give them a monstrous shape, a place indefinitely prolonged*

- make them resemble beings that were hideously fantastic monstrous
- hideous beings, as occupying a sprawling place a place prolonged in Time.
- a very considerable place, a very considerable place compared with the restricted one that is allotted them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure in Time.
- [The End]

[Segment inserted in the small blank space preceding "The End"]

-for they touch simultaneously some like giants plunged into the years the far apart epochs that they experience as immensely far apart, between which many, many days have acquired a place—in Time.²⁶

The End

On examining the crossed-out drafts, we can confirm something that has already been suggested by such sentences as the one of the seven rooms: Proust works with sequences, either with incomplete clauses (that leave out one or more categorical constituents) or with nominal, participial, or adjectival transformations. He returns to these fragments in order to refine his chosen terms through synonyms or quasi-synonyms, although he finishes neither the subordinate clauses nor the sentence as a whole. Proust increases the number of subordinate clauses in order to guide himself toward a maximum lucidity, relying on multiple embeddings but without blurring their boundaries. He easily eliminates these painstaking constructions, which are replaced by a single image. Thus a long syntactic development may lead to a simple though unsettling metaphor. Finally, however, Proust unfolds the metaphor through a new syntactic device—one that is less encumbered, more elegant, yet careful to retain the logical course of the ideas underlying the image that directly precedes it. In this way, a logico-syntactic surplus can be joined with a taste for metaphor.

Thematically, a first group of thoughts places our writer at the time of his death: the present moment, the moment he is in when holding his pen: "it is the moment when" and "today" are repeated several times. Today is a moment of "fear"—will I have my life and my strength "for long enough" "to accomplish my work"? This troubling thought does not further disturb the narrator for he is occupied in embellishing its form: "at least if enough [strength] were granted me" or "that is, if enough strength were granted me for long enough to accomplish my work." The fear must be marked with "the seal of time," which has been imprinted throughout the novel, though the idea is all the more powerful today.

"Today," the final day, the "simple image of the risk." We should note that the word *death* is absent and that this omission is not a euphemism. Yet despite the "fear" and the "risk" that clearly point to fatality, there is a persistent attempt to avoid being demolished, to return to the project of the book: "extend it with givens," "to increase in an instant the greatness." Who and what is the subject of this fragment? Does the risk extend death and increase its grandeur? Or does it extend the "seal of

time," that is, the "idea" that has always preoccupied the writer? What follows lends support to the second theory: the fear of death is absorbed into the idea of a Time placed in the bodies of men, not to annihilate them but to make them into giants.

The risk is still present, however. What risk? "The risk"—"if I could not carry out all these changes in the transcription of a universe." What changes? The act of writing must change "the misleading transcription of a universe that had to be reworked in its entirety." From one embedding to the next, the aesthetic project of writing a book takes form again in these final lines, recapitulated and redefined on the threshold of death. Since our representations are a misleading transcription of the universe, we must rework them incessantly until the book is complete. And why is this necessary? The response is offered by a new embedding: "whose necessity, if you wish to understand the real, appeared within the narrative." One can only admire this desire to clarify and to synthesize, a desire that parakes of the globality of experience ("the real," "the narrative") and keeps Proust alive throughout these final sequences. Then, as if he had suddenly found this synthesis to be too ambitious and pointless, he reduces its importance through an addition: "at least I had decided," although he continues to refine the synonyms he offers for his decision: "at least I should begin, I should not fail first and foremost to describe men."

From the appearance of these words, the notion that fear and risk preclude the book's completion disappears, and the notion of "the seal of time" that "had to be reworked" is imprinted on "men." The expansion of the first theme (the fear of death—an accurate transcription of the universe) proves to be unnecessary. It reveals the anguish experienced by the subject of enunciation and unveils the anchorage point of his sentence beyond the sentence. This thought does not have to inscribe itself in the preserved utterance that serves only to point out that the project has been carried out—to give it its last thread, its final vision. Thus Proust only retains "the seal of time" and "to describe men" from this first theme. This condensation of two semantic fields leads to the ultimate—and not the least gripping—of Proustian images: "and even if the results were to make them in the form of a being, of monstrous beings / monstrously and indefinitely prolonged." In this way, men become characters or giant, resonant statues, as we have seen.²⁷

Along addition placed in the margin introduces a subordinate clause giving full scope to a singularly Proustian theme, that of Time placed within men who are transformed later into monstrous beings. The

immediately preceding sentence prepares for and prefigures this metaphor. It presents the duc de Guermantes swaying back and forth on "legs as tottery as those of some old archbishop with nothing solid about his person but his metal crucifix . . . upon the almost unmanageable summit of his eighty-three years, as though men spend their lives perched upon living stilts which never cease to grow until sometimes they become taller than church steeples, making it in the end both difficult and perilous for them to walk and raising them to an eminence from which suddenly they fall."²⁸ The sentence also returns to an idea developed in the preceding paragraph: "we occupy a place in Time,"²⁹ "I carry the past within myself," and "it is because they contain thus within themselves the hours of the past that human bodies have the power to hurt so terribly, to have "such cruel" memories, time "prolongs" me: "perched on its giddy summit, I could not myself make a movement without displacing it . . . enormous dimension I did not know how to acquire . . . as though from a height, which was my own height, of many leagues, at the long series of the years."³⁰

Let us return to what Proust added in the margin. The men are monstrous, then, like the narrator himself, but how so? "As if they had a length not of their bodies but of their years," while in apposition, it is "an increasingly difficult task that overwhelms them in the end." After this interpolation, we return to the men, who seem to have to "drag [their years] with them and not only the bodies when they are displaced." Why are we faced with this overwhelming task? "Since we have in reality the time we have experienced" or, in corrected form, "since the time we have experienced remains our own," "since we have the length of our years." Proust adds: "a task that is always growing and that overwhelms us in the end," and he does not forget that it is "our bodies" although it is "not only" our bodies that must always "be displaced." Proust shows an example here of his astonishing ability to retain words and sequences in his memory and his relentless effort to clarify them, to explain them, and to place them in a stable logical occurrence. Body, place, and space absorb the years.

As the body that writes disappears, it becomes more important to recapture the monstrous bodies that are "indefinitely prolonged." What is added in the margin reminds us of the reasoning behind this, but, itself "growing," it "overwhelms us in the end." Let us cross out as much as we can. We shall confine ourselves to the "men," the "place," and "Time." Which monstrous men? The ones "occupying a place" (which is the word needed to retain "displace" from the margin and to preserve

the semantic field of "sprawling," "measure," and "shape," which has already been mentioned) more substantial (one could say "much more substantial," "far more substantial," or "considerable") than the restricted one that is allotted to them in space, a place in Time."

The phrase is good, almost the one needed. Nevertheless, the idea of "monstrosity" is still missing: Proust still has to incorporate the "monsters" into the "place." He decides on another variation: "even if the results were to give them a monstrous shape, a place indefinitely prolonged," "make them resemble beings that were hideously fantastic, monstrous." This time, the two threads hold together: the place and the monsters, the space and the fantastic characters are joined as one. Finally, it could be mentioned that monstrosity stems from time implanted in men, that the hideous fable is the fable of memory, like the novel, like this novel. Proust will write: "hideous beings, as occupying a sprawling place, a place prolonged past measure in Time." No, let's take Time away; let's not hurry, let's use a few subordinate clauses to explain this colossal, prodigious place, since we must say clearly that it is not a place in space but a place in Time: "a place far more substantial" or "much more considerable than the restricted one that is allotted to them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure in Time." There, everything is accounted for: The place is monstrous because it is considerable and not at all restricted to space. It is monstrous because it is prolonged past measure in Time. Monster = space-time = characters. Now he can write "The End."

Nevertheless, Proust never tires of his continuous expansions. He returns to the giants—an important theme of the preceding crossed-out pages—as well as to time with its disparate years, in an effort to clarify the meaning of the greatness, the immoderate distance embodied by the giants. Here, then, he offers one final burst of subordinate clauses:

a place on the contrary prolonged past measure,
[why?]
for they touch simultaneously
[in what way?]
like giants
[which ones?]
plunged into the years
[touching whom? what?]
epochs
[which epochs]
far apart . . . that they experience as immensely far apart,

[again, which epochs, what distances?]
between which many, many days have acquired a place
 [where? when?]

in Time

Memory does not stop opening itself up in order to compile new details (adverbial phrases or clauses transformed into participles) about space while it absorbs time and about space while it is modulated into time. By always going back to the branches suspended in the tree of memory, no detail will be forgotten. There is no risk, no more fear, for each word is imprinted with the seal of another, and each sentence carries the seal of numerous sketches or insinuations that preceded it.

It is you who must retrace these steps and keep your memory alive within time-made-into-place, a superimposition of places and a superposition of syntactical approaches.

We have no time other than the time of our syntax. The chronological progression is none other than the progression of the sentence that makes its subject work toward an object or a goal.

Linear time leads implacably to death (that "fear," that "risk"). Unlike linear time, the sentence reproduces a giant breath through explanatory detours or backward leaps that develop traces that had already been constructed, erased, and not absorbed. The chronological progression, broken up and superimposed onto itself, can thus sketch out a space—the architecture, the always already anterior texture of a sort of timelessness.

If we search for this architecture under the erasures, we will find that the last sentence of Proust's novel forms a microcosm of its evolution. Temporal duration has been visually distorted into a real presence, which could be termed a "hideous giant,"³¹ "a morsel of time in the pure state,"³¹ "embodiment," or eternity.

CHAPTER 9

Losing Impatience



Since we are beings, Being is innate in us.

—Leibniz

Since we are beings of logic and action, we are tempted by impatience. We want everything to be later, deeper, higher, and stronger. In reality, our race to the finish stems from a concern culminating in death. In our imagination, however, our haste can be infinite, or perhaps, when it is consumed, it points to the end of history.

The multifaceted rhythms dividing the modern world are caught between two figures of time: the pressure of concern and the disappointment of duration. Can we choose between a neurosis obsessed with the notion that longings will never be satisfied and a melancholy that escapes from time by fleeing desire?

Since Hegel, the great modern philosophers—Bergson, Husserl, and especially Heidegger—have been philosophers of time. It comes as no surprise, then, that Proust's "involuntary memory" and narrative labyrinth are often compared to these philosophers' notions of time. Freud looms over this debate, for he is the one who made the first careful study of neurotic disturbances and melancholic passion. "Free association" is a discourse that loses all impatience and expands or contracts in the image of Proust's syntactic intermitencies. Free association *should* be in the image of the Proustian sentence. Yet who manages to do this? No one. Psychoanalysis is often unable to lose impatience with-