The Fiction of Marcel Proust's Autobiography

Gian Balsamo
English and Comparative Literature, American University in Cairo

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Abstract This essay discusses the literary genre of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* as analogous with the genre peculiar to Dante's *Commedia* and Augustine's *Confessions*. Both Dante and Augustine narrate their autobiography in terms of a writerly vocation pursued by means of a love quest; both authors' success in the affirmation of their respective identity depends on the success of the love quest. Dante's case is especially relevant to this essay insofar as his poem instantiates his authorial identity as coincident with that of his fictional character. Augustine's confessions, however driven by a love quest, belong to the more conventionally autobiographic genre of the personal memoir. The fiction of the *Commedia* is that the biography of its fictional protagonist *is* the author's autobiography. The same principle, which challenges the narratological distinction among real author, implied author, and narrator, may be applied to Proust's novel. Marcel, the protagonist, crowns his literary vocation only at the end of a protracted love quest. His success in the love quest coincides with the end of the novel, and it is at this point that the distinction between fictional character and historical author loses its force. After Erich Auerbach on the *Commedia*, one can argue that Marcel and Marcel Proust come to coincide at the point of intersection of allegory and history; the fictional character is the allegory of the author's historical authenticity. Toward the end, Marcel-the-character, finally equipped with the means and determination to write the novel we have just read, metamorphoses into Proust-the-author: he is Proust's deliberate choice for his own autobiography.

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Composition History of *In Search of Lost Time*

It took Marcel Proust roughly fourteen years, from about 1908 (the year of the famous *Carnet*) to his death in 1922, to write *In Search of Lost Time*—not counting, that is, the years he devoted to two aborted novels, *Jean Santeuil* (started in 1896) and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (started before 1908), and to sketches whose themes, episodes, and meditations on time and memory eventually would feed his great novel (Proust 1971a, 1971b; Carter 2000: 467; Tadié 2000: 275–76, 510–11). The publication history of *In Search of Lost Time* also ranges over fourteen years, from *Swann's Way*, which appeared in 1913, to *Time Regained*, printed posthumously in 1927.[1]

The composition history includes five successive and distinctive stages:

1. The first stage, that of inception, culminates in the 1913 publication of *Swann's Way* by Grasset.
2. The second stage (1914–15) expands the range and thematic ambition of the novel-in-progress, and this is signaled by the birth of the pivotal character of Albertine, who "supplants . . . the inconsequential love affairs" of the preparatory drafts with "the grandeur of Racinian passion" (Tadié 2000: 603).
3. The third stage corresponds to Gallimard's 1919 publication of *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*[2] and to the announcement, among the forthcoming volumes, of a new title, *Sodom and Gomorrah*.
4. The fourth stage sees Gallimard's publication, in rapid sequence, of the two volumes of *The Guermantes Way* (volume 1 in 1920 and volume 2 in 1921, the latter including book 1 of *Sodom and Gomorrah*) and in 1922 the NRF publication of book 2 of *Sodom and Gomorrah*.
5. In 1922 Proust dies, leaving behind, completed but unrevised, book 3 of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, which his older brother Robert edited and published in three separate volumes, namely: *The Captive* in 1923, *The Fugitive* in 1925, and *Time Regained* in 1927 (Tadié 2000: 580–84, 667, 698–700, 711–13, 735–36, 752–54; 1987: cxxxii–cxlii).

1. All translations from the works of Marcel Proust are mine whenever reference is given to the original version; when relevant, parenthetical reference to the English version of the same passage also is provided.

2. The title *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, adopted by James Grieve for his recent translation (Proust 2005), is the literal translation of the French title of the second volume of Proust's novel. The previous English translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin adopted the title *Within a Budding Grove*.

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From Aesthetic Inception to Amorous Conception

The project corresponding to the novel's first stage of inception conceived of an adult narrator, conventionally identified as Marcel, who would recount his past life, especially his youth.[3] The impulse for this autobiographical narration would come to Marcel after the scent (*l'odeur*) and the flavor (*la saveur*) of a cookie—Proust's (1987a: 46) notorious "madeleine"—dipped in a cup of herbal tea triggered in him a mysterious and never previously experienced power of reminiscence. A substantial portion of Marcel's reminiscences would concern his inconclusive infatuation with Gilberte Swann, an elusive object of juvenile desire. Marcel would also tell the story of the love affair and subsequent marriage between Gilberte's father, Charles Swann, an irresolute dilettante of art appreciation, and Gilberte's mother, Odette de Crécy, who was a professional cocotte before her marriage. In Swann's life, his mediocre marriage to Odette would come to mirror (if not gradually to replace) his mediocre involvement in matters artistic. In this case, Proust's novel would thereby equate temperament with fate, enacting a dramatization of Schopenhauer's subordination of individual volition to "empirical temperament," that is, of one's instinctive moral character in its practical manifestations (Schopenhauer 1966: bk. 4, § 55); this dramatization gives, incidentally, an indication of the heavy debt which, as brilliantly documented by Anne Henry and Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Proust owed to Schopenhauer's philosophy.[4] In contrast with Swann's fate, Marcel would narrate the manner by which he manages to get to the bottom, the mysterious bottom, of his power of reminiscence, retrieving or "regaining," at the end of the novel, all the past or lost time he had been reminiscing about. In Marcel's case, the novel would show, in its gradual unfolding, how he gets to recognize intimately the flaws and virtues of his empirical temperament and develop thereby the "acquired temperament," as Schopenhauer (ibid.) calls it, that will enable him to express his truest individuality. By the end of the novel, more precisely, the discovery of the secret of his power of reminiscence would enable Marcel to undertake the literary labor that will turn time lost into time regained; and this literary

3. In his many preparatory drafts of the novel, Marcel Proust identified the protagonist and narrator of his novel by the name "Marcel" on no less than five occasions. In the long process of editing and emendation, he then reduced the use of this name to only two occasions, both occurring in *La prisonnièr* (Proust 1988c: 583 [two repetitions of the name "Marcel"], 663 [three repetitions]; see Landy 2004a: 22).

4. See Henry 1981: 45–97, 1983: esp. 33, 40; Nattiez 1989: 78–87. In Proust's (1988a: 248) novel, Marcel talks of the "constancy of our temperament" in regard to the recurrent feminine types he falls in love with.

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labor will consist of the novel by Proust that the reader would just have finished reading.[5]

In this first stage of the novel's inception therefore, Marcel's success in his appropriation of "time regained" would hinge on his determination to reject the amateurish and superficial attitude toward art which for quite a long time he had shared with Swann and on his complementary espousal of a rigorously artistic vocation and a corresponding lifestyle.[6] "I would not . . . permit people to come and see me at home during my hours of work, for the duty of writing my book took precedence over that of being polite or even kind" (Proust 1999: 435–36).

The successive stages in the novel's conception extend the discordant relation between Marcel and Swann from the realm of art to the realm of love—the latter being, in Swann's case, the cradle and eventually, after his marriage, the tomb of his élan vital. As we saw, the discordant aesthetic analogy contrasts Swann as the mediocre aesthete to Marcel as the accomplished artist, or more precisely, as the would-be artist depicted on his way toward accomplishment. The discordant amorous analogy, on the other hand, contrasts Swann as the inept lover to Marcel as the poet of his own love quest. The switch to the amorous discordance hinges on the introduction of three new major thematic branches, which would be inserted before the closing episodes devoted in the novel to "time regained." The branches deal with:

1. Marcel's infatuation with the mundane existence of the Parisian aristocracy, which is epitomized in the novel by the Guermantes family. Here Marcel would grow into Swann's brilliant substitute and frivolous alter ego.
2. The underground world of Parisian homosexuals, whose amorous mores and secret dalliances Marcel observes with a keen eye. Here Marcel would exhibit an insight into human emotions, desires, and motivations of which Swann was pathetically incapable at the time when, still jealous of Odette—still in love with her, that is—he suspected that she was being unfaithful to him.
3. Marcel's relationship with Albertine, a love story duplicating both

5. See Rousset 1995: 144; Martin-Chauffier 1943: 56; Shattuck 1982: 38; de Man 1979: 16; Terdiman 1976: 173; Frank 1963: 23. In contrast to my thesis, Joshua Landy (2004a: 38–47) has recently argued that the literary work titled *À la recherche du temps perdu* should be understood at once as a novel by Proust, its author, and a "memoir" by Marcel, its narrator—a memoir preparatory to the "autobiographical fiction" that Marcel "has in mind" but has not written yet at the end of the novel (see also Landy 2004b: 115, 2001: 120).

6. The discordant analogies between Marcel and Swann have been stressed in Genette 1980: 46; Macksey 1977: 109; Rousset 1995: 146; Spitzer 1970: 413.

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the romance and the subsequent marriage (amounting to a cohabitation in Marcel and Albertine's case) between Swann and Odette. The difference between these two couples is that everything in Marcel and Albertine's love, from passion to devotion, from disappointment to deception, from attachment to jealousy, from emotion to motivation, would be on a much grander scale, one proportional to Marcel's eventual affirmation of his superior amorous temperament vis-à-vis Swann.

The Genre of Proust's Novel

In Search of Lost Time belongs, then, to a most illustrious genre of literary autobiography, namely, one that narrates a writerly vocation being affirmed through a love quest. The genre, epitomized in Petrarch's identification of his beloved Laura with the laurel crown of poetic excellence, has its principal model in Dante's *Commedia*, while the genre's inaugural model is Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. The latter remains inaugural even though lacking, as we will discuss presently, the emblematic character of Dante's *Commedia*. For as established by John Freccero (1986: 2), Dante's "entire spiritual autobiography is essentially Augustinian in structure."

Proust's novel shares with Dante's *Commedia* the prerogative of being informed—in the words of the eminent Dantist Charles Singleton (1957: 62)—by the "fiction . . . that it is not a fiction." Singleton's oft-cited felicitous phrase alludes first of all to the fact that the author and the narrator-protagonist of Dante's poem have the same name; or as James Nohrnberg (2003: 6) has more recently written, "the identities of author . . . narrator . . . and signatory converge on . . . a real personage—an empiric, self-experiencing, and self-knowing 'I' from history." The same holds true for the author and the narrator-protagonist of Proust's novel.[7] In the *Commedia*, Dante-the-author narrates the otherworldly—and clearly fictitious—quest undertaken by Dante-the-lover to rejoin his beloved Beatrice, who died long before; as I will argue below, at the end of the quest Dante-the-lover finds both the vocation and the literary means to narrate this experience, and his fictitious persona comes thereby to coincide in identity with the person of Dante-the-author. By means of such narration of fictional events, Dante-the-author instantiates his own identity in Dante-the-lover,

7. In contrast to the five occurrences, in two distinct episodes, of Marcel's name in Proust's novel, Dante's name appears only once in the *Commedia*, in *Purgatorio* 30.55; it is the name by which Beatrice addresses her lover. Interestingly, in Proust's aborted novel *Jean Santeuil*, there is one occasion where the protagonist, Jean, is called "Marcel" by his "new love" Charlotte (Proust 1971b: 831).

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and the author of the *Commedia* is universally known to this day as such love-driven individual. As Freccero (1986: 25) writes, referring to Dante's traveler to the otherworld as the "pilgrim":

> For Dante, the distance between protagonist and author is at its maximum at the beginning of the story and is gradually closed by the dialectic of poetic process until pilgrim and poet coincide at the ending of the poem. . . . It is at the last moment that . . . [the pilgrim is] metamorphosed into the poet, capable at last of writing the story that we have read.

It is in the terms of this convergence between poetic fiction and biographical self-instantiation that I am applying Singleton's definition to *In Search of Lost Time*:[8] *The fiction of Proust's novel is that it is not a fiction*. Hence, against Joshua Landy (2004a: 21–22, 130, 134–35), who likes to attribute to Proust a narratological concern with the distinction of real author, implied author, and narrator, I posit the mutual convergence in Proust's novel of these three figures, as ubiquitous figures of Marcel Proust himself. Marcel, the narrator and protagonist of *In Search of Lost Time*, is the implied author of the novel; and the implied author is in turn Proust's deliberate choice for his own biographical self-instantiation.

Fictional narration as such is typically pervaded by a hypothetical "as if"—for instance, in the statement: "Dante narrates his quest of Beatrice in the hereafter *as if* it truly happened." But this hypothetical condition collapses under the encroaching of fictionality and literalism on Dante's *Commedia*. Like any other autobiographical form, the literary work narrating an artistic vocation affirmed through a love quest is based on a closed existential loop. Just as no artist could describe his or her transformation into a writer unless he or she were the artist writing the description (except for the case of mendacious or prophetic writing),[9] so no writer could narrate his or her own artistic transformation through a successful love quest unless this love quest had indeed been successful. In the case of the *Commedia*, the hypothetical "as if" of fictional narration is to be replaced with a conditional "only if": *only if* Dante's fictional quest of his beloved in the otherworld succeeded would he be able to write the *Commedia* . . . and in fact he wrote it.

The autobiographical identification of Dante-the-author and Dante-the-otherworldly-lover (Freccero's "pilgrim") is upheld by such mutual sustenance between fictionality and literalism. Not only does the fiction

8. I have defined the existential premises of self-instantiation via literary autobiography in Balsamo 2004: 8–15 as well as in Balsamo 2006: 1–2, 28–30.

9. In his editorial commentary on this article, Meir Sternberg called my attention to the second of these exceptions.

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of the love quest in search of artistic identity acquire literal signification in the *Commedia*, but its literal signification is validated as biography by the concrete existence of the poem narrating it. Elsewhere I have called the *Commedia* a "performative text of self-expression" in the sense that Dante's establishment of personal identity does not precede it but rather incorporates, and coincides with, its creation.[10]

However, even if I agree with Freccero's identification of the poet with the protagonist of the *Commedia*, it is important to emphasize that my views on Dante's biographical self-instantiation—which provide me with the blueprint for the present study of Proust's novel as autobiographical—accord only to a partial extent with the structural analogy posited by Freccero between Augustine's "novel of the self" and Dante's poem. According to Freccero, "the spiritual resurrection" of Christian conversion provides Augustine with the symbolic death that gives "closure" to his life as a sinner and justifies thereby the writing of his autobiography (cited in Jacoff 1986: xii). But my hypothesis of an analogy between Dante's and Proust's autobiographical narrations does not hinge on the turning point of a symbolic death brought about by religious conversion—there is no trace of such an Augustinian conversion, or even of a Dantesque, symbolic conversion from the death of sin to the life of grace, in the French writer. It rather hinges on the artistic conversion brought about by success in the love quest. As will appear, in both Dante's *Commedia* and Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, there is a pivotal episode when success in the protagonist's love quest provides him with adequate means of literary expression and also triggers his determination to write his own story. As Freccero (1986: 25) phrases it regarding Dante, these two writers become "capable at last of writing the story that we have read."

My approach may also be profitably applied to Augustine, as long as one notes that the object of Augustine's quest is not a woman's love, as in the cases of Dante and Proust, but rather Love (*dilectio*) itself, that is, God (*Deus*

10. For my definition of the "performative text of self-expression," see Balsamo 2006: 1–2, 15–18, 28–30. There I argue that an important peculiarity of Dante's poetic self-expression is that the definition of personal identity is predicated in it on the unconditional fusion of the author's self with the otherness of her or his lover, so that the moment of self-expression incorporates the lover's alterity and ultimately coincides with it. (See, à propos, Sigmund Freud's [1989: 12–13] definition of love, which is to him the "melting away of the boundary" between lover and beloved as well as the only non-pathological state in which the ego renounces any "clear and sharp lines of demarcation" between itself and the outside world.) Moreover, this gesture of self-expression does not consist of a delayed testimony of the lover's personal experience of authentic selfhood but rather coincides with this experience, so that one could say that in the *Commedia* the medium of Dante's self-expression is identical with the self-knowledge he acquires as the poem's experiential result.

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dilectio est—Augustine 2003: 678 [15.17.31]).[11] Augustine's autobiographical narrator converts to the Roman Church at the end of book 8 of the *Confessions*. Yet, as remarked by Landy (2004a: 220n47), this episode does not close the loop of autobiographical narration. Contrary to Freccero's view, which is predicated upon the closure brought about by the episode of conversion, this episode inaugurates and even necessitates Augustine's love quest proper: from the instant of mystical intimacy with God experienced in book 9, this quest leads Augustine, through agonizing doubt and disorientation, to the introspective and retrospective quest in the mnemonic dimension of book 10 and in the temporal dimension of book 11. Even at this stage, after his formal conversion has already occurred, Augustine declares himself to be still a pilgrim in absentia, a pilgrim, that is, traveling away from rather than toward God, his destination (*peregrinor abs te*). The destination of Augustine's introspective pilgrimage in time and memory is Love, yet he procrastinates and keeps coming "late" to the tryst with this "beauty so ancient and so new" (*Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antique et tam nova, sero te amavi!*—Augustine 2000, 2:84, 146 [10.5, 10.27]; my translation). He needs to be drawn to it by desire:

> You shed your fragrance, I drew breath and now I pant after you. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst after you. You touched me, and now I am inflamed in your peace. (Ibid: 146; my translation)

Augustine's amorous declaration to God in book 10 of the *Confessions* coincides with the saint's full submission to a love that cannot be won over by one's own design or secured by one's own determination; he is still "hungering and thirsting" after it, "inflamed" with desire. This love can only be received as a gift of divine grace. Augustine's desire will come to coincide with Love only to the extent that Love will give him the kind of desire which divine grace expects him to nurture within himself (ibid.: 148 [10.29]: *da quod iubes et iube quod vis*); this is the supreme manifestation of the loop, or self-feeding necessity, of free will in Augustine. His amorous declaration to God entails Augustine's advocacy of the principle, inherent in his polemics against Pelagius (ibid.), that God's gift of himself comes to one only through divine benevolence and compassion. In this free-willed yet self-effacing submission to a love that can only be accepted but never purposefully won over, one finds the clearest justification of Augustine's sacrifice of his persuasive, mind-conquering skills as rhetorician to the *humillimo genere loquendi* ("the most humble style of speaking"—Augustine 2000,

11. For the coincidence of love (*amor*) and dilection (*dilectio*), see, for instance, Augustine 2003: 14.7.10.

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1:284 [6.5]), which he learned from Scripture. This style, as will emerge, exercised in turn a most profound influence on Dante's adoption of an elocuzione *dimessa e umile* (a "humble and unassuming elocution") in the *Commedia* (Dante 1965).

Hence, Augustine's amorous declaration undermines Freccero's argument about the episode of conversion giving closure to the autobiographical loop. From a story of renunciation and conversion, rather, Augustine's autobiography must now of necessity stream into the love quest which will turn each day of his life—both past and future, both retrospectively and prospectively—into a station of his itinerary to Love.

Like Augustine, Marcel, Proust's narrator-protagonist, also undertakes a quest in the dimension of memory; and at times, as in Dante's case, this quest for the past brings him to the world where the shades of the dead reside (Proust 1988b: 214–16).[12] At the end of this quest, Marcel meets the embodiment of his desires and, like Dante and Augustine before him, finds himself projected both forward and backward in time, toward the vocation to narrate, in a "style" suitable to the subject, the past events leading to this encounter. Proust's adopted "style" is not so much of Augustinian or Dantean as, most likely, of Goethean derivation, as I will argue later in some detail and against Jean-Yves Tadié's (1971: 189–90) suggestion that Goethe's example taught Proust (1989b: 473) mainly "artistic techniques," that is, the writer's craft (*le métier*). By means of the fictional narration of how Marcel becomes a writer, Proust instantiates his own biographical persona as coincident with the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time*.

Hence, the fiction that Proust's and Dante's respective fictions are not fictions consists ultimately in this, that they both establish a special, literary notion of the autobiographical genre, which differs substantially in means of documentation and manners of expression from the paradigms of historiographic or documentary biography.

As I said, because of the restrictions inherent in the autobiographical form, no artist could narrate love's successful transformation of himself or herself into a writer unless he or she had previously succeeded in becoming such a love-inspired writer. This explains why, in both Proust and Dante, the genetic episode, corresponding to the moment when, having defined their vocation and artistic task, they begin writing their autobiography, comes at the end of the story. This genetic episode functions in the literary work as the emblematic seal of the artist's amatory parable.

In what follows, we will be mainly concerned with the genetic episode and its reverberations on the author's autobiography-in-fiction. I am going

12. See also *Esquisse* 13 (Proust 1988d: 1044–45).

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to discuss this episode first in Dante and then—our pièce de résistance—in Proust.

In the case of Dante, the genetic episode occurs in the *Paradiso*, the third *cantica* of the *Commedia*. At the gates of paradise, Dante encounters his beloved Beatrice, who is now a saint, enjoying, like all other saints, a condition of undifferentiated union with God. Beatrice talks in the same "mild and direct speech" (*soave e piana . . . voce*), Augustinian in its unassuming simplicity, which Virgil had echoed in the "dark wood" of sin, when he reported *verbatim* to Dante Beatrice's recommendation that her "unfortunate friend" should be guided back to the right path. This speech, discordant with Virgil's own refined, high style, Dante would in turn emulate in his own poem (1964a: 1.2, 2.56–57).

After his own entrance into paradise, where he experiences a mystic instant of intimacy with the divine, Dante can at last be reunited with his beloved in an amorous condition proper to her sainthood. Dante's union with God—the coalescence of his desire with God's love (1964c: 33.143–45)—signals the success of his love quest and coincides with his reunion with Beatrice.

John Freccero points out that Dante's reunion with his authentic source of inspiration makes superfluous the company of Virgil, the "master and author" (*lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore* [1964a: 1.85]) who acted thus far as his otherworldly guide. This superfluity is signaled by the last words that Dante, "trembl[ing] at the approach of Beatrice," addresses to Virgil before his disappearance: "I know the tokens of the ancient flame" (1991; *Conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma* [1964b: 30.48]).

> [This phrase is] a literal translation of Dido's words of foreboding [in Virgil's *Aeneid*], when she first sees Aeneas and recalls her passion for her dead husband while she anticipates the funeral pyre on which she will die [because of her passion for Aeneas]: *Agnosco veteris flammae vestigia* (*Aeneid* IV, 23). Dante transforms these words . . . for he uses them to celebrate [instead] the return of his beloved and a love stronger than death. (Freccero 1986: 207–8)

Dante, in other words, turns Dido's intended meaning upside down: her Latin phrase of misgiving becomes, in Dante's allusion, an Italian formula for Love's sanctification. This reversal in turn sanctions Dante's emancipation from Virgil's guidance (and, on a distinct metaphorical level, from the anxiety of classical influence). This is how Dante's reunion with Beatrice brings about his true poetic vocation and defines his artistic stature.

When they first meet at the gates of paradise, Dante is invited by Beatrice to remember ("nota"), transcribe, and teach to others ("segna") the visions she is going to afford him:

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Do you note, and even as these words are uttered by me,
so teach them to the living. (Dante 1991: 367 [33.52–54]; modified)[13]

Beatrice's injunction, *Tu nota* ("do you note"), denoting an act of observation and remembrance, is also etymologically congruent with "annotation" and alludes as such to the act of writing. Analogously, the injunction *segna*, translated correctly by Singleton as "teach" (*insegna*), is etymologically congruent with the English "sign" and also intimates therefore the inscription of the graphemes which are essential to Dante's craft of poetic composition.

In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach draws an analogy between Dante's poetry and Augustine's revolutionary rhetoric in the *Confessions—the humillimo genere loquendi* ("the most humble style of speaking"), which the bishop of Hippo learned from Scripture (Augustine 2000: 1: 6.5). Auerbach (1991: 153–55) points out that Beatrice's words in the first and third *cantica* of the *Commedia* exemplify an emblematic sort of Christian speech, "not couched in an 'elevated style'" but rather understandable "to those whose hearts are simple." "As late as the second half of the fourteenth century," Benvenuto da Imola opposed this humble speech to Virgil's own haughty and conceited verses (*sermo . . . altus et superbus*). As I suggested above, it is this speech, which Virgil himself, acting as Beatrice's and indirectly Augustine's faithful mouthpiece, exemplifies for Dante at the outset of the quest, that establishes an elocution *dimessa e umile* ("humble and unassuming") as the stylistic paradigm which informs the *Commedia* (Dante 1965).

Yet Dante-the-lover grows equal to his vocation as Dante-the-poet only at the instant when he experiences a saintly condition of self-dissolution—only at the mystic instant, that is, when intimacy with God dissolves the boundaries of his own selfhood and enables him to experience, however briefly, Beatrice's state of undifferentiated union with God and all the saints of paradise.[14] It is only by the completion of this quest of amorous

13. "Tu nota; e sì come da me son porte, / così queste parole segna a' vivi" (Dante 1964b: 33.52–54).

14. For clarity's sake, I report here an abridged version of the Dantesque logic of paradisal subjectivity as I have argued it in Balsamo 2004: 53. Two conflicting modalities of selfhood are simultaneously in play in the *Paradiso*. One is the selfhood of historical subjects, endowed with the prerogative of irreducible individuality. The other is the selfhood of paradisiac saints, who are invaginated in a celestial rose so antagonistic to individual, subjective separateness that not even the *fonte* ("source, fountain") of the rose itself, God, may be kept distinct from it. The saints are *indiati*, "in-numenated"—invaginated onto a numen or god which is indistinguishable from this very motion of universal invagination (see Dante 1964c: 4.28). The term *in-numenated* is my translation of Dante's neologism *indiati*, obtained by the superposition of *in*, a prepositional adverb of place, with *dio*, Italian for god (or the Latin *numen*), and with *ati*, a past participial plural desinence.

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reunion, in paradise, that Dante-the-lover—having lost himself (or more precisely, having surrendered his own sublunary self) to the amorous condition—may undertake the description of the conversion of his own individual identity into that of a saintly lover and thereby become the narrator of his own, successful love quest.

The Body of Memory in Proust's Novel

In Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the genetic episode occurs near the end of the novel, when a sixteen-year-old girl, Mlle de Saint-Loup, appears in front of Marcel, who is more than twice her age. This appearance, which occurs during the "matinée" or reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's described in the novel's last book, *Time Regained*, has the suddenness and the typical revelatory effects of a mystical epiphany. In the discussion below, I will argue that Mlle de Saint-Loup embodies a disconcertingly rich cluster of existential possibilities for Marcel: she is the incarnation of time lost and the promise of time regained; she bears, either metaphorically or literally, all the place- and family names that have most mattered to Marcel in the past; she is the lover he has been at one and the same time seeking and feeling nostalgic for all his life. Marcel knows at first sight that he can read Mlle de Saint-Loup's young body like a book. One could echo Schopenhauer (1966: bk. 4, § 60) here, to whom "man's temporal expression of his will is the paraphrase of the body," and submit that Mlle de Saint-Loup's body is indeed the paraphrase of Marcel's long-postponed novel on time lost.

> Time . . . had materialized itself in [Mlle de Saint-Loup], it had fashioned her into a masterpiece, while on me, alas, it had merely executed its opposite labor. (Proust 1989b: 608–9, 1999: 506)

Like Beatrice in Dante's *Paradiso*, Mlle de Saint-Loup embodies the protagonist's longed-for love as well as his book-to-come, his own masterpiece—the "performative text of self-expression" that is going to both establish his personal identity and coincide with his experience of selfhood. One could say that Mlle de Saint-Loup is Marcel's Word incarnate.

Marcel's encounter with Mlle de Saint-Loup is especially epiphanic in its economy of words. In line with the mystical precepts of the *via amoris* ("path of love")—whose main proponent in the thirteenth century, Thomas Gallus, opposed wordless *affectus* ("affection") to the logorrhea of *intellectus, ratio*, and *imaginatio* ("intellect, reason, and imagination") (Gallus 1934: 14; my translation; Vannini 2005: 160)—Marcel and the girl meet in a condition of rigorous silence. They exchange no words, not even too-direct

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gazes; she just stands there, like the forbidden totality of revelation—an idol, a strangely tolerant Diana indulging Acteon's gaze in the dark of her cave. Yet this is a Word incarnate which, contrary to the soul of Dante's Beatrice, does not need a transcendental dimension in order to implement itself to the fullest. Proust works here in a most radical dimension of figural literalism. According to Erich Auerbach's figural interpretation, Beatrice's soul fulfills ("the technical term," explains Auerbach, "is *figuram implere*") the destiny inherent in the historical life of her sublunary self: that self, in all the historical incidents and accidents of its earthly stations, is the *figura* that finds implementation in the afterlife. This interplay between worldly and otherworldly character, which Dante would apply to all souls and to all historical events, reflects, not surprisingly, the patristic logic of biblical typology (Auerbach 1991: 73; see also 156–62, 194–202, 1963: 176–226).[15] From Auerbach's perspective, Proust may be said to radicalize Dante's figuralism by fusing the natural and the supernatural dimensions, so that it is as a mere speechless (and mortal) body that Mlle de Saint-Loup is transubstantiated into Word before Marcel's eyes. If I may be allowed a slight pun, the attractively French *figure* of Mlle de Saint-Loup's body suffices to exhaust the whole logic of *figuram implere*. Her body displays in Marcel's eyes the entire complex of memories, feelings, cognitions, and resolutions that will constitute the substance of his book-to-come; it is at once both *figura* and implementation.

Mlle de Saint-Loup is Marcel's last and truest flame. One cannot know if, at the instant of her apparition, she inflames Marcel with sudden desire (the way Augustine was "inflamed" by Love); even if she does, her effect on Marcel is not comparable, owing to the brevity of the episode, to the long-lasting effects obtained on him by Gilberte Swann and Albertine (or even to the more episodic impact of Andrée, whom at one point Marcel even considers marrying, or Mme de Guermantes). But her appearance has the distinctive, unique effect of bestowing on Marcel the Pentecostal gift of the writerly tongue. It is only after meeting Mlle de Saint-Loup that Marcel is struck by the "idea of Time that . . . tells [him] that it is time to begin [writing his novel]," so that "[his] life [will be] realized in a book" (Proust 1989b: 609, 1999: 507). Hence, regardless of any possible new turn in the future of Marcel's sentimental or gallant life, after his encounter with Mlle de Saint-Loup there is clearly no room left for any other amorous flame in the self which will be instantiated in his autobiography.

There is a precursor to the epiphany experienced by Marcel in front of Mlle de Saint-Loup in the second book of Proust's novel, *In the Shadow*

15. Regarding Auerbach's polemics with Benedetto Croce, see Vellucci 1994: 94–98.

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of Young Girls in Flower, where Marcel is depicted visiting the studio of a famous painter he greatly admires, Elstir. Here Marcel realizes that:

> To a certain ideal type [of woman, Elstir] had attributed a character that was almost divine, since he had dedicated . . . his whole life . . . to the task of distinguishing [its] lines as clearly as possible and of reproducing them as faithfully as possible. What such an ideal inspired in Elstir was indeed a cult, . . . it was the most intimate part of himself; and so he had never been able to look at it with detachment, to extract emotion from it, until the day on which he encountered it, realized outside himself, *in the body of a woman*, the body of the woman who had in due course become Mme Elstir. (Proust 1992: 586–87; my emphasis)

This precedent is not too surprising. Proust's novel, as we saw in the case of the discordant analogies between Marcel and Swann, is systematically organized around such precedents; they are designed to emphasize, by the contrast or discordant analogies between Marcel and another character, or between Marcel's various love affairs and infatuations, the difference in artistic stature and amorous compassion that will eventually come to distinguish Marcel *in the course of time*. Proust's novel is methodical in exemplifying the exceptional and often eccentric process whereby Marcel comes to terms with the laws of mortal duration; faced, like all of Proust's other characters, with the prospect of decay and temporality which is inherent in our human condition, Marcel learns—in time—to contain and subdue this prospect through a well-calibrated dosage of love, art, and remembrance. In the present case, the episode in the painter's studio prepares the reader for the epiphany of Marcel's vision of the body of Mlle de Saint-Loup.

Another precedent is found in Marcel's nostalgia for the body of his most carnal and most intense lover, Albertine:

> Between the satisfaction of my need for tenderness and the distinctive characteristics of her body, such an inextricable network of memories had been woven that I could no longer detach all that embroidery from any new physical desire. She alone could give me that happiness. The idea of her uniqueness was no longer a metaphysical *a priori* based upon what was individual in Albertine . . . but an *a posteriori* created by the contingent and indissoluble overlapping of my memories. (Proust 1989a: 136, 2003: 749–50)

At the time of this nostalgic reflection of Marcel's, Albertine is dead, and he is going through a protracted period of mourning. This passage complements the previous one in indicating that the "most intimate part of himself" that either Elstir or Marcel extracts out of the body of his beloved ("the distinctive characteristics of her body") has to do with the interplay of present experience and past remembrance. It seems to me that, in the contrast between the abstract ideal of Albertine's individuality and the tan-

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gible imbrications of desire and remembrance in her physical body, one may hear another echo from Schopenhauer's philosophy. Marcel's awareness of the entanglement of his amorous reminiscences with the body of Albertine signals the uniqueness of his love for her. And keeping in mind, as argued above, that love is at the core of Marcel's motivations (just as will is at the core of human motivation in Schopenhauer), one can see an analogy between the above citation from *The Fugitive*, where Marcel intimates that the motives of his desire for Albertine have undergone the transition from the "metaphysical *a priori*" of her concrete presence in his life to the "*a posteriori*" of his memories of her in absentia, and Schopenhauer's (1966: bk. 2, § 18) following declaration: "Will is the knowledge *a posteriori* of the body and the body is the knowledge *a priori* of the will."

Up to the day of his meeting with Mlle de Saint-Loup, Marcel's notion of love tolerates, actually requires a multiplicity of objects of desire, each one corresponding to a different self, a different, transient *moi*. Still, Albertine unquestionably figures in the novel as Mlle de Saint-Loup's most direct predecessor (Proust 1989b: 476, 1999: 301). As such, she embodies the closest approximation to the manifestation of love which Marcel will envision—fulfilled, completely implemented—in his final epiphany.

Before going deeper into this epiphany, it is worth remarking that an analogously genetic moment of conversion to the writer's vocation, equally pivoting on the vision of a girl's body and more explicitly pervaded by a mystical aura, is described in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Published in 1916, hence contemporary or slightly antecedent to the birth of the character of Mlle de Saint-Loup in Proust's *cahier Babouches* (Nakano 1998: 60–67; Callu 1987: clxii), Joyce's novel (ignored by Proust) describes Stephen Dedalus's genetic moment in chapter 4 (Carter 2000: 777).

> A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and softhued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some darkplumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish; and girlish, and touched by the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (Joyce 1976: 171)

This girl's description centers in the analogy between her body, shaped like a dove's, and the Holy Spirit, the bestower of the gift of tongues, which is conventionally represented as a dove—except for the intrusion, aestheti-

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cally instrumental considering most doves' matronly deportment, of a welcome pair of cranelike legs. The girl's full bosom is "soft and slight" like a dove's; her naked thighs are surmounted by the *faux derrière* of tucked-up skirts that "dovetailed behind her"—balancing, even in diction, the posterior and anterior fullness of her dovelike proportions. Meanwhile, the "ivory" of her long thighs, the "white" of her exposed underwear, and the "slateblue" of her skirts compound the Pentecostal overtones with an allusion to the Virgin Mary. Further, chapter 3 of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ends with Stephen "hold[ing] upon his tongue the [sacred] host"; chapter 2, with Stephen opening his mouth to the enterprising tongue of a young whore. Therefore, his holding of his tongue in this episode—he turns away from the dovelike girl without trying to kiss her, flirt with her, or even just talk to her—reveals Stephen's instantaneous conversion to a changed lifestyle: his newly tempered tongue is now to be kept in reserve for different tasks (Joyce 1976: 146, 101).

Marcel's Encounter with Mlle de Saint-Loup

Let me now show how the body of Mlle de Saint-Loup contributes to Marcel's retrieval of time lost. I will show, more specifically, how this body implements and brings to fruition the master trope which informs Marcel's love quest, a trope which, as befits the notion of the quest, stands for the cartography of convergent destinations. When Mlle de Saint-Loup appears before him, Marcel realizes that a multiplicity of paths, all leading back to his past's "most diverse sites," converge on her person: "And first of all, the two great 'sites,' where I had taken so many walks and dreamt so much, led to her—the site of Guermantes through her father Robert de Saint-Loup, and through her mother Gilberte the site of Méséglise, which was Swann's site" (Proust 1989b: 607–8).

Although Schopenhauer is certainly not the only author who ever claimed that a writer must in some cases live with the same thought and hold on to the same idea for the duration of the composition of an entire book, his version of this claim is relevant to us because of the philosopher's influence on Proust. Throughout *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer tirelessly argues that this entire, massive work "is only the unfolding of a single thought" (1966: Book 4, § 54)—an impressive proposition, correct in my opinion. Proust goes far beyond Schopenhauer. Not only does he hold on to the same master trope of convergent destinations for the several thousand pages of his novel (roughly five times longer than Schopenhauer's book); he even displays this trope under infinitely different guises, over and over in the novel, never allowing the reader to forget,

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neglect, or set it aside. More aware than Schopenhauer of how memory works, Proust fills his novel with intimations, signposts, and mementos for the benefit of his reader. Hence, when Guermantes and Méséglise, the two dominant sites in his novel's master trope, converge on the body of Mlle de Saint-Loup—and literally, as I will argue, *become* this body—one is not surprised or overwhelmed by this miraculous conversion. Most readers and critics are so unsurprised in fact that they miss the pivotal function of the silent encounter between Marcel and Mlle de Saint-Loup within the overall structure of the novel.

To my knowledge, Roger Shattuck (1964: 127) was the first critic (followed by William Carter [1992: 228–29]) to point out the "total reorientation of the action" brought about by this encounter:

> Four pages are devoted to establishing . . . how [Mlle de Saint-Loup] embodies the entire action of the book. . . . And when at last Marcel turns his attention to the approaching girl of sixteen, he sees more than he has seen in any other person in his life. . . . He recognizes in her "my Youth" . . . She *is* his vocation, not merely its symbol, but the work of art in the flesh, which he must have the courage to reproduce in its lengthy gestation and its final fullness. (Shattuck 1964: 35–36; his emphasis; see also Shattuck 2000: 134)

Without the "spur" of love, as embodied at the end of the novel by Mlle de Saint-Loup, Marcel would lack the essential determinant of his artistic vocation (see Ricoeur 1991: 375). This is why I have intimated above that, one crucial exception aside, love in Proust's novel plays the equivalent role of will in Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*. The exception is that Schopenhauer's will finds its own self-annihilation in its highest objectification or incarnation, which is the human being capable of ascending to the pure, selfless contemplation of the world, while Proust's love finds its most genuine implementation in the self-instantiation of the lover.

In this light, love in Proust may be seen at once as the affirmation and the negation of personal will: the affirmation of the individual temperament which is "acquired" through the exercise of one's personal volition but also the antidote to will's nihilistic destruction of the self. As I said above, several transient selves take turns in identifying Marcel in the unfolding of his sentimental adventures, each one of them consistent with a Swann-like, indecisive empirical temperament, each one of them corresponding to one of Marcel's transient loves. But all these alternating selves get eventually replaced by a permanent and integral self, namely, the self which is expressed in Proust's autobiographic instantiation, "not on the plane of [the artist's] individual life, but in the mode of existence that represents his true life" (Proust 1987b: 548, 2005: 133).

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As we will discuss later in greater detail, before joining the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's that closes Proust's novel, Marcel penetrates at long last the mystery of his mnemonic potency, that same mystery which has eluded him for the previous three and a half decades of his life, and he immediately decides to extract "the materials of [his] literary work [out of] his past life, perhaps under the title: a vocation" (Proust 1989b: 478, 1999: 304). Although this decision comes after a long period of resignation to his lack of writerly talent, Marcel's constantly renewed resolution to become a writer is familiar to the novel's reader, who recognizes in it the leitmotif of his frustrated ambitions. Why should we believe this time in Marcel's firmness of purpose? The reader who, like Landy, misses Mlle de Saint-Loup's contribution, cannot grasp the epiphanic turn in Marcel's encounter with the girl. Far from Landy's (2001: 115–16, 2004a: 93–94, 100) "lucid self-delusion," the amorous prospect opened by Marcel's encounter with Mlle de Saint-Loup spurs him to break away from his endemic, vegetative indolence and start writing his long-postponed novel.

Let me now illustrate the master trope that informs Marcel's love quest in *In Search of Lost Time* and how it gradually evolves from a cartography of convergent destinations into a panorama of amorous attachments.

The trope, which comes to be eventually embodied in Mlle de Saint-Loup, is originally triadic. As is well known, the literal translations of the titles of volumes 1 and 3 of Proust's novel read, respectively, "on the side of Swann's estate" and "the side of Guermantes." Swann's country estate is in the vicinity of the town of Méséglise-la-Vineuse, while the land of the Guermantes' old feudal possessions surrounds the family's ancestral residence in the village of Tansonville. Marcel's original memories, in the book, refer to his Easter and summer residences at Combray, an imaginary town in northern France which stands between Méséglise and Guermantes. In days of unreliable weather, he and his family would take their shorter walk *toward* Méséglise, without ever reaching it. On days of excellent weather, they took the longer walk toward Guermantes, without ever reaching this destination, either:

> There were, in the environs of Combray, two "ways" which we used to take for our walks, and they were so diametrically opposed that we would actually leave the house by a different door according to the way we had chosen: the way toward Méséglise-la-Vineuse, which we called also "Swann's way" because to get there one had to pass along the boundary of M. Swann's estate, and the "Guermantes way." Of Méséglise-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything more than the "way" . . . During the whole of my boyhood, if Méséglise was to me something inaccessible as the horizon, . . . Guermantes, on the other hand, meant no more than the ultimate goal, ideal rather than real, of

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> the "Guermantes way," a sort of abstract geographical term like the North Pole of the Equator or the Orient. And so to "take the Guermantes way" to get to Méséglise, or vice versa, would have seemed to me as nonsensical a proceeding as to turn to the east in order to reach the west. . . . I set between [these two destinations], far more than the mere distance in miles that separated one from the other, the distance that there was between the two parts of my brain in which I used to think of them, one of those distances of the mind which not only keep things apart, but cut them off from one another and put them on different planes. (Proust 1987a: 132, 2004: 188–89)

The destinations of both walks appear unreachable to the child Marcel; they stand separate and distinct from each other like East and West on the horizon, no less distinct and separate than the two complementary parts of Marcel's brain; each requires that in order to walk toward it (since reaching it is out of the question), Marcel should leave his summer house through a different door. In the middle of these two paths, of these two geographical destinations, and of these two mental maps, and as a completion of the triad in our master trope, stands Combray, the point of departure, which is symbolized by Marcel's house-of-two-doors—the door oriented toward Méséglise and the door oriented toward Guermantes. Marcel's remembrance of his days at Combray, which is inaugurated by his recollection of the house's garden and his bedroom upstairs and then gains in detail and in definition as the first book of the novel unfolds, is circumscribed by these two invisible and inaccessible horizons, the side of Swann's country estate and the side of the Guermantes' old feudal possessions. The question implicitly raised by the first book is whether the center, Combray, will ever come to embrace its two opposite horizons.

In time, place-names come to be identified and coalesce with the characters in the novel, that is, with person names. This twist enables Proust to complement the geographical triad with the amorous one. Marcel, who stands for Combray, the center of the novel's spatial coordinates, develops two complementary infatuations, with the Swann family and the Guermantes family, respectively. His juvenile infatuation with the intellectual charm of Charles Swann transfers itself, when the marriage with Odette turns Swann into an inept and ineffective dilettante of art appreciation, to the slightly decadent elegance of Odette's salon—not before having ripened into an unrequited love for Swann and Odette's daughter Gilberte.[16]

16. Given the triadic character of our master trope and the principle of embodiment informing the present discussion, it is interesting to note that the Swann family with its three members exhibits a lower-key, ancillary figuration of the same master trope; a sort of triadic embodiment surfaces in it on a purely physiological level. "In Gilberte's face, just to one side of its perfect reproduction of Odette's nose, the skin rose slightly to show the two moles of

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On the opposite side of Combray's horizon, Marcel develops an infatuation with the aristocratic charm of Mme de Guermantes (who lives in Paris in the same apartment building inhabited by Marcel and his parents); although openly and even harshly discouraged, this infatuation—this "inaccessible love," as Paul Ricoeur (1991: 363) calls it—earns him eventually some perplexing overtures from Mme de Guermantes's brother-in-law, the *homme-femme* Baron de Charlus, and ripens moreover in his intense friendship with Mme de Guermantes's nephew, a brilliant *homme à femmes*, Robert de Saint-Loup. The transition from place-name to person name is complemented by the transition from the elusiveness of spatial destination to the intangibility of sentimental affection. The symmetrical poles of both Charles Swann and Robert de Saint-Loup represent in fact instances of unhappy love.[17]

Shortly before Marcel's birth, Swann falls unhappily in love with a professional cocotte, Odette de Crécy, who betrays him, among others, with M. de Forcheville; after their marriage, the couple as well as their daughter Gilberte, who is the same age as Marcel, are ostracized by the high society which Swann, in spite of being a Jew, used to be on intimate terms with. When Marcel and Robert de Saint-Loup strike up a friendship at the sea resort of Balbec, the latter is having a troublesome and unhappy affair with a Jewish actress, Rachel, who dominates, disrespects, and exploits him.

Marcel, a direct witness to the vicissitudes of Saint-Loup's love affair with Rachel and an indirect witness, by hearsay, to those of Swann's love affair with Odette, gets passionately entangled in turn with Albertine, whom he meets at Balbec at a time when he has conveniently forgotten his devotion for Gilberte (Proust 1987a: 184). Marcel's love affair with Albertine occupies a good portion of *Sodom and Gomorrah* as well as the two volumes of *The Captive* and *The Fugitive*. Albertine's personal flaws compound Odette's unreliability (although Marcel will never come to any firm conclusion about Albertine's unfaithfulness, not even after her premature death) not only with Rachel's independence (although Albertine's elusiveness, suggestive of an insincere temperament, is to a great extent Marcel's own fabrication) but also with the Baron de Charlus's homosexuality (although Albertine's sexual "inversion" might be another fabrication of Marcel's—we will never know any better about it than Marcel himself does).

The geographical triangle composed of Combray, Méséglise, and

M. Swann. . . . The line separating Gilberte's twin likenesses was not hard and fast, though. Now and then, as she laughed, you suddenly glimpsed the oval of her father's cheek in her mother's face" (Proust 1987b: 554–55, 2005: 139).

17. I leave aside Charlus's complex and contradictory relationship with his lover Morel since, in the economy of the present discussion, it would at best provide a reflection and a reinforcement of the erotic role played by Robert de Saint-Loup.

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Guermantes is mirrored in the amorous triangle composed by the pairs of Marcel and Albertine, Swann and Odette, and Saint-Loup and Rachel. The difference in the elements of the latter triangle must be seen in terms of personal stature and sentimental integrity. In spite of his awkwardness, infantilism, and insecurities, Marcel's devotion to Albertine has an intensity unknown to either Swann or Saint-Loup. While both Swann and Saint-Loup abjure rather nonchalantly the great love of his life, that is, Odette in Swann's case and Rachel in Robert's case, Marcel, who loses Albertine to premature death, will struggle desperately against the inclination to forget, connatural to all human beings, in order to preserve his genuine mourning for his beloved; this is testified to by the several hundred pages he devotes postmortem to Albertine's remembrance. Not to mention that, in a move that at once consecrates Albertine's pivotal contribution to his love quest and anticipates the epiphanic arrival on the scene of Mlle de Saint-Loup, Marcel openly sets his love for Albertine at the figural heart of the novel's master trope:

> As, long ago, the Méséglise and the Guermantes ways had laid the foundations of my taste for the countryside and prevented me thereafter from finding any real charm in a place where there was no old church, where there were no cornflowers or buttercups, so it was by linking them in my mind to a past full of charm that my love for Albertine made me seek out exclusively a certain type of woman. (Proust 1989a: 133–34, 2003: 745–46).

After his long period of mourning, Marcel travels to Venice in the company of his mother and then, on his return to Paris, learns that his former sweetheart Gilberte is engaged to marry his good friend Robert de Saint-Loup. Marcel is surprised by the paradoxical nature of this marriage and the squalor of the social dynamics behind it. The ostracism imposed on Swann's wife and daughter by the Parisian aristocracy would in fact have made this marriage impossible if Gilberte's engagement to Robert had not been preceded by three table-turning events:

1. after Swann's death, Odette marries her lover, de Forcheville;
2. Gilberte inherits a colossal fortune from a relative of her father;
3. de Forcheville, an impoverished aristocrat, offers to adopt his wealthy stepdaughter, giving her thereby a name better suited to translating her wealth into a prestigious marriage opportunity.

Gilberte, it turns out, is only too happy to renounce Swann's Jewish name, which after the Dreyfus affair has become an embarrassment to her and Odette, and adopts rather proudly the name of her stepfather.[18]

18. "On n'osait plus devant [Gilberte] prononcer le nom de Swann" ("One didn't dare utter Swann's name in front of Gilberte") (Proust 1989a: 162).

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Indeed, Gilberte's unscrupulous repudiation of her father's name, which draws such a contrast with the filial affection of her youth (Proust 1987b: 527, 556–57), could be viewed as the unifying figure that sums up the tenor of the love stories grafted upon the place-names of Méséglise and Guermantes. Although he remains to the last a devoted father and a punctilious husband, Swann turns his back on his affection for Odette soon after his marriage to her. Robert never fully leaves Rachel (in fact it seems that he is still "keeping" her after his marriage to Gilberte), but his family's disapproval of his relationship with this lower-class Jewish actress induces him to break up with her, at least officially. In doing so, he appears to reject his own disposition to sincere affection; his marriage to Gilberte and his subsequent adulterous affairs, as well as his fading friendship for Marcel, even suggest to the latter that a saturation of sexual indulgence has finally induced Robert to cross over to the Baron de Charlus's sisterhood of the *hommes-femmes*.

But what needs to be emphasized at this juncture is that out of all this affective misery, perfidy, impotence, deception, and self-indulgence there emerges Marcel's occasion of artistic vocation and biographic self-instantiation. During the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's, Marcel meets a corpulent lady whom at first he does not recognize as Gilberte and who, having identified herself, proceeds to hold a strangely protracted and intermittent conversation with him (Proust 1989b: 558). (The intermittency of the conversation—and the prolixity of this entire section of the novel, as presented in Jean-Pierre Tadié's accurate version of 1989—must be imputed to the posthumous publication of *Time Regained*, which Proust never fully revised.) During this conversation, Marcel finds the time to devote a few private thoughts to his future lifestyle as a writer: he will have to conform to a strict discipline of solitude and isolation, indulging at most in an occasional affair with a *jeune fille en fleur*. At this juncture, having realized that he feels no residual attraction for Gilberte, he finds himself asking her, almost inadvertently, to help him meet some young girl who could revive the feelings he had nourished for her once (ibid.: 565–68). Far from being mortified by his request, Gilberte appears to take it very seriously. After an extraordinarily long reflection (presumably, again, the result of an incomplete revision), during which Marcel is variously engaged in conversations with other acquaintances, Gilberte volunteers to introduce her own daughter to Marcel—a confirmation, Marcel reflects, that she must have inherited some of the libertine nature of her mother Odette.

"I am sure [my daughter] is going to be a gentle friend for you," declares Gilberte. Waiting for the introduction, his appetite whetted by Gilberte's

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promising words, Marcel examines the thick "texture" (*trame*) of threads linking his entire existence to the existence of Gilberte's daughter—a genealogy of memories spanning the conglomeration of dynasties from both the *côté de Guermantes* and the *côté de Méséglise* (Proust 1989b: 605–7, 1999: 501). He intends to invite her to be the successor of his great love, Albertine (Proust 1989b: 608), who was in turn Gilberte's successor and avatar.[19] Then he finally sees the girl walk toward him:

> I found her very beautiful: still full of hopes, full of laughter, fashioned by those very years which I had meanwhile lost, she resembled my own youth. (Proust 1989b: 609, 1999: 507)

In Gilberte and Robert's marriage, the two opposite sides of Combray's unreachable horizon lose their demarcation and come to mingle with each other; an unimaginable twist of fate allows the organic fusion of Marcel's separate infatuations with the "side of Swann's estate" and the "side of Guermantes." This is undeniably a revolution of cosmic proportions in the novel, the sealing of its master trope, whose outcome, whose genetic offspring—both physiological and genealogical—is Mlle de Saint-Loup—the girl who, seventeen years after Gilberte and Saint-Loup's marriage, stands epiphanically in front of Marcel.

In acknowledging the originality of Shattuck's identification of Mlle de Saint-Loup with Marcel's "work of art in the flesh," Paul Ricoeur (1990: 149) has defined the encounter between Marcel and Mlle de Saint-Loup as "the ultimate recognition scene." Not only does Marcel recognize in the girl's physiognomy the superposed physiognomies of her multiple ancestors, he also recognizes his own lost youth in her. The physiognomic superposition of her parents, Gilberte and Robert, and her grandparents, Odette and Swann, together with the entire ancestry of the Guermantes, of which the Saint-Loups are a prominent branch, outlines, as a metaphor of genealogical inception, the long gestation of the book which Marcel must now write. And the girl's embodying, as though in the concentrated form of her own vital fluids, of the progression of Marcel's life story, from early youth till the moment when he will have undertaken the narration of his intercourse with her genitors and progenitors, is a benevolent adumbration of the completion of his literary endeavors.

Since her manifest physiognomy endows Mlle de Saint-Loup with the attributes (in terms, properly speaking, of a set of cumulative facial and bodily features) from several of her elders, it lends itself to Marcel's recognition in the narrow sense of the term, according to Ricoeur. And since it allows Marcel to apprehend the appearance of the girl as an all-inclusive

19. See, for instance, Proust 1989b: 483, 1988a: 248–49.

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confirmation of his literary vocation (operating therefore on the principle of converging recollections rather than on that of cumulative physiognomies), the fact that she, as he phrases it, "resemble[s his] own youth" justifies Marcel's metaphorical recognition of her as the completion of his quest (Proust 1989b: 609). In Ricoeur's (1990: 147–49) hermeneutical scheme, the aspect of physical recognition weaves together the temporal threads of Proust's novel, while the metaphorical aspect turns these temporal threads into a unified texture.

Having described the genre of the autobiography as narrated in terms of a writerly vocation pursued by means of a love quest, I must take exception here to the fact that Ricoeur's and Shattuck's concordant schemes of recognition completely ignore Marcel's intention to sleep with Mlle de Saint-Loup. A moment before meeting her, Marcel was still wishing to make the acquaintance of a generic jeune fille en fleur. But in the looks of Mlle de Saint-Loup he discerns something much more relevant than the mere chance to reexperience, as an innocent diversion or a writer's recreational pastime, his youthful lust of Balbec. It is not only because she brings together the gradual "gestation" of his memories and the unified "fullness" of their inscription in the work of art that "she *is* his vocation," as Shattuck (1964: 35–36; his emphasis) puts it. She is his vocation first and foremost because she, the punctual coincidence of—socially speaking—the people Marcel loved but never fully possessed and—erotically speaking—the girls "in flower" he occasionally seduced but never deflowered, incarnates his one chance to synchronize at long last his memory with his desire.

As the reader of the first chapter of *The Fugitive* knows too well, all the other women in Marcel's existence could only be desired intermittently, precisely when they were absent, and in their absence Marcel's heart, which can imagine only that which is absent and therefore memorable (Proust 1989b: 450–51), could apply to their remembrance all the regrets, suspicions, and resentments of his jealousy. Mlle de Saint-Loup, on the other hand, stands in Marcel's eyes for incessant and unregretful desire, the very hinge of that "perpetual adoration" under whose rubric Proust composed the closure of his novel.[20] She can be imagined and therefore desired incessantly, since in her incarnation of the totality of Marcel's relevant memories, her presence is absence transubstantiated, the essence of that which is memorable for Marcel.

His heart can imagine her especially in the fullness of her proximity. The presence of her body is not therefore an impediment to the memory of

20. See *Esquisses* XXIV ff. esp. LVIII, in Proust 1989c: 798 ff., 939–40.

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his desire, as was the case even with Albertine, but is, on the contrary, the miracle of an incarnated memory of desire. Mlle de Saint-Loup is Marcel's "work of art in the flesh," as Shattuck (1964: 35–36) puts it, because she makes his determination (to write the story which nature and history have embedded in her body) coalesce with his desire (to possess the woman whose body stands for all the women of his life and, being more memorable than the body of any one of them, is more desirable too). Therefore, against Shattuck's and Ricoeur's concordant schemes, it seems to me that lust plays an essential role in bringing together Marcel's writerly vocation and love quest.

Proust's Paradise Lost

I said above that the long-postponed discovery of the secret of his power of reminiscence predisposes Marcel to undertake the literary labor that will enable him to turn time lost into time regained. The encounter with Mlle de Saint-Loup occurs during the "matinée" at the Princesse de Guermantes's and is preceded by a solitary interval spent by Marcel in the princess's library. We learn from the *esquisse* XXXIV of the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's that now Marcel "lived in a world of signs which habit had deprived of their signification. [He] read the wrong way [*à contresens*] the book of [his] own life." He could not smell any longer the evasive scent of the water lilies in the name of the Guermantes, could not envision any longer rocky peaks in the blue froth of the ocean's waves, had no desire to discover new churches after his adolescent discovery of the church of Balbec. "I felt as though I still had in me the book of my life, [but] like someone whom a congestion followed by verbal aphasia had deprived of the faculty of reading its letters" (Proust 1989c: 856–57).

During the interval in the library, three mnemonic episodes in rapid succession, all akin to the madeleine episode which inaugurates Marcel's reminiscences in the novel, reveal to him the mysterious secret of his power of remembrance. This discovery introduces one of the novel's most Schopenhauerian moments, that of Marcel's "lost paradises."

> The returning memory . . . causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past, that purer air which the poets have vainly tried to situate in paradise and which could induce so profound a sensation of renewal only if it had been breathed before, since *the true paradises are the paradises which we have lost*. (Proust 1999: 261; my emphasis)[21]

21. See Proust 1989b: 449: "le souvenir . . . nous fait tout à coup respirer un air nouveau, précisément parce que c'est un air qu'on a respiré autrefois, cet air plus pur que les poètes

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When and how is Marcel enabled to evade the squalor of his present circumstances, of their "directly felt reality," which is normally imbued with jealousy, remorse, resentment, and insecurity? He escapes that squalor when the uncorrupted freshness of a previous experience—analogous to his actual predicament yet miraculously immune from its negative connotations—relieves him of his self-awareness and bestows on his present circumstances the aura of their true "essence" (Proust 1989b: 450). This escape from the relentless oppression of ordinary existence, back into "the paradises which we have lost," is permitted by the action of involuntary memory, which recalls certain past events without the contribution of his "will" or his "intellect" (ibid.: 451); a reminiscence brought about by involuntary memory allows Marcel to appreciate the present through the rich filter of his own "imagination," keeping at bay thereby the destructive drive to merely (mis-)understand or (un-)will the present. Marcel corrects here the Aristotelian principle that an object of the imagination that is imprinted in memory cannot coincide with the present experience of the object itself, because "there is no such thing as memory of the present" (Aristotle 1971: 714–15). Although he espouses the Aristotelian principle that "one can only imagine what is absent," Marcel sees this principle as invalidated whenever the essential character of a presently experienced sensation coincides with that of a sensation imprinted in memory. In such an instance, one can enjoy the impression of the present sensation to the fullest; thanks to the intensifying "application" of one's imagination of it, one enjoys, in other words, the impression that a sensation or event from the past is being concretely resuscitated in the here and now. This imaginative appreciation of the present throws one into the bliss of a dimension "outside of time" (*en dehors du temps*) and makes one oblivious of or indifferent to the squalor of one's "directly felt reality" (Proust 1989b: 450–51).

A detailed protocol for this mnemonic process of emancipation from the squalor of ordinary experience is found in book 3 of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1966: bk. 3, § 38):

> The individual knowing [the idea as pure contemplation] is raised to the condition (*Zustand*) of the pure subject of *will-less knowledge*, and now [both this idea and this subject] *no longer stand in the stream of time*. . . . It is finally that bliss of will-less perception (*Anschauens*) that spreads so wonderful a charm over the past and the distant and by a self-delusion represents (*darstellt*) them to us in so flattering a light. For by our conjuring up in our minds days long past spent in a distant place, the objects are only recalled by our phantasy (*Phantasie*), and

ont vainement essayé de faire régner dans le paradis et qui ne pourrait donner cette sensation profonde de renouvellement que s'il avait été respiré déjà, car les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu'on a perdus."

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> not by the subject of will, which carried around its incurable sorrows with it just as much then as it does now. . . . Now in what is remembered, objective perception (*Auschauung*) is just as effective as it would be in what is present, if we could allow the latter to have influence over us, if we could surrender to it after purging ourselves of the will. Hence it happens that, especially when we are more than usually disturbed by some want, the sudden recollection of past and distant scenes flits across our minds *like a lost paradise*. (Translation modified)[22]

In Schopenhauer, "pure contemplation" is intuitive (and so is involuntary memory in Proust); it is immune from the intrusion of both will and intellect (and so is involuntary memory in Proust). Hence, Schopenhauer's "pure contemplation" emancipates the individual from his or her own selfhood (which is by definition ruled and informed by the drive to will) and from the dominion of temporality (which is by definition regulated by the rational or intellectual principles of cause and effect), delivering him or her thereby to a painless perception of the world, indifferent to the urge to understand or will it. When this perception is mediated by recollection, it is regulated by the faculty of phantasy (*Phantasie*), which in Schopenhauer's idealistic tradition is a close relative of the faculty of imagination—whose notion, as we saw, Proust borrowed and revised from Aristotle.

Autobiography and Self-Instantiation in Proust

One could say that when it comes to the power of reminiscence, Proust operates as a Schopenhauerian revisionist. Marcel's paradise is, like the German philosopher's, outside of the "stream of time" and made accessible only to the individual who—contrary, as we saw, to Swann's resignation to fate and subjugation to temperament—is able to jettison the ballast of his or her own empirical temperament, together with the misdirected willpower that pervades it. Yet Proust's paradise "outside-of-time" (*en dehors du temps*) has a Dantesque and Augustinian attribute that is absent from the existential options offered by Schopenhauer to the individual who purges or frees himself or herself of will (Proust 1989b: 450–51). This is the attribute of being informed by love. The options offered by Schopenhauer to the will-less and selfless subject—which consist of the alternative between an aesthetic contemplation of the world, driven by intuition, or an ethical renunciation of the world, driven by intellection—reflect two existential stances refractory to the amorous experience. Schopenhauer acknowledges this much in *The World as Will and Representation*. He accuses

22. See Schopenhauer 1891, 2: § 38, 231–34.

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of naiveté Augustine's following description of the operations of love, which the bishop of Hippo allegedly confuses with the operations of will: "The specific gravity of bodies is . . . their love, whether they are carried downwards by their weight, or upwards by their levity. For the body is borne by its gravity, as the spirit by love, whithersoever it is borne" (Augustine 1993: 11.28; Schopenhauer 1966: § 24, § 38, § 55, § 60, § 68ff.). In truth, Augustine never confuses the effects of love with those of will. On the contrary, in this metaphorical notion of love, as the main cause of change in human life, one finds the germs of the *via amoris* (path of love) which, starting from Bernard of Clairvaux, founder of the Order of the Cistercians, and culminating, as we saw, with Thomas Gallus, will increasingly inform Christian mysticism in the late Middle Ages. In Bernard's own words, love is not, as Schopenhauer would have it, a misnomer of will; rather will achieves its proper effects only in the "agreement of [two distinct] wills" or "volitions," which love itself brings about (Bernard de Clairvaux 2005: Sermon LXXI; my translation).

Proust's protagonist embraces neither aesthetic contemplation nor ethical renunciation. Hence, he does not renounce selfhood, as Schopenhauer would recommend, but rather rejects his own indecisive temperament, his several alternating selves (the equivalent of the empirical temperament which Swann could not overcome). He affirms instead the integral and permanent identity of his self-instantiation in "the creation of a work of art" (Proust 1989b: 457, 1999: 273). Like the protagonist of Dante's performative text of self-expression, Marcel finds his self-affirmation in a work of art which is the autobiography of a lover.

This is of course a nonhistoriographic and nondocumentary autobiography, whose "mode of existence" does not correspond to "the plane of [its author's] individual life" but rather, as I intimated earlier in Proust's (1987b: 548, 2005: 133) own words, to "the mode of existence that represents his true life." Let me therefore repeat for the third time that, as in the case of Dante's *Commedia*, the fiction of Proust's novel is that it is not a fiction. And one is bound therefore to ask about Proust's novel the same perplexing question which I have elsewhere (Balsamo 2006: 29–30) offered to Dante's poem: What kind of validating ground can be supplied to an autobiography which the author has neatly and deliberately removed from the realm of documentable facts in order to instantiate his own identity within the existential coordinates of a literary work?[23]

23. "In this book . . . there is not a single incident which is not fictitious, not a single character who is a real person in disguise, in [it] everything has been invented *by me* in accordance with the requirements of my theme" (Proust 1999: 225; my emphasis; the original French version is in Proust 1989b: 424).

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In order to answer this question, we must pay attention to the artistic program—the *ars poetica*, as Ricoeur defines it—which Marcel elaborates in the solitude of the Princesse de Guermantes's library and particularly to the responsible tasks that this program assigns to Marcel as a writer (Ricoeur 1990: 143). This program consists of two distinct parts: an aesthetic of imagination, coping with the "ecstasies" induced in him by the experiences of involuntary memory, and an ethic of "vision," coping with the solipsism of these ecstasies (Proust 1989b: 453, 474). The aesthetic component, whose principles have informed our discussion thus far, supplies Marcel with a solution to, as Ricoeur (1991: 380–81) phrases it, the "distance that is [to be] traversed" between time lost and time regained in the novel; the ethics of "vision" defines instead the responsible tasks of Marcel's artistic vocation.

"[Vision] is the revelation . . . of the qualitative difference in the fashion whereby the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, without the mediation of art, would remain everybody's eternal secret" (Proust 1989b: 474, 1999: 299). The manifestation of the praetertemporal "essence of things"—praetertemporal insofar as it pertains, as we saw, to a dimension "outside of time" (*en dehors du temps*)—reaches Marcel only through his ephemeral and strictly intrasubjective raptures or "ecstasies" over the "miracle of [the] analogy" between present and past sensations (Proust 1989b: 450–51, 1999: 262–63). However, this essence may be captured and codified in the "laws and ideas" of general applicability that those raptures, per se mystical and incommunicable, have impressed upon his memory in the guise of decodable "signs," thus putting them within reach of his intellect (Proust 1989b: 457, 1999: 273). Marcel's notion of "vision" entails, he explains, the task of working out a "style" for himself as writer. He is after a style, I submit, of the sort which Goethe would recommend, aiming at neither a merely mimetic reproduction of reality nor at a manneristic and "vacuous" expression of it but capable rather of inscribing in the permanence of his artwork both a faithful rendition of his solipsistic raptures and the premises for their rational decoding by his reader. In his 1789 essay "Simple Imitation of Nature, Manner, Style," Goethe (1980: 22) claims that "style is based on the profoundest knowledge, on the essence of things, insofar as we can recognize it in visible and tangible forms." Proust's familiarity with Goethe's work is documented not only in his unpublished and undated essay on the German author, included by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre in the collection *Essais et articles* under the title "Sur Goethe," but also by his remarkably frequent references in *Pastiches et mélanges* and in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Proust 1971a: 647–50; cf. Tadié 1971: 264, 340–41, 345 on Proust's admiration for Goethe). So Proust would know that Goethe

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(1980: 22) established three forms, "shading into one another," for artistic representation, namely, "simple imitation," "manner," and "the highest level . . . style"; in this superior form, "style," he identified the "culmination" of art (Vellucci 1994: 105; Pareyson 1971).

In defining this stylistic rule, Marcel's concern is oriented toward the reader. By translating the patrimony of reminiscences left him by the experience of ecstatic rapture into an accessible vision of the "essence of things," Marcel makes this patrimony communal, intersubjective. The hermeneutics of the way whereby the "world appears to [him]" (normally destined to remain a "secret") should eventually provide his readers with "the means to read within themselves," so that the *belle pensée d'un maître* would never again reduce them to the passive absorption of "somebody else's conscience" (Proust 1989b: 473, 1999: 297).

Paul Ricoeur (1990: 372–73) maintains that these mnemonic signs, left behind by ecstatic rapture, find "the principle of their decipherment" in the relation between the joy they convey to Marcel and his final discovery of his vocation as a writer. The transition from the joyful discernment of the "essence of things" to the "inscription in an actual work" of Marcel's own past experiences would bring about "the resurrection of time lost." As supporting evidence of this view, Ricoeur cites Marcel's verdict that, as a dilettante of art appreciation, "Swann's mistake" was that he confused the beneficial effects of artistic creation with "the pleasures of love." In my opinion, this view of Ricoeur's, and especially its corollary opposition of love's pleasures to art's benefits (an opposition found in Proust also by Jean-Jacques Nattiez [1989: 31]), neglects two crucial aspects of Marcel's project at the end of the novel. On the side of aesthetics, Marcel does not want to become a generic chronicler of his own past, and not even a philosopher of memory work, but rather the author of the kind of autobiography that narrates of a writerly vocation affirmed through a love quest; on the side of ethics, Marcel does not want to encourage his readers to a generic sort of intro- or retrospection but rather to the kind of self-decipherment that gives preeminence to the "signs of love" over all others, extracting out of them "laws and ideas" of general and futural applicability.[24] It is particularly on the side of ethics (Proust's ethics of "vision") that one must seek the validating ground for an autobiography aimed at instantiating its author's identity within the coordinates of a literary work—or, in Marcel's words, aimed at "realiz[ing . . . his] life in a book" (Proust 1989b: 609, 1999: 507).

24. See Ricoeur 1991: 370–71. Ricoeur adopts the notion that Marcel undergoes in the novel the "apprenticeship" of a triad of signs ("signs of the world, of love, and of sensory impression") from Deleuze's *Proust and Signs* (1972); see Ricoeur 1991: 363–68.

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As I have argued elsewhere (Balsamo 2006: 28–30) with regard to Dante's *Commedia*, such a validating ground for Proust's autobiographical instantiation may be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's notions of authorial self-rendering. In his 1948 essay "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" Sartre maintains that every literary work of existential import is an "appeal"—an exhortation and an invitation—to the reader. The literary author can never encounter his or her own text as an "essential object" in the autonomy of the aesthetic phenomenon; it pertains to the "generosity" of the reader to provide the author's existential self-instantiation with the legitimacy of communal credentials. Sartre's proposal to intend the literary work as an appeal to its reader applies directly to such a text as *In Search of Lost Time*, whose ethical purpose not only keeps in rigorous tension the writer's and the reader's needs of self-expression but also, as we saw, does so from a perspective that gives priority to the amorous condition over all other existential experiences.

Proust instantiates his own identity in the literary narration of a love quest. But only the reader who receives and appreciates the gift of Proust's "laws and ideas," and consents besides to verify their applicability to the reader's own love life, has the privilege of returning to him, in the guise of a gift, Proust's present of himself in the novel. An amorous correspondence, truly Augustinian in spirit, is established between author and reader by the very nature of the novel. And it is through this correspondence that *In Search of Lost Time*, given away by Proust as subjective self-instantiation, is returned to him in the objectified condition of a shared, communal patrimony.[25] *In memoriam*.

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25. See Sartre 1948: 91, 93–94, 96, 100, 108, 111.

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