GÉRARD GENETTE

Narrative Discourse
AN ESSAY IN METHOD

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5 Voice

The Narrating Instance

"For a long time I used to go to bed early": obviously, such a statement—unlike, let us say, "Water boils at one-hundred degrees Celsius" or "The sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles"—can be interpreted only with respect to the person who utters it and the situation in which he utters it. I is identifiable only with reference to that person, and the completed past of the "action" told is completed only in relation to the moment of utterance. To use Benveniste's well-known terms again, the story here is not without a share of discourse, and it is not too difficult to show that this is practically always the case.1 Even historical narrative of the type "Napoleon died at Saint Helena" implies in its preterite that the story precedes the narrating, and I am not certain that the present tense in "Water boils at one-hundred degrees" (iterative narrative) is as atemporal as it seems. Nevertheless, the importance or the relevance of these implications is essentially variable, and this variability can justify or impose distinctions and contrasts that have at least an operative value. When I read Gambara or Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, I am interested in a story, and care little to know who tells it, where, and when; if I read Facino Cane, at no time can I overlook the presence of the narrator in the story he tells; if it is

1 On this subject see my Figures II, pp. 61–69.

La Maison Nucingen, the author makes it his business to draw my attention to the person of the talker Bixiou and the group of listeners he addresses; if it is L'Auberge rouge, I will undoubtedly give less attention to the foreseeable unfolding of the story Hermann tells than to the reactions of a listener named Taillefer, for the narrative is on two levels, and the second—where someone narrates—is where most of the drama's excitement is.

This kind of effect is what we are going to look at under the category of voice: "the mode of action," says Vendryes, "of the verb considered for its relations to the subject"—the subject here being not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person (the same one or another) who reports it, and, if need be, all those people who participate, even though passively, in this narrating activity. We know that linguistics has taken its time in addressing the task of accounting for what Benveniste has called subjectivity in language,2 that is, in passing from analysis of statements to analysis of relations between these statements and their generating instance—what today we call their enunciating. It seems that poetics is experiencing a comparable difficulty in approaching the generating instance of narrative discourse, an instance for which we have reserved the parallel term narrating. This difficulty is shown especially by a sort of hesitation, no doubt an unconscious one, to recognize and respect the autonomy of that instance, or even simply its specificity. On the one hand, as we have already noted, critics restrict questions of narrative enunciating to questions of "point of view"; on the other hand they identify the narrating instance with the instance of "writing," the narrator with the author, and the recipient of the narrative with the reader of the work;3 a confusion that is perhaps legitimate in the case of a historical narrative or a real autobiography, but not when we are dealing with a narrative of fiction, where the role of narrator is itself fictive, even if assumed directly by the author, and where the supposed narrating situation can be very different from the act of writing (or of dictating) which

refers to it. It is not the Abbé Prévost who tells the love of Manon and Des Grieux, it is not even the Marquis de Renoncourt, supposed author of the Mémoires d’un homme de qualité; it is Des Grieux himself, in an oral narrative where "I" can designate only him, and where "here" and "now" refer to the spatio-temporal circumstances of that narrating and in no way to the circumstances of the writing of Manon Lescaut by its real author. And even the references in Tristram Shandy to the situation of writing speak to the (fictive) act of Tristram and not the (real) one of Sterne; but in a more subtle and also more radical way, the narrator of Père Goriot "is" not Balzac, even if here and there he expresses Balzac's opinions, for this author-narrator is someone who "knows" the Vauquer boardinghouse, its landlady and its lodgers, whereas all Balzac himself does is imagine them; and in this sense, of course, the narrating situation of a fictional account is never reduced to its situation of writing.

So it is this narrating instance that we have still to look at, according to the traces it has left—the traces it is considered to have left—in the narrative discourse it is considered to have produced. But it goes without saying that the instance does not necessarily remain identical and invariable in the course of a single narrative work. Most of Manon Lescaut is told by Des Grieux, but some pages revert to M. de Renoncourt; inversely, most of the Odyssey is told by "Homer," but Books IX–XII revert to Ulysses; and the baroque novel, The Thousand and One Nights, and Lord Jim have accustomed us to much more complex situations. Narrative analysis must obviously take charge of the

4 On the Thousand and One Nights, see Todorov, "Narrative-Men," in Poetics of Prose: "The record [for embedding] seems to be held by the narrative which offers us the story of the bloody chest. Here Scheherazade tells that Jafer tells that the tailor tells that the barber tells that his brother (and he has six brothers) tells that... The last story is a story to the fifth degree" (p. 71). But the term "embedding" does not do justice to the fact precisely that each of these stories is at a higher "degree" than the preceding one, since its narrator is a character in the preceding one; for stories can also be "embedded" at the same level, simply by digression, without any shift in the narrating instance: see Jacques's parentheses in the Fataliste.

study of these modifications—or of these permanences: for if it is remarkable that Ulysses' adventures are told by two different narrators, it is proper to find it just as noteworthy that the loves of Swann and of Marcel are told by the same narrator.

A narrating situation is, like any other, a complex whole within which analysis, or simply description, cannot differentiate except by ripping apart a tight web of connections among the narrating act, its protagonists, its spatio-temporal determinations, its relationship to the other narrating situations involved in the same narrative, etc. The demands of exposition constrain us to this unavoidable violence simply by the fact that critical discourse, like any other discourse, cannot say everything at once. Here again, therefore, we will look successively at elements of definition whose actual functioning is simultaneous: we will attach these elements, for the most part, to the categories of time of the narrating, narrative level, and "person" (that is, relations between the narrator—plus, should the occasion arise, his or their narratee[s]—and the story he tells).

Time of the Narrating

By a dissymmetry whose underlying reasons escape us but which is inscribed in the very structures of language (or at the very least of the main "languages of civilization" of Western culture), I can very well tell a story without specifying the place where it happens, and whether this place is more or less distant from the place where I am telling it; nevertheless, it is almost impossible for me not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act, since I must necessarily tell the story in a present, past, or future tense. This is perhaps why the temporal determinations of the narrating instance are manifestly more important than its spatial determinations. With the exception of

5 This is what I will call the receiver of the narrative, patterned after the contrast between sender and receiver proposed by A. J. Greimas (Sémantique structurale [Paris, 1966], p. 177).

6 Certain uses of the present tense do indeed connote temporal indefiniteness (and not simultaneousness between story and narrating), but curiously they seem reserved for very particular forms of narrative (joke, riddle, scientific problem or experiment, plot summary) and literature does not have much investment in them. The case of the "narrative present" with preterite value is also different.
second-degree narratings, whose setting is generally indicated by the diegetic context (Ulysses with the Phaeacians, the landlady of *Jacques le fataliste* in her inn), the narrating place is very rarely specified, and is almost never relevant: we know more or less where Proust wrote the *Recherche du temps perdu*, but we are ignorant of where Marcel is considered to have produced the narrative of his life, and we scarcely think of worrying about it. On the other hand, it is very important to us to know, for example, how much time elapses between the first scene of the *Recherche* (the "drama of going to bed") and the moment when it is evoked in these terms: "Many years have passed since that night. The wall of the staircase, up which I had watched the light of his candle gradually climb, was long ago demolished"; for this temporal interval, and what fills it up and gives it life, is an essential element in the narrative's significance.

The chief temporal determination of the narrating instance is obviously its position relative to the story. It seems evident that the narrating can only be subsequent to what it tells, but this obviousness has been belied for many centuries by the existence of "predictive" narrative in its various forms (prophetic, apocalyptic, oracular, astrological, chiromantic, cartomantic, oneiromantic, etc.), whose origin is lost in the darkness of time—and has been belied also, at least since *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, by the use of narrative in the present tense. We must consider, further, that a past-tense narrating can to some extent be split up and inserted between the various moments of the story, much like a "live" running commentary—a common practice with correspondence and private diary, and therefore with the "novel by letters" or the narrating in the form of a journal (Wuthering Heights, Journal d'un curé de campagne). It is therefore necessary, merely from the point of view of temporal position, to differentiate four types of narrating: subsequent (the classical position of the past-tense narrative, undoubtedly far and away the most frequent); prior (predictive narrative, generally in the future tense, but not prohibited from being conjugated in the present, like Jocabel's dream in *Moyse sauvé*); simultaneous (narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action); and interpolated (between the moments of the action).

The last type is a priori the most complex, since it involves a narrating with several instances, and since the story and the narrating can become entangled in such a way that the latter has an effect on the former. This is what happens particularly in the epistolary novel with several correspondents, where, as we know, the letter is at the same time both a medium of the narrative and an element in the plot. This type of narrating can also be the most delicate, indeed, the one most refractory to analysis, as for example when the journal form loosens up to result in a sort of monologue after the event, with an indefinite, even incoherent, temporal position: attentive readers of *L’Étranger* have not missed these uncertainties, which are one of the audacities—perhaps unintentional—of that narrative. Finally, the extreme closeness of story to narrating produces here, most often, a very subtle effect of friction (if I may call it that) between the slight temporal displacement of the narrative of events ("Here is what happened to me today") and the complete simultaneousness in the report of thoughts and feelings ("Here

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7 It could be, but for reasons which are not exactly spatial in kind: for a "first-person" narrative to be produced in prison, on a hospital bed, in a psychiatric institution, can constitute a decisive element of advance notice about the denouement.


9 Radio or television reporting is obviously the most perfectly live form of this kind of narrative, where the narrating follows so closely on the action that it can be considered practically simultaneous, whence the use of the present tense. We find a curious literary use of simultaneous narrative in chapter 29 of *Ivanhoe*, where Rebecca is telling the wounded Ivanhoe all about the battle taking place at the foot of the castle, a battle she is following from the window.

10 On the typology of epistolary novels according to the number of correspondents, see Rousset, "Une forme littéraire: le roman par lettres," *Forme et signification*, and Romberg, *Studies*, pp. 51 ff.


13 But there also exist delayed forms of journal narrating; for example, the "first notebook" of the *Symphonie pastorale*, or the complex countertop of *L’Emploi du temps*. 
is what I think about it this evening"). The journal and the
epistolary confidence constantly combine what in broadcasting
language is called the live and the prerecorded account, the
quasi-interior monologue and the account after the event. Here,
the narrator is at one and the same time still the hero and al-
ready someone else: the events of the day are already in the
past, and the "point of view" may have been modified since
then; the feelings of the evening or the next day are fully of the
present, and here focalization through the narrator is at the
same time focalization through the hero. Cécile Volanges writes
to Mme. de Merteuil to tell her how she was seduced, last night,
by Valmont, and to confide to her her remorse; the seduction
scene is past, and with it the confusion that Cécile no longer
feels, and can no longer even imagine; what remains is the
shame, and a sort of stupor which is both incomprehension and
discovery of oneself: "What I reproach myself for most, and
what, however, I must talk to you about, is that I am afraid I
didn't defend myself as much as I could have. I don't know how
that happened: surely I don't love M. de Valmont, very much
the opposite; and there were moments when I acted as if I did
love him..."14 The Cécile of yesterday, very near and already
far off, is seen and spoken of by the Cécile of today. We have here
two successive heroines, (only) the second of whom is (also) the
narrator and gives her point of view, the point of view—dis-
placed just enough to create dissonance—of the immediate post-
event future.15 We know how the eighteenth-century novel, from
Pamela to Obermann, exploited that narrative situation propitious
to the most subtle and the most "irritating" counterpoints: the
situation of the tiniest temporal interval.

The third type (simultaneous narrating), by contrast, is in
principle the simplest, since the rigorous simultaneousness of
story and narrating eliminates any sort of interference or tem-
poral game. We must observe, however, that the blending of the
instances can function here in two opposite directions, accor-
ding to whether the emphasis is put on the story or on the narra-
tive discourse. A present-tense narrative which is "behaviorist"
in type and strictly of the moment can seem like the height of
objectivity, since the last trace of enunciating that still subsisted
in the Hemingway-style narrative (the mark of temporal interval
between story and narrating, which the use of the pretérite un-
avoidably comprises) now disappears in a total transparency of
the narrative, which finally fades away in favor of the story.
That is how the works that come under the heading of the
French "new novel," and especially Robbe-Grillet's early
novels,16 have generally been received: "objective literature," "school of the look"—these designations express well the sense
of the narrating's absolute transitivity which a generalized use of
the present tense promotes. But inversely, if the emphasis rests
on the narrating itself, as in narratives of "interior monologue,"
the simultaneouslyness operates in favor of the discourse; and
then it is the action that seems reduced to the condition of sim-
ple pretext, and ultimately abolished. This effect was already
noticeable in Dujardin, and became more marked in a Beckett, a
Claude Simon, a Roger Laporte. So it is as if use of the present
tense, bringing the instances together, had the effect of un-
balancing their equilibrium and allowing the whole of the narra-
tive to tip, according to the slightest shifting of emphasis, either
onto the side of the story or onto the side of the narrating, that
is, the discourse. And the facility with which the French novel in
recent years has passed from one extreme to the other perhaps
illustrates this ambivalence and reversibility.17

The second type (prior narrating) has until now enjoyed a
much smaller literary investment than the others, and certainly
even novels of anticipation, from Wells to Bradbury—which
nevertheless belong fully to the prophetic genre—almost always
postdate their narrating instances, making them implicitly sub-
sequent to their stories (which indeed illustrates the autonomy
of this fictive instance with respect to the moment of actual

14 Letter 97.
15 Compare letter 48, from Valmont to Tourvel, written in Emilie's bed, "live" and, if I may say so, at the event.
16 All written in the present tense except Le Voyageur, whose temporal system, as we know, is more complex.
17 An even more striking illustration is La Jalousie, which can be read ad libitum in the objectivist mode with no jealous person in the narrating, or purely as the interior monologue of a husband spying on his wife and imagining her adventures. Indeed, when this work was published in 1959 it played a pivotal role.
writing). Predictive narrative hardly appears at all in the literary corpus except on the second level: examples, in Saint-Amant’s Moyse sauvé, are Aaron’s prophetic narrative (sixth part) and Jocabel’s long premonitory dream (fourth, fifth, and sixth parts), both of which are connected with Moses’ future. The common characteristic of these second narratives is obviously that they are predictive in relation to the immediate narrating instance (Aaron, Jocabel’s dream) but not in relation to the final instance (the implied author of Moyse sauvé, who explicitly identifies himself with Saint-Amant); clear examples of prediction after the event.

Subsequent narrating (the first type) is what presides over the immense majority of the narratives produced to this day. The use of a past tense is enough to make a narrative subsequent, although without indicating the temporal interval which separates the moment of the narrating from the moment of the story. In classical “third-person” narrative, this interval appears generally indeterminate, and the question irrelevant, the preterite marking a sort of ageless past: the story can be dated, as it often is in Balzac, without the narrating being so. It sometimes happens, however, that a narrative contemporaneity of story time and narrating time is disclosed by the use of the present tense, either at the beginning, as in Tom Jones or Le

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23 “Madame Vauquer, whose maiden name was De Confins, is an elderly woman who for forty years has kept, in Paris, a family boardinghouse” (Père Goriot, trans. J. M. Sedgevick [New York: Rinehart, 1950], p. 1).
24 “Her face is very pale and quiet now, and there is a tinge of sadness in the low tones of her voice. She has simple manners” (Eugénie Grandet, trans. E. Marriage [Philadelphia: Geibe, 1899], p. 223).
25 “The devil himself doesn’t have a greater following than [M. Homais]; the authorities treat him considerately, and public opinion is on his side. He has just been awarded the cross of the Legion of Honor” (Madame Bovary, trans. F. Steegmuller [New York: Random House, 1957], p. 396). Let us remember that the opening pages (“We were in study-hall...” [Steegmuller, p. 3]) already indicate that the narrator is contemporary with the hero, and is even one of his fellow students.
26 The Spanish picareque seems to form a notable exception to this rule, at any rate Lazarillo, which ends in suspense (“It was the time of my prosperity, and I was at the height of all good fortune”). Guzman and Buscon also, but while promising a continuation and end, which will not come.
27 Robinson Crusoe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1928), III, 220. Or, in a more ironic mode, Gil Blas: “It is three years since then, my friend the reader, that I have been leading a delightful life with such dear people. As a crowning satisfaction, heaven was pleased to bestow on me two children, whose upbringing will become the pastime of my old age, and whose father I dutifully think I am.”
accomplice into the ocean where a shark awaits them: “I didn’t hear the stateroom door open, but she’s beside me now while I’m writing. I can feel her. / The moon.”

In order for the story to overtake the narrating in this way, the duration of the latter must of course not exceed the duration of the former. Take Tristram’s comic aoria: in one year of writing having succeeded in telling only the first day of his life, he observes that he has gotten 364 days behind, that he has therefore moved backward rather than forward, and that, living 364 times faster than he writes, it follows that the more he writes the more there remains for him to write; that, in short, his undertaking is hopeless. Faultless reasoning, whose premises are not at all absurd. Telling takes time (Scheherazade’s life hangs by that one thread), and when a novelist puts on his stage an oral narrating in the second degree, he rarely fails to take that into account: many things happen at the inn while the landlady of Jacques tells the story of the Marquis des Arcis, and the first part of Manon Lescaut ends with the remark that since the Chevalier spent more than an hour on his tale, he certainly needs supper in order to “get a little rest.” We have a few reasons to think that Prévost, for his part, spent much more than an hour writing those some one-hundred pages, and we know, for example, that Flaubert needed almost five years to write Madame Bovary. Nevertheless—and this is finally very odd—the fictive narrating of that narrative, as with almost all the novels in the world except Tristram Shandy, is considered to have no duration; or, more exactly, everything takes place as if the question of its duration had no relevance. One of the fictions of literary narrating—perhaps the most powerful one, because it passes unnoticed, so to speak—is that the narrating involves an instantaneous action, without a temporal dimension. Sometimes it is dated, but it is never measured: we know that M. Homais has just received the cross of the Legion of Honor at the moment when the narrator writes that last sentence, but we do not know what was happening while the narrator was writing his first one. Indeed, we even know that this question is absurd: nothing is held to separate those two moments of the narrating instance except the atemporal space of the narrative as text. Contrary to simultaneous or interpolated narrating, which exist through their duration and the relations between that duration and the story’s, subsequent narrating exists through this paradox: it possesses at the same time a temporal situation (with respect to the past story) and an atemporal essence (since it has no duration proper). Like Proustian reminiscence, it is rapture, “a moment brief as a flash of lightning,” a miraculous syncope, “a minute freed from the order of time.”

The narrating instance of the Recherche obviously corresponds to this last type. We know that Proust spent more than ten years writing his novel, but Marcel’s act of narrating bears no mark of duration, or of division: it is instantaneous. The narrator’s present, which on almost every page we find mingled with the hero’s various pasts, is a single moment without progression. Marcel Muller thought he found in Germaine Brée the hypothesis of a double narrating instance—before and after the final revelation—but this hypothesis has no basis, and in fact all I see in Germaine Brée is an improper (although common) use of “narrator” for hero, which perhaps led Muller into error on that point. As for the feelings expressed on the final pages of Swann, which we know do not correspond to the narrator’s final conviction, Muller himself shows very well that they do not at all prove the existence of a narrating instance prior to the revelation; on the contrary, the letter to Jacques Rivière quoted above shows that Proust was anxious to tune the narrator’s

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30 Temporal indications of the kind “we have already said” and “we will see later,” etc., do not in fact refer to the temporality of the narrating, but to the space of the text (= we have said above, we will see further on . . . ) and to the temporality of reading.
31 RH II, 1001 and 1002; III, 872 and 873.
33 Muller, p. 46.
34 Pp. 199-200.
discourse to the hero’s “errors,” and thus to impute to the narrator a belief not his own, in order to avoid disclosing his own mind too early. Even the narrative Marcel produces after the Guermantes soirée, the narrative of his beginnings as a writer (seclusion, rough drafts, first reactions of readers), which necessarily takes into account the length of writing (“like him too, . . . I had something to write. But my task was longer than his, my words had to reach more than a single person. My task was long. By day, the most I could hope for was to try to sleep. If I worked, it would be only at night. But I should need many nights, a hundred perhaps, or even a thousand”)\textsuperscript{35} and the interrupting fear of death—even this narrative does not gainsay the fictive instantaneousness of its narrating: for the book Marcel then begins to write in the story cannot legitimately be identified with the one Marcel has then almost finished writing as narrative—and which is the Recherche itself. Writing the fictive book, which is the subject of the narrative, is, like writing every book, a “task [that] was long.” But the actual book, the narrative-book, does not have knowledge of its own “length”: it does away with its own duration.

The present of Proustian narrating—from 1909 to 1922—corresponds to many of the “presents” of the writing, and we know that almost a third of the book—including, as it happens, the final pages—was written by 1913. The fictive moment of narrating has thus in fact shifted in the course of the real writing: today it is no longer what it was in 1913, at the moment when Proust thought his work concluded for the Grasset edition. Therefore, the temporal intervals he had in mind—and wanted to signify—when he wrote, for example apropos of the bedtime scene, “Many years have passed since that night,” or apropos of the resurrection of Combray by the madeleine, “I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed”—these spaces have increased by more than ten years simply because the story’s time has lengthened: the signified of these sentences is no longer the same. Whence certain irreducible contradictions like this one: the narrator’s today is obviously, for us,

later than the war, but the “Paris today” of the last pages of Swann remains in its historical determinations (its referential content) a prewar Paris, as it was seen and described in its better days. The novelistic signified (the moment of the narrating) has become something like 1925, but the historical referent, which corresponds to the moment of the writing, did not keep pace and continues to say: 1913. Narrative analysis must register these shifts—and the resulting discordances—as effects of the actual genesis of the work; but in the end analysis can look at the narrating instance only as it is given in the final state of the text, as a single moment without duration, necessarily placed several years after the last “scene,” therefore after the war, and even, as we have seen, after the death of Marcel Proust. This paradox, let us remember, is not one: Marcel is not Proust, and nothing requires him to die with Proust. What is required, on the other hand, is that Marcel spend “many years” after 1916 in a clinic, which necessarily puts his return to Paris and the Guermantes matinée in 1921 at the earliest, and the meeting with an Odette “showing signs of senility” in 1923.\textsuperscript{37} That consequence is a must.

Between this single narrating instant and the different moments of the story, the interval is necessarily variable. If “many years” have elapsed since the bedtime scene in Combray, it is only “of late” that the narrator has again begun to hear his childhood soars, and the interval separating the narrating instant from the Guermantes matinée is obviously smaller than the interval separating narrating instant and the hero’s first arrival in Balbec. The system of language, the uniform use of the past tense, does not allow this gradual shrinking to be imprinted in the very texture of the narrative discourse, but we have seen that to a certain extent Proust had succeeded in making it felt, by modifications in the temporal pacing of the narrative: gradual disappearance of the iterative, lengthening of the singulative scenes, increasing discontinuity, accentuation of the rhythm—

\textsuperscript{35} RH II, 1136/P III, 1043.

\textsuperscript{37} This episode takes place (RH II, 1063/P III, 951) “Less than three years”—thus more than two years—after the Guermantes matinée.
as if the story time were tending to dilate and make itself more and more conspicuous while drawing near its end, which is also its origin.

According to what we have already seen to be the common practice of "autobiographical" narrating, we could expect to see the narrative bring its hero to the point where the narrator awaits him, in order that these two hypostases might meet and finally merge. People have sometimes, a little quickly, claimed that this is what happens.\textsuperscript{38} In fact, as Marcel Muller well notes, "between the day of the reception at the Princess's and the day when the Narrator recounts that reception there extends a whole era which maintains a gap between the Hero and the Narrator, a gap that cannot be bridged: the verbal forms in the conclusion of the Temps retrouvé are all in the past tense."\textsuperscript{39} The narrator brings his hero's story—his own story—precisely to the point when, as Jean Roussset says, "the hero is about to become the narrator"\textsuperscript{40} I would say rather, is beginning to become the narrator, since he actually starts in on his writing. Muller writes that "if the hero overtakes the Narrator, it is like an asymptote: the interval separating them approaches zero, but will never reach it," but his image connotes a Sermenean play on the two durations that does not in fact exist in Proust. There is simply the narrative's halt at the point when the hero has discovered the truth and the meaning of his life: at the point, therefore, when this "story of a vocation"—which, let us remember, is the avowed subject of Proustian narrative—comes to an end. The rest, whose outcome is already known to us by the very novel that concludes here, no longer belongs to the "vocation" but to the effort that follows it up, and must therefore be only sketched in. The subject of the Recherche is indeed "Marcel becomes a writer," not "Marcel the writer": the Recherche remains a novel of development, and to see it as a "novel about the novelist," like the Faux Monnayeurs (The Counterfeiters), would be to distort its intentions and above all to violate its meaning; it is a novel about the future novelist. "The continuation," Hegel said, precisely apropos of the Bildungsroman, "no longer has anything novelistic about it." Proust probably would have been glad to apply that formulation to his own narrative: what is novelistic is the quest, the search (recherche), which ends at the discovery (the revelation), not at the use to which that discovery will afterward be put. The final discovery of the truth, the late encounter with the vocation, like the happiness of lovers reunited, can be only a denouement, not an interim stopping place; and in this sense, the subject of the Recherche is indeed a traditional subject. So it is necessary that the narrative be interrupted before the hero overtakes the narrator; it is inconceivable for them both together to write: The End. The narrator's last sentence is when—is that—the hero finally reaches his first. The interval between the end of the story and the moment of the narrating is therefore the time it takes the hero to write this book, which is and is not the book the narrator, in his turn, reveals to us in a moment brief as a flash of lightning.

\section*{Narrative Levels}

When Des Grieux, having reached the end of his narrative, states that he has just sailed from New Orleans to Havre-de-Grâce, then from Havre to Calais to meet his brother who is waiting for him several miles away, the temporal (and spatial) interval that until then separated the reported action from the narrating act becomes gradually smaller until it is finally reduced to zero: the narrative has reached the here and the now: the story has overtaken the narrating. Yet a distance still exists between the final episodes of the Chevalier's loves and the room in the "Lion d'or" with its occupants, including the Chevalier himself and his host, where after supper he recounts these episodes to the Marquis de Renoncourt: the distance between episodes and inn lies neither in time nor in space, but in the difference be-

\textsuperscript{38} In particular Louis Martin-Chauffier: "As in memoirs, the man who writes and the man whose life we see are distinct in time, but tend to catch up with each other in the long run: they are moving towards the day when the progress of the hero through his life stops at the table, where the narrator, no longer separated from him in time nor tied to him by memory, invites him to sit down beside him so that both together may write: the End" ("Proust and the Double I," \textit{Partisan Review}, 16 [October 1949], 1012).

\textsuperscript{39} Muller, pp. 49-50. Let us remember, however, that certain anticipations (like the last meeting with Odette) cover a part of that "era."

\textsuperscript{40} Roussset, p. 144.
tween the relations which both the episodes and the inn maintain at that point with Des Grieux’s narrative. We will distinguish those relations in a rough and necessarily inadequate way by saying that the episodes of the Chevalier’s loves are inside (meaning inside the narrative) and the inn with its occupants is outside. What separates them is less a distance than a sort of threshold represented by the narrating itself, a difference of level. The “Lion d’or,” the Marquis, the Chevalier in his function as narrator are for us inside a particular narrative, not Des Grieux’s but the Marquis’s, the Mémoires d’un homme de qualité; the return from Louisiana, the trip from Havre to Calais, the Chevalier in his function as hero are inside another narrative, this one Des Grieux’s, which is contained within the first one, not only in the sense that the first frames it with a preamble and a conclusion (although the latter is missing here), but also in the sense that the narrator of the second narrative is already a character in the first one, and that the act of narrating which produces the second narrative is an event recounted in the first one.

We will define this difference in level by saying that any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed. M. de Renoncourt’s writing of his fictive Mémoires is a (literary) act carried out at a first level, which we will call extradiegetic; the events told in those Mémoires (including Des Grieux’s narrating act) are inside this first narrative, so we will describe them as diegetic, or intradiegetic; the events told in Des Grieux’s narrative, a narrative in the second degree, we will call metadiegetic. In

The same way, M. de Renoncourt as “author” of the Mémoires is extradiegetic: although fictive, he addresses the actual public, just like Rousseau or Michelet; the same Marquis as hero of the same Mémoires is diegetic, or intradiegetic, and so also is Des Grieux the narrator at the “Lion d’or,” as well as the Marquis noticed by the Marquis at the first meeting in Pacy; but Des Grieux the hero of his own narrative, and Manon the heroine, and his brother, and the minor characters, are metadiegetic. These terms (metadiegetic, etc.) designate, not individuals, but relative situations and functions.42

The narrating instance of a first narrative is therefore extradiegetic by definition, as the narrating instance of a second (metadiegetic) narrative is diegetic by definition, etc. Let us emphasize the fact that the possibly fictive nature of the first instance does not modify this state of affairs any more than the possibly “real” nature of the subsequent instances does: M. de Renoncourt is not a “character” in a narrative taken charge of by the Abbé Prévost; he is the fictive author of Mémoires, whose real author, of course, is Prévost, just as Robinson Crusoe is the fictive author of the novel by Defoe that bears his name; subsequently, each of them (the Marquis and Crusoe) becomes a character in his own narrative. Neither Prévost nor Defoe enters the space of our inquiry, which, let us recall, bears on the narrating instance, not on the literary instance. M. de Renoncourt and Crusoe are author-narrators, and as such they are at the same narrative level as their public—that is, as you and me. This is not the case with Des Grieux, who never addresses himself to us, but only to the patient Marquis; and inversely, even if this fictive Marquis had met a real person at Calais (say, Sterne on a journey), this person would nonetheless be diegetic, even though real—just like Richelieu in Dumas, Napoleon in Balzac, or the

41 These terms have already been put forth in my Figures II, p. 202. The prefix meta-obviously connotes here, as in “metalanguage,” the transition to the second degree: the metanarrative is a narrative within the narrative, the metadiegesis is the universe of this second narrative, as the diegesis (according to a now widespread usage) designates the universe of the first narrative. We must admit, however, that this term functions in a way opposite to that of its model in logic and linguistics: metalanguage is a language in which one speaks of another language, so metanarrative should be the first narrative, within which one would tell a second narrative. But it seemed to me that it was better to keep the simplest and most common designation for the first degree, and thus to reverse the direction of interlocking. Naturally, the eventual third degree will be a meta-metanarrative, with its meta-metadiegesis, etc.

42 The same character can, moreover, assume two identical (parallel) narrative functions at different levels: for example, in Sarrasine, the extradiegetic narrator himself becomes intradiegetic narrator when he tells his companion the story of Zambinella. Thus he tells us that he tells this story—a story of which he is not the hero: this situation is the exact opposite of the (much more common) one of Manon, where the first narrator becomes on the second level the listener of another character who tells his own story. The situation of a double narrator occurs only, to my knowledge, in Sarrasine.
Princesse Mathilde in Proust. In short, we shall not confound extradietastic with real historical existence, nor diegetic (or even metadietastic) status with fiction: Paris and Balbec are at the same level, although one is real and the other fictive, and every day we are subjects of a narrative, if not heroes of a novel.

But not every extradietastic narrating is necessarily taken up as a literary work with its protagonist an author-narrator in a position to address himself, like the Marquis de Renoncourt, to a public termed such. A novel in the form of a diary (like the Journal d'un curé de campagne or the Symphonie pastorale) does not in principle aim at any public or any reader, and it is the same with an epistolary novel, whether it include a single letter writer (like Pamela, Werther, or Obermann, often described as journals disguised as correspondence) or several (like La Nouvelle Héloïse or Les Liaisons dangereuses). Bernanos, Gide, Richardson, Goethe, Senancour, Rousseau, and Laclos present themselves here simply as “editors,” but the fictive authors of these diaries or “letters collected and published by . . .”—as distinct from Renoncourt, or Crusoe, or Gil Blas—obviously did not look on themselves as “authors.” What is more, extradietastic narrating is not even necessarily handled as written narrating: nothing claims that Meursault or The Unnamable wrote the texts we read as their interior monologues, and it goes without saying that the text of the Lauriers sont coupés cannot be anything but a “stream of consciousness”—not written, or even spoken—mysteriously caught and transcribed by Dujardin. It is the nature of immediate speech to preclude any formal determination of the narrating instance which it constitutes.

Inversely, every intradietastic narrating does not necessarily produce, like Des Grieux’s, an oral narrative. It can consist of a written text, like the memoir with no recipient written by Adolphe, or even a fictive literary text, a work within a work, like the “story” of the Curious Impertinent discovered in a cloak bag by the curate in Don Quixote, or the novella L’Ambitieux.

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43 See the “Notes by the Author” published at the head of Manon Lescot.
44 There remains, however, an appreciable difference between these “epistolary monodies,” as Rousset calls them, and a diary: the difference is the existence of a receiver (even a mute one), and his traces in the text.

par amour” published in a fictive magazine by the hero of Albert Savarus, the intradietastic author of a metadietastic work. But the second narrative can also be neither oral nor written, and can present itself, openly or not, as an inward narrative (for instance, Jocabe’s dream in Moyse sauve) or (more frequently and less supernaturally) as any kind of recollection that a character has (in a dream or not). Thus (and this detail made a strong impression on Proust) the second chapter of Sylvie is interrupted by the episode (“memory half dreamed”) of Adrien’s song: “I went back to bed and could find no rest there. As I lay between sleeping and waking, my whole youth passed through my memory . . . . I visualized a château from the time of Henry IV.”

Finally, the second narrative can be handled as a nonverbal representation (most often visual), a sort of iconographic document, which the narrator converts into a narrative by describing it himself (the print representing the descent of Ariadne, in The Nuptial Song of Peleus and Thetis, or the tapestry of the flood in Moyse sauve), or, more rarely, by having another character describe it (like the tableaux of Joseph’s life commented on by Amram, also in Moyse sauve).

Metadietastic Narrative

Second-degree narrative is a form that goes back to the very origins of epic narrating, since Books IX–XII of the Odyssey, as we know, are devoted to the narrative Ulysses makes to the assembled Phaeacians. Via Virgil, Ariosto, and Tasso, this technique (which the Thousand and One Nights has an enormous investment in, as we know in another connection) enters the novelistic tradition in the baroque period, and a work like Astrée, for example, is in large part composed of narratives obtained by one or another character. The practice continues in the

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45 So we have there an analepsis which is metadietastic—obviously not the case of every analepsis. For example, in that same Sylvie, the retrospection of chapters 4, 5, and 6 is taken on by the narrator himself and not obtained through the hero’s memory: “While the carriage is climbing the slopes, let us recollect the time when I came here so often.” Here the analepsis is purely diegetic—or, if we wish to mark more clearly the equality of narrative level, it is isodiegetic. (Proust’s comments are in Marcel Proust on Art, p. 147, and the Recherche, RH II, 1038f, III, 919.)
eighteenth century, despite the competition of new forms like the epistolary novel; we certainly see it in Manon Lescaut, or Tristram Shandy, or Jacques le fataliste. And even the advent of realism does not prevent it from surviving in Balzac (La Maison Nucingen, Autre étude de femme, L'Auberge rouge, Sarrasine, La Peau de chagrin) and Fromentin (Dominique); we can even observe a certain exacerbation of the topos with Barbey, or in Wuthering Heights (Isabella's narrative to Nelly, reported by Nelly to Lockwood, noted by Lockwood in his journal), and especially in Lord Jim, where the entanglement reaches the bounds of general intelligibility. The formal and historical study of this technique would go well beyond our intention, but for the sake of what follows it is necessary here at least to differentiate the main types of relationships that can connect the metadiegetic narrative to the first narrative, into which it is inserted.

The first type of relationship is direct causality between the events of the metadiegesis and those of the diegesis, conferring on the second narrative an explanatory function. It is the Balzacian "this is why," but taken here by a character, whether the story he tells is someone else's (Sarrasine) or, more often, his own (Ulysses, Des Grieux, Dominique). All these narratives answer, explicitly or not, a question of the type "What events have led to the present situation?" Most often, the curiosity of the intradiegetic listener is only a pretext for replying to the curiosity of the reader (as in the expository scenes of classical drama), and the metadiegetic narrative only a variant of the explanatory analepsis. Whence certain discords between the alleged function and the real function—generally resolved in favor of the latter. For instance, in Book XII of the Odyssey, Ulysses interrupts his narrative at the arrival on Calypso's island, although most of his audience does not know what follows; the pretext is that he told it briefly the day before to Alcinous and Arete (Book VII); the real reason is obviously that the reader knows it in detail by the direct narrative in Book V. "It liketh me not twice," says Ulysses, "to tell a plain-told tale":46 this reluctance is, to begin with, the poet's own.


The second type consists of a purely thematic relationship, therefore implying no spatio-temporal continuity between metadiegesis and diegesis: a relationship of contrast (the deserted Ariadne's unhappiness, in the midst of Thetis' joyous wedding) or of analogy (as when Jocabel, in Moyse sauve, hesitates to execute the divine command and Amram tells her the story of Abraham's sacrifice). The famous structure en abyme, not long ago so prized by the "new novel" of the 1960's, is obviously an extreme form of this relationship of analogy, pushed to the limits of identity. Thematic relationship can, moreover, when it is perceived by the audience, exert an influence on the diegetic situation: Amram's narrative has as its immediate effect (and, moreover, as its aim) to convince Jocabel; it is an exemplum with a function of persuading. We know that regular genres, like the parable or the apologue (the fable), are based on that monitory effect of analogy: before the rebelling populace, Menenius Agrippa tells the story of the Members [of the body] and the Belly; then, adds Titus Livius, "Drawing a parallel from this to show how like was the internal dissension of the bodily members to the anger of the plebs against the Fathers, he prevailed upon the minds of his hearers."47 In Proust we will find a less curative illustration of this force of example.

The third type involves no explicit relationship between the two story levels: it is the act of narrating itself that fulfills a function in the diegesis, independently of the metadiegetic content—a function of distraction, for example, and/or obstruction. Surely the most illustrious example is found in the Thousand and One Nights, where Scheherazade holds off death with renewed narratives, whatever they might be (provided they interest the sultan). We notice that, from the first type to the third, the importance of the narrating instance only grows. In the first type, the relationship (of linking) is direct; it is not via the narrative, which could very well be dispensed with: whether Ulysses tells about it or not, the storm is what cast him up on the shore of Phaeacia, and the only transformation his narrative introduces is of a purely cognitive order. In the second type, the

relationship is indirect, rigorously mediated by the narrative, which is indispensable to the linking: the adventure of the members and the belly calms the populace on condition that Menenius tell it to the plebs. In the third type, the relationship is only between the narrating act and the present situation, with the metadiegetic content (almost) not mattering any more than a Biblical message does during a filibuster at the rostrum of the United States Senate. This relationship indeed confirms, if there were a need to, that narrating is an act like any other.

Metalepses

The transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation. Any other form of transit is, if not always impossible, at any rate always transgressive. Cortazar tells the story of a man assassinated by one of the characters in the novel he is reading; this is an inverse (and extreme) form of the narrative figure the classics called author’s metalepsis, which consists of pretending that the poet “himself brings the effects he celebrates,” as when we say that Virgil “has Dido die” in Book IV of the Aeneid, or when Diderot, more equivocally, writes in Jacques le fataliste: “What would prevent me from getting the Master married and making him a cuckold?” or even, addressing the reader, “If it gives you pleasure, let us set the peasant girl back in the saddle behind her escort, let us let them go and let us come back to our two travelers.” Sterne pushed the thing so far as to entreat the intervention of the reader, whom he beseeched to close the door or help Mr. Shandy get back to his bed, but his principle is the same: any intrusion by the extradiiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse (as in Cortazar), produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical (when, as in Sterne or Diderot, it is presented in a joking tone) or fantastic.

We will extend the term narrative metalepsis51 to all these transgressions. Some of them, as ordinary and innocent as those of classical rhetoric, play on the double temporality of the story and the narrating. Here, for example, is Balzac, in a passage already quoted from Illusions perdues: “While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain . . . .” as if the narrating were contemporaneous with the story and had to fill up the latter’s dead spaces. This is the very prevalent model Proust follows when he writes, for example, “but I have no time left now, before my departure for Balbec . . . , to start upon a series of pictures of society,” or “I confine myself at present, as the train halts and the porter calls out ‘Doncieres,’ ‘Grattevast,’ ‘Maineville,’ etc., to noting down the particular memory that the watering-place or garrison town recalls to me,” or again: “But it is time to rejoin the Baron as he advances . . . .”52 Sterne’s temporal games, of course, are a bit bolder, a bit more literal, in other words, as when the digressions of Tristram the (extradiiegetic) narrator require his father (in the diegesis) to prolong his nap by more than an hour,53 but here, too, the principle is the same.54 In a certain way, the Pirandello manner of Six Characters in Search of an Author or Tonight We Improvise, where the same actors are in turn characters and players, is nothing but a vast expansion of metalepsis; so is everything deriving from that manner in the plays of Genet, for example, and so are the changes of level in the Robbe-Grillet type of narrative (characters escaped from a painting, a book, a press clipping, a photograph, a dream, a memory, a fantasy, and so on).

51 Metalepsis here forms a system with prolepsis, analepsis, syllepsis, and paralepsis, with this specific sense: “taking hold of (telling) by changing level.”
52 RH II, 102-103/P II, 742; RH II, 339/P II, 1076; RH II, 530/P III, 216. Or again, RH II, 292/P II, 1011: “Let us for the moment say simply this, while Albertine waits for me . . . .”
53 Sterne, Tristram Shandy, III, chap. 38, and IV, chap. 2.
54 I owe the distant revelation of the metaleptic game to this lapse, perhaps a deliberate one, by a history teacher: “We are going to study the Second Empire now from the coup d’état to the Easter vacation.”

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48 Cortazar, “Continuidad de los Parques,” in Final del Juego.
50 Garnier, pp. 495 and 497.
Narrative Discourse

etc.). All these games, by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude—a boundary that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells. Whences the uneasiness Borges so well put his finger on: “Such inversions suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious.” 55 The most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative.

A less audacious figure, but one we can connect to metalepsis, consists of telling as if it were diegetic (as if it were at the same narrative level as its context) something that has nevertheless been presented as (or can easily be guessed to be) metadiegetic in its principle or, if one prefers, in its origin: as if the Marquis de Renoncourt, after having acknowledged that he has gotten the story of Des Grieux’s lovers from Des Grieux himself (or even after having let Des Grieux speak for several pages), subsequently took back the floor to tell that story himself, no longer “speaking,” Plato would say, “as if he had become Des Grieux.” The prototype of this technique is undoubtedly the Theaetetus, which, as we know, consists of a conversation among Socrates, Theodorus, and Theàetetus, which Socrates himself told to Euclides, who tells it to Terpsion. But, says Euclides, “to avoid in the written account the tiresome effect of bits of narrative interrupting the dialogue, such as ‘and I said’ or ‘and I remarked’ wherever Socrates was speaking of himself, and ‘he asserted’ or ‘he did not agree,’ where he reported the answer,” the conversation has been reworded into the form of “a direct conversation between the actual speakers.” 56 These forms of narrating where

Voice

the metadiegetic way station, mentioned or not, is immediately ousted in favor of the first narrator, which to some extent economizes on one (or sometimes several) narrative level(s)—these forms we will call reduced metadiegetic (implying: reduced to the diegetic), or pseudo-diegetic.

In fact, the reduction is not always obvious; more precisely, the difference between metadiegetic and pseudo-diegetic is not always perceptible in the literary narrative text, which (unlike the cinematographic text) does not have at hand features capable of indicating the metadiegetic nature of a section, 57 except by a shift in person: if M. de Renoncourt took Des Grieux’s place to tell the latter’s adventures, the substitution would be indicated immediately in the transition from I to he; but when the hero of Sylvie relives in a dream a moment from his youth, nothing allows us to decide whether the narrative is then a narrative of that dream or a direct narrative, beyond the dream instance, of the earlier moment.

From Jean Santeuil to the Recherche, or
The Triumph of the Pseudo-diegetic

After that additional detour, it will be easier for us to characterize the narrative choice Proust made, deliberately or not, in the Recherche du temps perdu. But before we can do that we must remember what the choice was in his first large narrative work, or, more precisely, in the first version of the Recherche, that is, in Jean Santeuil. In that book the narrating instance is split in two: the extradiegetic narrator, who does not have a name (but he is a first hypostasis of the hero, and we see him in situations later assigned to Marcel), is on vacation with a friend at the Bay of Concarneau; the two young men strike up a friendship with a writer named C. (the second hypostasis of the hero), who at their request undertakes each evening to read them the pages he wrote, during the day, of a novel in progress. These fragmentary readings are not transcribed, but some years later, after C.’s

57 Such as the blur, slow motion, voice-off, transition from color to black and white or the reverse, etc. Conventions of this kind, moreover, could have been established in literature (italics, bold-faced type, etc.).
death, the narrator, who has somehow gotten hold of a copy of the novel, decides to publish it: it is Jean Santeuil, whose hero is obviously a third outline of Marcel. This domino structure is fairly archaic, differing only in two minor ways from the tradition represented by Maun Lescou: the intradiegetic narrator here does not tell his own story, and his narrative is not oral but written, and even literary, since it involves a novel. We will return later to the first difference, which touches on the problem of "person," but here we must emphasize the second, which, at a period when those techniques were no longer much used, attests to a certain timidity at novelistic writing and an obvious need for "distancing" with respect to this biography of Jean—much closer to autobiography than the Recherche is. The narrative splitting in two is further heightened by the literary—and, what is more, fictive (because novelistic)—nature of the metadiegetic narrative.

From this first attempt we should retain the fact that Proust was familiar with the use of "Chinese-box" narrative, and that he had submitted to its temptation. Moreover, he alludes to this technique at one point in La Fugitive:

Novelists sometimes pretend in an introduction that while traveling in a foreign country they have met somebody who has told them the story of a person's life. They then withdraw in favor of this casual acquaintance, and the story that he tells them is nothing more or less than their novel. Thus the life of Fabrice del Dongo was related to Stendhal by a Canon of Padua. How gladly would we, when we are in love, that is to say when another person's existence seems to us mysterious, find some such well-informed narrator! And undoubtedly he exists. Do we not ourselves frequently relate, without any trace of passion, the story of some woman or other, to one o' our friends, or to a stranger, who has known nothing of her love-affairs and listens to us with keen interest?²⁸

We see that the comment does not concern only literary creation, but extends to the most common narrative activity, such as

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²⁸ RH II, 768/P III, 551.

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can be pursued, for example, in Marcel's existence: these narratives told by X to Y apropos of Z are the very fabric of our "experience," a large part of which is narrative in kind.

Those antecedents and that allusion only throw into greater relief the dominant feature of the narrating in the Recherche, which is the almost systematic elimination of metadiegetic narrative. In the first place, the fiction of the discovered manuscript disappears in favor of a direct narrating in which the narrator-hero openly presents his narrative as a literary work, and thus takes up the role of (fictive) author, like Gil Blas or Crusoe, in immediate contact with the public. Whence the use of the phrase "these volumes" or "this work"⁵⁹ to refer to his narrative; whence the editorial "we,"⁶⁰ those addresses to the reader,⁶¹ and even this humorous pseudo-dialogue in Sterne's or Diderot's manner: "'All this,' the reader will remark, 'tells us nothing as to . . . . ' It is indeed a pity, gentle reader. And sadder than you think. . . . 'In a word, did Mme. d'Arpajon introduce you to the Prince?' No, Lut be quiet and let me go on with my story."⁶²

The fictive novelist of Jean Santeuil did not permit himself that much, and this difference measures the progress achieved in emancipating the narrator. Second, metadiegetic insertions are almost completely missing from the Recherche: under this heading we can hardly point to anything except Swann's narrative to Marcel about his conversation with the Prince de Guermantes who has converted to Dreyfusism,⁶³ Aimé's reports about Albertine's past behavior,⁶⁴ and above all the narrative assigned to the Goncourts about a dinner at the Verdurins'.⁶⁵ We will notice, moreover, that in these three cases the narrating instance is

⁵⁹ "That invisible vocation of which these volumes are the history" (RH I, 1002/P II, 397); "The proportions of this work . . . . " (RH II, 33/P II, 642); "this book in which there is not a single incident which is not fictitious . . . . " (RH II, 981/P III, 846).

⁶⁰ "We suppose M. de Charlus . . . . " (RH II, 291/P II, 1010).

⁶¹ "We must warn the reader . . . . " (RH II, 406/P III, 40); "Before we come back to Jupien's shop, the author would like to say how deeply he would regret it should any reader be offended . . . . " (RH II, 410/P III, 46).

⁶² RH II, 39-40/P II, 651-652.

⁶³ RH II, 77-82/P II, 705-712.

⁶⁴ RH II, 744-745/P III, 515-516; RH II, 750-751/P III, 524-525.

⁶⁵ RH II, 880-885/P III, 709-717.
highlighted and competes in importance with the event being related: Swann’s naïve partiality interests Marcel much more than the Prince’s conversion does; Aime’s writing style, with its parentheses and quotation marks, is an imaginary pastiche; and the pseudo-Goncourt, a real pastiche, serves here as a page from literature and a testimony to the vanity of Letters much more than as evidence about the Verdunin salon. For these various reasons it was not possible to reduce those metadiegetic narratives, that is, to have the narrator take control of them.

Everywhere else, on the other hand, the narrative in the Recherche constantly practices what we have christened the pseudo-diegetic: that is, a narrative second in its origin is immediately brought to the first level and taken charge of, whatever its source might be, by the narrator-hero. Most of the analepses noted in Chapter 1 originate either in memories the hero recalls (and thus in a sort of inward narrative in the manner of Nerval) or else in reports made to the hero by a third person. Coming under the first type, for example, are the last pages of the Jeunes Filles en fleurs, evoking the sun-bathed mornings of Balbec—but doing so through the memory of them that the hero, back in Paris, has preserved: “What my mind’s eye did almost invariably see when I thought of Balbec were the hours which every morning during the fine weather...” 66 after this the evocation forgets its memory-elicited pretext and to the last line unfolds on its own account as direct narrative, so that many readers do not notice the spatio-temporal detour that gave rise to it and think it a simple isodiegetic “return backward” without a change in narrative level. Also coming under the first type is the return to 1914, during the stay in Paris in 1916, introduced with this sentence: “I reflected that it was a long time since I had seen any of the personages who have been mentioned in this work. In 1914, it was true...”; 67 then comes a direct narrative about that first return, as if it were not a memory evoked during the second return, or as if the memory were in this case only a narrative pretext, what Proust precisely calls a “method of tran-

68 RH I, 712–713/P I, 953.
67 RH II, 900/P III, 737.

sition.” Another example of the first type comes some pages later, where the passage devoted to Saint-Loup’s visit, 68 which begins as an isodiegetic analepsis, ends with a sentence which reveals, after the event, its source as memory: “As I turned over in my mind this recent meeting with Saint-Loup...” But above all we should remember that Combray I is an insomniac’s reverie, that Combray II is an “involuntary memory” called forth by the taste of the madeleine, and that everything after that, starting with Un amour de Swann, is again an evocation of the insomniac. The whole Recherche is in fact a huge pseudo-diegetic analepsis in the name of the memories of the “intermediary subject”—memories which the final narrator immediately claims and takes control of.

To the second type (reports made to the hero by a third person) belong all those episodes, evoked in the preceding chapter apropos of the problems of focalization, that took place out of the hero’s presence and that the narrator could therefore not be informed of except by an intermediary narrative. Examples are the circumstances of Swann’s marriage, the negotiations between Norpois and Faffenheim, Bergotte’s death, Gilberte’s conduct after Swann’s death, the missed reception at Berma’s. 69 As we have seen, the source of all this information is sometimes stated, sometimes implicit, but in every case Marcel jealously incorporates into his own narrative what he has gotten from Cottard, from Norpois, from the Duchess, or from God knows whom, as if he could not bear to give up to anyone else the slightest part of his narrative privilege.

The most typical and naturally the most important case is Un amour de Swann. With respect to its source this episode is doubly metadiegetic, first since the details were reported to Marcel by an undetermined narrator at an undetermined time, and then because Marcel is remembering these details in the course of certain sleepless nights. These are memories of earlier narratives, therefore, from which the extradiegetic narrator once

again gathers up the whole kitty and in his own name tells this whole story that took place before he was born—not without introducing it into subtle marks of his subsequent existence, which are there like a signature and prevent the reader from forgetting him for too long: a fine example of narrative egocentrism. In *Jean Santeuil* Proust had savored the antiquated pleasures of the metadiegetic, and it is as if he had vowed not to come back to them any more, and to reserve for himself (or for his spokesman) the whole of the narrating function. An *Amour de Swann* told by Swann himself would have compromised this unity of instance and this monopoly by the hero. In the definitive economy of the *Recherche*, Swann, the ex-hypostasis of Marcel, must be no more than an unhappy and imperfect precursor. He therefore has no right to the “floor,” that is, to the narrative—and even less (we will come back to this) to the discourse that transmits it, accompanies it, and gives it its meaning. This is why it is Marcel, and only Marcel, who in the final instance, and scorning all the others, must recount that love affair which is not his own.

But which prefigures his (as everyone knows) and to a certain extent brings it to pass. Here again we meet the indirect influence, analyzed above, of certain metadiegetic narratives: Swann’s love for Odette in principle has no direct impact on Marcel’s fate, and on that ground the classical norm would undoubtedly deem Swann’s love purely episodic; but on the other hand its indirect impact—that is, the influence of the knowledge Marcel has of that love, gained through a narrative—is considerable, as he himself testifies in this passage from *Sodome*:

70 “I used often to recall to myself when, many years later, I began to take an interest in his character because of the similarities which, in wholly different respects, it offered to my own...” (RH I, 227/II I, 295); “I myself was to go...” (RH I, 228/II I, 297); “my grandfather” (RH I, 149, 238/II I, 194, 310); “my uncle” (RH I, 239-240/II I, 311–312), etc.


72 Unless we count as such the very existence of Gilberte, the “fruit” of that love.

I thought then of all that I had been told about Swann’s love for Odette, of the way in which Swann had been tricked all his life. Indeed, when I come to think of it, the hypothesis that made me gradually build up the whole of Albertine’s character and give a painful interpretation to every moment of a life that I could not control in its entirety, was the memory, the rooted idea of Mme. Swann’s character, as it had been described to me. These accounts helped my imagination, in after years, to take the line of supposing that Albertine might, instead of being a good girl, have had the same immorality, the same faculty of deception as a reformed prostitute, and I thought of all the sufferings that would in that case have been in store for me had I ever really been her lover.73

73 “These accounts helped...”: it is because of the narrative of Swann in love that Marcel will one day be able actually to imagine an Albertine like Odette—unfaithful, given to vice, unattainable—and consequently to fall in love with her. We know what happens then. The power of narrative...

Let us not forget, after all, that if Oedipus can do what every man, so they say, goes only so far as wishing to do, it is because an oracle *told* in advance that one day he would kill his father and marry his mother: without the oracle, no exile, thus no ignominy, thus no parricide and no incest. The oracle in Oedipus the *King* is a metadiegetic narrative in the future tense, the mere uttering of which will throw into gear the “infernal machine” capable of carrying it out. This is not a prophecy that comes true; it is a trap in the form of a narrative, a trap that “takes.” Yes, the power (and cunning) of narrative. Some give life (Scheherazade), some take life. And we do not properly understand *Un amour de Swann* unless we realize that this love *told* is an instrument of Destiny.

**Person**

Readers may have noticed that until now we have used the terms “first-person—or third-person—narrative” only when paired with quotation marks of protest. Indeed, these common locutions seem to me inadequate, in that they stress variation in the element of the narrative situation that is in fact invariant—to
witt, the presence (explicit or implicit) of the "person" of the narrator. This presence is invariant because the narrator can be in his narrative (like every subject of an enunciating in his enunciated statement) only in the "first person"—except for an enal- lage of convention as in Caesar's Commentaries; and stressing "person" leads one to think that the choice the narrator has to make—a purely grammatical and rhetorical choice—is always of the same order as Caesar's in deciding to write his Memoirs "in" one or another person. In fact, of course, this is not the issue. The novelist's choice, unlike the narrator's, is not between two grammatical forms, but between two narrative postures (whose grammatical forms are simply an automatic consequence): to have the story told by one of its "characters," or to have it told by a narrator outside of the story. The presence of first-person verbs in a narrative text can therefore refer to two very different situations which grammar renders identical but which narrative analysis must distinguish: the narrator's own designation of himself as such, as when Virgil writes "I sing of arms and the man...", or else the identity of person between the narrator and one of the characters in the story, as when Crusoe writes "I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York..." The term "first-person narrative" refers, quite obviously, only to the second of these situations, and this dissymmetry confirms its unfitness. Insofar as the narrator can at any instant intervene as such in the narrative, every narrating is, by definition, to all intents and purposes presented in the first person (even if in the editorial plural, as when Stendhal writes, "We will confess that... we have begun the story of our hero... "). The real question is whether or not the narrator can use the first person to designate one of his characters. We will therefore distinguish here two types of narrative: one with the narrator absent from the story he tells (example: Homer in the Iliad, or Flaubert in L'Education sentimen-

tale), the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells (example: Gil Blas, or Wuthering Heights). I call the first type, for obvious reasons, heterodiegetic, and the second type homodiegetic.

But from the examples selected no doubt a dissymmetry in the status of these two types already emerges. Homer and Flaubert are both totally, and therefore equally, absent from the two narratives in question; on the other hand, we cannot say that Gil Blas and Lockwood are equally present in their respective narratives: Gil Blas is incontestably the hero of the story he tells, Lockwood is incontestably not (and we could easily find examples of even weaker "presence"; I will come back to this momentarily). Absence is absolute, but presence has degrees. So will have to differentiate within the homodiegetic type at least two varieties: one where the narrator is the hero of his narrative (Gil Blas) and one where he plays only a secondary role, which almost always turns out to be a role as observer and witness: Lockwood, the anonymous narrator of Louis Lambert, Ishmael in Moby Dick, Marlow in Lord Jim, Caraway in The Great Gatsby, Zeitiblo in Doctor Faustus—not to mention the most illustrious and most representative one of all, the transparent (but inquisitive) Dr. Watson of Conan Doyle. It is as if the narrator cannot be an ordinary walk-on in his narrative: he can be only the star, or else a mere bystander. For the first variety (which to some extent represents the strong degree of the homodiegetic) we will reserve the unavoidable term autodiegetic.

Defined this way, the narrator's relationship to the story is in principle invariable: even when Gil Blas and Watson momentarily disappear as characters, we know that they belong to the diegetic universe of their narrative and that they will reappear sooner or later. So the reader unfailingly takes the transition from one status to the other—when he perceives it—as an infraction of an implicit norm: for instance the (discret) disappearance of the initial witness-narrator of the Rouge

74 This term [personnages] is used here for lack of a more neutral or more extensive term which would not unduly connotate, as this one does, the "humanity" of the narrative agent, even though in fiction nothing prevents us from entrusting that role to an animal (Memoires d'un ane (Memoirs of a Donkey)) or indeed to an "inanimate" object (I don't know whether we should put into this category the successive narrators of the Bisoux et laudes (Indiscreet Jewels)).

75 A variant of this type is the narrative with a collective witness as narrator: the crew of The Nigger of the "Narissus," the inhabitants of the small town in A Rose for Emily. We remember that the opening pages of Bobary are written in this mode.
or Bovary, or the (noisier) one of the narrator of Lamiel, who openly leaves the diegesis "in order to become a man of letters. Thus, O benevolent reader, farewell; you will hear nothing more of me."\textsuperscript{76} An even more glaring violation is the shift in grammatical person to designate the same character: for instance, in Autre étude de femme, Bianchon moves all of a sudden from "I" to "he,"\textsuperscript{77} as if he were unexpectedly abandoning the role of narrator; for instance, in Jean Santeuil, the hero moves inversely from "he" to "I."\textsuperscript{78} In the field of the classical novel, and still in Proust, such effects obviously result from a sort of narrative pathology, explicable by last-minute resuffles and states of textual incompleteness. But we know that the contemporary novel has passed that limit, as it has so many others, and does not hesitate to establish between narrator and character(s) a variable or floating relationship, a pronominal vertigo in tune with a freer logic and a more complex conception of "personality." The most advanced forms of this emancipation\textsuperscript{79} are perhaps not the most perceptible ones, because the classical attributes of "character"—proper name, physical and moral "nature"—have disappeared and along with them the signs that direct grammatical (pronominal) traffic. It is undoubtedly Borges who offers us the most spectacular example of this violation—spectacular precisely because it is put down in a completely traditional narrative system, which accentuates the contrast—in the story entitled "The Form of the Sword":\textsuperscript{80} the hero begins to tell his vile adventure while identifying himself with his victim, before confessing that he is in fact the other, the dastardly informer who until then was dealt with, with all due contempt, in the "third person." Moon himself supplies the "ideological" comment on this narrative technique: "What one man does is

\begin{quotation}
something done, in some measure, by all men... I am all others, any man is all men." The Borgesian fantastic, in this respect emblematic of a whole modern literature, does not accept person.
\end{quotation}

I do not intend to stretch Proustian narrating in this direction, although in Proust the process of the disintegration of "character" is amply (and notoriously) begun. The Recherche is fundamentally an autodiegetic narrative, where, as we have seen, the narrator-hero never, as it were, yields the privilege of the narrative function to anyone. Here what is most important is not the presence of this completely traditional form, but first the conversion it results from, and next the difficulties it encounters in a novel like this one.

Since it is a "disguised autobiography," it seems on the whole quite natural and a matter of course that the Recherche should be a narrative in autobiographical form written "in the first person." This naturalness is obviously deceptive, for Proust's initial plan, as Germaine Brée suspected in 1948 and as the publication of Jean Santeuil has since confirmed, made no place (except a preliminary one) for that narrative course. Jean Santeuil, let us remember, is deliberately heterodiegetic in form. Such a detour prohibits us, then, from looking on the narrative form of the Recherche as the direct extension of an authentically personal discourse, whose discords with respect to the real life of Marcel Proust would constitute only secondary deviations. "His use of the first person then," Germaine Brée accurately observes, "was the result of a conscious esthetic choice and not proof that he considered his work as a confession or an autobiography."\textsuperscript{81} To have "Marcel's" life be told by "Marcel" himself, after having had "Jean's" be told by the writer "C.," arises indeed from a narrative choice as distinct, and thus as significant, as Defoe's choice for Robinson Crusoe or Lesage's for Gil Blas—and even more significant, because of the detour. But we cannot fail to notice also that that conversion from the heterodiegetic to the autodiegetic accompanies and completes the other conversion, already mentioned, of the metodiegetic to the diege-

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{76} Stendhal, Lamiel (Paris: Divan, 1948), p. 43. The inverse case, the sudden appearance of an autodiegetic "I" in a heterodiegetic narrative, seems more rare. The Stendhalian "I believe" (Lettres, p. 117, Chartruese, p. 76) can belong to the narrator as such.
\textsuperscript{77} Balzac, Autre étude de femme (Geneva: Skira), pp. 75-77.
\textsuperscript{78} Jean Santeuil, Pléiade, p. 319; trans. Hopkins, pp. 118-119.
\textsuperscript{81} Brée, p. 8.
\end{quotation}
tic (or pseudo-diegetic). From Santeuil to the Recherche, the hero could move from "he" to "I" without the stratification of the narrating instances necessarily disappearing: it would be enough for C.'s "novel" to be autobiographical, or even simply auto-diegetic in form. Inversely, the double instance could be reduced without modifying the relationship between hero and narrator: it would be enough to suppress the preamble and begin with something like, "For a long time Marcel had gone to bed early..." We must therefore look at the full significance of the dual conversion enacted by the transition from the narrative system of Jean Santeuil to the narrative system of the Recherche.

If in every narrative we define the narrator's status both by its narrative level (extra- or intradiegetic) and by its relationship to the story (hetero- or homodiegetic), we can represent the four basic types of narrator's status as follows: (1) extradiegetic-heterodiegetic—paradigm: Homer, a narrator in the first degree who tells a story he is absent from; (2) extradiegetic-homodiegetic—paradigm: Gil Blas, a narrator in the first degree who tells his own story; (3) intradiegetic-heterodiegetic—paradigm: Scheherazade, a narrator in the second degree who tells stories she is on the whole absent from; (4) intradiegetic-homodiegetic—paradigm: Ulysses in Books IX-XII, a narrator in the second degree who tells his own story. In this system the (second) narrator of the quasi-totality of the narrative in Santeuil, the fictive novelist C., falls into the same category that Scheherazade does as intra-heterodiegetic, and the (single) narrator of the Recherche into the diametrically (diagonally) opposite category (whatever arrangement the entries are given) that Gil Blas does, as extra-homodiegetic:

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<th>LEVEL:</th>
<th>Extradiegetic</th>
<th>Intradiegetic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Heterodiegetic</td>
<td>Homer</td>
<td>Scheherazade C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homodiegetic</td>
<td>Gil Blas Marcel</td>
<td>Ulysses</td>
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We are dealing here with an absolute reversal, since we move from a situation characterized by the complete dissociation of the instances (first and extradiegetic author-narrator: 'I'; second narrator, intradiegetic novelist: 'C.'; metadiegetic hero: "Jean") to the inverse situation, characterized by the merging of all three instances in one single "person": the author-narrator-hero Marcel. Most obviously significant in this turn-around is the late, and deliberate, assumption of the form of direct autobiography, which we must immediately connect to the apparently contradictory fact that the narrative content of the Recherche is less directly autobiographical than the narrative content of Santeuil—as if Proust first had had to conquer a certain adhesion to himself, had to detach himself from himself, in order to win the right to say "I," or more precisely the right to have this hero who is neither completely himself nor completely someone else say "I." So the conquest of the I here is not a return to and attendance on himself, not a settling into the comfort of "subjectivity," but perhaps exactly the opposite: the difficult experience of relating to oneself with (slight) distance and off-centering—a relationship wonderfully symbolized by that barely suggested, seemingly accidental semihomonymy of the narrator-hero and the signatory.  

But this explanation clearly pays particular attention to the

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82 See Tadié, pp. 20-23.
83 The famous Proustian "subjectivism" is nothing less than a proof of subjectivity. And Proust himself did not fail to get angry at the too-facile conclusions people drew from his narrative choice: "As I had the misfortune to begin my book with I and could not change it anymore, I am 'subjective' in aeternum. If I had begun instead, 'Roger Mauchard was occupying a summer house,' I would be classified 'objective' " (to J. Boulanger, 30 November 1921, Correspondance générale (Paris, 1932), III, 278).
84 On this controversial question, see M. Suzuki, "La 'je' proustien," Bulletin de la Société des amis de Marcel Proust, 9 (1959); Harold Waters, "The Narrator, not Marcel," French Review, 33 (February 1960), 389-392; and Muller, pp. 12 and 164-165. We know that the only two occurrences of this first name in the Recherche are late (RH II, 429 and 488/P III, 75 and 157), and that the first is not without a reservation. But it seems to me that this is not enough for us to reject it. If we were to contest everything that is said only once... On the other hand, naming the hero Marcel is obviously not identifying him with Proust; but this partial and fragile coincidence is highly symbolic.
transition from heterodiegetic to autodiegetic and leaves something in the background the suppression of the metadiegetic level. The ruthless condensing of instances was perhaps already underway in those pages of Jean Santeuil where the "I" of the narrator (but which one?) supplanted as if inadvertently the "he" of the hero: a result of impatience, undoubtedly, but not necessarily impatience to "express himself" or to "narrate himself" by removing the mask of the novelistic fiction; irritation, rather, at the obstructions or hindrances that the dissociation of instances puts in the way of the stance of the discourse—which, even in Santeuil, is not just a narrative discourse. Undoubtedly, to a narrator so eager to accompany his "story" with that sort of running commentary that is its underlying justification, nothing is more annoying than to have to shift "voice" incessantly, narrating the hero’s experiences "in the third person" and then commenting on them in his own name, with a continually repeated and always discordant intrusion. Whence the temptation to leap over the obstruction, and lay claim to and finally annex the experience itself, as in the passage where the narrator, after having told the "feelings recaptured" by Jean when the countryside of Lake Geneva reminds him of the sea at Beg Meil, continues with his own reminiscences, and his resolution to write "only of what the past brings suddenly to life in a smell, in a sight, in what has, as it were, exploded within me and set the imagination quivering, so that the accompanying joy stirs me to inspiration."

We see that here we are no longer dealing with inadvertence: it is the narrative course as a whole chosen for Santeuil which is revealed as inadequate, and which finally gives way before the deepest needs and instances of the discourse. Such "accidents" prefigure both the failure (or rather the approaching abandonment) of Santeuil and its later resumption in the right voice of the Recherche, the voice of direct autodiegetic narrating.

But, as we saw in the chapter on mood, this new course itself is not without problems, since now into a narrative in autobiographical form there has to be integrated a whole social chronicle that often goes beyond the field of the hero’s direct knowledge and sometimes, as is the case with Un amour de Swann, does not easily enter even the narrator’s knowledge. In fact, as B. G. Rogers has shown, the Proustian novel manages only with much difficulty to reconcile two contradictory courses. The first is that of an omnipresent speculative discourse, which barely accommodates itself to classical "objective" narrating and which requires the experience of the hero to merge with the past of the narrator, who will thus be able to comment on it without seeming to intrude (whence the ultimate adoption of a direct autodiegetic narrating where the voices—of hero, narrator, and an author turned toward a public to instruct and persuade—may mingle and blend). The second is that of a comprehensive narrative content that widely overflows the hero’s inner experience and at times requires a quasi-"omniscient" narrator (whence the embarrassments and pluralities of focalization we have already met).

The narrative course in Jean Santeuil was doubtless untenable, and its abandonment seems to us retrospectively "justified"; the course in the Recherche is better suited to the needs of Proustian discourse, but it is not by any means perfectly coherent. In fact, the Proustian plan could be fully satisfied by neither the one nor the other: neither the too-remote "objectivity" of heterodiegetic narrative, which kept the narrator’s discourse set apart from the "action" (and thus from the hero’s experience), nor the "subjectivity" of autodiegetic narrative, too personal and seemingly too confined to encompass without improbability a narrative content widely overflowing that experience. We are dealing here, let us make clear, with the fictive experience of the hero, which Proust, for well-known reasons, wished more limited than his own personal experience. In a sense, nothing in the Recherche exceeds Proust’s experience, but everything he thought it necessary to assign to Swann, Saint-Loup, Bergotte, Charlus, Mlle. Vinteuil, Legrandin, and many others obviously exceeds Marcel’s experience: a deliberate dispersion of the autobiographical "material," which is responsible for certain narrative problems. So—to cite only the two most flagrant paralapses—we can find it strange that Marcel should have had access to Bergotte’s final

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86 Rogers, pp. 120-141.
thoughts, but not that Proust should have, since he had "lived" them himself at the Jeu de Paume on a certain day in May 1921; similarly, we can wonder that Marcel should so well read Mlle. Vinteuil's ambiguous feelings at Montjouvin, but much less, I think, that Proust should have been able to ascribe them to her. All this, and a lot more, comes from Proust, and we will not go so far in disdaining the "referent" as to pretend to be unaware of it; but we also know that he wanted to get it off his hands by getting it off his hero's hands. So he needs both an "omniscient" narrator capable of dominating a moral experience which is now objectivized and an autodiegetic narrator capable of personally taking up, authenticating, and illuminating by his own commentary the spiritual experience which gives all the rest its ultimate meaning and which, for its part, remains the hero's privilege. Whence that paradoxical—and to some people shameful—situation of a "first-person" narrating that is nevertheless occasionally omniscient. Here again—without wanting to, perhaps unknowingly, and for reasons that result from the profound (and profoundly contradictory) nature of its purpose—the Recherche attacks the best-established convention of novelistic narrating by cracking not only its traditional "forms," but also—a more hidden and thus more decisive loosening—the very logic of its discourse.

**Hero/Narrator**

As in any narrative in autobiographical form, the two *actants* that Spitzer called *erzähldes Ich* (the narrating I) and *erzähltes Ich* (the narrated I) are separated in the *Recherche* by a difference in age and experience that authorizes the former to treat the latter with a sort of condescending or ironic superiority, very noticeable for example in the scene of Marcel's missed introduction to Albertine, or that of the kiss denied. But peculiar to the *Recherche*, distinguishing it from almost all other autobiographies real or fictive, is that added to this essentially variable

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87 In question here is classical autobiography, with subsequent narrating, and not interior monologue in the present tense.


89 RH II, 997/P III, 866.

90 Usually during moments of aesthetic meditation, apropos of Elstir (RH I, 1017–1020/P II, 419–422), Wagner (RH II, 489–492/P III, 158–162), or Vinteuil (RH II, 555–559/P III, 252–258), when the hero has a presentiment which will be confirmed by the final revelation. *Sodome I*, which in one sense is a first revelation scene, also presents features of coincidence between the two discourses, but there the narrator takes care, at least once, to correct an error of the hero's (RH II, 24–25/P II, 630–631). An inverse exception is the final group of pages in *Swann*, where it is the narrator who makes a pretense of sharing the point of view of the character.
functions of the narrator. It seems strange, at first sight, to attribute to any narrator a role other than the actual narrating, the act of telling the story, but in fact we know well that the narrator’s discourse, novelistic or not, can take on other functions. Perhaps it is worth the trouble to make a quick survey of them in order to appreciate better the distinctiveness, in this respect, of Proustian narrating. It seems to me that we can distribute these functions (rather as Jakobson distributes the functions of language) in accordance with the several aspects of narrative (in the broad sense) to which they are connected.

The first of these aspects is obviously the story, and the function connected to it is the properly narrative function, which no narrator can turn away from without at the same time losing his status as narrator, and to which he can quite well try—as some American novelists have—to reduce his role. The second aspect is the narrative text, which the narrator can refer to in a discourse that is to some extent metalinguistic (metanarrative, in this case) to mark its articulations, connections, interrelationships, in short, its internal organization: these “stage directions” of the discourse, which Georges Blin called “directing indications,” belong to a second function that we can call directing function.

The third aspect is the narrating situation itself, whose two protagonists are the narratee—present, absent, or implied—and the narrator. The function that concerns the narrator’s orientation toward the narratee—his care in establishing or maintaining with the narratee a contact, indeed, a dialogue (actual, as in La Maison Nucingen, or fictive, as in Tristram Shandy)—recalls both

94 Regiebemerkungen (Stendhal et les problèmes du roman, p. 222).
Jakobson's "phatic" (verifying the contact) and his "conative" (acting on the receiver) functions. Rogers calls narrators of the Shandian type, always turned toward their public and often more interested in the relationship they maintain with that public than in their narrative itself, "raconteurs." 95 At one time they would have been called "talkers," and perhaps we should name the function they tend to privilege the function of communication. We know what importance it acquires in the epistolary novel, and perhaps particularly in those forms that Jean Rousséet calls "epistolary monodies," such as, obviously, the Lettres portugaises, where the absent presence of the receiver becomes the dominant (obessive) element of the discourse.

The narrator's orientation toward himself, finally, brings about a function very homologous with the one Jakobson names, a little unfortunately, the "emotive" function: this is the one accounting for the part the narrator as such takes in the story he tells, the relationship he maintains with it—an affective relationship, of course, but equally a moral or intellectual one. It may take the form simply of an attestation, as when the narrator indicates the source of his information, or the degree of precision of his own memories, or the feelings which one or another episode awakens in him. 96 We have here something which could be called testimonial function, or function of attestation. But the narrator's interventions, direct or indirect, with regard to the story can also take the more didactic form of an authorized commentary on the action. This is an assertion of what could be called the narrator's ideological function, 97 and we know that Balzac, for example, greatly developed this form of explanatory and justificatory discourse—for him, as for so many others, a vehicle of realistic motivation.

These five functions are certainly not to be put into watertight compartments; none of the categories is completely undulterated and free of complicity with others, none except the first is completely indispensable, and at the same time none, however carefully an author tries, can be completely avoided. It is rather a question of emphasis and relative weight: everyone knows that Balzac "intervenes" in his narrative more than Flaubert, that Fielding addresses the reader more often than Mme. de La Fayette does, that the "directing indications" are more discreet in James Fenimore Cooper 98 than Thomas Mann 99 than in Hemingway, etc., but we will not claim to derive some cumbersome typology from that.

Nor will we go back to the various manifestations, already encountered elsewhere, of the Proustian narrator's extranarrative functions: addresses to the reader, organization of the narrative by means of advance notices and recalls, indications of source, memory-elicted attestations. What remains for us to emphasize, here, is the situation of the narrator's quasi-monopoly with regard to what we have christened the ideological function, and the deliberate (nonobligatory) nature of this monopoly. In fact, of all the extranarrative functions, this is the only one that does not of necessity revert to the narrator. We know how careful great ideological novelists like Dostoevski,

95 Rogers, p. 55.
96 "In writing this I feel my pulse quicken yet; those moments will always be with me, were I to live a hundred thousand years" (Rousseau, Confessions, already quoted on pp. 67–68). But the narrator's attestation may also bear on events contemporary with the act of narrating and unconnected to the story he is telling: for example, the pages in Doctor Faustus on the war that rages while Zeitblom is writing his memories of Leverkühn.
97 Which is not necessarily the author's: the judgments of Des Grieux do not a priori commit the Abbé Prévost, and those of the fictive author-narrator of Lesuan or the Chartreuse by no means commit Henry Beyle.
Narrative Discourse

Tolstoy, Mann, Broch, Malraux were to transfer onto some of their characters the task of commentary and didactic discourse—going so far as to transform such scenes from The Possessed, The Magic Mountain, or L’Esprit [Man’s Hope] into veritable colloquia of speculation. Nothing of the sort takes place in Proust, who, other than Marcel, has given himself no “spokesman.” A Swann, a Saint-Loup, a Charlus, despite all their intelligence, are objects of observation, not organs of truth or even genuine interlocutors (we know, moreover, what Marcel thinks of the intellectual qualities of conversation and friendship): their errors, their absurdities, their failures and falling-offs are more instructive than their opinions. Even such figures of artistic creation as Bergotte, Vinteuil, or Elstir do not intervene, so to speak, as custodians of an authorized speculative discourse: Vinteuil is mute and Bergotte is reticent or trivial, and the meditation on their work reverts to Marcel; Elstir begins, symbolically, with M. Biche’s art-student antics, and the statements he makes at Balbec matter less than the silent teaching of his canvases. Intellectual conversation is a genre plainly contrary to Proustian taste. We know the disdain inspired in him by everything that “thinks”—like, according to him, the Hugo of the early poems, “instead of contenting himself, like Nature, with supplying food for thought.” All humanity, from Bergotte to Françoise and from Charlus to Mme. Sazerat, is before him like “Nature,” entranced with provoking thought, not expressing it. An extreme case of intellectual solipsism. Ultimately, and in his own way, Marcel is an autodidact.

The consequence is that no one—except the hero under certain conditions—is able or allowed to contest with the narrator his privilege of ideological commentary: whence the well-known proliferation of this “auctorial” discourse, to borrow from German critics a term which indicates both the presence of the author (actual or fictive) and the sovereign authority of that

Voice

presence in his work. The quantitative and qualitative importance of this psychological, historical, aesthetic, metaphysical discourse is such, despite the denials, that we can undoubtedly attribute to it the responsibility—and in one sense the credit—for the strongest shock given in this work, and by this work, to the traditional equilibrium of novelistic form. If the Recherche du temps perdu is experienced by everyone as being “not completely a novel any more” and as the work which, at its level, concludes the history of the genre (of the genres) and, along with some others, inaugurates the limitless and indefinite space of modern literature, the cause is obviously—and this time too despite the “author’s intentions” and through the effect of a movement all the more irresistible because involuntary—this invasion of the story by the commentary, of the novel by the essay, of the narrative by its own discourse.

The Narratee

Such speculative imperialism, such certainty of truth, could lead one to think that the receiver’s role here is purely passive, that he is limited to receiving a message he must take or leave and to “consuming” after the event a work that was completed far from him and without him. Nothing would be more contrary to Proust’s convictions, to his own experience of reading, and to the most powerful demands of his work.

Before considering this final dimension of the Proustian narrating instance we must say a more general word about this personage that we have called the narratee, and whose function in the narrative seems so variable. Like the narrator, the narratee is one of the elements in the narrating situation, and he is necessarily located at the same diegetic level; that is, he does not merge a priori with the reader (even an implied reader) any more than the narrator necessarily merges with the author.

To an intradiegetic narrator corresponds an intradiegetic nar-

100 “Was this perhaps that happiness which the little phrase of the sonata promised to Swann and which he, because he was unable to find it in artistic creation, mistakenly assimilated to the pleasures of love...” (RH II, 1006/P III, 877).
101 RH I, 1107/P II, 549.

102 “Hence the temptation for the writer to write intellectual works, which is, however, a gross mistake. A work in which there are theories is like an object which still has the ticket that shows its price” (RH II, 1009/P III, 882). Doesn’t the reader of the Recherche know what it costs?
ratee; and the narrative of Des Grieux or Bixiou is not addressed to the reader of Manon Lescaut or of La Maison Nucingen, but indeed only to M. de Renoncourt, only to Pinot, Couture, and Blondet; they alone are designated by the “second-person” marks present on occasion in the text, just as the “second-person” marks we find in an epistolary novel can designate only the epistolary correspondent. We, the readers, cannot identify ourselves with those fictive narratees anymore than those intradiegetic narrators can address themselves to us, or even assume our existence. For we can neither interrupt Bixiou nor write to Mme. de Tournel.

The extradiegetic narrator, on the other hand, can aim only at an extradiegetic narratee, who merges with the implied reader and with whom each real reader can identify. This implied reader is in principle undefined, although Balzac does turn particularly sometimes toward a reader from the provinces, sometimes toward a Parisian reader, and Sterne sometimes calls him Madam or Sir Critick. The extradiegetic narrator can also pretend, like Meursault, to address no one, but this posture—fairly widespread in the contemporary novel—obviously cannot change the fact that a narrative, like every discourse, is necessarily addressed to someone and always contains below the surface an appeal to the receiver. And if the existence of an intradiegetic narratee has the effect of keeping us at a distance, since he is always interposed between the narrator and us—as Finot, Couture, and Blondet are interposed between Bixiou and the nosy listener behind the partition, for whom that narrative was not intended (but, Bixiou says, “there is always someone off to the side”)—it is also true that the more transparent the receiving instance and the more silent its evocation in the narrative, so undoubtedly the easier, or rather the more irresistible, each real reader’s identification with or substitution for that implied instance will be.

It is indeed this relationship—despite some rare and fully needless challenges we have already called attention to—that the Recherche maintains with its readers. Every one of them knows himself to be the implied—and anxiously awaited—narratee of this swirling narrative that, in order to exist in its own truth, undoubtedly needs, more than any other narrative, to escape the closure of “final message” and narrative completion, to assume endlessly the circular movement from the work to the vocation it “tells” and from the vocation back to the work it gives rise to, and so on ceaselessly.

As the very terms of the famous letter to Rivière make clear, the “dogmatism” and “structure” of the Proustian work do not dispense with a continual resort to the reader, who is entrusted not only with “guessing” them before they are expressed, but also, once they have been revealed, with interpreting them and placing them back into the movement which both generates them and carries them off. Proust could not exempt himself from the rule he enunciates in the Temps retrouvé, a rule granting the reader the right to translate the universe of the work into his own terms in order then to “give to what he is reading its full general import”: whatever apparent infidelity they commit, “in order to read with understanding many readers require to read in their own particular fashion, and the author must not be indignant at this; on the contrary, he must leave the reader all possible liberty,” because the work is ultimately, according to Proust himself, only an optical instrument the author offers the reader to help him read within himself. “For it is only out of habit, a habit contrived from the insincere language of prefaces and dedications, that the writer speaks of ‘my reader.’ In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self.”

Such is the vertiginous status of the Proustian narratee: invited not, like Nathanaël, to “throw this book away,” but to rewrite it, being totally unfaithful and wonderfully exact, like

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103 A special case is the metadiegetic literary work, of the Curious Impertinent or Jean Santeuil kind, which can possibly aim at a reader, but a reader who in principle is himself fictive.

104 “At last I find a reader who guesses that my book is a dogmatic work and a structure!” (Choix de lettres, p. 197).


106 [Translator’s note.] Nathanaël is the character addressed by the “first-person” narrator of Gide’s Les Nourritures terrestres (The Fruits of the Earth).
To conclude without useless récapitulations, here are some words of self-criticism, or, if one likes, of excuse. The categories and procedures put forward here are certainly not faultless in my eyes: it has been a question, as it often is, of choosing between drawbacks. In an area we regularly grant to intuition and empiricism, the proliferation of concepts and terms will doubtless have annoyed more than one reader, and I do not expect "posterity" to retain too large a part of these propositions. This arsenal, like any other, will inevitably be out of date before many years have passed, and all the more quickly the more seriously it is taken, that is, debated, tested, and revised with time. One of the characteristics of what we can call scientific effort is that it knows itself to be essentially decaying and doomed to die out: a wholly negative trait, certainly, and one rather melancholy to reflect on for the "literary" mind, always inclined to count on some posthumous glory; but if the critic can dream of an achievement in the second degree, the poetician for his part knows that he labors in—let us say rather at—the ephemeral, a worker aware of becoming un-worked.

Therefore I think, and hope, that all this technology—prolepses, analepses, the iterative, focalizations, paralipses, the metadiiegetic, etc.—surely barbaric to the lovers of belles lettres, tomorrow will seem positively rustic, and will go to join other packaging, the detritus of Poetics; let us only hope that it will not be abandoned without having had some transitory useful-