

Metamorphoses of Time and Space in Marcel Proust's Novel

Eva Gjorgjievska

Department of Romance Studies, Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, Macedonia

Email: eva.gorgjievska@ugd.edu.mk

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Abstract

The article considers different manifestations of time found throughout the novel of Marcel Proust *In Search of Lost Time*, which is not only the subjective time of Narrator's personal memory, but the time that aims to objectify and manifest itself through different images and characters, and to finally turn into time of the work of art, that is, to become a monument that contains and disperses temporality in all its varieties. The paper emphasizes the fact that time in Proust is always correlated with its expression in multiple spaces, objects and characters, and that is what actually makes his poetics original.

Keywords

Time, Space, Metamorphosis, Metaphor

1. Introduction

For almost a century, Marcel Proust's novel has provoked philosophical debates that tried to explain it according to one of the already known conceptions of Time: from French phenomenology to German idealism, from Bergson and Schopenhauer as contemporaries of Proust to Hegel and Husserl (Henry, 1981, 2000), and more recently Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 1961, 1964; Simon, 2000). Although in his writing Proust is reminiscent of a phenomenologist trying to institute the primordial contact with the world and with the other, his Time is quite different from that of philosophers, because it is primarily fictionalized. Hence we can consider Proust's conception of the body that remembers, as opposed to the mind, which sets the past and the present according to the principle of metaphor or metamorphosis, that is, as a combination of two opposing points in time and as a transition of one matter into another. The whole work is conceived according to that complex structure of metamorphic overlap and

transition from one state to another, hence there are several times in Proust: Time understood not only as a memory, but as a complex phenomenon dissected and objectified in all its manifestations. Time becomes a principle of free associations that do not refer only to the Narrator's subjective time.

We can consider an example. The childhood in Combray knows many rituals, and going to Saturday Mass is one of them. The Church of Saint-Hilaire is a fascination for the child, because it defies the ravages of time, and yet incorporates the time into its worn and smooth stone blocks and medieval tapestries. The church, which through its architecture and art, is "hiding the rugged barbarities of the eleventh century in the thickness of its walls" (Proust, 2015d: p. 83)¹, unites the elements of time with those of space.

This is how the Narrator describes the church with admiration during the Sunday Mass: "as into a fairy-haunted valley, where the rustic sees with amazement in a rock, a tree, a pond, the tangible traces of the little people's supernatural passage—all this made of the church for me something entirely different from the rest of the town: an edifice occupying, so to speak, a four-dimensional space—the name of the fourth being Time—extending through the centuries its ancient nave, which, bay after bay, chapel after chapel, seemed to stretch across and conquer not merely a few yards of soil, but each successive epoch from which it emerged triumphant" (Proust, 2015d: p. 83). This is, in fact, the first moment in the book when Proust openly unites the elements of time with space, space itself possessing the fourth dimension—the Time, that is, fixing its transience through images.

At the end of the novel, in the *Time Regained*, all the characters we follow through its pages should become the subject of the future book, and which as "monsters" or "giants" immersed in the years of various epochs, currently occupy limited space, but whose space in terms of time is extended without measure because it opens simultaneously different times (Proust, 2015f: p. 279). Proust's characters reflect the same ideal of the cathedral to unite time with space, that is, the present with the past, and do not concern only the personal past of the Narrator. Thus the principle of exteriorization is quite important in the novel, because the subjective time takes a form that is objectified outside the character, as the novel represents a metamorphosis of the writer.

Proust's claim that the novel should be a cathedral is well known, so the question is, what kind of "time-space" is Proust searching for in the novel, and what does the title *In Search of Lost Time* mean? Between the time of the dream when the dreamer forgets about himself for a moment, the time of the ancestors which is unconsciously rooted in body movements and gestures, the time of history through rulers and churches, which stands authoritatively in front of the characters, the time of love that dissects and fragments the character, the time of the

¹While writing this article, I was primarily reading the French edition of Proust by Gallimard. Afterwards, I found the English equivalents of the selected citations in the online English edition, and those are the citations that are integrated here. Also, the references are being used only in the abbreviations of the titles of Proust's books.

present as a contingency of the flow of ideas, the atmospheric time or weather as a sensually embraced space, the time of the development of the character that anticipates the action, the grammatical and the narrative time, ... this “little time in the pure state” (Proust, 2015f) which is theoretically mentioned on the end, is just an aesthetic phenomenon, which would be reductive to say that defines the Proust’s novel because in the text we can talk about several types of time and their objectification in space, and not just about one conception of time, as suggested by the title—*In Search of Lost Time*. Finally, Proust’s novel itself does not openly raise the question of time, as much as it depicts the state of the self which extends through time and space and branches its possibilities through it, recomposes, loses and recreates, interrupts and replaces itself. It is not just a psychological interiority, but an embodied time, filled with sensory experiences and bodily predispositions. All the previously mentioned times should be decomposed in order to understand this “pure time” as a unifying time that contains all its temporal manifestations.

2. Materialization of Time and History in Proust Characters

The Proust characters contain history and thus incarnate, here and now, Time in its duration and existence. Time seems to be looking for bodies to nest in, so the bodies of the characters become palimpsests through which the layered meanings of the past and of the ancestors can be read, or media through which the mentalities of archaic times are transmitted.

At the very beginning of the novel, back in Combray, the child’s admiration for French history comes to the fore: the Narrator’s phantasmagoria speaks of the glorious past that makes Duchess de Guermantes a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, “in short, invariably wrapped in the mystery of the Merovingian age” (Proust, 2015d: p. 242). During the Mass, the child’s admiring gaze starts from the worn, perforated or smoothed stones on the church porch and is continuously added to the two wall tapestries. Exactly one of the tapestries representing the “Coronation of Esther” (Proust, 2015d: p. 242) is painted after the character of lady de Guermantes and introduces in the novel the moment of identification of female characters with painted portraits, as Odette will later be equated with Zephora from Botticelli’s painting or Albertine with the paintings of Elster.

On the other hand, regardless of the rank she occupies, the family cook and servant in their household in Combray, Françoise, emanates history in her own way. She instinctively knows the protocols that can be applied to even the most refined society, although she has never left her closed circle of domestic helpers. This leads the Narrator to conclude that some old French past exists in Françoise and is unconsciously transmitted independently of her will. It is no coincidence that her name, Françoise, suggests the French descent. But Françoise, in addition to being a representative of the ordinary French people, is also of Jewish descent in the previous versions of the novel. This opens up another topic in the novel.

The past of the Jewish characters, including Françoise, always connects holiness with the grotesque and even the trivial, which we will witness later. Proust does not fail to compare her rigid code with that of the Jewish laws, which require blind obedience, although they are not always consistent with each other in the prohibitions, according to him, and in what is allowed and what should not be done. In the present case, which concerns the child's request that the mother interrupt her conversation with their guest Swann, Françoise applies that code which requires respect "not only for the family (as for the dead, for the clergy, or for royalty), but also for the stranger within our gates" (Proust, 2015d: p. 38); and Proust spares no time to name that "sacred character" of the dinner a "ceremonial", which seems to express, through Françoise's mentality, the prohibitions that have their roots far beyond the Old Testament. The suffering of the child on the night he was deprived of his mother's kiss because of the guest Swann is compared to the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, which again emphasizes the Jewish predisposition of Marcel himself.

Considering Proust's Jewish ancestry, references to the Old Testament are numerous in this quasi-autobiographical novel. However, they are never affirmatively expressed in a religious sense, but are used to ironize Judaism or to express a reserved attitude towards one's behavior. However, this connection of the characters with the collective past also makes Proust an existentialist who raises the question of the possibility for the artist to overcome the linearity of his destiny and to go beyond the time of the ancestors.

Namely, throughout the novel, all the characters who are bearers of Judaism are represented in their civilizational regress, tics, slips, absence of finesse. An exception is Swann, who is the guest at the beginning of the novel while the child longs for his good night kiss, and who through his devotion to art manages to gain sophistication and enter the high circles of French society. But that only happens at the beginning of the novel. Later, the love for Odette, "a woman of the worst type, almost a prostitute, whom, to do him justice, he never attempted to introduce to us" (Proust, 2015d: p. 26), and later the fanatical defense of the Jewish soldier Dreyfus, no matter how justified that position was, will cause Swann to gradually regress, losing his social advantage. Contributing to this is also the refusal to engage in serious work of art, at the expense of which he dwells on the formal data of works of art, becoming their collector and entering idolatry through the identification of a loved one with a portrait of Michelangelo (Rivers, 1983). Blindness from political and love passions will help Swann to return to everything he once had overcome. Swann "having come to the premature term of his life, like a weary animal that is goaded on, he cried out against these persecutions and was returning to the spiritual fold of his fathers" (Proust, 2015c: p. 367).

In fact, Swann turns from a rival into an idol for the child and that's why he is an allegory of the Narrator's artistic position: "As for Swann, in order to try to resemble him, I spent all my time at table pulling my nose and rubbing my eyes.

My father would exclaim: ‘The child’s an idiot, he’ll make himself quite hideous.’ More than anything else I should have liked to be as bald as Swann. He seemed to be so extraordinary” (Proust, 2015d: pp. 563-564). That’s why Swann’s illness, and later his death, marks his lost battle with art: “There are certain Israelites, superior people for all that and refined men of the world, in whom there are main in reserve and in the wings, ready to enter at a given moment in their lives, as in a play, a bouncer and a prophet. Swann had arrived at the age of the prophet. Certainly, with his face from which, by the action of his disease, whole segments had vanished, as when a block of ice melts and slabs of it fall off bodily, he had greatly altered” (Proust, 2015b: pp. 61-62). Swann’s face becomes a book from which the history of his distant ancestors can be read. It is the emphasis on disease as a genetic predisposition that puts Swann within what Proust calls “race” (“race de Guermantes”, “race des tantes”, “race des Juifs”,...). However, the authentic goal of the artist is to transcend the given affiliations and to rise to the individuality, so even though he acknowledges the past, he should not melt into it (Sartre, 1954).

With Bloch, Marcel’s childhood friend, the story is different. At the beginning he is characterized by social maladaptation, with outbursts of pathos, which is complemented by his knowledge of ancient authors through which he tries to add intellectual value and transcend his origin—because the art in this novel is a kind of means of refinement—and to change his identity. Bloch is portrayed in the group of his family who unculturedly shouts and threatens across the beach and ironizes its own destiny (Recanati, 1979). That rudeness of Bloch is still accompanied by his strong desire to become part of high society and that effort will pay off in the end, because we will see a new Bloch who in all his movements and speech has acquired sophistication that seems to be given to him from birth.

Contrary to such descriptions of the Jews, the Guermantes carry the gene of the “race” in their every movement (Carnevali, 2006). The encounter at the restaurant in Paris with Saint-Loup, where the Narrator is tangled in the spinning door and testifies to his lack of access to the modern world, is in contrast to Saint-Loup jumping over the chairs in the restaurant when he has to bring the Narrator’s coat to protect him from the cold. Saint-Loup wants to bridge the gap between the two classes and two histories, personal and collective, by bringing privileges to the Narrator in a restaurant where everything is arranged according to social divisions. The Narrator sees Saint-Loup movements as a reflection of his ancestors, inheriting his natural gallantry from his past generations. The bodies of Bloch or Saint-Loup are also a kind of palimpsest on which layers of time and history of their ancestors are inscribed.

After all these indications it can be concluded that the Narrator treats the past of the ancestors as something that deeply determines the present and is carried objectively through the unconscious body language, but which is still not only a result of personal predispositions, but also of a way of life, of training, of discipline, mainly passed down from generation to generation, but also achieved with

effort and investment within the present. However, against that determination of social skill, there is an in-depth approach to art, which in turn goes beyond the advantages of the aristocracy and speaks of a new aristocracy of the spirit which is pure art uncontaminated with social predispositions. Remnants of the past may be subject to cultural reorganization. According to Proust, time determines man, but that determination can be initially socially overcome, and later artistically overcome, as a third stage of change (Green, 1949).

That is the story of the two main characters of the Jews in the novel, while the Narrator should try to overcome Bloch's stage, a gaffer with whom the Narrator is initially identified, then to resemble Swan as a positive example of such overcoming, and finally to avoid Swann's mistakes and to achieve an authentic approach to art. Prophecy, though mentioned in an ironic way, still remains a feat for the artist, that is, Swann, who could have been Moses (as the companion of Zipporah with whom he identifies Odette), but preferred idolatry to the eloquence of the sublime message.

3. Atmospheric Sensations in Function of Space and Time

Among the many other versions of time that Proust suggests, atmospheric sensations are also amenable to the sublimation of "space-time". Similar atmospheric sensations transmit the Narrator from one time to another, and from one space to another. Weather conditions and circumstances create a special emotion in the Narrator and arouse his sensitivity, but also carry a binding character throughout the work, creating associations on several levels (Richard, 1974). Namely, the fog will appear in several scattered places in the book, but it will always evoke some previous experience: the morning in Doncières when the fog prevents the recognition of the region, then the fog that envelops the restaurant in Paris where the Narrator has to dine with Saint-Loup and which will successively remind him not only of Doncières, but also of Combray and Rivebelle:

"But between one and another of the memories that had now come to me in turn of Combray, of Doncières and of Rivebelle, I was conscious at the moment of more than a distance in time, of the distance that there would be between two separate universes the material elements in which were not the same" (Proust, 2015c: p. 257).

The Narrator's sensitivity to atmospheric change is an unavoidable theme in the novel, but it also precedes it, given Proust's early writings. Even in "Filial Feelings of a Parricide" the specificity of the weather conditions is given as a precondition for the occurrence of nervous excesses. At the very beginning of the Narrator's love affair with Gilberte after his relocation to Paris, winter proves to be a barrier to their encounters, and the coldness—a frost and distance between them. That coldness, which is the opposite of fluidity and favors fragmentation, will forever remain a mark of the perception of the beloved in all future adventures, starting from the fragmentation of his self in relation to Gilberte, and especially in the scene with the decomposition of Albertine's face.

Enjoying the weather and its changes is accentuated in the moments of waking up in the morning, when the new day brings a new climate. In *The Captive* Proust places those moments as sensory experiences that take him away from the writer's work, but paradoxically, many years later, those very moments will become the basis for the phenomenological research in his book. Back in Doncières (Proust, 2015c), the foggy morning is preceded by experimentation with auditory perceptions, when the closed curtains block his gaze and enhance other sensory perceptions. The Narrator is in the room of his friend Saint-Loup and is waiting for him to return from a meeting with a captain from his garrison. The room is so quiet that only the ticking sound of Saint-Loup's clock echoes through it. Until he fixates it with his gaze, the sound floats on all sides around him and it is not possible to specify where it comes from. It is the sense of sight, not the hearing, that stops the sound of the clock in one place.

That fact speaks to the association that awakens this fog, which obscures things from their full picture, and which allows the free mixing of properties and the breaking down of strict boundaries between them. As with sound, the fixation of phenomena with other things appears as a secondary operation, and not as an essential feature. Just as in Doncières, in a time of fog, the symbolic boundaries between the Narrator's class rank and that of Saint-Loup are blurred, so the fog in front of a Parisian restaurant leads visitors to nebula, loss of way, and confusion of visitors' belonging to a particular hall, because originally the Jews were separated from the aristocrats. Hence, the fog is not only an atmospheric phenomenon, but also a symbolic phenomenon that speaks of overcoming differences, *i.e.* the absence of distinction between things. As the Narrator puts it, differences and affiliations are secondarily imposed, as is sound fixation after vision intervention.

The metaphor of fog will manifest itself in other "water shades" throughout the novel, to also suggest social mobility over time despite space barriers. In its vagueness, water is a common metaphor for Proust, which serves to explain the overflow from one state to another, but also to archetypically allude to the subconscious (Miguet-Ollagnier, 1982).

Initially, that state of uncertainty and gradual manifestation in vaporization, reminiscent of fog, Proust used as a metaphor in painting the social space of the theater. The ritual of the church as a repetitive ceremony that we mentioned at the beginning when we talked about Combray, later in the novel will be replaced by the ritual of the theater, which becomes the new space of social grouping.

The key scene is that of the opera, which in that period can be a micro-image of the society of the divided classes. Space becomes symbolic: the division of spectators into lodges and orchestra shows the insurmountable boundary of space and the impossible passage from one class to another. While in the illuminated orchestra are the vulgar observers (including the Narrator), members of the bourgeoisie, who use this opportunity to observe the people present in the theater, naming and pointing to them, identifying them, while adding to them

the need to be seen—at the height of the lodges and almost completely withdrawn into the darkness at the bottom of their seats, occasionally portraying themselves as “goddesses coming out of the water”, sit the aristocrats who communicate with each other with dexterity and naturalness. The two worlds are separated from each other, clearly outlining the oppositions up-down, light-dark, curiosity-indifference, creating a scene of luxurious baroque:

“The white deities who inhabited those sombre abodes had flown for shelter against their shadowy walls and remained invisible. Gradually, however, as the performance went on, their vaguely human forms detached themselves, one by one, from the shades of night which they patterned, and, raising themselves towards the light, allowed their semi-nude bodies to emerge, and rose, and stopped at the limit of their course, at the luminous, shaded surface on which their brilliant faces appeared behind the gaily breaking foam of the feather fans they unfurled and lightly waved, beneath their hyacinthine locks begemmed with pearls, which the flow of the tide seemed to have caught and drawn with it; this side of them, began the orchestra stalls, abode of mortals for ever separated from the transparent, shadowy realm to which, at points here and there, served as boundaries, on its brimming surface, the limpid, mirroring eyes of the water-nymphs.” (Proust, 2015c: p. 31)

The feathers and white pearls, the context of the goddesses coming out of the water, represent the spectators in their gradual appearance from the dark background like swans that appear in the distance on the water surface. The whiteness of the Duchess is like the whiteness of a misty morning. They are for the Narrator an experience that is elusive in its essence despite the strict boundary that symbolizes the monocle of the spectators. Contrary to rational distinctions, there are preconceived notions that equate all things.

Many years later, another metaphoric object that contain water will appear, the fountain of Hubert Robert, which is a sensation during one of the visits of the Narrator at the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The fountain, which at first glance looks like a united and compact whole, when better deepened reveals its disintegration into tiny drops that are in constant and alternating progression and decline, which for Proust is a picture of the instability of the social identity of each of its characters, or the one that is currently at the top of the fountain in a short time flows back to its bottom:

“In a clearing surrounded by fine trees several of which were as old as itself, set in a place apart, one could see it in the distance, slender, immobile, stiffened, allowing the breeze to stir only the lighter fall of its pale and quivering plume (...) Seen close at hand, drops without strength fell back from the column of water crossing on their way their climbing sisters and, at times, torn, caught in an eddy of the night air, disturbed by this ceaseless flow, floated awhile before being drowned in the basin. They teased with their hesitations, with their passage in the opposite direction, and blurred with their soft vapour the vertical tension of that stem, bearing aloft an oblong cloud composed of a thousand tiny drops, but

apparently painted in an unchanging, golden brown which rose, unbreakable, constant, urgent, swift, to mingle with the clouds in the sky.” (Proust, 2015b: p. 41)

Bidou-Zahariassen joins the same interpretation of the fountain as a symbol of the mobility of the social space, saying: “a metaphor of the society represented through a large basin set in motion by a jet of water. Some are carried upwards but can also fall before others climb in their turn” (Bidou-Zahariassen, 1997: p. 78). From the fixation of the aquarium and the barrier of glass in front of which lurks the threat of the hungry masses, to the fountain that returns the same water, there is a continuous change and declassification, forcing to climb to the top those who were at the bottom at the beginning. Hence, one can perceive the Proust conception of time as a time that goes forward, but carries with it and repeats the past. It is persistence, but at the same time—a change.

4. The Time of the Dream and the Narrative Time in the Space of the “Second Apartment”

On the other side of the opera’s lights, the indefinite spheres of the dream extend. And the dream is tied to the dark room and the bed which becomes the chronotope of life and death, of birth and of the attenuation of consciousness. And only in the dream do the differences and demarcations completely disappear. “For a long time I would go to bed early” (Proust, 2015d: p. 1), the first sentence of the overture of the novel and especially the adverb “long time” puts Time in the center of the reader’s attention, and at the same time creates the first division between the character who once had the experience and the Narrator who much later tries to create a story about that same experience. But, between them, the third instance will be inserted, that of the dreamer, through whose memory the story of Combray will actually be created, and later the whole novel. The initial triple arrangement of the narrative levels, as Marcel Miller (Muller, 1965, 1979) calls them, on the one hand complicates the structure of the novel and creates a Narrator who, although not omniscient, except in *Swann in Love*, still writes the story that the character lives and for which even at the end of the novel he decides to be the subject of his future writings. The very experience of the dream for the character creates a constant search, loss and finding of himself, which speaks much more generally about the simple understanding of the subject, which in fact can be followed by all further analyzes of the novel. The multiplication of the self of the narrative subject leads to the free disposal of time, and thus to the perception of one’s own self through fragments that allow mutual replacement and arbitrary combination: “When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly bodies. Instinctively he consults them when he awakes, and in an instant reads off his own position on the earth’s surface and the time that has elapsed during his slumbers; but this ordered procession is apt to grow confused, and to break its ranks” (Proust, 2015d: p. 4). The deepest spheres of human existence, which are reduced exclusively to the sensations of the body, but where the

representation or image is absent, show the human in its ultimate ambivalence, but at the same time possessing all potentials for the realization of his existence in the rational stabilization of ideas. Temporal, spatial, sexual, social, historical or religious identifications are even a consequence of one Being that is common to all human. Scripture is a kind of rationalization of the deepest passions and affections that permeate both the rational phase of its existence and which can stabilize the image of oneself and of the other only through the memory that comes to help to give place to things. In line with Ricœur's theoretical proposition (Ricœur, 1990), a rationalized sign that operates through memory is needed to create a coherent picture of what the self is: "I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute than the cave-dweller; but then the memory—not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived and might now very possibly be—would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being" (Proust, 2015d: p. 4).

In *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the Narrator will return to the experience of the dream, but this time the scene is set in the heart of the revelation of the darkest passions and the viciousness. The return from Raspelière where the gatherings take place is almost always accompanied by the Narrator sinking into a deep sleep. Deep sleep is described as sinking into a deep dark apartment, a kind of space without time, in which only indeterminate sounds are recognized, in which one lives, but which is at a primitive stage. The time of the deepest dream is in fact the moment when that time turns into a space, into a second apartment, i.e. into a fixed, immutable matter in which the subject melts, who has no awareness of himself, and thus no awareness of time and its leakage. It has already been established that in some segments like these, Proust is close to the idea of Schopenhauer's Being, and that his deepest expression, as with the philosopher, can be expressed through the abstraction of music (Kristeva, 1994). The Being is identified with the will, which is not a personal and reasonable motivation, but an essential energy carried by the subject. From this experience of the dream the Narrator draws that energy which later becomes the energy of the writing. The novel begins with the awakening from the dream, and the second overture is with the transposition in the room where the goodnight kiss is missing. In the second apartment, the Narrator will compare his writing activity with that of the owl's blindness ("like an owl sees a little bit clearly only in the shadows", Proust, 2015f).

5. Identification and Metamorphosis of the Characters

The dark room becomes a space of creation and is tied to the kiss, the relation to the mother and the ability to write. But the ritual of falling asleep in the dark room at night also contains a kaleidoscope showing images from history, where Gallo instructs Geneviève. The phenomenon of sacrifice incarnated by Geneviève will continue as identification in the further course of the novel. The be-

ginning of the novel, which tells the story of a childhood spent in Combray and which gives the key scene with the madeleine dipped in a cup of tea, evokes twice the references to a neglected child, a helpless victim or a sacrifice. For example, when the mother reads *François le Champi* to the Narrator at bedtime, she skips the tickling scenes of incest suggested by the book. In fact, George Sand's book is about an abandoned child raised by Madeleine who took pity on him, but in later years the child returns and falls in love with her, alluding to a quasi-incestuous relationship between the surrogate mother and the son found. In a second example, the father forbids a goodnight kiss, which is compared to the Bible's Abraham who's to sacrifice his son Isaac. In the later part of the novel, the Narrator is the one who has fantasies about Duchesse de Guermantes and wishes her to be a helpless girl to whom he would confide his love. But even with Albertine, his idea comes true, because Albertine is a child without parents assigned to be raised by her aunt. Few years later, the Narrator will place her in his apartment, buy her dresses, correct her vocabulary, in one word, will start treating her as a child and work on her education and progress.

In *Albertine Gone*, the Narrator conducts a kind of police search when, after Albertine's death, he tries to find out about her offenses. At that moment he realizes that he lacks a Narrator who will tell her story and if Albertine is the character who bears the blame in this novel, unlike the psychological-detective novels that this quest resembles, here we never hear her confession. The abandoned child who is first Marcel and then Albertine, never manages to tell his/her story, because Marcel needs to take his mother's place in order to be able to stand up in front of his work as in front of his own child. Actually, in one of his interviews Proust compares the writing of a book with the birth of a child.

In *The Captive* (Proust, 2015e), Françoise interrupts between Albertine and Marcel, as well as she did initially between the child and the mother (Coudert, 2014). Also, the letter that she refuses to take to his mother repeats the scene with the message from Albertine that Françoise does not want to pass to Marcel. Albertine is Marcel's alterity, she is the woman who emerges from the thigh at the very beginning of the novel, like Eve who is born of Adam, and through her sin, represents Marcel's wrongdoing towards his mother and the worries he causes her. That concern for Albertine is in fact the duality that the Narrator has to overcome in order to start writing. Hence, in fact, arises the complete distance from the problems in the work, unlike the strategy of other novels where the characters speak and suffer. Albertine's death (Proust, 2015a) is both a transcendence of herself and her role of helplessness in sin, and thus the beginning of the writing for the Narrator.

6. Conclusion

From all these times and all intertextualities, whether they refer to the history of literature or the history of societies, or to the fusion of the personal with the collective, it is certain that Proust brings a new experience of plasticity (Malabou,

2005) of time and space in world literature.

From one point of view, Proust unconsciously approached the new reflections on Time that physics at the time found through the work of Albert Einstein. Proust was aware that he made a new distortion of time and that he probably achieved in the novel what the physicist knows in his science, although he can neither understand nor explain his theory. In December 1921, Proust addressed a letter to Duc de Guiche, saying: “No matter how many people write to me that I derive from him or he from me, I do not understand a single word of his theories, not knowing algebra. And I doubt for my part that he has read my novels. We seem to have an analogous way of distorting time. But I can’t figure it out myself...”. (Grunspan, 2017)

On the other hand, despite all the philosophical and scientific implications that were present in the era when Proust created, his work evokes equally the Christian thought, although not without considering its modification. Apart from the numerous references to Christianity, through which the novelist’s vocation is understood as a kind of prophecy, as opposed to the numerous references that are intertextual retrieval of biblical stories with inevitable recoding and even blasphemy (Mingelgrun, 1978). That is the metamorphic transition from one form to another. For the writer, it will have a figurative meaning in the attempt through sensations, perceptions and emotions to achieve the transfer of the whole body and soul in the narrative text, to restructure all the dimensions of life, more precisely the subject’s relationship with the world through the pages of the novel.

Although we can conclude that “a little time in the pure state” (Proust, 2015f) was not the only goal of the author, we can not refuse that he sees Art as a state of realized identification between the artist and the Being. That assertion testifies that at a time when ideas related to German idealism were circulating on the scientific scene in France, a new stream of thinkers was emerging who believed that creativity should sublimate the unconscious, which is at odds with the tendency to create argumentative and purely intellectual prose. The works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer were translated, and Proust was trying to capture their subversive message. The works of the Russian writers, especially Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, from which the writer takes the themes of parricide, guilt, sin, and suicide, follow the indomitable contents of deep psychology. Proust therefore aspires to a redefinition of the relationship between the artist and the Being, situated between the structure of things and the series of coincidences that include these objects in the matrix of life flow, between past and future, truth and lie, life and death, reality and the imaginary (Descombes, 1987). That is why many authors will talk about the incarnation of Proust’s ideas, and not about their bare existence behind the appearance of things. Hence, the novel reveals the essential characteristic of Proust’s understanding of reality and the Being as dynamism, change and revision, and the connection of two opposing states, the possession of multiple identities at the same time (Henry, 2000).

According to that vision, the qualities of space and time become complementary entities, as Proust explains it himself at the very end of the novel: “I would therein describe men, if need be, as monsters occupying a place in Time infinitely more important than the restricted one reserved for them in space, a place, on the contrary, prolonged immeasurably since, simultaneously touching widely separated years and the distant periods they have lived through” (Proust, 2015f: p. 279). In fact, the place in time is more important than the concrete space, and vice versa, the places are immeasurably prolonged because of their affiliation to different times. And the work of art will become for Proust the ideal monument to reconnect the years and the places.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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