

Proust's New Look

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Over nearly three quarters of a century, the house of Gallimard has made handsome amends for its rejection, in 1912, of the typescript submitted by Marcel Proust, then forty years old, and with no track record of significant publication, as one would say nowadays. From 1916 there was the famous NRF paperback edition, with the last volumes produced posthumously from a collection of manuscripts which would daunt all but the toughest and most devoted readers. Then, in 1954, there was the Pléiade edition, for which Pierre Clarac and André Ferré were able to review Proust's manuscripts and other documents. And now we have a new Pléiade edition, in four volumes.¹

That a new edition was needed is undisputable. Since 1954, virtually all Proust's papers have come into the public domain, and for twenty-five years they have been the subject of intense scrutiny. Publication of extracts from these papers, in particular from the nearly one hundred exercise books which were Proust's favored way of writing, has revealed countless surprises, and gradually we have come to understand the genesis of the Proustian text in a new way. It is certainly timely that we should now be given an edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu* which records substantial portions of these exercise books and typescripts, and which illuminates the text from the genetic standpoint which is nowadays so much in favor in Proust studies. One advantage of having this abundance of new documents at hand is that the text itself, particularly in the posthumous portions, could be improved. Not that the material available makes the editors' choices easy; Proust's different revisions often conflict, and the typescripts are sometimes unfaithful to the original manuscript. Besides, there are still a few gaps in the collection. But the choices made here are based on consistent principles, and seem eminently reasonable.

One of the drawbacks of a search for authenticity is that the original volume breaks had more to do with the space available than with the logic of the novel's organization. Traces of this remain, naturally. The crux comes in vol. IV where editors have to decide where exactly *Albertine disparue* (or *La Fugitive*; the editors restore the original title) becomes *Le Temps retrouvé*; the manuscript makes no division. The new editors have chosen to make the division right in the middle of the Narrator's visit to Tansonville; the matter will always be debatable and debated. I have to say that the reason given for breaking there, as well as the reasons for preferring the 1925 title, seem to me unconvincing and illogical.

The first volume has a substantial introduction by the distinguished scholar who has been in charge of the new enterprise, Jean-Yves Tadié. In it he sets out to write the history of *La recherche*, that is, to "retracer les progrès

¹ Marcel Proust, *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, NRF, Bibliothèque de las Pléiade, 1987-1990).

d'une vocation," and he does so brilliantly. There is no biography in the usual sense, and absolutely no aesthetic evaluation, except for the comment that having for so long envied the English for having Shakespeare, the Italians for Dante, and the Germans for Goethe, the French acquired, with Proust, their own supreme writer. Tadié's account of Proust's life as an author is illuminating; it is also exceptionally perceptive, frighteningly well informed,² and written with both elegance and passion. Anyone who wants to know the humble origins and the complex, fascinating growth of *La recherche* need look no further, it is all here.

This approach is followed by the team of editors who together have been responsible for the separate parts of *La Recherche*. Each part has its "Notice" placed at the end of the volume. We are told when the original edition was published, and it is briefly characterized. The fundamental elements are then traced back in Proust's writings. A privileged position is given to the exercise books Proust began to write in 1909, which lead directly to the novel itself, and to the version (well advanced for the first half of the novel, sketchy for the remainder) which Proust prepared in 1911-1912. Only *Swann* was published in 1913, so for all the other parts, the editors have had to trace the subsequent elaboration which took place during the war, including many episodes, indeed some whole sections, which were not envisaged in 1913, but which the original frame was able to accommodate. These Notices give us a good sense of the truly fascinating story of how the great novel gradually emerged from the "clusters" of well-defined episodes into the tightly organized, but at the same time, exhilaratingly free structure of the 3000 pages which constitute the final version.

Though the Notices adopt a genetic framework, they usually discuss Proust's choices in the light of aesthetic necessity (and not of biographical pressures), and show, often with much insight, how the elements finally join together and form a complex unity. Only the notice on "Un Amour de Swann" seems to me to give an unsatisfactory answer to the question of the integration of that episode into the whole; the editor seeks an answer in the author's biography, and the strong structural links are virtually ignored. And I was disappointed with the Notice on *Le Temps retrouvé*, which is relatively short, and which traces the prehistory of the elements of that volume, without giving much attention to the structure, and without ever presenting the volume as a unity.

The Notices are followed by notes and variants on the text. The notes are often magnificent, and reveal immense erudition, worn lightly and used to illuminate. Allusions are not only clarified in themselves, Proust's own awareness of the subject is explored, through an apparently exhaustive knowledge of the manuscripts and the correspondence. The annotation of "Combray" by Francine Goujon is particularly fine, and should be consulted by everyone with a professional interest in presenting this part of the novel, so much better known than the rest.

² Though there are some errors, some of which are mentioned below.

The unique contribution made by this new edition, however, is in the wealth of variants, earlier versions culled from the voluminous manuscripts and the typescripts. The general introduction is followed by an inventory of the Proust collection held by the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, by Florence Callu, who is presently the conservateur of the Manuscript room, and who was responsible for the classification of the manuscripts, which she has tended for nearly thirty years. This inventory—22 pages, nearly 200 documents, of which 164, if I have counted correctly, are of material directly related to *La Recherche*—indicates just how daunting is the task facing anyone who wishes to know Proust through his working drafts. One can only feel immensely grateful to the team of scholars who have prepared these volumes, making so much of this treasure trove accessible, and who have done so with such a high degree of professional conscience and competence. Guided by the Notices and the general introduction, we can follow the elaboration of the various incidents for ourselves.

What material has been selected for presentation? How has it been transcribed? Are the transcriptions reliable? Here, inevitably, there is more room for disagreement.

The first two questions need not detain us. Even running to four fat volumes, nearly 7200 pages, of which the novel itself fills just over 3000, there is room for only a selection of the material that exists, and as with any anthology, there will be regrets that some important passages have been overlooked. But the selection is generous, and one can respect the editors' decisions, noting only that room could have been found for even more soundings if there had been fewer overlaps between the different parts. (We explain the reason for these overlaps below.) As for the method of transcription, while one can understand the disapproval of some specialists, who expect a faithful transliteration of all the hesitations which the manuscript reveal, I do tend to agree that in an edition like this, a simplified transcription makes sense. Significant additions and deletions are usually mentioned in the notes. This edition should satisfy all but the scholar who needs total precision, and he or she can have recourse to other means. As for reliability, the standard is extremely high. However, an attentive reader might entertain some doubts when he or she notices that some manuscript passages appear twice, and that the transcriptions given do not wholly agree³. Occasionally the notes are wrongly placed⁴.

³ See I, 950 and 1: 1009; 1: 986 and 992; 2: 1847 (var. 905c) and 1: 660; 1: 1458 (note 1 to p. 783) and 1517 (1031 n. 6); I, 955-58 and II, 887-88; 1: 958 and 2: 891-2. There are other errors, which an unwary reader could not suspect. On 1: 833, line 4, there should not be a new sentence at "Moi"; at 1: 1509, note 1 to p. 1015, read "De plus, " not "De même"; 3: 1860, description of book 64, read "Deux ans après" for "près." At least one transcription seems to me to have been botched and that is the passage on pages 34 and 35 of the typescript, transcribed on p. 1102. Proust rewrote these pages, and the text printed here is a jumble of the two versions. One sentence, for example, which Proust moved and modified, now appears twice, once in the original place and in its original form, one in its new place, in the revised form. Twice, the editors take it upon themselves to "correct" Proust. At the top of I, 52, the editions actually omit the word "et," arguing in the note that it was added mistakenly by Proust to his typescript, and created a notorious absurdity which influenced Gide when he recommended the rejection of *Swann* in 1912. I believe the evidence shows that the nonsensical detail was what Proust, for once nodding, actually wanted; in any case, it should not have been removed. Finally, 3: 961, Guermantes is "corrected" to Garmantes, although the hesitation between the two forms, noted on 1: 1436, helps to date certain notebooks, and should not be obliterated.

⁴ Note 911a (1: 1481) should have been inserted at p. 914.

More contentious, in my view, is the resolution of the question of how this material should be integrated. A first decision was to distinguish passages in exercise books which are like embryos of passages in *La Recherche* from the typescript and proofs, which are considered as first versions of the novel proper. Proust, as we have implied already, worked in segments, constantly rewriting, expanding, joining parts together, separating others. Consequently, a given incident will have many antecedents, most of them placed in different contexts. Where the editor judges these antecedents to be of interest, he cites them, often extensively. They are termed "Esquisses," and numbered consecutively for each part of the novel. Thus all the Sketches for the first episode of a book are given, arranged chronologically, before the Sketches for the following episode⁵. As a single manuscript text might feed several episodes in the novel, the manuscript units are frequently divided into segments, depending on the use to which they are eventually put. Hence the overlapping extracts, when one sequential passage is relevant to different portions of the novel.

The manuscripts do not exhaust the sources for variant texts. When Proust was on the right path, he would put a fair copy together, and have it typed. These typescripts were then worked over more, indeed the proofs themselves were submitted to further revision. Because the typescripts and proofs are generally reasonably close to the final text, the editors have put the variants in with the notes, rather than separately as another set of Sketches. When the typescript diverges significantly from the final version, the variant is accordingly long. The record is held by the manuscript version (typed out, but subsequently completely reworked) of the opening of *Sodome II*, filling no fewer than 55 pages (3: 1300 ff). For typescript variants of more than a page or two (and there are several such), the editors might have had recourse to calling them Sketches, which would have brought them more readily to the reader's attention.⁶

With this one reservation, the plan adopted strikes me as an ingenious solution to a tricky problem, and probably the best one. There is a certain logic about attaching all the sketches of a particular incident together, and placing them in the order in which we come across the incidents in question as we read the book, and the general reader can assuredly find it interesting to follow an incident through its various versions. But the moment the reader starts wondering about the narrative context of the earlier versions (that is, what came immediately before and immediately after a given Sketch, whether it was part of the same sequence or not), problems arise. Indications are there, in plenty, to help the reader reconstitute the original settings. But they are scattered, and it needs great singleness of purpose to use them to work out the answer to a question the editors do not seem to have found important⁷. The task of finding one's way round the hundreds of Sketches which have been included could have been simplified if we had been given a single listing of the Sketches with

⁵ Sometimes they are numbered consecutively, sometimes subdivided as parts of one number. Editorial policy is inconsistent on this one, even once changing in mid stream (2: 932).

⁶ There are some occasions where an important variant is given only in a note. Thus the first appearance of the wheel-tapper (notebook 26) is cited in a note to *Le Temps retrouvé*, 4: 1397-99, where it could easily be missed.

⁷ It is much less easy to find the information one needs about *Le temps retrouvé* than is the case with the other parts of the novel.

their sources, and if the Inventory of the Bibliothèque Nationale's collection had been given in strict numerical order, with perhaps an index to the Sketches incorporated.⁸

One of the indications that helps the reader is that the editors have scrupulously given the date for each quotation from a manuscript source. On the whole these datings can be trusted, but there are contradictions from one part of the novel to another, which only the most attentive reading would bring to light, and other assertions could be questioned. The careful insistence on suggesting 1908-1909 for the beginnings is unnecessary; Proust did not start using the exercise books before the end of 1908, and we have nothing of the pages he said he had written in 1908, despite two indications to the contrary⁹. With regard to the fair copy and typescript of "Combray" in late 1909, it is wrong to say that the madeleine was in place when Proust read an extract to Hahn (1: 1072); it was added to the typescript at the last minute. A number of elements are attributed to 1909, when there is no reason to put them earlier than 1910, when Proust had pulled most of "Combray" together, and was busy amplifying "Querqueville" (later Balbec).¹⁰ The editors have not always taken into consideration the fact that Proust did not write any of his exercise books in one movement, and there are several cases where later additions are attributed here to the same date as the basic layer of the book in question¹¹.

It is inevitable that in an enterprise of this size, there will be errors. Considering the intricacy of the material presented, and the opportunities for mistakes to creep in, it is amazing how few there are. Nevertheless, they do exist, and for the specialist, who is using this edition to study as much of the history of the novel as possible, they can be quite irritating. Apart from a handful of typographical errors which the reader can correct¹², I might note some er-

⁸ The trouble with listing the hundred or so exercise books according to categories is not only that it becomes very difficult to look up a book if one does not know its status in advance; it gives a misleading impression that the status of each book is clearly determined. That is not the case, however. Many books were abandoned and picked up again later, many books contain material that does not belong to the category where the book has been impaled. Moreover, some classifications appear arbitrary, such as the decision to classify books 69 and 22 (for some reason listed in the inverse order) as the manuscript of "Un Amour de Swann" rather than as part of the "roman de 1909-1911" (and why 1911 rather than 1910?), and the decision to put 23, which also belongs to the 1909-1910 novel, at the end of the short section on "Autour de Mme Swann" (it should in any case come first, not last).

⁹ Citing in the Notice to Combray (1: 1059) the list of "pages écrites" which appears on Proust's carnet, the editor says that the episode "Ce que m'ont appris le côté de Villebon et le côté de Méséglise" was published by Kolb in *Textes retrouvés*. This is not so; the original sketch is missing, like all the other "pages écrites" of 1908. The version published by Kolb, following Thierry Maulnier and Bardèche, is taken from *Cahier 26*, i.e., Sketch LV of this edition. Nor can it be said that the large sheets in "Proust 45" belong to 1908, just because the "pages écrites" were, according to Bernard de Fallois who saw them in the early fifties, on large sheets (1: xxvii).

¹⁰ E.G. Bergotte in book 29 (1: xlvii and 1068; 2: 1323 gets it right); Maria (1: lviii); book 32 (2: 1841 and by implication 1317; correct on 1: 1455); book 30 (2: 1885, correct at 1: 1455). However, I believe that the opening pages of book 36 do date from 1909 (as 4: 1002, 1335, 1339, 1353) and not 1910 (as 3: 1816).

¹¹ Reference to Padua, and to the kitchen maid in notebook 5 are later than the first pages of this notebook, and tie in coherently with the later expansion of "Combray" (1: xlvii and 1066). 1: 1189, the pages on Swann and Anna are much earlier than the rest of this notebook. On 2: 1317 a brief episode in book 6 (reproduced 3: 933) is said to be the first appearance of the name Querqueville (the Normandy resort). But it is an addition, and the first mention of Querqueville is certainly in book 8, when Proust sketched the famous opening scene where the Narrator recalls various bedrooms in which he has slept. 4: 1154, I am not convinced that the passage at the back of book 51 (inverted), which gives the first version of the "bal de têtes," is 1909, like the first section of that notebook.

¹² 1: 1310, book 29 is 1909 or (better) 1910, not 1900. 1: 1441, var. 705b, there should be no stop at the end of the variant, which is continued by the main text on p. 705.

rors in the references.¹³ Sometimes the information given is misleading¹⁴, very occasionally wrong¹⁵; sometimes the editors omit an explanation where one is called for¹⁶, or give one which could be improved upon¹⁷.

No doubt these tiny instances could be multiplied. But it must be stressed that in proportion to the mass of information contained in these beautiful volumes, these flaws are infinitesimally tiny¹⁸. There is no question that this edition represents a major advance in Proust scholarship.

¹³ The paragraph on 1: 800 is described in the note (1461) as being on f. 14r of the manuscript; this should read 14v. The detail is significant, as verso passages are invariably additions, Proust writing first on one side only of the page. At 1: 1125, n.3, the reference should be to *Esquisse XVII*, not to XVIII. The note to 912a (1: 1481) is quite confusing; it should not read f. 23-27, reproduced on 892ff. but 21-25, repr. 895-97. The identification of the first sketch of *Sodome* should be 7, f. 39, not f. 29. 3: 1927, line 3, the reference should read f. 87, not 85.

¹⁴ The painter of book 12 is not yet Elstir (2: 989). The use of the name Anna for Maria in book 64 suggests not just that Proust was confused, but that he was actually copying an earlier sketch (3: 1861). On the other hand, the appearance of the names Jean and Françoise in 22 was probably a case of distraction. But they are not replaced "later" by Swann and Odette (1: clv), whose identities have been established for some time. The note at the name "Jean" on p. 946 should have been given also on p. 926-27. 2: 1883 (1061a), it is misleading to say that Proust skips a line; if he did so, it was because the episode was complete, and in the notebook he passed on to something different.

¹⁵ Notebook 69 contains a substantial essay on Leconte de Lisle, not Baudelaire (1: cliii, repeated 3: 1860). I also question the statement that a passage quoted on 1: 1246-47 is from book 22, it seems to me to belong to the next stage in the elaboration of "Un Amour." More important, Cahier 49 is said to be earlier than 39-43, which in fact it completes, to give the first draft of *Le Côté de Guermantes* (3: 1206, 1209, 1827).

¹⁶ On 2: 1007 the concluding phrase "J'étais décidé etc." surely requires a note giving the reference, which is probably to notebook 12, reproduced as the following sketch. On 2: 1107 there is an allusion to something written just five pages earlier in the same notebook, which is reproduced here as a later sketch, on p. 1150; a cross-reference would be useful.

¹⁷ Annotating the short extract from book 64 (1004 n.1) the editor professes to be puzzled by the indication "voir plus haut," yet when the same words reappear nine lines lower, he gives a cross-reference to book 12, which applied equally well to both instances. A note on 2: 1867 says that Proust is referring to an episode which has not survived, perhaps was never written. But it seems to me that it is the episode reproduced in 1: 972-73. The marginal addition which "does not fit" (1: 862) is surely a variant of the sentence three lines down from there.

¹⁸ Dare one suggest that there are hints of an *esprit de chapelle* here and there? It is a pity that acknowledgment is not made to Françoise Leriche for having redated the "Combray" typescript at the same time as Wada (1: bd), and curious that in the case of a letter first published by one of the team, no reference is made to the volume of Philip Kolb's edition of the *Correspondance* where it has subsequently been reprinted (1: xlvi).