

In Another Time: Proust, Hemingway and the Fourth Dimension

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It may seem odd, at first glance, to compare Ernest Hemingway and Marcel Proust. The public image of the American writer is that of a macho hunter and whiskey-drinking womanizer who revolutionized world writing with his short, terse sentences and truer than life dialog, whereas the Parisian author was a social-climbing aesthete who suffered from asthma and lived in a cork-lined apartment, a neurasthenic whose long sentences and remembrance of time past are viewed as the high point of psychological realism and the art of the novel in France.

Public myth aside, and private idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, the element that brings these two novelists together is time: space-time on the one hand and art on the other, and both together as the manifestation and synthesis of minds that are hyperconscious of death and the vicissitudes of the self. Time (the passage of time and the relativity of time) is the theme common to both men's writing: Hemingway links it with love, whereas Proust ties it to memory.

In *Green Hills of Africa* Hemingway describes ecstatic love as "to have, and be, and live in, to possess now again for always, for that long sudden-ended always; making time stand still, sometimes so very still that afterwards you wait to hear it move, and it is slow in starting."¹ How can time stand still, objectively speaking? The planets never stop orbiting around the sun, the galaxies turn, clocks keep ticking, and all living things move inexorably from birth toward death. In the physical and biological worlds time never stops, yet Proust, like Hemingway, under special circumstances, has the feeling that he has escaped from time. There is another realm besides the scientific one and, if Hemingway and Proust are right, it is based on our inner subjective sense of ecstasy and joy. It is a happiness that transcends the temporal and it prompts Marcel, the narrator in *Du côté de chez Swann*, after his first electrifying experience, known as the episode of the *madeleine* (a cookie in the form of a scallop shell), to say that he no longer feels "mediocre, contingent, mortal."²

Hemingway glorifies the senses, as Proust does, but differently. For Hemingway, love is a religion, whereas for Proust love is a disease that makes people behave in jealous, erratic, and yet predictable ways. In *A Farewell to Arms* Catherine tells Frederic that he's her religion,³ and in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* Maria

¹ Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Scribner's, 1935) 72.

² Marcel Proust, "Du Côté de chez Swann," in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954) 1: 45. My translation. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text after the abbreviation Swann.

³ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Scribner's, 1929) 116.

says she is thankful "to have been another time in *la gloria*."⁴ Allen Josephs points out that in Spanish, *estar en la gloria* means to be in heaven—"to be out of this world, to be in ecstasy"—and he equates it with sexual mysticism.⁵

For Proust, being in love is an experience that heightens the senses and rejuvenates the self, but it has no mystical or even sexual ecstasy. On the contrary, he compares love to the cholera bacillus whose ravages on the body are long lasting and far flung. For Proust, love is based on an illusion and it inevitably leads to deception. Only memory can resurrect the past and the ecstasy, and it gives Swann the feeling that he is timeless.

According to Proust, there are two kinds of memory: voluntary and involuntary. He discards voluntary memory as being of no consequence whereas involuntary memory occurs spontaneously, when a taste, a smell, a sound, or a bodily sensation act as catalysts in order to resurrect a fragment of the past. The *madeleine* is one such episode in which the taste of the cookie impregnated with tea is capable of dramatizing a whole visual and affective landscape: the room of Marcel's aunt in which he first tasted a *madeleine*, the house in Combray where he grew up, the town square, and the streets all emerge, lock stock and barrel from a past that he thought had been forgotten forever, but which now unfold in his mind's eye in complete and vivid detail (Swann 46-48). The past is the present and the present is the past and Marcel has the illusion that he has escaped from time. It is this simultaneity, this fusion of two time zones that gives him a sense of insuperable joy (Swann 45). During such privileged moments death is held at bay and time stands still. For Proust the body is a reservoir from which the past can emerge intact and become the present thereby generating the ecstasy of remembrance.

Proust incorporates this knowledge into the title of his novel, *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The work is a unified architectural structure in which, among other things, the narrator writes about his search for a subject. Only in the last volume, *Le temps retrouvé* (time regained) does Marcel come to understand that these so-called privileged moments during which time is abolished and the full intensity of the past is recovered in the present, that these moments will be the subject matter of his novel.⁶ The uneven paving stones in the Guermantes courtyard resurrect the uneven paving stones felt underfoot during a trip to Venice, the feel on his lips of a starched napkin, the sound of a spoon tinkling against a coffee cup, the melody of a violin sonata all evoke moments of the past that are relived as though they were occurring in the present.

For example, during the course of their affair, Swann and Odette refer to the Vinteuil Sonata as the national anthem of their love. It is an emblematic sound, like the sight of an orchid which is their emblematic flower—the flower of love-making (*faire catterleya*)—and Botticelli's painting of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, in one of the Sixtine Frescoes, which is an emblematic portrait of Odette. Sight, however, is not one of Proust's privileged senses, and it cannot revive the past involun-

⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Scribner's, 1940) 379. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text after the abbreviation FWBT.

⁵ Allen Josephs, "Love in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*: Hemingway's Undiscovered Country." Paper presented at The International Hemingway Conference in Guilin, China, July 21, 1993.

⁶ Marcel Proust, "Le temp retrouvé," in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

tarily. However, the sound of the Vinteuil Sonata functions in the same way that the taste of the *madeleine* does, and long after Swann believes that he had forgotten Odette, the sound of the violin one afternoon at a reception given by Princess Mathilde revives the past and his love for Odette in rhythmic oxymoronic pangs of joy and sadness. Proust's aesthetic is more unified than Hemingway's and it permeates the entire structure of his novel. Although Proust's treatment of time is more comprehensive, his view of love is so cynical that we need Hemingway's linkage of love and time as an antidote to the Frenchman's pessimism.

Although Hemingway uses flashbacks, he does not fuse the past and the present the way Proust does. Whatever fusion exists occurs during the love act as, for example, when Catherine and Frederic in *A Farewell to Arms* become "the same one." This loss of self in the other is a misnomer because so much is gained in that moment when time stops: joy, happiness, heaven, eternal life, here and now, *hic et nunc* as the Gospel says. This is truly beyond time, since life everlasting is also time everlasting. It is eternity and to have experienced eternity in a moment of orgasm is hyperbole of the highest kind. Maria tells Jordan that she is thankful "to have been another time in *la gloria*" (FWBT 379). Of the four times they make love only two are detailed love scenes, i.e., when the earth moves on the afternoon of the second day and again in the early hours of the fourth morning. After the final love scene Maria says "another time," in a manner that implies another heavenly experience. Yet "another time" in addition to the "fourth time" have connotations that evoke Hemingway's allusions to the fourth, fifth, and sixth dimensions of writing. The fourth dimension, which is based on laws of motion, the relativity of distance, time, and mass, defines Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. It postulates that the world we live in is a four-dimensional space-time continuum. But what does it mean to apply the fourth dimension to Hemingway's writing?

A railroad track, for example, is a one-dimensional space continuum. The surface of the sea is a two-dimensional continuum, whereas an airplane pilot guides his plane through a three-dimensional continuum. He, like a sailor, has to consider not only longitude and latitude, but also altitude. However, in order to describe a physical event involving motion it is also necessary to state how position changes in time as well as in space. Time, then, is the fourth dimension. The fact that an airplane is at latitude x , longitude y , and altitude z means nothing to a traffic controller unless the time coordinate is given. The world must be viewed as a space-time continuum and all measurements of time are also measurements in space.⁷

According to Lincoln Barnett, the author of *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, a theoretical concept is devoid of content to the degree that it is deprived of sensory experience. "For the only world man can truly know," he says, "is the world created for him by his senses" (UE 123). This is also the world of art and, specifically, the works we are discussing by Hemingway and Proust. If man expunges all the impressions which the senses translate and which memory stores, nothing is left. All we have is "the colorless, soundless, impalpable cosmos which lies like an iceberg beneath the plane of man's perceptions" (UE 123-24; my emphasis). It is worth noting that Barnett, like Hemingway, also uses the iceberg analogy in order

⁷ Lincoln Barnett, *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* (New York: New American Library, 1954) 74-76. Subsequent page references will appear in the text, after the abbreviation UE.

to describe the difference between science and life. Science uses mathematics as a theoretical sign-system in order to define concepts such as gravitation, electromagnetism, energy, current, momentum, the atom, the neutron, and so forth. But, says Barnett, they are all "theoretical substructures, inventions, metaphors which man's intellect has contrived to help him picture the true, the objective reality he apprehends beneath the surface of things" (*UE* 124). Although it may not be accurate to speak of an objective reality that is independent of the point of view of an observer, it may be useful to think of art as giving substance to the abstractions of science. It would seem that the chaotic and deceitful representations of the senses do have a coherent, although invisible, structure. The art of Hemingway and Proust is that visible one eighth of the iceberg that gives substance to the theoretical substructures their writing alludes to, either directly or indirectly. For Proust there are the *madeleine*, the Vinteuil Sonata, the uneven paving stones, the starched napkin, and involuntary memory, all of which stop time, whereas for Hemingway there is the experience of oneness between two people and the intensity of a love that is capable of arresting time.

Hemingway's depiction of Maria and the curve of her throat, the evocation of the smell of crushed heather, Jordan's desire and the movement of the minute hand on the dial of his small watch, and then the narration of the love act with the overriding use of the word "now," followed in due course by the sight of the pines against the sky, the low-swung stars, and the fast coming of the morning—whatever the necessary descriptive function of these things may be—also seem specifically designed to call the reader's attention to the fourth dimension that is the underpinning of the love scenes.⁸ "Now Robert Jordan lay with the girl and he watched time passing on his wrist. It went slowly, almost imperceptibly, for it was a small watch and he could not see the second hand. But as he watched the minute hand he found he could almost check its motion with his concentration. . . . his eyes close to the watch where the lance-pointed, luminous splinter moved slowly up the left face of the dial. He could see its movement clearly and steadily now and he held Maria close now to slow it. He did not want to wake her . . . now in this last time. . . . He could see the hand moving on the watch and he held her tighter . . . and he saw the hand of the watch now mounting in sharp angle toward the top where the hour was" (*FWBT* 378).

Why, we might ask, does Hemingway describe Jordan's watch in such detail when, in fact, his desire is focusing on Maria with "an aching hollowness of wanting" (*FWBT* 158). Clearly the overture describing the inanimate watch hands adumbrates the movement of Jordan's living hands, not to mention a certain "mounting in sharp angle"; it also serves to contrast objective time with subjective time. Holding Maria close is enough to slow time even as in due course making love will stop it. Hence the emphasis on the watch and the repetition of the word "now" both of which stress the present in a language that highlights Jordan's subjectivity, i.e., his rapture, religious ecstasy, veneration, altruism, and oneness. As

⁸ In *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, edited by Paul Smith, Michael S. Reynolds informs us that from 1922 to 1928 the *New York Times* carried 172 stories about Einstein and that during that time some 100 articles about him were published in English and American Journals and periodicals (255). In *The Young Hemingway* (New York: Blackwell, 1986), Reynolds cites a phrase that Hadley used in a letter to Hemingway in the Spring, 1929, referring to "an unknown fourth dimension just like ours" (208). Reynolds goes on to say that "the idea of a fourth dimension was much discussed in those days, for Einstein's theories of relativity turned him into an international figure" (209).

the love act moves toward climax and the merging of the two bodies into one, the past, the present, and the future are experienced simultaneously, and the couple ascends to heaven and is fulfilled, and time also stops. When their descent begins, slowly, the ticking of objective time resumes. It is worth quoting the passage in some detail because, in addition to time, the biblical connotations are striking: "Then they were together so that as the hand on the watch moved, unseen now, they knew that nothing could ever happen to the one that did not happen to the other . . . this was all and always; this was what had been and now and whatever was to come. . . . They were having now and before and always and now and now and now. . . . there is no other one but one now, soaring now, away now, all the way now, all of all the way now; one and one is one, is one, is one, is still one, is still one" (FWBT 379).

This *subjective* experience of time is different from the fourth dimension, *objectively* speaking, because the relative position of an airplane in its space-time continuum is always measured in relation to the passage of time. For the airplane or its passengers time does not stop, yet for the "wheeling" and "soaring" Jordan and Maria who are enveloped in subjective time, everything stops and time is "absolutely still" (FWBT 159). Only when the earth moves "out and away from under them" does time resume (FWBT 159). In mathematics, one and one equals two, but in the ecstasy of love, one and one is one. The subjectivity of oneness is different from the objectivity of arithmetic.

When we refer our experiences to a clock or a calendar we make time into an objective concept. Yet the time intervals provided by the clock are not absolute quantities imposed by some divine edict. All of men's clocks are geared to the solar system and to a measurement in space. What we call one hour is an arc of 15 degrees in the rotation of the earth around the sun. One year is the measure of one complete orbit around the sun. According to Relativity there is no such thing as a fixed interval of time that is independent of the system to which it is referred. Simultaneity or "now" do not exist outside of a system of reference (UE 51-52). Clearly the system of reference in the passage quoted above is the oneness experienced by Jordan and Maria. Together they are a moving system and their love act propels them into a time zone that is different from clock time.

According to Relativity, if we attach a measuring rod to any moving system it changes its length according to the velocity of the system. i.e., the clock slows down as its velocity increases and the measuring rod shrinks in the direction of its motion (UE 61). Indeed, if we apply this principle to Jordan and Maria there is a comical aspect to Hemingway's description of the love act. Jordan and Maria are the rotating bodies and we can imagine the velocity of their lovemaking reaching its apogee at the moment of climax when they are orbiting the earth. At this speed Jordan's "rod" will have shrunk in the direction of its motion and we can image its detumescence on the return trip as objective time resumes and "the earth moves out and away" (FWBT 159). Moreover, Relativity postulates that the velocity of light is the top limiting velocity in the universe and that a clock traveling at this speed would stop completely (UE 62). For time to stop, and for the couple to experience *la gloria*, Jordan's lovemaking will have accelerated to the speed of light. His trip to heaven and back has occurred at this vertiginous speed and when he lands

again on the Spanish earth and subjective time and objective time coincide once more, it is then that the earth's gravitational pull "moves out and away."

In physics, inertia produces the sensation we feel when a train suddenly slows down or when the engineer applies the brakes suddenly. Our bodies want to continue moving forward in a uniformly straight line, and it is this lurch forward that counters the slowing down of the train.⁹ Inertia resists deceleration (*UE* 81). In this case it is Jordan and Maria who, subjectively, have been traveling at the speed of light. When they slow down it is the planet's inertia that propels it forward, and it is this force that explains the earth moving out and away. Jordan and Maria feel that they have been transported magically outside the gravitational field of the earth, hence their "wheeling" and "soaring." Indeed, their love-making is an energy that sends them to heaven, high in orbit into "another time" (*FWBT* 379), free of the earth's gravitational pull.

The human heart, like a watch, is also a clock of sorts, since any periodic motion, as Einstein has pointed out, serves to measure time (*UE* 65). A person traveling with a velocity close to the speed of light would, according to Relativity, experience a slowing of the heartbeat, and it is this slowing of time that Jordan feels whenever he takes Maria in his arms. But since no material body can travel at the speed of light (*UE* 68) we have to assume, since time stops, that it is not Hemingway or Proust who are traveling, or their hearts, but something else. Can love and involuntary memory "travel" through space-time? Yes, probably, if the heart is viewed as a metaphor, particularly if we think of radiation or energy as matter shedding its mass in order to achieve the speed of light (*UE* 71). In art, however, we are dealing not with astrophysics, but with the vicissitudes of the heart, its symbols, and its metaphors.

Is this the fourth dimension? Perhaps. "Yes," if we apply the principles of Relativity to Hemingway's and Proust's writing in a metaphorical context, and "no" if we apply these principles literally in the mathematical sense with the expectation of shedding light on energy and mass. On the abstract level, neither memory nor love seems capable of elucidating Einstein's famous formula $E = mc^2$. This formula is the abstraction of reality—the invisible iceberg beneath the surface. However, Jordan's and Maria's love and Marcel's *madeleine*—the concretizations of feeling and emotion—are that portion of the iceberg and of life that lend themselves to art and give substance to abstraction. Time is the essence of love and remembrance, and both writers have used it to produce masterpieces that still resist the erosion of time and the corrosive forces of death.

⁹ In a paper cited by Paul Smith in *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, entitled "Einstein's Train Stops at Hemingway's Station," Reynolds discusses the story "Homage to Switzerland" (written in 1932) and Hemingway's ironic treatment of time and space. Hemingway undoubtedly borrowed the term "fourth dimension" from Einstein's Relativity and, according to Reynolds (*The Young Hemingway*), he "probably meant the timeless quality of great writing" (209). See Michael S. Reynolds, in Paul Smith, *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (Boston: Hall, 1989).