Mimologics

(Mimologiques: Voyage en Cratylie)

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With a Foreword by

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CHAPTER 13

The Age of Names

In *Remembrance of Things Past* as in the *Cratylus,* the preferred object of mimologically motivated reverie is what Marcel Proust calls the Name {*le Nom*}: that is, the proper noun {*le nom propre*}.[1] The difference between the Name and the Word {*le Mot*} or common noun is established in a famous passage from the third part of *Swann's Way,* in which Proust describes his hero's reveries on the names of several countries where he hopes to spend the upcoming Easter vacation:

> Words present to us little pictures of things, lucid and normal, like the pictures that are hung on the walls of schoolrooms to give children an illustration of what is meant by a carpenter's bench, a bird, an anthill; things chosen as typical of everything else of the same sort. But names—of persons and of towns which they accustom us to regard as individual, as unique, like persons—present to us a confused picture, which draws from the names, from the brightness or darkness of their sound, the color in which it is uniformly painted.[2]

Evidently, the traditional (and questionable) opposition between the individuality of the proper noun and the generality of the common noun is here accompanied by another difference, an apparently secondary one that actually sums up Proust's entire semantic theory of the name: the "image" of the thing presented by the common noun is "clear and ordinary," and being neutral, transparent, inactive, it has no effect whatsoever on the mental representation, the concept of bird, carpenter's bench, or anthill. In contrast, the image presented by the proper noun is *confused* because it borrows its unique color from the substantial reality (the "sound") of this name; the image is confused, therefore, in the sense of being *indistinct* in its unity, or rather its uniqueness, of tone; but the image is also *confused* in the sense of being *complex* as an amalgam of elements coming from the signifier and those coming from the signified. In point of fact, the extralinguistic representation of a person or a town, as we shall see, always coexists with suggestions emanating from its name, and often exists prior to them.

Let us keep in mind, then, that Proust reserves for proper nouns that active relationship between signifier and signified which other authors apply to com-

mon nouns as well.[3] Such a restriction might appear surprising on the part of a writer so obviously familiar with metaphorical relationships. The reason for this restriction lies in the highly marked predominance of a spatial or, even better, geographical sensibility in his work, for the proper nouns around which the Narrator's reverie crystallizes are in fact almost always (and not only in the chapter so entitled) names of places—or names of noble families that derive their essential imaginative value from the fact that they are "always place names."[4] The uniqueness, the individuality of places is an article of faith with the young Marcel, as it is with the narrator of *Jean Santeuil,* and despite the eventual counterevidence of experience, he holds on to at least a trace of this faith in his dreams, since he is still able to write with regard to the landscape of Guermantes: "Sometimes, at night, in my dreams, [its] individuality binds me with a power that is almost fantastic."[5] The supposed singularity of the proper noun corresponds to the mythical singularity of the place, reinforcing it: "[Names] magnified the idea that I formed of certain points on the earth's surface, making them more special, and in consequence more real.... How much more individual still was the character that they assumed from being designated by names, names that were only for themselves, proper names such as people have."[6] However, one should not allow oneself to succumb to this linguistic laziness, which seems here to make "person" into the very model of individuality ("towns ... as individual, as unique, as people"): the individuality of places, albeit a mythical one, is actually much more marked in Proust than that of living creatures.[7] From their first appearances on the scene, Saint-Loup, Charlus, Odette, Albertine manifest an elusive multiplicity and the network of confused kinships and resemblances tying them to many other people who are no closer to being "unique" than they are themselves. Moreover, as will emerge further on, their names are not really fixed and do not belong to them in a properly substantial way: Odette changes hers several times; Saint-Loup and Charlus have more than one; even the first names of Albertine and Gilberte are set up so as to become confused some day, and so on. In appearance at least, places exist much more as "persons"[8] than people themselves do; moreover, they *hold on* to their names much better.

We should now specify the nature of that "active relationship" between the name and the thing in which lies the essence of Proust's nominal imagination. If we were to refer to the theoretical statement quoted above, we would be inclined to see a unilateral relation in which the "image" of the place drew its entire content from the "sound" of the name. As a matter of fact, the relation, as it can be inferred from the several examples that appear in *Remembrance,* is more complicated and more dialectical. But first we need to introduce a distinction between the names Proust invents for fictional places, such as *Balbec,* and (real) names for real places, such as *Florence* or *Quimperlé*—with the understanding that this distinction is relevant solely to the author's (real) work and not to the fictitious

reveries of his hero, for whom Florence and Balbec are situated on the same plane of "reality."[9] According to a comment made by Roland Barthes, the role of the "narrator" (let us say, for the sake of clarity, the hero) is that of decoding here, while that of the novelist is one of encoding: "The narrator and the novelist cover the same trajectory in contrary directions: the narrator believes he can decipher, in the names given to him, a kind of natural affinity between signifier and signified, between the vocalic color of *Parme* {Parma} and the mauve sweetness of its content; the novelist, having to invent a site at once Norman, Gothic, and windy, must search the general tablature for phonemes, a few sounds tuned to the combination of these signifieds."[10] But it is somewhat misrepresenting the situation to align the hero with a real name (*Parme*) and the author with a fictional name (*Balbec*). Actually, the encoding, on Proust's part, occurs exclusively for coined names: that is, for a very small proportion of the place names (in the passage under discussion, Balbec is the only one). As for real names, the positions of hero and novelist are no longer symmetrically inverse but parallel, with Proust attributing to Marcel a decoding or a motivating interpretation of the nominal form that he himself, of course, has "invented" and, therefore (the two activities being equivalent in this case), carried out. Their positions may be parallel but they are not identical, for on at least one point the hero's experience does not coincide with the writer's: when he thinks of Venice or of Benodet, the young Marcel has not yet even been to either of these places, but when he writes this passage, Proust, in contrast, is already familiar with them; and we will see that he does not completely disregard his own memories—of his real experience—when he ascribes to his hero reveries that purport to be fed by two sources alone: the names of these places and a few bits of knowledge taken from books or acquired by hearsay.

Indeed, a fairly close reading shows that none of these images is determined by the form of the noun alone, that on the contrary each of them results from an interaction between this form and some idea, whether true or false, which is in any case independent of the name and comes from somewhere else. When Marcel says that the name of *Parme* seems "compact and glossy, mauve, soft" to him, it is quite obvious that at least the detail of the color has more to do with the violets in the town than with the sound of its name, and this conspicuous link is confirmed a few lines later: "I could imagine it [the house in Parma where he dreams of staying for a few days] only by the aid of that heavy syllable of the name of Parma, in which no breath of air stirred, and of all that I had made it *absorb* of Stendhalian sweetness and the reflected hue of violets."[11] The semantic analysis here is furnished by Proust himself, who evidently assigns the qualities of compactness and also of glossiness to the proper noun's influence, the color mauve to hearsay knowledge about the violets, and the sweetness to his memory of Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme*. The signifier definitely acts upon the signi-

fied, causing Marcel to imagine a town where everything is glossy and compact, but the signified acts equally forcefully upon the signifier, causing him to perceive the "name" of this town as mauve and sweet.[12] Likewise, *Florence* owes its image, "miraculously embalmed, and flowerlike," as much to the red lily in its emblem and to its cathedral, *Sainte-Marie-des-Fleurs,* as to the floral allusion in its first syllable, with content and expression here being in a relation no longer of complementarity and exchange but of redundancy, since the name turns out to be positively (although indirectly, through its formation) motivated in this case.[13] Balbec derives its archaic image ("old piece of Norman pottery," "long abolished custom," "feudal right," "former condition of some place," "obsolete way of pronouncing the language") from the "incongruous syllables" of its name, but it is clear that the fundamental theme of "waves surging round a church built in the Persian manner" contaminates, without any reference to the name, two descriptions offered by Swann and by Legrandin.[14] Here, the verbal suggestion and the extralinguistic notion have not completely succeeded in merging, for if the Norman essence of the countryside and even the pseudo-Persian style of its church are both "reflected" in the sonorities of *Balbec,*[15] it is more difficult to find in this name an echo of the storms forecast by Legrandin.[16]

Subsequent references realize more effectively, as in the case of *Parme,* the mutual contagion of the name by the idea and the idea by the name: thus, the highest point of the cathedral of *Bayeux,* "so lofty in its noble coronet of rusty lace," catches the light with "the old gold of its last syllable"; the old-fashioned windows {*vitrage*} of the houses in Vitré justify ("etymologically") the name, whose acute accent, in turn, suggests through its diagonal movement—"a lozenge of dark wood"—the old-fashioned facades (note the operation of the name's graphic form rather than its sound here); the nearly uniform whiteness of *doux Lamballe* {gentle Lamballe} yields nuances moving from the "eggshell yellow" of its first syllable to the "pearly gray" of its second one; the same "diphthong" *an* that appears "fatty and yellowish" in *Coutances* softens the "tower of butter" of its Norman cathedral.[17] But *Tour de beurre* is, in fact, as everyone knows (and for reasons having to do with neither its shape nor its color), the name of the right-hand tower of Rouen; and the mineral rigidity of *Coutances* ill fits this description, which would seem wholly inspired by the sound of the name (with the possible addition of a homophony between *Coutances* and *rance* {rancid}). We will run across this reduplicative association of *an* = *jaune* {yellow} again; let us observe for the moment that it has a rival in the "old gold" of *yeu* in *Bayeux.* The little picture *Lannion,* which surely lays no claim to the specificity of Tréguier, misappropriates the fable of the coach and the fly as an illustration of the essence of provinciality and rusticity: the "noise of the coach (*Lan-*) followed by the fly (*-nion*)."[18] *Questambert* and *Pontorson* are no doubt connected, as Jean-Pierre Richard remarks,[19] through the identity of their "pro-

sodic mould" but also through the analogy of their consonantal structure, in which the "funny" contortion of *rs* echoes that of *st* (which inevitably suggests another shared patron: *Marcelproust*). The "white feathers and yellow-spotted beaks" probably resonate both with this oral dance and (as in *Lamballe* and *Coutances*) with hearing the nasal consonants as colors—whence that sketch of the duck pond confirmed by the "fluviality" of *Pontorson,* with which the earthling *Questambert* is willy-nilly associated. In *Benodet,* the phonic lightness—or lability—attributed to the name, which is "scarcely moored and which the river seems to be striving to draw down into the tangle of its seaweeds," owes more to geographical fact, as does *Pont-Aven,* "the snowy, rosy flight of the wing of a lightly poised coif, tremulously reflected in the greenish waters of a canal."[20] Finally, the limpid streams that previously spellbound the Flaubert of *Par les champs et par les grèves* correspond to the transparent pearlescence {*perlé*} that ends the name *Quimperlé* in an etymological fantasy.

The same interaction animates other reveries about names scattered throughout the early volumes of *Remembrance,* such as the one sustained by that especially magical name *Guermantes,* evocative of "a dungeon keep without mass, no more indeed than a band of orange light."[21] The dungeon obviously belongs to the fortified castle that is supposedly the cradle of this feudal family, and the orange light "emanates" from the last syllable of the name.[22] This emanation, moreover, is less direct than it would appear at first sight, for the same name of Guermantes elsewhere[23] takes on an amaranthine color hardly compatible with orange, whose resonance derives from the golden blond hair of the Guermantes family. Contradictory from the perspective of "hearing in color," these two descriptions come, therefore, not only from the spontaneous synaesthesia[24] equating *an* and yellow, as in *Coutances* and *Lamballe* above, but also from a *lexical association:* that is, from the shared presence of the sound *an* in the name *Guermantes* and in the names for the colors *orange* and *amarante* {amaranthine}—just as the acidity of the name *Gilberte,* "pungent and cool as the drops which fell from the green watering-pipe,"[25] probably derives less from the direct action of its sounds than from the assonance *Gilberte-verte* {-green}. The paths of motivation are often more devious than expected, and we have had occasion to see how often a clandestine (pseudo)etymology acts to supplement the weak link of phonic expressiveness.[26]

One last example: if the name *Faffenheim* conjures up, through its straightforward attack and "the stammering repetition" that punctuates the first two syllables, "the impulse, the mannered simplicity, the heady delicacies of the Teutonic race," and through the "dark blue enamel" of the last syllable, "the mystic light of a Rhenish window behind the pale and finely wrought gildings of the German eighteenth century," it is not only because of its sounds but also because *Faffenheim* was the name of a Prince Elector.[27] Frankness and repetition

are clearly inscribed in *Faffen,* but their specifically Germanic nuance comes from the signified and, even more particularly, from the memory, called up by the first version of the same passage in *By Way of Sainte-Beuve,* of the "colored sweets eaten in a small grocery shop on the old German square."[28] Hearing the sounds of the final *-heim* in color may evoke the transparency of a dark blue stained-glass church window, but the Rhenishness of this window and the rococo gilding that frames it do not spring full-fledged from what the earlier version called the "variegated sound of the last syllable." Such anticipated and authorially controlled interpretations are organized like program music or like those "expressive" leitmotifs about which Proust remarks that they "paint in splendid colors the glow of fire, the rush of water, the peace of fields and woods, to audiences who, having first let their eyes run over the program, have their imagination trained in the right direction."[29] Should this connivance of the signified be found wanting, then the vocable no longer "expresses" anything, or else expresses something entirely different. On the little train that takes him from Balbec-en-Terre to Balbec-Plage, Marcel discovers a strangeness in the names of towns such as Incarville, Arcouville, Arambouville, Maineville, "dreary names, made up of sand, of space too airy and empty and of salt, out of which the termination *ville* always escaped, as the *vole* seems to fly out from the end of the word *Pigeon-vole*" — in short, names whose connotations seem typically marine, without his realizing their resemblance to other names, however familiar, such as Roussainville or Martinville, whose "somber charm" derives on the contrary from the taste of preserves or from the smell of fire associated with the childhood world at Combray.[30] The forms are quite similar, but the unbridgeable gap between the contents invested in them prevents him from even noticing their analogy: thus, "to the trained ear two musical airs, each consisting of so many notes, several of which are common to them both, will present no similarity whatever if they differ in the color of their harmony and orchestration."[31]

Marcel's poetic reveries display, therefore, that same tendency to motivate language that also inspires the solecisms of Françoise or of the elevator boy at Balbec; but instead of acting on the material of an unfamiliar word in order to reduce it to a form that is "familiar and meaningful," and thereby justified, this motivation operates, more subtly, both on the form of that word (the way its "substance," phonic or otherwise, is perceived, concretized, and interpreted) and on the form of its meaning (the "image" of the place) in order to make them compatible, harmonious, mutually suggestive. The illusory nature of this agreement between "sound" and "sense" has been discussed above, and we will see further on how the awareness and critique of this illusion is expressed in *Remembrance.* But there is another mirage, involving the meaning itself: Roland Barthes rightly emphasizes the imaginary character of semic complexes suggested by a reverie on names and how erroneous it would be, here as elsewhere, to confuse

the signified with the *referent:* that is to say, the actual object.[32] Yet this error is exactly the one Marcel makes, and its correction is one of the central aspects of the painful learning experience that constitutes the plot of the novel. A reverie about names, says Proust, results in making the image of these places more beautiful "but also more different from anything that the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could in reality be, and, by increasing the arbitrary delights of my imagination, this aggravated the disenchantment that was in store for me when I set out upon my travels."[33] The reader will recall, for example, what bitter disillusion Marcel feels upon discovering that the composite image of Balbec that he has made for himself (the Persian-style church beaten by the waves) bears only a distant resemblance to the real Balbec, whose church and beach are miles and miles away from each other.[34] Marcel feels the same disappointment a little later, upon seeing the Duke and Duchess of Guermantes "withdrawn from that name Guermantes in which long ago I had imagined them leading an unimaginable life"; or in the presence of the Princess of Parma, a small, dark (not mauve) woman who is more concerned about pious deeds than Stendhalian sweetness; or in the presence of the Prince of Agrigente, whose name seems "a transparent sheet of colored glass through which I beheld, struck, on the shore of the violet sea, by the slanting rays of a golden sun, the rosy marble cubes of an ancient city," and who himself seems "as independent of his name as of any work of art that he might have owned without bearing upon his person any trace of its beauty, without, perhaps, ever having stopped to examine it"; and even in the presence of the Prince of Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen, Rheingraf and Elector Palatine, who uses the revenues and sullies the reputation of his Wagnerian fief in order to maintain "five Charron motorcars, a house in Paris and one in London, a box on Mondays at the *Opéra* and another for the 'Tuesdays' at the *Français,*" and whose pathetic ambition is to be elected a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences.[35]

Thus, when Proust states that names, "whimsical draughtsmen,"[36] are responsible for the illusion that encircles his hero, we should not take "name" {*nom*} to mean the vocable alone but rather the sign in its totality, the unity constituted, according to Louis Hjelmslev's definition, by the relation of *interdependence* posited between the form of the content and the form of expression.[37] In *Parme,* it is not the sequence of sounds or of letters that creates the poetic myth of a compact, mauve, and sweet town; it is the "solidarity" gradually established between a compact signifier and a mauve, sweet signified. The "name," therefore, is not the cause of the illusion but more precisely the *locus:* it is in the name that the illusion becomes concentrated and crystallized. The apparent indissolubility of sound and sense, the motivation of the sign, encourages the childish belief in the unity and the individuality of the imaginary place designated. As we have seen, Marcel's arrival in Balbec dispels the first belief. There are two Balbecs;

the car rides with Albertine, in *Cities of the Plain,* will dispense with the second one. In fact, unlike the voyage by train—during which essences are materialized by each station's "signboard" bearing the individual and distinct name of a new place and which entails in Proust an abrupt change (an abruptness brought on by the traveler's having slept between the two stations) from one essential state to another[38]—the voyage by car is an uninterrupted progression that reveals the continuity of the countryside, the interconnectedness of places, and this discovery annihilates the myth of their separation and of their respective singularities,[39] just as Gilberte, at the beginning of *Time Regained,* will abolish the crucial opposition between the "two ways" simply by saying to Marcel: "If you like, we might go out one afternoon and then we can go to Guermantes, taking the road by Méséglise, it is the nicest walk."[40]

Once shattered by contact with geographical reality, the prestige of names undergoes another attack when the narrator, listening to the Duc de Guermantes's self-satisfied genealogical explanations, discovers the seamless network of alliances and inheritances that link so many noble names—place names—which, until then, he had thought to be quite completely irreconcilable, as radically dissociated by "one of those distances in the mind that not only distance, but separate and locate on another plane" as those of Guermantes and Méséglise, Balbec, and Combray. The reader will remember Marcel's surprise, despite Saint-Loup's earlier explanations, upon learning at Madame de Villeparisis's house that Monsieur de Charlus was the brother of the Duc de Guermantes. When the duke reveals to Marcel, for example, that a Norpois married a Mortemart under Louis XIV, that "Monsieur de Bréauté's mother had been a Choiseul and his grandmother a Lucinge," and that "Monsieur d'Ornessan's great-grandmother had been the sister of Marie de Castille Montjeu, the wife of Timoleon de Castille, and consequently Oriane's aunt"—all these names "springing to take their places by the side of others from which I should have supposed them to be remote... each name displaced by the attraction of another, with which I had never suspected it of having any affinity"[41]—distances are canceled out and barriers broken down; essences thought of as incompatible merge into one another and in so doing vanish. The life of names is revealed to be a series of transmissions and usurpations that removes any remaining basis from onomastic reverie. The name of Guermantes will eventually fall into the possession of the utterly common *Patronne,* formerly Verdurin (via Duras); Odette is successively Crécy, Swann, Forcheville; Gilberte is Swann, Forcheville, and Saint-Loup; the death of a relative makes the Prince de Laumes a Duc de Guermantes, and the Baron de Charlus is "also Duc de Brabant, Damoiseau de Montargis, Prince d'Oléron, de Carency, de Viareggio, and de Dunes";[42] in a more roundabout but no less significant manner, Legrandin will become the Count of Méséglise. A name is really a paltry thing.

Yet Marcel was still able to feel a sort of poetic vertigo when witnessing the onomastic ballet of *The Guermantes Way.*[43] The same cannot be said for one final experience, a purely linguistic one this time, which reveals to him, with no aesthetic compensation, the emptiness of his reveries on place names: this involves the etymologies of Brichot in the last part of *Cities of the Plain.*[44] Critics have often speculated on the function of these etymologies in the novel, and Jean Vendryès, who sees in these tirades a satire on the pedantry of the Sorbonne, adds that they also evince a sort of fascination. There is no doubt about this ambivalence, but the "etymological passion" probably does not have the sense Vendryès gives it when he asserts that "Proust believed in etymology as a rational means of penetrating the hidden meaning of names and consequently of acquiring knowledge about the essence of things. This notion," he continues, "goes back to Plato, but no scholar would defend it today."[45] Vendryès does not hesitate to connect the etymologies of Brichot to those of Socrates and to put them at the service of the "Cratylian consciousness,"[46] for which in fact, as we have seen, the *essence of things* lies in the *hidden meaning* of their names. Now if these etymologies are considered a bit more closely, along with their effect on the hero's mind, it is easy to see that they have exactly the opposite function. Whatever their actual scientific value, it is obvious that they are proffered and understood as so many corrections of errors of common sense (or of the amateur linguist embodied in the priest of Combray), of "popular" or naive etymologies, of spontaneous interpretations of the imaginary.

Against all this, and therefore against the instinctive Cratylism of the young hero, who is convinced that an immediate relationship exists between the *present* form of the name and the timeless essence of the thing, Brichot, symbol of the new linguistics, reinstates the deceptive truth of historical filiation, phonetic erosion—in short, the diachronic dimension of language. Not every etymology is necessarily inspired by *realism:* those of Socrates are because they aim at establishing through arbitrary analyses an appropriateness of sound and sense that is not sufficiently obvious from the total form of the name or noun. By contrast, Brichot's are almost systematically antirealist. If, as an exception, *Chantepie* is really the forest where the *pie* {magpie} sings {*chante*}, the queen {*reine*} who sings at *Chantereine* is a vulgar frog ({Latin} *rana*), with all due respect to Monsieur de Cambremer; Loctudy is not the "barbarous name" that the priest of Combray sees in it but the properly Latin name *Locus Tudeni; Fervaches,* whatever the Princess Sherbatoff believes, is Warm-water ({Latin} *fervidae aquae;* {French *Eaux-chaudes*}); *Pont-à-Couleuvre* shelters no grass snake {*couleuvre*} but really means Tollbridge (*Pont à qui l'ouvre*); Charlus may have his oak tree {*chêne*} at *Saint-Martin du Chêne,* but no yews {*ifs*} at *Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs* (from {Latin} *aqua*); in *Torpehomme, homme* {man} "does not in the least mean what you are naturally led to suppose, Baron," but is *holm,* which means a "small

island." Finally, *Balbec* itself has nothing Gothic or stormy or above all Persian about it: this name is a corruption of Dalbec, from *dal,* "valley" and *bec,* "stream"; and even *Balbec-en-Terre* does not signify "Balbec-on-Land," through an allusion to a few leagues that separate it from the coast and its storms, but "Balbec-of-the-Continent," in opposition to the barony of Dover of which it was once a dependency: *Balbec d'outre-Manche.*[47] "Anyhow, when you go back to Balbec, you will know what Balbec means," Monsieur Verdurin says ironically; but his irony does not reach its direct target alone (the pedant Brichot), for it is quite true that Marcel, too, has long believed that he knows what Balbec "signifies," and if Brichot's revelations captivate him, it is because they finally destroy his old beliefs and introduce him to the salubrious disenchantment of the truth.[48] In this way, he will come to see the charm vanish from the *fleur* {flower} that he must no longer seek in *Honfleur* (which instead comes from *fiord,* "port"), and the humor from the *boeuf* {cattle} that he must no longer seek in *Bricqueboeuf* (instead from *budh,* "hut"). Thus, he will come to discover that names are no more individual than the places they designate, and that just as the latter display a continuity (or contiguity) on the "ground," so the former exhibit a kinship through their paradigmatic organization in the system of natural language:

> What had appeared to me a particular instance became general, Bricqueboeuf took its place by the side of Elbeuf, and indeed in a name that was at first sight as individual as the place itself, like the name Pennedepie, in which the obscurities most impossible for the mind to elucidate seemed to me to have been amalgamated from time immemorial in a word as coarse, savory and hard as a certain Norman cheese, I was disappointed to find the Gallic *pen* which means mountain and is as recognizable in Pennemarck as in the Appennines.[49]

Like experience of the "visible world," linguistic apprenticeship depoeticizes and demystifies: the names of countries are "half-stripped of mystery which etymology [replaces] with reasoning."[50] As a matter of fact, after this lesson, nominal reveries disappear for good from the text of *Remembrance:* Brichot has made them literally *impossible.* His etymologies, therefore, do have an "emblematic function," as Barthes says, but not one pointing to the "Cratylian character of the name"; quite to the contrary, Brichot's etymologies constitute a refutation of this nature through the "specifications of linguistic science."[51]

So we should not, without reservation, attribute to Proust himself the *optimism of the signifier*[52] evinced by his youthful hero; belief in the truth of names is for him an ambiguous privilege of childhood, one of those "illusions to be destroyed" which the hero must shed one after another in order to attain the state of absolute disenchantment that precedes and prepares for the final revelation.

We know from a letter to Louis Robert that Proust once thought of calling the three parts of the *Remembrance,* as planned in 1913, *L'Age des noms, L'Age des mots, L'Age des choses* {The age of names, The age of words, The age of things}.[53] Whatever interpretation is given to the last two, the first formula unequivocally designates the fetishism of names as a transitory stage, or rather as a point of departure.[54] The age of names is what *Swann's Way* more cruelly dubs "the age in which one believes that one creates a thing by giving it a name."[55] This remark occurs in the context of Bloch's request that Marcel call him *cher maître* {dear master}, and "to create" should be taken here in its most naively realist sense: the illusion of realism is believing that what one names exists *exactly as one names it.*

A sort of anticipatory mockery of this deceitful "magic" of proper names might be found in *Swann in Love,* in the somewhat tasteless jokes exchanged between Charles and Oriane at the Sainte-Euverte party with regard to the name *Cambremer,* puns {*calembours*} and parodies of Socratic etymology about which one might wish to consult the illustrious Brichot:

> "These Cambremers have rather a startling name. It ends just in time, but it ends badly!" she said with a laugh.
>
> "It begins no better." Swann took the point.
>
> "Yes; that double abbreviation!"
>
> "Someone very angry and very proper who didn't dare to finish the first word."
>
> "But since he could stop himself beginning the second, he'd have done better to have finished the first and be done with it."[56]

Such are the unseemly consequences of carelessly opening (or breaking) what *By Way of Sainte-Beuve* calls the "urn of the unthought."[57]

The *Remembrance,* therefore, offers simultaneously a very faithful account of mimological reverie and a critique—sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, but always severe—of this form of imagination. It is doubly exposed as a realist illusion: first, as the belief in an identity between the signified (the "image") and the referent (the place), or the *referential illusion,* according to current terminology; and second, as the belief in a natural relation between the signified and the signifier, or what could properly be termed the *semantic illusion.* This critique, although it happens to mesh with or to anticipate certain themes of linguistic thought, is nonetheless closely linked in Proust to the development and to the perspective of a personal experience, which is the hero-narrator's apprenticeship to (Proust's version of) truth. As a realization that involves, among other things, the value and the function of the language system, this critical lesson clearly rejoins that of the *Cratylus:* to wit, we should begin not with names,

in order to know things, but with the things themselves.[58] Proust's journey faithfully repeats that of Socrates, from the initial mimologism to its final repudiation. And like Socrates, Marcel plays both roles successively.[59] The Cratylist hero becomes (and this becoming is one of the lessons of this novel of apprenticeship) the Hermogenist narrator, who necessarily has the last word, since he "holds the pen." From the critique of language emerges the triumph of Writing {*Écriture*}.

181. Jakobson, "Linguistics," p.358 {original emphasis}.

182. Ibid., pp.358–59.

183. Ibid., p.358 (emphasis added).

184. Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), p.81 (emphasis added).

185. Ibid., pp.81–82; "Linguistics," p.372 (emphasis added). Cf. "Linguistics," pp. 367–68, concerning the semantic value of rhymes.

186. Jakobson, "Linguistics," pp.367, 370 (emphases added). Note the shift from *equivalence* (but the English term here is already *equational principle*) to *similarity.*

187. Ibid., p.372.

188. Maurice Barrès, *Sous l'oeil des Barbares* (Paris: Plon, 1921), p.192.

189. Jakobson, "La Première Lettre de Ferdinand de Saussure à Antoine Meillet sur les anagrammes," in *Selected Writings,* 2:190; and Jakobson, "Une microscopie du dernier 'Spleen' dans *Les Fleurs du mal,*" in *Questions,* pp.434–35. *Trans. Note:* Baudelaire's poems, "Spleen" (IV) and "Le Gouffre" (The abyss), can be found in the bilingual edition *The Flowers of Evil: A Selection,* trans. Marthiel and Jackson Mathews (New York: New Directions, 1955), pp.62–65, 146–49.

190. A good example is the privilege Jean Cohen explicitly grants to "modern," which actually means symbolist, poetry (*Structure du langage poétique* [Paris: Flammarion, 1966]). Another example is Julia Kristeva's situating of the "revolution in poetic language" in the nineteenth century.

191. Here is a rather random example from Bernard Lamy: "Among the flaws in the arrangement of words is included similitude: that is, an excessively frequent repetition of the same letter, the same ending, the same sound, and the same cadence. Variety gives pleasure; the best things become boring when they are excessively commonplace. ... It is not caprice alone that makes variety necessary: nature loves change, and the reason for this is as follows. A sound wearies the parts of the organ of hearing that it strikes for too long a time; this is why variety is necessary in all actions, because the labor is divided up, each part of an organ is less fatigued by it" (*La Rhétorique; ou, L'Art de parler* [Paris: Pralard, 1675], bk.3, chap.8, p.184, and chap.9, pp.190–91.

192. The two statements, not at all equivalent, are from Valéry.

193. Boris Pasternak, quoted in Roman Jakobson, "Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak" (1935), trans. from the German in *Language in Literature,* p.317.

CHAPTER 13

1. This chapter includes, with several additions, pages 232–48 of *Figures II* (Paris: Seuil, 1969). If any excuses be needed for this somewhat irregular practice, here are two: the first is self-evident; the second is that sometimes one has to repeat oneself in order to be understood. *Trans. Note:* Those pages in *Figures II* belong to the essay "Proust et le langage indirect," translated by Alan Sheridan as "Proust and Indirect Language" in

Figures of Literary Discourse (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 229–95. Since Genette recast his analysis of Proust's Cratylism for *Mimologiques,* however, I have translated the text anew, keeping the Sheridan version in mind throughout.

2. Marcel Proust, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955–56), trans. as *Remembrance of Things Past* by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff (vols. 1–6) and Andreas Mayor (vol. 7) (New York: Random House, 1970), 1:296. *Trans. Note:* The syntax of the 1970 Moncrieff-Mayor translation (the edition cited here) has been slightly modified in a few instances and the spelling Americanized.

3. To the best of my knowledge, Proust's only remark concerning the form of a common noun (which is anything but common!) has to do with *mousme* {Japanese girl}: "When you hear this word, you get a toothache, as if you had put a large piece of ice into your mouth" (*Remembrance,* 3:257). But this is plainly a description of mere physical sensation, and not the beginnings of semantic motivation.

4. Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 274. See the passage in *Cities of the Plain* where Marcel receives an invitation to a funeral which has been signed by a host of names of the Norman nobility ending in *-ville, -court,* and *-tot:* "Garbed in the roof tiles of their castle or in the roughcast of their parish church, their nodding heads barely reaching above the vault of the nave or banqueting hall, and then only to cap themselves with the Norman lantern or the dovecote of the pepperpot turret, they gave the impression of having sounded the rallying call to all the charming villages straggling or scattered over a radius of fifty leagues" (*Remembrance* 4:135).

5. Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 570; *Remembrance,* 1:142. *Trans. Note:* On the available English translation of *Jean Santeuil,* see Sheridan, p. 288 n. 34, in Genette, "Proust and Indirect Language."

6. Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:296.

7. {Ibid.}

8. Proust, *Santeuil,* pp. 534–35.

9. An intermediate case is that of names borrowed from reality and assigned to a fictional place, such as *Guermantes:* here, the novelist exercises his freedom not through the combination of phonemes but through the overall choice of an aptly suited vocable.

10. Roland Barthes, "Proust and Names," in *New Critical Essays,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980), p. 62.

11. Emphasis added. This word, which quite plainly shows the effect of the signified on the signifier, already possesses the same value at the beginning of this passage: "If their names thus permanently absorbed the image that I had formed of these towns it was only by transforming that image, by subordinating its reappearance in me to their own special laws" (*Remembrance,* 1:296). The reciprocity is very noticeable here. *Trans. Note:* As Genette points out in chapter 18, one of the main sites of mimological reverie is the equivalence between vowel sounds and the color spectrum. In this spirit, I have rendered *mauve* as such in English, whereas Scott-Moncrieff translates it "violet-colored." In the long quotation from Proust above, I follow Sheridan's translation: see "Proust and Indirect Language," p. 288 n. 39.

12. Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:296. Note also: "Its compact and almost cloying name" (3:307). This is an extreme case of "sense suggestion," in which the mimetic relation is asserted through the most minimal attempt at justification: "*Fontainebleau,* a name sweet and golden as a cluster of grapes raised to the sky!" (Proust, *Santeuil,* p.570). Or again: "*Versailles* (in the autumn), a grand name, rusty and mellow" (Proust, *Plaisirs et les jours.*) *Trans. Note:* The relatively weak mimetic motivations here seem to be a semantic one—*Fontaine* (fountain) + *bleau* (read: *bleu,* blue)—and a pseudophonetic or orthological one: *Versa-illes/rou-ille* (rust).

13. {Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:297.}

14. {Ibid.}

15. The Norman essence comes through an analogy with Balbec, Caudebec, etc. The Persian style of the name (*Remembrance,* 2:172: "The name—almost Persian in style—of Balbec") probably derives from its homophony with names such as Usbeck in Montaigne's *Lettres persanes* {*Persian Letters*}, not to mention the Lebanese Baalbek. These lexical associations are again classifiable under indirect motivation.

16. Unless, as Barthes suggests ("Proust and Names," p.63), we pass through the "conceptual relay ... of the word *rugueux* (rugose)," which would enable him to evoke "a complex of high-crested waves, steep cliffs and bristling architecture."

17. {Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:297.}

18. {Ibid.}

19. Jean-Pierre Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.90 n.3.

20. {Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:297 (modified).}

21. Proust says "a yellowing tower" in *Remembrance,* 3:6, and a "golden name" in *Sainte-Beuve,* p.273.

22. Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:132: "the orange light which glowed from the resounding syllable *-antes.*"

23. Proust, *Remembrance,* 3:149: "That amaranthine color of the closing syllable of her name."

24. As does, it would seem, the association *i* = purple, instanced at least twice (Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:32, and *Sainte-Beuve,* p.168), noted in Barthes, "Proust and Names."

25. Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:109.

26. On other aspects of the Guermantes network, see Claudine Quémar's invaluable note in *Cahiers Marcel Proust* 7:254.

27. Proust, *Remembrance,* 3:183. See Jean Pommier, *La Mystique de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Droz, 1939), p.50.

28. The fact that in this case, curiously enough, the name has been analyzed without being cited might lead one to think (though it is hardly likely) that it was invented afterward (Proust, *Sainte-Beuve,* p.277).

29. Proust, *Remembrance,* 2:291.

30. {Ibid., 2:174.}

31. Ibid.

32. {Barthes, "Proust and Names," pp. 60–64.}

33. Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:296 {modified}.

34. Ibid., 2:172.

35. Ibid., 3:374, 311, 184.

36. Ibid., 2:90.

37. Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language,* trans. F. J. Whitfield, 2d rev. ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 60.

38. Proust, *Remembrance,* 2:161.

39. Ibid., 4:363.

40. Ibid., 6:193.

41. Ibid., 3:387.

42. Ibid., 4:243. At Balbec, Saint-Loup had already warned Marcel about this instability: "In that family they change their names as you'd change your shirt" (2:243).

43. "The name Guermantes itself received from all the beautiful names—extinct, and so all the more glowingly rekindled—with which I learned only now that it was connected, a new sense and purpose, purely poetical" (ibid., 3:387).

44. The functional relation between these etymologies and Basin's genealogies is clearly pointed out by Proust: noblemen are "etymologists of the language not of words but of names" (*Remembrance,* 3:380); but Brichot, too, confines himself to the etymology of names (of places). We should remember that his etymologies can be found scattered throughout *Remembrance,* 5:205–41. Before this, the priest of Combray offered a few etymologies (1:79–81), but these were still lacking in critical value; besides, Brichot often refutes them. In regard to the linkage between genealogies and etymologies, one might note Marcel's somewhat hybrid "revelation" when he learns that the name Surgis-le-Duc derives not from a ducal filiation but from a misalliance with a rich manufacturer called Leduc (4:78).

45. Jean Vendryès, "Proust et les noms propres," in *Mélanges Huguet* (Paris: Boivin, 1940), p. 126.

46. Barthes, "Proust and Names," p. 68.

47. {Proust, *Remembrance,* 4:206, 209, 229, 231, 236–37, 239, 355.}

48. {Ibid., 4:248.}

49. {Ibid., pp. 354–55.}

50. Ibid., 4:355.

51. Barthes, "Proust and Names," pp. 67–68.

52. Jean-Pierre Richard, *Paysage de Chateaubriand* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), p. 162.

53. André Maurois, *À la recherche de Marcel Proust, avec de nombreux inédits* (Paris: Hachette, 1947), p. 270.

54. Moreover, traces of a parallel course can be seen in the outlines for *Contre Sainte-Beuve* collected in chap. 14 ("Names of People") of the Fallois edition and in the final version of *Remembrance.* In the former, the onomastic refutation does not yet exercise its power of disillusionment: the name of a given Norman family "is actually Provençal. That does not prevent its evoking Normandy for me"; and the "inevitable disappoint-

ment of our encounter with things whose names we know" ought not to destroy, or even depreciate, the "imaginative charm" of nominal reverie. Perhaps Cratylian optimism died out only late in Proust, as did other kinds.

55. Proust, *Remembrance,* 1:69.

56. Ibid., 1:262.

57. Proust, *Sainte-Beuve,* p.278.

58. For all that, this final critical attitude does not invalidate all research on Proust's onomastics, especially as it applies to places or to fictional beings. Whether borrowed (like *Guermantes*) or coined (like *Verdurin*), the names in Proust are indeed chosen according to an expressive structure, precisely the one that arises from secondary Cratylism. Yet we need to recognize and take into account this secondariness, and hence the critique it presupposes and entails: to coin or to borrow (that is, to displace) "appropriate" names is to correct, and therefore to admit the "defect" {*défaut*} of, most real names. We should not confuse Proust's work (of factitious motivation) with Marcel's "illusions" about natural motivation, which is, in a sense, the exact opposite.

59. Whence, perhaps, the double misreading, the persistent double myth, of Plato's and Proust's Cratylism.

CHAPTER 14

1. Paul Claudel, *Poetic Art* (1907), trans. Renée Spodheim (1948; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969), p.111 n.1 {modified}.

2. Paul Claudel, "La Poésie est un art" (1952), in *Oeuvres en prose,* ed. Jacques Petit and Charles Galperine (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.51–52.

3. Paul Claudel, "L'Harmonie imitative" (1933), in *Oeuvres en prose,* pp.95–110 {quotations, p.96}. This is a florilegium from de Piis's poem "L'Harmonie imitative de la langue française" (1785–88), a web of expressive alliterations.

4. {Claudel, "Harmonie," pp.97–98.}

5. Paul Claudel, "Lettre à l'abbé Bremond sur l'inspiration poétique," in *Oeuvres en prose,* pp.47, 48.

6. Claudel, "Harmonie," pp.98–99.

7. This aspect, among others, becomes clear in Claudel's "Réflexions et propositions sur le vers français," in *Positions et propositions:* "Written speech {*la parole écrite*} is used for two purposes: we wish to produce in the reader's mind either a state of knowledge or a state of joy.... In the first case we have prose; in the second we have poetry" (in *Oeuvres en prose,* p.4).

8. {Claudel, "Harmonie," p.99.}

9. See Claudel, "Réflexions," p.41; *Oeuvres complètes,* vol.18, *Accompagnements, discours et remerciements* (Paris: Gallimard: 1961), p.355; and, of course, *The Satin Slipper* {1928–29} Third Day, sc.2.

10. Claudel, "Réflexions," p.41.

11. Claudel, "Poésie," pp.54–55. The paradox lies in this text's title: *La Poésie est un art.*