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A study of the symbol of the cross in Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*

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A STUDY OF THE SYMBOL OF THE CROSS
IN MARCEL PROUST'S
A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU

BY

EUGENE FREEDMAN

A THESIS
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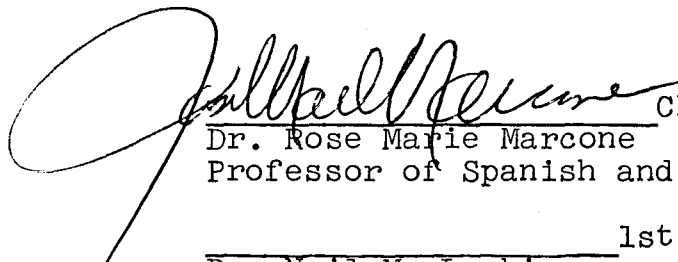
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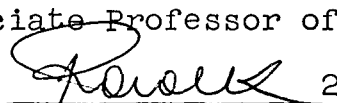
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A STUDY OF THE SYMBOL OF THE CROSS
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INTRODUCTION

A la recherche du temps perdu, by Marcel Proust, is the story of a young, naive boy named Marcel who grew up to be a writer. In this paper, when the author of the novel is referred to, the name Proust will be employed, while the main character of the novel will be referred to as Marcel. For Marcel, the narrator of the work, the composition of a novel was his only hope for immortality and salvation from the passage of time, since time destroys. In his quest for immortality, it was his task to understand the ever-changing relationships between him and the other characters with whom he came in contact. Proust realized that reality is only relative to a man's position within the framework of perpetually flowing time. As with time, all reality is transient and must be viewed from the vantage point of the present, through memory. For Proust, every individual undergoes a metamorphosis from past to present to future time. In every human being, however, there are three separate persons: the person he believes himself to be, the person as other people see him, and the person he really is. These three-sided relationships within a trilateral framework of past,

present, and future time become quite complicated and intricate. The writing of the novel was Marcel's manner of observing and recording the flux of time and its effects on human relationships.

He had to gaze backward in time to understand his role within time and decided to recreate the world as he knew it within the universe of his novel. The novel was the only way in which he could lock permanently, all those changing realities, thereby making them the one, universal reality within the confines of the covers. It was a way in which to make all the modalities of time "the present." The novel becomes its own reality since it transcends the natural passage of time. Like a god, Proust created a world which for him was reality, a universe in which only he could change the chronological order of events. Even though time has destroyed all past relationships, the novel, as art, has preserved and glorified them.

In this respect, Proust has connected every major event in Marcel's transition from young man to writer with a series of symbols, all of which are related either directly or indirectly with the symbol of the cross. The cross in A la recherche du temps perdu is either a symbol of reality revealed, reality deceived or reality rediscovered. The allusions to the cross intensify the triunity of time and all relationships because of the three-sided construction of the

cross. Proust has, however, severed the meaning of the symbol of the cross from its traditional religious context for his own literary purpose of demonstrating that there is salvation only in art and only for the creative artist.

This paper seeks to explore the image of the cross, as the symbol of salvation which marked Marcel's growth as writer, in quest of his own deliverance from time by the writing of the novel.

CHAPTER I

The first important event in Marcel's life was the evening he was denied the usual goodnight kiss by his mother. He was extremely close to her and as part of his daily rituals, his mother would put him to bed with a kiss. Marcel's parents had as their guest that evening, Charles Swann, a friend of the family and frequenter of high society. Swann was to become one of the greatest influences on Marcel's life. Marcel was sent to bed without his kiss since his parents did not want to leave Swann unattended.

For Marcel, the nocturnal kiss was "une communion de paix où mes lèvres puiseraient sa présence réelle et le pouvoir de m'endormir."¹ Marcel's mother's "act of communion" was a physical restrengthening of his contact with reality, his mother's love for him. Denied the kiss, Marcel was propelled into the world of the adult, a world of confusion, where reality and nonreality could only be distinguished by memory.

The Christian religious overtones are evident

¹Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1954), I, 13. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will immediately follow the citation. The Roman numeral indicates the volume, the Arabic number, the page.

in the ritual of the kiss. It recalled the kiss Judas gave to Christ after he had betrayed Him. The denial of the kiss by Marcel's mother is the mirror image, on the literal level, of Judas' kiss to Christ but their meaning remains the same, betrayal. Proust removed the symbol of the kiss from its religious connotations by making it a mirror-image of Judas' kiss. The denial of the kiss was the event which signalled the beginning of his development as a writer. Judas' kiss was not only the sign that Christ had been betrayed, but that he would be crucified, resurrected, and saved. Without the physical proof of the reality of his mother's love for him, Marcel would be inflicted with the pains of life and lack of love, away from his mother. As a writer, he would attempt to resurrect himself by establishing truth and reality. The writing of the novel would also be his salvation since Proust thought that only through art could one be saved from the nonrealities of flowing time.

For Proust, the composition of his novel was, in a sense, a religious experience, a pilgrimage for lost time. The experience was regenerated with the incident of the "madeleine" dipped in his tea, causing a spiritual materialization of the town of his childhood happiness, Combray. Having taken place during the Easter season, it magnifies the theme of resurrection for Marcel. Combray held for him all the magic of his

childhood: vacations with his parents, the countryside steeped in history, the colorful peasantry of the area, and most of all, the churches. They were to him, living, breathing entities. Locked in their stone walls was all the history that had transpired in Combray and in France. They were replete with the tombs and carved figures of the ancestors of the Guermantes, a local, noble family, whom Marcel greatly admired. The stained-glass windows of the churches were objects of art to him, not religious scenes. Churches, however, were not merely relics of the passage of time. For Proust, they were not symbols of the religious convictions of mortal men. They were symbols of the immortality of art. They contained a mystical essence of a living reality. The lives and emotions of all the people who had ever lived in Combray were forever bonded within the confines of the church. They were, unlike mortal men, eternal and unforgetting witnesses to the transitory relationships between mortal men.

The structure which symbolized for Marcel the town of Combray was the steeple of the church of St. Hilaire. Proust described the steeple as a signpost of human existence and as a reference point of home. It was for Combray a reference point of time and of life. "C'était le clocher de Saint-Hilaire qui donnait à toutes les occupations, à toutes les heures, à tous les points de vue de la ville, leur figure, leur

couronnement, leur consécration." (I, 64) The steeple of St. Hilaire had such a tremendous influence on young Marcel that,

Et aujourd'hui encore si, dans une grande ville de province ou dans un quartier de Paris que je connais mal, un passant qui m'a "mis dans mon chemin" me montre au loin, comme un point de repère, tel beffroi d'hôpital, tel clocher de couvent levant la pointe de son bonnet ecclésiastique au coin d'une rue que je dois prendre, pour peu que ma mémoire puisse obscurément lui trouver quelque trait de ressemblance avec la figure chère et disparue, le passant, s'il se retourne pour s'assurer que je ne m'égare pas, peut, à son étonnement, m'apercevoir qui, oublieux de la promenade entreprise ou de la course obligée, reste là, devant le clocher, pendant des heures, immobile, essayant de me souvenir, sentant au fond de moi des terres reconquises sur l'oubli qui s'assèchent et se rebâtissent; et sans doute alors, et plus anxieusement que tout à l'heure quand je lui demandais de me renseigner, je cherche encore mon chemin, je tourne une rue...mais...c'est dans mon coeur....
(I, 66-67)

As the embodiment of the past reality of childhood innocence, the steeple of St. Hilaire was an anchor in time, and all other steeples in Marcel's pilgrimage through time and the novel would be checkpoints in his journey.

One day, while on a walk in the countryside with his grandfather, a local doctor, Dr. Percepied, offered Marcel and his grandfather a ride back to the village in his carriage. At a bend in the road Marcel saw the twin steeples of the church of the village of Martinville. As the carriage continued along the road, another steeple came into view, that of the church of Vieuxvicq. The changing positions of the carriage,

the sun, and surrounding trees caused the three steeples to change position with respect to Marcel. The steeples had a mystifying effect on Marcel.

En constatant, en notant la forme de leur flèche, le déplacement de leurs lignes, l'ensoleillement de leur surface, je sentais que je n'allais pas au bout de mon impression, que quelque chose était derrière ce mouvement, derrière cette clarté, quelque chose qu'ils semblaient contenir et dérober à la fois. (I, 180)

In direct opposition to the single steeple of St. Hilaire, with all its single reality, Marcel could not interpret the fluctuating and unknown reality of three other steeples. As Marcel drew farther away in distance and in age from his childhood, the symbols of reality became less and less fixed. All steeples did not represent the idealized steeple of St. Hilaire. The three steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq were the emblems of the flux of present, past, and future time. They held traces of the past and present but they were also premonitions of an unknown future destiny. Marcel could not comprehend the mystery of the steeples so,

Sans me dire que ce qui était caché derrière les clochers de Martinville devait être quelque chose d'analogue à une jolie phrase, puisque c'était sous la forme de mots qui me faisaient plaisir que cela m'était apparu, demandant un crayon et du papier au docteur, je composai malgré les cahots de la voiture, pur soulager ma conscience et obéir à mon enthousiasme, le petit morceau suivant que j'ai retrouvé depuis et auquel je n'ai eu à faire subir que peu de changements: (I, 181)

What followed was the first attempt at writing for

Marcel. The steeples served as a catalyst for his literary career. By recording the experience, Marcel fixed the one aspect of the changing realities of the steeples on paper, a permanent tribute to the incident. The steeples are another link in the chain of metaphors of Marcel's development as an author. Faced with ever-changing realities of distance and time, Marcel decided to save their mystery by capturing them in written form.

After an introduction to a portion of the world of high society, the Faubourg St. Germain and a rather transitory relationship with Swann's daughter, Gilberte, Marcel was advised to take a trip to a seaside resort, Balbec, for his health. Marcel was introduced to the world of the secret society of the homosexual with its rites, customs, and accoutrements on this first trip to Balbec, even though he was unaware of it at the time. It is there where he first met or saw the major homosexual characters of the work, Charlus, St. Loup, and Albertine. It was also at Balbec where he saw a premonition of the way of art. Before his departure for Balbec from Combray, Marcel reflected that,

Il faut laisser toute espérance de rentrer coucher chez soi une fois qu'on s'est décidé à pénétrer dans l'ancre empesté par où l'on accède au mystère, dans un de ces grands ateliers vitrés, comme celui de Saint-Lazare où j'allai chercher le train de Balbec, et qui déployait au-dessus de la ville éventrée un de ces immenses ciels crus et gros de menaces amoncelées de drame, pareils à certains ciels, d'une modernité presque parisienne, de

Mantegna ou de Véronèse, et sous lequel ne pouvait s'accomplir que quelque acte terrible et solennel comme un départ en chemin de fer ou l'érection de la Croix. (I, 645)

For Marcel, the trip to Balbec was to be a momentous occasion in his life and was to be exposed there to many mysteries. The mystery of the train station is the stepping stone to the mysteries of the rest of the novel. The symbol of the Elevation of the Cross is the symbol of the beginning of salvation for Marcel, the writer. It is the symbol of the theme of "felix culpa," that one must sin or must fall from grace before one can be saved. At Balbec, Marcel was bombarded with many realities, especially the constantly changing realities of his great love, Albertine. His subjection to a constant state of disillusionment, apart from a one reality, is in a sense his sin. The cross is the symbol of Marcel's awakening to what was to become part of his own reality and is also a marking point for the flow of time in Marcel's life. Marcel's relationships with Charlus, St. Loup, and Albertine were to become a part of his own reality, although a reality in a constant state of flux.

From his arrival at the coastal city of Balbec, Marcel was barraged by the images of Christ, the church and the crucifix. On his arrival there, Marcel thought,

Balbec-le-vieux, Balbec-en-terre, où je me trouvais n'était ni une plage ni un port. Certes, c'était bien dans la mer que les pêcheurs avaient trouvé, selon la légende, le Christ miraculeux

dont un vitrail de cette église qui était à quelques mètres de moi racontait la découverte; c'était bien de falaises battues par les flots qu'avait été tirée la pierre de la nef et des tours. (I, 658)

The mystery of the Christ in the water is linked to the aura of enigma which permeated the entire atmosphere of the city of Balbec. The mystery is compounded since there existed, in what is now modern Lebanon, an ancient city named Baalbek, which was the center of a cult of sun-worshippers. Its ruins remain as a testimony to its existence. The fact that Proust attributed Christian qualities to a city whose namesake was a site of paganism, exhibits once again the manner in which he subtly rejected the Christian religious nature of the imagery. The imagery of Balbec and Baalbek makes a connection, however, because of the fact that both sites were frequented by "sun-worshippers." There is certainly a relationship between the oriental nature of the church at Balbec, of which Proust wrote, and the oriental nature of the ruins excavated at Baalbek.

Like the Christ fished from the water, Marcel also found some significance in the church at Balbec.

Mais je ne voulus plus penser qu'à la signification éternelle des sculptures, quand je reconnus les Apôtres dont j'avais vu les statues moulées au musée du Trocadéro et qui, dans deux côtés de la Vierge, devant la baie profonde du porche, m'attendaient comme pour me faire honneur. La figure bienveillante, camuse et douce, le dos voûté, ils semblaient s'avancer d'un air de bienvenue en chantant l'Alleluia d'un beau jour. Mais on s'aperçevait que leur expression était immuable comme celle d'un mort et ne se modifiait que si on tournait autour d'eux. Je me disais: C'est ici,

c'est l'église de Balbec. Cette place qui a l'air de savoir sa gloire, est le seul lieu du monde qui possède l'église de Balbec. Ce que j'ai vu jusqu'ici, c'était des photographies de cette église, et, des ces Apôtres, de cette Vierge du porche si célèbres, les moulages seulement. Maintenant c'est l'église elle-même, c'est la statue elle-même, elles, les uniques: c'est bien plus. (I, 659)

The carved statues of the Apostles greeted Marcel, paid reverence to him, as they would to Christ, a living Christ in the form of writer, creator of art. Marcel had to change his position while viewing the statues of the Apostles to achieve different impressions of them. They were permanent realities of themselves, immortal, while Marcel was in a constant change of change. Unlike the casts of the Apostles in the Trocadero Museum, being once removed from the actual statues, the statues in the church were their own reality, yet holding a significance far greater than being mere statues. Marcel viewed them esthetically, not as religious objects. They were the symbols of the permanence of art and they welcomed Marcel to the world of art, art revering creator and vice versa.

Marcel was, however, disappointed with his first impressions of Balbec. He had, nevertheless, the reassuring character of his grandmother with him, a living entity from the world of the reality of Combray. Marcel's feelings for his grandmother were extremely strong. He felt very unsure of the strange surroundings in his room in the Grand Hotel at Balbec.

The new environs exuded none of the realities of his bedroom in Combray. He did, however, keep in contact with his grandmother, who was staying in the room next to his, with a series of taps on her wall to which she answered.

Et à peine j'avais frappé mes coups que j'en entendais trois autres, d'une intonation différente ceux-là, empreints d'une calme autorité, répétés à deux reprises pour plus de clarté et qui disaient: "Ne t'agite pas, j'ai entendu; dans quelques instants je serai là"; et bientôt après ma grand'mère arrivait. Je lui disais que j'avais eu peur qu'elle ne m'entendit pas ou crût que c'était un voisin qui avait frappé; elle riait: (I, 669)

The series of three taps reassured Marcel that his grandmother was within close proximity, that a fragment of the universe he considered to be reality was nearby. The trinity of the taps is another symbol of reality rediscovered, Marcel having been surrounded with objects foreign to his usual existence. The trinity of the taps was akin to an exorcist's cross in the expulsion of evil spirits, those spirits being the spirits of Marcel's new surroundings.

During his stay at Balbec, Marcel was introduced to an old school friend of his grandmother, Mme de Villeparisis. One day, this rather caustic woman took Marcel and his grandmother to a town named Carqueville. On their way back from Carqueville to Balbec, Marcel was confronted with a profound experience at Hudimesnil.

Nous descendîmes sur Hudimesnil; tout d'un coup je fus rempli de ce bonheur profond que je n'avais pas souvent ressenti depuis Combray, un bonheur analogue à celui que m'avaient donné, entre autres, les clochers de Martinville. Mais, cette fois, il resta incomplet. Je venais d'apercevoir, en retrait de la route en dos d'âne que nous suivions, trois arbres qui devaient servir d'entrée à une allée couverte et formaient un dessin que je ne voyais pas pour la première fois, je ne pouvais arriver à reconnaître le lieu dont ils étaient comme détachés, mais je sentais qu'il m'avait été familier autrefois; (I, 717)

The three trees did indeed have something in common with the three steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq as well as the steeple of St. Hilaire. Marcel was extremely confused as to their meaning.

Je regardais les trois arbres, je les voyais bien, mais mon esprit sentait qu'ils recouvraient quelque chose sur quoi il n'avait pas prise, comme sur ces objets placés trop loin dont nos doigts, allongés au bout de notre bras tendu, effleurent seulement par instant l'enveloppe sans arriver à rien saisir. (I, 717)

The three trees are another symbol in the progression of symbols of Marcel's development as a writer. The steeple of St. Hilaire was a symbol of reality, while the three steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq had confused reality for Marcel, effecting in him an urge to write. The three trees at Hudimesnil took this theme one step further. Unlike the steeples, the trees were animate objects, living and changing, therefore having only a temporary reality or no concrete reality as compared to the absolute reality of the steeple of St. Hilaire. For Marcel, nature was inferior, art was superior, in the form of man-made objects. It is

ironic that art, in the form of steeple and church, was able to arrest time, nature was symbolic of its flow. The steeples, which remained permanent, held the bells which pealed the passage of time. The steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq were inanimate, yet each possessed its own, singular reality. Assembled together, however, in Marcel's view of them, the singular realities lost their own reality in the reality of the composite vision. The three trees were

...peut-être apparation mythique, ronde de sorcieres ou de nornes qui me proposait ses oracles. Je crus plutôt que c'étaient des fantômes du passé, de chers compagnons de mon enfance, des amis disparus qui invoquaient nos communs souvenirs. Comme des ombres ils semblaient me demander de les emmener avec moi, de les rendre à la vie. (I, 719)

Whereas the steeple of St. Hilaire represented an absolute past reality, while the steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq were a symbol of the confusion of the amalgamation of past and present realities, the trinity of the trees held the mystery of past, present, and most importantly, future time and future reality. The trees were vestiges of Marcel's childhood, holding like Druidic souls, the memory of the former reality of his childhood at Combray, yet they were oracles of the future of Marcel. As the carriage moved away from the trees, Marcel reflected that, "Elle m'entraînait loin de ce que je croyais seul vrai, de ce qui m'eût rendu vraiment heureux, elle ressemblait à ma vie."

(I, 719)

The confusion Marcel experienced with the trees was a premonition of the anguish and disillusionment he would later feel in his life and in the novel, especially with the members of the secret society, one of them being Albertine, his great love. The trees are a symbol of both the death of his former, secure life and his propulsion into a life of enigmatic realities and the life of writer.

The ordeal of the trees was also a memory of the creative urge to write which had germinated after the vision of the bobbing steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq.

Ce plaisir, dont l'objet n'était que pressenti, que j'avais à créer moi-même, je ne l'éprouvais que de rares fois, mais à chacune d'elles il me semblait que les choses qui s'étaient passées dans l'intervalle n'avaient guère d'importance et qu'en m'attachant à sa seule réalité je pourrais commencer enfin une vraie vie. (I, 718)

Only by attaching himself to the pleasure of writing, of creativity, of forming a reality superior to life, could Marcel lead a true life. The incident of the three trees cemented the urge in Marcel to create a universal reality in the form of a monument to the immortality of man as artist.

Et quand, la voiture ayant bifurqué, je leur tournai le dos et cessai de les voir, tandis que Mme de Villeparisis me demandait pourquoi j'avais l'air rêveur, j'étais triste comme si je venais de perdre un ami, de mourir à moi-même, de renier un mort ou de méconnaître un dieu. (I, 719)

Marcel was to change immensely after this experience, for the innocent, childlike Marcel was to die after being introduced to the Marquis Robert de St. Loup. The friendship Marcel was to have with St. Loup was like the denial of a god since he was to enter the society of a hellish world where the Eden-like gardens of the reality of Combray no longer existed.

The white-robed being Marcel had seen on the beach in front of the Grand Hotel at Balbec, in the person of Robert de St. Loup, remained an enigma to him. Before St. Loup was introduced to Marcel, he behaved the part of arrogant aristocrat, snubbing Marcel at every opportunity. Marcel, however, changed his opinion of St. Loup after having been introduced to him.

Les premiers rites d'exorcisme une fois accomplis, comme une fée hargneuse dépouille sa première apparence et se pare de grâces enchantées, je vis cet être dédaigneux devenir le plus aimable, le plus prévenant jeune homme que j'eusse jamais rencontré. (I, 732)

Marcel described his meeting St. Loup in terms denoting a religious ritual to cast out the demonic spirits of one possessed. Again, the idea of the presence of the cross, used in exorcisms by the church, is employed by Proust to mark another point in Marcel's progression through time and the novel. It was Robert de St. Loup who introduced Marcel to the world of the secret society. This "rite of exorcism" described by Marcel is, however, an exorcism in reverse. St. Loup would only

become possessed of the mystery and nonreality of time until he was unmasked by another cross, his own.

St. Loup ushered Marcel into a meeting with his uncle, the Baron de Charlus. It was Charlus who would initiate Marcel, as voyeur, into the bizarre and cryptic world of the homosexual.

L'oncle qu'on attendait s'appelait Palamède, d'un prénom qu'il avait hérité des princes de Sicile, ses ancêtres. Et plus tard quand je retrouvai dans mes lectures historiques, appartenant à tel podestat ou tel prince de l'Église, ce prénom même, belle médaille de la Renaissance--d'aucuns disaient un véritable antique--toujours restée dans la famille, ayant glissé de descendant en descendant depuis le cabinet du Vatican jusqu'à l'oncle de mon ami. (I, 749)

Charles is placed in a Christian context. His name was descended from a Prince of the Church. Marcel foreshadowed an important event in his development as a writer with an indirect allusion to the cross.

After his initial meeting with Charlus, Marcel was disappointed that Charlus' aristocratic air was not one of mystery. Something did, however, plague Marcel and that was Charlus' gaze. Charlus' face with a pair of dark rings on his cheeks,

faisait penser à quelque incognite, à quelque déguisement d'un homme puissant en danger ou seulement d'un individu dangereux, mais tragique. J'aurais voulu deviner quel était ce secret que ne portaient pas en eux les autres hommes et qui m'avait déjà rendu si énigmatique le regard de M. de Charlus quand je l'avais vu le matin près du casino. (I, 761)

An important event, perhaps more important than his introduction to Charlus, was Marcel's meeting with

Bergotte, the writer. During his dinner with Bergotte, at the Swann home, Marcel reflected on the genius of the writer.

Pour se promener dans les airs, il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir l'automobile la plus puissante, mais une automobile qui, ne continuant pas de courir à terre et coupant d'une verticale la ligne qu'elle suivait, soit capable de convertir en force ascensionnelle sa vitesse horizontale. De même ceux qui produisent des oeuvres géniales ne sont pas ceux qui vivent dans le milieu le plus délicat, qui ont la conversation la plus brillante, la culture la plus étendue, mais ceux qui ont eu le pouvoir, cessant brusquement de vivre pour eux-mêmes, de rendre leur personnalité pareille à un miroir, de telle sorte que leur vie, si médiocre d'ailleurs qu'elle pouvait être momentanément et même, dans un certain sens, intellectuellement parlant, s'y reflète, le génie consistant dans le pouvoir réfléchissant et non dans la qualité intrinsèque du spectacle reflété. Le jour où le jeune Bergotte put montrer au monde de ses lecteurs le salon de mauvais goût où il avait passé son enfance et les causeries pas très drôles qu'il y tenait avec ses frères, ce jour-là il monta plus haut que les amis de sa famille, plus spirituels et plus distingués: ceux-ci dans leurs belles Rolls-Royce pourraient rentrer chez eux en témoignant un peu de mépris pour la vulgarité des Bergotte; mais lui, de son modeste appareil qui venait enfin de "décoller", il les survolait.
(I, 554-555)

Proust's use of the airplane as symbol of the superiority of the perception of the writer is significant. He could have chosen to use the symbol of the bird to allude to this superiority. The airplane, however, when viewed from the ground, especially the biplanes of Proust's life, were, in shape and form, flying crosses. Proust's choice of the airplane also reflects his view that nature is inferior, man-made objects, superior. He has wrenched the symbol of the cross from

its religious traditions by placing the symbol in the secular form of an airplane. In this respect, the cross has been transformed into the ultimate literary symbol. The writer has become a cross, in the literary sense. The writer as an airplane, in Marcel's eyes, has freed himself from the trappings of earthly existence. The writer also operates in a different element and from that vantage point of creative intellect he may observe with great clarity the realities of life in which other, mortal men are forever lost. The writer has been saved from terrestrial impermanence. As in Salvador Dali's Christ, in his painting, Discovery of America by Columbus, the writer, as artist, is resurrected into immortality by his work, by his genius of eluding time.

Marcel foreshadowed his visit to Balbec and the secret society while at the same dinner with Bergotte, when he thought,

Comme les grands docteurs de l'église commencèrent souvent, tout en étant bons, par connaître les péchés de tous les hommes, et en tirèrent leur sainteté personnelle, souvent les grands artistes, tout en étant mauvais, se servent de leurs vices pour arriver à concevoir la règle morale de tous. Ce sont les vices (ou seulement les faiblesses et les ridicules) du milieu où ils vivaient, les propos inconséquents, la vie frivole et choquante de leur fille, les trahisons de leur femme ou leurs propres fautes, que les écrivains ont le plus souvent flétris dans leurs diatribes sans changer pour cela le train de leur ménage ou le mauvais ton qui règne dans leur foyer. (I, 558)

Marcel compared Bergotte, as well as other writers, including himself, with churchmen who must seek out "sin"

to understand it, so that they may rise above it. Again, Proust has alluded to the theme of "felix culpa," that one must sin before one may be saved. Marcel, must, in order to write, have been exposed to a world of realities different from his corporeal and secure world of Combray--the world of secret societies, of Albertine, of changing reality. The budding writer, as fallen god, must know the worlds of reality and non-reality, decipher them, and incorporate them into his true, one reality. Only then can he achieve immortality and salvation from time.

Marcel, while at Balbec, noticed a band of girls who would play sports together. He became very interested in them and would wait for any opportunity to see them. They intrigued him, for their lives were mystery to him. Marcel yearned to be introduced to the band, especially to one of its members, who stood out from the others.

...en devenant l'ami de l'une d'elles j'eusse pénétré--comme un païen raffiné ou un chrétien scrupuleux chez les barbares--dans une société rejeunissante où régnaient la santé, l'inconscience, la volupté, la cruauté, l'inintellectualité et la joie. (I, 830)

Proust once again uses the image of the writer as fallen Christian, who must penetrate the barbarian society, the society of changing realities, the society of the band of girls, in order to incorporate that reality into his own sphere of reality as artist. The theme

of "felix culpa" is an important metaphor for Proust.

It is significant that Marcel finally discovered the name of the member of the band of girls with whom he had become so intrigued, at the studio of Elstir, the artist. Marcel had confessed to Elstir that he had been disappointed after having seen at first-hand, the porch of the church at Balbec. Elstir then explained to Marcel the religious significance of the story of the Virgin carved in stone at Balbec.

...et celui qui trempe sa main dans l'eau du bain de Jésus pour voir si elle est assez chaude; et celui qui sort des nuées pour poser sa couronne sur le front de la Vierge; et tous ceux qui, penchés du haut du ciel entre les balustres de la Jérusalem céleste, lèvent les bras d'épouvante ou de joie à la vue des supplices des méchants et du bonheur des élus! Car c'est tous les cercles du ciel, tout un gigantesque poème théologique et symbolique que vous avez là. (I, 841)

Marcel thought,

Cette vaste vision céleste dont il me parlait, ce gigantesque poème théologique que je comprenais avoir été écrit là, pourtant quand mes yeux pleins de désirs s'étaient ouverts devant la façade, ce n'est pas eux que j'avais vus. (I, 841-842)

Marcel was to feel the same frustration at not understanding Albertine as the frustration he felt at not having been able to perceive the significance of the religious scene at the church of Balbec. Marcel, struck by the esthetic beauty of the church as art, had failed to understand its religious symbolism. Albertine was to be as complex as a person as the porch at the church of Balbec was complex as a work of symbolic art.

Albertine, as Marcel's guide to "felix culpa," would also be his guide to the way of art, since in his understanding of her true reality, he would also understand the message of art. Marcel had approached the porch at the church of Balbec with presupposed, emotional conclusions and because of this approach, he failed to understand the symbolism of the porch. Elstir was his guide to that understanding. Marcel perceived Albertine from an emotional viewpoint and because of that stance would fail to see through her symbolic "haze." Time, as memory, would be the revealer of her true reality. He would be able to understand the symbolic poem of Albertine.

When Marcel was finally introduced to Albertine at Elstir's studio, he was disappointed with her. All the illusions he had of Albertine until his meeting with her were shattered.

J'avais beau être assez désappointé d'avoir trouvé en Mlle Simonet une jeune fille trop peu différente de tout ce que je connaissais, de même que ma déception devant l'église de Balbec ne m'empêchait pas de désirer aller à Quimperlé, à Pont-Aven et à Venise, je me disais que, par Albertine du moins, si elle-même n'était pas ce que j'avais espéré, je pourrais connaître ses amies de la petite bande. (I, 876)

As with all relationships in A la recherche du temps perdu, transcended space caused shattered illusions. Just as Elstir pointed out to Marcel, with his discussion of the porch at Balbec, that Marcel had not seen all the implications of the carvings, Marcel had not

even begun to penetrate the mysteries of Albertine. The disappointment Marcel had felt on first meeting Albertine could not begin to equal the disappointment and disillusionment he would feel later when he would suspect Albertine's lesbian tendencies. Marcel's meeting of Albertine was another step in his development as a writer, for with Albertine, Marcel would be thrown into a death cycle of disillusionment and nonreality greater than any other he had previously experienced and from which he would have to resurrect himself.

It was Charles Swann who was indirectly responsible for Marcel meeting Albertine for it was he who recommended Marcel to go to Balbec for his health. It is interesting to note that the last time Swann is seen as a functioning character in the novel was at the house of the Guermantes, in the final pages of Le Côté de Guermantes. Marcel had gone to visit Oriane, Charlus' sister-in-law. He was greeted by the Duc de Guermantes who told him,

Vous verrez Oriane tout à l'heure, me dit le duc quand je fus entré. Comme Swann doit venir tout à l'heure lui apporter les épreuves de son étude sur les monnaies de l'Ordre de Malte, et, ce qui est pis, une photographie immense où il a fait reproduire les deux faces de ces monnaies, Oriane a préféré s'habiller d'abord, pour pouvoir rester avec lui jusqu'au moment d'aller dîner. (II, 574)

Swann, earlier in the novel, was seen as the person who encouraged Marcel to write. In this incident, one of the last in which Swann is viewed, he is seen as a

broken man, a man who satisfied himself with a paltry work on the coinage of Malta, a man who had at one time promised a more literary manuscript about Johann Vermeer, the artist. It is significant that Swann commenced to be ushered out of the working plot of the novel as a literary dilettante, a fate Marcel would fear for himself. It is also meaningful that Swann's work was one dealing with a crusading order, soldiers of the Cross, the Knights of Malta. This indirect allusion to the cross is employed by Proust as a premonition of the demise of Swann. Swann would not achieve immortality for his work was on the coinage of Malta. It did not involve the creative intellect Marcel had described when speaking of the talents of Bergotte. Swann's work did not employ any of the metaphorical subtlety which would be the hallmark of Proust's. Swann's crosses had no symbolic meaning, they were merely stamped onto coins whereas Proust used the symbol of the cross as metaphor, the meaning of each lying below its concrete representation, as symbols of art.

The symbol of the cross in this little visit by Marcel to the Guermantes is also a premonition of the true character of Charlus as homosexual. It is, however, a twisted, perverted symbol, withdrawn from its religious traditions. In the same scene of the Duc de Guermantes greeting Marcel, he said, of Oriane,

Elle a cru que c'était gentil de demander à Swann de pouvoir regarder les uns à côté des autres tous ces grands maîtres de l'Ordre dont il a trouvé les médailles à Rhodes. Car je vous disais Malte, c'est Rhodes, mais c'est le même Ordre de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem. Dans le fond elle ne s'intéresse à cela que parce que Swann s'en occupe. Notre famille est très mêlée à toute cette histoire; même encore aujourd'hui, mon frère que vous connaissez est un des plus hauts dignitaires de l'Ordre de Malte. Mais j'aurais parlé de tout cela à Oriane, elle ne m'aurait seulement pas écouté. En revanche, il a suffi que les recherches de Swann sur les Templiers (car c'est inouï la rage des gens d'une religion à étudier celle des autres) l'aient conduit à l'Histoire des Chevaliers de Rhodes, héritiers des Templiers, pour qu'aussitôt Oriane veuille voir les têtes de ces chevaliers. (II, 574)

Charlus is discovered to be a high dignitary in the Order of Malta. The Knights of Malta, as with all crusading orders, employed the symbol of the cross as their crest. Proust made a subtle connection between the Knights of Malta and the Knights Templars in the Duc's conversation with Marcel when the Duc said the Knights of Rhodes and the Knights of Malta were of the same order of Saint John of Jerusalem and that the Knights of Rhodes succeeded the Templars. During the crusades, King Philip IV of France hated the power of the Templars, who had become the bankers of Europe. In 1307, the Templars were charged with heresy by a former member of the order and with the aid of Pope Clement V, Philip IV instigated proceedings against the Templars. Whether the charges were true or not, one of the major crimes attributed to the Templars was the sin of

homosexuality and desecrating the cross during their initiation rites. Many of the confessions to the alleged crimes were obtained by torture. The trials continued until 1314 when the Grand Master Jacques de Molay was burned at the stake.

With the information concerning Charlus' high position in the Order of Malta, Proust has alluded to, or presaged, the homosexuality of Charlus. Swann's visit to the Guermantes showed him to be a mere social climber. His visit was also a subtle exposé of the true character of Charlus. Detached from the world of Swann and Combray, Marcel would be plummeted into the netherworld of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Whereas the cross for Marcel is a symbol of resurrection and salvation from time, the cross, or allusions to it, for the homosexual characters in the work, it is a symbol of their guilt, their depravity, impending doom and destruction. This is no more evident than in the novel, Sodome et Gomorrhe. At the outset of this novel, Proust again perverted the symbol of the cross in the homosexual scene between Charlus and Jupien, the tailor. Charlus had been discussing with Jupien some of the men with whom he had associated.

"Pour revenir aux jeunes gens qui ne sont pas du peuple, reprit le baron, en ce moment j'ai la tête tournée par un étrange petit bonhomme, un intelligent petit bourgeois, qui montre à mon égard une incivilité prodigieuse. Il n'a aucunement la notion du prodigieux personnage que je suis et du microscopique vibrion qu'il figure. Après tout

qu'importe, ce petit âne peut braire autant qu'il lui plaît devant ma robe auguste d'évêque.--
 Évêque! s'écria Jupien qui n'avait rien compris des dernières phrases que venait de prononcer M. de Charlus, mais que le mot d'évêque stupéfia. Mais cela ne va guère avec la religion, dit-il.--
 J'ai trois papes dans ma famille, répondit M. de Charlus, et le droit de draper en rouge à cause d'un titre cardinalice, la nièce du cardinal, mon grand-oncle, ayant apporté à mon grand-père le titre de duc qui fut substitué. (II, 612)

It is significant that the voyeuristic revelation of Charlus' homosexuality occurred at the same moment as the revelation that Charlus enjoyed the right to a bishop's mantle in gules. A bishop, while wearing his official, clerical garb, bears a large cross on his chest, suspended from his neck by a chain, known as a "pectoral cross." The association or allusion to the crucifix is obvious. Proust, as the crime of which the Knights Templars were accused, desecrated the symbol of the cross by associating it with a homosexual rite. Marcel was not only introduced to the homosexual world by his vision of Charlus and Jupien but was introduced to its twisted symbols and secrets, in this case, a homosexual is a bishop by inheritance. In this allusion to the cross, it is a symbol of homosexuality, and of reality deceived. Marcel, however, preserves the cross for himself as the symbol of resurrection from time.

In this respect, Proust gave the cross a multiple symbolism and removed it from its religious context. From the time of Christ's death, the cross was

always an ambiguous symbol with two clearly separated meanings. The Cross of Good Friday was a cross of Death but when viewed from the vantage point of Easter Sunday, it was a cross of triumph over Death, and of salvation. The Church Fathers believed that not everyone could perceive this event in the same manner because Good Friday and Easter had to be viewed through the eyes of Faith. The pagan, a nonbeliever, would only see the Cross of Good Friday as a cross of Death. The believer would see the Cross of Good Friday from the vantage point of Easter Sunday, a symbol of triumph over Death.

Although Proust removed the symbol of the cross from its religious context, the cross, for Marcel, as a blind "believer" in his own, though unsupported hope that he would become a writer and realize his creative genius, was the cross in the sky, a cross of triumph over the ephemerality of Time and Death. Marcel had faith, that, like Christ, he too, would become immortal. The pagans, as represented by the homosexuals in the novel, had no faith. Their cross-symbol was like the Cross of Good Friday, the earthbound cross of Death.

Homosexuals reproduce themselves outside of biological time.

Comme tant de créatures du règne animal et du règne végétal, comme la plante qui produirait la vanille, mais qui, parce que, chez elle, l'organe mâle est séparé par une cloison de l'organe femelle, demeure stérile si les

oiseaux-mouches ou certaines petites abeilles ne transportent le pollen des unes aux autres ou si l'homme ne les féconde artificiellement, M. de Charlus (et ici le mot fécondation doit être pris au sens moral, puisqu'au sens physique l'union du mâle avec le mâle est stérile, ... (II, 627)

Proust stated that homosexual relationships are sterile, in the biological sense, however, the perpetuance of the homosexual society through time is not sterile since it is brought about by social reproduction.

Heterosexual relationships are not sterile in the biological sense but the secret society of the homosexual, as microcosm of all societies, accentuates the fact that all societies are sterile because of the inevitability of death. Only the writer, as artist, above the transitory nature of society, is not sterile. His efforts are not futile, unlike all societies, since his endeavors remain as a permanent, living entity.

The theme of the cross as symbol of reality deceived, as symbol of the destruction of the secret society and perhaps of all societies, since all societies are ephemeral, is continued in Proust's description of M. de Charles at the party given by the Princesse de Guermantes.

J'eus tout le loisir (comme il feignait d'être absorbe dans une partie de whist simulée qui lui permettait de ne pas avoir l'air de voir les gens) d'admirer la volontaire et artiste simplicité de son frac qui, par des riens qu'un couturier seul eût discernés, avait l'air d'une "Harmonie" noir et blanc de Whistler; noir, blanc et rouge plutôt, car M. de Charlus portait, suspendue à un large cordon au jabot de l'habit,

la croix en émail blanc, noir et rouge de Chevalier de l'Ordre religieux de Malte. (II, 652)

Proust "painted" a conspicuous "portrait" of Charlus wearing his cross. It is as if Charlus was wearing the badge of his sin, "bearing the cross" of his guilt, the emblem of his secret associations. This portrait, presented by Proust, is one of stark, defined realism. The elegant yet severe combination of black, white and red seemed to hint at the malevolence of Charlus' personality. It is not mere happenstance that Proust emphasized Charlus' cross with a reference to the artist Whistler, who had, himself, led a rather strange, private life. Whistler, as artist, was superior, however, to Charlus, since in his paintings he had transcended time. Proust's "Harmonie" of Charlus would be superior to Charlus himself. The "Harmonie" is permanent, Charlus was ephemeral.

These references to the cross are seen throughout the work. Another allusion to the symbol was witnessed in the comical scene between the hotel manager and Marcel on Marcel's second arrival at the seaside city of Balbec. The manager had been informing Marcel of some of the events which had transpired during his absence from Balbec. One of the events concerned the chief magistrate of Caen.

Compensation heureuse, le premier président de Caen venait de recevoir la "cravache" de commandeur de la Légion d'honneur. "Sûr et certain

qu'il a des capacités, mais paraît qu'on la lui a donnée surtout à cause de sa grande "impuissance". (II, 752)

Whether the manager meant to use the word "impuissance" or not, due to the poor manner in which he spoke the French language, Proust's message is clear. The decoration of the Légion d'honneur, inaugurated by Napoléon I, is in the shape of a cross. The allusion or reference to the sterility and perhaps, homosexuality of the magistrate of Caen, is evident in the employment of the symbol of the crucifix. The symbol of the cross has again been reduced to a secular context. The magistrate received his cross as symbol of his "sterility."

Balbec, especially the Grand Hotel at Balbec, was the scene for much of the activity of the secret society of the homosexual in the novel, Sodome et Gomorrhe. One day, while observing the activities of the personnel of the Grand Hotel at Balbec, Marcel asked himself, "je pouvais me demander si je pénétrais dans le grand hôtel de Balbec ou dans le temple de Salomon." The Knights Templars, who were accused of homosexuality and desecrating the cross, were named the Knights of the Temple because of the fact that their first headquarters, during the Crusades, were at the Temple of Solomon in the Holy Land. In this reference, Proust has made a subtle connection between the homosexuality of the Templars and the guests of the

hotel at Balbec.

Continuing the theme of Balbec as an amalgamation of the Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Proust again employed an allusion to the Knights Templars in Marcel's conversation with Brichot, a professor at the Sorbonne.

...je demandai à Brichot s'il savait ce que signifiait Balbec. "Balbec est probablement une corruption de Daldec, me dit-il. Il faudrait pouvoir consulter les chartes des rois d'Angleterre, suzerains de la Normandie, car Balbec dépendait de la baronnie de Douvres, à cause de quoi on disait souvent Balbec d'Outre-Mer, Balbec-en-Terre. Mais la baronnie de Douvres elle-même relevait de l'évêché de Bayeux et malgré des droits qu'eurent momentanément les templiers sur l'abbaye, à partir de Louis d'Harcourt, patriarche de Jérusalem et évêque de Bayeux, ce furent les évêques de ce diocèse qui furent colatéraux aux biens de Balbec. (II, 936-937)

Brichot stated that the Templars temporarily enjoyed the rights of the abbey in Balbec. Perhaps they enjoyed the same "rights" as the characters who frequented the Grand Hotel at Balbec. The personnel employed at the hotel shared the same sexual proclivities as the patrons. In fact, in speaking of Aimé, the hotel's head waiter, Marcel stated,

Comme tous les chefs d'étage de l'hôtel de Balbec, comme plusieurs valets de chambre du prince de Guermantes, Aimé appartenait à une race plus ancienne que celle du prince, donc plus noble. (II, 990)

The homosexual society could claim inheritance to homosexuals who had lived during the Golden Age of Greece, while the Prince de Guermantes could probably trace

his own ancestry only as far in the past as the year 900, therefore, the homosexual would deem himself more "noble" than the relatively "new nobility" of heterosexual, titled individuals.

During his second visit to Balbec, Marcel had been engaged in a fairly satisfactory relationship with his mysterious love, Albertine, but their association began to show the strains of jealousy. These pressures began when Marcel viewed Albertine and Andrée intimately dancing in the ballroom of the Grand Hotel at Balbec. Albertine denied to Marcel that she had any attraction for members of her own sex and that all her love was focused on Marcel. This little incident, however, was enough to precipitate in Marcel an all-consuming jealousy. The argument which occurred between Albertine and Marcel concerning Albertine's desire to go to the nearby town of Infreville to see some of her lady friends did not alleviate the worst of fears in Marcel. Until this point in the novel, he had been only an observer of the society of Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, because of his relationship with the shadowy Albertine, Marcel was directly affected by their customs, activities, and idiosyncrasies. He had lost the security of the recreated world he had made for himself at Balbec. The world of his childhood, of innocence, the Paradise Lost of Combray, had vanished in the oblivion of time. Even though Marcel had

witnessed a lesbian love scene between Mlle. Vinteuil and her lady friend during his childhood at Combray, he had failed to comprehend its meaning. The distance from Combray to Balbec only underscored his passage through time from child to man and the phenomena of discovery and disillusionment which accompanied his aging. Habit, at Balbec, had restored some of the security he had felt at Combray but because of Albertine's suspicious activities, Marcel was again forced into a world of confusion, where the meaning for him, remained obscure.

While on an automobile trip in the countryside, surrounding Balbec, an incident occurred to Marcel which was directly related to the event of the steeples at Martinville and also to the three trees at Hudimesnil. Marcel, while on the way to join Albertine, thought about all the women he had pursued.

C'était naturel, et ce n'était pourtant pas indifférent; ils me rappelaient que mon sort était de ne poursuivre que des fantômes, des êtres dont la réalité, pour une bonne part, était dans mon imagination; il y a des êtres en effet--et ç'avait été, dès la jeunesse, mon cas--pour qui tout ce qui a une valeur fixe, constatable par d'autres, la fortune, le succès, les hautes situations, ne comptent pas; ce qu'il leur faut, ce sont des fantômes. Ils y sacrifient tout le reste, mettent tout en oeuvre, font tout servir à rencontrer tel fantôme. Mais celui-ci ne tarde pas à s'évanouir; alors on court après tel autre, quitte à revenir ensuite au premier. Ce n'était pas la première fois que je recherchais Albertine, la jeune fille vue la première année devant la mer. (II, 1012)

Marcel came to the realization that reality had only

existed in his imagination. He had fixed an ideal of Albertine in his mind, an Albertine who would forever be faithful and in love with him only. The only ideal which Albertine could project was in his own mind. The Albertine he had been pursuing was only a "fantôme," a creature from some netherworld who could appear and disappear at will, an entity in which the worlds of reality and nonreality collided.

De fantômes poursuivis, oubliés, recherchés à nouveau, quelquefois pour une seule entrevue, et afin de toucher à une vie irréelle laquelle aussitôt s'enfuyait, ces chemins de Balbec en étaient pleins. En pensant que leurs arbres, poiriers, pommiers, tamaris, me survivraient, il me semblait recevoir d'eux le conseil de me mettre enfin au travail, pendant que n'avait pas encore sonné l'heure du repos éternel.
(II, 1013)

The warning he had received from the trees lining the roads of Balbec was the same as that of the trees at Hudimesnil. That trinity of trees had sparked in him an urge to write. The trees of Balbec, of which Proust mentioned three types, motivated him to forget all the phantoms he had been chasing, to escape and engage himself in the quest for the one, true reality, the creative genius of his imagination and memory in the form of a written work of art. The phantoms of his childhood and the phantoms of the women he had pursued were but a part of the changing realities of an illusive world. As Marcel noted, time was overtaking him. If he did not commence with his work, he would be swallowed

up, as all other mortals and phantom chasers, in the abyss of time. The trees, as symbol of the trinity, as well as the cross, were signals that would direct him on the path, the way, of art. In this respect, Marcel realized that,

J'avais peut-être de l'amour pour Albertine, mais n'osais pas le lui laisser apercevoir, si bien que, s'il existait en moi, ce ne pouvait être que comme une vérité sans valeur jusqu'à ce qu'on eût pu la contrôler par l'expérience; or il me semblait irréalisable et hors du plan de la vie. Quant à ma jalousie, elle me poussait à quitter le moins possible Albertine, bien que je susse qu'elle ne guérirait tout à fait qu'en me séparant d'elle à jamais. (II, 1015)

As well as being plagued by the mysteries of Albertine, Marcel was plagued by the enigma of Charlus. It was seen that Charlus and his musician friend and ward, Morel, had employed a car a chauffeur whose company was in Paris. The chauffeur took Charlus and Morel on excursions in the countryside. He, however, had been ordered back to Paris by the company for whom he worked.

Cette raison, d'autant plus que le chauffeur était charmant et s'exprimait si simplement qu'on eût toujours dit paroles d'Évangile, nous sembla devoir être conforme à la vérité. Elle ne l'était qu'à demi. Il n'y avait, en effet, plus rien à faire à Balbec. Et en tous cas, la Compagnie, n'ayant qu'à demi confiance dans la véracité du jeune évangéliste, appuyé sur sa roue de consécration, désirait qu'il revînt au plus vite à Paris. Et en effet, si le jeune apôtre accomplissait miraculeusement la multiplication des kilomètres quand il les comptait à M. de Charlus, en revanche, dès qu'il s'agissait de rendre compte à sa Compagnie, il divisait par 6 ce qu'il avait gagné. (II, 1027-1028)

The chauffeur, Charlus' young "Apostle," bent over the "consecration cross" of his steering wheel, is another image of the crucifix as symbol of the impermanence, guilt, and doom of the homosexual society. The chauffeur's "cross," the earthbound cross, in the form of his steering wheel, was guide to the homosexual activities of Charlus and Morel. This incident, described in such Christian terms, also reminds one of the praise Marcel gave to the writer Bergotte when he described him as an airplane soaring over the heads of the mortal, non-artists, like Charlus, who were contented to roll along the ground in their automobiles. The themes of the cross in the sky versus the earthbound cross were particularly emphasized by Proust, for on practically the same page in the novel, Marcel was horseback riding in the countryside when,

Tout à coup mon cheval se cabra; il avait entendu un bruit singulier, j'eus peine à le maîtriser et à ne pas être jeté à terre, puis je levai vers le point d'où semblait venir ce bruit mes yeux pleins de larmes, et je vis à une cinquantaine de mètres au-dessus de moi, dans le soleil, entre deux grandes ailes d'acier étincelant qui l'emportaient, un être dont la figure peu distincte me parut ressembler à celle d'un homme. Je fus aussi ému que pouvait l'être un Grec qui voyait pour la première fois un demi-dieu. Je pleurais aussi, car j'étais prêt à pleurer du moment que j'avais reconnu que le bruit venait d'au-dessus de ma tête--les avions étaient encore rares à cette époque--à la pensée que ce que j'allais voir pour la première fois c'était un avion. Alors, comme quand on sent venir dans un journal une parole émouvante, je n'attendais que d'avoir aperçu l'avion pour fondre en larmes. Cependant l'aviateur sembla hésiter sur sa voie; je sentais ouvertes devant lui--devant moi, si l'habitude

ne m'avait pas fait prisonnier--toutes les routes de l'espace, de la vie; il poussa plus loin, plana quelques instants au-dessus de la mer, puis prenant brusquement son parti, semblant céder à quelque attraction inverse de celle de la pesanteur, comme retournant dans sa patrie, d'un léger mouvement de ses ailes d'or il piqua droit vers le ciel.
(II, 1029)

This scene of Marcel's sheer delight and awe upon seeing the airplane was a restrengthening of his desire to become a writer. The allusion to the airplane as literary symbol was reinforced when Marcel said, "Alors, comme quand on sent venir dans un journal une parole émouvante, je n'attendais que d'avoir aperçu l'avion pour fondre en larmes." (II, 1029) Whereas Charlus was concerned with such mundane and lamentable tasks as attempting to keep a chauffeur for his own employment and enjoyment, Marcel realized the superiority of the airman, soaring in a celestial, ethereal element above all other mortals. The "demi-god" suspended on his cross of the "deux grandes ailes d'acier étincelant" visually expressed Marcel's yearning to free himself from the temporal element of the earth, and all its confusing reality and mortal tragedy, to ascend into the heavenly element of the limitless sky. The sky symbolized for him the infinite expanse of space where distance, or the transcendence of space, had almost no meaning as a metaphor of time, where time was almost arrested, where the only reality would be Marcel, his imagination, and his memories. The cross of the airplane was the symbol of Marcel's desire

to be resurrected from earthly temporalities. It was his Cross of Good Friday viewed from the vantage point of Easter Sunday, although Proust transformed the symbol from its religious traditions into a literary symbol.

Another allusion to the ephemerality of societies transpired during the scene in which Charlus learned that a Jewish man, Bloch, the person who introduced Marcel to the works of Bergotte, had purchased a house named "La Commanderie." Charlus was disturbed that a Jew would live in a house which possessed the name of the headquarters of a crusading order.

"Quelle horreur! s'écria-t-il, en rendant à sa voix toute sa vigueur claironnante. Toutes les localités ou propriétés appelées "la Commanderie" ont été bâties ou possédées par les Chevaliers de l'Ordre de Malte (dont je suis), comme les lieux dits le "Temple" ou "la Cavalerie" par les Templiers. J'habiterais la Commanderie que rien ne serait plus naturel. Mais un Juif! Du reste, cela ne m'étonne pas; cela tient à un curieux goût du sacrilège, particulier à cette race.
(II, 1104-1105)

The Knights Templars also called their headquarters "La Commanderie." It is rather ironic that Charlus, being a man of intelligence, would not see the connection between the Jews and Knights of Malta and Knights Templars. Both the Jews and the crusading orders strove to take possession of Palestine, territory holy to both Christians and Jews. The Jews and Knights Templars were also targets of persecution, as are all minorities, including the minority of which Charlus was a member, the

homosexual society. It is also ironic that the Jews and the Templars would be charged with the same crime of sacrilege, the Jews of desecrating a god on a cross, the Templars of desecrating the symbol of the cross. A Jew living in a "Christian" habitat is merely an allusion to the fact that as one society crumbles, others will take its place in a never-ending cycle. With the impending disaster of World War I, the nobility in Europe would collapse, to be replaced by a strong, middle-class society. The allusions to the societies whose symbols were the cross only serve to reinforce the theme that the crosses and symbols of mortal men are symbols of their transience while Marcel's crosses were symbols of a permanent reality.

Charlus was also upset when he discovered that Bloch's address was Rue du Temple. During the conversation which ensued between Brichot and Charlus, more subtle references through etymological association were made to Balbec as a homosexual haven.

"En effet, fit remarquer Brichot, la rue du Temple s'appelait rue de la Chevalerie-du-Temple. Et à ce propos, me permettez-vous une remarque, baron? dit l'universitaire.--Quoi? Qu'est-ce que c'est? dit sèchement M. de Charlus, que cette observation empêchait d'avoir son renseignement.--Non, rien, répondit Brichot intimidé. C'était à propos de l'étymologie de Balbec qu'on m'avait demandée. La rue du Temple s'appelait autrefois la rue Barre-du-Bec, parce que l'Abbaye du Bec, en Normandie, avait là à Paris sa barre de justice." (II, 1105)

There is a multisided connection in this quotation

between what Charlus viewed as a perverse act, that is, a Jew living in la Rue du Temple and what he did not view as a perverse act, homosexuals using Balbec as a resort area. It was apropos for the homosexual society, however, to use Balbec as a spa if the charges made in the fourteenth century against the Templars were indeed true.

Charlus again exhibited his hatred for the Jews when he stated,

Quand on donne, dans la Semaine Sainte, ces indécents spectacles qu'on appelle "la Passion", ma moitié de la salle est remplie de Juifs, exultant à la pensée qu'ils vont mettre une seconde fois le Christ sur la Croix, au moins en effigie. (II, 1105)

Charlus did not realize, however, that in his own indecent spectacles of passion, such as the one with Jupien to which Marcel was audience, and in his wearing of the effigy of Christ, the cross of the Order of Malta, he committed acts of sacrilege far worse than those of which he had alleged to Jews.

During this period, Marcel's suspicions of Albertine became more intense when he learned of her friendship with Mlle. Vinteuil's lady friend, the woman whom he had seen during his childhood, engaged in a lesbian love scene with Mlle. Vinteuil at Montjouvain. The world of society, of transient relationships, and temporal realities was collapsing around Marcel. He realized that the only world of true reality existed

within his mind.

Deux on trois fois, pendant un instant, j'eus l'idée que le monde ou étaient cette chambre et ces bibliothèques, et dans lequel Albertine était si peu de chose, était peut-être un monde intellectuel, qui était la seule réalité, et mon chagrin, quelque chose comme celui que donne la lecture d'un roman et dont un fou seul pourrait faire un chagrin durable et permanent et se prolongeant dans sa vie; qu'il suffirait peut-être d'un petit mouvement de ma volonté pour atteindre ce monde réel, y rentrer en dépassant ma douleur comme un cerceau de papier qu'on crève, et ne plus me soucier davantage de ce qu'avait fait Albertine que nous ne nous soucions des actions de l'héroïne imaginaire d'un roman après que nous en avons fini la lecture. (II, 1126)

Marcel, at this point, was becoming more disillusioned with the world of society, of Albertine, and more possessed of the world of books, the world of memory encased within the covers of the written work. He realized that the intellect and the creative spirit held a position far superior to the fugitive delights of Albertine. He did make, however, one more fruitless attempt to capture the reality of a transient, unreal world when he decided to leave Balbec with Albertine and keep her as a virtual prisoner in his house in Paris. Marcel knew, nevertheless,

En réalité, en quittant Balbec, j'avais cru quitter Gomorrhe, en arracher Albertine; hélas! Gomorrhe était dispersée aux quatre coins du monde. Et, moitié par ma jalousie, moitié par ignorance de ces joies (cas qui est fort rare), j'avais réglé à mon insu cette partie de cache-cache où Albertine m'échapperait toujours. (III, 23)

Marcel was to discover that the only solution to his problems would be the departure of Albertine from his

life. The future flight of Albertine was alluded to when Marcel thought,

A ces êtres-là, à ces êtres de fuite, leur nature, notre inquiétude attachent des ailes. Et même auprès de nous, leur regard semble nous dire qu'ils vont s'envoler. La preuve de cette beauté, surpassant la beauté, qu'ajoutent les ailes, est que bien souvent pour nous un même être est successivement sans ailes et ailé. Que nous craignons de le perdre, nous oublions tous les autres. Sûrs de le garder, nous le comparons à ces autres qu'aussitôt nous lui préférons. (III, 93)

This theme of flight, the flight of Albertine and thus the flight of Marcel to freedom from the ethereal world of transient realities was continued in the reference to the visit of Marcel and Albertine to an aerodrome.

Comme il n'avait pas tardé à s'établir autour de Paris des hangars d'aviation, qui sont pour les aéroplanes ce que les ports sont pour les vaisseaux, et que depuis le jour où, près de la Raspelière, la rencontre quasi mythologique d'un aviateur, dont le vol avait fait se cabrer mon cheval, avait été pour moi comme une image de la liberté, j'aimais souvent qu'à la fin de la journée le but de nos sorties--agréable d'ailleurs à Albertine, passionnée pour tous les sports--fût un de ces aérodromes. (III, 105)

For both Albertine and Marcel, the airplane was a symbol of liberty. For Albertine, it was freedom from Marcel, to be free to lead her Sapphic life without his restraints. For Marcel, it was a symbol of resurrection, a cross-like image of salvation, from Albertine and from time.

Marcel's jealousy was reaching its full fruition when Albertine no longer wished to visit the Verdurins. Their evenings together no longer amused him.

Ce n'était plus l'apaisement du baiser de ma mère à Combray que j'éprouvais auprès d'Albertine, ces soirs-là, mais, au contraire, l'angoisse de ceux où ma mère me disait à peine bonsoir, ou même ne montait pas dans ma chambre, soit qu'elle fût fâchée contre moi ou retenue par des invités.
(III, 111)

Marcel felt again the anguish of his days at Combray when the good-night kiss was denied him by his mother. Those kisses of the "Holy Spirit" now denied him again by Albertine catapulted him further into the confused world of human relationships.

Albertine began to make trips to Versailles by automobile, which aroused in Marcel even greater suspicions. He entrusted Albertine in the care of her chauffeur and demanded that he keep a watchful eye over her activities. The chauffeur did reveal, however, his true nature, in Proust's description of him.

Le charmant mécanicien apostolique sourit finement, la main posée sur sa roue en forme de croix de consécration. Puis il me dit ces paroles qui (chassant les inquiétudes de mon coeur ou elles furent aussitôt remplacées par la joie) me donnèrent envie de lui sauter au cou: "N'ayez crainte, me dit-il. Il ne peut rien lui arriver, car, quand mon volant ne la promène pas, mon oeil la suit partout. (III, 133)

This chauffeur, just as the one at Balbec, was described in religious terms. He is "apostolic" and his steering wheel was described as a consecration cross, yet he deceived Marcel. Again, the symbol of the cross emerged as an allusion of the transience and nonreality of people, who as mortals, are contented to ride in motorcars. This chauffeur, as was the chauffeur of

Charlus and Morel, was a guide to the homosexual activities of Albertine. The consecration cross of the steering wheel, as earthbound cross, is a symbol of death since motorcars travel on a horizontal plane, not liberated from terrestrial mortality. The symbol for Marcel, as for Bergotte, was the airplane, the cross capable of traveling in a vertical plane, in the element of heavenly immortality, the cross as symbol of resurrection and salvation of the artist.

The image of the airplane as cross, was noted once again during a moment Marcel reflected on the meanings of books and music as art, as being more real than life.

Séparé de Wagner par la cloison sonore, je l'entendais redoubler le rire immortellement jeune et les coups de marteau de Siegfried; du reste, plus merveilleusement frappées étaient ces phrases, l'habileté technique de l'ouvrier ne servait qu'à leur faire plus librement quitter la terre, oiseaux pareils non au cygne de Lohengrin mais à cet aéroplane que j'avais vu à Balbec changer son énergie en élévation, planer au-dessus des flots, et se perdre dans le ciel. Peut-être, comme les oiseaux qui montent le plus haut, qui volent le plus vite, ont une aile plus puissante, fallait-il de ces appareils vraiment matériels pour explorer l'infini, de ces cent vingt chevaux marque Mystère, où pourtant, si haut qu'on plane, on est un peu empêché de goûter le silence des espaces par le puissant ronflement du moteur! (III, 162)

A dichotomy is expressed here between the material essence of the work of literature or music as a means of escape to a higher reality and the materiality of the airplane as a means to experience the infinity of space. Marcel demonstrated, however, that the pleasure

of experiencing that infinity by airplane is somewhat inferior due to the noise of the engines. The work of art, translated into intellectual reality in the mind of the participant would be the only satisfactory vehicle in which to experience the reality of the infinity of one's mind. The "Mystère" of the airplane is related to the mystery of the resurrection of Christ.

The character who inspired Marcel to explore the reality of art, by way of his being a rather famed writer himself, died. Bergotte's death left Marcel without the inspiration Bergotte's living had upon him. Bergotte, however, was not permanently gone in the eyes of Marcel, or his readers,

On l'enterra, mais toute la nuit funèbre, aux vitrines éclairées, ses livres, disposés trois par trois, veillaient comme des anges aux ailes éployées et semblaient, pour celui qui n'était plus, le symbole de sa resurrection. (III, 188)

Bergotte's books, lined up on the shelf three by three, in the manner of the trinity, were the symbols of his resurrection, his victory over the temporality of time. Proust once again removed the symbol of the cross from its religious traditions by replacing it with the literary symbol of the trinity of Bergotte's books.

Swann, a non-artist, who died shortly after Bergotte, was not to be resurrected in the same manner. In fact, as Marcel demonstrated, his life was reduced to a short obituary in a newspaper. "Elles avaient suffi à faire d'un vivant quelqu'un qui ne pût plus

répondre à ce qu'on lui dit, qu'on nom, un nom écrit, passé tout à coup du monde réel dans le royaume du silence." (III, 201) Unlike Bergotte, whose literary words would express his feelings, ideas, and viewpoints long after his death, Swann's only hope for resurrection from the "royaume du silence" would be to become part of Marcel's memory and thus incorporated into his work.

Marcel's memory was jolted with the phrase from the musical composition of Vinteuil at the party of the Verdurins.

Je savais que cette nuance nouvelle de la joie, cet appel vers une joie supra-terrestre, je ne l'oublierais jamais. Mais serait-elle jamais réalisable pour moi? Cette question me paraissait d'autant plus importante que cette phrase était ce qui aurait pu le mieux caractériser--comme tranchant avec tout le reste de ma vie, avec le monde visible--ces impressions qu'à des intervalles éloignés je retrouvais dans ma vie comme les points de repère, les amorces pour la construction d'une vie véritable: l'impression éprouvée devant les clochers de Martinville, devant une rangée d'arbres près de Balbec. (III, 261)

Vinteuil's phrase brought back memories of important events in Marcel's life, which signalled starting points in Marcel's quest for a true vocation, the life of writer. The phrase which recreated memories of the Martinville steeples and the trees at Balbec also resurrected the memory of Mlle. Vinteuil and her suspected relations with one of the nonrealities in his life, Albertine.

Another event also occurred at the Verdurins' party which precipitated the break of Charlus with the Verdurin clan and Morel. Charlus had promised Marcel a gift in appreciation for his friendship.

"Hé bien, enfin, ce n'est pas trop tôt; êtes-vous content, jeune gloire et bientôt jeune chevalier de la Légion d'honneur? Car bientôt vous pourrez montrer votre croix", demanda M. de Charlus à Morel d'un air tendre et triomphant, mais, par ces mots mêmes de décoration, contre-signant les mensonges de Mme Verdurin, qui apparurent une vérité indiscutable à Morel. (III, 316)

Charlus would have greatly enjoyed seeing Morel wearing a cross like his, an earthbound cross, symbol of his guilt, of his homosexuality, of Morel's relationships with him. Morel refused the gift of the cross, denouncing Charlus after Mme Verdurin told him Charlus only procured the cross in order that Morel could impress his uncle, the footman. Charlus, in turn, denounced Morel and the Verdurin clan. After the little scene was completed, it had been reported that Charlus had attempted to rape the young musician. Charlus fell into great disfavor, his true character having been unmasked by the incident. The promised gift of the cross was the catalyst of Charlus' downfall as well as revealer of his sadistic nature.

Charlus' sinister reputation had spread and in another allusion to the homosexuality of the crusading orders and Charlus, Brichtot, in a conversation with Marcel, said,

Je vous assure que, si j'ose m'exprimer comme Mgr d'Hulst, je ne m'embête pas les jours où je reçois la visite de ce féodal qui, voulant défendre Adonis contre notre âge de mécréants, a suivi les instincts de sa race, et en toute innocence sodomiste, s'est croisé." (III, 328)

It is again significant that Proust chose to use the word "croisé" when he referred to Charlus' homosexual philandering. This allusion is related to all the others throughout the work with reference to the etymology of Balbec, the Templars, and homosexuality.

Albertine, meanwhile, began to reveal more of her true nature to Marcel and became entangled in the falsehoods with which she had hoped to deceive him. He had discovered that she had spent three days at Balbec with the chauffeur, which she denied, stating instead that she had been in Auteuil. Albertine attempted to reassure Marcel that she had not been up to any deviltry in Auteuil. "Je n'osais même pas sortir dans Auteuil de peur d'être vue. La seule fois que je suis sortie, c'est déguisée en homme, histoire de rigoler plutôt." (III, 334-335) Marcel, his suspicions reaffirmed, was horrified at Albertine's blatant masquerades. The chauffeur, far from being the trustworthy agent of Marcel, was an accomplice to Albertine's shenanigans. The "consecration cross" of his steering wheel did indeed guide her, but not as Marcel had wished. There was no doubt in Marcel's mind that she had been betraying him, doubling his pain, for his

jealousy was not caused by her love for other men, but for her love for her own sex.

Marcel, in a masochistic sense, continued to derive pleasure from his relationship with Albertine. While on an excursion with her to Versailles, he had another exalting experience with an airplane.

Je pensais à ma grand'mère qui aimait, dans l'art humain, dans la nature, la grandeur, et qui se plaisait à regarder monter dans ce même bleu le clocher de Saint-Hilaire. Soudain j'éprouvai de nouveau la nostalgie de ma liberté perdue en entendant un bruit que je ne reconnus pas d'abord et que ma grand'mère eût, lui aussi, tant aimé. C'était comme le bourdonnement d'une guêpe. "Tiens, me dit Albertine, il y a un aéroplane, il est très haut, très haut." Je regardais tout autour de moi, mais, comme le promeneur couché dans un champ, je ne voyais, sans aucune tache noire, que la pâleur intacte du bleu sans mélange. (III, 406)

This event was one of great importance for it represents or alludes to many themes found throughout the novel. On hearing the sound of the airplane, Marcel had a longing for his "liberté perdue," the liberty from the world of nonreality, which he experienced at Balbec for the liberty of reality of childhood innocence of Combray. Like the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, symbol of the world of lost reality, the airplane, piercing the blue expanse of the sky, is the symbol of a new life for Marcel, a restoration of the paradise he had lost on becoming a man. It is significant that the steeple of the church of St. Jacques, in Proust's childhood town of Illiers, is topped with a cross, as are most church

steeple. The airplane, as cross, in the vertical plane emerged again as symbol of Marcel's freedom, in this case, freedom from Albertine, and as symbol of his own resurrection, the restoration, through memory and art of the reality of the past.

This incident of the airplane holds another significance. It was a premonition of the flight of Albertine, which occurred soon after the event, as well as the symbol of the resurrection of Albertine, an Albertine who in death, continued to live as a demon in Marcel's jealousies of her activities before her demise.²

Albertine continued to live in Marcel's jealousies. "En son fond qu'était-elle? A quoi pensait-elle? Qu'aimait-elle? Me mentait-elle?" (III, 516) The image of an Albertine, faithful to Marcel, remained in Marcel's soul but,

Maintenant, à sa place--pour ma punition d'avoir poussé plus loin une curiosité à laquelle, contrairement à ce que j'avais supposé, la mort n'avait pas mis fin--ce que je trouvais c'était une jeune fille différente, multipliant les mensonges et les tromperies là où l'autre m'avait

²Alfred Agostinelli, Proust's secretary, who was thought to have served as a model for Albertine, died in an airplane accident. Albertine also died from a fall, even though hers was from a horse. Proust probably did not choose to have her die from an airplane accident because it would not have been very realistic. The coincidence of Albertine's fall, the airplane theme in the novel, and Agostinelli's death are too strong to dismiss as mere happenstance. Proust was too much the technician for this to have been accidental.

si doucement rassuré en me jurant n'avoir jamais connu ces plaisirs que, dans l'ivresse de sa liberté reconquise, elle était partie goûter jusqu'à la pâmoison, jusqu'à mordre cette petite blanchisseuse qu'elle retrouvait au soleil levant, sur le bord de la Loire, et à qui elle disait: "Tu me mets aux anges." (III, 525)

The evil Albertine, the Albertine of deceit, with her flight had been resurrected in the mind of Marcel.

This jealousy rekindled Marcel's love for her, for we love what we cannot possess.

The final novel of A la recherche du temps perdu, Le Temps retrouvé, culminated the themes of decline and resurrection which were coalescing in the previous works of the cycle. Marcel was seen as a totally disillusioned man. Albertine had become more or less a bad dream and a visit to Tansonville and Combray left Marcel with a great sense of disenchantment with memories of his childhood. His distaste for literature after reading an excerpt from the Goncourt Journal clearly demonstrated his dissatisfaction with all aspects of his life. Marcel, defeated, retired for a short time to a sanitarium. During his sojourn in the sanitarium, World War I began and in 1916, Marcel returned to Paris. The war was to be a symbol of the fall of all societies. It was a signal of the end of the "ancien régime," the transcendence of all societal boundaries, and the scattering of the homosexual society.

Paris was in a state of siege and bombardment by the Germans. The sky was filled with the dirigibles

and airplanes of the enemy. Charlus, cast out from the mainstream of society for his homosexuality, made himself even less admired because of his pro-German feelings. His pro-Germanic feelings were a symptom of his masochistic tendencies. His sympathy for his country's enemies was only the beginning of his degeneracy. Marcel discovered Charlus' feelings in a discussion of the enemy's airmen.

M. de Charlus me dit son admiration pour ces aviateurs, et comme il ne pouvait pas plus s'empêcher de donner libre cours à sa germanophilie qu'à ses autres penchants tout en niant l'une comme les autres: "D'ailleurs j'ajoute que j'admire tout autant des Allemands qui montent dans des gothas. Et sur des zeppelins, pensez le courage qu'il faut! Mais ce sont des héros, tout simplement. (III, 802)

As Charlus' Maltese cross was a symbol of his guilt while the unfulfilled gift of the cross to Morel was a symbol of his degenerate friendship, the zeppelins and the flying crosses of the airplanes, emblazoned with the Iron Cross of Germany's military forces, were the symbols of his punishment and doom. His admiration for his persecutors was a symptom of his masochism and homosexuality.

The apocalyptic, macrocosmic vision of the destruction of Paris is also directly related to the microcosmic vision of Marcel's nadir in life. The airplane, the cross in the vertical plane, former symbol of freedom, life, and eternity has been transformed by some demonic perversion into a symbol of death and

destruction. Marcel had not yet been redeemed by art. Having been subjected to war, the ultimate symbol of the ephemerality of society, Marcel's faith in his own creative genius was put to the test. Marcel, because of his eroding faith in himself, like a pagan, began to envision the airplane as a Cross of Good Friday, a cross of Death. He did have, however, enough faith left in his creative intellect to realize that this vision of destructive crosses in the sky, was one reserved for the nonbelievers, the non-artists. The nonbelievers, by their own denial of faith, would be destroyed by the "war-crosses." For Marcel, the "cross" of death would accentuate the dichotomy between the impermanence of society and the eternity of his intellect. Marcel would have to "die" before he could be resurrected and saved. The warplane was the symbol of the period between his "death" and resurrection, as artist.

Marcel reflected on the fate of Paris and alluded to the demise of Pompeii.

Si je pense que nous pouvons avoir demain le sort des villes du Vésuve, celles-ci sentaient qu'elles étaient menacées du sort des villes maudites de la Bible. On a retrouvé sur les murs d'une maison de Pompéi cette inscription révélatrice: Sodoma, Gomora." Je ne sais si ce fut ce nom de Sodome et les idées qu'il éveilla en lui, ou celle du bombardement, qui firent que M. de Charlus leva un instant les yeux au ciel, mais il les ramena bientôt sur la terre. (III, 807)

The fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Pompeii

could have been the same fate of Paris from the German firebombs. The war symbolized the possible doom of Paris as modern Sodom and Gomorrah. Society, and the homosexual society as microcosm of society as a whole, could have been destroyed and their destruction would have been wrought from a flying cross, symbol of doom for transient society.

This vision of hell was continued in Marcel's visit to Jupien's male brothel. Upon entering the establishment, Marcel overheard various conversations concerning the state of the war. One of the clients engaged in conversation was an airman. "Quand tu auras comme moi quinze mois de front et que tu auras abattu ton cinquième avion boche, tu pourras en causer." (III, 813) It was during this visit that Marcel saw the ultimate scene of degradation and déclassement.

Alors je m'aperçus qu'il y avait dans cette chambre un oeil-de-boeuf latéral dont on avait oublié de tirer le rideau; cheminant à pas de loup dans l'ombre, je me glissai jusqu'à cet oeil-de-boeuf, et là, enchainé sur un lit comme Prométhée sur son rocher, recevant les coups d'un martinet en effet plante de clous que lui infligeait Maurice, je vis, déjà tout en sang, et couvert d'ecchymoses qui prouvaient que le supplice n'avait pas lieu, pour la première fois, je vis devant moi M. de Charlus. (III, 815)

M. de Charlus is seen as fallen noble, as god of society descended to the lowest depths of decadence. His homosexuality had evolved into the saddest state of masochism. M. de Charlus was paying for his sins, for his guilt, in much the same way as the noble classes of

Europe, who precipitated the war, would be repaid by the war, by losing their nobility. The war virtually destroyed the aristocratic classes of Europe, making the bourgeois class the most powerful. For Marcel, this horrible scene was proof of the fact that all societies, even the noble society of the Faubourg St. Germain, had been equalized by the greatest of all destroyers, time.

After his departure from Jupien's establishment, Marcel had another experience similar to the one he had at La Raspelière with the airplane.

En un instant, les rues devinrent entièrement noires. Parfois seulement, un avion ennemi qui volait assez bas éclairait le point où il voulait jeter une bombe. Je ne retrouvais plus mon chemin. Je pensai à ce jour, en allant à la Raspelière, où j'avais rencontré, comme un dieu qui avait fait se cabrer mon cheval, un avion. Je pensais que maintenant la rencontre serait différente et le fuir comme un voyageur poursuivi par le mascaret, je tournais en cercle dans les places noires, d'où je ne pouvais plus sortir. Enfin les flammes d'un incendie m'éclairèrent et je pus retrouver mon chemin cependant que crépitaient sans arrêt les coups de canons. Mais ma pensée s'était détournée vers un autre objet. Je pensais à la maison de Jupien, peut-être réduite en cendres maintenant, car une bombe était tombée tout près de moi comme je venais seulement d'en sortir, cette maison sur laquelle M. de Charlus eût pu prophétiquement écrire Sodoma comme avait fait, avec non moins de prescience ou peut-être au début de l'éruption volcanique et de la catastrophe déjà commencée, l'habitant inconnu de Pompéi. (III, 833)

Unlike the airplane of La Raspelière, which inspired Marcel's thoughts of freedom and resurrection from time, the warplane, the "god of evil," was a vision of

destruction and death. Whereas the airplane of La Raspelière was a symbol of Marcel's individual liberty as creative intellect, the German airplane was the symbol of society destroying society. The cross of the airplane at La Raspelière was the emblem of salvation, the cross of the German airplane was the emblem of the ephemerality of society. This episode is the paragon of Marcel's separation from the reality and innocence of his childhood at Combray. Upon seeing the airplane, Marcel was not as concerned with his own safety as he was with the fate of the frequenters of Jupien's house. He thought that perhaps they would be cremated by the fires of the enemy bombs as the inhabitants of Pompeii, a city in moral decline, were cremated by the volcanic fires of Vesuvius. Marcel surmised, however, that Jupien's clients would be unconcerned about the bombing since they would have less harassment from the police since they were occupied with saving lives of the inhabitants of the city.

Marcel reflected on the nature of perversion as witnessed in Jupien's place. He felt that in the most insane of perversions love must exist, even in M. de Charlus.

--au fond de tout cela il y avait chez M. de Charlus tout son rêve de virilité, attesté au besoin par des actes brutaux, et toute l'enluminure intérieure, invisible pour nous, mais dont il projetait ainsi quelques reflets, de croix de justice, de tortues féodales, que décorait son imagination moyenâgeuse. (III, 840)

M. de Charlus' punishment is linked with the symbol of the cross, in this case, the cross of justice. He envisioned himself as paying retribution for his sins in a scene of medieval torture.

Even Marcel's friend, the young lion, Marquis Robert de St. Loup, was not left unscathed by the passage of time, for he too was unmasked. While Marcel was at Jupien's establishment, "On était très agité d'une croix de guerre qui avait été trouvé par terre, et on ne savait pas qui l'avait perdue, à qui la renvoyer pour éviter au titulaire une punition." (III, 820) When Marcel returned home from Jupien's establishment, Françoise told him that Robert had stopped in to inquire if perhaps he had dropped his croix de guerre in Marcel's house. The servants had searched for St. Loup's cross, but did not find it. Marcel knew where the cross was. "Moi qui me doutais où cette croix avait été oubliée, je conseillai à Françoise et au maître d'hôtel d'aller se coucher." (III, 841) St. Loup's cross was a symbol of reality revealed since it unmasked his true identity as homosexual. Marcel had been suspicious of Robert's sexual inclinations but the cross discovered at Jupien's brothel offered concrete proof of St. Loup's true tastes.

Unlike Charlus, who was more degenerate than homosexual, in the view of Marcel, St. Loup remained a hero. Whereas Charlus remained satisfied to follow

his degenerated life, St. Loup was a man of action. The war for St. Loup was not a spectator sport but something in which to become involved. Marcel was saddened when he learned of the news of St. Loup's death in the war. St. Loup had undergone many personality transformations during his life due to the flux of time. Marcel had viewed him as noble, Don Juan, warrior, patriot, cuckold, and homosexual, but,

--ce Guermantes était mort plus lui-même, ou plutôt plus de sa race, en laquelle il se fondait, en laquelle il n'était plus qu'un Guermantes, comme ce fut symboliquement visible à son enterrement dans l'église Saint-Hilaire de Combray, toute tendue de tentures noires où se détachait en rouge, sous la couronne fermée, sans initiales de prénoms ni titres, le G du Guermantes que par la mort il était redevenu. (III, 851)

For Marcel, St. Loup's homosexual identity was not his true identity unlike Charlus, whose life was encompassed by his homosexuality. At death, St. Loup was once again metamorphosized into the family Guermantes, to be interred in the childhood reality of Marcel's church of St. Hilaire at Combray. In this medieval sense of time, where there are no differentiations made between one past time and another, St. Loup was as dead as all his royal ancestors and in death, had joined their ranks immediately. St. Loup had died a hero's death, like some warrior knight, while Charlus would die a debauched, decrepit old man.

Marcel believed that if St. Loup had not been

killed, he could have been elected to the Chamber of Deputies, due to his meritorious service to France during the war.

Mais peut-être aimait-il trop sincèrement le peuple pour arriver à conquérir les suffrages du peuple, lequel pourtant lui aurait sans doute, en faveur de ses quartiers de noblesse, pardonné ses idées démocratiques. Saint-Loup les eût exposées sans doute avec succès devant une chambre d'aviateurs, Certes ces héros l'auraient compris, ainsi que quelques très rares hauts esprits.
(III, 853-854)

The symbol of the airplane and aviator are again used by Proust to symbolize the ideal and the noble. For all the other homosexuals in the work, the cross and the airplane as cross-shaped object have been symbols of death, but Marcel reserved for Robert, the symbol of the airplane, as for himself, the symbol of the ideal. Even though Robert was a homosexual, he did strive for the ideal as patriot-hero whereas Charlus had almost completely degenerated as a human being. It would have been appropriate for St. Loup to have appeared before a chamber of aviators because for Marcel, they were the real heroes of the war.

The death of St. Loup altered the lives of other characters in the work. St. Loup had been searching for Charlus' ward, Morel, who had deserted. A general discovered that Morel was a deserter and had him arrested. Morel had suspected that Charlus had had him arrested in revenge for his unreturned "friendship." The general wrote to St. Loup apologizing for the fact

that he had to punish Morel. After the general received his letter back with the information that St. Loup had been killed, out of deference for the dead St. Loup, he had Morel sent to the front instead of having him face a court martial and, "il s'y conduisit bravement, échappa à tous les dangers et revint, la guerre finie, avec la croix que M. de Charlus avait jadis vainement sollicitée pour lui, et que lui valut indirectement la mort de Saint-Loup." (III, 853) It is ironic that the characters of Charlus, St. Loup, and Morel are linked with the cross. The two friends, the war heroes Morel and St. Loup, had won their crosses for valor, and it was because of the death of St. Loup that Morel had had the opportunity to win his cross. Charlus, the ultimate degenerate, had failed to procure the cross of the Legion of Honor for Morel. Morel and St. Loup had earned their crosses under fire, whereas Charlus, who wore the cross of the Order of Malta, had probably earned his cross through political influence or perhaps in some way linked to his homosexuality. The croix de guerre, awarded for heroism, was more similar to a cross of the ideal, to which Marcel aspired, however, due to the fact that it was earned in war, a symbol of the ephemerality of society, it could not approach the symbolism of the "cross" of creative intellect and immortality. Marcel would earn his "cross" by the way of art. His cross would be his

resurrection from time in the form of a written work.

After the war, Marcel returned to a new sanitarium and remained there for a number of years. On the train journey which took him back to Paris after his withdrawal from the sanitarium, Marcel again experienced the "message of the trees."

C'était, je me le rappelle, à un arrêt du train en pleine campagne. Le soleil éclairait jusqu'à la moitié de leur tronc une ligne d'arbres qui suivait la voie du chemin de fer. "Arbres, pensai-je, vous n'avez plus rien à me dire, mon coeur refroidi ne vous entend plus. Je suis pourtant ici en pleine nature, eh bien, c'est avec froideur, avec ennui que mes yeux constatent la ligne qui sépare votre front lumineux de votre tronc d'ombre. Si j'ai jamais pu me croire poète, je sais maintenant que je ne le suis pas. Peut-être dans la nouvelle partie de ma vie, si desséchée, qui s'ouvre, les hommes pourraient-ils m'inspirer ce que ne me dit plus la nature. Mais les années où j'aurais peut-être été capable de la chanter ne reviendront jamais." (III, 855)

From this selection, it can be seen that Marcel was a broken and disillusioned man. Nature had failed to provide him with the inspiration to seek out truth and reality. Man, as evidenced by the war and the degeneracy of the homosexual circle of Charlus and Albertine, as well as the revelation of St. Loup's secret, confused Marcel. No truths could be derived from the transient relationships of man in society. Although Marcel could no longer be inspired by nature, he felt that perhaps man could, in the end, induce him to create.

The memory of the name Guermantes could indeed

have been that catalyst. Marcel had accepted an invitation to the house of the Prince de Guermantes although he was disillusioned because of the Prince's change of residence. He was pleased, however, as the car proceeded to convey him to the mansion because it had to traverse streets which led to the Champs Elysées, streets which held for him many happy memories. Marcel became immersed in the environs, so long forgotten, to the point that all contact with the physical reality of the cobblestones and the car were obliterated. "Le sol de lui-même savait où il devait aller; sa résistance était vaincue. Et comme un aviateur qui a jusque-là péniblement roulé à terre, "décollant" brusquement, je m'élevais lentement vers les hauteurs silencieuses du souvenir." (III, 858) It was at this point that Marcel realized he was a writer, that he was charged with the duty of preserving his own past. This experience recalled Marcel's description of Bergotte as airplane, someone who had vanquished the ordinary impermanence of the earth and its temporal qualities of time and death. Marcel was being resurrected from the transience of the present to the permanence of the past, preserved in his intellect as memory. The theme of the airplane, as cross, as vehicle of salvation, was once again expressed in this progression from disillusionment and death, to the reality of the memories of the past. "Je ne traversais pas les mêmes

rues que les promeneurs qui étaient dehors ce jours-là, mais un passé glissant, triste et doux." (III, 858)

As artist, Marcel had the perceptive qualities to interpret the mnemonic radiations of the streets while others only perceived their present qualities.

Throughout the odyssey of Marcel's life, chauffeurs had been entities of evil and destructive forces. Charlus' chauffeur and that of Albertine had been accomplices in their secretive activities of homosexuality, of self-destruction. They were also symbols of those people whom Marcel scorned, those who contented themselves to merely roll along the ground whereas aviators symbolized god-like beings who held the power of flight from the terrestrial mediocrities of life on earth. Upon his arrival at the Guermantes' mansion, chauffeurs and automobiles would gain new meaning as symbols of evil and death.

En roulant les tristes pensées que je disais il y a un instant, j'étais entré dans la cour de l'hôtel de Guermantes, et dans ma distraction je n'avais pas vu une voiture qui s'avançait; au cri du wattman je n'eus que le temps de me ranger vivement de côté, et je reculai assez pour buter malgré moi contre les pavés assez mal équarris derrière lesquels était une remise. Mais au moment où, me remettant d'aplomb, je posai mon pied sur un pavé qui était un peu moins élevé que le précédent, tout mon découragement s'évanouit devant la même félicité qu'à diverses époques de ma vie m'avaient donnée la vue d'arbres que j'avais cru reconnaître dans une promenade en voiture autour de Balbec, la vue des clochers de Martinville, la saveur d'une madeleine trempée dans une infusion, tant d'atours sensations dont j'ai parlé et que les dernières oeuvres de Vinteuil

m'avaient paru synthétiser. Comme au moment où je goûtais la madeleine, toute inquiétude sur l'avenir, tout doute intellectuel étaient dissipés. Ceux qui m'assaillaient tout à l'heure au sujet de la réalité de mes dons littéraires, et même de la réalité de la littérature, se trouvaient levés comme par enchantement. (III, 866-867)

It is ironic that a chauffeur, by causing Marcel to trip, would cause Marcel to experience another involuntary memory, a resurrection of the past, which would induce Marcel to reflect on the course of his future as artist, as immobilizer of past sensations. It is significant that a vehicle that rolled along the ground, guided by the earthbound cross of the steering wheel, symbol of the mortality of ordinary men, would be the impetus, by nearly killing Marcel, for him to resurrect himself to immortality. Perhaps in the brush with death, Marcel decided that his fate would be the same as other mortals if he did not begin to write his novel. His name would not be lost in the oblivion of time. It was because of the chauffeur-induced accident that Marcel would decide to write. All his doubts about the reality of literature and his creative abilities were obliterated by the accident.

It was under the guise of Marcel's reflections that Proust's ideas of the role of artist were explained.

En somme, dans un cas comme dans l'autre, qu'il s'agit d'impressions comme celle que m'avait donnée la vue des clochers de Martinville, ou de réminiscences comme celle de l'inégalité des deux marches ou le goût de la madeleine, il fallait tâcher d'interpréter les sensations comme les

signes d'autant de lois et d'idées, en essayant de penser, c'est-à-dire de faire sortir de la pénombre ce que j'avais senti, de le convertir en un équivalent spirituel. Or, ce moyen qui me paraissait le seul, qu'était-ce autre chose que faire une oeuvre d'art? (III, 878-879)

Marcel determined that his role was to convert all the sensations which he had felt into a work of art. Art, for Marcel, "est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier." (III, 880) It was his only means of achieving salvation and would be the Last Judgment of all his artistic talents and of his life as a chapter in time.

Marcel felt that instincts only were the true source of literary genius. The "realism" of politics and history had no value as true art.

Comment la littérature de notations aurait-elle une valeur quelconque, puisque c'est sous de petites choses comme celles qu'elle note que la réalité est contenue (la grandeur dans le bruit lointain d'un aéroplane, dans la ligne du clocher de Saint-Hilaire, le passé dans la saveur d'une madeleine, etc.) et qu'elles sont sans signification par elles-mêmes si on ne l'en dégage pas? (III, 894-895)

The three events Marcel used as examples of hidden but true reality are all related to the image of the cross, they all being spiritually-heightened events of consciousness. They are all religious experiences of involuntary memory, links with the past which are more real than the past from which they evolved.

The allusion to the airplane was continued in Marcel's thoughts of the reality of art.

Et comme l'art recompose exactement la vie, autour des vérités qu'on a atteintes en soi-même flottera toujours une atmosphère de poésie, la douceur d'un mystère qui n'est que le vestige de la pénombre que nous avons dû traverser, l'indication, marquée exactement comme par un altimètre, de la profondeur d'une oeuvre. (III, 898)

Proust again alluded to the airplane as a literary vehicle when he chose the instrument which measures altitudes, usually found in airplanes, to measure the depth or grandeur of a written work of art.

Marcel thought about his past life and a means of recapturing it.

Alors, moins éclatante sans doute que celle qui m'avait fait apercevoir que l'oeuvre d'art était le seul moyen de retrouver le Temps perdu, une nouvelle lumière se fit en moi. Et je compris que tous ces matériaux de l'oeuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passée;... (III, 899)

The light that shone in Marcel was the literary equivalent of the Light of the Cross of Jesus' crucifixion. He realized that the way of art would be constituted of his past life resurrected in the work of art. His relationships with others and his sufferings because of them would be the source of salvation. As the sufferings of Jesus for the sins of others would be marked by his crucifixion, Marcel's work would be his own symbol of salvation by memorializing the relationships of past time within the covers. As Christ's suffering and death redeemed others, all the characters in the novel owe their redemption, though not through any effort of their own, to Marcel's efforts and suffering. Marcel

bestowed immortality to those he knew, by his creative genius.

The idea of the Trinity is also alluded to when Marcel discussed the three-dimensional aspect of his work.

Ainsi chaque individu--et j'étais moi-même un de ces individus--mesurait pour moi la durée par la révolution qu'il avait accomplie non seulement autour de soi-même, mais autour des autres, et notamment par les positions qu'il avait occupées succesivement par rapport à moi. Et sans doute tous ces plans différents suivant lesquels le Temps, depuis que je venais de le ressaisir dans cette fête, disposait ma vie, en me faisant songer que, dans un livre qui voudrait en raconter une, il faudrait user, par opposition à la psychologie plane dont on use d'ordinaire, d'une sorte de psychologie dans l'espace, ajoutaient une beauté nouvelle à ces résurrections que ma mémoire opérait tant que je songeais seul dans la bibliothèque, puisque la mémoire, en introduisant le passé dans le présent sans le modifier, tel qu'il était au moment où il était le présent, supprime précisément cette grande dimension du Temps suivant laquelle la vie se réalise. (III, 1031)

The third dimension of time has been transcended by the resurrection of past life in the form of memory in Marcel's novel. Time, and its destruction of societal lines, love, and man, has been discovered to be inferior to the permanence of memory, above the transience of time. Incorporated within the work, memory achieves a religious significance, an immortality not known in other two-dimensional works. The circular aspect of the novel, A la recherche du temps perdu, served only to accentuate this idea.

At the end of the work, Marcel felt wary of

starting such a huge endeavor as writing his novel.

"J'avais le vertige de voir au-dessous de moi, en moi pourtant, comme si j'avais les lieues de hauteur, tant d'années." (III, 1047) Marcel, having started his "flight," at the outset of his own resurrection from time, as if suspended from a crucifix or in an airplane of the sort with which he described Bergotte, was dizzied by the heights of his freedom from time. Marcel was, however, encouraged by the vision of the Duc de Guermantes.

...il s'était levé et avait voulu se tenir debout, avait vacillé sur des jambes flageolantes comme celles de ces vieux archevêques sur lesquels il n'y a de solide que leur croix métallique et vers lesquels s'empressent des jeunes séminaristes gaillards, et ne s'était avancé qu'en tremblant comme une feuille, sur le sommet peu praticable de quatre-vingt-trois années, comme si les hommes étaient juchés sur de vivantes échasses, grandissant sans cesse, parfois plus hautes que des clochers, finissant par leur rendre la marche difficile et périlleuse, et d'où tout d'un coup ils tombaient. (III, 1047-1048)

The allusion to the archbishop relying solely on his metal crucifix is significant, for even though he had a tangible symbol of salvation and support in the form of cross, he would fall into the abyss of time. Even his relationships with his seminarians, in their supportive role, would not be enough to guarantee him immortality. He was as weak to the onslaught of time as are all other mortal men of eminence. Marcel was above all other mortals for,

...si elle (la force) m'était laissée assez longtemps pour accomplir mon oeuvre, ne manquerais-je pas d'abord d'y décrire les hommes (cela dût-il les faire ressembler à des êtres monstrueux) comme occupant une place si considérable, à côté de celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une place au contraire prolongée sans mesure-- puisqu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années, à des époques si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer--dans le Temps. (III, 1048)

Marcel realized he had the power to become immortal by explaining the relationships of all men to past, present and future time. For Marcel, the life of one man was a reflection of all past time and the radiation of all future events. He, however, was more influential than those about whom he wrote for he was the artist. His work would be mightier and more puissant than any terrestrial symbols of power and eminence, for his work would be the immortal monument of his life. The archbishop's cross did not have the power of Marcel's "cross," his symbol of salvation and resurrection, his novel.

It is rather doubtful that Proust was unaware of his employment of the cross as symbol of both the ephemerality of society and as symbol, in his allusive references to the cross, of the development and resurrection of Marcel as writer. Even if Proust was not aware of the cross as metaphor in his own work, for the reader,

Seule l'impression, si chétive qu'en semble la matière, si insaisissable la trace, est un critérium de vérité, et à cause de cela mérite seule d'être appréhendée par l'esprit, car elle est seule capable, s'il sait en dégager cette vérité, de l'amener à une plus grande perfection et de lui donner une pure joie. (III, 880)

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