

A POETICS OF MARCEL PROUST'S VOCATION

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Abstract

The view is upheld that it is possible to constitute a conception of artistic vocation from fiction itself with characteristics that may be extended to other vocational fields. "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu" by Marcel Proust is made use of to exemplify how this author reflects critically on his own work and on the artist's conditions. Thus he points out the importance of randomness, childhood, Materializing into a work an adequate conception of his own artistic work, involuntary memory, the life that has been lived, and his own comprehension of art, the force of conviction, Vocation is a call that overcomes the dichotomy between innate gift and social product as it is the result of a genesis of sensory impressions and involuntary memories that, although they are fugacious, they become fixed in the literary work. It is explained how "A la Recherche..." both can and cannot be considered the history of a vocation, as literature had not played any role at all in the novelistic hero's life, but, however, it really was a history of a vocation since the work was a consequence of events that had been lived. Notwithstanding, even if vocation had never been deemed so important, he must win a battle against death. Genette sums up "A la Recherche..." thus: "Marcel becomes a writer".

Key words: artist; work of art; childhood; memory; influences; intermission

“ La paresse ou le doute ou/ l'impuissance se réfugiant/ dans l'incertitude sur la forme/ d'art. Faut-il en faire/ un roman, une étude philosophi/ que, suis-je romancier?” (1)

In this excerpt from *Carnet de 1908*, the dilemma of choosing between the path of philosophy and that of literary creation was anticipated, the incertitude between two seemingly opposing possibilities. After that, in "A la recherche du temps perdu" (1913-1927) (2), Proust treads paths that at first seem to separate but that in the end converge into one. Thus, Proust's famous *Recherche*: 1) synthetically solves the confrontation between reasoning and narration (3); 2) endowed with an analytical mind and by means of subtle reflections on art, he also answers the effort to establish the nature of the artist's condition and 3) hence Proust's novel, and the fact that he became the author's artist, are, we might say, two expressions of the same process: the creation of the work of art and his own creation as an artist. Artistic vocation is a call, an invitation to discover that which is most genuine in oneself and the challenge to achieve its realization.

Proust is keen on the conception that vocation does not achieve authenticity if it is not fulfilled in the form of production. Therefore, it is essential for him to be able to establish an artistic world and strongly stresses that those vocations that go astray are useless, both for the arts as for life itself.

At the beginning of the novelistic cycle the hero, on waking up, wonders where he is, and this means asking what he is and also asking himself about his strongest passion, art. (4) Vocation is not a kind of inborn idea, given at the beginning with an independent life, neither does it exist *a priori* but it evolves through a process of genesis, that is, it constitutes itself in relation to life and its reconstruction within the author's literary work.

Marcel Proust's scholars have indicated that *A la recherche du temps perdu*, might be construed as the history of a vocation, i.e. that of the novel's hero who throughout the seven tomes, finds hints, signs, footsteps showing his possibilities in art; to be more specific, they show him his possibilities to become a novelist. But at the same time, in an opposing direction, a series of mishaps, disappointments and characters who, like the diplomat Norpois, do not appreciate his juvenile exercises. The hero himself does not understand artistic works and he harbours doubts as to his own capacity for artistic endeavour. In fact, a fight takes place within the hero's own mind that, after many pages does not achieve much and that only on a few occasions, when he is contemplating great works of art, he poses himself the question of his own capacity, while in many other paragraphs he seems to be lost in mundane conflicts, in love, such as can be found in young Proust's writings as "Violante ou la mondanité". (5) Finally, in the last tome, *Le Temps retrouvé*, he fully discovers his vocation and decides to write a book, after many revelations and for reasons that shall be analysed below.

However, "*A la Recherche...*", has been the object of diverse interpretations, according to the importance attributed by the author to involuntary memory, to sign learning, to the Wagnerian access to the work, to its writing. But if it can be argued that the history of a vocation is the fundamental subject in the work, it is not possible to cast doubts on its great importance in the novelistic cycle. That is the reason why Gérard Genette holds that the novel could be summed up with the words "Marcel becomes a writer". (6)

On the other hand, vocation is included in a pattern of different perspectives, foreshortenings, diverse language levels, since it is a novel, in the words of Barthes, which lends itself to a multiplicity of interpretations, it is a galaxy. (7) And furthermore, Proust addresses the question of interpretation, the hermeneutic of the text and by the same token, that of vocation, to the reader, as he states that every reader is a reader of his or her self. Thus, the capacity to be an artist depends on the capacity of being read artistically. In this way, he anticipates the aesthetic of reception that turns from the author

to the importance of the reader and Umberto Eco's conception of the novel's open-mindedness. (8)

But it is important to observe that even if "*A la Recherche ...*" is not an autobiographic novel, since clearly fiction and the reconstruction of the life that has been lived prevail throughout, doubtlessly the work's sources are, albeit transformed, very related to life, aesthetic and artistic preferences, as well as to Proust's own love-affairs and character models. Thus, it can be shown that Proust, after publishing *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, as a young writer, he abjures from *Jean Santeuil* (9), whose writings are mainly biographical; this work was found after the author's death by Bernard de Fallois.

The seven tomes that make up "*A la Recherche ...*", a production from Proust's mature years, were the object of multiple versions, took a long time to write, needed as much time to be published, and were published in full well after Proust's death in 1922. Proust used to write almost illegible manuscripts, and scholars who have studied the genetic method have dedicated their efforts to establishing the texts.

Moreover, there is a discussion at present on *Albertine disparue*, the sixth tome, as a new version has been found by Claude Mauriac, and finally Jean Milly presents the published version and the new one in their multiplicity of interrelationships.(10) One can comprehend, therefore, Marcel Proust's intense hard work as if art were a form of redemption together with his supreme conviction of his work's value. It is difficult to find similar cases in the history of art in which a vocation is coupled with such conviction. Perhaps one of these cases might be that of Richard Wagner, who deemed that everything was at the service of his musical dramas and this was a justification for his behaviour.

Proust had to endure the rejection of the most important literary journal of his time, *Nouvelle Revue française*, under the responsibility of André Gide, for whom he felt great respect. Later, Gide admitted that this rejection had been the greatest mistake in the history of the journal (11). Due to this as well as to other rejections of his work, Proust had to pay by his own means the first edition of *Du côté de chez Swann*, the first tome of *la Recherche*, which was printed by Grasset. He did not achieve any important recognition until he won the Goncourt prize, awarded to him for the second tome of *A la Recherche ...*, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*.

The texture and development of his work grew as time went by and with the multiplicity of versions, while initially he had only foreseen two large parts to his work, i.e. the difficulties proved to be an engine for his artistic work. In his last years of life, he secluded himself in a room whose walls were covered with cork layers to dedicate himself fully to the culmination of his work, together with his copyist and housekeeper Celeste Albaret. Sometimes he received calls, including one by a string quartet and made a few

escapades. But the relationship between reality and fiction became thus as complex in the work as in life itself.

It has been repeatedly said that Proust was a dandy, as for instance, among our own writers, by Juan José Hernández, or that he was silly, as has been proclaimed by Juan José Saer (12), who owes him so much. Though if we consider everything he wrote, the way he wrote it, the importance he ascribed to his work, and even the 21 tomes of letters collected by Philip Kolb, the image that we get of him is quite different. Some have made use, ever since Maurice Sachs's writings (13), of detailed accounts of some peculiarities of his erotic life, but surely, "*A la Recherche ...*" is evidence enough to understand Proust's thoughts about this subject, as the same laws apply in all love affairs and choice of lovers should never be a subject of debate.

In order to come to terms with the subtle hues of his vocation, Proust had to free himself from his great teacher, the aesthetic theoretician John Ruskin, who taught him through his own work the pilgrimage that took him to Gothic cathedrals, a pictorial conception of Venice and its artists, the importance of medieval times and of modern painters, such as Turner. Ruskin's world appears anyway in the form of fiction in "*A la Recherche...*" "but it is already Proust's reconstructed view of it. The English critic is but rarely cited, mainly in relation to relevant narrative or aesthetic situations.

Proust translated two of Ruskin's works: *La Bible d' Amiens* and *Sésame et les lys*, and in his prologue to the second one, entitled "*Journées de lecture*" (14), he rejects the importance of a conception of reading that alienates the reader in the text, as he considers that the narration belongs to someone else, to its author, and he who reads the text can only reach the threshold of author's thought, so that what may be considered conclusions by the author, to the reader are mere incitements.

Regarding certain difficulties experienced by an individual concerning his or her vocation in relation to the power of influences, it seems convenient to quote A. Melamed, who wrote about the relationship between Proust and Ruskin:

This declared submission and the de facto distancing from each other, are a manifestation of what, following Harold Bloom's interpretation, we shall call "the anxiety of influences", i.e. the poet's being condemned to learn about his innermost cravings through the other poets' verification, in the outside world. Even the strongest poets were weak at their beginnings – holds Bloom – so that their relationship could not be other than a dialectic of influences: on top of being an inevitable encounter, it was a veiled threat to their own freedom. (15)

In fact, according to Bloom, "Poetic influences constitute a kind of melancholy or the beginning of anxiety". (16)

And this anxiety of influences proves that the idea of Proust's artistic vocation is linked to the completion of his own work and that this work should be at the same time original and capable of producing a rift with accepted conceptions about life and art, in the same way as a "geologic catastrophe". That is why, in "*A la Recherche...*", Proust calls art's bachelors those who waste all their energies in social life and love affairs but cannot achieve a work of art as was the case of his predecessor, Swann, so subtle and intelligent, who does not listen to the call of art to become lost in his love for Odette, baron Charlus, an excellent pianist who does not develop his talents and the elegant duchess of Guermantes. But the artistic world is full of surprises and we shall never know who will become an outstanding artist, as Proust's writings show us the difficulties of discovering an artistic vocation for the other characters and for ourselves, the readers.

Artists as such may not be immediately recognizable as to their worth and in the novel there are many examples, like that of Vinteuil, who is neither understood by the hero's aunts even to the point of not being willing to listen to his music, nor by Swann despite the fact that he is an exquisite connoisseur. Octavio's example is remarkable as he was believed to be incapable of serious conversation and turns out to be a revolutionary in today's theatre.

In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, (17) Proust attempts to explain these situations originated around the multiplicity of I's and the separation between artist and man. The critic Sainte Beuve wants to be able to perceive the artist in man and that is the reason why he does not understand Baudelaire, the best poet of his age according to Proust. Probably, Proust's method was more suitable for the XIX century when conditions for artistic production were different.

This multiplicity of I's originates in the empiricist philosopher Hume, who does not accept the notion of a substantial unity of conscience. (18) Thus, in the novel, the I we are when we are artists is foreign to our daily I. When he is off from his artistic work, we do not find the true creator in him.

This difference turns a little more relative in the fiction of "*A la Recherche...*". In other works I have pointed out that, rigorously, it is possible to find the I of a man, the I of the lover and the I of the artist.(19)

Later, as was mentioned above, Proust presents a more creative conception of literature, given that the reader has the right to have his own means to interpret the work and therefore there is no unique version of it. I would like to reiterate that in the different tomes of the novel, the hero goes through diverse episodes which induce him to think about his own artistic power. Thus, the sketch of the landscape he sees from Mrs. Villeparisis carriage, the contemplation of works of art at Balbec church, and above all the history of the sonata and then that of the septette of the fictional vanguard musician Vinteuil.

But in Proust's masterpiece, coming in contact with artistic works, as well as not coming in contact, are common occurrences. That is to say, that vocation is doubtlessly linked to the capacity to understand and receive these works and, therefore, this must also be analysed from this perspective. A prototypical and juvenile example is seen in the great illusions the hero harbours to be able to see a great actress' performance by the name of Berma. However, the first time he watches her performance he is not able to discover the secret of her art.

Cases like this one are frequent in "*A la Recherche...*". Now, we find in Proust the notion that the first sightings and hearings of masterpieces do not allow us to reach the level of comprehension and pleasure they deserve. For, as he says, revolutionary works must generate their own public. Thus, Beethoven's quartets are the most suitable example of works whose worth was only recognized after a long time. This is so because these works say something that is novel and unexpected, that collides with received criteria of perception and because of this a great effort and a long time must be dedicated in order to understand them. It is indisputable that Proust was well-versed both in history of art and literature. In Beethoven's case, this interpretation fully agrees with Berlioz's description, after attending the performance of one of Beethoven's last quartets, when he says that the audience believed that the master was deranged. (20)

Vocation is related thus, also, to the work of time. It is this difficulty to understand a work of art that links Proust with a tradition that comes from Schopenhauer and even from Kant, as to the former the applause from his contemporaries is tantamount to failure in posterity. (21) It is important to stress here that we stand before a conception of the artist who thinks about posterity; this is something that has not frequently occurred in the history of art, and before established circuits of consecration of the works, i.e. an artistic field, as has been pointed out by Bourdieu (22), where the artist's vocation must be developed.

To Kant art, as opposed to Newton's science, cannot be taught. Those who deserve to be called geniuses cannot explain by means of discourse how a work must be created. (23) Schopenhauer furthers this line of thinking. To Proust, who in these matters also follows the romantic tradition, the artist is endowed with the gift of the genius, an extraordinary being who stands out from the rest by his originality and thus he cannot teach by means of words or work practices his own art. The French novelist recasts in fiction this same conception through numerous examples, the most representative of which may be the one in which, against his own grandmother's advice he chooses to run after young ladies in blossom instead of receiving the teachings of the fictional great master and painter Elstir. And later on, the hero understands that he had been right in doing so. And this leads us to return to Proust's conception that if it is essential for artists to get together, there must be some other reason since, as men, they cannot transmit creative knowledge but only mere

workmanship. Disappointment and incomprehension emerged, in fact, when Proust, Joyce, Stravinsky, Picasso and Diaghilev met. (24) It is as if vocation can only be fostered by *artistic reconstruction of other artists' works*.

Proust, in this sense, has his own predecessors and preferences, a whole gallery of works of art. I shall name but a few in each of the art genres. In music he admires, amongst others, Bach, Mozart, Wagner -who is essential for his own work plan; he professes admiration for Debussy and the mystery of his richness of timbre, for Beethoven, Chopin's purity, Fauré, Cesar Franck, Mussorsky, Schumann, Schubert and Mendelssohn. In painting and architecture, he treasures the Italian and Flemish renaissance, Çarpaccio's sensitivity and Boticelli's Neo-Platonic sadness, Vermeer's view of art, and the contrasts between Rembrandt and Chardin. He also loves Rosetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, with their rejection of the industrial revolution and their proposed return to the medieval worlds and to Dante and Giotto, Turner's search, the reappearances of multiple sketches of cathedrals by Monet, French impressionism, Venice, its painters, Ruskin, gothic pilgrimages to all French cathedrals, *the Gothic revival*, English Victorian art and his endeared works by Whistler. And in literature, *François le Champi* by George Sand, madame de Sevigné, love and perspective, Tolstoi, Dostoevski, wisdom and illness; Chateaubriand, Nerval and his work on oneiric worlds, the great Beaudelaire and his nostalgia for Paris' streets; the cyclic reappearance of Balzac's characters, always poorly defined and transmuted; Racine's plays, *Fedra, Esther, Andrómaca* . Thus does Proust reconstruct artistically his own history of art.

Proust usually presents artists and philosophers under the guise of characters or in fictional episodes in his work. Even if they are all invented by him, without prior knowledge of the history of art the reader might feel confused by those characters who have some historical precursor and those who have not, although the latter could have been inspired by some models from the real world.

That is why I wish to remind the reader that the work of art is discovered by revisiting the great art works that the hero appreciates from his own point of view. Once more, every reader is a reader of his or her own self.

I must make some clarifications regarding love and vocation. Love is a fictional construction, i.e. according to Proust, we never love a woman for what she is, something we know nothing about, but for what we imagine her to be. There are, then, judgements related to knowledge and those which are related to love, and oftentimes flaws and pain mean more than virtues, as Balzac had anticipated. We fall in love with a definite kind of woman and the link between this fact and artistic vocation is that Proust holds that they pose before us as a model before the sculptor. Love is sometimes a path full of deceit, as in Plato, which can lead us to artistic creation. Anyway, as I have said earlier, true artistic

communication is achieved by means of works of art. But love is a sketch of art, this being a hypothesis that inspires us.

L'amour le plus exclusif pour une personne est toujours l'amour d'autre chose. (...) et je m'étais mieux rendu compte depuis, qu'en étant amoureux d'une femme nous projetons simplement en elle un état de notre âme; que par conséquent l'important n'est pas la valeur de la femme mais la profondeur de l'état; et que les émotions qu'une jeune fille médiocre nous donne peuvent nous permettre de faire monter à notre conscience des parties plus intimes de nous-même, plus personnelles, plus lointaines, plus essentielles, que ne ferait le plaisir que nous donne la conversation d'un homme supérieur ou même la contemplation admirative de ses oeuvres. (25)

Artistic vocation possesses also a subjective character such as love itself does, but even if it is founded on subjectivity, it is more dependent on impressions that come to awake memories and to discover true life and allow the emergence of an evoked world. There is not in any way a case of solipsism of vocation, it is not mere consciousness, our mind that although it may carry out essential work by itself, without the perception of all sensations, could constitute the artist.

Another essential component of artistic vocation is the feeling of perplexity at the outside world, the things, the individuals, the answers which are always contradictory, social ascent and descent, decadence, different visions from different perspectives and the impossibility of being sure and, hence, the need to resort exclusively to hypotheses. Just as in Vinteuil's case, it is a proven fact that this perplexity is an invitation to discovery and artistic reflection.

Here are again the different paths, walks, labyrinths which must be trodden in life and in art to be able to find the communication that leads to the work of art or that obliterates it when we go astray. Therefore, it is inevitable in Proust's view, to introduce randomness in the development of the artistic vocation and in the production of a work of art.

"*A la Recherche...*" is not only art but also a reflection about art, its different forms and the condition of possibilities for fictional reason, that also establishes its own conditions of credibility that are not those commonly accepted in the real world but that find support in the works' narrative rigour. There are, then, artistic analyses and demonstrations that do not resort to orthodox logical criteria.

We find in the same novel a very important foundation for the subject I am studying. The hero will only become conscious of his vocation when he discovers the falsehood of naturalist art, which is the mimic of a reality that has turned misty by the work of habit, of customs, of abstract logic, conventions, where pragmatism reigns, having the role of

disfiguring what things really are. It is important to the hero, to unveil a new conception of literature and art, “the true literature”, capable of destroying habitual perception and reconstructing a new vision of the self and the world. Thus, art reaches the capacity to clear what is false and to discover what is true.

Moreover, the hero’s frustrated attempts, his lack of understanding of important works and, finally, the history of his vocation, depend on the revelation of a new side to art. There is then a strong link between the plenitude of vocation, the decision to write and the establishment of a new conception of art, which is his own. “*A la Recherche...*” is not only a novel with characters, episodes, developments, but also a meta-artistic record of vocation’s walk, for this reason not in a theoretical way but always from the different fictional levels, i.e. from the meta-language of fiction.

This fight waged by vocation against habit, against received conventions that cloud art and the vision of the world can also be related to Hume, as can be appreciated in the following paragraph:

L’habitude d’associer la personne d’Albertine au sentiment qu’elle n’avait pas inspiré me faisait pourtant croire qu’il était spécial à elle, comme l’habitude donne à la simple association d’idées entre deux phénomènes, à ce que prétend une certaine école philosophique, la force, la nécessité illusoires, d’une loi de causalité.²⁶

On the other hand, for Proust vocation is not a feverish inspiration that leads him to produce works of art (for example, Rossini composed the overture to *El barbero de Sevilla* overnight) but, as in the case of the musician Vinteuil and that of the hero himself, a hard and intense work, subjected to several revisions, corrections, editions, a book full of hieroglyphs that attempts to penetrate into the mind and to decipher by means of fictional knowledge truths about the man and the world that are artistically created.

Even if the work can be produced very fast, it is the work of a lifetime, as the painter Whistler states.

Artistic vocation is not necessarily accompanied in Proust by an ethics. However, as has been shown by Emilio Estiú, there is an implicit renunciation to the world to be able to give it away in the form of a work of art, a sort of deprivation of life.²⁷ The lack of artistic consciousness, which is certainly not true either in Proust’s case or in the case of his main fictional artistic characters, becomes apparent in particular in the case of the violinist Morel. It is the presence of the Platonic conception that through the bard or the rapsoda a god is speaking, since there are artists and players who have little to say about what they do²⁸. Morel is a prototypical character to show us this ethical distance between his talent,

the importance he attributes to music and his role as mediator between Sodoma and Gomorra, i.e. the moral condemnation formulated by Proust himself in his essay “A propos de Baudelaire”²⁹.

A fundamental question regarding vocation is that art is intimately related to life. It can be perceived as a reflection of a life that has been lived, a kind of confession; that is, it is autobiographic, as in Jean Santeuil's early poem:

Puis-je appeler ce livre un roman? C'est moins peut-être et bien plus, l'essence même de ma vie, recueillie sans y rien mêler, dans ces heures de déchirure où elle découle. Ce livre n'a jamais été fait, il a été récolté....³⁰

Or, on the other hand, as in *Le Temps retrouvé*, where we find an artistic recreation of true life.

Ainsi toute ma vie jusqu'à ce jour aurait pu et n'aurait pas pu être résumée sous ce titre: une vocation. Elle en l'aurait pas pu en ce sens que la littérature n' avait joué aucun rôle dans ma vie. Elle l'aurait pu en ce que cette vie, les souvenirs de ces tristesses, des ces joies, formaient une réserve pareille à cet albumen qui est logé dans l'ovule des plantes et dans le quel celui-ci puise sa nourriture pour se transformer en graine (...). Ainsi ma vie était-elle en rapport avec ce qu'amènerait sa maturation”³¹.

It is this second position of aesthetic doctrine found in the last tome of “*A la Recherche...*” the one which triumphs in the end and solves at the same time the question of vocation and the predominance of fiction over autobiographical references.

That is the reason why the hero holds that art had not played any role in his life (it might not, then, have been called a vocation) as his work comes late in life. Nevertheless, the fiction that he can create is based on the aesthetic transformation of life's events, of known people, of admired landscapes, of frequented Salons, of deciphered signs (then, it could be called a vocation). In Proust's view, a book is a cemetery in which the tombs' names have been erased.

And, finally, Proust's hero discovers and recognizes the involuntary memory, which is essential for the constitution of his art, from the celebrated magdalena who opens up a whole village and the world of infancy and his former self, to the memories of the Guermentes' Salon, which take him into earlier stages of his life. Proust's involuntary memory can be related somehow to Freud, as the latter in his own writings calls it unconscious memory.

We feel unexpectedly assaulted when two sensitive impressions from different times turn into one. It is useless to make an effort to revive the feelings, the events, the landscapes that came up, we can only retain a memory that has been transmuted by time and by the life that has been lived. This is all that our involuntary memory can give us.

Instead, memories, images, remembrances, flash back into our minds spurred by feelings that are experienced in our present time. These reminiscences not only give us an impression of something that we have really lived, but as something that is timeless. Moreover, we assume our former self. This is why, even if they are painful or joyful, they are so strong. It then becomes apparent that vocation cannot be severed from oblivion, as if the work of art must rebuild things as they really happened, it can only do so because these events have fled away from our consciousness, i.e. they have been forgotten and this oblivion has the positive property of excluding everything that transformed us later. In order to create a work of art, then, we must accept forgetfulness. Vocation is related, therefore, to the recovery of the true lost paradises that are those from the past.

Thus, when it seems that everything is lost and he enters the Guermites's Salon a series of epiphanies occur, earthenware that is reminiscent of one he saw in Venice, a napkin that reminds him of the Balbec hotel, the sound of a teaspoon hitting a cup which takes us to the train on its way to Balbec and an exemplary one taken from *Francoise le Champi* by George Sand that her mother used to read to him in his childhood, somehow perpetrating a kind of transgression by skipping lewd passages and thus giving shape to the first paradigm of readers' freedom.

Here we reach an essential component in Proust's conception of vocation: childhood. Always subjacent, it reappears through our involuntary memory: her first love, her mother who phrases the ominous law regarding all loves and readings made in infancy, the magic lantern and its fictional characters.

Proust's novel represents a fight to recover time lost, that which flows without leaving traces, and to transmute it by means of an artistic *prise de conscience* of the life we live. These revelations contained in the epiphanies are expressed in works of art, after the artist makes an effort to interpret and comprehend them. For, after the revelation is made, there comes time to destroy everything, death, nothingness, in the famous masquerade. Time is the great painter who turns all characters, through time, into unrecognizable beings and merely caricatures of themselves, which leads the hero to discover his own frailties. The novel ends with this duel between vocation and the destructive masks, and the hero makes up his mind to write a book which might be the one we have read but that in any case we should have to read it once more. Perhaps artistic vocation has never been called upon to play such a role in the discovery of the meaning of someone's life and

to put down for the reader, in the form of a work of art, a reminder of the fugacity of our reminiscences.

And yet, in Proust's view, vocation is exposed to frailty and the shadows of death. Could this book ever be written? Will there be time?

Notas

1. Cahiers Marcel Proust, *Le Carnet de 1908*. Paris, 1976, Gallimard.
2. In this paper we shall quotations will be made taken from the French edition by Jean – Yves Tadié, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, 4 volúmenes, Paris, 1987-1989, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.
3. Cf. Barthes, Roland, "Mucho tiempo he estado acostándome temprano", in *El susurro del lenguaje*, Barcelona, 1987, Paidós, p. 331
4. I, p. 6. I, p. 14.
5. Proust, Marcel, "Violante ou la mondanité" in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, Paris, 1971, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, N. R. F., Gallimard.
6. "... l'Odyssee ou la Recherche ne font d'une certaine manière qu'amplifier (au sens rhétorique) des énoncés tels que *Ulysse rentre à Ithaque* ou *Marcel devient écrivain*" G. Genette, "Discours du récit" in *Figures III*, 1972, Seuil, p. 75.
7. Barthes, R. "Un tema de investigación" in *El susurro del lenguaje*, *Op. cit.*, 1987, p. 325
8. Eco, U, *Obra abierta*, Barcelona, 1979, Ariel. Warning, R., *Estética de la recepción*. Madrid, 1989, Visor, La balsa de Medusa.
9. Proust, Marcel, *Jean Santeuil precedé de Les Plaisir et les jours*. Work edited by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre. París, 1971, Pléiade.
10. Proust, Marcel, *Albertine disparue*, 1992, Slatkine.
11. According to Proust's biographers Painter, George D., *Marcel Proust. Biografía*. Barcelona, 1967, Editorial Lumen. Tadié, Jean-Yves, *Biographie*, 2 tomes, Paris, 1996, Gallimard. This is a very different situation to that of Borges who decides to carry out the first publication of Cortázar's short-story entitled "Casa tomada" stating later that this circumstance honours him.
12. Hernández in texts extracted from *Página/12* year 2003 and Saer in an interview held at the Cultural Centre Islas Malvinas in La Plata, in 2000.
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