Combray’s location on the map of France:

In *Swann’s Way*, written before the war, Proust locates Combray in the same geographical spot as his father’s home town of Illiers: On the walk that became the “Méséglise” or “Swann’s way,” Dr. Adrien Proust led his sons south of Illiers, out towards Vieuvicq and Tansonville, passing “fields of wheat undulating under the sharp wind that seemed to arrive in a straight line from Chartres.” During the war, Proust made a strategic decision regarding the geography of his novel: he moved Combray from its Beauce location near Chartres, where Illiers lies on the map, to the north of Paris, near Laon, in order to place the little village in the path of the German advance.

See also “how we read newspapers.”

How we read newspapers:

The butler’s desire to torment Françoise over the war’s impending disasters and the slaughter of the young was frequently dominated by a patriotic cheerfulness [as to the French victory.] I was alarmed at the speed with which the scene of the [German] victories was approaching Paris, and was astonished that even the butler, having seen in one bulletin that an engagement had taken place near Lens, was not disturbed to read in the newspaper next day that it had been followed by satisfactory operations in the neighborhood of Jouy-le-Vicomte, of which the approaches were firmly in our hands. Now the butler knew Jouy-le-Vicomte well by name, for it was not so very far from Combray, but we read the newspapers as we love, blindfold. We do not try to understand the facts. We listen to the soothing words of the editor as we listen to the words of our mistress. —*Time Regained* 6: 88

Proust as a mimic, a writer of parodies: the inner metronome
Proust’s parodies are generally considered by his peers to be among the best ever written. Since a parody mimics a writer’s use of vocabulary, turns of phrases, and other stylistic hallmarks, it is virtually untranslatable. For a parody to be good, Proust said, one must not copy or use words from the original, but find words or expressions that the writer might have used. The secret was to catch the particular song or rhythm of the original. During his extensive readings, Proust had learned well the particular “music” of distinguished French authors—and one foreigner John Ruskin. For example, regarding his parody of Ernest Renan, Proust explained to Robert Dreyfus that, once he had adjusted his “inner metronome” to Renan’s “rhythm,” he could have written “ten volumes like that.” (Marcel Proust: Selected Letters 2: 356-57) The pastiches show Proust’s extraordinary versatility as a writer and his mischievous sense of humor. His amazing gift for mimicry, seen earlier in his salon imitations of Count Robert de Montesquiou’s gestures and speech, served him well in creating the distinctive language of his characters.

**War planes and Wagner’s Valkyries:**

In 1979, Francis Ford Coppola, in his film *Apocalypse Now*, used Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” as the musical accompaniment to a U.S. army helicopter raid on a Vietnamese village. We see that concerning ideas for a movie soundtrack, Proust was more than a half a century ahead of the Hollywood director.