



# Forgetting to Remember: An Approach to Proust's Recherche

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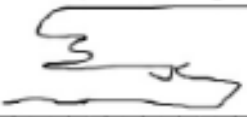


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*Forgetting to Remember: An Approach to Proust's Recherche*

A dissertation presented

by

Lara Roizen

to

The Department of Comparative Literature

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Forgetting to Remember: An Approach to Proust's *Recherche***Abstract**

Since Walter Benjamin's observation that "remembrance is the woof, and forgetting the warp" in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, critics have observed the importance of *oubli*, as a "réserve" of memories, for the return of involuntary memory. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century psychological discourse on forgetting and memory, however, evinces a more complex interplay between forgetting and memory. Théodule Ribot's *Les Maladies de la Mémoire*, in particular, posits that memory depends upon a balance between forgetting and memory, in which forgetting corrects *hypermnnesia* - an excess of memory - so that other memories no longer overwhelmed by competing memories may return. This study examines the expression of this paradigm of forgetting and memory in the *Recherche*, suggesting that *oubli* acts not only as a reserve for memory, but that the destructive agency of forgetting paves the path for memory by undoing the effects of *habitude* - impressions that become ingrained as a habituated perceptual response. I probe this exchange in the *Recherche* by examining not only how forgetting shapes the ability to remember in the *Recherche*, but is ultimately also essential to the perception and creation of art. I show that Swann's and the narrator's experiences of the *Vinteuil Sonate* demonstrate that the forgetting that takes place over successive encounters with a work of art wears away at aesthetic habits so that one may perceive a work of art anew. *Illumination rétrospective*, I suggest, similarly depends upon an interval of forgetting that renews the artist's perspective and in turn allows for the discovery and implementation of an underlying unity: a unity "vitale et non

logique” produced by the artist’s *inconscient*. *Oubli*, I argue, thus is not only the source of memory but the condition for remembering - a vital aspect of memory in both life and the creative process.

Dissertation Advisor: Virginie Greene

Lara Roizen

*Forgetting to Remember: An Approach to Proust's Recherche*

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## Introduction

In Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Funes the Memorious," a man who suffers a horseback riding accident that leaves him crippled suddenly develops the ability to remember everything - and in perfect detail.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to imagine that the narrator of the *Recherche* would admire such mnemonic talent. Yet this form of genius, although it may recapture memory in full, paradoxically renders memory meaningless. Funes, remembering everything, finds it impossible to create meaning from the encyclopedic catalogue of competing memories. The Proustian ideal - the return of time lost - turns out to be a curse for Funes. Funes remembers everything and yet, unable to grasp the meaning of his memories, effectively remembers nothing.

Borges' story echoes the story of a Russian man, Shereshevskii, who was treated in the late 1920s for precisely such a problem. Unable to forget, he failed to understand abstract concepts or even recognize people because his memory of a person was attached to a specific point in time, and thus to specific facial expressions and facial features.<sup>2</sup> The physician who treated him, Dr. Luria, wrote a famous case history titled "The Art of Forgetting" that concluded that the ability to forget was vital.

Myriad recent research on the psychology and biology of memory suggests why this may be the case, showing that forgetting plays more of a role in memory and our ability to remember

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 69-72. *Collected Fictions*. Trans. Andrew Hurley, Penguin, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> See "The Art of Forgetting" in A.R. Luria's *The Mind of a Mnemonist*. Trans. by Lynn Solotaroff, Basic Books, 1968, as cited in "Scientists Identify Neurons That Help the Brain Forget." *New York Times*, 19 Sept. 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/science/brain-memory-forgetting-mind.html>. Accessed 2 August 2020.



than previously understood. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Nagoya University in Japan, and Scripps Research Institute have recently offered evidence that the brain has a mechanism to actively forget information during sleep in order to clear space for new memories, suggesting that the true purpose of sleep is to forget. Sleep, they posit, may be the time during which the brain prunes synapses, a process that wears away at certain memories while allowing other memories to form.<sup>3</sup> During sleep, in other words, the brain clears certain memories to leave room for others. In a Stanford study published in *Nature Neuroscience*, visual images of participants' brains during a word-memorization test similarly showed that those who experienced forgetting during the test remembered new concepts better.<sup>4</sup> A paper in the journal *Neuron* argues that the very structure of our brains is built to promote an interplay between forgetting and remembering.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps most surprisingly, researchers at MIT and University of Glasgow suggested that the weakening of memory facilitates problem-solving; memory can be too rigid, making it

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<sup>3</sup> See "The Purpose of Sleep? To Forget, Scientists Say." Carl Zimmer. *New York Times*, 2 Feb. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/science/sleep-memory-brain-forgetting.html>. Accessed 2 August 2020. See also "Scientists Identify Neurons That Help the Brain Forget," *Ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> As cited in "Forgetting May Be Part of the Process of Remembering" by Carl Zimmer. *New York Times*, 5 June 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/05/health/psychology/05forg.html>. Accessed 2 August 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Richards, Blake A. and Paul W. Frankland. "The Persistence and Transience of Memory." *Neuron*, vol. 94, no. 6, 2017, [https://www.cell.com/neuron/fulltext/S0896-6273\(17\)30365-3?\\_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS0896627317303653%3Fshowall%3Dtrue](https://www.cell.com/neuron/fulltext/S0896-6273(17)30365-3?_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS0896627317303653%3Fshowall%3Dtrue). Accessed 2 August 2020.

difficult to grasp new concepts.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Storm, a psychologist who led a similar study on forgetting in 2011 now takes forgetting and its role in “creative cognition” - the ability to grasp new concepts - so seriously that he has factored forgetting into his own creative process. Dr. Storm now writes papers well ahead of deadlines in order to leave enough time for forgetting before revisiting his writing. He has applied this method of forgetting even to reading, reading articles twice “with a long break in between.”<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, these studies all share one common aspect: they indicate that memory is not unilateral, but rather consists of an intricate interplay between forgetting and memory in which forgetting - as the destruction of memory - is vital.

Proust’s *Recherche* anticipates in many ways this symbiosis between forgetting and memory discovered by cognitive scientists, although the *Recherche* paints a more complex picture of this relationship, demonstrating not only how forgetting paves the path for new memories, but may allow for a restructuring of the different layers of memory. It is this dynamic exchange between forgetting and memory that this dissertation is interested in examining in the *Recherche (RTP)* as well as in Proust’s writings, exposing how a reciprocal relationship between forgetting and memory plays out in both life as well as the artist’s creative practices.

Proustian scholarship has generally associated *oubli* with the subconscious, emphasizing *oubli*’s role in preserving memory, as discussed below. This project, however, asks how the

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<sup>6</sup> See Neechi Mosha and Edwin M. Robertson’s “Unstable Memories Create a High-Level Representation that Enables Learning Transfer” in *Current Biology*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5817890/>. Accessed 3 August 2020, as cited in “Forgot Where You Parked? Good” by Ulrich Boser. *New York Times*, 30 June 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/30/opinion/sunday/forgot-where-you-parked-good.html>. Accessed 2 August 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See “Forgot Where You Parked? Good,” *ibid.*

destructive aspect of forgetting may itself transform and facilitate the return of memory, aiming to show that forgetting is more than the preservation of memory within the subconscious but rather, as the destruction of memory, is essential to memory itself.

In examining this relationship between forgetting and memory, my work pivots away from a psychoanalytical model of forgetting, which has emphasized forgetting as a form of repression by way of the Freudian concept of *l'inconscient*,<sup>8</sup> instead focusing on Proustian scholarship that has drawn attention to the agency of forgetting in making memory possible. Among such scholarship is Paul Ricoeur's *La Mémoire, l'oubli, l'histoire*, which emphasizes that forgetting is not a Freudian "refoulement," but rather an "oubli de réserve" - a bank of memory that involuntary memory draws upon,<sup>9</sup> as well as Samuel Beckett's *Proust*, which designates forgetting as that which preserves memory.<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin and Gilles Deleuze, among others, have similarly conceived of *oubli* as a reserve of memory essential to involuntary memory in *RTP*, emphasizing that impressions must be relegated to oblivion before they can be

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<sup>8</sup> Freudian readings of forgetting in *R*, most notably, Malcolm Bowie's *Freud, Proust, and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*, Serge Doubrovsky's *La Place de la madeleine*, and Leo Bersani's *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art*, have interpreted forgetting as a means of suppression. Both Bersani and Doubrovsky therefore focus overwhelmingly on voluntary memory - as a form of forgetting - in the *Recherche*. See *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art*. 1965. New York: OUP, 2013; see *Proust Among the Stars*, London: Harper Collings, 1998; see *La Place de la madeleine*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> See p. 541, Paris: Seuil, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> See p. 17, 43-46 in *Proust*. New York: Grove Press, 1970.

recovered.<sup>11</sup> Benjamin writes that involuntary memory hews closer to forgetting than memory in his well-known metaphor about forgetting and memory: “remembrance,” Benjamin observes, “is the woof, and forgetting the warp.”<sup>12</sup> Deleuze, as well, considers that the loss of memory is not something that must be overcome, but rather which makes possible the “nature objective de ce qu’on retrouve au sein de l’oubli, et en tant que perdu.”<sup>13</sup> Memory must be lost - forgotten - in order to be recovered, because only that which has remained outside of the purview of the conscious mind is free of conscious mediation. More recent scholarship by Harald Weinrich and Helga Geyer-Ryan has reiterated and expanded upon these observations and their significance to *RTP*, noting that forgetting is not only a reserve for memory, but, in so doing, protects memory from the contingencies of habit and voluntary memory.<sup>14</sup>

It is this notion of *oubli* - *oubli* as a “réserve” of memory - that Proustian scholarship has generally designated as the cornerstone to the perception and creation of art. Echoing Ricoeur’s

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<sup>11</sup> “The Image in Proust.” *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, p. 202.

*Différence et Répétition*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> In weaving, the warp is the foundation - the lengthwise threads that create the frame on a loom, while the woof weaves through these lengthwise threads to complete the design. Benjamin thus characterizes forgetting as the foundation - the reserve - from which memory draws. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> “La perte ou l’oubli ne sont pas...des déterminations qui doivent être surmontées, mais désignent au contraire la nature objective de ce qu’on retrouve au sein de l’oubli, et en tant que perdu” (136).

<sup>14</sup> See Harald Weinrich’s *Lethé, the Art and Critique of Forgetting*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004, p. 150. See also p. 310 in Helga Geyer-Ryan’s “The Rhetoric of Forgetting” in *Convention and Innovation in Literature*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989, p. 310. See also Martin Hägglund’s *Dying for Time*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012, p. 154.

notion of *oubli* as a “réserve,” for instance, Stéphane Chaudier has suggested the possibility that Proust’s own artistic process may reflect the rhythm of forgetting and memory of involuntary memory.<sup>15</sup> With respect to the perception of art of *RTP*, Roger Shattuck has emphasized that the experience of listening to music - a process “cumulative, subject to time, never exhaustive” - is one that entails a forgetting that lays the “foundation, as it were, of a musical platform of memory.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Guillaume Perrier’s *La Mémoire du Lecteur*, which focuses concretely on the ways in which *RTP* aims to elicit the experience of involuntary memory for the reader, has highlighted the role of forgetting in the reading experience as the first step to reproducing involuntary remembrance.<sup>17</sup> These studies on forgetting and art share the conviction that forgetting - whether in the case of the listener, the reader, or the musician - is experienced as a “réserve” that is the condition for involuntary memory, itself deemed as integral to the perception and creation of art.

These works inform my understanding of the role of *oubli* as essential to preserving memory, and as ultimately vital to both the experience, as well as creation, of art. I draw upon these observations in order to consider what constitutes memory in the perception of both life

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<sup>15</sup> “Peut-on dégager l’esquisse d’un art de l’oubli? Si l’on voulait, si l’on pouvait être sage, alors peut-être faudrait-il reprendre à son compte la leçon que Proust délivre à son insu : et comme son héros, il faudrait être capable, alternativement, de s’oublier soi-même, pour se donner au monde, et triompher sur la scène sociale, et d’oublier le monde, pour se retrouver soi-même, et goûter les jouissances de l’intimité reconquise” (44). “Proust et l’oubli créateur.” *L’oubli*, special issue of *La Faute à Rousseau*, no. 54, 2010, p. 40-42.

<sup>16</sup> See p. 238. *Proust’s Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time*. W.W. Norton, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> See *La Mémoire du lecteur*. Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2011.

and art: I posit that the memories worth recovering are those that have been preserved, as literary critics have argued, within the “réserve” of *oubli*. I also expand upon the observations made by Stéphane Chaudier, among others,<sup>18</sup> who have outlined how art may be considered the manifestation of involuntary memory, suggesting that forgotten impressions preserved within *oubli* may thus form the basis of the involuntary expression of memory through art. However, the central question of this dissertation is what makes access to the subconscious - this “réserve d’oubli” - possible, both in life and in art.

It is in the attempt to answer this question that this dissertation marks a departure from traditional scholarship on forgetting, which has designated *oubli* as a “réserve” of memory, in order to examine how a different conception of forgetting contributes to uncovering the work of the subconscious. Although scholarship has established the “réserve” of *oubli* as the site of memory, it largely ignores another productive function of *oubli*: *oubli* not as a “réserve” but as the destructive forgetfulness that takes place over time - the loss and dissolution of memory. It is this latter form of forgetting and its relationship to memory that is the focus of my thesis.

I find recent scholarship that has refocused attention on the necessity of the erasure of memory especially productive for expanding the definition of *oubli* beyond its ability to preserve. In collaboration with his brother, a neurosurgeon, Jean-Yves Tadié, has recently emphasized forgetting in the *Recherche* in *Le sens de la mémoire*, suggesting that forgetting is an essential aspect of involuntary memory because it allows for “triage” and selection, giving sense

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<sup>18</sup> See p. 163 in Carlo Caballero’s chapter in *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics*. “Homogeneity: meaning, risks, and consequences.” New York: CUP, 2001. Caballero discusses Vinteuil’s music as the product of the artist’s involuntary memory but does not focus on the role of forgetting.

to memory.<sup>19</sup> Richard Terdiman argues that the density of information in the “flux of reality”<sup>20</sup> means that forgetting - as the erosion of memory - is essential to facilitating the return of memory, a notion echoed by Miguel de Beistegui.<sup>21</sup> Forgetting not only makes space for memory, however; in *Trafics de Proust*, although considering forgetting within a Deleuzian framework, Anne Simon suggests that reading *RTP* engenders an experience of forgetting - a “sortie de soi” - that renews perception (creating an “altérité déconcertante”), in turn allowing Proustian readers such as Deleuze and Barthes to both better assimilate Proust’s writing into their own work as well as, ultimately, understand the self.<sup>22</sup> Finally, even as Harald Weinrich’s primary aim in *Lethe, the Art and Critique of Forgetting* is to emphasize the preservational power of forgetting, he also suggests that oblivion has a purifying effect, purifying memory “of all contingency.”<sup>23</sup>

Recent literary critics have thus designated forgetting as something that can renew perception as well as transforming memory itself, emboldening me to consider how the effect of forgetting on memory itself - the alteration and reorganization of different layers of memory as a

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<sup>19</sup> See *Le sens de la mémoire*. 1999. Gallimard: Paris, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 22

<sup>21</sup> A similar notion of forgetting is mentioned in passing by Miguel de Beistegui in *Proust as Philosopher: The Art of Metaphor*, who writes that one aspect of forgetting is its ability to get “rid of certain impressions in order to make room for others” (51). *Proust as Philosopher: The Art of Metaphor*. Trans. by Dorothee Bonnigal Katz, Simon Sparks, and Miguel de Beistegui. 2007. Routledge: New York, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> See p. 95-100; see also p. 125-135. *Trafics de Proust*. Paris: Hermann, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

result of forgetting - may make possible an exchange between forgetting and memory that facilitates the return of older “strata” of memory.

The discussion of the useful nature of forgetting is not, however, particular to 21<sup>st</sup>-century literary criticism, but is in fact endemic to the discourse on forgetting in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century psychology, which highlighted the interaction of memory and forgetting. Théodule Ribot’s work *Les Maladies de la Mémoire*, in particular, with which Proust was familiar and which was enormously influential at the time,<sup>24</sup> considered memory and forgetting from the perspective of mental health, warning against an excess of either forgetting or memory. Ribot’s *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* suggested that forgotten impressions could be stored, or transcribed, as physical memories within the body, a notion that echoes involuntary memory and *oubli* as a “réserve.”<sup>25</sup> The body, as the site of the preservation of memory, would counteract forgetting, or *amnesia*. On the other hand, Ribot also cautioned that an overabundance of memory, or *hypermnesia*, could be dangerous, casting it as a psychological pathology that could resuscitate painful moments and prolong suffering. Not only would *hypermnesia* extend suffering, however; *hypermnesia*, Ribot claimed, would contribute to a flux of impressions and information that would render the return

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<sup>24</sup> Proust had read Ribot’s work and had direct knowledge of it. See p. 194 in *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*. Furthermore, Ribot founded the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* with the intention of establishing a more rigorous and scientific approach to psychology and philosophy and was a well-known international figure of psychology, considered by some to be the founder of modern French psychology. See “The Seminal Contributions of Théodule Ribot (1839-1916): The Centenary of the Passing of the Founder of Modern French Psychology.” Nicolas, Serge, and Michel Sabourin et al., *L’Année Psychologique*, Vol. 116, 2016, p. 519-546.

<sup>25</sup> *Les maladies de la Mémoire*. 1881. Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 2005.



of memory, or recollection, impossible.<sup>26</sup> Ribot, in other words, advances the notion that the weakening or suppression of memory, as a result of forgetting, is itself beneficial to memory. Ribot thus develops a paradigm of memory that depends on a balance of forgetting and memory in equal parts.

As Richard Terdiman observes, Proust's observations on forgetting in *RTP* reflect an awareness of the beneficent aspects of forgetting as articulated in Ribot's work.<sup>27</sup> This awareness is evidenced, Terdiman writes, in Proust's depiction of involuntary memory, in which *oubli*, safeguarding memory from the intellect, is key to its eventual remembrance, as noted by literary critics. The parallels in Proust's and Ribot's conceptualization of forgetting embolden me to trace another possible parallel between *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* and *RTP*: the depiction of forgetting as that which corrects the excesses of memory, in turn facilitating memory - Ribot's paradigm of forgetting and memory.

My examination of the relationship of forgetting to memory is also informed by the psychological and philosophical discourse on *habitude* at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which suggested a relationship between *habitude* and the excesses of memory. The traditional definition of habit refers to what Henri Bergson referred to as "motor mechanisms"<sup>28</sup> - in other words, physical actions that have, over time, become automatized: physiological habits. However, other contemporary works with which Proust was familiar blurred the distinction between

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<sup>26</sup> See especially p. 45-6 in *Les maladies de la Mémoire*, *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> See p. 194-98, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Matter and Memory*. Trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1991, pg. 79.

physiological habits and psychological habits.<sup>29</sup> Félix Ravaisson's *De l'Habitude* goes so far as to argue that certain psychological activities - ways of thinking or perceiving - may create a certain "disposition" or inclination to perceiving the object, person, or situation in question in a similar manner in the future.<sup>30</sup> The repetition of certain thoughts or attitudes may thus become psychologically habitual, or ingrained. It is this articulation of habit in particular that leads me to redefine *habitude* as a disposition or tendency to a certain kind of perception in *RTP*. This redefinition ultimately permits me to consider how the work of voluntary memory may become entrenched as *habitude* through repetition, contributing to the excesses of memory, and how the work of forgetting, in turn, may become integral to undoing the effects of *habitude*.

Finally, this thesis also turns to genetic criticism in order to examine the role of forgetting - and remembering - in Proust's own creative process. Proust famously described the construction of his novel in terms of building a cathedral. The meaning of this analogy has been much debated, however, in part because Proust's own creative practices appear to bely what is suggested in the quote itself: that *RTP* was constructed in a precise, methodological manner, with every detail planned out from beginning to end. Proust's use of *paperoles* to retrospectively insert sections, and his recombination of previous material, is well known. A central question in genetic criticism is thus to what extent *RTP* is a product of planning, versus the result of improvisation. On the one hand, Proust's valorization of *illumination rétrospective* in *RTP* places

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<sup>29</sup> See p. 125 in *Proust as Philosopher* for a summary of the direct and indirect influence of Ravaisson on Proust.

<sup>30</sup> See p. 64. *De l'habitude/Of Habit*. 1838. Trans. and Ed. by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair. New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2008.

value on the organic, improvised nature of artistic creation; on the other, he appears to have planned at least the beginning and end of *RTP* meticulously.

To this end, the creative practices disclosed by genetic criticism are particularly revealing. Luc Fraisse, however, has shown that in spite of the planned structure of the *RTP* with respect to the beginning and end, Proust's writing of the middle of *RTP* - the *entredeux* - allowed for a substantial amount of improvisation.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Nathalie Mauriac Dyer has suggested that the addition of the Albertine episode - which formed part of the *entredeux* - subsequently informed and shaped the dramatic structure of *RTP*.<sup>32</sup> Other studies have also shown that Proust's writing of *RTP*, spanning from 1908-1922, bears the traces of Proust's forgetting of his own work during the revision process.<sup>33</sup> These studies have paved the path for considering the role of improvisation in the construction of the text, on the one hand, and the possibility of forgetfulness during the creative process, on the other, permitting me to examine how forgetting may have informed improvisations - possible retrospective discoveries - that took place during the writing process.

This project, which unites the study of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century psychology with literary and genetic criticism, thus aims to bridge the gap between scholarship that has highlighted the

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<sup>31</sup> See p. 95-97, "Les principes de composition de *La Recherche du temps perdu*." *Thélème*, vol. 22, 2007, p. 79-100.

<sup>32</sup> See Nathalie Mauriac Dyer's "Composition and publication of *À la recherche du temps perdu*," p. 63-64. *Marcel Proust in Context*. Ed. Adam Watt. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> See p. 254 in Anthony Pugh's *The Growth of À la Recherche du Temps Perdu: A Chronological Examination of Proust's Manuscripts from 1909 to 1914, Volume I: 1909-1911*. University of Toronto Press, 2004.

beneficial aspects of the destructive force of forgetting, and scholarship that has called attention to the importance of *oubli* - as a means to preserving memory - for the perception and creation of art. This thesis seeks to intervene in Proustian scholarship that has characterized *oubli* as a preservational force in order to ask how the destructive force of memory may itself form a productive exchange with memory in *RTP*. At the same time, this project considers how such an exchange may allow access to the memory preserved by *oubli* itself. As such, this study is focused on two questions in particular. First, what is the relationship of the destructive power of forgetting to the recovery of memory encased by *oubli* in *RTP*? Second, how is this relationship between forgetting and memory manifested in the experience - and creation - of art itself, as well as in Proust's own creative practices? This thesis thus traces the experience of forgetting both in everyday perception and the creation of art in *RTP*, in order to propose a different function of forgetting: the loss of memory not as a means to preservation, but as a destructive force that is itself necessary - as part of an exchange between forgetting and memory - to the recovery of memory. I ultimately expose this alternative function of forgetting in *RTP* to suggest that forgetting not only shapes the ability to remember in *RTP*, but, as such, ultimately becomes an essential aspect of artistic practice both in *RTP* as well as in Proust's own creative strategies.

#### Chapter 1 Overview: A New Paradigm of Forgetting: Forgetting as a Catalyst for Memory

My first chapter aims to expand the definition of forgetting beyond its role as that which preserves memory in order to propose an alternative paradigm between forgetting and memory. This paradigm draws upon the conception of forgetting and memory in Ribot's *Les Maladies de la Mémoire*, and its possible expression within *RTP* itself. Ribot posits that forgetting corrects the excesses of memory, making the remembrance of obscured layers of memory possible by

wearing away at memory.<sup>34</sup> Ribot's characterization of *oubli*, I argue, thus diverges from the traditional notion of *oubli* as that which safeguards memory, instead pointing to the productive nature of the loss of memory itself.

In order to consider the possible expression of this dynamic between forgetting and memory in *RTP*, this chapter first considers what might constitute the excesses of memory in *RTP*. Taking into account Ravaillon's articulation of *habitude*, which posited that habit may refer to psychological, rather than physiological, predispositions, I contend that the work of voluntary memory in *RTP* may similarly become ingrained, or habituated, over time. The excesses of memory perpetuated by *habitude*, I argue, in turn often obscure other associations with the object of perception, as one's impression of a person, object, or place becomes fixed.

I first expose how Ribot's paradigm of forgetting and memory may function within *RTP* by examining the interaction of forgetting and the excesses of memory - or *habitude* - in passages on sleep and involuntary memory in *RTP*. I consider two different types of *oubli* in particular: *oubli* both as oblivion, or the temporary paralysis of cognition, and as forgetfulness, or the forgetting that gradually takes place over time. The experience of sleep, I argue, exemplifies oblivion, in which the narrator's consciousness is interrupted - a break in cognition that temporarily suspends the effects of *habitude* in the brief moments that follow waking. I posit that the narrator's perception of his surroundings, temporarily stripped of habit, revives old, forgotten associations. The *moments bienheureux* similarly demonstrates the necessity of oblivion: the oblivion created by the returning force of involuntary memory temporarily suspends competing habitual impressions, or *habitude*, in turn permitting for the return of involuntary memory. At the same time, involuntary memory also often follows not only after a

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

temporary moment of oblivion, but after a long period of forgetting in which the original memory and associated *habitudes* have, over the course of time, been forgotten. Both involuntary memory and sleep, I suggest, thus evince a different paradigm of forgetting and memory: one in which memory returns only after *oubli* - both as oblivion and as forgetfulness - has undone the effects of *habitude*.

A similar pattern unfolds in Swann's and the narrator's relationships with Odette and Albertine, respectively. Swann's relationship with Odette is marked by his desire to ignore certain undesirable aspects or impressions of Odette in favor of others. While initially, Swann's adherence to a particular image of Odette is the work of voluntary memory, eventually, it becomes the work of habit: a "résidu fixe d'habitudes" obscures his initial unfavorable impressions of her.<sup>35</sup> After Swann's longest absence from Odette, however, Swann's memory of Odette and his associated *habitudes* begin to fade. Without the hold of these habituated impressions, earlier impressions of Odette obscured by habit - those Swann previously wished to ignore - resurface.

The effect of forgetting on *habitude* is further dramatized in the narrator's relationship with Albertine. The narrator's past experiences with Albertine form a figurative screen - an "énorme oeuf douloureux" - that blocks his perception of Albertine.<sup>36</sup> Even as this "oeuf" demonstrates the power of affect, it also continuously reflects back to the narrator his past impressions of Albertine, contributing to a habituated perception of Albertine. As the narrator begins to forget Albertine, however, he simultaneously forgets the habituated impressions that had become inextricably attached to the image of Albertine. I suggest that the mitigation of these

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<sup>35</sup> *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1988, I, 275.

<sup>36</sup> IV, 22.

ingrained impressions afforded by forgetting, in turn, corresponds directly with the narrator's ability to suddenly remember Albertine in a different light. The return of Swann's and the narrator's forgotten impressions of Odette and Albertine - impressions that contain unwanted truths - suggests a similarity between romantic relationships in *RTP* and involuntary memory; it is only when the images, or impressions, perpetuated by *habitude* may no longer be remembered that other memories preserved within the subconscious, no longer obstructed by habit, may return.

The characterization of the interdependence of forgetting and memory in *RTP* thus mirrors the paradigm of forgetting and memory already established in Ribot's work, in which forgetting must correct the excesses of memory. Whether as a result of forgetfulness or oblivion, I contend that the suspension or undermining of the effects of *habitude* created by *oubli*, corrects the excesses of memory - certain associations that have become ingrained over time - in order to facilitate the return of memory. *Oubli*, I argue, thus not only preserves forgotten memories from the effects of habit, but, as that which effaces habit, is itself a catalyst for the return of memory.

## Chapter 2: "Comme Tout Ce Qui Se Réalise Dans le Temps": *Oubli* and the Work of Art

This chapter probes the narrator's experience of *la Berma's* performances and Vinteuil's music in order to consider how forgetting contributes to one's understanding of the arts. In particular, I examine the forgetting that takes place across successive encounters with *la Berma* and Vinteuil and its relationship to the perception of art as a whole in *RTP*. The narrator's experience of Berma's performances illustrates the ways in which habit may pose an obstacle not only to understanding Berma, but to all art. The narrator's initial impressions of Berma's performance are rooted in a particular notion of what constitutes the dramatic arts; the narrator's

“collection d’idées” corresponds to the dramatic performances of actresses to which he has grown accustomed (II, 349). The characterization of the narrator’s preconceived notions of art - his aesthetic *habitudes* - are not described as particular to Berma; instead, the narrator’s difficulty in initially understanding Berma’s genius is an example of the way in which aesthetic habits make it difficult to appreciate all truly novel works of art that defy aesthetic conventions and expectations. Berma’s experience thus provides a definition of what constitutes *habitude* with respect to art itself.

At the same time, the interval of forgetting between Berma’s first and second performance demonstrates how forgetting may productively affect one’s perception of the work of art. The narrator encounters Berma for the second time after “[des] années d’oubli,” a forgetting which, I argue, permits the narrator to perceive her performance without the effects of habit.<sup>37</sup> Forgetting not only mitigates the effects of habit in the dramatic arts, but in both Swann’s and the narrator’s experiences of Vinteuil’s music, as well. As Swann forgets the *petite phrase* and, in turn, his own habituated associations with it, he rediscovers previously forgotten impressions that the *petite phrase* once provoked for him. Although Swann’s experience of forgetting recent associations in order to remember older ones instantiates the exchange of forgetting and memory, Swann’s understanding of the *petite phrase* and Vinteuil’s music remains grounded in its relationship to his own life, and thus, is limited to an autobiographical interpretation of Vinteuil and his music.

The narrator’s experience of the *Sonate* similarly evinces the forgetting implicated in musical experience. There are two types of forgetting at play in the narrator’s experience of Vinteuil’s *Sonate*. The first is *oubli* as oblivion: the preservation of impressions within the

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<sup>37</sup> II, 347.



listener's subconscious. During the listening experience, certain musical concepts are too novel or complex to be consciously registered, which remain forgotten and yet are preserved within the subconscious. This type of musical listening is desirable, I argue, as it allows music to be understood in a way that bypasses the intellect: "musicographes," we are told, may understand the connections within a musician's work "par le raisonnement," but such analysis is superficial.<sup>38</sup>

Forgetfulness, however - the forgetting that takes place over time - is equally important to accessing those impressions which, relegated to oblivion, take shape within the subconscious. The narrator makes clear that in listening to the *Sonate*, as in the case of Berma's performances, one initially enjoys the aspects of a piece that most appeal to our own preconceived notions of music. The narrator, however, recognizes that as in life, art, too, is privy to forgetting: over the course of successive hearings of a piece, certain aspects begin to escape us. Initially, the narrator's recognition of this forgetfulness brings about a sense of melancholy; the experience of art is as fleeting as life itself. Nevertheless, the narrator's melancholy is tempered by the realization that as one's initial impressions fade and are forgotten - impressions rooted in our expectations of music and aesthetic *habitudes* - the listener may begin to appreciate previously ignored impressions: those forgotten impressions which, after taking shape within the subconscious, may finally resurface. The forgetfulness that takes place across successive encounters thus permits for the recovery of the work of the subconscious: those impressions relegated to *oubli*. These recovered impressions ultimately yield a less superficial understanding

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<sup>38</sup> It is based on "des analogies plutôt ingénieusement trouvées par le raisonnement que senties par l'impression directe" (III, 760).

of the work of art - one that, as mentioned above, bypasses the effects of habit precisely because it has coalesced within the subconscious.

Although the fleeting nature of music serves to underscore the experience of time - and therefore, forgetting - in the perception of the work of art, ultimately, the narrator's observations in his reflection on forgetting and art extends beyond music to all "chefs-d'oeuvre."<sup>39</sup> Music, I argue, thus becomes a symbol for the time - and, thus, forgetting - necessary to understand all truly novel works of art. This chapter, therefore, ultimately contends that *habitude* affects not only one's perception of life, but of art; and that the interval of forgetting between successive encounters with a work of art, as in life, permits for an exchange between forgetting and memory that is ultimately integral to understanding truly novel works of art, or *chefs-d'oeuvre*.

Chapter 3: Creating the Ideal Work of Art: *Oubli* and the Discovery of the Artist's *Patrie Perdue*.

My third and final chapter posits that the relationship of forgetting to memory in *RTP*, both as it relates to life and the perception of art, is ultimately a microcosm of the interdependence of forgetting and memory that is necessary to creating the ideal work of art. The artist's stylistic unity - the recurring themes and motifs unique to the artist's work - is depicted in *La Prisonnière (P)* as ideally being the involuntary manifestation of the artist's *patrie perdue* - the aspects of the artist's self that remain hidden, forgotten even by the artist themselves. Only the involuntary expression of the *patrie perdue* guarantees that the work of art expresses the artist's most authentic self, as opposed to perpetuating the work of the intellect - the artist's conscious designs, or the "ressemblances voulues" the artist wishes to impose upon the work of

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<sup>39</sup> I, 521.

art.<sup>40</sup> *Oubli*'s ability to preserve - the relegation and transcription of impressions to oblivion - is thus integral to the conception of the ideal work of art in *RTP*.

From his observations on the creative processes of Balzac, Wagner, and Raphaël in *P*, the narrator recognizes that *illumination rétrospective* is a method of ensuring that the intellect does not predetermine the unity of the work of art; instead, retrospective illumination permits the artist to discover an underlying unity - the patterns involuntarily generated by their *patrie perdue* - *après coup*. Retrospective illumination therefore allows for the creation of a work of art that is, on the one hand, initially shaped by the artist's subconscious and yet, on the other, enhanced retrospectively by the efforts of the intellect, preserving the unconscious design created by the artist's *patrie perdue*. This, then, I argue, is the ideal work of art in *RTP*: the product of the subconscious - of aspects of the self relegated to *oubli* - enhanced after the fact by the intellect.

The artist's reorganization of their work according to the patterns generated by their subconscious, however, presupposes the artist's ability to recognize them. I propose that this is the other lesson the narrator gleans from Balzac's, Wagner's, and Raphaël's creative processes. The narrator observes that the discovery of the underlying unity in one's own work occurs as a result of the interval of forgetting that takes place between the creation and revision of a work of art; Wagner, for instance, discovers the hidden connections in his work only after forgetting a "morceau" in one of his drawers.<sup>41</sup> The ultimate lesson learned from other artists' in *P* is that the forgetfulness of one's own work renews perception such that the artist, seeing their work anew, may recognize patterns previously obscured by habit. The artist cannot will their work into

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<sup>40</sup> III, 760.

<sup>41</sup> III, 666-67.

oblivion; instead, retrospective illumination, I argue, becomes a conscious means of accessing the subconscious by provoking the forgetting that makes remembrance possible.

Proust, like the narrator, admired the retrospective illumination that he interpreted as part and parcel of Balzac's, Wagner's, and Ruskin's creative genius because it expressed certain "traits profonds" - aspects of the artists' *inconscient*.<sup>42</sup> Not only did Proust indicate in that he often discovered such "traits" in his own work, suggesting the retrospective discovery of underlying patterns in his own work; Proust's method of editing also bore a strong resemblance to the very methods of retrospective illumination he ascribed to the artists he admired - both in his letters and in *Contre Sainte-Beuve (CSB)*, as well as in *RTP*. At the same time, discrepancies in *RTP* indicate that the length of the editing process brought Proust, at times, to forget his own work. Proust's writing, thus, suggests that his admiration of retrospective illumination in Balzac's, Wagner's, and Ruskin's work provided him with a model for his own creative process; furthermore, the interval of forgetting evidenced in his own revisions suggest that, like the artists in *RTP*, forgetting may have similarly facilitated Proust's ability to recognize - and subsequently illuminate in his work - the "traits profonds" of Proust's own subconscious.

This chapter thus advances two arguments about *oubli*. I posit that *oubli* - the artist's oblivion of their *patrie perdue* - is the ideal source of the stylistic unity of a work of art. The

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<sup>42</sup> See Proust's letter to Jacques Copeau, p. 616 in *Lettres: 1879-1922*: "de même qu'en lisant Stendhal, Thomas Hardy, Balzac, j'ai relevé chez eux, avec mon intelligence, des traits profonds de leur instinct que j'aimerais dessiner, - car cela n'a jamais été fait, si un peu de temps m'était encore concédé, - de même en me lisant moi-même, j'ai dégagé après coup des traits constitutifs de mon inconscient." *Lettres: 1879-1922*. Ed. by Katherine Kolb, Caroline Szyłowicz, François Leriche, and Virginie Greene. Paris: Plon, 2004.

recovery of the underlying unity produced by the artist's *patrie perdue* depends, however, upon the work of forgetting: the artist suddenly recognizes the hidden unity in their work only when forgetting has had long enough to undo the work of the intellect - the artist's conscious designs for their art. Ultimately, this chapter thus aims to show that the narrator's experiences of the exchange between forgetting and remembering within the novel (the *moments bienheureux*, sleep, Albertine, the perception of art) are a microcosm of the forgetting and remembering that is a necessary part of the creative process, both for the narrator and Proust. I thus articulate an alternative conception of the relationship between forgetting and memory in order to examine how forgetfulness facilitates the return of memory, and, in so doing, may ultimately allow for the creation of the ideal work of art: one that originates from the artist's *oubli* of the self - their *patrie perdue*.

## **Chapter 1**

## The Exchange Between Forgetting and Memory in *RTP*: Forgetting in Order to Remember

The sense of loss created by the annihilation of memory in the *Recherche* is well known. As the narrator laments in *La Fugitive (F)*, forgetting is a sort of second death. Although death may detach one from those they love, it is forgetting that is the most “cruel” punishment:

Je savais que je l’oublierais un jour, j’avais bien oublié Gilberte, Mme de Guermantes, j’avais bien oublié ma grand-mère. Et c’est notre plus juste et plus cruel chatiment de l’oubli si total, paisible comme ceux des cimetières, par quoi nous nous sommes détachés de ceux que nous n’aimons plus, que nous entrevoyions ce même oubli comme inévitable à l’égard de ceux que nous aimons encore.<sup>43</sup>

The most final death is the one produced by forgetting, because it is forgetting that erases the memory of loved ones until, as the narrator observes in *Bal de têtes*, they signify nothing more than “un mot incompris.”<sup>44</sup> Forgetting is thus dramatized here as the ultimate cemetery, in which all memory and life is laid to rest. At the same time, the forgetting of others implicates the death of the self, for ultimately we forget others only because of our existence in time - a reminder of our mortality: “Ce n’est pas parce que les autres sont morts que notre affection pour eux s’affaiblit, c’est parce que nous mourons nous-mêmes.”<sup>45</sup> Forgetting, then, is not only the complete obliteration of others and loss of memory, but the gradual effacement of the self. It is the aim of involuntary memory, as scholarship has traditionally posited, to wrest memory from the oppressive grip of oblivion.

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<sup>43</sup> IV, 64.

<sup>44</sup> IV, 483.

<sup>45</sup> IV, 175.

In spite of forgetting's annihilation, however, many scholars have also called attention to its ability to preserve and safeguard memory. Walter Benjamin<sup>46</sup> and Gilles Deleuze,<sup>47</sup> among others, have underlined the role of forgetting in the *Recherche* as essential to involuntary memory, emphasizing that it is only when something has been truly lost that it may be recovered: in other words, the way in which forgetting preserves. Harald Weinrich echoes the claim that forgetting, by preserving memory, is the condition for involuntary memory, arguing that "involuntary memory tunnels underneath a long, deep oblivion,"<sup>48</sup> making possible the return of memory. More recent scholarship has suggested that forgetting preserves the affective power of memory by protecting it from habit.<sup>49</sup> These studies, thus, upset the notion of forgetting as a purely destructive force in *R*, arguing in favor of forgetting's utility in safeguarding memory.

Even more recently, however, literary critics have foregrounded yet another facet of forgetting: forgetting as that which may transform or productively alter memory through the erasure of memory itself. Richard Terdiman, writing about the history of forgetting and memory in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, has observed that the destructive property of forgetting is an essential principle of memory itself: "the most constant element of recollection is forgetting,

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<sup>46</sup> See p. 202: "For the important thing for the remembering author is...the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection. Or should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting?"

<sup>47</sup> "La perte ou l'oubli ne sont pas ici des déterminations qui doivent être surmontées, mais désignent au contraire la nature objective de ce qu'on retrouve au sein de l'oubli, et en tant que perdu." *Différence et Répétition*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, p. 136.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. See also Helga Geyer-Ryan's "The Rhetoric of Forgetting," *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *A Reader's Guide to Proust's 'In Search of Lost Time.'* New York: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 71.



discarding the nonretained so that retention, remembrance can occur at all.”<sup>50</sup> Terdiman thus argues that the density of information in the “flux of reality” means that forgetting - as the erosion of memory - is essential to facilitating the return of memory. Several studies, as previously mentioned, have suggested a possible connection between this aspect of forgetting and its relationship to memory in *RTP* itself, noting that forgetting allows for the triage<sup>51</sup> or purification of memory.<sup>52</sup>

This conception of forgetting as that which productively alters memory echoes a principle of forgetting that was already well-developed in Proust’s time, as noted by Terdiman. Théodule Ribot’s work on memory and forgetting in *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* adduced the importance of forgetting for memory, positing that a balance between memory and forgetting was necessary for psychological well-being. On the one hand, Ribot wrote about *hypermnnesia* - the inability to forget - as permitting for the sudden recall of forgotten memories.<sup>53</sup> *Hypermnnesia*, however, was not without its dangers, according to Ribot; for if *hypermnnesia* served to correct the annihilation of *amnesia*, or forgetting, the reverse was also true. Ribot warned about the excesses of memory, arguing that without the loss of memory, there would be too many competing memories to allow

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> See *Le sens de la mémoire* by Jean-Yves and Marc Tadié, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> As discussed earlier, Weinrich suggests in *Lethe, the Art and Critique of Forgetting* that oblivion must be “deep enough” in order for involuntary memory to “go into action” (151). Forgetting, Weinrich observes, “purifie[s] it [memory]...of all contingency,” thus not only preserving, but transforming, the memory in question (151).

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 4 of *Les Maladies de la mémoire*, p. 139-155 (as cited by Terdiman, p. 194).

for the recollection of older memories.<sup>54</sup> Many scholars, including Terdiman and Luc Fraisse, have commented on Proust's close familiarity with Ribot's work.<sup>55</sup> Terdiman, among others, have furthermore traced the probable influence of Ribot's idea about *hypermnesia* - the sudden recall of memory - to the concept of involuntary memory in *RTP*.<sup>56</sup> While they have thus illustrated the parallel in both Ribot's and Proust's works, in which *hypermnesia* serves to counteract forgetting, they have not, however, considered the role of forgetting in counteracting *hypermnesia* - the excesses of memory - itself. These studies prompt me to expand the definition of forgetting beyond its role as preserving memory in *RTP*, asking instead how forgetting in *RTP* may cohere with Ribot's articulation of it; in other words, how forgetting, as the loss of memory itself, may be productive to reclaiming memory in the *Recherche* itself.

At the same time, scholarship that has highlighted the influence of Félix Ravaisson's conception of *habitude* on *RTP* motivates me to consider how *habitude*, as that which perpetuates the work of voluntary memory, may pose an obstacle to the recovery of memory. The traditional conception of *habitude* aligns with Henri Bergson's formulation of it in *Matter and Memory*, in which he defined "mémoire habitude" as physical "motor mechanisms"<sup>57</sup> that had become ingrained through habit in the memory of the body. Félix Ravaisson, however -

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<sup>54</sup> See p. 45-6 in *Les Maladies de la mémoire*.

<sup>55</sup> See p. 194 in *Modernity and the Memory Crisis*. See footnote 8, p. 152, in Luc Fraisse's "La mémoire des sensations: Proust en discussion avec une génération de philosophes." *Le Temps de la mémoire: le Flux, la rupture, l'empreinte*. Ed. Danielle Bohler. Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2006, p. 151-167.

<sup>56</sup> See also "Proust and Ribot" by Douglas W. Alden. *Modern Languages Notes*, vol. 58, no. 7, 1943, p. 501-507.

<sup>57</sup> See pg. 79, *ibid*.

another important influence on Proust - drew a connection not only between habit and motor actions, but between habit and memory, as well as psychological states. Ravaisson's iteration of *habitude*, as will be further discussed below, posits that impressions may, over time, become automatic and ingrained, such that they are no longer voluntary, but rather a matter of habit. Erika Fülöp, among others,<sup>58</sup> have recently problematized the traditional reading of habit in the *Recherche*, drawing on Ravaisson's influence in particular to elucidate the role of *habitude* in shaping the narrator's experiences and ultimately his identity, emphasizing the role of habit in the development of one's psychological state, or what may become "second nature."<sup>59</sup> This scholarship, which has underlined the role of *habitude* in perpetuating voluntary memory, permits me to examine the relationship of forgetting to correcting the excesses of voluntary memory, which this chapter defines as *habitude*.

It is ultimately this relationship between *habitude* - as the excess of memory - and forgetting, that this chapter explores. This chapter first gives an overview of Ribot's paradigm of forgetting and memory, and Proust's familiarity with it; I emphasize in particular Ribot's conception of the role of *amnesia* - forgetting as that which effaces memory - in facilitating the return of memory. I then turn to the question of what constitutes the excesses of memory in *RTP*, drawing on Ravaisson's articulation of *habitude* in order to illustrate how voluntary memory becomes ingrained as habit, overwhelming divergent impressions. Having defined forgetting and the excesses of memory, this chapter then aims to illustrate how Ribot's paradigm plays out in *RTP* itself, examining how forgetting in *RTP* parallels the function of *amnesia* outlined in *Les Maladies et la Mémoire*. I trace the effects of *oubli* - both oblivion and forgetfulness - on

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<sup>58</sup> See also p. 35-37 in *Proust as Philosopher: The Art of Metaphor*.

<sup>59</sup> See "Habit in *À la recherche du temps perdu*," *ibid*.

memory in sleep and involuntary memory, respectively. The temporary oblivion provided by sleep and the force of returning involuntary memories, I argue, creates a suspension of the intellect that obviates habit, in turn facilitating the return of long-forgotten memories. At the same time, the narrator's experience of the *moments bienheureux*, I posit, reveals a pattern in which memory returns after long intervals of forgetting. Forgetfulness - the forgetting that gradually takes place over time, rather than in a temporary moment of oblivion - similarly mitigates the effects of habit, precipitating the recovery of the narrator's childhood impressions. Both oblivion and forgetfulness, I suggest, thus make possible the return of memory by effacing habitual impressions.

I then consider how this relationship between forgetting and memory, or between *oubli* and *habitude*, is a microcosm of the productive role of forgetting in Swann's and the narrator's relationships with Odette and Albertine, respectively. I first examine how Swann's longest absence from Odette provokes Swann's forgetfulness of his impressions of Odette that have become ingrained and habituated over time - a forgetfulness which, undoing the effects of *habitude*, unearths long-forgotten and unfavorable memories of Swann's first impressions of Odette. The narrator's relationship with Albertine is even more marked by habit, as past impressions become inextricably associated with Albertine, such that even the sight of Albertine rescuscitates these habitual impressions. I contend that the narrator's forgetting of Albertine in *La Fugitive* weakens a multitude of habituated associations, which, no longer dominating the narrator's perception of Albertine, open the narrator up to perceptions and memories of Albertine that differ from his prevailing impressions of her.

This chapter thus diverges from literary criticism that has focused on *oubli*'s ability to form a "réserve" of memory, drawing instead from Ribot's paradigm of forgetting and memory,

in order to suggest that forgetting in *RTP* forms part of a mutual reciprocity between memory and forgetting, in which forgetting corrects the excesses of memory, or *habitude*. In doing so, this chapter ultimately advances the notion that the loss of memory caused by oblivion and forgetfulness in may be itself essential to the recovery of memory, effacing the effects of habit in order to reveal other memories forgotten but preserved.

### Proust, Théodule Ribot, and the *Recherche*

As Richard Terdiman, among others, have observed, Proust knew and read Théodule Ribot's work on forgetting and memory intimately. Proust's appropriation of Ribot's notion of forgetting as central to *hypermnesia* is echoed in Proust's paradigm of involuntary memory, in which the loss of memory is similarly key to the resuscitation of memory.<sup>60</sup> However, as Terdiman notes, Ribot in fact cast hypermnesia as a pathology which, in resuscitating painful moments, could cause prolonged periods of suffering. Forgetting, or *amnesia*, becomes the antithesis to the anguish caused by hypermnesia.<sup>61</sup> According to Ribot, forgetting thus is essential to overcoming the excesses of memory; Ribot's paradigm of forgetting argues that a balance between memory and forgetting is necessary to avoid either hypermnesic crises, on the one hand, or amnesia, on the other.

Richard Terdiman has convincingly demonstrated Proust's awareness of this paradigm, in which the loss of memory created by forgetting serves a benevolent function. On the one hand, this paradigm is played out in involuntary memory itself, in which the loss of memory is the

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<sup>60</sup> See Terdiman, p. 194.

<sup>61</sup> See Terdiman, p. 195.

condition to its eventual recall.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, forgetting, by bringing memory to fade, also alleviates the suffering caused by particularly painful memories, such as is the case in the narrator's gradual forgetting of Albertine.<sup>63</sup> If *F* is initially marked by the proliferation of painful memories of Albertine, it is equally marked by a forgetting which, eventually, dulls the emotional intensity of such memories.

However, the balance between forgetting and memory not only refers to forgetting's ability to mitigate painful memories. Ribot identifies forgetting itself as necessary to the ability to perceive and recall memory itself:

Nous arrivons donc à ce résultat paradoxal qu'une condition de la mémoire, c'est l'oubli. Sans l'oubli total d'un nombre prodigieux d'états de conscience et l'oubli momentané d'un grand nombre, nous ne pourrions nous souvenir. L'oubli, sauf dans certains cas, n'est donc pas une maladie de la mémoire, mais une condition de sa santé et de sa vie. Nous trouvons ici une analogie frappante avec les deux processus vitaux essentiels. Vivre, c'est acquérir et perdre; la vie est constituée par le travail qui désassimile autant que par celui qui fixe.<sup>64</sup>

Even remembrance itself requires the “oubli total d'un nombre prodigieux d'états de conscience” - the repression of other states of minds and impressions, without which memory would overwhelm the returning memory. Ribot depicts memory as necessitating forgetting in order to leave room for new memories to form - or even, as suggested above, for older ones to resurface. In this iteration of forgetting, forgetting does not aid memory by preserving impressions or forming a *réserve*; rather, forgetting paves the path for memory by wearing away at memory itself.

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<sup>62</sup> See Ribot, p. 45-6; see also Terdiman, p. 194-98.

<sup>63</sup> Terdiman points out that “the power of *Albertine disparue* arises in the unmediated intensity of the memory determining it.”

<sup>64</sup> *Les Maladies de la mémoire, ibid.*

To illustrate this theory, Ribot recounts the story of a man, who, possessing an extraordinary ability to recite extremely long documents in another language, was unable to remember a single part of the text unless he repeated the text in its entirety.<sup>65</sup> The man's unique ability to remember everything resulted in an overwhelming mass of different memories which, in turn, made it impossible for him to pick a single memory out of the vast field of memories. *Hypermnesia* thus essentially renders memory meaningless, as ultimately an excess of memory impedes the ability to remember itself.

Although *RTP*, as Terdiman has shown, bears the traces of Ribot's theory on forgetting and memory, this other aspect of Ribot's theory - the dependence of memory on the loss of memory - has not yet been examined within *RTP*. It is the aim of the next sections to suggest that - in addition to the other roles played by forgetting in *RTP*, as already suggested by much critical scholarship and Terdiman - the characterization of forgetting in *RTP* also occupies another function that aligns with Ribot's proposed balance between forgetting and memory: a paradigm in which forgetting becomes necessary to undermine the excesses of memory and, in turn, recovering memory.

#### Félix Ravaisson and Proust: *Habitude* in the *Recherche*

In order to consider the possible expression of Ribot's paradigm in *RTP*, it is necessary to first examine what may constitute the excesses of memory. Félix Ravaisson's articulation of *habitude* in *De l'Habitude* posited that habit may be both of a psychological as well as physiological nature. Not only was Proust most likely familiar with Ravaisson's work, as will be discussed below; Proust's depiction of *habitude* in *RTP* also closely aligns with Ravaisson's

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

conception of it, characterizing not only motor functions, but also psychological impressions, as privy to the effects of habit. In particular, I posit that voluntary memory, as in Ravaisson's articulation of *habitude*, may become a matter of habit in *RTP*, over time becoming a habituated response to the object of perception. This redefinition of *habitude* in *RTP* according to Ravaisson's conception of it not only emphasizes the psychological aspects of habit, however; it also permits me to consider how *habitude* may contribute to *hypermnnesia* in *RTP*. As voluntary memory become a matter of habitual perception, the object of perception, I argue, may continually provoke the same habitual response, thus contributing to an excess of memory - a dominant impression that is not only ubiquitous but becomes virtually inescapable.

While Proust read and annotated Bergson's *Matière et Mémoire*, Félix Ravaisson was also a notable influence. There is significant evidence in favor of the notion that Proust was familiar with Ravaisson's work, as Migeul Beistegui has shown. Beistegui notes that Proust met Ravaisson shortly before Ravaisson's death, writing in a letter to Paul Marais that he was honored to have met him.<sup>66</sup> Proust, as Beistegui writes, was also likely familiar with Ravaisson's dissertation through his philosophy professor, Alphonse Darlu, who was a "disciple of Jules Lachelier, himself one of Ravaisson's disciples." Furthermore, a year before receiving his *licence*, Proust attended a lecture on January 6, 1893 given by Charles Secrétan, in which

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<sup>66</sup> See Marco Piazza's *Passione e conoscenza in Proust*, Milan: Guerini, 1998, p. 92-95, and Annamaria Contini, *La biblioteca di Proust*, Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1988, p. 57-65 (as cited in *Proust as Philosopher*; Beistegui, 125).



Secrétan discussed Ravaisson's work, among others. Both indirectly and directly, Ravaisson's work had a probable influence on Proust's thought.<sup>67</sup>

As mentioned above, Ravaisson's definition of *habitude* insists that not only physiological actions, but also psychological ones, are privy to the possible effects of habit. His description of habit and motor functions echoes his description of the relationship between habit and psychological states. In discussing motor functions, Ravaisson emphasizes that the more one repeats a particular action, the more the subject performs this action involuntarily: "Dans l'homme, le progrès de l'habitude conduit la conscience, par une dégradation non interrompue, de la volonté à l'instinct, et de l'unité accomplie de la personne à l'extrême diffusion de l'impersonnalité."<sup>68</sup> The more an action is taken, becoming habit, the less the conscious mind is involved in this process, which becomes automatized. Thought and volition disappear as habituation makes certain movements or actions automatic over time. Ravaisson thus defined habit as the movement of an action from "les mouvements volontaires" to "mouvements instinctifs."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> See also François Leriche's annotation in *Sodome et Gomorrhe I et II*, p. 599, in which she traces a direct influence of Ravaisson on Proust. Ed. F. Leriche. Paris: Librairie générale française, 1993 (as cited in "Habit in *À la recherche du temps perdu*"; Fülöp, 354). See also Jean-Yves Tadié's *Marcel Proust: biographie*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, and Luc Fraisse's *L'Éclectisme philosophique de Marcel Proust*, Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2013, for a discussion of the indirect influence of Ravaisson's work through Proust's general knowledge of 19<sup>th</sup>-century idealist thought (as cited by Fülöp, 346).

<sup>68</sup> *De l'habitude/Of Habit*, *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>69</sup> "L'habitude transforme en mouvements instinctifs les mouvements volontaires," *ibid.*, p. 58.

This transition from voluntary to involuntary that takes place in the formation of a motor habit is significant because Ravaisson also applies it to his conception of psychological habits - to habits of the mind and soul:

Enfin, dans l'activité de l'âme, comme dans le mouvement, l'habitude transforme peu à peu en un penchant involontaire la volonté de l'action. Les *moeurs*, la *moralité*, se forment de cette sorte. La vertu est d'abord un effort, une fatigue; elle devient par la pratique seule un attrait et un plaisir, un désir qui s'oublie ou qui s'ignore, et peu à peu elle se rapproche de la sainteté de l'innocence. Là est tout le secret de l'éducation. Son art, c'est d'attirer au bien par l'action, et d'y fixer le penchant. Ainsi se forme une *seconde nature*.<sup>70</sup>

Ravaisson's work immediately calls to mind the Aristotelian notion of *hexis*,<sup>71</sup> which suggests that psychological impressions and states may become a habituated response that corresponds to a "disposition" towards a particular mode of perception or being. Ravaisson insists that habit does not occur only as a result of motor actions, but as a result of psychological and moral actions that could over time create a change in disposition. As Amy Ross Loeserman writes, Ravaisson considers that "when moral acts are accomplished, there is developed within the soul

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<sup>70</sup> *De l'Habitude/Of Habit*, p. 85.

<sup>71</sup> In Hellenistic philosophy, *hexis* describes a persistent state of being. As Deborah Achtenberg notes, however, *hexis* has also been translated as "habit" and "stable character," with "disposition" being one of the most recent common translations. Achtenberg writes that "'Disposition' suggests a condition as a result of which the one who has it tends to act in a certain way," which reflects Aristotle's notion of ethical virtue as a choice. See p. 111 in *Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002. In "Aristotle, Ethics and Politics," Roger Crisp and Trevor Saunders add that this translation is particularly apt because it reflects Aristotle's belief that virtues are "dispositions (*hexeis*), engendered in us through practices." *From Aristotle to Augustine*. Ed. David Furley. London: Routledge, 1997, p. 119.

the inclination or tendency to repeat them.”<sup>72</sup> Moral actions, while initially requiring effort, thus become “une seconde nature”; they affect one’s psychological state, or “l’activité de l’âme.”

Psychological and intellectual activity may thus over time become a habitual response.

Habit, thus, may condition not just motor functions, but one’s psychological and even moral responses. This articulation of *habitude* may be seen in several different passages in *RTP*, which feature psychological states that transform, over time, into a habitual mode of perception. The parallel between Proust’s and Ravaisson’s conception of *habitude* is clearest in the famous scene in the Balbec hotel room, in which habit accustoms the narrator to his new surroundings:

...j’avais revu tantôt l’une, tantôt l’autre, des chambres que j’avais habitées dans ma vie...parfois la chambre Louis XVI, si gaie...; parfois au contraire celle, petite et si élevée de plafond, creusée en forme de pyramide dans la hauteur de deux étages et partiellement revêtue d’acagou, où dès la première seconde j’avais été intoxiqué moralement par l’odeur inconnue du vétiver...; où ma pensée, s’efforçant pendant des heures de se disloquer, de s’étirer en hauteur pour prendre exactement la forme de la chambre et arriver à remplir jusqu’en haut son gigantesque entonnoir, avait souffert bien de dures nuits, tandis que j’étais étendu dans mon lit, les yeux levés, l’oreille anxieuses, la narine rétive, le coeur battant: jusqu’à ce que l’habitude eût changé la couleur des rideaux...et notablement diminué la hauteur apparente du plafond. *L’habitude! aménageuse habile mais bien lente et qui commence par laisser souffrir notre esprit pendant des semaines dans une installation provisoire; mais que malgré tout il est bien heureux de trouver, car sans l’habitude et réduit à ses seuls moyens il serait impuissant à nous rendre un logis habitable.*<sup>73</sup>

The narrator finds the foreignness of the hotel room in Balbec, with its high ceiling, disconcerting. The narrator makes a conscious effort to become reassure himself: “ma pensée, s’efforçant pendant des heures de se disloquer...avait souffert bien de dures nuits...”. Ultimately, however, it is habit that changes his perception of the room, affecting the color of the curtains

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<sup>72</sup> *Proust and the Discourse on Habit*. Dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 2004. See p. 133.

<sup>73</sup> I, 8.

and making the high ceilings appear lower: “l’habitude eût changé la couleur des rideaux...et notablement diminué la hauteur apparente du plafond...”. *Habitude* becomes a figurative way of seeing - of perceiving - the world around him: a habitual response which, in this case, alleviates the narrator’s suffering.

Visual impressions in *RTP* are particularly prone to the effects of habit. In one of the most commonly cited examples of voluntary memory that appears in *Du Côté de chez Swann* (*DCS*), the narrator suggests that a person’s physical appearance becomes associated with one’s preconceived notions of the person such that they appear to be a “transparente enveloppe”:

Même l’acte si simple que nous appelons ‘voir une personne que nous connaissons’ est en partie un acte intellectuel. Nous remplissons l’apparence physique de l’être que nous voyons de toutes les notions que nous avons sur lui, et dans l’aspect total que nous nous représentons, ces notions ont certainement la plus grand part. Elles finissent par gonfler si parfaitement les joues, par suivre en une adhérence si exacte la ligne du nez, elles se mêlent si bien de nuancer la sonorité de la voix comme si celle-ci n’était qu’une transparente enveloppe, que chaque fois que nous voyons ce visage et que nous entendons cette voix, ce sont ces notions que nous retrouvons, que nous écoutons.<sup>74</sup>

The narrator defines the act of seeing as a process which is “en partie un acte intellectuel.” The initial impression associated with Swann’s appearance is described as an act of volition (“nous nous représentons), in which the imagination “fills” the body as if it were a “transparente enveloppe.” Initially, then, this conception of Swann is the work of voluntary memory.

However, the act of seeing does not require the same effort of the imagination - of the intellect - every time. After multiple encounters with Swann (the narrator mentions later in the passage “des heures oisives passées ensemble après nos dîners hebdomadaires”), the mental image of Swann constructed by the intellect gradually becomes embedded in Swann’s facial features such that they are inseparable from one another: “[ces notions] finissent par gonfler si

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<sup>74</sup> I, 18-19.

parfaitement les joues, par suivre une adhérence si exacte la ligne du nez, elles se mêlent si bien de nuancer la sonorité de la voix...”. The projected mental image becomes inextricably associated with Swann’s appearance, such that every time the narrator sees him (“chaque fois”), the sight of Swann provokes the narrator’s preconceived notions of him. The involuntary nature of this response is indicated by the fact that the impressions provoked are not consciously sought, but rather found (“ce sont ces notions que nous retrouvons”), signaling a reaction rather than a conscious interpretation. The narrator becomes habituated to the mental image he projects onto Swann repeatedly until eventually, this image becomes a matter of *habitude*. The narrator no longer sees Swann; the sight of Swann is enough to provoke a habitual response that reflects back to him his preconceived notions of him.

Another instance in *Le Côté de Guermantes* (CG) highlights how visual associations, initially the work of voluntary memory, may eventually condition an automatic and involuntary perceptual response. Discussing the memory of his grandmother’s image, the narrator portrays the projections of voluntary memory onto her image as an involuntary process, one in which the “regard habitual” continuously resuscitates the familiar image rather than reality:

Ce qui, mécaniquement, se fit à ce moment dans mes yeux quand j’aperçus ma grandmère, ce fut bien une photographie. Nous ne voyons jamais les êtres chéris que dans le système animé, le mouvement perpétuel de notre incessante tendresse, laquelle, avant de laisser les images que nous présente leur visage arriver jusqu’à nous, les prend dans son tourbillon, les rejette sur l’idée que nous nous faisons d’eux depuis toujours, les fait adhérer à elle, coïncider avec elle. Comment, puisque le front, les joues de ma grandmère, je leur faisais signifier ce qu’il y avait de plus délicat et de plus permanent dans son esprit, comment, puisque tout regard habituel est une nécromancie et chaque visage qu’on aime le miroir du passé, comment n’en eussé-je pas omis ce qui en elle avait pu s’alourdir et changer, alors que, même dans les spectacles les plus indifférents de la vie, notre œil, chargé de pensée, néglige, comme ferait une tragédie classique, toutes les images qui ne concourent pas à l’action et ne retient que celles qui peuvent en rendre intelligible le but?<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> II, 439.

The narrator describes the exact process in which habit intercepts sight. One sees a person's face, and yet before this image has truly been processed by the mind ("avant de laisser les images que nous présente leur visage arriver jusqu'à nous"), one's established impressions ("l'idée que nous nous faisons d'eux depuis toujours") intercede, overtaking visual perception. There is an element of automation implied in this act, in which sight cannot catch up to the habitual image that immediately re-asserts itself, perpetuated by the narrator's "incessante tendresse." This automation becomes even clearer shortly thereafter, in which the narrator observes that sight becomes a matter of habitual perception: "tout regard habituel est une nécromancie et chaque visage qu'on aime le miroir du passé."<sup>76</sup> The mere act of looking, imbued with habituated visual associations, resuscitates, as if in an act of "nécromancie," one's former impressions. Sight reproduces "mécaniquement" the narrator's former "idée" of his grandmother because the image created by voluntary memory has become a habituated response.

Voluntary memory, thus, at times appears to be a misnomer. What begins as voluntary memory or, in the case of visual memory, an image, may be transformed over time into a habitual response, demonstrating the work of *habitude* - as articulated by Ravaisson in *De l'Habitude* - at play in *RTP*. The work of the intellect eventually ceases to be an act of volition and, as Ravaisson stipulates, becomes a mechanized reaction: a *habitude*. In this sense, *habitude* may constitute an excess of memory: memory which, repeatedly provoked by the object of perception, proves difficult to overcome.

### The Two Types of *Oubli* in *RTP*: Oblivion and Forgetfulness in Sleep and Involuntary Memory

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<sup>76</sup> II, 439.

The redefinition of *habitude*, thus, illustrates how perception may become limited to a fixed image or impression. The narrator's experience of sleep and involuntary memory, however, as will be discussed below, suggests that *habitude* not only perpetuates dominant impressions; it also obstructs the return of memory. Habit and memory are depicted as two opposing forces; habit, the narrator emphasizes, threatens to obscure or overwhelm the return of memory at every point in the process of remembrance. An examination of the passages on sleep and involuntary memory in the next two sections permits me to consider how forgetting may undo the effects of habit in order to facilitate the return of memory.

I consider that involuntary memory and sleep exemplify *oubli* as oblivion - the temporary suspension of cognition - as well as *oubli* as forgetfulness, or the forgetting that gradually takes place over time. Sleep instantiates *oubli* as oblivion: the narrator experiences sleep as the temporary suspension of consciousness, stripped of cognition. In the opening pages of *Combray*, however, the effects of *oubli* linger temporarily even upon waking, as will be discussed below; the narrator may thus, for a brief moment, perceive his surroundings without the lens of habit. Temporarily stripped of habit, the narrator, I argue, may turn back the pages of time, reliving forgotten memories which, no longer obscured by habit, are triggered by his physical surroundings.

Involuntary memory, on the other hand, occupies both functions of *oubli*. Involuntary memory - the *moments bienheureux*, in particular - engenders a moment of *oubli*; the dizzying force of the returning memory often, as I illustrate below, temporarily suspends cognition. This oblivion is not coincidental, but is instead essential to the ability to perceive the returning memory. Involuntary memory is often experienced as a vacillation between the narrator's habitual associations with material reality - what he knows to be currently true of his

surroundings - and the returning memory. The oblivion created by the force of involuntary memory eradicates the hold of these competing habitual associations, so that involuntary memory may assert itself - temporarily - over habit. The relationship between *oubli* and memory in involuntary memory thus closely resembles the effects of *oubli* on memory in sleep. Involuntary memory, furthermore, not only produces a moment of *oubli*; it is often also precipitated by a long period of forgetting itself which, I argue, undermines the effects of habit, thereby allowing for the discovery of forgotten memories.

The following sections on sleep and involuntary memory, respectively, thus aim to demonstrate that the opening pages of *Combray* as well as the privileged moments of the novel exemplify Ribot's conception of the necessary exchange between forgetting and memory. I posit that the narrator's experiences of both sleep as well as involuntary memory underscore the ways in which *oubli* - both oblivion and forgetfulness - undermines or suspends the effects of *habitude*, in turn facilitating the return of older layers of memory. I thus contend that *oubli* corrects the excesses of memory perpetuated by habit in *RTP*, encapsulating Ribot's paradigm of the mutually dependent relationship of *amnesia* and *hypermnnesia*.

### The Oblivion of Sleep

Critical scholarship has often observed that sleep suspends the effects of habit. Jacqueline Risset, for instance, notes that sleep "definitively leaves behind the habitual categories of thought."<sup>77</sup> James H. Reid has similarly remarked that sleep produces a "bouleversement...of habitual understanding" that "liberates [the narrator's] mind from the constraints of habitual

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<sup>77</sup> See p. 50 in *Sleep's Powers* by Jacqueline Risset. Trans. Jennifer Moxley, Ugly Duckling Presse, 2008.



thought, enabling it to reconstruct a myriad of past bedrooms and selves.”<sup>78</sup> These readings on sleep underscore sleep’s ability to overcome habit. They do not, however, consider its import to the relationship between *oubli* and memory.<sup>79</sup> Conversely, Roger Shattuck has described sleep as a “forgetting” that “permits the reawakening of a purified individual who has lost himself and found himself again.”<sup>80</sup> Although Roger Shattuck has suggested a relationship between the forgetting of sleep and “self-recognition,” he does not, however, specify the nature of forgetting’s purification.

Drawing on Shattuck’s observations, I propose that sleep arrests cognition, creating a state of non-subjectivity, or *oubli*, in which consciousness is temporarily arrested and memory is lost. It is this *oubli*, I argue, that creates the overturning of habit Reid observes; the *oubli* of sleep, undoing the effects of habit, permits for the return of long-forgotten associations with the narrator’s surroundings. Emphasizing the role of *oubli* in sleep thus permits me to expose how the erasure of memory produced by *oubli* precipitates the return of memory, revealing the privileged relationship between oblivion and the recovery of memory.

Sleep famously sets off the “fauteuil magique” - a kaleidoscope of memories that break the normal order of time and space:

Un homme qui dort, tient en cercle autour de lui le fil des heures, l'ordre des années et des mondes. Il les consulte d'instinct en s'éveillant et y lit en une seconde le point de la terre qu'il occupe, le temps qui s'est écoulé jusqu'à son réveil; mais leurs rangs peuvent se mêler, se rompre. ...Que s'il s'assoupit dans une position encore plus déplacée et

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<sup>78</sup> See p.29. *Proust, Beckett, and Narration*. New York: CUP, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Reid mentions that deep sleep “erases [Marcel’s] power to remember where he is.” Nevertheless, he does not equate sleep itself with oblivion - a lack of consciousness - itself (29).

<sup>80</sup> See p. 66. *Proust’s Binoculars, A Study of Memory, Time, and Recognition in À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. 1962. Princeton University Press, 1983.

divergente, par exemple après dîner assis dans un fauteuil, alors le bouleversement sera complet dans les mondes désorbités, le fauteuil magique le fera voyager à toute vitesse dans le temps et dans l'espace, et au moment d'ouvrir les paupières, il se croira couché quelques mois plus tôt dans une autre contrée.<sup>81</sup>

Falling asleep in a different position or place resuscitates long-forgotten memories provoked by associations with physical triggers (the placement of the arm, falling asleep in the “fauteuil”).

This travel to a different time or place is eventually cut short, however, by the faculty of the intellect, which eventually re-establishes itself over the effects of the “fauteuil magique,” rendering the objects around him immobile:

Certes, j'étais bien éveillé maintenant, mon corps avait viré une dernière fois et le bon ange de la certitude avait tout arrêté autour de moi, m'avait couché sous mes couvertures, dans ma chambre, et avait mis approximativement à leur place dans l'obscurité ma commode, mon bureau, ma cheminée, la fenêtre sur la rue et les deux portes.<sup>82</sup>

The newfound “immobilité” of his surroundings is attributed to the intellect, which restores our perception of things as we know them, not as we once knew them: “Peut-être l’immobilité des choses autour de nous leur est-elle imposée par notre certitude que ce sont elles et non pas d’autres, par l’immobilité de notre pensée en face d’elles” (I, 6). It is not only the narrator’s surroundings that the narrator describes as immobile but thought itself (“l’immobilité de notre pensée”). The intellect is immobile in the rigidity of its perception of the world around us: it is unable to overcome the conviction, or “certitude,” that “des choses...sont elles et non pas d’autres.” The intellect, thus, returns to us our familiar perceptions of our surroundings: that which we currently know to be true. The re-establishment of this familiarity immediately dispels the temporary magic of sleep.

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<sup>81</sup> I, 7.

<sup>82</sup> I, 8.

Memory wins through to the narrator's consciousness precisely because it temporarily subverts the certitude of cognition and, thus, the effects of habit. Deep sleep arrests cognition, bringing the narrator to lose his awareness of his surroundings:

...il suffisait que, dans mon lit même, *mon sommeil fût profond et détendît entièrement mon esprit*; alors celui-ci lâchait le plan du lieu où je m'étais endormi, et quand je m'éveillais au milieu de la nuit, comme j'ignorais où je me trouvais, je ne savais même pas au premier instant qui j'étais; j'avais seulement dans sa simplicité première, le sentiment de l'existence comme il peut frémir au fond d'un animal: j'étais plus dénué que l'homme des cavernes; mais alors le souvenir - non encore du lieu où j'étais, mais de quelques-uns de ceux que j'avais habités et où j'aurais pu être - venait à moi comme un secours d'en haut pour me tirer du néant d'où je n'aurais pu sortir tout seul; je passais en une seconde par-dessus des siècles de civilisation, et l'image confusément entrevue de lampes à pétrole, puis de chemises à col rabattu, recomposaient peu à peu les traits originaux de mon moi.<sup>83</sup>

Even more significantly, however, is that the narrator's obliviousness of his whereabouts temporarily persists in the brief interval between sleep and waking: "alors celui-ci lâchait le plan du lieu...et quand je m'éveillais au milieu de la nuit, comme j'ignorais où je me trouvais, je ne savais même pas au premier instant qui j'étais...". The effects of the oblivion produced by sleep are thus momentarily maintained even once the narrator has regained consciousness. The *oubli* of sleep, undermining the effects of the conscious mind, provokes an animalistic state in which the intellect is suspended for the narrator: like an animal, the narrator discerns only the "sentiment de l'existence comme il peut frémir au fond d'un animal" upon waking. In the moments following sleep, the narrator temporarily perceives the world around him without, however, experiencing the effects of cognition.

This transitory effect of the oblivion of sleep echoes the very opening lines:

...je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de lire, mais ces réflexions avaient pris un tour un peu particulier; il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage; une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François 1<sup>er</sup> et de Charles-

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<sup>83</sup> I, 5-6; my emphasis.

Quint. Cette croyance survivait pendant quelques secondes à mon reveil, elle ne choquait pas ma raison...<sup>84</sup>

Asleep, the narrator forgets who he is, falling into a state of utter non-subjectivity in which he dreams he is the subjects he has just read about; awake, the oblivion of sleep lingers, if only for a few seconds.

The narrator's momentary *oubli* upon waking safeguards memory from the effects of habit. When deep sleep suspends reason ("détendît entièrement [son] esprit"), the intellect finally lets go ("lâch[e]") of its grip on the narrator's surroundings, permitting the return of memory: "...il suffisait que, dans mon lit même, mon sommeil fût profond et détendît entièrement mon esprit; alors celui-ci lâchait le plan du lieu où je m'étais endormi...".<sup>85</sup> It is precisely in this moment, in the narrator's mental "néant" ("le souvenir...venait à moi comme un secours d'en haut pour me tirer du néant"), that memory resurfaces because the intellect is temporarily prevented from asserting itself. As a result, the narrator is able to recover "les traits originaux de mon moi" - the former memories and sensations that make up the narrator's past selves - in the brief moments before the return of cognition.

Similarly, in another passage, the state of oblivion that persists between sleep and wakefulness is directly correlated with the ability to remember:

Toujours est-il que, quand je me réveillais ainsi, mon esprit s'agitant pour chercher, sans y réussir, à savoir où j'étais, tout tournait autour de moi dans l'obscurité, les choses, les pays, les années. Mon corps, trop engourdi pour remuer, cherchait, d'après la forme de sa fatigue, à repérer la position de ses membres pour en induire la direction du mur, la place des meubles, pour reconstruire et pour nommer la demeure où il se trouvait. Sa mémoire, la mémoire de ses côtes, de ses genoux, de ses épaules, lui présentait successivement plusieurs des chambres où il avait dormi, tandis qu'autour de lui les murs invisibles, changeant de place selon la forme de la pièce imaginée, tourbillonnaient dans les ténèbres. Et avant même que ma pensée, qui hésitait au seuil des temps et des formes, eût

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<sup>84</sup> I, 3.

<sup>85</sup> I, 5.

identifié le logis en rapprochant les circonstances, lui,—mon corps,—se rappelait pour chacun le genre du lit, la place des portes, la prise de jour des fenêtres, l'existence d'un couloir, avec la pensée que j'avais en m'y endormant et que je retrouvais au réveil.<sup>86</sup>

The oblivion of sleep, thus, once again extends beyond sleep to the narrator's waking moments. The narrator's "esprit" attempts to re-establish itself, but the narrator's mind, still ensconced in the oblivion generated by sleep, temporarily fails: "mon esprit s'agit[ait] pour chercher, sans y réussir." The intellect, thus, cannot recognize the narrator's surroundings, nor can it restore habitual perception - the "plan" of his room as he knows it to be ("le plan de lieu"). This suspension of habitual perception before the narrator's "pensée" is restored permits the narrator to recall, if briefly, the different rooms he has slept in. The temporary failure of the intellect to re-establish itself, as a result of the state of oblivion that persists upon waking, thus makes possible the revival of memory.

Although the intellect restores habitual perception, rendering the narrator's surroundings once again familiar, sleep therefore provides a temporary respite from the effects of habitual perception by suspending cognition entirely. In the battle between habit and memory, oblivion temporarily gives memory the upper hand, bypassing the habitual constraints of the intellect in order to allow long-forgotten memories to resurface. Sleep, thus, is an example of the balance between forgetting and memory necessary to the return of memory itself: the complete erasure of memory - oblivion - leaves room for other memories obscured by more dominant impressions.

### The Oblivion of Involuntary Memory

Involuntary memory in *Bal de têtes* is similarly characterized as the struggle between dominant, habitual associations and older memories attached to a sensation or object.

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<sup>86</sup> I, 6.

Furthermore, as is true of sleep, involuntary memory creates a temporary oblivion that permits for the bypassing of habit. The force of returning memories in the narrator's experience of involuntary memory often temporarily suspends the conscious mind, simultaneously forcing out any habitual associations. In other instances, an impaired mental state caused by fatigue or heightened emotions leads to a temporary oblivion in which the intellect is similarly suspended or undermined, thereby simultaneously effacing the effects of habit. The *oubli* that precedes involuntary memory, or is generated by involuntary memory itself, thus temporarily undercuts habit. The pattern of *oubli* followed by involuntary memory does not appear coincidental: rather, it appears that it is precisely when habit, no longer obscuring other impressions, is out of the picture that older memories return. The return of involuntary memory, I contend, therefore is contingent upon a temporary *oubli* which, by suspending the intellect and in turn the habits of the conscious mind, prevents habit from overwhelming the original impression made by the object of perception.

The narrator's experience of the *moments bienheureux* in *Bal de têtes* depicts habit as a threat to involuntary memory. When a memory is triggered by the sight of a physical object or place, involuntary memory struggles against one's awareness of external reality - the mind's recognition that the object belongs not to the past, but to the present. This recognition immediately returns the object to our current associations with it - a place or object as we know it to be in the present:

Toujours, dans ces résurrections-là, le lieu lointain engendré autour de la sensation commune s'était accouplé un instant comme un lutteur au lieu actuel. Toujours le lieu actuel avait été vainqueur; toujours c'était le vaincu qui m'avait paru le plus beau...Et si le lieu actuel n'avait pas été aussitôt vainqueur, je crois que j'aurais perdu connaissance; *car ces résurrections du passé, dans la seconde qu'elles durent, sont si totales qu'elles n'obligent pas seulement nos yeux à cesser de voir la chambre qui est près d'eux pour regarder la voie bordée d'arbres ou la marée montante. Elles forcent nos narines à respirer l'air de lieux pourtant si lointains, notre volonté à choisir entre les divers projets*

qu'ils nous proposent, notre personne tout entière à se croire entourée par eux, ou du moins à trébucher entre eux et les lieux présents, dans l'étourdissement d'une incertitude pareille à celle qu'on éprouve parfois devant une vision ineffable, au moment de s'endormir.<sup>87</sup>

The “lieu actuel” and our recognition of the place as it is - not as it was in our memory - thus eventually always become the “vainqueur” of any past impressions. This would always be the case, were it not for the fact that involuntary memory temporarily conquers the cognition of the conscious mind: the force of a returning memory forces out one’s awareness of their surroundings, temporarily paralyzing the conscious mind, which ceases to perceive or recognize “la chambre qui est près d’eux [nos yeux].” Involuntary memory thus wins through to the subject in spite of the external reality perceived by the conscious mind - our current associations with the place in question - by temporarily wresting its subject from cognition.

Returning memories not only themselves effectuate this suspension of consciousness; the faculty of the intellect is often obstructed before involuntary memory may take place at all. Roger Shattuck’s categorical analysis of the patterns that arise in involuntary memory has illustrated that involuntary memory is often precipitated by mental, emotional, or physical exhaustion, or all of the above: “Each of these *moments bienheureux* ...follows or partially follows a uniform pattern....First, Marcel is always in a dispirited state of mind - bored, usually tired, alone...”<sup>88</sup> As cited by Shattuck, the resurrection prompted by the smell in the little pavilion in *JF*, for instance, is preceded by emotional exhaustion and despair: the narrator announces his despair (“j’*étais désespéré*”) directly before he perceives an odour which,

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<sup>87</sup> IV, 453-54, emphasis mine.

<sup>88</sup> See p. 257 in *Proust’s Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time*.

reminding him of his Uncle Adolphe's room, elicits a feeling of exaltation.<sup>89</sup> In another instance, the narrator experiences cardiac exhaustion ("je souffrais d'une crise de fatigue cardiaque") before the sudden memory of his grandmother.<sup>90</sup>

Both fatigue and extreme emotional states lend themselves to a high degree of absent-mindedness which, as Steve Bachmann observes, "help undermine the intellect."<sup>91</sup> Such is the case, for instance, when the narrator trips on the paving stones in *R*, precipitating his memories of the baptistery in Venice. As the narrator, convinced that he has no talent, despairs over his inability to write, his despair produces a state of distraction that undermines the workings of the conscious mind:

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'avavançait ; 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 des 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...<sup>92</sup>

The narrator's despair leads to an absent-minded state ("dans ma distraction") - a state of oblivion in which, in his lack of attention to the world around him, the narrator fails to see a car approaching him.

The significance of this pattern - physical or mental fatigue, followed by involuntary memory - is most clear in the madeleine episode, in which the narrator invites oblivion as a means of emptying his mind and mitigating the effects of habit. The narrator's reflections on the

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<sup>89</sup> See *RTP*, I, 537; see Shattuck, p. 129, *ibid*.

<sup>90</sup> III, 152-3.

<sup>91</sup> See p. 135 in *Proust for Beginners*, 2016.

<sup>92</sup> IV, 445.



initial associations provoked by the madeleine before he has tasted it emphasize once again the conflict between habit and memory:

La vue de la petite madeleine ne m'avait rien rappelé avant que je n'y eusse goûté; peut-être parce que, en ayant souvent aperçu depuis, sans en manger, sur les tablettes des pâtisseries, leur image avait quitté ces jours de Combray pour se lier à d'autres plus récents...<sup>93</sup>

The image of the madeleine has dissociated itself from the narrator's Combray days ("leur image avait quitté ces jours de Combray") because these older memories are overwhelmed by more dominant, recent memories ("d'autres [jours] plus récents"): the old associations with the madeleine have been supplanted by the memories of madeleines he regularly sees on the pastry-cooks' shelves. The sight of the madeleine registered by the conscious mind reproduces recent associations that have become ingrained in the image of the madeleine, obscuring older memories associated with the sight of the madeleine. The conscious mind, thus, perpetuates *habitude*: the sight of the madeleine provokes more recent associations.

The narrator's suspension of the intellect - a clearing of his conscious mind and any associated thoughts - precludes the interference of any possible habitual impressions, however. Although the taste of madeleine produces a certain joy - the presentiment of a memory waiting to be discovered - the narrator is initially unable to grasp its meaning or connect it to a particular memory. In an effort to discover the origin of the sensation caused by the madeleine, he strives instead to block out any external perception and any extraneous ideas ("toute idée étrangère"):

Et je recommence à me demander quel pouvait être cet état inconnu, qui n'apportait aucune preuve logique, mais l'évidence de sa félicité, de sa réalité devant laquelle les autres s'évanouissaient. Je veux essayer de le faire réapparaître. Je rétrograde par la pensée au moment où je pris la première cuillerée de thé. Je retrouve le même état, sans une clarté nouvelle. Je demande à mon esprit un effort de plus, de ramener encore une fois la sensation qui s'enfuit. Et, pour que rien ne brise l'élan dont il va tâcher de la ressaisir, j'écarte tout obstacle, toute idée étrangère, j'abrite mes oreilles et mon attention

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<sup>93</sup> I, 47.

contre les bruits de la chambre voisine. Mais sentant mon esprit qui se fatigue sans réussir, je le force au contraire à prendre cette distraction que je lui refusais, à penser à autre chose, à se refaire avant une tentative suprême. Puis une deuxième fois, je fais le vide devant lui, je remets en face de lui la saveur encore récente de cette première gorgée et je sens tressaillir en moi quelque chose qui se déplace, voudrait s'élever, quelque chose qu'on aurait désancré, à une grande profondeur ; je ne sais ce que c'est, mais cela monte lentement; j'éprouve la résistance et j'entends la rumeur des distances traversées.<sup>94</sup>

The initial effort to expel all thought does not succeed. The second attempt, however, is successful: "puis une deuxième fois, je fais le vide devant lui." Rather than concentrating on the memory itself, the narrator's effort to recover the original memory thus consists of creating a state in which thought - the faculty of the intellect - is suspended - a state in which conscious thought, and in turn the *habitudes* of the conscious mind, can no longer impede the return of memory. It is in such a state of voluntarily induced oblivion that the narrator may recover the memories of his Combray days from the sensation produced by the madeleine, although the narrator will have to repeat the arduous task of clearing his mind ten times before its return.<sup>95</sup>

The narrator's attempts to voluntarily engage in oblivion thus reveals the purpose of the latter - whether willed or as a result of physical and mental states that undermine the intellect - in facilitating involuntary memory. The narrator happens upon involuntary memory when he is disproportionately exhausted, distraught, or tired, precisely because it is when the impressions perpetuated by *habitude* may no longer be remembered - when habitual associations are lost to oblivion - that other memories, no longer obstructed by habit, may return. The return of involuntary memory thus depends not only on the oblivion that safeguards memory, as literary criticism has demonstrated, but also on the oblivion which, by suspending the faculty of the

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<sup>94</sup> I, 45.

<sup>95</sup> "Dix fois il me faut recommencer, me pencher vers lui" (I, 46).

intellect - whether as a result of the force of returning memory, or as a result of a state of physical and mental exhaustion - expels habit.

### Forgetfulness and Involuntary Memory

*Oubli*, however, not only occurs in the form of a temporary oblivion. Other instances of involuntary memory demonstrate the necessity of the gradual forgetting leading up to the moment of remembrance. Antoine Compagnon has pointed out that geology becomes one of Proust's favorite metaphors for involuntary memory, suggesting that involuntary memory disrupts the sedimentation of voluntary memory and permits the restoration of "couches anciennes."<sup>96</sup> This disruption, however, is created not only as a result of the sudden appearance of involuntary memory itself, but by the gradual forgetting that precedes the return of memory. After extended periods of absence from the object or person in question, forgetting effaces the most recent associations attached to the object of perception. As the impression provoked by the object of perception returns, habit, no longer impeding perception, permits for the recovery of the original impression. I thus argue that the long interval of forgetting between the first and second encounter with the object of perception produces a necessary exchange between forgetting and memory in which forgetting facilitates the return of involuntary memory.

In the narrator's discussion of place-names in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, the necessity of clearing away recent associations becomes evident. The narrator establishes the magic behind

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<sup>96</sup> "...la bonne mémoire est stratifiée, par opposition à la mauvaise mémoire de l'habitude." Compagnon refers in particular to "couches anciennes" which may be continually rearranged. See p. 14 in "Proust, mémoire de la littérature." *Proust, la mémoire et la littérature: Séminaire 2006-2007 au Collège de France*. Ed. by Jean-Baptiste Amadiou. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009.

names as something which exists in opposition to physical reality: physical distance is required in order for names to recapture their initial sense of magic and beauty, as Howard Moss, among others, have previously reasoned.<sup>97</sup> Reality, as in the case of the Persian church at Balbec, casts a disappointing light upon the semantic illusion provided by the name “Balbec.” Yet temporal distance is also part of the process of distancing oneself physically from the disappointing realities behind names, as recent interactions leave the reality of the place fresh in one’s mind. In a reflection on names titled “Noms de personnes” in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust emphasizes this temporal element: the narrator observes that as soon as one forgets the countries one has visited, and they once again become names, open to the initial mystery and magic produced by the sound of their syllables: “...dès qu’ils sont un peu oubliés et qu’ils sont redevenus pour nous des noms,” the magical quality of names masks once again the disappointing reality behind them (“recouvre de nouveau [les pays] que nous avons connus”).<sup>98</sup> Temporal distance – and the attendant forgetting – makes it possible to recapture the original sensation stimulated by a place-name by allowing recent associations to fade.

This principle of forgetting reappears in *Bal de têtes*, permitting the narrator to rediscover his former enchantment with the Guermantes’ name. After an extended absence from Mme de Guermantes, both the sight of her as well as her name are rendered unfamiliar to the narrator as a result of forgetting. The narrator comments that the name assumes its former meaning of “tant de féodalité,” but only after he had not seen her for a long time: “...quand je n’avais pas vu les

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<sup>97</sup> See pg. 34-35. *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2012.

<sup>98</sup> See p. 278-9, *Contre Sainte-Beuve précédé de Pastiches et mélanges et suivi de Essais et articles*. Ed. Piere Clarac and Yves Sandre. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

Guermantes depuis longtemps.”<sup>99</sup> As a result of forgetting, the name is thus emptied over time from the meaning it had acquired, eroding the top layers of memory. The narrator may thus recover the “ancienne couche,” no longer obscured by recent associations. Extended absence from the object in question thus allows for the forgetting of recent associations, which distances the “ancienne couche” from becoming “une chose du présent.”<sup>100</sup> The layers of memory that had recently become associated with the name are cleared away through forgetting, facilitating the recovery of older layers of memory.

In yet another instance of involuntary memory in *Bal de têtes*, the narrator actively invites the effects of forgetting in order to recall his former impressions of *François le Champi*. Consistent with the geological metaphor of memory present throughout the *Recherche* that Antoine Compagnon has observed, recent associations with *François le Champi* are on the “surface,” while the “impression d’enfance bien ancienne,” by contrast, exists beneath the surface in the depths of memory. The narrator had come to associate *François le Champi* with the commonplace ideas that all “romans berrichons de George Sand” have in common.<sup>101</sup> This idea had become a habitual association to the extent that the title automatically invokes the narrator’s habituated impression of George Sand’s novels, obscuring his childhood associations of it: “Dans un dîner, quand la pensée reste toujours à la surface, j’aurais pu sans doute parler de François le Champi et des Guermantes sans que ni l’un ni l’autre fussent ceux de Combray.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> IV, 462.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> IV, 462.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

In the narrator's desire to remember his childhood impression of *François le Champi*, he claims that he would not want to be in possession of the book itself, because opening it would immediately trigger his "impressions d'aujourd'hui," thereby eclipsing his childhood impression.<sup>103</sup> The narrator thus makes a distinct choice to remove himself from the possibility of seeing the book in order to forget habituated impressions which would otherwise obscure his childhood impression. Forgetting the visual image of the book itself becomes necessary because the sight of it would otherwise trigger impressions which have become ingrained in habituated visual memory. To prevent the corruption of the narrator's childhood impressions, it is not enough for the memory to be preserved: the topmost layers of recent associations must be forgotten in order to recall the original experience.

These instances of involuntary memory suggest that it is not only memory itself that may be forgotten over time, but also the subsequent associations which become a form of habitual perception, mask the initial impression itself. This effacement of habit, in turn, allows for the return of the narrator's former enchantment - the recovery of memory. Forgetting, thus, precedes involuntary memory not only because it allows for the preservation and therefore return of memory, but because memory may return only once forgetting has had sufficient time to undo the work of habit.

The characterization of *oubli* in both sleep and involuntary memory - whether as forgetting or oblivion - thus ultimately mirrors the paradigm of forgetting and memory outlined in Ribot's work. Whether *oubli* occurs as the result of a short burst of oblivion in which the intellect and voluntary memory are suspended, or as the result of a gradual fading of memory that leads to oblivion, forgetting precipitates memory by effacing the excesses of memory - those

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

impressions which have, through habit, become inextricably associated with the object of perception. Far from depicting *oubli* only as that which safeguards memory, Proust designates *oubli*'s erasure of memory itself as a catalyst for memory.

### Swann and Odette in *Un Amour de Swann*

This paradigm of forgetting and memory is not only illustrated through Proust's characterizations of sleep and involuntary memory, but also in the evolution of Swann's and the narrator's romantic relationships. Much of *Un Amour de Swann* charts the effects of voluntary memory on Swann's perception of Odette - a perception which, I argue, becomes an involuntary and habitual response to Odette over time. The end of *Un Amour de Swann*, however, features Swann's longest absence from Odette yet. This absence, I argue, ultimately contributes to Swann's forgetting of Odette - a forgetting symbolized by Swann's dream, in which the self who once loved Odette is manifested as a stranger ("un inconnu"). In the dream, Swann's forgotten self sees Odette. Viewing Odette through the lens of *habitude*, however, this former self ignores Odette's "points rouges" and "traits tirés."<sup>104</sup> Upon waking, Swann remembers the image of Odette's face evoked in his dream: having forgotten the former self and this self's associations, however, Swann only remembers the "points rouges" and "traits tirés" this other self had ignored. Stripped of the effects of *habitude* perpetuated by his past self, Swann's forgetting of his past self, I argue, permits Swann to suddenly remember Odette as he first saw her, before the work of voluntary memory and *habitude* had set in - a woman who was not his type. Although the return of this memory signals a return to a perhaps undesirable objectivity, it also illustrates

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<sup>104</sup> I, 372.

that the return of memory depends upon the gradual effacement of *habitude* produced by forgetting.

### Odette and *Habitude*

Swann's initial impression of Odette is an unfavorable one, as we learn at the very end of *Un Amour de Swann* when Swann finally remembers this "première image":

le teint pâle d'Odette, les joues trop maigres, les traits tirés, les yeux battus, tout ce que - au cours des tendresses successives qui avaient fait de son durable amour pour Odette un long oubli de l'image première qu'il avait reçue d'elle - il avait cessé de remarquer depuis les premiers temps de leur liaison...<sup>105</sup>

Swann thus initially finds Odette unattractive, remarking her "teint pâle" and "traits tirés." It is not entirely true, however, that Swann had ceased to remember this "image première" since the very "premiers temps de leur liaison." The beginning of their relationship is marked by Swann's disappointment with Odette, who does not fulfill his physical ideal, as well as Swann's subsequent attempts to rework his memory of her to align it with Odette as he wishes to see her.

In Odette's initial visits to Swann, the sight of Odette constitutes constant renewed disappointment for Swann as he is forced to confront the fact that her beauty is not his type:

Odette de Crécy retourna voir Swann, puis rapprocha ses visites; et sans doute chacune d'elles renouvelait pour lui la déception qu'il éprouvait à se retrouver devant ce visage dont il avait un peu oublié les particularités dans l'intervalle et qu'il ne s'était rappelé ni si expressif ni, malgré sa jeunesse, si fané; il regrettait, pendant qu'elle causait avec lui, que la grand beauté qu'elle avait ne fut pas du genre de celles qu'il aurait spontanément préférées.<sup>106</sup>

Seeing her distorts the image he had formed of her in the interval in her absence, during which he is able to forget displeasing "particularités" of her face. His absence from Odette makes the

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<sup>105</sup> I, 375.

<sup>106</sup> I, 194.



work of voluntary memory easier, as reality no longer poses an obstacle to Swann's imagination. In her absence, Swann may construct his own image of Odette, selectively remembering what is most pleasing to him while ignoring her less attractive traits: "Mais quand Odette était partie, Swann...il se rappelait l'air inquiet, timide, avec laquelle elle l'avait une fois prié que ce ne fût pas dans trop longtemps, et les regards qu'elle avait eus à ce moment-là...la faisaient touchante..."<sup>107</sup>

Swann must even prepare himself for the disappointment caused by Odette by imagining her without her defects before seeing her:

Chaque fois qu'il devait la voir, d'avance il se la représentait; et la nécessité où il était pour trouver jolie sa figure de limiter aux seules pommettes roses et fraîches, les joues qu'elle avait souvent jaunes, languissantes, parfois piquées de petits points rouges, l'affligeait...<sup>108</sup>

This, then, is the work of voluntary memory: Swann desires to rework the image of Odette in order to make her conform to his imagined ideal.

Imagining Odette in this manner in her absence turns into "rêveries romanesques" about Odette.<sup>109</sup> And yet, although this is initially the work of the intellect, Proust describes the process whereby the work of voluntary memory - Swann's "rêveries" - eventually ceases to be voluntary, making the image produced by voluntary memory inseparable from the image of Odette herself:

Et sans doute, en se rappelant ainsi leurs entretiens, en pensant ainsi à elle quand il était seul, il faisait seulement jouer son image entre beaucoup d'autres images de femmes dans des rêveries romanesques; mais si, grâce à une circonstance quelconque (ou même peut-être sans que ce fût grâce à elle, la circonstance qui se présente au moment où un état, latent jusque-là, se déclare, pouvant n'avoir influé en rien sur lui), l'image d'Odette de Crécy venait à absorber toutes ces rêveries, si celles-ci n'étaient plus séparables de son souvenir, alors l'imperfection de son corps ne garderait plus aucune importance, ni qu'il

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<sup>107</sup> I, 195.

<sup>108</sup> I, 219.

<sup>109</sup> I, 196.

êut été, plus ou moins qu'un autre corps, selon le goût de Swann, puisque, devenu le corps de celle qui l'aimait, il serait désormais le seul qui fût capable de lui causer des joies et des tourments.<sup>110</sup>

There comes a point when the image of Odette absorbs “toutes ces rêveries,” such that the narrator’s idealized images of her are no longer separable from his memory of her (“celles-ci n’étaient plus séparables de son souvenir”). The narrator describes the transition from voluntary memory to *habitude*: the work of voluntary memory eventually becomes inseparable from Swann’s visual memory of Odette. The fantasy of Odette and her physical reality become indistinguishable, and the reality of Odette no longer carries any importance: “son corps ne garderait plus aucune importance, ni qu’il eût été, plus ou moins qu’un autre corps selon le goût de Swann...”.

Astute readers will remark that love factors into the equation, changing Swann’s perception of her: Odette’s body becomes “le corps de celle qui l’aimait.” However, in the order of events outlined above, *habitude* precedes Swann’s falling in love with Odette. Swann falls in love with Odette *because* she has finally become inseparable from Swann’s idealizations of her. Habit can anesthetize the effects of love, making Swann and the narrator inured to women who, once in their possession, become familiar and therefore less attractive; yet habit appears to also contribute to love itself.<sup>111</sup>

The defining moment in which the narrator “rêveries” are absorbed into the image of Odette takes place when Swann discovers the similarity between Odette and Zéphora from Botticelli’s *La Primavera*:

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<sup>110</sup> I, 196.

<sup>111</sup> See also the episode in which Swann’s jealousy is described as *habitude*: an octopus that attaches itself to Swann and leads him to “sa perte,” developing a life of its own (I, 278-9).

Elle était un peu souffrante; elle le reçut en peignoir de crêpe de Chine mauve, ramenant sur sa poitrine, comme un manteau, une étoffe richement brodée. Debout à côté de lui, laissant couler le long de ses joues ses cheveux qu'elle avait dénoués, fléchissant une jambe dans une attitude légèrement dansante pour pouvoir se pencher sans fatigue vers la gravure qu'elle regardait, en inclinant la tête, de ses grands yeux, si fatigués et maussades quand elle ne s'animait pas, elle frappa Swann par sa ressemblance avec cette figure de Zéphora, la fille de Jéthro, qu'on voit dans une fresque de la chapelle Sixtine...Il n'estima plus le visage d'Odette selon la plus ou moins bonne qualité de ses joues...mais comme un écheveau de lignes subtiles et belles que ses regards dévidèrent...<sup>112</sup>

Echoing the narrator's previous statements, it is at this moment that Odette finally enters, or absorbs, the world of Swann's dreams: "Le mot d'oeuvre florentine' rendit un grand service à Swann. Il lui permit, comme un titre, de faire pénétrer l'image d'Odette dans un monde de rêves, où elle n'avait pas eu accès jusqu'ici et où elle s'imprégna de noblesse."<sup>113</sup> This resemblance, the narrator tells us, produces a profound pleasure that will exert an extended influence over Swann's perception of Odette: "le plaisir fut plus profond et devait exercer sur Swann une influence durable." As the narrator predicted, a chance circumstance - the sudden recognition of Odette as Zéphora - renders Swann's "rêveries" of Odette inseparable from Odette herself; the "image d'Odette" is, finally, absorbed into his dreams ("il lui permit...de *faire pénétrer l'image d'Odette dans un monde de rêves*").

The association of Odette with Botticelli's *La Primavera* ultimately demonstrates the danger of aestheticizing life through the work of art, which Proust criticizes in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.<sup>114</sup> At the same time, this aestheticization marks the turning point in which voluntary memory becomes imprinted in visual memory; in which the relationship between Swann's imagination - his "rêveries" - and reality is finally collapsed. The image of Odette, thus, ceases to

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<sup>112</sup> I, 219-20.

<sup>113</sup> I, 221.

<sup>114</sup> See p. 137, *ibid.*

be the product of voluntary memory, and becomes a *habitude*: a form of habitual perception in which Odette becomes indistinguishable from the projections of Swann's imagination.

### Swann's Dream: Forgetting Odette

After a prolonged absence from Odette, however, Swann begins to forget Odette. The absence of Odette contributes to a growing feeling of indifference: "Chaque fois qu'elle était partie depuis un peu de temps, Swann sentait qu'il commençait à se détacher d'elle...."<sup>115</sup> After Odette leaves for a voyage which lasts "près d'un an,"<sup>116</sup> Swann struggles to revive his love for Odette. Attempting to recall his former impressions, Swann only feels "l'obscurité se faisant dans son cerveau."<sup>117</sup> Odette's absence thus contributes to Swann's gradual forgetting of her; of the self that once loved Odette.

This splitting of the self - Swann's past and current selves - is dramatized in Swann's dream. The self who still loves Odette appears as an "inconnu" in Swann's dream - a man who Swann consoled after the discovery that Odette is the mistress of Napoleon III (in the dream):

Le jeune homme inconnu se mit à pleurer. Swann essaya de le consoler. 'Après tout elle a raison, lui dit-il en lui essuyant les yeux et en lui ôtant son fez pour qu'il fût plus à son aise. Je le lui ai conseillé dix fois. Pourquoi en être triste? C'était bien l'homme qui pouvait la comprendre.' Ainsi Swann se parlait-il à lui-même, car le jeune homme qu'il n'avait pu identifier d'abord était aussi lui; comme certains romanciers, il avait distribué sa personnalité à deux personnages, celui qui faisait le rêve, et un qu'il voyait devant lui coiffé d'un fez.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> I, 367.

<sup>116</sup> I, 367.

<sup>117</sup> I, 371.

<sup>118</sup> I, 373.

Swann's dream reveals what has already taken place; the separation of Swann's former self from his current self. Now indifferent to Odette, Swann, unlike the "inconnu," is unbothered by the thought that Odette has become the mistress of Napoleon III, later revealed to be, by "quelque vague association d'idées," a representation of Forcheville. It is this particular moment in the dream that marks the division of Swann's selves, marking Swann's complete forgetting of this past self.

Sleep allows Swann - as the "inconnu" - to recall Odette's image as he first saw her ("pendant qu'il dormait, sa mémoire en avait été chercher la sensation exacte"):

Mais tandis que, une heure après son réveil, il donnait des indications au coiffeur pour que sa brosse ne se dérangerât pas en wagon, il repensa à son rêve; il revit, comme il les avait sentis tout près de lui, le teint pâle d'Odette, les joues trop maigres, les traits tirés, les yeux battus, tout ce que - au cours des tendresses successives qui avaient fait de son durable amour pour Odette un long oubli de l'image première qu'il avait reçue d'elle - il avait cessé de remarquer depuis les premiers temps de leur liaison, dans lesquels sans doute, pendant qu'il dormait, sa mémoire en avait été chercher la sensation exacte. Et avec cette muflerie intermittente qui reparaisait chez lui dès qu'il n'était plus malheureux et qui baissait du même coup le niveau de sa moralité, il s'écria en lui-même: 'Dire que j'ai gâché des années de ma vie, que j'ai voulu mourir, que j'ai eu mon plus grand amour, pour une femme qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était pas mon genre!'<sup>119</sup>

In the dream itself, however, the return of this image does not provoke the same reaction expressed by Swann once awake. In Swann's dream, Swann - or Swann as the "inconnu" - is still under the spell of his established notion of Odette and, ignoring her "petits points rouges" and "traits tirés," finds that he loves her "tellement qu'il aurait voulu l'emmener tout de suite" (I, 372). Although the dream returns Swann's initial impression of Odette to Swann, it is not recognized as such in the dream itself by the "inconnu."

The dream itself thus does not restore the impression created by the "première image" of Odette; rather, Swann perceives the image seen by the "inconnu" differently because his

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<sup>119</sup> I, 375.

impression of Odette has been stripped of the habitual perception of this other self. Upon waking, Swann does not remember the “inconnu” or his associations with Odette; he does not see Odette through the eyes of the “inconnu.” Attempting to remember his dream, Swann only remembers the image of Odette with “petits points rouges” and “traits tirés.”<sup>120</sup> Swann’s perception thus undergoes a figurative subtraction. Swann remembers the image produced by his dream, but without the habitual perception of this other self, which has been forgotten. Swann, in other words, does not perceive this image as the *inconnu* does; stripped of the habitual associations of this other, Swann, recalling the image of Odette from his dream, sees her “petits points rouges” and “traits tirés.” Swann’s complete forgetting of his past self, as dramatized in his dream, thus permits Swann to remember the image furnished by his dream without the lens of habit.

Over the course of falling in love with Odette, Swann’s initial unfavorable impression of Odette is obscured by habit - new associations that become indelibly associated with his perception of Odette. As Swann forgets Odette, however, he in turn forgets the work of voluntary memory perpetuated by *habitude* - *habitude*’s reworking of his initial impression - thereby unearthing the long-forgotten initial impression of Odette. No longer perceiving Odette through the screen of his former self, Swann suddenly retrieves his “image première” of Odette lost to a “long oubli” - an Odette with “points rouges” and “traits tirés” who, Swann concludes, was never his type at all.

### Albertine and *Habitude*

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<sup>120</sup> I, 372.

The difficulty in overcoming habitual perception - and the role of *oubli* in undoing its effects - is further exemplified in *La Fugitive (F)*, as discussed in the next two sections. *La Fugitive* features a narrator who finds it difficult, if not impossible, to separate the mass of his past associations from his relationship with Albertine. Although initially, this is a mark of the narrator's love, *F* demonstrates that even love is not inured to the effects of *habitude*: the constant association of Albertine with particularly painful or joyful moments from the narrator's past becomes a matter of *habitude*, in which the sight of Albertine immediately rescuscitates these associations. What begins as affect, I argue, is thus eventually perpetuated through *habitude*.

The description of Albertine in *F* demonstrates the narrator's inability to separate what habit has come to associate with Albertine's physical features from what he knows about Albertine. Albertine's physical appearance becomes inextricably marked by the mass of sensations - the memory of both sufferings and pleasures - that have over time been ingrained into the narrator's visual memory:

Le temps était loin où j'avais bien petitement commencé à Balbec par ajouter aux sensations visuelles quand je regardais Albertine, des sensations de saveur, d'odeur, de toucher. Depuis, des sensations plus profondes, plus douces, plus indéfinissables s'y étaient ajoutées, puis des sensations douloureuses. Bref Albertine n'était, comme une pierre autour de laquelle il a neigé, que le centre générateur d'une immense construction qui passait par le plan de mon coeur.<sup>121</sup>

These sensations, which have become ingrained into the memory of Albertine's appearance, act as a screen that reflects the narrator's love, pain, and suffering back to him, obscuring the image of Albertine herself, who is hidden beneath a network of associations that hide her, as if she were a rock, underneath a thick layer of snow: "une pierre autour de laquelle il a neigé...".

This screen of associations proves impossible to separate from Albertine's appearance:

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<sup>121</sup> IV, 22.

la construction des sensations interposées entre le visage de la femme et les yeux de l'amant, l'énorme oeuf douloureux qui l'engaine et le dissimule autant qu'une couche de neige une fontaine sont déjà poussés assez loin pour que le point où s'arrêtent les regards de l'amant, le point où il rencontre son plaisir et ses souffrances, soit aussi loin du point où les autres le voient qu'est loin le soleil véritable de l'endroit où sa lumière condensée nous le fait apercevoir dans le ciel.<sup>122</sup>

Although Albertine's face has had "le temps de vieillir et de changer," the narrator is unable to subtract "mon apport cardiaque et mental dans la composition d'Albertine et de me la représenter telle qu'elle devait apparaître à Saint-Loup..."<sup>123</sup> The mass of sensations becomes indistinguishable from the visual memory they had been superimposed onto, and therefore from the sight of Albertine herself. Unable to separate Albertine as she is now from the Albertine associated with this mass of sensations, the result is that "si le visage que l'amant a vu la première fois est fort loin de celui qu'il voit depuis qu'il aime et souffre, il est, en sens inverse, tout aussi loin de celui que peut voir maintenant le spectateur indifférent," and the "pires métamorphoses de l'être aimé" are invisible to the lover.<sup>124</sup> Albertine's appearance has come to be associated with a mass of sensations over time until the narrator is no longer able to truly see her; the act of seeing is automatically overtaken by associations which have become visually inseparable from Albertine herself.

Albertine's appearance in turn becomes a reflection of past impressions and experiences. Albertine's features serve as a reminder of the past experiences of love, which habit has attached to her physical appearance: seeing Albertine, the narrator is reminded of "tout le processus d'émotions, d'angoisses... que tels hasards nous ont fait jadis éprouver à propos d'elle et que

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<sup>122</sup> IV, 22.

<sup>123</sup> IV, 24.

<sup>124</sup> IV, 23.



*l'habitude a attaché à elle.*"<sup>125</sup> Through the work of habit, her features have become the physical representation – the “*extrait algébrique*” – which immediately recalls the narrator’s efforts, worries, and desires:

“...ce qu’on aime est trop dans le passé, consiste trop dans le temps perdu ensemble pour qu’on ait besoin de toute la femme; on veut seulement être sûr que c’est elle, ne pas se tromper sur l’identité, autrement important que la beauté pour ceux qui aiment; les joues peuvent se creuser, le corps s’amaigrir, même pour ceux qui ont été d’abord le plus orgueilleux, aux yeux des autres, de leur domination sur une beauté, ce petit bout de museau, ce signe où se résume la personnalité permanente d’une femme, cet extrait algébrique, cette constante, cela suffit pour qu’un homme attendu dans le plus grand monde et qui l’aimait ne puisse disposer d’une seule de ses soirées...”<sup>126</sup>

As a result, even the “*petit bout de museau*” is sufficient “pour qu’un homme attendu dans le plus grand monde et qui l’aimait, ne puisse disposer d’une seule de ses soirées...” because Albertine’s face has been attached, through *habitude*, to the narrator’s past experiences of sufferings and happiness. A mere fragment of Albertine’s face is necessary to conjure up the past tied to her identity, which in turn summons up “le passé”; Albertine’s appearance is only significant insofar as “ce qu’on aime est trop dans le passé” and “consiste trop dans le temps perdu ensemble pour qu’on ait besoin de toute la femme; on veut seulement être sûr que c’est elle, ne pas se tromper sur l’identité...”.

The narrator’s associations with Albertine thus become inseparable from Albertine herself. These associations cease to be the product of a mental “composition,” but rather, attached to Albertine through *habitude*, are involuntarily provoked: as the narrator attempts to forget Albertine, the sight of Albertine sets him back, immediately triggering the narrator’s past experiences and emotions. *Habitude*, thus, becomes a screen that obscures the narrator’s

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> IV, 24.

perception of Albertine as she is, instead reflecting back to him associations ingrained, or habituated, into his visual memory of her.

### The “Gymnastique Inverse” of Forgetting: Forgetting Albertine

The second half of *La Fugitive* describes the narrator in the process of forgetting Albertine. As mentioned above, forgetting allows the narrator to adapt to the grief caused by Albertine’s death. This adaptive element of forgetting illustrates Proust’s awareness of Ribot’s paradigm of forgetting and memory, in which forgetting mitigates the suffering that takes place as a result of the excess of memory. In this section, however, I wish to underline yet another parallel between Ribot’s notion of forgetting and forgetting in *F*, focusing on the effect of forgetting in attenuating the excesses of memory in order to permit for the return of memory. I posit that as the narrator begins to forget Albertine, the hold of habit on his perception of her similarly begins to unravel, provoking the return of previously obscured memories. I thus suggest that forgetting not only alleviates the narrator’s suffering, but that it is also the condition for the narrator’s recovery of memories of Albertine.

The telegram the narrator receives from Gilberte, mistakenly leading him to believe that Albertine is alive, brings the narrator to recognize the extent to which he has forgotten Albertine. Believing her to be alive and finding himself indifferent, he realizes that he has in fact forgotten her completely:

Maintenant qu’Albertine dans ma pensée ne vivait plus pour moi, la nouvelle qu’elle était vivante ne me causa pas la joie que j’aurais cru. Albertine n’avait été pour moi qu’un faisceau de pensées, elle avait survécu à sa mort matérielle tant que ces pensées vivaient en moi; en revanche, maintenant que ces pensées étaient mortes, Albertine ne ressuscitait nullement pour moi avec son corps.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> IV, 220-22.

The narrator's forgetting is dramatized as the splitting of his self into two different selves: the self that loved Albertine has been eclipsed ("le moi éclipsé") by a new self that no longer feels the same. Ultimately, this new self has taken over "l'autre" such that the narrator does not even experience guilt at the fact of forgetting: "l'oublieux ne s'attriste pas de son manque de mémoire, précisément parce qu'il a oublié."<sup>128</sup> The telegram incident thus marks the culmination of the narrator's forgetting of Albertine.

At the same time, this forgetting weakens the hold of dominant, habitual memories on the narrator's impressions of Albertine. As I suggested in the previous section, the affect attached to the narrator's memory of Albertine is not only a matter of emotional intensity or the narrator's love for Albertine; affect, including jealousy, love, and a host of other emotions, may over time become a habituated response attached through *habitude* to the perception of the person themselves. Even the sight of Albertine reminds the narrator of "tout le processus d'émotions, d'angoisses...que l'habitude a attaché à elle"; in looking at Albertine, there is a "couche" that reflects back to the narrator "son plaisir et ses souffrances." This reference to the association of Albertine with particular impressions of pleasure and suffering - impressions which become a matter of "habitude" - is particularly salient because it is once again referred to when the narrator forgets Albertine.

The following passage once again bears witness to the dominance of certain "impressions douces ou douloureuses" over the narrator's perception of Albertine, echoing the "plaisir et...souffrances" that had become ingrained in the narrator's perception of Albertine:

Ma tendresse pour Albertine, ma jalousie tenaient, on l'a vu, à l'irradiation par association d'idées de certaines noyaux d'impressions douces ou douloureuses, au souvenir de Mlle de Vinteuil à Montjouvain, aux doux baisers du soir qu'Albertine me

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<sup>128</sup> IV, 221.

donnait dans le cou. Mais au fur et à mesure que ces impressions s'étaient affaiblies, l'immense champ d'impressions qu'elles coloraient d'une teinte angoissante ou douce avait repris des tons neutres. Une fois que l'oubli se fut emparé de quelques points dominants de souffrance et de plaisir, la résistance de mon amour était vaincue, je n'aimais plus Albertine.<sup>129</sup>

Particular images and impressions - "certaines impressions douces ou douloureuses" and "points dominants de souffrance et de plaisir" - affect the narrator's other impressions. As the narrator underlines here, these specific memories dominate and color the narrator's memory of other impressions by an associative principle: particularly painful or sweet memories ("certaines impressions douces ou douloureuses") act as "noyaux" that irradiate to other impressions.

These dominant impressions, however, fade over time, stripping the narrator's perception of Albertine of these associations: "Mais au fur et à mesure que ces impressions s'étaient affaiblies, l'immense champ d'impressions qu'elles coloraient d'une teinte angoissante ou douce avait repris des tons neutres."<sup>130</sup> As the emotional intensity of "certaines impressions douces ou douloureuses" (the "points dominants de souffrance et de plaisir" referred to shortly thereafter) fades, these impressions lose their affect - their "teinte angoissante ou douce." These dominant impressions had affected - via "irradiation" - the narrator's "champ d'impressions." As the "noyaux" lose their strength, however, they also release the narrator's "champ d'impressions" from the hold of these "points dominants de souffrance et de plaisir." These dominant associations, as I have argued, are not only a matter of love, but a matter of *habitude*: they become a "processus d'émotions, d'angoisses...que l'habitude a attaché à elle." As these dominant impressions are forgotten and fade, the hold of these dominant impressions over the narrator's perception of Albertine is thus broken.

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<sup>129</sup> IV, 221.

<sup>130</sup> IV, 221.

Having forgotten Albertine and these associations, the narrator then attempts to remember Albertine. The first time, he fails; the second time, the image the narrator recalls is entirely different from the one perpetuated by *habitude*:

D'ailleurs, j'essayai de me la rappeler, et peut-être parce que je n'avais plus qu'un signe à faire pour l'avoir à moi, le souvenir qui me vint fut celui d'une fille fort grosse, hommasse, dans le visage fané de laquelle saillait déjà, comme une graine, le profil de Mme Bontemps....Est-ce pour cette fille que je revoyais en ce moment bouffie et qui avait certainement vieilli comme avaient vieilli les filles qu'elle avait aimées, est-ce pour elle qu'il fallait renoncer à l'éclatante fille qui était mon souvenir d'hier, mon espoir de demain..., renoncer à cette Albertine nouvelle, non point 'telle que l'ont vue les enfers' mais fidèle, et 'même un peu farouche.' C'était elle qui était maintenant ce qu'Albertine avait été autrefois...<sup>131</sup>

Previously, the narrator was unable to subtract the “composition” of Albertine created by the mind from the image of Albertine herself. The narrator had attempted to imagine Albertine as someone whose features are not associated with the sensations and experiences “attaché à elle”: “j’essayais d’ôter mon apport cardiaque et mental dans la composition d’Albertine...”.<sup>132</sup> The narrator, however, is not successful in what he refers to as a “gymnastique inverse.” Instead, the “apport cardiaque et mental” provided by both mind and heart become habitual; the narrator needs only “ce petit bout de museau” to instantly recall the additions that have contributed to this “composition.”

Having forgotten the habitual impressions that had come to be associated with Albertine, however, the narrator can no longer recall these additions. Finally remembering Albertine, the Albertine that comes to mind is shorn of the effects of habit: “une fille déjà fort grosse, hommasse, dans le visage fané de laquelle saillit déjà, comme une graine, le profil de Mme

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<sup>131</sup> IV, 222.

<sup>132</sup> IV, 24.

Bontemps.”<sup>133</sup> Forgetting thus produces a “gymnastique inverse” of the image of Albertine, wearing away at the additions created by habit until, the additions of memory having been forgotten, the narrator remembers Albertine as she was, not as he remembered her.

The narrator’s forgetting of Albertine thus undermines *habitude* - perceptions of Albertine that have become associated over time with her memory and image - thereby restoring impressions lost to memory, even if the image retrieved is ultimately not the image one wishes to remember. However, whether forgetting undoes the work of habits that one might wish to retain, as in the case of the narrator’s habituated associations with Albertine, or whether forgetting undoes unwelcome habits, as is the case in the associations that obscure the original charm of the Guermantes’ name, the narrator’s forgetting of Albertine nevertheless affirms a necessary exchange between forgetting and memory.

#### Conclusion:

The opening pages in *Combray* on sleep thus mark a pattern that repeats itself throughout the *Recherche*, in which forgetting, by liberating the narrator from *habitude*, simultaneously liberates other memories in the narrator’s own subconscious. This pattern, furthermore, is replicated not only in the temporary oblivion that forces out dominant impressions in the experience of involuntary memory, but also in the forgetting that leads up to involuntary memory. The narrator’s encounters with names after he has had sufficient time to forget them and, in turn, his habitual associations with them, makes possible the return of his previous enchantment - the return, in other words, of his childhood impressions. This exchange between forgetting and memory may also be observed in Swann’s and the narrator’s relationships, in

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<sup>133</sup> IV, 222.

which *habitude* perpetuates particular images or impressions of both Odette and Albertine. It is only after long intervals in forgetting, in which the habitual impressions associated with their memory are forgotten that underlying layers of memory - obscured by habitual impressions - may be uncovered.

The characterization of forgetting in *RTP* thus mirrors the paradigm of forgetting and memory already established in Ribot's work, in which forgetting must correct the excesses of memory. *Habitude* acts not only as a motor mechanism in *RTP*, but, as in *Les Maladies de la mémoire*, perpetuates impressions that become ingrained within one's perception. Furthermore, although the loss of forgetting may be cause for grief, this forgetting at the same time makes it possible to uncover forgotten impressions previously obscured by *habitude*. The depiction of the role of forgetting in *RTP* thus suggests that Proust not only took into account this benevolent aspect of forgetting - its alleviation of pain - but also its ability to undo the work of memory in order to create space for the resurfacing of memory. Ultimately, in *RTP* as in Ribot's framework of memory, the very annihilation of memory caused by forgetting - both oblivion and the forgetfulness that takes place over time - thus paves the path for the return of memory itself.

## Chapter 2



## “Comme Tout Ce Qui Se Réalise Dans le Temps”: *Oubli* and the Work of Art

In my first chapter, I argued that forgetting not only preserves memory from the intellect and habit, but actively erodes habitual associations, thus facilitating the return of memory. Forgetting, however, is not exclusive to life itself; this chapter aims to demonstrate that the depiction of the listening experience in *RTP* reveals the role of forgetting in both music and art as a whole. As Howard Moss has observed, the experience of listening to music in *RTP* is marked by the loss of memory that takes place during the listening experience itself. Music, Moss writes, is “the aesthetic equivalent of the temporal process” in that what is initially lost to perception in the listening experience is later recovered upon repeated hearings.<sup>134</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, among others, has similarly highlighted the role of forgetting in musical listening.<sup>135</sup> Nattiez writes that music, above all, “imitates life, and foreshadows the effort the Narrator must make in order to gather the scraps of life together into a single, organised whole, because it works like involuntary memory: a fresh occurrence of a theme already heard recalls its first

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<sup>134</sup> See p. 114 in *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust: A Critical Study of Remembrance of Things Past*.

<sup>135</sup> Roger Shattuck has also written that music is memory as it is experienced in life “in miniature”: when the narrator hears the Septet, he “finally hears and understands that the shape of music is the shape of fiction, and the shape of life itself properly lived.” See p. 252 in “Making Time: A Study of Stravinsky, Proust and Sartre.” *The Kenyon Review*. Vol. 25, No. 2, 1962, pp. 248-263. In *Proust’s Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time*, Shattuck describes this shape as “delayed revelation,” the rhythm and structure he ascribes to the *Recherche* itself (238).

appearance to us...”.<sup>136</sup> Such scholarship has emphasized the relationship of the experience of music to time, and, ultimately, forgetting.

At the same time, while this scholarship calls attention to the forgetting that takes place during the experience of listening to music, it focuses exclusively on the relationship of forgetting to involuntary memory; in other words, the ability of forgetting to preserve and eventually recall what was lost to the listener. On the one hand, this chapter expands upon such scholarship, examining how the experience of forgetting in the experience of listening allows for the development of understanding within the subconscious; on the other hand, this chapter examines how the loss of memory - even when memory is not preserved - may be beneficial to the listening experience, asking how the forgetting that takes place during the listening experience may allow the listener to overcome habit and, in turn, remember previously forgotten impressions stored within the subconscious.

This chapter first examines the role of habit and forgetting in the narrator’s description of his experience of *la Berma*, a relationship which I argue finds its counterpart in the experience of listening to music. This experience involves an extensive discussion on the part of the narrator of what constitutes habit with respect to the perception of art: the narrator’s preconceived notions of art and artistic genius. The narrator observes, however, that his forgetting of *la Berma* brings him to forget his initial impressions of her, allowing him to experience her performance with renewed perception. The productive role of forgetting in the experience of art is made explicit in the narrator’s observations about his experience of *la Berma*.

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<sup>136</sup> See p. 63, *Proust as Musician*. Trans. by Derrick Puffett. New York: CUP, 1989. See also p. 39, in which Nattiez discusses how “music imitates, in its thematic development, the workings of involuntary memory” and therefore is a “microcosm of our relation to the world as inscribed in time.”

In order to discuss the relationship of forgetting and memory in the *Sonate de Vinteuil*, however, I first consider how forgetting contributes to the “réserve” of musical memory in both Swann’s as well as the narrator’s experiences of Vinteuil’s music, allowing musical understanding to take shape while bypassing the intellect. I draw substantially upon John Hamilton’s observations that impressions may enter and be transcribed within the subconscious, without the aid of the conscious brain.<sup>137</sup> I posit, however, that the inscription of impressions within the subconscious not only allows, as Hamilton observes, for the “playback,” or return, of memory; I suggest that these impressions may build and take shape within the subconscious, making unfamiliar concepts understandable over the course of successive hearings. By bypassing the intellect, these impressions - once they rise to the surface of the conscious mind - permit the listener to develop an appreciation of phrases which, challenging the listener’s *habitudes*, would otherwise be too novel and complex to be grasped by the conscious mind alone. The aim of this chapter is to ask what makes the recovery of these forgotten impressions possible - impressions which ultimately contribute to a more profound understanding of art.

The narrator valorizes forgetting in the perception of music as an end in and of itself: unlike life, the narrator tells us, music - and “grands chefs-d’oeuvre” in general - do not begin by

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<sup>137</sup> This “gramophonic” inscription of acoustic impressions in turn facilitates understanding upon repeated hearings, or “playback,” a notion that opens up the accepted notion of musical memory in *RTP* as being only the domain of the conscious memory, suggesting that musical memory is reliant upon the work of the subconscious. See “‘Cette douceur, pour ainsi dire wagnérienne’: musical resonance in Proust’s Recherche.” *Proust and the Arts*. Ed. by Christie McDonald and François Proulx. Cambridge: CUP 2015, p. 157- 169.

giving us “ce qu’ils ont de meilleur.”<sup>138</sup> Instead, one’s initial impressions - “les beautés qu’on découvre le plus tôt” - must give way before a different type of understanding may take place, because these initial impressions, as is the case in the narrator’s initial impressions of *la Berma*, are rooted in one’s preconceived notions of art.<sup>139</sup> I contend that the forgetting that takes place during the listening experience, by contributing to the forgetting of these impressions, allows the listener to discover previously forgotten impressions that have taken shape during the listening process within the listener’s subconscious. I thus propose that the forgetting inherent to musical listening is not undesirable, but rather permits the listener to overcome the effects of habit in order to uncover the work of the subconscious - impressions which, as previously mentioned, allow for an appreciation of the novelty of Vinteuil’s music.

At the same time, I suggest that the lesson the narrator draws about forgetting from musical listening is characterized in terms of the perception of art as a whole. While music exemplifies the passage of time and the role of forgetting in undoing the effects of *habitude*, the narrator repeatedly extends this role of forgetting to the ability to understand all “grands chefs-d’oeuvre.” The experience of music, I argue, becomes a symbol for the experience of all art, revealing to the narrator the productive role of forgetting in the perception of art at large. I thus contend that the narrator’s experience of Vinteuil’s *Sonate* makes explicit what is alluded to in the *la Berma* passages: that forgetting is essential to renewing perception and, thus, to uncovering the impressions obscured by one’s initial impressions. Ultimately, this chapter therefore posits that the narrator’s experiences of the *Vinteuil Sonate* and of *la Berma* demonstrate that the forgetting that takes place over the successive encounters with a work of art

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<sup>138</sup> I, 521.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

is itself essential to recovering the forgotten impressions preserved within the subconscious and, as such, is essential to the ability to understand a truly novel work of art.

### Aesthetic Innovation and the “Chef-d’oeuvre Vraiment Nouveau”

The narrator’s discussion of the posterity of a work of art in *JF* exemplifies the characterization of the principles of aesthetic innovation in the *Recherche*. The narrator defines a true masterpiece not only by its innovative qualities, but also by its inimitable difference from all other artists’ work. These unique and novel qualities are ultimately the ones which, according to the narrator, not only constitute the beauty of a piece of music, but all art in general.

The narrator encourages artists to not look to the future or the present in the attempt to conform to aesthetic conventions, but rather to be unrestrainedly innovative. The work of art of a true artist, or *génie*, is always ahead of his or her time: “Ce qui est cause qu’une oeuvre de génie est difficilement admirée tout de suite, c’est que celui qui l’a écrite est extraordinaire, que peu de gens lui ressemblent...”<sup>140</sup> Although their work may not be appreciated in their time, a true artist, however, should not aim to please their contemporaries or conform to current aesthetic conventions: the true work of art will create its own posterity by creating “une assemblée de contemporains” who, “cinquante ans plus tard,” will be “capables de l’aimer.”<sup>141</sup> An artist should thus confidently launch their work into the future, “là où il y a assez de profondeur, en plein et lointain avenir.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> I, 522.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

On the other hand, the composer should not attempt to anticipate possible future aesthetic fashions, either: “Et pourtant ce temps à venir, vraie perspective des chefs-d’oeuvre, si n’en pas tenir compte est l’erreur des mauvais juges, en tenir compte est parfois le dangereux scrupule des bons”.<sup>143</sup> It is impossible to predict the future; as such, true innovation should not come from the trends of either the present or the future, but from the artist’s own unique vision, free from the influence of either. Rather than shying away from it, aesthetic innovation is thus the condition to which true artists and, in turn, their art, should aspire.

It is, furthermore, the novelty of a work of art that yields the most rewarding impressions of a work of art. What is most beautiful in a great work of art diverges from what one is already aesthetically familiar with - that which one is primed by the conventions of their time to easily understand:

...[les] grands chefs-d’oeuvre ne commencent pas par nous donner ce qu’ils ont de meilleur. Dans la Sonate de Vinteuil, les beautés qu’on découvre le plus tôt sont aussi celles dont on se fatigue le plus vite, et pour la même raison sans doute, qui est qu’elles diffèrent moins de ce qu’on connaissait déjà. Mais quand celles-là se sont éloignées, il nous reste à aimer telle phrase que son ordre trop nouveau pour offrir à notre esprit rien que confusion nous avait rendue indiscernable...<sup>144</sup>

Although the narrator refers to the *Sonate* in particular, the *Sonate* also stands in, as will be further discussed below, for “grands chefs-d’oeuvre” in general. In all great works of art, including the *Sonate*, it is that which is initially too novel to be understood that is the most beautiful. Accordingly, these impressions - the ones initially too new and unfamiliar to be grasped - are those which the audience, or in this case, the listener, will eventually come to love the most: “Mais nous la quitterons aussi en dernier. Et nous l’aimerons plus longtemps que les

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<sup>143</sup> I, 522.

<sup>144</sup> I, 522.

autres, parce que nous aurons mis plus longtemps à l'aimer".<sup>145</sup> The discovery of the unfamiliar, novel aspects of a work of art are ultimately the most rewarding aspect of the aesthetic experience. These innovative qualities are, furthermore, what makes truly great works of art difficult to understand by challenging one's aesthetic *habitudes*.

*La Berma* and *Habitude*: The "Signification Ingénieuse" of Great Actresses

As readers of Proust will know, habit often leads to indifference and disappointment in life in *RTP* because of its dulling effect on one's sensitivity to familiar impressions, experiences, and even people: "s'il n'y avait pas l'habitude, la vie devrait paraître délicieuse à ... tous les hommes."<sup>146</sup> At the same time, however, habit has yet another drawback: it makes it difficult to appreciate the inhabitual. As Anthony Pilkington writes, habit "makes it extremely difficult for us to respond to what is inhabitual, since when confronted by something quite outside our habits, we either simply fail to realize its existence, reject it or reduce it to what is habitual...".<sup>147</sup> The narrator's experience of *la Berma*'s performances illustrates that this facet of habit is not unique to perception in general, but to the narrator's perception of *la Berma* and art as a whole.

The narrator articulates the fraught relationship between habit and the ability to appreciate a work of art in observing his own reaction to *la Berma*. The narrator's initial reaction

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<sup>145</sup> I, 521.

<sup>146</sup> I, 72.

<sup>147</sup> See p. 165 in Anthony Pilkington's *Bergson and His Influence: A Reassessment*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976.

to *la Berma* is one of disappointment: “Hélas! cette première matinée fut une grande déception.”<sup>148</sup> To a certain extent, this is a result of the ephemeral nature of the dramatic arts:

J'aurais voulu – pour pouvoir l'approfondir, pour tâcher d'y découvrir ce qu'elle avait de beau – arrêter, immobiliser longtemps devant moi chaque intonation de l'artiste, chaque expression de sa physionomie; du moins, je tâchais, à force d'agilité mentale, en ayant avant un vers mon attention tout installée et mise au point, de ne pas distraire en préparatifs une parcelle de la durée de chaque mot, de chaque geste, et, grâce à l'intensité de mon attention, d'arriver à descendre en eux aussi profondément que j'aurais fait si j'avais eu de longues heures à moi. Mais que cette durée était brève! À peine un son était-il reçu dans mon oreille qu'il était remplacé par un autre.<sup>149</sup>

The performance moves along too quickly for the narrator to grasp *la Berma*'s genius; it takes all of the narrator's concentration simply to understand what he is hearing and seeing. However, although the temporal constraints of the performance limit the narrator's understanding, this is not ultimately what prevents him from appreciating her unique - and innovative - genius.

The narrator's observations suggest yet another, more significant explanation for his disappointment. Even if the narrator must make an effort to grasp every word and gesture due to the fleeting nature of the performance, he understands enough to recognize that he does not, ultimately, appreciate Berma's interpretation:

...tout mon plaisir avait cessé; j'avais beau tendre vers la Berma mes yeux, mes oreilles, mon esprit, pour ne pas laisser échapper une miette des raisons qu'elle me donnerait de l'admirer, je ne parvenais pas à en recueillir une seule. Je ne pouvais même pas, comme pour ses camarades, distinguer dans sa diction et dans son jeu des intonations intelligentes, de beaux gestes. Je l'écoutais comme j'aurais lu Phèdre, ou comme si Phèdre elle-même avait dit en ce moment les choses que j'entendais, sans que le talent de la Berma semblât leur avoir rien ajouté.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> I, 439.

<sup>149</sup> I, 440-41.

<sup>150</sup> I, 440.



Not only does the narrator not find her interpretation particularly interesting; he finds it unintelligent and substandard even by a high-schooler's standards:

Quant à la déclaration à Hippolyte, j'avais beaucoup compté sur ce morceau où, à en juger par la signification ingénieuse que ses camarades me découvraient à tout moment dans des parties moins belles, elle aurait certainement des intonations plus surprenantes que celles que chez moi, en lisant, j'avais tâché d'imaginer; mais elle n'atteignit même pas jusqu'à celles qu'Oenone ou Aricie eussent trouvées, elle passa au rabot d'une mélodie uniforme toute la tirade où se trouvèrent confondues ensemble des oppositions, pourtant si tranchées, qu'une tragédienne à peine intelligente, même des élèves de lycée, n'en eussent pas négligé l'effet...<sup>151</sup>

The narrator finds the monotony with which Berma gives the performance to be senseless and “à peine intelligente,” glossing over dramatic contrasts that “des élèves de lycée” would not neglect to emphasize. Berma, in other words, does not read the text as he imagined it should be read.

As the narrator will observe later on, the reason for his disappointment is that he expected an interpretation in which one could observe the actresses' intervention; in which the actresses left their own mark or “résidu” onto the text itself, along the lines of the two other actresses' dramatic readings, or, as he refers to with irony in the above passage, the “signification ingénieuse” of Berma's “camarades.” These two actresses conform to the narrator's expectations of drama because he can perceive a specific interpretation in their gestures and intonations, which make expressly and dramatically clear certain nuances in the text:

Toutes deux d'ailleurs ajoutaient à leur rôle de noble gestes - que je distinguais clairement et dont je comprenais la relation avec le texte, tandis qu'elles soulevaient leurs beaux péplums - et aussi des intonations ingénieuses, tantôt passionnées, tantôt ironiques, qui me faisaient comprendre la signification d'un vers que j'avais lu chez moi sans apporter assez d'attention à ce qu'il voulait dire.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> I, 441.

<sup>152</sup> I, 440.

Berma's interpretation, in its monotony and simplicity, is too different from the dramatic "signification" the narrator expects. Her reading does not appear to constitute an interpretation at all. She does not make any unusual "intonations," or "de beaux gestes"; at times, she appears to not have interpreted the text whatsoever, so that one has the impressions of hearing the text as Phèdre would have read it: "comme si Phèdre elle-même avait dit en ce moment les choses que j'entendais, sans que le talent de la Berma semblât leur avoir rien ajouté."<sup>153</sup> Because the narrator understands talent to be the uniqueness of the actor's interpretation - an interpretation that may be readily observed as distinct from the written text itself - he is unable to appreciate Berma's unique talent, which consists precisely in the fact that she embodies the character so fully that her interpretation - evidence of her "acting" - is not present at all. The narrator's appreciation of Berma's talent is thus hindered by his preconceived notions of what dramatic performance should be: that talent should make visible the actor's contribution to the text.

This is confirmed later in *CG*, in which the narrator, finally understanding Berma's talent, reflects on his initial disappointment. The narrator observes that he had been unable to appreciate Berma's genius because it did not conform to his own idea of what art should be. This idea, the narrator emphasizes, is shaped by our aesthetic habits, themselves shaped by previous artistic experiences and conventions:

Entre les deux déceptions il n'y avait peut-être pas seulement cette ressemblance, une autre aussi, plus profonde. L'impression que nous cause une personne, une oeuvre (ou une interprétation) fortement caractérisées, est particulière. *Nous avons apporté avec nous les idées de 'beauté,' 'largeur de style,' 'pathétique,' que nous pourrions à la rigueur avoir l'illusion de reconnaître dans la banalité d'un talent, d'un visage corrects, mais notre esprit attentif a devant lui l'insistance d'une forme dont il ne possède pas l'équivalent intellectuel, dont il lui faut dégager l'inconnu. Il entend un son aigu, une intonation bizarrement interrogative. Il se demande: 'Est-ce beau? ce que j'éprouve, est-ce de l'admiration? Est-ce cela la richesse de coloris, la noblesse, la puissance?' Et ce qui lui répond de nouveau, c'est une voix aiguë, c'est un ton curieusement questionneur, c'est*

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

l'impression despotique causée par un être qu'on ne connaît pas, toute matérielle, et dans laquelle aucun espace vide n'est laissé pour la 'largeur de l'interprétation.' *Et à cause de cela ce sont les oeuvres vraiment belles, si elles sont sincèrement écoutées, qui doivent le plus nous décevoir, parce que, dans la collection de nos idées, il n'y en a aucune qui réponde à une impression individuelle.*<sup>154</sup>

The narrator has a particular idea of what constitutes the “beauté,” “largeur de style,” and “pathétique,” of a dramatic interpretation. These expectations are rooted in often banal conventions: they are the markers of talent one has come to expect from “un talent...un visage corrects.” One thus carries into one’s perception of a work of art a certain “collection” of ideas (“la collection de nos idées”) that correspond to aesthetic habits. These habits preclude the appreciation of the unique impression conveyed by artistic genius, which does not correspond to these ideas: “dans la collection de nos idées, il n’y en a aucune qui réponde à une impression individuelle.”

The narrator’s disappointment with Berma’s performance is thus indicative of the effect of habit in his perception of the dramatic arts. The narrator perceives Berma’s talent through the lens of habit, and because true innovative art by definition surpasses habit, he is unable to appreciate its ingenuity. The narrator’s difficulty in understanding Berma’s genius, furthermore, is not limited to the dramatic arts; rather, as the narrator tells us, it is true for the perception of all great and truly novel works of art (“les oeuvres vraiment belles”).

#### “Ces Années d’Oubli”: Forgetting *La Berma*, Forgetting Habit

The narrator does not understand the beauty of Berma’s performance until after a long interval of time has passed, in which he has forgotten Berma. The narrator compares this interval of forgetting explicitly to both sleep and involuntary memory. In contrast to either the process of

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<sup>154</sup> II, 349; my emphasis.

involuntary memory or sleep, however, there is no return of memory: Berma's "return" takes place in the form of her second performance. Instead of emphasizing forgetting as a means to recovering memory, the narrator emphasizes that forgetting strips his perception of Berma of his initial habitual impressions. As his initial impressions, rooted in aesthetic *habitudes*, are forgotten, he is capable of interpreting Berma's second performance - after a long interval of forgetting - without the lens of habit. The difference in the narrator's experience between the two performances, I argue, thus reveals the way in which forgetting becomes key to dismantling habit in the perception of a work of art.

Habit takes on a very particular form in the narrator's expectations of Berma's performance, as discussed above. The narrator is used to the conventions he recognizes in actors who, with their "talent" and "visage corrects," appear to conform to one's ideas of "beauté," "largeur de style," and "pathétique." The dramatic readings of the actresses who play Aricie and Ismène conform to these standards, because they render a particular interpretation - or the actor's own contribution to the text - visible. The narrator's ideas of "talent" and "pathétique," in other words, are rooted firmly in the notion that good acting consists of a highly dramatic interpretation of a text, in which the interpretation may be easily separated from the role itself: in other words, as Bryan Reddick argues, that "the talent or genius of la Berma would be distinct from the role Racine had created."<sup>155</sup> This expectation runs counter to Berma's genius, which, as we will see later, consists precisely in rendering her interpretation - and her talent itself - invisible.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> See p. 687 in "Proust: the 'La Berma' Passages." *The French Review*. Vol. 42, no. 5, 1969, p. 683-692.

<sup>156</sup> As we learn later, Berma's genius renders her interpretation inseparable from the material of the text itself, which she interiorizes to the point of embodying it: "Les intentions entourant comme une bordure

The narrator's forgetting of Berma, and, in turn, his indifference to her, upends this expectation. There is a long interval in time - "[des] années d'oubli" - that takes place before the narrator's second encounter with *la Berma*, making the narrator completely indifferent to her:

Celle-ci venait d'entrer en scène. Et alors, ô miracle, comme ces leçons que nous nous sommes vainement épuisés à apprendre le soir et que nous retrouvons en nous, sues par coeur, après que nous avons dormi, comme aussi ces visages des morts que les efforts passionnés de notre mémoire poursuivent sans les retrouver, et qui, quand nous ne pensons plus à eux, sont là devant nos yeux, avec la ressemblance de la vie, le talent de la Berma qui m'avait fui quand je cherchais si avidement à en saisir l'essence, maintenant, après ces années d'oubli, dans cette heure d'indifférence, s'imposait avec la force de l'évidence à mon admiration. Autrefois, pour tâcher d'isoler ce talent, je défalquais en quelque sorte de ce que j'entendais le rôle lui-même, le rôle, partie commune à toutes les actrices qui jouaient *Phèdre* et que j'avais étudié d'avance pour que je fusse capable de le soustraire, de ne recueillir comme résidu que le talent de Mme Berma. Mais ce talent que je cherchais à percevoir en dehors du rôle, il ne faisait qu'un avec lui.<sup>157</sup>

This forgetting, however, is productive; having forgotten Berma and become indifferent to her, the narrator no longer strives to see her through the narrow - and mistaken - lens of his own notion of the dramatic arts. When the narrator no longer seeks "si avidement" to understand Berma, he may finally appreciate it precisely because the interference of the conscious mind - the narrator's *habitudes* and aesthetic expectations that he initially carried into Berma's initial performance - is no longer at play.

This function of forgetting is suggested as well in the narrator's comparison of Berma's talent to involuntary memory. In order to remember "ces visages morts," one must no longer remember or even think about them. It is only "quand nous ne pensons plus à eux" that these memories return. The narrator emphasizes here the role of forgetting in suppressing or

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majestueuse ou délicate la voix et la mimique d'Aricie, d'Ismène, d'Hippolyte, j'avais pu les distinguer; mais *Phèdre* se les était intériorisées...." (II, 348).

<sup>157</sup> II, 348.

eliminating habitual impressions: it is when the conscious mind no longer holds a conscious image of the person - when the work of voluntary memory and habit are no longer present - that one recovers the desired memory. The comparison suggests that, like the person who can remember someone only when the image provided by voluntary memory fades, the narrator understands Berma's talent when forgetting has undermined his initial impressions of her first performance - impressions shaped by his aesthetic *habitudes*.

Whereas in the above passage, this function of forgetting remains theoretical, its practical implications become clear in the narrator's experience of Berma's second performance itself. From the very opening of the curtains, the narrator's forgetting of Berma transforms his perception of her performance. The narrator's indifference to her leads him, as he recognizes with a certain "melancolie," to follow her performance with less attention:

Puis le rideau se leva. Je ne pus constater sans mélancolie qu'il ne me restait rien de mes dispositions d'autrefois quand, pour ne rien perdre du phénomène extraordinaire que j'aurais été contempler au bout du monde, je tenais mon esprit préparé comme ces plaques sensibles que les astronomes vont installer en Afrique, aux Antilles, en vue de l'observation scrupuleuse d'une comète ou d'une éclipse...<sup>158</sup>

The narrator's indifference to Berma produces a state of inattention, in which the narrator does not strive to observe every detail of Berma's performance. Furthermore, he no longer experiences performance with his former "dispositions d'autrefois"; the desire to isolate Berma's talent from the role she is playing - an expectation rooted in the narrator's aesthetic habits and what he has come to expect of the dramatic arts. In the narrator's "heure d'indifférence," the narrator no longer carries his previous "dispositions," or expectations, into his perception of Berma's performance.

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<sup>158</sup> II, 344.

This dissolution of the narrator's previous expectations after a long period of forgetting - expectations informed by particular aesthetic *habitudes* - constitutes the main difference in the narrator's appreciation of Berma's talent:

Mon impression, à vrai dire, plus agréable que celle d'autrefois, n'était pas différente. Seulement *je ne la confrontais plus à une idée préalable*, abstrait et fausse, du génie dramatique, et je comprenais que le génie dramatique, c'était justement cela.<sup>159</sup>

No longer perceiving Berma through the lens of a particular notion of the dramatic arts - "une idée préalable, abstrait et fausse, du génie dramatique" - the narrator may recognize that Berma's talent, contrary to what he had become accustomed to, consists precisely in its invisibility:

Mais ce talent que je cherchais à apercevoir en dehors du rôle, il ne faisait qu'un avec lui....Les intentions entourant comme une bordure majestueuse ou délicate la voix et la mimique d'Aricie, d'Ismène, d'Hippolyte, j'avais pu les distinguer; mais Phèdre se les était intériorisées, et mon esprit n'avait pas réussi à arracher à la diction et aux attitudes, à appréhender dans l'avare simplicité de leurs surfaces unies, ces trouvailles, ces effets qui n'en dépassaient pas, tants ils s'y étaient profondément résorbés.<sup>160</sup>

Finally, the narrator understands Berma's true talent: her art is invisible because she has interiorized the character of Phèdre to the point that the role cannot be separated from Berma herself. In the best performances, the narrator learns, art conceals itself.

The narrator thus learns to appreciate Berma's talent precisely because, having forgotten her and the expectations he had attached to her initial performance, he is capable of interpreting her performance without his "idée préalable" about artistic talent. In his state of indifference after "années d'oubli," he no longer aims to isolate her talent from her role, and therefore may paradoxically recognize Berma's true talent. If the forgetting between the narrator's encounters of Berma is cause for "mélancolie," it ultimately also serves to produce a change in perception

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<sup>159</sup> II, 348-9; emphasis mine.

<sup>160</sup> II, 348.

that removes the narrator's initial associations from his perception of Berma the second time around, allowing the narrator to recognize Berma's talent.

"Ces Poncifs" of Art: Vinteuil and *Habitude*

The narrator's initial disappointment to Berma's performance closely echoes his - and the Verdurin clan's - response to Vinteuil's music. The narrator similarly describes a habitual response to Vinteuil's music as a reaction shaped by the aesthetic norms of the time. Initially, the response of the public is one of disappointment, because truly original works neither correspond to the artistic trends of their time, nor to their expectations of art:

Comme le public ne connaît du charme, de la grâce, des formes de la nature que ce qu'il en a puisé dans les poncifs d'un art lentement assimilé, et qu'un artiste original commence par rejeter ces poncifs, M. et Mme Cottard, image en cela du public, ne trouvaient ni dans la sonate de Vinteuil, ni dans les portraits du peintre [de 'M. Biche'], ce qui faisait pour eux l'harmonie de la musique et la beauté de la peinture.<sup>161</sup>

The Cottards, representing the "image...du public," are unable to appreciate the new figures they see in the portraits of M. Biche, which appear to them as "alourdie[s] et vulgarisé[s]," because these figures do not align with the customs of the particular "école de peinture" they have become accustomed to. This mode of habitual understanding is extended, by analogy, to how they hear music: much as they cannot appreciate the beauty of something novel in M. Biche's portraits, neither can they understand the "harmonie" of Vinteuil's music. Because the Cottards wish to see and hear in a work of art that which they already are familiar with, they are incapable of understanding the originality of Vinteuil's *Sonate*, which they hear as notes played "au hasard

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<sup>161</sup> I, 210.



sur le piano” because his compositions do not cohere with “les formes auxquelles ils étaient habitués.”<sup>162</sup>

However, as the narrator explains, a truly original artist begins by rejecting “ces poncifs,” creating something which is neither in accord with commonplace artistic trends of the time, nor with particular schools of art. The narrator’s remarks on the public response to an original work of art not only emphasize the originality and difference of the work of art from others’ compositions, but also illuminate how habit may affect the listening experience with respect to music, in spite of the privileged status of music as a nonlinguistic art: listening prevents listeners from understanding the unique qualities of great artists who, by definition, defy aesthetic expectations and norms. A preconceived understanding of what music should be - an understanding rooted in aesthetic norms or styles with which the listener is already familiar with - poses the initial obstacle to understanding a musical *chef-d’oeuvre*.

Although the narrator is eventually able to overcome his initial disappointment upon hearing Vinteuil’s *Sonate* and *Septuor*, as will be discussed further below, he is nevertheless also privy to the effects of habit. Describing his own reactions to Vinteuil’s music, and the joyous motif in the *Septuor* in particular, the narrator attributes his initial disappointment to his “impression initiale.” Initially, the narrator hears that which he is already familiar with - “ce qu’on connaissait déjà”: “Dans la Sonate de Vinteuil les beautés qu’on découvre le plus tôt sont aussi celles dont on se fatigue le plus vite et pour la même raison sans doute, qui est qu’elles diffèrent moins de ce qu’on connaissait déjà.”<sup>163</sup> Certain musical elements thus initially grasp his attention only because they are no different from what he already knows, and it is these familiar

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> I, 521.

elements that the narrator first appreciates. The narrator's initial impression of Vinteuil's music is similarly rooted in habit and a desire for the familiar that initially prevents him from fully appreciating Vinteuil's music.

Habitual listening may thus be defined as that which, as a result of the listener's own preconceived notions, as well as habituation to particular artistic norms and conventions, shapes the listener's initial impressions of Vinteuil's music. As discussed above, the definition of a *chef-d'oeuvre* is in stark contrast to habitual listening: a *chef-d'oeuvre* is defined by its novelty and its difference from that which is familiar. Habitual listening, however, as illustrated in the initial reactions of the Verdurins', Swann, and even the narrator, draws the listener's attention to what they are already familiar with. A habitual response to music therefore, by limiting the listener to hearing what they already know, hinders the listener's ability to appreciate the most compelling aspects of a *chef-d'oeuvre* - its innovative beauty and originality.

This relationship between habit and aesthetic innovation is made explicit in *JF*, in which the narrator argues that a habitual reaction to art - one's preconceived aesthetic understanding - must be overcome before one can appreciate the "nouveau" of a work of art:

D'ailleurs toute nouveauté ayant pour condition l'élimination préalable du poncif auquel nous étions habitués et qui nous semblait la réalité même, toute conversation neuve, aussi bien que toute peinture, toute musique originales, paraîtra toujours alambiquée et fatigante.<sup>164</sup>

Habit, restricting aesthetic appreciation to the familiar, prevents the listener from appreciating the originality of a piece of music. It is only after the "élimination" of the "poncif auquel nous étions habitués" - the elimination of the artistic clichés and conventions one has become accustomed to - that one may appreciate original art; without the "élimination" of this habitual

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<sup>164</sup> I, 542.

reaction, aesthetic innovation is initially perceived as too confusing and wearisome (“alambiquée et fatigante”) to be appreciated. The ability to grasp the most rewarding aspect of music - a unique beauty that does not correlate to the familiar or to one’s “collection de nos idées” - thus depends on moving beyond a habitual response to music.

### Musical Memory: The Subconscious “Ouvrier” and Understanding Novel Concepts

Forgetting allows the listener to overcome their initial habitual response to music in more than one way. As will be discussed later, as is true of the forgetting that takes place in between *la Berma*’s performances, the forgetting that takes place over the narrator’s successive hearings of the *Sonate de Vinteuil* allows for the renewal of perception, mitigating the effects of habit. Before considering the effects of a similar interval of forgetting between the narrator’s encounters of Vinteuil’s music, however, I first examine the role of *oubli* in preserving and developing forgotten impressions within the subconscious. The description of musical listening in *P*, specifically with respect to the *Sonate de Vinteuil*, reveals the role of *oubli* - the relegation of forgotten impression to the subconscious - in musical understanding. Impressions initially too novel and complex - which challenge one’s aesthetic *habitudes* - are not consciously registered yet inscribed within the subconscious. Their relegation to *oubli*, however, far from preventing understanding, contributes to it. As the listener is exposed to certain novel impressions repeatedly, these impressions, initially too novel to understand, gradually take shape within the subconscious, permitting for an understanding that bypasses the faculty of the intellect and, in turn, habitual perception.

Musical memory in *RTP* - that which makes understanding possible while listening to music - has often been assumed to refer to conscious memory, perhaps because the comparison

of memory to “un ouvrier qui travaille à établir des fondations durables” evokes the notion of active, and therefore conscious memory.<sup>165</sup> Recently, however, Claudia Brodksy and John Hamilton’s observations on the nature of musical memory have questioned the accepted notion that “ouvrier” refers to conscious memory. Brodsky writes that this “laborer” belongs to neither voluntary nor involuntary memory; instead, it transcribes the “pure sensation of sound” in “a repeatable form...free of associations.”<sup>166</sup> Hamilton emphasizes the bypassing of conscious memory in the listening experience, drawing upon Jean-Marie Guyau’s articulation of the phonograph as unconscious memory,<sup>167</sup> a sound technology which, like the gramophone, possesses no “self-consciousness” and cannot be said to “remember.”<sup>168</sup> Their scholarship, which emphasizes the subconscious nature of memory, enables me to consider not only how the subconscious may preserve impressions in order to make remembrance possible, but how the gramphonic inscription of forgotten impressions permits initially confusing impression to take shape and crystallize within the subconscious over time. I propose that the subconscious becomes the means to a gradual development of musical understanding akin to the learning that takes place during sleep, allowing the listener to grasp acoustic impressions that were initially too novel and complex to understand.

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<sup>165</sup> I, 206.

<sup>166</sup> See p. 1027 in “Remembering Swann: Memory and Representation in Proust.” *MLN: Comparative Literature*. Vol. 102, No. 5, Dec. 1987.

<sup>167</sup> As referenced in Hamilton’s article, see p. 30-31 of Friedrich Kittler’s *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* for citations of Jean-Marie Guyau’s “Memory and Phonograph.” Trans. G. Winthrop-Young and M. Wutz. Stanford: Stanford UP: 1999.

<sup>168</sup> See Hamilton, *ibid.*, p. 163.

John Hamilton uses the analogy of the gramophone, a machine with no capability for consciousness, to describe this phenomenon of acoustic impressions that are transcribed by memory without conscious mediation; impressions are, as in gramophonic inscription, recorded without the mediation of consciousness.<sup>169</sup> The possibility for remembrance, Hamilton argues, is dependent on a trigger which produces a “play-back,” but also on the preservation of memory within the subconscious: “acoustic phenomena, which are filed away, forgotten, and only thus eligible for recall.”<sup>170</sup> The inscription of impressions within the subconscious leaves a groove which, allows the listener to recall the initial impression upon hearing it again. It is thus not conscious memory which is hard at work during the listening experience, but the subconscious; furthermore, Hamilton suggests that the subconscious enregistrement of impressions and their retrieval is analogous to involuntary memory, in that involuntary memory, like gramophonic inscription, “reminds the conscious memory of what it has lost,” all the while bypassing conscious mediation.<sup>171</sup> This section builds upon Hamilton’s observations on the subconscious nature of gramophonic inscription in particular in order to consider how it may apply not only to involuntary retrieval, as Hamilton has shown, but may also extend to the more gradual process of understanding which takes place across successive hearings as a result of this inscription.

The narrator’s description of Swann’s initial encounter with the *Sonate* as a “transcription sommaire et provisoire” bears out the notion that acoustic impressions enter through the

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166.

<sup>171</sup> Hamilton writes, “[i]nvoluntary memory operates on the basis of a recording instrument, insofar as it reminds the conscious memory of what it has lost.” *Ibid.*, p. 163.

subconscious, as John Hamilton has observed. The music one hears vanishes before the conscious mind may understand it:

Sans doute les notes que nous entendons alors, tendent déjà, selon leur hauteur et leur quantité, à couvrir devant nos yeux des surfaces de dimensions variées, à tracer des arabesques, à nous donner des sensations de largeur, de ténuité, de stabilité, de caprice. Mais les notes sont évanouies avant que ces sensations soient assez formées en nous pour ne pas être submergées par celles qu'éveillent déjà les notes suivantes ou même simultanées. Et cette impression continuerait à envelopper de sa liquidité et de son 'fondu' les motifs qui par instants en émergent, à peine discernables, pour plonger aussitôt et disparaître... si la mémoire, comme un ouvrier qui travaille à établir des fondations durables au milieu des flots, en fabriquant pour nous des facsimilés de ces phrases fugitives, ne nous permettait de les comparer à celles qui leur succèdent et de les différencier. Ainsi à peine la sensation délicieuse que Swann avait ressentie était-elle expirée, que sa mémoire lui en avait fourni séance tenante une transcription sommaire et provisoire, mais sur laquelle il avait jeté les yeux tandis que le morceau continuait, si bien que la même impression était tout d'un coup revenue, elle n'était déjà plus insaisissable.<sup>172</sup>

A "fac-similé" of these "phrases fugitives" is recorded by memory. However, the acoustic impressions, the first time one hears them, have not been consciously registered. Conscious perception is not fast enough to consciously grasp sounds before they have already been succeeded by new ones: "les notes sont évanouies avant que ces sensations *soient assez formées en nous pour ne pas être submergées* par celles qu'éveillent déjà les notes suivantes ou même simultanées."<sup>173</sup> The sensations evoked by the rapid stream of new acoustic impressions are too evanescent to be perceived by the conscious mind: these sensations vanish before they are "assez formées en nous."<sup>174</sup> The preservation of these "phrases fugitives" in spite of this initial lack of comprehension, however, suggests that these impressions are not remembered through conscious memory, but rather recorded in a way that bypasses cognition: through the subconscious. It is this recording capacity of the subconscious memory, which transcribes acoustic impressions into

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<sup>172</sup> I, 206.

<sup>173</sup> I, 206; my emphasis.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

the subconscious without conscious mediation, as John Hamilton has suggested, which makes acoustic impressions understandable when heard again.

This initial inscription serves Swann once again in *DCS*, making it possible for Swann to grasp aspects of Vinteuil's music which had gone unnoticed:

Elle [la petite phrase] avait disparu. Swann savait qu'elle reparaitrait à la fin du dernier mouvement, après tout un long morceau que le pianiste de Mme Verdurin sautait toujours. Il y avait là d'admirables idées *que Swann n'avait pas distinguées à la première audition et qu'il percevait maintenant, comme si elles se fussent, dans le vestiaire de sa mémoire, débarrassées du déguisement uniforme de la nouveauté.*<sup>175</sup>

The notion of subconscious transcription is once again invoked here: although Swann did not distinguish the acoustic impressions of these "admirables idées" in the initial encounter, they nevertheless were preserved within the "vestiaire de sa mémoire." As Jean-Jacques Nattiez notes in *Proust as Musician*, the "intervention of memory" between successive hearings is clear here; there has been a development in understanding over the course of repeated hearings.<sup>176</sup> The turn of phrase "vestiaire de sa mémoire," however, does not indicate voluntary or conscious memory, but rather suggests that the memory of these "admirable idées" are drawn from the recesses of the narrator's mind. The "admirable idées," unnoticed yet preserved within the subconscious, are made understandable over time through repetition, such that although Swann could not initially distinguish them, repeated hearings allow them to take shape in the subconscious until they are eventually - after being "débarrassées" of their novelty - made available to the conscious mind.

In *JF*, the narrator once more touches upon the subject of musical memory, when Odette plays a part of the *Sonate* on the piano for him:

Parfois...Mme Swann se mettait au piano. Ce fut un de ces jours-là qu'il lui arriva de me jouer la partie de la Sonate de Vinteuil où se trouve la petite phrase que Swann avait tant

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<sup>175</sup> I, 345; emphasis mine.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

aimée. Mais souvent on n'entend rien, si c'est une musique un peu compliquée qu'on écoute pour la première fois. Et pourtant plus tard on m'eut joué deux ou trois fois cette Sonate, je me trouvai la connaître parfaitement.<sup>177</sup>

As Nattiez has noted, time is an essential factor in the “understanding and appreciation of works of art.”<sup>178</sup> Initially, the narrator hears and distinguishes nothing, as is most likely the case for many listeners, he observes: “souvent on n'entend rien.” Nevertheless, after hearing the *Sonate* a few times, the narrator finds that he has somehow suddenly come to know the *Sonate*: “je me trouvai la connaître parfaitement.” This crystallization thus takes shape without the intervention of the conscious mind: conscious effort is elided here, as the *Sonate* gradually becomes clear without agency on the part of the listener. This process belies the work of the subconscious: the transcription of an initial acoustic impression - forgotten but preserved - makes it possible, for this initial impression to be solidified after the course of several hearings, without, however, the listener being aware of this process.

The narrator's further elaboration on musical memory in the same passage further emphasizes this subconscious element of musical understanding:

Aussi n'a-t-on pas tort de dire ‘entendre pour la première fois.’ Si l'on n'avait vraiment, comme on l'a cru, rien distingué à la première audition, la deuxième, la troisième seraient autant de premières, et il n'y aurait pas de raison pour qu'on comprît quelque chose de plus à la dixième. Probablement ce qui fait défaut, la première fois, ce n'est pas la compréhension, mais la mémoire. Car la nôtre, relativement à la complexité des impressions auxquelles elle a à faire face pendant que nous écoutons, est infime, aussi brève que la mémoire d'un homme qui en dormant pense mille choses qu'il oublie aussitôt, ou d'un homme tombé à moitié en enfance qui ne se rappelle pas la minute d'après ce qu'on vient de lui dire. Ces impressions multiples, la mémoire n'est pas capable de nous en fournir immédiatement le souvenir. Mais celui-ci se forme en elle peu à peu et, à l'égard des oeuvres qu'on a entendues deux ou trois fois, on est comme le

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<sup>177</sup> I, 520.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.



collégien qui a relu à plusieurs reprises avant de s'endormir une leçon qu'il croyait ne pas savoir et qui la récite par coeur le lendemain matin.<sup>179</sup>

Memory is entirely lacking in this initial encounter (“ce qui fait défaut...[c'est] la mémoire”). The analogy of the inability to remember in the initial listening experience to the “homme qui en dormant pense mille choses qu'il oublie aussitôt, ou d'un homme tombé à moitié en enfance qui ne se rappelle pas la minute d'après ce qu'on vient de lui dire” highlights that this initial impression is not available to the conscious mind. The speed of multiple impressions in the initial auditory experience (“ces impressions multiples”), the narrator further explains, makes it impossible for this to be retained consciously: “la mémoire n'est pas capable de nous en fournir immédiatement le souvenir.” Although it would appear that one hears and remembers nothing upon listening to a piece of music for the first time, the narrator observes that this is in fact untrue: if it were true, every subsequent hearing would appear to be as new as the first, because there would be no impression to build upon. This is not the case, however: with every hearing, this initial impression, forgotten yet preserved, continues to become more understandable - “la deuxième, la troisième” impressions are not in fact “autant de premières.” One thus does not hear the “dixième” hearing as if it were the first time - “pour la première fois” - in spite of the initial “défaut” of memory: although the “première audition” initially escapes conscious perception, it is preserved elsewhere, making future understanding possible. This gradual understanding, in which impressions escape conscious perception yet are preserved outside of the reach of the conscious mind, suggests that these acoustic impressions have been inscribed within the subconscious.

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<sup>179</sup> I, 520.

Acoustic impressions not only enter into the subconscious, but also are described as taking shape within the subconscious, remaining isolated from conscious perception until they have solidified enough to become recognizable to the conscious mind. The deepening of understanding through listening occurs through repeated hearings: understanding takes shape “peu à peu” after having heard a piece “deux ou trois fois.” After hearing a musical phrase several times, an initially confusing acoustic impression becomes no longer unrecognizable and may be consciously grasped by the listener. However, conscious recognition only takes place once acoustic impressions have solidified enough to become recognizable. Even as the listener encounters the same acoustic impression repeatedly, the impression is not perceived consciously. The narrator describes the understanding the listener arrives at as something that they hear as if for the first time: “Aussi n’a-t-on pas tort de dire ‘entendre pour la première fois.’” In other words, the acoustic impression one perceives after several repeated hearings is not one that has been consciously registered up until that point. When one comes to recognize an initially confused impression, one hears it as if for the first time because this impression has remained within the subconscious; the initial auditory experience takes shape “peu à peu” until it eventually becomes available to the conscious mind. Acoustic impressions are thus not only inscribed within the subconscious but develop within it as each successive hearing deepens the groove established by the initial auditory inscription over time.

An analogous instance of subconscious understanding similarly takes place in *JF*, in which the “ordre trop nouveau” of new acoustic impressions, initially too unfamiliar to be grasped, is relegated to the subconscious:

Dans la Sonate de Vinteuil, les beautés qu’on découvre le plus tôt sont aussi celles dont on se fatigue le plus vite et pour la même raison sans doute, qui est qu’elles diffèrent moins de ce qu’on connaissait déjà. Mais quand celles-là se sont éloignées, il nous reste à aimer telle phrase que son ordre trop nouveau pour offrir à notre esprit rien que confusion

nous avait rendue indiscernable et gardée intacte; alors elle devant qui nous passions tous les jours sans le savoir et qui s'était réservée, qui pour le pouvoir de sa seule beauté était devenue invisible et restée inconnue, elle vient à nous la dernière.<sup>180</sup>

The conscious mind, or “esprit” does not register these impressions: unfamiliar impressions are forgotten as soon as they are heard, because the “confusion” they create for the conscious mind render these impressions “indiscernable,” they in turn enter into the subconscious, where they are, however, recorded and preserved, “gardée intacte.” Even as the narrator encounters an initially confusing phrase repeatedly, these encounters remain unrecognized by the conscious mind. The narrator passes by them repeatedly without recognizing them consciously: “elle devant qui nous passions tous les jours sans le savoir....” Nevertheless, as each forgotten encounter enters into the subconscious, repeated encounters gives shape to the acoustic impression so that eventually it may pass from the subconscious to the conscious mind, which finally is able to perceive and understand it. The subconscious is thus positioned here as that which makes difficult musical concepts understandable not as a result of conscious memory but precisely because, as phrases are forgotten and become “invisible” and “inconnue” within the subconscious, their inscription within the subconscious - as a result of forgetting - allows understanding to take shape.

Finally, the narrator directly alludes to the subconscious nature of understanding in the listening experience in his comparison of musical understanding to the learning that takes place during sleep: “Mais celui-ci se forme en elle peu à peu et, à l'égard des oeuvres qu'on a entendues deux ou trois fois, on est comme le collégien qui a relu à plusieurs reprises avant de s'endormir une leçon qu'il croyait ne pas savoir et qui la récite par coeur le lendemain matin.”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> I, 521.

<sup>181</sup> I, 520.

The analogy of the “collégien” highlights the subconscious element of musical memory: the process of understanding does not occur in a state of consciousness for the student, but rather in the interval of sleep after having reread a lesson several times. The *collégien* did not consciously understand what he had read while awake, believing that he did not know his lessons: (“il croyait ne pas savoir...”). However, the student’s impressions have been subconsciously stored, making understanding possible later. While sleeping, these stored impressions take shape and solidify within the subconscious such that upon waking up, the *collégien* finds he suddenly knows them. The analogy of the listening experience to subconscious understanding in the *collégien*’s suggests that the narrator meant to emphasize that for the listener, as is the case for the *collégien*, the subconscious is a key element of arriving at an understanding of concepts that were initially too new for the mind to grasp. The comparison emphasizes that new musical concepts are understood not only as a result of time or repetition, but because of the agency of the subconscious in developing forgotten impressions.

This type of musical listening is desirable, as it allows music to be understood in a way that bypasses the intellect. Proust valorizes direct impressions, as opposed to reason, as a means of understanding music in *P*, making light of “musicographes” who attempt to understand a composer’s music:

Prière, espérance qui était au fond la même, reconnaissable sous ces déguisements dans les diverses oeuvres de Vinteuil, et, d'autre part, qu'on ne trouvait que dans les oeuvres de Vinteuil. Ces phrases-là, les musicographes pourraient bien trouver leur apparentement, leur généalogie, dans les oeuvres d'autres grands musiciens, mais seulement pour des raisons accessoires, des ressemblances extérieures, des analogies plutôt ingénieusement trouvées par le raisonnement que senties par l'impression directe. Celle que donnaient ces phrases de Vinteuil était différente de toute autre, comme si, en dépit des conclusions qui semblent se dégager de la science, l'individuel existait.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> III, 760.

“Musicographes” may seek to understand the connections within a musician’s work by finding similarities to other musicians’ styles, but such analysis is superficial, discovering only “des ressemblances extérieures, des analogies plutôt ingénieusement trouvées par le raisonnement que senties par l’impression directe.” That which makes Vinteuil’s music unique - its individuality - cannot be understood by the intellect. By definition, its very novelty - its very difference from all other art - defies aesthetic convention and what the public knows about art. It is fitting, then, that the listener, as described in *P*, comes to understand the most unique phrases in Vinteuil’s music not through the intellect but as a result of impressions that gradually take shape within the subconscious.

In music, as in life, it is thus the subconscious that acts as a powerful mechanism for understanding, allowing the listener to grasp new impressions that had initially escaped his comprehension - precisely because they initially bypass the faculty of the intellect. Musical understanding is posited as a process in which impressions initially resistant to intellectual understanding may finally be understood without the intellect: by their inscription - and development - within the subconscious. It is ultimately *oubli* that permits the listener to appreciate certain impressions which, initially too complex and novel to be understood, the conscious mind alone is incapable of understanding.

### Swann and the *Sonate de Vinteuil*: Forgetting and Remembering the *Petite Phrase*

*Oubli* thus contributes to an understanding of the *Sonate de Vinteuil* that bypasses the foibles of the intellect. The following sections expose how these impressions within the subconscious may be uncovered by the listener, positing that as the listener’s initial impressions -

those that align with their preconceived notions of art - are forgotten, the listener may discover those impressions forgotten and yet developed within the subconscious.

Swann's understanding of the *Sonate de Vinteuil* echoes the narrator's experience of *la Berma*; his understanding of the *petite phrase*, in particular, evolves as a result of the forgetfulness that takes place over the course of his successive encounters with the *Sonate*. Unlike the narrator, however, Swann is ultimately unable to further his understanding of Vinteuil's music because he continues to associate the *Sonate de Vinteuil* with the events in his life, interpreting the music through the lens of autobiography. Examining the change in Swann's understanding, however, even if it remains rooted in autobiographical interpretation, nevertheless shows the exchange of forgetting and memory at play, illustrating how forgetting, by weakening the hold of Swann's initial impressions, may facilitate the recovery of older, forgotten impressions of the *Sonate*.

Swann's forgotten associations of the *Sonate* with the Bois de Boulogne "tombé en catalepsie" in the springtime - the associations he eventually recovers - are initially masked by the dominance of his initial association of the *petite phrase* with Odette.<sup>183</sup> Swann's feverish state in his initiation to the *Sonate* - he is "fiévreux et chagrin" - shapes his initial hearing of the *Sonate*. In this feverish state, Swann links the *petite phrase* to Odette, and it becomes a symbol of Odette's relationship with Swann. For as long as Swann continues to be in this state, he continues associating Odette with the *Sonate*:

...je compris par d'autres propos de lui que ces feuillages nocturnes étaient tout simplement ceux sous l'épaisseur desquels, dans maint restaurant des environs de Paris, il avait entendu, bien des soirs, la petite phrase. Au lieu du sens profond qu'il lui avait si souvent demandé, ce qu'elle rapportait à Swann, c'était ces feuillages rangés, enroulés, peints autour d'elle...c'était tout un printemps dont il n'avait pu jouir autrefois, n'ayant

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<sup>183</sup> I, 523.

pas, *fiévreux et chagrin* comme il était alors, assez de bien-être pour cela, et que (comme on fait, pour un malade, des bonnes choses qu'il n'a pu manger), elle lui avait gardé.<sup>184</sup>

A change in Swann's emotional state, however, leads to the emergence of previous impressions that had escaped Swann's notice at the time because the end of his feverish state diminishes the strength of his initial impressions. Swann's feverish state had obscured other impressions which, although not consciously registered, were inscribed in his memory: the Bois de Boulogne represents, as the narrator suggests, the "environs de Paris" and "printemps" which had previously escaped Swann's notice during his infatuation with Odette - "tout ce à quoi [il] ne faisai[t] pas attention à cette époque."<sup>185</sup> Although these impressions of the Bois de Boulogne in the spring eluded Swann's grasp in his feverish state, the *petite phrase* preserves Swann's impressions from this period of time ("elle lui avait gardé"). As Swann's recovery from his feverish state - his "bien-être" - takes root, this in turn corresponds to the forgetting of his initial association of Odette with the *petite phrase*, an association formed during this feverish state. The weakening of the association of the *petite phrase* with Odette as a result of his sudden "bien-être" in strips the *petite phrase* of its habitual association of it with Odette so that Swann may suddenly remember the impressions of spring he had previously not taken notice of: "ces feuillages rangés, enroulés...tout un printemps dont il n'avait pu jouit autrefois."<sup>186</sup> A substitution of associations thus takes place: as Swann begins to forget Odette, he suddenly rediscovers his previous impressions of the Bois de Boulogne in the springtime.

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<sup>184</sup> I, 524.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

As Swann himself observes, an exchange of impressions has taken place: "...la phrase de Vinteuil ne me montre que tout ce à quoi je ne faisais pas attention à cette époque. De mes soucis, de mes amours de ce temps-là, elle ne me rappelle plus rien, elle a fait l'échange."<sup>187</sup> Involuntary memory allows these perceptions to return upon hearing the *petite phrase* once again, which acts as a trigger suddenly recalling previously unperceived impressions to Swann: it is the *petite phrase* which is given agency, acting as the trigger that has "fait l'échange." However, unlike other instances of involuntary memory, in which returning memory pushes established habitual associations out, as is the case when the narrator is flooded with forgotten impressions of his grandmother in "Les Intermittences du coeur,"<sup>188</sup> the order is reversed in this case: it is the weakening of initial associations which makes the return of memory possible. Swann does not recover these perceptions until a change in his emotional state allows him to forget his initial impression, allowing other impressions to come to the surface. The weakening of initial impressions facilitates the recovery of older impressions in music by stripping the listener of their habitual impressions, leaving room for forgotten impressions to come to the surface. This exchange between forgetting and memory makes an "échange" of impressions possible.

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> "Mais à peine eus-je touché le premier bouton de ma bottine, ma poitrine s'enfla, remplie d'un présence inconnue, divine..." (II, 176-7).



Ultimately, the exchange of forgetting and memory is a failure because Swann continues to interpret the Sonata through its associations to his life, an approach to art which repeats the mistakes of St. Beuve in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.<sup>189</sup> Swann confuses life with art:

...ce que la musique montre - du moins à moi - ce n'est pas du tout la 'Volonté en soi' et la 'Synthèse de l'infini,' mais, par exemple, le père Verdurin en redingote dans le Palmarium du Jardin d'Acclimatation.<sup>190</sup>

As this biographical approach to art continues to be the interpretive lens through which Swann understands art, the recovery of Swann's forgotten impressions only serves to remind Swann of associations of the *Sonate* with his own life, thus contributing little to further his understanding.

Nevertheless, the mutability of Swann's understanding serves to illustrate the role of forgetting in facilitating the recovery of previously forgotten impressions. The fading of Swann's initial association of Odette with the *petite phrase*, which no longer shapes how Swann hears the *Sonate*, allows him to uncover forgotten impressions from previous encounters with the Sonata. Forgetting thus permits for the discovery of forgotten impressions obscured by the strength of more dominant impressions, conforming to the principle of forgetting and remembering, even if what he ultimately remembers does not advance his understanding of the *Sonate* itself.

#### "Comme Tout Ce Qui Se Réalise Dans le Temps": The Narrator and the *Sonate de Vinteuil*

This exchange between forgetting and memory is repeated - and emphasized - in the narrator's experience of the *Sonate de Vinteuil*. The fleeting nature of music lends itself to being defined in particular by the ravages of time and, thus, forgetting. The narrator characterizes the

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<sup>189</sup> See p. 137 in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, *ibid.*, for an example of Proust's criticism of the aestheticization of life in art.

<sup>190</sup> I, 524.

experience of music in particular as privy to forgetfulness on the part of the listener: the narrator is unable to remember the entirety of the *Sonate*, not only while listening to the *Sonate* itself, but even after successive hearings. The *Sonate* episode, however, takes an unexpected twist, for it marks the moment in which the narrator recognizes that forgetting, instead of being a source of “mélancolie,” as he initially claims, is in fact part and parcel of understanding the work of art: the narrator identifies the discovery of forgotten impressions inscribed within the subconscious as dependent upon the forgetting of one’s initial impressions. The *Sonate*, however, not only discloses the value of the exchange between forgetting and memory; recurrent references to “chefs-d’oeuvre,” suggest that this lesson about forgetting extends beyond music to the perception of all innovative art. The experience of forgetting in the *Sonate de Vinteuil* episode, I argue, thus ultimately stands in for the experience of forgetting in the perception of all art: the forgetting that takes place over the course of understanding a work of art, far from being destructive, ushers in the return of forgotten impressions.

Forgetting, as in life, is inevitable in the successive hearings of a piece of music:

Mais bien plus, même quand j'eus écouté la Sonate d'un bout à l'autre, elle me resta presque tout entière invisible, comme un monument dont la distance ou la brume ne laissent apercevoir que de faibles parties. De là, la mélancolie qui s'attache à la connaissance de tels ouvrages, comme de tout ce qui se réalise dans le temps. Quand ce qui est le plus caché dans la Sonate de Vinteuil se découvrit à moi, déjà entraîné par l'habitude hors des prises de ma sensibilité, ce que j'avais distingué, préféré tout d'abord, commençait à m'échapper, à me fuir. Pour n'avoir pu aimer qu'en des temps successifs tout ce que m'apportait cette sonate, je ne la possédai jamais tout entière: elle ressemblait à la vie. Mais, moins décevants que la vie, ces grands chefs-d'oeuvre ne commencent pas par nous donner ce qu'ils ont de meilleur.<sup>191</sup>

Forgetting defines the very process of listening to music here. Even once the narrator has listened to the *Sonate* “d’un bout à l’autre,” there are still aspects of the *Sonate* lost to memory: “elle me

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<sup>191</sup> I, 521.

resta presque tout entière invisible, comme un monument dont la distance ou la brume ne laissent apercevoir que de faibles parties.” As the narrator remarks only a few lines earlier, this is especially true for aesthetically innovative works: “on ne retient pas tout de suite les oeuvres vraiment rares.”<sup>192</sup> A certain melancholy overtakes him, as he realizes that the perception of music, too, is governed by forgetting. Even when the narrator has heard the *Sonate* multiple times (“en des temps successifs”), he is unable to escape forgetting. Over time, certain parts that he initially preferred have begun to fade (“commençait à m’échapper, à me fuir”). In this respect, the *Sonate* resembles life: its fleeting nature means it is impossible to grasp all at once (“tout entière”). However, while forgetting is a melancholy aspect of life, the narrator immediately also recognizes that it serves a useful purpose in aesthetic appreciation: the *Sonate* brings the narrator to realize that there is an essential difference between art and life: works of art - “ces grands chefs-d’oeuvre” - are less disappointing than life because they do not begin by giving us “ce qu’ils ont de meilleur.”<sup>193</sup>

A paradigm of aesthetic appreciation is presented here: as Roger Shattuck observes, the greatest recompense arrives later rather than earlier when it comes to understanding art.<sup>194</sup> Why, however, is this the case? Does it simply take more time to understand a work of art? Edward Hughes suggests that it is not merely a matter of needing more time; rather, music reveals the necessity of a diachronic dimension in art. Commenting on the tendency of the listener to forget his earlier impressions, Edward Hughes has remarked that the understanding which takes place

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<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> See p. 238 in *Proust’s Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time* for a discussion of the pattern of “delayed revelation.”

over time in art, as characterized in the above passage, is “less incremental than sequential,” because in “grasping a new angle, we lose something previously acquired.”<sup>195</sup> In other words, the *Sonate de Vinteuil* does not only show that new works of art take time to master, but that this mastery is dependent upon a certain trade-off. Knowledge, as Hughes writes, is here depicted as a “perpetual state of negotiation.”

Forgetting is an advantage to the perception of art, the narrator suggests, precisely because it allows for such a negotiation. When the most hidden and profound aspects of the *Sonate* - those not grasped right away - are revealed to the narrator, the narrator’s initial impressions have already been forgotten: “Quand ce qui est le plus caché dans la Sonate de Vinteuil se découvrit à moi, déjà entraîné par l’habitude hors des prises de ma sensibilité, ce que j’avais distingué, préféré tout d’abord, commençait à m’échapper, à me fuir.”<sup>196</sup> As mentioned above, that which the narrator prefers “tout d’abord” are the “parties les moins précieuses”: the narrator appreciates them immediately only because they appeal to his aesthetic habits - to that which he is already familiar with. At the same time, over successive hearings, these initial impressions lose their appeal. Habit, paradoxically, eventually carries them outside of the reach of the conscious mind. Thus, by the time the narrator has discovered “ce qui est le plus caché,” these impressions are already “hors des prises de [s]a sensibilité” - they have already been forgotten, or are well on their way to being forgotten. The discovery of other, more interesting

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<sup>195</sup> See p. 25-26 in “‘Cette Ignorance Si Envahissante’: Oblivion, Posterity, Art.” *Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui, Vol. 12 (Swann at 100/ Swann à 100 ans)*. Ed. by Adam Watt. Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015, p. 18-34.

<sup>196</sup> I, 521.

parts of the *Sonate* cements the forgetting was already taking place: the narrator is no longer to remember his initial impressions whatsoever - they escape him completely.

The order of events appears somewhat ambiguous here: on the one hand, the narrator's initial impressions have already been forgotten ("hors des prises de [s]a sensibilité"); on the other, the arrival of a new impression completes the narrator's forgetting of these initial impressions. Do new impressions bring one to forget old impressions, or does forgetting old impressions bring one to discover new impressions? Whereas the latter may be true, it is ultimately the former that the narrator emphasizes only one line later:

Dans la Sonate de Vinteuil, les beautés qu'on découvre le plus tôt sont aussi celles dont on se fatigue le plus vite et pour la même raison sans doute, qui est qu'elles diffèrent moins de ce qu'on connaissait déjà. Mais quand celles-là se sont éloignées, il nous reste à aimer telle phrase que son ordre trop nouveau pour offrir à notre esprit rien que confusion nous avait rendue indiscernable et gardée intacte... alors elle devant qui nous passions tous les jours sans le savoir et qui s'était réservée, qui pour le pouvoir de sa seule beauté était devenue invisible et restée inconnue, elle vient à nous la dernière. Mais nous la quitterons aussi en dernier. Et nous l'aimerons plus longtemps que les autres, parce que nous aurons mis plus longtemps à l'aimer.<sup>197</sup>

Initially, the narrator may find parts of the Sonata immediately beautiful not because they are more beautiful, but because they are closer to what he already knows - "ce qu'on connaissait déjà." These initial impressions, in other words, are once again, rooted in his aesthetic habitudes. Over the course of successive hearings, however, these impressions eventually escape the narrator. It is once these impressions ("*quand* celles-là se sont éloignées") have been forgotten that the narrator may uncover the phrase forgotten yet preserved - "indiscernable et gardée intacte." This "exchange" between impressions is thus dependent upon the disappearance of the listener's initial impressions, which leave room for those impressions preserved within the subconscious. As discussed earlier, such impressions may not be perceived consciously at first,

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<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

but rather enter into the subconscious, where they gradually take shape over the course of successive encounters (“elle devant qui nous passions tous les jours”) until they may be perceived by the conscious mind.

The forgetting that takes place over “des temps successifs” thus facilitates a shift in attention to these preserved impressions which, once the initial impression no longer dominates the listener’s attention, the listener may finally discover. Forgetting therefore becomes essential to uncovering the newfound understanding that has been taking shape beneath the surface of more dominant impressions; by stripping the narrator of the force of his initial impressions, forgetting allows the narrator to suddenly recognize the beauty of parts of the *Sonate* which, preserved and developed within his subconscious, were waiting to be discovered. The experience of the *Sonate* therefore reveals not only that an exchange between forgetting and memory is part of the process of understanding music - but that such an exchange is beneficial. The most rewarding aspects of a work of art ultimately come last (“elle vient à nous dernière”) because it is the passing of time - and hence, forgetting - that makes such an exchange possible.

Although the perception of all arts arguably takes place in time, musical performance emphasizes the time-bound nature of perceiving music to the narrator, thus highlighting the benefits of forgetting in the perception of music. The diachronic dimension of music, however, not only brings the narrator to recognize the importance of forgetting for music alone. Although the focus of the narrator’s observations about forgetting are on music, he also refers repeatedly to great works of art in general. Discussing the difficulty of remembering the *Sonate* in its entirety, the narrator compares this to the difficulty that one has in remembering all rare works of art:

Et non seulement *on ne retient pas tout de suite les oeuvres vraiment rares*, mais même au sein de chacune de ces oeuvres-là, et cela m'arriva pour la Sonate de Vinteuil, ce sont les parties les moins précieuses qu'on perçoit d'abord.<sup>198</sup>

Something escapes perception - is forgotten - not only in the case of the *Sonate*, but in “les oeuvres vraiment rares” in general. This formulation already suggests that the *Sonate* stands in as an example of the forgetting that is inherent to the perception of all innovative art. This connection is made clear shortly thereafter:

Mais bien plus, même quand j'eus écouté la Sonate d'un bout à l'autre, elle me resta presque tout entière invisible, comme un monument dont la distance ou la brume ne laissent apercevoir que de faibles parties. De là, la mélancolie qui s'attache à *la connaissance de tels ouvrages*, comme de tout ce qui se réalise dans le temps.<sup>199</sup>

The forgetting the narrator experiences with respect to the *Sonate* is not particular to music alone; forgetting constitutes the experience of all great works of art - the “*connaissance de tels ouvrages*.”

The lesson the narrator draws about forgetting and the *Sonate* - that forgetting allows for a beneficial evolution in perception - is similarly extended to great works of art in the same passage: “Pour n'avoir pu aimer qu'en des temps successifs tout ce que m'apportait cette Sonate, je ne la possédai jamais tout entière : elle ressemblait à la vie. Mais, moins décevants que la vie, ces *grands chefs-d'oeuvre* ne commencent pas par nous donner ce qu'ils ont de meilleur.”<sup>200</sup> The time it takes to understand “*grands chefs-d'oeuvre*” - and the forgetting that inevitably takes place in the process - is not a source of melancholy, but rather, as in music, eventually produces a more rewarding understanding. Finally, after the narrator's description of the exchange of

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

forgetting and memory that happens over his successive hearings of the *Sonate* (“quand celles-là se sont éloignées...”), the narrator refers once again directly to this diachronic dimension of music as relevant to the appreciation of all art:

*Ce temps du reste qu'il faut à un individu – comme il me le fallut à moi à l'égard de cette Sonate – pour pénétrer une oeuvre un peu profonde, n'est que le raccourci et comme le symbole des années, des siècles parfois, qui s'écoulent avant que le public puisse aimer un chef-d'oeuvre vraiment nouveau.*<sup>201</sup>

The narrator suggests that the *Sonate* serves as an example of the time (“ce temps du reste”) - and the exchange of forgetting and memory - that the individual and the public need to “pénétrer une oeuvre un peu profonde.”

At every turn in this discussion of the *Sonate*, the narrator ties music to the perception of “grands chefs-d'oeuvre” in general. Music best exemplifies the fleeting nature of time, and therefore, the role of forgetting in art; nevertheless, the *Sonate* is ultimately a metaphor for the productive nature of forgetting in the aesthetic appreciation of all art. Although forgetting initially gives cause for melancholy, the narrator thus recognizes that the loss of memory that takes place across successive encounters with a work of art facilitates an evolution in perception; the forgetting of one's initial impressions of a great work of art makes it possible to move beyond habit, paving the way for the resurfacing of those impressions which, unknown to us, have taken shape within the subconscious, waiting to be discovered.

### Conclusion:

The ideal understanding of a work of art is thus not one in which understanding remains static, but rather one in which loss and forgetting is implicated as an inevitable - and useful - part

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<sup>201</sup> I, 521-2.



of aesthetic appreciation. The narrator's experience of *la Berma* and Vinteuil illustrate that habit is no less of an obstacle to art than to life. The narrator is initially unable to overcome his "collection d'idées" about art while listening to *la Berma*, preventing him from appreciating her genius. Similarly, the narrator's encounter with the *Sonate de Vinteuil* shows how even musical listening may become a matter of habit: the conscious mind initially hears music through the preconceived aesthetic notions to which the listener has become habituated, preferring that which is most familiar. These impressions rooted in habit, however, do not correspond to "the parties les plus précieuses" of Vinteuil's music, because what is most beautiful in a musical work is not what is already most familiar, but rather its original and novel aesthetic. The narrator's discussion about habit and art in his observations about *la Berma* are not limited to the actress herself, but to art in general. Similarly, in *P*, as well, habit is not endemic only to musical listening, but to the public perception of all art in general. Habit, thus, affects the perception of and ability to appreciate art, especially aesthetically innovative works of art which challenge what is most familiar - what one has become habituated to.

The narrator's experience of *la Berma*'s performances furthermore mirrors his experience of the *Sonate de Vinteuil*. The narrator's forgetting of *la Berma* not only brings him to forget the actress herself, but also the particular expectations and associations he had attached to her performance - associations rooted in his preconceived notions of what art should be. No longer burdened by these associations, the second time the narrator sees *la Berma*, he is able to appreciate her own unique talent. The narrator's disappointment and subsequent appreciation of *la Berma* reveals the way in which successive encounters with a work of art engender an experience of forgetting that creates a productive shift in perception.

The *Sonate de Vinteuil* makes clear what is implicit in the narrator's experience with *la Berma's* performances; that as with anything that takes place in time ("comme tout ce qui se réalise dans le temps"), the perception of music, and art in general, creates a certain forgetfulness that is itself necessary to understanding art. As I've argued, the inscription of these acoustic impressions within the subconscious makes it possible for the listener, for whom the novel work of art initially resists comprehension, to understand novel concepts: the repetition of forgotten acoustic impressions allows for a gradual understanding to crystallize within the subconscious such that eventually becomes recognizable to the conscious mind. However, it is the forgetting of the listener's initial impressions that allows the listener to uncover the other acoustic impressions that had taken shape within the subconscious. Although initially, the narrator interprets this forgetfulness as melancholic - the "mélancolie" that accompanies the awareness that all memory fades - he quickly recognizes that as one's initial impressions fade, other impressions - forgotten yet preserved - may rise to the surface. By removing the force of the listener's initial impressions, forgetting enables the listener to rediscover the forgotten impressions that initially escaped their notice. It is thus forgetting itself that allows the listener to uncover the acoustic impressions that take shape within the subconscious, creating a productive exchange, or "negotiation," between forgetting and memory.

Ultimately, however, music becomes an emblem of the experience of art as a whole. Proust interchangeably refers to music or "grands chefs-d'oeuvre" in the discussion of the narrator's experience of Vinteuil's *Sonate*. In music, the flux of impressions one experiences - and the difficulty in remembering them - emphasizes the effect of time on perception. Nevertheless, even as music may distinguish itself from the visual arts or from literature, the perception of all art takes place in time, as the narrator observes. The forgetting and

remembering involved in understanding the *Sonate de Vinteuil*, thus, serves to dramatize the experience of forgetting and remembering that takes place over successive encounters with a work of art. As is true of life, forgetting is not only destructive, leading to a sense of melancholy about the ephemerality of life and memory; its very destruction clears the mind of the *habitudes* that prevent us from understanding great new works of art, in turn unearthing new impressions forgotten but not lost, waiting to be discovered. These recovered impressions - impressions which, preserved and developed within the subconscious, bypass the effects of habit - allow for a more rewarding understanding of art that surpasses the listener's established aesthetic preferences.

Ultimately, what is most beautiful in a musical work is not what is already most familiar, but rather that which challenges one's aesthetic *habitudes* - its originality and novelty. The negotiation between forgetting and memory thus forms an integral part of understanding music, allowing the listener to move beyond the habitual listening of the first impressions, and, in so doing, permits the listener to appreciate the unique novelty of a true *chef-d'oeuvre*.

## **Chapter 3**

## Creating the Ideal Work of Art: *Oubli* and the Discovery of the Artist's *Patrie Perdue*

In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust describes writing as the act of following one's subconscious, or "inconscient": "Nous n'avons plus qu'à subir sans frein ce que nous dicte notre inconscient. Et c'est toute mon esthétique."<sup>202</sup> In the *Carnet de 1908*, in which Proust wrote down notes and ideas that would furnish the foundational ideas for the *Recherche*, he similarly tied literary creation to "[c]e qui se présente ainsi obscurément au fond de la conscience," or the "moi obscur":

Ce qui se présente ainsi obscurément au fond de la conscience, avant de le réaliser en œuvre, avant de le faire sortir au dehors, il faut lui faire traverser une région intermédiaire entre notre moi obscur et l'extérieur, notre intelligence, mais comment l'amener jusque-là, comment le saisir? On peut rester des heures à tâcher de se répéter l'impression première, le signe insaisissable qui était sur elle qui disait: approfondis-moi, sans s'en rapprocher / sans la faire venir à soi. Et pourtant c'est tout l'art c'est le seul art. Seul mérite d'être exprimé ce qui est apparu dans les profondeurs et habituellement sauf dans l'illumination d'un éclair, ou par des temps exceptionnellement clairs, animants, ces profondeurs sont obscures. Cette profondeur, cette inaccessibilité pour nous-mêmes est la seule marque de la valeur - ainsi peut-être qu'une certaine joie...<sup>203</sup>

Proust's conceptualization of art in the early stages of writing the *Recherche* is thus closely tied to the subconscious - the "moi obscur" - as its source. The question, however, is how the artist may extract the work of the *moi obscur*: "...mais comment l'amener jusque là [à l'extérieur], comment le saisir?" Yet another question is raised here, as well. The *moi obscur* must pass through the "région intermédiaire entre notre moi obscur et l'extérieur, notre intelligence." How, however, does the artist access the impressions contained within the *moi obscur* without the intervention of the intellect: "sans s'en rapprocher / sans la faire venir à soi"? In other words,

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<sup>202</sup> *CSB*, p. 640-61.

<sup>203</sup> Kolb, Philip. "Cahiers Marcel Proust no. 8: *Carnet de 1908*." *Etudes proustiennes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 102.

how can the artist consciously access the *moi obscur* in order to convey it in their art, while nevertheless safeguarding it from the mediation of the intellect? These questions are ultimately left out of *Bal de têtes* in a passage that echoes Proust's notes in the *Carnet de 1908*, in which the narrator insists that an artist must follow his "instinct" in order to draw from the "obscurité qui est en nous."<sup>204</sup> Nevertheless, the same questions, as this chapter aims to show, animates much of the discussion on artistic creation in the *Recherche*.

In seeking to answer these questions, this chapter focuses on *La Prisonnière* in particular, in which the narrator, discovering the "habileté technique" of Wagner, begins to question whether art - the product of the intellect - may convey aspects of the artist's self that remain hidden even to the artist themselves: the artist's *patrie perdue*. I propose that there are two types of *oubli* which, as described in *P*, may provide a possible answer to Proust's and the narrator's question of how to access the subconscious in order to create art: the *oubli*, or oblivion, of the artist's self, on the one hand, and the artist's forgetfulness of their own work, on the other. First, I ask what the relationship of the *moi obscur*, referred to in *RTP* as the artist's *patrie perdue* (a

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<sup>204</sup> "À tout moment l'artiste doit écouter son instinct, ce qui fait que l'art est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier....Les idées formées par l'intelligence pure n'ont qu'une vérité logique, une vérité possible, leur election est arbitraire....Seule l'impression, si chétive qu'en semble la matière, si invraisemblable la trace, est un critérium de vérité et à cause de cela mérite d'être appréhendée par l'esprit....L'impression est pour l'écrivain ce qu'est l'expérimentation pour le savant, avec cette différence que chez le savant le travail de l'intelligence précède et chez l'écrivain vient après: Ce que nous n'avons pas eu à déchiffrer, à éclaircir par notre effort personnel, ce qui était clair avant nous, n'est pas à nous. Ne vient de nous-même que ce que nous tirons de l'obscurité qui est en nous et que ne connaissent pas les autres" (IV, 458-459).

self lost and yet preserved by oblivion), is to artistic creation in *P*. Second, I consider the role of the forgetting that takes place in between the creation of a work of art and its revision as part of a creative process which, in *P*, the narrator outlines as a means of discovering the *patrie perdue*.

While several studies have focused on the role of *oubli* with respect to Proust's aesthetic, such as the work of Guillaume Perrier and Jerry Flieger, they have not considered *oubli* in the context of the process of artistic creation itself.<sup>205</sup> James Reid has shed light in *Proust, Beckett, and Narration* on the role of voluntary forgetting as a condition for the narrator's fulfillment of his vocation. However, Reid's definition of forgetting focuses on the deconstruction of structure of perception - "conventional signs of consciousness" - rather than the forgetting of past experience itself.<sup>206</sup> This chapter, by contrast, considers the relationship of involuntary forgetting, or *oubli* - as defined by traditional Proust scholarship as well as in my first two chapters - to artistic creation.

Although many have observed the role of *oubli* in protecting impressions from the intellect, they have not examined the implication of this function for artistic creation. Samuel

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<sup>205</sup> As mentioned previously, Perrier examines the ways in which *RTP* seeks to elicit the experience of involuntary memory for the reader. See *La Mémoire du lecteur*, *ibid*. Jerry Flieger discusses the way in which Proust's writing "multiplies possible ways of being and perceiving" at the textual level, including forgetting. However, Flieger is primarily interested in forgetting as Proust's repression of the self in order to "see his life through the eyes of Marcel, his... 'other.'" See p. 81 in "Proust, Freud, and the Art of Forgetting." *SubStance*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Issue 29, 1980, p. 66-82.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Beckett, Harald Weinrich, and Roger Shattuck, among others,<sup>207</sup> have observed that *oubli*'s primary function is to safeguard impressions from the intellect; they have not, however, considered the relationship of this *oubli* to preserving impressions from the intellect in the process of creating art. By examining the role of *oubli* within the context of artistic creation in the *Recherche*, this chapter aims, on the one hand to extend the existing scholarship on *oubli* from perception to artistic creation by exposing the ideal work of art as stemming from *oubli*; on the other hand, this chapter also adds to the scholarship on *oubli* by further developing the notion, as suggested in my first two chapters, that it is not only *oubli*'s ability to preserve, but the very destruction of memory itself, that is essential to the recovery of memory - for the purpose of artistic creation.

This chapter first considers the relationship of *oubli* as a possible source for the work of art. Proust's conceptualization of the artist's stylistic unity - the themes and motifs that unify a work of art - emphasizes the necessity of the artist's *oubli*, or oblivion, of certain aspects of the self never consciously registered, yet preserved by oblivion. The artist's *oubli* of this self, I argue, takes the form of the artist's *patrie perdue*: a self the artist is not consciously aware of and yet remains subconsciously attuned to during the creation of the work of art. The oblivion of this self, however, serves to safeguard the artist's *patrie* from the intellect, ensuring its involuntary -

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<sup>207</sup> See p. 17, 43-46 in *Proust, ibid.* See p. 150 in *Lethe, the Art and Critique of Forgetting, ibid.* See *Proust's Binoculars, ibid.* See also p. 136 in Gilles Deleuze's *Différences et Répétition, ibid.* Deleuze argues that forgetting preserves the qualitative difference between the past and the present moment as the virtual past - the past as it was never lived: "La perte ou l'oubli ne sont pas ici des déterminations qui doivent être surmontées, mais désignent au contraire la nature objective de ce qu'on retrouve au sein de l'oubli, et en tant que perdu."



and therefore authentic - expression in art. *Oubli*, I suggest, is thus valorized in *P* as the ideal source of art, permitting for the creation of a work of art that transcends the strictures of habit and voluntary memory.

If *oubli* is the ideal source of art, however, art nevertheless is also necessarily a product of the intellect. How, then, may the artist reconcile the efforts of the intellect with the desire to create a work of art in which the artist's *patrie perdue* is involuntarily expressed? The narrator, I argue, draws on the lessons he learns from Balzac, Wagner, and Raphaël, learning from their creative processes that *illumination rétrospective* - the artist's retrospective organization of their work - precludes the intervention of the intellect; retrospective illumination, he discovers, allows the artist to discover and reinforce the underlying unity of their work after its creation. The narrator, I argue, thus learns that retrospective illumination is a conscious means of ensuring that art is the product of the subconscious - the artist's forgotten *patrie perdue* - which remains lost until its discovery by the artist *après coup*.

From Balzac, Wagner, and Raphaël, the narrator, I suggest, also learns yet another valuable lesson: how the artist may recognize and uncover the patterns involuntarily expressed in their work by the *patrie perdue* in order to lend a retrospective unity to their work. Balzac, Wagner, and Raphaël discover the hidden unity in their work only after a long interval in forgetting between the creation and revision of a work of art in which the artist becomes an "étranger" to their own work. The ultimate lesson from Balzac, Wagner, and Raphaël, I argue, is thus not only that retrospective illumination ensures the involuntary expression of the artist's *patrie perdue*, but that the renewed perception afforded by this forgetting permits the artist to see beyond the conscious designs for their art - the work of the intellect - in order to recognize the work of their *patrie perdue*. I thus contend that retrospective illumination becomes a conscious

means to reproducing forgetting in order to remember: although the artist cannot will their work into oblivion, retrospective illumination creates an interval of forgetting which, by undoing the effects of habit, makes possible the discovery of the artist's *patrie perdue*.

Proust's analysis of and interpretation of the creative processes of artists such as Balzac, Wagner, and Ruskin in his letters and in *CSB* similarly demonstrates an attentiveness to their ability to discover - and retrospectively unify - aspects of their own *inconscient* in their work. Like the narrator, the lesson Proust appears to draw from these artists is that it is possible to create a work of art initially shaped by the subconscious - by one's *inconscient* - and yet retrospectively developed by the intellect. Proust directly expressed an interest in discovering aspects of his own *inconscient* in his writing. Furthermore, Proust's habit of retrospectively joining together unrelated fragments, a process facilitated by his use of *paperoles*, suggests the implementation of retrospective illumination. Finally, Proust's revisions reveal inconsistencies that point to his own forgetfulness of previous artistic intentions. I therefore propose that Proust's own creative method, similar to the creative process he outlined in *RTP*, most likely relied on retrospective illumination - a process that itself may have been informed by intervals of forgetting that made possible the discovery of his own *patrie perdue*.

This chapter thus contends that the ideal work of art is one that is involuntarily expressed by the artist's *inconscient* - the work of *oubli* - and yet is retrospectively enhanced by the intellect. At the same time, I propose that it is forgetting itself that allows the artist in *RTP* to discover the hidden unity produced by *oubli* for the purpose of artistic creation, a process of forgetting and remembering set into motion by retrospective illumination. This chapter therefore aims to suggest that the relationship between forgetting and remembering outlined in the novel thus far ultimately encapsulates the forgetting and remembering required of the artist to create

the ideal work of art. Much as the recovery of memory in the *moments bienheureux*, sleep, and the perception of art, is precipitated by forgetfulness, retrospective illumination permits the artist to forget in order to remember.

### Stylistic Unity and the *Oubli* of the Self: The Artist *Malgré Lui*

Discovering the work of the intellect present in Wagner's and Vinteuil's work (the artist's "habileté vulcanienne"), the narrator begins to question whether art can transcend the effects of habit and voluntary memory. The narrator's concerns are alleviated only when he discovers that there are aspects of the artist's work that escape the influence of the intellect. The narrator distinguishes the artist's deliberate attempts at unifying their work - the product of the intellect - from the underlying unity that defines an artist's stylistic unity; the unifying characteristics of the artist's art.<sup>208</sup> This stylistic unity is described as the manifestation of forgotten aspects of the artist's innermost self - their *patrie perdue*. Unlike the product of the intellect, stylistic unity convinces the narrator of art's ability to bypass the intellect because this unique unity, as characterized by the narrator, is the involuntary expression of the artist's *patrie perdue*. Forgetting is integral to this involuntary expression of the artist's *patrie perdue*. The artist's *patrie* remains forgotten, or *perdue*, during the process of artistic creation. This relegation of the artist's *patrie* to the subconscious allows for the preservation of the artist's *patrie* from the

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<sup>208</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez refers to artificial unity - deliberate resemblances - as a homogeneity that takes place as the result of the intellect - "the effort of the will." Personal style, on the other hand, is the "specificity that the work displays in relation to all the others at one and the same time as it shares a stylistic relationship with them" (61). Personal style, in other words, is an essential sameness in the artist's work. I am interested in the latter in this chapter. See *Proust as Musician*, *ibid.*

mediation of the intellect, ensuring that style is not motivated by the intellect, but rather the involuntary, unmediated expression of the artist's forgotten self. The ideal work of art - one that expresses the artist's unmediated self and makes art worthwhile - is thus ultimately dependent upon the artist's *oubli* as the condition for the unmediated return of the artist's *patrie* through his art.

Wagner's music initially proves to be a disappointment to the narrator, because his music - the product of his intellect - fails to capture the artist's unmediated identity - their "personnalité véritable." Playing Wagner's *Tristan* on the piano, the narrator is troubled by what he perceives to be an industrious labor ("labeur industriel") and vulcan-like skill ("habileté vulcanienne") in Wagner's music:

Chez [Wagner], quelle que soit la tristesse du poète, elle est consolée, surpassée - c'est-à-dire malheureusement un peu détruite - par l'allégresse du fabricant. Mais alors, autant que par l'identité que j'avais remarquée tout à l'heure entre la phrase de Vinteuil et celle de Wagner, j'étais troublé par cette habileté vulcanienne. Serait-ce elle [cette habileté vulcanienne] qui donnerait chez les grands artistes l'illusion d'une originalité foncière, irréductible, en apparence reflet d'une réalité plus qu'humaine, en fait produit d'un labeur industriel? Si l'art n'est que cela, il n'est pas plus réel que la vie, et je n'avais tant de regrets à avoir.<sup>209</sup>

The work of the intellect is concerning because it appears to create an artificial unity that merely conveys the illusion of identity ("l'illusion d'une originalité foncière") rather than evincing a deeper sense of self. The narrator's doubt is directly tied to an earlier question about identity, in which the narrator opposes the social self - the product of habit and the intellect - to a self not conveyed in "l'existence quotidienne":

La vie pouvait-elle me consoler de l'art, y avait-il dans l'art une réalité plus profonde où notre personnalité véritable trouve une expression que ne lui donnent pas les actions de la

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<sup>209</sup> III, 667.

vie? Chaque grand artiste semble, en effet, si différent des autres, et nous donne tant cette sensation de l'individualité que nous cherchons en vain dans l'existence quotidienne.<sup>210</sup>

If the identity perceived through art is the result of the intellect, then it would be no more real than the artist's social identity in everyday life: both are artificial constructions of identity, as opposed to conveying a self unfettered by habit or the intellect. Art that is the product of the intellect thus appears to fail because it does not disclose the artist's innermost self, free of habit - the *moi profond*, as Proust describes it in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*: "un autre moi que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes, dans la société, dans nos vices."<sup>211</sup>

Whereas in the above passage, the narrator's observations remain tentative, the narrator ultimately concludes that Wagner's deliberate efforts are unsuccessful because the work of the intellect does not capture Wagner's *moi profond*. Instead, deliberate effort only creates the illusion of identity:

Je continuais à jouer *Tristan*. Séparé de Wagner par la cloison sonore, je l'entendais exulter, m'inviter à partager sa joie, j'entendais redoubler le rire immortellement jeune et les coups de marteau de Siegfried, en qui 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!<sup>212</sup>

The "cloison sonore" - Wagner's artificial techniques - prevent the listener from hearing any evidence of Wagner's identity in his music: the listener is "[s]éparé de Wagner par la cloison

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<sup>210</sup> III, 664.

<sup>211</sup> See p. 221-2 in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, *ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> III, 667-8.

sonore...”. As James Reid has observed, the last phrase in the passage is an allusion to Pascal’s phrase, “Le silence éternel des espaces infinis m’effraie” in his *Pensées*. Nietzsche, as Reid writes, interpreted Pascal’s “silence” as the “‘fearful possibility’ that God, the ultimate mystery, exists.”<sup>213</sup> The narrator, like Nietzsche, hopes to discover proof of the possible existence of a creator through his art (58). Wagner’s artificial techniques may lend his music a sense of loftiness (“l’ouvrier ne servait qu’à leur [les phrases] faire plus librement quitter la terre”) that gives the impression of exploring the mystery of “le silence des espaces.” As Reid argues, however, this effort of the intellect - the “puissant ronflement” of Wagner’s musical technique - ultimately drowns out any evidence of Wagner’s identity: “si haut qu’on plane, on est un peu empêché de goûter le silence des espaces par le puissant ronflement du moteur!” Wagner’s deliberate efforts preclude the possibility of hearing his “personnalité véritable,” presenting instead only the illusion of identity created by the intellect.

Listening to Vinteuil’s *Septuor* later in *P*, however, the narrator finds evidence of a different form of unity - a sameness, or “accent,” that pervades the artist’s work, regardless of the deliberate efforts of the intellect:

Sans doute, le rougeoyant septuor différait singulièrement de la blanche sonate....Et pourtant, ces phrases si différentes étaient faites des mêmes éléments, car...la musique de Vinteuil étendait, notes par notes, touches par touches, les colorations inconnues d’un univers inestimable, insoupçonné, fragmenté par les lacunes que laissaient entre elles les auditions de son oeuvre; ces deux interrogations si dissemblables qui commandaient les mouvements si différents de la sonate et du septuor...c’était pourtant, l’une si calme et timide...l’autre si pressante, anxieuse, implorante, une même prière, jaillie devant différent levers de soleil intérieurs, et seulement réfractée à travers les milieux différents de pensées autres, de recherches d’art en progrès au cours d’années où il avait voulu créer quelque chose de nouveau. *Prière, espérance qui était au fond la même, reconnaissable sous ces déguisements dans les diverses oeuvres de Vinteuil*, et, d’autre part, qu’on ne trouvait que dans les oeuvres de Vinteuil.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> See p. 58 in *Proust, Beckett, and Narration*.

<sup>214</sup> III, 759; my emphasis.

Vinteuil's work is unified by a certain "espérance" recognizable across all "déguisements dans les diverses oeuvres." This impression of hope is pervasive and unique to Vinteuil's music - a personal idiosyncrasy that defines his style:

de toute la puissance de son effort créateur [Vinteuil] atteignait sa propre essence à ces profondeurs où, quelque question qu'on lui pose, c'est du même accent, le sien propre, qu'elle répond. Un accent, cet accent de Vinteuil, séparé de l'accent des autres musiciens par une différence bien plus grande que celle que nous percevons entre la voix de deux personnes...<sup>215</sup>

An artist's "accent," or style, thus underpins the differences both within and across an artist's *oeuvre*, regardless of variations in musical themes or motifs.

Reflecting on the artist's "accent," the narrator returns to his question about whether art is capable of conveying a truer self than the identity expressed in life. This time, he answers in the affirmative:

Vinteuil était mort depuis nombre d'années; mais, au milieu de ces instruments qu'il avait aimés, il lui avait été donné de poursuivre, pour un temps illimité, une part au moins de sa vie. De sa vie d'homme seulement? Si l'art n'était vraiment qu'un prolongement de la vie, valait-il de lui rien sacrifier, n'était-il pas aussi irréel qu'elle-même? À mieux écouter ce septuor, je ne le pouvais pas penser.<sup>216</sup>

The self conveyed through Vinteuil's style is distinct from Vinteuil's identity in "sa vie d'homme": this self, instead, conveys an "autre" differentiated from the artist's social self. This "autre" is not merely the "prolongement de la vie" but "réel" because the identity expressed in Vinteuil's music transcends the superficial self. The narrator thus concludes that the sameness that constitutes an artist's accent - their personal style - expresses the artist's *moi profond*: an identity unaffected by the "habitudes" that mitigate its authentic expression in life.

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<sup>215</sup> III, 760.

<sup>216</sup> III, 759.

The question, however, is why this underlying unity evinces the artist's *moi profond* whereas the efforts of the intellect do not. What persuades the narrator that the artist's personal style is not also the product of the intellect? The narrator's discussion of Vinteuil's accent reveals that it is the involuntary nature of the artist's style that affirms that style, unlike Wagner's "originalité acquise," is not the product of the intellect:

Et c'était justement quand il cherchait puissamment à être nouveau, qu'on reconnaissait, sous les différences apparentes, les similitudes profondes et les ressemblances voulues qu'il y avait au sein d'une oeuvre, quand Vinteuil reprenait à diverses reprises une même phrase, la diversifiait, s'amusa à changer son rythme, à la faire reparaître sous sa forme première, ces ressemblances-là voulues, oeuvre de l'intelligence, forcément superficielles, n'arrivaient jamais à être aussi frappantes que ces ressemblances dissimulées, involontaires, qui éclataient sous des couleurs différentes, entre les deux chefs-d'oeuvre distincts...<sup>217</sup>

Artificial unity consists of "les ressemblances voulues": the artificial differentiation of "une même phrase" within or across an artist's work created by the intellect. The underlying unity ("les similitudes profondes") across an artist's work takes place in spite of the "différences apparentes" - the artist's deliberate efforts - because the former is involuntarily expressed: the artist's style is the product of "ressemblances dissimulées, *involontaires*." The narrator characterizes the involuntary underlying similarity to be more striking ("frappante") than the deliberate efforts of Vinteuil precisely because involuntary "ressemblances," unlike the "ressemblances voulues," are not artificial: "ces ressemblances-là voulues, oeuvre de l'intelligence, forcément *superficielles*, n'arrivaient jamais à être aussi frappantes que ces ressemblances dissimulées, involontaires....". An artist's style is thus less superficial precisely because, as the product of involuntary expression, it cannot be the product of the intellect - "an

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<sup>217</sup> III, 760.



oeuvre de l'intelligence." The involuntary expression of the "monotonie" or "accent" of an artist's work, in other words, is the very mark of its authenticity.

Carlo Caballero has argued in *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* that the involuntary resemblances produced by the artist reveal to the narrator that there is a "“deep-seated, irreducible originality”" that exists "beside and beneath the work of ‘diligent labor.’"<sup>218</sup> Caballero thus alludes to the notion that for Proust, "a composer's relation to his own style would seem to be largely unconscious."<sup>219</sup> However, while Caballero observes that Vinteuil remains unaware of his own style, Caballero does not elaborate upon this insight, nor does he consider the role of *oubli* in the production of style. Caballero describes Vinteuil's "homeland" as "unknown" primarily in the sense that "it cannot be located in particular works but only, so to speak, in between them."<sup>220</sup> As the narrator emphasizes on multiple locations, however, the musician's homeland, or *patrie*, is unknown not only in the sense that it cannot be located, but unknown rather in the sense that it remains forgotten by the musician themselves, as will be further discussed below. Redefining musicians' - and artists' - "patrie" as a *forgotten* homeland allows me to illustrate that the *oubli* of the artist's *patrie*, by protecting the artist's *moi profond* from either habit or the intellect, is essential to ensuring its involuntary expression.

The narrator draws attention to Vinteuil's *oubli* of his *patrie*. Directly following the narrator's observations on "resemblances involontaires," the narrator describes Vinteuil's *patrie* as forgotten by the musician himself:

Chaque artiste semble ainsi comme le citoyen d'une patrie inconnue, oubliée de lui-même, différente de celle d'où viendra, appareillant pour la terre, un autre grand artiste.

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<sup>218</sup> See p. 161 in *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics*.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

Quand la vision de l'univers se modifie, s'épure, devient plus adéquate au souvenir de la patrie intérieure, il est bien naturel que cela se traduise par une altération générale, des sonorités chez le musicien comme de la couleur chez le peintre.<sup>221</sup>

The artist's *patrie* is described in terms that echo the concept of the *moi profond*: the artist's homeland refers to the musician's inner world ("la patrie intérieure") - the "composition intime" of Vinteuil's world, or, as the narrator refers to it shortly thereafter, "les éléments composants de son âme."<sup>222</sup> The musician's homeland, or *patrie*, is thus the musician's private, most intimate self - an "autre" that belies the musician's "existence quotidienne": their *moi profond*. This self, however, remains unknown to the musician: "Chaque artiste semble comme le citoyen d'une patrie inconnue, oubliée de lui-même." Vinteuil's *patrie* - his *moi profond* - is thus not unknown primarily in the sense that it is difficult for the listener to pinpoint, but rather unknown in the sense that he himself does not know it consciously.

While the notion of the artist's *patrie perdue* is discussed extensively within the context of music and Vinteuil's *Septuor* in particular, the concept of the *patrie perdue* is not exclusive to music but, rather, pertains to literature and painting as well. In order to illustrate that the artist in general, as much as the musician, forgets their *patrie*, or *moi profond*, it is important to first establish that painting and literature can be said to possess the same stylistic unity as music - a style that indicates the existence of the artist's *moi profond*. In *P*, the narrator finds that there is a "monotonie" in all of Vinteuil's music, a quality that can also be found in the works of "les grands littérateurs": "En repensant à la monotonie des oeuvres de Vinteuil, j'expliquais à

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<sup>221</sup> III, 761.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

Albertine que les grands littérateurs n'ont jamais fait qu'une seule oeuvre, ou plutôt n'ont jamais que réfracté à travers des milieux divers une même beauté qu'ils apportent au monde."<sup>223</sup>

Enumerating various examples, the narrator notices, for instance, "un certain sentiment de l'altitude" tied to "la vie spirituelle" in Stendhal's work that unites his art: "le lieu élevé où Julien Sorel est prisonnier, la tour au haut de laquelle est enfermé Fabrice, le clocher où l'abbé Barnès s'occupe d'astrologie...".<sup>224</sup> Similarly, although Dostoyevsky and Vermeer may depict different characters, the narrator finds "la même table, le même tapis, la même femme, la même nouvelle et unique beauté" in their work. There is thus a stylistic unity - a certain sameness or "monotonie" constitutive of the artist's style - that appears across the works of both writers and painters.

This stylistic unity, as is true of Vinteuil's music, appears to point to the forgotten inner world of the artist in both painting and literature as well. The artist's - and not just the musician's - forgetting of their *patrie* is implied by the narrator's use of "artiste" instead of "musicien": "Chaque *artiste* semble ainsi comme le citoyen d'une patrie inconnue, oubliée de lui-même...".<sup>225</sup> Although the artist's *patrie perdue* is discussed within the context of Vinteuil's style, the narrator thus extends the notion of the *patrie perdue* - a forgotten self expressed through a stylistic "monotonie" - beyond music to art in general. Proust's own preoccupation with the writer's subconscious relationship to style furthermore suggests that the artist's forgetting of his *patrie* is a phenomenon Proust was especially interested in with respect to literature and writing.

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<sup>223</sup> III, 877.

<sup>224</sup> III, 879.

<sup>225</sup> III, 761; my emphasis.

In both *P* and in his letters, Proust characterized writers' style as the manifestation of their inner world - a world which, as will be discussed further below, is forgotten. Discussing the "monotonie" of Barbey d'Aurevilly's work, for instance, the narrator observes that the involuntary repetition of certain motifs reveals a hidden reality - une "réalité cachée."<sup>226</sup> While the meaning of this hidden reality remains ambiguous in *P*, Proust's own reflections on the meaning of unifying patterns in writers' work elucidate the narrator's commentary on the "réalité cachée" revealed across a writer's work. In a letter to Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, Proust found that d'Aurevilly's work is unified by a "pudeur physiologique" that pervades "la chair de *tous* les grands personnages de Barbey d'Aurevilly"<sup>227</sup>; in the *Carnet* of 1908, Proust wondered about the consistent "sensation d'anxiété" in d'Aurevilly's landscapes.<sup>228</sup> Proust similarly reflected on the personality expressed by patterns he perceived across Thomas Hardy's novels, going so far as to write a letter to Robert de Billy in which he asked de Billy to confirm his intuition about Hardy's temperament.<sup>229</sup> Proust's own commentary on the patterns in these writers' works suggest that he

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<sup>226</sup> III, 879.

<sup>227</sup> p. 166, *Correspondance de Marcel Proust, XI*. Ed. Philip Kolb. Plon, 1970-1993. See Luc Fraisse's article "Marcel Proust lecteur de Barbey d'Aurevilly" for a discussion of the notion of "pudeur" in Proust's letters about Barbey d'Aurevilly and *R* in particular. *Travaux de littérature*, Vol. 20-21. Paris: Klincksieck, 1995.

<sup>228</sup> p. 95, *Cahiers Marcel Proust, No. 8: Carnet de 1908, ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> p. 180-1, *Marcel Proust: lettres et conversations*. Paris: Éditions des portiques, 1930, as cited by Peter Casagrande. See p. 123-126 in Peter Casagrande's *Hardy's Influence on the Modern Novel* for an analysis of Proust's letters about Thomas Hardy, and Proust's curiosity about Hardy's temperament - as perceived in his novels - in particular. London: The Macmillan Press, 1987.

believed writing capable of expressing a hidden psychological reality about the artist - a “réalité cachée” revealed through their style.

This psychological reality is hidden in the sense that the writer remains unaware of it during the act of writing, as further illustrated by Proust’s remarks on literature. In the aforementioned letter to Jacques Copeau, which closely mirrors the narrator’s observations of the “monotonie” in Vinteuil’s work in *P*, Proust indicates that the writer remains oblivious of their *patrie* in the process of writing:

de même qu’en lisant Stendhal, Thomas Hardy, Balzac, j’ai relevé chez eux, avec mon intelligence, des traits profonds de leur instinct que j’aimerais dessiner, - car cela n’a jamais été fait, si un peu de temps m’était encore concédé, - de même en me lisant moi-même, j’ai dégagé après coup des traits constitutifs de mon inconscient.<sup>230</sup>

Proust’s letter reiterates the notion, already expressed in *P*, that the stylistic unity found across a writer’s work is the manifestation of the writer’s inner self, or *moi profond* - “des traits profonds de leur instinct.”<sup>231</sup> At the same time, however, Proust suggests here that the writer remains unaware of this self, which is relegated to the writer’s “inconscient.” Proust’s commentary on writers’ personal style, his own included, thus indicates that the essential aspects of the artist’s self - their *moi profond* - remain forgotten during the act of writing. For Proust, then, in both music and painting, and especially in literature, the artist’s style is the manifestation of the artist’s *moi profond* - a self that remains forgotten during artistic creation - regardless of the artistic medium.

I thus interpret the following representation of *oubli* and its function to hold true not only for Vinteuil, but for painting and literature as well:

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<sup>230</sup> p. 616 in *Lettres*. Paris: Plon, 2004.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

Cette patrie perdue, les musiciens ne se la rappellent pas, mais chacun d'eux reste toujours inconsciemment accordé en un certain unisson avec elle; il délire de joie quand il chante selon sa patrie, la trahit parfois par amour de la gloire, mais alors en cherchant la gloire il la fuit, et ce n'est qu'en la dédaignant qu'il la trouve quand il entonne, quel que soit le sujet qu'il traite, ce chant singulier dont la monotonie - car quel que soit le sujet traité, il reste identique à soi-même - prouve la fixité des éléments composants de son âme....l'art d'un Vinteuil comme celui d'un Elstir [...] fait apparaître, extériorisant dans les couleurs du spectre la composition intime de ces mondes que nous appelons les individus.<sup>232</sup>

The artist may attempt to seek artistic glory (“gloire”), creating an artificially unity - “ressemblances voulues” - in order to inspire admiration of his work. The artist’s *patrie*, however, having been forgotten, remains outside of the reach of the conscious mind, only unconsciously apprehended: “chacun d’eux reste toujours *inconsciemment* accordé en un certain unisson avec elle [cette patrie perdue].” The isolation of the artist’s *patrie* from the conscious mind, as a result of *oubli*, preserves it from the intellect; regardless of the artist’s deliberate efforts at style, the artist’s *patrie*, relegated to the subconscious, is protected from the artist’s attempts at “la gloire” - the mediation of the intellect.

The artist’s *oubli* of their *patrie* - the artist’s innermost self - thus safeguards the artist’s self from the mediation of the intellect, making the involuntary expression of the artist’s *patrie* possible. The unmediated nature of the artist’s *patrie* remains uncompromised by the intellect because the artist’s *patrie perdue* is initially forgotten and remains forgotten until the artist’s discovery - and retrospective illumination - of it, as will be further discussed below.

### Retrospective Illumination and the Expression of the Artist’s *Patrie Perdue*

The intellect must eventually play a role in artistic creation, in the form of *illumination retrospective* - the artist’s revision of his art according to the pre-existing unity he discovers after

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<sup>232</sup> III, 761- 2.

the fact of creation. Both the description of retrospective illumination in *P*, as well as in Proust's own reading of Ruskin, suggest that retrospective illumination precludes the possibility of predetermining the unity of a work of art. Instead, retrospective illumination allows the artist to discover an already existing underlying pattern subconsciously created in his art, only then retrospectively revising his work accordingly to "illuminate" the patterns he has discovered. I argue, thus, that retrospective illumination provides a method for ensuring that the work of art is ultimately the expression of the subconscious, even as the intellect must develop this pre-existing unity after the fact in order to make it perceptible to the readers, viewers, or listeners of a work of art.

As many Proust scholars have observed, retrospective illumination allows the artist to unify his work without imposing, on the other hand, a predetermined unity, allowing for a more authentic and "vitale" unity. Miguel de Beistegui, for instance, argues that retrospective illumination allows for an organic totality - a unity that still "partakes of an ideal of organicity" - which nevertheless "does not abolish chance."<sup>233</sup> Christine Cano, similarly, sees retrospective unity as "an alternative between formal and organic unity," or "authenticity or artificiality, vital or logic unity."<sup>234</sup> However, it is not only the organicity of the unity that is at stake in the case of retrospective illumination, but also the expression of the artist's *patrie perdue* from the mediation of the intellect. I contend that retrospective illumination - the deferral of the intellect until *après coup* - resolves the tension between formal and organic unity by ensuring that the

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<sup>233</sup> See p. 98 in *Proust as Philosopher*.

<sup>234</sup> See p. 52 in "Death as Editor." *Proust in Perspective: Visions and Revisions*. Ed. Armine Kotim Morimer and Katherine Kolb. University of Illinois Press, 2002.

stylistic unity of a work of art is primarily shaped by the subconscious (reinforced later by the intellect).

Proust's interpretation of Ruskin's own creative process in *Sésame et les lys* suggests that retrospective illumination allows for the recovery and expression of the subconscious in art.

Proust characterizes the unity discovered by Ruskin *après coup* in his art as Ruskin's forgotten homeland; at the same time, he suggests that retrospective illumination allows for Ruskin's expression of this forgotten homeland:

Cette épigraphe...projette comme un rayon supplémentaire qui ne vient toucher que la dernière phrase de la conférence...mais illumine rétrospectivement tout ce qui a précédé...

Cette citation pose nettement dès le début les trois sens du mot Sésame, la lecture qui ouvre les portes de la sagesse le mot magique d'Ali-Baba, et la graine enchantée. Dès le début Ruskin expose ainsi ses trois thèmes et à la fin de la conférence il les mêlera inextricablement dans la dernière phrase où sera rappelée dans l'accord final la tonalité du début (sésame graine), phrase qui empruntera à ces trois thèmes...une richesse et une plénitude extraordinaires....

Mais c'est le charme précisément de l'oeuvre de Ruskin qu'il y ait entre les idées d'un même livre, et entre les divers livres des liens qu'il ne montre pas, qu'il laisse à peine apparaître un instant et qu'il a d'ailleurs peut-être tissés après coup, mais jamais artificiels cependant puisqu'ils sont toujours tirés de la substance toujours identique à elle-même de sa pensée. Les préoccupations multiples mais constantes de cette pensée, voilà ce qui assure à ces livres une unité plus réelle que l'unité de composition, généralement absente, il faut bien le dire.

Je vois que, dans la note placée à la fin de la conférence, j'ai cru pouvoir noter jusqu'à sept thèmes dans la dernière phrase. En réalité Ruskin y range l'une à côté de l'autre, mêle, fait manoeuvrer et resplendir ensemble toutes les principales idées - ou images - qui ont apparu avec quelque désordre au long de sa conférence. C'est son procédé. Il passe d'une idée à l'autre sans aucun ordre apparent. Mais en réalité la fantaisie qui le mène suit des affinités profondes qui lui imposent malgré lui une logique supérieure. Si bien qu'à la fin il se trouve avoir obéi à une sorte de plan secret qui, dévoilé à la fin, impose rétrospectivement à l'ensemble une sorte d'ordre et le fait apercevoir magnifiquement étagé jusqu'à cette apothéose finale...<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> See note 131 in *Sésame et les Lys*. Ed. Antoine Compagnon. Bruxelles: Édition Complexe, 1987, p.



A “fantaisie” motivates Ruskin’s writing, respecting “des affinités profondes” outside of Ruskin’s conscious control. The “fantaisie” has the agency in this description; Ruskin, on the other hand, as a writer, takes on a passive role, allowing himself to be controlled by a “fantaisie” that leads him from one idea to the next, following an order that is not apparent even to himself until after the fact. Ruskin, thus, remains unaware of the source - the fantasy, or *patrie perdue* - that generates the involuntary unity in his own work while writing. The pre-existing unity the artist develops remains forgotten during the initial writing process, not following any “ordre apparent”: this unity, thus, is not the result of the conscious design of the intellect, but rather the artist’s subconscious.

Reviewing his work, Ruskin eventually perceives the “affinités profondes” involuntarily expressed in his work: “à la fin il se trouve avoir obéi à une sorte de plan secret, dévoilé à la fin...”. Ruskin, in turn, adds final, unifying touches that illuminate, or further develop, the underlying unity that already pre-exists in his work. In the case of *Sésame et les lys*, this takes the form of the epigraph, which ties together the themes produced in his writing in one sentence, retrospectively illuminating “tout ce qui a précédé...”. Although it is the intellect that emphasizes this pre-existing unity through retrospective illumination, the resulting unity is not the product of the intellect; the effort of the intellect only reinforces the pre-existing unity discovered after the fact. Retrospective illumination thus allows for the expression of the Ruskin’s *patrie perdue* even as it preserves the “logique supérieure” of the subconscious design recognized by Ruskin.

In *P*, retrospective illumination similarly becomes the means whereby the artist may express the pre-existing unity - their *patrie perdue* - in their work. As mentioned before, the narrator becomes concerned in *P* that art cannot be as authentic as life if it is solely the product

of the intellect. The unity created as a result of retrospective illumination, by contrast, is more “réelle” because it avoids the mediation of the intellect:

L'autre musicien, celui qui me ravissait en ce moment, Wagner... dut éprouver un peu de la même ivresse que Balzac quand, jetant sur ses ouvrages le regard à la fois d'un étranger et d'un père, trouvant à celui-ci la pureté de Raphaël, à cet autre la simplicité de l'Évangile, il s'avisait brusquement, en projetant sur eux une illumination rétrospective, qu'ils seraient plus beaux réunis en un cycle où les mêmes personnages reviendraient, et ajouta à son oeuvre, en ce raccord, un coup de pinceau, le dernier et le plus sublime. Unité ultérieure, non factice, sinon elle fût tombée en poussière comme tant de systématisations d'écrivains médiocres qui, à grand renfort de titres et de sous-titres, se donnent l'apparence d'avoir poursuivi un seul et transcendant dessein. Non factice, peut-être même plus réelle d'être ultérieure, d'être née d'un moment d'enthousiasme où elle est découverte entre des morceaux qui n'ont plus qu'à se rejoindre. Unité qui s'ignorait, donc vitale et non logique, qui n'a pas proscrit la variété, refroidi l'exécution.<sup>236</sup>

As is the case for Ruskin, there is an unknown, forgotten source that motivates the hidden patterns in the artist's work and of which the artist remains unaware (“unité qui s'ignorait...”) - the artist's *patrie perdue*. Upon reviewing his work, however, the artist recognizes and in turn illuminates this newly discovered unity in his work with “un coup de pinceau, le dernier et le plus sublime.” Up until the discovery of the intellect, the artist, as mentioned above, remains unaware of the “unité” of his work: the artist discovers this pre-existing unity only once he has looked back over the work or works of art he has created. The ultimate unity created by retrospective illumination is thus “vitale et non logique” because retrospective illumination, although requiring the work of the intellect to illuminate this underlying unity, makes use of the intellect only after the recognition of a pre-existing unity - the artist's *patrie perdue*. Retrospective illumination therefore results in an ultimate unity that is not predetermined - the work of the intellect - but is rather the voluntary effort to develop the involuntary unity initially generated by the artist's subconscious.

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<sup>236</sup> III, 666-7.

Retrospective illumination, thus, achieves more than resolving the tension between a logical and non-logical unity; it allows for the creation of a work of art that preserves the involuntary unity motivated by the subconscious at the same time that it makes use of the intellect to reinforce the latter's expression in their art. Although the artist's *oubli* of their *patrie perdue* is involuntary, the practice of retrospective illumination thus ensures that the unity of a work of art is ultimately the product of *oubli*. An artist who wishes to create art that is the product of the subconscious - the type of work of art idealized in *P* - must discover its unity ulterior to the creation of a work of art.

#### *Oubli* and the Artist as *Étranger*: Forgetting In Order To Remember

In order to retrospectively illuminate the underlying unity created by their *patrie perdue*, however, the artist must be capable of discovering it. The artist's discovery of this underlying unity is not a given. As the narrator's difficulty in perceiving his article in the *Figaro* objectively demonstrates, the artist's conscious designs for their art - their artistic intentions - may prevent the artist from seeing the work of art as it is, not as they intended it to be. Essential to the recovery of the artist's *patrie perdue*, I suggest, is the artist's ability to overcome the work of the intellect. The interval of forgetting between the creation and revision of a work of art brings the artist to forget the conscious designs of the intellect, renewing the artist's perception of their own work. As in the case of involuntary memory, in which memory returns only after forgetting has had long enough to undo the effects of habit, the artist's forgetfulness of their own work, I argue, thus makes possible the discovery of the underlying unity produced by their subconscious - patterns initially obscured by the work of the intellect.

As the narrator's experience of reading his own article in *F* illustrates, an artist's inability to distance himself from his art adversely affects his perception of his own work. In this case, the narrator, unable to detach himself sufficiently from his own work, perceives his writing through the lens of what he intended to write - his artistic intentions. The narrator, in other words, sees the efforts of the intellect reflected back to him in his work, unable to perceive his work without these associations. In *F*, the narrator attempts to read his article from *Le Figaro* as if the text were unknown to him in order to imagine how possible readers would perceive it. His authorial ego, however, interrupts the process, and the narrator fails:

Ce que je tenais en main, ce n'est pas un certain exemplaire du journal, c'est l'un quelconque des dix mille; ce n'est pas seulement ce qui a été écrit pour moi, c'est ce qui a été écrit pour moi et pour tous. Pour apprécier exactement le phénomène qui se produit en ce moment...il faut que je lise cet article non en auteur, mais comme un des autres lecteurs du journal....Aussi pour le lire, fallait-il que je cessasse un moment d'en être l'auteur, que je fusse l'un quelconque des lecteurs du Figaro....Je fais comme ceux-là, je commence...; *au moment même où je veux être un lecteur, mon esprit refait en auteur le tour de ceux qui liront mon article.* Si M. de Guermantes ne comprenait pas telle phrase que Bloch aimerait, en revanche il pourrait s'amuser de telle réflexion que Bloch dédaignerait. Ainsi pour chaque partie que le lecteur précédent semblait délaisser, un nouvel amateur se présentant, l'ensemble de l'article se trouvait élevé aux nues par une foule et s'imposait ainsi à ma propre défiance de moi-même qui n'avait plus besoin de le détruire.<sup>237</sup>

Although attempting to read his own work as if he were not its author, the narrator quickly reverts to the role of the author: “au moment même où je veux être un lecteur, mon esprit refait en auteur le tour de ceux qui liront mon article.” Instead of truly reading his work as one of its readers, the narrator adjusts the imagined reader's perception of his work according to his whim: if one reader fails to appreciate one phrase, another imagined reader is always there to come to the rescue (“un nouvel amateur se présentant”). The narrator is unable to detach himself from his

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<sup>237</sup> IV, 150-1; my emphasis.

artistic intentions, believing that they are communicated clearly - and will be perceived by readers - as he intended them.

The consequences of the narrator's failure to distance himself from his work is further illuminated later in the same passage when the narrator makes a second attempt to read his writing as if he were one of its readers:

Ces phrases de mon article, lorsque je les écrivis, étaient si pâles auprès de ma pensée, si compliquées et opaques auprès de ma vision harmonieuse...que leur lecture était pour moi une souffrance...Mais maintenant, en m'efforçant d'être lecteur, si je me déchargeais sur les autres du devoir douloureux de me juger, je réussissais du moins à faire table rase *de ce que j'avais voulu faire en lisant ce que j'avais fait*. Je lisais l'article en m'efforçant de me persuader qu'il était d'un autre. Alors toutes mes images, toutes mes réflexions, toutes mes épithètes prises en elles-mêmes et sans le souvenir de l'échec qu'elles représentaient pour mes visées, me charmaient par leur éclat, leur ampleur, leur profondeur. Et quand je sentais une défaillance trop grande, me réfugiant dans l'âme du lecteur quelconque émerveillé, je me disais: 'Bah! Comment un lecteur peut-il s'apercevoir de cela? Il manque quelque chose là, c'est possible. Mais, sapristi, s'ils ne sont pas contents! Il y a assez de jolies choses comme cela, plus qu'ils n'en ont d'habitude.' Et m'appuyant sur ces dix mille approbations qui me soutenaient, je puisais autant de sentiment de ma force et d'espoir de talent dans la lecture que je faisais à ce moment que j'y avais puisé de défiance quand ce que j'avais écrit ne s'adressait qu'à moi.<sup>238</sup>

The narrator identifies here the advantages of reading his work as if he were a stranger to it: distance from his work purportedly would allow the narrator to read "ce que [il] avai[t] fait" instead of reading "ce que [il] avai[t] voulu faire" - the author's "visées." In this endeavor, however, the narrator fails once again, falling into the same trap. Yet again, the ego interposes itself, and although the narrator begins by reading his work as if "il était d'un autre," he proceeds to slip in and out of this role. As Michael Finn observes, the narrator "replac[es] [the] reader with author as needed."<sup>239</sup> Noticing possible weaknesses, the narrator imagines that readers would not be perceptive enough to notice them. As Finn writes, the narrator becomes only a "would-be

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<sup>238</sup> IV, 151; emphasis mine.

<sup>239</sup> See p. 121 in *Proust, the Body and Literary Form*. New York: CUP, 1999.

objective reader,” alternately imagining a reader who will either understand the intention behind his work or fail to notice when his artistic intentions are not clearly communicated.<sup>240</sup> The narrator’s attempt to perceive “ce qu[’il] avai[t] fait” in his work is thus frustrated by the narrator’s inability to distance himself from his conscious designs for his article; the narrator remains, in spite of himself, unable to see his work without attempting to make it adhere to his intentions. The narrator is thus unable to recognize “ce qu[’il] avai[t] fait” instead of “ce qu[’il] avai[t] voulu faire” in his work.

Conversely, in *P*, it is the artist’s distance from their work - their detachment from their role as creator - that gives the artist the necessary distance to perceive his work not through the lens of the intellect and artistic intentions, but to recognize what is in fact present in the work itself. Retrospective illumination is dependent upon the artist’s ability to perceive the hidden, underlying unity in his own work, the recognition of which in turn allows the artist to make necessary changes:

L’autre musicien, celui qui me ravissait en ce moment, Wagner, tirant de ses tiroirs un morceau délicieux pour le faire entrer comme thème rétrospectivement... puis ayant composé un premier opéra mythologique, puis un second, puis d’autres encore, et s’apercevant tout à coup qu’il venait de faire une tétralogie, [Wagner] dut éprouver la même ivresse que Balzac quand, jetant sur ses ouvrages le regard à la fois d’un étranger et d’un père, trouvant à celui-ci la pureté de Raphaël, à cet autre la simplicité de l’Évangile...<sup>241</sup>

Wagner must be capable of recognizing certain patterns in his work - “la pureté de Raphaël, à cet autre la simplicité de l’Évangile” - that bring him to recognize that his work forms a “tétralogie.”

The artist’s perception of his own work - his understanding of his own art - thus becomes

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<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>241</sup> III, 667.

necessary for artistic creation. This perception, however, depends on the artist's ability to perceive his work as both creator and stranger.

In the above passage, Balzac is in fact both the creator (“père”) as well as a stranger (“étranger”) to his own work, experiencing it as both author and reader. As Acquisto argues, the artist only “doubles himself by becoming the perceiver of his own work, an act by which he is then able to proceed to the final act of creation...”.<sup>242</sup> The artist, of course, always retains their role as creator of their work: becoming a “perceiver” of one's own work does not negate the artist's role as its creator. The artist, even as he becomes a temporary stranger to his own work, never ceases being the artist. Nevertheless, it is the artist's shift to the role of “perceiver” which, creating a distance between the artist and their creation, changes the artist's perception of his own work. As Walter Kassel writes, Balzac makes the discovery of “what he had accomplished only when, as author, he was sufficiently removed from his creation to enjoy the perspective Marcel calls ‘le regard à la fois d'un étranger et d'un père.’”<sup>243</sup> The artist is both the creator and the stranger, yet it is the estrangement from one's own work - the shift in perception from creator to stranger - that allows the artist to recognize a deeper, underlying unity in his work.

The process involved in retrospective illumination makes such a shift in perception possible by allowing for an interval of forgetting between the moment of creation and the artist's examination of his work - an interval that enacts an involuntary estrangement of the artist from his work. Upon reviewing his work, Wagner's previous compositions have been forgotten, filed away in “ses tiroirs.” This interval in time between the moment of creation and examination is

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<sup>242</sup> See p. 26 in *Proust, Music, and Meaning: Theories and Practices of Listening in the Recherche*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>243</sup> See p. 14 in *Marcel Proust and the Strategy of Reading*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1980.

long enough to render Wagner's own works unrecognizable to Wagner himself. Although Wagner is still the creator (hence the "regard à la fois d'un étranger et d'un père"), he is suddenly capable of seeing his work as if he were an "étranger...trouvant à celui-ci la pureté de Raphaël, à cet autre la simplicité de l'Évangile."<sup>244</sup> The interval of forgetting between creation and revision, in other words, allows the artist to temporarily shed one's own habitual associations with one's work - the artist's intentions for his work, which are the product of the intellect - in order to uncover something new in his work. As the artist casts off his intended artistic vision for his art, the renewed perception afforded by forgetting brings aspects outside of the scope of the artist's conscious designs - unintended, involuntary patterns - to the artist's attention.

The interval of time between artistic creation and revision that takes place in the process leading up to retrospective illumination, thus, contributes to the artist's forgetfulness of their art and, in turn, a forgetfulness of their deliberate artistic intentions - the artist's "ressemblances voulues." By estranging the artist from his own art, retrospective illumination simultaneously brings the artist to forget the conscious designs for his art - the efforts of the conscious mind. This shift in perception from creator to stranger allows for a renewal of the artist's aesthetic perception of his own work, in turn making possible the discovery of a hidden, underlying unity possible - a unity ultimately more essential to his art than the efforts of the intellect. The estrangement from the artist's artistic intentions produced by forgetting - as a result of the process of retrospective illumination - is ultimately integral to the artist's revision of his work - the retrospective illumination of his *patrie perdue* - and, therefore, to artistic creation.

Retrospective illumination, thus, creates the forgetting integral to the renewal of the artist's perception and, in turn, the discovery of their *patrie perdue* in their own work. The lesson

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<sup>244</sup> III, 667.



learned from Wagner and Balzac is therefore not only that retrospective illumination is a method which, by delaying the final organization of the work, ensures that the intellect does not impose an artificial unity onto the work of art; the lesson is also that retrospective illumination is a means of creating the forgetting that provokes the artist's recognition of their *patrie perdue*.

### Proust At Work: Retrospective Illumination and the *Inconscient*

It is not only the narrator who finds merit in retrospective illumination as a creative strategy: Proust himself admired evidence of retrospective illumination in other artists' creative strategies - an admiration substantiated by Proust's own creative process. In spite of the seemingly closed structure of *RTP* (Proust wrote *Combray* and the *matinée* scene almost simultaneously), the "entre-deux" - the middle section - was left open to constant retrospective discoveries and improvisation that subsequently shaped the direction of *RTP* in spite of Proust's initial plans. The method whereby Proust made these changes, I argue, echoes the description of retrospective illumination both in *RTP* as well as in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Much as Balzac and Wagner precluded imposing a unity onto their work by discovering its unity *après coup*, Proust wrote freestanding textual units without assigning them a final position in *RTP*, which he subsequently joined together in *cahiers de montage*. Taking into account the similarities between Proust's creative process and the process of retrospective illumination he described both in *CSB* and *RTP*, I contend that Proust's creative process consisted of a pattern in which Proust, like the artists he described, created *RTP* through joining together "des morceaux qui n'ont plus qu'à se rejoindre," conferring a retrospective unity onto it that was discovered after the fact. Proust's interest in discovering aspects of his *inconscient* furthermore suggests the possibility that, as is true of retrospective illumination in *RTP* and *CSB*, retrospective illumination afforded Proust the

means to discovering - and in turn illuminating - aspects of his own subconscious in his own writing. Finally, the forgetfulness that appears to have been a part of Proust's creative process indicates the possibility that forgetting, as in *RTP*, may have facilitated Proust's retrospective discoveries - discoveries which, in turn, informed and shaped the structure of *RTP*. This section thus posits that Proust's creative strategy not only relied on *illumination rétrospective* as a means of discovering hidden connections in his own work, but that this strategy may have relied on an interval of forgetting that made remembrance - the recognition of his own unconscious, or *patrie perdue*, possible.

Both Antoine Compagnon and Philip Kolb have focused on how the unity of the *Recherche* is retrospectively illuminated for the reader, examining the moment in which the themes of *RTP* are made understandable to the reader. Compagnon's reading of retrospective illumination aligns with Proust's description of retrospective illumination as a "final accord" - a unity that is made clear to the reader in a "dernière phrase" (in *P*):

...la *Recherche du temps perdu* devait se boucler sur elle-même. Elle devait raconter l'histoire d'une vocation afin que la découverte après coup de l'unité de la vie par le héros fût le principe déjà mis en oeuvre par le narrateur durant tout le livre, à l'insu du lecteur.<sup>245</sup>

Philip Kolb has similarly argued that Proust's writing renders clear what was initially "énigmatique" to the reader in a moment of retrospective illumination:

De même que Ruskin, il avait présenté au début, de façon énigmatique, les éléments de tout son roman. Immédiatement après, il [Proust] avait rédigé le chapitre final, où sont reposés et résumés les principaux thèmes afin d'éclaircir le dessein caché de tout ce qui devait précéder.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> See p. 48. *Proust entre deux siècles*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1989.

<sup>246</sup> See "Proust et Ruskin: Nouvelles perspectives." *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* no. 12, 1960, p. 259-273.

These accounts of retrospective illumination suggest that the unity of the text is communicated to the reader at the end of the reading experience, finally making clear to the reader, in a Ruskinian “final accord,” the relationship of the themes and motifs they have encountered over the course of *RTP*. In order to consider Proust’s own creative process, however, it is necessary to expand the definition of retrospective illumination beyond the point of view of the reader in order to consider its role in the creative process for Proust himself. As I have argued, retrospective illumination is the creative process whereby the artist discovers an underlying unity between different fragments of his own art, and in turn reorganizes his work of art accordingly. As such, retrospective illumination is not only the final stroke that illuminates for the reader the unity of the text; it is also the reorganization - on a larger scale - of the artist’s own work by the artist themselves, based on their own discovery of an underlying unity that is the product of the subconscious. It is this latter definition of retrospective illumination that I am interested in and which I argue describes Proust’s own creative process.

In order to understand the similarities between the creative process Proust described and the method he himself employed, we have to first consider what specifically constitutes the “final accord” of retrospective illumination for the artist themselves. Proust’s description in *CSB* offers specific insights into the kinds of retrospective changes an artist may make to his work:

C’est l’idée de génie de Balzac que Sainte-Beuve méconnaît là. Sans doute, pourra-t-on dire, il ne l’a pas eue tout de suite. Telle partie de ses grands cycles ne s’y est trouvée rattachée qu’après coup. Qu’importe? L’Enchantement du vendredi saint est un morceau que Wagner écrivit avant de penser à faire Parsifal et qu’il l’y introduisit ensuite. Mais les ajoutages, ces beautés rapportées, les rapports nouveaux aperçus brusquement par le génie entre les parties séparées de son œuvre qui se rejoignent, vivent et ne pourraient plus se séparer, ne sont-ce pas de ses plus belles intuitions? La sœur de Balzac nous a raconté la joie qu’il éprouva le jour où il eut cette idée, et je la trouve aussi grande ainsi, que s’il l’avait eue avant de commencer son œuvre.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> See p. 274 in *CSB*, *ibid.*

Proust echoes this description of retrospective illumination in *P*. The narrator describes Balzac in *P* as an author who suddenly recognizes that his “ouvrages” would be “plus beaux réunis en un cycle.” One variation of retrospective illumination, thus, is to combine one’s previous works - separate, initially unrelated fragments - into a single whole. This latter notion is further emphasized in the above passage from *CSB*, in which Balzac, similarly, does not predetermine the final design of his “grands cycles”; instead, certain sections are added after the fact to create unity: “Telle partie de ses grands cycles ne s’y est trouvée rattachée qu’après coup.” In the above passage, Wagner similarly discovers that a previously written piece - “L’Enchantement du vendredi saint” - could be introduced into *Parsifal* - a piece originally entirely independent of the creation of *Parsifal*. The above passage confirms what is already suggested in *P*: retrospective illumination does not only take place in a “dernière phrase,” as in the case of Ruskin, but also takes place through the addition and combination of previously separate, isolated fragments (“les parties séparées”).

Proust describes the retrospective addition and recombination of these fragments - whose place in a work is not initially known - as a method of expressing the subconscious. Both Balzac and Wagner achieve a unity not based on the intellect, according to Proust, but according to instinct: their “belles intuitions.” As I’ve argued, Proust uses instinct and “l’inconscient” interchangeably in *R*; furthermore, in a letter to Jacques Copeau, he equates the “traits profonds de leur instinct” (the artist’s instincts) with the “traits constitutifs de [l’]inconscient.”<sup>248</sup> It is thus

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<sup>248</sup> See Proust’s letter to Jacques Copeau, p. 616 in *Lettres: 1879-1922*: “de même qu’en lisant Stendhal, Thomas Hardy, Balzac, j’ai relevé chez eux, avec mon intelligence, des traits profonds de leur instinct que j’aimerais dessiner, - car cela n’a jamais été fait, si un peu de temps m’était encore concédé, - de même en me lisant moi-même, j’ai dégagé après coup des traits constitutifs de mon inconscient.”

reasonable to suggest that in Proust's discussion of retrospective illumination in *CSB*, he similarly refers to the artist's subconscious as "intuition." The artist in *CSB*, upon reviewing his work, therefore recognizes and illuminates these previously unforeseen connections - the product of his subconscious. Once again, in *CSB* as in *RTP*, retrospective illumination allows the artist to preserve and express the "logique supérieure" of the subconscious in spite of this intellectual effort because the artist remains unaware of this unity until after the fact ("il ne l'a pas eue tout de suite"). Proust's own description of retrospective illumination thus echoes the description of retrospective illumination in *RTP* as outlined in this chapter: according not only to the narrator of *RTP* but to Proust as well, retrospective illumination is a means of preserving and expressing the subconscious.

Proust's own artistic method, I suggest, mirrors the processes described above - processes that Proust clearly delineated as a means of expressing the subconscious. Before turning to the similarities between Proust's creative process and the ones described in *CSB*, however, let us first address the apparent discrepancy between what is valorized in *RTP* - a unity illuminated only after the fact - and Proust's own creative process. Retrospective illumination demands that the unity of a work of art not be predetermined, but rather discovered after the fact. Can that be said to be true of Proust, who, as we know, had planned out the beginning and end of *RTP* before writing it?

In a letter to Paul Souday, Proust explained that "[l]e dernier chapitre du dernier volume a été écrit tout de suite après le premier chapitre du premier volume."<sup>249</sup> In another letter to Benjamin Crémieux, he wrote that "la dernière page du *Temps retrouvé* (écrite avant le reste du

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<sup>249</sup> See p. 536, "Lettre à Paul Souday" dans *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, Vol. XVIII. Ed. Philip Kolb. Plon, 1970-1993.

livre) se refermera exactement sur la première de *Swann*. Tout ‘l’entre-deux’ a été écrit ensuite.”<sup>250</sup> Proust, then, began the *Recherche* by first establishing its beginning and end - a process of organization that would appear to be purely the work of the intellect, and exclude the possibility of any unité “logique.”<sup>251</sup>

Luc Fraisse, however, has argued that even though Proust had imposed a structure - the beginning and the end - onto *RTP*, the work itself did not stop evolving, even if the figurative bookends of the *Recherche* itself had been determined beforehand. Proust rewrote the intervening sections endlessly, adding certain themes and even unplanned volumes after the fact, as will be further discussed below. Proust’s contemporary, Louis Gautier-Vignal, described his creative process in the following terms:

D’après ses réponses, je crois que le plan général de la *Recherche* était dès lors tracé dans son esprit, ainsi que la façon dont se terminerait l’ouvrage. Mais il hésitait encore sur le nombre de livres que celui-ci comporterait, car *il ne pouvait prévoir les développements* qu’il donnerait à telle ou telle partie du récit.<sup>252</sup>

Proust, as Fraisse argues, thus align more closely with the description of an “écrivain immanent” rather than an “écrivain programmatique,” in spite of Proust’s careful planning:

[l]’auteur de la *Recherche*...ne dresse pas des plans détaillés comme celui de *Madame Bovary*, il se jette dans le récit, qu’il récrit, bâtissant des itinéraires en route. C’est assurément le plus programmatique des écrivains immanents; mais les découvertes improvisées jouent donc dans sa création, et dans son mode de composition, un rôle essentiel.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> See p. 41, *ibid.*, Vol. XXI.

<sup>251</sup> III, 666-7.

<sup>252</sup> Gautier, Vignal, Louis. *Proust connu et inconnu*. Robert Laffont, 1976, as cited in Luc Fraisse’s article “Les principes de composition de *la Recherche du temps perdu*,” *ibid.*, emphasis mine.

<sup>253</sup> p. 96, “Les principes de la composition de *la Recherche du temps perdu*.”

In other words, the initial closed bipartite structure of *RTP* did not mean that the middle section was similarly planned. Instead, this structure freed Proust up to leave the intervening sections open to improvisation and new developments - “les découvertes improvisées.”<sup>254</sup>

Proust’s creative process was remarkably similar to the processes he ascribed to other artists in both *P* as well as *CSB*. Like Balzac and Wagner, who combine previous “ouvrages” into a single cycle, *RTP* itself is, as Luc Fraisse has argued, the joining together of fragments - Proust’s previous works - into a whole: the *Recherche*. Fraisse writes that Proust, for instance, used his novella, *L’Indifférent*, for the composition of “Un amour de Swann.”<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, the themes, events, and even names from *Jean Santeuil* are also taken up in *RTP*. Finally, Fraisse writes, Proust’s translations of Ruskin and his personal letters gave Proust “une esthétique générale” and “d’innombrables facettes des scènes et personnages de son cycle romanesque,” respectively, which would later make their way into *RTP*.<sup>256</sup> The creation of the *Recherche* itself, then, may be considered the unification of previous works into a single work of art, made possible by a unity discovered after the fact of their creation. In this sense, *RTP* is itself the retrospective illumination of Proust’s previous work: the illumination of “[des] morceaux qui n’avaient plus qu’à se rejoindre.”<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> See also p. 10 in *Proust entre deux siècles*, *ibid*, in which Antoine Compagnon writes that in spite of the planned structure of *RTP*, “à peu près n’importe quoi pouvait s’insérer au milieu,” including “de nouveaux développements imprévus et souvent parasites.”

<sup>255</sup> See p. 96, *ibid*.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>257</sup> Fraisse, 96; III, 666-7.

Furthermore, like Balzac and Wagner in *CSB*, certain sections of *RTP* were written and added by Proust after the fact of having sketched out the initial bipartite structure of *RTP*, suggesting the possibility that Proust discovered - and then integrated, or *illuminated* - a new and previously unplanned structure for *RTP*. Proust had already written the drafts of what would later become *Le Temps perdu*, *Du côté du chez Swann*, and *Du côté de Guermantes* by 1912.<sup>258</sup> The most famous change “après coup” to Proust’s original plan was the addition of the Albertine episode, as Nathalie Mauriac Dyer has written. While editing *DCS*, Proust became involved with Alfred Agostinelli, his ex-chauffeur and secretary. As Dyer writes, events from Proust’s life at the time, including his involvement with Agostinelli in particular, were transposed into Proust’s *Cahier 71* titled *Dux* (1913) and *Cahier 54* titled *Vénusté* (1914):

While Proust was engaged in the correction of the *Swann* proofs, he was also involved with his ex-chauffeur and secretary Alfred Agostinelli, whom he had first met at Cabourg in 1907. The events that took place from early August 1913 to June 1914 were crucial for the rest of the genesis of *À la recherche* and are well known thanks to Proust’s correspondence: the sudden (and still enigmatic) return from Normandy with Agostinelli in August 1913, his flight from the writer’s home a few months later, Proust’s frantic efforts to have him return, his drowning after a plane crash in May 1914, Proust’s immense grief and mourning followed by a process of forgetting.” The *Cahier 71* titled *Dux* (1913) and *Cahier 54* titled *Vénusté* (1914) are clear transpositions of this chain of events.<sup>259</sup>

This addition, Dyer writes, “brought to the numerous seaside flirtations sketched in earlier *cahiers* what they lacked: a clearly designed dramatic structure.” Proust himself, Dyer points out,

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<sup>258</sup> See p. 63-64 in “Composition and publication of *À la recherche du temps perdu*” by Nathalie Mauriac, *ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.



referred to the Albertine story as bringing about “peripeteia” in his correspondence.<sup>260</sup> The eruption of the First World War gave Proust the opportunity to further develop this episode.

The addition of *SG*, furthermore, would constitute a fundamental change to *RTP*. Dyer writes that upon the publication of *Du côté de chez Swann* in November 1913, Proust had included a “list of chapters for the next two volumes.”<sup>261</sup> This initial two-part structure can loosely be characterized as containing two main thematic sections: time lost and time regained. In 1916, however, Proust wrote to his publisher, Gallimard, that his book would be “longer than [he himself] had realized”; it would now include a volume titled *Sodome et Gomorrhe*.<sup>262</sup> The addition of *SG* after the eruption of WWI expanded the initial two-part framework. Time would not only be lost, sought, and regained; the narrator’s quest would now also be accompanied by a “third structural opposition after *Temps perdu* and *Temps retrouvé*, Swann and Guermantes, and placing Albertine (*Gomorrhe*) on a par with no less than Charlus (*Sodome*).”<sup>263</sup> Proust’s well-defined design, thus, would change in spite of Proust’s initial plans; Proust wrote an entirely new section that would not only form the “peripeteia” of the theme of youthful flirtation and desire that began in *JF*, but would furthermore expand the overall framework of the novel from a bipartite to tripartite structure. For Proust, in both the case of the addition of the Albertine story, as well as the addition of *SG*, parts of the *Recherche* were added retrospectively - retrospective additions which carried a profound impact on the overall organization and unifying structure of

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<sup>260</sup> Dyer, p. 64; *Corr*, XIV, 281.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Dyer, p. 64; *Corr*, XIX, 733.

<sup>263</sup> Dyer, p. 65.

RTP. Like Wagner in *La Prisonnière*, “[t]elle partie” of the *Recherche* “ne s’y est trouvée rattachée qu’après coup.”

Proust’s method of organizing his writing furthermore indicates a writing process that relied on the retrospective joining together of separate, freestanding textual units. Proust’s writing method was unique in that he often wrote freestanding texts without assigning their place in the text. As Nathalie Mauriac Dyer has described Proust’s process, Proust did not follow a “‘programmatic’ practice” - a “linear, systematic and predictable fashion from an initial basis of documentary notes and detailed scenarios,” as did Flaubert. Rather, within a given *cahier*, Proust formed a “fully textualized sequence” that would then be “disseminated and “‘mounted’ with other fragments in so-called *cahiers de montage*.”<sup>264</sup> Proust, thus, wrote fully realized sequences, without knowing precisely how they would fit into the final design of *R*; instead, he would combine and reintegrate these freestanding units into existing textual units in his *cahiers de montage* after the fact. As Mauriac writes,

[t]his process goes on at the fair copy stage (*cahiers de la mise au net*), where previously assembled textual units may explode again, their parts be moved around or disappear, in a combination of expansion and condensation. This tireless reworking goes on even at the typescript and galley-proofs stages, making it one of the most defining and remarkable traits of Proust’s genetic ‘style.’

The final design of entire sections of Proust’s work, thus, was arguably created through the process of retrospective illumination: the constant recognition and, in turn, illumination of connections that Proust initially remained unaware of. Undoubtedly, Proust’s use of *paperoles* (long pieces of paper he could easily paste into notebooks) further facilitated such a method of

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<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61-2.

working, allowing Proust to create “new and much expanded sequences” that he “enriche[d] further in the margins...and on long, pasted-on papers (*paperoles*).”<sup>265</sup>

Furthermore, without knowing how certain discrete textual units would be integrated into the final design, Proust could not have planned the final unity of the “entre-deux” of *RTP* in advance. Instead, Proust’s lack of “programmatic” outlining suggests that Proust did not accidentally engage in retrospective illumination as a method of artistic creation, but rather counted on it as the means whereby he would advance his writing.

Proust’s creative process, thus, is not just marked by constant revision, but by retrospective illumination - the joining together of “des morceaux qui n’avaient plus qu’à se rejoindre” on multiple levels: (1) the unification of previous works into a single work, (2) the addition of entire sections to the cycle that changed its overall dramatic structure - even after having completed an initial sketch of a bipartite structure for Gallimard, and, lastly, (3) the repeated “montage” of separate, freestanding textual units into the larger text (whose position was not predetermined). Proust’s methods ultimately mirror his descriptions of retrospective illumination - both in *P* and *CSB* - very closely.

In *P* and *CSB*, as I have argued, the artist’s retrospective illumination of an underlying unity in his work is made possible by his discovery of a subconsciously motivated unity - the artist’s *patrie perdue*, which allows for the expression of the artist’s subconscious. Could Proust’s process of retrospective illumination similarly have involved the recognition of patterns of his own subconscious?

Proust wrote in his correspondence that he was able to uncover traits of his own subconscious in his work “après coup” - and even in the work of others. In a letter to Jacques

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<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Copeau that closely mirrors the narrator's observations of the "monotonie" created by the artist's subconscious in Vinteuil's work, Proust indicates that the writer remains oblivious of their subconscious self during the process of writing. This subconscious self, however, involuntarily produces certain patterns that may, with the help of the intellect, be grasped consciously *après coup*:

de même qu'en lisant Stendhal, Thomas Hardy, Balzac, j'ai relevé chez eux, avec mon intelligence, des traits profonds de leur instinct que j'aimerais dessiner, - car cela n'a jamais été fait, si un peu de temps m'était encore concédé, - de même en me lisant moi-même, j'ai dégagé après coup des traits constitutifs de mon inconscient."<sup>266</sup>

Proust's letter reiterates the notion, already expressed in *P*, that the stylistic unity found across a writer's work is the manifestation of the writer's subconscious self - "des traits profonds de leur instinct" - or, as Proust writes shortly thereafter, the "traits constitutifs de [son] inconscient."<sup>267</sup>

The discovery of an underlying unity produced by the unconscious is thus not limited to the realm of fiction in *P*. Proust himself not only discovered the "traits profonds" in Stendhal's, Hardy's, and Balzac's works; upon reviewing his own work, Proust also recognized "des traits constitutifs" of his own "inconscient" in his work. As Luc Fraisse suggests, Proust's own letter suggests that Proust viewed literary creation as "une sorte d'auto-analyse," even as Proust ignored "tout du freudisme."<sup>268</sup> Reviewing his own work becomes a means of allowing conscious access to the subconscious: "le transvasement de l'inconscient dans la claire conscience...".

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<sup>266</sup> p. 616 in *Lettres*. Paris: Plon, 2004.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> See p. 224 in "Proust et Michaux: Assonances Profondes." *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, Vol. 2, 1995, p. 218-239.

Proust, then, was interested in discovering - and did discover - aspects of his subconscious by reviewing his work, as did Balzac and Wagner (“jetant sur ses ouvrages le regard à la fois d’un étranger et d’un père...” in *P*). Furthermore, in spite of an initial bipartite structure, Proust continuously retrospectively discovered and illuminated, or joined together, freestanding textual fragments, a process that significantly shaped the dramatic structure of the “entre-deux” of *RTP*. Proust’s retrospective unification of textual fragments thus suggests that he followed a similar creative process to the one he referred to in *CSB* and in *RTP* as retrospective illumination. Both in *CSB* and in *RTP*, Proust described retrospective illumination a means to accessing and expressing the subconscious - the discovery of an underlying unity created by the artist’s *patrie perdue*. Given the similarities between Proust’s creative method and Proust’s desire to examine his own work *après coup* for “des traits constitutifs de [son] inconscient,” it seems plausible that for Proust as well as for the artists he admired, retrospective illumination may have become a means of accessing and expressing an underlying unity in his work produced by his subconscious - his “traits profonds.”

How might Proust have discovered his “traits profonds”? As discussed in my previous section, retrospective illumination produces an interval of forgetting which, by stripping the artist of habitual perception - their familiarity with their own work - permits them to uncover the hidden unity produced by their *patrie perdue*. I suggest that Proust may not only have engaged in retrospective illumination, as it is depicted in the novel, but that forgetting may have - as it does in *RTP* - similarly allowed him to make such discoveries.

The length of *RTP* and amount of revision suggest that Proust’s forgetting of his own work during the creative process would likely have been a part of its creation. Lamenting the extended publication process, Proust regretted the fact that by the time readers reached the end of

*RTP*, they would have forgotten the first volume: “quand [les trois derniers volumes] paraîtront...les lecteurs auront depuis longtemps oublié l’existence de Swann, et le tout sera raté.”<sup>269</sup> As Christine M. Cano observes, the consequences of the length of *RTP* for readers’ ability to remember, and therefore understand, the totality of the novel, troubled Proust.<sup>270</sup> Cano adds, however, that it was not only readers who experienced forgetting in the course of reading *RTP*:

As Proust corrected one set of proofs after another, he began to articulate a desire to reread the entire novel, from end to end, before finishing his corrections. ‘Car pour un livre si long, où ont pu se glisser des répétitions, des double-emplois, il est utile que je relise d’un bout à l’autre l’ouvrage.’<sup>271</sup>

The length of *RTP* - and the long process of revision - posed a problem for Proust himself, who recognized that he would have to reread *RTP* in its entirety in order to correct any discrepancies or repetitions that arose as a result of its length. As Cano writes, “the incoherencies that have become familiar to readers of Proust since his death - contradictions, repetitions, inexplicable resuscitations - are understood by Proust as the result of time itself, a sort of inscription of the passage of time, as forgetting, into the text.”

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<sup>269</sup> See p. 55 in “Death as Editor” by Christine M. Cano, *ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> As cited by Cano, Proust wrote to Gallimard in November 1918, expressing his concern thus: “Maintenant que je vois qu’il ne faudra pas un an pour les quatre volumes comme vous m’aviez dit, mais huit ans! Or (comme les trois derniers volumes...paraîtront ensemble), quand ils paraîtront (c’est-à-dire, de ce train-là, vers 1925, au plus tôt), à supposer que l’auteur soit toujours en vie pour corriger ses épreuves, les lecteurs auront depuis longtemps oublié l’existence de Swann, et le tout sera raté,” *Corr.* XVII, p. 442.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

As Anthony R. Pugh's and Guillaume Perrier's observations suggest, Proust in fact forgot what he had written on more than one occasion. Pugh notes that Proust wrote an entire draft of a section that he most likely forgot about, using an earlier draft in spite of notes to himself that indicated Proust was to use a newer version.<sup>272</sup> Guillaume Perrier furthermore remarks that although Proust meant to create scenes that would act as an "antecedent" to an eventual dramatic reversal or revelation in later scenes, several discrepancies in these parallels suggest that at last some of the asymmetries in earlier scenes were likely due to Proust's forgetting to edit them accordingly.<sup>273</sup> Proust himself, then, like the readers he envisaged, experienced the forgetting of his own work.

Proust's forgetfulness, coupled with his desire to discover patterns of his subconscious in his work and his practice of retrospectively unifying fragments, suggest the possibility that Proust's retrospective discoveries may have taken place after a period of forgetting. The forgetting that took place during the process of revising his work may well have been unintentional and even regrettable to the extent that it undermined Proust's control over his work. Nevertheless, if this contributed to discrepancies in the novel, it may also have proven

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<sup>272</sup> See Pugh's footnote No. 9 on p. 154 in *The Growth of À la Recherche du Temps Perdu: 1909-1911*. Pugh writes that *Cahier 64* refers to a draft "écrit qq part," which Proust appears to have forgotten, instead rescuing an older, earlier draft.

<sup>273</sup> Guillaume Perrier's main aim is to suggest that *RTP* creates an experience of forgetting and remembrance for the reader, demonstrating that Proust may have withheld certain key details that would be revealed only in later volumes in order to prompt the experience of involuntary memory on the part of the reader. At least some of these, however, Perrier notes, were not intentional. See *La Mémoire du lecteur, ibid.*

welcome in Proust's efforts to discover patterns of his *inconscient* - his "traits profonds" - after the fact. Like the artist who must forget his work in a "tiroir" before he may recognize the relationship between it and his other works of art, Proust's writing process was itself possibly informed by the dynamic of forgetting and remembering essential to artistic creation in *RTP* - a process in which forgetting, by clearing the mind of the artist's artistic intentions, would allow him to view his work anew in order to recognize previously hidden connections.

### Conclusion

The narrator's analysis of retrospective illumination in other artists' creative practices, such as Wagner's and Balzac's artistic methods, thus reveals that retrospective illumination not only permits the artist to avoid predetermining the unity of their work of art; it also creates an interval of forgetting between the creation and revision of a work of art that allows the artist, by casting off their own preconceived notions about their art, to recognize previously unperceived patterns in their art - the hidden connections produced by their own *patrie perdue*. The ideal work of art, thus, is created through a process that privileges the rhythm of forgetting and memory - that allows for the interval of forgetting that ultimately makes possible the return of memory. Although it is difficult if not impossible to will impressions into oblivion in order to forget one's work - as the narrator attempts to do with his *Figaro* article - retrospective illumination becomes a conscious means of reproducing the involuntary forgetting that provokes memory.

This creative method was not limited to the world of fiction, furthermore, but possibly extended to Proust's own creative process. Proust's admiration of Balzac, Wagner's, and Ruskin's use of retrospective illumination echoes the narrator's observations in *RTP*; in both



cases, art is created through the discovery and further implementation of hidden patterns in one's own work. Proust not only valorized this creative method; his creative process suggests that his observations of other artists' creative processes furnished him with a model for his own creative process. Proust was not only fascinated by the "traits profonds" of the subconscious he could uncover in Balzac's, Wagner's, and Ruskin's works, but also sought to discover traits of his subconscious in his own writing. Furthermore, Proust's recombination of his own previous works and written fragments *après coup* bears a remarkably similarity to both the process of retrospective illumination as described in *RTP* and in *CSB*. Finally, Proust's revisions of *RTP* bear the traces of forgetting which may have, as is the case retrospective illumination in *RTP*, facilitated Proust's own discovery of the hidden connections in his work after the fact. Perhaps, then, not only for the artists Proust so admired in *RTP* as well as in *CSB*, but for Proust as well, Proust's own creative process was comprised of intervals of forgetting that made possible the discovery - and subsequent illumination - of his own subconscious.

This chapter thus makes two distinct yet interrelated arguments about the role of *oubli* in the creative process. On the one hand, this chapter argues that the stylistic unity of a work of art ideally is initially shaped by the subconscious. The involuntary expression of the artist's *patrie perdue* ensures that the work of art is not the product of voluntary memory and the intellect, but rather the authentic expression of the artist's self. The artist's *patrie perdue*, thus, ideally remains forgotten during the creative process, relegated to oblivion. On the other hand, it is the duty of the artist to recover and recognize the patterns created by their subconscious - their *patrie perdue* - and revise their work accordingly. This recognition, I argue, takes place as a result of the interval of forgetting that takes place between the creation and revision of a work of art.

Forgetting, then, is both the ideal source as well as the condition for the artist's ability to uncover the work of the subconscious.

In demonstrating the effects of forgetting on memory in the creative process, this chapter illustrates that artistic creation ultimately encapsulates the relationship of forgetting and memory as characterized in *RTP*. In my first chapter, we saw that forgetting, by effacing habit, allows for the resurfacing of older layers of memory preserved within the subconscious. My second chapter posits that one's understanding of art itself depends upon the work of the subconscious, in which impressions not consciously registered and yet preserved may take shape. I argue that the forgetting that takes place across one's successive encounters with a work of art, by undoing the effects of habit, permits for the recovery of impressions developed within the subconscious. The recovery of these impressions in turn contributes to an appreciation for the more novel aspects of art because such impressions, which have taken shape in the subconscious, bypass the influence of the intellect and habit.

The line between the perception and the creation of art, however, turns out to be thin, for ultimately the creation of a work of art requires the artist to become, if temporarily, the perceiver of their own work of art. Like the listener who understands the *Sonate de Vinteuil* only after enough time has passed and, forgetting their initial impressions, hears the *Sonate* anew, the artist who forgets their work of art may perceive it anew, forgetting their artistic intentions in order to recognize the patterns produced by their *patrie perdue*. This creative process not only mirrors the perception of art, but also the narrator's experience of forgetting and remembering in, for instance, the opening pages of *Combray* or the *moments bienheureux*, which undoes the effects of habit in order to allow for the return of memory. The narrator's experience of forgetting and remembering in the novel is thus a microcosm of the rhythm of forgetting and remembering

necessary to artistic creation; the narrator, if he is to become an artist, must ultimately recreate the effects of forgetting experienced in *RTP* in order to recover the work of the subconscious and, ultimately, create the ideal work of art.

## Conclusion

### The River *Lethe*: A Rite of Passage

In *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, Harald Weinrich likens the forgetting in the *Recherche* to the river *Lethe*, the spring of forgetfulness in Greek mythology.<sup>274</sup> Evoking a paradigm of forgetting established by other scholars such as Walter Benjamin, among others, Weinrich posits that forgetting is the well-spring, or reserve, of memory.<sup>275</sup> In Weinrich's articulation of forgetting, as well as scholarship that has similarly emphasized the counterplay between forgetting and memory, the river *Lethe* and the river *Mnemosyne* are thus intertwined; the river *Lethe*, preserving memory from the contingencies of the intellect, becomes the site of memory.

In the original Greek mythology, however, the river *Lethe* does not serve to preserve memory; it is depicted as a destructive force. In some retellings of the myth, drinking from the *Lethe* river is a source of punishment that prevents the dead from remembering their life, condemning them to oblivion for eternity. In the oracle of Lebadeia, however, as told by Jean Pierre Vernant, *Lethe* was the river that the newly initiated of the underworld would drink from as a rite of passage:

Before venturing into the mouth of hell, the questor, who had already undergone rites of purification, was taken to two springs named respectively *Lethe* and *Mnemosune*. He drank from the first and immediately forgot everything to do with his human life and, like a dead man, he entered the realm of Night. The water of the second spring was to enable him to remember all that he had seen and heard in the other world. When he returned he

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<sup>274</sup> See p. 150, *ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> Benjamin's paradigm of forgetting similarly posits that forgetting and remembering become essentially synonymous in *RTP*: forgetting becomes the site, or the "woof" of memory. See p. 202 in *Illuminations*, *ibid.*

was no longer restricted to knowledge of the present moment: contact with the beyond had revealed both past and future to him.<sup>276</sup>

In the above passage, it is not the preservation of memory, but precisely the destruction of memory that makes the river *Lethe* a necessary part of the initiation into the underworld. Only when those who drink from the river *Lethe* experience the complete forgetfulness of their past lives and the self that may they, in turn, drink from the river *Mnemosyne*. Forgetting here is not the source of memory itself, but rather the precursor to memory.

As Amnesh Sinha notes, the question is why initiates must drink from from *Lethe* instead of vice versa.<sup>277</sup> A Greek travelogue written by Pausanias recounts the order in which one drinks from the rivers *Lethe* and *Mnemosyne* and the ritual customs surrounding this rite of passage thus:

First, during the night he [the supplicant] is taken to the river Hercyna by two boys of the citizens about thirteen years old, named Hermae, who after taking him there anoint him with oil and wash him. It is these who wash the descended, and do all the other necessary services as his attendant boys. After this he is taken by the priests, not at once to the oracle, but to fountains of water very near to each other.

Here [at the chthonian oracle of Trophonios in Boiotia] he must drink water called the water of Forgetfulness, that he may forget all that he has been thinking of hitherto, and afterwards he drinks of another water, the water of Memory, which causes him to remember what he sees after his descent. After looking at the image which they say was made by Daedalus (it is not shown by the priests save to such as are going to visit Trophonius), having seen it, worshipped it and prayed, he proceeds to the oracle, dressed in a linen tunic, with ribbons girding it, and wearing the boots of the country.<sup>278</sup>

The erasure of memory is depicted here as a purification akin to cleansing the body: first the initiates' bodies are cleansed; directly afterwards, they are stripped of all memory. These are the

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<sup>276</sup> See p. 81 in *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

<sup>277</sup> See p. 23. "Forgetting to Remember: From Benjamin to Blanchot." *Colloquy*, Issue 10, 2005, p. 22-41.

<sup>278</sup> See Book 9, Ch. 39, Sections 7-8 in *Description of Greece*. Translated by Jones, W. H. S. and Omerod, H. A. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1918.

rites of passage which, cleansing the newly initiated both figuratively and metaphorically, allow them to receive their memory of the afterlife. In some variations of this myth, then, the *Lethe* river, far from being a source of punishment, becomes a means of purification that prepares the newly initiated to receive memory by stripping them of memory. Forgetting, in other words, becomes a rite of passage that allows for the reception of memory.

This iteration of the *Lethe* river ultimately resembles the role of forgetting in the *Recherche* as I have outlined it in this thesis: forgetting as that which not only preserves, but whose destruction clears the path for the return of memory. As I argued in my first chapter, *oubli* - both as a state in which memory is lacking (oblivion), and as the forgetting that takes place over the course of time - does more than safeguard memory from the intellect; *oubli* also corrects the excesses of memory - voluntary memory that has, over time, become attached to a particular object of perception in the form of *habitude*. As best exemplified in the *moments bienheureux*, habitual associations pose a threat to the return of memory; it is only forgetting - whether the temporary paralysis of cognition due to the returning force of memory, or the forgetting of the object of perception itself - that permits for the return of memory by undoing the effects of habit.

Involuntary memory itself echoes the depiction of forgetting from the opening pages of *Combray*, in which the *oubli* of sleep temporarily suspends the narrator's habitual associations of his surroundings, permitting him to turn back the pages of time. The characterization of *oubli* in these important moments of the novel illustrates that it is when the images and memories perpetuated by voluntary memory and habit may no longer be remembered - when the *habitudes* of the conscious mind have been forgotten - that other memories, no longer obstructed by habit, may return.

The depiction of *oubli* in these important moments of the novel is not limited to passages on sleep and involuntary memory but is also reflected in the dynamic between memory and forgetting in Swann's and the narrator's relationships with Odette and Albertine, respectively. Swann's forgetting of Odette, by effacing habit - the impression of Odette as Zéphora ingrained into Swann's visual memory - permits Swann to eventually recover an impression long obscured underneath the reworking of voluntary memory and habit: his initial unfavorable impression of Odette. Similarly, after a long interval of forgetting in which the narrator forgets Albertine, the impressions attached to Albertine by *habitude* ("que l'habitude a attaché à elle") eventually fade, revealing in their stead a different image of Albertine: Albertine not as the narrator wished to remember her but as she was. If the river *Lethe* annihilates memory, it also brings one to forget so that memory, purified of the effects of habit, may be restored.

As I argue in my second chapter, the narrator's encounters with *la Berma* and Vinteuil's music suggest that this role of forgetting extends to the perception, and ultimately, appreciation of art. *Habitude* applies ultimately not only to a habituated mode of perception - a disposition to perceive someone or something in a particular manner - but to the understanding of art. One approaches art with a set of established ideas, or "collection d'idées" about what art should be - expectations which, however, are at odds with the very definition of artistic masterpieces; *chefs-d'oeuvre* are defined by their individuality and nonconformity to such aesthetic expectations. The joyous motif of the *Septuor*, in its difference from anything the narrator has heard before, thus proves to be a disappointment. As the narrator's experience with *la Berma* illustrates, however, our perception of art changes over the course of multiple encounters; it is when the narrator has forgotten Berma that, after "années d'oubli," he is able to understand the nature of her genius. The narrator not only forgets Berma; he forgets the set of expectations he carried into

her first performance so that, seeing her a second time, his perception is shorn of the effects of habit.

Forgetting not only strips the perception of art of habit, however; in doing so, it also allows for the revelation of a deeper understanding of art. As the narrator's experience of the *Sonate* and *Septuor* demonstrates, a work of art may produce impressions that are too novel to initially be consciously understood. These impressions, temporarily forgotten, are not discarded, however; instead, they are preserved within the subconscious, where, isolated from the effects of habit, a gradual understanding crystallizes over successive hearings until these impressions may eventually be recognized by the conscious mind. This moment of recognition, I argue, comes about as a result of the exchange between forgetting and memory. The narrator emphasizes in particular the forgetting that occurs over the successive hearings of a piece as essential to the recovery of these forgotten impressions. It is only when those parts of the piece one initially most enjoys have faded - initial impressions that reify his aesthetic expectations - that those forgotten impressions, preserved within the subconscious, rise to the surface of the conscious mind.

The exchange between forgetting and memory that must take place in the individual's perception of music is ultimately a symbol for all art; the discussion of understanding Vinteuil's music is not particular to music alone, but rather dramatizes the effects of forgetting and remembering that take place in our understanding of all "oeuvres vraiments rares."<sup>279</sup> Music, thus, becomes a metaphor for the effects of time - and forgetting - on the perception of art, revealing that forgetting the work of art paradoxically allows one, in successive encounters, to better understand it. On the one hand, forgetting allows for the necessary work of the

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<sup>279</sup> I, 521.



subconscious, which permits impressions to take shape without the influence of habit. On the other hand, forgetting, by bringing initial impressions rooted in habit to fade, simultaneously permits for the recovery of impressions lost and developed within *oubli* - impressions integral to understanding the novel qualities of a truly novel work of art.

This exchange of forgetting and remembering with respect to the perception of the work of art is particularly salient to artistic creation because the artist, in the process of revising their own work, ultimately must learn to perceive their own work of art anew. Stylistic unity - the recurring themes and motifs particular to a work of art or an artist's *oeuvre* - is ideally the involuntary product of the subconscious: the involuntary expression of the artist's *patrie perdue*, or the forgotten aspects of the artist's self, in their art. The narrator's observation of *illumination rétrospective* in other artists' creative processes - those of Balzac and Wagner, for example - provides him with a method of reconciling the necessary efforts of the intellect involved in creating art, on the one hand, and the preservation and discovery of the efforts of the subconscious, on the other. *Illumination rétrospective* ensures that the intellect does not predetermine the stylistic unity of a work of art, as it delays the intervention of the intellect until after the drafting process, when the artist begins the process of revision. *Illumination rétrospective* thus preserves the involuntary expression of the artist's *patrie perdue* in their art even as it makes possible its retrospective enhancement through efforts of the intellect.

More significantly, however, *illumination rétrospective* is a method that also allows the artist to discover their *patrie perdue* in order to retrospectively communicate it to readers, viewers, or listeners. Although art is initially the involuntary expression of the subconscious, the artist must revise their work in order to illuminate the meaning of the themes and motifs produced in their work to their audience. Art, then, is ideally the work of the subconscious -

revised and illuminated retrospectively by the intellect. This presupposes, however, that the artist is capable of recognizing their *patrie perdue*. Ultimately, the lesson learned from Balzac's and Wagner's retrospective illumination is not only that the underlying unity of a work of art is illuminated *après coup*, but that retrospective illumination creates a necessary interval of forgetting between the creation and revision of the artist's work. It is only when the artist has filed away and forgotten a work of art that, having forgotten the conscious designs of the intellect, they may recognize previously unforeseen connections. Forgetting - the forgotten *patrie perdue* - is thus not only a reserve of memory from which memory draws for the purpose of artistic creation; forgetting also effaces habit, so that memory may return at all. Forgetting rids the artist's perception of his own work of the contingencies of habit so that, seeing their work with renewed perception, they may recognize patterns outside of the scope of the artist's conscious designs for their art.

The *Recherche*, thus, not only designates the subconscious - the artist's *patrie perdue* - as the ideal basis for the stylistic unity of a work of art; it also provides would-be artists with the method to create such a work of art. The artist does not voluntarily endeavor to forget their own work; one cannot will memory to fade into oblivion. Nevertheless, retrospective illumination becomes a privileged method of creating the ideal work of art because it makes possible the interval of forgetting necessary to uncovering the work of the subconscious. Retrospective illumination, thus, becomes a conscious means to accessing the subconscious; a deliberate method of setting into motion the forgetting that makes possible the return of memory.

The lesson the narrator learns from Wagner and Balzac echoes Proust's own observations - and possibly the lesson - that he drew from both Wagner and Balzac, as well as Ruskin. In the process of translating Ruskin, Proust recognized that Ruskin discovered and reinforced the

underlying unity produced by his subconscious - “affinités profondes” - retrospectively. From Balzac and Wagner, he learned what retrospective illumination consisted of; the combination of different fragments into a single work of art. Like Ruskin, Proust expressed a fascination with discovering the work of his subconscious at play in his own writing; like Balzac and Wagner, Proust’s own writing process also depended upon a series of improvisations in which Proust discovered - and retrospectively implemented - hidden connections in his own work which, in turn, informed the overlying dramatic structure - the unification - of the *Recherche*.

Proust’s creative process thus suggests that Proust found a model for his own creative strategy in Ruskin’s, Wagner’s, and Balzac’s creative processes: Proust’s writing process itself consisted of the discovery and retrospective implementation of his own *patrie perdue*. Furthermore, like the authors he so admires in *RTP*, Proust’s own revision process was similarly marked by intervals of forgetting that possibly facilitated Proust’s discovery of evidence of his “traits profonds” in his own work. At the least, the creation of *RTP* likely involved the retrospective illumination of aspects of Proust’s subconscious; at most, the creation of *RTP* involved a process of forgetting and remembering akin to the one described within *RTP* itself, permitting an interval of forgetting that allowed Proust to retrospectively discover - and implement - the hidden connections in his work; his *patrie perdue*.

Ultimately, Proust’s creative method as well as the creative process delineated in *RTP* suggest that the creation of art reproduces the dynamic of forgetting and memory characterized throughout *RTP*. As this thesis demonstrates, forgetting not only facilitates the preservation and thus return of memory; it also corrects the excesses of memory. *Habitude* - particular impressions that become habituated over time - perpetuate the work of voluntary memory and the intellect, obscuring other underlying impressions. The loss of memory, however, even when

such memory is irredeemable, contributes to an equilibrium between forgetting and memory by undoing the effects of habit: the work of the intellect turned into *habitude*. Memory thus returns - in the case, for instance, of sleep and involuntary memory - when habitual impressions have been forgotten. The forgetting essential to the discovery of the artist's *patrie perdue* in retrospective illumination demonstrates that the exchange between forgetting and memory is ultimately vital not only to the perception of the work of art, but to the artist's perception - and therefore creation - of their own work of art. In articulating this alternative conception of forgetting, this thesis thus posits that forgetting is essential not only to the recovery of memory in the *Recherche*, but that it is equally essential to the creative process itself; the relationship of forgetting to memory in *RTP* is ultimately a microcosm for the effect of forgetting on memory in the creation of a work of art.

Just as the narrator who, after the oblivion of sleep, may uncover forgotten memories; just as the erasure of memory itself precipitates involuntary memory; just as the individual who better understands the work of art after a period of forgetting, the artist who wishes to access and recognize their *patrie perdue* must ultimately forget in order to remember. Perhaps, then, drinking from the river *Lethe* is not only a rite of passage for those who want to recover memory, but for those who want to create the ideal work of art.

In considering future avenues of research on the role of *oubli* in the *Recherche*, I hope to attend to the question of forgetting and aesthetics in order to consider the implications of forgetting on the stylistic expectations of an artist. In what ways may an aesthetic aim to create, or recreate, the experience of forgetting at the sentence level for the reader? Furthermore, if the unity of a work of art is ideally generated by the subconscious, does privileging forgetting promote a particular aesthetic, or does it preclude the possibility of any aesthetic at all? Further

exploring these questions would permit me to examine whether forgetting is not only the source and condition to creating art but may also constitute an aesthetic of forgetting.

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