



The Case for Reduction, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Jakob Schillinger, Cultural Inquiry, 25 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 267–70

SAM DOLBEAR

Proust List Impulse

CITE AS:

Sam Dolbear, 'Proust List Impulse', in *The Case for Reduction*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Jakob Schillinger, Cultural Inquiry, 25 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 267–70 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-25_15>

RIGHTS STATEMENT:

© by the author(s)

Except for images or otherwise noted, this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

ABSTRACT: Lists litter Marcel Proust's pages of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time), but also the works about it. This short contribution collects together a number of those lists, and offers some reflection on the list's place and function within the work, on the level of the sentence and as a form in its own right.

KEYWORDS: Lists; Proust, Marcel; Exhaustion; Sentences; Incompletion; Water

Proust List Impulse

SAM DOLBEAR

For s. m. r.

Lists proliferate in Marcel Proust's work but also his wake.¹ Anne Carson lists 59 instances of Albertine's appearances in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), including the number of pages on which she is mentioned (807) and the percentage of time in which she's asleep (19%).² Rebecca Comay lists the remarks made by those who visited Proust on his deathbed, including François Mauriac's comment on the youthfulness of his corpse and Paul Helleu's note that he remained handsome, strange given his diet had consisted of little but *café au lait* for five months.³ Samuel Beckett lists a number of fetishes in the novel:

-
- 1 This year I have been reading one volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu* every month, as they were cut into twelve in a particular 1943 publication. At the start of the year I wrapped up the volumes in brown paper, and, at the start of each month, I unwrap a volume to start reading it. I am in a Proust support group with two friends, Lizzie Homersham and Aurelia Guo, who are doing something similar. We send each other voice notes, thoughts, images, and quotes. I have kept a document of notes as I go.
 - 2 Anne Carson, 'The Albertine Workout', *London Review of Books*, 5 June 2014.
 - 3 Rebecca Comay, 'Proust's Remains', *October*, 144 (2013), pp. 3–24 <https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00138>.

1. The Madeleine steeped in an infusion of tea.
2. The steeples of Martinville, seen from Dr. Percepied's trap.
3. A musty smell in a public lavatory in the Champs-Élysées.
4. The three trees, seen near Balbec from the carriage of Mme. de Villeparisis.
5. The hedge of hawthorn near Balbec.
6. He stoops to unbutton his boots on the occasion of his second visit to the Grand Hotel Balbec.
7. Uneven cobbles in the courtyard of the Guermantes Hotel.
8. The noise of a spoon against a plate.
9. He wipes his mouth with a napkin.
10. The noise of water in the pipes.
11. Georg Sand's François le Champi.⁴

Beckett ends this list with the comment: 'The list is not complete.'⁵

Anne Borrell collects together the recipes mentioned in the volumes.⁶ Eric Karpeles compiles the paintings.⁷ Julia Kristeva, in her third lecture on Proust, lists the many stages of the experience of the consumption of the madeleine.⁸ Edward Said lists the social institutions that Proust moved through: families, intellectual associations, musical and concert events, philosophical traditions, and academic institutions.⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick lists the various ways in which weather signifies the transmigration of the narrator, when he becomes

4 Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1949), pp. 36–37.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

6 Anne Borrell, *Dining with Proust* (London: Ebury Press, 1992).

7 Eric Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to 'In Search of Lost Time'* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008).

8 These are listed in eight stages: 'Stage 1: just a "luminous patch"'; 'Stage 2: the metamorphosis of the dead'; 'Stage 3: I have the luck to taste a madeleine'; 'Stage 4: incest and silence — the disappearance of two women's names'; 'Stage 5: an exquisite pleasure without origin'; 'Stage 6: desire and the visible'; 'Stage 7: a substitution quietens the effervescence — Aunt Leonie in place of Mamma'; 'Stage 8: memory is a cascade of spatial metaphors'. See Julia Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, trans. by Stephen Bann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 30–49.

9 Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 14.

an ‘animated barometer’ or is born again after waking up to changed weather. Sedgwick then collates the instances of alchemical changes of state, when air and light are described as:

‘melted’ (5:100), ‘glazed’ (5:553), ‘unctuous’ (5:553), ‘elastic’ (5:555), ‘fermenting’ (5:555), ‘contracted’ (5:803), ‘distended’ (5:803), ‘solidified’ (6:19), ‘distilled’ (2:387), ‘scattered’ (2:387), ‘liquid’ (2:565), ‘woven’ (3:474), ‘brittle’ (3:474), ‘powdery’ (2:567), ‘crumbling’ (2:567), ‘embalmed’ (2:730), ‘congealed’ (4:721), ‘gummy’ (1:88), ‘flaked’ (1:88), ‘squeezed’ (1:120), ‘frayed’ (1:214), ‘pressed’ (1:235), ‘percolated’ (1:387), ‘volatilised’ (2:656), or even ‘burning’ (4:534).¹⁰

The technique of listing finds its origin in syntax as much as form. Jacqueline Rose remarked in a radio interview that the experience of reading one of Proust’s sentences is equivalent to diving into a pool and holding one’s breath. You plunge into someone’s mind, you have to let yourself go, else you drown.¹¹ With each comma comes an additional element, an accumulation, ripples that turn into waves. It could go on but it stops. Walter Benjamin also mobilized watery analogues *vis-à-vis* the ‘endless sentences’. He says they are like a river, specifically the Nile — a metaphor of Orientalist fancy (of which many lists could be made) — of a language that ‘overflows and fructifies the regions of truth.’¹² At another point in his essay on Proust, the sentences are weighted like fisher’s catch: ‘his sentences are the entire muscular activity of the intelligible body; they contain the whole enormous effort to raise this catch.’¹³ For Benjamin, Proust’s asthma (part of a list of other illnesses) becomes part of the sentences — or, he says, maybe his asthma is produced by the sentences, as they ‘rhythmically and step by step reproduc[e] his fear of suffocating’, as if drowning in air.¹⁴

10 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 9.

11 ‘Proust’, *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4, first transmitted 17 April 2003 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00548wx>> [accessed 6 July 2022].

12 Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Image of Proust’ [1929], trans. by Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Michael Jennings and others, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004–06), II.1 (2005), pp. 237–47 (p. 237).

13 *Ibid.*, p. 247.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

The above list of lists is incomplete. As each page turns, new ones fall out and in. Other people have no doubt compiled other lists, and other ones have yet to be collated. Each list might also end with an *et cetera*, to mark an inability to reach a final entry. How else to take account of experience if not by piling object on subject on object, social interaction on sensation on memory on habit? How else to make sense of the pages, to remember their contents, against excess and forgetting, when all we have been offered is *durée réelle* (real duration), a pool in which to swim, to come out the other side.

Sam Dolbear, 'Proust List Impulse', in *The Case for Reduction*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Jakob Schillinger, *Cultural Inquiry*, 25 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 267–70 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-25_15>

REFERENCES

- Beckett, Samuel, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1949)
- Benjamin, Walter, 'On the Image of Proust' [1929], trans. by Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Michael Jennings and others, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004–06), II.1 (2005), pp. 237–47
- Borrell, Anne, *Dining with Proust* (London: Ebury Press, 1992)
- Carson, Anne, 'The Albertine Workout', *London Review of Books*, 5 June 2014
- Comay, Rebecca, 'Proust's Remains', *October*, 144 (2013), pp. 3–24 <<https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO>>
- Karpeles, Eric, *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to 'In Search of Lost Time'* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008)
- Kristeva, Julia, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, trans. by Stephen Bann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)
- 'Proust', *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4, first transmitted 17 April 2003 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00548wx>> [accessed 6 July 2022]
- Said, Edward, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017)
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *The Weather in Proust* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394921>>