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# Marcel Proust's 'Le Temps retrouvé': The Inner Book of Impressions and Metaphor as the Language of Thought

Korinne E. Hensley  
*The University of Vermont*

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Marcel Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé*:

The Inner Book of Impressions and Metaphor as the Language of Thought

By Korinne Hensley

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

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## I. Introduction

In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the last volume of Marcel Proust's magnum opus *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust's hero Marcel comes to the realization that he is to become an author. In this final volume, we witness Marcel reach the end of his struggle and arrive at the illuminating conclusion:

La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent pleinement vécue, c'est la littérature. (Proust 202)

Marcel tasks himself with the creation of a book that will convey the essential truth of his life experiences. More specifically, he realizes that he must become the translator of what he calls the "le livre intérieur des signes inconnus", or inner book of impressions. This is a metaphorical book that each individual has within them, composed of impressions left by experiences encountered throughout the course of one's life. These impressions, Marcel discovers, are the truths of existence, and as a writer (a writer of *truths* and *essences*) it is his task to translate this book in order that it might be understood by those who do not partake in his individual reality. This, Marcel tells the reader, is the ultimate task of the author<sup>1</sup>.

In this paper, I seek to give tangible form to the notion of this inner book of impressions, namely that of the cognitive theory of *phantasia* put forth by Aristotle. Once the book has been made tangible, I propose that art is the only feasible medium that can be used to express the

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<sup>1</sup> "Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur." (Proust 197)

meanings dwelling in the inner book. More specifically, art in the form of literary metaphor, which reveals itself to be the only art form that makes this translation possible as it is the language in which we think, and therefore is the language in which the impressions are initially created into the mind of Marcel. This brings into question the nature of art and what “art” really is, a question to which Marcel gives us a multi-faceted answer. Finally, I seek to show that through the translation of this inner book of impressions, Proust via Marcel attempts to prove that individual realities are communicable, and that it is possible to partake in the realities of others, contrary to the solipsist claim that the self is all that can be known to exist.

## II. Le livre intérieur de signes inconnus, or the Inner Book of Impressions

What is the Inner Book of Impressions?

To begin, the inner book of impressions must be explored in greater depth. The impressions that comprise the inner book come to be “written” in Marcel in a particular way. Arguably the most well-known selections from Proust’s work are those instances often referred to as moments of involuntary memory, all of which bring slices of Marcel’s past back to him in such an all-encompassing manner that he is unaware of the present moment passing, and is instead almost reliving the past moments as if they were happening then and there. It is in these moments that Marcel experiences the creation of impressions.

The culminating moment during which Marcel realizes that his path is that of the translator of his inner book of impressions is in this last volume, *Le Temps retrouvé*, when he is inside the library of the Guermantes awaiting the moment to enter a room in which a concert is

taking place. While he waits, Marcel overhears a servant bang a spoon against a plate. In this moment of sound perception, he is overcome by a past memory:

...une nouvelle vision d'azur passa devant mes yeux; mais il était pur et salin, il se gonfla en mamelles bleuâtres ; l'impression fut si forte que le moment que je vivais me sembla être le moment actuel ...(Proust 175).

Upon hearing the spoon clatter against the plate, Marcel makes a discovery: these instances of past memories laden with sensations from bygone times by are the key to understanding the essence of reality, i.e. the substance that gives reality depth and meaning. If Marcel can capture these fleeting moments of involuntary and all-consuming memory, he will have captured reality and in doing so he will have escaped a fruitless existence. The book that he has therefore tasked himself with writing, the inner book of impressions, is described as follows:

Quant au livre intérieur de signes inconnus (de signes en relief, semblait-il, que mon attention explorant mon inconscient allait chercher, heurtait, contournait, comme un plongeur qui sonde), pour sa lecture personne ne pouvait m'aider d'aucune règle, cette lecture consistant en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer, ni même collaborer avec nous... Ce livre, le plus pénible de tous à déchiffrer, et aussi le seul que nous ait dicté la réalité, le seul dont l' "impression" ait été faite en nous par la réalité même.  
(Proust 186)

This book of impressions, once translated, will convey the understanding of essences<sup>2</sup>, and consequently the understanding of reality. According to Marcel, without this inner book of impressions reality is rendered incommunicable. Unlike other books, which are laden with intentions and ulterior motives (aspects that, according to Marcel, hinder the true purpose of literature<sup>3</sup>), this book will be able to convey reality *telle qu'elle est*.

What are these “impressions”, and how do they come to be?

To begin deciphering what this book is, to create a fully fleshed-out notion of what the book looks like and consists of, we must examine more in depth the “impressions” themselves: what they are and how they come to be.

Marcel describes what the impressions consist of after his experience of involuntary memory following the sound of the silverware hitting the plate:

Le geste, l'acte le plus simple reste enfermé comme dans mille vases clos dont chacun serait rempli de choses d'une couleur, d'une odeur, d'une température absolument différentes. (Proust 176)

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<sup>2</sup> “Essence” here, for Proust, takes on a meaning that pertains more to the slowed down, perceptual appreciation of experiences, as will be elaborated on more with discussion of the work of Shklovsky, brought up later on in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> “Aussi combien se détournent de l'écrire ! Que de tâches n'assume t-on pas pour éviter celle-là! Chaque événement, que ce fût l'affaire Dreyfus, que ce fût la guerre, avait fourni d'autres excuses aux écrivains pour ne pas déchiffrer ce livre-là, ils voulaient assurer le triomphe du droit, refaire l'unité morale de la nation, n'avaient pas le temps de penser à la littérature... Seulement les excuses ne figurent point dans l'art...” (Proust 186)

What Marcel is describing here is a complex, multidimensional perceptual experience. It is not merely the image of a spoon brought into the mind upon will: it is a thousand stopped vases filled with smell, sight, taste, sound, and feel, stored somewhere in the mind where they can only be accessed when one is not vainly attempting to recall them.

As stated earlier, what Marcel is experiencing is beyond the mere imprinting of one single percept (for example, the *image* of a spoon on a plate, disregarding all other perceptual information that composed the scene around the spoon and the plate) and resulting memory formation. What he is experiencing and describing was initially detailed by Aristotle in his discussions of cognitive theory, found in his treatise on the soul, *De Anima*<sup>4</sup>.

In this treatise, Aristotle ruminates over an explanation of thought and the intermediate process between perception of an object outside of the body and consequent thought creation and memory recall, a process he calls *phantasia*. According to Aristotle, *phantasia* accounts for the human ability to recall images (impressions) of percepts that are no longer in the immediate environment, to have these impressions be more than mere two-dimensional image reproductions

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotelian philosophy was a subject matter in which Proust was versed. During his studies with professor Alphonse Darlu, Aristotle was one of the subjects addressed. (For more on Proust's early education, see Tadié and Cameron. For a more summary examination of his early life, see Taylor). However, despite being well versed in Aristotelian philosophy, Proust was less than willing to adhere to this school of thought, as scholars such as Luc Fraise have argued. Fraise claims that Proust had a rather rocky relationship with Aristotle and ancient philosophy in general: Proust's use of philosophy in *A la recherche du temps perdu* "suppose une certaine attitude vis-à-vis de la philosophie: la rupture avec une orthodoxie, à travers le renversement de l'aristotélisme somme toute académique." According to Fraise, the satirical use of ancient philosophy was part of Proust's search for his own style: "C'est encore, on le voit, la question de trouver sa voix." Regardless, we do see that Aristotle had an influence on Proust's thought process, be it subliminal or otherwise (as Fraise tells us: "Si pour lui, écrire c'est penser, penser c'est en fait tout repenser, ce qui oblige le romancier philosophe à oublier sa licence de philosophie et à ne pas se montrer en philosophe, d'où résultent un faux dialogue, de faux souvenirs philosophiques, chaque fois que le nom d'un philosophe apparaît à la surface de la narration : c'est que le vrai dialogue avec la philosophie interviendra ailleurs.") (Fraise 279-306). For more on Proust's quest to find his literary voice, see Tribout-Joseph.



in the mind, and the ability to form concepts and consequently understand universal notions (or *essences*, the conveying of which via literature is the goal of Marcel and his inner book).

*Phantasia* is the intermediate step, I contend, that Marcel is describing each time he experiences a moment of involuntary memory, i.e. a moment of impression creation.

I will begin here by further explaining *phantasia*. Aristotle introduces the notion in the following manner:

That perceiving and understanding are not identical is therefore obvious;... That *phantasia* is not sense is clear from the following considerations: Sense is either a faculty or an activity, e.g. sight or seeing: *phantasia* takes place in the absence of both, e.g. in dreams.  
(Aristotle, *De Anima*, 427b8, 428a5-7)

Aristotle presents *phantasia* to us as a process and ability distinct from perception, and argues that it is the explanation for memory formation as well as memory recall. While the section discussing *phantasia* in *De Anima* is rather short, classicist Victor Caston has fleshed out the section significantly in his studies on Aristotle.

According to Caston, the processes of perception and thought formation occur in analogous ways: they both have causal relationships, meaning both processes are about the objects that brought them about. The only difference is that perception is caused by contact with a particular external object (and therefore deals only with a particular instantiation of various aspects) while thought is caused by an *internal* object and is about *universals*. Thought is dependent on perception insofar as perception gathers the information that thought refers to, however the two processes do not have a direct connection. The purpose of perception is to

gather information in order to form universal concepts. We are repeatedly exposed to and perceive particulars from which we glean information about what types of particulars they are. From there we begin to understand the nature of these particulars. The key step in this process of forming understanding of universals, or essences, is the storing of the perceptual experience from the moment it occurs until the moment when it is drawn to the forefront of focus in order to be thought about. What is at work in between the two processes of perception and thought is the *phantasia* (Caston 322).

Aristotle goes on, according to Caston, to claim that one never thinks without a “*phantasmata*”, or the state we are in when experiencing *phantasia*. What is happening when one utilizes *phantasia* is that one enters a physical and mental state that enables one to capture not only an individual object of one perceptive ability (e.g. the colors and shapes of everything captured via the eyes) but *every* possible object of *every* sense (e.g. the aural objects of the ears, the gustatory objects of taste, the visible objects of sight, the tangible objects of touch, and the olfactory objects of smell)—all of these are captured when the mind enters the state of a *phantasmata*, utilizing *phantasia* to capture every sense datum possible (Caston 323).

When Marcel experiences the moments of involuntary memory recapturing, he is accessing these impressions, which are stored *phantasmata*. For example, when Marcel describes hearing the spoon clatter against the plate he is thrown backwards in time in a fit of re-experience: he not only remembers the moment, he is put back into the exact mindset that he was in when he formed the memories, enabling him to recall the sights, tastes, smells, and overall the comprehensive whole of the sense data that was collected during the exact moment that the impression was formed. The *phantasmata*, the instances of stored, comprehensive perceptual experiences, are what Marcel is describing as he creates the metaphor of the vases when

explaining what the impressions are—whole portions of space and time, including not only the visual percept impression but also the perfumes in the air, the speed of the wind at the time, etc.

These *phantasmata* are what the inner book is comprised of, and each *phantasmata* is due to a particular experience in Marcel's life. These life moments are imprinted into the inner book, but they are not what we might usually think of, as discussed above, when we think of "impressions". Deviating from Plato's wax tablet metaphor, which holds that memories are like two-dimensional imprints pressed into the wax tablet of the mind by a signet ring of sorts, the impressions that Marcel is talking about when he discusses his inner book of impressions are comprehensive instances of experience. These impressions are far beyond mere imprints left in wax; they are entire four-dimensional impressions—they occupy the basic three dimensions (length, width, depth) and also the fourth dimension, that of time. This fourth dimension is not defined spatially or temporally, but rather is known relative to the motion of Marcel, the observer of these impressions. The *phantasmata* are what allow the impressions left by Marcel's life experiences to be more than two-dimensional impressions.

This brings us to the next problem, that of actually accessing these impressions. In order for Marcel to be able to translate these impressions, he must be able to access them. As these impressions are not mere imprints of percepts, nor mere hazy recollections of percepts, but instead actual slices of time and space, there are three options: either 1) these impressions are able to be brought forth in present time to be reinstated in the present moment, 2) Marcel is able to be thrown back into in time when the impression was formed, or 3) it is not a question of moving backwards or forwards in time at all, but rather it is an experience outside of space and time.

Marcel denies the possibility of the first two options for us:

Rien qu'un moment du passé? Beaucoup plus, peut-être ; quelque chose qui, commun à la fois au passé et au présent, est beaucoup plus essentiel qu'eux deux. (Proust 178)

Here Marcel tells us that each impression/moment is more than just a memory of the past, or even a memory of the past reinstated in the present—it is something much more essential that these two options share.

Une minute affranchie de l'ordre du temps a recréé en nous pour la sentir l'homme affranchi de l'ordre du temps. Et celui-là, on comprend qu'il soit confiant dans sa joie, même le simple goût d'une madeleine ne semble pas contenir logiquement les raisons de cette joie, on comprend que le mot de “mort” n'ait pas de sens pour lui ; situé hors du temps, que pourrait-il craindre de l'avenir? (Proust 179)

Here we have a clear explanation of the only viable option for reaching these moments of impression, which is the third option: it is not a question of moving backwards or forwards in time at all, but rather it is an experience outside of space and time.

Along the same Aristotelian vein, *phantasia* accounts for this ability of impressions to exist extemporaneously as well as for the ability of Marcel to access them. Caston elaborates further on the discussion of perceptual impressions in *De Anima*, bringing into the picture a new feature that he calls “agent intellect”. In *De Anima* III.5, Aristotle briefly introduces the agent intellect, a sort of second intellect to the intellect that each human being possesses individually. This second intellect is essentially the ability to understand anything at all—it is all essences of

all things possibly understood being understood at once. When one grasps understanding of a universal concept (an essence), one is doing so only by gaining access to the agent intellect. This intellect exists not only independently of individual humans but also outside of the fabric of time and space (Caston 330). If the goal of Marcel is to convey his knowledge of universal truths found in his moments of enlightened clarity from his memory impressions (and we are assuming here that he is), he must necessarily be accessing the agent intellect. This works perfectly with the problem that Marcel's access to memory presents to us: if the question is how Marcel exits space and time in order to encounter the moments of impressed memory, agent intellect is the answer. The agent intellect has moments of existence in space and time via those who understand universals, i.e. via Marcel when he grasps the importance and the essence of his relived memories.

Or cette cause, je la devinais en comparant entre elles ces diverses impressions bienheureuses et qui avaient entre elles ceci de commun que j'éprouvais à la fois dans le moment actuel et dans un moment éloigné, le bruit de la cuiller sur l'assiette, l'inégalité des dalles, le gout de la madeleine jusqu'à faire empiéter le passé sur le présent, à me faire hésiter à savoir dans lequel des deux je me trouvais : au vrai, l'être qui alors goûtait en moi cette impression la goûtait en ce qu'elle avait de commun dans un jour ancien et maintenant, dans ce qu'elle avait d'extra-temporel, un être qui n'apparaissait que quand, par une de ces identités entre le présent et le passé, il pouvait se trouver le seul milieu où il pût vivre, jouir de l'essence des choses, c'est-à-dire en dehors du temps. (Proust 178).

What Marcel describes here lines up with what Aristotle described when discussing the agent intellect, according to Caston. The ability of Marcel to leave the realm of time and space when reencountering the moments life has impressed upon him is due to his accessing the agent intellect, outside of space and time.

The agent intellect also accounts for the distinction that Marcel makes between voluntary and involuntary memory. This distinction is an important one, as involuntary memories are the only ones that import any sort of deeper understanding. Without them, understanding would be limited to the voluntary conjuring up of memories that bring us no new comprehension of the truths they might possess hidden. The impressions that are found in the inner book are only accessible by chance: they are exclusively due to random triggers, and cannot be brought on through will power. This is why the translation of the inner book of impressions is such a task: it is not possible to sit down and experience these instances of deeper understanding by sheer force of will; they can only be accessed when they are involuntarily triggered within. As Marcel tells us:

*Cet être-là n'était jamais venu à moi, ne s'était jamais manifesté qu'en dehors de l'action, de la jouissance immédiate, chaque fois que le miracle d'une analogie m'avait fait échapper au présent. Seul il avait le pouvoir de me faire retrouver les jours anciens, le temps perdu, devant quoi les efforts de ma mémoire et de mon intelligence échouaient toujours. (Proust 178)*

The efforts of memory and intellect fail completely in attempts to acquire the knowledge that the instances of involuntary memory bring to Marcel. The essential knowledge comes exclusively

from moments that cannot be willed into existence. This is where the agent intellect comes into play once again. Aristotle proposes, according to Caston, that there is more than just one intellect. There is the intellect, as I have mentioned, that is able to be exercised at will, and there is an intellect that exists outside of human control. This is the intellect that taps into Marcel, rather than Marcel tapping into it himself—he spends a considerable amount of time attempting to do so, to no avail. For instance, when Marcel looks upon a line of trees and laments his lack of poetic inspiration:

Le soleil éclairait jusqu'à la moitié de leur tronc une ligne qui suivait la voie du chemin de fer. 'Arbres, pensais-je, vous n'avez rien à me dire, mon coeur refroidé ne vous entend plus. Je suis pourtant ici en pleine nature, eh bien, c'est avec froideur, avec ennui que mes yeux constatent la ligne qui sépare votre front lumineux de votre tronc d'ombre. Si j'ai jamais pu me croire poète, je sais maintenant que je ne le suis pas.' (Proust 161)

Marcel is conscious of the fact that he cannot will inspiration and deeper essential knowledge into being because he has tried and failed in the face of something he knows intellectually to be beautiful (the trees hit by the sun). The second type of intellect, which is not willed into being, which can only be imparted to one, is the agent intellect that accounts for the unconscious memory revival. Marcel comes to this realization:

Les idées formées par l'intelligence pure n'ont qu'une vérité logique, une vérité possible, leur élection est arbitraire. Le livre aux caractères figurés, non tracés par nous, est notre seul livre. Non que les idées que nous formons ne puissent être justes logiquement, mais

nous ne savons pas si elles sont vraies. 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 seule d'être appréhendée par l'esprit, car elle est seule capable, s'il sait en dégager cette vérité, de l'amener à une plus grande perfection et de lui donner une pure joie. (Proust 186)

Marcel makes the distinction between knowledge that one comes up with on one's own and judges to be logical and knowledge that is imparted to one and is outside of one's control. This knowledge, the type that is out of the control of the thinker, is the only type of knowledge worth contemplating, as it is the only knowledge with any real truth to it. This is the agent intellect acting upon the mind of the thinker, allowing the thinker access to this real understanding. This only happens when the thinker unconsciously comes into contact with a stimulant that triggers within the mind a similarity found in another memory. These moments cannot be willed into existence, because the similarity found in another memory is necessarily forgotten and thus hidden deep within the subconscious. The thinker does not know that it is there anymore, given that the memory has been forgotten, and so it is not possible to draw up from the subconscious, as the thinker does not know what it is that needs to be drawn up.

Overall, this inner book of impressions is a wealth of instances in time, gathered in all of their sense data, and stored in the mind of Marcel, who is only able to access them upon accidental, true understanding of essences. We now have answers to what the impressions are, how they are formed, and how they exist and are accessed by Marcel. Questions that now arise are: what language was this book of inner impressions in, if Marcel tasks himself not only with



*writing* the book, but with *translating* it, or is it a language at all? Furthermore, how is he to translate it?

### III. The Language of the Inner Book of Impressions, and How and Why It Has to Be Translated

This section will address the manner in which Marcel realizes he must translate the inner book of impressions. Having discovered the mechanics of the impressions, how they come to be in Marcel and what they are composed of, the next step is Marcel's realization that he must take the sense data that the impressions contain and translate them into communicable forms, in order to convey universal truths of reality that raw sense data does not express on its own. As Marcel states:

Je m'apercevais que ce livre essentiel, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire. Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur. (Proust 197)

What remains for Marcel to accomplish, upon understanding the impressions, is now to translate the inner book in which they are found.

How and Why the Inner Book of Impressions Must Be Translated

After finally arriving at the realization that he has within him this inner book of impressions, Marcel must now create a physical manifestation of the book in order to convey the truths that are inscribed in the impressions. His solution to this problem is the creation of works of art. As Marcel tells us, art is the only effective method for translation for many reasons, including the fact that art permits the recording of entire moments of existence anchored in specific spaces and times, and simultaneously allows for the processing of the essential truth that these moments contain. Marcel describes the material that remains to be translated thusly:

Des impressions obscures avaient quelquefois, et déjà à Combray du côté de Guermantes, sollicité ma pensée, à la façon de ces réminiscences, mais qui cachaient non une sensation d'autrefois mais une vérité nouvelle, une image précieuse que je cherchais à découvrir par des efforts du même genre que ceux qu'on fait pour se rappeler quelque chose, comme si nos plus belles idées étaient comme des airs de musique qui nous reviendraient sans que nous les eussions jamais entendus, et que nous nous efforcerions d'écouter, de transcrire. (Proust 184-185)

As the book's translator, the work is that of taking the raw sense data (the impressions discussed in the previous section) and bringing to the surface the deeper meaning that they possess. What he realizes here is that the impressions that he formed, when they were being formed, were entirely unappreciated for what they were. While Marcel was living in Combray during his childhood, for example, the sight of the sea meant nothing to him. However, in retrospect, due to the didactic effect of the memories that inundate Marcel in the present, he is able to see that each

sensation and each percept perceived in these moments of his past held deeper meanings. Marcel elaborates on this notion later on in the same section, saying:

...que déjà à Combray je fixais avec attention devant mon esprit quelque image qui m'avait forcé à la regarder, un nuage, un triangle, un clocher, une fleur, un caillou, en sentant qu'il y avait peut-être sous ces signes quelque chose de tout autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir, une pensée qu'ils traduisaient à la façon de ces caractères hiéroglyphiques qu'on croyait représenter seulement des objets matériels. Sans doute ce déchiffrement était difficile mais seul il donnait quelque vérité à lire. (Proust 185)

The work of the memories is that of bringing to the surface a truth that was not evident at the time of the initial impression. It is only in retrospect, or moreover only in the moments when Marcel accesses the agent intellect outside of space and time, that any deeper meaning that was overlooked when first perceived is revealed. This is what must be translated. Without translating the impressions as they were first made, the truth and meaning of every experience would remain hidden in code in the backlogs of undeveloped memory.

The task of the translator has multiple parts. First, one is made to think that the initial impressions were composed in a language not immediately understood or communicable. I will address the question of the language of thought in a later section. The second notion that is brought up is the question of the medium in which the impressions are to be translated. As discussed in the previous section, the impressions are beyond mere images of percepts that exist in exterior reality. It is not just the image of a spoon, for instance, that comes to mind when he hears it hit the plate, but rather an entire slice of past existence that engulfs his current state of

being. Marcel must be able not only to describe the external reality of percepts but also every emotional association and sense datum that accompanied it.

In her work on the notion of recording reality, sociologist and professor of film studies Elizabeth Cowie makes the distinction between what she calls emotional response and identification. With identification, what the author is doing is seeking the “truth” of reality, what really exists externally and what it means objectively. On the contrary, emotional response is what we attach to external stimulus (Cowie 86-117). This is what Marcel realizes he must make communicable: the privileged point of view of the narrator (in this case, himself) taking into account the emotional responses that came with the external percepts that initially created the impressions.

But how to do this? Marcel comes to understand that the only way he can capture and convey the emotional responses attached to the impressions that make them entire slices of past reality is via a specific type of art<sup>5</sup>. Reality on its own, conveyed as is as we see in realist literature, for example, is not satisfactory. It carries with it none of the emotional value that each individual ascribes to the reality they perceive. Through art, we are able to experience the emotional aspects and as a result the cohesive whole of the experience as the narrator experiences them during moments of involuntary memory.

In an article on the notion of art and time in Proust’s novel, Susan E. Benyon discusses how Proust displays the ability of art to take us out of the temporal plane, thus enabling us to follow the path of the involuntary memories and to re-experience their deeper truth, enabling them to be expressed to an audience and not remain trapped in the mind of Marcel. As the moments of involuntary memory transcend time and space, so does art in capturing such

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<sup>5</sup> For more on Proust and art, see Bowie 68-125.

moments. Benyon refers to this as “aesthetic sensation”, defining it as something that is common both to the past and the present but much more essential than both. In other words, the aesthetic sensation is something that both the past moment that is being recalled and present moment that triggered the recollection possess, but is only brought to light when the two moments are joined together by a similarity, e.g. the metallic sound of the silverware against the plate shared by the sound created by the train Marcel heard long ago. Art is the only thing that is able to capture this aesthetic sensation, which is brought into being during moments of involuntary memory (Benyon 86-93). It is art that will enable Marcel to capture the essence of the experiences he has.

At first Marcel begins broadly, proposing that art in any form is the only way that we can take the impressions from the past that have resurfaced and convey the deeper meaning that they present upon reexamination<sup>6</sup>. For our hero, the art is in the form of writing, but art in general is given as the solution to the problem of communication of individual realities. For Marcel expression and communication using art is the solution to a reality otherwise unable to access the essential meaning that lies under the objective surface level.

The idea that art is the solution to understanding and appreciating the deeper meaning that goes unseen, hidden behind the percepts of tangible reality, has been discussed by many. One of the scholars that discussed the importance of art is Victor Shlovsky. In his essay “Art as Technique” Shlovsky describes what it is that we see Marcel discovering pertaining to the essential importance of art in life. For both Shlovsky and Proust, art is the only medium through which we can process life in real time and then understand the truths it contains hidden behind

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<sup>6</sup> “En somme, dans un cas comme dans l’autre, qu’il s’agit d’impressions comme celle que m’avait donnée la vue des clochers, de Martinville, ou de reminiscences comme celle de l’inégalité des deux marches ou le goût de la madeleine, il fallait tâcher d’interpréter les sensations comme les signes d’autant de lois et d’idées, en essayant de penser, c’est-à-dire de faire sortir de la pénombre ce que j’avais senti, de le convertir en un équivalent spirituel. Or, ce moyen qui me paraissait le seul, qu’était-ce autre chose que faire un oeuvre d’art?” (Proust 185)

perceptible reality. Marcel discovers that art is the material that must be used to slow down and allow the processing of life in real time. In the words of Shlovsky,

In order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By 'estranging' objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious'. The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. (Shklovsky 6)

So, we see that art not only allows for proper processing (as it pertains to the viewer of the art) but also for the artist (the writer, in our case) art makes it possible to communicate the truth beneath the percepts, the truth that is linked with the emotional and multi-sensual associations found in the involuntary memories. This is the knowledge of which Shlovksy spoke, the knowledge of the truth that underlies external realities only knowable through art.

Life passes in front of us, moments that comprise life are fleeting, and it becomes impossible for Marcel to process any deeper meaning or truths that these moments might be carrying with them in the present. What art does is to allow the viewer to stop and appreciate the deeper meaning in the past frozen in present time, thus enabling the viewer to delve into a past moment that was hitherto inaccessible and therefore unable to be processed and mined for meaning. In this manner, art is the only way to fully reflect, appreciate, and understand life. Without art, the pause and moment of reflection would not exist, as the instants that comprise life are too fleeting and almost imperceptible. As Marcel states:

Car les vérités que l'intelligence saisit directement à claire-voie dans le monde de la pleine lumière ont quelque chose de moins profond, de moins nécessaire, que celles que la vie nous a malgré nous communiquées en une impression, matérielle parce qu'elle est entrée par nos sens, mais dont nous pouvons dégager l'esprit. (Proust 185)

What we are able to glean in broad daylight, in the present, is fundamentally worth less than what is translated into art and then processed by both viewer and artist alike. Without reflection and translation into art, the essence of anything is unknowable. Marcel elaborates:

Des impressions telles que celles que je cherchais à fixer ne pouvaient que s'évanouir au contact d'une jouissance directe qui a été impuissante à les faire naître. La seule manière de les goûter d'avantage, c'était de tâcher de les connaître plus complètement, là où elles se trouvaient, c'est-à-dire en moi-même, de les rendre claires jusque dans leurs profondeurs. (Proust 184)

The percepts that reality presents to us laid bare and undisguised offer only ephemeral glimpses into what might be essential understanding. In order to grasp that meaning completely and move beyond just the glimmer of depth, translation of the initial impression into art is necessary<sup>7</sup>.

What then becomes the task of the art that is to be created is as follows: first, the impression, composed as it is of emotions and multiple sense data, must be translated into

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the importance of art in revealing essential truth, see Prendergast 104-129

thought. This thought must be translated into a physical manifestation, namely, into a work of art. Mary Crenshaw Rawlinson also describes the importance of art in conveying the essences of perceptual experiences, in other words, the truth of reality, in her article concerning truth and art in Proust's works. One of the key aspects of art is the fact that it can only be created after retrospection. The subject of the art has necessarily only existed in the past, and is now being re-experienced in order to be manifested as a work of art. In this way the art becomes the vessel for the essences that Marcel seeks to express. The work of art becomes the window into the past world and past self, the entire cohesive moment of past existence, and allows the artist to re-experience, glean the essence, and translate it for the audience (Rawlinson 12-16). Without art acting as the interlocutor between the past and the present, as Marcel tells us, we remain like a group of crazy people attempting to communicate some reality to each other, which is just about as effective as talking to furniture<sup>8</sup>.

However, this brings up another notion, that of defining art. Marcel knows that art is the communicative medium he must utilize in order to fully convey his experience, but the notion of art is so broad that it seems almost a cop-out to say, "One must use art to express one's personal experience". Art comes in so many forms and the term is applied to so many things that it is not specific whatsoever to say that "art" is the solution. We must, therefore, define art as Marcel views it, and as he would need it to be in order to achieve this task of communication.

In defining art in a way that is all at once effective, comprehensive, and relevant to Proust as he was writing, Leo Tolstoy's study on the matter stands out. In his work aptly titled *What Is*

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<sup>8</sup> "L'artiste qui renonce à une heure de travail pour une heure de causerie avec un ami sait qu'il sacrifie une réalité pour quelque chose qui n'existe pas (les amis n'étant des amis que dans cette douce folie que nous avons au cours de la vie, à laquelle nous nous prêtons, mais que du fond de notre intelligence nous savons l'erreur d'un fou qui croirait que les meubles vivent et causerait avec eux)" (Proust 182)



*Art?*, Tolstoy endeavors to define what he considers *real* art to be. This specific work of Tolstoy's is heralded as among the most influential works on art for the era in which it was published, as it was one of the more complete and thorough examinations available at that time. It was in 1897 that he first published this work, and it made significant impact on its readers due in part to its all-encompassing approach to a difficult-to-define subject matter as well as its rejection of aestheticism<sup>9</sup>. Tolstoy also had an influence indirectly on Proust, through Proust's professor of philosophy during his teenage years<sup>10</sup>. Although he spends a considerable amount of time in this study deriding much of French literature and poetry on the basis that he considers it all to be product of a culture that looks upon art as nothing more than amusement and diversion (Tolstoy 63-72), much else of what Tolstoy argues will help our understanding of what Marcel realizes he must create in terms of art as the vehicle for his experience and understanding. Tolstoy begins his quest for definition by examining a definition of art that is widely accepted, a definition he calls the practical definition. This definition describes art as "an external manifestation, by means of lines, colors, gestures, sounds or words, of emotions experienced by a man" (Tolstoy 37). This definition was first put forth by Eugène Véron in his 1890 work *L'esthétique*. However, Tolstoy quickly goes on to say that this definition of art is imprecise on the basis that this definition leaves out the necessity of art *affecting others* (Tolstoy 37). This notion, though, makes one wonder: would a drunken man screaming be considered art? It is an external manifestation of emotion that no doubt affects others in some way, but few would argue

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the influence of Tolstoy and *What Is Art?* specifically, see Maude.

<sup>10</sup> Proust's professor during his adolescence, Alphonse Darlu, followed Tolstoy in terms of his philosophical beliefs, specifically in the belief in truth and love above all else, especially when it came to questions of morality. Darlu, Proust confessed in a letter, was one of the only men to influence him, a fact that Proust was loath to admit. For more on Proust's formative education, see Tadié and Cameron.

that it is art. The argument is further qualified by Tolstoy with a notion he introduces as “communion”. According to Tolstoy:

Every work of art results in the one who receives it entering into a certain kind of communion with the one who produced or is producing the art, and with all those who, simultaneously with him, or after him, have received or will receive the same artistic impression. (Tolstoy 38)

We are therefore to conclude that what defines art is necessarily its ability to convey something (an impression, an emotion, etc.) to someone, and to have what is being conveyed be able to be completely understood by the one receiving it, exactly as the artist once experienced it, thus bringing the artist and his audience into a communion of sorts. This is an important notion that will factor into the conclusion of this paper, pertaining to the ability of solipsism to be conquered, which I will discuss in due time.

One of the ideals that Marcel wished to achieve as an author is the expression of the hidden truths that reality possesses, not immediately available to be perceived or understood by the viewer<sup>11</sup>. In doing this, Marcel also realizes that he must be able to translate his own reality

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<sup>11</sup> “Déjà à Combray je fixais avec attention devant mon esprit quelque image qui m’avait forcé à la regarder, un nuage, un triangle, un clocher, une fleur, un caillou, en sentant qu’il y avait peut-être sous ces signes quelque chose de tout autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir, une pensée qu’ils traduisaient à la façon de ces caractères hiéroglyphiques qu’on croirait représenter seulement des objets matériels.” (Proust 185)

so that others who do not partake in it may be able to understand it without difficulty<sup>12</sup>. To be able to do this successfully, Tolstoy gives us another step in the process of creating art:

Art begins when a man, with the purpose of communicating to other people a feeling he once experienced, calls it up again within himself and expresses it by certain external signals (Tolstoy 39).

This step is one whose necessity Marcel realizes as well. The notion of recalling something is the entire basis of Marcel's involuntary memory. This is in full agreement with the argument that it is necessary that the memories, with their hidden truths, be *recalled* in order that they be understood and consequently conveyed to the audience. Just as Marcel himself tells us:

Oui, si le souvenir, grâce à l'oubli, n'a pu contracter aucun lien, jeter aucun chaînon entre lui et la minute présente, s'il est resté à sa place, à sa date, s'il a gardé ses distances, son isolement dans le creux d'une vallée ou à la pointe d'un sommet ; il nous fait tout à coup respirer un air nouveau, précisément parce que c'est un air qu'on a respiré autrefois, cet air plus pur que les poètes ont vainement essayé de faire régner dans le Paradis et qui ne pourrait donner cette sensation profonde de renouvellement que s'il avait été respiré déjà, car les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu'on a perdus. (Proust 177)

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<sup>12</sup> “Par l’art seulement nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n’est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu’il peut y avoir dans la lune.” (Proust 202)

It is necessary to the creation of art that the subject material that is to become the masterpiece be forgotten before being reinterpreted and created. According to this definition of art and how it comes to be, it is impossible to create without recollection. Art cannot be created based on the initial impression, it must be forgotten and left to be recalled later on, then reproduced into a physical manifestation. It is precisely this retelling of experience that makes art “real” art: the retelling makes the artist himself re-experience the entire moment of his past life (this would be the description of what is contained in the vases of Marcel’s memory, containing entire slices of his past selves), and simultaneously “infect” (Tolstoy, 39) the reader so that they may experience it as he did. It is this infection, as Tolstoy calls it, which constitutes art. If the feeling that drove the artist to create does not succeed in infecting the audience, what he creates is not art. We can therefore conclude that the notion of involuntary memory is integral for the creation of art.

Without the act of falling back into a past self, of re-experiencing a moment in time that was forgotten, it would be impossible to articulate the experience in a way that would infect the audience so that they too experience the exact sensations present in that impression. This also implies that the agent intellect, with its ability to enter into existence only when one comprehends truth, plays an integral role in the creation of art. Without the agent intellect, Marcel would never be able to understand the deeper meanings that his memories provide, and would therefore have nothing to convey to his audience.

This notion of forgetting and consequent recall is discussed also by James H. Reid in his work on literary theory entitled *Proust, Beckett, and Narration*. Reid discusses the narration that is present in Proust’s work and the interplay between the notion of remembering the “I” (the self) and forgetting the “I”. Once again noting the importance of involuntary memory, Reid argues that it is necessary to entirely forget and remove oneself from the present day self in order to fall

back into what was the past “I”. Marcel illustrates this notion of the past self being accessed when he stumbles by chance upon the Guermantes’ copy of *François le champi*. Upon opening the children’s book that he had been read so long ago, Marcel tells us upon glancing into the book:

Cet étranger, c’était moi-même, c’était l’enfant que j’étais alors, que le livre venait de susciter en moi, car de moi ne connaissant que cet enfant, c’est cet enfant que le livre avait appelé tout de suite, ne voulant être regardé que par ses yeux, aimé que par son cœur et ne parler qu’à lui. (Proust 191)

The Marcel that is reading *François le Champi* is not the Marcel that is telling us this story, it is entirely different person whose mentality is being accessed: the child Marcel of Marcel’s past. This is an instance of involuntary memory, described as forgetting the current self enough to be able to be engulfed by the experience of a past self to such a degree that the past self occupies the mental status of what was the current self up until this point. This moment of forgetting the present self is integral in order to recall the past self, in an attempt to regain the material that the art is to be composed of.

In addition to the necessity of forgetting and recalling, there are other aspects of art that need to be considered in order to find the perfect type of art for the communication that Marcel seeks. The definition of art as something that has a subject that is forgotten, recalled, and infects the audience and in doing so inducts them into a communion does not necessarily give us one single solution outright. It does not tell the reader that, for instance, painting is the only true medium of art, or that singing is the only effective manner for artists to achieve their goal of

communicating personal experience. However Tolstoy once again qualifies the definition of art that he has given:

Through the word, man communicates in thought, through the images of art he communicates in feeling with all people, not only of the present, but of the past and the future. (Tolstoy 138)

This creates a more whittled-down idea of the types of art that could be effective in terms of “infecting” the audience. At first it seems that Tolstoy is singling out visual images as the most effective means of communication and communion in art. However, he also brings up the notion of words, and not for naught: Marcel, in his attempt to utilize writing as a means to express his experience and understanding of the deeper meanings of his experiences, is attempting not to convey merely the emotions he experienced upon the formation of the impression, what Cowie described as the emotional response, but the entire experience as a whole, taking into account every sense data received at the moment of impression. This involves necessarily going beyond mere words. However, the solution is not, as Tolstoy seems to suggest, an image, at least not an image on its own. There must be some type of union of both word and image that will enable Marcel to convey his experience and understanding *exactly* as he experienced it: there must be some vehicle that enables, too, the reader to uninhibitedly understand Marcel’s experience *exactly* as Marcel understands it.

So the ideal form of art, if we are to define it now using what we have from Proust and Tolstoy, does not seem to fall under any one extant school of art. In fact, both Marcel and

Tolstoy openly spoke against the school of realism, stating that it is inefficient and moreover completely wrong for the task at hand. Marcel stated on the topic of realist art:

La littérature qui se contente de « décrire les choses », de donner un misérable relevé de leurs lignes et de leur surface, est, malgré sa prétention réaliste, la plus éloignée de la réalité, celle qui nous appauvrit et nous attriste le plus, ne parlât-elle que de gloire et de grandeurs, car elle coupe brusquement toute communication de notre moi présent avec le passé, dont les choses gardent l'essence, et l'avenir, où elles nous incitent à le goûter encore. (Proust 196)

According to Marcel, works of literature (and by extension works of art, we can assume) that aim to achieve a realist depiction of their subject are completely missing the mark. Instead of bringing the reader closer to reality, realist literature takes the raw sense material and from it derives nothing. The deeper meaning that reality possesses is left completely undeveloped and the reader gains nothing from the surface level, realist depiction. The essence, the important aspect of reality, is left undiscovered. This passage also tells us once again of the necessity of removal of the past from the present. The distance that exists between the past and the present is what makes the essence mineable from reality. It is from the distance that allows for the consequent realization of essential worth which then enables the creation of a work of art that is organic and rich in essential meaning. The language of science, the most universally recognized, realistic language that one can use to describe objective reality, therefore becomes the least efficient manner in which one can express anything, at least if one hopes to communicate any deeper truth.

What necessarily follows is the rejection of objective, scientific language as a means of communication and the acceptance of the opposite: metaphorical language as the only effective method of communicating essential knowledge. This language is the verbal/written manifestation of symbolist thinking and art: what is made manifest is not the objective, physical details of the essence, but rather just the essence itself.

The next step in communicating Marcel's experiences is finding this method that enables the conversion of his impressions into "summary images of art" (Rawlinson, 6), i.e. cloaking the impressions and the knowledge that they bring with them in a form that summarizes their deeper meaning while making that meaning communicable to an audience. While Marcel only goes so far as to propose art, unspecified and nonspecific, as the solution to the translation of the inner book of impressions, through his writing we can glean that Marcel, and more specifically Proust, has in fact narrowed down the solution to one specific form of art: the metaphor. In this case, the written metaphor.

#### IV. Metaphor as the Language of Thought and Method of Translation

The task gets narrower and narrower. In the midst of *Le temps retrouvé* Marcel establishes that he must create a work of art<sup>13</sup>, and by the end of the volume he realizes that his work is to be the translation of his inner book of impressions, containing all of the understanding of the essence of reality encoded in impressions left in his mind that linger in his subconscious

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote 3.



like vases containing entire moments of past existence<sup>14</sup>. What is left for our hero to do is to successfully translate this inner book, and so he does.

Marcel decides upon the metaphor as the only efficient vehicle for conveying his experiences in full, as he himself experienced them, to his audience.

On peut faire se succéder indéfiniment dans une description des objets qui figuraient dans le lieu décrit, la vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport, analogue dans le monde de l'art à celui qu'est le rapport unique de la loi causale dans le monde de la science, et les enfermera dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style. Même, ainsi que la vie, quand en rapprochant une qualité commune à deux sensations, il dégagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'une et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore. (Proust 196)

With his use of metaphor, Proust displays several things using Marcel as a vehicle. First, he brings up the notion of metaphor as the language of thought. Second, he proposes that metaphorical language is the only language capable of conveying essential understanding gleaned from Marcel's moments of involuntary memory. In doing so, Proust's writing proves that solipsism is conquerable.

First, in order to convey what is happening in his mind when he forms memories, Marcel must be able to translate his inner book of impressions in the most accurate manner possible.

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<sup>14</sup> “Sans doute ce déchiffrement était difficile mais seul il donnait quelque vérité à lire. Car les vérités que l'intelligence saisit directement à claire-voie dans le monde de la pleine lumière ont quelque chose de moins profond, de moins nécessaire, que celles que la vie nous a malgré nous communiqués en une impression, matérielle parce qu'elle est entrée par nos sens, mais dont nous pouvons dégager l'esprit.” (Proust 185)

That is to say, Marcel must use the language that he thinks in to write them down. Or at least, he must be able to translate said language in a manner that is able to express what is contained in the impressions without varying from the initial impression. This requires a very specific language, and it requires that we be familiar with the language of thought.

This brings us to the question: What is the language of thought? In answering this, we will be able to tell what “language” the inner book of impressions was written in, why it needed to then be translated by Marcel, and why art is the only method possible for translation. Before going any further, however, it is necessary to clarify whether or not the inner book of impressions was actually “written” in anything that could be considered a language. While it has been established that Marcel must translate his experience into something that can be conveyed to an audience, this does not necessarily imply that it is a language at all. One can express one’s experience in, say, motion pictures, or dance, and have no need to use any type of language whatsoever in order to get their point across. However, according to Vincent Descombes, the inner book of impressions was necessarily first “written” in a language of sorts. According to Descombes, if Marcel’s task is to translate this book that itself translates experience, then the inner book must already be a text (Descombes 223). Marcel tells us this when mentioning the fact that the inner book is within each one of us, and what remains only is to write it (“le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n’a pas, dans le sens courant, à l’inventer puisqu’il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire” (Proust 197)). If there is, as Marcel claims, no need to *create* this book, merely the need to translate it, then we can assume that it is indeed already a text. Descombes goes further with this argument, claiming that it is not the experience that precedes the literature describing it, but rather the literature precedes the experience (Descombes 224). Descombes calls this the “literary experience”, meaning what we experience upon reacting to

exterior stimulus is already literary in nature, and the task remaining is experiencing this literature within us and then translating it. What remains is finding the language in which to do so with the most accuracy.

There is only one successful way of doing this, Marcel discovers, and this is by the use of the metaphor<sup>15</sup>. Marcel touches on other schools of expression, namely realism, and how it is entirely ineffectual and missing the mark in terms of conveying the essence of reality:

Je m'en assurais par la fausseté même de l'art prétendu réaliste et qui ne serait pas si mensonger si nous n'avions pris dans la vie l'habitude de donner à ce que nous sentons une expression qui en diffère tellement, et que nous prenons au bout de peu de temps pour la réalité même. (Proust 188)

Realist literature does nothing, according to Marcel, more than describing the surface level appearance of reality, which, contrary to its aim, only removes the reader further from true reality (read: the reality of essences). Art that attempts to depict the objective percepts that comprise what we often refer to as reality is missing the mark entirely. It stands to reason the opposite of this scientific, descriptive language of realism would then be able to do what it could not. Here is where metaphorical language becomes the solution. The notion of metaphor as the tool used to fill the void left by scientific, objective language, Descombes elaborates, is due in part to the fact that reality (that is, the physical, external percepts that comprise what is often called objective reality) is actually just a byproduct of experience (Descombes 222). This

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<sup>15</sup> “Metaphor” here more or less meaning a literary description that is not literally applicable to the object or experience that it describes.

byproduct reality is the same for every person who perceives it, and is thus unremarkable. What becomes the important part is the experience that each person ascribes to the byproduct reality, and this is what Proust means when he writes, “La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent pleinement vécue, c’est la littérature” (Proust 202): the real life is this emotional response triggered by the objective external reality, and it is these emotional responses that comprise the inner book of impressions, and eventually the book that Marcel will write (which in turn will become the literature that is “real” life, finally discovered and fully lived as mentioned above).

The reason why the metaphor is the only effective method of translation is due to the nature of the material that needs to be translated. As was discussed in the first section of this paper, the impressions that Marcel seeks to convey in his writing are not mere words or images alone, instead they are entire slices of experience, encompassing all of the sense data that was gathered when the memory was formed. The impressions, were they merely two-dimensional, could have simply been images (e.g. the image of a pencil recalled after the initial perception of the pencil via the eyes). However given that the impressions are much more complex than this, images cannot be the language that they are composed in initially.

What makes metaphor the perfect medium, if image alone does not suffice for the translation of the inner book? There are many characteristics inherent in the metaphor that make it the perfect form of art for this task. To begin, metaphors have a special relation to the way in which human beings think. In his collection entitled *Metaphor and Thought*, Andrew Ortony compiled a selection of essays treating the metaphor and its many uses. In his introduction, Ortony tells us of the work of metaphors, specifically, “knowledge of reality, whether occasioned by perception, language, or memory, necessitates going beyond the information given” (Ortony

1). In other words, reality as objective, external percepts is not “reality”, it is merely that: physical percepts with no emotional connotation. What makes reality what we know it to be is the subjective, emotional response we attach to the exterior percepts. This is the reality that metaphor expresses, as metaphor is able to capture multiple associations and connotations attached to objective reality in a way that other language is not (as will be shown later on in this paper with specific examples of metaphors employed by Proust). Ortony goes on to propose that metaphors offer two important contributions to language and thought: 1) metaphor creates something new when it is understood, and 2) metaphors afford different ways of viewing the world. What we see Proust doing with his writing, and what Marcel will realize he must do in order to translate his inner impressions, is using the metaphor to discover and translate new understanding.

In this same collection of essays, Max Black elaborates on what Ortony proposed. According to Black, metaphors stretch the boundaries of conceptualization. Metaphors fill the void that is left by literal, scientific language, oftentimes used in an attempt to describe reality. Where literal language falls short to convey the richness of human experience, metaphor is able to convey the “interrelations and analogies of domains typically separated” (Black 33). Black tells us that a metaphor is not merely a way to play with words, but is actually an “ontological mapping across conceptual domains” (Black 208). Black goes further, and proposes that the metaphor does not originate in written or spoken word. Instead, he argues that the location of metaphor origination is the mind. Before we write or speak in metaphors, we think metaphorically (Black 203). Metaphor, as I argued in the beginning of this section, is the language of thought. When thinking metaphorically, one is taking the comprehensive whole of one concept and mapping it over a different concept, thus merging the two to create a new

understanding. This is what Marcel is doing when he experiences surges of involuntary memory. As Marcel himself describes:

Il y avait eu en moi, irradiant d'une petite zone autour de moi, une sensation (goût de la madeleine trempée, bruit métallique, sensation de pas inégaux) qui était commune à cet endroit (où je me trouvais) et aussi à un autre endroit (chambre de ma tante Léonie, wagon de chemin de fer, baptistère de Saint-Marc). (Proust 175)

Here, Marcel is joining together two entirely different, completely separate moments in time. As Black discussed, the job of the metaphor is creating a new understanding by mapping two distinct concepts onto one another, and what we see Marcel describing here is mapping two distinct moments in time over one another in order to create new understanding once he is able to finally glean the essence from the overlap. This overlap of distinct moments in time is analogous to the overlap that occurs with concepts in creating a metaphor. Therefore, in order to remain close to the manner of origin of thought when translating the inner book of impressions, Marcel will use literary metaphors to mimic the metaphorical way in which we think. The overlap also throws into high relief the essential meaning that is carried by the similarities of the otherwise completely separate experiences. This underlines once again the necessity of the distance in time. Without a significant amount of time separating the two instances, they hypothetically could not overlap with the same result of differences being thrown into quite as sharp relief, thus enabling the essence to be more readily graspable.

To elaborate on the idea of metaphor as the language of thought and on its necessity in writing, Black argues that one cannot comprehend any subject matter at all without metaphor as

the interlocutor (Black 204). As soon as one attempts to express emotions or abstractions of any sort, metaphor becomes the only possible way to do so. We can therefore conclude that metaphor, in Marcel's case, is the only viable option for the task of translating the inner book of impressions, at least if he is to stay true to the nature of the impressions.

Assuming, as we are, that metaphor is the language in which we think, then, metaphor is the language in which the inner book of impressions was written. The metaphor that originates in the mind and is the method by which we initially make sense of the world is then translated into what Black calls the "novel metaphor", or metaphor used in a literary context. The important thing is to know that before a metaphor was ever used as a literary trope, it was the manner in which the author thought. Therefore, metaphor used in writing is the closest literary tactic to writing down pure thought, which is exactly Marcel's mission with the translation of his inner book of impressions. Marcel comes to this conclusion himself:

On peut faire se succéder indéfiniment dans une description les objets qui figuraient dans le lieu décrit, la vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport, analogue dans le monde de l'art à celui qu'est le rapport unique de la loi causale dans le monde de la science, et les enfermera dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style, ou même, ainsi que la vie, quand, en rapprochant une qualité commune à deux sensations, il dégagera leur essence en les réunissant l'une et l'autre, pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore, et les enchaînera par le lien indescriptible d'une alliance de mots. (Proust 196)

Here Marcel proposes metaphor as both the way to extract the essence of the experience as well as to preserve the experience forever in time, where eternal existence is certainly unsure and many things are left forgotten and never revived in moments of involuntary memory.

Having realized that metaphor is the language in which we think, Marcel will use written, or novel, metaphor as the prompt for the readers to perform the conceptual mapping that Black discussed when translating his inner book. When we read the novel metaphor, as the reader we map the two concepts presented and are then able to understand the deeper meaning that the author himself understands as he understands it. Without metaphor, this type of shared comprehension would not be possible<sup>16</sup>.

One of the reasons this shared comprehension is possible is because metaphors are able to tap into a conventional knowledge shared by all who have higher cognitive abilities. For example, when one reads “Love is a journey”, it is generally understood by most that love shares certain similarities with the concept of a journey, in which there are road-related problems, vehicle issues, and finally a destination (the happy ending that love promises). The metaphor “Love is a journey” is based on this general knowledge that the majority of people have about the concept of love, a knowledge stemming from experience that most people have had (Black 237). Reading and understanding the metaphor then brings all readers into the communion of which Tolstoy spoke. This, however, only accounts for conventionally utilized metaphors that

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<sup>16</sup> “Grace à l’art, au lieu de voir un seul monde, le nôtre, nous le voyons se multiplier, et autant qu’il y a d’artistes originaux, autant nous avons de mondes à notre disposition, plus différent, c’est exactement le travail inverse de celui qui, à chaque minute, quand nous vivons détourné de nous-même, l’amour-propre, la passion, l’intelligence, et l’habitude aussi accomplissent en nous, quand elles amassent au-dessus de nos impressions variées, pour nous les cacher entièrement, les nomenclatures, les buts pratiques que nous appelons faussement la vie. En somme, cet art si compliqué est justement le seul art vivant. Seul il exprime pour les autres et nous fait voir à nous-même notre propre vie, cette vie qui ne peut pas s’ « observer », dont les apparences qu’on observe ont besoin d’être traduites et souvent lues à rebours et péniblement déchiffrés.” (Proust 202-203)



one might use in everyday conversation, and Proust (via Marcel) seems to employ metaphors that are somewhat more complex. This, as Rawlinson discusses in her article, is intentional, with the purpose of forcing the reader to stop and think instead of merely accepting the proposed metaphor at face value. The complex metaphors put forth by Proust do not just offer a description that is realistic and flat. Rather they force the reader to enter into the space of thinking that Proust occupied upon creating the metaphor, thus enabling the reader to reach the same essential understanding that Marcel gains during moments of involuntary memory (Rawlinson 8). The metaphors that Proust employs in his writing take ontologically diverse concepts and map them onto one another to create a meaning much deeper than we could possibly gain from conventionally utilized metaphors such as “Love is a journey”.

Proust chooses to use such ontologically diverse concepts when creating metaphors in order to cause what is called “defamiliarization”<sup>17</sup>. This concept was put forth by Shklovsky as a method of forced deeper comprehension, comprehension that only art can bring about (harkening back to the argument made earlier about the indispensability of art the medium by which Marcel conveys his inner impressions). Shklovsky argued that automatization of tools of language such as metaphor results in dulling of meaning and effect. “Love is a journey”, for instance, is used so colloquially that it hardly requires deep thought to extract meaning from it. His solution to this dulling of the senses is defamiliarization, and in Proust’s case this means using metaphors that join concepts that would not normally be put together. Doing so, Shklovsky tells us, forces the reader to stop and process what is being proposed in the metaphor: “By ‘estranging’ objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious” (Shklovsky 6).

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<sup>17</sup> For more on Proust’s use of defamiliarization, see Gardener.

Where one can read “Love is a journey” without stopping to reread in order to comprehend, one cannot read:

Dans toute la partie de la ville que dominant les tours du Trocadéro, le ciel avait l’air d’une immense mer nuance de turquoise qui se retire, laissant déjà émerger toute une ligne légère de rochers noirs, peut-être même de simples filets de pêcheurs alignés les uns après les autres, et qui étaient de petits nuages. (Proust 70)

and instantly understand what Proust meant to convey when comparing the sky to a retreating sea, leaving exposed rocks. Nor could one read:

On parle de vandalisme, de statues détruites. Mais est-ce que la destruction de tant de merveilleux jeunes gens, qui étaient des statues polychromes incomparables, n’est pas du vandalisme aussi ? (Proust 100)

and be able to understand every nuance that Proust implied when writing this without pausing to think of all of the connotations that “vandalisme”, “polychromes” and “statues” carry with them in this context of war and destruction. Proust thereby forces the reader to reread multiple times what he has written in order to glean the deeper meaning. Through metaphor as his chosen artistic expression, Proust forces us to appropriate his own point of view and understand his thought process rather than our own when looking at something that we might once have seen as familiar and unremarkable (e.g. sunlight hitting the midline of a tree trunk), thereby making us

appreciate the object and glean a different understanding from it that we otherwise would not have access to.

Descombes also touches on this notion of the complexity of literary expression in contrast with using metaphors that are utilized in everyday situations to express sentiments that are more or less shared by everyone. He refers to these everyday expressions as “faulty translation”, and compares them to what he calls “true translation”, which is the type of metaphor Marcel employs most successfully. Marcel makes the distinction between faulty translation of his impressions and true translation when he discusses the failings of verbal communication:

Si j’essayais de me rendre compte de ce qui se passe en effet au moment où une chose nous fait une certaine impression, soit comme ce jour où, en passant sur le pont de la Vivonne, l’ombre d’un nuage sur l’eau m’avait fait crier “Zut alors!” en sautant de joie, soit qu’écoutant une phrase de Bergotte, tout ce que j’eusse vu de mon impression c’est ceci qui ne lui convient pas spécialement: “C’est admirable!”, soit qu’irrité d’un mauvais procédé, Bloch prononçait ces mots qui ne convient pas du tout à une aventure si vulgaire: “Qu’on agisse ainsi, je trouve cela tout de même fffantastique”... (Proust 197)

All of these expressions and exclamations are examples of false translation of impressions, made on the spot without proper reflection (which would be impossible without experiencing involuntary memory). These are all on the spot translations of impressions, and they can be understood by most everyone on a base level without deeper reflection. However, these are not true translations. Marcel tells us:

L'artiste qui renonce à une heure de travail pour une heure de causerie avec un ami sait qu'il sacrifie une réalité pour quelque chose qui n'existe pas (les amis n'étant des amis que dans cette douce folie que nous avons au cours de la vie, à laquelle nous nous prêtons, mais que du fond de notre intelligence nous savons l'erreur d'un fou qui croirait que les meubles vivent et causerait avec eux). (Proust 182)

According to Marcel, what we produce in conversation with others is nothing more than useless translation of material that requires far more reflection. Conversing with external beings conveys nothing of any worth, and it is only the reality of the truth that is conveyed by the written metaphor that is worth investing any time in. This is the art that faulty translation produces. It is an art void of depth and truth, "sans beauté...si ennuyeux et si vain" (Proust 201). On the contrary, real translation is not something that everyone can resonate with upon first perceiving it. It is not something that can be understood immediately, and it necessitates deep reflection. More than deep reflection, because this might imply that sheer will alone could enable the deep understanding, it necessitates involuntary memory recall.

La grandeur de l'art véritable, au contraire, c'était de retrouver, de ressaisir, de nous faire connaître cette réalité loin de laquelle nous nous écartons de plus en plus... (Proust 202)

This is an important contrast that Descombes touches on as well. The difference between faulty translation and translation that forces one to recognize true reality is a distinction between what Descombes describes as being two different uses of language: conversation and literature

(Descombes 232). Conversation fails to actually communicate anything, as it is the result of thought being directly translated into a communicable form. It is thought translated into a “collective form of expression” (Descombes 234), able to be understood by an audience without any deep reflection. Literature on the other hand necessitates the writer finding his voice and articulating the impression in way that is unique to his thought process. This, according to Descombes, is of vital importance, because if what is written seems to be anything other than original, it will come across to the reader as fabricated and cliché, and will therefore convey nothing of any depth (Descombes 235). Marcel must be able to write in such a way that he is essentially writing himself on the page. The only method by which this is possible, we see, is through the complex metaphors that we see Proust employing.

Continuing on this notion of the importance of originality and complexity, another feature of the metaphor that enables this expression to take place is the context in which it is situated. In his essay in *Metaphor and Thought*, George A. Miller discusses the importance of searching the textual context offered by the author in order to understand exactly what the author intended when creating a metaphor. For instance, Miller gives us the example of “John is a wolf”. The missing explanation of how John is a wolf is understood to be composed of characteristics that are shared by both men and wolves. How the reader is to discover what these shared characteristics are is by reading the context set up by the author, what Miller calls the “author’s grounds” for the metaphor (Miller 392). These grounds constrain the basis of the metaphorical comparison to a set of plausible characteristics that can be used. Proust’s writing does this in a way that, during the time he was writing, was rather unconventional: by switching between narration of the life of Marcel, the hero, and what is described by many as philosophical divergences. These instances of divergence appear as straying from the narrative tale and

entering into what reads more as philosophical musings. These philosophical musings are the context needed so that the metaphors that Proust sets up can function. These are the grounds that he draws from when creating his metaphors. Without these divergences from the narrative form, the reader would not be able to gain access to the impressions just as Marcel does, the reason being that these alternations between philosophical essay and narrative storytelling mimic the structure of Marcel's thoughts. For instance, when Proust writes of Marcel describing the sky as a turquoise sea, once the metaphor is initially created, Proust writes Marcel's narrative as pontificating about the world as if it were a sea for an entire fourth of a page:

Mer en ce moment couleur turquoise et qui emporte avec elle, sans qu'ils s'en aperçoivent, les hommes entraînés dans l'immense révolution de la terre, de la terre sur laquelle ils sont assez fous pour continuer leurs révolutions à eux, et leurs vaines guerres, comme celle qui ensanglantait en ce moment la France. Au reste, à force de regarder le ciel paresseux et trop beau, qui ne trouvait pas digne de lui de changer son horaire et au-dessus de la ville allumée prolongeait mollement, en ces tons bleuâtres, sa journée qui s'attardait, le vertige prenait, ce n'était plus une mer étendue mais une gradation verticale de bleus glaciers. (Proust 70)

This philosophical divergence from the main narrative is what Miller tells us is necessary in order that the metaphors be understood with all of the emotional connotations that Marcel associated with them upon their initial inscription in his inner book of impressions. It mimics what happens in the mind of Marcel as he is thinking: he floats between being part of the world

of bare percepts and partaking in the societal narrative and being lost in his own thoughts, pontificating to himself about the essential truth that is hidden in the world that he takes part in<sup>18</sup>.

Another aspect of the novel metaphor that makes it the only feasible manner for translation of the inner book is the fact that the essential knowledge conveyed in the metaphor is rooted firmly in human occurrences. In other words, what makes metaphors effective is that they draw upon knowledge that is shared or accessible to all people due to their experiential knowledge of everyday life. In this way, the metaphor is able to communicate in the same way to any number of different people who partake in any number of individual realities. This is essential for Marcel's project, because his aim is not to describe merely the ideal forms of the essential knowledge he becomes privy to. Rather, according to Descombes, Marcel desires to show the importance of the accidents in the time that they occur. In other words, Marcel wants to express the essential knowledge via accidental instantiations of these essences in every day life (Descombes 18). This is, after all, how he himself came to know these essential truths: he himself stumbled upon uneven paving stones and thus a new knowledge was born within him, due to the parallel with the cobblestones that lined the streets of Venice. For Marcel, it is vital that we do not abstract the essences from their individual instantiation; otherwise we risk creating "lifeless allegories" (Descombes 18). What Proust shows is that without metaphor, the essential truth that Marcel hopes to convey lacks a concrete, comprehensible aspect, an aspect that is necessary if comprehension is to take place. Marcel comments on the importance of the moments of essential understanding being anchored in the everyday occurrences of life:

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the style and sentence structure created by Proust, see Landy 138-145.

Je sentais pourtant que ces vérités que l'intelligence dégage directement de la réalité ne sont pas à dédaigner entièrement, car elles pourraient enchâsser d'une matière moins pure mais encore pénétrée d'esprit, ces impressions que nous apporte hors du temps l'essence commune aux sensations du passé et du présent, mais qui, plus précieuses, sont aussi trop rares pour que l'oeuvre d'art puisse être composée seulement avec elles. Capables d'être utilisées pour cela, je sentais se presser en moi une foule de vérités relatives aux passions, aux caractères, aux moeurs. Leur perception me causait de la joie ; pourtant il me semblait me rappeler que plus d'une entre elles, je l'avais découverte dans la souffrance, d'autres dans de biens médiocres plaisirs. (Proust 205)

The essential knowledge could not be communicated nor initially felt if it were not for very human experiences that caused them. When Marcel falls in love or when he bites into a madeleine (both experiences that are commonplace), only then does he gain access to the essential truths that these moments offer. It follows then that the only manner in which these experiences can be expressed is one that links the pure essence to accidents of concrete life. This is what the metaphor does: it takes the essence of the truths the Marcel comes to understand, and cements them in the communicable form of accidental instantiation, thus making the essential coherent.

Another aspect of the metaphor that makes it the perfect medium for translation is discussed by Miguel de Beistigui in his book *Proust as Philosopher: The Art of Metaphor*. According to de Beistigui, through the use of the metaphor Proust is able to convey the deeper reality that is present in the memories stored in the subconscious that are only delved into via involuntary memory. Why the metaphor is necessary, Beistigui explains, is because the two



memories that are linked together during moments of involuntary memory recall are joined by a trait that they share in common (the metallic hammer on the train wheel and the spoon against the plate sharing the same sound, for instance). This is the same work done by the creation of a novel metaphor, i.e. the joining together of two dissimilar concepts by a certain similarity that they share. These metaphors, Beistigui argues, are efficient only because they anchor the ideal essences in recognizable, sensible expressions. Beistigui holds that Proust's metaphors are strictly ontological, not merely metaphorical (Beistigui 70), meaning that the metaphors that Proust creates are not, as we discussed earlier, simple and used so often that they are devoid of meaning or that they have become merely ornamental, but that they are lodged firmly in the individual, human experience. We see that this is true in, for example, this extended metaphor:

Et je compris que tous ces matériaux de l'oeuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passée ; je compris qu'ils étaient venus en moi, dans les plaisirs frivoles, dans la paresse, dans la tendresse, dans la douleur, emmagasinés par moi sans que je devinasse plus leur destination, leur survivance même, que la graine mettant en reserve tous les aliments qui nourriront la plante. Comme la graine, je pourrais mourir quand la plante se serait développée... Ainsi toute ma vie jusqu'à ce jour aurait pu et n'aurait pas pu être résumée sous ce titre: Une vocation... Elle l'aurait pu en ce que cette vie, les souvenirs de ses tristesses, de ses joies, formaient une réserve pareille à cet albumen qui est logé dans l'ovule des plantes et dans lequel celui-ci puise sa nourriture pour se transformer en graine, en ce temps où on ignore encore que l'embryon d'une plante se développe, lequel est pourtant le lieu de phénomènes chimiques et respiratoires secrets mais très actifs.

(Proust 206)

Within this metaphor Marcel is comparing himself to a seed and his work to a plant. Here, Proust anchors the essential meaning in a comprehensible form, i.e. that of a plant's germination, a concept that most readers would be familiar with enough to understand, but not so that they could fully comprehend it without deeper reflection. Proust's metaphors are specifically created to be too complex to understand without deep thought while still being anchored in examples that are recognizable and thus able to convey ideal essences in a way that is comprehensible to readers who do not partake in his reality.

Metaphor, being the language of thought, is the method Marcel decides upon as the method necessary to translate the inner book of impressions. Given the complex nature of the inner book, it becomes clear that metaphor is the only manner in which Marcel can translate the inner book and have it be understood by the reader, thus allowing them to partake in his thought process and finally in his reality.

## V. Conclusions

The inner book of impressions, the book that Marcel finds within himself and finally realizes is the book that he must translate and publish, is not a book that is composed easily. First, the book has been anchored in the Aristotelian tradition, making the concept of the inner book tangible, and explaining the origin of the impressions. Without this background, the book remains an intangible concept, an idea of a book that has yet to be composed that is floating

somehow in the subconscious of Marcel. Many have explored the idea of the inner book of impressions, but few have bound the concept of the book in a concrete, well-established theory of cognition, such as the theory of *phantasia*. Anchoring the book in a concrete cognitive theory that explains its origins makes Marcel's next step, that of finding a medium in which he can capture the impressions and their meaning and then convey them to his audience, much easier. Art is the only vehicle that is able to express the complex process by which the impressions come to be and also express those deep and complicated truths that they possess, ready to be communicated. From here Marcel is able to narrow down the form of art, finally landing on the metaphor as the most effective method by which he can translate his book of impressions. The final and most important step that the inner book takes is that of inviting the reader into the mind of Marcel. Once Marcel has effectively translated his inner book into literary metaphors, he is able to invite his readers, each of whom partakes in their own, individual reality, to now partake in his. This breaks down the idea that Marcel's personal reality is incommunicable, and so proves that solipsism is conquerable. Marcel comes to the same conclusions concerning the ability of art to communicate the realities of others in a way that is able to be understood by an audience:

Notre vie, et aussi la vie des autres ; car le style pour l'écrivain aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre est une question non de technique mais de vision. Il est la révélation, qui serait impossible par des moyens directs et conscients, de la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde, différence qui, s'il n'y avait pas l'art, resterait le secret éternel de chacun. Par l'art seulement nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n'est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les

paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu'il peut y avoir dans la lune.

(Proust 202)

Art in the form of the written metaphor does what Marcel here describes: it is the unconscious realization of the way in which the world appears to each one of us individually, that without art would remain foreign and incommunicable to others.

What my work here adds to the body of extant work on Proust is that it attaches what is otherwise a rather intangible theory of “signes”, of mental imagery, of the inner book of impressions, to a tangible theory of Aristotle’s, namely the theory of *phantasia*. Adding on to this, I contend that Marcel shows us, the readers, that the language in which we think is metaphorical: thoughts are composed of metaphors, making literary metaphors the only way to translate the work of art that exists within each artist. Finally, I conclude that through Marcel and his literary discoveries, Proust proves that individual realities of others are communicable, and others are able to partake in realities that are not their own when those realities are expressed using the novel metaphor. Despite some readings and works being published discussing the idea that Proust is of the solipsist school of thought<sup>19</sup>, *Le Temps retrouvé* displays through the use of carefully constructed, complex metaphors that the realities of others can in fact be known by individuals who exist outside of these individual realities.

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<sup>19</sup> See Descombes 48-54.

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