10
PROUSTIAN HABIT

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The reader of RTP is granted just a few paragraphs before habit is introduced:

> Habit! That able but slow-moving arranger who begins by letting our minds suffer for weeks on end in temporary quarters, but whom our mind is nonetheless only too happy to find, for without it, reduced to its own devices, it would be powerless to make any room habitable.
>
> *(SW, 9, translation altered; I 8)*

Implied is a view of mind: powerless to interfere with habit's course, but equally powerless to reconcile us even to something as innocuous as a room, were it not for habit's work. Corresponding to this is a view of the world: hostile. The objects are nasty, imposing, menacing: a 'mentally poisoning' smell, malicious curtains and a cruel mirror (*SW*, 9; I 8). Habit, unbidden but welcome, steps in. The mirror becomes compassionate.

Habit is a central aspect of the narrator's worldview. It appears both at major plot points and in significant theoretical passages. Proust had already thematised habit in some of his earliest published work – notably in 'Violante ou la Mondanité' (1892) ('Violante, or High Society') – as well as in unpublished material (see II 1352 fn. 2). His ideas have their roots in his philosophical education, where habit formed a key part of the syllabus. Indeed, in retrospect, we can say that Proust may have been taught philosophy at a time and place where habit, as a philosophical topic, was approaching its high watermark, as a major theme in French philosophical thought. Another major theme, of course, was time.

It is my aim to explicate habit in RTP, with a view to a better understanding of the text, and a better understanding of the phenomenon which the novel describes. The prominence of habit in the novel has never been a secret (Beckett 1969, 18–29; Henry 2004; Fülöp 2014). But philosophical treatments of Proust have nonetheless tended to ignore or underplay its essential role. After noting some terminological issues ('Terminology: L'habitude, Habit and Habituation'), I set out a background theory of habit, based on RTP and the philosophical tradition that lay behind it ('Habit in Context: Two Models'). The section entitled 'RTP as Habit in Action' returns, with this theory, to habit's role in the plot of RTP. The next three sections look at habit's connection with the self: its mediation of the external world ('Selfing

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the World') and of other people, in the form of love and loss ('Habits of Love and Loss') and, finally, its relation to the self outside time ('Habit and the Self Outside Time').

Terminology: L'habitude, Habit and Habituation

Contemporary readers of an English translation can be forgiven for missing and misunderstanding the nature and the significance of habit in the novel. This is partly a function of differences between French and English when it comes to the word 'habit' – the subject of this section. A second factor is the comparative lack of philosophical or psychological analysis of habit in our intellectual context (see 'Habit in Context: Two Models').

Looking back to the work of the 'slow-moving arranger' (or 'very slow housekeeper' (Proust 2003b, 8)), we might already feel that 'habit' is an unnatural English term for what is going on. The narrator, we might say, is getting used or accustomed to the room. *L'habitude*, the term which is standardly translated as 'habit', is indeed often captured better by something like 'getting used to' or, more directly, by 'habituation'. Sometimes, by all means, *une habitude* is a habit: Albertine's 'stupid habits of speech' (*C*, 11; III 527), for example. Often, though, *habitude* (and its cognates, such as '*s'habituer*') is not translated using 'habit' (and its cognates, such as 'habituate') at all.[1] Readers of English translations of RTP therefore meet the word 'habit' (and its cognates) less frequently than French readers meet '*habitude*' (and its cognates).[2] Just after the introduction of habit, cited above, the magic lantern undoes habit's careful work by changing the way the room looks. In French, the lantern destroys 'l'*habitude* que j'avais de ma chambre' (emphasis added). Literally, it destroys 'my *habituation* to my room' or even 'the *habit* I had of my room' (my translations, emphasis added). In the Scott Moncrieff (et al.) translation, it destroys 'the *familiar impression* I had of my room' (*SW*, 10, emphasis added; I 9); Lydia Davis has 'the *familiarity* which my bedroom had acquired for me' (Proust 2003b, 9). Here, as elsewhere, the French expression 'avoir l'habitude de' (literally, the ugly phrase 'to have the habit of'), followed by a noun, can prove elusive. To take another example, 'où nous avons l'habitude de vivre' (literally 'where we have the habit of living') becomes 'where one is accustomed to live' (*G*, 103; II 395; or see I 110; *SW*, 131: 'as a rule'). Overall, a wide variety of terms are used to translate the *habitude* family: 'grown accustomed' (*F*, 621; IV 123); 'growing used to' (*BG*, 282; II 27); 'ordinarily' (*SW*, 52; I 44); 'normal' (*SW*, 186; I 154); 'practised' (*SG*, 41; I 33); 'normal practice' (*G*, 296; II 555); 'routine' (*G*, 266; II 531); 'familiarity' (*G*, 41; II 343).

Proust often uses *habitude* (and cognates) repeatedly in the same sentence or passage. This, too, is liable to be removed in translation. For example, at the start of *The Captive*, the sun brings new decoration to a room by shining on it at an unfamiliar hour: it changes 'celle que nous avions *l'habitude* d'y voir' and reveals, in the narrator, 'un jeune homme plus ancien qu'avait caché longtemps *l'habitude*' (III 520–1, emphasis added). Literally, that is, it changes 'what we had the *habit* of seeing there', revealing 'a previous [or: former] young man whom *habit* had long concealed'. In translation, it changes 'what we were *accustomed* to see' while revealing 'an earlier young man whom *habit* had long concealed' (*C*, 3, emphasis added[3]; for other instances, compare *SW*, 406 and I 335; *SW*, 47 and I 40; *BG*, 482–3 and II 194).

If the aim is to produce a readable translation, then this removal of *habitude*/habit in favour of other expressions is perfectly understandable. But it weakens the links that the narrator draws between *habitude* and many of the other aspects of RTP, some of which we investigate below. Moreover, repetition itself bears a close relation to habit. *Prima facie*, we might say that we get used to things, grow accustomed to them, become familiar with them precisely by repeated exposure; and Proust's prose repeatedly exposes us to '*habitude*'. Habit

was defined in terms of repetition in one of Proust's philosophy textbooks, as we shall see. Even if this is not the whole story – one can get accustomed to a single, prolonged but not repeated noise – accounts of habit must grapple with repetition in some form or another.[4] Proust's repetitions of *habitude* may be a deliberate play on that – an attempt to habituate the reader to its use and significance, to slip it under the radar, in preparation for occasional, surprisingly direct treatment.

While reflecting upon the different translations presents us with some of the ways in which *habitude* can be rendered into English, the overriding point here is that there is no easy, frictionless translation of this family of terms. Compounding that problem is the fact that *habitude* was a theoretical term with a particular set of meanings and associations in Proust's intellectual context – the point we turn to next.

Habit in Context: Two Models

In present-day anglophone, philosophy, habit is not a major topic; nor does it pose a conventional, precisely defined problem, puzzle or paradox. It has a long history (for the most comprehensive historical analysis, up to its date of publication, see Funke and Schmandt 1961), but one in which it frequently takes an auxiliary role, as it does in Aristotle's ethics, Hume's account of causation or Hegel's philosophy of spirit – to name three prominent treatments. In Hume's case, to which Proust obliquely refers (*F*, 576; IV 85), habitual association (or 'custom') is required for us to form the idea of a cause, but its operations 'seem […] not to take place, merely because [they are] found in the highest degree' (Hume 2007, 4.8, p. 20; see also 5.4–5.5, pp. 31–2). ('Custom' is translated 'l'habitude' in the quotation of Hume known to Proust (see Fraisse 2013, 666).)

This is not to imply that nothing recent has been written on habit and philosophy (Carlisle 2014; Caruana and Testa 2020), let alone historical analysis of particular eras or figures, such as Aristotle, Early Modern accounts of habit, Ravaisson or Hegel (McCumber 1990; Rodrigo 2011; Wright 2011; Sinclair 2019; Novakovic 2019; and see Sinclair and Carlisle 2011). But habit is unlikely to have a chapter to itself in a textbook introducing high school students to philosophy or in a philosophy textbook aimed at university students. Proust had both (in Rabier 1888 and in Janet and Séailles 1887, respectively; for an extensive discussion of these and further sources, see Fraisse 2013). Of the two chapters in Proust's textbooks, Rabier's is more systematic and analytical, dealing, albeit idiosyncratically, with habit's causes, nature and effects. Janet and Séailles begin with a definition: a 'disposition acquired or contracted ["contractée", which has the medical connotation, too – almost "caught"] by repetition or continuation of impressions or acts' (Janet and Séailles 1887, 357). The authors then offer their students a history of philosophical discussions of habit, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, moving via the Stoics and Epicureans to (among others) Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Maine de Biran and Herbert Spencer. In France, in particular, theorists were building on the work of Maine de Biran (1841 [1802]) and Xavier Bichat (1805 [1800]) at the turn of the nineteenth century, and on Ravaisson's influential *Of Habit* (2008 [1838]). A vast array of studies were published towards the end of the century and shortly thereafter (for a partial list, see e.g. Funke and Schmandt 1961, 16), many of which were known to Proust, directly or indirectly.

The philosophers just listed do not always mean the same thing by habit, nor are they giving answers to the same questions about it. As told by Janet and Séailles, for example, habit was primarily a focus for moral philosophy, most famously in Aristotle, until the early modern empiricists brought it to bear on theoretical philosophy, most famously in Hume's

account of causation (Janet and Séailles 1887, 370–1). For Leibniz, according to Proust's textbook, habit is in effect a 'universal metaphysical law', while for Hume it is the psychological mechanism by which we access matters of fact (Janet and Séailles 1887, 369, 374). Ravaisson connects habit with a speculative philosophy of nature. On Spencer's evolutionary account, habits are hereditary – ultimately continuous with instincts, only not yet as well established (Janet and Séailles 1887, 385–7). Bichat (whom Proust mentioned in passing in one of his *Pastiches*) had combined physiological research with philosophical reflection, producing a vitalist account of the difference between animal life, including humans, and non-animal life: habit's effects are felt in animal life only (Bichat 1805; for a brief, clear account of Bichat on habit, see Sinclair 2019, 25–39). More broadly, and in today's terms, two major debates were, first, whether or not habit can be explained naturalistically (for example, as in Malebranche, by changes in the brain (see Wright 2011, 23)) and, second, whether habituated actions were voluntary in a morally relevant sense.

Proust therefore had every reason to think of habit as a major philosophical theme, historically and in contemporary work. In passing, therefore, we might note one of the difficulties of enquiring into Proust's philosophical status: if habit formed part of his formal, philosophical landscape, but not ours, he might have considered himself more philosophical than we would.

Faced with all of this variety, how might Proust and his contemporaries have understood the role and significance of habit? We can usefully begin with a collection of psychological observations, parts of which were emphasised by some, others by others, but which can be summarised by putting together two parallel models of habituation: one for how we habituate sensations, the other for the habituation of activities. These models are my own summaries, abstracted from various sources, including Proust's textbooks. Each model contains three stages.

Sensation:

1. A new sensation appears, the novelty of which draws the subject's attention to it. For example: a sound, a sight or a bodily feeling, including pleasure or pain.
2. This sensation is repeated or endures and, on repetition or duration, produces a diminishing impact on the subject, who pays it and *is able to* pay it less and less attention.
3. Now, if the sensation ceases, then the subject's attention is drawn to its absence.

Activity:

1. The subject performs some new action, which requires the subject's close attention: an activity, a skill, a way of behaving.
2. With repetition, the action becomes easier to perform and demands less of the subject's attention.
3. Once habituated, the subject has, or may have, an unwitting or involuntary tendency either to perform this action or to seek out occasions to perform it.[5]

These abstracted models were rarely set out as universal patterns or as the final word on the matter. Plenty is left unanswered. Why do some sensations become more *irritating* with repetition, while others simply cannot be tuned out? (Bichat has a category of 'absolute' sensation, usually extreme pain or pleasure, which is immune to habituation.) Why do some activities never get easier? Some skills do not seek expression at every opportunity: why not? Are the models roughly analogous by coincidence, or is there a deeper connection between

them? The distinction between sensation and activity is not easily maintained: if paying attention to sensations is a kind of activity, then, according to the activity model, we ought to be able to improve at it; on the sensation model, meanwhile, the sensations in question ought slowly to disappear. Making sense of this distinction and interrelation was the focal point of Maine de Biran's long essay. More ambitiously, Ravaisson, known indirectly to Proust, attempted, first, to unify these models under one principle and then to invoke that principle as the key to understanding the relationship between mind and nature.

Regardless of their faults or incompleteness, Proust draws on these underlying models, aspects of which appear at various points in RTP. The magic lantern undoes the 'anaesthetic effect of habit' (*SW*, 11; I 10). Originally, new sensations, pressing in on the mind of the narrator, had prevented him from settling in his room (1); they were dulled by habit (2); the lantern produces a room full of new sensations, unsettling him again (3). The novel is full of the ways that habituation renders things invisible or prevents us from feeling or experiencing them with their initial force: weather (*G*, 76; II 372), landscape (*G*, 85; II 380), the 'monstrous abnormality' of the lives of servants (*G*, 66; II 364), unpleasant memories (*SG*, 207; III 176; *F*, 611–3; IV 115–7), the pleasures of a long-term partner (*F*, 488; IV 12), the ageing of those we frequently see (*TR*, 448; IV 623) or miraculous new technology (*G*, 147; II 431). The narrator observes that being in a non-habituated location makes it harder to detach ourselves from our immediate sensations, whether they are thereby experienced as threatening and intrusive (the magic lantern), a pleasant distraction (*G*, 103; II 395) or the life-affirming basis for falling in love (*BG*, 270; II 17).

Habit also operates according to the activity model. It offers a 'dispensation from effort' (*G*, 88; II 382). Walking a route which is unfamiliar to him, the narrator's limbs ache. Upon realising that he has unwittingly arrived home, everything becomes easier:

> I no longer had another step to take, the ground walked for me in this garden where for so long my actions had ceased to be accompanied by voluntary attention: Habit came to take me in her arms and carried me up to my bed like a little child.
>
> *(I 114, my translation; SW, 136)*

Habituated actions are not even really actions, because the ground moves and Habit carries him to bed. Likewise, in the habituated room, the doorknob 'seemed to move of its own accord [...] so unconscious had its manipulation become' (*SW*, 11; I 10). As for the third stage: the narrator, long after Albertine's disappearance, is 'keeping a girl in Paris', behaving towards her according to the patterns established by the multiple habits he formed with Albertine (*F*, 780–1; IV 255–6).

Keeping these two different models in mind shines a light, moreover, on the way that Proust plays with them. Once he has had time to adjust to certain painful memories associated with Albertine's (alleged) infidelities, the narrator writes:

> I was habituated to these latter [painful] memories [...], ever present albeit obscured in my memory, like those pieces of furniture placed in the half-light of a gallery which, without being able to pick them out, one nonetheless avoids bumping into.
>
> *(F, 621, translation altered; IV 124)*

The narrator's point is that an objectively less threatening memory is more upsetting at this moment because it, unlike its nastier but better-habituated rivals, has not been dulled by repetition and can therefore strike the mind with full force. But Proust's choice of image is

revealing. He conjures up the mind as a space filled with potentially hazardous furniture (the more sinister but better-habituated memories) and pictures the thinker as a person nimbly but non-consciously weaving around this furniture, precisely by means of habituation. Thus, habituation on the activity model (nimbly stepping around obstacles) is used, metaphorically, to illustrate habit's dulling effect on the displeasure associated with bad memories – in other words, to illustrate something akin to the sensation model. The general idea is that habituation dulls the significance, emotional impact and even the ability to recall or pay attention to memories, but that this inability to recall or re-experience *is* a skill, an active form of memory-making.

I have set out the models, above, in a way that emphasises their parallels: a first stage of novelty and attention; second, repetition and what we might call 'disattention'; finally, compulsion towards an absence, whether by paying attention to the absent sensation, or by performing the missing activity. We ought not to miss the much-discussed difference between habituated sensation and action. In the case of sensation, habit kills it off; in the case of ability, habit may enable or liberate. An optimistic spin on this difference would be that in both cases the result may be positive. Irritating or obtrusive sensations, coming from without, are dulled and made hospitable, while the subject is freed up to do more of what she wants, to pursue her own activities, which come from within. The result, in both cases, is a person increasingly self-propelled and less buffeted about by external impositions. This was the view of Albert Lemoine (Lemoine 1875), for example, whose book on habit was cited, with approval, by Rabier, as evidence for the claim that, without habit, there would be no progress:

> It is thanks to habit that man can run instead of crawling, that the sciences are created and enriched; that virtue is acquired; that in all things progress is accomplished. Because the [habituated] act requires less effort to be repeated, the surplus power which the cause does not expend on reproducing it becomes available, in some way, for new and higher efforts.
>
> *(Lemoine, cited in Rabier 1888, 1:587)*

Though he allows for habit's role in making his room less hostile and in making certain tasks less effortful, Proust's narrator wisely eschews a simple, optimistic reading along these lines. For one thing, as had long been pointed out, some of the sensations that are dulled are those that, all things considered, we might prefer to retain. Bichat noted, in passing, the effects that habit had on pleasurable sensations: 'it is the nature of pleasure and pain to destroy themselves, to cease to be, because they have been' (Bichat 1805, 41). Pleasure, understood as a sensation of a sort, offers diminishing returns on repetition: we are all chasing the dragon. The sensation model, when the sensation is the hum of the radiators in the corridor, enables me to get on with my work. Substitute the hum of the radiator for any pleasurable experience and what you get is the Rake's Progress, or the Hedonic Treadmill, or, in Bichat, a sardonic explanation for why men get bored with their wives (Bichat 1805, 41–2). Sensory habituation, on such accounts, is at best a mixed blessing. As Rabier puts it:

> Any phenomenon that is repeated or prolonged, if it is left on its own and abandoned to the power of habit, is a phenomenon lost to consciousness. Habit is like avarice: it gathers treasures, but it hides them from all eyes. Hence, habit tends to make us perfect automatons: it gives us the sureness of action of the automaton, but also the unconsciousness of the automaton.
>
> *(Rabier 1888, 1:580–1)*

The narrator agrees that habit impedes delight (*BG*, 337; II 72). But he takes this further: habituated experience is not merely hidden, but thereby *distorted,* for 'we only truly know what is new, what suddenly introduces into our sensibility a change of tone which strikes us, what habit has not yet replaced with its colourless facsimiles' (*F*, 605; IV 110; see also *F*, 642; IV 141 on habit blocking us from 'the reality of life' and *BG*, 337; II 72).

Likewise, not all aspects of the activity model are welcome. As the third step highlights, we must be careful what we do. Each action is not an isolated way of behaving, but a blueprint for how we are likely to behave in the future, for what we will (and will be able to) pay attention to and what we will desire or seek out. Habit, on this model, does not distinguish between an aptitude that can be summoned at will and a bad habit or an irritating propensity (Rabier 1888, 1:517) and no desire can be considered in isolation from past and future habits (Rabier 1888, 1:529). Some authors drew analogies between habit, in the organic realm, and the inertia of material bodies: in both cases, things tend to remain the way they were (Rabier 1888, 1:575). Metaphorically, in RTP, habit renders inert (*G*, 166–7; II 448; see also 'Violante ou la Mondanité').

All of this is not to rush to the other extreme – to suggest that habit is *merely* hostile or negative in *RTP*. Rather than asking whether it is treated positively or negatively, it is more fruitful to consider, first, how habit appears in the action of the novel, and, second, the account of the self which emerges from taking these two models seriously in the light of this action.

RTP as Habit in Action

RTP is a drama of gathering and casting off habits, of slow accrual and then of equally slow dehabituation (that is, of unlearning or being cut off from the relevant habits), or of sudden, peculiar interruption. The magic lantern has a sharp dehabituating effect on the young narrator in his room. But, more importantly, the madeleine episode is possible only because the tea that he drinks is 'contrary to my habit' (I 44, my translation; *SW*, 52). What happens next presages the diminishing returns that come with habituated sensations. With each mouthful, the power of the tea-dipped madeleine reduces: the third 'gives me rather less than the second' (*SW*, 53; I 45). The novel springs forth from this interruption of habit. Moreover, as Erika Fülöp points out, dipping the tea in the madeleine was itself a habit from the narrator's childhood (Fülöp 2014, 357). An interruption of his habits puts him in contact with a former habit, a point we return to later.

By the time the narrator eats the madeleine, habit's significance has been signalled, not just in the habituated room, but also in the *drame du coucher.* To her dismay, the young narrator has become habituated to Maman's kiss (*SW*, 14–5; I 13). The theme recurs twice. First because, when they have guests, Maman, who habitually offers the kiss in his bedroom, bestows it downstairs: an interruption of habit, but at least a *habitual* interruption which is tolerable enough (*SW*, 26–7; I 23; compare the early lunch on Saturdays: *SW*, 131; I 109). Second, on finding him distraught, Maman is reluctant to concede to his special request, precisely because she is reluctant to habituate him (*SW*, 42; I 36). As this example indicates, habit appears not merely as a force in the narrator's own interior world, but as something that his characters find themselves reckoning with, often explicitly – as though it were a local deity, the power of which is known to many in the book. Swann, suffering from jealousy, cannot bear the thought of leaving Paris, fearing the consequences of going to a place in which habit hasn't deadened his sensations (*SW*, 421; I 348). Being exposed to a raft of non-habituated impressions will undermine

his carefully constructed defences. Cottard, in his fateful remark about Albertine and Andrée's dancing, notes that 'parents are very rash to allow their daughters to form such habits' (*SG*, 225; III 191).

Meanwhile, interruptions of habit presage dramatic consequences. Strange things happen when people do things they don't habitually do or are taken from their habitual environments. We have already mentioned the magic lantern and the madeleine. There are others. The narrator, his habits interrupted, becomes fascinated with the milk-girl (*BG*, 270; II 17). Swann visits Odette at a non-habitual hour (*SW*, 331; I 273), with disturbing results. The Baron's arrival, contrary to habit, leads to his first encounter with Jupien (*SG*, 2; III 4). Albertine returns to Paris, breaking the 'habitual order' of her plans, and the narrator ends up kissing her for the first time (*G*, 406; II 648). The revelations of the final volume are likewise occasioned by an interruption of habit (*TR*, 215; IV 444). Symbolically, as well as literally, habit interferes with knowledge: it keeps characters set in their ways, including those literal ways which the novel will have to work to undo: it ensures that the narrator's family never takes both ways – the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way – on the same day (*SW*, 160–1; I 133). This is one reason why, as Henry notes, the cessation of habit leaves the subject 'unprepared, more receptive, even vulnerable' (Henry 2004, 458), open to more profound insight.

Consequently, the novel examines the ways that habit is thwarted, undermined or interrupted. In Rabier's chapter on habit, the author attempts to present a counterforce to habit: attention, which he calls habit's 'antagonist' (Rabier 1888, 1:581). By concentrating on something, he claims, we can oppose the way that habit undermines attention. Rabier seems to acknowledge, tacitly, that this isn't altogether a satisfactory counterforce: habit functions precisely to dull attention over time, so to say that we should lavish more attention on something begs the question. In any case, Proust does not explore this possibility; interruption or dehabituation seems as little willed as habit itself. But he does consider alternative ways in which habit is interrupted. These can be mundane: time apart from someone we regularly see (*G*, 157; II 439–40); new technology (*G*, 149; II 433) or a change of weather (*C*, 20; III 535). In fact, though, many of the major subjects treated by the novel have an intricate relation with habit's interruption. Art is a disrupter of habits (*BG* 482–3; II 194; *G*, 90; II 384; *F*, 642; IV, 141; *TR* 254–6; IV 474–6). Love, grief and jealousy are tied to habit (see below).

Habit's connection with memory was a commonplace observation in Proust's context (Egger 1880, 218; Janet and Séailles 1887, 368), though the exact nature of that connection was much disputed.[6] Likewise, habit's connection with time was known and disputed. Rabier cites Albert Lemoine's study (1875), for whom habit appears, in effect, as sedimented time:

> For a being capable of habit, it is not true to say that the past is no more, nor even that the future is not yet. His past is not abolished; he carries it with him in his very present; and, with this past, he anticipates the future. For him, the past accumulates and is summed up in the present; it is all there in the form of habit.
>
> *(Albert Lemoine, quoted in Rabier 1888, 1:585)*

While we touch on some of these themes in the remainder, my focus will be on habit's relations to the novel's conception of the self. This focus is warranted by the centrality of this topic, by its interconnectedness with habit's other roles, and by the novelty with which Proust treats habit in this regard.

Selfing the World

The twin models of habituation, taken together, yield a vision of human experience and action which the present-day reader is unlikely to carry with her into the novel. A person, on these models, is dynamic. She is not permitted a moment's peace to observe or to act in isolation without drawing on or invoking ties to the past and without strengthening and weakening ties to the future. At any given moment, new sensations are being suppressed and incorporated. They are made less intrusive, by all means, but only at the cost of distortion and dependence. Attention cannot be maintained at will, because it is dulled by repetition. Even willing appears in the novel as a kind of activity which can be lost from lack of practice, like any other habit (*F*, 489; IV 13). Likewise, new skills can always be acquired, but we lose the ability to pay attention to them and we may seek out opportunities to display them.

A person, subject to these two models, is composed to a significant degree of constantly shifting patterns of layered and interwoven habits. Layered, because many habits will be contingent on previous ones: the habituated activity of walking up the stairs at Combray depends upon the habituated activity of walking and walking upstairs. Interwoven, because we never perform an activity, or sense our surroundings, in isolation from other sights, sounds and activities: I walk, but I do so here, at this time, in this weather, with these preoccupations – all of which get bound up with my habits, however contingently. In principle, with perfect repetition or uninterrupted duration, habit would tend towards complete indifference with regard to sensation and unconsciousness with regard to action. But perfect repetition of a sensation or action is precluded, meaning that our habits change over time. Though our current patterns are not the same as the earlier ones, they do bear an intricate relation to them, just as they lay down patterns for the future. Each step is portentous, shaped by the past and shaping the future. Nothing is innocuous. Taken as an always-habituated and always-habituating being, it is not clear how we could conceive of a person isolated from her past, a will that stands apart from a set of choices that are presented to it, or a way of experiencing the world that is not intimately tied to the journey of the experiencer. When it comes to morality, the narrator is clear-eyed in his view that habit overrides moral conscience – one reason, perhaps, why he shows little sustained interest in the latter (*TR*, 180–2; IV 415–7). While some figures in the history of philosophy disputed whether habituated actions are voluntary or not (Wright 2011), a better way of putting things might be that the concept of the always-habituating self frequently undercuts the question of whether or not some action is voluntary in any neat or final sense. As in Hegel's treatment of it, habit offers a grey zone between freedom and necessity, between will and nature (Hegel 1970, Volume 10, Sections 409–10, pp. 182–91).

Is this dynamic, habituating self, this grey zone, all there is to us? Bichat answered in the negative: physiologically, some aspects of us are cordoned off from habit. Herbert Spencer's evolutionary theory was taken, at least by Janet and Séailles, to answer affirmatively: we are habit all the way down, some inherited (therefore essentially fixed as far as we are concerned), others added by us, but all in principle open to dehabituation over time. Others, like Rabier, find this question unanswerable. The narrator, however, appears to affirm that there is a self completely apart from habit. We return to this important point at the end. Meanwhile, our focus for the moment is on the everyday self, by which I mean the self in time, the habituating self that is the subject of most of the novel. We begin, in this section, with its relation to the external world and look, in the following section, at its relation to other people.

Through habituation, we might say, a person *selfs* the world. In putting it this way, I aim to make clear, albeit in ugly language, a feature of the narrator's and others' emphasis on

habit. Namely, that focusing on habituation prevents us from thinking of the boundary of the body as the boundary of the self. From a phenomenological point of view, we might say, the habituated, humming radiator has been *selfed* or *me'd*, and turning it off would therefore be like removing a part of me. Likewise with activities: one would be hard pressed to separate a 'me' off from those activities I am able to do without thinking. Janet and Séailles, summarising an aspect of Ravaisson's account, note that a repeated sensation, once habituated, becomes 'a permanent state of the soul, something of ourselves' (Janet and Séailles 1887, 382). Hegel suggests that, prior to its habituation, a sensation may be so intrusive that it is as if the mind *is* the sensation (Hegel 1970, Volume 10, Sections 409–10, pp. 182–91). Habituation to sensation elevates us above mere susceptibility towards control. Habituation is therefore a form of freedom, as Hegel understands it, namely a way of being at home with yourself in the world.

Similarly, habituation is not merely presented in Proust as a tuning out of noise or gaining skills in some action, but rather as a mine-making and, because what is ours is absorbed into us through habit, as a me-making or self-constituting process. In the Balbec hotel, habit becomes a dragon-slayer (*SG*, 189; III 160–1), by means of which we 'impose on things the soul which is familiar to us in place of their soul, which terrifies us' (III 161, my translation; *SG*, 189). Earlier, the 'anaesthetic effect of habit' on the impression of the room is at the same time a mine-making, a 'filling [the room] with my own self [*moi*] until I paid no more attention to it than to my self' (I 10, my translation; *SW*, 11). Things in the narrator's Paris room did not disturb him because they were 'merely extensions of my organs, an enlargement of myself': consequently, in the new Balbec room, he experiences himself as literally diminished (*BG*, 282–3; II 27). These are examples from the realm of sensation, but activity, too, is a kind of me-making. As we have seen, habit makes the ground walk for you and doorknob move itself: the external world is admixed with will.

The habituated room is one I have selfed, or made part of me. Yet, Proust also uses an apparently opposing image to make a similar point. After the rooms in Paris and Balbec come the room at Doncières, which he anticipates with fear, expecting to find it unfamiliar and disturbing. (The fear is unfounded, as it happens, because these dwellings are, as it were, pre-habituated [*G*, 87; II 382]). He remarks that every bedroom he finds himself in is a new bedroom, because once a bedroom has been habituated, *he* is no longer present in it: 'my mind remained elsewhere and sent mere Habit to take its place' (*G*, 86; II 381). (Conversely, the milk-girl gets the narrator's full attention, his 'whole being', due to the cessation of habit [*BG*, 270; II 17].) This is a different image of the relation between self, habit and the fully habituated room: in the first, the self expands beyond the body to absorb the room; in the second, it vanishes to the point of absence, its thoughts elsewhere.[7] The connection between them lies in the narrator's view that the body, including the expanded body (the habituated room), commands no attention as such, unless something changes or goes wrong, as in the case of sickness.[8]

Habits of Love and Loss

Proust was not the first to remark on the impact of habit on interpersonal relations – Bichat calls habitual memory the 'only evil of happy lovers' (Bichat 1805, 42) – but RTP concentrates on this subject to an extraordinary degree, developing its own picture. For it is not just rooms, walks and drinks which are habituated (or 'selfed') in RTP. Other people are, too. To be in love is to be habituated to another, and the depth of that love corresponds to the degree of habituation (*F*, 489; IV 13). With habituation, predictably enough, comes the invisibility

of the other. Conversely, both falling out of love and grief – processes which are, at times, indistinguishable in the novel – are presented as forms of dehabituation. To grieve someone is to get out of the habit of them and to get them out of one's habits. Habit's relation to love is explored in three of the major loves in the novel (and briefly in others): Swann and Odette; the narrator and Gilberte; the narrator and Albertine. This section reconstructs a Proustian account of how habit and love progress.

First, meeting, novelty and relative indifference, followed by the slow accumulation of habits relating to the other. As noted, interruption of habit itself can be fertile ground for love (*BG*, 270; II 17). Proust likes to emphasise how little notice is taken, at first, of the future beloved. This is symbolised by Albertine's roaming beauty spot (*BG*, 489; II 200; *BG*, 526–7; II 230). Indeed, he suggests that this inobservance results from an unguardedness which is a precondition for great love. Swann's love for a woman who is not his type is explicable with reference to habit: by not taking such a woman seriously as a potential great love, Swann can permit her to make herself part of 'every hour' (*TR*, 416; IV 599), thus enabling him to get habituated. The narrator concludes: 'what is dangerous and productive of suffering in love is not the woman herself, it is her presence every day [...]; it is not the woman, it is habit' (IV 599, my translation; *TR*, 417; see also *C*, 406; III 857–8). With the increase of love comes an increased habituation – that is, behaving in ways which mean you will meet them (*SW*, 110; I 92–3), thereby associating them with certain accidental, proximate sensations (waves, music, flowers). Third, the other is strongly but not fully interwoven with the lover's habits. The narrator's love of Gilberte can be broken by a combination of will and luck (*BG*, 190; I 579); his love of Albertine is similar before the end of *Sodom and Gomorrah,* when he leaves her for Balbec, hoping to form new habits with new women (SG 178; III 151). Fourth, incorporation into all habits – for example, when the narrator has lived with Albertine for some time (*F*, 489; IV 13). Fifth, a process of dehabituation caused by ceasing to see the beloved.

We can usefully elaborate on the fourth and fifth stages. Love reaches its zenith when, in one of Proust's favoured medical metaphors, it is declared 'no longer operable' (*SW*, 368; I 303). Once fully in love with someone, the beloved is, on the one hand, fully enmeshed with our being (hence inoperable, unable to be removed without destroying us) and, on the other, invisible, precisely because she is everywhere. Swann's love becomes 'so closely interwoven with *all* his habits' (*SW*, 368, my emphasis; I 303) that its object, Odette, disappears altogether. Of course, it is a general tendency of habit to diminish, to make less salient and even make vanish our habituated sensations and activities. But, in the case of the habituated room, one can move to another room. Love, by contrast, represents habit at its limit: the beloved is absorbed not by means of one kind of habituation but into *every* habit; consequently, she is nowhere to be found in the mind of the lover, a mind condemned to remain elsewhere. Yet, there is no other room. Indeed, the narrator's love of Albertine first undoes his habituation to his room, and then rehabituates him to it with her in mind – a concise example of how the beloved gets incorporated everywhere (*BG*, 584; II 278). The narrator therefore likens the fully habituated love-object to our consciousness: omnipresent and invisible (*F*, 532; IV 48). This phenomenon explains why Albertine, prior to departure, seems to be 'nothing to me', whereas, afterwards, she is revealed as 'my entire life' (*F*, 477; IV 3).[9]

In the previous section, we looked at a different way of conceiving of a fully habituated room – as an extension of the self. Does love offer the same? It appears to in the case of the love of the narrator for his grandmother in Balbec (*BG*, 283–4; II 28). Yet, the most prominent loves in RTP are jealous loves. The narrator's jealousy makes him keep Albertine prisoner, thereby locking her into his habits. But jealousy is also a *dehabituating* force, a magic lantern constantly changing the beloved, forcing the lover to look again, to see familiar

things in a new light (such as certain words: *SW*, 428–9; I 354; see also *G*, 405–6; II 647). Jealous love, in the novel, moves back and forth between the invisibility and consequent boredom of full habituation and the agony of dehabituating jealousy. Habit therefore goes some way to account for the dystopian element in so many of the personal relationships in the novel. Love, full habituation, is a not-seeing and not-knowing. To see the beloved, love must be partial or riven by jealousy. Even the more harmonious love between the narrator and his grandmother has a darker aspect: despite his loving description, she effectively becomes his replacement bedroom, merely an extension of him (*BG*, 283; II 28; on love and lack of separation, see *G*, 157; II 439; *BG*, 549; II 248–9).

When he describes the fifth stage, falling out of love, Proust likewise invokes the workings of habit. When Albertine leaves, he moves from seeing habit as a dulling force (when Albertine is always with him), to a disorientating one:

> Hitherto I had regarded [habit] chiefly as an annihilating force which suppresses the originality and even the awareness of one's perceptions; now I saw it as a dread deity, so riveted to one's being [...] that if it detaches itself [...] this deity that one had barely distinguished inflicts on one sufferings more terrible than any other and is then as cruel as death itself.
>
> *(F, 478; IV 4)*

If love, at its limit, means full habituation, then a sharp severance means total dehabituation. As its first appearance makes clear (see above), one of habit's main functions is to render the external world less hostile. After her initial departure, the narrator is powerless against this aggressive onslaught, maladapted, a fish out of water. Of course, little by little, new habits, not associated with the loved one, cannot help but accruing (*F*, 512–3; IV 32–3). These are, in turn, alterations of the self which appears composed of these habits. On the narrator's telling, therefore, the constant, shifting process of habituation and dehabituation amounts to a process of death ('a true death of the self' (II 32, my translation; *BG*, 288)) followed by the resurrection of a slightly different self (*BG*, 286–9; II 30–2; also *TR*, 438; IV 615). The fear, for example, of a future in which he does not love Gilberte is simultaneously a fear of the death of the part of him that loves her (ibid.) and which, at the inoperable stage of love, would require the alteration of all habits. After Albertine's departure, a similar pattern emerges. The narrator soon experiences moments of calm in which the absence of the beloved is not salient to him. He recoils with horror:

> my love, which had just seen and recognised the one enemy by whom it could be conquered, forgetting (*l'oubli*), began to tremble, like a lion which in the cage in which it has been confined has suddenly caught sight of the python that will devour it.
>
> *(F, 511, translation altered; IV 31)*

Love entangles the other in many, if not all, of our habits; dehabituation is a change of self; therefore, falling out of love is a kind of death.

It is a characteristic feature of dehabituation in Proust that its progress is not strictly chronological. Habits associated with the departed do not simply diminish over time. Habit deadens or overrides what is *frequently* encountered, which means that habits associated with infrequent events or sensations are not overridden as quickly (*BG*, 254; II 4–5). The narrator speaks, in this context, of a multiplicity of 'selves' ('moi'), each of which must be told that Albertine is gone. The 'moi' that must get his hair cut, for example, might be informed long

after the 'moi' that must get out of bed – the former taking place less frequently than the latter (*F,* 491; IV 14). Nonetheless, following a rupture, love tends to diminish over time, as habits are unlearned and replaced. Once he has broken with Gilberte, habit works *both* to diminish his love for her *and* to preserve it indefinitely in Paris, fossilised in various activities. Leaving Paris for Balbec, habit therefore has contrary effects. First, it awakens his former love, because he can encounter non-dehabituated memories and phrases; second, these re-animated memories are quickly deadened through exposure and habituation, so the narrator achieves a fuller break with Gilberte. In effect, going to Balbec flushes out and eradicates the final vestiges of his love (*BG*, 253–5; II 3–5). This is one way in which habit connects with involuntary memory.

Habit and the Self Outside Time

As we have already seen, habit requires time. If I am habituated to some sensation, I have encountered it in the past; a habituated activity is one which was impossible without a prior instance, and it is one which I may look to repeat in the future. Proust knew that he was not the first to theorise habit in relation to a victory over time. Lemoine writes, for example, that though the fleeting moment may have passed, through habit 'I have wrested from time something which henceforth belongs to me' (quoted in Rabier 1888, 1:586). Habituation, on this optimistic model, keeps for the self the best of the past, equipping it for the future. In RTP, however, it is *not* habit which wins the victory over time. Far from liberating us from the weight of the world, habit forms part of that weight. If anything, *interruptions* of habit reconnect us with the past, with past or other selves. These models are consistent: habit could secure useful aspects of the past, as Lemoine has it, while opening us up to interruptions of a Proustian kind, connecting us more directly with a differently habituated past self, otherwise lost to us.

Nonetheless, the real victory over time occurs at the end of the novel, when the narrator experiences the revelation of a self that lies not in the past (like the earlier young man revealed by a change of light) but which lies, explicitly, *outside* time (*TR*, 222–3; IV 449–50). The nature of this being is hardly self-evident (see, in this volume, the Introduction and chapters by Colburn and Panaioti), but what concerns us here is its relation to habit. One symbolic relation is clear: experiences which provoke involuntary memory – some of which are linked to the revelation at the end – may be occasioned by interruptions of habit: the madeleine; the Guermantes courtyard (*TR*, 215; IV 444).

Erika Fülöp posits a further, intrinsic connection. The madeleine episode, enabled by the interruption of habit, yields a different *habit*, that of 'Sunday morning tea with a piece of madeleine' (Fülöp 2014, 357). She concludes that, while interruptions of habit reveal 'the fundamental unity and continuity of the self, habit itself is a key component of that suddenly revealed continuity' (Fülöp 2014, 357). In other words, she suggests, the *revealed self* has a habit among its features. As things stand, this seems like a step too far. While it is true, and curious, that a former habit is revealed by the madeleine episode, this is very much an exception among the sensations which provoke the thought of the self outside time, most of which are not habits (the uneven stones; the spoon and the hammer; the napkin and the towel (*TR*, 218–9; IV 446–7)). More importantly, it is difficult to see how anything outside time, including a self, could be subject to habituation – a temporal phenomenon which, as we have seen, renders the self in question open to constant change.

However, we might develop Fülöp's underlying thought that there is a deeper connection between the two. It appears to be part of the appeal of the self outside time that it is immune

to habituation, and in this light it is important to keep in mind the strong structural similarities between involuntary memory and habit formation. Both can follow from repetition over time of some sensation or act (repeatedly opening the door of a bedroom; stepping on uneven stones in Venice and in Paris). Yet in one case, the self in time becomes further habituated, so that the repeated sensation or action becomes less present to mind. In the other case, the self outside time takes pleasure in some extratemporal essence common to both experiences. Why, we might ask, does repeatedly stepping on uneven stones not simply yield a habituated ability to balance on them without paying it much attention? I can find no explanation in the text itself. Symbolically, as well as theoretically, however, what is offered is a way out, an escape from the many lives and deaths of the habituated self.[10]

Notes

1 See below for examples. This observation holds even when one factors out '*d'habitude*', the standard term for 'usually' or 'normally'.
2 A brief, cursory linguistic analysis of *Swann's Way* yields 54 instances of words containing 'habit', compared with 156 in the French original (excluding *d'habitude*).
3 Similarly in the Penguin translation (Proust 2003a, 4).
4 There was also a discussion of whether habit is *formed by* repetitions, or whether, more abstractly, habituation is a tendency we have to produce or bring about the repetitions themselves. Rabier, following Egger, stresses that the very first instance of a sensation or action is already working towards the formation of a habit; thus, repetition is not required (Egger 1880; Rabier 1888, 1:572; this line of argument is taken up in Sinclair 2019).
5 This observation is commonly associated with Thomas Reid, whom Proust knew through Janet and Séailles (1887, 377). See also Hume (2007, 5.5., p. 32). As Wright notes (2011, 19), some authors, like Locke, remain ambiguous regarding this third stage, but it plays an important role in Ravaisson, among others.
6 Egger, for example, had claimed that 'the distinction between habit and memory has no scientific character' (1880, 217).
7 Hegel, at the end of his discussion of habit, calls attention to this seeming paradox: once habituated, what he calls the 'soul' both 'penetrates' (or pervades), completely, its environment and 'leaves' it (Hegel 1970, vol. 10, p. 191).
8 I explored Proust's treatment of sickness, in this regard, in Stern 2011.
9 Sedgwick remarks, in passing (2012, 23), that the narrator's relation to Françoise has similar features: he appears habituated to and almost completely unappreciative of her service. Only he never gets an equivalent moment of revelation, a *Françoise Disparue*.
10 Thanks to Anna Elsner and Andrea Haslanger for their comments on an earlier draft.

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