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PROUST AND MUSIC STUDIES: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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The present list of recommended readings on Proust and music was devised in line with three principles: historical, thematic, and personal. Accordingly, I selected books, chapters in books, and articles published in academic journals that, simultaneously, bear a historical relevance to the field of Proust and music, are informative, insightful and of pleasant reading, and focus primarily on more general ideas regarding the role of music in Proust’s œuvre, particularly A la recherche du temps perdu. The selected texts stretch from 1923, the year after Proust’s death, to 2014, and comprise texts in both English and French languages.


Jacques Bénoist-Méchin’s ‘De la musique considérée par rapport aux opérations de langage dans l’œuvre de Marcel Proust’, published in Intentions in January 1923 and later developed into the book La musique et l’immortalité dans l’œuvre de Marcel Proust (Paris: Kra, 1926), has been customarily pointed as the inaugural endeavour towards a field of scholarship devoted to the multiplicity of relations between Proust and music. However, André Cœuroy’s article, published in La Revue musicale in that same January 1923 represents, in my opinion, a much better scholarly debut. Rather than trying to account for the complex and ever problematic role of music in A la recherche, Cœuroy offers an insightful list of forms through which Proust engaged with music throughout his work. He thus
anticipates the dominating trends of what I call Proust and music studies by pointing out Proust's melomania, as well as its unfolding, Proust's Wagnerism and Debussism, by raising issues regarding literary representations of sound and listening and processes of organisation of 'le monde inorganisé des bruits';\(^1\) by mentioning Proust's hypersensibility to sound, by commenting on the relation between music and writing, and Proust's verbal music, by discussing the musical construction of Proust's novel and style, by digging out the possible actual sources of Vinteuil, by briefly analysing the key relation between music, morality, and snobbery as well as music and psychology in *A la recherche*, and finally by demonstrating how the interplay between memory and music determines Proust's aesthetic values. Despite the superficiality of the discussions, this article offers a good way in to Proust and music studies due principally to its comprehensiveness.

\(^2\) Pierre Costil, 'La Construction musicale de la “Recherche du temps perdu” (I)', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray*, 8 (1958), 469–489, and 'La Construction musicale de la “Recherche du temps perdu” (II), *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray*, 9 (1959), 83–110. Published in two parts as a sort of follow-up to two meetings of the Société des Amis de Marcel Proust, held on 28 August 1956 and 1 September 1957, Costil's perceptive essay analyses the extent to which the *Recherche* is underpinned by a narrative structure which is truly musical (Costil, 1958: 469). To reveal the musical skeleton of Proust's novel, he puts forward a comparative study of the chapter of the novel *Jean Santeuil* where the petite phrase makes its appearance, an extract from Proust's *cahiers* published in the *Figaro littéraire* on 13 November 1946, and a scene in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* in which the narrator hears for the first time the petite phrase. He not only convincingly demonstrates the crucial contribution of music to the formal organisation of *A la recherche*, but also sagaciously and resourcefully displaces the centre of the novel's musical

framework from either Swann’s hearing of the *Sonata* or the narrator’s hearing of the *Septet* to the narrator’s first hearing of the *petite phrase* next to Swann.

(3) Georges Piroué, *Proust et la musique du devenir* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1960). Georges Piroué presents us with the first attempt to provide a systematic, thorough, and critical study of the influence of music over Proust’s life and work. Organised in four sections, the book discusses respectively the presence of music in Proust’s life, the role music plays in *A la recherche*, Proust’s aesthetics of music, and (in the wake of Costil) the musical structure of *A la recherche*. This work is surely a watershed in Proust and music studies.

(4) Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Proust musicien, 2nd ed.* (Paris: Christian Burgois, 1999 [1984]). Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Proust as Musician*, trans. by Derrick Puffett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Nattiez puts forwards a tripartite way of accounting for the role music plays in Proust’s masterpiece. The strength of his study resides in his systematic analysis of the nine main episodes related to Vinteuil’s music in the novel. His study, however, must be read with the caveat that Nattiez, at times, reduces Proust’s abundant and complex use of music to his own debatable and extensively debated semiotic model of music. In this sense, for him, music evolves in the novel according to three successive and complementarily levels:

> L’inventaire empirique de ce que Proust nous dit de la musique constitue bien une analyse du niveau neutre […] ; l’explication de la conception proustienne de la musique par Schopenhauer, remontant à un aspect particulier des stratégies créatrices de Proust, relève de la poétique ; quant à l’examen critique des interprétations de la ‘petite phrase’ chez mes prédécesseurs, il illustre l’approche esthétique, c’est-à-dire l’étude de la perception et de la compréhension du texte de Proust. (Nattiez, 1999: 13)

Despite the methodological ‘violence’ of using Proust almost as a mere illustration of his own system, Nattiez’s study is well-researched, informative, and systematically comprehensive.

A pleasant and passionate reading of the well-trodden musical stair leading to love and death in the *Recherche*, Goodkin's chapter's main achievement, far from being the ready-made cocktail of Proust and Wagner, is his kaleidoscopic exploration of the figure of 'octave' as a musico-literary trope and a thematic centre to which narratives of love and death harmoniously converge. Anagrams and word plays alleviate and dilute bold statements regarding Swann's musical listening and the death of the grandmother.


With a competently woven and groundbreaking argument, Newark and Wassenaar tackle the nature of music in Proust's narrative. Against the backdrop of *wagnérisme*, they investigate the extent to which 'what is represented in *A la recherche* is not real music at all but Music – a nineteenth-century Romantic literary trope bearing little or no relationship with actual pieces' (164). Their analysis is orientated by the idea of a competence of 'hearing' and the anxiety engendered by the struggle to express and write down aural-affective experiences. With perspicacity, they shake up the walls separating reality and representation (very much in the taste of Proust), between Wagner's and Proust's *Tristans*, and between Proust's, the narrator's, Swann's, and our own musical experiences.


By tracing out a threefold homology brought forth by the encounter of love, suffering, and music in *A la recherche*, Patrick Labarthe reveals with dazzling clarity and elegance the often clumsily (over)stated reciprocity and mutual determination between love and music in Proust's novel. He efficiently shows how, by means of structural indexes, the motif of the unknown ('l'Inconnue'), and
the notion of insularity, Proust interweaves music and love into the rich tapestry of his novel and how such patterns touch upon what he calls the paradoxes of the individual in art ('l'individuel en art') and of saying the unsayable ('dire l'indicible').


Dayan offers us one of the most powerful and thought-provoking analysis of the meaning of music in *A la recherche* by means of a deconstructive reading of a set of musical scenes. These scenes are commonly associated with ‘obscure impressions’ as opposed to ‘recall-impressions’, such as those triggered by the tea-soaked madeleine. It is by exploring the notion of obscure impression – in other words, impressions predicated on a sense of recognition whose ‘causes’, however, cannot be fathomed – that Dayan arrives at the radical ideas that ‘music, by definition, by Proust’s definition, [is something that] cannot be understood’ (85), cannot be put into words, and must remain unheard, ‘indeed forever inaudible’ (87). For originally putting forward a deconstructive critique of the musical in Proust, for the accuracy and surgical precision of his analysis, and for the boldness of conclusions, I believe that Dayan's chapter represents a major contribution to the understanding of, at least, one crucial aspect of the nature of music in the *Recherche*.


Kaltenecker's extensive investigation into the discursive construction of musical listening over the 18th and 19th centuries ends with an examination of what Proust has to say about musical listening. The merits of his enterprise consist, firstly, in inscribing Proust into a discursive tradition of music and musical listening and, secondly, in steering the analytical approach to canonical episodes of *A la recherche* away from music towards listening. Thus, he draws out a sort of typology of musical listening in Proust’s work.

Somewhat following in the footsteps of Dayan, Newark and Wassenaar, Rushworth discloses the strict literary and textual nature of music in the work of Marcel Proust. To support her claim, she turns to pieces of music Proust ‘admired and which themselves contain or are prefaced by important textual elements’ (76), focusing specifically on Proust’s allusions to compositions by Debussy, Beethoven, and Massenet. Her article carries out a careful analysis that reveals in detail the processes of textual transposition to turn music into literature adopted by Proust. Her discussion brings into play an often neglected ‘flipside’ of the crucial inquiry into the enduring tension between musicality and textuality.