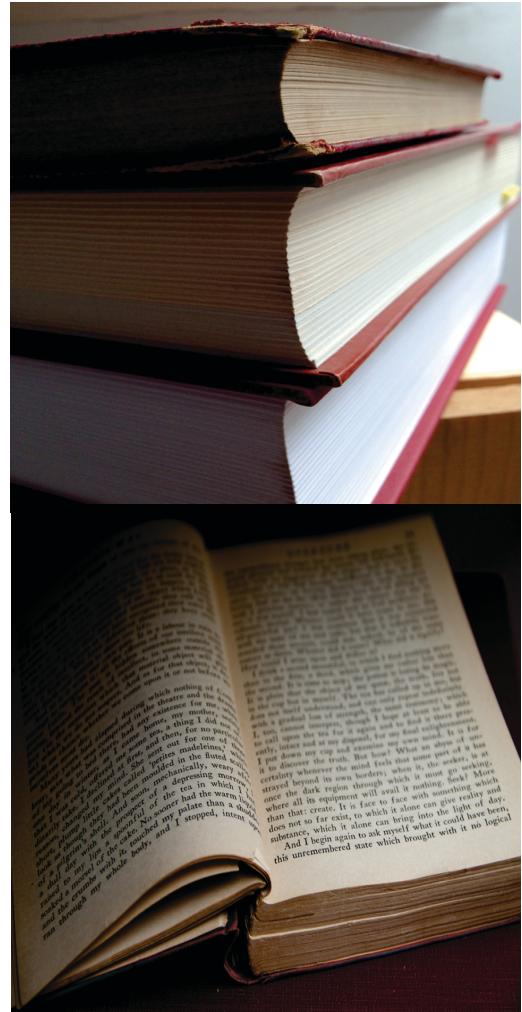
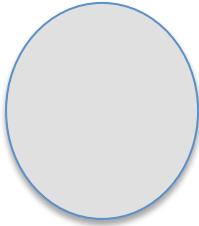


# ON CONSCIOUSNESS





FOR A LONG TIME I WOULD GO TO BED EARLY. SOMETIMES, THE CANDLE BARELY OUT, MY EYES CLOSED SO QUICKLY THAT I DID NOT HAVE TIME TO TELL MYSELF: "I'M FALLING ASLEEP." AND HALF AN HOUR LATER THE THOUGHT THAT IT WAS TIME TO LOOK FOR SLEEP WOULD AWAKEN ME; I WOULD MAKE AS IF TO PUT AWAY THE BOOK WHICH I IMAGINED WAS STILL IN MY HANDS, AND TO BLOW OUT THE LIGHT; I HAD GONE ON THINKING, WHILE I WAS ASLEEP, ABOUT WHAT I HAD JUST BEEN READING, BUT THESE THOUGHTS HAD TAKEN A RATHER PECULIAR TURN; IT SEEMED TO ME THAT I MYSELF WAS THE IMMEDIATE SUBJECT OF MY BOOK: A CHURCH, A QUARTET, THE RIVALRY BETWEEN FRANÇOIS I AND CHARLES V.

Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*

AS MUCH AS PROUST'S WORK IS A MEDITATION ON MEMORY, IT IS ALSO AN OBSERVATION ABOUT CONSCIOUSNESS AND HOW OUR LIVES ARE EXPERIENCED THROUGH THE SCRIM OF THE PAST. AS PROUST'S NOVEL OPENS, MARCEL IS ON THE THRESHOLD OF CONSCIOUSNESS, A HYPNAGOGIC STATE WHERE DREAMS AND THOUGHTS BLUR. HE IS NEITHER AWAKE NOR ASLEEP. JUST AS TWILIGHT IS A MAGICAL TIME BETWEEN DAY AND NIGHT WHERE LIGHT TRICKS THE EYE, FALLING ASLEEP IS AN INSTANT BETWEEN THINKING AND DREAMING, BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS.

BUT WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS? ON FIRST BLUSH, WE THINK OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS THE STATE OF BEING AWAKE. WHEN I VISITED MY PARENTS AND ARRIVED WHEN MY FATHER WAS TAKING AN AFTERNOON Siesta, MY MOTHER WOULD SAY, "HE'S NOT CONSCIOUS." FROM THIS RESERVE, THAT EXPRESSION SOUNDS RATHER OMINOUS, BUT BACK THEN IT WAS JUST HER WAY OF SAYING 'HE'S TAKING A NAP.' SIMPLY BEING AWAKE AND RESPONSIVE IS ONE DEFINITION OF CONSCIOUSNESS. AND BEING ASLEEP IS A DEFINITION OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS. WE ALSO THINK OF SOMEONE AS UNCONSCIOUS WHEN THEY HAVE SOME KIND OF BRAIN TRAUMA—A CONCUSSION ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD, AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT, A STROKE—AND THIS FORM OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS HAS PATHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS. SLEEP IS A HEALTHY AND NECESSARY UNCONSCIOUSNESS. I FIND IT ODD THAT DREAMING DURING THE UNCONSCIOUSNESS OF SLEEP IS CONSIDERED A CONSCIOUS STATE. HOW CAN DREAMS BE CONSCIOUS IF WE ARE ASLEEP? THE ANSWER LIES IN THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE SIGNATURE BRAIN PROCESSES OF DREAMING SLEEP (AT LEAST THOSE DREAMS OCCURRING DURING REM SLEEP—RAPID EYE MOVEMENT SLEEP)—AND WAKEFULNESS. DREAMS ARE VIVID, SENSORIMOTOR HALLUCINATIONS THAT WE EXPERIENCE "AS IF" WE WERE AWAKE. IN CONTRAST TO WHEN WE ARE AWAKE, HOWEVER, THINGS HAPPEN IN DREAMS THAT ARE NOT POSSIBLE IN THE LIGHT OF DAY; IN DREAMS WE CAN FLY, TIME TRAVEL, TALK TO RELATIVES LONG DECEASED, SEE CREATURES THAT HAVE NEVER EXISTED ON EARTH, AND PERFORM SUPERHUMAN FEATS. ALTHOUGH WE EXPERIENCE THESE DREAMED EVENTS AS QUITE REAL, UNLIKE WHEN WE ARE AWAKE, WE CANNOT REFLECT UPON OUR EXPERIENCES WITHIN A DREAM. WE DO NOT SAY TO OURSELVES, "I'M FLYING!" (LIKE THE CHILDREN IN PETER PAN); WE SIMPLY ACCEPT THAT WE CAN FLY IN DREAMS. APROPOS OF *SCRATCH AND SNIFF PROUST*, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT WE DO NOT SMELL IN OUR DREAMS, A REMINDER THAT OLFACTION FUNCTIONS DIFFERENTLY FROM THE OTHER SENSES. (SEE "ON OLFACTION.") THUS ALTHOUGH DREAMS ARE CATEGORIZED AS CONSCIOUS PHENOMENA, THEY EXIST SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE REFLECTIVE CONSCIOUS STATES.

IN UNDERSTANDING MARCEL'S EXPERIENCES AS WE READ PROUST, WE FIND OURSELVES THINKING ABOUT THE QUESTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS. GIVEN THERE ARE A PLETHORA OF WAYS TO THINK ABOUT CONSCIOUSNESS, ONE METHOD TO ORIENT OURSELVES IS BY CONSIDERING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF HUMANS AND THAT OF ANIMALS. WHAT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT? OR ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

MY BELOVED DOG, A MIXTURE OF HUSKY AND MALAMUTE, WAS MY BOLD PROTECTOR ON EARLY MORNING RUNS THAT OFTEN BEGAN BEFORE THE SUN WAS UP, A TIME WHEN VERY FEW HUMANS WERE OUT AND ABOUT. (THE SKUNKS, HOWEVER, WERE INVARIABLY SKULKING IN THE SHADOWS NECESSITATING THAT I KEEP KOANI ON LEASH.) GIVEN HER SIZE AND HER LOYALTY, I WAS NEVER AFRAID KNOWING KOANI WOULD FACE DOWN ANY PERSON (OR ANIMAL) WHO MIGHT THREATEN MY SAFETY. BESIDES, SHE WAS SO BIG THAT MOST PEOPLE WERE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS ON APPROACHING US. THAT SAID, ON RAINY DAYS, MY BRAVE DEFENDER WAS UTTERLY DEFANGED WHEN SHE HEARD (AND FELT) THE BOOM OF THUNDER. SHE WOULD HEAR DISTANT RUMBLES LONG BEFORE THEY BECAME AUDIBLE TO ME.

WITH THE ONSET OF THUNDER, KOANI SUDDENLY WOULD BE PRESSING CLOSELY UP AGAINST ME, TREMBLING, WHIMPERING, AND AFRAID. WHAT FRIGHTENED HER SO? COULD SHE HAVE BEEN TRAUMATIZED AS A PUPPY? SHE CAME TO ME AT SIX MONTHS OF AGE HAVING PREVIOUSLY LIVED IN TWO OTHER HOMES. COULD HER FEARFULNESS BE ATTRIBUTED TO A

TRAUMATIC EVENT THAT HAD OCCURRED DURING A THUNDERSTORM? OR PERHAPS THIS WAS ONE OF THOSE HARD-WIRED, EVOLUTIONARY-GIVEN, INNATE RESPONSES. I NEVER KNEW. HOWEVER, WHAT I DID KNOW WAS THAT KOANI DID NOT SIT AROUND WONDERING WHAT SHE WAS GOING TO DO WHEN THE NEXT SPRING DOWNPOUR OCCURRED. SHE DID NOT WORRY ANTICIPATING THE NEXT CLAP OF THUNDER (UNLIKE CHILDREN WHO WILL EXPRESS THEIR FEARS OF THUNDERSTORMS AND CAN ANXIOUSLY ANTICIPATE A POSSIBLE FUTURE STORM.) INSTEAD, KOANI'S FEARFUL BEHAVIORS WERE CLOSELY TIED TO THE ACTUAL SOUND OF THUNDER. THUNDER CALLED UP A PREDICTABLE EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE, YET ONCE THE STORM HAD PASSED, KOANI RETURNED TO HER FEARLESS SELF.

CERTAIN AUTHORS CALL THIS KIND OF CONSCIOUSNESS (LIKE KOANI'S RESPONSE TO THUNDER) "PRIMARY ORDER CONSCIOUSNESS." IT IS A CONSCIOUSNESS WITHOUT A PAST OR A FUTURE. LIKE A FLASHLIGHT ILLUMINATING A PATH IN THE DARK SUCH THAT OBJECTS OUTSIDE OF ITS BEAM REMAIN UNSEEN, PRIMARY ORDER CONSCIOUSNESS PRODUCES AWARENESS ONLY OF THE "HERE AND NOW" OR WHAT IS IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF US. IT IS COLORED BY THE EMOTIONS OF THAT MOMENT—FOR KOANI THOSE EMOTIONS INCLUDED FEAR WHEN SHE HEARD THUNDER, JOY WHEN I GRABBED THE LEASH IN PREPARATION FOR A RUN, INTEREST WHEN I POURED OUT HER DOG FOOD, AND SO FORTH.

YOU MIGHT WONDER HOW I KNOW THESE WERE HER EMOTIONS. DOGS, OF COURSE, CANNOT TALK. ALL I SAW WERE THE BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS OF WHAT I ASSUME WERE THE UNDERLYING EMOTIONS. (FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF WHY I ASSUME THAT KOANI DID INDEED HAVE THESE EMOTIONS, PLEASE SEE "ON EMOTION.")

AS YOU MIGHT SURMISE, MEMORY IS INVOLVED WITH THIS LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS SINCE A LEARNED BEHAVIOR IS CALLED UP, BUT, AS IN DREAMS, THERE IS NO CAPACITY TO REFLECT ON THAT BEHAVIOR. IT IS A "SENSORY-BASED" CONSCIOUSNESS IN THAT A SENSATION RELEASES THE LEARNED BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE. THUNDER CAUSED KOANI TO COWER. WHAT HUMANS HAVE THAT ANIMALS DO NOT (AT LEAST NOT TO THE SAME DEGREE GIVEN WHAT WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT DOLPHINS, WHALES AND OTHER CREATURES) IS THE CAPACITY TO REFLECT ON THEIR EXPERIENCES. KOANI WAS AFRAID ONLY WHEN SHE HEARD THUNDER, BUT SHE WAS NOT ABLE TO THINK, "I AM AFRAID." THAT KIND OF SELF-REFLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS, ALSO CALLED "HIGHER ORDER CONSCIOUSNESS," DEPENDS ON THE COORDINATED ACTIVATION OF BRAIN PATHWAYS THAT DOGS DO NOT POSSESS. IN HUMAN BEINGS THESE PATHWAYS MATURE DURING THE FIRST COUPLE OF YEARS OF LIFE. BECAUSE OF THE GRADUAL MATURATION OF THESE NEURONAL PATHWAYS, INFANTS (LIKE DOGS) ARE NOT CAPABLE OF SELF-REFLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS. THIS KIND OF CONSCIOUSNESS ONLY GRADUALLY EMERGES AS THE RELEVANT BRAIN STRUCTURES MATURE. (SEE "ON MEMORY.") AS PATHWAYS IN THE CORTEX BECOME MYELINATED<sup>4</sup>, THEY SUPPORT THE ABILITY TO CREATE SYMBOLS—WORDS—and TO USE LANGUAGE IN ORDER TO REFLECT (REMEMBER, PLAN, THINK ABOUT) ON EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN JUST LIVE IT.

IT IS WITH THIS FORM OF CONSCIOUSNESS (AND CLEARLY, MEMORY IS INVOLVED HERE AS WELL) THAT WE CAN REFLECT ON THE PAST, EXPERIENCE THE PRESENT IN LIGHT OF THE PAST, AND CONSIDER THE FUTURE.

PROUST EXPLORES THESE DIFFERENT STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS. MANY MOMENTS THROUGHOUT THE VOLUMES OF *IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME* OCCUR IN THAT LIMINAL SPACE BETWEEN WAKING AND SLEEPING, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN LINEAR THOUGHT AND DREAMS, BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS. IN THE QUOTATION THAT HEADS THIS CHAPTER, MARCEL FALLS INTO THIS STATE AS HE IS READING HIS BOOK AT BEDTIME.

---

<sup>4</sup> Myelin is the insulating sheath around the axons of neurons that speeds up the transmission of impulses.

. . . MY THOUGHTS HAD RUN INTO A CHANNEL OF THEIR OWN, UNTIL I MYSELF SEEMED ACTUALLY TO HAVE BECOME THE SUBJECT OF MY BOOK: A CHURCH, A QUARTET, THE RIVALRY BETWEEN FRANÇOIS I AND CHARLES V.

#### MARCEL PROUST, *SWANN'S WAY*

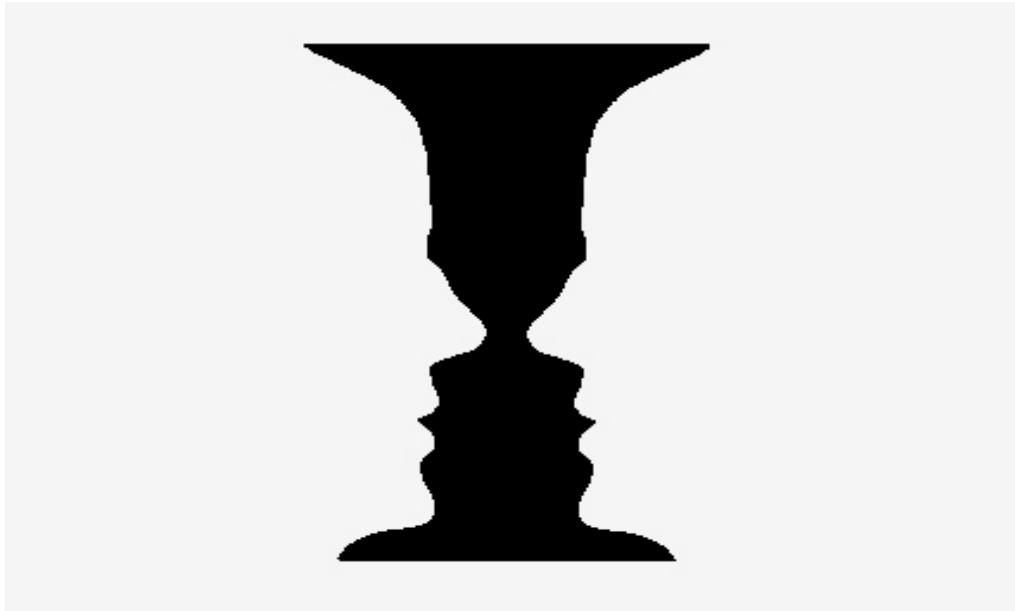
AS HE IS FALLING ASLEEP, MARCEL'S THOUGHTS "HAVE RUN INTO A CHANNEL OF THEIR OWN." THEY ARE NO LONGER CONSTRAINED BY THE BOOK HE WAS READING, BUT FOLLOW UNCONSCIOUS ASSOCIATIVE PATHWAYS IN HIS MIND. AS IN DREAMS THAT TAKE OFF FROM THE INNER WORLD'S CONCERNs AND CONFLICTS, SO TOO IN THIS LIMINAL STATE ARE THOUGHTS GUIDED BY PERSONAL PREOCCUPATIONS AND MEMORIES. CONTINUING THIS THOUGHT, MARCEL REFLECTS:

*PERHAPS THE IMMObILITY OF THE THINGS THAT SURROUND US IS FORCED UPON THEM BY OUR CONVICTION THAT THEY ARE THEMSELVES AND NOT ANYTHING ELSE, AND BY THE IMMObILITY OF OUR CONCEPTIONS OF THEM. FOR IT ALWAYS HAPPENED THAT WHEN I AWOKE LIKE THIS AND MY MIND STRUGGLED IN AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO DISCOVER WHERE I WAS, EVERYTHING REVOLVED AROUND ME THROUGH THE DARKNESS: THINGS, PLACES, YEARS. MY BODY, STILL TOO HEAVY WITH SLEEP TO MOVE, WOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO CONSTRUE FROM THE PATTERN OF ITS TIREDNESS THE POSITION OF ITS VARIOUS LIMBS, IN ORDER TO DEDUCE THEREFROM THE DIRECTION OF THE WALL, THE LOCATION OF THE FURNITURE, TO PIECE TOGETHER AND GIVE A NAME TO THE HOUSE IN WHICH IT LAY. ITS MEMORY, THE COMPOSITE MEMORY OF ITS RIBS, KNEES, ITS SHOULDER BLADES, OFFERED IT A WHOLE SERIES OF ROOMS IN WHICH IT HAD AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER SLEPT, WHILE THE UNSEEN WALLS, SHIFTING AND ADAPTING THEMSELVES TO THE SHAPE OF EACH SUCCESSIVE ROOM THAT IT REMEMBERED, WHIRLED AROUND IT IN THE DARK. AND EVEN BEFORE MY BRAIN, LINGERING IN COGITATION OVER WHEN THINGS HAD HAPPENED AND OF WHAT THEY HAD LOOKED LIKE, HAD REASSEMBLED THE CIRCUMSTANCES SUFFICIENTLY TO IDENTIFY THE ROOM, IT, MY BODY, WOULD RECALL FROM EACH ROOM IN SUCCESSION THE STYLE OF THE BED, THE POSITION OF THE DOORS, THE ANGLE AT WHICH THE DAYLIGHT CAME IN AT THE WINDOWS, WHETHER THERE WAS A PASSAGE OUTSIDE, WHAT I HAD HAD IN MY MIND WHEN I WENT TO SLEEP, AND FOUND THERE WHEN I AWOKE. THE STIFFENED SIDE ON WHICH I LAY WOULD, FOR INSTANCE, IN TRYING TO FIX ITS POSITION, IMAGINE ITSELF TO BE LYING FACE TO THE WALL IN A BIG BED WITH A CANOPY; AND AT ONCE I WOULD SAY TO MYSELF, "WHY, I MUST HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP BEFORE MAMMA CAME TO SAY GOOD NIGHT!" FOR I WAS IN THE COUNTRY AT MY GRANDFATHER'S, WHO DIED YEARS AGO; AND MY BODY, THE SIDE UPON WHICH I WAS LYING, FAITHFUL GUARDIANS OF A PAST WHICH MY MIND SHOULD NEVER HAVE FORGOTTEN, BROUGHT BACK BEFORE MY EYES THE GLIMMERING FLAME OF THE NIGHT-LIGHT IN ITS URN-SHAPED BOWL OF BOHEMIAN GLASS THAT HUNG BY CHAINS FROM THE CEILING, AND THE CHIMNEY-PIECE OF SIENA MARBLE IN MY BEDROOM AT COMBRAY, IN MY GRANDPARENTS' HOUSE, IN THOSE FAR DISTANT DAYS WHICH AT THIS MOMENT I IMAGINED TO BE IN THE PRESENT WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO PICTURE THEM EXACTLY, AND WHICH WOULD BECOME PLAINER IN A LITTLE WHILE WHEN I WAS PROPERLY AWAKE.*

#### MARCEL PROUST, *SWANN'S WAY*

TIME COLLAPSES IN THIS LIMINAL STATE – THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CO-EXIST, AND PLACES ARE MERGED. THIS IS CLEARLY A DIFFERENT STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS FROM THAT OF OUR WAKING STATE.

WHAT IS IT THEN THAT DISTINGUISHES CONSCIOUS PROCESSES FROM UNCONSCIOUS ONES? FOR ONE THING, CONSCIOUS PROCESSES OPERATE IN A LINEAR FASHION. WE HAVE JUST ONE THOUGHT AT A TIME. THEY MAY FOLLOW EACH OTHER IN RAPID SUCCESSION, BUT IT IS... JUST ONE AT A TIME. AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE SO-CALLED FIGURE-GROUND PERCEPTION. LOOK AT THIS IMAGE.



IF YOU STARE AT THE PAGE, YOU WILL ALTERNATELY SEE TWO IMAGES: FIRST A VASE AND THEN THE PROFILES OF TWO FACES LOOKING AT ONE ANOTHER (OR THE OTHER WAY AROUND). CAN YOU SEE BOTH AT THE SAME TIME? IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE BOTH IMAGES AT THE SAME MOMENT. IF YOU LOOK HARD ENOUGH, YOU MAY BRIEFLY CAPTURE BOTH IMAGES, BUT QUICKLY YOU REVERT TO SEEING FIRST ONE IMAGE AND THEN THE OTHER. THIS IS THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUS PERCEPTION. YOU CAN ONLY SEE ONE IMAGE—HAVE ONE PERCEPTION, ONE THOUGHT—at a time. This is in contrast to how things are processed unconsciously. In the unconscious massive parallel processing is accomplished completely outside of awareness. Both the figures and the vase are assessed, but only one image gains access to conscious awareness.

PARALLEL PROCESSING OPERATES CONTINUOUSLY AS WE PERCEIVE ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING, EVEN THOUGH PERCEPTS CAN ONLY ATTAIN CONSCIOUSNESS ONE AT A TIME. IN ORDER TO CREATE A CONSCIOUS IMAGE, MANY DISTRIBUTED BRAIN PROCESSES ARE CALLED UPON; IMAGES OF BRAIN ACTIVATION SUCH AS FMRI'S DEMONSTRATE THE MANY AREAS OF THE BRAIN THAT ARE ACTIVATED IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING A UNIFIED PERCEPTION. FOR EXAMPLE, IN ORDER TO PERCEIVE A FACE—YOUR MOTHER'S FACE—MULTIPLE AREAS CALLED "FACE PATCHES" LOCATED IN THE RIGHT HEMISPHERE ARE ACTIVATED UNCONSCIOUSLY TO CONTRIBUTE TO WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE AS A UNIFIED CONSCIOUS IMAGE OF YOUR MOTHER SMILING BENEVOLENTLY AT YOU.

OVER ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, SIGMUND FREUD DESCRIBED HOW UNCONSCIOUS PROCESSES INFLUENCE CONSCIOUS PERCEPTION; HE CAME TO THIS CONCLUSION WITHOUT THE AID OF BRAIN IMAGING STUDIES. FREUD'S INSIGHT WAS SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF CURRENT COGNITIVE SCIENTISTS WHO DELINEATE THE AREAS OF THE BRAIN THAT CONTRIBUTE TO UNCONSCIOUS PROCESSING AS IN THE FACE PATCH EXAMPLE. FREUD'S EMPHASIS WAS ON THE DYNAMIC PLAY OF BRAIN PROCESSES BY WHICH THOUGHTS THAT EVOKE PAINFUL FEELINGS ARE PUSHED BELOW CONSCIOUSNESS YET CONTINUE TO EXERT AN

IMPACT ON CONSCIOUS THOUGHT. MANY PEOPLE STILL RESIST ACCEPTING THIS INSIGHT, AS A RECENT INTERACTION CAN ILLUSTRATE.

ONE DAY I WAS AT THE DOG BEACH WITH KOANI. WHILE WATCHING THE DOGS ROMP ON THE BEACH OF LAKE MICHIGAN, I STRUCK UP A CONVERSATION WITH ANOTHER DOG OWNER. AFTER FIRST POINTING OUT OUR DOGS, WE BEGAN THE USUAL DEMOGRAPHICS. HE WAS A TRADER AT THE OPTIONS EXCHANGE AND HE ASKED ME WHAT I DID FOR A LIVING. I TOLD HIM I WAS A PSYCHIATRIST. "OH," HE SAID. THEN HE ASKED ME A QUESTION NO ONE HAS EVER ASKED ME. "IS THERE ANY PSYCHIATRIST WHO YOU PARTICULARLY ADMIRE?"

I WAS PERPLEXED. "YOU MEAN LIKE FREUD?"

STEPPING BACKWARDS HE GASPED, "YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN FREUD, DO YOU?"

"WELL," I SAID, "HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT A NUMBER OF THINGS." I FELT A BIT DEFENSIVE OF FREUD WHOSE PROFOUND INSIGHTS HAVE BEEN TARNISHED BY THE MISTAKES HE MADE. SO I WENT ON. "HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THINGS LIKE SLIPS OF THE TONGUE THAT BELIE A CONFLICT."

THE TRADER'S SKEPTICISM REMAINED MANIFEST.

"LET ME TELL YOU A STORY FROM EARLIER TODAY." I BEGAN TO RECOUNT WHAT HAD TRANSPRIRED EARLIER THAT DAY IN MY DOWNTOWN OFFICE. "I MET WITH A YOUNG WOMAN IN HER EARLY TWENTIES. IN THIS FIRST MEETING, SHE TOLD ME SHE NEEDED HELP BECAUSE ALTHOUGH SHE KNEW SHE SHOULD LEAVE HER VERBALLY AND PHYSICALLY ABUSIVE BOYFRIEND, SHE WAS UNABLE TO EXTRICATE HERSELF FROM THE RELATIONSHIP. SHE THOUGHT SHE NEEDED SOME HELP WITH THIS MATTER."

CHECKING TO SEE IF MY SKEPTIC WAS ENGAGED, I CONTINUED. "I ASKED HER TO TELL ME MORE ABOUT HERSELF, AND SHE TOLD ME THAT SHE HAD BEEN LIVING WITH HER BOYFRIEND FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS. SHE WAS FROM AN IRISH CATHOLIC FAMILY AND GREW UP ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF CHICAGO. HER BOYFRIEND WAS FROM THE SAME COMMUNITY. THE YOUNG WOMAN'S FATHER WAS A POLICE OFFICER; HER BOYFRIEND'S FATHER WAS A FIREFIGHTER. THE YOUNG WOMAN AND HER BOYFRIEND WERE CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARTS AND EVERYONE AGREED THAT THEY MADE A GREAT COUPLE. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS... HER BOYFRIEND HAD A VIOLENT TEMPER. FOR WHAT APPEARED TO BE IRRATIONAL REASONS, HE WOULD ERUPT INTO A RAGE AND LAY INTO HER, USUALLY WITH VERBAL ATTACKS, BUT SOMETIMES WITH PHYSICAL ASSAULTS LEAVING BRUISES. MY PATIENT REALIZED THAT SHE NEEDED TO GET OUT OF THE RELATIONSHIP. MANY TIMES, SHE LEFT HIM, BUT ALWAYS RETURNED. EACH TIME HE WAS REMORSEFUL ABOUT HIS BEHAVIOR AND BEGGED HER TO COME BACK. AND YET NOTHING CHANGED. HE CONTINUES TO ASSAULT HER AND SHE KNEW SHE SHOULD LEAVE BUT SHE 'COULDN'T.'"

"AS IT TURNED OUT, SHE HAD GOTTEN PREGNANT BY THIS MAN AND HAD HAD AN ABORTION ABOUT WHICH SHE FELT DEEPLY GUILTY. ALTHOUGH SHE HAD NOT FELT SHE HAD ANY OPTIONS OTHER THAN TO GET AN ABORTION, SHE FELT SHE HAD TRANSGRESSED. AS WE SPOKE, IT BECAME CLEAR TO BOTH OF US THAT THE REASON SHE WAS UNABLE TO LEAVE HER ABUSIVE BOYFRIEND WAS BECAUSE SHE FELT SO GUILTY—HER CATHOLIC UPBRINGING—ABOUT THE ABORTION. SHE EXPERIENCED HER BOYFRIEND'S VIOLENT ATTACKS AS THE PUNISHMENT SHE DESERVED; IN HER MIND SHE BELIEVED SHE DID NOT DESERVE TO LEAVE THIS ABUSIVE MAN."

WHEN I FINISHED MY STORY, THE YOUNG TRADER COMMENTED. "I DON'T BUY IT."

INWARDLY, I SIGHED.

"THERE ARE LOTS OF OTHER REASONS THAT WOULD EXPLAIN THE DIVORCE."

I FELT SLIGHTLY DISORIENTED. "WHAT DID YOU SAY?"

"I MEAN THE ABORTION. . . THERE ARE LOTS OF OTHER THINGS THAT COULD EXPLAIN HER STAYING WITH HER BOYFRIEND RATHER THAN GUILT ABOUT AN ABORTION. MAYBE SHE JUST LOVED THE GUY."

WE WERE SILENT FOR A BIT, AND THEN THE SKEPTICAL YOUNG MAN SAID: "YOU KNOW, THERE IS JUST ONE THING I FEEL GUILTY ABOUT IN MY LIFE."

I WAITED, INTRIGUED WITH THE TURN OF THE CONVERSATION.

"WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BOY—MAYBE FIVE OR SIX—MY PARENTS WERE HAVING A TERRIBLE TIME, FIGHTING WITH EACH OTHER CONTINUOUSLY. AT LEAST THAT IS THE WAY IT SEEMED TO ME. I WAS WORRIED THAT THEY WERE GOING TO BREAK UP, SO I WROTE MY MOTHER A LETTER. I BEGGED HER NOT TO LEAVE DADDY. CAN YOU IMAGINE? AND ALL THESE YEARS I HAVE FELT GUILTY FOR KEEPING MY MOTHER IN A HORRENDOUS MARRIAGE."

I WANTED TO SAY, "AND I REST MY CASE ABOUT THE INFLUENCE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS," BUT I RESTRAINED MYSELF SEEING THAT HE WAS SHAKEN BY WHAT HE HAD UTTERED OUT LOUD. YET IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT EXPRESSING HIS DISBELIEF ABOUT THE "DIVORCE" REPRESENTED A "PARAPRAXIS"<sup>5</sup> IN WHICH HIS CONSCIOUS INTENTION TO SAY "ABORTION" HAD BEEN OVERRIDDEN BY HIS UNCONSCIOUS STRUGGLE TO MANAGE HIS OWN GUILT ABOUT HAVING HAD THE POWER AT AGE FIVE TO PREVENT HIS PARENTS' DIVORCE AND CONSIGN HIS MOTHER TO MISERY FOR HER ENTIRE LIFE. (IF HE WERE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS, WE WOULD ALSO HAVE TO ADDRESS HIS INFANTILE GRANDIOSITY THAT MUST HAVE HELPED HIM COPE WITH A FEELING OF HELPLESSNESS IN THE FACE OF HIS FAMILY'S DYSFUNCTION.)

AS ILLUSTRATED BY MY FELLOW DOG WALKER, WHAT EMERGES INTO CONSCIOUSNESS CAN OFTEN BE A "COMPROMISE" BETWEEN WARRING UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHTS AND BATTLING MOTIVATIONS. IN A STUDY THAT LOOKED AT HOW PEOPLE REMEMBER THEIR GRADES FROM HIGH SCHOOL, MOST PEOPLE HAD RELATIVELY ACCURATE RECALL OF THEIR GRADES. WHEN ERRORS IN RECALL WERE MADE, HOWEVER, IT WAS GENERALLY TO INFLATE A BAD GRADE, REMEMBERING A D AS A B OR C. RARELY, HOWEVER, WAS A D REMEMBERED AS AN A. THIS ILLUSTRATES THE COMPROMISE FORMED BETWEEN DIFFERENT UNCONSCIOUS MOTIVATIONS: SELF-ESTEEM REGULATION NECESSITATED A DENIAL OF THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING GOTTEN A D, AND YET INTERNAL GOALS OF HONESTY AND INTEGRITY OPERATED SUCH THAT THE INDIVIDUAL DID NOT REMEMBER THE D AS AN A. REMEMBERING THE GRADE AS A C OR B WAS A COMPROMISE BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND HONESTY.

RETURNING TO PROUST, HOW CAN WE INTERPRET WHAT HAPPENS IN MARCEL'S LIMINAL STATE? TO UNDERSTAND WE MUST KEEP IN MIND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT ALL CONSCIOUSNESS IS EMERGENT, CONSTRUCTED AT EVERY MOMENT ON THE FLY, COMBINING MANY ELEMENTS TO PRODUCE A CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE. ORDINARY CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE MIGHT DEPEND UPON ELEMENTS SUCH AS CURRENT EMOTIONAL STATE, FOCUS OF ATTENTION, THE STATE OF THE BODY (WHETHER ONE IS DISTRACTED BY PAIN OR THE BODY'S HOMEOSTASIS IS IN EQUILIBRIUM AND THEREFORE NOT A FOCUS OF CONCERN), PERSONAL HISTORY (THE MEMORIES THAT PROVIDE CONTINUITY OF EXPERIENCE), AND SO

---

<sup>5</sup> A parapraxis is another term for "Freudian slip". It refers to an error in speech, memory, or physical action that occurs due to the interference of an unconscious ("dynamically repressed") wish, conflict, or train of thought.

FORTH. THESE ELEMENTS ARE CONTINUOUSLY IN FLUX AND INFLUENCE OUR MOMENT-BY-MOMENT EXPERIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS. IN PSYCHOANALYSIS, WE OBSERVE THESE SHIFTS IN CONSCIOUSNESS AS LONG-FORGOTTEN OR REPRESSSED GESTALTS ARE BROUGHT INTO THE CONSULTING ROOM. (SEE "ON PSYCHOANALYSIS.") IN *SWANN'S WAY*, MARCEL'S CONSCIOUSNESS IS DIRECTED BY THE POSITION OF HIS BODY AS HE AWAKENS STIFFENED BY SLEEP IN A POSITION THAT ACTIVATES ASSOCIATIONS TO A CHILDHOOD STAY AT HIS GRANDPARENTS' HOME IN COMBRAY<sup>6</sup>. IN THE DARKNESS, WITHOUT DAYLIGHT PERCEPTIONS TO ORIENT HIM, MARCEL'S CONSCIOUSNESS IS MORE PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCED BY HIS PHYSICAL POSITION THAT WAS SO CLOSELY TIED IN HIS MIND TO THE LOST PARADISE OF CHILDHOOD, AND HE IMAGINES THE ELEMENTS OF HIS BEDROOM IN COMBRAY.

AS THIS PASSAGE CONTINUES, A SHIFT IN HIS PHYSICAL POSITION EVOKE A COMPLETELY NEW SET OF MEMORIES:

*THEN THE MEMORY OF A NEW POSITION WOULD SPRING UP, THE WALL WOULD SLIDE AWAY IN ANOTHER DIRECTION; I WAS IN MY ROOM IN MME. DE SAINT-Loup'S HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY; GOOD HEAVENS, IT MUST BE TEN O'CLOCK, THEY WILL HAVE FINISHED DINNER! . . .*

MARCEL REFLECTS:

*THESE SHIFTING AND CONFUSED GUSTS OF MEMORY NEVER LASTED MORE THAN A FEW SECONDS. . . BUT I HAD SEEN FIRST ONE AND THEN ANOTHER OF THE ROOMS IN WHICH I HAD SLEPT DURING MY LIFE, AND IN THE END I WOULD REVISIT THEM ALL IN THE LONG COURSE OF MY WAKING DREAM: . . .*

MARCEL PROUST, *SWANN'S WAY*

THE PASSAGE CONTINUES AS MARCEL POIGNANTLY RECOUNTS THE IMAGES WOVEN INTO HIS THOUGHTS COLORING HIS CONSCIOUSNESS THAT IS INFLUENCED BY ALL HIS EXPERIENCES OF THE PAST AS WELL AS BY HIS GRADUAL AWARENESS OF HIS CURRENT SITUATION.

AS I END THIS SECTION ON CONSCIOUSNESS, I WANT TO UNDERSCORE THE POWER OF OLFACTION TO CAPTURE CONSCIOUSNESS ("WAKE UP AND SMELL THE COFFEE!"); WHEN ALL THE ELEMENTS COME INTO PLAY, A SMELL AND THE PRIMORDIAL EMOTIONS THAT SMELL EVOKE, HAVE THE POWER TO CATAPULT US WITHOUT WORDS TO TIMES WHERE WE UNDERSTOOD THE WORLD THROUGH OUR VISCERAL RESPONSES, IMMEDIATELY AND INTENSELY. WE ARE CONSCIOUS OF A FEELING AND OFTEN THIS KIND OF CONSCIOUSNESS IS THE KIND LACKING REFLECTION. MOST OFTEN, THESE OLFACTORY MEMORIES ARE MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD. HOWEVER, BOTH TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES ASSOCIATED WITH ODORS (FIRE, SMOKE, ROT, DEATH) AS WELL AS ECSTATIC MEMORIES ASSOCIATED WITH ODORS (PERHAPS

---

<sup>6</sup> Combray is the name of the imagined village of Marcel's childhood. This village was inspired by the village of Proust's childhood called Illiers. Illiers has now been renamed Illiers-Combray in honor of Proust.

LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON) CAN EVOKE POWERFUL VISCERAL MEMORIES; THE MEMORY IS IN “HOW” WE FEEL RATHER THAN “WHAT” WE REMEMBER.