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**CHOPIN IN MARCEL PROUST'S
*A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU***

In publications about Chopin in Polish and foreign literature, Marcel Proust (1871–1922) is all but non-existent. And yet the greatest French writer of the twentieth century had a special connection with Chopin. He had absorbed his music since childhood, thanks to his mother, Jeanne Proust, and grandmother, Adèle Weil, who watched over his musical education. In his novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927), its narrative constructed from recollections recovered through conscious memory and involuntary memory (triggered by sensory stimuli, like the famous ‘madeleine’ dunked in tea), Proust paints frescoes of French society around the turn of the twentieth century and reflects on music, painting and literature, as well as questions of method in creative work. He wrote this novel in isolation, but only after he had pursued a social life full of music making and discussion, as well writing reviews and articles, works in verse and prose, a youthful novel, translations of Ruskin, pastiches, and sketches for a book on the literary critic Sainte-Beuve. Chopin fascinated Proust not just because he had contributed to the evolution of music, but also as a case where fame was eclipsed and then restored through the esteem of French composers, critics and audiences. That is the aspect which he drew on in his work. Initially (in 1894), he intended to write (with the help of Reynaldo Hahn) *Une vie de Chopin*, but he abandoned that idea. Proust portrayed three images of Chopin. The first, in keeping with contemporary representations, is a portrait of an ailing composer whose music expresses a range of feelings and capriciously mixes sorrow and joy (the poem ‘Chopin’ in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, 1896). In the second (1908), the figure of Chopin begins to fade, while his music – the ‘Raindrop’ Prelude – stirs auditory, visual and olfactory images (*Contre Sainte-Beuve*, pub. 1954). In the novel, the composer, eclipsed by Wagner, appears in the recollections of the ageing Marquis de Cambremer, who took piano lessons from one of the master’s pupils (Camille Dubois-O’Meara), and his music is appreciated by sensitive individuals with musical training. Finally, during a private concert, the narrator declares, in the presence of the marquis’s daughter-in-law, an ardent ‘Wagnerite’, that Chopin is valued by Debussy (he published Chopin’s works for piano, 1915) and esteemed by the critics. The young Mme de Cambremer immediately changes her opinion,

illustrating her musical snobbery. Proust adored Chopin's music, because it revealed an unknown world to him, and its shifting moods inspired him to write long sentences full of unexpected turns, which for a long time disturbed both critics and readers alike.