

**A LA RECHERCHE DES OBJETS PERDUS
or, Never Let an Author Near Your Catalog [or even Catalogue]**

Communication Privée

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Abstract You have to have abstracts, otherwise the papers don't look professional enough. However, as nobody reads them, it's more of a visual thing; as long as there are words in a small typeface at the top of each paper it's probably ok. Check out the other papers in this edition and see what you think.

The Text of this Paper

p482and idly turning the pages of one of those erudite yet strangely evocative and incoherent documents of which the modern world is alas so encumbered, I found myself wondering as ever of the intrinsic beauty of the mysterious processes delineated and assembled there for the purpose of holding, intact and inviolable, the tangible reminders of a forgotten age, perhaps those of one's childhood and adolescent wanderings. I was ineluctably drawn to the alphabetical series of letters carefully set in warm yet ordered parentheses describing the points to be considered in the establishment of criteria for determining whether an object should qualify for inclusion in a collection, when my imagination was challenged by the likely future form of literary biography and its associated paraphernalia. Could it possibly be that over the intervening years such criteria might have in my ignorance been applied to the fond yet simple symbols of those cataclysmic and deeply disturbing tummy upsets which plagued me at Combray? With deep misgivings interspersed with the emotional inertia characteristic of my most intimate relationships I reluctantly began to explore with trembling fingers the cabinet which presented me with many small rectangular drawers equipped with brass label holders and those cupped handles still clouded with the patina of the delicate touch of those girls whose bowed heads had so many times.... but I digress. With trembling fingers I slid out to its fullest extent CAN-DIM, heavy with cards, all cream with blue lines, some dog-eared, some softly adhering the one to the other, some with header tabs: CA, CE, CI, CO, CU... CUP! Silver, ceremonial; Wood, drinking; China, teacup - Balbec-on-Sea, and now I could feel my spirit lift through barely decipherable let alone cataloguable categories of meaning, to those far-off rumblings of my earliest years. Now at last with increasing mobilisation of my spiritual forces, there came into view as if through a haze of those little flies which we find so commonly dead under the windows of summerhouses the leather bound Register with

its marbled fore-edge which reminded me of the stained glass of our little chapel and the gold lettering giving dates, real dates, 1899, September, part of a set belonging to Mme L. de Saint-Loup, and with that subtle underlying chill not unlike rising damp which unbidden permeates the body when faced with a guilty secret I began to experience that joy which only research can bring. And it was eventually the curator of the establishment, a lady of extreme gentility whom I had at first failed to recognize as a person because I had classified her as in that category of woman whose habit was merely to accommodate those who asked stupid questions, but who, when I had conveyed the chaste desires of my heart, by passing her fingers lightly over a small console with an illuminated screen, finally resolved my unease and my disbelief and confronted me at last with the extraordinary magic or virtual reality of what was for me wrapped always in the mystery of the past - that very cup, the object of my remembrances, still bearing the last crumbs of the soaked madeleine, still damp with traces of infusion of lime flowers gathered at dawn and no doubt trampled on our behalf by one of those nameless servants without whom none of us, let alone the exquisite hats of the ladies, would have survived, and who undoubtedly exchanged with delight the countless little stories of my bowel disorder which led to such an uneventful yet to me madly exciting love-life. It was indeed upon the rim of that very cup that I saw miraculously conserved the almost immaculate stain of saliva where my tongue had described its incredible journey and I felt something start within me, something which was embedded like an anchor at great depth and which I could feel mounting slowly until the whole world of literary indigestion permeating my delicate form became too great to conceal and I was forced to avail myself of the balefully inadequate facilities provided for the public somehow redolent of the outdoor closet at my Uncle Adolphe's *pied-a-terre* at Combray. It was none-the-less here at last that I realized that in this sacred repository I had finally gloriously revisited that moment of truth which was finally the reason for bequeathing to an unsuspecting world one of the most complex of individual narratives which was to become also one of the most difficult paperbacks to read in bed.

Footnote