



The Guermentes Way

Marcel Proust , *C.K. Scott Moncrieff (Translator)* , *Terence Kilmartin (Translator)* , *D.J. Enright (Revisions)*

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THE ACCLAIMED FULLY REVISED EDITION OF THE SCOTT MONCRIEFF AND KILMARTIN TRANSLATION

In *The Guermentes Way* Proust's narrator recalls his initiation into the dazzling world of Parisian high society. Looking back over his time in the glamorous salons of the aristocracy, he satirises this shallow world and his own youthful infatuation with it. His observations, and his experiences with his lover Albertine, also educate him in the volatile nature of desire as he walks the path towards adulthood.

The Guermentes Way Details

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some pretty superficial crazies anyway. M., being a creep, stalks Mme. de Guermentes everyday on her morning walks, and befriends her nephew, Saint-Loup and is like "oh can I have that picture of your aunt? ...why? uh....." - whatever, we've all been there right? ..right?anyone? anyone? Bueller?

We also get historical in this one with the Dreyfus affair as the background. There are a few Jewish characters, Bloch who is totally oblivious about being unwanted and annoying, and Charles Swann who of course we love and sympathize with since he married a whore. The Dreyfus affair really wears Swann out, which is sad, but as a reader you're really distracted by the total creepiness of Marcel so you get over it pretty quickly.

This chapter also emerges us in, what every book ought to have, TONS OF SOCIETY BITCHES. And they're all really obsessed with seeming witty (which I've learned from Balzac is REALLY important to French people). We get a LOT of Mme. de Guermentes superr bitchy opinions about her friends and family. Like Princess de Parma and etc. We also hear lots of gossip about people we've met, like Charlus and his dead wife and M. de Norpois and his affair with Mme. de Villeparisis. SCANDALOUS. My only complaint about this volume is I felt like it talked about the lineage of the Guermentes for way too long, and like, the lineages of everyone in all of France. It got rather dry for a good 30-100 pages, but it picked up later.

This book kind of kills Elstir in M.'s eyes a little since the Guermentes don't like his paintings. Whatever...bitches.

There's a really funny scene (and witty, go figure) where B. de Charlus has given M. a book of Bergotte's (which happens pretty much right after he's all like "Bergotte sucks"), and then Charlus calls M. to his house and accuses him of slandering him because M. told people he would help him into society (which he did), and he says "Similarly, you did not even recognize on the binding of Bergotte's book the lintel of myosotis over the door of Balbec church. Could there have been a clearer way of saying to you: 'Forget me not!'" I laughed out loud in an untrammled geeky way, since it is totally absurd to read that much into such a thing.

The book ends on a CLIFFHANGER. Guys, Proust is basically the Agatha Christie of 4000 page novel-y things that sorta don't have a plot and sorta don't have action verbs and stuff. It ends and its like, WILL M. BE INVITED TO THIS PARTY? You would die without knowing if you didn't ever read volume four. How could you live with that suspense? You couldn't. Onto V.4: Sodom + Gomorrah!

BlackOxford says

Names with Power

According to Proust, proper names imply a soul, even for inanimate objects like cities. If something has a proper name, it somehow lives and has some sort of spiritual coherence. And the existence of such names has a specific effect on human beings. It provokes them to join with proper names in a sort of search for what this nominal soul, and their own, might consist of.

Guermentes is such a proper name. Guermentes is a person, in the first instance the Duchess but also her husband Le Duc. Guermentes is also a place, or rather two particular places, a castle in the country and a Parisian residence in the Faubourg St. Germain. Further removed, but also denoted by the proper name, Guermentes is a dispersed set of estates in space, and a corresponding family history which chronicles their acquisition and management in time.

All of these denotations, according to Proust's theory, have a soul to be searched for and explored. But it is

not the person or place that is to be investigated; it is the proper noun itself. Thus, for example, the actress Berman, by whom the younger Marcel was captivated, no longer has a soul for him. The concrete person is vacuous and her name has no real significance except as a good actress. No longer an archetype of Woman, she has been reduced to 'that actress', not even a proper noun. Although he admires her theatrical skill, she has lost all power in Marcel's life.

On the other hand, Guermantes is a name with power, not archetypal but singular power. It is a word that, like all proper nouns, has a meaning that exceeds its denotations. It is a word that can only be described as having a life of its own. It is self-referential. And such a proper noun is powerful precisely to the degree of its self-referentiality. It is bigger than its denotation, not in the sense of suggesting something 'beyond' but because it attracts meaning to itself.

So, the Duchess Guermantes, although fashionable, is a fairly unimpressive woman. Out of the context of her proper name she might be considered merely ordinary. But her salon is the most sought-after in Paris. Guermantes castle is insignificant militarily and architecturally; but it is enmeshed in a sort of regal nostalgia which seems a part of the French national psyche since the Revolution. The Guermantes family name itself has no ancient pedigree; but it has emotional and social 'connections' which allow it to be treated as if it had. Its history is a symbol for the history of all of France.

Words with power condense inarticulate feelings into articulate myths and ideals. But however articulate these myths and ideals, they are unanalyzable, first because their articulation is never stable and second because they are infinitely interpretable. Every interpretive statement about them becomes a component of their meaning and adds to their power.

This power of proper names appears to be supernatural, even more mysterious and potent than language in general. It emanates mysteriously from human interaction but is beyond the control of any individual, as all language is. But there is a character to proper nouns which is decidedly religious, even doctrinal. As Marcel says with some obvious religious emotion,

"... the presence of Jesus Christ in the host seemed to me no more a mystery than [the Duchess's] house in the Faubourg being situated on the right bank of the river and so near my bedroom in the morning. I could hear its carpets being beaten. But the line of demarcation that separated me from the Faubourg St. Germain seemed to me all the more real because it was purely ideal."

It is not possible to escape the power of these proper nouns. One cannot ignore them or unilaterally refrain from using them in one's vocabulary because they intrude continuously and intimately into one's life. Encountering Le Duc, for example, without knowing who he is or without using the correct form of address will evoke a humiliating response.

On the other hand, attempting to actively resist this power is futile. The power does not exist in the concrete embodiment of Le Duc, or his castle, or even of his wealth. It exists in his name itself. Its power is that of vocabulary not of politics or armaments. It is a power that is immune from individual effort to displace it. As is always the case with language, fighting it means isolating oneself utterly from one's fellow. The name derives its potency for all intents and purposes from another dimension.

Therefore one must submit to the power of these proper nouns, either by merely accepting their mythical and ideological demands, or by assimilating these demands into one's own personality. In this matter event, one discovers the motivation of ambition for the first time: the active desire to become a part of the word with power.

The recognition of ambition marks Marcel's transition into adulthood. The grown-up world is not one of the concrete reality of things. It is a world of the symbolic reality of proper names. Of course symbolism has always been important for Marcel - one thinks of the meanings suggested by church steeples, as well as the actress in previous volumes, for example. But the symbolism of these things was directed toward an ungraspable beyondness, a primitive spirituality, that evoked searching, as it were, past the symbol to some other reality. These symbols represented something internal to Marcel, whether purpose or destiny, he knew not. But they called him forth into himself.

Marcel's emergent adult symbolism is of a radically different sort. The symbols of proper nouns point not beyond themselves but only to themselves. This is the psychic sump of their self-referentiality. Their profound self-referentiality will eventually blind Marcel to his infantile symbolic quest altogether. His iconic symbolism will be steadily replaced by a sort of heretical symbolism which narrows and closely binds Marcel's perception. This is the Guermites Way.

Rowena says

“It is not possible to describe human life without bathing it in the sleep into which it plunges and which, night after night, encircles it like the sea around a promontory.” - Marcel Proust, The Guermites Way

Having recently read Anais Nin's thoughts in *The Novel of the Future*, a book in which she lauded Proust and similar authors for being sensitive to the subconscious and incorporating elements of philosophy and psychology in their writing, I was very eager to start reading this volume. Nin also mentioned that Proust had a way of making characters unforgettable, and the servant Françoise is a prime example of the sort of character one can never forget once one has encountered her:

"Françoise, her footman and the butler heard the bell ring, not as a summons with no thought of answering it, but rather as the first sounds of instruments tuning up for the next part of a concert, when it is clear that there are only a few more minutes of the interval left to go."

I have to admit that I had been slightly worried about liking this book because I hadn't enjoyed "In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower" as much as I had "Swann's Way"; I was concerned that my enjoyment of the remaining volumes would decrease. I needn't have worried though; *The Guermites Way* is a work of art.

In the first section, Proust has moved from Combray to Paris due to his ailing grandmother. Our protagonist is still as sensitive as ever and is in love with the married Mme Oriane de Guermites. He turns out to be quite the obsessed, creepy stalker but at least his infatuation of her inspires some poetic passages:

“...She threw him a glance from her lovely eyes, cut from a diamond that intelligence and friendliness seemed to turn liquid at such moments, whereas when they were still, reduced to their purely material beauty, to their merely mineral brilliance, if the least thing caused them to move, even slightly, they set the depths of the orchestra stalls ablaze with the horizontal splendour of their inhuman fire.”

French society is completely satirized in this account. We are introduced to the shallow aristocratic society of salons and bluestockings. And there is scandal and slander galore.

The section where Proust's grandmother passes away is poignant and heartbreaking. It reminds me of how

one is often philosophical when confronted with death:

“We say that the hour of death cannot be forecast, but when we say this we imagine that hour as placed in an obscure and distant future. It never occurs to us that it has any connection with the day already begun or that death could arrive this same afternoon, this afternoon which is so certain and which has every hour filled in advance.”

I think I'll read book #4 earlier than planned.

Nikos Tsentemeidis says

«... τρεις γυναίκες που εγχα αγαπεί - , σκέφτηκα πως η κοινωνική μας ζωή είναι, όπως το εργαστέρι του καλλιτέχνη, γεμάτη προσχέδια πεταμένα στα οποια νομίσουμε πως θα μπορούσαμε να δώσουμε οριστική μορφή στην ανάγκη μας για έναν μεγάλο ρωτά, αλλά δεν λογιάσα πως μερικές φορές, αν το προσχέδιο δεν είναι πολύ παλιό, μπορεί να τείνει να το ξαναπιστούμε και να το μετατρέψουμε σε ένα άργιο ολτέλα διαφορετικό, όπως μάλιστα και πιο σημαντικό απ' εκείνο που εγχαμε προβλέψει αρχικά».

Εξίσου εντυπωσιακός ο Προυστ, όπως και στα δύο πρώτα βιβλία. Αγαπημένος.

Mala says

We are attracted by every form of life which represents to us something unknown and strange, by a last illusion still unshattered.

I read this book in a purple haze of the summer daze—no, not the Hendrix variety, rather, a surreal read where words seemed to be scuttling across text, dropping off the pages, dimming when I focussed on them—closed the book, thinking, tomorrow is another day—& found no recollection of the previous day's read, started all over again... Didn't help that there were endless paragraphs (or was it pages!) on military strategy— if you want to torture someone, put them in a dungeon & make them read those portions again & again.

I was beginning to despair till mercifully Proust landed us into the salon of Mme de Villeparisis— for there is no politics like salon politics— the mean sophistication of which would put the High School Bullies-like cliques of Goodreads to shame!

Like a Restoration Comedy but infinitely more refined (this is Proust, after all!), endless characters are paraded before our eyes & eviscerated— from the royalty, to landed aristocracy, to politicians, artistic types, to wannabes of all kinds— none is spared. Why, the writer even makes someone refer to Marcel as that "hypocritical little flatterer."! People gathered in these places as in a "social Eucharist"!

From this salon, we move on to a grander one— Mme de Guermentes', whose secret charms, Marcel was so dying to penetrate, yet found to his disappointment:

Only she (Mme de Guermentes) was incapable of realising what I had sought for in her, the charm of her historic name, and the tiny quantity of it that I had found in her, a rustic survival from Guermentes. Were

our relations founded upon a misunderstanding which could not fail to become manifest as soon as my homage, instead of being addressed to the relatively superior woman that she believed herself to be, should be diverted to some other woman of equal mediocrity and breathing the same unconscious charm? A misunderstanding so entirely natural, and one that will always exist between a young dreamer like myself and a woman of the world, one however that profoundly disturbs him, so long as he has not yet discovered the nature of his imaginative faculties and has not acquired his share of the inevitable disappointments which he is destined to find in people, as in the theatre, in his travels and indeed in love.

Unlike the others, the narrator's presence at these sparkling gatherings were more out of a sense of historical curiosity & aesthetic pleasure than for sating his physical appetites—to go deeper & beyond the mystery of those ancient names, because "The human mind, hovering perpetually between the two planes of experience and imagination, seeks to fathom the ideal life of the people it knows and to know the people whose life it has had to imagine"— Marcel remains a neutral, detached observer, faithfully recording his impressions of people & things, showing the fascinating aspects of the Guermentes set, warts & all—

For example:

Mme. de Guermentes's mind attracted me just because of what it excluded was exactly the content of my own thoughts.

And this one of Princess de Parme :

She treated each of them with that charming courtesy with which well-bred people treat their inferiors and was continually, to make herself useful, pushing back her chair so as to leave more room, holding my gloves, offering me all those services which would demean the proud spirit of a commoner but are very willingly rendered by sovereign ladies.

A genealogy tree would've helped as all those name-dropping got really confusing towards the end. Guermentes Way excels as a social satire— the narrative extending outwards from Marcel's inner world of the earlier two segments of Swann's Way, & Within a Budding Grove, as the budding artist is poised to take his place in the larger scheme of things. Don't let the earlier 200 pages or so disappoint you as from there onwards, it really picks up. Also pay attention to people & things because it seems in the ISoLT series, every thing is connected. I'll quote a line from this book itself to describe it, "It's long-winded, but it's quite strong in parts".

Some highlights—

- A night at the opera, where the audience is more interested in looking back & up at those exclusive boxes graced by the presence of the gorgeous Guermentes set rather than at the stage!
- You finally get to meet Robert Saint-Loup's much-talked-about mistress.
- A death in the family.
- The 'Lady in Pink' makes a brief appearance.
- Marcel is infatuated once again!
- The Dreyfus affair dominates a lot of the salon conversation.
- M.de Charlus, " an Apollo grown old", every time he appears on the pages, the narrative goes vra-vra-vroom!
- Swann is there too & it's heartbreaking.

Some quotes: Because I love them & more so because it's Proust— if his beautiful prose can't induce you to read this, I don't know what will!

(view spoiler)

Edward says

--The Guermentes Way (In Search of Lost Time Volume III)

Notes

Addenda

Synopsis

Aubrey says

And even in my most carnal desires, oriented always in a particular direction, concentrated round a single dream, I might have recognized as their primary motive an idea, an idea for which I would have laid down my life, at the innermost core of which, as in my day-dreams while I sat reading all afternoon in the garden at Combray, lay the notion of perfection.

-Marcel Proust

I go forward slowly, dead, and my vision is no longer mine, it's nothing: it's only the vision of the human animal who, without wanting, inherited Greek culture, Roman order, Christian morality, and all the other illusions that constitute the civilization in which I feel. Where can the living be?

-Fernando Pessoa

Constants are a comfort. Predictable, reliable, indestructible, themes upon which to stake a claim, build a life, and conjure up a culture. Without them, there would be no tradition, no heritage, no common meaning that has been given centuries to bring together the many millions of humanity, and will continue to do so long into the future.

Transience is stimulating. Unique, original, unpredictable, the many spices that fill each day of life with novelty and excitement. Without them, civilization would die a slow death, unable to provide for the insatiable minds crowding its surface, compensate them for all the rules and regulations that confine them in every aspect of their lives.

In *Swann's Way*, we were introduced to the fragile chaos that is memory, all of its invisible triggers and surprising strengths when it came to prying forth events that molt and flex with each passing second, as fast as we ourselves can metamorphosize. In *Within a Budding Grove*, we found beauty, then lost it, then found it again, so long as we lied and were lied to, consciously or otherwise, in hopes of that one instant where what we loved was indeed what was. In *Guermentes Way*, we reach out of our protective cocoons, and unleash these truths of mind and matter to rampage over the wide plane of humanity.

What results is both admirable and terrible, a truth of life whose nakedness proves too ferocious for the majority of minds. We are satisfied with neither peace nor war, with neither the unchanging monotony that lies too close to the cold and silent realm of mortality, nor the rampant fury that upturns our sensibilities and forces us through evolutionary contortions at a sometimes deathly speed. We yearn for connections based on

similarity, and shy away from anything that decries our individuality. We wish to be understood; we do not want to be spoken through.

So we form our societies, our little cliques, our passion plays that eternally jest with one hand and keep a tight hold on emergency conventions with the other. We set the trends, watch as the clusters form and the enthusiasm rises to a fever pitch, then switch gears as soon as the crowds begin to settle and the dissonant murmurs begin to rise. We ensure that, above all else, shallowness is the key to every sort of success; we make sure to never tread too deeply in the psyche, where the shadowy past looms large and conforms more thoroughly than one with inherent beliefs in ones self can bear. We adapt at every social turn and mental acrobatics trick so that the momentary thrill is always there and always momentary, and make the word hypocrisy nothing more than the incessant whine of those who failed.

One never has to worry about disagreeing states of mind so long as one is the ringmaster of the entertainment. One never has to concern oneself with, say, feelings, and justice, and empathy, when the supreme goal is maintenance of the social formula. One need not ever have to plant oneself in another's shoes, when one is so busy in leading a parade of thousands.

For how else are we supposed to be satisfied, we social animals with our countless hopes and dreams and mentalities, always clashing when together and so very lonely when apart? How else do we function within the constricting walls of ideologies that have had millenia in which to grow, find a little variation to make the promise of a new day something of a comfort rather than a living hell? Our minds, our bodies, our souls change with every passing moment, and yet we seek the refuge of similarity with a fellow human being whose transformations are just as quick and just as erratic. We grow upon ideas that have given us security since the first idea came into being, and then we find ourselves outgrowing them, flaying ourselves on insidious restrictions that are almost too ingrained to be even be considered in words, let alone questioned.

Our thoughts swim to gorgeous depths that cannot sustain life, and so we must wait on the surface and make do with the wreckage that manages to float up through the darkness. The bits and pieces last until they no longer suffice for a pleasant existence, what with so many others crowding and crewing and manipulating the flotsam and jetsam to their own advantage. We wonder if it would be more enjoyable to sink down and make ones own way through the sunken ships, with only ones thoughts for company. We would miss the others, though, what with their complete removal from our own frame of mind, so refreshingly different despite all their sometimes aggravating differences.

It's difficult, balancing the worth of self in solitude against that of living in conformation, judging how much of oneself is an identity and how much of it is a sociocultural construct. Truth, versus stability. It's not a wonder that most of the world is devoted to the latter. At least, there, you're not alone.

Manny says

In the first two volumes (I argue, anyway, in my review of *A L'Ombre Des Jeunes Filles En Fleurs*), Proust was most interested in putting romantic relationships under the microscope. He returns to that theme later on in the series, but in the third book he is primarily concerned with picking apart the concept of wit, more exactly, *esprit*, something that has always been terribly important to the French upper classes. If you want an easier tour of the subject, you might like to check out Leconte's 1996 movie *Ridicule*, which covers roughly the same ground as Proust's novel.

As usual in Proust, a vast number of things happen, and the language is very beautiful, so I'm only giving the barest of bare bones. The narrator develops a major crush on the Duchesse de Guermantes, Paris's most

charming, fashionable, and above all *witty* hostess. It's kind of embarrassing at first: he pretty much stalks her. But, after a while, he manages to get into her highly exclusive social circle, and appreciate all that sparkling *esprit* at first hand. People sometimes criticize Proust for not being amusing, but this book is the exception. The Duchesse is, in fact, pretty damn funny a lot of the time. I particularly like her *désinvolture* as she comments on the Duc's interminable series of mistresses, and how much trouble they always cause her.

What's both fascinating and rather scary is the way in which Proust then focuses his analytical intelligence on the Duchesse's wit. Instead of just enjoying it, he decides to pick it to pieces. He's almost too successful in this attempt: a good part of me wished he hadn't done it. What was originally sparkling becomes trite and mechanical. She's got a number of formulas, and she rings the changes on them. I shouldn't have looked at the man behind the curtain. It's all part of Proust's overall program, and it's thematic, so I guess I shouldn't complain; the true reward for reading him is supposed to be at a higher level. All the same, it would be nice to get some straightforward pleasure every now and then without him insisting on ruining it immediately afterwards. His analysis reminds me of the following well-known lines from T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*:

Man's life is a cheat and disappointment;
All things are unreal,
Unreal and disappointing:
The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat,
The prizes given at the children's party,
The prize awarded for the English Essay,
The scholar's degree, the statesman's decoration,
All things become less real, man passes
From unreality to unreality.

I like this passage for the same reason I like *Le Côté de Guermentes*; it expresses despair in a wonderfully elegant way.

After posting my review of *The Information* a couple of days ago, I started to wonder what other books there were which directly address the Goodreads experience. It occurred to me that *Le Côté De Guermentes* was a strong contender. Literary salons have passed into the realm of myth, so you don't immediately recognize one when it comes along, but Goodreads does indeed seem to have many of the qualities you find in descriptions from 19th century and early 20th century novels. We're all sitting around trying to dazzle each other with our witty sallies, and there is a definite *cachet* attached to being friendly with the pickier reviewing stars.

And, just as in Proust, you discover how hard it is to maintain a high standard of *esprit*. Over and over again, you see the phenomenon he describes here: you're first captivated by someone's brilliant *aperçus*, then, having become familiar with their style, you start anticipating them. In the end, they become predictable and boring, and you move on to admiring someone else.

I hope I haven't ruined too many people's days by pointing this out, and I'm honestly not thinking of anyone in particular. It's everyone; it's part of the human condition. Damn Proust for noticing that and explaining it so well.

Sue says

This may be my favorite book of ISOLT so far. Yes there are moments that seemed to go on....and on...a bit, but overall I feel that the narrator became more real, more human, as did many of the people around him, including those who he has been studying from afar.

In *The Guermantes Way*, our unnamed narrator has matured somewhat, though his exact age remains unspecified. He is now attending the salons of those who he has admired from a distance, especially Mme de Guermantes, the woman he virtually "stalked" in the streets, setting up regular "impromptu" meetings during her daily travels around Paris. A love-struck teen or slightly older perhaps.

But at these salons, exciting things happen--not duels or sightings of fabulous art and people so much as overhearing wonderful conversation. Our narrator learns about people, his heroes and heroines, himself, and we learn about him. The politics of the time are discussed, with the Dreyfus case front and center, views on that "race matter" being central, anti-semitism rampant. Then there are the posing and poseurs, the toadying for favors, and the finding that people are not who they outwardly appear to be. And all of this is done in Proust's quite wonderful prose.

Here is a description of the Guermantes and their interactions with others.

And yet, to take an example, all of them--all those who were true Guermantes, that is--when you were introduced to them, indulged in a kind of ceremony, almost as though by holding out their hands to you they were performing an act as weighty as confirming a knighthood upon you. The moment he heard your name uttered, a Guermantes, even a twenty-year-old Guermantes, but treading already in the footsteps of his elders, let fall upon you, as though he had not made up his mind to acknowledge you, a gaze that was generally blue and always as cold as a steel blade, seemingly destined to plunge into the deepest recesses of your heart. And this is just what the Guermantes imagined themselves to be doing since they all regarded themselves as first-class psychologists. They also felt that this inspection intensified the affability of the greeting that was to follow it, which would not be delivered without a shrewd idea of your worth. All this occurred at a distance from yourself that would have been too close for a passage of arms, but seemed immense for a handshake. (p 440)

And to complete this:

...when the Guermantes in question, after a lightning tour of the last hiding places of your soul and your integrity, had deemed you worthy to consort with him in the future, his hand, directed toward you at the end of an arm stretched out to its full length, seemed to be presenting a rapier for single combat, and the hand was in fact placed so far in front of the Guermantes himself at that moment that when he proceeded to bow

his head it was difficult to distinguish whether it was yourself or his own hand he was acknowledging. (p 440)

And these are only observations of the male side of the family. To read more of Mme de Guermentes, you really must read this book. Proust comes into his own here, in my opinion, with his clever witticisms, sometimes gentle but biting descriptions and some beautiful language. There are some sections that seemed a bit long but it also seemed I was rewarded for these by a writerly gift or two throughout the novel.

Highly recommended with the caveat that you should begin with Swann's Way

Kelly says

Back when I was reading *Swann's Way*, I expressed the wish that Marcel would relax a bit and let his witty side come out to play more. At the time, things were generally pretty intense and serious inside his head. (Yes, in fact, I do know I have a knack for understatement, thank you.) Between the madeleine, his mother obsession and his painstaking, point-by-point dissection of Swann's love-jealousy process, it was a rather relentless windstorm. But, it must have been about three-quarters through, there was this one little scene where he let Swann leave his house and his head to attend a party. There, he encounters various ridiculous figures whose characters he sums up and then assassinates in the matter of a paragraph or two of simple observation. It was a delightful, all-too-brief break from the concentrated drilling and mining that had been relentlessly marching on. It reassured me that Proust, too, went down to the corner bar, had some sort of (snooty) adult beverage and gossiped from time to time. All too soon, however, he encountered 'the little phrase' and we were winding our way back to where we had come from. As beautiful as that section on the little phrase was, and however little I regret reading it, I wasn't ready to leave the party.

Well. Be careful what you wish for. Because my wish was granted many times over in this volume. Proust gave me everything that I asked for, and hundreds and hundreds of pages more. Instead of having a brief, lucid, in-the-present moment that shone out from the morass of wallowing and the trips to the land-of-never-was around it, we almost *never* left the party. If he wasn't there, he was yearning to get there. We sure aren't in Combray anymore. In this volume, Marcel goes full on Parisian. He's reached what I gauge to be late adolescence or perhaps at most his early twenties. His family now lives in a residence attached to the complex of the ducal Guermentes family, of earlier obsessive inside-Marcel's-head fame, for reasons that don't matter. What matters is that this situation gives Marcel the springboard for a new obsession. I think we know Marcel well enough by now to know that he's got to be worshipping *something*, obviously something gorgeous, usually something unattainable and preferably anything with a strong link to a past he can thoroughly romanticize. Fortunately for him, his latest residence comes ready made with someone who fits that description exactly: Mme de Guermentes.

Part I: I Am Obsessed with Mme De Guermentes

Of all things I never thought would matter for a volume of Proust, I feel compelled to start with a brief plot overview of the beginning of this book:

So, this is the one where Marcel's a stalker. I mean, he's a stalker in that way that movies often try to convince us is adorable, but still. He starts off in Paris, observing his little house, like he's always done. A big part of what he sees, of course, is its connection to the Guermentes, in case anyone has forgotten his childhood obsession with them from Combray. It's reignited one evening at the theatre when he THINKS he MAY have seen Mme de Guermentes smile at him. This is the beginning of a violent, immediate and

renewed passion for her. He then starts scheming! He plans his morning walks to “coincidentally” coincide with hers. He shows up on the doorstep regularly, pretends like he’s not really looking for her when he goes to her house, angles for invitations to her parties.... and then, not long later, gets an inkling that maybe she doesn’t like this behavior. (Which is totally shocking.) He then decides to go off and visit her nephew, Saint Loup, his supposed BFF, to see if HE can hook him up with her. He ends up being sort of distracted by his man-time (and Saint-Loup’s own women issues, which he gets pretty thoroughly involved with and judgey about), but still can’t quite forget his obsession with her. And moreover, he doesn’t really get the invitation he’s looking for. He gets back to Paris and is still angling for a meeting that eventually comes far too late. In the meantime, he makes do with Mme de Villeparisis, the Duchesse’s old, kind-of-outcast Aunt, instead. It takes two hundred more pages, a death, a season changing, some sex, and some outright humiliation from his mother to get himself over the worst of the situation.

Obviously, this section is about more than the sum of the parts that I just told you about. Actually, everything I just said is the best evidence I could give you that focusing on plot in this book really gives you absolutely no idea of what it is really about or how it reads. But I think it is important for us to keep in mind that however beautifully he writes, however lovely his thoughts might be, usually we judge people by what they say and what they do, yes? So while plot will never be king here, that does not mean that it should be entirely dismissed. He frequently deflects attention from his narrator’s actions with his focus on the beauty of his thoughts and descriptive rhapsodies. But this is an excellent reason to make sure we pay attention to them, particularly in this society focused book which is all about watching how people build up their public personas and relationships and finding the holes and inconsistencies in them. (Which I am quite sure he intended.) The narrator’s high minded thoughts are frequently in contradiction to what he actually does. Which is especially effective when he’s just been in the midst of some profound contemplation on human nature, or just after the thousandth time someone has told him how special or interesting he is.

There are a few good examples of this in this section. The first, and perhaps the most hilariously pathetic, is when he has gone to visit Saint-Loup at the barracks. While he is there, he notices that Saint-Loup has a picture of Mme de Guermantes in his room, which he quickly becomes obsessed with and desires to possess. Out to dinner with him one evening, he hems and haws about it, bringing it up and saying to him: “...*I’ve been hearing the most astonishing things about her... That has made me enormously interested in her, from a literary point of view, you understand, from a-how shall I put it?- a from a Balzacian point of view.*” He follows this up with a request that Robert tell her how awesome he is, pretending that he doesn’t care if he does that at all and using some good old reverse psychology to say, basically, “I bet you couldn’t set me up with her if you tried!” When this ploy actually works, because Saint-Loup is a dolt, he gets so excited and at the same time embarrassed at what he’s probably revealed that he creates a diversion by pretending that Saint-Loup actually matters to him for a second, as a person, and goes:

“But it really is time to join the others, and I’ve mentioned only one of the two things that I’ve meant to ask you, the least important one. The other one is more important to me, but I’m afraid you will say no. Would you mind if we called each other ‘tu’?”

“Mind? I’d be delighted! Joy! Tears of joy! Undreamed of happiness!”

“Oh thank you... thank you... After you! It’s such a pleasure to me that you needn’t bother about Mme de Guermantes if you’d prefer- calling each other ‘tu’ is enough.”

He manages, therefore, to pretend that this was all about Saint Loup for all of... what, three sentences? And it takes all of one more exchange for the whole curtain to come rolling down when he finally just outs with: “*I suppose I couldn’t ask you to give me her photograph?*” Saint Loup’s resulting record-scratch double-take AWKWARD reaction is the best, and totally deserved. What a little emotional manipulator our little Marcel is. This is usually the part in the sitcom where the character admits, with embarrassment, what they’ve been up to and apologizes, while still begging their friend, much more openly, for help. But not Marcel. He sees his friend has moral scruples and decides to hate him for it.

But examining the plot aside, I will give his writing its due. Even in this section, in the midst of all of this ridiculousness and light operetta-like maneuvering, Marcel takes a lot of time out for some beautiful pondering on the meaning of relationships, how they are formed and why they are maintained, and what a huge role perception plays in all of it. One major theme that is introduced in this section (and which comes back time and time again throughout the entire book) is Marcel's personally unadmitted obsession with the aristocracy. His obsession with the Guermites family dates back to Swann's Way, when he saw ancestors of the family in the stained glass windows of his parish church and dreamed a whole life for them. But here, it reaches its full flowering. One of the things that is mentioned the most about the Guermites is how they frequently talk about how they don't care about being aristocratic, and are supposed to be "progressive." He marks it as a point in their favor, but also can't help but notice that the Duchesse personally found the oldest name with the most money she could find, and only generally hangs around with people of similar rank and ancient name, however much she professes that they bore her. Her husband can recite genealogy for days, something which Marcel finds gorgeous, and makes a thousand excuses for that are everything but, "I find aristocrats with extensively documented family trees very attractive." He finds Albertine, a girl from the lower ranks of polite society, more attractive when she uses expressions that come from the world of the upper class. The Duchesse, he states, is limited in the intelligence of what she can express because she speaks, "*in the prose of Henry IV.*" But it is just as clear that he wouldn't have it any other way. He goes out of his way to spend dozens and dozens of pages talking about these haughty aristocrats trying to impress him, for reasons he protests are not even apparent to himself. It's clearly about the best day of his life when the Duc de Guermites waits dinner on him while he's looking at paintings in another part of the house. This internally unacknowledged bias makes up the better part of Marcel's true motivation throughout this book.

Another theme is the way in which our own desires "Otherize" a person, or otherwise fill them up with content that is a projection of what's going on inside of us. The Guermites and their "society" of course are the real focus of this in the book, as he puffs them up according to how puffed up it makes him feel that they would even vaguely want to hang out with him. But the more revealing and, it seemed to me, true-to-life example of that is Albertine. The focus of his desire, at least in a nebulous way, in the second volume, her appearance here comes far too late, after Mme de Guermites, after his encounter with the Baron de Charlus, and especially after the death of his grandmother. She comes to see him, ready to get it on, far beyond the point where she could possibly get the best of him. He's currently in the throes of an obsession with some random older lady, planning his seduction of her in extensive detail. Their flirting, her tentative come-ons and his replies, are actually adorable in an aw-he's-trying-to-be-slick sort of way, but afterwards:

"...I insisted she go home and she eventually did so, but she was so discomfited on my account by my lack of courtesy that she laughed almost as though she were apologizing for me, like a hostess who has admitted an improperly dressed guest but has her qualms about it.

"Why are you laughing?" I asked

"I'm not laughing. I'm smiling at you," she replied affectionately. "When shall I see you again?" she added in a way that suggested that she did not regard what we had just done (generally the crowning moment) as even the prelude to a great affection, a pre-existent affection we owed it to ourselves to discover, to confess, and which alone could account for what we just indulged in.

"Since you give your permission, I'll send word for you to come when I can."

I dared not let her know that I was putting the chance of seeing Mme de Stermaria before everything else."

Charming. Just charming. At least Proust is self-aware enough to deliver his own verdict on this: "*There is nothing like desire for obstructing any resemblance between what one says and what one has on one's mind.*"

Part II: Cutting the Cords

Unlike the first portion of this book, which, as I mentioned above, to some degree keeps the focus and the

priority on the same sorts of themes that were present in the first two volumes- relationships, memory, the past, subjects and people that are pretty close to home or interwoven fairly tightly with his somewhat solitary life. This next section, I think, quite consciously begins to move him away from that. The death of his grandmother is the surprisingly short interlude that does most of the work. Which is a shame because, like the moment with witty Marcel in Swann's Way, spending time with her brings back some of what I miss about the first volume, the stillness, the standing about in a sunbeam, unnoticed, with one eye around a door:

“Alas, it was this ghostly image that I saw when I entered the drawing room, before my grandmother had been informed of my return, and found her there reading. I was there in the room, but in another way I was not there, because she was ignorant of the fact, and like a woman who has been caught unawares at some piece of handiwork that she will hide away if anyone comes in, she was absorbed in thoughts she had always kept hidden in my presence. The only part of myself that was present- in that privileged moment which does not last and which, during the brief space of a return, we suddenly find ourselves able to perceive our own absence- was the witness, the observer, in traveling coat and hat, the stranger to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places that will never be seen again. What my eyes did, automatically, as I caught sight of my grandmother was to take a photograph. We never see those dear to us except in the animated workings, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which, before allowing the images their faces represent to reach us, draws them into its vortex, flings them back onto the idea of them we have always had, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it.”

But, not long later, she is gone. This cuts his ties with some more of the ideals of his childhood. His mother takes care of the next step and humiliates him about his stalking behavior towards Mme de Guermentes, which takes care of that for a little while. His cynical pursuit of Mme de Stermaria and gross interlude with Albertine completes the mourning process. After it spits him out, it thrusts him whole-hog back into Parisian society, into dinners with Saint-Loup and company and taking up, finally, with the Guermentes. He dines with the Duc and Duchesse, is taken up as a sort of interesting plaything that might adorn their salon and prove how “progressive” and intelligent they are, as a new member of their nightly audience for their greatness, a piece of the legend of themselves they are constantly pressing into service. This leaves Marcel free to indulge the worst of his obsessions and take up his aristocracy obsession once more, the one he pretends he doesn't have, though to his credit nonetheless taking every opportunity to notice the inconsistencies, absurdities, hypocrisies and outright mean stupidities these same people he worships commit. Not that he doesn't find a thousand excuses for it every single time.

Two things struck my attention in this section. The first was how very passive Marcel presents himself in these volumes. I suppose it is inevitable for any book that is observational in nature, but it really does seem as if he scarcely talks to anyone. His lines are sparing and rare is any exchange of back and forth conversation that involves him. If he is compelled to speak, he often gives the reader reasons why, as if that is necessary. It's usually quite defensive, and involves some sort of nasty comment about someone else around him. Like the lady who was convinced that he was related to a boring French Admiral. He HAD to respond to her and then disparage her character. Or the one who couldn't remember that Flaubert had written *Salamambo*. His intelligence and pretension definitely needs to be put in its place. He has some exchanges with Saint-Loup, but we've already gone through a sample of what THOSE can be like. But generally, he seems to simply sit silently and watch, in detail, the exchanges and dialogue of others. Presumably, while this is happening, he is having conversations of his own off-screen that he finds more interesting, since he is seated next to people at dinner and generally describes himself as being in a knot of conversation while he is visiting places. Are his own conversations that uninteresting and he doesn't want to say so? Is he the rudest person imaginable, ignoring his conversational partners to obsessively watch someone else? Why are these people all convinced he is brilliant and special when he rarely says a word?

The second was something that had been going on since the beginning of the book, but which became more apparent in this volume, given that we spent so much time on more quotidian happenings, rather than on intense reveries. It was really that.. when you read through the pages he might spend pondering on something

and then reduce it down to a summary.. it's all quite simple main ideas. For example, towards the beginning of the book, he goes to see the actress La Berma. He spends pages analyzing why he finds her better now than he did back when he saw her while he was obsessed with her. What does it boil down to? Basically: "I was too excited, so I overhyped myself for when I saw it. So it was a let down." When he saw Mme de Guermites, actually saw her dressed like the type of woman that she was, rather than as an ethereal figure in his imagination, it's a let down. Why? Because, essentially: "Your imagination will always be more impressive than the real thing." Later, when discussing why Saint-Loup rudely and angrily tells his mother and then, later, Proust something that he's done and shouldn't, why he has such an attitude about it: "Because when we do something wrong, we want to push the blame on someone else. We double down." It's all quite beautifully expressed, but it's all also thoughts that I've encountered elsewhere that didn't take dozens of pages to express.

There were moments of more in-depth insight, as we saw with his moment with his grandmother above, but for the most part his insights really could be reduced to rather fortune-cookie style ideas, in substance. Which is why, of course, the *style* of Proust matters so much, as it does any great author. It's even a sign of greatness when this happens, I think. I noticed the same thing going on in Joyce and Tolstoy.

Part IV: A Very. Rude. Man.

A secondary, but recurring player in Marcel's life the last two volumes has become the Baron de Charlus. Charlus, a relative of the Guermites, comes from the upper echelons of society. He is generally a quite haughty and rather awkward person who places the highest importance on his own rank and worth in such a way that it seems to prevent him from acting like a genuine person with most people that he meets, even the ones with whom it is apparent that he would like to form a connection. He's built some extraordinarily high self-protective walls that make him come across as progressively more quixotic, angry and eager to place himself as a victim with every meeting we have with him... (continued in the comments...)

Teresa says

4.5

Of the three volumes I've read so far, this is the one I loved most and found the most frustrating. Frustrating, from its beginning, with the narrator's obsession with Duchesse de Guermites that mirrors his earlier obsessions, as if he hasn't learned anything, which is true: he hasn't learned a thing ... yet. This is a looking back on what he didn't know then with the knowledge he has now. So, of course, the reader sees before he does and to read of his later awareness is a joy ... mostly. The unraveling of an ingrained cherished belief is laborious and we need to see the whole thought process ... I guess. So when I again became frustrated, much later, by a long digression about Duchesse de Guermites' way of speaking, I wished to tell our narrator: "Just say she is a contrarian and be done with it!" I felt vindicated when I finally come across that exact word (at least in translation) to describe her. Each time I thought I couldn't possibly take one of these passages any longer, they either ended or up popped one of those lines that seems a throwaway but immediately causes excitement, my inner self perking up to pay even more attention.

Though the narrator's world may seem constrained by the aristocratic set that has befriended him, the narrator-as-character is becoming just a tiny bit more clear: through an actual line he speaks in conversation when we don't usually get to hear what he says otherwise; with an almost shocking instance of pure anger. But then there's this that perplexes me as to how he could go on to the Guermites' to ask about a party invitation directly after some knowledge of which he has this to say:

Now this wait on the staircase was to have for me consequences so considerable, and to reveal

????? ??????
?. ????????

Junta says

[With each volume I read of *In Search of Lost Time*, I'm seeing more and more beauty in his prose. This is for all of my fellow Proust fans out there:

(hide spoiler)]

karen says

how can a sociopath love society so much??

because, make no mistake, that is what we are dealing with here.in this third installment, our dear narrator graduates from being a feeble child, from being a lovesick adolescent into a manipulating, stalking, social climbing creature who learns a lesson in disillusionment. cheers.

for all his bookish intelligence, his overthinking, his lofty words, at the end of the day, he is just a pale sticky thing masturbating in society's stairwell.

this is his idea of true love: "I was genuinely in love with Mme. de Guermites. The greatest happiness that I could have asked of God would have been that he should send down on her every imaginable calamity, and that ruined, despised, stripped of all the privileges that separated her from me, having no longer any home of her own or people who would condescend to speak to her, she should come to me for asylum."

THAT would be his greatest happiness?? dude...

"I was less sad than usual because the melancholy of her expression, the sort of clausturation which the startling hue of her dress set between her and the rest of the world, made her seem somehow lonely and unhappy, and this comforted me."

he is such a little shit.

so then how does he get to simultaneously have such refinement and linguistic elegance to make these beautiful observations:

"For the fact of the matter is that, since we are determined always to keep our feelings to ourselves, we have never given any thought to the manner in which we should express them. And suddenly there is within us a strange and obscene animal making itself heard, whose tones may inspire as much alarm in the person who receives the involuntary, elliptical and almost irresistible communication of one's defect or vice as would the sudden avowal indirectly and outlandishly proffered by a criminal who can no longer refrain from confessing to a murder of which one had never imagined him to be guilty. "

this is how salieri must have felt that such a wanker as mozart was given such talent.(and yes, i get all my history from peter schaffer)

i do love proust, but it is not the way i love anyone i want to spend a lot of time with, and not the kind of love you feel for distant relations, where you kind of *have* to love them. i don't feel an obligatory book-lover's love for him; he moves me so often that i know my love is genuine, but he also kind of sickens me.

because he writes these gross scenes:

"My food was brought to me in a little panelled room upstairs. The lamp went out during dinner and the serving-girl lighted a couple of candles. Pretending that I could not see very well as I held out my plate while she helped me to potatoes, I took her bare forearm in my hand, as though to guide her. Seeing that she did not withdraw it, I began to fondle it, then, without saying a word, pulled her towards me, blew out the candles and told her to feel in my pocket for some money."

you just know after the money-in-the-pocket routine, he went home and had himself a good scrawl, kevin spacey-in-se7en kind of way, in his notebooks piling to the ceiling. he pursues women the way he pursued his mother, with this obsessive need that once obtained is quickly discarded, as a scene in this book which i will not spoil for others makes most apparent. (incidentally, mommy is only mentioned once or twice in this volume - we are all grown up now)

and why does that serving-girl scene gross me out so much? because i love byron, and he is known for his "falling upon chambermaids like a lightning bolt". what, ultimately, is the difference between byron and this guy? is it just a matter of proactivity vs passivity? because if byron had said that about a serving wench, i would have just sighed "oh, byron..." but this guy - suddenly pulling out his one tough-guy move, it just makes the skin crawl. he hasn't earned my belief as an irresistible lady-killer, and comes across instead as kind of rape-y. i picture him as a tiny, pale truman capote creature in the corner, complaining about the draft while trying to look down ladies' blouses and calling it love.

unrelated to the last paragraph, the whole time i was reading this, all i could think of was this song, one of my all time favorites. and then i found that youtube video which was great because someone else had made the leap from recording studio to salon and made the visual for me just to use in this review. thanks, internet! (note - the video has changed, but the song remains the same...music pun intentional)

this is a perfect song about the purity of nostalgia and hero-worship and all of that, with a different ending than proust offers, but i think, a more sweetly poignant ending. who knew there was a bigger downer than morrissey? it is a different situation entirely, of course, but the impulse of infatuation with someone you only know through reputation - these society women were the rock stars of their times.

why am i dwelling so much on morrissey? cuz he is my madeleine.

and this makes it sound like i didn't like this book, but that's not true. i am just focusing on what i felt the most strongly about. the first 200 pages were not terribly fun for me, despite an alarming number of bookmarks indicating my favorite passages. and then - dialogue! it was like a revelation - *that's* what has been missing! from then on i liked it a lot more, but less than the previous two volumes. i am giving it four, but shhh it really means 3.5.

the parts that were good were very very good, and reminded me of another favorite non-book related piece of entertainment, but let's be honest - there were some dull bits here.

in a novel about the emptiness of the social elite, the impulse is to side with, emotionally, the narrator over the shallow society types. but here, you really can't, because his fawning judgmental inertia is not heroic. he has done nothing to earn my love or readerly hurrahs. there are no heroes here. it is france.

come to my blog!

brian says

the literary equivalent of that (genius but dull as rocks) 10 minute tracking shot in *le week-end*.

Madeleine says

No longer confined to orbiting his parents and living for the freedom of a solitary walk, no longer living in thrall of adolescent hormones and grappling with the strange new worlds blossoming both within and without himself, *The Guermantes Way* finds our Narrator thrust ever forward into adulthood and the disappointing discovery that grown-ups rarely behave like adults, especially when the pride of ancestral inheritance is on the line and there are duplicitous societal niceties to abide by, while the utterly insignificance and inanity of it all are underscored to devastating though understated effect by the first real taste of loss that this age usually carries with it. This third volume of *In Search of Lost Time* captures the period when our window to early 20th-century Parisian society is finding his place in it, though, true to his nervous, writer persona, he seems content to observe (now with the emergence of a sly humor) rather than engage with these exalted figures whose human forms slowly pale in comparison to the larger-than-life names he has aggrandized in youth.

It is, I imagine, intentional that battlefield philosophy receives generous attention early in this volume, as everything that follows is revealed to rest upon a framework of military-caliber tactics, from love (or what passes as love within the confines of Proust's created world -- ye gods, do any of these characters know what a healthy relationship actually looks like?) to facing the Grim Reaper as he counts down the minutes to one's predestined departure from this mortal coil to the carefully plotted choreography of maintaining superficial acquaintances to simply navigating daily life among even second-rate society when each moment brings a new potential for detonating reputationally ruinous land mines. If my piecemeal knowledge of foreign-language pronunciations isn't too far off the mark, I'd go so far as to suggest that the first syllable of the titular name is tellingly reminiscent of the French word "guerre."

I am so grateful that the (still somewhat and charmingly naive) Narrator is beginning to see through the shiny veneer of the socialites with whom he spends so much time and is slowly discovering, through both his own astute observations and whatever decidedly reliable tidbits are churned out by the rumor mill, what dirty secrets are hidden just below the surface and who has a limitless number of faces he or she presents according to present company and circumstance -- not to mention the public knowledge that is simply not spoken of unless it's being rehashed in hushed voices. If these vast stretches of recounting one gathering after another weren't full of the Narrator's observations about who's lying to whom, marital fissures slowly widening right before the public's eye, the double-talk that flatters one while slandering another (or are simply backhanded compliments cruelly served to one unlucky individual) and other betrayals of the his unwillingness to swallow the facade presented at these salons, I would have been bored to tears, page after page of gorgeous language or not, because I just don't care about such petty triflings in real life. A moment of the Narrator's blunt honesty echoed my own sentiments while handing them back to me in a beautifully rewrapped package while also illustrating that he was just as bored as I was in danger of becoming if not for his wit, beautiful prose and keen insights making it all worth the effort:

I scarcely listened to those anecdotes, something like the ones M. de Norpois used to tell my father; they

afforded no food for my preferred patterns of thought; and, besides, even had they possessed the elements they lacked, they would have needed to be of a highly exciting nature for my inner life to be aroused during those hours spent in society when I lived on the surface, my hair well groomed, my shirtfront starched--that is to say, hours in which I could feel nothing of what I personally regarded as pleasure.

He does offer such a poetic presentation of these long hours listening to others' witticisms grow stale with every retelling, of gossip masquerading as current events, of current events being reduced to small talk (thanks for the Dreyfus affair primer, V.!) that it was easy for me to forget that the Narrator just wants to lose himself in his hosts' collection of Elstirs (which he does with abandon when finally given the opportunity, like the awkward animal lover who spends most of a party in the corner drunk on liquid courage and cooing not to an attractive stranger but to the party-giver's cat -- not that I have any personal experience there), catch a play and maybe finally start tapping into the creative juices that just won't let the words flow smoothly from his mind to the page. Society is no place for a sensitive man with an artist's soul, as even the most celebrated wit at the salon will eventually turn him into a plaything or a vehicle of immortality, as great painters are demonstrably reduced to mundane portraiture that will only be nitpicked by unappreciative minds for failing to capture the subject's outer beauty and inner glow adequately enough to pacify an aging ego that is fighting the nullification of death with the frivolity of social escapades.

As a sobering reminder of such an inevitability, this volume also sees the loss of the Narrator's beloved grandmother (it's not really a spoiler if the book in question is nearly a century old, right?), whose stroke and rapid decline allow her one last gesture of undying love, as she suffers in valiant silence so as to not upset her family and amends her few voiced complaints to meaningless utterances should they be overheard, lest she further worry those she's about to leave behind. The visible wreckage gathering in the Narrator's mother as she watches her own mother's life ebb away is heartache set to words and makes for one of the most sorrowful sequences I've ever observed as a reader, but also serves as a testament to the humanity with which Proust animates his already estimable writing. The Narrator's own first taste of loss that runs deeper than simple interruption of a mother's nightly affections is the natural foil to the artificial high-society world he so often finds himself in, which emphasizes the skewed perspective of the latter and permanent void of the former.

It seems that a book about recapturing lost times through recollections of the past is bound to memorialize the dead as well as serve as the predictable offspring of a society that is so obsessed with itself that it gleefully, and often maliciously, recounts its own clever turns of phrase when it's not reliving a favorite adversary's shameful misstep. Because if that's not the epitome of living in a moment before it hurries into the fading past, what is?

Greg says

After being a little disappointed in the second volume of Proust, this one returns to the absolute wonderfulness of *Swanns Way*. I noticed that another reviewer commented on the addictive quality of Proust and I have to agree. A few weeks ago when I started *Swanns Way* I figured I'd read one of his books, and then maybe next summer go into the next one and leisurely through the remaining years of my thirties read one Proust book a year and enter into my forties being able to say that I'd read Proust. Instead though as soon as I finish one of his books I want to immediately begin the next.

Thinking about this book and if I was asked to tell someone 'what it was about', a question I've been asked by three people while reading this book. One of them, a security guard at work, and one someone in one of my library classes and the third a person in the park who none of the characters of this book would ever associate with. Each time I told them it was about France around the turn of the century. Each in turn told me they were sorry and it didn't sound interesting, I should note that not one of the people knew who Proust was, a

