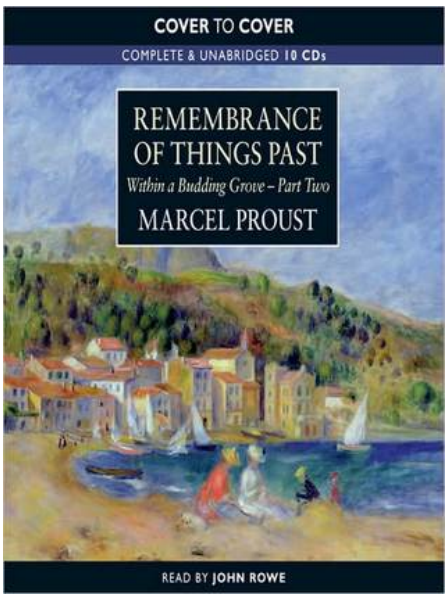

Within a Budding Grove, Part 2

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Within a Budding Grove, Part 2 Details

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From Reader Review Within a Budding Grove, Part 2 for online ebook

Fionnuala says

When Françoise draws the heavy curtains of the narrator's hotel room window at the end of *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, we realise that due to doctor's orders, and from the very beginning of his stay at the Grand Hotel in Balbec, the narrator was confined to his room for long periods each morning. He lay there in the darkness listening to the sounds of the new day getting underway on the promenade; the band tuning up beneath his window; the young people calling to each other gaily; carriages and motors arriving and leaving. And when the curtains were finally parted towards noon, it was as if they opened on a theatre setting for a play called 'Les Vacances à Balbec', the sea making a spectacular backdrop to the action on the promenade stage.

In the early weeks of his holiday, the narrator was very much a spectator, looking down on the action from the opera box of his hotel window or from the parterre of the dining level, longing to be part of the scene but never believing there could be a role for him in the play. He knew all the actors by sight, some by name; he knew all their various costumes: the equestrians, the golfers, the casino players, the cyclists, but it seemed impossible that he might ever speak with any of them.

This has become a familiar theme in Proust's work, the narrator on the outside looking in, wishing to be part of the action. We remember the Tansonville gardens, the Vinteuil house near Combray, Mme Swann's house in Paris, the children playing in the Champs Élysée gardens, and always, the narrator longing to have a role to play in every scene.

And because he spends so much time observing rather than acting, it is as an observer that he excels, and more and more with every stage of his young life. The artist Elstir becomes his guide in Balbec, and he learns to look beyond the surface of things and see what lies beneath, whether it concerns the carvings of the local church, the cliffs and seascapes along the Normandy coast, or the expressive faces of the young girls who eventually befriend him.

But in this episode of the story of his life, the narrator as observer graduates to the role of actor. Just as M Norpois introduced him into Mme Swann's salon in Paris, now in Balbec, Mme de Villeparisis opens the way for him to walk on stage and meet all the other actors. He finally gets to play a central role in the play entitled 'Les Vacances à Balbec'.

James says

Quite good--I wondered if I would want to tackle the whole series but believe I will.

Two highlights of this book--after arriving at Balbec--are the comparisons of the "band of girls" to a garden of rose; and the social networks of the dining room to the rotating galaxies and orbiting planets.

Light on plot, but intentionally so, Proust creates and interprets a delicious world to the reader.

Menna says

I've enjoyed it since the beginning, yet I still felt that Swann's Way was more superior than this one. However, the book changes drastically when he sees the band of girls by the beach. Proust is one of the best authors who can zoom in on one moment in time, freeze it and intensify it. He chooses moments that are haiku-like, but unlike the haiku he write profusely in the most beautiful prose, using abundant metaphors to describe a certain memory. He so accurately captures those adolescent feelings of meeting new friends and the excitement that accompanies it. He's also the only author who could write such beautiful prose about the difficulty of getting up after an afternoon nap. It's a beautiful beautiful book.

Elmaja says

Jeg elskede denne bog. Sproget er uforligneligt og helt hans eget. Jeg forundres dog jævnligt over det der foregår - hvad er det for et forhold han har til sin mormor? Hvor gammel er han? Hvad er det dog for et liv de lever? Sover til langt ud på formiddagen, hvilket dog delvist skyldes fortællerens svage helbred, går på visitter, fører de mærkeligste samtaler, hvor man oftest siger det modsatte af det man mener, er underlagt en social kodeks som der bruges meget tid på at forvalte, en masse snobberi, etc.

Og så må man simpelthen bryde ud i latter over hans beskrivelser af pigerne. Det er så råt! Der lægges ikke fingre i mellem, det er ikke særlig flatterende, og alligevel så elsker han dem jo! Men åh! hvor er han bare god, når han beskriver forelskelsen i forelskelsen, der består af 99 procents fantasier, drømmerier og projektioner.

Jordan Debben says

I think this would be impossible to recommend to anybody who is not interested in philosophy or French history or culture, or reading books simply because they are regarded as classics. The unusual writing style might be of interest to aspiring authors, or those studying literature, but that's about it. It's a very difficult book to recommend on it's own merits.

Stephen AB says

It seems as if all of Remembrance of Things Past is based on a complex web of engaging digressions – which maybe the way we experience the world – I don’t know. Maybe he's describing the world through obliqueness. It’s a helleva way to write and remain coherent though, but there you go.

Anyway, a digression which captivated me this week: Marcel is overwhelmed by déjà vu, which engulfs him on catching sight of a stand of three trees during a coach trip outside Balbec. This does echo a childhood

experience somewhat, a pivotal moment in his life, which perhaps started him writing about “stuff” in the mode of ROTP; I don't know. It was, for him, a near ineffable experience of being transfixed by three church steeples in the landscape, which slowly shift position relative to each other, merging and separating, during a carriage ride home one evening in Combray. He was seized, impelled to get down in writing, to capture the quiet ecstasy he felt, to reveal something essential to himself. I’ve no idea what that essential thing was about those three steeples that reached inside him, really, and I don’t think he says so either (?) - but I think I recognize the feeling of being mysteriously drawn to something in that way (never mind people). It reminds me - I’ve seen toddlers, and cats too, who are irresistible drawn to something; or to a “spot”; or to tirelessly “do” something over and over again; some obsession that seemingly springs out spontaneously from within, without apparent reason, and then often passes.

So here, as Marcel passes by the trees, he desperately tries to understand why they seem so familiar, trying to unearth from within himself some explanation. Is it a half remembered memory, from a dream - or a premonition? Is it something from outside of himself, or within - or is there no barrier there at all? But in the end, feeling he has not been able to grasp something important, that there will be no second chances here, they pass by. And looking back as they recede, a sense of loss permeates him, and the trees almost seem to have an air of withholding, of deliberate concealment and challenge. Its a strange thing to experience this, and I occasionally feel this very strongly - I probably over use the word "existential", but it has something of that to it, a kind of unknowableness, a feeling of being confronted by surface, either its full of meaning, or there is no meaning at all.

Proust is extraordinarily good at describing people, social interactions, fears, desires, loves - sometimes to a clinical (albeit lyrical) degree, and of the contradictions and paradoxes of people - but there is always this strangeness, a mystery, underlying everything.

Anyway, déjà vu is not referred to by name, which made me wonder when it was named, or surfaced as a recognized phenomena – well, it seems the first use of the term was around 1903, but it had been well known before that – for instance, in the 1880s physicians noted it was often experienced by people with epilepsy, and Charles Dickens described it. And there seems to be descriptions of it well before this, back to the days of Homer and early Christian writers; but it was associated with the occult, past lives and such, so it was viewed with a certain wariness.

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this is when the mind stops, the usually incessant inner chatter has receded, and young Marcel is present with the scene

Aaah, this is great, thank you – I felt a little whoosh going through my head on reading this – I let go of trying to “understand”, and instead in some way embraced “recognizing”, if that makes sense.

There’s also a passage that follows on from the three trees - the carriage going up to the crest of a hill – and he then goes on to describe, in a similar way, how this experience in that landscape goes on echoing through his life, when he traverses similar hills, or smells certain smells, or for any number of triggers and sensations... so there he is, telling me all this! Sigh… and I definitely have my own versions of these personal - what would you call them? - mythic moments and landscapes. Very much like Tarkovsky, yes... Reading these passages by Proust, which are slipped in every now and then, feels so eerie at times.

And talking of the eerie, Proust mentioned Edgar Allen Poe, and in The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I, Poe is mentioned a lot as being an influence on French writers and artists at the end of the 19th century, from Baudelaire to Jarry. To the point one of one guy changing his name to a double barrelled Lugné-Poe, and then claiming to be a distant relative. I had no idea Poe had such influence and respect amongst the French.

20th Sept 2016

About half way through the chapter Seascape, with Frieze of Girls, in Within a Budding Grove. Proust's digressions, echoing and rebounding off one another, intertwining... I'm far enough in now to sense themes starting to constellate into a more coherent whole, a richer and richer layering of meaning and emotions.

Here he kicks off with a wonderfully filmic description of a gang of somewhat arrogant young girls, loping along the sea front in Balbec, full of disdain and vitality, visiting shock and consternation on the gentle folk perambulating. It's tantamount to directions for a modern film; even alluding to slow motion sequences; jump cuts of peoples faces and actions, building up a composite picture from multiple moments, angles and impressions – almost cubist, perhaps. Marcel is, of course, entranced... over and over thru ROTP he has been enthralled by fleeting glimpses of passing girls, letting his melancholy imagination savour delicious fantasies about “what if” encounters and (im)possible alternative lives. He recognises its all unhindered by the reality of the people, that knowing them would bring it all crashing down - but relishes the full reign of his imagination... he really wants to escape, does young Marcel.

So as always, he fantasizes about meeting this group of girls. At first he finds it difficult to differentiate between them, they seem interchangeable. In fact, that seems unimportant to him - its the group that's captured him; but here, there, slowly, over several days of waiting for them to appear, searching for them; slowly Albertine is coming into focus...

And all during this quest, events and thoughts continue to flow by: he gets drunk - hah! He gives a wonderful description of that state of mind; of how it moves him into the present, and he is led by his emotions - by the music, the people dining, the movement of the waiters. He captures that touch of the surreal intoxication brings, the wooziness...

...then he goes home: sleeping, dreaming, memories, desires…

...and then later, crucially, serendipitous, for a number of reasons, meeting and visiting the Impressionist painter Elstir. And learning there, that the painter is trying to see and paint that moment, when he really sees what is really there in front of him, before the mind, the intellect, starts ordering it, creating structure, filling in the gaps. Before Habit intervenes.

Marcel is slowly pulling together these experiences of Time and memory, and Habit (his capitals) as the novel progresses, all the time. And here, and now, these discoveries seem to get associated with the girls, and Albertine… with Proust, everything seems to be a part of everything else, all connected, all seeping into one another. At one point he even says that our Love often has less to do with the other than we imagine, and more to do with the context of our own state of mind and desires of that moment, changing from moment to moment.

Anyway, it continues to be a joy. And not even a third of the way through. I love how he brings to the fore

forgotten characters, and we meet those he has foreshadowed (and often more than that - he often states, way before he reaches that part of the narrative, some pivotal event in the future - odd, surely you shouldn't give away plot points so readily? But this novel doesn't suffer - it is its sheer length, I think, also, that allows him to break conventions). Intrigued how he will sustain it for a couple of more 1000 pages...

I've just read Marcel's first meeting with Albertine, and it is a lovely description of moving from desiring someone from afar, and then meeting them in real life - the shifting perspectives and feelings of it all, the place it holds in memory directly afterwards, and then later on - and then hearing it from the other's perspective, things you imagined only you saw or felt. Certainly beats "our eyes met across the room" type of thing (although, I did meet perhaps the love of my life in just that lightening strike kind of way, so it does happen).

I'd also like to quote a little passage of Albertine, whose manner of talking is described as "British phlegm", where he nails that mannerism, and is very funny to boot,

In speaking, Albertine kept her head motionless, her nostrils closed, allowing only the corners of her lips to move. The result of this was a drawling, nasal sound, into the composition of which there entered perhaps a provincial descent, a juvenile affectation of British phlegm, the teaching of a foreign governess and a congestive hypertrophy of the mucus of the nose.

Nearing the end of Within a Budding Grove; Albertine has just declared her love, via a note, to Marcel. Last time I was discussing Marcel’s love life, I noted how he seemed more in love with being in love, than falling in love with a particular someone. In some slight exasperation, I put Proust aside for a time, and then picked it up again this week - and hah, immediately I read:

"The state of being indicated by the presence of all the signs by which we are accustomed to recognise that we are in love […] no doubt this state, recurring indifferently at the thought of one or another, was as different from what we call love as is from human life the life of the zoophytes, where an existence, an individuality, if we may term it, is divided up among several organisms. […] Such was for me this state of love divided among several girls at once. [...] that without my being able to say which of them it was [...] I was most anxious to love. At the start of a new love as at its ending, we are not exclusively attached to the object of that love, but rather the desire to be loving from which it will presently emerge ..."

As usual, Proust is one step ahead of me.

He also describes a discussion of an academic essay, written by one of the girls: it's beginning to dawn on me how tied up with conventions and rules and sensibilities French literature and poetry was (is?); that there was a very set way to structure and phrase, and also subject matter seemed to be derived predominately from classical literature, and the likes of Racine; and that delighting sensibilities within these rules seemed more precious to aesthetes than actually saying something new or thought provoking...

Web Webster says

Marcel is still very bourgeoisly ill. Vapors! Fits! Inopportune swooning!

Gilberte Swann is clearly “that sort of woman” in training. She’s making Marcel twitterpated. So Marcel and his dear grandmama remove to the beach at Balbec.

Promenade strolling! Dressing for dinner! More strolling!

And at last, Marcel meets Albertine, the perfect anodyne to THOT Gilberte. He longs to possess Albertine.

Glances! Notes! More stuff about hawthorn blossoms! He’s invited to her room. She’s fetchingly déshabillé, languorously draped across her bed. He thinks one thing, but Albertine has another game afoot. DENIED!

It’s the perfect jumping off point for five more volumes and 6000 more pages. On to the next one.

Chris Walker says

I'm starting to think that the best way to read Proust is as a book of quotations. There's lots of dry desert between moments of exquisite beauty in this. Took me a long time to slog through it, even with the help of Mr Rowe reading to me so well. Still, I do think that Proust makes you look at things differently and want to try to capture beauty in the ordinary things of everyday life - before the moment flits past and becomes memory.

Sophie says

Continuing where we left off, Marcel's infatuations have leapt from his mother, to Gilberte, and then Albertine. It is the story of a man discovering different kinds of love - maternal, lust, and friendship. With homosexual undertones, Within a Budding Grove further's Proust's sexual awakening and the maturity of his relationships.

Harry Burnside says

Totally absorbing. His depth of vision is incredible as he continually diverges to liken his emotions and experiences to other situations and natural phenomenon.
It is not an adventure book and is very deep but the prose is thrilling and encourages the reader to relate Proust's experiences to those of our own. Not a quick read but worth the investment of time.
Now on to Part 3.

Charles Keatts says

A masterful and beautiful book, much easier and more pleasant to read than Swann's Way, not like that dark book in that sense, but really Proust starting to come into his own with the complex sentence structures he is known for. Makes sense that it won the prize. I finished this a few years ago and am tempted to read it again having just finished the Guermantes Way, a very different but also rich and complex book.

Federico Trejos says

I read this in English due to it being a gift and then of course the beautiful trnaslation of G.K.SCOTT MONCIREFF AND TERENCE KILMARTIN by the Modern Library. I'm three fourths, and it is an impressionistic ancient film of pastel images of mind and memory, being truly drunk & lost in time, a sort of limbo, really pleasing, bring in a romance phantaste and a little ghostly, if someone picked up on that, but the narration doesn't let you stop, the long long phrases carry you through and make landmarks on your soul, and at least myself I never get lost, different to Joyce in both Ulysses and Finnegans, which I admire more in a linguistic manner. I hope to make it to the whole Search for Lost Time volumes while I have time,
Best
Fed

Kirstine says

In this, the second part of *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, Marcel travels to Balbec with his grandmother, and his arrival brings with it a string of disappointments.

Marcel had built up great expectations for both a church in Balbec and the ocean itself, and both, as he arrives and sees them, turn out to be quite different from what he expected. And as he arrives at the hotel itself, everything is foreign, nothing is familiar and the first night he spends in agony, lamenting that habit has not yet set in, making the furniture, the room, the circumstances not strangers, but old acquaintances that feel safe and known, so much you no longer notice them.

The subject of habit turns up several times over the course of the entire work, and habit is generally a good thing, it orders our surroundings, it makes the new feel like home after a few days. We all know the feeling. But in the first days of pain and restlessness from the unfamiliarity of it all, his grandmother becomes the rock he leans on. We discover how important she is to him, how she’s the person he reflects himself in, trusts with his everyday life and relies on. She’s a mother figure to him, whereas his actual mother is distant from and cold towards him, the grandmother fills her space with warmth and reassurance.

And so the subject of death also arrives, albeit very discreetly. When we get used to our surroundings, we no longer see them or pay attention to them; they die. They wither away, until something revives them, whether it be placing them in new surroundings or some circumstance bringing them to attention again. And the constant presence of the grandmother, his fear that she won’t hear him if he knocks at night and needs her there, is also a sign of death, his knowledge she won’t live forever, that she cannot always be there for him.

In this novel Marcel finds his feet, and falls in love with an entire group of girls, Albertine among them, before his sight settles, somewhat permanently, on Albertine, although their love affair has not yet truly

begun. Saint-Loup, the nephew of Mme de Guermantes, is also introduced and the two strike up a fond and warm friendship that will last for most of the story. Saint-Loup is in love with a woman called Rachel, who mirrors Odette slightly in her position in life, and their affair mirrors the affair of Swann and Odette as well – and the affair Marcel will later have with Albertine. The mirror structure, the same story returning again and again, slightly changed, is integral to the story. It's what it builds on, it's how it rewards us; recognition.

Baron de Charlus is introduced as well, leading to some interesting and confusing scenes between him and Marcel that will not be clear until much later.

Most importantly, other than Marcel meeting Albertine, tasting love and freedom and taking his first independent steps towards high society and the social circles of the nobility, his time in Balbec is important for one other reason: art.

So much of *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower* – and In Search of Lost Time in general – is beautifully and wonderfully described. But the scenes with Marcel in his room, looking at the ocean, how it blends seamlessly with the sky, making it impossible to tell where one stops and the other begins, are particularly exquisite. And later he'll see that very same thing in the atelier of the artist Elstir – and he'll have his first lesson in art, and how to look at art, and the world, the right way.

Not only has his social education begun, so has his apprenticeship in art.

I think, along with the first part of *Swann's Way*, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower* is my favorite book in the series so far. There's something so innocent and tender about it, it's a beginning, the place where so many things start and find their foothold. A pale reflection of the future, whispering vague warnings about what's to come. The more of the books I've read, the clearer it is to me what a vision Proust has, how he is a singular talent in the art of foreshadowing.

Stunning.

Libby says

The second volume of Proust's masterpiece In Search of Lost Time, Within a Budding Grove picks up approximately when the first volume left off, with the never-named protagonist being lectured by civil servants, aristocrats, and occasionally artists about art, theatre, and literature. Summarizing Proust, as Monty Python tells us, is an absurd thing to do, but I'll take a crack at it.

Part I: Madame Swann at Home
After a summer in Combray, we find the sickly Narrator living in Paris with his family. He's still obsessed with Swann's daughter Gilberte, and he engineers meetings with her on the Champs-Élysées, where they become regular playmates. M. Norpois comes to dinner and tells the Narrator his writing reminds him of Bergotte's and not in a good way, but convinces the Narrator's parents to let him see the great actress Berma in Phaedre, though the Narrator builds it up in his imagination so much that he's disappointed by everything about the performance, not least of which, the audience ("That's a good bit of work! It's all gold, look! Fine, ain't it?").

He manages to invite himself to tea regularly at the Swann's, "playing" with Gilberte takes a turn for the sensual, he is once again disappointed by reality as compared to his imagination when he meets the writer

Bergotte, and his admiration for Gilberte's beautiful mother grows. Strolls happen and calls involving intricate social maneuvering are paid, the Narrator's friend Bloch takes him to a brothel, and later the Narrator fights with Gilberte and decides not to see her again, though he knows he will cease being angry if she writes to him. *SPOILER* She doesn't. Instead, the Narrator continues to visit Madame Swann until he sees Gilberte with another boy and eventually gives her up as well. Madame Swann's beauty and grace remain fond remembrances.

Part II: Place-Names: The Place
Some two years after the Gilberte Debacle, the Narrator's grandmother drags him to the seaside resort of Balbec for the summer. After having a hissy over being separated from his mother and being disappointed by everything and terrified of everyone in Balbec, he comes around to the good weather and beautiful scenery, and eventually even the varied assortment of people. His affection for his grandmother is rekindled, and they become reacquainted with an aristocratic friend of hers, Mme de Villeparisis, whose dashing nephew Saint-Loup befriends the Narrator and takes him out for dinner (and a lot of alcohol) at Rivebelle and occasionally tolerates Bloch's boorish overtures. Mme de Villeparisis takes them on rides through the countryside and talks about all the famous artists she knows, the Narrator meets just about every rich/aristocratic person in Balbec and at least two of Madame Swann's lovers.

He stalks a group of athletic young ladies, and eventually meets them, courtesy an artist named Elstir, who was part of the enclave from Volume I overseen by the awful Verdurins. The Narrator neglects his friends and other social engagements to spend as much time with the girls as possible, and all sorts of things go wrong as Albertine, the new object of the Narrator's affections, fails to re-enact the scenes the Narrator invents in his head. The girls take their exams, Saint-Loup shocks the Narrator by getting engaged to someone rich and respectable before dumping his mistress, and eventually, everybody leaves.

So that's what happens. What made this a five-star read? It's a more linear narrative than in Swann's Way, as the Narrator's recollections are told in roughly chronological order with some references to future knowledge. Like in the first volume, the reader sees the world through the Narrator's intricately rendered perceptions, expectations, and desires. As the Narrator ages, his recollections become less about his childhood fears and anxieties and more about his desire for the world to be as he imagines it, his pleasure when it is, and his humiliation when it isn't. And yet, the awesome beauty of Balbec, with its sea, sun, and cliffs is rendered with as much love as the childhood paths around Combray, just as the cheap seaside amusements and ridiculous people are drawn with the same ironic detachment that the small-town residents of Combray are. The wonder and amusement the Narrator feels for these recollections is as beautifully written as they are enjoyable to experience through his eyes.

When I was about halfway through the book, I started putting improvised bookmarks at passages that I found particularly meaningful or beautiful, but when I went back to find them for this review, I found other lines that seemed equally important, to the point that I'm tempted to copy entire passages. So here's a longer passage of Within a Budding Grove than I originally chose to share, but that feels appropriate, given that the entire work ended up being the longest novel in the western canon- a record I doubt Proust was attempting to set when he began writing it.

[w]hen we are in love with a woman we simply project on to her a state of our own soul; that consequently the important thing is not the worth of the woman but the profundity of the state; and that the emotions which a perfectly ordinary girl arouses in us can enable us to bring to the surface of our consciousness some of the innermost parts of our being, more personal, more remote, more quintessential than any that might be evoked by the pleasure we derive from the conversation of a great man or even from the admiring contemplation of his work.

Stay tuned for next summer's installment, Volume 2: The Guermantes Way!

Friedrick says

This is a different kind of book than most of us are used to reading. One must give up the idea of finishing it this weekend or next or the weekend after that. It traces it's own dimensions in time and space, and everything is slowed. Only once in a while we come to a break--I mean once in hundreds and hundreds of pages, and we can put it down to catch up on the accumulated stack of New Yorkers or whatever. And, if you resist hurrying, you find that you do understand and you do get drawn into this alternate existence, and Paris and Combray and Balbec are yours.
