In Search of Lost Time

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For this complete, authoritative English-language edition, D. J. Enright has revised the late Terence Kilmartin's acclaimed reworking of C. K. Scott Moncrieff's translation to take into account the new definitive French editions of 'À la recherche du temps perdu' (the final volume of these new editions was published by the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade in 1989).

In Search of Lost Time Details

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From Reader Review In Search of Lost Time for online ebook

Jessica says

I took today off work because I need to put everything I own into boxes so I can move tomorrow, but obviously I can't begin doing that until I get some of these obsessive thoughts about Proust out of my system. I mean, can I? Nope. I can't! After all, this house is where I read Proust -- wait, I read *Swann's Way* before I moved here, which is pretty nuts to think about -- and so how can I move without reviewing the whole thing?

I do feel pretty traumatized after finishing this book. Sort of shellshocked and confused with all these half-formed thoughts and intense inexplicable feelings bouncing around in me, and I don't know what to do with them or myself. Yesterday I wound up sitting in my friend's bar explaining Proust's aesthetic theories, but that kind of behavior'll get you kicked out of most places, and is not really becoming a young lady. And obviously that's where this website comes in.... what is it for, if not to unload just this kind of mental baggage?

Reading Proust made me wish I were more of a scholar, so I could try to puzzle out some kind of literary context for what this book is. I feel like people think of Proust as being stuffy and old-fashioned and all crusty and ancient, but I think a lot of that has to do with the subject matter (a lost time with superficial resemblance to Jane Austen's milieu), so it's kind of shocking to remember what else was going on while he was writing this. I know this is dumb and there're much better comparisons, but I kept thinking while reading this that it was like thinking your whole life that New York punk in the seventies was all about the Ramones and imagining you really got what was going on then from just listening to that.... but then when you're in your mid-twenties someone suddenly plays you Television for the first time, and you're like *what?* Like you think you know what modernism is, it's like *Ulysses* or whatever, but then you find out it's got this completely insane cousin across the river who's just doing all these things that appear at first to have no relationship at all to everything you ignorantly thought you kind of understood at least a little bit before. Again, I'm not much of a scholar and what I'm saying probably doesn't make any sense. To be honest, I don't even know what "modernism" means, I just know it sounds literary.... I think what I'm trying to get at is that the relevance of Proust's concerns to his time aren't immediately obvious because his approach to them initially seems so weird and unfamiliar. But then you realize, while you're in it, that Proust is actually so much of his time it's incredible, and that what he's saying and doing was hugely innovative and exciting at the beginning of the last century, and actually, I'd say, remains as much so today. And I just kind of wish that I knew more about art and literature and whatnot so I could tie it all in better, since I sense there're all these fascinating connections and reference points, but I don't know what they are. I'd sort of like to sneak into some college class or something where they're reading Proust, and listen in, or at least steal their syllabus.... do they even read Proust in college? I feel like they don't. I mean, I never heard of him when I was in college, or after. I really hadn't. I honestly had no idea who Proust was until I started hanging out on this website.

Anyway, for me the most relevant contemporary writer I thought of while reading this wasn't a novelist. A little background: I always really loathed the discipline of psychology and thought it was stupid. When I unwittingly enrolled in social work school, I was dismayed to discover that getting my MSW involved reading pages and pages of precisely this stuff I'd always looked down on.... My happy discovery was that Freud, at least, was actually a fabulous writer, and a lot of his ideas are totally fascinating and very beautiful. What I realized finally is that I just resented psychology for its pretension of pretending it's a science. But actually psychology's concerns and sometimes even their expression are hugely significant -- among the most significant -- and kind of wonderful. In fact, I decided, I love psychology, as long as it knows its place

and realizes it's an art, not a science.... Freud said he wanted his case histories to read like short stories, so I think he understood this. Proust, of course, took this to an extreme, by exploring essentially the same territory, not in a short story, but in an extraordinarily long and in some ways kind of ridiculous novel. *In Search of Lost Time* is about the development of the mind, the experience of consciousness, the influence of past events and relationships on one's emotions and behavior.... all the same stuff Freud cared about, only it made more sense to me here, presented this way.

I completely lost my shit reading the last couple pages of this book, and broke down on some fundamental level in a way I imagine was akin to what you can get from really top-shelf psychotherapy. Towards the end of the book, Proust explains everything he's been trying to do, and just did, in writing this novel. It's his theory of art and specifically of literature, and it's pretty hard to argue with since you've watched him just do it. One of the things that Proust says is that readers of his book "would not be my readers but readers of themselves, my book serving merely as a sort of magnifying glass, such as the optician of Combray used to offer to a customer, so that through my book I would give them the means of reading in their own selves" (p. 384). I guess that could sound unexciting, ripped out of context, but he really does do this, and it truly is astounding. I felt throughly convinced by Proust's theory of what art is for, and as far as I'm concerned he was totally successful in accomplishing his aims. Like psychotherapy, *ISoLT* attempts to dive into the murk of the unconscious past to retrieve experiences and cognitions that have become inaccessible. Proust dives in and swims down to the bottom, and he finds them, and he grabs them, and he brings them back up and then hands them to you.... Which is pretty nuts. I mean, it's intense. I feel fucked up from it.

Hm. I thought I wanted to talk about this book, but maybe I just want to pack up my shit after all. I really do want to review this book, but maybe it's too soon? It's a really insane novel, and there's tons of stuff in it I'd really love to dork out about on here.... but yeah, maybe too soon. I might come back and say something more coherent later on, when it's all settled down a bit.

I guess the only thing I need to add right at this moment is that I really felt like Proust gave me this particular combination of the things I need most. I really can't read anything too difficult or serious, and to anyone who's considering giving Proust a try -- I can't emphasize this enough -- forget what you heard: this book is anything but a ponderous drag. It's silly and hilarious and smart and bizarre, and there's tons of fashion and sex and depravity and satire and insane plot twists that don't make any sense. I personally have a very short attention span and I cannot and do not read anything that isn't vastly entertaining. *In Search of Lost Time* is VASTLY ENTERTAINING!! (Except for *The Captive*, which is only somewhat entertaining.) This is not to say that it's for everyone, and I can see how lots of people would totally hate this. HOWEVER: it's definitely worth a shot, because this book could change your life. I mean that. It could. I'm a completely different person now than I was when I started. So what if this means I'm now an obsessively jealous, elitist, antisemitic, agoraphobic pervert who speaks exclusively in run-on sentences? I think I'm better for it, and you might be too.

Elena says

“We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you, have not been shaped by a paterfamilias or a schoolmaster, they have sprung from very different beginnings, having been influenced by evil or commonplace that prevailed round them. They represent a struggle and a victory.”

Proust is a great teacher. This may sound embarrassingly platitudinous, and yet I find that it is a fact altogether too easily overlooked in our incessant praise (or bemoaning) of his technical achievements as a stylistic innovator. Setting aside for a while the whole issue of innovative narrative technique (which is nonetheless essential to the realization of his thought through literary art), we can appreciate that he has something important to teach us about what it means to be wise, or, in short, a more fully realized human being.

He does so by bodying forth through narrative a model (I'd even say, a paradigm) of the process of self-knowledge. In so doing, he becomes an indispensable companion to our own most personal and intimate developmental struggle to compass the manifold, disjointed flux of experience into a coherent, meaningful whole that we can point to as “our self.” As psychologists now recognize, a series of narrative acts (or “acts of meaning,” as Jerome Bruner put it) weave together, one by one, the fabric of our identity. What we are fundamentally is a narrative identity, a carefully demarcated world of meaning to which we cling in the face of the flux (notice Proust's recurring focus of description: thresholds and borders, doorways and windows, walls and fences). The slow construction of this most fundamental narrative unity that constitutes the real ground of our most mundane awareness is Proust's chosen theme.

This fundamental understanding of the self-making self is, paradoxically, the culmination of the pursuit of self-knowledge. And in this, Proust puts his finger on the very pulse of what identity means and can mean in our historical epoch. As Charles Taylor points out in Sources of the Self, the fundamental understanding of an ineradicable and refractory (to the theoretical understanding and its search for pure transparency) poietic element that lies at the heart of all our acts of knowing is foundational for modern thought in general. In short, we make the self we strive to know, necessarily. Deliberations about meanings to entertain and construct form the very ground we stand on in our attempts to reflect and to know Self.

In this, Proust's narrative art implicitly critiques the foundational move of Western philosophy and intellectual history alike: namely, Plato's separation between narrative and knowledge, theoria and poiesis, art and philosophy. Proust seems to say that theoria is poietic, and poiesis is theoretical, and reminds us the more primal etymological sense of narrative (gno – to know). In this, he elevates the modern novel to the status of a privileged epistemic instrument and redefines the aim of wisdom. The artist stakes out for himself his own wisdom path distinct from that of the philosopher. The knowing to be sought is the kind of knowing we live by. His narrative re-enacts those acts of knowing by which we structure a life-story and come to affirm a self, and then later, transcend it.

The mainstream of modern thought has, of course, led in the opposite direction. Reductionist mechanism aspires to corner the mind into some ultimate system, a self-made cage of thought - a Theory of “Everything” - from which it may never again emerge to see the light of day. Any access to immediate experience must be mediated by said totalizing System; any experience that does not fit therein is to be explained away. While we managed to keep at bay political totalitarianism as a civilization, intellectual totalitarianism still rules the day as an ever-appetizing lodestar. If we could but persuade ourselves to stay in the box we made, we might buy ourselves some semblance of certainty, provided we forget we ourselves have fabricated it. William Barrett, in “The Illusion of Technique,” outlines this totalizing aspect of modern thought well when he shows how time and again, the great thinkers of modernity are subject to the irresistible temptation to “reify the objects of their symbolism,” thereby becoming “victims of their own language.”

Proust's approach to the whole question of how we may become wise differs from this mainstream in two ways: first, he avoids becoming a “victim of (his) symbolism” by adopting a “meta” stance vis-a-vis his own cognitive framings, and second, he validates the adequacy to experience of his methodology by continually touching base with where we actually stand in our most intimate dealings with the world through a close

description of detail.

I already touched on the first, but essentially, the critical decision here lies in his not assuming transparency and instead foregrounding and scrutinizing the constructive process of knowing a life as it unfolds. There is wisdom in this, for by pretending that our mental filters are transparent to reality, we risk mistaking the specks of dirt on our windowpane for features in the landscape. The fundamental working metaphor Proust operates with here is the magic lantern of the mind. This is introduced early on in the context of one of those childhood revelations that seems to suddenly make clear for us the sense of this strange, shadowy life. The young narrator lying in his bed awaiting sleep while struggling with separation anxiety from his mother, watched the projected fairytale images of the magic lantern gliding across his walls, furniture, doorknob. The reference to Plato's Cave is unmistakable, and yet the wisdom to be found here lies not in "peering through" to the substantial origin of these shadowy fairytale forms that float over the surface of our awareness. The umbilical chord to such cosmic orders is severed, for Proust as for so many moderns. We are left floating in a sea of images, that strange, in-between realm where mind approaches nature but never quite rests in a secure grasp of it.

The best lucidity we can hope for comes from an acceptance of the free-floating quality of the magic lantern of our minds: it touches reality only when, as the projected fairytale images, the form is distorted as it glides over an obtruding object, such as the doorknob. The entire rest of the narrative is like a grand cartography of the magic lantern of the mind, and of the unshakable, unsettling, yet poignant sense of irreality that it brings to the heart of even our most lucid daylight experience. In this, Proust has a lot in common with the stripping down of layer upon layer of formal illusion that characterizes Zen meditation. The work is indeed much like a guided meditation manual. The hard-earned lucidity to be found at the culmination of the gathering back together act at the end of the narrative, in Time Regained, is one not of “seeing through” to some architectonic world-structure (which must always in the end be a cognitive artifact endlessly referencing us even as we struggle to wipe ourselves out of our picture); it is instead a lucidity that comes from a comprehensive grasp of the ineradicable stain our filtration systems leave on even the most intimate, seemingly immediate moments. We never stand in the light of day. It is a scary realization, but an unshakable one, and one that peers at the very heart of the human condition. We always stand in the shadow of our own form, and of our limited capacity for realization. Our relation to reality must be understood (and more fully realized) by incrementally beating against our walls, at last coming to make peace with them, and in so doing, finding our only possible transcendence.

And second, we come to the crucial revelation detailed description allows and that theoretical systems by their nature must overlook. Detailed description, while making lazy readers cringe, is the writer's best friend, as well as his/her greatest advantage over the philosophical systematizer. It is how the modern novel becomes a philosophically significant epistemic instrument. In my review of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, I noted that Kant and Proust can be understood as complementary opposites of the phenomenological spectrum, and that a fully realized self-understanding must encompass both the stances that they represent. Kant offers the phenomenology of logical principles, Proust the sketch of phenomenological form by which we gain a hold of lived experience. I'd add here that there's simply no philosophical substitute for Proust and for the kind of world-disclosure his narrative technique enables: he is a better cartographer of Heidegger's Clearing and Husserl's Lifeworld than they ever could be (although I deeply admire both). And this is because his (literary) methodology allows him to scrutinize and lay bare the workings of that fundamental act of reflective thought: description. It goes right to the heart of our moment-to-moment encounter with reality in re-enacting the constructive framing we impose through our descriptions.

One has to admire the lucidity and tenacity with which Proust takes up his analytical scalpel to the most indefinite, amorphous phenomena. He is, in my estimation, a cartographer of indefinite who charts the limits

of representation, and thus, of our capacity for lucidity and meaning. To define and articulate the undefinable details of lived experience – while foregrounding the constructive nature of all such articulation, definition, and cognitive framing - is both his (insane) narrative task and greatest epistemic achievement. Relish a densely descriptive paragraph of his, say, of a summer field, or of the subtly shifting feel of the atmosphere and mood change of a room as different personages enter and exit. Countless pages meticulously render articulate what we usually allow to fester untapped in the margins of liminal awareness, through synaesthetic descriptions that try to recapture the comprehensive feel of the mingling of shades at twilight, of the shifting of air currents, of the interpenetration of music and scent, and then of the pain of lack running through it all, of never attaining some culminating state of sufficiency. For my own part, far from having to strain to appreciate the descriptive passages, I find they provide meditative exercise that gives me the tools to better bring my day-to-day experiences to articulate clarity, instead of lazily allowing them to glide past. In so doing, they intensify my capacity for awareness and presence in the world. Both cognitive form and narrative technique here are opened up to their widest capaciousness and plasticity in order to incorporate not only dramatic action, but its peripheral reverberation, not only central figure but its background of embeddedness, not only words but their echoes, too.

I feel more alive after reading Proust, more present to my experiences, and more ashamed at how much of my life I let slip by me each and every day. The perspective the narrator achieves over his life here makes our usual biographical sense seem botched and anemic. In comparison, it seems like we have scarcely deigned to show up for our life story much at all. Instead of integrating and transcending in a moment of lucidity that surpasses our highest attained perspectival unity, as the narrator does at the culmination of the narrative when the various strands somehow coalesce, we just let it all slip by, rush on to the next thing, and through this habit enacted out of laziness, skim through our lives without delving deeper into the mystery they disclose. Experience washes over us and past us, leaving us untransformed and not building up to a unity, which is indeed wholly ours.

His analysis of the pervasiveness of Habit as our substitute for awareness here is sobering. “Most of our faculties lie dormant because they can rely upon Habit, which knows what there is to be done and has no need of their services.” He shows how through it, we fall back on prematurely fossilized interpretive structures - “our personality” - and fail to rise up to the task of continuing to develop resources for gathering meanings as they continue to unfold and emerge. The entire work seems to urge us to recall that psychological maturation, unlike physical, doesn't occur automatically or is finished once and for all at a specific moment in time after puberty. It ends with death, or with its psychological correlative – the death we experience when we opt out of the necessarily ongoing struggle to continue articulating an increasingly integrative perspective on our lives. Premature unity is psychological death; through it, our lives become a foreclosed matter. As Beckett notes in his study of Proust, “The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day.” The same goes for our own little life-world. There is no resting in the process of endless formal development until death because experience never ceases to unfold new capacities for revelation. Our understanding can never rest content with yesterday's story when facing today's experiences.

Proust shows us what the stakes for self-knowledge are, and this is as inspiring for us ordinary (barely aware) mortals as it is supremely humbling. And it is enabling, as any creative work should be. It shows the way to greater realization.

Sandra says

11/2/2010 Oggi ho terminato di leggere "Dalla parte di Swann".
"Ma quando di un antico passato non sussiste niente, dopo la morte degli esseri, dopo la distruzione delle cose, soli, più fragili ma più intensi, più immateriali, più persistenti, più fedeli, l'odore e il sapore restano ancora a lungo, come anime, a ricordare, ad attendere, a sperare, sulla rovina di tutto il resto, a reggere, senza piegarsi, sulla loro gocciolina quasi impalpabile, l'immenso edificio del ricordo".
Il ricordo rimane vivo e sconfigge anche la morte.
9/7/2010 Oggi ho terminato la lettura di “all’ombra delle fanciulle in fiore”.
“E il timore di un avvenire in cui saremo privati della vista e della compagnia di coloro che amiamo e dai quali ci viene oggi la gioia più cara, si accresce se pensiamo che al dolore di una simile privazione si aggiungerà non sentirla come dolore, restarvi indifferente..; sarebbe dunque una vera morte di noi stessi, morte seguita da resurrezione, ma di un io diverso, all’amore del quale non possono giungere le parti dell’antico io condannato a morire. Sono queste che provano sgomento e oppongono un rifiuto, con ribellioni in cui si deve vedere un modo segreto, parziale, tangibile, reale della resistenza alla morte, della lunga, disperata e quotidiana resistenza alla morte frammentaria e continua che si insedia in noi per tutta la durata della nostra vita…”
li 11/10/2010 ho terminato di leggere "i Guermantes".
"Un uomo, che sia diventato sordo del tutto, non può nemmeno far scaldare accanto a sè un bollitore pieno di latte senza dover spiare con gli occhi nel recipiente scoperchiato il riflesso bianco, iperboreo, simile a quello di una tempesta di neve, che è il segno premonitore al quale sarà bene ubbidire togliendo, come il Signore arresta le onde, la spina elettrica, infatti quella specie di uovo ascendente e convulso del latte che bolle sta salendo, sollevandosi irregolarmente, gonfia, arrotonda qualche vela semicapovolta che la panna aveva increspato e ne lancia nella tempesta una di madreperla che l'interruzione di corrente, se l'uragano elettrico è scongiurato in tempo, farà girare su se stessa e getterà alla deriva mutata in petali di magnolia."
Anche l'attività quotidiana più semplice come il bollire il latte è poesia nella penna di Proust.
13/1/2011: ho terminato la lettura di Sodoma e Gomorra.
" In qualsiasi momento la consideriamo, la nostra anima nella sua totalità ha un valore quasi soltanto fittizio, nonstante il cospicuo bilancio delle sue ricchezze, poichè ora le une ora le altre sono indisponibili, sia che si tratti di ricchezze effettive o immaginarie, e nel mio caso, per esempio, quella dell'antico nome di Guermantes o quelle, tanto più gravi, del vero ricordo della nonna. Perchè ai turbamenti della memoria sono legate le intermittenze del cuore. E' probabile sia l'esistenza del nostro corpo, simile per noi a un vaso in cui sarebbe rinchiusa la nostra spiritualità, a farci supporre che tutti i nostri beni interiori, le nostre gioie passate, tutti i nostri dolori siano perennemente in nostro possesso. Forse è altrettanto inesatto credere che essi svaniscano o ritornino. In tutti i casi, se restano in noi, la maggior parte del tempo risiedono in una zona sconosciuta dove non ci sono di alcuna utilità, e dove anche i più usuali sono soffocati dai ricordi di altro ordine e che escludono ogni simultaneità con essi nella nostra coscienza. Ma se riusciamo a riafferrare l'insieme di sensazioni in cui sono custoditi, essi hanno, a loro volta, il medesimo potere di espellere tutto ciò che è incompatibile con essi, di installare in noi soltanto l'io che li ha vissuti".
19/3/2011: ho terminato la lettura de "la prigioniera". Per me credo sia il volume della Recherche che più mi ha affascinato.
"Ciò che ci lega alle persone sono le mille radici, quei fili innumerevoli che sono i ricordi della serata di ieri, le speranze del mattino di domani, quella trama continua di abitudini da cui non riusciamo a liberarci. Così come esistono avari che accumulano per generosità, noi siamo dei prodighi che scialano per avarizia, e sacrifichiamo la nostra vita non tanto a un essere quanto a tutto ciò che egli ha saputo legare a sè delle nostre ore, dei nostri giorni, delle cose al cui confronto la vita ancora da vivere, la vita relativamente futura, ci sembra più remota, più distaccata, meno intima, meno nostra."
17/5/2011: ho terminato di leggere "la fuggitiva".

"Ogni donna sente che, più il suo potere su un uomo è grande, il solo modo di andarsene è fuggire.Fuggitiva perchè regina.E' così.Certo, esiste una distanza immensa tra la noia che solo un istante prima essa ci ispirava e quel furioso bisogno di averla presso di sè per il fatto che se ne è andata."
"La vera vita, la vita finalmente scoperta e messa in luce, di conseguenza la sola vita realmente vissuta, è la letteratura, vita che, in un certo senso, dimora in ogni momento in tutti gli uomini così come nell'artista. Ma essi non la vedono perchè non cercano di portarla alla luce".
Il mio viaggio con Proust è terminato. Cinque stelle non rappresentano il valore di quest'opera monumentale, le ho messe simbolicamente: le mie stelle sono dieci, cento, mille...

Roy Lotz says

> *In reality, every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have perceived in himself.*

I struggled with Proust, on and off, for three years. I read these books sitting, standing, lying down, in cars and on trains, waiting in airports, on commutes to work, relaxing on vacation. Some of it I read in New York, some in Madrid, Lisbon, Vienna. By now this book functions as my own madeleine, with different passages triggering memories from widely scattered places and periods in my life.

I am surprised I reached the end. Every time I put down a volume, I was sure I would never pick up another; each installment only promised more of the same and I had already had more than enough; but then the nagging sense of the incomplete overcame my aversion and, with mixed feeling, I would pick up the next one and repeat the experience.

Throughout this long voyage, my response to Proust has been consistent—I should say consistently inconsistent—alternately admiration and frustration. There are times when I fall completely under Proust's spell, and times when I find his writing intolerable. Probably this mixture has much to do with what Harold Bloom called the "anxiety of influence," since almost as soon as I finished the first volume, I started working on a novel, a novel which very clearly bears the traces of Proust's influence. It may be that, with Proust, I have something of an Oedipal complex, and I need to lodge criticism at his work in order to clear the air for my own—though I don't know. What I do know is that my reactions to this book have proven tempestuous and I have yet to spur myself to write a fair review.

When approaching a novel of this size and complexity, it is difficult to know where to start. Can *In Search of Lost Time* even be called a novel? In a writing class my instructor told us that any story needs to have a protagonist, an objective, a series of obstacles, a strategy for overcoming these obstacles, a sequence of failures and successes, all of it culminating in a grand climax that leads directly to a resolution. If you look carefully, you can, indeed, make out the bare outline of this dramatic pattern in Proust's work. But, like the slender skeleton of a peacock buried under a mountain of feathers, this outline serves as a vague scaffold over which are draped colorful ornament; and it is the ornament that attracts our attention.

In most novels, any given passage will serve some dramatic purpose: characterization, description, plot. However, there are times when the author will pull back from the story to make a more general comment, on society, humanity, or the world. These comments are, very often, pungent and aphoristic—the most quotable section of the whole book, since they do not depend on their context. Some authors, like Dickens, very

infrequently make these sorts of remarks; others, like George Elliot, are full of them: *"Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know of no speck so troublesome as self."*

Elliot's masterpiece, *Middlemarch*, is distinguished for being simultaneously didactic and dramatic, equal parts analysis and art. Proust goes even further in the direction of analysis, totally overwhelming every other aspect of the book with his ceaseless commentary. No event, however insignificant, happens without being dissected; the Narrator lets no observation go unobserved, even at the cost of being redundant. This endless exegesis, circling the same themes with relentless exactitude, is what swells this book to its famously vast proportions. Tolstoy, no laconic writer, used less than half the length to tell a story that spanned years and encompassed whole nations. The story Proust tells could have been told by, say, Jane Austen in 400 pages—although this would leave out everything that makes it worth reading.

Different as the two authors are, the social milieu Proust represents is oddly reminiscent of Jane Austen's world, being populated by snobby aristocrats who jostle for status and who never have to work, a world of elegant gatherings, witty conversation, and artistic dilettantism. Austen and Proust also share an affinity for satirizing their worlds, although they use different means for very different ends. In any case, both Austen's England and Proust's France are long gone, and it can be very difficult for the modern reader to sympathize with these characters, whose priorities, manners, and lifestyle are so distant from our own. Why should we care about soirées and salons, dukes and duchesses, who do nothing but gossip, pursue petty love affairs, and pontificate ignorantly in their pinched world?

Yet this narrow social milieu, though always in focus, only forms the backdrop for Proust's real purpose; and this purpose is suitably universal: to create a religion of art. A new religion was needed. Proust was writing at a turbulent time in European history: in the aftermath of the Death of God, as the fin de siècle high society of his youth was shattered by World War I, as new notions of psychology overturned old verities of human behavior, as every convention in art, music, and literature was being broken. Even the physical world was becoming unrecognizable—populated by quantum fields and bending space-time. It was the world of Freud's unconscious, Einstein's relativity, and Picasso's cubism, when new theories about everything were embraced. Granted, Proust may have been only peripherally aware of these historical currents, but he was no doubt responsive to them, as this novel amply proves.

In this book, Proust sets out to show that our salvation lays in art. This means showing us that our salvation does not lay in anything else. Specifically, Proust must demonstrate that social status and romantic love, two universal human aspirations, are will-o'-the-wisps. He does this subtly and slowly. First, as a young man, the Protagonist is awed by high society. The names of famous actresses, writers, composers, and most of all socialites—the aristocratic Guermantes—hold a mysterious allure that he finds irresistible. He slowly learns how to behave in salons and to hold his own in conversation, eventually meeting all the people he idolized from afar. But when he finally does make the acquaintance of these elite socialites, he finds that their wit is exaggerated, their knowledge superficial, their opinions conventional, their artistic taste deficient. In short, the allure of status was empty.

And not only that, temporary. In the final volume, Proust demonstrates that status waxes and wanes with changes of fashion, often in unforeseen ways. By the end of the book, Rachel, who began as a prostitute, is a celebrated actress; while Berma, who began as a celebrated actress, ends as a broken down old women, still respected but no longer fashionable. The Protagonist's friend, Bloch, who is a flatfooted, stupid, and awkward man, ends the book as a celebrated author, despite a total lack of originality or wit. The Baron de Charlus, an intensely proud man, ends up doffing his hat to nearly anyone he runs into in the street, while the rest of society ostracizes him. Status, in other words, being based on nothing but mass whim, is liable to

change whimsically.

Proust's views of love are even more cynical. The Protagonist does have a genuine affection for his mother and grandmother; but these are almost the only genuine bonds in the entire long novel. When Proust looks at romantic love, he sees only delusion and jealousy: an inability to see another person accurately combined with a narcissistic urge to possess and a paranoia of losing them. The archetypical Proustian relationship is that between Swann and Odette, wherein Swann, a figure in high-society, has a casual dalliance with Odette, a courtesan, and despite not thinking much of Odette, Swann nearly loses his mind when he begins to suspect she is cheating on him. He marries Odette, not out of romantic passion, but in order to gain some measure of peace from his paranoid jealousy.

Summarized in this way, Proust's views seem, if somewhat disenchanted, hardly radical. But the real thrust of Proust's thinking depends on a truly radical subjectivism. This book, as Harold Bloom points out, is wisdom literature, firmly rooted in the introspective tradition of Montaigne. But Proust is more than introspective. A true Cartesian, Proust is solipsistic. And much of his rejection of worldly sources of happiness, and his concomitant embrace of art, depends on this intensely first-person view of the world.

In his emphasis on the subjective basis of reality, Proust's thought is often oddly reminiscent of Buddhism. Our personalities, far from being stable, are nothing but an endless flux that changes from moment to moment; each second we die and are born again. What's more, we perceive other people through the lens of our own desires, knowledge, opinions, and biases, and therefore never perceive accurately. There are as many versions of you as there are people to perceive you. Thus we never really know another person. Our relationships with friends and lovers are really relationships with mental constructions that have only a tenuous connection with the real person:

> *The bonds between ourselves and another person exist only in our minds. Memory as it grows fainter loosens them, and notwithstanding the illusion by which we want to be duped and with which, out of love, friendship, politeness, deference, duty, we dupe other people, we exist alone. Man is the creature who cannot escape from himself, who knows other people only in himself, and when he asserts the contrary, he is lying.*

You might think that this is a shockingly cynical view, and it is; but Proust adheres to it consistently. Here he is on friendship:

> *… our friends being friends only in the light of an agreeable folly which travels with us through life and to which we readily accommodate ourselves, but which at the bottom of our hearts we know to be no more reasonable than the delusions of the man who talks to furniture because he believes that it is alive…*

And love, of course, comes off even worse than friendship:

> *Almost everyone was surprised at the marriage, and that in itself is surprising. No doubt very few people understand the purely subjective nature of the phenomenon we call love, or how it creates, so to speak, a supplementary person, distinct from the person whom the world knows by the same name, a person most of whose constituent elements are derived from ourselves.*

In the dissolving acid of Proust's solipsism, one can see why he considers both social status and romantic

love as vain pursuits, since they are not, and can never be, based on anything but a delusion.

Of course, status and love do bring people happiness, at least temporarily. But Proust is careful to show that all happiness and sadness caused by these things have nothing to do with their reality, but only with our subjective understanding of that reality. Depending on how we interpret a word or analyze an intention; depending on whether we hold someone in esteem or in contempt—depending, in short, on how we subjectively understand what we experience—we will be happy or sad. The source of all suffering and bliss is in the mind, not the world, but we are normally blind to this fact and thus go on mistakenly trying to alter the world: *"I had realized before now that it is only a clumsy and erroneous perception which places everything in the object, when really everything is in the mind…"*

As you can see, we are moving in a strikingly mystical direction, where love and success are just egotistic delusions, hypostatized mental artifacts that we mistake for solid reality. So what should we do? Proust's answer to this predicament is also mystical in flavor. Normally we are trapped by our perspective, thinking that we are viewing reality when we are actually just experiencing our own warped mental apparatus. To break us out of this trap we must first experience unhappiness: *"As for happiness, that is really useful only in one way only, by making unhappiness possible."* And unhappiness results when something we mistook to be solid—reputation, love, even life itself—is shown to be fleeting and unreal, that our everyday reality is based on nothing but lies, mistakes, and misunderstandings. You might say this is Proust's version of Christian consolation. For in the despair that opens up during these crises, we can give up our fantasies and partake in Proustian mysticism.

This mysticism consists in reconnecting with our basic sensations. To do this, Proust does not, like the Buddhists, turn to meditation on the present moment. Instead, he relies on art and memory. Normal language is totally inadequate to this task. Our words, being universally used, only convey that aspect of experience that is common to everyone; all the individual savor of a perception, its most essential quality, is lost. But great artists—like the fictitious Vinteuil, Bergotte, or Elstir—can use their medium to overcome the usual limits of discourse, transmitting the full power of their perspectives. Even so, this artistic communication can only act as a spur for our own introspective quest. Shorn of illusory happiness, inspired by example, we can probe our own memory and experience the bliss of pure experience.

Memory is essential in this, for Proust thinks that it is only by juxtaposing one experience with another that we can see the perception in its pure form, without any reference to our conventional reality. This is why moments of involuntary memory, like the madeleine episode, are so important for Proust: it is in these moments, when a present experience triggers a long-buried memory, that we can re-visit the experiences of our past, free from delusion, as a pure impartial spectator. The final Proustian wisdom is essentially contemplative, passive, aesthetic, able to see the ironies of human life and to appreciate the recurring patterns of human existence.

Proust's goal, then, is to do for the reader what Bergotte, Elstir, and Vinteuil did for his Narrator: to create art that acts as a window to the self. And his style is exactly suited to this purpose. In my review of a book on meditation, I noted what I called the "novelistic imagination," which is our tendency to see the world as a setting and ourselves as the Protagonist, beset by trials and tribulations. Meditation aims to break out of this rather unrealistic mindset by focusing on the present moment. Proust's aim is similar but his method is different. He takes the narrative tendency of the novelistic imagination, and stretches and stretches, pulling each sentence apart, twisting it around itself, extending the form and padding the structure until the narration is hardly narration at all, until you are simply swimming in a sea of sounds.

By doing so, Proust allows you to feel the passage of time, to make time palpable and real, and to feel our

memory processing and being activated over and over again in response to passing sensations. This way, Proust hopes to bring us in contact with reality: *"An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what we call reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them…"*

This is my attempt to elucidate Proust's aesthetic religion. Of course, like any religion of art, it is objectionable for manifold reasons: it lacks any moral compass, it is elitist, it is purely passive. Not only that, but Proust connects with his religion a solipsism that is questionable on philosophic grounds, not to mention cynical in the extreme. It is a cold, antisocial, unsympathetic doctrine, with appeal only to disenchanted aesthetes. But of course, this is ultimately a work of art and not of philosophy; and so *In Search of Lost Time* must be judged on literary grounds.

When it comes to the criteria by which we judge a usual novelist—characterization, dialogue, plot—I think Proust is somewhat weak. There is, of course, little plot to speak of. And although Harold Bloom thought that Proust was a rival of Shakespeare when it came to characterization—a judgment that baffles me—I felt very little for any of the people in this novel. They all speak in Proust's longwinded voice, and so never came alive for me. It always seems as if I am overhearing Proust describe someone rather than meeting them myself.

But of course one cannot appraise Proust using these standards. This novel is, above all, audacious. It is a modernist tour de force, which turns nearly every novelistic convention on its head. More than that, it is a novel of ideas, which puts forward a radical view of the human predicament and its own answers to the perennial questions of life. It is wisdom literature rooted deeply in tradition, while being absolutely original and uncompromising in its newness. It is both intensely beautiful and intensely ugly—hideously sublime. For anyone who can pull themselves through all its pages, it will leave them deeply marked. I know I have been.

Roberta says

Questa non è una recensione, ce ne sono in giro già abbastanza. Anzi, ciò che è stato scritto a proposito della Recherce supera di gran lunga il numero di pagine della Recherche stessa. Inoltre, se continuano ad esserci lettori che macinano con gioia le 2000 e più pagine del romanzo, un motivo ci sarà: è bello.
Quindi mi limito a lasciare qui qualche appunto, pensieri che mi vengono in mente durante la lettura.

DALLA PARTE DI SWANN

Ho sempre associato questa prima parte alla primavera e anche oggi mi fa lo stesso effetto. Immagino siano le descrizioni delle passeggiate e dei paesaggi. Non vedo l'ora che il tempo mi permetta di leggere all'aperto.
Intanto Swann ha incontrato Odette ed il guinzaglio si fa sempre più corto, fino a sfociare in un matrimonio socialmente esecrabile. Odette è un personaggio triste, una mantenuta senza altra dote che la bellezza, che non si fa scrupolo ad usare.
Odette e Swann avranno una bambina: conclusa la generazione dei padri, si passa al parco a giocare coi figli

ALL'OMBRA DELLE FANCIULLE IN FIORE

Perché leggere Proust oggi? Anche solo per la descrizione del teatro, e dell'emozione di andarci per la prima volta. Il nostro giovane è passato dall'essere mammone ad essere terribilmente romantico.

Proust è in grado di descrivere i bagni pubblici come se fossero una sala da tè.

Non riesco a capire esattamente quanti abbia il fanciullo che va in vacanza a Balbec. Prima gioca alla lotta con Gilberte traendone un piacere da adulto, ora è in crisi nel dover lasciare la madre per una breve vacanza. Intanto si ubriaca, dietro consiglio medico, per affrontare le emozioni di un viaggio in treno (lascio a voi pendolari eventuali battute sull'abbinamento alcool-trenitalia).

Ed eccomi alle ultime pagine del secondo libro. Il giovanotto è in vacanza al mare e la nonna è ormai dimenticata a favore di un gruppo di ragazze tra cui spicca Albertine, la fanciulla che darà titolo a uno dei prossimi volumi.
Il ragazzino è un marpioncello in divenire. Nota ogni ragazza in egual misura, per tutte sembra trovare un particolare di suo interesse. Quando ne "conquista" una, il che spesso significa semplicemente esserle presentato ed aver scambiato due parole, ammette candidamente che la conoscenza e l'abitudine cancellano la passione. La realtà è infatti molto meno passionale dei sogni ad occhi aperti.
Io intanto provo piacere ed interesse a vederlo crescere. Non è un personaggio simpatico: è spesso superficiale, attirato più dalla moda che dalla sostanza. Si è creato una sorta di persona immaginaria a cui aspira: va a teatro credendo di cadere vittima di una sorta di sindrome di Stendhal e ci rimane male perché ha provato "solo" il piacere di un normale intrattenimento. Ma dato che altri raccontano quella stessa opera come un capolavoro creto dall'attrice protagonista, allora ecco che il nostro eroe si ri-racconta l'esperienza fino a farla combaciare con lo standard che si era inventato. Al giorno d'oggi si parlerebbe di peer-pressure (fare cose e tenere certi atteggiamenti per soddisfare il gruppo a cui si appartiene), lui riesce a farsi peer-pressure da solo.

I GUERMANTES

Ed eccoci nella casa nuova. Francoise è simpatica come sempre, ma sono arrivata al primo scoglio. Saint-Loup e la celebrazione dell'arte militare mi annoiano parecchio, voglio tornare alle seghe mentali del protagonista.
Saint-Loup è l'uomo zerbino, erede di Swann. Il nostro eroe punta alla zia di Saint-Loup, ma senza costrutto. La cosa interessante è la cronaca dell'affare Dreyfuss, che viene superficialmente citato dai personaggi.

Sono alle ultime pagine di questo volume e sto facendo fatica. La scrittura di Proust è sempre ottima e una volta ricominciato a leggere veleggio serenamente tra salotti e frivolezze, ma il problema è proprio riprendere in mano il racconto dopo una pausa. Sono, infatti, 547 pagine (1534-987) di salotti, di viziate signore aristocratiche che fanno battutine di spirito a cui tutti ridacchiano per dovere (non fanno ridere), donne che fanno le eccentriche a tutti i costi credendo così di farsi notare, principesse di spirito popolano che per dimostrarsi d'ampie vedute trattano gli inferiori come simpatici animaletti bisognosi di attenzioni. Facendo un paragone con la cultura popolare italiana mi è venuto in mente l'episodio di Fantozzi in cui i dipendenti della megaditta vengono invitati a cena a casa della Contessa Serbelloni Mazzanti Viendalmare e lei continua a chiamarli "inferiori".
E, diciamocelo, questa Guermantes è davvero antipatica, una gatta morta.

Il mazzo di asparagi di Elstir-Manet che i Guermantes non hanno comprato

SODOMA E GOMORRA

Ma che simpatico questo Proust. Esordisce con una descrizione piuttosto allegra dell'omosessualità maschile, ma quando viene ipotizzata quella femminile allora è scandalo e fastidio.

Però, amico Proust, un filo d'azione potresti anche mettercela. Un colpo di scena, che so. Guarda, accetto anche due lacrimucce in stile "C'è posta per te", ma andiamo avanti. Interessante la digressione sull'etimologia di alcuni termini, ma ora basta con queste conversazioni superficiali da salotto. Mi sento come l'invitata che non conosce nessuno, non condivide i gusti degli altri e se ne sta in un angolo sbocconcellando un pasticcino e sorridendo ebete, cercando una scusa per potersi allontanare presto dal party più noioso della storia.

LA PRIGIONIERA

Titolo esaustivo. Il nostro eroe è sempre più disturbato e ritiene che infilarsi Albertine in casa sia un miglioramento. La fanciulla ci sta perché si fa mantenere mica male e tanto lo frega come vuole. Continuano le ansie per le supposte relazioni omosessuali di Albertine.
Secondo me di lesbico Albertine non ha nulla, ma questo Christian Grey d'antan semplicemente non vuole che lei abbia relazioni con esseri umani diversi da lui e Francoise. E diciamocelo: anche Francoise ci mette del suo per abusare psicologicamente di Albertine.
Poi abbiamo i Verdurin, che con tutti i difetti non riusciamo però ad abbandonare. Sono come dei parenti alla lontana, quelli strani che devi sopportare a matrimoni e funerali.

ALBERTINE SCOMPARSA

E dopo l'omosessualità allegra del tomo precedente, esordiamo con una simpatica accusa di corruzione di minore.

No, fermi tutti! (view spoiler) E adesso?
E adesso nulla, il chiodo è sempre lo stesso: Albertine è lesbica? Ha mai fatto sesso con altre ragazze? Se sì, come/cosa ha fatto?
Qualcuno dia un abbonamento Pornhub a quest'uomo!

Muore giovane chi è caro agli dei.

IL TEMPO RITROVATO

Non riesco a crederci, sono alla fine. Guerra e sadomaso.

No, ma dai, adesso parte il pippone malinconico. In effetti, a poche (relativamente parlando) pagine dalla fine la necessità di congedarsi e fare il punto della situazione è sentita. Ritorna la madeleine iniziale, ancora più carica di significato ora che sappiamo tutta la storia.
6 mesi, 2000 pagine, tanti personaggi peculiari che sono diventati una sorta di famiglia letteraria: il treno è in ritardo? Ottimo, approfittiamone per andare a vedere cosa fanno questi eccentrici francesi.

Ebbene, sono arrivata alla fine. Troppo presto, non ero pronta. E adesso? Con chi li passo i prossimi 6 mesi, ora che non ho più la compagnia di questi vanesi, superficiali francesi?

http://www.marcelproust.it/

Travelling Sunny says

In another LIST book (1Q84) it was said that unless you have the opportunity to be in jail or have to hide out for a long time, you can't read the whole of *In Search of Lost Time*.

Volume 1. Swann's Way (★★★★?)
Volume 2. Within a Budding Grove (★★★??)
Volume 3. The Guermantes Way (★★???)
Volume 4. Cities of the Plain (★★★★★)
Volume 5. The Captive (★★★★★)
Volume 6. The Fugitive (★★★★?)
Volume 7. Time Regained (★★★★★)

Darwin8u says

The first volume of 'In Search of Lost Time' (ISoLT), or 'Remembrance of Things Past' (RoTP), or 'À la recherche du temps perdu' (Merde mère un autre?) was first published in France 100 years ago this month. I started reading in February, and now end this beast in November. Apparently, I needed a little wind-up to start and if the last 12 hours is any indication, I will need a wee bit of time to settle down from the mess Proust has left in my head.

This is a book that feels like a hypnotic river that both transports, nourishes, warms and transcends. 4211 pages later and I feel like this is a novel I want to read again (both immediately and much much later). I had barely put down Time Regained and I was, like an orobus, reaching for 'Swann's Way'. I'm going to chew on my BIG review of ISoLT for awhile. I don't know if I'm ready to try to explain or even understand the whole of Proust yet. Hell, I'm not sure I'm ready to look at myself that closely yet.

Reading Proust was a bit like reading 'Finnegans Wake'. Certainly not the details or style mind you. Proust wasn't deliberately sending his prose into language fractals, neologisms and ghillie suits of his own idioglossia. Proust isn't trying to capture or interpret the night or dreams (although dreams and sleep do play a part of ISoLT). Proust isn't trying to hide, he is seeking to uncover.

Both works, however, are best approached as literature that shouldn't be sipped. These are pieces that you need to let wash over you. You will miss parts for sure, but unless you are a Joyce or Proust scholar you won't uncover 1/10 of what they are really sending your direction anyway. Let the prose roll. Let the message(s) seep into your conciousness. Beware of the designs of the left-brained temptor to stop every sentenece and try to comprehend completely what was written. Finnegans wake is too obscure and ISoLT is

too damn long to do this. Pull your feet up, push your head back, and float -- damn you all.

[a quick after note: the first four books of Proust I read were the Viking Translations done by Lydia Davis (Bk 1), James Grieve (Bk 2), Mark Treharne (Bks 3-4). The last three (Bks 5-7) were the Modern Library's Enright - Scott Moncrieff translations.]

Mari Mann says

There are some writers that have made such a unique contribution to literature and to art that they are considered among the best, if not the best, and not just in their own country, but in the world. Such a writer was Marcel Proust. He has been called the greatest novelist of the 20th century, and the novel, A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, compared to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. But Michelangelo was known as "The Divine", while Proust was called a hypochondriac, a dilettante, a homosexual and a mama's boy. All of these things were true, to a certain extent, and when the first volume of In Search of Lost Time (Swann's Way) was published in 1913, Proust's friends were shocked that he had produced such a masterpiece. As Marcel himself said, there was not just one Proust, but many, and his many selves were often paradoxical and antithetical to each other. He used the ways of a hypochondriac to make people, mostly his mother, give him special treatment, yet he had his first asthma attack at age nine and struggled with ill health until his death at age 51. He was a social-climbing dilettante yet spent the last ten years of his life as a virtual recluse, shielded from the outside world by the cork-lined walls of his bedroom. He was a homosexual who wrote and spoke as if he deplored homosexuality. And he was a mama's boy who used the love and anguish of that relationship as a springboard for the novel's deep and enduring truths about all forms of love and devotion and life and art.

But do we really need to know anything about the writer to understand, or even appreciate, the work itself? Remembrance of Things Past, or as it is more accurately titled now, In Search of Lost Time, is often described as a semi-autobiographical work, so can't we just read the books to know the man? No, in answer to both questions, but…yes. Although Proust only peripherally identifies the "Narrator" in Lost Time as himself, the book closely parallels his life, possibly a better phrase would be reflects his life (as some key things are reversed, as if seen in a mirror). And at the risk of sounding dramatic, Proust gave this life- mentally & physically- to the service of writing these volumes. He gave the novel his life and in return, it gave him immortality. Proust was aware of this "bargain with the devil" he'd made, and when he wrote fin at the end of the novel, he told his housekeeper/companion "Now I can die"…and shortly afterward, he did. Knowing something of the life of this man can help illuminate the world of Lost Time, as a reading of Lost Time illuminates not just Marcel's life but all lives, our own included. That's one of the reasons why this work is regarded as one of the world's best, and why it is as relevant to us now as it was then and as it will continue to be in the future

In Search of Lost Time actually consists of seven volumes, the first being Swann's Way. When these volumes were being translated into English, the translator changed the title, A la recherché du Temps Perdu, to a line from Shakespeare, "Remembrance of Things Past". This is not only a bad interpretation of In Search of Lost Time , it's not even what the novel is about. Marcel hated it. He didn't much care for Swann's Way either, which in French is Du cote de chez Swann, but what could he do? He was only the author.

So what is the novel about? And if it's so great, why do so many people start reading it but give up before they even reach the famous madeleine scene? Is it because of Proust's famously long sentences (the Proust Society of America says his longest is 958 words & may be the longest sentence in all of literature)? Or

because, as one critic complained after the publication of Swann's Way, that Proust takes fifteen pages to tell how he turns over in bed at night? Yes. But when the long sentences and the seemingly random and rambling passages begin to coalesce into a whole, and the invisible web of past, present and future becomes visible and clear, then the magnitude of this work and the joy of reading it shines through.

But what is it about? It's about life, from one life to all lives.

Manny says

When you read Proust, and learn to appreciate his extraordinary, dreamy, hypnotic, truly inimitable style (this review is a mere shadow on the wall of a Platonic cave), which succeeds in making the syntax of language, usually as invisible as air, into a tangible element, so that, like literary yogis, we may feel, for the first time, how enjoyable the simple activity of reading, like breathing, can be; and discover the delights of sentences which took the author days to construct and us an hour to read, unpacking layers of subordinate clauses to discover, nestling inside their crisp folds, a simile as unexpected and delicious as a Swiss chocolate rabbit, wearing a yellow marzipan waistcoat and carrying an edible rake, found in its cocoon of tissue paper under a lilac bush during a childhood Easter egg hunt; or, steaming across the calm waters of a limpid grammatical lake in the capable hands of Captain Marcel and his crew, confident that they know the route from generations of experience, and will in due time, exactly on schedule, arrive at the main verb, pointing us tourists to it with justifiable, understated pride; then you will gradually come to identify with the alchemical author, spending twenty years sitting, propped up by pillows, in his velvet dressing-gown, transmuting the lead of his accumulated experience into gold, surrounded by galley proofs which he constantly rereads and revises, pasting in a parenthesis in the middle of this sentence, an apposition in that, so that the papers are gradually festooned, like bizarre Christmas decorations, with loops and curlicues of afterthoughts; and waiting for life, his unfaithful mistress, to leave him, simultaneously knowing that it is inevitable, and also that she will never do so, at least as long as this, the greatest and strangest of all novels, is still not quite finished...

Jason says

Initially published in French between 1913 and 1927, Marcel Proust's seven-part work *In Search of Lost Time* (also called *Remembrance of Things Past*) has undergone a befuddling series of translations. The "Moncrieff–Kilmartin–Enright" version, made available for this Modern Library publication, is essentially the original C. K. Scott Moncrieff translation with further revisions by Terence Kilmartin in 1984 (based on the 1954 definitive French text) and D. J. Enright in 1992.

As I finish each volume, I will rate and review it individually. All seven volumes of *In Search of Lost Time* can be found on my À-la-recherche-du-temps-perdu shelf. They are also listed here:

In Search of Lost Time

1. **Swann's Way** – my review (★★★★★)
2. **Within a Budding Grove** – my review (★★★★?)

3. **The Guermantes Way** – my review (currently reading)
4. **Sodom and Gomorrah** – my review (?????)
5. **The Captive**[1] – my review (?????)
6. **The Fugitive**[1] – my review (?????)
7. **Time Regained**[2] – my review (?????)

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[1]In the Modern Library edition, *The Captive* and *The Fugitive* are combined into a single volume, but I will rate/review them separately.

[2]The Kilmartin–Enright revision of *Time Regained* is based on an English translation by Andreas Mayor, as Scott Moncrieff died in 1930.

Manny says

[1. Mar

Petra says

I finished this work. Each book is reviewed below. The only question left is "Was it worth it?". Was it worth 10 months of working my way through this opus? Was it worth what I got out of it?
The answer is a definite Yes.
Yes, there were times where it was an effort to read another page. Yes, there were times that it was mesmerizing and I didn't want to put it down. Yes, it was funny. Yes, it was sad. Mostly it was profound, thoughtful and very universal. It speaks to all people because it speaks of Life.
I really enjoyed the interconnections. The Six Steps of Kevin Bacon came to my mind at one point.....Proust was incredibly ahead of his time with this concept; he nailed the interconnectivity thing.
This is definitely a worthwhile read. I can see why it's surviving the ages, despite those navel-gazing moments throughout.
Will I reread it at some point? Probably not the whole thing, from start to finish. However, I'm sure I'll pick up one volume or another at some point and reread it wholly or partially.
Final rating for the entire work as a whole: **5 stars**.

Time Regained **5-star**
(view spoiler)

The Fugitive **3-star**
(view spoiler)

The Captive **4-star**
(view spoiler)

Sodom & Gomorrah **4-star**
(view spoiler)

The Guermantes Way **3-star**
(view spoiler)

Within A Budding Grove (read March 2017) **4-star**
(view spoiler)

Swann's Way **5-Star**
(read Apr/2011 and again in January 2017)
(view spoiler)

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http://naqderooz.ir/zu

Ben says

Why did Proust have to write a 4000 page novel, especially when there is not any discernable, coherent plot? Was it really necessary to have those extended society scenes, some of which lasted for 150 pages or so? Couldn’t the whole thing have been tightened up a little and cut down to 1000 pages or so?

I asked myself these questions at various points over the nine months it took me to journey through Proust’s masterpiece. It was not until the final two volumes (and particularly the latter half of *Time Regained*) that it all started to make sense. The point Proust is trying to make can only be experienced (as opposed to realized intellectually) if you have plodded through the seemingly endless series of anecdotes, asides and philosophical musings.

Proust is trying to tell us how the experiences of our past slip away from our memory and, as such, no longer have any obvious impact on us. In some cases, (i.e. sexual jealousy and grief), this is a good thing, lest the pain of these losses would forever burden us. But it also isolates us from those moments of pleasure, of experiencing pure beauty. We can try, through the vehicle of voluntary memory to retrieve “the good old days” but we will get nothing more than a snapshot, and will not feel the experience of what it was really like in those moments. The only way to recapture lost time, Proust tells us, is through the involuntary memories that spontaneously arise from random sensory input (the taste of a madeleine soaked in tea, the experience of standing on uneven paving stones, the clang of a spoon against a dish) as it triggers the memories of the last time we experienced the same sensations along with the other physical and emotional sensations with which the catalytic sensation is associated. The experience of these sensations is actually of a purer form than we experienced when they happened to us the first time, because they are not impeded by all the other competing stimuli that were impinging on us at the time. At the time, for example, we may have been disappointed that this resort was not exactly what we had in mind, we may have been worried about the health of a loved one, we might be distracted by concerns of our professional careers. In this moment of recapturing the past, all that comes to us is the unadulterated form of the experience of pleasure.

Of course, this is a pretty unreliable mechanism to tap into our past and, as Proust shows, it is fleeting as well. The only way to recapture the past in a lasting way is through the creation of a work of art: which is where the book comes in. How does a writer depict an experience which is eventually forgotten, and is then perfectly recaptured years later? Well, you have to help the reader have the experience of long stretches of time, of the entirety of a long life lived, complete with all the hundreds of people and experiences and moments of inspiration and self-doubt that come with it. When, in the last pages of *Time Regained*, Proust describes the incident of the “good night kiss” (one of the earliest episodes of the book), I felt like this did occur 40 years ago, given how long ago I read it. And, as Proust, through his magnificent prose lovingly reconstructed the scene, it came back to me with the full force of his original description. He had succeeded in helping me recapture this literary event, and how beautiful the experience of it was!

I certainly don’t want to try to compete with the length of *In Search of Lost Time* itself with this review, so let me conclude quickly. Please, if you have any interest at all in serious literature, do not be thrown off by the length of this book. It is an unparalleled work of genius for which, as I hope I have argued successfully above, the length is an essential element. If you make the commitment, you will be rewarded.

Avis Black says

I read the whole damn thing, for which I feel like demanding a medal. A famous quote about this work goes, "I may be thicker skinned than most, but I just can't understand why anyone should take thirty pages to describe how he tosses about in bed because he can't get to sleep. I clutched my head."

I heartily agree. Nor do I like dinner parties that take longer to read about than they took to occur. The main problem with Proust (and his admirers) is that they are convinced that the French aristocracy, with all their trivial concerns and all their trivial conversations, were actually interesting. In reality, they were very dull and conventional people. One of Proust's friends actually said that to him, but Proust was too status-struck to listen.

The only character in the books I liked was Charles Morel, because he screwed everyone over and treated them like dirt. By the time I finished, I thought they deserved him.