Characters and Themes

Characters:

Place-Names: The Name

Marcel

We see in this section, as we will in the beginning of *Within a Budding Grove*, that Marcel’s mother and grandmother’s worst fears are being realized. The young man is sick with a number of ailments and he refers to himself from time to time as being nervous or neurotic. As he becomes more sedentary during the course of the novel, he will acknowledge that he resembles an invalid like Aunt Léonie rather than someone with a healthy, independent nature like his grandmother.

Themes:

Androgyny

In a letter to Dr. Samuel Pozzi, who was a good friend of the Proust family, Proust stated his belief that the writer’s voice should be androgynous: “A writer must forget that he has a sex and speak for all” his characters. *Bulletin Marcel Proust* 51: 27.

We have seen Swann’s dream at the end of *Swann in Love* in which Mme Verdurin becomes a man. This passage contains a statement that is similar to the idea expressed in the letter to Pozzi: a novelist must become all his characters:

[In the dream] Swann reasoned with himself, for the young man whom he had failed at first to identify was himself too; like certain novelists, he had distributed his own personality between two characters, the one who was dreaming the dream, and another whom he saw in front of him sporting a fez. —*Swann’s Way* 1: 540
We will have much more to say about sexuality and androgyny in Proust, according to whom, the very nature of dreams is androgynous, as he states in a later volume: “The race that inhabits it (the realm of sleep), like that of our first human ancestors, is androgynous.” — *Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 516