Questions and Topics for discussion

Lecture 7

Within a Budding Grove 2: 299-419

1. Why does Marcel give the girl from the village a 5-franc piece?

2. Why does Marcel say that “adolescence is the only period in which we learn anything”?

3. The doctor has prescribed beer or brandy “to prevent the suffocating fits which the journey might bring on.” Why does this alarm the grandmother?

4. Marcel reads Sévigné’s letters. Note how he describes her style and that he links it to the fictional painter Elstir and that of the modern Russian novelist Dostoevsky. How is this style related to the description of the rain from Combray?

5. What is Marcel’s first impression of the hotel manager? How does the manager appear once Marcel grows accustomed to him?

6. How do the reflections of the sea in the “glass fronts of the bookcases” in Marcel’s room at the Grand-Hôtel anticipate the later description of Elstir’s painting, “Le Port de Carquethuit”?

7. Note the comparison of the dining-room to an aquarium. What sort of social and political upheaval is Marcel alluding to here?

8. Marcel will pursue Mlle de Stermaria at different intervals. Note the identification of her with the landscape of Brittany. How is his notion of possessing her similar to Swann’s identification of Odette with a woman painted by Botticelli?

9. Humor: Marcel has no friends but Françoise has many. How does this affect her service?

10. What does Marcel say about his age and nature and about his grandmother’s view of social formalities?