Lecture 14  
*Sodom and Gomorrah*  

**Characters and Themes**  

**Characters:**  

**Charlus**  

Here is another good quote on androgyny from Proust, which includes his belief in the power of mind over body:  

I now understood, moreover, why earlier when I had seen him coming away from Mme de Villeparisis’s, I had managed to arrived at the conclusion that M. de Charlus, looked like a woman: he was one! He belonged to that race of beings, less paradoxical than they appear, whose ideal is manly simply because their temperament is feminine, and who in their life resemble other men in appearance only; there where each of us carries, inscribed in those eyes through which he beholds everything in the universe, a human outline engraved on the surface of the pupil, for them it is no that of a nymph but of an ephebe. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 19-20  

See also Mme de Vaugoubert below:  

**Françoise**  

Note Françoise’s ironic and comic remarks about Charlus and Jupien, which include her ideas about their making the perfect husbands. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 41  

**Marcel**  

Marcel, a staunch defender of Dreyfus, like Proust himself, maintains that he fought several duels on account of the Dreyfus case. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 11.  

Proust did fight one duel with columnist Jean Lorrain to defend his honor after Lorrain insinuated in a newspaper article that Proust was homosexual and the lover of Lucien Daudet, son of distinguished writer Alphonse Daudet and brother of writer and
journalist and noted anti-Semite Léon Daudet, to whom Proust dedicated *The Guermantes Way*.

After Marcel witnesses the tryst between Charlus and Jupien, his “gaydar” becomes fully functioning:

I could hear a voice of a sort which henceforth I was able to identify without the least possibility of an error. It was, in this particular instance, the voice of M. de Vaugoubert talking to M. de Charlus. A skilled physician need not even make his patient unbutton his short, nor listen to his breathing—the sound of his voice is enough. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 86

**Mme de Vaugoubert**

Mme de Vaugoubert was really a man. Whether she had always been one, or had grown to be as I now saw her, matters little, for in either case we are faced with one of the most touching miracles of nature which, in the latter alternative especially, makes the human kingdom resemble the kingdom of flowers. . . . if the woman has not at first these masculine characteristics, she adopts them by degrees, to please her husband, and even unconsciously, by that sort of mimicry which makes certain flowers assume the appearance of the insects which they seek to attract. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 61-62

**Themes:**

**Sexual Attraction**

Here is a sample of Proust’s stunning and complex display of sexual attraction:

“the jealous friend [a male homosexual] suffers from the feeling that the man he loves is riveted to the woman who is to him almost a man, and at the same time feels his beloved almost escape him because, to these women, he is something which the lover himself cannot conceive, a sort of woman. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 31

**Sleep**
A little insomnia is not without its value in making us appreciate sleep, in throwing a ray of light upon that darkness. An unfailing memory is not a very powerful incentive to the study of the phenomena of memory. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 69-70