Lecture 15

Bertrand de Fénelon

The lady from Combray and her pronunciation. This passage allows Proust to pay tribute to his friend Bertrand de Fénelon, who was killed in action early in World War 1. He is one of the models for Saint-Loup. We remember that it was Fénélon’s top hat that Proust destroyed in a fit of rage, an event that is given to Marcel in the novel when he destroys M. de Charlus’s top hat.

She felt “spoon” to be too hard a word to apply to a piece of silverware which measured out her syrups, and said, in consequence “spune”; she would have been afraid of offending the gentle bard of Télémaque by calling him bluntly Fénélon—as I myself did with every reason to know, having as my dearest friend the best, bravest, most intelligent of men, whom no one who knew him could forget: Bertrand de Fénélon—and invariably said “Fénélon,” feeling that the acute accent added a certain softness.

—Sodom and Gomorrah 4: 231-32

Social manifestations and artistic movements

To a certain extent social manifestations (vastly less important than artistic movements, political crises, the trend that leads public taste towards the theater of ideas, then towards Impressionist painting, then towards music that is German and complicated, then music that is Russian and simple, or towards ideals of social service, ideas of justice, religious reaction, outbursts of patriotism) are nevertheless an echo of them, distant, disjointed, uncertain, changeable, blurred. —Sodom and Gomorrah 4: 192