Characters and Themes

Characters:

Marcel and Albertine

Here is a nice image as Marcel contemplates Albertine’s intelligence and her sweetness:

For no doubt, if I returned with tender emotion to her intelligence and her sweetness to me, it was not because they had been any greater than those of other persons whom I had known; had not Mme de Cambremer said to me at Balbec: “What! You could be spending your days with Elstir, who is a genius, and you spend them with your cousin!” Albertine’s intelligence pleased me because, by association, it reminded me of what I called her sweetness, as we call the sweetness of a fruit a certain sensation which exists only in our palate. And in fact, when I thought of Albertine’s intelligence, my lips instinctively protruded and savored a memory of which I preferred that the reality should remain external to me and should consist in the objective superiority of a person. —The Fugitive 5: 668-69

But after we have reached a certain age our loves, our mistresses, are begotten of our anguish; our past, and the physical lesions in which it is recorded, determine our future. In the case of Albertine in particular, the fact that it was not necessarily she that I was predestined to love was inscribed, even without those circumambient loves, in the history of my love for her, that is to say for herself and her friends. For it was not even a love like my love for Gilberte, but was created by division among a number of girls. —The Fugitive 5: 681

Albertine, being penniless and obscure, must have been anxious to marry me. And yet I had not been able to possess her exclusively. Whatever our social position, however wise our precautions, when the truth is confessed we have no hold over the life of another person. Why had she not said to me: “I have those tastes”? I would have yielded, would
have allowed her to gratify them. [...] What was the good of all these futile miseries? But I saw now that we are not free to refrain from forging the chains of our own misery, and that however well we may know our own will, other people do not obey it. —The Fugitive 5: 683-84

Marcel imagines that he is about to receive a message from Albertine telling him that although the accident real it had not been fatal and now repentant, she asks to be allowed to come and live with me forever:

And—giving me an insight into the nature of certain mild lunacies in people who otherwise appear sane—I felt co-existing in me the certainty that she was dead and the constant hope that I might see her come into the room. —The Fugitive 5: 691-92

Although Albertine might exist in my memory only as she had successively appeared to me in the course of her life, that is, subdivided in accordance with a series of fractions of time, my mind, re-establishing unity in her, made her a single person, and it was on this person that I wished to arrive at a general judgment, to know whether she had lied to me, whether she loved women, whether it was in order to associate with them freely that she had left me. What the woman in the baths would have to say might perhaps put an end forever to my doubts as to Albertine’s proclivities. —The Fugitive 5: 693

Remembering Albertine: Mutilated minutes:

Even when she gradually ceased to be present in my thoughts and all-powerful over my heart, I felt a sudden pang if I had occasion, as in the time when she was there, to go into her room, to grope for the light, to sit down by the pianola. Divided into a number of little household gods, she dwelt for a long time in the flame of the candle, the doorknob, the back of a chair, and other domains more immaterial. . .—The Fugitive 5: 705

But, although the idea of Albertine’s death made some headway in me, the reflux of the sensation that she was alive, if it did not arrest that progress, obstructed it nevertheless and prevented its being regular. —The Fugitive 5: 721

. . . since regret for a woman is only a recrudescence of love and remains subject to the same laws, the keenness of my regret was intensified by the same causes which in
Albertine’s lifetime had increased my love for her and in the front rank of which had always appeared jealousy and grief. —*The Fugitive* 5: 724

We gave the following quote in the lecture, but I repeat it here because, so far as what appears to be Marcel’s intolerance regarding homosexuality, will quickly evolve. He later says that he over-stated his feelings in this matter. And at near the conclusion of *The Fugitive*, we will find him making a statement indicating his tolerance or indifference. For far as Proust himself was concerned, his attitude was one of tolerance and compassion. When Marcel’s statements seem to contradict this, we have to remember that he is supposed to be a fairly young, naïve, and heterosexual.

And as once again I sought to discover what could have been the reason for that obstinacy, all of a sudden the memory came back to me of a remark that I had made to her at Balbec on the day she gave me a pencil. As I reproached her for not having allowed me to kiss her, I had told her that I thought a kiss just as natural as I thought it revolting that a woman should have relations with another woman. Alas, perhaps Albertine had remembered it. —*The Fugitive* 5: 749

**Themes:**

**Artist**

It is often said that something may survive of a person after his death, if that person was an artist and put a little of himself into his work. —*The Fugitive* 5: 706

**Love**

Unique, we suppose? She is legion. And yet she is compact and indestructible in our loving eyes, irreplaceable for a long time to come by any other. The truth is that this woman has only raised to life by a sort of magic countless elements of tenderness existing in us already in a fragmentary state, which she has assembled, joined together, effacing every gap between them, and it is we ourselves who by giving her her features
have supplied all the solid matter of the beloved object. Whence it arises that even if we are only one among a thousand to her and perhaps the last of them all, to us she is the only one, the one towards whom our whole life gravitates. —*The Fugitive* 5: 679

For very often, in order that we may discover that we are in love, perhaps indeed in order that we may fall in love, the day of separation must first have come. —*The Fugitive* 5: 683

**Oblivion**

And now she no longer existed anywhere; I could have scoured the earth from pole to pole without finding Albertine; the reality which had closed over her was once more unbroken, had obliterated every trace of the being who had sunk without trace. She was now no more than a name. —*The Fugitive* 5: 688