Characters and Themes

Characters:

Marcel and marriage

Gilberte said to me, “It is an old Balzac which I am swotting up so as to be as well-informed as my uncles, La Fille aux Yeux d’Or. But it is absurd, improbable, nightmarish. For one thing, I suppose a woman might be kept under surveillance in that way by another woman, but surely not by a man.”

“You are wrong, I once knew a woman who was loved by a man who in the end literally imprisoned her; she was never allowed to see anybody, she could only go out with trusted servants.”

“Well, you who are so kind must be horrified at the idea. By the way, we were saying, Robert and I, that you ought to get married. Your wife would improve your health and you would make her happy.”

“No, I have too bad a character.”

“How absurd!”

“I mean it. Besides, I was engaged once. But I couldn’t quite make up my mind to marry the girl—and anyhow she thought better of it herself, because of my undecided and cantankerous character.” This was, in fact, the excessively simple light in which I regarded my adventure with Albertine, now that I saw it only from outside. —Time Regained 6: 23

The Verdurins’ changing taste

The Verdurins, too, swept along by the fatal progress of aestheticism which ends by eating its own tail, said now that they could not endure art nouveau (besides, it came from Munich) or white rooms; they cared only for old French furniture in a somber color-scheme. —Time Regained 6: 57

Mme Verdurin
Mme Verdurin wants Odette to return to the fold. — *Time Regained* 6: 60

“I can’t think why we no longer see her here. She may have fallen out with me, I haven’t with her. After all, what harm have I done her? It was in my house that she met both her husbands. If she wants to come back, let her know that the door is open.” But a prolonged separation, which has the effect of appeasing resentments, in some cases also reawakens feelings of friendship. [. . .] Mme Verdurin waited in vain for Odette, until events that will come to our notice later brought about, for entirely different reasons, what the intercession of the “deserters,” for all their zeal, had been unable to achieve. So rarely do we meet either with easy success or with irreversible defeat. — *Time Regained* 6: 60

**Themes:**

**Homosexuality, love for sale or not**

Saint-Loup had just come back from Balbec. I learnt later, indirectly, that he had made unsuccessful advances to the manager of the restaurant. The latter owed his position to the money he had inherited from M. Nissim Bernard. But wealth in the waiter’s case had brought with it virtue and it was in vain that Saint-Loup had attempted to seduce him. Thus, by a process of compensation, while virtuous young men abandon themselves in their later years to the passions of which they have at length become conscious, promiscuous youths turn into men of principle from whom any Charlus who turns up too late on the strength of old stories will get an unpleasant rebuff. It is all a question of chronology. — *Time Regained* 6: 67-68

**How others see us**

We find here a variation of this maxim expressed in the beginning of the novel: Our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people. — *Swann’s Way* 1: 23

Marcel and Saint-Loup have different opinions of M. and Mme Cambremer: But this was merely an instance of the law that a person is many different persons according to who is judging him, quite apart from the different standards by which different people judge. — *Time Regained* 6: 71
The writer as a mirror

Proust reprises the example of Bergotte as a writer who knows how to observe and, having mastered his craft, becomes a mirror that makes things visible:

For I had already realized long ago that it is not the man with the liveliest mind, the most well-informed, the best supplied with friends and acquaintances, but the one who knows how to become a mirror and in this way can reflect his life, commonplace though it may be, who becomes a Bergotte (even if his contemporaries once thought him less witty than Swann, less erudite than Bréauté), and could one not say as much, as with better reason, of a painter’s models? —Time Regained 6: 44-45