

Time Regained

Plot of the movie As prepared for OLLI Loudoun Class L411 January 27 & February 3, 2009

Video scene 1: ***Manuscript pages of the book.*** In his bed, Proust is dictating the final pages of his book to Céleste Albaret, the woman who took care of his household and secretarial needs the final nine years of his life. Proust the author is near death in 1922, but it is his character Marcel who is thinking back on his life. Marcel looks at his picture collection; he sees Odette, his grandmother, the Verdurins, his mother, his father, the doctor Cottard, Robert de Saint-Loup, a man whose picture he finds out of place in the collection, Gilberte, and himself at an early age.

Video scene 2: ***Morel is paying the piano at an afternoon concert in Paris during the war.*** Marcel is thinking back on a series of events in his life. His memories are a mixed up combination of adult and childhood scenes. This memory is of a concert that was given by Mme Verdurin and Mme Bontemps during the war. Marcel had returned to Paris from years in a sanatorium. Charles Morel is playing the piano. Morel is thinking of enlisting at this time. He is playing a German dance by Beethoven, unwise during wartime. The social climber Mme Verdurin has become one of the queens of wartime society. She is talking to a woman about Odette who has shown up at the concert unannounced. After Odette's husband Charles Swann died, Odette married Comte de Forcheville and became titled as the Comtesse de Forcheville.

Odette opens a door into the past and we see a young Marcel and the magic lantern he enjoyed.

Marcel's mother is reading the legendary Geneviève de Brabant story to him as a child. Geneviève is considered an ancestor of the Guermantes line and other nobility in France.

Marcel, shown as a young man, is in a room customarily used at this time for storing top hats of the guests on the floor.

Then, still a young man, he is shown with Saint-Loup who is shown much older—as he was during the war. Saint-Loup is looking at stereopticon pictures of the war.

Next, Marcel is a teenager again looking down at Gilberte Swann playing on the Tansonville estate lawn of her father Charles Swann. Marcel is thinking of the way he first met 12-year-old Gilbert at Combray where his family lived during the summer and often took walks on a path going the way by Swann's house. At their first meeting she makes what Marcel thinks is a crude gesture.

Still at Tansonville, but at a much later time, an adult Marcel is talking to an adult Gilberte about that first meeting. Gilberte has married the Marquis de Saint-Loup and has become the Marquise de Saint-Loup. They are interrupted to be photographed on the steps of the Tansonville estate where Gilberte and her husband are living. Marcel is both having his picture taken and witnessing the event.

The scene reverts back to author Proust's own bedroom where he is asking Céleste Albaret if there are roses in the house. His mind is thinking back to another bedroom, with roses, when character Marcel stayed with Gilberte and Robert de Saint-Loup at Tansonville perhaps as early as 1903. Memories of his own room at Combray, also with roses, also are mixed in.

Video scene 3: *Saint-Loup and Gilberte are seated at a table.* They are in their home in Tansonville before the war. Saint-Loup is on the point of winding down an affair with the actress Rachel. He is finding he enjoys men more than women. At this time, however, he is on his way to meet Rachel; the man he says he must meet in Paris on business is only a backup for his false story.

On the same visit to Tansonville, Gilberte and Marcel are at tea. Gilberte is unhappy because her husband is unfaithful. They are discussing books: the Goncourt brother's journal of society events and Balzac's novel *Girl with the Eyes of Gold*. This reminds Marcel of Albertine, the love of his life, who has died in a riding accident a few months earlier. Marcel became very jealous of Albertine's friends when she lived with him. Even after her death he is still trying to confirm his fears that Albertine loved women too. He asks Gilberte about a girl Albertine often met with in the park.

Then Marcel tries to find out who the young man was whom he saw Gilberte herself walking with back when they were teenagers and more romantically close to each other. Or perhaps it was a woman Gilberte was with. She offers to tell him but doesn't. Marcel's teacup breaks. Gilberte is very upset and has it preserved. Perhaps it is from the very person Marcel has asked about. His spoon ringing against the teacup and the ringing of the servant bell both remind Marcel of a past incident involving a train trip. In this movie, this is the first appearance of sudden remembrances of things past triggered by sensory impressions: sounds, taste, and texture.

Later in that same visit, Marcel is sleeping in his bedroom at Tansonville. He tries to reach for the bell but the memory of Albertine overwhelms him. He remembers his trip to Venice with his mother, the trip which ended with his decision to marry Albertine.

Video scene 4: *The diverging "ways" in Combray.* Marcel is still remembering the 1903 visit in Tansonville. He is walking with Gilberte in Combray. Notice the separation of the two paths. Note the herbal teashop where they take refuge from the rain. Marcel was sometimes sent by his Aunt Léone in Combray to buy the lime blossom tea that she sipped with her madeleine. The story of the madeleine does not appear in this movie. Gilberte is talking to Marcel about Saint-Loup's lover, the actress Rachel. She points out the man, obviously not in Paris, whom Saint-Loup told Gilberte he was going to visit.

In the teahouse avoiding the rain, Marcel has a very mixed up flash back. He thinks of Gilberte when he first met her on the walk to Tansonville. Then he remembers a time when he was a young man and had received a note from Gilberte inviting him to the Swann house to spend some time together. Françoise refuses to believe the signature starts with a G and is that of Gilberte. She thinks it starts with an A and is from Albertine. But the memory is mixed with a time much later, after Albertine's fatal accident, when an illegible telegram arrives for an adult Marcel. He, wanting to think that Albertine might still be alive and the riding accident report in error, sees the telegram signature starting with an A. He discovers later it was from Gilberte saying she is going to marry Saint-Loup.

There is another confused remembrance: A picture of the actress Rachel is seen in Gilberte's dressing room. She is using it to dress up like Rachel. The scene is a flash forward of a later scene. Then, chronologically earlier, we see Rachel in her dressing room talking about Saint-Loup's overwhelming deliveries of flowers. But it is Marcel in the mirror. Then we see Marcel watching Gilberte crying in the later scene. Continuing the scene in Rachel's theater dressing room, she talks with her hairdresser. Rachel realizes that Saint-Loup is unfaithful to her because he is starting a

relationship with Morel, the musician. Someone brings her strawberries in ether, a recreational drug at the time.

In his house, Saint-Loup is talking to Morel about literature. Saint-Loup thinks Morel will stay the evening but Morel has another assignation and uses his supposed algebra class as a reason to leave. The scene then shifts to Morel and Morel's wife in their house. Morel's wife is polishing his picture and talking about faithfulness. She asks about his algebra class. She asks about his picture of Rachel on the back of the picture she is working on. She is not happy when Morel lies to her.

Video scene 5: *A theater poster advertising a Rachel performance.* The scene begins with a theater poster with picture of Rachel followed by the scene of Gilberte continuing to dress up as Rachel.

Saint-Loup and Marcel are talking in a study in Saint-Loup's house in Tansonville. Saint-Loup is talking about Rachel. Saint-Loup says Rachel told him he was her first love. Marcel knows that Rachel used to work in a brothel in Paris. Saint-Loup gives Marcel a letter from Rachel saying she can't live without Saint-Loup. Saint-Loup asks Marcel to convince Gilberte that he, Saint-Loup, still loves her, despite Rachel.

Gilberte makes a grand appearance looking and acting like Rachel. In the course of things Marcel notices the box with the broken teacup. Then a flash to Gilberte at a later time showing Marcel the repaired cup.

Video scene 6: *A train travels through the fog.* Marcel is on a train, maybe going back to the sanatorium. He reads the Goncourt journal on the train, in particular the description of a Verdurin party as having perfect taste, out-of-the-world food. It has a great effect on Marcel. He thinks the Verdurin are ignorant social climbers but the detailed description by the Goncourt brothers makes him think he has overlooked something in his own writing. He thinks that his own writing skills are lacking in comparison.

Marcel remembers a dinner party at the Verdurin's before the war. At the Verdurin's everything has a story. Mme Verdurin brags about teaching the painter Elstir about flowers. Marcel is going to sleep. Her pearls were white before a fire when they turned black. Cottard is there. Marcel thinks "I knew these vulgar people. I saw through their outward charm." He is depressed about choosing writing as his remaining way to contributing to culture.

There are some scenes through the train window about the war, and of Marcel himself in the snow. But we see he is still in his deathbed looking at his pictures. Then while Marcel continues to look at his pictures there are voices and fragments of scenes from other gatherings; they are talking about Marcel himself — his illness and how he is still writing his book.

Video scene 7: *The champagne table at the same wartime concert.* The scene continues with Mme Verdurin talking about Norpois' writing about the war. Rachel is giving a reading at the party. Wartime fashions are discussed: jewelry made from shrapnel. Morel plays the German dance on the piano. Odette has married a second time, to Comte de Forcheville and has become the Comtesse de Forcheville. She hasn't frequented Mme Verdurin's gatherings recently. Morel announces he is going to volunteer for the army. Odette shows up without an RSVP. Mme de Bontemps is mentioned, she is another wartime hostess and also Albertine's aunt.

Marcel leaves the party with Odette to go to dinner. She gives him a letter from Gilberte who is protecting her home at Tansonville. Odette passes on news about Saint-Loup at the front. They spot Charlus in the restaurant with someone. The restaurant has to close because of an air raid at

the regular time. Odette and Marcel leave the restaurant. Odette fills him in on several of their friends. Cottard is sick. Odette goes her own way.

Video scene 8: ***Marcel wanders around the darkened restaurant still looking for Charlus.*** He meets the son of M. de Foix. Foix talks about his father being friends with Charlus—tarred with the same brush. Foix and Marcel go to another restaurant which caters to younger people. A party is in progress celebrating M. de Mericourt's engagement to Mlle d'Ambresac.

Marcel walks around the dark restaurant and finds Charlus drinking brandy alone. Charlus talks about Odette, the Cottards, Cambremers, Norpois, and Brichot. He asks about Morel. Charlus says Morel is crazy about women. The all-clear sounds.

Video scene 9: ***Marcel is in a café reading the letter from Gilberte.*** Gilberte writes him that she has been at Tansonville two years saving the property from the Germans and saving "her beloved papa's" collections. She talks about the destruction of the area. The battle of Méséglise lasted 8 months with Méséglise being totally destroyed.

The scene sifts to the residence of a dying man. Even though the whole episode of the moneybox was the way Swann discretely paid Odette for her services before they were married, the dying man is not Swann but rather Dr. Cottard. Odette is called Mme de Forcheville when she arrives at the residence. And the woman who receives her says "He'd attended so many deathbeds. Now it was his turn." Moreover, to sharp observers, the man in the bed looks like the man reporting on the effects of a fire on a servant in video scene 6, Dr. Cottard.

The next scene is in a cemetery. Marcel is consoling a woman. The woman is Mme Léontine Cottard and the funeral, during the war, is for her husband Doctor Cottard. Jean-Eves Tadié, in his book *Marcel Proust: a Life*, writes

A scrap of paper, intended for *Le Temps Retrouvé*, also describes Cottard's infidelity, which was discovered, after his death, by his wife; some letters revealed that her husband had always maintained a relationship at regular intervals, with Odette....

The words that Tadié then quotes from the "scrap of paper" are identical to the words Marcel speaks in the Ruiz movie. Also, perceptive observers will recognize the widow as the same woman who received Odette in the previous scene.

Video scene 10: ***Marcel is reading a restaurant menu.*** During his 1916 visit to Paris he is having lunch with Saint-Loup who is back from the front. Notice Saint-Loup's Croix de Guere. Someone mentions Bloch. Flashback to Bloch during an earlier visit. Bloch's fake patriotism. He insults Saint-Loup many times of being privileged dandy playing at war. Saint-Loup and Marcel go to a restaurant at a time before the first flashback. Saint-Loup talks about why he might join the army. For one thing, he believes in the nobility of "manly friendships, far from women." Saint-Loop talks about getting the bellhop at Balbec a good post if he signs up.

Another flashback and forward: Marcel remembers the bellhop at Balbec, probably from his second visit. Marcel talks to the bellhop about Saint-Loup being an invert; then a flash forward to the luncheon scene with Saint-Loup.

Video scene 11: ***Morel talks with Mme Verdurin about migraines.*** It is 1916, during the war. She has her own struggles with the war. She asks if he saw the Baron Charlus the day before. The scene switches to that encounter in a park. Morel and Charlus are talking. Then back to Mme

Verdurin. She plays Vinteuil's septet on a coin machine that receives broadcasts by telephone. Morel looks at his cup. Mme Verdurin has not yet remarried either the second time, to the Duc de Duras, or the third time, to Gilbert, Prince de Guermantes, when she becomes the Princesse de Guermantes, one of the highest-ranking hostesses in the society.

The scene shifts to Marcel still trying to get home. Three drunk soldiers walk by. A man is taking a flash picture of something. It reminds Marcel of a time he as a child and his grandmother had a picture taken. Then he sees Saint-Loup in military uniform standing. Then he remembers another social group having their picture taken at some past time. Then he notices a streetwalker. The son of the Prince de Foix appears. Marcel asks him if he too saw Saint-Loup. Marcel discovers he is standing in front of a male brothel, the very brothel that M. Foix's father died in. Marcel is tired and needs to rest. He goes into the brothel and asks for a bed for a couple hours. The staff is eating and talking about their experiences in the war. The brothel specializes in sadism. Marcel knows Jupien, who is the proprietor, from his years living at the Duc de Guermantes' hotel. Charlus is both owner and client of the brothel.

Video scene 12: *Marcel lying on a bed.* The beating of Charlus episode. Marcel rejoins the staff downstairs. The chair of the Prince de Foix is pointed out to Marcel. Charlus comes down and tips the staff.

Video scene 13: *The all-clear alarm sounds; people are leaving the shelters.* On the way home, Marcel meets his old family servant Françoise in the shelter. Afterward they go to Marcel's lodgings. Saint-Loop has been there searching for his Croix de Guerre. Charlus has been there too and has left a note for him telling where Morel has been located. Marcel visits Morel who is hiding from the police because he has deserted the army. Morel is practicing the violin. We have only seen him as a pianist in this movie but in the novel he is totally a violinist.

Video scene 14: *Church tower at Combray.* A scene at the Guermantes section of the Combray cemetery. It is Saint-Loup's funeral. Marcel thinks back to when he first met Charlus at the grand beach hotel at Balbec. Mme de Villeparisis, the Marquise de Villeparisis, introduced Saint-Loup and Charlus to Marcel's grandmother. Later Marcel's grandmother deliberately cannot see Saint-Loup because she considers him an unsuitable person.

Back at Saint-Loop's funeral, Morel arrives. He is greeted by Mme Verdurin and is followed by the police who intend to arrest him for desertion. Gilberte says he is not welcome at her husband's funeral.

Video scene 15: *Bare tree limbs.* Marcel's carriage in a park. It is 1925, long after the war. Marcel has returned from a different sanatorium. This is his third trip back to Paris and he intends to stay. He is depressed about his prospects for contributing to literary culture. He is thinking about the Goncourt article he read on the train trip to the sanatorium and how it made him realize his lack of literary talent. He thinks about the vanity and falsehood of literature. He is on the way to a matinee given by the new Prince and Princesse de Guermantes—Gilbert, Prince de Guermantes, with the former Mme Verdurin. In the park he meets Jupien, former manager of the male brothel, and the Baron de Charlus, who is very ill and disoriented. Jupien is now the chief caretaker and companion of Charlus. Charlus bows to Mme de Saint-Euverte whom he once hated. Marcel thinks back to Balbec beach when he met Charlus for the first time. Charlus talks to the young Marcel and advises him.

Video scene 16: ***Blue tile advertisement in the park.*** Marcel is still in the park walking to the party at the hotel of the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes. Marcel suddenly remembers walking in Venice with his mother where he stumbled over uneven pavement blocks. This is the start of a series of remembrances, epiphanies, of things past. Director Raoul Ruiz does not show the famous madeleine and lime-blossom tea incident but does mention it briefly in the library scene.

Marcel cannot enter the salon during the performance. While waiting in a library, a servant serves him tea and cakes. Marcel, hearing the clanking of the spoon, remembers the similar sound of railroad workers checking for broken wheels on a train. Wiping his face with a linen napkin reminds him of the restaurant at the grand hotel in Balbec. He remembers the group of boys at Balbec removing a statue. He is gratified that he can remember these things. He thinks the memories are encouraging; they restore his faith in his writing skills. “I can understand and enjoy something when I remember it. Not when it is happening.” He decides he must write a work of art based on his own life and experiences. He finds a book in the library which might be the same as his mother read to him in Combray when she stayed in his room after Swann departed.

Video scene 17: ***Servants opening the performance room.*** Guests are heading for the refreshment room. Marcel meets first the Duchesse de Guermantes, Oriane. In these scenes the director Ruiz often shows first an aged version of Marcel’s friends which then morphs into younger versions played by the actual actresses. This is the way Marcel remembers them and the way we remember them too. Ruiz did not do this for Oriane. Marcel learns that Morel is now highly respected. When he was caught and returned to the front he became a hero several times. Oriane advises Marcel to steer clear of Gilberte. Oriane calls her a tramp.

He next meets Albert Bloch, an old school friend his. Bloch is now going by the name Jacques de Rozier. Marcel introduces Bloch to Gilbert, Prince de Guermantes

Video scene 18: ***Guests begin to leave the refreshment table returning to the concert room.*** A violinist and accompanist enter to play. Marcel remembers when Albertine was a “prisoner” in his house and played the piano for him. In that memory Albertine mentions the time Marcel had noticed Gilberte walking in the park with a young man or woman. It turns out that Gilberte was walking with Lea who was dressed in men’s clothes, another girl who loved women.

Video scene 19: ***Violinist begins to play.*** You can see Morel, the former favorite musician of society, impatiently watching the new young violinist. Marcel thinks back. When the music is over Morel jumps up, looks as if he is going to take a bow, but turns back to applaud.

Video scene 20: ***Guests coming back into the reception room of the party after the concert.*** Marcel meets Gilberte, who says people often confuse her with her mother Odette. She points out the new Princesse de Guermantes, the former Mme Verdurin.

Video scene 21: ***Marcel leaves the main room.*** Marcel meets other people he knows, including Odette and, finally, the man who can’t remember Marcel’s name. Then follows a short scene with a young Marcel walking with Saint-Loup. They are discussing a young man who didn’t know men could be attracted to men. Saint-Loup replies that he doesn’t know about things like that because he is a soldier. Then Marcel meets Robert de Saint-Loop’s and Gilberte’s daughter: Mlle de Saint-Loop. A flashback to Marcel’s first meeting with Odette. When he was very young and once visited his Uncle Adolphe by surprise and met the lady in pink—Odette as a young courtesan. Charles Morel is the son of Uncle Adolphe’s valet.

Video scene 22: *Odette*. She is laughing and talking with a young American woman who wants to speak English with her. Morel sits at the piano playing Beethoven. Memories are becoming more confused in the mind of Marcel the narrator on his deathbed. This memory is from the 1916 wartime party not the 1925 matinee party. Marcel walks into the room used for storing men's hats, only this time Saint-Loup is not present. You can hear Rachel acting in another room. He meets the servant with the key to the sitting room. He hears the children playing again. He sees himself reading and discusses reading with himself. He remembers the stone faces on the sides of, perhaps, tombs in Italy. He is walking in the catacombs in Italy, perhaps Venice.

Video scene 23: *Pennants flapping in the wind at the Balbec beach*. Marcel, or maybe Proust, is thinking back to some of the happiest times of his life—the beach at Balbec and his trip to Italy with his mother. Even at the end he is still trying to get details for his book, the type of embroidery on a woman's cuff.

Author's note: Marcel's story about the sculptor Salvini may have been thought correct at the time. Sebastiano Salvini da Settignano was a Renaissance painter and sculptor, (late 1400; early 1500). In the Campo Santo, a cemetery in Pisa, there is said to be a painting on one wall of a room called *The Triumph of Death* but it is now attributed to the painter brothers Lorenzetti (c. 1340). A source states that on the opposite wall of the same room there is a statue by Salvini.]

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