

PROUST ONLINE FOLDER

Lecture 15

Characters and Themes

Characters:

Charlus

Charlus's roving eye:

“They are my sons,” said Mme de Surgis, with a blush which would not have colored her cheeks had she been shrewder, without necessarily being more virtuous. She would then have understood that the air of absolute indifference or of sarcasm which M. de Charlus displayed towards a young man was no more sincere than the wholly superficial admiration which he showed for a woman expressed his true nature. The woman to whom he could go on indefinitely paying the prettiest compliments might well be jealous of the look which, while talking to her, he shot at a man whom he would pretend afterwards not to have noticed. For that look was different from the looks which M. de Charlus kept for women; a special look, springing from the depths, which even at a party could not help straying naïvely in the direction of the young men, like the look in a tailor’s eye which betrays his profession by immediately fastening upon your attire.

—*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 130-31

Charlus’s scatological tirade against Mme de Saint-Euverte infuriates Marcel, who observes that Mme de Saint-Euverte is a coward: “Unfortunately, in the social and in the political world, the victims are such cowards that one cannot for long remain indignant with their executioners.” —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 135-37

Mamma

People’s remarks (about the grandmother) could not but make Mamma happy . . . like everything else that guaranteed my grandmother survival in people’s hearts. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 230

Saint-Loup on his uncle Charlus and Mme Molé

Saint-Loup on Charlus and Mme Molé; he remains naive about Charlus:

“I gather it was quite a spectacle, he never let her out of his sight for a moment, and didn’t leave her until he’d seen her into her carriage. I bear my uncle no ill will, only I do think it odd that my family council, which has always been so hard on me, should be composed of the very ones who have lived it up the most, beginning with the biggest roisterer of the lot, my uncle Charlus, who is my surrogate guardian, has had more women than Don Juan, and is still carrying on in spite of his age.” —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 123

Themes:

Languishing glances

Of a woman who used to “cast languishing glances” at him, Marcel says:

There is a special kind of look, apparently of recognition, which a young man receives from certain women—and from certain men—only until the day on which they have made his acquaintance and have learned that he is the friend of people with whom they too are intimate. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 164