

PROUST ONLINE FOLDER

Lecture 18

Characters and Themes

Characters:

Charlus

Charlus's outbursts often include scatological comments. We have seen this before and will see it again. Here is the most notable example from *Sodom and Gomorrah*, one that includes the malicious fun that members of the Guermantes family having in playing with the name "Cambremer":

"As for all the little people who call themselves Marquis de Cambremerde or de Gotoblazes, there is no difference between them and the humblest rookie in your regiment. Whether you go and do wee-wee at the Countess Cack's or cack at the Baroness Wee-wee's, it's exactly the same, you will have compromised your reputation and have used a shitty rag instead of toilet paper. Which is unsavory." —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 667

Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin

In a conversation with other guests, Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin insists that Saint-Loup has remained a Dreyfusard, even when Marcel tells her "He was once, but he isn't any longer."

"But I tell you, he himself told me he was a Dreyfusard," said Mme de Cambremer, "—not that there isn't every excuse for him, the Guermantes are half German." —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 673

This comment about the Guermantes being half German will be an important factor during the World War 1 years.

Marquise de Cambremer

Here is another example of her standing the rule of the three adjectives on its

head:

Immediately after the first dinner-party that I had attended at La Raspelière with what was still called at Féterne “the young couple,” albeit M. and Mme de Cambremer were no longer, by any means, in their first youth, the old Marquise had written me one of those letters which one can pick out by their handwriting from among a thousand. She said to me: “Bring your delicious—charming—nice cousin. It will be a delight, a pleasure,” failing always to observe the sequence that the recipient of her letter would naturally have expected. . . .” —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 663

Themes:

Habit & Place Names: The Place

These halts of the little train were a setting for social intercourse like any other. And so Hermenonville, Harambouville, Incarville no longer suggested to me even the rugged grandeurs of the Norman Conquest. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 695

Multiples selves

Who has not observed the phenomenon in women, and even in men, endowed with remarkable intelligence but afflicted with nervous irritability? When they are happy, calm, satisfied with their surroundings, we marvel at their precious gifts; it is the truth, literally, that speaks through their lips. A touch of headache, the slightest prick to their self-esteem, is enough to alter everything. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 667-68

The unknowable other

What a deceptive sense sight is! A human body, even a beloved one, as Albertine’s was, seems to us, from a few yards, from a few inches away, remote from us. And similarly with the soul that inhabits it. —*Sodom and Gomorrah* 4: 719