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Marcel Proust

Within a Budding Grove

Part I

Read by **Neville Jason**



NA308812D

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST • III

1	Inviting the Marquis de Norpois to dinner	9:43
2	M. de Norpois persuades my father to let me go...	8:26
3	My first matinée – a disappointment.	7:30
4	Meeting M. de Norpois before dinner	10:47
5	The church at Balbec	5:50
6	Marriage and the Swanns	12:05
7	'And was Mme Swann's daughter at the dinner?'	6:15
8	My father – unexpected kindnesses	3:14
9	A New Year's Day offering	8:37
10	Neurotic subjects are perhaps less addicted...	9:54
11	Hopes for a welcome at the Swanns' home	9:27
12	The world of Odette Swann	9:27
13	'Le lunch' and Vinteuil's Sonata	7:20
14	Lunch with the writer Bergotte	8:29

15	Further friendship with Bergotte	10:36
16	Worldly advice about women	6:00
17	Good intentions and struggles with my writing	5:27
18	The last time that I called to see Gilberte...	8:08
19	Mme Swann attached great importance to her 'tea'	8:14
20	New Year's Day again, an unhappy anniversary	6:38
21	A windfall of ten thousand francs	8:26
22	Walks with Mme Swann	7:22
23	Place Names: The Place	8:38
24	The church at Balbec	8:21
25	The aftermath – burning with exhaustion	8:58
26	Society at Balbec	4:56
27	The Marquise de Villeparisis	6:56
28	Princesse de Luxembourg in a stately equipage,	10:59

Total time: 3:46:51



Le Grand Hôtel, Cabourg – the inspiration for the setting of Balbec.

Marcel Proust

Within a Budding Grove

Part I

Marcel Proust was born on July 10, 1871. His father, a distinguished professor of medicine, was from a Catholic family, while his mother was Jewish. Although intent on becoming a writer from an early age, Proust was riddled with self-doubt.

During his twenties he co-founded a short-lived review, *Le Banquet*, contributed to *La Revue Blanche* and had his first book published, a collection of essays entitled *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*.

He became an enthusiastic admirer of Ruskin and translated his *Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lilies* into French. A novel, *Jean Santeuil*, was eventually abandoned and only published long after his death, in 1954. For much of his youth he led the life of a man about town, frequenting fashionable Paris drawing rooms and literary salons, which were to form the background of a number of his stories and sketches.

The death of his adored mother in 1905 resulted in a nervous collapse and aggravated his chronic asthma and insomnia. But despite his grief and the sense of loss from which he never recovered, his mother's death freed him

with regard to his homosexual emotional life and allowed him to express his feelings, at least in fictional form, in his work.

In 1907 he moved into an apartment in the Boulevard Haussmann where, in the bedroom which he had had lined with cork to keep out noise, he embarked upon his great work, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*).

This long cycle of autobiographical novels was published in eight sections: *Du Côté de Chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*) in 1913; *A L'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs* (*Within a Budding Grove*) in 1918; *Le Côté de Guermantes I* (*The Guermantes Way I*) in 1920; *Le Côte de Guermantes II* and *Sodom et Gomorrhe* (*Cities of the Plain I*) in 1921; *Sodom et Gomorrhe II* in 1922; *La Prisonnière* (*The Captive*) in 1923; *Albertine Disparue* (*The Sweet Cheat Gone*) in 1925; and *Le Temps Retrouvé* (*Time Regained*) in 1927.

Proust was obliged to publish *Swann's Way* at his own expense, and even after it had appeared he had trouble finding a publisher for the next volume, *A L'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*. However, when it

appeared in 1918 it received considerable acclaim, and was awarded the Prix Goncourt the following year.

By the time Proust died, on November 18, 1922, the first four parts of the cycle had been published, leaving the others to appear posthumously. The English translation from which this abridged version has been prepared, was made by C.K. Scott Moncrieff.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

The two parts of *Within a Budding Grove* form the second book of *Remembrance of Things Past*, which has been described by the critic André Maurois as 'one of the greatest works of the imagination of all time'. Although a form of autobiography, and the narrator, though never named, clearly a fictionalised version of Proust himself, the cycle is, at the same time, undoubtedly and supremely a work of the imagination.

Scholars and literary historians have identified many of the sources of the characters and places which appear in the novel. Illiers, for instance, a small town not far from Chartres where the young Marcel spent his holidays, was the home of his father's family and appears in *Swann's Way* as Combray. Cabourg, a modest seaside resort on the Normandy coast often visited

by the Proust family, was the original of that Balbec to which Marcel and his grandmother travel in *Within a Budding Grove*. Both Swann and Odette had real life counterparts whose photographs exist for us to study, searching for some signs of the characters we know so intimately through their fictional selves.

But although such literary detective work may be fascinating, it is in the final analysis irrelevant, because the world with which Proust presents us is not the external world in which he lived shackled by time and objective reality, but his own internal world, the world of his mind and his spirit, into which he allows us to enter and share his feelings, thoughts, perceptions and memories.

Proust created out of the incidents of his life and the surroundings in which he lived, a magic world, uniquely his own. Perhaps more than any other writer he succeeded in making of the raw material of his life an enduring work of art. Thus, to describe *Remembrance of Things Past* as autobiographical, though it may be accurate, falls as short of the truth as to describe Monet's Nymphéas as paintings of aquatic weeds, or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a tale about the Danish Royal family.

And yet, Proust, great artist that he is, writes on many levels. His descriptions of

clothes, carriages, the interiors of drawing rooms, provide us with vivid images of the period in which he lived. Just as Cezanne saw the world in an apple, so Proust finds heaven in the silk lining of a lady's jacket.

There is no subtler observer than Proust of his social surroundings, which he describes with inimitable humour, (a characteristic of his writing seldom remarked upon, but notably present). His descriptions are distinguished not only by the depth of his psychological understanding, but by his keen observation of the manners and attitudes of different social circles. Indeed, the tension between the *haute bourgeoisie* and the aristocracy is one of the many themes woven into the rich texture of the work, and is the note on which *Within a Budding Grove* ends.

It feels, perhaps, a less than satisfactory ending, which was due possibly to Proust's habit, having finished a book and corrected the proofs, of adding new material to what was already written, and returning packets to the publisher which were considerably bulkier than those that had been sent out. So we may imagine the poor, distracted publisher hurrying into print before the author's fertile mind presented him with yet more *pensées*, even further delaying the approaching deadline for the book's appearance. But we are able to comfort

ourselves with the knowledge that this is not really an ending at all but merely a breaking-off point, before the story continues in Part II.

The previous books

Swann's Way

Combray

Swann's Way is set in the village of Combray, where Marcel and his parents spend the holidays with his grandfather and grandmother in a house belonging to Aunt Léonie, an elderly, bedridden invalid whose only interest is observing the *va-et-vien* of the local inhabitants from her window. She is looked after by her loyal servant Françoise who, after the death of Aunt Léonie, continues to serve Marcel's family at their home in Paris. We discover the child Marcel's hypersensitive nature when the lack of his mother's goodnight kiss prevents him from sleeping and leads to a display of nervous hysteria.

A frequent visitor to the house is their neighbour Charles Swann, who has married a woman of dubious reputation who is not received in 'respectable' houses, such as that of Marcel's family. There are two different directions in which the family take their country walks; one, which skirts land belonging to the aristocratic Guermites family, is known as the Guermites Way,

the other, which passes around the boundaries of Swann's estate, is referred to as Swann's Way, and it is here that on one memorable occasion, Marcel catches his first sight of Odette and her daughter Gilberte with whom Marcel will later fall in love.

Other significant characters are introduced, many of whom reappear in later books. One is the composer Vinteuil, whose daughter's lesbian love affair drives him to an early grave, and whose Sonata later becomes the anthem of Swann and Odette's love. Another is the arch-snob Legrandin, whose reluctance to give Marcel's parents an introduction to his sister who lives near Balbec, causes the family both amusement and irritation.

Throughout the novel runs the theme of the passage of time and the recall of the past, stated here in the famous passage where the narrator describes how a bite of *madeleine* pastry dipped in an infusion of lime flower tea brings flooding back to his consciousness a host of forgotten memories.

Swann in Love

In the chronology of Swann's Way, this second part takes place in an earlier period and chronicles the progress of Swann's love affair with Odette. We are introduced into the Bohemian salon of Madame Verdurin,

whose regular circle include several characters who will appear again in later books; notably the physician Cottard and the painter Elstir. Odette's suspected unfaithfulness causes Swann pain and jealousy and ends with their parting and his seeming loss of love for her.

Place Names: The Place

To our surprise, at the beginning of the second section of the book, we find Swann and Odette married, and their daughter Gilberte the same age as the narrator. Marcel falls in love with Gilberte, and his suffering during the course of their adolescent relationship mirrors that caused to Swann by Odette, as he attempts to capture her elusive spirit, and to will her to return his love.

Many years later, the narrator, now elderly, takes a walk through the autumnal woods of the Bois de Boulogne. His imagination peoples the empty alleys with the elegant throng who would have appeared there in the past. He recalls the proud horses and stylish carriages, and in particular the enchanting figure of Odette, strolling surrounded by a crowd of admiring men. But as the bright vision disappears, blown away by the cold wind of reality, he meditates on the passing of time and the painful impossibility of recapturing the past.

Notes by Neville Jason

The Author

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homosexual emotional life, and allowed him to address homosexuality in his writing, albeit in a manner which treated such experiences as happening to others rather than to himself.

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Notes by Neville Jason

The music on this recording is taken from the MARCO POLO catalogue

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Music programming by Neville Jason

Cover picture: The Hotel Roches Noires at Trouville, by Claude Monet.
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Marcel Proust

Within a Budding Grove Part I

Read by **Neville Jason**

Within a Budding Grove Part I continues Marcel Proust's monumental cycle *Remembrance of Things Past*, which has been described as 'one of the greatest works of imagination of all time'.

As the young narrator succumbs to the charms of the enchanting Gilberte, the author presents us with an unparalleled account of the pangs of adolescent love. Proust has created from the raw material of his life a work of art of unsurpassed originality, filled with his own uniquely sensitive and subtle spirit.

Within a Budding Grove was awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1919.



Neville Jason trained at RADA where he was awarded the Diction Prize by Sir John Gielgud. He has worked with the English Stage Co., the Old Vic Company and the RSC as well as in films and musicals. In television he has appeared in popular serials such as *Maigret*, *Emergency Ward 10* and *Dr Who*, as well as playing classical roles such as *Orestes* and *Horatio*. Formerly a member of the BBC Radio Drama Co., he is frequently to be heard on radio. As well as *Remembrance of Things Past*, he also reads Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* for Naxos AudioBooks.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-088-2

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Abridged by Neville Jason. Produced by Nicolaas Soames
Post-production: Simon Weir, The Classical Recording
Company
Engineer (speech): Alan Smyth, Bucks Audio Cassettes

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Total time
3:46:51