



# Marcel Proust's Search for Lost Time: A Reader's Guide to the Remembrance of Things Past

*Patrick Alexander*

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## **Marcel Proust's Search for Lost Time: A Reader's Guide to the Remembrance of Things Past** Patrick Alexander

An accessible, irreverent guide to one of the most admired--and entertaining--novels of the past century: *Remembrance of Things Past*. There is no other guide like this; a user-friendly and enticing entry into the marvelously enjoyable world of Proust.

At seven volumes, three thousand pages, and more than four hundred characters, as well as a towering reputation as a literary classic, Proust's novel can seem daunting. But though begun a century ago, in 1909, it is in fact as engaging and relevant to our times as ever. Patrick Alexander is passionate about Proust's genius and appeal--he calls the work "outrageously bawdy and extremely funny"--and in his guide he makes it more accessible to the general reader through detailed plot summaries, historical and cultural background, a guide to the fifty most important characters, maps, family trees, illustrations, and a brief biography of Proust. Essential for readers and book groups currently reading Proust and who want help keeping track of the huge cast and intricate plot, this Reader's Guide is also a wonderful introduction for students and new readers and a memory-refresher for long-time fans.

## **Marcel Proust's Search for Lost Time: A Reader's Guide to the Remembrance of Things Past Details**

Date : Published September 22nd 2009 by Vintage (first published August 6th 2007)

ISBN : 9780307472328

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Format : Paperback 385 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Literature, Criticism, Literary Criticism, Reference, Writing, Books About Books

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## From Reader Review Marcel Proust's Search for Lost Time: A Reader's Guide to the Remembrance of Things Past for online ebook

### Aron says

Since reading Proust can take years, this guide provides a useful summary of the books and characters which can serve as a "refresher" between books. I am just about to start book 4, and it's been months since I finished book 3, so the book summaries were a good reminder of "the story thus far."

The short biography and background chapters are also useful. On the whole, though, there aren't any great or even new insights here. Mary Ann Caws book covers most of the same info found in these background chapters with more useful insights and fantastic illustrations.

I'm still waiting for the annotated Proust or something like *Ulysses Seen* (I realize there is a graphic novel version, but *Ulysses Seen* is also annotated).

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### Sean Kottke says

This could be considered a weightier, better-written Cliff's Notes to Proust, but I found it an indispensable companion for my reading of *In Search of Lost Time*, given the fifteen year time span that it took me to read it and the complexity of Proust's project of writing an essay in the form of a novel :) It was helpful for validating my impressions of the big ideas in each segment of the book and refreshing my memory of characters' identities, biographies and relationships. The historical context essays on French history, the Belle Époque and the Dreyfus Affair were also superb for filling in the considerable gaps in my European history education. Unless you have the opportunity to read this novel in the company of a Proust scholar or social network to help digest the epic seven course meal that is *In Search of Lost Time*, this is an essential literary Sherpa.

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### Gerbik says

Over about 5 years, in sporadic but devoted bouts, I've read vol. 1 of Proust twice and volume 2 once (Modern Library "Enright" editions). In beginning vol. 3, THE GUERMANTES WAY, I decided to use this reader's guide to catch up and review what I'd already imbibed. For that purpose it's mostly great, and overall this is a really excellent and inspiring book (as in, it inspires you to delve further into Proust's world). However, there were definitely some very unwelcome spoilers in the synopses of vol. 1 and 2. Granted, there is so much of Proust that it cannot be "ruined" by the early divulgence of a plot-point - plot is not the reason to read Proust, as the first page or so will surely tell you. Nonetheless, there are classic moments of Proustian revelation wherein something will turn out to be entirely other than what you'd thought it to be for the last 1000 pages, and to expose those moments instead of sticking to the basic task of summary is a real mark against this book. Further, it's privately published and at times the editing is inconsistent and the few graphics, while incredibly helpful, are a bit cheap looking. Still, four stars - easily.

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## Jim says

This is a great, non-academic guide to Proust. The book summaries, character descriptions, and background information are presented in clear language and logical order designed for the "readers" of Proust rather than for "researchers".

### After second read:

Confirmed in my opinion that this book is a great support for Proust without having to become a Proust-scholar to understand it.

Having gone through the book twice now, I feel well-prepared for the 2013 year of reading Proust. Will also be looking at additional references to supplement Alexander's work.

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## Ani says

A very useful reference for those like me who keep forgetting who's who and miss things because they lose track of what is going on by the time they get to the end of one of Proust's long sentences. If I was able to maintain focus and read all of Remembrance of Things Past consecutively, maybe I wouldn't need such a guide. But If you're like me and tackle the novels with significant time in-between, then the character outlines, plot synopsis, contextual points and suggestions for further reading in this guide are invaluable. Very easy to digest.

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## Lynne-marie says

Useful to a total newcomer to Proust, and the Character guide a definite plus as one wends one's way through the great work, but as to content, not so hot.

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## Caroline says

Entertaining, and provided some context as well as the idea that things said in one part of the book recur later with more meaning (so you need to pay attention). I might have to take it out of the library again if I ever try to read Lost Time again. His summary of the story reminds me why I only liked the first and last volumes, though.

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## Federico says

Under the spell of À LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU since closing the last volume of the series. Haven't found a book as satisfyingly dense, as creative, as generous, since then. Start a book, leave it, start another, drop it. You know the feeling. Then I found the magical MONSIEUR PROUST'S LIBRAIRY, and now, this wonderful overview of the entire TEMPS PERDU. While I doubt this book can serve as an

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introduction to Proust's masterpiece for someone who has not read it (too many references to events and characters), it is the perfect validation and security blanket needed by readers such as myself, completely at loose ends after having run the gamut of reactions and feelings to what is probably the world's greatest read! This reader's guide is the Coles Notes that Marcel Proust's masterpiece requires.

You get a leisurely précis of the plot (Can one really call it a plot?); full descriptions of the main and secondary characters, a description of the Dreyfus affair (which runs through all seven books of TEMPS PERDU), and a brief history of France, during the troubled times that serve as backdrop to the novel. A most satisfying walk-through!

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### **Richard says**

Proust is the last of the great writers I have struggled with, and having given up several times, I turned to this guide book for help. So far it seems to be working as I'm 120 pages into Proust and surviving. This book has been very helpful, particularly getting through the Overture. I thought it would be full of spoilers (which was why I resisted this approach) but in fact it is not. Anyway if you can't get through or get started with Proust I highly recommend this book.

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### **Chris Flick says**

I wish that I had read this before I read The Remembrance of Things Past. The author provides an excellent summary of the plot, as well as detailed descriptions of each character, and insight into Proust's Paris and the relationship of his book to French history. Now I want to go back and read The Remembrance of Things Past again.

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### **Petra says**

I enjoyed this companion read to Proust's Remembrance of Things Past. I would read a book by Proust, read the chapter in Patrick Alexander's book, etc. If I lost track of a character, I'd check the character list in this book. After finishing Proust, I read the sections on the history of France at the time of Proust, the Dreyfus Affair and Paris in the time of Proust.

This is an interesting and informative addition to reading Proust.

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### **Ann Otto says**

Before attempting Marcel Proust's The Remembrance of Things Past, I decided to do some research. I started with William Carter's biography, Marcel Proust (previously reviewed), and just finished Patrick Alexander's Reader's Guide. There are many guides to Proust's work, but Alexander's is basically a companion to the three-volume Remembrance of Things Past as all are published by Random House Vintage Books. Many current and past authors consider Proust's work the best novel ever written-so a must read for any reader or writer. But at more than 3,000 pages, and with more than 400 characters, one needs a guide. Alexander suggests other guides, including the popular Proust's Way by Roger Shattuck. I'll probably refer to that also before I'm finished with Remembrance. Alexander's book is well organized with synopses for the entire book

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by sections, a review of main characters, the locations of importance in the book, and the historical events and culture of the period. He recommends other sources for understanding the art, music, and written works referred to in the novel.

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### **Alex says**

This was simply a very very very very long Cliff's Notes. It would be helpful as a reference guide, but since it is titled a reader's guide I thought it was going to offer helpful insight as I made my way through Proust's enormous and somewhat treacherous text. Rather, it gave boring summaries of everything I just read, including very lengthy (often whole page) quotes. I just read it, so why would I want to read it again here? The best section was a historical guide to Proust's Paris, including sexuality at the time and the importance of the Dreyfus case. Had more of the book been devoted to this it would have merited more stars, and its title as a true reader's guide.

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### **Devon says**

Alright as a reference for overview of the plot and biographical info on Proust. Stylistically quite bad though, and I didn't agree with Alexander about which parts of the novel were most compelling and which were boring. Also, horrible as a reading companion if you are reading the novel for the first time, as there are huge spoilers the whole way along... DO NOT READ WITHOUT COMPLETING THE NOVEL

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### **Braden says**

I'm not entirely sure why this book was written. It comes off as a slightly heftier Cliff's Notes version of In Search of Lost Time, with the bulk of the pages devoted to plot synopses and character descriptions. To devote so much space to the plot and characters of Proust is to miss the point entirely. While this might be useful as a bedside reference to help sort out the numerous characters in Proust (and for that reason I gave it two stars instead of less), it falls far short of the ground covered in works such as Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time that actually put effort into analysis of the text and not merely synopsis.

For Proust enthusiasts, don't bother. Much of the reference material in this volume can be found in the appendices of the Modern Library edition of In Search of Lost Time, anyway. For those looking for a quick introduction to Proust, this might be useful but again, it overlooks so much of what makes Proust so amazing that it is almost detrimental to Alexander's stated purpose of wanting to popularize Proust.

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