The Life and Work of Marcel Proust

Read by Neville Jason
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Reynaldo Hahn sings Offrande, 1909</th>
<th>8:00</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Three fictional creative artists:</td>
<td>6:52</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Proust’s episodes of ‘involuntary memory’</td>
<td>3:53</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The Franco-Prussian War</td>
<td>2:06</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The birth of Marcel Proust, 10 January 1871</td>
<td>6:30</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The goodnight kiss</td>
<td>11:47</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Military service</td>
<td>5:50</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>The first short story</td>
<td>4:30</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Influential drawing rooms</td>
<td>3:49</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac</td>
<td>8:08</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reynaldo Hahn</td>
<td>13:43</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Lucien Daudet</td>
<td>2:05</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>The Dreyfus Case</td>
<td>2:16</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>The Dreyfus Case (cont.)</td>
<td>3:53</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Pleasures and Days</td>
<td>6:31</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Jean Santeuil, the early, autobiographical novel</td>
<td>6:34</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Anna de Noailles</td>
<td>3:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Marcel Proust and John Ruskin</td>
<td>7:55</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>More work: Ruskin’s The Bible of Amiens</td>
<td>5:01</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The move to 102 Boulevard Haussmann</td>
<td>5:12</td>
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Time Lost, Time Regained, involuntary memory 5:35
Alfred Agostinelli 7:36
Sergei Diaghilev, Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso 9:20
Looking for a publisher 8:23
The manuscript is delivered to Grasset 4:47
Proust and Agostinelli 4:47
Proust and Agostinelli (cont.) 1:27
The publication of Swann’s Way 9:57
The First World War begins, 3 August 1914 7:50
The year of 1915 7:56
The poet Paul Morand 3:07
Proust begins to go out again into the world 4:58
Proust changes publishers 6:00
The Armistice 2:34
Within a Budding Grove published in 1919, 6:22
The meeting with James Joyce 2:15
Proust and Music 6:30
The Guermantes Way Part II 4:09
Colette remembers 1:22
People and characters 7:47
Worsening health and death 7:07

Total time: 3:58:18
Few authors have attracted as many biographers as Marcel Proust. And yet, to the best of my knowledge, *The Life and Work of Marcel Proust* has the distinction of being the first audio-biography.

To avoid any confusion, it may be wise to point out that Proust’s great work, *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, was originally translated into English by Charles K. Scott-Moncrieff and published in 1922 under the title, *Remembrance of Things Past*. It has subsequently been retranslated by Terence Kilmartin and appeared in 1981 as *In Search of Lost Time*. Naxos AudioBooks’ abridged version has been prepared from the Scott-Moncrieff text (except for *Time Regained*, which was translated by myself), and references to the work in this audio-biography use the original English title.

My own contact with Proust began when as a seventeen-year-old schoolboy I first read *Swann’s Way*. I could not have guessed then that many years into the future Proust would take over my life for a period of some six years, during which time I would abridge and record his three-thousand-page masterpiece, *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Having once embarked on this daunting but exciting task, it occurred to me that although the people on whom Proust based his characters were no longer living, the places he wrote about were still there, and so I set off to see them.

I was delighted to discover that Illiers, where Marcel Proust spent his holidays as a child, and which figures in the book as Combray, is now marked on the maps as Illiers-Combray, in official recognition of the reason for this sleepy village’s wider fame.

In a narrow street just off the market square is the house in which Proust’s father, Adrien Proust, was born, and further along is the house of his aunt Elisabeth, now a Proust museum, where Elisabeth’s fictional counterpart, the bedridden Aunt Léonie, watched the world from her bedroom window. Around the corner from the house is a little boulangerie with a sign in the window announcing proudly that ‘This is where Aunt Léonie bought her madeleines’. It only occurs to me as I buy a packet of the scallop-shaped cakes, that Aunt Léonie is a...
creature of fiction. Never mind, Aunt Elisabeth might well have patronised the establishment, or one very like it. Up the hill there a real house called Tansonville, the name of the house occupied by Charles Swann, and later by his daughter Gilberte and her husband Robert de Saint-Loup, and further on there is a real village called Méréglise, a name almost identical to the fictional Méséglise.

Water lilies are still reflected in the glassy surface of the river Loir, which in the book bears the more poetic name the Vivonne, and beyond the stream lies the Pré Catalan, the enchanting park created by Proust’s horticulturally-minded Uncle Jules.

Each spring a group of members of The Society of Friends of Marcel Proust gather in Illiers on a Proustian pilgrimage, following a tradition originated by Marcel Proust’s brother Robert who, during the 1930s, started bringing friends here every May to enjoy the hawthorn blossom. I join them as they climb the gently sloping hawthorn path which borders the Pré Catalan. In the book this is the route to Charles Swann’s estate – Swann’s Way. From time to time the little group comes to a halt while someone reads out loud an excerpt from the text which describes the scene before us.

My own pilgrimage has an additional aim – to record a radio programme on Proust for the BBC, and so having said goodbye to my fellow pilgrims, I travel on to Cabourg, a seaside resort on the Normandy coast, and the original of the fictional Balbec. Here the Grand Hotel in all its Edwardian splendour has remained much as Proust describes it as the setting for his summer holidays with his grandmother. The great glass windows of the restaurant look out over the promenade to the beach below, and with a little imagination that group of budding young girls in bikinis is transformed into the little band of ‘jeunes filles en fleurs’ outlined against the sea.

On to Paris, and 102 Boulevard Haussmann, Proust’s home for many years, where he wrote so much of Remembrance of Things Past. The building is still owned by the same bank that purchased it from Proust’s aunt, when her inconsiderate decision to sell it forced him to move. His bedroom is still there, but unfurnished, and to see the room as it was, I visit the Musée Carnavalet, where his bed, chaise-longue and other effects are displayed in a reconstruction of the famous cork-lined room.

A walk to the gardens of the Champs
Elysées brings me to an area with a sign which tells me I am in the Allée Marcel Proust. Children chase each other – perhaps playing the modern equivalent of ‘prisoner’s base’, the game played by Gilberte and her friends. This is where the real Marcel played as a child with the real Marie de Benardaky, with whom he fell in love, just as the fictional Marcel falls in love with the fictional Gilberte Swann.

In the real world the same spaces are occupied now by different people. Time has moved on, but places remain, and we have the privilege of entering, not only the imaginary world Proust created, but that portion of the real world which had a part in its creation. His presence in the places he passed through left behind a trace of magic, and we see them differently, because we see them through his eyes. One day those places, too, will have crumbled into dust, as will we ourselves, and the space we now consider ours will be occupied by others. But as long as civilization remains, those who come after will be able to share Proust’s vision and enter into his world. Proust was aware that art is the only true reality, and that through his creations the artist continues to live after his death, beyond space and beyond time.

Notes by Neville Jason
Marcel Proust (right) and his younger brother Robert, c. 1877
A Proust Chronology

1871, July 10  
Marcel Proust born

1873, May 24  
Robert Proust born

1878-1886  
holiday visits to Illiers (now Illiers-Combray)

1880, spring  
Marcel’s first attack of asthma

1882-1888  
attends the Lycée Condorcet

1888  
contributes to La Revue Lilas and La Revue Verte

1889-1890  
military service at Orléans

1890, January 3  
death of maternal grandmother, Adèle Weil

1890, August  
holiday at Cabourg

1890, November  
enrols as a student in the Faculty of Law and at the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques

1890, November-1891, September  
contributes to Le Mensuel

1892, March  
first edition of Le Banquet

1893, March  
last edition of Le Banquet

1893, April 13  
meets Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac

1893  
contributes to La Revue Blanche, degree in law

1894, May 22  
meets Reynaldo Hahn

1894, December  
trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus

1895, March  
degree in philosophy

1895, summer  
holiday in Brittany with Reynaldo Hahn

1896  
publication of Les Plaisirs et Les Jours, writing Jean Santeuil

1897, February 6  
duel with Jean Lorrain

1898, January 13  
Emile Zola’s article J’Accuse published

1899  
begins translation of Ruskin’s Our Fathers Have Told Us (La Bible d’Amiens)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>summer holiday at Evian-les-Bains, visits the Brancovan family at Amphion</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>June and October visits Venice</td>
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<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>abandons work on <em>Jean Santeuil</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>November 26 death of Adrien Proust</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td>publication of <em>La Bible d’Amiens</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>September 26 death of Jeanne Proust</td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>June publication of <em>Sesame and Lilies (Sésame et les Lys)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>July Dreyfus declared innocent</td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>December moves to 102 Boulevard Haussmann</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>summer holiday at Cabourg, where he will spend the next seven summers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Meets Alfred Agostinelli</td>
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<td>1908-09</td>
<td>begins writing <em>A la Recherche du Temps Perdu</em></td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>Agostinelli re-enters Proust’s life. Employs Celeste Albaret</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>November <em>Du Côté de Chez Swann (Swann’s Way)</em> published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>May 30 Alfred Agostinelli dies in an aircraft accident</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>June publication of <em>A l’Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs</em> (Within a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Budding Grove), <em>Pastiche et Melanges</em> and new edition of <em>Swann’s Way</em></td>
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<td>1919</td>
<td>June moves to 8, rue Laurent-Pichat</td>
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<td>1919</td>
<td>December <em>Within a Budding Grove</em> awarded the Prix Goncourt</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>October moves to 44, rue Hamelin</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>October <em>Le Côté de Guermantes I (The Guermantes Way I)</em> published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>April *Le Côté de Guermantes II and Sodom et Gomorrhe I (Cities of the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Plain I)* published</td>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>December 11 death of Montesquiou</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>April <em>Sodom et Gomorrhe II</em> published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922, October</td>
<td>awarded the Légion d’Honneur</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922, November 18</td>
<td>death of Marcel Proust</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td><em>La Prisonnière</em> (The Captive) published</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Albertine Disparue</em> (<em>The Fugitive/The Sweet Cheat Gone</em>) published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td><em>Le Temps Retrouvé</em> (Time Regained) published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td><em>Jean Santeuil</em> published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td><em>Contre Sainte-Beuve</em> (Against Sainte-Beuve) published</td>
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Some further biographical reading available in English:

**Marcel Proust, A Life** by Jean-Yves Tadié, Viking Penguin 2000
**Marcel Proust, A Life** by William C. Carter, Yale University Press 2000
**Marcel Proust** by George D. Painter, Chatto & Windus 1959, 1965, revised Chatto & Windus Pimlico 1996
**Proust** by Edmund White, Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1999
**Proust** by Samuel Beckett, Grove Press Inc./Chatto & Windus 1931
**Proust: A Biography** by Ronald Hayman, Heinemann 1990
**Monsieur Proust** by Céleste Albaret, Collins/McGraw-Hill 1976
**The Quest for Proust** by André Maurois, Jonathan Cape 1950
**The Translation of Memories** by P.F. Prestwich, Peter Owen 1999
**Proust** by William Sansom, Thames and Hudson 1973
Reynaldo Hahn, 1898

Proust during military service at Orléans, 1889-90
Acknowledgements

Just as the abridged readings of Remembrance of Things Past may lead some listeners to read the original novel in its entirety, it may be that this spoken word overview of Proust’s life and work will encourage some to turn to the more comprehensive works which are available. The most important of these are Marcel Proust, A Life, by Jean-Yves Tadié and Marcel Proust, A Life, by William Carter. Both are works of enormous diligence and scholarship, and I freely admit my indebtedness to them in the preparation of this spoken word biography. I should also like to acknowledge my debt to George D. Painter’s Marcel Proust, which I found deeply moving, and which has waited thirty-five years before being surpassed in scope and accuracy by the works of Tadié and Carter. Other works on Proust I have consulted for the purpose of this work are included in the brief bibliography.

My gratitude is also due to those who have helped, directly or indirectly, towards the completion of this project; to Nicolas Soames who commissioned it, and who has led me patiently and skilfully not only through this recording, but through twelve studio sessions of Remembrance of Things Past; to Dr. Cynthia Gamble, who has been immensely helpful in providing texts, checking the accuracy of certain facts, and in advising me in the translation of Proust’s poetry; to Dr. Hugh Griffiths for reading the text and making useful suggestions, to John Theocharis for making the BBC programme Proust’s Way such a memorable event, to Anne Borrell and Mireille Naturel of Les Amis de Marcel Proust for showing me around Illiers-Combray, to Barbara Bray and Emily Eels for introducing me to Proust’s Paris. Finally, my most important ‘thank you’ is to my wife Gillian for her support and encouragement throughout this project, as in all my endeavours.

Notes by Neville Jason
The music was programmed by Neville Jason

**HAHN** Offrande, Paris, 1919
Reynaldo Hahn, baryton

**HAHN** La barchèta from Venezia – in Venetian dialect by Pietro Buratti
Reynaldo Hahn, Paris circa 1911

**DEBUSSY** Voici ce qu’il écrit à son frère Pélléas
(Act 1 Sc 2)
Maggie Teyte (soprano); Gerald Moore, piano
London, 5 October 1947

Historic recordings supplied by Peter Dempsey
Restored by K&A Productions

Other music on this CD taken from the NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues

**ČIURLIONIS** Piano Works
Mûza Rubackyté  8.223549

**FRANCK** Violin Sonata in A Major
Takako Nishizaki, Violin; Jenő Jandó, Piano  8.550417

**SAINT-SAËNS** French Violin Sonatas
Dong-Suk Kang, Violin; Pascal Devoyon, Piano  8.550276
Le Grand Hôtel, Cabourg in Proust’s day
The final page of Remembrance of Things Past in Proust’s hand
Céleste Albaret, 1914
Elaine Claxton has worked extensively in the theatre, including London’s Royal National Theatre where she appeared in The Children’s Hour, The Machine Wreckers and Richard II. She has twice been a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company during which time she participated in over 200 broadcasts. She also appears on Naxos AudioBooks’ Lady Windermere’s Fan.

Gordon Griffin has recorded over 220 audiobooks. His vast range includes nine Catherine Cookson novels, books by Melvyn Bragg, David Lodge, and the entire Wycliffe series by W J Burley. Gordon also appears regularly on television and in films. He was dialogue coach (Geordie) on Byker Grove and Kavanagh QC.

Denys Hawthorne’s long and distinguished career has encompassed extensive work in theatre, television and film both in England and Ireland. Drama has included Shakespeare and Chekhov, as well as many contemporary plays, while he has appeared in popular TV series including Inspector Morse and Father Ted, and The Russia House and Emma on the wide screen. Throughout, radio performance has been a constant theme, notably in drama and poetry.
Neville Jason
The Life and Work of Marcel Proust

Read by Neville Jason

This first audio-biography of Marcel Proust tells the story of one of the world’s most original and admired literary geniuses. From his youth in the salons of Belle Époque Paris, we follow his progress through to his later years when, as a near recluse, he writes through the nights in his cork-lined bedroom. In his great autobiographical novel *Remembrance of Things Past*, separating fact from fiction becomes a fascinating game of literary detection.

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, TV and musicals. He is frequently heard on radio. As well as *Remembrance of Things Past*, he also reads Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, *Far From The Madding Crowd*, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* for Naxos AudioBooks.


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