

## Document Citation

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# TIME REGAINED

(LE TEMPS RETROUVE)

(PERIOD DRAMA — FRENCH-ITALIAN)

A Gemini Films, France 2 Cinema, Les Films du Lendemain, Blu Cinematografica production in association with Madragoa Filmes with participation of Canal Plus, CNC. (International sales: President Films, Paris.) Produced by Paulo Branco.

Directed by Raoul Ruiz. Screenplay, Gilles Taurand, Ruiz, based on "Remembrance of Things Past" by Marcel Proust. Camera (color), Ricardo Aronovich; editor, Denise de Casabianca; music, Jorge Arriagada; production designer, Bruno Beauge; costume designers, Gabriella Pescucci, Caroline de Vivaise; sound (Digital DTS, Dolby Digital), Philippe Morel; line producer, Philippe Saal; associate producers, Leo Pescarolo, Massimo Ferrero; assistant director, Antoine Beau; casting, Richard Rousseau. **Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (competing)**, May 16, 1999. Running time: 158 MIN.

Odette ..... Catherine Deneuve  
Gilberte ..... Emmanuelle Beart  
Morel ..... Vincent Perez  
Charlus ..... John Malkovich  
Saint-Loup ..... Pascal Greggory  
Narrator ..... Marcello Mazzarella  
Madame Verdurin .... Marie-France Pisier  
Albertine ..... Chiara Mastroianni  
Madame de Farcy ..... Arielle Dombasle

With: Edith Scob, Elsa Zylberstein, Christian Vadim, Dominique Labourier, Philippe Morier-Genoud, Melvil Poupaud, Mathilde Seigner, Jacques Peiller, Helene Surgere, Andre Engel, Georges du Fresne, Monique Melinand, Laurence Fevrier, Jean-Francois Balmer.

By DAVID ROONEY

**W**hile the task of putting Proust on the screen has defeated directors like Joseph Losey and Luchino Visconti, Chilean maverick Raoul Ruiz takes a valiant stab at it in "Time Regained." Not unsuccessful in reproducing the eclectic spirit of "Remembrance of Things Past," this handsomely mounted period piece nonetheless leaves audiences unfamiliar with that magnum opus at a distinct disadvantage in connecting the dots of its dense, multicharacter semblance of plot. The film is engrossing despite its chaotically fragmented form, and its high-profile cast should open doors in select Euro salles.

A long rumination on the contorted paths of memory and the blurred lines between reality and imagination, the film centers on Proust's quest to construct a bridge between past — both real and literary — and present as he lies on his death bed in 1922 tended by his maid Celeste.

In an unconstrained, eccentric

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style, tripping in and out of the past without regard to chronology and tossing in occasional surreal images, Ruiz revisits the writer's entire life in two hours, 40 minutes.

But as the closing dialogue points out, "To review it would take an eternity." That may be the main limitation here in adapting such substantial source material. While each of the colorful characters is brought to the fore at various points, the feeling remains that only a fraction of the vast reserves of information about them is being tapped, rendering them as superficial as the *haute societe* world they inhabit.

That decadent world is in a sense the film's protagonist, and Ruiz paints it as a nest of vain, glamorous vipers and faithless philanderers. Proust himself (Marcello Mazzarella) moves easily among the characters as narrator, observer and confidant. The principal figures include Odette (Catherine Deneuve), who has used her beauty to get what she wants in life; her stepdaughter, Gilberte (Emmanuelle Beart), described as "a sterilized rose" by one acquaintance; and her husband, Saint-Loup (Pascale Gregory), who betrays her with both a theater floozy (Elsa Zylberstein) and a moody young pianist, Morel (Vincent Perez).

Saint-Loup's passion is for the army, which he perceives as a noble world of men from which women are excluded. The war — which for the most part remains only a topic for discussion and fails to touch directly on the Parisians' lives — eventually brings about Saint-Loup's death, freeing Gilberte from her unhappy marriage. Sharing Saint-Loup's taste for young men, but in more extreme forms, is his sexually depraved uncle, Baron de Charlus (John Malkovich).

Moments from Proust's childhood frequently surface, but the main focus is his social and literary life as an adult, mapping the changing shape of upper-class French salon society while at the same time examining the writer's doubts about his work and his difficulty in obtaining a firm grasp of the life he wishes to recount.

This last concern is in essence the element that ultimately ties the film together. The rambling journey of memory associations has no shape or narrative momentum but to a great extent works as an entertaining, mosaic-like social comedy.

Given that characters lapse in and out of view throughout the film, this is very much an ensemble effort, with each character given only a limited opportunity to shine.

Deneuve impresses with her usual poise and cool allure; Beart makes Gilberte a hardened but still human beauty; Perez is amusingly huffy when Morel's musical talents are eclipsed; and Malkovich is louche and languid, superciliously appraising a receiving line of bordel-lo boys.

Also notable is Marie-France Pisier, as a frivolous socialite who continues gossiping gaily even during funerals, and Italian actor Mazzarella, a remarkable Proust look-alike, who achieves an admirable balance in making the writer both an opaque and a tangible presence. Other characters, including Proust's great love, Albertine (Chiara Mastroianni), are barely developed.

While it doesn't have the eye-popping sumptuousness of bigger-budget costumers, the film's production values are polished, particularly the elegant costumes by Gabriella Pescucci and Caroline de Vivaise. Ruiz's playful spirit is at work in occasional visual tricks such as revolving the spectators during a music recital.



**PROUSTIAN PAIR:** Vincent Perez and John Malkovich are featured in Chilean helmer Raoul Ruiz's Cannes Fest pic "Time Regained."