

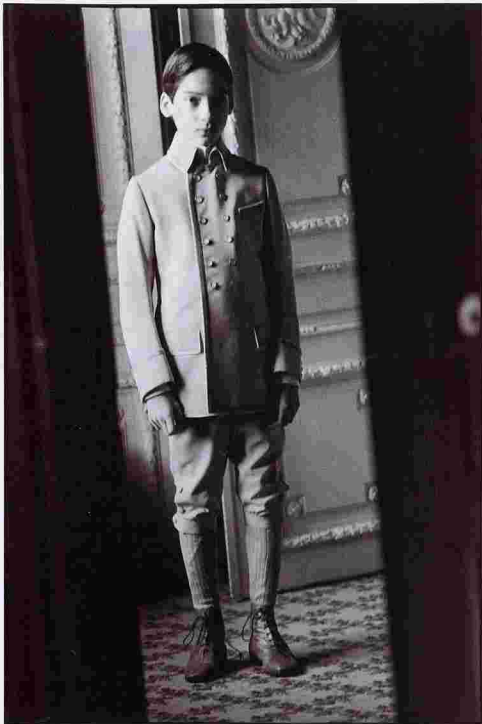
THE French were a while coming to Proust. As late as the nineteen-fifties, when most Americans already took it for granted that he was among the greatest of modern writers, a lot of people in France saw him as a slightly secondary figure—the way we might have seen a long-winded Scott Fitzgerald, or a Truman Capote who actually got his book written. In the past twenty-five years, though, all that has changed, and Proust has taken his deserved place among the French as at once the most magnanimous and the most exquisite of their novelists. And so the release of the first successful movie translation of Proust's "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu" has made for an event in Paris. There is almost universal agreement that Raul Ruiz's adaptation of "Le Temps Retrouvé," Proust's last volume, ought to have won the Palme d'Or at Cannes. The film—whose title in English will be "Time Regained"—was released in France three days after its début in Cannes, and has found an audience that at one cinema in Paris stretches out along the Boulevard Saint-Germain near the Odéon every night.

Previous movie attempts (by Harold Pinter, Joseph Losey, Luchino Visconti, and Volker Schlöndorff, most notably) to invade the Proust territory had foundered on the beaches of "Swann in Love." Ruiz, a Chilean director of select reputation, who had made more than fifty little-seen films, had the crazy-smart idea of adapting, instead, the unpromising valedictory last volume, in which the war comes, and everyone dies, suffers, or is shown to have been living a life of pitiful

illusion. In principle, this should have been like trying to mount a production of "Hamlet" in which the entire story is set off by the exchange of poisoned foils. But, since Proust's purpose was to make every poisoned foil tossed between his characters imply the whole

pressed, in the best sense of the term.")

Although in Paris the success of the film has generally been held to be the consequence of its jump-cutting, surrealist mise en scène, its visual style can sometimes seem more Cocteau than Proust, and its real triumph may lie in the roster of performances that Ruiz has coaxed out of his actors, particularly the women: Marie-France Pisier as a comically hysterical and beautifully aged Madame Verdurin; Catherine Deneuve, seemingly miscast as Odette, yet rightly, deeply cold; and, best of all, the unbelievably beautiful Emmanuelle Béart as the seductive, heartbreaking, and broken-hearted Gilberte. No curtain of late-modern irony (or, truth be told, emancipation) seems to separate these actresses from the lives of the women of the last fin de siècle whom they impersonate. Among the men, John Malkovich creates a furious, dagger-sharp Baron de Charlus, the aesthetic dictator, and Pascal Greggory is a tortured and noble Saint-Loup. The matchlessly high-hearted and funny and tender narrator himself is impersonated by the Italian actor Marcello Mazzarella, a scarily perfect



plot, this finale-first approach works.

Ruiz has suddenly become a personage in Paris. He has even been paid the compliment of being asked to fill out the "Proust questionnaire," a who-are-you? parlor game that the real Marcel played as a young man. (Ruiz announced to his new public that his favorite characters in literature are "Don Quichotte, Jean Valjean, and Jude l'Obscur," and that his current state of mind is "tired and de-

look-alike. The playing of the company brings forward the delicious social comedy of the book—the Molière in Proust—in a bracing clear air of real places and faces. The camera, someone once said, always falsifies the present since it forgets the remembering present. The gift on the other side of that curse is that in the eternal present of movies, with the remembering present gone, the past just lives. —ADAM GOPNIK



Previous page: Marcello Mazzarella is the narrator in Raul Ruiz's movie of "Le Temps Retrouvé." Above: Georges du Fresne plays the young Marcel. Opposite: Catherine Deneuve is Odette de Crécy.