

Marcel Proust And “A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu”

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Marcel Proust (1871- 1922) the great French writer is the author of the most famous novel “Remembrance of the things past”. This book has not only brought fame to the writer but the translator of this book, Charles Kenneth Scott. Moncrieff, has also achieved eternal fame. There is contradiction about the exact number of its volumes and different people have given different numbers. Some say it comprises of 15 volumes, others believe the number of volumes is 16 and some say there are 17 volumes but at last, it is published in seven volumes and contains 4000 pages. According to some literary critics it is one of the grand victories of the literary world.

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This book published during 14 years i.e. from 1913 to 1927 and five years after the death of the author, publication of the last volumes took place. Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff completed the English translation in 9 years from 1922 to 1931 with the title “Remembrance of things past”. According to some critics, Charles has so nicely translated the work of Marcel Proust that it has elevated Proust’s work and the admirers of English Literature will always remember him.

In Marcel Proust’s book “Remembrance of things past”, time is not indicated by present, past and future nor it indicates a fixed time-time which can be calculated by minutes and hours and indicates a particular time period is not preferable. Because the time indicated here is like the time in Henri Bergson’s philosophy and Proust follows it. This time cannot be mentally

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determined but a human mind can ascertain its existence and height, and does not possess the mechanical norms and apparatus to measure it.

The individual's condition, his emotions at that time and his reaction when the incident took place indicates the long and short span of time. It is because of this that Proust in the novel "Remembrance of things past" quits from extrospection to introspection. He like the Russian author Dastayuvski instead of writing his own views enters the souls of his novel's characters and he pictures their emotional reactions. However, the difference between Proust and Dastayuski is that Dastayuvski was inclined towards unusual and ailing souls and Proust was fond of normal humans and balanced temperament.

Proust in this book has registered his experiences and through them, he has inherited his life experiences. A small incident is also reminiscent and it takes him to his past. He in this novel talks about the impossibility of achieving the mortal life, absurd human struggles, dominance of sin, disappointment and lack of love from its actual means. He through this concludes that a human life possesses an important significance because life in spite of all difficulties and problems is full of inner beauties and pleasures for a human. The author has a unique style in writing this book and he has followed other author's adopting classicism and symbolism style. Dennis Saurat 1946, Professor of French Literature in the University of London and the author of the book "Modern French Literature", giving his views regarding Proust in one of the chapters of his book has raised him equal in rank to William Shakespeare in French Literature. He has also praised Proust's expertise in writing a novel and has considered him as the grand novelist after Balzac (p.116)

Marcel Proust by having an inward view of a human, acts like an expert psychologist and is proficient in the psychoanalysis of a normal, healthy human being and he with his deep insight notes down the thoughts and behaviors of the characters of his novel. He penetrates their unconscious domain and does not forget the inner characteristics of his novel's characters. He very efficiently delivers the human thoughts to his readers.

According to Brewster and Burrell the Professors of Columbia University and the author of "Modern World Fiction" Proust is in search of his salvation, he is in search of such values, that time and changeability can easily eliminate them (p.142)

This salvation can be mystical and leads to inner peace which forces a human towards eternity. Proust in this book has implicitly criticized on the social conditions of France in the

end of the 19th century. His novel is a lament. It is an epic of human life where the author tries to explain through his psychological analysis and with the topics like art, life, society, former association and its memoirs, he wants to change all mortal things into immortal and brightens all that is dark and ambiguous.

The complete novel "Remembrance of the things past" is composed from seven books each consist a separate topic. These books are as follows:

1. Its French title "Ducote De Chez Swan" and English version "Swans Way". This is an autobiography of a lover named Swan and is related to the childhood of Marcel Proust. Vintage published the English translation and it consists 325 pages.
2. The French book named "Al Ombre Des Jeunes Fillesefenfleurs" and its English version is "Within Abudding Grove" which in 1918 got a literary prize. This book is related to Marcel Proust's teenage. The English version published by Vintage consists 386 pages.
3. The book is named "Le cote De Guermantes. It's English version "Guermantes Way" is related to nobles, named The Guermantes . This story is about Proust's failure in love with a beautiful and noble girl named Douches Dogarmant. Chatto and Windus-London published the English translation of this book in two volumes. It consists 824 pages.
4. The fourth book named "Sodome Et Gommorhe" and its English version is "Cities of the Plain". In this book Proust looks upon the French society of the late 19th century as two sinful sects of Torah named Sodome and Gommorhe, who benefit from their sins and rebellious actions and are captives of their own corruptions. Its English translation was published by Vintage and consists 378 pages.
5. This book is named "La prisonniere" in French and its English version is "The Captive". This is the story of the various incidents which took place during the author's teenage and Albertine's difficulties in Proust's apartment. Its English translation was published by Vintage and comprises 289 pages.
6. The French name of this book is "Albertine Disparue" and its English version is "The Sweet Cheat Gone". This book is about the death of Albertine-the author's lover and analysis of Proust's love for his beloved.
7. In French this book is named "Le temps retrouve" and its English version is "The Past recaptured". It is related to the initial years of the First World War and the vast changes occurring in the lives of the characters of this novel. The author with deep thought and

self analysis succeeds opening new vista for former associational thoughts and make his perished life immortal with an artistic approach. The English translation of this book was published by Vintage which consists 272 pages.

The author in most of the above prescribed books has tried to explain the failure and bewilderment of his novel's characters, and in some books he has related past events of his teenage and youth. Proust is optimistic but at times he seems to be pessimistic and with despair. Sometimes he talks about the moral degradation and homosexuality in his own society, and sometimes he unveils the inner self of humans, their jealousies, suspicions and disappointments, and shows the decline of a human.

In his seventh book he has discussed the consequences of the war, the duties and betrayals and moreover the changes which results from it.

The everlasting book of Marcel Proust "Remembrance of things past" consists of some important features, discussed as under:

The language of this book is quite difficult. It seems that throughout the seven volumes, he has not looked upon his writing style nor he has tried to improve it by writing shorter sentences, which could be perceived easily. At times, his long and tiresome sentences cover the whole page without an end.

His mind does not have a specific direction, it seems he does not have a centralized thought therefore he could not concentrate in one direction or on one topic. Many literary critics are of the view that if Marcel Proust had been alive after the publication of his book he would have definitely omitted some portions of his book and this way he would have condensed the seven volumes in five volumes.

Denis Saurat (1946) in the book "Modern French Literature"(pp.95-97) says that prolixity in the writings of French novelists started from the mid of 18th century. Only ten percent of the subject matter is worth reading and the rest is just an idle talk. For example, the famous book of Victor Hugo named "Les Miserable". If some text from this book is omitted it will not effect the book nor the authors art of writing. Proust is also an eminent author having his own style. His innovation in the style of French literature has attracted many French and world fame writers like Jacques De Lacretelle, Andre Gide, Virginia Woolf and Anthony Powel.

Several issues have come in discussion in Proust's book for example the story of

Drifouse the accused officer who was exiled to an evil island due to the allegation of a spy. Proust considered this officer sinless, with the help of other nobles like Amil Zola and France who stood against the French Government, with the help of Drifouse's defence attorney M. Labori wrote an affidavit and got it signed by Drifouse's supporters who were mostly bourgeois. At last, the trial of the accused officer was revised and it led to his emancipation.

The second important topic in the seventh volume of his book is regarding the effects of the First World War and its pathetic results such as death, vagrancy and misery, hunger and poverty, captivity and torture, ill usage and expediency of human race.

Marcel Proust was born in a Jewish family but he was a Christian. Proust's house was free of religious problems because his Jewish mother and Christian father had decided to avoid religious discussions in their home. Proust's life shows that Christianity had much influence on his life, but it is very strange that the concept of God exist neither in his writings nor in his belief. However, we can say that the author has concern for beauty and therefore wherever there is beauty his God is present there.

Freud's unconscious mind, Buddhist Nirvana inclination, and his way of thought regarding time was influenced by his philosophy teacher Henri Bergson. All this has enabled him to benefit his writings in a vigilant manner and while understanding a human he should concentrate on the human's inner self and not his outer self.

Proust was a profound writer and an intellectual thinker who was influenced by different literary schools of thoughts and scholars. For example in satirical writing and humor he was impressed by two famous personalities of the 17th century namely Due de Louis de Rouvroy Saint-Simone (1675-1755) the famous scholar and writer in the court of Louie 14th and Sevigne Chantal (1626-1696). Both these scholars belonged to the school of New Classicism. Marquise Marie De Rabutines the French writer of the 17th century who was one of the pioneers of the school of Romanticism - Francois Rene De Chateaubriand (1768-1848) who wrote a book named Memoires D outre-Tombe.

This book comprises of the writers autobiography from his childhood until the time he became a famous writer. Without doubt, this book has influenced Proust while writing his own book "Remembrance of things past". Among the other writers who has impressed Proust is Gerard de Nerval (1808-1855) the followers of Symbolism and Surrealism in the 19th century.

This writer has written a book in poetry named “Les filles de feu-Sylive” and Proust has adapted some part of his autobiography from a story of this book named Sylive.

Gostav flober, Sharil Augastin, Sunbo and Hepolitan the writers from the school of Realism and Onara dobalzak and Amil Zola the writers from the school of Naturalism have also influenced Proust. Through these two writers of the school of Naturalism Proust has come to know about the problems of Torah and the influence of society on the life of a human.

Feodor Dostoyevsky by writing two books “The Brothers Karamazov” and “Crime and Punishment” opted the trend of inner analysis and this style attracted Proust towards the complicated world of human mind, and he used Freud’s method of ‘Psychoanalysis’.

Proust’s familiarity with Amanoil Kent’s thoughts inspired him to benefit from the school of Symbolism. Amanoel Kent also inspired the two French poets Arthor Rambo and Sharil Bodler. Proust’s book reflects the influence of almost all the important literary schools of thought. But the philosopher who really changed Proust’s thinking was Henri Bergson with his book “Time and Free Will”.

When this book was published Proust did not know its writer but he had read the book. He was so much inspired by this book that he got admission at the University of Sorbian in the department of Political Science, and there he became acquainted with the French philosopher and hence he decided to base his book on Bergson’s hypothesis which means the plan of passing time, continuous movement and transformation of an individuals personality, retrieval of the unconscious mind in the novel “Remembrance of the things past” which like all the famous books of the world helps in increasing the readers knowledge regarding the vast external world.

Proust criticizes a social group and introduces it to us where there are arrogant people who are self satisfied. Also opportunists and conspirators and at the same time we are introduced to cultural people who step forward to gain perfection and at the same time they experience decline. But all this provides awareness with the outer world and the main theme of “Remembrance of the things past” is to make us aware of the inner world. This book with various dimensions helps us to know ourselves. There are fewer readers who after reading this book thoroughly do not retrieve their past and do not explore their inner self.

At last Marcel Proust died on 18th November 1922 due to asthma. He was suffering from this disease since nine years and this had led him to isolation. At the time of his death he was 51 years old.

He was a very fortunate child who was born in a rich bourgeois family on 10th July 1871. His father was a famous medical doctor named Dr Adrien Proust and his mother Jeanne Weil was a rich Jewish lady. They lived a well of life. Proust had inherited curiosity in scientific problems from his father and love for beauty, sensitiveness and short temper from his mother. He was a bachelor through his life and never loved a woman whole heartedly. He due to asthma did not like unusual noise and therefore he had covered his house with cork sheets to avoid noise. He never opened the windows of his room so that his house may not get the smell of food. He arranged food from hotel and he used to feel depressed at night due to loneliness and hard work. He would only walk on the road when there was no hustle and bustle.

He spent most of his time writing his book “Remembrance of the things past”. Like all other famous scholars the first volume of Marcel Proust’s book was not accepted by any publisher. The publishers did not consider his book for publication and believed that it would not get them a big sale. Eventually Proust published it on his own expenditure. Due to the First World War (1914) there was ample time to edit this book and this editing continued till the end of his life. If he would have lived long it is supposed that he would have brought ample changes in his text and this would have decreased the number of volumes of his book.

It is said that Malarma, the poet, writer and pioneer of the school of Symbolism was in search of eternity, but could never reach it. Marcel Proust is of the opinion that if somebody would be in search of the remembrance of the things past he would always be in search of eternity. According to many critics Proust unlike Malarma has reached eternity. Apart from this he in his book by reaching the unconscious of all the people in France and in the world, has reached eternity and therefore his work is considered equally successful in the literary works of the world. (Encyclopedia Britannica 1974,p.131)

Conclusion

Marcel Proust, the prominent French writer, passed away in 1922, leaving France in a big shock. He had turned into a legendary writer before death for his book, Remembrance of Things Past. Proust mixed story writing with psychology and as a pioneer in this field found access to human’s unconscious. Unlike Dastayovski, the Russian writer, who brought up the psychological characteristics of abnormal people in his works, Proust’s work is a unique report about thoughts and behaviors of normal humans. To create this masterpiece, Proust sacrificed everything even his health but proved his talent in writing and turned into a universal scholar whose memory and name will remain in the collective conscious of all supporters of human issues.

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