



THE RELEVANCE OF DREAMS IN THE PROUSTIAN WORLD

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ABSTRACT The world literary scene has offered many great master pieces in different languages , from legendary icons since time immemorial , like Dante Alighieri , William Shakespeare , Lord Byron , Victor Hugo and Goethe to name a few. The French not to be left behind ,have dominated European literature through the centuries, with stalwarts such as Racine, Molière, Voltaire , Victor Hugo, Flaubert and Proust and many more whose literary prowess captures the imagination of every literary aficionado even today . Marcel Proust, is certainly one of the French writers of late XIX century who has immortalised himself with his literary contribution of epic proportions “*A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*” translated as “*In search of lost time*” : A master piece, where Proust effectively uses his memories as tools to arrest time which is fleeing with his life and in the process render his life immortal. In this colourful landscape of life , seen through the lens of memories , dreams too become an expression of his memories .

KEYWORDS :

The master story teller that Marcel Proust was in the French literary world , he continues to hold his readers and critics in awe , even after a century of his premature demise , with his enormous contribution to the world of literature.

A literary genius who has often been described as a sick recluse , he has given his readers a humungous task of reading and decoding the various characters and plots in his epic novel contained in 7 volumes titled “*A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*” or “*In search of lost time*”.

Though often criticised for his long , torturous sentences which often left the reader , a gargantuan challenge of completing the reading at a stretch and compelled them to read it a second time.

His style led his readers into a world of emotions , morality , immortality of senses and memories and he wove many sub- plots into one major literary master piece until he succumbed to asthma in 1922.

Though he has often been credited with the discovery of human emotions linked to some Freudian elements of neuro-psychology , like the small piece of madeleine dipped into tea , which overwhelms the author and unleashes a flood of memories in his mind , of his childhood at Combray , today described as the Proustian memory or Proustian moment.

Marcel Proust was born on 10th July 1871, at Auteuil –Paris . His father Adrien Proust , a catholic and a Doctor by profession , was largely responsible for his practice of the catholic faith which was later rejected by Proust himself . Thanks to his mother, Jeanne Clémence , a rich Jew from Alsace , whose literary knowledge helped young Proust to hone his skills in literature .

The genius that he was , his story telling has always evoked mixed reactions from his avid readers to his fiercest critics .

His penchant for recording every minute detail , presents his readers a plateau , a room , a dream , an expectation in each of its earnest minute detail . It is this detailing which lures the readers into the Proustian world of emotions as experienced by the author himself or the narrator who is Proust himself.

Though few of his literary contemporaries and critics would love to disagree that he is one of the few in the French literary scenario who created epics out of their own lives and thereby immortalised their lives , he acted as a catalyst to a certain literary trend which was carried forward by Gide and Genet, famous French authors amongst others in the XX century .

Dissecting every detail with scientific precision

One aspect which has been applauded by many is his eye for dissecting every minute detail which is incessant throughout the novel and urges the reader to live the life as experienced by the narrator and it is

possible for the reader to associate these details in their lives.

Proust, the narrator has constantly delved into the nuances of human emotions and completely dissected every fibre of human emotion , be it in a relationship , a desire , a craving , a fear or even a very rudimentary state of existence in a world filled with senses , often depicted in dreams . He is like a surgeon, who uses his scalpel with precision while dissecting human emotions.

Dreams beyond reality

Proust relies heavily on dreams as a mechanism to transport himself to a world beyond realistic achievement and uses it as a staircase to lead himself into a world , hitherto unexplored , full of expectation, though surreal and at times , forbidden for the mundane world .

Proust was , in his childhood , afraid of the dark and often suffered from Insomnia which is very vividly depicted in the introductory passages of *Du Côté de chez Swann* - Part 1 .

Following is an extract from chapter 1 where he describes his agonising moments trying to fall asleep and when he succeeded in his quest to sleep, it was only to be interrupted by short and terrifying dreams which forced him to bury his head in his pillow and revisit the world of dreams once again.

“ Or ,perhaps , while I was asleep I had returned without the least effort to an earlier stage in my life , now for ever outgrown;and had come under the thrall of one of my childish terrors, such as that old terror of my great uncle's pulling my curls , which was effectively dispelled on the day- the dawn of a new era to me- on which they were finally cropped from my head . I had forgotten that event during my sleep ; I remembered it again immediately I had succeeded in making myself wake up to escape my great –uncle's fingers; still, as a measure of precaution , I would bury the whole of my head in the pillow before returning to the world of dreams ”¹.

Dreams conjure in humans , as portrayed by Proust , every possible human sentiment beginning with fear to expectations to cravings and forbidden desires. Marcel Proust says: “*If a little dreaming is dangerous , the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more , to dream all the time*”.

Dreams have always found a very strong , overwhelming resonance in human beings , than other animal species , a phenomenon which has been greatly studied by psychologists and philosophers alike.

A dream is more of a visual companion to man which visits him , at no specific interval but recalled from the abyss of the mind to pleasure him or haunt him until man ceases to exist .

The tendency to dream is more of a visual experience which is innate in human beings from a certain age. But, what is the mechanism that triggers the need to dream in humans ?

The answer perhaps lies in Proust's reflection of time that is a fugitive which is constantly fleeing and dream is a mechanism to halt its flight, and by recalling these memories, they are imprisoned for life.

Human mind : An enigma

Proust plunges into the unimaginable profundity of the human mind which is a complex collection of both events from the unconscious mind and the conscious mind, which are stored as memories and brought back to life, in dreams.

Dreams, do they manifest as a precursor to the future, as a premonition of an event that is waiting to occur in the future in Proust's master piece?

Proust's world of dreams is not meant to predict the unforeseen. It does not become an intuitive instrument to peer into the distant dark unknown future.

On the contrary, Dreams in Proust's works, are mechanisms to freeze the past events in life, against the flight of time in relation to space in the form of memories and to become a part of the immortal.

A Proustian dream is meant to be a visual impression like an art form recorded in the unconscious mind to recover the part that has flown away with time and to recapture it.

A Proustian memory or a Proustian moment is often described as a very simple mundane act in everyday life but which assumes great significance as it unleashes a flood of memories, hitherto hidden in the deepest unconscious memory of the human mind, at a later time in life. A simple routine action of dipping a Madeleine (tea cake) into a cup of tea and the flood of emotions overwhelming Proust with his childhood memories at Combray. Could it be perceived as a memory or a dream?

Proust perceives dreams as a visual impression recorded in our unconscious mind and that remains there as a memory. It gets dragged back from its hidden depths to become a dream, an action that has no specific trigger and no time frame, but reappears from time to time to evoke feelings of happiness as the walk in the park which was a delight for the young Proust or a horrible wretched feeling as he had experienced it when his merciless great uncle's prying fingers tugged at his curls.

Proust's dreams neither hinge only on some terrifying incident from his past childhood nor of a memorable pleasant walk in the park with his mother just to have a glimpse of Odette, a beautiful lady.

His dreams do not depict his fears always but are also an indication of his young adolescent physiological needs manifesting as fantasies, begging to be set free from the confines of his imagination, leading to a gratification of his senses as a common mortal.

Following is an extract of a dream which highlights his dreams as a childhood fantasy seeking to liberate his mind and body from the confines of morality and to live those few rare and cherished moments, at least in his dreams:

" Sometimes, too, just as eve was created from a rib of Adam, so a woman would come into existence while I was sleeping, conceived from some strain in the position of my limbs. Formed by the appetite that I was on the point of gratifying, she it was, I imagined, who offered me that gratification. My body, conscious that its own warmth was permeating hers, would strive to become one with her; and I would awake. The rest of humanity seemed very remote in comparison with this woman whose company I had left but a moment ago; my cheek was still warm with her kiss, my body bent beneath the weight of hers. If, as would sometimes happen, she had the appearance of some woman whom I had known in waking hours, I would abandon myself altogether to the sole quest of her, like people who set out on a journey to see with their own eyes, some city that they have always longed to visit, and imagine that they can taste in reality what has charmed their fancy. And then, gradually, the memory of her would dissolve and vanish, until I had forgotten the maiden of my dream."

Conclusion

It is proved beyond doubt, through his works, that Proust is one of the rare literary giants who could even fathom the limits of memories and dreams and save them for eternity in his colossal novel to ensure that he stays on in the minds of literary enthusiasts.

At a time when Victorian values (moral values during the Victorian

era) crept into literary works and stifled creative liberty under the guise of morality, Proust was perhaps one of the few writers who unflinchingly dared to venture into a domain which was hitherto unexplored in literature, until then, in France and elsewhere in the world. An aspect which will certainly lead to more research studies in the future.