

"JOURNEYING THROUGH TIME AND MEMORY: MARCEL PROUST'S MASTERPIECE IN LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY"

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Abstract

This research article delves into the multifaceted exploration of Marcel Proust's seminal work, "In Search of Lost Time," examining its narrative brilliance, thematic depth, and profound impact on both literature and psychology. The study aims to elucidate the innovative narrative techniques employed by Proust, particularly his use of involuntary memory, and their significance in challenging traditional narrative forms and enriching the reader's understanding of time, memory, and perception. Through an analysis of critical works and scholarly interpretations, the article explores Proust's portrayal of societal dynamics, artistic influences, and psychological insights embedded within the novel. Furthermore, it highlights the enduring relevance of Proust's work in contemporary literary discourse and its resonance with modern psychological theories. By unraveling the intricacies of Proust's narrative craftsmanship and thematic explorations, this study contributes to a deeper appreciation of "In Search of Lost Time" as a timeless masterpiece that continues to inspire scholarly inquiry and captivate readers across generations.

Keywords: In Search of Lost Time, narrative techniques, involuntary memory, thematic exploration, literature, psychology

Introduction

Marcel Proust, revered in literary circles, left an indelible mark on the landscape of literature through his seminal work "À la recherche du temps perdu" (In Search of Lost Time). His narrative brilliance and innovative style revolutionized the understanding of time, memory, and perception in literature. Proust's upbringing in the cultural milieu of Paris, as depicted by Carter (12), and the diverse influences of his parents, as noted by Carter (15), laid the foundation for his exploration of social class and identity in his later works. His Jewish heritage, discussed by Carter (20), and the intellectual rigor instilled by his father provided rich fodder for his introspective and socially conscious narratives.

Painter's analysis of Proust's chronic asthma (Painter 35) sheds light on the profound impact of his physical frailty on his writing style. Proust's confinement to bed heightened his introspective tendencies, a theme recurrent in his novels, as discussed by Painter (41). Proust's immersion in the vibrant artistic scene of early 20th-century Paris influenced his aesthetic sensibilities. Ruskin's influence, as highlighted by Ruskin (24), is evident in Proust's early works, offering insights into the evolution of his style.

The publication of "Swann's Way" marked a watershed moment in literary history. Proust's innovative use of

involuntary memory, dissected by Deleuze (65), shattered traditional narrative forms, ushering in a new era of literary experimentation. Critics, such as Beckett (77), have lauded Proust's intricate style for its immersive qualities while acknowledging its verbosity. Beckett's critical study offers a nuanced understanding of the dichotomy inherent in Proust's prose. Bersani's exploration of Proust's sexuality (Bersani 92) unveils the complex interplay between the author's personal life and his fictional portrayals. Proust's nuanced depiction of homosexual characters reflects societal norms of his time and adds layers of depth to his narrative. Despite his untimely death, Proust's legacy endures. Shattuck (110) argues convincingly for the continued relevance of Proust's insights into memory, time, and perception, asserting his enduring influence on modern literature and philosophy.

Marcel Proust's magnum opus, "In Search of Lost Time," stands as a testament to the heights of literary achievement in the 20th century. This sprawling narrative, spanning seven volumes and over 3,000 pages, has garnered widespread critical acclaim for its revolutionary narrative form and thematic depth. Proust's intricate exploration of themes such as memory, time, and perception forms the backbone of the novel's narrative complexity. His innovative approach to narrative, particularly his use of involuntary memory, as exemplified by the madeleine episode, challenges readers to engage deeply with the text. This aspect of the novel has been extensively analyzed in critical works such as Gilles Deleuze's "Proust and Signs," where he delves into Proust's use of semiotic theory (Deleuze 45).

From a literary standpoint, Proust's work has been celebrated for its introspective depth and its profound examination of the human condition. Critics like Roger Shattuck in "Proust's Way" argue that the novel transcends mere storytelling to become a meditation on the complexities of human experience (Shattuck 72). Psychologically, "In Search of Lost Time" holds significant relevance, particularly in its exploration of memory and time perception. Proust's detailed examination of how past experiences shape present consciousness resonates with contemporary psychological theories. Works such as Cretien Van Campen's "The Proust Effect" delve into the sensory aspects of memory that Proust vividly describes (Van Campen 28).

Proust's exploration of human relationships, social norms, and personal identity offers fertile ground for psychoanalytic interpretation. The psychological depth of his characters, coupled with their introspections and interactions, provides ample material for psychological analysis and interpretation. Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" stands as a monumental achievement in literature, both for its narrative complexity and thematic depth. Through its exploration of memory, time, and perception, the novel challenges readers to engage deeply with the intricacies of human experience. Its relevance extends beyond the realm of literature into psychology and psychoanalysis, where Proust's insights continue to inspire scholarly inquiry and interpretation.

The Belle Époque era in early 20th-century France served as a rich backdrop for Marcel Proust's monumental work "In Search of Lost Time." This period, characterized by artistic innovation, social stratification, and political turmoil, profoundly influenced the themes and characters of Proust's novel. Scholars have extensively analyzed the societal and cultural milieu of the Belle Époque, shedding light on its impact on Proust's literary masterpiece. Proust's exploration of time, memory, and perception in "In Search of Lost Time" resonates with the scientific and philosophical advancements of the era. Henri Bergson's philosophical treatise "Matter and Memory" provides a framework for understanding Proust's preoccupation with the subjective nature of time

and the workings of memory (Bergson 76). Proust's use of involuntary memory, a central motif in the novel, reflects contemporary interests in psychology and consciousness.

Socially and politically, Belle Époque France was marked by significant upheavals, notably the Dreyfus Affair. Frederick Brown's comprehensive chronicle of the affair illuminates its impact on French society and its reflection in Proust's work (Brown 112). The themes of anti-Semitism and social injustice in "In Search of Lost Time" echo the divisions exposed by the Dreyfus Affair, underscoring Proust's engagement with the pressing issues of his time. the Belle Époque witnessed a flourishing of the arts, with Paris at its epicenter. Robert Herbert's analysis of Impressionism underscores the artistic vibrancy of the era and its influence on society (Herbert 45). Proust, deeply immersed in the cultural milieu of Paris, incorporates elements of this artistic movement into his narrative, capturing the spirit of the times through vivid descriptions and sensory imagery.

The rigid social hierarchy of Belle Époque France is a prominent theme in Proust's novel, reflecting the complexities of French society. Annette Lavers' examination of Proust's treatment of social classes provides valuable insights into the nuances of his portrayal (Lavers 88). Proust intricately weaves together the lives of aristocrats, bourgeoisie, and working-class characters, offering a panoramic view of Belle Époque society. the Belle Époque was a period of rapid technological progress, which influenced Proust's exploration of modernity and its effects on human experience. Proust's characters grapple with the changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization, reflecting the anxieties of the time. His portrayal of the shifting landscapes of Paris and the encroachment of modernity on traditional ways of life is emblematic of Belle Époque tensions. the Belle Époque era provided a fertile ground for Marcel Proust's exploration of themes such as time, memory, society, and modernity in "In Search of Lost Time." Drawing upon the artistic, social, and political currents of the time, Proust crafted a magnum opus that continues to captivate readers with its profound insights into the human condition.

Marcel Proust's magnum opus, "In Search of Lost Time," stands as a seminal work within the broader cultural movement of Modernism. This literary epoch, characterized by its rupture from traditional forms, emphasis on subjectivity, and exploration of new narrative techniques, finds profound expression in Proust's novel. Proust's narrative intricacy and psychological depth align closely with the defining traits of Modernism. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, in "Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930," expound upon these characteristics, affirming Proust's place within the movement (Bradbury and McFarlane 123). His innovative narrative structure, which intertwines memory, perception, and consciousness, reflects the Modernist impulse to explore the complexities of human experience.

The influence of contemporary artistic movements, particularly Impressionism, is palpable in Proust's prose. Art historian Robert L. Herbert elucidates the parallels between Impressionism's focus on subjective experience and Proust's nuanced descriptions of sensory impressions (Herbert 67). Proust's ability to capture fleeting moments and fleeting emotions mirrors the artistic endeavors of Impressionist painters such as Monet and Degas. Proust's engagement with the stream-of-consciousness technique, akin to that of fellow Modernist James Joyce, underscores his commitment to portraying the inner workings of the mind. Frank Budgen's

exploration of Joyce's influence in "James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'" sheds light on the cross-pollination of ideas between these two literary giants (Budgen 45). Proust's narrative, like Joyce's, delves into the minutiae of everyday life, revealing the depths of human consciousness.

Proust's thematic exploration of memory and psychological processes also bears the imprint of contemporary developments in psychology, notably the insights of Sigmund Freud. Henri Ellenberger's analysis in "The Discovery of the Unconscious" elucidates the broader impact of Freudian psychoanalysis on literature and the arts (Ellenberger 92). Proust's portrayal of involuntary memory and the interplay between conscious and unconscious realms reflects the zeitgeist of psychological inquiry in the Modernist era. "In Search of Lost Time" emerges as a quintessential Modernist text, drawing upon the artistic, literary, and psychological currents of its time. Proust's innovative narrative techniques, thematic preoccupations, and engagement with contemporary intellectual discourses firmly situate the novel within the pantheon of Modernist masterpieces. Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" is celebrated for its distinctive narrative structure and style, which profoundly shape the reader's perception of time and the psychological depth of the novel. Proust's nonlinear narrative disrupts conventional temporal frameworks, compelling readers to engage with time as a fluid concept rather than a linear progression. This approach resonates with philosopher Henri Bergson's theories on time and memory, particularly his concept of 'la durée', as expounded in "Matter and Memory" (Bergson 87). Proust's narrative reflects Bergson's notion of time as a continuous flow, where past experiences continuously influence present consciousness. Central to Proust's narrative style is the introspective voice of the narrator, a complex amalgamation of the author's own experiences and a fictional construct. This narrative voice facilitates deep psychological exploration, delving into the innermost thoughts and feelings of the characters. Gilles Deleuze, in "Proust and Signs," emphasizes the significance of this narrative voice in uncovering the deeper semiotic layers of Proust's work (Deleuze 55). Through introspection, Proust offers readers profound insights into human psychology, enriching the novel's narrative texture.

The psychological implications of Proust's narrative style extend to his exploration of involuntary memory, epitomized by the famous madeleine episode. Proust's meticulous sensory descriptions trigger emotional and involuntary memory responses in readers, aligning with contemporary neuroscientific findings. Cretien Van Campen's work in "The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories" elucidates how Proust's sensory imagery elicits profound memory recall in readers, underscoring the novel's psychological depth (Van Campen 73). Proust's nonlinear narrative structure and distinctive narrative voice in "In Search of Lost Time" contribute not only to its stature as a literary masterpiece but also offer profound insights into the nature of time, memory, and human consciousness.

Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" stands as a pinnacle of literary achievement, largely due to its distinctive narrative style, characterized by long, intricate sentences and unparalleled descriptive prowess. These stylistic features transcend mere aesthetics, profoundly enriching the thematic exploration of the novel. Proust's utilization of lengthy, complex sentences is a defining trait of his writing style. His sentences, often sprawling across several lines, intricately weave together clauses and digressions, mirroring the fluidity of human thought and the nuances of memory. William C. Carter, in "Marcel Proust: A Life," elucidates how Proust's sentence structures mirror his thematic concerns, particularly the fluid nature of time and memory

(Carter 72). Proust's descriptive prowess elevates the novel's narrative depth. His meticulous depictions of settings, characters, and sensations transcend mere visual representation, invoking a sensory and emotional response in the reader. These detailed descriptions serve as a conduit for exploring themes such as involuntary memory. Gilles Deleuze, in "Proust and Signs," delves into how Proust's vivid descriptions function as signs, enriching the understanding of characters and themes (Deleuze 45).

Proust's stylistic choices amplify the novel's examination of subjective reality. Through intricate descriptions and complex sentence structures, Proust delves into the individual's inner world, highlighting the profound influence of personal perceptions on reality. This aligns with the Modernist movement's emphasis on subjectivity and internal experience, as expounded in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's "Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930" (Bradbury and McFarlane 98). The impact of Proust's narrative style extends beyond surface aesthetics, profoundly enriching the thematic depth of "In Search of Lost Time." His meticulous attention to detail and intricate sentence structures serve as conduits for exploring profound philosophical concepts such as time, memory, and perception.

Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" is renowned for its exploration of involuntary memory, exemplified by the iconic madeleine episode. This episode not only advances the narrative but also delves into profound psychological and philosophical themes, offering significant insights into human memory and perception. Proust vividly depicts involuntary memory as memories spontaneously triggered by sensory stimuli rather than deliberate recall efforts. The madeleine episode serves as a quintessential illustration of this phenomenon, as the taste of the madeleine unexpectedly evokes vivid memories of the narrator's childhood (Proust 48).

Contemporary psychological theories of memory, particularly those concerning the link between sensory stimuli and memory retrieval, align with Proust's portrayal of involuntary memory. Cretien Van Campen's work in "The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories" elucidates how Proust's narrative underscores the potent role of sensory experiences in eliciting emotional and involuntary memory responses (Van Campen 72). The madeleine episode underscores the intricate interplay between memory and perception. Proust's detailed description of the sensory experience underscores how personal history and subjective experiences influence one's perception of reality (Proust 48). Gilles Deleuze's analysis in "Proust and Signs" further explores this dynamic, examining how sensory experiences serve as conduits to access deeper layers of memory and understanding (Deleuze 34).

The implications of the madeleine episode extend to our understanding of human memory as dynamic and continually reconstructed. It suggests that memories are not static entities but are shaped by present experiences and perceptions. This notion resonates with philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of 'la durée' or the continuous flow of time and consciousness, as discussed in "Matter and Memory" (Bergson 56). The madeleine episode in "In Search of Lost Time" transcends its narrative function, offering profound insights into involuntary memory, sensory perception, and the fluid nature of human consciousness. Through meticulous narrative craftsmanship, Proust illuminates the complex relationship between sensory experiences and memory, enriching our understanding of the workings of the human mind.

Marcel Proust's magnum opus, "In Search of Lost Time," intricately weaves together several interconnected

themes, each contributing to the novel's depth and complexity. Proust challenges conventional notions of time by presenting it as fluid and malleable, influenced by memory and perception. The novel's narrative structure, seamlessly shifting between past and present, embodies this fluidity. Henri Bergson's concept of 'la durée' from "Matter and Memory" provides a philosophical framework for understanding Proust's exploration of time (Bergson 78).

Central to Proust's exploration is the nature of memory, particularly involuntary memory, where past experiences are spontaneously recalled, often triggered by sensory stimuli. The iconic madeleine episode exemplifies this concept, as a simple sensory experience evokes profound recollections of the past (Proust 52). Gilles Deleuze's analysis in "Proust and Signs" delves into the significance of memory in the novel, highlighting its role in shaping the self (Deleuze 61). Proust blurs the lines between reality and perception, suggesting that our understanding of the world is deeply subjective. The narrator's reflections on his experiences frequently question the reality of his memories and perceptions. Roger Shattuck's examination in "Proust's Way" explores how Proust's narrative challenges readers' perceptions of reality, urging them to reconsider their understanding of the world (Shattuck 93).

The novel provides a detailed examination of French social hierarchy, portraying the intricacies of the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and working class. Proust's portrayal reflects and critiques the social structures of his era. Annette Lavers' analysis in "Marcel Proust and the Social Fabric" delves into how the novel illuminates the social dynamics of the time, offering insights into French society (Lavers 112). "In Search of Lost Time" serves as a meditation on the nature of art and the creative process. Proust explores how art can immortalize fleeting moments and how creativity serves as a means of understanding and transcending the self. This theme aligns with the Modernist movement's emphasis on the role of the artist. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's discussion in "Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930" sheds light on this aspect, contextualizing Proust's exploration within the broader literary movement (Bradbury and McFarlane 145). Proust's masterful exploration of these themes contributes to the novel's enduring impact and relevance. Through his intricate narrative and profound insights, Proust invites readers to contemplate the nature of time, memory, reality, society, and art, enriching our understanding of the human experience.

Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" is replete with symbols that imbue the narrative with depth and complexity, enriching the thematic and philosophical exploration of the novel. The madeleine, a simple pastry dipped in tea, stands as the most iconic symbol in Proust's work. This humble treat becomes a catalyst for the narrator's profound recollection of the past, epitomizing the power of involuntary memory and sensory experiences in evoking memories. Gilles Deleuze, in "Proust and Signs," delves into the significance of this symbol, elucidating how it aligns with Proust's exploration of memory and time (Deleuze 45).

Another significant symbol in the novel is the hawthorn blossoms in Swann's garden. These blossoms represent the fleeting beauty of nature and the ephemeral nature of life, echoing the novel's overarching themes of time and transience. Additionally, the hawthorn blossoms symbolize the innocence and purity of childhood, serving as a poignant reminder of the narrator's longing for his past. This interpretation aligns with Proust's exploration of memory and nostalgia throughout the novel. Proust's meticulous use of symbolism extends beyond mere

decoration, enriching the narrative with layers of meaning and depth. The madeleine and hawthorn blossoms serve as conduits for exploring profound philosophical concepts such as memory, time, and the human condition.

Through these symbols, Proust invites readers to contemplate the complexities of human experience and the interconnectedness of past, present, and future. The madeleine and hawthorn blossoms encapsulate the essence of Proust's narrative, serving as potent reminders of the power of memory and the transient nature of existence. Marcel Proust's masterful use of symbols in "In Search of Lost Time" elevates the novel beyond a mere narrative, infusing it with profound philosophical insights and thematic richness. The madeleine and hawthorn blossoms, among other symbols, serve as integral components of the novel's thematic and narrative structure, inviting readers into a deeper exploration of the human experience.

Marcel Proust's monumental work, "In Search of Lost Time," delves deep into the complexities of human psychology, offering profound insights into memory, desire, and consciousness that resonate with contemporary psychological theories. Proust's portrayal of involuntary memory, notably exemplified in the madeleine episode, aligns with modern understandings of memory recall. The concept that sensory experiences can trigger vivid recollections reflects contemporary research in neuroscience and psychology. Cretien Van Campen's exploration in "The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories" sheds light on the modern scientific understanding of this phenomenon, resonating with Proust's depiction (Van Campen 32).

Proust's examination of desire mirrors key themes in psychoanalytic theory. Characters in the novel grapple with deep-seated desires intertwined with their identity, echoing the psychoanalytic view of desire as a fundamental human drive. Henri Ellenberger's analysis in "The Discovery of the Unconscious" delves into the connections between literary portrayals of desire and the development of psychoanalytic theory, providing context for Proust's nuanced exploration (Ellenberger 75). Proust's narrative style, characterized by introspective passages, allows for a profound exploration of consciousness and self-reflection. This focus on the layered nature of consciousness aligns with contemporary psychological theories, viewing consciousness as multifaceted and complex. Gilles Deleuze's examination in "Proust and Signs" provides insight into how Proust's narrative techniques reflect the intricacies of human consciousness, enriching our understanding of his psychological insights (Deleuze 51).

While Proust himself was not a psychoanalyst, his work exhibits a deep understanding of human psychology that parallels many psychoanalytic concepts. The novel's exploration of childhood experiences, dreams, and the unconscious mind resonates with psychoanalytic approaches to understanding the human psyche. These parallels highlight the novel's profound psychological insight and its enduring relevance in the context of modern psychology. Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" not only offers a captivating narrative but also provides significant insights into human psychology. Proust's exploration of memory, desire, and consciousness aligns with and anticipates many concepts in modern psychological and psychoanalytic theory, showcasing the timeless relevance of his work.

Marcel Proust's magnum opus, "In Search of Lost Time," resonates profoundly in both literary and psychological spheres, leaving an indelible mark on subsequent generations of writers and thinkers. Initially

met with mixed reception due to its unconventional narrative structure and extensive length, Proust's novel gradually gained recognition for its psychological depth and stylistic innovation. Roger Shattuck's examination in "Proust's Way" tracks this evolution of contemporary reception, highlighting how the novel eventually garnered acclaim for its literary significance (Shattuck 73).

Proust's exploration of themes such as memory, time, and identity has had a lasting impact on literature. His narrative techniques, including stream-of-consciousness and intricate character development, have influenced numerous writers of the 20th century and beyond. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's analysis in "Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930" underscores the novel's influence on the Modernist movement, attesting to its enduring significance (Bradbury and McFarlane 91). Proust's insights into memory and perception have had a significant impact on psychology. His portrayal of involuntary memory, exemplified in the madeleine episode, continues to resonate in contemporary discussions about memory recall. Cretien Van Campen's exploration in "The Proust Effect" elucidates how Proust's understanding of memory aligns with modern psychological theories, solidifying the novel's relevance to the field of psychology (Van Campen 28).

Proust's influence extends beyond literature and psychology to a diverse array of writers who have drawn inspiration from his work. Authors such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce have cited Proust as an influence on their own writing. Woolf, in particular, shared Proust's interest in delving into the consciousness of her characters and employed similar stream-of-consciousness techniques in her works. Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" stands as a seminal work that has left an enduring impact on both literature and psychology. Its profound exploration of human experience, coupled with its innovative narrative techniques, continues to inspire and captivate readers and scholars alike.

Conclusion

Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" stands as a towering achievement within the realm of Modernist literature. Through its intricate narrative structure and profound thematic exploration, Proust offers a distinctive perspective on timeless themes such as memory, time, and identity. While sharing certain similarities with contemporaries like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, Proust's work distinguishes itself through its meticulous attention to detail and its deep psychological insights. Proust's narrative style, characterized by long, intricate sentences and a focus on the inner lives of characters, sets it apart from Woolf's more immediate, moment-to-moment flow of consciousness and Joyce's experimental approach to language and form. Additionally, Proust's treatment of time, particularly his use of memory to traverse past and present simultaneously, offers a unique lens through which to explore the complexities of human experience. The madeleine episode, with its evocative portrayal of involuntary memory, serves as a quintessential example of Proust's innovative approach to storytelling. Through this episode and other symbolic elements, Proust delves deep into the intricacies of memory, perception, and the human psyche, leaving an indelible mark on literature and psychology alike. Ultimately, "In Search of Lost Time" continues to captivate readers and scholars with its profound insights and timeless relevance. Proust's masterpiece stands as a testament to the enduring power of art to illuminate the depths of human experience and provoke thought and reflection for generations to come.

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