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Anitra Sisholce Gordon

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Marcel Proust: On Genius

by

Anitra Gordon

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Preface

In this thesis I should like to examine the works of Marcel Proust to determine his ideas about the man of genius and works of genius. I shall compare the opinions of other geniuses on this topic with Proust's ideas, so that the latter can be seen in perspective. This type of examination will lead to some implications about Marcel Proust, his life and his work, which will be considered separately in later chapters.

After the comparative study, the stress will be on Proust's ideas on all the aspects of the life and work of the genius, rather than on the ideas of others. Beginning with the characteristics of the genius, Proust's inspiration, personality, and mode of living will be considered. The work of the genius is of vital importance to him, and so I shall consider its meaning and effect. The relationship between the genius and his work is the subject of another chapter.

Proust has created many intelligent people who are not geniuses. Some of these people are outstandingly talented. An analysis of these individuals will be presented to show in what ways they differ from the geniuses. Throughout this thesis Proust's ideas will be examined in their earlier forms as well as in their final one. This internal comparison will be an indication of Proust's growth in his ideas and his expressions of the quality of genius.

The last two chapters will deal with a comparison of Proust's ideas on the work of a genius as set forth in his writings, and a critical analysis of what he himself has given to readers of his works. His ideas on the genius and his life will be considered and related in the first of these chapters, to Proust's own life. The facts of his life that would be of interest as they show the life of a particular genius - Marcel Proust, form another chapter.
I shall follow the general convention of referring to the author as Proust, and to the narrator of A la Recherche du Temps perdu as Marcel. Whenever Marcel's ideas differ from those of Proust this difference will be indicated. However, on many topics they seem to me to be identical, and then I shall use them from either source to support hypotheses I am considering for both Marcel and Proust. Occasionally, I feel that a statement made by another character expresses Proust's feelings. In this instance I shall indicate the speaker although I am using the item to express an idea of Proust's.

1 Marcel Proust, A la Recherche du Temps Perdu (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954) - hereafter cited as A la Recherche
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Bibliography
Chapter One

Essential Characteristics of the Genius

A study of selected writings of geniuses and great men on the subject of genius and creativity has shown this writer that there is a remarkable degree of agreement among them on the more basic points. Some of these writings are presented later in the chapter. They discuss the same general questions and arrive at similar answers. The ideas of Marcel Proust are in agreement with these other men on fundamentals. Proust, however, goes far beyond them, thus showing his originality and genius on this topic. His treatment of the genius and his work is extremely thorough.

In the body of Jean Santeuil the reader is presented with some intelligent people: philosophers, writers, politicians, artists, and teachers, all in various stages of development. None of these people ever reaches the stature of a genius for Proust. In Pastiche et Mélanges and Les Plaisirs et les Jours Proust creates some intellectuals, most notably the Baron de Silvande (who will be discussed in Chapter Five). Proust presents these characters as talented and intelligent, but without genius.

In these early works Proust's comments on his characters, and on the question of genius in general, do not show any originality. For example, speaking of the uniqueness of great men he tells us: "Il est rare que sur un très grand homme . . . on ne nous dise pas qu'en une partie, tout à fait materiel de son art il ne fit des choses tout à fait impossible aux autres". Proust recognizes the difference between a genius and another person, but he does not examine it closely. However, in A la Recherche he goes into the problem of the genius and his work.
In his early work Proust is able to recognize genius and specifically refers to Sarah Bernhardt and Talma as geniuses in their profession, but in this early phase of his life he goes no further than to identify them as geniuses. It is interesting to notice the growth of Proust's ideas on the genius and the creative process. This can be seen by a comparison of similar ideas, characters or situations in his various works. A consideration of a passage in *A la Recherche* shows that his sensitivity and understanding, as it relates to the makings of a performing genius, develop greatly beyond this early phase. Speaking of the great actress, Berma, Marcel says, "Mais ce talent que je cherchais à apercevoir en dehors du rôle, il ne faisait qu'un avec lui . . . ce jeu est devenu si transparent, si rempli de ce qu'il interprète que lui-même on ne le voit plus, et qu'il n'est plus qu'une fenêtre qui donne sur un chef-d'oeuvre." Through Marcel, Proust goes on to discuss the perfection of Berma's acting, analysing her gestures and her voice, concluding, "Telle l'interprétation de la Berma était autour de l'oeuvre [of the author] une seconde oeuvre vivifiée aussi par le génie." The contrast between the early treatment of Bernhardt and the later treatment of Berma is especially interesting as "there is at one point a hint that the author is thinking of Sarah Bernhardt" in his creation of the character Berma. The great difference in the presentation of the two women is probably due to a growth in Proust, which might be similar to Marcel's growth in appreciation of dramatic art which is recorded in *A la Recherche*.

Marcel was greatly disappointed in his first visit to the theatre because he could see no reason for exalting Berma above the other performers.
As he matures he realizes the difference between Berma and other performers and is able to appreciate and to judge Berma's genius. The unique characteristics of Berma's acting are discussed in Chapter Four, where the individual geniuses created by Proust are studied.

The subject of genius has two parts. The study of the man - the genius and his essential nature is one. The other is the consideration of the work of genius, its inspiration and completion. In this chapter and the following one, I shall discuss the former.

In his early works Proust does not give us the characteristics of a genius. In *A la Recherche* he has a fully developed theory of genius. Genius, for Proust, is instinct. He often uses instinct as a synonym for genius: "de génie, c'est-à-dire d'instinct." This instinct seems to operate as a sixth sense in the genius. Proust says: "Le talent d'un grand écrivain... n'est qu'un instinct religieusement écouté au milieu du silence imposé à tout le reste, un instinct perfectionné, et compris, qu'avec le verbiage superficiel et les critères changeants des juges attitrés." This instinctual quality is also extremely important in the creative act, as will be shown in Chapter Three.

Instinct is so integral a part of genius that it cannot really be considered as merely a characteristic of the genius. However, the term, "genius" does imply certain qualities in the man. Sensitivity is an important characteristic of the genius. It includes his emotional nature and capacity for deep feeling. This sensitivity enables the artist to observe the general in the individuals that he sees. "C'est le sentiment du général qui dans l'écrivain futur, choisit lui-même ce qui est général et pourra enter dans
This same quality helps the genius understand people and therefore create realistic characters. Most important, this sensibility enables him to feel deeply his own life and his experiences, which are the basis for his creative work.

Imagination is an important but not essential quality for the genius. The function of imagination can be served by sensitivity, as this quote shows.

"Il n'est pas certain que, pour créer une oeuvre littéraire, l'imagination et la sensibilité ne soient pas des qualités interchangeables... Un homme né sensible et qui n'aurait pas d'imagination pourrait malgré cela écrire des romans admirables." The works produced primarily by imagination would certainly be very different from those produced mainly by the sensitivity of an artist. Proust uses The Arabian Nights and the Memoirs of Saint-Simon as representatives of these two poles of creativity. Both are the works of great writers, and neither is superior to the other because of its stress on one or the other of these qualities.

All the geniuses created by Proust are intelligent and talented. These qualities are usually implied in his discussions of genius. They are considered native to the genius, but are not among his unique qualities. Proust often speaks of intelligence as if it were a significant characteristic. For example, speaking of the life of a genius he says, his life "interprété par l'intelligence, pourrait faire la matière d'un livre non seulement aussi beau que s'il était imaginé, inventé, mais encore aussi extérieur à la rêverie de l'auteur s'il avait été livré à lui-même et heureux aussi surprenant pour lui-même, aussi accidentel qu'un caprice fortuit de l'imagination." What is omitted here seems to be a fact that he stresses
so often; it is that the sensitive quality of the genius precedes this in-
tellectual effort and by its illuminations gives meaning to facts which
intelligence then orders. This relationship will be discussed further in
connection with the inspiration of the geniuses' work.\footnote{14}

Proust places intelligence relative to another more important quality
here:

Mais le génie, même le grand talent, vient moins d'éléments
intellectuels et d'affinement social supérieurs à ceux
d'autrui, qui de la faculté de les transposer.

The "les" here refers to the material elements and objects surrounding the
genius. Proust continues:

Pour se promener dans les airs, il n'est pas nécessaire
da\'avoir l'automobile la plus puissante, mais une automobile
qui ne continuant pas de courir à terre et coupant d'une
verticale la ligne qu'elle suivait, soit capable de con-
vertir en force ascensionnelle sa vitesse horizontale.\footnote{15}

This power of transposing and transforming the given elements which is
so important to Proust forms the basis for the symbolic type of novel that
he writes, and has led Edmund Wilson to consider Proust as the first sym-
bolic novelist. Wilson gives a complete definition of symbolism:

Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of con-
sciousness, is different from every other; and it is, in
consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we
actually experience them through the conventional and
universal language of ordinary literature. Each poet has
his unique personality; each of his moments has its
special tone, its special combination of elements. And
it is the poet's task to find, to invent the special
language which will alone be capable of expressing his
personality and feelings. Such a language must make
use of symbols: what is so special, so fleeting and so
vague cannot be conveyed by direct statement or de-
scription, but only by a suggestion of words, of images,
which will serve to suggest it to the reader . . . what
the symbols or Symbolism really were, were metaphors
detached from their subjects.\footnote{16}
There are many consequences of this ability to transpose and transform. Another facet of it leads to the formation of "les combinaisons . . . suivant un ordre absolument contraire, [to the usual perception] répondant à un autre type."\(^{17}\) The presentation of these new groupings in the work of an artist makes, "chaque artiste semble ainsi comme le citoyen d'une patrie inconnue."\(^{18}\) Some of the uniqueness in the artist's work is derived primarily from his new and individual way of seeing things. He does not follow the usual patterns, but leads in the formation of new combinations. "Comme le public ne connaît du charme, de la grâce, des formes de la nature que ce qu'il en a puisé dans les poncifs d'un art lentement assimile, et qu'un artiste original commence par rejeter ces poncifs."\(^{19}\)

In *Jean Santeuil* Proust expresses the same idea, that a genius must present an idea freshly, and not in the conventional manner. "Jean com-

prit de quel prix pour l'intelligence sont ces exercices qui, en l'obligeant à devêtir une pensée de toutes les formules convenues, de toutes les élégances apprises, de tout poncif ambiant à travers lesquels nous les apercevons involontairement, nous forcent à en saisir la réalité même et qui ont seulement pour objet les œuvres de tous les temps, l'univers et la vie."\(^{20}\)

The power to see uniquely - or vision, as Proust calls it - becomes extremely important to Proust. It is the determinant of style: "Le style pour l'écrivain aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre, est une ques-
tion non de technique mais de vision. Il est la révélation, qui serait impossible par des moyens directs et conscients, de la différence qu'il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde."\(^{21}\)
For Proust this quality of vision goes beyond style, and is the most important characteristic of the genius:

Il aurait fallu trouver, de la fragrance de géranium de sa musique, non une explication matérielle, mais l'équivalent profond, la fête inconnue et colorée (donc ses œuvres semblaient les fragments disjoints, les éclats aux cassures écarlates) mode selon lequel il 'entendait' et projetait hors de lui l'univers. Cette qualité inconnue d'un monde unique et qu'aucun autre musicien [he is speaking of Vinteuil] ne nous avait jamais fait voir, peut-être était-ce en cela... qu'est la preuve la plus authentique du génie, bien plus que le contenu de l'œuvre elle-même.22

Proust continues and relates the unique vision of the genius to literature and to art. It is Elstir's vision that pervades all of his paintings, so they represent his view of the world, or really, his own world. The same is true in music and in literature, and this is the reasoning behind his statement: "Les grands littérateurs n'ont jamais fait qu'une seule œuvre, ou plutôt réfracté à travers des milieux divers une même beauté qu'ils apportent au monde."23 Style can be copied but it will be empty, unless it encloses a unique vision.

With the presentation of a complete world, each artist becomes in a sense, a philosopher. He is the proponent of a particular way of looking at reality, and if the genius produces a great deal, his will be a considerable vision from which a complete philosophy can be inferred.

Another ability inherent in the genius is that of mirroring life:

De même ceux qui produisent des œuvres géniales ne sont pas ceux qui vivent dans le milieu le plus délicat, qui ont la conversation la plus brillante, la culture la plus étendue, mais ceux qui ont eu le pouvoir, cessant brusquement de vivre pour eux-mêmes, de rendre leur personnalité pareille à un miroir, de telle sorte que leur vie, si médiocre d'ailleurs qu'elle pouvait être mondainement et même, dans un certain sens, intellectuellement parlant, s'y reflète, le génie consistant dans le pouvoir réfléchissant et non dans la
The noun "miroir" is frequently used in discussions of the qualities of the genius. Proust is not referring to a mirroring of the materialistic objects around us, but to the reflecting of the truths for which these objects act as symbols. This rendering is done by each genius in his own style which, as has just been said, is dependent on his vision. Proust has integrated these important qualities so that one implies another, at the same time that it depends upon the other for its own validity.

Listening and observing are abilities specifically mentioned as characteristics of the genius. These, together with memory, form a basis upon which the work is built. These qualities are particularly important to the genius who stresses sensitivity rather than imagination in his work, for his material comes from what he has heard, seen, felt, and remembered. However, the artist who stresses imagination must also base his concepts and his world on what he has experienced in life. He too is dependent on his power to listen, to observe, and to remember, although to a lesser extent.

The importance of memory is mentioned frequently in connection with Berma and the performing arts. Proust also refers to it as a specific phenomenon apart from the person. "Le génie de la mémoire qui, plus rapidement que l'électricité, fait le tour du temps, l'y avait déposé sans qu'il pût s'apercevoir même si une seconde avait passé."25

A characteristic important in the nature of the literary genius is language. Proust mentions this aspect of the genius, apart from any specific masterpiece. In this treatment language becomes a quality which may be examined independently of a person. "Le génie linguistique à l'état
vivant, l'avenir et le passé du français, voilà ce qui eût dû m'intéresser dans les fautes de Françoise."

Proust does not list ability to experience involuntary memory as inherent in all geniuses, but I should like to consider briefly the phenomenon as it is related to the conceptions of several of the men whose ideas I will now compare to Proust's. It is at the core of Marcel's genius, and therefore will be considered more completely when I examine the individual geniuses.

The phenomenon of involuntary memory gives Marcel's life its richness and meaning by enabling him to find the essence of his past and preserve it for himself, and through his work for the reader. It gives him his vision of the world and the realities it presents. Involuntary memory occurs when habit is not working. For Proust, habit dulls impressions. In so doing it tends to destroy the uniqueness of a moment by permitting the person to perceive only the conventional experiences and sensations. When habit is not at work, as happens in a new environment, or when the person is tired, involuntary memory may occur.

Involuntary memory is the recall, with all the full essence of feeling, of a past moment. This recall occurs when a present sensation is the same as one in a past moment. The similarity enables Marcel to recapture the past experience with a great vividness. From the two similar moments he is able to extract the essential nature of both of them. The identical sensation is the essence of the experience and exists independent of the experience. It exists outside of the time in which the experience took place. The similar moments mean that the earlier experience is experienced twice, and therefore exists beyond time.
The above qualities are those which are native to the genius. Proust, however, does not use the term genius in relation to those people who may have these qualities but do not use them creatively. For Proust, ability alone does not constitute genius. This implies a final quality - ambition to produce. We are told, "Elstir, c'est le travail." The other geniuses are also hard-working, productive people. Conversely, "celle-ci [laziness] paraissait même à la Patronne [Mme. Verdurin] un don de plus, étant le contraire du travail, qu'elle croyait le lot des êtres sans génie." Proust does not present his geniuses to his readers while they are at work. The amount of work required for the creation of a masterpiece is not mentioned, although the fact that the genius must produce is stressed.

The characteristics of a genius as Proust sees them are, then: a certain instinct which is often used to imply the whole of genius; a vision of reality, which is unique; a sensitive and emotional nature; imagination and intelligence, though these need not be outstanding; and the abilities to listen, to observe, to remember, and to work.

Proust often uses a specific artist to stand for genius, or he refers to genius by mentioning a class, such as musicians. These general terms (poet, artist, etc.) are also used by the writers I shall now be quoting. The word genius can usually be substituted. I shall make comparisons between Proust's ideas and those of selected intellectuals.

The authors whose ideas are presented below were chosen because they have written articles or books in which they have presented lists of qualities which they feel a genius must possess. I have chosen writers whose ideas are representative of the ideas expressed on the subject. As their ideas are presented, I shall both compare and contrast them with Proust's
opinion on the topic of genius.

Henry Fielding gives us a list of qualities that he feels are necessary to produce a work of genius. By implication these are also qualities that exist in the genius. Fielding asks:

Whose assistance shall I invoke to direct my pen.

First, Genius; thou gift of Heaven: without whose aid in vain we struggle against the stream of nature. Thou who dost sow the generous seeds which art nourishes, and brings to perfection.

And thou, almost the constant attendant on true genius, Humanity, bring all thy tender sensations.

. . . Not without these the tender scene is painted. From these alone proceed the noble, disinterested friendship, the melting love, the generous sentiment, the ardent gratitude, the soft compassion, the candid opinion; and all those strong energies of a good mind, which fill the moistened eyes with tears, the glowing cheeks with blood, and swell the heart with tides of grief, joy, and benevolence.

Learning! for without thy assistance nothing pure, nothing correct, can genius produce.

Lastly, come Experience, long conversant with the wise, the good, the learned and the polite. Nor with them only, but with every kind of character . . . From thee only can the manners of mankind be known; to which the recluse pedant, however great his parts or extensive his learning be, hath ever been a stranger. 29

Proust does not discuss learning, although in some way the term "intelligence" can be understood to mean the same thing. He does discuss intelligence, but as has been shown above he does not consider it to be one of the more important qualities of the genius. Fielding places learning high on his list. Apart from this difference the two lists are similar, although different words are used. "Sensitivity" could be substituted for "humanity." Proust, like Fielding, discussed experience, or life, but primarily as a source of inspiration.
Another writer who discusses the process of creation and the qualities of the genius is Henri Poincaré. He discusses creativity in mathematics in terms reminiscent of those used by Proust. Poincaré speaks of the instinctual ability of the genius; "this feeling, this intuition of mathematical order, that makes us divine hidden harmonies and relations." He compares this to what those people with only intelligence and talent can do. "Others will have this feeling only in a slight degree, but they will be gifted with an uncommon memory and a great power of attention. They will learn by heart the details . . . they can understand mathematics and sometimes make applications, but they cannot create."

Poincaré's main stress is on a feeling of creative intuition which orders the thoughts of the genius. This emphasis is similar to Proust's idea of an inclusive vision which cannot be compensated for by any other qualities. It is interesting to note similarities between men who are ordinarily considered to be poles apart— the poet and the mathematician.

Wordsworth asks, "What is a Poet?" and answers, "He is a man . . . endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him . . ." He has "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions . . . a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement."
Wordsworth's ideas about the power of recall is similar to, but not as complete as Proust's development of the phenomenon of involuntary memory. Wordsworth, like Proust, stresses sensibility and related traits as being extremely important. To those qualities already cited from the works of Proust, Wordsworth adds passion.\textsuperscript{32}

Another quality not mentioned by Proust is madness. It is mentioned by A. E. Houseman, in a literal sense,\textsuperscript{33} and Stephen Spender has written that a poet must have "the condition of inspiration which many people have said is near to madness."

Spender goes on to contrast two distinct kinds of genius. The first, exemplified by Mozart, "is able to plunge the greatest depths of his own experience by the tremendous effort of a moment, and the other (the Beethovenian) must dig deeper and deeper into his consciousness, layer by layer."\textsuperscript{34} Marcel is capable of both of these types of inspiration. There are the moments of involuntary memory and also the analyses of interpersonal relationships. In both of these activities Marcel is outstanding. Proust does not consider this distinction of kind in his discussion of the genius.

For Spender "memory exercised in a particular way is the natural gift of the poetic genius. The poet never forgets certain sense-impressions which he has experienced and which he can re-live again and again as though with all their original freshness."\textsuperscript{35} This idea of re-experiencing a past moment is similar to Proust's involuntary memory. Spender does not give it the importance that Proust accords it, nor does he explain its occurrence in any systematic fashion.
Matthew Arnold speaks of another kind of genius - the critic. He states that this is a lesser quality than that of the creative genius thus introducing the idea of a ranking of geniuses. The critic of genius, by the nature of his work, has some different qualities from those of the artist:

The grand work of a literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combinations - making beautiful works with them, in short. 36

In Arnold's philosophy the critic's work follows that of the writer. The critic functions objectively to analyze the epoch and to point out weaknesses in the society and the works of the writers which are often related to the society. He identifies the problems with which the writer is dealing, and suggests others which he feels should be presented. For both the critic and the writer, Arnold feels that knowledge is very important.

Proust does not stress knowledge as does Arnold. Knowledge is often considered to be the opposite of intuition and emotion which are the aspects of the creative personality stressed by Proust. Proust does not feel that the critic has as important a function as Arnold gives him. In Contre Sainte-Beuve Proust describes the function of a critic as that of interpreting the work of an artist to the public. 37 By so doing the public becomes aware of the talented, new artists. A work of art should be judged on its own merits. This is contrary to the method of Sainte-Beuve who based his judgments of a work on facts and opinions expressed about the
In *A la Recherche* there is little mention of the critic. Through Marcel's analyses of various masterpieces the reader understands that he judges a work on its own merits. Proust does not feel that the criticism of his day had a valid or important function in society. He thinks of the practitioner of that criticism rather as a meddlesome person - like Sainte-Beuve.

I have presented the viewpoints of various writers on the subject of the genius. It seems evident that there is a great deal of agreement among geniuses in all fields as to the more common characteristics of a creative person. What differs is the stress placed on the various qualities.

Proust is outstanding among this group of writers because of his complete treatment of the question, and his unique contributions to it. For Proust the vision of a genius is at the center of all creative work. The quality of the work depends on that vision. The genius transposes and transforms the "real" world in accord with this vision. He mirrors the essence of life through a symbolic presentation. The three qualities identified by Proust, vision, ability to transpose the elements in the world, and in so doing to mirror the truths or realities of life, are tightly connected. His idea of a vision permits the transformation of elements which mirrors not the externals of life but the hidden essences.

Proust's idea of involuntary memory is another unique contribution. Unlike the other qualities listed by him, this one is not necessary for all geniuses. The reader knows that it is the source of Marcel's inspiration, but it is not mentioned in connection with the other geniuses in his works.
For Proust, the genius is a person who can give his readers, his audience or viewers, the sense of another world, a world which is seen only by the genius, and through his talent and other characteristics, is transmitted into his work of art. More than any specific idea, it is this vision that sets the creative person apart from other men and indicates his genius.
Chapter One

Notes

1. Marcel Proust, Jean Santeuil (Paris: Gallimard, 1952)
2. Marcel Proust, Pastiches and Melanges (Paris: Gallimard, 1921)
4. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 252
5. Ibid, II, 47
8. Ibid, III, 893
9. Some writers feel that there is a strong connection between some of Proust's ideas and those of Henri Bergson. Proust never admitted this. Bergson is mentioned just once in A la Recherche. L. Pierre-Quint says: "Les idées qui dominent l'esprit et l'oeuvre de Proust, l'écoulement du temps, l'évolution perpétuelle de la personnalité dans la durée, les richesses insoupçonnées de l'inconscient que nous ne pouvons retrouver que par l'intuition, la mémoire ou les associations involontaires, mais qu'il n'est pas possible d'exprimer qu'à l'aide de l'intelligence, l'intelligence seule incapable de saisir la vie, l'art unique réalité du monde et qui permet de reprouver la vie dans sa profondeur, toutes ces idées s'inspirent de Bergson."
10. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 900
11. Ibid, III, 900
12. Ibid, Passim
13. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 900-901
14. Chapters Three and Five
15. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 554
16. Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931)
17. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 861
18. Ibid, III, 251
19. Ibid, I, 213
20. Ibid, I, 103
21. Ibid, III, 895
22. Ibid, III, 375
23. Ibid, III, 376
24. Ibid, I, 554-555
25. Proust, Jean Santeuil, I, 66
26. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 736
27. Ibid, II, 939
28. Ibid, III, 873
32. Ibid
33. A. E. Houseman, "The Name and Nature of Poetry", Ghiselin, ed. _op. cit._, p. 86
35. _Ibid_, p. 120
Chapter Two
The Genius: His Work and His Society

In his discussions of genius, Proust generally refers to the writer, the artist, and the musician. Sometimes he includes the performing artist in these discussions. He has created representatives of the first three categories as complete characters; Bergotte is the writer, Elstir, the painter, and Vinteuil, the musician. Berma, an actress, is another but less complete presentation of a genius. There is also C., the imaginary author to whom Jean Santeuil is attributed, but he exists only in a short introduction to the book. Octave, Andrée's husband, is the sixth genius created by Proust. He is a set designer for the theatre. He appears only briefly in A la Recherche, and functions to show the reader some qualities about the life of the genius. Marcel is the final person created as a genius. His function in the novel is greater than that of any of the others, and it will be considered in detail in Chapter Four.

All of these geniuses (except Marcel at times) are considered as equals. Proust says, "Je ne crois pas beaucoup à la 'hiérarchie' des arts." The comparisons made among his group of geniuses show that for Proust it is the quality of genius, not the specific expression, that is important and comparable.

The idea that there are basic similarities among geniuses is not a unique one. Henry James discusses the similarity of two artists:

The analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete. Their inspiration is the same, their success is the same. They may learn from each other, they may explain and sustain each other. Their cause is the same, and the honor of one is the honor of the other.
Another of Proust's ideas about the genius is that his occurrence is an individual phenomenon, unrelated to the society in which he lives. This differs from Matthew Arnold's ideas which relate the two very closely. Arnold feels that the critic can prepare the atmosphere for the creative genius. This function is particularly important in present day society where a cleavage exists, unlike "the Greece of ... Sophocles," and "the England of Shakespeare ... [where] the poet lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power, society was, in the fullest measure, permeated by fresh thought, intelligent and live."

For Arnold the creative genius functions best in a certain atmosphere of the entire society. He says:

This is why great creative epochs in literature are so rare, this is why there is so much that is unsatisfactory in the productions of many men of real genius; because, for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment; the creative power has, for its happy exercise, appointed elements, and these elements are not in its own control.

Nay, they are more within the control of the critical power ... [which] tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature.

It is interesting to note that Proust does not consider the present day artist in relation to his society. He never raises the questions of interdependence between the creative man and his atmosphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, he does recognize a kind of genius that is directly related to its society; this is the art of the cathedrals of France. Proust thinks of these cathedrals as:
Proust also recognizes and enjoys the relation between the churches
and their religious overtones; "La liturgie catholique ne fait qu'un avec
l'architecture et la sculpture de nos cathédrales, car les unes comme
l'autre dérivent d'un même symbolisme."6

This difference in Proust's attitudes toward the society that produced
the cathedrals, and present society is striking. He implies that the cath-
edrals were produced by a society which felt they were important, and some-
how influenced their creation. His praise for the unknown individuals who
achieved them is sincere. At the time the cathedrals were built, Proust
implies that there was a close relationship between the society and those
who produced the works of genius. This integration has been transmitted
into the production of the churches, and enhances Proust's feelings about
the churches.

For Proust the churches seem like natural objects, rather than man made
buildings. For example, the feelings inspired by the spires of Martinville
are similar to those felt on observing certain groups of trees. In present
society it is only the works of geniuses or of nature that are able to move
sensitive people; whereas the cathedrals were the work of an entire society,
not of an individual of genius. The following quote indicates Proust's
feeling that man in his society was not capable of transmitting beauty -
but rather of destroying it. Genius is no longer a characteristic of
society but the quality of an individual, who now stands apart:

Sans trop savoir pourquoi, ma grand'mère trouvait au
clocher de Saint-Hilaire cette absence de vulgarité,
Proust does not suggest any way of relating society and the genius more satisfactorily. For Arnold this function should be performed by the critic. Proust feels that his society is not able to, or does not, appreciate fully the artist. He compares the poet and the judge in Jean Santeuil. He recognizes the superiority of the poet, but feels that society favors the judge. In Pastiches et Mélanges he compares a genius to a criminal. "Seul pouvait ainsi marcher un sublime génie ou un grand criminel. Le génie n'est-il pas d'ailleurs une sorte de crime contre la routine du passé que notre temps punit plus sévèrement que le crime même, puisque les savants meurent a l'hôpital qui est plus triste que le bagne."9

Proust feels himself at variance with the values of his society on the question of genius. Unlike the majority of his contemporaries he considers the geniuses as the most significant people. Proust has said that he does not have a hierarchy of the arts, but he does have a hierarchy of geniuses. For him, the artistic geniuses are considered more highly than "un chimiste de génie" or "un génie stratégique" that he may briefly mention. Poincaré has mentioned similarities between creation in mathematics and in the arts.10 Proust, however, seems unaware that the essential natures of both processes are alike.

With the power of genius go certain obligations. Proust recognized these in his early work, Jean Santeuil:

Mais les impressions un peu profondes, qui ont frappé plus avant que son moi phénoménal et y ont apporté plus qu'une vérité phénoménale, l'artiste à le devoir de les exprimer
Proust's ideas do not greatly change in *A la Recherche*. From Proust's writing in this work, Edmund Wilson has noted the writer's duty (here the writer can stand as a symbol for all geniuses):

> It is at the death of Bergotte that Proust's narrator, in what is perhaps the noblest passage of the book, affirms the reality of these obligations, culminating in the obligation of the writer to do his work as it ought to be done, which seems to be derived from some other world, 'based on goodness, scrupulousness, sacrifice' so little sanction can we recognize them as having in the uncertain and selfish world of humanity those 'laws which we have obeyed because we have carried their precepts within us without knowing who inscribed them there - those laws to which we are brought by every profound exercise of the intelligence, and which are invisible only and are they really? - to fools.'

In the creation of his work an artist also has the duty to be honest. "Si les mots sont choisis, non par notre pensée selon les affinités de son essence, mais par notre désir de nous peindre, il représente ce désir et ne nous représente pas." Even the subject of a work of art is not a free choice. Proust feels that the creative work of a particular genius is the only possible thing that he can present. He says, "L'instinct dicte le devoir... Le livre aux caractères figurés, non tracés par nous, est notre seul livre."

Proust is strongly opposed to an artistic work being done to satisfy any religious, personal or political purposes. M. de Norpois, a family friend, criticizes Bergotte for ignoring political questions in his writing,
but Proust feels that it is Norpois who is wrong.\textsuperscript{15} The only concern of the artist should be the attainment of truth.

Nowhere does Proust state why the individual genius chooses one medium rather than another in which to express himself. The implication seems to be that this decision is instinctual. As surely as the genius knows what he will say in his work, he seems to be led to the correct medium of expression.

Connected with the idea that genius is born and not created, there is a relationship between maturity and art for Proust. Faulkner would agree with Proust that writers have a peak period. He said:

I think there's a period in a writer's life when he, well, simply for lack of any other work, is fertile and he just produces. Later on, his blood slows, his bones get a little more brittle, his muscles get a little stiff, he gets perhaps other interests, but I think there's one time in his life when he writes at the top of his talent plus his speed, too. Later the speed slows; the talent doesn't necessarily have to fade at the same time. But there is a time in his life, one matchless time, when they are matched completely. The speed, the power and the talent, they're all there and then he is... 'hot'.\textsuperscript{15}

Proust does not specify just what conditions exist during the genius' peak, but he details the effects of growing old. In speaking of old age, he says, "Un jour viendra où, par l'usure de son cerveau, il n'aura plus, devant ces matériaux dont se servait son génie, la force de faire l'effort intellectuel qui seul peut produire son oeuvre."\textsuperscript{16} The artist may still have moments of illumination, but this alone will not produce his work.

While speaking of Elstir, Proust says:

\begin{quote}
Il approchait de l'âge où l'on compte sur les satisfactions du corps pour stimuler la force de l'esprit, ou la fatigue de celui-ci en nous inclinant au matérialisme, et la diminution de l'activité, à la possibilité d'influences passivement reçues, commencent à nous faire admettre qu'il y a peut-être bien certains corps,
\end{quote}
The older man is no longer able to produce a work of genius. There is a loss of intellectual power, of talent and of ability for a concerted effort to create. At this point he becomes "de plus en plus enclin à croire materialistement qu'une part notable de la beauté réside dans les choses." Proust speaks then of their idolatry, which is an interest in forms for their own sake, rather than for what they symbolize or conceal from view.

At this point the artist does not necessarily stop producing. As Bergotte does, he may produce works inferior to those created in his prime. A certain lack of judgment, together with pride, induces him to publish (this is true in the case of Bergotte) his work. Proust sees this final stage as fitting in with the rest of the genius' life:

Seulement, après cette marée montante du génie qui recouvre la vie, quand le cerveau se fatigue, peu à peu l'équilibre se rompt, et comme un fleuve qui reprend son cours après le contre-flux d'une grande marée, c'est la vie qui reprend le dessus. Or, pendant que durait la première période, l'artiste a peu à peu dégagé la loi, la formule de son don inconscient.

Despite the obligations that a genius has, Proust feels that the greatest gift that a man can have is that of genius. He says of Bergotte, "Il avait du génie, a côté de quoi la situation dans le monde et les positions officielles ne sont rien." Through Marcel, Proust shows how important the quality of genius can be. As a young boy Marcel is afraid that, "Je n'aurais jamais de talent, que je n'étais pas doué." This fear causes him much unhappiness. Marcel as a young man is still sad about what he
feels is a lack of talent and genius in himself. With the slow recognition of his talent and true vocation he becomes ecstatically happy. The desire to write becomes the most important aspect of his life, and finally becomes the only reason for living.

This idea is very different from that held by many of the romantics. "L'idée que le génie et le pouvoir sont des obstacles au bonheur a été exprimée par plusieurs écrivans romantiques, notamment par Chateaubriand et Mme. de Staël." Vigny in his poignant poem, "Moïse" expresses the idea that "le génie rend l'homme isolé et malheureux." Vigny states this same idea in his play, Chatterton.

However, for Proust the vision and understanding of the genius put him in touch with certain realities that give life its deepest meaning. Thus the genius exists on a par with other artistic geniuses without regard to the forms of their art, each as an individual with obligations, not to society, but only to himself. A man apart, he achieves joy by the supreme effort necessary to reveal, explain, and clarify truth with complete personal honesty and to do this with all the skill and art which the presentation of truth needs. The man privileged to be able to create as a genius during his vigorous years experiences the greatest happiness in his work.
Chapter Two

Notes

1. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 79
4. Ibid.
5. Proust, Pastiches et Melanges, pp. 199-200
6. Ibid., p. 201
7. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 64
8. Proust, Jean Santeuil, II, 113
10. Henri Poincare, op. cit., p. 36
11. Proust, Jean Santeuil, I, 234
13. Proust, Pastiches et Melanges, p. 265
14. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 879
16. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 852
17. Ibid., II, 851
18. Ibid., III, 1004
19. Ibid., III, 770
20. Ibid., Passim, for example, I, 852
21. Ibid., I, 851
22. Ibid., I, 557
23. Ibid., I, 440
25. Ibid., p. 39
Chapter Three
Sources of Inspiration

A great deal of the enjoyment experienced by a genius in relation to his work comes from the inspiration he feels before he begins his work. For Proust the act of creation by a genius is a completely natural one. It is in essence the external expression of the basic truths perceived by the artist. A genius can be inspired by many things. The process is the same regardless of the source of inspiration.

An object is felt to be inspiring to a genius when it reveals to him the realities or truths of life. Inspiration is followed by hard work, it is not just a direct and complete revelation. As the following passage shows, there are several elements in the process which work together to enable the genius to produce his work. In Jean Santeuil, Proust says:

Ce sont les belles heures de la vie du poète, celles où le hasard met sur son chemin une sensation qui enferme un passé et qui promet à son imagination de faire connaissance avec le passé qu'elle n'avait pas connu, qui n'était pas tombé sous son regard et que l'intelligence, l'effort, le désir, rien ne pouvait lui faire connaître. Il lui fallait le souvenir, non point précisément le souvenir, mais la transmutation du souvenir en une réalité directement sentie.

The above passage points out some qualities common to all types of inspiration. First, inspiration occurs by chance. One cannot prepare to be inspired. The ability of an object or idea to be inspiring is dependent upon its evoking a sensation that recalls a similar sensation that occurred in the past. The imagination connects the two, linking the present with the past. The recalled past event is not necessarily part of the individual's past, but of mankind's past. The perception of the similarity is not dependent on intelligence, effort or desire. It seems to occur in the above passage as a revelation, but Proust relates it to
intellectual effort. Marcel often says that he does not have the time to make the effort or the will to ponder the meaning of an object. He is aware that inspiration is partly an intellectual job: "Je reconnaissais ce genre de plaisir qui requiert, is est vrai, un certain travail de la pensée."² This passage is particularly interesting, for although it is from Jean Santeuil, it contains so many of Proust's later ideas on inspiration.

The study of the intuitive processes was also one of Proust's earliest preoccupations. In Pastiches et Mélanges, he says that it is not just an effort of intelligence or thought that is necessary to perceive reality but "le progrès intime de notre pensée et . . . l'effort de notre coeur."³ Here Proust used the conventional dichotomy between head and heart as he does many times, always favoring the latter. For example, "Il était sans importance que mon intelligence ne fût pas dans le secret, puisque mon coeur l'entendait si bien."⁴ In A la Recherche the phenomenon of involuntary memory becomes the basis for the inspiration of the genius. It serves as the link between the sensation of a present moment and the same sensation of a past moment. Ordinarily the past is the individual's past, from which a general past may be inferred.

It is involuntary memory that reveals the essential truths. Intelligence functions to fill in the obvious outward details. Here the truths of intelligence are related to those revealed through involuntary memory:

Quant aux vérités que l'intelligence - même des plus hauts esprits - crieille à claire-voie, devant elle, en plein lumière, leur valeur peut être très grande; mais elles ont des contours plus secs et sont planes n'ont pas de profondeur parce qu'il n'y a pas eu de profondeurs à franchir pour les atteindre, parce qu'elles n'ont pas été récrées.⁵
Proust feels that at the time a particular act happens, the person is too close to it fully to see and understand what is happening. At a later time when the specific incident is forgotten and the person is relaxed and usually doing something that is not part of his ordinary routine, he experiences a sensation which instantly recalls the earlier incident.

With this recall, imagination is evoked and contributes to the emotional experience. The feelings that then fill Marcel are so powerful that he feels transported back into the past. At the same time the similarities of the sensations give him the essence of the experience. It is the feeling of similarity that is timeless; it is an essence common to two experiences and seems to exist outside of time. Sometimes the recollection of the similar past event is spontaneous, as the final examples at the Princess de Guermantes' reception. At other times, such as in the Madeline incident, it requires some mental action. The results are the same from either kind of inspiration and, with both, the essential stimulus is involuntary. These moments are followed by a powerful emotion unlike that ordinarily felt:

Je savais que cette nuance nouvelle de la joie, cet appel vers une joie supraterrestre, je ne l'oublierais jamais . . . ces impressions qu'à des intervalles éloignées je retrouverais dans ma vie comme les points de repère, les amorces pour la construction d'une vie véritable.

Inspiration comes without any pre-planning. Intelligence adds to inspiration, but the reality, the truth of the vision is instinctual. Proust does not present Marcel sitting down devoting himself to the problem of his work. But, in a sense, Marcel's entire life can be considered a search for meaning, which prepares him for the final revelations. After
these revelations of the meaning of life, which occur at the Princess de Guermantes' the story is over. But it is understood that at this point Marcel begins the hard work of writing his book. The basis of it was inspired, but it was preceded and followed by intellectual and emotional effort.

This particular pattern, a final revelation after years of thought, represents the inspirational process for Marcel, who can be considered to be very similar to Proust. Just what the process is like for the other geniuses in the book is not shown. Proust has made Elstir an Impressionist, who uses his initial vision, rather than his intelligence, to form the basis for his work. We are told nothing about his specific inspiration, nor about the inspiration of the other geniuses.9

I shall try below to pick out the expressions of several geniuses on the creative process as they experience it, and to compare and contrast their ideas to those held by Proust. I have omitted purely biological, psychological, or psychoanalytic theories as being outside the scope of this thesis.

Poincaré, like Proust, speaks of the involuntary appearance of the necessary idea. "At the moment when I put my foot on the step the idea came to me," he writes.10 He sees this illumination as a "manifest sign of long, unconscious prior work which was preceded and . . . followed by a period of conscious work."11 These ideas of Poincaré on spontaneous inspiration and its relation to work are similar to those expressed by many famous artists some of whom I quote below. The stress is always on feeling rather than reason as the basis of the work. "Theorize, theorize all you like - but when you start to paint, shut your theoretical eyes and go
for it with instinct and intuition," said D. H. Lawrence.¹²

Inspiration for Stephen Spender is "the beginning of a poem and it is also the final goal . . . in between . . . there is the hard race."¹³ In this idea Spender differs from Proust who, like Poincaré, considers inspiration the middle point. Jung feels that "the secret of artistic creation and of the effectiveness of art is to be found in a return to the state of participation mystique - to that level of experience at which it is man who lives, and not the individual, at which the weal or woe of the single human does not count, but only human existence."¹⁴ This idea is not too different from Proust's attempt to capture that which is unique for himself, and also true for mankind. The realities he is seeking are concerned with mankind and are therefore relevant to everyone.

For Proust, inspiration is an innate process. It is essentially a revelation. He specifically mentions sources of inspiration in his works. The most common source of inspiration for Proust is in nature. As early as Jean Santeuil, he says, "tant la nature sait où est ce que nous avons à exprimer et nous y conduit à coup sur, vérité exprimée en disant que le poète travaille mieux à la campagne que dans la ville où qu'il est plus inspiré dans la solitude que dans la société."¹⁵

He felt that nature held secrets which were the key to reality. As a young boy, Marcel stared at the hawthorne blossoms, at the flowers in the Vivonne, and at the three trees on the road, in an effort to understand their message. As a young man he is able to see in the paintings of flowers by Elstir the revelations of the truths for which he had so often searched himself. The close relation between nature and works of art is often shown by Proust's metaphors and comparisons, such as this one:
Jadis, quand le vent soufflait dans ma cheminée,
j'écouteais les coups qu'il frappait contre la trappe
avec autant d'émotion que si, pareils aux fameux coups
d'archet par lesquels débute la symphonie en ut mineur,
ils avaient été les appels irrésistibles d'un mystérieux
destin. Tout changement à vue de la nature nous offre
une transformation semblable, en adaptant au mode nouveau
des choses nos désirs harmonisés.  

The relation between nature and the artist is a popular idea of the ro-
mantic movement. It is interesting to see the mathematician-philosopher,
Alfred North Whitehead, examine this concept, which is also so important to
Proust:

There is no real dualism . . . between external lakes
and hills, on the one hand and personal feelings, on
the other: human feelings and inanimate objects are
interdependent and developing together in some fashion
of which our traditional notions of laws of cause and
effect, of dualities of mind and matter or of body
and soul, can give us no true idea. The Romantic poet,
then, with his turbid or opalescent language, his
sympathies and passions which cause him to seem to
merge with his surroundings, is the prophet of a new
insight into nature: he is describing things as they
really are; and a revolution in the imagery of poetry
is in reality a revolution in metaphysics.  

This passage also relates to an earlier point, in which it was suggested
that the genius, because of his vision, is also a philosopher.

In Proust’s earliest works, he felt that the simple life in the
country is best suited to creativity. In relation to this he stresses the
artist’s need for solitude and the destructive power of high society.
The good life consists of a close relationship to nature, and to what is
most natural in people. In this sense, peasants become more inspiring
than high society members.

In A la Recherche, he expands this early idea greatly. "Et je compris
que tous ces matériaux de l'œuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passé; je
compris qu'ils étaient venus à moi, dans les plaisirs frivoles, dans la paresse, dans la tendresse, dans la douleur emmagasinés par moi.\textsuperscript{18}

What is important is not how one lives, but just that fact of living. This is directly opposite to what he had said in \textit{Les Plaisirs et les Jours} in which he stressed dreaming rather than living: "Il vaut mieux rêver sa vie que la vivre, encore que la vivre, ce soit la rêver, mais moins mystérieusement et moins clairement à la fois d'un rêve obscur et lourd semblable à un rêve épars dans la faible conscience des bêtes qui ruminent."\textsuperscript{19}

Life should inspire not just a copy, but a presentation of its essence. Proust gives this example, "Les poètes qui ont créé les imperissables amoureuses n'ont souvent connu que de mediocres servantes d'auberge, tandis que les voluptueux les plus enviés ne saivent point concevoir la vie qu'ils mènent, ou plutôt qui les mène."\textsuperscript{20} This idea indicates that a truth is true for all of mankind, not just for a certain class or person. Any experience can be made to retain its reality when its setting has been transposed by an artist.

As for the relation between solitude and inspiration, versus that between society and inspiration, Proust says:

\textit{Le retour dans la société, m'eussent fourni ce point de départ vers une vie nouvelle que je n'avais pas su trouver dans la solitude. Ce fait n'avait rien d'extraordinaire, une impression qui pouvait ressusciter en moi l'homme éternel n'était pas lié plus fortement à la solitude qu'à la société.}\textsuperscript{21}

It is interesting that his final realization of the importance of living, of the meaning in each individual life, was recognized by Marcel as a boy walking along the Guermantes' Way. After recalling some similarities between Bergotte's novels and his own ideas and life, Marcel said:
"Il me sembla soudain que mon humble vie et les royaumes du vrai n'étaient pas aussi séparés que j'avais cru, qu'il coïncidaient même sur certains points, et de confiance et de joie je pleurai sur les pages de l'écrivain comme dans les bras d'un père retrouvé."22

Participation in the life of society is an important source of inspiration in two ways. First, as observers, the geniuses can get ideas from what they see. Secondly, as participants, they are moved. Emotions such as love, friendship, and desire, naturally relate to art and are helpful in perceptions. Proust, in this passage, shows how emotions and artistic perceptions can be related: "Quand je subissais le charme d'un visage nouveau, quand c'était à l'aide d'une autre jeune fille que j'espérais connaître les cathédrales gothiques, les palais et les jardins de l'Italie."23

The relationship between the person inspiring an understanding of art, or an idea, and a work of art enhancing the idea of the person is shown to be reciprocal:

Je faisais sans m'en douter sortir de moi les rêves qu'Albertine y avait jadis suscités quand je ne la connaissais pas encore... Je les jetais dans la phrase du musicien ou l'image du peintre comme dans un creuset, j'en nourrissais l'oeuvre que je lisais. Et sans doute celle-ci n'en paraissait plus vivante. Mais Albertine ne gagnait pas moins à être ainsi transportée de l'un dans l'autre des deux mondes où nous avons acces, et où nous pouvons situer tour à tour un même objet, à échapper ainsi à l'écrasante pression de la matière pour jouer dans les fluides espaces de la pensée. Je me trouvais tout d'un coup, et pour un instant, pouvoir éprouver pour la fastidieuse jeune fille des sentiments ardents. Elle avait à ce moment-la l'apparence d'une oeuvre d'Elstir ou de Bergotte j'éprouvais une exaltation momentanée pour elle, la voyant dans le recul de l'imagination et de l'art.24
Proust does not feel that experiences should be restricted in any way, as one cannot know what inspiration will come from an experience. He seems to be suggesting a variety of experiences as most helpful for the production of a work of genius. Different kinds of people are capable of eliciting strong feeling in the genius: "Mais c'est justement pour cela (et c'est une indication à ne pas vivre dans une atmosphère trop intellectuelle), parce qu'elle était si différente de moi, qu'elle m'avait fécondé par le chagrin, et même d'abord par le simple effort pour imaginer ce qui diffère de soi." 25

Here even a room different from one's usual room is an inspiring place; "Pour moi, je ne me sens vivre et penser que dans une chambre où tout est la création et le langage de vives profondément différents de la mienne, d'un goût opposé au mien, où je ne retrouve rien de ma pensée consciente, où mon imagination s'exalte en se sentant plongée au sein du non-moi." 26

Physical desire is sometimes felt to be conducive to work:

Le plaisir un peu enfoncé dans la chair aide au travail des lettres parce qu'il anéantit les autres plaisirs, par exemple les plaisirs de la société, ceux qui sont les mêmes pour tout le monde. Et même si cet amour amène des désillusions, du moins agit-t-il de cette façon-là aussi la surface de l'âme, qui sans cela risquerait de devenir stagnante. Le désir n'est donc pas inutile à l'écrivain pour l'éloigner des autres hommes d'abord et de se conformer à eux, pour rendre ensuite quelques mouvements à une machine spirituelle qui, passé un certain âge, a tendance à s'immobiliser. 27

One reason for Proust's stress on the need for different kinds of people and atmospheres may be that under new conditions, habit is not able to dull impressions, as it is in one's habitual life. This relaxing of habit is also very important in involuntary memory.
Physical well-being and emotions are also important as sources of inspiration. "Cette gaîté et cette vie, qui est si utile au travail de l'esprit que très souvent l'absence de sommeil ou l'absence de nourriture, ou la fièvre empêche l'état matériel de l'esprit ou les phénomènes de l'inspiration de se produire." They are not only pleasant emotions that are able to inspire works, but unpleasant ones, also. Proust says, "Car le bonheur seul est salutaire pour le corps mais c'est le chagrin qui développe les forces de l'esprit." From this quote it would seem that only negative or unpleasant emotions are able to inspire works, but this is not so in the novel where many happy emotions and memories stimulate Marcel to write. The first such happy feeling is that produced by the spires of Martinville, and the most important are the incidents at the Guermantes' reception, after which he will devote his life to writing. The importance of emotions is again stressed: "Ce sont nos passions qui esquissent nos livres, le repos d'intervalle qui les écrit."

Books and other artistic works are other sources of inspiration:

L'exaltation qui suit certaines lectures ait une influence propice sur le travail personnel, on cite plus d'un écrivain qui aimait à lire une belle page avant de se mettre au travail ... Quel bonheur, quel repos pour un esprit fatigué de chercher la vérité en lui-même de se dire qu'elle est située hors de lui, aux feuillets.

Proust feels that books and erudition cannot substitute for experience.

"Cette érudition avait chez lui [Hugo] nourri le génie au lieu de l'étouffer." The stifling of genius or intelligence by too much reading and erudition is always a danger.

Architecture forms a very important stimulus for creative thought and work. The value of the cathedrals for Proust was discussed earlier. The
sonata and septet of Vinteuil serve to inspire Marcel, who feels a closeness to reality when he hears them. Proust describes the relation between a work of genius and the person or genius who is able to be moved by it:

Ce qui nous les fait paraître autres et plus beaux scènes que [to] le reste du monde, c'est qu'ils portent sur eux comme un reflet insaisissable l'impression qu'ils ont donné au génie, et que nous verrions errer aussi singulièrè et aussi despotique sur la face indifférente et soumise de tous les pays qu'il aurait peints. 33

Another source of inspiration is in names, which recall an entire history. This source is particularly important to Marcel who builds elaborate dreams around the magical name of Guermantes, and the names of Balbec and Venice. "Les Noms, nous offrant l'image de l'inconnaisissable que nous avons versé en eux, dans le même moment où ils désignent aussi pour nous un lieu réel, nous forcent par là à identifier l'un à l'autre." 34

A final source has been mentioned earlier in another connection. It is the idolatry of forms which usually occurs after the genius has reached his peak and is in his decline. Throughout the productive life of a genius solitude is important. Only in solitude can the genius produce the work that his inspiration has outlined for him. At the point at which the artist is ready to work, society becomes detrimental to him, by taking time from his work, and distracting the artist from his goal.

In this chapter I have tried to indicate the many specific sources of inspiration for Proust. All aspects of life are potential sources of inspiration. The re-experiencing of a moment forms the basis of the inspirational process for Marcel and for Proust. Specific sources of inspiration mentioned by Proust include nature, powerful emotions, physical desire, names, books, and other artistic works. The forms of art become
the basis for idolatry in the later years of the geniuses' lives. For
Proust all inspiration comes suddenly although there may be a great deal
of intellectual thought leading up to the moment of revelation.
Chapter 3

Notes

2. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 717
3. Proust, Pastiches et Mélanges, p. 254
4. Proust, Les Plaisirs et les Jours, p. 192
5. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 898
6. Ibid., III, 880, 865, 866, etc.
7. Ibid., I, 45
8. Ibid., III, 261
9. Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve, p. 246 contains an early idea on inspiration which is similar in content to the passage from Jean Santeuil at the beginning of this chapter.
11. Ibid., p. 37
12. Ibid., p. 69
13. Ibid., p. 118
14. Ibid., p. 220
15. Proust, Jean Santeuil, II, 145
16. Proust, A la Recherche, II, 345
17. Edmund Wilson, op. cit., pp 5-5
18. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 899
19. Proust, Les Plaisirs et les Jours, p. 185
20. Ibid., p. 185
21. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 918
22. Ibid., I, 96-97
23. Ibid., I, 643
24. Ibid., III, 56
25. Ibid., III, 915
27. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 183
28. Proust, Jean Santeuil, II, 194
29. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 905
30. Ibid., III, 907
31. Proust, Pastiches et Mélanges, pp. 253-254
32. Ibid., p. 259
33. Ibid., pp. 249-250
34. Proust, A la Recherche, II, 10
Chapter Four

The Geniuses in the Works of Marcel Proust

In this chapter I shall examine the personalities and lives of the geniuses that Proust has created to see what similarities and differences exist among them. Then these facts will be related in a brief, general consideration of the life of a genius.

The first genius created by Proust was C. (no other name is given to him). Jean Santeuil is presented as the work of C. published posthumously by some friends. Since C. exists only in the Introduction, his function seems mainly to give the reader a picture of the personality of the genius and of the life most conducive to creativity. With this short introductory technique, C. does not have to be a complete or realistic person, but can represent Proust's basic ideas on the genius. I do not think that Proust was trying to convince the reader that C. wrote the book as had been done earlier by writers desirous of keeping their names separate from their work. Pascal did this in 1656, with his letters Les Provinciales, and Montesquieu with Le11tre Persanes in 1721. However, these men had political purposes to serve by this pretence and Proust did not. In A la Recherche he says, "Les romanciers prétendent souvent dans une introduction qu'en voyageant dans un pays ils ont raconté quelqu'un qui leur a rencontré la vie d'une personne. Ils laissent alors la parole à cet ami de rencontre, et le récit qu'il leur fait c'est précisément leur roman."  

C. represents Proust's early ideas on the genius. He spends most of his time at a country inn. There he finds, "la seule chose que la poète puisse demander aux autres quand il le veut... de s'en aller et de se
In C. there is a hint of the idea that a genius must be able to connect with the past. This faculty develops into involuntary memory in *À la Recherche*. Proust says that he looked "non comme un présage de l'avenir, mais plutôt à ce que j'ai compris comme un ressouvenir du passé." In general C. is a pleasant man, who "aimait comme un autre à plaisanter." He also has a sadistic side, and amused himself by chasing geese into the sea. As he thinks over these incidents he realizes "qu'il n'était pas aussi bon que ces gens le croyaient." His illuminations or inspirations come from the simplest aspects of nature and also from observation of the country people. His creative process is not completely described. The reader is simply told that he has some "moments de profonde illumination où l'esprit descend au fond de toutes les choses et les éclaire." Proust's idea of the creative process becomes much clearer and less mystical in *À la Recherche*.

Society is a negative influence on C.'s work. He comments on society and the theatre: "Je sais bien qu'ils me font du mal: je vois les choses moins à fond, cette manière superficielle qu'on a d'y sentir s'étend sur le reste de mon temps, avec une excitation stérile qui me gêne pour travailler." Before his death, C. has in large part given up his social activities. He has also been able to accept the inevitable facts of life: suffering, illness, change, even death. He says:
C'est ce que j'ai toujours trouvé de si beau dans la nature, c'est comme elle peut lier et délier avec aisance. Moi qui craignais tant la mort, par cette impossibilité qui j'ai toujours eue aux beaux jours de ma vie d' accepter les contraires, elle a su me la rendre bien aimable en m' envoyant ses ministres, les chagrins, la souffrance. Ils m'ont si bien préparé qu' aujourd'hui je la souhaite.

To summarize C.'s essential traits - he was a modest fun-loving man, as well as a sadist. His genius did not show in his life or conversation as brilliantly as it did in his work. At the time of his death he was resigned to the inevitable cycle of life and death.

Bergotte, another of the authors created by Proust, was also a genius. As a young boy, Marcel reads his works and creates a Bergotte in his mind. He so revered this imagined man that when he heard the name Bergotte it "me fit tressauter comme le bruit d'un revolver qu'on aurait déchargé sur moi." When he is introduced to Bergotte, what he sees is "un jeune homme, rude, petit, râlé et myope, à nez rouge en forme de coquille de colimaçon et une barbiche noire." As he listens to Bergotte, Marcel decides that he is "en effet un organe bizarre." This is generally the opinion held by M. de Norpois and by many others who tolerate Bergotte only because of his great position in the literary world.

As Marcel matures he is able to "découvrir une exacte correspondance avec les parties de ses livres où sa forme devenait si poétique et musical [and] certains passages de la conversation" of Bergotte. The cause of the disappointment for many people in listening to Bergotte, Marcel decides, is that:

Toute nouveauté ayant pour condition l'élimination préalable du poncif auquel nous étions habitués et qui nous semblait la réalité même, toute peinture, toute musique originales, paraître toujours alambiquée et fatigante. Elle repose sur des figures auxquelles
Bergotte's writing style, like Proust's stresses the use of metaphor. Through this means he relates two different objects. This new connection brings out similarities between the two, and presents a new way of perceiving the objects. Marcel says that what he liked in the books of Bergotte was:

ce . . . flux mélodique, ces expressions anciennes, quelques autres très simples et connues, mais pour lesquelles la place où il les mettait en lumière semblait révéler de sa part un goût particulier; enfin, dans les passages tristes, une certaine brusquerie, un accent presque raucy. Et sans doute lui-même devait sentir que là étaient ses plus grands charmes. Car dans les livres qui suivirent, s'il avait rencontré quelque grande vérité . . . il interrompait son récit et dans une invocation, une apostrophe, une longue prière, il donnait un libre cours à ces effluves qui dans ses premiers ouvrages restaient intérieurs à sa prose, décélés seulement alors par les ondulations de la surface, plus douce peut-être encore, plus harmonieuse quand elles étaient ainsi voilées et qu'on n'aurait pu indiquer d'une manière précise où naissait, où expirait leur murmure. Ces morceaux auxquels il se complaisait était [my] . . . morceaux préférés. 13

A distinct relationship between Bergotte and his work is noted. His books are superior to his person. This is possible, for a characteristic of the person may be completely usurped by his work, as with Bergotte's musical voice: "Mais pour lui, à partir du moment où il les transporta dans ses livres, il cessa inconsciemment d'en user dans son discours. Du jour où il avait commencé d'écrire et, . . . plus tard, quand je le connus sa voix s'en était désorchestrée pour toujours." 14 The close relationship between a man and his work is again noted just before Bergotte's death: "Déjà la plus grande partie de sa pensée avait passé de son cerveau dans les livres. Il était amaigri comme s'il avait été opéré d'eux." 15
The relationship is almost parasitic:

Peut-être, plus le grand écrivain se développa en Bergotte aux dépens de l'homme à barbiche, plus sa vie individuelle se noya dans le flot de toutes les vies qu'il imaginait et ne lui parut plus l'obliger à des devoir effectifs, lesquels étaient remplacés pour lui par le devoir d'imaginer ces autres vies.¹⁶

The best of Bergotte is what is similar to his books, but there is another part of him, "égoïste, ambitieux, et qui ne pensait qu'à parler de tels gens puissants, nobles ou riches, pour se faire valoir."¹⁷ There is a suggestion of some "autres vices, à demi incestueux qu'on disait même compliqué d'indélicatesse en matière d'argent."¹⁸ These reports do not upset Marcel. Rather, he is able to place them in relation to the work of art:

... souvent les grands artistes, tout en étant mauvais se servent de leur vices pour arriver à concevoir la règle morale de tous. Ce sont les vices (ou seulement les faiblesses et les ridicules) du milieu où ils vivaient ... que les écrivains ont le plus souvent flétries dans leur diatribes sans changer pour cela le train de leur ménage ou le mauvais ton qui règne dans leur foyer.¹⁹

It was around Bergotte that Odette built her salon. He would write short plays to be presented there. Later in life he entered the Guermantes' circle, and was considered by the Duchess to be very witty.²⁰ Proust points out that Bergotte was not really interested in the social world, "il n'avait jamais aimé le monde, où l'avait aimé un seul jour pour le mépriser ... non de mépriser parce qu'on ne peut obtenir, mais aussitôt qu'on a obtenu."²¹ As he ages Bergotte withdraws from society. With old age also comes a loss of talent. Proust describes his later works as inferior to those written during his prime. At the time of his death Bergotte, like C., is able to accept death. He has some last misgivings about his work just before he dies.
Through Bergotte, Proust shows his readers that society is not harmful to the artist if it does not completely engulf his personality. Bergotte is also the vehicle through whom Proust shows the very close relationship between an artist and his work. The effects of aging and vice on a genius are also seen by the reader.

Elstir is the great painter created by Proust. He is given two distinct personalities. At first, as M. Biche, (Tiche in Volume III) he is pretentious, and foolish in his social conversation; "... au lieu de répondre d'une façon intéressante à Swann, ce qu'il eût probablement fait s'il eût été seul avec lui, préfère se faire admirer des convives en plaçant un morceau sur l'habileté du maître dispara." Despite his vanities Swann is able to say: "Et quant au peintre, si sa prétention est déplaisante quand il cherche à étonner, en revanche c'est une des plus belles intelligences qui j'aie connues."^23

The change in Elstir is so enormous that Marcel who had heard about the foolish Biche, wonders when he realizes that he is Elstir: "Serait-il possible que cet homme de génie, ce sage, ce solitaire, ce philosophe à la conversation magnifique et qui dominait toutes choses, fût le peintre ridicule et pervers adopté jadis par les Verdurin."^24

Elstir is an impressionist, (modeled somewhat after Monet). He presents things, "dans l'ordre de nos perceptions, au lieu de les expliquer d'abord par leur cause."^25 Marcel enjoys and understands his work:

Mais j'y pouvais discerner que le charme de chacune [of the paintings] consistait en une sorte de métamorphose des choses représentées, analogue à celle qu'en poésie on nomme métaphore, et que, si le Dieu le Père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur en donnant un autre, qu'Elstir les récréeait. Les noms qui désignent les choses répondent toujours à une notion de l'intelligence,
Elstir’s canvases represent "les rares moments où l’on voie la nature telle qu’elle est, poétiquement." André Maurois writes, "Elstir (comme Proust) compose ses chefs-d’œuvre avec ‘des parcelles de réalité, qui toute avaient été personnellement senties’". It is Elstir who explains the art of the cathedrals to Marcel. "Si vous saviez, à côté de l’exactitude la plus minutieuse à traduire le texte saint, quelles trouvailles de délicatesse a eues le vieux sculpteur que de profondes pensées, quelle délicieuse poésie." Elstir leads a life similar to that of C. He lives simply, in the country, far from society. It seems that Elstir, more than Bergotte, was held from working by his social connections. "Il paraît que mes diverses lui faisaient perdre du temps, que je nuisais au développement de son génie, dit-elle [Mme. Verdurin] sur un ton d’ironie. Comme si la fréquentation d’une femme comme moi pouvait ne pas être salutaire à un artiste."

The subjects of Elstir’s works are chosen mostly from nature rather than from people. Perhaps this is why he can live apart from society. The relationship between his works and people is not as close as it would be with a writer. Elstir’s fine qualities are sharply contrasted to an insensitive society:

Elstir aimait à donner, à se donner. Tout ce qu’il possédait, idées, œuvres, et le reste qu’il comptait pour bien moins, il l’eût donné avec joie à quelqu’un qui l’eût compris. Mais faute d’une société supportable, il vivait dans un isolement, avec une sauvagerie, que les gens du monde appelaient de la pose et de la mauvaise éducation.

It would seem that this desire of Elstir to share, was what made life in
society difficult for him:

Car un artiste pour être tout à fait dans la vérité de la vie spirituelle doit être seul, et ne pas prodiguer de son moi, ... de toute circonstance, qu'elle fut relative à lui ou à d'autres, il cherchait à extraire, pour le meilleur enseignement des jeunes gens, la part de vérité qu'elle contenait.32

As Elstir grows older, Marcel comments on his growing idolatry, which makes him enjoy certain forms without questioning their meaning. The idolatry of a genius is discussed in Chapter Two. His genius, like Bergotte's lessens with age. Generally Elstir leads a very happy life. In this fact he is different not only from the other geniuses but from most of the other characters in A la Recherche.

The details of Vinteuil's life are not presented in the same degree as the lives of the other geniuses. Although his music pervades the book, more than the work of any other artist, he himself appears less frequently than the others. To Marcel he is just the piano teacher of his great aunts. Vinteuil is excessively shy. Through a window Marcel sees him spread out his compositions so that they will be noticed by visitors, but rapidly gather them up when his guests enter, too shy to play them.

Vinteuil's life is saddened and shortened by the knowledge that his daughter is a practicing homosexual. He lives in Combray and has no contact with the upper classes, or even with intellectuals. So shy, foolish, and self-conscious is Vinteuil that it never occurs to Swann, who knows him, that he is the same Vinteuil who has composed such moving music. He is the most provincial of the geniuses created by Proust, and his life is the most restricted in terms of travel and friends. Yet it is his work that is most often discussed in the novel. Through his music he presents his vision of the world:
En sa petite phrase quoiqu'elle présentait à la raison une surface obscure, on sentait un contenu si consistant, si explicite, auquel elle donnait une force si nouvelle, si originale, que ceux qui l'avaient entendue la conservaient en eux de plainpied avec les idées de l'intelligence.\textsuperscript{33}

After Vinteuil's death, his septet is published and this new composition greatly surpasses his earlier works. Marcel discusses Vinteuil's genius; he is a symbolist who uses music in a way similar to Bergotte's use of words.

Car à des dons plus profonds, Vinteuil joignait celui que peu de musiciens, et même peu de peintres ont possédé, d'user de couleurs non seulement si stables mais si personnelles que, pas plus que le temps n'altère leur fraîcheur, les élèves qui imitent celui qui les a trouvées, et les maîtres mêmes qui le dépassent, ne font pâler leur originalité.\textsuperscript{34}

In his works can be felt his sadness, and also his deep joys and emotions. "Et la pensée de Swann se porta . . . dans un élan de pitié et de tendresse vers ce Vinteuil, vers ce frère inconnu et sublime qui lui aussi avait du tant suffrir; qu'avait pu être sa vie? au fond de quelles douleurs avait-il puisé cette force de dieu, cette puissance illimitée de créer."\textsuperscript{35} The relationship between his personality and his work is extremely close for a perceptive listener. "Le peintre [Elstir] avait entendu dire que Vinteuil était menacé d'aliénation mentale. Et il assurait qu'on pouvait s'en apercevoir à certains passages de sa sonate."\textsuperscript{36}

Considering the relationship between the genius and his work, Proust has said: "Le bourgeoisisme pudibond de l'un, [Vinteuil] les défauts insupportables de l'autre, [Bergotte] même la prétentieuse vulgarité d'un Elstir à ses débuts ne prouvent rien contre eux, puisque leur génie est manifeste par leurs œuvres."\textsuperscript{37}
However, there is also shown to be a definite relationship between
the artist and his creation. This is not necessarily perceived by a casual
observer. But a sensitive and intelligent person can see the connections.
Thus Marcel sees the relation between Bergotte and his work only when he
is mature and knows Bergotte well. Swann is able to say that Elstir, when
he was M. Biche, was basically intelligent. With Vinteuil the problem is
that he appeared so foolish that neither Swann nor Marcel ever took the
trouble to get to know him. Elstir, who had heard of Vinteuil's mental
illness, can see signs of this in his music.

Berma is still another type of genius. She exists in the work mostly
as an artist, rather than as a complete character. Of her private life
little is known, except that she is extremely devoted to her selfish
daughter and son-in-law. To earn money for them she destroys her health
by returning to the stage when she is too old to bear the physical strain
of acting.

It is interesting that Proust should have chosen an actress as one of
his geniuses, as this is not as usual a type as are the musician, and the
artist. He details the aspects of her work which make her outstanding in
her profession. Some of these were discussed in Chapter One. Her genius
is equated with that of the other geniuses, in that it too shows the hidden
realities of life. Marcel says: "Le spectacle [of Berma acting] m'appar-
issait-il comme la forme peut-être nécessaire de la perception de ces
vérités . . . appartenant à un monde plus réel que celui où je vivais."38

Marcel learns just what constitutes dramatic genius. "Je compris alors
que l'oeuvre de l'écrivain n'était pour la tragédienne qu'une matière, à
peu près indifférente en soi-même, pour la création de son chef-d'oeuvre
Bergotte remarks on a certain pose of Berma's in Phèdre "où elle reste le bras levé à la hauteur de l'épaule... elle avait su évoquer avec un art très noble des chefs-d'œuvre qu'elle n'avait peut-être d'ailleurs jamais vus, une Hespéride qui fait ce geste sur une méthope d'Olympie, et aussi les belles vierges de l'ancien Eréchthéion."

With his presentation of Berma, Proust enriches the conventional considerations of genius, by adding an actress to the usual group. However, with the sudden revelation that Octave is also a genius, I feel that Proust has gone beyond credulity. Proust's main reason for introducing him seems to be to stress again that there need be no visible relationship between the genius' outward life and his productions.

Octave is a designer for the theatre: "Ce jeune homme fit représenter de petits sketches, dans des décors et avec des costumes de lui, et qui ont amené dans l'art contemporain une révolution au moins égale à celle accomplie par les Ballets russes."

Marcel is surprised at this new side of Octave, whom he had known only as a young man interested only in sports and clothes. He wonders:

Ou bien il avait été, en effet, pendant de longues années la 'brute épaisse' qu'il paraissait, et quelque cataclysme physiologique avait éveillé en lui le génie assoupi comme la Belle au bois dormant; ou bien à cette époque de sa rhétorique orageuse, il était déjà un homme de génie, peut-être distrait de son génie, l'ayant laissé la clef sous la porte dans l'effervescence de passions juvéniles; ou bien même, homme de génie déjà conscient, et si dernier en classe, parce que pendant que le professeur disait des banalités sur Cicéron, lui lisait Rimbaud ou Goethe... Il pouvait être très vaniteux, ce qui peut s'allier au génie, et chercher à briller de la manière qu'il savait propre à éblouir dans le monde... et qui n'était nullement de prouver une connaissance approfondie des Affinités électorives, mais bien plutôt de conduire à quatre."
Proust has shown in Elstir and Bergotte the effects of old age on genius. With Elstir it is his idolatry and with Bergotte a mediocrity that comes with age. In Octave the reader sees the uncovering or development of genius. In relation to Octave's early conversations which were foolish and in which art was never mentioned, Marcel says: "Sans compter que pour Octave les choses de l'art devaient être quelque chose de si intime, de vivant tellement dans les plus secrets replis de lui-même, qu'il n'eût sans doute pas eu l'idée d'en parler."^3

Here Proust is showing that he does not have an hierarchy of the arts, as he mentioned earlier. Octave's work is never fully discussed as is the work of the other geniuses. And since his medium is not very common, the reader wonders why Proust chose to present him. Octave himself is well integrated into the novel. He is Mme. Verdurin's nephew, a possible fiance for Albertine, and later the husband of Andrée. I feel the introduction and treatment of Octave as a genius is one of the weak points in the novel.

Marcel is the most important genius. His personality is in many ways identical to Proust's and his artistic theories are those of Proust. His most outstanding trait is his sensitivity. Marcel's childhood memories center around the night when Swann's visit prevented his mother from giving him his good-night kiss. Throughout his childhood Marcel is a voluminous and intelligent reader. As a mature man he is well versed in all the arts. Proust says of intelligence in the genius: "Le génie ayant la plus grande expérience de l'intelligence, peut le mieux comprendre les idées qui sont le plus opposées à celles qui forment le fond de ses propres œuvres."^4

The quality Marcel lacks is will - and this he acquires before he is ready to write his book. Marcel has amazing powers of self-analysis. These
are particularly apparent during his affairs with Gilberte and Albertine. He is also very conscious of his relationship with his mother and grandmother.

From childhood his desire is to be a great writer, and he does some writing throughout most of his life. His early writings are for magazines and the newspapers. From these he gets a reputation as an intellectual. It is not until he is past middle age that he finds his real theme. At this point he devotes himself to writing full time.

Marcel, unlike the other geniuses, has a place in high society from his youth. This position is not fully accounted for by the fact that he is sought after for his brilliant conversation. Marcel spends much of his time in society. As he grows older he gradually withdraws, first to his house — where he is keeping Albertine — and finally to a sanitarium. He is unable to find any substantial happiness in travel, in love, or in society. His ill health is another reason for his withdrawal.

Many years later he returns to society. In rapid succession, several instances of involuntary memory reveal to him the nature of the work he will write. This is what he has been searching for all his life. Although the revelation comes to him suddenly he has had hints of it all through his life. This seems to indicate that his genius, like Octave's, has taken time to reach its peak. Perhaps this is another reason for the introduction of Octave. His case parallels Marcel's in this aspect of maturation. Their lives are both extremely social ones. Albertine is still another link between them.

What Marcel will write will be the story of his life. He will present it as he has felt it, essentially through moments of involuntary memory.
These moments have linked an occurrence in the past, with one in the present, where the same sensation has been aroused. If a moment can be savored twice in its essential feeling then the past is not dead but exists in the individual, and outside of time. There are moments that are experienced by an individual and the essence of these may be the same for mankind. They exist apart from the particular experience of any person as they are common to all men. Thus, some emotions of Swann, when he loved Odette, are repeated by Marcel during the times he loved Gilberte and Albertine. They are essentially the same emotions that exist for Charlus and St. Loup in their respective loves. These emotions become definite patterns, infinitely repeated by mankind. These are the themes of the novel Proust's novel and Marcel's. Marcel will create a novel where the main theme is not outside time, but Time itself. It will be the story of Time in relation to an individual's life. Time becomes anthropomorphosed and is shown to act upon the individuals who exist within it.

Proust feels that a man's genius does not necessarily have to be apparent to the casual observer. At times this dichotomy between the man and the genius is so great that Proust says:

Tout cela vient à l'appui de ce que je te disais, que l'homme qui vit dans un même corps avec tout grand génie a peu de rapport avec lui, que c'est lui que ses intimes connaissent, et qu'ainsi il est absurde de juger comme Sainte-Beuve le poète par l'homme ou par le dire de ses amis. Quant à l'homme lui-même, il n'est qu'un homme, et peut parfaitement ignorer ce que veut le poète qui vit en lui... C'est notre raisonnement qui, dégageant de l'oeuvre du poète sa grandeur, dit: c'est un roi, et le voit roi, et voudrait qu'il se conduisît en roi.47

However a sensitive person who understands the artist's work, and knows him well may be able to see the similarity between the genius and his creation.
Proust does not suggest that any one kind of life will be more conducive to creativity than another. The only requirement seems to be that the genius have solitude after he has been inspired and is ready to create. It is at this point that society can interfere with the work of a genius. No specific type of personality is common to all geniuses. Rather they are individuals although they do all possess the traits inherent in Proust's meaning of the word "genius". These characteristics were discussed in Chapter One.
Chapter 4

Notes

1. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 551
2. Proust, Jean Santeuil, I, 36
3. Ibid., I, 32
4. Ibid., I, 40
5. Ibid., I, 33
6. Ibid., I, 38
7. Ibid., I, 43
8. Ibid., I, 48
9. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 547
10. Ibid., I, 547
11. Ibid., I, 550
12. Ibid., I, 552
13. Ibid., I, 95
14. Ibid., I, 554
15. Ibid., II, 328
16. Ibid., I, 559
17. Ibid., I, 588
18. Ibid., I, 588
19. Ibid., II, 588
20. Ibid., II, 212
21. Ibid., III, 183
22. Ibid., I, 254
23. Ibid., I, 248
24. Ibid., I, 863
25. Ibid., I, 653
26. Ibid., I, 835
27. Ibid., I, 835
29. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 840
30. Ibid., II, 943
31. Ibid., II, 827-828
32. Ibid., I, 863
33. Ibid., I, 350
34. Ibid., III, 253-254
35. Ibid., I, 348
36. Ibid., I, 214
37. Ibid., III, 728
38. Ibid., II, 441
39. Ibid., II, 50
40. Ibid., I, 560
41. Ibid., III, 605
42. Ibid., III, 606
43. Ibid., III, 606
44. Ibid., I, 566
45. Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve, pp. 175-177
Chapter Five

The Intelligent and Talented Inhabitants of Proust's World

Proust has created many intelligent and talented people in his works who never reach the stature of the genius. I should like to examine the most important of these characters and consider similarities and differences between this group and the geniuses presented.

The most important of the intellectuals in the novel A la Recherche is Swann. He is Marcel's neighbor in Combray where Swann is considered a member of the bourgeois community. At the same time he is welcomed in the highest circles of the aristocracy, where he is considered an intellectual and a wit. Proust, in a section entitled, "Un Amour de Swann", gives his readers the story of Swann's life during the crucial years when he still had the choice of becoming an artist or of remaining a dilettante. Just how great an artist Swann might have become the reader does not know.

Swann is presented as an authority on all the arts, particularly painting. He is able to recognize Elstir's genius while Elstir is still unknown. A close friendship exists between Swann and Bergotte. Swann can understand certain of Bergotte's themes, and this too shows his ability in the field of the arts.

During Marcel's childhood he realizes that Swann "avait l'air de ne pas oser avoir une opinion et de n'être tranquille que quand il pouvait donner méticuleusement des renseignements précis." Here Swann seems to be restricting his own growth by refraining from originality. Originality is a characteristic of all geniuses. In preference to being unique and offering his own ideas, Swann offers the standard information. This tends
to become habit forming with him, and he becomes precise rather than original.

While Swann is still a young man, he falls in love with Odette de Crécy, a beautiful courtesan. During his courtship, he hears Vinteuil's music again. The power of the sonata is so great that Swann is able to "envisager la possibilité inespérée de commencer sur le tard une vie tout différente," from his present dilettante existence. The first time that he hears the music it makes a profound impression and offers many possibilities to him:

The music offers hope to Swann but he does not follow its lead to look for the happiness art offers. To do this he would have to give up the social life which takes all his time, and try to search in himself for the meaning of life. Instead of producing this change in Swann, the sonata's meaning becomes more concrete for Swann, thus losing its ideal element, which is its only reality for Proust. This ideal represents something different in each genius. It is the element of reality (reality may be differently seen) behind all objects that is symbolized by art. Swann sees the sonata as only the theme song of his love:

Mais depuis plus d'une année que, lui révélant à lui-même bien des richesses de son âme, l'amour de la musique était, pour quelque temps au moins, né
en lui, Swann tenait les motifs musicaux pour de véritables idées, d'un autre monde, d'un autre ordre, idées voilées de ténèbres, inconnues, impénétrables à l'intelligence, mais qui n'en sont pas moins parfaitement distinctes les unes des autres, inégales entre elles de valeur et de signification.

Swann has chosen to devote himself to love, rather than to developing his talents fully and becoming an artist. Edmund Wilson points out how painting is also made to symbolize only Swann's love for Odett. "Swann, associating the beauty of Odette with that of the women of Botticelli, ridiculously and tragically identifies his passion for her with his neglected aesthetic interests."

Vanity is another cause of Swann's esthetic failure: "Ce [vanity] fut lui sans doute qui autrefois l'avait dirigé vers cette carrière mondaine où il avait gaspillé dans les plaisirs frivoles les dons de son esprit et fait servir son érudition en matière d'art à conseiller les dames de la société." Intellectual laziness and a social life become such habits with Swann that he makes excuses for his failure to create and ends by believing in them:

Puis, il appartenait à cette catégorie d'hommes intelligents qui ont vécu dans l'oisiveté et qui cherchent une consolation et peut-être une excuse dans l'idée que cette oisiveté offre à leur intelligence des objets aussi dignes d'intérêt que pourrait faire l'art ou l'étude, que la 'Vie' contient des situations plus intéressantes, plus romanesques que tous les romans.

The force exerted by habit is a final obstacle to Swann's creativity. The effect of habit is shown by Proust in his story, "Violante ou la Mondanité." In this tale, a talented girl is unable to withdraw from a social life that bores her, because of the power of habit.

Le baron de Charlus is another very intelligent person created by
Proust. At one point in the novel he is referred to as a genius: "Du moins cette monde intellectuelle est-elle naïve et croit-elle de bonne foi au néant d'un génial Charlus, à l'incontestable autorité d'un stupide Morel." This unique instance seems intended to stress Charlus' talent rather than seriously to classify him as a genius.

Charlus is not of the intellectual stature that Proust has given to his geniuses. Charlus, like Swann, leads an extremely social life. By birth, the baron holds one of the highest positions in the social world in which Marcel mixes. The two men are good friends. The baron is a tyrant over society, and for many years he determines who is to be accepted and who shall be overlooked for a place in society. Proust describes Charlus' relation to his society: "M. de Charlus était en quelque sorte leur poète, celui qui avait su dégager de la mondanité ambiante une sorte de poésie ou il entrait de l'histoire, de la beauté, du pittoresque, du comique, de la frivole élegance." Charlus' intellectual gifts, like Swann's, are in all of the arts. As Marcel discovers, he is also a manager:

D'ailleurs un manager (M. de Charlus, chez qui j'ignorais ces talents, bien que Mme. de Guermantes, qui l'avait connu fort différent dans leur jeunesse, prétendait qu'il lui avait fait une sonate, peint un éventail, etc.), un manager modeste en ce qui concernait ses vraies superiorités, mais de premier ordre, sut mettre cette virtuosité au service d'un sens artistique multiple et qui la déculpa.11

One feels that Charlus is prevented from great achievements by his homosexual nature. In his youth, as the above quote shows, he was creative. During this time, the implication is that he was able to control his homosexuality. When the reader meets him, however, he is in his decline, both physical and moral. He becomes more pathetic and ludicrous throughout
the novel. His sexual activities become more apparent and they begin to
control him. The "'côté' presque fou" begins to dominate the more nor-
mal restrained personality of the baron. This mad aspect of his character
makes of him an extremist in all types of sexual behavior.

Dr. Cottard is also a brilliant man for Proust, but not a genius.
He is an outstanding physican, and later he becomes "le professeur Cottard."
Mme Verdurin's clique is the center of his social world, and he attaches
great importance to his attendance at her functions. Cottard's knowledge
exists in just a narrow field, unlike Swann and Charlus. Speaking of
Cottard and others like him, Proust says: "On peut être illettré, faire
des calembours stupides, et posséder un don particulier qu'aucune culture
générale ne remplace, comme le don du grand stratège ou du grand clinicien." Here Proust stresses the fact of Cottard's intellectual dichotomy:

Chez cet homme si insignifiant, si commun, il y avait,
dans ces courts moments où il délibérait . . . la sorte
de grandeur d'un général qui, vulgaire dans le reste
de la vie, émeut par sa décision au moment où le sort
de la patrie se joue, quand après avoir hésité un in-
stant, il conclut par ce qui militairement est le plus
sage.\footnote{14}

Cottard is awkward and foolish in social situations. He completely
lacks subtlety and does not recognize it in others. He has no understand-
ing of art, "M. et Mme Cottard . . . ne trouvaient ni dans la sonate de Vin-
teuil, ni dans les portraits du peintre, Elstir, ce qui faisait pour eux
l'harmonie de la musique et la beauté de la peinture."\footnote{15}

During his lifetime, his skill and reputation as a diagnostician in-
crease, but he never develops any artistic appreciation or understanding.
He is limited to just one kind of knowledge and never even realizes that
art represents a different kind of knowledge and truth.
These three men are the most intelligent non-genius that Proust has created. They never experience the personal happiness and satisfaction that the geniuses do, through their creative works and talents. Swann has moments of great joy when he first hears the sonata. Later on, it just reminds him of a time when he was happy. Neither in love nor in any other aspect of his life does Swann find any lasting satisfaction. For Proust true happiness can exist only in relation to creating or understanding art. Charlus is not a happy man for the same reasons. He does not relate art to his life, but lives for his physical pleasures. Cottard, unlike the other two, uses his full capacity and is a happy man, in his own way. His happiness is limited to a narrow field and in this respect very different from that experienced by the geniuses created by Proust. Cottard's profession and its requirements are his kind of art. This close relationship between the man and his work is the basis for his happiness.

Each of these men seems to be prevented by some aspect of his nature from developing beyond certain limits. For Swann these limits are set by his vanity, his love, his desire for an extensive social life, and finally by habit, which had been formed as a result of the other three. Moreover, he has a certain laziness, which, as Mme Verdurin has said, belongs to those without genius. These factors prevent him from becoming a great artist and enjoying the happiness that is related to creative work. One must assume that he was not born a genius, since this quality is innate, and enables those that have it to produce, no matter what the pattern of their lives. Marcel, for example, is a man who leads a life similar to Swann's, and yet he produces a great work when the genius in his personality becomes uppermost.
Charlus' limits are mostly constitutional. His talents and finally his whole personality become subservient to his sexual drives. Charlus the intellectual, diminishes as Charlus, the biological creature gains ascendance.

Cottard's limits are also pre-determined. He is gifted in only one sphere. The reader is told that "sur tous les points cependant où une franche question lui semblait permise, le docteur ne se faisait pas faute de s'efforcer de restreindre le champ de ses doutes et de compléter son instruction." Despite his attempts to learn, he remains ignorant about most topics throughout his life.

A la Recherche presents many other intelligent people who, like Cottard, excel in one field. Their achievements are not as great as his, for Proust does present medicine as a more important field than those exemplified by some of his other characters. Each individual can express himself through a medium, and by doing his best can find a special happiness through this creative act. This is Proust's feeling, for he describes a variety of fields, and shows someone enjoying himself in each. Here he describes Françoise, the family cook:

Et depuis la veille Françoise, heureuse de s'adonner à cet art de la cuisine pour lequel elle avait certainement un don, stimulée, d'ailleurs par l'annonce d'un convive nouveau, et sachant qu'elle aurait à composer, selon des méthodes sues d'elle seule, du boeuf à la gelée, vivait dans l'effervescence de la création.

This description is similar to the way in which he has described his geniuses. Françoise is someone who has a certain knack which is unique. This quality of uniqueness is one that is important to all geniuses. She is often compared to artists: She has "la brûlante certitude des grands
In performing her task, Françoise is happy; her knowledge is limited but this does not impair her enjoyment of her culinary skill: "On n'aurait pu parler de pensée à propos de Françoise. Elle ne savait rien, dans ce sens total où ne rien savoir équivaut à ne rien comprendre, sauf les rares vérités que le coeur est capable d'atteindre directement. Le monde immense des idées n'existait pas pour elle."

For St. Loup, it is in military science that he finds a means for happiness through self-expression. He is Marcel's closest friend, and the nephew of the baron de Charlus. The duchess de Guermantes is able to express her individuality through elegance. This elegance exists in her dress, manners, and conversation, and separates her from the other members of her circle.

Both Marcel's mother and grandmother incorporate art, particularly literature, into their lives. From this they derive great pleasure. The two women frequently quote from their favorite author, Mme de Sevigne. They particularly enjoy noticing and using quotes that are appropriate to the situation. In doing this they are drawing a relationship between two distinct moments. This is similar to Proust's style, which depends on the metaphor to show similarities in diverse moments. These women have a capacity for artistic living.

Many of Proust's outstanding people have more common talents, such as Morel, the violinist; Mme de Villeparisis, the baron's aunt, who paints and also writes; and M. de Norpois, her lover, who is a diplomat. These people are not outstanding to the same degree as Cottard, Swann or Charlus, although their talents are in similar fields. Many intellectuals inhabit Proust's work: Brichot, a professor, Mme de Cambrier, a member of the
Guermantes' circle, and Bloch, Marcel's friend. They are bright, but not unique in their intellectual expressions.

From the mention of the many fields in which Proust allows his characters to express themselves, one can deduce that he feels that any means of creative self-expression offers happiness. It is not the kind of work, but the quality of the participation that is important. It is interesting to hypothesize as to why he did not create any scientists. His technique and message in A la Recherche are somewhat anti-intellectual, in their stress on non-intellectual means of getting to reality. This is related to the philosophy prevalent in his day. Perhaps his omission of a scientist is another facet of the swing away from science in Proust's day.

Arts, even the minor ones, are the only means for an individual to obtain any permanent or real satisfaction in life. The minor artists and intellectuals in Proust's work differ from the geniuses in degree of talent and in the meaning and enjoyment they can derive from their work. The non-geniuses are also more inclined to interpret art in a materialistic sense rather than to seek behind the material to an idealistic or symbolic meaning. These latter interpretations give to the geniuses the sense of extreme joy which is never felt by the other intellectuals.
Chapter 5

Notes

1. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 98
2. Ibid., I, 211
3. Ibid., I, 210
4. Ibid., I, 349
5. Edmund Wilson, op. cit., p. 134
6. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 193
7. Ibid., I, 193
8. This story appears in Les Plaisirs et les Jours.
9. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 221
10. Ibid., III, 766
11. Ibid., II, 911
12. Ibid., III, 806
13. Ibid., I, 433
14. Ibid., III, 318
15. Ibid., I, 213
16. See Chapter One
17. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 100
18. Ibid., I, 445
19. Ibid., I, 446
20. Ibid., I, 650
Chapter Six

The Aim and Effect of the Work of Genius

I would like in this chapter to consider the effect of art on the listener, observer, or reader. The production of a work of art is the aim of every genius that Proust presents. Artistic creation is the artist's means of expression. Through art he presents his vision to mankind. The work of the genius has certain effects on its audience, as well as on the genius as he creates it. The artist and his public do not necessarily feel the same way about the artistic production.

The effect on artists' work varies somewhat depending on what the individual asks of art. The hopes and questions with which people turn to art differ greatly. Jean Santeuil "avait demandé à la poésie le secret de la vie, de la mort et de son âme". Marcel believes that "le secret de la vérité et de la beauté" is to be found in art. A la Recherche is in part the story of his search for these secrets.

Throughout most of Marcel's life he is upset by the fear that he lacks talent, and even more important, the genius to create a work of art. He feels that he has nothing to write about. He becomes particularly depressed after he reads some passages in the Concourt Journals. These paragraphs are about people that he has known, such as M. Verdurin and Dr. Cottard. Described by the Concourt Brothers, they seem like different people. Marcel feels that literature is not truth and is inaccurate.

Many years later, at the Guermantes' reception, Marcel has four instances of involuntary memory (these are fully discussed in Chapter Four). He becomes aware suddenly of the significance of life and of its two levels.
One is completely related to the individual person and the other goes beyond the individual and represents similarities in all men. The former is determined, the latter is a free level, or world.

Proust has hinted at this division earlier. When explaining Kant's ideas, he says that "après la démonstration la plus rigoureuse du déterminisme, on découvre qu'au-dessus du monde de la nécessité il y a celui de la liberté." Marcel has been made aware of the determined nature of the one level throughout his life. On this level man meets disappointment in love, in his work, in his friendships, and eventually must die. He has had glimpses of the other level in his moments of involuntary memory. These moments represent the freedom that exists on the other level.

Marcel then realizes that he must record this vision and that art is the only way of showing that the other world exists. He thinks:

Il fallait tâcher d'interpréter les sensations comme les signes d'autant de lois et d'idées, en essayant de penser, c'est-à-dire de faire sortir de la pénombre ce que j'avais senti, de le convertir en un équivalent spirituel. Or, ce moyen qui me paraissait le seul, qu'était-ce autre chose que faire une œuvre d'art?

He understands that art orders and explains life and gives it its value. Also, as was mentioned in Chapter Three, it is life that gives art its subject matter. The connection between the two is very close, closer for the writer, but all art must relate to something and this thing is life.

La grandeur de l'art véritable . . . c'était de retrouver, de ressaisir, de nous faire connaître cette réalité loin de laquelle nous vivons, de laquelle nous nous écartons de plus en plus au fur et à mesure que prend plus d'épaisseur et d'imperméabilité la connaissance conventionnelle
que nous lui substituons, cette réalité que nous risquerions fort de mourir sans avoir connue, et qui est tout simplement notre vie. La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent réellement vécue, c'est la littérature; . . . Mais ils [men] ne la voient pas, parce qu'ils ne cherchent pas à l'éclaircir.

Art reveals the essence of life which convention, habit, and erudition threaten to block out. Art makes men see and understand their real lives, not what they think they are doing, but what is actually happening in each life. "Seul il [art] exprime pour les autres et nous fait voir à nous-même notre propre vie." And more explicitly:

En réalité, chaque lecteur est, quand il lit, le propre lecteur de soi-même. L'œuvre de l'écrivain n'est-ce qu'une espèce d'instrument optique qu'il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n'eût peut-être pas vu en soi-même. La reconnaissance en soi-même, par le lecteur, de ce que dit le livre, est la preuve de la vérité de celui-ci, et vice versa.

Inherent in any great work of art is the indication that life is of value: "la lecture . . . nous apprend à relever la valeur de la vie, valeur que nous n'avons pas su apprécier et donc nous nous rendons compte seulement par le livre combien elle était grande." On the question of the meaning of art, Proust is precise to the point of being repetitious. I have tried to select those quotes from his work that will indicate the many functions that art does have. Some of these ideas are also expressed in his earlier works. In addition to enabling man to understand and appreciate his own life, art is the medium through which the artist can communicate his deepest feelings and thoughts. Grâce à l'art, au lieu de voir un seul monde, le notre, nous le voyons se multiplier, et, autant qu'il y a d'artistes originaux, autant nous avons de mondes à notre disposition, plus différents les uns des autres.
The possibilities open to the artist are infinite, says Proust. Art captures the essence of life through the use of metaphor and by creating the general rather than the unique. This does not mean that Proust's characters are stereotypes; rather they are archetypes.

Art alone enables man really to express himself honestly. And only in art can a person really analyze or understand himself. Art here refers to creating art of just to understanding it.

La musique, bien différente en cela de la société d'Albertine, m'aidait à descendre en moi-même, à y découvrir du nouveau; la variété que j'avais en vain cherchée dans la vie, dans le voyage, dont pourtant la nostalgie m'était donnée par ce flot sonore qui faisait mourir à côté de moi ses vagues ensoleillées. Diversité double... [art] nous permettent de connaître cette essence qualitative des sensations d'un autre où l'amour pour un autre être ne nous fait pas pénétrer. Puis, diversité au sein de l'oeuvre même, par le seul moyen qu'il y a d'être effectivement divers: réunir divers individualités. 11

The feeling of happiness that come to Marcel, when he realizes that art symbolizes a reality beyond that which is ordinarily realized by man is overwhelming.

Il me semblait, quand je m'abandonnais à cette hypothèse où l'art serait réel, que c'était même plus que la simple joie nerveuse d'un beau temps ou d'une nuit d'opium que la musique peut rendre, mais une ivresse plus réelle, plus féconde, du moins à ce que je pressentais. Mais il n'est pas possible qu'une sculpture, une musique qui donne une émotion qu'on sent plus élevée plus pure, plus vraie, ne corresponde pas à une certaine réalité spirituelle, ou la vie n'aurait aucun sens. 12

What the artist does is to capture a moment or a series of moments. These remain always in his work. He has taken them from the one level and transplanted them to the realm of eternity. 13
To get the meaning from the work of art the reader or observer or listener must make an effort to understand. This is not easy to do: "Cette reaction sur la deception que causerent d'abord les chefs-d'oeuvre, on peut, en effet, l'attribuer a un affaiblissement de l'impression initiale ou a l'effort necessaire pour degager la verite." 14

In the ability to understand art, people differ greatly, as I have mentioned in Chapter Five. The effort is similar to the one made by the artist. For the genius, as well as his audience, it is necessary to divest the work of art of all conventional meaning and common ideas to savor its true essence. Swann did not go this far, and he never experienced the hoy that comes from understanding art.

Proust does not often discuss the critic, and the few comments he makes are unfavorable. He seems to feel that they do not really understand some of the work they criticize (he must have had his then incomplete work, *A la Recherche*, in mind). Proust does detail the job of the critic, but he does not say that he means a professional critic specifically but anyone who criticizes. He speaks of understanding works of art which is the function of the critic, but also is what every person should do. However, a clear understanding of art is so rare to Proust's experience that in his work only the geniuses can really understand each others' work. Thus it is Elstir who explains to Marcel the meaning of the cathedrals; and Bergotte who explains the genius of Berma.

Proust seemed fully aware that the reading public, and the audience for the other arts, was not always able to make the effort to understand the work of genius. His work is full of such intellectually limited people (Chapter Five); those who do understand are just six. He does not choose
to explain this lack of artistic understanding or to suggest possible courses to correct it. I shall not try either as this is a problem requiring a great deal of knowledge about society in Proust's day. The problem of comprehension is particularly interesting, as it has persisted into our day. Arnold, as mentioned in Chapter Two, addressed himself to this problem, as Proust does not.

For the artist, as well as his reader, honesty is necessary. The artist must also have a definite message, or vision, to present.

Il n'y avait pour moi de beaux spectacles que ceux que je savais qui n'étaient pas artificiellement combinés pour mon plaisir, mais étaient nécessaires, inchangeables, . . . les beautés des paysages ou du grand art . . . je n'étais avide de connaître que ce que je croyais plus vrai que moi-même, ce qui avait pour moi le prix de me montrer un peu la pensée d'un grand génie, ou de la force ou de la grâce de la nature telle qu'elle se manifeste livrée à elle-même, sans l'intervention des hommes.15

For Proust, the work of the genius is like nature, in that it is necessary and at the same time is not created to serve a particular purpose. Without honesty in his work and the ability to perceive certain truths or themes of life, the book or creation is second-rate. The fact that it may please people is another indication of the lack of ability of the public in Proust's day. In Jean Santeuil, Proust turns critic and through C. gives us this criticism of Balzac, who has

une puissance . . . seulement aussi c'est une puissance un peu matérielle: il plaît à plus de gens et jamais il ne plaira autant aux artistes. Mais vous savez qu'ils l'aiment bien tout de même. Et au fond c'est bien curieux, car il semble que rien ne devrait nous sembler plus bas. Car au fond, tout le temps, ce n'est pas par l'art que cela nous prend. C'est un plaisir qui n'est vraiment pas très pur. Il essaye de nous prendre comme la vie par un tas de mauvaises choses et il lui ressemble.16
Germaine Bree summarizes her ideas on this subject:

the direct apprehension and communication of an experience, the quality of which escapes analysis. This quality is translated into the work of art, from whence it emerges in the new relationships which the artist establishes among the elements which compose his work. A work of art, then, is for the artist a testimonial, for the public a revelation; it has no equivalent. In the domain of esthetics, its structure is intellectual, but its meaning is immediately communicable in that it transmits the sum total of an experience which logical thought could only succeed in formulating in part.

I disagree with Bree on the question of the immediate communicability of art. I feel Proust is saying that an effort must be made to get at the meaning of art, as well as to create art. As I understand Proust, the revelation of art is concerned with the meaning of life, which art alone can stress. Art shows the many possible worlds created by the geniuses. Through art, man is able to understand himself and others more clearly than would otherwise be possible. Art, by capturing a moment, saves this moment for eternity, and this is the timeless aspect of art. For Proust, art is the most important thing in life, for it gives life its only possible meaning.
Chapter 6

Notes

1. Proust, Jean Santeuil, I, 104
2. Proust, A la Recherche, I, 84
3. These passages were pastiches written by Proust.
4. Proust, A la Recherche, II, 477
5. Ibid., III, 878-879
6. Ibid., III, 90
7. Ibid., III, 720
8. Proust, Jean Santeuil, II, 22, 45-46; also Pastiches et Melanges, pp. 103, 148. These are just a few of the many examples from his work.
9. Proust, A la Recherche, III, 875-876
10. Ibid., I, 349
11. Ibid., III, 159
12. Ibid., III, 375
13. Ibid., III, 421
14. Ibid., III, 374
15. Ibid., I, 384
16. Proust, Jean Santeuil, I, 45
Throughout *A la Recherche*, Proust consistently says that art represents a world - a world more real than the one of which we are usually conscious. The following quote is typical of many which point to Proust's belief in a world symbolized by art:

"Mais comme la vie me paraissait agréable! L'insignificance de celle que je menais n'avait aucune importance... puisque au-delà existaient, d'une façon absolue, difficiles à approcher, impossibles à posséder tout entières, ces réalités plus solides, *Phèdre*, la manière dont disait la Berma."

A consistent attitude is absent, however, when Proust deals with two important problems: that of eternity for a work of art, and of immortality for the genius who created it. I feel that the dichotomy existing about these two questions is the result of two paths simultaneously followed by Proust. One path is that created by his desires, the other is based on his intellectual reasoning.

In *A la Recherche*, Proust makes the point that intelligence alone is not enough to enable one to perceive the essence of life. This essence or meaning can be experienced by the genius when he is inspired, and by those people who can understand the message of art.

Proust seems to need to feel that he, either directly or through his work, will be immortal. Many times in his work, through Marcel, he raises the question of immortality of the soul. These discussions begin rather affirmatively, and become less positive as his belief in this type of eternity disappears. Finally, he presents immortality of the soul as one of two possible choices:
Deux hypothèses qui se représentent pour toutes les questions importantes: les questions de la réalité de l'Art de la Réalité, de l'Éternité de l'âme; c'est un choix qu'il faut faire entre elles; et pour la musique de Vinteuil, ce choix se représentait à tout moment sous bien des formes.\textsuperscript{2}

Marcel questions the possibility of these realities many times. I feel that in these discussions Marcel can be considered as speaking for Proust. Although at one point he gives up the belief in the reality of art, this is just temporary. (This was discussed in Chapter Six.) He renounces his belief in the after-life and never goes back to it. At this point, Albertine is dead and Marcel is inquiring into the secrets of her life:

Mais cela, ces indiscretions qui ne se produisent qu'après que la vie terrestre d'une personne est finie, ne prouvent-elles pas que personne ne croit, au fond, à une vie future? Si ces indiscretions sont vraies, on devrait redouter le ressentiment de celle dont on dévoile les actions, autant pour le jour où on la rencontrera au ciel, qu'on le redoutait tant qu'elle vivait, ou on se croyait tenu à cacher son secret. Et si ces indiscretions sont fausses, inventées parce qu'elle n'est plus là pour démentir, on devrait craindre plus encore la colère de la morte si on croyait au ciel. Mais personne n'y croit.\textsuperscript{3}

From the logical and sincere way in which Proust treated this question it is clear that the immortality of the soul presented a real problem for him. Perhaps his early religious training formed the basis for these ideas, which only in his later life did he completely discard.

When Marcel questions the validity of art, he asks, "En abandonnant, en fait, cette ambition, avais-je renoncé à quelque chose de réel? La vie pouvait-elle me consoler de l'art? y avait-il dans l'art une réalité plus profonde où notre personnalité véritable trouve une expression que
ne lui donnent pas les actions de la vie?” After the experience at
the Guermantes’ reception of the series of recaptured moments, Marcel
reaffirms his faith in the arts. This includes his earlier idea of the
eternity of the work of art. This eternity is derived from the message
of art. Art symbolizes a world which exists and is not governed by the
laws of determinism which reign in the ordinary world. Marcel arrives
at this conclusion when he is able to re-experience or relive a past
moment. By having it twice he has it forever.

When Marcel discusses his own work, he does not mention its
immortality. The reason for this may be modesty on the part of Proust,
for at these points, Marcel is identical with the author. In considera-
tions of the work of other geniuses, however, Proust speaks of the im-
ortality of a work of art.

Avant même de savoir si je l’y trouverai, c’est l’âme
de Ruskin que j’y allais [to Amiens] chercher et qu’il
a imprimée aussi profondément aux pierres d’Amiens
qu’y avaient imprimé la leur ceux qui les sculptèrent,
car les paroles du génie peuvent aussi bien que le ciseau
donne aux choses une forme immortelle.

Here Proust is discussing the immortality given to the sculpture in the
church, both by the articles written by Ruskin and by the man whose
chisel did the original creation.

In *A la Recherche*, Proust speaks of an author’s immortality which is
achieved through his work. Here, speaking of Vinteuil, he says:

On aurait dit que réincarné l’auteur vivait à
jamais dans sa musique; on sentait la joie avec
laquelle il choisissait la couleur de tel timbre,
I’ assortissait aux autres. Car à des dons plus
profonds, Vinteuil joignait celui que peu de
musiciens, et même peu de peintres ont possède,
d’user de couleur non seulement si stables mais
si personnelles que, pas plus que le temps n’altère
leur fraîcheur.
The same question of immortality is raised when Bergotte dies. "Il était mort. Mort à jamais? Qui peut le dire? Certes, les expériences spirites pas plus que les dogmes religieux n'apportent de preuve que l'âme subsiste." 7

Proust then speaks of the duties of the artist, (concerning which I have quoted from Wilson’s discussion in Chapter Two). These duties are so different from the necessities of the material world that they seem to be from another world. "Un monde entièrement différent de celui-ci, et dont nous sortons pour naître à cette terre, avant peut-être d'y retourner revivre sous l'empire de ces lois inconnues ... De sorte que Bergotte n'était pas mort à jamais est sans invraisemblance." 8 Here the ideas of immortality of the soul and the immortality of the artist accorded him by his work are fused. The artist's work like Bergotte's books is "pour celui qui n'était plus, le symbole de sa résurrection." 9

As mentioned above, Proust dismisses the idea of immortality of the soul, but this still leaves an artistic immortality to men such as Bergotte and Vinteuil. Since the character Bergotte is often the spokesman for Proust, it can be inferred that Proust hoped for a kind of eternal life for himself, similar to the one he seems to offer to Bergotte. Proust is never explicit on the question of immortality as he is with other intuitional or emotional topics, for example, the meaning of art and the question of inspiration. I feel that this vagueness which exists in A la Recherche must have existed in the mind of Proust. His presentation of this question seems to be a conflict between a strong desire to believe in an immortality, which was expressed,
and the logical reasoning that leads to a different conclusion.

Running parallel to the idea of eternal life, but in a counter direction, are the ideas of a mortal art, and an art that exists in a definite place in time. These ideas are expressed in this passage where Marcel is considering the fate of the dying genius, Bergotte:

Il [Bergotte] allait ainsi se refroidissant progressivement, petite planète qui offrait une image anticipée de la grandeur quand, peu à peu, la chaleur se retirera de la terre, puis la vie. Alors la résurrection aura pris fin, car, si avant dans les générations futures que brillent les œuvres des hommes, encore faut-il qu'il y ait des hommes. Si certaines espèces d'animaux résistent plus longtemps au froid envahisseur, quand il n'y aura plus d'hommes, et à supposer que la gloire de Bergotte ait duré jusque-la, brusquement elle s'éteindra à tout jamais. Ce ne sont pas les derniers animaux qui le liront, car il est peu probable que comme les apôtres à la Pentecôte, ils puissent comprendre le langage des divers peuples humains sans l'avoir appris.

Proust's treatment of Bergotte's immortality is a very scientific treatment of the problem. It shows, I feel, the scientific background out of which Proust and others strove to find a place for poetry. In the above quote he gives the artist immortality as long as men exist, assuming that the work of the artist will always be enjoyed by the living members of the human race.

Even this kind of immortality is withdrawn from the artist at the end of the book. Marcel is planning his future work, the great novel he will write, and he says:

Sans doute mes livres eux aussi, comme mon être de chair, finiraient un jour par mourir. Mais il faut se résigner à mourir. On accepta la pensée que dans dix ans soi-même, dans cent ans ses livres ne seront plus. La durée éternelle n'est pas plus promise aux œuvres qu'aux hommes.
Earlier in the novel, even while Bergotte is alive and creative, Marcel describes the coming end for Bergotte's works. Marcel, speaking for Proust, represents the avant-garde and one can assume that the ordinary reader will follow Marcel's pattern:

Une œuvre est rarement tout à fait comprise et victorieuse, sans que celle d'un autre écrivain, obscure encore, n'ait commencé, auprès de quelques esprits plus difficiles, de substituer un nouveau culte à celui qui a presque fini de s'imposer... Or un nouvel écrivain avait commencé à publier des œuvres où les rapports entre les choses étaient si différents de ceux qui les liaient pour moi que je ne comprenais presque rien de ce qu'il écrivait.\(^\text{12}\)

The preceding passage is almost brutal to the idea that a work of art or the artist will endure and contrasts sharply with the above paragraphs, so full of hope. This last paragraph clearly shows the dichotomy that existed in Proust's mind and which he was unable to resolve. At no point in his novel does he ever pull together these fragments of the eternity versus the mortality of art and the genius.

After presenting Bergotte to be an incomparable artist, and his work to be a permanent addition to mankind's knowledge, he introduces the work of an unnamed author and demolishes the stability of Bergotte: "Tel est l'univers nouveau et périssable qui vient d'être créé. Il durera jusqu'à la prochaine catastrophe géologique que déchaîneront un nouveau peintre ou un nouvel écrivain originaux."\(^\text{13}\)

Proust has also created a genius, Berma, whose works cannot outlast her life. In discussing her art, Proust says, "ce charme répond au vol sur un vers, ces geste instables perpétuellement transformées, ces tableaux successifs, c'était le résultat fugitif, le but momentané, le mobile chef-d'œuvre que l'art théâtral se proposait et que détruirait
en voulant le fixer l'attention d'un auditeur trop épris. He does not treat her genius any differently from Bergotte's or Vinteuil's or Elstir's. What Berma could leave is an interpretation, the idea of a certain mode of presentation which would only be living when another actress would present the same role.

Proust describes the process of preparing the public for a work of genius. In this context, it seems that the work is considered important only when the society is able to understand it. The work is not understood immediately by most people:

"Ce qui est cause qu'une œuvre de génie est difficilement admirée tout de suite, c'est que celui qui l'a écrite est extraordinaire, que peu de gens lui ressemblent. C'est son œuvre elle-même qui, en fécondant les rares esprits capables de le comprendre, les fera croître et multiplier."

Proust himself gives an example of the change in public taste where he is discussing the fate of certain painters over a period of time:

"Les gens de goût nous disent aujourd'hui que Renoir est un grand peintre du XVIIIe siècle. Mais en disant cela ils oublient le Temps et qu'il en a fallu beaucoup, même en plein XIXe, pour que Renoir fût salué grand artiste. Pour réussir à être ainsi reconnus, le peintre original, l'artiste original procèdent à la façon des oculistes. Le traitement par leur peinture, par leur prose, n'est pas toujours agréable. Quand il est terminé, le praticien nous dit: Maintenant regardez. Et voici que le monde (qui n'a pas été créé une fois, mais aussi souvent qu'un artiste original est survenu) nous apparaît entièrement différent de l'ancien, mais parfaitement clair."

Within a single lifetime great changes take place in artistic opinion:
Pourtant les plus vieux auraient pu se dire qu’au cours de leur vie ils avaient vu, au fur et à mesure que les années les en éloignaient, la distance infranchissable entre ce qu’ils jugeaient un chef-d’œuvre d’Ingres et ce qu’ils croyaient devoir rester à jamais une horreur (par exemple l’Olympia de Manet) diminuer jusqu’à ce que les deux toiles eussent l’air jumelles.17

Here Proust speaks of the growth of a reputation. With Bergotte the reader has been shown the end of a reputation. Proust seems to have begun to work out this problem in his treatment of Vinteuil:

Vinteuil, quoique venu ‘à son heure et fixé à son rang dans l’évolution musicale, le quitterait toujours pour venir prendre la tête des qu’on jouerait une de ses productions, qui devrait de paraître enclose après celle de musiciens plus récents a ce caractère en apparence contradictoire et en effet trompeur, de durable nouveauté.18

In describing the close relationship between Vinteuil and his work, Proust says, "il lui [his music] avait été donné de poursuivre, pour un temps illimité, une part au moins de sa vie."19 And the obvious question is whether Vinteuil will gain an immortality through this relationship.

I have tried to show in this chapter the different directions taken by Proust in his work, when he treats the immortality of art and of the artist. I feel that these instances of contrasting development represent an internal conflict between Proust’s logical mind, and his strong emotions and desires. It remains an unsolved question in his work, a struggle, as is so much of his work, between intuition and intellect.
Chapter 7

Notes

1. Proust, *A la Recherche*, II, 45
2. Ibid., III, 374
3. Ibid., III, 617
4. Ibid., III, 158
5. Proust, *Pastiches et Mélanges*, p. 146
7. Ibid., III, 187
8. Ibid., III, 188
9. Ibid., III, 188
10. Ibid., III, 184
11. Ibid., III, 1043
12. Ibid., II, 326
13. Ibid., II, 327
14. Ibid., II, 52
15. Ibid., II, 326
16. Ibid., III, 327
17. Ibid., II, 42
18. Ibid., III, 254
19. Ibid., III, 255
Chapter Eight

Marcel Proust: The Life Of A Genius (1871-1922)

The story of Marcel Proust's life is more unique than that of the lives of his characters. However, there are many similarities between his personality and the personalities of many of his characters, for example, Marcel, Swann, and Bergotte. Many other characters momentarily bear traits that are Proust's. He has remarked on this subject that "il semble que notre attention, toujours attirée sur ce qui nous caractérise, le remarque plus que toute autre chose chez les autres."

I shall briefly mention the salient points in his life, and consider the relationships between some of the details in his life, and incidents in his work.

Critics feel that the incident of the good-night kiss, so important to Marcel, probably occurred in Proust's life. Without his mother's kiss, sleep was impossible for Marcel, so deep was his devotion to her. His mother's love was the most important thing to him in his childhood. "At fourteen he noted that his idea of misery was to be separated from his mother."^1

His deep devotion to his mother brought many problems with it. "Her life with her son was an unending battle between her demonstrative affection and her dutiful preoccupation with the strengthening of his character."^2

Proust is described as an extremely sensitive child. A combination of genetic factors and his close relationship with his mother, together with relations with his father which were ambiguous, are probable factors in his development of a homosexual nature. His homosexuality is one of
the most important aspects of his mode of life. His ambiguous rela-
tionship with his father is mentioned by most critics. March says,
"Sometimes the father, officially in favor of discipline but preoccupied
with other matters, became aware for a moment of his son's unhappiness,
capriciously ordered indulgence, and thought no more about it. To his
wife his word was law, but the work of weeks had been undone."³

Biographers point out how different Proust was from his father.
Pierre-Qunit described Dr. Proust, "Le pince-nez qu'il agitait sans
cesse paraissait le signe d'une vie extrêmement occupée, qu'il passait,
remuant, actif, presque toujours dehors."⁴ Critics generally compare
Proust to his mother, and point out many similarities both in appearance
and in personality.

Proust's brother, Robert, like his father, eventually became a
doctor. Despite the fact that he was only two years younger than Marcel
they were never close friends. In Contre Sainte-Beuve, Jean Santeuil,
and the Combray scenes of A la Recherche, Proust has presented intricate
parent-child relationships in what appears to be a very revealing, auto-
biographical manner.

M. Proust was Catholic, but Mme Proust was Jewish. Although Proust
was raised as a Catholic he generally sympathized with the Jew. This
religious division seems to have enabled him to understand the problem
of the Jew of his day. In both Jean Santeuil and A la Recherche, he
deals with the Dreyfus case, siding with Dreyfus. Swann as a Jew in
society, is skillfully treated by Proust.

One can guess that the three most important aspects of his youth
seem to have been his desire for the exclusive love of his mother, his
feelings about his homosexuality, and his acceptance of his Jewish connections. The importance of these facts is shown in his works by his treatment of these problems and by his omission of these elements from Marcel's character. In such an autobiographical novel, this deletion shows how sensitive he was to these points and how important they were to him.

Turnell points to the directions in which each parent exerted his influence on Proust:

There can be little doubt that the mixture of races played a decisive part in the formation of his character and the development of his art. From his father he derived his feeling for the historic France which gives his novel its strength and solidity; from his mother his exceptionally delicate nervous sensibility, and possibly his interest in clans and coteries.

Perhaps the most important incident in his childhood was one which did not center around either parent. When he was nine he experienced his first attack of asthma. The attack was "so violent that even his doctor-father feared for his life. The attack passed, but disciplinary scruples vanished before the continued precariousness of his condition." Proust seemed to enjoy the state of a semi-invalid with the extra attention it meant. He expressed the advantages of his illness in a letter to his mother, where he said, "Mais il est triste de ne pouvoir avoir, à la fois, affection et santé."

Critics and biographers question how much of his illness was a fact and how much a desire. Although no one can be certain of the facts, Krutch probably well represents the critical literary opinion on this subject:
Doubtless this asthma was a nervous disorder and one is permitted to suspect that it was a sympathetic device rather than a cause of the peculiarities of his temperament. It enabled him in childhood to claim, from his mother especially, the extravagant affection which he demanded, and in later life it served as an excuse for fantastic habits which he doubtless did not want to give up. But it was real enough nevertheless and it marked the first step in that progressive retirement from active life which was to constitute the course of his outward existence. The little Marcel - it was thus that he continued until his dying day to be known - must make a life of his own since he obviously could not share the life of his fellows.

The advantages of the life of an invalid are shown in "La Mort de la Baron de Sylvande." The baron finds a fatal illness and the solicitude and attention it brings more pleasant than the life of a healthy man. Another of Proust's characters who enjoys an invalid's state is Aunt Léonie, in A la Recherche.

As a boy, Proust's favorite activity was reading. He recounts this pastime throughout Jean Santeuil and Du Côté de chez Swann. As he grew older society became very important to him. Pierre-Quint writes, "Il [society] était pour lui le centre des plaisirs, le lieu d'une vie placée sur un autre plan, où les découvertes sont inépuisables." He also speaks of "sa passion pour le monde... son intense amour pour le monde."11

In 1882 he entered le lycée Condorcet, where he continued until 1889. He was a good, but not brilliant student. His school friends gave him his entrance into society. He was often at the salons of Mme Straus-Bizet and Mme Lemaire, where he was treated as a pet. "C'est là [Mme Straus' salon] qu'accroupi aux pieds des femmes vers lesquelles il levait ses beaux yeux brûlants d'intelligence il goûtta ses premiers
succès; c'est de la que l'enfant gâté partit à la conquête de toute une société."12

His close detailing of society life in his works was the natural result of this aspect of his life. He had many close relationships, usually with older women or men. He was so very extravagant in his actions toward his friends that his behavior seemed false. However, in Les Plaisirs et les Jours, he writes, "la flatterie n'est parfois que l'épanchement de la tendresse et la franchise la bave de la mauvaise humeur."13

He spent two years in military service. In his works he spends a good deal of time discussing the military. After his service he began to write stories and reviews for publication. He also started to entertain his friends lavishly. He entertained either at his parents' home or at the most fashionable restaurants, where he left enormous tips. His entertaining was a point of friction between Proust and his mother. Occasionally she "waxes impatient at his lavish dinner parties for his male friends, which she once terms dinners of 'cocottes'"14.

Turnell has quoted from several biographies about Proust, passages which give a "depressing and in some ways repellent" picture of him during the years when he was working steadily on A la Recherche.15 He quotes first from Pierre-Quint:

Illness had profoundly changed him. His face was pale, the ends of his moustache were of unequal length. His nose had a pinched appearance, his cheeks were sunken and his eyes more brilliant. When he was not in bed, he received his visitors in a snuff-colored dressing-gown. He felt the cold more than ever and wore strips of cotton wool over his shirt collar, cotton gloves on his hands and woolen slippers on his feet. His fumigating apparatus gave out a suffocating smell. He
looked like some fabulous necromancer in his laboratory. The dead whom he raised were people whom he had known and whom he brought back to life in his novel... It is still the portrait of the recluse, but by using the work 'necromancer' Proust’s biographer [Pierre-Quint] has, probably without realizing it, introduced a fresh and slightly sinister impression. Another observer actually uses the word 'sinister'.

'I [Mauriac] see again that sinister room in the Rue Hamelin, that black hearth, that bed with an overcoat for a blanket, that waxen mask out of which you would have said that our host was watching us eat and of which only the hair seemed to be alive... Proust seemed already to be more than half engaged in the realm of non-being, turning into that enormous proliferating mushroom which was nourished by his own substance, by his work - Le Temps retrouve.'

Turnell gives several other examples, and concludes:

There is something monstrous about the man which is reflected in the more sombre parts of the novel, but we are somehow aware of the enfant-monstre behind it. Proust was almost a dual personality. The gentle suffering recluse was real, but so was the unsavory being who haunted the slaughter-houses in the hope of seeing a calf killed, who would have rats pricked with hatpins in his presence...

It is striking to notice the number of parallel incidents between his life and work. In the following description of Mme de Guermantes, he attributes traits to her similar to those just mentioned by Turnell. "Mme de Guermantes m'offrait domestiquée et soumise par l'amabilité, par le respect envers les valeurs spirituelles, l'énergie et le charme d'une cruelle petite fille de l’aristocratie des environs de Combray, qui dès son enfance, montait à cheval, cassait les reins aux chats, arrachait l’œil aux lapins."

Despite Turnell's picture, the general descriptions of Proust and his life are not so gruesome. The final impression seems to be of a peculiar man, who is intelligent, humorous, sensitive, and imaginative.
He never appears to have felt bound by the conventions of his society. His peculiarities seem to have increased toward the end of his life, when he had achieved the social and literary status he had aimed at from his childhood. Krutch discusses his oddities and his popularity: "It is impossible not to wonder a little at the extent to which he was not only accepted, but loved, by people who would have found half so many eccentricities intolerable in any other."18

It is interesting to compare a man's life and work, but one should be very cautious in generalizing from one to the other. In the geniuses Proust created, little in their modes of living seemed to have any relation to their works. Close ties often exist between a man's thoughts, vision, and emotions, and these are not apparent. Beginning with the work, certain facts can be inferred about the man. This is more true with a work like A la Recherche, which is basically autobiographical, than would be the case with a more imaginative work. Proust himself opposed judging the work by the man. An essay in Contre Sainte-Beuve is "a relentless attack on the French critic who attempted to explain the works of authors through the secrets of their lives."19

Proust's life was unique, but throughout it he seems to have been motivated by his desire to become a great artist. He worked hard to achieve this aim as was realized by critics after Contre Sainte-Beuve and Jean Santeuil were published. These works were not published during his lifetime, probably because he felt they were inferior to what he had achieved in A la Recherche.
Chapter 8

Notes

5. This is an idea I got from class discussions.
7. March, *op. cit.*, p. 25
8. Maurois, *op. cit.*, p. 91
15. Turnbull, *op. cit.*, p. 335
17. Proust, *A la Recherche*, III, 503
Chapter Nine

Marcel Proust: The Genius of his Work

I have discussed the question of genius from the material presented by Proust in his works. He is explicit about some of his ideas, such as the function of the genius, the meaning of his art, and the characteristics of the genius. Certain of his ideas are never fully clarified, such as the problem of immortality. A certain ambiguity exists as to the amount of intellectual effort required to get at the meaning of the impressions brought on by moments of involuntary memory. In discussing these questions, I have passed judgments on the genius, Marcel Proust, and his treatment of certain ideas. In his handling of the more basic and difficult problems of mankind he bears some similarity to a philosopher. I should like in this chapter to examine briefly Proust's work as a critic. In this consideration of his work, I shall try to point out the many ways in which he shows his genius, and to see how he may differ from the criteria he himself has set up by which to judge a genius.

Joseph Wood Krutch feels that some writers are in tune with their age. These are men who are concerned with the major problems that face their contemporaries. With others, as with Proust, "some idiosyncrasy sets [them] . . . apart. The life which they have been compelled to lead is radically different from the normal life of their contemporaries. . . . Regarding events from an unfamiliar angle . . . [such a writer] perceives relationships to which the rest are blind."¹ Speaking of Proust specifically, Krutch writes, "for him, the starting point was the fact that he could not share the aims and opinions of his fellows; that
for some reason he must either give a new meaning to life or rest content with finding it forever meaningless."

Proust was fully aware of the standards of the world of his day. However, as his aims were different from those of his contemporaries, he was able to view their goals fairly objectively and to criticize the world that he lived in. He begins his novel, A la Recherche, by setting up a standard of excellence against which the changing world of the narrator is judged. This standard is the world of Combray. Proust is minute in his presentation of the details of this world. He includes all aspects of life and thought in Combray so that it will be an adequate yardstick for the full and changing picture of the world of the mature narrator.

In Combray the code of conduct is known by everyone, so there is no need for uncertainty or ambiguity. In this town, "les bourgeois d'alors se faisaient de la société une idée un peu hindue, et la considéraient comme composée de castes fermées ou chacun, dès sa naissance, se trouvait placé dans le rang qu'occupaient ses parents." The world of Combray is first seen by a boy who implicitly accepts its code, and applies it to his succeeding experiences. He also takes Combray and its values for granted and is sure that the other world, that of high society, is superior. Part of the narrator's disillusionment results from his learning that this is not true. Therefore, as Marcel grows older, Combray begins to have more and more meaning for him. He regrets the fact that the world he inhabits is not as fine as was the Combray of his childhood. This regret is one form of criticism of his present society:
The meaning of Combray changes slightly as the narrator becomes more aware of the significance of actions he did not understand as a boy. This creates actually two Combrays, and raises the question of what is reality. There is the idealized Combray that grew from the sick room of Marcel's Aunt Léonie, and the other that included Swann's marriage and the lesbian activities of Mlle Vinteuil. Later the reader learns of Swann's and the duchess de Guermantes' idea of Combray. What is important to Marcel is that he believed in certain standards. These affected the outlook of Marcel, and of Proust, who grew out of a similar childhood. Many of Marcel's and Proust's personal prejudices stem from this early contact with the ideals of Combray. Martin Turnell speaks of,"A sense of personal guilt [which] ... breaks through again and again in Proust's accounts of the different amours of his hero and his characters in A la Recherche."5

Some of the errors of reasoning based on the early Combray code are realized by Marcel when he speaks of "les erreurs charmantes de ma jeunesse."6 This comparison of Combray and the later world of the narrator is an effective means of criticism. This end is achieved in another way by a contrast of societies, which enables the reader to compare the societies and to judge the values and the goals of each.
"We are aware on almost every page he wrote of that ancient France with its thousands of years of civilization ... symbolized by the one word Combray."7

In a sense, Combray is the sum total of the past, as well as something which exists in the present. Other examples of the past, that Proust gives his readers, are names. The place - and family names conjure up ideas of the past for Marcel, who is interested in them as was Proust. "The history embodied in names and places fascinated him because history is essentially the idea left behind by events that have ceased to flow."8 The art of the past presents another means of the comparison of centuries. In Chapter Two, I mentioned the art of the cathedrals, and connected this to an idea of the past.

Proust's view of the past extends beyond the recorded history of France. We are given comparisons between human society and animal and plant life. These comparisons result from Proust's vision, which uses the technique of the metaphor to connect two different objects and comment on them.

An analysis in depth of human motivation is presented in the novel. Probing common actions, Proust is able to show his reader how people respond under certain conditions, and why. Sometimes these reasons may be apparent to the reader, but not to the person involved. Often the reason motivating action is deeply enmeshed in the character, and Proust probes to show his audience how actions are accounted for. These analyses are exceptionally clear when Proust deals with love. The reader is given detailed accounts of Swann's love for Odette, Marcel's loves, and other hetero- and homosexual loves, as well as the parent-child love relationship.
Proust feels that behavior is in part determined by heredity. This is his explanation for homosexuality, and also the basis for the reasoning used by some members of his society. He also traces back through family lines to show the source of certain traits in his characters. Such tracing is particularly common in his treatment of physical appearances and gestures, which he shows as existing in many members of the same family.

Proust gives his readers an exact picture of his contemporary society. He details dress, speech, manners, activities, lineage, current problems, etc. In this sense he functions as an historian. His particular area is the aristocracy, which he can see clearly as a mature man, and he realizes that it is not the magic, enchanted world he believed it was when he was a boy. At the same time, he is able to present the other classes in society. By using parallel incidents he demonstrates that the differences between classes are superficial, and mostly a matter of manners, rather than morals or feeling.

The age in which Proust lived was filled with change. He captures the feeling of this change through the mechanical inventions of the day. The book opens with carriage scenes, and passes to the introduction of the automobile and finally to the airplane. Other inventions such as the camera and the telephone are given special treatment in his novel.

It is apparent that contemporary ideas influenced Proust. Many of his geniuses and intelligent people expound theories that were prevalent in his day. The political questions of France during this time are not stressed by Proust although several of the more important events are presented. The Dreyfus case is mentioned in both Jean Santeuil and
A la Recherche and obviously made a deep impression on him. The reason for this may be found in his Jewish background, which probably made him sensitive to an episode which was rooted in anti-Semitic feeling. World War I also made a profound impression on him.

The portrayal of characters shows Proust's great sensitivity; this sensitivity is one of the traits which he felt is important to the genius. The careful presentation of personality traits, gestures, conversations, and manners shows how good an observer and abstracter he was. From the many people he knew and saw, he selected the traits for his characters. Many of the incidents are related to those he actually experienced and depend more on sensitivity than imagination. As has been mentioned in Chapter One, he felt that imagination was not necessary to a sensitive artist.

Proust does not say that the man of genius may also be a philosopher, but many of his geniuses are, and so is he. He presents a unique vision of the world and of people. His ideas on art and all aspects of life show this philosophical trend. This thesis has attempted to show some of Proust's ideas, including those related to the problem of the genius. I am not discussing those of Proust's theories which are most widely known, for to do that would be to say again what has been so well written in the books I have used for references.

Proust felt that the most important task of the genius is to present a unique vision of the world to the public. Proust's vision stems from his feeling about art. "Art fascinated him because art is the technique by which the idea is made to emerge from the events or the objects which it chooses as its subject . . . [art] extracts the permanent
and the significant from the transitory and the trivial." As I have attempted to demonstrate in Chapter Six, Proust is very clear as to the meaning of art.

The pleasures of art are such that everyone can enjoy them. The difference between a genius' ability to enjoy art and Françoise's ability is one of degree, rather than a qualitative difference. *A la Recherche* can be enjoyed on many levels. Like all great art it can be re-read with new knowledge and a greater appreciation for its author. Proust's technique underlies his basic ideas about life. His originality in form and conception stems from his perception of the world. His stress is on the truths which cannot be comprehended by intelligence directly. Emotion or intuition is necessary for this understanding. "Reality is merely obscured by the grossness of direct sensation. It lies, not in phenomena, but in that idea behind them which can be grasped only after it has been detached." This reality is related to the individual and all meaning must be found in oneself. A genius can make this connection between himself and the ideal. This is what Marcel does. A man such as Swann places the meaning of art outside of himself and is not able to enjoy it, while Françoise, although her understanding is limited, relates herself directly to her art of cooking.

Proust, like the geniuses that he has created, sees the world uniquely, and, through art, is able to present this vision to the reader. He does not stress in his work the fact that a genius will represent through his work many aspects of his time. Even when speaking of a writer's use of sensitivity rather than imagination, he does not seem to realize that these perceptions are affected by the time in which a
man lives.

I have tried in this chapter to show that Marcel Proust performs all of the functions that he feels a genius must do, the most important being his presentation of a unique vision of the world which enables him to introduce his readers into a new universe. He forms this world by a transposing of the facts in the environment around him. In addition, he serves several other functions: as a critic of his time, a philosopher, and an historian. All of his great talents are governed by his vision of reality which pervades his work and introduces the reader to a new world.
Notes

3. Proust, *A la Recherche*, I, 16
5. Turnell, *op. cit.*, p. 320
7. Turnell, *op. cit.*, p. 320
11. *A la Recherche*, I, 87, and passim
Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


Articles: