Proust & Mc Blog

Proust and Me is the first title Roland Barthes considered for the letters he gave away to Proust in the fall of 1968 at the Collège de France, and then at NYU. Not, he said, because “I consider myself to this great writer,” but because “I identify myself with him.” For ‘In Search of Lost Time’ is ‘the narrative of a desire to write.’

What is your personal experience with Proust? Have you read all of La Ruche? Or where did you leave off, and why? We look forward to the conversation!

A La Proust: The Dangers of Writing in Bed

In the beginning is the end. We are all going to die. Proust is going to die. We are all writing in bed. Proust is writing in bed. He is writing to die. We are writing to die.

Suzanne’s Way was published on November 15, 1913. Just two days before, the newspaper Le Temps printed an interview with Proust. This interview was a lie. It was entirely written by Proust himself. He had an idea: “In the rooms where shades are almost always shut, Mr. Marcel Proust is lying down. The electric light accentuates his massive complexion, but two admirable eyes full of life and forever erect shroud under a forehead braced beyond his hair. Mr. Marcel Proust is still a snow to illness, but one can no longer sense it when the writer, asked to explain himself on his work, becomes animated and speaks.” What greater management than these lines, written, no doubt, by Proust himself, as a preamble to an interview with himself? And yet what stingy power they have, these words, as every littletoner who languishes in bed cannot but think of Proust’s sickly complexion, somnolent lungs and glinting eyes, his suddenly animated pose.

I confess: The first time a novelist friend told me, with a shrug, that he was in bed “a la Proust,” I was taken shock by his arrogance. A moment later it hit me: I, too, have for several months been writing in bed. Rather fully lying down, with just my head propped up and my laptop on my legs. Or sitting up, with half-a-dozen pillows stuffed behind me. I don’t know how 33 reached. I hadn’t used to be this way. I can’t put a precise date on it. Just a few months. Maybe a year. I think I began because my desk was unturned with books. It was impossible to find a space for myself, and there seemed to be already too many books lying on the floor, everywhere. Each time I glanced towards the desk, I felt a sick sense of oppression. So one day I stayed in bed. It was cold outside when I began, last winter. I would hop out of bed, make myself a quick tea and tortoise, and hop back to, very handy on the floor. The breakfast lasted forever, and the writing seemed to flow with more ease and fluency than it did on the desk. The people who visited the apartment, neighbors, friends, handymen, second thoughts to find me under the covers as late as 9 or 6PM, surrounded with papers, eaten and half-filled cups. I remember feeling a pressing need to justify myself to the passerby one afternoon. “I, I am a writer...”, I explained sheepishly. I took one skeptical look at me which basically meant “real writer, KID!” and considered something about the kitchen pipes.

Next, I realized that in these conditions would surely prove useless, unhealthy and cerebrally of the French-born American. I had become over the last twelve or so years... Since I set about morning towards the end of the afternoon and seeing my friends at night. To this day, and so as I am writing this, I continue to write in bed. My windows are often wide-open because of the 120-degree heat in New York apartments at wintertime, and as the weather in Massachusetts goes, on most days, there is nothing. I am still possessed with an overwhelming sense of embarrassment when people around me complain of long commutes, and who offers political. I have my own vision of fiction, of course—the everyday terror of finding nothing worth writing about, nothing to be told, and nothing to be done in the flying carpet.

by Lila Azam Zanganeh

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