Personal Introduction

Enlightening and absolutely captivating, the swerve is a timeless testimony of curiosity and rediscovery which not only exposes Roman and Greek philosophies but offers much more. What flabbergasted me was basically finding out how a vanished piece of writing brought about such a tremendous change, modernizing the world. The book does throw limelight on a glowing portrait of how the world was before the Renaissance and how the heroic classical poem added to the far-reaching changes that followed the Renaissance.

What inspired me about this work of art was how the author talked about the belief that the world didn't work on its own. This book is simply amazing, and I could not afford to take a break from reading it. The author did justice by describing each and every momentous occurrence and happenings in such a rational, conceivable way covering the plots, themes and milieu.

Author

Stephen Jay Greenblatt was born in Boston on November 7, 1943. He did his schooling from Newton High School and got his B.A, M.Phil and Ph.D. degree from Yale University. After completing his degrees, he taught at prestigious universities like California, Berkeley and Harvard.

He is a literary critic, philosopher and scholar. His work has been high-ranking since the early 1980s when the word new historicism was first introduced by him.

Greenblatt has written and edited several books and articles pertinent to new historicism. Morover, he has also worked on the study of culture, Renaissance and Shakespeare studies. Greenblatt is considered to be a connoisseur in these fields. His most popular work till now is Will in the World, a biography of Shakespeare.

Furthermore, he has also written on subjects like travelling in Laos and China, miracles and story-telling.

Greenblatt once quoted, "My deep, ongoing interest is in the relation between literature and history, the process through which certain remarkable works of art are at once embedded in a highly specific life-world and seem to pull free of that life-world. I am constantly struck by the strangeness of reading works that seem addressed, personally and intimately, to me, and yet were written by people who crumbled to dust long ago".

About the book- historical background

Stephen Greenblatt has produced a fascinating account of Lucretius’s, Poggio and Epicurus and the worlds they colonized. The major part of the book is concerned with Poggio's life and work. His life had been rich and full of incident. There is also much admirable substance on the frenzied political world, the Church and secular powers struggled to dominate. More so, he also emphasized on how Lucretius’s came to generate his poem and on how its rediscovery and publication was important for the existing world and how it further influenced the belief of people. The development of Lucretius’s' work and that of other philosophers "swerved" the world dramatically and it renewed the popularity of lost scholars.

The Swerve, which began with Poggio's career and crisis of Catholic Church, highlights the loss and retrieval in the early 15th century. The clash took place between two popes, one at Rome and the other at Avignon whose dispute couldn't be resolved even with court meetings. Soon enough Poggio's master, John XXIII was exiled and Poggio himself lost his job. This made him travel to German monasteries in search for classical texts at which he was an expert copying. He sent his text to his friend, Niccolo, who kept it safe with him for the longest period and then allowed for copies to be made. This step popularized Lucretius’s writing and this spread of secularism paved way for Renaissance.

Overall summary- major themes

"Swerve is an intense, emotional telling of a true story, one with much at stake for all of us. And the further you read, the more astonishing it becomes. It's a chapter in how we became what we are, how we arrived at the worldview of the present. No one can tell the whole story, but Greenblatt seizes on a crucial pivot, a moment of recovery, of transmission, as amazing as anything in fiction." - Philadelphia Inquirer

Nearly six hundred years ago a shrewdly alert man in his late thirties took a very old manuscript off a library shelf. He saw what he had discovered with exhilaration and had it copied. What he found was a beautiful poem by Lucretius’s, a Roman philosopher which basically led to the moderation of the universe. De Rerum Natura contains ardent arguments in opposition to the fear of death, as well as some astounding descriptions.

The Swerve is, nonetheless, an alluring retelling of the old humanist saga of the heroic liberation of orthodox knowledge that had been part of monastic darkness since centuries. It is an attempt to transform the old stereo type notions of the old generation and bring about a great revival of conventional texts and engender a scholarly sunup.

"The line between this work and modernity is not direct," Greenblatt writes. "Nothing is ever so simple. There were innumerable forgettings, disappearances, recoveries, dismissals, distortions, challenges, transformations, and renewed forgettings. And yet the vital connection is there. Hidden behind the worldview I recognize as my own is an ancient poem, a poem once lost, apparently irrevocably, and then found.”

The Swerve is a mind-boggling work on non-fiction that is based on a historical manuscript about a long lost discovery which had weird perceptions about the world and its existence. The rediscovery revealed that the world was operative itself, without any interference of Gods, and that matter was made up of microscopic particles and that the fear of religion wasn't healthy to human existence.

The theme discussed in this book was Lucretius's poem. Epicurean/Lucretius’s view was not only a bodily vision of the outer space but also a visualization of how human beings are supposed to live. Lucretius believed that in this universe so formed, there was no reason to think that the earth or its inhabitants occupy a central place. He thought that there was no good reason on which the humans should be set apart from all other animals. He also emphasized on the belief that Gods shouldn't be enticed or appeased. Nothing such as God ever existed. Humans had been since forever. There was no place for religious devotion. None to be worshipped or should be asked for. Religion had no significance. Motivation and the power to appreciate and be grateful to lacked. He was of the thought that there was no possibility to feel accomplished over nature. More so, he assumed that the humans should only clinch to the beauty of this world and should be contented with it. Furthermore, he emphasized that people are supposed to conquer their fears and believe in the fact that everything in this world is temporary.

Quotes from Lucretius’s' work:

1. "Such evil deeds could religion prompt." De Rerum Natura

2. "Fear is the mother of all gods."

3. "Nature does all things spontaneously, by herself, without the meddling of the gods."

4. "Hell does exist on earth - in the life of fools."

5. "Nothing can be created from nothing."

6. "All things must need be borne on through the calm void, moving at equal rate with unequal rates."

7. "Thus the sum of things is ever being renewed, and mortals live dependent one upon another. Some nations increase, others diminish, and in a short space the generations of living creatures are changed and like runners pass on the torch of life."

Had it not been for Epicurus, Lucretius, and Bracciolini, today the western history would have been entirely different. Their work, its re-discovery and the thought and work of Greenblatt led to the existence of renaissance.

Important people:

Epicurus

Epicurus was an ancient Greek philosopher and the originator of the Epicureanism. He was the first to emphasize on human liberty. He followed Aristotle and clearly states three possible causes - "Some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency." His work was followed by many, including Lucretius’s.

Lucretius’s:

Titus Lucretius’s Carus was a Roman poet and logician. He is well-known for his poem that laid out the beliefs of Epicureanism, De Rerum Natura. It was translated in English as On the Nature of Things or "On the Nature of the Universe".

His basic aim behind the poem was to free the people from the fear of death. Therefore, he believed that God did not run the world instead it was operated by natural phenomenon.

Poggio Bracciolini :

He was the person who re-discovered the work of Lucretius’s. Exactly one century earlier, in 1417, the Italian humanist researcher and book-hunter Poggio Bracciolini discovered a ninth-century script of the prehistoric poem in the library of a German monastery. He had a copy made and brought it back to Florence to his fellow devotee, Niccolò Niccoli. He copied the work in the exceptionally attractive handwriting that became the basis for the italic script. By the 1450s, Lucretius’s lost poem was being read and analyzed by many literate people. Its first printed edition came in 1478, and it was then that the work was circulated outside of Italy too.

Bibliographic references:

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