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Nicolas Grimaldi, *Le baiser du soir. Sur la psychologie de Proust*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2015. 112 pp. 13€ ISBN: 978-2-13-065101-7.

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“[L]e baiser du soir” of Grimaldi’s title refers to the well-known scene in “Combray,” the opening section of Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in which the narrator recalls how, as a child, he yearned obsessively for his mother’s goodnight kiss, without which he was anxious and distraught to the point of being inconsolable. On one occasion, rather than retiring to his bedroom as he has been instructed, he waits on the landing and surprises his mother, launching himself at her as she climbs the stairs to bed after a dinner with Charles Swann. The narrator’s father soon appears and in spite of the boy’s misdemeanour, he uncharacteristically yields to this show of emotion and bids mother and son spend the night together. This results in a scene that is at once a moment of discovery and a source of confusion: a misdeed seems to be rewarded; the child’s yearning is satisfied beyond his hopes, yet his happiness is tainted by a creeping awareness that what is experienced that night can never be repeated. What is portrayed in these pages is undoubtedly at the heart of the narrator’s psychology and the foundational nature of the revelations and realisations they contain has prompted a great deal of critical reflection and analysis from scholars.[1] In Grimaldi’s “avant-propos” we read the following: “Trois thèmes gouvernent donc les principales expériences du narrateur: celui de la représentation, celui de l’imagination, et celui de la mémoire involontaire” (p. 13), and these are the themes that Grimaldi explores across three short chapters of around fifteen pages each (“Le baiser du soir”; “Solitude de la représentation”; “L’imagination mimétique”) and a longer final chapter of almost thirty pages, “La réalité révélée.” Despite the very considerable number of critics and thinkers that have grappled with and illuminated these themes, Grimaldi unfortunately does not acknowledge any of the existing work in the field. In keeping with the author’s two other books on Proust,[2] no bibliography is provided, only a list of Grimaldi’s own publications. He refers twice in passing to biographies by Painter and Diesbach, but otherwise the great many footnotes in *Le baiser du soir* are used exclusively to provide references for the author’s quotations from Proust or, more regularly, to provide lengthy supplementary quotations.[3] This brings us to another oddity: Grimaldi’s book (like his two previous studies) uses the now long-superseded first Pléiade edition of Proust’s novel, published in the 1950s.[4] Broaching this short book, then, is a peculiar experience. It is as if Jean-Yves Tadié and his team never grappled with Proust’s manuscript drafts and variants, and critics such as Gilles Deleuze, Anne Henry, Vincent Descombes and Anne Simon had never opened Proust’s novel, let alone published ground-breaking critical readings of its philosophical import.[5]

Grimaldi’s book is unusual on a number of levels. It is largely descriptive and draws heavily, as indicated above, on *A la recherche du temps perdu*, but also quotes from *Jean Santeuil* and the early writings collected in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. There is little here, though, that will excite or engage the specialist. We read in the first chapter, for instance, that it is in the opening pages of *A la recherche* that readers will find “la clef de tout ce qui suivra” (p. 16). In the second chapter, we read of the Martinville bell-towers that “comme autant de signes, ils attendent d’être déchiffrés pour délivrer la vérité qu’ils

indiquent” (p. 35), a formulation that seems to cry out for a follow-up acknowledgement of Deleuze’s extremely influential reading of the novel along these lines, yet none is provided. Grimaldi in these pages is very close to his argument in *Proust, les horreurs de l’amour*, specifically the section entitled “L’énigme du réel.”[6] Later he spends a stretch of his final chapter (pp. 74-75) enumerating and describing the scenes of involuntary memory in Proust’s novel, a task carried out as long ago as 1931 by Samuel Beckett in his ground-breaking early study.[7] Here and elsewhere one wonders just who is the anticipated or hoped-for audience for this book. One suspects that followers of Grimaldi’s other work, students and readers of philosophy and aesthetics, will be more receptive to his approach than students and scholars of literature. A run-down of the episodes of involuntary memory might be useful for a beginner, but given the title of Grimaldi’s book and its minimal critical apparatus, such a reader is unlikely to tackle it. Repeatedly quotation (or gloss) takes the place of argument and the bulk of what we read is often not much more than descriptive commentary on well-known aspects of Proust’s novel. The expository nature of Grimaldi’s book is evinced by the pervasiveness of two syntactical forms: periods that begin with the conjunction “Car” and those that begin “Aussi” followed by the inversion of the verb, communicating, respectively, coordination and consequence. One, other or both of these formulations are found on very nearly every page of the text: a more attentive copy editor might have spared the reader this repetitiveness, which is all the more striking in such a short book.

In sum, then, *Le Baiser du soir* is a frustrating read. Whilst the attention paid to separation, representation, imagination and the real is interesting, there is little direct discussion of how their handling in *A la recherche du temps perdu* contributes to an understanding of psychology in the novel (as announced in the title), less still a strong argument that persuades readers to see it in a new light. Grimaldi refers throughout to Proust’s narrator, save for one curious moment when author and narrator are confused. In discussing the apparent absurdity of wanting to experience at one and the same time that which is past and present, real and unreal, the author proposes that “Telle est pourtant l’inconcevable expérience dont Proust croit avoir reçu la révélation dans la cour de l’hôtel de Guermantes, lorsqu’il avait perçu toute une partie de sa vie *passée* qu’une sensation *présente* lui avait fait imaginer” (p. 63, original emphasis). This conflation is conspicuous. It is well known that Proust’s own experiences informed and nourished his fictional project; but to place the biographical individual in the fictional “cour de l’hôtel de Guermantes” is wrong-headed. The tensions between biography and fiction, between the self as a site of lived experience and the self as a fictional construct, might have enriched and nuanced Grimaldi’s book, relating as they do to perception, imagination and representation, but this is not a path he takes. Instead, *Le Baiser du soir* remains rather limited in its scope. It may be of interest to followers of Grimaldi’s writings on philosophy and aesthetics but is unlikely to find its way on to many reading lists on Proust’s novel.

NOTES

[1] A selective sample would include Serge Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine: écriture et fantasme chez Proust* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1974); Jean-François Reille, “Le baiser du soir” in *Proust: le temps du désir. Une lecture textuelle* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1979), pp. 35-68; Béatrice Didier, *L’Écriture-femme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981); Margaret Gray, *Postmodern Proust* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Julia Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible: Proust et l’expérience littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994); Michel Schneider, *Maman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); Adam Watt, *Reading in Proust’s A la recherche: ‘le délire de la lecture’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[2] Nicolas Grimaldi, *Proust, les horreurs de l’amour* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008); *Essai sur la jalousie. L’Enfer proustien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010).

[3] George Painter, *Marcel Proust (1871-1922)*, trans. by G. Cattai and R.-P. Vial, 2 vols (Paris: Mercure de France, 1963-66); Ghislain de Diesbach, *Proust* (Paris: Perrin, 1991).

[4] Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and André Ferré, 3 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1955-56).

[5] Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié et al, 4 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89); Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964; fourth, revised edition 1970); Anne Henry, *Marcel Proust: théories pour une esthétique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1981); Vincent Descombes, *Proust: philosophie du roman* (Paris: Minuit, 1987); Anne Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2000; reissued with Honoré Champion, 2011).

[6] Nicolas Grimaldi, *Proust, les horreurs de l'amour*, pp. 79-80.

[7] Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1987 [1931]).

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