

H-France Review Vol. 19 (September 2019), No. 174

Yuri Cerqueira dos Anjos, *Marcel Proust et la presse de la Belle Époque*. Paris: Champion, 2018. 343 pp. Tables, illustrations, bibliography, and indexes. €52.15 (pb). ISBN 978-2-7453-4912-5.

Review by Christine M. Cano, Case Western Reserve University.

In this ambitious work, Yuri Cerqueira dos Anjos takes a broad historical approach to a relatively little-studied corpus: Marcel Proust's writings for the French press, 1890-1922. Its overarching objective is to provide a corrective to a longstanding tendency in Proust criticism to consider the numerous articles Proust published in the years preceding the publication of *À la recherche du temps perdu* as preparatory exercises for the novel—and to view the press as a kind of “laboratoire du roman” (p. 77). To read the press articles in terms of their role in the novel's genesis, Cerqueira dos Anjos argues, is to divorce them from their original media context. The considerable achievement of his book is that it restitutes the complex and vibrant universe of the printed press of the Belle Époque as a meaningful context for Proust's journalistic writings. Cerqueira dos Anjos considers the latter both in their immediate relationship to specific periodicals in which they appeared—from artisanal nineteenth-century literary reviews to major French dailies such as *Le Figaro*—and against the larger horizon of the press-saturated culture in which Proust lived and wrote. The book is therefore as much about the *civilisation du journal* that arose during the Third Republic as it is about Proust's contributions to the press.[1]

Cerqueira dos Anjos's project is consonant with a recent movement, in Proust studies, to focus scholarly attention on the marginalized or forgotten parts of Proust's œuvre and to bring them out from under the novel's shadow. Over the last decade, many critics have argued for a more serious consideration of Proust's early writings, including the collection of short stories *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (1896), most of which appeared first in the literary press, and the series of pastiches inspired by the Lemoine Affair (*Le Figaro*, February 1908-March 1909).[2] *Marcel Proust et la presse de la Belle Époque* partakes of this movement and builds on recent scholarship focusing on Proust and the press, such as that of Guillaume Pinson and Teresa Whittington.[3] Marie-Ève Thérénty's work on the relationship between literary and journalistic modes of writing in the Belle Époque is also an important frame of reference.[4] Cerqueira dos Anjos places his own project squarely in line with Thérénty's inquiry, affirming that “le rapport étroit entre littérature et presse incite à mener une réflexion plus profonde sur les écrits de presse de Proust, puisqu'ils ont rarement été lus sous cette perspective d'interdépendance entre presse et littérature” (pp. 21-22). Indeed, the fact that Proust's contemporary fellow writers invariably wrote for the press, like their nineteenth-century literary predecessors, is one of the study's points of departure.

The book is divided into four parts: “Fondements,” “Autour de l’*ethos*,” “Poétique de la presse,” and “L’imaginaire médiatique.” Part one orients the reader to the media world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which press historians call the golden age of the French press.[5] “Le contexte médiatique” (chapter two of part one) provides a rich exposition of the cultural and technological factors that turned newspapers into a product of mass consumption during this period. One of the elements of this transformation was the rise of a new type of journalistic writing—ostensibly neutral—and of the information press. Cerqueira dos Anjos rightly insists that the growing dominance of the information press, and the concomitant retreat of the nineteenth-century “*presse d’opinion*,” did not entail the disappearance of literature from newspapers (p. 47). Proust’s production in the press, whatever the venue, revolved around literature and culture. Cerqueira dos Anjos also underscores the fact that Proust practiced multiple genres in the press, from obituary notices to society columns to personal essays. He thus gives us a rare glimpse of Proust as a writer capable of adapting his writing to external protocols—not only the protocols of genres specific to the press, but also those related to length, deadlines, and even style.

Parts two through four develop the relationship between Proust and the press in depth, from three points of view: “l’image de soi dans la presse (*ethos*), l’écriture qu’on y produit (poétique), et la manière dont on l’envisage (imaginaire)” (p. 67). The term *ethos* is defined by the field of discourse analysis as a self-image projected by the writer or speaker (*locuteur*) in order to assert influence over the addressee (*allocutaire*). Here it is used to bring out the ways in which Proust situated himself with respect to both the periodicals in which he published and their specific readerships. This approach yields illuminating new readings of two of the most commented-upon press articles, “Un dimanche au conservatoire” (*Le Gaulois*, January 14, 1895) and “Impressions de route en automobile” (*Le Figaro*, November 19, 1907). While it may be obvious that the second piece is thematically driven by speed and motion, Cerqueira dos Anjos shows how both pieces belong to a discourse of mobility that pervaded Belle Époque journalism. He further shows how “Impressions de route en automobile” is inseparable from its immediate context: *Le Figaro*’s extensive coverage of the Salon de l’Automobile in the week preceding Proust’s article. For the Parisian reader who encountered Proust’s first-person *chronique* about automobile travel in the *Figaro*, the newspaper’s coverage of the Salon, with its thematics of mobility and technical progress, would have been an inevitable intertext. As Cerqueira dos Anjos writes, “Après avoir connu, grâce au Salon et à la presse, les voitures les plus modernes au long de la semaine antérieure, les lecteurs du *Figaro* sont invités à prendre la route et à sentir de manière plus élaborée l’expérience de la mobilité” (p. 138). In contextualized close readings such as this one, the author’s exhaustive research into Belle Époque periodicals—called a “retour aux sources” in the introduction (p. 13)—comes to fruition.

One of the highlights of part three is a foray into Proust’s “atelier journalistique” (p. 173), a body of manuscripts representing the press articles in composition. (Cerqueira dos Anjos is an associate member of the Proust team at the national French research center for the study of manuscripts, ITEM-CNRS.) Housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and at the Centre de Documentation de l’Équipe Proust (ITEM-CNRS), these drafts and notes have been largely overlooked by scholars, who have concentrated their attention on the manuscripts linked to the creation of the *Recherche*. Cerqueira dos Anjos brings to light significant incoherences in the organization of these *avant-textes* related to the press: for example, some appear to be organized according to their ulterior publication in volume form, which obscures the specificity of their original destination as press articles.[6] This foray into the archives thus confirms one of the

book's basic insights: that the idea of a *Proust journaliste* has yet to be legitimated in Proust scholarship, where the logic of the novel or the volume dominates at many levels. Part three also contains a fresh analysis of Proust's famous denunciation of the methods of the literary critic Sainte-Beuve, who had a regular column in *Le Constitutionnel*. Proust's critiques of Saint-Beuve extended to the critic's use of an artificial, journalistic style and his dependence on the approbation of his readers (pp. 206-7). Cerqueira dos Anjos embeds these critiques in a larger societal debate about the evolution of journalistic writing, which took place in newspapers, literary reviews, and (most interestingly) journalism manuals in the early twentieth century. Finally, in a brief reading of the series of pastiches Proust published in *Le Figaro*, he finds elements of a critical reflection on "l'écriture médiatique" (p. 240). In addition to the classic studies on the pastiches cited in the text, it would have enriched the discussion to engage with more recent works such as Michael Finn's *Proust, the Body and Literary Form* or Hannah Freed-Thall's landmark article on the Lemoine Affair and newspaper culture.[7]

While other scholars have addressed representations of journalism and the press in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Cerqueira dos Anjos seeks out an "imaginaire médiatique" in Proust's writings for the press in part four. (His point of departure here is Guillaume Pinson's study, *L'Imaginaire médiatique*, cited in note 3.) This approach yields a revealing portrait of Marcel Proust immersed in the self-reflective discourses that circulated in the press of the Belle Époque. We see Proust enter into dialogue with a favorite object of that self-reflection, typologies of newspaper readers and journalists, notably in his caricature of a theater critic, "Silhouette d'artiste" (*Revue d'art dramatique*, January 1897). Part four also offers an interesting discussion of the excerpts or "prepublications" of the *Recherche* that appeared in newspapers as part of the launching of each new volume, from 1912 to 1927. A close reading of the series of excerpts published in *Le Figaro* in anticipation of *Du côté de chez Swann* demonstrates that these were not simple extracts of the novel to come; they were altered to fit their venue and date of publication.[8] The beauty of this reading is that it shows how certain prepublications resonated thematically with other pieces appearing in *Le Figaro* in the same time frame, which restores an essential part of their context and anchors us in their readers' horizon of expectations.

In a concise conclusion that provides a retrospective roadmap for this complex book, Cerqueira dos Anjos recalls his guiding hypothesis: "[1] hypothèse qui a guidé cette recherche a été celle de l'existence, chez Proust, d'une pensée et d'une pratique de la presse" (p. 303). He sums up the task he set out to accomplish: "retrouver dans ces textes [médiatiques] des rapports, des intertextes, des réseaux de signification oubliés par une critique qui a souvent négligé dans sa lecture des articles de Proust le rôle du support et l'importance du médiatique comme forme collective, polyphonique" (p. 305). This description goes to the heart of two of the book's key contributions to Proust studies: an emphasis on the role of the press as a material medium (*support*) that cannot be discounted in analyses of the press writings, and an emphasis on the press as a collective practice where individual voices define themselves in relationship to other voices. Recovering the larger fabric of which Proust's publications were a part—the "réseau textuel" of newspapers—required, of course, a colossal amount of archival work.

*Marcel Proust et la presse de la Belle Époque* is a valuable resource for historians of the French press as well as for Proust scholars. The comprehensive bibliography includes a complete listing of Proust's known press articles, texts by contemporaneous journalists, and secondary works in fields ranging from discourse analysis to cultural studies. The book's comprehensive nature, and the author's approach, present some drawbacks for the reader, however. Proust's production for

the press is not treated chronologically throughout the study, since theoretical considerations dominate (Proust's youthful fin-de-siècle writings for literary reviews, for example, return at the end of the book). In close readings of cited texts, every implication is followed to its last thread, and some of these do not advance the book's arguments. Finally, the reader encounters frequent typographical errors, signs of an incomplete editing process. None of these flaws compromises the important contributions of this beautifully conceived study, the first to envision fully a Proust in the press.

## NOTES

[1] The apt expression "la civilisation du journal" recurs throughout the book, echoing the title of a landmark edited volume on the nineteenth-century French press. Dominique Kalifa, Philippe Régnier, Marie-Ève Thérénty, and Alain Vaillant, eds., *La Civilisation du journal: histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2011).

[2] See Marion Schmid's review of Thanh-Vân Ton-That, *Proust avant la Recherche: Jeunesse et genèse d'une écriture au tournant du siècle* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012) in *H-France Review*, Volume 14 (April 2014), no. 58.

[3] Guillaume Pinson, "L'imaginaire médiatique dans *À la recherche du temps perdu*," *Études françaises* 43, no.3(2007): 11-26; Pinson, *Fiction du monde: de la presse mondaine à Marcel Proust* (Montreal: PUM, 2008); Pinson, *L'Imaginaire médiatique: histoire et fiction du journal au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Garnier, 2012). Teresa Whittington, *The Syllables of Time: Proust and the History of Reading* (Oxford: Legenda, 2009).

[4] Marie-Ève Thérénty, *La littérature au quotidien: poétiques journalistiques au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

[5] On the "golden age" of the French press, see Pierre Albert, *Histoire de la presse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), pp. 64-72.

[6] A number of Proust's press articles were reedited in volume form. Notably, Robert Proust edited a volume of collected articles, mostly from *Le Figaro*, after the writer's death: Marcel Proust, *Chroniques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927).

[7] Michael Finn, *Proust, the Body and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999). Hannah Freed-Thall, "'Prestige of a Momentary Diamond': Economies of Distinction in Proust," *New Literary History* 43, no.1(Winter 2012): 159-178.

[8] Marcel Proust, "Au seuil du printemps. Épinettes blanches, épinettes roses," *Le Figaro*, March 21, 1912; "Rayon de soleil sur le balcon," *Le Figaro*, June 4, 1912; "L'Église de village," *Le Figaro*, September 3, 1912.

Christine M. Cano  
Case Western Reserve University  
[cmc21@case.edu](mailto:cmc21@case.edu)

---

Copyright © 2019 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172