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Edward Bizub, *Faux pas sur les pavés, Proust controversé: suivi de, Beckett et Quignard à contre-pied*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020. Bibliothèque Proustienne 34. 469 pp. Bibliography, index. €87.00. (hb). ISBN 9782406093770; €49.00 (pb). ISBN 9782406093763.

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For more than a century now, Marcel Proust (1871-1922) and his prolific pen have stimulated considerable debate, discussion, and scholarship. Proust is of course known, first and foremost, for his magnum opus, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, but scholars from around the globe do not limit their criticism to these seven volumes, published between 1913 and 1927. In addition to articles and pastiches published during his lifetime, Proust left behind a plethora of notebooks that include not only his extensive drafts for the *Recherche*, but also the first seeds of what would become his masterpiece in the form of an unfinished novel and an unfinished essay, known today as *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* respectively. The existence of these earlier, and lengthy, textual endeavors sheds light on the author's compositional process and thematic interests, prompting increased investigations into the genesis of the *Recherche* and, dare I say, intentions of the author. On top of all this, Proust's abundant correspondence is thought to amount to nearly 20,000 letters, roughly 6,000 of which have been collected and included in various publications.[1]

To be sure, the quantity of what Edward Bizub calls "*paratextes*" (borrowing Gérard Genette's term), pertaining to the creation and content of the *Recherche*, along with the rich biographical archive of its author's life, offers scholars much to consider and debate.[2] As with most admirable works of art, Proust and his œuvre are no strangers to controversy. Broadly speaking, the enigmatic identity of Proust's narrator and his likeness—or lack thereof—to the author remain a much-disputed topic. Questions surrounding the gender and sexuality of characters—given the author's sexual preferences—have fueled discussions and publications for decades, as has the portrayal of Judaism in the *Recherche*, and many other complex issues. Of course, using biographical information to evaluate the work of the author of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is controversial in and of itself. Then again, Proust's death prior to the publication of the last three volumes of the *Recherche* has obliged editors and scholars to consult paratextual and biographical information in their noble efforts to determine the definitive text, where the notion of the definitive necessarily becomes an aspirational ideal. It is well known that Proust essentially wrote the beginning and the end of the *Recherche* nearly simultaneously, suggesting a clear vision of the novel's basic structure. And, yet, he continued to revise and expand the project at every stage in the process—from his writing notebooks to the typed proofs—for over a decade, until his death in

1922. In short, the existence of multiple drafts and corrected versions of these later volumes proves both helpful and challenging, and has resulted in some controversy.

Issues regarding the establishment of the sixth volume, including its title, referred to here as *Albertine disparue*, motivate in part Edward Bizub's *Faux pas sur les pavés, Proust controversé*. More specifically, Bizub is concerned with proving and illustrating the vital importance of the Proustian narrator's "*faux pas sur le pavé*" in the Guermantes' courtyard in *Le Temps retrouvé*, the implication of which may be altered depending on which version of *Albertine disparue* you read. For Bizub, this editorial dispute is just one of the many controversies surrounding the *faux pas* and its significance in Proust's work. In fact, what Bizub finds most outrageous is the lack of scholarly attention accorded this scene, which serves as a response, or conclusion, to the madeleine episode and ultimately leads to the narrator's discovery of his "*moi profond*," "*son livre intérieur*," which he aims to translate to his readers in his now imminent literary endeavor (pp. 24-25). In Bizub's opinion, the madeleine scene wrongly eclipses the *faux pas* scene in Proustian scholarship, leading to vast misunderstandings of Proust's work: "L'attrait de la madeleine pourrait effectivement être attribué—sans doute inconsciemment—à une dénégation, à une tentative d'ignorer, voire de subvertir la signification de l'œuvre" (p. 26). Bizub therefore sets out to assert the crucial importance of the *faux pas* scene and then to review, quite selectively, Proustian scholarship as it pertains to this scene, the discernment of the text as a whole, and finally our appreciation of the novel.

Bizub's study is divided into three sections: "Alpha et Omega," "Du Chant des Sirènes au Banc des Accusés" and "Lacunes." Each section is divided into two or three subparts, which are themselves made up of multiple short chapters. An epilogue entitled "Beckett et Quignard à contre-pied" closes the monograph. In the first set of chapters, Bizub charts the origins of the *Recherche* to demonstrate that the *faux pas* in the Guermantes' courtyard plays an essential role in communicating the "dogme de la mémoire involontaire, alpha et omega d'*À la recherche du temps perdu*" (p. 41). To be sure, his interpretation of this passage is not in any way original, and hardly controversial: the misstep in the Guermantes' courtyard initiates a string of incidents (clanking of silverware, the sight of *François le champi* in the Guermantes' library) that, like the spoonful of madeleine soaked in tea, provoke the experience of involuntary memory. The *faux pas* in the courtyard, it is important to note, recalls a similar stumble in the Saint-Marc baptistery in Venice. What distinguishes this scene from the madeleine passage is, of course, that the narrator has finally discovered that "la véritable écriture consiste à déchiffrer le livre intérieur rédigé par un autre moi qui, lui seul, a pu enregistrer les traces diffuses de l'inconscient" (p. 25). Bizub's conflation of involuntary memory and the unconscious is not a prevalent interpretation, and the precise conception of this "*autre moi*" may be debated; but the view that this scene ultimately leads to the narrator's articulation of literary redemption is generally accepted. Yet, Bizub is less interested in analyzing the actual text than he is in: (1) identifying the roots of this passage and Proust's conception of "*le moi profond*" as articulated in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, *Jean Santeuil* and earlier *la Recherche* notebooks; and (2) exploring possible motivations and connections with Proust's life and biographical context (influences from contemporary philosophers, psychologists, his father's own work, and so on). Where Bizub differs from many other scholars of Proust is his unique focus on and interest in the "*dogme*" communicated in the *faux pas* passage to the detriment of the rest of the text.

Indeed, Bizub insists early on that what happens in the novel between the madeleine scene and the *faux pas* scene is essentially fraudulent: "Le héros nous dit qu'il envisage un livre où chaque

lecteur est lecteur de lui-même, mais peut-on se lire dans un texte volontiers mensonger? Dans un texte qui cherche d'emblée à induire le lecteur en erreur?" (p. 116). This interpretation of the novel stems largely from a letter Proust wrote to Jacques Rivière in February 1914 in which he explains that his "*pensée*" will not be revealed until the end of the novel (in *Le Temps retrouvé*) (p. 41). He is therefore forced to "peindre les erreurs, sans croire devoir dire que je les tiens pour des erreurs" (p. 41). Bizub signals his espousal of this perspective of the novel as he begins reviewing the critical response to the *Recherche*, starting with contributions made in the 1923 *Hommage à Marcel Proust*.^[3] Given that *Le Temps retrouvé* was not published until 1927, none of these scholars could have taken into account the final volume with the *faux pas* scene in their interpretations of Proust's text. And yet Bizub deems it useful to point out their shortcomings, citing one of the final passages of *Du Côté de chez Swann* to illustrate the author's misleading rhetoric: "Mais quand disparaît une croyance, il lui survit—et de plus en plus vivace, pour masquer le manque de la puissance que nous avons perdue de donner de la réalité à des choses nouvelles—un attachement fétichiste aux anciennes qu'elle avait animées, comme si c'était en elles et non en nous que le divin résidait et si notre incrédulité actuelle avait une cause contingente, la mort des Dieux. (I, 417)" (p. 136).^[4] Although this is one of the few passages actually quoted from the *Recherche* (as opposed to an earlier manuscript or *carnet*), Bizub nonetheless misreads it as an affirmation that the narrator will have to "enterrer pour toujours l'âge des croyances," and that "il se lamente sur la mort des dieux en considérant que dorénavant il devrait se contenter de leurs piètres substituts, leurs *traces*: les fétiches" (p. 139; Bizub's italics). In his attempt to critique the work of other scholars and highlight the dishonesty in Proust's text, he fails to see the very clear foreshadowing to the final revelation conveyed in the words "*comme si*." Bizub concludes this first section with an examination of Proustian scholarship from the 1930s and 1940s.

In the second section, Bizub continues his review of Proustian criticism as it pertains to the *faux pas* scene. After applauding Blanchot's appreciation of the misstep on the cobblestone, he asserts that "[l]e déni de l'importance des pavés pour la lecture de l'œuvre commence avec Deleuze dans sa lecture platonicienne du roman" (p. 176). The author views Deleuze's semiotic approach to textual analysis as the beginning of the end for Proust's *faux pas*. Bizub enumerates one scholar after another who participates in what he perceives as "*une forme de révisionnisme*," scholarship that questions the value and implications of Proust's dogma (p. 188). Among Bizub's examples, Vincent Descombes argues for the superiority of the romanesque novel: that is, the fictional aspects of the novel (or what Bizub would call the lies), to the detriment of its philosophical theories (pp. 191-197). Anne Henry sees Proust's theory for what it is, but deems it typical of his time and therefore mediocre (pp. 197-207). As for Compagnon, Bizub returns to his scholarship time and again, but criticizes him at the outset for downplaying the importance of "*la théorie esthétique proustienne*," ostensibly considered too much of the Nineteenth Century, in favor of a more modernist assessment of Proust's work (p. 211).

In the second part of the second section, Bizub unexpectedly broaches the topic of "*les deux races*": inverts (or homosexuals) and Jews and their roles in Proust's work (p. 235). At first, he draws attention to one critic's accusation that the *Recherche* is both antisemitic and homophobic; but then, two pages later, he quotes "Enthoven père et fils," who claim that it was in fact Marcel Proust, and not Simone de Beauvoir or Judith Butler, who invented gender studies (p. 238). Bizub seems to recognize that these issues are as equally important as the philosophical *dogme* in Proust's work, but that is where his expertise on these topics ends. After negligible engagement with the abundance of existing scholarship on these two very rich subjects, he claims that "le silence critique à ce sujet a pour effet d'empêcher une interrogation légitime du processus créateur

de l'écrivain et, partant, du véritable noyau du roman," where "à ce sujet" means "la raison créatrice poussant Proust à traiter le thème des deux 'races' en les dénigrant" (p. 252). Bizub's concerns clearly lie in identifying the author's motivations here. He therefore undertakes a fragmented argument that intermingles biographical and fictional information without any clear method or logic to propose finally that for Proust "[l]e baptistère de Saint-Marc représenterait une conversion à la 'vraie vie' comme celle de Saint-Augustin renonçant à son passé débauché" (p. 286). If the visit to the Saint-Marc Baptistery represents such a momentous change in the author's life (or is it the narrator's?), it is no wonder that its elimination from the 1987 Grasset edition of *Albertine Disparue* denotes a scandal like no other for Bizub.

The controversy surrounding *Albertine Disparue* is finally addressed in the third section, entitled "Lacune," of *Faux pas sur les pavés, Proust controversé*, but not until the second half of this section. The first half, "Rival de Freud," explores the shared interests of the eponymous psychoanalyst and the author of the *Recherche*. It is well known that Proust never read Freud's work, but what is somewhat less well-known and discussed is that Freud was not impressed by *Du Côté de chez Swann*. Clearly pitting them as adversaries, Bizub is interested in exploring what, exactly, the Austrian refuted in Proust's work. With little more than a couple of vague sentences from a letter written by Freud to Marie Bonaparte to explain his position, Bizub turns to Freud's and Proust's work, and to scholars of that work, such as Julia Kristeva and Marie-Françoise Guittard-Maury. He comes back, of course, to the instance of the *faux pas* and its connection to the Saint-Marc Baptistery to underline the importance of the physical and sensorial body, as well as the significance of religion in Proust's theory: "On ne peut que proposer des hypothèses pour expliquer ce rejet, et notamment deux *pierres d'achoppement* : d'une part, le rôle du corps manifeste dès le début de 'Combray' et, d'autre part, l'importance primordiale dévolue à la religion dans la tentative proustienne de 'fixer' le lieu de l'inconscient" (p. 328; Bizub's italics).

Having established, in his mind, the fundamental nature of the *faux pas* scene, including its role in triggering an involuntary memory of the narrator's visit with his mother to the Saint-Marc Baptistery in Venice, Bizub is now ready to address what he certainly views as the most consequential controversy: Nathalie Mauriac and Étienne Wolf's 1987 edition of *Albertine Disparue*. In this final section of the book, entitled "Scandale," the critic explains what is different about this version and why it exists. In short, newly discovered typed proofs with Proust's corrections made days before he died indicate that he planned to make drastic changes to the end of the *Recherche*. Part of these changes entail cutting half of *Albertine Disparue*, including the visit to Saint-Marc's Baptistery. It is not clear if, or how, Proust might have wanted to modify *Le Temps retrouvé*, but in its existing form this would mean that the *faux pas sur le pavé* that evokes an involuntary memory would no longer have a referent. For Bizub, this so-called new version entirely changes the novel and everything it represents, especially since, in his view, everything that takes place between the madeleine and the *faux pas* is erroneous and hardly merits our attention. It is true that the notion that Proust intended to make sweeping changes to his novel at the end of his life is noteworthy, curious, and even shocking. Mostly, though, it is extremely unfortunate that he could not have lived long enough to see every volume published as he wished. Nonetheless, the publication of this edition of *Albertine Disparue* has not prevented scholars from reading and consulting the original version, which is widely available in bookstores. Scholars now have the burden of making a choice about which version they deem most appropriate to study. Although Bizub recognizes this choice, he declares that those who refuse to recognize the "miracle du faux pas sur les pavés" are forced to defend a novel that, like Swann who wakes up and realizes he has wasted his time on Odette, "n'est décidément pas leur 'genre'" (p. 431).

What is most confounding about this study is the contradictory position adopted by the critic who, on the one hand, strives to establish the author's intentions regarding his philosophical dogma and his motivations for discussing topics such as sexuality and Judaism, and, on the other, blatantly rejects the author's wishes when they do not serve his purposes. In a bizarre affront to the latter, Bizub inaugurates his 450-page book with five epigraphs, the last of which explicitly articulates Proust's aversion to the thought that anyone might be able to scour his manuscripts and letters to make claims about his thought-process and intentions: "[L]a pensée ne m'est pas très agréable que n'importe qui (si on se soucie encore de mes livres) sera admis à compulsurer mes manuscrits, à les comparer au texte définitif, à enduire des suppositions qui seront toujours fausses sur ma manière de travailler, sur l'évolution de ma pensée, etc" ("Marcel Proust, lettre adressée à M. et Mme Schiff en 1922, quelques mois avant sa mort"). Strangely, this is exactly what Bizub does in this study. No doubt, he is not the only scholar to rely heavily on paratextual and biographical sources; but why highlight the author's own distaste for such an effort? Perhaps this epigraph is intended to anticipate his rebuke of Mauriac and Wolf's 1987 edition of *Albertine Disparue* (discussed 370 pages later) that eliminates the visit to Saint-Marc, among other passages, based on more recently discovered proofs. There is, of course, no version of *Albertine Disparue*, or *Le Temps retrouvé* for that matter, that does not rely on such an editorial method. Beyond Bizub's inability to entertain the idea that Proust may have changed his mind about certain aspects of his novel between 1908 and 1922, he exhibits much more interest in the author's unpublished work than in the four volumes that were published during his lifetime. Accordingly, one has to wonder if the *Recherche* really is his "genre" (p. 431).

NOTES

[1] Francis Lecomte. "Proust Letters to Go Online," *CNRS New*, February 15, 2018. <<https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/prousts-letters-to-go-online>> (last accessed April 26, 2021).

[2] Bizub employs Genette's term "paratextes" when specifying what constitutes "le biographisme" (p. 109). Although Genette does not use the term to refer to anything related to an author's life, he does include "correspondences, private journals and the like" in his definition of "epitexts," a subcategory of his term "paratexts" ("Introduction to the Paratext," *New Literary History* 22, 2 [1991], p. 264). Unfortunately, Bizub's index omits this reference to Genette, and Sainte-Beuve's complete absence from the index represents another oversight on this front.

[3] *Hommage à Marcel Proust, Nouvelle Revue Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1923).

[4] Bizub cites the following edition: Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 4 vols, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1987-1989).

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