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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.

Response by Edward Bizub, Geneva.

I am grateful to H-France for giving me the opportunity to reply to Professor Soldin's criticism, an interesting option that furthers scholarly debate. I agree with the characterization of my work in the first five paragraphs of the review, while taking exception to her somehow considering "outrageous" the lack of critical attention to the *faux pas* as construed by me. Soldin has identified the particular angle that motivated my study: "Where Bizub differs from 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." I take issue, however, with her phrase "to the detriment of the rest of the text." My focus is indeed on the passage announced in my book's title and on its pivotal importance in the reader's interpretative choice concerning the novel's significance as a whole.

Soldin corroborates Proust's intention to deceive the reader as to the real reason behind the writing of his novel, which is the starting point of my analysis, by quoting the letter to Jacques Rivière written in February 1914. Proust is determined to mislead the reader by feeding him errors, what he calls the fundamental misunderstanding (*malentendu*) destined to hide the novel's real message that the scene of the *faux pas* will finally unveil. He thus justifies to that end the decision to "peindre les erreurs, sans croire devoir que je les tiens pour les erreurs." I have indeed "signaled my espousal" of Proust's perspective, as Soldin rightly points out. Mentioning my illustration of wrongheaded interpretations in the 1923 *Hommage à Marcel Proust*, given that they did not dispose of the conclusion of the *Temps retrouvé*, published posthumously in 1927, she nevertheless fails to understand that the "shortcomings" of these critical reviews ("And yet Bizub deems it useful to point out their shortcomings...") prefigure future interpretations by critics who prefer to ignore the revelations of the *Temps retrouvé* without having the excuse of being unaware of them.

She has misread my analysis of the hero's nostalgic regret in the passage, "Mais quand disparaît une croyance [...]," asserting that I have misunderstood the "*comme si*" of that same quotation. The "*comme si*" likens the loss of the hero's juvenile conviction (his *âge de croyance*) to *la mort des Dieux*. Proust explains in his correspondence regarding this closing passage of *Du côté de chez Swann* that what seems to be the definitive attitude of his hero is the opposite of what he himself believes. This is just one example of the misunderstanding he intends to deploy throughout the novel. What is presented as a definitive renunciation by the hero of his original belief will be radically overturned by the impact of the *faux pas*, in a conclusion that in his letter to Rivière he describes as "*objective et croyante*." The *faux pas* is destined to dispel the false impression the writer has created throughout the plot. Proust thus resorts to a rhetorical ploy meant to throw the reader off and to push him further into the misunderstanding (the programmatic *malentendu*) at the heart of his novel. And the "*comme si*" is relevant here, for it announces the antithesis of the

early mistaken impression. The *faux pas* will be a means of bringing about the *résurrection des Dieux*.

Soldin's analysis of the second section of my book also deserves comment. Have I inadvertently "applauded" Blanchot's "appreciation" of the misstep on the cobblestones? When she evokes my commentary on Descombes's analysis, she rightly argues that he prefers the "romanesque novel," but at what cost, for he calls Proust's philosophical theories pure delirium (*égarement*). Anne Henry not only denigrates that same programmatic dogma triggered by the *faux pas*, but ridicules it as a consummate example of unmitigated kitsch.

In Soldin's paragraph, beginning "[i]n the second part of the second section," she blatantly misunderstands the basis of my critical examination of Proustian criticism. She quotes two conflicting critical opinions about the writer's treatment of Judaism and homosexuality, only to wonder how I can take into account their antithesis. But that is precisely the point. One can approach these radically differing opinions only by quoting Proust's personal point of view as found in his correspondence and in the rough drafts leading up to the final version, which is what I have tried to do in order to unravel Proust's thought.

My book may be too dense to be absorbed in one fell swoop. I believe, however, that the response to a book review should likewise identify what the reviewer has omitted. I fear that Soldin's account may give the impression of a sterile reading of Proustian criticism and its ideologically based conflicts. She minimizes the response to the *Recherche* by two of its most astute readers, Samuel Beckett and Sigmund Freud. The former hones in on the underpinning of Proust's novel: a sacred act in veneration of the cult of the Eucharist, what we would call today in modern jargon the novel's onto-theological foundation. This groundbreaking interpretation has since been verified by a number of texts unknown to Beckett but that later have come to light: excerpts from Proust's correspondence, rough drafts of Marcel's revelation comparing it to the worship of the Eucharist and the discovery of the Holy Grail in Wagner's *Parsifal*, and the writer's rabid opposition to the law of 1905 separating church and state. He feared that the French would lose contact with their Christian roots and that French literature would be deprived of its nourishment, of the "*présence réelle*," of its inherent ties to the mystery of the liturgy celebrated at the mass in a consecrated space. It is with this in mind that Proust, identifying himself radically with the clerical cause, chooses the cathedral as the architectural form for his novel, a polemical move declaring war on what he calls humanitarian literature, as exemplified by writers of his time (an up-and-coming generation), especially Romain Rolland, advocate of what will later be called a *littérature engagée*.

As for Freud, she slights out of hand a little-known fact: his outright disapproval of the novel after having read *Du côté chez Swann* in 1926, which, as everyone knows, contains the madeleine episode exploited in many a psychoanalytical approach. It is that very episode that most likely leads to Freud's utter rejection of Proust's vision of the unconscious. Soldin has ignored the psychoanalyst's hostile rejection and its implications, which is deeply problematic. She asserts that Freud's curt dismissal of Proust's novel is not enough to lend credence to his objection. However curt, Freud's dismissal of the work is emphatic: he predicts the *Recherche* will disappear very quickly from circulation and implies that he hopes this will be the case. Soldin chooses to ignore my analysis of this rejection, which stems from the rivalry between the founder of psychoanalysis and Paul Sollier, Proust's psychotherapist. The latter, in December 1905, in the midst of the cure, offered his patient his study on memory, establishing the connection between

involuntary memory and bodily sensations as a way to uncover the secrets of the unconscious. Proust incorporated this truth into his work and went so far as to affirm that this discovery vitiated certain critics' willingness to assert Bergson's influence over him. In other words, Proust, unwittingly perhaps, became Sollier's standard-bearer and implicitly a pioneering critic of Freud's purely psychological approach. I have even gone out on a limb by suggesting that Freud had possibly embarked on a hidden denunciation of Proust's novel when writing his *Avenir d'une illusion* in 1927. The chronology does coincide.

In the last two paragraphs of her review, Soldin tackles what the author of *Faux pas...* "certainly views as the most consequential controversy: Nathalie Mauriac and Étienne Wolff's 1987 edition of *Albertine Disparue* [*sic*]." Her description of my treatment of this belatedly discovered version is accurate, with one notable exception. She mistakenly takes the title of my last chapter "Scandale : œuvre sans sésame" as a moral judgement, when it is meant to be merely the description of a controversy that has shaken Proustian scholars. Perhaps I should have included the word "scandal" in quotation marks to show a certain distance, for I try to examine the whole matter by giving voice to both sides. It is with the invaluable contribution of Jean Milly, an advocate of the last-minute change of direction in Proust's ending and notably in the elimination of the *faux pas*, that I have been able to negotiate the meandering conflict over the novel's conclusion. I have espoused his comparison of Proust's undermining his apotheosis of the *faux pas*, initially the cornerstone of the novel (and later its stumbling block) to Penelope's undoing her *ouvrage* each night in Homer's *Odyssey*, condemning herself to a prolonged widowhood in the event her husband Ulysses fails to reach the shores of his homeland and the warmth of his hearth.

I have thus in no way refused to "entertain the idea that Proust may have changed his mind about certain aspects of the novel between 1908 and 1922." To the contrary, this question is at the heart of my study, announced in a forthright manner in the *avertissement* at the beginning of the book. There is absolutely no foundation in Soldin's conjecture that I have intended a "rebuke" in my analysis of the uncovering of the 1987 version eliminating the paving stones. As a matter of fact, I have indicated that this elimination corresponds to what Nathalie Mauriac considers the modernist turn in literature, reflecting a refusal of the sacred in literary pursuits. If Soldin had paid attention to the commentary on Beckett in my epilogue, she would have recognized that an important part of his work, as I have tried to show, derives from a sweeping commentary on Proust's *faux pas*. And there is no rebuke on my part.

Soldin winds up her commentary by calling my work "confounding," but she fails to acknowledge the confounding nature of Proust's project itself. Indeed, the writer puts the reader in a double bind that can be justified only if one considers that he has two very different readers in mind, an initiated and an uninitiated one. For the latter, a *faux pas* is a *faux pas*, and the hero's ecstasy is just that, an ecstasy that has something to do with the ineffable, as well as a touch of myth, with overtones of "Open, sesame" and Aladdin's conjuring a genie by rubbing a magic lamp—a fantastic ending that can be appreciated by all. But the initiate, recalling the French adage, "pas de fumée sans feu"—"where there's smoke there's fire"—is invited to seek the flame smoldering beneath the surface. And they are up against two very different injunctions that may be construed as reflecting the author's personal bewilderment when tackling the discoveries, as he claims to have done, that he made in delving into the depths of his unconscious.

On the one hand, Proust asserts that the first-rate author (in which category he includes himself) is characterized by a sacrifice in that he refuses to reveal the chemistry of his creative process by shielding this most precious treasure behind a veil of silence. Paradoxically, though not being divulged, this treasure will nevertheless radiate throughout the work. On the other hand, and at about the same time, the writer explains to a young admirer the importance of delving beneath an author's text to uncover what he failed to put into words—or dared not do so—by applying an investigative method seeking *transparence*. He invokes translation as the model of this method, recalling what I have termed Proust's *poétique de la traduction*, a method that he had to develop personally in order to translate Ruskin from English, which is a language that he entirely ignored at the outset of his seven years' apprenticeship. In other words, not only must the writer obey what Proust calls his duty and task to translate the unconscious, but the reader must uncover the source of the author's creative flame smoldering beneath the hero's foot and causing him to stumble on the uneven paving stones.

Proust champions the idea of particular readers as members of the elect (*lecteur élu*), and includes himself in this category when deciphering the carefully hidden underside (*les dessous*) of certain passages in Balzac's novels. In this same vein, I have taken Antoine Compagnon's lead and followed his description of the passage figuring in my title to a crime scene. Proust analyzes Dostoevski's preoccupation with crime as a sign of the Russian novelist's criminal instincts, thus lending credence to the idea that an author may come to grips with a personal complex in the working through of his plot. The theme of Proust's guilt feelings has been amply analyzed by others, the *faux pas*, in which the hero, transported back by a sensation in his foot to his entry into the baptistry of Saint Mark's in Venice, absolves himself, symbolically, of reprehensible acts in his past.

The misstep, bringing about the novel's climax destined to reveal Proust's Truth, is a significant pivot in two different ways. It is the moment, attested by Proust's early notes in 1908, when autobiography yields to fiction. Immediately thereafter, Illiers becomes Combray, etc. What is more, the joy the author attaches to the *faux pas* is directly linked to his psychotherapy, for he expressly associates Sollier with his experience, leading us to conjecture that Proust's recollection of his soul-searching inquiry into the unconscious some years before, by practicing Sollier's sensory method, has now become the springboard of his creative flight. The twisting of the hero's foot likewise concerns the changing manner in which the reader reacts to a literary text, according to his *horizon d'attente*. One of Beckett's protagonists in an early text, Belacqua, named after Dante's character stuck between Heaven and Hell, experiments with the Proustian method in an attempt to bring about the resurrection of a "radiant Venice." By rubbing his foot on the ground, he hopes to have access to a supernatural world...but nothing happens. Beckett ironically dubs his character a dud mystic.

After looking from so many different angles at one particular moment of the novel, namely its climax, I have the impression, upon reading Soldin's review, that I have somehow opened up a Pandora's box that, whatever the methodological arguments used to combat the unleashing of its multiple conjectures, will be difficult to shut. To answer Soldin's closing remark, one has to wonder if the *Recherche*, with all its complexity and its deliberately programmed misunderstandings, its theological underpinnings and its search for the unconscious through bodily sensations in a way that contradicts Freud's vision, really is her "genre."

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