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Ce beau français un peu individuel: Proust et la langue
(review)

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relying on notions of multiple rather than fixed conceptions of identity, allow an understanding of the persistence of diversity in the face of its purported entropic erosion and decline. One of the lasting contributions of this book to current debates may well be the productive tension it generates between its ‘ostensible’ subject matter: the tracking of how ‘elsewhere’ is figured in practical terms in French and francophone cultures, and the ongoing reflection on, and theorization of, the complex notion of the exotic. Forsdick modestly identifies as one of his objectives a desire to ‘contribute to a further opening up of the field of studies of travel literature in French’ (p. xvi). This book goes much further than that: it demonstrates how a cultural archive can be decolonized, thus opening up a refreshing engagement with new theoretical spaces.

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Ce beau français un peu individuel: Proust et la langue. By SYLVIE PIERRON. Saint-Denis, Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2005. 263 pp. Pb €22.00.

Sylvie Pierron’s innovative study maps out the intersection of national and individual language, of linguistic tradition and experimentation in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Reflecting a crisis in French national identity following the defeat at Sedan, Proust’s novel, Pierron argues, embodies a tension between reactionary and progressive trends in language. Within this frame, Pierron’s study offers new readings of individual characters’ idiolects, and explores the interdependence of the narrator’s evolving perspectives on language and his path to creation. The structure of the study echoes this dual evolution, and the paradoxes that Pierron skilfully evokes throughout her study are present from Part One, where the apparent purist of ‘Contre l’obscurité’ is also lured by the verbal innovations of writers as diverse as Racine and Maeterlinck. The next section of the study immerses the reader in the richly composite curiosities of language usage in *A la recherche*. Here, Pierron extends the narrator’s already plural identity: he becomes the philologist whose metalinguistic commentary ranges from normative remarks on the anomalous features of individual characters’ speech to broader considerations on ‘la langue française’. Neologisms, jargon, private languages, slang, borrowings, pastiche and mispronunciation represent just a selection of the quirks written into the linguistic textures of the novel. These are exhaustively catalogued and their features and effects analysed by reference to such measures as their inclusive/exclusive function or their voluntary/involuntary status. The unity behind this heterogeneity of speech habits is ‘excess’: each pushes back the boundaries of standard language and/or the speaker’s normal linguistic context. This polyphony of voices is not merely ornamental, as Pierron rightly demonstrates, but rather a dynamic construction that creates (and shows the reader how to create) meaning within the novel. More generally, too, it dramatizes the shifting shape of the French language. The narrator-philologist’s linguistic authority may be confirmed here, but Pierron deftly resists resolving the novel’s inherent tensions by highlighting, in the following section, how language also evades and defies the narrator. Particularly suggestive is the discussion of polysemantic terms such as ‘langue’. Its erotic, gustatory and verbal

meanings coincide in Albertine's 'demolition' of her ice-cream in *La Prisonnière*: her pastiche of the narrator, or 'theft' of his 'langue', marks a symbolic extension of her erotic power over him. Being stripped of the power of language and the illusion of power *over* language is, argues Pierron, a necessary step if the narrator is to adopt a revolutionary attitude to it and so realize his vocation to write. The study thus comes full circle to the Symbolist–Classicist debate with which it opened. Pierron's concluding discussion of Proust's linguistic experimentation persuasively argues that the true audaciousness and the true aesthetic tension of Proust's enterprise can be found in its transposition of Symbolist poetic experimentation onto a novelistic scale. This valuable study is of interest as a systematic 'reference guide' for those working on specific elements of language usage, as well as making a significant contribution to our understanding of the role of language in the narrator's evolution to creation.

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Proust inachevé: le dossier 'Albertine disparue'. By NATHALIE MAURIAC DYER. (Recherches proustiennes, 6). Paris, Champion, 2005. 405 pp. Hb €70.00.

Combining painstaking detective work with creative speculation, Nathalie Mauriac Dyer's study marks a bold engagement with the structural, thematic and editorial problems posed by the discovery, in 1986, of the *Albertine disparue* typescript. For Mauriac Dyer, this typescript, which Proust was revising just before his death, reveals the degree of structural incompleteness that posthumous editors of Proust's novel have masked by creating a 'finished' seven-volume novel despite evidence that Proust envisaged a symmetrical eight-volume work. This study explores, in exhaustive detail, the wide-ranging implications of the typescript. More broadly, it challenges future editors to recognize the unresolved plurality of a novel whose legacy is now sufficiently strong to resist the threat of oblivion that early editors feared would be its fate were it not rendered unified and 'complete'. The study begins by charting the gradual development of the series, in four (or more) parts, that Proust planned, under the title *Sodome et Gomorrhe I–IV*, as the largest part of the second 'panel' in the diptych of illusion and revelation that would structure the novel (*Swann, Guermites/Sodome, Temps retrouvé*). Drawing extensively on Proust's correspondence, Mauriac Dyer meticulously crashes sets out the chronology of revisions to both text and 'tomaison' and offers engaging hypotheses as to how the arrangement of volumes might have been further developed, had Proust survived, to enhance symmetries and tighten composition. This is followed by a detailed scrutiny of all of the work undertaken by Proust in 1922, notably his revisions to the thousand-odd pages that were to bear the title *Sodome et Gomorrhe III* (*La Prisonnière, Albertine disparue*) and a possible *Sodome et Gomorrhe IV*. The interplay of external and internal impulses, commercial and creative tensions, here allows for a fascinating reconstruction of the hesitations and *volte-face* that mark Proust's choice of titles and arrangement of volumes. The possibility of a proliferation of coexistent revisions is also opened up by such factors as Proust's near-concurrent editing of manuscript versions of the novel and the typed copies of these same manuscripts that were requested by Gallimard from