

Rubén Gallo. *Proust's Latin Americans*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014. 280 pp.

Rubén Gallo's book explores the importance of Latin America in the life and work of Marcel Proust. The novelist's Latin Americans included the composer Reynaldo Hahn, Proust's Venezuelan lover; Gabriel de Yturri, an Argentinean dandy; José-Maria de Heredia, a Cuban poet who rose to fame in the Parnassian movement; and Ramon Fernandez, a brilliant Mexican critic who became one of the most influential intellectuals in Paris in the 1920s-1930s. Each chapter is punctuated by a *paperolle*, a meditation on minor characters or events that illuminate further Proust's interactions with Latin America.

The aim of the four chapters is to provide a brief biographical sketch in which Gallo examines how each of the Latin Americans "negotiated the vicissitudes of cultural alterity while asserting a cosmopolitan identity" (21). Gallo explores their correspondence with Proust in the larger context of a transatlantic cultural history, and their place in the aesthetic and political debates in Europe and Latin America. The author of *In Search of Lost Time* lived in an era that saw a rapid colonial expansion of his country to different continents including the Americas, specifically Mexico, and later Panama.

Gallo's focus is biographical, cultural, and historical. The book also presents insightful readings of Proust by positing Latin America as the novelist's political unconscious. Gallo seeks to show how Proust's speculation with Mexican stocks informed the various fictional passages of *In Search of Lost Time* devoted to financial transactions, and how the Panama Affair shaped his understanding of the conquest of America. The author discusses in the introduction the influence of foreigners on Proust's work from Bibesco to Ruskin; the Latin Americans in French literature in Balzac and Valéry Larbaud; and Latin Americans in *À la recherche du temps perdu* who appear as *rastaquouères* among Madame Verdurin's guests and in the Guermantes' soirées.

The presence of foreign and borderline individuals in Proust is explained by the fact that "as a neurotic, homosexual, hypochondriac, Jewish bourgeois, [...] Proust was the ultimate 'stranger to himself'" ("étranger à soi-même", to quote Kristeva) (5). Contrary to postcolonial studies as well as theories of displacement and exile that emphasize the traumatic experience of the foreign, Gallo underscores the cosmopolitan nature of the Latin American authors, artists, and poets portrayed in the book: "Hahn, Yturri, and Heredia were not exiles, refugees, outcasts, victims [...] or traumatized by their experience" (17). Cosmopolitans driven by love across countries and languages, Proust's Latin Americans embraced their adopted culture.

As the author points out, one might object to the book's theoretical contention that the Parisian Latin-Americans' "cosmopolitan experience of love

requires much more than money [...] a special psychic disposition, an openness to others, and a willingness to reshape one's experience" (19). This interpretation is in sharp contrast with the postcolonial approaches that associate exile and displacement with traumatic experiences. Crossing boundaries and traveling across cultures, Rubén Gallo conceives of a theory of cosmopolitanism that focuses on individual experience. By doing so, he makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of French cultural history beyond the margins of European and North American boundaries.

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