Contre Sainte-Beuve

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Dans *Pour la critique*, Sainte-Beuve expose sa vision d'une critique protéiforme qui se doit de faire comprendre l'oeuvre de manière intime et de faire office d'intermédiaire entre l'élite intellectuelle et l'ensemble des lecteurs. Lorsqu'il se prononce *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, ce sont à la fois ces ambitions déclarées et la manière de Sainte-Beuve que Proust met au pilori. Pour lui, ce ton qui se veut détaché est en réalité une vertu mondaine qui s'apparente au morceau de bravoure recherché. Quant à faire de la critique une activité mimétique au point d'en arriver au pastiche, adopter le style de l'auteur au point d'en oublier le sien, cela équivaut à n'en avoir aucun. Au-delà d'une querelle de méthode qui transgresserait les frontières temporelles, cet ouvrage offre une manière de comprendre la beauté non pas intellectuelle et catégorisante, mais sensorielle et spirituelle. La beauté s'impose comme une vérité, elle se manifeste par une impression. Ce plaidoyer illustré pour une libération de la sensation, dans la création comme dans la critique littéraire, se présente donc tout naturellement comme un entrelacement d'analyses et d'impressions qui laisse libre cours à la mémoire. --*Sana Tang-Léopold Wauters*

Contre Sainte-Beuve Details

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From Reader Review Contre Sainte-Beuve for online ebook

Pierre E. Loignon says

Sous ce titre a été rassemblé un ensemble hétéroclite de papiers dont l’un deux concerne bel et bien directement et explicitement Sainte-Beuve, mais, même dans ce chapitre, il s’agit moins d’une critique de Sainte-Beuve que d’une volonté de se positionner, d’exister, d’affirmer, l’impulsion purement subjective qui hantera toujours l’auteur d’À la recherche du temps perdu.
Aussi la critique attendue (car laissée à entendre par le titre) n’impose rien objectivement au lecteur, mais se révèle plutôt comme traits encore mal définis d’une conviction intérieure immédiate.
D’autre part, on retrouve plusieurs passages qui vont être repris dans La recherche du temps perdu et qu’il me semble qu’il vaut mieux aller lire là-bas à moins d’être un expert de Proust ou d’aimer l’érudition pour elle-même.

Bahadir Arslan says

Kitap Proust'un seçmelerinden olu?uyor. Sainte-Beuve adl? ele?tirmen/yazar?n görü?lerinden birkaç yaz?s?ndan bahsetti?inden kitaba ismini vermi? oluyor . Aç?kças? en s?k?ld???m yaz?larda bunlar oldu çünkü Sainte-Beuve hakk?nda hem yazar?n hem çevirmenin verdi?i bilgiler yetersizdi.Göndermeleri-internette konuyla ilgili gezinmeme ra?men-falan anlayamad?m . Di?er yaz?lar?nda ise Kay?p Zaman?n ?zinde den esintilerin oldu?unu ve sevdi?im yazar? okuma f?rsat? buldum. Marcel Proust anlat?m? hala gözümde 1 numara tabii Roza Hakmen fark?yla .

Kristianne says

I didn't actually read the French version, though I'd like to say I was able to. My French reading comprehension is still stuck somewhere around Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince.
I love that Proust decides to write a book about the literary style of a certain writer and then takes 100 pages to even begin to touch on the subject. Those first 100 pages are my favorite, full of all the gazing at window panes and reminiscing about the faces of lovers from the past that you would hope to find in Proust's pages.
"...in the case of things, and places, and griefs, and loves; those in possession of them do not see the poetry; it only shines at a distance." from -The Countess-

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Agnes Fontana says

"Contre Sainte-Beuve" est furieusement desservi par son titre. En réalité, il n'est nul besoin d'avoir lu Sainte Beuve, ni même de savoir qui c'était (cf la perle de lycée : la Sainte avait raison...), pour adorer cet ouvrage de Marcel Proust. Il rassemble, tel un bouquet, des morceaux de souvenirs, où l'on trouve déjà tout, les variation infinies et subtiles sur la mémoire et les jeux de lumière, la puissance évocatrice des noms, les catégories sociales... et quelques morceaux critiques où Proust démolit Sainte veuve pour qui, afin de pénétrer l'oeuvre d'un auteur, il convenait de tout savoir sur sa vie et ses fréquentations. Proust pense qu'au contraire l'oeuvre révèle l'homme intérieur, inconnu de nos voisins et de nos relations. Il analyse, d'abord

pour contredire Sainte-Beuve mais qui devient très vite transparent, Baudelaire, Balzac et Nerval (et nous donne envie de lire ce dernier). Puis, retour aux souvenirs et aux impressions.
Ce livre contient, en ébauché, tout ce qui fera la spécificité de La Recherche. Il a, par rapport à cette dernière, le charme des esquisses au crayon par rapport à la peinture à l'huile. C'est hilarant, d'ailleurs (oui, oui, on peut rire en lisant Proust), le fameux chapitre avec la madeleine trempée est déjà là sauf que... c'est du pain grillé, et on imagine Marcel se relisant et disant : "Moui... ce passage est pas mal, je sens que je tiens là quelque chose mais ce n'est pas encore tout à fait ça, il faudrait rendre ça plus visuel, en changeant un détail peut-être, mais quoi ?"

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poncho says

Contre Sainte-Beuve is an essayistic-narrative project by Marcel Proust, author of *À la recherche tu temps perdu*, written about one year before his magnum opus began to take shape. In fact, this is the key that took Marcel to the development of his famous work on many vanguardist topics such as memory, time and, well, the human mind in general, as well as other controversial topics such as homosexuality. The edition I read was a Spanish edition, in which it's stated that there's no final text for this project; it rather consists in the compilation of the sketches written by Proust, along with many of his correspondences. The work begins with Marcel speaking about the *souvenirs d'une matinée* (the subtitle often given to this work), about his sleeping habits, starting off with a paragraph that resembles so much the famous opening lines in *Du côté de chez Swann*. Then there's an event that occurs at the second half of *ISOLT*, and it's the publication of his article in *Le Figaro*. This leads Marcel to a conversation between him and his mother (remember she was the one who brought him the newspaper) in which they begin discussing our narrator's talent for literature and after being praised by his mother, he tells her about some ideas he's been sketching in his mind for a while: an essay against Sainte-Beuve's method. Like the madeleine — the pastry of that french writer, whose pleasing taste brought joy into the world of literature — this article is what makes the whole stream of consciousness emerge. The importance given to the attachment of any object, as well as the one given to hearsay, remains constant throughout the book — I think he has made that clear in his whole literary legacy. For example, the author says how a renown connoisseur may feel attached to certain oeuvre that is not necessarily a masterpiece, but, for him, that work might have some affective meaning which is greater than any critic's opinion.

For Proust, there's only a secondary place for intelligence, being past impressions what has a greater weight in a writer's work — maybe in anyone's work, regardless of their vocation. Even though intelligence is the means to translate those evocations, it's our memory the main carrier, the ambassadress between the world we perceive and the spectral world of our experiences, always waiting for their awakening to be restored in life. All these are theories posed by Proust, of course. So its whilst speaking of this when the author brings the madeleine up — not as significant as it would later be though, but not less beautifully described. Like this episode, already familiar for the reader who has already read (even partially) *ISOLT*, there are many others that are slightly different — even some inconsistencies like the ever-changing Françoise's name — but it's actually this what makes the book an enriching reading since one can appreciate how those magnificent ideas written in his masterpiece took shape. I would think of this as *In search of lost time: Volume Zero.* Maybe as the aperitif before the great dinner-party that closes with a flourish in *Finding time again:* the disclosure for all the subjects at some point embraced. For me, it was marvellous to read how Proust had everything perfectly planned and how he developed it all in such a memorable way.

According to Sainte-Beuve, however, in order to fully understand a writer's work one would have to know in detail the author's private life, the former being a reflection of the latter. Why, that's what Proust is against. For him, acquaintance doesn't mean comprehension: there's a mask upon the writer while creating, such that not even their closest friends can unveil it. I absolutely agree with Proust here. I am no artist, and I never was

— far from it, I'm pretty sure — but there was a time when I used to make music and when I did it, I felt like a different self: someone truer speaking from profound regions of my soul; and when my friends listened to the lyrics I wrote, they didn't see *me*, the one they knew, which might have made them reflect on how little they knew me. So maybe Sainte-Beuve's method works as a support, but what's higher in a writer, nay, in any one, is their intimacy as individuals rather than the one we acquire as society; it's the closeness with night and silence what releases our souls — something like Christ's motion for prayer:

> *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*
> —Matthew 6:6 (KJV)

But enclosing a writer in a method is to reduce him to a soulless automaton.

Let's remember Elstir and Bergotte in *ISOLT* and how the narrator's impressions upon them changed the more he saw them interact in society. However, there was something within him that couldn't believe it was them who created some of the great pieces he was fond of. Proust writes about Baudelaire and his relationship with Sainte-Beueve and I couldn't believe the author of such somber and raging verses was so humble and meek, that he who was exhaled by his family rejection was so concerned about being part of the *Académie*; but that makes a great example out of how the way the writer behaves says so little about what he pours through his pen. Proust thinks of our souls as Heaven in Catholic Theology: composed by many regions and the higher one is the one whence the creative process comes from.

> *Books are the work of solitude and the offspring of silence.*

Last but not least, I would like to say some words about something that comes almost to the end of the book and it's a chapter called *The damned race*. It's one of the most beautiful things I've ever read; it's an apology for homosexuality. We know Proust waited until Volume IV: *Sodom and Gomorrah* to expatiate on this subject and then keep going till the end of the series. Well, this chapter condensed the sorrows of his inverts, the place they take in the world. It is saddening that this was written many years ago and even though there have been several improvements, the same kind of rejection remains — by those who are not *damned* and even those who are but disrespect the "less masculine". But Proust writes all this so beautifully that whenever someone wants to understand homosexuality I'd recommend this specific chapter for them to know that it's not all about flamboyance and that it is definitely not a choice — who would like to be through the kind of sorrows described in it?

> *[A]ffectionate beings excluded from friendship, because their friends might suspect something more than friendship, when they only feel a pure friendship for them, and they would not understand if they confided them something else […] Homosexuality is never talked about more than before a homosexual, until the ineluctable day in which sooner or later he'll be devoured […], forced to cover his feelings, to modify his words, to feminize his sentences, to excuse himself before his acquaintances, to justify his rages, more uncomfortable because of the interior need and the imperious order of his vice than because of the social need of not letting his likings betray him.*

Balzac said he would like to achieve success either by *La comédie humaine* or by getting married. Maybe

Proust did not success in a happy-ending-wedding (perhaps he didn't even want it), being himself part of that lonely race, but he did gain success by writing such an outstanding marvel drafted in this project as an essay against Sainte-Bueve. And it's funny that actually Proust spared us some effort in order to link his life and his work: he had already portrayed the former in the vast landscape of the latter.

> *But that night, while we were talking about some trifles, I told her that, contrary to what I hitherto believed, recent scientific discoveries and the most advanced philosophical researches cast materialism down, that they considered death was something merely ostensible, that souls were immortal and some day they reunited…*

Jim says

This unfinished project was collected together from Proust's posthumous papers. Not quite a novel, not exactly literary criticism--never the less an interesting look into the genesis of his masterpiece, A la Recherche. Gives a very good sense of his early ideas on what he wanted to accomplish with the major work. There are many parallel episodes and a good bit of theory. Should you read it before or after Recherche? Read before it makes a much shorter and easier introduction. Read after you can see how he developed his themes and plot. Ideally you would read it BOTH before and after, but then that means you need to read the 3,000 page Recherche twice. But you know it's worth it.

Shyam says

> *She leaves me; but my thoughts return to my article, and suddenly I have an idea for another one. Contre Sainte-Beuve. I re-read him not long ago, I made, contrary to my usual habit, a great many rough notes and put them away in a drawer, and I have some interesting things to say about him. I begin to think out the article. More and more ideas occur to me. Before half an hour has gone by the whole article has taken shape in my head. I want to ask Mamma what she thinks of it. I call, there is no sound, no answer. I call again, I hear stealthy footsteps, they pause outside my door, and the door creaks.*
> *“Mamma.”*
> *“Did I hear you calling me, my darling?”*
> *“Yes . . . Listen! I want your advice. Sit down . . .You’re settled? Good! Now this is what I want to tell you about. I’ve had an idea for an article, and I want your opinion on it.”*
> *“But you know that I can’t give you advice about such things. I’m not like you, I don’t read great books.”*
> *“Now listen! The subject is to be: Objections to the method of Sainte-Beuve.”*
> *“Goodness! I thought it was everything it should be. In that article by Bourget you made me read, he said that it is such a marvellous method that there has been no one in the nineteenth century who could make use of it.”*
> *“Oh yes, that’s what he said, but it was stupid. You know the principles of that method?”*
> *“Go on as if I didn’t . . .” (Ch. 7)*
>
> ———
>
> *. . . filled with the notion of my talent, convinced that I am to be preferred to all other writers. Above this vista of awakening intellects, the thought of my fame dawning on each mind shines*

> *on me with a rosier hue than the manifold sunrise flushing each window. If there is a word or two wrong—well, they will not notice it; and in any case, it is not too bad, and better than what they are used to. (Ch. 5)*
>
> *Should I make it a novel, or a philosophical study—am I a novelist? (Proust, Diary entry, Carnet de 1908)*

How does one describe *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, a work ostensibly devoted to the critique of the nineteenth century literary critic from whom it takes its name? In the introduction to *Marcel Proust: On Art and Literature 1896-1919* , Terence Kilmartin writes

> *In the preface to his edition of the Carnet de 1908, Kolb quotes a letter in which Proust speaks of having in hand at the same time "a study on the nobility, a Parision novel, an essay on Pederasty (not easy to publish), a study on stained glass, a study on the novel."*

Remove the part about stained glass, and, to an extent, the part about the novel, and you could come pretty close . . . but the best way to describe it is in the context of Proust's magnum opus

> *All his other writings are in one way or another, consciously or unconsciously, drafts, sketches, trial runs, first shots, preliminaries for the work that was to come, stages on the road to the final all-embracing masterpiece.*

Having read *In Search of Lost Time*, the comparison is inevitable; you cannot help but feel you are reading an embryonic version of Proust's masterpiece. I would be very interested to read the thoughts of someone who had not read his novel, and are approaching this in the context of, as it is commonly described, an Essay. Surely, as they read on, they must feel slightly confused, as they notice that the work

> *. . . is so closely intermingled with the memories he continues to call up, that one is constantly obliged to turn back to an earlier page to see where one is, if it is the present or the past recalled. (Ch. 10)*

If you have read *In Search of Lost Time*, you will recognise a lot of the themes Proust touches on, sometimes here in different contexts; if you haven't, I think this would serve as a great introduction; an Apéritif, as another reviewer put it, to the seven-course dinner that is *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

Read from *Marcel Proust: On Art and Literature 1896-1919*

I dipped the toast in the cup of tea and as soon as I put it in my mouth, and felt its softened texture, all flavoured with tea, against my palate, something came over me—the smell of geraniums and orange-blossoms, a sensation of extraordinary radiance and happiness . . . Something of greater importance engaged me, I still did not know what it was, but in the depth of my being I felt the flutter of a past that I did not recognise. (Prologue)

These past hours will only hide themselves away in objects where intellect has not tried to embody them. These objects which you have consciously tried to connect with certain hours of your life, these they can never take shelter in. What is more, if something else should resuscitate those hours, the objects called back with them will be stripped of their poetry. (Prologue)

A present writer . . . is not much further forward than Homer. (Ch. 8)

Perhaps, too, they may grant me that ravishing thing: a pleasure of the imagination, a pleasure of no reality, the only true pleasure of the poets . . . And from this impression and others like it something common to them all is liberated . . . And when we recognise this thing, this common essence of our impressions, we feel a pleasure like no other pleasure . . . And after we have read pages containing the loftiest thoughts and the noblest sentiments and have remarked, "That's really quite good," if, suddenly and without our knowing why or wherefore, from some seemingly casual word a breath of that essence is wafted to us, we know that this is Beauty. (Ch. 6)

. . . the writer's true self is manifested in his books alone, and that what he shows to men of the world is merely a man of the world like themselves. (Ch. 8)

As for myself, during those years which I can count happy (before 1848) I endeavoured, and, as I believed, successfully, to shape my existence serenely and worthily. From time to time to write something congenial, to read what was congenial and solid, above all, not to write too much, to cultivate friendships, to reserve some of one's intellect for day-to-day contacts and know how to expend it ungrudgingly, to bestow more on private than on public relations, to keep one's finest, most sensitive part, the cream on oneself, for private life, to employ, discreetly, what remained of one's youth in happy interchanges of intellect and feeling, so did my fancy paint its dream of a gentleman of letters, who possesses a true sense of values and does not allow profession or work on hand to encroach too far on his mental or spiritual development. Since those days, necessity has become my master, and compelled me to renounce what I regard as the sole felicity or the exquisite consolation of the melancholy and the man of wisdom. (Ch. 8)

But alas, at the very moment when I profit by this discharge, my own work pronounces sentence on me. If I see a picture in my words, it is because I meant to paint it; but it is not there. And if in some places I have indeed managed to bring a description to life, even so, unless the description calls up something the reader already knows and loves, he will find nothing there to recognise and welcome. Re-reading one to two good passages I say to myself, Yes, these words convey what I thought, what I saw; I can rest easy, I have done my part, anyone coming on this will see what I meant, he has but to open Le Figaro to find this wealth of thought and imagery. As if thoughts lay on the printed page, as if they had but to meet the eye of a reader in order to be received into a mind where they were not already native. All mine can do is to awaken kindred thoughts in kindred spirits. In others, where my words find nothing to awaken, what an absurd notion of me will be called up! what will they make of it, these statements that mean things which not only will they never be able to understand, but which could never enter their heads? So when they read them they see—what? (Ch. 5)

But this was not all that I would have liked to see again. The train halted there, and as I stood at the window where a smell of coal-smoke came in, a girl of sixteen, tall and rosy-cheeked, walked by with steaming cups of café au lait. There is no spice in the abstract love of beauty, for it imagines beauty in terms of the already known, and confronts us with a made and concluded universe. But what a pretty girl the more has to offer is precisely something we had not imagined—not beauty, something in common with others, but a person, something particular, a thing by itself, and also something individual, which exists and in which we would like to mingle our life . . .

> [For because every beauty is a separate type, because there is no one Beauty but many beautiful women, a beautiful woman is an invitation to a happiness which she alone can fulfill.]

. . . I called out “Coffee, please!” She did not hear me. I saw this life in which I counted for nothing, her eyes that had never known me, her thoughts in which I played no part, going away from me; I called her, she heard me, she turned round, smiled and came back, and while I was drinking my coffee and the train was about to start, I stared her full in the eyes; hers did not flinch, staring back into mine with a look of

astonishment, where, though, my desire believed it saw fellow feeling. How I would have liked to purloin her existence, to take her with me on my journey, call my own, if not her body, at least her attention, her time, her friendship, her ways. There was no time to spare, for the train was starting. I said to myself, I shall come back tomorrow. And now, two years after, I feel that I will go back there, that I will try to live in that neighbourhood, and early one morning, under a pink sky and looking down on that wild ravine, kiss the apple-cheeked girl who offers me café au lait. (Ch. 3)

. . . traveling on and on among cornflowers and poppies and crimson clover, of knowing that I would arrive at the wished-for place where the woman I loved awaited me. (Ch. 3)

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I believed at every moment that I should die. (Ch. 1)

"You know, you've seen it for yourself, how wretched I am without you at first. And then, you know, my life shapes itself differently, and though I don't forget the people I love, I don't depend on them any more, I manage very well without them. For the first week, I am demented. After that, I can go on by myself for months, for years, for ever." For ever I said; but that same evening, arising out of something quite different, I told her that contrary to what I had previously believed, the latest scientific discoveries and the most advanced philosophic enquiries demolished materialism and made out death to be something merely phenomenal; that souls were immortal, and eventually met again . . . (Ch. 15)

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I do not know what mythical race it was which sprang from the mating of a goddess and a bird, but I feel sure that the Guermantes belonged to it. (Ch. 14)

The idea that at some time I might have anything to do with them had not even entered my mind when one day I opened an envelope: "At Home. The Prince and Princess de Guermantes request the pleasure . . ." (Ch. 13)

. . . The fairy-palace spontaneously opening its doors to me, myself an invited guest and mingling with those legendary, magic-lantern, painted-window, tapestry beings with their ninth-century feudalities of pit and gallows, that proud name of Guermantes seeming to come to life, to acknowledge me, to reach out to me—since, after all, it really was my name on the envelope, and in imposing calligraphy—all this seemed too good to be true, and I was afraid it might be a practical joke that someone had played on me. (Ch. 13)

“Aunt, you cannot say that the Cure de Tours, which is the one you mean, isn’t well drawn. That country town, could anything be more like the real thing?” “Precisely,” said the Marquise, proceeding to what was one of her favourite gambits, and the universal test that she applied to literary productions, “and in what way can it interest me to read a treatise about things I know quite as much about as he? People say, It's so like a country town. By all means; but I know all about that, I’ve lived in the country, so why should I be interested in it?” And so proud was she of this line of argument, a favourite of hers, that a smile of arrogance brightened her eyes as she glanced towards her audience, adding, to pour oil on the troubled waters: “You may think it very silly of me, but I must admit that when I read a book, I am weak-minded enough to want to learn something new.” For the next two months, it was retailed, even among the Countess’s remotest cousins, that this particular At Home at the Guermantes’s had been quite the most interesting affair imaginable. (Ch. 12)

At the utterance of some name he would cry out: "But she's my cousin!" as if this were some unhoped-for stroke of luck, and in a voice that made one long to reply: "But I never said she wasn't.” (Ch. 12)

Ro says

Es claro que el nombre de Marcel Proust goza de mayor popularidad que el de Charles Agustin Sainte-Beuve. A este crítico francés, amigo de Víctor Hugo, amante de su esposa y novelista de poco éxito, se le conoce por ser quizá, el epítome de la idea del crítico literario que es crítico por frustración. Conocido por colaborar con el segundo imperio Francés y ocupar un escaño en el senado hasta el día de su muerte, también le sumó a su fama el hecho de, en su momento glorificar escritores que han quedado totalmente en el olvido y reventar con extrema virulencia la obra de escritores como Stendhal, Baudelaire o Balzac, a quienes tildaba de vulgares y sosos (de Las Flores del Mal decía que era “esa cabañita que el poeta se ha construido en el Kamchatka literario” por ejemplo). Su método crítico, que es en parte la excusa para este ensayo de Proust se basa en que para Sainte-Beuve, la obra de un escritor es reflejo de su vida y es a través de ese reflejo que la obra debe ser explicada.
En este ensayo, Proust nos ofrece una serie de reflexiones que abarcan periodos de su infancia, ideas sobre la belleza, la mujer, desbordamientos sociales sobre la creciente clase media del siglo XIX y su relación con la aristocracia, la homosexualidad, los placeres solitarios, la anarquía y el origen de la imaginación. En una parte del libro, establece un diálogo con su madre, el cual registra y que servirá, años después, como punto de enlace para dar forma a su obra maestra, En Busca del Tiempo Perdido. Sin embargo, el mayor valor de este trabajo radica en la importancia de lo que el texto sugiere en relación a la actividad de escribir. Cuando se lanza contra Sainte-Beuve no lo hace a manera personal, pues a diferencia de lo que sugiere el método de Charles Agustin, Proust resalta a través de ideas contundentes de una gran sutileza poética la labor de los que escriben y engarza esta labor con el talento, la capacidad de observación y la manera en que los objetos cotidianos se convierten en escondites de la memoria y que es a través del reencuentro con esos objetos, que esta memoria, este tiempo perdido vuelve a uno para poder convertirse después, en texto.
Así, en esta serie de notas que dan cuerpo al libro, Proust ejerce un ensayo literario y sorprende darnos cuenta que tenía todo perfectamente planeado, la búsqueda de las palabras justas que compitan en armonía con un “aguacero de luz matutino” (como él llama al momento en que un grupo de mujeres camina por las calles y el sol les pega en las espaldas mientras ellas dejar viajar sus risas como pájaros que recién despiertan) y no de aquellas que como dice, se convierten sólo en “simples palabras que las personas inteligentes citan jocosamente”. En pocas palabras, se escribe lo que se ve, más allá de tratar de escribir lo que se siente.
El diálogo con su madre no puede terminar de manera más bella, cuando afirma que “nunca necesitamos demostrarnos que nos queríamos más que nada en el mundo: jamás se nos ocurrió ponerlo en duda. Lo que sí hacíamos era fingir que nos queríamos menos de lo que parecía y que la vida resultaría soportable para el que se quedase solo”, vislumbrando quizá, el día que en el mundo nos faltaran los Proust y nos sobraran los Sainte-Beuves.

Frank says

Fascinerend, geweldig vertaald & samengesteld & geannoteerd. Het leek me bij voorbaat vrij saai: *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is eigenlijk een verzameling ongepubliceerde schetsen, half essay half romanaanzet. Maar het is prachtig en maakt onmiddellijk hongerig naar meer – naar het (her)lezen van de hele Recherche (waarvan dit een eerste embryonale vorm is, en die deze vertalers ook maar eens onder handen moeten nemen).

Michel says

Not only do I disagree with the point of view (the world divided between the intellectuals who write books, the masses who read them, and the critics who interpret them for said benighted masses), but the style is pompous and at times abstruse.
Plus it was required reading, the kiss of death.

Michael Finocchiaro says

Another book for the Proust fanatic, this is a sort of dry run for what would later become La Recherche. The limpid prose, the endlessly gorgeous sentences and the intimate character portraits are here. But, I would not start here, the real meat of Proust, the real reading pleasure is in La Recherche. I would be more inclined to recommend on of the biographies or commentaries that I reviewed here on GR if you wish to immerse yourself in Marcel's world.

Realini says

Contre Sainte- Beuve by Marcel Proust

Proust represents a supreme role model, the peak of the highest mountain, the clear blue sky. You cannot get any better, more beautiful or deeper Literature.
This is the masterpiece and the genius at its best.
You can only hope to have the ability, the skill and power to grasp it all.
But, alas, chances are it is too complex and deep to be embraced.
That is an advantage as well as a challenge.
I for one will read Proust again. And again.
Because it will always be beyond my power of understanding and I can only be in awe and admiration at the sheer complexity, magnitude of what is the best work that man has produced.

Even in his essays, it is evident that Proust was a wonderful reader, a keen reader and an amazing critic. He not only notices one structure and the ingenuity of a paragraph, he gets the whole picture.
Proust has preferences for various authors, but whenever the creator is not among his favorites, that does not mean that his work will get rough treatment.
On the contrary, if Flaubert is not among the writers that enjoy special status, his work is still classified among the best.
By the way, I learned that Flaubert is among the best, if not the very best there is. And yet, Proust seems not to be so enchanted by Gustave Flaubert, however much he praised his oeuvre.
But we are subjective by nature. I have read with extreme delight Breakfast at Tiffany’s and that work is not listed among the very best.
There are some passages in the essays that I have enjoyed thoroughly.
Proust describes the joy that we have when we read and the interesting and strange power that we have in relationship with books and writers.
Whenever we feel like ‘shutting up”, say -Beckett, we can. No matter how great and powerful the author was or is, we can always place that book on a shelf and end the “discussion there”.
Some interesting aspects were the special interests that Proust had for various writers or poets. He liked Ruskin so much that he dedicated a lot of time to the study and translation of his work.
Marcel Proust had special relationships with various authors and nobles of Romanian extraction, which is of particular interest to citizens of my country: Antoine Bibesco and Anna de Noailles have been among the intimate friends of the great writer.
Proust writes with admiration about Flaubert, Baudelaire and a number of other great writers, and he is not only objective, but does not spare his praising words and is very generous in his admiration, where others are mean and jealous.

Cen says

"Car pour lui exister et être heureux n'est qu'une seule chose."

Danial says

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Manchester says

Proust, sos enorme.