

Online Reviews

Rozet, Amélie and Jean Pruvost. *Le Train “grâce auquel l’homme n’a plus rien à envier aux poissons et aux oiseaux.”* Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 2012. Pp. 139. ISBN: 978-2-7453-2462-7

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In *Le train “grâce auquel l’homme n’a plus rien à envier aux poissons et aux oiseaux”* Amélie Rozet and Jean Pruvost trace the development of the word *train* in French from its first documented appearance in the 1130s to its current referent, France’s high-speed train, the TGV, and beyond. This study begins by examining traditional sources, such as historical French dictionaries, and then progressively widens its scope. At the end of their study, the authors examine words and expressions using the word *train*, followed by literary quotations and, finally, films in which trains play a significant role. Rozet and Pruvost have written a well-researched book that will be of interest to cultured readers curious about how trains have transformed society. Their short volume, written with enthusiastic humor and verve, will also interest specialists of nineteenth-century French literature and society, particularly given the importance of the development of trains and the train system during that period.

In chapter one of their study, which is entitled “De train en train,” Rozet and Pruvost begin the prehistory of the word *train* in the following manner: “Il tient ses origines de la vaste famille latine construite autour du verbe *trahere*, ‘tirer, traîner derrière soi’, *tragere* en bas latin, *traginare* en latin populaire, puis *traîner* en ancien français” (8). The authors maintain that the word *train* appeared several years after the first documented use of the word *traîner* in 1131 and that it referred generally to a “fil, ensemble de choses tirées” (8), be it a group of beasts of burden tethered together, or a more regal group constituted by a king traveling with his retinue. The rest of this chapter describes other changes in the general meaning of this word through the sixteenth century.

In chapter two, which is entitled “Le train aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles,” the authors continue their exploration of the word *train* by examining a variety of resources, namely, the French dictionaries of Nicot, Richelet, Furetière, and *L’Académie française*; Cotgrave’s French to English dictionary; and *L’Encyclopédie*. Rozet and Pruvost see a new characteristic developing over time in these reference works, namely: “D’une part le *train*, les roues avant du coche ou le long convoi ainsi appelé, et d’autre part le *chemin*, . . . tous deux sont en relation étroite” (17). They see prefigured in these texts growing economic and military needs for a new mode of transportation that would produce the future railway system, the *chemin de fer*.

As the train, along with the steam engine and the railway, are all closely associated with the nineteenth century and with its notion of progress, two chapters of the book are exclusively devoted to them: chapter three, “De la naissance du train au XIX^e siècle jusqu’à Larousse et Littré,” and chapter four, “Le train triomphant dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle.” Although the train was invented in England, French enthusiasm for the development of the railway is clearly chronicled in the following passage quoted by the authors from the *Dictionnaire du commerce, de la banque et des manufactures* published by Joseph Chérade Montbrion in 1848: “C’est l’une des plus belles inventions de l’industrie humaine, que celle qui a pour objet d’abrégé tout à la fois l’espace et le temps, ce qui est l’immense résultat des chemins de fer” (29). Pierre Larousse would later amplify this exuberant enthusiasm by

dedicating the longest article in his monumental, seventeen-volume, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* to the railway. Throughout these chapters, readers are made aware of the many reasons for which the train was clearly a symbol of modernity.

In chapters five and six, entitled “De la toute fin du XIX^e siècle au plein XX^e siècle” and “Le Train à l’ère du TGV,” respectively, Rozet and Pruvost present an overview of the development of the French railway during the twentieth century. Their commentaries on the role of the railway during the First World War and on the creation of the *Société nationale des chemins de fer français* in 1937 are of particular interest. After a brief description of the TGV, the authors examine significant changes in the way this high-speed train is described in French reference books over time.

The remaining chapters of this study deal with words, expressions, literary quotations, film, and images, all of which have something to do with trains. The chapter titles speak for themselves: chapter seven, “De trains en trains: mots et expressions d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, suivis par un train de citations,” and chapter eight, “Autour du train en images.” These chapters are followed by a word and name index, a brief bibliography, and short lists of thematically related French associations, websites, periodicals, museums, and broadcasts.

I highly recommend *Le train* “grâce auquel l’homme n’a plus rien à envier aux poissons et aux oiseaux” for inclusion in any college or university library collection where there is a French and/or French Studies program at the undergraduate level or above.

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