

Aller(s)-Retour(s)

Aller(s)-Retour(s):
Nineteenth-Century France in Motion

Edited by

Loïc Guyon and Andrew Watts

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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—Loïc Guyon and Andrew Watts

INTRODUCTION

If the eighteenth century was the age of reason and enlightenment, the nineteenth century was undeniably the age of movement. This tumultuous period in French history bore witness to the rise and fall of countless political movements, from revolutions and “coups d’état”, to popular protests and the first workers’ strikes. It was an age of economic movements as France embraced the new world of finance and banking, and underwent its own industrial revolution. Social mobility increased as a dynamic commercial bourgeoisie began to challenge the system of aristocratic privilege that neither the 1789 Revolution nor the Napoleonic Empire had dismantled entirely. The era was one of artistic ferment, as Romanticism gave way to Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, and Symbolism. Intellectual and philosophical movements, from Liberalism to Saint-Simonianism, sought both to reconcile the country with its past and construct the framework for a progressive, more harmonious future. Finally, technological advances and the invention of new modes of transport encouraged geographical movement on an unprecedented scale, from the rise of tourism and colonial expeditions, to the rural exodus and urban overpopulation. The appetite for movement in nineteenth-century France proved insatiable, so much so that even the planet appeared to shrink, making it possible, as Jules Verne demonstrated to readers of his *Voyages extraordinaires*, to go around the world in eighty days by boat and train, or to soar over continents in a hot air balloon.

The relentless movement which characterised nineteenth-century French society was symptomatic of a desire for individual and collective freedom. In the Arts, Romanticism cast off the rigid conventions of Classicism. In the political sphere, parties, factions, and pressure groups strove to fulfil the promise of the Revolution and defend the principles inscribed in the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme*. And in the street, ordinary men and women formed and participated in movements of their own, from *les trois glorieuses* that drove Charles X from the throne in 1830, to the Commune that saw thousands of working-class Parisians executed, imprisoned, or sent into exile. The connection between freedom and movement that endured throughout the nineteenth century was of course intrinsically linked to the idea of progress, which both Liberalism and Positivism championed as an essential prerequisite for happiness.

However, this society of progress also carried within it the seeds of its own misfortunes. “Sans cesse le progrès, roue au double engrenage, fait marcher quelque chose pour écraser quelqu’un,”¹ Hugo claimed, highlighting, in his own distinctive manner, the grimmer aspects of this constant obsession with looking ahead and moving forwards.

Aller(s)-Retour(s) aims to examine the multiple forms of movement that shaped nineteenth-century France as it struggled, and often failed, to propel itself away from the turmoil of the Revolution. While recent scholarship has by no means ignored the theme of movement, critical attention in this area has focused principally on journeys and physical travel. The work of Francis Claudon, Alain Guyot, Chantal Massot, Sarga Moussa, and C.W. Thompson, amongst others, together with the numerous publications produced by the Centre de Recherche sur la Littérature des Voyages (CRLV, Université Paris-Sorbonne), attest to a vibrant interest in French travel writing of this period, and to the enduring importance of the travelogue as a literary sub-genre.² Without seeking to devalue this body of research, *Aller(s)-Retour(s)* interprets movement more widely, in both its literal and figurative manifestations. As the contributors to this volume demonstrate, movement can be defined as the cyclical movement of travel—journeys where travellers are transported back to their starting point—but also as one-way movements. Some departures have no corresponding return, leading to exile and imprisonment, or to escape and liberation. Even in the case of return trips, some returns are not true returns, for the individual who comes back is sometimes very different from the one who set out, and the place of departure has sometimes changed significantly since the time of leaving. In fact, all movement implies change and evolution. In terms of travel, of course, this change is principally of a spatial nature. However, a change of external environment can also bring about an inner psychological evolution. The traveller who strays beyond his or her familiar surroundings may be irreversibly affected by exposure to new people and places. Equally, one does not necessarily have to cover great distances in order to experience the impact of

¹ Victor Hugo, *Voyage de nuit*, in *Les Contemplations* (Paris: Gallimard, “nrf”, 1943), XIX, 358.

² See for example Alain Guyot and Chantal Massot (eds), *Voyager en France au temps du romantisme: poétique, esthétique, idéologie* (Grenoble: Ellug, 2003); C.W. Thompson, *French Romantic Travel Writing: Chateaubriand to Nerval* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Francis Claudon, *Le Voyage romantique: des itinéraires pour aujourd’hui* (Paris: Philippe Lebaud, 1986); Sarga Moussa and Sylvain Venayre (eds), *Le Voyage et la mémoire au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Créaphis, 2011).

movement. The unstoppable march of time transforms societies and the individuals which constitute them. Rarely was this historical evolution more apparent, even to its contemporaries, than in the nineteenth century.

The present volume is all the more necessary given the extent to which nineteenth-century France was fascinated by movement. This was a century that studied and theorised mobility—and immobility—compulsively. Scholarly books, essays, paintings, photographs, etiquette manuals, and medical papers dealing, either directly or indirectly, with the subject of movement proliferated during this era. In *Théorie de la démarche* in 1833, Balzac set out to examine what he playfully described as one of the most neglected fields of scientific enquiry—the importance of tics and gestures as reflections of inner thought processes and personality types. Among the founders of the key political and philosophical movements of the age, Auguste Comte, Henri de Saint-Simon, and Pierre Leroux all published works that sought to explain their theories to the wider public. As the century neared its end, artists and writers turned increasingly towards evaluating and attempting to make sense of the movements spawned during the preceding decades. In his 1888 essay “Le Roman”, Maupassant typified this mood of retrospection by lauding the most accomplished exponents of Realist fiction as illusionists. Against a contrasting backdrop of *fin de siècle* optimism, new theories of movement also began to emerge. In 1894, Étienne-Jules Marey produced a study of human locomotion under the title *Le Mouvement*, having previously used a photographic gun to record the movements of different animal species. This was a century that was forever reflecting on, and writing about, movement.

As intellectuals in nineteenth-century France explored the concept of motion from an array of perspectives, so it is fitting that academic criticism should seek to understand better the different forms of movement they inspired, analysed, participated in, and often fought against. The contributors to this volume invite us to reflect on literary representations of the static and the dynamic, from journeys that return to their point of origin in the poetry of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, to travel by horse in Dumas's *Les Trois Mousquetaires*. They range over some of the most controversial and hitherto neglected movements of the period, such as the campaign to commemorate the French men and women who died during the Prussian occupation of Paris in 1870-71. The essays featured here are concerned with movements both real (Flaubert's visit to the Holy Land) and imaginary (Gide's journey through his own psyche in *Le Voyage d'Urien*). They consider the sense of excitement that comes with movement in new directions, as exemplified by Jules Verne's *Cinq semaines*

en ballon, and expose the despair caused by journeys which fail to bring about their desired outcome. Through the seventeen readings that make up this volume, *Aller(s)-Retour(s)* seeks to understand nineteenth-century France as a society in perpetual motion. Recognising the instability that is key to the very concept of movement, it explains how the intellectual shifts and cross-currents of the nineteenth century responded to, and impacted upon, each other. Finally, and most importantly, it asks why questions of motion and movement dominated this period, as every sphere of French life confronted its own extremes of progress and renewal, stagnancy and regression. The volume examines these issues in four thematic sections: *Attempted Escapes*, *New Horizons/New Perspectives*, *Redirecting Otherness*, and *Textual Movement and Moving Texts*.

The first part of the volume, *Attempted Escapes*, considers the pre-condition of all movement, the concept of stasis, of immobility—whether imposed or self-imposed—from which the dream, desire or attempt at movement is born. In “Failed Departures and Inevitable Returns: Impossible Journeys in Baudelaire and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam”, **Helen Abbott** reflects on the dichotomy of movement and stasis at the heart of nineteenth-century poetic practice. Inspired by Baudelaire’s “Invitation au voyage”, Villiers’s 1875 poem “A s’y méprendre” recounts a journey across Paris in which the narrator, upon arriving at his destination, senses that he has merely returned to his starting point. “A s’y méprendre” explores the relationship between language and perception, as Villiers employs near-identical syntax and vocabulary to describe both the building from which the narrator embarks on his journey and the café at which he supposedly arrives. As Abbott explains, the failed journey carries a paradoxical charge for Villiers, whose own textual returns bring him back repeatedly to Baudelaire. By recalling “Les Aveugles” and “Les Hiboux”, two sonnets from *Les Fleurs du mal* which present journeys made by the eyes and the imagination, Villiers invites the reader to look again at his own work, and to share in his poetic vision. This very act of looking is itself problematic, however, for while the reader’s ability actually to depart anywhere is hampered by the preoccupations of the everyday, the poet must confront the impossibility of ever being able to return to an idealised space before the text.

Continuing Abbott’s discussion of failed departures, **Francesco Manzini** reflects on the journeys undertaken by Stendhal’s male protagonists as they attempt to distance themselves from their real and

substitute mothers. In *Le Rouge et le noir*, Julien leaves Verrières, Besançon, and Strasbourg, but always returns to the maternal figure of Madame de Rênal. As Manzini explains, Stendhal associates these “matripetal” journeys with death. When Julien returns to Verrières for the final time, he shoots his former lover, and then awaits his execution in the certainty that no other woman can replace her. Moreover, the speed with which Julien returns from Paris, so often interpreted by critics as a Stendhalian lapsus, illustrates the strength of the psychological bond between Julien and the older woman whom he idealised as a source of both maternal and romantic love. Manzini contrasts the representation of return journeys in *Le Rouge et le noir* with *Lucien Leuwen*, in which the eponymous hero finds himself caught between his mother and her resentment towards his lover Bathilde de Chasteller. Like Julien, Lucien undertakes a series of return trips between Paris and Nancy. Curiously, however, Stendhal left blank the sixteen pages of the chapter recounting Lucien’s supposed reunion with Bathilde. Instead, the text resumes with the protagonist’s departure for Italy, a one-way trip that separates him definitively from his real mother and her maternal analogue. According to Manzini, Stendhal’s decision not to write this episode confers privileged status upon Lucien, who in contrast to his fictional counterpart Julien Sorel, chooses to escape the controlling sphere of maternity and, ultimately, to live.

In “Ballons-poste, pigeons voyageurs et guerriers insoumis”, **Janice Best** explores the notion of attempted escapes within the context of the Paris Commune, and the tension between commemorating and forgetting that arose in the decade after the bloody siege of 1871. Through a study of the various proposals for a commemorative memorial submitted to the authorities in 1878, Best shows how a particular historic event inspired a range of widely differing artistic interpretations on the part of the competitors, and analyses the issues behind them. The title of her essay refers to the proposal submitted by Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, a work of sculpture depicting the hot air balloons and carrier pigeons used by besieged Parisians in an attempt to breach the Prussian lines. Bartholdi’s idea was not selected, however, and neither was that of Rodin, who had also chosen to portray the liberation movement in terms of flight, with an allegorical depiction of the Republic as a winged woman. The piece eventually chosen was that of Louis-Ernest Barrias, a simple depiction of a woman (wingless) posing as a symbol of the city of Paris, a young soldier of the national guard lying injured at her feet and a little girl cowering behind her skirts. Among the various reasons which may have motivated the jury’s decision, and which Best analyses incisively (recalling in

particular the enormous collective silence which still surrounded the traumatic events of the Commune), one wonders whether the absence of movement and the fatalistic realism manifested by Barrias's work are not in fact the most telling indicators of the Third Republic's concern to "freeze" forever, while appearing to glorify, the rebellious spirit of the people of Paris.

The tension between movement and stasis that Best views in socio-political terms assumes a more personal dimension for **Elizabeth Geary Keohane**. In "A Return Trip to the Writer's Imagination: Gide's *Le Voyage d'Urien* (1893)", Geary Keohane proposes a re-reading of Gide's *Voyage d'Urien* through the lens of the "voyage intérieur", equivalent to a "voyage in writing" in which Gide himself seems to invite his readers to share from the very outset. According to Geary Keohane, the imaginary sea voyage of Urien was conceived of by Gide as a metaphorical journey around his study-chamber (in other words, a "voyage en chambre") which is constituted, from the viewpoint of the artist, by the actual process of writing. Geary Keohane thus shows how, by means of the many references to the creative process scattered throughout his fictional travelogue, as well as the description of the actual surroundings (the study-chamber) in which this creative process is undertaken, Gide manages to describe the ever-present tension, the constant ebb and flow between fantasy and reality with which all artists are confronted. By doing so, through *Le Voyage d'Urien*, Gide reveals the creative mind as one of the most powerful means of transport.

Completing this series of readings on immobility and attempted movement, **Manon Mathias** reflects on the inner journey undertaken by George Sand through the medium of the painted image. Drawing on texts such as *Un Hiver à Majorque*, *Le Pêché de Monsieur Antoine*, *Histoire de ma vie*, *Le Piccinino*, and *Promenade autour d'un village*, Mathias reminds us of Sand's fascination with the power of visual art to capture the essence of objects, animate and inanimate, to the extent that an alternative reality is created which rivals the original. Having highlighted Sand's propensity to compose literary descriptions as though painting a picture, Mathias demonstrates that this oblique act of rendition is far more than simply a descriptive "technique", and in fact constitutes the very source of the author's inspiration. For Sand, the painted image (or even the imagined one) is the starting point of a fantastical voyage towards another world, a journey affording a glimpse of possible alternatives to the real one. Mathias's lively analysis illustrates how the depictions of these "visions" in fact served eloquently as a conduit for George Sand's social and moral conscience.

The second group of essays, *New Horizons/New Perspectives*, is concerned with both the aims and consequences of movement. As the five chapters in this section demonstrate, all movement tends towards a goal, whether this be a geographical point or an outcome, consciously or unconsciously desired. Furthermore, as we noted in our opening remarks, no movement is trivial in that it always brings about change or evolution, however minor. This change can just as easily involve the subject or the moving object as its surroundings. **Kathryn Brown**'s essay on balloon travel in Jules Verne's *Cinq semaines en ballon* provides just such an example of the impact of movement on the individual and his or her environment. In his 1863 novel, Verne recounts a fictional journey across Africa in which an English adventurer sets out with two companions to trace the sources of the Nile. Brown situates balloon travel within the context of a nineteenth-century drive towards scientific objectivity. Echoing Nadar, who in 1858 famously used a balloon to photograph Paris from the air, Verne affords his protagonists a comprehensive view of the African landscape by elevating them above it. While enabling them to see the continent differently, the characters' chosen mode of transport does not, however, guarantee their moral objectivity. As the fictional explorers shoot at tribesmen engaged in acts of cannibalism, so their actions reflect a contemporary European will to impose order on the indigenous peoples of Africa. If the novel presents such violence against Africans as legitimate, the end of the text, in which the balloon is badly damaged, nevertheless complicates any straightforward understanding of this expedition as a success or failure. As Brown suggests in the final part of her essay, *Cinq semaines en ballon* prompts us instead to reflect on the objectivity of our own worldview, and on the extent to which this has been shaped by a nineteenth-century model of imperial domination.

While Brown is concerned with geographical exploration, **Anne O'Neil-Henry** focuses on movements within the cultural space, and the reception of *Jane Eyre* in mid-nineteenth-century France. The first French translation of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel appeared in 1854, though as O'Neil-Henry points out, references to *Jane Eyre* in the Parisian Press date from as early as 1849. Critics in France reacted enthusiastically to Brontë's work, despite its portrayal of the French lifestyle as overly decadent and morally corrupt. O'Neil-Henry argues that *Jane Eyre* won favour with contemporary readers partly because the novel echoes Brontë's own fascination with the French language. The fictional Jane learns French in the hope of strengthening her qualifications as a governess and

achieving a measure of personal and financial independence. Moreover, Brontë's representation of England as a country of solid bourgeois values appealed to French readers who had lived through the turmoil of the 1848 Revolution, the coup d'état of 1851, and the establishment of the Second Empire in 1852. By presenting Victorian England as a society that controls and neutralises class conflict, *Jane Eyre* resonated with a French public that found in this transnational text a subtle antidote to its own political anxieties.

As O'Neil-Henry assesses the broader cultural impact of *Jane Eyre* in France, **Anthony Zielonka** considers the deeply personal consequences of movement in "Gustave Flaubert's Journey to the Holy Land: Anticipation, Disenchantment and Enduring Fascination". Flaubert's notes and correspondence reveal the mixture of exhilaration and disappointment that he felt upon arriving in Jerusalem in 1850. On the one hand, Zielonka argues, the novelist's view of the city as dirty and filled with ruins should be understood in terms of a Romantic aesthetic that perceived images of decay in every civilisation. On the other, Flaubert's excitement on glimpsing the Holy City stemmed from his wider fascination with Middle Eastern culture and religion. Zielonka reminds us that Flaubert had conducted extensive research into the origins of Christianity and the lives of saints while preparing his first version of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* in 1849. The works he produced following his return to France not only testify to the enduring nature of this interest, but illustrate that direct exposure to the Middle East fractured the novelist's perspective. As Zielonka explains, *Madame Bovary*, *Salammbô*, *Trois Contes*, and the 1874 *Tentation de Saint Antoine* echo the moral and physical degradation with which Flaubert associated the Holy Land, but also the moments of emotional and spiritual transcendence he experienced during his own journey to the region.

Following Zielonka's reflections on Flaubert and the Middle East, **Juliet Simpson** explores the cultural exchanges between Mallarmé and England. In "Aesthetic Traffic: Mallarmé, Art and the 1870s English Connection", Simpson demonstrates that Mallarmé's cross-Channel *allers-retours* had a profound impact on the development of his creative praxis. The Frenchman first visited England in 1862, and returned to review the London International Exhibition in 1871. In London, he met the poet John Payne, in whom he discovered an artistic soul-mate who shared his interest in philology and, most notably, myth. Mallarmé's subsequent friendship with Payne, Simpson argues, exposed the Parnassian poet to the influence of a wider aesthetic circle that included the artist Burne-Jones. In his treatment of mythical subjects such as Venus and Pygmalion, Burne-Jones

strove to create effects of suggestive ambiguity which appear to have resonated strongly with Mallarmé's own explorations of poetic symbolism and pattern-making. As Mallarmé derived artistic stimulation from these exchanges, so his visits to England also provided him with opportunities to participate in art criticism. His essay "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet" bears particular witness to the impact of English Aestheticism on his conceptualisation of French Impressionist painting. While Zola and Duranty's art commentaries focused on the naturalistic qualities of the genre, Mallarmé portrayed Impressionism as an art that distilled and transformed reality. As Simpson concludes, this vision of the "impersonal modernity" of Impressionist painting represented an entirely new strand of critical thought in 1876, and must be credited in large measure to Mallarmé's aesthetic engagement with England during this period.

In her re-reading of *L'Homme qui rit*, **Stéphanie Boulard** considers where Victor Hugo wished to transport readers in his notoriously disconcerting epic of 1869. For Boulard, the journey undertaken in *L'Homme qui rit* is multidimensional: there is the narrative dimension, where we have the account of the wanderings of Gwynplaine and his troop of acrobats, and then the poetic dimension, where we are witness to a journey of words across time and space (or, in other words, through their etymological sources and lexical fields) and of course through the meaning of these words themselves. Taking the figure of the acrobat as a guiding principle, Boulard shows that the particular style of *L'Homme qui rit* is the result of Hugo's own playful yet serious attempt at inventing a new form of expression, a vocabulary in complete harmony with its subject. Here, according to Boulard, Hugo reveals his desire to play around with the materiality of language, just as he experimented with the body and face of his protagonist. In so doing, Hugo ensures that language remains in a state of perpetual motion, allowing him to move back and forth between signifiers and signified, between the French language and foreign languages, between fiction and encryption. The writer seeks to force the reader to question those things normally taken for granted, and to embark with the author on a psychological journey or, as he put it himself, "to force him to reflect at every line".

The third part of this volume, *Redirecting Otherness*, is devoted to one of the near-inevitable consequences of all movement: the encounter with the Other. Here we examine the treatment of alterity, the apprehension of difference and the changes wrought by this encounter with the unknown,

discernible both in the subject or the moving object and in the figure of the “Other”. **Melanie Vandenbrouck** and **Julia Thoma** open this section with a study of the painter Horace Vernet’s representations of the Orient. Having travelled to Algeria on at least nine occasions, Vernet had acquired a detailed knowledge of the Arabs and the Kabyle tribes, their way of life, and their customs and traditions. As a result of these trips, the painter was able to move away from certain “orientalist” clichés and to adopt a very realistic style which led to his success as a painter. However, Thoma and Vandenbrouck demonstrate that this realistic depiction of physical traits, costume, interiors and oriental landscapes did not entirely prevent Vernet from indulging the numerous ideological stereotypes associated with contemporary colonialism. The artist generally worked on commission, and was tasked with encouraging French patriotic sentiment, notably by rendering the colonial army in all its glory. This said, Vernet’s attention to detail, his efforts to capture real life, his moderate use of colour, his even-handed artistic style, all contributed to an air of truth in his paintings, a faithful evocation of reality unequalled at the time and which also manifested itself in his works inspired by scenes from the Old Testament. The fact that Vernet chose to represent his biblical characters in oriental dress, his “orientalisation” of the Bible (for which he was reproached by certain contemporaries) is an excellent example of the profound and lasting effects of foreign influence on the traveller.

The personal experiences of the French when confronted with “the Other” is also the concern of **Michelle Cheyne**’s essay, “No Laughing Matter: Fornicating Foreigners and the Limits of Stage Humour during the Bourbon Restoration”. Based on her study of a corpus of often neglected plays on the subject of travel, and focusing on a comparative analysis of two of these in particular, *Les Français à Londres* and *Les Parisiens à Londres*, Cheyne exposes the growing taboo which surrounded the question of inter-racial unions under the Restoration. Whereas the historical context of colonial conquest goes a long way towards explaining the widespread condemnation of mixed unions between coloniser and colonised, European and non-European, it is rather more surprising to learn that sexual relations between a French person and someone from another European country were also generally frowned upon in the late 1820s. Hitherto, relations between a French man or woman and a subject of the English Crown had been tolerated in the name of shared values and mutual admiration. However, such alliances are no longer a feature of stage productions dating from the end of the Restoration period. Cheyne’s analysis shows how the endings of such plays were composed in such a manner as to play down the consequences of any encounters with a

foreigner, in an effort to preserve the political interests and the ethnic purity of the nation.

Maintaining the focus on individual movements towards the Other, **Cécile Meynard** offers us an analysis of *Une année dans le Sahel*, the fictional travel diary written by Eugène Fromentin several years after one of his many expeditions to Algeria. This fictional travelogue, moreover, is accompanied by an equally fictive correspondence between Fromentin and his friend Du Mesnil, who was also his travelling companion on his first journey to North Africa. The text is unusual in several respects: firstly, it is not a true travel account, written from day to day, or immediately after the journey's end, but rather an amalgamation of memories from a number of separate trips made by the painter to Algeria. Furthermore, Meynard demonstrates how Fromentin's fictional diary focuses mostly on the theme of return rather than on the journey itself: the emotions and feelings experienced by the painter on his return to Algeria and the Sahara, and also just before his return to France. The familiar atmosphere of these places, insistently recalled, compose the primary subject of the text and seem to reduce the journey between these places to the status of a simple trip. As Meynard suggests, this preoccupation with returning, with the familiar and ordinary constantly in the background, bears all the hallmarks of the psychological journey or "voyage en chambre", as previously evoked by Geary Keohane with reference to *Voyage d'Urien*. It is in France, from the confines of his studio, at least ten years later, that Fromentin reinvents his journey, his travels in Algeria, written in the form of short "escapades", while he himself remains firmly in one place. Like Gide, the painter finds himself confronted with the difficult nature of the constant ebb and flow between imagined spatial reality, or remembered in this case, and that which has been actually experienced first hand. Meynard's analysis reveals the various compositional and narrative techniques used by Fromentin to recreate what he describes himself as the travelogue of "an absent being".

We conclude this volume with a discussion of the relationship between movement and text in nineteenth-century literature, examining the textual representation of movement (from a semantic and narratological perspective) and the interplay of textual motion itself. This final series of readings, *Textual Movements and Moving Texts*, begins with **Judith Spencer**'s essay on the aesthetic traffickings between French and German romanticism. Focusing on the works of Balzac and Baudelaire, Spencer

argues that both writers can be seen to reflect on their own acts of artistic production. However, this self-consciousness also leads them to engage in an ironic deconstruction of their texts as aesthetic objects. Like Schlegel, Balzac and Baudelaire understood art as work in progress, and their writings as artefacts whose internal mechanics could be exposed and explored in multiple ways. Taking as a case study *Le Père Goriot*, Spencer traces the shift between Balzac's grandiose presentation of himself as the "secretary" of nineteenth-century society and his willingness to disrupt the reader's ability to glean stable meanings from the text. In the famed opening description of Madame Vauquer's boarding house, the novelist who classified social types reveals his capacity for introducing disorder to his own literary creation. Through his persistent use of the formula "peut-être", Balzac repeatedly undercuts his claims to historical accuracy, and warns that the meanings contained in his fiction are, like the crumbling statue of Venus in Madame Vauquer's garden, perpetually on the brink of collapse. In so doing, he not only demonstrates the semantic fragility of his text, but infuses his realism with a playfulness that recalls his early reading of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

The shifts and interactions between literary genres that subtend Spencer's analysis are thrown into further relief by **Fiona Cox's** study of *Les Misérables* and its place within the epic tradition. Cox highlights one of the essential features of the epic: the tension between a mythical past and an improbable future. Scattered throughout with both explicit and implicit references to classical authors, *Les Misérables* is a perfect example of how every "new" epic is in the first instance a continuation, a sequel to past epics. The epic is embedded in movement, that of History and of civilisation. However, Cox demonstrates that by drawing its source from the past, the epic must also turn towards the future, of necessity a distant and unattainable horizon, in order to ensure its mythical permanence and to enable the work to act in turn as an inspiration to other authors. The epic is therefore an open genre, allowing for constant re-invention and a continual to-and-fro between past and future, often manifesting itself as an intertextual journey. With *Les Misérables*, Hugo achieved his goal: to capture the French national identity in a modern-day epic, a mythical tale set in a now vanished Paris, but whose message serves to shed light on the future and on the great tragedies yet to unfold.

In complement to these studies of (inter)textual movement, **Stephanie Wooler** reflects on the sartorial journey undertaken by Flora Tristan in *Péréginations d'une paria*, in which the author documents her voyage to Peru in search of her paternal family. Tristan's text makes repeated reference to clothing, from chic Parisian fashions to the traditional

Peruvian dress worn by the women of Lima. As Wooler shows, Tristan, who had been designated as illegitimate in her native France, uses the language of clothing to assert the right to speak for herself and other female victims of societal oppression. At the outset of her journey, she calls upon women to unveil both their suffering and their femininity, and criticises her contemporary George Sand for hiding behind the double veil of masculine attire and a male pseudonym. *Péréginations d'une paria* also marks a shift, however, in Tristan's representation of the garments she comes to recognise as trapping women within, rather than liberating them from, fixed gender categories. The conclusion to the text underlines the ambivalent results of Tristan's South American experience, for while the author fails to secure a share in her father's inheritance, her return across the sea causes her to imagine an authentic female identity founded not on the sartorial conventions of another society, but on a space outside of society altogether.

The closing essay in this volume returns us to the representation of physical movement and modes of transport in nineteenth-century prose fiction, as **Roxane Petit-Rasselle** discusses the role of horses in *Les Trois Mousquetaires*. Dumas's novel abounds in references to different breeds and standards of horse, from broken-down mules to elegant stallions. Equestrianism, explains Petit-Rasselle, is integral to the representation of heroism in this text, functioning as a symbol of bravery and masculinity, but also of cowardice and femininity. The fictional Porthos, Athos, and Aramis ride sleek black chargers befitting of their acts of daring, while d'Artagnan realises that if he is to join the musketeers, he must sell the ageing mount that provokes laughter upon his arrival in Paris. Dumas further employs the vocabulary associated with horses to generate suspense. The recurrence of the noun "galop", in particular, regulates the speed and progression of the narrative, and infuses the novel with a sense of breathless excitement that sustains the reader's interest through passages of extended description. Seen in this perspective, *Les Trois Mousquetaires* provides invaluable insights not only into the relationship between horses and Dumas's narrative technique, but into equestrian travel as a distinct sub-category among the multiple modes of transport featured in nineteenth-century adventure writing.

From horses to hot air balloons, from journeys in prose and poetry to voyages of exploration and self-discovery, *Aller(s)-Retour(s)* examines the restlessness at the heart of nineteenth-century France, and reveals the key movements that shaped this turbulent, yet compellingly productive, era.

PART I

ATTEMPTED ESCAPES

CHAPTER ONE

FAILED DEPARTURES
AND INEVITABLE RETURNS:
IMPOSSIBLE JOURNEYS IN BAUDELAIRE
AND VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

HELEN ABBOTT

As a model of literary travel, Baudelaire's "invitation au voyage" represents one of the defining poetic moments of the nineteenth century in France. It is an invitation to undertake an impossible journey; the poet fails to actually depart for his yearned-for destination and inevitably returns to his point of departure, albeit in a transformed state. The impact of this famed "invitation" on the younger poet Villiers de l'Isle-Adam has yet to be fully analysed, but understanding the significance of the elder poet's influence will reveal an important nineteenth-century preoccupation with the supposedly conflicting opposites of movement and stasis. This study presents a comparative reading of Villiers's attitudes towards the notion of impossible journeys in relation to those of Baudelaire, focusing on a corpus of seven texts drawn from the writings of both poets. Villiers's prose poem "À s'y méprendre" will form the main basis of the analysis, but reference will also be made to an *histoire* entitled "La Maison du bonheur" and an important scene from the closing act of Villiers's play *Axël*. The Baudelairean texts which directly inspire Villiers take not only the form of the verse and prose "Invitation au voyage" poems, but also of two sonnets from *Les Fleurs du mal*, namely "Les Aveugles" and "Les Hiboux".¹ By analysing these works in conjunction with one another, this

¹ All references to Baudelaire are from the following edition: Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975–76). Subsequent references will be signalled by the abbreviation B.O.C. While the closing poem of *Les Fleurs du mal*, "Le Voyage", is also an important point of reference when analysing the concept of impossible journeys, this poem is not a significant intertext for the Villiers texts under analysis here.

study will explore whether the kind of journeys which are at stake in these texts are those in which neither poet nor protagonist succeeds in truly departing, leading therefore to inevitable returns, as the reader is subjected to both thematic and textual revisiting, both within and across their writings.

Villiers's writing career sits firmly within the Symbolist mode. A friend of Mallarmé, and an avid admirer of Poe and Baudelaire, Villiers is best remembered for his prose works, including the tales and prose poems of the *Contes cruels* (1883) and his futuristic novel *L'Ève future* (1886). The way in which Villiers's writing inherits from Baudelaire is of particular interest here. Before Baudelaire's death in 1867, Villiers had corresponded briefly with the elder poet (three letters from Villiers to Baudelaire remain, but sadly the return correspondence has been lost).² In these letters, the youthful Villiers writes enthusiastically of how particular ideas from *Les Fleurs du Mal* have inspired him, and this early contact with Baudelaire's work continues to influence his later writings. In his prose poem "À s'y méprendre", Villiers describes a particular Parisian location which invites the onlooker to stop, or to use Villiers's own words as he describes a half-open door: "Ce seuil invite à s'y arrêter".³ This invitation to stop seems to be in direct opposition to Baudelaire's "invitation au voyage", even though—in this instance—neither the verse nor the prose poem are referenced as specific intertexts. Nonetheless, Baudelaire's work serves as a rather significant pre-text for Villiers's writings about movement and stasis. The invitation to stop in "À s'y méprendre" gives rise to problematic and negative scenarios in which only a particular kind of movement can play an important role. What seems, initially, to be a simple binary opposition between stopping and travelling, between an "invitation à s'y arrêter" and an "invitation au voyage", is in fact tempered by a third element, itself derived directly from Baudelaire who inspires Villiers to consider both movement and stasis as an integral part of the poet's ability for mental travel. The invitation "à s'y arrêter" in Villiers's prose poem is paralleled, syntactically, by the formulation of the title itself: "À s'y méprendre". This parallel suggests that we should look again at what stopping or staying put mean in relation to travel and

² The letters date from 1860, 1861 and 1862. See Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Correspondance générale*, ed. by Joseph BOLLERY, 2 vols (Paris: Mercure de France, 1962), I, 44-54.

³ Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Alan RAITT, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1986), I, 628. All subsequent references to this edition will be signalled by the abbreviation V.O.C.

movement. Villiers, following Baudelaire, implies that we need to be careful with our modes of perception, in order to avoid being taken in by what seem to be obvious modes of travelling through a literary text. For Villiers—as was already the case for Baudelaire—modes of transport such as the fiacre, the boat or the train play a far less significant role in the literary domain than the eyes and the imagination.⁴ By suggesting that the mind's eye becomes an important mode of transport for Villiers and for Baudelaire, we can begin to understand the significance of impossible journeys within their writings, as they begin to demand that the reader return to, and revise, initial perceptions set out in the literary space.

“À s’y méprendre” (V.OC, I, 628-30) was published for first time on 16 December 1875 in *Le Spectateur*, but it did not enjoy a particularly wide readership until it was later re-published, with minor modifications, in the *Contes cruels* of 1883. Set in Paris, it is a short prose poem in which the narrator sets out, by foot, on a misty, windy, November morning in order to get to a business meeting. As he makes progress through the city, he realises that he is running late, and, perhaps perversely, decides to stop under a portico. His decision to stop is predicated on the idea that the portico will serve as a convenient sheltered spot from which to attempt to hail a passing fiacre which he hopes will speed up his journey. This stopping place is the location which, according to the narrator, “invite à s’y arrêter”, and the invitation is so enticing, in fact, that the protagonist finds himself drawn to enter the building. It is at this point that the prose poem takes on more sinister overtones, as the architectural layout of the building's interior and the meditative appearance of its occupants transfixes the unwitting visitor. As he surveys the scene, casting his eye over the marble tables that are dotted about the room, he hears the rumbling of a fiacre as it comes to stop—fortuitously—directly in front of the building he has just entered. He then swiftly exits the building, gets into the fiacre, and calls out “Passage de l’Opéra” to the coachman, who then takes him on a journey through Paris in which he is able to contemplate the never-ending flow of passers-by. As he arrives at his destination, a café which serves as the venue for his business meeting, the text itself takes a rather strange turn, or rather re-turn. The description that

⁴ For example, in a poem published in 1860, entitled “Chemins de fer”, Villiers satirises the supposed “progress” being made by the advent of the railways. See V.OC, II, 848-90. As Michael Hanne points out, “in *Fleurs du Mal* [Baudelaire] abandoned the idea that travel in the literal sense could offer a remedy for the tedium of life and the many voyages recorded in his poetry are journeys of the senses and of the imagination” (Michael Hanne (ed.), *Literature and Travel* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), 5).

Villiers had used for the first building (V.*OC*, I, 628-29) is repeated, almost verbatim, for the second (V.*OC*, I, 630), as outlined below (emphases my own):

j'entrai, souriant, et me trouvai, de plain-pied, devant une espèce de salle à toiture vitrée, d'où le jour tombait, livide.

À des colonnes étaient appendus des vêtements, des cache-nez, des chapeaux.

Des tables de marbre étaient disposées de toutes parts.

Plusieurs individus, les jambes allongées, la tête élevée, les yeux fixes, l'air positif, paraissaient méditer.

Et les regards étaient sans pensée, les visages couleur du temps.

Il y avait des portefeuilles ouverts, des papiers dépliés auprès de chacun d'eux.

[...]

Je considérai mes hôtes.

Certes, pour échapper aux soucis de l'existence tracassière, la plupart de ceux qui occupaient la salle avaient assassiné leurs corps, espérant, ainsi, un peu plus de bien-être.

Comme j'écoutais le bruit des robinets de cuivre scellés à la muraille et destinés à l'arrosage quotidien de ces restes mortels, j'entendis le roulement d'un fiacre.

Je tournai donc le bouton de la porte **et me trouvai, de plain-pied**, dans une salle **où le jour tombait** d'en haut, par le vitrage, **livide**.

À des colonnes étaient appendus des vêtements, des cache-nez, des chapeaux.

Des tables de marbre étaient disposées de toutes parts.

Plusieurs individus, les jambes allongées, la tête levée, les yeux fixes, l'air positif, paraissaient méditer.

Et les *visages* étaient *couleur du temps*, les regards sans pensée.

Il y avait des portefeuilles ouverts, des papiers dépliés auprès de chacun d'eux.

Je considérai ces hommes.

Certes, pour échapper aux obsessions de l'insupportable conscience, **la plupart de ceux qui occupaient la salle avaient**, depuis longtemps, **assassiné leurs "âmes", espérant, ainsi, un peu plus de bien-être.**

Comme j'écoutais le bruit des robinets de cuivre scellés à la muraille et destinés à l'arrosage quotidien de ces restes mortels, le souvenir du **roulement** de la voiture me revint à l'esprit.

The minor modifications show that the narrator has arrived at a different location. Yet the verbal proximity of the two locations makes the reader question whether the narrator has in fact undertaken any journey at all. In fact, the narrator himself thinks out loud: "À coup sûr, me dis-je, il faut que ce cocher ait été frappé à la longue, d'une sorte d'hébétude, pour m'avoir ramené, après tant de circonvolutions, simplement à notre point de départ?" (V.*OC*, I, 630). If the coachman has simply brought him back to his point of departure, the implication is that his verbal instruction has

failed, and that the true “destination” of the narrator’s journey is none other than a return which alters his perspective on what language is able to do. The relationship between the (failed) journey undertaken thematically within the text, and the journey undertaken *by* the text itself is part of a process of verbal communication (the instruction to the coachman / the words on the page addressed to the reader) which is always at risk of failure.

This is what Anne Le Fleuvre suggests in her analysis of Villiers’s work (emphasis my own):

À vrai dire, Villiers n’a pas une vision des plus optimistes de la communication: pour lui, le message se déforme toujours **en cours de route**, et la signification initiale donnée par le locuteur disparaît au profit d’un sens nouveau, **détourné**.⁵

The diversion undertaken by language—like the “tant de circonvolutions” undertaken by the coachman following the instruction from the narrator—signals a potentially ominous outcome. The process of speaking becomes allied to the process of seeing things in a new light, by returning to re-consider and re-evaluate the original starting point—be this a particular location described within the text or the words on the page themselves. What Villiers recognises is that this process is problematic, negative and threatening. This is why Villiers concludes the poem with two morals. The first (stated in capitals) claims that: LE SECOND COUP D’ŒIL EST PLUS SINISTRE QUE LE PREMIER. Villiers here acknowledges that his ability to see has been heightened by the fact he has undertaken a journey—allegedly through the Parisian cityscape, but more pertinently through language itself. By returning to look at what he had first seen, he becomes troubled by how his new perspective revises the initial perspective on his point of departure. The second moral (stated in italics) serves as the final words of the prose poem, and seems to have a rather more oblique significance, however. Villiers writes that it is in the protagonist’s best interest to resolve: *à ne jamais faire d’affaires*. This refusal to ever again conduct business is fuelled by a desire to stop and stay put, in order to have time to contemplate the threatening nature of textual returns and what they reveal about perceptions of language.

It is significant that on an initial reading, it seems that “À s’y méprendre” is a poem which has more to do with movement than stasis. A summary textual analysis of motifs of movement and motifs of stasis

⁵ Anne Le Fleuvre, *Une Poétique de la récitation : Villiers de l’Isle-Adam* (Paris: Champion, 1999), 28.