

**Relational Geographies:
Toward an Interconnected Vision of Place in French Literature and Geography, 1850-
1900**

By

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ABSTRACT: *Relational Geographies: Toward an Interconnected Vision of Place in French Literature and Geography, 1850-1900*

This dissertation explores how writers, artists, and geographers from the second half of the 19th century represented landscapes as dynamic places whose interconnectedness encourages a relational understanding of French geography and identity. The study begins in Fontainebleau Forest, where a “réserve artistique” was proposed in 1853 and finalized in 1861. Led by artists, writers, and other forest enthusiasts, Fontainebleau became a *cause célèbre* in the “rediscovery” of France’s natural spaces. In the following decades, writers, artists, and geographers would reinvest France’s previously shunned or ignored forested, mountainous, and marine landscapes with new meanings, while showing how these apparently distinct geographies were in fact parts of a larger whole.

Tracing this evolution in geographical aesthetics, I focus on the dynamic representation of three landscape types, forests, mountains, and seas, in the works of: Gustave Flaubert (*Madame Bovary* [1857], *L’Éducation sentimentale* [1869]), the Goncourt brothers (*Manette Salomon* [1867]), Théophile Gautier (*Les Vacances du lundi* [1869]), Alphonse Daudet (*Tartarin sur les Alpes* [1885]), Jules Michelet (*La Mer* [1861]), Victor Hugo (*Les Travailleurs de la mer* [1866]), Jules Verne (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* [1870]), Honoré de Balzac (*Le Médecin de campagne* [1833]), Guy de Maupassant (“L’Auberge” [1886], “Sur l’eau” [1876], *Le Horla* [1887]), the landscape paintings of Théodore Rousseau, and geographer Élisée Reclus (*Histoire d’un ruisseau* [1869], *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* [1876]). Drawing on theoretical work by Alain Corbin, Michel Collot, contemporaneous geographers, and the conceptual tools of ecocriticism, geocriticism, and literary geography, I show how these thinkers understood France as a relational geography, a place in constant flux, with each diverse landscape interacting to create a network of connected places across time and space. Ultimately, their works reinterpreted human identity as fundamentally related to the geographical places of the earth.

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INTRODUCTION

Il faut absolument sauver la Forêt de Fontainebleau. Dans une telle création de la nature, le bûcheron est un vandale. Un arbre est un édifice : une forêt est une cité ; et entre toutes les forêts, la Forêt de Fontainebleau est un monument.

Les arbres vieillissent, meurent, c'est le cycle de la vie. Cela nous ramène à notre humanité, à notre finitude, comme une fatalité. Mais voir des arbres en pleine fleur de l'âge coupés en rondelles, broyés et réduits en poussière par centaines, c'est comme une amputation des bras et des jambes, comme si l'on m'empêchait de respirer. Le consumérisme effréné de nos sociétés, la marchandisation de la nature et de la forêt nous conduisent tout droit à notre perte.

1. Toward a Relational Vision of Geographical Space

The two texts, the first written by Victor Hugo in 1872¹, and the second by Fontainebleau resident Florence Combe-Amrouche, published in 2017² in the journal *Reporterre*, speak to the sustained concern over the environmental fate of this beloved forest. Woodcutting in a forest so deeply vested with cultural, biological, and aesthetic meaning continues to generate intense passions and crystallizes debate about the proper human use of and relation to the biophysical world.

Published in *Renaissance littéraire*, a French weekly newspaper in 1872, Hugo offered support of a campaign to protect Fontainebleau forest, located about 60 kilometers south of Paris, from another round of woodcutting that many feared would destroy the forest's ancient beauty. 145 years later, forest enthusiast Combe-Amrouche visited Fontainebleau to discover with horror that the French forest service had initiated a new round of tree clearing under the pretext of restoring the "paysages anciens, tels qu'on les avait à l'époque des peintres"³. Long visited by artists, writers, photographers, and nature enthusiasts, Fontainebleau forest is a place "où très tôt s'est noué un dialogue fécond entre art et nature"⁴, a place of struggle

¹ Victor Hugo, Lettre d'adhésion adressée à M. Bureau Rioffrey, secrétaire général du Comité de protection artistique de la forêt de Fontainebleau, in *Renaissance littéraire*, 7 décembre 1872, p. 264.

² Florence Combe-Amrouche, « Massacre au bulldozer en forêt de Fontainebleau », *Reporterre*, 9 février 2017.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Chantal Georgel, « La forêt de Fontainebleau : une nature monumentale, un monument naturel ? », *Perspective* [En ligne], 1 | 2017, p. 129. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/perspective/7226>

between differing notions of landscape, and a place where ultimately a new relationship to geographical space was forged, starting in the mid-19th century.

1853 was a foundational point in the history of environmental protection in France, which began with the proposed creation of a “réserve artistique” of 624 hectares in Fontainebleau⁵, following landscape painter Théodore Rousseau’s petition to Napoléon III in 1852, in which Rousseau argued for the preservation of the forest of Fontainebleau for aesthetic purposes. While portions of the forest had been set aside as a “réserve artistique” in 1853, Hugo wrote during a time when foresters intensified cutting after the lean years of the 1870-71 war with Prussia⁶. Despite the inscription of the forest within UNESCO’s “Man and the Biosphere Program” as a “Réserve de biosphère” since 1998, the risks to the forest appeared equally troubling to Combe-Amrouche in 2017. Indeed, both writers point to a forest under imminent threat of destruction despite the respective protection regimes in place, casting the “bûcheron”, or the “Office national des forêts”, in the role of villain concerned only with base mercantile interests. Beyond the immediate desire to save the forest from this “destruction massive”⁷, both authors qualify Fontainebleau in monumental terms, part of a “patrimoine forestier”⁸ with implications for how we define and preserve cultural memory in natural space and for the even larger philosophical question of the place of the human within the biosphere. The striking echoes between texts written almost 150 years apart is evidence of a long history of French concern for the state of the natural world. Indeed, many of the issues that the *Reporterre* piece raises have their origin in 19th-century debates.

The protection of Fontainebleau forest was one instance in a much wider movement to redefine the relationship to geographical space throughout the French territory, especially

⁵ Olivier Nougarede, “Les racines des conflits sur le statut du massif forestier bellifontain”, au Colloque “Un parc national à Fontainebleau : quelle faisabilité ?”, 7 avril 2010, p. 13-14.

⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

⁷ Florence Combe-Amrouche, « Massacre », *op. cit.*, 2017.

⁸ Ibid.

with regard to three emblematic landscape types, or topologies: the forest, the mountain, and the sea. In the second half of the 19th century, writers, artists, and geographers rediscovered and reinvested these three spaces with new cultural meanings during one of the most important and formative periods for French thought on the environment. It is a period characterized by the development of the geographical sciences, a revolution in pictorial and literary landscape aesthetics, the rediscovery of France's regional diversity, industrialization and urbanization, and the beginnings of environmental movements that sought to protect various landscapes or species. Spatial and geographical concerns were at the center of intellectual and aesthetic inquiry.

Of course, French interest in the natural world did not begin in 1853. In the 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau developed his “sentiment de la nature” in many works, notably in the “Cinquième promenade” of his *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) during which the author resides on the île Saint-Pierre situated in the Lac de Bienne, a place that affords him great peace of mind: “Le flux et le reflux de cette eau [...] suppléaient aux mouvements internes que la rêverie éteignait en moi et suffisaient pour me faire sentir avec plaisir mon existence, sans prendre la peine de penser”⁹. Here, J. J. Rousseau sought to separate himself from “toute espèce de communication avec la terre ferme de sorte qu’ignorant tout ce qui se faisait dans le monde j’en eusse oublié l’existence”¹⁰. The ultimate goal of J. J. Rousseau’s stay consisted in finding “un état où l’âme trouve une assiette assez solide pour s’y reposer tout entière et rassembler là tout son être”¹¹, a state of retreat within the self. J. J. Rousseau’s contemplative experience on the Lac de Bienne shares many characteristics with one of the most iconic Romantic poems in the French canon, Alphonse de

⁹ Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1997 [1782], p. 114. Even earlier in French literary history, many baroque writers, like Théophile de Viau, had a well-developed nature sensibility. See Bruno Sibona, “Les Tritons de Théophile : sensibilité baroque de la Nature et sentiment écologique chez Théophile de Viau”, *L’Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2006, p. 17-32.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Lamartine's "Le Lac" (1820)¹². Unlike J. J. Rousseau's idealization of an eternal present, Lamartine lyricized the impossibility of halting time's passage and the difference between a nature subject to such slow, cyclical change as to appear nearly immutable and an ephemeral humanity. Nature's function, then, is to remind us of our "moments d'ivresse"¹³, a place we might go to see our fleeting human emotions and memories inscribed: "Ô lacs ! rochers muets ! grottes ! forêt obscure ! / Vous que le temps épargne ou qu'il peut rajeunir, / Gardez de cette nuit, gardez, belle nature, / Au moins le souvenir !". Poetry and nature serve as idealized sites to preserve memory for eternity. Both J. J. Rousseau and Lamartine viewed nature as a space of aesthetic contemplation where the consequences of time have little impact, musing on the eternal and perineal forces that animate the natural world.

These experiences with-and-in nature were less about engaging the biophysical reality of earth's geography, full of distracting "impressions sensuelles et terrestres"¹⁴, than it was about connecting with their own state of mind¹⁵. J. J. Rousseau's nature sensibility and later Romantic movements did offer powerful critiques of industrialization and demonstrated a close attention to landscape, but their lyricism and effort to represent the author's *états d'âme* often refer to nature not as a physical reality, but as a symbolic means of embodying poetic feeling¹⁶. I deliberately situate my study after the height of French Romanticism of the 1830s-1840s to capture the development of new aesthetic stances anchored in physical places. While

¹² Alphonse de Lamartine, "Le Lac", *Méditations poétiques* [1820], in *Œuvres complètes de Lamartine*, Chez l'auteur, 1860, p. 157-159.

¹³ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁴ Rousseau, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁵ « De quoi jouit-on dans une pareille situation ? De rien d'extérieur à soi, de rien sinon de soi-même et de sa propre existence, tant que cet état dure on se suffit à soi-même comme Dieu ». Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁶ Chateaubriand's experience of the French territory, for example, is informed by his desire to read historical permanence in the landscape that could surmount the horrors of the Revolution. See, Fabio Vasarri, "Fragments d'un voyage en France", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 46, N° 3-4, 2018, p. 270-284. Romantics in the 1830s and 1840s developed a melancholic, elegiac response to industrial development, but the nostalgic mode was more a feeling than a link with a concrete place. See, Pierre Laforgue, "Machinisme et industrialisme, ou romantisme, modernité et mélancolie. Quelques jalons (1840-1870)", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, Vol. 103, 2003/1, p. 63-92. The exiled Hugo of the 1860s, much more attentive to the physical, embodied experience of the world, developed his lyricism into a hybrid materialist-spiritualist aesthetics, as I will argue in Chapter Three in the analysis of *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866).

the discourse surrounding Fontainebleau's protection for aesthetic reasons draws upon Romantic themes, the juridical protection of the forest also marks a shift toward a concrete commitment to place.

This dissertation sets out to analyze how writers, artists, and geographers from the second half of the 19th century articulated their concerns for, and developed new relationships with the environment starting from the official legal protection of the Fontainebleau forest in 1853 and ending with 1905, the death of popular geographer Élisée Reclus, an era frequently ignored by scholars of the environment¹⁷. This study traces a move beyond Romanticism's psychological concerns among artists and writers toward an active engagement with France's biophysical geography. To do so, I will explore how in the second half of the 19th century, literary, artistic, and scientific representations imbued specific places with history, meaning, and value, by instituting a relational vision of geographical space, in which the human is linked with biophysical processes and in which each individual landscape contributes to a network of connected places across time and space.

I will use the notion of "relational geography" to explore spatial questions in the works of my corpus. In this regard, I draw inspiration from the writings of Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), who theorized the idea of "relation" in several of his texts, from Élisée Reclus's dynamic idea of geography, and from the particular spatial relations present in the works I analyze. In *Traité du Tout-Monde*, Glissant discusses the poetics of relation: "j'appelle *Poétique de la Relation* ce possible de l'imaginaire qui nous porte à concevoir la globalité [...] en même temps qu'il nous permet d'en relever quelque détail, et en particulier de chanter notre lieu"¹⁸. Glissant's idea of relation is both anchored in local place, while emphasizing the

¹⁷ Most of the work related to "environmentalism", ecology as a political movement, and environmental protection in France focuses on contemporary issues, almost as if environmental problems and thinking emerged *ex nihilo* in the 1960s and 1970s. See Caroline Ford, "Nature, Culture and Conservation in France and Her Colonies 1840-1940", *Past & Present* 183.1, 2004, p. 175 for a summary list of the literature related to the contemporary period.

¹⁸ Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997, p. 120.

role of the imagination in constructing relations with the rest of the world. For Glissant, relation is primarily a concept that permits cross-cultural interaction, a way to conceive of identity without excluding the Other. For Reclus, human identities and biophysical geographies alike exist in constant flux; they are “semblable[s] au ruisseau qui s’enfuit”¹⁹, undergoing perpetual transformation permitted through innumerable exchanges of energy and matter that create surprising proximities between people and places.

Taking inspiration from Reclus and Glissant, I define relation as a “geo-cultural” concept that helps us become more attentive to exchanges of energy and matter between biophysical entities and perceive of hidden connections between seemingly distant landscapes. The concepts of relational geography and relational identity help explain how landscapes and human identities form and evolve in connection with other natural existences. While the works in my corpus take care to represent particular places, they also imagine relations with the wider world, meaning these artistic representations help us envision the small details of our environments even while they allow us to “concevoir la globalité”²⁰.

Drawing on multiple sources, this dissertation is resolutely interdisciplinary. Venturing outside disciplinary constraints allows one to benefit from a multiplicity of perspectives, gain unique insights, and help to answer, or at least attempt to answer, the biggest questions regarding the place of the human in the world. A variety of contemporary and contemporaneous sources, from literary criticism, geography, environmental history, art history, forestry, and science and technology studies, will help sketch a fuller picture of the changing relationship to geographical places in the second half of the 19th century.

2. Methodological Background

¹⁹ Élisée Reclus, *Histoire d'un ruisseau*, Paris, Hetzel, 1869, p. 251.

²⁰ Glissant, *Tout-monde*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

A key tenet of this inquiry is that art, and in particular literature, offers a privileged lens to explore the natural environment and to critically assess the various ecological crises linked to growing human exploitation of the planet, as well as its biophysical and ethical implications. In her call for a French ecocriticism, Stéphanie Posthumus underlines these ethical responsibilities of literature:

Premièrement, la littérature est le lieu d'où l'on peut imaginer de nouveaux modes de vivre, de nouvelles réalités, et donc, de nouveaux rapports au monde, à la planète et à la terre. Deuxièmement, la littérature est la voix de la contestation, de la subversion, de la mise en cause des autres discours sociaux. Enfin, la littérature est l'outil linguistique qui permet de mettre en évidence les limites, les possibilités et les impossibilités des représentations du monde. Elle influence ainsi la manière dont on comprend le monde mais également la manière dont on conçoit l'écart entre le monde et le texte²¹.

The literary text not only represents the world, but it also offers a critical examination of how we depict and experience our environment, challenging assumptions and received ideas, and imagining new possibilities of existence. To further examine how 19th-century writers, artists, and scientists responded to environmental questions, I will draw on three approaches that are all emblematic of what has been coined the “spatial turn” in recent theory: ecocriticism, geocriticism, and “literary geography”.

2.1 The “Spatial Turn”

In recent years, “space” has emerged as an important interpretive tool in various disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. The growing interest in the “relations de la littérature avec l'espace”²² is part of a wider intellectual evolution known as the “Spatial Turn”²³, a shift in attentiveness toward the spatial (geographical) aspects of human, social, and cultural phenomena. In geography, an expanded concentration on human spatial experience has given rise to a discipline interested in the “espace vécu” rather than an

²¹ Stéphanie Posthumus, « Vers une écocritique française : le contrat naturel de Michel Serres », *Mosaic* 44.2, 2011, p. 86.

²² Michel Collot, *Pour une géographie littéraire*, Paris, José Corti, 2014, p. 15.

²³ The first to use the term is Edward Soja in his *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London, Verso, 1989.

exclusive focus on maps and quantitative method²⁴. For geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, “space and place together define the nature of geography”, but he clearly distinguishes between the former, which “requires an abstract and objective frame of thought, quantifiable data, and ideally the language of mathematics”, and place, “a unique entity, a ‘special ensemble’; it has a history and meaning”²⁵. Many geographers have studied literature as cultural documents that express the subjective dimensions of lived or imagined geographical experience²⁶. This interest in geography as “espace vécu” goes back to the 19th century when one of its main proponents, Élisée Reclus, elaborated geography as the union between human experience and physical space²⁷. A similar evolution toward a “spatial turn” appears to be underway in French historiography as well: Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* project studies the notion of collective memory preserved in space; the *longue durée* approach that emerged from the École des Annales studied historical questions inscribed in space, an effort that Fernand Braudel carried on in his use of the concept “géohistoire”²⁸ (a conception Reclus had already started using at the end of the 19th century²⁹); finally, Alain Corbin’s *histoire des*

²⁴ Marc Brosseau, *Des romans-géographes*, L’Harmattan, 1996, p. 32: « Cherchant à faire le contrepoint des analyses ‘spatiales’ de la géographie quantitative, [les] travaux [de la géographie humaniste] se sont acharnés à mettre en valeur ce qui fait l’originalité des lieux, la charge subjective dont ils sont investis par l’expérience. À une géographie de l’espace (*space*), on oppose une géographie science des lieux pour l’homme ». See also, Collot, *Géographie littéraire*, *op. cit.*, p. 20-24.

²⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, “Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective”, in S. Gale and G. Olsson (eds.), *Philosophy in Geography*, Springer, 1979, p. 387.

²⁶ See Marc Brosseau, *Des romans-géographes*, *op. cit.*; Michel Chevalier (dir.), *La Littérature dans tous ses espaces*, CNRS éditions, 1993; or the work of Lionel Dupuy, who focuses on imaginary geography, metaphor, the geographical novel, and the *merveilleux géographique*, especially in the writings of Jules Verne. Cf., Dupuy & Jean-Yves Puyo (coord.), *De l’imaginaire géographique aux géographies de l’imaginaire. Écritures de l’espace*, Pau, Presses Universitaires de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour, 2015; Dupuy & Puyo (coord.), *L’imaginaire géographique. Entre géographie, langue, et littérature*, Pau, Presses Universitaires de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour, 2014.

²⁷ See this argument related to Élisée Reclus in Yves Lacoste, “Élisée Reclus, une très large conception de la géographicit  et une bienveillante géopolitique”, *H rodote*, n  117, 2005/2, p. 29-52.

²⁸ For Braudel, geohistory “n’a pas pour simple but de localiser les faits pass s, mais  tudie le r le de l’espace (centre/p riph rie, marges, distances...) dans les processus historiques, et en retour la mani re dont les processus historiques s’inscrivent dans une dimension spatiale particuli re”. Cf., Braudel, « G ohistoire : la soci t , l’espace, le temps », in *Les Ambitions de l’Histoire*, De Fallois, 1997, p. 114.

²⁹ See the famous sentence Reclus placed as the exergue of his last work *L’Homme et la Terre*: « La g ographie n’est autre chose que l’histoire dans l’espace, de m me que l’histoire est la g ographie dans le temps ». Cf., Reclus, *L’Homme et la Terre*, Vol. I, Paris, Librairie universelle, 1905, p. 1.

mentalités/sensibilités field has offered groundbreaking studies related to space, including some focused on the 19th century³⁰.

Recently, the fields of anthropology and sociology have made their own contributions to the spatial turn and to the dismantling of the nature-culture binary. The work of Philippe Descola, professor of anthropology at the Collège de France, and of Bruno Latour, professor of “sociologie des sciences” at Sciences-Po in Paris, stand out for their critical approaches. In *Par-delà nature et culture*³¹, Descola theorizes a series of ontologies describing how human beings socialize the biophysical world, ranging from *animisme* and *totémisme* to *analogisme* and the *naturalisme* prevalent in Western modernity. Descola’s work shows nature/culture dualism as a product of Western history, and he calls instead for new “modes de conciliation”³² linking humans and non-humans in “une universalité nouvelle...ouverte à toutes les composantes du monde”. Meanwhile, in *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes*³³, Latour draws from sociology and the history of science to posit the notion that Western modernity has never truly achieved that which it claimed, the pure and total separation between the realm of nature and the sociopolitical realm of human culture. Instead, modernity continually produces the hybrid objects and beings whose very existence challenges the ideal of purity. While these valuable perspectives are part of a paradigm shift in Western thinking toward a biophysical world increasingly seen as capable of agency³⁴, this study tracks traces of these nascent ideas in the literature, art, and geography from the second half of the 19th century.

³⁰ See, for instance, Alain Corbin, *Le Territoire du vide. L’Occident et le désir du rivage, 1750-1840*, Flammarion, 1988; *Les Cloches de la terre. Paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIX^e siècle*, Flammarion, 1994; *L’Avènement des loisirs (1850-1960)*, Flammarion, 1995.

³¹ Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 552.

³³ Bruno Latour, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes*, Paris, La Découverte, 1991.

³⁴ See Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel*, Paris, François Bourin, 1990 for one of the most important texts in this shift toward granting agency to existences in nature. While 19th-century thinkers did not yet go as far as Serres or Latour, many of the works in my corpus also see the biophysical world as composed of active, dynamic entities and forces.

2.2 Ecocriticism and Géocritique

In the United States, concern for the environment combined with an academic interest in literary studies led to the creation of the approach known as “Ecocriticism”, a field of research in literary and cultural studies that explores the diverse relations between human beings and the environment of which they are part. Recent ecocritical theory highlights the inseparability of human beings and the environment in “a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection”³⁵. Ecocritical theory and practice developed rapidly in the 1990s, principally in the Anglophone world. The focused attention on the Anglo-American traditions has not gone unnoticed by French scholars and critics: Stéphanie Posthumus, a leading advocate for a *French* eco-criticism, points to the intellectual deficit of a field suffering from monolingualism³⁶. Even so, the approach has stirred recent interest in France, as can be inferred by the special issue of the review *Écologie & Politique* (2008) entitled, “Littérature et écologie : vers une écopoétique”, in which the authors “s’interrogent sur les liens entre conscience environnementale et esthétique littéraire”³⁷.

Given today’s environmental challenges, ecocritical studies have primarily focused on contemporary authors³⁸. Some recent scholarship on 19th-century French authors exists³⁹, but

³⁵ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 8. Ecocritic Greg Garrard has posited that ecocriticism’s reassessment of the human place in the biosphere constitutes “a reconsideration of the idea of ‘the human’”. Cf., Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 16.

³⁶ Posthumus, « Vers une écocritique française », *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁷ Nathalie Blanc, Thomas Pughe, Denis Chartier (dirs.), « Littérature et écologie : vers une écopoétique », *Écologie & Politique*, Vol. 36 (2), p. 15.

³⁸ See the special issue of the journal *Loxias*, “(Re)lectures écocritiques : l’histoire littéraire européenne à l’épreuve de la question environnementale”, N°52, 2016. The issue contains only one article dealing with a 19th century writer, the German naturalist and geographer Alexander von Humboldt. The three articles about French authors are analyses of the work of Marcel Pagnol, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Albert Camus, and Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio.

³⁹ See Abbey Carrico, “Pour une lecture écocritique de Maupassant”, *Cahiers naturalistes*, Vol. 88, 2014, p. 237-249, 426; Carrico, *Pour une écopoétique de l’eau dans les œuvres de Gustave Flaubert et de Guy de Maupassant*, Dissertation, Emory University, 2012; Jessica Tanner, “The Climate of Naturalism: Zola’s Atmospheres”, *Esprit créateur*, Vol. 57 (1), 2017, p. 20-33; Lionel Dupuy, “Jules Verne, l’homme et la terre : Une lecture écocritique des *Voyages extraordinaires*”, *Esprit créateur*, Vol. 57 (1), 2017, p. 9-19; Manon Mathias, “Recycling Excrement in Flaubert and Zola”, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 2018, p. 224-243; Annie Smart, “George Sand’s réalisme vert: Toward an Ecocritical Reading of *Le Meunier d’Angibault*”, in Douglas Boudreau & Marnie Sullivan (eds.), *Ecocritical Approaches to Literature in French*, Lexington Books, 2016, p. 41-63.

these are still in the minority compared to the concentration on contemporary and Anglo-American writers. Still, the attentiveness of ecocriticism to the embodied experience of human beings in the environment and its sensitivity to political struggle over competing conceptions of the natural world are particularly relevant to analyze the new relationship to the biophysical world that the artists and authors in my corpus helped initiate. They did this even while advocating for environmental protection of the landscapes they represented in their work. This dissertation project contributes therefore to current ecocritical scholarship, in that it helps to fill a gap between contemporary environmental studies and studies of 19th-century French literature and art.

To advance the analysis of the specific relationships between humans and the particular topologies with which they interact, I draw on conceptual tools offered by “Géocritique”, a theoretical approach in literary studies associated with Bertrand Westphal. This analytical approach focuses on the interactions “entre espaces humains et littérature”⁴⁰, emphasizing that literature not only represents space, but it also contributes to the way human beings perceive, imagine, and construct it. Westphal identifies four methods for leading a geocritical study: “géocentrisme” (place as the primary object of study), “multifocalisation” (multiplication of perspectives and understandings of place), “polysensorialité” (the use of all of the senses), and “stratigraphie” (attending to the accumulation of temporal layers of cultural memory)⁴¹. Geocriticism’s comparative approach, which confronts a single geographical space with many viewpoints from a diverse set of writers, artists, and linguistic traditions, offers an effective means of interrogating specific physical spaces in interaction with artistic representation.

⁴⁰ Bertrand Westphal, « Pour une géocritique des textes », 30/09/2005, SFLGC (*Vox Poetica*), URL : <http://www.vox-poetica.org/sflgc/biblio/gcr.htm>. Michel Collot defines “géocritique” as an approach that studies “les représentations de l’espace dans les textes eux-mêmes”. See: Michel Collot, « Pour une géographie littéraire » n°8, *LHT*, Dossier, 16 mai 2011.

⁴¹ Bertrand Westphal, *La géocritique : réel, fiction, espace*, Paris, Minuit, 2007, p. 200.

Ecocriticism and geocriticism are complementary approaches that address the human place within the biophysical world as materially embodied experience, moving us toward a fuller appreciation of our lives as relation and an awareness of ecologically responsible modes of representation⁴². This dissertation takes up the call for an articulated approach between ecocriticism and geocriticism to study literary geography in 19th-century literature, art, and geography. This combined perspective, justified by the source material itself, will help us remain attentive to the actual places that literature and art represent and to the unique sensory, imaginative experience of those landscapes that artists, authors, and geographers from the second half of the 19th century constructed in their works.

2.3 Géographie littéraire

In his work *Pour une géographie littéraire*⁴³, Michel Collot traces the growing interest in studying the representation of places in literature, a trend in critical theory that he labels, “une géographie littéraire”:

Le terme de “géographie littéraire” recouvre en effet des orientations diverses, qu’il importe de distinguer tout en essayant de les articuler : des approches de type **géographique**, qui étudient le contexte spatial dans lequel sont produites les œuvres (une géographie de la littérature) ou qui repèrent les référents géographiques auxquels ils renvoient (la géographie dans la littérature) ; des approches de type **géocritique** qui analysent les représentations et les significations de l’espace dans les textes eux-mêmes ; des approches de type **géopoétique** qui se concentrent sur les rapports entre la création littéraire et l’espace mais aussi sur la façon dont ils sont mis en forme. (11)

Collot associates these three approaches with three dimensions of space in literature: “ses attaches avec des lieux réels ; la construction d’un ‘univers imaginaire’ ou d’un ‘paysage’ ; la spatialité propre au texte”⁴⁴. This “géographie littéraire”, intended to complement the longstanding tradition of “histoire littéraire”, provides analytical tools to the

⁴² Eric Prieto, “Geocriticism Meets Ecocriticism: Bertrand Westphal and Environmental Thinking”, in *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism. Overlapping Territories in Environmental and Spatial Literary Studies*, Christine M. Battista, Robert T. Tally (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

⁴³ Michel Collot, *Pour une géographie littéraire*, op. cit., 2014.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

reconceptualization of topologies represented in mid-to-late 19th-century French literature (forests, mountains, and the seas).

In the field of 19th-century literary criticism, Franco Moretti has made the most remarkable contribution to the study of geography of literature, perhaps most well-known for his mapping of the urban (Parisian) streetscapes of *La Comédie humaine*⁴⁵. For Moretti, “la géographie est un aspect essentiel du développement et de l’invention littéraires ; c’est une force active, concrète, qui imprime sa marque sur les textes, sur les intrigues, sur les systèmes d’attente”⁴⁶. The study of “géographie de la littérature” takes two forms in Moretti’s work, encompassing both “l’étude de l’espace dans la littérature” and the study “de la littérature dans l’espace”⁴⁷. The title of *Atlas* reveals much about Moretti’s project, and he bases his work, whether studying the representation of place in the 19th-century novel or its places of diffusion and reception, on the tool of the map. In particular, Moretti’s studies have provided new tools to analyze the spatial dimensions of the 19th century realist novel, but there are opportunities to expand this work to unexplored areas of characters’ subjective perceptions of space, their lived experience of place, and literary description itself, which “même en régime réaliste, métamorphose les lieux décrits”⁴⁸. In other words, the map cannot tell us everything about the spatial possibilities of literary description⁴⁹. For Collot, the solution is to “retourner au texte, et le lire pour y découvrir son paysage”⁵⁰, a project that is “la tâche d’une approche géocritique”.

3. Chapter Organization

⁴⁵ Franco Moretti, *Atlas du roman européen 1800-1900*, traduction française, Paris, Seuil, 2000.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Collot, *Géographie littéraire*, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Taking up Collot's call to "retourner au texte"⁵¹ in order to study "son paysage", I organize this dissertation around the analysis of three major landscapes that inspired 19th-century thinkers, writers, artists, and geographers: the forest, the mountain, and the sea. I conclude with a chapter examining the development of a relational view of geography, as a science and practice, which sees landscapes functioning in interconnected ways that extend beyond their apparent physical boundaries, offering the possibility of expanded human identities.

This study seeks geographical representations with "deux caractéristiques trop négligées de tout paysage : sa mobilité et son ouverture abyssale"⁵². Rather than see landscape "comme une configuration stable et limitée d'objets rassemblés par le regard ou le pinceau de l'artiste", I follow Collot's formulation of the evolving "paysage": "le paysage change constamment, en fonction du temps qui passe et du temps qu'il fait, au rythme des saisons, selon les variations du point de vue, de l'atmosphère ou de l'éclairage"⁵³. Studying the plurality of landscape representation, each crafted with the particular imagination and style of the artist/writer/observer, we are brought into closer connection with a biophysical world otherwise, and elsewhere, conceived of as distinct from ourselves. Through a process of relational geography, where these lived dimensions and environments intertwine, we are able to observe the world in its perpetual transformation.

I group each chapter of this dissertation according to landscape topology and in the following order:

Chapter One, "The Forest Preserved: Toward a New Vision of Geographical Space", analyzes the evolving aesthetics of forest representation in the pictorial and literary arts, especially related to the forest of Fontainebleau. Opening the chapter with a review of

⁵¹ Collot, *Géographie littéraire*, op. cit., p. 85.

⁵² Michel Collot, "Entre chaos et cosmos", in *Paysage et poésie, du romantisme à nos jours*, Paris, José Corti, 2005, p. 215-216.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 216.

Fontainebleau's history, I then focus on a new generation of artists whose representations of the forest produced a revolution in landscape art and in the relationship to French geography: Théodore Rousseau's paintings interpret the forest as a dynamic being that participates in endless material exchanges between entities in the organic order. In the aftermath of the successful campaign to preserve Fontainebleau's arboreal space, literary descriptions of the forest from the Goncourt brothers' *Manette Salomon* (1867) and Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869), represent the woodland as a liminal space at the crossroads of space and time. The imaginative depictions of Rousseau, the Brothers Goncourt, and Flaubert help make Fontainebleau the ultimate place of relational geography, where one's experience of the world could include the unseen spatial connections of existence.

Chapter Two, "The Mountain Conquered? Alpine Geographies in Literature, Art, and Science", focuses on the unstable relationship between human beings, mountain landscapes, and alpine representations through the lens of conquest. Beginning with an overview of the 19th century's changing relationship to alpine space, I next analyze Théophile Gautier's series of mountain essays, published as *Les Vacances du lundi* in 1869, where the author poses the mountain as the ultimate challenge for literary and artistic expression. Gautier shows that this supreme aesthetic "conquest" can contribute to a new appreciation of the wonder of life on Earth. Alphonse Daudet's *Tartarin sur les Alpes* (1885) offers a satirical, comical take on "conquest" that reveals the theatrical aspects of alpine experience and representation for would-be tourists, using irony as a means of renewing our relationship with the mountain. Finally, Guy de Maupassant's "L'Auberge" (1886) takes us to a mountain landscape made dynamic via the literary *fantastique*, fear, paranoia, and a living geography that actively resists human domination.

Chapter Three, "Visions of Infinity: Life and Death in the Deep Seas", treats literary representations of the oceans from three major texts of the second half of the 19th century:

Jules Michelet's *La Mer* (1861), Victor Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866), and Jules Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1870). The texts express various modes of relation to the unknown realm of the deep seas. For Michelet, the sea becomes the maternal source of all life, a domain of infinite regenerative power. In Hugo's visionary prose, author and character heroically submit their art and their being to a new reality, as unstable as the ocean itself, full of dynamic potential, yet subject to deformation and constant change. For Verne, the ocean is a place of prodigious biological productivity, a mysterious domain that offers tantalizing discoveries for science, even as it traces the limits to human action and reveals a latent monstrosity in the human quest for power.

In Chapter Four, "The Part and the Whole: Toward a Relational Vision of Geography", I examine the development of a relational vision of geography, in scientific and literary representations of landscapes as interconnected ensembles offering both promise and peril for expanded views of human identity. Starting with an overview of the development of geography as a science, including disciplinary debates between centralizing and universalizing models of geographical practice and writing, I then move to close readings of two works by popular geographer Élisée Reclus: *Histoire d'un ruisseau* (1869) and *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* (1876-1894) that revolutionized his discipline while proposing a jubilant interpretation of the liberating possibility of geography as the expression of connection between people and places. I next analyze literary texts that incorporated geographical methods and discursive strategies in their descriptions as a means of subtly supporting or subverting the centralizing model of geographical practice, including Honoré de Balzac's *Le Médecin de campagne* (1833) and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). Finally, two of Maupassant's short stories that interrogate the fraught nature of geographical relation, "Sur l'eau" (1876) and *Le Horla* (1887) will conclude the chapter, demonstrating the potency of relation as a productive concept for studying space in literature.

This project apprehends landscape as an animate, living ensemble, and not as “un ensemble de formes visibles, statiques et closes”⁵⁴. Less interested in evaluating the naturalistic fidelity of landscape representations, I seek the moments when geography moves, when contours between beings and objects blur, when the experience of the world becomes dynamic. I follow Collot’s call for literary geography attentive to the “singularité d’un paysage littéraire”⁵⁵ as the union between “un imaginaire”, “une sensibilité”, and “un style personnel”. I also remain attentive to the environmental histories of the physical and symbolic landscapes I study, to their reality as material spaces where embodied subjects experience the world. This multidisciplinary approach reveals how artists and writers from the second half of the 19th century simultaneously rediscovered the physical landscape and revolutionized its aesthetic portrayal⁵⁶. This dissertation will evolve at the interface of topography and topology⁵⁷, between physical space and imagined place, recognizing that landscapes are “à la fois lieu concret et son simulacre, en même temps cadre et ce que le cadre contient”⁵⁸. In doing so, we gain new insights into the evolving relationship between people and places in 19th-century France, and into the capacity for aesthetics to renew our connection with the living planet.

⁵⁴ Collot, “Entre chaos et cosmos”, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁵⁵ Collot, *Géographie littéraire*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁵⁶ François Walter, “La montagne alpine : un dispositif esthétique et idéologique à l’échelle de l’Europe”, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2005/2, n°52-2, p. 64-87. Walter shows how the notion of “paysage” evolved from a genre within pictorial figuration to include the concrete, physical aspects of “une nature bien réelle” (66), representing an “extraordinaire enrichissement de la pensée” (65). For Walter, it was particularly the alpine landscapes that functioned as “modèle ou matrice paysagère” (68), but I will show that the forest and the sea played equally important roles in revolutionizing 19th-century views of landscape.

⁵⁷ Collot, *Géographie littéraire*, *op. cit.*, p. 121: « il ne s’agit plus de repérer des référents géographiques, mais des structures spatiales, voire des schèmes assez abstraits, qui informent les thèmes mais aussi la composition et l’écriture d’une œuvre. C’est une *topologie* plutôt qu’une *topographie* » (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Chapter One: The Forest Preserved: Toward a New Vision of Geographical Space

Introduction

In an 1839 issue of *L'Artiste*, an illustrated weekly journal dedicated to the literary and fine arts, an anonymous article⁵⁹ entitled “La Forêt de Fontainebleau. Dévastations” claimed that the “Administration des Eaux et Forêts” was systematically destroying the most beautiful, old-growth oak trees in the Bas-Bréau region of the Forest of Fontainebleau. The article protested “contre les destructions opérées par l’Administration des Eaux et Forêts parmi les chênes proches de Barbizon”. Comparing the foresters to “marchands de bois” the article went on to suggest that poets and artists were “plus près de la nature que tous les autres” since they alone were innocent of forest destruction. The article, followed by the uprooting of implanted conifer saplings, led Louis-Philippe’s administration to end the planned cutting of many oaks in the region, conserving some of the oldest stands in the forest⁶⁰. The incident was a precursor of much tension to come regarding the fate of Fontainebleau forest. In short order, Fontainebleau would emerge as a powerful, complicated symbol, representing artistic and poetic inspiration, the fear of environmental degradation, the desire to preserve sites of national heritage, the emergence of nature tourism, all wrapped up in the apparent conflict between aesthetic and utilitarian views of nature. The fight for Fontainebleau is thus an important case study and a relevant starting point to interrogate 19th-century issues of environmental degradation and protection as well as the value and role of literature in investigating these questions.

In 1853, the “inspecteur des forêts” Louis Sthème proposed to create a “réserve artistique” of 624 hectares in the forest of Fontainebleau⁶¹. Sthème’s proposal followed painter Théodore Rousseau’s petition to Napoléon III in 1852, in which he argued for the

⁵⁹ « La Forêt de Fontainebleau. Dévastations. », *L'Artiste*, 1839, 2^{ième} Série, Tome 3, p. 290-292.

⁶⁰ Olivier Nougarede, “Les racines des conflits sur le statut du massif forestier bellifontain”, au Colloque “Un parc national à Fontainebleau : quelle faisabilité ?”, 7 avril 2010, p. 12.

⁶¹ Nougarede, p. 13-14.

preservation of the forest of Fontainebleau for aesthetic purposes. Fontainebleau, with its proximity to Paris, had emerged as an important center for landscape painting and a place many writers visited seeking inspiration. Writers, artists, and even scientists feared that the forest's slow destruction would deprive them of one of the best places to study nature⁶². Following the 1853 proposal, Napoléon III issued an 1861 imperial decree protecting 1,097 hectares of Fontainebleau forest as a "réserve artistique"⁶³. As a result, France became the first country to explicitly protect a specific landscape. This action predated the 1864 signing of the Yosemite Grant, often hailed as the first instance of nature preservation, by three years. Aesthetics, then, have been at the center of nature protection in France from its very beginning. Théodore Rousseau's demand "que l'art ait sa place"⁶⁴ had been heeded and France officially recognized aesthetic concerns as a legitimate player in the Fontainebleau question.

As royal foresters were executing management reforms during the 18th century, the idea of setting aside a portion of Fontainebleau forest as an "artistic reserve" must have been the farthest thing from their minds. Between the era of royal control and the ceding of territory for aesthetic purposes during the Second Empire, what accounts for this radical shift in the way the landscape was seen and managed? How was it that Fontainebleau's "réserve artistique" became the first protected territory in the Western world⁶⁵? Fontainebleau would emerge as a *cause célèbre*, an emblem of a new way of defining the self and the nation in relation to geographical space. The creation of Fontainebleau's reserve was both the culmination of a long contestation over a piece of land and the inauguration of a new vision of

⁶² Caroline Ford, "Nature, Culture and Conservation in France and Her Colonies 1840-1940", *Past & Present* 183.1, 2004, p. 180-82.

⁶³ Ford, p. 183.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Nougarede, op. cit., p. 13.

⁶⁵ Ford, op. cit., p. 183.

identity and geography that would open up new perspectives in literature, art, and science throughout the rest of the century.

There were, of course, several motivations that could explain why many artists, writers, and other public figures advocated for Fontainebleau's protection. In addition to the desire of reserving nature for an elite group of artists, the Fontainebleau initiative emerged from an impulse to protect important sites of the national heritage. In his petition, Théodore Rousseau reflected these sentiments when he called the trees of Fontainebleau "souvenirs vénérables des âges passés". At a time when France was rediscovering and restoring its historical monuments, Rousseau struck a patriotic tone in comparing the country's natural landscapes to its built patrimony: "Si on reconnaît que les monuments des hommes...doivent être conservés avec respect, ne serait-il pas aussi raisonnable d'ordonner que les plus sublimes monuments de la nature aient comme eux une tranquille fin?"⁶⁶. The forest's protection also furthered the budding trend of nature tourism, bringing visitors as well as art enthusiasts from whom Rousseau and other landscape painters stood to benefit. From the beginning then, the protection of the forest of Fontainebleau was wrapped up in a myriad of issues, from natural heritage protection and the potentially negative consequences of patriotic ambitions, to the disjunction between protecting nature and selling its experience to visitors and the problem of setting off land for the use of cultural elites. Our study will examine the forest as a liminal space at the intersection of competing desires and intertwining geographies, while delving into the changing aesthetic relationship to Fontainebleau that helped lead to its protection and inaugurate a new way of understanding France's biophysical landscapes as relational geographies during the second half of the century.

Starting with an overview of the historical context of Fontainebleau and its place in French forest management, our study will move on to the fight for the forest's protection

⁶⁶ Ibid.

during the middle decades of the century, inspired in part by the new generation of landscape artists, like Camille Corot and Théodore Rousseau. As these artists began working in the forest, they created a revolution in French painting aesthetics, drawing on themes from Romanticism while also moving toward a more realist stance⁶⁷. Meanwhile, perceived threats to the forest's future led many of those artists and other activists to oppose forest service management and begin advocating for a "réserve artistique" in Fontainebleau.

After the artists successfully petitioned for the creation of the artistic reserve in Fontainebleau, the forest began attracting visitors from Paris and elsewhere, drawn by the revolution in aesthetic tastes underway and by a desire to escape the pressures of modern urban life, an escape facilitated by new rail connections⁶⁸ that suddenly made the forest easily accessible. Fontainebleau would emerge as a "lieu de mémoire"⁶⁹, where people could go to access a part of French history and to experience the biophysical world. Writers such as the Goncourt brothers (*Manette Salomon*) and Flaubert (*L'Éducation sentimentale*) also offered their literary takes on Fontainebleau, cementing its reputation in French landscape memory and representing the forest as a liminal space at the crossroads of space and time. This chapter explores the aesthetic and literary techniques that helped turn the forest into the ultimate place of relational geography, where one's experience of the real and of being could extend beyond the world's surfaces toward the hidden connections of existence. The Fontainebleau case, far from an isolated argument between artists and foresters over aesthetics and utilitarianism, thus emerges as a foundational episode in the history of French views toward geography in the second half of the 19th century. Here was a place where artists, writers, nature enthusiasts,

⁶⁷ See Jules Breton, *Nos peintres du siècle*, Paris, 1899, p. 43-44 : « C'est alors que Fontainebleau, à l'abri de ses chênes et de ses hêtres, vit naître l'admirable colonie de ses paysagistes. Et ceci eut lieu en même temps que le triomphe du romantisme. La naissante école, à peine remarquée d'abord, devait grandir et le remplacer. »

⁶⁸ Fontainebleau's rail connection to the capital was completed by 1850. Cf., Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ See Françoise Cachin, « Le paysage du peintre », in *Lieux de mémoire* (éd. Pierre Nora), t. 2 *La Nation*, Vol. 1, Gallimard, 1992, p. 957-996 and Andrée Corvol, « La forêt », in *Lieux de mémoire* (éd. Pierre Nora), t. 3 *Les France*, Vol. 1, Gallimard, 1993, p. 672-737.

foresters, geographers, scientists, and visitors converged, where physical, geographical space arose as a defining category of cultural, national, and individual identity, and where ultimately a tenuous consensus arose about the interconnectedness of France's landscapes.

1. The Fight for Fontainebleau

1.1 Cultural memory in the forest primeval

Next to places of human settlement, there is perhaps no other landscape so deeply woven within our collective cultural memories than the forest⁷⁰. A place of profound contradictions, the forest is at once seen as the origin of civilization and its antithesis; the raw material from which human culture was forged and the wild substrate to which we could still descend. From the old French *forest* via medieval Latin's *foris*, for "outside" or "door", the word shares a common origin with Latin's *forum*, the exterior space at the center of civic life. The forest, then, sits simultaneously at the heart and the outside margins of human culture. Replacing earlier words like Latin's *silva*, from the Greek *hylê*, "wooded area", the forest became a wooded area outside the walls of the city under the sole jurisdiction of the king or lord (*silva foris*). Perceived as wild (*silvaticus*) and uncultivated, it is the abode of untamed beasts and a place of bewilderment, initiation, and transformation. One who enters there without foresight and cleverness risks losing one's way or experiencing physical and mental metamorphosis. The forest is often a foundational step in personal growth or in civilizational origin stories. A liminal space between the world of the real and that of the *merveilleux*, the forest is omnipresent in tales and narratives ancient and modern. Above all, it is the place that reveals hidden biological connections and lays bare life on Earth's originary kinship.

⁷⁰ In his brilliant essay that attempts to write a comprehensive, though selective, history of forests in the Western imagination, Robert Pogue Harrison argues that forests exist "everywhere in the fossil record of cultural memory" (*Forests: The Shadows of Civilization*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. X). See also, Andr  e Corvol, "La for  t", *op. cit.* and *L'homme aux bois. Histoire des relations de l'homme et de la for  t (XVII^e-XX^e si  cle)*, Paris, Fayard, 1987.

When 19th-century artists and writers began visiting the forest of Fontainebleau, located 60 kilometers southeast of Paris, they waded into this collective memory, in the midst of one of France's most culturally loaded spaces. Among France's largest forests today covering an area of 25,000 hectares⁷¹, Fontainebleau was managed as a royal and state domain throughout the dynastic era, as early as the 10th century, serving as hunting grounds for the royal and aristocratic elite and as managed forest providing raw materials for royal construction projects. The forest also attracted a more modest group of users concerned with their own subsistence, including "tout un petit peuple de pasteurs, de porchers, de glaneurs, de carriers, de bûcherons, de charbonniers et autres boisilleurs, voire d'indigents, de proscrits et même de brigands"⁷². Most of these marginal locals would have been considered "plus ou moins braconniers"⁷³, since they exploited the forest's resources without royal approval, although "droits d'usage" including "affouage" (right to gather wood), "pacage" (pasturing rights), and "panage" (pig foraging rights) were granted to some locals since 1270⁷⁴. Still, most of this group left little noticeable impact, except for the shepherds, wood workers, and especially, the quarry workers, who had actively exploited the massif's sandstone formations for "pierres de construction et des pavés" since the 14th century, and whose extractive work reached a height of 2,900,000 cobblestones removed from the forest in 1829⁷⁵.

Fontainebleau was actively managed for wood production and became "l'archétype du domaine forestier cynégétique"⁷⁶, for France's royal or imperial sovereigns. The forest was thus a living domain, but whose plant and animal life ultimately served the wishes and desires of the monarchy. The management of the forest was tied to the growth of state power of the Kingdom of France, as successive kings imposed their control on the domain. François I, for

⁷¹ Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁷² Ibid, p. 5-6.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

example, implemented a series of reforms intended to protect the forest against abusive destruction. In reality, these reforms were mainly aimed at preventing occasional users, like herders and wood gatherers, from damaging the treasured royal hunting grounds⁷⁷. François I attempted to rationalize his forested domains, by putting them under the dual management of the “Capitainerie des Chasses Royales” and the “Maîtrise des Eaux et Forêts”⁷⁸. These two administrators speak to the double function of the royal forests: to maximize and rationalize wood production in service of the kingdom’s needs and to preserve a forest well-stocked in game to ensure a successful hunt for the royalty.

The post-François I era saw further attempts to rationalize the use of the forest. The first large scale management reform, known as the “réformation d’aménagement de Barillon d’Amoncourt” occurred in 1664, during the reign of Louis XIV. This effort was preceded by a general census of the domain’s composition, which discovered that only 6,740 hectares of the area’s 13,000 were covered in forest, while nearly the remaining half was composed of “vuides” of moorland and marginal lands covered in unvalued species like juniper and birch⁷⁹. To remedy the problems, the plan called for regularizing wood cutting and creating more protected plantations to guard against the ravages caused by game species and grazing animals. Ironically then, managing the forest as a royal hunting ground was leading to increasing populations of game animals, which in turn steadily increased their negative footprint on the forest’s biological health. Indeed, the second major attempt at reform, in 1716, known as the De La Falluère réformation, recognized the problems caused by management as hunting grounds, a census of the domain’s health revealing a growing proportion of empty or heath lands on one hand and an aging, degenerating forest on the other⁸⁰. Since the previous effort had focused its cuts on areas of the forest farthest removed

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

from the royal hunting grounds, these protected zones were suffering from degeneration and constant damage from game animals. The reform called for large-scale regeneration of the oldest portions of the forest, with the plantation of oak and beech planned for an area of 3000 hectares⁸¹. The regeneration policy was pursued with the third reform plan begun in 1754.

When foresters saw the difficulty of regenerating with native oak and beech, they increasingly turned to imported conifer species, particularly the “pin sylvestre” (Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris*), an introduced species that made up 5400 of the 6200 hectares reforested between 1830 and 1847⁸², and which performed much more effectively on the dried out soils. From the second reform plan in 1716 to the end of the Monarchie de Juillet in 1848, the evolution in forest composition was profound enough to consider “l’essentiel du paysage forestier contemporain” as a direct heir of these 130 years of reforms, deforestations, and replantings⁸³. The forest managers quickly found themselves trapped in a quandary of their own creation: they could stop clear-cutting, at the risk of allowing the forest to continue to age and degenerate; or they could pursue the practice, which would lead inevitably to an increasing reliance on implanted pine species at the expense of native oak and beech stands (other alternatives, such as selective harvesting, were not yet seriously considered). The terms of a protracted conflict were in place between foresters’ commercially motivated management practices and painters’ aesthetic hopes for the protection of the forest’s ancient beauty.

Tensions built during the 1830s as plans called for further clear cutting of older stands of oak and beech to be replaced with imported conifer plantations⁸⁴. By the end of the 19th century, what began as a forest dominated almost entirely by oak and some beech had been transformed into a much more mixed landscape, with oak and pine concentrations almost

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p. 2.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

equivalent⁸⁵. While the reform policies helped to rationalize the management of the forest to maximize its wood production, other users and admirers of Fontainebleau felt alienated by what they perceived as a vile destruction of the ancient heritage and beauty of the forest⁸⁶. Protesters felt forest managers operated with little concern for the “marginal” users of the woodland, whether they were plant, animal, or human, or for the long-term impacts of their decisions on the living forest. More than ever, it seemed like the forest’s ancient character was to be sacrificed at the altar of economic expediency. It was at this precise time, at the height of the most radical changes the forest had seen for centuries that landscape painters began pouring into Fontainebleau, discovering at once a landscape of profound beauty and a wood undergoing rapid upheaval. The time was ripe for a new engagement in service of France’s biophysical geography, to promote an alternative vision to the purely economic or royal imperatives that had governed the forest.

1.2 The Revolution of Landscape Painting

As early as the 1820s, painters began visiting the forest of Fontainebleau, seeking a new impulsion that could free artistic expression from the constraints of *art académique*⁸⁷. At the same time, artists, writers, and nature enthusiasts began taking more interest in the forest’s future, increasingly protesting against management policies they considered destructive. In the 1820s, the young painter Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875) came to Fontainebleau seeking new inspiration for his art. Corot’s 1822 study of a dead tree in Fontainebleau, titled simply, *Détail de tronc d’arbre en forêt* (fig. 1), represents the artist’s practice of working *en plein air*, combining a deep observation of the natural, visible world with a final studio composition allowing the artist to infuse his work with memory and personal, subjective feeling. Importantly, Corot’s landscape eschews any historical, allegorical, or religious

⁸⁵ See Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 181. She relates a forest composition of “44 per cent oak, 10 per cent beech and 41 per cent pine”.

⁸⁶ Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 2. See also article in *L’Artiste*, « La forêt de Fontainebleau. Dévastations. », *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Nougarede, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

symbolism, a triptych of referential tropes that had long dominated landscape aesthetics. Instead, Corot focuses his attention directly on the fallen tree in the center of his work. Though this painting was, in Corot's own words, his "1^{ère} étude faite à Fontainebleau"⁸⁸, it already demonstrates many aspects that would come to characterize the aesthetics of the group of artists working in the forest, who came there to research and paint subjects "sur le motif". Corot's early interest in Fontainebleau encouraged other enterprising landscape artists to venture to the forest. Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867) came to the area in 1833, staying at the *auberge* in Barbizon, then known as Chailly-en-Bière, on the outskirts of Fontainebleau Forest⁸⁹. At just twenty-one years old, the young painter had already undertaken aesthetic voyages in Auvergne and Normandy, where his striking talent as a landscape artist began to shine⁹⁰. During these travels, Rousseau experimented with working *en plein air*, adopting the same technique as Corot of sketches on paper that were later mounted on canvas. Already demonstrating immense talent, Rousseau's coming to Fontainebleau was a career and life-altering event; before long, the painter had become an undeclared *chef de file* of the insurgent, rapidly budding landscape art movement⁹¹.

To measure the revolution represented by Rousseau and the generation of landscape painters who worked in Fontainebleau, one only needs to consider the relative absence of

⁸⁸ Hand-written inscription on the back of the canvas that is today on display at the Musée des Peintres de Barbizon. See, <http://www.musee-peintres-barbizon.fr/jean-baptiste-camille-corot-detail-de-tronc-d-arbre-en-foret>.

⁸⁹ Greg M. Thomas, *Art and Ecology in Nineteenth-Century France: The Landscapes of Théodore Rousseau*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 218.

⁹⁰ See, for instance, the painting *Paysage d'Auvergne*, 1830, whose warm colors and impressionistic forms seem several artistic movements ahead of their time. The work almost heralds Cézanne's many studies of Sainte-Victoire, 55 years before the Aixois master first painted the Provençal mountain. Rousseau painted several *Paysages* during his travels in Auvergne, demonstrating an early desire to capture the changing effects of light, atmosphere, and season. Several of these landscapes are included in the catalogue from the exposition, "Théodore Rousseau : Le renouveau de la peinture de paysage", Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Meudon, 2013.

⁹¹ The naming of the landscape movement as the "École de Barbizon" only occurred after Rousseau's death (1867), when the Scottish art critic David Croal Thomson published *The Barbizon School of Painters* in 1890. Though some critics dispute the name, arguing that the group of painters never organized into a coherent school displaying a unified style, the appellation has stuck, coming to define the more or less associated group of artists working in and around Fontainebleau from 1825 to 1875. See, Chantal Georgel (dir.), *La Forêt de Fontainebleau, un atelier grandeur nature*, catalogue de l'exposition du Musée d'Orsay (6 mars au 13 mai 2007), éd. RMN, 2007.

landscape art in France before the 1830s⁹². The classic French landscape painters, like Nicolas Poussin or Claude Lorrain (known simply as “le Lorrain” in French), preferred to paint “l’Italie ou un paysage idéal inspiré de la nature romaine”⁹³, ignoring French landscapes in favor of idealized representations that served only to showcase their true mythological or historical subjects. Their works demonstrated “une nature contrôlée, civilisée, véritablement régentée”, emblematic of a classical French view of a rationalized natural order, of which Le Nôtre’s park and gardens of Versailles represent “le triomphe”. The vision of Poussin and le Lorrain would “imposer leur modèle”⁹⁴ during the 17th and 18th centuries, being adopted and institutionalized at the Académie des beaux-arts and taught at the École des beaux-arts. Indeed, the model became so entrenched in the art world as to persist throughout the entire 19th century, even as challengers in the form of Romanticism, Realism, and Impressionism emerged. Though in today’s popular imaginary of the French landscape images from the École de Barbizon or from the impressionists and post-impressionists prevail, it is important to remember the outsider status of these insurgent art movements, which had to resist an entrenched aesthetic vision that trained the gaze and technique of generations of artists. The development of landscape painting free of classical idealization parallels the construction of a national identity, history, and memory tied not to the monarchy, religion, or mythology, but to people living in particular places⁹⁵. In this new context, the landscape emerged as the place

⁹² Françoise Cachin, « Le paysage du peintre », *op. cit.*, p. 960.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 961.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 965.

⁹⁵ One anonymous reviewer of the 1833 Salon writing in *L’Ariste* attributed this newfound interest for the arts in the natural world was the breakdown of old belief systems that had long provided the basis for French identity: “Faute d’une croyance générale, qui les portent et les soutiennent, les artistes ne demandent plus rien au monde moral. C’est la nature extérieure qui les sollicite davantage ; ce sont ses jeux, ses effets, ses accidens [*sic*] de lumière et d’ombre, les différentes formes de sa multiple création, terres et mers, hommes et animaux, plantes et monumens [*sic*] qu’ils s’attachent à reproduire”. Anonymous, « Salon de 1833 », *L’Artiste*, 1st series, 5, no. 6, 1833, 70.

“où se ressourcent la permanence nationale”⁹⁶. Landscape art helped elaborate a new national identity; or, as Cachin puts it succinctly, “Barbizon avait remplacé Versailles”⁹⁷.

Before this revolutionary vision of the self and of space would gain acceptance, however, landscape art had to endure periods varying from disdainful contempt, wholesale rejection, or begrudging acceptance. Through academic institutions, official competitions like the Prix de Rome, and the career-making exhibition of the Salon, the tenors of academic art had the power to consecrate or destroy the hopes of ambitious artists. Still, the Barbizon School did not spontaneously erupt onto the art scene in a way that fundamentally upset the prevailing conventions⁹⁸. Rather, these artists received their training from academic artists, making them “rattachés, dans le rejet comme dans l’héritage, à une tradition”. Théodore Rousseau, for instance, was first mentored by Pierre-Alexandre Pau de Saint-Martin, a landscape painter, before beginning formal study under Jean-Charles-Joseph Rémond, an academic landscapist who had won the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1821⁹⁹. Finally, Rousseau studied under Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, who had earned the second Prix de Rome in 1784 with the subject of *La Cananéenne aux pieds de Jésus-Christ*¹⁰⁰, and who was named professor at the École des beaux-arts in 1819, thus cementing his status in the academic art world. Rousseau, then, did not emerge *ex nihilo* ready to disrupt the traditional order; instead he learned from the masters of the very system he would later challenge.

Théodore Rousseau’s destiny, despite his early displays of aesthetic genius, would prove to be full of challenges. A frequent traveler in search of new inspiration, Rousseau visited Auvergne, Normandy, the Berry, the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Jura, though his most preferred muse remained Fontainebleau Forest, which he explored regularly from 1833 until

⁹⁶ Cachin, *op. cit.*, p. 962.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Thomas, *Art and Ecology, op. cit.*, p. 28, 62, 80, 115-16.

¹⁰⁰ The painting is conserved at the Musée des Beaux-Arts d’Angers. See Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

he settled permanently in Barbizon in 1847. In the intervening years, Rousseau had experienced a mixed reception from the academic art world, successfully submitting his first work to the Salon of 1831 (*Paysage d'Auvergne*) before earning a third class medal there in 1834 at the age of twenty-two¹⁰¹ (Rousseau also had one landscape, “le plus beau”, according to Théophile Gautier, refused the same year¹⁰²). Beginning in 1836, however, the painter’s work was refused for six consecutive years by the exposition of reference¹⁰³. Despite his status as a highly skilled landscape artist, Rousseau had become a “grand refusé”; the painter responded by refusing to submit works of any kind from 1842 to 1848. During these years of rejection and voluntary absence, many critics regretted the loss of Rousseau’s aesthetic innovations. Writing a critique of the 1839 Salon in *La Presse*, Gautier questioned the logic of the Jury, which “repouss[ait] systématiquement” the painter’s landscapes. Gautier spoke of Rousseau’s exclusion as “inconcevable”, given the artist’s “mérite incontestable” and his “talent original”, already seeing in the repeated rejections the beginnings of a personal and aesthetic feud¹⁰⁴. Rousseau’s absence, whether forced or voluntary, would last thirteen years.

By 1845, the tenth consecutive year of Rousseau’s absence from the Salon¹⁰⁵, Baudelaire placed Corot “à la tête de l’école moderne du paysage”, though he quickly

¹⁰¹ In his book-length review of the 1834 Salon, the art critic Alexandre Decamps attributed the jury’s awarding of a medal to Rousseau as a means of covering up their own shameful refusal to admit his other landscape submission: « M. Rousseau, dont le tableau exposé l’année dernière était incontestablement le meilleur paysage du Salon, et qui a vu cette année, en récompense de son succès, refuser son grand paysage. Il est vrai que pour obscurcir encore cet imbroglio d’ignorance et d’absurdités, voici qu’on a donné une médaille à M. Rousseau probablement pour le tableau qu’on lui a refusé ». Alexandre Decamps, *Le Musée, Revue du Salon de 1834*, Paris, 1834, 92-3.

¹⁰² Gautier, writing his remarks on the Salon de 1834 in *France industrielle*, April 1834, associated this rejection, a “chose indigne”, with Rousseau’s introduction of “le mouvement en peinture...pour le paysage”, an innovation that broke with the orderly standards of neoclassical taste and that also caused the Jury to refuse a painting by Delacroix, who represented “le mouvement...pour l’histoire”. Implicitly, then, Gautier already recognizes Rousseau as the leading innovator in French landscape painting.

¹⁰³ Rousseau’s *La descente des vaches des hauts plateaux du Jura* was rejected for the 1836 Salon along with *Vue du château de Broglie*, despite having been commissioned by François Guizot, then minister of education. See Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁰⁴ Théophile Gautier, « Salon de 1839 », *La Presse*, 21 mars 1839. The jury rejected Rousseau’s *Lisière de forêt*. Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁰⁵ Rousseau, despite his reputation as persecuted grand refusé, or reclusive bohemian, was quite adept at transforming the attention gained from his refusals into profitable private exhibitions or into higher prices for his work on the exploding art market, especially for landscape paintings, throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Writing in the republican-leaning journal *Le National* in 1847, critic Prosper Haussard noted Rousseau’s growing worth on

qualified his praise by adding, “si M. Théodore Rousseau voulait exposer, la suprématie serait douteuse”¹⁰⁶. Baudelaire praised his “plus grand charme” and “plus grande sûreté d’exécution”, compared to Corot. Rousseau’s talents would finally return to the public square in the 1849 Salon, at which he exposed three landscapes and where he earned one of three first-class medals¹⁰⁷. That same year, Rousseau started an oil on canvas painting focused on the old-growth oak trees of the Bas-Bréau grove he would later work to protect. The result, *Lisière du Bas-Bréau. Haute futaie donnant sur la plaine de Clairbois*¹⁰⁸ (fig. 2), is a striking landscape that remains relatively unstudied among art historians¹⁰⁹. This painting belongs to a category known as *dessin-peint* in which the artist notes the composition on site in chalk and thin layers of paint, and then returns to the studio to enhance particular elements and unite the composition¹¹⁰. This was a frequent technique for Rousseau, who often pursued a hybrid strategy between preliminary work in *plein air* followed by finishing in studio. Art historian Anthea Callen singles out Rousseau’s innovative style, which here combines “the freedom of a plein-air étude [with] the scale of a finished tableau”¹¹¹.

Greg Thomas has argued that Rousseau’s paintings go beyond the naturalism of his era, or the attempt to artistically figure physical phenomena and sensation, in that he

the market: “M. Théodore Rousseau, dont les toiles atteignent à moitié déjà le prix des Ruysdael, se tient pour interdit et ne se présente plus au Louvre depuis dix ans”. Prosper Haussard, « Salon de 1847. Ouverture », *Le National*, 16 March 1847, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Baudelaire, Charles, *Salon de 1845*, V, « Paysages ».

¹⁰⁷ That year, Rousseau exhibited *Une avenue, forêt de l’Isle-Adam*, *Terrains d’automne*, and *Lisière de forêt, soleil couchant*, see Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, op. cit., p. 88-89. Haussard would qualify Rousseau’s return to the Salon as « le fait capital, l’événement du Salon de 1849 à signaler ». Having been a victim of « la plus sauvage persécution qu’ait jamais exercée un jury académique », Rousseau’s adversaries had nonetheless been incapable of « [l’]étouffer ou [le] tuer » and the painter enjoyed such a reputation that collectors « se disput[aient] [son œuvre] ». Prosper Haussard, « Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1849 », *Le National*, 26 June 1849, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Théodore Rousseau, *Lisière du Bas-Bréau. Haute futaie donnant sur la plaine de Clairbois*, 1849-1855, Oil on canvas, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

¹⁰⁹ Mary G. Morton, “New Discoveries: Théodore Rousseau’s Forest of Fontainebleau”, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 2008.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. See also Nicholas Green, *Theodore Rousseau, 1812-1867*, Exhibition catalogue (Sainsbury Center for the Visual Arts and Hazlitt), Gooden & Fox, 1982, p. 15.

¹¹¹ Anthea Callen, *The Work of Art: Plein-air Painting and Artistic Identity in Nineteenth-century France*, London, Reaktion Books, 2015, p. 51.

eliminates most textual, social, or political signifiers, replacing them with “nonsemantic visual elements”¹¹², comprising a “new visual attitude” that concentrates on the biophysical processes present in the landscape itself. For Thomas, that focus combined with a specific visual experience to create landscape painting that is “itself capable of generating ecological appreciation of the landscape”¹¹³. Lacking narrative cues to guide our interpretation, and infusing his works with elements that resist understanding, Rousseau’s landscapes force the viewer to examine the biophysical world itself, confronting us with the “excessive sensory stimuli of real-world landscape experience”¹¹⁴. Rousseau’s landscapes take us on a journey from the surface of the physical world, toward an understanding of the organic order as infinite, constant exchange.

Working intermittently on the painting from 1849-1855, Rousseau’s *Lisière du Bas-Bréau* directs our attention on an immense, living oak-tree, set just to the left of center, a towering mass of biophysical material whose trunk, branches, and foliage impart a sense of dynamism to the work. The diffuse glow of the afternoon sun radiates through the tree branches, strikes a small pond in the right foreground, before reflecting its light on the surface of the central oak and filtering through the trees’ foliage to create a nuanced range of earthy colors of green and brown. Small cattle figures drinking water at the pond’s edge are barely visible, and the viewer can spot a tiny human being in the distance, perhaps a cowherd, obscured against the backlit sky. These figures offer no narrative, as Rousseau focuses on the towering trees. Behind the central oak, the viewer can make out nearly infinite forest details, from intricately rendered oak leaves and dabs of green and brown background foliage, to the dark understory and an apparently impenetrable wall of vegetation. The central oak’s branches extend and meander in all directions, creating the sense that its organic energy

¹¹² Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

cannot be contained by the surface of its bark nor by the frame of the painting. Instead, the tree's existence extends throughout networks of relations, between leaves, branches, roots, rocks, grass, earth, water, and sun. Rousseau resists rendering all of these elements with excessive clarity, leaving some elements of the forest deliberately shrouded in darkness, and suggesting the forest's dynamic vitality with vigorous brushstrokes that ripple in multiple directions¹¹⁵. This vibrant brushwork also helps blur the contours between individual objects in the forest scene, reminding us that the tree's essence is not reducible to its visible borders. Meanwhile, two dead tree trunks flank the central living oak, helping to frame the reader's attention and give deeper meaning to the endless dynamics of organic life and death in the forest. Similarly, a large hole in the central oak's trunk points to the tree's important role in the forest's web of life, as living being and habitat for a multitude of organisms, even as it offers a means for the viewer to immerse herself within the landscape. The hole also provides a check against the oak's otherwise limitless vitality, again recalling the interplay of life and death that together ensure the forest's continued dynamism¹¹⁶.

Rousseau included the work in an 1867 private exhibition of the Cercle des Arts, which classified it as an "ébauche", or preparatory draft toward a finished tableau. He increasingly blurred the distinction between preparatory draft and finished painting, even showing a tendency (or obsession) with leaving his works unfinished, attempting to capture new sensations to imitate the constant change in the biophysical world through the passing seasons and years. This innovation would reach its culmination with the painting *Forêt*

¹¹⁵ As early as 1834, critics praised Rousseau's ability to capture the inherent, yet hidden dynamism in nature: "M. Rousseau a étudié avec un bonheur singulier la végétation de notre climat. La plupart des peintres de paysages ont semblé oublier que, si les végétaux sont dénudés de locomotion, ils ne sont pas pour cela condamnés à un repos et à une immobilité absolue. Dans les arbres comme dans les plantes les plus humbles, un léger frémissement court toujours par toutes les parties, et leur donne à chacune un mouvement distinct. C'est surtout ce sentiment qui anime le feuillage que M. Rousseau a reproduit à un profond degré de vérité. Il a saisi la physionomie de la végétation, mais sans tomber dans ce mécanisme de procédés que beaucoup de paysagistes se sont créés et à l'aide duquel ils parviennent à copier l'arbre qu'ils ont choisi, comme machinalement, et sans trouver dans leur travail plus d'intérêt qu'ils ne font éprouver au spectateur", Anonymous, « Paysages », *L'Artiste*, 7, no. 10, 1834, 112.

¹¹⁶ I thank François Paré for his helpful interpretation regarding the importance of this hole in the oak.

*d'hiver*¹¹⁷ (fig. 3), on which Rousseau worked for the last 21 years of his life without ever “completing” it, in an attempt to turn the canvas into “a being that breathes and grows, and that mimics the flux and instability of actual landscape sites”¹¹⁸. Rousseau’s naturalism became a means of bringing out the living quality of a landscape’s biophysical processes, not fixing its temporary appearance. His process of transferring the living landscape from world to canvas is not additive, but qualitative, as the painter stated in his advice to his student Letrône, “ce qui finit un tableau, ce n’est point la quantité des détails, c’est la justesse de l’ensemble”¹¹⁹. For Rousseau, a true landscape could never be complete, just as the living landscape it represents results from continuous organic processes: “Votre tableau pourra se prolonger indéfiniment. Jamais vous n’en aurez la fin. Jamais vous n’aurez fini”. Thomas speculates that *Forêt d’hiver* made the painter unique among landscapists in that he intentionally ensured that the work was “perpetually unfinished”¹²⁰.

A canvas of monumental dimensions (162.6 x 260 cm), Rousseau thought of *Forêt d’hiver* as his crowning achievement, writing in a letter to his friend Sensier that the work crystallized his desire to achieve “la genèse d’un seul et unique tableau”¹²¹. Around 1846, Rousseau made a small *plein-air* sketch and a larger charcoal drawing of a site in the Bas-Bréau grove of Fontainebleau. Over the years, Rousseau returned almost daily to the site, constantly adjusting colors, tones, and tree details as the painting evolved in tandem with the living landscape itself. In *Forêt d’hiver*, the life of trees, including the cycle of growth, death, and decay, becomes the central subject of the painting. Majestic old oaks, seasonally devoid of leaves, tower over the scene, their limbs twisting and meandering to reach the diffuse glow

¹¹⁷ Théodore Rousseau, *Forêt d’hiver*, 1846-1867, Oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

¹¹⁸ Greg M. Thomas, “The Practice of ‘Naturalism’: The Working Methods of Théodore Rousseau”, *Barbizon: Malerei der Natur, Natur der Malerei*, 1999, p. 145.

¹¹⁹ Quoted by Letrône in a letter quoted by Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

¹²⁰ Thomas, “The Practice of ‘Naturalism’”, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹²¹ Letter to Sensier, quoted in Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, p. 259: “S’il m’était donné de formuler un souhait, je voudrais être millionnaire, rien que pour opérer la genèse d’un seul et unique tableau.”

of a winter sunset, while older trees appear brittle, ready to break and fall, clearing the way for the forest's renewal. Trees evolve in cyclical patterns, mirroring the daily revolution of the earth on its axis, producing constant change, interconnections between stem and sky, and a web of existence that extends beyond the limit of the world's surfaces. The monumental scale of the piece, its tangled web of tree limbs, its range of deep sunset colors, its chaotic undergrowth, the parabolic sweep of the trees which seem to enclose the viewer, and the intense integration between all these elements combine to create a sense of immersion within an uncontained, unlimited biophysical world. The observer finds herself at a pivotal moment in the day's cycle: just before the sun sinks below the horizon to leave the landscape obscured in pure darkness, the warm colors of dusk filter through the thick oak grove, blurring the borders between surfaces and diffusing existences between interconnected beings. Death plays an essential role in this continuing drama of life, including a giant dead oak beyond the pond, a broken stump in the right foreground, and many other trees perhaps caught at the interface of life and death. With day passing to night and the trees remaining leafless for the winter season, life is extinguished by death and decay, forces that pair with creation to ensure the continual renewal of the self-perpetuating organic order. Rousseau poured his soul into this great landscape, both biophysical and pictorial, creating a work that represents the ongoing exchange between the land, artist, and canvas. By leaving the work unfinished, Rousseau realized, perhaps more fully than anyone before or since, the goal of naturalism – to reproduce the “unending dynamism of sentient being”¹²² in the world.

Rousseau's three landscapes at the 1849 Salon were not uniformly saluted. Art critic Henri Blaze de Bury, *dit* F. de Lagenevais, expressed reservations about Rousseau's status as “le réaliste par excellence”¹²³, but he remained “ravi...que l'avènement d'un nouvel ordre de choses dans la république des arts ait mis enfin M. Rousseau en contact avec le public”.

¹²² Thomas, “Working Methods”, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹²³ F. de Lagenevais (Henri Blaze de Bury), « Le Salon de 1849 », *Revue des deux mondes*, 1849, p. 582-583.

Gautier was unequivocal in celebrating the end of Rousseau's "longue persécution", qualifying the artist's return as "l'événement du Salon"¹²⁴. After the "ostracisme injuste", Rousseau's return signified for Gautier that "enfin le jour de la justice est arrivé". The critic praised Rousseau's skill in translating "la réalité même" of the forest, a world where "les arbres confondent leurs branches, les plantes leurs filaments". Like Rousseau's landscape, the forest is "touffu[e], inextricable, fourmillant[e] de détails, obstrué[e] de mille accidents [*sic*] peu intelligibles". Unlike traditional landscapes that are "ébarbée...et tirée au cordeau", Rousseau's aesthetics seek to capture the disorderliness and confusion of wild nature, figuring the ephemeral, fugitive effects of light's motion and reflection through "le réseau mouvant du feuillage" to create a landscape both deeply attached to the real and attentive to the subjective impressions of human vision. For Gautier, Rousseau is the artist who "a plus que personne repoussé la tradition classique du paysage", qualifying his work as "une réaction ou plutôt une insurrection dans le domaine de l'art", a protest against neoclassical artists like "Michalon, Bertin ou Watelet". Rousseau's triumph signaled a personal and aesthetic vindication, while announcing the advent of landscape art as the vanguard of modern French painting.

In the following years, Rousseau continued to expose his works at the Salon, achieving widespread recognition for his talents as a master, not only "un grand peintre" of landscapes, "mais encore un grand poète"¹²⁵. The 1850s were the decade of recognition and consecration for Rousseau, an apotheosis obtained not through a return to "conventionnel" or "scolastique" themes, but through a dogged pursuit of "la nature, son éternel sujet"¹²⁶, and the growing acceptance of the landscape's centrality in modern art. Rousseau's work demonstrated an "incroyable variété", as he moved to study the impressions and effects of different seasonal, temporal, and atmospheric conditions. At the Salon of 1850-1851,

¹²⁴ Théophile Gautier, « Feuilleton de *La Presse* du 11 août 1849, Salon de 1849, 12^{ème} article », *La Presse*, 11 août 1849.

¹²⁵ François Sabatier-Unger, *Salon de 1851*, p. 12-15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Rousseau presented seven paintings, notably including his *Sortie de forêt à Fontainebleau, soleil couchant*¹²⁷, a state commission ordered by Ledru-Rollin, the new minister of the interior and Jeanron, the new director of the Louvre, and *La forêt de Fontainebleau, le matin*¹²⁸, which both depicted a scene at the edge of Fontainebleau forest, respectively at sunset and sunrise. Some critics criticized Rousseau's apparent inability to "franchir ce terme au-delà duquel l'ébauche devient tableau"¹²⁹, but Gautier saw this "fault" in terms of Rousseau's vision of nature; even if the painter's "exécution est tantôt molle, tantôt violente, négligée comme une esquisse ou brutalement surchargée"¹³⁰, these apparent mistakes better represented "la vie végétale", including its "force de végétation", "luxuriance de verdure", and "puissance d'épanouissement incroyables". If line and form were sometimes unclear or imprecise in Rousseau's works, for Gautier, these features served to better capture the complex interconnections between growing things in a dynamic ecosystem. As Gautier said, "il n'a pas voulu être plus clair que la nature"¹³¹. While the human eye may be incapable of capturing these energetic exchanges, leading us to believe in the distinct, immutable character of things, Rousseau's art aims to reveal the hidden connections of a dynamic, relational nature. His paintings seek the hidden "souffle"¹³², the "vie des forêts" which passes "entre chaque feuille" and "chaque brin d'herbe". In this conception of forest geography or more generally of life itself, beings and objects, both animate and inanimate, obtain significance through innumerable relations with their *milieu*, never completely finished, but always in a state of interdependent, dynamic becoming. Each tree leaf has thus both an internal existence partly composed of external elements and an external existence whereby its matter and energy

¹²⁷ *Sortie de forêt à Fontainebleau, soleil couchant*, 1848-1851, Oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre. See Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 88, 204-205, for details on the state commission of this painting.

¹²⁸ *La forêt de Fontainebleau, le matin*, 1851, Oil on canvas, The Wallace Collection, London.

¹²⁹ Albert de La Fizelière, *Salon de 1850-1851*, Exposition nationale, p. 77-78.

¹³⁰ Théophile Gautier, "Salon de 1850-1851", *La Presse*, 24 avril 1851.

¹³¹ Gautier, « Salon de 1849 », *op. cit.*

¹³² Gautier, "Salon de 1850-1851", *op. cit.*

contribute to the life beyond its boundary. Existence neither begins nor ends at the edge of each individual object or being in a landscape; rather, it extends beyond the surface of every natural element that participates in a network of exchanges of matter and energy.

In 1854, Rousseau's run of success continued when Napoléon III selected him as a member of the jury to prepare the painting section of the Exposition universelle de 1855¹³³. From his status as "grand refusé" of the Paris Salon, to a place on the jury that would present the best of modern painting to the world, the evolution toward official consecration was complete. Rousseau also contributed thirteen of his own works to the exposition, obtaining a first class medal and widespread acclaim. Writing his review of the event in *Le Moniteur Universel*, Gautier recalled "le tumulte" which had erupted when Rousseau dared to "peindre des arbres qui n'étaient pas la gaine d'une Hamadryade, mais bien de naïfs chênes de Fontainebleau, d'honnêtes ormes de grande route, de simples bouleaux de Ville-d'Avray, et tout cela sans le moindre temple grec, sans le moindre Ulysse, sans la plus petite Nausicaa"¹³⁴. J. de la Rochenoire enthusiastically declared Rousseau as "le premier paysagiste du monde entier", especially moved by the painter's ability to capture nature's "effets imprévus, impressions fugitives, sensations mystérieuses"¹³⁵. After "vingt ans d'efforts acharnés"¹³⁶, Théodore Rousseau's acclaimed presence at the Exposition universelle of 1855 "a consacré sa tardive réputation". Ultimately recognized by his contemporaries as "le premier apôtre de la vérité dans le paysage"¹³⁷, Rousseau offered a profoundly new way of understanding the natural world and of representing it aesthetically. Thanks to his stubborn persistence, immense talent, and unique vision, Rousseau "ouvrit une brèche énorme par où

¹³³ <http://www.musee-peintres-barbizon.fr/theodore-rousseau-et-la-critique>; Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹³⁴ Philippe Burty, « Théodore Rousseau », *La grande encyclopédie: inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts*, t. 28, Paris, Société anonyme de La grande encyclopédie, p. 1071.

¹³⁵ J. de La Rochenoire, *Le Salon de 1855 – Deuxième partie – Animaux. – Paysage. – Marine.*, p. 64-66.

¹³⁶ Jules Antoine Castagnary, *Salons (1857-1870), Année 1857, La Nature, le paysage.*

¹³⁷ Edmond About, *Nos artistes au Salon de 1857*, Paris, Hachette, 1858, p. 352.

bien d'autres ont passé après lui"¹³⁸. The influence of Rousseau and the forest of Fontainebleau which so often featured in his paintings would extend throughout the art world and beyond, inspiring an entire generation to imagine a different relation with geographical space.

1.3 Fontainebleau, the forest preserved

The idea to reserve part of the forest for artistic use only emerged after several years of increasing protests over forest service's management. In the beginning, artists and other forest defenders did not explicitly call for an artistic reserve; instead, they focused their complaints on what they saw as destructive practices which were slowly degrading the majesty of the forest. These advocates often implied that the generation of painters drawn to Fontainebleau would be the ideal group of people to responsibly protect the ancient beauty of the forest. In an 1839 edition of *L'Artiste*, an anonymous article signed only as "A.S.", fustigated against the devastating impacts of the foresters' "réformes", and the perverse mercantile vision that sees nothing but "le lieu où l'on peut faire une grande fortune, en rendant préalablement ce lieu le plus laid du monde"¹³⁹. The landscape artists and poets who celebrated Fontainebleau, however, are "plus près de la nature que tous les autres", since they envision the forest not in terms of their immediate social or economic interests, but as "une sainte oasis nécessaire au milieu des envahissements impies d'une civilisation destructrice et imprévoyante". Nature helps to replenish the mind and body from an alienating economy and society, but those qualities required active protection.

The forest agents play an active role in the composition and evolution of the landscape, exercising their "métier" perfectly within "leur droit" (290). Although these administrators could have a positive impact on the forest, since they "plantent, nettoient, alignent, entretiennent" the woodland, they ultimately do so "dans un but fort peu poétique";

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ « La Forêt de Fontainebleau. Dévastations. », *L'Artiste*, 1839, 2^{ième} Série, Tome 3, p. 290.

dedicating themselves to the principles of maximum yield and productive efficiency, they become “les corrélatifs des marchands de bois” as their cultivating work turns into little but “une œuvre non interrompue de destruction, dont chaque époque est prévue cent ans à l’avance”. Against this destruction, the author sees the need for “un asile momentané”, protecting the forest from commercial imperatives. In the preserved forest, painters and writers would find “un atelier magnifique où se révèlent des inspirations grandioses, un temple majestueux où les plus belles harmonies de la nature s’unissent dignement pour louer le Créateur”. Not simply a site of Romantic escape, Fontainebleau’s unique qualities made it an important site for artistic, historical, geographical, and cultural knowledge.

Fontainebleau was recognized “de l’aveu de tous les artistes” as “la plus belle de l’Europe” (290). Here was “la seule [forêt] en France où se voient quelques vestiges de la forêt vierge”, a link to the country’s historical, or even ancient past. Part of the place’s unique character arises from an encounter between geological and botanical forces, produced from the forest’s “lit de roches” and the “travail inouï” of the region’s trees, adopting tormented forms to take root upon and “prendre leur nourriture” from the rocky, nutrient poor soils. This meeting between rocks and gnarled tree roots offers “au peintre des modèles qu’on chercherait en vain ailleurs”. For the forest of Fontainebleau is so much more than pure woodland; a complex mosaic of interconnected landscapes of “landes immenses”, “bruyères colorées”, and “désert[s] majestueux” of rock masses, Fontainebleau emerges as “un lieu unique, un type original que la nature n’a probablement pas reproduit une seconde fois”. From an opening statement about nature’s role as asylum, a rather banal idea for its time, the writer moves on to provide rich detail about Fontainebleau’s diverse landscapes. For this new generation of writers and artists, the forest’s material reality was under threat and required swift action to protect. The site’s historical and biophysical uniqueness made it a “monument

que les âges transmettent à l'admiration des âges suivants". To prevent the loss of such a monument, it was time for a new era of art that advocated for environmental protection.

For the anonymous author in *L'Artiste* motivated by aesthetic concerns, even the rational analysis of the merchant "spéculateur" (291) would reach the same conclusion. Indeed, the characteristics that make the forest so aesthetically intriguing, namely the "lutte séculaire" (290) of vegetation growing atop "un sol ingrat et pauvre", render the range's trees "une assez triste marchandise" (291). Even if the forest is "pittoresque", its old wood is poorly suited for economic exploitation. The most ancient stands of trees have worked over time to produce an "amas millénaire d'une pourriture végétale", which assembled creates a thin layer of soil, "un terrain factice" which barely covers the unforgiving bedrock underlying the entire forest. The soil is a product of the trees themselves, an assemblage of plant matter built up over centuries. Removing the ancient trees that shaded, protected, and continually reproduced the thin layer of soil would expose this fragile earth to the destructive impacts of wind, sun, and rain, leading to erosion and elimination of the delicate topsoil. Fontainebleau's particular conditions ensure that any wide scale harvesting of this silvicultural material result in diminishing returns if not a complete destruction of the resource. Writing in an artistic and literary journal, one would expect to find arguments for the forest's protection couched in aesthetic terms; the author, however, convincingly draws upon economic, geological, and botanical discourses to show how protecting the place is not only an artistic imperative, it also makes good long-term economic (and ecological) sense. The forest administration's policy of clear-cutting and replacement caused aesthetic harm while undermining the long-term biological viability of the forest itself.

These practices were in fact widespread as administrators sought to maximize wood production. In the area known as the Mont-Saint-Père, "tous les grands arbres" (291) were being removed, following the simplistic logic that "*cela ne fait plus de bois*". The

administrators failed to realize, however, how these ancient trees contributed to the delicate balance of the forest's soil health. The author relates similar deforesting efforts underway in "les descentes des gorges d'Apremont", an already "aride" site rendered even more so by the removal of their "curieux bouquets de chênes". Art and biology are thus mutually impoverished by the deforestation, as "générations" of "paysagistes" are deprived of the area's "variété des motifs". Still, the management plans continue to spread their impact into new zones of the forest, such as the "rochers de la Salamandre", where the author has recently witnessed a degraded landscape where once stood "une foule de chênes et de hêtres", but which have all been "abattus" (292), leaving "des terrains dénudés" in their wake. The author fears all of Fontainebleau would soon resemble these degraded slopes, or become a forest parody with commercially exploitable trees geometrically aligned in "futaies en quinconce".

The justification for such a radical disfiguring of Fontainebleau remains mysterious to the author, but he suspects that the "agents des forêts" (292), eager to please their superiors motivated by commercial interests, engage in a program of systematic destruction of the old oak and beech stands to ensure their rapid replacement with pine plantations, perceived as "un arbre merveilleux et d'une utilité sans seconde". The quick-growing pine became "la plantation en faveur". Indeed, this "*pinomanie*" had become prevalent "dans les vallées comme sur les hauteurs" and the author does not doubt that the forest administration "arracherait, si [elle] pouvait, toute la forêt pour la remplacer par des semis de pins". Ignoring the forest's history largely dominated by deciduous oak and beech, the pine suddenly was recognized as "la seule essence qui puisse réussir dans les terrains pauvres". Put simply, the old-growth oak and beech stands did not align with the new commercial imperatives that motivated the forest administration. In the pine, the foresters had found a species which "croît assez vite", thereby replacing old trees that no longer produced exploitable wood with a conifer that "promet des produits pour un avenir peu éloigné".

Concluding the diatribe against the devastations brought about by the administration, the author is careful to draw a distinction between “messieurs les forestiers” (292), agents of destruction, and “la couronne”, which had always acted “comme la gardienne et la protectrice de tout ce qui est grand et beau”. Though the foresters served the interest of the king and the nation, their own logic had become more devoted to “tout ce qui est sordidement utile”, leading to a sacrificing of “une des plus belles choses de la France”. This lauding of the king’s role as protector of France’s beauty, intended to ward off accusations of the article as a personal attack on the monarch¹⁴⁰, appeals to an eternal essence which surpasses the immediate obsession with utility. For this interest in the arts constitutes an essential part of the French character, a concern broadly shared beyond the monarchy, among men like “M. de Montalivet”, who served as the monarchy’s steward of the “liste civile”, a list of domains under state protection that included Fontainebleau. To reverse this state of affairs, the author argues that direct intervention will be necessary to “conserver à la France, et même à l’Europe, un monument naturel qui n’a pas d’égal”. Fontainebleau was not simply another forest, it was a monument of national, even international importance, worthy of the same protection afforded to the country’s architectural patrimony. Without a *prise de conscience* of the threats facing Fontainebleau, the forest would continue an inexorable slide. The author concludes with a hopeful note, confident that the French nation will recognize the forest as one of its “trésors de grandeur et de magnificence” which required direct action to save.

The anonymous piece in *L’Artiste* signaled a shift in how people envisioned geographical space and its relation to national identity. The Romantics had encouraged a reconnection with the nation’s medieval heritage, notably in the country’s architectural patrimony of churches, abbeys, monasteries, cathedrals, and castles, and had begun a movement to preserve, protect, or restore these sites now conceived as “monuments

¹⁴⁰ The laws of September 1835 banned direct opposition to the person of the king while also restricting forms of contestation against the dynasty or constitutional monarchy regime itself.

nationaux”¹⁴¹. Furthermore, the advent of realism in art and literature allowed a fresh look at the country’s geography, from its biophysical to its built, urban landscapes as essential elements of the French character. The preservation of France’s physical geography would connect the French people with an ancient memory and encourage an identity constructed relationally with biophysical landscapes, a materialization of identity and memory.

The 1839 article in *L’Artiste* may have been the first reference to the forest of Fontainebleau as a “monument naturel” worthy of conservation, but it would soon acquire many adherents, until its final institutionalization in 1861. In the aftermath of the article’s publication, expanding protests, including the uprooting of pine saplings, eventually led Louis-Philippe’s forest administration to abandon the reform efforts¹⁴². During the 1830s, the group of landscape painters often gathered at the inn in Barbizon, on the western edge of the forest. Foresters, meanwhile, were not welcome for dinner unless they arrived with “at least a pair of young pines pulled up from the forest – a practice they called pine to dine”¹⁴³. The movement to protect the botanical heritage of Fontainebleau proceeded via agitation in the press, growing admiration for the landscape art inspired by the forest, and direct action on the ground to disrupt the administration’s management plans.

During the 1840s, landscape art’s growing popularity helped develop the new phenomenon of nature tourism. Instrumental to this budding trend was Claude-François Denecourt, a twice-wounded veteran of Napoléon’s Grande Armée, former merchant active in republican opposition movements throughout the 1820s, and victim of anti-republican repression instituted by Louis-Philippe’s regime in the early 1830s. Denecourt would settle in

¹⁴¹ See André Fermigier, « Mérimée et l’inspection des monuments historiques », in *Lieux de mémoire*, t. 2 *La Nation*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 1599-1614 and Bruno Foucart, « Viollet-le-Duc et la restauration », *ibid.*, p. 1615-1643. The post of *inspecteur général des Monuments historiques* was created in 1830 and held by Mérimée from 1834-1860.

¹⁴² Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁴³ Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 183. From the French “un pin pour un pain”. From Greg M. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

Fontainebleau at the same time as many of the Barbizon painters¹⁴⁴, and he dedicated the rest of his life to disseminating the many wonders of the forest, becoming a celebrated guidebook writer while designing and constructing approximately 160 kilometers of walking trails to benefit visitors, during a career spanning forty years¹⁴⁵. As early as 1840, Denecourt published a comprehensive guidebook covering both the palace and forest of Fontainebleau, including “tout ce qu’il y a d’intéressant et de remarquable”¹⁴⁶ and all things “qui méritent d’être vues”. The writer hoped his guide would become “le guide le plus commode et le plus utile aux étrangers qui viennent chaque année, davantage, à Fontainebleau, pour en visiter les chefs-d’œuvre et les merveilles”. Even before the rail line connecting Paris and Fontainebleau was completed by 1850¹⁴⁷, the forest was already becoming a favorite destination for Parisians seeking to experience some of the marvels they had seen in pictorial representations and read about in the press. The emergent phenomenon of nature-based tourism slowly turned the question of the forest’s management from a minor dispute between foresters and artists to a debate over the nature of France’s national identity¹⁴⁸.

As the forest administration progressively abandoned its deforestation/replanting program throughout the 1840s, artists and forest enthusiasts moved further in their effort to ensure Fontainebleau’s long-term protection. Théodore Rousseau turned his attention to influencing the next forest management reform. Years of political upheaval, which saw the end of France’s experiment with constitutional monarchy, the 1848 Revolution, the founding of the Second Republic, and Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte’s 1851 coup d’état and his declaration of the Second Empire, meant the status of Fontainebleau’s forestry regime entered

¹⁴⁴ See Simon Schama, “An Arcadia for the People: The Forest of Fontainebleau”, in *Landscape and Memory*, A.A. Knopf, 1995, p. 546-560.

¹⁴⁵ Claude-François Denecourt, *L’Indicateur de Fontainebleau. Indicateur descriptif du palais et de toutes les plus charmantes promenades de la forêt*, Paris, Hachette, 1874, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶ Denecourt, *Guide du voyageur dans le Palais et la Forêt de Fontainebleau, ou Histoire et Description abrégées de ces lieux remarquables et pittoresques*, Fontainebleau, F. Lhuillier, 1840, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

into a period of uncertainty. Meanwhile, Rousseau's return to the Salon of 1849 led many to believe the political and aesthetic winds had shifted in their favor. Rousseau and other painters thus advocated more directly for a final resolution to Fontainebleau's status, picking up the argument sketched out in the 1839 *L'Artiste* article to pursue the creation of an artistic reserve in the forest.

In 1852, Théodore Rousseau wrote a petition to Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte that advocated for the preservation of Fontainebleau as a reserve of inspiration for artists. His petition used much of the same language as the 1839 article all while expanding the conception of the forest as a national monument, making sure to hit on key figures and moments from France's history to move the emperor to action. For Rousseau, Fontainebleau was "le seul souvenir vivant qui nous reste des temps héroïques de la Patrie depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Napoléon"¹⁴⁹, thus crafting a rhetorical union between those two emperors and the ambitions of the new imperial regime. Even if Rousseau and most of the Barbizon painters were on the political Left¹⁵⁰, his petition capitalized on themes, imagery, and fantasies potent on the Right and among Bonapartist sympathizers. For a young regime eager to solidify its legitimacy and to regain the popularity, glory, and power of France's Carolingian and Napoleonic Empires, Rousseau presented the protection of Fontainebleau as a key building block in the construction of a popular symbolism that would connect the emerging order with a triumphant past. While it would be easy to read Rousseau's petition as opportunistic or nationalistic, the painter did not see Fontainebleau uniquely as a means to solidify or glorify imperial ambitions; the forest would also serve as a living model "pour les artistes qui étudient la nature". Rousseau's nationalism reflected his desire to better understand, through art, the reality of the French landscape.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁵⁰ Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

As a landscapist, Rousseau wanted to experience the French territory itself, developing an immanent relationship to the land. Just like other sculptors and artists who learn their craft by studying the great works of the past, from “modèles qui nous ont été laissés par Michel-Ange”, Rousseau insisted that landscape painters require places to seek inspiration and to hone the skills of their subject, which is to study and reflect the organic processes of biophysical nature. The forest itself was a model from the past which survived in the present, allowing landscape artists to better apprehend their own interpretation of lived reality. For Rousseau, the link with history and memory was essential to allow landscape painters to situate, contemplate, and represent physical reality in the present world. Rousseau’s petition ultimately marshalled changing sensibilities in both politics and aesthetics in his attempt to prevent further degradation of the forest he loved.

Rousseau also continued to distinguish between Fontainebleau’s “historic” trees (oak and beech) and the “newcomers” (pine)¹⁵¹, picking up on the arguments from the *L’Artiste* article. The artist deplored the foresters who planted “à profusion des quantités innombrables de Pins du Nord qui enlèvent à cette forêt son vieux type gaulois et nous donnera bientôt le spectacle dur et triste des forêts de la Russie”¹⁵². The language here is explicitly nationalistic, using the alarmist rhetoric of a foreign invasion which threatened the very essence of France’s Gallic character, while cleverly evoking the traumatic memory of Napoléon I’s Russian debacle. While part of this opposition, especially its hints of nationalism, is indeed troubling, the reference to Russian forests is also a skillful rhetorical figure intended to push the country’s future emperor into action. The artists also opposed the forestry changes on geographical grounds, hinting toward a deeper connection between Fontainebleau’s soils and its arboreal life and arguing that continued deforestation and replacement would exert lasting damage on the territory’s soil fertility. The forest, then, was seen as a source of aesthetic

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁵² Quoted in Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

inspiration, as a means of accessing the country's ancient heritage, and finally as a fragile, dynamic geography of living things. Without direct action to protect the landscape, the entire territory risked falling further under the economic logic of maximal production. Perhaps moved by Rousseau's petition, Napoléon III's forest administration proposed a management plan, known as the "aménagement de Sthème", which set aside 624 hectares as a "réserve artistique"¹⁵³. The proposal represented the first official recognition of the artists' idea to protect part of the forest as an aesthetic resource.

Continued agitation from the Barbizon painters and from Denecourt led to the final promulgation of a new management plan for Fontainebleau, delivered as an imperial decree on 13 August 1861¹⁵⁴. The reform, known as the "aménagement de Frescheville et Massé", notably created the first protected landscape in France, even increasing the Sthème proposal's allotment of artistic reserves from 624 to 1097 hectares. In addition to these areas left outside of direct development, composed of 542 hectares of old-growth woodland and 555 hectares of rock formations, the plan created two other managed sections in the forest. The main portion, with an area of 13,723 hectares, would be managed as a "futaie régulière", or as an even-aged high-woodland parcel, with natural reseeding and periodic clear-cutting. The second parcel under development consisted of 1622 hectares managed according to the "taillis sous futaie" method, with a thirty year harvesting cycle¹⁵⁵. The reform thus placed nearly 3000 hectares of Fontainebleau outside the traditional pattern of plantation-clearcutting-replantation, whether as protected reserves or as differently managed forest parcels.

The vision of forest management in Fontainebleau that the 1861 reform inaugurated tended to prevail for much of the remaining decades of the 19th century. Fontainebleau, long the source of rancorous disputes, was on its way toward becoming a place of synthesis over

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ The "taillis sous futaie" regime mixes the "futaie" with the "taillis", or coppiced woodland management.

how to manage an ancient, yet fragile resource for many, often competing desires. That synthesis could prove fragile, especially during times of national conflict. In the debacle of the Second Empire's fall in 1870, the Prussian siege of Paris, and the chaos of the Paris Commune insurrection and Thiers's Versailles-government repression, the forest of Fontainebleau offered a wealth of much-needed resources in close proximity to the beleaguered capital. During the war and its aftermath, the forest lost more than 13,000 oak trees, some more than 300 years old¹⁵⁶. In response, an organization of local notables, artists, and writers created the *Comité de protection artistique de la forêt de Fontainebleau*. Formed in 1873, the group's impetus came from Denecourt and his student, Charles Colinet, who would soon succeed the *Sylvain*¹⁵⁷ as the main organizer and guide-writer for the forest's trail network. Jean-François Millet was named the group's honorary president, and he was joined in his task by fellow landscape painters like Corot and Charles-François Daubigny and by writers such as Victor Hugo, George Sand, and Jules Michelet¹⁵⁸.

Despite the conflict, many elected officials and influential thinkers argued persuasively in favor of expanding the artistic reserves, seen by deputy Horace de Choiseul as evidence of France's position as a leading figure in landscape preservation¹⁵⁹. Indeed, the second development program for Fontainebleau implemented in 1892 increased the portion of the forest outside of direct development to an area of 1616 hectares, including a substantially larger artistic reserve of 1514 hectares. The consensus over the value of the forest's artistic reserves had only seemed to grow as the century progressed. The 1892 reform also became the first to implement a "futaie jardinée", or selective harvesting, in a 3000 hectare portion of the forest, which allowed foresters to maintain a diversity of tree species, ages, and

¹⁵⁶ Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 174. Quoted in Anon., "La Série artistique de la forêt de Fontainebleau : discussion à la Chambre des Députés (séance du 16 décembre 1876)", *Revue des eaux et forêts*, xvi (1877), 5-10.

¹⁵⁷ Denecourt's nickname comes from a text Théophile Gautier contributed to an 1855 literary homage to Denecourt. Théophile Gautier, « Sylvain », in *Hommage à C.F. Denecourt*, Paris, Hachette, 1855, p. 346-351.

¹⁵⁸ Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 7-8. Théodore Rousseau had died six years earlier, in 1867.

¹⁵⁹ Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 173-174.

dimensions and to protect forest soils against erosion, compaction, desiccation, and nutrient loss all while ensuring a constant harvest without clear-cutting.¹⁶⁰ Thus, more than 5350 hectares of Fontainebleau were now included outside of the clear-cutting zones (increasing from 3000 ha in the 1861 plan), whether in a protected area reserved for aesthetic purposes, parcels managed as coppiced woodlands, or the section devoted to selective harvesting.

The anonymous author of the 1839 article in *L'Artiste* who protested vehemently against the forest administration's policies might not have recognized the forest by the end of the century. The pace and scale of changing practices in the forest, whether geographical, silvicultural, social, or mental, would have bewildered anyone who remembered the conflicts of the 1830s between artists and the forest managers. Eventually, the dogged pursuit of these painters and lovers of nature transformed society's appreciation of once-denigrated aesthetic tastes and geographical spaces into celebrated works of art and valued places to protect. Fontainebleau was no longer the refuge of reclusive landscape painters working in opposition to established aesthetic taste, it had become an essential source for France's artistic renewal, the muse for some of the century's most celebrated artists.

The momentum created by the Barbizon painters did not cease with the dawn of the 20th century, as the forest administration decided in 1904 to manage the entire forest completely “d'après des vues esthétiques”¹⁶¹. This third development plan, known as the *aménagement de Duchaufour*, created five areas of “futaies jardinées”, where selective cutting would favor the lightest-possible interventions, nine deciduous sections where interventions would never be “accentuées”, and an enlarged artistic reserve of 1693 hectares. The goal of the plan was to allow “les peuplements réguliers”, such as oak and beech, to “croître sans limite” and to manage other areas so as to constantly maintain the forest's “état boisé” all while “respectant partout où il se trouve les vieux sujets encore susceptibles de vivre”. Those

¹⁶⁰ Nougarede, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

once-vilified administrators had fully adopted the language of Fontainebleau's crowd of nature lovers, calling for all steps to be made "afin de conserver à la forêt son caractère de musée végétal".

2. Fontainebleau, a literary geography of relation

The influence of the Barbizon landscape art movement did not limit itself to the world of visual aesthetics. During the decades from 1840-1880, it also found its way into the literary world, inspiring numerous writers to color their narratives with examinations of the phenomenon and its consequences. Authors used artists and painters as characters in their novels and they often frequented places that played important roles in the lives of artists in preparation for their writing. Among the many works of literature that took place at least in part in Fontainebleau forest¹⁶², were *Manette Salomon*, an 1867 novel by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt and *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Flaubert's 1869 *roman d'apprentissage* masterpiece on disillusionment. While Fontainebleau does not figure in either novel as the primary setting, the forest plays an important role, almost casting a magnetic pull to attract artistically inclined Parisians to wander among its tall stands of oak, beech, and pine. Both novels feature painters and other hopeful participants in the exploding Parisian art scene, for whom Fontainebleau stands as a *passage obligé* toward perfecting modern painting techniques like working on landscapes *en plein air*. For other characters, Fontainebleau looms as a nearby refuge from Paris's constant tumult, a haven of calm where one can discover a landscape between ephemeral modernity and eternal time and space. While the characters

¹⁶² Étienne de Senancour's *Obermann* (1804, republished in 1833 by George Sand and Sainte-Beuve) inaugurated the literary "fièvre bellifontaine" (Cf., Chantal Georgel, "La forêt de Fontainebleau : une nature monumentale, un monument naturel?", *Perspective*, 1 | 2017, p. 131). The autobiographical, epistolary novel offers a series of impressions about the forest but is weighed down by the desire to read sentiments of solitude, melancholy, and the search for liberty in the landscape. Champfleury's *Les Amis de la Nature* (1859) is a mean-spirited satire of nature admirers like Denecourt and the Barbizon landscape painters. Fontainebleau often inspired poetry and travelogues, which are not the focus of the current study. The two works studied here represent fuller developed attempts at literary description of the forest landscape itself, offer intriguing connections with pictorial representation, and present a vision of the forest, between metaphor and reality, as a place of geographical relation.

often fail in their quest for aesthetic authenticity or in pertinently reading the spatio-temporal connections in the forest geography, the works suggest language itself as a means of opening the human relation to geographical space.

2.1 Manette Salomon: in the aesthetic forest

Manette Salomon opens with a long narration recounting the movements of “un monde particulier, mêlé, cosmopolite”¹⁶³ throughout the labyrinth in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. This group makes its way to the *gloriette du Buffon*, the pavilion that sits at the summit of a small hill at the western end of the Jardin. From this elevated position, the visitors are treated to a panoramic vision of Paris, which sits, “sous eux, à droite, à gauche, partout” (I, 3). What follows is a long discourse on the physical makeup of Paris and the manner in which this profusion of urban material is enveloped within the wider natural world of sky, light, clouds, trees, and water. The passage is worth quoting at length to discern its reliance on aesthetic language that turns the city itself into a work of art:

En regardant vers la droite, on voyait un Génie d’or sur une colonne, entre la tête d’un arbre vert se colorant dans ce ciel d’hiver d’une chaleur olive, et les plus hautes branches du cèdre, planes, étalées, gazonnées, sur lesquels les oiseaux marchaient en sautillant comme sur une pelouse. Au-delà de la cime des sapins, ... l’œil embrassait tout l’espace entre le dôme de la Salpêtrière et la masse de l’Observatoire : d’abord, un grand plan d’ombre ressemblant à un lavis d’encre de Chine sur un dessous de sanguine, une zone de tons ardents et bitumineux, brûlés de ces roussissures de gelée et de ces chaleurs d’hiver qu’on retrouve sur la palette d’aquarelle des Anglais ; puis, dans la finesse infinie d’une teinte dégradée, il se levait un rayon blanchâtre, une vapeur laiteuse et nacrée, trouée du clair des bâtisses neuves, et où s’effaçait, se mêlaient, se fondaient, en s’opalisant, une fin de capitale, des extrémités de faubourgs, des bouts de rue perdues. ... Tout au loin, l’Observatoire apparaissait, vaguement noyé dans un éblouissement, dans la splendeur féerique d’un coup de soleil d’argent. Et à l’extrémité de droite, se dressait la borne de l’horizon, le pâtre du Panthéon, presque transparent dans le ciel, et comme lavé d’un bleu limpide (5-6).

¹⁶³ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Manette Salomon*, Paris, Librairie Internationale, 1868 [1867], Tome 1, p. 1. Subsequent references to this novel appear in parentheses, unless further precision is necessary. The novel’s namesake is the model, then lover of Coriolis, a painter whose ambitions are slowly but surely undermined by the overbearing presence of his mistress. It should be noted that the Goncourts’ negative portrayal of Manette suffers from a disturbing level of anti-Semitism and misogyny.

In this form of *ekphrasis*, the Goncourts imagine the city as a panorama to be meticulously described. An attentiveness to form, color, and light and a tendency for detailed enumerations announce the novel's approach to literary description. While the eye desires to see and know everything, an uneven luminosity produced by the urban variance conspires with a constantly changing atmosphere to create a sense of "splendeur féerique" accompanied with moments of clarity, activating the viewer's imagination and inspiring an artistic interpretation of the city. It also hints at one of the novel's key themes: aesthetics as a means of immersive communion with the physical world, a mode of relation at odds with mercantile consumption.

The intradiegetic source of this description is Anatole, an aspiring artist who serves as impromptu guide to the cityscape. Accompanied by three young friends, including Garnotelle, Chassagnol, and Coriolis (I, 11), the group of young painters dines while discussing aesthetic and social issues in the art world "vers l'année 1840" (I, 18). The narrator identifies the period as a transitional moment in art history, one where "le grand mouvement révolutionnaire du Romantisme...finissait dans une sorte d'épuisement et de défaillance". As a result of this collapse, painting possessed no genre or current that could powerfully represent "la vie moderne" (I, 21). Meanwhile, landscape art still found itself placed "au-dessous de la grande peinture", struggling "encore à demi méconnu, presque suspect, contre les sévérités du jury et les préjugés du public". The narrator, writing during the 1860s, hints at the future success of the landscape: "le paysage n'avait point alors l'autorité, la considération, la place dans l'art qu'il devait finir par conquérir à coups de chefs-d'œuvre". In 1840, landscape art, including Rousseau, "ne pouvait forcer les portes du Salon", remaining on the outside of official recognition. Coriolis advocates for the techniques of the *paysagistes* to reinvigorate modern art. For Coriolis, a modern painter needs to feel "l'émotion de la nature" (I, 212), allowing a place's natural characteristics to shine, like "[Théodore] Rousseau" who understands how to

be “un refléteur [tout] en restant personnel”. Coriolis seeks art related to geographical realities while limiting the imposition of allegorical, religious, or historical frames.

More than a decade after this opening scene, Coriolis finds himself seeking recovery from a sickness during the summer of 1853 in Paris and settles on the idea of escaping from the capital in favor of “des endroits où il y a de l’air et de l’ombre d’arbres” (II, 14). For a painter of his generation, the destination seemed almost pre-ordained: Fontainebleau forest. Coriolis had never visited the region, but he had heard “à ce qu’ils disent tous, que c’est une vraie forêt”, and he knew that the “auberge” at “Barbison” had long welcomed artists, the ideal “installation”, for a working holiday for himself, his mistress Manette, and friend Anatole. Traveling within the “calèche de louage” (II, 16), the three Parisians apparently see nothing of importance during their first foray into the woods, instead focusing on the charming, rustic village of Barbizon. For Coriolis, the village seemed less a real place than the manifestation of what many artists had already represented: “Coriolis reconnaissait des toits de bois sur des portes, des cours, des ruelles de masures donnant sur la campagne, que des eaux-fortes lui avaient déjà montrées” (II, 17). Even as Coriolis seeks new life within the forest’s “air sain et calmant de la vie végétative” (II, 20), he cannot fully escape his aesthetic training and internalized cultural frames. Unlike Coriolis, Anatole connects deeply with the forest’s biophysical life, spending his days “étendu, étalé, aplati tout de son long”, in a state of “épanouissement d’une jubilation infinie” (II, 23). Anatole integrates himself within the forest’s biorhythms, studying its landscapes without regard to prevailing aesthetic models.

Coriolis, though he also “passait des journées dans la forêt” (II, 26), opts for an aesthetic method more removed from his immediate object of study, spending his time “sans peindre, sans dessiner”, preferring to “laiss[er] se faire en lui ces croquis inconscients, ces espèces d’esquisses flottantes que fixent plus tard la mémoire et la palette du peintre”. In Coriolis’s view, the painter’s memory, vision, and talent are more important than his ability to

directly capture the precise details of a natural scene. Despite this removed approach, he experiences feelings of awe whenever he encounters particular places within the forest, especially the “Bas-Bréau” old-growth grove (II, 27), protected in the 1853 plan. This conserved landscape inspires in Coriolis “une émotion presque religieuse...chaque fois” (II, 28), sensing himself “devant une des grandes majestés de la Nature”. Here the Goncourts adopt an emphatic tone to describe “cette entrée d’allée...cette porte triomphale” as a temple, an architectural masterpiece of natural beauty. As his eye contemplates a stand of “chênes magnifiques et sévères”, Coriolis sees an immemorial forest, its trees having “un âge de dieux et une solennité de monuments”. This reaction to the Bas-Bréau woods as a sacred, monumental place demonstrates the effectiveness of the campaign to save this beloved grove from further destruction.

As an artist, Coriolis’s eye begins to investigate the space, noticing the interplay of light, color, and line producing a visual spectacle worthy of the greatest works of art. He witnesses the monumental height of the oak trees that “sort[aient], comme d’une herbe naine, des forêts de fougère écrasées de leur hauteur”. Appreciating the contrasting light and shadow, Coriolis walks “sous ces voûtes qui éclataient...en fusées de branches, en cimes foudroyées, en furies échevelées et tordues”, and among “les ombres couchées barrant le chemin”. Meanwhile the grove’s “dessous de bois”, colored with a “vert doux et tendre”, are occasionally met with “un zigzag de soleil, un rayon courant”, producing “une rampe de feux d’émeraude”. The interplay between sunlight, forest vegetation, and liquid water produces a unified spectacle between architectural, botanical, and mineral orders: “plus près de lui, des petits genévriers en pyramide étincelaient de luisants de givre ; et les houx rampants remuaient sur le vernis de leurs feuilles une lumière métallique et liquide, l’éblouissement blanc d’un diamant dans une goutte d’eau”. The combined scene allows the artist to rediscover “l’allégresse d’être jeune”.

In addition to the mixing of orders, the trees have seemingly organized themselves in particular aesthetic patterns. Coriolis thus observes many trees “aux membres d’athlètes, au dessin héroïque” and others who appeared “réunis, assemblés, mêlant et nouant leurs bras en dôme de verdure, semblaient dessiner un rond de danse pour des hamadryades”. As the Parisian admires the scene’s beauty, he moves beyond aesthetic, or even mythological appreciation to become aware of and captivated by the forest’s living, breathing character:

et il avançait dans ce silence de la forêt muette et murmurante, où tombe des arbres comme une pluie de petits bruits secs, où bourdonnent incessamment, pour le bercement de la rêverie, tous les infiniment petits de la vie, le battement du rien qui vole, le bruissement du rien qui marche. Et quand il s’étendait sur un tertre de mousse, le coude sur la terre, les yeux à l’éternel balancement des branches auprès du ciel, de petits souffles accouraient à lui, sur l’herbe et les feuilles tombées, avec le pas d’une bête (II, 29).

The artist’s attentiveness to the infinitely small aspects that make up the forest’s biodiversity allows him to more fully enter into a meaningful relation with Fontainebleau, not only as an object of aesthetic study, but as a dynamic place full of life. Even if his artistic instincts originally lead him to resort to a mythologized reading, those same instincts encourage him to focus on the place’s tiny details to understand Fontainebleau as a living geography.

In the groves of the Bas-Bréau Coriolis observes a diversity of forest flora and fauna, from the “grands chênes” to the younger “petits bois” where he can witness “au galop comme un grand cheval rouge...un cerf”. His strolls also bring him to the more open landscapes of Fontainebleau’s “gorges sauvages d’Apremont”, a “paysage découvert” where “un âpre plein midi brûlait” the massive “rochers [qui] dressaient, en masses violettes”. Carefully slipping “entre des écartements de roc” (II, 30), Coriolis embarks on a journey of discovery, pausing to “sond[er] et batt[re] de son bâton...l’inconnu de ces arbustes”. Coming to dryer areas, Coriolis moves among “des sables”, “de hautes herbes ondulantes”, and “des lits de torrents séchés”, recalling the region’s formative past as a shallow sea. The artist begins to imagine the connections between Fontainebleau’s landscapes and a wide-range of apparently distant,

unrelated geographies. While he moves through a desiccated region of the forest, the valley's "blanc de chaux calciné" was interrupted "ça et là" by "un morceau de mousse d'un vert humide", blurring the distinction between mineral and liquid orders of matter. Continuing within the close walls of the rocky valley, the painter "croyait voir l'éboulement, l'avalanche, la cascade de morceaux de montagne lâchés par une défaite de Titans" (II, 31). These chaotic visions give form to the complex relations between distinct geographies that combine to produce the biophysical world we experience. The dynamic vocabulary reinforces the special role of water, in its polymorphic power, as destructor and creator of geographical space.

Coriolis' reflections upon the gorge's landscape indicate how the present appearance of a landscape only begins to reveal the hidden complexity of that space's biophysical formation. As for Fontainebleau, Coriolis sees "dans le tumulte immobile du paysage comme une grande tempête de la nature soudainement pétrifiée", a hybrid space, forged over the long duration by the combined forces and matters of water, wind, storm, rock, and plant. If the landscape now appears "immobile", it is ultimately a tumultuous immobility, one that reveals its chaotic history¹⁶⁴. Standing in such a place one could imagine the myriad connections between Fontainebleau and other, far-flung or completely imaginary landscapes: "toutes les formes, tous les aspects, toutes les formidables fantaisies et toutes les terribles apparences du rocher, étaient rassemblés dans ce cirque où les grès énormes prenaient des profils d'animaux de rêves, des silhouettes de lions assyriens, des allongements de lamentins sur un promontoire". Imagining relations between its present appearance as a rocky, desert-like valley and its historical marine formation, one could easily see "les pierres entassées" taking the form of "un écrasement de tortues monstrueuses, de carapaces essayant de se chevaucher", or as "deux sphinx camus" that "serraient la route et barraient presque le passage". The rocks found here were none other than "les vastes galets d'une première mer du monde", pointing

¹⁶⁴ The sandstone boulders of Fontainebleau are sedimentary rocks of marine origin, having deposited over time on the bottom of a shallow sea which covered the area. Cf., Élisée Reclus, *NGU*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 692.

directly toward “des remous des siècles”, and “le souvenir et le dessin des grands os du passé”, elements of the relational formation of geographical space.

Returning to “le Bas-Bréau” (II, 32), Coriolis admires the fading daylight that “faisait...une magie dans la forêt”, further blurring the distinction between states of matter as forms of earth, plant, rock, water, and sky fuse into an interconnected display of life. Coriolis witnesses “des brumes de verdure” that “se levaient doucement des massifs”, causing the “molle clarté des écorces” to “s’ètei[ndre]” in a confusion of “formes à demi flottantes”. As day falls, bright colors of yellow, orange, and red give way to lighter, more subdued tones of dusk: “le bleuissement, l’estompage vaporeux du soir montait insensiblement” (II, 33). The changing light reveals softer, colder colors, combining with the forest’s increasing mistiness to create an impressionistic painting (*avant la lettre*) where once rigid forms flow gently into their surroundings, allowing the viewer/artist the liberty of representing a fluid materiality. As “un petit brouillard aérien” surrounded the painter, he finds himself within “une fumée de rêve suspendue dans l’air”. Not simply an impression that he later recreates in his own memory, Coriolis directly experiences the evening forest landscape as a place of fluid identities, where the relational existences of beings, forms, and colors are finally revealed.

Despite Coriolis’s admiration for Fontainebleau, this “homme du monde” (II, 39) would before long tire of “la rusticité de l’auberge”. Anatole, however, continues to integrate himself more fully within Fontainebleau’s rhythms, both improving his technique as a landscape painter and discovering a fuller existence as a member of the forest community. Anatole hones his craft by directly recording his impressions of the forested landscape, a technique known colloquially as “*piger le motif*” (II, 48). These many hours spent in close communion with the forest attune Anatole to the various desecrations wrought on Fontainebleau, including “les plantations déshonorant la forêt” (II, 49). Anatole protests against the forced rationality of these pine plantations, engaging in direct action when he

“piétinait pendant deux heures les petites pousses des pins en ligne”. Anatole’s ability to quickly adapt to his surroundings turns the painter into an ardent defender of Fontainebleau’s natural beauty. His experience of the forest surpasses that of the landscape painter or activist; though he spends hours painting *sur le motif*, Anatole also moves toward a deeper relationship with the forest environment itself, taking great pleasure in simply searching the forest floor for “tout ce qu’on trouve là, ce que la main ramasse par terre, sous le bois, avec une joie étonnée” (II, 50). Giving himself over to the joys of forest life, the painter had never before experienced “une si douce et si pleine existence”.

As their time in Fontainebleau draws to an end, Coriolis and Anatole receive a dinner invitation from “une des particularités du pays, le fameux paysagiste Crescent” (II, 62). This painter, “un des grands représentants du paysage moderne” (II, 63), though a fictional creation of the Goncourts, crystallizes the tendencies of French landscape painting of the middle decades of the 19th century. Crescent had made “un nom et une place à part” in the century’s “grand mouvement du retour de l’art et de l’homme...à la nature *naturelle*”, as one of the first painters to eschew “le paysage historique”. Crescent found passion in representing “des beautés simples, humbles, ingénues de la terre”, siting his work “au premier champ, à la première herbe, à la première eau”. Crescent learned to look “naïvement et religieusement en l’air et à ses pieds, à quelques pas d’un faubourg et d’une barrière”, calling attention to the hidden majesty of marginalized spaces that nonetheless provided infinite inspiration to any painter or observer willing to look carefully.

As an early adherent of what would be known as the Barbizon school, Crescent stands in for pioneering *paysagistes* like Rousseau, while his dedication to depicting scenes from the French quotidian, whether “quelque scène champêtre, les semailles, la moisson, la récolte”, recalls the work of Jean-François Millet. In Crescent, Coriolis was thrilled to “trouver enfin un peintre qui parlât un peu de son art” (II, 74). The partnership allows Coriolis to “pass[er]

des heures dans l'atelier de Crescent" (II, 78), where the landscapist diligently pursues his work. Like the image often associated with the reclusive Rousseau, Crescent avoids the "beau monde" of elite artistic circles, living "retiré, muré dans sa 'barbisonnière', étranger au monde" (II, 80), remaining unconcerned with the spheres of politics and aesthetic culture.

The end of summer and its "derniers beaux jours" (II, 99) followed by the coming of autumn and its "mélancolie qui tombe des grands bois" (II, 100) lead Coriolis to contemplate his final departure from Fontainebleau. Coriolis identifies autumn with a material and psychological end: of his time in the region, of the forest's life, and in its capacity to inspire beautiful art. Unmoved by the season's biophysical changes, Coriolis instead focuses on what he sees as "l'espèce de sommeil maudit d'une forêt sans eau et sans oiseau, sans joie qui coule, sans joie qui chante". Where the forest's "chênes superbes" formerly filled him with immense happiness and admiration, Coriolis now feels fatigued by "le désespoir de leurs bras, le tourment qui les sillonne du haut en bas" (II, 101). The winds and the autumn rains produce "dans le creux de la forêt, le mugissement de la mer" (II, 102), which both recalls the forest's marine origin and seemed to complete "le dépouillement et l'ensevelissement" of the once dynamic forest. Melancholy reigns over a "morne paysage de froideur sauvage" (II, 103) as an "âpre intensité d'une désolation monochrome" takes hold of the painter. Unlike Rousseau's monumental *Forêt d'hiver*, Coriolis is incapable of appreciating the dynamic life cycles of autumn and winter, essential to organic processes in northern climates.

While autumn and winter certainly constitute periods of decreased biological activity in northern forests, Coriolis equates this decline with literal death. As he walks among these formerly bustling groves, he remarks upon "le silence", which for him represents "la plus grande mort de tout". With Fontainebleau now lacking "le bourdonnement, le voltigement, le sifflement, le stridulant murmure d'atomes ailés", the forest's "vie invisible et présente qui fait vivre la touffe d'herbe, la feuille, le grain de sable" had been snuffed out. This hidden

insect life, which nevertheless makes up “le cœur de la forêt”, now seems absent, killed off by “le froid et l’eau”, though if Coriolis had examined the forest floor more carefully, he would have likely found it teeming with insect communities, as Michelet would discover during his research in Fontainebleau for *L’Insecte*, summed up by the historian’s *mot d’ordre*: “creusez et vous trouverez”¹⁶⁵. Instead, the Parisian insists in his depiction of the forest’s soil as “inanimé et sourd”, a feeling which now mirrors Coriolis’s aesthetic unproductivity. The dream of Fontainebleau as realist muse, a place to contemplate the catastrophic origins of the world and experience the dynamism of organic life, had died in Coriolis’s mind. Further cementing the connection between the forest’s declining biological activity and Coriolis’s reduced creativity, the painter enters a prolonged period of artistic sterility, incapable of beginning “quelque grand morceau, une œuvre importante à son retour de Fontainebleau” (II, 131). Coriolis’s Fontainebleau failure illustrates competing modes of relating to the biophysical world. Between becoming immersed in the forest landscape through minute observations, equating sensory experience with prevailing aesthetic models, or transforming those feelings into a mercantile product, Coriolis finds himself trapped in an unresolvable tension, and the painter devolves toward artistic sterility.

Upon returning to Paris, Anatole’s friends in the landscapist community at Barbizon help him gain temporary employment to paint portraits “de l’Empereur” (II, 283) at the “palais de l’Industrie”¹⁶⁶ as part of the Exposition universelle. The new régime, eager to stabilize and legitimize its power, promoted landscape art hoping to link the empire to the land itself, forging a bond between the young political régime and the timeless, eternal

¹⁶⁵ Michelet, *L’Insecte*, Hachette, 1858, p. XXI.

¹⁶⁶ The Palais de l’Industrie was constructed in 1855 for France’s first Exposition universelle, along the Champs-Élysées where the Grand and Petit Palais now stand. Displaying technical and industrial innovations, it was part of Napoléon III’s desire to use the Exposition to showcase France (and Paris) as the new world center of civilization. Théodore Rousseau served as a member of the jury for the painting section of the Exposition. The palace also served as the home of the Salon from 1857 to 1897. Cf., Amédée Achard, *Paris-Guide par les principaux écrivains et artistes de la France*, Paris, éd. Librairie Internationale, 1867.

character of the French landscape. Anatole's commission comes shortly after Rousseau's petition to Napoléon III began drawing attention to the fate of Fontainebleau Forest. In 1855, Rousseau and other landscapists were featured prominently at the first Exposition universelle held in Paris. Anatole's position therefore owes as much to politics as it did to aesthetic success, but it ultimately proves fleeting when the commissions dry up in the exposition's aftermath. Near the end of the book, Madame Crescent visits Anatole to offer her Parisian friend "une petite place dans [le] Jardin des plantes" (II, 301), using her and her husband's surprising influence at Napoléon III's imperial court, recently moved to Fontainebleau. Though the painter is initially shamed upon receiving the offer letter as "aide préparateur au Jardin des Plantes" (II, 302), he ends up accepting the job as a means of financial security¹⁶⁷. He finishes the novel where he began it, in the Jardin des Plantes, his aesthetic dreams out of reach, forced to tend to animals held as captive as him.

Though artistic success remains inaccessible, Anatole benefits from his new situation to redefine his identity in relational terms, as "ce qui est autour de lui le pénètre par tous les pores" (II, 315), and he feels "une sensation délicieuse" as he becomes part of "la Terre" itself, feeling himself "un peu dans tout ce qui vole, dans tout ce qui croît, dans tout ce qui court". The process, though it expands his identity, is not presented uniquely positively. Indeed, Anatole seems to lose his individuality as "la créature commence à se dissoudre dans le Tout vivant de la création" (II, 316). Anatole's ability to communicate beyond the self is part of an attempt to rediscover "la félicité du premier homme en face de la Nature vierge", a quest for primordial kinship free of mercantile concerns paradoxically undertaken in the midst of a domesticated, encaged nature. Though Anatole achieves moments of communion with the biophysical world, both ontological and aesthetic, his ultimate goals are often trammled

¹⁶⁷ In addition to profligate spending habits following each commission payment, Anatole becomes responsible for liquidating a heavy load of debts from his mother, further compromising his position. When the commissions end, Anatole accepts the job out of his love for "les bêtes" (II, 299), to earn a regular salary, and in hopes that he could continue to "pein[dre] là-dedans" (II, 301).

by society's need to turn everything into an object of consumption. Though *Manette Salomon* offers few models of sustained artistic success, the Fontainebleau scenes provide moments of innovative landscape description and immersion within the forest geography, further accentuating the importance of aesthetics (pictorial or literary) as a means of moving beyond mercantile concerns in cultivating a relational form of being, together with the world.

2.2 Flaubert's Fontainebleau Forest: geographical and literary dynamism

Two years after the publication of the Goncourt brothers' *Manette Salomon*, Gustave Flaubert's masterpiece *L'Éducation sentimentale* makes another intriguing investigation of mid-19th century artistic, literary, and political life. This 1869 *roman d'apprentissage* also examines the disillusionment of ambition and idealism while situating an essential moment in Fontainebleau Forest. If the Goncourt brothers take their painter characters to Fontainebleau as a *passage obligé* for mid-century artists, Flaubert exploits the forest's proximity to Paris in order to avoid narrating the events of the 1848 Revolution for a second time within the same novel and to allow his characters a brief but peaceful respite. While Flaubert described himself as "ahuri, ébloui, bourré" after reading the Goncourts' novel, he wrote them a letter asking: "Fontainebleau m'a semblé un peu long. Pourquoi ?"¹⁶⁸. Flaubert's Fontainebleau episode is deliberately shorter—eleven pages in a 517-page novel (in its original 1869 edition)—and it suspends the narrative momentum itself, with the descriptive mode gradually taking precedence over story development¹⁶⁹. The passage is rich with descriptive detail, intertextual references (including to *Manette Salomon*), and interesting metaphorical

¹⁶⁸ Lettre à Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, 13 novembre 1867, Flaubert, *Correspondance* (éd. J. Bruneau), t. III, Gallimard, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 1991, p. 702.

¹⁶⁹ As Éric Le Calvez writes "la forêt de Fontainebleau constitue, littéralement, un bloc homogène, de façon telle que le descriptif prédomine, le narratif étant réduit au strict minimum". In « Notes de repérage et descriptions dans 'L'Éducation sentimentale' (II) : Genèse de la forêt de Fontainebleau », Éric Le Calvez, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (1994), p. 363. See also Jeanne Bem, « La forêt de Flaubert : retour sur un épisode de *L'Éducation sentimentale* », in *Orients littéraires : mélanges offerts à Jacques Huré réunis par Sophie Basch, André Guyaux et Gilbert Salmon*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2004, p. 53.

innovations that link the forest geography with the wider world and provide a unique interpretation of existence, in a mix of documentary realism, irony, and imagination.

For this episode, Flaubert made two preparatory visits to the forest and only later drew on his notes to organize and compose the passage itself¹⁷⁰. By doing so, he implemented some of the same techniques as the famous landscapists who had painted the region, working *d'après nature*. Translating his survey notes into workable literary prose proved challenging. In a famous letter to George Sand dated 9 September 1868¹⁷¹, Flaubert lamented his difficulty in composing the forest passage, writing to his friend: “je viens de faire une *description* de la forêt de Fontainebleau qui m’a donné envie de me pendre à un de ses arbres”. The Fontainebleau episode required eighty-two pages of drafts, “portant de nombreuses ratures”¹⁷², with “certains passages...corrigés sur seize versions successives”¹⁷³. The author’s preparatory surveying of the forest was equally extensive, consisting of twenty-five folios of documentary material¹⁷⁴. In fact, Flaubert’s meticulous preparation for the Fontainebleau episode matched up with the author’s standard documentary process, which typically consisted of local surveying, annotations, and “*notes de repérage*” in his *Carnets*¹⁷⁵. That being said, Flaubert did not normally conceive of literary composition as a simple transposition between preparatory notes and final page, declaring that “la Réalité [...] ne doit être qu’un *tremplin*”¹⁷⁶ in service of the fictional world he wished to create. Creating a work of art requires a transfiguration of the real, of the observed reality, rather than a complete adherence to the forest’s physical and sensory detail. The reality that the author observed

¹⁷⁰ Letter of 10 August 1868, *Correspondance Flaubert/Sand*, Flammarion, 1981, p. 190: “j’ai été deux fois à Fontainebleau”.

¹⁷¹ Letter of 9 September 1868, *Correspondance Flaubert/Sand*, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁷² Le Calvez, “Notes de repérage”, p. 363.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Éric Le Calvez, “Notes de repérage et descriptions dans *L’Éducation sentimentale* (Étude de genèse)”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 94, No. 3/4 (1993), p. 359.

¹⁷⁶ Letter to Ivan Tourgueneff, 8 December 1877, *Corr.* (éd. J. Bruneau et Yvan Leclerc), t. V, Gallimard, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 2007, p. 337.

during his excursions needed to be “arrang[ée] et fond[ue]”¹⁷⁷ to match the writer’s particular vision. Notes and text exist in a symbiotic relationship with reality and fiction continually informing and influencing each other. Flaubert draws on shared ideas, images, and associations, all while attempting to offer an original vision of the forest geography. In fact, the Fontainebleau episode is intertextual to its core, to an extent that the characters themselves do little but follow preordained itineraries while missing the details of the forest that unfolds in front of them.

Frédéric Moreau, Flaubert’s young antihero in a desperate search for sentimental and literary success, “avait soif d’abandonner Paris” (390)¹⁷⁸ in June 1848, as the second round of revolutionary days was about to begin in the capital. Having just sought out the comfort of his mistress, “la Maréchale” Rosanette Bron, who also had feelings for Frédéric’s friend Jacques Arnoux, husband of Frédéric’s true love interest, Mme Arnoux, Frédéric asks Rosanette to choose between the two men. Receiving a favorable response from Rosanette, who claims she “n’aimait pas Arnoux”, Frédéric proposes that the two leave the capital for Fontainebleau, a “fantaisie” that the Maréchale “ne repoussa pas”, with the two leaving “dès le lendemain”. Their excursion would be anything but rustic, taking up lodging in a hotel that “se distinguait des autres par un jet d’eau clapotant au milieu de sa cour”, in a room that “était grande, fournie de bons meubles, tendue d’indienne”. Like Coriolis before them, the two tourists go to Fontainebleau in search of “un apaisement” from the turbulent commotion of urban Paris. Unlike the painter, though, Frédéric and Rosanette visit the region without any pretense of performing work. Confirming their tourist intentions, the two wake up “de bonne heure” the next morning to “visiter le château”, a striking palace “couleur de rouille comme une vieille armure”, whose façade composed of “cinq pavillons à toits aigus” recalled royal and imperial

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ References to the text of *L’Éducation sentimentale* will be given parenthetically. Citations come from the Pierre-Marc de Biasi edition: Gustave Flaubert, *L’Éducation sentimentale*, éd. Pierre-Marc de Biasi, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 2002.

glories¹⁷⁹. The forest (and castle) continues to draw legions of tourists eager for the opportunity to discover the peacefulness of Fontainebleau's groves and the majesty of its gorges. Whether they came seeking communion with an apparently more "primitive" nature, historical and architectural curiosities, or simply to find a brief respite from urban ferment, Fontainebleau was the ideal place for widely shared metropolitan ideas about the human relationship to nature to play out.

With Rosanette quickly growing tired of the château's room after room of historical splendors, the pair exit the palace to head toward the "étang des carpes" that "la divertit davantage" (393). Meanwhile, Frédéric contemplates the history of incredible "personnages qui avaient hanté ces murs", as he considers Fontainebleau as a *lieu de mémoire*, a place deeply connected to French national identity, although the sheer weight of that history and its "confusion d'images" "étourdiss[aient]" Frédéric. Indeed, the couple has quickly tired under the force of the royal residence's "mélancolie particulière" that resulted from a disproportion between its "dimensions trop considérables" and "le petit nombre de [ses] hôtes". Perhaps influenced by the fervor of republicanism playing out in the nearby capital, Frédéric and Rosanette notice and are surprised by the "silence" that reigned within the palace "après tant de fanfares", a vision of a dying dynastic society that seemed to collapse under the "poids des siècles" (394). So incommensurate did monarchism now appear with modern societal developments as to give to the château "un parfum de momie" and an "engourdisant et funèbre" feeling of death that was felt even by "têtes naïves". It is unclear that the characters understand the importance of the presence of Diane, whose attributes, "des croissants et des carquois", announce her role as harmonizer of the cycles of life and death. Diane, goddess of the hunt, protectress of young forest animals, and guardian of the cycles of fertility, incarnates

¹⁷⁹ Bernard Masson tracks the proximity of Flaubert's descriptions and choice of itinerary to the *Guide Joanne's* guide to Fontainebleau. Cf., Bernard Masson, « Dans la forêt profonde : retour sur un épisode de *L'Éducation sentimentale* », in *Lectures de l'imaginaire*, Paris, PUF, 1993, p. 99-115.

an idea dear to Flaubert and to the episode as a whole: a dynamic harmony via an alternance between the phases of life. Ironically highlighting the inability of his characters to read the memory of this space, Flaubert concludes the passage: “Rosanette bâillait démesurément”. Having completed an illiterate and superficial visit, the couple leave the palace, making for a different *lieu de mémoire*, that of the Forest of Fontainebleau.

After lunching at their hotel, the couple heads into the forest in “une voiture découverte”, beginning their exploration entrenched in the tourist mode of viewing natural curiosities at a comfortable distance. As the lovers “montèrent au pas une route sablonneuse dans un bois de petits pins”, their “cocher”, here serving as both driver and tour guide, points out all the “sites célèbres”, like “les Frères-Siamois, le Pharamond, le Bouquet-du-Roi...”, even taking pains to stop the vehicle, “pour les faire admirer”. Meanwhile, the neglectful description provides few details about these famous locations, contradicting their importance or betraying the minimal interest of the couple to develop an intense connection with the forest. Although “les arbres devinrent plus grands” and the trio “entrèrent dans la futaie de Franchard”, we once again witness the extent to which the forest has been prepared for tourists, as “un garçon de café parut” in the midst of this majestic stand of trees, together with “des tables rondes”, ready to serve the day’s visitors. Frédéric and Rosanette “descendirent” at this point, and the “roucoulement” “des pigeons qu’on ne voyait pas” give the scene an air of romantic fantasy¹⁸⁰. This strange collage of images becomes even more peculiar when the two lovers finally step foot outside their carriage “sur de grosses roches” and quickly reach “le fond de la gorge” of Franchard. The valley itself is characterized by “un entremêlement de grès et de genévriers”, a form of life that stubbornly grows in the harsh rocky conditions in a union of mineral and plant essences. Not stopping to examine the landscape, however,

¹⁸⁰ It should be noted that the “Mare aux pigeons” is indeed a charted, mapped location, situated just south of Franchard. Flaubert, however, makes no explicit mention of the place, rendering it difficult to tell whether the author heard the birds’ “roucoulements”, or simply added them to give the scene a stereotypical romantic feel.

Frédéric and Rosanette leave the valley hastily, as Flaubert manipulates time to immediately skip “une demi-heure après” when the two “mirent pied à terre encore une fois pour gravir les hauteurs d’Aspremont” [sic]. The unreasonable geographical jump to the *gorges d’Apremont* a mere half-hour after exploring the far southern groves and gorges of Franchard, reinforces the couple’s inattention to the landscape as they are hurried forward to the northwestern portion of Fontainebleau. During this early period of their excursion, Frédéric and Rosanette remain only trivially interested in the forest geography.

As the group enters the Apremont heights, following a path that “fait des zigzags”, the forest’s botanical character changes, becoming more coniferous, more rocky, and more “sauvage”; here, the couple moves along the path “entre les pins trapus sous des rochers à profils anguleux”¹⁸¹ while the air itself is filled with “une odeur résineuse”, signs of the contested Forest Administration practices of replacing native oak and beech stands with imported pine. Although they now feel “quelque chose d’étouffé, d’un peu sauvage et de recueilli”, they are walking among a thoroughly humanized portion of Fontainebleau, the product of decisions made by foresters, administrators, and protesters over the course of many decades or even centuries. Perhaps hinting at this long history, when walking among these gorges and groves, “on pense aux ermites”, who maintain an immemorial human presence in the forest, while still remaining the “compagnons des grands cerfs”, those symbols of wild nature *par excellence*, both prey and protégés of Diane. In this harsh landscape rendered even more inhospitable due to human clear-cutting, the remaining trees fight desperately for life, as their “racines à ras du sol s’entrecroisaient comme des veines”. The strange sadness of this

¹⁸¹ Éric Le Calvez shows how Flaubert uses the technique of descriptive displacement to hide his hypotexts, in this case, the Goncourts’ *Manette Salomon*, who describe Franchard’s boulders as “profils d’animaux” or akin to mythological Titans, while Flaubert displaces while humanizing this topography to the landscape of Apremont. This “déplacement référentiel” serves to render the reference opaque, as Le Calvez shows, but one could add that it also allows to create a sense of geographical relation between the two landscapes. Le Calvez, « Génétique et hypotextes descriptifs (La forêt de Fontainebleau dans *L’Éducation sentimentale*) », *Néophilologus*, Vol. 78, No. 2, 1994, p. 223.

region, populated with twisted, mangled pines staking out a meager life on top of sandy soils or rocky heights begins to affect Rosanette; becoming “désespérée” (395), she “avait envie de pleurer”. This feeling relates perhaps to the imposed rationality of the pine plantations compared to its replaced deciduous stands, places of disorganized diversity, leading to a quieter, more depressing environment.

Rosanette’s discomfort would soon be staunched, thanks to the incongruous presence of “une manière de cabaret”, located “tout au haut” of the Apremont heights, where la Maréchale would stop to “b[oire] une bouteille de limonade”. Even though this summit offers an unobstructed perspective, Rosanette leaves the area “sans donner un coup d’œil au paysage”. Like his characters, Flaubert seems pressed for time, eschewing description, the author segues to the next portion of the couple’s forest visit with a short, one-sentence paragraph: “leur voiture les attendait dans le Bas-Bréau”. Entering this area, one of the most contested landscapes in the entire forest, and one that painters had long prized for its prevalence of magnificent old-growth oak trees, Flaubert neglects a detailed description of the area’s geography. Instead the author represents “un peintre en blouse bleue”, working “au pied d’un chêne”, relying on a long-standing association between the Bas-Bréau and landscape artists, a detail at the interface between observed reality and entrenched stereotype added for literary effect¹⁸². Regardless of his motivations, Flaubert maintains the pace of his compressed description, offering no other details save for the painter’s “boîte de couleurs sur les genoux”. He pushes his narrative forward, hurrying to exit the forest as quickly as possible. Returning to the tourist car, the group is forced to “rabattre la capote” to guard against rain from “un nuage, crevant tout à coup”, concluding their lightning visit back in the city of Fontainebleau, whose “pavés des rues brillaient sous le soleil”. Frédéric and Rosanette thus complete a rapid, highly stereotypical, almost uninterested tour of the forest, pausing

¹⁸² Flaubert makes no reference to a landscape painter in his *Carnets* from his documentary visits.

only briefly to see a few sights, despairing quickly at the apparent sadness of the Apremont heights, and always returning to the vehicle to be whisked away to the next stop.

The two days following this initial excursion are marked by more seated visits, guided by their “cocher”, who takes them to see sights like “la Gorge-au-Loup, la Mare-aux-Fées, le Long-Rocher, la Marlotte”, before taking a more open-minded, fortuitous approach during “le surlendemain”, their third day in the region. The couple completely relinquishes control to their driver during this third day, going “au hasard...sans demander où ils étaient, et souvent même négligeant les sites fameux”. While Flaubert rapidly compresses these two days in the forest with a single-sentence paragraph, the serendipitous method the couple favors during the third day provides them a better opportunity for a more original experience of the forest. After the summarizing paragraph, written in the *passé simple*, indicating completed events, Flaubert switches to using the *imparfait*, providing a more diffuse, enduring sense of time’s passage. As a reader, it is unclear to which day these verbs refer, or whether the experiences recounted point more toward persistent feelings and events that continue throughout the visit. Although Frédéric and Rosanette are able to experience new portions of the forest, their sight seems especially drawn toward those spaces closest to their horse-pulled car, the “fossés pleins de broussailles”, but the speed of their advance imperils and blurs their vision, as the trees and bushes “filaient sous leurs yeux, avec un mouvement doux et continu”. The sense of sight, though privileged by their means of transport through the forest, is simultaneously imperiled by the speed of their journey. Flaubert nonetheless provides a wealth of sensory details, especially the curious interplay between sunlight, green leaves, tree bark, and other biophysical material in the forest, as the sun’s light enters the woods as “des rayons blancs” that quickly “traversaient comme des flèches les hautes fougères”. Frédéric and Rosanette remain relatively powerless to control the carriage’s movement, even when they spy “de petits sentiers courbes” (396), partially hidden “sous les feuilles” and feel a sudden need “de les

suivre” to discover their mysteries. The vision and desire pass quickly as “le cheval tournait”, taking the car in another direction, or causing it to “enfon[cer] dans la boue”. These brief periods of growing interest in discovering the forest are always interrupted by some other, more imperious need to propel the journey forward.

Even if Frédéric and Rosanette “se croyaient loin des autres, bien seuls”, they inevitably find themselves in the company of others, such as “un garde-chasse avec son fusil” who “tout à coup passait” or “une bande de femmes en haillons”, breaking the illusion of solitude. Fontainebleau, despite its appearance as a wild forest removed from civilization, is indeed a highly trafficked place, including foresters, tourists, and those living in socioeconomic misery. The continued use of the *imparfait*, even for an apparently singular event that would normally require the *passé simple*, contributes to the oniric ambiance of the lovers’ two-day journey through the forest. Paradoxically, the couple moves through the forest both at breakneck speed and at the pace of a slowly developing dream, with shadowy, blurry forms and events occurring in the blink of an eye yet somehow extending indefinitely. On the rare occasion where the *landau* “s’arrêtait”, the forest’s rhythms seem simultaneously suspended in time and in dynamic movement, its biology both silenced and resounding. During these brief interludes, “il se faisait un silence universel”, a sentiment quickly contradicted by “le souffle du cheval” and “un cri d’oiseau très faible, répété”. Flaubert paints a picture of biological life in constant flux, a dynamic forest whose appearance of stillness proves illusory to the attentive observer.

The mystery of the forest’s life, both omnipresent and remote, relates to the dual nature of light reflecting through the woods, “à de certaines places éclairant la lisière du bois” even as it “laissait les fonds dans l’ombre”. Here, Flaubert leaves his characters behind, sacrificing the narrative to completely dedicate himself to the descriptive mode as his forest portrait begins to resemble a landscape painting. The ground near the author’s eye becomes

“les premiers plans”, where the light was “atténuée...par une sorte de crépuscule”, even as “les lointains” are bathed in “des vapeurs violettes” and “une clarté blanche”. Flaubert also describes the changing conditions of the sunlight throughout the day, akin to landscapists who sought to represent the same scene under diverse conditions. Here, the midday sun offers a stunning spectacle of reflecting light, “tombant d’aplomb sur les larges verdure”, giving the forest’s plant life an appearance of mineral splendor. The cascading light “éclaboussait” the biophysical material, flowing against trees, leaves, and grass to create “des gouttes argentines à la pointe des branches”, “[des] traînées d’émeraude” along the ground, and even “des taches d’or” upon the forest floor, covered with “feuilles mortes”. Completing the painting, one could contemplate the sky, source of light and life, “en se renversant la tête”, in between “les cimes des arbres”. These massive trees, catching the sun’s light among their upper branches and reflecting it throughout the understory, inevitably draw one’s attention thanks to their “altitude démesurée”, and with their “airs de patriarches et d’empereurs”, they appear as the rulers of the forest. Here, one begins seeing the trees as architectural marvels, their stretching branches and “long fûts” combining to resemble “des arcs de triomphe”, even as some “poussés dès le bas obliquement” appear vulnerable, like “des colonnes près de tomber”. The author reads the forest like an architectural treasure, ancient and strong yet susceptible to decay and ruin under the forces of natural change or human destruction, not unlike the reading Victor Hugo provided of Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral in his eponymous novel. Akin to the gothic cathedrals France had begun preserving or restoring¹⁸³, Fontainebleau can be seen as a national monument, full of history and wonder, fragile to abuse and neglect, and worthy of the public’s admiration and protection.

The forest is a place where a diversity of life flourishes, occupying all biological niches and presenting itself in a great variety of material forms. While Flaubert has just

¹⁸³ See Fermigier, « Mérimée et l’inspection des monuments historiques », *op. cit.*, p. 1599-1614 and Bruno Foucart, « Viollet-le-Duc et la restauration », *ibid.*, p. 1615-1643.

emphasized the fragile strength of Fontainebleau's column-like trees, their architectural essence gives way to a softer, more flowing materiality as the author recognizes dynamic movements throughout the forest. In certain spots, the forest canopy, supported by a "foule de grosses lignes verticales", would "s'entr'ouvr[ir]", allowing one to witness an unfolding of "d'énormes flots verts", forming "bosselages inégaux jusqu'à la surface des vallées". These open areas, perhaps formed through natural processes or encouraged via planned deforestation, allow for other species to flourish, without the dominance of the high trees. Distinctions between liquid, solid, and gaseous states of matter blur, as the trees open up their uniform cover to allow air and light to reach the ground that seems to flow like water or shuffle in the breeze, all hinting toward the way these material states relate intimately to one another in the forest geography. As the two lovers stand "sur quelque éminence du terrain", the movement of all these forms, materials, and energies throughout the landscape allows them to "sent[ir]...leur entrer dans l'âme comme l'orgueil d'une vie plus libre" (396-397). The dynamic circulating of these forces, the ability of materials to simultaneously occupy different states of matter, and the interconnections between the various energies of the forest enable Frédéric and Rosanette to feel their own beings expanded through "une surabondance des forces" (397) and to experience "une joie sans cause" resulting from their newfound relation to the living forest geography.

The sense of dynamism and relational identity applies equally powerfully to the forest's most salient feature: its trees. While at first glance they seem monotone or monospecific, Fontainebleau in fact presents impressive "diversité des arbres" which "faisait un spectacle changeant". The forest includes "[des] hêtres à l'écorce blanche et lisse", "des frênes", "cépées de charmes", "des houx", "de minces bouleaux", and "[des] pins". Of course, the oak reigns supreme in Fontainebleau, where one could see "des chênes rugueux, énormes", taking on improbable shapes as they "se convulsaient, s'étiraient du sol" in search

of the sun's vital light. Even as they sought to ensure their own existence, they create a community, as the oak branches “s'étreignaient les uns les autres”, and “pareils à des torses” the mighty trunks communicate “avec leurs bras nus”, casting out “des appels de désespoir, des menaces furibondes, comme un groupe de Titans immobilisés dans leur colère”. Like the Goncourts, Flaubert sees a majestic, almost mythic forest full of passion, both immobile and dynamic, a frozen glimpse in time of a powerful species in constant communication with its environment¹⁸⁴. Involved in an eternal, though futile fight for life, the rugged oaks convulse desperately, seeking comfort in their agony. Even if the war against decay will be lost (just as the people of Paris fight a futile battle against the forces of repression), they represent Flaubert's vision of a universal law: the natural order that overcomes political strife through the constant interplay of life and death¹⁸⁵. While these mighty trees may inspire feelings of solidity or defeatism, there is nonetheless a dynamic lightness that prevails throughout these groves, inspired by the sense of movement and interconnection between the trees, sunlight, and the forest floor.

Throughout their journey, Frédéric and Rosanette usually act as casually interested tourists. Occasionally, they witness other purposes of Fontainebleau, such as when they “traversaient des clairières monotones”, not natural clearings but rather the aftermath of the Forest Administration's clear-cutting technique, where only “un baliveau ça et là” remained, young reserve trees intended to serve toward the next harvest. The couple discovers another industrial impact on the forest, first through the sound of “un bruit de fer”, which rings out in “des coups drus et nombreux”, auditory evidence confirmed by the sight of “une compagnie de carriers battant les roches”, located “au flanc d'une colline”, perhaps one of the hills in the

¹⁸⁴ For more on the sensitivity of trees and plants, see Emmanuel Coccia, *La vie des plantes*, Paris, Payot, Bibliothèque Rivages, 2016; Peter Wohlleben, Corinne Tresca (translator), *La vie secrète des arbres*, Les Arènes, 2017; and Fleur Daugey, *L'intelligence des plantes*, Éditions Ulmer, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ This idea was dear to Flaubert: “J'aime surtout la végétation qui pousse dans les ruines, cet envahissement de la nature [...] me réjouit d'une joie profonde et large. La Vie vient se replacer sur la Mort ; elle fait pousser l'herbe dans les crânes pétrifiés”. Lettre to Louise Colet, 26/8/1846, *Corr. I* (éd. J. Bruneau), 1973, p. 314-315.

Apremont heights. In certain regions, the trees give way as the roches “se multipliaient de plus en plus, et finissaient par emplir tout le paysage”, taking on diverse forms, sometimes “cubiques comme des maisons” or “plates comme des dalles”. Once again, Flaubert assimilates this landscape with France’s national monuments, although here they appear “telles que les ruines méconnaissables et monstrueuses de quelque cité disparue”, announcing both the origin and the ruin of urban society. Meanwhile, he adopts the same marine metaphor as the Goncourts to describe these rock formations, seeing a furious sea solidified in mineral form: “la furie même de leur chaos fait plutôt rêver à des volcans, à des déluges, aux grands cataclysmes ignorés”. Contemplating these mobile landscapes thus offers a window into the past and a glimpse at their evolving future; they become “ghost-spaces”, providing hints to their geological and hydrological histories to the attentive observer and revealing these areas as relational geographies, formed from a tight association between water, rock, and time. Frédéric again errs in seeing unchanging landscapes from “le commencement du monde” that “resteraient ainsi jusqu’à la fin”, denying the role of environmental history, and Rosanette is forced to “détourn[er] la tête” as the spectacle “la rend[ait] folle”, moving off to “cueillir des bruyères” (397-398).

Suddenly, after more than two pages of descriptions in the *imparfait*, which gives the account a timeless, dream-like character, Flaubert returns to the use of the *passé simple*, again announcing singular, discrete events. Still, Flaubert neglects to specify during which day the recounted events occur, preferring the more ambiguous “un jour” (398). The two lovers “arrivèrent un jour à mi-hauteur d’une colline tout en sable”, with the double instance of the indefinite article serving to blur the likely location of the “sables d’Arbonne”. Finally, they seem truly alone of human presence, finding the hill’s surface “vierge de pas”, yet “rayée en ondulations symétriques”, the sandy area recalling the regularity of the ocean’s waves. The marine metaphor is extended to englobe “des roches ayant de vagues formes d’animaux”, like

“tortues avançant la tête, phoques qui rampent, hippopotames et ours”. Perhaps recalling the dual geological-hydrological history of Fontainebleau’s bedrock, soils, and sands, once completely covered by a sea, all these rocky features appear akin to “des promontoires sur le lit desséché d’un océan”. These zoologico-marine metaphors combine familiar and foreign elements to help the observer or reader to simultaneously relate to the place Flaubert describes while helping to cultivate one’s geographical imaginary. The use of such metaphors also harkens back to the Goncourts’ *Manette Salomon*, an important hypotext for Flaubert, and reinforces the relational character of this geography. Meanwhile, spatiotemporal contours dissolve as the landscape recovers a marine mobility, while its sands, “frappés par le soleil, éblouissaient”, cause a zoological reawakening, “les bêtes parurent remuer”. Provoked by a “vibration de la lumière”, the renewed animal life frightens the couple, who “s’en retourn[a] vite, fuyant le vertige”. The couple neglects the chance to witness the natural dynamism of the diverse forest geography.

Flaubert’s diffuse descriptive spatiality ends by taking over even the bodies of his characters, especially Rosanette’s. Indeed, Frédéric no longer distinguishes “la fraîcheur de sa peau” from the “grand parfum des bois”. Rosanette becomes assimilated with the surrounding biophysical material; objectified as “la taille”, the young woman’s words fuse with “les oiseaux [qui] gazouillaient”. The presence of Diane returns, symbolized here by “une biche” and “son faon”, and Rosanette implicitly accepts her association with Diane, even though this goddess of chastity, fecundity, and maternity incarnates virtues that the woman has never known. Rosanette “aurait voulu courir après, pour l’embrasser”, to become part of Diane’s sylvestrian cortege. Both Frédéric and Rosanette begin adopting the natural rhythms of the forest, linking their bodies and minds to the biophysical matter surrounding them. Forsaking their reckless pace, the curiosities they now “se montraient” were surprisingly ordinary, banal features of the forest, like “des fils de la Vierge suspendus aux buissons, des trous pleins

d'eau au milieu des pierres, un écureuil sur les branches, le vol de deux papillons qui les suivaient". All these events are recounted through the *imparfait*, reinforcing the notion of duration while placing everything within an undefined chronology.

With the brief intervention of the *passé simple*, and the removal of the couple to the auberge, the narrative's and Frédéric's observational gaze averts from the forest geography to more fully focus on the subject of his desire, Rosanette. The mediocre quality of the dinner, unlike Coriolis, did not bother the lovers; in fact, it only "augmentait le plaisir, l'illusion", making them feel even farther from the reality of their lives and the turmoil in Paris, going as far as to "se cro[ire] presque au milieu d'un voyage, en Italie, dans leur lune de miel". Following dinner, the two "allèrent se promener le long de la berge", as they quickly reenter a dream-like realm under the domination of the *imparfait*. Walking along the riverbank offers a more open horizon, a clearer vision of "le ciel d'un bleu tendre" that "s'appuyait...sur la dentelure des bois". The lovers thus move in a liminal space, on the edge between several ecosystems. The hybrid space allows them to witness evidence of France's relational geography, all at work in one interconnected landscape. In short order, they witness the forest's "dentelure des bois" that helps form the mixing between biosphere and atmosphere; "la prairie", symbol of gently-rolling grass and pasturelands; "un clocher dans un village", markers of France's small towns and of the country's religious and architectural history; and "le toit d'une maison" situated along the river, representing a rugged side of France's rurality, not directly connected to farming or agriculture, but more dependent on hunting, *glanage*, fishing, and subsistence gardening. As for the river itself, the Seine, which symbolically connects the lovers to their Parisian home, it here appears "immobile dans toute la longueur de sa sinuosité", another hopeful misinterpretation that the lovers could exist outside of history, during a fairytale "lune de miel".

So complete is the fantasy, so convincing the illusion, that Frédéric “ne doutait pas qu’il ne fût heureux pour jusqu’à la fin de ses jours”. Having a woman he desired to himself for the first time in his life¹⁸⁶, the young man believes “son bonheur” was “inhérent...à la personne de cette femme”. The forest has left the pair “altérés d’eux-mêmes” (400), giving them a new outlook on life, themselves, and the possibilities of uninhibited love. Even the distant sound of “des roulements de tambour”, signaling “la générale que l’on battait dans les villages”¹⁸⁷ to rise up against the Parisian insurrection, could not interfere with the plenitude Frédéric felt in the presence of “leur amour et de la nature éternelle”. Despite their newfound intimacy, the romantic interlude seems destined to fade, as personal shame acts as “des précipices ou des fanges qui empêchent de poursuivre”, the challenge of mutual comprehension prevents sharing “des confidences les plus intimes”, and the difficulty to “exprimer exactement quoi que ce soit” interferes with the possibility of a “union complète”. Returning to the standard flow of time, “le dimanche matin”¹⁸⁸, Frédéric sees his friend Dussardier’s name “sur une liste de blessés”, immediately announcing his intention to leave in support of this wounded anti-revolutionary, signaling the end of the couple’s Edenic voyage through the forest. Though a careful reading of the couple’s confusing chronology in Fontainebleau allows one to posit a visit of only three days, in terms of their “temps vécu”¹⁸⁹, the lovers experience a “durée existentielle qualitativement éprouvée” out of step with chronological time, producing new “rythmes psychobiologiques” that change their vision of themselves and each other.

¹⁸⁶ The evidence comes from Flaubert himself, from his preparatory *scénarios*: « Il emmène la Maréchale à Fontainebleau. Là ils sont seuls, loin du bruit. Pour la première fois de sa vie, Fr. a une femme à lui. » Quoted in Masson, *op. cit.*, p. 102. From BN, NAF 17611, f°92.

¹⁸⁷ This “appel de Cavaignac”, following the Assemblée’s proclamation of “l’état de siège” in Paris, occurred Saturday 24 June, as the General called on the help of nearby regiments and of provincial national guardsmen to the defense of the capital. Masson shows that the lovers had left for Fontainebleau only two days earlier, 22 June, the same day the *ateliers nationaux* were closed. Cf., Masson, « Dans la forêt profonde », *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁸⁸ This Sunday morning, as Masson has shown, could be none other than Sunday 25 June, date of Cavaignac’s general offensive against the “insurgés” in Paris. *Ibid.*, p. 103-104.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

What should one retain from this Fontainebleau episode where a diffuse spatiality dominates the narrative, preventing the characters from partaking in 1848's historical tumult? In fact, removing his characters from Paris allows Flaubert to elaborate a different vision of history; far from the political finalities each camp trumpeted, Flaubert's history remains incomplete, since it "n'est que la réflexion du présent sur le passé"¹⁹⁰ and is subsumed within natural history. Flaubert's topographical descriptions take the reader on a journey through time and space, at the intersection of geology and history. Moving beyond *pittoresque* interlude, the Fontainebleau episode's descriptive mode helps reveal the heart of the novel's narrative. Flaubert seeks to pierce the surface of visible reality, with its illusory separation between beings and things, to rediscover the primordial kinship of life on Earth. Flaubert's style casts an ironic light on the stereotypical touristic explorations of Fontainebleau forest while exposing his characters to moments of immersion within the landscape.

In his descriptions of Fontainebleau, Flaubert takes us into a complex forest, where the tree's materiality represents just one part of its existence, composed of invisible relations, constant transformations, and profound memory. Literary style, especially one as honed as Flaubert's, reveals the world's hidden dynamism, a way of accessing the deeper reality of the world. For artists like Flaubert and Rousseau, Fontainebleau becomes the "tremplin", the means by which we can discover the "virtualités secrètes" of existence and the kinship of all life on Earth. In reading Flaubert, in engaging with one of Rousseau's paintings, we too gain in attentiveness and consciousness to the world and our being within it, showing us a world where existence and memory do not end at the periphery of our physical bodies but extend relationally throughout the Earth and its living beings.

¹⁹⁰ Letter to Mme Roger des Genettes, Novembre 1864, *Corr.* III, 1991, p. 414-415.

Chapter Two: The Mountain Conquered? Alpine Geographies in Literature, Art, and Science

The second half of the 19th century saw the flourishing of the practice of “*alpinisme*”, an enthusiastic desire to ascend and “conquer” the principal peaks of the Alps. While the high mountain had been feared and denigrated as an inherently inhumane, deadly space throughout most of European history, the wave of “*ascensionnistes*” helped to cultivate a different relationship with these high mountain summits. Many of the earliest mountaineers combined scientific concerns with their interest in alpinism. As the practice gained in popularity, elite English tourists and sporting enthusiasts became eager to engage in a physical and psychological battle with the harsh Alpine conditions, sometimes abandoning scientific justifications and practicing alpinism as a sport or race to achieve what had never before been done. Although most of the peaks of the Alps had been summited by the middle of the 19th century¹⁹¹, the Matterhorn (le Cervin) was not “conquered” until 1865, when a group of alpinists led by Edward Whymper¹⁹², an English painter and accomplished climber, realized the feat on 14 July. The triumph, however, was short-lived, as a disastrous slip and broken rope on the descent led to the deaths of four members of the *cordée*, including the French guide Michel Croz¹⁹³.

Did the popularity of *alpinisme* lead to a changing relationship to the mountain? The notion of “conquest” at the heart of alpinism is not totally at odds with other attempts to apprehend the mountain world, from the arts (literary, pictorial, photographic) to the sciences (geography, geology). These disciplines saw the mountain differently, whether in its

¹⁹¹ The first ascension of Mont Blanc occurred on 8 August 1786 by the Chamoniards Michel Paccard and Jacques Balmat. The Swiss naturalist Hector-Bénédict de Saussure (perhaps the greatest of all alpinists) followed one year later, also guided by Balmat. Despite its early conquest, the highest peak in the Alps would maintain its fearsome status throughout the 19th century. (Cf., Claire-Eliane Engel, *La Littérature alpestre en France et en Angleterre aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, Chambéry, Librairie Dardel, 1930, p. 71.)

¹⁹² See Edward Whymper, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*, Second Edition, London, J. Murray, 1871.

¹⁹³ Engel, *op. cit.*, p. 221. See Whymper’s personal account of the ascent and disaster, “The Ascent of the Matterhorn”, in *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*, Ten Speed Press, 1981 [1871], p. 150-155 and “The Descent of the Matterhorn”, p. 155-162.

traditional role of inactive *décor*, the possible foreground of artistic representations, or a place with its own meaning and value. This chapter analyzes alpine conquest in representations of the mountain in three major texts from the second half of the 19th century. We will first study Gautier's *Vacances du lundi* (1862-1869) series of travel essays in the Alps, where the writer embraces the challenge of an aesthetic "conquest" of the mountain. Next, Alphonse Daudet's comic satire of alpinism *Tartarin sur les Alpes* presents mountaineering as cliché farce but nonetheless offers the possibility of renewing our vision of the alpine landscape. We will conclude with Maupassant's "L'Auberge", a short story that mobilizes fear, anguish, and the supernatural to represent an animate mountain geography whose dynamism renders its physical conquest impossible. Uniting these literary texts is the notion that careful observation of the landscape allows us to envision the human place within a wider world, not as setting to be conquered, but as a living geography of which we are part.

1. Discovering the mountain: Scientific research and artistic exploration

Literary representations of alpine landscapes developed in the context of a growing scientific interest in the mountain from disciplines such as geography, geology, glaciology, cartography, botany, and mineralogy. At the same time, traditional views of the mountain persisted and evolved, both interacting and colliding with the expanding scientific knowledge of this geography. Artists, photographers, and writers all participated in the vogue, ambitiously seeking to figure this most forbidding environment in new, innovative ways. What were the principal scientific discoveries regarding mountain environments from this period and how did they contribute to and interact with the figurative arts? To what extent did these various approaches lead to a renewed understanding and/or appreciation of the mountain in human consciousness?

From 1873-1880, Charles Durier, member of the Société de Géographie and the Club alpin français, dedicated three works to the history of Mont Blanc, and more generally, to the

natural and literary history of the mountain and its place in human thought¹⁹⁴. His works trace the emergence of a new appreciation for and willingness to engage with mountain geographies, phenomena that accelerated during the second half of the 19th century. Durier places the origin of this newfound interest at the end of the 18th century, with the rise of academic geology:

L'époque de la découverte du Mont-Blanc n'est autre en effet que le point de départ d'une science nouvelle et d'une façon nouvelle de juger les beautés pittoresques de la nature.

La science nouvelle, c'est la géologie, c'est-à-dire cette science, comme on l'a très-bien dit, qui, par l'étude des terrains, de leurs soulèvements, de la faune et de la flore fossiles, est en voie de reconstituer l'histoire de notre planète¹⁹⁵.

The great instigator of this new scientific endeavor was Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, a Genevan naturalist and geologist whose enthusiasm for mountain landscapes led him to make “voyages répétés au Mont-Blanc”¹⁹⁶ that contributed to a new importance for alpine geology in the understanding of the earth's history. The work of geologists signaled one of the most profound shifts in our understandings of the earth, demonstrating that the planet was not fixed, but constantly changing. The earth itself had a history that begged to be discovered. Saussure's work showed the usefulness of mountains for a number of scientific disciplines, revealing the mountain as a great natural laboratory of scientific discovery. His boundless energy trekking across the entire Alpine range encouraged many to take up study of the mountains, while pushing others to discover the high peaks for non-scientific reasons like sport, pleasure, or artistic inspiration.

Saussure's “discovery” of Mont Blanc and the rest of the Alps also contributed to “une révolution du goût pittoresque” (Durier 5). This revolution, building off of Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* in 1761, reached a new audience with the success of Saussure's work,

¹⁹⁴ Charles Durier, *Histoire du Mont-Blanc*, Paris, Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1873 ; *Le Mont-Blanc*, Paris, Librairie Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1877 (2^e édition, 1880).

¹⁹⁵ Durier, *Histoire du Mont-Blanc*, 1873, p. 5.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

whose followers tended to adopt a more rigorous engagement with the mountain landscape than did those who sought to emulate Julie and Saint-Preux¹⁹⁷. Rousseau's work only dealt superficially with the high mountains, while Saussure was part of the second party to ever reach Mont Blanc's summit in 1787. Saussure's interaction with the high mountain was not simply a "mode", a way to "jouer à la nature" (Durier 12), but a labor-intensive effort to understand these imposing environments. While his scientific contribution cannot be understated, Durier shows that Saussure's literary merit was no less profound, declaring him the "Homère des Alpes", capable of rendering "l'impression qui pénètre l'âme en présence [des] sommets glacés". Saussure, Durier declares, is at once the "grand savant" and the "grand peintre" of the high mountains.

Of course, were scientists to benefit from the natural laboratory of the Alps, access to the high peaks would need to be codified, secured, mapped, and planned. Generations of interested parties, including geologists, geographers, cartographers, state planners, and climbers, took to the challenge, working toward the goal of a "topographie exacte"¹⁹⁸ of the Alps. This new interest in scientific precision replaced old dogmas that condemned the mountains as "accursed". Indeed, Mercator's *Grand Atlas* of 1595, though a cartographic marvel for its day, designated Mont Blanc with the name "la Mont Maudite"¹⁹⁹. Durier ties this toponym to the low-lying town of Geneva and its regional influence, citing Saussure's *Voyages dans les Alpes*: "Le petit peuple de notre ville et des environs, donne au Mont-Blanc et aux montagnes couvertes de neige qui l'entourent, le nom de *montagnes maudites*"²⁰⁰. Though Geneva is a city surrounded on nearly all sides by mountains, the eternally snow-

¹⁹⁷ *La Nouvelle Héloïse* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau would exert a large influence for many decades on representations of the mountain. In the Haut-Valais, Rousseau "rencontre un type de société proche de son idéal social", showing the Valaisains as "des êtres simples, honnêtes, tranquilles", who form an ideal mountain community. See Michel Ballerini, *Le Roman de montagne en France*, Arthaud, 1973, p. 17-19 for an examination of Rousseau's enduring influence on representations of mountain geography and psychology.

¹⁹⁸ Durier, *Histoire du Mont-Blanc*, 1877, p. 25.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15-16.

²⁰⁰ Saussure, *Voyages dans les Alpes*, § 732. Quoted in Durier, *Histoire*, 1877, p. 19-20.

covered peaks of the high Alps remain at a comfortable distance, with the more gentle slopes of the Jura and the Salève occupying the immediate proximity. Durier shows that the Genevans, at least before the Enlightenment and the breakneck pace of scientific development in the 19th century, remained a superstitious population, adopting widely held views about the danger, even the inherent evil in “cursed” places like mountains. These Genevans, along with most Europeans, chose to not see the mountains, or as Durier puts it: “on voit mal, on voit sans comprendre ce qui n’intéresse pas, et les montagnes n’intéressaient personne, pas même les géographes”²⁰¹. Those that lived forever in the shadow of the great mountains, however, like the inhabitants of Chamonix, treated the peaks with more respect, “trop familiarisés avec les sommets couverts de neige pour en faire des contes ridicules”²⁰². The Chamoniards had always called the mountain in whose shadow they lived “Mont Blanc”, while the residents of Savoy knew it as “Glacière”²⁰³. In little time, this more nuanced, respectful vision of the mountain would gain favor throughout Europe.

Following Saussure, a new generation of mountain climbers began to attack the slopes of the Alps, leading geographers to again dedicate themselves to accurately mapping the range. This combination of scientific and practical concerns led to a flourishing of Alpine cartography, with both geographers and tourists working to map the exact nature of the Alpine terrain²⁰⁴. Other scientists set about studying diverse phenomena in the laboratory of the high mountains, especially in the fields of glaciology, meteorology, and climatology. In time, artists and writers followed these initial explorers, visiting the mountain in search of the sublime or a new impulsion for the arts. Élisée Reclus, a geographer imprisoned during the Commune, combined these goals when he sought the mountains as an “asile”²⁰⁵ from political

²⁰¹ Durier, *Histoire*, p. 20.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 24-25.

²⁰⁵ Élisée Reclus, *Histoire d’une montagne*, Paris, Hetzel, 1880, p. 4. Reclus had already written many geographical studies on alpine environments, including a 26-page introduction entitled « Géographie » to

persecution, a living laboratory for his geographical work, and a place that would inspire his evocative writing style to produce popular works of literary geography like *Histoire d'une montagne* (1880). Reclus' writing, to which we will refer periodically throughout this chapter, aims to discover the mountain's artistic, literary, political, and geographical attributes, summed up by the geographer's simple statement of love for "la montagne elle-même"²⁰⁶.

Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), a Swiss naturalist at the Université de Neuchâtel, made several pioneering discoveries during his many explorations in the Alps. Agassiz was interested in the origin of erratics, large masses of rock seemingly dropped down at random, differing in size and composition from the neighboring rocks where they came to rest. Agassiz would spend several summers studying phenomena such as the origin, structure, and movement of glacial ice and the displacement of "erratic" blocks of rock. Published in 1840, Agassiz's work *Études sur les glaciers*²⁰⁷, is a pivotal moment for the way we understand the planet's history. Agassiz made the surprising claim that in a relatively recent past, far from having its glaciers confined to the high Alps, Switzerland was akin to another Greenland, with vast glacial fields covering river valleys, plains, and even reaching many peaks in the Jura range. This claim became the basis for later discoveries in the Scottish Highlands, which led Agassiz to posit the idea of the "ice age", a period when "la terre s'est couverte d'une immense nappe de glace"²⁰⁸, which covered "toutes les inégalités de la surface de l'Europe", including "toute l'Amérique septentrionale". The advance and later retreat of most of those glaciers profoundly shaped the earth as we know it today, lowering and then raising global sea levels; creating and removing "land bridges" allowing for massive biological migrations;

Adolphe Joanne's *Itinéraire descriptif et historique de la Savoie*, Paris, Hachette, 1860. *Histoire d'une montagne* was first published as a 27-part *feuilleton* in *La Science illustrée*, Louis Figuier's popular magazine from 1875-1876, while Reclus was still officially banned from France. The definitive volume edition was published by P.-J. Hetzel in 1880.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰⁷ Louis Agassiz, *Études sur les glaciers*, Neuchâtel, 1840.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 304.

carving out river valleys; filling in depressions with melt water to create huge freshwater lakes; depositing glacial drift and glacial erratics throughout landscapes; leveling hills and mountains; and forming giant ridges, moraines, and drumlins. Without a doubt, Agassiz's discoveries are some of the most profound in the history of geology.

John Tyndall, an Irish physicist, conducted foundational work on the causes of the movement of glaciers. Tyndall's studies, published as *The Glaciers of the Alps*²⁰⁹ in 1860, posited the theory of "regelation", picking up on earlier work by Michael Faraday²¹⁰, as a complex mechanism permitting glacial flow. Glaciers exist in constant states of construction – via snowfall, the condensation of water vapor, and freezing of water – and destruction, produced by melting and evaporation. The water molecules that make up the glacier are in constant flux; these dynamic processes lead to an ice mass in perpetual motion. Tyndall also showed how under the intense pressures exerted by the ice mass, the melting point of water could be lowered, leading to melting at the base levels of the glacier, and refreezing as the pressure lessened. Liquid water could flow through the numerous cracks, veins, and fissures in the ice, leading to the glacier's slow, but inexorable march. Tyndall was himself an accomplished mountain climber, devoting the first part of his text to a "narrative" explanation of "the life of an Alpine explorer", relating his experiences climbing Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, respectively the two highest massifs in the Alps. The question of glacial flow would fascinate Tyndall's contemporaries, leading to fierce debates surrounding its physical properties and some outlandish representations. In Michelet's *La Montagne*, for instance, the author relates a scene witnessed through a Grindelwald hotel window of the terrifying march of an enormous glacier advancing directly toward him, seemingly possessed of its own will

²⁰⁹ John Tyndall, *The Glaciers of the Alps*, London, 1860.

²¹⁰ Michael Faraday, "Note on Regelation", in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, Vol. 10 (1859-1860), pp. 440-450.

seeking entry through the open window²¹¹. While the story is certainly exaggerated, the idea is important: far from inactive masses, glaciers are subject to dynamic processes leading to constant motion, an idea that had made its way from the sciences to history and the arts. Rather than being inert, glaciers contain as much force as the sea, both composed of flowing, powerful masses of water.

1.1 Gautier and the (im)possibility of mountain art

As an established art critic, journalist, poet, and novelist, Théophile Gautier was part of a generation of artists and writers who journeyed through the mountains seeking new inspiration for their art. Gautier, however, distinguished himself not only by relating his experiences, but by producing profound meditations on the capacity of art and literature to represent environments as monumental as the high mountains. Appearing during his life in various newspapers and journals, the full collection of Gautier's travels through the mountains was published as *Les Vacances du lundi* in 1869²¹². These essays give us a privileged look into Gautier's conception of art and literature, along with their respective figurative potential. His work represents a sustained effort to understand the awesomeness of alpine environments and the human place in relation to them. Still not commonly studied, Gautier's essays are essential to building an understanding of the vision of the mountain during the second half of the 19th century.

An 1862 voyage took Gautier to the peaks of Savoy and Switzerland. The recent annexation of the former by the Second Empire brought with it an upwelling of popular

²¹¹ Jules Michelet, *La Montagne*, Paris, Librairie Internationale, 1868, p. 18 : « [...] on ouvre une fenêtre... Je me retourne. Cette croisée, tout inondée de lumière m'apparaît dans son cadre étroit plus que pleine, débordante de je ne sais quoi d'énorme, éclatant, en mouvement, et qui venait droit à moi. [...] C'était un chaos lumineux, qui semblait tout près déjà des vitres, voulait entrer. »

²¹² Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi. Tableaux de montagne*, Paris, G. Charpentier, 1881. The first essays appeared in *Le Moniteur universel*, n° 167, 16 juin 1862 and the first volume edition appeared in 1869. See Jouty's introduction to the 1994 reedition; Alain Guyot, "Les Vacances du lundi, tableaux de montagnes de Théophile Gautier ou comment le journal fit tomber le récit de voyage dans la poésie", *Recherches et travaux*, N° 65, 2005, p. 56; and Pierre-Henry Frangne, « L'image déhiscente : Théophile Gautier et la photographie de montagne des frères Bisson », *Études photographiques*, N° 25, mai 2010, p. 210-242.

interest in the mountainous region, accompanied by infrastructure projects, an official imperial visit, and a surge in mountain tourism²¹³. Gautier, however, focused more on the emotional impact that these magnificent peaks could exert on the mind and body, the view of which would build linkages across time and space, helping to contextualize human existence on Earth:

Quand on habite les villes ou les plaines, il est facile d'oublier qu'on circule à travers l'insondable espace, emporté par une planète gravitant autour du soleil avec une prodigieuse vitesse. L'épiderme de l'astre a disparu sous l'encombrement des bâtisses et la culture humaine, et il faut un effort d'imagination pour croire que cette terre vue de Mars ou de Vénus prenne sur l'azur noir du ciel l'aspect d'un globe d'or ou d'argent, au reflet du phare central de notre monde. Les données, si précises pourtant, de l'astronomie semblent presque chimériques, et il vous prend des envies de revenir au système de Ptolémée, qui faisait de notre chétif habitacle le noyau même de l'univers. Les grandes montagnes aident à faire comprendre que la terre est bien réellement un corps céleste suspendu dans l'éther, ayant pris sa figure actuelle après mille révolutions cosmogoniques, une énorme boule de feu qu'enveloppe une mince pellicule solidifiée où peut-être la vie animée n'est qu'un accident temporaire, et l'homme qu'un parasite menacé de disparaître au moindre cataclysme neptunien ou plutonien.²¹⁴

The mountain's grandeur reconnected the spectator with our place in the universe, confronting us with our fundamental fragility, but also with the wonder and mystery of life on Earth.

Gautier's enthusiasm for the mountain, however, quickly cedes to his pessimism about art's capacity to represent this feeling:

Aucune description de poète, pas même le lyrisme de lord Byron dans *Manfred*, ne peut donner l'idée de ce prodigieux spectacle qui restitue à la terre sa beauté d'astre, défigurée par l'homme. Les couleurs du peintre, si un peintre montait jusque-là, se glaceraient sur sa palette. Eh bien ! ce que ni l'écrivain ni l'artiste ne sauraient faire, la photographie vient de l'exécuter. (51)

²¹³ See Numa Broc, « La montagne, la carte et l'alpinisme », in *Images de la montagne : de l'artiste cartographe à l'ordinateur*, Catalogue de l'exposition de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, 1984, p. 111-124: « L'année 1860 marque un véritable tournant : l'annexion de la Savoie, le voyage de Napoléon III à Chamonix, la publication de l'*Itinéraire descriptif et historique de la Savoie* de Joanne, mettent la haute montagne à la mode » (115).

²¹⁴ Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi*, « Vues de Savoie et de Suisse », Paris, G. Charpentier, 1881, p. 49. All future citations from this edition will appear in parentheses.

Although poetry and painting fail to capture the mountain's essence, Gautier places his hope in the relatively new art of photography as the only way to figure alpine grandeur accurately²¹⁵.

In his view, the limited perspective afforded by a painting's frame unjustly renders the mountain's majesty, whose "dimension dépasse toute échelle" (52). The mountain's fundamental verticality "se redresse devant vous", presenting another problem for the painter's eye, accustomed to a landscape that "fui[t] à l'horizon" in a gentle, horizontal plane. Worse, the mountain's colorations "déconcertent la palette" (53) since they "sortent de la gamme terrestre et prennent des irisations prismatiques". Gautier's chromatic sensitivity detects a palette of colors "irréductibles aux moyens de l'homme", including tones of "améthyste et de saphir, des verts d'aigue-marine, des blancs d'argent et de perle, des roses d'une fraîcheur idéale", magnificent colors that contrast with the "bruns sombres, des verts veloutés, des noirs profonds et violents" that characterize humanity's typical Earth-art relationship. Gautier looks at the interplay of alpine forms and cascading rays of light and perceives a wonder impossible to capture with humanity's limited artistic talent, despite demonstrating his own magnificent descriptive ability. Indeed, his pronouncement goes one step further, declaring the high mountain definitively inaccessible to the means of art: "L'art, selon nous, ne monte pas plus haut que la végétation. Il s'arrête là où la dernière plante meurt en frissonnant. Au-delà, c'est l'inaccessible, l'éternel, l'infini, le domaine de Dieu" (53). At once mobilizing the Romantic register of the sublime, the figure of preterition, and his own feeling of awe in the midst of mountain majesty, Gautier claims literature and art incapable of bridging the disconnect between the mountain's grandeur and humanity's figurative talent. Shall we take his words at face value? It seems that for Gautier, the goal of the artist is to emulate, or even surpass photography rather than concede defeat. As Pierre-Henry Frangne

²¹⁵ For more on Gautier's « approche photographico-poétique » see Bernd Stiegler, « La Surface du monde : note sur Théophile Gautier », *Romantisme*, N° 105, 1999, p. 91-95.

astutely notes, Gautier conceives of mountain photography as “un modèle que l’écriture et la peinture doivent égaler en un mouvement d’autant plus spectaculaire qu’il est initialement pensé comme impossible”²¹⁶. In fact, his response to the challenge is a success: Sylvain Jouty, writer, critic, and historian of the mountain, goes so far as to suggest that “la magie propre au paysage montagnard n’a jamais été mieux rendue”²¹⁷.

Gautier directs his admiration for photography’s unique ability to represent the mountain toward the Bisson brothers, photographic pioneers who consecrated several studies to the high Alps. Their photographic ascension of Mont Blanc in 1860²¹⁸ serves as the model for Gautier’s praise of photographic mountain art. In a “vaste photographie” (55), the brothers capture the immensity of the mountain scene, “où vingt personnes ne s’aperçoivent pas”, yet revealing only “un pli de cette mer immobile, plus accidentée et plus houleuse que l’Océan dans ses fureurs”. One will immediately note the correspondence between the mountain and marine environments, conceived as raging, powerful masses of water. The photographic image, according to Gautier, reconnects the observer with the cosmic origin of this extreme environment: “l’ébullition cosmique refroidie depuis longtemps s’y lit en caractères irrécusables. [...] c’est la peau rugueuse de l’astre, l’épiderme même de la planète”. Gautier admits that this image only represents a “pli” of Mont Blanc’s vast glacial sea, “un fragment, une vague de la mer de glace” (56), yet this contingency bothers him less than painting’s limiting frame. Despite the limitation, photography is able to capture the myriad forms of the mountain, allowing the viewer to witness the “déchiqetures, ses cristallisations, ses milliards de prismes contrariés, travail immense que s’est donné la nature d’allier le détail infinitésimal à l’ensemble énorme et chaotique”. Above all, the photographic images offer a beautiful

²¹⁶ Pierre-Henry Frangne, “L’image déhiscente”, *op. cit.*

²¹⁷ Sylvain Jouty, « Le Voyage aux Alpes de Théophile Gautier », Préface, *Les Vacances du lundi*, Champ Vallon, 1994, p. 40.

²¹⁸ Bisson frères, *Haute-Savoie. Le mont Blanc et ses glaciers. Souvenir du voyage de LL. MM. L’empereur et l’impératrice, par MM. Bisson frères photographes de Sa Majesté l’empereur*, Paris, 1859-1860. See also the BnF exhibition on photography during the Second Empire: URL: <http://expositions.bnf.fr/napol/index.htm>

union between art and science: “Malgré tous les obstacles qu’il a entassés autour de lui, le mont Blanc n’a pu échapper à l’opiniâtre recherche de la science. Nous le tenons, farouche et seul, emprisonné dans le cadre étroit d’une planche photographique” (57). The work of the Bisson brothers, “digne d’illustrer le *Cosmos* d’Humboldt ou quelque traité de géologie” (58) signals the alliance of science and art, a new point of entry to the heretofore forbidden place of the high mountain.

Gautier’s pronouncement that art cannot exist above the tree line did not deter him from producing his own attempts at figuring the majesty of the mountains. Written in 1868, his essay “Le Mont Blanc”²¹⁹ represents a sustained effort to render the uniqueness in form, color, and geological wonder of the mountainous geography. Ultimately, the reader witnesses a demonstration of forces: the geological forces at work in constructing the mountain’s form combined with Gautier’s aesthetic force in rendering these magnificent forms.

Throughout the essay, Gautier emphasizes the long-time work of geology in fashioning the alpine environment: “Quelle merveilleuse variété de ton sur ces larges pans de terre redressés par les soulèvements géologiques ou mis à nu par les affaissements des vallées et le passage des eaux !” (150). Observing the mountain is to observe the history of the planet, to witness the slow passage of time, with its steady accumulation of materials and sudden catastrophic events combining to produce the great variety of mountainous forms. The work of time on various scales, from the slow sedimentation to the rapid collapsing of cliff faces, results in a great chromatic variety as well:

Depuis la froideur des gris jusqu’aux chaleurs des ocres et des terres de Sienne brûlées, depuis le vert noir des sapins jusqu’au vert-de-gris des mousses, toutes les teintes s’y trouvent, tantôt fondues, tantôt brusquement heurtées. Ici la montagne se revêt d’un épiderme de végétation ; là, dépouillée de sa peau et mise à nu comme un écorché, elle laisse voir les muscles, les veines et les nerfs de la terre (150).

²¹⁹ Gautier, « Le Mont Blanc », *Les Vacances du lundi*, op. cit., p. 141-239.

These dual threads, on one hand the tremendous diversity of colors, on the other the variety of physical forms, are the two threads that Gautier will pull on throughout his essay, contradicting his previous claim about irrepresentability by revealing the mountain as perhaps the artistic place *par excellence*. If an artist is someone who manipulates forms and colors with the intention of aesthetic investigation, the mountain is the place to undertake this discovery, constantly presenting new shapes and shades to the discerning eye.

Though Gautier produced only one written account of the Salon of 1867²²⁰, we might reasonably assume that the famous art critic would have seen there a striking landscape by Théodore Rousseau, *Vue du Mont-Blanc*²²¹ (fig. 4), begun in 1863 before being presented at the 1867 Salon shortly before his death, one year before Gautier's essay. Art historian Simon Kelly has called this painting "the crowning result of Rousseau's obsessive research in the last years of his life"²²². Gautier's explanation of chromatic variety and transitions, both slow and sudden, reads like an extended description of Rousseau's alpine masterpiece, characterized by gradually brightening colors, from the dark green, nearly black of foreground fir trees, to the light green-blond vineyards on the banks of Lake Léman's gentle blue-grey waters, culminating in the brilliant white of Mont Blanc's snowy summit and an "intense ultramarine blue"²²³ in the sky above. The viewer's eye can experience these chromatic shifts as gradual or violently sudden, depending on how the observer interacts with the alpine landscape. Rousseau experimented with a "novel technique of a preparatory layer of watercolor to achieve an enhanced tonal luminosity"²²⁴ to produce striking chromatic contrasts, and he

²²⁰ Gautier, like many critics, was consumed by the Exposition universelle held that same year, where Rousseau was elected president of the international painting jury. (Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 93)

²²¹ Cf., Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 202-203. The painting is likely a reworking of an earlier 1834 landscape of a similar view, *Vue de la chaîne du mont Blanc pendant une tempête*, held at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek museum in Copenhagen. The 1863-1867 oil on canvas is now held at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. <https://collections.artsia.org/art/6239/view-of-mont-blanc-seen-from-la-faucille-theodore-rousseau>

²²² Simon Kelly, "Théodore Rousseau's *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*", *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, Spring 2009.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

accented these effects by alternating between “very thin, near transparent layers” and more opaque touches of paint. Both Gautier and Rousseau emphasize chromatic and physical diversity as constitutive elements of alpine geography. The landscapist and writer confirm that alpine art is indeed possible, but that it requires intensive study of the geology and contrasting light effects of mountain landscapes.

Gautier’s reflections on mountain forms and colors deepens upon his first close-up view of Mont Blanc: “Au débouché de la vallée de Maglans, nous²²⁵ éprouvâmes un éblouissement d’admiration : le mont Blanc se découvrit soudain à nos regards, si splendidement magnifique, si en dehors des formes et des couleurs terrestres, qu’il nous sembla qu’on ouvrait devant nous à deux battants les portes du rêve” (153). An observer of Rousseau’s *Vue du Mont-Blanc* could experience a similar reaction if she focuses on the brilliantly white mountain summit. Viewed close-up, the summit of Rousseau’s Mont Blanc seems to radiate its brilliance throughout the surrounding atmosphere, even as the painter hints toward its valleys with gentle tones of blue-grey paint. Placed in the middle of the painting and dominating the landscape, Rousseau’s Mont Blanc remains in constant communication with the wider geography. As Greg Thomas suggests, Rousseau’s painting served a wider purpose, in producing a “topography that in itself instills ecological awareness, making plain the superhuman scale of the world”²²⁶ and highlighting the important connections between the Alps and Europe’s major river systems. Indeed, Rousseau represents Lake Léman as it nears its southwestern edge at Geneva narrowing into a riverine shape before resuming its course as the Rhone River where it is soon joined by the waters of Mont Blanc via the Arve.

²²⁵ Though Gautier uses the plural “nous” throughout his essay, he never identifies who he includes in the pronoun, offering only the laconic remark at the beginning of the essay: “Vers la fin de mai, une voiture partit d’une villa située près de Genève, emmenant une petite caravane de voyageurs unis par les liens du sang et de l’amitié”. Cf., Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

²²⁶ Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

Like Rousseau, Gautier's admiration of the mountain's chromatic qualities can be understood in terms of an artistic quest for ideal form and perfect color. Gautier is clearly moved by this "other-worldly" experience, as he relies on poetic images to render his subjective experience: "On eût dit un énorme fragment de la lune tombé là du haut ciel. L'éclat de la neige étincelante que frappait le soleil eût rendu noires toutes les comparaisons de la *Symphonie en blanc majeur*. C'était le blanc idéal, le blanc absolu, le blanc de lumière qui illumina le Christ sur le Thabor" (153). That Gautier would reference, negatively, his own poem "Symphonie en blanc majeur" is significant, since this work is dedicated to the search for ideal forms of art, especially to the symbolism associated with a perfect white, and the poetic effort to represent these ideal forms and colors. Gautier's conviction of having poetically represented an ideal white color evaporates in the presence of Mont Blanc's physical and chromatic perfection.

Gautier's poem, "Symphonie en blanc majeur" was originally published in 1849 in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes* and later included in the collection *Émaux et Camées* in 1852²²⁷. His poem sings the praises of an idealized "femme-cygne", "qui chez nous descend quelquefois", whose pure white color marvels the poet. Through a wide range of metaphors, Gautier evokes the ideal whiteness of the swan-woman, who is "blanche comme le clair de lune / Sur les glaciers dans les cieux froids", and whose breast, "neige moulée en globe" wins purity battles against "les camélias blancs / Et le blanc satin de sa robe". Her perfect skin is apparently composed of a mixture of "mica de neige vierge", "moelle de roseau", "hostie", and "cierge", while the poet wonders whether some combination of elements as diverse as a drop of the Milky Way galaxy, "le lis", "la blanche écume de la mer", "le marbre blanc", "l'ivoire", "l'hermine vierge", the white flowers of the "aubépine de mai", along with pale alabaster, the "duvet blanc de la colombe" could aptly mirror the marvelous figure he contemplates. The

²²⁷ Théophile Gautier, « Symphonie en blanc majeur », *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, Tome 1, 1 janvier 1849, p. 312-314.

most common register of comparison, however, is that of winter, with Gautier relying on a lexical field associated with the cold season, including snow, glaciers, ice, avalanche, and the frozen expanses of “des Groenlands et des Norvèges”. Many of these landscapes are associated with eternally frozen slopes of the high mountains, whose extreme conditions help preserve the cleanliness of pure white spaces. In the swan woman, Gautier seems to have discovered a white even more impeccable than this litany of examples, so pure it shames the most unsullied landscapes, a brilliance that Mont Blanc would nonetheless surpass nearly twenty years later. Rereading this poem makes Gautier’s self-reference even more surprising, especially considering the way with which he repositions nature as the depository of ideal colors and forms. Mont Blanc profoundly upsets Gautier’s conviction of art’s supremacy over nature.

The magnificence of the scene is such that Gautier denies language’s ability to fully express it, again resorting to the figure of preterition:

Ce mélange de nuages et de neige, ce chaos d’argent, ces vagues de lumière se brisant en écume de blancheur, ces phosphorescences diamantées voudraient, pour être exprimées, des mots qui manquent à la langue humaine et que trouverait le rêveur de l’Apocalypse dans l’extase de la vision ; jamais plus radieux spectacle ne se déploya à nos yeux surpris, et nous eûmes à ce moment la sensation complète du beau, du grand, du sublime. Les montagnes, comme les poètes, ont leur jour d’inspiration, et, ce soir-là, le mont Blanc était en verve²²⁸.

Although the mountain remains inaccessible to human representation, Gautier nonetheless persists in his effort to describe it, reveling in its perfection of form and color. While Gautier denies “la langue humaine” the evocative potential to figure the mountain’s beauty, he reserves a place for “le rêveur de l’Apocalypse”, the poet taken by a trance-like “extase de la vision”, whose language alone remains powerful enough to represent the complete sensation of beauty. Locating perfection in nature does not destroy the role of the artist but actually accentuates it, since she alone is capable of rendering pure beauty. Not only is the mountain

²²⁸ Ibid.

the ideal place for the artist to perform an aesthetic quest, but the mountain itself takes part in this same inspired search, sealing the deep bond between the two.

As Gautier's essays continue, they tend to stray from these artistic flights of wonder at the discovery of pure beauty, instead attempting a more grounded, physical approach to describing the forms and colors he observes. This approach inscribes itself within Gautier's belief that the figurative arts require sustained, diligent work in order to achieve precision in representing ideas and images in the minds of their publics. Art could not simply rely on Romantic *états d'âme* to connect with its audience, it had to provide concrete depictions that would produce precise images for the reader or observer of the work. It is in this context that Gautier's mountain descriptions take on a sculptural character, with Mont Blanc becoming a "prodigieux bloc de marbre de Carrare, tant la neige était d'un blanc solide et mat" (157). Later, while marveling at the "fleuve de cristal", the glacier known as the "Mer de glace", Gautier signals irregularities in the ice mass as "colonnettes de marbre blanc" (190). These efforts to produce a full vision of the mountain landscape, drawing on metaphors of sculpture and architecture, also echo Gautier's Parnassian aesthetic ideal that favored a physical, sculptural definition of art²²⁹. Indeed, Gautier leans heavily on architectural comparisons to represent Mont Blanc's forms. The use of the first art seems paradoxical since an aesthetic dedicated above all to the ordered arrangement of space is at odds with the mountain's inherent disorderliness. Yet, Gautier's architectural and sculptural descriptions render the small beauties of a glacier's choppy irregularities and give these glacial ridges hard precision, all while elevating them to monumental importance in his own visionary experience:

On dirait les parois d'un palais de fée. À de certains tournants, des blocs gênés dans leur marche se sont amoncelés les uns sur les autres comme les glaçons d'une débâcle, et redressés en aiguilles de formes bizarres, en dentelures fantasques, qui font penser à la forêt de pignons en marbre blanc du dôme de Milan ou à l'architecture neigeuse d'une banquise du pôle. On ne se lasserait pas d'admirer ce prodigieux entassement de

²²⁹ See, for example, Gautier's poem "L'Art", which closes the 1872 edition of *Émaux et Camées*, in which he instructs poets and artists to « Sculpte, lime, cisèle ; / Que ton rêve flottant / Se scelle / Dans le bloc résistant ! ».

pyramides, d'aiguilles, de clochetons, de tours, de pylones [*sic*], de flèches, de prismes qui semblent les rêves cristallisés de l'hiver (181).

While architectural metaphors abound in Gautier's descriptions of mountain landscapes, his most interesting contribution comes from his attention to color. Here, Gautier draws on his background as an art critic and as a painter to show the richness of the mountain's chromatic palette. One example of this effort occurs, paradoxically, as Gautier approaches the tree line, the line he had earlier declared synonymous with the upper-limit of art. Here, however, he finds life, vibrant colors, and beauty in the harshest environment: "nous allions bientôt atteindre la région que les arbres ne dépassent pas ; mais des plantes courageuses et vivaces montent plus haut encore. Les rhododendrons sauvages épanouissaient leurs fleurs d'un rose vif, la gentiane ouvrait son étoile bleue, et la renoncule des glaces semait dans l'herbe son étincelle jaune" (178). The brightness of this transition zone contrasts with the "sévère nudité primordiale" as the group reaches higher altitudes. Despite the lack of vegetation, Gautier hazards an artistic description of the mountain peak's chromatic wonder, finding pure colors beyond anything seen in human visual art:

On ne saurait imaginer les couleurs que prend dans l'éloignement la terre dépouillée de toute verdure vers le sommet des montagnes, au-dessus de la région des neiges éternelles. Ce sont des tons d'une légèreté, d'une transparence et d'une fleur à faire paraître boueuse la plus fraîche palette : gris de perle, lilas, fumée de cigare, rose de Chine, violet d'améthyste, azur de turquoise, comme les fonds que met Breughel de Paradis à ses paysages édeniques, et mille nuances que le pinceau exprimerait mieux que la plume. On comprend que c'est bien là l'épiderme d'un astre, et que la terre, vue de la lune, doit briller comme un globe d'or. Cette transformation de couleur étonne toujours les habitants de la plaine et les peintres semblent en redouter l'effet ; car, excepté Diday et Calame, les vues des montagnes n'ont jusqu'à présent guère tenté les artistes, qui peut-être se sentent impuissants devant tant de grandeur (179-180).

So unique are the mountain's chromatic qualities that they surpass the most imaginative combinations, the most vibrant palettes of any artist, adding to their inspirational potential. Redescending the mountain toward the vegetated valley, Gautier attempts precise

descriptions of the colors he sees, but ultimately resorts to naming a new color after the mountain itself:

Le pied des hautes montagnes qui forment la chaîne du mont Blanc, revêtu de forêts et de pâturages, avait des tons d'une intensité et d'une vigueur admirables. Figurez-vous une immense pièce de velours vert chiffonnée à grands plis comme un rideau de théâtre, avec les noirs profonds de ses cassures et les miroitements dorés de ses lumières ; c'est une image bien petite pour la grandeur de l'objet, mais nous n'en trouvons pas qui puisse mieux exprimer cet effet. Le vert de Scheele, le vert minéral, tous ceux qui peuvent résulter des combinaisons du bleu de Prusse avec le jaune d'ocre, de chrome de Naples, du mélange de l'indigo et du jaune indien, le vert Véronèse aux matités glauques, le vert prasin, ne pourraient rendre cette qualité de vert, que nous appellerions volontiers vert de montagne et qui passe du noir velouté aux nuances vertes les plus tendres (187-188).

Gautier employs the image of the theatre curtain while discussing chromatic nuances using the tone of an art critic. While he dismisses the comparison as insufficient, the reference to the theatrical arts also contributes to the notion of total art to which Gautier aspires.

What contributes to the incredibly nuanced shades of green witnessed by the poet? In fact, the mountain's biological/botanical diversity directly results in the chromatic range so important for Gautier's artistic eye:

Dans ce jeu de nuances, les sapins font les ombres ; les arbres à feuilles caduques et les plaques de prairies ou de mousse, les clairs. Les ondulations et les coupures ravinées de la montagne accidentent ces grandes masses de vert, premier plan vigoureux, repoussoir énergique qui rend plus vapoureux et fait fuir les tons légers des zones dépouillées de verdure et couronnées par les rehauts à la gouache de la neige. A de certains endroits plus découverts, l'herbe verdoie au soleil, et des arbres semblables à des mouchetures semées sur ce fond clair lui donnent l'apparence d'une étoffe épinglée. Mais lorsque nous parlons d'arbres et de sapins, de bois et de forêts, ne vous représentez pas autre chose que de vastes taches de mousse sombre sur les pentes de la montagne : les plus hauts troncs y prennent la proportion d'un brin d'herbe (188-189).

This description once again tracks with Rousseau's *Vue du Mont-Blanc*, especially the subtle nuances of green foliage, varying from shadowy foreground firs to delicate, light green vineyards in the mid-ground fields on the banks of Lake Léman and the lower mountain slopes, represented using a "proto-pointillist"²³⁰ technique that recalls Gautier's comparison to "mouchetures", and which give Rousseau's work "l'apparence d'une étoffe". The entire

²³⁰ Kelly, *op. cit.*

mountain landscape must be considered if an artist is to fully benefit from her experience, from rocky, barren peaks to smooth openings of grass, from stands of dark-green conifers to the ever-changing deciduous trees, from the dazzling expanses of snow and ice to the tiny mosses clinging to trees and rocks, everything contributes to create an astonishing scene for the curious, discerning eye. Through it all, like in Rousseau's work, the mountain peak reigns supreme, towering over the most massive trees, inspiring art but never submitting to it.

While the great diversity of forms and colors of the gentle, green valleys understandably amazes Gautier, an awe in line with his earlier pronouncement of the correct elevation for art, his admiration now extends itself to include the rocky peaks and the eternal snow and ice that cover them. No longer searching for the purity of an ideal white color, Gautier seeks the surprising variety of colors in this seemingly monochromatic world. Crevasses of ice sheets prove to be especially promising places to find this hidden polychromatic scene:

Les parois de ces crevasses revêtent des couleurs magiques, des teintes de grotte d'azur. Un bleu idéal qui n'est ni le bleu du ciel ni le bleu de l'eau, qui est le bleu de la glace, ton innommé qu'on ne trouve pas sur la palette des peintres, illumine ces gerçures splendides et y tourne parfois à un vert d'aigue-marine ou de burgau par des dégradations d'une finesse étonnante (191-192).

Surprisingly then, in this frozen, forbidden zone, Gautier finds hues of blue and green, even discovering another ideal to go along with the perfect white of Mont Blanc's summit, the ideal blue of ice. Indeed, as Agassiz put it, "aucun glacier n'est parfaitement blanc ; vus de loin, ils ont généralement une légère teinte bleuâtre ou verdâtre"²³¹. This colorful world is a dream realm for any painter in search of new inspiration. Gautier's intense observation turns apparently monochromatic ice into a multicolored wonder-world, an ideal place for artistic inspiration.

²³¹ Agassiz, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

As Gautier's travels throughout the Mont Blanc region conclude, his route takes him to the Salève, the pre-Alpine mountain that dominates Geneva and offers a view of the Jura Mountains along the French-Switzerland border and of the Alps. Turning back toward the massif he had just left, Gautier marvels at "le roi des Alpes" (238), the peak that majestically soars above all others "comme un géant parmi les nains". His eyes find the eternal snows of the mountain's summit, its "diadème neigeux", whose perfect white color had initiated Gautier's conversion to the mountain's artistic potential, and art's necessity to venture there. Faced with the mountain's "sérénité majesteuse", Gautier once again adopts the trope of rhetorical denial to demonstrate his achievement in rendering the mountain in the face of great odds: "Avant de redescendre de ce plateau d'où nous lui disions adieu, nous lui demandâmes pardon d'avoir si faiblement parlé de sa beauté et de sa grandeur ; mais les montagnes sont plus indulgentes que les hommes et elles savent que leur langage de granit n'est pas facile à traduire" (239).

Gautier's magnificent descriptions show that he had risen to the aesthetic challenge of the mountain, refuting his own notion that art had no place above the tree line. In fact, the mountain proves an essential place to craft one's artistic style. Yet, Gautier remains conscious of his limits, using that awareness as an enduring force to push his art ever further. In the process, he shows that poets and artists need to seek inspiration in these exalted places, setting themselves the ultimate aesthetic challenge, but that their art can never surpass the alpine geography in its grandeur. Gautier offers a new vision for art, based in careful observation of physical, geological, and geographical phenomena, one that meticulously structures its metaphors, an ambitious project that seeks the highest forms of artistic ideals all while anchoring that search in the most precise constructions. The mountain, involved in its own search for beauty, became at once the source of inspiration, the poetic partner actively searching, and the geographical place to anchor artistic study.

2. Tartarin sur les Alpes: Alpinism's impossible conquest

In the second half of the 19th century, a new wave of mountain enthusiasts embarked on climbing missions in the high Alps. While naturalists, geologists, glaciologists, and other scientists had been climbing the high peaks for decades, the new mountain climbers were less preoccupied with scientific research than with mountaineering as an extreme sport. Elite English travelers exerted particular influence in the changing nature of mountain climbing during the middle of the century. Historians have termed this period the “Golden Age of Alpinism” (*Âge d’or d’alpinisme*²³²), due to the concentration of “conquests” of the highest Alpine peaks during the years 1854-1865. The English Alpine Club was founded in London in 1857, allowing the increasing numbers of alpinists to gather, communicate, and share observations from their journeys²³³. As these climbers embarked on always more ambitious ascents, they depended upon local mountain guides, helped to shape the budding tourist industry in mountain areas, and contributed to the understanding of the harsh Alpine geography. To what extent, however, did the mountain represent a real *place* of discovery for these alpinists, rather than a fashionable *décor* upon which they could exercise their fantasies of conquest?

One literary text that demonstrates the tensions, paradoxes, and possibilities of the alpinist movement and of the mountain as a place in literature, is Alphonse Daudet’s *Tartarin sur les Alpes*, published in 1885. The satirical novel takes us on a whirlwind tour of some of the “hottest” places in *alpinisme*, from sites in Switzerland like the Rigi-Kulm and the Jungfrau to Chamonix and Mont Blanc in France. Ultimately, the novel does not completely escape from the mountain as *cadre* approach that has too frequently characterized the theme

²³² Engel, op. cit., p. 218-221.

²³³ Ibid., p. 220.

in literature. However, Daudet delivers a subtle, comical²³⁴ critique of the growing tourist industry and of alpinism itself, revealing the staged attributes of these linked enterprises. Daudet's text provides key insights to understand critical reactions to alpine tourism, while questioning whether alpinism as conquest can ever offer an authentic experience of the mountain.

Tartarin sur les Alpes is a sequel-of-sorts to Daudet's 1872 *Aventures prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon*, which featured the eponymous character as a kind of naïf anti-hero desperately searching for hunting adventures in Algeria. The second novel sends the Tarasconnais on various climbing missions in the high Alps, in order to prove himself worthy of conserving the presidency of the "Club des Alpines" (the English spelling obviously references and/or satirizes the London-based Alpine Club)²³⁵. Daudet often relegates the climbing scenes in the book to secondary importance, emphasizing Tartarin's discovery of alpinism's staged quality. Indeed, only three of the book's fourteen chapters directly involve events in the high mountains, including mount Rigi, the Jungfrau, and Mont Blanc. Still, Daudet analyzes the phenomenon of alpinism in the late 19th century while considering the tensions between authenticity and artifice that constitute mountaineering and literary representations alike.

It is clear from the beginning of Daudet's text that Tartarin is not the typical alpinist. Upon entering the Rigi-Kulm, the "hôtel gigantesque [...] vitré comme un observatoire, massif comme une citadelle, où pose pour un jour et une nuit la foule des touristes adoreurs

²³⁴ Henri Bergson, *Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1938 [1899]. Bergson identifies Daudet's *Tartarin sur les Alpes* in his study of "le rire spécialement provoqué par le comique" (v) as a classic case of *le comique* arising from "un trucage mécanique de la vie" (45). Daudet's use of comic satire is an essential part of his text's ability to subtly critique alpinism's superficial relationship via "conquest" to the mountain.

²³⁵ The name "Alpines" also refers to the low-altitude chain of mountains in southern France lying between the valleys of the Rhône and Durance rivers. The range is more properly called the "Alpilles", although "Alpines" is perhaps the more ancient toponym, still present in features like the "Canal des Alpines". In 2007, the Parc naturel régional des Alpilles was created, protecting an area of 510 km². (<http://www.parc-alpilles.fr/>)

du soleil” (5-6), located at the summit of mount Rigi in central Switzerland, Tartarin’s high-mountain attire contrasts ridiculously with the touristic opulence of the hotel:

Au perron, l’arbalétrier ne fut plus qu’un gros homme, trapu, râblé, qui s’arrêtait pour souffler, secouer la neige des jambières en drap jaune comme sa casquette, de son passe-montagne tricoté ne laissant guère voir du visage que quelques touffes de barbe grisonnante et d’énormes lunettes vertes, bombées en verres de stéréoscope. Le piolet, l’alpenstock, un sac sur le dos, un paquet de cordes en sautoir, des crampons et crochets de fer à la ceinture d’une blouse anglaise à larges pattes complétaient le harnachement de ce parfait alpiniste.

Sur les cimes désolées du mont Blanc ou du Finsteraarhorn, cette tenue d’escalade aurait semblé naturelle ; mais au Rigi-Kulm, à deux pas du chemin de fer !

L’Alpiniste, il est vrai, venait du côté opposé à la station, et l’état de ses jambières témoignait d’une longue marche dans la neige et la boue (7).

The tourists, clearly not accustomed to seeing someone dressed to confront the highest peaks at a ritzy hotel stationed at 1800 meters, and “à deux pas du chemin de fer”, react with disbelief bordering on hilarity at Tartarin’s arrival. The Tarasconnais has arrived not at a mountain refuge, but at a rich retreat for elite tourists eager to reproduce the pleasures of worldly living. Although the enthusiastic alpinist’s naïveté is on full display, Daudet also critiques the indulgence of the elegant hotel, which seems more out-of-place in the middle of the Swiss Alps than Tartarin’s over-dressed appearance.

The second chapter takes the reader back to the preparations that precede Tartarin’s ascension of the Rigi. We learn that this president of the “Club des Alpes” (P.C.A.) had little real mountain experience: “rarement, en effet, Tartarin prenait part aux ascensions, il se contentait de les accompagner de ses vœux et de lire en grande séance, avec des roulements d’yeux et des intonations à faire pâlir les dames, les tragiques comptes rendus des expéditions” (39). For Tartarin, *alpinisme* hardly consisted of making real excursions in the high peaks, but instead reading exaggerated accounts of these feats in various *récits*, all within the comfort and safety of home. The threat of losing the presidency of the Club, however, to the current vice-president, Costecalde, spurs Tartarin into action. His first step is to read up on alpinism by consulting the greatest in travel narratives and scientific reports of the day:

Tout de suite il se mit à l'œuvre, fit venir secrètement de Paris une foule d'ouvrages spéciaux, les *Escalades* de Whymper, les *Glaciers* de Tyndall, le *Mont-Blanc* de Stéphan d'Arve, des relations du Club Alpin, anglais et suisse, se farcit la tête d'une foule d'expressions alpestres, 'cheminées, couloirs, moulins, névés, séracs, moraine, rotures', sans savoir bien précisément ce qu'elles signifiaient (41).

Tartarin seems most interested in ensuring that his journeys resemble a ritual repetition of the key words, phrases, and events that constitute the conventions of the alpinist genre, with little concern for originality or true knowledge.

Tartarin, however, remains dedicated to the ideal of *alpinisme* as he continues his preparations by gearing up accordingly: "En même temps, il commandait *en* Avignon, chez un bon serrurier, des crampons système Whymper pour sa chaussure, un piolet système Kennedy" (44). Names like Whymper and (E.S.) Kennedy (one of the founding members of the Alpine Club²³⁶) ensure the apparent reliability of Tartarin's equipment. Still the P.C.A. cannot help but imagine the most horrifying results of his journey as he draws up his will before leaving Tarascon: "Pendant une minute, il se vit fracassé, en lambeaux, au pied d'une haute montagne, ramassé dans une brouette et ses restes informes rapportés à Tarascon" (47). This tension between artifice and authentic experience, expressed through legitimate fear, drives the entire narrative. Despite his fears, Tartarin sets out for his first mountain conquest, the Rigi, which at 1800 meters, presents to the inexperienced climber an "exercice d'entraînement, le Rigi l'avait tenté à cause de sa petite altitude [...] et aussi à cause du splendide panorama qu'on découvre du sommet, toutes les Alpes bernoises alignées, blanches et roses, autour des lacs, attendant que l'ascensionniste fasse son choix, jette son piolet sur l'une d'elles". From the beginning, the possibility of a beautiful panorama overrides any attempt to discover the mountain itself, which becomes a pretext, a frame device from which to train one's eye on the surrounding landscape.

²³⁶ Engel, op. cit., p. 220.

Throughout the text, multiple layers of artificiality pile up upon one another, and the reader ponders which is more staged: Tartarin's desperate attempts to be perceived as a heroic alpinist or the carefully constructed world of alpine tourism that burdens to hide its artifice beneath its rustic visage? Of course, this rugged appearance is nowhere to be found during Tartarin's first encounter with the world of alpine tourism at the Rigi and especially at the Rigi-Kulm hotel. Upon arriving at the town of Vitznau, "au pied du Rigi" (53), Tartarin enters an *auberge* and inquires about the time required to ascend the mountain:

'Et autrement, demanda-t-il pendant qu'il chargeait son sac, combien de temps faut-il pour monter au Rigi ?'

-- Une heure, une heure et quart, monsieur ; mais dépêchez-vous, le train part dans cinq minutes.

-- Un train pour le Rigi !... vous badinez !'

Par la fenêtre à vitraux de plomb de l'auberge, on le lui montra qui partait. Deux grands wagons couverts, sans vasistas, poussés par une locomotive à cheminée courte et ventrue en forme de marmite, un monstrueux insecte agrippé à la montagne et s'essouffant à grimper ses pentes vertigineuses (56).

Tartarin, still dedicated to the alpinist ideal, is horrified to learn of the rack railway²³⁷ that climbs the slopes of the Rigi, as he "se révolt[a]...à l'idée de monter dans cette hideuse mécanique", deciding to set off "de [s]on pied" (57).

Along the route to the summit, Tartarin notes the abundance of water flowing down the slopes in torrents, remarkable to someone accustomed to the arid landscapes of the Midi. Daudet's description of the mountain then rapidly transitions from the verdant landscape of orchards, trees, and flowing waters to a new world of "des pentes mornes, dénudées, de grands éboulis de roche qu'il escaladait sur les genoux de peur de tomber" (60). Yet another rapid transition allows Tartarin to reach the "région des neiges":

Tout à coup il s'arrêta ; le sol blanchissait vaguement devant lui.... Gare les yeux !... Il arrivait dans la région des neiges....

[...] La minute fut solennelle. Un peu ému, fier tout de même, il sembla à Tartarin que, d'un bond, il s'était élevé de 1000 mètres vers les cimes et les grands dangers (61).

²³⁷ This rack railway (also called a cog railway, or *chemin de fer à crémaillère*), the Vitznau-Rigi-Bahn, began operation in 1871 and was the first of its kind in continental Europe (<http://www.rigi.ch/La-societe/Les-chemins-de-fer-du-Rigi/Histoire-de-la-montagne-des-chemins-de-fer>).

The narration, just like Tartarin, has little patience for describing the landscape, but jumps along to the required passage among the high mountain snows. This rapidity contrasts with the proceeding observation, emphasizing the slowness of Tartarin's climb: "Au fait, peut-être s'était-il trompé de montagne ! Plus de six heures qu'il marchait, quand le Rigi ne demandait que trois heures". As the day lengthens around him, and just as Tartarin begins to worry about his predicament, an "immense hôtel à trois cents fenêtres" (62), the Rigi-Kulm, appears before his eyes. Tartarin's first ascent results in four pages of narration lacking depth, including merely one page dedicated to the "high mountain" snowy region. Almost before it begins, the alpinist in training had completed his first climb.

Quickly discouraged by the atmosphere of the hotel, Tartarin already dreams of his next mountain "conquest", hesitating between "le Finsteraarhorn plus élevé et le Jungfrau plus célèbre". As he reflects on his next move, Tartarin comes across a series of photographs and prints representing famous events and sites of alpinism:

En préparant ces alternatives, pendant qu'on préparait sa note, il s'amusait à regarder, dans l'immense hall lugubre et silencieux de l'hôtel, les grandes photographies coloriées accrochées aux murailles, représentant des glaciers, des pentes neigeuses, des passages fameux et dangereux de la montagne : ici, des ascensionnistes à la file, comme des fourmis en quête, sur une arête de glace tranchante et bleue ; plus loin une énorme crevasse aux parois glauques en travers de laquelle on a jeté une échelle que franchit une dame sur les genoux, puis un abbé relevant sa soutane. L'alpiniste de Tarascon, les deux mains sur son piolet, n'avait jamais eu l'idée de difficultés pareilles ; il faudrait passer là, pas moins !...

The emphasis of these perilous aspects of the high mountains shows that Tartarin is really after adventure in the Alps rather than a voyage of discovery, even if the possibility of danger frightens him. Each photograph, each cliché, represents a *passage obligé* for an alpinist worthy of the name. Tartarin can only succeed his mission, then, if he engages in a (staged) reproduction of the required sequences of his alpinist predecessors. The next image that Tartarin sees causes him to "pâli[r] affreusement". The print, a reproduction of a famous

painting by Gustave Doré²³⁸, represents the 1865 catastrophe of the Matterhorn, the disastrous death of four alpinists shortly after they took part in the first successful summiting of the formidable peak, led by Whymper and Michel Croz:

Dans un cadre noir, une gravure, d'après le dessin fameux de Gustave Doré, reproduisait la catastrophe du mont Cervin : Quatre corps humains à plat ventre ou sur le dos, dégringolant la pente presque à pic d'un névé, les bras jetés, les mains qui tâtent, se cramponnent, cherchent la corde rompue qui tenait ce collier de vies et ne sert qu'à les entraîner mieux vers la mort, vers le gouffre où le tas va tomber pêle-mêle avec les cordes, les piolets, les voiles verts, tout le joyeux attirail d'ascension devenu soudainement tragique (80).

The print of Doré's painting becomes a founding moment in Tartarin's alpinist education.

Desperate to reproduce the thrill of such an event (while avoiding the disastrous end), Tartarin would embark on his alpinist adventure, a 19th-century Don Quixote²³⁹ eager to relive the experiences represented in literary and pictorial representations of mountaineering.

Tartarin sets out to find the esteemed mountain guide recommended by the maître d'hôtel at the Rigi-Kulm. Whom he finds, instead, is a friend from Tarascon, Bompard, known locally as "L'Imposteur". Tartarin admits his desperation to find a capable guide after the "impression que lui avait faite le dessin de Doré" (108), but Bompard, despite his sterling reputation, "[n'a] pas fait tout ce qu'[il a] raconté" (109). As the two men contemplate the beauty of the landscape around them—the lake, the trees, the high mountain summits—a dream world with "un vrai décor de féerie dans l'encadrement des murs de granit" (110), Bompard offers a sweeping critique of Switzerland's staged tourism, whose scale astonishes Tartarin:

'La Suisse, à l'heure qu'il est, vé ! monsieur Tartarin, n'est plus qu'un vaste Kursaal, ouvert de juin en septembre, un casino panoramique, où l'on vient se distraire des quatre parties du monde et qu'exploite une Compagnie richissime à centaines de millions de milliasses, qui a son siège à Genève et à Londres. Il en fallait de l'argent, figurez-vous bien, pour affermer, peigner et pomponner tout ce territoire, lacs, forêts,

²³⁸ According to Théophile Gautier, Doré was the artist who "a mieux compris la montagne". Cf., Gautier, « Le Mont Blanc », p. 217. The drawing is conserved at the RMN-Grand Palais, a photo of which is viewable here: <https://www.photo.rmn.fr/archive/90-003419-2C6NU0HGFO8S.html>

²³⁹ Colette Bottin-Fourchette, "Tartarin de Tarascon: enfant terrible de Don Quichotte", *Recherches et études comparatistes ibéro-françaises de la Sorbonne nouvelle*, Vol. 4, 1982, p. 12-34.

montagnes et cascades, entretenir un peuple d'employés, de comparses, et sur les plus hautes cimes installer des hôtels mirobolants, avec gaz, télégraphes, téléphones !' (114).

The exaggerated, exclamatory discourse reveals the passage's irony²⁴⁰, but Tartarin accepts that his friend must be telling the truth, recalling his surprise at the Rigi's improbable opulence. For Bompard, the staged production falsifies not only mountain hotels, but even the heart of the country itself: the Swiss Alps and the ideals of alpinism. As Tartarin prepares to ascend some of these high peaks, Bompard informs him of their controlled reality hiding beneath their rugged appearance: "...des cascades éclairées à giorno, des tourniquets à l'entrée des glaciers, et, pour les ascensions, des tas de chemins de fer hydrauliques ou funiculaires". The "Compagnie" has done everything to preserve the illusion: "Toutefois, la Compagnie, songeant à sa clientèle d'Anglais et d'Américains grimpeurs, garde à quelques Alpes fameuses, la Jungfrau, le Moine, le Finsteraarhorn, leur apparence dangereuse et farouche, bien qu'en réalité, il n'y ait pas plus de risques là qu'ailleurs". The Compagnie has looked into every dangerous aspect of alpinism, putting in place measures to propagate the façade of authentic peril while ensuring complete control and safety beneath the surface.

Before he can fully accept the Compagnie's ultimate control, Doré's terrifying representation of the Matterhorn disaster looms large in Tartarin's memory: "Différemment, mon bon ami, comment expliquez-vous ces catastrophes épouvantables...celle du Cervin par exemple !'... --Il y a seize ans de cela, la Compagnie n'était pas constituée, monsieur Tartarin" (115). A more recent example, the disaster of the Wetterhorn, despite the appearance of "deux guides ensevelis avec leurs voyageurs", proves how far the Compagnie is willing to go to preserve the illusion of danger: "Il faut bien, té, pardi !... pour amorcer les alpinistes... Une montagne où l'on ne s'est pas un peu cassé la tête, les Anglais n'y viennent plus.... Le Wetterhorn périlait depuis quelque temps ; avec ce petit fait-divers, les recettes

²⁴⁰ See Adrien Guignard, "Le recouvrement des Alpes et la question de l'ironie", *Romantisme*, n° 153, 2011/3, p. 129-146.

ont remonté tout de suite” (116). The “disaster” turns out to be a marketing ploy to attract attention and new English tourists. According to Bompard, the Compagnie has so falsified the mountains as to make accidents impossible, only to stage those very accidents to keep up the illusion of wildness.

Tartarin, reassured by Bompard’s claims, now feels a renewed sense of confidence as he contemplates climbing the Jungfrau. Leaving the next day, via Brünig pass, he spends one night each at Interlaken and Grindelwald, before attempting his first high alpine climb at the Jungfrau. As Tartarin sets off for the great peak, he no longer notices the potential perils of his situation:

Tartarin ne voit plus le danger, il ne regarde pas non plus le paysage, la vallée de Meiringen baignée d’une claire buée d’eau, avec sa rivière aux lignes droites, le lac, des villages qui se massent dans l’éloignement et tout un horizon de montagnes, de glaciers confondus parfois avec les nuées ou se déplaçant aux détours du chemin, s’écartant, se découvrant comme les pièces remuées d’un décor (153).

The landscape barely merits the alpinist’s gaze, as physical structures and phenomena become akin to the moving pieces of a theatrical set. The narrator, however, describes the geography as a confused mass of mountains, glaciers, clouds in constant movement despite its apparent immobility. The movement of elements in the landscape operates according to hidden mechanisms, just like the technical crew of a spectacle moves the pieces of a “décor” without being seen. As the Tarasconnais arrives in Interlaken, Tartarin’s focus settles on the picturesque view of the Jungfrau, offering a description full of received ideas: “...le premier objet qui frappait ses yeux par-delà des blés, des luzernes, des sapinières, un cirque de sombres verdure étagées, c’était la Jungfrau sortant des nuages sa cime en corne, d’un blanc pur de neige amoncelée, où s’accrochait toujours le rayon furtif d’un invisible levant” (180). The distant peak of the Jungfrau plays as the *arrière-plan* of Tartarin’s painting, framed in the middle and foregrounds by pastoral images of wheat and romantic images of forests, crowned

with the beauty of a furtive sunrise²⁴¹. After his long study of prints and images at the hotel Rigi-Kulm, Tartarin now seemingly sees the world itself as a painting, with himself in the position of painter-observer-actor.

Setting out on the climb of the Jungfrau, the forested character of the mountain slopes immediately strike Tartarin and his Tarasconnais companions:

Les délégués tarasconnais, la tête en l'air, avançaient avec une sorte de terreur, d'admiration religieuse ; ainsi les compagnons de Sindbad le marin, lorsqu'ils arrivèrent devant les palétuviers, les manguiers, toute la flore géante des côtes indiennes. Ne connaissant que leurs montagnes pelées et pétrées, ils n'auraient jamais pensé qu'il pût y avoir tant d'arbres à la fois sur des montagnes si hautes (207).

Knowing only the Alpes du Sud, “pelées et pétrées” of all forest cover, the lushness of the Jungfrau seems even more remarkable, requiring another marine metaphor to comprehend.

Despite the fascinating contrast, Tartarin quickly tires of the landscape:

Mais on se lasse après deux heures de marche dans le même décor, fût-il organisé, vert sur bleu, des glaciers dans le fond, et sonore comme une horloge à musique. Le fracas des torrents, [...] devinrent insupportables à nos gens, l'humidité surtout, cette buée au fond de cet entonnoir, ce sol mou, fleuri de plantes d'eau, où jamais le soleil n'a pénétré (208-209).

The Jungfrau, first shown in its interesting strangeness, now becomes a packaged, monotonous décor that inspires lassitude among the travelers.

As the ascension of the Jungfrau proper gets underway, Tartarin displays a level of confidence that belies his inexperience as an alpinist, “son dernier doute sur le truquage de la Suisse s'étant dissipé le matin même devant les deux glaciers de Grindelwald, précédés chacun d'un guichet et d'un tourniquet avec cette inscription : ‘Entrée du glacier : un franc cinquante’” (225). Still, this confidence would need to be confronted with the reality of climbing one of the highest peaks (4158 m) in the Swiss Alps with almost no experience: “De sa vie, naturellement, le président du Club des Alpines n'avait mis les pieds sur un glacier” (229). This inexperience and the encounter with the strange landscape of the high mountain

²⁴¹ The description closely matches the phased lighting effects in Théodore Rousseau's *Vue du Mont-Blanc*, discussed above.

allow Daudet to analyze Tartarin's engagement with the unknown geography. This time, the narrator opts for an extended metaphor, comparing the high mountain with the more familiar landscapes of Provence and the gentle movements of the sea:

[...] et cependant les abords du Guggi lui donnaient une sensation de déjà vu, éveillaient le souvenir de chasses en Provence, tout au bout de la Camargue, vers la mer. C'était la même herbe toujours plus courte, grillée, comme roussie au feu. Ça et là des flaques d'eau, des infiltrations trahies de roseaux grêles, puis la moraine, comme une dune mobile de sable, de coquilles brisées, d'escarbilles, et, au bout, le glacier aux vagues bleu-vert, crêtées de blanc, moutonnantes comme des flots silencieux et figés. Le vent qui venait de là, sifflant et dur, avait aussi le mordant, la fraîcheur salubre des brises de mer.

Tartarin understands the unknown through the familiar, relating the alpine landscape to the arid, estuarine, and marine environments of the Midi. Under Tartarin's eye and Daudet's plume, the Jungfrau's icy glaciers are akin to wooly flocks of sheep, frozen, yet containing a hidden dynamism comparable to the waves of the sea. While the mountains of the Jungfrau and the coastal geographies of Provence are not part of the same watershed (Rhine and Rhone, respectively), these distinct places share an aquatic nature that creates dynamic life in each landscape.

As the climbers venture onto the frozen glaciers of the Jungfrau, Tartarin encounters the difficulty of navigating this mountain terrain. Though the mountain may appear immobile, Tartarin experiences a more animated Jungfrau: "Immobilité apparente, car des craquements sourds, de monstrueux borborygmes, d'énormes quartiers de glace se déplaçant avec lenteur comme les pièces truquées d'un décor, indiquaient l'intérieure vie de toute cette masse figée, ses traîtrises d'élément" (231). The contradictory imagery, assigned at once to a living mountain and to an all-powerful human presence creating theatrical productions, shows the conflict within Tartarin's experience of the landscape. The personification of the mountain gives it a life of its own, independent of human concerns, while the desire for safety in a dangerous situation causes Tartarin to embrace the Compagnie hypothesis of an enormous

scam. The ice's interior life hints toward the mountain's deeper dynamism, unconquered by alpinism and tourism alike.

With night coming quickly, a shelter again presents itself at the perfect moment. Tartarin finds himself greeted with the pleasing smell of “soupe à l'oignon” (234), arriving at “Die Hütte”, a much more rustic shelter than the hotel Rigi-Kulm: “Rien de plus rudimentaire que ces haltes établies dans la montagne par les soins du Club Alpin Suisse. Une seule pièce dont un plan de bois dur incliné, servant de lit, tient presque tout l'espace, n'en laissant que fort peu pour le fourneau et la table longue clouée au parquet comme les bancs qui l'entourent”. The pause in this mountain refuge allows Tartarin to connect with the particular wisdom of the local guides, whose alpine experiences assimilate with Tartarin's marine ones:

habitués aux grands espaces, comme en ont les matelots ; et cette sensation de mer et du large qu'il avait tout à l'heure en approchant du Guggi, Tartarin la retrouvait ici, en face de ces marins du glacier, dans cette cabane étroite, basse et fumeuse, vrai entrepont de navire, dans l'égouttement de la neige du toit qui fondait à la chaleur, et les grands coups de vent tombant en paquet d'eau, secouant tout, faisant craquer les planches, vaciller la flamme de la lampe, et s'arrêtant tout à coup sur un silence énorme, monstrueux, de fin du monde (235-236).

Tartarin again draws broad connections between distinct geographical spaces. For Tartarin, the glaciers of the Swiss Alps are connected to the geographies and hydrographies of the Midi. As water flows out of the Alps, “château d'eau d'Europe”, the river valleys of the continent fill with life and movement. The Rhône, the major aquatic resource of eastern and southern France, takes its source at the glacier du Rhône, in northeastern Valais. In this way, glaciers, “sous l'apparence de l'immobilité”²⁴², become immense storehouses of animation and life. According to Agassiz, “rien n'est plus mobile et plus changeant que [la] surface [des glaciers]”²⁴³. Tartarin, seeing glaciers as mobile waves of ice, discovers the connections between spatially separated, but environmentally linked geographies.

²⁴² Agassiz, *Études*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

Early the next morning, the guides wake the group for the concluding portion of the Jungfrau climb. Tartarin sagely follows the movements of the experienced guides as the party makes its way up the steep slopes and navigates a narrow ridgeline. The P.C.P. remains calm, confident that he is only following the benevolent intentions of the Compagnie. Before long, however, the endless references to the mountain's dangers take on more than a rhetorical significance as Tartarin's overconfident demeanor leads to dangerous consequences. As the guides take the group on a "grand détour pour s'éloigner des séracs" (241), the group finds itself held up "par une énorme crevasse qu'éclairait en profondeur, sur les parois d'un vert glauque, le furtif et premier rayon du jour". The party's attempt to traverse the crevasse proves fruitless when a "pont de neige" collapses "dans un tourbillon de poussière blanche". Tartarin thus finds himself hanging, "comme un pantin détraqué" (242) from a cord (a reproduction of the images he saw at the hotel Rigi-Kulm?), entirely at the mercy of the strength of the rear guide. Suspended with Tartarin, the front guide keeps his calm, and he begins fashioning footholds in the wall of the crevasse using Tartarin's piolet. As he gets pulled from the depths, Tartarin attempts to save face, bragging as he emerges: "'Farceur, je savais bien qu'il n'y avait pas de danger....'" (244). The guides resume the climb, leading the group on the final push up "une sorte de mur de glace gigantesque de six à huit cents mètres où l'on creusait des degrés à mesure". This final effort, however, would prove too much for the amateur alpinist, "à bout de forces".

Tartarin's inexperience ultimately gets the better of his enthusiasm, as he falls into an "affreuse défaillance". Once again relating the alpine and marine experiences, Tartarin is seized by a "mal de montagnes qui produit les mêmes effets que le mal de mer. Éreinté, la tête vide, les jambes molles, il manquait les pas et ses guides durent l'empoigner, chacun d'un côté, comme la veille, le soutenant, le hissant jusqu'en haut du mur de glace". This less-than-spectacular final ascent mitigates Tartarin's long planned triumph at the Jungfrau. In a heroic

effort, the guides manage to pull him, nearly comatose, up the last stretch of the ice wall to reach the summit of the Jungfrau: “On était arrivé. Ce point dans l’espace immaculé, cette crête blanche un peu arrondie, c’était le but, et pour le bon Tartarin la fin de la torpeur somnambulique dans laquelle il vaguait depuis une heure” (245). As for the Jungfrau itself, its high vantage point provides the opportunity to explore the aesthetic pleasures of the surprisingly diverse mountain landscape:

De là jusque vers eux s’étalait un panorama admirable, une montée de champs de neige dorés, orangés par le soleil, ou d’un bleu profond et froid, un amoncellement de glaces bizarrement structurées en tours, en flèches, en aiguilles, arêtes, bosses gigantesques, à croire que dormait dessous le mastodonte ou le mégathérium disparus. Toutes les teintes du prisme s’y jouaient, s’y rejoignaient dans le lit de vastes glaciers roulant leurs cascades immobiles, croisées avec d’autres petits torrents figés dont l’ardeur du soleil liquéfiait les surfaces plus brillantes et plus unies.

Standing in the center of a vast world of snow and ice, the most remarkable aspects that emerge from the study of this landscape is its chromatic variety and its hidden dynamism. Daudet’s description of the alpine landscape recalls Gautier’s effort to render the full palette of mountain colors, while its scale requires architectural and paleontological metaphors. Emphasizing the mobility of the landscape, the sun actively liquefies the icy surfaces, sending the melt water streaking down the mountain slopes, despite their appearance as “cascades immobiles” and “torrents figés”. Although Tartarin barely makes it to the Jungfrau’s summit, he (or someone) has recovered enough to offer the reader an engaging analysis of this complex alpine geography.

The embarrassing finish to Tartarin’s climb does not prevent him from performing the last “coup de théâtre” necessary to affirm his place as an alpinist. Awaken from his “torpeur” by canon blasts in the alpinists’ honor from the far-below hotel, Tartarin finds greatness in his feat despite his strong conviction that the whole ascension was staged anyway. In a final theatrical flourish, Tartarin takes up the banner of the Club des Alpines, “[la] fit flotter deux ou trois fois ; puis, enfonçant son piolet dans la neige, s’assit sur le fer de sa pioche, bannière

au poing, superbe, face au public” (246). Daudet’s last exaggerated tableau on top of the Jungfrau creates a legend of Tartarin, clearly at odds with the pitiful final ascent we just read:

Et, sans qu’il s’en aperçût, par une de ces répercussions spectrales fréquentes aux cimes, pris entre le soleil et les brumes qui s’élevaient derrière lui, un Tartarin gigantesque se dessina dans le ciel, élargi et trapu, la barbe hérissée hors du passe-montagne, pareil à un de ces dieux scandinaves que la légende se figure trônant au milieu des nuages.

The ironic image comically offers a glorious finish to an uninspiring climb up the Jungfrau. Adrien Guignard has shown how Daudet’s ironic stance serves as an “écriture oblique” allowing the reader to avoid fatigue with the cliché representations of the alpine landscape, ultimately permitting “un renouvellement des manières de dire les rencontres qu’un voyageur noue avec les hommes et les paysages”²⁴⁴. Understood ironically, Daudet’s stereotypical mountain depictions allow us to renew our vision of alpine geography.

Returning to the valley, Tartarin fills his time by recounting to his companions “un long récit détaillé, circonstancié, de son expédition, pour être lu en séance au Club des Alpines et publié dans le *Forum*...” (249-250). Not merely experiencing life as an alpinist, Tartarin actively engages in the *representation* of his experiences, becoming an *acteur/metteur-en-scène* of his own theatrical production. Pleased with his own success, Tartarin makes plans to return to Tarascon, via Geneva, before learning that his rival at the Club, Costecalde, “*va partir pour l’ascension du Mont-Blanc, monter encore plus haut que Tartarin*” (271), hoping to claim the presidency of the Club des Alpines. The P.C.A. decides on the spot to precede his rival on the climb. As for Mont Blanc itself, the highest point in the Alps, the mighty peak seems little more than a pretext, a stage upon which a provincial squabble of little importance can be played out. Shortly after his arrival in Chamonix, Tartarin meets an old guide having completed 27 ascensions of Mont Blanc. The guide, at first highly skeptical of the plans, becomes interested once he learns of Tartarin’s recent summing of the

²⁴⁴ Guignard, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

Jungfrau, a narrative full of embellishment. The conversation soon turns to certain technical aspects of alpinism, including the need to attach oneself with a rope, referencing the disaster of the Cervin. For the guide, it was not the rope that failed, but rather the rear guard who cut the cord to avoid “sept victimes au lieu de quatre” (285). An idealistic Tartarin disagrees, insisting that:

...s’attacher à la file, c’était comme un engagement d’honneur de vivre ou de mourir ensemble ; [...] ‘Ainsi, demain, *té*, en m’attachant avec Bompard, ce n’est pas une simple précaution que je prendrai, c’est un serment devant Dieu et devant les hommes de n’être qu’un avec mon compagnon et de mourir plutôt que de rentrer sans lui, coquin de sort !’

Like a captain going down with the ship, Tartarin considers a group of alpinists as linked in life or death. Bompard accepts the code almost as eagerly as his friend. Bompard’s nickname, “l’Imposteur”, as well as Tartarin’s penchant for exaggeration, cast great skepticism on this arrangement of united “farceurs”, whose ideals are so often sacrificed to expediency.

Reflecting on the “différence entre le néophyte qu’il était alors et l’alpiniste de premier ordre qu’il se sentait devenu !” (293), Tartarin assures himself that he can climb Mont Blanc almost without a guide: “solide sur ses lourdes bottes que le portier de l’hôtel lui avait ferrées le matin même de quatre gros clous, expert à se servir de son piolet, c’est à peine s’il eut besoin de la main d’un de ses guides, moins pour le soutenir que pour lui montrer le chemin”. Arriving at the first refuge, the “cabane des Grands-Mulets”, an *aubergiste* excitedly shows the climbers the delights of his little museum, dedicated to the “souvenirs de toutes les catastrophes qui avaient eu lieu au Mont-Blanc” (296). The old guide seems to relish the opportunity, painting a sinister picture for the alpinists:

Sous le jour tombant et le pâle reflet des névés contre les carreaux, l’étalage de ces reliques mortuaires, ces récits monotones avaient quelque chose de poignant, d’autant que le vieillard attendrissait sa voix tremblante aux endroits pathétiques, trouvait des larmes en dépliant un bout de voile vert d’une dame anglaise roulée par l’avalanche en 1827.

As the aubergiste carefully cultivates a sense of intrigue and danger, Tartarin's confidence in the benevolent Compagnie begins to flounder.

Just as Tartarin's fear grows that Mont Blanc is not "aménagé comme les autres" (296), Bompard reveals that the whole story about the Compagnie was a farce: "'Comment ! vous avez cru... mais c'était une *galéjade*....'" (297-298). At this point, Bompard's credibility is rather reproachable, so the reader does not know which version of the Compagnie's influence she should believe. While Bompard's revelations should embolden Tartarin by showing him how much he was in charge of his own destiny, his thoughts immediately turn to "ce paysage en cataclysme polaire, froid, assombri, accidenté de gouffres... ces lamentations du vieil aubergiste encore pleurantes à ses oreilles....". Strangely, the possibility of disaster, of replicating the literary and pictorial narratives of alpine catastrophe, increases Tartarin's desire to attempt the climb: "le gravisser aime d'autant plus la montagne qu'il [risque] d'y périr"²⁴⁵.

Two hours after setting out early the next morning, the climbing party reaches the edge of "une énorme crevasse, ce que les montagnards appellent une 'roture'" (302), too wide to cross using a ladder. Adding to the difficulty, "l'autre bord se dresse en hauteur de quatre-vingts à cent pieds" (303), and crossing the crevasse requires the group to "descendre au fond du trou qui se rétrécit, à l'aide de marches creusées au piolet, et de remonter pareillement". Newly confident, Tartarin fulfills a leadership role within the group, encouraging them to carry forward. With the *roture* successfully navigated, the group pauses to contemplate the billowing white clouds issuing from Mont Blanc's summit, and the guides declare the smoke a sure sign of "un vent terrible au sommet, une tempête de neige qui sera sur [eux] avant longtemps" (309-310). The awaiting danger divides the group as Bompard sees another opportunity to quit the climb. When one member decides to continue toward the summit

²⁴⁵ Reclus, *Montagne*, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

anyway, the lead guide hurriedly resumes the climb. As the other guides unprofessionally rush off, the two Tarasconnais are left alone to consider their next move.

The separation, however unlikely that reputed Chamonix guides would ever allow it to happen, allows Daudet to concentrate the action on Tartarin and his friend Bompard.

Defeated, the two decide continuing the climb without experienced guides is too dangerous given the conditions on Mont Blanc's summit. Though they decide to return to the auberge, they remain "attachés à la même corde", dedicated to their honor code. As they descend the mountain, Tartarin regrets missing the peak of Mont Blanc, but Bompard has another solution in mind: "“Qui le saura ? riposte Bompard cyniquement. Les porteurs ont conservé la bannière ; de Chamonix on croira que c'est vous”" (312). Bompard proposes yet another farcical production, and Tartarin cynically accepts. This time Tartarin would not even need to physically reach the summit to receive the honors of climbing the highest point in the Alps.

The storm, meanwhile, continues its own advance down the mountain slopes, enveloping the two defeated alpinists in a fog of snow, and leaving them surrounded by massive ice boulders that risk falling with any wrong movement. Contemplating their perilous position, the time for confessions arrives. Tartarin asks forgiveness for calling Bompard a liar, while he himself was guilty of having "beaucoup menti dans [sa] vie" (314), professing "à cette heure suprême" the desire to "avouer publiquement mes impostures". Bompard pushes aside Tartarin's guilty conscience with an impassioned defense of lying:

‘C’est notre soleil qui veut ça, on naît avec le mensonge [...] Dès que j’ouvre la bouche, mon Midi me monte comme une attaque. Les gens dont je parle, je ne les connais pas ; les pays, je n’y suis jamais allé, et tout ça fait un tel tissu d’inventions que je ne m’y débrouille plus moi-même’ (315).

Tartarin, quickly reassured by this tirade, recasts their mounting pile of lies as "imagination": "“nous sommes des menteurs par imagination [...] Et ces mensonges-là n’ont jamais fait de mal à personne....”". From their high-minded pledges sworn in the village of Chamonix, to this discourse in defense of lying, the two friends have fallen far in little time. Reading

deeper, however, we can see Tartarin's true personality: starting from a naïve, idealistic vision of reality, he inevitably ends up in a conflicted position, personally embracing artifice and a muted realization of his ideals, all while manifesting an outward appearance as a conquering hero²⁴⁶. Tartarin embraces his role as a storyteller, as a producer of his own legend. On one hand cynical excuse, Tartarin's attitude shows that even the most glorious achievements are not simply historical facts, but stories that are created and told.

The two friends soon find themselves at the top of a dizzying slope of ice boulders and glaciers, at the bottom of which another refuge could be seen. As they navigate their way through the dangers, finding themselves on either side of an icy ridge, "Bompard entend un cri terrible de son compagnon, en même temps qu'il sent la corde se tendre d'une violente et désordonnée secousse.... Il veut résister, se cramponner pour retenir son compagnon sur l'abîme. Mais la corde était vieille, sans doute, car elle se rompt brusquement sous l'effort" (318). Having professed their life-or-death connection, the companions have honor-bound obligations to find one another before continuing. These obligations, however, fall silent in a "calme de mort" in the aftermath of the accident. Without transition or explanation, Daudet's narration follows Bompard as he returns to the auberge des Grands-Mulets, "un spectre aux cheveux dressés, boueux, ruisselant" (319), unable to speak besides a halting: "'Tartarin... perdu... cassé la corde....'". The successful expedition, having summited Mont Blanc and returned to Grands-Mulets, sets out on a search mission for Tartarin. After eight days, the group is forced to admit "une victime de plus" for Mont Blanc, giving up and returning to Tarascon.

While the entire town of Tarascon gathers for Tartarin's funeral ceremony, the allegedly deceased, still dressed in alpinist attire, enters the outskirts of the town. Tartarin's

²⁴⁶ For Esther Leslie, Tartarin's story is ultimately "an inquiry into the character of the artificial and the real, construction and the found". Cf., Esther Leslie, "Snowglobalism: Kitsch and terror in capitalist cosmography", *Environmental Politics Workshop*, University of California, Berkeley, Vol. 19, February 2009.

reappearance is explained as a dual moment of cowardice and betrayal, just after Tartarin and Bompard felt the cord tighten on either side of the icy ridge:

... dans l'angoisse de la peur, tous deux, oubliant le serment solennel à l'hôtel Baltet, d'un même mouvement, et d'un même geste instinctif, coupèrent la corde, Bompard avec son couteau, Tartarin d'un coup de piolet ; puis, épouvantés de leur crime, convaincus l'un et l'autre qu'ils venaient de sacrifier leur ami, ils s'enfuirent dans des directions opposées (326).

The shameful act sacrifices another ideal of alpinism. While Bompard returned to the Grands-Mulets, Tartarin went in an opposite direction, reaching the Italian side of Mont Blanc at Courmayeur, where “...il n'était bruit que d'une épouvantable catastrophe arrivée au Mont-Blanc, tout à fait le pendant de l'accident du Cervin : encore un alpiniste englouti par la rupture de la corde” (327). This new “catastrophe” is thus understood in reference to the earlier one at the Cervin, represented by Doré's terrifying painting. Everything had been leading up to this moment: the chance for Tartarin to live out an alpine experience as a replica of those alpine masters who had preceded him. An ashamed Tartarin assumes his friend perished on the slopes of Mont Blanc, and he discreetly returns to Tarascon. Seeing the ceremony, Tartarin can only assume that Bompard's funeral is ongoing, and retreats to his home in shame.

After the service, members of the Club des Alpines gather to hear Bompard's telling of the “disaster”, who takes a strange pleasure in the recounting, complete with his own exaggerations and fabrications:

En effet, l'attendrissement devenait général à mesure que Bompard avançait dans son récit fantastique. [...] Après s'être montrés, lui et son illustre compagnon, à la cime du Mont-Blanc, sans guides, car tous s'étaient refusés à les suivre, effrayés par le mauvais temps, -- seuls avec la bannière déployée pendant cinq minutes sur le plus haut pic de l'Europe, il racontait maintenant, et avec quelle émotion, la descente périlleuse et la chute. Tartarin roulant au fond d'une crevasse, et lui, Bompard, s'attachant pour explorer le gouffre dans toute sa longueur, d'une corde de deux cents pieds (331-332).

Just as he finishes his tale, with the entire assembly shedding tears or emitting sobs of distress, Tartarin enters. His sudden arrival produces merely a “médiocre étonnement”, as the

Tarasconnais are well-accustomed “aux histoires invraisemblables, aux mensonges audacieux et vite réfutés” (333). The fabrications in Bompard’s version of the events are never seriously questioned, as everyone celebrates the return of the P.C.A., now crowned with the glory of two ascensions in the high Alps (though he never finished either one on his own).

What should we ultimately take away from this satirical telling of alpinism and mountain tourism? The novel’s satire critiques a form of alpinism that emphasized mountaineering as a sport to be practiced in extreme settings to affirm one’s physical prowess (usually male-dominated) and ability to “conquer” the harshest natural conditions. Daudet’s *Tartarin sur les Alpes* succeeds in revealing the inherent paradoxes in this idealistic notion of alpinism and the ways in which it was typically represented. Tartarin’s shock at discovering a carefully prepared world stems from his belief in the ideals of alpinism as established by early English enthusiasts. Though represented as an exceedingly dangerous endeavor, Tartarin’s experience lays bare the underlying infrastructure that makes alpinism possible. Despite his efforts to recreate those experiences, Tartarin participates in a banal, mercantile version of alpinism.

Rather than persisting as an observer of the conflict between representation and reality, however, Tartarin wastes little time in participating in his own creative storytelling. If everything in alpinism is a staged production, why not become the actor and producer of his own legend? The dichotomy between Tartarin’s pseudo-successful ascensions of the Jungfrau and of Mont Blanc and the legendary stories that result from them is a critique of the exaggerated claims alpinists make to glorify their own accomplishments, leading to what Myriam Kissel has called an “aporie de la conquête”²⁴⁷. The dichotomy also speaks to the inherent human desire to tell stories about the places we inhabit and our experiences in those places. Knowing that all stories are constructed allows us to question how various narratives

²⁴⁷ Myriam Kissel, “*Tartarin sur les Alpes*. Humour et nihilisme. L’Aporie de la conquête”, *Écritures XIX*, 1 (2003), p. 185.

come into existence, how they persist, evolve, or expire, and allows us to self-critically examine the narratives we tell about ourselves and about the places we care about.

Even if the mountains in *Tartarin sur les Alpes* generally serve as a *cadre* or *décor* for Tartarin's failed "conquests", many passages analyze alpine geographies via their connections to landscapes in the wider region or world. Daudet's most effective innovation concerns the extended metaphor comparing mountain and aquatic (or marine) environments. These passages reveal the profound relations that connect mountains to streams, rivers, *fleuves*, and ultimately the sea, they posit frozen mountains as equally dynamic as flowing waters, and they reflect our need to understand the unknown through the familiar. Along with his satire of alpine conquest, Daudet moves beyond representations of mountains as lifeless and immobile and shows their active role in providing water and sustaining life. Daudet's satirical critique of stereotypical representations of the mountain demonstrates the need for original thinking in portraying these landscapes, free of the need for "conquest", quiet moments when we might more fully embrace the mountain's dynamic life.

3. "L'Auberge": Maupassant's dynamic, animate mountain geography

Every story has a setting. Every tale we tell takes place in a particular time and a specific place, whether located in the physical universe or imagined in the mind of the storyteller. Usually, we think of these "settings" as the backgrounds, the stage upon which the drama unfolds. The setting itself does not play an active role in the story's development; rather, it is a constant, inanimate backdrop, the physical stuff where our more psychological dramas play out. What happens, however, when the setting becomes more than just an inanimate backdrop? What happens when a story's geography becomes a dynamic actor in the story itself? These are the questions that emerge from a reading of Guy de Maupassant's short story "L'Auberge", first published in 1886 in the journal *Les Lettres et les arts*. While the story considers the nature of madness, it also places an animate geography at its center. Subtle

narrative and descriptive strategies and the mobilizing of the literary *fantastique* allow Maupassant's mountain setting to assert itself as an equal actor within the human drama, resisting attempts to conquer it, and revealing geography as an active, constitutive part of human identity.

3.1 Mountain Sublime and Mountain Prison

Maupassant's short stories usually follow a similar pattern: an initial, seemingly peaceful situation, followed by a trigger that disrupts that situation, the unfolding of the drama, concluding with the *dénouement*, which may come in the form of a "chute", a surprise or rapid resolution to the problem (if the problem is resolved at all)²⁴⁸. The beginning of "L'Auberge" is no different, as it sets up the surprise of the second part of the story, all while sewing clues to the ambivalent nature of the mountain setting where the story takes place. The main drama occurs inside and surrounding the "auberge de Schwarenbach", located along Gemmi Pass in the Bernese Alps above the Swiss commune of "Loèche". On one hand, this area captures the sublime of mountain regions between beauty and horror, since the auberge remains open "pendant six mois", to greet and lodge travelers eager to experience a true mountain passage. During the winter months, however, the Pass becomes dangerous as great snows fill in the valleys, making the mountain impassible and leaving the auberge without visitors. In winter, the Hauser family, proprietors of the refuge, descend to the town of Loèche, entrusting the auberge to two caretakers, "le vieux guide Gaspard Hari" and "le jeune guide Ulrich Kungsi", assisted by the faithful mountain dog, Sam. The Hausers, comfortable with leaving their home in the hands of trusty guardians, have been following this pattern for years, and their descent toward Loèche must have taken on the role of an annual ritual. The "femmes, le père, et les trois fils s'en vont" as they did every year, leaving their home "jusqu'au printemps".

²⁴⁸ See, for example, Ruth Hottell, "The Delusory Denouement and Other Strategies in Maupassant's Fantastic Tales", *The Romanic Review*, vol. 85, no. 4, 1994.

Maupassant's extradiegetic narrator, however, gives the attentive reader many signs that point toward this winter retreat as anything but safe or normal. The auberge itself is first described as "pareille à toutes les hôtelleries ... dans les Hautes-Alpes", serving as a "refuge". Quickly, however, when the focus shifts to the six months that the two guides will spend here, the auberge becomes a "prison de neige". In a sentence that spans an entire paragraph, Maupassant describes the guides' situation as both tranquil and troubling:

Les deux hommes et la bête demeurent jusqu'au printemps dans cette prison de neige, n'ayant devant les yeux que la pente immense et blanche du Balmhorn, entourés de sommets pâles et luisants, enfermés, bloqués, ensevelis sous la neige qui monte autour d'eux, enveloppe, étreint, écrase la petite maison, s'amoncelle sur le toit, atteint les fenêtres et mure la porte.

The lexical and verbal emphasis on imprisonment suggests a potentially dangerous, even deadly situation awaiting the two men. If the mountain can represent a peaceful refuge from social persecution²⁴⁹, here the mountain acts with apparent violence in trapping the guardians. Snow itself is the active agent of the sentence, it rises, envelops, squeezes, and crushes, becoming the dominant element in the mountain scene. The apparently objective narrator chooses descriptors charged with macabre connotations. Before winter has even begun, Maupassant leaves no doubt as to whose agency reigns supreme in the mountain geography. The animated description of the landscape makes the reader suspect the existence of a supernatural order on the mountain²⁵⁰.

As the Hauser family descends the mountain toward the village of Loèche, the surrounding landscape seems to swallow them up in its grandeur: "ils contournèrent d'abord le petit lac, gelé maintenant au fond du grand trou de rochers qui s'étend devant l'auberge,

²⁴⁹ Cf., Reclus, *Histoire*, *op. cit.*, 1880. The mountain becomes an asylum during political exile where the geographer could "retrouver, dans la solitude, [sa] force et le calme de [son] esprit", p. 1-2. The sight of the mountains procures in Reclus "un mouvement de joie réelle" as he breathes "avec volupté l'air pur descendu de la montagne" (p. 3).

²⁵⁰ For Jean Fabre, the transformation of space from passive setting to animate actor is an essential part of the literary *fantastique*: "l'espace n'est plus seulement le cadre dans lequel se produit l'événement surnaturel, mais il tend à devenir le monstre lui-même ; il se fait siège de l'altération et le matériau du fantastique". Fabre, *Le miroir de sorcière*, Paris, José Corti, 1993, p. 222. To this definition, we might add that in becoming animate, Maupassant's mountain asserts its agency, making its conquest impossible.

puis ils suivirent le vallon clair comme un drap et dominé de tous côtés par des sommets de neige”. Maupassant’s use of terms like “au fond”, “trou” show how the family, and even the valley itself, are “dominated” by the towering masses of snow, already freezing and filling everything in their path even early in the season. The sun becomes the harbinger of dangerous storms to come; described as an “averse” the sun’s rays reflect a “désert blanc éclatant et glacé”, a “flamme aveuglante et froide” that extinguishes all life. The narrator characterizes the place by its complete absence of life, even while choosing descriptors full of animated movement: “une averse de soleil” in an “océan des monts”. Using language caught between frozen desert and dynamic images of life, Maupassant suggests the possibility of unseen beings hidden beneath the surface of the apparently dead landscape²⁵¹, a world where “les neiges elles-mêmes semblent vivantes”²⁵², the repair of “des milliards et des milliards d’êtres grouillants”. Maupassant’s snowy desert remains full of dynamic movement, the result of hidden, profuse microscopic life or some other, supernatural force still unknown to science.

Nearing their destination of Loèche, which sits “au fond d’un abîme effrayant”, the travelers look down upon the insignificance of the village’s homes, which resemble “des grains de sable jetés dans cette crevasse énorme”. Far from inanimate backdrop, this physical geography asserts itself, helping to form the identities of the humans that call this place home. Maupassant’s narrative voice provides detailed descriptions of the physical environment, while adding ambiguous markers of the geography’s unique personality, seen as dangerous or hiding supernatural forces. The opening scenes provide the comfort of an annual ritual juxtaposed against the foreshadowed danger of winter on the mountain, the potential home of supernatural forces. It is clear from the start that the mountain geography is no mere “setting” for this story, but a character in its own right.

²⁵¹ This “présence de mondes et de puissances insolites” is one of the hallmarks of the literary *fantastique*, according to Tzvetan Todorov. Cf., Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p. 97.

²⁵² Reclus, *Montagne*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

3.2 The Crisis Triggered: Gaspard's "Dissolution" and the Spirit of the Mountain

As soon as the Hauser family leaves the two guides, the reality of facing “quatre ou cinq mois” alone in the harsh winter begins to hit home. Gaspard Hari, however, remains enthusiastic, telling his companion that the most important part is facing up to the situation “dès le premier jour” and voluntarily creating “des distractions, des jeux, beaucoup de passe-temps”. Gaspard, about to begin his fourteenth winter at the auberge, does not worry about the cold season, although he recognizes that “un accident peut arriver pendant cette longue solitude”. His resoluteness in confronting winter’s challenges contrasts with Ulrich Kungsi’s inattentiveness, preoccupied instead with “ceux qui descendaient vers le village”²⁵³. Finally returning to the auberge, the guardians hardly make out its form: “un point noir au pied de la monstrueuse vague de neige”. The word “monstrueuse”, while hinting at the overwhelming presence of snow, also etymologically refers to a warning from the gods, an omen of some future event. Describing the snow as monstrous, then, is another way of foreshadowing the dynamic role it will play in the unfolding of the story.

The first day in their temporary home underscores the differences between the “vieux” Gaspard and the “jeune” Ulrich. While the experienced guardian settles instantly into a new routine of winter monotony, the young rookie “regardait par la fenêtre l’éclatante montagne en face de la maison”, and he becomes frustrated by the boring length of the “matinée”. That afternoon, Ulrich’s impatience leads him to retrace the previous day’s route, stopping at the top of Gemmi Pass for another look down at Loèche. The reader is then treated to a privileged access into Ulrich’s personal thoughts, via a narrative change to free indirect discourse: “La petite Hauser était là, maintenant, dans une de ces demeures grises. Dans laquelle ? Ulrich Kungsi se trouvait trop loin pour les distinguer séparément. Comme il aurait voulu descendre, pendant qu’il le pouvait encore !”. While understandable for a first-time guardian, Ulrich’s

²⁵³ Ulrich’s thoughts likely center on Louise Hauser, with whom he shares a tender moment before the young woman retreats down the mountain with her family at the beginning of the story.

mind remains fixed on the village he cannot reach. This disconnect with his current situation would lead to an even greater sense of solitude and a worsening psychological crisis.

Meanwhile, Gaspard continues to integrate himself within the forms of life that call the mountain home, spending “ses après-midi à guetter les aigles et les rares oiseaux qui s’aventurent sur ces sommets glacés”, a description of mountain biology that contradicts the narrator’s previous claim of a lifeless landscape. The old mountain man respects and appreciates the diversity of life that the mountain provides, gaining privileged insight into alpine ecology through careful observation. Ulrich, while he handles “tous les travaux de propreté” and takes care of woodcutting, remains fixated on his isolation, returning each day to “contempler le village”. Unsurprisingly, Gaspard is the first to notice the arrival of a “nuage mouvant, profond et léger”. Once again, the narrator emphasizes the dynamic nature of the mountain’s geography: this cloud moves quickly, dumping an “écume blanche” over their heads, burying them under an “épais et sourd matelas de mousse”. The repetition of the verb “ensevelir” again evokes some pending death, the mortal power of the mountain storm. The narrator’s language from the beginning of the story is confirmed as the two guides become “prisonniers” within the auberge.

Despite their forced imprisonment, Gaspard and Ulrich remain content in carrying out their daily routines and chores, resigning themselves to their fate. The regularity of this routine is only broken by the occasional “festin de chair fraîche” after Gaspard’s successful hunts of the chamois, according to Reclus, “le véritable habitant de la montagne”²⁵⁴. Gaspard’s skills as a hunter are another sign of a man in tune with his mountain environment; while using his knowledge of the mountain in order to kill another living being, he does it in an ethic of deference, only taking that which he needs to survive. The mountain itself, while dangerous, provides sustenance, nourishment, and even great joy to those who understand and

²⁵⁴ Reclus, *Histoire d’une montagne*, op. cit., p. 187.

respect its ways. Like Reclus, but unlike Ulrich, Gaspard seems to “aimer la montagne pour elle-même”²⁵⁵, and he is rewarded for his calm patience, careful observation, and smooth integration within the mountain environment.

When Gaspard vanishes without a trace one morning, Ulrich is left to confront a solitude that will put his psychological strength to the test. At this moment, Maupassant’s language begins to ambiguously alternate between presence and solitude, so that the reader never quite knows whether Ulrich is alone or accompanied. For Ayten Er, this marks the point when both the characters and the reader experience reality in terms of the unstable *fantastique*, when the story slides from the “fantastique-étrange” or those events that appear supernatural but “reçoivent à la fin une explication rationnelle”²⁵⁶ into the “fantastique-merveilleux”, characterized by a final acceptance of the supernatural. Although the narrator uses *focalisation zéro*, with direct access to Ulrich’s thoughts, emotions, and perceptions, the reader does not learn which of these mental states correspond with objective reality. In one sentence, the narrator oscillates between presence and absence: “Il déjeuna lentement *avec Sam*, qui passait aussi ses jours et ses nuits à dormir devant le feu; puis il se sentit triste, *effrayé même de la solitude* et saisi par le besoin de la partie de cartes quotidienne, comme on l’est par le désir d’une habitude invincible” (emphasis mine). Although he is not physically alone, the presence of Sam, the mountain dog, does not eliminate his sadness, and the impression of solitude builds.

Worried over his partner’s failure to return, Ulrich ventures out into the geography of snow and ice to search for signs of the old guide. What he discovers instead is a landscape of silent death. The snowstorm has filled up the entire valley, covered the lakes, and rounded off the rocky outcroppings, making the entire mountain resemble “une immense cuve blanche

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁵⁶ Todorov, *op. cit.*, p. 49. See also Ayten Er, “La Dichotomie fondamentale du fantastique dans ‘L’Auberge’ de Guy de Maupassant”, *Frankofoni*, N° 8, 1996, p. 273-281.

régulière, aveuglante et glacée”. Everything has been “buried”, including the village of Loèche, beneath a “manteau pâle” of cold snow. In this “silence de mort” Ulrich lets loose a call for his friend, a call that falters and goes unanswered. Yet within this deathly geography, Maupassant employs a vocabulary that speaks to the dynamic, living nature of the mountain. The wind itself seems a human voice, though it is “sec et gelé”, it travels across the icy surfaces “par souffles brusques”. In this troubling solitude, Ulrich begins to falter, becoming afraid and running back to the auberge to seek shelter: “Il lui sembla que le silence, le froid, la solitude, la mort hivernale de ces monts entraient en lui, allaient arrêter et geler son sang, raidir ses membres, faire de lui un être immobile et glacé. Et il se mit à courir, s’enfuyant vers sa demeure”. Here it seems as if a supernatural force of mountain geography, containing sonic, climatic, biological, and seasonal components, seek to enter into Ulrich’s body, eliminating the distinction between the man and the mountain. Rejecting this strange communion with the larger environment, he flees back to the auberge, where crushing solitude awaits. While “les fantômes lugubres”²⁵⁷ haunting Reclus’s mind would recede thanks to the purifying influence of the mountain air, Ulrich rejects the chance to “[se] laisser pénétrer par les impressions du milieu”²⁵⁸. The reader hesitates between explanations: Ulrich’s reason failing him, or supernatural forces at work. In either case, Ulrich rejects the living mountain and isolates himself within an “espace intérieur rétréci”²⁵⁹ that “accélère l’altération de [sa] santé”.

3.3 Ulrich’s Madness of Forced Solitude

Waiting for Gaspard’s return, Ulrich’s mind begins to wander, imagining the horrible accidents that could have befallen the old guide. The narrator does not specify whether Ulrich’s perceptions are real or not, furthering the reader’s hesitation. Using both indirect and

²⁵⁷ Reclus, *Montagne*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Ayten Er, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

free indirect discourse, the reader gains access to the thoughts and fears of Ulrich Kuntsi, forcing us to consider his point of view, even as the possibility of madness becomes more apparent. Gathering his courage, Ulrich ventures out once again, this time taking Sam with him, in search of his lost friend. Finally reaching one of Gaspard's favorite hunting haunts at the top of a summit, Ulrich waits until dawn. It is here that he witnesses an incredible scene of mountain magic:

Le ciel pâlisait sur sa tête ; et soudain une lueur bizarre, née on ne sait d'où, éclaira brusquement l'immense océan des cimes pâles qui s'étendaient à cent lieues autour de lui. On eût dit que cette clarté vague sortait de la neige elle-même pour se répandre dans l'espace. Peu à peu les sommets lointains les plus hauts devinrent tous d'un rose tendre comme de la chair, et le soleil rouge apparut derrière les lourds géants des Alpes bernoises.

This powerful moment highlights the intense geographical connections between the elements of the alpine system – the snow, the sky, the rocky peaks, and the sun. These elements combine to form a strangely liquid, mobile scene within a frozen “océan des cimes pâles”. The scene resembles an apotheosis: the snow that has presumably swallowed up the old Gaspard here radiates a bright light providing enough energy to illuminate the entire mountain sky (the ambivalence of “ciel” as sky and heaven is perhaps deliberate). It is possible that this moment represents Gaspard's death and his rebirth as part of the eternal spirit of the mountain.

Ulrich finally gives up the search after trekking across 50 kilometers of mountain from one in the morning until late at night. Too far from home, he builds a makeshift shelter out of the snow and sleeps the night side-by-side with the loyal dog, Sam. Out of necessity, Ulrich accepts the presence of another being as essential to his own survival. His madness, however, only worsens, as he spends the night “hanté de visions” and “secoués de frissons”. These visions and hauntings would intensify as soon as he returned to the auberge. Interrupting the emptiness of his solitude (he does not recognize Sam as a real presence), Ulrich convinces himself that he hears a voice desperately calling his name. Thinking it must

be Gaspard, Ulrich flies outside, only to hear no response: “Rien ne répondit ; aucun son, aucun murmure, aucun gémissement, rien”. The reader again hesitates over how to interpret these events. Several explanations present themselves, but the reader hesitates to choose: 1) accepting Ulrich’s story, someone actually is calling his name, but they will not respond when he goes outside; 2) he is crazy and imagines someone calling his name; 3) someone actually is calling his name, but it is the ghost of Gaspard haunting Ulrich into madness; 4) the call comes from Gaspard, in his last moments of life; 5/ the geography is exerting itself, demonstrating its supreme power over human weakness of both body and mind²⁶⁰. The description of the rising wind as “souffles brusques” strengthens this last hypothesis. Perhaps this wind stands for Gaspard as part of the spirit of the mountain, who calls Ulrich’s name, not to haunt him, but to comfort him, to let him know that he endures through the alpine geography. Whatever it is, we can infer that Ulrich is now being tortured by the mountain itself or by his own damaged psyche.

The following moments of crazed imprisonment, when Ulrich imagines a “fantôme” stalking the exterior of the auberge, contribute to the explanation of a guilty psyche and a feeling of complicity in Gaspard’s death. Confronted with these harsh thoughts, Ulrich retreats into the realm of madness, still believing himself alone on the mountain and refusing to exit the auberge, now truly a prison: “il se sentait seul, le misérable, comme aucun homme n’avait jamais été seul ! Il était seul dans cet immense désert de neige, seul à deux mille mètres au-dessus de la terre habitée, au-dessus des maisons humaines, au-dessus de la vie qui s’agite, bruit et palpite, seul dans le ciel glacé !”. The repetition of the word “seul”

²⁶⁰ See Armine Kotin Mortimer, “Secrets of Literature, Resistance to Meaning”, in *Confrontations: Politics and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century France*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2001, p. 55-66. Though she studies a different *nouvelle* from Maupassant (among other stories), she claims that one of the literary text’s meanings is “to remind us that literature entices by refusing meaning” (59). We might add that the multiple, unresolved explanations for the cry increases the possible sources of the sound, including Ulrich’s mind, Gaspard (alive or dead), or the animate geography itself. Such hesitation forces the reader to reconsider traditional notions of setting as inert background.

demonstrates Ulrich's growing panic, though he is not actually alone, but accompanied by Sam, and by "l'autre", a presence possibly of his own imagination.

Resorting to a month of drunkenness to calm his horror, Ulrich commits the ultimate act of ignorance that confirms his madness. Finally opening the auberge's door, he "reçut en plein visage un *souffle* d'air froid qui le glaça jusqu'aux os et il referma le battant et poussa les verrous, sans remarquer que Sam s'était élancé dehors" (emphasis mine). The reader here "possesses more information than Ulrich"²⁶¹, a rare occasion that serves to explain his growing insanity. Once again, the word "souffle" is used to describe the glacial mountain wind, implying the union between Gaspard and the mountain geography. Ulrich, now delirious, interprets Sam's frenzied scratching and whining as another sign of supernatural presence²⁶². The young guide responds by further barricading himself within a prison of his own making, even failing to notice Sam's disappearance. The reader no longer hesitates over Ulrich's descent into delirium.

3.4 Conclusion: The Enduring Spirit of the Mountain and Animate Geography

Although we cannot say with absolute certainty that Gaspard's disappearance represents his dissolution into the spirit of the mountain, Maupassant provides ample clues to show how this old guide understood the dynamic life of the mountain, drew nourishment from it, and ultimately vanished into its wider geography. From the beginning, the mountain and winter's seasonal attributes assert themselves as active players in the drama of life, not a mere inert setting where human desires unfold. Gaspard understands the complex connections that allow life to endure, even in the harshest of conditions, and he willingly accepts the loss of human control as one part of a dynamic ecosystem. Symbolically and ecologically, after long

²⁶¹ Ruth A. Hottell, "The delusory dénouement", *op. cit.*, 1994.

²⁶² For Ayten Er, this is a rare moment when Maupassant offers a rational explanation for an apparently supernatural event, passing into the "fantastique-étrange". The earlier cries, however, remain unexplained, forcing the reader to accept the existence of supernatural forces, part of the "fantastique-merveilleux". Cf., Ayten Er, *op. cit.*, p. 280-281.

sustaining himself on what the mountain provides, Gaspard's disappearance becomes part of the living mountain's endurance. In contrast, Ulrich's inability to relate to non-human life leads to his panic and guilt over Gaspard's disappearance and his descent into self-imposed solitude and madness.

With the end of winter in the town of Loèche and the auberge, the Hauser family climbs back up the mountain to return home. Approaching the door, they see on the threshold, "un squelette d'animal dépecé par les aigles, un grand squelette couché sur le flanc". Abandoned by Ulrich, Sam had been left for dead on the outside of the auberge. Eventually, his corpse must have been devoured by eagles and some of the other birds that Gaspard had observed on the first day of winter. While the image is brutal and underscores Ulrich's folly, it provides still more evidence of functioning mountain life cycles – the life that Ulrich did not see. Though Sam's death was ultimately the result of neglect, ignorance, and madness, his body did serve a greater purpose in the end by joining with the life force of other beings on the mountain.

Ulrich Kungsi does return to the village of Loèche, that village he had so long contemplated. He returns, however, as a changed man, such that the Hausers do not recognize him. After having spent the entire winter regretting human absence, Ulrich walks out of the auberge in a sub-human state. Although no one ever discovers what became of Gaspard, Maupassant's text shows us that this old guide accepts his fate from the beginning as one small part who must participate in the wider mountain geography in order to survive (physically and psychologically). His companion, on the other hand, through inexperience and regret, ignores the mountain's active life and falls into a deep despair. In the process, the mountain and the winter overthrow his mind, leaving him crazy and aged beyond his years. The reader is left considering what Ulrich could have done to escape the peril of solitude, his descent into isolated madness. Perhaps if he had lived more in phase with the mountain from

the beginning, he could have appreciated the unique diversity of winter alpine life. As Reclus shows, the mountain is also an asylum of peace and liberty where we might gain a broader perspective on the world. Had he adopted this inquisitive view, the mountain itself could have become his “auberge”, rather than his prison.

Through the deeper, wider, and longer perspectives offered by writers like Gautier and Maupassant, artists like Rousseau, geologists like Agassiz, or geographers like Reclus we might embrace “a truly global perspective of the earth from [its] summit”²⁶³, allowing us a glimpse of “the normally ungraspable scale of geological time and planetary space”. With patient attentiveness, we come to appreciate the rhythm of the mountain, taking the time to “la parcourir dans tous les sens, en gravir chaque saillie, pénétrer dans la moindre gorge”²⁶⁴, not in a desire to conquer it, but to more fully apprehend “the superhuman scale of the world and the dependent place of human culture in that world”²⁶⁵. Unlike Ulrich, we might accept our inherent fragility and gain a sense of the immensity of relations that make up the world and our deep connection within those biophysical rhythms. Maupassant’s portrayal of a descent into madness seems at first glance a depressing description of a landscape of death, but he hints toward a way out of this quandary. So long as we can renounce “conquest” for discovery and fear of solitude for an acceptance of wider communion with life, we might find a home within the living, dynamic geography of the Earth and not ever feel truly alone.

²⁶³ Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

²⁶⁴ Reclus, *Montagne*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁶⁵ Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

Chapter Three: Visions of Infinity: Life and Death in the Deep Seas

Introduction

While water has always been present throughout our study of forests and mountains, gently flowing through landscapes or destructively revealing its hidden power, here it will be time to accord this essential element its full due. Connections between water and forest and mountain geographies are fundamental to building an understanding of a relational geographical outlook in the second half of the 19th century. These interconnections will occupy the entirety of Chapter Four of our analysis. For the time being, however, it serves to signal a few of the ways that 19th-century thinkers understood the linkages between forested, mountainous, and marine spaces and how they distinguished between them. While forests and mountains were long seen as forbidden zones occupied by, in some cases, insular, backward populations, and in others, by dangerous animals or malevolent spirits, seascapes can instead be understood as areas of mixing, exchange, contact, and commerce. If mountains and seas (and, to some extent, forests) represent dangerous boundary spaces that resist human presence or habitation, the sea can also signify just the opposite: an area of transfer that breaks down barriers and permits the exchange of goods, people, and ideas²⁶⁶.

It is in the deep seas, however, where the most obvious parallel can be drawn between mountain and marine geographies, in that both environments were long seen as refuges of the strange, the unknown, or even the monstrous. If literary and artistic representations of forested and mountainous landscapes presented many challenges, the deep seas, places where human beings cannot go without significant technical assistance, pose the ultimate obstacle²⁶⁷. Still,

²⁶⁶ This is Élisée Reclus' reading of the sea, especially the Mediterranean in his *Nouvelle Géographie universelle*, *op. cit.* See also Federico Ferretti's analysis of Reclus' vision of Europe's geographical identity, defined in the interaction between mountain and marine geographies. Ferretti, "L'identité géographique de l'Europe : Mer et Montagne dans la *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* (1876-1894) d'Élisée Reclus", in Alain Cabantous, Jean-Luc Chappey, Renaud Morieux, Nathalie Richard, François Walter [dir.], *Mer et montagne dans la culture européenne (XVI^e-XIX^e siècle)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011, p. 175-188.

²⁶⁷ See Alain Corbin's "Introduction" to the Exposition Catalogue, *La Mer. Terreur et fascination*, Paris, Édition Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2005.

writers took up this difficult task, perhaps encouraged by the rapid acceleration of scientific study of these areas throughout the 19th century, offering new representations that also incorporated traditional views of the dangerous monsters that allegedly populated these unseen abysses. In some cases, such as Jules Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1870), authors exploited the tension and strange similarities between scientific and superstitious views of the world, likening some modern machinery to the great mythological beasts and monsters so prevalent in human folk imaginations. These attempts to create bridges between mythology and modern science animate unknown seascapes with life to render them more relatable to human experience, preserving a key role for writers during times of rapid scientific advancement.

Historian Alain Corbin contributed to the study of both mountain and marine environments in his work on “empty landscapes”²⁶⁸, which analyzed the evolution of attitudes regarding these two geographies. Littoral zones and maritime environments, long forgotten, were suddenly invested with new meaning and cultural value. Like the mountain, the littoral became a place of exploration, discovery, and self-development, often tied to an elite that showcased wealth, privilege, or the freedom to leisurely dispose of one's time. In a time of increased urban growth, primarily concentrated among the working classes, the elite class sought refuge in the newly emptied territories outside the city²⁶⁹, part of a coincident cultural shift that began to see the mountains and the coasts as havens of escape from urban life's pressures, a means to reinvigorate one's soul, and a way to show off one's cultural sophistication. The rapid growth of coastal tourism and *stations balnéaires* profited from these changing cultural attitudes, leading to the spectacular development of many coastal towns, first along the English Channel, followed by resorts on the Atlantic and Mediterranean

²⁶⁸ Alain Corbin, *Le Territoire du vide. L'Occident et le désir du rivage, 1750-1840*, Paris, Flammarion, 1988.

²⁶⁹ See Jacques Bethemont, « 1856 : De la gestion d'une catastrophe au bon usage d'une crise », *La Houille blanche*, N°1, 2007, p. 24. France's rural population peaked in 1850, before beginning an inexorable decline.

coasts²⁷⁰. As transportation became cheaper and faster, tourists from a more diverse set of socioeconomic backgrounds took advantage of the littoral experience²⁷¹. This, in turn, led the elite class to seek “empty” territories far from the “unworthy” classes “invading” their once privileged escapes, and to invest the high seas as the place for their ostentatious displays. New activities evolved that took greater advantage of open space farther from the shore, including yacht clubs, steamer tourism, boat races, and packet boats (cruise ships)²⁷². These experiences offered the chance to recreate a world of luxury free from the social nuisances represented by the urban working classes, or even the bourgeois. They also gave rise to a “nouvel imaginaire de la mer”²⁷³ symbolized in the “paquebot”, and they would provide access to the “vacuité” of the seascape, a pure escape outside of space or time.

Corbin’s analysis mostly focuses on the marine surface. Yet, seeing seascapes as “empty”, flat canvases overlooks the ocean’s essential character: the vast majority of its biophysical material exists beneath the surface, beyond human vision²⁷⁴. Indeed, writing off seven-tenths of the planet’s surface as empty space constitutes ignorance of the physical world humans inhabit. A more complete sweep of human relationships to marine places²⁷⁵ would navigate the surface while plunging into the unseen realms of the deep seas and open oceans²⁷⁶. In the second half of the 19th century, literature took up this ultimate challenge of representation, allowing us to continue where Corbin’s work left off in analyzing the new imaginary of the seas that forged a fresh relation to the deep oceans. We will focus on the

²⁷⁰ See Corbin, *L’avènement des loisirs (1850-1960)*, Paris, Flammarion, 1995, p. 85.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 47-48, 54, and 62-63. Verne’s *Une île flottante* is a good representation of these elite leisure activities.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁷⁴ This space remained largely unreachable for human technology; indeed, the deepest parts of the ocean remain relatively unknown and inaccessible even today. See “La mer est-elle sans fond ?” and “La révélation des merveilles de la mer”, in *La Mer. Terreur et fascination*, *op. cit.*, for deep ocean exploration chronology. The first deep-sea oceanography was conducted during the expeditions of the *Lightning* and the *Porcupine* in 1868-1870 and especially of the *Challenger* from 1872-1876.

²⁷⁵ The reference anthology on marine writing in French literature is Simon Leys, *La mer dans la littérature française*, 2 Vols., Paris, Plon, 2003.

²⁷⁶ The average depth of the world’s oceans reaches 3800 meters, making it impossible to understand them without plunging these submarine depths.

works of three immense writers who embraced this test, including Michelet's *La Mer* (1861), Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866), and Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*.

While these three writers share a fascination for the deep seas, they illuminate the marine space and its human exploration in diverse ways. Michelet casts the sea as maternal source of life on Earth in a celebration of mystical materialism revealed by a spectator narrator. Hugo focuses on the character's (and author's) heroic tasks even as an aesthetics of fluid instability transforms our relationship to text and to mortality. Verne, for his part, subtly questions human hubris and the tension between ambition and limits as his scientist narrator attempts to pierce the opaque oceanic depths. These three works offer unique ideas of marine biology and materiality and propose the means to renew our relationship to the biophysical world through a fluid understanding of human identity and a relational vision of life on Earth.

1. Seas: the infinite, imperiled cradle and crucible of life in Michelet's *La Mer*

In his series of natural history studies, the historian Jules Michelet borrows literary tropes and employs narrative strategies that allow him to construct a modern mythology intricately linked to France's landscapes²⁷⁷. Perhaps his most complete and successful attempt at this kind of geographical mythmaking is his 1861 study titled simply, *La Mer*²⁷⁸. Beginning with *L'Oiseau* in 1856 and followed by *L'Insecte* one year later, Michelet sought to communicate with the hidden "soul" of the humble creatures he studied. A logical extension of this expanding network of compassion occurred with the publication of *La Mer*, which allowed Michelet to concentrate on the fundamental properties of the natural world itself, contemplating the role of the seas in the life of the planet and in humanity's history. Continuing his penchant for micro-studies contained within a much grander, sweeping

²⁷⁷ Stéphanie Clément analyzes the figure of the mirror to create correspondences between natural objects and their literary representation in Michelet's *La Mer* and *La Montagne*. See *Immersion. L'imaginaire des profondeurs de la Terre au dix-neuvième siècle*, Diss., University of Colorado, 2016, p. 93-117.

²⁷⁸ Jules Michelet, *La Mer*, Paris, Hachette, 1861, for the first edition.

narrative, Michelet observes both the infinitely small and the infinitely large scales of the world's seas. That attention to detail and to the wider frame allows Michelet to posit a simultaneously mystical and material vision of the sea, which he sees as the heart of Earth's biological systems.

While critics often expressed skepticism over Michelet's seemingly careless bibliographic documentation, the unreliability of his sources, or the superficiality of his scientific claims²⁷⁹, one should note that his work is a patient assimilation of sources, from some one hundred-fifty intellectuals and explorers²⁸⁰. Michelet's erudition is beyond reproach. His work provides a sound synthesis of the state of the natural sciences at a particular moment in time, rendered understandable for the widest possible public: it is popular science at its best. As Borie writes, Michelet's science "est descriptive et narrative, aventureuse aussi. Elle cherche un secret, le secret du monde, et elle espère le trouver, non dans une formule mathématique, mais dans une cachette violée, dans un bourgeon déplié, dans une scène surprise" (357).

1.1 Local and global seas: Michelet's journey from the shore

Michelet titles the first book of his study "Un regard sur les mers" and the first chapter of that book "La mer vue du rivage". These names give us indications about the direction of the writer's gaze, as well as his physical and intellectual positioning in beginning his project. If the sea represents the object of his study, the writer of that study remains firmly planted on terrestrial, continental space. Michelet's text takes us on a journey of discovery from the comfortable shoreline to the bottomless depths of the oceans, using his own experiences, scientific knowledge, and his own skill as a storyteller. Michelet begins with a cautionary tale,

²⁷⁹ For a review of these critiques and a response, see "Notice", in Jean Borie's edition of *La Mer*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983, p. 351-365. Élisabeth Plas analyzes the intertextual genesis of Michelet's sources, finding he was especially inspired by the *Encyclopédie*. Plas shows the metatextual nature "d'un ouvrage de vulgarisation scientifique" (188), even as Michelet often breaks with his sources for literary reasons. Plas, "Intertextualité et histoire naturelle", *Genesis* [En ligne], 34, 2012, URL: <http://genesis.revues.org/981>.

²⁸⁰ Borie, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

noting that water “pour tout être terrestre, est l’élément non respirable, l’élément de l’asphyxie”²⁸¹. Encountering the sea, one first feels fear, especially of its “profonde épaisseur”, the unknown dangers of its hidden depths. We have often seen the sea as the “barrière fatale, éternelle, qui sépare irrémédiablement les deux mondes” of the terrestrial and marine domains. The historian evokes the sea’s inherent darkness, which quickly reaches a state of “obscurité totale” (44) not far below the surface. Prevailing wisdom associates light with life, seeing in the sea a vast, deserted space: “on supposait que la vie cesse partout où manque la lumière, et qu’excepté les premières couches, toute l’épaisseur insondable, le fond (si l’abîme a un fond), était une noire solitude, rien que sable aride et cailloux, sauf des ossements et des débris”. Whether deserted or filled with “les mangeurs d’hommes, les monstres, le léviathan, le kraken et le grand serpent de mer”, the sea plays on our most basic instincts of fear. For Michelet, while these “enfantines” (45) terrors belong to a “vieux monde” and are a sign of ignorance, they have not totally disappeared. The writer invites his reader to partake in a journey from ignorance to discovery.

Michelet makes great use of the indefinite third-person subject pronoun, “on”, throughout the first part of his essay. While this pronoun can indicate a neutral approach, its versatility in French helps Michelet to connect with his reader. “On” rhymes more with “nous” throughout this passage, a reading reinforced by the prevalence of the object pronoun “nous”, the possessive pronoun “nos”, and other references to a collective human community, such as “qui” [“Qui s’y hasarde, se sent fortement soulevé” (44)], “tout être” [“On peut dire que tout être qui en a la surprise, ressent cette impression” (45)], and “toute personne” [“Toute personne qui va à la mer par ces voies est très-frappée de la région intermédiaire qui l’annonce” (45-46)]. These appeals to a universal human community begin to unravel the landscape of separation initially posited, allowing Michelet to eventually extend the idea of

²⁸¹ Michelet, *La Mer*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983, p. 43. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

communication from within the human species to imagine connections to seemingly distinct species and places. This idea constitutes one of Michelet's main themes: despite the apparent separations that distinguish species and places, there exists a mysterious force that allows communication between all aspects of life on Earth.

Indeed, one need only visit a "région intermédiaire", such as the "fleuves du nord-ouest, les vastes sables du Midi, ou les landes de Bretagne" to witness the terrestrial and maritime worlds in deep communication, places which are home to unique, biodiverse forms of life: "le long de ces fleuves, c'est un vague infini de joncs, d'oseraies, de plantes diverses, qui, par les degrés des eaux mêlées et peu à peu saumâtres, deviennent enfin marines" (46). As one approaches the sea, "on entend et on devine la redoutable personne", well before one observes visually the phenomenon. Again, Michelet emphasizes the theme of communication:

D'abord, c'est un bruit lointain, sourd et uniforme. Et peu à peu tous les bruits lui cèdent et en sont couverts. On en remarque bientôt la solennelle alternative, le retour invariable de la même note, forte et basse, qui de plus en plus roule, gronde. [...] On y sent, on croit y sentir la vibrante intonation de la vie.

The sound of the sea here indicates a vast realm of life, a feeling soon confirmed with the incoming tide: "En effet, au moment du flux, quand la vague monte sur la vague, immense, électrique, il se mêle au roulement orageux des eaux le bruit des coquilles et de mille êtres divers qu'elle apporte avec elle" (46-7). In the span of a few pages, Michelet's vision of the sea has expanded from the traditional idea of a vast, dead, barrier, to reveal the transitional, communicative aspects that tie the human/terrestrial zones to the maritime environments.

Michelet's first look complexifies as he gathers more experience with the sea. These experiences remain rooted to terrestrial zones which tend to "gene[r]" (50) and "indigne[r]" the sea by imposing confines to its infinity. Zones of contact between earth and water break down the dichotomy between spaces. Sharp distinctions tend to fade away in this ecological transition zone: "c'est et ce n'est pas la terre, c'est et ce n'est pas la mer" (53). The apparent battle between elements transforms into a nourishing partnership, as the sea becomes the

fertile mother of the earth: “loin de faire mal, au contraire, elle apporte, cette furieuse dans ses flots si menaçants, un trésor de sel fécond, meilleur que le limon du Nil, qui enrichit toute culture [...] c’est une mère un peu violente, mais enfin, c’est une mère” (54). Carefully examining “la vraie intelligence de la mer”, we understand that even the sea’s “fureurs apparentes” become “des bienfaits” for earth and humans alike. Approaching the sea from the transitional zones of “les plages, les grèves et les falaises” (55) allows us to “mett[re la mer] en rapport avec nous”. Through the meeting of earth and water, what once appeared to us in its “sauvage” form becomes “divine au fond, donc, amie”.

Having shown the way our relationship to the sea can evolve from one of fear, misunderstanding, and even hostility to a partnership based on wonder, curiosity, and friendship, Michelet extends his metaphorical observation of the sea, seeing it as a living, breathing being. This vision is made possible through a position *en plongée*, giving him better access to the sea’s dynamic life: “l’avantage des falaises, c’est qu’au pied de ces hauts murs bien plus sensiblement qu’ailleurs on apprécie la marée, la respiration, disons-le, le pouls de la mer”. The ocean’s regular movement reveals a great correspondance between living things, reminding the observer of her own life and her place in the universe: “L’Océan respire comme moi, il concorde à mon mouvement intérieur, à celui d’en haut. [...] Il me rappelle et à moi et au monde” (56). Observing the dynamic patterns of the sea helps us to know ourselves and to understand our place in the world. The regular ebb and flow of the ocean’s tides also reveal a vast system of mutual attraction that connects the cosmic bodies of the solar system, a communicative aspiration to “sortir de son égoïsme” (71). The earth’s fluid mass signals its desire to communicate with the celestial bodies with its twice-daily élan toward its cosmic partners. These exterior movements are coupled with an interior respiration of the numerous oceanic currents, the *fleuves* of the ocean, or even anthropomorphized as a marine circulatory system of veins, arteries, and vessels. The physical dynamics of this circulation, however,

show a stronger association with “quelques êtres inférieurs” (72), such as molluscs and annelids, animals whose circulatory system functions according to a *lacunary*, rather than a *vascular* logic associated with the more complexly organized animals. Indeed, the fluid dynamics of the oceanic currents were explained in part thanks to the movements of those “animalcules”, a cloud of life which revealed the hidden pulse of the ocean (73).

For Michelet, the rapid acceleration of human understanding of the planet’s natural phenomena would be largely impossible without an accompanying revolution in the way human beings *imagine* the natural world. From a world of “*littéralisme biblique*, qui fait de la mer une chose” (76) to the modern feeling of “*sympathie de la nature*, pour qui la mer est animée, est une force de vie et presque une personne”, Michelet sees a huge shift at work in cultural attitudes toward the earth, and in particular, toward the sea. He expresses admiration for the work of Matthew Maury, an early American meteorologist who attempted to institute a system of regular maritime meteorology from a collection of logbooks in order to secure oceanic navigation. His *Physical Geography of the Sea*, published in 1855²⁸², strongly influenced Michelet and inspired his reflections on the transitions to a sympathetic view of nature that sees a living, animate world possessing its own personality. This animate view of nature that departed from biblical understanding, long dominant in the natural sciences, and the mechanistic view, ascendant since at least Descartes, is so important to Michelet’s argument that it is worth citing at length:

Il est curieux de voir dans ce livre [de Maury] l’auteur approcher peu à peu du dernier point de vue [animé] par une invincible pente. Tout ce qu’il peut, il l’explique d’abord mécaniquement, physiquement (par la pesanteur, la chaleur, la densité, etc.). Mais cela ne suffit pas. Il ajoute, en certains cas, telle attraction moléculaire, telle action magnétique. Cela ne suffit pas encore. Alors franchement il a recours aux lois physiologiques qui régissent la vie. Il donne à la mer un poulx, des artères, un cœur

²⁸² Excerpts of Maury’s work were first translated and published in French in the *Revue coloniale*, 2^e série, t. XIX, janvier-mars 1858, p. 83-121, 218-228 by E. Tricault, “capitaine de frégate”. The first full translation in French appeared as *Géographie physique de la mer*, Paris, J. Corréard, 1860, trad. P.-A. Terquem and was exhausted in less than a year, before a second edition in 1861. Michelet could have read the translated excerpts published in 1858, the first French edition, as well as the original text in English before writing *La Mer*.

même. Sont-ce de simples formes de style, des comparaisons ? Point du tout. Il a [...] en lui un sentiment impérieux, invincible, de la personnalité de la mer (76-7).

The sea, appearing as an immense “mer animalisée”, breaks down the barriers between physical and living matter. Though the sea is “non organisée encore”, Michelet wonders whether it “ne demand[e] qu’à l’être”, which would complete its evolution from physical force to an organized, organic life form.

Extending this idea, Michelet seeks to build an understanding of marine hydrography which accounts less for the spectacular agitation of the ocean’s surface and more for the relative tranquillity of its deeper waters, the site of its personalized being as “mère et nourrice des êtres” (79). While the true nature of the sea remains a mystery, Michelet assures himself that “les tempêtes sont des violences passagères” (80), and that plunging the depths should bring us closer to “la vraie, la mystérieuse personnalité de la mer”. The opening “Regard sur les mers” allows Michelet to directly state some of the prejudices relating to the seas, to attempt to master those preconceptions in his own writing, and to move toward a fuller reimagining of this living environment.

1.2. Marine Genesis: The Sea as Regenerative Mother

In Michelet’s second book, “La genèse de la mer”, the historian returns to the “source” of his object of study, combined with the imaginary of a skilled writer. Together, these traits contribute to Michelet’s cosmological vision of the sea as mother, a symbolic relationship that remains grounded in exchanges of physical material between the multitudes of Earth’s species. Here, the “genesis” of the sea is not simply a foundational event, it is an endlessly renewed process where death and life interrelate and where humanity participates within Earth’s infinite materiality. The sea’s birth and continuing fertility are tightly linked with the species that constitute the oceanic depths, creating a system of vital exchanges so productive as to break down the distinction between organic and inorganic matter, leading to the recognition of the sea itself as a living being. Michelet’s observations on the sea’s abundant

fertility constitute a reversal of widely held beliefs that imagined the sea as a lifeless desert. Instead, Michelet witnesses “des profondeurs à la surface un monde vivant” (107). The “genesis” of the title refers to the engendering power of the sea, represented by hordes of fish that “épanchent des torrents de fécondité” (108), producing a hybrid mass of water and reproductive material, a “flux maternel” and a “mer blanche de la laitance des mâles”.

This flood of life and its reproductive potential would quickly fill up the seas themselves if not for “l’âpre ligue de toutes les destructions”, a force of death which here appears as the sister of life’s fertility, providing necessary balance. Death becomes a destructive force which consists not in emptying the oceans, but in preventing their solidification. Life and death “se livrent un combat, une lutte immense qui n’est qu’harmonie et fait le salut”. Michelet reimages mortality within a reconceptualized vision of life, which depends upon physical exchanges with both living and dead material. In this vital cycle, mortality becomes a vector toward an eternal rebirth. As Michelet climbs up the food chain from the hareng to the whiting, which gorges on hareng, to the codfish, which devours whiting, he encounters another problem of ichthyological profusion: the cod, part of the “ligue de destruction”, is itself a remarkably productive species, “si bien que le danger des mers, l’excès de la fécondité, recommence ici, plus terrible”. Michelet even calls for a largescale fishing enterprise to combat this species’s overabundance: “lançons des vaisseaux, équipons des flottes” (109-10), failing to envision a future where humanity’s destructive potential would overwhelm the sea’s productivity²⁸³. Not relying on humanity’s “petits efforts”, nature calls upon “des forces de mort bien autrement énergiques”, a “suprême dévorateur” who can

²⁸³ Atlantic cod has been subject to a fishing moratorium in the waters east of Canada since 1992 after total biomass collapsed to 1% of its earlier level; many scientists fear that Northwest cod populations will never recover, due to a potentially permanent shift in the ecosystem’s food chain in favor of cod’s traditional prey species, Cf., Kenneth T. Frank et al., « Trophic Cascades in a Formerly Cod-Dominated Ecosystem », *Science* 308 (5728), p. 1621-1623. [10.1126/science.1113075]. WWF placed cod on its endangered species list in 2000; Greenpeace International added Atlantic cod to its red list of endangered fish species in 2010.

devour without overproducing, a killer “de digestion immense et de génération avare”. This “*beau mangeur de la nature, mangeur patenté*” is the shark, the species which closes the cycle of overabundant productivity. These forces of reproduction and destruction thus exist in a tenuous balance, a vital cycle of material exchanges which permits life to endure.

Though nature ensures the system’s balance, the true wealth of marine biology exists at an even smaller, though infinite scale, a “monde infini d’atomes vivants, d’animaux microscopiques” (111). Playing on oppositions, Michelet highlights the paradoxical wonder of these creatures: despite each individual’s minuscule size, together they produce a “véritable abîme de vie”. That the vastness of the world’s oceans could be “filled” with creatures of such insignificant scale is a mind-boggling paradox. The waves and currents themselves, from the abyssal depths to the agitated surface become “peuplés d’infusoires et de vers microscopiques”. In short, in this previously deserted hydrography, “tout vit et se meut”. Such is the concentration of life in the “eaux vivantes” (112) of the world’s seas that we might consider them less as physical vessel for these creatures than as a living being. The density of life in the sea transforms it into “la grande femelle du globe, dont l’infatigable désir, la conception permanente, l’enfantement, ne finit jamais” (113). Here the metaphor of the indefatigable sea speaks to Michelet’s own desires which essentialize women as unlimited reproductive repositories. Still, this metaphor of the reproductive sea mother is the fundamental idea which allows Michelet to posit a new vision of all life on Earth.

One of the most important steps along Michelet’s recognition of the sea as living being occurs with his investigation of the mystery of seawater’s appearance as “légèrement blanchâtre et un peu visqueuse” (114). All marine plants and animals are covered in this mucus-like substance, perhaps representing “l’élément universel de la vie” (115). Consulting a “chimiste illustre” on this matter, Michelet discovers that although its exact nature remains unknown, it most likely consists of “une densité d’infusoires” (115-16), a name used to

describe a class of unicellular organisms which live via infusion of organic particles²⁸⁴.

Consulting further with “un grand physiologiste”²⁸⁵ (116), the mucus is explained as “tout à la fois une fin et un commencement”. In part composed of “des résidus innombrables de la mort”, the substance also contains the extra “stuff” which living beings constantly exude and which “remplissent le monde des mers d’une richesse gélatineuse dont la vie naissante profite à l’instant”. In the crucible of marine life, these “parcelles animées”, exuded by living species “ne retombe[nt] pas à l’état inorganique, mais entre[nt] rapidement dans les organismes nouveaux”. This “mer de lait” is a world of constant material exchanges between living and nonliving entities, where the source of life comes directly from material emitted by other creatures. So permanent are these exchanges that one cannot clearly distinguish between a living species and the milky, animated parcels in which it evolves and to which it constantly contributes material. Life exists in an infinite state of flux, in material relations so interdependent as to void the idea of “individual self”.

Michelet sympathizes with these microscopic creatures that constitute the basis of all marine life, for their ability to “être au-delà de son être” (119) via their constant interactions with their aquatic milieu. The genesis of the sea refers to the infinite reproductive power of the “lait maternel” (122), even as it hints toward the beginnings of life in Earth’s seas. As energy and organic matter concentrated near the early Earth’s “innombrables volcans”, novel “combinaisons” of elementary life emerged. Organic material eventually accumulated not only in the “mer de lait” but also covered the “sombre nudité des roches vierges” of terrestrial geographies, providing the fertility necessary for life’s expansion onto solid ground. In this

²⁸⁴ Debate over the proper classification of these organisms continues today. Some taxonomic systems refer to “protists” as a kingdom of eukaryotic microorganisms while others prefer the term “chromalyeolata” to describe them, with a further subdivision of “ciliophora” used alternatively as phylum, class, or order. The “infusoires” to which Michelet refers were seen as “animalcules”, animal-like microorganisms. For more on these taxonomic debates, see *La Mer*, *op. cit.*, p. 127-132.

²⁸⁵ Michelet refers to Charles-Philippe Robin, whose consultation Michelet notes in his *Journal* dated 20 May 1860. Robin, educated as a doctor and naturalist, occupied a chair in natural history at the Faculté de médecine but refused some ideas, such as the cellular theory of Schwann, which stated that all living things were composed of cells, the basic unit of life. Borie, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

“travail éternel de fabrication” the sea emerges as the mother of all life, the place of its origin and the place where we can most clearly witness life’s perpetual (re)generation. Michelet writes a new creation story, with the sea playing the roles of creator, setting, protagonist, artist, and eternal mother constantly providing for a world full of its children.

For Michelet, the progression of the natural sciences leads to a growing recognition of the omnipresence of life, a process he calls a “grand effort révolutionnaire contre la matière inerte, et qui irait jusqu’à supprimer l’inorganique” (143). Optimistically drawing inspiration from Lamarck’s discovery and organization of the class of invertebrates²⁸⁶, Michelet envisions the dawn of a new scientific and sympathetic understanding of life, where “et les animaux, et le grand animal, le globe” can be reanimated from the “état pétrifié où on les tenait”. In this animate world, “rien ne serait mort tout à fait”, since decomposed biological matter maintains an element of “vie latente, une aptitude à revivre” by reintegrating with living matter. The classic distinctions between inert minerals, vegetative plants, and animate animals, fade away as the entire planet becomes integrated within a system of living exchanges. Additional discoveries reclassify inert “rock” as living creatures, such as Lamarck’s exposition of the “madrépores” at the Muséum d’histoire naturelle, which revealed these apparent minerals as collections of animal life, leading to a revolutionary concept: “on commença à soupçonner que, si la terre fait l’animal, l’animal fait aussi la terre, et que tous deux accomplissent l’un pour l’autre l’office de création” (144). Terrestrial and animal “selves” exist in an interdependence, now reunited as two forms of life: “vie *agissante* aujourd’hui, vie *disponible* qui agira demain”. The generative potential of the seas constantly recreates life, while death becomes a salutary force which permits the recycling of vital materials for all biological forms. This infinite interfacing between living beings and material substances allows for an expanded notion of identity and being: no longer stopping at the

²⁸⁶ Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck, *Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres*, 7 vol., Paris, Verdière, 1815-1822.

boundary of the skin, shell, or scale, identity extends throughout the relational networks established between active organisms and the material world in which they live. Being thus becomes permeable and mobile, both infiltrating inwardly and expanding outwardly until we might consider the sea itself as a living being of infinite fertile and nourishing power.

Michelet hopes that this regenerative power can also inspire a human “renaissance” out of the dark ages of exploitative relations with the seas toward a new era of understanding, compassion, and healing. This era would necessarily involve direct physical contact between human bodies and the reinvigorating waters of the world’s seas²⁸⁷. Stepping into the sea becomes akin to a return to the maternal womb, allowing a fresh emergence into a reclaimed world. The physical contact between human and marine bodies leads to an expansion of being, an extension of one’s self which engages with the fullness of the biophysical world. Michelet highlights the sea’s potential to serve as a “dépôt pour refaire la vie” (283); a palliative against human decline, the sea provides the healing “calcaire qui [nous] manque”, the same matter that creates the shells and structures of molluscs, crustaceans, and coral, “jusqu’à faire des continents”. This crucible of fertility and constant material exchanges produces a “mucus embryonnaire” (285), a marine womb “où l’homme naquit et renaît”. For Michelet, marine immersion signifies a new engagement with the material essence of human existence and a renewed sense of being defined in terms of relational exchanges between the self and the world.

If trends like coastal tourism and sea bathing could contribute to improving human health, Michelet also sees these activities as important in their ability to reconnect us with the essential features of life. The coasts provide a glimpse into a much wider and deeper world of marine biodiversity. Even though we lack direct access to the deep seas, during the retreating waters of low tide, the ocean “[se] manifeste lui-même et vous offre en quelque sorte la riche

²⁸⁷ See Ceri Crossley, “‘Je ne crois pas aisément à la mort’. Santé et survie selon Michelet”, *Europe*, May 1998 for an analysis of Michelet’s mastery of history used to legitimize his medical discourse on marine regeneration.

vie qu'il nourrit en lui" (304). Walking "pas à pas...sur le sable humide", intensifies this experience, revealing that "ce sable n'est pas mort, qu'ici et là s'agitent nombre de retardataires que le reflux a surpris". These low-tide observations reveal "des espaces immenses, inconnus", a bit of magic during which "le mystérieux fond de la mer, sur lequel on fait tant de rêves, apparaît". This experience, "c'est l'école, c'est le musée" (305), a kind of open-air learning laboratory along the coasts that moves us toward a deeper identification with the infinite forms of life.

Despite seaside tourism's unsatisfactory aspects, Michelet remained optimistic about the ocean's ability to open up the human heart toward a wider notion of self. Identifying "trois formes de la nature" that "étendent et grandissent notre âme, la font sortir d'elle-même et voguer dans l'infini" (315), Michelet places "l'océan des eaux" above "le fixe océan de la terre" and "le variable océan de l'air", for its unique ability to communicate the mystery of the relations that constitute life. Here Michelet makes his most direct, yet poetic statement justifying the sea's role in a renewed notion of human identity. To anyone who would stop to listen, the ocean communicates a powerful message of life and harmony:

la terre est muette, et l'Océan parle. L'Océan est une voix. Il parle aux astres lointains [...] Il parle à la terre, au rivage [...] Il s'adresse à l'homme surtout. Comme il est le creuset fécond où la création commença et continue dans sa puissance, il en a la vivante éloquence ; c'est la vie qui parle à la vie (316).

Born of the inherent fertility of the "mer de lait", the "millions, milliards" of its living beings enter into a chorus of relations to create "la grande voix de l'Océan", which sings the praises of "la vie", "immortalité", and "solidarité". These three pillars of oceanic existence constitute, for Michelet, a trinity of principles for a renewed relationship with all life on Earth and for an expanded notion of human identity. The ocean's call reveals the mystery of life as one of "métamorphose éternelle" and "existence fluide". So abundant and rapid are the material exchanges between living beings as to require an expanded idea of the individual, from now

on engaged in “la loi suprême qui nous fait coopérer, créer, avec la grande Âme, associés (dans notre mesure) à l’aimante Harmonie du monde”.

Michelet’s *La Mer* stands out as a unique achievement in French thinking about the natural world. Drawing upon diverse ideas and metaphors, including literature, legend, history, anecdotal evidence, personal experience, and scientific studies, Michelet produces a compelling synthesis of contemporary human knowledge about the seas. Relaying the latest scientific understandings of the oceans, he relies at least as much on his literary voice to tell a story with the sea as both “décor” and protagonist. Seeing the omnipresence of oceanic fertility and the dynamic harmonies created by the forces of reproduction and destruction, Michelet redefines life and matter themselves, as both organic and inorganic forms participate in the material exchanges constituting existence. Marine life is so prodigious that it physically constructs the ground upon which terrestrial life flourishes, cementing the centrality of marine biology in the planet’s functioning. Ultimately, these forces of production, exchange, and vital cycling cause Michelet to posit a *fluid* notion of life on Earth and a relational identity where the human self expands in infinite exchanges with the totality of the world. Michelet’s maternal seas and mystical materiality would inspire many authors, including Victor Hugo, whose literary descriptions recall Michelet’s fluidity, but where form arises through the violent clashing of antithetical forces. Hugo offers a heroic vision of the encounter between humanity and the sea, where the sacrifice of body and text to the marine element also carries the promise of an eternal renewal.

2. Memento humare: Hugo’s marine vision of dynamic life, creation, and (im)mortality in *Les Travailleurs de la mer*

Victor Hugo has been called “l’Homme Océan”²⁸⁸, for the depth and virtuosity of his artistic talent, during a life and career which spanned most of the 19th century. It would seem

²⁸⁸ The expression originates from Hugo himself, in his 1864 biography-manifesto, *William Shakespeare*: « Il y a des hommes océans en effet. Ces ondes, ce flux et ce reflux, ce va-et-vient terrible, ce bruit de tous les souffles,

only the ocean, with its infinite vistas and abyssal depths, could possess the colossal dimensions to match the man's immense talent. Hugo's own biographical and political path, which saw him exiled to the Anglo-Norman, or Channel Islands, first on Jersey, then on Guernesey, following Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état in 1851, would put the great author in direct contact with the seas, initiating meditations which profoundly influenced his writing and thought. The Hugo that emerges from this experience is, in many ways, a product of a human-ocean encounter, as the seas become the central metaphorical force in Hugo's writing, their immensity serving to enrich his ideas about space, time, and mortality. One of his most important texts written in exile, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*²⁸⁹ is an homage to the maritime populations of the Anglo-Norman islands that allows Hugo to contemplate the complex relations to space which structure human identity, in both life and death. Turning to this novel will allow us to examine Hugo's elevation of the marine space from simple setting to the level of active character and his ideas concerning human identity and immortality formed in relation to the world. Darker, more violent, and more radical than Michelet, Hugo's literary and narrative strategies represent a vision of infinity as a constant clash between creation and destruction, while reinterpreting death as a material return to the earth that renews and perpetuates life. Though Hugo's novel has been frequently studied for its depictions of monstrosity or the aesthetics of his marine descriptions²⁹⁰, our analysis will focus on the aesthetics of discordant harmony, fluid instabilities, and permanent transformations that renew our relationship to the text, the physical world, and our mortal selves²⁹¹.

ces noirceurs et ces transparences, ces végétations propres au gouffre, cette démagogie des nuées en plein ouragan, ces aigles dans l'écume [...]cet insondable, tout cela peut être dans un esprit, et alors cet esprit s'appelle génie, et vous avez Eschyle, vous avez Isaïe, vous avez Juvénal, vous avez Dante, vous avez Michel-Ange, vous avez Shakespeare, et c'est la même chose de regarder ces âmes ou de regarder l'océan. »

²⁸⁹ Victor Hugo, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, Paris, Librairie Internationale, 1866. References to the novel come from the 2012 edition: *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, Paris, Flammarion, 2012.

²⁹⁰ See, for a recent example, Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Profunda. Essai sur le drapé tourmente*, Paris, Gallimard, 2017. Other critical works are referenced throughout the study.

²⁹¹ Unlike some critics, I do not read the novel's ultimate goal as going "au-delà de la matière" (Clément, *Immersion*, *op. cit.*, p. 144). Instead, Hugo creates a novel as fluidly unstable as the elements he describes,

2.1 Fluid beings and things: Hugo's dynamic vision of human-marine identities

From the beginning of Hugo's text, mobility emerges as both a central theme and a structural motif which drives the narrative forward. This fluid movement, associated with seascapes, remains present during scenes taking place entirely upon land or during moments where the reader gains access to the subjective experience of the principal characters. Although the opening scene places the reader in a tranquil setting around "la Christmas de 182. ... à Guernesey"(113), one is quickly presented with the ubiquity of movement in this otherwise calm scene. Falling snow imparts a dynamism to a winter landscape "à peu près désert", and the "route qui longe la mer" indicates the near presence of the aquatic element, simultaneously present in its liquid and solidified forms. As three "passants" appear along the road, "en dépit de la fête", they seem oddly rushed: the man, identified later in the chapter as "Gilliatt", wears "ses habits de tous les jours" including "un pantalon de jambières goudronnées", not intending to participate in the religious festivities, and the woman, who already wears "sa toilette d'église", nevertheless moves "avec une vivacité libre et légère" (114). This young woman named Déruchette stops suddenly to write something on the snow, a "mot écrit sur une page blanche", revealed as the name of the man, despite the fact that the two had "visiblement aucun lien entre eux". By the time Gilliatt reaches the traced letters on the bed of snow, Déruchette has moved on, leaving the perplexed man to contemplate the scene in a brief moment of immobility, which persists for less than a single sentence: "Il resta longtemps immobile, regardant ce nom, ces petits pieds, cette neige, puis continua sa route, pensif". The analogy between Déruchette's "mot" and Hugo's own writing process is significant for the novel as a whole. Destined to disappear, the name on the snow²⁹² is

while also encouraging a renewed relationship to the material world. Art, after Hugo, consists not in giving material form to an idea, but in ensuring that form remains as subject to transformation as the world it represents.

²⁹² Victor Brombert highlights snow's essential ambivalence and impermanence as "neither solid nor liquid, neither earth nor water" and "bound to disappear". See "*Les Travailleurs de la mer*: Hugo's Poem of Effacement", *New Literary History*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1978, p. 581.

impermanent; like Hugo's writing, it is a form that will be *deformed*, a process of destruction that also carries regenerative potential. Hugo's characters are mobile, the landscape of Guernesey is dynamic, and matter exists simultaneously in multiple states.

In Hugo's vision of the Anglo-Norman islands, all aspects of the land and seascapes, whether marine/natural, animal, human, or constructed, appear as living, active forces. This living geography's dynamism promotes constant exchanges of physical materials and invisible energy forces between beings, "objects", physical matter, and natural phenomena, transfers which create a high degree of instability and variability in all beings and forms. The sea's fluidity permeates the island's geography, making everything mobile and fleeting. The "maison visionnée" (115) provides a look at Hugo's method of representing these fluid relations. This class of homes, called "visionnées", blurs distinctions between domestic interior and natural exterior spaces. Even though a home of this type has its entry "barricadée", the windows of the upper floors reveal its hybrid existence: "les fenêtres des étages supérieurs sont à la fois fermées et ouvertes". Nature is not banished from these homes, but grows in, around, and upon the structure itself: "s'il y a un beyle, une cour, l'herbe y pousse, le parapet d'enceinte s'écroule ; s'il y a un jardin, il est ortie, ronce et ciguë, et l'on peut y épier les insectes rares". The inter-species hybridity and wildness of these spaces provoke fear and animosity, given their apparent diabolical disposition. Gilliatt inhabits one of these possessed homes, a dilapidated domicile, called "le Bû de la rue" (117), which sits in an isolated zone. This isolation does not prevent the Bû de la rue from participating in its local marine and island biogeographies. Located "à la pointe d'une langue de terre...qui faisait un petit mouillage à part dans la crique de Houmet-Paradis", Gilliatt's home balances itself above the void, which allows it dual communication with the land and the "eau profonde" whose "hautes marées noyaient quelquefois le jardin". It is these hybrid, unstable states of being which shake the confidence of a superstitious population, allowing them to imagine the

most sorcerous deeds taking place within the suspicious house. For Hugo, however, these mobile forms and identities constitute the nature of existence itself.

Gilliatt's mysterious origins and solitary life only augment the public's suspicion surrounding his person and his isolated home. The apparent son of an immigrant, who "était anglaise, à moins qu'elle ne fût française" (120), Gilliatt's life took a major turn with his "mother's" death. His emotional pain accentuated his isolation, creating a deserted void around his inherited residence of Bû de la rue. As social outcast, Gilliatt had more space to mix his identity with the natural phenomena cohabiting his terrestrial-marine environment. Gilliatt's solitude "l'attir[e] vers les choses et loin des hommes" (122), while his uncertain origins only produce doubts in the eyes of his contemporaries: "les gens du pays n'aiment pas qu'il y ait des énigmes sur des étrangers" (123). His lack of participation in religious services, his interest in books, his propensity to communicate with "inert" objects in nature, his nocturnal walks along the island's coasts, his "faible pour les oiseaux" (131), all contribute to the public's suspicions, as Gilliatt becomes "à peu près haï dans tout le pays". Despite Gilliatt's isolation and relative material poverty, the man knows how to read and write, and displays qualities which placed him "sur la limite qui sépare le songeur du penseur" (136), often seen with a "regard profond", that of a thinker who questions the universe's mystery. He is also "un homme de mer surprenant", thanks to a physical prowess forged "à force de grimper dans les rochers, d'escalader les escarpements, d'aller et de venir dans l'archipel par tous les temps". Gilliatt's abilities and knowledge arise from his direct connection to the sea. His skill at navigating the "bas-fonds" and the "récifs de l'archipel normand" is such that one could believe he possessed "sous la voûte du crâne une carte du fond de la mer". These marine skills produce an encyclopedic knowledge of the sea's character and its deep, hidden essence.

Gilliatt's close observations of the biophysical world lead him to posit the existence of an infinite, invisible realm of living creatures, filling the world's atmosphere as much as the "transparences vivantes" (141) which populate the seas. Everywhere Gilliatt looks in the visible world, he sees a dynamic "nature infinie", a limitless biosphere that extends even into the invisible domain of "l'Inconnu". This unknown world reveals its secrets to Gilliatt during lucid dreams, where previously ignored forms and beings "deviennent voisins de l'homme" (142), oscillating between physical existence and immaterial forms: "devant notre contemplation spectrale, une vie autre que la nôtre s'agrège et se désagrège, composée de nous-mêmes et d'autre chose". Gilliatt gains access to this hidden world full of "ces animalités étranges, ces végétations extraordinaires, ces lividités terribles ou souriantes"; devoid of "surnaturalisme", it is simply the revealed mystery of "la réalité invisible". Between those human beings careful enough to contemplate these mysteries and the surrounding world, there is a profound connection: each being is partially composed of everything else in nature while also realizing its own independent reality. Gilliatt appears uniquely positioned to apprehend the infinity of the living world as well as the invisible relations that expand and link together human and marine identities. Like the sea itself, identities veer in constant flux, composed relationally of themselves and everything else in the environment. In the process, the sea's "fluidity" defines all participants in the world.

An environment which possesses strange dynamic forces and seems to actively conspire against human presence is the "Rocher Douvres", a group of rocky reefs and cliffs "à cinq lieues environ en pleine mer, au sud de Guernesey" (285). Situated approximately sixteen kilometers to the west of Jersey, and less than forty kilometers west of the French Norman coastline, this group of rocks finds itself in an exposed position, making it appear inhospitable, even "farouche". While Hugo cites many other "sauvage" rocks in the Channel, the Douvres distinguish themselves by their total desolation: "aux rochers Douvres,

personne”. It is perhaps this inhospitability to humans, however, that allow the Douvres to play a different ecological role: “les oiseaux de mer sont là chez eux”. This rock group is a hybrid land and seascape that both attracts and repels life, preventing human presence while serving as an important refuge for a diverse marine biology. The combined effects of “la rafale, l’eau, la nuée” (286) produce terrifying storms that lash against the granite rock faces “d’une stature brutale et hideuse”, creating both an “inhospitalité sévère de l’abîme” and perfect conditions for those creatures who seek isolation from human influence. Combining the features of the deep seas with the shallower recesses of the littoral, the Douvres condense the most salient aspects of the sea-land relationship in a single place.

Hugo’s discourse relies on the figure of antithesis, which permits the author to unite otherwise contrasting ideas within a single image. Rather than pulling the reader from one pole to the other, Hugo’s antitheses add depth, complexity, and dynamism to his characters and descriptions of places. The antithesis creates, then destroys an image, but Hugo’s destruction is generative of a new reality²⁹³. In his representations of the sea, Hugo’s use of semantic contrasts helps the reader to internalize the notion of fluidity in her own mental images of those places. While the first portrait of the Douvres emphasizes danger, the place is also home to a kind of frenetic dynamism, where flourishing life and devouring death coexist: “C’est une sorte de vaste madrépore sous-marin... Les espèces monstrueuses y pullulent. On s’entre-dévore... D’effroyables essaims nageants rôdent là, faisant ce qu’ils ont à faire. C’est une ruche d’hydres” (286). Here, the forces of life and death compete for supremacy, resulting in an unstable balance between proliferating abundance and devouring consumption. Like Michelet, Hugo shows the salutary aspects of decay and death, those necessary checks on life’s excessive fertility. Verbs like “attirer”, “abriter”, and “pulluler” conflict directly with

²⁹³ Textually, the antithesis destroys the original image, but both images remain active in the reader’s mind. Bombert (*op. cit.*, p. 589) sees the process as “merging, vanishing, melting of one into the other”, but we read it differently: Hugo’s antitheses offer a fluid conception of reality with two coexisting, conflictual possibilities.

verbs like “manger”, “errer”, and “s’entre-dévorer”. Life in the Douvres can resemble a productive harbor or a perilous hell. While the Douvres may be deserted to humans, it hosts a multitude of creatures participating in the grand symphony of life and death.

Gilliatt’s arrival on the scene of the wrecked steamship *Durande* in the Douvres brings us to a complex environment at the interface of rock, water, and wind. Not simply the result of steamer crashing against rock, the *Durande*’s wreck owes to “la nuée, le tonnerre, la pluie, les souffles, les flots, les roches” (360), all acting as “complice” in the larger work of destruction. In the drama of the *Durande*’s ruin, “le vent mord, le flot dévore ; la vague est une mâchoire”, each element plays its role. So complete were “la déchirure, la dislocation, et la rupture” (361) of the *Durande* that the hulking mass of mechanics seemed to dissolve within its aquatic surroundings, taking on a fluid identity: “ce je ne sais quoi d’inconsistant et de liquide qui caractérise tous les pêle-mêle...tout croulait, tout coulait”. In short, the Douvres are not simply a rock wall which challenges marine navigation, but an environment whose fluid identity arises from the relational interplay between all aspects of an active, biophysical space. While the reef projected a foreboding presence, its emerged portion only represented “que le haut” (365), while the great mass of its material remained hidden in the sea’s depths. In the Douvres, we can see the forces of geology and hydrography competing and working together to shape the visible world, the Douvres formed as a hybrid space, both mountain and sea: “l’émergement de deux gigantesques lames de granit se touchant presque et sortant verticalement, comme une crête, des cimes qui sont au fond de l’océan”. Formed by the forces of continental drift and plate tectonics, alternately covered or exposed by changing global sealevels, the Douvres are perpetually shaped by the dual action of rock and water: “la rafale et la houle avaient déchiqueté cette crête en scie”. Hugo reminds us to remain attentive to the reef’s submerged aspects – “ce que le flot cachait devait être énorme” – which constitute the majority of the place’s reality and contribute to its liminal identity.

As Gilliatt further inspects the “double façade intérieure de l’écueil” (366), he discovers what seems to be a land/seascape of decay, decomposition, and death. Ambiguously situated at the intersection of life and death, decomposers reveal their presence in the form of diversely colored molds clinging to the marine rocks. This “moisissure” dispersed “par places des pourpres affreuses, des verdissements suspects, des éclaboussures vermeilles”. Though these molds participate in decay, they are themselves living creatures that recycle matter and nutrients in the environment. The inclusion of these molds adds a layer of complexity which prevents a uniform interpretation of the place. Indeed, through the signs of murder and the presence of decomposers, the Douvres plays host to all stages of the life cycle, whether living being, decomposing flesh, or dead matter. Far from Michelet’s maternal figure, violent confrontations between competing forces characterize Hugo’s descriptions. Hugo’s use of antithesis, hyperbole, oxymoron, and metaphor radically animates the identity of the Douvres and prepares the ground for a fluid conception of humanity itself, to which we now turn.

2.2 Fluid humanity: Hugo’s vision of humility, sacrifice, and mortality in a marine world

From the beginning, Hugo’s descriptions of Gilliatt assimilate his physical character and personality traits with the fluid dynamics of the sea. As the mariner attempts the herculean feat of saving the *Durande* from the *rocher Douvres*, he engages in a quest of mythological proportions which carries him to the brink of human limits. Gilliatt’s experience covers the full spectrum of human possibility, allowing Hugo to sketch his conception of a fluid human identity and a reclaimed idea of humble, sacrificial mortality. Beginning his labors, Gilliatt accesses the *Douvre’s* summit where, “jamais rien que d’ailé n’avait posé le pied” (378). Meanwhile, a group of seabirds including “des mouettes, des goëlands, des frégates, des cormorans, des mauves, une nuée d’oiseaux de mer, étonnés” (381), return home to the *grande Douvre*, “leur auberge”, but are forced to seek temporary residence on the pillar known as “l’Homme”, on the other side of the reef. Gilliatt resides in a seabird’s roost while

the stunned seabirds lodge on a rock called “l’Homme”, reversing standard associations in this hydro-geography, as Gilliatt connects with the possibilities of a fluid identity.

Gilliatt’s search for useful debris from the Durande’s wreck and his need to hunt for food push him to explore the maze of tunnels, caverns, caves, grottos, fissures, and passages that make up the rocher Douvres, both subterranean and submarine spaces. In the underwater maze, the power of the sea appears sovereign: “La mer y est seule. Elle fait ce qu’elle veut. Nulle apparition terrestre ne l’inquiète” (394). While this power speaks as “monologue des flots”, the real genius of its construction arises from the interaction between oceanic and geological forces, the sea perfecting the raw material of the earth: “Elle travaille à l’écueil, répare ses avaries, aiguise ses pointes, le hérise, le remet à neuf, le maintient en état”. With a litany of verbs in the active voice, the sea acts as both engineer and artist: “Elle entreprend le percement du rocher, désagrège la pierre tendue, dénude la pierre dure, ôte la chair, laisse l’ossement, fouille, dissèque, fore, troue, canalise...emplit l’écueil de cellules, imite l’éponge en grand, creuse le dedans, sculpte le dehors”. The sea uses its talents to transform the raw rock into a complex edifice while adding biological matter to give the ensemble a living aesthetic: “Elle se fait...des antres, des sanctuaires, des palais ; elle a on ne sait quelle végétation hideuse et splendide composée d’herbes flottantes qui mordent et de monstres qui prennent racine”. Hugo signals the sea’s sublime power to “enfou[ir] sous l’ombre de l’eau cette magnificence affreuse”. The fluid space becomes a metaphor for Gilliatt’s ability to constantly evolve in tandem with other participants in the seascape.

When Gilliatt plunges into the labyrinth-like depths of sea caves under the Douvres, he leaves a world under his control and allows his identity to flow as freely as the ocean currents, in a manner as uncertain as the passages he explores. Emphasizing his evolution, Hugo employs a series of verbs which evoke animal movements, forcing his hero to give up his bipedal humanity by adopting a slinking profile in order to access the narrow tunnels. In

search of food, Gilliatt “fur[ète]” (396) into a narrow fissure, assuming the shape and mindset of a hunting ferret. Later, the constricting passage requires Gilliatt to contort his body near the point of self-erasure: “il fit effort, s’effaça, se tordit de son mieux, et s’engagea le plus avant qu’il put” (397). While he eventually makes his way through the “boyau” into a wider cavern, Gilliatt carries on using animalistic movements, becoming like the octopus he would soon encounter: “[Il]...serpentait, rampait, se heurait le front, se courbait, se redressait, perdait pied, retrouvait le sol, avançait péniblement”. While he finally reaches the end of the bowel-like passage, his success relies upon his unstable identity: giving up elements of his humanity, Gilliatt accesses a more-than-human world.

Emerging from the cave, the man “était devenu effrayant” (418), having neglected his physical and psychological health during his desperate attempt to save the Durande. Quickly, “privations d’un côté, lassitude de l’autre”, left Gilliatt long-haired, bearded, and bare-footed, left with only one “chemise qui ne fût en loques”. Continued neglect could prove fatal: “il avait faim, il avait soif, il avait froid”. As his “forces décroissaient”, it became clear that the Douvres, “ce rocher redoutable lui soutirait la vie”. So profound is the change in Gilliatt that the local birds “s’étaient accoutumées à lui, et ne s’envolaient pas à son approche”. Since they “ne le trouvaient plus un homme et le croyaient une bête” (419) the birds and Gilliatt “étaient maintenant bons amis”. A dual movement characterizes Gilliatt’s moral and physical evolution: on one hand, his “défaillances du corps” diminish his material existence; on the other, his strength of spirit “l’hallucinait” (423), allowing a higher moral purpose to dominate his physical suffering. Slowly, Gilliatt feels himself taken within the vastness of the universe, hurtling toward a “destinée” from which there was “pas d’évasion possible” (429). To be taken within the “engrenage” of the universe produces a split feeling of “angoisse” and “ravisement”, as the inevitable approach of mortality is juxtaposed against the vague hope of “une immortalité”, “une éternité possible”. Despite physical weakness, Gilliatt moves toward

an expanded relationship between the self and the world, as one feels “l’inconnu qu’on a en soi fraterniser mystérieusement avec un inconnu qu’on a hors de soi”. Boundaries between individual beings and the wide universe dissolve as the self contemplates an “adhérence à l’infini”, an eternal relationship with the world. The fear of death by submersion “dans le prodigieux flot de ce déluge de vie universelle” is countered by “l’opiniâtreté insubmersible du moi”. This maintenance of the self can only be achieved through a complete union with the universe, through reuniting the human and non-human “abîmes”. Sacrificing his life so that his material and spiritual essences might join “l’infini”, Gilliatt moves toward a form of “immortalité”, a renewed vision for both life and death²⁹⁴.

After freeing the Durande’s machine from the Douvres, Gilliatt is faced with a terrifying combination of earth, air, water, and fire, in the form of a great equinox storm. The trapped mariner decides to join forces with another unlikely alliance of rock, water, and air: “le rocher Douvres, autrefois son adversaire, était maintenant son second” (471). Accepting his possible death in an act of extreme self-abnegation, Gilliatt seeks to “mourir le premier” (475), in order to save the “machine”, which “lui faisait l’effet d’une personne”. As the storm crashes in, with one near-catastrophe after another, Gilliatt “ne se déconcertait pas” (481), countering the “démence” and “colère” of oceanic “ouragan” with his own style of calm, “aussi prudent que hardi”. The mariner’s skill “contre le délire des forces” (484), allows him to transform a looming disaster (the fall of the Durande’s shell) into an unforeseen advantage. The ship’s broken hull lodges itself between the two Douvres, creating a vertical wall twelve feet above the wave level, becoming a “cinquième barricade improvisée” (485). Gilliatt’s

²⁹⁴ One might read the influence of *spiritisme* in Gilliatt’s ability to join with the unseen, infinite “abîme”, to communicate beyond death. See Allan Kardec, *Le Livre des Esprits*, 1857. For Hugo’s participation in the doctrine, see Jean de Mutigny, *Victor Hugo et le spiritisme*, Paris, Nathan, 1981. After arriving in Jersey, Hugo began organizing “séances des tables tournantes”, even before Kardec’s book appeared. The phenomenon even inspired scientists to conduct experimental research into its origins. See, for example, Michael Faraday, “Recherches expérimentales sur les tables tournantes”, *L’Illustration*, 2 juillet 1853. See also, Guillaume Cuchet, *Les Voix d’outre-tombe. Tables tournantes, spiritisme et société au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 2012.

triumph consists in using the forces of his adversary against itself; ironically, “l’ouragan, aveugle, avait travaillé à cette barricade dernière”. His calm ability to link his strength to other forces allows Gilliatt to “tir[er] le salut” “de la catastrophe”²⁹⁵.

Awakening from a coma-like fatigue after his battle with the storm, Gilliatt perceives a sea which “s’apaisait” (489) and feels intense hunger. The need leads him on a search for “poux de roque”, “langoustes”, and “crabes”, bringing him to the same mysterious seacave he had earlier visited. Upon returning, the mariner becomes the target of the *pieuvre*, a horrifying monster of infinite protean possibility²⁹⁶. Feeling his arm seized by something “mince, âpre, plat, glacé, gluant et vivant” (492), Gilliatt experiences “l’horreur indescriptible”. The *pieuvre*’s “lanières” are “souple[s] comme le cuir, solide[s] comme l’acier, froide[s] comme la nuit”, quickly surrounding Gilliatt’s body with five tentacles covered in “enfouissements ronds” capable of “lui boire le sang” and powerful enough to compress his breathing to a pained wheeze. So horrible is the *pieuvre* that “les vieilles hydres font sourire” (494) in comparison. The beast, a materialization of the sea’s inherent danger, is a “chef-d’œuvre” of “épouvante” and the tangible form of a monstrous human subconscious²⁹⁷. The *pieuvre*’s offensive strategy consists almost entirely of “la ventouse” (495), which covers the length of its eight appendages allowing debilitating attacks from any angle. These sucking organs, four hundred in total, allow the *pieuvre* to “adhère étroitement à sa proie” (496), creating an “inarrachable” vacuum. Varying in dimension, the “ventouses” are cartilaginous organs that

²⁹⁵ See Margaret Cohen’s fine work *The Novel and the Sea*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010, where she reads Hugo’s novel as “glorification of work” (189), of both Gilliatt’s maritime struggle and Hugo’s labor of literary description, seeing the novel as “modernist exploration into the dynamism of poetic imagery” (191). We share Cohen’s admiration for Hugo’s modernism, yet we do not agree that the goal of the work is to “dematerialize the nature” (196) he describes.

²⁹⁶ See Stéphanie Boulard, *Écrire, dessiner, penser le monstre dans l’oeuvre de Victor Hugo*, Diss., Emory University, 2006, for a reading of monstrosity in Hugo’s works. Boulard sees the *pieuvre* as Hugo’s attempt to deal with the monstrosity of the death penalty, comparing its habitat, the H-shaped Douvres to the form of the guillotine, a reading reinforced by Gilliatt’s beheading of the cephalopod.

²⁹⁷ Laurent Jenny, *La terre et les signes poétiques de rupture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982, p. 107, reads the *pieuvre* as Hugo’s horror of the indescribable: “the octopus is both part of the world and an exit from the world”. Hugo as novelist is linked to the octopus, its defensive cloud of black ink mirroring the writer’s fear of textual formlessness. Though Gilliatt dispenses with the beast, its role as manifestation of the void cannot be wholly erased, given the unsettling similarities between human and monster.

are strangely fleshy and “livides”. Possessing a high degree of sensitivity and motor responsiveness, the suckers “obéi[ssent] à la moindre intention de l’animal”, always corresponding exactly “aux mouvements intérieurs de la bête et aux incidents extérieurs”²⁹⁸. The pieuvre, then, is not simply a killing machine, but a highly sensitive, intelligent animal capable of implementing its will while living in phase with its environment.

The fearsome animal belongs both to reality and to legend. Long known to mariners as “poulpe”, to scientists as “céphalopode”, and to myth as “kraken”, the Channel Islands name the beast “pieuvre”²⁹⁹. Symbol of the fluid environment where it makes its home, the pieuvre is an unstable, flexible being; the beast is “une viscosité qui a une volonté” (497). The pieuvre’s “ventouses” make the animal more fearsome than those possessing the sharpest claws or fangs. The ventouse does not “entre dans votre chair” (498) as does the “griffe”, but instead “c’est vous-même qui entrez dans la bête”, as human blood is sucked from the body and “se mêle affreusement à la lymphe du mollusque”. The pieuvre “vous aspire”, creating a horrifying hybrid where “l’hydre s’incorpore à l’homme ; l’homme s’amalgame à l’hydre”. The pieuvre’s incorporation of the human body within its own blurs the distinction between human and beast. For Hugo, apprehending one of these “étranges animaux”(499) is a question not only for science, but more profoundly for philosophy. Challenging conventional notions of life, the pieuvre reveals nature’s reality as “mangeante et mangée” (501), a world of “la mort partout”. Life on Earth does not consist in a stable separation between species and matter. Instead, “tous les êtres rentrent les uns dans les autres” in a vast system of material

²⁹⁸ Hugo’s description matches with surprising precision the contemporary understanding of the cephalopod’s distributed nervous system, where functions are shared between “the central brain and the rest of the organism, which has its own nervous organization”. See Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Other Minds. The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016, p. 105.

²⁹⁹ See, for instance, Pierre Dénys de Montfort’s *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière des mollusques*, 4 Vol., Paris, 1801-1804. Montfort recognized two species of giant octopus, including the *poulpe-kraken* capable of sinking ships, his description inspired by stories from mariners and writers like Pliny the Elder rather than by empirical evidence. The smaller octopus was often confused with the giant squid, only officially discovered in 1857 by the Danish scientist Johan Japetus Steenstrup. It should be noted that the octopus does not suck blood, but this aspect serves Hugo’s creation of the *pieuvre* as ideal horror.

exchanges where “pourriture, c’est nourriture”, where the other exists within the self. In realizing its function as voracious “ensevelisseur”, the pieuvre pairs with human beings since, “l’homme, carnassier, est, lui aussi, un enterreur”. Revealing similarities between two wildly different species, the pieuvre helps us to reexamine the notion of death, where we might “tâch[er] que la mort nous soit progrès”. Hugo meditates on the doom that awaits Gilliatt and all living beings, but he points toward a new purpose for death in relation to life on Earth.

Enlaced in five arms of the beast and covered with “deux cent cinquante suçoirs” (503), Gilliatt marshalls his marine knowledge, aware that “le poulpe, en effet, n’est vulnérable qu’à la tête”. The trapped man prepares his strike by arming his free left hand with his knife. In this moment, both sides waited for the other to act; Gilliatt “regardait la pieuvre, qui le regardait” (504), a brief visual exchange which affirms the animal as thinking subject, yet radically other. Just as the animal makes its move to apply a sixth tentacle to Gilliatt’s body, he “évit[e] l’antenne” and plunges his “poing armé” into the beast’s center. With a “mouvement giratoire”, he quickly beheads the pieuvre, and “ce fut fini”. Through the octopus’s death, Gilliatt *undoes* the immediate danger, but his body is covered with “plus de deux cents tumeurs” (505), including several out of which “le sang jaillissait”; the pieuvre thus remains present in Gilliatt’s transformed body. Author and character create and destroy, but the destruction is never total – it generates a new reality. Gilliatt ensures the transformation when he turns to the seawater as a “remède à ces lésions”, replacing his lost flesh with marine matter to further unite his identity with the sea.

Exiting the seacave, Gilliatt encounters “un squelette humain” (506), surrounded by “une multitude de crabes”, themselves “inertes” and “vides”. So numerous are the crabs that they “faisaient sur le pavé de galets qui encombraient le caveau des constellations difformes”, their shells indistinguishable from the rocky cave floor. Though this “merveilleux palais de l’abîme” (507) is “brodé et incrusté de toutes les pierreries de la mer”, those precious stones

are in fact built of decomposed organic matter. The spectacle again allows the narrator to consider “l’horreur profonde des choses”: here “les crabes avaient mangé l’homme, la pieuvre avait mangé les crabes”. Gilliatt discovers clear evidence of death in relation with the world, where “rien ne se cache et rien ne se perd”, each mortal organic body sustaining other living beings, accumulating to form the earth’s solid forms, or dissolving into the chemical solution of the ocean to be absorbed by new life forms, recommencing an eternal cycle.

Having survived all challenges, Gilliatt finds himself confronted with one that surpassed them all: his boat had been pierced during the storm and was taking water. Diminished through constant struggle, the mariner stands hopelessly on top of the grande Douvre “nu devant l’immensité” (518); finally despairing, he “se coucha tout de son long le dos sur la roche, la face aux étoiles” (519). Gilliatt “se sentait dissoudre”, as he accepts his own mortal end, destined to unite his body with the marine system of organic, mineral, and liquid materiality. Though his death seems assured, the entire seascape reverses its hostile tendencies to assume the role of nourishing mother, from the sun that contributes “une prodigalité de lumière” (520) and the wind offering “la printanière haleine de mai” to the “mer sereine” that reflects the sun’s life-giving rays toward the rock to “réchauff[er] l’homme”. The sea accepts Gilliatt as “son enfant”, a mariner now completely integrated within the seascape. Now “joyeux”, Gilliatt concludes his labors and “le lendemain, à l’aube...par un bon vent, par une mer admirable, [il] sortit de l’écueil Douvres” (521), on his way back to Guernesey. Thanks to his ability to unite his strength with his surroundings, he realizes a heroic feat, and he now returns with an identity expanded through trial unto the ends of the universe itself.

The rescue of the Durande’s machine should earn for Gilliatt a triumphant return to Guernesey and the hand of Déruchette, but his arrival proves to be one day too late, as he witnesses while “caché sous les ronces” (543), the pastor Ebenezer propose to the young

woman. Overcome with despair, Gilliatt refuses mess Lethierry's attempts to intervene on his behalf, choosing instead to sacrifice himself to ensure the young woman's happiness, even working to ensure the successful marriage of Déruchette and Ebenezer. Leading the two lovers to the church, Gilliatt appears as "un spectre menant deux âmes au paradis" (576). While Gilliatt does not become Déruchette's husband, he is responsible for her marriage and her happiness. Without his sacrifice, the young woman would have endured forced separation and an unwanted marriage. Gilliatt had nothing left to do but to lead the newlyweds onboard the *Cashmere*, then watch until it sailed out of sight, before realizing the final union between his own fluid identity and that of the sea itself. Following the ship along the shore, his sadness contrasts with the atmosphere of springtime joy which the entirety of nature celebrates. It was a morning which "avait on ne sait quoi de nuptial" (588), where "la création semble n'avoir d'autre but que de se donner une fête et de faire son bonheur" (589). The entire landscape participates in a festival of new life, "de la forêt comme du village, de la vague comme de l'atmosphère, il y avait un roucoulement". The entire island, from its birds to its flowering plants, calls out with "des cris de bienvenue", welcoming "les pousses nouvelles", the returning "oiseaux lointains", and even the underlying work of "les magnificences microscopiques", whose endeavors were revealed "comme dans une eau limpide" by "une divine plénitude et un gonflement mystérieux" (590). This profusion of life could be traced back to "l'effort panique et sacré de la sève en travail", ensuring the constant exchange of matter and "la reproduction des êtres" essential for life's endurance. Against the backdrop of this ecstatic celebration of life, Gilliatt proceeds silently toward a meeting with destiny.

In a serene acceptance of his fate, Gilliatt moves toward a final meeting with the sea. He leaves his former life behind him, advancing "non du côté de la terre, mais du côté de la mer" (591), toward "ce gros obélisque de granit debout au milieu de la mer qu'on appelait la Corne de la Bête", where rock, water, and human could unite. Arriving at the "chaise Gild-

Holm-'Ur", Gilliatt reaches the extremity of the island of Guernesey, the place where "la terre finissait" (592) and his final reunion with the oceanic infinity would occur. The infinite expanses of the atmosphere and the ocean appear "immobile[s]" (593), a serenity contrasting with their prior agitation in the Douvres. Both "l'air et la vague" now seem "assoupis", while the sea's tide rises only "par gonflement" and "sans palpitation". Like Gilliatt, the sea appears at peace with itself, mounting incrementally to meet the waiting mariner. As the seawater "s'enflait paisiblement", producing no waves against the motionless mariner, Gilliatt loses his status as the primary subject of the narrative as representations of space and time become the active performers in the text. Birds "volaient" (595), the tide "s'élevait", time "passait", the wind "ne se faisait pas sentir", and water "s'enflait", all while Gilliatt maintains a resigned passivity. The sea continues its movement that can only end in the submergence and drowning of the motionless man. It thus remains an active force, but it refrains from claiming Gilliatt's life with the violence it displayed in the Douvres, rising up in a calm embrace of a man it accepts as its brother. This dual serenity, Gilliatt's passive acceptance of death and the sea's surprising calmness in submerging him, points toward a reclaimed vision of mortality. Lacking spectacle, Gilliatt's death is a choice entered into with full recognition of its consequences. The sea "montait avec une douceur sinistre", accepting its role as executioner, but without vicious force. This is the meeting of a pair of linked identities, the ultimate union of oceanic and human infinities.

Remembering Hugo's explanation of mortal immortality in the chapter "Sub umbrà" (2, II, V), where the self maintains its identity after death while achieving synthesis with the infinite space of the world, we should understand Gilliatt's drowning death as an example of the "opiniâtreté insubmersible du moi". The title of Hugo's last chapter, "La grande tombe", suggests a death with wider implications, where the body dissolves into a larger communion with the infinite space of the world. As Gilliatt's body disappears underneath "le flux", his

head alone remains above the rising waters, and the narration shifts to focus on “l’œil de Gilliatt”. This synecdoche symbolizes the mariner’s departure from the human world even as he acquires immortal status and joins his essence with the “eau infinie” (596) of the universe. Although his eye “ne ressemblait à rien de ce qu’on peut voir sur la terre”, it displayed a certain “apaisement”, a “prunelle tragique et calme” that contained “l’acceptation lugubre d’un autre accomplissement”, the accomplishment of his final union with the world. As night falls around him, “l’obscurité céleste se faisait sous ce sourcil”, indicating an evolution in the location of Gilliatt’s self, from the terrestrial/marine to the celestial, suggesting a deeper meaning for the man’s mortality. Gilliatt accepts his oceanized fate, but he is not uniquely passive since the humanized sea shares his calm serenity.

Soon, Gilliatt’s eye acquires the same depth as the sea around it, dissolving the distinction between man and water: “en même temps que l’eau infinie autour du rocher Gild-Holm-’Ur, l’immense tranquillité de l’ombre montait dans l’œil profond de Gilliatt”. The strange description highlights a confusion of identities as the dark seawater assumes Gilliatt’s personality and his self acquires the physical depth of the ocean. Gilliatt’s “œil fixe” watches as the *Cashmere* fades out of sight; the ship “pâlit”, “s’amointrit”, and “se dissipa”, a dissolution that parallels Gilliatt’s own fusion with the ocean. At the exact “instant où le navire s’effaça à l’horizon”, Gilliatt’s “tête disparut sous l’eau”, the novel ending, as it began, “under the sign of effacement and dissolution”³⁰⁰. His submergence is figured not as a death, but as a disappearance. Hugo’s last sentence, “il n’y eut plus rien que la mer”, could be read as a fatalistic expression of inevitable human death, but placing it in the context of the novel’s theme of surpassing the traditional boundary between life and death, the sentence suggests a

³⁰⁰ Brombert, *op. cit.*, p. 581. Brombert notes that both characters and text are condemned to obliteration, but, we argue that Hugo’s effacement is never complete, it offers hope for a renewed reality (and literary style) which survives immersion. For a fine analysis of the novel’s end, see Jean-Pierre Montier, “Le ‘finale’ des *Travailleurs de la mer* : horizon et limite du texte romanesque”, *Littérature*, N° 135, 2004. Gilliatt’s eye, though it is a “rayon éteint”, “est transmué en sphère planétaire” (p. 16) as his identity expands throughout the universe.

possible immortal union with the universe. In the final scene, Gilliatt obtains such a union, as his self possesses the full depth of the sea that submerges him. Though Gilliatt drowns, the scene contains no violence, as Hugo instead focuses on Gilliatt's "œil fixe", implying he retains a form of his identity, expanded now throughout the infinite depth and vastness of the sea.

If Hugo's novel paints a tragic picture of Gilliatt's heroism, his selfless sacrifice and possible immortality permit a more optimistic interpretation. The mariner's ability to associate his strength with the forces of his environment allows him to overcome innumerable challenges and perhaps even to vanquish mortality itself, pointing toward an expanded notion of identity which embraces hybridity and uncertainty and which forms in relation to the natural world. A *memento mori*, with death omnipresent, the story is also a "*memento humare*", a reminder of our human destination as part of the *humus* that makes up the physical earth. Through the use of antithesis, lexical diversity, and an "instabilité déroutante"³⁰¹, Hugo's vision of life and of the text consists of embracing one's inner infinity through intimate relations with the world, reimagining death as part of a relationship to the rest of the planet's life. If "la mer" is all that remains, it is a dynamic sea of infinite generative potential, which creates and destroys, and which mirrors Hugo's renewal of the novel, now conceived as an art of perpetual transformation permitting an expanded relation with the world.

3. Life and death in the depths: Profundity, ambition, and limits in Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*

Jules Verne's stories, collectively known as the *Voyages extraordinaires*, operate at the interface of science and art, encouraging journeys between the real and the imaginary. A project elaborated through a collaboration with his editor Pierre-Jules Hetzel³⁰², Verne

³⁰¹ Michel Collot, "Entre chaos et cosmos", in *Paysage et poésie*, Paris, José Corti, 2005, p. 197.

³⁰² See the "Avertissement au lecteur" which prefaced *Les Aventures du capitaine Hatteras*, where Hetzel explains: « Les Romans de Jules Verne sont d'ailleurs arrivés à leur point. Quand on voit le public empressé courir aux conférences qui se sont ouvertes sur mille points de la France, quand on voit qu'à côté des critiques

ambitioned to provide his readers with the latest developments in scientific knowledge all while making those discoveries enjoyable literary experiences³⁰³. Verne's goal was to "refaire...l'histoire de l'univers" by collecting and disseminating "toutes les connaissances géographiques, géologiques, physiques, [et] astronomiques" of modern science and packaging them in imaginative tales of discovery. After the 1866 publication of *Les Aventures du capitaine Hatteras*, the first novel to carry the series' name *Voyages extraordinaires*, Verne would continue to publish these works of scientific imagination at a feverish pace for most of the remainder of the century. Perhaps the most noteworthy novel of the series, and a work to which Verne attached a great deal of importance, *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* was published first in serial format in the *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* from March 1869 to June 1870, while the first part appeared in volume format in October 1869 and the second part in June 1870. Verne spent an unusually long period preparing and writing the novel, the idea for which may have come from a letter from George Sand in July 1865, in which the famous novelist encourages Verne to take his readers on a journey to the depths of the sea:

Je vous remercie, Monsieur, de vos aimables mots mis en deux saisissants ouvrages [...] Je n'ai qu'un chagrin en ce qui les concerne, c'est de les avoir finis et de n'en avoir pas encore une douzaine à lire. J'espère que vous nous conduirez bientôt dans les profondeurs de la mer et que vous ferez voyager vos personnages dans ces appareils de plongeurs que votre science et votre imagination peuvent se permettre de perfectionner³⁰⁴.

Working over the next several years on the project, Verne saw it as a key piece in his literary enterprise, writing to Hetzel in March 1868, "Ah ! mon cher Hetzel, si je ratais ce livre-là, je ne m'en consolerais pas. Je n'ai jamais eu un plus beau sujet entre les mains"³⁰⁵. Having earned immediate and lasting success and influence, Verne's tale of a mad captain

d'art et de théâtre, il a fallu faire place dans nos journaux aux comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences, il faut bien se dire que l'art pour l'art ne suffit plus à notre époque, et que l'heure est venue où la science a sa place faite dans le domaine de la littérature ».

³⁰³ See also the Verne-Hetzel Correspondence for more on Verne's idea of the project. Cf., *Revue Jules Verne*, N° 37, Hetzel, éditeur par excellence, 2013 for more on the relationship between writer and editor.

³⁰⁴ George Sand-Jules Verne, Lettre du 25 juillet 1865. Quoted in Charles-Noël Martin, "George Sand et le Nautilus", *Bulletin de la Société Jules Verne*, N°s 26/27, 1973.

³⁰⁵ Letter to Pierre-Jules Hetzel, 28 March 1868.

adventuring the oceanic depths seeking refuge from human tyranny on the surface is one of the most influential and beloved stories about the sea ever told.

While its representation of scientific exploration and technical advances permits one to read the novel as a celebration of technological science, the work is characterized by much greater complexity and ambivalence regarding human knowledge and its limits. In addition, the novel innovates in its attempt to figure the deep oceans, spaces where literature had rarely gone. While Michelet's *La Mer* and Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la mer* both represent oceanic depth, neither work constitutes such a sustained effort to imagine submarine life as does Verne's novel, where profoundness itself becomes a central theme to interrogate the human relationship to geographical space and the tension between scientific ambition and human limitations. In the process, a double form of depth reveals itself³⁰⁶, characterized by science and technology giving humanity transparent understanding of the deep seas and by the ocean's irreducible opaqueness that demonstrates fundamental limits to human ambition. Our study of Verne's novel will proceed in three parts: first, we will show how opacity defines the seas from the very beginning; next, we will demonstrate how science, technology, and imagination combine to reveal a transparent marine world open to discovery; finally, we will analyze death as beneficial force in a dynamic marine world juxtaposed against senseless acts of human violence that demonstrate human hubris and reveal a deeper monstrosity.

3.1 The opaque seas: a voyage of discovery between science and imagination

With the title of *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, Jules Verne set himself a formidable challenge, writing at a time when understanding of the deep oceans remained limited.

Oceanography as an independent discipline did not emerge until the 1870s at the earliest³⁰⁷,

³⁰⁶ Stéphanie Clément, "La double profondeur dans *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* ou le sens des limites", *Verniana*, Vol. 6, 2013-2014. The word "profondeur(s)" appears 114 times in the novel and the word "abîme" 21 times, to indicate both measurable distance and human depth. Clément, *Immersion*, op. cit., p. 187.

³⁰⁷ Following the expeditions of the *Lightning* and the *Porcupine*, 1868-1870 and the *Challenger*, 1872-1876.

although some important work on the physical geography of the (surface) seas had been conducted, notably by early meteorologist Maury. This context helps to explain the ambivalent status of science in Verne's novel and the key role of literary imagination in representing the unknown submarine realm. These competing epistemological tendencies are particularly present during the novel's opening passages which precede Professor Aronnax's embarkation aboard the *Nautilus*. Verne cultivates a sense of mystery regarding the deep oceans and their inhabitants by mobilizing complementary discourses from mythology, literature, popular imagination, and science. While hinting toward science's ability to resolve these tensions through methods of deductive reasoning and empirical data collection, Verne often casts doubt on this capacity by revealing many of the book's scientific hypotheses as false. Human knowledge remained limited, preserving a key role for the literary imagination in our relationship with the world.

The intriguing hook which draws readers into *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* is the presence of an unexplained object which wreaks havoc on international shipping and navies around the world and provokes a mystery that "surexcit[ait] l'esprit public" (1)³⁰⁸.

Complicating the matter, even the world's most renowned scientists are unable to agree on the nature of the "chose énorme" (2) in question. As scientific methodology proves incapable of solving the mystery, imaginative explanations fill the gap. The first chapter's title, "Un écueil fuyant", concentrates the underlying uncertainty at the heart of the book's opening sequences: a mobile challenge in the fluid waters of the high seas, the "écueil" resists conclusive identification, while the image captures science's ambition to master the unknown through reason and empiricism. Still, the "écueil" remains outside the grasp of that ambition as it "flees" from certainty, encouraging continuing speculation.

³⁰⁸ Page numbers in parentheses refer to Jules Verne, *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, Paris, J. Hetzel, 1871.

The object or “être phénoménal” (2) confuses the best scientists of the day, since “il surpassait en volume tous [les cétacés] que la science avait classés jusqu’alors” and it “dépassait de beaucoup toutes les dimensions admises jusqu’à ce jour par les ichtyologistes”. Newspapers begin reprinting representations of “tous les êtres imaginaires et gigantesques, depuis la baleine blanche, le terrible ‘Moby Dick’ des régions hyperboréennes, jusqu’au Kraken démesuré” (3). Among “les sociétés savantes et les journaux scientifiques”, explanations range from a gigantic monster unknown to science or an “îlot, rocher, écueil, mais écueil fuyant, indéterminable, insaisissable” (4). A shift in narrative focalization in the second chapter transfers the perspective from an external observer to an intradiagetic narrator, the renowned scientist, “professeur-suppléant au Muséum d’histoire naturelle de Paris” (7), Pierre Aronnax, whose expertise is now needed to resolve the mystery. Indeed Aronnax has recently published a work entitled, “*Les Mystères des grands fonds sous-marins*”³⁰⁹ (9-10), which was “particulièrement goûté du monde savant” (10). The book’s title, however, recalls a successful literary genre made popular after Eugène Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris* in 1842, a work which descended into the *bas-fonds* of Parisian society. Aronnax, despite his scientific expertise, is incapable of resolving the enigma, admitting in an article for the *New-York-Herald* that “les grandes profondeurs de l’Océan nous sont totalement inconnues”.

Soon after the professor’s arrival in New York, “l’hypothèse de l’îlot flottant...était absolument abandonnée” (7), seen now as impossible given the rapidity of the object’s movements in open water. Aronnax examines the two remaining possibilities, “un monstre d’une force colossale” or “un bateau ‘sous-marin’ d’une extrême puissance motrice”, showing the implausibility of the second option given the categorical denials from the world’s states powerful enough to have built such a machine. Despite conceding his own ignorance, the

³⁰⁹ The title also references a work Verne consulted: Arthur Mangin, *Les Mystères de l’océan*, Tours, Marne, 1864. See Jacques Noiray, “L’‘Effet de science’ dans *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*,” *Francofonia*, No. 51, 2006, p. 44-45 for a list of other works Verne read in preparation.

scientist declares that “il faut nécessairement admettre l’existence d’un animal marin d’une puissance excessive” (10). Aronnax proposes the existence of “un *Narwal géant*”, an enlarged version of the “narwal vulgaire” (11) whose dimensions would be increased tenfold to reach the reported size and force of the animal in question. Aronnax’s article, far from settling the issue, “fut chaudement discuté”, while its claims “laiss[aient] libre carrière à l’imagination”.

When scientific and public opinion crystallize around the existence of a new marine monster, many people demand that the ocean be purged of the monster, “afin de rassurer les communications transocéaniques” (12), under pressure from industrial and commercial interests, who decide to mount “une expédition destinée à poursuivre le narwal”, with “une frégate de grande marche, l’*Abraham-Lincoln*” chosen as the vessel to undertake the mission. The rapid decision to eliminate this mysterious beast is the first sign of a troubling desire to kill which continues throughout the narrative, calling into question the impartiality of scientific research. Aronnax himself is not innocent in the kill mission, claiming to finally understand “que [sa] véritable vocation, l’unique but de [sa] vie, était de chasser ce monstre inquiétant et d’en purger le monde” (13). Transitioning to a worldwide ocean hunt, the frigate is armed with “tous les engins connus” (20), making it a veritable floating killing machine, a ship that “ne manquait d’aucun moyen de destruction”. Along with its technical prowess, the *Abraham-Lincoln* carried onboard a human whaler known as the “roi des harponneurs”, the Canadian Ned Land. As the resident scientific expert on marine biology, Aronnax defends his hypothesis of the colossal marine animal, even daring to classify the unseen animal “à l’embranchement des vertébrés, à la classe des mammifères, au groupe des pisciformes, et finalement à l’ordre des cétacés” (22), while reserving final judgment as to its “famille” (26), “genre”, and “espèce”, for after the frigate’s killing mission had been achieved.

Natural science’s goal to classify the world’s biology relies on a violent relationship with the earth’s living beings, as the professor admits that in order to resolve his questions, “il

fallait disséquer ce monstre inconnu, pour le disséquer le prendre, pour le prendre le harponner”. Aronnax’s scientific ambitions contrast with the resistant opacity of the world’s oceans, with Verne accentuating the divergence by alternating the narrative rhythm between the fevered excitement of the chase to the dull monotony of sea travel. The fifth chapter’s title, “À l’aventure !”, promises high seas drama, yet here the narrative is defined by its tedium as the *Abraham-Lincoln* sails the oceans without any sign of the hunted animal. For three months “dont chaque jour durait un siècle” (29), the frigate manages to witness “rien que l’immensité des flots déserts”. Aronnax “ne quitt[ait] plus le pont du navire” (28) as he concentrates so fiercely that he “dévor[ait] d’un œil avide le cotonneux sillage...à en user [sa] rétine, à en devenir aveugle”. Despite his ambitions for transparent vision, Aronnax’s blindness crashes against the opaque refusal of the sea to reveal its secrets.

As Verne contributes to confusion between various understandings of the object in question, the text encourages the reader to embark on a journey of discovery into a semi-imaginary world, where fantasy collides with the physicality of the real. Lionel Dupuy has described this hybrid space as a “merveilleux géographique”³¹⁰, where everything seems tinted with a nuance of imaginary, but where we are also confronted with a new sense of our physical reality. In this space, what first appears as different becomes uncomfortably similar and human; the text takes the reader from a feeling of alterity to one of unstable relation. This is the evolution we undergo as the frigate embarks on its hunting mission, its crew convinced of the beast’s alterity and its hostility to human interests. Verne then imposes difficulties on this conceived quest as the journey bogs down in repetitive monotony. Just as the ship contemplates turning back, Ned Land spots “la chose en question” (32), but its appearance and behavior in the water continue to defy expectations. The crew is surprised to witness its

³¹⁰ Dupuy, “La métaphore au service de l’imaginaire géographique : *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* de Jules Verne”, *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, Vol. 55, N° 154, 2011, p. 39. For Dupuy, the *merveilleux géographique* marshalls both mythical and symbolic dimensions to assure the narrative displaces the reader “de l’ici vers l’ailleurs” (39).

“éclat très-intense, mais inexplicable” (34), brightness “de nature essentiellement électrique”.

Although Aronnax begins to doubt the nature of the “surnaturel animal”, the ship’s commander remains committed to the cause of killing this “être formidable” (35).

Verne mixes mechanical metaphors with animalistic descriptions to designate the “beast”, slowly bringing the monster within the realm of human creation. The “énorme narwal” (36) could be distinguished by its “respiration haletante”, which here recalls mechanical operation: “l’air s’engouffrait dans ses poumons, comme fait la vapeur dans les vastes cylindres d’une machine de deux mille chevaux”. When the commander orders a cannon blast that “atteignit son but...mais non pas normalement, et glissant sur sa surface arrondie, il alla se perdre à deux milles en mer” (39), the “canonnier” concludes the narwal “est donc blindé avec des plaques de six pouces”. Succumbing to madness, the commander declares that he “poursuivr[a] l’animal jusqu’à ce que ma frégate éclate !”. The animal, however, proves itself “indifférent à la fatigue comme une machine à vapeur” (40). Managing to get close enough to unleash Ned Land’s harpoon, the weapon’s strike produces a “choc sonore” (42), the beast’s electrical light “s’éteignit soudain”, and a massive torrent of seawater falls on the frigate, pushing Aronnax overboard into the sea.

The professor’s sudden plunge into the ocean takes the reader for the first time below the marine surface “à une profondeur de vingt pieds environ”. The sinking scientist is saved by the “main vigoureuse” (43) of his *domestique* Conseil, and the pair divide their forces “afin de ne pas les épuiser simultanément” (44). With Ned Land, the pair find themselves lifted out of the water “au sommet de l’être ou de l’objet” (46), to discover that the beast “est faite en tôle d’acier !”. Modifying his hypothesis in the face of the new evidence, Aronnax offers that the body could be “une carapace osseuse, semblable à celle des animaux antédiluviens”, but he revises his theory when he realizes that “le dos noirâtre...était lisse, poli, non imbiqué” and that it seemed “fait de plaques boulonnées”. The eminent scientist changes his position from

marine mammal, to amphibious reptile, to “un phénomène de main d’homme”, annihilating his previous certainty and confronting him with “l’impossible mystérieusement et humainement réalisé”. Aronnax’s confident hypotheses regarding the nature of the marine object are proven utterly false, in a collision between scientific theory and empirical reality. Verne’s emphasis on human vision and blindness disconnect the desire to gain knowledge about the marine environment from the impediments to that understanding, whether superstition, overconfidence, arrogance, or violence. The author takes the reader on a journey where representations of radical alterity, like monstrous marine beasts, are revealed as profoundly human traits. As the trio of characters plunge within the “formidable machine” (50) that is the *Nautilus*, they will witness a new dimension of oceanic knowledge, one in which human technology allows for a transparent vision of the infinite submarine world.

3.2 The profound seas: depth, transparency, and infinity under the surface

If the opening sequences of the novel represent the natural sciences in an ambivalent position caught between infinite ambition and technical limits, the embarkation on board the *Nautilus* signals the beginning of a new, transparent relationship to the seas. Through the combined forces of scientific discovery, technical progress, and literary imagination, Verne takes us on a journey to the depths of the oceans, offering a rare look at this unknown realm. The *Nautilus* becomes the means by which the scientific ignorance of the book’s beginning chapters can be rectified, a technological marvel that permits the free exercise of scientific discovery in the most inhospitable environments. The submarine allows the reader to forge unlikely connections between marine species and human beings. Verne writes the oceanic depths as neither empty desert nor the sole domain of vicious monsters (although monsters there are), but as a place of profound biodiversity, the birthplace and crucible of all life on Earth, accessible to humans through an ideally transparent relationship.

The change from ignorance about the opaque seas to newfound enlightenment and transparency occurs progressively. Indeed, the first scenes aboard the *Nautilus* are characterized by “une obscurité profonde” (50), which restricts vision entirely. Aronnax’s immediate interpretation of the new vessel is one of a “prison flottante”, where complete darkness reigns, preventing all sensory engagement. After exploring their spatial situation “en tâtonnant” (51), the three prisoners are suddenly dazzled with “la plus violente lumière... tellement vive qu’[ils] ne [purent] d’abord en supporter l’éclat”. The three travelers see nothing but dark shadows upon their entry aboard the *Nautilus*, only to be blinded by the submarine’s oppressive clarity. The group’s ignorance and visual ineptitude are further highlighted upon the first encounter with captain Nemo, whose eyes and gaze are given special importance. The captain seems a reassuring presence to the confused trio, comforted by “ses yeux noirs [qui] regardaient avec une froide assurance” (52) and by “son regard ferme et calme”. Though his eyes presented a deformity, situated “un peu écartés l’un de l’autre”, this defect turns to the man’s advantage, allowing him to “embrasser simultanément près d’un quart de l’horizon”. The professor is impressed by Nemo’s penetrating gaze, completing his description with details that anticipate coming events in the novel:

Lorsque cet inconnu fixait un objet, la ligne de ses sourcils se fronçait, ses larges paupières se rapprochaient de manière à circonscrire la pupille des yeux et à rétrécir ainsi l’étendue du champ visuel, et il regardait ! Quel regard ! comme il grossissait les objets rapetissés par l’éloignement ! comme il vous pénétrait jusqu’à l’âme ! comme il perceait ces nappes liquides, si opaques à nos yeux, et comme il lisait au plus profond des mers ! (53)

For the naturalist, Nemo already seems a model for scientific discovery, capable of transparently reading the deepest fathoms of the opaque seas with his enlightened vision.

If captain Nemo’s piercing gaze represents the ideal of scientific discovery, the background, objectives, and personality of the man himself remained clouded in enigma. The captain’s ship presented its own mysteries, not the least of which concerned its “mode de ventilation” (59), a question resolved as Aronnax feels the sudden refreshment of “un courant

d'air pur et tout parfumé d'émanations salines". The submarine, "le monstre de tôle" thus breathes "à la façon des baleines"; replenishing its air supplies required occasional surfacings "comme un cétacé", another confusion between technical vessel and marine biology. This "zoomorphism" hints toward one of the major themes of the rest of the book: despite the apparent separation between human technology and the natural world, the two realms are intricately linked. Nemo reveals little about his origins, although he admits to understanding and speaking "le français, l'anglais, l'allemand et le latin" (66), a polylingual humanism that contrasts with his declaration of being "un homme qui a rompu avec l'humanité" (67). If Nemo and the *Nautilus* possess the power to see the deepest secrets of the oceans, they impose a form of blindness on their guests, who would remain on occasion "dans l'impossibilité de voir ce qui ne doit pas être vu" (68). This condition, which Aronnax sees as abusive, applies to a group Nemo sees as his "prisonniers après combat" (69), although he is quick to add that the journey aboard the submarine will allow the scientist to "voyager dans le pays des merveilles" (70), to deepen his understanding of oceanography beyond anything possible within "la science terrestre". Indeed, Nemo has "souvent lu" Aronnax's great work on the unknown sea depths, but he tells the professor that he "n'[a] pas tout vu". The *Nautilus*, though prison, offers to the naturalist privileged access to scientific discovery.

Nemo is not simply an anarchic misanthrope; he also offers a philosophy regarding the human place in the natural world, choosing to integrate himself and his ship within the ecology of the sea. The captain has "renoncé aux aliments de la terre" (71), opting instead to nourish himself and his crew exclusively through oceanic products, which "fournit à tous [ses] besoins". Nemo's vision of the "prodigieuse, inépuisable" (74) sea that provides the *Nautilus* with all its needs, contrasts with prevailing notions of empty, lifeless oceans and recalls Michelet's celebration of marine fertility. Nemo, however, also recognizes limits as part of an interconnected cycle of life: "tout me vient maintenant de la mer comme tout lui

retournera un jour !”. Such is the profusion of life around him that “l’homme n’est jamais seul, car il sent frémir la vie à ses côtés”, with the liquid water serving as “le véhicule d’une surnaturelle et prodigieuse existence”. Like Hugo and Michelet, Nemo encounters infinity when he contemplates the sea, an “infini vivant” where life exists fully in its “minéral, végétal, animal” forms. Though the ocean is not separate from the rest of the planet’s life, since it forms “le vaste réservoir de la nature”, it provides freedom from the horrors of tyrannical power that Nemo sees reigning on the terrestrial surface, a despotism that disappears “à trente pieds” below the ocean’s surface, the only independent area left on Earth: “là seulement est l’indépendance ! Là je ne reconnais pas de maîtres ! Là je suis libre !”. For Nemo, the sea offers infinite biological productivity, interconnected cycles between all forms of life that suppose limits, and independence from human oppression.

As the captain takes the professor on a tour of the *Nautilus*, the source of Nemo’s knowledge becomes apparent, especially when he shows Aronnax his library containing twelve thousand volumes, a richness which surpasses even the “cabinet du Muséum” (75). The library’s titles reveal Nemo as a scientific humanist, showing equal interest in “l’histoire, la poésie, le roman et la science, depuis Homère jusqu’à Victor Hugo, depuis Xénophon jusqu’à Michelet, depuis Rabelais jusqu’à madame Sand” (76). The scientific collection is first-rate, containing works from Humboldt, Arago, Milne-Edwards, Tyndall, Faraday, Maury, and Agassiz, to name only a few. In short, the captain passed for a polymath of rare proportions, mastering theoretical and applied sciences to enable his adventures. The enumeration of great authors and scientists also reinforces the idea that Verne himself possesses this kind of erudition, a glimpse at the wealth of sources read during the novel’s genesis and one of many devices Verne uses to convince the reader of the book’s scientific

authenticity³¹¹. Continuing the visit, Nemo reveals samples of “les plus précieux produits de la mer qui eussent jamais été livrés aux regards d’un naturaliste” (79). As Aronnax examines the displays, his “joie de professeur” takes over the narrative, transforming it into a taxonomic catalogue as he identifies the collection’s species of “zoophytes”, “polypes”, “échinodermes”, and “mollusques”. Though the accumulation of biological nomenclature can become burdensome, naming each species provides them with inherent worth³¹², as even the smallest species play major roles, like the “polypiers...qui deviendront un jour des continents”. Nemo and Aronnax show that the best science is both emotional and rational; it must remain sensitive to its objects of study while aiming toward methodological rigor.

The mysteries of the ship’s underwater navigation are unveiled via a visit to the captain’s chambers. Here, the submarine’s technical instruments all operate by “l’électricité” (84), which “règne en maître” onboard as “l’âme de [ses] appareils mécaniques”. These mechanisms and the electricity itself are uniquely sourced from the ocean, which “produit l’électricité, et l’électricité donne au *Nautilus* la chaleur, la lumière, le mouvement, la vie en un mot” (85). While the submarine is a technical marvel, its ultimate achievement consists in its ability to draw its energy from the seawater itself, integrating within its environment like a techno-organic life form. Here, the confusion between marine beast and mechanical monster obtains new significance as the *Nautilus* exists at the crossroads between constructed machine and living being. Though ingeniously designed and constructed, the *Nautilus* owes its success to the oceans of which it is now part, like the saltwater that provides ample material for the captain’s “piles au sodium”, imparting a dynamic “force électro-motrice” to the ship. Like the ocean from which it draws its sustenance, the *Nautilus* is an inherently mobile apparatus, a

³¹¹ Jacques Noiray calls the device an “effet de science”, a science-fiction analogue to Barthes’ “effet de réel” proper to realist novelists. See Noiray, *op. cit.*, p. 43-44. For Barthes, see *L’Effet de réel*, « Communications », mars 1968, repris dans *Le Bruissement de la langue*, Paris, Seuil, 1984.

³¹² Noiray identifies the proliferation of scientific nomenclature as another “effet de science” intended as ostentatious “mise en scène du nom” creating a permanent exhibition of Aronnax’s limitless expertise. Noiray, *op. cit.*, p. 51-52.

fluidity and integration within its environment highlighted by the ship's Latin motto, "*Mobilis in mobili*", or "mobile dans l'élément mobile" (58). Through its assimilation with the oceanic element, the ship offers privileged access "à des profondeurs considérables" (92)³¹³. At these depths electrical energy pierces the "obscurité des eaux" (94), thanks to "un puissant réflecteur électrique, dont les rayons illuminent la mer à un demi-mille de distance". Nemo declares his boat "le navire par excellence" (95), not simply because of its technical capabilities, but more importantly because they allow one to discover the essence of the sea that remains hidden to those who remain on the surface. If the sea's surface is an environment where "tout est danger", the submarine depths present "plus rien à redouter". Just "quelques mètres" underwater, one finds "l'absolue tranquillité", the sea's true nature that contrasts with the turbulent surface and its "roulis", "tangage", and "tempête[s] à braver". Only a submarine journey allows the necessary depth to understand the ocean's true essence.

Now at home aboard the *Nautilus*, Aronnax relates his experiences exploring the deep seas, rendered transparent to his scientific gaze. Beginning their "exploration sous les eaux" (100) on 8 November, "à trois cents milles environ des côtes du Japon", the submarine dives to a depth of fifty meters, allowing the professor to contemplate the spectacle of marine life surrounding the ship. In a world of "obscurité absolue" (103), the vessel reveals two glass panels on either side of the salon through which the passengers were free to observe the sea's wonders. Stunned, Aronnax doubts his ability to capture the feeling, evoking the trope of literary preterition. From a state of blindness, the companions are greeted with the "spectacle" of a sea "distinctement visible dans un rayon d'un mille autour du *Nautilus*". Aronnax

³¹³ See Catherine M. Schwartz, who writes that the 19th century's conception of a fluid, rather than gaseous, atmosphere also contributes to a sense of permeability between bodies and media, whether air or water. Schwartz notes that this fluid conception of the atmosphere also applies to the *Nautilus*, which first appears as comfortable container separating domains, but which "troubles the myth of the sealed membrane – the definite boundary, skin, or shell that separates the self from the environment". Schwartz, "'An ethereal sea reaching over the whole world': Fluid Atmospheres in Jules Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*", *TRANS-* [Online], 18, 2014, URL: <http://trans.revues.org/1058>.

wonders “quelle plume” could ever describe the wondrous scene in front of him, where light passes through the sea’s “nappes transparentes”. Indeed, the limpid seawater seems to both produce and reflect the light of the ship: “dans ce milieu fluide que parcourait le *Nautilus*, l’éclat électrique se produisait au sein même des ondes”. The light Aronnax describes is thus internal to the marine system, an inherent quality of the sea itself, producing an effect not of “eau lumineuse” but of “lumière liquide”. For a scientist like Aronnax, the spectacle is awe-inspiring, offering him “une fenêtre ouverte sur ces abîmes inexplorés” (104). The sight is akin to being “devant un aquarium” (108), but Aronnax knows that this experience is even more special, since “l’aquarium n’est qu’une cage, et ces poissons-là sont libres comme l’oiseau dans l’air”. The naturalist has the unexpected opportunity to “surprendre ces animaux vivants...libres dans leur élément naturel” (109). The typical dynamics of scientific observation are reversed here, with the human observers inside a “cage”, enclosed by the walls of the *Nautilus*, while the animal species express themselves in the open ocean. Both sides participate in a theatrical performance, reinforced by the closing of the “panneaux de tôle” that recall the stage’s curtain closing at the end of an act. Even the fish appear as actors; rather than fleeing the submarine’s presence, “ces poissons accouraient...attirés sans doute par l’éclatant foyer de lumière électrique”. A correspondence emerges between human, animal, marine, and mechanical actors, all integrated within the transparent oceanic space.

To truly understand the diversity of the seas, one would need to explore the depths “à pied” (115). Disdainful of traditional “scaphandres” which require attachment to a surface air pump, Nemo imagines a diving solution that draws inspiration from “l’appareil Rouquayrol-Denayrouze”³¹⁴ (116), perfected to allow one to “affront[er] des pressions considérables au fond des mers”, without remaining chained to the surface or even to the ship. Suiting up in

³¹⁴ According to Nemo’s own description, in this diving suit: “deux tuyaux en caoutchouc, partant d’[une] boîte [d’air sous pression], viennent aboutir à une sorte de pavillon qui emprisonne le nez et la bouche de l’opérateur ; l’un sert à l’introduction de l’air inspiré, l’autre à l’issue de l’air expiré, et la langue ferme celui-ci ou celui-là, suivant les besoins de la respiration” (116).

their “lourds vêtements imperméables” (119), the companions and Nemo leave the ship to “foul[er] le fond de la mer” (122). While Aronnax questions the capability of “le pinceau” and “la plume” to capture “les effets particuliers à l’élément liquide”, the subsequent passages prove just the opposite. Aronnax’s observations are aided by the transparency of the “masse aqueuse”, through which “les rayons solaires traversaient aisément”, permitting sufficient clarity for the professor to “distingue[er] nettement les objets à une distance de cent mètres”. Far from being a domain of obscurity, the seawater resembles “une sorte d’air, plus dense que l’atmosphère terrestre, mais presque aussi diaphane”, an “incomparable pureté” (123) that gives him privileged access to an otherwise unexplored world. The ocean floor is home to unique animal communities, composed of “de magnifiques premiers plans de rochers, tapissés de zoophytes du plus bel échantillon”, requiring a hybrid vocabulary between the fine arts and the natural sciences. The professor’s eye becomes artistic as he observes the interplay between light and water which produces “une merveille, une fête des yeux”. Refracted “rayons du soleil” contact the “fleurs, rochers, plantules, coquillages, polypes” of the milieu to create a festival of shades “des sept couleurs du spectre solaire”. With each step, new viewing angles result in a changing spectacle of “tons colorés”, akin to a rotating “kaléidoscope” where one could observe “toute la palette d’un coloriste enragé”. As the sun’s rays near noon, “la perpendicularité des rayons solaires...ne se réfractai[t] plus” (124), leading to a decline in “la magie des couleurs” (125). While Aronnax witnesses a sensational display, its ephemeral nature suggests the inability to seize upon fixed attributes in a fluid environment that resists stability.

Perhaps sensing the difficulty, Aronnax next adopts a more naturalistic tone to identify and classify the species he witnesses. What follows is a litany of biological identifications that highlight the diversity of marine life and particularly, the importance of “mollusques” (124) and “coquilles” which “jonchaient le sol par milliers”. The concentration of oceanic biology is

such that the seabed itself is a dynamic environment where life creates the material conditions for its own persistence. The naturalist has no trouble identifying each species he encounters, from marine fauna like “zoophytes”, “mollusques”, “polypes et échinodermes”, coral, and “anémones” to flora like great “algues” which compose an entire prairie extending from the ocean surface to the floor. Aronnax’s first underwater excursion reveals diverse communities of flora and fauna, at all depths of the submarine environment, while his exhaustive descriptions drawing from discourses like art, physics, and biology show himself worthy of both “le pinceau” and “la plume”.

During the *Nautilus*’s underwater explorations, the pelagic space is defined in terms of its depth: its distance below the surface and the profound diversity of its biology. During the submarine’s surfacings to replenish its air supplies, Aronnax climbs aboard the platform to observe the ocean’s surface, reinforcing the stark differences between the surface and submarine seascapes. Here, the naturalist observes a “désert” (133), an infinite expanse where the sea absorbed “les couleurs du prisme, à l’exception des rayons bleus”, creating a monochromatic but “admirable teinte d’indigo”. The surface, unlike the biodiverse depths, offers a world of unlimited horizontality, with no sign of biological presence. For the enlightened eye, however, like that of captain Nemo, even the sight of the deserted surface reveals the hidden dynamics of the ocean, “doué d’une vie réelle” (134). From anywhere on the globe, one can observe the ocean’s “circulation” that arises from “le calorique, le sel et les animalcules”. Remaining attentive to these dynamics helps one to understand the oceans as a single entity composed of constant interrelations, since differentials in “densités” and levels of “évaporation” lead to “courants” (135) and “contre-courants” and “un échange permanent des eaux tropicales et des eaux polaires”. For Nemo, every “gouttelette” in the sea is alive, containing millions of “infusoires”, microscopic life forms who play a role disproportionate to their size in building continents, creating “des coraux et des madrépores”, regulating

evaporation, and circulating sea salts. These “animalcules” absorb “les éléments solides de l’eau”, ensuring a “double courant ascendant et descendant” of minerals and liquids, resulting in “toujours le mouvement, toujours la vie”³¹⁵. The oceanic life that Nemo celebrates is “plus intense que sur les continents, plus exubérante, plus infinie”, flourishing “dans toutes les parties de cet océan”. The relation between living creatures and liquid seawater seems so interdependent to give rise to the notion that the sea itself is a living “organisme”. Far from seeing an empty, lifeless expanse, Nemo’s vision of the sea is of a realm with such inherent energy, movement, and life as to constitute “la vraie existence” (136).

Professor Aronnax gains direct experience of the constructive potential of microscopic marine fauna when the *Nautilus* visits the southwest Pacific Ocean and its island archipelagos, most of which are “coralligènes” (141). The naturalist has the opportunity to “étudier ce système madréporique” (142) at the heart of coral island formation. The “dépôts calcaires” of these patient builders “deviennent rochers, récifs, îlots, îles”, sometimes surrounding islands as circular rings, “entourant un lagon ou un petit lac intérieur”, creating massive barrier reefs, or otherwise raising “des récifs frangés, hautes murailles droites” in the vicinity of deep ocean waters. The observation of coral construction continues at the Melanesian island of Vanikoro, a place with a certain “magique” power, since it was here where the infamous expedition of La Pérouse met its tragic end³¹⁶. Indeed, as the submarine descends within a coral reef barrier surrounding the island, Aronnax observes vibrant coral life that interacts with the remains of the shipwreck, which becomes the structural basis for the flourishing of a new coral ecosystem, full of “fongies, de syphonules, d’alcyons, de cariophyllées” (150) and abundant

³¹⁵ Nemo’s theory of biogenic ocean currents was confirmed in a 2018 study, which found that marine zooplankton “considerably alter the physical and biogeochemical structure of the water column”. Cf., Isabel Houghton, Jeffrey Koseff, Stephen Monismith, Josh Dabiri, “Vertically migrating swimmers generate aggregation-scale eddies in a stratified column”, *Nature*, Vol. 556, p. 497-500.

³¹⁶ The doomed expedition, charged with the exploration and cartography of the Pacific, disappeared in 1788.

“poissons charmants”. Sealife adapts to seize opportunities, operates at a microscopic scale while achieving monumental results, and ensures the flourishing of new generations of life.

The group’s second submarine excursion to “le royaume du corail” (196) presents a stunning spectacle of marine biodiversity and a look at the biophysical mechanisms that produce and sustain life in the seas. Biologically, coral has long puzzled the scientific community, who classified it “dans les règnes minéral, végétal et animal” before “le Marseillais Peyssonnel le rangea définitivement dans le règne animal” at the turn of the 18th century. Composed of “un ensemble d’animalcules”, of tiny “polypes” which emerge from “un générateur unique”, the coral animals “possèdent une existence propre, tout en participant à la vie commune”. The group constructs its home in the form of “un polypier de nature cassante et pierreuse”, whose mineral properties combine with shapes that “s’arboris[ent]”, giving the coral community characteristics of animal, plant, and mineral life. The structure permits light to dance around the coral’s “ramures si vivement colorées” (197) even as “de légers poissons, aux rapides nageoires” flit in and out of the numerous passages “comme des volées d’oiseaux”. After following a “pente douce” (198) for two hours, the companions reach “la forêt immense” at a depth of three hundred meters, where the coral attains a monumental scale, as “les grandes végétations minérales, les énormes arbres pétrifiés” combine with “un tapis de fleurs, semé de gemmes” to create an “indescriptible spectacle”.

Leaving the Pacific, the *Nautilus* turns to the Indian Ocean, a “vaste plaine liquide...dont les eaux sont si transparentes qu’elles donnent le vertige à qui se penche à leur surface” (203). So dense is the concentration of life here that it becomes difficult to distinguish between aquatic creatures and the liquid element that supports them. From the stunning diversity of oceanic fish to the “mer de lait” (210) that creates a landscape of life “à perte de vue”, life under the sea exists everywhere the companions look, biodiversity so integrated within the aquatic ecosystem as to think of the ocean itself as living being. The

most vibrant profusions often occur at the interface of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. In the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, Aronnax observes water with “une limpidité de cristal” (237), giving the naturalist unimpeded sight of the “admirables buissons de coraux éclatants, et de vastes pans de rochers revêtus d’une splendide fourrure verte d’algues et de fucus”. The scientist uses botanical terms to describe the rock-like coral reefs while mineral structures mix with botanical species and a descriptor, “fourrure”, normally reserved for terrestrial mammals. This hybrid language links domains of life separated in scientific discourses, mirroring the relational character of these liminal spaces. So productive are these coral ecosystems that they themselves create the physical structures to which marine species adhere, providing the home for flourishing animal communities. Aronnax’s observations in the Red Sea show him how many of the most important concentrations of marine biology can be found at the interface between the terrestrial and oceanic realms.

As Aronnax pursues his scientific research of the deep oceans, a competing tendency challenges his desire to transparently understand the submarine world. Problems like navigational dangers, human limits, and the risk of mortality become increasingly difficult to ignore, preventing Aronnax from realizing his ideal of uninhibited knowledge about the seas. While these threats are always present, their prevalence increases over time, hurtling the heroes toward an uncomfortable, perhaps mortal, conclusion. The omnipresence of mortality serves several narrative and thematic purposes. First, continued threats to the novel’s explorers posit the sea as an autonomous entity, existing and thriving without human intervention. Secondly, the dangers of underwater navigation help define the contours of human limits, showing the impossibility of absolute scientific knowledge and the necessary human attachment to our terrestrial home. Finally, the novel’s treatment of death, which coexists in a fragile, yet dynamic balance with forces of creative life, allows Verne to contemplate a vision of mortality that materially contributes to continued life on Earth. Like

Michelet and Hugo, Verne imagines mortality as a productive and creative force, even as he more forcefully portrays it as tracing the limits to human ambition. These representations of danger, brutality, and death occupy the final section of our analysis of Verne's novel.

3.3 The deadly seas: representations of danger, brutality, and mortality

In navigating the deep oceans onboard the *Nautilus*, captain Nemo intends to separate himself from the earth's terrestrial areas, seeing in the sea a refuge of independence from human despotism. For this mysterious recluse, "la mer est tout" (74); it is a "nourrice prodigieuse" which sustains the ship's crew and to which their energy and physical matter will return. From the beginning of Nemo's defense of the sea, he accepts his inexorable march toward mortality and his belonging to a system of marine life where death integrates with "l'infini vivant". With increasing frequency, the underwater experiences of the *Nautilus* darken with the looming danger of death, indicating limits to human ambition while pointing toward mortality as part of the sea's living infinity. The complicated role played by dead matter in the novel becomes evident during Aronnax's first exploration of the oceanic floor, which he discovers is in fact "semé d'une impalpable poussière de coquillages" (123). The structural makeup of the planet is thus constituted by the dead bodies of formerly living creatures, in various stages of decomposition. Against that beneficial mortality, the human explorers offer their own form of deadly destruction, when the captain shoots down "une magnifique loutre de mer" (131) and the naturalist describes the animal in coldly economic terms: "sa peau, d'un brun marron en dessus, et argentée en dessous, faisait une de ces admirables fourrures si recherchées sur les marchés russes et chinois ; la finesse et le lustre de son poil lui assuraient une valeur minimum de deux mille francs". So formidable is the human hunting pressure on "ce précieux carnassier" that "son espèce ne tardera pas à s'éteindre". Human beings emerge as forces of destruction, sewing death on a scale that overwhelms marine biology's apparent inexhaustibility.

Death is not uniquely a destructive process, since it also provides the raw material for life's continual renewal. The *Nautilus* often encounters islands whose ecosystems arise from collaborations between organic life and the material foundation provided by dead creatures. Aronnax observes this process as the ship briefly surfaces in the proximity of the atoll of "Clermont-Tonnerre" (143) (now known as Reao) in the islands of French Polynesia. The island's land, composed of "roches madréporiques", gradually emerged from the ocean as coral species deposited "couches calcaires" upon which plants began to thrive, beginning with "quelque graine, enlevée par l'ouragan aux terres voisines". These early plants found a rich ground in which to take root, composed of layers of limestone, itself the product of once living creatures, mixed with "des détrit[us] décomposés de poissons et de plantes marines". The soil's fertility, supplied by residues issued from dead or decomposing organisms, allows for increasing vegetative cover, the birth of island streams, and the development of animal life "attiré[e] par la verdure et la fertilité". In this way, death and life exist in a complex balance, assisting each other in productive relationships that renew the biophysical world. The oceanic and terrestrial spheres are thus tightly linked in islands, the "œuvres immenses d'animaux [marins] microscopiques".

The second underwater excursion brings Aronnax to the "royaume du corail" (196), but his enthusiasm for this biodiverse world is tempered when it concludes with a burial ceremony for one of the crew members. Stopping their walk, the crew forms "un demi-cercle autour de leur chef" (198) in the midst of "une vaste clairière, entourée par les hautes aborisations de la forêt sous-marine". Unlike the seawater's earlier living luminosity, here Aronnax notes that only the clearing remained lit by "une sorte de clarté crépusculaire" while in the sea beyond, "l'obscurité redevenait profonde". Aronnax realizes that this "scène étrange" is none other than a "un cimetière" where "le capitaine Nemo et les siens venaient enterrer leur compagnon dans cette demeure commune, au fond de cet inaccessible Océan"

(199). Indeed, the seafloor “était gonflé...par de légères extumescences encroûtées de dépôts calcaires”, where the body’s “humide tombe” mixes with earth, sea, and coral matter. The burial concludes as the tomb is covered by “des débris arrachés au sol”, and the “funèbre troupe” returns to the *Nautilus*. Nemo later affirms the essential role of this “paisible cimetière, à quelques centaines de pieds au-dessous de la surface des flots” (200), a place where “les polypes se chargent d’y sceller nos morts pour l’éternité”, giving material reality to the captain’s statement that everything he had would return to the sea, as the crews’ bodies become part of the marine ecosystem. Nemo’s marine cemetery and his emphasis on related human and natural materiality point toward a purposeful vision of mortality, one where death contributes to the renewal of the biophysical world.

The specters of death and disaster pursue the companions throughout their underwater explorations, hurtling the narrative toward a catastrophic conclusion. Marine predators pose a constant threat, opposing Nemo’s and Aronnax’s unlimited ambitions to penetrate the sea’s secrets. Through this resistance, the marine ecosystem grows from its role as transparent setting for scientific discovery to assert itself as a living place, independent of human concerns. Navigating the open ocean waters of the Atlantic Ocean, south of Cape Horn, the crew encounters “une troupe de baleines” (323), providing new excitement for the whaler Ned Land. At the sight of a southern right whale, Ned assumes his identity as a “pêcheur de baleines” (324), while the single whale is joined by “un troupeau tout entier” (327). Ned requests Nemo’s approval of a hunt, “ne fût-ce que pour ne pas oublier [son] ancien métier de harponneur”. For the captain, however, this hunt serves no purpose; since they have no need of “huile de baleine à bord”, Ned’s hunt becomes about “chasser uniquement pour détruire”, which contradicts Nemo’s values. Indeed, even if the privilege of “tuer pour tuer” is “réservé à l’homme”, it is ultimately “une action blâmable” which leads to the senseless annihilation of “une classe d’animaux utiles”. For Nemo, the “passe-temps meurtriers” of whalers had

already led to the slaughter of the right whale and the extirpation of “toute la baie de Baffin”. Aronnax sides with the captain, noting that “l’acharnement barbare et inconsidéré des pêcheurs fera disparaître un jour la dernière baleine de l’Océan”. The captain’s and professor’s stance against Ned Land’s sport hunting reveals a split human tendency, given to both acts of barbarism and deep sympathy for the planet’s species.

The applicability of these sentiments, though, would fail as the *Nautilus* encounters a group of “cachalots” (328), a scene revealing a stunning human capacity for brutality. The sperm whales, which Nemo designates as “bêtes cruelles et malfaisantes”, converge on the innocent “troupeau de cétacés”. Forgetting his ethical lesson against killing for its own sake, Nemo unleashes his hatred for these new arrivals, “animaux terribles” that “on a raison d’exterminer”³¹⁷. Aronnax, dropping his conservationist credo, proposes a hunting expedition against the “cachalots”, “dans l’intérêt même des baleines” (329). Nemo’s desire to kill the approaching sperm whales knows no bounds, offering the *Nautilus*’s “éperon d’acier” as a devastating weapon and declaring “pas de pitié” in the fight between submarine and cetacean. The *Nautilus* thus rediscovers its identity as fearsome marine beast, although this time its monstrous disposition results from human madness rather than animalistic savagery. The following scene of senseless carnage illustrates humanity’s disturbing tendency to kill for killing’s sake, a thirst for destruction which surpasses the most “voracious” predators. Unlike the various shark species or the sperm whales they battle, the companions of the *Nautilus* have no intention of using the resources from the animals they kill. They intend to slaughter every sperm whale they meet, leaving behind a seascape of blood and floating bodies.

³¹⁷ Sperm whales function as keystone species in many oceanic environments. The reduction of their numbers has had vast impacts on these ecosystems, even altering the chemistry of ocean water. See Trish J. Lavery et al., “Iron defecation by sperm whales stimulates carbon export in the Southern Ocean”, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Biological Sciences*, 16 June 2010. Reduced sperm whale numbers may even be decreasing the ocean’s ability to absorb atmospheric carbon, which exacerbates the impacts of climate change.

As the *Nautilus* takes the fight to the unsuspecting toothed whales, Aronnax adopts an exclamatory tone to paint the scene in heroic, even mythological colors. Ned is overcome with excitement; the harpooner “finit par battre des mains” (330), seeing in the submarine a manifestation of his own “harpon formidable”. With Nemo at the controls, the *Nautilus* mercilessly attacks, cutting the cetaceans in two and leaving behind “deux grouillantes moitiés d’animal”. Aronnax admires the spectacle as the bestial ship exterminates its adversaries, adding several exclamations to drive home the feeling and comparing it to a “homérique massacre” (331): “quel carnage ! quel bruit à la surface des flots ! quels sifflements aigus et quels ronflements particuliers à ces animaux épouvantés !”. In the end, the *Nautilus*’s unrelenting onslaught overwhelms the “divisé[s], déchiré[s], déchiqueté[s]” whales, leaving the sea surface “couverte de cadavres mutilés”. Only a few horrified cachalots “fuyaient à l’horizon”, while their dead companions float in pieces of “masses charnues”. With the pod destroyed, the companions observe the aftermath from the ship’s platform, with the surface of the ocean “teint[e] en rouge” as “le *Nautilus* flottait au milieu d’une mer de sang”. Even Ned Land calls it “un spectacle terrible” and “une boucherie”. Nemo defends his actions, claiming to have executed “un massacre d’animaux malfaisants”, content to have perpetrated an epic slaying for its own purposes. Meanwhile, the preposition “d’” in the expression “massacre d’animaux malfaisants” plays an ambiguous role, since it can both indicate the massacred animals themselves, or the authors of the violence, the human companions of the *Nautilus*. Verne plays with these ambiguities to implicitly express the idea that the “animaux malfaisants” are the producers of the “massacre”, pointing to a strain of violent madness running through the human mind, a savagery that undermines the scientific ambitions of the underwater journey.

During their explorations in the Atlantic and Southern Oceans, the *Nautilus*’s crew alternates between a conservationist approach and a series of manic fits where human

violence spreads wide destruction and senseless death. Resuming a course due south, the *Nautilus* enters the waters of the Southern Ocean on a collision course with “la banquise” (339) and the South Pole itself. The captain becomes obsessed with the idea of going “là où d’autres ont échoué”, by passing “par-dessous” the Antarctic sea ice reaching “au pôle même”. This desire collides with a frozen seascape, where “tout était gelé” (337). For Ned Land, the edge of the “banquise” represents a frontier “que personne ne peut franchir”, a natural limit to human endeavor. As the ice reduces the ship “à l’immobilité” (338), Nemo doubles down, insisting on the *Nautilus*’s ability to pass underneath the sea ice. After a nearly tragic miscalculation of the sea ice’s thickness, the companions reach “la mer libre” (343), within the Antarctic Circle where a surprisingly biodiverse community flourishes made up of “un monde d’oiseaux dans les airs, et des myriades de poissons sous ces eaux”. Farther south, the Antarctic landmass arises out of an open sea “couverte de glaces flottantes” (345), confirming the “hypothèses de Maury”, the oceanographer who theorized that “le cercle antarctique renferme des terres considérables, puisque les icebergs ne peuvent se former en pleine mer, mais seulement sur des côtes”. After launching an expeditionary “canot” (346), Nemo displays his desire to control earthly territory, despite his contempt for human despotism. The captain justifies his return to the land since “jusqu’ici, aucun être humain n’y a laissé la trace de ses pas”, as the “homme des eaux” becomes a conquering explorer: “le regard ardent, immobile, muet, il sembla prendre possession de ces régions australes”.

Nemo’s “possession” of the Antarctic continent confirms a tendency which runs throughout the novel, that of the desire to dominate and control the biophysical world. After Nemo claims control of the austral land, the crew massacres a colony of native “manchots” (347). Aronnax justifies the killing of “quelques centaines” of these defenseless birds “car leur chair noire est très mangeable”, but whose scale of destruction does not correspond to the needs of the crew. Even while admiring the region’s marine mammals, Aronnax imagines

exploitative relationships with them for humanity's benefit; though he lauds the seal's "développement considérable des lobes cérébraux" (350), he considers the ease of domesticating them so that they might "rendre de grands services comme chiens de pêche". Back onboard the *Nautilus*, the naturalist dines on "un excellent morceau de foie de phoque" (354), comparing the intelligent species he had just praised to the equivalent of "la viande de porc". Between Nemo's declaration of Antarctic ownership and the slaughter of the region's animal inhabitants, the crew displays a lethal tendency to dominate everything it encounters.

A near fatal imprisonment within a "muraille de glace" (362) of advancing sea ice as the Antarctic climate transitions into its subzero autumn signals the end of the group's domination of the austral region, reinforcing the seas' transition from passive, transparent medium to opaque resistor of human presence and knowledge. Speeding north out of the Antarctic waters, the *Nautilus* rounds the northeastern shore of South America to the east of "les Guyanes" (381), where a slowed pace allows Aronnax to proceed with his naturalistic investigations. As the vessel flanks the northern coast, the scientist takes note of "plusieurs groupes de lamantins" (383) who lived in the estuary "en famille", but whose species has suffered depletion from overhunting. Indeed, Aronnax remarks, "ces beaux animaux, paisibles et inoffensifs" played "un rôle important", whose impacts percolated throughout the marine, fluvial, and human systems of the region. Together with the seal, these manatees "doivent paître les prairies sous-marines et détruire ainsi les agglomérations d'herbes qui obstruent l'embouchure des fleuves tropicaux", but overhunting had "presque entièrement anéanti ces races utiles". Aronnax connects the declining manatee populations to a corresponding increase in "herbes putréfiées" which "empoisonn[ent] l'air" and facilitate the spread of "la fièvre jaune qui désole ces admirables contrées". The manatee's plight and its ecological consequences provide a modest preview of the "fléau" in preparation which will result "lorsque les mers seront dépeuplées de baleines et de phoques". Victims of oceanic

overhunting without precedent, these species are no longer capable of serving as the “vastes estomacs” of the seas that become “encombrées de poulpes, de méduses, de calmars”. For Aronnax, overhunting produces devastating ecological impacts accompanied with tragic consequences for human beings.

While Aronnax understands the connections between hunting and ecological stability, he proves incapable of recognizing his own responsibility in the 19th century’s ongoing slaughter of marine mammals, particularly whales. Despite his tirade against the senseless killing of these ecologically important mammals, the ship’s crew proceeds to “s’empar[er] d’une demi-douzaine de manates” who “se laissaient frapper sans se défendre” (384). If the taking of these animals is justified to “approvisionner les cambuses d’une chair excellente, supérieure à celle du bœuf et du veau”, no one wonders whether the several hundred penguins killed in Antarctica or the numerous catches of fresh fish could not have sufficed for the crew’s nourishment. Immediately following the manatee hunt, the ship’s reserves swell with another catch of fish, several “tortues marines” (385), and “plusieurs cacouannes” (386) [sic] (“caouanne”, loggerhead sea turtle), each weighing “deux cents kilos”. Weeks after killing hundreds of birds and seals in the Antarctic, the limitless carnivorous appetite of the passengers requires another feeding. Despite Aronnax’s good intentions and his understanding of ecological relations, he fails to connect the crew’s consumption patterns with his century’s ongoing slaughter of the seas.

Even as they adventure into tropical waters, constant obstacles arise to block the submarine’s progress, as if the sea is determined to prove wrong the first half of Nemo’s infamous slogan “*Mobilis in mobile*”. In the waters of the Antilles, the companions witness “un calmar de dimensions colossales” (394) advancing on the ship, followed by “d’autres poulpes”, whose numerous appendages seize and immobilize the *Nautilus*. Nemo’s solution is again violent, choosing to combat the cephalopods “corps à corps” (395) and to “massacrer

toute cette vermine”. The captain’s reaction, shared by the companions, mirrors that of the monstrous “poulpes”³¹⁸, whose “couleur inconstante” translated the species’ anger, its protean form, and its fluid personality. Nemo, Aronnax, Ned Land, and “une dizaine d’hommes” ready themselves for the fight, hacking away at each intrusion of “un de ces longs bras” of the enemy cephalopods. Despite their furious “coups de hache” (396), the fighters lose a companion to an invading octopus arm, while they receive “une colonne d’un liquide noirâtre”, temporarily rendering them “aveuglés”. The marine transparency again transforms into a blinding opaqueness, which allows the sea and its species to realize their own desires. Raging at the loss of their comrade, the scene becomes even more violent, composed of “des flots de sang et d’encre noire”, opaque liquids that obscure the normally clear waters of the Antilles. Although the human beings force the retreat of the “monstres vaincus, mutilés, frappés à mort”, they lose their comrade to the sea. For Aronnax, the episode would remain unforgettable, although he doubts his own ability to portray the emotional experience, for which one would need “la plume du plus illustre de nos poètes, l’auteur des *Travailleurs de la mer*” (397). Indeed, Aronnax’s account borrows heavily from Hugo’s depiction, but Verne innovates in his subtle repetition of the word “monstre”, which reflects back from the cephalopods to reveal the unleashed monstrous qualities of the human companions³¹⁹.

Without a ceremonial burial on the seafloor, the sea and its species would determine the outcome of the captured man’s body. Although Nemo’s “douleur fut immense” over the death of this second crew member, it seems a small sacrifice next to the prodigious quantities of animal flesh killed and consumed by the captain and his companions during their

³¹⁸ Verne ambiguously identifies the creatures as “poulpes” (octopuses) and “calmars” (squids), forgetting naturalistic precision. The octopus makes up part of the suborder Incirrina of the order Octopoda (eight arms) within the class Cephalopoda. Squids form their own order, Teuthida, as part of the super-order Decabrachia, cephalopods with ten arms. See Godfrey-Smith, *Other Minds*, *op. cit.*, p. 195-196.

³¹⁹ My reading differs from Odile Gannier’s, who reads Verne’s repetition of the word “monstre” during this scene as revealing the ocean itself as monstrous and the octopus as its perfect manifestation. Verne repeatedly shows the monstrous characteristics of his human characters throughout the novel. See “Du poulpe à la pieuvre. Art comparé de la description chez Michelet (*La Mer*), Jules Verne (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*) et Victor Hugo (*Les Travailleurs de la mer*)”, in *Poétiques du descriptif*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2013, p. 179-195.

underwater adventures. The tragedy forces Nemo into a period of desperate sadness, during which the *Nautilus* floats mournfully “comme un cadavre au gré des lames”. Nemo gives up all determination, as if he turns himself over to the will of the sea to atone for his recent history of violence. Even when the *Nautilus* resumes more active navigation patterns, after ten days of pointless circling, it does so only with the help of “le courant du plus grand fleuve de la mer...le Gulf-Stream”, following a course arranged by the sea itself. As for the captain, he isolates himself in his private chambers, where he works on writing “le résumé de [ses] études sur la mer” (403), which, upon completion, he intends on encasing “dans un petit appareil insubmersible” which might be cast into the sea by “le dernier survivant” onboard the *Nautilus*. The graveness with which the captain broaches the topic and his repeated references to his own demise suggest Nemo senses an end to his underwater journeys, now resolved to go, like the insubmersible containing his history, “où les flots le porteront”.

Arriving in European waters, Nemo’s behavior becomes even stranger, as the captain’s secret mission of vengeance boils to the surface. Indeed, a “un coup de canon” (418) and “un navire de guerre” rapidly approaching the *Nautilus* confirm Aronnax’s suspicions that Nemo had many enemies at sea, and that a confrontation was imminent. Now it became clear that Nemo had long been fleeing “les nations coalisées contre lui” (419), aware of the danger of this submarine “justicier”. Nemo responds to the warship’s cannon blast by raising his “pavillon noir” (420) in an act of defiance, declaring his intention to “couler” his adversary’s vessel. A last attempt to convince Nemo to seek out a peaceful resolution to the conflict sees the captain respond with bitter hatred: “Je suis le droit, je suis la justice !...Je suis l’opprimé, et voilà l’opprimeur ! C’est par lui que tout ce que j’ai aimé, chéri, vénéré, patrie, femme, enfants, mon père, ma mère, j’ai vu tout périr ! Tout ce que je hais est là ! Taisez-vous !” (421)³²⁰. Aronnax realizes they have no choice but to attempt escaping the *Nautilus*, even at

³²⁰ Verne never provides a clear reason to explain Nemo’s hatred and desire for vengeance, only hinting that it has something to do with the (unexplained) loss of a wife and children.

the peril of their lives. During the ensuing battle, the companions can do little more than confine themselves in Aronnax's room as "réfugiés" (423), waiting for the inevitable "détonation épouvantable". Locked up in his room, the professor's ideal of transparent submarine vision dissolves, forced to "viv[re] que par le sens de l'ouïe". When his sense of vision is restored, it is not until after the scientist had felt the *Nautilus*'s "éperon d'acier" (424) piercing the enemy vessel. The observational potential of the submarine's glass panels, once used to witness the sea's incredible biodiversity, now serve to display an agonizing spectacle of death, as the warship "sombrait sous les eaux" (425) while its living crew transform into "victimes" and "cadavres". Once the sinking had concluded, Aronnax sees Nemo return to his room where the sight of "le portrait d'une femme jeune encore et de deux petits enfants" (426) puts the captain on his knees where he "fon[d] en sanglots". Though intended as atonement for the mysterious loss of Nemo's family, the vengeful actions of "ce terrible justicier" provide little consolation for the unresolved trauma eating away at the heart of his troubled conscience.

This latest explosion of violence and murder signals the final failure of Aronnax's scientific optimism aboard the *Nautilus*. The mysterious submarine has now earned its original assimilation with marine monsters, although its monstrosity and that of its captain surpasses anything found in the world's oceans, in its capacity to kill for the sake of killing. In the aftermath of "cette vision effrayante" of human brutality, the ship's panels close, disconnecting Aronnax from the outside waters and leaving him cloaked in "ténèbres et silence": "d'observer, d'étudier, de classer, il n'était plus question alors" (427). Speeding its way into the northern Atlantic "au milieu des brumes hyberboréennes", the *Nautilus* enters a "domaine de l'étrange", where human senses no longer perceive "le temps qui s'écoulait" nor the boat's spatial position "sur le planisphère". In these mysterious waters Aronnax's scientific gaze loses its ability to penetrate the sea's opacity; he no longer distinguishes

between physical reality and the figments of his “imagination surmenée”. While its human occupants retreat into a state of “assoupissement pénible et maladif” (428), the *Nautilus* now becomes a living marine creature moving of its own accord, sealing the link between the mobile submarine and the mobile element.

Profiting from the general onboard indifference, Aronnax and his companions decide to flee the doomed ship, though the professor deplors the sad fate of “cette collection sans rivale destinée à périr un jour au fond des mers avec celui qui l’avait formée” (429), the scientific potential of Nemo’s discoveries marred by bitterness and violence. Though he tries to calm himself, the naturalist quickly loses control of his “cerveau surexcité”, seeing a vision of a massive captain Nemo whose “proportions surhumaines” made him appear as “l’homme des eaux, le génie des mers”, an enigmatic *daímôn* of the sea itself, both fecund genitor and voracious destroyer. The sudden threat of the Maelstrom, known as “le ‘Nombril de l’Océan’” (431), looms just as the companions are ready to make their final escape, shaking Aronnax from his lugubrious visions. The combined effects of rising tides, strong oceanic currents, and a narrow gap between “les îles Feroë et Loffoden” produce a whirlpool of “lames monstrueuses”, an oceanic black hole that sucks in “non seulement les navires, mais les baleines, mais aussi les ours blancs des régions boréales”. The Maelstrom’s “irrésistible violence” represented a marine abyss from which “aucun navire n’a jamais pu sortir”. The *Nautilus* now seemed doomed to defeat in a catastrophic whirlwind, a tragic fulfillment of Nemo’s fatalistic prophecy of final return. The companions, seeing no alternative, board the small “canot”, only to be taken within the Maelstrom. When a blast of water separates the defenseless raft from the *Nautilus* into the vortex, the companions are finally liberated from their underwater prison, only to find themselves submerged in the violent energy of the sea.

At the mercy of the dynamic forces of the marine environment, Aronnax hits his head on “une membrure de fer” (433) and loses consciousness. Miraculously rescued by “un

pêcheur des îles Loffoden”, the professor assures his reader of the realism of his “récit [dont] pas un fait n’a été omis, pas un détail n’a été exagéré” (434), despite extended unawareness. The novel concludes with strange haste, eluding the improbability of the companions’ survival and leaving the fate of the *Nautilus* and its captain unresolved. After organizing his notes, Aronnax insists having written “la narration fidèle de cette invraisemblable expédition sous un élément inaccessible à l’homme, et dont le progrès rendra les routes libres un jour”. The professor cares little whether the public finds his story believable, since he has finally attained the “droit de parler de ces mers sous lesquelles, en moins de dix mois j’ai franchi vingt mille lieues” (forgetting his earlier publication about the deep seas). As for captain Nemo, Aronnax hopes that the enigmatic man and his incredible submarine were able to survive the Maelstrom, seeing in him a “savant” capable of “la paisible exploration des mers”, if he could succeed in calming the hatred repressed in his heart. Filled with pride from having lived “dix mois de cette existence extra-naturelle” under the seas, Aronnax concludes his story in grandiose style: “Aussi, à cette demande posée, il y a six mille ans, par l’Écclésiaste : ‘Qui a jamais pu sonder les profondeurs de l’abîme ?’ deux hommes entre tous les hommes ont le droit de répondre maintenant. Le capitaine Nemo et moi.”

Despite Aronnax’s pompousness, one must agree with its claim of novelty. Indeed, Verne’s novel became the most complete attempt to narratively figure the unknown depths of the world’s seas. Importantly, Verne moves beyond scientific triumphalism to reveal the limits to human action in the world. During the first several months of the journey, the professor’s enthusiasm for a transparent relationship with the aquatic element help him interact with a dynamic world of limitless productivity and diversity. As the journey continues, Aronnax’s vision of the sea complicates, as the oceans become more opaque and resistant to interpretation. The naturalist encounters the omnipresence of death, which reinforces the sea’s dynamic productivity by ensuring a constant cycling of matter throughout

the environment. In this world of ubiquitous, but beneficial death, the companions instead adopt more violent dispositions, embracing the monstrous side of their humanity to kill without cause or need. Increasingly, Nemo's goal of an autonomous existence in the oceans crashes against his desire for vengeance, as his submarine marvel becomes a means to violent conquest. Technology thus plays an ambivalent role in Verne's novel, allowing more direct encounters between human beings and natural environments, but enabling humanity's negative traits in a way that forces us to contemplate the limits to human action in the world.

Adopting a subtly critical stance toward technological progress allows Verne to examine the human place in the natural world and the inherent difficulties of representing the oceanic environment. Verne confronts Aronnax's scientific optimism with examples of human ignorance and violence that prevent the realization of the professor's noble ideal. Aronnax's scientific objectives end up coopted by Nemo's delusions of grandeur and by the crew's tendency to kill everything in its sights. With his naturalistic work becoming less achievable, Aronnax turns to reflect on the inner depth of the human mind and on the challenges of representing the underwater world. In this sense, the "*profondeurs de l'abîme*" reference both the unexplored oceanic abysses and the infinite profundity of the human psyche, recalling Hugo's formulation of a conversation between two "*abîmes*". Referring often to literary precursors like Michelet and Hugo, Aronnax's project evolves to embrace scientific lyricism. The story thus becomes not only a tale of fantastic undersea adventures or a naturalistic report on oceanic biodiversity, but also a reflection on human reactions to dangerous environmental conditions and an experiment in language's ability to represent the most inaccessible places. The image of the deep ocean which emerges from Verne's novel is a complex one, made up of productive ecosystems that construct the physical form of the earth itself, break down the barrier between organic and inorganic life, and recast death as a beneficial recycling and regeneration of biophysical matter. Far from the stereotypical vision

of deserted expanse, the true soul of the seas consists in the tiny lifeforms which fill up the waters, serving as the oceans' breath, pulse, and hidden construction team. Even as Verne pits his human heroes against colossal oceanic beasts, the stunning violence of the *Nautilus*'s occupants destroys the dichotomy between cultured humanity and bestial animality. If the professor can assert that he had “sond[é] les profondeurs de l'abîme”, Verne's representation of the deep oceans leaves enough room for mystery to inspire future generations of scientists and writers to explore a marine world perhaps destined to remain slightly inaccessible, “un écueil fuyant”, even as science and the human imagination struggle to unlock its secrets.

Chapter Four: The Part and the Whole: Toward a Relational Vision of Geography

While geography, that is, the representations of France's biophysical, literary, and visual landscapes in literature, the fine arts, the geographical sciences, and in popular culture has been a common thread throughout this dissertation, the present chapter will place the development of this science and its relations with the literary arts at its center. After an overview of the history of French geography³²¹, the chapter will focus on the period from 1850-1905, years that mark the popularity of geography as a practice and as a pastime, signal the development of the science as a semi-independent academic discipline, and culminate with the publication of Paul Vidal de la Blache's *Tableau de la géographie de la France* in 1903, the death of Élisée Reclus in 1905, and the beginning of the posthumous publication of his final work, *L'Homme et la Terre*³²². The period also covers the entire publication run of Reclus's monumental nineteen-volume *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* (NGU), which appeared first in weekly *livraisons* from the Hachette publishing house and in volume form in yearly installments from 1876-1894. Vidal, recognized as the "père fondateur"³²³ of the French "school" of geography, occupied one of the first independent chairs of geography in 1875 at the Université de Nancy and later at the École normale supérieure (rue d'Ulm)³²⁴, following an episode of national soul-searching after France's defeat at the hands of Prussia in the War of 1870-1871, a disaster some would impute to Prussian superiority in the teaching and knowledge of geography³²⁵. Meanwhile, *récits de voyage* and geographical tourism

³²¹ For a fuller telling of the history of French geography, see Numa Broc, *Une histoire de la géographie physique en France (XIXe - XXe siècle)*, Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 1993; *Regards sur la géographie française de la renaissance à nos jours*, Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 1994; « L'établissement de la géographie en France: diffusion, institutions, projets (1870-1890) », *Annales de Géographie*, 83^e année, No. 459, septembre-octobre 1974, p. 545-568; and Vincent Berdoulay, *La formation de l'école française de géographie (1870-1914)*, Paris, Editions du CTHS, 3^e édition, 2008.

³²² Vidal de la Blache, *Tableau de la géographie de la France*, Paris, Hachette, 1903; Élisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, Paris, La Librairie universelle, 6 vol., 1905-1908.

³²³ Yves Lacoste, « Géographicit  et g opolitique :  lis e Reclus », *H rodote*, Vol. 22, 1981, p. 15. Lacoste is highly critical of Vidal's status, favoring Reclus as the more complete geographer.

³²⁴ Broc, «  tablissement », *op. cit.*, p. 557, 568.

³²⁵ See Berdoulay, *op. cit.*, p. 19: « La croyance tr s r pandue en France apr s 1870 que la force de l'Allemagne  tait fond e sur son d veloppement scientifique s'appliquait tout autant   la g ographie » ; and  mile Levasseur, *L' tude et l'enseignement de la g ographie*, 1872, p. 4 : « On ne sait, en France, ni la g ographie ni les langues

remained popular pastimes and reading material, while geography became an important part of the Third Republic's mission to educate France's citizenry in the newly-established free, obligatory, secular, public school system, destined to encourage "l'acquisition d'une bonne connaissance du territoire national" as part of a "formation patriotique"³²⁶. Not just the province of academics, geography and the changing relationship between French people and places, manifested in popular culture, literature, the visual arts, school classrooms, and in myriad individual experiences in the biophysical world. This chapter will concern itself with the development of a relational notion of geography, the idea that France's diverse landscapes were intimately connected in contiguous relationships.

The first part of our study will include an overview of the disciplinary strife within French geography during the 19th century. In the early part of the century, geographers continued the tendencies of the Enlightenment *encyclopédistes* while adding an effort to rationally (re)organize the territory under centralized models of government. In the academy, however, geography was often left searching for its own methods and held subservient to the *discipline reine* of history³²⁷. In the second half of the century, geographical reformers, especially Élisée Reclus, developed their own writing style, imagining an expanded role for the discipline that could serve as universal pursuit and unifying science, connecting people to place and linking disparate forms of knowledge. In Reclus' *NGU* and his more literary text, *Histoire d'un ruisseau* (1869), the writer offers a dynamic approach to geography, hopeful about the possibility of geographical knowledge to broaden human identities in connection with the living planet. During the second half of the 19th century, geography became institutionalized as an independent academic discipline, remained a popular practice, and

vivantes ». Jules Simon, ministre de l'Instruction publique, had charged Levasseur with renovating the teaching of geography in France.

³²⁶ Jean-Yves Puyo, « La science forestière vue par les géographes français, ou la confrontation de deux sciences 'diagonales' (1870-1914) », *Annales de Géographie*, 108^e Année, N° 609/610, septembre-décembre 1999, p. 622.

³²⁷ See Broc, « L'établissement », *op. cit.*, and « La pensée géographique en France au XIX^e siècle : continuité ou rupture ? », *Revue géographique des Pyrénées et du Sud-Ouest*, tome 47, fascicule 3, 1976, p. 225-247.

offered the means of thinking about one's relational place in the world. Geographer Ludovic Drapeyron characterized the period for the flourishing of an "esprit géographique"³²⁸. This chapter investigates that spirit: geography as the expression of connections linking people and places in a relational vision of identity.

The second part will examine how the methods of statistical geography and geographical description of landscapes made their way into regional and realist literature, such as Balzac's *Le Médecin de campagne* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Realist literary texts from this period (1830-1860)³²⁹, both enshrine and subtly subvert the statist vision common in the era's geographical surveys, from Balzac's confidence in technical progress to reclaim the provinces to Flaubert's ironic portrayal that reveals the hollowness of official discourse. In other literary texts from the second half of the century, like Maupassant's "Sur l'eau" (1876) and *Le Horla* (1887), the relation to geographical space becomes even more fraught with chance and risk, between expanding one's being in connection with the "others" of the world (biophysical and human) and the fear of losing one's self through contamination by "exterior" influences.

In the geography and literature from the second half of the century, we see an emerging idea of France's relational geography, of a country whose landscapes are both contiguous and distinct, the study of which offers the possibility of a dynamic notion of human identity. The notion of relation, however, would elaborate itself in different ways in the various texts, genres, and disciplines that concerned themselves with the written description of place. For Reclus, the interconnection between geographical entities is cause for a hopeful, even euphoric celebration of the biophysical world. Through the character of Benassis, Balzac expresses his belief in a beneficial mastery of the environment through

³²⁸ Quoted in Broc, *op. cit.*, "L'établissement", p. 553.

³²⁹ See Mikhail Avrekh, "Romantic Geography and the (Re)invention of the Provinces in the Realist Novel", Dissertation, Yale University, 2013.

rational order and technical progress, but Maupassant represents a more anguished view of relation, ambivalently caught between the possibility of self-expansion and the deadly peril of contamination. Like water, for thinkers and writers from the second half of the 19th century, the idea of relation was both attractive and treacherous, as it became an animating tension for those who contemplated the changing dynamics between people and place.

1. Centralization to Universalism: French Geographical Visions of the 19th Century

1.1 Post-Revolutionary, Napoleonic, and Restoration geography: statist spaces

In the chaotic half-century following the Revolution, France passed chronologically through the Consulat and the end of the First Republic, the Napoleonic Empire, the Bourbon Restoration, the Monarchie de Juillet, and the Second Republic. These profound changes in political structure and state ideology would have significant impacts on both geography's and literature's development throughout the period. Despite the frequency of regime change, however, many geographical constants emerged, especially related to state-based geography, as each regime sought to extend its influence from the capital throughout the provinces, via the rationalization, centralization, and submission of the country's regions through geographical statistics³³⁰. Mikhal Avrekh notes that state functionaries collected statistical information about the physical, demographic, and economic geography of the provinces, in order to rationalize the new administrative order. At the same time, the early Romantics began emphasizing *pittoresque* voyages as a means of (re)discovering the regional distinctiveness and sublime natural landscapes that would reconnect the traveler with the country's essence and allow one to escape Paris' "corrupting" influences³³¹. Eventually, realist novelists and painters would capitalize on the popularity of these regional travels, offering their own

³³⁰ Avrekh, *op. cit.*

³³¹ Stéphane Gerson, "Parisian Littérateurs, Provincial Journeys and the Construction of National Unity in Post-Revolutionary France", *Past and Present*, 1996, No. 151, p. 147: "The *voyage pittoresque* reached its zenith between 1780 and 1830. [...] Following Rousseau and others, many yearned to escape the corruption of worldly society and urban life." For the 18th century "Romantic" voyage, see Rousseau's influence, for example, his *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, already referenced in the Introduction.

versions of *récits de voyage* throughout France's landscapes³³². Literary and geographical texts both participated in and rejected the project of state-based centralizing intended to figure regional differences through abstract, easily comparable models like charts and maps.

In the aftermath of the Revolution, the new Republican government commissioned geographical surveys of the French interior, consisting of “regularly updated textual descriptions of each locality”³³³, a means of centrally controlling and managing the provinces through the rationalized collection of data. Geographical surveys were certainly not new in the early decades of the 19th century; rather, they built off prior state-sponsored efforts during the *Ancien régime*, such as Bougainville's voyage, the maritime expedition of La Pérouse³³⁴, or the cartographic projects of the Cassini family. The emphasis now, however, shifted from distant locales to the systematic surveying, mapping, and recording of the French interior. The geographers, travelers, and writers of the period faced several methodological, literary, and stylistic questions related to the challenge of describing the French provinces. The lack of a fixed methodology for geography meant that statistics, mapping, and the listing of facts³³⁵ became privileged means of “writing” France's regional diversity. Indeed, the problem of description would challenge geography and literature alike, two disciplines concerned with textually representing the world's physical space. Meanwhile, geography as an academic discipline remained confined to the École normale in Paris, which the Convention had established in 1794 as a means of educating “des citoyens déjà instruits dans les sciences utiles” in “l'art d'enseigner”³³⁶. The course in geography, taught under professors and geographers Edme Mentelle and Jean-Nicolas Buache, provided almost no analysis or

³³² Gerson has estimated the total number of publications in the travel and geographical genres at 343 in the first half of the century, using the *Catalogue de l'histoire de France* as reference, a nearly three-fold increase over the preceding three centuries. Meanwhile, his reading of the *Bibliographie de la France* suggests 650 domestic travel accounts were published between 1811 and 1850. Gerson, *op. cit.*, p. 149-151.

³³³ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³³⁴ The doomed expedition, which disappeared in the Pacific in 1788, was charged with exploring and mapping the Pacific Ocean and its islands.

³³⁵ These facts included geographical nomenclature and lists of latitudes and longitudes.

³³⁶ Décret du 9 brumaire, an III. See Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

discussion, preferring instead to dispense a “litany of facts”³³⁷, a tendency that reappears in the era’s geographical surveys and some realist novels.

One impetus for the geographical surveying after the Revolution was the redrawing of political boundaries via the abolition of the *Ancien Régime*’s provinces in favor of the system of *départements*. In order to manage this new administrative geography, state surveyors inventoried the French countryside, producing maps and studies for the new departmental system³³⁸. One geographical text that emblemizes the post-Revolutionary approach was the *Cosmographie républicaine*, published anonymously in 1795, whose “objet le plus essentiel” was to “[faire] connoître (*sic*) son pays” and to “devenir utile à [leurs] concitoyens” through a study of France’s citizens, history, and geography³³⁹. The book presents a centralized point of view, describing each department in the same way: “its current name, its name (if different) and composition before the Revolution, the etymology of the name, its population, its area in square leagues, its primary commerce, how many districts or cantons it contains, where its tribunal is located”³⁴⁰. These statistical details show a departmental France with reliably uniform criteria whose mathematical or nominal representation create an impression of rational truth. This centralizing impulse becomes even clearer when the authors discuss the languages of Europe, while proudly emphasizing in a footnote that, “en France, on supprime tous les jargons et patois”³⁴¹. This “centripetal”³⁴² style of geographical writing participated in the project to repress local diversity. This form would remain prominent throughout the first half of the 19th century, even as picturesque, Romantic, realist, and travel narratives began to paint a fuller picture of the provinces, using both enthusiastic and ironic tones.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 19. See also Gerson, *op. cit.*, p. 141-173.

³³⁹ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁴¹ Anonymous, *Cosmographie républicaine, par demandes et par réponses ; Contenant la description du Ciel et des Astres ; la Géographie ; la description des Departemens et leurs productions*, Langlois fils, 1795, p. 58.

³⁴² Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

1.2 Geography and geographical writing, 1850-1871: toward an interconnected aesthetics

The geography of the first half of the 19th century concerned itself with mapping, inventorying, and surveying the French territory in search of national unity and centralized administration of a diverse country. This part of the chapter will turn to geography's situation as a science at the end of the Second Republic and during the Second Empire and the influence these ideas had on the evolution of literary representations of geography. That is, how did geographers resolve the tension that had been brooding during the preceding decades between geography as literary *récit de voyage* and geography as dry collection of facts and names? New models of geographical representation emerged during the Second Empire that emphasized universalism and interconnection while some geographers avoided the diversity-crushing tendencies of centralization. To do so, geographers made use of literary style to inform their representation of landscapes. Indeed, an obsession with visibility and universality characterizes both the realist-naturalist enterprise in literature and the totalizing effort of the geographer to capture all aspects of a landscape's nature³⁴³. The growing importance of geographical tourism, the triumph of landscape art, and the encyclopedic culture of spectacle associated with the era's Expositions universelles combined to create a desire to experience, know, and dominate the entirety of French landscapes, if not the world itself. What emerges is an idea of geography as a relational science and discourse that links people and places. This relational geography, however, took many forms, between a model of centralized power that sought to control peripheral peoples and places and one interested in studying a diverse set of geographical phenomena as part of a dynamic whole, a tension that animated the geographical texts and disciplinary debates of the era.

During the second half of the century, increasing literacy rates, improved education, better access to libraries or *cabinets de lecture*, growing access to media, and the development

³⁴³ See Philippe Hamon, *Expositions, Littérature et architecture au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Corti, 1995.

of railroads and tourism meant a larger proportion of the French population could read about and experience places discussed in travel and literary descriptions of the country³⁴⁴.

Geographer, editor, and guidebook writer Adolphe Joanne capitalized on the changing cultural environment with his series of travel guides that offered model itineraries, practical advice, and enthusiastic prose for discovering France's diverse landscapes³⁴⁵. The *Guides Joanne* series welcomed the collaboration of some of the era's most important geographers, notably Élisée Reclus, who was only just beginning in his career in the 1850s. Reclus and Joanne combined on another project, Joanne's *Dictionnaire géographique, administratif, postal, statistique, archéologique, etc., de la France, de l'Algérie et des colonies*, for which Reclus provided a 184-page geographical introduction to the second edition in 1869. While collaborating with Joanne, Reclus began carving out an independent approach to geography, broadcasting those ideas to a wide readership³⁴⁶. Methodological and epistemological debates erupted about geographical description, between encyclopedic projects often connected to state-based power or a desire to instrumentalize "exotic" populations and locales, and the "universal" geographical model, which considered the interactions between diverse geocultural phenomena, while remaining attentive to exploitative power relationships.

Reclus and Joanne were not the only writers and thinkers who attempted to inventory France's landscapes. Indeed, many reform-minded geographers sought to redefine the science of geography as a universal discipline that would serve as the natural union between the "physical" and "moral" sciences³⁴⁷. Instead of emphasizing one of geography's many

³⁴⁴ Gerson, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

³⁴⁵ See Daniel Nordman, "Les Guides-Joanne", in *Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora (éd.), II. La Nation, Vol. 1, p. 1035-1072.

³⁴⁶ See Federico Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus, Pour une géographie nouvelle*, Paris, Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2014, p. 75-77 for the popularity of some of Reclus' works. His articles in the *Revue des deux mondes*, for which he contributed articles from 1859-1868 totaling more than 1,200 pages, were reaching more than 16,000 subscribers by the end of his collaboration (76), and his work with Hachette, including the Joanne series, was regularly printed at 20,000 copies per "livraison" (99).

³⁴⁷ In his work classifying human knowledge, Eugène Cortambert placed geography in a mediating position: « [Les sciences géographiques] sont, avec les sciences économiques, la transition entre les sciences physiques et

branches, whether physical, political, statistical, or commercial, reformers like Émile Levasseur attempted to reunite these “membres épars d’une même science” and to “chercher les liens qui unissent les parties les unes aux autres pour s’élever jusqu’à la conception de l’harmonie générale”³⁴⁸. This vision differed from the idea of geography that had prevailed only a few decades earlier. Under the Restoration, Jean-Antoine Letronne, general inspector of Public Instruction, offered a constrained definition of geography as “composée presque entièrement de faits ou isolés les uns des autres, ou qui du moins ne sont pas liés entre eux par cet enchaînement qui existe dans d’autres sciences, la géographie est en grande partie du domaine exclusif de la mémoire ; on l’apprend en lisant des livres d’histoire et de voyages”³⁴⁹. Perhaps in reaction to this limiting view, reformers like Levasseur saw the science as a unifying discipline consisting of “une chaîne de notions partant de la structure du sol et aboutissant à la civilisation”³⁵⁰; capable of linking physical, political, and social sciences, geography served as “l’enchaînement et l’unité”³⁵¹ between human beings and the biophysical planet. Not only would geography overcome its apparent lack of “enchaînement” that Letronne attributed to the other, true sciences, but it would emerge as the science of linkages *par excellence*, an intermediary between those disciplines while achieving its own “harmonie générale”. Both approaches, geography as litany of facts and names or geography as “enchaînement”, however, suffer from the same danger of “encylopédisme” that threatened to bury the search for a unifying idea under an avalanche of detail.

les sciences morales ». Cf., Eugène Cortambert, *Place de la géographie dans la classification des connaissances humaines*, 1852, quoted in Broc, « La pensée géographique », *op. cit.*, p. 230.

³⁴⁸ Émile Levasseur, *L’étude et l’enseignement de la géographie*, 1872, p. 20.

³⁴⁹ Jean-Antoine Letronne, *Cours élémentaire de Géographie*, 1828, p. V. Letronne studied under Edme Mentelle at the École Normale, whose courses were reputed as boring recitations of place names and geographical facts, as discussed above. See the “notice biographique” at the CTHS:

<http://cths.fr/an/prosopo.php?id=497#>

³⁵⁰ Levasseur, *Les Alpes et les grandes ascensions*, 1889, Préface.

³⁵¹ Levasseur, *L’étude*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

Geographers themselves were highly aware of this threat and took various steps to ward it off. Élisée Reclus began his career as a student of German geographer Carl Ritter³⁵², whose 1859 posthumous publication of *Die Erdkunde* became one of the most influential in the history of geography. Reclus would acknowledge the immensity of Ritter's writing of a "general geography", an undertaking "qu'une génération de savants oserait à peine essayer"³⁵³. Working on the project from 1817 and left unfinished at his death in 1859, Reclus calls Ritter's colossal effort "une tour de Babel qu'il savait ne pouvoir élever jusqu'au ciel" but that he entrusted to humanity the "soin de terminer son œuvre". Reclus, who took geography courses under Ritter at the University of Berlin in the early 1850s³⁵⁴, would translate "sous ses yeux"³⁵⁵ one of Ritter's most important texts, "De la configuration des continents et de leurs fonctions dans l'histoire"³⁵⁶ into French while writing an introduction to the article. For the young geographer, his mentor "a retiré la géographie de la misérable ornière des nomenclatures"³⁵⁷ while allowing geography to study "avec le même esprit l'histoire de la terre et celle des astres", to position itself thus as a relational discipline between social and biophysical phenomena. With the work of Ritter and followers like Reclus, geography would show "que les continents, les plateaux, les fleuves et les rivages se sont disposés, non pas au hasard, mais en vertu des lois du mouvement", the mechanisms of which geographers would analyze along with their relation to human realities. Still, Ritter's example remains complex since his work suffers under the dual threat facing many

³⁵² Carl Ritter (1779-1859), German professor of geography under whom Reclus studied at the Berliner Universität, author of an *Erdkunde*, a "general geography", which Reclus cites as model for his own work. Along with Alexander von Humboldt, Ritter is considered one of the founders of modern geography. See Ferretti, *Une nouvelle géographie*, *op. cit.*, p. 14-15; Franco Farinelli, « L'ultimo degli Erdkunder », in M. Schmidt di Friedberg (ed.), *Élisée Reclus, natura e educazione*, Milan, B. Mondadori, 2007, p. 34-40.

³⁵³ Élisée Reclus, *Introduction*, in Carl Ritter, "De la configuration des continents et de leurs fonctions dans l'histoire", *Revue Germanique*, vol. 8, No. 11, 1859, p. 242.

³⁵⁴ Federico Ferretti, « Comment Élisée Reclus est devenu athée. Un nouveau document biographique », *Cybergeo : European Journal of Geography* [En ligne], document 493, 2010, URL: <http://cybergeo.revues.org/22981>

³⁵⁵ Reclus, *Introduction*, in Ritter, « De la configuration », *op. cit.*, p. 241.

³⁵⁶ Ritter, Reclus (traducteur), *op. cit.*, p. 241-267.

³⁵⁷ Reclus, *Introduction*, in Ritter, « De la configuration », *op. cit.*, p. 242.

geographers of the period: an encyclopedic effort to catalogue the planet's biophysical phenomena and their relations with human activity, together with a desire to reduce that complexity to a series of physical laws that govern both nature and society, laws that risk becoming deterministic. The tendencies of *encyclopédisme* and *déterminisme* would fascinate and haunt the rest of the century, in geography and literature alike.

As geography attempted to break with the insistence on nomenclature, some promoters began to see the science as a discipline that would centralize “toutes les connaissances humaines”³⁵⁸. This universalism had its detractors as well, like Franz Schrader, who feared that teaching a geography that “ne connaît pas de bornes”³⁵⁹ would produce an incomprehensible accumulation of facts certain to bewilder students, readers, and enthusiasts. In order to retain its specificity and its usefulness, geography would have to “rassembl[er] des notions d'ordres différents, montr[er] leur correspondance et généralis[er]”³⁶⁰. Geographers could avoid the temptations of encyclopedism through the close observation of limited cases. Formats like articles, travel narratives, and regional monographs were all fragments of the larger, universal edifice of geography, floors of the tower of Babel, to follow Reclus's analogy. These shorter forms allowed geographers to posit close observation of landscapes in the field as an important method for geographical research and as a means of formulating general theories in a search for causal relationships between biophysical phenomena and the human social world.

Guidebooks, travel itineraries, *récits de voyage*, and narratives of exploration were all fragmented forms that allowed geographers, travel agents, writers, and publishers to study a particular region of the French territory while providing useful information to tourists

³⁵⁸ Ludovic Drapeyron, « De la transformation de la méthode des sciences politiques », *Revue de Géographie*, 1877.

³⁵⁹ Franz Schrader, *Quelques mots sur l'enseignement de la géographie*, Paris, Hachette, 1892. Quoted in Broc, « La pensée géographique », *op. cit.*, p. 233.

³⁶⁰ Bertrand Auerbach, « Caractère et tendance de la science géographique », *Annales de l'Est*, 1888.

sometimes presented in a literary style. Many of these books and journals were prominently illustrated, featuring *gravures* of drawings, paintings, or even photographs. As one example, Adolphe Joanne's guide book to Fontainebleau (palace, gardens, forest, and surroundings) published in 1867 featured 45 *gravures sur bois*, one map of the forest ("en tête du volume"), one plan of the castle ("à la fin du volume"), and numerous charts and graphs explaining practical details like departure times, distances, famous sites, and lodging information³⁶¹. From the heavy presence of illustrations and the writers' frequent emphasis on the *pittoresque* aspects of a landscape, these publications focused on the visual experience of France's geographies. In order to *know* a landscape, one would have to *see* it. Since these writers put so much importance on the visual experience of place, they also needed to help their readers to learn *how* and *from where* they could best see a landscape. Thus, in Reclus's continuation of Joanne's exploration of the Dauphiné³⁶², the geographer regularly guides his reader to the most privileged vantage points, from which a traveler could experience the wonder of the region. Reclus takes his readers to "le panorama le plus grandiose offert par le massif du Pelvoux" (402), to a summit from where "les voyageurs [...] verront d'un regard tout le massif des monts d'Oisans" (403), to the "escarpements du Diable" where one might "saisir d'un coup d'œil l'ensemble du chaos", and to numerous other vantage points that provide unimpeded access to the region's "amphithéâtre des glaciers" (406), a "spectacle" whose "magnificence...augmente à mesure que nous montons". Reclus's sixteen-page *récit* also features six illustrations (some full page, most of them drawn "d'après nature"³⁶³) and one map of the region. In using landscape drawings and emphasizing *seeing* the whole landscape, Reclus and Joanne encourage experiencing France's geographies as harmonious ensembles.

³⁶¹ Adolphe Joanne, *Fontainebleau: Son palais, ses jardins, sa forêt, ses environs*, Paris, Hachette, 1867.

³⁶² Élisée Reclus, « Excursions dans le Dauphiné, 1850-1860 », *Le Tour du Monde*, 2e semestre 1860, Paris, Hachette, p. 402-416.

³⁶³ The drawings are credited to "Sabatier", "Français", and "Karl Girardet", without further precision.

This obsession with seeing the entire landscape with a single “coup d’œil” also characterizes many literary projects of the era as well as geographical works written in a literary style. Indeed, the entire period seems both amazed and haunted at the possibility of seeing everything, at once, in a single place³⁶⁴. The desire to see, know, and exhibit the entirety of French (or global) geography became a frequent motif in the era’s literature and culture. From Verne’s first novel, *Cinq semaines en ballon* in 1863, which offers the reader the possibility to observe the entire earth’s geography from a privileged vantage point, to captain Nemo’s desire to house all cultural and oceanic treasures within his library; from the panoptic dystopia of unlimited consumerism and surveillance Victor Fournel imagined in his *Paris nouveau et Paris futur*³⁶⁵, when the dream of universalism transforms into a nightmare with the capital having distilled the entire country in a single location, to Zola’s frequent use of metonymy to reduce distances between Paris and province in *Le Ventre de Paris*, writers sought to create contiguous relationships despite spatial separation. All these techniques were part of a larger phenomenon of collection and exhibition, thought to realize the goal of universal knowledge capable of transcending physical distances, of which the era’s Salon and universal expositions were the most spectacular representatives.

1.3 Landscape as relation: the part, the whole, and the expanded self

Élisée Reclus’s *Histoire d’un ruisseau*, published by Verne’s editor, Hetzel, in 1869³⁶⁶, is a work of literary geography that insists on the relationship between France’s diverse landscapes. Though academic geographers often qualified the work as a minor, didactic project unconnected with his major works of geography, Reclus and Hetzel nonetheless considered the book an important contribution to building popular geographical

³⁶⁴ For more on this tendency, see Bernard Comment, *Le XIX^e siècle des panoramas*, Adam Biro, Paris, 1993.

³⁶⁵ Victor Fournel, *Paris nouveau et Paris futur*, Jacques Lecoivre, Paris, 1865.

³⁶⁶ Élisée Reclus, *Histoire d’un ruisseau*, Paris, Hetzel, 1869.

understanding³⁶⁷. In fact, Reclus shared Hetzel's passion for diffusing scientific knowledge in easily understandable forms and stories; his geographical work, whether appearing in Charton's *Le Tour du Monde*³⁶⁸, Joanne's guidebooks, his own universal geographies, or books like *Histoire d'une montagne*³⁶⁹, which formed a literary pair with *Ruisseau*, Reclus sought to write for a large public, to spread geographical knowledge, to encourage direct observation of landscapes, and to foster love of the natural world in his readers³⁷⁰. A common thread that unites his various works, whether the nineteen-volume *NGU* or his comparatively brief *Histoire d'un ruisseau* is his interest in universality, while avoiding encyclopedism³⁷¹. For both *Ruisseau* and *Montagne*, Reclus assumes the role of the "narrateur-voyageur"³⁷², drawing inspiration from his personal experiences, his childhood among the mountain streams and forests of France's southwest, his exile in Switzerland, and his tireless journeys in the field as a geographer. He thus adopts a stance as a geographer diffusing a form of liberating knowledge while taking up a literary style in hopes of moving his readers to engage with the world.

First published in 1869 and reprinted in 1882 as an illustrated volume, *Histoire d'un ruisseau* initially met with uncertain success. For a popular author accustomed to print runs of

³⁶⁷ Richard Lafaille, « En lisant Reclus », *Annales de Géographie*, t. 98, n°548, 1989, p. 454. For Lafaille, geographers ignore these works at their own peril, carelessly neglecting "une composante essentielle de la géographie de Reclus", preventing a full understanding of Reclus's *œuvre* while depriving themselves of "travaux géographiques originaux", all because of the presumed "literary" character of these works.

³⁶⁸ As part of a series of articles appearing in Gambetta's daily newspaper *La République française*, where Reclus laid out his vision of geography in a preview of his forthcoming *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, the geographer lauded the work of Charton's magazine of exploration: « il n'est point [...] d'ouvrage de science pure ou de description qui ait fait pour développer le goût de l'étude et l'amour des voyages la dixième partie de ce qu'a fait le *Tour du monde* » while naming Charton as the « principal éducateur de la nation ». Cf. Reclus, "Géographie générale", *La République française*, 21 juin 1872, p. 1.

³⁶⁹ *Histoire d'une montagne* and *Histoire d'un ruisseau* were both published by Hetzel in his *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, the same popular literary journal for children where Verne's *Voyages extraordinaires* would appear. See Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*, *op. cit.*, p. 77-83. *Montagne* also appeared in the journal of another scientific vulgarizer of the era, Louis Figuier's *La Science illustrée* in 27 "livraisons" from 1875-76, before its definitive (illustrated) volume publication at Hetzel in 1881.

³⁷⁰ Lafaille, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

³⁷¹ Rather than encyclopedic enumeration of isolated physical phenomena, Reclus's work focuses on the "milieu, combinaison dynamique de très nombreux facteurs", (*L'Homme et la Terre*, *op. cit.*, t. I, 1905, p. 110) leading to a unified vision of geography as "l'étude des interactions entre les phénomènes physiques et les phénomènes humains". See Lacoste, « Géographicité », *op. cit.*, p. 20 and Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

20,000 copies per “livraison” of his *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* with Hachette, Reclus feared the lesser success of the reedition of *Ruisseau* (9,200 copies for the first printing) confirmed his status as an unworthy writer: “je n’ai pas de succès comme écrivain, ce qui provient peut-être de la bonne raison que je n’en mérite pas”³⁷³. The work, however, would achieve lasting influence, with the city of Paris adopting the book (together with *Histoire d’une montagne*) as “livres de prix pour les meilleurs élèves des écoles primaires”³⁷⁴. Reclus’s text attempts a complete explanation of geographical phenomena³⁷⁵ related to moving water in all its forms, progressing from the infinitely small (“la gouttelette”) to the infinitely large (“l’océan”), reflecting throughout on the great diversity of natural and urbanized landscapes moving waters traverse on their way from sky to sea. The “ruisseau” referred to in the book’s title, is both examined at a microscopic level and elevated to a universal concept: “ce ruisseau je l’ai trouvé partout : c’est la Dronne, la Vézère, la Vanne, l’Almandarez, que sais-je ?”³⁷⁶.

While Reclus never names the “ruisseau” in question, the stream draws its various characteristics from the mountain torrents of the southwest, which Reclus remembered from his childhood, from his travels and studies around France for Joanne, and especially from “la gracieuse Andelle et la Crevon”, two streams of Normandy that “coul[aient] au pied de [son] cabinet de travail” and “au bord [desquelles]” Reclus wrote his book. Thus, if particular places informed his work, the geographer shows their relation to wider landscapes, revealing the stream and its mechanisms as fundamental concepts for understanding geography as a relational science.

Reclus guides his reader along a journey following a tiny drop of water from its source in a raincloud (“molécules de vapeur dans la nuée”³⁷⁷) before finishing in the ocean as

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

³⁷⁵ For Lafaille, this geographical ambition means the work represents “aucune brisure dans [son] œuvre”. Lafaille, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

³⁷⁶ Quoted in Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus, op. cit.*, p. 98.

³⁷⁷ Reclus, *op. cit.*, *Ruisseau*, p. 2.

“blanche écume sur la crête des flots”. Along the way the “gouttelette” will have traversed “le granit, le calcaire et l’argile” (1), formed crystals and precipitated as snow “sur la froide montagne”, before joining with other drops to “ruisseler en eau” on its journey to the sea. In this journey, Reclus sees “l’histoire de l’infini”, a story that convokes the participation of “tous les agents de l’atmosphère et de l’espace”, an infinitely tiny droplet of water whose destiny is as universal, as vast as “les astres énormes qui roulent dans les cieux”. Reclus thus sets himself the challenge of following this tiny drop “dans ses détours et ses chutes depuis son apparition dans la source jusqu’à son mélange avec l’eau du grand fleuve ou de l’Océan”, revealing the interaction between water and the land, the different forms moving water takes along its journey above and below ground, the interconnectedness of distant landscapes, and the deep cultural bonds human beings have developed with water. Though relatively short (253 pages in the 1869 edition) compared to earlier and later geographical studies from Reclus, the diverse characteristics of water flowing through landscapes allow the writer to engage with a wealth of disciplines, geographies, cultural practices, and industrial and urban settings, making the “ruisseau” a universal concept in geography. What emerges is a Reclusian method, forged through attentive observation, the linking of interconnected phenomena and places, and an abundant joy in being present in a landscape, in this case, that of flowing water, “le lieu charmant vers lequel on se sent invinciblement attiré” (3).

In *Histoire d’un ruisseau*, we will analyze Reclus’s discursive strategies, geographical methods, use of literary devices, and novel ideas that make the case for a relational understanding of geography. Beginning with a development on cultural, symbolic, mythological, and religious associations of “la source” throughout history, Reclus calls for a new interest in nature that would mobilize “tous les hommes qui aiment à la fois la poésie et la science”, an interest that would “lever le sort jeté sur les sources par le prêtre ignorant du moyen âge” (13). This new world would see a large coalition of scientists (both academic and

citizen amateurs) working together to study the stream “dans son flot, dans ses rides, dans le sable qu’elle roule et la terre qu’elle dissout”, allowing these nature lovers to “remont[er] le cours souterrain jusqu’à la première goutte qui suinte à travers le rocher” and to follow the stream “de cascade en cascade, de méandre en méandre jusqu’à l’immense réservoir de la mer où elle va s’engouffrer”. Though painstaking, such study would also be joyous and rewarding, since it would reveal “le rôle immense que, par son travail incessant, elle joue dans l’histoire de la planète”. The goal is not simply pure scientific knowledge, since the understanding of flowing water can be mobilized “pour le service commun de l’humanité” (14), for human industry, agriculture, and health while assisting in the “embellissement du globe”. Scientists, citizens, artists, and writers all had a part to play in this great project, since “ce retour vers la nature” would permit humanity to “fleur[ir] de nouveau dans sa jeunesse et dans sa vie”.

The observation, study, and love of flowing waters (and of nature, more generally) becomes central to a renaissance, in science, art, and human wellbeing. Even as Reclus emphasizes the importance of direct observation of nature, knowledge of artistic representations of those landscapes helps to render his experience even more profound, allowing the observer to engage in a conversation with “les générations d’autrefois” (33). For Reclus, the material and the symbolic experiences of nature are equally important. Being aware of these cultural connotations even helps one to become a better geographer, less concerned with a mathematical, flat rendering of the landscape, allowing one to remain closer to the object of study, to appreciate more fully the great diversity of a stream’s “course”. Unlike the mathematical geographer, who “calcule et trace sur le papier la courbe décrite par le ruisseau” and who finds “que cette ligne est d’une régularité presque parfaite”, Reclus celebrates the virtues of those more aware of nature’s three-dimensional diversity, like the “intrépide marcheur” who discovers “les plus brusques inégalités du sol, les différences de pente les plus soudaines”. Reclus fustigates his contemporary geographers obsessed with

mapping, statistics, and mathematical representations of landscapes; to these techniques, Reclus favors the direct, physical experience of nature and literary descriptions that allow a landscape's unique characteristics to shine. Reclus's geography is one of attentive detail to the seemingly most insignificant forces that are too small to show up on most maps. Thus, the geographer marvels at the hidden power behind a "ruisselet" (80) that is "pauvre et intermittent", but whose "action géologique n'en est pas moins grande". Only the intrepid traveler with an attentive eye discovers the spectacle of a "mince filet liquide qui a creusé l'énorme fosse", silently, constantly cutting through "l'argile et la roche dure" to open up "entailles profondes", all while its life-sustaining waters "entretien[nent] cette riche végétation de mousses, d'herbes, d'arbustes et de grands arbres". These hidden delights, what Reclus calls nature's "plus petites retraites" (81), remain accessible only to those willing to climb mountains, descend valleys, cross streams, or spend an afternoon "étendu sur un tapis de mousse" to fully contemplate the "grandeur" of the interaction between water and earth.

Ultimately, Reclus's project aims to bring to light the physical connections that link apparently separate landscapes and to show how human beings are intimately connected both to the spaces that sustain them and that they (re)shape and to each other across those same spaces. His vision differs from contemporaneous geographers, like Vidal de la Blache, who developed a more "fixiste et isolationniste"³⁷⁸ view that emphasized stable "genres de vie" of populations living in unchanging "pays". Reclus posits a relational, dynamic geography, one in which we are "semblable au ruisseau qui s'enfuit" (251). Flowing water puts far-flung geographies in relation, creating surprising proximities between people and places.

Following these moving waters is not only of interest to geographers; more importantly, it reveals the reality of our true selves and the deep connections that bind us to the biophysical world. Akin to Michelet's and Hugo's vision of endless material exchanges

³⁷⁸ Lacoste, "Géographicité", *op. cit.*, p. 18.

producing a relational identity and form of immortality, Reclus shows how the human body's functioning is analogous to the flowing of water across the earth's surface, bringing matter, nutrition, energy, and life and putting apparently distant parts in relation with the larger whole. Though we may think of ourselves as distinct, solid beings composed of a "dur squelette et des formes arrêtées" (250), we are in fact primarily "une masse liquide, un fleuve". Knowing this fact expands our existence beyond our immediate surroundings, putting us in relation with the world, or even the universe itself. The "fleuve" of our bodies serves as the temporary home for "des molécules sans nombre, provenant de toutes les régions de la terre et de l'espace". These terrestrial and universal elements, like our own bodies, are in constant motion, in continuous flux as they "recommen[cent] leur voyage infini, après un court passage dans notre organisme". In a state of becoming, "nous changeons à chaque instant : notre vie se renouvelle de minute en minute et si nous croyons rester les mêmes, ce n'est que pure illusion de l'esprit". The water cycle becomes "l'image de toute vie" (250), and "le symbole de la véritable immortalité", a constant cycle of (ex)change that surpasses the barrier of the self:

Le corps vivant, animal ou végétal, est un composé de molécules incessamment changeantes, que les organes de respiration ou de la nutrition ont saisies au dehors et fait entrer dans le tourbillon de la vie ; entraînées par le torrent circulaire de la sève, du sang ou d'autres liquides, elles prennent place dans un tissu, puis dans un autre et dans un autre encore ; elles voyagent ainsi dans tout l'organisme jusqu'à ce qu'elles soient enfin expulsées et rentrent dans ce grand monde extérieur, où les êtres vivants, par millions et par milliards, se pressent et se combattent pour s'emparer d'elles comme d'une proie et les utiliser à leur tour. (250)

Having followed flowing water from its origin as a tiny "gouttelette" bubbling from a "source" or precipitating from a raincloud along its journey across mountains, valleys, ravines, grottos, rapids, streams, rivers, mills, factories, and cities on its way to the ocean, Reclus shows how water touches, shapes, and animates every landscape, whether biophysical or human. Studying the ability of watercourses to connect distant landscapes helps Reclus to understand the same phenomena occurring in human identity, whether linked to biophysical

geographies or to human civilization itself, reading human history as a series of exchanges, of populations beginning to “se mettre en rapport d’une partie du monde à une autre partie” (252). Reclus sees the world in concentric circles as the geographer hopes human solidarity will extend beyond a tribal center to form “un cercle de plus en plus large”. Reclus finishes his work with an optimistic flourish, hoping for the day when human societies are every bit as relational as the landscapes he studies, when “les peuples se mêl[eront] aux peuples comme les ruisseaux aux ruisseaux, les rivières aux rivières”. The hopeful result of such a day would see humanity united as “une seule nation”, free of the destructive impulses of nationalism, brought together just as “toutes les eaux d’un même bassin finissent par se confondre en un seul fleuve” (253). Reclus sees “tous ses courants humains” growing progressively more cooperative toward an “idéal commun de justice et de liberté”, a universal vision of a geographical humanity flowing together as “un même fleuve” in a “fédération libre”, a future where “réunis en un seul flot, nous descendrons ensemble vers la grande mer où toutes les vies vont se perdre et se renouveler”. While Reclus’s hopeful form of federal anarchism colors his books conclusion, the organicist analogies he draws between flowing water and human identity mirror many of his contemporaries in geography and literature³⁷⁹. Devoted to universality, to close observation to understand the world, and to the dynamic interconnection between distant people and places through the relational nature of landscapes and the shared experience of the text, Reclus delivers a defense of geography that offers lived experience and aesthetic joy of landscapes as liberating means of opening the self to the world.

1.4 Reclus’s relational France: the geographical unifier of diversity

A prolific writer, Élisée Reclus achieved both popular and intellectual acclaim during the second half of the 19th century. A few years after publishing *Ruisseau*, he began his most

³⁷⁹ Dana Lindaman traces the “organicist” metaphor throughout literature and geography during the last decades of the 19th century, from Verne’s *Voyage au centre de la terre* to G. Bruno’s *Tour de la France par deux enfants*, passing through the work of geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache. Cf., Lindaman, *Mapping the Geographies of French Identity, 1871-1914*, Dissertation, Harvard University, 2008, p. 28-168.

significant achievement in geography, the nineteen-volume *Nouvelle Géographie universelle*, published by Hachette from 1875-1894³⁸⁰. We will focus here on the second volume, entirely dedicated to France. In this work, Reclus delivers his vision of France as an inhabited geographical entity, a place where differences were put in relation. Whether internally – in the country's defining regional, cultural, linguistic, and geographical diversity, or externally – symbolized by its position at the crossroads of important civilizational, biological, and geographical movements at a European or planetary scale, France appears in Reclus's text as a place where diversity and universality were destined to coexist. This vision differs from that of Vidal de la Blache, whose institutional position and more deterministic outlook contrasted with Reclus's status as banned, then exiled anarchist and with his dynamic idea of geography. Reclus's relational vision emphasized humanity's role within milieux, giving geography an empirical basis without amputating the role of cultural expression in differential human societies and outcomes. In titling his monumental undertaking the *Nouvelle Géographie universelle*³⁸¹, Élisée Reclus showed the ambition of his study while referencing his predecessors in the field, especially Malte-Brun's *Précis de la géographie universelle*, published in six volumes beginning in 1810. Reclus's title implies that these previous works needed updating, correcting, or improving. Though Reclus's 19-volume opus represents the largest work of the geographer's career³⁸², the *NGU* remains one of the least studied among his numerous writings³⁸³. Even as his notion of geographical relation never eludes sociopolitical conflict, Reclus develops his idea of France as the ultimate unifier of diversity, pointing toward an expanded, liberated notion of the human self.

³⁸⁰ For the *NGU*'s genesis, see Federico Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus, pour une géographie nouvelle*, op. cit., 2014.

³⁸¹ Élisée Reclus, *Nouvelle Géographie universelle : la terre et les hommes*, Hachette, 19 vol., 1876-1894. Hereafter referred to as the *NGU*.

³⁸² Franco Ferretti estimates that Reclus published more than 25,000 pages of material, more than 17,000 of which make up the *NGU*. Cf., Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*, op. cit., p. 6-7. The *NGU* itself contains 17,873 pages of text, 4,290 maps, and thousands of *gravures*. Cf., Béatrice Giblin, « Élisée Reclus : un géographe d'exception », *Hérodote*, 2/2005, N° 11, p. 6.

³⁸³ Ibid., p. 5.

Defining his project of universal geography as “une entreprise téméraire”³⁸⁴ nonetheless “justifiée par les progrès considérables qui se sont accomplis récemment et qui ne cessent de s’accomplir dans la conquête scientifique de la planète”, Reclus aims to offer a modern version of the work of “l’illustre Malte-Brun”. He admits his “grande ambition” would be to “décrire toutes les contrées de la Terre...comme s’il m’avait été donné de les parcourir moi-même”, admittedly an impossible task requiring “l’intermédiaire des voyageurs” collaborating on the project. The subject of his book, the nature of the planet and its relations with human societies, is almost impossible to grasp, since “cette nature elle-même change constamment avec les hommes qu’elle nourrit”, making natural and human “mobilité” a guiding principle for Reclusian geography. This evolving mobility that Reclus sees as “infinie” distinguishes his vision from “la géographie conventionnelle”, which remained interested in listing “les longitudes et les latitudes” and enumerating “les villes, les villages, les divisions politiques et administratives”. Instead, the geographer’s method will attempt to draw connections from the infinitely small to the universally large, showing the relation between the part and the whole, like “la goutte de vapeur” that “reflète sur sa molécule presque imperceptible l’univers qui l’entoure de son immensité”. Despite his use of the term “universelle”, Reclus’s geography eschewed “énumération analytique à prétention encyclopédique”, preferring instead to examine a diverse set of phenomena “dans leurs interactions et en fonction d’une dynamique globale”³⁸⁵. While demonstrating these innumerable relations, Reclus takes care to avoid geographical determinism, insisting on the “valeur essentiellement changeante” of “tous les traits particuliers de la Terre”, since human cultures exert a “rôle actif...par le travail sur le milieu qui les entoure”. Therefore, the careful geographer must attend to the fact that human beings both “subi[t] l’influence du milieu”³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Élisée Reclus, *NGU*, “Avertissement”, vol. 1, Hachette, 1879.

³⁸⁵ Lacoste, « Géographicité », *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁸⁶ For more on the notion of “milieu” in the 19th century in France, see Philippe Pelletier, « Pourquoi Élisée Reclus a choisi la géographie et non l’écologie », *Géographie, écologie, politique, manifeste pour une*

and “la modifie à [leur] profit”, making geography a “mésologie”, a “science des milieux”³⁸⁷, a non-deterministic study of the constantly changing relations between people and place.

For Reclus, the global study of these relations between people and place would be further subdivided into large biophysical or cultural regions, such as “L’Europe méridionale”, which makes up the first volume of the *NGU*, or France, which earns the attention of the entire second volume³⁸⁸. For the geographer, however, it is important to note that this prominence owes nothing to patriotic pretensions that would see in his mother country (from which he lived exiled at the time of this volume’s publication) “une sorte d’hégémonie morale” (2), but rather to its “influence” (3) and its “idées” that “la rendent tellement utile au monde”. Reclus sets out, therefore, to “connaître toutes les conditions du milieu dans lequel s’est développée une nation dont l’existence a été si remplie depuis que l’axe de la civilisation s’est déplacé de la Méditerranée vers les bords de l’Océan”. Reclus guards against the pitfalls of “quelque reste de vanité nationale”, and as a geographer having been imprisoned for his political engagement during the Paris Commune, he recognizes the destructive dangers of nationalism. France’s privileged position in the *NGU* owes much to its history as European and world power, and to its particular geographical position in Western Europe at the

géographie environnementale, Denis Chartier et Estienne Rodary dir., Paris, SciencesPo Les Presses, 2015, p. 99-120; and Pelletier, « Élisée Reclus et la mésologie », Colloque *Retour des territoires, renouveau de la mésologie*, Università di Corsica, Corte, 26-27 mars 2015; Pelletier traces the history of the idea of « milieu » in the sciences, showing how Reclus borrowed the term « mésologie », the study of milieux, from Charles-Philippe Robin, founding member of the Société de biologie, and from Auguste Comte, who elaborated an « étude théorique du milieu » in his *Système de politique positive* (1851-1854). For Comte, the study of life required an understanding of « l’ensemble des circonstances extérieures », and of a « certaine harmonie, à la fois active et passive, entre un organisme quelconque et un milieu convenable » (1851, I, p. 640). The science of « mésologie » would be further theorized by Louis-Adolphe Bertillon, one of the founders of the École d’anthropologie in Paris, who defined it as the « connaissance des conditions de ce milieu et des influences réciproques que chacun des deux termes (le corps vivant et le milieu) exerce l’un sur l’autre ». Cf., Bertillon, « Revue de biologie », *Presse scientifique des deux mondes, revue universelle du mouvement des sciences pures et appliquées*, 1, 1860, p. 120. For Bertillon and for Reclus, the study of « milieux » included an understanding of the interactions between living beings (including humans) and their physical and sociocultural conditions, with the geographer espousing a vision of this interaction as reciprocal exchange. Reclus’s dynamic vision of “milieu” thus differed from Hippolyte Taine’s, who theorized it as the fixed external conditions that, together with his idea of “race” and “moment”, would determine the evolution of historical events. Reclus criticized Taine’s emphasis on the present moment and his corresponding assumption that the current state of the “milieu” was fixed, immutable, and deterministic. See Pelletier, « Pourquoi », *op. cit.*, p. 6-7.

³⁸⁷ Élisée Reclus, *L’Homme et la Terre*, *op. cit.*, t. I, p. 39.

³⁸⁸ Élisée Reclus, *NGU*, “La France”, Vol. 2, Hachette, 1876. The pagination I use comes from the 1885 printing.

intersection of diverse cultural, geographical, biological, and meteorological phenomena. The combination of these factors of diversity united in a single place makes France the representation *par excellence* of Reclus's vision of relational, universal geography.

Reclus defines France by its diversity. Belonging at once “au monde méditerranéen et au groupe des terres océaniques” (3), putting the country in communication with the Mediterranean civilizations of Greece, Italy, Egypt, North Africa, and the Levant, so important historically, while remaining connected to the Germanic, Scandinavian, and Anglo-Saxon cultures of Northern and oceanic Europe, which increasingly took the economic ascendancy in modern times. France unites the Mediterranean and Atlantic biophysical and cultural spheres as “le pays de jonction”. This fact becomes the central animating force in France's geography and history, a unification of diversity that “lui assura un rôle à part dans l'humanité” (4). Indeed, Reclus points out that “la France est la seule contrée” in Europe “où les communications soient naturellement faciles entre les rivages de l'Océan et ceux de la Méditerranée”. These lines of communication remain open thanks to “les voies naturelles ouvertes de fleuve en fleuve”, a vast network of fluvial valleys that ensure connections “de commerce et de migration” between the diverse regions of the country, and between France and the rest of Europe and the world. France's geographical disposition also facilitates cultural mixing, becoming “la terre...où la civilisation méditerranéenne est venue se croiser avec les éléments de la culture celte et germaine”. In addition to its fluvial network, the country benefits from the steady decline of “l'arête médiane du continent”, a line that extends from the Carpathians through the Alps, but “finit à la base des Cévennes”, allowing the interaction of Northern and Southern populations otherwise geographically sundered. All these factors make France “un centre nécessaire, un nœud de vibration de tous les mouvements qui agitent l'Europe occidentale”. Within European geography, Reclus sees France as at once diverse, advantaged, and universal; it naturally concentrates Europe's

movements of ideas, economic activities, peoples, and geographical phenomena, placing the country itself (and not just Paris) at the center of a vast network.

Not only is France at the center of Europe's geographical and cultural exchanges, the country itself displays a surprising degree of "élégance" (5) and "équilibre" in its very form. A harmonious shape, France's "contours mouvementés" are balanced by "la solide majesté de l'ensemble", the regularity of these borders appearing as "une série d'ondulations rythmiques". Reclus is the first to advance the idea of France as octagon³⁸⁹, bisecting the figure with a "méridien" or "axe idéal" which crosses through the country's center while it "réunit les deux extrémités saillantes" even as it passes "à travers la capitale", with the figure balanced by "les faces du grand octogone que représente le pourtour du pays". While the territory appears balanced, it is not fixed, representing "l'expression d'un mouvement"³⁹⁰ located at the center of the "grandes diagonales du continent" (4) making it a place of change and relation. For Reclus, France is the ultimate representation of his universal geography: crossed by the 45th parallel, it enjoys a moderate climate in the center of the temperate zone; balanced by alternating "frontières de terre et de mer" which possess "à peu près la même longueur", the country belongs to both continental and marine spheres; finally, most of its land borders are guarded by high mountains, protecting from hostile invasions even as its wide river valleys keep the country open to economic and cultural exchanges. Formed by a combination of diverse forces and movements, France "présente une sorte d'harmonie dans les contrastes mêmes" (11).

³⁸⁹ According to Marie-Claire Robic, « Reclus a inventé la figure octogonale par laquelle s'exprime à ses yeux la perfection du territoire français ». Cf., M.-C. Robic, « Paris, la centralité de la France et le Français moyen : les solutions géographiques d'Élisée Reclus », in J. Feldman, G. Lagneau, B. Matalon, *Moyenne, milieu, centre*, Paris, EHESS, 1991, p. 315. Reclus's favored geometrical metaphor, despite being arguably more representative of France's shape, would lose out to the now dominant image of France as "l'Hexagone". See Eugen Weber, « L'hexagone », *Les Lieux de Mémoire II. La Nation*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, 97-116.

³⁹⁰ Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

Reclus saw France's center made up of "un socle de granit d'une remarquable symétrie de contours". For the writer, this great geological system is the heart of France as geographical being, it is "le squelette autour duquel les terrains plus récents se sont formés, comme des tissus autour d'un os dans un corps animé : c'est le centre résistant de l'organisme". Continuing the organicist metaphor, the Alps, Pyrenees, the ancient rocks of Bretagne, and the "double massif angulaire des Vosges et de l'Ardenne" become "les parties extérieures du squelette", the structure "d'un être vivant" eventually filled in by flooding oceans and rivers with "débris d'organismes calcaires et silicieux par milliards de myriades", constituting the country's "chair coulante". More than simple metaphor, France's very ground is composed of once living organisms that now provide their organic material to allow new generations of life to flourish. The territory is thus a productive relation between rocks, oceans, and rivers; these last two, despite their propensity to flood the land, leave behind "couches d'alluvions" on top of the underlying bedrock that help create a living, breathing, evolving geography. Meanwhile, the cultural and economic center of France seems to naturally converge around a "pôle positif" (15) of the "bassin de Paris", favored by natural fluvial movements and confluences, historical developments, and the capital's position near the country's northeastern borders, the most open to exchange. Even if the highlands of France's central plateau act as a "pôle négatif", they remain the "solide ossature du grand organisme français", the skeletal frame or "point d'appui" around which the rest of the French territory can organize, contributing to the sense of unity within geographical diversity.

Beyond the underlying geological conditions that, despite their great variety, provide the basis for a unified geographical, cultural, and political territory to emerge, Reclus highlights the continuous action of flowing waters as "l'agent le plus puissant du travail de transformation qui s'accomplit à la surface du sol" (29). Relational actors *par excellence*, France's network of streams, rivers, and *fleuves* sculpt, reshape, erode, and fertilize the

country, constantly redistributing biophysical material along their “chemin vers la mer”. This constant work, normally slow but occasionally devastating, manifests in numerous ways throughout the country, from “les ravins et les combes des Pyrénées, des Cévennes, des Alpes, du Jura” revealing the ability of waterways to sculpt the highest, hardest mountains to “les champs de sable ou de limon que l’on voit après les grandes crues sur les bords de la Loire”, a transfer that enables the “renouvellement des campagnes”. Flowing waters both erode and build, participating in “la naissance même de la terre ferme”, which can be seen in the country’s fluvial deltas, notably “aux bouches du Rhône”. As waters flow down mountain slopes, carrying rock and alluvial deposits to the valleys, forests, fields, and deltas below, France’s surrounding seas complete the cycle, as they “forment les rivières en donnant aux vapeurs des nues qui vont se déchirer aux rocs des montagnes” (30). Between France’s high mountains, its agricultural fields, its majestic forests, its fertile valleys, and its surrounding seas, there is a constant, contiguous relationship, a perpetual exchange of material and energy.

Serving as the means of geographical relation between the country’s diverse regions and landscapes, France’s rivers have long stood as “le grand agent de civilisation pour les peuples eux-mêmes” (29), permitting mobility, exchange, transport, commerce, travel, and cultural connections. Thus, France’s diverse geographies are every bit as relational as its people; composed of repeated exchanges, conquests, and migrations, the French nation is “multiple, semblable à un tronc aux milles racines” (45). Despite the great diversity, increased throughout the 19th century “par l’effet de l’immigration pacifique des étrangers dans toutes les grandes villes de la France et sur toutes ses frontières” (53), the nation remains “une des contrées dont les populations présentent la plus grande unité nationale”, forged not only through shared “conditions du sol et du climat”, or “la nature même des choses”, but also via a sense of common purpose, a “communauté des épreuves et des malheurs” (55). While the country’s relational geography certainly plays a role, Reclus recognizes the “prépondérance

naturelle qu'a prise la capitale", a place where France's diversity could mix to form the "Français moyen"³⁹¹, a unique combination of the entire nation's characteristics, and the "influence d'une langue littéraire", allowing people to participate in a shared narrative, and to "rapproch[er] les idées différentes par une forme identique". As a native of France's southwest, though, the geographer was acutely aware of the role of domination and conquest in the formation of national unity, an overthrow of Southern France Reclus calls an "œuvre d'extermination" (179). Language, "le plus solide des liens qui rattachent les uns aux autres les hommes de diverses provinces" (56) becomes the principle driver of French identity, even if Reclus values linguistic diversity: "c'est aussi avec la langue française, dont les premiers monuments remontent à plus d'un millier d'années, que la nation, personnalité collective, toujours renouvelée, mais toujours vivante, a commencé de prendre corps". For Reclus, France is thus every bit a story as it is a relational geography. Like the territory in constant flux, French identity is not fixed, but rather "essentiellement mobile" (58) in a process of becoming, formed through common metaphors, ideas, texts, and language³⁹².

After the introduction and opening chapter that present Reclus's "vue d'ensemble" and general remarks about France as a "milieu", the following chapters adopt a regional approach, while avoiding a purely departmental organization. The geographer starts his regional study with the southwest, perhaps owing to the fact that "la région pyrénéenne est, par sa géologie,

³⁹¹ Reclus is rather original in his use of the notion of "le Français moyen", which is not a statistical average of French identity, not "la moyenne du nombre", but rather a measure of « cette individualité nationale dans un milieu où elle [a] été développée, où elle se soit pour ainsi dire révélée à elle-même ». For Reclus, it was « dans les grandes villes, surtout à Paris » where one could find the « Français par excellence », a common place where « se rencontrent et s'influencent mutuellement » provincials from throughout the country. Paris, « la cité commune à tous », does not swallow up provincial differences, but helps create a new, composite identity, « le caractère général du peuple français », composed of « tous les traits du caractère national ». See also, M.-C. Robic, « Paris, la centralité de la France et le Français moyen », *op. cit.*, p. 315-331.

³⁹² Dana Lindaman discusses the importance of literature and language as a means of forming French identity, especially during the Third Republic: "A national identity is achieved, not assigned. Being French is no longer inhabiting the French territory of paying one's taxes to the French state. It is conforming to an historical identity – studying the canon of French authors, speaking the French language, adopting French principles, participating in the French myth. It is, to paraphrase Deleuze, Becoming-French rather than Being-French." Cf., Dana Lindaman, *op. cit.*, p. 18. One might legitimately object to Lindaman, as would Reclus, that national linguistic unity was largely achieved through forced imposition to the detriment of local, linguistic diversity.

de même que par l'histoire de ses populations, la contrée la plus distincte dans l'ensemble de la France" (63), the region that thus presents the greatest obstacle to his system of relational geography. This "monde à part" nonetheless offers unexpected connections with the rest of the French territory, even serving as a natural bridge between the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds, one of the more salient features of Reclus's conception of French geography. Indeed, located at the "base septentrionale" of the Pyrenees range, a "profonde dépression" running from the "étangs de Narbonne" in the southeast to the "estuaire de la Gironde" in the northwest is a phantom landscape, the remaining evidence of a narrow straight that "unissait...la Méditerranée à l'Océan". In modern times, a series of rivers maintain the old inter-marine connection, with the Aude, Garonne, and many others flowing "dans l'ancienne vallée marine". This former straight has long constituted an important route for cultural and economic exchanges, allowing the "Romains" (64) and their successors "un chemin facile entre les deux versants maritimes". This first of "trois grandes voies historiques" has played a relatively minor role in the "va-et-vient des nations", compared to the two other natural routes that follow the Rhone and the Loire rivers respectively. Reclus's goal is to trace these geographical and historical connectors, showing how they link landscapes, people, and ideas.

If the valley at the base of the Pyrenees occupying the former inter-marine straight allows for the union of "les plaines océaniques aux rivages de la Méditerranée" (178), Reclus highlights other fluvial systems that help connect apparently far-flung regions of the French territory. Chief among these is the "vallée du Rhône", which Reclus identifies as "la principale voie historique de la France", permitting the union of the Mediterranean with "la France du nord" and beyond. Via its northern affluent, la Saône and its numerous tributaries, the Rhone river system reaches Burgundy, "le bassin de la Seine", the capital in Paris, Normandy, the English Channel, "toutes les provinces de la France du nord ... les plaines de la Belgique", and even "toute l'Europe septentrionale", becoming a veritable "chemin des

nations”. In fact, the Rhone valley served as the geographical means of historical, civilizational, and military exchanges, moving usually “du sud au nord”, until the decline of Roman influence and the rise of “une forte individualité nationale” (179) in northern France lead to a reversal of these movements. Reclus is careful to highlight the motivations of violent subjugation that often animated these exchanges, including the original “union violente” between “le Midi” and “le Nord” that produced “les meurtres, l’incendie et l’oppression”. The destructive past has given way to a new reality, in which “l’unité géographique du pays” has been completed, giving the country “une façade sur la Méditerranée comme il en avait déjà sur la Manche et sur l’Océan”, creating a geographical union between North and South.

The Rhône’s connecting of North and South not only achieved national union, but a new role for France as “l’intermédiaire naturel entre les populations des deux versants continentaux”, allowing it to assume “ce rôle de médiatrice des idées qui la distingue parmi les nations de l’Europe”. Even as the waters of the “longue vallée” that constitute the Saône-Rhône river system traverse provinces diverse in their geology, climate, and cultures, there is a fundamental “unité géographique” connecting these regions, as water flows from the Vosges to Lorraine and through “la Bourgogne, la Franche-Comté, le Lyonnais, la Savoie, le Dauphiné, le Languedoc, la Provence, [et] la Ligurie française” in its journey “vers les mêmes parages de la mer”. Through this fluvial system, the Rhône “remonte le midi jusque dans les régions du nord”. If France is a single geographical entity, despite its great diversity of landscapes from the North Sea to the Mediterranean and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Alps, the Saône-Rhône valley plays a more important role than any other geographical feature.

Examples of these hidden relations abound for Reclus; as he moves the reader around France’s diverse geographies, he demonstrates how to read the landscape as a geographer and a writer. In the Dauphiné, for example, Reclus relates his experience among the “massif du Pelvoux, le plus fier des Alpes françaises” (199), an impressive, rocky array of “pyramides”,

“dômes”, and “contreforts”, which nonetheless take on a fluid appearance when “on se place au sommet d’une haute cime dominatrice de l’Oisans”. From this privileged vantage point, seeing nothing but “des séries d’aiguilles, de pointes et de crêtes” that resemble “les vagues figées d’un immense océan”, Reclus creatively shows the connection between these high peaks, the regions’ flowing rivers (“le Rhône, l’Isère et la Durance”) that carved the mountainous landscape, and the ultimate destination of the agitated sea. Meanwhile, destructive human interventions in the landscape disrupt the harmonious appearance, such as the careless deforestation of the “hautes pentes” (201), which creates a new dynamic resulting in the “écroulement des monts”. The replacement of the Dauphiné’s former “immenses forêts” with “de maigres cultures” or “de simples pâturages” leaves rain and meltwater with no resistance in their race down the denuded slopes. In a violent descent, torrential waters “pouss[ent] devant elle[s] tous les débris arrachés aux flancs”, eventually removing “toute la mince couche de terre végétale”, facilitating even further the creation of more “torrents furieux” to “dévaster le sol”. In the valleys below, the torrents gather with other streams and rivers before joining the engorged *fleuves* to wreak devastation in river towns throughout the watershed. For Reclus, however, human action need not be uniquely destructive, as every slope “où de sérieux essais ont été faits” shows signs of recovery. These efforts at “reboisement” allow the mountainsides to regain “leur parure”, via “de jeunes forêts” that renew in these areas “un aspect de fraîcheur et de gaieté”. Reclus draws on the work of Surell, a hydrographer and engineer, whose *Étude sur les torrents des Hautes-Alpes* influenced state efforts to reforest the country’s highlands as a means to slow the prevalence and destructiveness of downstream river flooding. Those efforts resulted in a reversal of deforestation trends in the final decades of the century, with 95,000 hectares in the French Alps reforested in the decade of the 1860s alone (202). Reclus bases his vision of relational geography on an understanding of France’s biophysical landscapes that draws from scientific

disciplines, but that also recognizes the important role human beings play in the destruction, modification, and reclamation of those same landscapes. While destructive actions devastate landscapes and ruin local livelihoods, Reclus notes the positive impacts of those human interventions undertaken in a spirit of “embellissement” and cooperation among people.

The Rhône, uniting Savoie with Provence, the Alps with the Mediterranean, continues its work of mediation via the Saône River, its principal tributary, which flows south before meeting the great *fleuve* in Lyon. The Saône brings the landscapes of the Vosges, Bourgogne, Franche-Comté, and the Jura into the Rhône’s relational geography, while also communicating with two other major fluvial systems, touching the Seine “par les nombreux passages de la Côte d’Or” (351) and the Rhine via “la porte de Belfort”. The river even maintains “relations fréquentes” with France’s largest *fleuve*, the Loire, via “des seuils nombreux” to the west of its flow. The Saône is therefore a “pays de transition”, a country where “le Nord et le Midi contrastent l’un avec l’autre”, while these “deux moitiés de la France entremêlent leurs climats et leurs aspects”. These Saônian landscapes “unissent harmonieusement les traits divers de ces deux natures”, from the Jura’s “noire verdure des sapins”, to the “roches blanchâtres de la Côte d’Or” recalling the Cévennes and the Alps of Provence. The riverbanks themselves are “frais comme ceux de la France occidentale”, while the prevailing sunlight brightens the air with “une lumière presque aussi franche que celle du Midi”. Here in the Saône valley, then, one can find France’s West, East, North, and South united in a single place. Sitting perfectly centered between the Saône’s northern climates and its southern continuation via the Rhône, the city of Lyon “est devenue le centre d’attraction de cette partie de la France” (352), and seems to serve as the natural “intermédiaire de Paris et de Marseille”, uniting the country’s “versant océanique” with its “littoral méditerranéen”.

Forming the eastern border of the Saône watershed, the Jura mountain range, shared between France and Switzerland, fans out in a gentle arc, extending from south of the Rhône

before following a more northeasterly direction north of the *fleuve*. For Reclus, these mountains are particularly interesting, since they allow one to witness geological formation as a long-term interaction between marine, terrestrial, and biological processes. Once again adopting the technique of a viewpoint *en plongée*, Reclus takes his reader to the “sommet d’une haute croupe” (353), from where the geographer reads the landscape as a “vaste tableau”, where the various “rangées d’inégale élévation” seem akin to “vagues successives de la mer assiégeant le rivage”. Having been formed as an oceanic-telluric combination, the Jura maintains its association between water and rock in the present via its “grands cirques d’érosion, au fond desquels brillent les lacs ou jaillissent les ruisseaux”, whose slow, constant flow carves out “entailles...dans la masse des roches”, producing “une grande variété d’aspect, des paysages imprévus et charmants”. Composed of “roches calcaires”, the Jura’s mountain slopes are even more “riches en fossiles” than the Alpine foothills of similar geological origin. This marine legacy is so rich that one can seemingly recognize “anciens *atolls* ou îles coralligènes” (353-354); the very ground of these mountains is made up of a “multitude des restes organiques” (354), which one can “ramasser par poignées”. The contrasting landscape of limestone rocks culminates with “sombres forêts qui croissent sur les pentes de la montagne” whose protective value has been recognized and preserved by “les habitants du Jura”. Historically formed as collaboration between coral biology, seawater, and mineral substances, in modern times the Jura maintains this status as a place of relation between biological, geological, marine, and fluvial forces. As these biogenic and geographical forces combine with the regions’ local inhabitants who valorize the area’s forests, Reclus highlights the Jura’s capacities to unite human, animal, mineral, and vegetal worlds, all while offering numerous connections to the rest of the French territory.

Strangely, the territory that had earned the reputation as a “pôle de divergence” (409), that is, what Reclus calls the “plateau Central”, would best illustrate the geographer’s ideas on

landscapes bringing into relation otherwise separated peoples, cultures, and geographies into a unified notion of French identity. Even if Reclus sees Paris as the essential French city, since it centripetally gathers the entire country's geography and character traits into a single place, the Massif central nonetheless forms France's geological core. The massive plateau, which "occupe la sixième partie de la France", extends "des bords mêmes du Rhône aux premières eaux de la Charente", forming an apparent "barrière de 300 kilomètres en largeur" between "la France du Nord et celle du Midi". Though the region receives the name of "plateau", its topography is actually quite "inégal[e] et découpé[e] dans tous les sens". While it seems to create an insurmountable border between North and South, these heights have played an essential role in the unifying of the lands lying between the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Alps. If the plateau central has posed an important obstacle to the movement of goods, ideas, and people, Reclus theorizes that other migration routes were insufficient "pour que la France devînt une". The "escalade" of the Massif central "de part et d'autre" became the moment that allowed for the eventual union of "les hommes du Nord et du Midi" into "un même peuple". As a native of the Southwest, Reclus is well aware of the "cortège de maux et d'avantages" that this "travail d'union nationale" brought with it, including both "guerres et croisement pacifiques, exterminations et bons rapports de commerce...et participation au patrimoine commun de la civilisation et des idées" (409-410). Indeed, if one looks closely enough, these separating highlands contain "un petit nombre de brèches et de passages" that allowed for constant relations between people on both sides of the range. The region receives its share of Atlantic-produced moisture, which then makes its way down numerous rivers and eventually into the great *fleuves*, including the Loire, the Rhône, and even the Seine, ensuring connections between people well beyond the area.

The Massif central plays another important role in the unification of a diverse country, serving as the source, at the "Gerbier de Joncs" in the Ardèche *département*, (420) for the

Loire River, at more than 1000 kilometers France's longest *fleuve*. Uniting “dans son bassin plus du cinquième de la superficie de la France” (533), the central Loire valley has long been considered the heart of the French nation. Even if the river itself seems an unnatural fit for this title, thanks to its uneven hydrological regime (“alternativement trop pauvre ou trop riche en eau”), its navigational perils including its series of sandbars and propensity to flood, and its location that “ne coïncide avec aucune des grandes voies historiques de l'Europe”, the Loire became the area that contributed the most “à la naissance au développement de la nation” (554). It was in this geography where the growing French nation was able to constitute itself “le plus solidement” and where “elle a le mieux trouvé sa langue et son génie”. Here, the richness of the French language flourished, and Reclus thinks of it as “la moyenne, le vrai centre d'équilibre de la nation”, a mixing of characteristics creating “un harmonieux ensemble”. From the plateau Central, the Loire first flows south, then west, then north, before finding its path to the Ocean, out of historic “langue d'oc” speaking regions into a transition zone, toward the Seine basin and the “langue d'oïl” areas of “la Champagne, la Picardie et l'Île de France”. The Loire valley thus became the geographical link connecting the peoples of the North and the South, another player in Reclus's relational vision of France.

Interest in geography would also manifest itself in literature from the second half of the 19th century. In literary texts, we observe similar tensions that animated the disciplinary debates in geography, between a static, cartographic vision of space and a dynamic and relational view of place (*espace vécu*), connected to subjective human experience. It is to literary texts and the animating tensions between these spatial visions that we now turn.

2. Literary Geographies: Relation as Peril and Possibility

2.1 The provinces in realist literature: enshrining and subverting the statist vision

By the 1830s, a new era of popular geographical exploration had emerged. Fueled by the success of Romantic travel narratives, accounts from geographers and explorers, a new

generation of landscape artists, and a developing realist form of literature that often used France's regions as its *cadre*, the public had more access than ever before to a wealth of literary, scientific, and visual narratives of the country's geography³⁹³. Though the Romantics and other travelers favored a more *pittoresque* or narrative approach than state-sponsored geography, works of literature would also absorb some elements of the statistical inventory, either to support the centralizing project or to subvert it subtly. The emerging realist novel would make particular use of this tendency, as in Balzac's *Comédie humaine* provincial novels and, later, in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Balzac's novels show the necessity of talented state managers to comb through the proliferation of geographical statistics related to each locality while Flaubert reveals the vacuity of a modernity burdened with clichés through his distracted, pompous, or futile characters³⁹⁴.

A common trope in both provincial novels and “non-fiction” travel narratives is the enduring “Paris-province” dichotomy³⁹⁵. Both genres commonly featured a Parisian educated figure, writer, explorer, geographer, or state administrator leaving the capital in order to (re)discover something essential about the province, or to engage in a mission of cataloguing the province's characteristics for state management. Balzac's *Le Médecin de campagne* (1833) falls into the latter sub-category, as its protagonist, Benassis, is a doctor having moved from Paris to an unnamed village in the Dauphiné region who subsequently manages to unleash a period of social and commercial prosperity through his rational, benevolent administration³⁹⁶. In the character of Benassis, Balzac metaphorically applies the doctor's vocation of “healing” the body to the restoration of the social and material fabric of this rural village. Balzac's depiction of a village in need of social, economic, even moral renewal

³⁹³ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁹⁴ See Philippe Hamon, *Expositions and Imageries* for more, especially, on Flaubert's characterization of the modern, distracted dreamer.

³⁹⁵ For more on this dichotomy, see Alain Corbin, “Paris-province”, in P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, t. 3, *Les France*, Paris, 1992, Vol. I, p. 777-823 and Gerson, *op. cit.*

³⁹⁶ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 94-95.

squares with his later pronouncement in his contribution “La femme de province” to the great social typology series *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, in which he declared “la province n’existe pas (par elle-même)”³⁹⁷. Instead, élite, educated Parisians would create, imagine, represent, and write the province, bringing France’s regions into the sphere of modernity through their beneficial influence. While Balzac aims to write “une scène de la vie de campagne”, depicting a rural character at the heart of French identity, he also shows the provinces in need of healing reform through the rational imposition of an enlightened order³⁹⁸.

Published in 1833 and later regrouped under the *Scènes de la vie de campagne* collection in *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac’s *Le Médecin de campagne*³⁹⁹ is a work he qualified as “l’imitation de Jésus-Christ poétisée”⁴⁰⁰, an account of moral integrity leading to personal liberation and shared material prosperity. The majority of the novel recounts Benassis’ successes in reforming the village’s agricultural practices, unleashing an era of prosperity fueled by commercial and industrial development. Avrekh notes that the novel borrows discursive methods from contemporaneous geography, including reading the landscape as a map and providing statistical detail about the village where the action takes place, using figures to highlight the area’s past, present, and future perspectives⁴⁰¹. The novel’s opening passage reads like a *mode d’emploi* of an arriving topographical surveyor, as a wide perspective becomes increasingly focalized to provide more and more detailed renderings of the landscape, passing from “un chemin montagneux” (45) and “une longue vallée...entre deux montagnes parallèles” to “le panier suspendu dans lequel sèchent les fromages” (46) above each door in the “gros bourg”. Through newly arriving Genestas, a former officer in the Napoleonic army, the reader discovers that the “bourg” is in fact

³⁹⁷ Honoré de Balzac, « La femme de province », in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes : encyclopédie morale du XIXe siècle*, 9 vols., Paris, 1840-2, vi, p. 8.

³⁹⁸ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

³⁹⁹ Honoré de Balzac, *Le Médecin de campagne*, Gallimard, Paris, 1974.

⁴⁰⁰ Letter of January 1833 to Mme Hanska, *Lettres à l’Étrangère*, I, p. 6.

⁴⁰¹ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

surrounded by new construction and valuable agricultural land providing richness to the apparently disaffected village. The territory is described in terms of concentric circles that “tourn[ent] autour d’un pic très-élevé, mais complètement nu, qui le domine” (127), part of the Chartreuse range⁴⁰², the mountains that surround and loom over the village and mirror Benassis’s dominant role in the region. Though the large peak appears barren, it nonetheless acts as a fountainhead for the village’s agricultural productivity, directing rain and meltwater down its clear slopes to create a fertile valley. The village thus appears as an optimistic (even utopian⁴⁰³) metonymic model for France itself⁴⁰⁴: surrounded on all sides by mountains, the town lies in a fertile valley filled with flowing waters, productive fields, industrious people, and enlightened administrators.

While the mountain concentrates and distributes water to the village, the real genius of the region’s productivity lies in Benassis’s idea to construct an irrigation system, known as “irrigation transversale” (73), that transforms formerly fallow highlands by gathering and disbursing the mountain’s water resources⁴⁰⁵. Once these agricultural reforms are put in place (“le premier âge de la vie prospère [du] bourg” [92]), stages of bourgeois commercial and industrial development soon follow (“il nous vint un mercier, après lui le cordonnier, le tailleur et le chapelier”), attracted by the valley’s productivity and moral rectitude, all symbolized in its benevolent overseer, Benassis. In addition, the mountain offers a place of panoptic vision, from which Benassis could survey the entire territory under his administration⁴⁰⁶. Benassis’ gifts of vision (the sense of sight and the ability to plan for the future) and his aptitude at marshalling geographical knowledge allow him to become a

⁴⁰² See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s introduction to the novel in the *Folio* edition: Honoré de Balzac, *Le Médecin de campagne*, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, p. 7-42. For Ladurie, the novel “débute comme une thèse de géographie de notre enfance” (7).

⁴⁰³ See Françoise Sylvos, « La poétique de l’utopie dans *Le Médecin de campagne* », *Année balzacienne*, 1.4, 2003, p. 101-123.

⁴⁰⁴ Balzac concludes his opening paragraph’s long description of the natural features of the region: « Enfin c’était un beau pays, c’était la France », turning the valley into a metonymy of the country as a whole.

⁴⁰⁵ Avrekh, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁴⁰⁶ For Ladurie, this panoptic vision makes Benassis a sort of colonial subjugator of France’s interior.

professional bureaucrat and a widely admired hero. At the time of his death, peasants and villagers venerate him, who place flowers on his grave and declare him “sauf les batailles, le Napoléon de notre vallée” (323)⁴⁰⁷. As an agent of the July Monarchy’s constitutional monarchy and a hero in Napoléon’s image, Benassis is a Parisian capable of surmounting socio-political fractures to unite the country across space, time, and political regime⁴⁰⁸. Benassis becomes the model for heroism in the post-Napoleonic world, when the bourgeoisie were asserting ever-greater influence, heroes were those who could apply their geographical knowledge toward practical reform of France’s territories⁴⁰⁹.

Another novel in the realist tradition that borrows descriptive strategies from the geographical works of the first half of the century is Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*⁴¹⁰. Published in 1857, the narrative’s action is situated during the Monarchie de Juillet, and it evokes the banal atmosphere of provincial life during this era. At times, drawing inspiration from its eponymous dreamer, Flaubert’s text takes lyrical flight in its colorful descriptions of the Norman landscape, while his sharp irony reduces those visions as clichés, returning to an empty picture of provincial geography, customs, and ideas. Unlike Balzac’s optimistic portrayal of a restored province through the benevolent actions of an enlightened administrator, Flaubert’s novel represents an insignificant, petty, and vacuous province, ruined by its own banality and the inane influences of hollow Romanticism and bourgeois materialism⁴¹¹. In Flaubert’s novels, the Paris-province dichotomy is complicated, as both capital and country fall victim to *la bêtise*, buried under platitudes, clichés, and facile thinking, even if they remain distinct places⁴¹². Among many scenes in *Madame Bovary*

⁴⁰⁷ Avrek, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁴⁰⁸ See Gerson, *op. cit.*, for more on Parisian littérateurs and the construction of national unity through travel narratives.

⁴⁰⁹ Avrek, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁴¹⁰ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, Édition de Bernard Ajac, Paris, Flammarion, 2014.

⁴¹¹ See Wei-ling Chen, « La Bêtise à l’œuvre : ‘le dérisoire’ dans *Madame Bovary* », *Fu Jen Studies*, vol. 42, 2009.

⁴¹² Nicole Mozet, “Yvetot vaut Constantinople : Littérature et géographie en France au XIX^{ème} siècle”, *Romantisme*, 1982, N° 35, p. 106-110.

where Flaubert draws on geographical descriptive strategies, let us consider the opening description of the fictitious village of Yonville-l'Abbaye at the beginning of the second part of the novel.

Connected “aux pâturages du pays de Bray” (133), at the “confins de la Normandie, de la Picardie et de l'Île-de-France” (134), “entre la route d'Abbeville et celle de Beauvais”, in a valley “qu'arrose la Rieule, petite rivière qui se jette dans l'Andelle”, the fictional “bourg” of Yonville-L'Abbaye, or simply Yonville, reveals itself to the vision of a mysterious narrator at the opening of the second part of *Madame Bovary*⁴¹³. Flaubert provides a flurry of authentic place names, a series of *effets de réel* that anchor the imagined provincial town in a Norman rural geography⁴¹⁴. Located only “huit lieues de Rouen”, Yonville appears as the picture of provincial calm, with its pleasant river that “fait tourner trois moulins”, whose fields are alternately “en herbage” or “en labour”, and where a wide plain “étale à perte de vue ses blondes pièces de blé”. The portrayal mirrors the description of a landscape painting or the style of a geographer charged with surveying an area's features, using a toponymical inventory that recalls the recourse to geographical nomenclature. Meanwhile, the ironic qualification of the region as a “contrée bâtarde” (134) deflates the area's claim to originality. The visitor is assumed to have arrived via “la grande route” (133), which one would leave “à la Boissière” in order to benefit from the panoptic vision from “au haut de la côte des Leux”, a vantage point “d'où l'on découvre la vallée” and the town of Yonville. Like in Balzac's panoramic description of a valley surrounded by mountains, here the traveler emphasizes panoptic perspective to access the area's geographical character. Quickly, however, the reader perceives the difference between Flaubert's and Balzac's descriptive style: here, there can be no benevolent management from an enlightened Parisian. A gray country, “sans accentuation,

⁴¹³ Homais is the most likely narrator here, a possibility reinforced by the enthusiastic portrayal of the town's pharmacy as “ce qui attire le plus les yeux”.

⁴¹⁴ See Daniel A. Finch-Race, “Geocritiquing Flaubert's Scaping of Yonville in *Madame Bovary*”, *French Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 38.1, N° 143.

comme le paysage sans caractère” (134), with poor soil making cultivation “coûteuse”, the region offers little basis for practical reform. Flaubert’s province is impossible to specify, despite the abundance of topographical details; it belongs to three different regions at once, losing its uniqueness to become the picture of “stationnaire” banality.

Flaubert reinforces the area’s hollowness with flat images and a topography that mirrors its inhabitants’ tendency to utter endless platitudes. In the first two paragraphs, the traveler sees the village’s river “au fond d’une vallée” (133), continues walking paradoxically “à plat jusqu’au haut”, where one can observe a prairie that “s’allonge” beneath “collines basses” and a “plaine” that “étale à perte de vue” its stalks of wheat. This emphasis on flat surfaces reduces geographical depth to two-dimensional image, similar to a landscape painting⁴¹⁵. Set in its ways, Yonville insists on cultivating “herbages”, despite their lack of economic prospects, and the village is personified as a “gardeur de vaches qui fait la sieste au bord de l’eau” (134). As Flaubert offers the reader an ironically enthusiastic description of the local pharmacy, the town’s sleepiness combines with sycophantic servitude to official power, which nonetheless offers no tangible advance to the backward bourg. The narrator thus laments the poor state of local roads, yet praises the “maison du notaire” (135) as “la plus belle du pays” and the “mairie” (136), a “temple grec” whose tympanum is decorated by “un coq gaulois, appuyé d’une patte sur la Charte et tenant de l’autre les balances de la justice”. Superficial objects and images reveal the pharmacist’s self-absorption, like the pharmacy’s “devanture” covered with “inscriptions écrites”, advertisements of products for sale, and its “enseigne” contains the printed letters, “*Homais, pharmacien*”, themselves covered in gold sheathing, gilded signs masking their empty signifiers. Unlike Balzac’s Dauphiné village, Flaubert offers no enlightened newcomer to reform the village and put it back on the path to

⁴¹⁵ Éric Le Calvez also argues that Flaubert’s description of Yonville “vise à assimiler le paysage à une ‘peinture’ et où le redoublement des comparaisons tend à transformer le paysage en un *tableau écrit*”. Le Calvez, « Flaubert et le ‘tremplin’ réaliste », *op. cit.*, p. 229.

prosperity⁴¹⁶. Everyone, from the enthusiastic pharmacist to the arriving outsiders (Emma and Charles Bovary), transmit tired platitudes originating in provincial simplicity, bourgeois materialism, or Romantic idealism. Even those having received an education return with their minds filled with clichés, a trajectory Léon sums up with his: “Oh ! J’adore la mer !” (146). Flaubert’s characters, limited by vacuous *bêtise*, “pulvéris[ent] le mythe romantique de la province”⁴¹⁷, which symbolizes neither the rustic heart of France, nor a place to be redeemed through beneficial geographical management.

2.2 Fluid literary geographies: interconnected landscapes and expanded human identities

While Balzac’s and Flaubert’s texts concentrate on circumscribed spaces (represented as inert in Flaubert’s case) nourished with geographical data, other literary texts highlighted space as a dynamic agent that was a source of both anguish and of openness to the unknown. Connections between upstream disruptions and downstream impacts allowed writers to investigate the possibilities and dangers associated with expanded or displaced notions of identity. Reclus saw rivers as especially important vectors of communication, as in his hopeful vision of fluvial interconnection and the euphoric joy he gained in following flowing water toward the sea. Maupassant, a talented *canotier* animated by “une grande passion, une passion dévorante, irrésistible”⁴¹⁸ for the Seine, translated the dual fascination and fear about unstable, shifting identities that the liquid element could inspire in two novellas that offer complex representations of the connection between the “here” and the “there”: “Sur l’eau” (1876) and *Le Horla* (1887). In these short stories, Maupassant shows how narratives of geographical relation can change the conception of existence itself.

⁴¹⁶ Homais would like to play this role, but his cult of progress discourse gets obscured by overwhelming vanity.

⁴¹⁷ Mozet, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁴¹⁸ Like his characters, Maupassant was animated by “une grande passion, une passion dévorante, irrésistible” for “la rivière”. Guy de Maupassant, « Sur l’eau », *La Maison Tellier*, P. Ollendorff, 1981, p. 88. Citations from this edition are given in parentheses.

In Maupassant's "Sur l'eau", the narrator of the frame introduces us to a friend he meets while spending a summer "au bord de la Seine" (87), a man who spends his days and nights "toujours près de l'eau, toujours sur l'eau, toujours dans l'eau". This "canotier enragé" does not gain placid acceptance of the river's capricious behavior with experience; instead the narrator hints the man "mourra bien certainement dans le canotage final", painting a sinister atmosphere from the story's incipit. The river remains "la chose mystérieuse, profonde, inconnue, le pays des mirages et des fantasmagories" (88), in language reminiscent of Hugo's formulation of the ocean as the abyssal realm of the unknown. A second, intra- and homodiegetic narrator picks up the mantle of storyteller to recount "une singulière aventure" (90) that occurred on the Seine at night, a shadowy period when "la rivière est illimitée" (88). Maupassant's multiple narrators using the first person singular "je" blur the distinction between characters and help the reader to imagine herself as part of the story. From the beginning, the work defines the self beyond the limits of one's physical body, to imagine the ways in which identity forms and deforms in relation with other existences. This allows an expansion of the self, but it also poses risks to the self's survival as an independent entity or even its imminent death. The fluvial environment accentuates that risk, since the river is "silencieuse et perfide" (89), hiding its power as it "coule toujours sans bruit", prefiguring its true nature as "le plus sinistre des cimetières, celui où l'on n'a point de tombeau" (88).

Indeed the boatman seems to perceive of the river as a space of death, with flooding, submersion, capsizing, and drowning all constant threats. Unlike the great seas, which also harbor a legion of "noyés" (89), the river brings an unspectacular form of death, where "on pourrit dans la vase" among "des profondeurs noires". Here, the solitary existence of the night boater is put to the test against the desire for companionship, the river's ability to mediate between and bring into relation spaces and beings, and the ever-present danger of submersion. The "canotier" draws from the full sweep of the river's possibilities. Living and working

“près de l’eau”, and remaining “toujours sur l’eau”, he achieves a fluidity and rapidity of movement inaccessible to an earth-bound body; and even going “dans l’eau”, the man fuses with the liquid element, expanding his being beyond his physical self even at the risk of drowning. The story’s title, though, only uses one of those spatial prepositions, “sur l’eau”, perhaps foreshadowing the danger the river poses to those who spend too much time “dans l’eau”. Indeed death is a frequent referent for the story’s intradiegetic narrator, with water ambivalently serving as the means of expanding companionship and the source of mortality, the ultimate form of solitude.

As the “canotier” recounts his story of one particular evening spent “sur l’eau”, he alternates drawing attention to the river’s perfect tranquility and its destabilizing agitation. Those conditions fill in for the narrator’s own state of mind, a back-and-forth Simone Artuk calls part of the boatman’s (un)conscious realization that “son moi et son alter ego, son double, vivent en alternance”⁴¹⁹, the acceptance that his self is fundamentally tied up with the river and its inhabitants. In fact, so connected is his identity with the Seine that this evening of intense solitude troubles the man to the core, leading him to imagine or perceive hidden beings and forces that populate his apparent isolation. Even as he begins his tale by noting he was “tout seul” (91), he proceeds to enumerate the various presences that accompany his evening journey on the river, pausing “pour reprendre haleine auprès de la pointe des roseaux”. Despite the man’s fatigue and his solitude, he enthusiastically recalls that “il faisait un temps magnifique” and that “la lune resplendissait, le fleuve brillait, l’air était calme et doux”. Everything seems transparent, limpid, and “parfaitement tranquille”; the “canotier” feels at peace among the fluvial and atmospheric elements. Although the land and waterscape produce a “silence extraordinaire”, the boatman nonetheless begins feeling anguished as “les légers mouvements de la barque” (92) seem “des embardées gigantesques, touchant tour à

⁴¹⁹ Simone Artuk, « Le Double dans *Le Horla* et *Sur l’eau* de Guy de Maupassant », *Frankofoni*, Vol. 9, 1997, p. 192-193.

tour les deux berges du fleuve”. The river’s and boat’s sudden (perceived or imagined) agitation contrasts with the narrator’s feeling of calm solitude, reinforcing the notion that he cannot live in isolation but rather in alternation, between the Self and the Other.

Certain elements of the narrator’s story suggest an episode of hallucination as explanation for his rapid mood swings. Using exaggerated language, the man claims he is “ballotté comme au milieu d’une tempête”, only to stand up quickly and see that “l’eau brillait, tout était calme”. Real or imagined, the boatman’s story gives his surroundings, the others that concur in forming his sense of self, an agitated, animate existence of which the river’s strange tranquility deprives them. Indeed, the narrator believes there is “un être” or “une force invisible” hidden “au fond de l’eau” that attempts to pull the boat toward the river bottom. This attractive, though dangerous possibility animates the narrator’s tale, as his evening experience transforms into the realization of his duality⁴²⁰. Blaming his disorientation on his “nerfs un peu ébranlés”, the man attempts to pull anchor, which “avait accroché quelque chose au fond de l’eau”, leaving him to “secou[er] la chaîne rageusement” (93) to no avail. Once again, the watery depths exert their attraction on the boatman, tempting him with the possibility of a fusion between his two selves. After drinking “deux ou trois verres” of rum meant to calm his “agitation nerveuse” (94), the man realizes that “la rivière s’était peu à peu couverte d’un brouillard blanc très épais”, such that he can no longer perceive “le fleuve, ni [ses] pieds, ni [son] bateau”, alienating the man from the two parts of his identity, his self and the river, his other self. The opaque fog thus “[l’]enseveli[t] jusqu’à la ceinture dans une nappe de coton d’une blancheur singulière”, as he envisions “des imaginations fantastiques” and “êtres étranges qui nageaient” in the hidden river. Lost and desperate, “ne voyant pas la berge, ne retrouvant plus [son] bateau” (95), the narrator feels his chances of escape washing away. Even as he attempts to “[se] raisonner”, to seize his will to live, he also feels “tiré par

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 188.

les pieds tout au fond de cette eau noire”. The man thus experiences his fundamental duality: “il y avait en moi autre chose que ma volonté, et cette autre chose avait peur”.

This duality is first perceived as an irreconcilable “opposition des deux êtres qui sont en nous”, with the Self “voulant” (96) its preservation and the Other “résistant”, a battle that moves toward mutual destruction. With each half of the narrator “l’emportant tour à tour”, the man remains “immobile, les yeux ouverts, l’oreille tendue et attendant”, passively awaiting the outcome of the struggle. This immobility, however, allows the man to reconceive of his self not as solitary or dual, but as fundamentally connected to his spatial surroundings, as someone who draws his essence from the multitude of beings and forces along, in, and on the water. The sense of the “autre résistant” becomes less one of irreducible, exteriorized alterity than part of his consciousness. The narrator accepts his alter ego “comme son autre moi qui lui appartient aussi”⁴²¹. Thus, the river need no longer be the place of profound solitude, but a place that creates connections and solidarity between the beings that live in its waters and along its banks. The narrator makes this realization after an “effort violent” that allows him to “ressaisir à peu près [sa] raison”, and he begins to call for help in all directions. Having accepted the need of assistance, the man notices that the dense fog “s’était peu à peu retiré et ramassé sur les rives” (97), a clearing that reveals “le plus merveilleux, le plus étonnant spectacle qu’il soit possible de voir”. The boatman is able to see the fluvial environment in its full diversity even as his consciousness is metaphorically relieved of the foggy screen he perceived as an irreducible barrier between his self and the world. Instead, he formulates his being as one part within a wider whole, not as an opposable duality, but as a dynamic interconnection between the self and the world. This reading differs from Simone Artuk’s, who sees in the conclusion of “Sur l’eau” the man’s acceptance of his existence as a duality in which both halves constitute one’s consciousness, but which exist in conflictual alternation,

⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 193.

“où l’un [l’]emporte tour à tour sur l’autre”. In fact, the boatman’s “conversion” is a much more profound reorientation of his self’s identity than simply accepting a split consciousness.

Finally able to free himself from a paralyzing “terreur” (96), the man reawakens in a state of “ébloui[ssement]” (97), witnessing what seems like “une de ces fantasmagories du pays des fées”. The fog had lifted, retreating to each river bank to leave “le fleuve absolument libre” and to form “sur chaque berge une colline ininterrompue” of cloudy vapor. The “grande lune illuminante” (98) once again shines brilliantly, reflecting against the mountainous fog “avec l’éclat superbe des neiges” akin to “deux montagnes blanches”. The water flowing here is the same that had once cascaded down the granite, forested hillsides of the Morvan, passing from Burgundy to Champagne, Paris to Normandy on its journey to the sea. Mountain, hill, forest, valley, plain, city, country, and coast are linked through the river’s flowing waters. The fluvial spectacle reconnects the narrator to the local water/landscape even as it offers a glimpse of even farther flung geographical relations. Locally, “toutes les bêtes de l’eau s’étaient réveillées” like the man, or rather, his connection to them has been renewed. The Seine’s residents combine to form a polyphonic symphony that contradicts the boatman’s earlier warnings about the river as “silencieuse et perfide”. Indeed, the polyphonic experience reinforces the story’s narrative multiplicity, with the first “je” ceding his place to the intradiegetic boatman, who recounts his story without ever relinquishing narrative “control” back to the first narrator. Amongst the furious “coass[ements]” of the “grenouilles” and the “voix cuivrée des crapauds”, the narrator “n’avai[t] plus peur”, relishing the intersubjective experience of his multiplied self. Feeling plenitude “au milieu d’un paysage tellement extraordinaire que les singularités les plus fortes n’eussent pu [l’]étonner”, the narrator loses the sense of time’s passage. A “pêcheur” (99) and another boater join the man, who help him pull his anchor free of a “masse noire” that had immobilized the vessel, revealing “le cadavre d’une vieille femme qui avait une grosse pierre au cou”.

The discovery of the old woman's corpse at the bottom of the river threatens to disrupt the narrator's newfound non-binary sense of self, suggesting the river as a menace to his survival, a threat that if not vanquished can only lead to the Self's death. Had the man persisted in this view, he might have ended up sharing the watery grave with the old woman, defeated by fear and a self-destructive belief in identity as an antagonistic binary between the Self and the world. Still, the novella's closing image makes its meaning ambivalent. Though the man overcomes his suicidal anguish by accepting a plural form of identity, one formed in dynamic relation with the multitude of beings and spaces of the world, the risk of submersion or death is never banished. The man's despair and sense of solitude lift with the fog, revealing the hidden multiplicity of his identity in relation to the diverse fluvial milieu. His salvation comes not from accepting a schizophrenic consciousness engaged in a struggle between the Self and the Other Self, but from realizing the multiple, relational nature of his identity. His survival becomes possible not from a fortuitous, temporary victory of his "[moi] volant" against the "autre résistant", but thanks to a call to others, an awakening to the wonder of the world and his place within it. Without that experience of plenitude within the biophysical world, without reaching beyond his anguished self, he may have shared the fate of the *suicidée* on the river bottom. The river remains a deeply ambivalent space, permitting spaces and beings to come into contact, leading to a complexification of identity, even as the flowing waters carry with them the peril of submersion or the destruction of the self. Bringing together multiple forms of being, the river carries the possibility of relation as conflict or coexistence. Between these poles, Maupassant's story refuses an easy interpretation, showing relation as a dynamic force capable of animating narratives, spaces, and lives.

2.3 Moving "hors" the "là": the union of external and internal spaces in *Le Horla*

Maupassant's short story *Le Horla* may be one of the most innovative stories ever written to question the interplay between human identity and geographical space, a

relationship enacted via the intermediary of flowing water that connects distant environments, representing both a threat and an opportunity to submerge or expand forms of identity. In the second version of this fantastic novella⁴²², we read the diary of a man who originally seems rather “normal”. The narrative picks up *in medias res*, plunging the reader directly into the action that begins on 8 May of an unidentified year. At the beginning of the story, the reader knows almost nothing about the protagonist/writer/diarist, except for the few details he provides for the first journal entry, qualified as an “admirable journée” (31). It remains unclear why the man has decided to take up journal writing on this particular day, nor why he feels it necessary to record his personal fondness for his home and local region (unless he intends to share the diary). Even before the reader can fully meet the man, the arrival of a “superbe trois-mâts brésilien” interrupts the peaceful quiet of the opening scene, an event that seems to unleash a worsening psychological crisis in the narrator. The ship, however, first appears totally benign, with the narrator even saluting its passage along the Seine. Starting with the second journal entry, the man begins suffering from what he calls a “fièvre” and from a deepening dread of “inconnaissables Puissances” (32) and of the “mystère de l’Invisible” (33). The narrator’s choice to begin writing a diary on the previous “admirable” day becomes more evident, with writing his own identity thus intimately tied to the arrival of the “Other” presence in his life. Textually, without the Horla, there would be no man; his identity is from the beginning linked to the Other. The nature of this relational identity is complex and ambivalent, fraught with fear, anguish, and possibility. In his relationship with “le Horla”, the narrator unwittingly expands his identity, even as his increasingly desperate efforts to rid

⁴²² Guy de Maupassant, *Le Horla*, Ollendorff, 1887. This final version of the story named *Le Horla* will particularly attract our attention here. The first version of the story appeared as *Lettre d’un fou*, in an epistolary form in the daily newspaper *Gil Blas* on 17 February 1885. The story’s second version was named *Le Horla*, using a frame device approach, also appearing in *Gil Blas* on 26 October 1886. The final version was published in an eponymous collection of short stories in 1887. Page numbers refer to: *Le Horla*, Paris, Gallimard, 2003.

himself of its presence culminate in an attempt to kill this “Autre”, ultimately revealed as a self-destructive, suicidal act.

While *Le Horla* is one of Maupassant’s most frequently studied stories, attracting consistent attention from scholars of diverse disciplines of literary criticism, psychology, and psychoanalysis⁴²³, almost no studies have directly connected the narrator’s identity crisis to Maupassant’s relation to the fluvial spaces throughout the Seine river valley between Paris and the Norman coast. Even if many scholars have pointed out Maupassant’s enduring attachment to these spaces⁴²⁴, very few have tied the creation of the mysterious being named “le Horla” to the author’s geo-hydrographical background. Water is omnipresent in *Le Horla* and in Maupassant’s *contes et nouvelles*, often appearing as a tantalizingly limpid element that hides dangerous “profondeurs noires”⁴²⁵ beneath its surface. Rivers, in particular, seem to have fascinated Maupassant⁴²⁶; places of exchange, commerce, and leisure, rivers put distant lands into relation, enriching local identities, even as they seem to threaten their elimination through the danger of submersion. In addition, analyses of the being “le Horla”, including

⁴²³ See, for instance, Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le conte fantastique en France*, Paris, José Corti, 1951; Roger Cailliois, *Anthologie de la littérature fantastique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966; Otto Rank, *Don Juan et son double*, Paris, Payot, 1973 (for a psychoanalytical analysis of Maupassant’s stories under the sign of worsening psychosis in the author); Mariane Bury, “Maupassant pessimiste”, *Romantisme*, n°61, 1988, p. 75-83 (for a sociocultural analysis of Maupassant’s place in *fin-de-siècle* society, a product of both positivism and pseudo-scientific practices and interest in the occult, allowing the author to produce his own version of the *fantastique*, combining rational and irrational elements); Joël Malrieu, *Le Horla de Maupassant*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996 (for a structural analysis of the *fantastique* genre reaching its zenith in *Le Horla*, which presents “un personnage vide face à un phénomène qui lui-même n’existe pas” [125]); Sayeeda Mamoon, “The Self and the Other/the Other Self: Negotiating Alterity in Maupassant’s Fiction”, *Excavatio, nouvelle revue Émile Zola et le naturalisme international*, Volume 18, Issue 1-2, 2003, p. 334-347.

⁴²⁴ See Mariane Bury, « L’Être voué à l’eau », *Europe*, 71, 772, 1 August 1993, p. 99-107 and Martin Calder, “Something in the Water: Self as Other in Guy de Maupassant’s *Le Horla*: A Barthesian Reading”, *French Studies*, Vol. 52 (1), January 1998, p. 42-57. Though Calder offers a convincing reading of water’s essential role as a vector for the “Other”, his ultimate goal is less about demonstrating the complexity of the narrator’s identity than it is about showing how Maupassant’s text can be read as “a metalinguistic journal about the very process of writing a journal” (p. 42). Like most scholars, Calder also reads the term “Horla” as meaning “out there”, a manifestation of the “Other”.

⁴²⁵ Maupassant, « Sur l’eau », *La Maison Tellier*, P. Ollendorff, 1891, p. 89.

⁴²⁶ Bury, *op. cit.*, “L’Être voué à l’eau”. See, for instance, the stories « Mouche », « Le Noyé », « Sur l’eau », « La Nuit » to name only a few. In these stories, rivers are places of work and leisure even as their moving waters always threaten to drown personal identity through submersion.

linguistic⁴²⁷, psychological⁴²⁸, or even clinical case studies⁴²⁹ of the diarist's decline to madness, tend to miss the complexity of the term "le Horla" itself. More than simple "double" fabricated by the narrator's fragile or psychotic mind, an analysis that combines linguistic and geocritical considerations reveals this mysterious being as a manifestation of an expanded notion of individual identity, formed in relation with our immediate surroundings and distant geographies. Though the possibility of the disruption of his unitary identity haunts the narrator, his existence is in fact inseparable from his Norman geography, from the Seine that connects him to city, country, and sea, and ultimately from the Horla itself, whose "arrival" inaugurates the narrator's being in the form of his written diary.

What do we know about the narrator at the beginning of the *nouvelle*, before the apparent arrival of the "Horla"? The unnamed man owns land and a home along the banks of the Seine in close proximity to the expansive forêt de Roumare, downstream of the city of Rouen in the region of Normandy. It is in this Norman country where the narrator "[a ses] racines, ces profondes et délicates racines qui attachent un homme à la terre où sont nés et morts ses aïeux" (31). The narrator "aime y vivre", yet we do not learn the man's name, nor his profession, age, physical traits, or moral character, appearing as Joël Malrieu has put it, as "un personnage vide"⁴³⁰. In short, the text itself (the diary) provides almost no identity that precedes the arrival of the Horla. While personal details are sparse, the man does offer a wealth of identifiers connecting him to the local environment via a series of geographical, fluvial, temporal, and familial relations. The diary's first paragraph demonstrates the

⁴²⁷ See Michel Serres for an exemplary etymological, linguistic, and spatial analysis of "le Horla" and its relation to Maupassant's identity as a Norman, caught between sea, earth, and river. "Lieux et positions", *L'Europe*, 1 August 1993, 71, 772, p. 26-43.

⁴²⁸ Ross Chambers, « La lecture comme hantise : Spirite et *Le Horla* », *Revue des Sciences humaines*, n°177, 1980, p. 105-117; Claudine Giacchetti, « Étranger à lui-même : Figures de l'autre dans l'œuvre de Maupassant », *Romance Notes*, vol. 42, n°2, 2002, p. 255-264.

⁴²⁹ See Anne-Marie Baron, « La description clinique et l'analyse des états-limites chez Maupassant », *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, *Maupassant*, t. XCIV, n°75, septembre-octobre 1994, p. 765-773; N. Fabre, « Fascinante étrangeté du double : L'étrange », *Études psychothérapeutiques*, Bruxelles, n°17, 1998, p. 121-129.

⁴³⁰ Malrieu, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

narrator's tendency to tie his identity to a variety of geographical spaces, including the "platane" that shelters and shades his home and the "odeurs du sol, des villages et de l'air lui-même". The spatial referents read like a series of exterior spaces that are nonetheless tightly bound up in his internal existence and his cultural knowledge. The importance he accords to the "forêt de Roumare" (36); to his home; and to the Seine that flows "presque chez [lui]" (31), expresses an identity that values rooted belonging that is deep yet subject to change via fluid interactions with geographical (and hydrographical) space. Rather than externalized spaces outside of his essence (*hors*), this local geography becomes a series of passages, connection points between the outside world and the internal self. The narrator's identity is thus akin to a door (*foris*), formed via constant linkages between the interior and exterior worlds. Thus we might understand the "hors" from the *Horla* not as irreconcilable exteriority to the Self, but via its Latin root word, *foris*, that which puts inner and outer spaces into relation. *Foris* also gives us the spatial adverbs *hors* and *fors*, to describe exterior places outside a central point and the nouns *forum* and *forêt*, naming places central to civic life and another usually considered on its margins. Maupassant's emphasis on these spaces and terminology and his choice in naming the being "le Horla" implicitly marshals the complexity of the *foris*, highlighting the threshold relationship between the Self and the wider world.

The Seine also acts as a threshold, permitting the transfer of ideas, goods, and "influences" between expanding networks of geographical connections. The mighty *fleuve*, "la grande et large Seine" (31), flows along the narrator's garden as a fluid presence that is part of the diarist's intimate local geography and a larger world, from Paris and from "Rouen au Havre". The river, as a major vector of commerce, links the French interior to the Norman countryside and the sea, which allows the narrator to expand his relational identity beyond his region and country. As Michel Serres has written, Maupassant's narrator reads like a Norman, grounded and mobile via earth, river, and sea, at once "terrien [et] canotier", "paysan" and

“marin”, and “enraciné, mais déraciné”⁴³¹. For the moment, the man happily welcomes the interactions between earth and water: lying on the ground during the first diary entry, he witnesses “un long convoi de navires” (32) coming up the Seine, including the Brazilian three-master, which he “salu[a]...tant ce navire [lui] fit plaisir à voir”. The narrator is comfortably at home at his Norman *demeure*, a place full of interfaces between internal and external space formed through concentrically expanding spatial relations, including the tree’s deep, but delicate roots; the Seine’s fluvial connection between city, country, and coast; relational networks expanding via trade to England *outrre-Manche* and even farther-flung countries across the Atlantic. *Le Horla* explores these relational geographies, moving “du voisinage aux confins de l’univers”⁴³².

The second recorded day signals a new, mysterious presence, but that will nonetheless constitute an essential piece of the narrator’s identity. Similar to his connection to the Norman landscape, *Le Horla* and the narrator become inseparable. It is important to highlight the nature of the narrator’s lived, embodied experience, a key stylistic change in the third version of the story compared to the previous two. Many critics have pointed out the advantage the diary offers compared to those previous versions in the imposition of Maupassant’s *fantastique* aesthetics or in turning the story into a metaphor for writing itself⁴³³, but few scholars have focused directly on the spatially embodied aspects that arise as key themes and animate the narrator’s *au jour le jour* lived experience of the Horla phenomenon. The combined contiguity and immediacy of the narrator’s experience, the proximity in both space and time between lived events and written accounts in his diary is essential for the process of

⁴³¹ Serres, *op. cit.*, « Lieux et positions », p. 27.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴³³ In her genetic criticism of *Le Horla*, Isabelle Nolin points out what she calls « la supériorité du *Horla II* » : « Dans cette dernière version, Maupassant fait passer son héros de témoin rétrospectif à celui de chroniqueur incapable de prendre du recul par rapport aux événements saisissants qui le troublent presque quotidiennement, ce qui change considérablement la donnée fantastique et invite à expérimenter une nouvelle forme de littérature étrange. » Isabelle Nolin, *La critique génétique du Horla de Maupassant*, Mémoire l’Université de McGill, Montréal, 2005, p. 16. Calder, meanwhile, remains primarily interested in “the text [as] a metalinguistic journal about the very process of writing a journal”. Calder, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

“identification entre le lecteur et le personnage confronté au surnaturel”⁴³⁴. Resolving the riddle of the diarist’s madness or his sensitivity to unknown supernatural phenomena is thus less central to our analysis than is studying the sensory and spatial aspects that give meaning to the presence of the “Horla” and help subvert the apparently irreconcilable alterity between the categories of “Self” and “Other”⁴³⁵.

How might we define this new being? At first, it is an entity that remains amorphous, even invisible, but whose presence is implicitly tied to the Brazilian ship and the “influences mystérieuses” (32) it may have carried. The narrator predicts the existence of invisible forces, lamenting the weakness of our sensory organs, particularly the faculty of vision: “Comme il est profond, ce mystère de l’Invisible ! Nous ne le pouvons sonder avec nos sens misérables” (33). Since our senses cannot perceive everything, it follows that there are non-perceived “êtres” that nonetheless exist “autour de nous”. The discussion borrows elements from the previous two versions of Maupassant’s story, even as the *journal intime* form makes the narrator’s experience visceral and more difficult to dismiss as psychotic ramblings, an attempt to rationalize the supernatural, or the result of psychosomatic infection. For the narrator, the influence of “l’Invisible” quickly becomes harmful: “Je suis malade, décidément ! ... j’ai sans cesse cette sensation affreuse d’un danger menaçant, cette appréhension d’un malheur qui vient ou de la mort qui approche”. The man attempts to rationalize his condition, turning to medical terminology of infections, fearing “l’atteinte d’un mal encore inconnu, germant dans le sang et dans la chair” (34). The man confuses the foreign entity with sleep: “Je ne le sens pas venir, comme autrefois, ce sommeil perfide, caché près de moi, qui me guette, qui va me saisir par la tête, me fermer les yeux, m’anéantir” (35). This fear of sleep, of being possessed

⁴³⁴ Nolin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁴³⁵ Other critics have analyzed the story for its xenophobic aspects, with the arriving “trois-mâts” representing the fear of contamination by foreign entities. See Pascale Krumm, “La Peur de l’autre dans ‘Le Horla’ de Maupassant et *Dracula* de Stoker”, *Neophilologus* 79, 1995, p. 541-554, who analyzes this fear of the other in terms of “la hantise quasi-obsessionnelle de la syphilis” (546). While this approach to the narrator’s xenophobia is perfectly legitimate, our analysis will focus on other spatial relations in the narrative.

and destroyed by “l’Autre”, worsens as the being takes a human-like form: “je sens aussi que quelqu’un s’approche de moi, me regarde, me palpe, monte sur mon lit, s’agenouille sur ma poitrine, me prend le cou entre ses mains et serre...serre...de toute sa force pour m’étrangler”. As writer of his life, the narrator objectifies his own body, examining himself as “Other”, a foreign body and being outside the writer’s mind-body. He thus already adopts the position of the “Other”, capable of sensing, seeing, touching, and moving as an apparently external being. Slowly, the narrator becomes the “Other”, or rather begins to know the “Other” within him. Even as he adopts the Other’s position, its senses, and its feelings, the man still attempts to “rejeter cet être”, oscillating between feeling its presence and feeling alone: “Et soudain, je m’éveille, affolé, couvert de sueur. J’allume une bougie. Je suis seul”. The narrator clings to the hope of asserting himself as an individual free from external contamination.

This individuality becomes impossible to maintain as the narrator’s identity increasingly attaches itself to the “Other”. In order to distract himself, the narrator takes a walk in the “forêt de Roumare” (36), believing that its “air frais, léger et doux...[lui] vers[eraient] aux veines un sang nouveau, au cœur une énergie nouvelle”. The diarist adopts an ambiguous medical language that alternates between poison and remedy, between hostile invasion and benevolent antidote. The man implicitly recognizes the necessity of the relation between his internal and external selves, between body and world, not as antagonistic, but as fundamental to his own being. The sense of forest as liminal threshold between internal and external spaces is emphasized when the man envisions the tall trees on either side of the path as “un toit vert”. The forest permits the intermingling of diverse geographies and living beings, a liminal space between internal and external worlds. Within this populated space, the narrator’s hope for refreshment turns into a nightmare: “Un frisson me saisit soudain, non pas un frisson de froid, mais un étrange frisson d’angoisse”. Having gone to the forest for renewal, the man becomes “inquiet d’être seul dans ce bois ... apeuré ... par la profonde

solitude". The uncomfortable feeling of solitude does not last, however: "Tout à coup, il me sembla que j'étais suivi, qu'on marchait sur mes talons, tout près, à me toucher". Turning around at once, the narrator discovers he is in fact "alone". Once again, he finds this solitude "redoutablement vide" and "effrayante". The man feels anguished whether he is alone or in the presence of the "Other", and he is forced to return home, once his comfortable dwelling, now under the occupation of the unknown being. The forest, external space deeply connected to the man through the tree roots, its "air frais" that he breathes, and its shared position with his garden along the banks of the Seine, provides no comfort, being itself occupied other existences. Finding the "foreign" being both within and without his home, in spaces associated as both "là" and "hors", the man could reasonably assume that the Horla is embedded in his own identity, that the two cannot be separated. Instead, the diarist feels increasingly alienated, subject to the will of the "Other", as he begins questioning his sanity.

A solitary voyage to Mont Saint-Michel signals another attempt at escape, leading to a month-long gap in the narrator's journal entries, at the end of which he triumphantly declares himself "guéri" (37). Unlike the majority of the diary, the man recounts his visit to the Mont retrospectively, giving him time to examine his experiences and to benefit from hindsight to rationalize strange phenomena. During the voyage, however, the man encounters further confirmation of his intuition that invisible phenomena are some of the most powerful forces in nature and that they constantly traverse, penetrate, and reshape both mind and matter⁴³⁶. At the summit of the gothic edifice, the narrator engages a monk in a discussion about local legends, split human-animal identities, and the reality of unseen forces. These stories both fascinate and terrify the diarist, especially the monk's argument for the existence of invisible energy, such as "le vent" (39), which, though invisible, is "la plus grande force de la nature, qui renverse les hommes, abat les édifices, déracine les arbres, soulève la mer en montagnes

⁴³⁶ Micheline Besnard, "Simples dérives (*Sur l'eau*)", *Littérature*, n°94, 1994, p. 55.

d'eau, détruit les falaises, et jette aux brisants les grands navires". Nature's fluid energies, through which the Horla seems to displace itself and draw its sustenance, including currents of flowing water and the force of the wind, "qui tue, qui siffle, qui gémit, qui mugit", appear as active, dynamic phenomena. For the narrator, accepting the monk's "simple raisonnement", it seems a small step from these fluid forces to admitting the existence of other invisible phenomena that, though unknown, nonetheless form the fabric of the natural world.

The conversation with the monk and the retrospection in writing gives even more force to the narrator's understanding of his experiences as "non-supernatural". The voyage and its corresponding break in writing also confirm the notion that the diarist lacks an identity independent of the Horla, the entity who is the unique source and subject of the man's journal. Despite the narrator's efforts, the "Other" and the "Self" are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather inherent within each other. The day following the man's self-diagnosis of recovery, sees the return of his former fears, this time to an even more worrisome degree. While the man has admitted the Horla's existence, he still seeks to rid himself of its assumed malevolent presence. The diarist again feels the sensation of "quelqu'un accroupi sur [lui]" (40), but this time the Horla "buvait [s]a vie entre [s]es lèvres". Once again the narrator proves capable of disembodiment, adopting the Horla's point of view to "witness" the "Other" drinking his life. Even when the being demonstrates less violent, even human tendencies, like physical thirst, the man perceives it as hostile enemy: "ayant soif, je bus un demi-verre d'eau, et je remarquai par hasard que ma carafe était pleine jusqu'au bouchon ... j'eus soif de nouveau ... j'allai vers la table où était posée ma carafe. Je la soulevai en la penchant sur mon verre ; rien ne coula. —Elle était vide !" (40-41). The narrator searches for an explanation for this enigma: "On avait donc bu cette eau ? Qui ? Moi ? Moi, sans doute ?" (41), and proposes that he must be a somnambulist and that an "être étranger ... anime ... notre corps captif qui obéit à cet autre, comme à nous-mêmes, plus qu'à nous-mêmes". The

clear separation between the man and the “être étranger” is no longer apparent. After several inconclusive experiments, a final test consists in covering his face and hands with “de la mine de plomb” in order to prove whether he is responsible for drinking the two liquids: “Je m’élançai vers ma table. Les linges enfermant les bouteilles étaient demeurés immaculés. Je déliai les cordons, en palpitant de crainte. On avait bu toute l’eau ! on avait bu tout le lait !” (42). The guilty party then must be a being other than the narrator, a being who shares his space, who haunts him, and even controls his will. The use of the impersonal subject pronoun, “on”, however, in place of the first person “je” or the third person “il/elle”, creates ambiguity and ties the Self to the Other, since “on” can be used to indicate an unknown person, even as it is used interchangeably with the first person plural “nous”. For better or worse, the narrator’s experiment links himself and the Horla in a relational identity.

Following this frightening experiment, the narrator leaves for Paris, attempting to rid himself of the being’s presence. He believes the voyage to be invigorating – separated from his infected house, Paris becomes a healing milieu: “Décidément, tout dépend des lieux et des milieux. Croire au surnaturel à l’île de la Grenouillère, serait le comble de la folie ... Nous subissons effroyablement l’influence de ce qui nous entoure” (50-51). The passage echoes the diary’s first entry, when the man proudly declared his attachment to the Norman earth, air, and water. Instead of signifying a healing break from his connection to the “lieux et milieux” and to the influence of the “Other”, the language reflects an extension of the man’s proficiency at forming his identity in relation to his surroundings. After returning to his home in Normandy, the narrator has his most shocking experience yet, believing to “see” evidence of the incorporeal being for the first time. The writer repeats the verb “voir” six times, in an apparent attempt to convince himself of the unlikely vision. During a walk outside, the man “sees” an invisible hand that picks a rose: “je vis, je vis distinctement, tout près de moi, la tige d’une de ces roses se plier, comme si une main invisible l’eût tordue, puis se casser, comme si

cette main l'eût cueillie !" (51). Throwing himself on the floating rose "pour la saisir", the man believes himself victim of a hallucination after it disappears. Between doubt and certainty, the narrator retreats indoors, now convinced that the house is occupied by an "être invisible, qui se nourrit de lait et d'eau, qui peut toucher aux choses, les prendre et les changer de place, doué par conséquent d'une nature matérielle, bien qu'imperceptible pour nos sens, et qui habite comme moi, sous mon toit". More and more, the man loses his autonomy; leaving for a planned trip to Rouen becomes impossible: "Tout le jour j'ai voulu m'en aller ; je n'ai pas pu. J'ai voulu accomplir cet acte de liberté si facile, si simple, – sortir – monter dans ma voiture pour gagner Rouen – je n'ai pas pu. Pourquoi ?" (55). The invisible being seems to take control of the man's will: "Quelqu'un possède mon âme et la gouverne !". Ultimately, the man manages to escape, "comme un prisonnier qui trouve ouverte, par hasard, la porte de son cachot" (56), only to be quickly "retrouvé et repris" (57) and forced to return home.

As the narrative advances, the meetings between the narrator and the invisible being become more despairing. The writer even begins to think of and act on ways to physically harass his enemy. One evening, the man sees a page of his book rise up and turn itself, "comme si un doigt l'eût feuilletée" (58). Overwhelmed with fury, he throws himself forward "pour le saisir, pour l'étrangler, pour le tuer", but the being escapes by apparently jumping out the open window. The incident confirms his belief that he lives with an "être nouveau" destined to replace humanity as the planet's dominant species, leading him to name the being (or have the name imposed upon him) "le Horla". However, the narrator immediately attempts to revolt against the imminent rule of this new master species, even as he tacitly admits a blurring of borders between himself and the stranger: "C'est lui, lui, le Horla, qui me hante, qui me fait penser ces folies ! Il est en moi, il devient mon âme ; je le tuerai !" (63). The man seeks to destroy the entity he perceives within himself. It is here that the nature of the mysterious term "le Horla" becomes more apparent. The Horla can be seen as a being that

moves away from, or outside, the “là” space, perceived as the antithesis to the “here”, the “ici”. In the late 19th century, this was the first meaning of the spatial adverb “là”, even as it has tended to function as a frequent synonym for the adverb “ici” in contemporary French. The “Horla”, then, is not the being that is both “hors” and “là”, meaning simultaneously there and here, nor is it the being that is uniquely “out there”, an external entity, an “Other” opposed to the “Self”. Instead, the “Horla” indicates a portal (“hors”) between inside and outside, it is a being that originates outside our immediate surroundings, in the “là” region, but that moves “hors”, toward ourselves. In a world of increasing geographical connections, the Horla crystallizes the tensions between expanded identities and the fear of contamination.

Reaching the height of his despair, the narrator promises to break free of the rule of the Horla by killing it. The man, taken by “une joie folle” (66), succeeds in confining le Horla within his home, reveling in this incarceration by lighting his own house on fire. In this ultimate act of folly, the narrator passes through several doors, pausing in the “entre-bâill[ement]”, the interface between *dedans* and *dehors*, a space and relation that drives the narrative, links the “Self” with the “Other”, and serves as the “racine” for the adverb “hors” and the Horla itself⁴³⁷. The symmetry of this act, attempting to imprison the externally originated Horla while the rooted narrator flees to the external world, reveals the unbreakable bond between these two existences. Apparently unconcerned about the loss of his home, the crazed man believes he holds the Horla at his mercy. Despite his momentary “triumph”, witnessed from within a “massif de lauriers”, not all goes as planned, and he becomes the spectator of a horrifying scene: “tout le bas de ma demeure n’était plus qu’un effrayant brasier. Mais un cri, un cri horrible, suraigu, déchirant, un cri de femme passa dans la nuit, et deux mansardes s’ouvrirent ! J’avais oublié mes domestiques !” (67). The house, transformed into a “bûcher horrible et magnifique” seems to both fascinate and terrify the man, and he

⁴³⁷ Serres, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

returns to the scene “pour voir”. Convinced that the Horla is burning inside, his doubts grow as he watches: “il brûlait aussi, Lui, Lui, mon prisonnier, l’Être nouveau, le nouveau maître, le Horla ! ... Mort ? Peut-être ? ... Son corps ? son corps que le jour traversait n’était-il pas indestructible par les moyens qui tuent les nôtres ?”. The narrative finishes with another certainty: the Horla is not dead and the only way to escape from its possession is suicide: “Non... non... sans aucun doute, sans aucun doute... il n’est pas mort... Alors... alors... il va donc falloir que je me tue, moi !” (68). The journal forces us to speculate on the final destiny of its author, who, while wanting to escape, likely finishes by killing himself, in a reckless attempt to rid himself of the “Other”.

Maupassant’s narrative oscillates between a desperate effort to become an autonomous individual and the impossibility of defining oneself without the “Other”. This is how we might qualify the narrator’s madness: incapable of independence, he is equally incapable of accepting his *relational* existence, his relationship with the “Other”, a double imbalance that leads him into a fatal spiral of madness. In another way, the narrator’s dissolution of his “Self” and relation to the “Other” forms the essence of writing, the heart of the literary text. The narrator’s textual existence depends on the Horla that drives him mad even as it permits the elaboration of a written, relational identity. *Le Horla* is ultimately a story about movement between the various geographies, forces, and invisible phenomena that form and reform our fluid existences between internal and external worlds. The story’s title is thus synonymous with another Latin word, *exsistere*, “being stable outside”, our being as union between internal and external selves. This is why the narrator lacks both a pre-Horla autonomy and ongoing existence after he attempts to kill it. The story demonstrates how our identities arise in a tension between “here” and “there”, between the interconnected places of the world.

Maupassant’s *Le Horla* gives narrative form to the changing relationship between people and place we have traced through the 19th century, demonstrating the fraught nature of

that evolving dynamic, caught between fear of change or loss of identity and hopeful expectation for a renewed relation to the world and an expanded notion of self, connected with disparate peoples and places. The narrator is at first a happy participant in his local geography, drawing physical and moral strength from the earth, water, and air that surround him and that connect him to ancestors and contemporaries across time and space. He is uniquely positioned to conceive of his own identity as relational and to look hopefully toward its expansion through interactions with the wider world that modern commerce, cultural exchange, transportation, and communication technologies increasingly permit. It is important that the narrator's and the Horla's identities are united via the Seine, one of the country's great *fleuves*, a symbol of the possibility and peril of geographical relation. The diarist senses the Horla's arrival on the Seine, and through writing, his identity expands together with growing anguish of contamination. Though his fear or even xenophobia prevent him from accepting his expanded existence through the relation with the "Other", a stark distinction between pure identity and pure alterity can no longer exist. The narrator, once at ease in his garden, grounded through the tree's "profondes et délicates racines" (31), sheltered by its wide branches, and nourished by the Seine's rich waters, now becomes himself an *hors là* as he leaves his dwelling and moves out into the wider world. For other people in other places, the narrator is now a *hors venu*⁴³⁸, one who comes from the outside world toward one's inner space, repeating a dynamic process of relation and becoming, representing an opportunity or a threat. That, after all, is the paradox of existing, of *ex-sistere*, being stable, remaining "là", even as one evolves together with an external world, a "hors", of inevitable change and dynamic transformation⁴³⁹. *Le Horla* is thus a story about a new kind of existence taking shape at the end of the 19th century, one formed in relation (from Latin *relatio*, narration), an evolving story of connections between people and places, of expanding identities in a state of

⁴³⁸ Serres, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

becoming, and of new geographical connections fundamentally reshaping the interface between *moi* and *monde*.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this dissertation, I put two texts written 145 years apart in parallel, as evidence of the ongoing concern over the state of the biophysical world, generally speaking, and over Fontainebleau forest, in particular. That such alarm about the health of the forest would persist over time could lead us to conclude that in spite of all the work of engagement, the efforts at preservation, and the novel ways of representing France's physical landscapes this dissertation has traced, ultimately no tangible progress has been made to protect this natural space and others like it. Yet even in her *Reporterre* piece, Florence Combe-Amrouche relates the desire of the forest service to return some of Fontainebleau's sites to their state during the height of the Barbizon landscape art movement. Though the foresters aim to achieve their goal via a round of tree cutting that Combe-Amrouche fiercely opposes, their dedication to the aesthetic appreciation of landscapes highlights the surprising success of that model in fashioning our vision of place. When those foresters look at Fontainebleau today, they hope to connect with the landscape the Barbizon artistic pioneers experienced and represented.

This dissertation has explored the theme of geographical relation in literary texts, landscape paintings, and geographical writing from the second half of the 19th century. In all of those forms, whether literary, pictorial, or geographical, the works I have studied propose new modes of relation to the earth, its landscapes, and the biological species with which we share the planet. Literary texts imagine unique means of representing the world that exist at the interface between naturalistic imitation and creative metamorphosis, between physical topography and imagined topology, that serve to translate the subjective visions of authors and the lived experiences of characters. Through their imaginative transfiguration of the real world into literary text or visual art, the writings and paintings in this dissertation offer a vision of landscape as dynamic, animate ensembles, helping the reader to become more aware

of the biophysical processes that underlie the organic order. Reading these texts, or examining these paintings, one is able to understand the natural world as ongoing process, perpetual transformation, and continual exchange between species and spaces. Aesthetic study and appreciation of landscape, then, play important roles in renewing our sense of identity formed in relation with the biophysical world. These texts show us that the goal of art that represents the physical world is no longer to fix its characteristics in time and space, but to render the essential trait of landscapes, that is, their fundamental movement as participants in the myriad processes of life.

More than other forms of cultural expression, literary texts have the power to open our eyes to these important features of the biological order. While we have studied a wide variety of source material, seeking always to enter into the internal logic of each *œuvre*, several common characteristics emerge to define the literary geography of these works. Each chapter has put in place different modes of “relation” with forests, mountains, seas, and interconnected landscapes. In Chapter One, the possibility of “immersion” was explored in the paintings of Théodore Rousseau and the writings of the brothers Goncourt and Flaubert. The idea of “conquest” structured the relationship to the mountain in Chapter Two’s texts from Gautier, Daudet, and Maupassant. Fluid identities in a tenuous balance between prodigious life and devouring death constitute the mode of relation in Chapter Three’s works by Michelet, Hugo, and Verne. Finally, the texts of Reclus, Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant, showed us the possibilities and perils of geographical relation as a means of extending one’s humanity in connection with the planet or as a risk to see one’s identity submerged or conquered by forces viewed as external to the self. In all of these works, the aesthetic representation of the natural world mobilizes corporeal, sensory, and cultural attributes, encouraging the reader to engage in a closer observation of the environment of which we are part. The texts we have studied give us access to a different vision of reality that pure

imitation cannot achieve, a world made up of hidden material relations, unexpected spatial connections, and constant change beneath the appearance of immutability.

In giving textual or pictorial form to landscapes as dynamic ensembles, the literary and visual art from this corpus confronts us with environments every bit as animate, as living as ourselves. No longer relegated to inert background or inactive setting for the more important human drama, these forested, mountainous, and marine geographies become mobile landscapes that actively participate in the unfolding existence of all biophysical entities. In the process, those landscapes call into question their apparently inherent “otherness”, even as they force us to see ourselves as one part within a living environment. Rather than represent the irreducible alterity of an externalized world, authors like Hugo show how both physical space and human beings are co-participants in a shared process of becoming, subject to formation and deformation, creation and destruction. Even as human and non-human beings evolve within a relational world undergoing constant transformation, each unique entity preserves its distinct characteristics all while exchanging with the totality of existences. When we contemplate the world and our place in it, we might see, as Gilliatt does, “une vie autre que la nôtre [qui] s’agrège et se désagrège, composée de nous-mêmes et d’autre chose”⁴⁴⁰. All the authors in my corpus consider the peril of death or loss of identity via submersion “dans le prodigieux flot de ce déluge de vie universelle”⁴⁴¹, while some, like Hugo, look forward hopefully to “l’opiniâtreté insubmersible du moi”⁴⁴², the self that maintains its uniqueness even as it immerses itself within the relational universe. For the Maupassant in “Sur l’eau”, the boatman only counters the risk of drowning or the temptation of joining the *suicidée* at the bottom of the Seine when he calls out for help, accepting his implication within a living geography composed of himself and other existences. The failure to accept this relational

⁴⁴⁰ Hugo, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, op. cit., p. 142.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 429.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

existence can have tragic consequences, as seen with the diarist in *Le Horla*, who finishes the story by burning his house to the ground, killing his domestic staff, and likely committing suicide.

The literary texts in my corpus also bring attention to other modes of relation to the biophysical world, notably nature tourism. Daudet's treatment of alpinism as planned reproduction of preexisting models and his portrayal of an omnipresent "Compagnie" in command of all alpine tourism in Switzerland speak to the staged attributes of that experience of the world. While Tartarin is desperate to reproduce the alpinist life, Daudet shows his character suffering legitimate fear, in moments that reveal the mountain geography as anything but inactive *décor*. Flaubert takes Frédéric and Rosanette on a whirlwind tour of the castle and forest of Fontainebleau, hitting all the "must-see" sites of the era. The characters fail to see their surroundings, suffer from a short attention span, and misread many of the historical sites or natural landscapes they encounter. Through an ironic portrayal of these visits, Flaubert critiques the superficial and stereotypical understandings the author saw among his contemporaries. Later, the lovers immerse themselves more fully in the forest landscape when they opt for a random excursion through the woods, experiencing a world that surpasses political history and elucidates the eternal processes of the vital order.

I have read these texts and interpreted these paintings through the lens of "relational geography", and I hope I have shown some of the potential for such an approach. In the second half of the 19th century, as geography developed as a discipline and remained a popular pastime, writers, artists, geographers, and thinkers of all kinds engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about the linkages that constitute French landscapes. Looking at literature and art through the lens of relation can reveal the hidden connections of the physical world, showing that landscape aesthetics is no longer about faithful representation of fixed abstract space, but a way of transferring the myriad interactions between places and existences into

textual or pictorial form. While I have selected a series of written and visual works for this dissertation, many others could benefit from such an approach to literary geography.

Clearly, however, the prism of relation cannot elucidate all the spatial dimensions of these works nor can it reveal all the other non-geographical aspects at play. There are undoubtedly more historical, narratological, psychological, linguistic, aesthetic, ecological, or other readings possible for some or all of the texts from this corpus. There were often moments in my own analyses where I relied more on historical context, scientific knowledge (contemporary and contemporaneous), socioeconomic factors, linguistic analysis, or the irreplaceable tool of close reading to illuminate the tangled meanings of the works. All these methods helped me offer interpretations of the texts I studied, but my readings are by no means exhaustive. Indeed, I would argue that one of the fundamental traits of a literary text is its dialogic interplay between opacity and transparency. The text creates meaning through its unique use of language, but some part always resists interpretation, subject to continual rereading. Relational geography has the potential to reveal previously hidden components of literary and pictorial representations from the 19th century and beyond, but it cannot substitute for the diversity of approaches that characterize literary criticism. My method has been resolutely multidisciplinary, drawing on art history, literary criticism, environmental history, and geography, among other disciplines, and I hope that other scholars of literature will be inspired to use these and other methods to further the study of spatial relations in 19th century French literature.

I will conclude by offering a few possibilities for the potential of the approach I have termed “relational geography” in the study of literary and artistic works from the 19th century and beyond. Around the same time that landscape art associated with the Barbizon painters began growing in popularity, a new generation of landscape photographers brought their nascent art to Fontainebleau. Future research could explore the connections between the

worlds of landscape painting and photography in Fontainebleau, as well as examining the different aesthetics associated with these movements. Does one of Rousseau's paintings of an old oak carry more or less emotional power than a photograph from Gustave Le Gray? Photography also helped to popularize the imagery of the seas during the 19th century, and Le Gray was one of the main forces behind that push⁴⁴³. How do the aesthetics of Le Gray's *La Grande Vague*, *Sète* differ from Courbet's series of marine paintings (which we did not have time to explore here), or from the literary descriptions in Michelet, Hugo, and Verne? More work could be done on impressionism through the lens of relational geography. How did the impressionists understand French landscapes and how did their aesthetics encourage an interconnected vision of spatial relations? In literature, relational geography could be used as a prism to study a number of texts from the second half of the 19th century, including other stories from Verne's *Voyages extraordinaires* series, such as his *Sans dessus dessous*⁴⁴⁴, which features stunning displays of human exploitation of the planet, or Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* novels, such as *Le Ventre de Paris* and *Germinal*.

I have focused on the geographies and spatial relations in texts, paintings, and geographical work from metropolitan France, but this approach would certainly lend itself to readings from the French Antilles, la Guyane, la Réunion, or Mayotte, all French regions whose geographies can be seen as an interplay between forested, mountainous (or volcanic), and marine environments. Contemporary French authors from these regions and critics have explicitly linked their literary projects with the notion of "relation"⁴⁴⁵, understood in ecological, linguistic, and cultural terms⁴⁴⁶. For Édouard Glissant, the French Antilles are

⁴⁴³ See Marnin Young, "Photography and the Philosophy of Time: On Gustave Le Gray's *Great Wave*, *Sète*", *Nonsite*, Issue 19, March 2016.

⁴⁴⁴ Jules Verne, *Sans dessus dessous*, Paris, J. Hetzel, 1889.

⁴⁴⁵ Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

⁴⁴⁶ See Gwenola Caradec, « *Partie prenante* » : *Environnement et poétique dans la littérature française et francophone des XX^{ème} et XX^{ème} siècles*, Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2013, especially Chapter 4, p. 182-244.

“une multi-relation”⁴⁴⁷, composed of a “géographie torturée”⁴⁴⁸ by historical and natural forces, where landscapes participate actively in the unfolding process of relation: “traversé et soutenu par la trace ; le paysage cesse d’être un décor convenable et devient un personnage du drama de la Relation”⁴⁴⁹. The French Caribbean offers particularly fertile ground for the study of geographical relations between local and global spaces, between “l’ailleurs et l’ici et inversement”⁴⁵⁰, in the works of Glissant and in those of Patrick Chamoiseau⁴⁵¹. The question of how landscapes arise from a multiplicity of historical and biophysical phenomena and how those landscapes interact with human outcomes could become an organizing principle for approaching both 19th-century and contemporary literature. Analyzing these works and others through the lens of relational geography could yield important discoveries about the myriad ways landscapes affect our lives and the stories we tell about them, and the even larger question of the human place on Earth.

⁴⁴⁷ Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, Paris, Seuil, 1981, p. 249.

⁴⁴⁸ Glissant, *Le Sang rivé*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983, p. 21.

⁴⁴⁹ Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996, p. 25.

⁴⁵⁰ Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, op. cit., p. 122.

⁴⁵¹ Patrick Chamoiseau, *L’esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997; *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*, Paris, Gallimard, 2009.

APPENDIX



Figure 1: Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *Détail de tronc d'arbre en forêt*, 1822, Oil on paper fixed to canvas, Musée des peintres de Barbizon, Barbizon, France. Cliché Yvan Bourhis/CG77. URL: <http://www.musee-peintres-barbizon.fr/jean-baptiste-camille-corot-detail-de-tronc-d-arbre-en-foret>



Figure 2: Théodore Rousseau, *Lisière du Bas-Bréau. Haute futaie donnant sur la plaine de Clairbois*, 1849-1855, Oil on canvas, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. URL: <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/240153/theodore-rousseau-forest-of-fontainebleau-cluster-of-tall-trees-overlooking-the-plain-of-clair-bois-at-the-edge-of-bas-breau-french-about-1849-1852/>



Figure 3: Théodore Rousseau, *Forêt d'hiver*, 1846-1867, Oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. URL: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438816>



Figure 4: Théodore Rousseau, *Vue du Mont-Blanc*, 1863-1867, Oil on canvas, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis. URL: <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/6239/view-of-mont-blanc-seen-from-la-faucille-theodore-rousseau>

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