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Imagination, Mimesis and Style:

Nineteenth-Century French Travel Narratives, Realism and Photography

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Comparative Literature

by

Michelle Chang-Hsien Lee

2015

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Imagination, Mimesis and Style:

Nineteenth-Century French Travel Narratives, Realism and Photography

by

Michelle Chang-Hsien Lee

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Ali Behdad, Chair

Analyzing French literature, travel photography and writing from the 1830s to 1860s, this dissertation, entitled *Imagination, Mimesis, and Style: Nineteenth-Century French Realism, Travel Narratives and Photography*, examines how Orientalism directly influenced the early realist and modernist works of Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Maxime Du Camp, and Charles Baudelaire. This dissertation underscores how the development of nineteenth-century realism and modernism is greatly indebted to French transcultural contact and overseas history and challenges the literary historical notion that realism and modernism were nationally bound genres. In the chapters that follow, considering the foreign or exotic beyond its role as providing ornamental diversity and diversion in European texts—and as actually participating in the development of form—this dissertation, in its methodology, departs from a nationalist understanding of nineteenth-century artistic and literary development. Responding to a current



lacuna in recent research that privileges how Romanticism contributed to orientalist imagery, this study will show how what have been considered orientalist modes of approaching the world in travel documentation functioned not merely as an “other” to realistic and modern modes of representation, but rather that the construction of these modern forms of literary and visual representation was instrumental in making “realism” realist and “modernism” modern. The first two chapters focus on how Orientalism played a central role in Balzac’s and Flaubert’s first successful novels, *La Peau de chagrin* and *Madame Bovary*, respectively, while the third chapter concerns how Maxime Du Camp employed romantic travel tropes to realistically portray the Orient. If the first three chapters show how Orientalism informed realism, then the fourth chapter turns to the modernism of Baudelaire’s travel poetry in order to elaborate how post-romantic cultural expressions in France grappled with the same questions of representation and reference as posed by Orientalism in the nineteenth century.

The dissertation of Michelle Chang-Hsien Lee is approved.

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2015

For Audrey and Cora, with love

and

Warren Lee, forever cherished in our hearts

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have such great respect and am honored to have as colleagues. I am extremely grateful for the friendship and support of Nasia Anam, Noa Bar, Daphne Cheng, Susannah Rodríguez Drissi, Yuting Huang, Maryam Wasif Khan, Iyabo Kwayana, Sarah Lazur, Kate Schlosser, Thea Sircar and John Tain among many others. I will forever be indebted to my writing partner and friend Katelyn Knox, who was instrumental in helping me find my academic “voice” and whose intellectual rigor and generosity make her the scholar I aspire to be.

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## **RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS**

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Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Continental Philosophy  
Literary theory  
Orientalism in Literary and Visual Culture  
Travel Literature and Photography

## **LANGUAGES SPOKEN**

French: near-native fluency (speaking, reading, writing)  
Modern Standard Arabic: proficient (speaking, reading, writing)  
Mandarin: heritage speaker

## INTRODUCTION

### Provincializing Realism<sup>1</sup>

In “The Oriental Mirage,” the introductory essay to the museum catalogue for *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, Roger Benjamin discusses “mirage” and “mirror”’s shared etymological root in order to unpack the processes of distortion in Orientalism’s visual representations of the Orient:

A mirage is an optical phenomenon of the desert whereby light refracted through layers of super-heated air produces a reflection of the blue sky on the sandy surface, which thus appears as an illusory sheet of water. Derived from the French word for mirroring or reflection, ‘mirage’ is a properly Orientalist term, taken up during the Napoleonic era to describe a ‘phenomenon...which [the French] army had daily opportunities of seeing, in their march through the deserts of Egypt’.<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin’s description of the relationship between mirage and mirror offers an apt analogy of how Orientalism functioned in nineteenth-century France: orientalist discourse allowed for European illusions about the Orient—a mirage of sorts—to unproblematically appear as a mirror, reflecting the world of the East, while in fact exposing France’s own anxieties and fixations. Benjamin’s explanation highlights how Orientalism thrived in the cultural sphere: namely, orientalist representations of the Orient, no matter how distorted or fantastic, always maintained its status as realistic because its referent was a distant and already othered Orient. Benjamin’s anecdote points up how Orientalism—through its intertwined relationship with realism—maintained its authoritative status in textual and visual representations, a relationship central to the preoccupations of this dissertation. The present study examines how French realism and modernism developed in dialogue with Orientalism in mid-nineteenth-century France.

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<sup>1</sup> Borrowing from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) the title “Provincializing Realism” underscores the dissertation’s aim to globalize an understanding of nineteenth-century European literary production and by extension to “de-provincialize” the participation of Orientalism in this process.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, Roger, “The Oriental Mirage,” *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, ed. Roger Benjamin. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2001: 7-31, p. 7.

However, this dissertation addresses a question that departs from Benjamin's analysis: how did realism resemble Orientalism; or to use Benjamin's terms, how did the "mirage" influence processes of mirroring? To explain further, I return to Benjamin's brief account of the linguistic relationship between mirror and mirage. He is correct to point out the orientalist origins of the word mirage: coined in 1753, the French word "mirage" most likely derived from *mirare*, the etymological root for mirror meaning "to reflect." This etymological history suggests that orientalist looking was a type of reflection. However, including *mirus*, "to wonder at," in the etymological history of mirage serves to detach "mirage" from being considered merely as an altered form of reflection. Acknowledging these different interpretations of the relationship between mirror and mirage also suggests an alternative understanding of the connections between the illusion of orientalist mirage and reality of realist mirroring.<sup>3</sup>

I emphasize these different readings because much of critical scholarship on Orientalism, in its understandable focus on how Orientalism *mis*-represented the (non-western) world, depends on an unquestioned division between mirage and mirror, imagination and reflection, or Orientalism and realism, which in turn privileges the latter as the primary mode of modern mimesis in the nineteenth century. Orientalism, then, has been figured as the mode of representation that is derived from or distorts realism, as it were. Questioning this assumption, this dissertation will explore how nineteenth-century French Orientalism was far from secondary to the development of nineteenth-century French realism and modernism but rather that it helped shape artistic and literary practices to become what we have come to identify as realism today. Analyzing French literature, travel photography and writing from the 1830s to 1860s, this

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, *reflectere* ("to bend back" or "to turn back"), the etymological root of the English word "reflection," which also means "to turn one's thoughts back on," draws further attention to the subjective aspect of the act of reflecting or mirroring.

dissertation examines how Orientalism directly influenced the early realist and modernist works of Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Maxime Du Camp, and Charles Baudelaire.

The following chapters will show how what have been considered orientalist modes of approaching the world (and in the case of Flaubert, Du Camp and Baudelaire, in their own travel works) functioned not merely as an “other” to realistic and modern modes of representation, but rather that the construction of these modern forms of literary and visual representation relied heavily on how Orientalism had represented the *non*-modern Orient such that Orientalism was instrumental in making “realism” realist and “modernism” modern. It is important to emphasize that, while Orientalism has been considered realism’s distorted “other,” I do not mean to suggest that Orientalism’s realism was or should be any more authoritative. In other words, I am not trying to claim that realism was merely a distorted Orientalism. Rather, by insisting on readings that privilege orientalist aesthetic practices, this study aims to bring to light the transnational relationships and processes of “transculturation” that underlie the development of nineteenth-century realism and modernism, relationships and processes that would otherwise be overlooked.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Relevance of Realism, or Orientalism’s “Reality Effect”**

By the nineteenth century, the incontestable popularization of various representational modes of display, such as the museum, world exhibitions, travel literature and photography brought the periphery closer to the hexagon. Representations of exotic destinations, including provincial France, centripetally flooded the capital, such that the Parisian would hardly need to travel to experience new sights. The diversity of images, objects and travel literature now available to the armchair traveler “expanded” the world, simultaneously shrinking the distance

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<sup>4</sup> I borrow the term “transculturation” from Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008) in order to emphasize the cultural activity, which had a bearing on European representational formal practices, that took place in the contact zone between metropolitan and colonial cultures.

one would need to travel to see the exotic. As new technologies and cultures of display took hold of nineteenth-century France, an increasingly transnational space, the reader and spectator began to trust these representations of the foreign world, and in particular of the Orient, as reproductions of a “reality” that existed outside of the metropolitan center. Accepted as documentation of the actual Orient, orientalist representations were thought of as realistically depicting a fantastic East.

Linda Nochlin’s analysis of the “reality effect” in Gérôme’s late nineteenth-century painting *The Snake Charmer* offers one reading of how Orientalism depicted the Orient.<sup>5</sup> This orientalist “real” is aligned with the objects that define it: oriental details (such as the carefully executed Turkish tile patterns in the painting’s background) denote the authenticity of the oriental reality depicted in Gérôme’s painting. These objects or details, then, go on to connote the artwork’s orientalist message of the Orient’s inferiority, decay, otherness, etc. The Orient’s geographical distance from the metropole is translated into its distance from (French) civilization. In short: the oriental objects, décor and motifs signify the reality effect of orientalist representations. However, lying just beyond the considerations of Nochlin’s analysis is the question: how should one interpret the presence of the orientalist—or what becomes the “exotic”—detail, motif or object in French works about France during a time when Orientalism was so mainstream that it would be almost impossible for any work depicting French reality at

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<sup>5</sup> Nochlin demonstrates how “the strategies of “realist” [...] mystification go hand in hand with those of Orientalist mystification” in “The Snake Charmer,” where the artist produces the effect of artlessness in his work. The painting’s seeming transparent ability to reflect the Orient, Nochlin argues, depends in large part on Gérôme’s employment of what Barthes has termed *l’effet de réel*: the use of a plethora of gratuitous detail that together signal to its viewer (or reader) that “we are the real.” Of course, Gérôme’s naturalist depiction is not a reflection of the Orient but an invention, one that must be understood, insists Nochlin, through the imperial history that enabled its production. Nochlin, Linda. “The Imaginary Orient,” *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989: 33-59, p. 37.

the time not to include some non-French elements as part of its décor?<sup>6</sup> Returning to the preoccupations of this study, what happens when it is not a barometer that appears in, for example, Flaubert's depiction of Madame Aubain's drawing room in *Un Coeur Simple* but rather an "oriental" object that emerges on the French scene?<sup>7</sup>

In response to Nochlin's claim, the analyses put forth by this dissertation contend that the very criteria of determining the "reality effect" of a work is already immersed in the discourse of Orientalism, which helped to enable nineteenth-century realism's (and its "reality effects") ability to claim its authenticity. If we consider only the presence of objects or motifs carrying traces of the East as pertaining solely to the orientalist content of a work, then we would miss out on how Orientalism played a part in the development of the very form of mid-nineteenth-century French realist and modernist works. In the following chapters I propose to examine the function of such orientalist objects, details and themes in canonical French writings, and in the instance of Du Camp, how he employed romantic travel tropes to realistically photograph the Orient.

### **The Orientalism of Realism**

In my analyses of French travel writing and photography, I remarked that popular methods and tropes employed to represent exotic and foreign cultures re-appeared in French representations of the French world. For example, in chapter two, the use of the banal exotic detail in Flaubert's travel notes, used to express his ennui while traveling in Egypt and the

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, there are references to the foreign world abound in many—if not almost *all*, I would venture to say—nineteenth-century works. I list here just a few instances that showcase how these details point to France's relationships to the rest of the world: George Sand's *Indiana* (1832) is partly set in Réunion; the Baron Hulot in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* (1846) embezzles money from a French outpost stationed in Algiers in order to fund his lavish lifestyle; Félicité's parrot in *Un Coeur Simple* comes from the Americas. Also see studies in *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History* (eds. Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) for readings that emphasize such global encounters in French literature from the medieval to the contemporary period.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes uses this anecdote to describe the "reality effect," how the real was in an effect or product of representation and did not precede it, in his 1967 essay "L'effet de réel." Barthes, Roland, "The Reality Effect," *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Want, 1986.

Middle East, offers a privileged glimpse into Flaubert's skeptical view concerning the possibility of authentic experience. By comparing the writer's travel notes and correspondence and his first mature novel *Madame Bovary* to contend that realism is a kind of Orientalism (as opposed to Orientalism being a kind of realism), this chapter reveals how Flaubert resists an empirical and positivist mode of engaging with the world first in his travel notes and then in his novel.

Striking in my reading of Flaubert's travel notes and *Madame Bovary* is how exoticism in fact manifested as a critical voice in the realist narrative of *Madame Bovary*. This observation pushed my research to crystalize around the following inter-related questions: How did orientalist representations during the height of French interest in the non-west influence the development of realism and modernism in France, which seemed to be solely preoccupied with domestic concerns and realities? Second, to what effect did the exotic then seep into representations of France? If the widely accepted model of the relationship between East and West promulgated by mainstream nineteenth-century French thought is that the first was valued for its contributions to "fantasy" while the second was aligned with the "real," how, then, did the Orient, which served as Europe's *unreal* "other," occupy a central place in France's supposedly purely domestically-conceived aesthetic works? Finally, how does illustrating that the same methods used to represent the "other" are re-appropriated for domestic representation refute nationalist understandings of French realism and modernism that see their development as linearly taking place solely within the geographical borders of the hexagon?

My exploration of these questions examines the ways post-romantic travelers and writers negotiated their relationship and indebtedness to their predecessors while working within and responding to a colonial framework. I show that in *La peau de chagrin* Balzac draws from the popular orientalist discourse of the time to inform his use of description, while constructing his

narrative around an oriental object; Du Camp's photographic album resembles a romantic travelogue; and in the case of Flaubert and Baudelaire, representations of their respective travel experience help to spark their critical literary voices. Finding unexpected formal echoes between travel and literature, this study thus examines the shared rhetoric between metropolitan cultural expressions (in the novel, poetry and photography) and Orientalism's vocabulary for depicting the Orient in the mid-nineteenth century at precisely the cultural moment in which, according to Edward Said, Orientalism became impenetrable in its truth-value in Europe. At the same time, the readings presented in this dissertation will regard both realism and Orientalism as contested hegemonic sites, emphasizing, in their relationship to each other, their interconnected contingent histories.

Performing "contrapuntal readings," the following study thus relocates a formal discussion of French works in the imperial periphery as a means to de-nationalize an understanding of its development.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis of this dissertation is not to read the persistence of the exotic in these French works as a space of resistance or site of dissidence from within the text.<sup>9</sup> Rather, locating spaces of opposition points to the very juncture of realism and Orientalism that disrupts closed notions of French aesthetic development as well as begins to dissolve the rigidness of the binary separating East and West. It is at these junctures, moreover, that it becomes clear the extent to which Orientalism indeed hovers over nineteenth-century French modernism like an irreducible specter.

### **Re-orient(aliz)ing Nationalism**

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<sup>8</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

<sup>9</sup> Borrowing from Homi Bhabha's concept of resistance and focusing on the "ambivalence" and "slippage" in exotic texts Jennifer Yee writes locates "oppositional strategies within the dominant episteme—understood here as the overarching discursive structure that constructed the non-European world as an unresisting space to be dominated intellectually and politically by European powers," which may "permit space for ideological shift" (Yee, Jennifer. *Exotic Subversions in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction*. Leeds: Legenda, 2008, pp. 4-5).



Nineteenth-century France witnessed several historical, political and epistemic shifts that many have claimed ushered in European modernity in the arts.<sup>10</sup> As France distanced itself from the Ancien Régime, it attempted to forge a renewed national identity, through the many political transitions in governmental rule, shuttling between empire, republic and monarchy that marked the nineteenth century, and by erecting cultural institutions that determined what was modern and French. Concomitant with this project of nation building, imperial expansion pursued France's economic and political interests overseas, most notably in competition with Great Britain. While expanding the borders of its political domain, the French simultaneously strengthened its vigilance policing the borders of what constituted its modern and progressing self, in opposition to what they considered were declining civilizations of the cultural other.

Some literary studies have extensively shown how the project of nationalism was coextensive with the arts, while also inadvertently reinforcing a nationalist understanding of European artistic and literary practices. Most notably, interpretations on the “rise of the novel” in nineteenth-century France considers this literary form as primarily a cultural product of processes of domestication.<sup>11</sup> Franco Moretti posits a centralized view of the nineteenth-century British and French novel such that “the nation-state...found the novel. And vice versa: the novel found the nation-state.”<sup>12</sup> For Moretti, the nineteenth-century novel established its *Europeanness*

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<sup>10</sup> There exists an extensive collection of critical and theoretical works on this subject, notably Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972 and Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton, University Press, 2003. On the reinvention of society in the nineteenth century as seen in visual culture see T.J. Clark's Marxist interpretation in *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York, Routledge, 2005; and Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in fin-de-siecle Paris*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Watt's study, which focuses on the eighteenth-century British novel. He narrates the teleological process by which the novel form constituted itself during the eighteenth century, in order to become in the nineteenth century the literary form best suited to portray with verisimilitude life and reality. Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*. New York: Verso, 1998, p. 17.

as it closed itself from foreign influences.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Pascale Casanova's study in the *World Republic of Letters*, while offering a cosmopolitan understanding of literature, also consolidates Paris as the world center of literary production.<sup>14</sup>

By insisting: "without empire...there is no European novel as we know it," Said counters narratives of centralization by showing how nineteenth-century Europe developed through its interaction with overseas territories.<sup>15</sup> Showing the intimate connection between the rise of nationalism and the ideological and political enterprise of Orientalism, Said further contends that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."<sup>16</sup> Many scholars writing in his wake have continued to

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<sup>13</sup> Moretti, p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> Casanova, Pascale, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York, Vintage: 1993, p. 69. In *Culture and Imperialism*, published fifteen years after *Orientalism*, Said makes the discussion of modern British and French imperialism even more central to an understanding of the development of mainstream British and French artistic and intellectual practices and distribution of cultural value. He also claims that "the novel, as a cultural artifact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other" (70-71). Another model for looking at the relationship between European modernism and its colonial structure is provided by Fredric Jameson. In "Modernism and Imperialism," Jameson asserts that the vastly restructured global space of colonialism constitutes the backdrop to which modernism responds. To quote Jameson at length here: "colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world—very different from that of the imperial power—remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they may belong to... To put it in other words, this last—daily life and existential experience in the metropolis—which is necessarily the very content of the national literature itself, can now no longer be grasped immanently; it no longer has its meaning, its deeper reason for being, within itself. As artistic content it will now henceforth always have something missing about it, but in the sense of a privation that can never be restored or made whole simply by adding back in the missing component: its lack is rather comparable to another dimension, an outside like the other face of a mirror, which it constitutively lacks, and which can never be made up or made good. This new and historically original problem in what is itself a new kind of content now constitutes the situation and the problem and the dilemma, the formal contradiction, that modernism seeks to solve; or better still, it is only that new kind of art which reflexively perceives this problem and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place." Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism," *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 50-51. The modern world that Jameson describes is one that grapples with representing the colonial world, at once irrefutably part of the cultural, economic and political fabric of nineteenth-century colonial powers yet at the same time wholly outside its representational reach.

<sup>16</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1978, p. 3.

parse how the non-West as such a “surrogate” self served the establishment of western modernity, culturally, economically, politically and scientifically.<sup>17</sup>

In the chapters that follow, considering the foreign or exotic beyond its role as providing ornamental diversity and diversion in European texts—and as actually participating in the development of form—this dissertation, in its methodology, departs from a nationalist understanding of nineteenth-century artistic and literary development. Resisting a teleological understanding of the development of nineteenth-century French genres in nationalistic terms, I adopt a “dialogic” approach in my readings, studying how works identified as realist and modernist engaged with travel. My discussion, then, will situate itself in dialogue with the following three narratives: the nationalist agenda of the “rise of the novel,” which sees nineteenth-century European representation as the culmination of western mimetic practices; Said’s diffusion of such a teleological understanding of nineteenth-century literature; thirdly, the discourse of Orientalism itself, particularly how it functions primarily as a system of representations, with its tropes and motifs.

As Said has made abundantly clear (and if there is only one take-away from *Orientalism* it would be this) Orientalism is not about the Orient; it expresses European anxieties, economic interests, knowledge systems and wielding of power. Said debunks the authority of Orientalism

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<sup>17</sup> This dialectical relationship between Europe and its cultural others is employed in many analyses following *Orientalism*. For example, according to Johannes Fabian’s conception of a “denial of coevalness” (defined as “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse”), there is an implicit understanding that the unmodern time of the Other offsets the modernity of the anthropologist. (*Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 31) Another notable example is Simon Gikandi’s writing on Picasso’s relationship to African art, which provides a framework for the “rethinking of the aesthetic of modernism and the schemata—and stigmata—of difference that both maintains and haunts it.” (Gikandi, Simon. “Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference,” *Modernism/modernity*, 10:3 (2003): 455-480, p. 457.) The disavowal by art historians and Picasso himself of the central role played by the savage Other in constituting the art of modernism, explains Gikandi, points to modernism’s “struggle to secure the aesthetic ideology of high modernism, especially the privileging of form as the mark of its breakthrough” (466). Gikandi’s emphasis on modernism’s desire to maintain a claim to pure (European) form highlights the ideological investments behind viewing art as taking place solely on national soil.

by emphasizing its “internal consistency,” disassociating Orientalism from a “real” Orient.<sup>18</sup> For him, there is nothing “real” about Orientalism. Nonetheless, despite its tenuous relationship to reality, Orientalism, capaciously ranging from the arts to public policy, has succeeded in propagating its beliefs about the East precisely because it functioned as a self-sufficient discursive system.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is this instability between representation and referent, or Orientalism and the Orient, which Said underscores in his analysis that, I believe, is equally under negotiation in the nineteenth-century French realist and modernist works examined in this dissertation.

Furthermore, moving away from privileging the nationalist model of the “rise of the novel” as well as the internal consistency of orientalist representation as suggested by Said, this study underscores how the artists and authors examined here, as practitioners of Orientalism, bring to light the inconsistencies within it. Analyzing the influence of the imperial imaginative landscape on what appeared to be narratives of national domestication, with which to question the very cohesiveness of the realist genre, this study demonstrates that the Orientalisms of Balzac, Du Camp, Flaubert and Baudelaire in fact become vehicles for disrupting a mainstream, teleological understanding of representation associated with both Orientalism and realism. In the case of Baudelaire and Flaubert, I show that their writings were produced in part from questioning orientalist discourse. And while Balzac and Du Camp embraced the Orientalism of

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<sup>18</sup> Here is the oft-cited excerpt from Said’s introduction to *Orientalism*: “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate [...] accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on” (*Orientalism*, pp. 2-3). Said also states that “the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [...] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a ‘real’ Orient” (5).

<sup>19</sup> See Spurr, David, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) for a discussion on how “one culture comes to interpret, to represent, and finally to dominate another” in “discourses of colonialism as produced in such forms as imaginative literature, journalism, travel writing, ethnographic description, historiography, political speeches, administrative documents, and statutes of law” (4-5).

their respective times, the readings put forth in this dissertation will reveal the extent to which their celebrated realisms depended on orientalist discourses. Engagement with the foreign and unknown therefore transforms into an experimental space that pushed forward the development of nineteenth-century aesthetic and literary practices in these artists' and authors' works. Their post-romantic Orientalism, then, may more accurately be described as a self-conscious mode of "being in the world"—which albeit continued to participate in designating the otherness of the non-West—that treated Orientalism as precisely what it was: an established discourse.<sup>20</sup>

### **Between Reference and Self-Reference: Travel Matters**

This dissertation has taken as one of its starting points that, as discursive terrains, realism and modernism grappled with the same epistemological conundrums with which Orientalism dealt. The tenuous relationship between reference and self-reference in nineteenth-century travel representation offers an apt opportunity to parse the relationship between the referentiality of realism and self-referentiality of modernism. French travel writing and photography produced by literate and mobile elites of the imperial center certainly contributed to perpetuating and reinforcing an orientalist worldview that sought to define non-west cultures. Many significant studies from the 1990s, responding to *Orientalism*, analyzed European travel representations to provide a more nuanced understanding of Orientalism.<sup>21</sup> Lisa Lowe's *Critical Terrains* turns to nineteenth-century orientalist travel writing to interrogate Said's reading of Orientalism as homogenous, instead drawing attention to its heterogeneities.<sup>22</sup> In *Belated Travels*, Ali Behdad focuses on how late romantic travel was marked by a sense of belatedness, or disappointment,

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<sup>20</sup> As Said explains about *Orientalism* in an interview from 1976: "My polemical intention is to demonstrate how Orientalism *is and was a way of being in the world*, a way of making statements with authority, and—crucially—a form of disciplined ideological presence." Said, Edward. "Interview: Edward W. Said," *Diacritics* (6:3) autumn, 1976 (30-47): 47, my emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> I would also include here James Clifford's *Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988) in which Clifford takes issue with what he deems as Said's own uncritical humanism and essentializing modes, central to Said's critique of European orientalist culture.

<sup>22</sup> Lowe, Lisa, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

having lost the opportunity for authentic experience, so esteemed by Romanticism. This belatedness, argues Behdad, reveals fissures in constructions of projected orientalist otherness, a “split,” which ultimately reinforced European Orientalism’s hegemony, no longer able to be viewed as a unified phenomenon.<sup>23</sup>

Mary Louise Pratt’s study in *Imperial Eyes* of European travel writing to Africa and the Americas from the eighteenth to twentieth century provides perhaps the most extensive analysis of travel writing’s relationship to imperial history.<sup>24</sup> Refuting a distinct binary between metropole and colony in order to rethink an understanding of the development of European Romanticism, Pratt underscores how travel writing not only defined the objects under representation but also shaped the way Europe redefined itself.<sup>25</sup> While indebted to how Pratt demonstrates that European Romanticism developed through global historical processes, my dissertation re-centers focus on how travel representations helped establish realism, in particular—as an authoritative representational frame of reference—in mid-nineteenth-century France. In doing so, I offer an alternative understanding of nineteenth-century literary history, and in particular, the transitions between Romanticism, realism and modernism.

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<sup>23</sup> Behdad, Ali, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> According to Pratt’s analysis, understanding the world made the European “feel part of a planetary project” and was “a key instrument, in other words, in creating the ‘domestic subject’ of empire” (3).

<sup>25</sup> To quote at length what I find most significant about Pratt’s argument:

The perspective of this book would call for rethinking “Romanticism” (and “Literature,” and “Europe”) in the light of writers like Humboldt and historical processes like changing contact with the Americas. “Romanticism,” then, provides an occasion to rethink habits of imagining “Europe” and “Literature” as *sui generis* entities that invent themselves from within then project outward onto the rest of the world. One can glimpse what it is like to imagine “Europe” as also constructing itself from the outside in, out of materials infiltrated, donated absorbed, appropriated, and imposed from contact zones all over the planet.

To the degree that “Romanticism” shapes the new discourses on America, Egypt, southern Africa, Polynesia, or Italy, *they shape it*. (Romantics are certainly known for stationing themselves round Europe’s peripheries...). Romanticism *consists*, among other things, of shifts in relations between Europe and other parts of the world—notably the Americas, which are precisely, liberating themselves from Europe. If one unhooks Humboldt from Schiller and locates him in another “Romantic” line—George Forster and Bernardin de St. Pierre (two of Humboldt’s personal idols), Volney, Chateaubriand, Stedman, Buffon, Le Vaillant, Captain Cook, and the Diderot of the “Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville”—one might be tempted to argue that Romanticism originated in the contact zones of America, North Africa, and the South Seas. (134-5)

Moreover, my focus on realism and modernism responds to a current lacuna in recent research that pays more attention to how romantic preoccupations with imagination, exotic settings and otherness promoted and further developed orientalist imagery. I am particularly interested in investigating the Orientalism of realism and modernism because they are representational modes that appear to have less to do with Orientalism than Romanticism. The choice to study the Orientalism of realism and modernism (and the realism and modernism of Orientalism) also does not seek to merely fill this analytical gap: as I have been suggesting above, the questions mid-nineteenth-century orientalist discourse raises regarding representation and reference address the core concerns of realism and modernism such that analyzing Orientalism with these issues in mind will shed light on our understanding of the developments of realism and modernism.

It is important to note that I do not mean to argue that Romanticism celebrated the exotic Orient in a positive manner. Quite the opposite, most of its writings, even, and perhaps particularly, the celebratory ones, reinforced the Orient as a place of otherness, seeing it as possessing characteristics ranging from the noble savage to the despotic tyrant. Moreover, the Orient continued to occupy a minor role in romantic literature, even while it was hailed as the alternative world to an increasingly vapid French civilization. What primarily interests this study is to point up how the works analyzed in this dissertation shifted away from employing the Orient as merely an alternative self, made popular by romantic depictions.

Therefore, I am interested in mid-nineteenth-century French travel precisely because, in my opinion, post-romantic writers debunked the myth of reference and empiricism associated with travel representations of the exotic other, which inspired a similar rethinking in their artistic and literary representation. This dissertation considers works published from the 1830s to the

1860s—a moment when the French romantic travel writing tradition thrived—because by then, France was saturated with accounts and images produced by European travelers who had ventured to all corners of the world, leaving almost no territory uncharted.<sup>26</sup> For the artists and authors studied in this dissertation, the experience of travel was mediated by the already established practices of travel documentation such that disappointment and in particular second-generation romantic ennui—possibly the strongest connection shared by each of the artists studied here—subtend all the works analyzed.<sup>27</sup> The long tradition of travel writing, which had already made the Orient familiar to French audiences raises the question: how was it possible to continue exoticizing a place when it had become so familiarized by a tradition of travel writing? I will in fact demonstrate that during the height of both Orientalism and the travel writing tradition, it is precisely because orientalist discourse had become so saturated and repetitive that its practitioners were able to undermine its consistency, which in turn allowed the artists examined here to negotiate their distance from Romanticism (back on French soil), albeit to very different effects.

The opening chapter of this dissertation studies Balzac's first bestseller *La Peau de chagrin* (1831). Upon writing this novel, Balzac was recovering from personal disappointment; before *La peau de chagrin*, his writing received hardly any critical praise. Entitled "Balzac's

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<sup>26</sup> For C.W. Thompson in *French Romantic Travel Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), there is even a distinctive romantic voice. He writes about "the emergence of a distinctive Romantic travelogue that was born with Chateaubriand and Staël, died soon after Nerval in the 1850s, [which] is characterized in part by a novelistic impulse" (3). Much critical ink has also been spilled over how this moment coincides with the height of Orientalism. John Zilcosky asserts that "travel writing underwent a swift change during the Enlightenment, which produced an unheard-of confidence in European civilization—reflected in the writing about the 'rest of the world' and Europe" (John Zilcosky, ed. *Writing Travel: the Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 11). Studying the eighteenth century, Srinivas Aravamudan's *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011) examines the period *before* the nineteenth century when, according to him, Orientalism became mainstream and increasingly uniform. These studies affirm that by the period of Romanticism, orientalist cultural expressions became irrevocably hegemonic.

<sup>27</sup> This notion has been persuasively demonstrated in *Belated Travels*. For example, Behdad shows that both Flaubert and Nerval expected an experience of immersing themselves in otherness, as described by their predecessors, in the Orient. What this present study aims to do is think about the critical and formal ramifications of this experience of disappointment and reference for other French aesthetic practices during this time.



Fantastic Realism in *La Peau de chagrin*,” this chapter focuses primarily on the protagonist Raphaël de Valentin’s entrance into bourgeois society, a trademark theme we have come to associate with the nineteenth-century realist novel. I contend that this staple of realism is in fact instigated by the presence of the eponymous magic skin hailing from the East, which grants its owner’s every wish while shortening his life, and therefore must be understood in relation to Balzac’s Orientalism. That is, I suggest that Balzac’s realism is an Orientalism turned *inward*, remapped onto the French landscape. The talisman skin—serving as an allegory for the impact of French imperial expansion on nineteenth-century France and by extension the Orientalism it evokes—stands to reformulate how we understand Balzac’s mimetic practices.

Although Balzac notably had no interest in traveling while Flaubert famously embarked on two voyages to the Orient, Orientalism played a central role in both their first successful works (admittedly more readily obvious in *La Peau de chagrin*’s oriental talisman than in *Madame Bovary*’s Normandy), which launched their careers as acclaimed novelists. Chapter two, entitled “Flaubert’s Exotic Detail: Experience, Realism and *La Bêtise*,” analyzes the travel notes of Flaubert’s trip to Egypt, the Middle East, Italy and Greece (1849-1851) in conjunction with his first mature novel *Madame Bovary* (1856), written immediately following his return from the East. This chapter analyzes the intertextual echoes between the exotic detail of Flaubert’s travel notes and correspondence and the so-called “realist detail” of *Madame Bovary*. Unlike many of his romantic predecessors as well as his travel companion Du Camp who celebrated witnessing first-hand the Orient’s grandeur, Flaubert encountered rather the epistemological limits of the discourse of Orientalism. Experiencing the Orient as a haunting uncanny composed of romantic tropes, Flaubert’s exotic detail de-sublimated his travel experience into a series of fragmented “daily stupidities.” While the preceding chapter shows

that Orientalism helped Balzac strengthen the thick description of his realist bildungsroman, this chapter demonstrates that Flaubert's exotic detail became the predecessor of his literary hallmark signaling the epistemological limits of language and representation: the *bêtise*.

Du Camp, by far the most enthusiastic traveler and orientalist of the authors discussed here, started his career by distinguishing himself from the Romanticism of his time in favor of progress and science. However, like Balzac, Du Camp relied on romantic Orientalism more than he had believed to do so. Entitled "Re-tracing the Travelogue in Maxime Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*," the third chapter analyzes Du Camp's 1852 *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, the first album of photographs successfully published in France. While many believed that it was the album's departure from the written word that naturalized the immediacy of its images of the East, this chapter reveals that it was in fact the opposite. As discussed in the previous chapters, French romantic travel literature had set the standard for authenticating its own representations of exotic destinations. This chapter examines how the scientific accuracy simulated by the edited 125 calotype images of monuments and landscape in Egypt, Palestine and Syria drew from pre-established discourses of romantic Orientalism. Specifically, this chapter contends that the extent to which the album's photos were taken as realist and objective representations of the Orient depended on how the album adopted the poetic subjectivity of romantic travelogues. This analysis of photography serves to demonstrate not only the constructedness of Du Camp's photographic album but also how orientalist discourse participated in facilitating the ability of these nineteenth-century photographs to earn their status as indexical of the real.

Chapter four of the dissertation, entitled "The World of Baudelaire's Travels: Real, Ironic and Imaginary," considers Baudelaire as an accomplished poet of travel, rethinking on the one

hand what travel meant for Baudelaire as well as its importance to his poetic and critical oeuvres. Like Flaubert, Baudelaire began his adult literary career after returning home from a disappointing trip abroad. While they both seemed to be more interested in exploring the bourgeois ennui of modern life that for them traveling to foreign and exotic lands could not even cure, as this dissertation will make clear, Flaubert and Baudelaire took travel much more seriously than they seem to reveal. Studying Baudelaire's Indian Ocean poetry, I argue that the anti-nationalist sentiments gleaned from his Indian Ocean poetry underpin his theoretical conception of beauty. Moreover, Baudelaire's exoticism, reflecting his positionality as an "outsider" (as the etymology of the word "exotic" reminds us), becomes a critical force in his representation of France, the Indian Ocean and their political complicity. The resonances between Baudelaire's Indian Ocean poems, which celebrated his real-life travel encounters, and "Un Voyage à Cythère," which seemed to denounce travel, demonstrate how the capacious notion of travel in Baudelaire's oeuvre point up the tensions between referentiality and self-referentiality found in the repertoire of nineteenth-century French travel representations. In this final chapter of the dissertation, I merge the preoccupations discussed in the previous chapters by showing that Baudelaire's exotic (and almost ethnographic) detail de-familiarized both domestic and foreign realities, while emphasizing travel poetry as a product of citation. By turning to modernism, this concluding chapter continues analyzing the influence of orientalist discourse's own self-referentiality on the French genre that is reputed to do just that.

## CHAPTER 1

### Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin*: Exoticism, Orientalism and Realism

#### ABSTRACT:

This chapter argues that Balzac's descriptive realism in *La Peau de chagrin* emerges from a primary engagement with Orientalism and assessment of the new exotic objects that flocked into nineteenth-century France in order to demonstrate Orientalism's impact on the very construction of the realist features of his novel. The second half of the chapter examines the eponymous skin, which, serving as an allegory for Balzac's mimetic practices as well as an increasingly global France, also registers how the changing material world of a global Paris widened an understanding of selfhood in the novel. This chapter concludes that Balzac's Orientalism, a series of mistranslations and misunderstandings, helped to fabricate not only an imaginary Orient but also the fictive universe of *La Peau de chagrin*.

While composing the works that eventually became part of his *Comédie humaine*, Balzac published two travel narratives, *Voyage de Paris à Java* (1832) and *La Chine et les chinois* (1842), based on fictional trips: he never actually traveled to the East. Like many other nineteenth-century French authors, he caught the *récit de voyage* bug; unlike them, however, he did not feel inclined to venture abroad.<sup>28</sup> Balzac echoes this sentiment toward travel in the preface to the first edition of one his earliest novels, *La Peau de chagrin* (1831): "Ainsi, le peintre le plus chaud, le plus exact de Florence, n'a jamais été à Florence; ainsi tel écrivain a pu merveilleusement dépeindre le désert, ses sables, ses mirages, ses palmiers, sans aller de Dan à Sahara."<sup>29</sup> Here, Balzac claims to be able to accurately depict a foreign place without ever visiting it, an ability that will be exemplified by the world of the curiosity shop in the opening scene of *La Peau de chagrin*, whose expansive collection of objects transports the rest of the world into the heart of Paris.

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<sup>28</sup> See C.W. Thompson, *French Romantic Travel Writing: Chateaubriand to Nerval* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) for an in-depth survey of the trend of romantic travel writing and the importance of the theme of the "journey" to Romanticism in general.

<sup>29</sup> Balzac, Honoré de. *La Peau de chagrin*. Paris: Flammarion, 1996, pp. 386-7. Here, Balzac refers to his own literary undertakings: he had traveled neither to Florence, the backdrop of his short story "Les Proscrits" (1831), nor to Dan or the Sahara, described in "Une Passion dans le désert" (1830).

While Balzac believed that one need not see a foreign place in order to represent it, when it came to depicting France, astute study was important. In fact, considering himself a “secretary,” Balzac claimed that he wanted his work to rival the records of the state.<sup>30</sup> Though realism did not begin as a recognizable mainstream movement in France until after the completion of the *Comédie humaine* in the 1850s, realists largely admired Balzac’s ability to offer judicious observations of his generation.<sup>31</sup> For example, inspired by Walter Scott’s historical novels as many works were in the 1820s, *Les Chouans* (originally entitled *Le Dernier Chouan*) (1828)—the first work to which Balzac signed his name—provided thick descriptions and chronicled with colorful and historical detail the 1790s Fougère revolt. Influenced by Balzac’s stay in Brittany, it was written with “une rigoureuse exactitude” to “bien présenter un portrait, de distribuer naturellement la lumière” and “de faire croire à la vie des personnages.”<sup>32</sup> Balzac maintains this dedication to realist representation throughout his career: in the preface to *Le Père Goriot* (1835), Balzac claimed to paint reality as it was; while in *Splendeurs et misères*

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<sup>30</sup> Balzac stated this in the preface to the *Comédie humaine*, which includes over two thousand characters. This proclamation is particularly interesting when we recall that Balzac dabbled as a journalist, and before *La Peau de chagrin*, was primarily celebrated as an author of nonfiction writing. For a discussion of Balzac’s career as a journalist see Roland Chollet’s *Balzac journaliste: le tournant de 1830* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> A *revue* entitled *Réalisme*, founded in 1856 by Edmond Duranty and Jules Asserzat, published articles that articulated the goals of the realist novel. Proponents of realism asserted that their novels were based on the faithful act of observation, providing scientific analyses of society in the service of the people. In his book *Le Réalisme* (1857), Champfleury provides a definition of realism: “La reproduction exacte, complète, sincère, du milieu où l'on vit, parce qu'une telle direction d'études est justifiée par la raison, les besoins de l'intelligence et l'intérêt du public, et qu'elle est exempte de mensonges, de toute tricherie.” In these iterations, realism shows its moralistic agenda and presents itself as a sociology rather than mere *divertissement* for its audience. According to Champfleury and the articles of *Réalisme* the new criteria for good art was no longer beauty, but rather honesty and transparency. Although these later proponents of realism claimed Balzac as one of its founders, Balzac did not strive for verisimilitude as much as he wished to depict how society functioned. Lukács’s Marxist reading appreciated Balzac for his ability to provide detailed descriptions such that the reader would be able to see the forces of history at work. Not only providing careful observation and thick description, Balzac’s “realism” also offered narrative unity. Lukács, Georg. *Studies in European Realism: a Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others*, trans. Edith Bone. London: Hillway Publishing Company, 1950.

<sup>32</sup> Balzac, Honoré de. *Les Chouans*. Paris: Gallimard, 2004, p. 502.

*des courtisanes* (1844), he claimed that his writing made a daguerreotype of society.<sup>33</sup> In *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac neatly summarizes his intention to reflect society in its complexity “en copiant toute la Société, la saisissant dans l’immensité de ses agitations,” and “en me voyant amasser tant de faits et les peindre comme ils sont.”<sup>34</sup> In this statement, he portrays his craft as one of copying what he sees around him.

Although Balzac paid great attention to the material world in his novels, his mind was never far from pessimistically probing the essences of human nature. He is equally known for his explorations of the monstrous undercurrents of social relations and emerging identities in the changing world following the 1789 revolution, detailing the new types to be found in post-1830 class formations and revealing the ultimately untenable nature of capitalist society that engulfs them. Balzac’s materialism gave commodities and objects a symbolic life even before Marx did; it is no surprise that he named Balzac his favorite writer.<sup>35</sup>

Balzac’s *études philosophiques* very clearly reflects his engagement with larger questions concerning the human condition, and its first entry *La Peau de chagrin* is no exception.

Historically considered one of Balzac’s more fantastic works, the novel explores questions of

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<sup>33</sup> The commonly held belief that the photographic image was a transparent reflection of the world will be thoroughly questioned in chapter three’s analysis of Maxime Du Camp’s photography book *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine, Syrie* (1852).

<sup>34</sup> Balzac, Honoré de. *Oeuvres complètes: le moment de la Comédie humaine*, “Avant-propos,” ed. Claude Duchet and Isabelle Tournier. St. Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1994, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Comparing Balzac’s descriptions, which invest figurative meaning in the material world, with Flaubert’s more modern descriptions, Fredric Jameson writes that “for in Balzac everything that looks like a physical sensation...always means something, it is a sign or allegory of the moral or social status of a given character: decent poverty, squalor, the pretensions of the parvenu, the true nobility of the old aristocracy, and so on. In short, it is not really a sensation, it is already a meaning, an allegory. By the time of Flaubert, these signs remain, but they have become stereotypical; and the new descriptions register a density beyond such stereotypical meanings” (*The Antinomies of Realism*, New York: Verso, 2013, p. 33). Balzac’s descriptions of objects never merely set the scene; they are imbued with moral weight and serve as a window into the deeper meanings of the novel. Later in the chapter, I will specifically focus on the narrative significance of the exotic objects that fill the opening scene of *La Peau de chagrin*.

power and will through the protagonist's encounter with the supernatural *peau de chagrin*.<sup>36</sup> Set in the Paris of 1829 to 1831, *La Peau de chagrin* details the sudden gain in wealth and tragic aftermath following protagonist Raphaël de Valentin's acquisition of the eponymous skin that satisfies his every desire while shortening his lifespan. Representing the Faustian death wish from which Raphaël is unable to escape, the destructive *peau de chagrin* operates as a centripetal force at each stage of the novel. Divided into three parts, the novel begins with "Le Talisman," which details Raphaël's acquisition of the onager's skin in a Parisian *cabinet de curiosité*. In "La femme sans cœur," set during an extravagant dinner party granted by his first wish, the reader learns of how Raphaël, penniless and rejected by the publically admired Foedora, arrives at the destitute state that leads him to obtain the magic skin. The third section, entitled "L'Agonie," recounts a wealthy Raphaël, having accepted his fate following the failure of scientists to artificially stretch the shrinking skin, safely sealed away from society in order to control his every impulse to desire.

Even though Balzac was not yet working on *La Comédie humaine* while writing *La Peau de chagrin*, exploring the themes of bourgeois ambition and corruption, the novel in many ways inaugurates his oeuvre and contains many of the elements that he will continue to address.<sup>37</sup> For

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<sup>36</sup> Many important studies on *La Peau de chagrin* comment on its fantastic and idealistic character. In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), Tzvetan Todorov famously singles out *La Peau de chagrin* in the beginning of his study of the fantastic genre. While in *The Hidden Reader: Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Baudelaire, Flaubert* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), Victor Brombert astutely summarizes that *La Peau de chagrin* reflects the most basic and paradoxical Balzacian characteristic: a vision both realistic and supernatural" (40). Jameson simply qualifies the novel as one of Balzac's "fantastic tales," with the "authentic smell of peasant wisdom" (Jameson, Fredric, "On Balzac: Unwrapping Balzac: A reading of *La Peau de Chagrin* by Samuel Weber." *boundary 2*, 12:1, p. 227). Finally, in "Empiricism and Empire: Orientalist Antiquing in Balzac's *Peau de chagrin*" (*Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, vol. 51 (2003-4)), Geoffrey Baker quotes Todorov as well as Henri Mitterand who has described the novel as a "fantastique des choses" (172).

<sup>37</sup> Brombert discusses how *La Peau de chagrin* presents themes that Balzac will continue to examine in the rest of *La Comédie humaine*. Brombert writes: "*La Peau de chagrin* thus contains in profusion some of the basic traits of *La Comédie humaine*. And every one of its themes was to give birth to further novels. Raphaël's loss of innocence and ideals is more amply treated in *Illusions perdues*...; the destructive power of thought, the tragedy of intellect, the psychophysical relation of mind and body are the subject of *Louis Lambert* (1833)...; the modern epic of money

example, Rastignac—*Le Père Goriot* will later on tell the story of his earlier years—first appears in *La Peau de chagrin* as Raphaël’s mentor. While in both *Le Père Goriot* and *La Peau de chagrin* Balzac chronicles the protagonists’ deeds and misdeeds while courting high society Parisians, what most separates the two works, however, is the exceptionally *unrealistic* skin and the fantastic world it evokes in *La Peau de chagrin*. The novel’s fantastic element is even more peculiar given that, as suggested above, imagination was reserved for representations of the foreign world (China, Florence, the Sahara), while supposedly Balzac typically employed empirical observation in his depictions of France, where *La Peau de chagrin* takes place. This seeming paradox is exactly the point in which this chapter takes interest: how does the fantastic element operate within this formative “realist” text for Balzac? My goal here is not to systematically resolve whether the supernatural *peau de chagrin* disrupts Balzac’s realist narrative or whether it seamlessly inhabits it; rather, I wish to reveal how Balzac instrumentalizes Orientalism in his depiction of the magic skin and demonstrate Orientalism’s impact on the very construction of the realist features of his novel.

Before turning to the analysis of *La Peau de chagrin*, it is important to note that as his first bestseller, the novel was a transformational work for Balzac’s career in many ways. By the time Balzac published the novel, most likely due to the despair brought on by the accumulation of botched writing projects and his increasing debt, he wished to introduce a mode of writing to reinvigorate the blasé reader and represent reality beyond the popular trends available to him. Writing *La Peau de chagrin* amidst a sense of disillusionment with the state of modern literature, Balzac claimed in the first edition preface that the public today

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and business speculation is at the heart of *César Birotteau* (1837); the satanic elements are embodied in the character of Vautrin, who first appears in *Le Père Goriot* (1835)...And in many novels the reader is again thrust into Paris” (*The Hidden Reader*, 41).



ne voulait plus sympathiser avec les *jeunes malades*, les *convalescents* et les doux trésors de mélancolie contenus dans l'infirmerie littéraire... Il était las des *bardes* nuageux et des Sylphes, comme il est aujourd'hui rassasié de l'Espagne, de l'Orient, des supplices, des pirates et de l'histoire de France *walterscottée*. Que nous reste-t-il donc ?<sup>38</sup>

Balzac's answer to his rhetorical question "que nous reste-t-il donc" is *La Peau de chagrin*, which ventures away from the style of "Walterscotted" historical fiction as well as a hackneyed understanding of sentimental romantic writing. The result is a novel that provides a detailed portrait of post-Restoration bourgeois life in Paris while pessimistically investigating larger questions about destruction, passion and the irrational, symbolized by the devilish *peau de chagrin*, which allows Raphaël to desire while shortening his life (and therefore his very ability to desire at the same time). Although Balzac includes the theme of the Orient as a stale subject to avoid, as I will develop below, his treatment of the *peau de chagrin* mirrors orientalist scholarship, gaining authority and popularity during Balzac's time. While the novel never leaves France, the magic *peau de chagrin* and the eclectic *cabinet de curiosité* bring the foreign world into Paris. And this Orientalism will have an ongoing bearing on how Balzac conveys meaning in the novel.

### **The Cabinet de Curiosités and the Fetish Object**

After losing his meager inheritance at the gambling tables, a last resort destination already signaling the modest protagonist's despondency, Raphaël, having already gambled away his means of existence, contemplates suicide on the banks of the Seine. He then confusedly stumbles into a *cabinet de curiosité*, where Raphaël buys the *peau de chagrin* and seals his fate by deferring the death to which he finally succumbs at the end of the novel.

Exotic objects hailing from around the world fill the opening pages of *La Peau de chagrin* in Balzac's detailed portrait of the *cabinet de curiosités* in which the magic of the shop

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<sup>38</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 388.

is juxtaposed to a realistic Paris. Balzac describes the shop: “Cette vision avait lieu dans Paris, sur le quai Voltaire, au dix-neuvième siècle, temps et lieux où la magie devait être impossible”; the use of *devait*, “should have been (but was not),” highlights how the magic that awaited the protagonist inside the *cabinet de curiosités* did not belong in a rational post-Enlightenment Paris, where Voltaire had already become a pedestrian name.<sup>39</sup> The *cabinet de curiosités*, although centrally located within the *métropole*, is defined as a space of magic and otherness to an orderly and rational France.

One of its shopkeepers, aptly named *Caliban*, functioning as a historically othered figure and a kind of surrogate native informant, lures Raphaël in by listing some of the shop’s exceptional possessions:

Nous n'avons en bas que des choses assez ordinaires; mais si vous voulez prendre la peine de monter au premier étage, je pourrai vous montrer de fort belles momies du Caire, plusieurs poteries incrustées, quelques ébènes sculptés, *vraie renaissance*, récemment arrivés et qui sont de toute beauté.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, an extraordinary world of mummies and other exotic curiosities await the brave explorer willing to venture beyond the mundane ground floor.<sup>41</sup> As exotic property of the shop, these commodities replace the need to travel abroad, importing a taste of foreign cultures from the periphery right into the metropolitan center and displaying “ruins” of older civilizations in a fetishistic manner.<sup>42</sup> The second-hand shop reanimates its relics, not unlike the mummy itself,

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<sup>39</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 81. The opening lines of the novel also uses details of time and space to specify the exact setting of the novel: “Vers la fin du mois octobre dernier, un jeune homme entra dans le Palais-Royal au moment où les maisons de jeu s’ouvraient... Sans trop hésiter, il monta l’escalier du tripot désigné sous le nom de numéro 36” (57). Details such as “la fin du mois octobre dernier,” “le Palais-Royal” and “numéro 36” concretely locate the novel in the local present, undoubtedly presenting Paris as a real space.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> The protagonist in Théophile Gautier’s fantastical short story “Le pied de momie” (1840) also finds a magical mummy’s foot in a *cabinet de curiosités*. The popularity of the mummy and the *cabinet de curiosités* speaks to how they both populate the French literary imaginary during this time as go-to exotic icons.

<sup>42</sup> The depiction of Near Eastern ruins will be the central focus of Maxime Du Camp’s photographs of archeological sites in North Africa and the Near East (discussed in chapter three).

already preserved for afterlife, as well as Raphaël himself, who on the verge of suicide, also gets a second chance at life as a result of his visit to the shop.

In order to highlight its exceptional range, this *cabinet* boasts of one of the most impressive and dizzying descriptions of a maze of objects in Balzac's writing—ranging from Chinese cups, Etruscan vases, Rembrandt paintings to Indian hookahs—arranged with no apparent organizational narrative logic. As Raphaël continues to explore the *cabinet*, Balzac's description of the shop picks up speed and shifts to simply listing its possessions. Balzac's penchant for lengthy descriptions and long-winded tangents are showcased in the portrait of the *cabinet*, where fascination with outlining the breadth of the collection takes over the description. Balzac writes:

Les instruments de mort, poignards, pistolets curieux, armes à secret, étaient jetés pêle-mêle avec des instruments de vie : soupières en porcelaine, assiettes de Saxe, tasses diaphanes venues de Chine, salières antiques, drageoirs féodaux. Un vaisseau d'ivoire voguait à pleines voiles sur le dos d'une immobile tortue. Une machine pneumatique éborgnait l'empereur Auguste, majestueusement impassible. Plusieurs portraits d'échevins français, de bourgmestres hollandais, insensibles alors comme pendant leur vie, s'élevaient au-dessus de ce chaos d'antiquités, en y lançant un regard pâle et froid.<sup>43</sup>

Instruments of life and death lying next to each other highlight both the exhaustiveness and disorganization of the collection of objects, which here span from Saxony to China, and from the Roman Empire to the feudal era. Close attention to the description reveals that it gains narrative force from detailing the cacophony of the disordered arrangement: an ivory miniature of a vessel sits atop a preserved tortoise while an air pump crushes the emperor Augustus.<sup>44</sup> There is precisely a *lack* of logic that brings together antiques, industrial tools and trinkets in this motley

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<sup>43</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>44</sup> Baker puts forth that the description of the shop employs the two epistemologies of empire, the “realist enumerative” and the “fantastic imaginative,” simultaneously confirming the rational empiricism of the imperial center and the mystical nature of the outside world (Baker 169-70).

collection of objects, ineffectively overseen by the portraits of French and Dutch municipal magistrates unable to reign over the multitude of objects.

The location of the *cabinet de curiosité* in Paris also calls attention to the imperial climate surrounding the collection of objects in the shop.<sup>45</sup> Neighboring official institutes that celebrate French cultural patrimony, the *cabinet de curiosité* is situated across the Seine from the Louvre museum, which, during the Restoration, became increasingly encyclopedic and prominent, boasting of a new Egyptian wing that displayed the spoils of Napoleon's 1798 expedition. Facing each other on opposite sides of the Seine, the *curiosité* shop offers a position from which to examine the "curiosity" of the Louvre's display of *extraordinary* objects. That is to say, the proximity of the *cabinet de curiosité* to the Louvre suggests that while the encyclopedic museum aimed to be comprehensive in its representation of different fields of knowledge, by highlighting the exoticism of the civilizations from which the objects were extracted, the museum simultaneously functioned like the *cabinet de curiosité*. However, while both the shop and museum exhibited a shared mania for collecting, the shop's chaotic display resembled anything but the order and rigid classification of the encyclopedic museum.

The explicitly disorganized space of Balzac's *cabinet de curiosité*, moreover, challenges Edward Said's analysis of the European nineteenth-century realist narrative, an analysis that emphasizes the novel's attention to spatial mastery.<sup>46</sup> Showing the parallels between the

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<sup>45</sup> The reader learns that before entering the *cabinet*, Raphaël "étudia le Louvre, l'Institut, les tours de Notre-Dame, celles du Palais, le pont des Arts" from the quai Voltaire. *La Peau de chagrin*, pp. 68-9.

<sup>46</sup> Specifically borrowing from a Foucaultian framework, Said's *Orientalism* examines the discursive practices of how the "West invented the East," showing that this body of knowledge revealed the anxieties, preoccupations, and desiring systems of the West and, thus, debunking the notion that it provided any accurate understanding of the diverse cultures and societies of the East that it purported to master. Said emphasizes the exhaustive motivations of the methodologies behind Orientalism, which mirrored imperialism's intentions to occupy ever more territory. He asserts: "without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). Thus,

exhaustive empirical intentions of the novel creating a master account of the world and the imperial impulses to economically and politically dominate it, Said charts the shared ideological beliefs underpinning the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel and imperialism.<sup>47</sup> However, in the *cabinet de curiosité*, Raphaël is overwhelmed by the disorderly space of the shop, described as “un tableau confus, dans lequel toutes les œuvres humaines se heurtaient,” in which “le commencement du monde et les événements d’hier se mariaient avec une grotesque bonhomie.”<sup>48</sup> Here, the shop thrusts together its artifacts and relics without rhyme or reason. As a result, Raphaël sees “millions” of objects from a myriad “de civilisations, de cultes, de divinités, de chefs-d’œuvre, de royautés, de débauches, de raison et de folie,” an uncountable mass of things defying classification.<sup>49</sup> So although Balzac’s ambitious intention to create a comprehensive social world in his *Comédie Humaine* may reflect an imperial energy to classify, map, and represent foreign civilizations, the *cabinet de curiosité*, anything but an orderly and mastered space, defies any sense of recognizable social organization.

On the other hand, for Dorian Bell, who questions the conspicuous absence of the non-French world in the nineteenth-century realist novel, while imperial ambitions may have inspired realism’s desire to map French society, the realist novel failed to actually address France’s endeavors overseas.<sup>50</sup> According to Bell’s analysis, “the conspicuous paucity of colonial

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Orientalism as a cultural attitude and scholarly discipline, produced a familiar lexicon of ideologically invested concerns and motifs with which to justify France’s political and imperial agenda concerning the Orient.

<sup>47</sup> Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1993. p. 69-71.

<sup>48</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> Bell, Dorian, “Balzac’s Algeria: Realism and the Colonial” *NCFCS*, vol 40, number 1 & 2, Fall-Winter 2011-2012 (35-56) p. 37. Highlighting the discontinuities between Balzac’s realist vision of the metropole in contradistinction to that of the colonies, Bell argues that in the case of Balzac, his representational arsenal was unequipped to portray the different spatial and epistemological configurations of the colonial periphery, as his vision did not in fact travel with the same integrity to the outskirts of empire. This disjointedness, furthermore, served to question and re-contextualize the actual universality of Balzac’s realist modes of representation. In fact he argues about the entire discipline: “As has been voluminously documented, nineteenth-century French authors writing in romantic, exoticist adventure, and other veins showed no compunction about ranging far and wide in their fiction. True, these authors often occluded the unpleasant colonial truths that contravened their constructed fantasies. But the critical attention

settings” in Balzac’s novels resulted from their inability to reaffirm clearly demarcated class distinctions, fading in the France of the July Monarchy. Balzac, therefore, occluded the colonial periphery in his narrative in order to attempt to maintain an illusion of social order in Paris, which was rapidly changing. While Bell’s assessment of the marginalization of the colonies in the realist novel is apt, in the case of *La Peau de chagrin*, the exotic periphery had already become part of the metropolitan center. The descriptions of the objects in the *cabinet de curiosité* in *La Peau de chagrin* highlight how the European *métropole* was itself becoming an increasingly global space and challenge the view that the foreign world did not have a place, and a quite central one at that, in the “real” world of Paris. *La Peau de chagrin*’s *cabinet de curiosité* reveals how the outside world reconfigured the French capital from within, while the diversity of the *cabinet*’s objects resisted imperial modes of classification and control right in the heart of France.

In this cultural reconfiguration exemplified by Balzac’s description of the eclectic *cabinet de curiosité*, the mania for collecting objects, intensified by the imperial climate, re-signified the value of the objects within the commercial walls of the shop.<sup>51</sup> As Janell Watson has extensively shown, the rise in prominence of the *cabinet de curiosité* points to the shifting mechanisms of assigning value following the 1789 revolution and a rethinking “of spaces in which goods are accumulated, displayed, classified, and valorized.”<sup>52</sup> The popularity of the once insignificant and miscellaneous curio or bibelot, heterogeneously encompassing in the nineteenth century anything from rare antiques to valueless knickknacks, reveals new and emerging reconfigurations of

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this occlusion has justifiably received itself overlooks the conspicuous paucity of colonial settings in the one novelistic mode—realism—whose largely France-bound ways furnish the least material for postcolonial readings” (“Balzac’s Algeria,” 36-37).

<sup>51</sup> In many ways, Balzac’s novels focus on the reassigning of identity in post-Restoration France in which older modes of assigning and recognizing heroism, status and wealth have become obsolete.

<sup>52</sup> Watson, Janell. *Literature and material Culture from Balzac to Proust: the Collection and Consumption of Curiosities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 7.

systems of meaning and value. The effect of this reconfiguration is seen above, moreover, as the presence of these newly resignified objects served to restyle Balzac's narrative: his descriptions take shape from re-presenting the shop's diverse collection of objects.

Furthermore, the cultural logic undergirding Balzac's *cabinet de curiosité* turned its objects into exotic fetish curios. Marx's and Freud's understandings of the fetish offer further insight into how the curiosities—as desired objects on the market—operated within the *cabinet* where “une poussière obstinée avait jeté son léger voile sur tous ces objets.”<sup>53</sup> The disavowal of the objects' historical specificity in the shop operates not unlike Marx's commodity fetishism in which the labor and human history of commodities are obscured in the assigning of (exchange) value. The ability to conceal labor in turn grants Marx's commodity fetish a “magical” power to dictate the very social activity and organization necessary to produce it. In psychoanalytic terms, Freud's fetish, serving as a surrogate object of desire, also defers meaning onto a simulacrum, with no access to any form of an original object of desire. The *peau de chagrin*, which Raphaël will eventually possess, mirrors this function of the skin as a proxy object of desire. Both of these readings point up the social re-codification of the objects, while emphasizing how the objects take up new meaning within the shop and novel.

Emily Apter's notion of “critical fetishism,” outlining how the mimetic economy of the fetish is an ever-shifting one, further directs our attention to how the objects, signified by otherness, propose a new organizational system of meaning for the novel as well as challenge the notion of any stable origin for these objects.<sup>54</sup> However, in *Ideas in Things*, Elaine Freedgood

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<sup>53</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 71.

<sup>54</sup> In *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) Emily Apter emphasizes that the fetish is an open rather than a fixed system, proposing that “fetishism emerges as an ever-shifting form of specular mimesis, an ambiguous state that demystifies and falsifies at the same time, or that reveals its own techniques of masquerade while putting into doubt any fixed referent” (14).

deems that recent critical studies on the fetish, like Apter's, do not actually take seriously enough the object, continuing, despite attention paid to things, to subsume the reading of the literal object to figurative meaning.<sup>55</sup> In response, her methodology employs the metonym, "involving, initially, a moment of taking [things] literally, followed by a lengthy metonymic search beyond the covers of the text."<sup>56</sup>

In *La Peau de chagrin*, however, I would argue that while the objects in the *cabinet de curiosité* are infused with far-reaching figurative meaning (signifying chaos and ruin), it is the objects, as a collection of material things, which take control of the narrative.<sup>57</sup> Balzac's novels are already known to passionately engage with the material world; what I find interesting in the case of *La Peau de chagrin* is that it registers how the changing material world of a global Paris widens an understanding of selfhood in the novel. In the *cabinet*, for example, the shop objects provoke a violent shift in Raphaël's ability to assess reality. He does not consume the objects in the shop, but is consumed *by* the shop, where "il sortit de la vie réelle, monta par degrés vers un monde idéal, et tomba dans une indéfinissable extase."<sup>58</sup> Succumbing to the power of the shop's phantasmagoric scene and lacking the ability to bring order to "la vue de tant d'existences nationales ou individuelles, attestées par ces gages humains qui leur survivaient," which "acheva

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<sup>55</sup> Freedgood, Elaine. "Introduction: Reading Things," *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. She cites among other works: Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish*; Apter and Pietz, eds., *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996). See also Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Freedgood, p. 6. For her, Said's analysis of sugar in *Mansfield Park* to signal the presence of imperial exploitation and slavery in Antigua in the novel is an example of such a metonymic reading (20). Similarly, in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), Bhabha also employs metonymy in his Freudian understanding of the fetish as "the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack), highlighting the instability of any metaphorical act of substitution, as always haunted by a specter of absence (107).

<sup>57</sup> As discussed above, Balzac is of course known for investing meaning in the most insignificant detail or object. However, I would argue here that the objects in the shop are not subsumed by outside figurative meaning but that they maintain their significance as objects. The object's authority will become even more evident with the *peau de chagrin*, which no amount of *logos*, study, science or translation is able to change.

<sup>58</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 71-72.



d'engourdir les sens du jeune homme,” Raphaël loses control when trying to make sense of the artifacts’ (confused) re-presentation of world history.<sup>59</sup> Physically depleted and “souhaitant plus vivement que jamais de mourir, il tomba sur une chaise curule, en laissant errer ses regards à travers les fantasmagories de ce panorama du passé.”<sup>60</sup> Here, taking in the spectacle of the parade of objects, he literally falls into the grasp of one of the shop’s objects.

Producing pages of description such that enumerating the exotic objects monopolizes the narrative representation of the shop in, what Naomi Schor would consider, a “threatening” way, this seemingly haphazard list of objects—in which *les instruments de mort* fight against *des instruments de vie*—also mirrors Raphaël’s struggle between life and death.<sup>61</sup> This disorganization reflects the protagonist’s internal struggle. Thus, focusing on the diverse exoticism of the shop objects reveals how it is precisely at the moment in which Balzac stages a dreamlike setting, then, that he employs thick description of a material environment, lauded in such scenes as the description of the *Maison Vauquer* in *Le Père Goriot*, in which, as it is well known, Balzac embeds moral commentary in the portrayal of each of the aspects of the pension. However, Balzac’s descriptive attention to the material world in the *cabinet* reveals by contrast a deep engagement with capturing the sheer diversity of the objects eccentrically brought together under one (imperial) roof. In other words, it is through the descriptive listing of the seemingly unquantifiable amount of objects in the globalized space of the *cabinet* that Balzac produces the atmosphere of this scene and in turn conveys the agitated state of his protagonist. In other words, Balzac does not provide any further moral commentary using these objects; instead, the exotic

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71. The heterogeneity of the objects in the shop mirrors Balzac’s larger project of bringing together a diversity of elements to form the world of the *Comédie humaine*, itself composed of a diverse styles of writing, ranging from the historical novel to fantastic tales.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>61</sup> In *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 2007), Naomi Schor writes that the detail may be threatening in its “tendency to subvert an internal hierarchic ordering of the work of art which clearly subordinates the periphery to the center, the accessory to the principal, the foreground to the background” (20).

status of the objects itself serves as an analogy for the chaos of the shop and Raphaël's mental state.

Moreover, Raphaël begins to resemble the objects around him and become a "curiosity" himself in the *cabinet de curiosités* where "rien de complet ne s'offrait à l'âme."<sup>62</sup> The curiosity shop in effect operates as a space of re-assessment not only for its items but for Raphaël's subjectivity, as well. While in the shop, he is referred to as an "*inconnu*" and "*étranger*"; it is not until Raphaël emerges back onto the streets of Paris as owner of the magic skin, literally stumbling across his friends, that the reader learns his name.<sup>63</sup> Raphaël, as an unnamed and unspecified *étranger*—like Marx's commodity fetish that can be substituted by others—occupies the same unstable position as the objects around him. He is a stranger surrounded by "strange" artifacts: "Poursuivi par les formes les plus étranges, par des créations merveilleuses assises sur les confins de la mort et de la vie, il marchait dans les enchantements d'un songe. Enfin, doutant de son existence, il était comme ces objets curieux, ni tout à fait mort, ni tout à fait vivant."<sup>64</sup>

Resembling the redefined objects—obsolete ruins from past civilizations—and trapped in a state

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<sup>62</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 73.

<sup>63</sup> Withholding the identity of the protagonist for part of the novel is a narrative technique that Balzac employs in order to defy conventions of the sentimental novel. By choosing to reveal Raphaël's identity upon acquisition of the onager's skin in *La Peau de chagrin*, Balzac emphasizes the curiosity shop as a preparatory site of identity formation for his protagonist. This also suggests that in the novel Raphaël's identity is inseparable from his experience in the shop and being owner of the skin.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75. Michel Foucault's understanding of the modern episteme, the study of man in his finitude, or anthropology, reveals the double-bind of the knowledge produced by the human sciences at this time; neither man nor the world was a stable entity. This moment is illustrated here in Raphaël's experience in the shop, where the protagonist retains no power over the world around him. Foucault writes:

since the general theory of representation was disappearing at the same time, and the necessity of interrogating man's being as the foundation of all positivities was imposing itself in its place, an imbalance could not fail to occur: man became that upon the basis of which all knowledge could be constituted as immediate and non-problematized evidence; he became *a fortiori*, that which justified the calling into question of all knowledge of man. (Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1994, p. 345.)

Here, Foucault points out how the emergence of man as the "basis of knowledge" occurred while hitherto accepted models of representation from the classical age were breaking down and no longer sufficient.

between life and death, Raphaël walks through the shop in a liminal state until he comes across the *peau de chagrin*.<sup>65</sup>

### **From Epidermis to Episteme: the Mimetic Economy of the Talisman**

I will now turn my focus to one shop object in particular, the *peau de chagrin*, a leather talisman extracted from an onager and the privileged fetish object in the novel. As I will show below, the magic skin, an already inscribed canvas that will chart Raphaël's life, diminishing in size as the protagonist's life shrinks, will reveal a discussion of Balzac's philosophy on the craft of writing.<sup>66</sup> The following examination of the talisman will also more distinctly reveal how the procedures of orientalist investigation become a productive site for the construction of Balzac's realist narrative.

First, using scientific logic, Raphaël is unsuccessful in his attempts to understand the *peau de chagrin*. Seeing the skin, Raphaël is at first captivated by its supernatural-appearing radiating luster, but quickly looks for “une cause naturelle à cette singulière lucidité.”<sup>67</sup> To explain away his fascination, Raphaël employs scientific method to try to rationally dull the seemingly magical features of the polished skin: “il démontra mathématiquement la raison de ce phénomène.”<sup>68</sup> However, unsatisfied with his scientific attempts to understand the skin's physical attributes, Raphaël, a trained Orientalist, turns to investigating the *cuir oriental* with his knowledge of the Orient. He compares the writing on the skin to “Solomon's Seal,” a mythic

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<sup>65</sup> Considering how *La Peau de chagrin*, a foundational text of *La Comédie humaine*, presents a world of chaos and non-mastery serves to question the epistemological transparency normally associated with the nineteenth-century realist novel. Playing a central role in this scene of the novel, the objects ultimately question the identity of Balzac's novel as possessing a “transcendent order of knowledge,” “primacy of knowing subject” and a stable object-subject agreement for which realist novels are known (Prendergast, Christopher, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 26.). See also Watt, Ian, *Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

<sup>66</sup> Employing “canvas” as a metaphor for the skin here, I also want to mention that the painting “The Transfiguration of Christ,” illustrating the meeting between man and the divine by the protagonist's namesake Raphael, is also part of the *cabinet's* collection. Balzac, in *La Peau de chagrin*, also depicts the meeting between man (Raphaël) and the divine (the *peau de chagrin*) The painting also serves

<sup>67</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 85.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

cachet that granted King Solomon the magical power to command genies. In skeptical response to his new findings, Raphaël rhetorically addresses the shopkeeper:

Existe-t-il au monde un homme assez simple pour croire à cette chimère ?... Ne savez-vous pas, ajouta-t-il, que les superstitions de l'Orient ont consacré la forme mystique et les caractères mensongers de cet emblème qui représente une puissance fabuleuse ? Je ne crois pas devoir être plus taxé de niaiserie dans cette circonstance que si je parlais des Sphinx ou des Griffons, dont l'existence est en quelque sorte mythologiquement admise.<sup>69</sup>

Raphaël's explanation of the talisman's oriental origins relegated the object to the category of superstition. For Raphaël, the oriental object, whose existence defied scientific reason, could only exist as myth.

Focusing on the skin as an oriental object, Raphaël carries out a physical, and more violent, examination of it. Not wanting to be the dupe of what he thought was the antique shop's spectacle of illusions, Raphaël tries to show the markings on the skin as merely superficial by attempting to cut into its surface and thus disprove its magical appearance. The following episode details Raphaël's investigation:

[Le vieillard] apporta la lampe près du talisman que le jeune homme tenait à l'envers, et lui fit apercevoir des caractères *incrustés* dans le tissu cellulaire de cette Peau...

« J'avoue, s'écria l'inconnu, que je ne devine guère le procédé dont on se sera servi pour *graver* si profondément ces lettres sur la peau d'un onagre. »...

« Que voulez-vous ? demanda le vieillard.

--Un instrument pour trancher le chagrin, afin de voir si les lettres y sont *empreintes* ou *incrustées*. »<sup>70</sup>

Balzac's intention to "copy" society in his writing, as discussed above, begins to take on new meaning here: analyzing the skin's surface immediately transforms into a discussion on representation. In his inspection, Raphaël takes pains to determine whether the words are

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86 (my emphases).

superficially printed (*empreintes, imprimées*) on the surface of the skin, or somehow magically embedded or engraved (*incrustés, graver*) in it. While, historically, engraving served a utilitarian purpose—the ability to produce multiple impressions from an original image or text—in the context of Raphaël’s investigation, the act of copying or writing is henceforth translated into the supernatural terms of the skin. This investigation lends itself to raising the same questions one may put to Balzac’s realism: does his perspicacious vision of the world lie in copying what appears on the surface of his characters’ environments or rather in exposing what lies underneath?

Raphaël’s investigation also aims, but ultimately fails, to mark the skin:

Le vieillard présenta son *stylet* à l’inconnu, qui le prit et tenta d’entamer la Peau à l’endroit où les paroles se trouvaient écrites ; mais, quand il eut enlevé une légère couche de cuir, les lettres y reparurent si nettes et tellement conformes à celles qui étaient *imprimées* sur la surface, que, pendant un moment, il crut n’en avoir rien ôté.<sup>71</sup>

Using a stylus, at once a dagger and a writing utensil, to inspect the features of the talisman, Raphaël’s carving into the talisman, a violent action that foreshadows his eventual possession of it, also resembles the excavating work of “archeological digging.”<sup>72</sup> Probing *and* “writing” at the same time, Raphaël attempts to carve into the skin and cover over the existing inscription with the markings of his examination. This act brings to mind Balzac, taking ink to paper to produce his novel. This revealed inextricable relationship between writing and examining further suggests that Raphaël’s orientalist investigation of the skin’s text *becomes* a form of literary creation itself. Put in another way, Raphaël’s examination of the skin is the very act that leads to his writing over it. I would like to suggest that his act of paleology—the study of antiquities, or one

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86 (my emphases).

<sup>72</sup> Similarly, a “burin” is used for engraving and print making, but also serves as an archeological tool. This scene recalls the one in which Raphaël spies on Foedora as she is entertaining her admirers. In order to learn the true nature of Foedora, Raphaël replaces his dagger with a penknife: “En m’habillant, je mis dans la poche de mon gilet un petit *canif* anglais, à défaut de *poignard*. Trouvé sur moi, cet instrument littéraire n’avait rien de suspect, et ne sachant jusqu’où me conduirait ma résolution romanesque, je voulais être armé” (196 my emphases). Here, the more innocent-looking yet equally harmful literary instrument functions as a weapon.

antique in particular: the talisman—evokes the idea of paleonymy, to borrow Jacques Derrida’s term, which emphasizes how new meanings continue to operate in light of older ones.<sup>73</sup>

Raphaël’s story, beginning with a paleologic investigation of the skin and transforming into a paleonymic procedure, demonstrates that the process of orientalist knowledge production sheds light on how this skin (shrinking as Raphaël’s life shortens), will (literally) re-present his life, just as the novel does.<sup>74</sup>

Although the novel focuses only briefly on the description of the magical qualities of the skin in relation to the rest of the novel, the presence of the talisman looms over the narrative with the same force it consumes and controls Raphaël’s mental energies and his life. After the protagonist leaves the exotic and fantastic space of the *cabinet*, the rest of the novel, detailing Raphaël’s entrance into high bourgeois society, continues to function as a consequence of as well as in response to his orientalist investigation of the skin.<sup>75</sup>

The creation of new text and knowledge from Raphaël’s investigation is most apparent in the final stage of his examination of the skin: his translation of it allows Raphaël to at last understand the talisman in his own terms and then to possess it.<sup>76</sup> The skin displays two foreign properties that Raphaël wishes to investigate and interpret: its inexplicable physical features and the foreign inscription on its surface (referred to in the novel as Sanskrit but provided by Balzac

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<sup>73</sup> Derrida writes in the opening page of *Dissemination* about paleonymy: “Why should an old name, for a determinate time, be retained? Why should the effects of a new meaning, concept, or object be damped by memory?” (Derrida, Jacques. Trans. Barbara Johnson. *Dissemination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 3).

<sup>74</sup> In *Unwrapping Balzac: A Reading of La Peau de Chagrin*, Samuel Weber writes: “The skin is thus the bearer of a text, but of a text so intrinsically fused with its bearer that the inscription seems to emanate directly from the creature whose skin has now itself become a text which replaces and conserves its *author*” (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979, p. 45).

<sup>75</sup> Not to mention that Balzac will continue to pit a magical and timeless Orient, represented by the unforgiving talisman, against a modern bourgeois Paris. Many examples that appear in the novel, ranging from the French translation of *Mille et une nuits* to the *Description d’Égypte*, participated in establishing the Orient as a site of distant fantasy. Moreover, the scientific quest to stretch the *peau de chagrin* at the end of the novel will mirror Raphaël examining the skin here.

<sup>76</sup> Weber argues that the talisman’s words “must be translated,” such that “the problem of its *representation*, of the text as representation, is thereby made manifest” (*Unwrapping Balzac* 46).

in Arabic). Unable to alter the physical qualities of the skin, which remain impervious to his probing, Raphaël, going from the epidermis to the episteme, so to speak, decides to translate the foreign code into his own lingua franca in order to *make* sense—implying both to understand *and* produce further meaning—of the text.

Drawing from his knowledge of oriental languages, Raphaël provides the following French translation of the text, engraved on the skin in the form of an upside-down triangle<sup>77</sup>:

Si tu me possèdes, tu possèderas tout. Mais ta vie m'appartiendra. Dieu l'a voulu ainsi. Désire, et tes désirs seront accomplis. Mais règle tes souhaits sur ta vie. Elle est là. À chaque vouloir, je décroîtrai comme tes jours. Me veux-tu ? Prends. Dieu t'exaucera. Soit !<sup>78</sup>

Raphaël's translation unlocks the following contract and seals his intertwined fate with the talisman: as each of the owner's desires is satisfied, his life is shortened. Moreover, Raphaël acquires the skin not with money but directly with his life (paid in the currency of his desires). Ultimately, Raphaël trades his life for the ability to satisfy his desires, which then devolves into material wealth (and spiritual decline), echoing the moral message underpinning Balzac's portrait of post-1830 bourgeois society. Enunciating his wish for an extravagant dinner party, featured in the second section of the novel, Raphaël signs his name to the contract of the talisman, succeeding in only postponing his suicide; as the shopkeeper confirms: "Vous avez signé le pacte, tout est dit."<sup>79</sup>

In order to further highlight how Raphaël's translation of the talisman opens up a new world for him, a detour to discuss how his translation resembles that of the Rosetta Stone will

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<sup>77</sup> As a student, Raphaël sought to master oriental languages, anatomy and physiology.

<sup>78</sup> *La Peau de Chagrin*, p. 87.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91. Raphaël's word continues to have significance throughout the novel. First, as the skin shrinks he must rearrange his life in order not to utter a single desire. The power of Raphaël's *mot* is also exemplified when he finally is able to escape from Foedora's seduction. About Foedora, Balzac describes: "Quand aucun de ses amants bannis ne méconnaissait sa puissance, Valentin, seul dans le monde, était à l'abri de ses séductions. Un pouvoir impunément bravé touche à sa ruine. Cette maxime est gravée plus profondément au cœur d'une femme qu'à la tête des rois... Un mot, dit par lui la veille à l'Opéra, était déjà devenu célèbre dans les salons de Paris. Le tranchant de cette terrible épigramme avait fait à la comtesse une blessure incurable" (248).

prove to be illuminating. Raphaël's interaction with the talisman—the simultaneous failure of physical domination and triumph in cultural achievement—recalls the historic French discovery of the Rosetta Stone during Napoleon's Expedition in Egypt, a cornerstone of the history of nineteenth-century French Orientalism, in that they both epistemologically unlock new worlds of meaning for the West through translation.<sup>80</sup> The Rosetta Stone provided the key to France's modern understanding of Egyptian hieroglyphs, while the talisman transforms Raphaël into a modern Balzacian protagonist negotiating the world of post-1830 bourgeois Paris.<sup>81</sup>

As with Raphaël's deciphering of the talisman, the Rosetta Stone presents translation as the indissoluble bridge providing the West further access to eastern cultures and civilizations. The success of "decrypting" the Rosetta Stone, the first multi-lingual text of its kind in the modern era, therefore, offered a paradigm shift for late eighteenth- to nineteenth-century French and British imperialism. Translating an entire civilization through deciphering the tablet, this scientific feat allowed the British and French to solidify their technological and cultural modernity and political superiority in contradistinction to what they deemed were declining civilizations of the ancient East.<sup>82</sup> The translation of the Rosetta Stone was essential, therefore, to

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<sup>80</sup> Discovered in 1799 by Napoleon's army and then quickly passed on to the scientists and *savants* that accompanied Napoleon on his expedition, the Rosetta Stone contained text in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, Demotic and ancient Greek. After several advancements were made in decoding the hieroglyphs, as well as British repossession of the stone, Jean-François Champollion succeeded in transliterating the entire hieroglyph text in 1822. Although ancient Greek was used to make possible the transliteration into modern tongues, and thus announcing a certain distance between French erudition and the object of study, Champollion's transliteration eventually led to celebrated widespread translation and study of ancient Egyptian civilization and literature. Marx's metaphor of the commodity fetish as "social hieroglyph," whose symbolic value remains unable to be deciphered, depends on considering the hieroglyph as the epitome of a complex foreign sign system that did not guarantee any transparency.

<sup>81</sup> I recognize that the talisman and the Rosetta Stone also possess quite a few differences: the first is monolingual and the latter trilingual; the talisman is culturally mistranslated while the Rosetta Stone is a beacon of translation. However, my comparison between the Rosetta Stone and the skin focuses on how Raphaël's scientific and orientalist *approach* to the skin mirrors that of Napoleon's team of scientists. Both processes of orientalist knowledge production also reveal the importance of linguistic study of the Orient to the foundation of modern Orientalism.

<sup>82</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*, New York: Random House, 1979, p. 121.



unlocking an uneven worldview that allowed for the West to believe that mastery of the world was possible, and mastery of the colonial world was on the verge of being attained.

While translation of the Rosetta Stone offered the British and French hitherto unobtainable access to the ancient Egyptian world, unintentional mistranslation at both the diegetic and extradiegetic level in *La Peau de chagrin* surrounds Balzac's scripting of Raphaël's translation such that there exists a fundamental cultural misunderstanding at the basis of Raphaël's interpretation. While the inscription is provided in the novel in both Arabic and French, the shopkeeper, in the narrative, refers to the original language as Sanskrit.<sup>83</sup> So while Raphaël "succeeds" in translating the surface of the skin, to the extent that the text appearing on the surface of the page of the novel remains mislabeled. Furthermore, many errors on the geographical "origins" of the skin also circumscribe Raphaël's translation of the inscription. As with the fetish status of the objects in the shop, the Orient here functions like an open reference point onto which Balzac erroneously projects cultural, geographical and linguistic labels that fit under the rubric of the "East," such that for example, the shopkeeper, in response to Raphaël's ability to read Arabic, asks him if he had traveled to Persia or Bengal.<sup>84</sup> Supposing the skin as coming from the eastern Mediterranean region, Raphaël responds: "L'industrie du Levant a des secrets qui lui sont réellement particuliers, dit-il en regardant la sentence orientale avec une sorte d'inquiétude."<sup>85</sup> Here, geographical sites as diverse as "Persia," "Bengal," and "the Levant" are conflated into one homogeneous and unspecified "Orient." Recalling the fetish structure

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<sup>83</sup> The editorial note of a recent translation explains: "The original edition of the novel contained only the 'translation' of the inscription on the skin. In 1838 Balzac added an 'original' in Arabic (not Sanskrit) provided by the acquaintance of his mistress Madame Hanska, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, whom Balzac met in Vienna in 1835. He neglected, however, to change his text; the 'oriental' character of the inscription would seem in any case to matter more than linguistic accuracy." Balzac, Honoré de. *The Wild Ass's Skin*. Trans. Helen Constantine. Ed. Patrick Coleman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 235. This editorial note emphasizes the extent to which Balzac, aiming to evoke an oriental character, did not feel the need to revise for accuracy in his referencing of foreign cultures.

<sup>84</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 87.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86.

discussed above, Balzac's loose portrayal of the talisman as representing a diverse array of oriental civilizations precisely obscures the knowledge of the talisman's origins.

His mistranslations and misunderstandings in the novel further make evident how his Orientalism simultaneously created two new worlds: a fabricated Orient as well as the fictive universe of *La Peau de chagrin*. Balzac's egregious conflation is telling of the popular Orientalism of his time, which represented the Orient as an invention of the western imaginary. Operating as a bridge between two cultures, translation of the talisman transmuted its meaning and value while guaranteeing its absolute alterity in a mainstream European cultural economy. However, as William Pietz has rightly maintained, Europe is in fact an integral part of the intercultural exchange that endowed the fetish object with its magical power.<sup>86</sup> Drawing attention to the orientalist treatment of the talisman in the act of translation into French reveals how the West equally depended on the magic of the mythic talisman, reified through an inaccurate understanding of the Orient.

Once the reader leaves the *cabinet de curiosité*, the rest of the novel tells of how Raphaël gains his unexpected fortune in more "realistic" terms.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, like the talisman, the fortunes of both Raphaël and his virtuous but poor neighbor Pauline—who only lacked wealth in order to be a suitable match for him—also arrive from the peripheries of the French empire, this time from South Asia. Pauline's father, a leader of the notable imperial grenadiers, returns from

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<sup>86</sup> The use of the "fetish" to bridge two foreign cultures in an unprecedented encounter also points to the irreducible difference between the two cultures. William Pietz underscores the transcultural history of the word fetish, a European tool used to translate an object's value between different cultures, as stemming from the Portuguese term *fetisso*—itself derived from *feitiço*, the high medieval word for "witchcraft"—developed to facilitate African-European trade on the West African coast. The talisman uncannily mirrors Pietz's genealogy of the fetish: it comes into being in the novel through an encounter between two cultures (France and the Orient), demanding translation; it unlocks a social contract that binds the owner and a commercial object. See Pietz, William, "The Problem of the Fetish," pt. 1, *Res* 9 (Spring 1985).

<sup>87</sup> Asserting that the fantastic tale was necessary to the success of *La Peau de chagrin*, Patrick Coleman argues: "were the story told in wholly realist terms, Raphaël's case would not elicit much sympathy. If he lived in the same ordinary world as the reader, the fact that Raphaël is never really engaged with other people or with life in general would prevent us from caring much about him." Coleman, Patrick. *Reparative Realism: Mourning and Modernity in the French Novel 1730-1830*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998 (131).

India, bringing back to the family both their status and wealth. Meanwhile, as the sole heir to a maternal Irish uncle who dies in Calcutta in 1828, Raphaël inherits his entire estate. Although the supernatural origins of the talisman, whose trajectory from the Orient to Paris, are never explained, Balzac historically grounds the explanation of Raphaël's surprise fortune in France's military exploits abroad.<sup>88</sup>

However, Balzac's negligent Orientalism in the rest of the novel continues to reinforce a notion of the East as a blank slate on which to project an array of cultural associations. For example, adding yet another inaccurate reference to his orientalist repertoire, Raphaël attributes the power of the talisman to "a Brahmin underneath it," to stand in for the mysterious features of the talisman.<sup>89</sup> While it is easy to dismiss such a careless and ignorant reference as reflective of the mainstream Orientalism of Balzac's time (in which the interchangeability of the different cultures associated with the *Orient* suggests that it is one continuous homogenous space), these details reflect how the Orient continues to function as an over-invested signifier that simply connotes exoticism. Though we are not meant to take this claim as empirically serious—it does not in fact matter whether a "Brahmin" is lurking somewhere controlling the power of the talisman—the representation of the Orient as a space of undifferentiated fantasy nonetheless serves to obscure the historical reality that military conquest contributed to pillaging the wealth abroad and reinforced the cultural Orientalism at home that made such works as *La Peau de chagrin* possible and successful. These references also signal the relative unimportance of the Orient to the portrayal of Raphaël's exploits around Paris. In other words, it does not appear to matter to the "realist" narrative that France have or not have a veritable imperial presence in

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<sup>88</sup> These allusions to India are an example of how, for Bell, Balzac marginalizes the French imperial periphery in the realist novel.

<sup>89</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p.140.

India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as imperial reality was not the focus of French literary realism.

Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the novel *La Peau de chagrin* in fact began as simply the short story “Le Talisman,” previously entitled “La peau de chagrin.” It is this fantastic tale that then launches the rest of the novel, full of recognizable trademark Balzacian descriptions and themes of social circumstance and mobility of Parisian types. The story that follows Raphaël’s purchasing of the skin, to some extent, then, merely supplemented the original tale featuring the eccentric curiosity shop and the magical powers of the skin. Moreover, as the novel progresses, Raphaël’s self-absorption and obsession with the invincible onager’s skin increases, along with the fervor with which the first-person narrative takes over the second-half of the story. Beyond reflecting the diversity of Balzac’s *Comédie humaine*, the chaotic world of the *cabinet* and the fantastic treatment of the skin also suggest that, despite Balzac’s focus on the domestic world, inclusion of the imperial periphery was necessary to providing a comprehensive view of French society during his time.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, this presence of the foreign world inside Paris, as outlined by the fetish mimetic economy of the *peau de chagrin*—deferring historical specificity, stable meaning as well as its owner’s desires—functioned to transform Balzac’s own mimetic techniques.<sup>91</sup>

### **The Talisman and Imagination**

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<sup>90</sup> For Lawrence Schehr, this incorporation of newly heard voices is an inevitability of the realist project, as “realism itself changes, develops, and ultimately winds up a narrative of a world far different from the one that gave birth to it” (17) such that “realism is its own reversal, its own undoing, and its own deconstruction. By pretending to move toward the universal, realism includes laws that are antithetical to the establishment of a homogenous system” (*Figures of Alterity: French Realism and Its Others*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 16).

<sup>91</sup> This understanding of Orientalism and the skin echoes Derrida’s “différance,” by which he underlines how endless deferral governs the production of textual meaning such that a stable relationship between signifier and signified is unachievable. Derrida, Jacques. Trans. Alan Bass. “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982 (278-301).

Keeping in mind that *La Peau de chagrin* was also an inaugural work of Balzac's *études philosophiques*, this novel illuminates not only Balzac's realist mimetic practice but also the ideas behind it. Importantly, the significance of the talisman extends beyond the narrative to symbolize for Balzac the unharnessed potential of imagination, unfettered by reality, to create a fictional universe. He states in the preface to *La Peau de chagrin*: "Les hommes ont-ils le pouvoir de faire venir l'univers dans leur cerveau, ou leur cerveau est-il un *talisman* avec lequel ils abolissent les lois du temps et de l'espace ?"<sup>92</sup> Echoing the idea presented above that the talisman engages with the questions of print and engraving, considering the talisman as representing the uncharted terrain of a renewed imagination with which one is able to invent a new universe, Balzac uses the skin as a metaphor to discuss the vision behind his writing.

In his new proposed literary imaginary, Balzac philosophically situates the craft of writing in a tension between astute study and the power of imagination, in which the soul reveals the world "intuitively" to the writer. Balzac explains in the preface that the author "va, en esprit, à travers les espaces, aussi facilement que les choses, jadis observées, renaissent fidèlement en lui, belles de la grâce ou terribles de l'horreur primitive qui l'avaient saisi. Il a réellement vu le monde, ou son âme le lui a révélé intuitivement."<sup>93</sup> Here, judicious observation by which the author *had really seen the world* ("a réellement vu le monde") makes up only half of Balzac's writing technique and realist craft; accurate representation of the world may also come from *within* the writer-philosopher.<sup>94</sup> Thus, Balzac's vision of "truth" is often an invention that stretches beyond the material world. This certainly seems to be the case with the magical

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<sup>92</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 387 (my emphasis).

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, p. 386.

<sup>94</sup> In addition to the necessary dual talents of "observation and expression," of "doing and conceiving," writers who are "true philosophers" offer a "psychological phenomenon," which provides "une sorte de seconde vue qui leur permet de deviner la vérité dans toutes les situations possibles... Ils inventent le vrai, par analogie, ou voient l'objet à décrire, soit que l'objet vienne à eux, soit qu'ils aillent eux-mêmes vers l'objet" (385-386).

talisman, which not only grants Raphaël modern luxuries but also reveals the “truth” about the deceptive façade of the financial freedoms he appears to have gained.

Balzac’s interest in the relationship between imagination and experience is most clearly explored in the novel through the discussion of *vouloir* (volition), *pouvoir* (power) and *savoir* (knowledge). Championing intellectual over material wealth, the shopkeeper divides man’s actions into the categories of *vouloir* and *pouvoir* (“la Peau de chagrin est le *pouvoir* et le *vouloir* réunis”) and the superior *savoir* and *voir* (seeing).<sup>95</sup> Able to be satisfied by his *savoir*—this notion of *savoir* seems to represent for Balzac the lost wisdom no longer available in the modern moment—the shopkeeper who had traveled and *seen* the world claims he never transformed his thoughts into material wants. Addressing the relationship between travel and imagination, he maintains:

Ce que les hommes appellent chagrins, amours, ambitions, revers, tristesse, sont, pour moi, des idées que je change en rêveries ; au lieu de les sentir, je les exprime, je les traduis ; au lieu de leur laisser dévorer ma vie, je les dramatise, je les développe ; je m’en amuse comme de romans que je lirais par une vision intérieure.<sup>96</sup>

Echoing the nineteenth-century view of the novelist’s role as “liberating” the reader from his desires, the shopkeeper is able to be satisfied by his ability to indulge in imagined seraglios and not yearn for the corporality of flesh in fantasy acts of intimacy. Like the novelist, the shopkeeper translates all earthly aspects of life that one may experience into an imaginary world that may exist solely in the mental realm.

Before coming into possession of the skin, Raphaël, like the shopkeeper, had also lived in the world of *savoir* as opposed to *vouloir* and *pouvoir*. Raphaël dedicated his life to study, bound to a rigorous lifestyle free of want. As his father before him, Raphaël conservatively re-organized his lifestyle to only require the bare minimum and thus to *stretch* his allowance to last as long as

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

possible.<sup>97</sup> He devoted all his time to writing *Théorie de la volonté*, “ouvrant une nouvelle route à la science humaine.”<sup>98</sup> The irony of Raphaël’s studies should not be lost on the reader: while for most of his life, Raphaël tries to philosophically master the notion of will (while living a very self-disciplined lifestyle); after acquiring the skin, he loses all control of self-mastery.

In order to give his entire life to science or *savoir* Raphaël, as a dedicated scholar, remains removed from the world, allowing the merits of his imagination to reign over experience. Learning to find solace in his work, Raphaël proclaims: “Heureusement le sommeil finissait par éteindre ces visions dévorantes; le lendemain la science m’appelait en souriant, je lui étais fidèle.”<sup>99</sup> Promptly, Raphaël’s Orientalism is evoked to describe his sacrifice, as he claims: “Amant efféminé de la paresse orientale, amoureux de mes rêves, sensuel, j’ai toujours travaillé, me refusant à goûter les jouissances de la vie parisienne.”<sup>100</sup> Orientalism allows Raphaël to indulge in his imagination and *not* in material and sensual pleasure. As a result, Raphaël learns to delight in armchair Orientalism: “désirant visiter plusieurs pays, trouvant encore du plaisir à faire, comme un enfant, ricocher des cailloux sur l’eau, je suis resté constamment assis, une plume à la main.”<sup>101</sup> Echoing Balzac’s prefatory remarks on travel, while Raphaël is unable to physically travel, his daydreams could just as effectively transport him to distant exotic locations

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<sup>97</sup> In this manner, Raphaël’s life before and after the talisman resembled each other: he needed to firmly control his desires in both.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p. 150. The autobiographical element in the novel is also quite clear: Raphaël, a young and ambitious writer getting by with little material means, dedicates his life to producing his *Théorie de la volonté*, while Balzac, authors *La Peau de chagrin*, which explores the themes of *vouloir*, *pouvoir* and *savoir*. In fact, as a student Balzac writes an essay entitled *Traité de la volonté*, which the protagonist of *Louis Lambert* (1832), more overtly autobiographical than *La Peau de chagrin*, also pens as a student. It is also important to mention that Balzac was insolvent for almost the entirety of his adult life, which may perhaps explain his interest in questions of excess, luxury, poverty and spending, reflected here in *La Peau de chagrin*.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p. 150.

as exemplified by the following belief: “De tels rêves ne sont pas sans charmes, ne ressemblent-ils pas à ces causeries du soir, en hiver, où l’on part de son foyer pour aller en Chine.”<sup>102</sup>

It is no surprise that Raphaël’s acquisition of the talisman, which will allow him to finally satisfy his desires, coincides with his resolve to leave behind these days of study: “J’avais résolu ma vie par l’étude et par la pensée ; mais elles ne m’ont même pas nourri,” the young protagonist announces to the shopkeeper.<sup>103</sup> He leaves the “perpétuel état de calme” of *savoir* and commits the remainder of his life to the tumultuous world of *vouloir* and *pouvoir*, the way of life that the rest of the novel documents.<sup>104</sup> The talisman grants Raphaël access to the world of desire and power in the bourgeois society of Restoration Paris, where his desires are never truly satisfied but only endlessly deferred until his death.

Raphaël’s fantasies materialize at the Taillefer orgy (the result of his first wish), where he experiences hitherto unobtainable decadence: “Ce sérail offrait des séductions pour tous les yeux, des voluptés pour tous les caprices... Là une gaze diaphane, ici la soie chatoyante cachaient ou révélaient des perfections mystérieuses.”<sup>105</sup> No longer possessing the *cabinet* shopkeeper’s self-restraint, Raphaël leaves the world of his imagination to experience an actual seraglio. However, this world of sumptuous silks and enticing mysteries nonetheless remains but a fleeting fantasy, as the next day: “Les mouvements du sommeil ayant brisé l’élégant édifice de leurs coiffures et fané leurs toilettes, les femmes frappées par l’éclat du jour présentèrent un hideux spectacle : leurs cheveux pendaient sans grâce, leurs physionomies avaient changé d’expression, leurs yeux si brillants étaient ternis par la lassitude.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 151. This line seems to foreshadow Balzac’s writing of *La Chine et les chinois* (1842).

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 225-226.



Balzac's description of the greatly admired Foedora—the obsessive pursuit of whom leads him to his suicidal state at the beginning of the novel—further emphasizes how she, like the women of the seraglio, possessing only superficial beauty, represents the world of *vouloir* and *pouvoir*. Lacking virtuous Pauline's beautiful soul,<sup>107</sup> and “malgré sa finesse, Foedora n'avait pas effacé tout vestige de sa plébienne origine : son oubli d'elle-même était fausseté ; ses manières, au lieu d'être innées, avaient été laborieusement conquises ; enfin sa politesse sentait la servitude.”<sup>108</sup> Perhaps it is Foedora's very ability to put on sensual airs to attract him that Raphaël finds so compelling. Resembling an odalisque in her gothic boudoir, Foedora inspires the following description:

Vêtue d'une robe de cachemire bleu, la comtesse était étendue sur un divan, les pieds sur un coussin. Un béret oriental, coiffure que les peintres attribuent aux premiers Hébreux, avait ajouté je ne sais quel piquant attrait d'étrangeté à ses séductions. Sa figure était empreinte d'un charme fugitif, qui semblait prouver que nous sommes à chaque instant des êtres nouveaux, uniques, sans aucune similitude avec le *nous* de l'avenir et le *nous* du passé. Je ne l'avais jamais vue aussi éclatante.<sup>109</sup>

Here, it is precisely Foedora's masquerade in such an exotic scene that arouses Raphaël. His lust for her is deeply fueled by his imagination as exemplified in this following confession: “Je l'admirais, lui prêtant des charmes auxquels elle mentait. En ce moment, elle était à moi, à moi seul. Je possédais cette ravissante créature, comme il était permis de la posséder, intuitivement ; je l'enveloppai dans mon désir, la tins, la serrai, mon imagination l'épousa.”<sup>110</sup> Not only does Raphaël project onto Foedora charms that she did not in fact possess, he employs imagination and intuition—two key elements Balzac named for a successful novel—to consummate his attraction for her. Raphaël's desire here reveals that even at the height of utilizing his *pouvoir* to

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<sup>107</sup> Even when infatuated with Foedora, Raphaël claims “son âme était aride” (190). Upon reuniting with Pauline, after both become rich, Raphaël sees Pauline as “Foedora douée d'une belle âme” (251).

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

materialize his desires, the imagination, on which he depended during his days of study, remains central to maintaining his life's fantasy-scape.

Ultimately, Raphaël's desire for Foedora, like his possession of the talisman, is untenable. He confesses to Pauline: "Foedora me tue, je veux mourir."<sup>111</sup> As Raphaël nears the end of his life, experiencing the unforgiving cruelty of both the shrinking skin and society, he comes to the conclusion:

Ce petit monde obéissait, sans le savoir peut-être, à la grande loi qui régit la haute société, dont la morale implacable se développa tout entière aux yeux de Raphaël. Un regard rétrograde lui en montra le type complet en Foedora. Il ne devait pas rencontrer plus de sympathie pour ses maux chez celle-ci, que, pour ses misères de cœur, chez celle-là. Le beau monde bannit de son sein les malheureux, comme un homme de santé vigoureuse expulse de son corps un principe morbifique. Le monde abhorre les douleurs et les infortunes, il les redoute à l'égal des contagions, il n'hésite jamais entre elles et les vices : le vice est un luxe.<sup>112</sup>

Foedora represents the unjust facades of high society to which Raphaël is blind until they all fail him; his material wealth proves completely powerless here. Raphaël's lesson no doubt reflects Balzac's own disregard for the newly achieved "freedoms" that resulted from the July Monarchy. Announcing in the epilogue that Foedora "est partout, si vous voulez, la Société," Balzac makes clear that Foedora—like both the talisman and modern society—would never be able to satisfy Raphaël.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, in the end, this is the knowledge that Raphaël gains with the talisman's *pouvoir*. Thus, while he feared to be duped by the spectacle of the fantastic *cabinet de curiosité*, it is rather the alluring airs of what a modern Paris promises to offer him that ultimately deceive Raphaël.

### **The Talisman and the Myth of Science**

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<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 329.

Balzac's depiction, in the final part of the novel, of the impotence of science to steer Raphaël away from his death wish ultimately betrays the author's lingering interest in the irrational and supernatural world, represented by the magical skin. In *La Peau de chagrin*, rational science falls short of the more inaccessible form of *savoir*, as represented by the talisman. It would appear that Balzac, who penned *La Peau de chagrin* while in a state of disillusion, extended his disappointment to medicine and science as well: the first is unable to physically cure Raphaël's body and the second to stretch the skin. Although Balzac was known to be quite interested in popular medical studies, including Lavater's theory of physiognomy, he devalued the world of science in his mocking portrayal of its ineffectiveness at the novel's conclusion.

Moreover, even though after obtaining the talisman Raphaël "[a] dit adieu pour toujours à la Science," desperate to find a way to extend his life, Raphaël returns to science, as a last resort, at the end of the novel in order to once again use reason to try to change the physical features of the talisman.<sup>114</sup> This time he does so in an attempt to save his life. Raphaël quips:

dans un siècle de lumières où nous avons appris que les diamants sont les cristaux du carbone, à une époque où tout s'explique, où la police traduirait un nouveau Messie devant les tribunaux et soumettrait ses miracles à l'Académie des sciences, dans un temps où nous ne croyons plus qu'aux paraphes des notaires, je croirais, moi ! à une espèce de *Mané, Thekel, Pharès*. Non, de par Dieu ! je ne penserai pas que l'Être Suprême puisse trouver du plaisir à tourmenter une honnête créature. Allons voir les savants.<sup>115</sup>

While Balzac describes the world of modern science as one that is devoid of mystery, Raphaël again naively hopes that recent scientific discovery may help him bend the mystical yet omnipotent power of the talisman to his will. Recalling Raphaël's initial encounter with the skin, this scene exposes how different branches of the discipline, including etymology, zoology and

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<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, p. 262. This description of modern France echoes that which opens the novel and cited above: "au dix-neuvième siècle, temps et lieux où la magie devait être impossible." Both accounts suggest that, despite the narrator's insistence, progress had not rid France of magic and superstition.

chemistry, futilely attempt to stretch the *peau de chagrin*. As in his first endeavor to decipher the talisman, Raphaël again tries to understand the skin linguistically and then to manipulate it physically. Through a lengthy foray of the eastern origins of the onager, the zoologist explains the etymological origins of the word *chagrin* (derived from the Turkish word *chagri*) and claims the animal to be the “zoological king of the Orient” and nothing like the western donkey. However, yet again, this knowledge will have little to no effect on the scholar’s ability to physically manipulate the skin.

Instead of progressing and renewing the world with cutting edge discoveries of the material and objective world, the scientists Raphaël encounters appear only to be reinforcing the status quo. Following the zoologist, a mechanics professor’s hydraulic press shatters while trying to increase the skin’s surface area. Both he and a chemist, who tries to dissolve the skin, fail to physically alter the skin in any way. Emphasizing the obsolete qualities of scientific discovery, at one point, Raphaël remarks to the chemist that “Faute de pouvoir inventer des choses...il paraît que vous en êtes réduits à inventer des noms.”<sup>116</sup> The rigor of science is portrayed as an empty and ultimately useless system of knowledge only appearing to be offering new modes of interaction with the physical world, much like how the discourse of Orientalism functioned in the nineteenth century.

In the same way in which Balzac pitted the unstoppable power of the talisman with the impotent power of scientific study to change the skin, he appears to turn the new scientific advancements of the day on their head. Moreover, as revealed in the expression “*bête comme un fait*,” objective study and science do not promise what the Enlightenment had sought out—to free man of the chains of doxa—but rather function like a system of myth. Balzac observes about the scientists: “Tous deux étaient dans leur rôle. Pour un mécanicien, l’univers est une machine

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<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p. 277.

qui veut un ouvrier ; pour la chimie, cette œuvre d'un démon qui va décomposant tout, le monde est un gaz doué de mouvement.”<sup>117</sup> The scientists' lack of passion and critical thought mirror the state in which Balzac found contemporary literature, particularly the “Walterscotted” writings from which he wished to stray. The magic *peau de chagrin*, while portrayed as an indomitable force with which to be reckoned, on the other hand, remains the only element in the novel that maintains a level of mysticism and mystery (which Balzac sought for his novel, as well), which scientific advancement had unsuccessfully tried to eliminate.

It has been my aim, therefore, to show that the chronicling of a young man's entrance into bourgeois society, a trademark theme we have come to associate with the nineteenth-century European realist novel—in Balzac's first successful work, no less—is instigated by the magical talisman hailing from a mystified Orient. The *cabinet de curiosité* scene demonstrates how the resignified knick-knacks within the walls of the shop extend beyond their function as fetish objects to exert control over the descriptive narrative. Moreover, Raphaël's attempt to have scientific mastery over the *peau de chagrin* fails on all fronts; this failure by extension is used to critique modern-day advancements in science as well as the newfound possibilities of social mobility.

From mis-translation to mis-representation, Balzac's orientalist treatment of the *peau de chagrin* is evident throughout the novel. Used to symbolize insatiable and ultimately destructive desire, the skin conforms to conventional French stereotypes regarding the Orient during Balzac's time. Yet Balzac's employment of Orientalism in the novel is not completely clear. Indeed, the *peau* represents an older and more mystical symbolic economy, left behind by the contemporary moment for which Balzac, who remained a monarchist his entire life, considered with disdain. However, neither does he offer the *peau* as an example of a viable alternative

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<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, p. 279.

model of life. What the presence of the skin does help Balzac achieve is his wish to present a new style of writing, while suggesting that Orientalism functioned like the paleonymy of the magic skin: caught between the old and the new, the novel's Orientalism casts doubt on the binary opposition distinguishing the values associated with the modern from the mythical and, by extension, realism from Orientalism.

As a means of concluding, I would like to turn my attention to the opening epigraph of *La Peau de chagrin*: a squiggle line that Balzac borrows from Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.<sup>118</sup> In this novel, the line refers to a hand gesture traced in the air to illustrate the freedom of remaining unmarried, whereas Balzac uses this figure to show "la vie avec ses ondulations bizarres, avec sa course vagabonde et son allure *serpentine*," because life, according to Balzac "est un drame qui serpente, ondule, tournoie, et au courant duquel il faut s'abandonner, comme le dit la très spirituelle épigraphe."<sup>119</sup> Thus, Balzac uses the skin to expose the misadventures and *ondulations* that marked modern life in Paris, which will become the focus of most future works in his *Comédie humaine*.

Through a series of misunderstandings, this squiggle line came to be interpreted as representing the shape of a snake, which in turn led to the perception that the *peau de chagrin* was made from snakeskin (and not from an onager). This chain of misinterpretations of the epigraph foreshadows the series of mistranslations that make up the orientalist assertions scattered throughout the novel. While Balzac employs this squiggle line in the epigraph to point up the unpredictability of life as the central focus of *La Peau de chagrin*, the subsequent misconceptions of this squiggle line at the same time suggest the structural importance of (orientalist) misinterpretation to Balzac's creative process in the literary undertaking of this

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<sup>118</sup> Balzac took cues from his English predecessor to balance his aesthetic and moral concerns in his narrative.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

novel. This undulating figure will reappear again in the following chapter on Flaubert's travel writings and *Madame Bovary*, showing how the author's journey in the Near East set a precedent for the way in which he came to understand experience and representation in his later prose works, as well.

## CHAPTER 2

### Flaubert's Exotic Detail: Experience, Realism, and *La Bêtise*

#### ABSTRACT:

This chapter reconsiders Flaubert's realism by comparing the writer's travel notes and correspondence and his first mature novel *Madame Bovary*. I show that the exotic detail used in Flaubert's travel writing to express his ennui while traveling in Egypt and the Middle East offers a privileged glimpse into Flaubert's skeptical view concerning the possibility of authentic experience. By revealing how the exotic detail is inter-textually refigured from his travel notes in *Madame Bovary*, this chapter re-casts the literary lineage of the work's *l'effet de réel* to include Flaubert's exoticism. Contending that realism is a kind of Orientalism (as opposed to Orientalism being a kind of realism), this chapter reveals how Flaubert resists an empirical and positivist mode of engaging with the world first in his travel notes and then in his novel.

Learning of Balzac's death in Constantinople, Flaubert pays homage to Balzac's perspicacious ability to represent his generation. In November 1850, Flaubert writes: "Pourquoi la mort de Balzac m'a-t-elle *vivement affecté* ? Quand meurt un homme que l'on admire on est toujours triste.—On espérait le connaître plus tard et s'en faire aimer. Oui, c'était un homme fort et qui avait crânement compris son temps."<sup>120</sup> In certain ways, Flaubert succeeded Balzac in taking on the project of scrupulously painting the portrait of his generation, but with a radically different writing style.<sup>121</sup> The comparison between Balzac's and Flaubert's mimetic techniques has long preoccupied scholars of nineteenth-century literature, who have mainly posited that Flaubert departed from Balzac's penchant for creating social types and coherent meaning within a social world.<sup>122</sup> While Balzac dedicated most of his fictional projects to crafting the world of

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<sup>120</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance I*. Paris: Gallimard, 1973, p. 710.

<sup>121</sup> While it is true that Balzac does not figure as one of Flaubert's key literary influences, Balzac is referenced here and there (such as in the quote above). Another example includes Bouilhet's reaction to Flaubert's reading of *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, which was too romantic for Bouilhet's taste: "Prends un sujet terre à terre, un de ces incidents dont la vie bourgeoise est pleine, quelque chose comme *La Cousine Bette*, comme *Le Cousin Pons*, de Balzac" (Taken from "Notes et variantes" in *Correspondance I*, p. 1071).

<sup>122</sup> Most notably, see Lukàcs, Georg, *Studies in European Realism* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972); Auerbach, Erich. "In the Hôtel de la Mole," *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Culler, Jonathan, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).



the *Comédie humaine*, Flaubert preferred the rupturing effect of the fragmented and “demoralizing” detail to illustrate with critical distance his protagonists’ struggles with mediocrity and *la bêtise*.<sup>123</sup>

Flaubert, of course, never identified his writing with realism, having stated “on me croit épris du réel, tandis que je l’exècre ; car c’est en haine du réalisme que j’ai entrepris ce roman,” this “roman” being *Madame Bovary* (1856).<sup>124</sup> A century later, in his influential “L’effet de réel,” (1967), echoing Flaubert’s critical view of realism, Barthes further debunks the realism of nineteenth-century realists.<sup>125</sup> Drawing from *Madame Bovary* (among other works), Barthes demonstrates how realism’s so-called referential status and *vraisemblance* are in fact semiologically produced illusions. Barthes argues that the uselessness of the “insignificant” or “superfluous” detail, which appears to refer to or denote reality, actually *connotes* this denotation. Thus, the *détail inutile*, seeming to be uncoded and free of symbolic baggage, produces the effect of referencing the real when in fact it is participating in a highly complex semiotic organization of signs and codes.<sup>126</sup>

Barthes’s notion of the *illusion référentielle* offers a particularly apt choice of words for examining the themes of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, a novel centered around its eponymous protagonist’s misguided illusions and investments in realities constructed by romantic ideals. In

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<sup>123</sup> In *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*, Culler uses the term “demoralizing” in order to describe the ways in which Flaubert undermines reader expectations by resisting narrative unification in his novels.

<sup>124</sup> This is taken from a letter dated 30 Oct. 1856 following the publication of the first part of the novel on October 1<sup>st</sup> in *Revue de Paris*. Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance II* Paris: Gallimard, 1980, pp. 643-4.

<sup>125</sup> Barthes, Roland, “The Reality Effect,” *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (New York, Routledge, 1995).

<sup>126</sup> Modern and even postmodern readings of Flaubert’s realist prose continue to focus on his employment of the excess or superfluous detail. See Jonathan Culler, *The Uses of Uncertainty*; Prendergast, Christopher, “Flaubert: The Stupidity of Mimesis,” *The Order of Mimesis* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 180-211); Rousset, Jean, “Madame Bovary ou le livre sur rien” in *Forme et signification* (Paris: José Corti, 1962, pp. 109-133); Nathalie Sarraute’s *Flaubert le précurseur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986); Naomi Schor’s “For a Restricted Thematics: Writing, Speech, and Difference in *Madame Bovary*,” in *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory, and French Realism Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp 3-28); Sherrington, R.J. *Three Novels by Flaubert: A Study of Techniques* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970).

short, Emma Bovary's flaw is that she is trapped in a referential illusion herself: she believes that the world of romantic fantasy with which she surrounds herself is real, and more devastatingly, that it should be real *for her*. The following study offers a focused analysis of Flaubert's use of the *détail inutile* in the construction of Emma's fantasies in *Madame Bovary*; this analysis is situated alongside an examination of Flaubert's travel correspondence and notes from his trip to North Africa and the Middle East (1849-1851). Investigating the *détail inutile* that Barthes has already exposed as semiologically produced rather than referential of the signified world, in light of Flaubert's use of exotic detail to describe his experiences in the Orient—seen as a fecund “*puits d'images*”—this chapter puts into dialogue the realist detail, meant to produce *vraisemblance*, with the *invraisemblance* of the exotic detail, whose very job is to signify the foreign, or *étrange*.<sup>127</sup>

In order to explore the intertextual echoes between the exotic detail of Flaubert's travel notes and letters and the so-called “realist detail” of *Madame Bovary*, first, I will present how Flaubert distanced himself from official discourses of Orientalism for much the same reasons he showed disdain for realism. This is followed by a discussion of Flaubert's conscious dissociation from Romanticism while traveling in the Orient, where he was mostly preoccupied with his own ennui. Next, drawing from Freud's notion of the uncanny to further understand Flaubert's travels to the East, I suggest that the Orient becomes an uncanny site of familiarity, filled with a palimpsest of romantic tropes of travel with which Flaubert was familiar. This uncanny experience results in the proliferation of the “excess” detail, which Flaubert uses to describe courtesan Kuchuk Hanem. This excess detail will later reappear in the form of *la bêtise*—one of Flaubert's literary trademarks which has come to be understood as precisely that which resists interpretation and understanding—in his first mature novel *Madame Bovary*.

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<sup>127</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Voyage en Égypte*, ed. Pierre-Marc de Biasi. Paris: Grasset, 1991, p. 14.

## Realism and Orientalism: Some Theoretical Parallels

In his discussion of Orientalism, Edward Said highlights epistemological affinities between nineteenth-century British and French Orientalism and realism, positing that

Philosophically, then, the kind of language, thought and vision that I have been calling Orientalism very generally is a form of *radical realism*; anyone employing Orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities, and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or simply to be, reality.<sup>128</sup> Operating under enlightenment convictions and empirical scientific processes that study and measure phenomena to know the world, the “radical realism” of orientalist scholarship puts forth and verifies its own truth claims about the Orient. To this end, Orientalism is a kind of performative speech act: European scholarship defines and names an object to bring it into existence. By tethering the logic of Orientalism to realism’s goal of verisimilitude, Said underlines how by “designating,” “naming” and “pointing to” the Orient, orientalist discourse presents itself as providing an objective imitation of a signified Orient. Thus, following the rules of *vraisemblance*, both orientalist discourse and realism bring a fictitious world into existence; by claiming to copy the world, the radical realism of Orientalism deemed its own representations to stand in for reality.

According to Said, Flaubert also “pointed to” and “fixed” stereotypical notions about the Orient. Along with his travel notes, *Salammô* (for which Flaubert made a special trip to Tunis in 1858) largely contributed to a growing nineteenth-century French repertoire of alienating and offensive orientalist beliefs about the Orient as a site of sexual decadence.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, Said revisits Flaubert’s methods, in particular, of “copying” the Orient and offers a more nuanced reading of Flaubert’s oeuvre:

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<sup>128</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979, p. 72 (my emphasis).

<sup>129</sup> Said shows that many of the stereotypes he wrote about in his travel notes reappear in fictional form in *Salammô* (1862).

And more than most novelists Flaubert was acquainted with organized learning, its products, and its results: these products are clearly evident in the misfortunes of Bouvard and Pécuchet, but they would have been as comically apparent in fields like Orientalism, whose textual attitudes belonged to the world of *idées reçues*. Therefore one could either construct the world with verve and style, or one could *copy* it tirelessly according to impersonal academic rules of procedure.<sup>130</sup>

Here, Said offers another point of comparison: now between organized Orientalism and Flaubert's mocking interpretation of the *idées reçues* of his time. Said acknowledges Flaubert's relentless genius for critiquing conventional habits, by condemning them as acts of mindless "copying." For Said, not all copying was rote activity, as "one could either construct the world with verve and style, or one could copy it tirelessly according to impersonal academic rules of procedure." Citing Flaubert's brilliant yet confounding and unfinished *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Said clearly considered Flaubert as part of the first group.

In this novel, recounting the absurdly disappointing adventures of copy-clerks Bouvard and Pécuchet, Flaubert pushes the boundaries of the very understanding of concrete knowledge to meaninglessness by critically showing such knowledge acquisition to be a string of foolish episodes of repetitive routine. As with *Emma Bovary*, *la bêtise* of Bouvard and Pécuchet largely ensues from conflating the fields of arts and sciences they took upon themselves to pursue with reality itself. Thus, while *Bouvard et Pécuchet* offers a comic meditation on the world as composed of institutions of copying, Said reminds us that the field of Orientalism functioned as such an *idée reçue*: a product of organized learning with which Flaubert, increasingly critical of the *idées reçues* of his time, was very acquainted. Thus, Flaubert did not solely replicate the orientalist stereotypes of his time: his scathing portrayal of institutions of knowledge involved a critical response to Orientalism as well.

A *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, composed of Bouvard and Pécuchet's copied ideas, was intended to accompany *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Though this satirical dictionary was published

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<sup>130</sup> *Orientalism*, p. 189 (my emphasis).

posthumously, Flaubert began thinking about the project quite early on. In fact, the earliest written record of his idea for creating such a *dictionnaire* came in a letter written from Damascus to Louis Bouilhet. Following a brief discussion of his ongoing recovery from his failed reading of *Saint Antoine*, Flaubert writes:

Tu fais bien de songer au *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues*. Ce livre *complètement* fait et précédé d'une bonne préface où l'on indiquerait comme quoi l'ouvrage a été fait dans le but de rattacher le public à la tradition, à l'ordre, à la convention générale, et arrangée de telle manière que le lecteur ne sache pas si on se fout de lui, oui ou non, ce serait peut-être une œuvre étrange, et capable de réussir, car elle serait toute d'actualité.<sup>131</sup>

Here we learn that while traveling in the Orient, Flaubert already started plotting this writing project whose whole purpose was to satirize accepted tradition and present-day conventions.

This mock dictionary would simultaneously present itself as genuine, by pretending to subscribe to the very values under scrutiny. Flaubert was indeed setting himself up to be the authorial trickster that we recognize today, leaving nothing outside the purview of his critical web, including—and perhaps most importantly—the reader. Moreover, as is well known, Flaubert did not produce a travel narrative from his trip to the Orient, but only offered fragmented travel notes that were never meant to be published.<sup>132</sup> Considering that perhaps Flaubert began planning the destabilizing *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues* instead of composing a travelogue, it becomes increasingly evident that while on his trip Flaubert questioned the possibility of meaningful reproduction of knowledge more so than actually subscribing belief in it.

As Said shows above, Flaubert's rejection of Orientalism as an *idée reçue* of rote knowledge and his self-reflexive ethos of counter-establishment highlight the discursive limitations (as opposed to strength) of both Orientalism and realism in their attempts to provide

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<sup>131</sup> *Correspondance I*, pp. 678-9.

<sup>132</sup> In *Belated Travelers*, Ali Behdad discusses how the “orderlessness and fracturedness” of Flaubert's travel notes reflect his discovery of the loss of the Other as an alternative. Behdad writes: “it is precisely this articulation of the loss as a discourse of discontentment that differentiates the belated orientalist's discourse from the official (dominant) modes of orientalist representation” (Behdad, Ali. *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 55.).

an accurate mimetic imitation of reality.<sup>133</sup> Hence, we have arrived at a crossroads of ideas that suggests that during his trip to the Orient, Flaubert responds to and negotiates his relationship to orthodox Orientalism—precisely as an institution constituted of mindless copying.<sup>134</sup> As I will continue to demonstrate below, discovering that Orientalism (another discursive site dependent on referential illusion) offered in fact a false reality, Flaubert witnessed how pre-determined orientalist discourses coincided (or did not coincide) with the Orient. Questioning then the very status of the discursive Orientalism of his time—a questioning that undergirds his reconsideration of the relationship between imagination, reality and representation—Flaubert reconsiders the real of the Orient as always already mediated, and therefore direct access to the “real” Orient as impossible. The following section will demonstrate that Flaubert’s correspondence and travel notes reveal a position toward Orientalism that instead inclines toward the *mise-en-scène* of *la bêtise*—the stupidity from which man in his efforts to *conclure* with knowledge cannot escape.

### **Flaubert, Romanticism and *La Bêtise* of Travel**

Displaying the foolishness of Emma Bovary’s quixotic dreams and mindless dependence on romantic rhetoric, *Madame Bovary* chronicles Flaubert’s own establishment of critical distance from a romantic vision of the world. As I suggested above, this shift happens in large part during his trip to the Orient. While traveling in the Orient, Flaubert first began to question the possibility of “recreating the real” through undergoing *la bêtise* of bourgeois boredom and

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<sup>133</sup> For Richard Terdiman, the trip to the East functioned for Flaubert as a “counter-experience,” which lead to texts that would mobilize a counter-discourse.” (Terdiman, Richard. *Discourse/Counter Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*. Ithaca: Cornell, University Press, 1985, p. 232).

<sup>134</sup> Lisa Lowe advances that in later novel *L’Éducation sentimentale*, Flaubert parodied his earlier ideological positions by showcasing ironic distance from the Orientalism from his travel writing and *Salammô*. Lowe’s inter-textual reading shows that Flaubert returns to and works through his Orientalism, as ideological trope, in his fictional projects. However, the present study highlights the ironic parodying of travel that is already taking place for Flaubert while in the Orient, before the novels of his late career. Lowe, Lisa. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

the impossibility of authentic experience.<sup>135</sup> To begin this discussion, this section will show, through presenting the prominence of the notions of *rien* and *la bêtise* as responses to his travels, how, during his trip to the Orient, Flaubert resisted the romantic vision of his generation.

It is no exaggeration to claim that Flaubert's first trip to the Orient marks a turning point in his career—he leaves his Romanticism behind in the East. Before departing for the Orient in the fall of 1849, Flaubert recites his latest obsession, the first version of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* to best friends Bouilhet and Maxime Du Camp, Flaubert's soon-to-be travel companion. Deploring Flaubert's hopeless Romanticism, his two friends tell him that he must at all costs abandon such lyricism in his writing.<sup>136</sup> It is at this reading that Bouilhet plants the "Bovary" seed in Flaubert and suggests to him to write on the bourgeois *fait divers* about the story of Delaunay whose young wife commits suicide after an unfortunate love affair. Following Bouilhet's advice, while in the Orient, Flaubert sets out to explore the possibility of writing on as earthly a topic as bourgeois adultery.

Du Camp, Flaubert's travel companion during the trip, shows that this is exactly what Flaubert begins to do, revealing how Flaubert discovered *Madame Bovary* in the Orient. Du Camp writes:

Devant les paysages africains il rêvait à des paysages normands. Aux confins de la Nubie inférieure, sur le sommet de Djebel-Aboucir, qui domine la seconde cataracte, pendant que nous regardions le Nil se battre contre les épis de rochers en granit noir, il [Flaubert] jeta un cri: "J'ai trouvé! *Eurêka! Eurêka!* je l'appellerai Emma Bovary."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Prendergast states it best when he writes: "La bêtise consists in the desire to arrest the infinite play of human constructions of reality, to fill the void with a plenitude of immediately available sense" (Prendergast, Christopher, "Flaubert: the Stupidity of Mimesis," *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>136</sup> According to Du Camp's *Souvenirs littéraires* Bouilhet spoke on behalf of everyone and told Flaubert: "Nous pensons qu'il faut jeter cela au feu et n'en jamais reparler" (Du Camp, Maxime. *Souvenirs littéraires*. Paris: Aubier, 1994, pp. 405-442).

<sup>137</sup> Du Camp, Maxime. *Souvenirs littéraires*. Paris: Aubier, 1994, p. 314. There remains some controversy regarding the accuracy of Du Camp's "souvenir." It has also been reported that the Delanunay-Delamare case happened in December 1849, after Flaubert and Du Camp had already left for their trip. Thus, Bouilhet perhaps only told Flaubert about this *fait divers* upon his return. Taken from "Notes et variantes" in *Correspondance I*, p. 1072.

Projecting a fictional French reality onto the foreign *paysage africain*, Flaubert began creating Emma Bovary's world, while dreaming of her in the Orient.<sup>138</sup> In contradistinction to Du Camp's own photographic and scientifically trained eye, Flaubert looks (or rather, does not look) out at the Nile to imagine his new French protagonist. In this passage, Du Camp emphasizes that Flaubert did not pay attention to his new surroundings, underscoring how Flaubert was completely disconnected from the outside world—more preoccupied with thinking about himself than exploring the external world. For Du Camp, Flaubert's self-absorption was so unbearable that Du Camp alleged that his travel companion: “ne regardait rien et se souvenait de tout,” emphasizing that Flaubert did not pay attention to his surroundings (and yet seemed to manage to take in everything).<sup>139</sup> The idea that Flaubert “saw nothing” and “remembered everything” raises the question of what constituted Flaubert's “reality” during his trip, what it was that his memory preserved, and whether the two were in fact related. If Flaubert's memory was not based on firsthand observation, then what was it that Flaubert recalled? Traces of his recollection, I suggest, reappear in *Madame Bovary*.

Following his trip, Flaubert continued to distance himself from his lingering Romanticism, but perhaps never fully successfully. Upon his return, after spending June to September 1851 recopying his notes, Flaubert dedicates himself to writing what becomes his first published mature work: *Madame Bovary* replaces the project of *La Tentation de saint Antoine*.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> The idea that Flaubert dreamed of “des paysages normands” is further evidenced in the following nostalgic description for a growingly distant Normandy: “Là-bas sur un fleuve moins antique j'ai quelque part une maison blanche dont les volets sont fermés, maintenant que je n'y suis pas. Les peupliers sans feuilles frémissent dans le brouillard froid—et les morceaux de glace que charrie la rivière viennent heurter aux rives durcies” (Flaubert, *Voyage en Égypte*, p. 138).

<sup>139</sup> Du Camp, Maxime. *Souvenirs littéraires*. Paris: Aubier, 1994, p. 315. Interestingly, Flaubert made the exact opposite charge of Du Camp's travel writing of the Orient; for Flaubert Du Camp saw everything and remembered nothing (of importance).

<sup>140</sup> However, even while on his trip, even while Flaubert thinks about his reading of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, he continues to take interest in researching antiquity, such as seeking out a Coptic Christian bishop while in Cairo, where he remarks “Toute ma vieille érudition de *Saint Antoine* est remontée à flot” (*Correspondance I*, p. 559).



However, Flaubert continues to fight his predilection for reveling in the romantic themes that drew him to the writing of the eastern tale. Flaubert compares his experience drafting *Madame Bovary* with that of *La Tentation* in the following manner:

Ce qui m'est naturel à moi, c'est le non-naturel pour les autres, l'extraordinaire, le fantastique, la hurlade métaphysique, mythologique. *Saint Antoine* ne m'a pas demandé le quart de la tension d'esprit que la *Bovary* me cause. C'était un déversoir ; je n'ai eu que plaisir à écrire, et les dix-huit mois que j'ai passés à en écrire les 500 pages ont été les plus profondément voluptueux de toute ma vie.<sup>141</sup>

This quote shows the extent to which the fantastic world of the oriental tale lingered in Flaubert's mind while he went against his "nature" to write about provincial French bourgeois mores.

Revealing the contrived manner of entering the world of *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert found difficult leaving behind the world of Romanticism, which inspired in him a wealth of pleasure.

As Flaubert explains, the "realism" of the *Bovary*'s story did not suit him like the fantastic realm of *Saint Antoine*.<sup>142</sup> Writing *La Tentation* was a "déversoir," an unadulterated vehicle for his passion, while *Madame Bovary* needed to be something else, not least of which was the purging of these feelings.

In a letter to Louise Colet, dating from January 1852, Flaubert begins to formulate how this new writing style will have to take shape. He writes from Croisset:

Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est *un livre sur rien*, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut.<sup>143</sup>

Espousing such a *l'art pour l'art* sentiment and announcing a certain detachment from creating a referential form of representation, Flaubert begins to value style above content, which *Madame*

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Thus, while he had to give up on writing *Saint Antoine* for the time being, he remained mentally invested in the project.

<sup>141</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance II*, p. 297.

<sup>142</sup> See Foucault's "La Bibliothèque fantastique" (1967) ["The Fantasia of the Library," ed. Donald F. Bouchard, in *Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980)] for his analysis of how *La Tentation* inspires the idea of the fantastic library, a metaphor for a new experience of fantasy in the nineteenth century.

<sup>143</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance II*, p. 31 (my emphasis)

*Bovary* will showcase. As is well known, Flaubert painstakingly drafted his story about the Bovarys in fits and starts, while detesting the process: “Que ma *Bovary* m’embête ! Je commence à m’y débrouiller pourtant un peu. Je n’ai jamais de ma vie rien écrit de plus difficile que ce que je fais maintenant, du dialogue trivial.”<sup>144</sup> Feeling immense aversion for the bourgeois subject matter of his novel, Flaubert concerned himself instead with perfecting *le beau style*, writing and rewriting sentences until they met his approval. Furthermore, that his novel began to “embêter” its author speaks to the extent to which writing of the *bêtise* of his bourgeois characters saturated the writing of *Madame Bovary*, so much so that it seeped into the author’s very experience of writing.

It is important to note that Flaubert showed a similar interest for the concept of *rien* as well as *la bêtise* as they related to the act of writing while traveling through Egypt and the Middle East. While Du Camp dutifully photographed sites of archeological merit, Flaubert was much more interested in resisting such productivity and found his mission incompatible with travel.<sup>145</sup> In a letter sent from Cairo, Flaubert reveals that he had no plans or intentions for his future writing career (especially with his latest work having been poorly received by his friends). He writes: “Lorsque je pense cependant à mon avenir (cela m’arrive rarement, car je ne pense à *rien du tout*, contrairement aux grandes pensées que l’on doit avoir devant les ruines).”<sup>146</sup> Flaubert admits that contrary to the expectations of what he should experience while in the Orient, the East did not inspire in him great thoughts; instead he replaces the “grandes pensées”

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<sup>144</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance II*, p. 159

<sup>145</sup> Flaubert writes to Louis Bouilhet: “Pour remplir à mon mandat exactement, il eût fallu renoncer à mon voyage. C’eût été trop sot. Je fais parfois des bêtises, mais pas de si pommées. Me vois-tu dans chaque pays m’informant des récoltes, du produit, de la consommation, combien, chie-t-on d’huile, combien goinfre-t-on de pommes de terre ? Et dans chaque port : combien de navires ? quel tonnage ? combien en partance ? combien en arrivée ? dito, report d’autre part, etc. merde ! Ah non, franchement, je te le demande, était-ce possible ?” (Correspondance I, p. 628). Interestingly, Flaubert employs a similar tone in *Madame Bovary* as he does in this letter.

<sup>146</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance I*, p. 561 (my emphasis).

with thinking about “*rien du tout*.”<sup>147</sup> By the same token, he tells Jules Cloquet “si nous publions quelque chose, *ce serait au retour*, mais d’ici là que *rien* ne transpire... mon intention bien arrêtée étant de ne *rien publier* d’ici à longtemps encore,”<sup>148</sup> after having warned his mother: “J’espère bien que vous n’avez pas le toupet d’espérer de moi une relation de voyage.”<sup>149</sup> The notion of *rien* functions for Flaubert as a way to distance himself from the “grandes pensées” of his predecessors, which greatly encapsulated his frame of mind while traveling in the Orient.

Moreover, sluggishly traveling through the Orient, Flaubert discovers in the East a European legacy of stupidity. He writes:

Je voudrais bien imaginer quelque chose, mais (je suis comme Baudin) je ne sais quoi. Il me semble que je deviens *bête* comme un pot. Nous lisons dans les temples les noms des voyageurs ; cela nous paraît bien grêle et bien vain. –Nous n’avons mis les nôtres nulle part. –Il y en a qui ont dû demander trois jours à être gravés, tant c’est profondément entaillé dans la pierre. Quelques-uns se retrouvent partout avec une constance de *bêtise* sublime.<sup>150</sup>

Here, we return again to a scathing critique of writing and “knowledge production” in general in the Orient. Flaubert talks about coming across temples carrying inscriptions of travelers’ names. This is an instance of travelers *physically* writing on the Orient, and Flaubert sees this behavior as an example of *la bêtise*, a condition that is in fact contagious, as he finds himself also becoming *bête* during his stay. The act of these European tourists engraving their names on the walls of temples also serves as a metaphor for the tradition of orientalist travel writing: inscribing oneself into the landscape and writing *over* the Orient with one’s title and one’s own narratives of experience. By framing this entire enterprise as *bête*, Flaubert calls into question the

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<sup>147</sup> To give a sense of how Flaubert’s travel observations were the opposite of “de grandes pensées,” I provide the following example: “Le soir, bal masqué dans la rue des bordels valaques. Il y avait en tout deux masques ayant le physique de putains à 3 francs, spencers noirs avec des fourrures—grosse femme maîtresse de l’établissement—table de jeu et consommation de petits verres—c’était d’un comique froid et stupide.” (*Voyage en Egypte*, p. 233) It is also important to note that while Flaubert unrelentingly maintains that he would not produce a travelogue, his correspondence, notes and observations nonetheless approximate one.

<sup>148</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance I*, p. 564.

<sup>149</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance I*, p. 548.

<sup>150</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance I*, p. 615 (my emphases).

very subject position of mastery that these travelogues assumed for the writer. Deviating from a romantic notion of the sublime as signaling the overwhelming awesomeness of nature, Flaubert initiates a radical modernist break by associating the experience of the sublime with widespread French tourist banality and stupidity, equally remarkable. Flaubert writes elsewhere: “le servilisme général qui règne ici (bassesse et lâcheté) vous soulève le cœur de dégoût, et sur ce chapitre bien des Européens sont plus Orientaux que les Orientaux”<sup>151</sup> Certainly, by employing the adjective “oriental” to signal baseness, there is no doubt that Flaubert perpetuates the racism of orientalist stereotypes here. However, Flaubert’s statement also attests to his interest in writing “nothing” and exploring the “*bêtise sublime*” of the European traveler more than adding to the existent repertoire of European stupidity.

### **La Bêtise in Madame Bovary**

If Flaubert did indeed discover Emma Bovary in the East, then it can be surmised that Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* bears the traces of his eastern voyage. Through illustrations of *la bêtise*, *Madame Bovary* showcases an ironic display of Flaubert’s disillusion with travel in the Orient, as discussed above. Emma’s ennui and her foolish lifestyle of *bêtise*, always wanting to be other than she is, are intimately tied. And in many ways her *bêtise* stems from living in a moment incompatible with romantic fantasies, a lesson Flaubert learned firsthand at his reading of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* and continued to discover while on his trip to the East. *La bêtise* in *Madame Bovary* largely centers around Emma’s futile attempts to leave behind her life of ennui dictated by repetition. Embodying a cynical view of youthful romanticism, Emma indulges in romantic literature, luxury commodities and reveries of travel, which both distract her from the life she felt had wrongfully fallen upon her and continue to fuel her dissatisfaction with it.

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<sup>151</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance I*, p. 565.

Like Flaubert in the East, Emma is constantly dreaming; descriptions of her in activities involving *rêver* and *songer* are scattered throughout the novel. One always imagines Emma with her elbows propped on the windowsill, looking out onto the street, longing to be in any other world than the one she found herself in. For example, taking in the exquisite Vaubyessard ball, representing the glamorous lifestyle for which she was meant (but had not yet attained), “Emma mit un châte sur ses épaules, ouvrit la fenêtre et s’accouda.”<sup>152</sup> This image is not unlike Du Camp’s impression of Flaubert staring out at the Nile, yet with his imagination miles away, dreaming of Emma Bovary.

Like Bouvard and Pécuchet, Emma is trapped in experiencing repetitive occurrences of disappointment and ennui. Condemned to her life of boredom as if, concludes Charles at the end of the novel, “c’est la faute de la fatalité,” Emma only finds momentary instants of passion that always seem to fade.<sup>153</sup> Settling into her quotidian life following her marriage to Charles, “sa vie était froide comme un grenier dont la lucarne est au nord, et l’ennui, araignée silencieuse, filait sa toile dans l’ombre à tous les coins de son cœur.”<sup>154</sup> And in the end even adultery reproduced for her these same feelings of frustrated boredom, as “Emma retrouvait dans l’adultère toutes les platitudes du mariage.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, for Emma, all that she experienced remained the same: “Elle ne croyait pas que les choses pussent se représenter les mêmes à des places différentes, et, puisque la portion vécue avait été mauvaise, sans doute ce qui restait à consommer serait meilleur.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Paris: Flammarion, 1986, p. 114.

<sup>153</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 424.

<sup>154</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 105.

<sup>155</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 364. At first, Charles was the source of Emma’s passion: “Quand Charles vint aux Bertaux pour la première fois, elle se considérait comme fort désillusionnée, n’ayant plus rien à apprendre, ne devant plus rien sentir. Mais l’anxiété d’un état nouveau, ou peut-être l’irritation causée par la présence de cet homme, avait suffi à lui faire croire qu’elle possédait enfin cette passion merveilleuse qui jusqu’alors s’était tenue comme un grand oiseau au plumage rose planant dans la splendeur des ciels poétiques ; —elle ne pouvait s’imaginer à présent que ce calme où elle vivait fût le bonheur qu’elle avait rêvé” (99-100). However, just a few pages later, she wonders: “Pourquoi, mon Dieu, me suis-je mariée?” (104).

<sup>156</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 150.

New experiences only left Emma longing for more. At the same time, Emma herself is a simulacrum of sorts. For one thing, Emma is the third Madame Bovary in the novel, following Charles's mother and first wife, while for Rodolphe Emma was easily replaceable: "Il s'était tant de fois entendu dire ces choses, qu'elles n'avaient pour lui rien d'original. Emma ressemblait à toutes les maîtresses; et le charme de la nouveauté, peu à peu tombant comme un vêtement, laissait voir à nu l'éternelle monotonie de la passion, qui a toujours les mêmes formes et le même langage."<sup>157</sup>

While Emma does not seem able to progress beyond her daily ennui, Charles, who opens and ends the novel, and whose conversation skills were "plate comme un trottoir de rue," is really the embodiment of the human stupidity that Flaubert scrutinizes in the novel.<sup>158</sup> The reader meets Emma for the first time through Charles's pitifully one-dimensional perspective. And the novel opens with a similar tone with which it ends: both Charles and later Emma remain unmemorable.

Instead of starting with its eponymous heroine, *Madame Bovary* begins describing the life of a young and mediocre Charles. The unidentified *nous* narrator in the opening description of Charles has caught the attention of many critical readings.<sup>159</sup> After describing Charles's pitiful first day at school as *le nouveau*, hopelessly mute and fumbling with his *casquette*, the unnamed narrator concludes: "Il serait maintenant impossible à aucun de nous de se rien rappeler de

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<sup>157</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 259.

<sup>158</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 101. Although Charles is portrayed as an example of bourgeois mediocrity, Flaubert is ultimately more sympathetic to him than to the deceitful Homais and L'heureux.

<sup>159</sup> According to Culler, readings, from Sartre to Brombert, have offered about the mysterious *nous* narrator evidence of "the effectiveness of [Flaubert's] *piège à cons*" and how "the Flaubertian text can demoralize" Culler, p. 112. Culler points out that after recounting Charles's childhood, Flaubert asks us to question his narrative by confessing the inability to properly remember what actually happened. Culler particularly aims critique at R.J. Sherrington's theory of "limited points of view," which, not willing to recognize the discontinuity in Flaubert's narration, justifies each observation, no matter its significance, by attaching it to a narrator: Culler opts for a postmodern interpretation; while Sherrington a modern one. For Culler, Sherrington's reading "denatures strangeness by personalizing it, making it a function of a particular optic" (113). Moreover Sherrington's reading serves to justify any description or position because it describes the world from a particular perspective.

lui.”<sup>160</sup> This confession undermines the *nous* narrator’s own ability to recollect—the very faculty that Flaubert, who saw nothing yet remembered everything—retained during his travels. And yet while it is impossible for the narrator to remember Charles, details of the *maladroit* young boy remain comically unforgettable. The sentiment of forgetting comes full circle at the end of the novel, in which Charles attempts to hold onto the memory of Emma, but in vain:

Une chose étrange, c’est que Bovary, tout en pensant à Emma continuellement, l’oubliait ; et il se désespérait à sentir cette image lui échapper de la mémoire au milieu des efforts qu’il faisait pour la retenir. Chaque nuit, pourtant, il la rêvait ; c’était toujours le même rêve : il s’approchait d’elle ; mais, quand il venait à l’êtreindre, elle tombait en pourriture dans ses bras.<sup>161</sup>

In a state of financial despair and mourning, the devastated Charles himself possessed the problem of remembering his beloved deceased wife. Caught in a dream state, Charles continuously returned to Emma but could no longer access her. This response echoes the ephemerality with which Emma saw her own life and the extent to which Charles, with his rose-colored lens, never clearly understood his wife. In the following section, I will show how, while traveling in the Orient, Flaubert describes a similar experience of being unable to grasp reality in a dream state.

When the novel turns to look at Emma’s childhood, the reader learns that the protagonist’s passion for romantic literature fuels her reveries. The romances young Emma indulges in reading at the convent provide her with a romantic vocabulary that feeds her desire to be anywhere besides provincial northern France.<sup>162</sup> The idea of escaping to a new destination seems to offer a solution to her never-ending dreary life. In the convent, she discovers and revels in Bernardin de St. Pierre, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Walter Scott. These modern-day romances fill her imagination with scenes of unbridled passion; “loin de s’ennuyer au couvent les

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<sup>160</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 62.

<sup>161</sup> Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 421.

<sup>162</sup> While Flaubert traveled in part for health reasons (he suffered from epilepsy), a similar restlessness contributed to his resolve to leave for the Orient.

premiers temps,”<sup>163</sup> she is transported to the distant world of castles, lovers, and chivalry.

Reading the pastoral tale *Paul et Virginie*, taking place in Mauritius, “elle avait rêvé la maisonnette de bambous, le nègre Domingo, le chien Fidèle, mais surtout l'amitié douce de quelque bon petit frère, qui va chercher pour vous des fruits rouges dans des grands arbres plus hauts que des clochers, ou qui court pieds nus sur le sable, vous apportant un nid d'oiseau.”<sup>164</sup>

Romantic literature such as this not only inspired her with a story of idyllic emotion and love but it also introduced the idea that these heroic scenes of pure sentiment took place in unknown realities either in the past or in distant parts of the world—albeit imperially tied to France. No doubt, literary romanticism instilled in Emma’s imagination the association between exoticism and the romantic life she would never have.

While never having the chance to travel to the exotic destinations showcased by her beloved romantic literature, Emma would have to search for the exceptional in her local environs. The Vaubyessard ball, held in a château constructed “à l’italienne” was the grand event in Emma’s life: a materialization of Emma’s fantasies of a life opposite to her own.<sup>165</sup> Here, she delights in the refined tastes of the noble company for exotic imports: “elle n’avait jamais vu de grenades ni mangé d’ananas. Le sucre en poudre même lui parut plus blanc et plus fin qu’ailleurs.”<sup>166</sup> Following that evening, she could only reminisce about that fanciful soirée, which remained for her a fantasy, floating farther and farther back into the debris of her memory: “Ce fut donc une occupation pour Emma que le souvenir de ce bal... Et peu à peu, les physionomies se confondirent dans sa mémoire... quelques détails s’en allèrent, mais le regret lui

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<sup>163</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 95.

<sup>164</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 94.

<sup>165</sup> References to Italy reoccur throughout the novel to signal the decadence and difference for which Emma craved. An example of how much *Madame Bovary*’s provincial France was just the opposite of Italy, let us recall that Flaubert described Charles’s childhood neighborhood in Rouen “comme une ignoble petite Venise... Des ouvriers, accroupis au bord, lavaient leurs bras dans l’eau” (69).

<sup>166</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 109.



resta.”<sup>167</sup> In time, the experience of the Vaubyessard ball transforms into a memory reminding her of the unattainability of the allure it represented. Like Charles above, Emma is fated only to have faded access to her recollection, forever a reminder of the distance that lies between her actual and fantasy life. “Regret,” a sentiment Flaubert had felt in relation to Kuchuk Hanem—discussed further below—however, remains very much alive and real for Emma, while the actual details of the ball disappear from her memory.

This regret, moreover, does not prevent Emma from continuing to dream of escaping her life, exemplified in her plans to run away to Italy with Rodolphe.<sup>168</sup> Adopting the very techniques and tone of romantic travelogues, which Flaubert had resisted while in the East but parodies here, Emma employs romantic detail to conjure up a new reality for herself:

Emma ne dormait pas, elle faisait semblant d’être endormie ; et, tandis qu[e Charles] s’assoupissait à ses côtés, elle se réveillait en d’autres rêves. Au galop de quatre chevaux, elle était emportée depuis huit jours vers un pays nouveau, d’où ils ne reviendraient plus. Ils allaient, ils allaient, les bras enlacés, sans parler. Souvent, du haut d’une montagne, ils apercevaient tout à coup quelque cité splendide avec des dômes, des ponts, des navires, des forêts de citronniers et des cathédrales de marbre blanc, dont les clochers aigus portaient des nids de cigognes. On marchait au pas à cause des grandes dalles, et il y avait par terre des bouquets de fleurs que vous offraient des femmes habillées en corset rouge.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 117.

<sup>168</sup> In the end, unlike Flaubert, Emma never leaves Rouen and does not even travel as far as Paris, “plus vaste que l’Océan,” whose opulence, as she imagined it, would provide an antidote to her provincialism (*Madame Bovary*, p. 118).

<sup>169</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 264. This description of Italy uncannily resembles an idealized portrayal of climbing the pyramids in the first *Éducation sentimentale*, written before Flaubert’s trip to Egypt. They also share a similar tone: “Arrivé au haut de la pyramide, le voyageur a les mains déchirées, les genoux saignants, le désert l’entoure, la lumière le dévore ; une âpre atmosphère brule sa poitrine. Accablé de fatigue et ébloui de clartés il se couche agonisant sur la pierre, au milieu des carcasses d’oiseaux qui sont venus y mourir. Mais relève la tête ! regarde, regarde ; et tu verras des cités avec des dômes d’or, et des minarets de porcelaine, des palais de lave bâtis sur un socle d’albâtre, des bassins entourés de marbre, où les sultanes viennent baigner leur corps...Regarde, prête l’oreille, écoute et contemple, ô voyageur ! ô penseur ! et ta soif sera calmée et toute ta vie aura passé comme un songe car tu sentiras ton âme s’en aller vers la lumière et voler dans l’infini !” (Flaubert, Gustave. *Œuvres de jeunesse I*. Paris: Gallimard, 2001, p. 1072). For example, “Arrivé au haut de la pyramide,” and “regarde, regarde” are echoed by “du haut d’une montagne” and “Ils allaient, ils allaient.” Both then describe a sumptuous view from a high vantage point. This rapprochement between a more romantic Flaubert and the parodied romanticism in *Madame Bovary* also significantly highlights the stylistic rapprochement between Flaubert’s travel notes and *Madame Bovary*.

This nighttime daydreaming continues for another half page until Berthe's coughs and Charles's snores wake her from her fantasy. Emma imagines a happier (future) self through evoking a new and unknown place in great detail. Interestingly, in his choice to move from Tostes to Yonville, even Charles believes that a new location could cure Emma of her dispirited nature. Emma's wish to escape to Italy, made up of a constellation of foolish investments in romantic reveries, remains more "real" to her than her own life did, revealing the hazardous consequences of Romanticism's ability to reproduce an imagined destination. Instead of living with the sentiment of regret, Emma transforms this sentiment into a fantasy that dangerously leads to her eventual demise.

### **The Uncanny Experience of Travel**

As we saw above in the discussion of *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert ironically demonstrates how romantic rhetoric generates fantasy descriptions of travel. Now, I turn to a discussion of Flaubert's depiction of his own experience of travel in the East in which he encounters the Orient as *de vieux rêves oubliés*. Flaubert writes to his mother from Cairo in January 1850:

Tu me demandes si l'orient est à la hauteur de ce que j'imaginai. À la hauteur, oui, de plus il dépasse en largeur la supposition que j'en faisais. J'ai trouvé dessiné nettement ce qui pour moi était brumeux. Le fait a fait place au pressentiment, si bien que c'est souvent comme si je retrouvais tout à coup *de vieux rêves oubliés*.<sup>170</sup>

At first, it appears that Flaubert draws from an empirical vocabulary to describe his new orientation toward the world, one that yields depth, clarity, delineation and facts as opposed to narrowness, haziness and suppositions. Putting "imagined" in the imperfect tense ("Tu me demandes si l'orient est à la hauteur de ce que j'imaginai"), Flaubert maintains that he is no longer merely "imagining" the Orient; rather, he is able to speak from a place of direct experience, by physically *being* there. By attempting to describe his new impressions, he pits a "real" Orient as surpassing an "imagined" one: what was once "foggy" is now "clearly

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<sup>170</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance I*, p. 562 (my emphasis).

delineated.” This new perspective allows him to “dépasse[r] en largeur la supposition” as “le fait a fait place au pressentiment,” suggesting that the new view Flaubert possesses of the Orient no longer comes from speculation. Yet at the same time, Flaubert also experiences the Orient as a dreamed past, “de vieux rêves oubliés,” echoing a common orientalist trope of the Orient as a dreamscape, in which, as we saw above, both Emma and Charles were also caught. Therefore, Flaubert’s so-called new cognitive precision leads him back to encountering “de vieux rêves oubliés,” recalling a familiar trope of romantic representation of travel in the East.

We have arrived at a seeming paradox that demands further attention: It is precisely the act of positing empirical realness in the Orient, as it were, that sends Flaubert back to an older imaginary world, “de vieux rêves oubliés.” I will show that “de vieux rêves oubliés” are evoked by the act of encountering the nostalgia fueled by the persistence of romantic tropes that had defined the Orient. In Flaubert’s direct collision with reality, he comes into contact with the imaginary repertoire of fantastical narratives that long nourished European orientalism before the mid-nineteenth century. By this logic, the Orient is better described as a palimpsest of representations. As a result, Flaubert’s simultaneous encounter with the real and the dream suggests that a certain strange familiarity persists in what may be considered as the “realness of direct experience.”

In my reading, this conjunction between reality and the dream is best explored—but will ultimately resist being neatly resolved—through the lens of Freud’s theory of the uncanny, and particularly his personal experience of the *unheimlich* while traveling in Italy. Using the lens of the uncanny to situate a reading of Flaubert’s travel notes also highlights how pre-existing orientalist modes of relating to the world were not able to adequately account for representing Flaubert’s experience. The notion of the uncanny offers a theoretical intervention to explore how

Flaubert encountered the nostalgic romantic orientalist trope of seeing the Orient as a dreamed past, as opposed to seeing it as a new *topos*. Flaubert did not simply experience the Orient as the dreamed reality his romantic predecessors had written about; rather, encountering the Orient as a dreamed past was already a mediated experience for Flaubert, transforming the “real” Orient into a haunting simulacrum.<sup>171</sup>

Drawing examples from literature and personal experience, Freud's 1919 essay “The Uncanny” displaces the notion of “strangeness” from a reaction to the new and strange to a confrontation with a deeply familiar memory. This aspect of the uncanny also echoes Du Camp's description of Flaubert as “seeing nothing and remembering everything”; here, we will continue to explore what is involved in Flaubert's act of remembering without seeing (or directly experiencing) in the East. Aesthetically and philologically exploring the multivalent definitions of the *unheimlich* and cataloguing instances of the uncanny, Freud argues that “the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind.”<sup>172</sup> The etymology of the English translation “unhomely” strongly suggests an intimate relationship between the experience of the uncanny and *dépaysement* (or *mal de pays*), homesickness, from traveling outside of one's familiar comfort zone. In the case of Flaubert and Freud, however, this homesickness does not result from experiencing an alienating newness of the foreign environment but rather an encounter with an older home within this foreign context.

Both Flaubert's and Freud's accounts of international travel reveal how the encounter with the familiar, against a foreign backdrop, triggers a feeling of unease. Freud experiences the

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<sup>171</sup> Interestingly, Flaubert writes: “Mais il y a un élément nouveau, que je ne m'attendais pas à voir et qui est immense ici, c'est le grotesque. Tout le vieux comique de l'esclave rose, du vendeur de femmes bourru, du marchand filou, est ici très jeune, très vrai, charmant” (Flaubert, *Correspondance I*, p. 538). Grotesque impressions of the East are of course not original to Flaubert. While Flaubert considers the “grotesque” as new for him, perceiving the “grotesque” picks up on a common orientalist trope in depicting the otherness of the Orient. The grotesque also figures prominently in Hugo's romantic manifesto, “Préface de Cromwell” (1827).

<sup>172</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XVII (1917-1919)*. Trans James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press, 1955, p. 241.

uncanny while abroad in a deserted provincial Italian town, haunted by recursive repetition (not unlike Emma's ongoing suffering of ennui); he is overcome with a hitherto unnamed anxiety when unable to escape encountering the same narrow street three times.<sup>173</sup> Freud's account underlines that it was not the newness of the altogether foreign place that provoked the feeling of uncanniness; it was brought on by inexplicably encountering the *same* street as before. This repetition, seeming to hold him prisoner when and wherever he tried to avoid this street, produced in him the feeling of "unhomeliness." Thus, it is the *repetitive* encounter with an older memory that causes the physical and psychic experiences of unease.

For Flaubert, the encounter with a familiar world in the Orient presented itself as a "retrouvaille" of French romantic impressions. With the intention of not writing a travel narrative, Flaubert offers the following remarks<sup>174</sup>:

D'un mot, voici jusqu'à présent comment je résume ce que j'ai ressenti : peu d'étonnement de la nature, comme paysage, comme ciel, comme désert (sauf le mirage) ; étonnement énorme des villes et des hommes. Hugo dirait : « J'étais plus près de Dieu que de l'humanité ! » Cela tient sans doute à ce que j'avais plus rêvé, plus creusé et plus imaginé tout ce qui est horizons, verdure, sables, arbres, soleil, que ce qui est maison, rues, costume et visage. Ç'a été pour la nature une retrouvaille et pour le reste une trouvaille.<sup>175</sup>

The majority of Flaubert's reactions here are in fragmented form ("peu d'étonnement de la nature, comme paysage, comme ciel, comme désert"; "étonnement énorme des villes et des

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<sup>173</sup> When we read about Freud's personal experience of the uncanny, there is nothing particularly disturbing that jumps off the page. Walking through the streets of a provincial Italian town, Freud, having lost his way, attempts to leave a street and finds himself returning to it three times. In fact, we would not think that his three detours around the Italian piazza would cause Freud such distress had he not announced it as such; he opens his discussion: "[...] this phenomenon [repetition of the same thing] does undoubtedly [...] arouse an uncanny feeling, which furthermore, recalls the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream states" (Freud 236-7). After describing the experience returning to the same street, he reminds his reader: "Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery" (237). The experience of the uncanny for Freud arose from repetitively encountering the same place, while trying to avoid it.

<sup>174</sup> One of the ways in which Flaubert reacted to this uncanny experience of travel is through his refusal to write a travel narrative. Flaubert reiterates to Bouilhet his plan to not write a travel narrative: "Je crois bien... que tu ne t'attends pas à recevoir de moi une *relation* de mon voyage... Je n'ai encore rien écrit, ni même ouvert un livre... Je voudrais pourtant t'envoyer quelque chose qui aille te divertir" (*Correspondance I*, p. 538).

<sup>175</sup> *Correspondance I*, p. 538.

hommes”) introduced by “d’un mot,” to emphasize the intended brevity of his report. Flaubert divides his impressions into two simple categories (“peu d’étonnement” and “étonnement”) as if mechanically fulfilling the expectations of what a travelogue would offer. Not surprisingly, Flaubert cites the great romantic Hugo, further reiterating how the ideas of Romanticism impressed future travelers, even if Flaubert reacted against them. He reveals that he had no doubt already dreamed and imagined a pastoral vision of nature such that the natural landscape was “a retrouvaille” with familiar travel accounts.<sup>176</sup> What is new to Flaubert is everything else that does not fit this pastoral vision: houses, streets, costumes and faces. As Flaubert describes elsewhere: “Pour qui voit les choses avec quelque attention on *retrouve* encore bien plus qu’on ne *trouve*”: his experience of the Orient is more a reunion with the *idées reçues* of old travelogues than a discovery of new ideas.<sup>177</sup>

In a letter dated January 15, 1850 to Jules Cloquet, Flaubert further describes his experience in the Orient as one of *disorientation*:

Qu’en dire ? Que voulez-vous que je vous en écrive ? Je ne fais que revenir à peine du premier étourdissement. C’est comme si l’on vous jetait tout au beau milieu d’une symphonie de Beethoven, quand les cuivres déchirent l’oreille, que les basses grondent et que les flûtes soupirent. *Le détail vous saisit*, il vous empoigne, il vous pince et, plus il vous occupe, moins vous *saisissez* bien l’ensemble. Puis, peu à peu, cela s’harmonise et se place de soi-même avec toutes les exigences de la perspective. Mais les premiers jours, le diable m’emporte, c’est un tohu-bohu de couleurs étourdissant, si bien que votre pauvre imagination, comme devant un feu d’artifice d’images, en demeure tout éblouie.<sup>178</sup>

The experience here of “étourdissement” recalls the fogginess associated with “de vieux rêves oubliés,” in which Flaubert loses clear access to his surroundings. Flaubert’s travel impressions reference an overpowering haze that follows him around in his encounters in the Orient, which he neither re-narrates into a mystical experience nor attempts to reassess with scientific

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<sup>176</sup> Not only in his experience of the *unheimlich* did Flaubert encounter the familiar in the new foreign land, but the converse was also true: he also found what was strange in the familiar.

<sup>177</sup> *Correspondance I*, p. 564.

<sup>178</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance I*, p. 563 (my emphases).

knowledge to form a coherent study. Here, in the haziness of encountering the foreign landscape, the disarray of the singular details assaults Flaubert's perception; he confesses to being seized by them. Touring the Orient becomes then a visceral experience of encountering an aggressive excess of signs: "le détail vous saisi, il vous empoigne, il vous pince." Moreover, Flaubert's description above revolves around the action *saisir*, one in the instance of the detail seizing the subject ("le détail vous *saisit*") and the other describing the subject seizing (or failing to seize) the detail ("plus il vous occupe, moins vous *saisissiez* bien l'ensemble"). Furthermore, according to Flaubert's description, the detail overpowers and seizes the subject, possessing a strange agency, not unlike the mesmerizing yet perplexing power the courtesan Kuchuk Hanem wielded over him, (this will be examined in depth in the following section).

Similarly, Freud's repetitive return to a mistaken but particular landmark is also paved by overpowering detail. In "Freud's Uncanny Narratives," Robyn Lyndenberg explains how one of Freud's visits to a once *heimisch* street turns into a haunting experience:

Confusion is caused not by an absence but by an *excess* of signs: looking for the "marked or familiar path," one is led to a mistaken but "particular landmark" to which one involuntarily and repeatedly returns. That familiar but rejected landmark serves the same function as the painted women, who are marked with the familiar but rejected signs of female sexuality.<sup>179</sup>

Freud's "painted women" operate as a euphemism for his repetitive visits to a familiar narrow street, one lined with brothels, suggesting that Freud returns to a repressed memory at the scene of sexual ease. It is the "excess of signs" that triggers Freud's experience of the uncanny, which ultimately catapults Freud back to a familiar site of rejection. This excess of signs proliferates in a recognizable way not unlike Flaubert's entrance into a familiar but forgotten dream state while experiencing a new but heavily mediated reality.

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<sup>179</sup> Lyndenberg, Robyn. "Freud's Uncanny Narratives," *PMLA*. 112:5 (Oct. 1997), pp. 1072-1086. (p. 1078 my emphasis). She underlines how Freud foregoes discursive control as a narrator by recounting a personal experience of the uncanny.

Thus, it is my contention that the Orient's visceral act of seizing its subject challenges discursive Orientalism's postulation that a *real* Orient could be clearly delineated through empirical means, as it is precisely the act of concentrating on the detail in order to form a whole that works against the possibility of creating a coherent picture—"plus il vous occupe, moins vous saisissiez bien l'ensemble." Flaubert's direct experience with the Orient did not reinforce the validity of European modes of classification and designation but rather undermined them. The unrecognizable real of the detail lulls him into a state where his perception breaks down, while holding him captive. While Flaubert surely arrived in the Orient equipped with a repertoire of orientalist images and impressions, the proximity to the "real," however mediated, produced new paradigms of thinking about the limits of representation.

Such a reading would complicate arguments made by scholars such as Timothy Mitchell who claims that Flaubert's experience of "disorientation" from the chaos of the Orient comes from his expectation of encountering an organized and semiologically intelligible picture.<sup>180</sup> As I have shown, the "real" Orient produced feelings of the uncanny in Flaubert precisely because the Orient appeared as a simulacrum. While Mitchell discusses how the traveler needed to separate himself from the Orient to cogently comprehend the view, I argue that such separation became impossible for Flaubert, who remained seized by the chaos of the "excess of signs." Existing in a third space between the imposed coherency of metropolitan representations and the attendant disorder of reality when actually in the Orient, Flaubert's uncanny encounter shifts emphasis away from how the West imposed its own organizing model onto the Orient towards how Flaubert persisted in the space of incommensurability between the model and so-called reality, an uncanny feeling that he explores in his novels.

### **Flaubert's Experience of the Sexual Real**

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<sup>180</sup> Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.



Du Camp may have been partially correct when he charged that Flaubert “saw nothing” during his trip; however, at the same time, Flaubert did physically interact with the world around him and did not shy away from writing explicit descriptions of his sexual escapades. Recounting that “Demain nous devons faire *une partie sur l’eau*, avec plusieurs putains qui danseront au son du tarabouch, avec des crotales, et leurs coiffures de piastres d’or” is one such example.<sup>181</sup> To this description Flaubert adds, with a tone of token boredom and nonchalance exemplary of most of the descriptions he offers while on his trip: “Avant-hier nous fûmes chez une femme qui nous en fit baiser deux autres. L’appartement délabré et percé à tous les vents était éclairé par une vieilleuse, on voyait un palmier par la fenêtre sans carreaux et les deux femmes turques avaient des vêtements de soie brochés d’or.”<sup>182</sup> Striking in Flaubert’s description is the contrast between the completely banal description of his visits to the local brothels (“Avant-hier nous fûmes chez une femme qui nous en fit baiser deux autres”) and the orientalist details (du tarabouch, des crotales, les deux femmes turques, des vêtements de soie brochés d’or, etc.) that signal the cultural context of the Near East. Providing the setting, these latter details connote the exoticism of Flaubert’s encounter. The hyper-detailed nature of the decorative description in contradistinction to the brief report of sexual activity suggests that the importance of Flaubert’s description lies in outlining its exotic nature more so than conveying the actual sexual experience.

Through the case study of Flaubert’s interactions with Kuchuk Hanem, to whom Flaubert shows particular interest, we will take a closer look at how the exotic excess detail viscerally “seized” the traveler in the Orient. Further below, I will show how this excess of signs, or rather of the *détail inutile* reappears as the “demoralizing” signs of *la bêtise* in *Madame Bovary*. While

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<sup>181</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance I*, p. 541.

<sup>182</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance I*, p. 541.

Hanem was by no means the only courtesan Flaubert frequented during his trip, she made the most lasting impression on him. Flaubert records the captivating *danse de l'abeille* Hanem performed during their evening together:

La danse de Kuchiouk est brutale comme coups de cul. – Elle se serre la gorge dans sa veste de manière que ses deux seins découverts sont rapprochés et serrés l'un [contre] l'autre – pour danser, elle met comme ceinture pliée en cravate un châle brun à raie d'or avec trois glands suspendus à des rubans – elle s'enlève tantôt sur un pied, tantôt sur un autre, chose merveilleuse : un pied restant à terre, l'autre passe devant le tibia de celui-ci, le tout dans un saut léger.<sup>183</sup>

No longer pithy and banal, this description studies Hanem's intense movements, positing her as an untamed creature echoing her dance, itself titled after the frenzied movements of an animal.

From a linguistic perspective, Hanem is an agent of her dance (*elle se serre; elle met; elle s'enlève*). “Brutale comme coups de cul,” as both a terrifying and arousing force, Hanem shows mastery over her body, manipulating it to seductively perform for her audience. Flaubert's captivated tone suggests that Hanem possessed this same mastery over him as spectator.<sup>184</sup>

Moreover, as in the description above of his visits to brothels, Flaubert also describes Hanem's orientalist decoration, specifically “un châle brun à raie d'or avec trois glands suspendus à des rubans.” Dangling on her body as the tassels dangle on the shawl, the sartorial ornament heightens her feminine sexual prowess as the foreign word *châle* further renders her as exotic.<sup>185</sup>

This *châle* will continue to reappear throughout Flaubert's travel correspondence as a reminder of Hanem and will reappear prominently in *Madame Bovary*, as revealed further below.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Flaubert, *Voyage en Égypte*, p. 283.

<sup>184</sup> Writing “less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity, Kuchuk... is the prototype of Flaubert's Salammbô and Salomé, as well as all the versions of carnal female temptation to which his Saint Anthony is subject,” Said concurs that Flaubert's Hanem underscored a view of the Orient as a site of hypersexuality and feminine decadence. *Orientalism*, p. 187.

<sup>185</sup> The French word “*châle*” (and the English “shawl”) is borrowed from Hindi, and originates in Farsi. Flaubert will alternate between using “*châle*” and “*écharpe*” to describe Hanem's article of clothing.

<sup>186</sup> Jennifer Yee has offered a suggestive intertextual reading of the *châle/écharpe* as an example of “textual fetishism,” between the travel notes, *Salammbô* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* (but not *Madame Bovary*), where it travels from Kuchuk Hanem's hips to ironically reappear on the shoulders of Madame Arnoux. Yee, Jennifer. “‘Like an Apparition’: Oriental Ghosting in Flaubert's *Education sentimentale*,” *French Studies*. 67:3 (2013): 340-354.

A year later in 1851, Flaubert returns to Esneh to look for Hanem, only to discover that she had left for Cairo.<sup>187</sup> Inspired by Flaubert's accounts of Hanem, Bouilhet himself immortalized Hanem (whom he had never met) in an eponymous poem he composed for Flaubert.<sup>188</sup> Interspersing his thoughts of regret for losing Hanem with verses extracted from Bouilhet's lyric homage, Flaubert recalls her scarf<sup>189</sup>:

J'ai eu un moment l'idée de lui acheter, à Kuchiouk, une grande écharpe terminée par des glands d'or dont elle s'entourait la taille en dansant. Je ne l'ai pas fait par une de ces *inactions* qui sont un mystère effrayant de l'homme. Maxime m'a dit : « Bah ! à quoi ça te servirait-il ? ça n'a rien de particulier », ce qui était juste. J'ai des *remords*, un regret aigre, de ne pas l'avoir.<sup>190</sup>

In this melancholic revisiting of his time spent with Hanem, Flaubert returns to thinking of her scarf. He wishes to make up for his loss by possessing the *écharpe* that he associates with her dance and their evening together. His hesitancy to purchase the scarf, a transaction that serves as a synecdoche for his relationship with the courtesan, points to an *à quoi bon* ambivalence that encapsulates Flaubert's overall cynicism regarding the ability to have a "grand" experience while on his trip.<sup>191</sup> Conceding to Du Camp's more rational logic for not purchasing the scarf (*ça n'a rien de particulier*) serves to highlight how for Flaubert, Hanem oscillated between the ordinary and unique: on the one hand Hanem was replaceable (with a scarf, other prostitutes, etc.), and on the other hand, Hanem became an irreplaceable loss that left him with the stain of regret. Equipped with only his memories of her, Flaubert chose to linger in inaction and the bitter

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<sup>187</sup> *Correspondance I*, p. 777.

<sup>188</sup> The poem is entitled "Kuchiuk-Hanem, Souvenir" (Louis Bouilhet, *Poèmes. Festons et atragales*, Paris: Bourdilliat, 1859, p. 45-7).

<sup>189</sup> Flaubert cites the following lines from Bouilhet's "Kuchiuk-Hanem, Souvenir": "Étale en parasol ses feuilles immobiles," "Les aigles enivrés chancellent par les airs," "C'est l'heure du soleil et du calme étouffant," "Ont une odeur de sucre et de térébenthine," "Quand le vieux Maître au coin d'un bois s'endort," *Correspondance I*, p. 777-9.

<sup>190</sup> *Correspondance I*, p. 778.

<sup>191</sup> In a letter to Louis Bouilhet from Damascus, Flaubert writes: "Je voyais tout à travers le voile d'ennui dont cette déception m'avait enveloppé, et je me répétais l'inepte parole que tu m'envoies : « à quoi bon ? »" (*Correspondance I*, p. 678).

remorse of her absence. While Flaubert did not purchase the scarf, it also did not disappear completely from his memory.

Flaubert's longing for Hanem does not subside once he returns to France: here, the scarf transforms into a feeling of bitterness (reminding us of the regret that lingers with Emma after the Vaubyessard ball). Back in Croisset, in one of his many letters to Louise Colet during the writing of *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert defends his lust for Hanem by viscerally recalling his regret. Writing from memory in March 1853 two years following his first encounter with Hanem, Flaubert taunts Colet:

Tu me dis que les punaises de Kuchiouk-Hânem te la dégradent ; c'est là, moi, ce qui m'enchantait. Leur odeur nauséabonde se mêlait au parfum de sa peau ruisselante de santal. Je veux qu'il y ait une amertume à tout, un éternel coup de sa peau au milieu de nos triomphes, et que la désolation même soit dans l'enthousiasme.<sup>192</sup>

Flaubert's mentioning of "amertume" demonstrates the extent to which the bitterness he associated with the loss of Hanem remained with him. Recollecting the nauseating signs of Hanem's oriental decadence, Flaubert embraces her bugs and odor, which continue to evoke for him the earthly qualities of her sexual prowess. In this description, while Hanem's "punaises" replace her "danse de l'abeille," Flaubert's venerating view of Hanem remains unchanged. Flaubert's reuse of the word "coup" in "un éternel coup de sa peau" recalls Hanem's impressive "coups de cul," therein underlining how she remains powerfully imprinted in his memory. Yet, Flaubert is only left with the details he employed to recall his memory. What had been the impressive "coups de cul" of Hanem's dance becomes the "éternel coup" of the bitterness she inspires that haunts Flaubert. Left with neither Hanem nor the scarf, sexual excitement transforms into sexual loss.

### **The Exotic Detail of *Madame Bovary***

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<sup>192</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance II*. Paris. Gallimard, 2013, p.283.

This section will now examine how Hanem's scarf rematerializes in *Madame Bovary* to order to consider how Flaubert's refusal to neatly represent the Orient according to the romantic tradition operates in *Madame Bovary*. In the previous sections, I have explored Freud's notion of the uncanny to illustrate that it is the repetitive familiarity of a place, and not its foreignness, that haunts the traveler, and how the excessive detail lingers as a symptom of this haunting anxiety. In my view, the uncanny is not limited to being useful for understanding Flaubert's travel writing; rather as the chapter will now illustrate, the uncanny also sheds light on a reading of *Madame Bovary*. In the novel the uncanny experience appears through the reoccurring trope of the scarf, recalling Flaubert's relationship with Kuchuk Hanem. Here, the *unheimlich* will also be experienced as the strange and unknown that haunts what seems familiar.

Having suggested that *Madame Bovary* bears the traces of Flaubert's simultaneous self-conscious distancing from Romanticism and the renegotiation of his relationship to Orientalism, I now propose a reformulation of Said's claim that Orientalism was a form of "radical realism" to contend instead that in the case of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*: *realism was a form of Orientalism*. Tracing how *Madame Bovary* echoes the ennui that Flaubert made very prominent in the descriptions of travel experience, I ultimately question the referential status of verisimilitude in Flaubert's novel, through expanding an understanding of its development in a transcultural dialogue with his travel notes.

First, I point out that Flaubert's "amertume" from regretting Hanem reappears on Emma's dinner plate in *Madame Bovary*. In a description summing up Emma's disappointment with married life, Flaubert writes:

Mais c'était surtout aux heures des repas qu'elle n'en pouvait plus, dans cette petite salle au rez-de-chaussée, avec le poêle qui fumait, la porte qui criait, les murs qui suintaient, les pavés humides ; toute *l'amertume* de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette,

et, à la fumée du bouilli, il montait du fond de son âme comme d'autres bouffées d'affadissement.<sup>193</sup>

Here, Flaubert's portrait of this scene summarizes Emma's indomitable discontentment with her provincial life and dim-witted husband. The rez-de-chaussée in which the young couple dines is transformed into a pressure cooker imprisoning Emma, while the description of this vignette climaxes with the line: "toute l'amertume de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette." Auerbach, having made this passage famous, cites this excerpt as an example of how Flaubert departs from the more involved and passionate realisms of Balzac and Stendhal.<sup>194</sup> For Auerbach, this scene exemplifies Flaubert's more impartial and impersonal realism, claiming that "she does not simply see, but is herself seen as one seeing." Departing from Auerbach's interpretation of this passage as exemplary of Flaubert's objectivity, I suggest a reading that reconsiders Emma's "amertume" as one about which Flaubert spoke in his descriptions of Hanem, discussed above. The bitterness and the desolation that Emma feels in her new life directly reference how Flaubert describes the loss of Hanem. Recovering this sentiment in the novel shows how Flaubert continues to explore the experience of loss he underwent while abroad.

While in the Orient Flaubert thinks to purchase a scarf to console his own "amertume," in *Madame Bovary*, Emma does the same. After the ecstatic experience of the Vaubyessard ball, Emma begins to acquire items of luxury beyond her means at Lheureux's shop. He first displays for her "trois écharpes algériennes, plusieurs paquets d'aiguilles anglaises, une paire de pantoufles en paille et, enfin quatre coquetiers en coco..."<sup>195</sup> Though she does not buy anything at her initial visit, "en songeant aux écharpes" afterwards, the objects stay firmly fixed in her

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<sup>193</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 126 (my emphasis).

<sup>194</sup> Auerbach, "In the Hôtel de la Mole," *Mimesis*.

<sup>195</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 168.

mind.<sup>196</sup> Finally, to console herself after Léon leaves Yonville, in a state of chagrin, Emma returns to the shop to purchase “la plus belle de ses écharpes ; elle se la nouait à la taille par-dessus sa robe de chambre ; et, les volets fermés, avec un livre à la main, elle restait étendue sur un canapé, dans cet accoutrement.”<sup>197</sup> Emma buys the scarf to color her otherwise boring life, using it as a prop to transform her surroundings into an exotic scene resembling something of a harem where she decadently reads while languidly lying on a couch. And later, the scarf also comes to represent Emma, just as it had reminded Flaubert of Hanem. After they become lovers, Léon tells Emma: “Je m’imaginai quelquefois qu’un hasard vous amènerait. J’ai cru vous reconnaître au coin des rues : et je courais après tous les fiacres où flottait à la portière un châle, un voile pareil au vôtre.”<sup>198</sup> Here, Emma’s *écharpe* becomes not just a *châle* but also *un voile*, as it symbolizes Léon’s longing for her when she is not with him. This scene also echoes Flaubert’s efforts to buy the scarf to replace Hanem.

During her affair with Léon, Emma continues to transform into an orientalist figure. As life with Charles grows increasingly unbearable during her affair with Léon, Emma indulges in such late night activities at home:

Elle restait [dans sa chambre] tout le long du jour, engourdie, à peine vêtue, et, de temps à autre, faisant fumer des pastilles du sérail qu’elle avait achetées à Rouen, dans la boutique d’un Algérien. Pour ne pas avoir, la nuit, auprès d’elle cet homme étendu qui dormait, elle finit, à force de grimaces, par le reléguer au second étage ; et elle lisait jusqu’au matin des livres extravagants où il y avait des tableaux orgiaques avec des situations sanglantes.<sup>199</sup>

No longer simply dreaming of Italy while lying next to her husband, Emma escapes from her nightmare life by enacting an orientalist fantasy of creating a harem setting in which to indulge in Algerian pastilles and entertaining tales. These details, while playing no major role in the

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<sup>196</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 170.

<sup>197</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 190.

<sup>198</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 306.

<sup>199</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 362.

development of the plot, are nonetheless significant as they tell the story of how Emma futilely combats her world of ennui by escaping to an exotically constructed one, an endeavor about which Flaubert writes condemningly. Emma continues to indulge in her youthful hobby of reading, further plunging into the fantasies that they have to offer her.

Departing from the more aristocratic tone of Emma's affair with Rodolphe, her dalliances with Léon were much more bourgeois and quotidian. As an object of desire for Léon, Emma fit into pre-casted molds:

Elle était l'amoureuse de tous les romans, l'héroïne de tous les drames, le vague *elle* de tous les volumes de vers. Il retrouvait sur ses épaules la couleur ambrée de l'*odalisque au bain* ; elle avait le corsage long des châtelaines féodales ; elle ressemblait aussi à la *femme pâle de Barcelone*, mais elle était par-dessus tout Ange !<sup>200</sup>

Writing this passage in an ironic tone to scoff at the emptiness—and later, danger—of romantic rhetoric, Flaubert shows that Léon desires Emma through prevailing modes of romantic feminine idealization, indulging in the same fantasies Emma used to shape her own worldview. In the first line, echoing Emma's love for literature, Léon cites textual forms of mediation ("*les romans*" and "*les volumes de vers*") as inspiration for his lust for her. Léon can only desire Emma through thinking of her as these pre-fabricated types. In the end these romantic stereotypes will fail to keep Emma and Léon together, just as Emma's own futile wish to model her life after romantic fantasies is never able to bring her happiness. Comparing his mistress's physical beauty to that of an odalisque, Léon's attraction for Emma, as a long-awaited object of desire, borrows from orientalist tropes to define her appeal. While "odalisque" is only one of the diverse feminine stereotypes cited, for Léon, it is precisely Emma's bare shoulders, replacing her *châle/écharpe*, that inspire this reference to an "odalisque." Moreover, thinking about the figure of the odalisque as one cast of feminine desirability among many others demonstrates how the Orientalism from

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<sup>200</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 338.



which Léon's imagination drew functioned in a complementary manner alongside established models of feminine sexuality in his time.

While in the passage above, Emma lasciviously indulges in orientalist decadence, in the following scene, her body movements resemble Hanem's dance. In the hotel room with Léon:

elle se déshabillait brutalement, arrachant le lacet mince de son corset, qui sifflait autour de ses hanches comme une couleuvre qui glisse. Elle allait sur la pointe de ses pieds nus regarder encore une fois si la porte était fermée, puis elle faisait d'un seul geste tomber ensemble tous ses vêtements; —et, pâle, sans parler, sérieuse, elle s'abattait contre sa poitrine, avec un long frisson.<sup>201</sup>

In this scene, as in the others, the continual orientalizing of Emma takes place in an enclosed domestic space. Undressing "brutalement" recalls Hanem's forceful movements in her dance of seduction. While her corset glides down her body like a snake, Emma becomes increasingly animal (*bête*-like), as Hanem's dance was described, glacially mute while pounding her chest. The chilling state of her sexuality marks a transformation of her entire being into a mirror of Flaubert's objectification of Hanem. Here, the courtesan's dance, now figured as *serpentine* or *la bêt(e)*ise that Flaubert encountered while in the Orient, reemerges in the textual fabric of *Madame Bovary*.

Emily Apter analyzes the "serpentine" figurations of Flaubert's descriptions of Hanem's dance as an example of how the male traveler apprehended a "real" Orient via contact with the exotic female colonial subject, who could be touched and thus deemed "real."<sup>202</sup> Apter argues that Flaubert's repetitive rhetoric focusing around movements of undulation reveals Orientalism's role in "plant[ing] a palimpsest of seduction inside the viewer's craning outlook toward the east" and maintains that the metaphor of serpentine provided a "way of talking

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<sup>201</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 355-6.

<sup>202</sup> Apter, Emily. "Figura Serpentina: Visual Seduction and the Colonial Gaze," *Spectacles of Realism: Gender, Body, Genre*. Eds. Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1995. (163-178)

about the epistemological limits of knowing culturally ‘other’ subjects.”<sup>203</sup> Thus, as stated above, Flaubert’s simultaneously banal and exotic vision of his travels to the Orient offers a potential critique of the discursive power of Orientalism. In light of Apter’s suggestive reading that the experience of the colonial real coincides precisely with encountering the exotic, I extend her argument to examine how this “exotic” detail functions in *Madame Bovary*. In this way, the “serpentine” movements of Emma point to the very limits of understanding the world with which he came into contact during his trip, which is in turn further explored the world of *Madame Bovary*. Moreover, discovering how the serpentine figurations resurface in *Madame Bovary* outlines how the “palimpsest of seduction” continues to refract and unravel in the novel, further destabilizing Flaubert’s realist narrative structure.

Finally, the trope of the *châle/écharpe* is not only associated with Emma as a mistress; it is also found in the scene describing Emma and Charles’s marriage, in which both serpentine and undulating figures reappear. Flaubert writes of the young couple’s wedding procession:

Le cortège, d’abord uni comme une seule écharpe de couleur, qui *ondulait* dans la campagne, le long de l’étroit sentier *serpentant* entre les blés verts, s’allongea bientôt et se coupa en groupes différents, qui s’attardaient à causer. Le ménétrier allait en avant avec son violon empanaché de rubans à la coquille; les mariés venaient ensuite, les parents, les amis tout au hasard, et les enfants restaient derrière, s’amusant à arracher les clochettes des brins d’avoine, ou à se jouer entre eux, sans qu’on les vît.<sup>204</sup>

Here, as the lens through which the narrator describes the scene, the trope of the “écharpe,” representing the exoticism and decadence of Flaubert’s trip, literally gives shape to the assembled group of provincial Frenchmen attending a very unspectacular wedding celebration. The narrator offers a panoramic perspective, describing as if from a distance the shape created by the marriage procession and simultaneously provides a close-up view to include minute details of the “rubans à la coquille” dangling from the violin. The “rubans à la coquille” recalls Flaubert’s

<sup>203</sup> Apter, p. 170. Moreover, the “palimpsest” here echoes Flaubert’s uncanny “retrouvaille” with romantic narratives of travel.

<sup>204</sup> *Madame Bovary*, pp. 86-87 (my emphases).

description of Hanem's *danse de l'abeille*, in which she wrapped around her waist "un châle brun à raie d'or avec trois glands suspendus à des rubans." The resemblance between Hanem's sartorial decoration and the provincial French wedding procession uncannily echoes Flaubert's own repetitive encounters with the palimpsest of representations in the Orient; here, Hanem is the familiar but repressed bitter memory that resurfaces in *Madame Bovary*. While Emma's wedding day resembled nothing like the spectacle of Hanem's *danse de l'abeille*, Hanem's undulating movements nonetheless make their way into the landscape of the novel. The entire wedding procession, "d'abord uni comme une seule écharpe de couleur, qui ondulait dans la campagne," pays homage to the movements of Hanem's dance, recaptured here.

Telescoping in and then back out, this image of the marriage procession defies a fixed and stable relationship between the spectator and the view. The ending description that the children play "sans qu'on les vît" provides another example of Flaubert's "demoralization," pulling the cognitive rug out from under his readers.<sup>205</sup> Considering how the palimpsest of the undulating scarf recalls Flaubert's experience of the limits of representation while in the Orient illustrates how the ability to "demoralize" echoes Flaubert's particular employment of the exotic detail and the *bêtise* in the Orient.

Finally, the serpentine shape reappears one last time in another procession, that of Emma's death, now disguised as the instrument accompanying the mourners: "Le serpent soufflait à pleine poitrine."<sup>206</sup> The baritone sounds of this brass wind instrument sets a sober tone

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<sup>205</sup> Culler writes: "To make one's own life a novel is to name its elements in the terms those models provide and compose them into a legible text. And here, of course, lies the opportunity that attracts someone aspiring to the role of demoralizer. What if, instead of learning how to unify their dispersed selves into a personality and the disparate events of their lives into a meaningful destiny, they found that when put together according to novelistic models things still did not fit together?" (85 *The Uses of Uncertainty*).

<sup>206</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 411.

for Emma's funeral; Flaubert did not even spare this solemn event from the sentiment of ennui: when paying their respects to Emma, "chacun s'ennuyait d'une façon démesurée."<sup>207</sup>

Returning to Barthes's formulation of the "reality effect," the description of Emma's marriage procession would appear to be an example of superfluous and banal detail used to set the realistic stage for his narrative. However, as the analysis of the orientalist description in Flaubert's travel writing has demonstrated, these details are not merely background fluff providing the narrative's "reality effect"; rather, much of the ironic play that Flaubert achieves points the reader in the direction of his travel notes. Seen in this way then, the exoticism of Hanem's "châle brun à raie d'or avec trois glands suspendus à des rubans," for example, no longer merely highlights Hanem's unattainable and memorable exoticism; more than this, the exoticism now stands in for Flaubert's refusal to instrumentalize the world around him to create a realistic representation and his preference for disorientation while in the Orient, an outlook that undergirds *la bêtise* in *Madame Bovary*.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the shift in focus, *realism as a form of Orientalism*, has allowed this chapter to foreground the cultural and discursive practice of Orientalism to the development of a domestic French literary work such as *Madame Bovary*, a reframing that underscores the concomitant efforts of orientalist and realist discourse, while putting a nationalist understanding French realism under scrutiny. Orientalism had been in the business of reproducing the (other) world for centuries, through the means of fantasy, exploration, translation and scholarship; realism became a privileged iteration of this ongoing representational project. This reading attempts to challenge the ways in which readers and scholars have associated realism with copying reality and verisimilitude, by instead portraying realism as an enterprise that highlights the epistemological

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<sup>207</sup> *Madame Bovary*, p. 406.

barriers one runs into when trying to produce a copy of the world. By reconsidering a relationship between the exotic and the excess or supplementary detail and *la bêtise*, as continuing to question the referential function of the realist narrative itself, this study has presented the Orient as a productive site in which to think about how Flaubert worked through his understanding of experiencing and representing the “real.”

My concluding remarks offer a reading of the very final image of the novel. Here, Flaubert provides a scathing portrait of the cruelty of the *idée reçue* of modern society’s veneration of science (juxtaposed with the outdated status of religion) in the portrait of Homais at the end of the novel. Detailing the rapid physical decline of widower Charles and the increasing success of Homais, no longer willing to be seen with his neighbor due to their different social stations, the novel closes with a brazen dose of reality: Homais’ long-awaited recognition of the *croix d’honneur*. Just three years prior to the publication of *Madame Bovary*, Du Camp received the same but renamed prestigious title, the *Légion d’honneur*, for the photographic accomplishments (the topic of the next chapter) that resulted from his and Flaubert’s trip together to East.<sup>208</sup> As it is widely known, this trip altered the course of their friendship, as they chose divergent career paths: Flaubert avoided mainstream recognition and fame, while Du Camp embraced it. As editor of *Revue de Paris*, Du Camp’s refusal to publish *Madame Bovary* of course exacerbated their separation and further caused a rift in their friendship. Thus, by awarding the *croix d’honneur* to an *arriviste* pseudo-scientist such as Homais, Flaubert here undermines the integrity of the prize, meant to recognize high achievement.

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<sup>208</sup> When Flaubert learns of Du Camp’s receipt of the medal of the Legion of Honor, he snidely remarks to Colet (15 January 1853) “Admirable époque...que celle où l’on décore les photographes et où l’on exile les poètes” (*Correspondance II*, p. 239).

Without lingering on the details of the motivations behind Flaubert's choice, I would simply note that the appearance of the *croix d'honneur*, given the last word in the novel, symbolizes the extreme difference between Flaubert and Du Camp's understandings of their trip. Unlike Du Camp, whose photography promises (albeit paradoxically) unmediated access to the Orient's "reality," Flaubert's enterprise makes the act of mediation relevant and central to his "making sense" of the Orient, confronting an experience of epistemological limits, which his novels bear out aesthetically. In the following chapter, I provide a discussion of how Du Camp's photography, while providing the French public with the supposed accuracy that the technology promised, drew on literary tropes from the same romantic tradition that preoccupied Flaubert, in order to produce its own persuasive and visual *effet de réel*.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Re-Tracing the Travelogue in Maxime Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*

##### ABSTRACT:

The chapter takes as its primary focus of analysis Maxime Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852), the first successfully published album of photographs in France. This study analyzes how the scientific accuracy simulated by the edited 125 calotype images of monuments and landscape in Egypt, Palestine and Syria drew from pre-established discourses of romantic Orientalism. Specifically, this chapter contends that the poetic subjectivity of romantic travelogues mediated the album's ability to appear as realist and objective representations of the Orient.

As it has been commonly remarked, the two friends Maxime Du Camp and Gustave Flaubert could not have been more different in their writing styles and careers.<sup>209</sup> This is perhaps most evident during their trip together to the Orient in which they toured Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Greece and Italy: as discussed in chapter two, Du Camp took his photographic mission much more seriously than Flaubert his assignment to gather information on commercial activity and traffic. Du Camp focused on the grandeur of ancient monuments whereas Flaubert was much more curious about the quotidian banalities of contemporary life, particularly the indecent and perverse. While Flaubert's trip was sponsored by the *ministère du Commerce*, Du Camp, on his second trip to the Orient, was assigned a scientific mission "d'explorer les antiquités, de recueillir les traditions, de relever les inscriptions et les sculptures et d'étudier l'histoire dans les monuments" with a camera.<sup>210</sup> For Flaubert, Du Camp's dutiful focus produced a "blindness," which resulted in a flat and ultimately uninteresting representation of the Orient: for all his

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<sup>209</sup> In 1853, Flaubert writes to Colet: "Le jeune Du Camp est officier de la Légion d'honneur ! Comme ça doit lui faire plaisir ! Quand il se compare à moi, et considère le chemin qu'il a fait depuis qu'il m'a quitté, il est certain qu'il doit me trouver bien loin de lui en arrière, et qu'il a fait de la route (extérieure). Tu le verras, à quelque jour, attraper une place et laisser là cette bonne littérature. Tout se confond dans sa tête, femmes, croix, art, bottes, tout cela, tourbillonne au même niveau, et pourvu que ça le pousse, c'est l'important." (*Correspondance II*, Paris: Gallimard, 1980, pp. 238-9).

<sup>210</sup> Dewachter, Michel and Daniel Oster, *Un Voyageur en Égypte Vers 1850: Le " Nil " de Maxime Du Camp* (Préface: Jean Leclant). Sand/Conti, 1987. p. 16.

attentiveness, Du Camp, according to Flaubert, missed all the interesting details.<sup>211</sup> It is also not surprising then that Flaubert deemed Du Camp's dedication to photography as a sort of futile obsession with technological perfection, completely lacking in creativity.<sup>212</sup>

While Flaubert may have found Du Camp's mission in the Orient uninteresting and his observations banal, the latter created photographs that produced the first photography book of its kind to be published in France. Surpassing the inexactness of previous depictions, including but not limited to the *Description de l'Égypte*, a tradition of travelogues, lithographs and paintings depicting the Near East, Du Camp's collection of photographs received widespread praise for its precision and ability to represent the Orient in an exceptionally realistic manner. Although both were lauded as great works of realism (*Madame Bovary* was celebrated later), Flaubert's *bêtise* realism and Du Camp's scholarly photography differed radically from each other.<sup>213</sup>

Du Camp's collection of photographs, conceived as a work of scientific research, was not thought to draw from an exotic fantasy of a mysterious distant East or from the observations of the romantic poet journeying through foreign landscape. However, as this study will argue, even though it was meant to appear as an objective study, Du Camp's album, like *Madame Bovary*,

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<sup>211</sup> He writes to L. Colet on 7 October 1853: "L'ami Max a commencé à publier son voyage en Égypte: *Le Nil* pour faire pendant à *Le Rhin* ! C'est curieux de nullité. Je ne parle pas du style, qui est archiplat et cent fois pire que dans le *Livre posthume*. Mais comme fond, comme faits, il n'y a rien ! Les détails qu'il a le mieux vus, et les plus caractéristiques dans la nature, il les oublie" (*Correspondance II*, p. 338). Yet during his first trip to the Orient, Du Camp had wanted to share in the same sights as Flaubert and writes to his friend: "Si jamais tu fais le voyage d'Orient, cher vieux, je le ferai avec toi, et alors tous deux, unis comme nous le sommes, voyant avec les mêmes yeux, nous isolant parfaitement au milieu de tous, nous pourrions faire d'admirables excursions," *Lettres inédites à Gustave Flaubert* (Messina, Italy: EDAAS, 1978 my emphasis) [Quoted in McCauley, Elizabeth Anne, "The Photographic Adventures of Maxime Du Camp," *Perspectives on Photography: Essays on the Work of Du Camp, Dancer, Robinson, Stieglitz, Strand and Smithers*, eds. Dave Oliphant and Thomas Zigal. Austin, Texas: Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, 1982, 18-51: 19]. In reality, during their trip together the two friends did not end up viewing the Orient through *les mêmes yeux*.

<sup>212</sup> Flaubert writes: "La photographie absorbe et consume les jours de Max[ime]. Il réussit, mais se désespère chaque fois que rate une épreuve ou qu'un plateau est mal nettoyé. Vraiment s'il ne calme il en crèvera." (*Correspondance I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1973, p. 560).

<sup>213</sup> Moreover, Flaubert adamantly opposed the idea of illustrating *Salammbô*, deeming that his descriptions would be sufficient to evoke ancient Carthage: "Quant aux illustrations, m'offrirait-on cent mille francs, je te jure qu'il n'en paraîtra pas une. Ainsi, il est inutile de revenir là-dessus. Cette idée seule me fait entrer en phrénésie. Je trouve cela stupide, surtout à propos de Carthage." (*Correspondance III*, Paris: Gallimard, 1991, p. 226).



was not without traces of its author's experience of travel. In fact, many features of the album, analyzed below, suggest that the photography book resembled a travelogue more so than was immediately apparent. Moreover, though outwardly presented as objective, Du Camp's album will demand to be read within the historical context of French orientalist knowledge production and culture.

As it will be demonstrated below, Du Camp's photographs gained their authority as indexical of reality not because of their indubitable objectivity, but rather because of their ability to simulate the tropes of romantic travelogues. Du Camp's photography book—while conforming to a pre-existing western orientalist imaginary of the East—paradoxically seemed to overcome the subjectivity of these representations. All the while, the photographs and the composition of the book unintentionally reveal the constructedness of Du Camp's Orient. Du Camp's photography book, therefore—whose ultimate feat seemed that it was able to convey an unmediated story from using the image—appears to be telling a different story regarding the relationship between text and image. Monuments populate the landscape like graphic markers, mirroring the etymology of “photograph,” bringing together light and writing: the root “graph” already suggests textuality at work in determining the construction of the image. I argue that in this way the photograph is not *opposed* to the subjective act of writing riddled with arbitrary rhetorical tricks, but as the root “graph” suggests, is rather a *type of writing*. Thus, Du Camp's photography, heavily embedded in a literary tradition, questions the very faith put in the referential image during his time.

### **Du Camp's Mission, Science and Civilization**

Starting in 1832 following the death of philologist Jean-François Champollion, the *Académie des Inscriptions de Belles-Lettres* participated in three archeological missions

commissioned by the *ministère de l'Instruction publique* to study the ruins of Egypt and the Near East, which culminated in Du Camp's trip on November 4, 1849, five years after Jean-Jacques Ampère's failed attempt. During his trip, Du Camp created 214 successful negative and positive calotype prints on salted paper. Gide et Baudry published 125 of these images, printed by Blanquart-Evrard, in *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie: Dessins photographiques recueillis pendant les années 1849, 1850 et 1851* (1852), France's first successfully printed book composed entirely of paper photographs.<sup>214</sup> A written introduction by Du Camp describing his findings, a detailed legend of the images and three engraved illustrations of site layouts by Émile Prisse d'Avennes accompany the compiled photographs. That Du Camp would be awarded the *Légion d'honneur* in 1853 for this very book testifies to its paradigm-shifting significance.<sup>215</sup>

Conceived as a luxury item with a high production cost, an estimated 200 copies of the album, approximately 49 x 33 x 6 cm, were printed and sold. With balanced contrast in color tone, the Blanquart-Evrard prints provided clear and uniform high-quality images in this leather-bound album.<sup>216</sup> The photographic prints ranged between 14-17 cm by 20-23 cm, approximately the size of an average human face. The one-to-one scale between the photographic image (of monuments, landscape, terrain) and the human face, I suggest, allows for a particular kind of identification between the French viewer and featured oriental sites. With one look at the photograph, the viewer is able to take in the object all at once, which suggests a certain kind of mastery that the album offered the viewer. Moreover, this ratio stands in contrast, for example, with that of a much more alienating and overbearing wide-scale panorama, as it would also differ

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<sup>214</sup> Du Camp, Maxime. *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie: Dessins photographiques recueillis pendant les années 1849, 1850 et 1851*. Paris: Gide et Baudry, 1852.

<sup>215</sup> Having joined the *Académie française* in 1880, Du Camp left his private library to the *Bibliothèque de l'Institut*, which included the original 214 paper negatives and photographic paper prints captioned by Du Camp himself, and his personal copy of the circulated album. Different versions of the album exist, such as *Égypte, Nubie, Syrie: paysage et monuments* (analyzed further below), which Du Camp compiled for orientalist painter Alexandre Bida.

<sup>216</sup> Du Camp's own prints, which would fade, did not achieve the clarity and quality of image of which Blanquart-Evrard was capable.

from the ratio with a smaller art object, offering the owner a much more intimate relationship.<sup>217</sup> In this way, Du Camp's album depicts the Orient as exotic and exceptional yet at the same time manageable and consumable. The size of the photographs personalized the images for their viewer's consumption, while the large-scale presentation of the album reinforced its remarkable status. Furthermore, despite its popularity, the album was not yet meant for mass consumption and ownership; its luxury status (the entire album had cost 500 francs) indicates that the photography book, purchased by amateur enthusiasts and academics alike, was still in the early stages of development.<sup>218</sup> Finally, the success of *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* as an album of photographs also speaks to the mania for collecting exotic objects at the time: the book promises a comprehensive view of the recorded monuments and sites for the avid reader and viewer hungry for images of the Orient.

It is evident from Du Camp's list of publications that traveling to the Orient occupied an important place in his career; his voyages yielded several travelogues, including his first single-authored work, entitled *Souvenirs et paysages d'Orient, Smyrne, Ephèse, Magnésie, Constantinople* (1848), dedicated to Flaubert.<sup>219</sup> The 1849-1851 trip generated two more pieces of writing in the travel-writing genre: *Le Livre posthume—Mémoires d'un suicidé* (1853) and *Le Nil* (1854). Dedicated to Théophile Gautier, *Le Nil* provides a first-person epistolary account of his journey, while *Le Livre posthume—Mémoires d'un suicidé* tells the story of protagonist

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<sup>217</sup> Representations of the exotic locales and sites of (attempted) colonial conquest existed in both of these other forms.

<sup>218</sup> As one of the first photographic albums of its kind, to be successfully published and distributed (but not on a mass scale), it sets the precedent for future albums. The luxury size of the photography book meant that its owner could put it on display in the home: it is neither a mounted exhibition of the photographic prints nor is it simply a book among others in one's library. It also fits somewhere between the more portable and popular *carte-de-visite* and a fine arts piece.

<sup>219</sup> Although not published until 1881, one of Du Camp's first works, *Par les champs et par les grèves* is a co-authored travelogue of his and Flaubert's trip to Brittany in 1847, a year before their trip to the East.

Jean-Marc's farewell to romanticism, set against the background of the East.<sup>220</sup> In his last work, *Souvenirs littéraires* (1882-1883), which offers reflections on his life and career, Du Camp dedicates many pages to reflecting on his life-changing trip to the Orient with Flaubert.<sup>221</sup>

His 1849-1851 trip to the Orient, where Du Camp was introduced to the ideas of Saint-Simon, also signaled a sea change in the young traveler's intellectual orientation.<sup>222</sup> The influence of Saint-Simonism on Du Camp is most evident in his collection of poems *Les chants modernes* (1855), which celebrated the progress of science and technology and called to "mettre les hommes de lettre au service de la science et de l'industrie."<sup>223</sup> Indeed his embracing of positivism and his departure from the depleted world of Romanticism, already signaled in *Mémoires d'un suicidé*, coincided with his experiences in the Orient. Du Camp's shift in outlook can be seen most saliently in a comparison between his first travelogue and *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*: while in *Souvenirs et paysages d'Orient*, he aimed to "parler des paysages qu'[il a] vus là-bas, pour te promener dans Constantinople, pour te donner envie d'aller dans les pays du Soleil," his photographs aspired to be just the opposite and represent the East in an objective manner.<sup>224</sup>

This scientific view of photography during Du Camp's time is reflected quite evidently in the instructions for the mission that led to the publication of *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, which no doubt planted the seed for Du Camp's eventual embracing of the merits of science and

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<sup>220</sup> See Marta Caraion study's of the relationship between Du Camp's travelogues and his photography in *Pour fixer la trace* (Geneva: Droz, 2003). Here, she analyzes the relationship between Du Camp's written work and *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine, Syrie*.

<sup>221</sup> While Du Camp mentions Flaubert neither in *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine, Syrie* (although the latter does anonymously appear in the photograph "Le Kaire, Mousky") nor in *Le Nil*, in *Souvenirs littéraires*, Du Camp discusses in great length his experience with Flaubert in the Orient.

<sup>222</sup> In Cairo, he met Charles Lambert who had followed Saint-Simonian leader Enfantin and approximately forty other disciples to Egypt in 1832. Abroad, they continued to adhere to their group's tenets of coupling science and religion while waiting for the female Messiah.

<sup>223</sup> Du Camp, Maxime. *Les Chants modernes*. Paris: Michel Levy, 1855.

<sup>224</sup> Du Camp, Maxime. *Souvenirs et paysages d'orient : Smyrne, Ephèse, Magnésie, Constantinople, Scio*. Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1848, p.11. Moreover, both Du Camp and Flaubert—for very different reasons—left their Romanticism in the Orient, so to speak.

technology. Aiming to gather archeological knowledge on the Orient, the “Rapport de la Commission Nommée par l'Académie des Inscriptions Pour Rédiger Les Instructions du Voyage de M. Maxime Du Camp” declares:

Bien que les principaux monuments des bords du Nil aient été relevés avec soin et dessinés avec exactitude, il serait utile de posséder des vues d'ensemble prises au Daguerreotype et des détails d'architecture dans de grandes proportions. Le caractère particulier de la photographie, son *exactitude incontestable*, et sa *minutieuse fidélité*, jusque dans les accessoires les plus inaperçus, donnent du prix à tout ce qu'elle produit.<sup>225</sup>

While directing the focus of Du Camp’s mission to reproduce inscriptions, the report echoed the contemporary belief in the “habile, prompt et toujours scrupuleusement fidèle” camera as a tool for creating exactitude and objectivity, uncorrupted by human touch.<sup>226</sup> Regarding the Orient as a site for archeological study, the Commission requested “les vues générales et les détails d’un monument, soit une légende entière, soit un tableau hiéroglyphique complet,” which Du Camp will accomplish with the calotype (and not the daguerreotype).<sup>227</sup> With these images, the report asserts: “il ne s’agit plus de *charmer* nos yeux par les effets séduisants que la lumière porte dans la chambre noire, mais de *copier* fidèlement et avec suite, des textes réclamés par la science.”<sup>228</sup> Echoing his departure from *Souvenirs et paysages d'Orient*, Du Camp’s mission demanded that he not “charm” the viewer’s eyes but simply “copy” the texts of the Orient to gain scientific knowledge on the region. However, as discussed further below, Du Camp will in fact employ artistic framing techniques in order to render the monuments appealing and attractive.

Thinking of photography as not only a scientific tool capable of unforeseen precision but also one that aided in the development of Orientalism was already announced at the official inception of photography in France. In his presentation of the daguerreotype to the Chamber of

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<sup>225</sup> *Un Voyageur en Égypte Vers 1850*, p. 14 (my emphases).

<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>227</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>228</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14 (my emphasis).

Deputies in 1839, Dominique François Arago proclaimed that the photographic image provided “le fini d’un précieux inimaginable” and declared that “la précision des formes est aussi complète que possible”; in the same breath, he also conjectured that the archeologists and scholars of the *Expédition d’Égypte* would have greatly benefitted from the technology had it existed.<sup>229</sup> Arago declares:

A l’inspection de plusieurs tableaux qui ont passé sous vos yeux, chacun songera à l’immense parti qu’on aurait tiré, pendant l’expédition d’Égypte, d’un moyen de reproduction si exact et si prompt ; chacun sera frappé de cette réflexion, que si la photographie avait été connue en 1798, nous aurions aujourd’hui des images fidèles d’un bon nombre de tableaux emblématiques, dont la cupidité des Arabes et le vandalisme de certain voyageurs, ont privé à jamais le monde savant.<sup>230</sup>

Arago’s claim of how the daguerreotype would have changed the course of France’s archeological “discovery” of Egypt only serves to heighten its appeal as well as cast future photography missions as continuing Napoleon’s imperial mission. Arago’s promises contained much foresight as, after being made available to the public, the daguerreotype, and particularly the calotype later on, was almost instantly used to document sites outside the *métropole*, revealing the importance of travel to the early developments of photography. His announcement also outlines the extent to which photography—although presented as a radically new mode of representation—reinforced more than it departed from older intentions of depicting the world.

Arago equally predicts how, employed in the context of the Orient, photography would be used primarily in service of the growing desire for accurate documentation of hieroglyphs—fueled by the Egyptomania of his time—of which Du Camp’s mission is a prime example:

Pour copier les millions et millions d’hiéroglyphes qui couvrent, même à l’extérieur, les grands monuments de Thèbes, de Memphis, de Karnak, etc., il faudrait des vingtaines d’années et des légions de dessinateurs. Avec le Daguerreotype, un seul homme pourrait mener à bonne fin cet immense travail. Munissez l’institut d’Égypte de deux ou trois

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<sup>229</sup> Arago, Dominique François. *Rapport de M. Arago sur le daguerreotype, lu à la séance de la Chambre des Députés le 3 juillet 1839, et à l’Académie des Sciences, séance du 19 août* (Paris: Bachelier, 1839), p. 33.

<sup>230</sup> Arago, *Rapport*, 25-28.

appareils de M. Daguerre, et sur plusieurs des grandes planches de l'ouvrage célèbre, fruit de notre immortelle expédition, de vastes étendues de hiéroglyphes réels iront remplacer des hiéroglyphes fictifs ou de pure convention ; et les dessins surpasseront partout en fidélité, en couleur locale, les œuvres des plus habiles peintres.<sup>231</sup>

Highlighting the photographic image's capacity to bypass the need for human labor and reproduce a vast amount of hieroglyphic text with one click, Arago reveals how the hyper-reality offered by the photograph removed the need for the viewer to physically experience the foreign site. Du Camp's mission set out precisely to utilize photography's groundbreaking ability to create "des images fidèles" of hieroglyphic inscriptions and replace the work and time of several draftsmen. Interestingly, Arago's focus on the camera's ability to copy the numerous hieroglyphs also served to privilege the translation of a place into semiotic text. This is curious particularly given that the transparency that the photographic image seemed to guarantee was to bypass the imperfections of human activity needed for the written word.<sup>232</sup> Thought to possess an indelible marking of the true nature of things, the image, unlike text, was believed not to produce but rather capture a reality not coded with authorial meaning—to see the thing as it is and not as a specific construct of an individual imagination.<sup>233</sup> According to Arago, the photograph was to be the culmination of such naturalness of the image.

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<sup>231</sup> Arago, Dominique François. "Rapport à la Chambre des députés," ed. André Rouillé, *La Photographie en France. Textes et controverses : une anthologie 1816-1871*, Paris : Macula, 1989, p. 38.

<sup>232</sup> The discourse around photography exemplified how vision and the image became increasingly fetishized as certified sources of knowledge. See Roland Barthes's, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" (*Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.) In the nineteenth century, images began to gain currency as the most authentic and immediate mode by which to access and understand the world, as Philippe Hamon and others have argued, leading many to coin the nineteenth century as the century of the image. See Hamon, Philippe (*Imageries: littérature et image au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Corti, 2001). Along this line of thought, like travel writing, realist writing had been thought to attain its realist status by becoming more "image-like."

<sup>233</sup> However, historicizing the development of the pictorial image and how it came to comprise of verisimilitude and truth reveals that it did not always possess its natural authority to most accurately represent an object; this connection was invented by the visual arts. W.J.T. Mitchell (*Image, Icon, Text*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) explains that at first, "likeness," a spiritual concept, did not indicate materially creating resemblance but rather producing the inner essence of something. Mitchell points out that Alberti's invention of artificial perspective in 1435 Italy paved the way for the claim that one could visually and thus pictorially capture the truth of an objet by representing its appearance. With the existence of perspective, it became possible to reproduce truth through imitation of physical characteristics. Artificially produced perspective elided itself with "natural"

This belief in the immediacy and superiority of the mimetic image over the arbitrary and artificial nature of the written word is echoed by Chateaubriand who wrote in *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811) that he went to the Orient “chercher des images, voilà tout,” seeing himself as a “peintre de paysage” who ekphratically “penned” what he saw.<sup>234</sup> The use of “voilà tout” speaks to the simplicity and transparency one associated with the image during Chateaubriand’s time; by writing as if copying an image, Chateaubriand’s words were to offer a truer representation of what he saw. Du Camp was similarly convinced by the power of the photographic image over text to accurately recall the impressions of his trip. Du Camp maintains:

Dans mes précédents voyages, j’avais remarqué que je perdais un temps précieux à dessiner les monuments ou les points de vue dont je voulais garder le souvenir ; je dessinais lentement et d’une façon peu correcte ; en outre, les notes que je prenais pour décrire soit un édifice soit un paysage, me semblaient confuses lorsque je les relisais à distance, et j’avais compris qu’il me fallait un instrument de précision pour rapporter des images qui me permettraient des reconstitutions exactes.<sup>235</sup>

De Cormenin echoes Du Camp’s impatience with imprecise representations in his view that “un voyage perd toujours à la substitution d’un récit, si fidèle qu’il puisse être.”<sup>236</sup> Instead, De Cormenin asserts: “nous préférons, pour notre part, qu’un voyageur s’efface.”<sup>237</sup> This statement in fact accurately points to one of the effects that Du Camp’s photographs appeared to achieve: erasure of the subjectivity of the traveler responsible for taking them. Meant to

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representation (thereby hiding its own artificiality) governed by “objectivity” and science. The use of perspective privileged vision’s prowess for deciphering and presenting truth. Likeness and therefore truth became something that one could not only experience through the sense of sight, but also create through mimetic representation.

<sup>234</sup> Chateaubriand, François de. *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*. Paris : Gallimard/Folio, 2005, p. 55.

<sup>235</sup> *Souvenirs littéraires*, p. 309. This sentiment is echoed the review of Du Camp’s album by Louis de Cormenin, who notes: “nous n’avons plus besoin de monter sur le vaisseau des Cook et des Lapeyrouse pour tenter de périlleux voyages ; l’héliographie, confiée à quelques intrépides, fera pour nous le tour du monde, et nous rapportera l’univers en portefeuille, sans que nous quittions notre fauteuil.” De Cormenin, Louis. “A propos de *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, de Maxime Du Camp,” *La Lumière*, 12 June 1852, n. 25, p. 104. Taken from Rouillé, André. *La Photographie en France. Textes et controverses: une anthologie 1816-1871*.

<sup>236</sup> *Souvenirs littéraires*, p. 309.

<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*



document monuments and landscape, the images were for the most part devoid of people; of course on a technical level, this effect was also pragmatic—the result of the long exposure time needed to produce a stable image.<sup>238</sup> However, capturing images of monuments devoid of people fit in with Du Camp’s mission and contributed to rendering his images as scientific studies. Thus, unlike Du Camp’s first-person epistolary travel account in *Le Nil*, which followed in the footsteps of and celebrated the literary tradition of the travelogue, the book of photographs removed the need to physically experience the Orient for oneself.<sup>239</sup> The images captured by the camera lens replace the first person “I” with a general and objective “we.” By presenting itself as purely indexical and thus offering an objectivity that attempted to replace the role of the romantic traveler, somatic experience continues to be evacuated from the photographic images, which seemingly erased the subject position of both the image-maker and traveler.<sup>240</sup>

### **The Constructed Objectivity of *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*’s Realism**

As discussed above, Du Camp’s mission at once foregrounds the objective precision of the photographic image and prioritizes the documentation of hieroglyphic inscriptions. These

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<sup>238</sup> See Julia Ballerini, *The Stillness of Hajj Ishmael: Maxime Du Camp’s 1850 Photographic Encounters*. iUniverse, 2010. Ballerini discusses the importance of Du Camp’s use of one of his guides as a measuring device to provide a sense of scale. This figure repeatedly appears in multiple images, functioning as a scientific tool facilitating Du Camp’s orientalist project.

<sup>239</sup> In *Le Nil*, not only does Du Camp follow the itinerary of Chateaubriand, he celebrates the voyages of Byron, Lamartine and Hugo whose literary footsteps he also professes to follow. Du Camp addresses Gautier “Tu me faisais observer que le génie des littératures modernes est essentiellement voyageur, et que, chacun selon ses forces, parmi nos demi-dieux, avait essayé de dire à ses contemporains les pérégrinations qu’il avait accomplies. Byron, Chateaubriand [*sic*], Lamartine ont été des pèlerins ; ils ont marché à travers le monde et ont chanté leurs routes. Victor Hugo a été le prédicateur de l’Orient ; il a été, par les *Orientales*, le Pierre Hermite de cette croisade artistique que nous avons tous entreprise et menée à bonne fin.” (Du Camp, *Le Nil*, p. 69).

<sup>240</sup> This view is reinforced in L.A. Martin’s review, in which he writes:

Ce n’est pas le dessin ni le calque plus ou moins fidèle du monument, d’un site remarquable, c’est le monument, *c’est le site lui-même que l’on voit*, que l’on touche dans ses moindres détails. Tous les débris de l’antique Égypte et de la Syrie sont là, tels que le temps et les hommes nous les ont laissés. Il eût été impossible au crayon le plus habile de les reproduire avec cette exactitude, qui va désormais devenir indispensable au genre d’études que de telles reproductions ont pour objet. (*La Lumière*, Paris France, 1852. p. 74. (my emphasis))

Martin’s praise revealed in the immediacy of the image, as exemplified in the phrase “c’est le site lui-même que l’on voit,” disavowing altogether the role of photography as a medium. According to Martin, *replacing* the actual Orient, the photograph brought the ancient sites of the Near East to present-day France.

two concerns also appear somewhat contradictory: the accessibility and naturalness of the image appear to satisfy a deeper desire to gain an increased understanding of a textual tradition, which demands exegesis. In other words, the transparency of the photographic image captures text that would then be subjected to interpretation. As we shall see demonstrated in the following section, the success of Du Camp's album in fact strayed away from both of these premises: his images were far from objective recordings of the East, and the album did not solely provide depictions of architectural inscriptions.

Although hailed as an objective "view" of the East, Du Camp's photography book was nonetheless not produced without the touch of the human hand—a fact to which the album's very form, which required an individual to catalogue and frame, testifies. As bearer of scientific knowledge guiding the reader through an archeological tour of Egypt to Palestine, the album orders and systematizes the images to further validate them as objective findings. The composition of the book conforms to the ethos of Du Camp's mission: to present a scientific record of the important archeological sites of the Near East. First, the organization of the pages of the album put the Orient on display: each spread—without a photograph on the facing page—demands the viewer to focus on the presented photographic image. The content is featured at the center of the photograph, which is itself centered on the album page; this provides the photograph with a double frame delineated by the edges of the photograph itself and then by the page on which it is fixed. Moreover, standardized composition and scale of the images offer a sense of purposive unity for *all* the pictures collected together, presenting them as un-manipulated and straightforward documentation of the subject matter. The angles and points of view used are not meant to be "artistic," but rather to convey the maximum amount of information about the monuments.

Surrounding each photograph, in large font centered at the top of the page is a geographical location, presenting the name of the region, for example “Le Caire” or “Haute Égypte.” A subtitle underneath the photograph offers more detailed information, for example “Vue générale d’Essneh” or “Grand Temple d’Isis à Philae.” Providing the geographical context of the photographs, these textual labels guide the readers in an academic journey to study the Orient, while reinforcing the album as an academic work offering a virtual tour of the region.

Comparing the circulated version with the unbound set of the original 214 photographs shows not only the editing process of the album but also reveals how the labeling became increasingly systematized in *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*.<sup>241</sup> The similarity in organization between the original photographs and the album, moreover, suggests the idea that the unbound collection was a “rough draft” for the album. Both the original prints and the bound version possessed similarly consistent page layouts: the images are in landscape format and both followed the same general order of cities, based on Du Camp’s itinerary in the Orient. Pointing to the indexical underpinning of the project from its very beginning, in the original collection, chronologically numbered handwritten labels provide the name of the city, a very brief description of what is pictured in the image, and the date the photograph was taken; for example: “1. Alexandrie. Vue générale d’Alexandrie prise de la terrasse de l’hôtel d’Orient; 17 novembre 1849.”<sup>242</sup> As the handwritten labels are transformed into print in the final circulated version, the numbers and the date also drop out of the subtitle. Here, editors erase the numbers and the dates

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<sup>241</sup> The original 214 prints, in a much-deteriorated quality, are held at the *Bibliothèque de l’Institut* in Paris, France. Upon return to Paris from his trip in May 1851, Du Camp presented his proofs to the *Société héliographique*, who were quite impressed with his results. It was not until October of that year that Du Camp began to make arrangements with Blanquart-Evrard (and then later Gide et Baudry) to professionally publish his proofs in an album would later become *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (McCauley, “The Photographic Adventure of Maxime Du Camp,” pp. 45-47).

<sup>242</sup> It is interesting to note that in the hand-written captions of the original 214 photographs, there are a handful of “mistakes” in the numbering system, in which, for example, in the number 28, the “8” is crossed out replaced with a “9.” This editing process makes evident the extent to which the human hand played a role in the cataloguing of the photographs.

from the labels in order for the images to appear as more universal representations of the Orient. The edited album then organizes the photographs together by chapter, beginning with “Le Kaire,” and then proceeding up the Nile to “Égypte Moyenne,” “Haute Égypte,” “Thèbes,” “Nubie,” “Palestine,” and finally “Syrie,” highlighting the importance of geographically cataloguing Du Camp’s trip and his findings.

Presenting long shots, medium shots and close-up views of the same monument in the circulated album—to which I will return later in the chapter with a more in-depth analysis of a particular case—offered the sense that each monument was being rigorously studied and situated. Long-shot images, in which the foreground is often centrally positioned at approximately two-thirds down from the top, would introduce the reader to the featured site. These general-view photographs contextualized and introduced the monuments, allowing the reader to take it all in before medium and close-up shots would follow to zoom in on a particular feature. All the while, linear perspective employed in the photographic image provides a sense of verisimilitude.

While the cataloguing and systematization of the images in the album help to create the sense that it is an archeological study, not all of the images reproduced in Du Camp’s albums actually focus on the goal of the archeological mission: to reproduce inscriptions.<sup>243</sup> *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* opens with a view of Cairo, followed by urban images and photographs of mosques. These pictures have little to do with Egypt’s archeological heritage and even less to do with its hieroglyphic inscriptions. Most sections include a general view of the site as well as of nearby landscape, providing a sense of the exotic surroundings. For example, “Vue prise de l’est de Philae” (figure 3.1) features a slightly sparse landscape with trees surrounding a dwelling

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<sup>243</sup> In the original 214 prints, it is even more evident that Du Camp did not focus merely on sites of archeological significance; he even took a few experimental photographs documenting social mores, such as workers tending to a well (plate 163) in Chadouf à Abou-hor or a still-life of a typical headdress (plate 199) in Jerusalem.

of some sort; land is situated in the middle of the photograph with sky and water occupying two-thirds of the image, following the proportions of landscape painting. This landscape “view,” specifically stated to be “east” of Philae, literally circumscribes the group of photographs depicting the ruins of Philae, which come after this photograph in the album.<sup>244</sup> Conforming to the rules of spatial coherency, “Vue prise de l’est de Philae” provides the viewer with a scene of oriental landscape, depictions already made familiar by paintings and travelogues. Both the horizon line, which centrally bisects the image, and the equal distribution of water, land and sky connote a sense of seeming stability, while the lack of shadows in the image (most likely because the picture was taken at mid-day) further portrays this landscape scene as serene. With palm trees and an abundance of water surrounding the dwelling, mimicking the exotic views of paintings and lithographs, this image also compels the reader to see Egypt differently: not just as a desert but also as a place inhabitable by the western traveler. The emptiness of the image suggests the lack of (eastern) subjectivity occupying the image (as mentioned above) while it simultaneously invites a narrative to overwrite and superimpose itself on the blank scene.

Although the mission emphasized the goals of Du Camp’s trip as principally scientific—to photograph monuments and archeological sites—the prospectus of the album explains why such images as the picturesque “Vue prise de l’est de Philae” were included: “L’ouvrage que nous annonçons a le double intérêt d’une publication archéologique et daguerrienne, pittoresque et savante.”<sup>245</sup> The prospectus continues to insist on the “exacte fidélité” of the photographs in the album even while revealing that scientific concerns were not the collection’s sole interest:<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Many of the photographic images are similar to the visual representations provided by *Description de l’Égypte*; this is the case with “Vue prise de l’est de Philae.” As a matter of fact the island of Philae was a very popular site for orientalist depiction prior to the invention of photography.

<sup>245</sup> *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, “Prospectus.”

<sup>246</sup> There is a notable difference in tone between the squarely scientific tone of the mission and the language justifying the luxury album that was the product of this mission.

Afin de rompre la monotonie que pourrait présenter une série continue de monuments, temples, palais portiques, bas-reliefs, hypogées, nécropoles, pyramides, obélisques, statues, panneaux d'hieroglyphes, cartouches, etc., et varier l'aspect trop architectural de l'ensemble, nous avons donné quelques paysages, quelques sites intéressants, caractéristiques et curieux, voulant mêler la nature aux monuments et relier le présent au passé pour la clarté et la succession de l'ouvrage.<sup>247</sup>

Breaking the monotony of the images of monuments to maintain the interest of the viewers, the landscape images add a picturesque “character” to the archeological study. According to the logic of the album’s prospectus, the inclusion of such picturesque views does not deter from the scholarly nature of the album but rather contributes to the overall harmony of the collection. Adding an element of “nature” to the album, by providing familiar tropes to which the French audience was already accustomed, the landscape images also contributed to naturalizing the photographs of the archeological sites as scientific and documentary. As Ernest Gombrich argues in *Art and Illusion*, picturesque landscape painting offered a mode of visualizing the world, one that responded to the desire to see it in familiar terms as opposed to as it really was.<sup>248</sup> “Vue prise de l’est de Philae,” therefore, not only interrupts the homogeneity of the architectural views, it provides a necessary sense of familiarity to build trust with the reader.

### **The Role of Orientalism in the Construction of Objectivity**

Significantly for the construction of the album, the perception of its objectivity also cannot be considered outside of thinking about how French Orientalism conditioned its existence. As seen above, borrowed tropes from travelogues and painting traditions were key to rendering Du Camp’s album legible as providing accurate depictions of the Orient. Portraying the Orient as “an object on display for the western gaze” was certainly not a neutral feat, as this kind of realist representation borrowed from and contributed to the creation of an “Imaginary

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<sup>247</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Gombrich, Ernest. *Art and Illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960.

Orient,” to use Linda Nochlin’s term, sustained through established representational and viewing expectations and practices.<sup>249</sup> Said’s questioning of Orientalism’s nineteenth-century “descriptive realism” as “a means of *creation*”<sup>250</sup> also reminds us that “elaborately wrought imitations of what a live Orient might be thought to look like” did not detract “from the strength of their imaginative conception,” one greatly informed by the orientalist imaginary.<sup>251</sup> In short, the objectivity of the photographic album largely depended on reproducing established orientalist depictions of the Near East.<sup>252</sup>

The importance of Du Camp’s training in Orientalism is quite evident in the book’s opening text, which presents an introduction to the region.<sup>253</sup> A combination of historical study, tourist brochure and report of Du Camp’s findings, the *texte explicatif* provides an orientalist context to frame the photographs, while offering a range of information from historical anecdotes to technical detail such as the longitude and latitude coordinates of the monuments. Take for example the following statement in which Du Camp echoes the significance of his photographs: “Les écrivains orientaux, venus après les Grecs et les Latins, n’ont fait qu’enchérir sur leurs douteuses assertions. Nous n’entreprenons pas de les concilier ; nous ne consignons ici que des faits recueillis et authentiqués par le concours des plus exactes observations et des opinions les

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<sup>249</sup> Nochlin, Linda. “The Imaginary Orient,” *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989, pp. 33-59. Moreover, in “The Photographic Adventure of Maxime Du Camp,” McCauley writes that “Even though most of the reference works Du Camp is known to have consulted before his trip were either unillustrated or accompanied by engravings representing hieroglyphic panels, he was familiar with both topographical lithographs of the Middle East and orientalist paintings by his good friend Gleyre and by Delacroix, Decamps, Marilhat, and Fromentin, whom he had noticed in the 1847 Salon” (26). These pictorial views shaped the way he represented the Near East with the camera.

<sup>250</sup> *Orientalism*, p. 87.

<sup>251</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>252</sup> With the exception of a few monuments, Du Camp photographed the same sites that were featured in Hector Horeau’s lithographic work *Panorama d’Egypte et de Nubie* (“The Photographic Adventure of Maxime Du Camp,” pp. 26-29). This shows how Du Camp mimicked and was influenced by earlier non-photographic studies of Near Eastern monuments.

<sup>253</sup> In preparation for his mission, Du Camp trained not only in photography but also orientalist studies at the Bibliothèque de l’Institut and joined the *Société Orientale*. And on a personal note, Du Camp’s uncle Amédée Chéronnet even married Champollion’s daughter in 1848, personally tying Du Camp to France’s most important Egyptologist.

plus dignes de confiance.”<sup>254</sup> Employing the academic “nous” as opposed to “je,” Du Camp speaks from an official and scientific perspective to provide trustworthy observations on local writing that are “*plus dignes de confiance*.” Moreover, by positioning himself as providing more accurate depictions of what had been represented in the past, he in fact legitimizes the value of these previous interpretations as important albeit less accurate representations.

The impact of Orientalism is felt even stronger in how Du Camp understands the history of the Near East through privileging French presence in the region. He cites Champollion within the first few pages of the text: “[la ville] repose sur un massif composé de débris antiques, parmi lesquels Champollion le jeune a reconnu le cartouche de Psammetich II.”<sup>255</sup> Mentioned throughout the introduction, Champollion not only lends credence to Du Camp’s modern archeological study of the Orient but also recalls the accomplishments of Napoleon’s expedition. This authority, of course, stems directly from the established status of Orientalism as a trustworthy source of information on the Orient in France.<sup>256</sup> Citing both Champollion and Psammetich II in the same sentence also serves to highlight how the modern French empire had replaced the ancient Egyptian one. Du Camp also lists a lineage of historically significant men in the region: “Les pays que [Du Camp] a parcourus ont été le berceau même des civilisations des religions. Moïse, Sésostris, Alexandre, Pompée, César, Jésus-Christ, Mahomet, Lusignan, Napoléon et Chateaubriand les ont tour à tour fécondés par le glaive ou par la parole et les ont immortalisés de leurs glorieux noms.”<sup>257</sup> Culminating in Chateaubriand, this cohort shows the

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<sup>254</sup> *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, p. 7.

<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>256</sup> Du Camp does not shy away from employing the history of French archeological study as the definitive history of the Orient. His bias is clear in the following statement: “Nous n’aurons que peu de mots à dire sur la Nubie, car ses monuments sont moins intéressants que ceux de l’Égypte; les anciens historiens n’en parlent pas.” Du Camp’s conviction that Egypt deserved more attention than any other region reflects how he was influenced by the Egyptomania of his day. Of his eighteen-month trip, he spends eight months in Egypt and creates 189 of 214 photograph negatives there.

<sup>257</sup> *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, “Prospectus.”



importance of the romantic travel writing tradition to Du Camp's interpretation of the region as well as how, with the photography book, he would be the logical next figure in this lineage.

Like Du Camp's introduction, reviews celebrating the tremendous feat of the photographs also could not help but put the album in the company of a literary tradition representing the East. About Du Camp's courage and entrepreneurial skills in creating *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, Louis de Cormenin, to whom the album is dedicated, writes in the accolade-filled study published in *La Lumière*:

Où la plume est impuissante à saisir, dans la vérité et la variété de leurs aspects, les monuments et les paysages, où le crayon est capricieux et s'égare, altérant la pureté des textes, la photographie est inflexible. Son ambition s'est bornée à dresser un procès-verbal et à transcrire un pays. C'était en même temps donner le cadre et la signification au Coran et à la Bible, et replacer l'histoire dans son décor naturel. Histoire ou voyage, archéologie religieuse ou roman, Josèphe ou Chateaubriand, Lamartine ou Bonaparte y acquerraient la précision de la réalité, du mouvement et de la vie, décalqués en quelque sorte au pur et vrai reflet du soleil. Là, ni fantaisie ni supercherie, la vérité nue.<sup>258</sup>

While employing language that supposedly praises the album's scientific achievements, the celebratory rhetoric of the review anchors the photograph in a lineage of textual imaginary of the Orient, spanning from the bible to the poetic voyages of Lamartine. Arguing that photography preserved "la pureté des textes" where the pen and the paintbrush had failed, the review in fact describes the album as representing the "naked truth" of the Orient, as presented through the lens of this history. Maintaining that the camera was able to capture "the precision of reality"—assuming that reality, as the appearance of things, naturally possessed "precision" or "truth" that the camera was able to innocently reproduce—de Cormenin considers Du Camp's album as providing the "natural décor" for the Koran and the Bible. Thus, the precise images did not depart from the stories that represented and gave meaning to the region but rather gained their truth-value by reinforcing these narratives.

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<sup>258</sup> *La Lumière*, Paris France, 1852. p. 98.

This review also clearly outlines that photography did not offer a new view of the Orient, but rather reiterated the ideas that were already in place. As De Cormenin succinctly lauds: “Nous n’avons plus besoin de monter sur le vaisseau des Cooke et des Lapeyrouse pour tenter de périlleux voyages : l’héliographie, confiée à quelques intrépides, fera pour nous le tour du monde, et nous rapportera l’univers en portefeuille, sans que nous quittions notre fauteuil.”<sup>259</sup> Here, the naturalness of the photograph is actually considered in terms of how it successfully replaced the work of travelogues.

Remarkably, citing a lineage of great travelers is also central to *Le Nil*, from which the photography book was thought to depart. This dedication to the romantic travel writing tradition is most evident in Du Camp addressing Gautier throughout the narrative; as Du Camp’s interlocutor, Gautier is an integral part of *Le Nil*.<sup>260</sup> Du Camp shows his indebtedness to his addressee:

Le récit de mes voyages fera-t-il jaillir une étincelle dans notre nuit ? Je ne le crois pas ; pourquoi donc le faire ?  
A cela tu m’as répondu : Essaye de faire partager aux autres les jouissances que tu as éprouvées ; raconte ce que tu as vu, d’autres en tireront les conséquences devant lesquelles tu sembles reculer ; chante ta chanson, quelle qu’elle soit, une voix se trouvera peut-être pour qui elle aura été écrite.  
Tu as raison, cher Théophile, et je me mets à l’œuvre. C’est à toi que j’adresserai ces lettres sur l’Égypte et la Nubie, elles te reviennent de droit, car sans ta sage insistance, je ne les aurais peut-être jamais écrites.<sup>261</sup>

Du Camp makes clear that he is following in Gautier’s footsteps, as well as the travel writers who have come before to “faire partager aux autres les jouissances [...] éprouvées.” In *Le Nil*, contrary to the “nous” of the text of the photography book, Du Camp employs an experiencing

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<sup>259</sup> *La Lumière*, Paris France, 1852. p. 98.

<sup>260</sup> There is an interesting rapprochement between *Le Nil* and Flaubert’s travel correspondence, which contains the bulk of his observations. Both the writers’ “travelogues” were epistolary in nature.

<sup>261</sup> *Un Voyageur en Égypte vers 1850, “Le Nil” de Maxime Du Camp*, ed. Michel Dewachter and Daniel Oster. Paris: Sand/Conti, 1987, pp. 69-70.

and observing “je,” which operates in tandem with Gautier’s privileged “tu.” The way Du Camp presents his journey is very much a personal one sharing the *jouissances* he felt while traveling and celebrating his friendship with Gautier as well as the French tradition of romantic travel writing. Du Camp comprises his epistolary text with personal reflections on his experiences in the Orient as well as provides commentary on the actual transformative process of composing a travel narrative, as his predecessors had done.<sup>262</sup> The following section will more thoroughly explore how Du Camp did not fully erase the subjective presence of the romantic tradition from his photography book, as commonly thought.

### **The Traces of the Travelogue in *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie***

We have now seen how Du Camp’s scientific photography was hardly free from the artifice that supposedly only tainted literary and artistic representations of the Orient. Not only did Du Camp’s album—while portraying itself as scientific—employ popular tropes from these other forms of representation; it also formally resembled and depended on the conventions of the romantic travelogue in order to be legible as realistic representation. What is more, as I claim below, the “realism” of the scientific album stems from the epistemological standards set by the romantic travelogue—namely, the need for subjective presence to authenticate the representations. Even though the album was premised on being an objective recording of the important monuments and sites of the Near East, the representation of movement and the passage of time, as well as evoking the photographer’s *experience* in the East, become crucial to bestowing on the album its scientific authority.

The photograph “Seconde cataracte. Dgebel-Aboucir, limite de la Nubie Inférieure et de la Nubie Supérieure,” plate 112 of the album (figure 3.2), a landscape view, functions as a

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<sup>262</sup> Perhaps this is what led Flaubert to declare that Du Camp seemed to have missed all the interesting details encountered during their trip.

geographical marker, indicating Du Camp's itinerary up the Nile.<sup>263</sup> Possessing no archeological value, this image demarcates a border between upper and lower Nubia, while recording the distance Du Camp traversed during his trip. As its inclusion in the album is purely geographical, this photograph of the cataract validates the *having-been-thereness* of the photographic image more so than the other images, serving as proof that Du Camp was indeed in the Orient.<sup>264</sup> While the landscape photographs provide a sense of spatial coherency in the composition of the image, the photographs of the cataracts also offer an impression of geographical coherency. Here, in contrast to the more calm "Vue prise de l'est de Philae," the horizon line is on the top one-fifth of the image; the topography is clearly showcased in this image, occupied mostly by land, rocks and water. While "Vue prise de l'est de Philae" is concerned with providing a sense of the atmosphere, this image focuses on conveying the terrain and texture of the cataract. The angle of the photograph also draws the viewer into the foreground's uneven terrain, suggesting the difficulty of the journey ahead. In short, the viewer embarks on the trip of discovery, following in Du Camp's footsteps.

Geographical movement is further simulated, in an even more distinct way, in Du Camp's photographs of the temple of Denderah in Upper Egypt. An examination of how Du Camp photographed a particular monument will offer insight into how the travelogue genre influenced his images. On May 28, 1850, Du Camp took six photographs, documenting the site, monument and inscriptions on its walls, five of which are displayed in the edited album.

Following images depicting Cairo, the pyramids and landscape, this set of images is the first that

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<sup>263</sup> The album also includes other images of cataracts: "Entrée de la première cataracte. Vue prise au S.-E. d'Açouan" (photograph 66) and exit of the first cataract, "Sortie de la première cataracte. Limites de l'Égypte et de la Nubie" (photograph 67).

<sup>264</sup> In "Rhetoric of the Image," (*Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 32-51) Barthes claims that the *having-been-there* status of the photograph allows for the image's denotative meaning to naturalize its ideological message, or connotative meaning. Interestingly, the *having-been-thereness* of the photograph coincides precisely with the privileging of subjective experience in the romantic travelogue.

showcases hieroglyphic wall inscriptions. The collection begins with “Vue générale,” followed by “Hypèthre construit sur la terrasse,” “Façade postérieure,” and two close-up images of inscriptions entitled “Sculptures de la façade postérieure,” photographs sixteen to twenty of the album.

The first photograph in the Denderah series, “Vue générale” (figure 3.3), sets the scene for the reader as well as establishes a sense of linear perspective in the image. A long-shot photograph, it features the entire front side of the temple in the center of the frame, along with the surrounding landscape, offering a comprehensive view of the monument’s entrance. The straightforward shot allows the viewer to take in the entire monument without feeling overwhelmed by its size. The man standing on one of the pillars, whom we know to be Hajj Ishmael, one of Du Camp’s servants and here used to provide scale, is clearly meant to demonstrate the enormity of the temple.<sup>265</sup> While Ishmael is obviously not the focus of the photograph, the camera, placed on the right-hand wall that encloses the pathway to the entrance, is curiously positioned directly in front of him. He is deceptively at once insignificant and the focal point of the image. In the bottom half of the photograph, a path, creating diagonal parallel lines that converge at the entrance of the temple, suggests movement toward the monument. These lines also direct the viewer’s attention to the front of the temple, and more specifically to one of the sections of dark space lurking between two white columns. Here, the photograph invites the viewer to look inside the temple, which from the perspective of this first photograph

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<sup>265</sup> See Ballerini, *The Stillness of Hajj Ishmael* for a thorough study of Ishmael. In “Rewriting the Nubian Figure in the Photograph: Maxime Du Camp’s ‘cultural hypochondria’” in *Colonialist Photography Imag(in)ing race and place*, eds. Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson (New York: Routledge, 2002), Ballerini argues that Du Camp experiences “cultural hypochondria” fearing that the civilization to which he belongs may also one day disintegrate. Du Camp’s use of Ishmael in his pictures is a way of deferring this anxiety. See also “The in visibility of Hadji-Ishmael: Maxime Du Camp’s 1850 photographs of Egypt,” in *The Body Imaged: the human form and visual culture since the Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) for a discussion of Du Camp’s comments on Ishmael in *Le Nil*.

remains hidden and obscure. The entrance is for now at once a blank and dark space, appealing to the viewer to color it with his own imagination as well as turn the page of the album.

In the following photograph, “Hypèthre construit sur la terrasse” (figure 3.4), the viewer enters into the monument. Du Camp’s exploration of Denderah is replicated in the progression from the first to the second photograph. “Hypèthre construit sur la terrasse” is a medium long shot of a chaotic array of ruins located inside of the temple, to which the photograph offers access. Standing at what appeared to have been a window-like structure, Ishmael, now much bigger than before, again serves as a measuring device for the image. The change in scale from the first to the second photograph is significant as the viewer has traveled from a comprehensive view of the monument to an interior space of domestic proportion, reflected by the scale between the figure and the ruins. It is also clear that while the first image introduces the viewer to the new site, “Hypèthre construit sur la terrasse,” a much more constricted view, signals to the viewer to now focus on the archeological value of the ruins themselves. The disorderliness of the ruins in this image, particularly in contrast to the cleaner lines of the “Vue générale,” also suggests that this photograph presents the reality awaiting the viewer behind the entrance.

The first two photographs, therefore, create the effect of literal as well as metaphorical movement; physical succession between the two frames mirrors the advancement towards scientific discovery, in which one gains insight about the monument. The opening photograph, “Vue générale,” suggests that there is something to see behind the entrance to the temple, while the second photograph reveals precisely what this is. The coupling of movement or travel with knowledge accumulation is not unlike the orientalist ideology undergirding the tradition of European travelogues, in which personal experience and observation gained during travel authenticated the veracity of the accounts of foreign cultures, which unveiled something about

them. The album thus reiterates this connection between experience and truth-value, which was solidified in the tradition of travel writing.

The next photograph in the series, “Façade postérieure,” provides a long-shot image of the posterior façade of the temple, pictured with surrounding ruins (3.5). Already, hieroglyphic inscriptions loomed in the background of “Hypèthre construit sur la terrasse,” which are then shown in more evidence in “Façade postérieure.” Here, Hajj Ishmael is standing on top of the temple, and becomes relatively small again in relation to the monument’s size, as in the “Vue générale.” The standing wall is surrounded by crumbling ruin, which likens traveling towards and into the monument to traveling back in time. The association between these two states reinforces the idea that for the French viewer, the monuments of the Orient could only be relics of a distant past. By privileging archeological ruins, the album constructed the Orient in contradistinction to the modernizing French urban landscape. This historical passage of time between the ancient past of the Orient and the modern present of the photograph mirrors the passage of time simulated in the progression from figure three to five. The rendering of time, then, played a pivotal role in the configuration of the album in two ways: the passage of time needed for the experience of travel and the representation of the Orient as an archeological site, in a distant past time. Witnessing this historical *décalage horaire* became necessary for the French viewer to be able to situate and therefore to understand the images: the Orient becomes legible in the photographs only as distant in space *and* time in relation to France.<sup>266</sup>

Both “Hypèthre construit sur la terrasse” and “Façade postérieure” prepare the viewer for the next photograph “Sculptures de la façade postérieure” (figure 3.6), a close-up shot of the wall of inscriptions. Focusing on the wall of hieroglyphs, “Sculptures de la façade postérieure” is the

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<sup>266</sup> See Fabian, Johannes, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) for a discussion of the denial of coevalness between Europe and its anthropological others.

culminating image in the Denderah series. Depicting the hieroglyphic text in this photograph, Du Camp fulfills his intended mission for the *Académie des Inscriptions*. At the same time, the image only captures an “excerpt” of the text; arbitrarily cutting off the rest of the inscription suggests that scholarly orientalist study was in fact not the goal of the album. Instead, showing that Du Camp was capable of producing a high-quality image of hieroglyphic text, his feat lies in his technological prowess to manipulate the camera.

Although with the Denderah series, Du Camp fulfills his scientific mission of representing ancient inscriptions, the hieroglyphic text remains undecipherable for the amateur French audience who will purchase the album. For them, the inscriptions, or the “writing on the wall,” remain completely foreign, such that rendering the Orient “legible” through the documentation of text simultaneously reinforces the Orient as precisely *illegible*. Thus, accomplishing the scientific goal of the archeological trip therefore paradoxically coincides with the ruins remaining unreadable. While the album appears to generate knowledge on the Orient, it in fact does the opposite and maintains the Orient as a mystery in the western imaginary. Interestingly, before the systematic translation of hieroglyphs, it was believed that hieroglyphic text was pictorially oriented and thus not mediated through a complex system of signs. We have since learned that this is untrue and that hieroglyphs in fact functioned as a system, no more transparent than French or English. This revised understanding of hieroglyphs highlights the means through which the album in fact functioned. Although it appears to provide a transparent representation of the monuments documented, the album in fact draws from and partakes in a complicated sign system, grounded in the history of orientalist representation, thus disrupting the very immediacy the camera seemed to promise during Du Camp’s time.



The photographs of the Denderah series also show how fulfilling the goal of mimetically re-presenting inscriptions coincided with likening the album of photographs to an actual book of text, through printing the hieroglyphs on the calotype—or literally putting writing onto paper. This discussion necessitates a slight detour to review the history of the calotype in France and show how the rise in popularity of the calotype is essential for understanding Du Camp's collection of photographs. The technology of the paper-based calotype, or “beautiful” “impression,” defined by its particular technique of creating a salted paper print from a paper negative developed alongside the daguerreotype. In England, William Henry Fox Talbot invented the calotype or Talbotype process and succeeded in making the first known photographic image, a “paper negative,” in 1835. In France, Daguerre announced his invention of the daguerreotype, capturing an image onto a silvered copper plate while Hippolyte Bayard publically exhibited for the first time his paper-based positive images in 1839. In the early 1840s, the daguerreotype offered shorter exposure time, clarity and precision.

However, beginning in the early 1850s, the calotype began to witness increased success, as early photographers like Blanquart-Evrard, Le Gray and others had improved the calotype process throughout the 1840s, such that it was now able to compete with copies produced from the widely admired daguerreotype.<sup>267</sup> The invention of pre-treated paper, allowing for printing and distribution on a much wider scale, also greatly facilitated the execution of the photograph, particularly for travelers, who were able to prepare their photographic negatives up to a few weeks in advance. It is no surprise then that with advancements in the process of its execution, the calotype became the preferred medium for traveling photographic missions. Du Camp trained

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<sup>267</sup> In 1851 *La Lumière, revue photographique*, the first journal dedicated to studying the heliographic arts, was also founded. Borrowing from Talbot's discoveries, Blanquart-Evrard introduced the method of printing photography on paper in 1847 and presented his *Traité de Photographie sur papier* to the Académie des sciences in 1851, the same year he started his *Imprimerie photographique* in Lille. A short-lived success, the printing workshop closed down four years later.

in Le Gray's waxed paper method, designed to minimize the effects of the paper fibers on the image and provide a wider tonal range for what was then the most convenient method for the travelers. However, during his mission, Du Camp eventually turned to Blanquart-Evrard's pre-treated wet collodion process, which proved to be even more effective than the waxed paper, even though Le Gray's waxed paper negative technique created sharper images.<sup>268</sup> Du Camp's choice of Blanquart's wet process served to further soften Du Camp's prints as the fibers of the paper created a slightly blurring effect, as was the case with most calotypes.<sup>269</sup>

The history of early photography's interest in reproducing past times also contextualizes an understanding of the effect the medium of the calotype had on documenting the archeological sites of Egypt and the Holy Lands. According to Prosper Mérimée, head inspector of *Monuments historiques* since 1837, the daguerreotype provided too cold and objective an effect to capture the charm and non-modern flavor of France's medieval monuments.<sup>270</sup> The glossy metallic surface of the daguerreotype could not create the picturesque quality of which the paper-based calotype was capable, thereby making the calotype better suited to nostalgically reconstruct a French history by creating picturesque views to celebrate and catalogue French patrimonial architecture. Far from being an objective medium, the calotype projected a nostalgic lens onto the subject of its images. This graininess in image served to further situate Du Camp's Orient as part of a distant and unreachable history. Thus, by dutifully succeeding in creating calotype

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<sup>268</sup> While en route to Alexandria, Du Camp and Flaubert met Alexis de Lagrange, one of Blanquart's students, where de Lagrange divulged to his compatriots Blanquart's latest developments in his revolutionary chemically treated paper.

<sup>269</sup> In fact, many early photographers played with the calotype precisely in order to create this romantic and painterly inflection in their images.

<sup>270</sup> *Monuments historiques* was a calotype-based initiative that catalogued French patrimony and part of a much larger project to document French monuments that would result in the massive production of *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* (1820-1878), a collection of drawings, etchings and lithographs of French historical monuments. Another example of such an effort in this period includes the periodical *Le Magasin pittoresque*. The project reacted against what some believed to be the eradication of French identity and its history, exemplary in Haussmannian urban reform at the start of the 1850s, piquing renewed interest in nostalgically memorializing the non-modern past. Viewers came to recognize the representation of historical monuments in calotypes as picturesque images, untainted by the modern world.

prints for his photography book, Du Camp's representations of the Orient continued to borrow from a picturesque tradition of nostalgically recreating the past.

### **Traces of Du Camp's Trip in his Photographs**

Du Camp dedicates an album entitled *Égypte, Nubie, Syrie: Paysages et Monuments*, consisting of 175 images, to orientalist painter Alexandre Bida, and signs on the first page: "Au grand artiste Bida / l'humble Photographe Maxime Du Camp." The album opens with a frontispiece (figure 3.7), illustrated by Prisse d'Avenne.<sup>271</sup> Also included with the original unbound prints, this frontispiece exhibits some of the same mimetic techniques that are later employed in the framing of the photographs. A realistic figurative illustration of the subtitle laid out on what appears to be a large monument, occupying almost the entire page in portrait format, the frontispiece recalls some of the close-up views of inscriptions; however, here the inscription is in French. "Égypte / Nubie / Syrie / Paysages & Monuments / Maxime Du Camp / MDCCCLI" is clearly and evenly written on the rectangular stone monument, surrounded by foliage that takes up the rest of the photograph. The scale-providing bird at the bottom right corner of the image along with the medium close-up view, in which the plant life extends outside of the frame, highlight the "immensity" of the title-page monument.<sup>272</sup>

This image foreshadows the importance of Du Camp's archeological findings as well as offers a preview of the techniques of representation that will be employed in them. The prolific foliage encroaching on the stone signals the passage of time that had engulfed the monument, which appears to have fallen into both geographical and temporal obscurity. This image echoes

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<sup>271</sup> Egyptologue and illustrator Prisse d'Avennes also helps Du Camp write the introduction to the album published by Gide et Baudry.

<sup>272</sup> McCauley compares a few of Du Camp's images with those of Félix Teynard who published his photographs in *Egypte et Nubie* (1858) and shows that Du Camp's framing techniques and use of lighting highlighted the grandeur and immensity of the monuments much more so than his contemporary did ("The Photographic Adventures of Maxime Du Camp," pp. 35-43).

how the “realism” of the photographic album depended on a conflation of distance in time with distance in space: traveling east to the Orient becomes synonymous with traveling *back* to a pre-modern time. The way in which the title and the monument are centered in the image simultaneously suggests that photographic discovery lifted the monuments out of obscurity. While this frontispiece clearly shows the imagination at work in all the photographic images in the album, its absence from the circulated album plainly outlines how the editors preferred the photographs to convey this message themselves.

Although the three versions follow the same order of cities based on Du Camp’s itinerary, the original collection and the version dedicated to Bida open and end with domestic photographic images not included in the circulated version.<sup>273</sup> These images do not provide any information of scientific depth on the region but rather signal Du Camp’s personal experience of travel that circumscribes his scientific expedition. Whereas the published album opens with images of Cairo, the collection of original prints and *Égypte, Nubie, Syrie* both begin with a picture taken in Alexandria, where Du Camp began the North African portion of his trip.<sup>274</sup> The first photograph in the original collection is of the hôtel d’Orient in Alexandria (Figure 3.8), where Du Camp stayed during his trip. Reflecting more directly Du Camp’s personal experience in the Orient, the original collection begins with this very domestic scene, capturing the hotel’s

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<sup>273</sup> On the topic of exclusion, not only were damaged and unsuccessful negatives excluded from the final album but also so were any of the images that captured an aspect of the societies and traditions he visited. And of course it goes without saying that Du Camp’s participation in any activity with the local people, including his frequent visits to brothels (which Flaubert recounts in lavish detail) would also not be represented in the album.

<sup>274</sup> Even the opening images of Cairo in the edited album present a hodge-podge view of the East, not unlike a *cabinet de curiosité* of photographs. For example, the official album opens with the following images “Vue générale prise à l’Ouest,” “Mosquée près de Bab-El-Saïda et partie méridionale des murailles du Kaire,” “Maison et jardin dans le quartier Frank,” an often-reproduced photograph that captures Flaubert wandering through the neighborhood. Interestingly, while Flaubert is glaringly absent from *Le Nil*, he in fact appears in Du Camp’s published photography album. These exotic opening images, seeming to have very little relation to the archeological images of the album introduce the reader/viewer to the Orient in order to set the stage for the “scientific” ones that follow.

clotheslines. This image also marks the beginning of Du Camp's career in photography, as he begins to get his bearings as a travel photographer. Presented before the images of archeological and historical import, this photograph highlights the photographer's personal experience. As a medium long shot of the hotel, which itself appears to be falling apart, and in (modern) ruins, the view is constricted: there is barely any skyline, and the image appears to be of the rear of the hotel. This angle differs sharply from most of the rest of the images in the album, which portray their objects of focus in a much more prominent light. This set of domestic images taken of Alexandria is immediately followed by a panoramic view of an urban and developed Cairo.

Foregrounding even more evidently the trip that led to the creation of the photographs, removed images such as "L'hôtel d'Orient" highlight the photographer's experience in the Orient alongside the fruits of his mission. Even while edited out of *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, these images suggest how Du Camp's subjective experience authenticated the scientific findings outlined in the album. A concluding message one may glean from the organization of the album suggests that in order to scientifically decipher the Orient, one must first turn it into inspiration for writing about, and restructuring selfhood against the backdrop of an alienating yet inviting oriental elsewhere, much as the romantic travelogue had done. If eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel writing merged the subjective romantic "I" and the observing "eye" in the re-narration of experience, then Du Camp's photographs—as the analysis of "L'hôtel d'Orient" demonstrates—while seeming to have forsaken the subjective romantic "I," depended just as much on it.

### **Conclusion**

The assertion that Du Camp's photographs hinge on the presence of the subjective romantic "I" in his observations responds to Flaubert's charge, with which I opened this chapter,

that Du Camp abandoned writing interesting prose due to his blind obedience to accomplishing his photographic mission. As this chapter has demonstrated, Du Camp's photographs were far from mechanical and merely objective reproductions of the sights both travelers encountered during their trip. Rather, Du Camp's album functions in many ways as a record of his experience of travel, while the strength of the scientific status of the album depends in part on detecting such traces of subjective experience. It is important to note that Du Camp abandons his photographic equipment at the end of his trip, never to return to the Orient or to professionally pick up a camera again. From a letter written to his mother in October 1850, we learn from Flaubert: "Maxime a lâché la photographie à Beyrouth. Il l'a cédée à un amateur frénétique : en échange des appareils, nous avons acquis de quoi nous faire à chacun un divan *comme les rois n'en ont pas* : dix pieds de laine et soie brodée d'or. Je crois que ce sera chic !"<sup>275</sup> Literally exchanging his camera for the stuff of orientalist fantasy, Du Camp's acquisition of the exotic fabric demonstrates that this view of the Orient was never far from his mind as well as from his camera lens.

In conclusion, I will examine the final image of the original collection, not included in the circulated album, an image in which Du Camp comes into central focus. This analysis further reveals how erasing traces of Du Camp's trip is important for the composition of *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine, Syrie*. The 214<sup>th</sup> plate, the photograph is a medium long shot of the Temple of Jupiter in Baalbek (Figure 3.9) and follows after five close-up images of the temple and its ruins. What differentiates the last photograph from the rest in the album is that it centrally features Du Camp himself in the picture. Unlike the other images, which had hitherto only used "native" men to provide scale to emphasize the grandeur of the mission and monuments, Du Camp is clearly in the foreground of the picture, with the temple of Baalbek in the background. Here, dressed in

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<sup>275</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance I*. Paris: Gallimard, 1973, p. 697.

“oriental” garb, Du Camp, looking at the camera, leans towards the ruins and poses to have his picture taken. This photograph outlines how the Orient operates as background to the depiction of Du Camp as author, traveler and photographer.

The existence of this thematically different photograph in the original collection begs the viewer to inquire about its significance to Du Camp’s photographic mission in 1849.

Incorporating a portrait of himself in the East in one of the very last photographs he takes, Du Camp includes himself at the most literal level in the project of objective scientific documentation. This move reinforces one of the key notions this chapter has interrogated: the presence of authorship in the pursuit of objective scientific representation of the Orient. Furthermore, the exclusion of the image from the published album further echoes both the importance of this subjective intervention as well as the necessity of erasing its traces in order for the public album to appear as a scientific study.

At the same time, this portrait of Du Camp in the East as the final image in the original collection of photographs suggests another desire driving the scientifically charged photographic mission in the Orient. The photograph of Du Camp leaning towards the monument dressed in what he believed to be indigenous wear shows the author himself in the act of trying to identify with the land and culture he was exploring. And thus, this photograph suggests that perhaps accompanying or pushing the desire to decode the Orient was in fact a search to arrive at and unite with the searching or desiring self *via* his own fantasy of the Orient. This photograph suggests the importance of Du Camp’s Orientalism to his photographic accomplishment.

This final image of the original prints also reveals the extent to which Du Camp was a reader not just of the Orient but also of other French travelers to the Orient. It echoes the lessons that Du Camp learned from reading of his predecessor’s trips, from Chateaubriand to Nerval,

whose reveries and explorations of selfhood no doubt accompanied Du Camp during his own journeys to the East where he was sent to produce a new style of objective images. With his head leaning on his hand, propped up by his leg, this final image enacts a *mise-en-scène* of the trope of the pensive French traveler set against foreign landscape. We see now that the quest to set a scientific precedent in the documentation of Egyptian ruins in fact coincided with an epistemological reinforcement of the acting self, a metonymic extension of Europe and its knowledge systems. Here, the development of modern Orientalism in nineteenth-century France, as exemplified in the employment of photography, is dialectically related to imagining a romantic Orient: Du Camp's album at once is contingent on and disavows this imaginary.

The fabrication of this photograph also shows Du Camp self-consciously employing the perspective of the orientalist traveler just as he dons the foreign garb as a temporary costume. Yet, at the same time, fashioning himself as such a traveler, Du Camp can only temporarily play dress up in his role as romantic traveler.<sup>276</sup> The gap found between the clichéd employment of recognizable romantic tropes of travel and his actual experience of journeying abroad echoes the representational distance found between the Orient of his photographs and the Orient that he visited. This gap will be further explored in the following chapter, which shows that Baudelaire's travel poetry drew from this same tension between the representation and actual experience of travel to the East.

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<sup>276</sup> Du Camp wrote and traveled during the wave of second-generation romantics, which included his close friend Gautier, to whom, as mentioned above, Du Camp's travelogue *Le Nil* is dedicated. Second-generation romantic writers were very self-conscious about writing after first-generation writers, such as Chateaubriand and Hugo.



## CHAPTER 4

### The World of Baudelaire's Travels: Real, Ironic and Imaginary

#### ABSTRACT:

Analyzing how Baudelaire's travels overseas were a site of creative and critical development for the young poet, this chapter examines the impact of travel on Baudelaire's writing and reconsiders the value of travel poetry to his oeuvre. In the first half of the chapter, I show that the poet first approached the concept of beauty from a foreign context and that in his Indian Ocean poetry he is already grappling with the same notions that underpin his theoretical conception of *le beau*. Departing from the idea that travel to the East was principally responsible for inspiring in Baudelaire orientalist sentiments of lightness and escape, I demonstrate that the experience of travel in fact encouraged him to approach beauty as historically contingent. In the second half of the chapter, through an analysis of "Un voyage à Cythère," I show that Baudelaire explores his complicity with the romantic travel tradition. By citing Nerval, Baudelaire's poem reveals how "experience" was a product of representation in both their travel accounts and by doing so, addresses the tensions underpinning romantic travel writing itself.

#### **Introduction**

From early in his adult life, Baudelaire's proclivity for literature was a passion that his family wished to contain. Following expulsion from the *collège* Louis-le-Grand and after passing his *baccalauréat* in August 1839, Baudelaire, under pressure from his stepfather Général Aupick, was to begin at the *École de Droit* that fall. Instead of focusing on his studies, Baudelaire began frequenting artists and writers, such as Gérard de Nerval and by July 1840, he registered for law school for the fourth and last time. The young poet preferred to indulge in the bohemian lifestyle that the *Quartier Latin* had to offer. Worrying about Baudelaire's growing debt and ill health (he had also contracted a venereal disease by this time), his family decided to send him overseas. On June 9, 1841, Baudelaire set sail on the merchant ship *Paquebot des Mers du Sud*, traveling from Bordeaux to Calcutta, under the supervision of Captain Saliz, a former officer of the imperial navy; the journey would take 12-15 months. Aupick organized the trip hoping this voyage would cure Baudelaire of his love for literature and teach the young bohemian to "*rentrer dans le vrai*"

(give him a dose of reality), while his mother “hoped by this voyage *to change the course of* [Baudelaire’s] *ideas*, and to cure him of his wish to be an *author*.”<sup>277</sup> For Baudelaire’s family, the young poet’s *Quartier Latin* was the source of unrealistic and, according to his family, damaging pipedreams, while sea travel to India, a last ditch effort to prod Baudelaire into adopting a conventional bourgeois lifestyle, became a source of “reality.”

In the events during and leading up to Baudelaire’s trip, traveling and writing were posited as juxtaposed to each other. Aupick (mis)calculates that the extreme experience of sea travel could cure his stepson of his excessive love for literature, while Saliz blamed Baudelaire’s inability to socialize with others on the young bohemian’s love for books.<sup>278</sup> Baudelaire’s voyage did not produce the results for which Baudelaire’s family had hoped: sea travel certainly did not neutralize Baudelaire’s desire to become a writer. Rather, it had just the opposite effect. As I will show in this chapter, his trip to the East, which became a catalyst for a break with his family (particularly his stepfather), was for Baudelaire one *towards* and not away from literature.<sup>279</sup> He wrote travel poetry that referenced the real life encounters of his voyage, producing early tensions between literature and travel; home and away; the familiar and exotic, which would

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<sup>277</sup> Undated, Institut de France. Lovenjoul C 491 f 124. Quoted in Richardson, Joanna. *Baudelaire: the Life of Charles Baudelaire*. London: Murray, 1994, p. 61.

<sup>278</sup> Saliz reported to the Général Aupick: “Dès notre départ de France, nous avons tous pu voir à bord qu’il était trop tard pour espérer faire revenir M. Beaudelaire [*sic*] soit de son goût exclusif pour la littérature telle qu’on l’entend aujourd’hui, soit de sa détermination de ne se livrer à aucune autre occupation.” (Pichois, Claude and Ziegler, Jean. *Baudelaire*. Paris: Julliard, 1987, pp. 147-148). Pichois cites the following passage from *La Chronique de Paris*, describing a stubborn Baudelaire disembarking the ship, unwilling to separate from his books at all costs: “Bien que renseigné sur cette précaution nécessaire [qu’il faut saisir les échelons], Baudelaire s’obstina à monter à l’échelle avec des livres sous le bras (c’était assurément original, mais embarrassant), et gravit l’échelle lentement, gravement, poursuivi par la vague remontante. Bientôt la vague l’atteint, le submerge, le couvre de douze à quinze pieds d’eau et l’arrache à l’échelle. On le repêche à grand’peine ; mais chose inouïe, *il avait toujours ses livres sous le bras*. Alors seulement il consentit à les laisser dans le canot qui se tenait au pied de l’échelle ; mais en remontant il se laissa encore une fois atteindre par la vague, ne lâcha pas prise, arriva sur la rive et prit le chemin de la ville, clame, froid, sans avoir l’air de s’apercevoir de l’émoi des spectateurs. Son chapeau seul avait été la proie des requins” (146-147 my emphasis). This comical portrait of Baudelaire as an eccentric and unconventional traveler clearly highlights the priority of his books (which Jules Levallois has imagined were Balzac’s complete works) over everything else, including his own safety.

<sup>279</sup> While Baudelaire remained in contact with his mother, upon return (from a trip during which he was for the most part an outsider), he went out in search of his own chosen “family,” ranging from fellow artists to social outcasts of the Parisian *bas-fonds*, such as those featured in *Les fleurs du mal*.

have a lasting effect on his poetry and criticism as well as push him to develop a historical understanding of beauty.

Baudelaire's Indian Ocean poems are an early instance of cultivating a sensibility for representing the violence of political reality, a sensibility that Baudelaire will employ in other travel poems in *Les fleurs du mal*. As I contend below, examining the exotic imagery of "À une dame créole," "La Malabaraise," "La belle Dorothée," and "Bien loin d'ici," the first half of the chapter shows how Baudelaire reoriented his relationship to France as a fixed center of reference. Couching his aesthetic depiction of the women he encountered while abroad in the political context of their surroundings, Baudelaire imagines political complicity between metropolitan France and the Indian Ocean. Analyzing "Un voyage à Cythère," a travel poem *not* based on his own travels, the second half of the chapter reconsiders how Baudelaire self-consciously grapples with his inheritance of the romantic travel tradition. The resonances between Baudelaire's Indian Ocean poetry and "Un Voyage à Cythère," will offer a reconsideration of what travel meant for Baudelaire and its undeniable significance to his later writings.

### **Reality and Myth in Baudelaire's Trip to the East**

Due to his great distaste for travel, Baudelaire never arrived at his intended destination of the eastern coast of India. After rounding the Cape of Good Hope, the *Paquebot des Mers du Sud* on which Baudelaire was aboard met with a terrible storm, which forced it to dock on September 1, 1841 at its first port of call Port-Louis, capital of Mauritius.<sup>280</sup> Here, having felt as an outcast on the ship, Baudelaire was finally able to end his isolation, reveling in the opportunity to share his passion for literature with new friends: a wealthy magistrate Gustave-Adolphe Autard de

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<sup>280</sup> While under French rule (1767-1810), Mauritius was called l'Île de France. The British, who took over in 1810, renamed the island Mauritius after the Dutch settlers who came before the French. Under British rule, slavery was abolished on February 1, 1835.

Bragard and his wife Emmelina, known on the island for her beauty.<sup>281</sup> This encounter would lead Baudelaire to pen “À une dame créole,” the first poem to be published under his name. After his nineteen-day stay on Mauritius, the *Paquebot des Mers du Sud* took Baudelaire to Saint-Denis on l’Île Bourbon (present day Réunion) on September 18. Returning to a routine of seclusion amongst inhabitants who did not welcome him as the Franco-Mauritians had, Baudelaire refused to continue on to India and insisted on returning to France at all costs. Having witnessed the stubborn young bohemian’s unchanged asocial behavior for three months and not wanting Baudelaire’s condition to worsen, Saliz conceded to the recalcitrant traveler’s request.<sup>282</sup> Baudelaire stayed on Réunion for another six weeks before sailing back to France on the next ship, *Alcide*, on November 4. After making a stop in Cape Town a month later, the ship docked at Bordeaux on February 15, 1842, concluding Baudelaire’s first and only trip overseas.

Like other nineteenth-century voyages to the East, Baudelaire’s trip was a mixture of real life and invention. Though it has now been proven that Baudelaire did not travel to India, during Baudelaire’s time, the details of his trip and whether he had reached the subcontinent remained

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<sup>281</sup> In “Reframing Baudelaire: Critical Fictions, Poetic Critique” (*Le su et l’incertain: Cosmopolitiques créoles de l’océan Indien; The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitics of The Indian Ocean*. Trou d’Eau Douce, Mauritius: L’Atelier d’écriture, 2012: 162-217), Lionnet points out that Franco-Mauritian elites such as the Autard de Bragards “were living under British rule and made every effort to hold on to any vestige of French culture” (174). The host and guest’s shared interest in discussing French literature and culture surely contributed to the Autard de Bragards’ hospitality and Baudelaire’s enjoyment of his stay on their estates in Pamplémousses, in northwestern Mauritius.

<sup>282</sup> In the same letter from Saliz to Aupick, cited above, Saliz explains Baudelaire’s complete disinterest in travel and undeviating desire to return to Paris: “Rien dans un pays, dans une société, tout nouveau pour lui, n’a attiré son attention, ni rapports qu’avec quelques hommes de lettres inconnus dans un pays où elles occupent une place bien petite, et ses idées se sont fixés sur le désir de retourner à Paris le plus tôt possible. Il voulait partir sur le premier navire pour France. Je crus devoir m’y refuser et m’en tenir aux instructions que vous m’aviez données... d’un autre côté, par ce que je voyais dans nos entrevues fréquentes, par l’opinion d’un passager qui avait toute mon estime et qui demeurait avec lui, je craignis qu’il ne fût atteint de la Nostalgie, cette maladie cruelle dont j’ai vu des effets terribles dans mes voyages... Je dus donc, au moment où seul il me retenait à Maurice, lui donner pour l’entraîner à bord l’espoir que je me rendrais à sa volonté, s’il y persistait encore” (Pichois and Ziegler, *Baudelaire*, 148-149). Saliz’s description of Baudelaire reads not unlike Du Camp’s description of Flaubert’s lack of interest in their adventures abroad.

unclear.<sup>283</sup> Baudelaire himself contributed to this myth by casually recounting to friends that he had visited Malabar, Ceylon, and Hindustan, when in fact he had not. Baudelaire's ambiguity around the subject spawned multiple versions of his trip: he even tried to convince Leconte de Lisle, who was from Réunion, that he never visited his place of birth.<sup>284</sup> While in *Souvenirs littéraires*, Maxime Du Camp claimed that Baudelaire did in fact reach India.

In response to this confusion, Ernest Prarond urges:

Il faut en finir avec la légende de l'Inde parcourue par Baudelaire. Elle était séduisante, Gautier l'a adoptée, Banville ne l'a pas négligée... Mais la vérité vraie est que Baudelaire, embarqué malgré lui, brûla la politesse à l'Inde... Peut-être Baudelaire abandonnait-il complaisamment au commun public ces bruits de longues pérégrinations en pays fabuleux, parce qu'il en tirait, avec des couleurs de mystère, *l'air de revenir de loin*. Dans tous les cas, il ne nous parlait jamais de ces voyages. A peine, à son retour, nous dit-il quelques mots d'une station dans l'île Maurice ou l'île Bourbon.<sup>285</sup>

Hoping to set the record straight, Prarond explains that Baudelaire may have encouraged myths about the details of his trip to the "*pays fabuleux*" of India in order to cultivate a mysterious air of having "*reven[u] de loin*." However, although Prarond separates fact from the fiction that Baudelaire had traveled to India, his account still considers Baudelaire's destinations as *pays fabuleux* that produced in the young poet a general *air de revenir de loin*. Although Prarond mentions the actual destinations—l'île Maurice and l'île Bourbon—of Baudelaire's trip, he pays no critical attention to how Baudelaire's writing may have said more than "quelques mots" about his stay on these two islands. In fact, Baudelaire wrote poems during his trip as well as *about* it upon return; poems in the *Les fleurs du mal*, such as "La Chevelure" and "Parfum Exotique" in the Jeanne Duval section, also indirectly reflect his travels. Moreover, while Prarond wished to

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<sup>283</sup> Pichois, fn 1, p. 625. In 1956, Charles Hérissou in the *Mercure de France* definitively proves that Baudelaire never set foot in India.

<sup>284</sup> Baudelaire wrote in a letter to Leconte de l'Isle, "Je n'ai jamais mis les pieds dans votre cage à moustiques, sur votre perchoir à perroquets..." [quoted in Lionnet, "Reframing Baudelaire," p. 172]. Maurin, Henri and Jacques Lengtege, eds. *Le mémorial de La Réunion*. St.-Denis, Réunion: Australe, 1979. 2: 1768-1848.

<sup>285</sup> Letter dated 1886 from Ernest Prarond to Eugène Crépet, the poet's first biographer [cited in Pichois and Zeigler, p. 144] (my emphasis).

put an end to the legend that Baudelaire had visited India, many critics after him not only continued to ignore Baudelaire's actual destinations, they have continued to cultivate myths around the exoticism that traveling produced in him.<sup>286</sup>

For much of biographical writing on Baudelaire, his trip to the East was influential for intensifying the exoticism of his poetry, a view that not only has contributed to our present-day understanding of Baudelaire's Orientalism but also continues to overlook the influence Baudelaire's actual experience of travel may have had on him beyond encouraging his Orientalism. For example, elevating the trip to almost mythic status, Joanna Richardson considers Baudelaire's "Oriental odyssey"<sup>287</sup> "to be almost the only source in his work of the open air, of light and happiness. It was to enrich the sensibility, to free him forever from social conventions and literary constraints," and most importantly, "it was to make him one of the first of French exotic poets."<sup>288</sup> Revealing more about his own orientalist view of the East than Baudelaire's, Charles Yriarte thought the Orient made Baudelaire more "oriental."<sup>289</sup> While,

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<sup>286</sup> In "Reframing Baudelaire," Lionnet counters the geographically damaging work done by critics who have continued up to the present moment to obscure the geographical details of his trip. Drawing from archival research surrounding Baudelaire's 1841 stay on both islands, she demonstrates how his Indian Ocean poetry in fact provided a fairly accurate portrait of social and political life on Mauritius and Réunion and "reexamine[s] the criticisms that have been lodged against [Baudelaire's] exoticizing rhetoric in order to show what it owes to realistic rather than exotic patterns of representation" (Lionnet 165). Building on Lionnet's study, this chapter shows that Baudelaire's exotic language, serving as a record of his experience of travel, reveals an outlook towards the world, which not only took seriously the experience of travel but also shaped his critical and modern view on art.

<sup>287</sup> She declares that "whatever poems he brought back from 'his maritime penance', the experience was to make Baudelaire a superb maritime poet; and he kept, from his Oriental odyssey, a vision which would never leave his eyes" (Richardson 69).

<sup>288</sup> Richardson, p. 69. Moreover, according to Richardson, from traveling, "he had acquired a commitment to the primitive which, to some extent, remained with him to the end of his life" (65). I do not completely disagree with Richardson's assessment. However, my analysis differs in emphasis: I am rather more interested in examining how Baudelaire approached the "primitive" and how this may reflect a shift in his way of viewing the world.

<sup>289</sup> Charles Yriarte's writing on Baudelaire's exoticism perpetuates an exotic and undifferentiated vision of a mystical Orient located anywhere east of France:

While he was still young, Baudelaire went to India [*sic*],...and the impression of this violent nature was never effaced in him...The recollection of this nature was revealed in all his tastes, he loved brilliance and violent colours, the enormous and the monstrous...There was in him something of the fakir and the dervish, he was contemplative like an Oriental. (Cited in Richardson, *Baudelaire*, p. 67)

Yriarte's description of Baudelaire's "oriental" sensibility not only incorrectly places Baudelaire in India, but also ascribes the characteristic of "contemplative" like a "fakir" or "dervish" to these travels. Also yielding to an

Arthur Symons thought the foreign Orient marked Baudelaire for life.<sup>290</sup> While Symons and Yriarte erroneously sent Baudelaire to India, in *Visions de l'Afrique dans l'œuvre de Baudelaire*, Joseph Nnadi believed the African continent to be the source of Baudelaire's exoticism, arguing that "the great features of "Africa" as Baudelaire conceived it are found in his critical works as well as his poetry."<sup>291</sup>

Claude Pichois questions the facile exoticism that has been attributed to the impact of Baudelaire's trip overseas and reminds us that far from simply returning *de loin*, Baudelaire embarked on a real trip: "Voyage truqué quant à l'Inde. Pourtant, *vrai* voyage au long cours avec deux vraies aventures. Voyage maudit peut-être, mais qui laissera dans l'œuvre des souvenirs parfumés que le poète sut maîtriser assez pour ne pas donner dans l'exotisme."<sup>292</sup> Pichois's assessment reminds us that Baudelaire's two "real" adventures—on Mauritius and Réunion—remain in some ways connected to an idea of the imaginary journey ("voyage truqué"), a relationship, I contend, that will shape how Baudelaire writes about travel. The following readings of his Indian Ocean poems suggest that Baudelaire did not give in to facile exoticism, as Pichois proposes, and it is precisely Baudelaire's seemingly exotic vocabulary that betrays how he indeed did not idealize the foreign destinations of his trip and how his "real" adventures instilled in him, rather, a critical exoticism, seen in his creative and critical writing.

### **Home Away from Home: Baudelaire's Concept of Beauty in "À une dame créole"**

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unexamined understanding of the Orient to explain Baudelaire's repertoire of exotic imagery, Arthur Symons concludes that there is "something Oriental in Baudelaire's genius: a nostalgia that never left him after he had seen the East... For only the East, when one has lived in it, can excite one's vision to a point of ardent ecstasy."

<sup>290</sup> Symons, Arthur. *Charles Baudelaire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009, p. 39. Symons also writes that for Baudelaire, "a scent was to mean more than a sunset, a perfume more than a flower, the tempting demons more than the unseductive angels" (68).

<sup>291</sup> Nnadi, p. 135 [Cited in Richardson, *Baudelaire*. p. 67]. The eagerness with which critics have imprecisely connected Baudelaire's artistic work to distant cultural contexts ranging from "Africa" to "India" only serves to highlight the instability of such categories as "the "East," "the Orient," and even "Africa" and thereby empty them of any "real" meaning. This chapter differs from the interpretations above by analyzing what Baudelaire's "exoticism" reveals about *how* the experiences of his trip pushed him to become a critical, not just exotic, writer upon return from the Indian Ocean.

<sup>292</sup> Pichois and Ziegler, p. 152 (my emphasis).

While abroad, Baudelaire, who in many ways considered himself an exile in his own city, first began to shift a fixed understanding of home. Through a reading of “À une dame créole,” the first poem to be published under his name, this section outlines how far from idealizing his trip abroad, the exotic language in Baudelaire’s Indian Ocean poems privileged the real life experiences of his encounters overseas. This section will demonstrate that his Indian Ocean poems in fact championed an anti-nationalist sensibility of judging beauty, which exposed at once France’s imperial entanglement with the Indian Ocean region as well as the critical role his experiences there played in an early understanding of *le beau*.

Baudelaire’s Indian Ocean poetry shows more than anything else that traveling away from France led to fruitful encounters that occasioned a good number of his early poems. It has been well documented that Baudelaire greatly preferred his stopover in Mauritius to his stay in Réunion, in large part due to his hosts the Autard de Bragards. Corresponding with Autard de Bragard, Baudelaire reminisces:

Depuis que je vous ai quitté, j’ai souvent pensé à vous et à vos excellents amis. . . Si je n’aimais et si je ne regrettais pas tant Paris, je resterais le plus longtemps possible auprès de vous, et je vous forcerais à m’aimer et à me trouver un peu moins *baroque* que je n’en ai l’air.<sup>293</sup>

In this letter to the only people with whom he felt *at home*, so to speak, during his entire journey, Baudelaire showed gratitude for their cultural bond, despite living in different hemispheres. Here, the young traveler experienced kinship with these surrogate-parent figures based on shared interests as opposed to familial or even national ties. Although Baudelaire returned to Paris following his brief sojourn to the Indian Ocean, he did not do so without keeping a fond memory of his Mauritian hosts, celebrated in “À une dame créole.” This camaraderie, moreover,

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<sup>293</sup> Published in *Le cernéen*, June 22, 1866. Reprinted in Pichois and Ziegler [153-4]



foreshadows the life—preferring the company of fellow Parisian artists to that of his family—Baudelaire will pursue upon return to France.

The sonnet “À une dame créole,” written in response to Autard de Bragard’s request for a poem from the young traveler, documents Baudelaire’s appreciation for his new friends. In 1841, Baudelaire sends to Autard de Bragard from Réunion the following lines of verse dedicated to his wife:

À une dame créole

Au pays parfumé que le soleil caresse,  
J’ai vu dans un retrait de tamarins ambrés  
Et de palmiers d’où pleut sur les yeux la paresse  
Une dame Créole aux charmes ignorés.

Son teint est pâle et chaud ; la brune enchanteresse  
A dans le cou des airs noblement maniérés ;  
Grande et svelte en marchant comme une chasserresse,  
Son sourire est tranquille et ses yeux assurés.

Si vous alliez, Madame, au vrai pays de Gloire,  
Sur les bords de la Seine ou de la verte Loire,  
Belle, digne d’orner les antiques manoirs,

Vous feriez, à l’abri des mousseuses retraites,  
Germer mille sonnets dans le cœur des poètes,  
Que vos regards rendraient plus soumis que des noirs.<sup>294</sup>

Describing the foreign surroundings where he encounters the *charmes ignorés* of the creole lady, the poem resembles a travel account, in which Baudelaire chronicles the discovery of the unnoticed beauty of the eponymous *dame créole* featured in his poem. At first glance, the poem opens with seemingly typical tropical imagery (“le soleil caresse,” “de tamarins ambrés”) describing a destination boasting of warmer climes conducive towards idleness.<sup>295</sup> The soft

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<sup>294</sup> Pichois, *Baudelaire*, p. 79. The version in *Les fleurs du mal* is altered somewhat.

<sup>295</sup> Richardson reads the first stanza of “À une dame créole,” as an indication of Baudelaire’s exotic sensibility; she writes: “Already, in 1841, the first three lines of the sonnet contain aromas, warmth and indolence, three tropical

sounds of the *-esse* endings (*caresse, paresse, enchanteresse, chasseresse*) in the first two stanzas sound like waves gently hitting the shore, seducing and inviting the reader to experience the *douceur* of the *dame créole*'s surroundings.

Critics have argued that largely due to its exotic language, the poem in fact praises France more so than celebrates the beauty of the creole woman, whom the sonnet merely exoticizes. In his study of "À une dame créole," Christopher Miller sees the poem as reinforcing a hierarchy pitting white as superior to black and takes issue with the third stanza, in which the young poet imagines how the creole woman's beauty would fare in France.<sup>296</sup> Baudelaire supposes: "Si vous alliez, Madame, au vrai pays de Gloire, / Sur les bords de la Seine ou de la verte Loire, / Belle, digne d'orner les antiques manoirs," she would succeed in winning the hearts of all the poets.<sup>297</sup> Miller insists: "As the lady hypothetically emigrates to France and acquires the title "Madame," she is pronounced "worthy." But worthy to do what? "Digne d'orner": worthy to decorate, to fulfill the function of a piece of furniture or a painting, to add beauty, to be *bizarre*."<sup>298</sup>

Contrary to Miller's view that considers the creole lady's *bizarre* exoticism as a marker of inferiority, a closer look at the poem suggests that the creole lady's beauty did not merely serve as trivial decoration for French consumption.<sup>299</sup> Baudelaire may have exoticized the creole lady's surroundings, but by mentioning her tranquility and confidence, Baudelaire likens the creole lady's beauty to a noble aristocrat. While he does imagine the *dame créole* in France, he did not write of her beauty in order to simply reinforce French standards. Rather, by referring to

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themes which were often to recur in the poetry of Baudelaire. Already, too, he was haunted by exotic women" (Richardson p. 65).

<sup>296</sup> Miller, Christopher. "Baudelaire in the Nineteenth Century: Black and White in Color," *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

<sup>297</sup> Baudelaire's "À une mendicante rousse" employs similar vocabulary to describe the comparison between the eponymous redhead beggar girl and the riches of an upper class France.

<sup>298</sup> Miller, p. 105. Later in *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire insists on the decorative or external element of modern beauty, which would suggest the importance of being "digne d'orner," or worthy to decorate.

<sup>299</sup> Keeping in mind that for Baudelaire "*le beau est toujours bizarre*," the beauty espoused in "À une dame créole" may have had a larger impact on Baudelaire's aesthetic vision than Miller acknowledges here.

France, Baudelaire, I would argue, instead calls attention to the imperial context that tied France to Mauritius and created the opportunity for his visit there.

Comparing the poem sent to the Autard de Bragards and a revised version of “À une dame créole” to appear four years later in *L’Artiste* on May 26, 1845 highlights the transnational political context surrounding the poem as well as makes evident Baudelaire’s awareness of it. Intended for a French audience, the 1845 version of “À une dame créole,” later included in the 1857 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, reads:

Au pays parfumé que le soleil caresse,  
J’ai connu sous un dais d’arbres tout empourprés  
Et de palmiers d’où pleut sur les yeux la paresse  
Une dame créole aux charmes ignorés.

Son teint est pâle et chaud ; la brune enchanteresse  
A dans le cou des airs noblement maniérés ;  
Grande et svelte en marchant comme une chasseresse,  
Son sourire est tranquille et ses yeux assurés.

Si vous alliez, Madame, au vrai pays de gloire,  
Sur les bords de la Seine ou de la verte Loire,  
Belle, digne d’orner les antiques manoirs,

Vous feriez, à l’abri des mousseuses retraites,  
Germer mille sonnets dans le cœur des poètes,  
Que vos grands yeux rendraient plus soumis que vos noirs.<sup>300</sup>

Lionnet has persuasively explained that Baudelaire’s use of the indefinite article (*des*) in the last line of the original version of the poem—as opposed to his use of *vos* in the published version—reveals how Baudelaire was cognizant of Mauritius’s recent abolition of slavery just six months prior to his arrival.<sup>301</sup> Displaying awareness of the sociopolitical conditions of the people whom he met on Mauritius, Baudelaire’s use of *des* counters the idea that he was blindly preoccupied

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<sup>300</sup> Baudelaire, Charles. *Œuvres complètes*, v. 1, ed. Claude Pichois. Paris, Gallimard, 1975, pp. 62-63.

<sup>301</sup> Lionnet, “Baudelaire’s Colonial World,” p. 726.

with France during his stay.<sup>302</sup> Remarkably, Baudelaire (literally) pays homage to the creole lady's beauty through this pronounced understanding of Mauritius's imperial history. The last line "Que vos regards rendraient plus soumis que des noirs / Que vos grands yeux rendraient plus soumis que vos noirs" announces the exceptional beauty of the *dame créole* through evoking the colonial violence of her surroundings: looming just underneath Baudelaire's aesthetic priorities was an awareness of the political reality circumscribing his experience.

Moreover, the last stanza, professing his heroine's ability to inspire poets, indicates that her beauty would outshine even French norms. It is, after all, a creole beauty set in Mauritius, and not Baudelaire's loyalty to France, which would prompt one thousand sonnets from the hearts of poets. In this formulation, the (presumably French) poets such as Baudelaire himself would occupy the place of subjugation in relation to the protagonist's beauty. While Miller argues that Baudelaire treats the *dame créole* as a passive object to be manipulated by the poet as he wishes, by which "the Creole therefore cannot make beauty; he or she must be *made beautiful*; the Creole cannot make color; he or she must be colored," my reading proposes that the particularity, and not to mention exoticism, of the creole lady's beauty plays a much more significant role in inspiring Baudelaire's praise of her beauty.<sup>303</sup> In fact, far from simply reinforcing French standards, the creole lady's exceptional beauty appears to be resetting them.

Furthermore, the editorial changes between the poem dedicated to the Autard de Bragards and the version adapted for publication in Paris also remind readers not only of Baudelaire's geographical and physical displacement of travel that brought on the occasion to pen this poem but also highlight Baudelaire's own ideological displacement that shifted his relationship to France as a fixed center of reference. Significantly, that the original addressee of "À une dame

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<sup>302</sup> This should be even more remarkable given that during most of his journey sailing towards the Indian Ocean, Baudelaire, an antisocial bookworm, paid more attention to his books than to what was taking place around him.

<sup>303</sup> Miller, p. 95.

créole” is Mauritian and Baudelaire later adapts the poem for a French audience also indicates a reversal in the direction of the flow of cultural influence between the French metropolitan center and its periphery in this poem.

Demonstrating an instance of artistic inspiration traveling from outside the Hexagon into France, Baudelaire’s representation of the “exotic” beauty of the creole lady reveals the importance of beauty existing for Baudelaire “outside” of his own familiar surroundings, as the etymology of “exotic” reminds us (and of course Baudelaire remained an outsider back in Paris for most of his life). Coupled with the observation above that it is an *ex-otic* beauty of the *dame créole* that would inspire French poetry, the priority of the Mauritian addressee reiterates that in this first poem, in which he discovers a universal beauty outside of France, Baudelaire shows that the “exotic” qualities surrounding the *dame créole* serve to frame her beauty and not to detract from it.

Baudelaire continues to explore feminine beauty in his other Indian Ocean poems. While “À une dame créole” is a celebration of his fortunate meeting with the Autard de Bragards, the poem “À une Malabaraise,” the third poem published under his name, is written about one of their servants.<sup>304</sup>

#### À une Malabaraise

Tes pieds sont aussi fins que tes mains, et ta hanche  
Est large à faire envie à la plus belle blanche ;  
À l’artiste pensif ton corps est doux et cher ;  
Tes grands yeux de velours sont plus noirs que ta chair.  
Au pays chauds et bleus où ton Dieu t’a fait naître,  
Ta tâche est d’allumer la pipe de ton maître,

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<sup>304</sup> After noting that the themes of “À une Malabaraise” had already appeared in Hugo’s “La Fille d’O-Taïti” and Gautier’s “Le Bengali” and “Ce monde-ci et l’autre,” Pichois notes that the *Malabaraise* most likely existed and refers to Emmelina Autard de Bragards’s *sœur de lait* who then continued to work for the Autard de Bragards (*Œuvres complètes*, v. I, pp. 1159-60). This anecdote highlights how Baudelaire’s Indian Ocean poems did not merely replicate commonly treated travel themes by his predecessors but that they reflected his actual experience of travel on the island.

De pourvoir les flacons d’eaux fraîches et d’odeurs,  
 De chasser loin du lit les moustiques rôdeurs,  
 Et, dès que le matin fait chanter les platanes,  
 D’acheter au bazar ananas et bananes.  
 Tout le jour, où tu veux, tu mènes tes pieds nus,  
 Et fredonnes tout bas de vieux airs inconnus;  
 Et quand descend le soir au manteau d’écarlate,  
 Tu poses doucement ton corps sur une natte,  
 Où tes rêves flottants sont pleins de colibris,  
 Et toujours, comme toi, gracieux et fleuris.  
 Pourquoi, l’heureuse enfant, veux-tu voir notre France,  
 Ce pays trop peuplé que fauche la souffrance,  
 Et, confiant ta vie aux bras forts des marins,  
 Faire de grands adieux à tes chers tamarins?  
 Toi, vêtue à moitié de mousselines frêles,  
 Frissonnante là-bas sous la neige et les grêles,  
 Comme tu pleurerai tes loisirs doux et francs  
 Si, le corset brutal emprisonnant tes flancs  
 Il te fallait glaner ton souper dans nos fanges  
 Et vendre le parfum de tes charmes étranges,  
 L’œil pensif, et suivant, dans nos sales brouillards,  
 Des cocotiers absents les fantômes épars!<sup>305</sup>

According to the poem, a cold and uninviting France is the source of economic and social misery, distinctly contrasted with a tropical Mauritius. For example, while in Mauritius, the *Malabaraise* would be able to sport the comfortable and free-flowing *mousselines frêles*, in France, she would be imprisoned by much more restrictive gear. Baudelaire describes France as “Ce pays trop peuplé que fauche la souffrance,” and wonders why she would want to travel there: “Et, confiant ta vie aux bras forts des marins, / Faire de grands adieux à tes chers tamarins ?” Baudelaire imagines the *Malabaraise*’s existence in France as one of continued exploitation (like many of the subjects portrayed in *Les fleurs du mal*), where, the speaker makes known: “il te fallait glaner ton souper dans nos fanges / Et vendre le parfum de tes charmes étranges.”<sup>306</sup>

<sup>305</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v.1, pp. 173-4.

<sup>306</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v.1, p. 174. In “Reframing Baudelaire,” emphasizing the creole identity of the *Malabaraise*, Lionnet questions the ultimately nationalist binary agenda in Miller’s geographically confused reading

Despite contrasting Mauritius with France, the poem's denouncing view of France resisted idealizing the *Malabaraise's* life on Mauritius as free from strife, or as Lionnet puts it: his imagery does not "perpetuate the myth of island paradises" but rather "disclose[s] the scandal and the violence of colonial life."<sup>307</sup> In a much more exotic portrait than of the *dame créole*, Baudelaire opens the poem with a description of the *Malabaraise's* physical attractiveness, which again outshines the beauty of "la plus belle blanche" and would inspire "l'artiste pensif." Then, almost immediately following this description, Baudelaire transitions to point out: "Ta tâche est d'allumer la pipe de ton maître," supplementing his portrait of her beauty with a dose of reality: her socioeconomic status on the Autard de Bragards' estate.

To further explain my point that, while a French traveler, Baudelaire decentered the role of French prejudice in his assessment of exotic beauty, I would like to draw attention to the fact that in this poem, as well as in "À une dame créole" above, Baudelaire specifically anchors his description in what he claimed to have seen (as exemplified in such lines as "*J'ai vu dans un retrait de tamarins ambrés*"), as opposed to what the "*vrai pays de gloire*" would have dictated that he see.<sup>308</sup> Emphasizing the subjective act of observation, Baudelaire anchors his exotic vocabulary in his actual experiences.

Baudelaire's non-idealization of his trip is also pronounced in his understanding of an *autre* beauty, presented in "La belle Dorothée," which, referencing the colonial realities he encountered while on Bourbon, tells a much bleaker story than "À une Malabaraise" and "À une

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of this stanza: that it is meant to exclude the African *Malabaraise* from France. (pp. 183-184). (Miller, Christopher, "Hallucinations of France and Africa in the Colonial Exhibition of 1931 and Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris*." *Paragraph* 18 (March 1995: 39-63).

<sup>307</sup> Lionnet, Françoise. "'The Indies': Baudelaire's *Colonial World*." *PMLA*, 123.3: 723-736, p. 725.

<sup>308</sup> Interestingly, in Baudelaire's four poems that directly address his experiences on the Indian Ocean, the narrator omnisciently observes the scene. On the other hand, in other "exotic" poems, such as "Parfum exotique" and "La chevelure," the speaker becomes part of the scene.

dame créole.”<sup>309</sup> Found in the “Petits poèmes en prose” section of *Les fleurs du mal* and published twenty years after his trip, “La belle Dorothée” solidifies the idea that Baudelaire’s experiences in the Indian Ocean remained with him long after his return to Paris.<sup>310</sup>

In “La belle Dorothée,” Baudelaire highlights the remarkable beauty of the eponymous Dorothée, “forte et fière comme le soleil.” “La belle Dorothée,” as in “À une dame créole” above, prioritizes the eponymous heroine’s beauty when compared to France (the words *belle* and *beauté* appear a total of six times in the poem). Most of the poem deceptively describes at length Dorothée roaming around the city; it is not until the last two paragraphs that the poem reveals that she is not simply on a leisurely walk but in fact has a destination. The penultimate paragraph exposes:

Peut-être a-t-elle un rendez-vous avec quelque jeune officier qui, sur des plages lointaines, a entendu parler par ses camarades de la célèbre Dorothée. Infailliblement elle le priera, la simple créature, de lui décrire le bal de l’Opéra, et lui demandera si on peut y aller pieds nus, comme aux danses du dimanche, où les vieilles Cafrines elles-mêmes deviennent ivres et furieuses de joie ; et puis encore si les belles dames de Paris sont toutes plus belles qu’elle.<sup>311</sup>

The reader learns that Dorothée must use her beauty to earn money in order to buy the freedom of her young sister “qui est déjà mûre, et si belle !” What is more, she is not an anonymous inhabitant of Réunion, but rather known on “des plages lointaines.” Here, emphasizing her reputation among fellow soldiers stationed on other coastlines, Baudelaire subtly but clearly

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<sup>309</sup> In “Baudelaire, Lacaussade and the Historical Identity of ‘La Belle Dorothée,’” Alexander Ockenden finds the identity of a freed slave named Dorothée Dormeuil, who lived on the island and did indeed have a young sister, which fit the description of the poem, during Baudelaire’s stay. Ockenden posits that given Baudelaire’s established interest in frequenting prostitutes and his “life-long erotic fascination with dark-skinned women,” it is possible to imagine that the young bohemian may have even “contributed financially to the freedom of Dorothée’s sister as well as immortalizing the two in poetry,” (*French Studies Bulletin*, Autumn 2014, 35 (132): 64-68, p. 65).

<sup>310</sup> Whether or not Baudelaire in fact met the woman who inspires the Dorothée of his poem, about “La Belle Dorothée,” Baudelaire writes in response to criticism: “Monsieur, je désire sincèrement vous remercier du bon accueil que vous m’avez fait ; *mais je sais ce que j’écris*, et je ne raconte *que ce que j’ai vu*.” Quoted in Baudelaire, Charles. *Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Laffont, 1980, p. 963.

<sup>311</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 1, ed. Claude Pichois, p. 317.



evokes the imperial climate that circumscribes Dorothée's existence and provides her with customers.

Even though Baudelaire discusses Dorothée's plight, the last line of the poem, "Elle réussira sans doute, la bonne Dorothée ; le maître de l'enfant est si avare, trop avare pour comprendre *une autre beauté* que celle des écus !" suggests that Baudelaire's depiction of Dorothée offers an optimistic ending to her unfortunate situation and presents a space for an alternative understanding of beauty: "*une autre beauté*."<sup>312</sup> Thus, in response to the beautiful Dorothée's question "si les belles dames de Paris sont toutes plus belles qu'elle," Baudelaire's answer would be emphatically no. What is more, Baudelaire clearly values Dorothée's beauty over and against the attractiveness of the French money ("celle des écus") needed to buy her sister out of slavery.

"Bien Loin d'ici" also tells the story of the beautiful Dorothée, but in verse instead of prose. In an experimental sonnet form, the poem focuses on the "*case sacrée*," which she must leave to meet the "jeune officier" in "La belle Dorothée," discussed above.

Bien loin d'ici

C'est ici la case sacrée  
Où cette fille très parée,  
Tranquille et toujours préparée,

D'une main éventant ses seins,  
Et son coude dans les coussins,  
Écoute pleurer les bassins :

C'est la chambre de Dorothée.  
--La brise et l'eau chantent au loin  
Leur chanson de sanglots heurtée  
Pour bercer cette enfant gâtée.

Du haut en bas, avec grand soin,  
Sa peau délicate est frottée

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<sup>312</sup> *ibid.* (my emphasis).

D'huile odorante et de benjoin  
--Des fleurs se pâment dans un coin.<sup>313</sup>

It is clear that Baudelaire idealizes Dorothée in “Bien Loin d’ici” more than in “La belle Dorothée.” The exalting tone of the verse poem (also suggested by the title itself: “Bien *loin* d’ici”) registers a certain distance, in time, space and memory between Baudelaire’s poem and his experience with Dorothée.

The difference in tone between the prose and verse poems is particularly apparent when comparing between “Bien loin d’ici” and the following paragraph in “La belle Dorothée,” which corresponds to the sonnet:

Pourquoi a-t-elle quitté sa petite case si coquettement arrange, dont les fleurs et les nattes font à si peu de frais un parfait boudoir ; où elle prend tant de plaisir à se peigner, à fumer, à se faire éventer ou à se regarder dans le miroir de ses grands éventails de plumes, pendant que la mer, qui bat la plage à cent pas de là, fait à ses rêveries indécises un puissant et monotone accompagnement, et que la marmite de fer, où cuit un ragoût de crabes au riz et au safran, lui envoie, du fond de la cour, ses parfums excitants ?<sup>314</sup>

While the sweet odors of Dorothée’s cosmetics linger throughout “Bien loin d’ici,” in “La belle Dorothée,” the much more pungent smells of “un ragoût de crabes au riz et au safran” is evoked in the poem that offers thicker description of Dorothée’s life. Moreover, Dorothée’s beauty is much more palpable and ultimately pronounced in “La belle Dorothée,” while in “Bien loin d’ici,” Dorothée is rather endearingly referred to as an “enfant gâtée,” which strips her of the resilient beauty she exudes in the prose poem. In “La belle Dorothée,” her remarkable “*autre beauté*” is inseparable from the dynamic description of her life and dilemma on the island.

It is not insignificant that the static portrait of Dorothée in “Bien loin d’ici” focuses particularly on Dorothée’s home, pictured as a sacred altar that houses her exalted beauty, while

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<sup>313</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 1, p. 145. First published in March 1864 in the *Revue nouvelle*, verse poem “Bien loin d’ici” was mostly likely written in 1860 a few months after the prose poem “La belle Dorothée,” which, as Claude Pichois notes, was quite rare (pp. 1118-9).

<sup>314</sup> *ibid.*, p. 185.

“La belle Dorothée” documents her outside this home. The emphasis in “La belle Dorothée” on Dorothée *leaving* her home echoes, in some ways, Baudelaire’s own experience of leaving home to travel to the Indian Ocean. Coupled with the observation that the prose poem details more explicitly the imperial realities (unseen within the walls of “Bien loin d’ici”) that Dorothée faces and with which Baudelaire comes into contact while on the island, the prose poem, the more experimental of the two poems as well as the one that is more anchored in his encounter with Dorothée, points to how actual travel, and *not* a romantic idealization of the experience, becomes aligned with poetic experimentation in Baudelaire’s writing.<sup>315</sup>

These images and experiences from Mauritius and Réunion also return to France with Baudelaire. The reappearance of exotic vocabulary from “À une dame créole,” “La belle Dorothée” and “À une Malabaraise,” in poems that do not specifically relate to travel, such as “Parfum exotique” and “La chevelure,” is intriguing enough to merit some discussion.<sup>316</sup> For example, one wonders if the *Malabaraise’s* “*parfum des charmes étranges*” does not resurface in “Parfum exotique,” which is often thought to be inspired by Baudelaire’s liaison with the “belle créole” Jeanne Duval, whom he meets upon return from his trip. Notably, in “Parfum exotique,” evoking “une île paresseuse” and “des verts tamariniers,” Baudelaire describes what appears to be a paradise, which while geographically distant, is not one completely unknown to the poet.<sup>317</sup>

Recall that in “À une Malabaraise,” as well as in “À une dame créole,” leaving Mauritius would

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<sup>315</sup> In “Worlding Baudelaire: Geography, Genre, and Translation” (in *MLA Approaches to Teaching Baudelaire’s Prose Poems*, ed. Cheryl Krueger (forthcoming)), Lionnet discusses the influence of Réunion poet Evariste Parny’s (1753-1814) prose poems on Baudelaire and the impact this Creole inspiration had on not only Baudelaire’s appreciation for tropical landscapes but also his poetic sensibility.

<sup>316</sup> Another example of this is how “des cocotiers absents” in “À une Malabaraise”—the poem ends with the couplet: “L’œil pensif, et suivant, dans nos sales brouillards / Des cocotiers absents les fantômes épars” (174)—return in the eleventh stanza of “Le cygne,” which conjures “Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique / Derrière la muraille immense du brouillard” (87). Gayatri Spivak also discusses this connection between “À une Malabaraise” and “Le cygne” in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 153-154).

<sup>317</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 1, pp-25-6. While it is certainly possible to argue that Baudelaire simply borrowed from the exoticism from his Indian Ocean poems to describe the racially othered Jeanne Duval back in France, my reading focuses on the historical specificity of the exotic imagery in his Indian Ocean poems and that it reveals how Baudelaire positioned himself vis-à-vis his experiences there.

mean abandoning the “*chers tamarins*” of the island.<sup>318</sup> Therefore, here, the image of the *tamarins*, serving as a metaphor for the Indian Ocean’s tropical environment, does not evoke a generic exotic destination, as Richardson, Symons and Yiarte discussed above would maintain. Rather, what may seem like mere exotic vocabulary in fact betrays Baudelaire’s privileging of the very experience of travel over an idealization of it. The exotic imagery and odors from the tropics—from the “*chers tamarins*” to “un ragoût de crabes au riz et au safran”—therefore indicate how Baudelaire continued to privilege experience over idealization in his writing.

Moreover, while in “Parfum exotique,” the woman’s scent evokes the islands for the speaker, in “La chevelure,” Baudelaire intentionally reminisces of “la langoureuse Asie et la brulante Afrique, / Tout un monde lointain, absent, presque défunt, / Vit dans tes profondeurs, forêt aromatique !” in a poem that functions for him like “le vin du souvenir,” further suggesting how he recalls his time in the tropics.<sup>319</sup> Here, Baudelaire also speaks of a “féconde paresse” echoing, as does “Parfum exotique,” “la paresse” found in “À une dame créole” as well as used to describe Dorothée who possesses “un air triomphant et paresseux” in “La belle Dorothée.”<sup>320</sup> “La chevelure” and “Parfum exotique” not only borrow imagery from Baudelaire’s travel poems, they also both reference sea travel. The third stanza of “Parfum exotique” reads “Guidé par ton odeur vers de charmants climats, / Je vois un port rempli de voiles et de mâts,”<sup>321</sup> resembling the “voiles” and “mâts” of “La chevelure”’s third stanza: “J’irai là-bas où l’arbre et l’homme, pleins de sève, / Se pâment longuement sous l’ardeur des climats ; / Fortes tresses, soyez la houle qui m’enlève ! / Tu contiens, mer d’ébène, un éblouissant rêve / De voiles, de rameurs, de flammes

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<sup>318</sup> Moreover, Tamarin is also the name of a western coastal village in Mauritius about thirty kilometers from Port Louis, where Baudelaire arrived, and forty kilometers from Pamplemousses, where he stayed.

<sup>319</sup> *ibid.*, pp-26-7.

<sup>320</sup> More specifically, the couplet in the fifth stanza of “La Chevelure,” “Et mon esprit subtil que le roulis caresse / Saura vous retrouver, ô féconde paresse” (26) echoes the rhyming of “caresse” and “paresse” from first stanza of “À une dame créole.”

<sup>321</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

et de mâts.”<sup>322</sup> Analyzing “La chevelure” and “Parfum exotique” next to the Indian Ocean poems not only recontextualizes their exotic vocabulary as historically contingent it also demonstrates how the world of travel remained very much alive throughout Baudelaire’s oeuvre, outside of the poems that dealt specifically with his trip, or even travel.<sup>323</sup>

### **“Le Beau est toujours bizarre”: Baudelaire’s Modern Beauty**

Having suggested above that Baudelaire’s depiction of exotic beauty reoriented a national approach to relating to foreign cultures, in my view, this also has considerable ramifications for how we understand his later theoretical writings on *le beau*. I argue that his early displacement of the notion of home gleaned from the anti-nationalist sentiments of his Indian Ocean poetry underpins this conception of beauty. My readings above of the non-nationalist beauty of “À une dame créole” and the *autre* beauty in “La belle Dorothée” reveal how Baudelaire remained indebted to his travel experience in the Indian Ocean. While the previous section considers how Baudelaire dealt with the beauty of these particular women, in the following discussion, I locate how these interpretations inform his conception of *le beau*.

Famously, in the *Exposition Universelle* of 1855, Baudelaire’s *beau* becomes “multiforme” and “versicolore,”<sup>324</sup> while he affirms an anti-nationalist view in the opening lines of his review of the 1855 *Exposition Universelle*.<sup>325</sup> Here, Baudelaire specifically shows the limitations of upholding one cultural entity as possessing a “universal” mode of beauty.<sup>326</sup> It is

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<sup>322</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>323</sup> The discussion below will address how the theme of sea travel will reappear again in “Un voyage à Cythère.”

<sup>324</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 2, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris : Gallimard, 1976, p. 578.

<sup>325</sup> “Quand je dis hiérarchie, je ne veux pas affirmer la suprématie de telle nation sur telle autre... je ne veux pas faire ici autre chose qu’affirmer leur *égale* utilité aux yeux de CELUI qui est indéfinissable, et le miraculeux secours qu’elles se prêtent dans l’harmonie de l’univers” (Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 2, 575).

<sup>326</sup> Marguerite Murphy argues that, amidst the parochialism of other art critics, “in Baudelaire’s cosmopolitanism, openness to the unfamiliar, here the exhibited object that serves as an entry-point into its entire original culture, is key and a move beyond the moment of critique that opens up not only the possibility of new conceptions of beauty, but also of a new definition of the ‘universal’” (Murphy, Marguerite. “Becoming Cosmopolitan: Viewing and

no surprise therefore that Baudelaire came to the conclusion in his writing on the 1855 *Exposition* that “*Le beau est toujours bizarre*,” preferring a “bizarre” beauty over “le beau idéal,” championed by Gautier.<sup>327</sup> The value of the *bizarre*, here, serves to displace French culture from unquestionably occupying the top echelon of the global art scene during his time. As seen in his Indian Ocean poems, discussed above, Baudelaire does not equate France with the universal.

Moreover, Baudelaire’s most significant contribution to a modern understanding of *le beau*, I would argue, is not just that it must be bizarre, but rather that it is anchored in the present moment. This view is reflected in the core argument in *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), his culminating work on *le beau*, in which Baudelaire champions a historical understanding of the beautiful. He insists on the dual nature of beauty, and, importantly, the crucial component of beauty’s relative and circumstantial manifestation:

C’est ici une belle occasion, en vérité, pour établir une théorie rationnelle et historique du beau, en opposition avec la théorie du beau unique et absolu ; pour montrer que le beau est toujours, inévitablement, d’une composition double, bien que l’impression qu’il produit soit une ; car la difficulté de discerner les éléments variables du beau dans l’unité de l’impression n’infirme en rien la nécessité de la variété dans sa composition. Le beau est fait d’un élément éternel, invariable, dont la quantité est excessivement difficile à déterminer, et d’un élément relatif, circonstanciel, qui sera, si l’on veut, tour à tour ou tout ensemble, l’époque, la mode, la morale, la passion. Sans ce second élément, qui est comme l’enveloppe amusante, titillante, apéritive, du divin gâteau, le premier élément serait indigestible, inappréciable, non adapté et non approprié à la nature humaine. Je défie qu’on découvre un échantillon quelconque de beauté qui ne contienne pas ces deux éléments.<sup>328</sup>

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Reviewing the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*. 32:1 (March 2010): 31-46, p. 32).

<sup>327</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 2, p. 578. Baudelaire arrives at this conclusion in his assessment of the Chinese art at the *Exposition*, which spawns the occasion to rethink a universal paradigm of judging beauty. He writes : “que dirait un Winckelmann moderne... en face d’un produit chinois, produit étrange, bizarre, contourné dans sa forme, intense par sa couleur, et quelque fois délicat jusqu’à l’évanouissement ? Cependant c’est un échantillon de la beauté universelle ; mais il faut, pour qu’il soit compris, que le critique, le spectateur opère en lui-même une transformation qui tient du mystère, et que, par un phénomène de la volonté agissant sur l’imagination, il apprenne de lui-même à participer au milieu qui a donné naissance à cette floraison insolite” (Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 2, 576).

<sup>328</sup> Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 2, p. 685

Like theorists of aesthetics before him, Baudelaire does not deny that there is an eternal and invariable aspect of *le beau*, but insists that without the modern element, the beautiful would be impossible to discern.<sup>329</sup> In fact, Baudelaire's appreciation for romantic beauty as early as in the *Salon de 1846* already anticipated Baudelaire's theory of *le beau* in *Le peintre de la vie moderne*. Contrary to the beliefs of his contemporaries, Baudelaire argued in the *Salon de 1846* that Romanticism was capable of producing beauty that rivaled the venerated classical period. Baudelaire insisted on the "heroism of *modern* life," as only the modern moment could make beauty visible to its contemporary beholders. Here, Baudelaire's contention emphasizes that beauty, composed of "un élément relatif, circonstanciel," must be something that is experienced.

The *Salon de 1846*, written just five years after returning from the Indian Ocean, contains both a virulent critique of the damaging effects of nationalism on art production and the conviction that beauty must manifest itself in the particular circumstance in which it is found. Refusing to blindly praise Horace Vernet's work for its patriotic celebration of France's political glory, which only served to diminish the artistic quality of his work, the *Salon de 1846* solidifies a connection between modern beauty and anti-nationalism.<sup>330</sup> As revealed above, Baudelaire's Indian Ocean poetry is an earlier example of creative work that already counters a theory of *le beau unique et absolu* and the unequivocal status of French standards as universal. Reiterated in *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire's depictions of the *dame créole*, the *Malabaraise* and

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<sup>329</sup> Whereas in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant also emphasizes the particular over the universal in his understanding of the beautiful, Baudelaire's modern beauty insists not only on the particular but also on its historical contingency. For Baudelaire, beauty can only manifest itself through the modern make-up of one's time and therefore needs the present historical moment in order to do so. Similarly, Flaubert's *bêtise* and even Hugo's notion of the grotesque before him have also opted for the experience or the particular over the standard or ideal beauty, but they did not insist on its modernity as Baudelaire had.

<sup>330</sup> Although Baudelaire was not the only critic who disliked Vernet's work, his scathing critique of Vernet's paintings at the Salon showcase Baudelaire's anti-nationalism: "Tels sont les principes sévères qui conduisent dans la recherche du beau cet artiste éminemment national, dont les compositions décorent la chaumière du pauvre villageois et la mansarde du joyeux étudiant, le salon des maisons de tolérance les plus misérables et les palais de nos rois. Je sais bien que cet homme est un Français, et qu'un Français est une chose sainte et sacrée, --et même à l'étranger, à ce qu'on dit ; mais c'est pour cela même que je le hais." Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, v. 2, p. 469.

Dorothee's beauty are inseparable from their political surroundings and the modern moment in which Baudelaire experienced their beauty.

### **Baudelaire and Experience as Disappointment in “Un voyage à Cythère”**

Not only in his life, even in his writing, Baudelaire's relationship to travel was never a straightforward one. His “travel poetry” consists not only of poems based on his trip to the Indian Ocean but also on ones rooted in metaphorical or fictional notions of travel. Moreover, there is, as Jonathan Culler has pointed out, a fundamental paradox in Baudelaire's view on travel: Baudelaire wrote about both the transformative effects of travel as well as its futility, for which he is more known to uphold.<sup>331</sup> One of Baudelaire's most important travel poems that first appeared in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* in June 1855, “Un Voyage à Cythère” frames the experience of travel as one of disillusionment. Baudelaire's poem is directly inspired by Nerval's travel account “Voyage à Cythère,” which appeared in 1844 in *L'Artiste* before being integrated into his *Voyage en Orient*.<sup>332</sup> Nerval also never traveled to the island; both Baudelaire and Nerval based their accounts on others.

There have been different interpretations on the significance of “Un voyage à Cythère” to Baudelaire's poetic oeuvre, many of which only consider its metaphorical impact and do not explore the poem's relationship to Baudelaire's own experience of travel overseas. For example, some have claimed that the juxtaposition between the lightness of the opening lines and the macabre reality of the island metonymically represents the relationship between Baudelairean cynicism and the sentimentality of romanticism, most plainly communicated in the duality evoked in the title *Les Fleurs du mal*. However, by foregrounding the French romantic tradition

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<sup>331</sup> Culler, Jonathan. ““Trouver du nouveau?” Baudelaire's Voyages,” *Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey*, ed. John Zilcosky. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

<sup>332</sup> Nerval, Gérard de. *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Guillaume and Claude Pichois, vol.2. Paris: Gallimard, 1984: 233-48. Moreover, in *Les Contemplations*, Hugo's “Cérigo” responds to Baudelaire's “Un Voyage à Cythère.” Hugo replaces Baudelaire's disillusion with the island with the discovery of the island's celestial characteristics.



of travel writing as the lens with which to approach this poem, it becomes clear that the poem highlights another axis of duality: one between the experience itself of travel and the tradition of representing it. As I show below, by citing Nerval, Baudelaire's poem reveals how "experience" was a product of representation in both their travel accounts and, by doing so, arrives at the very heart of the tensions underpinning romantic travel writing.<sup>333</sup> The following analysis on Baudelaire's travel poem *not* based on actual travel proposes that Baudelaire was in fact deeply engaged with considering his relationship to the tradition of travel writing that marked his time.<sup>334</sup>

"Un Voyage à Cythère" charts the narrator's disappointing discovery of the titular island and offers a critique of the travel writing tradition.

#### Un Voyage à Cythère

Mon cœur, comme un oiseau, voltigeait tout joyeux  
Et planait librement à l'entour des cordages ;  
Le navire roulait sous un ciel sans nuages,  
Comme un ange enivré d'un soleil radieux.

Quelle est cette île triste et noire ?—C'est Cythère,  
Nous dit-on, un pays fameux dans les chansons  
Eldorado banal de tous les vieux garçons.  
Regardez, après tout, c'est une pauvre terre.

--Île des doux secrets et des fêtes du cœur !  
De l'antique Vénus le superbe fantôme  
Au-dessus de tes mers plane comme un arôme  
Et charge les esprits d'amour et de langueur.

Belle île aux myrtes verts, pleine de fleurs écloses,  
Vénérée à jamais par toute nation,

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<sup>333</sup> Baudelaire even wrote in the margins of one of his drafts of "Un voyage à Cythère": "Le point de départ de cette pièce est quelques lignes de Gérard (artiste) qu'il serait bon de retrouver." Quoted in Paul Perdrizet, "Un voyage à Cythère." *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, No. 3 (1925): 430-1, p. 430.

<sup>334</sup> Remarking on the predominance of the practice of citation in romantic travel writers, Culler writes: "It is striking that Baudelaire's most detailed, circumstantial poem about a voyage is an adaptation of Nerval's account, which was itself borrowed to fill in what he had not himself been able to see," pp. 85-86.

Où les soupirs des cœurs en adoration  
Roulent comme l'encens sur un jardin de roses

Ou le roucoulement éternel d'un ramier !  
--Cythère n'était plus qu'un terrain des plus maigres,  
Un désert rocailleux troublé par des cris aigres.  
J'entrevois pourtant un objet singulier !

Ce n'était pas un temple aux ombres bocagères,  
Où la jeune prêtresse, amoureuse des fleurs,  
Allait, le corps brûlé de secrètes chaleurs,  
Entre-bâillant sa robe aux brises passagères ;

Mais voilà qu'en rasant la côte d'assez près  
Pour troubler les oiseaux avec nos voiles blanches,  
Nous vîmes que c'était un gibet à trois branches,  
Du ciel se détachant en noir, comme un cyprès.

De féroces oiseaux perchés sur leur pâture  
Détruisant avec rage un pendu déjà mûr,  
Chacun plantant, comme un outil, son bec impur  
Dans tous les coins saignants de cette pourriture ;

Les yeux étaient deux trous, et du ventre effondré  
Les intestins pesants lui coulaient sur les cuisses,  
Et ses bourreaux, gorgés de hideuses délices,  
L'avaient à coups de bec absolument châtré.

Sous les pieds, un troupeau de jaloux quadrupèdes,  
Le museau relevé, tournoyait et rôdait ;  
Une plus grande bête au milieu s'agitait  
Comme un exécuter entouré de ses aides.

Habitant de Cythère, enfant d'un ciel si beau,  
Silencieusement tu souffrais ces insultes  
En expiation de tes infâmes cultes  
Et des péchés qui t'ont interdit le tombeau.

Ridicule pendu, tes douleurs sont les miennes !  
Je sentis, à l'aspect de tes membres flottants,  
Comme un vomissement, remonter vers mes dents  
Le long fleuve de fiel des douleurs anciennes ;

Devant toi, pauvre diable au souvenir si cher,  
J'ai senti tous les becs et toutes les mâchoires  
Des corbeaux lancinants et des panthères noires

Qui jadis aimaient tant à triturer ma chair.

--Le ciel était charmant, la mer était unie ;  
Pour moi tout était noir et sanglant désormais,  
Hélas ! et j'avais, comme en un suaire épais,  
Le cœur enseveli dans cette allégorie.

Dans ton île, ô Vénus ! je n'ai trouvé debout  
Qu'un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image...  
--Ah ! Seigneur ! donnez-moi la force et le courage  
De contempler mon cœur et mon corps sans dégoût !<sup>335</sup>

The first five stanzas of the poem alternate between presenting an idyllic and mythic Cythère and a sad and barren one. Comparing his heart to the freedom of a bird in flight, in the opening stanza, the speaker evokes a feeling of unbounded autonomy experienced while traveling. Blue skies and radiating sunshine benevolently protect the ship in this idealized image of sea travel—unlike Baudelaire's actual experience of sailing to the Indian Ocean, which was one of isolation and seclusion.

However, in the next stanza, the celebratory tone of the voyage comes to an end as the narrative begins to describe the encounter with the island, dispelling its mythic status. The second stanza follows the idyllic description with a reaction of disappointment: "Quelle est cette île triste et noire ?—C'est Cythère." The stark contrast in tone between the delightfulness of travel in the first stanza and the sad and dark Cythère of the second stanza points up the incongruence between the myth and actual state of the island. Calling Cythère an "Eldorado banal de tous les vieux garçons," the second stanza reveals that the "doux secrets" of Venus's birthplace, is merely a deceptive old and sterile trope. The actual state of the island "après tout" pales in comparison. This juxtaposition, before arriving at the image of the *pendu*, comes to a fore in the third and fifth stanzas, exemplified in the following lines: "--Île des doux secrets et des fêtes du cœur !" (li. 9) and "--Cythère n'était plus qu'un terrain des plus maigres" (li. 18); the

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<sup>335</sup> Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, v. 1, pp. 117-119.

first one reveres Cythère as the birthplace of Venus while the second one dismantles the island's status as a prelapsarian paradise.

Baudelaire's depiction of a disappointing Cythère is already seen in Nerval's invented account. However, as Pichois reminds us, Nerval "voit moins qu'il ne lit. Souvent il ne voit que grâce aux livres. Parfois, il nous fait voir ce qu'il n'a pas vu, sans qu'apparaisse la différence entre ce qu'il a lu et ce qu'il a réellement vu."<sup>336</sup> For example, with the island in his horizon, Nerval announces the sighting of the purple rocks for which the island is mythically known: "devant nous, là-bas, à l'horizon, cette côte vermeille, ces collines empourprées qui semblent des nuages, c'est l'île même de Vénus, c'est l'antique Cythère aux rochers de porphyre."<sup>337</sup> Like many of his contemporary travelers to the East, Nerval followed in the footsteps of Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811), Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient* (1835) and other travelers who took to visiting the holy lands.<sup>338</sup> Here, Nerval describes the Cythère familiar to him from mythic stories, particularly drawing from *Voyage de Dimo et Nicolo Stephanapoli* as well as Watteau's painting of Cythère as home to Venus.<sup>339</sup> As in Baudelaire's poem, contact with the island "awakens" Nerval from the fantasy of a mythic Cythère. He writes: "Voilà mon rêve...et voici mon réveil ! Le ciel et la mer sont toujours là ; le ciel d'Orient, la mer d'Ionie se donnent chaque matin le saint baiser d'amour ; mais la terre est morte, morte sous la main de l'homme, et les dieux se sont envolés !"<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Nerval, Gerard de. *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Jean Guillaume and Claude Pichois. Paris: Gallimard, 1989, p. 1379.

<sup>337</sup> *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>338</sup> Unlike his two great predecessors, Nerval was equally interested in exploring the Eastern lands as contemporary cultures and not just as ruins of antiquity.

<sup>339</sup> In *The Rhetoric of Empire* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1993), David Spurr, in his study of colonial discourse in non-fiction, posits Nerval's travel writing as a pinnacle of the romantic travel writing experience in which "the non-Western world is made an object of fantasy" (153). In his study of travel writing, Spurr argues how Nerval's work "makes the experience of the non-Western world into an inner journey" (142).

<sup>340</sup> Nerval, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 234

Although Nerval “voit moins qu’il ne lit,” he describes *seeing* a British scaffold on Cythère:

Pendant que nous rasions la côte, avant de nous abriter à San Nicolo, j’avais aperçu un petit monument, vaguement découpé sur l’azur du ciel, et qui, du haut d’un rocher, semblait la statue encore debout de quelque divinité protectrice... Mais, en approchant davantage, nous avons distingué clairement l’objet qui signalait cette côte à l’attention des voyageurs. C’était un gibet, un gibet à trois branches, dont une seule était garnie. Le premier gibet réel que j’ai vu encore, c’est sur le sol de Cythère, possession anglaise, qu’il m’a été donné de l’apercevoir !<sup>341</sup>

Here, Nerval substantiates his travel account through the repetitive employment of verbs of sight, such as “apercevoir,” “distinguer” and “voir.” He aligns geographical proximity with increased clarity, by which he at first sees a scaffold “vaguement” in the distance and then “clairement” upon approach. However, it is important to note that in regard to the image of the scaffold, Nerval admits to “n’avoir fait cette observation que comme critique de la domination anglaise, qui a confisqué les libertés de la république des Sept-Iles.”<sup>342</sup> Nerval laments the detrimental effects of British control on the island: “En mettant le pied sur le sol de Cérigo, je n’ai pu songer sans peine que cette île, dans les premières années de notre siècle, avait appartenu à la France.”<sup>343</sup> Revealing his nationalist prejudice, Nerval aligns the mythic status of the island to its French past and its disappointing reality to its state under British domination. Employing the travel trope of observation, Nerval authenticates his invention of a (British) scaffold by feigning that he had actually *seen* it.<sup>344</sup>

Baudelaire’s poem follows the same basic narrative structure as Nerval’s account: they first detail the positive sentiment of approaching Cythère, after which, “viewing” the island

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<sup>341</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>342</sup> Rouge, Gilbert. “Gerard de Nerval à Cythère,” *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France*. No. 4 (1948): 296-308, p. 305.

<sup>343</sup> Nerval, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 240.

<sup>344</sup> This relationship between France and Britain interestingly echoes the situation for the French on Mauritius during the time Baudelaire stayed on the island. I think this coincidence really speaks to the wide-ranging impact of the nineteenth-century imperial climate in Europe, dominated by France and Britain at the time.

brings about disappointment with its “real” state. Seeing the corpse on the gallows is the narrative climax of both poems. Nerval’s description of glimpsing the *gibet* most directly served as inspiration for “Un Voyage à Cythère,” particularly the seventh stanza.<sup>345</sup> This stanza mimics Nerval’s prose description, resulting in the following insistent similarities: “rasions la côte” / “en rasant la côte”; “un gibet à trois branches” / “un gibet à trois branches”; “découpé sur l’azur du ciel,” / “Du ciel se détachant en noir.”

Copying Nerval who writes “Le premier gibet réel que j’ai vu encore,” Baudelaire’s narrator announces his sighting of the corpse by exclaiming “J’entrevois pourtant un objet singulier !” However, the introduction of the scaffold is also where Baudelaire departs from not only the discursive celebration of the island’s mythic heritage but also Nerval’s denunciation of Cythère under British rule. Imposing onto Nerval’s British scaffold the image of the decayed *pendu*, Baudelaire’s symbolic *gibet* presents a psychologically nightmarish portrait of the repulsive corpse, ravaged by time and nature, a description that spans seven stanzas. Baudelaire shocks the reader with a macabre bas-romantic portrait of the *pendu* being feasted on by the island’s bloodthirsty animals. The rhyming of “beau” and “tombeau” in the eleventh stanza—echoing the juxtaposition of the grand yet indifferent sky watching over as one of the island’s inhabitants is cruelly left to decompose—also suggests a vision of beauty in this poem that is aligned with the inevitability of death and decay, which no amount of travel may help man to escape. Thus, while Nerval ultimately preserves an idealized vision of Cythère (how it was under French rule), Baudelaire’s representation of Cythère does not offer any such alternative of the island.

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<sup>345</sup> Michel Jamet writes about “Un voyage à Cythère”: “Baudelaire doit au *Voyage à Cythère* de Gérard de Nerval, paru dans *L’Artiste* des 20 juin et 11 août 1844 l’opposition purement nominale de Cythère et de Cérigo, possession anglaise. Le gibet à trois branches est déjà présent dans le texte de Nerval qui rappelle—pour le dénoncer quelques lignes plus bas—le mythe de Cythère.” (Baudelaire, Charles. *Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980, p. 957).

It is my contention that Baudelaire's *gibet*, straying from Nerval's nationalist agenda (denouncing British control of Cythère), offers reflection on the very tradition of travel writing itself. By specifically replicating the travel tropes employed by Nerval to authenticate his disappointment with the island, Baudelaire calls attention to the constructedness of Nerval's travel account and by doing so puts ironic distance between Nerval's romantic travel writing practices and his own.<sup>346</sup> Tellingly, the first two lines of the last stanza of Baudelaire's poem ("Dans ton île, ô Vénus ! je n'ai trouvé debout / Qu'un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image...") emphatically announce that the *gibet* on the island is a symbolic one, calling attention to the employment of imagination and rhetorical language in the construction of his narrative. Yet at the same time, Baudelaire is very aware of his complicity with the lineage of artists who had represented Cythère. Through the very act of explicit copying, the poem in fact enacts a *mise-en-scène* of the fraught relationship between reference and representation underpinning travel writing at the time. Baudelaire's *Cythère* begins to resemble what the name sonorously suggests: "*Cite-terre*," a destination created out of a kaleidoscope of artistic citations orchestrated by its author. Far from hiding this string of citations, Baudelaire highlights it.

The sentiment of complicity is also echoed in the latter half of the poem, where Baudelaire presents his most significant contribution to the representation of Cythère: self-reflection. The speaker of "Un voyage à Cythère" identifies with the disgusting sight of the corpse, announcing to it that "tes douleurs sont les miennes." Here, the repulsive vision described by the speaker then transforms into one of *self-torment*. Having lived with syphilis his entire adult life, Baudelaire understood from personal experience the limitations of the physical body. The image of intensified decay of the *pendu* in the poem, then in fact, mirrored the process

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<sup>346</sup> See Sanyal, Debarati. *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) for a discussion of how the political implications of the ironic formalism in Baudelaire's poetry respond to the historical violence of modernity.

of accelerated deterioration Baudelaire experienced in his own body. In an interesting turn of events, Baudelaire's imaginary trip to the island of Venus embodied something real: his sinful nature.

When read next to Baudelaire's Indian Ocean poetry, the ways in which "Un Voyage à Cythère" distanced itself from romantic French travel writing may also signal a move away from the Orientalism that pervaded so much of this tradition.<sup>347</sup> According to "Un Voyage à Cythère," travel offered self-reflection, or more specifically, an encounter of "notre image" as "une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui" as the closing poem of the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, "Le Voyage" (dedicated to Maxime Du Camp), espouses. Offering a critique of the prevalence of Orientalism in much of travel writing, "Un Voyage à Cythère," implies that writers (and travelers) who only graze the coast, so to speak, as Baudelaire's traveler in the poem does, and base their accounts on others will only be able to see the self—albeit distorted—reflected back to themselves.<sup>348</sup>

Conversely, Baudelaire, who abandoned ship before arriving in India, also chooses to base "Un Voyage à Cythère" on Nerval's account during which he "rasions la côte" before arriving at his intended destination as well. The cliché that the journey matters more than the destination becomes rather significant to Baudelaire's view of travel: the young traveler gains experience from the unplanned stops in Mauritius and Réunion. Baudelaire's lyrical verse on Cythère also lingered on the coast of its predecessors, hovering between his and Nerval's imagined accounts. *Not* arriving at one's destination, but rather "en rasant la côte," therefore, posits self-reflection as the ultimate benefit of travel. The resonances between Baudelaire's

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<sup>347</sup> For example, compared to the much more romantic and orientalist *España* by Théophile Gautier, to whom *Les Fleurs du mal* is dedicated, Baudelaire's exotic travel poems rather do not replicate the Orientalism common to romantic travel poems.

<sup>348</sup> "Le Voyage," possibly Baudelaire's greatest travel poem, certainly mocks an orientalist search for the exotic.



Indian Ocean poetry, which celebrated his real-life travel encounters, and “Un Voyage à Cythère,” which seemed to claim that actual travel was not necessary for self-reflection, urge us to rethink on the one hand what travel meant for Baudelaire as well as its importance to his poetic and critical oeuvres.

By way of concluding, I would like to briefly return to a discussion of the 1855 *Exposition Universelle*, in which Baudelaire, albeit hyperbolically, provides a rare instance of Baudelaire praising travel. Baudelaire conjectures:

Peu d’hommes ont,--au complet,--cette grâce divine du cosmopolitisme ; mais tous peuvent l’acquérir. A des degrés divers. Les mieux doués à cet égard sont ces voyageurs solitaires qui ont vécu pendant des années au fond des bois, au milieu des vertigineuses prairies, sans autre compagnon que leur fusil, contemplant, disséquant, écrivant. Aucun voile scolaire, aucun paradoxe universitaire, aucune utopie pédagogique, ne se sont interposés entre eux et la complexe vérité.<sup>349</sup>

Advocating a cosmopolitan outlook of the world, Baudelaire puts forth that travel is instrumental in helping man arrive at such a worldly perspective. Strikingly, but not surprisingly, this statement contains a paradoxical logic: in order to acquire a “grâce divine du cosmopolitisme,” one must not travel the world but rather be a traveler who remains in rural seclusion. Perhaps this is how Baudelaire experienced his trip overseas: as one ultimately of solitude, marked by a brief respite on the Autard de Bragrards’ estate.

Here, Baudelaire also celebrates cultivating sympathy for other cultures, something that, again, only travel could bring about:

Si au lieu d’un pédagogue, je prends un homme du monde, un intelligent, et si je transporte dans une contrée lointaine, je suis sûr que, si les étonnements du débarquements sont grands, si l’accoutumance est plus ou moins longue, plus ou moins laborieuse, la sympathie sera tôt ou tard si vive, si pénétrante, qu’elle créera en lui un monde nouveau d’idées, monde qui fera partie intégrante de lui-même, et qui l’accompagnera, sous la forme de souvenirs, jusqu’à la mort.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> *ibid.*, p. 576.

<sup>350</sup> *ibid.*, p. 576.

In this description, Baudelaire provides an aptly pithy definition of travel: the transportation of a man to a faraway place. Here, Baudelaire identifies travel as an experience that builds cross-cultural understanding and leads to a new world of ideas, one that would accompany the traveler throughout his life. In this ultimate praise of the benefits of travel, Baudelaire believed these new sympathies able to radically alter how “un homme du monde” would view the world. In light of the friendships that Baudelaire made while in Mauritius and the poem he wrote to commemorate it, this description appears to carry traces of Baudelaire’s appreciation for the transformative effects of his personal experiences overseas, despite his suspicions regarding the excessive popularity of travel during his time and the difficulties he encountered throughout most of his own trip during his youth.

A productive tension between denouncing the importance of travel and grappling with the experience and representation of actual travel, therefore, motivates Baudelaire’s travel poetry, in its seeming contradictions. Analyzing the poems in this chapter, I would like to suggest that, while relentlessly highlighting the disappointment of the romantic tradition of travel, Baudelaire ultimately valued the experience of travel, which he later transformed into symbolic travel in future poems.<sup>351</sup> However, it is only by analyzing Baudelaire’s productive resistance to travel and rethinking his exoticism as a “critical exoticism” that we begin to see how the young poet began to reevaluate the relationship between the familiar and the strange that would distinctively mark his writing and contributions to European literary modernism in the nineteenth century.

Finally, if Baudelaire’s ultimate message about travel is indeed what he writes in “Le voyage” (“Amer savoir, celui qu’on tire du voyage ! / Le monde, monotone et petit, aujourd’hui, / hier, demain, toujours, nous fait voir notre image : / Une oasis d’horreur dans un désert

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<sup>351</sup> The relationship between the exoticism in Baudelaire’s Indian Ocean poetry and that in his Jeanne Duval poems could also be said to mirror this connection between real and symbolic travel.

d'ennui")—that the world is so monotone and small that not even travel can cure us of our boredom—"Un voyage à Cythère" maintains that it is precisely travel that can do this work and reflect back to us the vast sea of boredom that may be our reality and, thus, "nous fait voir notre image."<sup>352</sup> Both "Le Voyage" and "Un voyage à Cythère" detail an instance of maritime travel—and in the case of "Un voyage à Cythère," to a foreign island—an experience that may have marked Baudelaire despite his overt silence about it.<sup>353</sup> One thing is certain, in his Indian Ocean poems and in "Un Voyage à Cythère," Baudelaire wrestles with his own ambivalent feelings about participating in a tradition from which he wanted to gain distance, ultimately finding no definitive resolution. However, by doing so, he redefined the meaning of travel for his writing. And his oeuvre is stronger for it.

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<sup>352</sup> Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, v. 1, p. 133. By declaring that the *pendu* reflected *an image* of the speaker back to himself, Baudelaire's poem also suggests how nineteenth-century French travel produced a complex vision of the self—not the "other"—while traveling through foreign destinations. In "Un voyage à Cythère," Baudelaire paints a veritably nightmarish version of the self, and his description of the *pendu* plunges psychic depths to explore spaces of decrepitude in human existence. The act of arriving at a distorted image of the self through travel in some ways echoes how his Indian Ocean poetry, focused on the realities of his destinations, offered a reflection of France seen *from* elsewhere. These poems suggest that travel, both actual and metaphorical, may help one to arrive at a distorted or, rather, changed understanding of oneself.

<sup>353</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to make clear that "Un voyage à Cythère" and "Le voyage" do differ somewhat in their messages. Though both chart the disappointment of travel, "Un voyage à Cythère" claims that in the end one is able to gain self-reflection through travel, while according to "Le voyage," one may travel far and away, but there is absolutely nothing new to experience, only endless ennui.

## CONCLUSION

« Au siècle de Louis XIV on était helléniste, maintenant on est orientaliste. »<sup>354</sup>

I begin my concluding remarks with a line from Victor Hugo's preface to *Les orientales* (1829), in which the poet justifies his choice to dedicate an entire volume of poetry to a vast expanse of land, which for him stretches from China to Spain.<sup>355</sup> Indeed, he conjectures that it has become impossible for artists and thinkers of his time not to be preoccupied by the *couleur locale* of the Orient. While Hugo certainly did not view France's relationship to the Orient through a postcolonial perspective, his statement that nineteenth-century France was orientalist in many ways supports the significance of considering the transnational encounters and relationships that underpin the works examined in this dissertation.

Analyzing the development of nineteenth-century French canonical works through a global and imperial framework, this dissertation has challenged the notion that nineteenth-century realism and modernism developed as strictly nationalist enterprises. Employing a postcolonial approach to studying the development of nineteenth-century French canonical works, this project has examined how colonial contact with non-European cultures shaped the ways in which nineteenth-century France defined and represented itself. It may at first appear anachronistic to use a postcolonial approach to consider literature and photography produced during France's colonial period. However, borrowing from Françoise Lionnet's useful refiguring of postcolonial as "post contact," I understand "postcolonial," not as a temporal marker, but

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<sup>354</sup> Hugo, Victor. *Préface de Les orientales*. Brussels : Laurent, 1832, p. 13.

<sup>355</sup> Hugo writes: "on s'occupe beaucoup plus de l'Orient qu'on ne l'a jamais fait. Les études orientales n'ont jamais été poussées si avant... Jamais tant d'intelligences n'ont fouillé à la fois ce grand abîme de l'Asie... Il résulte de tout cela que l'Orient, soit comme image, soit comme pensée, est devenu, pour les intelligences autant que pour les imaginations, une sorte de préoccupation générale à laquelle l'auteur de ce livre a obéi peut-être à son insu. Les couleurs orientales sont venues comme d'elles-mêmes empreindre toutes ses pensées, toutes ses rêveries ; et ses rêveries et ses pensées se sont trouvées tour à tour, et presque sans l'avoir voulu, hébraïques, turques, grecques, persanes, arabes, espagnoles même, car l'Espagne c'est encore l'Orient ; l'Espagne est à demi africaine, l'Afrique est à demi asiatique," pp. 13-14.

rather as an epistemic lens that reveals French literature and culture's artistic and political preoccupations as well as emphasizes how the colonial moment, at the height of imperial expansion, shifted France's understanding of the world and its place in it.<sup>356</sup>

Considering France as the object of postcolonial criticism not only refutes a facile binary understanding of an opposition between East and West, it also suggests a reversal of the flow of cultural influence whereby French colonial contact greatly influenced the French works analyzed in the preceding chapters. By demonstrating that colonial encounter affected not only the colonies but France as well, this dissertation has rethought the nationalist perspective through which French realism and modernism in the nineteenth century have been understood. Culture and language have been significant politically charged fronts on which colonial occupation has been waged, and separating canonical French works from their non-canonical non-French counterparts has perpetuated this uneven relationship between colonial and colonized cultures. Therefore, showing that the representational tools developed to represent the cultural and political "other" in the colonial contact zones are directly re-appropriated for domestic representation, this dissertation questions the parochial boundaries delineating mainstream interpretations of French canon formation; this reconsideration becomes primarily the work of employing new reading practices.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Lionnet, Françoise. *Postcolonial Representations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 4. Lionnet redefines "postcolonial" as "postcontact," or a "process whereby all elements involved in the interaction would be changed by that encounter." By doing so, she sees "postcoloniality" as a condition that exists within, and thus contests and resists, the colonial moment itself with its ideology of domination" (4).

<sup>357</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, editors of *The Empire Writes Back*, write: "The subversion of a canon is not simply a matter of replacing one set of texts with another. This would be radically to simplify what is implicit in the idea of canonicity itself. A canon is not a body of texts *per se*, but rather a set of reading practices (the enactment of innumerable individual and community assumptions, for example about genre, about literature, and even about writing). These reading practices, in their turn, are resident in institutional structures, such as education curricula and publishing networks. So the subversion of a canon involves the bringing-to-consciousness and articulation of these practices and institutions, and will result not only in the replacement of some texts by others, or the redeployment of some hierarchy of value within them, but equally crucially by the reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts through *alternative reading practices*." Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Empire Writes Back The Empire Writes Back*. New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 186-7 (my emphasis).

## Travel's "Tropography"

Hugo's statement that "maintenant on est orientaliste" also reminds us that he was a celebrated orientalist without ever visiting the Orient. As a foundational orientalist romantic work published before those examined in this dissertation, *Les orientales* and its preface are a testament to how musings on the Orient had indeed saturated the European imaginary.<sup>358</sup> Works such as Hugo's collection of poetry show the extent to which Orientalism defined the Orient for the West, confirming as Said has argued, that Orientalism was a "topos," which this dissertation has sought to "read" and interpret.<sup>359</sup>

As the preceding chapters have shown, nineteenth-century travel literature and photography certainly contributed to this constellation of representations and were indeed more *self*-referential, or rather inter-referential, than actually referential of the Orient. This dissertation has demonstrated how artists and authors, referring to each other, projected from their own fantasies and ready-made tropes onto the Orient. Employing tropes that re-configured the Orient's topography in the French imaginary, this process might be called "tropography."<sup>360</sup> Considering travel's "tropography" provides an additional epistemic lens with which to

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<sup>358</sup> Moreover, Hugo claims that using the Orient as a theme, he was able to create a volume of "pure poetry." He writes: "Que signifie ce livre inutile de pure poésie jeté au milieu des préoccupations graves du public et au seuil d'une session ?" (Hugo 9-10).

<sup>359</sup> Said writes in *Orientalism*: "In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these" (177).

<sup>360</sup> To my knowledge, I have not encountered the term "tropography," whose etymology suggests that this kind of inscription, which is both linguistic and imagistic, points in some ways to the question of representation *tout court*. This term is inspired by Said's outlining of the Orient, not as a place, but as a *topos* (cited above). Derrida has discussed "ontology," which examines the ontological value of belonging to a specific territory. However, I find "tropography" a more compelling way to understand the impact of travel on one's relationship to a place because "tropography" places emphasis on the importance of the act of inscription itself to such understandings of selfhood. I also find helpful Hayden White's body of work in which he shows how tropes have informed historical interpretation and narrative. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 82.); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); *The Content of the Form; Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

understand the impact of nineteenth-century France's inscription of orientalist French tropes onto the Orient. This "writing with tropes" superimposes layers of meaning, which intersect in (or, rather, *on* the surface of) the characters, objects and places studied in this dissertation.

Balzac's orientalist treatment of the *peau de chagrin* reveals how he mobilized popular orientalist understandings of the Orient for his novel. At the same time, the skin itself, an inscribed piece of leather that responds to its owner's desires, betrays this very process of orientalist "tropography": meaning is intentionally re-inscribed onto an already repurposed object from the East. Similarly, in his travel notes, Flaubert comments on the *bêtise* of past travelers who had etched their names onto monuments in the Orient, a metaphor that lends itself to describing the travel writing tradition as one of etching oneself onto the landscape. Du Camp's calotypes, not unlike Balzac's *peau*—a treated surface embedded with a message—seem to transparently reproduce the East. All the while the images superimposed popular romantic travelogue tropes onto their renderings of the oriental monuments; operating as a guiding lens, these romantic tropes were instrumental in making the visual representation of this landscape legible as "real." The capturing of hieroglyphic inscriptions also literally translated the Orient into writing printed on a surface. Finally, Baudelaire's Indian Ocean poems, traversing bodies of land and water, offer a mobile understanding of the written record of his reimagining of the places he visited during his trip.

However, more importantly, this dissertation has aimed to show that not only were nineteenth-century French orientalist ideas imposed onto the Orient, but the reverse also occurred: orientalist tropes also saturated nineteenth-century representations of France. Balzac's *peau* became an inscrutable part of Raphaël's life, while the skin offered a privileged glimpse into Balzac's mimetic practices, now seen through the lens of Orientalism. In the end, while

traveling, Flaubert did not carve his name onto French monuments; instead, as according to Du Camp's account, Emma Bovary appeared to Flaubert in the oriental landscape. Back in France, Flaubert's ennui from traveling in an already-represented Orient reappears in Emma, suggesting that Emma Bovary is the reincarnation of the romantic Flaubert he left behind while in the Orient, providing another interpretation of the proposition: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi."<sup>361</sup> Du Camp's album, as an aesthetic object that circulated in France, illustrates how Orientalism mediated French photography's ability to reproduce the real. Here, Orientalism became part of the inscribing instrument that made French realism discernible to the nineteenth-century public. And finally, the de-familiarizing of Paris in Baudelaire's poetry echoes the poet's experience of leaving home, such that his exoticism refigures as "ironic distance" in his later writings. In this way, the tropes used to construct what has come to be accepted as the French canon had themselves traveled to the Orient and back. My hope with this dissertation is that demonstrating how Orientalism participated in French representations of France will push scholars of nineteenth-century French literature and culture to reconsider the marginalization of Orientalism in the study of realism and modernism, or at the very least to read France and France's Orient differently.

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<sup>361</sup> That it has not been proven that Flaubert actually wrote the words for which he is probably the most known only serves to highlight the ambiguities that underpin his writing, while also reiterating the importance of *Madame Bovary* to how he has been remembered. We can only trace through hearsay whether or not these words belong to Flaubert, which does not seem to have stopped the phrase from being associated with him.





Figure 3.1: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. Vue prise de l'est de Philae, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)





Figure 3.2: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. Vue de la seconde cataracte, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)





Figure 3.3: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. Vue générale, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)



Figure 3.4: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. Hypèthre construit sur la terrasse, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)





Figure 3.5: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. Façade postérieure, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)



Figure 3.6: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. Sculptures de la façade postérieure, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)





Figure 3.7: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Syrie*. Frontispiece, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)





Figure 3.8: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. L'hôtel d'Orient, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)





Figure 3.9: Maxime Du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*. Syrie Baalbeck Temple de Jupiter, 1852. Salted paper print (UCLA Special Collections)

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