THE POINT OF ALL RETURN: NOSTALGIA AND THE DREAM OF DISENLIGHTENMENT

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments...........................................................................................................................................iv

Abstract..............................................................................................................................................................vii

Introduction · Soup and Liberty..........................................................................................................................1

Chapter 1 · Oxa indecha/Ich wil Heim: The Origins of Nostalgia.................................................................39

Chapter 2 · Emotional Epidemiology: Medical Nostalgia and Fictional Sources.................................65

Chapter 3 · Balzac and the Battle for Brittany.................................................................................................91

Chapter 4 · Strange Nostalgia, or, the Miracle of Poetry in Prose............................................................130

Chapter 5 · The End of Nostalgia and the Origin of Everything: Freud and Rolland............................168

Conclusion · Nostalgia and Narcotization........................................................................................................208

Bibliography......................................................................................................................................................216
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The Point of All Return: Nostalgia and the Dream of Dis-Enlightenment traces a state of being that fascinated with equal force medical and literary writers over the long nineteenth century. First named in 1688 to diagnose a fatal form of homesickness and later seen as causing deadly epidemics among provincial conscripts during the Napoleonic wars, nostalgia also came to describe the experience of feeling out of place in one’s own time. Writers like Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Balzac and Baudelaire made this second understanding possible, positing the condition as an inevitable form of dissatisfaction with contemporary life as shaped by enlightenment, urbanization and revolution. This dissertation proposes both a historical analysis of the emergence of nostalgia and an examination of its re-appropriation as a clinical symptom of modernity.

In The Point of All Return, I first chart the spread of nostalgia as a condition alongside a common mythological language that centers on the allure and illusions of rustic life. I argue that these speculations served as an occasion for writers including Kant and Rousseau to further their broader claims about human nature. I then turn to the urgent practical concerns about nostalgia in the wake of the French Revolution and the use of fiction, especially Chateaubriand, to inform this discourse. Balzac, I argue, reconsiders the conclusions of military medicine in his novels of Brittany, deploying the archetypical figure of the nostalgic Breton in the service of a counter-historical narrative that dreams of reconnection with pre-Enlightened, pre-Revolutionary modes of living. Baudelaire and Gautier offer their own re-staging of the medical mythology of nostalgia, one that both poets see resonating profoundly with Baudelaire’s prose poetry. Finally, I consider Rolland’s long-standing interest in Baudelairean
“strange nostalgia” and its role in shaping his understanding of the oceanic feeling he discusses with Freud. Throughout my dissertation, I sustain a line of inquiry that Freud articulates in his debate with Rolland, in which I explore the futile hope for recuperating a primal experience of life that is interconnected, un-historical and impersonal.
The word *nostalgia* first appeared on Jun 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1688 in a medical thesis defended by a nineteen year-old medical student from Mulhouse named Johannes Hofer. His short text, *Dissertation medica de νοσταλγια, oder Heimwehe*, presented to the medical faculty at the University of Basel, sought to medically classify a phenomenon that Hofer treats as widespread but unnamed by the medical community. He proposes the name nostalgia, formed from *nostos*, homecoming, and *algos*, pain, to describe the condition of the patients from small mountain villages who were likely to die from the mere fact of being away from home. But Hofer also offers *nosomania*, fixation on homecoming, and *philopatridalgia*, pain caused by love of the fatherland, terms he considers equally acceptable (§ II). These come alongside two already-existing (though not exactly old) vernacular terms he mentions in the text, *Heimweh* and *maladie du païs*.\textsuperscript{1} Some time later, a new word was added to the English language for the express purpose of translating the technical term *nostalgia*—homesickness.

For two hundred years, beginning in the late 17th century, it was a widely-accepted medical fact that one could die from this disease. The present is a study of nostalgia as it was observed, discussed and theorized during the period in which nostalgia represented as grave a

\textsuperscript{1} I discuss this earlier history at length in the first chapter, demonstrating that these two terms were indeed quite recent to Hofer’s coining of nostalgia. Citations of Hofer throughout are my own translations of his Latin original. Complete English (Anspach) and German (Ernst) translations also exist.
concern for patients and doctors, soldiers and commanders, philosophers and poets and finally individuals and authorities as any other condition.

This study of nostalgia also will attempt, through a careful tracking of the depictions of the disease, and especially on the division between who is and is not susceptible to it, to add to a consideration of the time period itself. Namely, why and in what ways did writers from that period and after come to think of the long 18th century as a force that changed irreparably every human experience? Why did a sense of unbroken “routine” come to be replaced, as Balzac writes in Les Chouans, with the sense that “il fallait vivre vite, et beaucoup” (95). Why did a sense of “disenchantment” settle in so universally, such that “civilized man, placed in the midst of the continuous enrichment of culture by ideas, knowledge and problems, may become ‘tired of life’ but not ‘satiated with life’” (Weber, Science as a Vocation 171). Why did a fatal disease emerge so suddenly to qualify a longing for home that should seem universal, but was in fact limited to only those people insulated and protected from “civilization?” And why did those who observed the disease increasingly come to believe that they themselves were worse off than their patients?

My primary understanding and use of Enlightenment throughout is as a categorical divider between those who are “enlightened,” and those who are not. Along with the terms civilization, Kultur and humanitatis, “Enlightenment” marks a spectrum of degree of difference from animal life.

As is the case for the character Docteur Valayer in “Couramé.” See pages 79-81 of this dissertation.
Widely accepted as fatal in the revolutionary era and believed to be responsible for large numbers of deaths, a diagnosis of nostalgia was sufficient cause for excuse at a time when commanders could be killed for accepting former deserters back into their ranks. There are recurring myths that express the deadly yet sweet character of nostalgia. This best-known example was that of a Swiss soldier, who upon hearing the melody of the *Ranz des vaches*, abandons his unit and is shot for desertion. This story is cited in medical texts, by Rousseau in the *Dictionnaire de la musique* and at the closing of Gautier’s obituary for Baudelaire. The story of a family forced to flee the French revolution, taking refuge on a raft in the middle of the Rhine so they can feel the wind blowing from their homeland, is introduced by Chateaubriand as a case study for what was then a medical novelty. Later, Chateaubriand’s story would be composed into Latin by a young Baudelaire.

Unlike melancholia, of which Galen wrote that “each melancholic acts quite differently than the other” (95), the claim made by this dissertation is that all forms of nostalgia are identical. Nostalgia depends on, and yearns for, sameness. Nostalgia represents a fundamental urge to undo a change. The superficial cause of this interruption can be put in spatial terms—the mercenary, the conscript, the Swiss servant all want to return home. Or it can be inscribed chronologically, where an afflicted surgeon wants to abandon the present’s *temps de misères* in

4 The most exhaustive demonstration of this is contained in the doctoral dissertation of Thomas Dodman, “Homesick epoch: Dying of nostalgia in post-revolutionary France,” which in addition to many other considerable qualities, has for the first time introduced to the history of nostalgia broad use of archival sources.

5 See chapters 1 and 3, respectively.
order to recover les beaux jours de son père. Early on, doubts about which was the true cause—spatial or temporal separation—emerged in the literature. But distinction between place and time is ultimately moot. Powerful, overwhelming nostalgia can be provoked by and is attributed to any number of interruptions: physical displacement, cultural upheaval, burgeoning dissatisfaction with surroundings. The conscripted soldier feels nostalgia for his foyer maternel, the emigré for the old ways. But a Parisian can be nostalgic for Brittany solely based on romantic depictions he reads, and a poet beset by a feeling of homelessness in his own time can come to be nostalgic for terres lointaines and pays inconnus in front of a dazzling, otherworldly painting.

What these diverse manifestations all point to is a yearning for what Balzac calls the “immémoriale routine,” a cyclical and uninterrupted way of being that invokes animal life, innocence and a lack of a sense of history. It represents an attitude about Enlightenment as a historical moment and as a process. Nineteenth-century nostalgia wishes its own time had never been born, that the gulf created by the interruption could be erased. Nostalgia always amounts to nostalgia for the time before one first felt nostalgia—as Svetlana Boym writes, for the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history (8, emphasis mine). Nostalgia wants to revert to a previous state, and not so much in the end recover a lost past, but rather bury the artifacts of the present.
Critical Overview

In the past decade, nostalgia has elicited a historical and critical interest unseen since the first thirty years of the 19th century. No single figure has contributed more to this recent body of work than the French psychoanalyst André Bolzinger. His sustained efforts beginning with “Jalons pour une histoire de la nostalgie” in the thematic issue of the Bulletin de Psychologie he directed finally culminated in his 2007 Histoire de la nostalgie. Bolzinger’s historical study represents the most exhaustive work on the condition, and benefits greatly from his longstanding and intimate knowledge of the medical dissertations on nostalgia from the 17th-19th centuries. He also consolidates insights from a wide array of earlier studies in a way no author previously had. These sources include Karl Jaspers doctoral dissertation, “Heimweh und Verbrechen,” Fritz Ernst’s Von Heimweh, as well as shorter studies by Jean Starobinski and Marcel Reinhard.

Two recent historical dissertations have also added substantially to the study of nostalgia generally, and especially regarding France. Thomas Dodman’s Homesick Epoch: Dying of Nostalgia in Post-Revolutionary France is particularly valuable for its impressive use of previously-undocumental archival materials. His excellent research on nostalgia in French colonial Algeria has also been published in an article, “Un pays pour la colonie: Mourir de nostalgie en Algérie française, 1830-1880.” Likewise, Lisa O’Sullivan’s Dying For Home: The Medicine and Politics of Nostalgia in Nineteenth-Century France, is tremendously insightful in its exploration of the relationship between nostalgia and nationalism.

Though less directly related to nostalgia in France, Nicholas Dames’ Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870 and Linda M. Austin’s Nostalgia in
Transition, 1780-1917, are supremely useful to anyone concerned with the relationship between nostalgia and literature. Svetlana Boym’s The Future of Nostalgia no doubt inspired many of the subsequent studies, both in its sweeping cultural survey of post-Cold War Eastern Europe, and her broader portrait of modern nostalgia as “a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values” (8). Though it suffers from a nearly inscrutable prose style and fails to address many obvious French sources, Helmut Illbruck’s Nostalgia: Origins and Ends of an Unenlightened Disease has several qualities that make it an important contribution to the subject. Illbruck’s insights into Goethe, Schiller and the Ranz-des-Vaches are thorough and useful. More importantly, he explores the relationship between nostalgia and Enlightenment (a central concern of my own dissertation) in a way that had not been done since Alan McKillop’s prescient 1965 essay, “Local Attachement and Cosmopolitansim—The Eighteenth-Century Pattern.” And though Illbruck ultimately sees discourse on nostalgia as a potentially edifying application of utopian ideals, he correctly identifies the disease as a product of an “anxious Enlightenment […] prone to sentimentalize the longing itself” (137), a tendency I refer to as the envy of the nostalgic.

Morning Broth and Tribal Milk

In the beginning, nostalgia was so closely linked with Switzerland (and even then, with mostly just the Alpine region of the Canton of Bern) that it was unclear whether the disease could affect anyone besides the Swiss. It was they who died from hearing the ranz-des-vaches and they who had given nostalgia its first name, Heimwe, or Heim-weh or Heimweh. The
student Hofer, in his *dissertatio*, a research paper presented before completion of the doctoral degree (his doctoral thesis would be on uterine hydrosopes),⁷ argues that nostalgia could affect anyone, especially adolescents. He nevertheless makes a series of tentative explanations of why the Swiss mountain-folk might indeed be more susceptible to the nostalgia. “I do not know,” he writes, “whether it is because they cannot go fetch their morning broth [*Jusculi matutini*] or the milk of their tribe [*lacta gentilis*], in the way they are used to eating, [*saginata*] or they are denied use of the liberty of their fatherland [*est probitus libertatis patriae usus*]” (§ V). The pairing of soup and milk with liberty will come to encompass the most basic picture of nostalgia. It’s not entirely clear whether liberty here has a political connotation—as Haller notes in his entry in the *Supplément* to the *Encyclopédie*⁸—or whether it refers to a kind of free, wandering sense of movement that had characterized the open spaces of the nostalgic’s homeland. In subsequent texts, however, it is certain that the latter picture of freedom as aimless and unlimited mobility would become the more prominent element of the two. These elements will go on to define both the potential nostalgic, and the way of life that characterizes the places that produced virtually all victims of the disease.

The association with food, the most ordinary elemental forms of food and eating (*saginō*, to eat, but also to fatten up or feed, is often used with animals) represents a major source of concern among writers on nostalgia. For the nostalgic, what is transformed is not

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⁸ “Plus que toute autre nation, les Suisses sont avaries de leur droit de bourgeoisie.”
merely the familiar and the ordinary, but actually elements so familiar and ordinary that they are hardly remarked upon as things.⁹ Balzac, in Les Chouans refers to these elements of life, the rhythms and practices which the distant and anthropologically-minded narrator sees as threatened by the rapid changes following the Revolution with a telling phrase—*l’immémoriale routine*. The expression is almost redundant. The Breton peasants are portrayed as only becoming aware that their routine is simply one set of practices among others when alternatives emerge. At the same time, efforts toward restoration—the book was written just as the Bourbon Restoration had finally crumbled and depicts the tragic romance of two lovers for whom the Revolution has denied a rightful aristocratic destiny—run aground, failing to reinstate the routine as such. A routine can only really ever be a routine if uninterrupted, undifferentiated and immemorial.¹⁰

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⁹ This is the territory of what Georges Perec described as “l’infra-ordinaire” (as part of a collection bearing this title, Perec’s *Tentative d’inventaire des aliments liquides et solides que j’ai ingurgité au cours de l’année mil neuf cent soixante-quatorze* does in fact begin with *bouillon de boeuf*, but his morning broth is really represented by *N cafés*, ie, too familiar and repetitive to even enumerate).

¹⁰ In Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, the particular experience of time, the empty but rapidly dissolving perpetual present essential to idle, sick life in the Alpine tuberculosis sanitarium is referred to as “soup everlasting.” This comes in a chapter sequence in book V whose titles could very well represent the central preoccupations in my own introductory chapter: *Ewigkeitssuppe und plötzliche Klarheit* (soup everlasting and sudden enlightening),
By the time Balzac wrote *Les Chouans*, medical writers and philosophers had established a relationship with a certain way of life and nostalgia. Over and over, they remark that many of the poorest regions produce the most nostalgics. There is always some surprise that those who rightly or logically have the least to miss should long for their return home so violently. Already with Kant, the relationship is sufficiently established for him to remark, “It is also noteworthy that this *Heimweh* seizes more the peasants from a province that is poor but bound together by strong family ties than those who are busy earning money and take as their motto: *Patria ubi bene*” (Anthropology 87).

One of the early post-Revolutionary theses observes that “La nostalgie fut plus particulièrement funeste aux habitans des campagnes qu’aux jeunes gens sortis des villes: ceux-ci accoutumé à un genre de vie plus ou moins bruyant [et] pas aussi étrangers à l’espèce de vie “*Mein Gott, ich sehe*” (“My God, I see”) and *Freiheit* (liberty). The passage on time reads as follows:

All the days are nothing but the same day repeating itself—or rather, since it is always the same day, it is incorrect to speak of repetition; a continuous present, an identity, and everlastingness—such words as these would better convey the idea. They bring you your midday broth, as they brought it to you yesterday and will bring it to you tomorrow; and it comes over you—but whence or how you do not know, it makes you quite giddy to see the broth coming in—that you are losing a sense of the demarcation of time, that its units are running together, disappearing; and what is being revealed to you as the true content of time is merely a dimensionless present in which they eternally bring you the soup. (183-4)
errante que mènent ordinairement les soldats" (Gaillardot 32). Consequently, the “jeunes gens des campagnes [...] n’avaient et ne pouvaient avoir, pour sujet, que le souvenir du passé. Ils avaient perdu le bonheur en perdant la tranquilité. Les malheureux Bretons surtout [...] presque tout furent obligés d’entrer dans les différens hopitaux” (Gaillardot 41). Another thesis describes the "vie monotone" and the "habitude de certaines jouissances" that characterize the previous existence of “certains peuples, tels que les Suisses, les Ecossais, et dans ces derniers temps, les Bretons” (Lachaud 10). The strength of one’s nostalgia lies in inverse proportion to the wealth or even desirability of one’s homeland. Another, Cyr Ducrest de Lorangie compares this to a hypothetical Scythian counterpart to the exiled Ovid, who “meprise les amusemens de Rome, et revoit ses deserts avec une joie qui le transporte...” (50), which is to say that Ovid would have been unable to truly experience nostalgia, since his longing is logical and not unmotivated.

What has come into focus is a picture that very much reflects the suggested emphasis on the exclusivity of routine. Nostalgia is associated with a life that is “monotonous,” repetitive, less “noisy” or varied than the life of people from towns and cities, who would be accustomed to interactions with outsiders or relocations. This is a life whose isolation and repetition suggests something entirely opposite to the moving lines of a military campaign, or any form of urbanization, modernization or industrialization. For Hofer, the lack of variety in the rhythms of life and especially of social interactions poses a primary disposing factor: those “accustomed to no community of men [nullo hominum consortio assueti] , when they are sent forth to foreign

Another, Jules-Prosper Roché, writes: “Les pays moins favorisés de la nature semblent être ceux auxquels l’homme s'attache le plus” (9).
lands with alien customs, do not know how to accustom themselves to the manners of living
nor to forget their mother’s milk” (§ V). Haller very much shares this view, devoting most of his
entry in the *Supplément* to expanding the idea (perhaps this is why he saw fit to republish
Hofer’s text and return to Hofer’s term *nostalgia* after it had fallen into disuse for several
decades). Haller explains that “Un Suisse est donc accoutumé dès sa jeunesse à vivre avec de
gens connus, avec sa famille, avec d’autres familles généralement alliées avec la sienne; il est
accoutumé à ne voir que des frères, des cousins, des amis alliés par le sang & par la familiarité
qui naît avec eux.” He goes on further to explicitly connect the bonds of family to routine,
writing, “Parmi des étrangers il ne retrouve plus ces parens, ces amis d’enfance; il n’éprouve
pas cette affection qui naît du sang & de la longue habitude” so that “Plus le village est solitaire,
plus un Suisse est accoutumé de vivre avec les mêmes personnes, et plus il est sujet à la
nostalgie.” The future nostalgic, according to Hofer and Haller, has been primed by the
exclusivity of his routine, based on isolation and the bonds of blood.

The breaking of this exclusive routine—however it happens, and as I will discuss it can
happen a number of ways—provides the conditions for the disease. In other words, we find the
basis for a unifying principle for diverse experiences of nostalgia, a principle which makes
possible the translation of nostalgia as first a Swiss (and really Berner-Swiss) phenomenon into
a Breton, Westphalian, Scottish one (but by some accounts also affecting Bourguignons,
Gascons, English, Irish, Germans and colonial settlers). Likewise, the model of nostalgia as the
longing for a particular rhythm of life makes possible the forms of false nostalgias I will discuss,
the “étrange nostalgies de patries inconnues” of Baudelaire and Gautier, nostalgia for unknown
places and eras, or for Boym’s nostalgia for the experience of never having felt nostalgic. All of
these modes, whether they represent a real or imagined homeland or a moment in time, from Kant’s comment on the pleasures of youth to one Revolutionary patients longing for “les vieux jours de son pere” (Guerbois 35) are rooted in a similar sense of disruption.

The widely-varied approaches and accounts I will discuss offer a consistent conception of an experience of time as unperceived and undifferentiated routine. This experience of time that is observed or imagined to characterize the lives of the rural, simple, traditional peoples who succumb to nostalgia has as its basis the mode of routine I have just suggested. Hofer, raised on a street immediately neighboring the central square of Mulhouse with its spectacular Rothüss and educated in the even more cosmopolitan Basel, imagines the life of the mountain-folk as the repetitive, unbroken sequence of one bowl of morning broth after another, one day melting into the next. This is not the kind of experience that can be recovered—though one is always trying—through the importation of goods from the fatherland, or the recreation of familiar types of spaces like the like Parisian-style cafés built in Egypt during the Napoleonic campaign to stave off nostalgia. Instead, it is the unity and unbrokenness of the routine that is really interrupted. Hofer observes that the nostalgia-prone bristle in the face of “foreign manners, different kinds of food” (§ 8), but that these categories are often merely the first differences one encounters, to which he explains that we might “add six hundred other things.”

The nostalgic’s reaction to different fashions, styles of houses, typsettings, breeds of horse, etc., are merely the surface of the problem. Instead, the “changed way of life [mutata vivendi]

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12 The patient in question, Alexandre Brasdor, fils, is a major figure in chapter 2.

13 Lourdes-Seilles recounts that “trois jours après l’arrivée des Français au Caire, on vit dans la ville des cafés à l’instar de ceux de Paris” for this express purpose (12 fn).
"consists of the sudden awareness that the elements of the routine actually comprised one manner of living among others, and so it is the very monotony and isolation that he (like his successors) identify as the way “young people form the national customs, emotional bonds and ways of living [mores, delitias, aliasque vivendi consuetudines]” (§ 8).

In other words, all of the individual differences coalesce into the experience of the “changed way of life,” the fundamental and insuperable separation between past and present. This is no doubt why when, even during the period when nostalgia was nominally synonymous with homesickness or Heimweh, the English vernacular term invented to translate it and the Swiss-German term Hofer sought to translate, time and place are still interchangeable. This is why “home” and “the past” signal the same set of experiences, and why the obsessive nostalgics who spend their time thinking and speaking about their homeland “n’avaient et ne pouvaient avoir, pour sujet, que le souvenir du passé” (Gaillardot 41).

The discovery of the past

Denis Guerbois’ 1803 dissertation begins with a tearful account of his own departure from home:

“J’en fuis moi-même attaint [de nostalgie], lorsque je partis pour l’armée. C’était la première fois que je quittais ma mere: ses yeux baignés de larmes, sa main qui s’attachait à la mienne, ses regards qui me rappelait sans cesse, imprimer dans mon coeur, un souvenir que je conservai par-tout. Doux souvenir, tu étais ma seule consolation, et pourtant tu me tormentais sans cesse!” (3)
The experience, he writes, links him with many of his compatriots and patients, who left their own mothers and homes, but who were not able to recover from the shock, incapable, like Hofer says, of “forgetting their mother’s milk” (§ V). Guerbois was something like the star pupil among the generation of recruits who, following their return from the Casernes, produced a great number of nostalgia studies.\(^1^4\) He would go on to have the most impressive medical career of the group, acting both as a moderately-renowned researcher and as an advocate for health reforms. His dissertation is both speculative and emotional, with dramatic affective flourishes. Both tendencies compel Guerbois to make a brief and impassioned digression (he had clearly read Rousseau) to plea for mothers to nurse their children personally rather than giving them over to wet nurses (14). This plea gives Guerbois the occasion to make a still broader speculation. While the departure from home and the separation from the mother mark a fundamental division in his life, this experience is itself a painful repetition of an earlier event in one’s life. The primal trauma, for Guerbois, comes when the infant is separated from his mother and given over to his nurse. Before that moment, he writes, the child has no concept of time (“ce n’est point l’idée de l’avenir, il ne l’a point, il ne peut pas encore l’avoir” 13). Only because of this original traumatic event does the past come into view: “c’est donc le souvenir seul du passé, c’est la première peine qu’il éprouve” (13). The past—the mere existence of the past—marks the first experience of trauma, and conversely, this trauma, or inevitably some other, inaugurates the horrible realization that time is irreversible.

While Guerbois (like Hofer and Kant, etc.) sees this experience of a suddenly transformed experience of time as essential to the discussion of nostalgia, it is just as possible

\(^{14}\) Details about these dissertations have been especially well-documented by André Bolzinger.
to consider this relationship in the opposite direction. This is the process suggested by Jankélévitch when he writes that “Ce n'est pas le regrettable qui est ici regretté (car il n'y a peut-être rien à regretter), c'est le fait arbitraire, déraisonnable, et même irrationnel de la passéité en soi” (353). Nostalgia here does not represent the recovery of items and ways superior to one's present circumstances (again, writers are always noting the humbleness or undesirability of the places that produce most nostalgics). Nostalgia, for Jankélévitch, gives form to a “présence” or “quoddité” of time and the past. The ordinary (or sub-ordinary) elements of the new daily life become for the nostalgic irreparably marked, and Jankélévitch writes:

L’exilé a ainsi une double vie, et sa deuxième vie, qui fut un jour la première, et peut-être le redeviendra un jour, est comme inscrite en surimpression sur la grosse vie banale et tumultuese de l’action quotidienne; l’exilé tend l’oreille pour percevoir le pianissimo des voix intérieures à travers le vacarme tonitruant de la rue, de la Bourse et du marché; ces voix intérieures, ce sont les voix du passé et de la ville lointaine, et elles chuchotent leur secret nostalgique dans la langue de la musique et de la poésie. Celui qui se sent isolé comme un étranger parmi les étrangers et comme le survivant mélancolique d’une époque défunte en pleine actualité se sent par là même solidaire d’une autre cité dont il est le citoyen, d’une autre patrie, d’une ville invisible, d’une république lointaine; cette république est une sorte présence absente, un Ailleurs atmosphérique et vaporeux, une ville pneumatique que l’exilé entrevoit par transparence et comme en filigrane à travers l’agitation de la ville étrangère. L’image de la patrie
lointaine fait de notre présence au monde une présence distraite, une présence absente... (346).

We can compare this to Guerbois, who describes in the nostalgic the “desir qu'il conserve toujours de revoir un arbre, un champ, une maison, qui lui sont chers” Such a desire has the power to transform entirely his experience of daily life: “Séparé de tout de ce qu'il aime, tous les liens qui l'attacheaient à la vie sont rempus; le monde entier n'est plus pour lui qu'un vaste désert” (9-10).  

In this way of imaging the life of the mountain folk of the Alps, or of Bretons or Scottish highlanders, there is the unshakable sense that these communities lived not only without a sense of history, but without a sense of time. This was a source of fascination for the authors, and it will be useful here to consider a passage from Étienne de Condillac’s *Traité des sensations*. Condillac concludes his study on the formation of memory and reason through sensory experience with a discussion of a wild child found in the woods at ten years old. The child, who only grunted and brayed when first discovered, eventually acquires enough language to be able to speak about his earlier wild condition. Or he would have been, except for the fact that he “ne s’en souvint non plus que nous nous souvenons de ce qui nous est arrivé au berceau” (254).

15 Guerbois should have cited Haller, who writes of the nostalgic in the *Supplément* article, “il se croit isolé, égaré, perdu; la terre est un désert pour lui.”

16 Guerbois writes, “Voyez le montagnard, espèce d’homme sauvage, dont la cabane est entourée de neiges et de glaces presqu’éternelles” (8).
Condillac had spent his entire treatise up to that point endowing a statue with cognitive faculties in order to consider how consciousness is formed and to thereby explain his own account of the *tabula rasa*. With the wild child, he has a documented study of something very similar, and yet, in the accounts of the boy, there appears to be no way of bridging the divide between memory and nonmemory. According to Condillac, the boy is no better of an authority on the blank, unaltered mind than anybody else. This must have been a frustrating experience. The author’s first gesture is to explain in a way that corresponds quite closely to his broader method and thesis the child's lack of memory:

Quelquefois notre conscience partagée entre un grand nombre de perceptions, qui agissent sur nous avec une force à-peu-près égale, est si faible, qu’il ne nous reste aucun souvenir de ce que nous avons éprouvé. A peine sentons-nous pour lors que nous existons: des jours s’écouleraient comme des moments, sans que nous en fissions la différence; et nous éprouverions des milliers de fois la même perception, sans remarquer que nous l’avons déjà eue. Un homme qui a acquis beaucoup d’idées, et qui se les est rendues familières, ne peut pas demeurer longtemps dans cette espèce de léthargie. Plus la provision de ses idées est grande, plus il y a lieu de croire que quelqu’une aura occasion de se réveiller, d’exercer son attention d’une manière particulière, et de le retirer de cet assoupiissement. Cet enfant n’avait pas un pareil secours. Ses facultés engourdies ne pouvaient être secouées, que par le besoin de chercher de la nourriture; et sa vie ressemblait à un sommeil, qui ne serait interrompu que par des songes. Il était donc naturel qu’il oubliât son premier état (254-255).
The child’s lack of memory, in other words, comes not from an absence of perceptions, but the lack of a mechanism to order direct, order and organize them. And yet, as natural as the forgetting may be (and Condillac's explanation is perfectly convincing), the author is nevertheless led back to question his process quite forcefully:

Condillac has reached an impasse. On the one hand, the child has no memory of his “premier état,” this is certain. He has no more of a memory of his comparatively recent time in the forests than an adult does of his days as a newborn. Condillac has a means of explaining this lacuna: the needs of wild living prevented the kind of sustained focus necessary to form memories. These facts and this logic cannot prevent Condillac from immediately speculating that the child indeed might remember how to do all the things he did to survive and especially the place where he had lived, perhaps il n’eût pas eu besoin de s’instruire une seconde fois de
*toutes ces choses* (just as a number of studies on nostalgia call an animal’s propensity to return to a regular feeding spot nostalgia).\(^{17}\) He is left wholly in doubt about whether or not the primal memory, described in the preceding paragraph as an uninterrupted *sommeil*, has in fact been retained. But what could be retained from the time when the child possessed not language?

Condillac, without identifying it, has carved out a mode between memory and total darkness: the routine. The fact the boy cannot speak about the state he may actually remember fits into a mold that emphasizes animal life, always hewing close to the fulfilment of biological need. Over and over again, the writers who address nostalgia find themselves or imagine themselves in the same frustrating situation as Condillac interrogating a subject, himself real or imagined, who possesses a secret bond to a set of experiences which cannot be communicated because for the nostalgic, they were never seen as experiences but repeated endlessly and thoughtlessly in complete ignorance that things could be done otherwise. (As Bernard Stiegler writes of Rousseau’s depiction, “Tout est toujours identiquement le même pour l’homme originaire et sauvage” TT1, 134).

In the most obvious way, this failure of communication happens when the nostalgic and the examiner do not share a common language. This is a major element in an account identified

\(^{17}\) Guerbois: “voyez le cerf, que des chasseurs impitoyables ont lancé loin de sa paisible retraite; il y revient d’un pas rapide, dès qu’il est libre, et il verse, en la retrouvant, des larmes de joie. Le bruit de ses ennemis le force-t-il une seconde fois à la fuite, il s’en éloigne de nouveau; mais c’est pour y revenir encore, lorsqu’il a échappé à ses ennemis: c’est cet invincible besoin d’y revenir qui est la cause de sa perte (7-8)
by Haller as a case of nostalgia nearly two centuries after it first appeared. The case concerns several native Greenlanders taken to Copenhagen in the mid-16\textsuperscript{th} century, who grow despondent and attempt to return to their island by canoe. Isaac La Peyrère, Haller’s source, gives the following summary of the description of the linguistic struggles in a contemporary Danish text: "les trois Sauvages que le pilote Anglois amena du golfe Davis, parloient si viste, & bredoüilloient si fort, qu’ils ne prononçoient quoy que ce fust distinctement, excepté ces deux mots, \textit{oxa indecha}, dont on n’a jamais sçeu la signification."

What is transcribed as \textit{oxa}, according to the Greenlandic language authority the \textit{Oqaasiliortut}, almost certainly renders the word \textit{orsoq}, whale blubber.\textsuperscript{18} This fits into La Peyrère’s account of a particular preoccupation of the Greenlanders:

[L]e Roy de Danemarc establit des Personnes, qui eurent un soin particulier de les nourrir, & de les garder; de telle sorte neantmoins, qu’ils avoient la liberté d’aller par tout où ils vouloient. On les nourrissoit de laïct, de beurre, & de fromage; de chairs cruës, & de poissons cruds; de la mesme façon qu’ils vivoient en leur pays; parce qu’ils ne se pouvoient accoustumer à nostre pain, & à nos viandes cuittes; moins encore au vin, & qu’ils ne beuvoient quoy que ce soit de si bon cœur, que de grands traits d’huyle, ou de graisse de Balene. Ils tournoient souvent la teste vers le Nord, & sousprioient avec tant d’amour pour leur patrie, que leur garde estant relaschée, ceux qui se peurent saisir de leurs petits bateaux, & de leurs rames, se mirent en mer pour en hazarder le traject (169-171).

\textsuperscript{18} I thank Carl Christian Olsen, director of the \textit{Oqaasiliortut}, for this insight.
Once again, disruption of the dietary routine, the morning broth, appears as a type of disturbance capable of causing severe and potentially deadly nostalgia.

I will discuss this incident at some length in the following chapter, but two things can be said quickly about this passage. First, there is little difference in La Peyrère’s description of the language of the Greenlanders and Condillac’s account of the sounds made by the wild child before he had acquired any language. Both are or almost are described as animal sounds. It must also be pointed out that it was La Peyrère, with his theory of the pre-Adamite peoples, who may have first advanced in any kind of systematic way the idea that some races were on the other side of a gulf so profound they could not represent a continuous human specimen. This idea would continue to be of tremendous importance as philosophy, history and finally science sought to locate and learn about man’s remotest origins. For La Peyrère, the Greenlanders could tell him no more of these origins than the Lithuanian wild child could tell us of his past.19

Language became an issue on a mass scale among the Bretons during the mobilizations of 1794 on, with observers noting, quite understandably, that those least able to speak French suffered nostalgia with the greatest frequency. When Balzac dramatizes this kind of divide at the opening of Les Chouans, the figure of Marche-à-terre, covered in animal skins and mostly grunting, speaks just enough French for the Republicans to understand his refusal to cooperate, and for his speech to be rendered in the text. But here, too, his communication is compared to an animal intelligence:

19 We could add Hofer’s young female nostalgic, discussed at some length in chapter 1, who only and repeatedly utters the phrase “Ich wil heim.”
Il s'assit tranquillement sur le bord du chemin, tira de son sarreau quelques morceaux d'une mince et noire galette de sarrasin, repas national dont les tristes délices ne peuvent être comprises que des Bretons, et se mit à manger avec une indifférence stupide. Il faisait croire à une absence si complète de toute intelligence, que les officiers le comparèrent tour à tour, dans cette situation, à un des animaux qui broutaient les gras pâturages de la vallée (12).

The Chick and the Cow: Animal Life and Enlightenment

Accounts of nostalgia often involve patients of animal stupidity. It affects those whose rusticity causes them to appear, like Marche-à-terre, as having the uncurious and unbreakable indifference of a farm animal, or else the disease itself produces these characteristics in its victims.

Guerbois, in a surprising foray into philology,²⁰ makes the connection to animal life even more explicitly. In addition to the traditional etymology of nostos, Guerbois offers another possibility, expanding on a gloss he attributes to a professor Chaussier:

1. “Ce mot NOSTOS, que l'on a souvent écrit MOSTOS, et que les Latins ont traduit par celui de pullus, pusillus, signifie seulement un poussin; mais, par extension ou par comparaison, on l'a employé pour designer un homme pusillanime, faible, qui a les habitudes du poussin, un nouveau venu qui regrette sa mere.

²⁰ He would publish a book-length translation of Hippocrates late in his life.
2. Il est aussi employé, ainsi que ses dérives, pour désigner un *nid*, et par extension le *lieu natal*, acception que les latins ont traduit par les mots *nidus pullities*, *monsiuncula*, comme on peut le voir dans les dictionnaires grecs, où l’on trouvera aussi le composé NOTSTOPOIEÔ\textsuperscript{21}, *nidum struo*, je fuis, je construis un nid.

Ainsi, en se bornant à ces deux dernières acceptions, on peut dire que la *Nostalgie* ou *Nostomanie*, comme le préfère certains écrivains, est la *maladie du pays*, du *lieu natal*, ou, si l’on veut, l’*affection des nouveaux venus*, des hommes faibles qui regrettent le lieu natal, ne pensent et ne s’occupent de leurs habitudes premières, interprétation qui paraît plus conforme à la véritable composition du mot, ou l’objet que l’on veut exprimer, et à la nature même de l’affection (10-11)

Here, Guerbois has offered a complete picture of nostalgia and animal life. Nostalgia, as *affection des nouveaux-venus*,\textsuperscript{22} represents an innocence or ignorance of time, while at the same time conveying a deep sense of fragility and timidity. It is a condition which, in people, relates to a pre-civilized and unenlightened animal life oriented to the routines of “habitudes premières.” His figure of the *poussin* as archetypal embodies both enslavement to the routines of biological need, and the same time unencumbered liberty and flight. Both are encapsulated in the

\textsuperscript{21} Compare to Rousseau, in which the emergence of social man coincides with the dispersion and fleeing from the initial population—temporary shelter, freedom and fragility.

\textsuperscript{22} Bolzinger also notes on this point that young soldiers in Guerbois’ time were given the nickname “pioupious” (148).
in the verb *nostopoieō* (he likely means *neosopoeio*), which contains execution of habits (building a nest) and the capacity to flee in space. The temporary dwelling of the nest serves as a marker of both freedom of movement and primal fragility. Accordingly, the life of the nostalgia-prone is characterized *not* by unbroken ties to place, but on mobility and malleability. These traits are the features that cause vulnerability to nostalgia, and also those which make the nostalgic the subject of fascination and envy.

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23 This is will become an important point in any discussion of the relationship between nostalgia and nationalism. What matters in the context of nostalgia are the conditions provided by a given place, its isolation, its hostile climate, the ways of life it forces upon its inhabitants. Whatever particular attachments may manifest themselves, nostalgia is a more of a relationship to *Raum* than to *Land*. Consequently, its political manifestations resemble less “Crown and Country” than they do the *Phalanstère*, which Fourier insisted would work anywhere.

24 Freud identifies the technological developments of fire and weapons as the moment in time when men broke away forever from pure instinct. Rousseau, while making a similar connection about civilization and technology in the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* ("[l’homme] apprit à surmonter les obstacles de la nature, à combattre au besoin les autres animaux"), notes that this process was inseperable from the process by which people dispersed, spread out from others which, "exigèrent d’eux une nouvelle industrie" (165). The dual process of flight and reorganization was therefore critical to the establishment of civilization and the distancing from nature: "À mesure que le genre humain s’étendit, les peines se multiplièrent avec les hommes" (165).
Aside from Guerbois’ chick, the central figure in the portraits of animal life in service of investigating nostalgia is the cow. It is after all the Ranz des vaches, the cow call, whose melody and Alphorn are both described as resembling the cow’s stupid and constant mooing which unlocks the secret, indomitable force of nostalgia. The image of the cow, throughout the discussions of nostalgia, embodies in a special way an implacable obliviousness to time. More than any other animal, at least according to the symbolic language in question, it is a figure of routine. It is a cow, and specifically an Alpine cow,\(^\text{25}\) that serves for Nietzsche as an initial occasion for meditating on an un-historical existence in *The Use and Abuse of History*.

Consider the cattle, grazing as they pass you by: they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today, they leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again, and so from morn til night and from day to day, fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure, and thus neither melancholy nor bored. This is a hard sight for man to see; for, though he thinks himself better than the animals because he is human, he cannot help envying them their happiness—what they have, a life neither bored nor painful, is precisely what he wants, yet he cannot have it because he refuses to be like an animal. A human being may well as an animal: “Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze

\(^{25}\)I am taking a small liberty. Nietzsche does not exactly locate the cow, but does in the opening make a comparison that will frame his essay, equating man’s historical consciousness to the viewpoint of a narrowly-hewn Alpine valley, making such a central point into a setting or at least motif for the opening scene. Alpine valleys are well-stocked with cows.
at me?” The animal would like to answer and say: “The reason is I always forget what I was going to say”—but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering (60-61).

The secret to the cow’s happiness is that he still possesses the ignorance of time and difference that the nostalgic traumatically loses and for which the potential nostalgic is envied. This cannot be communicated because, should the cow acquire the ability to do so, he would then have the mechanisms for organizing thought, creating memory and therefore would lose his happiness.

“This is why,” writes Nietzsche, “it affects [man] like a vision of lost paradise to see herds grazing or, in closer proximity, a child which, having as yet nothing of the past to shake off, plays in blissful blindness between the hedges of past and future” (61).

I want to turn now to a series of comments made by Kant which I believe brings to light what is so important about the discussion of nostalgia during this period, and which reflect a similar picture of naivety to these images of animal life. His comments bear on the concepts I have discussed up to this point, about the routine or unmemory that has shaped the authors who address the causes of nostalgia directly. But they also take up the motifs catalogued so far: cows, childhood, and the images of carefree life. The most immediately pertinent discussion comes in Kant’s own thoughts on Heimweh, part of a broader treatment of imagination in the Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View. His account follows a model we have seen repeated up to this point, but it also articulates a broader set of concerns than previously seen. Beginning with the passage from the Anthropology:

The Heimweh of the Swiss (and, as I have it from the mouth of an experienced general, also Westphalians and Pomeranians) that seizes them when they are
transferred to other lands, is the result of a longing [Sehnsucht] for the places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life [Lebensfreuden]. This longing is aroused by the images of the carefree life [Sorgenfreiheit] and neighborly company in their early years. So it happens that later, after they visit these same places, they are greatly disappointed in their expectations and thus also find their Heimweh cured. To be sure, they think that this is because everything has changed a great deal, but in fact it is because they revive [hinbringen] their youth in that same place. It is also noteworthy that this Heimweh seizes more the peasants from a province that is poor but bound together by strong family ties than those who are busy earning money and take as their motto: Patria ubi bene (87, translation modified).  

Kant argues that the nostalgics who profess to be cured upon returning are only cured by their disappointment at the realization that their geographical attachment really only stood for a desire for the past. Homesickness is not, he explains, a longing for home in general, but for the particular experience of home as they left it. He also repeats the well-established imagery of the humble, rural setting, whose impoverishment grounds a mode of experience characterized by simple pleasures, carefreeness, and an unvaried social circle. All of these elements have been part of the picture of the nostalgia-prone since Hofer.

26 Guerbois also exempts from the populations at risk those who pursue “de l’or, de l’or!” (9).

27 For a similar argument, see Jankélévitch on “la déception d’Ulysse” (352-360).
But my real interest in Kant’s conclusions lies in their striking similarity to another, more famous, argument about the comforts of youth. In his brief essay on the question of Enlightenment, Kant offers a very concise appraisal about the process whereby mankind might take upon itself the courage and responsibility to rely on reason—*sapere aude*. What I want to focus on is his assessment of the unenlightened state, the shackles of which are supposed to be shaken off by his readers and by everyone. This state, as Kant explains in the opening sentence of the essay, is one of “self-imposed minority [Unmündigkeit]”—as in, below the age of majority, of adulthood. But for the purposes of the essay, *unmündig* really means “unenlightened.” The state of being “unmündig” means the following according to Kant: it is “the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance.” It represents the opposite of the slogan of Enlightenment, *sapere aude*. This state of being, acting as a youth, or being unenlightened, comes not from a lack of understanding. Its cause is “in indecision and lack of courage to use one’s own mind without another’s guidance.” The lack of courage manifests itself in the practice of accepting decisions of others in substitution for one’s own choices or reason. “If I have a book that thinks for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who prescribes my diet, and so on—then I have no need to exert myself” (135, translation modified).

The benefits of Enlightenment, according to Kant, are multiple and often repeated. But even in a piece of advocacy, even in a text where surely some subtly must be flattened by its format and broader readership, there is still an acknowledgement of loss. The subjects of authority, he writes, had come to accept their state of minority and actually “grew to like it.” “It is so comfortable [bequem] to be *unmündig,*” he writes, and this begs the question of
whether the advancements of Enlightenment he supports require in turn a permanent renunciation of comfort. But I will leave that question aside for the moment.  

There is, more immediately, a very direct parallel in the two accounts between the easy comfort of the unenlightened and the image of the Sorgenfreiheit of the Swiss or Westphalian. The only difference appears to be the role of authority that is central to the essay on Enlightenment, and which appears to be absent from the passage on Heimweh. Kant enumerates figures of power (the pastor, the physician, and very interestingly, the book) paired with a particular function (conscience, prescription of diet, thinking) that take up activity that one could perform on one’s own. Kant goes on to expound on this relationship between authority and function, writing:

Those guardians who have kindly taken supervision will see to it that the by far the largest part of mankind, including the entire “fair sex,” should consider the step into maturity, not only as hard, but as extremely dangerous. Once these guardians have made their domestic livestock [Hausvieh] stupid and carefully prevented these docile creatures from taking a single step without the leading-strings [Gängelwagen] to which they have fastened them, they then show them

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28 This point is made more explicitly by Moses Mendelssohn in the same issue of the Berlinische Monatsschrift: “The enlightenment of human beings can come into conflict with the enlightenment of citizens. Certain truths which are useful to him as a human being, can at times be harmful to him as a citizen […] Without their essential vocation as human beings, humans sink to the level of cattle” (315).
the danger that would threaten them if they should try to walk by themselves
(135, translation modified).

In an extended discussion of this section in his seminar *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres*,
Foucault is quick to underscore Kant’s depiction of power. The *Gängelwagen*, he explains was used throughout the 18th century: “pour encadrer les enfants” and was “une sorte de trapèze avec des roués, qui les faisait marcher” (28). “The cart is thus a technical object that both enables freedom and enforces a degree of obedience” writes Arne de Boever, noting the relationship between the device and Kant’s other "slogan" in the essay on Enlightenment (i.e., not *sapere aude*): “argue as much as you want, but obey!” This process ensures the animal remains stupid, fearful and domestic (like Guerbois’ *poussin*)—the device, like the routine, is a prosthetic.  

If the techniques of authority Kant discusses in the essay on Enlightenment are as subtle as he claims they are, employed not through explicit force of law but integrated over time through custom, indifference, habituation and convenience, then the question must be asked: are the guardians necessary to the establishment or maintenance of such a structure? The answer, even in Kant’s terms, is either no, or, yes but only in the most minimal sense. The structure has become second nature and is self-imposed, no doubt due to both an inclinations to maintain comfort and out of fear. He explains:

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29 Rousseau, in a footnote from the discourse on inequality, describes the same wild child as Condillac, noting that several wild children had to have wooden planks attached to arms to prevent them from walking on all fours (134n).
It is difficult for the isolated individual to work himself out of the position of minority which has become second-nature to him. He has even become fond of it, and for the time being is incapable of using his own intelligence, because he has never been allowed to make the attempt. Dogmas and formulas [Satzungen und Formeln], these mechanical tools of a serviceable use or rather misuse [mechanischen Werkzeuge eines vernünftigen Gebrauchs oder vielmehr Mißbrauchs] of his natural faculties, are the ankle chains of a perpetual minority. Whoever threw them off would make an uncertain jump over the smallest trench, because he is not used to such free movement. Therefore there are only a few who have pursued a firm path and who have succeeded in escaping minority by their own cultivation of the mind (135-136, translation modified, emphasis mine).

Like the Gängelwagen, the two mechanischen Werkzeuge he mentions here function to both enable and restrain. The slippage from “serviceable use” immediately to “misuse” in the middle of the sentence demonstrates how subtly this implementation can escape notice. The dogmas and formulas do not need to be imposed or enforced, they simply need to be used, received, absorbed from time immemorial and carried on in a tradition, a routine, to which no alternatives have been opposed.30

In this sense, the life Kant imagines of “the peasants from a province that is poor but bound together by strong family ties” requires none of the figures and more explicit mechanisms of authority which populate his essay on Enlightenment. Even Kant’s remark about diet reminds us especially of the mentions, over and over again, from Hofer on, of eating habits as among the most recognizable features of the routine. No physician is required to prescribe

30 I discuss this point further in the conclusion, pp. 209-214.
the morning broth. It appears every day just the same and like dogma, it is made from left-overs.

So here is how nostalgia presents a central predicament of Enlightenment. On one hand, nostalgia comes into being as the result of the encounter with the irreversible, the discovery of the past, the sudden awareness of difference and the realization that routine is not simply given but a subject of choice. Obviously, this is incompatible with Enlightenment, which requires an abandonment of the mechanisms (tradition, routine, dogma) that restricted the life into such a unitary, monotonous condition—to use one’s own reason to determine choices different from those inherited or imposed, one has to be taught about the existence of difference and choices. This abandonment only comes with the loss of the “comfort” of being unenlightened, a disavowal of “the places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life and “the images of the carefree life and neighborly company.” But this is a one-way road, as shown by the repeated images of failure, from Condillac to Rousseau to Kant to Nietzsche’s cow to successfully communicate with unenlightenment. Such an awakening is irreversible and the routine depends so essentially on oblivion, in these authors’ imaginations, that it cannot even be remembered. But one can try—like Romain Rolland’s attempts to describe a primal feeling of interconnectedness he called “la sensation océanique,” or as I will discuss in the following final section, through the attempted use of certain tools and procedures.

Techniques for disenlightenment

As we have seen, the life of the potential nostalgic as seen through the eyes of the philosophers and scientists who wrote about the disease is defined in terms of two apparently
contradictory approaches which ultimately prove to have a direct causal link. In the first place, he lives a life that is completely dictated by routine, whether that routine is imposed by tradition, the needs of life, or by the bounds of authority or family ties. Out of his reliance on authority figures, dogmas, prosthetics, he is ignorant, helpless, timid and comfortable. Like an only-slightly less extreme version of Condillac's wild child, there is nothing to organize and direct his sensations, perceptions and experiences into memory, let alone an awareness of history. He lives in a perpetual present, and any discovery of the past is so traumatic that it causes a potentially-fatal illness named nostalgia. He is a cow. At the same time, however, for the very reason that there is nothing to organize or mobilize his life, he is imagined to possess an unbounded freedom. He wanders without occupation, unburdened by worry, regret and memory. He is free from knowledge, appointments, politics and differences. He is comfortable.

A chasm had supposedly separated the enlightened from the sources of happiness the Enlightenment project had set out to reform. The people who had evaded Enlightenment longer than most could not communicate their happiness. Already with Rousseau, the conditions that made the disease nostalgia possible and which grounded its risks (as well as defining its sweetness) were vanishing. In 1763, he writes:

Je ne puis m'empêcher de remarquer seulement que la France est assurément le meilleur pays du monde, où toutes les commodités et tous les agréments de la vie concourent au bien-être des habitants. Cependant il n'y a jamais eu, que je sache, de hemvé ni de ranz des vaches qui fit pleurer et mourir de regret un Français en pays étranger ; et cette maladie diminue beaucoup chez les Suisses depuis qu'on vit plus agréablement dans leur pays (169).
Similarly, Wordsworth could write in the Bernese Alps, the supposed original epicenter of nostalgia, of his frustrated disconnection from the native force of the condition:

I LISTEN,—but no faculty of mine
Avails those modulations to detect,
Which, heard in foreign lands, the Swiss affect
With tenderest passion; leaving him to pine
(So fame reports) and die,—his sweet-breathed kine
Remembering, and green Alpine pastures decked
With vernal flowers.

(“On Hearing the Ranz des Vaches on the Top of the Pass of Saint Gothard”)

Wordsworth also compared his experience of the region to an account of wild native tribe in Paraguay in a way that very much mirrors the depictions of natives in discussions of nostalgia already seen and to come. The allure of the scene for Wordsworth (and its original author) come from the unformed, animal sounds made by the natives, “the wildest chorus that ever was heard by human ears—a song not of articulate sounds, but in which the voice was used as a mere instrument of music, more flexible than any which art could produce,—sweet, powerful, and thrilling beyond description.”

31 "While we were at the Waterfall, some half-score peasants, chiefly women and girls, assembled just out of reach of the spring, and set up—surely, the wildest chorus that ever was heard by human ears—a song not of articulate sounds, but in which the voice was used as a mere instrument of music, more flexible than any which art could produce,—sweet, powerful,
“l’habitant des rochers helvétiques” compared favorably to “L’habitant de la plaine et des riant vallons / Insipidement gais ou tristement féconds” less able to dream of his “dieux domestiques” despite have far more reason to do so.\(^3\)

As nostalgia came to be a growing source of concern for writers, whether scientific or literary or both, a parallel trend emerged. As I will show in chapter 2, writing on nostalgia became increasingly affective and emotional, progressively more imbued with the feeling of nostalgia for the time when \textit{one still had the capacity of feeling nostalgic}. Writing on nostalgia, which had always been imbued with the sense of lost time even when the word overlapped almost entirely with \textit{Heimweh}, became more explicit about its engagement with a lost age.

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\(^3\) L’habitant de la plaine et des riant vallons,  
\textit{Insipidement gais ou tristement féconds,}  
\textit{Rêve moins tendrement à ses dieux domestiques.}  
\textit{Mais voyez l’habitant des rochers helvétiques,}  
\textit{A-t-il quitté ces lieux tourmentés par les vents}  
\textit{Hérissés de frimats sillonnés de torrents,}  
\textit{Dans les plus doux climats dans leurs molles délices ?}  
\textit{Il regrette ses lacs ses rocs ses précipices [...]}  
\textit{Tant le doux souvenir embellit le désert!}

\textit{(from Imagination, chant IV)}
Simultaneously, writers began with increasing intensity to identify with and envy the victims of nostalgia. The chasm between the potential nostalgic and successfully enlightened or modernized man had become wider and more impossible, according to the accounts of nostalgia, and for this reason more fascinating, tempting, and seductive. Efforts to find ways to bridge this divide became more urgent, whether out of a sense of what Richard Terdiman calls the “memory crisis” (“a sense that their past had somehow evaded memory, that recollection had ceased to integrate with consciousness [in which] the very coherence of time and of subjectivity seemed disarticulated” 3-4) or because, as I suspect, a number of writers were confronted with the central paradox of Enlightenment—that knowledge and liberty allow for every possibility but a return to the comforts of being unfree and unknowing. The investigation of the figure of the nostalgic only brings this irreversibility into tragic light.

This is why, no doubt, the suggested remedies for nostalgia resembled so closely its supposed causes. Guerbois recommends that that a doctor present his patient with “objets d'attachement” which remind him of the time and place whose images he can’t shake because they are “témoins du bonheur de son premier age” (9). Music, which most famously in the case of the ranz-des-vaches posed such a danger, now, could become in treatment “une grande resource” (33). This recommendation comes in spite its capacity to, “en retraçant aux soldats des souvenirs trop chers de leur pays, de leur jeunesse, de leur plaisirs et de toute leur ancienne façon de vivre, leur inspirait un tel chagrin, qu’il leur fallait alors désérer ou mourir de langueur.” Emotional narratives like those by Chateaubriand or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, which had been thought to pose a danger to overly-sensitive patients (“le pauvre cœur s'attache toujours à tout ce qui lui fait le plus de plaisir”), become so central to the clinical
understanding of nostalgia that medical authors began to write their own fictional tales of nostalgia. These fictional works in turn are produced in a derivative style that resembles the formerly “dangerous” nostalgia-inspiring authors like Chateaubriand and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. And above all, the most widely recommended and implement treatment for nostalgia, the *congé*, represents the kind of change in scene and rhythm that had provided the conditions of the disease in the first place.

These nostalgic artifacts are not cures, they are only analgesics. As Susan Stewart writes of souvenir (which operations along these same lines), their function is to “authenticate a past or otherwise discredit a present” (139). In this sense, writing on nostalgia bears out in an especially clear way what Freud claims about the origins of all writing: “Writing was in its origin the voice of an absent person; and the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother’s womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 91). Since nostalgia is always nostalgia for the routine, which depends on a lack of historical awareness, as well as ignorance of difference or competing modes of life, the mechanisms of Enlightenment cannot be repealed. They can only be replaced with the techniques of disenlightenment.
In his article “Le concept de la nostalgie,” Jean Starobinski writes that “[p]our le critique, pour l’historien, un sentiment n’existe qu’au-delà du stade où celui-ci accède à son statut linguistique” and adds “rien n’est saisissable d’un sentiment en deçà du point où il se nomme, où il se désigne et s’exprime” (92). But at what point is nostalgia actually named? As previously mentioned, other terms (Heimweh and maladie du pays) existed alongside Hofer’s neologism—and locating these chronologically will be a major component of this history. Furthermore, the word “nostalgie” has itself a tortuous and often obscure history whose twists bring into light the interest and difficulty of the concept. Hofer’s thesis would be republished in 1745 by Albrecht von Haller, then chair of medicine at the University of Gottingen (and later author of the article on nostalgia for the Supplément to the Encyclopédie). Between that date and the original publication, Hofer’s new term had all but disappeared. Some of this disappearance was due to a process of scientific review. When Hofer’s professor, Theodor Zwinger, published his own study on the new disease in 1710, he replaced nostalgia with pothopatridalgia. The far more cumbersome term reigned for nearly a half century in the medical sphere. As André Bolzinger writes in his Histoire de la nostalgie, “le néologisme savant a vécu sa vie comme un personnage de roman,” apt to disappear in favor of another, only to return (50). Meanwhile, other designations were being introduced to better capture the idea in

33 Subsequent research into the history of emotions has offered ways around this categorical barrier, by tracking reactions like emotive utterances, gestures or blushing. But how does this apply to an emotion that began its linguistic existence as a disease?
question. By 1771, François de la Croix Boissier de Sauvages could collect three additional medical names, *philopatridomania, nostomania* and *nostrassia*. Haller coined another vernacular term, *Heimsehnsucht*, in his 1745 edition, and in 1756, an English neologism was introduced for the sole purpose of translating *nostalgia* in a German-language travelogue on Switzerland. 34 This was the first appearance in the English language of “homesickness.”

If the apparently hasty and confused accumulation of names illustrates the “complexité linguistique” described by Starobinski, it also demonstrates the medical world’s interest in the condition, and the conceptual problems that forced writers to continually revise the name to match shifting perceptions of the disease. Hofer presents his study as addressing for the first time the disease, and the examination committee remarks that the work indeed filled a need in medically describing *Heimweh*. One member expresses a degree of surprise that “no one had considered this *algos* before now” from a medical point of view. 36

Of course, from a strictly etymological point of view, Zwinger was right. The relationship between the pain and desire for return is vague in *nostalgia*. The name derives from its projected cure, the homeward journey, rather than its cause or symptom. The fatal longing for home that is described, at least literally, by the denominations of *Heimweh* and *maladie du pays, correspondes far more closely to *pothopatridalgia*. And yet, this exact relationship must not have covered all the early cases and stories about the unnamed phenomenon. Two facets

34 By Johann-Georg Keyssler, a member of the Royal Academy. Travels through Germany, Bohemia, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, and Lorrain. London: Linde and Field, 1756.

35 According to the *OED*.

36 In the verse *Respondentem* which follow the text.
of this evolution will become clear through an analysis of the writing on the disease both before and after Hofer. Firstly, Hofer’s text was responding to a problem that had already been observed and documented in the scientific world. Secondly, the term nostalgia, because of and not in spite of its fluidity of meaning, was able to allow for a far broader field of cases and narratives than otherwise. These narratives would inspire in turn doctors, philosophers and poets who consider the disease, whatever its name. Consequently, the stories themselves, real or fictional, would define an illness and create an emotion. The true innovation of Hofer, more than the choice of its imprecise (intentionally or not) name was to introduce and establish a series of motifs and a setting that would define a lasting mythology of the disease.

Nemo quam cogitavit adhuc: A Prehistory of “Nostalgia”

Did Hofer’s thesis medicalize a timeless tradition, as Bolzinger believes, stretching back to emotions already expressed by Homer, Ovid and Du Bellay? There is actually reason to believe that the notion corresponded instead to much more recent discussions. Two other texts confirm that the idea for including in the medical canon the condition Hofer would name nostalgia was rather widespread. One, a text by Rémy Fort, Le médecin d’armée: ou, Les entretiens de Poleniatre et de Leoceste sur les maladies des soldats, was published three years before the Hofer’s thesis. Fort’s book, whose format is modeled on the querelle des anciens et modernes, addresses several war illnesses, but considers the “plus dangereuse” to be “la maladie du païs” (38). Odile Roynette identifies this moment as the incipit of her history of the “invention of nostalgia” (31). This argument at odds with Starobinski’s model, carried on by Bolzinger when he writes of this text, “aussi longtemps que le mot ‘nostalgie’ n’existe pas, la
chose homonyme reste dans les limbes” (30). Nevertheless, Fort’s text positions itself as innovative. This illness, he remarks, is not only the most “dangerous” of those discussed by Polemiatre and Leoceste, it is also the unknown to the larger medical world.

At the outset, the wise Leoceste welcomes his old friend Polemiatre, just returned to his “patrie” after a long sojourn in the barracks. Leoceste appears content to lean on his opinions of medical theories and encyclopedias (he mentions Hermes Trismegistus, Geber, Raymond Llull, Arnaud de Villeneuve, Paracelsus among others, 206), and which he seems to know better than his interlocutor, less scholarly but more practically experienced. But Leoceste has not crossed the Rhine and has not had the occasion to observe the soldiers in the East in situ. He appears eager in light of this to raise a series of (apparently naïve) questions about the medical problems of soldierly life. It is in this context that the practical Polemiatre, compared to Diogenes the Cynic by Leoceste, introduces the new concept. He describes these illnesses affecting soldiers and “qui agitent leur esprit,” noting “je n’en ay point remarqué de plus dangereuses, ni de plus préjudiciable à leur santé, qu’une certaine langueur qu’on appelle parmi les troupes, la maladie du pays” (38). Leoceste’s response is revelatory: “Cette maladie m’est inconnue."

Leoceste is naturally surprised to learn of the existence of a disease not yet mentioned in his library, a concern wholly new and “d’une nature extraordinaire.” Reckoning that this disease merits being put aside in order to speak of less pressing medical problems, the two doctors only return to the question of maladie du pays in the very last pages, according it a privileged place in the book. It is there that Polemiatre can share his own theories on this new
pathology, so serious that it “ne cède à pas un des remèdes que la médecine peut fournir;” et comme ce mal rend l’esprit malade, plutôt que le corps, c’est à celui-là principalement qu’il faut appliquer les remèdes, se l’on veut sauver celui-ci” (191). “La mémoire,” continue Polemiatre, “Représente sans cesse à ces mécontents les choses qu’ils désirent et qu’ils regrettent [et] trouble sans cesse, comme un phantôme affreux, leur foible imagination.”

Leoceste réagit aux détails racontés par Polemiatre avec sympathie, concluant que le soldier’s state of being in the face of la maladie du pays is “digne de compassion” (194). Polemiatre’s point of view accounts for more practical concerns, “Comme [la maladie du pays] rend les soldats inutiles pour le service, on est obligé de les congédier et c’est là presque l’unique remède […] Il arrive même souvent qu’après avoir eu leur congé, cette grande envie de changer étant passées, il s’enrôlent de nouveau, et deviennent enfin de bons soldats” (198).

Less systematic than the texts by Hofer, Zwinger, Johann Jakob Scheuchzer and their successors, Fort’s dialogue still represents a serious medical reflection that names the new illness. In addition to identifying the afflicted’s “imagination” as a primary driver of la maladie du pays, Polemiatre also emphasizes a relationship to diet as an important factor. He notes that the disease often emerges when one feels a “desordre des alimens” (48) and later references reactions to the lack of access to one’s “cuisine première” (120), recalling Hofer’s “morning broth and native milk.” The text also suggests the most frequently suggested course of treatment, temporary leave to return home. Finally, Fort’s text emphasizes the particular danger of a gradual and silent death that would come to characterize so many narratives of nostalgia. Polemiatre explains that “[l]es soldats qui sont atteints de cette maladie, après avoir

37 As I discuss on p.18 below, Hofer makes the same claim.
longtemps trâiné, succombe enfin, et on dirait à les voir consumer à petit feu, qu’ils meurent sans maladie & que le corps quitte plutôt que l’ame qui est malade, que l’ame ne quitte le corps” (194). The two interlocutors offer two complementary perspectives, one founded on concrete experience in the army, the other enriched by medical texts. Their dialogues anticipate therefore the practical studies that will later recognize nostalgia’s particular symptoms and undeniable seriousness alluded to by Fort.

*Heimweh*

The other vernacular term to be “medicalized,” *Heimweh*, did not have a long written history either. According to the Swiss *Idiotikon*, *Heimweh* appears for the first time only in 1651 in a collection of popular texts. In this popular literature, *Heimweh* is already classified as grave illness (*schwere Krankheit*). Hofer himself believed the word was “introduced recently into the Swiss vernacular” (§2)—and one imagines this belief, if false, would have been corrected by his professors, who in addition to their expertise were native Swiss, unlike him. Ernst does allude to a mention of death caused by “Heimwe” [sic] in the correspondence of Swiss military figure Ludwig Pfyffer. The fact that this reference does appear in lexigraphic studies in the 17th and 18th centuries, coupled with Hofer’s claim about the novelty of the word, suggests the circulation of the missive was minimal. As Ernst writes, “the world would have to wait a long time” (13) for *Heimweh* to reappear, and the mention by Pfyffer was never published before his 19th-century biography. It seems most likely then, that the Pfyffer’s neologism both had no

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effect on the idea described in the 17th century, and that this kind of illness simply was not a concern before the 1650s, at which point it begins to appear in a variety of sources.\(^{39}\)

Knowledge of *Heimweh* appears to have spread relatively quickly. In a text entitled “De l’éloignement de son pays” first published in 1660\(^{40}\) François la Mothe le Vayer examines, among other emotions experienced by travelers and exiles, the relationship between the Swiss and “une maladie qu’eux-mêmes nomment *Heimuei*” (725).\(^{41}\) He even comes remarkably close to landing on the neologism Hofer will choose. According to him, the Swiss disease is an extreme and irrational manifestation of love for the homeland, of which he writes “combien cette passion est naturelle, et que les Grecs ont eu sujet de nommer *nostimon* ce qui est doux et agréable, par une métaphore prise de *nostos*, qui signifie le retour en sa patrie, parce qu’il est presque toujours accompagné de beaucoup de contentement” (725). And even if he doesn’t go as far as converting the Greek root *nostos* into *nostalgia*, the author does consider venture into medical language, noting that *Heimweh* threatens to provoke a “hectic,” or febrile, reaction.


\(^{40}\) See McKillop, 195, 215n23

\(^{41}\) Though “Hemvé” became the standard French rendering in the 18th century, this form appears in at least one other text, “je demanderay au Ciel qu’il vous envoye le Heimuei, la maladie qui Prend les Suisses quand ils sont éioigne de leur Patrie” (368) in René Le Pays, *Nouvelles Oeuvres de M. Le Pays*, Paris, Barbin, 1672, pt. 2.
The author of this text on *Heimweh* is informed on a wider phenomenon, though he doesn’t explicitly make this link. La Mothe le Vayer had been the dedicated recipient of the influential *Relation du Groenland* by Isaac La Peyrère, a book that recounts an episode concerning the sad destiny of nine native Greenlanders brought to Denmark through synopses of various Danish sources (169-188). Haller, in his article on nostalgia in the *Supplément* to *L’Encyclopédie*, categorized as “medicine nosologique,” finally gives a name to the Greenlanders’ suffering, which he discusses based on the original text of La Peyrère.42

La Peyrère, best known for expounding the theory that the Earth was inhabited before the creation of Adam, explains in his text the often difficult accommodations accorded to the newly-arrived, attempted to re-create their own way of life in a European setting:

> Je vous en ferai ici une petite Histoire; et vous dirai, Monsieur, que le Roy de Danemark établît des Personnes, qui eurent un soin particulier de les nourrir, et de les garder; de telle sorte néanmoins, qu’ils avoient la liberté d’aller par tout où ils voulaient. On les nourrissait de lait, de beurre, & de fromage; de chairs crues, & de poissons crus; de la même façon qu’ils vivaient en leur pays; parce qu’ils ne se pouvaient accoutumer à notre pain, et à nos viandes cuites; moins encore au vin, et qu’ils ne buvotent quoi que ce soit de si bon cœur, que de grands traits d’huile, ou de graisse de baleine (169-170).

Despite these efforts, these few Greenlanders cannot come to shake off their attachments to their homeland. “Ils tournoient souvent la tête vers le Nord, et soupiraient avec tant d’amour pour leur patrie,” recounts La Peyrère. In spite of the measures taken by the Danes for

42 It was also recounted in a variety of other contexts, see Mc Killop 216-216n27
combatting this tristesse, the first four Greenlanders “devenaient malades, et mouraient de langueur.”

La Peyrère makes no attempt to coin a term. But the choice of adopting medical language is already made, in a way that will be repeated in later research on nostalgia. The strange disease is a specific type of “langueur” or “mélancolie” and is presented in a way that closely catalogs both the behavior and emotions of the victims. “On avait remarqué de ce sauvage,” relates the text of one man, “qu'il pleurait, toutes les fois qu'il voyait un enfant, au col de sa mère, ou de sa nourrisse.” This emotional response leads the observers to conclude that the individual in question was himself married, and suffered at the memory of his wife and children awoken by the sight of a Danish mother and child. La Peyrère also notes a tendency to ponderous silence and the effect this has on the afflicted: “Ceux qui étaient retenus à Copenhague, furent resserrez plus étroitement que de coutume; ce qui ne fit qu'accroître le désir qu'ils avoient de revoir leur patrie, et le désespoir d'y retourner jamais”.

These signs take on tremendous importance in light of the severity of the unknown disease. La Peyrère reports that they “moururent presque tous de ce regret, & il ne resta que deux de ces malheureux Groenlandais, qui vécurent dix, ou douze ans, en Danemark, après la mort de leurs compagnons” (180). For the remaining two, the Danish guardians redoubled their efforts. According to La Peyrère, “Les Danois firent ce qu’ils peuvent pour leur persuader de vivre, et leur donnerent à entendre, qu’ils s’erient traités parmi eux, comme leurs amis, et leurs compatriots” in addition to the earlier efforts to provide them a suitable diet. The efforts at care also include attempts to induct the Greenlanders into the Christian faith: “On tâcha de les
faire Chrétiens, mais ils ne peuvent jamais apprendre la langue danoise; et la Foi étant de l’ouïe, il fut impossible de leur faire comprendre nos mystères” (181).

This linguistic and religious failure is particularly significant, since it operates in both directions. They cannot understand our mysteries and we cannot understand theirs. When La Peyrère recounts that “ceux qui prenaient garde de plus près à leurs actions, leur voyaient souvent lever les yeux au ciel, & adorer le Soleil levant,” the behavior of the Greenlanders is ambiguous. Is this another emotional observation, as when they became “resserrez plus étroitement que de coutume” or when one cried upon every sight of a mother with child? Or is this on the other hand an attempt to observe a religious equivalent to the uncommunicated Christian cosmogony, which would infer the adoring skyward gaze to be a relation to the divine? It is probably impossible to split this difference, because the very nature of the speculation depends on the failure of communication. Indeed, La Peyrère’s framing begins with this linguistic failure, and extrapolate from there a sense of mystery and secret. When describing these difficulties, he notes that "les trois Sauvages que le pilote Anglois amena du golfe Davis, parloient si viste, & bredouilloient si fort, qu’ils ne prononçoient quoy que ce fust distinctement, excepté ces deux mots, oxa indecha, dont on n'a jamais sçeu la signification" (173).

I have already offered a probable explanation of these words in the introduction, but for La Peyrère, the choice of including them is more important than their potential meaning. The choice of including these Greenlandic words, transcribed into Danish and then French, has the effect of inserting a hieroglyph into the text—like the phrase “la Penulitème est morte” from
Mallarmé’s “Démon de l’analogie,” it haunts the text more than it conveys meaning. The textual rendering of an incomprehensible phrase makes a secret (in the Derridean sense) conspicuous. For La Peyrère, this moment of fascination at the incomprehensibility of the Greenlandic language is not an isolated one. His theory of the “Praeadamitae” also passes through this episode, and the Greenlanders are held as the final, definitive case for his picture of human origins. Arguing against Hugo Grotius’ *On the Origin of the Native Races of America*, which proposed the idea that these peoples (including Greenlanders) are ultimately of Germanic descent, via Norway. Here the most important counter-point to Grotius is the fact that “there lived in Copenhagen Greenlanders, Barbarians, taken by the Danes about thirty years agoe, yea two of them for the space of two years were kept as Danes, who notwithstanding could not by no means learn the Danish, and he had no similitude of speech or behaviour like the Norwegians” (System 280). Settled in place before the creation of Adam, the Greenlanders are so radically other to La Peyrère that they precede Biblical time.43

We should consider the perceptions of the Greenlanders’ longing for home in light of this extreme difference and mysterious nature. La Peyrère describes the desperate efforts of the remaining Natives to return home. Those who could not be “persuaded to live” attempted to make the impossible journey from Denmark to their own land: “ceux qui se peuvent saisir de leurs petits bateaux, & de leurs rames, se mirent en mer pour en hasarder le trajet” (170-171).

43 He puts the question to Grotius, “What manner of men would he say they were? Would he say they were from eternity, or sprung from Greenland it self?” (280).
Again, desperate efforts are undertaken in a desperate attempt to save one of the men from his own uncontrollable longing. When finding him at the coast, “On lui fit entendre par signes, qu’il n’aurait jamais su trouver le Groenland, et qu’inafcallablement il aurait été englouti des vagues. Il répondit par signes, qu’il aurait suivi la côte de Norvège, jusque à une certaine hauteur, d’où il aurait pris la traverse; et se serait conduit par les étoiles dans son pays.” For Haller, the Greenlanders serve to demonstrate the extent of nostalgia’s force: “les Groenlandais, qu’on a transportés en Danemark,” he explains “Ont été si fort affectés de ce même mal, que, dans l’excès de leur désir de revoir leur triste patrie, ils se sont exposés, dans de petits canots, à périr sur les mers immenses qui les en séparaient.” But the greater testament to nostalgia’s force comes after this hazardous but aborted journey—“Étant de retour à Copenhague, il tomba en langueur, & mourut”

The presentation of this episode by La Peyrère as an unknown and extremely lethal malady, along with the sketch by Fort and the anecdotal medical details referenced by La Mothe le Vayer all reinforce the sense that Hofer’s text responded to a need that had emerged within the three preceding decades. There was clearly a new fascination with the type of phenomenon documented in all three instances. Accordingly, the case of the Greenlanders from its appearance in the *Relation du Groenland*, anticipates in many ways the cases of nostalgia recorded after Hofer’s thesis. The importance of native foods (like Hofer’s “morning broth” and “native milk” §6), the haggard, distance gaze drifting off absently toward the horizon, above all, the desire to face certain death or to die slowly and silently (à petit feu in Fort’s expression) rather than live another day away from home—these emotive gestures or symptoms will all come to be codified in the diagnostics of nostalgia, once named. The
circulation of this anecdote in the 18th century further confirms the growing fascination with a powerful and deadly languor affecting certain peoples caused by the sole fact of being away from home, and the growing sense that this condition should be addressed by medicine. It is easy therefore to imagine students and professors in the halls of the medical universities wondering and speculating about the enigmatic illness before the young Hofer answered the call.

*The Swiss Disease*

If the texts by Rémy Fort and La Mothe le Vayer mark the first hints of the new category within medical discourse, their efforts come short of offering formal case studies or systematic attempts at classification that would bridge the divide between popular mythology and scientific reflection. La Peyrère’s more detailed narrative synthesis on the other hand leaves the wasting of the Greenlanders in the realm of mystery.

Hofer would add to the gestures and terms already document a field of associations, images, motifs and anecdotes that would form over the course of the 18th century a more consistent lineage of nostalgia than its ever-fluid name. The specific bond with Switzerland, which dates back to the first appearances of *Heimweh* and occupies a central role in Hofer’s thesis, was so strong that the nostalgia could also be called *Schweizerkrankeit*, or the French equivalent, *la maladie des Suisses*. Switzerland is the setting for the earliest, and the overwhelming majority, of the accounts of nostalgia circulating in the medical and philosophical literature. This made possible in turn new discussions in the nature of nations. A reflection on this quasi-mythological tie between Switzerland and the case-studies of nostalgia is therefore necessary in order to isolate a progressive and competitive trend in the emerging category. The
interest in identifying the type of person susceptible to nostalgia gradually became a primary factor in the discourse, and this explains in part the durability and expansion of a mental pathology first limited to a small and isolated Alpine people.

For 18th-century writers across disciplines, Switzerland stood for the feeling of attachment to the fatherland—uniquely so according to Rousseau—but also, somewhat paradoxically, a tendency toward immigration. As one self-appointed defender of the Swiss national character writes, “la Suisse serait susceptible d’une population beaucoup plus grande si les services étrangers et ce goût pour l’émigration que les anciens Helvétiens ont transmis à leurs descendants n’y mettaient pas d’obstacles” (Sinner XI). This was primarily for economic reasons—the small mountain nation could not support agriculturally its comparatively large urban population. The Swiss who remained offered for these writers a picture of man “tel qu’il sortit des mains de la nature” (Bourrit 182). Switzerland, particularly the Alpine region of the canton of Berne—the Switzerland of Switzerland—functions as the very image of rusticity, simplicity and tradition. Whether or not this impression was true—Sinner complains that “Beaucoup de gens, parmi ceux qui devroient etre mieux instruits, regardent la Suisse comme une nation de paysans uniquement occupés de leur troupeaux”—these traits would collectively make its inhabitants nostalgics avant la lettre.

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44 See also Illbruck, p. 32 and notes.

45 One point of data to this effect comes from Rousseau’s Confessions where he describes his father’s inheritance as “un bien fort médiocre, à partager entre quinze enfants,” which in turn forced Jean-Jacques into an undesirable apprenticeship.
In his “De l’éloignement de son pays,” Le Vayer cites the Helvetians as the most rustic of all European peoples, “les hommes d’Europe de la plus grosse pâte.” He elaborates this stereotypical vision, explaining that “La plupart de ceux qui quittent leurs Cantons incultes et sauvages pour venir en France ou ailleurs, tombent dans une maladie qu’eux-mêmes nomment Heimweh, c’est-à-dire, rage de retourner chez soi, parce que le seul désir de revoir leur pays les rend si hectiques, et si imbéciles, qu’ils courent fortune de la vie, s’ils ne retournent visiter leurs foyers et leurs montagnes, aussi affreuses qu’infertiles” (725). This Swiss mythology, admittedly taken to an extreme by Le Vayer, is brought back up in nearly every text or debate on nostalgia. The isolation of the country and its rusticity create a deeper link to the past, and its inhabitants, less accustomed to changes to their rhythm of life, are more susceptible to suffer from nostalgia. This association between nostalgia and Switzerland will take on increasingly stronger dimensions in Romantic authors (Senancour, Heinrich Heine, the song “Der Schweizer” of Brentano and Arnim, up through the Johanna Spyri’s Heidi). But well before these fictional works, narratives of Swiss nostalgia were the object of fascination for medical and philosophical writers.

What made the Helvetians so vulnerable to nostalgia? Their character and their climate. For some, the cause of nostalgia came especially from the political and civic particularities of the Confederation. Hofer suggests that the young Helvetic residing abroad laments above all being “deprived of the liberty of his fatherland” (§5). For Haller, it is the cultural isolation at the structure of Swiss citizenship which makes possible this liberty, which in turn contributes to the

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46 Hofer uses the adjective imbecillis in the case of the girl from Basel (§ IV)
risks for nostalgia: “Plus que toute autre nation les Suisses sont avares de leur droit de bourgeoisie. Ce n'est pas seulement dans les villes dominantes que ce droit est inacquérable, les villages même, du moins du pays Allemand de la république de Berne, n'admettent aucun étranger.”\textsuperscript{47} The other explanation initially proposed is elaborated in a systematic way by Scheuchzer, in his \textit{Aeographia Helvetica}. According to Scheuchzer’s theory, nostalgia is the product of a pneumatic and physical reaction affecting mountain people unaccustomed to the denser air “down below.” This theory was shared by Louis de Jaucourt in his article on “Hemvé” in the \textit{Encyclopédie} and Abbé du Bos, who put the phenomenon into rather poetic terms: “l’air natal du père est devenu le poison du fils” (248-249). The pneumatic theory also occasioned a public debate in Zurich in February 1726 between Scheuchzer and a doctor from the faculty of Bologna, Giuseppe Verzalia, a debate reported as far as England (Roche 149-152).

In the choice of narrative evidence, on the contrary, these logical explanations cede to a more paradoxical causality, and it is this cause that captured the interest and imagination of the greatest number of authors. The essential quality of populations prone to suffer from nostalgia was the harshness of the homeland they held so dear—the more austere the way of life, the harsher the country, the more powerful the pull of nostalgia.\textsuperscript{48} As Rousseau remarks in his letter to the Maréchal de Luxembourg, “Il est fort singulier qu’un pays si rude, et dont les

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Supplément}

\textsuperscript{48} Susan Stewart identifies as passage in Burton’s \textit{Anatomy of Melancholy} that speaks to this phenomenon somewhat earlier (p. x). But Burton considers the feeling to be a “childish humour” and by no means pathological.
habitants sont si enclins à sortir, leur inspire pourtant un amour si tendre, que le regret de
l’avoir quitté les y ramène presque tous à la fin, et que ce regret donne à ceux qui n’y peuvent
revenir une maladie quelquefois mortelle, qu’ils appellent, je crois, le hemvé.” (C 52-53). Kant
shares this sense of surprise, noting in his *Anthropology* that it is “curious” that “this disease
strikes especially the country folk from impoverished land” (87).

*The Mysterious Child*

The rustic nature of these attachments was doubtless what the medical and
philosophical writers found most fascinating in their interpretations of anecdotes and cases.
This interest can be observed starting with the first case of nostalgia identified as such. Hofer
gives two such examples in his thesis, insisting on the fact that he knew plenty of others, but it
is the first case that would fascinate his successors:

A certain girl from the countryside around Basel fell from a high place; she was
gravely injured, nearly dead. They succeeded in transporting her to the hospital
where she stayed immobile and unconscious for several days. Finally, gradually,
she regained consciousness, thanks to drugs and surgery. But as soon as she
awoke and saw that she was surrounded by querulous and unpleasant old
women [in the hospital], nostalgia suddenly crept in. She spit out the food and
medicines given to her, and her state became precarious. Weeping and moaning,
she especially repeated her desire to return to her parents’ home: “*Ich wil heim;*
*Ich wil heim* [I want to go home]” (§4).
The others try to ask the young woman questions, they try to comfort her, but her answer, à la Bartleby, remains just as insistent. She repeats twice more her refrain: “Ich wil heim; Ich wil heim.” This case recounted by Hofer is taken back up in nearly all of the essays on nostalgia in the first half of the 18th century after Zwinger, his former professor (89-93). In a long discussion of nostalgia, Michael Bernhard Valenti, member of the Royal Society and the Prussian Academy of Sciences, recycles the case of the young woman from Basel, adding his own account of the case of a Geldersman (someone coming from Guelde or Westphalia) who pronounces himself a victim of nostalgia (647-639). This trend would continue.

Many elements contribute to the particular interest in the case of the woman from Basel. Firstly, the narrative observation bears out the innocence of the victim, a young girl recoiling in the face of old disagreeable women. From her demands, a position about medicine is clear: “no drug could cure her,” Hofer writes, “except for her parents’ home” (§4). But her refrain also suggests something mysterious: the image of a child who only wants to go home, of an innocent on the brink of death who possesses this conviction and this terror that held such a strong appeal for the authors. The nostalgic, Jankélévitch reminds us, holds a power of commitment to the idea of return that counterbalances his vulnerability. It is for this mysterious appeal that many authors, like Zwinger and Scheuchzer, who replace the name proposed by Hofer with other terms, still mention this anecdote.

In a way, this mysterious quality of the nostalgic is played out in Condillac’s influential 1754 epistemological work, the *Traité des sensations*. For Condillac, too, the treatment of narrative evidence is a process of distillation, identifying the unique and essential elements
within a single case, permitting one to move inductively from one case to others, from example to principle. In the *Traité*, Condillac offers an exemplary image, a statue “organisée intérieurement comme nous, et animée d’un esprit privé de toute espèce d’idées” whose senses are awakened, enabling her to demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge from zero (11). Only after fully developing this hypothetical image, only at the end of the fourth and final part of his long treatise, does Condillac turn to an established case, that of a ten year-old found living in the forests of Lithuania in 1694. The child has no language (but this not so different from La Peyrère’s Greenlanders, who could never learn Danish), and eventually learns to speak. He is able to answer questions, but his Réponses about his prior state are somewhat disappointing: “il ne s’en souvint non plus que nous nous souvenons de ce qui nous est arrivé au berceau” (254). This feral child, also mentioned by Rousseau in the *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, allows Condillac a profound and sweeping hypothesis: all memory is a function of civilization. This child, he argues, was so consumed with ensuring his survival that he was unable to devote any attention to fixing into place memories.

Perhaps for the same reasons that Condillac found his mysterious child so fascinating, the case of the young woman inspired its own kind of competition to find the most striking example possible case of nostalgia. Haller, in his *Supplément* article, claims to have seen some Swiss “prendre la nostalgie dans la Suisse même.” In the *Nosologie méthodique* of 1763, François Boissier de Sauvages mentions another mysterious child, observed in an even humbler setting than Hofer’s. After citing Zwinger’s text, which repeats Hofer’s original account, the nosologist turns to another type of victim, just as fragile as the young peasant, “les petits orphelins que leurs parents ne peuvent faire sortir de nos hôpitaux [qui] meurent presque tous
de cette maladie” (335). Inspired by the Swiss mythology, Boissier de Sauvages can cite a subject still more vulnerable: “J’ai vu un enfant de mendiant qui n’avait pour patrie que les carrefours et les rues, et qui mourut cependant de cette maladie, après avoir perdu son père et sa mère” (335). He has found, in other words, a landscape harsher than the Swiss Alps.

The Lansquenet and the Ranz-des-vaches

The most famous anecdote in the history of nostalgia remains that of a Swiss mercenary in the service of France. The various retellings of this story take up the themes observed in the repetition of the story of the girl from Basel. The young Helvetian, according to the various versions, hears the first accents of the traditional alphorn melody of the *Ranz-des-vaches*,

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49 In chapter three, I will consider the possibility for the Basel girl as a textual precedent for Balzac’s *Pierrette*, the heroine of which also becomes stricken with nostalgia after suffering a head trauma.

50 This basic model of story had a long afterlife. The August 12, 1900 issue of *Le Temps* relates the following account of an “Enfant suicidé par nostalgie”: Les époux Alphonse, ne trouvant plus de travail à Calais, avaient quitté cette ville pour la région des mines, où le mari trouva à s’embaucher. L’un des enfants, la petite Elise, âgée de treize ans, ne put se faire à sa nouvelle résidence. Elle éprouva un tel ennui qu’elle manifesta fréquemment à sa mère le désir de revenir à Calais ou qu’elle chercherait à en finir avec l’existence. L’on ne prit pas garde à cette menace d’enfant. L’on vient de trouver la petite Elise pendue dans le grenier au domicile de ses parents, à Bruay.
originally played in the late summer cattle drives. Hearing the song provokes in the young mercenary a nostalgia so profound that he abandons his post or dies on the spot. The effect of this song was so powerful, according to Rousseau, “qu’il fut défendu sous peine de mort de le jouer dans leurs Troupes parce qu’il faisait fondre en larmes, déserner ou mourir ceux qui l’entendaient tant il excitait en eux l’ardent désir de revoir leur pays” (Dictionnaire de la Musique). This ban is attested to by a wide array of authors following Zwinger, none of which doubt its veracity and at least one of which provides foot-noted documentary evidence, as is the case when Keyssler cites the article attributed to Scheuchzer in the *Sammlung von Natur- und Medicin- wie auch hierzu gehörigen Kunst- und Literaturgeschichten.* The Swiss predisposition, with its rustic and Alpine associations, once again accentuates the emotional fragility, the shock of the moment in which the young Helvetian is metaphorically transported by music to his homeland. And as for the poor Greenlanders described by La Peyrère, a fear of living far from home shows itself to be more horrifying than death.

There is good reason to believe that the attention accorded to the problems of moral suffering and desertion among the Swiss had a basis in truth, motivated by the practical concerns of military life (like those expressed by Rémy Fort’s *Polemiatre*). In his history of the mercenary service, John McCormack signals a degradation in the quality of life among Swiss ranks in the service foreign sovereigns, noting that the number of desertions, negligible before 1688, cost these armies one Swiss out of every four from 1701 to 1788 (105, 142-143). Did the nostalgia inspired by the *Ranz* represent a secretly suicidal impulse? This was at least the

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51 p. 832-837, attribution made by Ernst
interpretation of Bernardino Ramazzini. In his widely-cited study of illness among the professions, *De morbis artificum diatriba*, Ramazzini sums up the possibility with his formula, *Qui patriam quaerit mortem inventit*, those who desire their homeland conjure up their death. The link between nostalgia and suicide explains in part the interest devoted to the effects of the *ranz-des-vaches* and points once again to the perception that the actual or potential nostalgic hold within him a secret and deadly motive.

The myth of nostalgia spontaneously caused by the *ranz* quickly crossed out the borders of medical discourse. The theme is repeated by Rousseau, Raimond de Carbonnières, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Senancour, Chateaubriand and later, Heinrich Heine and Théophile Gautier. Yet, there is a near-total absence of first-hand or even second-hand accounts of anything like this phenomenon, which Rousseau accurately calls “célèbre”—the anecdote alone suffices. One exception appears in a text on German music by Charles Burney. Here, Lord George Keith reports an episode of nostalgia he observed in Spain:

> His lordship [...] confirmed to me the account of the *Maladie du Païs*, or homesickness being brought on by the tune, called the *Rens de Vache* [sic], if heard by and of the Swiss troops in foreign service. Five soldiers at Val[l]adolid, in Spain, who heard one of their countrymen play this tune, on the top of the steeple, were all seized with this distemper, and obliged to be sent home (126-127).

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52 See Starobinski, “Le Concept de la nostalgie.”

53 This is also the conclusion reached by Szadrowsky and Smeed, see Ernst p24-27
Burney’s account is the most direct observation by nostalgia brought on by the *ranz* melody, but the source of the anecdote is just as revealing. The Lord Marshal had himself been exiled onto the continent for his support of King James, along with a large number of Scots. At the end of the century, Jacobites specifically and Scots generally joined the Swiss as people at high risk for nostalgia. This new group became themselves “famous for being susceptible to nostalgia,” as Linda M. Austin notes, adding that a 1779 edition of Hofer’s dissertation includes a new discussion of Highlanders (*Brontë* 578). This addition was so developed that the mythology of the alphorn was joined by a mythology of the bagpipes. In the same way, we can see the Swiss archetypes adapted to other peoples. It became a matter for these authors to identify the essentials revealed in the case studies of Swiss nostalgia in order to better apply their details to cases outside the Confederation and in order to find “their” nostalgics.

When Kant addresses the illness, he considers the Helvetians as the most liable to suffer from nostalgia, but he adds the Westphalians and the Pomeranians, noting that he learned that fact “from the mouth of an experienced general” (82). For Chateaubriand, it is a disease that “antique surtout les Français loin de leur patrie.”

For the *chirurgiens* of the *armée de l’an II*, the “epidemics” of nostalgia ravaged Bretons in particular.

Elaborated from a model that once limited its victims to a single, small national group, the Swiss disease appears to have become an essential marker separating the civilized world

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54 He is also credited by the *Trésor de la langue française* for having introduced *le mal du pays* in the language in 1803, the same year he diagnosed friend, the poet Michaud, with the disease “que les médecins ont nommé *la nostalgie*”
from the hinterlands populations who had maintained their rusticity. Hence the turn from
nostalgia as a particular source of pride for some Swiss authors (Bridel, etc.), to a means of
contrasting and dividing peoples. Echoing Rousseau’s observation about the lack of a
phenomenon as powerful as the deadly ranz des vaches in France, the Abbé Delille writes,
“L’habitant de la plaine et des riant vallons / [...] rêve moins tendrement à ses dieux
domestiques” than “l’habitant des rochers helvétiques”(396). The strength of this dream is a
virtue in Delille’s poem, in spite of or perhaps because of the latter’s vulnerability to the
melodies of the “fifre imprudent” (396). Wordsworth and Goethe take up this dichotomy as
well. Both express a sense of loss and disappointment that someone in their position cannot
hear the ranz des vaches as a vulnerable Swiss mercenary away from his humble mountain
valleys. But this begs the question whether the fascination elicited by the early cases and the
imagery of nostalgia would inspire a cultural envy that could attribute to the peoples naturally
attached to their old ways a secret and mysterious passion for the country. Such a fascination
would suggest that a certain number of motifs found in the first works of romanticism depend
on Kant’s distinction about Heimweh—between those people governed by family bonds, and
those for whom Patria ubi bene. As Alan McKillop writes, “The time was soon to come when the
claims of such ‘base people’ were to be strongly urged on natural or anthropological grounds,
apart from the tradition of patriotism and civic pride” (193).

We should not underestimate the importance of assigning the new illness to
populations rather than individuals, both in the constructing a history of nostalgia, and in
thinking more broadly about the applications of the ideas underpinning nostalgia to broader

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55 On Goethe, see Illbruck, p. 81-84
ways of thinking. Melancholia was the disease of individuals par excellence, but nostalgia would become the disease of tribes. This is why the new concept cannot be seen as the mere medicalization of what Ovid or Ulysses or Du Bellay felt away from home. Instead, we must take quite seriously the distinction made following the revolution by Cyr Ducrest de Lorangie that Ovid could not have been truly nostalgic, because he had a rational basis in his longing for Rome. Instead, it is the Scythe barbarian among the pleasures of Rome who longs for his wastelands who has the true claim to nostalgia. Nostalgia depends on passions, desires and bonds which only appear to observers as mysterious, irrational and secret. This is the oxa indecha of nostalgia that one imagines to be greedily guarded by the remote and fragile populations who still possess it.

In the same way, what can be made of the desire expressed but not acted on to preserve the populations in this state in order to protect them? Rousseau writes in 1763 that nostalgia, which he has taken as a point of honor for his fellow citizens however deadly, “diminue beaucoup chez les Suisses depuis qu'on vit plus agréablement dans leur pays.” Around the same time, Sinner, eager to disprove the rustic stereotype, writes that “Ceux qui ont voyagé [in Switzerland], savent qu’on trouve aujourd’hui dans quelques villes une société agréable, de l’aisance, des gens de lettres, le gout des arts” (VII). If these pictures are in conflict as they appear to be, what steps might be taken to maintain the “antique simplicité” that Rousseau believes to be endangered?
As we have seen in the previous chapter, nostalgia’s simple relationship between the point of origin and the point of return is complicated on several levels, from the possibility of feigned nostalgia present in Hofer’s original text, to Kant’s claim in his *Anthropology* that what is desired is not just a place, but a place in time. Kant’s nostalgics are actually “aroused by the recollection of images of the carefree life and neighborly company in their early years and their return is colored by the impression that “everything there has changed a great deal, but in fact it is because they cannot recover their youth” (71).

The strict correspondence between nostalgia and the place to which one’s desire is attached is further undone in the medical texts of the early nineteenth century. In even the most practically-minded texts, military *chirurgiens* and future professors were compiling case studies that run counter to the prevailing narratives about displacement and nostalgia. Paradoxically, they detailed these cases at the same time they were advancing arguments reinforcing the consensus about nostalgia and its relationship to place. These cases form a counter-history about the evolution of thinking about nostalgia, serving as some of what Foucault calls in his essay on Nietzsche and genealogy the “details and accidents that accompany every beginning” (144).
Epidemics of Nostalgia

The undercurrent I will describe emerges at a time when cases of nostalgia were being seen with exponentially increasing frequency. Less than three months after the August 1793 levée en masse that saw mass movement and displacement from the provinces to the battle lines, concern with the new war trauma of nostalgia was reaching the highest ranks of the military. In an 18 November 1793 missive to the général en chef de l’armée du Nord, the adjoint au ministre de la guerre, Didier Jourdeuil, recommended special dispensation for soldiers suffering from nostalgia to be allowed to return home (Reinhard 1-2). Shortly after, nostalgia took epidemic proportions in the French forces. Denis Guerbois, author in 1803 of the

56 Following the decisive defeat to Austria at Neerwinden, the defection of general Dumouriez and increasingly violent unrest in the Vendée, the borders of revolutionary France were collapsing. The possibility of a levée en masse discussed since 1789 appeared inevitable by mid-1793. First- and second-hand accounts of the displacement this conscription produced follow below. For an excellent account of the rhetoric surrounding the levée en masse, see Forrest (111-130). Lefebvre provides a concise history of the events leading up to conscription (376-380), Phipps considers the military and strategic implications of these events (53-74) and Furet discusses the role of Saint-Just.

57 Freud will later argue in Psychoanalysis and the War-Neuroses, that “The precondition of the war neuroses, the soil that nourishes them, would seem to be a national [conscript] army (Volksheer) ; there would be no possibility of their arising in an army of professional soldiers or mercenaries” (209).
first dissertation on nostalgia defended at the *Faculté de médecine de Paris* encounters nostalgics “à chaque pas” (4). He identifies two particularly dramatic episodes of nostalgia, occurring “à deux époques bien remarquables; époques malheureuses, qui furent signalées par des épidémies meurtrières” (7). These two “épidémies qu'on peut appeler *Nostalgiques*” came in the beginning of Revolutionary year II in the *armée du Rhin* and the *armée des Alpes* in year VIII (15).

There was a consensus on the nature of these epidemics, their deadly consequences, and about the Bretons, whose customs, language and way of life was thought to make them especially vulnerable. Gaillardot notes that “dans le commencement de la révolution, on a observé plus fréquemment la nostalgie [affecting] presque tous les bretons” (13). The initial mass outbreak was believed to have swept through the Breton ranks in the *armée de Moselle* (Percy & Laurent 269). Awareness of the condition spread just as quickly through the new ranks of military medics, who “ont fait connaître la nostalgie qui fut si funeste en l'an II” (Lachaud 10). The army's *chirurgien en chef* Dominique-Jean Larrey observed this phenomenon and the subsequent formal response, during which “le mal du pays s'est déclaré chez les Bretons de l’armée de la Moselle” (Mesnier 92, emphasis mine). The persistence of these impressions would allow Balzac to describe in *Pierrette* “la nostalgie bretonne: maladie morale si connue que les colonels y ont égard pour les Bretons qui se trouvent dans leurs régiments” (107).

As André Bolzinger notes in his *Histoire de la nostalgie*, the prevailing ideas about nostalgia would be further enforced as those serving under the titles of *aide-major* and *chirurgien-major* during these epidemics wrote the first group of Parisian medical dissertations on nostalgia (Guerbois, Gaillardot, Castelnau, Lachaud, Therrin) and their superiors became
their professors, editing what would become the standard medical texts (67). Pierre-François Percy, professor of pathologie externe who wrote the authoritative article on the subject published in the Panckouke Dictionnaire des sciences médicales, and who, with Philippe Pinel, chief physician of the Salpêtrière, served as supervisors of these dissertations. The first-hand experience of the aide-majors, chirurgiens majors and their professors deeply affected the tenor of the early dissertations. Guerbois' dramatic account of the Moselle outbreak is among the most detailed of all these narratives of nostalgia epidemics. He describes a harrowing time in which “tous les hôpitaux du Rhin et particulièrement ceux de Strasbourg regorgeaient de malades” (18). This particular crisis followed catastrophic conditions in the face of “privations de tous genres” (21). In addition to exhaustion and injury, the armée de Moselle was hit with a devastating outbreak of dysentery (21). Many doctors too were infected (22) and Guerbois interrupts his dissertation to praise both the medics who died from infection and those who were forced to brave great risk facing these epidemics, including his chirurgien en chef, Alexandre Brasdor. He describes his superior’s heroic actions, towards both the patients and Guerbois himself:

Le citoyen Brasdor était alors à la tête de l’hôpital Sainte-Marguerite de Strasbourg. Il passait les journées entières dans les salles, au milieu des maladies le plus contagieuses. Plus le mal était grand, plus il déployait d’énergie. La mortalité la plus cruelle ne pouvait l’intimider, ni l’empêcher de rester à son poste, et d’y braver le danger. Il consolait les uns, encourageait les autres, et prouvait à tous, par sa présence assidue, que les maladies n’étaient pas aussi redoutables qu’on voulait le faire croire.
[...] O toi, à qui je dois mon existence, et celle de trois de mes plus chers amis! reçois l’hommage de ma vive reconnaissance; reçois-le chaque jour, car c’est chaque jour le besoin de mon cœur; reçois les remerciements de la plus tendre des mères, qui ne cesse de répéter qu’elle te doit la vie de son fils (22-23)


Guerbois devotes a substantial portion of his text to Brasdor and his strange, difficult case of nostalgia. Brasdor’s “convalescence [...] longue et pénible” presented a conceptual challenge not seen by the usual case studies, which end either in recuperation or death (33). Brasdor’s strange case actually goes back to before the mobilizations. Though Guerbois does not include these details in his text, Brasdor’s story begins the night of the 24 brumaire II. Girondist writer Nicolas Chamfort, having declared his desire to die a free man rather than face imprisonment, inflicted on himself twenty-two pistol and knife wounds. Though the wounds were exceptionally violent—he had perforated his eye and “charcuté” his neck—Chamfort survived the attempt (Pellisson 299). His condition presented a problem to the authorities. Chamfort was alive, but only barely, and even after a series of surgical interventions, it was questionable whether he could be sent to prison. A medical committee was convened, comprised of Pierre Brasdor, who operated on Chamfort sixty times (Arnaud 252), Charles Beauduin, Marie François Verger and the aforementioned Alexandre Brasdor, the surgeon’s
son. The younger Brasdor was to examine and testify about the gruesomely disfigured Chamfort, as he would Louis-Michel Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau (*Procès-Verbal* 4), whose murdered corpse would be the subject of a now-lost David painting that anticipated his *Mort de Marat* (Chevelier 7).

While these grizzly details would reemerge in Brasdor’s later comments about his nostalgia, the fact that such biographical information is even available about a nostalgia patient is itself unusual and revealing. Nostalgic case studies are more often anonymous, with patients described as categories rather than individuals, as “jeunes soldats” and “jeunes Bretons”. Or, they come from backgrounds that are effectively anonymous, leading obscure and simple lives in the distant and geographically isolated provinces, from a social stratum requiring only the use of their given name. Brasdor is not only Parisian, he is noteworthy, leading a life already inscribed into the public record, punctured by events other than those that usually provoke nostalgia. Guerbois describes his own experience, writing, “J’en fus moi-même atteint, lorsque je partis pour l’armée. C’était la première fois que je quittais ma mère” (3). He connects his own very typical nostalgia to the "jeunes militaires qui venaient de quitter la maison paternelle....je sentais si profondément, par ma propre expérience ce qu’ils devaient éprouver!” (4). For Brasdor, however, the onset of his disease comes not from leaving his *maison paternelle*, but from a historically significant public trauma.

This prominence contributes to another contrary and significant aspect of Brasdor’s case: he is Guerbois’s superior. This inverts the paternalistic dynamic between patient, typically from servant or conscripted classes, and medical officer. Brasdor’s medical training also allows him greater involvement in his own treatment, ordering himself “un vomitif qu’il prit sur-le-
“champ” (29). More importantly, he is also able to reflect on his condition and the two men continue their discussions after his convalescence. All this gives Brasdor's case greater depth than most, since Guerbois is willing to treat his experience not merely in the bounds of medical observation, but also as a character study of a man for whom “le talent, la vertu déchiraient son âme pure, sensible et délicate” (34).

Brasdor’s physical symptoms align with the consensus about nostalgia. He shows fever, wasting and withdrawal. Guerbois notes that “l’air était abattu, la prostration des forces était extrême, il était presque toujours assoupi; on ne lui arrachait que très difficilement quelques paroles” (30). Brasdor’s concerns, however, do not follow the standard of the other cases. Guerbois first attributes Brasdor's suffering to the latter's ongoing concerns throughout his treatment about his ill father. His father's ultimate death, the result of a drawn-out “épuisement sénile, qui depuis plusieurs années, s'était aggravé par une faiblesse paralytique des extrémités inférieures” (Rousille-Chamseru 461) does not appear to put an end to his nostalgia. Rather than particular attachment to his local culture, or even the loss of his father, Brasdor is ultimately concerned with another kind of heritage. He is preoccupied by “L'idée des temps de misères et d'horreurs dans lesquels nous vivions alors” and “celle de son pays malheureux” (33). The haunting images of Chamfort and Peletier embody his perception. But the broader feeling is one that expands to encompass a larger temporal movement. “Il tremblait pour les vieux jours de son père” observes Guerbois. “Triste et rêveur habituellement, le temps qu'il ne passait point auprès des malades, il donnait tout entier aux pensées les plus sombres. Aussi était-il impossible qu'il échappât à la maladie qui l'a frappé” (34).

Brasdor's "idea" would seem more universal than Guerbois' setting of nostalgia in the
separation from one's “maison paternelle.” The somber, troubled, daydreaming Brasdor is more disturbed by a broader form of displacement than his military circumstances. He is able to invoke a nostalgia for a nation and a bygone era, making him an idiosyncratic embodiment of Guerbois' formulation of the nostalgic: “le souvenir du passé excite ses regrets, il craint d'envisager l'avenir” (11). He essentially applies the sense of time Guerbois sees crippling the victim of nostalgia to the broader march of history, suggesting that after the Revolution, everything would be as bleak as the nostalgic's private future. Brasdor, despite a physical recuperation under Guerbois' care, is the only one of the case studies never to recover or die in a hospital bed. He remains in a state of suspension, able to leave the hospital and resume his career, but unable to recover from his nostalgia.

Brasdor's own understanding of the condition he cannot escape is also far gloomier than Guerbois' assessment, because what is lost is temporal not geographical, and consequently unrecoverable. Worse still, Brasdor's nostalgia is largely for an imagined past and therefore neither subjective not within his control. The time he longs for is bound up in the “vieux jours de son père.” While clearly associating this feeling with a sense of return, Brasdor longs for a point in time that is not only ipso-facto unattainable, but unfamiliar to him, having taken place before his own life. This complicates Kant’s claim that nostalgics suffer from their inability to “bring back their youth.” For Brasdor, it would be insufficient for him to undo the traumatic rupture that has provoked his nostalgia. His desire is to completely revert to an imagined state of being. Living in an age of terror, the future is inconceivably horrifying and his own past is what led to the present “temps de misères.”

Brasdor's loss of faith in the future is perhaps the defining feature of his particular
nostalgia. Guerbois, while noting that young and old soldiers can fall victim to the disease, argues that children have a different experience than adults. While children feel the pain of separation—and this might form the basis of nostalgia in adults—they are exempted from a broader and durable sense of despair about the future. For the child who cries to be returned to his mother or nourrice, “Ce n’est point l’idée de l’avenir qui le tourmente; il ne l’a pas” (13). Without a sense of the future, a child is protected against a fear of irreversibility:

Il est vrai que chez le plus grand nombre [d’enfants], grâce à l’extrême mobilité des impressions de cet âge, un laps de temps peu considérable, des distractions légerèses, quelques témoignages de bienveillance suffisent pour faire oublier à ces enfants celle qui leur a prodigué des soins depuis leur naissance; mais ils ont pas moins éprouvé, à l’instant de son départ, le mal affreux d’un aussi cruel moment (13).

But Brasdor cannot be distracted. His habitual daydreaming alternatively take him up to the edge of facing the future and turning back and fleeing from something too horrible to contemplate directly. Coupled with the idea of recovering what has been lost from the imagined days of his father’s era, Brasdor’s fantasy forms a coherent picture in which he might return to a sense of time without forward movement, before awareness of an irreversible linear time, reviving a child’s innocence about the future.

A victim of history, Brasdor died the same year Denis Guerbois defended his thesis (Boulinier 6). Rousille-Chamseru, a close friend of the family, makes no mention whatsoever of the younger Brasdor in his biography of Brasdor père, and Delauney notes simply that he “disappeared” from the rosters of surgeons in Paris with no record of his death (46). We can
only wonder if he met the same fate as the nostalgics driven to take their own lives.

“Plus commune qu’on ne pense”

Though the Brasdor case remained within the common body of evidence on medical discussions of nostalgia, cited in later dissertations (like Gaillardot’s), the need for broadening the discussion of nostalgia was apparent to other writers. The measures implemented to curb nostalgia among the military ranks, including mixing soldiers from different provinces did not eliminate the disease (Chenu 50). New data were needed since the prevailing discussions on nostalgia had not produced an effective cure. But as one of Guerbois’ classmates claims in his dissertation, the cases he and his colleagues were describing only amounted to the surface of a broader problem. Nostalgia was, he argues, “plus commune qu’on ne pense” (Castelnau 5).

We must note once again the singular nature of Brasdor’s background compared to that of the typical nostalgia patient. The fact that so many of the early case studies dealt with young conscripted men from the far-flung provinces may well reveal a selection bias. Those prone to feel a similar sense of historical rupture are, both logically and in actuality, especially likely to be observed among the émigrés, who are less prone to find themselves in a republican hospital. Similarly, colonized or enslaved populations had been cited in passing as susceptible to nostalgia, due to of their “primitive” attachments to their homeland and to their forced displacement (Cyr-Ducrest 8). But these populations were also left out of the early case studies. If an outside observer was inclined to make the association between nostalgics torn away the most primitive rhythms of life in Brittany with royalists and émigrés—as Balzac would later do—he would have to look elsewhere, to memoirs and fiction. For the first generation of physicians
and the faculty who wrote the first articles on the disease, the observation of nostalgia depended directly on the contemporary military circumstances, creating a bias that was codified in the literature as they left the ranks. The generation born after the Revolution and educated after the Napoleonic wars was less tied to this experience, less bound to pre-existing case studies from the military hospitals, and more open to a redefinition of nostalgia.

These studies, emerging in medicine some twenty-five years after the Brasdor case, take a particular emotional turn that Bolzinger attributes to the influence of Jean-Louis-Marc Alibert, a former student of Pinel who supervised a string of dissertations on nostalgia, including those by Hyacinthe Musset and Jules-Prosper Roché (78-92). Alibert's 1825 *Physiologie des passions, ou, Nouvelle doctrine des sentiments moraux* and the dissertations he supervised often straddle medical and literary domains, at times even employing novelistic inserts to otherwise medical texts, such as his own “Couramé ou l'amour de la terre natale” and Musset's story of François Cottineau in his dissertation on nostalgia. At other turns, increasing attention is paid to writings by émigrés like Chateaubriand, whose fiction and memoirs are both cited in medical texts on nostalgia. If a doctor includes fiction to prove a point, it's clear that he believes the whole story is not being told in the case studies. Other sources of inspiration and documentation from other fields would be necessary to understand—or to express fully—the origins and impact of nostalgia.

For their purposes, the fiction and memoirs of Chateaubriand was an ideal source. His writings married the emotional expression they sought as a basis for medical evidence with the circumstances of upheaval and displacement. As we will see later, Chateaubriand depicted the type of people (including himself) who would have been excluded from the early case studies of
nostalgia, émigrés and royalists, but also indigenous characters. And, he had himself weighed in on the question and terminology of nostalgia, inserting the medical discussion into a piece of literary criticism published five months before the defense of Guerbois' thesis. The 23 pluviôse XI / February 1803 issue of the *Mercure de France* ran Chateaubriand's largely positive critical response to the long poem, *Le Printemps d'un proscrit* by his friend Joseph-François Michaud. Chateaubriand's article begins with a diagnosis of the poem and its author. Chateaubriand writes:

> On devine, par la douceur des plaintes de l'auteur du poème du Printemps, qu'il avait ce mal du pays, ce mal qui attaque surtout les Français loin de leur patrie. Monime, au milieu des Barbares, ne pouvait oublier le doux sein de la Grèce. Les médecins ont appelé cette tristesse de l'âme nostalgie, de deux mots grecs; nostos, retour, et algos, douleur, parce qu'on ne peut la guérir qu'en retournant aux foyers (456-7)

While it is somewhat noteworthy that he considers nostalgia a particularly French disease, Chateaubriand's treatment of nostalgia here reflects the consensus of the médecins of his time. But unlike these medical authorities, he uses a fictional example as an exemplary case. As Alibert’s student Jules-Prosper Roché will do, Chateaubriand quotes his *Génie du christianisme*:

> On dit qu'un Français obligé de fuir pendant la Terreur avait acheté de quelques deniers qui lui restaient une barque sur le Rhin; il s'y était logé avec sa femme et ses deux enfants. N'ayant point d'argent, il n'y avait point pour lui d'hospitalité. Quand on le chassait d'un rivage, il passait, sans se plaindre, à l'autre bord; souvent poursuivi sur les deux rives, il était
obligé de jeter l'ancre au milieu du fleuve. Il pêchait pour nourrir sa
famille, mais les hommes lui disputaient encore les secours de la
Providence. La nuit il allait cueillir des herbes sèches pour faire un peu de
feu, et sa femme demeurait dans de mortelles angoisses jusqu'à son
retour. Obligée de se faire sauvage entre quatre nations civilisées, cette
famille n'avait pas sur le globe un seul coin de terre où elle osât mettre le
pied: toute sa consolation était, en errant dans le voisinage de la France,
de respirer quelquefois un air qui avait passé sur son pays. (Génie 600-601,
Printemps 457-8).

Later revisited by a young Baudelaire, this passage illustrates in physical terms the suspended
state of the nostalgia. As is literally the case for this mythical family, the nostalgic is unable to
regain the place his desires long for, but he is also incapable of leaving it behind.

Alibert’s observations on nostalgia center on a similar image. Like the family stranded in
the Rhine, sufferers of nostalgia are dually cut off from both the past and the future.
Consequently, nostalgia is both "la maladie des exilés" and "celle des jeunes guerriers que les
circonstances entraînent loin de leurs foyers et de leurs parents chéris" (258). For both groups,
the desire is all-consuming:

La nostalgie est une douleur profonde que l’on cherche parfois à
dissimuler mais ceux qui en sont atteints trahissent bientôt le secret de
leur âme par la distraction de leurs regards par un air inquiet et rêveur,
etc. Ils auraient voulu suivre le vent qui soufflait du côté de leur patrie
(259).
The desire to “suivre le vent qui soufflait du côté de leur patrie” is strikingly similar to the “consolation” of Chateaubriand’s family living in the middle of the Rhine, whose only reprieve was to “respirer quelquefois un air qui avait passé sur son pays.” Alibert also emphasizes the fact that nostalgia is often a secretive condition. Starting with Hofer’s original text up through the revolutionary era, observers noted a sense of shame about the condition the nostalgia patients were struggling to hide, so much so that they were relieved to be diagnosed against their will. This too must have suggested there were many cases not being included in the literature simply because the nostalgics were hiding their nostalgia, or because they belonged to marginal populations and could not speak for themselves.

Alibert concludes his section on nostalgia with a novelistic anecdote to just this effect, “Couramé: ou l’amour de la terre natale” a romantic tale of native woman in colonial Guyana (264-295). “Couramé” owes much, in style and substance, to Atala in particular and Chateaubriand in general, an author whom he cites as having inspired the wildly popular “goût de puiser des sujets dans cette nature enchanteresse” (267).

Found in the forests of Guyana as a child, Couramé is given a Western education in colonial Cayenne. She is taught the language, culture and customs of the French colonists under

the tutelage of a wealthy widow, Madame de Sainte-Croix. Though treated with great care, Couramé exhibits the telltale traits of the nostalgic, which Alibert catalogs according to prevailing discourse.

As was true for many of the conscrits, Couramé hides her nostalgia, afraid in her case to "passer pour ingrate et d'affliger sa bienfaitrice" (278). Her thoughts are obsessive and her desire is singular: "à tout instant, son imagination était bercée par des récits sans nombre qui rallumaient dans son cœur le désir de retourner dans sa patrie" (277, emphasis mine). Her symptoms reflect those of the military cases of bedridden wasting. Alibert reports that she "arrosait de ses larmes le lit où on voulait la faire dormir" and "passait des journées entières sans vouloir prendre aucune nourriture" (269). Her thoughts are singularly focused on return, as is the case, Alibert argues, for all nostalgics: “Revoir le champ de son père, reposer sa tête sous l’arbre qui ombragea son berceau, presser contre son cœur le sein maternel, embrasser les compagnons de son enfance, voilà à quoi se bornent ses vœux" (259).

Resolution comes for Couramé when the Baron de Besner, the actual colonial administrator of Cayenne, attempts to gather several Galibis in order to "améliorer leur sort en les amenant à la civilisation" (280). A feast is held, and Couramé's desire to return is dramatically revived in part by the sight of the Galibi costumes, but especially upon hearing their songs. The natives' attachment to the "airs qui tiennent au pays où ils sont nés" sung in a style Alibert characterizes as "triste et monotone" recalls the old mythology of the Ranz.

A true historical detail. See, inter alia Ferdinand Denis (53).
But whether or not Alibert is particularly inspired by the Swiss cases, the effect is the same. Only after hearing the mournful songs does Couramé decide to flee the colony, unable to hear sung "de tels regrets sans répandre un torrent de larmes." Transported by the music, Couramé "s’imagina aussi que sa mère la pleurait, et cette idée la plongea dans une tristesse qui l'empêcha de prendre aucune part à tout ce qui se passait autour d'elle" (287).

That night, Couramé takes flight and rejoins her tribe. Five years later, Doctor Valayer—the character to whom Alibert attributes the story—finds himself "par le plus singulier des hasards" among Couramé's tribe (291). He recognizes her immediately, but notes that she has profoundly changed. "Ce n’était plus cette jeune fille que la mélancolie et l’ennui desséchaient au milieu du luxe et de la richesse," according to his observation, "C’était une femme livrée tout entière aux soins maternels, et qui coulait sa vie dans la paix domestique" (290).

Couramé's nostalgia, it seems, has been cured. No longer "desiccated" by her nostalgia, her life once again "coulait." There is much to be said about Alibert's use of water metaphors, both here and the time Couramé spends contemplation the ocean before her flight, and this discussion will come in the context of Rolland's "oceanic nostalgia." But

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60 As described in the previous chapter, the Swiss alphorn melody was thought to provoke violent nostalgia among Swiss abroad. It was even believed, by Rousseau and many medical writers, that playing the *Ranz* before Swiss mercenaries was so dangerous that it was punishable by death.

61 "La lune brillait de tout son éclat, et Couramé profitait de sa clarté pour contempler de sa
there is an element of her recovery more immediate to the present discussion. The resolution of her imagined return is a projected, restorative death: "Elle voulait mourir aux lieux où était son berceau." The encounter is one that profoundly marks the doctor:

Le docteur Valayer admirait de son côté le choix des expressions de Couramé, qui contrastaient singulièrement avec la condition d’une sauvage; il approuvait ses résolutions; il était attendri de ses bons sentimens. Le croira-t-on? quelque temps après, ce bon et respectable vieillard, qui m’a raconté cette histoire, éprouva lui-même aussi vivement que Couramé l’amour de la terre natale; il vendit tout ce qu’il possédait dans la colonie pour retourner en France; et les lieux qui l’avaient vu naître ont été ceux qui l’ont vu mourir (294).

For both characters, death coincides with the resolution of nostalgia. Fulfillment of desire for return depends on the ultimate resettling in their homelands. Geography is inscribed onto time by desire: "Cayenne n’est pas très éloignée du canton d’Approuague, et pourtant il lui semblait qu’elle avait des régions immenses à traverser avant de parvenir au terme de ses vœux; pour un cœur impatient, ce n’est point l’espace, c’est le désir qui fait la distance" (277).

The use of emotional narrative, fictional or not, as a point of data in the medical fenêtre la surface de la mer. Avec quelle joie elle promenait ses regards sur cette plaine azurée que les pirogues des Indiens allaient bientôt sillonner!” (289).

62 Chateaubriand employs a similar formula in the introduction to his memoirs: “Mon berceau a de ma tombe, ma tombe a de mon berceau”
discussion of nostalgia would quickly become the rule. Hyacinthe Musset, another Alibert
disciple, offers his own Couramé, involving a certain Françoise Cottineau who is forced to run
away from home after an unintended pregnancy. She dies of nostalgia in the arms of Musset's
supposed colleague, who, like Alibert’s Doctor Valayer, had provided him the details of the
story. Jules-Prosper Roché’s 1829 Essai médico-philosophique sur la nostalgie ou mal du pays
reappropriates another data set—the writings of Chateaubriand. Not only does he use
Chateaubriand’s conclusions, citing them directly (“Lorsque nous languissons sur un sol
étranger, si un objet de notre pays s'offre à nos yeux, nous éprouvons la joie la plus vive” 10) or
by paraphrase (“l'homme n'est pas destiné à tout voir, à tout connaître” 5). Roché also uses
Atala as a case study, citing in full a particularly memorable episode:

Nous passâmes auprès du tombeau d’un enfant, qui servait de limite à
deux nations. On l’avait placé au bord du chemin, selon l’usage, afin que
les jeunes femmes, en allant à la fontaine, pussent attirer dans leur sein
l’âme de l’innocente créature, et la rendre à la patrie. On y voyait dans ce
moment des épouses nouvelles qui, désirant les douceurs de la
maternité, cherchaient, en entrouvrant leurs lèvres, à recueillir l’âme du
petit enfant, qu’elles croyaient voir errer sur les fleurs. La véritable mère
vint ensuite déposer une gerbe de maïs et des fleurs de lis blancs sur le
tombeau. Elle arrosa la terre de son lait, s’assit sur le gazon humide, et
parla à son enfant d’une voix attendrie:

Pourquoi te pleuré-je dans ton berceau de terre, ô mon nouveau-
né ? Quand le petit oiseau devient grand, il faut qu’il cherche sa
nourriture, et il trouve dans le désert bien des graines amères. Du moins tu as ignoré les pleurs ; du moins ton cœur n’a point été exposé au souffle dévorant des hommes. Le bouton qui sèche dans son enveloppe, passe avec tous ses parfums, comme toi, ô mon fils ! avec toute ton innocence. Heureux ceux qui meurent au berceau, ils n’ont connu que les baisers et les souris d’une mère ! (47).

Given his literary source material, it should come as no surprise that Roché’s analysis will take far more metaphorical terms. At the heart of this analysis is an internal conflict between the memory of “les soins tendres et touchants que nous y avons reçus de nos parents dans notre enfance” (8) and the passion of adolescence where (very like René) one feels “au-dedans de lui-même un tourment jusqu’alors inconnu, son âme, inquiète, demande de nouvelles sensations et aspire à quelque chose de grand et d’infini.” History intervenes, but is not contemporary—here it is narrative, memory, something like historical fiction. This narrative is colored with vicarious, glowing sentimentality.

But this is also a strikingly morbid tone to occupy a medical text. The feeling that death would be preferable to an upended life (a conviction that Balzac's Marie de Venteuil would repeat about the revolution in Les Chouans) is the very impulse that doctors were trying to prevent in their nostalgic patients. Guerbois and others sought all available methods, from speaking to provincials in dialect to ruses about the possibility of a return home to restore a harmonious sense of past and future. “[L]e monde n’est plus pour lui qu’un vaste désert,” he writes of the nostalgic, “Il cherche à calmer sa douleur, mais en vain” (9).

Roché is willing to take seriously the idea that the rupture posed by the historical
upheaval of the Revolution had destroyed the possibility of such harmony. He is willing to include such a perspective not only from other writers, but to announce his own feelings to this effect through an excited tone and vitriolic moralizing:

[L']injustice, l'ingratitud e et les persécutions que nous éprouvons de notre pays ne nous le rendent pas moins cher. Ainsi, à l'époque de notre sanglante et désastreuse révolution, d'illustres personnages furent obligés de fuir sur la terre de l'étranger pour échapper à la mort. Dépouillé de leurs rangs, de leurs dignités, de leur fortune, obligés d'abandonner le palais de leurs ancêtres, non seulement ils eurent à supporter les rigueurs de l'exil, mais encore à déplorer la perte d'un père, d'un frère......envoyés à l'échafaud (9).

And what has been lost, he will go on to explain, is a heroic way of being only possible in a bygone era. He describes how those of a previous generation were resistant to the rupture by virtue of this heroic nature:

Quelle grandeur de l'âme! Quel noble courage ces augustes proscrits ont montré dans ces jours de deuil et d'infortune! Hélas! Amis de la paix et d'une liberté sage et éclairée, leur cœur, profondément affligé du malheur de la France, chercha dans la solitude, dans la culture des lettres et des sciences le bonheur qu'ils ne trouvaient plus au sein de leur ingrate patrie; ils se consolaient des amertumes du présent par les souvenirs glorieux du passé, et par les douces espérances de l'avenir (9).
This sentimental identification goes as far as imagining a potential nostalgic return to the place of exile. Roché describes this “homecoming” as being just as staggering as the return to the homeland for the exilés “ce moment fut pour eux le plus doux et le plus délicieux de leur vie” (9). Returning to the scene of their exile, these former augustes proscrits could thereby reconnect with their bittersweet “souvenirs glorieux du passé.” Once their exile had ended, they exilés still felt, according to Roché, nostalgia for the pains of nostalgia.

It requires only the slightest extrapolation to call Roché himself nostalgic for the world he is describing. His laments are almost indistinguishable from those of the incurably nostalgic Brasdor from the generation preceding his own. His mourning of a past society is colored with grandiose, ancien-régime values. The revolution is ungrateful and usurping; its victims noble, dignified and august. The language here is so excited that we are led to wonder about the emotional stakes for the author. After all, the horrors he described all took place before he was born.

*Larmes délicieuses*

But as we've seen with Brasdor, and will continue to see, nostalgia does not require first-hand familiarity with the time or place that is supposed to serve as the point of return. Here, Roché tips his hand a bit. Though he hasn't lived any of what he describes, his extensive citation of Chateaubriand makes it clear that he has most definitely immersed himself in the post-revolutionary “culture des lettres” (9). The "consolation" that he describes therefore appeals very deeply to a doctor speaking on his own behalf, a fantasy that doesn't even require
that he feel “affligé du malheur de la France” or “des amertumes du présent.” His over-
identification—he makes no field observations—peaks in a final flourish, as he describes
glowingly the pleasures of other people's exiles. The consolations the displaced must have
found in their solitary contemplations, he imagines, made an eventual return to the place of
exile a joyful reunion with time that was "le plus doux et le plus délicieux de leur vie" (9).63

Roché’s text—as well as what has increasingly seemed to be his own case of nostalgia—
demonstrates the strange paradox of the condition. While the nostalgia logically should be a
narrowly subjective affliction in which personal and private attachments are held and jealously
guarded, the opposite is often true. In the same way “René l'Européen” can mourn for a past a
century earlier than François-René's, Roché's nostalgia is the affective attachment to someone
else's nostalgia. This is imbued with the same deep emotional identification that allows for
reading—even reading fiction—to serve as a trigger for the condition. Musset cites Gresset,
Delille, Chénendollé, Legouvé, Ovid, Virgil, Horace in addition to the “célebre voyageur de nos
jours” (30; he quotes the same passage as Roché) and warns that:

La lecture des ouvrages où règne une mélancolie douce qui plaît à une cœur
sensible, comme les méditations poétiques de Lamartine, le Traité de la
solitude du célèbre Zimmerman, Éliezer et Nephtaly, Joseph vendu par ses
frères de Bitaubé, Paul et Virginie, La Chaumière indienne. En lisant ces
charmants ouvrages le cœur éprouve un plaisir inexprimable, et nous

63 Musset shares this turn toward the displacement of the exilés: “Nulle époque ne fut plus
féconde en exemples de nostalgie que celle de nos troubles civils; elle s'empara des émigrés
comme de ceux qui étaient dans les armées” (14-15).
répandons des larmes délicieuses (29).

These *larmes délicieuses* inspired in equal terms by fiction and memoirs beg a question about whether writers like Chateaubriand (and later Baudelaire) don't engage in a suicidal way of thinking in which the fantasy of an uninterrupted way of being is very possibly more powerful than an actual past, which would inevitably be marked by the usual vicissitudes of life. But the question is far more immediate in a medical text that deals with death and sickness in a concrete and prescriptive way. Once again, we should underscore the morbid nature of this fantasy that wants to obliterate the present for the sake of an imagined past.

In Roché's terms, nostalgia can engender a morbid desire, quietly drawing the nostalgic toward death. Roché highlights their suffering, describing how a physician should "encourage la douce quiétude qui fait le bonheur de l'homme" (23). He advocates the cultivation of distraction as a way to limit the suffering of the nostalgic:

> Heureuse prévoyance de la divinité qui à tous tant que nous sommes, fait oublier, par un instant de plaisir, plusieurs années passés dans la douleur et dans la peine! [...] Si nous jetons un coup d'œil rapide sur le passé, nous l'envisageons comme un point dans l'espace, et cherchant à découvrir l'avenir, nous espérons encore... (24, his ellipsis).

Since this phantasm represents an impossibility, what can the doctor Roché do for the nostalgic Roché? The author does indeed confront this question, concluding with a discussion of incurable nostalgia. Faced with a patient for whom return would be impossible—he's addressing an impossible geographic return, but we wonder...—the attending physician should: “lui parler sans cesse des objets qu'il affectionne le plus, et semer quelques fleurs sur
les bords de la tombe qui s'ouvre devant lui, tâcher d'adoucir les derniers moments de cet
infortuné et de répandre autour de lui un calme trompeur pour lui rendre moins déchirants les
horreurs du trépas" (24-25). Roché is willing, in other words, to think of nostalgia not just as
coinciding with death (as was the case for Couramé and Valayer), but as fulfilled by death:

> On peut, dans cette circonstance, administrer l'opium avec beaucoup
d'avantage...s'il ne guérit pas toujours les souffrances qui sont inséparables
des infirmités humaines, il endort du moins les douleurs qui les
accompagnent, et rend ainsi plus supportables les angoisses cruelles qui
précède notre triste, mais inévitable destruction. Fin (25).

The physicians serves as the nostalgic’s “Dieu tutélaire et dépositaire de ses secrets,” leading
him toward the quietude of death: “C'est ainsi que nous arrivons au terme de notre existence”
(24).

What is only suggested by Brasdor’s murky biography is made explicit in Roché’s
conclusion. If life is a temps de misères, death is the homeland to which the nostalgic can
return. This is not a common conclusion to be sure. Though both real life case studies of
nostalgia and nostalgic characters often die prematurely, no one goes as far as Roché. But this
conclusion is wholly at odds with the purpose of medicine, especially military medicine, which

64 This kind of language is common in these texts. See Musset’s Françoise Cottineau’s
death under the care of a doctor known to Musset: “Il ne put semer aucune fleur sur la tombe
de cette infortunée; elle s'abstint de toute nourriture, et mourut au milieu des plus affreuses
convulsions, en pleurant son pays et suppliant mon collègue de demander à son père le pardon
de sa faute” (27).
has a deeply vested interest in preserving its patients. This is the clearest effect of the inclusion of literary sources into what would have otherwise been a medical discussion. Non-medical authors have greater freedom to pursue radical and unsettling conclusions about the relationship between nostalgia and death. Less constrained by the demand to save the patient, poets and novelists can reframe the compulsion to return home—with the spatial and temporal vectors of home already complicated in the medical literature—as a far more abstract desire. In this open framework, nostalgia could be conceived as the desire to recover an innocent experience of cyclical time, as in Balzac’s novels, or a recovery of a primal state of boundlessness, as it will be for Romain Rolland. But in these new and experimental iterations, death will remain closely associated with nostalgia, as the point of return longed for becomes increasingly abstract. We will be led to wonder whether death was, to paraphrase Baudelaire, not just the *terminus* but the *goal* of nostalgia.
Chapter 3 · Balzac and the Battle for Brittany

“As we have seen in the previous chapter, the developments in the study of nostalgia were wide-reaching and surprising. The period spanning the levée en masse to the near end of the Restoration saw not only a change in scope of what was still a medical concept, but a change in form. Alibert’s novelistic account of the home-sick Couramé and her equally touched French doctor inspired not only imitators within the medical community, but two operettas. Meanwhile, celebrated popular song-writer Béranger considered the condition broad enough to appeal to his audiences, writing a widely-circulated patriotic air, “Nostalgie” that describes the force of attachment to one’s native village. Clearly, this medical phenomenon had an appeal to a broader audience and offered insight, or at least pathos, for people who would hardly be engaged in a debate over a technical medical concept.

65 One by François-Adrien Boïeldieu and another by Caroline Martainville.
66 The song is similar to the old song Oronte quotes in Le Misanthrope, which Balzac quotes in a letter on nostalgia. It also takes up a number of familiar themes, including the attachments of mountain life (“rendez-moi, rendez-moi mon village / Et la montagne où je suis né!”), language (“En vain l’étude a poli mon langage,”) as well as livestock and food (“L’ours et les loups fondre sur mes brebis / Ah ! rendez-moi, rendez-moi mon village, / Et la houlette et le pain bis!”) (265-267).
If the concerns about nostalgia, which had previously been nearly exclusive to the armed services, were to become a central motif, a broad popular feeling that could characterize the early century, they would need to find a poetic voice of greater talents than medically-trained literary dabblers to diffuse them. The melodrama of Couramé prepares us for a more mature literary development, Balzac’s *Pierrette*. *Pierrette* represents a major step in the literary use of nostalgia. First, the novel gives the condition a more sustained treatment than the maudlin works produced by Alibert and his student. Second, it expands a condition we have heretofore seen as a medical phenomenon produced by historical circumstances to a symptom of a broader historical consciousness.

It is through this sense of history, so critical to Balzac’s conception of the *Comédie Humaine*, that nostalgia offers a perspective on the collection of novels and stories as a whole. Balzac will repeatedly play on the well-established Breton connections and stereotypes that see Brittany as a final frontier for urbanization and modernization. This drama, which I will call “the battle for Brittany” pits ideologies of republicanism, commerce and Enlightenment against the unenlightened rhythm of tradition what Balzac calls in *Les Chouans* “l’immémoriale routine” (14). Brittany as portrayed by Balzac and in particular the condition he identifies in *Pierrette* as “la nostalgie bretonne” (439) widens scope of discourse on nostalgia. While the eighteenth century saw scientific interest in describing a new medical phenomenon and the Napoleonic wars served to provoke a practical crisis of health that was later enlarged by the shortcomings
of these medical debates, Balzac’s novels introduce, for the first time in an explicit way, another motivation for addressing nostalgia—ideology.\(^{67}\)

Though Balzac was obviously keenly interested in the problems particular to Bretons in the Revolutionary era—interested enough to devote the first novel he published in his own name—he does not make explicit a connection to any sort of medical phenomenon. It is highly probable that Balzac was unaware of the terminology of nostalgia in 1830 for the publication of *Le Dernier Chouan*, the first incarnation of the novel of *chouannerie*. Between that time and the period from 1838-1840 when *Pierrette* was finalized and published, however, Balzac had made several direct references to the disease, in *Louis Lambert, Béatrix* and in an 1838 letter to his mistress, Ewelina Hanska.\(^{68}\) Balzac’s treatment of medical nostalgia in *Pierrette* makes clear that nostalgia represents something more important than a passing curiosity or a simple plot device. Rather, *Pierrette* elevates the stakes for nostalgia far more than any of the previous narrative treatments ever could. In this way, *Pierrette* provides a lens for reading the stakes of *Les Chouans* in particular, and the *Comédie Humaine* as a whole.

\(^{67}\) I mean ideology in the most general way, as Bakhtin describes in Balzac: “The distinctive qualities of a character’s discourse always strive for a certain social significance, a social breadth […] The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an *ideologue*, and his words are always *ideologemes*. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance” (333).

PART I: L’IMMÉMORIALE ROUTINE – LES CHOUANS

If *Pierrette* serves as an exposition of medical nostalgia, *Les Chouans* makes it clear why the disease interested Balzac in the first place. The hypercultivated and wily marquise Marie de Verneuil will form a bookend with the naive and uneducated Pierrette. The former is a republican spy sent into Brittany to capture the royalist leader of *chouan* forces, the Marquis de Montauran. This pairing of elites demonstrates that the cataclysms of cultural upheaval do not simply operate along the lines of bringing civilization to the barbarians. Everyone, regardless of origins or loyalties is implicated.

While Brittany “invades” the action of *Pierrette*, it surrounds *Les Chouans*. All of the action takes place within the province and no one is able or willing to leave. In both cases, Brittany serves as the edge of history, a final frontier for civilization that has been so closed off as to make the interruption more sudden, dramatic and threatening. This positioning implies that “Brittany is a region that, more than any other, demands modernization, though Balzac leaves us in no doubt that the price paid for such progress will be the eventual loss of the unique Breton identity” (Watt 113).

Brittany represents the final threshold for what Balzac calls in *Beatrix* “la civilisation nouvelle” (285). Largely cut off from communication with Paris—even provincial capitals in many cases—life in Brittany remains insulated culturally, geographically and architecturally. Great attention is paid to the physical obstacles that isolate Breton villages, both a natural landscape “qui semblait avoir eu le déluge pour architecte” (201) and “clôtures formidables dont les permanents obstacles rendent le pays imprenable, et la guerre des masses impossible”
This physical impenetrability leads in turn a closing off to the present, such that “[L]a Bretagne représente réellement un espace hors-temps, que l’histoire n’atteint pas” (Durans-Le Guern 85). In an extended anthropological interlude, the narrator of Les Chouans details this “temporal” isolation. Brittany is “close comme une forteresse” (199) lacking in culture and “nos principes commerciaux” (197). But this is also a world endowed with “la poésie des anciens temps” (202) practicing “une prière et non une religion” whose “simplicité patriarcale et d’héroïques vertus s’accordent à rendre les habitants de ces campagnes plus pauvres de combinaisons intellectuelles que ne le sont les Mohicans et les Peaux rouges de l’Amérique septentrionale, mais aussi grands qu’eux” (14).

Even the narrative edifice of Les Chouans bears out the conflict. On one hand, the narrator is positioned as an outsider to the story, demonstrating urban and cultivated ideas about the least-civilized province, often resorting to a tenor of exoticism. However—and this is only revealed in the novel’s final lines—the first hand details have been supplied to the narrator by a paysan who appears throughout the story as Marche-à-terre. Frequently compared to an animal, almost indistinguishable from the goat hide he wears over his back, “tranquille et stupide” (20), he functions as the embodiment of Brittany (Aynesworth 39). His name and lack of shoes emphasize his closeness to the Earth, and the novel opens on a scene in which he declares he will never leave Brittany. Marche-à-terre also exhibits, according to the narrator, “une assez grande difficulté de parler français” (11) a problem we have seen documented in the

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69 More on this, including the spatial disorientation of the reader, in Kadish.

70 Pierrette’s symptoms will later include a compulsion to eat roots and leaves.
medical literature on nostalgia during the Napoleonic wars. It seems not insignificant that the one primary source within the fictional works of the novel, “la personne à qui l’on doit de précieux renseignements sur tous les personnages de cette Scène” (290) is speaking across a language barrier. This is all the more the case considering that the narrator “is obliged to approach [Brittany] in the linguistic fashion of an anthropologist” (Aynesworth). This amounts to a translation not only of language but vastly different perspectives.

Though the word nostalgia is not used in this early work—Balzac begins to use the technical term in 1838—the phenomenon is alluded to in a particularly important political moment. After an extended catalog of the features of Breton religious life, we see Marie enter the church just as the gospel reading is ending. The firebrand abbé invokes a concern at the heart of many of the case studies on nostalgic Bretons, the reason why, as the narrator remarks in Pierrette “les colonels y ont égard pour les Bretons qui se trouvent dans leurs régiments” (439). While comparing outsiders to “Mahumétisches” he explains that the republicans pose a danger not only to religion but to Breton life. It’s not only the case that “les Bleus ont renversé les autels, ils ont tué les recteurs, ils ont assassiné le roi et la reine” but also that “ils veulent prendre tous les paroissiens de Bretagne pour en faire des Bleus comme eux et les envoyer se battre hors de leurs paroisses, dans des pays bien éloignés où l’on court risque de mourir sans confession et d’aller ainsi pour l’éternité dans l’enfer...” (203, emphasis mine). He invokes a particular fear that has been present since the opening scene, namely the dangers that come when crossing a dual political and spiritual border. When the wizened, practical republican

71 See Pancoucke’s article.
commander Hulot, dumbfounded, asks why the Bretons have suddenly broken from his command, Marche-à-terre grumbles, “C’est que, […] c’est que là, dit-il en étendant sa rude et large main vers Ernée, là est le Maine, et là finit la Bretagne” (11). There has already been mention of the difficulties in mass war mobilization in Brittany. But this more explicitly bears the concerns of nostalgic, whose preoccupation is as much about dying outside the homeland as it is being forced to live there.

It is easy enough to read Les Chouans through a simple prism of urban and modern pitted against rural and traditional. But the novel’s principal characters, Marie de Verneuil and the marquis de Montauran complicate this. Each is cut off by virtue of their youth and upbringing from the Ancien Régime they would ultimately restore. And both are polar opposites to the naïve lovers of Pierrette. The two meet by chance, while the marquis is disguised as a polytechnique student and while Marie is on her mission to seduce the chouan leader, whom she does not know to be her traveling companion. Moreover, we later learn that Marie is also not who she appears, not a rightful marquise, but the illegitimate daughter of a marquis who favored her over his legitimate heir, and not a committed republican, but forced against her will into service of a republic she does not support.

After a sly and flirtatious political discussion in which both characters hide their actual engagements and sensibilities, the two would-be lovers leave the carriage for air and the marquis reveals he is not actually the student he claimed to be. Marie immediately realizes the trouble brewing and demands to return to the carriage. Montauran is confused, leading to this revealing exchange:
– Mais, reprit l’inconnu, l’air ne nous valait rien ? …

– Oh ! il a changé, dit-elle avec un son de voix grave en continuant à marcher en proie à des pensées orageuses (98).

Marie’s statement that the air has changed operates on two levels. Their romantic moment has had the air sucked out of it, struck by a sudden interruption that will make their romance tragically impossible. But in a deeper way, as the two had been discussing coquettishly during the carriage trip, the intervening political events have dramatically changed the atmosphere—playing off the homophony of air and ère. The country and the region have not merely been shaken by a war. The elementary units of society have been altered. Life has changed speeds, according to Montauraud. “Autour de nous,” he explains, “Tout n’est-il pas frappé d’une inexplicable soudaineté. Aujourd’hui, nous aimons, nous haïssons sur la foi d’un regard. L’on s’unit pour la vie ou l’on se quitte avec la célérité dont on marche à la mort. On se dépêche en toute chose, comme la Nation dans ses tumultes” (94). Or, as Marie puts it brilliantly and succintly, “On sentait la nécessité de vivre vite et beaucoup” (95, emphasis mine). Cut off from uninterrupted tradition, life has become both finite and urgent.

This transformation is manifested in a number of ways in the novels, along the lines that will be seen in Pierrette. Brittany faces the incursion of a series of modulations in the rhythm of existence that simultaneously threaten Marie and Montauran’s romance and the way of being that Balzac’s Brittany typifies. He compares their imperiled romance to the ruins that dot the landscape: “Ce château, dit-il avec une légère tristesse, a été ruiné par la guerre, comme les projets que j’élevais pour notre bonheur l’ont été par vous” (117). His meaning is not subtle. As
will be the case in the Provins of \textit{Pierrette}, the vestiges of the past haunt the setting of the novel. But here they demonstrate a profound problem of discontinuity. The ruins form “une espèce d’histoire monumentale des temps nébuleux qui précèdent l’établissement de la monarchie” (117)—an uninterrupted link that is threatened.

We have already seen the way the Breton way of life risks a fundamental disturbance. Up to this point Brittany had been “entouré de lumières dont la bienfaisante chaleur ne l’atteint pas, ce pays ressemble à un charbon glacé qui resterait obscur et noir au sein d’un brillant foyer” (14). But the region’s impenetrability is gradually chipped away in the way that “Paris finit par égratigner la surface des villes départementales” (386) in \textit{Pierrette}. What the precarious nature of Brittany’s former impenetrability ultimately points to is the vulnerability of a mode of being born out in cyclical time—the “immobilité d’une population vouée aux pratiques d’une immémoriale routine” (14, emphasis mine). The cyclical nature of the routine is ultimately what is threatened. Considered in terms of interruption and incursion, loss of the \textit{immémoriale routine} amounts to a fundamental transformation of the speed of life previously described. This has major implications not only for the surrounding Breton society, but for Marie and Montauran. Both sets of parties attempt to repeat the past, but find that an anterior idea of repetition cannot be translated into their present.

The ruins demonstrate a particular problem of discontinuity from the past described as antediluvian, pagan and pre-monarchical, to the present. Their physical presence attests to an
inheritance from the past. But their meaning is inscrutable, in need of translation and interpretation in much the same way the anthropologically-minded narrator must work across a divide to tell the story of the novel. Rebuilding ruins poses the same kind of interruption as making ruins of the present. Restoration is as novel of a phenomenon as Revolution. This precise conflict is at the center of the nostalgia question in Balzac’s novels of Brittany—Recuperating the past, even if such a thing were possible, does not efface the interruption, it only makes ruins of the present in an effort to “faire le passé l’avenir.” Restoration is defacement and fraud. As a count who is one of his rivals for Marie claims, Montauran is seeking to redeem a world and way of life that is actually foreign to him:

Montauran, mademoiselle, disait le comte, a de la naissance, il est bien élevé, joli garçon; mais il ne connaît pas du tout la galanterie. Il est trop jeune pour avoir vu Versailles. Son éducation a été manquée, et, au lieu de faire des noirceurs, il donnera des coups de couteau. Il peut aimer violemment, mais il n’aura jamais cette fine fleur de manières qui distinguait Lauzun, Adhémar, Coigny, comme tant d’autres! (192).

This recalls the nostalgic fantasy inspired by the writings of the émigrés described in the medical dissertation of Jules-Prosper Roché. But it also reflects of the forward-looking

73 Generally authoritative on the depictions of ruins during this period, Göran Blix’ *From Paris to Pompeii: French Romanticism and the Cultural Politics of Archaeology* offers a particularly pertinent consideration to this passage, on the “ruined ruin” (177-178).

74 Like Chateaubriand.
aspirational of nostalgia of the *celibataires*, who feel nostalgic for a feudal Provins in which they would have occupied a very different social stratum than they desire. Moreover, the (entirely true) claim that Montauran is “trop jeune pour avoir vu Versailles” comes about via a ruse played by Marie, who deliberately turns the conversation to the subject of the *Ancien Régime* to serve her ends, knowing that the count will be unable to resist the bait. The desire Marie knows to manipulate is a willingness to view history through a wholly phantasmagoric lens. Ironically, similarities abound between the *ésprit* bouncing around the Parisian salons later derided by Marie and the narrator:

Une joie enivrante éclatait dans cette réunion composée des personnes les plus exaltées du parti royaliste, qui, n’ayant jamais pu juger, du fond d’une province insoumise, les événements de la Révolution, *devaient prendre les espérances les plus hypothétiques pour des réalités*. Les opérations hardies commencées par Montauran, son nom, sa fortune, sa capacité, relevaient tous les courages, et causaient cette ivresse politique, la plus dangereuse de toutes, en ce qu’elle ne se refroidit que dans des torrents de sang presque toujours inutilement versés. Pour toutes les personnes présentes, la Révolution n’était qu’un trouble passager dans le royaume de France, où, pour elles, rien ne paraissait change

(215, emphasis mine).

Of course, the ultimate result that Montauran and Marie are looking for can be cast in the same kind of nostalgic but ultimately disappointing vision. Such a restoration is only a form of play acting by a generation whose link to the past has already been interrupted. The fantasy of restoration is put in the following terms: “En quelque sorte née marquise, épousser
Montauran, n’était-ce pas pour elle agir et vivre dans la sphère qui lui était proper?” (260-261). But as we have learned, Marie is only a marquise in a way that breaks from the rigidity that such “spheres” would otherwise depend on. Not only is she a fille naturelle whose inheritance is the subject of a drawn-out legal dispute, but her activities show the same kind of play-acting of the Ancien Régime seen throughout the novel. She has gone undercover for the purposes of seducing her “rightful” lover while working as a double agent against her will, forced into the service of a regime whose supposed raison d’être is self-determination.

Moreover, she has been profoundly marked by the incursion of new ways and ideas. “La société du duc de Verneuil et celle où il m’introduisit étaient engouées de cette philosophie moqueuse dont s’enthousiasmait la France,” she explains, “Parce qu’on l’y professait partout avec esprit. Les brillantes conversations qui flattèrent mon oreille se recommandaient par la finesse des aperçus, ou par un mépris spirituellement formulé pour ce qui était religieux et vrai” (226). She casts this education in the newly prevailing philosophy in terms of seduction and resistance:

Les hommes, en se moquant des sentiments, les peignaient d’autant mieux qu’ils ne les éprouvaient pas; et ils séduisaient autant par leurs expressions épigrammatiques que par la bonhomie avec laquelle ils savaient mettre toute une aventure dans un mot; mais souvent ils péchaient par trop d’esprit, et fatiguaient les femmes en faisant de l’amour un art plutôt qu’une affaire de cœur. J’ai faiblement résisté à ce torrent (226).

But even to the extent that she has resisted the torrent, Marie can’t completely eliminate the incursion of Enlightenment thinking experienced in her Parisian milieu. “Trois années passées
auprès d’une famille opulente avaient développé ma vanité” (227) she explains, and she is left almost as naive and vulnerable as Pierrette or Eugénie Grandet, precisely because she has been raised under the opposite circumstances. “En satisfaisant à toutes mes fantaisies, mon père m’avait créé des besoins de luxe, des habitudes desquelles mon âme encore jeune et naïve ne s’expliquait ni les dangers, ni la tyrannie” (227). And even where her sense of danger is sufficiently developed to work in support of her values as she comes to understand them, she will not be able to return to a state before her sentiments and opinion had been transformed:

Cependant mon âme, pardonnez-moi cet orgueil, était assez passionnée pour sentir que l’esprit avait desséché tous les cœurs ; mais la vie que j’ai menée alors a eu pour résultat d’établir une lutte perpétuelle entre mes sentiments naturels et les habitudes vicieuses que j’y ai contractées. Quelques gens supérieurs s’étaient plu à développer en moi cette liberté de pensée, ce mépris de l’opinion publique qui ravissent à la femme une certaine modestie d’âme sans laquelle elle perd de son charme. Hélas ! le malheur n’a pas eu le pouvoir de détruire les défauts que me donna l’opulence (226-227, emphasis mine).

Marie’s laments attest to the irreversibility of the interruption. However willful she may be in combatting the desiccating and urbane esprit that had so marked her time in Paris, she will never be able to recuperate the innocent experience that preceded it. She is nostalgic for the pre-nostalgic state of being. The sense of permanence the narrator identifies in the immémoriale routine can only be broken once. Once disrupted, the synchrony of sentiments and habitudes is replaced with an experience of repetition—a lutte perpétuelle. The narrator (in a phrase that could almost be lifted from René) puts her experience in terms of a death fantasy:
“D’amers souvenirs lui firent désirer l’innocence de ses premières années et regretter de n’avoir pas été une victime de cette révolution dont la marche, alors victorieuse, ne pouvait pas être arrêtée par de si faibles mains” (40).

The unidirectional experience of history has shaped Marie in such a way that the nostalgic fantasy cannot be fulfilled symmetrically. Pierrette can be educated, but Marie cannot be made naïve. She is cast as Emma Bovary in reverse, a too-worldly “fille d’Opéra” (219) who longs for a quiet, provincial life: “le mariage, la maternité et ses soins, étaient pour elle moins une tâche qu’un repos. Elle aimait cette vie vertueuse et calme entrevue à travers ce dernier orage, comme une femme lasse de la vertu peut jeter un regard de convoitise sur une passion illicite. La vertu était pour elle une nouvelle seduction” (261).

This last bit explains why love offers the only hope of redemption in the novel. Love can serve, at least according to the aspirations of the two principal characters and the narrator, as a re-entry into cyclical time, into the routine. “L’amour est la seule passion qui ne souffre ni passé ni avenir” (105). But this hope ultimately proves to be the stage for disappointment and tragedy, and the terrible dénouement is anticipated by Francine and Madame du Gua from the moment they see the first signs of love between Marie and Mountauan.

Marie and Pierrette form a counter-factual pair with one another, each representing the irreversible nature of the interruption/incursion model. Pierrette maintains her naïveté such that she still feels connected to the immémoriale routine, but so much so that she is unable to adapt. Marie longs for a simple and quiet life, but this desire can only be considered with furtive glances and obtained through the kind of wiles she has acquired through her
worldliness. Both represent the two terminal poles of nostalgic destruction: death for Pierrette, desertion for Marie:

La vie humaine est tristement fertile en situations où, par suite, soit d’une méditation trop forte, soit d’une catastrophe, nos idées ne tiennent plus à rien, sont sans substance, sans point de départ, où le présent ne trouve plus de liens pour se rattacher au passé, ni dans l’avenir. Tel fut l’état de mademoiselle de Verneuil. Penchée dans le fond de la voiture, elle y resta comme un arbuste déraciné. (110, emphasis mine).

This explains why nostalgia can be both backward and forward looking: it seeks not simply to restore a past order, like the novel’s deluded royalists, but to recreate a sense of continuity to both past and future. But in both cases they can only ever be left uprooted.

**PART II—THE CASEMENT AND THE DOOR: PIERRETTE**

“Pierrette souffrait, elle n’était pas heureuse, elle regretta la Bretagne! qu’avait-elle?” (430)

Published in two installments in 1840, *Pierrette* at first resembles the kind of *Atala*-inspired genre fiction that had been produced in the para-medical texts. The novel begins when
Pierrette Lorrain, a young Breton girl brought by a series of family misfortunes to live with her miserly cousins in Provins, hears a familiar melody from her native land sung by Jacques Brigaut, a young man and childhood friend, who will become her love interest. The native song as a trigger is of course a familiar trope, related recently to popular effect in the Couramé novella and musical adaptations, and this melody “devait être pour une Bretonne le sujet d’impérieux souvenirs” (368). Moreover, the reader is quickly informed that the song has ties to—who else?—Chateaubriand: “Cette musique nationale, aussi délicieuse que celle adaptée par Chateaubriand à Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore” (368). Pierrette, comforted by the sight and song of an acquaintance and a countryman, cannot go past the casement she has opened, however. The song has roused her malicious guardian and Brigaut is forced to leave. The stage for the drama is set. Brittany cannot extend past the gate.

From these opening accents, Balzac appears to be priming his readers for an “œuvre un peu jeune fille,” as he had earlier described Pierrette to Madame Hanska. The plotline of adolescent love—Pierrette is fourteen and Brigaut sixteen—will be set against the schemes of her caretakers, the infamous “célibataires,” Sylvie and Jérome-Denis Rogron, who are eager to obtain the large inheritance of which Pierrette is entirely ignorant. The Rogrons and their associates in Provins are unrelentingly vicious and self-serving. Pierrette, who “ne savait qu’aimer” (413) is not only innocent and virtuous, but a bit dim. Her “droite et franche nature, jusqu’alors abandonnée à elle-même,” we are told, “ignorait la réflexion” (412).

75 The young Mlle. Lorrain’s name suggests that she is “stretched” between two far-flung provinces over the whole of France.
In its basic dramatic premise, *Pierrette* resembles the earlier *Eugénie Grandet*, another upstanding young woman and whose hopes for love are thwarted by miserly relatives and greedy suitors scheming over a fortune she has no interest in. In fact, one could make a plausible if superficial case that *Pierrette* is little more than a retread of a far more sophisticated novel that translates complicated forms of adult disappointment into a simplistic tale of good and evil, villain and victim. In this way, *Pierrette* is very much an “oeuvre un peu jeune fille.” On the other hand, the relentlessness of Pierrette’s victimization makes the novel into, as Jean-Louis Tritter calls it, “une des plus sinistres histoires de *La Comédie humaine*.” A story, as Takao Kashiwagi notes, “un peu trop âpre pour faire lire a une jeune fille a peu près le même âge que l’héroïne.” But regardless, it is difficult to find the grand drama in *Pierrette*. A comparatively small body of criticism about the novel appears to bear this out.\(^\text{76}\)

But *Pierrette*’s simple plot and stark moral oppositions make its final conclusions all the more devastating. While Eugénie passes through courtship, marriage and widowhood over decades, Pierrette’s romantic and financial dramas last only a few months. While there is a great deal of plotting in *Pierrette*, there is very little plot. The maneuvering for Pierrette’s inheritance ultimately proves fruitless and her death has little consequence for the story’s other characters. As Allan H. Pasco observes, “Neither God nor anyone else punishes the venal liberals who were, on the one hand, responsible for killing Pierrette and, on the other, guilty of covering up the crime.” "Furthermore,” he argues, "unlike Virginie and Béatrix, whose

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\(^{76}\) Recent notable exceptions can be found in Armine Mortimer Kotin, Allan H Pasco and Patrick Berthier.
memories are carefully preserved by history, Pierrette leaves no monument to virtue [...] Pierrette’s many virtues serve no purpose” (38-39)

The primary event of the novel only becomes remarkable in retrospect. Pierrette, fleeing Sylvie’s abuse, runs into a door and hits her head. Some time later, she dies, after a few small surprises that extend her life a few days and give her some consolation in her final hours. As her condition worsens in the days before her death, Pierrette’s complaints about vague head pain become premonitions about her demise. But the primary difference of plot structure that distinguishes Pierrette from Eugénie Grandet (which seems like a roman fleuve by comparison) reveals a critical and unique element of the later work. Pierrette’s injury and the strange reactions it provokes take on a monolithic importance. Likewise, it would be impossible to find in Pierrette the role of repetition in Balzac’s “episodic form” that Fredric Jameson identifies in Le Peau de chagrin. This repetition, rather than demonstrating a sequence along the lines of a “music-hall revue,” enforces according to Jameson a Hegelian picture of history that “acknowledges realities in convulsion” (228-229). Pierrette represents a complete absence of both this episodic repetition and the longue-durée narrative of Eugénie Grandet. The only events of Pierrette amount to stage-setting, an accident and its consequences. The novel’s entire plot springs from a single sentence: “En ce moment la pauvre Pierrette se cogna le front à la porte du corridor que le juge avait laissée ouverte” (455). And because her suffering is repeatedly and explicitly linked to a “nostalgie bretonne,” the novel can only be read as a strange and dramatic exposition of a condition nobody within the novel fully understands.
Pierrette’s condition

Pierrette’s medical condition represents the primary and perhaps only intrigue in the novel. Le Yaouanc describes the “grande étude nosographique” in *Pierrette* as “un tableau comparable par son ampleur à celui de la folie de Lambert, ou bien du cancer de Mme de Mortsaủf” (215). Balzac is deeply interested and well-informed about medicine, voiced here by Doctors Martener and Bianchon, but the novelist is often willing to bend the science to fit his own conclusions. Pierrette’s condition, along these lines, is both presented in scientific detail and discussed in hushed tones behind closed doors. As I will outline, both her physical and psychic symptoms reflect a traditional medical picture of nostalgia (though this will require some arguments to demonstrate), as well as a particularly Balzacian concept of the condition, one deeply imbued with the novelist’s sense of history.

The ample medical details given in the novel are complicated within the text, however. When Pierrette finally receives a diagnosis, pronounced by a prominent medical authority—“un nom aussi célèbre que celui d’Horace Bianchon” (471)—the medical picture is hardly resolved. The cause of Pierrette’s malady is described in stark, certain and dramatic terms: “Voici le Fait: une consultation délibérée à l’unanimité par un illustre médecin de Paris mandé en toute hâte, et par tous les médecins de cette ville, attribue l’état presque mortel où se trouve la mineure aux mauvais traitements qu’elle a reçus des sieur et demoiselle Rogron” (477). The solution, the only imaginable course of action brought on by the “épouvantable martyr exercé brutalement sur Pierrette par deux imbéciles tyrans” (482) is introduced no less starkly. A hole will be drilled into Pierrette’s skull, “la terrible opération du trépan” (482).
What is absent from this drama, however, is the diagnosis itself. Much is made of the fact that a “dépôt,” is found in Pierrette’s skull, and she is later found to have a “carie cérébrale” (486), the connection between these problems and her wasting is never made explicit. The most consequential discussions between Martener, Bianchon and the surgeon who will perform the trepanation (“le célèbre Desplein”), occur behind closed doors. Balzac, who almost never misses an opportunity to drop a scientific term of art, not only neglects to do so here, but announces that he won’t:

Il est inutile de donner le texte de cette consultation, qui fut encore une des pièces du procès. Si les termes de la médecine de Molière étaient barbares, ceux de la médecine moderne ont l’avantage d’être si clairs que l’explication de la maladie de Pierrette, quoique naturelle et malheureusement commune, effraierait les oreilles (477).

If the terms are so clear and common, why not give them? The refusal of a clear medical explanation here—and the vagueness of this paragraph leaves little doubt the omission is a deliberate choice by the author’s part—points us back to the setting of the novel’s events. After all, Pierrette’s sickness seems so gratuitous. Le Yaouanc asks, “Mais, se dit-on, d’où vient que [Balzac] a imaginé d’infliger à Pierrette Lorrain la carie d’un os de la tête?”—a question that wouldn’t need to be asked about Louis Lambert’s madness or Eugénie Grandet’s melancholy, __________________________

77 Le Yaouanc: “le romancier se montre en effet réservé sur les soins prodigués par Martener” (217)

78 For a discussion of the novel from a modern neurological perspective, see Ernst M. H. van den Doel.
maladies well-established in fiction. For Le Yaouanc, the important thing is Pierrette's demise; the cause is only an afterthought: "En cherchant à donner une forme précise à la maladie qui allait entraîner la mort de son héroïne, le romancier s'est souvenu d'un phénomène morbide que lui avaient fait connaître certaines de ses recherches dans le domaine de l’histoire."

Pierrette is doomed first, and Balzac simply needed to find a demise that fit a schedule of wasting and death according to this reading. But while Le Yaouanc devotes substantial attention to Pierrette's physical problems and, in a later section, her nostalgia, he does not connect the two.

A closer reading, however, shows that for Balzac, the two deadly “tracks” are never really separable. Pierrette’s emotional state and her physical impairment are so intertwined that it becomes impossible to determine which is the true cause and which is the symptom. It is not only the bump of a forehead against a door that provides a crisis of nostalgia. This is the symbolic explosion at the threshold which Pierrette cannot cross—she cannot remain in her “cell” at the hands of the Rogons, but nor can she return to her homeland. There is always a parallel, underlying crisis that intervenes into every aspect of Pierrette’s suffering, a crisis that serves as a spatial and temporal setting for the novel. Provins, especially as it is seen in the story, always through the eyes of Bretons and Parisians, suffers itself from nostalgia in a way that always stages Balzac’s medico-historical concerns.

**Physical Symptoms**

At the outset, it’s clear that Pierrette is worse for the wear due to both her cousins’ cruel treatment and her sadness. But no mention is made of any illness until the door scene,
which is narrated as a wholly undramatic event: “En ce moment la pauvre Pierrette se cogna le
front à la porte du corridor que le juge avait laissée ouverte” (455). When the accident
happens, Sylvie minimizes Pierrette’s injury:

— ⧫ Bon, c’est bien fait ⧫ ! s’écria Sylvie.

— ⧫ Que lui arrive-t-il ? demanda Desfondrilles.

— ⧫ Rien qu’elle ne mérite, répondit Sylvie (455-456).

Sylvie does get up to check on Pierrette only after Mlle Habert expresses concern, and even
then her primary interest, we are told, is to avoid paying the debts she has incurred over the
course of the game. The Provinois’ priorities being what they are, Mme Chargeboef stops Sylvie
insisting, “Payez-nous d’abord […] car vous ne vous souviendriez plus de rien en revenant”
(455). And so Sylvie’s dismissal of Pierrette’s injury receives a general if tacit approval. The
insistence on prioritizing Sylvie’s debt over Pierrette, a proposition “fondée sur la mauvaise foi
que l’ex-mercière mettait dans ses dettes de jeu ou dans ses chicanes, obtint l’assentiment
général” and Sylvie “ne pensa plus à Pierrette, et cette indifférence n’étonna personne.”

Pierrette’s initial lack of concern about the condition, on the other hand, is born out of
ignorance. “L’innocente enfant ignorait complètement que sa situation constituait une maladie
grave et voulait les plus grandes précautions” (439). Later, her silence (recalling Couramé) is
born out of fear: “Pierrette n’osa pas se plaindre des souffrances vagues, des douleurs qu’elle
sentit à la tête” (456). Also like Couramé, she refuses food—Jérôme-Denis reproaches her for
having an “appétit de moine!” (422).

But as her pain progresses, Pierrette finally feels compelled to confide in her
countryman:
Je suis bien malade, Jacques ! J’ai dans la tête des douleurs à crier, et dans les os, dans le dos, puis je ne sais quoi aux reins qui me tue, et je n’ai d’appétit que pour de vilaines choses, des racines, des feuilles; enfin j’aime à sentir l’odeur des papiers imprimés (459).

It is in this declaration that Pierrette’s physical symptoms are joined to nostalgia more broadly. The connection seems to occur to Pierrette herself, taking on full weight for her as she confesses to Jacques: “depuis quelques instants, elle joignait à ses souffrances corporelles les souffrances de la nostalgie bretonne” (439). This “diagnosis” functions as a mirror to Pierrette’s physical symptoms. Pierrette’s particular symptom of pica also cast her in nostalgic terms. Her longing for the land is so strong that she longs to devour roots.79

Pierrette and nostalgia

Parallel to the medical picture of Pierrette’s head injury is an extended exposition of nostalgia. With Pierrette well under way,80 Balzac described his own experience of nostalgia in a 23 May 1838 letter to Madame Hanska. Though he now has access to the technical term, he struggles to capture the feeling, writing “je vais et je viens sans âme, sans vie, sans pouvoir dire ce que j’ai, et si je restais ainsi deux semaines je serais mort. Expliquer cela est impossible.” But

79 This is also reminiscent of Baudelaire’s “Déjà,” discussed in the following chapter: “Tous étaient si affolés par l’image de la terre absente, qu’ils auraient, je crois, mangé de l’herbe avec plus d’enthousiasme que les bêtes.”

80 In 1836, Balzac was researching Beatrice Cenci, which would end up in the text of Pierrette, and the novel’s proofs were already held by Le Siècle in 1839
this is the very nature of the disease for Balzac—“Quel horrible mal que celui que la nostalgie, il est insaisissable, indescriptible.” The “horrible mal” was a matter of serious medical concern. Percy and Laurent, in the Encyclopédie Méthodique, still consider untreated nostalgia to be "une des maladies les plus graves."

As Balzac expresses in this letter, love offers hope for restoration, or at least distraction from "cette noire existence sous le soleil, cette atonie qui relâche les liens de la vie." Love presents the fantasy of restoring the damage or disfiguration caused by distance, distance from the homeland, ones beloved and from oneself. “Je ne suis heureux que pendant le moment où je vous écris, où je me dis que ce papier ira de Milan à Wierzchownia,” he continues in the letter, “c’est la seule opération qui maintienne l’union de l’âme et du corps.” This insight is transferred to Brigaut in Pierrette. “Oh ! Pierrette, retournons en Bretagne,” he implores her, before noting that her suffering extends to a kind of alienation she doesn’t seem to be aware of, “Tu ne marches plus à Provins comme tu te mouvais en Bretagne. Retournons en Bretagne !” (435).

It is from this perspective, in which her separation from Brittany menaces both body and soul, that we can begin to understand the force of Pierrette’s emotional state. When Balzac writes to Madame Hanska that their correspondence, metonymically their romance, is the seule opération qui maintienne l’union de l’âme et du corps there is a hint that the separation of body and soul—death, suicide—would be preferable to the pain of nostalgia. This dilemma, we remember, was a possibility that in the 1830’s medical science was itself prepared to consider. We are told that Pierrette, no less obliquely, faces a similar consideration:
Avant l’arrivée de Brigaut, si ce Néraud, qui pouvait se reprocher la mort de la grand’mère, eût révélé ce danger mortel à la petite-fille, Pierrette eût souri: elle trouvait trop d’amertume à la vie pour ne pas sourire à la mort. Mais depuis quelques instants, elle joignait à ses souffrances corporelles les souffrances de la nostalgie bretonne, maladie morale si connue que les colonels y ont égard pour les Bretons qui se trouvent dans leurs régiments, elle aimait Provins ! (439-440).

Here, though, her beloved is perhaps more important as a connection to Brittany than as Jacques from around the corner. His presence gives her reason not to simply welcome death, but at the same time re-establishes the powerful and deadly pull toward Brittany, like the legions of Breton who withered and died in Revolutionary hospitals.

*Physical Nostalgia, Psychic Nostalgia*

As we have seen on numerous occasions, the belief that Bretons in the military were especially predisposed was so widely held in the time of the Napoleonic wars that great care was taken to avoid units composed entirely of soldiers from the region. By the time Pierrette was written, reforms in the army made such a composition legally impossible. But Balzac is not merely well-informed about this anecdotal detail. It’s equally clear that he understands that the doctrine of *nostalgie compliquée*, whereby the condition could both aggravate and be aggravated by a host of other medical problems from fever to plague.

There is also the matter of the Pierrette’s initial injury, which appears to trigger her nostalgia. Well before Couramé, Françoise Cottineau and Pierrette, we must remember the first recorded case-study of the new disease. Johannes Hofer, back in 1688, recounts the
anonymous young woman from the canton of Berne who had fallen from a high place, struck her head, lost consciousness, regained it and only then became wildly and exclusively preoccupied with the idea of returning home to her parents. She cries out and refuses any food the nurses try to give her.

As Balzac claims in his 1838 letter to Madame Hanska, “l’union de l’âme et du corps” is threatened by his feeling of nostalgia (this potentially disturbed union is also mentioned in Louis Lambert).\(^8\) One set of symptoms cannot really be considered without the other. In describing Pierrette’s worsening condition and descent toward death, the shape of the novel’s apparently-simple plot comes into focus, but the problem of the novel’s stark plot has hardly been resolved. The lack of a diagnosis seems to make this point even clearer. What should be the central intrigue of the story—what’s wrong with our heroine?—is ostentatiously redacted from the narrative and we seem to be left of a novel that tells of little more than a blow to the head that results in a gradual painful death. But the real drama plays out on a stage in which Pierrette is only an accidental character, a drama of history and politics, a conflict of cities, stages of history, and ideologies. Armine Kotin-Mortimer seizes on exactly this. “No tale is too slight, in *La Comédie humaine*, to bear a political burden, and *Pierrette*, as slight as its pitiful heroine, shoulders a disproportionately weighty charge” (109). *Le Père Goriot*, while making use of its restoration setting, could exist in any world where greed, ambition and familial bonds are grounds for conflict. *Pierrette*’s “disproportionately weighty charge” lies in the fact that the drama is only the conflict between a character and a place in in time.

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\(^8\) See Muray, p. 633.
“Tout ce qui reste après la ruine des peuples”: Pierrette and History

As Bakhtin argues in his essay on historical poetics, one of the major developments seen in the realist novel is the incursion of history and politics into the private physical spaces of the novel. This is the case from the opening lines in which Brigaut is identified as what the "phraséologie moderne appelle si insolemment un prolétaire” (366). The simple Breton air he sings is likewise given weighty historical import:

Ce pouvoir de réveiller un monde de choses graves, douces et tristes par un rythme familier et souvent gai, n’est-il pas le caractère de ces chants populaires qui sont les superstitions de la musique, si l’on veut accepter le mot superstition comme signifiant tout ce qui reste après la ruine des peuples et surnage à leurs révolutions (368).

A background drama is announced about the persistence or dissolution of tradition. We see in Balzac a narrative perspective that does not wholly accept the rejection of the past as inferior, as mere “superstition” in the face of a regularization of a “new” worldview in the form of the new classification (“prolétaire”).

82 This usage owes to Saint-Simon and not to Marx.

83 Balzac also faced resistance in publication to the steady invective in *Pierrette* against “libéraux.” He accepted the changes, but called the editors of *Le Siècle* “puritains du libéralisme”
Provins as victim of nostalgia

Provins becomes a prime setting for nostalgia operating both spatially and temporally. Still marketed to tourists as France’s “cité médiévale" *par excellence*, Provins’ proximity to Paris (50 miles) make it a potential retreat for the Rogrons, while at the same time allowing them to maintain contact with their Parisian business interests. The Rogrons see it therefore as their *terre promise* and the object of their “nostalgie et monomanie” (385). The many recently returned émigrés in the novella view it as the site of their rightful restoration (which brings them into conflict with the *arrivistes* Rogrons). The city itself is victim of nostalgia for a lost Medieval golden age, left only with romanticized vestiges and administrative offices: “le parfum de notre gloire historique, celui de nos roses, et une sous-préfecture” (400) as one of Pierrette’s émigrés dryly puts it.

The nostalgic fantasy offered by Provins (fantasy because it represents a desire to reconnect with the unfamiliar) is what attracts the Rogrons who "commençaient à trouver l’atmosphère de la rue Saint-Denis malsaine; et l’odeur des boues de la Halle leur faisait désirer le parfum des roses de Provins” (385). They are driven by “une nostalgie et une monomanie contrariées par la nécessité de vendre leurs derniers bouts de fil, leurs bobines de soie et leurs boutons” (385). Finding themselves disgusted by their careers and their surroundings, they are led to seek out “La terre promise de la vallée de Provins” as “Hébreux [qui] avaient réellement souffert pendant longtemps, et traversé, haletants, les déserts sablonneux de la Mercerie” (385).
Parisian Invasions: Paris as a disease

Pierrette and Provins are not merely subject to the incursion of Paris into a formerly provincial way of being, an influence which itself “constitue une véritable maladie” (386). The Rogrons and their like-minded "Hébreux" in search of a promised land couldn't help but bring the corruption of Paris along with them. Upon returning to the provinces from Paris, a provincial merchant “y rapporte toujours quelques idées” and these ideas spread insidiously by “ces petits changements lents, successifs, par lesquels Paris finit par égratigner la surface des villes départementales” (386). The erosion of a surface that had once insulated provincial life becomes a model for literature concerned with nostalgia. This model presents a continuity from the earliest concern for the displaced and conscripted to later concerns about urbanization and modernization. Nostalgia will be able to operate along more abstract lines as sources of interruption and incursion multiply. However, this will result in a condition that is not simply romantic recasting of melancholy, but rather one that still marked by the memory of desertion, physical suffering and death that had first marked medical discourse on nostalgia.

This conflict between past and present, superstition and reason, tradition and commerce, brings into focus the importance of Pierrette’s demise and provides the fatal context for a myth driving the otherwise gratuitous story of sickness and death. Pierrette’s death is presented in the novel as at once personal restoration and social waste:

La jeune malade lui paraissait ainsi se mieux ressembler à elle-même: elle était délicieuse à voir, le visage entouré de cette auréole de batiste bordée de dentelles empesées. Sa tête, blanche de la blancheur du biscuit, son front auquel
la souffrance imprimait un semblant de pensée profonde, la pureté des lignes amaigries par la maladie, la lenteur du regard et la fixité des yeux par instants, tout faisait de Pierrette un admirable chef-d’œuvre de mélancolie (484).

The novel’s end offers what is at least aesthetically a tale of martyrdom. But for what cause? Is there even one at all? There is only *un semblant de pensée profonde*, no hint as to what this *pensée profonde* could really signify. No church bells toll, no fawn appears at the site where Pierrette’s ashes were scattered. It only makes the sense of wasted life and suffering stronger to consider Allan H. Pasco’s lovely gloss on the heroin’s name. He argues that, “While Christ had Peter, the rock on which Christ ‘will build his church,’ France has only the youth of the country, who, like Pierrette, the ‘little stone,’ are being disdained and discarded” (Pasco 38). Pierrette is a *clé de voûte ratée*, a martyr for a hypothetical restoration that could only occur if history were actually reversible.

Of course, *Pierrette* is only one of many Balzac novels in which the ending appears to ironically render moot everything that has come before—*Le Peau de chagrin* and *La Recherche de l’absolu* are probably the most striking examples. For Michel Butor, “Adieu” serves as an archetypical case of this type of ending. It represents “une remarquable mise en scène du thème de la répétition” in which “La reproduction exacte d’un événement du passé produit une sorte de foudroiement” (226). So, in an argument similar to Jameson’s about the episodic form of *La Peau de chagrin*, Butor identifies repetition as reinforcing a broader ideological agenda.

The repetition doubled by “Adieu” and the Bourbon Restoration in which the novel is set must itself point to whole series of repetitions that propose a fantastical (and nostalgic) re-creation. “La récupération du passe n’est pas simplement la récupération de l’Ancien Régime,” according
to Butor, “mais celle de quelque chose de beaucoup plus loin.” The Restoration’s premise of recuperating the Ancien Régime, in a way that I see as true of all nostalgic desire, is a restoration of *everything that has been lost*, encompassing for Butor the Deluge (232), a “grâce animale” and the “vrai paradis” (234). Once again, nostalgia for one place in time is nostalgia for *everything* in the past, or for past-ness itself. Butor’s reading lends important ideological weight to the Balzacian ironic ending. The “foudroiement” of repetition in “Adieu” presents the ultimate failure of successful historical reproduction. The monarchy, like Stéphanie, can be resurrected, but only to die more permanently. Or, as Philippe Muray writes, the final impression one is left with at the end of a Balzac novel is the picture of a “grouillement peu appétissant d’une multitude des petits êtres luttant les uns contre les autres dans leur propre efferevessance d’angoisse” (642, emphasis mine). The author of the Human Comedy carries out a sentence true the spirit of his Divine predecessor. They are condemned to *irony*.

The punishment for the characters with transcendent designs on manipulating and cheating to break out of their human struggle, for those “‘petits êtres’ en train de se battre dans l’espoir d’être” that typify the *Comédie humaine* for Muray, is to be dramatically dragged back into the cycle of repetition in the most ironic way possible. They find themselves, to use a phrase from Willa Cather, “dropped back into the immense design of things.” This perspective allows us to account for the two apparently contradictory accounts of the heroine’s demise. Either the blow to the head triggered a weakening that left her unable to resist an increasingly vicious, avaricious and diseased world that had taken her away from her provincial life, or these causes complicated her physiological injury. Just as Balzac writes that his own nostalgia is a condition that menaces his own “union de l’âme et du corps,” Pierrette would have been
ruined either way. One is tempted to see a parallel in allegory to answer Le Yaouanc’s question about the possible motivations for choosing the “forme précise à la maladie qui allait entraîner la mort de son heroine”: the incursion of Enlightenment and the cataclysm of Revolution, nostalgia brought on by the greedy schemes of the célibataires and a fatal blow to the head.

*The Dream of Dis-enlightenment*

For all its ambitious scope, it is important to remember that the *Comédie Humaine* is dominated by a single set of circumstances. Beginning with *Le dernier Chouan / Les Chouans*, Balzac embarks on a project that is essentially an episodic novel set into motion by the events of military history. When Barbéris writes of the critical turning point, “La genèse du Dernier Chouan est de la plus grande importance pour comprendre comment Balzac a pu passer d’un inspiration encore relativement personnelle à quelque chose de plus objectif et de plus “pensé” (755), a single pensée drives the development. This thought is an extended contemplation of broad social transformations crystalized into a dual fear: the fear that the transformations were on the one hand irreversible, and represented the possibility that everything was subject to the same kind of change. Nothing was permanent.

*L’Auberge rouge* and *Le Requisitionnaire* deal with mass conscription, a subject whose social impact I have discussed in chapter two. *El Verdugo*, set Spain in the shadows of Napoleon’s occupation, presents re-staging of the Terreur. Along with *Adieu, El Verdugo* was initially conceived under the auspices of *scènes de la vie militaire*, which collectively look back from the perspective of late-Restoration or July monarchy France. Just as *Le Père Goriot* was
being published, Balzac could only think of revisiting Revolutionary-era Western France, imagining a time when a project to be titled *Les Vendéens* “auront arraché la palme du roman à Scott...”

This military bias should hardly be surprising. As Balzac sought first to render in the new novelistic form the kind of sublime events that would have until then been the subject of classical drama or derive the basis of his contemporary mass culture, he would have had to pass through the same space. Namely, he would be looking to the events of 1793-1815, from the first *levée en masse* up to Waterloo.

This consistency is exactly what Lukács identified as the establishing principle of dialectical thought and the modern historical novel, both emerging in the second decade of the nineteenth century. According to Lukács, it was these very events, the Revolution and Napoleon’s rise, which made such a historical novel possible by establishing history as a mass experience. The difference of *La Comédie humaine* and, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Chateaubriand’s *Les Martyrs*, the works of Voltaire or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre is that in the latter cases, the historical and foreign settings are all vague, interchangeable, colored in rosy and comic tones that make them both universally applicable to all times and something like fairy tales. In Balzac, the recent past so forcefully sets into motion that any event—up to and including the bumping of a head on the side of the door—can only be understood through the lens of history.

What dominates the premises of the tales in the *Comédie humaine*, at least at the outset, is a terrifying sense of fragility and precariousness about the unidirectional picture of

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84 26 January 1835
history that Revolution and Enlightenment have attempted to instill. It is a bit like the sense of vulnerability the explorer Humboldt expressed after he was able to write, for the first time in history, about the first-hand experience of an earthquake: “A moment destroys the illusion of a whole life [...] we no longer trust the ground on which we stand” (Cosmos 215-216). Which is why, as Gabriel Moyal argues, “The characters in the Comédie humaine appear to cling desperately to a sense of individual wholeness which they see as continuous with their social responsibilities while they are besieged by a society which pressures them to systematically shed the remaining abstract spiritual values which have sustained them until the Revolution and beyond” (601). The air has changed; they can no longer trust the ground of which they stand.

This explains the severe sense of disorientation of Les Chouans. The intrigues, like the landscape of Brittany, are always emerging in pieces. One cannot seem to get the whole picture from on the ground. In the Fougères of 1799 or 1800 (depending on the edition), has the great upheaval already “happened”? Clearly, Brittany has not been Revolutionized, Enlightened. But it’s not even certain that any among the Revolution, the Terror, the declaration of “déstruction totale” of the Vendée, constitutes the seminal trauma that sets into motion irrevocably the novel’s tragic events. To believe Marie, the real “event” is the social transformation she witnesses in Paris, the rejection of superstition and tradition in favor of esprit. In a way, this presents the same problem of Pierrette’s diagnosis: has the world changed because of a series of events, or because of the ideological underpinnings that made the events possible or inevitable. Moreover, the difficulty of situating the causes of the novel is already in place even
before one considers the epilogue, which Balzac added after honing his particular ending technique.

In this new ending, the narrative gaze flashes ahead to 1827—the year in which *Pierrette* begins—to a seemingly unremarkable scene:

En 1827, un vieil homme accompagné de sa femme marchandait des bestiaux sur le marcher de Fougères, et personne ne lui disait rien quoiqu’il eut tué plus de cent personnes, on ne lui rappelai même plus son surnom de Marche-à-Terre ; la personne à qui l’on doit de précieux renseignements sur tout les personnages de cette scène, le vit emmenant une vache et allant de cet air simple, ingénus qui fait dire: — Voilà un bien brave homme ! (290)

One way of reading reinforces the narrative of historical progress, while preserving the good, universal, humanizing tradition of the novel. “Once the fury of the revolt has passed,” argues Pasco, “Marche-à-terre, whose viciousness has placed him beyond the pale of humanity, has apparently become human.” The savage has not been reformed by the civilizing project of the Republic, according to this reading, but by love. “The terrible tragedy of the Chouan revolt remains engraved in Balzac’s novel, but love as Francine and Marche-à-terre prove, conquers all. What but love could have changed this brute into a simple peasant selling livestock in 1827?” (201). This was the hope for Marie and Montauran, after all.

This would be nice, but my own reading is far less optimistic. Did Marche-à-Terre kill so many only to resign himself to gradual assimilation? Witnessing the fate of Marie and Montauran, finding a message of “love conquers all” is a little like Edgar’s conclusion that the
horrors of King Lear could’ve been avoided with just a little more sincerity (“We should speak what we feel, not what we ought to say”). The conclusions offered by the epilogue of Les Chouans very clearly do not belong to Marche-à-terre. They come to us only in the passive voice, translated once again by a narrator whose distance has always been clear, who like Marie and Montauran cannot bridge the gulf to the past. He has not seen Versailles and Marche-à-terre, the unenlightened, cannot speak. He is brave but not necessarily courageux. All the narrator can do is express with wonder and bewilderment at the difference between himself and Marche-à-terre, Voilà un bien brave homme!

What would Marche-à-terre really say if we could ask him? The gulf between the immémoriale routine and the perspective of the narrator is too great, and can only be crossed in one direction. We might as well ask the cow. After all, Marche-à-terre represents the same kind of fantasy that Nietzsche discusses in his own imagined bovine dialogue. “Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?” The animal would like to answer, and say, “The reason is I always forget what I was going to say” – but then he forgets that answer too, and stays silent, so that the human being is left wondering.” The immémoriale routine only functions if one doesn’t know any other way of living. Once it becomes a choice like any other, as in any claim to restoration, it is merely a life-style.

Pasco’s reading is in this sense Ancient Régime. According to his interpretation, the unredeemable ideologues die, the peuple can resume their lives, with other warriors bearing scars but returning to the farm, read to breed the next generation of peasant-warriors. Marche-à-terre attests to possibilities of redemption through the values of the old way: “Though old, he seems to have been changed by the love of Francine, and is clearly capable of
handling the business of a farm.” Doris Kadish gives a more skeptical reading, noting that
“Above all, whether the book’s final image of the last Chouan evokes sympathy or blame, it
serves as a poignant reminder of the defeat, the futility, and above all the irrevocable pastness
of the Chouans’ revolt” (52, emphasis mine). But this, too, misses the typically Balzacian joke.
Marie and Montauran are doomed because they want to choose a world that depends on not
having the kind of fundamental choices they are making. Pierrette and March-à-terre are their
fantasies because the latter pair represents a life that is only possible if one is stupid. For all its
“irrevocable pastness,” the Chouans’ revolt is held up at the end of the novel by its narrator,
operating from the same perspective as Marie and Montauran, as an object of desire. Marche-
à-terre is on the other side of the gulf, the side the narrator, Marie, Montauran, the “Hébreux”
who try to recuperate the medieval Provins in Pierrette all want to get to.

It is surely true that, as Lukács says, “in portraying the French Revolution, [Balzac]
sought (unconsciously) the social foundations of the Comédie humaine” (85). But it would be
an incomplete picture to view these social foundations without the qualification that the
existence of an alternative vision of the same foundations can never be dismissed. It would be
an incomplete picture to address only the “new” foundations, i.e., everything in the body of Les
Chouans, without talking about a fantasy of a complete and total restoration of the “old,”
presented in the epilogue. Lukács, somewhat strangely, does exactly this when choosing to
write about Le Dernier chouan and not Les Chouans. Lukács misses the joke too, misses the
point that the whole novel causes to happen the transformation of a warrior-peasant into an
old peasant one can celebrate for having been a warrior.
Winning the battle for Brittany does not come without a price. The price is a condemnation to a kind of stupidity very different from that of Marche-à-terre and Pierrette, a world for the victors, as Muray says, “où presque tout le monde est devenu analphabète après un lavage de cerveau qui s’appelle Révolution, Terreur, Empire, etc.” (628-9). Meanwhile, Balzac is uniquely positioned (“Balzac est seul à s’occuper de ces choses”) to pick up the pieces, rebuilding a social vision “comme s’il réinventait une bibliothèque brûlée.” Perhaps the most tragic of any of the medical case studies on nostalgia was the younger Doctor Brasdor, who could withstand the pain of being away from home but not the longing for the “vieux jours de son père.” The worst nostalgia, as Jankélévitch says, is always the desire for an impossible return, to a place and a time wholly and irrevocably transformed. For Balzac, the appeal of a still relatively uncommon medical phenomenon would have been evident.
Chapter 4 · Strange Nostalgia, or, the Miracle of Poetry in Prose

La lecture des Petits Poèmes en prose nous a souvent produit des impressions de ce genre; une phrase, un mot — un seul — bizarrement choisi et placé, évoquait pour nous un monde inconnu de figures oubliées et pourtant amies, ravivait les souvenirs d'existences antérieures et lointaines, et nous faisait pressentir autour de nous un chœur mystérieux d'idées évanouies, murmurer à mi-voix parmi les fantômes des choses qui se détachent incessamment de la réalité. Mais il faut y prendre garde, car elles vous donnent la nostalgie comme le ranz des vaches à ce pauvre lansquenet suisse de la ballade allemande, en garnison à Strasbourg, qui traversa le Rhin à la nage, qui fut repris et fusillé, “pour avoir trop écouté retentir le cor des Alpes.”

So concludes Gautier’s obituary of Baudelaire, published in installments in *L’Univers Illustré*, ending on 18 April 1868. Gautier’s observation on the subtle and seductive estrangement offered by the collection of prose poems—for which this text would be republished as an editor’s introduction—ends in a warning. The story of the Swiss deserter and the *ranz-des-vaches* are of course familiar to the mythology of nostalgia. The “ballade allemande” he refers to is “Zu Straßburg auf der Schanz” first anthologized as “Der Schweizer” and probably written by Clemens Brentano and Ludwig Achim von Arnim in their *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and the citation, in the form of paraphrase, appears to be taken from Heinrich Heine’s self-translated *De L’Allemagne*. Heine had presented “ces Ranz des vaches du moyen âge” as posing the danger of past as seduction, mentioning the need “comme Ulysse, de

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86 See Smeed and chapter 1.
boucher les oreilles” (101) to prevent an attack of nostalgia.

Heine’s influence fits with the kind of poetic seduction described in Gautier’s text, whereby the prose poems bring with them the dangers of the ranz-des-vaches for a new generation of potential nostalgics. These readers, like the “pauvre lansquenet Suisse,” ultimately risk their lives before a new “trigger” of nostalgia. Gautier had used the anecdote to describe his own feelings of mortality just after a brush with death, shortly before writing this text on Baudelaire. In a Letter to Carlotta Grisi 24 February 1868, he writes “je commence comme le soldat suisse qui a ecouté le ranz des vaches...” (CX, 52). But despite the familiar motifs, his warning about reading the prose poems is at odds with the preceding medical thinking about nostalgia. The mythical Swiss mercenary is drawn home by the melody most familiar to him. But every element of this impulse is complicated by Gautier. It is the unfamiliar, estranging prose of words organized “bizarrement” that calls Baudelaire’s readers away, provokes in them a homesickness for something very much not their home and apparently not even reality. There is a paradox here, an oxymoronic pull toward “un monde inconnu de figures oubliées et pourtant amies” that is, according to Gautier, revivified in the work of Baudelaire.

The two poets had in a way collaborated on the picture of nostalgia Gautier paints here, one where nostalgia, often an “étrange nostalgie” functions in a similar but inverted way to everything that that had come before them. As I will outline, Baudelaire and Gautier exchanged specific formulations of strange nostalgia in a sustained way, up to Baudelaire’s

87 It seems entirely appropriate to invoke Freud’s Das Unheimliche—the uncanny, but literally, the un-home-like.
death. There even appears to be a suggestion, purposefully oblique, that Baudelaire’s death was itself caused by a certain nostalgia. At the closing of the obituary, there is an immediacy in Gautier’s use of the demonstrative adjective in *ce lansquent*—as if to imply not just the figure from the legend, but the man he is memorializing.

In any case, if Baudelaire’s life ends, at least figuratively, under the shadow of deadly nostalgia, the beginning of his literary career coincided with the same impetus. Baudelaire’s famous voyage to the Indies was interrupted by what was deemed to be a severe case of nostalgia.\(^\text{88}\) As his ship’s captain explains in a letter to General Aupick, Baudelaire could not

\[^{88}\text{Also, in 1837, a sixteen year-old Baudelaire won the Latin verse composition contest at Louis-le-Grand—the proposed subject was “L’Exilé”—for his translation of this very story, which makes explicit what is only hinted at in the original. Baudelaire’s composition concludes:}\]

\[
\text{Parva sed ingentis restant solatia casus,}
\]
\[
\text{Quod circum patriam vecti notumque per amnem}
\]
\[
\text{Obscurosque procul colles dilectaque patrum}
\]
\[
\text{Ejecti castella vident, auraque fruuntur}
\]
\[
\text{Quae forsan patriis flores libavit in hortis}
\]
\[
(I, 230-231).
\]

Chateaubriand’s “consolation” is simply the possibility of “respire un air qui avait passé sur son pays. The distinctly Edenic turn at the end of Baudelaire’s translation is entirely his own invention, and the *lycée* Baudelaire is perhaps a little too eager for his addition to resonate at the poem’s close. His homesick exile is on the outside of the enclosure looking back, hoping to smell the flowers that bloom *in the garden*.\]
safely continue the journey that had been intended to reform him:

    Je craignis qu’il ne fût atteint de la Nostalgie, maladie cruelle dont j’ai vu des
    effets terribles dans mes voyages, et dont les conséquences qui pouvaient être
    funestes pour lui auraient laissé sur ma responsabilités un poids que j’aurais
    garde le reste de ma vie.

    14 October 1841, Captain Saur, Letter to General Aupick

This episode, diagnosis included, is repeated nearly verbatim by Mme Aupick shortly after her son’s death.

    But my intention is not to diagnose the poet with a lifelong case of chronic nostalgia. I instead hope to demonstrate that he, along with Gautier, engaged in a sustained discussion about and improvisation on nostalgia, an improvisation borne out as much in the subtleties of revisions as it is in the words of some his grandest poems, including “Le Cygne” and “L’Invitation au voyage.” The invocations of nostalgia, often a paradoxical “strange nostalgia” prove difficult to define, demonstrating a hesitation about the meaning of the word ‘nostalgia’ and an anxious tendency to return to and refine the concept the word describes, in a way that resembles so much of the lexical tinkering throughout the history of nostalgia.

    This innovation occurs at a critical point in nostalgia’s shift in usage. Up to this point, nostalgia had always outwardly described a relationship to place, even if doubts existed about the true interests of the nostalgic’s longing. Likewise, the concept belonged solidly in the purview of medicine, with literature entering in only through the back door of exemplary evidence. By the 1870s however, medical nostalgia and reports of its devastation in the military were being relegated to an “autrefois.” If dictionaries still advanced the view that one could die
of nostalgia, doctors were attributing fewer and fewer deaths to the condition, leading Louis-Jacques-Elie Mesnier to refer to nostalgia as “Une cause de suicide qui, ne nos jours, a perdu beaucoup de son influence, mais qui faisait autrefois de nombreuses victimes dans l'armée, a été signalée par tous les auteurs” (90).

Along the same lines, the nostalgia diagnosis Baudelaire was given on his Indian Ocean voyage operates on a different axis from Gautier’s warning to the readers of the prose poems. In the former case, it was the drive, dating back to the thesis of 1688 and persisting through the medical crisis of the Napoleonic wars, to recover the familiar. Later on for Gautier however, it is the uncanny experience of words “bizarrement choisis et placés” that points to a world of artifacts “pourtants amis” that moves nostalgia. The shift towards describing nostalgia as a yearning for something more abstract than mere homesickness seems to be complete.

I argue that Baudelaire and Gautier were instrumental in this shift. Their figurative, often oxymoronic uses of nostalgia operate on the level of poetic innovation. When Barbey d’Aurevilly published Une Vieille Maîtresse in 1851, the idea of temporal nostalgia still required an explanation that the concept was being applied in an unusual way. This happens when the author references “cette nostalgie du temps, comme le mal du pays est la nostalgie de l'espace” (513, emphasis mine). But through the reworking of theories of nostalgia by the two poets, the abstracted idea of nostalgia began to find a broader audience. The Goncourts recount a moment in August 1862, in which Gautier offers a clever exposition of his novel formulation. “Nous sommes pleins de nostalgie” he tells their mutual friend Claudin, “à la nostalgie d'un pays, on joint la nostalgie d'un temps, comme vous du 18e siècle par exemple, comme moi de
The question will remain, however, of what would be gained through the two poets’ interest in the idea of a strange nostalgia? Why employ a tactic of figurative language as indirect as the oxymoronic homesickness for unknown lands? This is especially important considering the terms at their disposal—*spleen, ennui, mélancolie* must have proved insufficient in order for this circuitous route to prove worthwhile. What becomes clear is that Baudelaire kept coming back to the idea, the particular formulation of “strange nostalgia,” adding the idea, for example, to the “Invitation au voyage,” and refining his phrasing to make the point more clearly. He does so in a sustained way from 1859 to 1862, during the period Richard D.E. Burton has convincingly argued to be Baudelaire’s most productive. This is also the moment of what Barbara Johnson has called the “second Baudelairean revolution”—namely, the turn to a strange and “miraculous” poetry in prose. The chronology and content of this innovation will prompt me consider Baudelaire’s most radical innovation as a profoundly nostalgic one.

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89 Or we could consider this accouter further on: “Gautier ajoute: ‘les deux vraies cordes de mon oeuvre, les deux vraies grandes notes sont la bouffonnerie et la mélancolie noire,- un emmerdement de mon temps, qui m’a fait chercher une espèce de dépaysement. - Oui, lui disons-nous, vous avez la nostalgie de l’obélisque! [the title of one of Gautier’s best-known poems] - C’est cela!” (I, 1359).
Toussenel and Celestial Nostalgia

Following the traces of the *Wunderhorn* and Heine, a series of references to otherworldly nostalgia emerge from German writers. Gautier, in addition to the aforementioned paraphrase of Heine, also cites art historian Jean Paul Friedrich Richter’s comment that “la musique est la nostalgie de l’âme” in his 1848 salon.

Similar maxims would have made their way to Gautier and Baudelaire through Alphonse Toussenel, an anti-Semitic disciple of Fourier known personally to both poets. Toussenel, largely forgotten today, achieved all the markers of a borderline literary celebrity. His works received nearly immediate translation, were anthologized alongside Hugo and Lamartine, and his image earned a memorial in his home town as well as a caricature by. His *Ornithologie Passionnelle*, a massive three-volume project on bird analogies was the most poetic of his deeply idiosyncratic works. Gautier calls him “le poète lyrique de la zoologie passionnelle” (Nature 137) And Baudelaire took the (for him) extraordinary step of writing Toussenel to praise his birds volume and to thank him for sending it.\(^\text{90}\) Here, Baudelaire identifies “des accents philosophiques irrésistibles” in the work of a writer of whom he can declare “ce qui est positif, c’est que vous êtes poète” (336)

Baudelaire’s letter turns to a critique of Fourier, to whom the superior writer Toussenel assigns needless deference, and a defense on Baudelaire’s part of Joseph de Maistre. This discussion ends at a point that hardly aligned with Toussenel’s fourieriste sensibilities, with

\(^{90}\) As he writes in the same letter, “Il y a bien longtemps que je rejette presque tous les livres avec dégoût.” This is mostly born out in the lack of correspondence of this kind.
Baudelaire affirming the importance of original sin (even for birds) and dismissing as “Pur quichottisme” the idea of progress (Qu’est-ce que le Progrès indéfini! qu’est-ce qu’une société qui n’est pas aristocratique!” 337). But for all this, Baudelaire’s admiration for Toussenel appears entirely sincere. Firstly, as Felix Leakey notes, there is the matter of Toussenel’s excited style, characterized by “enthusiasm and naivety, an exuberantly digressive eloquence [and] a blunt frankness which suffice to justify the no doubt genuine admiration expressed by Baudelaire” (221n5). More importantly, Toussenel’s particular attention to the details of animal emotional life point to a way of deciphering that also appealed to Baudelaire. The poet cites two passages in his letter to Toussenel. The first comes in the chapter on swans—and I will return to this in a discussion of “Le Cygne”—goes to this way of reading, in which “chaque animal est un sphinx qui présente à deviner son énigme, et le vrai savant est l’Œdipe qui déchiffre le mieux ces rebus” (III, 370).

The *Ornithologie Passionnelle* veers into social critique, literary and natural histories and advances a stark and often unsettling racial theory. But it is at all times a utopian plea for Fourierist harmony generally and for this harmony to be brought to the world through the means of *female power* specifically. As is noted by two of Toussenel’s few modern readers, Maurice Samuels and Loïc Rignol, the book’s complex web of hierarchies and correspondences is structured along sex lines. He writes that “Le règne de l’homme, créature inférieure, est le règne de la force brutale, de la contrainte, de l’imposture et des vieux, le règne de Satan. Il coïncide fatalement dans l’histoire de l’humanité avec la phase d’enfance, âge des folles terreurs et des superstitions.” On the other side, Toussenel describes a hypothetical “règne de la femme” in which universal harmony can structure the utopia to come. A société guided by
the “créature supérieure” is/will be “la phase d'apogée ou de plein développement de l'espèce humaine.”

In order to achieve this “plein développement de l'espèce humaine,” Toussenel turns to love, specifically love of the female—and the valorized (therefore feminine) species of birds are instructive human society. Love is the source of utopic harmony because, in the tradition of Plato’s Aristophanes, love harkens back to and is “le souvenir de l'unité primordiale de l'être. L'amour est à la fois souvenir et tendance.” And so it will be a woman, one with a kind of birdlike perspective, who is able to best see the eternal nature of love. “C'est une femme qui a dû penser, en levant ses doux regards bleus vers les nuages, que l'amour était la nostalgie de la patrie céleste.” This “nostalgie de la patrie céleste” would be the most poetic listing of nostalgia in the Larousse 1874 dictionary but obviously caught the attention first of Gautier, who would employ a similar turn of phrase, directly making the often-implicit connection between the fulfillment of nostalgia and death in his Jettatura: “On eût dit un ange retenu sur terre et ayant la nostalgie du ciel” (139). What this amounts to is the circulation about a celestial or eternal nostalgia that will constitute one half of the picture Baudelaire and Gautier will ultimately seize upon. What will become equally important is the sense, explored by Gautier, is that of a strange and impossible memory that weighs heavily on one’s mind as a particular but seductive form of satisfaction.

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91 Also later Freud: “Liebe ist Heimweh”

92 Which cites its slightly erroneously
One particular formulation for the kind of otherworldly nostalgia Gautier has been tinkering with does emerge—d’étrange(s) nostalgie(s) de patries inconnues. This turn of phrase captures both the unique, uncanny elements he seeks to identify in Baudelaire’s ability to use “un mot — un seul — bizarrement choisi et placé” to dazzle and estrange his readers, as well as the oxymoronic quality of the “unknown homeland.” In the first instance the phrase is used in Gautier’s 1844 “Critique d’Ingres”, there is a sense of foreboding nearly identical to his warning to readers of Baudelaire’s prose poetry. He describes the depicted odalisque in the following way:

[Elle] est agenouillée près de la favorite blanche et lui joue sur le tchéhégour quelques-unes de ces mélodies sauvages et bizarres qui endorment la douleur comme un chant de nourrice, à moins toutefois qu'elles n'inspirent d'étranges nostalgies de patries inconnues (Beaux-Arts 160)

Gautier more or less recycles the phrase in his Salon de 1848, identifying the association he sees in Ingres with the paintings of another orientalist, Félix Haffner:

M. Haffner a bien compris ces prunelles noires qu'attriste la nostalgie d'une patrie inconnue, cette peau dorée par un autre soleil, et cette misère que relève cependant la liberté, le premier des biens! (57)

The soothing capacity of the “chant de nourrice”—which recalls the early medical writings on nostalgia—also belies a certain experience of seduction, nostalgia that draws away from, rather than towards, the familiar. When seen in the context of the pull of the “nostalgie du ciel” at play in the death scene in La Jetattura, the effect is otherworldly nostalgia for, to use a phrase
Baudelaire would borrow from another image of a dying woman, “anywhere out of the world.”

It is important to note as well that Gautier’s phrase comes twice in the context of painting. While he would later associate the experience of strange nostalgia with Baudelaire, he twice identifies it with the exotic works of Ingres and Haffner. It seems reasonable to assume that Baudelaire would have revisited Gautier’s earlier text on Ingres as a way of picking back up the debate on pitting Ingres against Delacroix (and consequently Fromentin). In Fromentin’s works Baudelaire identifies an ability of the painter to locate “l’infini dans le fini” (II, 1397). He describes an otherworldly pull he feels upon seeing the painting, explaining “je suis moi-même atteint quelque peu d’une nostalgie qui m’entraîne vers le soleil; car de ces toiles lumineuses s’élève pour moi une vapeur enivrante, qui se condense bientôt en désirs et en regrets” (II, 649-650).93

93 Parmi les jeunes célébrités, l’une des plus solidement établies est celle de M. Fromentin. Il n’est précisément ni un paysagiste ni un peintre de genre. Ces deux terrains sont trop restreints pour contenir sa large et souple fantaisie. Si je disais de lui qu’il est un conteur de voyages, je ne dirais pas assez, car il y a beaucoup de voyageurs sans poésie et sans âme, et son âme est une des plus poétiques et des plus précieuses que je connaisse. Sa peinture proprement dite, sage, puissante, bien gouvernée, procède évidemment d’Eugène Delacroix. Chez lui aussi on retrouve cette savante et naturelle intelligence de la couleur, si rare parmi nous. Mais la lumière et la chaleur, qui jettent dans quelques cerveaux une espèce de folie tropicale, les agitent d’une fureur inapaisable et les poussent à des danses inconnues, ne versent dans son âme qu’une contemplation douce et reposée. C’est l’extase plutôt que le fanatisme. Il est présumable que je suis moi-même atteint quelque peu d’une nostalgie qui m’entraîne vers le soleil ; car de ces
Baudelaire would return to this formulation during his more productive years, especially in the important period of 1859-1862. The first time Baudelaire appears to have spoken about this phenomenon occurs two years prior to his piece on the 1859 salon, although in less explicit terms. In the version of the prose “Invitation au voyage” that was published in Le Présent, 24 August 1857, he writes: “Tu connais cette maladie qui s’empare de notre esprit dans les plus dures misères, cet amour du pays qu’on ignore, cette nostalgie de la curiosité?” But an important revision is made during Baudelaire’s “productive years.” After a slightly reworked version was published in 1861, Baudelaire flips the order in a version published in La Presse, 24 September 1862. This last formulation has “cette nostalgie du pays qu’on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité” (I, 301). The new construction follows Gautier’s earlier usage and better mirrors the oxymora throughout the poem, “un revenez-y de Sumatra,” and an “Orient de l’occident” (I, 301-302). In the earlier instances, it is difficult to tell what this nostalgia is for, though it may well correspond to a desire to leave the familiar rather than to return, a reverse nostalgia driven by curiosity. In the later version, the strangeness of the nostalgia is made explicit.

By the end of 1861, Baudelaire was working on, or at least planning on working on, “Le Joueur généreux” with enough focus to be able to refer to the poem by its title, doing so in a
letter dated 20 December 1861 to Arsène Houssaye. Here too Baudelaire uses a formula nearly identical to Gautier’s, apparently having settled on a standard of strange nostalgia. And again in strange, seductive and exotic terrain, in the company of his “bon diable” he references the same paradoxical reaction:

Nous fumâmes longuement quelques cigares dont la saveur et le parfum incomparables donnaient à l’âme la nostalgie de pays et de bonheurs inconnus, et, enivré de toutes ces délices, j’osai, dans un accès de familiarité qui ne parut pas lui déplaire, m’écrier, en m’emparant d’une coupe pleine jusqu’au bord: “A votre immortelle santé, vieux Bouc!” (I, 326).

Later, in an 1863 text on Delacroix, his last essay, and one that largely repeats material printed in the 1859 salon, Baudelaire goes to the trouble of adding a reference to strange nostalgia:

Il m’est arrivé plus d’une fois en le regardant de rêver des anciens souverains du Mexique de ce Montézuma dont la main habile aux sacrifices pouvait immoler en un seul jour trois mille créatures humaines sur l’autel pyramidal du Soleil, ou bien de quelqu’un de ces princes hindous, qui dans les splendeurs des plus glorieuses fêtes, portent au fond de leurs yeux une sorte d’avidité insatisfaite et une nostalgie inexplicable quelque chose comme le souvenir et le regret de choses non connues (II, 760, emphasis mine).

In the period from 1859, when Baudelaire published the Salon, his Paradis artificiels, his most important translations of Poe and wrote “Le Cygne,” until the end of 1863, strange nostalgia was a consistent preoccupation, causing him to return to earlier texts and revise this
formulation. We have already seen that this interest, especially in the specific period of time, is of importance to the historical development of ideas about nostalgia, and that Baudelaire’s and Gautier’s improvisations on the subject coincide with the final shift of nostalgia away from the domain of medicine and into the realm of poetry and painting. The interest in strange nostalgia is also of critical importance to Baudelaire’s poetry. A substantial amount of writing has addressed the “flattening” of time that emerges in the later poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, namely those composed after the 1857 edition, and then reinforced in the prose poems. The tendency has been to couch this flattening in terms of melancholy. This is particularly clear in a passage by Ross Chambers directly opposing melancholy to nostalgia:

> For a modern to regret the past as having been crucially different from and preferable to the present is to fall victim, therefore, to a form of illusion, specifically the form of self-deceit known as nostalgia. A truly modern consciousness – one that has been jolted into a diagnostic disposition by experiencing the shock of the new – is one for which nostalgia is made impossible by the knowledge that no essential difference separates past from present even though a crucial change has taken place. The alienations of the present existed also in the past, albeit under a different historical form. Baudelaire’s word for such diagnostic lucidity will be, not nostalgia therefore, but melancholia (107).

Perhaps not in the form of self-deceit, but I will argue that the poetic consciousness on display in the later poems of the *Fleurs du mal* and especially in the prose poems, depends very much on an idea of a functionally different primal past. This idea, perhaps a fantasy, and one
Baudelaire may himself consider impossible does indeed posit a prior unity that requires a “miracle” to reemerge. This is the precise point of fusion between the strange nostalgia I describe in this chapter and the poet’s “rêve” of a poetry in prose.

Sliding Strata

“Le Cygne”—with three versions from 1859 and 1861, serves as a crucial touchstone to Baudelaire’s consideration of nostalgia, both chronologically and philosophically, designated by Burton as the “culmination” of Baudelaire’s productive 1859. The picture of exile in “Le Cygne” first recalls Kant’s argument from the anthropology that nostalgia for a place is always inscribed onto a particular time. Here, the place in question, “ce camp de baraques, / Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts” (I, 86) of the old Carrousel has been displaced, while the nostalgic himself is free to return, though fruitlessly, to its former site. Past and present experiences of a single location are simultaneously overlaid, like the “stratified” (Burton) layers of old and new Paris. These strata slide in and out of the consciousness put on display in the text. The opening “Andromache, je pense à vous” is echoed in the second part of the poem. “Je pense à la nègresse, amaigrie et phtisique / Piétinant dans la boue, et cherchant, l’oeil hagard, / Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique” (I, 86). The absent African landscape serves as the absolutely exotic elsewhere—but the “cocotiers absents” find their own echo a few lines later in the “fôret ou mon esprit s’exile.” The “Simoïs menteur” overlays the Seine, otherwise absent from the poem, but just as much a part of the scene as the swan’s “beau lac natal.” There is also a doubling of colonial displacement and European nostalgia in the figure of the nègresse à
l’œil hagard in a way that reflects, for example, Hyacinthe Musset’s “Couramé” and Nerval’s Aurélia.

At the center of these strata is the feeling of stasis encapsulated in the “Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie / N’a bougé!” Aside from the two “Paris change,” the only actions rendered in the present tense are the repeated instances of “Je pense,” as well as “Je ne vois qu’un esprit” and “Un vieux Souvenir sonne,” which is to say that the only drama of the poem consists of thoughts. The other verbs are participles, ouvrant, tendant, piétinant, as though locked in time in the speaker’s memory, dumbly and mechanically repeated by the animal. These “mnemonic deposits of images [...] begin to reveal in this palimpsestic dogma that life is exile and suffering” (Babuts 95-96), and do so in such a way that the primary action of the poem is further elaboration of a general theme of which there are a seemingly unlimited number of examples. The instability of these sliding strata, each of which carries its own image of exile, points in turn to exile itself. Babuts sees this repetition, even redundancy, as reinforcing the power of exile, such that, “from the narrator’s perspective, the present field and the past are intersecting at the point of allegory [...] Exile is now the land where and artificial, and empty tomb [...] everything is a lost harmony calculated to revive and tease the consciousness of loss” (101).

The Absent Swan

But for all its jumps and sudden associations, “Le Cygne” is driven by a central image, the swan, “évadé de sa cage.” Structurally, this is accomplished by a certain amount of foreshadowing in the preceding lines. Babuts argues that the entire opening stanza is meant to
prepare the reader for the eventual appearance of the swan, whose place in the poem is (at least structurally) central. Andromache is doubled in the swan, and in a way so is the old Carrousel. Another “buried” place was the former ‘île des cygnes,’ an island in the Seine formerly used for manufacturing but joined to the mainland earlier in the century. Hugo depicts it, in *Les Misérables*, as home to the same urban grimness as was associated with the old Carrousel district.94

The Island, currently the attached at the Quai de Branly, would be close enough to the scene depicted in the poem that, even if it were out of sight, one could at least imagine seeing it, which is true to the mode of remembrance throughout the poem. Adding further to the swan’s importance is a particular emphasis made in his letter to Hugo dated 7 December 1859. Baudelaire, having recently expressed concern for Hugo’s vulnerability to “des regrets et des nostalgies” now compares to the exiled writer to another swan. He describes the capacity of this particular observed scene to inspire broader sympathetic reflection, explaining to Hugo how “la vue d’un animal souffrant pousse l’esprit vers tous les êtres que nous aimons, qui sont absents et qui souffrent, vers tous ceux qui sont privés de quelque chose d’irrétrouvable” (*C I*, 623). This echoes what has already been said about exile in the poem: exile everywhere, homesick for anywhere.

In the letter to Hugo, as in the poem, the expansion of the symbol toward the abstract and the nearly infinite serves as the emotional structure of the running train of thought. The...
particular sight of the suffering animal signals all those we know—not only people but all êtres—and the absents signal in turn a universally absent quelque chose d’irretrouvable. Indeed, this absence is represented in very intricate ways. The swan longs for its “beau lac natal”—bypassing the previously mentioned cage, thereby preferring the original, primal origin to its more immediate home. Baudelaire creates an axis dividing the cage and the “poudre” of the previous line on one side, and the other both the “lac natal” and imagined request from the swan for rain. “Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu? Quand tonneras-tu foudre?”—the swan’s desire goes to the heavens, “Comme s’il addressait des reproches à Dieu!” This bit of dialogue is disjointed from their imaged recipient (comme si), but also from their supposed origin. The causal link to the swan (“Et disait”), already given in the imperfect, is complicated further by the mechanical image expressed in the strangely symmetrical construction “la bête ouvrant le bec.” And the comparison made to “reproches à Dieu” is played out in the same progressive aspect, without a direct relation to the quoted questions or to any suggestion of sound, “son cou convulsif tendant sa tête avide.” The coupling of ouvrant/tendant underscores the separation from the swan and questions the poem associates with it, creating a disembodied, machine-like, voice-over effect.  

95 Again, there is a comparison to be made to Freud’s text on the uncanny. He cites approvingly the following insight from Ernst Jentsch, very much applicable here: “In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton, and to do it in such a way that his attention is not focused directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately” (227).
This type of floating question that emanates from an inanimate or non-human source finds an echo in Baudelaire’s thoughts about nostalgia. In the *Fusées* documents, he references “ces robustes navires, à l’air désœuvré et nostalgique, ne nous disent-ils pas dans une langue muette: Quand partons-nous pour le bonheur?” (I, 655). This reflection is repeated, nearly verbatim, in the *Paradis artificiels*. The emotions and the question are the same, but its origin is shifted: “ces beaux navires balancés par les eaux de la rade dans un désœuvrement nostalgique, et qui ont l’air de traduire notre pensée: quand partons-nous pour le bonheur?” This refinement creates the effect of a voice emanating from a middle position between the speaking object and the poet, not unlike the phenomenon Gautier describes in his obituary as “un chœur mystérieux d’idées évanouies, murmurer à mi-voix parmi les fantômes des choses” (emphasis mine).

The origin of the *quand partons-nous pour le bonheur?* takes on particular importance in

96 I have wondered if this reflection might have been inspired by the famous scene in at the Chesapeake Bay in Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative*, published in 1845 and translated into French in 1848. Baudelaire had no shortage sailboats to inspire him in Honfleur, so the similarity is probably a coincidence. Still, I cite from the French translation: “Ces beaux navires avec leurs ailes d’un blanc pur, ces objets de l’admiration des hommes libres, étaient pour moi comme des revenants, enveloppés de linceuls funèbres, qui étaient venus exprès pour me tourmenter et pour m’effrayer, en éveillant en moi mille réflexions sur ma misérable destinée. Souvent dans la profonde tranquillité d’un dimanche d’été, je suis resté seul sur les hautes rives de cette majestueuse baie; et j’ai suivi avec un cœur triste et les yeux pleins de larmes la multitude innombrable de voiles qui fuyaient vers le vaste ocean” (106-107).
the case of the voice of the swan. According to classical legend, swans only sing at the moment of death—hence the famous “swan song” (referenced in Ovid, among others). More recently, Toussenel had given the topic lengthy treatment, in his work well known to Baudelaire.\(^97\) Toussenel’s primarily considers the legendary death song in terms of zoological truth, mostly disputing the Greek notion (III, 331-332). But this doubt only lends further ambiguity to the picture. We see the swan’s beak opening, the bird straining as though to communicate, we are able to read the content of its would-be song, but there is no way, no moment, to connect the two elements of the act of vocalization. The swan appears caught between intoning its song of death—surely this is the “mythe étrange et fatale”—and is therefore in an indeterminate state of living or dying. The question lingers in suspension, waiting for the final blow—“Quand tonneras-tu foudre?”\(^98\)

Projected return in “Le Cygne,” in an absolute and abstract sense, is a preoccupation of

\(^97\) This is just a coincidence, but Toussenel employes the same animalistic metaphor to describe the swan’s silence that Baudelaire will use to describe his inability to speak in the year leading up to his death. Both “jettent leur langue aux chiens”

\(^98\) “A une passante,” composed more or less concurrently to “Le cygne,” its partner in the “Tableaux parisiens,” carries some of the same reverberations. The juxtaposition of the thunderclap—“Un éclair—puis la nuit”—and the final line create a parallel movement toward destruction and unity. The question posed in “A une passante” hinges on the projection of reunion and/or return: “Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l’éternité?” Reunion will only take place in death.
the poem in the same way exile is. This is to say that the “palimpsestic dogma” identified by Babuts drives a parallel impulse to repeatedly attempt a homecoming, to wherever or whenever one feels exiled from. The poem doubles back in a way that reflects a simultaneously static and restless thought-process. On one side of this process is the frenetic shifting of images and allegories. But on the other, one cannot escape the function of refrain represented by the assertion, “une image m’opprime.” The “oppressive” image of the swan, then back to Andromache. La négresse is introduced, then again to the “vieux Souvenir,” piercing the train of thought with its piercing horn blow. Then, again, Baudelaire inserts a seemingly rushed and wholly underdeveloped mention of “Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île, / Aux captifs, aux vaincus!...” This dangling addition, to which I will return later on, is especially noteworthy given the fact that Baudelaire’s own episode of nostalgia caused him to be “oublié dans une île.” But the mention appears to be, within the poem, simply another superfluous grasp at the ideas he has already expressed.99

99 For Hartmut Stenzel, the swan (doubled in Baudelaire and Toussenel) points to a direct division between the two perspectives. Which is to say that the swan permits a direct dialogue that will prove very consequential. For Toussenel, according to Stenzel, the swan represents “toutes les aspirations vers ce Bonheur terrestre qui aurait dû se réaliser par la création de la société phalanstérienne,” whereas for Baudelaire it functions as the figure of “la recherché de l’harmonie perdue.” This has the effect, according to Stenzel, of demonstrating that Baudelaire “semble rentir l’idée fouriériste de la représentation analogique des passions et aspirations humaines dans le domaine de la nature [...] mais il repousse l’optimisme qui y voit la preuve d’une harmonie pré-établie qui ne tardera pas à se réaliser” (12).
In spatial terms, this is not the terrain of the *flâneur*. The constituent elements are Stenzel’s astute assessment of Baudelaire and Toussenel may actually understate the utopian fervor contained the swan represents for the latter. Within the universive of *L’Esprit des bêtes*, it stands as a singly messianic figure of a coming harmony, who will itself exercise a practical role within a new order of health and peace. The swan will become for Toussenel an “Édile” or *aedile*, a status of Roman urban administrator whose coming will signal the beginning of the installation of the new utopia of health, cleanliness and love (III, 326). Toussenel is quite clear in fact about the prophetic nature of his vision, as he writes of the swan:

En l’an d’iniquité 1415 quand les évêques du concile de Constance firent brûler Jean Huss au mépris de la foi jurée la victime en montant au bûcher fit entendre à ses bourreaux cette parole prophétique. ‘L’innocent que vous allez mettre à mort n’est que l’Oie de la Réforme mais dans cent ans d’ici viendra le Cygne qui tuera l’imposture et vous fera expier tous vos crimes.’ Cent ans après le martyre de Jean Huss vint en effet Luther qui fit beaucoup de mal à l’Église catholique (III, 328, emphasis mine).

This is in large part the kind of claim that leads Baudelaire to describe Toussenel, in his Fourierist fervor, as “un vrai esprit égaré dans une secte” (336). But a close examination of the links between Toussenel’s text makes it possible to see in “Le Cygne” a critical response on the part of Baudelaire. In fact, it becomes clear that in the letter to Toussenel, “Le Cygne” and other later texts that the poet also seizes on the broad and deeply grounded claims of Toussenel’s logic, which, following from Fourier, describe a new and comprehensive epistemological framework intended to configure a future political and social state.
stacked vertically. There is nowhere to amble, no *passante* to cut through the scene and intrude into the mental space of the poem. The condition of nostalgia had always required a sense of motion. In the most obvious and original way, it took the form of displacement, longing brought about by the separation from one’s homeland. But by the end of Baudelaire’s career, Gautier would be able to identify a similar feeling of separation *that required no actual physical, or even temporal, distance*. The reading of a static composition—and as I will discuss Baudelaire’s poems become increasingly static in his later works—could now “raviver les souvenirs d’existences antérieures et lointaines.”

*Stasis and timelessness: Staging the Composition of a Poem*

Hiddleson argues that the “lyricism in *Les Fleurs du mal* points to another order of things, a vision of oneness where contradiction is overcome, where time and separation no longer prevail.” The prose poems, on the other hand, are “at the opposite pole, describing an ‘ecstasy’ before the irrational in which mere juxtaposition has shaped and paralyzed into a scene of internal stasis and timelessness” (97). But this transition is already well underway in “Le Cygne.” The actions of the poem are static or repeated to the point of barely being actions, and are instead thoughts or impressions inscribed on a perpetual present. Andromache serves to introduce the swan. The swan in turn, however central to the poem, however oppressive to the poet’s thoughts, simply slides back to Andromache—“et puis à vous.” If everything has become allegory, nothing transcends. This incessant circling back, the feeling of the poem’s inability to progress forward, even from one image to the next, creates the impression of a
work in progress. Burton writes that (155) the poem “foregrounds its own genesis,” i.e., frames its sudden and shifting jumps in consciousness in terms of the craft of composition.

Baudelaire had in fact, in a different role, recently presented a poem in a concurrent staging with its composition. In the 20 April 1859 *Revue Française*, Baudelaire published a piece entitled “La Genèse d’un poème,” a collated translation of both Poe’s “The Raven” and “Philosophy of Composition.” The poem and essay are given a collective (and new) title, with periodic interventions by Baudelaire. This edition sets forth the themes of “genesis, gestation and birth” that are, according to Burton, “central to Baudelaire’s preoccupations in 1859” a year he sees culminating in “Le Cygne.” For Baudelaire, these generative themes aim toward a predetermined endpoint. “Tout, dans un poëme comme dans un roman, dans un sonnet comme dans une nouvelle, doit concourir au dénouement,” explains Poe, in a central maxim chosen by the translator, “Un bon auteur a déjà sa dernière ligne en vue quand il écrit la première” (*Histoires Grotesques* 335). Baudelaire goes on to explain, in his own commentary, that “Grâce à cette admirable méthode, le compositeur peut commencer son œuvre par la fin, et travailler, quand il lui plaît, à n’importe quelle partie” (335). The discussion of composition likewise gives the translator the occasion to remind his readers of the value of (his) compositional efforts, the kind of work we have seen him putting into the choices and order of individual words:

Les amateurs du délire seront peut-être révoltés par ces cyniques maxims; mais chacun en peu prendre ce qu’il voudra. Il sera toujours utile de leur montrer quels benefices

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100 Burton also compares the two works in a different fashion, casting “Le Cygne” as “both text and metatext, ‘Raven’ and ‘Philosophy of Composition’ combined” (155).
l’art peut tirer de la délibération, et de faire voire aux gens du monde quell labeur exige
cet objet de luxe qu’on nomme Poésie.

We have seen this to be the case for Baudelaire’s poems, and he in turn considers “The Raven”
to be a “poème singulier entre tous” for many essentially the same reason. Encompassing the
uneasy and uncanny duality of stasis and repetition, “Il roule sur un mot mystérieux et
profound, terrible comme l’infini, que des milliers de bouches crispées ont répété depuis le
commencement des ages, et qie par une triviale habitude de désépoir plus d’un rêveur a écrit
sur le coin de sa table essayer sa plume: Jamais plus” (336).\(^{101}\)

This theory as presented by Baudelaire is not simply a matter of compositional
technique. It also constitutes the drama of “La Genèse.” He offers the invitation to test the
practice, channeling “le lecteur qui murmure comme Alceste: ‘Nous verrons bien!’” before the
announcement, “Voici donc le poème” (337). The allusion to Molière’s Misanthrope builds into
an extended theatrical metaphor as Baudelaire introduces the translation of Poe’s essay:
“Maintenant, voyons la coulisse, l’atelier, le laboratoire, le mécanisme intérieur, selon qu’il
vous plaira de qualifier la Méthode de composition” (344). Accordingly, Baudelaire goes on to
follow his translation of “The Raven” with Poe’s narrative of the poem’s composition, which
ends by citing its final stanza. This has the strange effect of twice repeating the poem’s

\(^{101}\) Or as he writes in Notes nouvelles sur Poe: “Quand un poème exquis amène les larmes au
bord des yeux, ces larmes ne sont pas la preuve d’un excès de jouissance, elles sont bien plutôt
le témoignage d’une mélancolie irritée, d’une postulation des nerfs, d’une nature exilée dans
l’imparfait et qui voudrait s’emparer immédiatement, sur cette terre même, d’un paradis révélé”
(II, 334, emphasis mine).
ending—the final “nevermore” is given an encore. The gesture is especially interesting in light on Poe’s thoughts on composition, and, as I will argue, Baudelaire’s own poetry.

Poe’s original text purports to definitively explain how “The Raven” was written. But the essay is idiosyncratic and often ironic, peppered with excited and sometimes dubious mechanical and theatrical language. His technical focus is double: both the author’s craft, with an emphasis on work and composition, and the internal mechanisms within the poem itself:

Most writers - poets in especial - prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy - an ecstatic intuition - and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought - at the true purposes seized only at the last moment - at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view - at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable - at the cautious selections and rejections - at the painful erasures and interpolations - in a word, at the wheels and pinions - the tackle for scene-shifting - the step-ladders, and demon-traps - the cock’s feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio (1374).

Poe will go on to detail the factors operating behind “the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought” whose “true purposes seized only at the last moment.” So of course he must account for the effect produced by the poem’s famous “nevermore.” Having concluded that “Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones,” Poe recounts his process for achieving the poem’s somber effect:
I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem - some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects - or more properly points, in the theatrical sense - I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the refrain. \[102\] [...] The question now arose as to the character of the word. Having made up my mind to a refrain, the division of the poem into stanzas was of course a corollary, the refrain forming the close to each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt, and these considerations inevitably led me to the long o as the most sonorous vowel in connection with r as the most producible consonant (1377-1378).

Poe goes on to elaborate his process of choosing “a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had pre-determined as the tone of the poem.” “[I]t would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word ‘Nevermore,’” he relates, “In fact it was the very first which presented itself” (1378). Such a magically coincidental process is the kind of bluff on Poe’s part that prompts Baudelaire to

\[102\] From the *OED* entry on “Point”: A gesture, vocal inflection, or some other piece of theatrical technique used to underline a climactic moment in a speech, role, or situation; a moment so underlined.
remark that “un peu de charlatanerie est toujours permis au genie” (335). But the demand that “a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis,” specifically by leaning on the ‘o’ and ‘r’ sounds does prompt a return to the closure of “Le Cygne.”

Ainsi dans la forêt où mon esprit s’exile

Un vieux Souvenir sonne à plein souffle du cor! \(^{103}\)

Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île,

Aux captifs, aux vaincus!... à bien d’autres encor! (I, 87)

Baudelaire, who laments in “La Genèse d’un poème” that it is “impossible de donner [au lecteur] une idée exacte de la sonorité profonde et lugubre” (336) of “The Raven” finds a way, a few months after the translation is published, to make use of Poe’s phonological theory in the cor/encore! rhyme. Giorgio Agamben notes the practical tendency to or inevitability of the particularly hurried way of ending poems at play in Baudelaire’s later work in general and “Le Cygne,” in particular (End of the Poem 113). The poem, which he otherwise calls “such a tight and heroic composition” ends in a sudden, cheap exclamation.

But the fact that the end of “Le Cygne” makes use of Poe’s emphasis on the o-r sonority of his refrain complicates this reading somewhat. We see a similar phenomenon in the middle of “Le Voyage”: “Et puis, et puis encore?” published 10 April 1859, just after “La Genèse d’un poème.” The line is set apart in its own numbered section, which makes its impact particularly ponderous. Agamben’s observation comes out of the fact that the final line of a poem cannot be verse since enjambment, the source of the famous “hesitation” between sound and sense, is no longer possible. “Hence the cheap and often abject quality of the end of the poem,” he

\(^{103}\) Like the cor des Alpes that caused nostalgia.
writes. “Proust once observed, with reference to the last poems of *Les Fleurs du mal*, that the poem seems to be suddenly ruined and to lose its breath (“it stops short,” he writes, “almost falls flat...despite everything, it seems something has been shortened, is out of breath” [*Il semble malgré tout qu’il y ait là quelque chose d’écourté, un manque de soufflé*]). Proust and Agamben both take “Le Cygne” as a particularly pertinent and surprising example.

If the ending of “Le Cygne” is a forceful “close,” it is also a call for an encore. The hurried final reference to the sailors, the repeated images and the repetitive actions give the poem a circular quality, as if to suggest the final “encor!” as an invitation to begin the poem again from the beginning, perhaps even with the expectation that the final references will be elaborated in subsequent readings. In other words, if “Le Cygne” foregrounds its own composition, it does so in a way that still conveys a sense of incompleteness. If the ending of the poem seems so fragmentary, as Proust, Agamben and Benjamin suggest, do the final lines constitute an *end*? Or is it merely a refrain?

“*Ni Queue ni Tête*”: Ending with the Refrain

Such an understanding of the closure of “Le Cygne” and Baudelaire’s later verse

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104 See Proust, “À propos de Baudelaire” (*Essais et Articles* 322-324). The comment cited by Agamben refers to the final line of “Le Cygne.” Another particularly pertinent insight on the poem and Baudelaire’s voyage interrupted by nostalgia: “Même derrière la muraille immense du brouillard il faisait évoquer par sa négresse les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique. Mais cette nature, on dirait qu’il ne l'a vue que du bateau.”
generally, is critical to the turn he makes to prose poetry. Baudelaire’s own account of this evolution will allow this radical questioning of the end of a poem to find serious grounding. He writes in his explicatory letter on the prose poems:

Mon cher ami, je vous envoie un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas dire, sans injustice, qu’il n’a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement (I, 275).

It is easy enough to see echoes of Poe’s theory of composition. But it is already clear in this first sentence that Baudelaire is looking to go much farther than Poe. This is not simply a matter of “commencer son oeuvre par la fin” but rather an invocation to do away with the idea of beginnings and ends. Moreover, this monstrous creation “à la fois tête et queue” is not merely a discussion of composition but serves as a guide for the reader as well. “Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture,” he explains, “Car je ne suspends pas la volonté rétive de celui-ci au fil interminable d’une intrigue superfine.” He goes further, suggesting even that the pieces, however we make them, can be freely combined in apparently innumerable ways:

Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part. Dans l’espérance que quelques-uns de ces tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous plaire et vous amuser, j’ose vous dédier le serpent tout entier (I, 275).

This possibility of infinite recombination has lead one critic to recently argue that Baudelaire
was the original inventor of the hypertext.\textsuperscript{105} But more basically, the question remains: what is the unit he is describing, the \textit{tronçon} or \textit{vertèbre} that is part of this freely recombinatory whole? While Baudelaire does suggest a general thematic orientation, “la fréquentation des villes énormes,” a relation to his earlier collection and a choice of form, he is addressing at the time of the letter to Houssaye a very much unfinished, even untitled work (I, 276). And Baudelaire had never been particularly concerned with producing tightly-programmed collections, but published poems repeatedly beforehand and tinkered with the order of poems in various editions he proposed. It seems unlikely then that Baudelaire would be referring to the order of the prose poems as the “morceaux.” It may not matter if one reads “Le Joujou du pauvre” before or after “Le Gateau,” but that on its own would hardly be an extraordinary claim. Instead, the compositional unit that Baudelaire sees operating so freely must not be entire poems. Thinking back to Gautier’s remarks about the “étrange nostalgie” caused by the prose poems, it was the smaller compositional unit, the word, which held such disorienting and intoxicating power: “une phrase, un mot — un seul — bizarrement choisi et placé, évoquait

\textsuperscript{105} Julien Roger argues, “Baudelaire a donc inventé l’hypertexte, bien avant Genette ou Internet. Même si Baudelaire, glosant ensuite le titre et le sous-titre du recueil, argue de son unité thématique (“la fréquentation des villes énormes”) et rhétmatique (“prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime”), on comprendra aisément que cette épître constitue un peu plus qu’une pirouette rhétorique mais bien un contrat de lecture, où la disparité acquerrait en retour une valeur herméneutique – la diversité comme principe d’unification, ou plutôt le désordre comme principe fondateur” (84).
pour nous un monde inconnu de figures oubliées et pourtant amies.”

If the contention I am making about the poetic force of individual words to be arranged and recombined freely echoes the one that Gautier made about the effect caused by “un mot — un seul” in Baudelaire’s readers, it is important to remember that the author himself locates this possibility in the realm of miracles and dreams. This mode of possibility more than anything else characterizes the project as he describes it to Houssaye:

Quel est celui de nous qui n’a pas, dans ses jours d’ambition, rêvé le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience ? (275-276).

This miraculous dream is what Baudelaire means when he describes his project as being “bien loin de mon mystérieux et brillant modèle.” As Barbara Johnson notes, Baudelaire’s claim of failure is neither false modesty nor a sincere deprecation of the project as a whole, but a means of reinforcing the grandiosity of his project (23).

If we return then to the questions raised by the ending of “Le Cygne,” the stakes for such a poetic achievement become clearer. “The disorder of the last verse,” Agamben has argued, “is brought about by the withdrawal of the possibility of enjambment, and with it, the end of the tension between meter and meaning.” Consequently, he sees a resistance within the poem, “As if the poem as a formal structure would not and could not end, as if the possibility of the end were radically withdrawn from it, since the end would simply imply a poetic impossibility: the exact coincidence of sound and sense.” The result of this resistance is a kind of degraded verse, or maybe prose, at the poem’s final line. “At the point in which sound is
about to be ruined in the abyss of sense the poem looks for shelter in suspending its own end in a declaration, so to speak of the state of poetic emergency” (*End* 113).

There is a way of considering all prose poetry in general along these lines. The degradation of verse into prose, either in a verse poem’s final line, or in a project like Baudelaire’s, produces a form that “n’a pas toujours eu bonne presse” (Johnson 9). And this is the case in critical readings of Baudelaire’s prose poetry that dismiss it outright, or see it as a purposeful cheapening or “defiguration” of poetry. Baudelaire’s dream of poetic prose represents the fantasy of a poetry without end, or for that matter, a beginning. It harkens back to an imagined perfected unity of meaning and language, pointing to an impossible sort of return that he kept coming back to from 1859 until the end of his career. The strange nostalgia emphasis gives us cause to reconsider the question posed by Barbara Johnson: how does the prose poem come to “dire le point d’arrivée du voyage?” (113).

“*Revenir de l’Infini*”

Two prose poems form a chiasmus, taking the same journey in exactly opposite directions: the much-studied “Invitation au voyage” and the far-less studied “Déjà!.” The

106 Consider also Agamben on prose: “Only the word puts us into contact with mute things. While nature and animals are forever caught up in a language, incessantly speaking and responding to signs even while keeping silent, only man succeeds in interrupting, in the word, the infinite language of nature and placing himself for a moment in front of mute things” (*Prose* 113).
former is colored, as mentioned, by a sense of homecoming to the unfamiliar. In “Déjà!” the scene of landing is sudden—”Enfin un rivage fut signalé”—but this homecoming is met with disappointment:

En disant adieu à cette incomparable beauté, je me sentais abattu jusqu’à la mort; et c’est pourquoi, quand chacun de mes compagnons dit: “Enfin!” je ne pus crier que: “Déjà!” (I, 338).

The two prose poems present a doubled perspective on the feeling of strange nostalgia and the question of the infinite. The simpler of the two opposes this feeling of disappointment to a very familiar account of homesickness. Among the other sailors—we think back to the “matelots oubliés dans une île” and perhaps Baudelaire’s own aborted Indian ocean voyage—there is brewing discontent and an obsessive returning to familiar memories: “Il y en avait qui pensaient à leur foyer, qui regrettaient leurs femmes infidèles et maussades, et leur progéniture criarde.”

Baudelaire characterizes this remembrance of hearth and home in terms of obsession: “Tous étaient si affolés par l'image de la terre absente, qu'ils auraient, je crois, mangé de l'herbe avec plus d'enthousiasme que les bêtes.” There is a hunger—almost literally—for the “l'image de la terre absente,” necessarily a purely mental image. Eating the land of one’s absent earth, the desire to possess it internally, takes a further step than the swan and its “coeur plein de son beau lac natal.” This is opposed to the vast and infinite openness of the sea, which from the perspective of the poem offers an opposite force of seduction:

Moi seul j'étais triste, inconcevablement triste. Semblable à un prêtre à qui on arracherait sa divinité, je ne pouvais, sans une navrante amertume, me détacher de cette mer si monstrueusement séduisante, de cette mer si infiniment variée
dans son effroyable simplicité, et qui semble contenir en elle et représenter par
ses jeux, ses allures, ses colères et ses sourires, les humeurs, les agonies et les
extases de toutes les âmes qui ont vécu, qui vivent et qui vivront! (I, 338).

“[C]ette mer si infiniment variée,” with its ability to absorb “les extases de toutes les âmes qui
ont vécu, qui vivent et qui vivront!” mirrors the final expression of the prose “Invitation au
voyage.” The latter poem’s paradoxical “étrange nostalgie de pays inconnus” and “revenez-y de
Sumatra” pose the same image from the opposite side. In “Déjà” the seduction is described
from a positive position. In “L’Invitation” it is created from contraries, “à travers l’oblitération
de toute différence—spatiale, temporelle, intersubjective” as Johnson notes (113). Such
obliteration creates the effect of a space that is simultaneously infinite and inexistent zero, in
which:

Le voyage semble aboutir à une plénitude première, indifférenciée et immobile,
antérieure au mouvement au temps. Comme “l’origine” d’un espèce engendré
par deux axes se trouve là où toute variable est égale à zéro, le lieu paradisiaque
de la plénitude première ne peut-être qu’une u-topie, un lieu sans espace, un
non-lieu. Cette “langue natale”, origine de la signification, point de convergence
de la métaphore et de la métonymie, marquée le point de disparition du langage
en tant que tel (113).

The miraculous dream of the prose poems can therefore itself be described as a kind of strange
nostalgia, the ability to, along the lines of “Déjà” and “L’Invitation,” simultaneously revenir to
and from the infinite. To Johnson’s question, “Comment le texte peut-il dire le point d’arrivée du voyage, si celui-ci équivaut à une absence de texte?” we might also add the matter of depicting the “point de retour” posed by Gautier: namely, what do the prose poems cause nostalgia for? Or, are they themselves the tentative object of a still inchoate nostalgia? It seems that by invoking the dream of returning to linguistic unity and perpetual poetry, poetry that is insulated from the crisis of the end of the poem, that exists “sans queue ni tête,” Baudelaire has in fact created a new origin myth with a powerful seductive appeal, at least for him. The space of the prose poems represents the possibility of cyclical and infinite re-creation, in which “Chaque homme porte en lui sa dose d’opium naturel, incessamment sécrétée et renouvelée” (I, 302).

This is maybe the most important possibility offered by the turn to prose, and one way of understanding the transformation of sound this turn creates. As Agamben argues, this is part of a sweeping and gradual trend:

The change of the structure of song in the direction of continuous ode and antimelodic instrumentation does not, therefore, signify a musical choice. Instead it is the prelude to a radical crisis in the relation between the text and its oral performance. In this sense, Daniel’s sestina is the first move in a secular game that has that has as its extreme checkmate Mallarmé’s “Un coup de dés,” and in which what is at stake is the emancipation of the poetic text not only from song but from all oral performance in general...In other words: poetry is something graphic (End, 33).

Agamben is not alone in tracing this historical progression. But Mallarmé’s seizing upon the
turn away from melody is not the only possible take-away from Baudelaire’s innovation. While
the prose poems are “graphic” in the sense they have removed the element of orality so critical
to verse, their ordinary paragraphs are, according the formal experiment that makes “Un coup
de dés” so radical, perhaps the least graphic incarnation of poetry ever produced. Moreover,
Baudelaire’s aesthetic choice in the turn to prose is dependent on a certain fantasy that I have
outlined here. Mallarmé was an excellent student of Baudelaire’s aesthetics, but this is only half
the picture. For this reason, I want to turn to another astute reader of Baudelaire, Romain
Rolland, who saw through to the poet’s expression of cette étrange nostalgie des terres
lointaines, “ces rêves océaniques” (Jean-Christophe 836). This will serve as the inspiration for an
idea that captured most of his career, culminating in his exchange with Freud about a
“sensation océanique.” At the center of this discussion is the durability of a memory of the
eternal, as expressed as a vestigial feeling of primordial unity that Rolland sees in Baudelairean
nostalgia, and whether or not such a feeling can be translated into psychoanalysis.
By the time Gautier was writing about the dangerous and seductive experience of nostalgia brought on by the prose poems, medical discourse on the condition had all but disappeared. In 1874, August Hapsel, prompted by a call from the Académie de Médecine de Paris for a paper on nostalgia, appears to bury it once and for all. His paper is comprehensive, drawing on what was then two centuries of medical sources. But it is also primarily retrospective. In his opening remarks, Haspel notes that “en se basant sur le peu d’attention qui lui a été accordée de nos jours, et aussi sur le petit nombre des faits cliniques que l’on rencontre dans les ouvrages, on est porté à penser que cette affection est beaucoup plus rare qu’il semblerait au premier abord.” Rather than doubting the veracity of the epidemics of nostalgia seen in the military, Haspel concludes instead that the problem has been solved. He invokes Ramazzini’s formula which I discussed in the first chapter, Qui patriam quaerit mortem inventit, he who desires his homeland conjures his own death, noting that “le proverbe […] n’est, grâce à la sollicitude éclairée des médecins militaires, plus vrai aujourd’hui” (467).

Haspel offers an explanation of this diminution that in many ways inverts the logic at play in Balzac, or in the “crisis of memory” hypothesis. These perspectives emphasize enlightenment and modernity as forces that occasion nostalgia: displacement, abandonment of tradition, a weakening of social ties and a perceived increase in the speed of life. But for Haspel, it is because of this process—or rather, because the process has now been fully accomplished—that the conditions of nostalgia can no longer exist on a mass scale:

Si, depuis quelques années, la nostalgie tend à s’atténuer, à disparaître dans
l’armée, ce n’est pas seulement à la facilité, à la rapidité des communications qu’il faut attribuer cette limitation, cette atténuation de ses progrès; une foule d’autres cause ont contribué simultanément à ce résultat; ces causes sont liées intimement au mouvement universel qui a fait descendre jusque dans les profondeurs de la société la lumière et les bienfaits de la civilisation et effacé en partie la différence des mœurs locales et du langage qui la créaient souvent autrefois (emphasis mine).

This conclusion leaves the individual, isolated and increasingly rare cases of nostalgia Haspel acknowledges in an indeterminate and awkward position, however. The consideration of nostalgia as a “forgotten disease,” a starting point in nearly every study of the condition from the 1960s on, would only take three years to be articulated. The 1877 dissertation of Raoul Chenu directly targets Haspel’s focus on the dissipation of nostalgia rather than its stubborn persistence, lamenting that “l’oubli semble être depuis longtemps le partage de la nostalgie”(5). This neglect makes for a difficult situation for doctors in which nostalgia “semble vouloir se venger de l’oubli dans lequel on la laisse”: “la nostalgie se trouve encore déclassée; mais si l’élève ne la trouve pas mentionnée dans les ouvrages qui sont entre ses mains, le médecin la rencontre, comme adversaire, dans les hôpitaux, dans les casernes, dans les camps, sur les navires, dans les ateliers et même dans la vie privée, chez des personnes éloignées brusquement de leurs pays, chez des personnes éloignées brusquement de leur pays, de leurs habitudes, de leurs affections” (6).

This frustration leads Chenu to a different kind of epistemological interrogation than we have previously seen. On the one hand, there is the recent silence on nostalgia in medicine
made still stranger by how recently the idea emerged. On the other side of this picture of nostalgia as a brief, two hundred-year-long phenomenon is the fact that “les poètes et les moralistes, à toutes les époques et dans tous les pays, ont, en revanche, beaucoup écrit, beaucoup disserté sur ce sujet” (5). Which is it? Chenu’s response takes a form not so different from the approach taken by this dissertation, treating the historical epiphenomenon of medical nostalgia from Hofer to Haspel in dialogue with a longue durée consideration of nostalgia. Accordingly, he notes that the writings of the poets and moralists, “bien loin de nous apprendre quelque chose sur cet état pathologique, ont au contraire été la source de nombreuses erreurs.” But rather than dismissing them, he treats them as the subject of analysis, a new scientific effort to recuperate their medical meaning that will begin with him. He cites plenty such writers—Chateaubriand, Chênedollé, Ovid, Rabelais, Béranger’s song serves as the epigraph to his dissertation—to this end. This method allows him to turn back and ask about a pre-history of nostalgia, about nostalgia before nostalgia:

On ne trouve rien dans les écrits d’Hippocrate, ni dans ceux de Galien, qui ait rapport à la nostalgie. Cette maladie devait assurément exister, mais les médecins ont dû la confondre avec d’autres affections, telles que la mélancolie, l’hypocondrie. Même silence au moyen âge. Malgré les guerres lointaines, les migrations nombreuses qui ont signalé ces temps agités, la nostalgie semble n’avoir pas existé, et nous devons arriver jusqu’au 17e siècle pour trouver la première description de cet état morbide (9, emphasis mine).

Chenu’s novel method is enabled in part by the fact that medicine had undergone a vast transformation since even the writings on nostalgia by Alibert and his disciples in the 1830s.
Charcot had received the chair of *anatomie pathologique* in 1872, joining the *Académie* Haspel was addressing in his paper on nostalgia the next year. So while Haspel was eulogizing nostalgia, more immediate attention was being devoted the then more-pressing illness of hysteria. More broadly, science across Europe had seen a radical transformation, turning from the task of systematic characterization that was typified by the nosologies of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, toward a mission Mircea Eliade calle “the quest for origins.” In his book of the same name (his supervised French translation captures the emotional and ideological stakes of this mission, *La Nostalgie des origines*), Eliade documents the shift to the deep-time model of research that captured nearly every discipline. In archaeology, linguistics (Franz Bopp’s *Comparative Grammar* set the foundations for Indo-European theory in various installments and revisions from 1833 to 1871, and Max Müller’s 1861 *Lectures on the Science of Language*), religion (often related to language, as in Müller’s *Introduction to the Science of Religion*), evolution (*The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* in 1859 and 1871, respectively) and cellular biology (the discover of cellular division in 1855 and the development of germ theory by Pasteur and Bernard in the 1860s), the task became finding the “absolute zero” of life, language, society and institutions. These discoveries and theories spilled into art as well (Nerval, the Parnassians, Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*). The immediate results of these developments on nostalgia are mixed. On one hand, the 1874 Universal Larousse could now give a proto-Indo-European root, *nas*-. On the other, the “rupture épistémologique” (as argued by Gilles Micouin\textsuperscript{107}) that opened the way for a new

\textsuperscript{107} According to Micouin: "l’abandon d’une conception de la maladie comme un ajout, un plus, un trop. Elle devient déficit, ce qui est d’ailleurs plus compatible avec la logique de
generation of neurological criteria, may have wholly obviated the potential for further
discussion about nostalgia. In any case, Chenu’s call to lift the illness out of the “oubli” into
which it had fallen went unanswered. His would be the last medical dissertation on nostalgia.

The kind of shift announced by Haspel’s confidence that nostalgia is no longer a major
medical problem, largely confirmed by the silence following Chenu’s text, can be approached in
a variety of ways. This question has produced far more in the way of critical response in the
case of another disease that appeared to vanish from the medical register, hysteria—(until very
recently, aside from Haspel and Chenu, nostalgia has seen almost no attention in this regard). In
his *Approaching Hysteria*, Mark S. Micale provides a history of approaches to this mystery,
offering substantial insight to the current question, breaking down explanations into three
categories. First, the disappearance of hysteria could possibly be attributed to effective socio-
cultural and psychological changes, by which a “de-Victorianization” (170) removed the
conditions that had for so long caused hysteria. A second explanation asserts the success of
medicine in positively transforming the experience of ordinary people. Whereas before the end
of hysteria’s long reign in medicine, “people were relatively primitive in their psychological
processes before the 20th century and found it easy to “somaticize” their anxieties, that is, to
express emotional distress through psychogenic physical symptom formation,” after these

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l’objectivation, défaut du fonctionnement normal de l’organisme et du psychisme. Freud, des
1895, rompt avec la logique médicale de son temps et rejoint l’ancienne conception, ce qui lui
permet ensuite de considérer la maladie névrotique non seulement dans sa dimension de corps
étranger, mais aussi dans sa dimension créatrice.”
advances, “individuals have become educated about the nature and operations of the psyche [...] As a result, people have been forced to develop more nuanced and inner-directed mental mechanisms for coping with the stresses of life.” Thirdly, there is the explanation of what contemporary pathologists refer to as “diagnostic drift.” This explanation, for Micale, pinpoints “the role of semantic and conceptual paradigm shift within the history of diagnostics” and the “radical nosological and nosographical reformulations” that resulted in the “sudden changes in what doctors regarded as the clinical content of the hysteria diagnosis and how they placed the disorder in the overall system of medical classifications” (174).

All three explanations have something to recommend them to the history of nostalgia. The first two, reflected in the explanations for its diminution by Haspel and Chenu, would emphasize the various military reforms of the 1830s, for example. In the third case, we could easily draw a line between the mass nostalgia epidemics in the conscripted armies to the “war traumas” addressed by Freud in the wake of the First World War, or the post-traumatic stress cases of the present day. But complicating this heritage is the long-standing relationship between nostalgia and art, built on the murky foundation that cause such disagreement about the nature and even name of nostalgia in the first century of its existence. This foundation produced a strange tradition of hybrid literature (like the novelistic accounts of nostalgia written by doctors Alibert and Musset), emphasized the value of poetry in medical discourse (until Chenu) and resulted in a fluid meaning of a supposedly technical term, closer I argued in chapter 1 to terms like sehnsucht, toska or saudade. And unlike hysteria, which may have been either cured by societal and medical changes or replaced in scientific discourse by more accurate diagnoses, nostalgia persisted, only in the purview of poetry and culture. While the
scientific medical afterlife of nostalgia (that is, after Haspel and Chenu) is speculative, the impact of the poetic discourse on nostalgia emerges as far more concrete.

In light of this, I want to take up connection that emerged at the end of chapter 4, examining the legacy of the “strange nostalgia” written about by Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier. This legacy reemerged in the fascinating collision of two latter-day humanists, Romain Rolland and Sigmund Freud, and a discussion of nostalgia brings into light central preoccupations of both. For Rolland, at stake is a new, universal conception of religious experience. For Freud, the question will deal with a murky form of transmission that makes Rolland’s picture of transcendence, or the kind of symmetrical restoration the nostalgic longs for, permanently impossible.

*The trouble with feelings: Civilization and Its Discontents, chapter 1.*

Freud begins his study of malaise or discomfort\(^{108}\) *Unbehagen* with the discussion of the oceanic feeling, a discussion that Freud demonstrates to be quite difficult, and leading only to provisional, uncertain conclusions. The major preoccupations of the book—the widespread “strange attitude of hostility to civilization” (86) and the certain impression that “we do not feel comfortable in our present-day civilization” (88)—appear only after he picks up his hypothesis on religion in chapter 2. It is not obvious why Freud chooses to begin with an idea that is not his own, nor a clear antithesis to the argument of the book. I will return to this question later on, but it is first necessary to examine Freud’s strange argument about Rolland’s feeling, which will

\(^{108}\) This is the term Freud suggested to the volume’s English-language translator, Joan Riviere—see Strachey’s introduction.
come to bear on both biological evolution and an archaeology of civilization.

Their intersection on the oceanic feeling develops in a series of exchanges in response to Freud’s *Future of an Illusion*. But the difference that would play out in *Civilization and Its Discontents* had already been independently articulated by both men. In 1926, Freud wrote to Rolland that he had always considered him to be an “Artiste et Apôtre de l’Amour des Hommes” (Vermorel 263). But in the same short letter, he draws a line that would reappear:

À l’amour des hommes, je tenais moi-même beaucoup, non pour des motifs sentimentaux ou par exigence et d’idéal, mais pour des raisons terre-à-terre, économiques, parce que, nos pulsions et le monde qui nous environne étant ce qu’ils sont, je n’ai pas pu pas le déclarer aussi indispensable à la conservation de l’espèce humaine que, par exemple, la technique.

Rolland, that same year, shared with Jean Bodin that despite great admiration for Freud, his work had left him with a profound uneasiness. He writes that the *Interpretation of Dreams* “ouvrait un monde monstreux mais puissant, sauvage, halluciné, un peu archaïque (comme celui de la préhistoire hellénique) […] Erreur abusive? Vision égarée? Déformation excessive? Oui” (Vermorel 284).

The opposition of Rolland as lover of humanity and Freud as the somber prophet of the “monstrous” and “archaic” psychic underworld would play out explicitly when Rolland received *The Future of an Illusion*. Freud’s work is brutal in its dismissal of religion, though for the mystic Rolland, the real point of contact is the former’s assessment of the origins of religious sentiment. While Freud sees as the fundamental basis for religion the primal Oedipal father as feared protector (I will discuss this more in the context of archaic heritage), Rolland
identifies an alternative hypothesis, an emotion or state of being that will come to be known as
the oceanic feeling. In a December 5, 1927 letter to Freud, Rolland argues for a primal religious
feeling described as “le fait simple et direct de la sensation de l’”éternel” (qui peut très bien
n’être pas éternel, mais simplement sans bornes perceptibles, et comme océanique)”
(Vermorel 303-304). This claim, reproduced by Freud in Civilization and Its Discontents, is met
with certain skepticism, some of which Rolland anticipates (“vous la rangerez aussi parmi les
Zwangneurosen”), but treated at length.

The trouble with speaking analytically about feelings lies in the word’s hesitation
between physical and psychological experience, which posits both a purely emotional reaction,
but also a certain intellectual appraisal. For Freud, the ambiguous nature of feeling serves as
first difficulty of his analysis of Rolland’s “oceanic feeling.” He explains that, while "It is not easy
to deal scientifically with feelings,” it is sometimes possible to “describe their physiological
signs,” as would be the case for the feeling of dread (65). In this case, however, it would seem
that “nothing remains but to fall back on the ideational content which is most readily
associated with the feeling,” a content that he defines as “a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of
being one with the external world as a whole,” which is primarily an “intellectual perception”
that possesses “an accompanying feeling-tone” (65).

The discussion becomes complicated, however, when addressing the continuity of this
feeling—whether it is the primal sentiment of religiosity as Rolland contends, or as Freud
suspects, a post-facto addition to an earlier current of religious feeling as “a first attempt at
religious consolation.” Such a feeling of connectedness to the external world—and this is what
Freud finds “so strange and fits in so badly with our psychological fabric”—seems to invert the
directional boundaries of the ego, which would normally bleed inward, “without any sharp
delimitation” into the id, while maintaining “clear and sharp lines of demarcation” outwardly
(66). Aside from rare psychopathologies and the feeling of being in love the feeling of total
interconnectedness stands as singular case of the ego adventure to open itself up to the
“strange and threatening ‘outside’” (67). This stands in direct opposition to the steady process
of demarcation whereby the ego seeks to separate itself from “everything that can become a
source of such unpleasure, to throw it outside and to create a pure pleasure-ego” (67). Such a
state does exist at the outset of awareness, before the formation of boundaries between the
ego and the outside world, a phase of development (or maybe preceding development) during
which “the ego includes everything.” As such, “our present ego-feeling is, therefore only a
shrunken residue [Rest] of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which
corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world around it” (68).

This shrunken residue, he will argue, cannot logically play much of a role in the developed psyche.
The original state of the ego cannot be revivified; nostalgic return is impossible—circumstances
that have so often suggested failure, frustration and death.

Leaving aside Freud’s potentially questionable analogical dismissal of the oceanic
feeling’s persistence in the developed psyche, we have reason to ask whether Freud has stuck
to his own terms for speaking about feeling. It seems, upon further review, that in insisting on
the unlikelihood of sustaining the ideational content of this feeling, he has let go of the role
played by the feeling-tone, perhaps out of his difficulty of categorizing or even spotting any

\[109\] I discuss this point further, on Freud’s comments on the indecipherable “narcotization” of
the past in the final section of this chapter.
physiological signs of the feeling. But in elevating the ideational over the affective qualities of the feeling, Freud inverts the priority assigned by Rolland—who emphasizes its “jalissement vital” (Vermorel 304). The expansion of the sense of self is both vaster and vaguer in Rolland’s original definition, which touches not only on an experience analogous to spatial distention, but also a kind of *temporal* enlargement. He describes “la sensation de l’éternel (qui peut très bien n’être pas éternel mais simplement sans bornes perceptibles, et comme océanique). The actual content of what Rolland describes is strikingly vague and one is left to wonder what—if any—ideational content the feeling actually encompasses. Rolland’s claim that the feeling *may or may not* be eternal suggests the possibility of *experiencing* the eternal without necessarily a particular belief in, for example, an immortal soul, or perhaps even the intellectual possibility of anything *eternal* whatsoever. What’s more, the apparent fungibility of spatial and temporal expansion begs the questions of whether the oceanic feeling allows for *any* sense of boundlessness, which is to say, whether it demands no particular ideational element at all, emphasizing instead the affective element, or the *tone* of interconnectedness in and of itself. It is a feeling *without* content, much in the way Fernando Pessoa expresses in his English-language poem, “Nirvanâ.”

A non-existence deeply within Being

A sentient nothingness ethereal,

A more than real Ideality, agreeing

Of subject and of object, all in all.

Nor Life, nor Death, nor sense nor senselessness,
There is a good reason for all this vagueness, however, one that points back to the developmental trajectory Freud identifies in the ego. The primal position of the psyche, in Freud’s terms, is essentially oceanic. In this initial state the ego has not been cut off from the limitless external world, experiences the “outside” in a way that has yet to acquire temporal or spatial boundaries. It is therefore by default an experience of the eternal/oceanic. Or more accurately, it is not not eternal or enclosed. In this negative reformulation, it becomes possible to understand the way Freud cites another author’s account of yogic practices, whereby in “withdrawing from the world [...] one can in fact evoke new sensations and coenaestheasias in oneself, which he regards as regressions to primordial states of mind which have long ago been overlaid.” And yet, for Rolland, the feeling is so present he can describe it as “un contact.”

While Freud recognizes a psychological basis for this kind of practice of withdrawal (and to yogic forms one might easily add a number of other philosophical schools, stoic, epicurean, etc.), his final word on the matter is that realistically attaining such a state depends on an overly “rosy” kind of thinking. Such a continuation is only possible, Freud concludes, if one has retained a primal way of looking at the external world. But while this conclusion might preclude an “end” of total (re-)interconnection, it seems difficult to account for the aspiration of attaining the oceanic feeling. In other words, even if the oceanic feeling is itself “wrong,” that is to say based on a false possibility of “restoring limitless narcissism,” Freud does not dispute the existence of a feeling that takes hold in some people and draws them to seek such a feeling.

But a deep feeling of not feeling aught;
A calm how deep!—much deeper than distress,
Haply as thinking is without the thought
state of connectedness. This desire strangely operates by withdrawing in order to connect, a paradox that seems to acknowledge its own illogical relation to the “psychological fabric.” But this seems to be the very appeal of striving for a restoration of an oceanic ego. Driven by a reaction against the ego’s status as cut off from the external, a yogic practitioner would have to reverse all the foundational trauma of the ego’s developmental delimitation, stripping away the “overlying” states of mind and trying to resurrect the state of feeling before content. This desire, impossible or not, to rediscover a primal oceanic feeling would seem far more important to founding religious practice than a feeling one had already fully attained. What counts more, then, is the faith in the existence in an oceanic unity or a perception of its absence, than the personal experience of the feeling itself.

For Freud, who writes, “I cannot discover this ‘oceanic’ feeling in myself” (65), Rolland has mistaken his political and religious will with human need and “a feeling can only be a source of energy if it is itself the expression of a strong need” (72). The universally-inscribed need Freud refers to in this passage is the familiar drama of the Oedipus complex, which he sees as a final foreclosure of the kind of restoration described by Rolland:

The derivation of religious needs from the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father [Vatersehnsucht] aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible, especially since the feeling is not simply prolonged from childhood days, but is permanently sustained by fear of the superior power of Fate. [...] Thus the part played by the oceanic feeling, which might seek something like the restoration of limitless narcissism, is ousted from a place in the foreground. The origin of the
religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness (72).

And yet, there is in this dismissal a question Freud is unable to resolve, which had entered into his thinking at least since the revised edition of *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1919, and perhaps was always there. The question of what precedes the Oedipus complex, and how it comes to be installed in the psyche with its distinctive form, would return as Freud struggled to deal with his own “shrunken residues” that were preserved and transmitted as “archaic heritage.” His doubts about the oceanic feeling point to a central difficulty in his own theory—“There may be something further behind that, but for the present it is wrapped in obscurity” (72).

“Un oiseau qui chante sa nostalgie du passé”: Rolland and Baudelairean Nostalgia

Rolland's comments on the oceanic feeling mark what had been one of his earliest lines of inquiry. As a twenty-two year-old student at the *École Normale Supérieure*, he had already begun to write about the “Océan de l’Etre” and the “Sensation de l’Etre” (*Credo* 360). And recalling Baudelaire’s paraphrase of Schoepenhauer ("tout est néant, excepté la Mort...le But, dans le seul vrai but de la vie!"), he formulates death as the ultimate basis for being: “la Mort, c'est la Vie toute-puissante et parfaite.” Following this overlapping, it is unsurprising that the thematics of Baudelairean strange nostalgia resonate deeply with this oceanic feeling (for example, “Vie antérieure” and “Déjà”). This comparison appears to have been evident to Rolland himself. In *Jean-Christophe*, he joins his cherished formulation with one of Baudelaire's

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111 See Vermorel 75-76.
as he describes the dear friend of the novel’s protagonist, the poet Olivier Jeannin, in the following terms:

Olivier passait les journées, perché dans les branches d’un frêne, et lisant des histoires merveilleuses: la délicieuse mythologie, les Contes de Musæus, ou de Mme d’Aulnoy, ou les Mille et une Nuits, ou des romans de voyage. Car il avait cette étrange nostalgie des terres lointaines, “ces rêves océaniques,” qui tourmentent parfois les jeunes garçons des petites villes de provinces françaises (JC 836, emphasis mine).

Rolland’s picture appears to marry “La Vie antérieure” with the picture of strange nostalgia for unknown times and places. In the former example, Rolland would find an evocation of

112 Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,
Mêlaient d’une façon solennelle et mystique
Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.
C’est là que j’ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l’azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d’odeurs,
Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l’unique soin était d’approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.
“voluptés calmes” in a situation in which “d’un façon solennelle et mystique,” reflections of light dancing on calm waves reflect off the surface of the speaker’s eyes, “blending” the individual with his surroundings “au milieu de l’azur.” In the second, the paradoxical nostalgia referenced explicitly by Rolland recalls the uneasy and exogenous awareness of a lost, imagined, unattainable unity, like the “navires nostalgiques” whose disembodied voice asks: “quand partons-nous pour le bonheur?”

Of great interest is how this ultimately fits with Freud’s work from Beyond the Pleasure Principle onward. After flirting with the designation by the word “nostalgie”—he describes “sexuelle nost[algie]” (sic) in his notes to an 1891 case on Nina R—Freud turns to other ways to name the phenomenon. He uses Heimweh to refer to the essential basis for love (The Uncanny 259) and Sehnsucht for the nostalgic yearning for the primal father (for the first time in Totem and Taboo 148). In light of this, an exploration of nostalgia—particularly, in the way of Baudelaire and Rolland—serves as revelatory in Freud’s work. Such a line of inquiry also

113 Freud’s azure more closely resembles Mallarmé’s:

   Il roule par la brume, ancien et traverse
   Ta native agonie ainsi qu’un glaive sûr
   Où fuir dans la révolte inutile et perverse?
   Je suis hanté. L’Azur! L’Azur! L’Azur! L’Azur!

114 On the history of these documents, see the Richards, A. and Grubrich-Simitis, I., Eds (1894). Four documents about the case "Nina R."
points to other (difficult and/or aborted) efforts, like the “nirvana principle.”

For Rolland, the possibility of summoning a self-transcendent and oceanic interconnectedness takes on a moral dimension. Always inclined to pacifism, his commitment to the cause had been confirmed and hardened by the experience of the Great War. Across Europe, the collective experience of the war could be situated at the most extreme end of a spectrum that starts with the oceanic feeling. Everything about the war—this war more than any that had come before—was the opposite of this picture of interconnectedness, “sans bornes perceptibles.” The great hopes of the early century were cut through, chopped into borders, lines, fronts, trenches, as the dream of internationalism receded into a barbarous tribalism armed with guns and gas, but especially in the popular imagination, with blades: knives, barbed wire, bayonets. To invoke this oceanic feeling is to represent, to some extent, complete removal from, safety from, this worst kind of conflict but also all kinds of lesser ones: to be, as Rolland titled his anti-war text, “au-dessus de la mêlée.” It helps in this sense that the religious component of the feeling is the ultimate in non-sectarianism. He writes in the introduction of a call to “la fraternité universelle dans la joie ou la souffrance, ou, comme nos esprits latins, percent de leur critique les préjugés de haine et d’ignorance qui séparent les individus et les peuples” (Mêlée 2). Though an “expérience intérieure,” the oceanic feeling offers the possibility of a new project of political enlightenment by instilling the sense of self-transcendence and interconnectedness on a mass scale. The primary ethical imperative becomes therefore an experience of connectedness to the being of the masses: “La grande

115 In Beyond the Pleasure Principle pp. 53-56 and “On the Economic Problem of Masochism” pp. 159-160.
Rolland is insistent, however, that the feeling does not merely represent a desire for self-transcendence. More than just a passing experience, he writes that “Le sentiment que j’éprouve m’impose comme un fait. C’est un contact” (Vermorel 304, Author’s emphasis). And indeed, in Rolland’s writings, one finds ample evidence for his claim that: “Tout au long de ma vie, elle ne m’a jamais manqué.” In addition to the echoes seen in his diary entries from the École normale, the oceanic feeling appears (without exactly being named as such) in Jean-Christophe, in developmental moments that closely parallel Freud’s later dismissal. Freud, we remember, has conceded that the experience Rolland puts forward corresponds to a real, but irrecoverable original state of infancy in which the ego includes everything. L’Aube, the first volume of Jean-Christophe, opens with an exposition that follows logically and mirrors stylistically this state:

Jour immense, taciturne, que marque le rythme égal de l’ombre et de la lumière, et le rythme de la vie de l’être engourdi qui rêve au fond de son berceau,—ses besoins impérieux, douloureux ou joyeux, si réguliers que le jour et la nuit qui les ramènent semblent ramenés par eux. Le balancier de la vie se meut avec lourdeur. L’être s’absorbe tout entier dans sa pulsation lente (JC 28, emphasis mine).\(^\text{116}\)

The slow rhythms of swirling, protean awareness drift in an out of reality. The effect is a universe in which:

\(^{116}\) The character bears a certain resemblance to Louis Lambert.
Infant Jean-Christophe’s dawning awareness holds “des mondes ensevelis dans l'ombre, des nébuleuses qui s'organisent, un univers en formation.” In his state of absolute and fearful ignorance, the unformed impressions nevertheless contain the entire universe. This is because, as Freud says, his “ego contains everything,” he contains everything: Son être est sans limites. Il est tout ce qui est...” (JC 28).

Chaque jour, il repart en exploration dans cet univers qui est à lui:-tout est à lui. - Rien n'est indifférent, tout se vaut, un homme ou une mouche; tout vit également: le chat, le feu, la table, les grains de poussière qui dansent dans un rayon de soleil. La chambre est un pays; un jour est une vie. Comment se reconnaître au milieu de ces espaces? Le monde est si grand! On s'y perd (30).

In Jean-Christophe, the medium for recapturing this fluidity or temporary loss of self is music. Music for Rolland has a profoundly nostalgic character, as for Jankélévitch, who assigns it a dual nature, able to “prête une voix au passé impuissant et à l’irréversibilité malheureuse” while also uniquely and in opposition to human time express what is “réitérable” (375).

Not only does the professional practice of music serve to ground the major plot points of Jean-Christophe—the protagonist is a third-generation musician, whose father experiences
substantial frustration in his own career and whose grandfather shields Jean-Christophe from his parents’ unhappy life by introducing him to music, and ultimately achieves some success as a composer—it pervades nearly every turn of the novel. Music, and sound more generally, possesses its own oceanic character. It has both the power to interrupt and inspire, while always being present in the background. Rolland constantly draws attention to the “musical” hums and rhythms of church bells, rivers and winds. As Jean-Christophe begins to discover the world as a separate existence of his own, he finds a familiar sensation to those described in his infancy:

Il n'y a plus rien de mal, il n'y a plus rien de triste, il n'y a plus rien... rien qu'un rêve léger, une musique sereine, qui flotte dans un rayon de soleil, comme les fils de la vierge par les beaux jours d'été [...] Et tout à fait au loin, comme une lueur d'acier au bord de l'horizon, une plaine liquide, une ligne de flots qui tremblent, - la mer. Le fleuve court à elle. Elle semble courir à lui. Elle l'aspire. Il la veut. Il va disparaître... la musique tournoie, les beaux rythmes de danse se balancent éperdus; tout est balayé dans leur tourbillon triomphal... l'âme libre fend l'espace, comme le vol des hirondelles, ivres d'air, qui traversent le ciel avec des cris aigus... joie! Joie! Il n'y a plus rien! ... Ô bonheur infini! (83-84).

The embodiment of the oceanic feeling within Jean-Christophe is fully realized when, as a young man, the music of the life suddenly awakens the protagonist to a simultaneous loss of faith and a profound opening to the external world. He experiences religious feeling without religion:

Christophe, retenant son souffle, pensait combien la musique des musiciens est pauvre auprès de cet océan de musique, où grondent des milliers d'êtres: c'est la
faune sauvage, le libre monde des sons, auprès du monde domestiqué, 
catalogué, froidement étiqueté par l'intelligence humaine. Il se perdait dans 
cette immensité sonore, sans rivages et sans bornes... [...] Il n'y avait plus de 
dieu... de même que la foi, la perte de la foi est souvent, elle aussi, un coup de la 
grâce, une lumière subite (249).

Finally, as has so often been the case, death marks the finally point of return for nostalgia: 

“Moi-même je dis adieu à mon âme passé; je la rejette derrière moi comme une envelope vide. 
La vie est une suite de morts et de resurrections. Mourrons, Christophe, pour renaître” (1483).

*From Sexual Nostalgia to Archaic Heritage*

In one of Freud’s earliest cases, from 1891-1894, lost to commenters until the 1970s, 
Freud considers the backward-looking and sexual nature of neurosis. Twenty-one year-old Nina 
R., a woman of “meaningful intelligence” and “singular” behavior, posed more of a challenge 
for Freud than most of the hysteria patients he had observed with Charcot and Breuer, and 
after two years of intermittent observation of the patient, he still feels that “the picture of this 
ilness has not become perfectly clear to me” (316). Nina, whose parents Freud and Josef 
Breuer identified as neurotic themselves, had been observed masturbating precociously, 
starting between three and four years old, followed by “much onanistic rubbing” between ten 
and eleven. From there, Nina developed a crippling fear of social contact, vomiting every time 
she had to leave her house, became anorexic, “weary of herself and the world” and expressed 
the feeling that something was “moving out of place in her brain.” Freud relates Breuer’s 
similar assessment, noting in the 1891 text that the latter “also recognized masturbation and
thought that the patient was forced to reprimand at all cost her excitement,” before adding his own term: “sexuelle nost[algie].”

Little has been written about the Nina R. case, owing both to the relatively small body of material and its very late discovery, but Freud’s other work during this period is legendary. It was here that he began to treat another hysterical in 1893, Anna O., and develop his theories of hysteria, first childhood sexual trauma (the theory of seduction) with Breuer, and soon after, the Oedipus complex. This series of developments begins with Freud and Breuer’s shared observation that all of their hysteria patients had experienced some degree of premature exposure to adult sexuality, leading to the conclusion that “no hysterical symptom can arise from a real experience alone, but that in every case the memory of earlier experiences awakened in association to it plays a part in causing the symptom.” (Etiology of Hysteria 196, his italics). In other words, it is not so much the traumatic experience itself— it is easy, by making a few enquiries, to find people who remember scenes of sexual seduction and sexual abuse in their childhood years, and yet who have never been hysterical” (206)—but the particular way in which these memories are experienced retrospectively.

The difference or distance between the original trauma and experience does not fully explain the causes of hysteria for Freud, even in the early stage. The prospect of identifying a primal trauma (as Breuer had believed he’d done with Anna O.) is not only rare, but often illusory. By the very nature of this theory, later traumas are shaped and colored by memories of previous traumas. The question will be then, how far back does one have to go, “where shall

\[117\] Freud gives the example of children who molest other children, themselves invariably the victims of an earlier act of sexual aggression (214).
we get to if we follow the chains of associated memories which the analysis has uncovered?

How far do they extend? Do they come anywhere to a natural end?” (194). Freud will go very far back to a form of inheritance that persists only in a forgotten, archaic form that represents, at its absolute origins, precisely an effort to determine this “natural end.”

The possibility of archaic heritage will return in Freud’s exchanges with Rolland, and would become one of his last preoccupations in Moses and Monotheism, but we can see the same concerns taking shape, embryonically, in the Nina R. documents. He considers the relationship between the patient’s condition and the “being” of her father:

The being [Das Wesen] of the father, the absence of tenderness from him, or at least signs of tenderness, has created in the patient a basis of dissatisfaction about her conditions of life and, as I learn from her, established by the usual way (fear of meals and occasions for meetings) the foundations of a hysterical anorexia with vomiting (315, emphasis Freud’s)

Freud will abandon the term, as he will “sexual nostalgia.” But we can see here the sketch of a linkage between the longing for the father and sexual neurosis. Read this way, the postulation of “sexual nostalgia” represents an early but aborted attempt to explain why neuroses take a familiar pattern that both adopts the tone of recollection and presents a particular image of the father that will later be reiterated as the Oedipus complex.¹¹⁸ Sexual nostalgia and the Oedipus complex are born as fraternal twins. From that point forward, writes Freud, “I have never doubted that religious phenomena are only to be understood on the

¹¹⁸ In Totem and Taboo, Freud will invoke Vatersehnsucht, longing or nostalgia for the father.
pattern of the individual neurotic symptoms familiar to us—as the return of long since forgotten, important events in the primeval history of the human family” (MM, 58).

Archaic heritage and the question of transmission.

If these events are indeed “forgotten,” how can they take on such an important role in the psychosexual life of a universal population? How can it be received without, as Freud claims, being the result of experience? To this end, Freud begins to consider a form of transmission, at times dangerously close to “neo-Lamarckianism”¹¹⁹ that is both acquired and passed down to future generations. Importantly, Freud’s claims that no symptom can arise “from a real experience alone,” or, as he writes in his famous letter to Fleiss, that the members of his audience were “just such an Oedipus” not only in fantasy but in germ, physiologically (Fleiss papers 71). These claims do not make the claim of biological or phylogenetic transmission as metaphor. The transmission of archaic heritage represents an actual “factor in biological evolution” which Freud says he “cannot do without” (MM 99). In this model, “accidental noxiae” that appear to trigger neuroses (as was the case in theory of seduction) actually only “exploit” the pre-existing biological traits. The mechanisms for accounting for the mechanism of transmission for archaic heritage push Freud into difficult and frustrated explanations—the tortured analogies about Roman streets and crocodiles he uses to dispute Rolland’s oceanic feeling are part of these difficulties. Perhaps the most extravagant effort to this effect is the extended musing in Beyond the Pleasure Principle on the sex lives of “slipper-

¹¹⁹ Bernard Stiegler’s term, Taking Care (7).
cell animalcules,” or paramecia, in which Freud compares the prostista’s mating to Aristophanes’ account of the creation of man and woman Plato’s *Symposium*. The assertion that individual experience is fundamentally dictated by the transmission of an acquired but species-wide heritage evidently strained Freud’s usually logical capacities.

This aporia of transmission I have just described, is initially articulated in the continuity/discontinuity of childhood experience. Memories from childhood (and as he speculates in the *Three Essays*, this is the phase of the greatest capacity for memory, 174-175) are both subject to a general amnesia later and life, while still harnessing the immense power to shape future development. Freud had previously accounted for this uneasy duality through the discussion of “screen memories” which are both forgotten by the adult and revivified through analysis. As he writes of infantile amnesia in the *Introductory Lectures*, “filling up these gaps in the memory of childhood” becomes a central task of psychoanalysis” and that dreams, of which “the forgotten material of the first years of childhood is thus a further archaic feature”

120 As Jean Laplanche observes, Freud has earlier used this myth to make a very different claim. In the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* the passage from the Symposium is a counter-example to Freud’s own theory and “very far from reality.” Instead, the legend is as Laplanche says emblematic of “l’opinion populaire voulant que la sexualité soit predeterminée, que chacun retrouve sa chacune, selon une harmonie originelle à rétablir” (27). Freud’s revisitation of the Aristophanes myth constitutes for Laplace a critical moment of the “fourvoiement biologisant.” It is indeed easy to see a certain degree to which Freud strains to identify a biological basis for a psychoanalytic picture of Eros (and later of archaic heritage).
serve as the primary storehouse (200). This mechanism for explaining the retention of early memory, in some corrupted, obscured or “archaic” form is not especially problematic on its face. But it limits itself to an individual memory, much in the way that Freud’s initial theory of seduction—premature and traumatic sexual initiation as the origin of adult neuroses—cannot claim the universal nature of the Oedipus complex. For the persistence of “archaic” childhood memory to implicate the broader claim of species-wide development or phylogenesis\textsuperscript{121}, there must also be a corresponding form of archaic transmission. Indeed this question, from the mid-1910s onward, represents a major and challenging question for Freud, one that not only ran into the biological difficulties already discussed, but still others to come.

In the 1919 revision of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, at roughly the same time he was struggling with the animalcules, Freud returned to expand vastly the scope of what could be learned from dreams, arguing that “Behind this childhood of the individual we are promised a picture of a phylogenetic childhood—a picture of the development of the human race, of which the individual’s development is in fact an abbreviated recapitulation influenced by the chance circumstances of life” (547-548). The task of interpreting dreams becomes therefore one of a kind of genealogy, filling up the gaps not only of an individual thought-life but of “the human race.” This marks turn toward a question of heredity and will lead Freud to consider quite seriously a claim by Nietzsche “that in dreams ‘some primaeval relic of humanity is at work which we can now scarcely reach any longer by a direct path’” whereby such an analysis “will lead us to a knowledge of man’s archaic heritage [Erbschaft], of what is psychically innate in

\textsuperscript{121} The term dates to Ernst Haeckel’s biological works in the 1870s and refers to the evolutionary development of groups of organisms.
him” (548, emphases mine). After writing in 1913 that “Neurotics [...] may be said to have inherited an archaic constitution as an atavistic vestige” [archaistische Konstitution als atavistischen Rest] (T&T 66) and referring to “archaic inheritance” [archaisches Erbteil] (Instincts and their Vicissitudes, 131) in 1915, he can by 1919 fully articulate the possibility of a wholly inherited, “physically innate” Oedipus complex which he associates with the archaic, animal heritage [Erbschaft] of humanity” (Preface to Reik’s Ritual, 261). By this point is clear that the repeated gestures toward hereditary (Erb-) transmissions represent a sustained and difficult concern. Freud is clearly fidgeting with the terminology, both in the hereditary

122 In his essay on the History of the Psychoanalytic movement (1916), Freud had explained of his recent work that “In later years I denied myself the great pleasure of Nietzsche’s works, with the conscious motive of not wishing to be hindered in the working out of my psychoanalytic impressions by any preconceived ideas” (413). Which is to say he had at least the fear that he had already or almost been influenced by Nietzsche. It is tempting to see in Freud’s production during this period a repeated avoidance of Nietzsche, especially in Totem and Taboo. Beginning in 1916, at the same time he references his having avoided Nietzsche, Freud begins to cite him frequently, in published texts for the first time, and with even greater frequency in letters. This turn to Nietzsche owes to the genetic turn in Freud’s work. See also Lehrer 237-244.

123 And again the same year in “A Child is Being Beaten”: “The origin of the Oedipus complex itself, and the destiny which compels man, probably alone among all animals, to begin his sexual life twice over, first like all other creatures in his early childhood, and then after a long interruption once more at the age of puberty—all the problems that are connected with man’s ‘archaic heritage.’”
metaphors, and its biological basis (animal, physical). He has also swerved into a biological impossibility—the transmission of acquired traits. And he would not return to the question in a sustained way until his very last work.

*Moses and Monotheism*

Only in his work on Moses does Freud address in a sustained way the possibility of an archaic heritage that is preserved genetically in such a way as to exist as residue in the memories of every individual. Freud will make a final and direct attempt to articulate, elaborate and explain his belief that memory of the type that forms the Oedipus complex can be retained and transmitted, which implies in turn that “there is an almost complete conformity in this respect between the individual and the group: in the group too an impression of the past is retained in unconscious memory-traces” (*MM* 94). Consequently, just as the process of “filling up the gaps” presented by dreams offered a picture of continuity to forgotten childhood memory, there was a secret “popular” knowledge that perpetuated memories of an impossibly distant past. The content of this unspoken and unremembered knowledge is legacy of the horde rising up and killing the primal father already discussed in *Totem and Taboo* and repeated in *Moses and Monotheism*, a killing that at once liberated the horde from the sexual dominion of the original father, and led to their permanent and traumatic subjugation to a new, divine father. The new tradition spawned after the killing of the original Moses, the tradition that invents both the mythical, heroic Moses and the monotheistic God depends for Freud on
the transmission of the earlier memory. On the one hand, “in the course of thousands of years the fact was forgotten that there had been a primal father with the characteristics we know and what his fate had been nor can we suppose that there was any oral tradition of it, as we can in the case of Moses” (94, emphasis mine). And so, the success of the Moses/monotheistic tradition depends on the residue of this memory. He writes:

Is it possible to attribute to knowledge held like this by a few people the power to produce such a lasting emotion in the masses when it came to their notice? It seems, rather, as though there must have been something present in the ignorant masses, too, which was in some way akin to the knowledge of the few and went halfway to meet it when it was uttered (94, emphasis mine).125

124 On the intersections between Judaism and Freud’s theory of archaic heritage, see Wurmser, p. 401-427

125 This is something like Alcibiades’ answer in the dialogue bearing his name to a claim made by Socrates. When Socrates insists that the many cannot teach a potential ruler anything, Alcibiades responds that they had already taught him to speak Greek. As Freud writes: “On further reflection I must admit that I have behaved for a long time as though the inheritance of memory-traces of the experience of our ancestors, independently of direct communication and of the influence of education by the setting of an example, were established beyond question. When I spoke of the survival of a tradition among a people or of the formation of a people’s character, I had mostly in mind an inherited tradition of this kind and not one transmitted by
Freud is left, then, with an aporia of tradition: if some form of prior transmission is necessary in order for the “historical truth” to become tradition, the transmission must have always already taken place. He is led to ask, “In what sense, then, does a tradition come in question at all? In what form can it have been present? [In welcher Form kann sie vorhanden gewesen sein?]” (94). It must be something like a disused canal suddenly flooded, in the moment of “historical truth,” by new waters. The effect of this transmission, the mechanisms of which Freud still has not found a satisfactory explanation, is that the individual psyche can never be entirely independent of the foundations of the tradition. Freud will have to consider to this end “what may be operative in an individual's psychical life may include not only what he has experienced himself but also things that were innately present in him at his birth” (98). This innate framing includes, as Freud has long argued, the drives (“something like instincts in animals”), or as he writes here, “certain [innate] dispositions such as are characteristic of all living organisms: in the capacity and tendency, that is, to enter particular lines of development and to react in a particular manner to certain excitations, impressions and stimuli” (98).

These physiological categories do not, however, account for the whole of what is “innately present” in every individual. The other half of the picture is the “elements with a phylogenetic origin—an archaic heritage” (98). In other words, “the archaic heritage of human beings comprises not only dispositions but also subject-matter—memory-traces of the experience of earlier generations” (99). How archaic is it? The heritage must emerge at the communication. Or at least I made no distinction between the two and was not clearly aware of my audacity in neglecting to do so” (MM 99)
most remotest conceivable point, just as Freud is led to look deeper and deeper in time (from
the invention of the Biblical monotheistic God, to the Egyptian Moses, to the earlier Moses of
the volcano God, to the primal father). Much like Müller, he attempts to consider the
emergence of language in its most original state in order to inform his portrait of deep history.
Instead of philology, his speculations take the form of semiotics, since “symbolism disregards
differences of language; investigations would probably show that it is ubiquitous—the same for
all peoples” (99). This allows for “an assured instance of an archaic heritage dating from the
period at which language developed” (99, emphasis mine).

Freud’s extraordinary claim that all psychical life has been limited and shaped by the actual historical experience coinciding with the development of language will need to be folded
back into his consideration of the emergence of culture, as well what finally seems to be a
competing understating of primal experience—the oceanic feeling. But the problem of
transmission still has not been solved. If anything, it has grown more complicated:

The symbolic representation of one object by another—the same thing applies
to actions—is familiar to all our children and comes to them, as it were, as a
matter of course. We cannot show in regard to them how they have learnt it and
must admit that in many cases learning it is impossible. It is a question of an
original knowledge which adults afterwards forget (98, emphasis mine).\(^{126}\)

\(^{126}\) The loss of an initially vast capacity for language is no trivial matter, as Daniel Heller-Roazen
has shown in *Echolalias*. I would add too that Freud appears to discount the possibility of an
infant’s reception of these transmissions through an original linguistic capacity that would be
lost as the child matures. Freud does once consider such infra-linguistic transmission of
knowledge. In a strange 1922 text, “Psycho-analysis and telepathy,” he reports of a patient who
harbored violent wishes against his future brother in-law, borne out of incestuous feelings for
his own sister. The patient had seen a fortune-teller, who was supposedly able to predict
anyone’s fate solely based on their sex and date of birth. She assured Freud’s jealous patient
that “the person in question will die next July or August of crayfish- or oyster-poisoning,” which
he found “marvelous” (183). Freud is surprised to learn that the rival was indeed “passionately
fond of crayfish and oysters and so on, and last August he really did have an attack of crayfish-
poisoning and almost died of it” (183). Freud is led to conclude:

> It is impossible that the knowledge that this man—born on the day in question—
> had had an attack of crayfish-poisoning could have been present in the fortune-
teller’s mind; nor can she have arrived at that knowledge from her tables and
calculations. It was, however, present in the mind of her questioner. The event
becomes completely explicable if we are ready to assume that the knowledge
was transferred from him to the supposed prophetess—by some unknown
method which excluded the means of communication familiar to us. That is to
say, we must draw the inference that there is such a thing as thought-
transference. The fortune-teller’s astrological activities would in that case have
performed the function of diverting her own psychical forces and occupying
them in a harmless way, so that she could become receptive and accessible to
the effects upon her of her client’s thoughts—so that she could become a true
‘medium’ (184).
Again, Freud faces an impossibility. If children cannot have learned symbolic language, how do they know it? And since the “discovery” of universal symbolic language is the moment when the archaic heritage is established, Freud has come no farther.\textsuperscript{127}

The same claim of impossible priority could well be made of language itself. Bernard Stiegler, in an extended exposition of a theory of inter-generational inheritance (epiphylogenesis) meant to counter Freud’s theory of transmission,\textsuperscript{128} considers the “aporia of language,” especially through Rousseau. Any effort to establish a sequence of the emergence of language represents for Stiegler an attempt to “franchir une si grande intervalle” that is destined to end in frustration (\textit{La Technique et le temps} 136). In his analysis of Rousseau’s account of the beginning of language in the \textit{Discours sur les origines et fondements de l’inégalité}, he pinpoints just such a difficulty. Rousseau wonders how language could emerge from a setting in which individual humans rarely see one another. This leads Stiegler to ask “qu’est-ce qui aura précédé, la langue pour fonder la société, ou la société pour décider la langue?” (137). And indeed, this does not escape Rousseau, who remarks in the face of his own speculations

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The medium’s ability to “[divert] her own psychical forces” harkens back to a state of infancy in which psychic forces are never directed. If this is the necessary posture for receiving thought-transference, why couldn’t an infant receive knowledge of the archaic heritage this way? \textsuperscript{127} Plato’s \textit{Meno} poses a similar dilemma. After Socrates has proven that virtue can neither be taught nor inherited, he is left to conclude that it must be “given by the daimon.” \textsuperscript{128} Failed according to Stiegler.
that “la parole paraît avoir été fort nécessaire pour établir l’usage de la parole” (148). This paradox makes it necessary for Rousseau, according to Stiegler, to employ a fictional device:

Le découpage de la fiction rousseauïste ne peut dire que et ignorer à la fois que comme la langue est pensée, comme le vouloir-dire est le dire, la langue est l’institution de la société, et la société est l’institution de la langue. Il faut montrer que tout arrive d’un coup, par la chute, et établir du même coup un principe d’antécédence: d’abord l’origine simple, puis l’accident qui vient à sa rencontre, déclenchant un processus dont découle une série de conséquences qu’il faut bien alors presenter comme une succession d’effets s’enchaînant les uns les autres. Mais ce qui apparaît aussi bien, du même coup, est l’impossibilité d’une telle successivité (138, author’s emphasis).

Freud, though he had long considered styling the third part of his work on Moses as a “historical novel” has reason to resist the use of such device. Nevertheless, faced with both what seems to be an impossible sequence and Darwinian evolution, Freud must admit:

My position, no doubt, is made more difficult by the present attitude of biological science, which refuses to hear of the inheritance of acquired characters by succeeding generations. I must, however, in all modesty confess that nevertheless I cannot do without this factor in biological evolution. The

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129 This is further complicated by the fact that “si les hommes ont eu besoin de la parole pour apprendre à penser, ils ont eu bien plus besoin encore de savoir penser pour trouver l’art de la parole” (147).
same thing is not in question, indeed, in the two cases: in the one it is a matter of acquired characters which are hard to grasp, in the other of memory-traces of external events—something tangible, as it were. But it may well be that at bottom we cannot imagine one without the other (99).

The biological basis for tradition in the form of innate archaic heritage comes to face the same predicament as Condillac and the wild child. For a moment to have had the shaping effect that Freud seeks to identify, it must be located so remotely that its content cannot be articulated. If indeed the investigation must ultimately end in “diminishing the gulf which earlier periods of human arrogance had torn too wide apart between mankind and the animals” (100), then the origin of the archaic heritage coincides not only with the emergence of language, but of the human species. Nothing precedes it.

_The Oceanic Feeling and Disenlightenment: Civilization and Its Discontents II-VIII_

Freud’s effort in accounting for a universal innate transmission of memory and tradition, however fraught, permits a reconsideration of Rolland’s adoption of nostalgia and the role of the feeling in _Civilization and Its Discontents_. Still (maybe always) a nebulous idea of which Freud was nonetheless entirely convinced, the inevitable transmission of archaic heritage would add to the impossibility of maintaining or restoring a primal impression of oceanic unity. If indeed the “important events in the primaeval history of the human family,” events that historically coincide with the origin of the linguistic human, the psyche of the child is always already cut off, delineated from limitless narcissism, just as newborns for Augustine exhibit the marks of original sin. In light of this, we can now understand the place of the oceanic feeling
within Freud’s assessment of unhappiness and malaise toward civilization. Freud argues that Rolland’s idea represents only “a first attempt at religious consolation.” But it is also a doomed and frustrating consolation in the face of the type of unhappiness at the heart of Freud’s picture of civilization.

While observing that “we do not feel comfortable in our present-day civilization,” Freud is quick to draw a wider picture. He is not simply addressing the present, merely noting instead that modern life represents the most obvious and tragic case of a centuries-old problem. According to his reading of his own time, the “newly-won power over space and time, this subjugation of the forces of nature, which is the fulfilment of a longing that goes back thousands of years, has not increased the amount of pleasurable satisfaction” (CD 87-88).

Contemporary civilization, with its unhappiness in the face of such achievements, is the proof that this kind of unhappiness is not cured by more civilization. This claim is possible because his definition of culture/civilization is extremely inclusive:

We recognize as cultural all activities and resources which are useful to men for making the earth serviceable to them, for protecting them against the violence of the forces of nature, and so on. As regards this side of civilization, there can be scarcely any doubt. If we go back far enough, we find that the first acts of civilization were the use of tools, the gaining of control over fire and the construction of dwellings (CD 90).

Here, Freud is not far from Rousseau in drawing the distinction at the point when man found it possible to deploy tools in the service of mastering nature in the most basic way. And also like Rousseau, he locates the original source of anguish in the most remote time. The only
thing on the other side of the archaic heritage is purely animal life. Freud also directly cautions against the identification of peoples considered “closer” to these human origins, the practice I have identified as the envy of the nostalgia patient. He describes the fascinated response of Westerners to undiscovered populations:

The last but one of these occasions was when the progress of voyages of discovery led to contact with primitive peoples and races. In consequence of insufficient observation and a mistaken view of their manners and customs, they appeared to Europeans to be leading a simple, happy life with few wants, a life such as was unattainable by their visitors with their superior civilization. Later experience has corrected some of those judgments (87).

In other words, it is not the simplicity, the mindlessness of these people that gives them the image of happiness, but a combination of natural bounty and the rosy, nostalgic impressions of their observers. If Kant had read the Supplément au voyage de Bougainville, he might have understood that unenlightened life can also be uncomfortable. Freud will be left to speculate, in

130 As Leo Bersani writes, “Nothing is stranger—and I am inclined to say nothing is more moving—in Civilization and Its Discontents than the erotically confessional footnotes—that is, those moments when the distinguished (if at times both extravagant and banal) anthropological imagination of the text descends into a footnote where it enjoys the fantasy of a mythic, prehistoric convulsing of our physical being in the passionate sniffing of a male on all fours” (Freudian Body 17).
these terms, that any idea of a golden age is nothing more than a phantasm produced by the very unhappiness Freud has diagnosed. The reason it is difficult to speak scientifically about feelings lies at this very point of failed identification:

It seems certain that we do not feel comfortable in our present-day civilization, but it is very difficult to form an opinion whether and in what degree men of an earlier age felt happier and what part their cultural conditions played in the matter. We shall always tend to consider people's distress objectively—that is, to place ourselves, with our own wants and sensibilities, in their conditions, and then to examine what occasions we should find in them for experiencing happiness or unhappiness. This method of looking at things, which seems objective because it ignores the variations in subjective sensibility, is, of course, the most subjective possible, since it puts one's own mental states in the place of any others, unknown though they may be. Happiness, however, is something essentially subjective. No matter how much we may shrink with horror from certain situations—of a galley-slave in antiquity, of a peasant during the Thirty Years’ War, of a victim of the Holy Inquisition, of a Jew awaiting a pogrom—it is nevertheless impossible for us to feel our way into such people—to divine the changes which original obtuseness of mind, a gradual stupefying process, the cessation of expectations, and cruder or more refined methods of narcotization have produced upon their receptivity to sensations of pleasure and unpleasure (89, emphasis mine).
In other words, even the techniques for undoing the stresses of enlightenment of civilization are borne out of a very basic error. The only reason the cow-like existence imagined to characterize the nostalgia-prone is imagined to mean happiness is that it represents an alternative to the life of the observer. The same is true of the oceanic feeling, itself a reflection of the impossible and self-contradictory étrange nostalgie de pays inconnus. It can be expressed only poetically, and only through negation (like Pessoa’s poem, ‘Nirvana’). And we are left to wonder whether Rolland has confused a feeling he has experienced with one he wished for, and to what extent efforts to have this experience will inspire searches for cruder or more refined methods of narcotization—political, religious or pharmacological. The frustrating experience of discordance is inevitable in even the most broadly-defined notion of civilization because the archaic heritage cannot be shaken off and the unformed pre-inherited state of being cannot be restored. The vestiges of primal memory that are retained (but also forgotten) collectively amount to an “archaic heirloom [Erbgut]” that according to Freud “is not fit to be used for the purposes of civilized social life in the form in which it is inherited by the individual” (Preface to Reik’s Ritual, 261). Freud’s account of the essential human condition resembles Chateaubriand’s family stranded in the middle of the Rhine: caught between two unreachable shores, only able to catch an occasional breeze that blows over from the past.

131 Again in Freud’s terms “the use of tools, the gaining of control over fire and the construction of dwellings.”
Conclusion: Nostalgia and Narcotization

The following winter passed without disturbance, and was employed in salutary measures. For, to accustom to rest and repose through the charms of luxury a population scattered and barbarous and therefore inclined to war, Agricola gave private encouragement and public aid to the building of temples, courts of justice and dwelling-houses, praising the energetic, and reproving the indolent. Thus an honorable rivalry took the place of compulsion. He likewise provided a liberal education for the sons of the chiefs, and showed such a preference for the natural powers of the Britons over the industry of the Gaul’s that they who lately disdained the tongue of Rome now coveted its eloquence. Hence, too, a liking sprang up for our style of dress, and the "toga" became fashionable. Step by step they were led to things which dispose to vice, the lounge, the bath, the elegant banquet. All this in their ignorance, they called civilization [humanitatis], when it was really part of their enslavement. (Tacitus, Agricola, 21)

Freud asserts that a (quasi-)genetic transmission of archaic heritage permanently forecloses the possibility of restoring a primal and unbounded self. This conclusion sheds new light on one of the most powerful expressions of nostalgia I have cited. Doctor Alexandre Brasdor fils, the protagonist of chapter two and the most fascinating case study from the Revolutionary era, tells his friend Denis Guerbois that he cannot shake a longing for “les vieux jours de son père” (33). First, it is of course entirely fitting in Freudian terms that the sense of security and stability (as opposed to the present “temps de misères”) are aligned with Brasdor’s father, underscoring the relationship between nostalgia and Vatersehnsucht. But Brasdor’s anguish also projects a way of thinking about the past that typifies man’s uneasiness “in our
present-day civilization” (CD 89). This nostalgic way of thinking, Freud explains, always imagines previous times and primitive peoples as indicative of “a simple, happy life with few wants” that is “unattainable” for those with a “superior civilization” (87).

Brasdor’s epochal nostalgia is also especially pertinent given the historical moment it articulates. His words resemble Isaiah Berlin’s famous but apocryphal quotation of Talleyrand—that “those who had not lived under the Ancien Régime did not know what true douceur de la vie had been” (7). It is certainly possible to consider, as Balzac does, the dual thresholds of Enlightenment and Revolution (Pierrette’s “casement and door”) that appear to separate the 18th and 19th centuries as the primary gulf that those suffering from temporal nostalgia seek to bridge. One could say, as Émile Blondet does in Illusions perdues, that “[l]e dix-huitième siècle a tout mis en question, le dix-neuvième est chargé de conclure” (308).

To believe Freud, the vieux jours de son père are not only out of reach because they no longer exist, but also because they represent a rosy target of wish-fulfillment. The phylogenetic transmission of the Oedipus complex leaves a “residue” that is fundamentally hostile to civilization. Which is to say that, for Freud, vieux jours and son père are essentially synonyms. All that can be done, therefore, is to find new ways to invent the past in such a way as to imagine life without civilization. This can be accomplished through the longing gaze that comes when the “civilized” observers envy primitive peoples for their supposed simple happiness. Or, an individual, through the kind of attentiveness or spiritual practices Rolland recommends when he describes the oceanic feeling, might restore the unbounded experience of life that precedes language, memory and self-awareness. But Freud considers both to be forms of self-
delusion because the archaic heritage is passed down at the very point in infancy when language is acquired, and he extrapolates this understanding to the entire species. There is really only one dividing line: that which separates animals and those afflicted with the Oedipus complex. Any envious vision of primitive, rural, unenlightened peoples is the result, for Freud, of a failure to account for the “changes which original obtuseness of mind, a gradual stupefying process, the cessation of expectations, and cruder or more refined methods of narcotization have produced upon their receptivity to sensations of pleasure and unpleasure” (89).

But to what extent can these same “methods of narcotization” be applied, in error or in an excess of zeal, to soothe the discontent nostalgia has always wanted to cure? A cure can become a prosthesis that one cannot live without—like Kant’s Gänglewagen and formulas that maintain the unenlightened in their fearful, docile and comfortable existence. The tools, techniques, dispositives, etc. which Foucault identifies in Kant have a dual function Kant seems to only partially recognize. I have previously discussed language (which allowed Condillac’s wild child to form a memory but forget his past, and especially the language of the colonizing power, opening the possibility for the Greenlanders to speak with the Danes and the Bretons to join the Republic) and food (where the encounters with a more-varied diet obviate and transform the daily routine).

In light of this, I want to open one more avenue of inquiry, that of technology. Giorgio Agamben, building off Foucault’s identification of the category of dispositifs, pushes for a far broader understanding of these mechanisms, such that the dispositive or apparatus should include:
[...] literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, judicial measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and—why not—language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses—one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably without realizing the consequences that he was about to face. (“What is an Apparatus?” 14)

This process is perpetually self-enforcing. Like the “comfort” Kant assigns to the unenlightened, Agamben’s apparatus do not have to be imposed, only used, trusted, and enjoyed. I have argued throughout that the particular set of traits for which the nostalgic or the nostalgia-prone are admired are represented by the combination of mindless routine and limitless mobility (soup and liberty). Certainly these are traits that can be recaptured through the application of certain technologies—mobile devices, but especially the driverless, search engine-powered car produced by Google. 132 Moreover, these products (any products) can depend on nostalgia-

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132 Presumably, the car will guide or “nudge” its occupants into following Google’s mapping software, which already directs users to “promoted” locations, which is to say advertisers. The driverless car is therefore the perfect compliment for my account of nostalgia, which
inspired marketing. Consider the presentation of an advertising campaign for the Kodak Carousel slide projector that concludes the first season of the television series *Mad Men*:

[T]echnology is a glittering lure. But there is a rare occasion when the public can be engaged on a level beyond flash – if they have a sentimental bond with the product. My first job I was in house at a fur company, with this old pro of a copywriter, a Greek, named Teddy. Teddy told me the most important idea in advertising is “new.” It creates an itch. You simply put your product in there as a kind of calamine lotion. He also talked about a deeper bond with a product: nostalgia. It’s delicate, but potent. Teddy told me that in Greek, nostalgia literally means the pain from an old wound. It’s a twinge in your heart, far more powerful than memory alone. This device isn’t a space ship, it’s a time machine. It goes backwards, forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It’s not called a wheel, it’s called a carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels. Round and a round, and back home again. To a place where we know we are loved.

The advertising pitch—which is of course an argument for the nostalgic period-piece itself—points back to the sense of simplicity of childhood and the freedom of movement that typifies nostalgia. But thinking back to Kant, we must ask to what extent the emphasis on this mode of life disinhibits the pedagogical process of enlightenment. Is the deliberate cultivation of

emphasizes the imagined past as a time of aimless mobility and protection from the stress of choice.
nostalgia simply another “mechanical tool” that has the effect of preserving a state of comfortable and childlike minority?

Agamben identifies in a passage from Aristotle that speaks to this effect, and which he calls “the most beautiful formulation to the aporia that lies at the foundation of Western politics” (*Homo Sacer* I 11). The passage in Aristotle identifies the same sense of fragility I have pointed to in the nostalgia texts, speculating on the strange connection between poverty, timidity and suffering with “natural sweetness”:

[T]here is probably some kind of good in the mere fact of living itself. If there is no great difficulty as to the way of life, clearly most men [*hoi polloi tôn anthrōpōn*] will tolerate much suffering and hold on to life [*zēn, “mere life”*] as if it were a kind of serenity and a natural sweetness (*Politics* 1278b, HS I, 23-31).

This holding onto mere life, for Aristotle, belongs to a subset of people (which is translated by Agamben as “*la maggior parte degli uomini*” and in the original is *hoi polloi tôn anthrōpōn*). The tradition rendering of *hoi polloi* with a genitive expression such as this typically reflects, as Agamben has done, a “merely statistical category” (Garrett 173-174), though this is not absolute. In other cases, *hoi polloi* in translated as “the many,” “the multitude,” etc. This is the case in an early passage from the Nichomachean Ethics, in which Aristotle considers a very similar kind of division. While a higher order of people seek to align their life-goal to the Good, “the generality of mankind then show themselves to be utterly slavish, by preferring what is only a life for cattle [*bokēmaton bion*]” (1095b). The life of *bokē*—to be fed, fattened or to graze—not only recalls the cattle imagery and the “stuffing” [*saginō*] of the Swiss mountain-folk in Hofer’s thesis, it begs a further question about Aristotle’s speculation in the *Politics*. It is very
clear that in the passage cited by Agamben, Aristotle includes neither himself nor anyone capable of any way of life or *ethos* he is interested in. He can only wonder, with the same impossible speculation seen in all the cases I have cited, about those for whom life is imagined to be primarily *grazing*.

It is this class of people in which the philosophers and scientists believed to have found their nostalgia patients, and which they believed needed monitoring in order to prevent the disease, and who fascinated them. Theirs is the way of life whose routines and sub-ordinary practices, traditions and routines, was most threatened by the time nostalgia became first a curiosity, then a series of epidemics.

The discussion of nostalgia, and efforts to cure it, can tell us a great deal about the ways in which undifferentiated, unhistorical, apolitical ways of life are imagined. They can show us the techniques which are conceived to recover or at least recall a life without distinction between public and private, or past and present, because these lives are only ever the same. Which is of course a fantasy. And they can present a warning about the fascination with and valorization of an impulse whose primary goal is to destroy the artifacts of the present and reinstate perpetual ignorance. After Agamben, we must ask whether the identification of simple or enlightened life as animal life, or mere life, as something fragile but sweet puts it in danger. One of the last medical dissertations written on nostalgia, by Jules-Prosper Roché, elaborates a highly-aestheticized euthanasia procedure for the victims of incurable nostalgia.133

Mass efforts that have attempted to bring to the scale of entire populations something resembling Guerbois’ and others’ curative program based on the use of “objets d'attachement”

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133 See the end of Chapter 2.
or exciting feeling in order to permit the population to “oublier le passé.” These projects, which go by the name of Restoration, can only take one of two paths. Either they will collapse under the weight of their own fraudulence or they will attempt to recreate, using new and draconian measures, the undifferentiated, ignorant, repetitive, uncospopolitan and happy lives the unenlightenend are imagined to possess.

In both cases, the projects will demonstrate a marked preference for “the peasants from a province that is poor but bound together by strong family ties” especially compared to “those who are busy earning money and take as their motto: Patria ubi bene.” Their “objets d’attachment” include agrarianism, religious reawakening, Romanticism, souvenirs, cultural preservation, porcelain figurines, restrictions on the use of foreign or minority language, the eclogue, special honors for women who have given birth to large numbers of children, Lamartine, the phalanstère, photography, Instagram, “Kidult,” anti-blasphemy laws, etc. But their accumulation, acceptance and appreciation only poses a new reversal of the old paradox described by Tacitus in his observation of the unenlightened tribes at the outskirts of the empire: All this in their ignorance, they called a return to simpler times, when it was really part of their enslavement.
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