

**TRADITION AND POETIC EXPERIMENTATION
IN *GASPARD DE LA NUIT*:
ALOYSIUS BERTRAND AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE
IN FRENCH ROMANTICISM**



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This work is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, *Roberto Gosetti* (1957-2007).

Abstract

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In mainstream literary histories, Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841) is still remembered as the canonical inventor of the prose poem in France. The established classification of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1842) within the realm of the prose poem inevitably involves a retrospective appreciation of Bertrand's work in light of the better-known authors that succeeded him in the history of this genre, such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé. The result is that Bertrand is often viewed as the inventor and/or the precursor of this genre; an important but, ultimately, minor contributor to its development. This hindsight brings with it a risk of critical anachronism against which Bertrand's contribution is often downplayed, especially because his thematic choices are seen to be outmoded, when compared to works by poets writing decades later. This thesis is a re-examination of Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit*, incorporating an analysis of the cultural context that contributed to its production. The central argument is that in order to fairly assess Bertrand's work, it is crucial to consider the poet's contribution to, as well as his position in, the wider cultural exchange typical of his time. Using this contextual and historical approach, this thesis examines and challenges some of the main traditional considerations of Bertrand, such as his being a *petit romantique*, his provincialism, his unoriginality, and his role as the precursor and/or inventor of the prose poem. The overall aim is to assess fairly Bertrand's unique synthesis of contemporary cultural and literary material with his own original work. By emphasising the crucial role of cultural exchange at the time of *Gaspard de la Nuit*'s production, we are thus able to begin to understand Bertrand in his own terms, rather than those of his successors, ourselves included, challenging commonly-held views and opening up new avenues for research.

Abstract (2500 words)

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In mainstream literary histories, Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841) is still remembered as the canonical inventor of the prose poem in France because of his collection *Gaspard de la Nuit: Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* (posthumously published in 1842). Anthologies and historical surveys of the prose poem usually grant *Gaspard de la Nuit* an important role, but it is rarely considered at any length and accounts are constrained by the fact that Bertrand is classified as a precursor.¹ More detailed studies that focus specifically on the first prose poems, such as Nathalie Vincent-Munnia's volume on the genealogy of this poetic form,² also apply the anachronistic label of *poème en prose*, thus perpetuating the traditional view of Bertrand as the precursor of a genre that was to become fully developed only later.

This established classification of *Gaspard de la Nuit* within the realm of the prose poem is the cause of a series of critical anachronisms. While Bertrand's pioneering formal experimentation is greatly valued, his thematic banality is denounced, for example, due to the presence of obvious Romantic themes and influences in *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Marvin Richards was one of the first critics to draw explicit attention to this paradox, where 'Bertrand receives recognition only to be dismissed as a precursor'. Richards denounces the resulting absurdity, where 'critics have refused to admit Bertrand to the canon precisely because of his unoriginality'.³ The source of any such judgment, I would argue, is an anachronistic comparison between Bertrand's compositions and those of authors, such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé, who experimented with prose poetry only years later, a comparison that renders Bertrand's compositions outdated because of the presence of themes that are typical of the first decades of the nineteenth century. This biased view of Bertrand's unoriginality, the anachronistic means by which it is decided, and the limitations

¹ These include, for instance, the seminal Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Nizet, 1959), and the more recent Julien Roumette, *Les Poèmes en prose* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001), and Yves Vadé, *Le Poème en prose et ses territoires* (Paris: Belin, 1996).

² Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose: généalogie d'un genre dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle français* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1996).

³ Marvin Richards, *Without Rhyme or Reason: Gaspard de la Nuit and the Dialectic of the Prose Poem* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998), pp. 13-14.

imposed by a retrospective labelling, are all reasons to look more closely at this poet, to make a new effort for a fairer assessment of his work, which will only be achieved by understanding him in his own terms. This is what I set out to achieve in my thesis.

Although I am in sympathy with Richards's view, as outlined above, Richards's volume on Bertrand's collection (the first English volume devoted entirely to Bertrand) aimed to demonstrate the originality of *Gaspard de la Nuit* as seen in the light of the generic paradoxes of prose poetry, such as those famously expounded by critical theorists (including Barbara Johnson, Jacques Derrida, and Gérard Genette). Where the present work departs from Richards is that I do not seek to propose a transhistorical theory and formal assessment of the prose poem, nor to value Bertrand's contribution through the eyes of his famous posthumous admirers. A second point of departure is my querying the concept of originality, instead of assuming that it is stable.

The method adopted here for achieving the above is the reincorporation of the original historical, cultural, and literary contexts that informed the writing of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, our analysis placing the *fantaisies* back in the French Romantic period of the 1820s and 1830s (a time characterised by lively cultural exchange) in order to expose and explore new interpretative avenues. Methodologically, the investigation of Bertrand's context is conducted through the study of such sources as correspondence, periodicals, archival documents, contemporary literary works and reviews, as well as historical studies. I aim to demonstrate that this historical approach, combined with a close reading of the texts, allows us to understand Bertrand's thematic and formal choices in much greater depth, permitting us to establish the nature of Bertrand's own poetic experimentation, while also appreciating his debts to literary tradition.

Some scholars (namely Nicolas Wanlin, Luc Bonenfant, and Nathalie Vincent-Munnia) have already demonstrated, albeit in different ways, the value of considering the historical context in the study of Bertrand's collection. My aim here, however, is to place greater emphasis on the importance of what I term the 'cultural exchange' characterising and constituting such a context. 'Cultural exchange' is a process involving active participation by Bertrand, who 'receives' and gleans from cultural, not only literary, phenomena of his time and 'gives back' to contemporary culture by reworking these materials in his own unique way, producing original material which, in turn, contributes to further exchange. The present study aims to show that, in order to fairly assess Bertrand's work, it is crucial to consider the poet's contribution to, as well as his position in, the wider cultural exchange typical of his time. I thus set out to provide a more nuanced account of this complex interaction.

Using the approach outlined, this following work consists of five chapters, each examining and challenging the main traditional critical considerations of *Gaspard de la Nuit* by Bertrand's critics. The first chapter ('Bertrand between Dijon and Paris') disputes the idea that Bertrand is a minor and provincial poet, a *petit romantique*. It also takes issue with the idea that provincialism should be considered as a weakness for authors in France at Bertrand's time. It starts with a brief historical overview, supporting and investigating the general rediscovery of the relevance of the provinces in the first decades of the nineteenth century in France, by looking at historical sources and at the works of historians who have examined this issue. This

chapter supports the idea of the cultural impact of this phenomenon through the examination of the relevant example of the 'série provinciale' to *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. The chapter then includes the case study of the relationship between literary life in Dijon and Paris, which I argue can shed light on the wider cultural change happening at the time. It then explores in more detail the spreading of Romanticism in Dijon, a process that was greatly shaped by the exchange of ideas within this provincial context, but also by the wider cultural exchange with the capital. This complex interaction is examined using evidence provided by original documents, such as correspondence and literary magazines, especially *Le Provincial*, a magazine of Dijon on which Bertrand collaborated. The analysis of such sources exposes both the vision of provincial intellectual life expressed by famous Parisian figures (such as Hugo, Nodier, and Sainte-Beuve), as well as the attitude of the poets of Dijon towards Parisian literary life, and towards the cultural life of their own city. The analysis undertaken in this chapter indicates the complexity of the relationship between Dijon and Paris, which involved contrasting tendencies such as Parisian encouragement, but also indifference; provincial sense of inferiority, but also pride. The negative consideration of provincialism is thus challenged. It is seen here, rather, as an added value, with Bertrand as a central figure in the literary life of his city, and a mediator between literary life in Dijon and the capital. This also challenges the conception of Bertrand as a minor poet. Overall, the chapter provides an account of the cultural landscape of Bertrand's writing; a backdrop against which Bertrand's compositions will be analysed throughout the remainder of the thesis.

The second chapter ('Between Representation and Imagination: The Provinces in *Gaspard de la Nuit*') argues that Bertrand's use of Dijon in his work is not to be underplayed, even though this city does not constitute the main setting in the entirety of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, appearing consistently only in the opening *ballade* and the first preface. In support, the first part of the chapter analyses these texts closely to show how the familiar geography of Dijon often becomes the setting for mysterious episodes, or incursions into the past, which challenge readers' expectations, showing that Dijon is used as a poetic introductory device for some of the leitmotifs of the *fantaisies* (such as attention to architecture, undefined Middle Ages, and fantastic events). Furthermore, the analysis shows that Bertrand was interested in building an intriguing and mysterious image of his city as a way of promoting his collection both in the capital and in his region, capitalising on his provincialism as a point of strength, rather than seeing it as a weakness, even within his collection itself. The setting of Dijon is thus crucial to understanding Bertrand in his own terms, because it has both an internal poetic function and a wider cultural function. Lastly, this chapter further argues that provincialism functions to add value by showing that, after the disappearance of Dijon, the provinces are not forgotten in Bertrand's collection. Readers proceed to encounter representations of Flanders and their inhabitants, *Les Flamands*, showing Bertrand's playful use of contemporary provincial stereotypes.

The third chapter ('The Presence of the Fantastic in *Gaspard de la Nuit*') explores Bertrand's compositions in relation to the wider nineteenth-century phenomenon of the fantastic, by analysing the presence of fantastic themes in some of the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, even when Dijon ceases to be their main setting. The majority of critics have emphasised the relevance of the fantastic

inspiration in Bertrand's collection, but some very significant critics such as Max Milner express doubts as to whether *Gaspard de la Nuit* can be studied as a typical example of this phenomenon, or whether or not the fantastic can even be considered as one of the main characteristics of this collection. After looking at twentieth-century critical discussions of the fantastic and clarifying the theoretical framework on which many critics based their analyses of the *fantaisies*, I propose that questions concerning the presence of the fantastic in the collection can be better assessed through an understanding of the meaning of the term 'fantastique' at Bertrand's time rather than in light of twentieth-century theories, thus avoiding further possible critical anachronisms.

The fourth chapter ('The Romantic Dialogue in *Gaspard de la Nuit*') explicitly takes issue with the traditional accusation of Bertrand's thematic 'unoriginality'. The chapter draws on the work of Kathryn Slott and Marvin Richards in arguing that Bertrand's intertextuality is still worthy of attention,⁴ but adds that Bertrand's intertextuality can be examined even more fruitfully if it is considered in its relationship to specific wider cultural phenomena characterising French Romanticism. Examining Bertrand's thematic 'unoriginality' can be very productive, especially when the intertextuality of his *fantaisies* is considered as a product of contemporary cultural exchange. Through the close analysis of 'La Viole de Gamba' and 'Ondine', two of the best-known compositions in the collection, the chapter aims to demonstrate how Bertrand's work interacts with some of the most typical Romantic themes and phenomena. In particular, the composition 'La Viole de Gamba' is analysed alongside the cultural phenomenon of the revival of pantomimes at the *Théâtre des Funambules* in the 1820s and 1830s (Bakhtin's study on Rabelais provides a valuable theoretical framework for this section), and the composition 'Ondine' is analysed alongside the fascination produced by northern myths and the influence of Loève-Weimars's collection of translations *Ballades, légendes et chants populaires de l'Angleterre à l'Écosse* (1825). In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that Bertrand's inventiveness is all the more evident whenever his compositions are studied alongside contemporary phenomena, and compared with contemporary texts, which probably influenced his choice of themes.

The above analyses of aspects of Bertrand's cultural context constitute an essential background for the fifth chapter ('Formal Experimentation in *Gaspard de la Nuit*'), which addresses the much-debated issue of the form of Bertrand's compositions. Again, so as to avoid anachronism, the chapter challenges both the traditional commonplaces of Bertrand as the inventor and the precursor of the *poème en prose*, while studying the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit* within the context of wider contemporary Romantic generic mobility. Here I consider what Bertrand himself was trying to achieve, and his level of deliberate awareness of his formal experimentation. The evidence considered here includes the few statements left by the poet, and a comparison of Bertrand's *fantaisies* with other little-known compositions in prose at his time, which challenged the normative distinction between the realm of prose and that of poetry, in volumes such as the *Tablettes*

⁴ Kathryn Slott, 'Le Texte e(s)t son double. *Gaspard de la Nuit*: intertextualité, parodie, auto-parodie', *French Forum* 6 (1981), 28-35. In particular, Richards suggests that 'further studies of his [Bertrand's] work are necessary to elucidate the complex intertextual web in which *Gaspard de la Nuit* is entangled', in *Without Rhyme or Reason*, p. 141.

romantiques and *Les Annales romantiques*. Through such textual evidence, my aim in this chapter is to understand the change in poetry taking place in the mindset of poets of the time and, in particular, in their realisation of the possibility of a new poetry freed from verse. This new understanding was based on a new conception of what constitutes poetry itself, which is not a mere *attribut*, but a *substance*, an idea that was spread amongst the Romantics both in the capital and in the provinces, as shown in this chapter by statements taken from articles appeared in the magazine *Le Provincial*. The chapter thus requires us to investigate the influence of this magazine on Bertrand's formal choice, and proposes that *Le Provincial* acted as an effective typographical laboratory, which led Bertrand to be very conscious of the importance of the spatial organisation of his texts. Because of this, I argue, Bertrand goes beyond his contemporaries, and his typographical devices such as asterisks and white spaces become an integral part of the texts themselves, requiring interpretation on the same level as the content. This is perhaps the clearest example of where an assessment of Bertrand's inventiveness is only achieved by resituating the *fantaisies* within their own time, freeing the analysis from possible critical anachronisms.

Essentially, this study of Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* is an attempt to show that sometimes the task of literary scholarship is to free an author from their canonical consideration, which we can here only do by reincorporating the original context of the author's creation. In so doing, new interpretative possibilities, which otherwise risk to be missed, can open up. By freeing Bertrand from his established role within the realm of prose poetry, we gain a better understanding of this author's synthesis of the available cultural and literary material at his time and his original work. This poet's own contribution to literary history, as well as his own experimentation with new poetic paths in his *fantaisies*, are thus re-valued through a more nuanced understanding of the context from which they arose.

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Introduction
Tradition and Poetic Experimentation in *Gaspard de la Nuit*:
Aloysius Bertrand and Cultural Exchange in French
Romanticism

‘The author is a captive of his epoch, of his own present. Subsequent times liberate him from his captivity, and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation’.¹ What was perhaps missing from this declaration of Mikhail Bakhtin in his ‘Response to a Question from Novy Mir’ is that an author can also be a captive of subsequent times – of his critical reception – and become a victim of the opinion of their posthumous readership. For a long time Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841) has been treated as a minor poet and classed under the controversial label of *petit romantique*;² his name has been worth mentioning mainly because of his role as the author of the first collection of prose poetry in France.³ Bertrand himself seemed to have glimpsed this possible destiny of his work. In the opening poem of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, dedicated to Victor Hugo, he writes:

Mais le petit livre que je te dédie, aura subi le sort de tout ce qui meurt, après
avoir, une matinée peut-être, amusé la cour et la ville qui s’amuse de peu de
chose.

¹ Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, ‘Response to a Question from Novy Mir’, in *Speech Genres and other Late Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 1-9 (p. 5).

² The name of Bertrand appears in Francis Dumont, *Les Petits Romantiques français* (Marseille: Les Cahiers du Sud, 1949). This volume is criticised in Max Milner, ‘Les Cahiers du Sud ont-ils inventé les « petits romantiques » ?’, *Romantisme* 18 (1988), 83-90. This issue is polemically addressed also in Jean-Luc Steinmetz, ‘Pour en finir avec les « petits romantiques »’, *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, 105 (2005), 891-912. In recent works, however, sometimes this controversial label reappears, for example: ‘Rabbe, Bertrand et Guérin sont à coup sûr trois « petits romantiques »’, in Jean-Pierre Bertrand, ‘Oublis Collatéraux: Rabbe, Bertrand, Guérin’, in *Les Oubliés du romantisme*, ed. by Marie-Andrée Beaudet, Luc Bonenfant, and Isabelle Daunais (Québec: Éditions Nota bene, 2004), pp. 69-79 (p. 69).

³ In general studies concerning literary genres, Bertrand is often mentioned because of this canonical role. Consider, for example Amélie Djourachkovitch-Schweiger, ‘Le Poème en prose. La prose pour libérer la poésie’, in *Les Grands Genres littéraires*, ed. by Daniel Mortier (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2001), pp. 63-72.

Alors, qu'un bibliophile s'avise d'exhumer cette œuvre moisie et vermoulue, il y lira à la première page ton nom illustre qui n'aura point sauvé le mien de l'oubli.⁴

This study of Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* will attempt to show that the task of literary scholarship can sometimes be that of freeing an author from their canonical critical consideration by reincorporating the original context of the author's creation. In so doing, we may open up new interpretative possibilities.

Anthologies and historical surveys on the evolution of the prose poem usually grant *Gaspard de la Nuit* an important role, and yet its consideration is only fleeting, both because of the succinct nature of such overviews and because Bertrand is classed as a precursor. For instance, in his *Les Poèmes en prose*, Julien Roumette surveys what are considered the main characteristics of Bertrand's collection (such as the 'vague gothique', the 'référence à la peinture', and the 'raffinement de son écriture'), taking up only five pages.⁵ In *Le Poème en prose et ses territoires*, a more didactic volume presenting the evolution of the genre from its origins to the 1980s, which includes an anthology of prose poems divided by themes, Yves Vadé covers Bertrand's work in slightly more than four pages. In this work the name of Bertrand still figures amongst the precursors, while the section 'Les Fondateurs' begins with Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*.⁶

Bertrand's collection gains more attention only in recent studies that focus more specifically on the first prose poems. This is the case, for example, in Nathalie Vincent-Munnia's volume on the genealogy of the prose poem in the first half of the nineteenth century, which contains a convincing formal and thematic analysis of

⁴ Aloysius Bertrand, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2000), pp. 106-07. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as *OC*.

⁵ Julien Roumette, *Les Poèmes en prose* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001), pp. 23-28.

⁶ Yves Vadé, *Le Poème en prose et ses territoires* (Paris: Belin, 1996), pp. 24-28.

some of what she calls the first *poèmes en prose* by such authors as Xavier Forneret, Alphonse Rabbe, Ludovic de Caillex, and Aloysius Bertrand.⁷ Although valuing the contribution of these first poets in prose, however, Vincent-Munnia perpetuates the traditional view of these authors, including Bertrand, as precursors of a genre which was only to become fully developed, later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. ‘Les premières poèmes en prose’, Vincent-Munnia writes, ‘ne font qu’inaugurer des caractéristiques esthétiques et des conceptions poétiques qui ne se réaliseront pleinement que par la suite’.⁸ The classical point of reference for the aforementioned studies is still Suzanne Bernard’s *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu’à nos jours*, the seminal volume on the history of the prose poem in France. This monumental study contains a full section on Aloysius Bertrand entitled ‘Aloysius Bertrand et la naissance du genre’, where Bernard presents *Gaspard de la Nuit* to readers who are likely to be unfamiliar with this work. She briefly elucidates the main elements of his biography, his formal technique (through some convincing textual examples), and some of the central Romantic themes of the *fantaisies*. However, even here, Bertrand is seen as predating the real beginning (‘Après lui le genre est créé’),⁹ the section on *Gaspard de la Nuit* preceding the first chapter, entitled ‘Baudelaire et le lyrisme moderne’.¹⁰ To borrow Todorov’s declaration, Bernard too finds that ‘Il est tout naturel de commencer par Baudelaire’.¹¹

The marginalisation of Bertrand’s position with respect to prose poetry can sometimes be seen in the criticism of prose poetry. While Bertrand’s pioneering

⁷ Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose: généalogie d’un genre dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle français* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1996).

⁸ Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose*, p. 431.

⁹ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Nizet, 1959), p. 71.

¹⁰ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 103.

¹¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Genres du discours* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 119.

formal experimentation is seen as valuable, his thematic banality and ‘manque de souffle’¹² are often denounced, due to his use of obvious Romantic themes and clichés that characterise *Gaspard de la Nuit*, a work which has even been defined as ‘un bréviaire, un abrégé du romantisme’.¹³ This judgment is sometimes taken to the extreme, as can be seen in the example of Hermine Riffaterre’s abrupt declaration: ‘Let me start with something that is not great poetry; I use it for its historical value’.¹⁴ Marvin Richards was the first critic to notice this paradox explicitly, where ‘Bertrand receives recognition only to be dismissed as a precursor’, denouncing it by pointing out how ‘critics have refused to admit Bertrand to the canon precisely because of his unoriginality’.¹⁵ Richards’ volume on Bertrand’s collection (the first English volume devoted entirely to Bertrand) aimed to demonstrate the originality of *Gaspard de la Nuit* seen in the light of the generic paradoxes of prose poetry, such as those famously expounded by critical theorists, including Barbara Johnson, Jacques Derrida, and Gérard Genette. Furthermore, in support of the idea of Bertrand’s originality, in his second chapter entitled ‘Atomized Narrative and Serialized Poetry: *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the New Novel’, Richards undertakes a comparison between some formal aspects of *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the *Nouveau Roman*.

In the same vein as Richards’s work, the present study aims to show that Bertrand’s contribution to literary history is greater than would be concluded from its treatment up until now. However, this analysis will differ from that of Richards in

¹² ‘On est tenté de reprocher à l’auteur de *Gaspard* ses insuffisances, son manque de souffle, le peu d’épaisseur humaine de ses tableaux, ou l’excès de recherche formelle qui donne parfois à sa phrase quelque chose de trop concerté’, in Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 72.

¹³ Jean Richer in the introduction to his edition of Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit. Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), p. 12.

¹⁴ Hermine Riffaterre, ‘Reading Constants: The Practice of the Prose Poem’, in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Hermine Riffaterre (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 98-115 (p. 101).

¹⁵ Marvin Richards, *Without Rhyme or Reason: Gaspard de la Nuit and the Dialectic of the Prose Poem* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998), pp. 13-14.

several ways. First of all, in my examination of Bertrand's *fantaisies* I shall not engage in a discussion of the deconstructive theories of prose poetry as a problematic mode of textual production, nor follow the example of deconstructive analyses of prose poems such as those of Barbara Johnson in her 'Disfiguring Poetic Language'.¹⁶ Indeed, I do not intend to form a transhistorical theory and formal assessment of the prose poem; rather, I aim to explore how the historical, cultural, and literary contexts inform the composition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

Secondly, while Richards assumes a stable notion for such concepts as 'originality' and 'unoriginality', in the present study I shall consider the possibility that the meaning of 'originality' itself may have shifted over time, rendering this concept as one important to understand within the cultural context at Bertrand's time. In particular, during the 1820s, the issues of originality and imitation were at the centre of the animated debate between the *classiques* and the *romantiques* taking place in influential periodicals, such as *Le Globe*.¹⁷ For instance on 9 July 1825, the critic Ampère demonstrated that originality and imitation can coexist in the same literary work; showing, in other words, that having models does not prevent an author from creating something novel and unique.¹⁸ Ampère clarified the meaning of

¹⁶ Barbara Johnson, 'Disfiguring Poetic Language', in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 100-115.

¹⁷ The main criticism of the *classiques* was their imitation of classical sources and conformity with classical rules, but at the same time, the *romantiques* themselves were imitating such models as Walter Scott and Byron.

¹⁸ Some of the *romantiques* insisted on the inherent originality of Romanticism, like Chauvet in one of his articles: 'cette doctrine, c'est la liberté, c'est l'imitation directe de la nature, c'est l'originalité', in 'Situation du Romantisme au 1er novembre 1825', *Le Globe*, 29 October 1825, article quoted in Pierre Trahard, *Le Romantisme défini par "Le Globe"* (Paris: Les Presse françaises, 1924), p. 92. The supporters of the 'nouvelle doctrine' also felt that Romantic literature was a better reflection of contemporary society 'Pour qu'une littérature vive il faut qu'elle naisse de la société', in *Le Globe*, 6 December 1825, article quoted in Trahard, *Le Romantisme défini par "Le Globe"*, p. 99. In the same way, the new models set by the Romantics, such as Medieval literature, Shakespeare, and foreign writers, seemed to reflect more truthfully the principles of society at the time. This can also be seen in well-known Romantic writings on this topic such as De Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1810) and Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823).

imitation in these terms: ‘il n’importe que l’on imite une littérature ancienne ou contemporaine, ce qui fait l’imitation c’est l’existence d’un modèle autre que la nature’.¹⁹ However, in the same article he also argued that even central literary figures like Tasso, Milton, Schiller, and Goethe drew from the literary works of other authors and yet he denounced ‘l’absurdité qu’il y aurait à contester aux poètes que je viens de nommer le mérite de l’originalité’.²⁰ In light of this questioning of the notion of originality, in the present study I am not undertaking an assessment of Bertrand’s originality *per se*, but rather examining this poet’s own and unique synthesis of the available literary material at his time with his own poetic experimentation.

The third way in which the present work will differ from that of Richards is in the consideration of Bertrand’s posterity. Richards focuses for more than half of his study on the reception of Bertrand by subsequent generations of writers, rather than on Bertrand’s compositions themselves.²¹ This is in keeping with other studies on Bertrand, where, as a way of enhancing a minor poet’s legacy, critics have chosen to remind readers of more famous authors such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Breton, the first ‘bibliophiles’ who expressed admiration for Bertrand’s work, and who had the merit of rescuing him from oblivion.²² For a long time Baudelaire’s consideration of *Gaspard de la Nuit* in his *lettre-dédicace* to Arsène Houssaye had fostered a feeling of belonging: ‘un livre connu de vous, de moi et de quelques-uns de nos amis,

¹⁹ Article quoted in Trahard, *Le Romantisme défini par "Le Globe"*, p. 65.

²⁰ Article quoted in Trahard, *Le Romantisme défini par "Le Globe"*, p. 67.

²¹ Especially Chapter 4, ‘Postface / Preface: A Bibliographical Essay on the Fortunes of *Gaspard de la Nuit*’ which looks at the reception of *Gaspard de la Nuit* in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, in *Without Rhyme or Reason*, pp. 122-41.

²² For example the chapter ‘De ses cendres le phénix s’envolera...’, in Fernand Rude, *Aloysius Bertrand, Poètes d’aujourd’hui* (Paris: Seghers, 1971) is entirely concerned with Bertrand’s posterity.

n'a-t-il pas tous les droits à être appelé *fameux*?'²³ where to be interested in Bertrand meant joining a small circle of Baudelaire's *amis*, so to speak. Very recently, however, the destiny of the critical reception of Bertrand has changed dramatically, most notably due to the attention gained by the inclusion of *Gaspard de la Nuit* as one of the main subjects in the programme for the French state examination *Agrégation de lettres modernes 2011*. This unprecedented flourishing of publications, workshops, and conferences, by both specialists and non-specialists, investigating the contribution of Bertrand has elevated the consideration of this author well above the second-hand credit given by references from more important names.²⁴ The feeling of a small circle is still nonetheless the dominant one amongst many Bertrand's scholars because, even with the enthusiasm caused by the *Agrégation*, the name of Aloysius Bertrand seems unlikely to gain its own independent place in mainstream literary histories and literary courses, where he is still often considered as the poor cousin of Baudelaire, or as a *petit romantique*, with the notable exception of the *Association à la mémoire d'Aloysius Bertrand*, which continues to expand research on the poet from Dijon.

In the present study, Bertrand's work will not be considered through the eyes

²³ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1975-76), I (1975), p. 275.

²⁴ For example the 'Colloque Aloysius Bertrand: Journée d'Agrégation' on 11 December 2010, jointly organised by the 'Centre de recherche sur les poétiques du XIXe siècle de Paris III' and the 'Centre de recherche sur la littérature française des XIXe-XXIe siècles de Paris IV', which lead to the publication of its proceedings: *«Un livre d'art fantasque et vagabond»: Gaspard de la Nuit d'Aloysius Bertrand*, ed. by André Guyaux (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010). The year 2010 saw the publication of other collections of essays on Bertrand and his work, such as *Gaspard de la Nuit le Grand Œuvre d'un petit romantique*, ed. by Nicolas Wanlin (Paris: PUPS, 2010); *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit de Louis ("Aloysius") Bertrand*, ed. by Steve Murphy (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Nicolas Wanlin, *Aloysius Bertrand: Le Sens du pittoresque. Usages et valeurs des arts dans Gaspard de la Nuit* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010). Furthermore, the inclusion of *Gaspard* in the program of the state examination encouraged the publication of basic teaching materials specifically aimed at those preparing the *Agrégation*, such as *Aloysius Bertrand, poétique d'un crieur de nuit Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. by Aurélie Loiseleur and Sylvain Ledda (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010) and *Gaspard de la Nuit d'Aloysius Bertrand*, ed. by Christine Marcandier and Sandrine Bédouret-Larraburu (Neuilly: Atlande, 2010).

of his famous posthumous admirers, such as Baudelaire. Since the gestation, writing, and posthumous publication of Bertrand's *fantaisies* (1842) came well before Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*, it is clear that, at the time of their creation, Bertrand's compositions were not classed, or read, as *poèmes en prose*; the 'horizon of expectations' of their first readers – to borrow Jauss's concept – was very different from that of the post-Baudelairian reader. This thesis will thus place the analysis of *Gaspard de la Nuit* back in its original cultural context, that of French Romanticism in the 1820s and 1830s, a time characterised, as I shall show, by lively cultural exchange. The investigation of Bertrand's context through such sources as correspondence, periodicals, contemporary literary works and reviews, as well as historical studies, will permit us to establish his own poetic experimentation, while understanding his debts to literary tradition. One of the starting points for this approach is Bourdieu's theory concerning the 'champ littéraire', insofar as he explores 'l'espace des possibles [...] qui s'offrent devant chaque écrivain à un moment donné de l'histoire du champ et les dispositions à l'égard de ces possibles qu'il doit à sa position dans le champ et à la trajectoire qu'il y a conduit'.²⁵ Expanding on this observation, this study will be an investigation of the specific possibilities which opened before Bertrand at his particular time in literary (and cultural) history. Furthermore, part of my analysis will be based on Jauss's concept of 'the reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past' in order to avoid possible interpretative anachronisms.²⁶ Indeed, the reconstruction of the 'horizon of expectations' at

²⁵ From the abstract of Pierre Bourdieu, 'Le Champ littéraire', in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 89 (1991), 3-46.

²⁶ Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 28.

Bertrand's time will be particularly relevant in order to understand how readers (and writers) at the time were likely to have considered such a literary work.

Some critics of Bertrand's *fantaisies* have already showed the importance of studying *Gaspard de la Nuit* in its context. This is the case, for example, with the introductory study on the evolution of the prose poem by Christian Leroy, *La Poésie en prose française du XVIIe siècle à nos jours: histoire d'un genre*,²⁷ and the aforementioned study on the genealogy of the prose poem by Vincent-Munnia, where she suggests that 'les premiers poèmes en prose doivent [...] être analysés et définis génériquement dans le contexte historique et littéraire de leur production'.²⁸ By considering Bertrand's work as part of the historical development of the genre, studies like Vincent-Munnia's and Leroy's have the merit of producing greater awareness of the literary context that made such development possible by such authors as Bertrand, Rabbe, de Guérin, and Forneret. My aim, however, is to undertake a close reading of some of Bertrand's *fantaisies* in light of specific cultural phenomena at the time that could have had a particular value for this author, which genealogical studies tend not to include. Moreover, as mentioned above, these studies still class Bertrand's *fantaisies* under the label of *poème en prose*. In contrast, in his study on the genre of *Gaspard de la Nuit* the critic Luc Bonenfant eliminates the possible historical bias of unproblematically naming Bertrand's compositions 'poèmes en prose'. In his volume Bonenfant closely analyses Bertrand's texts such as 'La Poterne du Louvre' and 'La Viole de Gamba', firstly as if they were a *récit*, then as a *nouvelle*, and lastly as a *poème en prose*. By so doing, Bonenfant seeks to

²⁷ Christian Leroy, *La Poésie en prose française du XVIIe siècle à nos jours: histoire d'un genre* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2001).

²⁸ Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose*, p. 11.

understand ‘le fonctionnement générique des textes et de leurs seuils’,²⁹ and to explore how Bertrand’s compositions challenge the traditional distinction between established genres, through employing stylistic and formal parameters such as ‘brièveté’, ‘densité’, and ‘unité’. Such parameters will be considered when assessing the formal aspects of Bertrand’s *fantaisies* in the final chapter of this thesis.

Beyond an assessment of the genre of Bertrand’s *fantaisies*, the rich potential of studying this writer’s context through well-documented historical research has recently been shown by Nicolas Wanlin’s *Aloysius Bertrand: Le Sens du pittoresque*, an engaging volume adding to existing critical work on the relationship between *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the arts, especially the visual arts.³⁰ However, Wanlin is not at all interested in comparing some of Bertrand’s *fantaisies* with the possible paintings that might have inspired them. By basing his thorough historical research on a solid theoretical framework, and by providing historical evidence supporting his arguments, Wanlin convincingly examines the various ways in which the use of other arts in Bertrand’s collection is a means by which this poet expresses different aesthetic, and perhaps even political and moral, values. Wanlin hence demonstrates that the *pittoresque* carries different values and meanings in Bertrand’s collection and that his *fantaisies* should not be considered as a mere transposition of other arts (even if the names of Callot and Rembrandt are mentioned in the title).

Although scholars like Wanlin, Bonenfant, and Vincent-Munnia have

²⁹ Luc Bonenfant, *Les Avatars romantiques du genre: transferts génériques dans l'œuvre d'Aloysius Bertrand* (Québec: Éditions Nota Bene, 2002), p. 209.

³⁰ Other studies and articles dealing with the relation between *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the visual arts include Renée Riese Hubert, ‘The Cult of the Visible in *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 25 (1964), 76-85; Renée Riese Hubert, ‘La Technique de la peinture dans le poème en prose’, *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* (1966), 169-78; David H. T. Scott, *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Béatrix Guillot, ‘Jacques Callot et Aloysius Bertrand’, *Les Diableries de la nuit. Hommage à Aloysius Bertrand*, ed. by Francis Claudon (Dijon: EUD, 1993), pp. 69-93; Poulette Choné, ‘À propos de Bertrand et de Callot’, *Les Diableries de la nuit*, pp. 95-109.

demonstrated the crucial value of the consideration of the historical context in the study of Bertrand's collection, albeit in different ways, none of them have placed sufficient emphasis on the importance of what I shall term the 'cultural exchange' characterising this context. By this I mean a dynamic process, entailing active participation on the part of Bertrand who, like other authors, 'receives' and gleans from cultural phenomena of his time (not solely literary ones) and 'gives back' to contemporary culture by reworking these materials in his own unique way. The present study seeks to show that, in order to assess Bertrand's work, it is crucial to consider the poet's contribution to, as well as his position in, the wider cultural exchange typical of his time; an approach aimed at providing a more nuanced account of the complex interaction between Bertrand and his context, in which some of its aspects will emerge as more valuable than others according to Bertrand's exposure to them. The starting point for this kind of approach is Bourdieu's reflection on the 'field of cultural production', especially on his insight that 'ignorance of everything which goes to make up the "mood of the age" produces a derealisation of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time [...] they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism'.³¹

The emphasis placed here on cultural exchange is partly informed by James Smith Allen's study *Popular French Romanticism*, a volume concentrating on the exchange between what he names 'elite' and 'popular' culture in Paris during French

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed', in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 29-73 (p. 32).

Romanticism.³² For example, Allen stresses the fact that now forgotten ‘popular’ authors had a much more central role in spreading and promoting Romantic ideals within society at large than canonical authors like Stendhal and Gautier. In part of this study, I shall demonstrate that now forgotten authors from the regions of France, such as intellectuals from Bertrand’s circle in Dijon, namely Théophile Foisset and Charles Brugnot, had a leading role in shaping the cultural environment of their cities and in fostering cultural exchange with the capital.³³

Using the approach outlined here, I shall examine and tackle some of the main traditional critical considerations of *Gaspard de la Nuit*; whether Bertrand is a minor and provincial poet, whether *Gaspard de la Nuit* belongs in the fantastic genre, and whether Bertrand is a precursor, or rather the inventor, or of the *poème en prose*. This study is composed of five chapters. The first chapter examines the significance and complexity of the idea of provincialism in the France of the first half of the nineteenth century, while undertaking a close analysis of the cultural context of Bertrand in Dijon and examining the relationship between Paris and Dijon through archival material, correspondence, and literary magazines. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the spreading of Romanticism in Dijon through the mindset of its own protagonists, a mindset which was greatly shaped by the exchange of ideas within this provincial context, but also by the wider cultural exchange with the

³² James Smith Allen, *Popular French Romanticism: Authors, Readers, and Books in the 19th Century* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981). Allen is interested in how elements of what he calls ‘elite Romanticism’ influenced and penetrated popular culture during the first half of the nineteenth century in Paris. The study of now forgotten ‘popular’ authors is still very important if one’s aim is to understand the cultural context of that time in Paris.

³³ Archival materials such as the ‘Fonds Foisset’ (34 J), preserved in the Archives départementales de la Côte-d’Or, in Dijon, thus deserve great attention from anyone who is interested in gaining a wider vision of nineteenth-century French culture outside Paris.

capital. This chapter seeks to establish the role of Bertrand in this context.³⁴ The second chapter examines the presence of Dijon at the start of the collection and the possible reasons for its disappearance in later parts, while analysing the presence and the significance of other regions of France in the volume. The third chapter explores Bertrand's compositions in relation to a wider nineteenth-century phenomenon: *le fantastique*. Since critics of Bertrand's collection have had different views about whether *Gaspard de la Nuit* can be considered as part of this phenomenon, this chapter seeks to contribute to this debate by proposing new hypotheses based on the study of the cultural and literary context. The fourth chapter takes issue with the traditional accusation of Bertrand's thematic 'unoriginality'. Unlike Jacques Bony who thinks that 'les sources d'inspiration de Bertrand ont été abondamment recensées par les commentateurs',³⁵ the chapter draws on the work of Kathryn Slott and Marvin Richards in arguing that Bertrand's intertextuality is still worthy of attention.³⁶ Moreover, the chapter proposes that Bertrand's intertextuality can be examined more fruitfully if it is considered in its relationship to wider cultural phenomena characterising French Romanticism. The extensive analysis of the cultural context in these four chapters constitutes an essential background for the last chapter, which addresses the much-debated issue of the form of Bertrand's

³⁴ The study of Bertrand's provincialism has been undertaken in a rather biographical fashion in studies like Henri Chabeuf, *Louis Bertrand et le romantisme à Dijon* (Dijon: Darantière, 1889); Cargill Sprietsma, *Louis Bertrand dit Aloysius Bertrand, 1807-1841: Une vie romantique: étude biographique d'après des documents inédits* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1926). Some important aspects of the literary context in Dijon have been addressed more recently in Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'Autour du Provincial. Deux amis de Victor Hugo, Charles Brugnot et Théophile Foisset', in *L'Esprit du lieu: La Bourgogne et ses écrivains*, ed. by Jacques Poirier (Dijon: Centre de Recherches Le Texte et l'Édition, Actes n° 4, Université de Bourgogne, 1998), pp. 95-119.

³⁵ 'Présentation', in Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. by Jacques Bony (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), p. 25.

³⁶ Kathryn Slott, 'Le Texte e(s)t son double. *Gaspard de la Nuit*: intertextualité, parodie, auto-parodie', *French Forum* 6 (1981), 28-35. In particular, Richards suggests that 'further studies of his [Bertrand's] work are necessary to elucidate the complex intertextual web in which *Gaspard de la Nuit* is entangled', in *Without Rhyme or Reason*, p. 141.

compositions. In order to avoid anachronisms, this chapter considers Bertrand outside of his pioneering role in the development of prose poetry and analyses how his use of an unusual form fits within wider contemporary Romantic generic mobility. Drawing on the idea that according to the *romantiques* ‘La poésie n’est plus un «attribut», elle devient, selon une conception toute moderne, une «substance»’³⁷ – to borrow the words of Vincent-Munnia – the chapter aims at finding more precise textual evidence for this change in the conception of poetry, which is gathered from both theoretical and literary writings of Bertrand and other relevant authors within his cultural context. With the theoretical support of Jauss’s claim that ‘a literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum’,³⁸ the final aim of this chapter will be to free Bertrand from his captivity within canonical literary history. Freeing Bertrand from his role as the precursor – or the inventor – of the prose poem, this work thus aims to revalue Bertrand’s unique contribution within his own context.

³⁷ Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose*, pp. 59-60. Margaret Gilman expresses a similar view through her general observation that, during French Romanticism, ‘the term poetry takes on a broader and broader meaning’, in *The Idea of Poetry in France. From Houdar de la Motte to Baudelaire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 146.

³⁸ Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception*, p. 23.

Chapter One

Bertrand between Dijon and Paris

Introduction: The Rediscovery of the French Provinces

‘C’est un grand et merveilleux spectacle de promener ses regards du centre aux extrémités, et d’embrasser de l’œil ce vaste et puissant organisme où les parties diverses sont si habilement rapprochées, opposées, associées, le faible au fort, le négatif au positif’.¹

(Jules Michelet, *Tableau de la France*, 1833)

In this chapter I shall examine the complex relationship between literary and cultural life in Dijon and Paris at Bertrand’s time using the evidence provided by original documents, such as correspondence and literary magazines.² I shall argue that, in a general sense, the interactions between the two cities had a great influence on Bertrand’s literary development and, more specifically, that the magazine *Le Provincial* of Dijon, on which Bertrand collaborated, had a central role in fostering these exchanges. Indeed *Le Provincial*, like other contemporary regional magazines such as *L’Indépendant* of Lyon and the *Feuilleton* of *Les Affiches d’Angers*, was crucial in spreading Romantic ideals beyond Paris. This was due to its inclusion of reviews of the latest publications of the *nouvelle école*, poetry and writings *à la manière romantique* by local writers, as well as letters of encouragement from leading Parisian figures (namely Chateaubriand and Hugo). *Le Provincial* also featured proud letters from regional readers in support of the importance of the cultural awakening of the so-called *provinces*.

In order both to introduce and contextualise the specific case study of the

¹ Jules Michelet, *Tableau de la France* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1995), p. 134.

² This research was carried out during a research trip to Dijon in the Archives départementales de la Côte-d’Or and in the Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon.

relationship between Dijon and Paris at Bertrand's time, I shall briefly explain the reason why the relationship between the capital and regional France was such a central issue in the first decades of the nineteenth century, looking at some historical sources and at the works of historians who have examined this issue. We shall see that what seems a mere geopolitical question has in fact a lot to do with society, with culture, and hence with literature. In order to further demonstrate the cultural impact of a general rediscovery of the importance of the provinces at the time, I shall consider the case of the 'série provinciale' of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. In the remainder of this chapter I shall focus on the cultural context of Dijon at Bertrand's time, and consider the role Bertrand played in the relationship between literary life in his city, and that in the capital.³ I shall examine on the one hand the vision of provincial intellectual life expressed by famous Parisian figures (such as Hugo, Nodier, and Sainte-Beuve); on the other hand, the attitude of the poets of Dijon towards Parisian literary life, as well as towards the cultural life of their own city and *province*. The result will be an account of the cultural landscape of Bertrand's writing, and a backdrop against which we may be able to analyse Bertrand's compositions.

Paris and the Provinces at the Beginning of the Nineteenth-Century

In *Une société provinciale: la Bourgogne sous la Monarchie de Juillet*, Pierre Lévêque remarks that 'La Révolution avait porté un rude coup à Dijon en lui enlevant son rôle de capitale provinciale'.⁴ The historian is here referring to the

³ Bertrand tried a career in the capital; he was in Paris from November 1828 to March 1830 and, shortly after 1832, he left Dijon for Paris, where he stayed until his death (January 1833 - April 1841).

⁴ Pierre Lévêque, *Une société provinciale: la Bourgogne sous la Monarchie de Juillet* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and Éditions Jean Touzot, 1983), p. 43.

creation of the *départements* during the years of the French Revolution, which were to replace the ancient French *provinces*. In this regard, in *Paris et ses provinces: le défi de la décentralisation 1770-1992*, Pierre Deyon recalls that:

Aux traditions, aux particularités, aux héritages historiques dont les provinces étaient porteuses, elle [la révolution française] choisit de préférer l'uniformité d'un découpage territoriale tout nouveau: la départementalisation.⁵

In his review of Pierre Deyon's study, Alain Parant summarises the political reason for this decision, indicating that 'les assemblées provinciales et les états provinciaux, porteurs de toutes les traditions, de tous les particularismes, de tous les héritages historiques' were indeed perceived as a threat to the unity that the revolutionaries aimed to achieve.⁶ This view is well supported by historical evidence. For instance, the revolutionary Jacques-Guillaume Thouret, addressing in the *Assemblée Nationale* on 2 November 1789, denounced 'l'esprit de province' as 'un esprit individuel, ennemi du véritable esprit national'.⁷ The creation of the *départements* thus reflected the revolutionary climate of secularisation and elimination of established privilege – in this case the old provincial privileges. The new administrative organisation of France was thus yet another way of starting from scratch, of rewriting history.

For the Romantic generation, national unity was still a central issue, but it was approached in a radically different way from that of the protagonists of the French Revolution. In his study *Culture and Society in France (1789-1848)*, Hemmings stresses the importance of the question of national unity for the French Romantics, suggesting that 'if France was to be enrolled under the romantic banner,

⁵ Pierre Deyon, *Paris et ses provinces: le défi de la décentralisation 1770-1992* (Paris: Armand Colin Éditeur, 1992), p. 8.

⁶ Alain Parant, 'Deyon (Pierre), Paris et ses provinces: le défi de la décentralisation 1770-1992', in *Population*, 3 (1993), 787-88 (p. 788).

⁷ Quoted in Pierre Deyon, *Paris et ses provinces*, p. 45.

it was important to have adherents in the provinces and in the capital'.⁸ In light of this view, later in this chapter, I shall show how influential intellectual figures of the first half of the nineteenth century strongly encouraged the cultural awakening of the *provinces*. More generally, throughout the nineteenth century, many publications reflected a revived interest and curiosity in regional France and its inhabitants. Amongst the most canonical and well-known examples are Balzac's depictions of different *provinciaux* in his *Comédie humaine*. As Nicole Mozet argues, Balzac was very careful to observe provincial life in its variety, 'La province balzacienne [...] ne s'oppose pas d'un bloc à Paris. Il y a tous les degrés de différenciation'.⁹ Balzac, who also played with stereotypical visions of the *provinciaux*, undoubtedly contributed to increasing the attention given to France outside the capital. Around the same years, Stendhal was publishing the first two volumes of *Mémoires d'un touriste* (1838), a fictional travel journal set across rural France. In the introduction to his edition of the *Mémoires*, Del Litto highlights the innovative value of Stendhal's choice in setting his travels in regional France:

Cette idée n'avait jamais traversé l'esprit d'un habitant de l'hexagone. Qu'on aille à la découverte de Paris, de ses secrets et des mystères, oui; mais perdre son temps à visiter la province, à s'entretenir avec des provinciaux par définition arriérés, lourds, grossiers! On laissait cette prétention saugrenue à quelque insulaire excentrique voulant se singulariser.¹⁰

During the same years, there were also non-fictional examples of this rediscovered interest in the regions, and the cultural value of regional France was explored and promoted by some monumental topographical series. Many would

⁸ F. W. J. Hemmings, *Culture and Society in France (1889-1848)* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), p. 216.

⁹ Nicole Mozet, 'La Province balzacienne confrontée au temps de la civilisation', in *Province < > Paris. Topographies littéraires du XIXe siècle*, ed. by Amélie Djourachkovitch and Yvan Leclerc (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 2000), pp. 59-72 (p. 61).

¹⁰ Stendhal, *Mémoires d'un touriste* (Paris: François Maspero, 1981), p. 13.

recall the impressive volumes composing the *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* directed by Charles Nodier, Justin Taylor, and Alphonse de Cailleux, which were published between 1820 and 1879.¹¹ These volumes celebrated the past of the French provinces and their beauty, were furnished with details about their history, and included over three thousand large lithographs by various artists, showing their architectural and artistic treasures. If the authors of the *Voyages pittoresques* were more interested in artistic and historical aspects, other publications chose to combine the *pittoresque*¹² with a more detailed statistical study, such as Abel Hugo's *La France pittoresque, ou Description pittoresque, topographique et statistique des départements et colonies de la France* (1835). As the subtitle suggests, for his surveys Abel Hugo chose to adopt the more rigorous and institutional subdivision into *départements*, reflecting his scientific and statistical aims. However, contrary to Abel Hugo's preference, all those volumes that insisted on different historical and cultural identities, characterising the France outside Paris, preferred to maintain the division into *provinces*. This is the case with the last two volumes of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle*, which chose the subdivision into provincial types including entries such as 'Le Breton', 'Le Bourguignon', and 'Le Flamand'.¹³

¹¹ For more on this topic, see Chapter 2.

¹² In the introduction to his study, Nicolas Wanlin specifies one of the evolutions of the term *pittoresque* taking place at the time, 'les *Voyages pittoresques* [...] sont ainsi appelés parce qu'ils décrivent extensivement les sites. Mais l'industrie de l'imprimerie développant la pratique des illustrations, les descriptions s'adjoignirent naturellement le concours des images pour renforcer l'impression. [...] Un ouvrage pittoresque ne pourrait plus se concevoir sans illustrations, et bientôt, *pittoresque* allait devenir synonyme d'*illustré*', *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 60. For 'La notion de *pittoresque* au début du XIXe siècle', see pp. 55-62.

¹³ In the introduction to the second volume of the 'série provinciale', it was explicitly stated that: 'On a [...] naturellement adopté l'ancienne division par provinces, la seule que la nature, le temps, la langue aient consacrée et qui pût fournir assez de traits distinctifs. On sent que les départements n'auraient pu servir: le Breton n'est pas le Normand, mais le Finistère et le Morbihan sont bretons', in Ourliac, 'Introduction', *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle. Province*, ed. by Léon Curmer, 3 vols (Paris: L. Curmer Éditeur, 1841-1842), II, p. i.

The ‘Série provinciale’ of Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, a Much Needed Addendum

Les Français peints par eux-mêmes was a well-known encyclopaedia of caricatures and stereotypical types, representing the French people of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Les Français consisted of eight volumes published between 1840 and 1842 under the direction of Léon Curmer. The first five volumes of this collection, reflecting the cultural hegemony of Paris within the French cultural landscape, contained a description of typically Parisian characters (such as ‘Les femmes politiques’, ‘Le viveur’, and ‘Le gamin de Paris’) as if ‘les Parisiens’ equalled ‘les Français’. In the introduction of *Les Français*, imagining how future readers would look back on his time, Jules Janin justified this predominance of Paris:

Dans ce temps-là, l’on entendra parler d’une capitale d’un grand royaume qui absorbait le royaume tout entier, qui attirait à elle toute fortune et toute beauté, toute intelligence et tout génie, toutes les vertus mais aussi tous les crimes, toutes les poésies mais aussi tous les vices.¹⁵

In the same introduction, however, Janin did not ignore the existence of a France outside Paris and briefly addressed the following problematic issue:

Plus la société française s’est trouvée divisée, et plus l’étude des mœurs est devenue difficile. Ce grand royaume a été tranché en autant de petites républiques, dont chacune a ses lois, ses usages, ses jargons, ses Héros, ses opinions politiques [...] Maintenant comment donc le même moraliste, le même écrivain de mœurs, pourrait-il pénétrer dans toutes ces régions lointaines dont il ne connaît ni les routes, ni la langue, ni la coutume? Comment donc le même homme pourrait-il comprendre tous ces patois étranges, tous ces langages divers? [...] Il est donc nécessaire que cette longue tâche de l’étude des mœurs se divise et se subdivise à l’infini, que chacune de ces régions lointaines choisisse un historien dans son propre lieu, que chacun parle de ce qu’il a vu et entendu dans le pays qu’il habite. Qu’un seul homme se chargeât de cette histoire, c’était bon autrefois, peut-être quand il n’y avait en France que la cour et la ville.¹⁶

¹⁴ Some of its contributors were quite prominent intellectual figures of the time, such as Balzac.

¹⁵ Jules Janin, ‘Introduction’, in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, ed. pres. by Pierre Bouttier (Paris: Omnibus: 2003), p. 11.

¹⁶ Jules Janin, ‘Introduction’, in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, p. 15.

The French regions are described as a group of foreign countries – as ‘petites républiques’ – with their own traditions, cultures and languages. A question thus arises, what is the relationship between ‘ces régions lointaines’ and France as a whole? Is it simply that the inhabitants of these ‘régions’ should be excluded from ‘les Français’? With the increasing interest in the *provinces*, these questions could no longer be ignored; three volumes with the subtitle ‘Province’ were thus added to the collection, bringing the total to eight.

Initially the first volume of the ‘série provinciale’ (which did not enjoy widespread success) included general provincial types such as ‘Le Directeur d'un théâtre de province’, ‘Le Comédien de province’ and ‘La Femme de province’, overlooking the many differences between the various *provinces* of France. The second volume of the ‘série provinciale’ opened with an introduction, which appears to be a statement in defence of the *provinces* and the centrality of their cultural value. The author of this introduction, Ourliac, recognised and explicitly supported the cultural value of the *provinces* and, in stark contrast with Janin’s definition of Paris as ‘capitale d’un grand royaume qui absorbait le royaume tout entier’, he argued:

Un ouvrage où l’on se proposait de peindre les mœurs des Français au dix-neuvième siècle ne devait point se borner à les considérer dans leurs divers états. Les modèles, toujours pris à Paris, n’auraient représenté que Paris au lieu de la France, et auraient achevé d’accorder à la capitale une prépondérance qui, Dieu merci, n’a rien encore de si bien établi.¹⁷

For containing both this conscious aim and explicit statement, the last two volumes of the ‘série provinciale’ of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, while still playing with some of the most stereotypical visions of the regions of France, should be considered as one of the most culturally significant endorsements of the *provinces* in

¹⁷ Ourliac, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, p. i.

nineteenth-century France. The introduction by Ourliac explicitly criticised the cultural hegemony of Paris along with its consequent homogenisation and impoverishment in France. Ourliac warned his readers: ‘cette physionomie des provinces qui [...] s’efface de jour en jour’, and soon ‘les barrières de Paris seront aux frontières’.¹⁸ The worried tone of Ourliac’s introduction is very different from the overall satirical tone characterising the caricatures of *Les Français*, and a serious reflection upon the imminent danger of a possible cultural loss was needed in order to rethink the meaning of French national identity as a whole. In her analysis of the ‘série provinciale’ of *Les Français*, Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini valuably stresses the point that ‘L’adjonction de l’espace provincial dans le tableau des Français infléchit ainsi la peinture des mœurs vers une réflexion sur le processus historique de construction nationale et sur l’articulation entre identité locale et identité nationale’,¹⁹ and further ‘il compose l’image d’une nation dont la diversité est signe, non nécessairement de division, mais de riche substantialité, et participe en lui-même à l’œuvre de construction nationale.[...] Pour peindre le tout, *Les Français-Province* valorisent ses parties’.²⁰

Overall, from Balzac and Stendhal’s fictional examples, to typographical series and other collective publications such as the ‘série provinciale’ of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, these works demonstrate the relevance of a rediscovery of the French *provinces* and of the richness of their cultural diversity, a rediscovery which started from the first decades of the nineteenth century. This

¹⁸ Ourliac, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, p. i.

¹⁹ Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini, ‘Le type et le niveau. Écriture pittoresque et construction de la nation dans la série provinciale des *Français peints par eux-mêmes*’, in *Imaginaire et sensibilités au XIXe siècle, études pour Alain Corbin*, ed. by Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini and Dominique Kalifa (Paris: Éditions Créaphis, 2005), pp. 85-97 (p. 93).

²⁰ Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini, ‘Le type et le niveau’, p. 95.

increasing awareness of the value of regional France was linked to reflection about national identity: the idea of France as a whole had to be renegotiated in order to incorporate all these different identities, a progressive change in the mindset of the entire nation that was taking place at Bertrand's time. While the next sections of this chapter will consider mainly the literary and cultural relationship between Paris and Dijon, much more could be said about the social and political implications of such a change. The influence of the work of Romantic writers on French contemporary society and politics, while beyond the scope of this work, is indeed of great relevance as many of them were seeking to leave an impact on their own society and political life, demonstrated most notably by the writings and life choices of the most famous of them, Victor Hugo.

Bertrand, the Échappé de province

‘Ils ont hâte de fuir le cadre étroit de leur province
pour rejoindre leurs compatriotes d’âme et faire
carrière à leur côté’.²¹
(Laisney, *L’Arsenal romantique*)

Opening Bertrand's collection of *fantaisies*, the first text a reader encounters is:

Ami, te souviens-tu qu'en route pour Cologne,
Un dimanche à Dijon, au cœur de la Bourgogne,
Nous allions admirant clochers, portails et tours,
Et les vieilles maisons dans les arrières-cours?²²

This passage is an epigraph taken from one of Sainte-Beuve's poems from the collection *Les Consolations* (1830). It is a memory of Dijon where the poet expresses

²¹ Vincent Laisney, *L’Arsenal romantique. Le Salon de Charles Nodier (1824-1834)* (Paris: Champion, 2002), p. 382.

²² OC, p. 91.

admiration for this city's architecture, 'admirant clochers, portails et tours'.²³ Sainte-Beuve's quotation, which appears at the beginning of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, is worth examining carefully. It has the notable position of being the first of a long list, as every composition in Bertrand's collection is opened by at least one epigraph. The choice of Sainte-Beuve's passage reflects a widespread attitude amongst regional intellectuals who were proud of their native city, and even more so when its beauty was recognised by important Parisian figures. The opinion of leading figures of Parisian cultural life was indeed often considered more valuable than the opinion of some local writer. For example, in a polemical letter to the *gérant* of one of the main magazines of Dijon *Le Spectateur* (6 August 1832), Bertrand declared: 'Je préfère vos dédains à vos suffrages. Vos suffrages d'ailleurs, seraient bien humbles, après ceux dont m'honorent Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve [...] dont l'amitié encourage mes études littéraires'.²⁴ Sainte-Beuve's lines function as a celebration of Dijon, but they are first and foremost a homage to Sainte-Beuve himself, perhaps an unspoken and hopeful declaration of belonging to the Parisian milieu on the part of Bertrand.

Some of the writers working in Paris had formed an opinion themselves on the relationship between literary life in the capital and the *province*. Against such a background, some of them witnessed and commented on the first arrival of Bertrand at a literary circle in Paris. This is how Sainte-Beuve recalled this first appearance some years later (1842):

Nous le vîmes arriver à Paris vers la fin de 1828 ou peut-être au commencement de 1829. [...] Nous vîmes simplement alors un grand et maigre jeune homme de vingt et un ans, au teint jaune et brun, aux petits yeux noirs très vifs, à la

²³ Poggenburg points out that Sainte-Beuve's poem 'Antiquités de Dijon' was dedicated to his friend Louis Boulanger who travelled with him to Dijon in 1829, see note 2, in *OC*, p. 284. It should be noted that the admiration for the architectural beauties of the provinces is one of the main themes of the *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*.

²⁴ *OC*, p. 758.

physionomie narquoise et fine sans doute, un peu chafouine peut-être, au long rire silencieux. Il semblait timide ou plutôt sauvage.²⁵

In 1857, as an introductory notice to a letter from David d'Angers to Sainte-Beuve in the *Revue de l'Anjou et du Maine*, Victor Pavie also described Bertrand's arrival at a literary gathering in Paris (specifically, Nodier's Arsenal):

Pendant l'hiver de 1828 un jeune homme apparut [...] à ce foyer de l'Arsenal dont la famille Nodier faisait si hospitalièrement les honneurs. Ses allures gauches, sa mine incorrecte et naïve, son défaut d'équilibre et d'aplomb trahissaient l'échappé de province. On devinait le poète au feu mal contenu de ses regards errants et timides. Son nom était Louis ou plutôt *Aloysius* Bertrand [...] Quant à l'expression de sa physionomie où je ne sais quel dilettantisme exalté se combinait avec une taciturnité un peu sauvage, il n'était que trop facile d'y reconnaître une de ces victimes de l'idéal et du caprice, qui chassées du terroir par des incompatibilités de race, s'en vont chercher fortune ou misère à Paris.²⁶

Poets who were already integrated in Parisian literary life became spectators of the first appearance of Bertrand. Both Sainte-Beuve and Victor Pavie agreed on the fact that Bertrand's behaviour differed from the typical Parisian etiquette; the poet from Dijon seemed 'wild', ('plutôt sauvage', 'une taciturnité un peu sauvage').

It should be noted that the adjective 'sauvage' is not to be considered as an unequivocally negative judgment. Indeed, this adjective reflects a common Parisian perception: the *provinciaux* were often seen as primitive, and their 'caractère primitif' was a mark of both their naivety and their innocence.²⁷ This understanding is also confirmed by other historical sources, such as the *Physiologie du provincial à Paris* (1841) by Pierre Durand, which ironically states: 'L'habitant de la Province qui a déjà fait le voyage à Paris ne peut plus être considéré comme provincial. En

²⁵ Notice de Sainte-Beuve, in *OC*, p. 80. Sainte-Beuve did not specify which circle he was referring to.

²⁶ Victor Pavie, foreword to the 'Lettre de David d'Angers à Sainte-Beuve sur la mort de Louis Bertrand', in *Revue de l'Anjou et du Maine* (Angers: Librairie de Cosnier et Lachèse, 1857), pp. 44-47 (p. 44).

²⁷ Demartini underlines that 'Le type provincial par excellence, c'est le type «primitif», dont les traditions et les mœurs, bravant le progrès et la civilisation, défient encore pour un temps le «niveau du siècle».', in Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini, 'Le type et le niveau', p. 93.

touchant une fois le sol de la capitale, il a perdu son caractère primitif, sa naïveté départementale. Notre contact l’a défloré; notre brouillard l’a décati’.²⁸ The arrival in Paris is described here as entailing the inevitable loss of innocence on the part of the provincial man, who thence becomes a hybrid, ‘Ce n’est peut-être pas encore un Parisien, mais assurément ce n’est plus un provincial’. In Durand’s *Physiologie* the ‘notre’ (in ‘notre contact’ and ‘notre brouillard’) and the ‘nous’ in Sainte-Beuve’s description ‘nous le vîmes arriver à Paris’ seem to mark the sense of distance between intellectuals in Paris and those arriving from the outside.

The aforementioned account by Victor Pavie contains even harsher comments. Pavie’s view is an interesting case as, coming from Angers, he can be considered himself as one of the *provinciaux*. Moreover, Pavie could be considered as a mediator between Angers and Paris, as he and his family had an important role in the spreading of Romantic literature in their city.²⁹ It is difficult to understand his attitude when he described Bertrand as an ‘échappé de province’, one of ‘ces victimes de l’idéal et du caprice, qui [...] s’en vont chercher fortune ou misère à Paris’. It could be that Pavie was depicting Bertrand’s arrival from the perspective of a *provincial*, who knew the kind of difficulty the poet of Dijon was going through; but it could also be that Pavie, already well integrated in Parisian literary life, felt entitled to judge the behaviour of a novice from the *province*. Reading Sainte-Beuve’s and Pavie’s accounts, as well as the ironic view expressed in Durand’s *Physiologie*, it is evident that the literati of Paris sensed a clear divide between poets in the capital and in other regions of France.

²⁸ Pierre Durand, *Physiologie du provincial à Paris* (Paris: Aubert et Lavigne, 1841), p. 118.

²⁹ For more on the role of the Pavies in the spreading of Romantic literature in Angers, refer to Vincent Laisney, ‘Victor Pavie et le *Feuilleton* des *Affiches d’Angers*’, in *Presse et plumes: Journalisme et littérature au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Marie-Eve Thérénty and Alain Vaillant (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2004), pp. 95-104.

The Parisian perspective is complex and multifaceted, however, and the awareness of an evident divide between the capital and regional France did not prevent many Parisian intellectuals from wishing for the end of the cultural hegemony of Paris. For example, important figures such as Nodier and Hugo saw in the literary efforts of the *province* the sign of a new vision, not only of literature, but also of culture and society – as something to be discussed and constructed by a wider community of men. As Laisney suggests in his study about Nodier’s literary gathering, ‘l’ouverture sur la province est l’occasion d’étendre le champ des relations entre hommes d’une même communauté de pensée’.³⁰

Charles Nodier was one of the first protagonists of Parisian literary life who showed great interest in the activities of the provinces. Not only did he welcome various *provinciaux* to his Salon, but he also actively encouraged several regional initiatives.³¹ An example of this is Nodier’s support of the *Académie provinciale* of Lyon, whose honorary president was Chateaubriand, a literary enterprise that failed in 1827.³² Nodier idealistically saw in the *Académie provinciale* a valid and more liberal alternative to the tyranny of the Parisian *Académie*. In a letter to Victor Hugo dated 30 October 1826, Nodier expressed his hopes concerning the group of Lyon the following terms:

Il est vrai que j’ai négligé moi-même d’insister auprès de vous sur l’importance que pouvoit prendre l’Académie provinciale, sur l’intérêt que nous offroient les relations qu’elle ouvre entre les hommes les plus distingués de la France excentrale, sur l’avantage si désiré dès longtemps d’avoir un journal vraiment libre.³³ [...] Il est temps de faire une Académie à côté de l’Académie, un journal

³⁰ Vincent Laisney, *L’Arsenal romantique*, p. 387.

³¹ Laisney remarks that ‘L’Arsenal s’offre en effet comme une exception remarquable au “salon parisien” où s’applique la règle non écrite de la ségrégation’, p. 381.

³² Jacques-Rémi Dahan suggests that the *Académie provinciale* ‘s’était constituée afin de promouvoir une littérature à l’enracinement provincial qui pût rivaliser avec celle des salons parisiens’. See Victor Hugo, and Charles Nodier, *Correspondance croisée*, ed. by Jacques-Rémi Dahan, pref. by Raymond Setbon (Bassac: Plein Chant, 1987), p. 71 n.1.

³³ This is a reference to *L’Indépendant*, which was run by the group of the *Académie provinciale*.

à côté des journaux, une littérature à côté de la littérature, car il est temps de faire une Nation.³⁴

Nodier foresaw the importance of involving what he called ‘les hommes les plus distingués de la France excentrale’, and this would soon be the general attitude of Parisian Romantics, many of whom welcomed the *Académie provinciale* of Lyon. In his article ‘La Vie culturelle à Dijon, à l’époque d’Aloysius Bertrand’, Dahan recalls that ‘Sur la liste de membres de l’Académie provinciale [...] on relève [...] les noms de Victor Hugo, de Ballanche, de Lamartine, de Guizot, de Thiers, d’Alphonse Rabbe, d’Alfred de Vigny etc’.³⁵ As Laisney valuably underlines:

À partir de 1828, après que le mouvement a fait ses preuves et que les provinciaux ont commencé à se manifester, Hugo et ses amis pressentent toute l’utilité d’un rayonnement vers les départements et la nécessité de tisser une vaste toile sur la France qui diffuse l’évangile romantique.³⁶

It was within this context of Romantic literary dynamism that, on 8 May 1828, Victor Hugo, who was already a literary idol for young poets both in the capital and regional France, addressed to the magazine of Dijon, *Le Provincial* an enthusiastic letter, in which he declared:

Il seroit temps en effet que la province cessât de recevoir de Paris des opinions toutes faites; il seroit temps qu’elle eût ses livres et ses journaux, qu’elle se sentît vivre par elle-même. [...] La centralisation produit à la fois deux effets opposés, deux maladies contraires pour la province et pour la capitale. La France est un Pays défaillant et appauvri; Paris est une ville pléthorique.³⁷

Hugo saw this magazine as one of the signs of a necessary provincial cultural awakening and, like other crucial literary figures in the capital, he wished for the end of the cultural hegemony of Paris. Another important literary figure of the early

³⁴ Victor Hugo-Charles Nodier, *Correspondance croisée*, pp. 71-73.

³⁵ Jacques-Rémi Dahan, ‘La Vie culturelle à Dijon, à l’époque d’Aloysius Bertrand’, *Les Diableries de la nuit*, pp. 27-28.

³⁶ Vincent Laisney, *L’Arsenal romantique*, p. 382.

³⁷ Cited in Cargill Sprietsma, *Louis Bertrand (1807-1841) dit Aloysius Bertrand*, ed. by Jacques Bony (Paris: Eurédit, 2005), p. 100.

nineteenth century, Chateaubriand, echoed Hugo's view in a letter to *Le Provincial* dated 11 August 1828, in which he affirmed: 'Il seroit à désirer que les départements exploitassent ainsi leur propre sol: la France est féconde, et toutes nos richesses ne sont pas renfermées dans la capitale'.³⁸ These statements show that the involvement of 'France excentrale' was seen by leading nineteenth-century intellectual figures as a fundamental element for the cultural enrichment of France as a whole.³⁹

Le Provincial: *Provincial Magazines as Sites for Cultural Promotion*

'Mais d'abord, pourquoi la province fait-elle des journaux?'

('Le Rédacteur en chef d'un journal de province',
Les Français peints par eux-mêmes)⁴⁰

The magazine *Le Provincial* was created in 1828 by some of the young members of the *Société d'Études de Dijon*, a cultural group that included leading figures of literary life in Dijon, such as Théophile Foisset, Charles Brugnot and Louis Bertrand, who joined it in 1826. Even though it was published for only four months, *Le Provincial* unquestionably left a mark in the history of literary exchange between Dijon and Paris at the time, as demonstrated by the encouraging letters of Hugo and Chateaubriand as mentioned above. Furthermore, the third issue of this paper (6 May 1828) contained a suspiciously over-flattering letter signed 'Ch. N.':

Monsieur,

Je n'ai pas l'honneur d'être dijonnais, mais j'ai toujours désiré de l'être, non parce que Dijon est une ville de grands hommes, comme on l'a imprimé cent fois, mais parce qu'on y a de l'esprit et qu'on y cause mieux qu'ailleurs. Je m'intéresse par là même au *Provincial*, et pourvu qu'il sache causer, je ne

³⁸ This letter was published on the first page of *Le Provincial*, 15 August 1828, see Appendix B, Document 9. A reproduction of the manuscript of this letter is included in Appendix C, Document 1.

³⁹ In his article 'Les Correspondants parisiens du *Provincial de Dijon*: collaboration ou instrumentalisation?', Dahan raises a doubt about the genuinity of Parisian encouragement, in *Presse et plumes*, pp. 105-19. What is relevant for my analysis, however, is the great symbolic value that these letters from Paris had for the members of the editorial team of *Le Provincial*.

⁴⁰ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, I, p. 576.

doute pas qu'un grand succès ne couronne les espérances que j'en ai conçues. [...] [referring to Dijon's past times] Vous avez pu même, comme on l'a dit, vous glorifier un moment de posséder la meilleure école de beaux-arts, *non point de la France, mais de l'Europe*.⁴¹

Jacques-Rémi Dahan recently discovered that this letter signed 'Ch. N.', fraudulently suggesting Charles Nodier, was in fact by Foisset, one of the main contributors to *Le Provincial*.⁴² Dahan recalls that Brugnot and Foisset 'jugeaient à présent indispensable de recueillir l'approbation – manifeste, ostensible surtout – des grands écrivains parisiens qui avaient deux ans plus tôt patronné *l'Académie provinciale*'.⁴³ Here it is worth mentioning briefly the different stages of this *Académie provinciale*, a cultural project that failed in Lyon and that had been regarded with hope in the capital, especially by Nodier. On 28 December 1825, the first issue of the magazine *L'Indépendant, Journal de Lyon, des départements, de Paris et de l'étranger* was published.⁴⁴ As Laisney recalls in his account:

Son titre trahit à lui seul le désir de désenclavement géographique de ses rédacteurs. Le journal, loin de se confiner à un rayonnement régional, prétend au contraire irradier de son point d'origine jusqu'à l'Europe entière en s'étendant par cercles concentriques jusqu'à Paris.⁴⁵

This magazine presented itself as an alternative to Parisian cultural hegemony, and it was on the side of the *romantiques*. At the end of 1826 this paper became the official

⁴¹ Cargill Sprietsma, *Louis Bertrand*, p. 98. In this biographical study about Bertrand published in 1926, Sprietsma introduced this letter in the following way: 'Charles Nodier avait envoyé au rédacteur, dès le premier numéro du *Provincial*, une lettre flatteuse, un peu longue, qui montre Nodier "patron" du romantisme de province', p. 98.

⁴² According to Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'Des personnalités marquantes qui avaient naguère prêté l'appui de leur nom à *l'Académie provinciale*, seul Nodier fit la sourde oreille'; in a note he also adds, 'la lettre publiée dans le n. 3 du *Provincial* [...] sous la signature «Ch. N.», n'est nullement de Nodier, mais... de Foisset lui-même ainsi que son commentaire!', in Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'Autour du *Provincial*. Deux amis de Victor Hugo, Charles Brugnot et Théophile Foisset', in *L'Esprit du lieu: La Bourgogne et ses écrivains*, ed. by Jacques Poirier (Dijon: Centre de Recherches Le Texte et l'Édition, Actes n° 4, Université de Bourgogne, 1998), pp. 95-119 (p. 105).

⁴³ Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'Autour du *Provincial*', p. 103. This is again a reference to the *Académie provinciale* of Lyon.

⁴⁴ This ambitious title would soon change into *L'Indépendant, Journal de la France provinciale*, see Vincent Laisney, *L'Arsenal romantique*, p. 385.

⁴⁵ Vincent Laisney, *L'Arsenal romantique*, p. 384-85.

magazine of the newly founded *Académie provinciale*, a rather utopian attempt to propose a real alternative to the traditional Parisian *Académie*. Unfortunately, the project failed due to lack of funds in 1827, but it was nevertheless of great symbolic value and represented an important and encouraging precedent for activities in other regions.⁴⁶

This literary enterprise was a crucial stimulus for the young people in Dijon, even if the project of *Le Provincial* did not aim at filling a role as ambitious as the original project of Lyon, due to its lacking the aspiration of replacing other Parisian magazines. Chateaubriand, the honorary president of the *Académie provinciale*, expressed his gratitude for the name of *Le Provincial*, itself a tribute to the *Académie*. In a letter to Brugnot dated 23 July 1828, Chateaubriand declared:

Je lis, Monsieur, avec un extrême plaisir *le Provincial* que l'on veut bien m'envoyer: je suis très heureux de voir réussir à Dijon une entreprise que nous avions manquée à Lyon.⁴⁷

At the same time, the support of Nodier was lacking and Foisset chose to step in on his behalf. The words chosen by Foisset, however, seem to go beyond the search for Parisian approval and to demonstrate a stark provincial pride, especially when he shamelessly writes such sentences as 'Je n'ai pas l'honneur d'être dijonnais, mais j'ai toujours désiré de l'être'.

Beyond the encouragement (whether genuine or not) coming from the capital, *Le Provincial* had an important symbolic value for writers in Dijon. The founders of this paper, proud of their efforts, strongly believed in the cultural value of their publication, as shown by the first editorial by Brugnot, who declared: 'Le temps

⁴⁶ For a longer and more detailed account of this enterprise of Lyon, Vincent Laisney, *L'Arsenal romantique*, pp. 383-94.

⁴⁷ Cited by Th. Foisset, in Charles Brugnot, *Poésies* (Dijon: Imprimerie de Mme Veuve Brugnot, 1833), p. xxix.

peut-être est venu de faire mieux, de se montrer moins superstitieux pour Paris, moins prompt sur-tout à faire les honneurs de ses proches [...] Ailleurs la lecture est un plaisir; à Dijon, c'est un besoin'.⁴⁸ Brugnot also hoped that his magazine could lead other regions of France to assume a more active involvement in national cultural life:

Des magistrats, des avocats, des professeurs, dont plusieurs sont étrangers à la Bourgogne, aucun à la Province, ont bien voulu s'associer à nos travaux. [...] À Toulouse, à Rouen, à Grenoble, à Troyes, à Besançon, à Strasbourg nous trouverons des cœurs pour nous comprendre, des voix pour répondre la nôtre.⁴⁹

Soon the other *provinces* started to answer Brugnot's call, contacting *Le Provincial*, while its editorial team cherished any sign of regional cultural awakening:

Nous avons reçu le premier numéro du *Courrier de la Haute-Marne*, journal politique, littéraire et d'annonces. De tous côtés, les Départements semblent se remuer pour s'affranchir de la tutèle sous laquelle les tenait la Capitale. Ils semblent comprendre enfin que le moment est venu d'essayer quelques peu ses forces et de montrer que le sang qui circule dans les veines n'est autre que celui même qui alimente le cœur.⁵⁰

During this time, some of the more radical subscribers expressed an even stronger desire for emancipation, hoping that the magazine would acquire greater intellectual autonomy from notable Parisian publications, namely *Le Globe*.⁵¹ In a long letter to the 'Directeur du *Provincial*', a subscriber from Grenoble proclaimed:

Monsieur, en vérité je vous trouve bien timide. J'espérois toujours que vous

⁴⁸ *Le Provincial*, 1 May 1828, p. 1. The relevance of the ideas expressed in this editorial is demonstrated by various letters from Brugnot to Foisset written in 1828, just prior to the first issue of *Le Provincial*. In these letters Brugnot discussed with passion several of these ideas with Foisset. Fonds Foisset, 34 J 93, at the Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or in Dijon. Some of these letters are included in Appendix C, '2. Three transcribed letters from Charles Brugnot to Théophile Foisset, April 1828'.

⁴⁹ *Le Provincial*, 1 May 1828, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Le Provincial*, 8 June 1828, p. 64.

⁵¹ *Le Provincial* was indeed inspired by *Le Globe*. Dahan recalls that 'Le programme du journal [...] indique assez sa tendance, celle d'un catholicisme monarchique et libéral, dans la ligne de celui du *Globe*', in 'La Vie culturelle à Dijon à l'époque d'Aloysius Bertrand', p. 28. For a more detailed account of the foundation of *Le Provincial* and its ideals, refer to Sylvain Milbach, 'La gestation du libéralisme catholique. L'itinéraire de Théophile Foisset sous la Restauration', in *Annales de Bourgogne*, 70 (1998), 55-129.

seriez de votre pays [...] provincial sur-tout, et qu'à ce compte vous feriez bonne guerre aux feuilles parisiens. Mais point. [...] Paris a beau dire, la Province a aussi des yeux et des idées. C'est encore là, croyez-moi, que vivent les convictions franches, désintéressées, indépendantes: il seroit temps peut-être que ces convictions eussent leurs organes.⁵²

This letter, permeated by declarations of independence and heartfelt promotion of the political and cultural weight of the 'Province', ended with an outspoken statement of the superiority of the intellectual honesty of the *provinciaux*:

Cette profession de foi n'est pas celle des coteries de Paris, mais elle est celle de beaucoup d'hommes d'élite dans toutes les provinces. Proclamez-la et vous représenterez plus ou moins tous ceux qui ne font pas leurs opinions avec un journal, tous ceux qui pensent que les feuilles parisiennes font fausse route et que les meilleures compromettent les vérités même qu'elles sont chargées de défendre. Vous auriez rempli une lacune.⁵³

This sense of provincial fraternity was also reflected by the enthusiasm that *Le Provincial* sparked within the French regional press. In *Le Provincial* of 10 July 1828, it was proudly announced that:

Nous voyons avec plaisir que *Le Provincial* gagne du terrain au dehors. *La Gazette de Lyon* lui a emprunté une lettre [...] *Le Mercure des villes et des campagnes* répète aujourd'hui notre article sur le budget du Clergé. Dans le temps même où l'on adressoit de Grenoble et de Strasbourg les communications qu'on a pu lire dans ce recueil, nous recevions de Vesoul une lettre que nous nous ferons un devoir de publier.⁵⁴

This letter by a subscriber from Vesoul also advocated the complete cultural independence of the *provinces* from Paris and its magazines: 'Paris et ses journaux ont servi à instruire les provinces; le jour est venu où elles se doivent affranchir d'une trop longue tutèle', while also adding: 'Qui donc rédige les principales feuilles de la capitale? Des Parisiens? Non sans doute, mais des provinciaux qui habitent à

⁵² *Le Provincial*, 6 July 1828, p. 100.

⁵³ *Le Provincial*, 6 July 1828, p. 101.

⁵⁴ 'Chronique', *Le Provincial*, 10 July 1828, p. 108.

Paris’.⁵⁵ This subscriber was referring to a very common phenomenon, where talented people moving from the regions to the capital would sometimes fill important cultural roles in Paris. This was the case, for example, with Brifaut, a *bourguignon illustre*, who became the editor of *La Gazette de France* and was elected to the *Académie Française* in 1826. From Paris, Brifaut paid particular attention to the cultural life of his region and addressed an enthusiastic letter to *Le Provincial* declaring: ‘Je suis charmé de voir Dijon sortir de sa léthargie. [...] Grâce à l’existence de la nouvelle feuille rédigée par vous et par vos amis, la réputation de ma ville natale va s’accroître’.⁵⁶

The aim of the various examples in this section is to demonstrate the important role played by regional magazines within the process of cultural awakening, and the intellectual emancipation of the *provinces* from the cultural hegemony of Paris. It is important to understand that the examples of *Le Provincial* and the works of its collaborators reflects a much wider historical and cultural phenomenon: the flourishing of provincial magazines at Bertrand’s time, and their widespread reception and consideration both in the provinces and in Paris. Indeed, the phenomenon of the provincial press was so culturally relevant that it gained an entry in the sixth volume of the *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. The entry ‘Le Rédacteur en chef d’un journal de Province’ ironically illustrating the Parisian perspective on the possible reason for provincial magazines:

Mais d’abord, pourquoi la province fait-elle des journaux?
 Pour deux raisons.
 J’ai longtemps cherché, je n’en ai pas trouvé trois.
 La première, c’est que la province a, tout aussi bien que Paris, du papier, de l’encre et des caractères; - des caractères d’imprimerie.

⁵⁵ *Le Provincial*, 13 July 1828, p. 112.

⁵⁶ *Le Provincial*, 20 July 1828, p. 123.

La seconde raison, c'est que Paris fait des journaux.⁵⁷

This entry deliberately plays with the stereotypically arrogant Parisian view over the inferior cultural attempts of the so-called 'province'.

As mentioned above, publications such as *Le Provincial* had a great symbolic value as they represented a progressive cultural awakening of the French regions. This was especially needed in France, where the homogenising cultural effects of revolutionary centralisation were perceived by people in the regions, a view acutely voiced by the aforementioned subscriber from Vesoul, who lamented that:

Ce n'est donc point sans motifs que l'on a déjà combattu cette centralisation funeste qui soumet toute la France aux caprices, aux erreurs, aux passions, aux vues secrètes des journaux de Paris. Nulle part cet abus n'est aussi grand qu'en France [...] Edimbourg, surnommée l'Athènes de la Grande Bretagne, et plusieurs autres villes de cet empire, partagent, avec la capitale, la facilité de répandre leurs journaux et leurs écrits.⁵⁸

A question thus arises: after all these declarations of independence and fierce support of their provincial pride, why were many provincial intellectuals at the time still attracted to and fascinated by their capital?

Le Complexe provincial

'Les rapports qui existent entre Paris et la province, sa funeste attraction, ont montré à l'auteur le jeune homme du XIXe siècle sous une face nouvelle'.⁵⁹
(Balzac, Preface to the first edition of the *Illusions perdues*, 1837)

The provincial pride exemplified in various passages in the preceding section of this chapter is only one attitude characterising the complex relationship to the capital expressed by intellectuals of Dijon. Indeed, they displayed different positions when

⁵⁷ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, Province*, I, p. 576.

⁵⁸ *Le Provincial*, 13 July 1828, p. 113.

⁵⁹ Balzac, *La Comédie humaine*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex et al., 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1976-81), v (1977), p. 111.

facing the cultural hegemony of Paris and the weighty view of leading Parisian figures. Some of these differences are introduced by Vincent Laisney when he draws attention to some ‘poètes sans vocation’ appearing at Nodier’s Salon de l’Arsenal, and to their stories, ‘l’histoire de ces hommes secondaires, de leurs espoirs et de leurs désillusions’.⁶⁰ Laisney divides them into two separate groups, ‘poètes de province’ on the one hand and ‘poètes de salon’ on the other; justifying his choice in the following way:

Bien que relevant d’une problématique identique, il nous a semblé nécessaire de partager cette population en deux groupes distincts: poètes de province d’un côté, poètes parisiens de l’autre. Cette distinction se justifie par le fait que, tandis que les hommes de la capitale n’eurent à faire face qu’à leur impuissance, les poètes de Lyon ou d’Angers durent encore surmonter leur complexe provincial, nous voulons parler de ce tenace sentiment d’infériorité lié à leur origine.⁶¹

Laisney is underlining here that poets coming from the regions outside Paris had to undergo a process of *déprovincialisation* in order to attend literary groups in the capital.

In Bertrand’s case, the concept of *déprovincialisation* is certainly controversial, as it risks entrenching the canonical view of this poet as a marginal *petit romantique*. There were indeed poets from the *provinces* who took advantage of the Parisian fascination with regional France, which was sometimes seen as an exotic and mysterious location. In the next chapter, I shall show how Bertrand exploited his provincialism instead of hiding it, and used the cultural value of his city as a way of promoting his collection of *fantaisies*. Provincialism can thus be considered as a point of strength for Bertrand, rather than a weakness, and his use of Dijon in the

⁶⁰ Vincent Laisney, *L’Arsenal romantique*, p. 380.

⁶¹ Vincent Laisney, *L’Arsenal romantique*, p. 380.

collection seen as a way of promoting a mysterious and fascinating image of his city for readers in the capital.⁶²

Moreover, it is possible that Bertrand understood his potential role as being that of the mediator between Paris and Dijon, and felt the importance of presenting himself and his city in a good light while also gaining the complicity and the approval of his friends from Dijon, some of whom already saw him, when in Paris, as a link between the two literary worlds. An example is Brugnot's vision of Bertrand as an important source of information regarding Paris, when the latter had the chance to be in the capital. In a letter written on 29 November 1828 Brugnot wrote:

Adieu. Parlez-moi longuement de Victor [Hugo] et de ses amis, et accoutumez-vous à ne plus laisser passer tant de temps sans m'écrire. [...] Vous êtes là, mon ami, parmi ceux qui admirent et se font admirer; moi près de mon foyer solitaire, maladif, sans force ni vertu, fiévreux, malade de la tête, de la poitrine, de l'estomac; ma santé a été pitoyable...⁶³

In another letter, written a month later as an answer to a letter by Bertrand:

Je vous sais le plus grand gré de détails que vous me donnez; il y a donc là un vrai enthousiasme, un amour simple et naïf de l'art, des poètes qui s'aiment et s'admirent *loyalement*, du génie et de la bienveillance, de la bonne amitié! Voilà ce qui ne fut jamais, je crois, que chez V. Hugo; ce qui me fait trouver cet homme plus excellent et plus admirable. Aussi, ma foi, je l'aime autant que vous; ne vous en déplaît.⁶⁴

These passages exemplify the enthusiasm of the young poet of Dijon, with his esteem for Hugo and his idealisation of the Parisian milieu, 'ceux qui admirent et se font admirer', 'poètes qui s'aiment et s'admirent *loyalement*, du génie et de la bienveillance, de la bonne amitié!', a view shared by many young poets both in the

⁶² This attitude was shown in other nineteenth-century publications, such as Samuel Henry Berthoud's *Légendes et traditions surnaturelles des Flandres* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1862). Some of Berthoud's tales were already being published in the 1830s.

⁶³ OC, p. 847.

⁶⁴ Bertrand's original letter was lost. As Poggenburg recalls in her notes, in OC, p. 921. In this letter Bertrand probably described to Brugnot an evening at Hugo's *Cénacle*, see OC, p. 850.

capital and in the regions. In another of Brugnot's letters dated 2 May 1829:

Je m'imagine que vous avez dû bien beaucoup travailler depuis que vous êtes à Paris [...] Paris a du moins quelque chose [de] merveilleusement bon, son activité, l'émulation toujours en présence: le tourbillon littéraire vous emporte dans sa rotation. Là il n'est pas permis d'avoir un peu de génie, dans le sentier qui vous sollicite.⁶⁵

The idea here is that the literary life of Paris could have a very positive influence on a provincial poet like Bertrand, and perhaps also change him. Meanwhile:

Nous autres provinciaux nous voyons aussi les lauriers de Thémistocle mais cela ne nous empêche pas de dormir.⁶⁶

This passage can be considered as an example of what Laisney calls the 'complexe provincial'. If it is indeed controversial to state that intellectuals in Dijon at Bertrand's time wanted to *se déprovincialiser* (even Bertrand, when in Paris, was always proud of his origins), it is not uncommon to find examples of the 'complexe provincial', the feeling of inferiority experienced by provincial poets. Brugnot's declaration seems to support an unavoidable inferiority of provincial literary life, but did the 'nous' in 'nous autres provinciaux' include Bertrand or did Brugnot consider his friend differently because of his time in the capital ('le tourbillon littéraire vous emporte dans sa rotation')? ⁶⁷ Was Bertrand already considered a hybrid as described in the above quoted *Physiologie du provincial à Paris*?

The use of 'nous' continues in this letter, which shows that, after all, the

⁶⁵ OC, p. 862.

⁶⁶ OC, p. 862.

⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Bertrand in Paris was not happily a member of 'tourbillon littéraire' as his friends in Dijon thought; in August 1829 the poet confessed to his mother and sister that he was living in poverty: 'Voici comment: je suis presque sans chaussures, mon habit est usé sur le devant [...] C'est aussi en partie ma toilette [...] qui me fait négliger Victor Hugo et ses amis' (OC, p. 865). It is evident that Bertrand could not risk his reputation with Victor Hugo, who was a figure of particular relevance for the young members of literary life in Dijon. The departure of Bertrand from Dijon to join the writers in Paris is recalled by Paul Foisset in his 'Récit de famille' (1880-1885), a history of Théophile Foisset's life. This manuscript is at the Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, Fonds Foisset, MS 34 J 5. For a reproduction of one page referring to Bertrand going to Paris, see Appendix C, Document 3.

provincial pride persisted beyond the feeling of inferiority:

En revanche, mon cher Bertrand, nous avons des promenades à travers les champs, qui valent peut-être les soirées d'Émile Deschamps. Nous avons les pêcheurs tout rose sur la côte, et les pruniers, les cerisiers, les pommiers [...] Je voudrais vous apporter sur des ailes d'hirondelle [...] Nous irions errant tout le jour par la verdure des bois et des champs [...] N'est-ce pas que vous donneriez bien huit jours de Paris pour une journée comme celle-là? ⁶⁸

Perhaps literary life in the capital was more vibrant, but Brugnot reminded his friend of the natural beauty of their region, another characteristic to recall with pride. In this case the 'nous' certainly includes Bertrand, whose promotion of his province dated back to the years of the *Société d'Études* and to his collaboration on *Le Provincial*, and continued at the beginning of his collection of *fantaisies*.

Inferiority and pride, these two opposing tendencies, are a constant presence in the writings of poets in Dijon. For example, in a volume collecting the poetic production of Charles Brugnot (published posthumously in 1833 thanks to the efforts of his wife), Foisset published a biography of his old friend, who died prematurely in 1831. This text, an insightful historical document shedding light on literary life in Dijon, opens with the following representation of provincial life:

J'ai à raconter une vie de province, de peu de mouvement et de bruit, si ce n'est vers la fin. De peu d'éclat, sans nulle pensée d'ambition, sans nul goût d'aventures ni de voyages; une simple vie de jeune homme et de poète sans nom. ⁶⁹

Provincial life is here characterised by 'peu de mouvement', promoting the traditional view that not much happened outside Paris, and that an awakening was much needed in the *province*.

This conception of 'peu de mouvement' expressed by Foisset was especially related to cultural and literary life. Amongst the examples of this are some

⁶⁸ OC, p. 863.

⁶⁹ Th. Foisset, in Brugnot, *Poésies*, p. xiii.

complaints regarding the availability of books outside Paris. Foisset recalled: ‘Chose curieuse d’ailleurs que les disparates de nos lectures! Pauvres provinciaux que nous étions, les livres n’abondaient pas dans nos mains’.⁷⁰ In the capital, books were of course easier to find and when Bertrand was in Paris, Brugnot asked his friend in a letter (dated 29 November 1828) to send him Hugo’s *Orientales*:

Envoyez-moi par la poste les *Orientales*, le jour où elles paraîtront. Les Librairies d’ici sont assommantes dans leurs délais. Je n’ai eu Émile Deschamps que 16 jours après l’avoir demandé!⁷¹

These genuine complaints about the accessibility of books by Foisset and Brugnot could also be a way of stressing the fact that the life of a poet in the provinces was not as easy as that of a poet in Paris. But was the provincial education all that different from that of a future poet in the capital at the time?

In his biographical introduction Foisset drew up a list of reading that had had a crucial role in his and Brugnot’s education and, therefore, which can be taken as the typical education of young intellectuals in Dijon at the time, including Bertrand. According to Foisset, from 1816 to 1820, these young writers were reading:

Florian, Gresset, Demoustier, Colardeau [...] l’*Émile* de Rousseau, les *Confessions*, le *Théâtre* de Voltaire, le *Génie du Christianisme*, les *Martyrs*, presque tout Delille, les *Études de la Nature*, Les Leçons de littérature de Noël, *Le Cours* de Laharpe, les feuillets des *Débats*, le *Conservateur*, la Bible, quelques volumes de Condillac, Brantôme et l’*Essai sur l’indifférence en matière de Religion*.⁷²

Some works were more relevant than others in these poets’ education; in particular Foisset expressed himself in the following terms concerning Chateaubriand:

La lecture du *Génie du Christianisme* avait emporté d’assaut toutes ses [Brugnot’s] convictions; en religion, en politique, en littérature [...] et jusqu’en 1830 M. de Chateaubriand resta l’étoile polaire de son horizon intellectuel.

⁷⁰ Th. Foisset, in Brugnot, *Poésies*, pp. xx-xxi.

⁷¹ OC, p. 847. This refers to the *Études françaises et étrangères* published on 1 November 1828.

⁷² Th. Foisset, in Brugnot, *Poésies*, p. xxi.

C'est l'histoire de beaucoup d'hommes de notre âge.⁷³

After 1820, another wave of readings was crucial in Brugnot's poetic development:

Il refléta successivement Gresset, Parny, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, Millevoye, André Chénier, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve.⁷⁴

In this inventory, it is not difficult to spot the names of authors that had a fundamental role in the development and the diffusion of Romantic literary and cultural ideals, such as Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Hugo. After all, it seems that the provincial reading list was not very different from that of a Parisian poet at the time. For example Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme* had a central role in the education of many Parisian Romantics, including Victor Hugo. Moreover, from the point of view of culture, Dijon was a lively city at Bertrand's time,⁷⁵ as recalled by Dahan in 'La Vie culturelle à Dijon, à l'époque d'Aloysius Bertrand', who reminds us that 'Dijon ne fut certes pas, dans ces années 1825-1835, le désert culturel que nos contemporains seraient tentés d'imaginer. Les Dijonnais d'alors aimaient la musique, le théâtre, la littérature'.⁷⁶

Despite this, the poets of Dijon sometimes openly expressed their 'complexe provincial' and their feeling of inferiority. For example, on 24 January 1829 Brugnot was saddened because he was not appointed as director of *Jeune France* and wrote to his Bertrand:

Je ne pensais plus en vérité à la direction de la *Jeune France*, quand vous m'en avez reparlé! [...] Je trouve tout naturel que M. V. Hugo ait disposé de la place

⁷³ Th. Foisset, in Brugnot, *Poésies*, p. xx.

⁷⁴ Th. Foisset, in Brugnot, *Poésies*, p.xxi.

⁷⁵ The historian Pierre Levêque reminds us that Dijon was 'siège d'une Académie [...] pourvue de trois facultés (droit, sciences et lettres) d'une école de médecine', in *Une société provinciale*, p. 43.

⁷⁶ Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'La Vie culturelle à Dijon', p. 32. In the same article Dahan recalls the importance of Dijon's Theatre, its *Sociétés savantes et littéraires*, such as the important *Académie* and the *Société d'Études*, and all its magazines such as *Le Journal politique et littéraire de la Côte-d'Or*, *Le Journal de Dijon et de la Côte-d'Or*, *Le Provincial*, *Le Spectateur*, and *Le Patriote de la Côte-d'Or*.

à donner en faveur d'une connaissance locale. Ah! Grand dieu! Il y a tant de gens à Paris qui sont plus aptes que moi à présider à un journal!⁷⁷

In this example, Brugnot felt the existence of a divide between literary life in Paris and in Dijon. Hugo chose a 'connaissance locale' and Brugnot justified this choice saying: 'Il y a tant de gens à Paris'. He thought that there were many valuable intellectuals in Paris, probably more suitable than a poet from Dijon for the position. The same feeling of inferiority emerges in another of Brugnot's letters to Bertrand written in February 1829. Here, Brugnot confessed to his friend that he did not like Hugo's *Orientales*:

Cet orientalisme me touche peu, et je comprends assez difficilement cette inspiration [...] Faites rimer sans fin *sultane* avec *capitane* [...] Et puis quelle manie descriptive!⁷⁸

In the same letter, Brugnot also wrote that he would have liked to write to Hugo, but had had second thoughts:

J'avais l'intention de faire à ce sujet une lettre à M. Hugo mais à quoi bon? J'aurais eu l'air d'un paysan du Danube arrivant au milieu de ses triomphes, avec mes critiques de province.⁷⁹

Brugnot's attitude exemplifies, once again, the sense of distance and of inferiority felt by provincial poets when they referred to Paris, and even more when they referred to Victor Hugo, a literary idol for many of the young members of the *Société d'Études de Dijon*. One of Brugnot's compositions 'À V. Hugo' (1825) opens with a poetic declaration of his deep esteem for Hugo:

Je m'élance vers toi d'un amour téméraire;
O poète, pardon! je t'appelle mon frère,
Et je réponds à tes accords.

⁷⁷ OC, p. 857.

⁷⁸ OC, pp. 858-59.

⁷⁹ OC, p. 859.

Car ta muse est aussi ma muse bien-aimée⁸⁰

In this poem, Hugo is viewed as the highest example of the Romantic poet; he is the poet-prophet sent by God ('Mais, dis-tu, le poète envoyé par Dieu même'; 'le Dieu qui t'appela'); he is the poet-*génie* ('Le poète est ce doux génie'); as well as the poet-guide ('Doit d'austères leçons à son siècle pervers;'). The composition ends again with Brugnot's own inferiority:

Quels parfums de poésie
Au doux sylphe puis-je offrir?
Peut-être n'aurais-je encore
Pour le maître qu'il adore
Qu'une couronne inodore
De fleurs qui doivent mourir.⁸¹

This stanza, in addition, is an example of a recurrent literary cliché, a sort of *captatio benevolentiae* that many aspiring poets used when comparing their own art to that of great poets they admired. Brugnot's lines indeed anticipate the opening composition in prose of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, dedicated by Bertrand to Victor Hugo in 1836, and cited in the introduction to the present study, part of which reads 'le petit livre que je te dédie aura subi le sort de tout ce qui meurt, après avoir, une matinée peut-être, amusé la cour et la ville qui s'amuse de peu de chose'.⁸² This attitude is shared by the 'génération romantique émergente', as defined by Anthony Glinoe, 'ces très jeunes gens sont tout entiers acquis de Victor Hugo, qu'ils idolâtrèrent sans modération'.⁸³ This was a sentiment that young poets in the capital also felt, but poets in the province situated Hugo within an already idealised vision of Parisian

⁸⁰ 'A V. Hugo', in Brugnot, *Poésies*, pp. 210-11.

⁸¹ Brugnot, *Poésies*, p. 220.

⁸² *OC*, p. 106. It should be noted that contemporary poets outside Dijon wrote similar compositions dedicated to Hugo, such as Nerval's 'À Victor Hugo', in Gérard de Nerval, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Jean Guillaume, Claude Pichois *et al.*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1984-93), I (1989), p. 739.

⁸³ In Victor Hugo, Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Correspondence*, ed. by Anthony Glinoe (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2004), p. 21.

literary life as seen from afar.

These examples, showing the ‘complexe provincial’ experienced by poets in Dijon and their idealisation of Parisian figures, support Laisney’s very valuable point in drawing a distinction between ‘marginal’ poets from Paris and ‘marginal’ poets from outside Paris. However, their provincialism should not solely be considered as a weakness. On the one hand, it is true that poets from Dijon sometimes felt excluded from the Parisian literary fervour and showed a certain sense of inferiority; but on the other, they also showed a fierce pride in their origins and in their city. Bertrand, in particular, understood the potential of exploiting Parisian fascination with the ‘exoticism’ of regional France, as I shall show in the next chapter.

Beyond all these contrasting attitudes, some of the young poets in Dijon greatly supported Romantic ideals and felt as if they were an integral part of the ‘génération romantique émergente’. These poets were eager to express their ‘enrollment under the romantic banner’⁸⁴ through their poetic work and their critical writings, and this aspect can be shown through an examination of the most significant literary articles of *Le Provincial*, which was a gateway to the wider Romantic community. The issue is now whether all the literary articles published in *Le Provincial* were supportive of Romantic ideas.

Le Provincial and the Literary Debate

It would be incorrect to state that, from the literary point of view, *Le Provincial* only promoted the ideals and aesthetics of the new Romantic generation. The creator of this magazine, Théophile Foisset, in fact had reservations about what he called the ‘genre romantique’. Some years earlier, in 1820, Foisset had given a speech entitled

⁸⁴ To borrow Hemmings’s expression, in *Culture and Society in France*, p. 216.

‘Du genre romantique, et de ses conséquences pour la langue et la littérature françaises’,⁸⁵ at the *Académie des Sciences, Arts, et Belles-Lettres de Dijon*.⁸⁶ This speech was a full-blown defense of the position of the *classiques*, even when recognising some achievement on the part of the *romantiques*. It presented very clear arguments in defense of classic poetry, such as the following:

Mon tribute de respect et d’admiration à cette belle littérature classique, hors de laquelle je ne vois point de salut, ni pour la langue ni pour les lettres françaises.⁸⁷

Throughout this speech the Romantics were explicitly called ‘nos adversaires’:

Après avoir justifié par le raisonnement les vérités que nos adversaires ont le plus combattues, je tâcherai [...] de montrer qu’il y a péril tout à la fois pour la langue et pour les lettres.⁸⁸

Foisset considered the ‘genre romantique’ to be a threat because, on the one hand he saw the *littérature classique* as French, national, and traditional; on the other, the *littérature romantique* as disruptive of rules, and foreign. This last aspect, especially, is outlined several times in Foisset’s speech:

Cette école se donna le nom de *Romantique*, nom tiré de l’une des langues étrangères auxquelles elle empruntoit ses modèles. [...] L’honneur national est intéressé à la cause des classiques. Car il s’agit de savoir si le sceptre des arts restera à la France, ou s’il sera transporté au-delà du Rhin: et si l’on considère que de littérateurs qui occupent les premières chaires de la capitale ont déjà sacrifié au Dieu étranger.⁸⁹

However, as Milbach recalls in his ‘La gestation du libéralisme catholique’, the contact and conversations with his Romantic friends (especially Charles Brugnot)

⁸⁵ Th. Foisset, ‘Du genre romantique, et de ses conséquences pour la langue et la littérature françaises’, in *Mémoires de L’Académie des sciences, art et belles-lettres de Dijon* (Dijon: Frantin, Imprimeur du Roi et de l’Académie, 1820), pp. 224-313.

⁸⁶ Poggenburg recalls that this *Académie* was founded in 1741 and that since 1816 it had acquired a monarchist orientation. She also adds that ‘à l’époque de Bertrand on comptait parmi ses membres des personnes distinguées dont plusieurs étaient membres de la *Société d’Études* et collaborateurs du *Provincial*’, note 1, *OC*, p. 714.

⁸⁷ Foisset, ‘Du genre romantique’, p. 227.

⁸⁸ Foisset, ‘Du genre romantique’, p. 229.

⁸⁹ Foisset, ‘Du genre romantique’, pp. 227-28.

softened Foisset's harsh judgement about their art; 'Foisset, cédant lui-même à l'air du temps, corrige son opinion'.⁹⁰ Milbach also quotes a passage of 'Aux classiques qui lisent *Le Provincial*', an article published in *Le Provincial* on 18 September 1828, where Foisset stated 'Il [l'auteur] imprimait, il y a sept ans, que tout ce qui est beau est classique. Il lui semble aujourd'hui qu'une cathédrale gothique est une belle chose; mais il n'oserait dire que ce soit la même chose qu'un temple grec'.⁹¹ Foisset did not change his mind about the supremacy of the *art classique* (somewhere else in the article he states 'Quand je dis *Nous* c'est les Classiques que je veux dire'),⁹² but he invited the *classiques* to 'comprendre avant d'admirer, [...] mais aussi de ne pas critiquer sans comprendre [...] avant de flétrir Shakespear, il faudrait le voir jouer, le lire du moins'.⁹³

Despite Foisset's support of the *art classique*, *Le Provincial* played a crucial role in promoting the *art romantique*, and in opening a fairer and wider debate about literature in Dijon. The example of Foisset shows that, thanks to the exchanges with his Romantic friends (namely Brugnot and Bertrand), and probably thanks to the reading of their publications in *Le Provincial*, this *classique* softened his negative judgement about the new literary trend. *Le Provincial* indeed played the particular role of counterbalancing the conservative views of the *Académie* of Dijon, giving voice and space to the admirers of the new Romantic generation in this city.⁹⁴ The young poets in Dijon could finally share their thoughts with other *romantiques*, but also with some of the *classiques*, who otherwise would not have reflected upon

⁹⁰ Sylvain Milbach, 'La gestation du libéralisme catholique', p. 101.

⁹¹ Quoted in Milbach, 'La gestation du libéralisme catholique', p. 101.

⁹² *Le Provincial*, 19 September 1828, p. 223.

⁹³ *Le Provincial*, 19 September 1828, p. 223.

⁹⁴ It was specially Bertrand who was opposed to the conservative views of the *Académie*, while Brugnot was one of its members even though he was a *romantique*. In *Le Provincial* of 25 May 1828, Bertrand published a satirical dramatic action entitled *Le Portier d'une Académie de province*, overtly mocking conservative attitude of the members of the *Académie*.

different points of view. The encouragement of the provincial magazine by charismatic figures of the Romantic milieu was therefore very successful in advancing new literary ideas in this city as well as in having their work promoted in *Le Provincial*.

An example of this phenomenon is Brugnot's review of 'Poésies par M. de Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. xxii, 12e livraison, 1828'; where he explained and supported such principles as the existence of good poetry without the need for strict rules of versification. The promotion of Chateaubriand's work and his aesthetic choices probably left a mark in Bertrand, as I shall discuss in more detail in the last chapter of this study, where Brugnot's article will be analysed in light of Bertrand's abandonment of verse in *Gaspard de la Nuit*.⁹⁵ Moreover, the discussion about the need for a more spontaneous poetic language recurred in other articles, such as the literary review of Sainte-Beuve's 'Tableau historique et critique de la poésie Française et du théâtre français au seizième siècle', where the manifesto of Du Bellay is criticised because of its rather elitist linguistic choices inspired by ancient Greek, Latin, and Italian instead of the more humble old *Galois*.⁹⁶ *Le Provincial* was thus a very important site for cultural exchange, even though leading Parisian poets, such as Hugo, never sent original literary works for publications to this magazine. Their letters of encouragement were enough to invite exchanges of ideas (such as a wider debate between *classiques* and *romantiques*), and their support contributed to the flourishing of writings by enthused local poets such as Brugnot and Bertrand, who often dedicated their compositions to Hugo (such as Bertrand's 'La Chanson du

⁹⁵ After all, *Le Provincial* already welcomed some examples of *Ballades in prose*, such as 'Le Foyer solitaire', a *ballade* signed 'A.G.' divided in five paragraphs in the issue of 1 August 1828, for more on this topic, see Chapter 5.

⁹⁶ *Le Provincial*, 31 August 1828, pp. 191-92.

Pélerin' in *Le Provincial* of 13 July 1828, and Brugnot's 'A M. Victor Hugo' on 17 August 1828) and to other of their Romantic heroes. It was perhaps also thanks to this enthusiasm and support that *Le Provincial* received some relevant contributions from artists outside Dijon. For example, Alfred de Musset published one of his first poems, 'Un Rêve', in *Le Provincial* on 31 August 1828, an edition which also contained the aforementioned literary review of Sainte-Beuve's work. Another example is the religious poem 'La Pentecôte' by the famous Italian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni, an unexpected appearance in *Le Provincial* on 25 May 1828.

A last crucial remark about the literary section of *Le Provincial* is the constant promotion of symbolic foreign authors who were also greatly admired by Romantics in the capital. It is the case, for example, of the omnipresence of Lord Byron, of Walter Scott, and, more generally, of the fascination for English legends and the northern literary tradition. As an instance of this, in the 'Variété' section of *Le Provincial* on 29 May 1828, we find the translation of a long section of an article that appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*, entitled 'Lord Byron and some of his contemporaries' by Leigh Hunt, a celebration of the life and works of Lord Byron. This was only the first part of this translation which continued in other issues of *Le Provincial*, but Byron's name appeared in epigraphs and dedications, for instance Brugnot's poem 'Le Premier amour' (in *Le Provincial*, 3 August 1828), which opens with 'Et le son de sa voix, l'impression de sa main, / arretoient ou précipitoient le cours de son/ sang./ Lord Byron'. At the same time some of Walter Scott's poems were adapted into French by Bertrand, for example 'Joch d'Hazeledean. Ballade Écossaise' (in *Le Provincial*, 5 July 1828), and Scott's name appeared in many critical articles as the father of a new kind of *roman historique*. The literary review

of ‘Le Prince Zizim. Roman Historique’ (in *Le Provincial*, 10 August 1828), for instance, opens with the following statements:

Le roman historique a pris un essor nouveau dans notre siècle. Jusqu’à Walter Scott on ne s’étoit pas encore avisé de chercher la science dans des fictions de ce genre, et de pousser la vérité de mœurs et des costumes jusqu’au scrupule dans les œuvres les plus capricieuses de l’imagination.⁹⁷

In the ‘Chroniques’ section of *le Provincial* on 5 September 1828, a new novel by Walter Scott was advertised; ‘Walter Scott met dans ce moment la dernière main à un nouveau roman qui, devra sur-tout faire fureur dans notre province’. The author of this announcement also invited readers to an open comparison between Walter Scott and an important local historian, ‘Les nombreux lecteurs de l’*Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne* seront bien heureux de comparer le romancier écossais avec M. de Barante, et la mise en œuvre par les deux célèbres écrivains d’une époque si dramatique’.⁹⁸

The importance of these examples should not be downplayed. The cultural promotion of new literary models indeed had a great impact on poets in Dijon, including Bertrand. Moreover, in *Le Provincial*, the works of foreign literature and the various reviews of works by contemporary French authors were published together with the works by local young writers, which were inspired by them. This aspect offered the possibility of an open comparison and can be studied as a testimony of the exchange of ideas that was fostered by this magazine, an exchange which also shaped Bertrand’s literary development. In the following chapters, when analysing the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *Le Provincial* will remain an important reference point to try to understand how some motifs entered the

⁹⁷ *Le Provincial*, 10 August 1828, p. 155.

⁹⁸ *Le Provincial*, 5 September 1828, p. 201.

fantaisies. This provincial magazine was, indeed, a literary laboratory for Bertrand, who not only gathered ideas but also experimented with his articles, poems in verse, translations, and published three of his *Bambochades Romantiques*. These pieces are of great importance as they are the origin of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. As Bertrand declared, ‘Ces trois pièces font partie d’un recueil de compositions du même genre que l’auteur se propose de publier très prochainement’.⁹⁹

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented various aspects of the relationship between Dijon and Paris in order to understand how it shaped Bertrand’s cultural context. This required understanding the importance of the magazine *Le Provincial* in fostering cultural and literary exchanges between these two cities, as well as its symbolic value in the eyes of the authors of Dijon. From a literary point of view, I argued that this magazine was one of the fundamental tools used to spread Romantic ideas in Dijon, as it offered an alternative to the more conservative views of the *Académie de Dijon*. It was also seen that important authors such as Hugo and Chateaubriand encouraged this publication as a way of building a stronger nation united by new Romantic literary, and perhaps also political, ideals. After explaining how considering the particular case study of the relationship between Dijon and Paris could shed light on a wider change in the consideration of the *provinces* that was taking place at the Bertrand’s time, I made the case for seeing the attitude of the poets considered here as linked to the general reconsideration of the *provinces* in their diversity and cultural richness, in the context of a brief historical overview given at the beginning of this chapter.

⁹⁹ *Le Provincial*, 12 September 1828, p. 212.

The examination of Bertrand's cultural context in this first chapter will act as a useful backdrop against which to analyse Bertrand's compositions throughout the rest of this study. This historical approach, combined with a close reading of the texts, will better enable us to understand Bertrand's thematic and formal choices, while permitting us to assess his own inventiveness and innovation. The next chapter turns to consider Bertrand's valorisation of his provincial origins in his *Gaspard de la Nuit*, which likely exploited the more general rediscovered interest in regional France at the time. I shall analyse how Dijon appears (and disappears) in the collection and how other *provinces* are presented, and propose possible interpretations of their value in the collection.

Chapter Two

Between Representation and Imagination: The Provinces in *Gaspard de la Nuit*

Introduction

‘Cette résurrection éveillera dans la patrie
dijonnaise plus d’un écho’.¹
(Sainte-Beuve, ‘Notice’)

In the previous chapter I analysed the question of how the young writers from Dijon sometimes felt excluded from Parisian literary ferment which they often idealised, and how they therefore manifested a sense of inferiority because of their marginality, which in his study on Nodier’s *Salon de l’Arsenal* Laisney called a ‘complexe provincial’.² Some of the evidence considered in the first chapter, however, challenges the idea of taking Laisney’s point at face value, and demonstrates rather that the attitude of the poets of Dijon was complex and multifaceted, their feeling of inferiority being counterbalanced by a sense of pride in their origins and a belief in the cultural importance of their city and province. In this richer interplay between pride and inferiority, Bertrand was seen by his friends from Dijon as a promising envoy of the eminence of their region. This aspect was recalled in Sainte-Beuve’s ‘Notice’, opening the first posthumous edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1842), in which he wrote: ‘Ses amis de Dijon se flattaient de voir bientôt paraître de lui quelque roman historique qui aurait remué leur chère Bourgogne’.³ Bertrand never wrote this historical novel but, at the beginning of his *Gaspard de la Nuit*, he celebrated Dijon and Burgundy by choosing an opening epigraph by Sainte-Beuve on

¹ *OC*, p. 84.

² This was defined as a ‘tenace sentiment d’infériorité lié à leur origine’, in Laisney, *L’Arsenal romantique*, p. 380.

³ *OC*, p. 81.

the beauty of the city, by writing a *ballade* in verse dedicated to it, and through the act of setting the first preface entirely in ‘le jardin de l’Arquebuse’, Dijon’s public gardens.⁴ In this chapter, I shall start by examining the ways in which Bertrand’s city is portrayed, through a detailed analysis of the opening *ballade* and preface, while investigating the possible reasons for the inclusion of Dijon that go beyond the act of glorification by Bertrand of his city.

Perhaps surprisingly, Dijon does not constitute one the main themes – or settings – of Bertrand’s collection, and, after the first preface, the word ‘Dijon’ itself virtually disappears from the entire work. This apparent abandonment of Dijon was criticised in one of the early literary reviews of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, published in *La Revue des deux mondes* on 15 January 1843, where the critic G. de Molènes writes:

Nous regrettons que le poète de Dijon ne se soit point plus souvent livré aux inspirations du terroir [...] si charmantes que soient les régions fantastiques où l’imagination de Louis Bertrand s’est promenée jusqu’à la lassitude, je crois qu’on leur préfère encore ces régions amies avec leurs horizons doux et familiers aux regards.⁵

A different view was expressed by Sainte-Beuve, who, in his ‘Notice’ argued that Bertrand was never that interested in a realistic representation of the Dijon of his time:

Le Dijon qu’il [Bertrand] aime sans doute est celui des ducs, celui des chroniques rouvertes par Walter Scott et M. de Barante, le Dijon gothique et chevaleresque, plutôt que celui des bourgeois et des vigneron. [...] Dijon et ses antiquités héroïques, et cette fraîche nature peuplée de légendes, emplissait son

⁴ *OC*, p. 92. Jean-Luc Steinmetz valuably indicates a possible link between this preface and a ‘roman historique’: ‘Les longues pages du préambule *Gaspard de la Nuit* proprement dit sont consacrées non seulement à la transmission d’un mythe, mais à l’évocation du Dijon d’autrefois, notée en des termes qui correspondent avec les modèles du roman historique.’, in Jean-Luc Steinmetz, ‘Bertrand et C^{ie}: «Les Chroniques»’, in *Gaspard de la Nuit. Le Grand Œuvre d’un petit romantique*, ed. by Nicolas Wanlin (Paris: PUPS, 2010), pp. 111-20 (p. 111).

⁵ Review included in Wanlin’s ‘Annexe I: Critiques contemporaines de la parution de *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, pp. 330-38 (p. 336).

cœur.⁶

In contrast to de Molènes, Sainte-Beuve does not see a neat separation between the ‘régions fantastiques’ and the ‘inspirations du terroir’. Indeed quite the opposite. Sainte-Beuve draws a link between these two elements, arguing that Bertrand loved Dijon, but not the Dijon that he knew firsthand; it was the glorious Dijon of the past and the legendary Dijon of his imagination. Nothing could be further from the ‘horizons doux et familiers aux regards’ mentioned by de Molènes. Following the lead offered by Sainte-Beuve, in this chapter, I shall thus propose some possible explanations for Bertrand’s interest in developing a myth about his city at the beginning of the collection, and for his then suddenly abandoning the focus on Dijon for the rest of his work.

Lastly, in this chapter, I shall investigate the case study of the presence of a second region and its inhabitants in Bertrand’s collection. For indeed, after the disappearance of Dijon, the ‘France excentrale’⁷ is not completely forgotten in *Gaspard de la Nuit*. In ‘L’École flamande’, the first section in Bertrand’s collection, as well as in the *fantaisie* ‘Les Flamands’, which is contained in ‘Les Chroniques’ section, readers encounter some representations of *Les Flandres* and their inhabitants, *les Flamands*. In the last part of this chapter, I shall examine the presence and portrayal of this region, while questioning its value and considering ways in which it could be linked to the representation of Bertrand’s Burgundy appearing at the beginning of *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

⁶ OC, p. 77.

⁷ This expression was used by Charles Nodier in a letter to Victor Hugo dated 30 October 1826, in Victor Hugo-Charles Nodier, *Correspondance croisée*, p. 72.

The First Pages of Gaspard de la Nuit: A Voyage pittoresque in Dijon

‘Dijon a de vertes promenades qui l’entourent, comme une fraîche ceinture. Dijon a son vieux château, ses tours pittoresques, ses remparts de guerre, ses fosses, ses créneaux. Dijon possède la Vierge noire qui [...] protégea contre les boulets suisses les flèches de ses églises et la vie de ses soldats’.⁸

‘Pour ses richesses pittoresques comme pour ses illustrations littéraires, la Bourgogne est à citer parmi toutes les provinces de France’.⁹

(*Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne*, 1833)

Opening *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Bertrand places the epigraph citing Sainte-Beuve, ‘Ami, te souviens-tu qu’en route pour Cologne, / Un dimanche à Dijon, au cœur de la Bourgogne, / Nous allions admirant clochers, portails et tours, / Et les vieilles maisons dans les arrière-cours?’.¹⁰ In doing so, he not only honours this poet, but also celebrates Dijon, while introducing his own composition in verse on the same page, here at the beginning of the collection. The following is the second of three *ballades* in verse where Bertrand celebrated his city:¹¹

Gothique donjon
Et flèche gothique
Dans un ciel d’optique,
Là-bas, c’est Dijon.
Ses joyeuses treilles,
N’ont point leurs pareilles
Ses clochers jadis
Se comptaient par dix.

Là, plus d’une pinte

⁸ From ‘Notre-Dame d’Étang’, *récit* attributed to Bertrand, *OC*, p. 436.

⁹ ‘Avertissement’ by Maillard de Chambure, quoted in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 353.

¹⁰ *OC*, p. 91.

¹¹ I use the term ‘ballade’, as this was the one chosen by Bertrand in order to define these compositions in verse. It should be noted, however, that at the time the term was used to denote texts of variable forms and shapes. In this regard, Théodore de Banville lamented that ‘les poèmes intitulés *Ballades* par Victor Hugo dans ses *Odes et ballades*, par analogie avec des poèmes appelés *Ballades* dans des pays autres que la France, ne peuvent raisonnablement s’appeler en France des *Ballades*’, in *Petit Traité de poésie française* (Paris: Charpentier Éditeur, 1881), p. 194.

Est sculptée ou peinte;
Là plus d'un portail
S'ouvre en éventail.
Dijon, *Moult te tarde!*
Et mon luth camard
Chante la moutarde
Et ton Jacquemart!¹²

Formally consisting of sixteen short lines, each of five syllables, this *ballade* is a good example of Bertrand's use of verse.¹³ It presents the typical rhetorical devices of verse writing, such as a strict rhyme scheme (a-b-b-a-c-c-d-d-e-e-f-f-g-h-g-h), and anaphora ('Et' lines 2, 14, 16; 'Là-bas' and 'Là' lines 4, 9, 11) to name a couple. Bertrand, considered by many to be the canonical inventor of the *poème en prose*, chose to open his collection with this rather formal, rigid composition, perhaps as a way of demonstrating that his *fantaisies* were not simply a way of avoiding verse.¹⁴

Thematically, the *ballade* enumerates well-known features of the city that people from Dijon would certainly recognise with pride. The term 'gothique', which opens the poem and is repeated in the second line, inaugurates the two main angles through which Dijon is depicted. Indeed this adjective launches both an artistic and architectural look over the city as a whole, and introduces a medieval historical timeframe, a celebration of the glorious past of the Dukes of Burgundy, a point of pride for this city even today. Examples of the artistic and architectural perspective, other than the aforementioned 'gothique', are elements such as the 'donjon' (tower of

¹² OC, p. 91. It is interesting to note how the mixture of styles is a characteristic of *Gaspard de la Nuit* from the very beginning. There are indeed two compositions in verse before the long preface in prose.

¹³ Poggenburg recalls that Théodore de Banville, one of the *chefs de file* of the Parnassian movement, quoted this composition in his *Petit Traité de poésie française* as an example of the use of verse composed by five syllables, see note 3, in OC, p. 285. Théodore de Banville, *Petit Traité de poésie française*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Indeed not using verse can represent a constraint, rather than freedom. In his essay 'Sans rythme', Gianfranco Contini demonstrates this paradox by spotting various alexandrines in some of Baudelaire's and Bertrand's compositions in prose; one of the most successful examples he finds in the first preface of *Gaspard* is: '«Vous avez cherché l'Art! Et vous l'avez trouvé?»', in Contini Gianfranco, 'Sans rythme', in *Scritti in onore di Giovanni Macchia*, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), I, pp. 481-95 (p. 489).

the Ducal palace), ‘flèche’, ‘clochers’, ‘portail’ (also in Sainte-Beuve’s epigraph ‘clochers, portails et tours’ were admired), the symbolic ‘Jacquemart’;¹⁵ and the verbs ‘sculptée’, ‘peinte’. The attention to art and architecture in this *ballade* highlights the visual and makes sight this poem’s leading sense, also stressed by the reference to the ‘ciel d’optique’. However, the other senses are not completely ignored, such as hearing, ‘mon luth [...] / Chante’, and perhaps partly recalled by ‘clochers’; or taste with the familiar ‘moutarde’ and ‘treille’, a reference to the famous wines of Burgundy.

Some of the architectural elements, such as the ‘flèche’, are also linked to the second aspect introduced by the term ‘gothique’ – the reference to the Middle Ages – spires being one of its chief architectural symbols. Within the poem can also be found more specific evocations of the glorious past of Dijon, such as ‘*Moult te tarde*’, the old motto of the *commune* of this city,¹⁶ or passages such as ‘Ses clochers jadis / Se comptaient par dix’. In the previous lines the adverb ‘jadis’ and the past tense in the verb ‘comptaient’ refer to a time when Dijon could pride itself on no less than two abbeys and seven churches, even though at Bertrand’s time many of them no longer existed. Like many other characteristics of Dijon, briefly appearing in the first *ballade*, this last aspect is evoked more extensively within the first preface, where specific architectonical elements of the ‘Dijon d’autrefois’ are mentioned: ‘avec ses églises, sa Sainte Chapelle, ses abbayes, ses monastères, qui faisaient des processions de clochers, de flèches, d’aiguilles’.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jacquemart and Jacqueline are two metallic statues positioned on the bell tower of Notre-Dame cathedral in Dijon; Jacquemart indicates the time by striking a hammer on the bell (his name probably comes from Jacques Marc, the constructor of the clock).

¹⁶ Bertrand added the following explanatory note, ‘*Moult me tarde!* ancienne devise de la commune de Dijon’, see note **, in *OC*, p. 91.

¹⁷ *OC*, p. 96. Bertrand added a clarification to this passage in a note: ‘Les deux abbayes [...] étaient si

A first reading of Bertrand's *ballade* in verse suggests that, here in the very first page of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, he wished to present to his possible Parisian and regional readers a Dijon which they could easily identify. As mentioned in the first chapter, at Bertrand's time the attention paid to such details was fostered by publications such as the *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'Ancienne France*,¹⁸ volumes which celebrated the architectural beauty and the historical importance of the regions of France; an attempt to represent all the different *provinces* in their uniqueness. Bertrand was perhaps exploiting this fashion of the *voyage pittoresque*, a device which readers at the time would recognise as a familiar intertext.¹⁹ A particular aspect in connection with this fashion that has often been disregarded is that the appearance of the first volumes of Nodier and Taylor's work greatly inspired some authors from Dijon, who, in 1833, published the first volume of a *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne* (dedicated to the Département de la Côte-d'Or). The authors of this volume were very close indeed to Bertrand, one of the contributors being Théophile Foisset.²⁰ Bertrand was seemingly very enthusiastic about the *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne* and published an article entitled 'Mon oncle essaya d'abord ses lunettes', in the magazine *Le Patriote de la Côte-d'Or*,

anciennes, si puissantes [...] les sept églises de la ville étaient leurs filles', note *, in *OC*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁸ As mentioned in the Chapter 1, some of the volumes of this collection were already being printed at Bertrand's time, such as the volumes regarding Normandy. Nicolas Wanlin recalls: 'Rien ne dit que Bertrand ait pu avoir accès aux premiers volumes de ce luxueux et monumental ouvrage. Mais rien n'interdit de penser qu'il ait pu consulter l'exemplaire du Baron de Barante, membre comme lui de la Société des études dijonnaises et souscripteur des *Voyages*', in *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 260.

¹⁹ Here by *voyage pittoresque*, I am not referring only to the *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'Ancienne France* by Taylor and Nodier, but more widely to the *Voyages pittoresques* 'qui se multiplient à partir de la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle' to borrow Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 60.

²⁰ It is again Wanlin who, at the end of his study, adds an 'Annexe 7: Extraits du *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne*', where he publishes a short abstract of this volume, encouraging the study of this unexplored research path: 'La proximité de Bertrand avec les auteurs de cet ouvrage [...] me poussent à produire ici ces textes encore non exploités par la critique', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, pp. 353-56 (p. 353). Following Wanlin's suggestion I have explored some other extracts from this volume.

advertising and praising the work of his friends.²¹

Moreover, the *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne* is of interest not only as a possible intertext for the beginning of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (the opening *ballade* and first preface), but it also functions as a very useful visual and explanatory support for the references made to churches, monuments, and sometimes even for historical facts. For example, this volume contains two lithographs entitled ‘Vue générale de Dijon’ (Appendix A, Figure 1 and 2). In one of these lithographs (Appendix A, Figure 1), we see travellers and peasants entering and exiting Dijon through the main street. Here Dijon is seen from far away and, in the distance, we perceive the most visible element of this city, the gothic spire of a cathedral (right in the middle of the image); and a tower (on the left-hand side of the lithograph). In another image (Appendix A, Figure 2) from the distance, a tower and a spire can be seen very close to one another. Similarly, Bertrand’s opening *ballade* presents Dijon as perceived from the distance. The fourth line of the *ballade* reads ‘Là-bas, c’est Dijon’, this is echoed in ‘Là, plus d’une pinte’ (l. 9) and ‘Là, plus d’un portail’ (l. 11). The use of adverbs such as ‘là-bas’ and ‘là’ indicate that this composition, although written by a local inhabitant, presents a picture of Dijon as seen from the outside, perhaps by a traveller. Curiously, Bertrand added a note to this poem: ‘Le donjon du palais des ducs, et la flèche de la cathédrale, que les voyageurs aperçoivent de plusieurs lieues dans la plaine’,²² this remark could easily be a caption for the lithographs ‘vue générale de Dijon’.

The examination of the pictures and texts of the *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne* alongside the beginning of *Gaspard de la Nuit* suggests some interesting

²¹ ‘Mon oncle essaya d’abord ses lunettes’, in *OC*, pp. 609-11.

²² Note *, in *OC*, p. 91.

interpretative possibilities. Could the phenomenon of the *littérature de voyage* more generally, not just that of the *voyages pittoresques*, be an important point of reference for Bertrand's representation of Dijon? In his article 'Aloysius Bertrand: *la fantaisie de la promenade*', for instance, Luc Bonenfant remarks that the whole of *Gaspard de la Nuit* could be interpreted as the book of a *promeneur*:

Dans *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Aloysius Bertrand se fait «promeneur». De la Hollande à l'Italie en passant par l'Espagne et le vieux Paris, le poète raconte des lieux qui semblent précis, reconstitue des atmosphères qui paraissent typiques.²³

Expanding on this line of argument, in the next section I shall argue that some of the common traits characterising the *récits de voyage* of Bertrand's time can be applied to his representation of Dijon in the first preface, which will be analysed as a sort of *récit de voyage*. While examining this issue, more fundamental questions will need to be addressed: overall, is Dijon an important presence in *Gaspard de la Nuit*? And how is it represented?

Transforming the Familiar into the Unfamiliar

«Exotiser» l'objet décrit, ou tout au moins [...] le soustraire à toute représentation mimétique du réel'.²⁴

Following the *ballade* in verse, Bertrand's homage to Dijon in *Gaspard de la Nuit* persists within the enigmatic first preface, which many critics have studied with particular interest.²⁵ The first lines of this text read: 'J'aime Dijon comme l'enfant la

²³ Luc Bonenfant, 'Aloysius Bertrand: *la fantaisie de la promenade*', in *Voyager en France au temps du romantisme. Poétique, esthétique, idéologie*, ed. by Alain Guyot and Chantal Massol (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2003), pp. 343-358 (p. 343).

²⁴ Sarga Moussa, 'Clichés et intertextualité dans «Un tour en Belgique et en Hollande» de Gautier', in *Voyager en France au temps du romantisme*, pp. 201-214 (p. 204).

²⁵ For example, Richard Sieburth, 'Gaspard de la Nuit. Prefacing Genre' in *Studies in Romanticism*, 23 (1985), 239-255; Marvin Richard's chapter 'The Prefaces to the Prose Poem' in *Without Rhyme or*

nourrice dont il a sucé le lait, comme le poète, la jeune fille qui a initié son cœur’,²⁶ as Fernand Rude put it, ‘Le premier mot de *Gaspard de la Nuit* est un cri d’amour pour Dijon’.²⁷ This declaration of love is the first of several times Dijon is mentioned within this preface; indeed, as said above, all the events narrated in the text are themselves set in the city’s public gardens. Even if, after the first preface, Bertrand’s city disappears almost entirely from *Gaspard de la Nuit*, the influence of Dijon (and Burgundy) was central in Bertrand’s poetic development and remains indirectly embedded in many aspects of his writing. For example, Suzanne Bernard valuably proposes that three of the main threads in Bertrand’s collection – that is ‘tendance au fantastique, goût du Moyen Age, rôle du grotesque’ – are directly linked both to his growing up in Burgundy (‘les influences de sa jeunesse bourguignonne’) and to his personality, (‘les dispositions profondes de son tempérament’). She also adds:

Le petit Louis a passé son enfance dans un pays imprégné de légendes [...] Ainsi voit-on s’élaborer une poésie qui, bien que peuplée de sorcières et d’apparitions fantastiques, n’aura rien d’artificiel parce qu’elle plongera ses racines dans le terroir bourguignon.²⁸

The appearance of Dijon in Bertrand’s collection, however, should be analysed not only in the light of its importance in his personal development and upbringing. The examination of the first preface of *Gaspard de la Nuit* shows some of the complexity of Bertrand’s use of his city. Certainly, on the one hand, Dijon is the ‘pays imprégné de légendes’ which influenced Bertrand, but on the other hand it was Bertrand

Reason, and more recently Henri Scepi, ‘Les stratégies du Prologue dans *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, in *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit*, pp. 55-68; Aurélie Loiseleur, ‘*Gaspard de la Nuit*, personnage de poésie’, in *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit*, pp. 69-84; Marie-Catherine Huet-Brichard, ‘Le texte liminaire de *Gaspard de la Nuit*: une symphonie ironique, in *Gaspard de la Nuit. Le Grand Œuvre d’un petit romantique*, ed. by Nicolas Wanlin (Paris: PUPS, 2010), pp. 17-31.

²⁶ *OC*, p. 92.

²⁷ Fernand Rude, *Aloysius Bertrand*, p. 5. Perhaps, less naively, Bertrand’s lines could also be a *captatio benevolentiae* to gain the approval of intellectuals in Dijon, while envisaging a career amongst the Parisian milieu.

²⁸ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 55.

himself who, sometimes ironically, invented new stories and unusual episodes set in his city. More importantly, Bertrand's Dijon seems to be used as a poetic device in order to introduce many leitmotifs of his collection.

The discrepancy between the physical, or geographical, reality (the real Dijon) and imagination (Bertrand's Dijon) in *Gaspard de la Nuit* is a common aspect of some *récits de voyage* of the time. In 'Voyage réel, voyage rêvé: les voyages «archéologiques» des petits romantiques', Maria Teresa Puleio comments on the *récits de voyage* of some authors who influenced Bertrand:

Nodier, Nerval, Gautier nous offrent des exemples de descriptions de lieux visités qui, tout en tenant compte de la géographie réelle, se doublent d'une géographie imaginaire avec ses propres cartes, son langage, sa syntaxe. Le premier niveau de ces textes témoigne des déplacements du voyageur dans des espaces réels, l'autre nous entraîne dans des espaces imaginaires.²⁹

This remark could equally be applied to Bertrand's representation of Dijon in his first preface, even though, unlike in a *récit de voyage*, the author does not describe what he sees in the first person. Indeed the city is portrayed here by a fictional character, M. Gaspard de la Nuit, and the character of Louis Bertrand is his listener.³⁰ The first preface is one of the few texts in *Gaspard de la Nuit* where Bertrand had the possibility of working with a 'géographie réelle' (that of Dijon). This aspect is particularly relevant because Bertrand often depicted places that he never saw, such as Italy, Spain, and Flanders. On this point, Bonenfant remarks that 'c'est dans le fort de son esprit et de son imagination qu'il effectue ses promenades; [...] Aloysius

²⁹ Maria Teresa Puleio, 'Voyage réel, voyage rêvé: les voyages «archéologiques» des petits romantiques', in *Voyager en France au temps du romantisme*, pp. 71-90 (p. 74).

³⁰ In *Seuils*, Gérard Genette remarks that this kind of preface, 'préface auctoriale dénégative' is an established literary cliché. In other words Bertrand assumes the role of simple publisher of the *Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* written by M. Gaspard de la Nuit. Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 258. For more on the use of the commonplace of the 'manuscript trouvé' in *Gaspard* see Aurélie Loiseleur, 'Gaspard de la Nuit, personnage de poésie', in *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit*, pp. 70-75.

Bertrand n'a visité ni la Hollande, ni l'Espagne, ni l'Italie'.³¹ In contrast, the opening text of the collection explores the most familiar geography of Bertrand's own city and region.

This familiarity is recalled throughout the preface in various ways; for example Burgundy is sometimes called 'notre Bourgogne'³² where the 'notre' makes for ambiguity, as it could be linked to the fact that both of the characters speaking are from this region, but may have also been used to gain the complicity of local readers and to create a sense of community. Moreover, as with the opening *ballade*, the preface contains several cultural references that only readers from Dijon would understand, at least without the need for further clarification such as that provided by the following passage:

C'était Jacquemart, qui, non moins imperturbable que de coutume sous sa *caule* de fer rapiécée, acheva sa besogne sans paraître s'inquiéter [...] Jacqueline [...] gardait une immobilité parfaite.³³

The appearance of the symbolic Jacquemart and Jacqueline, and the use of *caule*, a word in patois (indicated in italics in the original), make Bertrand's explanatory notes necessary for readers not familiar with Dijon and its symbols.³⁴ The use of these cryptic elements was perhaps also aimed at fostering a sense of mystery and fascination in readers from outside the city. This idea is supported by the fact that, throughout the preface, little by little the threshold between 'géographie réelle' and 'géographie imaginaire' is tackled and undermined, the familiar slowly turning into the unfamiliar.

In the *jardin de l'Arquebuse* of Dijon, M. Gaspard de la Nuit, a 'promeneur'

³¹ Luc Bonenfant, 'Aloysius Bertrand: *La Fantaisie de la promenade*', p. 343.

³² *OC*, p. 93.

³³ *OC*, p. 101.

³⁴ Poggenburg explains in her notes that *caule* means 'petit bonnet'. Le terme est traditionnellement appliqué à la coiffure de Jacquemart', note 43, in *OC*, p. 291.

described as ‘un pauvre diable dont l’extérieur n’annonçait que misères et souffrances’,³⁵ sits on a bench next to the narrator Louis Bertrand, ‘Nous étions maintenant deux sur le banc’.³⁶ The two of them (both poets) open a discussion about art and poetry. In this dialogue, the character of Bertrand and M. Gaspard do not engage in a clear exploration of theoretical issues, indeed quite the opposite. M. Gaspard de la Nuit’s account of his artistic quest becomes more and more captivating:

«J’avais résolu, dit-il, de chercher l’art comme au moyen-âge les rose-croix cherchèrent la pierre philosophale; – l’art, cette pierre philosophale du dix-neuvième siècle!»³⁷

This analogy between the quest for art and the alchemic quest for the ‘pierre philosophale’ is a signal, a warning of the difficulty and the mystery characterising M Gaspard’s research.

The difficulty of this research is shared by ‘L’Alchimiste’, the protagonist of the eighth *fantaisie* of ‘L’École flamande’ section, where the repetition of ‘Rien encore!’, ‘Non rien’, ‘Mais rien encore!’,³⁸ together with the use of the adverb ‘vainement’ expresses the bitter frustration of the alchemist. The circular structure of this *fantaisie* gives the idea that the alchemist’s research, perhaps an impossible task, will continue forever. A passage from the first paragraph reads:

³⁵ OC, p. 92. Here I chose to call the mysterious ‘promeneur’ M. Gaspard de la Nuit (or M. Gaspard), however, readers do not know the name of this character until the end of the preface and it is the narrator Louis Bertrand who understands that this is the name of the person he met in the park. Loiseleur remarks: ‘D’autre part, qui a décrété que l’inconnu rencontré au jardin de l’*Arquebuse* s’appelait Gaspard de la Nuit ? C’est le narrateur qui, par déduction, lui confère *a posteriori* et de façon peut-être posthume le statut de nom propre’, in ‘Gaspard de la Nuit, personnage de poésie’, p. 77.

³⁶ OC, p. 92.

³⁷ OC, p. 93. This kind of declarations produced important studies about the role of alchemy and occultism in Bertrand’s collection such as Réjane Blanc, *La Quête alchimique dans l’œuvre d’Aloysius Bertrand* (Paris: Nizet, 1986). The role of alchemy and occultism, although a very important topic to survey, cannot be taken too seriously. Bertrand was certainly also playing with stereotypes and clichés and this first text especially is characterised by irony.

³⁸ OC, pp. 129-30.

Et vainement ai-je feuilleté pendant trois jours et trois nuits, aux blafardes lueurs de la lampe, les livres hermétiques de Raymond-Lulle!

and this section of the last paragraph echoes:

Et pendant trois autres jours et trois autres nuits, je feuilletterai, aux blafardes lueurs de la lampe, les livres hermétiques de Raymond-Lulle!³⁹

In the first preface, this frustrated curiosity is expressed by the character of Bertrand, who keeps questioning M. Gaspard: ‘«Et l’art? Lui demandai-je.»’,⁴⁰ then more impatiently ‘«Et alors?»’, ‘«Et l’art?» – «Il existe» – «Mais où donc?»’.⁴¹ Often, M. Gaspard, instead of answering, goes on to describe more details of his research, admitting the failure of some of his experiments: ‘«Patience! – l’art était encore dans les limbes»’.⁴² Therefore, the figure of the alchemist, bordering on the threshold between science and magic, between rationality and irrationality; is a suitable analogy for M. Gaspard himself.⁴³

Much has been written about the enigmatic and ironic dialogue between M. Gaspard and Louis Bertrand, which has been called by the critic Henri Scepi a ‘micro-fiction de l’invention du livre [...] toute entière soutenue par un discours dont la charge de fantaisie humoristique et d’ironie ne fait pas de doute’.⁴⁴ The task is now to examine in more detail how this ‘fantaisie humoristique’ is introduced and produced by Bertrand. Through M. Gaspard’s eyes, readers witness strange episodes which are often difficult to explain rationally. For example, at the very beginning of

³⁹ OC, pp. 129-30.

⁴⁰ OC, p. 94 and p. 96.

⁴¹ OC, p. 102.

⁴² OC, p. 96.

⁴³ Moreover, at the end of the preface readers discover that M. Gaspard de la Nuit could be the devil, and they are forced to doubt his existence. Henri Scepi valuably suggests the connection between the devil and the double arguing that ‘L’unité et l’harmonie semblent interdites à l’artiste. Dans cette perspective, le diable représente la dualité irréductible, le heurt des contraires, la non-congruence’, in ‘Les stratégies du Prologue dans *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Henri Scepi, ‘Les stratégies du Prologue dans *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, p. 60. The dialogue about art in the first preface of *Gaspard* is indeed a fascinating topic. For more bibliographical references of studies on this topic, see note 31 above.

his research, while looking out of the window of his ‘mansarde’:

Ô surprise! Rêvais-je! Une terrasse que je n’avais pas soupçonnée aux suaves émanations des orangers, une jeune fille, vêtue de blanc, qui jouait de la harpe, un vieillard, vêtu de noir, qui priait à genoux!- Le livre me tomba de la main.⁴⁵

Soon after this passage, readers discover that these two ghost-like figures were real, ‘le vieillard était un ministre de la religion réformée’, ‘la musicienne était son unique enfant’,⁴⁶ but this episode sparks a series of mysterious events which threaten to destabilise the threshold between what is real and what is not. To some extent, episodes of this kind also undermine the credibility of M. Gaspard and his reliability as a narrator. In this case he even openly admits self-doubt, ‘Rêvais-je!’.

M. Gaspard’s quest for ‘ce qui dans l’art est l’idée’ is the occasion for a *voyage* ‘dans la nature’ and ‘les monuments des hommes’ of Dijon. However, the description of this city ceases to reflect reality and increasingly becomes more similar to a *conte fantastique*, an element which will be analysed more extensively in the next chapter. In a continuing escalation of strange episodes, by the end of the preface the presence of mystery and terror is the predominant element. No mimetic representation is left in such passages as:

La vierge noire, la vierge des temps barbares, haute d’une coudée, à la tremblante couronne de fil d’or, à la robe raide d’empois et de perle, la vierge miraculeuse devant qui grésille une lampe d’argent sauta en bas de sa chaire et courut sur les dalles, de la vitesse d’un toton. Elle s’avançait des neufs profondes, à bonds gracieux et inégaux, accompagnée d’un petit saint Jean de cire et de laine qu’embrasa une étincelle et qui se fondit bleu et rouge. Jacqueline s’était armée de ciseaux pour tondre l’occiput de son enfant enroulé ; un cierge éclaira au loin la chapelle du baptistère, et alors...⁴⁷

After the detailed and frightening description of an ‘espèce de messe noire’,⁴⁸ as it is called by Poggenburg, the character of Louis Bertrand impatiently questions ‘«Et

⁴⁵ OC, p. 93.

⁴⁶ OC, p. 93.

⁴⁷ OC, pp 101-02.

⁴⁸ Note 48, in OC, p. 292.

alors?» and M Gaspard confesses ‘J’avais fait un rêve’.⁴⁹ The entire episode is dismissed at this moment as a simple dream and the reliability of the narrator is thus damaged irreparably, as well as his mental stability, a madness overtly evoked by the main character himself: ‘j’ai longtemps cherché l’art absolu! Ô délire! Ô folie!’.⁵⁰ Shortly after M. Gaspard’s departure from the park, however, a doubt arises: indeed, M Gaspard de la Nuit was perhaps the devil himself, rendering everything he has narrated as in need of reconsideration. In the preface, readers will not find a definitive answer to this doubt; the only *finale* is the ironic and disenchanted exclamation by the character of Louis Bertrand, ‘Si Gaspard de la Nuit est en enfer, qu’il y rôtit. J’imprime son livre’.⁵¹

The next aim of this chapter is to understand the possible reasons for the sudden intervention of mystery in the familiarity of Bertrand’s own city. The progressive loss of referentiality in this long episode set in Dijon is a common trait of some of the *récits de voyage* of Bertrand’s time. Indeed few of these were accurate accounts of what happened during the journeys of the protagonists, and this had been a common feature for writers throughout the nineteenth century (and even earlier). In the first pages of *Un Tour en Belgique et en Hollande*,⁵² Théophile Gautier ironically unmask some of the commonplaces of the *récits de voyage* of his time:

Ce voyage est le premier que j’aie jamais fait, et j’en ai rapporté cette conviction, à savoir, que les auteurs de relations n’ont pas seulement mis le bout du pied dans les pays qu’ils décrivent, ou que, s’ils y sont allés, ils avaient comme l’abbé de Vertot, leur siège fait d’avance.⁵³

It is not uncommon that some travellers never visited the place they described, or

⁴⁹ *OC*, p. 102.

⁵⁰ *OC*, p. 102.

⁵¹ *OC*, p. 104.

⁵² This is the account of Gautier’s first voyage, which he undertook together with Gérard de Nerval in 1836.

⁵³ Gautier, Théophile, *Un Tour en Belgique et en Hollande*, ed. by Stéphane Guégan (Paris: L’école des loisirs, 1997), pp. 7-8.

that, even if they did so, they described something different from what they saw, filling in the reality with their imagination, or colouring it by their preconceived ideas about the place. Moreover, the imagination of these travellers was, in turn, often informed by what they had read about the area they were visiting.

In her article ‘Entre écriture du Monde et réécriture de la bibliothèque’, Christine Montalbetti analyses this important aspect:

Les relations intertextuelles prennent une place fondamentale à l’intérieur de cette poétique [du texte référentiel], en ce sens qu’elles viennent complexifier le rapport entre la plume et son objet en introduisant le troisième pôle de la bibliothèque.⁵⁴

Elsewhere in the same article she also remarks that ‘La bibliothèque contraire l’entreprise référentielle à plusieurs titres’.⁵⁵ One of the results of the presence of this ‘troisième pôle de la bibliothèque’ is that some *récits de voyage* end up becoming similar to a *conte fantastique*.⁵⁶ Maria Teresa Puleio recalls that this transformation was quite common, and that it was used by many authors at the time, such as Nodier, Hugo, Nerval, Gautier and Mérimée:

Il est d’ailleurs très fréquent que des impressions de voyage deviennent, après coup, des récits de fiction dans lesquels les personnages principaux, visitant les mêmes lieux que ceux décrits par l’écrivain, vivent des véritables expériences fantastiques.⁵⁷

In the first preface to *Gaspard de la Nuit* the referentiality of the representation of Dijon is challenged both by the presence of a strange series of elements (even some ‘expériences fantastiques’, as I shall show in the next chapter) and by the recollection

⁵⁴ Christine Montalbetti, ‘Entre écriture du Monde et réécriture de la bibliothèque’, in *Miroirs de textes. Récits de voyage et intertextualité*, ed. by Linon-Chipon, Magri-Morgues, and Moussa, (Nice: Publications de la Faculté de lettres, arts, et sciences humaines de Nice, 1998), pp. 3-16 (pp. 14-15).

⁵⁵ Christine Montalbetti, ‘Entre écriture du Monde et réécriture de la bibliothèque’, p. 7. For more on this topic, refer to Christine Montalbetti *Le Voyage, le monde et la bibliothèque* (Paris: PUF, 1997).

⁵⁶ In his article ‘L’étrangeté dans le récit de voyage et le conte fantastique: l’exemple de Mérimée’, Michel Viegnes valuably recalls that ‘Récit de voyage et récit fantastique se retrouvent [...] autour d’un enjeu essentiel: l’ouverture à l’altérité.’, in *Voyager en France au temps du romantisme*, pp. 375-88 (p. 376).

⁵⁷ Maria Teresa Puleio, ‘Voyage réel, voyage rêvé’, p. 75.

of a ‘Dijon d’Autrefois’. The mediation of what Montalbetti calls the ‘troisième pôle de la bibliothèque’ could easily be the source of many of the elements in Bertrand’s preface. For example the *conte fantastique* of his time could be behind its fantastic episodes, while historical and topographical volumes on Dijon and Burgundy, such as Barante’s *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne* and the aforementioned *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne*, were likely to have informed Bertrand’s representation of a Dijon of the past.⁵⁸

As mentioned above, concerning the mediation of popular legends, Suzanne Bernard recalls that ‘Louis a passé son enfance dans un pays imprégné de légendes’;⁵⁹ likewise in his ‘Notice’ Sainte-Beuve claimed that ‘Dijon et ses antiquités héroïques, et cette fraîche nature peuplée de légendes, emplissait son cœur’.⁶⁰ Both of these critics recognise the importance of the sentimental link between Bertrand and his city, where the revival of legends is to some extent also a nostalgic revival of childhood, a period characterised by its belief in legends. In his review of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, de Molène made a similar point, ‘Dijon [...] est pour lui ce qu’est à l’enfant la maison où il est né, un monde à la fois mystérieux et connu, illuminé par l’amour et agrandi par la rêverie’.⁶¹ However, it is debatable whether readers should fully accept the naivety of the opening line (‘J’aime Dijon comme l’enfant la nourrice’) after considering the general irony of the preface. Perhaps Bertrand was exploiting, rather than simply reviving, this legendary world as a way of creating a mysterious image of Dijon. A goal also achieved thanks to the

⁵⁸ Luc Bonenfant stresses the importance of Barante’s volumes in Bertrand’s consideration of the past, especially the ‘moyen âge’ and analyses the ‘dialogue institué par Bertrand avec l’historien Barante’ in his study ‘Aloysius Bertrand, les prismes historiques et grotesques du Moyen Âge’, in *Études littéraires*, XXXVII, 2, (2006), 63-74.

⁵⁹ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 55.

⁶⁰ *OC*, p. 77.

⁶¹ Review included in Wanlin’s ‘Annexe I’, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 335.

ambiguity of some passages in the preface, which rely on Bertrand's use of hidden references to legends. For example, in this passage M. Gaspard narrates:

Et les nuits même, les nuits d'été, balsamiques et diaphanes, que de fois j'ai gigué comme un lycanthrope autour d'un feu allumé dans le val herbu et désert, jusqu'à ce que les premiers coups de cognée du bûcheron ébranlassent les chênes!⁶²

Set in the surroundings of Dijon, this nightly ritual ('nuits d'été, balsamiques et diaphanes') describes a dance around the fire ('j'ai gigué comme un lycanthrope'), which evokes the legendary Sabbath of witches and magicians, a common theme in the legends of Burgundy.⁶³ The theme of the Sabbath also returns in Bertrand's *fantaisies*, such as in 'Départ pour le sabbat', 'La Ronde sous la cloche', and 'L'Heure du sabbat' (in the latter, we encounter again the figure of the lumberjack, 'le vieux bûcheron attardé par les sentiers, sa charge de bois sur le dos, entend et ne voit pas').⁶⁴

Many other allusions to legends often appear in M. Gaspard's rapid lists of episodes and evocations, where they risk remaining unnoticed.⁶⁵ Some of the allusions that are only sketched in the preface are still relevant, as they will reappear in the *fantaisies*.⁶⁶ Consider for example the short passage: 'Que de fois j'ai pêché l'écrevisse dans les gués échevelés des Tilles, parmi les cressons qui abritent la

⁶² OC, p. 95.

⁶³ For example, see the entry 'La Chasse Sauvage' in the section about Burgundy, in *Contes, récits et légendes des pays de France*, ed. by Claude Seignolle, 4 vols (Paris: Omnibus, 1997), II, pp. 969-971. The Sabbath also appears in various legends of other regions of France.

⁶⁴ OC, p. 185.

⁶⁵ M. Gaspard's narration presents many lists which often produce a sense of frenzy, but also of overwhelming totality. Consider for example: 'bourgeois, nobles, vilains, soudrilles, prêtres, moines, clercs, marchands, varlets, juifs, lombards, pèlerins, ménestrels, officiers du Parlement et de la Chambre des comptes, officiers des gabelles, officiers de la monnaie, officiers de la gruerie, officiers de la maison du duc', in OC, p. 97. Bertrand's use of the list could perhaps be inspired by Rabelais's writings, often presenting this element. Steinmetz stresses that 'l'inspiration rabelaisienne est bien présente dans *Gaspard de la nuit*', in his edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2002), p. 318.

⁶⁶ This aspect is even more evident after a reading of the collection *à l'envers*, in other words a rereading of the first preface after the *fantaisies* helps to spot several thematic similarities.

salamandre glacée, et les nénuphars dont bâillent les fleurs indolentes!'.⁶⁷ 'La Salamandre', alchemically linked to the element of fire, is the title of one of the *fantaisies* of 'La Nuit et ses prestiges' (the third section of *Gaspard de la Nuit*);⁶⁸ 'les nénuphars' are often linked to aquatic sprites and reappear in the poem 'Ondine' in the same section. From the thematic point of view, therefore, some of the legendary elements of the preface have the function of unifying the entire collection, insofar as they prefigure some of the later motifs of Bertrand's *fantaisies*. A similar cohesive role is also seen in the use of the 'Dijon d'autrefois', the past being one of the main protagonists in *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

The Dijon of the Past through its Ruins

'Cette ancienne ville de Dijon [...] qui de toutes parts lui offrait des reliques du Moyen Age'.⁶⁹

(Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours*)

'Et moi, j'errais parmi ces ruines comme l'antiquaire qui cherche des médailles romaines dans les sillons d'un *castrum*, après une grosse pluie d'orage. Dijon expiré conserve encore quelque chose de ce qu'il fut'.⁷⁰

(Louis Bertrand, 'Préface', *Gaspard de la Nuit*)

In the opening text of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, M. Gaspard's 'Dijon d'autrefois'⁷¹ is very difficult to locate within a precise timeframe. Indeed, even though M. Gaspard specifies, 'J'eus bientôt déblayé le Dijon des 14^e et 15^e siècles [...] Le Dijon de Philippe-le-Hardi, de Jean-sans-Peur, de Philippe-le-Bon, de Charles-le-

⁶⁷ OC, p. 95.

⁶⁸ The entry 'Salamandre' appears in *Dictionnaire de l'étrange*, ed. by Mazeau and Le Blé (Paris: Le Pré aux Clercs, 2007), p. 399. Here it is recalled that 'Elle [la Salamandre] a longtemps été associée à la sorcellerie, car on la croyait capable de traverser le feu sans se brûler.'

⁶⁹ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 56.

⁷⁰ OC, p. 100.

⁷¹ OC, p. 96.

Téméraire’,⁷² what follows in the narration is more of a pastiche of elements belonging to an undefined past, or better, of an undefined *Moyen Âge*. In his study ‘La ville et ses clochers: Bertrand et le Moyen Âge’, the *médiéviste* Denis Hüe recalls that this was a common aspect throughout the nineteenth century:

On se fabrique son propre Moyen Âge, pour en faire le lieu d’un imaginaire sciemment flou: c’est la raison pour laquelle c’est plus le *Temps passé*, qui est évoqué, irrécupérable et lieu de nostalgie, qu’un authentique Moyen Âge chronologique et historiquement daté.⁷³

This ‘temps passé’ is the indefinite ‘autrefois’ of Bertrand’s Dijon. From the poetic point of view, a rigorous historical perspective was not needed.⁷⁴ What counts is more the opposition between present and past, between what is real and what is lost and impossible to retrieve, ‘tout atteste deux Dijon – un Dijon d’aujourd’hui, un Dijon d’autrefois’.⁷⁵ The ‘autrefois’ too, as well as the fantastic elements, interferes with a mimetic representation of the real Dijon ‘d’aujourd’hui’. From this point of view, this *Moyen Âge* shares similar characteristics with the mysterious episodes occurring in the preface, as it is an ‘exotisme temporel’ which takes the narrator (and the reader) away from the reality of their experience.⁷⁶ Every element of the city (‘tout atteste’) is an occasion for a voyage through time, into a legendary past, filtered through Bertrand’s readings. The sense of nostalgia mentioned by Denis Hüe is thus also caused by the probable idealisation of this blurred past. Bertrand plays with this nostalgia, which, together with the mysterious elements described above,

⁷² OC, p. 96.

⁷³ Denis Hüe, ‘La ville et ses clochers: Bertrand et le Moyen Âge’, in *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit de Louis Bertrand*, pp. 111-16 (p. 114).

⁷⁴ Wanlin suggests that this attitude can be seen in the entirety of the collection: ‘Bertrand ne cherchait aucunement la valeur de vérité comme qualité de ses textes historiques’, in *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 297.

⁷⁵ OC, p. 96.

⁷⁶ To borrow the expression used by Michel Viegnes in his passage, ‘À l’exotisme temporel et spatial [...] fait pendant cet exotisme intérieur du fantastique, lui aussi confrontation avec l’Autre de la raison.’, in ‘L’étrangeté dans le récit de voyage et le conte fantastique’, p. 377.

creates an intriguing image of his city.

The sense of nostalgia for a lost world is sparked especially by what remains of this past, the ‘tout’ in ‘tout atteste deux Dijon’, which mainly refers to its architecture, and which stands as a continuous reminder of what the city once was. In this regard Vincent-Munnia suggests:

Les premières poètes en prose [...] particulièrement Bertrand, savent néanmoins conférer à leur Moyen-Âge, au-delà de la pure ornementation, une véritable fonction poétique. Ainsi va-t-il de l’architecture gothique [...] Cette préoccupation romantique pour les vieux monuments [...] se double chez Bertrand d’une perspective plus esthétique: le passé incarné par ces monuments gothiques y acquiert une fonction autre que purement historique.⁷⁷

The ‘fonction poétique’ of gothic architecture – I add – is closely linked to the loss of referentiality of the account, as every mentioned element opens an immediate leap into the past. Gothic architectural elements, rather than simple ornaments, create a visible point of contact with the past and its mindset, because they survived through time and now stand as continuous reminders of what is forever lost. Examples of gothic architecture are everywhere in the preface, ‘flèches’, ‘aiguilles’, ‘vitraux’; even the adjective ‘gothique’ is explicitly mentioned several times, such as when the ‘église de Notre Dame’ of Dijon is called a ‘gothique édifice’, and when this adjective is repeated twice in the same sentence ‘qui peuplent de leurs gothiques momies les caveaux gothiques de l’église’. It is here evident that the term ‘gothique’ recalls both the magnificent Dijon of the past ‘avec ses églises, sa sainte chapelle, ses abbayes, ses monastères’, and horror, as shown by the episode of the ‘gothique momies’ coming back to life and of ‘la vierge des temps barbares’;⁷⁸ hence this

⁷⁷ Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, ‘Le Moyen Âge dans le poème en prose’, in *La Fabrique du Moyen Âge au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Bernard-Griffiths, Glaudes, and Vibert (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006), pp. 987-98 (p. 989).

⁷⁸ This second use of the adjective ‘gothique’ to refer to horror is also seen in the *fantaisie* ‘La Chambre gothique’.

adjective manages to combine both the sense of mystery and the past.⁷⁹ This past, far from rigorously defined, is a ‘temporalité en fait symbolique’,⁸⁰ which makes it possible for Bertrand and his readers to compare what Dijon once was with what it had become.

Within gothic architecture, ruins have a very important function because their incompleteness immediately produces a sense of loss and nostalgia. They are visible fragments, parts of something which does not exist any longer and which can only be imagined. In ‘Entre écriture du monde et réécriture de la bibliothèque’, Montalbetti examines ‘la ruine’ as one of the ‘opérateurs d’intertextualité’; indeed she suggests that the vision of ruins immediately encourages a ‘geste intertextuel sur une logique de la synecdoque et de la métonymie’, where ruins metonymically ‘rend nécessaire l’évocation de l’édifice dans sa forme entière’.⁸¹ This process characterises some sections of Bertrand’s preface, such as the following passage, where the evocation of the old *chartreuse* is emphatically evoked:

La Chartreuse de Dijon! le Saint-Denis des ducs de Bourgogne! Ah ! pourquoi faut-il que les enfants soient jaloux des chefs d’œuvres de leurs pères ! – Allez maintenant où fut la Chartreuse, vos pas y heurteront sous l’herbe des pierres qui ont été des clefs de voûtes, des tabernacles d’autels, des chevets de tombeaux, des dalles d’oratoires ; des pierres où l’encens a fumé, où la cire a brûlé, où l’orgue a murmuré, où les ducs morts ont posé le front. — Ô néant de la grandeur et de la gloire ! on plante des calebasses dans la cendre de Philippe-le-Bon! — Plus rien de la Chartreuse ! Je me trompe. — Le portail de l’église et la tourelle du clocher sont debout.⁸²

This painful sentiment of nostalgia is sparked by the visible absence represented by the ruins of this *chartreuse*, ‘l’herbe des pierres qui ont été’; which also causes a

⁷⁹ In a review of Victor Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris* which appeared in *L’Artiste*, a critic ironically criticised the overuse of gothic elements typical of his time: ‘La société du Moyen âge surnagea dans les livres [...] les gothiques fleurs de lis, réinstallés aux frontons de nos édifices [...] ont fait revivre toute la littérature gothique’, in *L’Artiste* (1831) Ser.1, 1, p. 104.

⁸⁰ Vincent-Munnia, ‘Le Moyen Âge dans le poème en prose’, p. 990.

⁸¹ Christine Montalbetti, ‘Entre écriture du Monde et réécriture de la bibliothèque’, p. 13.

⁸² *OC*, pp. 98-99

sense of injustice because the view of this building can no longer be enjoyed, ‘pourquoi faut-il que les enfants soient jaloux [...] de leurs pères?’ The only thing left is to reflect upon what is still visible, ‘la tourelle’, ‘le portail’, and ‘le piédestal’:

La tourelle élancée et légère, une touffe de giroflée sur l’oreille, ressemble à un jouvenceau qui mène en laisse un lévrier; le portail martelé serait encore un joyau à pendre au cou d’une cathédrale. Il y a outre cela, dans le préau du cloître, un piédestal gigantesque dont la croix est absente et autour duquel sont nichées six statues de prophètes, admirables de désolation. — Et que pleurent-ils? Ils pleurent la croix que les anges ont reportée dans le ciel.⁸³

These examples show that the vision of the ruins in the surroundings of Dijon becomes an occasion for remembering the past of this city, with a sense of regret. In a typical Romantic celebration of melancholy, the nostalgia for what is lost goes hand in hand with the admiration of the ruins, ‘le portail [...] serait encore un joyau’; ‘le piédestal’, which lacks its cross, is still ‘gigantesque’ and its ‘six statues’ are ‘admirables de désolation’. The complaint thus hides a sense of pride for the beauty of what is left, where the expression of the loss is mixed with both a celebration of the mythical past of Dijon and the promotion of the remains that make the ‘Dijon d’aujourd’hui’ still fascinating. This attitude is even more evident when Bertrand’s first preface is compared with contemporary texts explicitly aimed at promoting the city and its beauty. For instance, a passage from an entry of the *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne* describing the *chartreuse* of Dijon reads:

La célèbre Chartreuse de Dijon, qui date du XIV^e siècle (1383), n’existe plus que dans la mémoire des Bourguignons [...] Tout a disparu, à l’exception cependant de quelques faibles ruines qui attestent, même dans leur exiguïté, la grandeur du passé. Ces ruines consistent dans le portail de l’église, dans une tourelle de 60 pieds d’élévation, maintenant isolée, mais jadis adossée au collatéral nord de l’église; et dans un piédestal chargé de sculptures et qui supportait une croix gothique.⁸⁴

⁸³ OC, p. 99.

⁸⁴ *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne*, p. 49.

Like Bertrand's preface, this passage expresses sorrow for what is lost, a feeling of regret which is echoed in M Gaspard's complaint, for example: 'Le sort de la Chartreuse a été celui de la plupart des monuments qui embellissaient Dijon [...] Cette ville n'est plus que l'ombre d'elle-même'.⁸⁵ This entry from the *Voyage pittoresque* begins with a remark that the chartreuse is preserved only in the collective memory of the people of Burgundy, 'la mémoire des Bourguignons', but also that its ruins 'attestent, même dans leur exiguité, la grandeur du passé' (Bertrand recalled this 'grandeur', '— Ô néant de la grandeur et de la gloire!'). After this opening, the entry describes what remains, the 'portail' and the 'piédestal', including two lithographs which show the beauty of these ruins (Appendix A, Figure 3 and 4).

We can therefore see that ruins and, more generally, architecture, have more than one role in the preface of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Firstly, the historicity of these elements interferes with the *entreprise référentielle* of a mimetic representation of a 'Dijon d'aujourd'hui'. Indeed, whenever M. Gaspard sees these ruins, he cannot avoid a nostalgic digression to recall the myth of what Dijon once was, which does not reflect a precise historical reality. Secondly, the leading role of architecture in the preface of is an important feature, which recurs in many of the *fantaisies* of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, as can be seen, for example, in the composition 'Le Maçon'. This visual text presents the reader with a constellation of architectural elements, as seen by the protagonist:

Le maçon Abraham Knupfer chante, la truelle à la main, dans les airs échafaudé, si haut que, lisant les vers gothiques du bourdon, il nivelle de ses pieds et l'église aux trente arc-boutants, et la ville aux trente églises.

Il voit les tarasques de pierre vomir l'eau des ardoises dans l'abîme confus des galeries, des fenêtres, des pendentifs, des clochetons, des tourelles, des toits

⁸⁵ OC, p. 99.

et des charpentes, que tache d'un point gris l'aile échancrée et immobile du tiercelet.

Il voit les fortifications qui se découpent en étoile, la citadelle qui se rengorge comme une géline dans un tourteau, les cours des palais où le soleil tarit les fontaines, et les cloîtres des monastères où l'ombre tourne autour des piliers.⁸⁶

Thirdly, the blurred and gothic *Moyen Âge*, which is recalled and represented by many of the architectonic elements mentioned in the first preface, will turn out to be the main setting of the *fantaisies*, as also seen in the example of 'Le Maçon'. This aspect of Bertrand's collection was emphasised even by its very first reviewers. For example, in *La Revue Indépendante* (25 February 1843), a critic read this feature of Bertrand's collection as outmoded for the time:

La plupart de ces pièces nous reportent vers le moyen âge; ce sont autant des petits tableaux qui reproduisent dans ses traits les plus saillants, et souvent avec bonheur, la physionomie pittoresque de ces siècles de preux et de troubadours. Mais aujourd'hui, à qui peut s'adresser cette froide poésie du passé ? [...] Ce livre, en paraissant aujourd'hui, est donc arrivé trop tard pour le succès.⁸⁷

Lastly, the attention to the architecture of Dijon again functions as a way of promoting a fascinating image of this city for readers beyond its borders. Thus, architecture, the past, and mysterious events combine to constitute a new myth of Dijon created by Bertrand, who mixed old legends with his own new episodes. The Dijon of M. Gaspard de la Nuit, who is perhaps the devil himself, and who inhabits this city of history and legends, carrying his manuscript, was a new image of Dijon that could be sold both in the capital and in Bertrand's region.

By developing such mystique, coming from regional France could have been transformed by Bertrand into a point of pride, rather than a weakness. Bertrand was exploiting the increasing interest in the *provinces* typical of his time; opening his

⁸⁶ OC, p. 117. For an extensive analysis the role of architecture in this composition, refer to Nicolas Wanlin's third chapter 'Le Portrait du poète en maçon', in *Le Sens du pittoresque*, pp. 235-83.

⁸⁷ Review included in Wanlin's 'Annexe I', *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 337.

collection with an intriguing image of his city was a way of making his work unique and different from that of other poets, especially Parisian ones. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, a similar attitude can be recognised in other authors of the time, such as Samuel-Henri Berthoud, an author from Cambrai who moved to Paris who, in 1831, published his *Légendes et traditions surnaturelles des Flandres*.⁸⁸ In this collection, Flanders became the mysterious place of a ‘surnaturel’ governed by the presence of the devil. In the magazine *L’Artiste*, a critic summarised this work as follows: ‘Ce n’est pas autre chose que l’histoire du diable, découpée en quarante petites histoires’.⁸⁹ One wonders to what extent the invention of new myths about their region by provincial authors was a conscious project. The textual evidence fits with an interpretation where an intriguing image of a region was created, which then was spread in Paris (and other regions). Later the region would start to see itself through its own mysterious image, as a mark of difference from the capital. The critic who presented Berthoud’s volume in the *Revue des deux mondes*, for instance, was certainly intrigued by the image of Flanders presented in the collection. Berthoud’s *Flandre* was even compared to ‘l’Écosse’, which at the time had many legendary connotations, thanks to Walter Scott, but also to such volumes as Loève-Weimars’s *Ballades, légendes et chants populaires de l’Angleterre et de l’Écosse* (1825).⁹⁰ A passage of this review reads:

La Flandre, par son ciel brumeux et ses habitudes, a plus d’un rapport avec

⁸⁸ Wanlin indicates that this work by Berthoud ‘mériterait d’être analysé en détail tant il me semble représentative de l’imaginaire folklorique contemporain de Bertrand et surtout du fait de ressemblances frappantes avec *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, in *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 204. For more on the possible connection between Berthoud and Bertrand, see ‘L’intertexte populaire de *Gaspard*’, in *Le Sens du pittoresque*, pp. 203-07.

⁸⁹ *L’Artiste* (1831), Ser. 1, II, pp. 119-20. This review was also indicated by Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 206.

⁹⁰ Loève-Weimars, *Ballades, légendes et chants populaires de l’Angleterre et de l’Écosse par Walter Scott, Thomas Moore, Campbell et les anciens poètes* (Paris: Antoine-Augustin Renouard, 1825). Some of the compositions in this collection will be examined in Chapter 4.

l'Écosse; comme elle, elle est riche de traditions pleines de poésie, et, comme elle aussi, elle vient de trouver son *stories-teller* dans un de ses enfants, qui a recueilli ces traditions et en a composé un livre plein d'intérêt. M. Berthoud raconte ses légendes avec ce ton de naïveté et de simplicité qu'on trouve dans les anciennes chroniques, dont la lecture paraît lui être familière.⁹¹

In contrast to Berthoud, Bertrand chose to abandon almost completely the explicit use of his own region (and city) after the first preface. Unlike Berthoud's Flanders, Burgundy and Dijon do not appear in the title of the collection, nor in any of the titles of the different sections. However, the representation of regional France in Bertrand's collection did not end with the disappearance of Burgundy and Dijon. After seeing how Bertrand defamiliarised the familiar environment of his city and region, the next section will consider how Bertrand dealt with the unfamiliar geography of the Flanders, which he never visited. This bordering region cannot be considered solely French in today's geography, as it includes other countries such as Belgium and The Netherlands. Moreover, from the historical point of view, the precise geographical definition of Bertrand's *Flandres* can be quite controversial.⁹² However, its geographical proximity, its cultural relevance in French history and its presence in the *imaginaire collectif* of the French justifies its inclusion within regional France for the purposes of the present analysis. This inclusion is also supported by the fact that the entry 'Le Flamand' was amongst the constellation of provincial types in the seventh volume of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*.⁹³ It should also be noted that Flanders shares a historical connection with Burgundy as the dukes of Burgundy conquered this area.⁹⁴ In the next section the image of *les*

⁹¹ 'Album', *Revue des deux mondes*, (1831), II, p. 340.

⁹² Bertrand often mixes aspects of the historical Flanders and of Holland in his representations.

⁹³ *Province*, II (Paris: L. Curmer Éd., 1842).

⁹⁴ In Barante's *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne*, various episodes describe the long-lasting historical link between Burgundy and the Flanders (for example, the marriage of Philippe l'Hardi with Marguerite de Flandre and the 'guerres des Flandres').

Flamands and their region within Bertrand's collection will be analysed with reference to the mindset of his time.

Being Flemish in Gaspard de la Nuit

'Les Flamands, gent mutine et têtue'.⁹⁵
(*Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche*)

'Il n'aime pas à être contredit, et sa ténacité prouve qu'il n'a point l'habitude d'avoir tort'.⁹⁶
(*'Le Flamand', Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*)

Luc Bonenfant concludes his article 'Aloysius Bertrand: La Fantaisie de la promenade' with this statement: 'Aloysius Bertrand, auteur romantique jamais sorti de Dijon et qui n'a connu l'autre qu'à travers ses livres'.⁹⁷ When analysing the representation of *les Flandres* and *les Flamands* in *Gaspard de la Nuit* it is crucial to remember that Bertrand never had first-hand knowledge of this region. His vision of this part of the world and its inhabitants was therefore inevitably mediated by other forms of communication such as readings, paintings, and popular stereotypes circulating at his time. In turn, by the mere act of producing literary texts about *les Flamands*, Bertrand was reinforcing and widening the available cultural material on this topic. Critics of *Gaspard de la Nuit* have studied especially the important role of Flemish art as a source of inspiration for many of the *fantaisies*, a study that was encouraged by the numerous mentions of Flemish artists and paintings, which are everywhere in the collection.⁹⁸ To recall just a few examples, Rembrandt is in the title, other artists such as Van-Eyck, Neef and Bruegel appear in the second preface,

⁹⁵ Epigraph to the *fantaisie* 'Les Flamands', in *OC*, p. 197.

⁹⁶ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, p. 294.

⁹⁷ Luc Bonenfant, 'Aloysius Bertrand: la fantaisie de la promenade', p. 358. (To the exception of Paris.)

⁹⁸ For example Renée Riese Hubert's 'La technique de la peinture dans le poème en prose', David Scott's *Pictorialist Poetics*, and Nicolas Wanlin's *Le Sens du pittoresque*.

the first section of *Gaspard de la Nuit* is called ‘L’École flamande’, an expression which also reappears in some of the *fantaisies*, such as in ‘Harlem’, ‘cette admirable bambochade qui résume l’école flamande, Harlem peint par Jean-Breughel, Peèter-Neef, David-Téniers et Paul Rembrandt’,⁹⁹ and in ‘Le Bibliophile’, ‘Ce n’était pas quelque tableau de l’école flamande’.¹⁰⁰

Towards the end of his study on the meaning of the use of the ‘pittoresque’ in Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Nicolas Wanlin suggests that the value of Flemish art goes beyond its mere role as a source of inspiration. This critic argues that the ‘manière «flamande»’ assumes a wider social and ideological significance in Bertrand’s collection.¹⁰¹ Indeed the choice of this school of painting, because of its celebration of everyday life, ‘apparaissait comme le plus apte à magnifier le peuple’.¹⁰² In contrast with Wanlin, however, my aim in this section is to take a step back from this reflection upon the ‘manière « flamande »’ in order to analyse the representation of *les Flamands* themselves from a different perspective. I hope to assess the extent to which Bertrand reflected the vision of *les Flamands* typical of his time and the extent to which he played with it, to create a new one.

As a starting point, it should be asked whether Bertrand’s representation of Flemish people reflected aspects of the historical and cultural reality characterising this population.¹⁰³ Was Bertrand playing with some specific cultural and historical elements of this region and its inhabitants? To address this question, I shall consider some examples taken from *Gaspard de la Nuit*, read alongside the entry ‘Le

⁹⁹ OC, p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ OC, p. 157.

¹⁰¹ Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, pp. 302-03.

¹⁰² Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 303

¹⁰³ Interest in the history of Flanders at Bertrand’s time is demonstrated by such studies as *Histoire de la Flandre, depuis le comte Guy de Dampierre jusqu’aux ducs de Bourgogne* (1280-1383), by Jules Van Praet, the review of which was published in *Le Globe*, 20 August 1828, VI, pp. 633-34.

Flamand’ in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1842); although this volume was published after Bertrand’s death, it is reasonable to think that the vision expressed in *Les Français* was not very different from that of Bertrand’s time. Passages from Gautier’s *Un Tour en Belgique et en Hollande* will also be a useful tool in attempting such an interpretation.

In ‘Harlem’, the first composition of ‘L’École flamande’, the depiction of the ‘admirable bambochade qui résume l’école flamande’ includes many scenes of everyday life, a typical feature of this school of painting, which Bertrand conveyed through this *fantaisie*.¹⁰⁴ After describing the city, its canal, its architecture, and some of its inhabitants (such as ‘l’insouciant bourguemestre’, ‘l’amoureux fleuriste’, ‘la bohémienne’ and ‘le vieillard’), the last paragraph of this composition introduces a characteristic Flemish place of sociability: ‘Et les buveurs qui fument dans l’estaminet borgne’.¹⁰⁵ Indeed ‘l’estaminet’ is not simply a small café where one can smoke, it has a special value in Flemish culture and society.¹⁰⁶ Timothy Baycroft remarks on the particular role of ‘l’estaminet’:

The standard means for the Flemish to socialise on a day-to-day basis was also peculiar to the region. Every small community, neighbourhood, and often many rural areas had what is known as an *estaminet*, or a kind of local pub, in which Flemish would come to drink, eat, sing, recite poetry, play games and to discuss with friends and neighbours.¹⁰⁷

The *estaminet* also had other peculiar features, which made it different from other

¹⁰⁴ In her ‘La technique de la peinture dans le poème en prose’, Hubert remarks that ‘Le poème «Harlem» abonde en souvenirs de tableaux flamands et hollandais’, but she also adds that ‘Bertrand ne s’efforce point d’imiter servilement l’art flamand [...] Le poète se saisit de détails que sa mémoire et son imagination plutôt que l’observation ou le contact immédiat avec des œuvres d’art ont rendu saillants’, p. 170.

¹⁰⁵ *OC*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ The first meaning suggested by the *Trésor de la langue française* is ‘Café ou salle de café où l’on peut fumer’. The etymology of the word ‘estaminet’ demonstrates its northern origins, ‘Empr. au wallon *staminê*, *èstaminê* [...] attesté dès le xvii^e s. sous la forme *staminai*’, <<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/estaminet>>.

¹⁰⁷ Timothy Baycroft, Timothy Baycroft, *Culture, Identity and Nationalism: French Flanders in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Suffolk: Boydell, 2004), p. 40.

places of sociability of this kind in the rest of France. For example, Baycroft recalls that here ‘women and children were present and indeed welcome’, that ‘they were generally speaking clean and commendable’ and that their atmosphere ‘was not “mean or sordid” but genuinely pleasant and friendly’.¹⁰⁸ In Bertrand’s ‘Harlem’, the *estaminet* loses many of these important cultural features and it is represented instead as an ‘estaminet borgne’, a shady place, where people come to drink and smoke: ‘les buveurs qui fument’. This depiction of l’*estaminet*, which excludes many of the positive functions described by Baycroft, probably reflects Bertrand’s own vision of this place, which he could gather by interpreting Flemish paintings depicting ‘scènes d’estaminet’.¹⁰⁹ One wonders whether first-hand knowledge of one of these places could have changed Bertrand’s representation, or modified his interpretation of the paintings which he had the possibility to observe.¹¹⁰

In Théophile Gautier’s ironic *récit de voyage* about his journey to Belgium and Holland, ‘un estaminet’ appears, almost symbolically, just after crossing the border between France and Belgium:

Un café, intitulé *Café de France*, orné d’un coq qui avait l’air d’un chameau, marquait l’endroit où finissait le territoire *français*. Un estaminet, à l’enseigne du *Lion de Belgique*, indiquait la place où commençaient les possessions de Sa Majesté Léopold.¹¹¹

At the sight of this *estaminet* with its inscription ‘Verkoopt men dranken’,¹¹² Gautier

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Baycroft, *Culture, Identity and Nationalism*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁹ In a note to the poem ‘Harlem’, Poggenburg recalls that ‘David Teniers le vieux, mentionné dans le premier verset, peignait surtout des scènes d’estaminets’, note 8, in *OC*, p. 297. However scenes of this kind were depicted also by David Teniers the Younger. See for example, his ‘Interieur d’estaminet’ at the Musée du Louvre, see Appendix A, Figure 5.

¹¹⁰ Even if Bertrand’s ‘Harlem’ is a ‘bambochade’, a term which refers both to painting, but also to Bertrand’s compositions which were initially called like this.

¹¹¹ Gautier, *Un Tour en Belgique et en Hollande*, p. 50.

¹¹² Shortly before crossing the border, in Valenciennes, Gautier sees this writing for the first time: ‘C’est à Valenciennes que je vis pour la première fois, sur les murs cette inscription formidable, qui s’est reproduite invariablement de dix maisons en dix maisons, jusqu’à la fin de cette odyssée merveilleuse [...] Ce qui signifie en loyal flamand: *Ici l’on vend à boire* ’, *Un Tour en Belgique et en*

and his travel companion Gérard de Nerval have the same idea:

Nous nous jetâmes, tout altérés de couleur locale et crevant en outre de soif, dans le triomphant estaminet du Lion belge, où nous répandîmes dans le corps plus de bière qu'il n'en pouvait raisonnablement tenir.¹¹³

'Altérés de couleurs locales', the two travellers start to behave like natives, drinking large quantities of beer, as a way of absorbing the *belgitude* of Belgium, 'nous nous assimilâmes la Belgique par tous les moyens possibles'.¹¹⁴ The common vision of people from the north as 'buveurs' is also introduced in the last paragraph of Bertrand's 'Harlem', a representation that is often found in the iconography through the centuries. For instance, in seventeenth-century paintings of the *École flamande*, such as David Teniers the Younger's 'scènes d'estaminet' (which always depicted people drinking) and his 'Buveur' (Appendix A, Figure 6); and two centuries later, in 1842, the image accompanying the entry 'Le Flamand' in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* still depicted a man smoking his pipe and holding a big glass of beer in his hand (Appendix A, Figure 7).

More generally, what distinguishes Flemish people from the rest of the population is their proverbial inability to control their intake of food and drink. In the entry of *Les Français* this aspect is stressed again and again, and the typical Flemish man is characterised by his plumpness:

On ne saurait glaner que des impressions culinaires hypergastronomiques dans ces campagnes apéritives, et ce qui arrive aux bons habitants du pays de Flandre. L'appétit leur vient par les yeux [...] ils rêvent à des tables bien servies, en admirant une contrée toute plantée de nourriture.¹¹⁵

Si vous rencontrez dans quelque lieu public où l'on puisse fumer et boire un homme au large flanc, à la face vermeille et réjouie, de qui les traits réguliers soient empâtés par un embonpoint qui en atténue l'expression [...] tenez-vous

Hollande, p. 48.

¹¹³ Gautier, *Un Tour en Belgique et en Hollande*, p. 51.

¹¹⁴ Gautier, *Un Tour en Belgique et en Hollande*, p. 52.

¹¹⁵ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, p. 299.

pour assuré que ce mortel est un bon Flamand.¹¹⁶

The characteristic body shape of the Flemish man ‘un homme au large flanc’, is recalled by Bertrand in an image of ‘Harlem’, ‘l’insouciant bourguemestre qui caresse de la main son double menton’ (moreover, in ‘Harlem’ there is even an explicit reference to food: ‘un faisan mort’),¹¹⁷ and in his ‘Les Cinq Doigts de la main’, ‘ce gras cabaretier flamand’.¹¹⁸

This bodily feature is not only typical of men but also of women. In Gautier’s narration of his travel, readers encounter *une Flamande*:

Dans la grande rue de Valenciennes, j’aperçus le premier et seul Rubens que j’aie jamais vu dans mon voyage à la recherche de la chevelure blonde et du contour ondoyant; c’était une grosse fille de cuisine, avec des hanches énormes et des avalanches d’appas prodigieuses.¹¹⁹

The uncontrolled love for eating and, most of all, drinking, is indeed shared by Flemish women; in *Les Français* it is highlighted that ‘les femmes mêmes boivent d’autant [...] Il y a moins de différence entre les deux sexes dans le nord qu’en tout autre pays’.¹²⁰ In the *fantaisie* ‘Les Cinq Doigts de la main’, Bertrand takes the image of the female drinker to the extreme; the wife of the ‘gras cabaretier flamand’, surprisingly thin, a ‘virago sèche comme une merluche’, cannot resist drinking and is depicted as an alcoholic, ‘sa femme [...] caresse la bouteille dont elle est amoureuse’.¹²¹ In the same composition there is a reference to another typically Flemish cultural feature, the predominance of beer over other beverages. In his historical study, Baycroft analyses some of these culinary characteristics of the French Flanders: ‘the consumption of beer or the preference for cooking with butter

¹¹⁶ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, pp. 294-95.

¹¹⁷ *OC*, p. 115.

¹¹⁸ *OC*, p. 125.

¹¹⁹ Gautier, *Un Tour en Belgique et en Hollande*, p. 48.

¹²⁰ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, p. 295.

¹²¹ *OC*, p. 125.

rather than oil, Flemish cuisine is clearly distinguishable from that of the rest of France'.¹²² The first paragraph of 'Les Cinq Doigts de la main' reads :

Le pouce est ce gras cabaretier flamand, d'humeur goguenarde et grivoise, qui fume sur sa porte, à l'enseigne de la double bière de mars.¹²³

After this reference to 'la double bière de mars', in the third paragraph, there is the image of 'le doigt du milieu', the son, who is a brewer, 'qui serait soldat s'il n'était pas brasseur'.¹²⁴ The presence of this beverage gives a touch of Flemish realism to the reunion of 'sorcières et sorcières' in 'Départ pour le sabbat', the last *fantaisie* of 'L'École flamande', 'Ils étaient là une douzaine qui mangeaient *la soupe à la bière*, et chacun d'eux avait pour cuiller l'os de l'avant-bras d'un mort'.¹²⁵

These apparently frivolous culinary details assume greater importance in *Les Français*, as the personality of the people from Flanders is directly linked to their consumption of food and drink; 'Ainsi, le trop bien de vivre leur alourdit l'esprit et l'imaginativité'.¹²⁶ In this sense, their physical *lourdeur*, also 'alourdit l'esprit'. In the first preface, Bertrand embraces this common place in defining the symbolic Jacquemart: 'L'exactitude, la pesanteur, le flegme de Jacquemart seraient le certificat de son origine flamande'.¹²⁷ It is their stereotypical lack of idealism, their *terre à terre* realism and simplicity, which probably attracted Bertrand to *les Flamands*, who, in his collection, often become types (as in 'Le Cinq Doigts de la main'). It should be stressed here that simplicity is not at all a negative feature. In *Les Français* the Flemish simple taste is linked to that of the people of the Middle Ages, 'Les Flamands aiment la représentation; pour les divertir, il faut des spectacles

¹²² Timothy Baycroft, *Culture, Identity and Nationalism*, p. 42

¹²³ OC, p. 125.

¹²⁴ OC, p. 125.

¹²⁵ My emphasis. OC, p. 131.

¹²⁶ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, p. 299.

¹²⁷ OC, p. 100.

magnifiques, étranges; le beau, pour eux, c'est le bizarre, et, sous ce rapport, ils conservent des analogies remarquables avec nos aïeux du moyen âge'.¹²⁸ This last observation sheds new light on the reason for the appearance of *les Flamands* in *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Indeed, their presence is not only a way of adding to the *couleur locale* of the collection, but the choice of *les Flamands* revives elements of the 'étrange' and the 'Moyen Âge' introduced by the first preface and characterising many of the other compositions.

Conclusion

'You would have found that they believed that minorities were more holy than majorities, that failure was nobler than success, which had something shoddy and something vulgar about it'.¹²⁹

(Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*)

Freed from any obligations to realism, in *Gaspard de la Nuit* the 'manière flamande' can be reinvented and become a 'valeur', encompassing any characteristics that Bertrand assigns to it.¹³⁰ In my analysis, rather than examine his use of Flemish art, which has been extensively surveyed by critics, I have chosen to show specific elements of Bertrand's representation of *les Flamands*. Bertrand's *Flamands* sometimes differ from the historical reality characterising these people and their region, but his representation of them remains similar to the vision of his contemporaries. On the one hand, Bertrand is not interested in a mimetic representation of reality; on the other he is very skilled at playing with the stereotypes of his time and using them as an added feature in his collection.

¹²⁸ *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Province*, II, p. 299.

¹²⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. by Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 9.

¹³⁰ Wanlin suggests an 'équivalence du «flamand» et du grotesque' and that 'Si l'on prolonge le raisonnement, on peut aussi englober la quasi-totalité du recueil sous la valeur «flamande»', in *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 303.

Therefore, Bertrand never needed to visit Flanders to present its population to an audience, who would have recognised the Flemish type without the need for further explication. Bertrand's depiction of Flemish characters (in such compositions as 'Harlem' and 'Les Cinq Doits de la main') guide readers in the interpretation of texts of a very different nature, such as 'Les Flamands' (in 'Les Chroniques' section), a historical recollection of the surrender of the city of Bruges. Thanks to the other compositions, readers are likely to have a preconceived idea of 'le bourguemestre et les échevins, criant merci, mantels et chaperons par terre'¹³¹ in 'Les Flamands', and are perhaps not surprised by this city's surrender.

Moreover, in this chapter I have shown that, even when realism is expected, such as in the representation of Dijon in the preface, Bertrand ironically dismantles all certitudes, turning the known into unknown. It is thanks to this process of defamiliarisation that Bertrand can create a new image of Dijon and can assign to this city new values and roles. Therefore, Bertrand's use of Dijon is not to be underplayed, even though this city does not constitute the main setting in *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Appearing at the beginning of the collection, Dijon covers different important roles, working as a way of promoting an intriguing vision of his region and as a poetic introductory device for some of the leitmotifs of the *fantaisies*. The celebration of Dijon thus has both an internal poetic function and a wider cultural function. In *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Dijon and Flanders have a lot in common, their gothic architecture with its cathedrals, their Middle Ages, their legends, their social outcasts. Paying tribute to all this is a way, on the part of Bertrand, 'de promener ses regards du centre aux extrémités',¹³² as suggested by Michelet in his *Tableau de la*

¹³¹ OC, p. 197.

¹³² Jules Michelet, *Tableau de la France*, p. 134.

France. From this point of view, Bertrand's 'France excentrale' paradoxically includes Paris, but unlike that of his contemporaries, it is 'Le Vieux Paris', a Paris *d'autrefois* which has a lot in common with the 'Dijon d'autrefois' of the first preface. This was likely another way in which Bertrand conducted an exchange between the two cities, between their stereotypes, their respective cultural location in the national topography, and between the readers in both.

Chapter Three

The Presence of the Fantastic in *Gaspard de la Nuit*

Introduction

‘Né d’une survivance du nocturne dans les temps dits éclairés, le fantastique hante tout le dix-neuvième siècle européen’.¹

(Michel Viegnes, *L’Envoûtante étrangeté*)

In the previous chapter, I showed how the familiar geography of Dijon at the beginning of *Gaspard de la Nuit* became the setting for mysterious episodes that challenge readers’ expectations, and which are aimed at producing fascination for this provincial city. In this chapter I shall analyse further the presence of this ‘hantise’ in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, which characterises many of Bertrand’s *fantaisies* even when Dijon ceases to be their main setting. Various critics of Bertrand’s collection have had different views on whether *Gaspard de la Nuit* can be considered as a typical example of the wider nineteenth-century phenomenon of *le fantastique* and on whether or not the fantastic can be considered as one of the main characteristics of this collection. In this chapter I seek to enter this critical debate in the following two ways. First of all I shall look at some of the main twentieth-century critical discussions on the fantastic in order to understand the theoretical framework on which many critics of Bertrand’s texts have based their analysis of the *fantaisies*. Secondly, I shall propose new hypotheses based on the understanding of the term ‘fantastique’ within Bertrand’s cultural and literary context. This will permit me to engage in a discussion of the presence of the fantastic element in the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, freed from possible critical anachronisms.

¹ Michel Viegnes, *L’Envoûtante étrangeté. Le fantastique dans la poésie française (1820-1924)* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2006), p. 13.

Traditionally critics have emphasised the relevance of the fantastic inspiration in Bertrand's collection. To name but a few significant examples, in chronological order, Suzanne Bernard suggests that 'l'inspiration de *Gaspard* présente trois traits essentiels de romantisme', the first one being 'l'inspiration fantastique' followed by 'l'amour du Moyen Age' and 'le goût du grotesque'.² In the introduction to his edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Jean Palou states that: 'Le goût du fantastique est propre à tous les romantiques de tous les pays et Aloysius Bertrand ne s'est pas fait faute de donner dans ce genre très à la mode vers 1828, en France'.³ A similar critical position was expressed by Marcel Schneider in his study *La Littérature fantastique en France*, when he indicates more generally that Bertrand, as well as other 'petits romantiques' of his time, showed evident fantastic inclinations, 'Aloysius Bertrand, Defontenay et Xavier Forneret. Petits romantiques, ils le furent dans la pleine acception du terme et fantastiques d'esprit, assurément'.⁴ In the 1970s, when Henri Corbat referred more generally to 'Hantise et Imagination' in the title of his study on Bertrand,⁵ in the preface to his edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit* Richer declared that in this collection readers can find 'un véritable répertoire des thèmes alors en vogue', amongst which he mentioned: 'inspiration fantastique, intérêt pour la magie et les diableries'.⁶ Fernand Rude, who in 1971 wrote one of the first substantial studies entirely devoted to Bertrand and his collection, declared without doubt that: 'Le tiers de *Gaspard de la Nuit* relève du genre fantastique. Le livre

² Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, pp. 54-55.

³ Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit. Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*, ed. by Jean Palou (La Colombe, Éd. du Vieux Colombier, 1962), p. 17.

⁴ Marcel Schneider, *Histoire de la littérature fantastique en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), pp. 224-25.

⁵ Henri Corbat, *Hantise et imagination chez Aloysius Bertrand* (Paris: Corti, 1975).

⁶ Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit. Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*, ed. by Jean Richer (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), p. 5.

troisième [‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’] appartient entièrement à ce genre’.⁷ And more recently, Nathalie Vincent-Munnia who defined Bertrand’s compositions as ‘jamais éloignée de la dérive fantastique’.⁸ So far, it would seem simple and straightforward to confirm the important presence of the fantastic in Bertrand’s collection. However, the matter becomes more complicated if one starts reflecting upon the definition of the fantastic itself, as discussed by such theorists as Castex, Caillois, and Todorov. In light of these theorists’ definitions, the issue of the presence of the fantastic in *Gaspard de la Nuit* becomes more complex and debatable.

Defining the Fantastic after Castex

‘Et je me demandais si je veillais ou si je dormais’.⁹
(Aloysius Bertrand, ‘Mon Bisaïeul’)

In the preface to his 1980 edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Max Milner perceived a theoretical problem in defining many of Bertrand’s compositions as examples of the fantastic, asking: ‘peut-on même parler de fantastique?’. Further he explained that:

Si l’on définit celui-ci [le fantastique] avec Pierre-Georges Castex, comme «l’intrusion brutale du mystère dans le cadre de la vie réelle», on constate aussitôt que, mis à part Mon Bisaïeul, qui répond aux normes les plus strictes du récit fantastique, le «cadre de la vie réelle» occupe une très petite place – souvent aucune place du tout – dans les pièces qui font intervenir des êtres mystérieux ou surnaturels.¹⁰

In this passage Milner specifically refers to the third section of *Gaspard de la Nuit* ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’, exactly the same one that Fernand Rude defined without hesitation as belonging entirely to the ‘genre fantastique’, as mentioned above. In

⁷ Fernand Rude, *Aloysius Bertrand*, p. 96. However, it should be recalled that even the consideration of *le fantastique* as a genre has often been challenged by critics, such as Michel Viegnes who states that ‘Le fantastique [...] n’est pas un *genre*, mais une catégorie esthétique, au même titre que le grotesque, le tragique, ou le comique’, in Michel Viegnes, *L’Envoûtante étrangeté*, p. 48.

⁸ Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose*, p. 82.

⁹ *OC*, p. 179.

¹⁰ Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit. Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*, ed. by Max Milner (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 40.

order to better understand Milner's critical position, a more complete version of Castex's definition needs to be considered. According to Castex, 'le fantastique' is different from other writings characterised by extraordinary events, such as ancient myths and fairy tales, because, contrary to these:

Il se caractérise [...] par une intrusion brutale du mystère dans le cadre de la vie réelle; il est lié généralement aux états morbides de la conscience qui, dans les phénomènes de cauchemar ou de délire, projette devant elle des images de ses angoisses ou de ses terreurs.¹¹

Castex's definition thus represents a turning point in the theorisation of the fantastic. This definition places a particular emphasis on a neat differentiation of *le fantastique* from other literary forms such as popular myths, medieval tales, and fairy tales because it includes as an essential component the psychology of the witness of this fantastic experience, who is dwelling 'dans le cadre de la vie réelle'. Castex's explanation does so by stressing the 'états morbides de la conscience' and the 'phénomènes de cauchemar ou de délire', in other words, the fantastic event itself should be considered in relation to the psychological state of the witness of such an event, to their own terrors and nightmares, within real life.

According to Max Milner, 'Mon Bisaïeul' is the sole 'pure' example of the fantastic in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, as it is the only composition in the collection that obeys all the rules mentioned in the aforementioned definition by Castex. Let us now analyse this *fantaisie* more closely.

¹¹ Pierre-George Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: Corti, 1951), p. 8.

Mon Bisaïeul

Tout dans cette chambre était encore dans le même état, si ce n'est que les tapisseries y étaient en lambeaux, et que les araignées y tissaient leurs toiles dans la poussière.

WALTER-SCOTT— Woodstock.

Les vénérables personnages de la tapisserie gothique, remuée par le vent, se saluèrent l'un l'autre, et mon bisaïeul entra dans la chambre, — mon bisaïeul mort il y aura bientôt quatre-vingts ans !

Là, — c'est devant ce prie-Dieu qu'il s'agenouilla, mon bisaïeul le conseiller, baisant de sa barbe ce jaune missel étalé à l'endroit de ce ruban.

Il marmotta des oraisons tant que dura la nuit, sans décroiser un moment ses bras de son camail de soie violette, sans obliquer un regard vers moi, sa postérité, qui étais couché dans son lit, son poudreux lit à baldaquin!

Et je remarquai avec effroi que ses yeux étaient vides, bien qu'il parût lire, — que ses lèvres étaient immobiles, bien que je l'entendisse prier, — que ses doigts étaient décharnés, bien qu'ils scintillassent de pierreries.

Et je me demandais si je veillais ou si je dormais, — si c'étaient les pâleurs de la lune ou de Lucifer, — si c'était minuit ou le point du jour!¹²

This *fantaisie* plays with one of the most stereotypical themes of the *contes fantastiques* circulating at the time: the theme of the *revenant*, the resurrection of the dead. The events described take place in the privacy of the protagonist's own bedroom. In this familiar environment, his ancestor, who had died more than 80 years earlier, suddenly enters the room. Simultaneously, the characters portrayed in the gothic tapestry decorating the wall animate and begin to greet each other. It should be recalled that the theme of the animation of tapestries, paintings, and portraits, is very widespread in various *contes fantastiques* at Bertrand's time. Consider, for example, Théophile Gautier's 'La Cafetière'.¹³ In this *conte*, the protagonist, during a trip to Normandy, witnesses various extraordinary episodes happening during the night in the solitude of his bedroom, amongst which: 'les

¹² OC, pp. 179-80.

¹³ This tale was published for the first time in 1831 in *Le Cabinet de lecture*.

personnages de la tapisserie [...] ce que j'avais pris pour de vaines peintures étaient la réalité', and further 'un des portraits, le plus ancien de tous [...] sortit, en grimaçant, la tête de son cadre'.¹⁴ Critics often indicate that the foreign source behind this theme is Walter Scott's ghost story 'The Tapestry Chamber or The lady in the Sacque' (1828), translated into French as 'La Chambre Tapissée ou La Dame en Sac'. It should be noticed, however, that in Scott's tale the tapestry itself does not come to life, but rather a ghost appears in the night in the so-called 'tapestry chamber' of an old castle in a small rural English town. In the 1820s there were also other tales containing similar episodes to those in Gautier's *conte*. For example in 1824 the American author Washington Irving, who was spending some time in Germany and Paris, published a collection entitled *Tales of a Traveller* under the pen name of Geoffrey Crayon. This collection was soon translated into French and included in the first volume of this author's *Œuvres complètes*, published in 1825, under the supervision of Washington Irving himself.¹⁵ In one of these tales, 'L'Aventure de ma Tante', the aunt moves to the rural region of Derby after the death of her husband and:

Tout-à-coup il lui semble qu'elle entend remuer quelque chose derrière elle. Elle regarde vite à l'entour; mais elle ne voit rien, rien que le portrait horriblement peint de son cher et pauvre mari [...] quand tout d'un coup elle croit voir que l'un des yeux du portrait se remuait.¹⁶

This and other tales were widely read in France in the 1820s and 1830s. Walter Scott, in particular, was not only a literary celebrity in France at the time, but also an author of great relevance for Bertrand, who quoted his work more than once in *Gaspard de*

¹⁴ Théophile Gautier, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, ed. by Pierre Laubriet, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2002), I (2002), pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Washington Irving, *Œuvres complètes de M. Washington Irving, traduites de l'anglais sous les yeux de l'auteur par M. Lebègue d'Auteuil*, 4 vols (Paris: Boulland, 1825). Hereafter referred as *OCWI*.

¹⁶ *OCWI*, I, p. 64.

la Nuit, namely in the epigraphs opening the *fantaisies* entitled ‘À M. Victor Hugo’, ‘Messire Jean’, ‘Mon Bisaïeul’, ‘La Poterne du Louvre’, and ‘La Citadelle de Wolgast’.¹⁷

Although in Scott’s ‘The Tapestryed Chamber’, the tapestry itself does not come to life, it is possible to identify clear similarities between this tale and ‘Mon Bisaïeul’. For example, in Scott’s tale the wind creates suspense and tension in the description of the décor in the mysterious room of the castle, where the protagonist, the brave military man General Brown, is about to spend the night:

Il y avait quelque chose de sombre dans les tentures de tapisserie qui entouraient la petite chambre; elles étaient doucement ondulées par la brise d'automne, qui, trouvant un passage à travers les veilles croisées en treillage, sifflait en pénétrant dans l'appartement.¹⁸

As Scott’s ‘brise d’automne’ moves the tapestry, similarly, in ‘Mon Bisaïeul’, the ‘tapisserie gothique’ is ‘remuée par le vent’. In Bertrand’s composition the presence of the wind is crucial, as it creates a certain ambiguity in the protagonist’s observation that ‘les vénérables personnages de la tapisserie gothique [...] se saluèrent l’un l’autre’ at the same time as the wind enters the room. Doubt is thus created about whether this personification is simply a hallucination created by the movement caused by the wind. The use of the wind in order to create ambiguity seems to be an established technique, which is also employed by Washington Irving in his ‘L’Aventure de ma Tante’, when he describes the first reaction of the protagonist when she hears a sigh: ‘Elle attribua ce bruit, au vent qui sifflait dans les

¹⁷ Between 1826 and 1833 the complete works of Walter Scott were being published in a monumental series of eighty-four volumes in a new French translation: *Œuvres complètes de Sir Walter Scott. Traduction nouvelle*, trans. by Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret (Paris: Charles Gosselin et A. Sautet et Co, 1826-33). All direct quotations from ‘La Chambre Tapissée’ will refer to this edition and French translation of Walter Scott’s works, hereafter referred as *OCWS*.

¹⁸ *OCWS*, LXXXIV, p. 293.

crevasses du vieux bâtiment'.¹⁹ Moreover, the shock and terror of the protagonist of Bertrand's composition when he discovers that he is dealing with a ghost 'Et je remarquai avec effroi que ses yeux étaient vides [...] que ses lèvres étaient immobiles' also recalls the shock and disbelief of General Brown when he tells the story of his nocturnal episode in the tapestried chamber: 'Grand Dieu! Mylord, quel visage elle me fit voir. Je n'eus plus besoin de me demander qui elle était, il n'y avait pas moyen de penser que c'était un être vivant. Sur un visage qui faisait voir les traits décharnés d'un cadavre'.²⁰

According to the definition by Castex, the 'cadre de la vie réelle' is a crucial element for establishing the presence of the fantastic in a given composition. As far as the reader knows, the events described in the tale 'La Chambre Tapissée' seem to happen within the 'cadre de la vie réelle', seen in the way the narration opens by setting a very plausible historical background:

Vers la fin de la guerre d'Amérique, lorsque officiers de l'armée de lord Cornwallis, qui se rendit à York-Town [...] retournaient dans leur patrie pour raconter leurs aventures et se reposer de leurs fatigues, il y avait parmi eux un officier général auquel miss Seward donne le nom de Brown [...] C'était un officier de mérite, aussi bien qu'un gentilhomme distingué [...] Quelques affaires conduisirent le général Brown à voyager dans les comtés de l'Ouest.²¹

Also in 'L'Aventure de ma Tante', the initial setting could be credible:

Peu de temps après, elle alla se fixer à la campagne, dans une vieille maison du Comté de Derby, long-temps abandonnée aux soins d'un intendant et d'une femme de charge.²²

In both of these cases, however, the initial setting creates suspicion because of their rural location, 'Comtés de l'Ouest', 'Comté de Derby'. As seen in the previous

¹⁹ *OCWI*, I, p. 64.

²⁰ *OCWS*, LXXXIV, p. 300.

²¹ *OCWS*, LXXXIV, p. 286-87.

²² *OCWI*, I, p. 61.

chapter, the setting of the *province* was often exploited to produce a sense of mystery in the minds of city readers. Added to this, the buildings where the extraordinary episodes occur are an isolated castle and a ‘vieille maison’, both enigmatic locations which could figure in a *roman noir*.

Bertrand’s ‘Mon Bisaïeul’, a *fantaisie* in prose and not a *conte*, lacks a proper introduction of the setting, the only assumption that can be made is that the bedroom of the protagonist should be a safe place. In this regard, it should be noted that Todorov, one of the main theorists of the fantastic, does not support the idea that this phenomenon can occur in poetry. The theorist states that the fantastic ‘exige [...] une réaction aux événements tels qu’ils se produisent dans le monde évoqué. Pour cette raison, le fantastique ne peut subsister que dans la fiction ; la poésie ne peut être fantastique’.²³ Other critics, such as Michel Viegnes, do not agree with Todorov’s position. Viegnes challenges the principle of the ‘non-référentialité absolue de la poésie’, on which Todorov’s point is based.²⁴ Bertrand’s *fantaisies* represent a challenge to usual formal categories, while also combining features typical of prose writing and poetry (such as its brevity), but it is evident that Bertrand’s compositions cannot unquestionably be defined as non-referential. In the case of ‘Mon Bisaïeul’, for example, readers can easily understand the reference to the ‘chambre’, as well as the terrified reaction experienced by the protagonist, and it is precisely the disruption of the safety provided by reality that causes the character’s shock at what they are witnessing. By the time Bertrand was writing his compositions, however, the shock on the part of readers at such episodes was perhaps weaker because the *conte fantastique* was a very popular genre and some of its elements an established cliché.

²³ Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, p. 65.

²⁴ Michel Viegnes, *L’Envoûtante étrangeté*, p. 45.

Max Milner finds it hard to observe the presence of this ‘cadre de la vie réelle’ in the other compositions of *Gaspard*, but I would suggest that ‘Mon Bisaïeul’ is not the only ‘pure’ example of the phenomenon of the fantastic in *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Consider for example this passage taken from the first preface, which was analysed more extensively in the previous chapter. The character of Louis Bertrand is here listening to the words of the mysterious M. Gaspard de la Nuit, who narrates the adventures of his quest for art around the city of Dijon:

-«J’étais un jour occupé devant l’église de Notre-Dame à considérer Jacquemart, sa femme et son enfant, qui martelaient midi. [...] Un éclat de rire se fit entendre là-haut et j’aperçus dans un angle du gothique édifice, une de ces monstrueuses figures, que les sculpteurs du moyen-âge ont attachées par les épaules aux gouttières des cathédrales [...] C’était elle qui avait ri.»

-«Vous aviez un fêtu dans l’œil ! m’écriai-je.»

-«Ni fêtu dans l’œil, ni coton dans l’oreille. – La figure de pierre avait ri, - ri d’un rire grimaçant, effroyable, infernal, mais – sarcastique, incisif, pittoresque»²⁵

This episode takes place within the ‘cadre de la vie réelle’, more specifically it occurs in Dijon at Bertrand’s time (Bertrand being a character in the story), outside the church of Notre Dame of Dijon. Here the character of Bertrand openly doubts the credibility of M. Gaspard, ‘Vous aviez un fêtu dans l’œil!’, but Gaspard insists on the sincerity of his vision, ‘Ni fêtu dans l’œil, ni coton dans l’oreille’. Louis Bertrand shows disbelief and doubt about what M Gaspard is narrating, and readers in turn doubt what is real and what is not within the context of the narration. M. Gaspard’s insistence on confirming that ‘La figure de pierre avait ri’, only adds to the ambiguity. This kind of hesitation could also be observed in ‘Mon Bisaïeul’, where the protagonist wonders whether what is happening is real or not: ‘Et je me

²⁵ OC, p. 100.

demandais si je veillais ou si je dormais’.²⁶

This hesitation has traditionally been considered an essential component of the fantastic, as described by Todorov in his famous definition: ‘le fantastique [...] ne dure que le temps d’une hésitation, hésitation commune au lecteur et au personnage, qui doivent décider si ce qu’ils perçoivent relève ou non de la réalité’.²⁷ ‘Le fantastique’ thus opens an ontological conflict; indeed it challenges all the beliefs of the character on what reality is. In a rather formalist fashion, Todorov added that if the protagonist (or the reader) decides that:

Les lois de la réalité demeurent intactes et permettent d’expliquer les phénomènes décrits, nous disons que l’œuvre relève d’un autre genre: l’étrange. Si, au contraire, il décide qu’on doit admettre de nouvelles lois de la nature, par lesquelles le phénomène peut être expliqué, nous entrons dans le genre du merveilleux.²⁸

Therefore, even according to this very strict categorisation, both ‘Mon Bisaïeul’ and the short passage taken from the first preface could be considered as examples of *le fantastique*, as there is no definitive resolution about the true nature of the extraordinary episodes.

Another important approach in the analysis of the fantastic is provided by the critic Roger Caillois, writing after Castex’s and before Todorov’s theories. Caillois took into account the crucial aspect of the historical and cultural developments that made it possible for the fantastic to arise. Caillois maintained the importance of the ‘cadre de la vie réelle’, while insisting on the significance of a conflict characterising the fantastic, a conflict between what is believed to be possible and what is believed

²⁶ Interestingly the listener of General Brown in Scott’s ‘The Tapestry Chamber’ does not question the credibility of his friend as he already suspected that the tapestry chamber was haunted by a ghost: ‘Lord Woodville ne demanda point à son ami s’il était sûr de ne point avoir fait un mauvais rêve, ni ne mit en avant aucune de ces suppositions par lesquelles on a l’habitude d’expliquer de telles apparitions’, in *OCWS*, LXXXIV, p. 302.

²⁷ Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, p. 46.

²⁸ Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, p. 46.

to be impossible: ‘Le fantastique [...] manifeste un scandale, une déchirure, une irruption insolite [...] dans le monde réel’.²⁹ This conflict can arise only in this particular time in cultural history because ‘le fantastique’, ‘naît au moment où chacun est plus ou moins persuadé de l’impossibilité des miracles’.³⁰ Therefore, the fantastic could not have arisen during, for example, the Middle Ages, when the belief in the supernatural was much more common amongst the population. In the nineteenth-century fantastic, on the other hand, Caillois suggests that:

Le surnaturel apparaît comme une rupture de la cohérence universelle. [...] Il est l’Impossible, survenant à l’improviste dans un monde d’où l’Impossible est banni par définition.³¹

A more nuanced reading of Todorov’s essay shows that he did not form a completely ahistorical view of the fantastic either. Referring to *Le Diable Amoureux* by Cazotte, Todorov proposed: ‘Ainsi se trouve-t-on amené au cœur du fantastique. Dans un monde qui est bien le nôtre, celui que nous connaissons, sans diables, sylphides, ni vampires, se produit un événement qui ne peut être expliqué par les lois de ce même monde familier’,³² a position that does not appear radically different from that of Caillois. In the above quoted episode taken from the first preface of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, the character of Bertrand is a man of the first half of the nineteenth century, who is sitting on a bench in the familiarity of the public gardens of Dijon, his own city. He is not a man of the Middle Ages, nor the protagonist of a fairy tale, which would have been introduced by an evident textual marker such as ‘Il était une fois’. Rather, at least as far as readers know, M. Gaspard de la Nuit could be one of Bertrand’s contemporaries. If Louis really believed that one of the gargoyles on the

²⁹ Roger Caillois, *Obliques (précédé de) Images, images...* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 18.

³⁰ Roger Caillois, *Obliques*, p. 19.

³¹ Roger Caillois, *Obliques*, p. 19.

³² Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, p. 29.

top of the cathedral of his city had laughed, that ‘une de ces monstrueuses figures [...] avait ri’, he would have to give up all his beliefs, his understanding of the distinction between the possible and the impossible would be undermined, his conception of reality itself would be challenged, hence his unavoidable hesitation.

Caillois’s perceptive consideration of the phenomenon of the fantastic from the cultural and historical perspectives could also give us insights into more detailed elements of a *conte fantastique*, such as the choice of characters. For example, in Scott’s ‘The Tapestry Chamber’, it is stressed throughout the tale that the protagonist is a very brave and respected military General who declares, ‘J’ai couru tous les dangers qu’on rencontre dans ma profession, et je puis assurer avec vérité que jamais on ne vit Richard Brown déshonorer l’épée qu’il porte’.³³ He is not a child, nor an uneducated woman, in other words not someone who typically believes in foolish superstitions. Hence his embarrassment when he confesses to his childhood friend, Lord Woodville, the strange episodes which had occurred during the night:

Cher lord, ce qui m’est arrivé la nuit dernière est d’une nature si étrange et si désagréable, que je puis à peine avoir le courage d’en donner des détails, [...]. Aux yeux des étrangers, la communication que je vais vous faire me donnerait tout l’air d’un sot superstitieux qui se laisse séduire et tromper par son imagination.³⁴

The exemplary figure of the General – a pragmatist who is forever shocked by what he had witnessed – represents every nineteenth-century man who, if faced with the same situation as the protagonist, would probably undergo the same ontological crisis, questioning his very conception of the real.

³³ *OCWS*, LXXXIV, p. 301.

³⁴ *OCWS*, LXXXIV, p. 298.

Fantastique ou Rêve?

‘Une fée parfume la nuit mon sommeil fantastique’.³⁵

(Aloysius Bertrand, ‘L’Ange et la Fée’)

So far, drawing on Milner’s position, I have concentrated on ‘Mon Bisaïeul’, which the critic considers to be the sole ‘pure’ example of the fantastic in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, while adding to this a second possible example taken from the first preface, which seems to fulfil the same criteria. Let us now concentrate on the second part of Max Milner’s position, where he stresses that in the other *fantaisies* of Bertrand the ‘«cadre de la vie réelle» occupe une très petite place – souvent aucune place du tout’.³⁶ Consider, for example the first composition of the section ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’, ‘La Chambre gothique’, where the sense of mystery is suggested by the title itself. The bedroom of the protagonist features elements which could figure in a *roman noir*: ‘je fermai la fenêtre qu’incrusta la croix du calvaire, noire dans la jaune auréole des vitraux’.³⁷ At the end of the *fantaisie*, after a series of frightening hypotheses, Scarbo appears; this is ‘le nain railleur’, one of the main characters of the third section of *Gaspard de la Nuit*.³⁸ It is very hard to see here the presence of elements of the ‘vie réelle’ and to see the hesitation of the protagonist, who seems to accept in a rather unproblematic fashion the presence of Scarbo: ‘Mais c’est Scarbo qui me mord au cou, et qui, pour cautériser ma blessure sanglante, y plonge son doigt de fer rougi à la fournaise!’.³⁹ Although the themes of ‘La Chambre gothique’ are typical of a frightening *conte fantastique*, many of the theoretical elements of the

³⁵ OC, p. 261.

³⁶ Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. by Max Milner, p. 40.

³⁷ OC, p. 165.

³⁸ ‘«Non! – ricanait le nain railleur, – tu serais la pâture de l’escarbot qui chasse, le soir, aux moucherons aveuglés par le soleil couchant!»’, in ‘Scarbo’, OC, p. 167.

³⁹ OC, p. 166.

fantastic, mentioned above, seem to be absent from this *fantaisie*.

A question then arises: if the other compositions of ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’ do not occur within the ‘cadre de la vie réelle’, in which framework are we? It is not the *merveilleux* typical of the Middle Ages, it is not a typical fairy tale, and it is not an example of science fiction either. What readers know is that these events take place during the night (‘murmurai-je à la nuit’, ‘à minuit’),⁴⁰ indeed the third book of *Gaspard* itself is entitled ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’. One could therefore believe that all the nocturnal episodes of this section are in fact dreams or nightmares. In this regard, in his preface Max Milner proposes that several of Bertrand’s poems ‘permettent [...] de suggérer l’incohérence ou la déconcertante gratuité des visions du sommeil’.⁴¹ Dreams and nightmares are gratuitous because they are not governed by reason, and therefore anything can happen. It should be noted here that some critics dispute a strict definition of the fantastic as given by Castex or Todorov and support the view that this denomination can be extended even to dreams. This is the case for Jean Marigny, who suggests that *le fantastique* ‘peut naître de l’irruption de l’étrange dans notre vie, qu’il s’agisse d’un rêve, d’une expérience vécue, d’une lecture ou de la rencontre avec une œuvre d’art’.⁴²

Beyond these strict categorisations, within a discussion related to the fantastic, the relevance, the role, and possible meanings of sleep deserve further investigation. ‘Le sommeil’ is an element of particular relevance in Bertrand’s collection, where it is mentioned more than once; to name only a few examples; ‘les

⁴⁰ *OC*, p. 165.

⁴¹ Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. by Max Milner, p. 41.

⁴² ‘Réflexions autour de la notion de fantastique’ in *Les Cahiers du G.E.R.F.*, n.1 (Grenoble: Université des langues et lettres, 1987), p. 20, quoted in *La Littérature fantastique*, ed. by Antoine Faivre, Colloque de Cerisy, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991), p. 15.

yeux lourds de sommeil' in 'La Chambre gothique',⁴³ 'il dormît d'un magique sommeil' in 'La Salamandre';⁴⁴ 'mon sommeil fantastique' in 'L'Ange et la fée';⁴⁵ 'livrée au sommeil' in 'Les Deux Anges'.⁴⁶ Sleep, freed from the powerful domination of reason, is the time and space for the irrational, giving way to uncontrolled impulses. This consideration of sleep, which could seem Freudian, was already a central reflection amongst writers during French Romanticism. For instance, in his article 'De quelques phénomènes du sommeil' Charles Nodier stated that:

Il est certain que le sommeil est non seulement l'état le plus puissant, mais encore le plus lucide de la pensée [...] Il semble que l'esprit, offusqué des ténèbres de la vie extérieure, ne s'en affranchit jamais avec plus de facilité que sous l'empire de cette mort intermittente, où il lui est permis de reposer dans sa propre essence, et à l'abri de toutes les influences de la personnalité de convention que la société nous a faite.⁴⁷

Paul Bénichou remarks that throughout this article Nodier referred to 'des vues sur une réalité supraterrrestre inaccessible à la veille'.⁴⁸ Sleep hence becomes a window through which men, freed from the blinding light of reason, are able to enter into contact with another supernatural and invisible reality.

Commenting on the fantastic in Novalis in his influential volume on Romanticism, the critic George Gusdorf also established a link between the fantastic and dreams during sleep. Referring to the fantastic, he suggests that:

Une libération du même ordre se réalise dans le rêve; le sommeil, supprimant les censures de l'état de veille, débloque la représentation; la conscience rêveuse vagabonde dans les marges du « bon sens », aux frontières entre le réel et

⁴³ *OC*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ *OC*, p. 183.

⁴⁵ *OC*, p. 261.

⁴⁶ *OC*, p. 265.

⁴⁷ *Œuvres de Charles Nodier. Rêveries*, 12 vols, (Paris: Renduel, 1832), v, pp. 160-61.

⁴⁸ Paul Bénichou, *Romantismes français II. L'École du désenchantement* (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2004), p. 1534.

l'irréel, dont l'opposition paraît alors dépourvue de sens.⁴⁹

This observation by Gusdorf, to some extent, challenges the definition of the fantastic given by Castex because Gusdorf proposes that during sleep, as in the fantastic, the mere opposition between what is real and what is not vanishes. It is perhaps because of this standpoint that Gusdorf proposes, without any reservation, that Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* depicts what he calls 'le fantastique nocturne'.⁵⁰ Night becomes an essential element, as it is the metaphor for the sleep of reason – daylight being the traditional metaphor for reason – where, in a reversal of the normal order of things, being deprived of light makes the protagonist see further. Gusdorf remarks that this is a general awareness typical of Romanticism:

La lumière, physique ou intellectuelle, [...] restreint notre présence au monde de l'environnement immédiat, qui nous fait prisonnier des apparences. La nuit abolit ces liens, supprime les lois de la perspective géométrique, et restaure dans ses droits la totalité où s'établit le relief véritable des sentiments, des aspirations et des désirs.⁵¹

This conception of a reversal in the traditional oppositions between light and darkness, night and day, can also be observed in Bertrand's compositions, where the obscurity of night often enlightens, while daylight blinds.⁵² In his *fantaisie* 'À M. Charles Nodier', the last composition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Bertrand makes an explicit reference to this kind of reversal when he ironically states: 'Mon livre, le voilà tel que je l'ai fait et tel qu'on doit le lire, avant que les commentateurs ne l'obscurcissent de leurs éclaircissements'.⁵³ The awareness of this reversal is based on a much wider philosophical conception, which Bertrand shared with the Romantic

⁴⁹ Georges Gusdorf, *Le Romantisme II. L'Homme et la nature* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1993), p. 344.

⁵⁰ Georges Gusdorf, *Le Romantisme II*, p. 345.

⁵¹ Georges Gusdorf, *Le Romantisme II*, p. 182.

⁵² In his collection the poet chooses the night, or the clair-obscur, as confessed by M. Gaspard in the first preface: 'ce manuscrit, ajouta-t-il, vous dira [...] combien de pinceaux j'ai usés sur la toile avant d'y voir naître la vague aurore du clair-obscur', in *OC*, p. 103.

⁵³ *OC*, p. 251.

generation, a conception which is in opposition to what Gusdorf referred to as a ‘révolution Galiléenne’, the typical vision of the Enlightenment – one based on the belief on an all-powerful human reason. In the first pages of the introduction to his anthology of fantastic texts, Castex explicitly declares that: ‘Depuis deux cents ans, la Raison a perdu sa royauté littéraire’,⁵⁴ but well before him, some of the main literary figures of the first half of the nineteenth century already perceived this restrictive aspect of reason. In an article on *le merveilleux* translated into French and published in *La Revue de Paris* in 1829, Walter Scott denounced human beings’ inability to perceive with clarity what surrounds them:

Tout nous rappelle sans cesse que nous ne sommes que des voyageurs sur cette terre d’épreuves d’où nous passons dans un monde inconnu, dont l’imperfection de nos sens ne nous permet pas d’apercevoir les formes et les habitants.⁵⁵

This general loss in faith in the power of reason, and logic, is thus a key to understanding Bertrand’s compositions.

Dreams and nightmares are not the only phenomena covered by the metaphor of the sleep of reason; madness too is a mental state that could be conveyed by the same metaphor. The section ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’ contains both a *fantaisie* entitled ‘Un rêve’ and one entitled ‘Le Fou’, where ‘le fou’ ‘vague, chaque nuit, par la cité déserte, un œil à la lune et l’autre — crevé!’.⁵⁶ Madness is evoked more than once throughout Bertrand’s collection, but this *folie* is not always negative; and the fool can sometimes be wiser than the wise man: ‘Le fou propose au sage des questions que celui-ci ne peut résoudre’.⁵⁷ In the *fantaisie* ‘À M. Charles Nodier’, Bertrand seems to suggest that *Gaspard de la Nuit* as a whole is the book of a fool,

⁵⁴ Pierre-George Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Walter Scott, ‘Du merveilleux dans le roman’, in *La Revue de Paris* (April 1829), 9 vols, 1, 25-33 (pp. 25-26).

⁵⁶ *OC*, p. 169.

⁵⁷ *OC*, p. 98.

proposing that madness could be the general condition of the writer: ‘L’empereur dicte ses ordres à ses capitaines, le pape adresse des bulles à la chrétienté, et le fou écrit un livre’.⁵⁸ Commenting on Gautier’s ‘Onuphrius ou les vexations fantastiques d’un admirateur d’Hoffmann’, part of *Les Jeunes-France*, Paul Bénichou reminds us that there is a possible correlation, or perhaps an even stronger causative link, between the fantastic and madness: ‘Onuphrius, obsédé de surnaturel et de fantastique et finissant dans la folie’.⁵⁹ One problem thus remains – that of the reliability of narrators (and writers) themselves – how can readers rely on the tale of a fool? How can readers rely on the perception of human beings after a loss of faith in human reason? Bertrand seemed to be aware of this ambiguity and played with it in such passages as ‘Et moi, il me semblait, — tant la fièvre est incohérente ! — que la lune, grimant sa face, me tirait la langue comme un pendu!’ in ‘Le Clair de lune’.⁶⁰

It is therefore more complicated to try to offer a definitive answer to the opening question – is the fantastic present in *Gaspard de la Nuit*? – whenever this question is considered in light of the twentieth-century debate on the definition of the fantastic, as introduced by critics such as Castex and Todorov. Added to this, matters become even more complex because doubts can be raised regarding those examples we thought to be unproblematic. For example, can we talk of the fantastic if terror or fear does not occur? Or, what if readers do not believe, even for a moment, in the account of the protagonists of Bertrand’s compositions? The irony pervading a considerable part of *Gaspard de la Nuit* could indeed cause problems in readers’ assessment, a problem which is also faced by the readers of Gautier’s ‘Onuphrius’. At the end of the first preface, for example, when the character of Louis Bertrand

⁵⁸ OC, p. 251.

⁵⁹ Paul Bénichou, *Romantismes français II*, pp. 1941-42.

⁶⁰ OC, p. 173.

discovers a secret regarding M Gaspard:

— «Faites-moi grâce de vos malignités et dites-moi où est M. Gaspard de la Nuit.» –

— «Il est en enfer, supposé qu’il ne soit pas ailleurs.» –

— «Ah! je m’avise enfin de comprendre! Quoi! Gaspard de la Nuit serait...?» –

— «Eh! oui ... le diable!»⁶¹ –

Here readers would probably expect a terrified reaction on the part of Louis Bertrand, who unknowingly spent a day talking to the devil himself. Instead of this, Louis declares:

— «Merci, mon brave!... Si Gaspard de la Nuit est en enfer, qu’il y rôtitse! J’imprime son livre.»⁶² –

Bertrand’s irony appears to be a testimony of his *désenchantement*, to borrow Bénichou’s famous definition for authors like Nodier, Nerval, and Gautier, where ‘le désenchantement qui leur est commun est bien chez eux tous la ruine de certitudes [...] précédentes’.⁶³ As I shall argue more extensively in the next chapter, Bertrand played with Romantic stereotypes, some of which he had previously embraced. This vision of Bertrand would support the idea that, in the case of his treatment of *le fantastique*, his irony was a way of mocking this dated literary phenomenon, which was otherwise a serious one at the time. However, this conclusion would go too far, as it overlooks an important consideration: that irony is often intrinsic to the fantastic. Many *contes fantastiques* were indeed characterised by irony and this aspect can already be seen in the foreign sources briefly analysed above, especially in the tales of Washington Irving. It would therefore be too simplistic to answer our

⁶¹ OC, p. 104.

⁶² OC, p. 104.

⁶³ Paul Bénichou, *Romantismes français II*, p. 1479.

original question by proposing that Bertrand's *fantaisies* are mere mockeries of the fantastic genre. A more fruitful way of finding a possible solution to the initial problem is to go back to the consideration of the fantastic at Bertrand's time and to examine this concept in his own literary and cultural context.

Defining 'Fantastique' according to Bertrand and his First Readers

‘Cet encadrement doit être le plus large et le plus historié qu’il se pourra. Le caractère général du dessin sera *moyen-âge* et *fantastique*’.⁶⁴

(Aloysius Bertrand, ‘Dessein d’un encadrement pour le texte’)

The first critics of Bertrand's collection in the 1840s – the years of its first posthumous publication – often described *Gaspard de la Nuit* using adjectives similar to the term ‘fantastique’. One of the most well-known descriptions of Bertrand's work within its first critical reception is, ‘c’est là un livre d’art *fantasque* et vagabond’⁶⁵ (*Revue du Calvados*, 1843). In his essay ‘*Gaspard de la Nuit* et la Fantaisie Romantique’, Filip Kekus recalls that at the time the boundaries between such terms as ‘fantasque’ and ‘fantastique’ were more indistinct than today, suggesting that ‘pour un romantique, c’est toujours le même principe qui est à l’œuvre, la fantaisie’.⁶⁶ Another of the first reviewers of *Gaspard de la Nuit* expressed a slight negative judgement on the collection because of its insistence on ‘les régions fantastiques où l’imagination de Louis Bertrand s’est promenée jusqu’à

⁶⁴ *OC*, pp. 374-75.

⁶⁵ My emphasis. This review is included by Wanlin in his ‘Annexe I’, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 331. According to the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 6th ed. online (1832-35), the term ‘fantasque’ at the time meant, 1. ‘adj. des deux genres Capricieux, sujet à des fantaisies, à des caprices’; 2. ‘Il signifie aussi, Bizarre, extraordinaire dans son genre’, <<http://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/dico1look.pl?strippedhw=fantasque&dicoid=ACAD1835&headword=&dicoid=ACAD1835>>.

⁶⁶ Filip Kekus, ‘*Gaspard de la Nuit* et la fantaisie romantique’, «*Un livre d’art fantasque et vagabond*», pp. 43-65 (p. 56).

la lassitude'⁶⁷ (*Revue littéraire de la Revue des deux mondes*, 1843). In a letter to Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Sainte-Beuve, the very first critic of Bertrand's collection, used the term 'fantastique', when he suggested *Gaspard de la Nuit* as suitable reading for Valmore's daughter Inès, defining it as 'un volume un peu *fantastique*'.⁶⁸

Well before his first critics and reviewers, Bertrand himself seemed to think that the adjective *fantastique* could define one of the principal features of his collection. This could also be one of the reasons for naming his compositions *fantaisies*.⁶⁹ The similarity between the term *fantaisie* and the adjective *fantastique* should not, however, be taken with too much significance, as the denomination *fantaisie* generally referred to the formal and thematic freedom of these compositions and to their irregularity (absence of strict rules), rather than being related to specific content. This word could indeed be taken from artistic or musical terminology, where the term refers to 'des ouvrages où l'on suit plutôt les caprices de son imagination que les règles de l'art'.⁷⁰ The hypothesis of authors such as Bertrand borrowing from musical terminology is supported by contemporary examples of a similar use, such as the well-known poem 'Fantaisie' by Gérard de Nerval, where the author described a musical piece: 'Il est un air, pour qui je donnerais / Tout Rossini, tout Mozart et tout Wèbre'.⁷¹

There is a specific instance of Bertrand explicitly using the term 'fantastique'

⁶⁷ Review included in Wanlin's 'Annexe I', *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 336.

⁶⁸ The quote reads 'Et pour mademoiselle Inès mais la destinée du jeune auteur est très réelle. Lisez les trois pièces que je cite pages 231, 243 et 247, cela suffit. A vous tous mes vœux, et à tous les vôtres', in Sainte-Beuve, *Correspondence générale. Lettres retrouvées, (1823-1859)*, ed. by Alain Bonnerot (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006), p. 278.

⁶⁹ For a more complete discussion regarding the use of term 'fantaisie' within the context of the French Romantic period, refer to Filip Kekus's '*Gaspard de la Nuit* et la fantaisie romantique'.

⁷⁰ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1832-35), <<http://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/dico1look.pl?strippedhw=fantaisie&dicoid=ACAD1835&headword=&dicoid=ACAD1835>>

⁷¹ Gérard de Nerval, *Œuvres complètes*, I (1989), p. 339.

to define aspects of his collection. In his ‘Dessein d’un encadrement pour le texte’, Bertrand imagined some drawings which were to surround his compositions in the printed version and he recommended to the *metteur en pages* that ‘Le caractère général du dessin sera *moyen âge et fantastique*’.⁷² In particular, Bertrand listed under the term ‘fantastique’ a range of diverse figures varying from ‘un gnome’, to ‘une fée’, to ‘un lutin’, to ‘Scarbo, le nain du cauchemar’, to ‘des magiciens dansant une ronde’ and so on, providing the typesetter with precise examples of possible drawings to accompany his texts.⁷³ Bertrand’s list demonstrates that he used the term ‘fantastique’ to define a wide range of themes, rather than to denote a particular theoretical definition of this phenomenon, which is more typical of twentieth-century theories, in which the adjective has become a substantive. At Bertrand’s time, and even before then, the adjective ‘fantastique’ could refer to a much more general set of themes and ideas. For example, Marcel Schneider reminds us that in the Renaissance the term simply meant ‘mené par son imagination, visionnaire, nourri de chimères’.⁷⁴

However, contemporaries of Bertrand started to write about literary phenomena related to the fantastic. It was during the first half of the nineteenth century that writers started to engage in a serious critical thinking on such terms as ‘fantastique’ and ‘merveilleux’. The topic thus started to attract critical attention from central French literary figures of the time, like Charles Nodier and Théophile Gautier, who began to reflect on the importance of the advent of irrational themes in French literature, especially thanks to foreign influences, such as Hoffmann and Scott. It would seem, for example, that Gautier had already perceived the importance of what

⁷² OC, p. 374.

⁷³ OC, pp. 375-76.

⁷⁴ Marcel Schneider, *Histoire de la littérature fantastique en France*, p. 143.

Castex was to call, more than a century later, the ‘cadre de la vie réelle’, and that he already understood the main distinction between the *contes* circulating at his time and the *contes de fées*. In his article on the work of Hoffmann, Gautier declared: ‘du reste, le merveilleux d’Hoffmann n’est pas le merveilleux des contes de fées, il a toujours un pied dans le monde réel’.⁷⁵ Although Gautier called ‘le merveilleux’ what was later defined as ‘le fantastique’, he had already remarked that in Hoffmann there was a continuous contact with ‘le monde réel’. Foreign influences, such as that of Hoffmann, thus had a crucial impact on initiating a reflection upon what was later called ‘le fantastique’ in the France of the first nineteenth century. It remains to be seen whether these foreign authors were the leading source of Bertrand’s interest in fantastic themes.

Exploring the Fantastic Inspiration in Gaspard de la Nuit as a Product of Cultural Exchange

‘Charmante féerie de cette scène fantastique. Oui!
un mauvais rêve à la *Smarra*’.⁷⁶
(Charles Brugnot, *Le Provincial*, 31 August 1828)

The subtitle of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ‘*Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*’⁷⁷ is a clear tribute to Hoffmann’s *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier* translated into French in 1829 by Loève-Veimars.⁷⁸ Because of this explicit reference, critics have tended to attribute the fantastic qualities of *Gaspard* to the

⁷⁵ *Musée des familles. Lectures du soir* (1840-1841), VIII, p. 119.

⁷⁶ From Charles Brugnot’s comment on Musset’s ‘Un Rêve’, *Le Provincial*, 31 August 1828.

⁷⁷ Rather than the subtitle, this could be considered as the real title of the work as in the first preface of the collection we discovered that M. Gaspard de la Nuit, was the author of the manuscript of the *fantaisies*.

⁷⁸ In his study investigating (following Jauss’s theories) the reception of Hoffmann and Poe in France, Gary Cummiskey reports that Loève-Veimars is the author of the ‘most successful separately published translation’ of Hoffmann’s work, but he also recalls that Hoffmann was already known in France before this translation thanks to various articles published in periodicals, Gary Cummiskey, *The Changing Face of Horror: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century French Fantastic Short Story* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 20-21.

influence of Hoffmann's work. For instance, referring to Bertrand's fantastic inspiration, Max Milner highlighted the importance of this influence by stating:

C'est évidemment la vogue du fantastique, amorcée en 1829 par les premières traductions d'Hoffmann, qui l'a amené à développer cette veine de son inspiration, dont les «bambochades» de 1827-1828, antérieures à son premier voyage à Paris, ne présentent guère de trace.⁷⁹

It is true that in Bertrand's compositions written before 1828 (some of which Bertrand read at the *Société d'Études* and published in *Le Provincial*),⁸⁰ this thematic inspiration is less developed. At first glance, it looks reasonable to conclude that the 'fantastic inspiration' of *Gaspard de la Nuit* stemmed from the crucial influence of Hoffmann on Bertrand and, more generally, on French literature in the years around 1829. The role of Hoffmann was also recognised by some of the first reviewers of Bertrand's posthumous collection, like de Molène who suggested: 'On se souvient de cet artiste d'Hoffmann'.⁸¹ This view of the leading role played by Hoffmann continued through time, prompting some critics to engage in specific studies of hypothetical intertextual connections between Bertrand's and Hoffmann's work, like Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann's 'Les Formes du fantastique: Pour une comparaison entre E.T.A. Hoffmann et A. Bertrand',⁸² and Stéphanie Lelièvre in her very recent '*Gaspard de la Nuit*: Des Fantaisies à la manière de... Hoffmann?'.⁸³

Whilst it may be true that some of the fantastic themes in Bertrand's collection are very likely to be due to the influence of Hoffmann's work, it is

⁷⁹ Milner, 'Préface', pp. 39-40.

⁸⁰ Compositions such as 'Jacques-Les-Andelys' that would become 'Les Grandes Compagnies (1364)' or 'La Citadelle de Mollgast' that later became 'La Citadelle de Wolgast'. For a list of these compositions, refer to Cargill Sprietsma, *Louis Bertrand*, ed. by Jacques Bony, p. 92.

⁸¹ Review included in Wanlin's 'Annexe I', *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 335.

⁸² Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann, 'Les Formes du fantastique: Pour une comparaison entre E.T.A. Hoffmann et A. Bertrand', in *Les Diableries de la nuit*, pp. 35-64.

⁸³ Stéphanie Lelièvre, 'Gaspard de la Nuit: Des Fantaisies à la manière de... Hoffmann?', in *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit de Louis («Aloysius») Bertrand*, pp. 135-51.

important to underline that Hoffmann was neither the first nor the only point of reference for Bertrand. Indeed, the impact of British literature is mixed with, and even precedes, the influence of Hoffmann's work. Two of these influential elements are the *roman noir*, which was very popular in France in the first half of the nineteenth-century,⁸⁴ and Walter Scott, some of whose works Bertrand adapted into French.⁸⁵ Through time, various influences on Bertrand's poetic development have been surveyed in relation to his fantastic themes. However, it is important to examine these influences more specifically in relation to the development of the wider literary context of Bertrand's time, while paying particular attention to the subtle dynamics at play within that literary community. Some initial questions will need to be addressed concerning the way Bertrand's work presents thematic affinities with other works produced in France at the time. Did Bertrand have first-hand contact with the works of foreign literature? Are foreign influences the main relevant ones relating to the fantastic inspiration in Bertrand's work?

I shall argue that, from the historical and cultural perspectives, *Gaspard de la Nuit* is a product of mainly French cultural and literary exchanges. The main reason for this position is that the foreign influences on Bertrand are never 'pure', but are always mediated by a French perspective. For instance, Bertrand read Hoffmann's works solely through translations into French that were often not entirely impartial; in the same way he certainly knew Scott's works in their famous French translations or pseudo-translations; all the epigraphs taken by Scott's works are cited in French in

⁸⁴ In his study, Van Tieghem reports as an example of the extreme success of the *roman noir* in France the words about Matthew Lewis in an article published in the *Journal de Paris* in 1810, 'Il n'est pas de nom plus célèbre que celui de M. Lewis dans la carrière du roman', in *Les Influences étrangères sur la littérature française (1550-1880)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), p. 178.

⁸⁵ As Poggenburg indicates 'La Nourrice', 'Jock d'Hazeldean' and 'Les Maraudeurs Écossais' are three poems in verse which Bertrand adapted respectively from Scott's 'The Lullaby of an Infant Chief', 'Jock of Hazeldean: Air- A Border Melody' and 'The Foray', *OC*, pp. 527, 528, 539.

Gaspard de la Nuit.⁸⁶ Bertrand was also influenced by the various articles appearing in French periodicals, and by the crucial filter presented through the views of central figures of his time, who played the role of guide for the young Romantic generation and who met to discuss and exchange ideas in the literary circles of the capital (see the first chapter of the present work for more detail). Amongst other important figures for the Romantic generation, I have shown how Charles Nodier and Victor Hugo both had a great impact on Bertrand's general poetic development. All these influences should also be considered when analysing the fantastic element that characterises part of *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

In his detailed historical and cultural investigation of the literary group of Charles Nodier, Vincent Laisney perceptively identifies a crucial direction of study:

Peut-être n'a-t-on pas suffisamment souligné à quel point la figure de Charles Nodier traverse l'œuvre de Bertrand; il faudrait dire, pour être juste, Nodier *et* Hugo, et plus précisément encore, Hugo en tant qu'il est l'Héritier direct de Nodier.⁸⁷

And furthermore:

En somme, on pourrait dire qu'après Victor Hugo et ses *Ballades* de 1826, Aloysius Bertrand est l'héritier le plus direct de la veine fantastico-poétique de Nodier.⁸⁸

Conferring a central role on Hoffmann thus risks underplaying what can be inferred from the textual interconnections in Nodier, Hugo, and Bertrand, when studied independently from Hoffmann's influence, as I shall briefly show below. This analysis could be carried further, since critics have not yet engaged in an investigation of the three authors together with close textual evidence, and by and

⁸⁶ The most famous collection was Loève-Veimars's *Ballades, légendes, et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse* (1825). One could even wonder whether Bertrand's adaptations of Walter Scott's ballads were perhaps a re-adaptation of Loève-Veimars's translations, instead of direct adaptations from the original English version.

⁸⁷ Vincent Laisney, *L'Arsenal romantique*, pp. 415-16.

⁸⁸ Vincent Laisney, *L'Arsenal romantique*, p. 417.

large have proposed fleeting, if valuable, remarks in this regard, such as Suzanne Bernard who only states that: ‘Il [le goût du fantastique] se reflète non seulement dans les œuvres de Nodier, mais dans les Ballades de Hugo’.⁸⁹

Well before Bertrand decided to express his tribute to Hoffmann in the title of his work, he had already acknowledged his poetic debts to these Parisian authors. In *Le Provincial* on 13 July 1828, Bertrand published the composition in verse ‘La Chanson du Pèlerin’, dedicated ‘au gentil et gracieux trouvère de Lutèce Victor Hugo’; and in *Le Provincial* of 12 September 1828, the piece in prose ‘Le Clair de lune’, dedicated ‘à l’auteur de Trilby’. This last composition – after being greatly reworked – was included in the third section of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’), but when Bertrand published this text (together with ‘Les Lavandières’ and ‘La Gourde et le flagelot’) in *Le Provincial* he stated:

Ces trois pièces font partie d’un recueil de compositions que l’auteur se propose de publier très prochainement sous le titre de *Bambochades romantiques*.⁹⁰

At this stage, the title for the collection, *Bambochades romantiques*, did not yet refer to Hoffmann’s *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (which became more popular in France after the translation in 1829 by Loève-Weimars). And yet, Nodier’s influence in relation to themes connected with the fantastic is already evident. In this first version of ‘Le Clair de lune’ there are indeed elements that characterise the section ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’, where, as seen above, the fantastic inspiration is the most developed. This composition in prose already presents the nocturnal setting ‘À l’heure qui sépare un jour d’un autre jour, quand la cité dort silencieuse’, ‘une nuit

⁸⁹ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 53.

⁹⁰ *OC*, p. 319. The term ‘Bambochade’ refers to the Flemish painter Pieter Van Laer, called ‘Il Bamboccio’ and to other painters operating in Rome in the seventeenth century called ‘Bamboccianti’ as they painted in the manner of Van Laer. Their main feature is their painting daily scenes rich in details and characterised by a strong realism.

d'hiver'; it is set within a domestic environment (which is no longer completely safe) 'ma chambre était à demi obscure'; a fairy is mentioned (even if used as the second element of a simile where the first element is a personified moon) 'la lune, vêtue d'une robe vaporeuse, comme une blanche fée, regardait mon sommeil à travers les vitraux'; there is a reference to the sphere of dream 'Et moi, à peine sorti d'un rêve, les yeux encore éblouis des merveilles d'un autre monde'; there is also a mention of mystery through the adverb 'mystérieusement'.⁹¹

The influence of Nodier is manifest here; for example 'Trilby', one of the 'lutins familiers',⁹² 'follet de la chaumière',⁹³ often mysteriously appears at night, in the domestic environment and in dreams. Also 'Smarra ou les Démons de la Nuit' offers a variety of thematic suggestions that Bertrand developed further in his successive compositions, such as the nocturnal terror and the nightmarish inspiration, not to mention the cast of personae appearing in Nodier's composition that would reappear in *Gaspard de la Nuit*. In his study, Cummiskey notices that Nodier is a peculiar case because his 'interest in supernatural fiction dates from the very early years of the century [...] well before Hoffmann was known in France, he wrote pieces in the genre of the frenetic ('Smarra', 1821) and the marvelous ('Trilby', 1822)'.⁹⁴ Suzanne Bernard had already indicated the importance of an earlier influence of Nodier on Bertrand's fantastic inspiration when she stated that 'L'influence d'Hoffmann [...] sera plus tardive [...]; et c'est en partie à travers Nodier que Bertrand la subira'.⁹⁵ Moreover, in 'Trilby ou le Lutin d'Argail', Nodier found his

⁹¹ OC, p. 320.

⁹² Charles Nodier, *Contes: Avec des textes et des documents inédits*, ed. and pres. by Pierre-Georges Castex (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961), p. 102.

⁹³ Nodier, *Contes*, p. 104.

⁹⁴ Cummiskey, *The Changing Face of Horror*, p. 56.

⁹⁵ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 53.

inspiration in a vast inventory of themes belonging to different literary traditions which precede the discovery of Hoffmann in France. In his preface to the first edition of 'Trilby', Nodier mentions figures such as Walter Scott ('Le sujet de cette nouvelle est tiré d'une préface ou d'une note des romans de Walter Scott'),⁹⁶ Cazotte and his *Le Diable Amoureux*, M. de Latouche (whom Nodier calls 'L'Hésiode des esprits des fées'), and Schiller.⁹⁷ Nodier thus had the crucial role of mediator in these exchanges with the northern literary tradition as he handed down these thematic inspirations to the readers of his texts, amongst whom Victor Hugo and Louis Bertrand.

It should be noticed that, in Cummiskey's account, the choice of terminology regarding Nodier's compositions reflects the general problem regarding a precise classification of this literary phenomenon, as explored earlier in this chapter. Cummiskey uses the terms 'frenetic' and 'marvelous' respectively for 'Smarra' and 'Trilby', preferring these terms to the term 'fantastic'. Such difficulty, we have seen, also extends to the classification of Bertrand's texts in which there is a thematic affinity with Nodier's *contes*. It is important to underline here once again that in the 1820s, the term 'fantastique' covered a wide number of themes, and that Bertrand himself shared this kind of all-encompassing view of this term.

Turning to Hugo's *Odes et ballades* (published before Hoffmann's work was translated by Loève-Veimars), it is worth mentioning the fourth ballade (entitled 'Trilby, le Lutin d'Argail') and the fourteenth, ('La Ronde du sabbat' dedicated 'A M. Charles N.'). Both of these compositions present a cast of personae belonging to different traditions, which had known great popularity thanks to Nodier's short stories. Some of these personae reappeared in Bertrand's collection. Surveying the

⁹⁶ Nodier, *Contes*, p. 95.

⁹⁷ Nodier, *Contes*, p. 96.

first of the two ballades after the appearance of the protagonist ‘C’est toi, Lutin’, we encounter figures such as a ‘Follet’, a ‘Fée’, a ‘Sylphyde’, ‘Ondines’, ‘Nains’, ‘Gnômes’, and ‘Fantômes’.⁹⁸ In Hugo’s ‘La Ronde du sabbat’, apart from the obvious connection to witchcraft in the title and the presence in the text of figures such as ‘la sorcière’ and ‘nécromants’, we encounter ‘larves’, ‘dragons’, ‘vampires’, ‘gnômes’, ‘monstres’, ‘graves démons’, ‘lutins rusés’, ‘nains’, ‘follets’, and ‘psylles’, up to the evocation of Smarra himself.⁹⁹ This list of personae shows great similarity to the one that Bertrand mentioned in his notes (quoted above). The impact of Nodier’s short stories is evident; indeed it is enough to quote a small passage of ‘Smarra’ to exemplify this inspiration:

Alors, le croirais-tu? elles vinrent toutes, les sorcières de Thessalie, escortées de ces nains de la terre qui travaillent dans les mines [...]; de ces salamandres aux longs bras [...] des Psylles qui sucent un venin cruel.¹⁰⁰

Critics of Bertrand agree on the fact that the figure of Smarra is also the basis of the figure of Scarbo, the diabolic dwarf, who reappears in several of the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit* and who is a central presence in ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’.¹⁰¹ Scarbo appears for the first time in ‘La Chambre gothique’ (the first composition of the third book). In this composition we again find characteristics that could be detected in connection with the early version of ‘Le Clair de lune’, such as the nightly scenario (‘-«Oh! La terre, – murmurai-je à la nuit, – est un calice embaumé dont le pistil et les étamines sont la lune et les étoiles!»’)¹⁰² and the domestic

⁹⁸ Victor Hugo, *Œuvres poétiques*, pref. by Gaëtan Picon, ed. by Pierre Albouy, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1964), I: *Avant l’exil 1802-1851*, pp. 505-06. (Hereafter referred as *VHOP*)

⁹⁹ *VHOP*, pp. 541-44.

¹⁰⁰ Nodier, *Contes*, p. 65.

¹⁰¹ This is proposed, for example by Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 53 and Henri Corbat, *Hantise et imagination*, pp. 51-52. However these critics do not consider the existing interrelations with Hugo’s works.

¹⁰² *OC*, p. 165.

environment ('La chambre' in the title and the exposition of elements belonging to the domestic routine 'je fermai la fenêtre', 'l'huile de ma lampe').¹⁰³ In the last paragraph of 'La Chambre gothique', Scarbo is introduced in these terms:

Mais c'est Scarbo qui me mord au cou, et qui, pour cautériser ma blessure sanglante, y plonge son doigt de fer rougi à la fournaise!¹⁰⁴

This passage has often been compared to a short passage of Nodier's 'Smarra' where the homonymous protagonist is presented as a 'nain difforme et joyeux dont les mains sont armées d'ongles d'un métal plus fin que l'acier, qui pénètrent la chair sans la déchirer, et boivent le sang à la manière de la pompe insidieuse des sangsues'.¹⁰⁵

In the other appearances of Scarbo throughout Bertrand's *fantaisies*, the similarities with Nodier's 'Smarra' are much more evident and nuanced than in 'La Chambre gothique', a passage usually taken as a prime example because it states Scarbo's vampirism.¹⁰⁶ In the second and third *fantaisies* of 'La Nuit et ses prestiges', respectively entitled 'Scarbo' (but initially entitled 'Le Linceul') and 'Le Fou', we find the dwarf whispering maledictions in the ears of his victim ('-«Que tu meures absous ou damné, – marmottait Scarbo cette nuit à mon oreille...»')¹⁰⁷ and sniggering ('ricanait le nain railleur');¹⁰⁸ we also find him defined as 'gnome dont les trésors foisonnent'.¹⁰⁹ In another poem entitled 'Scarbo' amongst the 'Pièces

¹⁰³ OC, p. 165.

¹⁰⁴ OC, p. 166. This example is quoted by various critics such as Henri Corbat, p. 52.

¹⁰⁵ Nodier, *Contes*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰⁶ On this matter, in a note Poggenburg underlines, 'N.B. C'est ici la seule occasion dans le recueil où le vampirisme de Scarbo soit évident, ce qui rapproche Scarbo des créations de Nodier et d'E.T.A. Hoffmann' (OC, p. 315). Scarbo's vampirism, however, is not the only element that connects this figure with Nodier's Smarra.

¹⁰⁷ OC, p. 167.

¹⁰⁸ OC, p. 167.

¹⁰⁹ OC, p. 169.

détachées extraites du portefeuille de l’auteur’,¹¹⁰ the dwarf is again characterised by his evil laughter (‘Que de fois j’ai entendu bourdonner son rire’)¹¹¹ and by his nails, which he uses for scaring and persecuting his victims (‘grincer son ongle sur le soie des courtines de mon lit!’).¹¹² This is also the only composition introduced by an epigraph taken from Hoffmann’s work (*Contes nocturnes* in this case), which had been reviewed by Sainte-Beuve in *Le Globe* (7 December 1830); it is likely that Bertrand read this review. However, Bertrand did not include this piece within the texts of his *Gaspard de la Nuit* and therefore there are no epigraphs taken from Hoffmann in the collection. It is worth quoting a longer passage of this version of ‘Scarbo’ as it introduces another crucial aspect of this dwarf that connects him to Smarra:

Que de fois je l’ai vu descendre du plancher, pirouetter sur un pied et rouler par la chambre comme le fuseau tombé de la quenouille d’une sorcière!
Le croyais-tu évanoui? le nain grandissait entre la lune et moi [...]
Mais bientôt son corps bleuissait, diaphane comme la cire d’une bougie, son visage blêmissait comme la cire d’un lumignon, – et soudain il s’éteignait.¹¹³

Nodier’s Smarra is also characterised by the rapidity of his movements; ‘tourne dans l’air avec rapidité’, ‘il s’attache sur mon cœur, se développe, soulève sa tête’. The frenzy of Scarbo and Smarra, together with their laughter (Smarra also ‘rit’)¹¹⁴ connects them to another figure mentioned within the inventory of fantastic presences in Nodier and Hugo, which were reworked by Bertrand, the figure of

¹¹⁰ This poem together with ‘Le Gibet’ and ‘Ondine’ would be transposed into music by Maurice Ravel in his work for piano *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1909).

¹¹¹ *OC*, p. 280.

¹¹² The restless persecution of the victim is also a feature of Smarra, ‘va tourmenter la victime que je t’ai livrée; fais-lui des supplices aussi variés que les épouvantements de l’enfer qui t’a conçu, aussi cruels [...]», Nodier, *Contes*, p. 64. Part of this passage is quoted by Henri Corbat, *Hantise et imagination*, p. 52.

¹¹³ *OC*, pp. 280-81.

¹¹⁴ Nodier, *Contes*, pp. 64-65.

‘Ondine’, which will be analysed more extensively in the next chapter.

The first line of Bertrand’s ‘Ondine’, ‘-«Écoute! Écoute!- C’est moi!, c’est Ondine...»’¹¹⁵ supports the idea of an intertextual play between Nodier, Hugo and Bertrand, reflecting the ‘«écoute un moment l’amant qui t’aime [...] c’est moi»’¹¹⁶ pronounced by Trilby to his Jeannie. The sense of hearing seems to be the leading one in perceiving the presence of fantastic creatures, who are often heard before being seen. This aspect can also be seen in a passage of Hugo’s ‘La Ronde du sabbat’, ‘Le silence retombe avec l’ombre... Écoutez! / Qui pousse ces clameurs?’.¹¹⁷ ‘Ondine’ also introduces a theme that was developed in Nodier’s ‘Trilby’ and revisited in Hugo’s ‘A Trilby, le Lutin d’Argail’, that of an impossible love between two creatures who belong to two different worlds. Trilby is in love with Jeannie, a human, while Ondine loves a mortal whom she wants to marry. The same theme is expressed in ‘La Salamandre’, the poem following ‘Ondine’, which is opened by an epigraph taken by Nodier’s ‘Trilby’. It is the impossible love between ‘la salamandre’ and ‘le grillon’ that ends with the tragic death of the latter.

Conclusion

The examples of intertextual relations between some of the texts of Nodier, Hugo, and Bertrand in this section are not meant to deny the evident impact of Hoffmann’s works on Bertrand’s collection, but they are particularly relevant as they are based on the cultural and literary exchange between the three French writers and show that to rely solely on Hoffmann’s influence would risk being too simplistic a reading. These

¹¹⁵ *OC*, p. 181.

¹¹⁶ Nodier, *Contes*, p. 104. This intertextual connection is mentioned by Poggenburg in a note regarding this passage of ‘Ondine’, in *OC*, p. 326.

¹¹⁷ *VHOP*, p. 541.

relations were highlighted in the first chapter, which examined the crucial role of such Parisian figures as Nodier and Hugo in Bertrand's poetic development.

Moreover, resituating Bertrand's work in the cultural and literary context of its creation finally permits us to attempt an answer to the original question: is the fantastic present in *Gaspard de la Nuit*? First of all, we can now see that this question itself entails a critical anachronism because at Bertrand's time the term 'fantastique' was still largely used as an adjective, which, I have shown, covered a varied range of themes. These themes, belonging to the sphere of the irrational, were included in almost all of the compositions of the third section 'La Nuit et ses prestiges', to the exclusion of 'La Salamandre', which appears to be more similar to a traditional fable with talking animals. Similar themes also characterise *fantaisies* contained in other sections, such as, for instance, 'Départ pour le sabbat' in 'L'École flamande', 'Padre Pugnaccio' in 'Espagne et Italie'. The presence of 'le fantastique' in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, considered strictly from a twentieth-century theoretical perspective, is certainly debatable, but if one considers the term from a historical perspective, taking into account the meaning of the term at the time, within the interplay of exchanges outlined in this chapter, many of Bertrand's *fantaisies* can indeed be defined by the adjective 'fantastiques'.

Chapter Four

The Romantic Dialogue in *Gaspard de la Nuit*

Introduction

In the previous chapter I showed how the consideration of the concept of ‘fantastique’ within Bertrand’s cultural context is important in order to address the critical debate regarding the fantastic while avoiding the risk of anachronism. In this chapter, my aim is to show that the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit* can be fruitfully analysed in light of precise phenomena characterising the cultural context of their time.¹ While Aloysius Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit* is usually valued for its pioneering formal experimentation within the criticism and history of the prose poem, its thematic unoriginality is sometimes criticised because of the presence of evident Romantic themes and influences in the collection. In this chapter, I shall tackle this accusation of unoriginality, by examining Bertrand’s own and unique synthesis of the available literary material at his time, and his own poetic experimentation, through the specific case study of the compositions ‘Ondine’ and ‘La Viole de Gamba’. In particular I shall propose an examination of their intertextuality, as a means of addressing specific interpretative questions. It is evident that Bertrand’s collection presents manifest Romantic influences, and critics still insist on this aspect today, such as Filip Kekus who maintains that *Gaspard de la Nuit* ‘peut faire figure d’authentique petite encyclopédie du romantisme fashionable’.² Marvin Richards has already recalled that ‘in effect, even as it is

¹ The success of a historical approach has been demonstrated recently by the study of Nicolas Wanlin, who in his examination of the poem ‘Le Maçon’ engages in a detailed historical survey and is careful to individuate Bertrand’s possible intertexts, see ‘Le Portrait du poète en maçon’ in Nicolas Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, pp. 234-83.

² Filip Kekus, ‘*Gaspard de la Nuit* et la fantaisie romantique’, p. 54.

radically other in its generic paradoxes, *Gaspard* is typically Romantic in its sources of inspiration',³ but later in his study he also examines how Bertrand parodies the convention of Romanticism.⁴ Also, the critic Kathryn Slott has valuably studied the role of intertextuality and parody in some of Bertrand's compositions, demonstrating that the analysis of Bertrand's unoriginality can still be very productive.⁵ I propose that a wider historical approach is needed in order to fully understand the value of the intertextuality in Bertrand's *fantaisies*, thus considered as a product of the cultural and literary exchange of his time. This approach will permit us to examine in detail some important themes of 'La Viole de Gamba' and 'Ondine', and to understand why Bertrand was drawn to these particular themes rather than others.

I have chosen these two *fantaisies* for the following reasons. First of all, 'La Viole de Gamba' and 'Ondine' are amongst the best-known texts in Bertrand's collection and have frequently been examined by critics.⁶ Secondly, I intend to cast new light on how these compositions are related to specific cultural phenomena typical of Bertrand's time, which critics often address only fleetingly. In the first part of this chapter, I shall show the ways in which 'La Viole de Gamba' is linked to the revival of pantomimes and of *Commedia dell'Arte* at the *Théâtre des Funambules* at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Paris, and to the fascination that this theatre produced in authors such as Nodier and Gautier. In the second half of the chapter, I shall examine how 'Ondine' draws on a repertoire of northern legends, which became very popular in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century,

³ Marvin Richards, *Without Rhyme or Reason*, p. 14.

⁴ Especially in his chapter 'The Carnivalization of Romanticism', pp. 92-121.

⁵ Kathryn Slott, 'Le Texte e(s)t son double', *French Forum* 6 (1981), 28-35.

⁶ For example, Pierre Brunel, 'A propos d' «Ondine»', in *Du visible à l'invisible. Pour Max Milner. «Mettre en Images, donner en spectacle»*, ed. by Stéphane Michaud, 2 vols (Paris: Corti, 1988), 1, pp. 267-73; Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'Ondine, ou la tentation luciférienne', in *«Un livre d'art fantasque et vagabond»*, pp. 163-72; Steve Murphy, 'Un air de chapelle travesti (La Viole de Gamba)', *La Giroflée. Bulletin Aloysius Bertrand*, 3 (2011), 89-108.

thanks to translations and adaptations into French of foreign literary works such as Loève-Veimars's anthology, *Ballades, légendes, et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse* (1825).⁷ The widespread interest in such northern European legends can be seen in the great attention devoted to this repertoire by the group of *Le Provincial*, as demonstrated by articles such as 'Superstitions des Suédois'.⁸ Lastly, these compositions share important elements with many of the other *fantaisies* of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, such as the use of asterisks and textual gaps, the presence of unusual syntactical choices and the employment of irony and humour. For these reasons, 'La Viole de Gamba' and 'Ondine' will be analysed here as case studies, and an interpretation of them will provide us with elements that will inform an overall reading of the collection.

'La Viole de Gamba': A Fantaisie-Pantomime and the Fraternity of Arts

'Laissez faire Deburau, il débrouillera à merveille ce chaos; il en fera un drame tout à lui, il en fera une comédie plus intéressante mille fois, plus animée, plus vive et plus vraie que tout le répertoire impérial du Théâtre-Français'.⁹

(Jules Janin, *Deburau*)

'La Viole de Gamba' is the seventh *fantaisie* of 'L'École flamande', the first section of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Behind a joking and frivolous façade, this composition presents unpredictable interpretative lacunae, and it is perhaps because of this internal contradiction between frivolity and difficulty that this *fantaisie* has been

⁷ Loève-Veimars, also known for his very important translations of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, *Contes fantastiques* (1829, the preface of which was written by Walter Scott), had a leading role in spreading this northern literary tradition within the French audience.

⁸ *Le Provincial*, 17 July 1828.

⁹ Jules Janin, *Deburau. Histoire du théâtre à quatre sous*, pref. by Arsène Houssaye (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1881), p. 185-86. In this chapter, I shall use the spelling 'Deburau' as preferred by Janin, but some historical documents and articles also use 'Déburau' or 'Debureau'.

accused of bad taste and inelegance by some critics, whilst being greatly valued by others. Referring to 'La Viole de Gamba', Corbat declared: 'Il [Bertrand] s'abandonna à une écriture de mauvais goût, comme son modèle d'un poème [...] c'est également la seule page où Bertrand se complaît à l'inélégance'.¹⁰ On the other hand, Poggenburg remarks that this *fantaisie* is 'parmi les textes les plus remarquables de Bertrand, il a suscité des comparaisons avec Verlaine, Max Jacob, Mallarmé, Daniel Lantrac'.¹¹ Beyond its playfulness, this composition leaves readers with many interpretative problems; for example what is the link between the different episodes? To what extent is the language of this composition metaphorical? Is it even worth trying to find a unifying principle, or is Bertrand depicting completely separate scenes? I shall attempt to answer these questions, while concentrating on the use of different art forms, from the visual arts, to music, and to different forms of theatre. I shall argue that the continuous interaction between various art forms creates different layers in the text, which I aim to expose step by step. I shall also examine the central role that theatre plays in this composition and argue that such an aspect is linked to the revival of pantomimes and *Commedia dell'Arte* at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Paris.

¹⁰ Henri Corbat, *Hantise et imagination*, p. 62.

¹¹ Note 1, *OC*, p. 303.

La Viole de Gamba

Il reconnut, à n'en pouvoir douter, la figure blême de son ami intime Jean-Gaspard Debureau, le grand paillasse des Funambules, qui le regardait avec une expression indéfinissable de malice et de bonhomie.

Théophile Gautier - *Onuphrius*.

Au clair de la lune
Mon ami Pierrot
Prête-moi une plume
Que j'écrive un mot.
Ma chandelle est morte
Je n'ai plus de feu;
Ouvre-moi la porte
Pour l'amour de Dieu.
Chanson populaire.

Le maître de chapelle eut à peine interrogé de l'archet la viole bourdonnante, qu'elle lui répondit par un gargouillement burlesque de lazzi et de roulades, comme si elle eût eu au ventre une indigestion de Comédie Italienne.

*

C'était d'abord la duègne Barbara qui grondait cet imbécile de Pierrot d'avoir, le maladroit, laissé tomber la boîte à perruque de M. Cassandre et répandu toute la poudre sur le plancher.

Et M. Cassandre de ramasser piteusement sa perruque, et Arlequin de détacher au viédase un coup de pied dans le derrière, et Colombine d'essuyer une larme de fou rire, et Pierrot d'élargir jusqu'aux oreilles une grimace enfarinée.

Mais bientôt, au clair de lune, Arlequin dont la chandelle était morte suppliait son ami Pierrot de tirer les verrous pour la lui rallumer, si bien que le traître enlevait la jeune fille avec la cassette du vieux.

*

- «Au diable Job Hans le luthier qui m'a vendu cette corde! s'écria le maître de chapelle recouchant la poudreuse viole dans son poudreux étui.» – La corde s'était cassée.¹²

Structure and Themes

This *fantaisie* consists of five paragraphs, where the first and the last function as a frame for the three central ones. Between the first and the second and again between

¹² OC, pp. 127-28.

the penultimate and the last paragraph there appears an asterisk, which represents a long pause, or a rupture in the text. The use of asterisks – a frequent feature of the *fantaisies* – is of great significance for Bertrand, who in his instructions to the *metteur en pages* recommended: ‘Je le prie de ne pas oublier de placer dans la mise en page les étoiles que j’ai figurées dans le manuscrit [...] et qui indiquent qu’il faut en outre un *double blanc*’.¹³ These asterisks are not simply a matter of typographical preference, as they often signify a deeper ontological change in the *fantaisie*. Indeed readers are presented with an unexpected shift of point of view, which entails a complete renegotiation and reinterpretation of what they have just read.¹⁴

This *fantaisie* can hence be divided into two different episodes, the first one described by the first and the last paragraphs, and the second consisting of the three central paragraphs. In the frame, the ‘maître de chapelle’ starts playing his viol, or viola da gamba, but the instrument produces an unpleasant music. All of a sudden, the musician angrily curses the violinmaker who sold him a string, putting the viol back in its case, when readers discover that one of the strings has broken (last paragraph). The central section is a narration of characteristic scenes of ‘Comédie Italienne’, a well-known theatrical form, which was born in sixteenth-century Italy and later become very popular in France. In this sequence various characters of the *Commedia dell’Arte* appear, first of all ‘la duègne Barbara’, the governess and chaperone; then Pierrot, one of the typical servant masks; Monsieur Cassandre, the mask of the stingy, bigoted old man, and the master; Arlequin the cunning servant, and Colombine the coquettish servant. These characters do not need a presentation, as readers should easily recognise the famous types and their traditional features. In

¹³ OC, p. 373.

¹⁴ This aspect will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 5.

this regard, Luc Bonenfant suggests: ‘L’introduction de ces personnages elliptiques provenant de la *commedia dell’arte* dans la seconde partie de la pièce permet d’éviter d’encombrants et lourds recours à toute justification psychologique’.¹⁵ Thematically, the central section can be divided into two scenes; in the first one Barbara reprimands Pierrot because he dropped M. Cassandre’s wig box, M. Cassandre for pathetically picking up his wig, Harlequin because he kicks M. Cassandre, Colombine because she bursts out laughing, and again Pierrot because of his reaction to these events, as given by his facial expression. The second scene (fourth paragraph) describes Harlequin holding an extinguished candle while begging Pierrot to open the door and to give him some light, but his real aim is to go away with the girl (probably Colombine) and the money of the old man (probably M. Cassandre).¹⁶

The link between the apparently unrelated frame (the episode about the ‘maître de chapelle’) and central section (about the *Commedia dell’Arte*) seems to be the passage: ‘comme si elle [la viole] eût eu au ventre une indigestion de comédie italienne’. Steve Murphy opens his analysis of ‘La Viole de Gamba’ by asking, ‘Pourquoi le maître de chapelle imagine-t-il des scènes comiques?’¹⁷ In contrast to Murphy, I propose that this simile implies that the pantomimic scenes in the central segment are, first and foremost, a theatrical representation of the music produced by the viol, rather than a representation of what the ‘maître de chapelle’ is imagining. Indeed, it is the narrator (who is a listener and a spectator) who describes the sounds of the viol without the use of musical terms, but by depicting three paragraphs of *Commedia dell’Arte*, which come out of the blue, after the rupture represented by the asterisk. This pause turns readers from listeners of a concert into spectators of a

¹⁵ Luc Bonenfant, *Les Avatars romantiques*, p. 32.

¹⁶ Part of this paragraph is a paraphrase of the *chanson populaire* quoted in the second epigraph.

¹⁷ Steve Murphy, ‘Un air de chapelle travesti (La Viole de Gamba)’, p. 90.

pantomime, carrying them inside the ‘ventre’ of the viol, as witnesses of its ‘indigestion de Comédie Italienne’. Another link between the frame and the central section are various lexical choices, which reappear in the two parts. For example, the ‘poudre’ of the ‘perruque’ in the second paragraph is recalled by the ‘poudreuse viole’ and ‘poudreux étui’ in the last one.¹⁸

Looking now at the three central paragraphs, it is immediately evident that they are characterised by the simultaneity of the actions performed by the various characters and their frenzy. The impression of temporal compression is here created by the rapid succession of verbs (‘grondait’, ‘d’avoir [...] laissé tomber’, ‘répandu’, ‘ramasser’, ‘détacher’, ‘essuyer’, ‘élargir’, ‘suppliait’, ‘tirer’, ‘enlevait’); the presence of some adverbs of time (‘d’abord’, ‘bientôt’); and, importantly, by the use of the *infinitif de narration* in the central paragraph, ‘Et M. Cassandre de ramasser piteusement sa perruque’, ‘et Arlequin de détacher [...] un coup de pied dans le derrière’, ‘et Colombine d’essuyer une larme de fou rire’, and ‘et Pierrot d’élargir [...] une grimace. The clash between the *infinitif de narration*, a stylistically elegant grammatical choice, and the comedic content of this section creates an evident sense of irony and adds to the playfulness of this composition.¹⁹

Because of this frenzy and playfulness, ‘La Viole de Gamba’ (as well as other *fantaisies* such as ‘La Chanson du masque’)²⁰ can be considered a *carnavalesque*

¹⁸ The use of ‘poudre’ and ‘perruque’ also give the sense of a parody of the *Ancien Régime*, this kind of theatre was indeed one of its forms of entertainment. Moreover, the ‘viole de gamba’ in the title was created in the fifteenth century and was then typically used in baroque music. Steve Murphy suggests that this element is a playful mockery of *les Anciens*: ‘la Commedia dell’Arte et le théâtre de la foire déjouaient les codes du Théâtre français, geste poursuivi par la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes entre les Classiques à perruques poudreuses et les Romantiques’, while Nathalie Ravonneaux suggests that the adjective ‘poudreaux’ establishes a possible link to the image of the ‘cadavre galvanisé’ as ‘le jeu autour de « poudreux » renvoie aux revenants et autres spectres’, in Steve Murphy, ‘Un air de chapelle travesti (La Viole de Gamba)’, p. 100.

¹⁹ The use of the ‘infinitif de narration’ was noticed by Bonenfant, see *Les Avatars romantiques*, p. 33.

²⁰ ‘La Chanson du masque’ is *carnavalesque* because of its themes, but it is also characterised by a

composition,²¹ as it is not possible to create order because the characters' actions are not governed by logic or reason. Even more fundamental logical parameters (before and after, cause and effect) are thus questioned. Wanlin valuably proposes:

On pourrait dire que Bertrand conçoit la scène indépendamment de l'intrigue [...] Un événement peut être saisi, mais sa logique est occultée: les déterminations des personnages demeurent inconnues, comme les causes de l'action, et surtout leurs conséquences. La scène, ainsi isolée [...] n'est plus un point dans la progression d'une action mais un moment qui perd sa temporalité en ce sens qu'il ne s'inscrit plus dans une consécution nécessaire.²²

Wanlin recalls that this aspect of Bertrand's compositions (in particular those in the section 'L'École flamande') is also one of the typical aspects of the homonymous school of painting, 'scènes de genre flamandes'.²³ Beyond the parallel with painting, this kind of world free of logic is one of the main aspects of the carnivalesque world, which is impossible to comprehend through traditional logical forms. This aspect has been analysed by Marvin Richards in his chapter 'The Carnivalization of Romanticism', where he examines some of Bertrand's compositions through the lens of Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais, especially Bakhtin's concept of carnival. Richards's analysis of poems such as 'La Chanson du masque' and 'La Viole de Gamba' is very valuable, but it lacks the support of a more specific historical consideration of Bertrand's context. In this chapter, I shall propose to analyse in

certain grammatical irony. Consider, for instance the 'et que' in the passage, 'Dansons et chantons, nous qui n'avons rien à perdre, et que derrière le rideau où se dessine l'ennui de leurs fronts penchés, nos patriciens jouent d'un coup de cartes palais et maîtresses!', *OC*, p. 231. Steinmetz recalls that 'Cet «et que», qui a étonné les commentateurs, peut se justifier si on lui attribue une valeur optative pleine d'ironie', see note 4, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. by Jean-Luc Steinmetz (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2002), p. 304.

²¹ Marvin Richards's argument is that '*Gaspard de la Nuit* carnivalizes the literature and theory of its day by turning the conventions of romantic code inside out (carnival's 'monde à l'envers')', p. 92. In his chapter 'The Carnivalization of Romanticism', Richards considers in particular the poems 'Un Rêve', 'La Chanson du masque', 'La Viole de Gamba', and 'À M. Charles Nodier', in *Without Rhyme or Reason*, pp. 92-121.

²² Nicolas Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 157.

²³ Wanlin argues, 'C'est précisément sur ce point que l'on peut rapprocher les bambochades des scènes de genre flamandes', *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 157.

more detail what kind of phenomena at Bertrand's time could have produced and revived the carnivalized world of his composition 'La Viole de Gamba'.

Bertrand's parody of Romantic conventions and his irony are shared by other authors of his time, such as Théophile Gautier. In the 1830s, Gautier was publishing *Les Jeunes France. Romans goguenards* (one of these *contes* is quoted in the epigraph of 'La Viole de Gamba'), in which he parodied the first Romantics and their clichés. One of the key elements of both Gautier's and Bertrand's irony is its auto-referential value. Indeed both of these authors, to some extent, parody themselves in their works, as they had believed in many of the Romantic conventions that they later mocked. Consider for example Gautier's unsuccessful collection of *Poésies* published in 1830; in which he fully embraced many Romantic commonplaces, such as the fascination for the Middle-Ages in his poem 'Moyen Âge', and the admiration for Byron in his 'Imitation de Byron'. In considering the cultural and literary context of 'La Viole de Gamba', I shall therefore firstly examine the possible origins of its carnivalesque world, and then propose a reading of Bertrand's *fantaisie* alongside some works of Gautier.

Pierrot, Masks, and Carnival

'The unique yet complex carnival experience of the people [...] it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms'.²⁴

(Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*)

As a follow up to Marvin Richards's analysis of the carnivalesque in some *fantaisies* of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, I shall start by adding some remarks on the application of Bakhtin's analysis to Bertrand's work. My ultimate aim will be to understand the

²⁴ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 10-11.

reason for the presence of the carnivalesque aspect in ‘La Viole de Gamba’ in relation to its sources and to the cultural environment that produced this composition. The ‘carnival spirit’ which ‘offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things’,²⁵ can be considered as one of the central keys of interpretation for compositions such as ‘La Viole de Gamba’ and ‘La Chanson du masque’. It is therefore worth recalling briefly some of its more important aspects through examples from Bertrand’s poems. The first paragraph of ‘La Chanson du masque’ is an instance of a clear refusal of all conventions:

Ce n’est point avec le froc et le chapelet, c’est avec le tambour de basque et
l’habit de fou que j’entreprends, moi, la vie, ce pèlerinage à la mort!²⁶

In this passage, the institutional religious pilgrimage of monks and friars (‘le froc et le chapelet’) is refused; life is instead the pilgrimage of a ‘fou’. This ‘chanson’ is indeed the song of a fool; the real protagonist of the Carnival, which is governed by the ‘king of fools’. This *fantaisie* goes on to describe a world without rules, where the people do not refrain from mocking the established order:

Marions nos mains, toi qui, monarque éphémère, ceins la couronne de
papier doré, et vous, ses grotesques sujets, qui lui formez un cortège de vos
manteaux de mille pièces, de vos barbes de filasse et de vos épées de bois.²⁷

In this mockery of monarchy, the king wears a paper crown and his subjects wear colourful cloaks and use wooden swords.²⁸ During the festive time of Carnival

²⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 35.

²⁶ *OC*, p. 230.

²⁷ *OC*, p. 230.

²⁸ The invitation to enjoy life, ‘dansons et chantons’, is also the main theme of one of Bertrand’s poems in verse, ‘Boutade Bacchique’. The last stanza of this poem reads: ‘Mortels insensés que vous êtes, / Riez, buvez durant vos jours, / Consolez-vous d’être mazettes, / Car mazettes serez toujours’, *OC*, p. 509. The invitation to enjoy life, often related to the figure of Bacchus, was a very popular theme during the Renaissance, consider for example Lorenzo De’ Medici’s famous opening of his ‘Canzona di Bacco’, a poem written especially to celebrate Carnival festivities in Florence: ‘Quanto è

everything can be mocked because everyone lives in the here and now, in the moment, without thinking of possible future consequences. In ‘La Chanson du masque’ even one of the most worrying manifestations of the power of the ruling class is ridiculed: death by execution (‘oubliés de l’inquisiteur’). In the second paragraph ‘Notre troupe bruyante’ (which can be seen as a carnivalesque crowd) ‘est accourue sur la place Saint-Marc’; St. Mark’s square is the main square in Venice, which is both the space for the Venetian Carnival and for public executions.

Another aspect of Bakhtin’s study is the importance of the grotesque body, which is at the centre of two chapters, ‘The Grotesque Image of the Body and its Sources’ and ‘Images of the Material Bodily Lower Stratum’. This is a conception of the body in all its materiality, physicality, and degradation, its ‘coming to earth’: ‘To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs’.²⁹ This body is that of Carnival often characterised, for example, by sexual allusions. In the first paragraph of ‘La Viole de Gamba’, the physicality of the lexical choices seems to recall these typical features. The Italian-sounding title is the name of the musical instrument Viol, which also contains the word ‘Gamba’, meaning leg in Italian. The bodily features of this instrument continue in the *fantaisie* through its personification, ‘comme si elle eût au ventre une indigestion’, or earlier ‘gargouillement’, a bodily noise which could be in someone’s throat, stomach, or even bowels. What could be expected to be the refined and sublime sound of the string instrument performed by the most important musician, ‘le maître de chapelle’, turns out to be quite the opposite, a noisy indigestion, in a typical carnivalesque reversal. This is not a simple indigestion, but

bella giovinezza, / che si fugge tuttavia! / Chi vuol esser lieto, sia, / di doman non c’è certezza’, in Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Opere*, ed. by Tiziano Zanato (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), p. 391.

²⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 21.

specifically ‘une indigestion de Comédie Italienne’; the physicality of ‘La Viole de gamba’, therefore, does not simply reflect the body of Carnival, but in particular the body of the *Commedia dell’Arte*.³⁰

In ‘La Viole de Gamba’ the central character is undoubtedly Pierrot, whose name appears three times in the three central paragraphs and who is the protagonist of the two epigraphs opening this *fantaisie*. The first epigraph is taken from Gautier’s ‘Onuphrius’, one of the *récits* later included in his *Les Jeunes France*, the second is a passage of a famous popular song about the character Pierrot.³¹ At Bertrand’s time, thinking of his French audience, the connection between the two epigraphs would have been more evident than today. Indeed Deburau, who was called by Gautier ‘le grand paillasse des Funambules’, was a very popular mime whose most famous character was Pierrot. In his *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask*, Robert Storey recalls that Deburau was praised by his contemporaries as ‘the most perfect actor who ever lived’, and that this mime ‘created a stage Pierrot that eclipsed all previous interpretations of *zanni* and hung, like a white shade, over most of his pantomimic successors’.³² It was this mime that handed down to the following generations the typical Romantic melancholic Pierrot; naming Deburau was already a way of recalling Pierrot, as Louisa Jones underlines, ‘Deburau made Pierrot, instead of Harlequin, the central figure of pantomime’.³³ Some critics of *Gaspard de la Nuit* think that the influence of this mime is even greater in the collection, such as Henri

³⁰ Bakhtin recalls that the *Commedia* ‘kept a close link with its carnival origin’, *Rabelais*, p. 34.

³¹ Many epigraphs in *Gaspard de la Nuit* are taken from popular songs and proverbs; an element in support of Wanlin’s valuable’s thesis ‘les bambochades participent du mouvement globalement anti-académique et anti-classique’, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 153.

³² Robert F. Storey, *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 94. *Zanni* was the general name for servants in the *Commedia dell’Arte*. This name is linked to the common Italian name ‘Giovanni’ or ‘Gianni’.

³³ Louisa E. Jones, *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots: Literature and the Popular Comic Arts in 19th-Century France* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1984), p. 43.

Corbat, who declares: ‘Jean Gaspard Deburau, la source du nom même de *Gaspard de la Nuit*’.³⁴ Poggenburg also stresses the importance of Pierrot-Deburau in *Gaspard de la Nuit*: ‘Ce personnage lunaire, si intimement associé à Jean-Gaspard Debureau, fera sentir son influence jusqu’au dernier poème du recueil, bien que son nom n’y apparaisse plus’.³⁵

The origins of Pierrot are rooted in the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*, as Pierrot is the evolution of the Italian Pedrolino. Like Arlecchino and Pulcinella,³⁶ Pedrolino is within the group of *maschere* representing the servants. Mentioning the Italian ancestor of the French Pierrot introduces us to the revival of the *Commedia dell’Arte* through the pantomimes of the *Théâtre des Funambules*, which were extremely popular in the early nineteenth century in Paris and especially amongst the enthusiastic *Jeunes France* of that time. The *fantaisie* ‘La Viole de Gamba’ is therefore influenced by Pierrot-Deburau, whose cultural role is enhanced by authors such as Gautier and Nodier, who were amongst the spectators of the pantomimes. In this regard, in his biography of Deburau, Jules Janin recalls that ‘Charles Nodier n’a jamais eu de sa vie qu’une loge louée à l’année, c’est au théâtre de Deburau’,³⁷ and that in order to describe the public of Deburau, ‘Il faudrait nommer tout le Paris littéraire, tout le Paris artiste, tout le Paris actif qui sent, qui applaudit, qui aime l’art partout où il se trouve’.³⁸

The semantic field of the *Commedia dell’Arte* – and hence of the pantomime – is a constant presence in ‘La Viole de Gamba’, where it also appears in the frame

³⁴ Henri Corbat, *Hantise et imagination*, p. 62.

³⁵ Notes, in *OC*, p. 303.

³⁶ Polichenelle appears early in Bertrand’s collection; in the second preface the puppet ‘Polichenelle cache à la foule curieuse le fil conducteur de son bras’, *OC*, p. 105.

³⁷ Jules Janin, *Deburau*, p. 204.

³⁸ Jules Janin, *Deburau*, p. 205.

(first and last paragraphs). For example, in the first paragraph we encounter ‘lazzis’, which means ‘Plaisanteries bouffonnes, and moqueuses’,³⁹ but which is also a theatrical term meaning ‘Suite d’actions, de gestes qui forment un jeu de scène bouffon’.⁴⁰ In particular, in the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*, ‘lazzi’ refers to a set of different movements composing a mute scene; this seems to be reflected in the three central paragraphs which describe various actions, remarkably without the use of direct dialogues or direct speech.⁴¹ This is even more remarkable if we consider that these are three of the most theatrical paragraphs of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, and that Bertrand used direct speech widely in his *fantaisies* in order to achieve theatrical effects.⁴² The most evident example is ‘Les Gueux de Nuit’, a composition almost entirely consisting of direct speech (six paragraphs of direct speech and one last paragraph of external narration separated by an asterisk). Consider for example the first two paragraphs:

– «Ohé! Rangez-vous, qu’on se chauffe!» – «Il ne te manque plus que d’enfourcher le foyer! Ce drôle a les jambes comme des pincettes.»

– «Une heure!» – «Il bise dru » – «Savez-vous, mes chats-huants, ce qui fait la lune si claire?» –«Non!» – «Les cornes de cocu qu’on y brûle.»⁴³

The central part of ‘La Viole de Gamba’, with its stress on movement rather than words (body instead of *logos* or reason), reflects a voiceless pantomime *à la*

³⁹ From *Le Robert. Dictionnaire de la langue française*. Note that Bertrand adds the suffix ‘-s’ to denote the plural, while in Italian the ‘lazzi’ is the plural of ‘lazzo’. Steve Murphy insists on the importance of this word. ‘Les lazzi (avec ou sans « s ») sont un aspect saillant de la comédie italienne, dont les procédés se distinguent de ceux du Théâtre français notamment par l’importance assignée à la corporalité, à la gestualité paroxystique et parfois acrobatique, voire au bas corporel et souvent à un humour scatologique.’, ‘Un air de chapelle travesti (La Viole de Gamba)’, p. 97.

⁴⁰ *Le Robert*

⁴¹ In the glossary of the volume, *I canovacci della Commedia dell’Arte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), we encounter the following definition of Lazzo (taken from Lippi, 1731): ‘Lazzo, lazzeggiare significa qualunque azione che facciano i comici per esprimere il loro pensiero [...]’, p. 412.

⁴² In ‘La Viole de Gamba’ direct speech appears only at the end, in the final paragraph which works as a frame, ‘Au diable Job Hans le luthier, qui m’a vendu cette corde!’, this is the musician cursing the person who sold him the viol.

⁴³ *OC*, p. 141.

Deburau, seen by an external spectator, as was also valuably suggested by Steve Murphy in his study, but I propose that the lack of dialogues could more specifically reflect the structure of the most popular *programmes de salle* (or scenarios), those texts aimed at describing the plot of the pantomimes for the spectators of the time.⁴⁴ These texts consisted of sections called ‘tableaux’ that often completely excluded the presence of direct dialogues or direct speech, and that described the scenes and the actions to be played on the stage of *les Funambules*. For example one of the most popular pantomimes of the time, *Le Boeuf enragé* by Philippe Laurent (written in 1827 and performed more than two hundred times at *Le Théâtre des Funambules*)⁴⁵ consisted of twelve *tableaux* (all preceded by a title) without any dialogue. Consider this auto-referential ‘Tableau IV, *Le Théâtre des Funambules*’:

Arlequin voulant cacher sa belle au sein de la grande foule, s’en va tout naturellement aux Funambules; mais Pierrot, qui est un habitué de l’endroit, et de plus très-lié avec Deburau, vient le dénoncer à Cassandre. Les amoureux vont être pincés dans une avant-scène. Arlequin emploie un moyen violent, mais infaillible, il agite sa batte, et soudain Pierrot se trouve en chemise. Les sergents de ville ne se contentent pas de lui refuser l’entrée du spectacle: ils l’emmènent goûter d’un air de violon.⁴⁶

This and the other *tableaux* described the main events taking place on the stage, leaving ample space for actors’ improvisation. It is likely that such descriptions influenced Bertrand in the composition of his *fantaisie*.

Many elements of ‘La Viole de Gamba’ seem to support the hypothesis of this influence. Added to the evident thematic similarities and the presence of the same characters, the style of the most pantomimic and frantic third paragraph, which

⁴⁴ Steve Murphy, ‘Un air de chapelle travesti (La Viole de Gamba)’, especially pp. 92-94.

⁴⁵ This scenario is reported by Roberto Cuppone in his *CDA. Il mito della Commedia dell’Arte nell’Ottocento francese* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1999). All direct quotations from this text will refer to this edition. Cuppone adds that ‘*Le Boeuf enragé* [...] diventò uno degli spettacoli antonomastici di quel teatro’, p. 315.

⁴⁶ Cuppone, *CDA*, p. 317.

lists each character's action, is very similar to a pantomimic *tableau* (for example Laurent's *tableaux*). In Bertrand's *fantaisie*, the frenzy is achieved stylistically through the predominance of verbs over nouns and adjectives, Bonenfant remarks, 'cette primauté des actions permet la rapidité [...] [this paragraph] fait succéder des actions concises, d'ailleurs toutes exprimées à l'«infinitif de la narration»'.⁴⁷ This is an unusual feature in Bertrand's *fantaisies*, where the condensing effect is usually obtained by the prevalence of nouns and adjectives over verbs. Consider for example the first part of 'Les Cinq Doigts de la main':

Le pouce est ce gras cabaretier flamand, d'humeur goguenarde et grivoise, qui fume sur sa porte, à l'enseigne de la double bière de mars.⁴⁸

Here the only two verbs are 'est' and 'fume', while in the third paragraph of 'La Viole de Gamba' readers encounter 'ramasser', 'détacher', 'essuyer', and 'élargir' (highly pantomimic verbs), presented rapidly in scenes that follow one another, without clear reason. Here body and gestures have a central role. In particular, Pierrot is forced to use his face and body instead of his words (as a mime), thus becoming the most exaggeratingly expressive amongst the characters 'et Pierrot d'élargir jusqu'aux Oreilles une grimace enfarinée'.⁴⁹ Needless to say, this 'grimace' recalls one of the main features of Deburau's Pierrot: 'Mon héros [...] c'est une grimace, mais une si piquante grimace que tout l'esprit de Beaumarchais s'avouerait vaincu'.⁵⁰

Another stylistic similarity between 'La Viole de Gamba' and a *tableau* is the

⁴⁷ Bonenfant, *Les Avatars romantiques*, p. 33. Here Bonenfant is quoting a definition used by Grevisse. Bonenfant is demonstrating that 'La Viole de Gamba' could be analysed as 'Une Nouvelle'. In the same section he valuably analyses this *fantaisie* as 'Un récit', 'Un conte', and 'Un poème en prose', pp. 27-40. Bonenfant's aim is to show how some compositions in Bertrand's collection are 'génériquement ambiguës', p. 40.

⁴⁸ OC, p. 125.

⁴⁹ Moreover this 'grimace' is ambiguous, is he amused by the scene? Is he worried, happy, or sad?

⁵⁰ Jules Janin, *Deburau*, pp. 76-77.

use of the transition ‘mais bientôt’ to introduce a new scene in the fourth paragraph. Similar constructions can often be found in the *tableaux* in order to introduce new scenes or actions. Consider for example the use of ‘tout aussitôt’ at the end of the last *tableau* of another very popular scenario at Bertrand’s time, *Le Songe d’or, ou Arlequin et l’avare* (1827), ‘Colombine et Pierrot et Arlequin suppliant le barbon, qui finit par céder. Tout aussitôt, Ismaël étend sa baguette vers le fond, qui disparaît et laisse voir le temple de l’amour’.⁵¹ Also ‘mais’ is commonly used in the *tableaux* in order to introduce a contrasting action between two opposing characters as in the above *tableau* ‘mais Pierrot [...] vient le dénoncer à Cassandre’, or in the same scenario, ‘Léandre veut courir après; mais Pierrot lui passé la jambe et le fait tomber’.⁵² Together with these thematic and stylistic similarities, a further important aspect supports the hypothesis of an influence of these scenarios on Bertrand’s ‘La Viole de Gamba’. It was briefly mentioned above that central nineteenth-century literary figures, such as Nodier and Gautier, were amongst the admirers of *Le Théâtre des Funambules*. More particularly, Nodier is considered not only the discoverer of the pantomime, but he is also believed to be the author of *Le Songe d’or, ou Arlequin et l’avare* and, as discussed in the first and third chapters, he was a figure of particular relevance for Bertrand.⁵³

After tracing these affinities between Bertrand’s *fantaisie* and Deburau’s theatre, it is not surprising to discover that ‘La Viole de Gamba’ produced accusations of inelegance, as similar accusations were advanced against pantomimes

⁵¹ Cuppone, *CDA*, p. 332.

⁵² Cuppone, *CDA*, p. 327.

⁵³ Storey remarks: ‘But let us begin at the beginning with the writer who “discovered” the pantomime, the polymath Charles Nodier’, in *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire*, p. 73. Regarding *Le Songe d’or, ou Arlequin et l’avare*, Cuppone maintains that ‘nonostante non sia firmato, sembra non vi siano dubbi sull’attribuzione a Charles Nodier’, in *CDA*, p. 324.

in the early nineteenth century. For example, the theatrical critic Geoffroy in his *Manuel dramatique à l'usage des acteurs et des auteurs* condemned pantomimes in the following terms:

Je blâme toujours les pantomimes comme très préjudiciables au bon goût et à la littérature; elles s'accréditent, presque toujours, par la frivolité, la paresse, le défaut d'attention, l'inaptitude à réfléchir. Ce spectacle n'exige que des jeux et n'a besoin d'aucune fonction de l'entendement.⁵⁴

What remains is to understand the reason why many important writers, poets and artist were attracted by this art form and what they saw beyond its 'frivolité, paresse' and its 'mauvais goût'. Probably, artists such as Gautier, Nodier, and Bertrand positively valued the fact that pantomimes needed 'aucune fonction de l'entendement' on a rational level, as they appealed to a more instinctive, childish, irrational level, a much more immediate form of communication. In his *Shakespeare aux Funambules* (published in *Revue de Paris* in 1842), Gautier praised this particular aspect of *Le Théâtre des Funambules*, and especially the attitude of its spectators:

Quelles pièces, mais aussi quel théâtre, et surtout quels spectateurs! Voilà un public! [...] naïf comme un enfant à qui l'on conte la Barbe bleu, se laissant aller bonnement à la fiction du poète – oui, du poète – en acceptant tout, à condition d'être amusé, un véritable public, comprenant la fantaisie avec une merveilleuse facilité, qui admettrait sans objection le Chat botté, le petit Chaperon rouge [...] ce monde étrangement bariolé de la farce italienne, mêlé à ce que la féerie a de plus extravagant.⁵⁵

Only a similar kind of public, or rather, similar readership, could enjoy the unexpected scenes of 'La Viole de Gamba', the fantastic incursions typical of Gautier's 'Onuphrius' or 'La Cafetière' and, before that, the fantastic narrations of some of Nodier's *contes* such as 'Smarra' or 'Trilby' in the early 1820s.

⁵⁴ Geoffroy, *Manuel dramatique à l'usage des acteurs et des auteurs* (Paris: Painparré, 1822), pp. 153-54. Quoted into English in Jones, *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Quoted Cuppone, *CDA*, pp. 347-48. Article published in *La Revue de Paris*, 4 September 1842.

An openness to the overturning of traditional rules and logic was especially required by the popular *pantomimes féeriques* of the 1820s, which Champfleury remembered in the following way in his *Souvenirs des Funambules*: ‘Mais toutes les pantomimes féeriques ne ressemblent guère au *Songe d’or*: elles en ont les défauts, c’est-à-dire le décousu, le manque de logique, des mélanges insensés’.⁵⁶ These *pantomimes féeriques*, which were the result of a mixture of various theatrical, acrobatic, and circus traditions, also included the use of magic, as in the above example from Laurent’s *Le Bœuf enragé*, ‘Arlequin emploie un moyen violent, mais infaillible, il agite sa batte, et soudain Pierrot se trouve en chemise’.⁵⁷ Audiences’ acceptance of this world without logic is also essential to understand the carnivalesque world revived by the influence of the *Commedia dell’Arte*. Louisa Jones recalls that ‘with its usual effervescence [...] commedia sprang back to create, in the 1820s, the great modern Pierrot. With its usual tenacity, it managed to maintain the carnivalesque tradition in all its richness’.⁵⁸ It can now be seen that the carnivalesque of ‘La Viole de Gamba’ is not an isolated element of this composition, and that its importance runs the risk of being underemphasised if examined in isolation. In this section, I attempted to show that a consideration of this particular aspect within a wider web of cultural references, such as the *Théâtre des Funambules* and their *Commedia* inheritance, can provide us with a deeper understanding of the poem in its relationship with the cultural phenomena that contributed to its production. In the following section I shall carry this analysis further by comparing

⁵⁶ Champfleury, *Souvenirs des Funambules* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères Libraires-éditeurs, 1859), p. 87.

⁵⁷ It is the mixture of different styles and of different traditions that were considered the greatest value and the main reason of the great popularity of *Le Bœuf enragé*. Cuppone stresses the importance of this aspect: ‘questa miscela di teatralità inglese e italiana, vaudevillesca e circense’, p. 83.

⁵⁸ Jones, *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots*, p. 17.

some aspects of ‘La Viole de Gamba’ to some of Gautier’s works, as its possible intertext.

‘La Viole de Gamba’: A Fantaisie à la Manière de Gautier?

‘Ohimè povero! Au diable les femmes!’
(Théophile Gautier, ‘Sous la Table’)

Bertrand’s ‘La Viole de Gamba’ introduces readers to a world where all conventions seem to be challenged.⁵⁹ The story narrated in the frame (the first and last paragraphs) undermines the musical authority of the ‘maître de chapelle’, and makes readers doubt his musical abilities. Moreover, the musician does not take any responsibility for his shortcoming, nor for how the viol sounds; he prefers cursing the luthier ‘Au diable Job Hans’⁶⁰ who sold him the string (‘cette corde’), and the musical instrument itself (‘poudreuse viole’).⁶¹ Bertrand’s ‘maître de chapelle’, who is unable to control his musical instrument, recalls Onuphrius, the protagonist of Gautier’s tale quoted in the epigraph. Onuphrius is first presented as a painter (‘Onuphrius était peintre’),⁶² who is painting a portrait of a woman, Jacintha. During the painting of this portrait, several times Onuphrius suddenly loses command of his hand, for example, ‘un coup violent dans le coude fit dévier sa main [...] il se

⁵⁹ In *La Lyre désenchantée*, referring to musical instruments, Laurence Tibi valuably notices that ‘Bertrand s’en sert pour mettre en place un univers fantastique dans lequel, comme chez Hoffmann, des forces occultes semblent s’ingénier à dérégler le cours des choses’, Laurence Tibi, *La Lyre désenchantée* (Paris : Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2003), p. 473.

⁶⁰ For more on the significance of the choice of the name ‘Job’, refer to Steve Murphy, ‘Un air de chapelle travesti (La Viole de Gamba)’, pp. 103-04.

⁶¹ The use of curses and the ‘importance of abusive language’ is one of typical forms of communications during Carnival. Bakhtin, in his introduction, includes it in one of the three ‘forms of folk humor’, ‘3. various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons’. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 5.

⁶² All direct quotations from this text will refer to its very first publication in *La France littéraire* in August 1832. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département Littérature et art, Z-21691-21729, III, p. 389.

retourna si brusquement [...] il ne vit personne'.⁶³ Only later in the tale do readers discover the possible reason for this and other inexplicable events in the narration, 'c'était le diable qui avait fait avancer l'aiguille, qui avait mis des moustaches a son portrait, changé le crin de ses brosses en fil d'archal, et rempli ses vessies de poudre fulminante : le coup dans le coude s'expliquait tout naturellement'.⁶⁴ However, the hypothesis of the devil's responsibility for these strange episodes is undermined by the unreliability of the point of view. Indeed the narrator describes Onuphrius's own hypothesis, and readers know that the protagonist has probably lost his mind.⁶⁵ Also in 'La Viole de Gamba' the devil appears, but ironically only in the final curse 'Au diable Job Hans'.

It seems that the reason for the failure of the 'maître de chapelle' is that his musical instrument has a life of its own. This viol answers the musician 'elle lui répondit', it produces bodily noises, 'gargouillement', and it even has a 'ventre'; moreover, the viol has its own personality, and apparently it likes mocking the musician and rebelling against him. This theme of the sudden personification of objects is a typical element of Gautier's fantastic, as in this passage of 'Onuphrius':

Les clocher s'inclinaient sur le chemin creux pour le regarder passer, ils le montraient au doigt, lui faisaient la nique, et lui montraient par dérision leurs cadrans dont les aiguilles étaient perpendiculaires.⁶⁶

Here the bell towers are alive and make fun of the protagonist. These sudden personifications of objects are also the central motif of Gautier's 'La Cafetière', first published in *Le Cabinet de Lecture* in May 1831. As briefly mentioned in chapter three of the present work, the narrator of this *conte* tells that he was spending his

⁶³ Gautier, 'Onuphrius', p. 390

⁶⁴ Gautier, 'Onuphrius', p. 394.

⁶⁵ It should be noticed that both the tone and the themes of this page of 'Onuphrius' are very similar to Bertrand's first preface and the discovery that Gaspard de la Nuit could be the devil himself.

⁶⁶ 'Onuphrius', pp. 396-97.

holiday ‘dans une terre au fond de la Normandie’,⁶⁷ and that during the night in his bedroom he felt ‘une terreur insurmontable’,⁶⁸ as he witnessed many extraordinary episodes.⁶⁹ For example, ‘Le lit s’agitait sous moi comme une vague’, ‘les personnages de la tapisserie [...] ce que j’avais pris pour de vaines peintures étaient la réalité’, ‘ensuite une cafetière se jeta en bas d’une table où elle était posée, et se dirigea, clopin-clopant, vers le foyer’, ‘Un des portraits, le plus ancien de tous [...] sortit, en grimaçant, la tête de son cadre’.⁷⁰

The animation of paintings and of the ‘tapisserie’, and the return of long-dead ancestors (‘C’étaient les aïeux de notre hôte’)⁷¹ in ‘La Cafetière’ are inspired, as seen in the previous chapter, by very popular foreign influences of that time such as Walter Scott.⁷² In ‘La Cafetière’, many elements bring to mind even more aspects of ‘La Viole de Gamba’. For example, ‘la tapisserie était un concerto italien’, and ‘l’archet des virtuoses passait [...] sur les cordes’. The description of the dance is very similar to the *lazzi* of the ‘Comédie Italienne’, ‘ces danseurs, sautaient, cabriolaient, faisaient des ronds de jambe, des jetés battus et entrechats de trois pieds en haut, tant que la sueur, leur coulant du front sur les yeux, leur emportait les mouches et le fard’.⁷³ All these elements not only suggest an affinity between Gautier and Bertrand, but they also indicate that these two authors share a common ground of foreign sources, such as Scott and Hoffmann.⁷⁴ Moreover, the similarity of

⁶⁷ Gautier, Théophile, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, I, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Gautier, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, I, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Once again the *province* is the place for extraordinary events, like Dijon in the first preface of *Gaspard*.

⁷⁰ Gautier, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, I, pp.4-5.

⁷¹ Gautier, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, I, p. 4.

⁷² Lacoste-Veysseyre in her ‘notice’ to Gautier’s *conte* recalls that amongst other sources, ‘Il s’agit de « La Chambre Tapissée » de Walter Scott’, Gautier, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, I, p. 1237.

⁷³ Gautier, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, I, p. 6.

⁷⁴ For more details on the possible influence of Hoffmann on ‘La Viole de Gamba’ and other poems, see Stéphane Lelièvre, ‘Gaspard de la Nuit: des fantaisies à la manière de... Hoffmann?’, *Lectures de*

these two authors is also expressed by their ironic tone, which arises from the treatment of their sources, their parody of clichés, but also, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, by the characteristic auto-referential value of their irony.

The Use of Other Arts in a Composition about Poetry

‘ « Poète, si c’est être poète que d’avoir cherché l’art! »’.⁷⁵
(‘Préface’, Louis Bertrand)

So far we have seen how Bertrand’s ‘La Viole de Gamba’ challenges readers’ expectations through examples of its reversals, its use of syntax, and the presence of carnival forms such as the pantomime, which operate both thematically and structurally. Another important aspect of this composition relies in its sudden transitions from one art form to the other. Indeed, the continuous shifting between music, theatre, and painting constitutes an ever-changing landscape which is difficult to interpret with certainty. These transitions are not unusual in Bertrand’s compositions, especially those included in the first section ‘L’École flamande’. Referring to the *fantaisie* ‘Harlem’, Wanlin remarks that ‘Harlem devient une «bambochade». Une ville est un tableau. Voire, une ville est un tableau qui est un poème’.⁷⁶ Applying a similar paradoxical description to ‘La Viole de Gamba’, one could state that ‘La Viole de Gamba’ is a *fantaisie* which describes the music of a personified musical instrument; the music produced by this instrument turning into a pantomime of ‘La Comédie Italienne’, a theatrical form. Moreover, these scenes of ‘Comédie Italienne’ recall many paintings of Callot and Watteau representing masks, Harlequins and Pierrots, and carnivalesque scenes of the *Commedia dell’Arte*.

Gaspard de la Nuit, pp. 135-52.

⁷⁵ OC, p. 93.

⁷⁶ Wanlin calls this aspect ‘logique métonymique’, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 86.

A question thus arises, what is the purpose of all these references to the arts? What if ‘La Viole de Gamba’ was itself a poem reflecting upon its own creation through the use of different art forms? In order to address these questions, consider, for example, the fourth paragraph of this *fantaisie*, a more prosaic version, a paraphrase, of the well-known popular song quoted in the epigraph. Here the well-known theme of the relationship between the two friends/enemies Harlequin and Pierrot is revisited.⁷⁷ A hidden theme in this passage, as Poggenburg remarks, is ‘la création poétique’; also suggesting that ‘le poète, dans un univers clos, a perdu le feu de l’inspiration, il faut donc que les verroux soient tirés’.⁷⁸ This remark would support the idea that, amongst its various layers, this *fantaisie* is self-referential, as it is a metaphorical representation of the writing of the poem itself. This would add writing, and poetic creation, to the varied list of art forms encompassed by this *fantaisie*, including music, theatre, pantomime, and the visual arts.

In the first preface, M. Gaspard confesses:

Ce manuscrit [...] vous dira combien d’instruments ont essayé mes lèvres avant d’arriver à celui qui rend la note pure et expressive, combien de pinceaux j’ai usés sur la toile avant d’y voir naître la vague aurore du clair-obscur.⁷⁹

Referring to this passage, Wanlin suggests that ‘la référence aux autres arts ne tient [...] pas tant, ici, à leurs ressemblances, qu’à la conception du travail artistique comme un apprentissage et une recherche techniques, une expérimentation de moyens de production’.⁸⁰ If we embrace this thesis, ‘La Viole de Gamba’ could be read as a metaphor for the difficulty of composing a poem, with particular attention

⁷⁷ Two very different terms are used in the same paragraph, ‘son ami’ and ‘traître’; indeed the real intention of *Arlequin* is not the one that he declares; this is what he was really aiming for, ‘le traître enlevait la jeune fille avec la cassette du vieux’.

⁷⁸ Note 5 in *OC*, p. 303.

⁷⁹ *OC*, p. 103.

⁸⁰ Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 76.

paid to the instruments, or means, of artistic production, here being represented, for example, by ‘La Viole de Gamba’ itself, ‘l’archet’, and the reappearing ‘corde’. Moreover, this ‘corde’ could also be an explicit reference to one of the *Théâtre des Funambules*; Jules Janin reminds us of the reason for the name of this theatre, ‘Ministre Jaloux! qui ordonnait à tout Acteur des Funambules de danser sur la Corde avant de faire son entrée’.⁸¹ ‘La corde s’était cassée’, if this line broke, the pantomime would thus abruptly end.

If poetic creation is the underlying motif of ‘La Viole de Gamba’, the frustration of the ‘maître de chapelle’, who wants to produce well-played and pleasant music, can be seen as the condition of the poet who wants to create a good composition, but where the very instrument he is using, language (‘la viole de gamba’), seems to have a life of its own. What might be an elegant poem about a musical instrument typical of the past turns out to be a poem about comedy and pantomime, with a multiplication of acting personae not governed by logic. The rupture of the string, graphically represented by the rupture in the text (the second asterisk), could thus be seen as the loss of inspiration. ‘La Viole de Gamba’, a title which could suggest a graceful poem, not only ends up being a carnivalesque and playful composition, but also a poem about the making of a poem. Bertrand’s auto-referentiality thus becomes one of the fundamental tools for his irony, and this aspect is similar to other writers of his time, such as Gautier, who is quoted in the epigraph. This epigraph should already have warned readers, as Onuphrius was himself an artist, both a poet and a painter, just like Gautier. In Gautier’s ironic (‘goguenard’) and somewhat autobiographical tale, Onuphrius is a typical young artist, a ‘Jeune

⁸¹ Jules Janin, *Deburau*, p. 63. The idea of a reference to the ‘corde’ of the *Funambules* is also suggested in Steve Murphy’s study, ‘nous fait remarquer N. Ravonneaux, du cordier qui fabrique notamment la corde sur laquelle marchent les funambules.’, p. 95.

France', who little by little completely loses his mind. The opening preface of *Gaspard de la Nuit* inaugurates the motif of the quest for art as an impossible task, 'l'art, cette pierre philosophale du dix-neuvième siècle'.⁸² This quest can lead to the loss of reason, which is at the origin of both exasperation and excitement, because it opens the possibility of breaking traditional rules and challenging expectations. It is perhaps this universe without reason and its contradictions that Bertrand was depicting in 'La Viole de Gamba', a composition which seems very unusual even after a first reading.

Through my analysis of 'La Viole de Gamba' in this section my aim has been to demonstrate that, even though Bertrand drew on themes and cultural references popular at his time, he played with them, thus producing an original composition. I have also shown that 'La Viole de Gamba' challenges readers' interpretation rather explicitly, through such elements as its textual gaps and its use of the carnivalesque. In other compositions, however, the unusual elements are less evident and they can be unveiled only after a closer comparison with other texts. In the next section, I shall show this aspect through the analysis of 'Ondine', which will be based on a more detailed textual comparison between this text and its possible sources. In so doing, I shall try to demonstrate that, even when it is not very explicit, the 'unusual' is an important element of Bertrand's poetics.

Le Rire d'Ondine: *A Reading of 'Ondine' in its Literary Context*

'Des travaux récents nous ont fait connaître de quel prix pouvaient devenir pour l'histoire d'une nation et pour la connaissance des mœurs d'un peuple, les romances nationales, le légendes, et les traditions populaires, que jusqu'ici l'on avait

⁸² OC, p. 93.

jugées indignes de servir à des recherches sérieuses'.⁸³
(Loève-Veimars, Introduction to *Ballades, légendes, et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse*, 1825)

'Ondine' is a *fantaisie* appearing in 'La Nuit et ses prestiges', the third section of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. The protagonist of this composition is a central figure of European folklore, revisited in nineteenth-century literary works, such as *Undine* (1811), the tale by the Baron de la Motte Fouqué, which enjoyed widespread popularity at the time in France. To borrow Carole G. Silver's clear and brief synopsis, this tale was 'the story of an elemental water spirit and her gaining a soul through a marriage with a Christian Knight'.⁸⁴ Ondine is a soulless sprite; as described in the alchemic studies of Paracelsus, Ondines, along with Nereids are water elementals, where the term 'elemental' means that they are constituted entirely by one of the four elements.⁸⁵ Amongst the many motifs that influenced the genesis of the various Ondines of the literary tradition, ranging from the wider theme of the *femme fatale*, to the motif of the 'Fairy Brides' as examined by Silver,⁸⁶ we cannot forget the figure of Mélusine. An entry in the *Dictionnaire des Mythes Littéraires* recalls that 'Mélusine est bien l'ancêtre d'Ondine'⁸⁷ and that this figure 'reproduit un schéma folklorique universel'.⁸⁸ This scheme starts with the meeting between two creatures who belong to two different worlds, in particular a male mortal human being and a female fairy-like creature. Usually the episode ends tragically, the mortal

⁸³ Loève-Veimars, *Ballades, légendes et chants populaires*, p. v.

⁸⁴ Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples. Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: OUP: 1999), p. 18.

⁸⁵ It is important to remark the various alchemic allusions in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, as studied in works such as Réjane Blanc's *La Quête alchimique dans l'œuvre d'Aloysius Bertrand* (Paris: Nizet, 1986). The third section of *Gaspard* not only contains 'Ondine', the water elemental, but also 'La Salamandre', the fire elemental. For more on the meaning of 'elemental', refer to Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'Ondine, ou la tentation luciférienne', pp. 164-65.

⁸⁶ Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, p. 89.

⁸⁷ *Le Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*, ed. by Pierre Brunel (Monaco: Éd. Du Rocher, 1988), p. 1003.

⁸⁸ For a more detailed account of this scheme, see *Le Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*, pp 1000-01.

surrendering to the charms of the fairy, thus being unfaithful to his future human bride before finally dying.⁸⁹

Northern European folklore enjoyed great popularity within Bertrand's cultural circle in Dijon in the late 1820s. For instance, on 17 July 1828 the periodical *Le Provincial* published 'Superstitions des Suédois', an article arguing that, contrary to what was happening in France, the preservation of myths and legends was an exemplary value of northern civilizations:

Tandis que dans les états que nous entourent, nous voyons les croyances superstitieuses s'évanouir [...] d'autres Pays conservent avec un respect que nous n'avons pas peine à comprendre, leurs traditions, et leurs légendes fabuleuses.⁹⁰

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this northern repertoire of legends sparked great interest across France as a whole, thanks to translations and adaptations into French of foreign literary works, such as Loève-Veimars's anthology, *Ballades, légendes, et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse* (1825). Bertrand was not immune to the influence of this anthology. As Suzanne Bernard and Max Milner have already indicated, Bertrand's 'Ondine' could have been particularly influenced by one of the translations in Loève-Veimars's collection, 'Le Chant de la Naiade',⁹¹ but in this volume, we also find other texts, which should be considered as a possible

⁸⁹ *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*, p. 1000.

⁹⁰ 'Variétés', *Le Provincial*, 17 July 1828.

⁹¹ Suzanne Bernard suggests: 'Bertrand n'a pas pu ne pas s'en souvenir en écrivant Ondine (on retrouve même, d'une pièce à l'autre, la construction ternaire de la plupart des couplets)', in *Le Poème en prose*, p. 52. Max Milner remarks that 'sur le thème d'Ondine, popularisé par le poème de La Motte-Fouqué, Bertrand trouvait dans *Les Ballades, légendes et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse* [...] des variations dont la forme même a pu l'influencer', in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, 'Préface', p. 39. 'Le Chant de la Naiade' is far from a faithful translation of the original, it is rather an adaptation into French prose of a section of the original English version in verse, *The Naiad: a Tale* (1816) written by a minor poet J.H. Reynolds (friend and correspondent of the poet Keats). In her article 'Erlkönig de Goethe et ses traducteurs français', Gisèle Vanhese remarks that, in nineteenth-century France, 'la traduction s'inscrit en effet dans une hypertextualité où figurent aussi l'imitation, l'adaptation, le pastiche, la parodie et le fragment'. In *Romantisme*, 106: *Traduire au xixe siècle* (1999), 109-18 (p. 109).

intertext for 'Ondine', for example 'Chant des Nymphes' and 'La Sirène du Galloway'. Bertrand's 'Ondine', however, is far from a mere imitation, as Pierre Brunel claimed: 'C'est une création originale, qui ne se laisse réduire à aucune des sources ordinairement proposées'.⁹² In this section, I shall consider more detailed examples from these and other possible sources in order to examine Bertrand's own and unique synthesis of the available literary material at his time and his own poetic experimentation. The analysis of the intertextuality of 'Ondine' will be a means of addressing precise interpretative questions such as the following. Considering that, traditionally, the key characteristic of this aquatic sprite is her irresistible sensuality, why isn't Bertrand's Ondine as seductive as her mythical ancestors? What is her understanding of the complex world of human senses?

Ondine

..... Je croyais entendre
 Une vague harmonie enchanter mon sommeil,
 Et près de moi s'épandre un murmure pareil
 Aux chants entrecoupés d'une voix triste et tendre.
 CH. BRUGNOT, *Les deux Génies*.

- « Écoute! - Écoute! - C'est moi, c'est Ondine qui frôle de ces gouttes d'eau les losanges sonores de ta fenêtre illuminée par les mornes rayons de la lune; et voici, en robe de moire, la dame châtelaine qui contemple à son balcon la belle nuit étoilée et le beau lac endormi.

» Chaque flot est un ondin qui nage dans le courant, chaque courant est un sentier qui serpente vers mon palais, et mon palais est bâti fluide, au fond du lac, dans le triangle du feu, de la terre et de l'air.

» Écoute! - Écoute! - Mon père bat l'eau coassante d'une branche d'aulne verte, et mes sœurs caressent de leurs bras d'écume les fraîches îles d'herbes, de nénuphars et de glaïeuls, ou se moquent du saule caduc et barbu qui pêche à la ligne!»

⁹² Pierre Brunel, 'A propos d' «Ondine», in *Du visible à l'invisible. Pour Max Milner. «Mettre en Images, donner en spectacle»*, ed. by Stéphane Michaud, 2 vols (Paris: Corti, 1988), I, p. 267.

*

Sa chanson murmurée, elle me supplia de recevoir son anneau à mon doigt,
pour être l'époux d'une Ondine, et de visiter avec elle son palais, pour être le roi
des lacs.

Et comme je lui répondais que j'aimais une mortelle, boudeuse et dépitée,
elle pleura quelques larmes, poussa un éclat de rire, et s'évanouit en giboulées
qui ruisselèrent blanches le long de mes vitraux bleus.

Structure, Themes and Thematic Variations

'Ondine' is a *fantaisie* in two movements, which are graphically divided by an asterisk, the importance of which has been already underlined in the above case study of 'La Viole de Gamba'. After the epigraph taken from the poem 'Les deux Génies' by Charles Brugnot, the first section consists of three paragraphs, opening with '«Écoute! Écoute! –C'est moi'; this is Ondine's direct speech and her *chant*. This opening is similar to that of other literary texts circulating at Bertrand's time. To mention but a few examples, a similar opening characterises a *ballade* entitled 'La Grille du cimetière', which appeared in *Le Provincial* on 5 June 1828 and which consisted of four paragraphs in prose, opening respectively with 'Écoutez! Écoutez-moi tous!', 'Écoutez! Écoutez toujours!', 'Et (écoutez! Écoutez encore!)', and 'Écoutez! Écoutez bien'.⁹³ The use of Ondine's own voice in the first part of the *fantaisie* recalls the structures of both 'Le Chant de la Naiade' and 'Chant des Nymphes'; as both of these compositions are entirely narrated by the singing voice of their aquatic protagonists. Ondine introduces herself directly by saying, 'C'est moi, c'est Ondine'; the naiad starts by singing, 'Ma demeure est au sein de la vague, le lis d'eau est mon lit';⁹⁴ and the nymphs, 'Loins des royaumes de l'air, nous habitons des

⁹³ For a reproduction of this *ballade*, see Document 6, Appendix B.

⁹⁴ 'Le Chant de la Naiade', in Loève-Veimars, *Ballades*, p. 160.

bosquets de corail: nos jardins son parés d'algue choisie'.⁹⁵ The frequent use of personal pronouns and of possessive adjectives in these compositions creates a sense of separation between the aquatic world of the protagonists and their listener (or listeners), even when the latter does not explicitly appear in the composition. Indeed, 'moi', 'mon', 'notre' inevitably imply a hidden 'your' or 'yours'. Examples of this are: 'moi', 'mon palais', 'mon père', 'mes sœurs' ('Ondine'); 'Ma demeure', 'mon lit', 'ma couche' ('Le Chant de la Naiade'); 'nous', 'nos jardins', 'notre vie' ('Chant des Nymphes').

Like the protagonists of these *ballades*, Ondine is attempting to gain someone's attention: she is trying to seduce a mortal. However, in contrast to the other compositions, the first paragraph of 'Ondine' appears divided into two parts, the second part beginning after the semicolon with 'et voici'. This deictic word in the second part of the paragraph can make for an ambiguity. After introducing herself and her world in the first part of the paragraph, Ondine starts describing to her listener something belonging to the human world; indeed 'voici' indicates something which is close both to the speaker and the listener. After 'et voici', readers encounter: 'la dame châtelaine qui contemple à son balcon la belle nuit étoilée et le beau lac endormi'. This passage has been interpreted in different ways, for example according to Brunel the 'châtelaine' is Ondine herself; while according to Poggenburg and Dahan, she is another character in the poem.⁹⁶ Dahan also adds that this is the first of a series of oppositions that characterise the entire *fantaisie*, Ondine and *la châtelaine* being 'les deux termes d'une irréductible antinomie' between the human world and

⁹⁵ 'Chant des Nymphes', in Loève-Veimars, *Ballades*, p. 156.

⁹⁶ Note 5, in *OC*, p. 326. Poggenburg quotes the exact passage from Brunel study: '«la chatelaine n'est autre qu'Ondine elle-même» selon P. Brunel (1988, p. 269)'.

that of Ondine.⁹⁷ In her note, Poggenburg also recalls the similarity of Bertrand's segment to a passage in Hugo's 'Le Sylphe': 'bientôt parut la dame à son balcon gothique'.⁹⁸ The tone of 'Ondine', especially if compared with the more serious tone of Hugo's poem, reinforces the idea that the Bertrand is playing with a cliché.⁹⁹ In 'Ondine' the woman is contemplating 'la belle nuit étoilée' and 'le beau lac endormi', where the close repetition of the same banal adjective in a different gender ('belle' and 'beau') could suggest a sense of mockery on the part of Ondine. Indeed Ondine seems to be making fun not only of the limited and rather naïve perspective of the mortal woman, who is not able to see what is really happening under the surface of the lake, but also of the clichéd vision of women in Romantic and *chevaleresque* literature, who are seen as angel-like figures, contemplating the beauty of nature, while waiting for their prince. On the other hand, Ondine knows well that the night and the lake are far from these stereotypical symbols of peace and tranquillity ('étoilée', 'endormi'), as seen by the 'dame châtelaine'; they are exactly the opposite. The lake at night is the realm of Ondine, her father, and her sisters, and other nocturnal aquatic creatures; there is a frenetic world going on under the surface, which the mortal 'dame' can neither perceive, nor imagine.

As mentioned above, after the asterisk, readers are shown the view of Ondine held by the mortal man. The presence of this alternative point of view describing the mythical creature is surely not a new feature introduced by Bertrand's *fantaisie*. For example in 'La Sirène du Galloway', a longer composition, the episode is narrated

⁹⁷ Dahan, 'Ondine, ou la tentation luciférienne', p. 170.

⁹⁸ Note 5, in *OC*, p. 326. Interesting to notice that Sylphes are air elementals.

⁹⁹ Also other passages of Hugo's 'Le Sylphe' suggest that this composition was a possible source of inspiration for Bertrand's 'Ondine'. Consider for example the presence of the window and the windowpanes acting as a divider between the two worlds: 'Ce vitrage éclairé', 'Que ta fenêtre s'ouvre!', in 'Le Sylphe' and 'ta fenêtre illuminée', 'mes vitraux bleus', in 'Ondine'.

from multiple points of view, including an external omniscient narrator, the mermaid, the *chevalier*, his *petit page*, and, at the end, ‘la chaste fiancée de Galloway’, who waited in vain for her future spouse and who relied on his faithfulness. The attitude of the ‘chaste fiancée’ is an impeccable example to illustrate the literary stereotype, which Ondine is mocking by referring to the ‘dame châtelaine’.¹⁰⁰ In the tone of the external views on the aquatic sprites, we find one of the greatest differences between Bertrand’s ‘Ondine’ and the other cited compositions. For instance, in ‘La Sirène du Galloway’, both the narrator and the *chevalier* describe the mermaid stressing her sensual attractiveness (‘sa chevelure blonde’, ‘sa voix douce et sonore charme’ ‘Que vos lèvres séparées sont roses! Rien n’égale la blancheur des lis de votre sein! Ah ! Ces yeux caressants séduiraient l’ermite le plus pieux’);¹⁰¹ in ‘Le Chant de la Naiade’, the protagonist insists on her own sensuality, ‘viens sur ce sein charmant, et tu tresseras parmi les vagues d’argent, ma chevelure de soie’.¹⁰² Not only are these sprites seen as irresistibly attractive, but they are also dangerous. Referring to the mermaid, it is said that ‘ses accens sont

¹⁰⁰ ‘La Sirène du Galloway’, pp. 255-63.

¹⁰¹ ‘La Sirène du Galloway’, pp. 257-58.

¹⁰² ‘Le Chant de la Naiade’, p. 160. Creatures belonging to a different world are often depicted as irresistibly attractive and fascinating also by Bertrand’s contemporaries. For example, in Brugnot’s poem ‘Les deux Génies’, quoted in the epigraph, the ‘Génie inconnu’ ‘ravissait mon âme errante dans les airs’, ‘Je n’oublierai jamais’, Charles Brugnot, *Poésies*, p. 196. In the article of *Le Provincial*, ‘Superstition des Suédois’, ‘les fées de la Suède et leurs sœur d’Angleterre’ are defined by their admirable voice ‘du reste leur voix est douce comme le murmure de l’air’. In Victor Hugo’s ‘Le Sylphe’, the dame cannot resist his fascination and surrenders to his requests, thus opening the door: ‘Une voix... ce n’était sans doute qu’un esprit ! / Bientôt parut la dame à son balcon gothique; / On ne sait si ce fut au sylphe qu’elle ouvrit’, *VHOP*, I, p. 503. Also in Hugo’s ‘Une Fée’ the fairy is beloved and attractive, ‘J’aime, en un rêve sans effroi, / Qu’une fée, au corps diaphane [...] Vienne pencher son front sur moi’, *VHOP*, I, p. 503. In some of his compositions, such as ‘L’Ange et la fée’, a *fantaisie* of the ‘Pièces détachées’, Bertrand followed this poetic motif; indeed both the fairy and the angel are deeply fascinating creatures belonging to the sphere of dreams (‘une fée parfume la nuit mon sommeil fantastique’) and described in an idealised Medieval decor (‘un ange [...] posa un pied sur la rampe du gothique balcon’), *OC*, pp. 261-62. This poem is deeply influenced by Hugo, in particular by his ‘Une Fée’, even if it is opened by a quotation from *Les Orientales*, ‘Une fée est cachée en tout ce que tu vois’, Poggenburg, Note 2, *OC*, p. 361. Also notice the reappearance of ‘gothique balcon’ recalling the *Hugolien* ‘balcon gothique’ in ‘Le Sylphe’.

perfides'¹⁰³ and the *petit page* confesses to his *maître* 'je crains pour vous'.¹⁰⁴

Even after first reading, it is evident that in 'Ondine' both this profound fascination and this danger disappear completely, and the mortal has no trouble at all resisting her proposal, nor does she frighten him. The man narrates to the reader the epilogue of the episode in a rather factual, detached, and disenchanted way: 'elle me supplia de recevoir son anneau à mon doigt, pour être l'époux d'une Ondine'. It seems that Ondine here is in a weaker position, as she ends up begging the mortal ('supplier'), who still ends up refusing her. In addition, it is Ondine who proposes to the mortal that he marry her, 'être l'époux d'une Ondine', and the man replies 'je lui répondais que j'aimais une mortelle',¹⁰⁵ probably a rather mortifying response for Ondine, who in this case is defeated by what to her are the banal charms of a normal mortal woman. Contrary to the *chevalier* of 'La Sirène du Galloway', who is seduced by the mermaid and fatally surrenders to her charm ('Oh! Donne-moi, tendre fille, un gage d'amour sincère!'),¹⁰⁶ the down-to-earth male protagonist of 'Ondine' does not fall for any of her promises, 'visiter avec elle son palais', 'être le roi des lacs', which sound absurd to his mortal ears. Moreover, the only two adjectives that the man uses to describe Ondine are the rather degrading 'boudeuse et dépitée'. In the man's eyes, Ondine behaves like a spoiled child, she is sulky and disappointed, as she responds to his refusal in the following way: 'elle pleura quelques larmes, poussa un éclat de rire, et s'évanouit'. However, Ondine's reaction could conceal something that the mortal man, because of his blinkered human perspective, is not able to perceive.

It is especially Ondine's laughter that introduces ambiguity. From the

¹⁰³ 'La Sirène du Galloway', p. 255.

¹⁰⁴ 'La Sirène du Galloway', p. 257.

¹⁰⁵ My emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ 'La Sirène du Galloway', p. 259.

perspective of the mortal, her reaction is seen as the unstable behaviour typical of children; Ondine first cries and then, not getting what she wants, she haughtily laughs. Ondine's childish frenzy and emotional instability certainly recall the conduct of Jean des Tilles, the male *Ondin* appearing in 'Silves', the last section of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Jean des Tilles, who spends his time harassing the *lavandières*, is described as 'l'ondin malicieux et espiègle qui ruisselle, *se plaint et rit* sous les coups redoublés du battoir'.¹⁰⁷ In an earlier version of 'Jean des Tilles', the poem entitled 'Les Lavandières', which Bertrand published in *Le Provincial* on 11 April 1828, the communal features between Ondine and the male Ondin de l'Armançon are even more evident. Here is the third paragraph of 'Les Lavandières':

C'est, disent les lavandières et les jeunes filles, c'est l'Ondin de l'Armançon qui se plait à nous dérober nos anneaux lorsque nos bras nus sont caressés par les ondes, qui danse et chante la nuit sur l'écume de la cascade, et qui malicieux et vain, cueille et jette les fruits mûrs au courant des eaux.¹⁰⁸

The *chant* of Ondine thus calls to mind the unspoken one of the Ondin de l'Armançon, who appears, singing and dancing, and moving amongst the naked arms of the washerwomen. Bertrand maintained in both 'Les Lavandières' and 'Jean des Tilles' the adjective 'malicieux', sowing seeds of doubt: is Jean des Tilles and Ondine's laughter only a manifestation of their childishness, or could it suggest something more unsettling?

Laughing creatures are everywhere in Bertrand's collection; Ondine 'poussa un éclat de rire',¹⁰⁹ Jean de Tilles 'rit',¹¹⁰ the dwarf Scarbo, 'le nain railleur',

¹⁰⁷ My emphasis. OC, p. 239. There are evident similarities between the *Bourguignon* Jean des Tilles and the Swedish Neck, one of the sprites described in the article 'Superstitions des Suédois', in *Le Provincial*, where this sprite is presented in these terms: 'Neck est l'esprit du bain. Jadis les baigneurs, avant d'entrer dans l'eau, lui jetoient une pièce de monnaie, afin de se le rendre favorable ; ils sont plus hardis maintenant, et voici ce qu'ils chantent en s'élançant dans l'eau : «Neck, Neck, Neck, le voleur, neck, vous êtes encore à terre, et me voici dans l'eau.»', *Le Provincial*, 17 July 1828.

¹⁰⁸ OC, notes, p. 351

¹⁰⁹ OC, p. 182.

‘ricanait’ (in ‘Scarbo’),¹¹¹ and again ‘ricana’ (in ‘Le Fou’);¹¹² ‘Que de fois j’ai entendu bourdonner son rire dans l’ombre de mon alcôve’ (in the ‘Scarbo’ of the ‘Pièces détachées’);¹¹³ Maribas, one of the protagonists of the diabolic Sabbath, ‘riaient ou pleuraient’ (in ‘Départ pour le sabbat’).¹¹⁴ All these *rires* appear to be related to the devil’s laughter itself, as in the last paragraph of ‘Padre Pugnaccio’, where ‘le diable, tapi dans la grand’manche de Padre Pugnaccio, ricana comme Polichinelle!’.¹¹⁵ In a section of his study *Les Rires de la poésie romantique*, examining several aspects of ‘les ricanements frénétiques’, Matthieu Liouville usefully notices:

Principe de division, le rire est en rapport direct avec le diabolique. Il est la marque de la supériorité du rieur, il déforme les traits, il cause le mal.¹¹⁶

Bakhtin’s study on Rabelais offers a very valuable examination of some of the main characteristics of the Romantic ‘principle of laughter’, while showing its fundamental differences from the laughter of the Renaissance and Middle Ages. After defining it as ‘the most important transformation of Romantic Grotesque’, Bakhtin proposes that within Romanticism ‘laughter was cut down to cold humor, irony sarcasm. It ceased to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity’.¹¹⁷ Bakhtin provides us with a good theoretical basis because he explains how this change in the principle of laughter is linked to other important features attributable to the world of Romantic grotesque, such as its relation to terror:

The world of Romantic grotesque is to a certain extent a terrifying world, alien to man. [...] On the other hand the medieval and renaissance folk culture was familiar with the element of terror only as represented by comic monsters, who

¹¹⁰ OC, p. 239.

¹¹¹ OC, p. 167.

¹¹² OC, p. 169.

¹¹³ OC, p. 280.

¹¹⁴ OC, p. 131.

¹¹⁵ OC, p. 229. Polichenelle, another character of the *Commedia dell’Arte*.

¹¹⁶ Liouville, Matthieu, *Les Rires de la poésie romantique* (Paris: Champion, 2009), p. 201.

¹¹⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 37-38.

were defeated by laughter. Terror was turned into something gay and comic.¹¹⁸

From this perspective, Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* is a very interesting example because this collection contains both of these aspects described by Bakhtin. On the one hand, some compositions in the collection seem to be linked to the sense of terror typical of the Romantic grotesque, for example 'La Chambre gothique', 'Scarbo', 'Le Nain' are representations of a terrifying world where the dwarf Scarbo enjoys torturing his victims in a very sadistic way. On the other hand, it seems that Bertrand, who was influenced by the work of Rabelais (an epigraph from *Pantagruel* appears in the third section opening the poem 'Un Rêve'), maintains some of the medieval and renaissance consideration of terror as something to laugh at. Let us briefly consider, for example, the comic ending of 'Le Départ pour le sabbat', where Maribas joins the other magicians flying on a saucepan handle:

Mais déjà sorciers et sorcières s'étaient envolés par la cheminée, à califourchon
qui sur le balai, qui sur les pincettes, et Maribas sur la queue de la poêle.¹¹⁹

Therefore, it is worth paying particular attention to the laughter of Ondine, as it invites readers to reconsider the conclusion of this *fantaisie* in a new light. If one leans towards the more terrifying sense of the Romantic grotesque, the ending of 'Ondine' would not be the victory of the mortal, through his refusal, but it would be Ondine's explosive rage, represented by her laughter (it is not a reassuring *rire* or *sourire*, but a violent *éclat de rire*) and by her sudden disappearance and explosion in a violent rain shower ('s'évanouit en giboulées'). Ondine's laughter could thus be interpreted as the foreboding of her future revenge over the mortal.¹²⁰ However, we

¹¹⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 38-39. In the first preface, M. Gaspard de la Nuit himself, the fictive author of the *fantaisies*, mentions some of the possible features of laughter: 'La figure de pierre avait ri, – ri d'un rire grimaçant, effroyable, infernal, mais – sarcastique, incisif, pittoresque', in *OC*, p. 100.

¹¹⁹ *OC*, p. 132.

¹²⁰ This more dramatic interpretation is supported, for example, by Gisèle Vanhese in her article 'Un

propose that her childishness empties her rage of venom and that this is exactly the reason why she fails to produce terror in the mortal, who dismisses her as one would a child. We shall now take a closer look at her *chant* to show Ondine's immature and puerile engagement with the world of the human senses, which she does not fully grasp.

Ondine's Unusual Aquatic Song

Throughout the *fantaisie*, Ondine attempts to be perceived as sensual and attractive by the mortal; she does so by expressing herself through a choice of musical words and evocative imagery. The most remarkable example of this aspect is the unusual combination of 'losanges sonores' in the first paragraph of the composition, where two different sensorial areas are addressed at once. Ondine attempts to shock her listener's (and her readers') sensory perception with the synaesthetic experience of a 'vision sonore' as Brunel defines it in his study, also suggesting: 'ce sont les gouttes d'eau qui sont sonores [...] «les losanges (que ces gouttes d'eau rendent) sonores»'.¹²¹ In 'Ondine' the hypnotic sound of water appears to be always in the background, even when it is not explicitly recalled by musical terms, as Ondine herself is made of this element. For example, the sound of water is visually evoked in passages such as 'Chaque flot est un ondin qui nage dans le courant' in the second paragraph, and 'giboulées qui ruisselèrent' in the last one, where the word 'giboulées' plays on the 'gouttes' of the first paragraph. The mention of 'flot', the wave, recalls 'le flot roule doucement' in 'Le Chant de la Naiade' and, even more,

sens à la fois précis et multiple. Poétique de l'ambigu dans *Gaspard de la Nuit*'; referring to Ondine's laughter she remarks: 'Par ce dernier trait, la séduction s'apparente explicitement à la séduction démoniaque [...] l'éclat de rire [...] étant toujours associé [...] à la présence satanique', in «*Un livre d'art fantasque et vagabond*», p. 75. Also Dahan leans towards this more dramatic interpretation in his article 'Ondine, ou la tentation luciférienne'.

¹²¹ Brunel, 'A propos d' «Ondine»', p. 271.

the playful paragraph of 'Chant des Nymphes': 'Dans le sillage du léger navire, nous folâtrons où le flot se sèpare, et nous flottons en rayonnant autour de l'écume soulevée par la rame'.¹²² In 'Ondine', water imagery is also accompanied by the reference to a fluid building, which is not found in the other compositions. Ondine claims: 'mon palais est bâti fluide, au fond du lac, dans le triangle du feu, de la terre et de l'air'. The words 'bâti' and 'fluide' cancel each other out, as the verb *bâtir* suggests the idea of something robust and solid, both concepts which are inevitably destroyed by their fluidity. Like Rimbaud's 'fleurs arctiques' in 'Barbare', it seems that Ondine's 'palais bâti fluide' is more of a sound-image, an evocation which is almost impossible to grasp conceptually even in our imagination; how would one envisage a fluid building? The location of Ondine's palais is also mysterious, not only is it situated at the bottom of the lake, but it is also at the centre of the alchemic meeting point of three elements ('feu', 'terre', 'air'), surprisingly to the exclusion of water, which is the main element in the entire composition, and which is here recalled only by the reference to the lake and to the fluidity of the palace. We should not forget that Ondine herself is an animation of water, she is speaking water: 'C'est moi, c'est Ondine qui frôle de ces gouttes d'eau', she is these droplets of water. Paradoxically, Ondine and her family are themselves a personification of the missing element.

Even if there are some similarities with the cited texts included in the anthology of Loève-Veimars, the atmosphere of 'Ondine' breaks away from the harmonious and attractive fluctuation of water typical of the other compositions. Adjectives such as 'coassante' (in stark contrast with the 'beau lac endormi') are

¹²² 'Chant des Nymphes', p. 156.

testimonies of Ondine's unsuccessful attempt to produce an inviting metaphor in order to seduce the mortal. Indeed, the adjective 'coassante' leads us to revisit the suggestive impression of the harmonic musicality of water, by evoking the rather unpleasant sound (and image) of a croaking lake. Ondine does not understand the art of human seduction and chooses images of conflict, which could perhaps be inviting if she was trying to attract another puckish sprite, but *helas*, not suitable for a mortal: 'Mon père bat l'eau coassante' and 'mes sœurs [...] se moquent du saule caduc'. This is the depiction of a violent father and of immature and cruel sisters, who spend their time making fun of the elderly. This is certainly not what human beings aspire to, nor does it depict a desirable image of potential in-laws. What Ondine is presenting in the third paragraph is far from an attractive family portrait for the mortal: it is also far from the inviting tranquility and *bonheur* depicted by the nymphs: 'Mortel, notre vie est douce: veux-tu comme nous connaître le bonheur, fuis le trouble et le bruit du monde, et viens demeurer sur les bords solitaires de la mer'.¹²³

Ondine's world is a loud pandemonium, all she has to offer is disruption and chaos, and what is worse is that she is not able to conceal all of this from the mortal in her attempts to seduce him. Added to this, Ondine does not fully grasp the emblematic value of some of the imagery she uses, such as the *aulne* and the *saule*, two legendary trees, which carry a great symbolic meaning, as they are linked to evil spirits.¹²⁴ These trees are here degraded, by becoming the father's weapon, 'branche

¹²³ 'Chant des Nymphes', p. 157.

¹²⁴ Referring to the poem 'L'Heure du sabbat', Poggenburg suggests that 'L'aulne est un arbre qui croît au bord de l'eau faisant donc partie du monde aquatique [...] Les aulnes et les saules sont associés aux esprits malfaisants', and then she recalls the importance of Latouche's *Roi des aulnes*, adaptation of Goethe's *Erkönig*, which Bertrand quoted in two of his epigraphs, one before the poem 'Jean des Tilles': 'C'est le tronc du vieux saule et ses rameaux penchants', note 2, *OC*, p. 328. In

d'aulne', and the personification of an old man, the 'saule caduc et barbu', who, instead of being respected and feared, is mocked by Ondine's equally childish sisters.¹²⁵ In the same way that children cannot value danger, Ondine and her sisters pester evil spirits, while their father 'bat l'eau coassante' probably in a futile attempt to govern his daughters, the Ondines, who run as wild, ill-mannered, and disobedient droplets of water. Confessing all these private family scenes to the mortal is a misjudgment and a failure on the part of Ondine, who ends up producing a grotesque imitation of the attractive *chants* of the *femmes fatales* of the literary tradition.

In this section, through the comparison of 'Ondine' with some of its possible sources of inspiration, I have shown that Bertrand, who often played with sudden reversals and their surprise effect in his *Gaspard de la Nuit*, chose to treat this northern myth with irony and humour. Indeed this composition, inspired by popular motifs of Bertrand's time, presents rather unusual elements, such as the mortal's detached reaction to Ondine's proposal, which moves away from the possible sources. On the one hand, this was perhaps a way of comically rationalising old superstitions but, on the other, it may have been a way of remembering and revaluing this important heritage that was part of a realm of popular myths, which the Romantic generation was reviving. Although the Romantic influences on Bertrand's collection are undeniable, this poet's irony and playfulness is one of the key features of his inventiveness.

Dahan's view the 'saule caduc et barbu' remains, also in 'Ondine', 'emblème de mort et de dégradation', in 'Ondine, ou la tentation luciférienne', p. 171.

¹²⁵ A similar degradation of one of this symbolic elements occurs in 'Jean des Tilles', where the willow becomes the house of a rat, 'le cri de la lavandière effraya dans la souche d'un saule un rat qui filait sa quenouille', *OC*, p. 239.

Conclusion

In this chapter, through my analysis of ‘La Viole de Gamba’ and ‘Ondine’, my aim was to demonstrate that, even though Bertrand drew from themes and cultural references which were popular at his time, he played with them and in so doing produced original compositions, which challenge readers’ interpretation. On some occasions these interpretative challenges are rather explicit, as in the *fantaisie* ‘La Viole de Gamba’, which is evidently fragmented because of its unusual structure, and which is openly playful because of its carnivalesque elements. In this case, the historical approach helps us to understand the possible cultural reasons for its particular themes and organization. In other compositions, the unusual elements are less evident and they can be unveiled only after a closer comparison with other texts, which were possible sources for Bertrand’s *fantaisies*. The comparison with the literary sources demonstrates that Ondine’s *chant* is unusual and that many elements of this composition move away from the other texts. Through the case studies of ‘La Viole de Gamba’ and ‘Ondine’, it is shown that the traditional accusation of unoriginality becomes void, while the consideration of the intertextuality in Bertrand’s collection can be useful, because Bertrand’s creativity becomes all the more apparent whenever his compositions are closely studied alongside their possible sources (both literary and cultural references), which probably influenced his choice of themes.

Chapter Five

Formal Experimentation in *Gaspard de la Nuit*

Introduction: The Prose Poem Was in the Air

‘Depuis cette époque, Voltaire et La Harpe ont déclaré qu’il n’y a point de poème en prose: ils étoient fatigués et dégoûtés par les imitations que l’on avoit faites du *Télémaque*. Mais cela est-il bien juste ? Parce qu’on fait tous les jours de mauvais vers, faut-il condamner tous les vers?’¹

(Chateaubriand, *Les Martyrs*)

In the preceding chapters, I have provided various examples of how the historical and cultural contexts of *Gaspard de la Nuit* inform its composition, in particular, the choice of themes and motifs in Bertrand’s collection and his own reworking of the literary stereotypes of his time. In French literary history, the name of Aloysius Bertrand is still remembered as that of the creator or the precursor of the *poème en prose*, and the themes of his compositions are thus often considered less relevant than his formal choice. To mention a few critics who have considered Bertrand as the creator of this new genre – or, at least, as the first poet who systematically used the *poème en prose*² – in 1959 Suzanne Bernard, drawing on some words of Raymond Schwab, affirmed ‘Je crois toutefois que *Gaspard de la Nuit* restera [...] «une articulation éternelle de l’histoire littéraire» et cela précisément parce qu’il y a une poésie de la prose qui commence à *Gaspard* parce que Bertrand est le véritable créateur [...] du poème en prose comme *genre littéraire*’;³ in 1975 Corbat suggested, ‘sensible à première lecture, le mérite immédiat de *Gaspard de la Nuit* découle de sa

¹ Chateaubriand, ‘Préface à la première édition’, in *Œuvres romanesques et voyages*, ed. by. Maurice Regard, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1969), II, p. 40.

² René Lalou declared: ‘L’originalité d’Aloysius Bertrand est son emploi systématique du poème en prose’; in *Vers une alchimie lyrique: Sainte-Beuve, Aloysius Bertrand, Gérard de Nerval, Baudelaire. Avec un florilège de ces auteurs* (Paris: Les Arts et le Livre, 1927), p. 44.

³ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, pp. 50-51.

forme. Le nouveau genre de prose qu'il crée consiste surtout en un travail d'orfèvrerie qui bannit les développements faciles de la prose courante';⁴ in 1980 Max Milner opened his preface to *Gaspard de la Nuit* arguing, 'Il est rare d'assister à la naissance d'un genre littéraire. Plus rare encore de pouvoir le rattacher au nom d'un écrivain particulier'.⁵

This view of Bertrand as the creator has often been replaced, or indeed accompanied, by the view of Bertrand as the precursor of the *poème en prose* (or, more generally the precursor of 'une certaine poésie moderne')⁶ a genre that was to be developed only later in the nineteenth century. The role of precursor has traditionally been assigned to the poet of Dijon because of Baudelaire's famous declaration in his *lettre-dédicace* opening *Le Spleen de Paris*: 'J'ai une petite confession à vous faire. C'est en feuilletant pour la vingtième fois au moins le fameux *Gaspard de la Nuit* d'Aloysius Bertrand [...] que l'idée m'est venue de tenter quelque chose d'analogue'.⁷ Baudelaire's confession, which for a long time was decisive in rescuing Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* from oblivion, has thus also had the inconvenience of inviting a comparison between the work of Bertrand, written in the 1820s and 1830s, and Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris* written more than thirty years later and published posthumously only in 1869.

⁴ Henri Corbat, *Hantise et imagination*, p. 150.

⁵ Max Milner, 'Préface', p. 7. Later in the same preface, Milner is careful to hedge his declaration, recalling the importance of other literary works in the development of the prose poem and names figures such as Fénelon, Senancour, Chateaubriand (*Atala*) as examples as well as the crucial importance of translations and pseudo-translations of *ballades*.

⁶ Suzanne Bernard concludes her section on Bertrand by writing: 'ce poète méconnu, ce parent pauvre du romantisme apparaît comme le précurseur d'une certaine poésie moderne', in *Le Poème en prose*, p. 71.

⁷ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 229.

This perspective on Bertrand can often be found in general works, such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias, consider for example this passage taken from the entry ‘poème en prose’ in the *Dictionnaire du XIXe Siècle européen*:

En 1842, plus d’un an après la mort d’Aloysius Bertrand, la publication de *Gaspard de la nuit* inaugurerait un genre nouveau, le poème en prose.

Mais tout en revendiquant l’exemple de Bertrand, Baudelaire ne tarda pas à le dépasser.⁸

Bertrand’s innovation is thus often downplayed because of this comparison with later poets and works. In the first chapter of his study, Marvin Richards, examining this problem in more detail, remarks: ‘placed at the beginning [...] Bertrand occupies the same space as a preface, coming before the real story, as a starting point for the narrative, but not really taking part in it’.⁹ This is often the case even in recent publications, as observed by Dominique Combe in his article ‘Le Cercle herméneutique du genre’: ‘Comment le montrent les éditions et les publications, jusqu’aux plus récentes, le nom de Bertrand dans l’histoire de la poésie française est ainsi inévitablement associé à celui de Baudelaire, et donc à la « naissance du poème en prose », à la « généalogie » où à la « genèse d’un genre »’.¹⁰

Because of this rather unfair comparison with later authors, Bertrand’s work might seem outdated. Indeed, the themes of *Gaspard de la Nuit* were already out of fashion by the time Bertrand’s *Gaspard* was rediscovered by authors such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Huysmans. In order to examine Bertrand’s contribution in a fairer way and to avoid this anachronism, we need to consider the ‘horizon of

⁸ ‘Poème en prose’ by Bertrand Marchal, in Ambrière Madeleine (ed.), *Dictionnaire du XIXe siècle européen* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp. 920-21.

⁹ Marvin Richards, *Without Rhyme or Reason*, p. 29.

¹⁰ Dominique Combe, ‘Le Cercle herméneutique du genre’, *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit*, pp. 229-38 (pp. 232-33).

expectations' of readers at the time of the composition of the *fantaisies*.¹¹ From this point of view, even calling Bertrand's *fantaisies* 'poèmes en prose' is already to some extent anachronistic, because this term refers to a post-Baudelairian critical context.¹² An example of an anachronism of this kind is Jean Palou's comment on Bertrand's poem 'Un Rêve', 'Ce beau poème est à notre avis très inférieur aux récits de rêves donnés par les surréalistes'.¹³

In more recent years, however, thanks to the publication of general studies on the problem of the origins of the *poème en prose*, there is a greater awareness of the importance of the historical development of this genre and, especially, on the importance of considering the literary context that made this development possible.¹⁴ For example, in the introduction to her study, Vincent-Munnia underlines that: 'Les premiers poèmes en prose doivent [...] être analysés et définis génériquement dans le contexte historique et littéraire de leur production',¹⁵ and Bonenfant's volume on Bertrand supports this position by remarking that 'la contextualisation historique est essentielle lorsqu'il s'agit de comprendre le fonctionnement générique des textes et de leurs seuils'.¹⁶ The study of Bertrand's *fantaisies* in the original context of their creation has opened many interesting research avenues. To name just one example, Nicolas Wanlin, advancing the hypothesis of a 'popular' background for the *fantaisies*, has proposed the research path of 'la chanson' as 'non seulement le

¹¹ The 'horizon of expectations' is one of the main concepts of Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory, as set out in his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*.

¹² Dominique Combe underlines an important aspect related to the 'dénomination générique', 'La terminologie, loin d'être une pure et contingente convention, une simple étiquette, apparaît comme une condition essentielle de la conscience critique, qui constitue l'horizon d'attente dans lequel s'inventent les genres historiques', in 'Le Cercle herméneutique du genre', p. 237.

¹³ Jean Palou, 'Introduction', p. 38.

¹⁴ For example, Natalie Vincent-Munnia's *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose* and Christian Leroy's *La Poésie en prose française du XVIIe siècle à nos jours*. More specifically on Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* is Luc Bonenfant's *Les Avatars romantiques*. See Introduction for more details on these volumes.

¹⁵ Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Bonenfant, *Les Avatars romantiques*, p. 209.

modèle poétique qui sert à l'élaboration de *Gaspard de la Nuit*, mais aussi la source d'une valeur esthétique marginale qui cherche à obtenir la reconnaissance'.¹⁷ The hypothesis of the 'valeur populaire' of *Gaspard de la Nuit* is also supported by the fact that the use of prose was more widespread in 'popular' literature than in 'élite' literature at the time, and Bertrand, who used a great quantity of popular material in his epigraphs (such as *chansons* and proverbs), was highly influenced by this context of his time.¹⁸ It would therefore be limiting to analyse Bertrand's composition only in light of later developments of the *poème en prose*. In so doing, other research avenues based on a wider study of Bertrand's own context risk being overlooked.

Unlike those studies interested in Bertrand's work as a phase in the historical and theoretical evolution of prose poetry as a genre, the aim here is not to situate Bertrand's *fantaisies* in the wider theory and history of the prose poem, but rather to analyse Bertrand's own and unique synthesis of the literary material available at his time and his own poetic experimentation. The aim is to show that Bertrand shared the Romantic understanding that poetry does not merely rely on its form (verse), but it is rather a matter of substance.¹⁹ In the first part of this chapter, I shall provide some

¹⁷ Nicolas Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 199. The increasing interest in the *chanson populaire* in the France of the 1820s is demonstrated by articles published in *Le Globe*, such as the series of articles dedicated to the 'Chants populaires de la France', the first of which appeared in *Le Globe*, 28 April 1829 (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), vii, pp. 271-72.

¹⁸ The critic Lambert suggests that: 'La littérature populaire, quant à elle, est libre d'opter pour les formes qui lui conviennent le mieux, car elle échappe aux règles, dans la mesure où elle renonce à s'insérer dans le grand Art', in José Lambert, 'Vers et prose à l'époque romantique, ou la hiérarchie des genres dans les lettres françaises', in *Du romantisme au surnaturalisme. Hommage à Claude Pichois* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1985), pp. 39-55 (pp. 40-41).

¹⁹ Vincent-Munnia recalls this generally agreed change in the conception of poetry on the part of 'les modernes': 'La poésie n'est plus un « attribut », elle devient, selon une conception toute moderne, une « substance ». Elle est donc réalisable dans des formes diverses, la prose notamment', in *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose*, pp. 59-60. Yves Vadé stresses the importance of a similar process: 'l'apparition du poème en prose et sa reconnaissance rapide comme genre poétique marque une dissociation, devenue irréversible, entre la poésie et la versification. On peut désormais se prévaloir du titre de poète [...] sans pratiquer l'art des vers', in *Le Poème en prose et ses territoires*, p. 173. Before Vincent-Munnia and Vadé, Roland Barthes already indicated that: 'La Poésie [moderne] n'est plus alors une Prose décorée d'ornements ou amputée de libertés. [...] Elle n'est plus attribut, elle est substance, et par

examples of this change in the poetic mindset of the Romantic generation, taken from *Le Provincial* of Dijon. In so doing, I shall propose that this magazine informed not only Bertrand's provincial pride and his choice of themes²⁰ – as shown in the previous chapters – but also that it had a crucial impact on his formal choices.

Possible anachronisms will be avoided by abandoning, and thereby challenging, the common view of Bertrand as the inventor and/or the precursor of the *poème en prose*. In the second part of this chapter, I shall investigate the possible reasons for what seems to be an unusual formal choice; while analysing and exemplifying the wider generic mobility which characterises 'le champ générique romantique',²¹ through specific case studies of little-known works circulating at Bertrand's time. Passages of Bertrand's *fantaisies* will be examined alongside other extracts of contemporary texts that are similarly organised in short paragraphs of prose, serving to highlight what makes these texts different to poetic prose, which itself was already not a novelty in the 1820s and 1830s, as it was already circulating well before then.²² The aim of my approach is to shed light on the subtle dialectic between tradition and innovation within the literary community at Bertrand's time. It will be a more empirical way of understanding what critics mean when they say that at Bertrand's time the prose poem was 'in the air',²³ offering a way of understanding

conséquent elle peut très bien renoncer aux signes, car elle porte sa nature en elle, et n'a que faire de signaler à l'extérieur son identité.', in 'Y a-t-il une écriture poétique?', *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 40.

²⁰ For instance, Suzanne Bernard shows that Bertrand transposed an article published in *Le Spectateur* into his *fantaisie* 'Octobre', demonstrating that newspapers provided the poet with useful material for his compositions, in *Le Poème en prose*, pp. 61-62.

²¹ To borrow the expression 'champ générique' as used by Jean Molino: 'Il y a donc, à un moment donné un champ générique avec des genres plus ou moins définis, entretenant entre eux des relations multiples et connaissant un plus ou moins succès', in *Poétique*, 93 (1993), p. 12. This expression is borrowed by Bonenfant, in *Les Avatars romantiques*, p. 210.

²² This is extensively studied in the first sections of Vincent-Munnia's and Leroy's volumes on the historical development of the *poème en prose*.

²³ For example Marvin Richards recalls that 'The prose poem was indeed in the air', in *Without Rhyme or Reason*, p. 14.

Bertrand's own formal choice, without anachronistically thinking about later examples of prose poems (by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, or Mallarmé), which still dominate the field today.

What is Poetry?: The Theoretical Debate in Le Provincial of Dijon

‘Vos poèmes morts et savamment versifiés,
je les compare à des cadavres embaumés’²⁴
(Charles Brugnot, *Le Provincial*, 20 July
1828)

One of the main changes in the conception of poetry by the new generation of Romantic poets was that poetry did not rely on verse, but rather, on its substance. Even if it proved difficult to define what this substance was, some of the main literary figures of the time supported and promoted this change in poetic vision. In his 1822 ‘Préface’ to the *Odes et ballades*, for example, Victor Hugo shared with his readers a firm statement which had a great impact on the new generation of poets:

Le domaine de la poésie est illimité [...] Les beaux ouvrages de poésie en tout genre, soit en vers, soit en prose, qui ont honoré notre siècle, ont révélé cette vérité [...] la poésie n’est pas dans la forme des idées, mais dans les idées elles-mêmes. La poésie c’est tout ce qu’il y a d’intime dans tout.²⁵

In the same years, this reflection upon the nature of poetry was exported from the capital to Dijon, where the young admirers of Hugo were themselves discussing the possibility of poetry without verse. In *Le Provincial* on 10 July 1828, for example, Charles Brugnot, wrote a review of Chateaubriand’s *Poésies* on the occasion of the publication of the twelfth volume of Chateaubriand’s *Œuvres complètes*. Brugnot’s declarations in this review show that by this time poets close to Bertrand already

²⁴ Charles Brugnot, ‘Poésies de M. de Chateaubriand’, *Le Provincial*, 20 July 1828, pp. 119-22 (p. 119).

²⁵ *VHOP*, p. 265.

understood that poetry can exist without the need for verse. This was the main argument of Brugnot's article, which began with this statement:

Jusqu'à notre XIX^e siècle, on appela *Poésie* des rimes telles quelles, encadrées dans un mètre. [...] Quelques littérateurs se sont avisés de croire que la poésie n'étoit pas tout entière dans des consonances, et qu'elle pouvoit même exister à la rigueur sans cadence uniforme, sans hémistiches. Bernardin de St. Pierre, Mme de Staël, M. de Chateaubriand commencèrent la nouvelle école; ils écrivirent en prose: et, nonobstant la forme, nous les avons nommés de grands poètes.²⁶

Brugnot then raises a crucial problem, 'Qu'est-ce que donc que vous entendez par poésie?', showing that such questions about the nature of poetry were central to discussion in Dijon, as well as in Paris. Indeed this literary review is one of the longest articles ever to appear in *Le Provincial*.

In Brugnot's review, the list of questions continues with: 'est-on poète en prose, n'est-on poète qu'en vers? Et comment arrive-t-on à être l'un ou l'autre?'. It should be remembered that these were very divisive issues, which separated not only the *classiques* from the *romantiques*, but that caused internal controversies even amongst the *romantiques* themselves, even years later. For example, in 1834, Alfred de Vigny abruptly declared 'Il n'y a point de Poète en prose',²⁷ and in 1842 his opinion on this matter had not changed. Commenting on the *prose poétique*, Vigny confessed: 'Ce qui fait qu'elle me répugne à l'excès, c'est le sentiment qu'elle me laisse de son allure fausse, assez pareille à celle [d'un muet] qui voudrait chanter [...] La poésie n'est que dans le vers et non ailleurs. Des grandes écrivains ont eu des velléités poétiques mais n'étaient pas poètes'.²⁸ Unlike this later view, Brugnot openly addresses the issue of poetry without verse, engaging in a discussion of the

²⁶ *Le Provincial*, 20 July 1828, p. 119.

²⁷ Alfred de Vigny, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by F. Baldensperger (Paris: Gallimard- Pléiade, 1948-49), I (1948), p. 572. (Hereafter referred as *AVOC*)

²⁸ *AVOC*, I, p. 573.

origins of poetry and its essential link to music, the poet being defined as ‘avant tout musicien’. Quoting directly from Chateaubriand’s preface, he adds: ‘J’ai long-temps fait des vers avant de descendre à la prose [...] je ne les ai quittés que pour exprimer plus rapidement des vérités que je croyais utiles’. In this quotation, prose is seen as a more direct means of communication and expression than verse, which, in turn, can sometimes be seen as an artificial construction.²⁹

Other examples of this change in the conception of poetry in Dijon can also be found in *Le Provincial* on 24 September 1828, which contains Brugnot’s third article about the ‘Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au seizième siècle’.³⁰ Here the poet declares that ‘la poésie n’est là (dans le rythme), qu’en vêtements, en corps, et non pas en âme’. Entering the discussion about the new théâtre, as promoted by the ‘Préface de Cromwell’, Brugnot fiercely supported the abandonment of verse: ‘Est-il besoin d’ajouter que le dialogue du drame n’exige pas une rigueur de rimes aussi grande que la strophe lyrique? Et qui n’en sent pas la raison?’. The names of Victor Hugo and Sainte-Beuve were here suggested as models to follow; the new manifestoes for the Romantics are indeed proposed as two works by these important figures: ‘nous renvoyons les artistes aux deux manifestes des Romantiques, la poétique savante mise en tête de Cromwell, et l’ouvrage de M. Sainte-Beuve, où se trouve consigné le dernier mot de l’école. [...]

²⁹ In his article, Brugnot was careful to identify themes and imagery of Chateaubriand’s early poems in verse (such as ‘L’hiver’), reappearing in Chateaubriand’s prose: ‘Nous retrouvons ici des rêveuses descriptions que le noble auteur a depuis transportées dans sa prose’. For the young poets in Dijon, as for many other young poets in the capital and other provinces, Chateaubriand’s work represented a fundamental step towards the understanding that poetry did not rely solely on verse. Chateaubriand was indeed seen as a poet in prose.

³⁰ ‘Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au seizième siècle suivi des œuvres de Ronsard; avec notice, notes et commentaires par C-A Sainte-Beuve’, *Le Provincial*, 24 September 1828.

Le poète n'est pas plus un grammairien qu'un architecte n'est un maçon; celui-ci taille avec son équerre et son compas; le second bâtit avec son génie'.³¹

These articles by Brugnot clearly demonstrate that poets in Dijon were not insulated from the wider change in poetic conception occurring in France at the time. The context of Bertrand's poetic development was thus characterised by a progressive understanding that the value of poetry relies on something very different than its mere form. It should also be noticed that Hugo's 'Préface de Cromwell' greatly influenced Bertrand who, in an article of literary critique published in the 'Littérature' section of *Le Provincial* on 17 September 1828, drew on Hugo's conception of the *drame* as the literary symbol of modern times:

Les temps primitifs étaient pleins de faits, avons-nous dit et les temps civilisés sont pleins de paroles. Venons au but: l'épopée de la barbarie doit être lyrique, parce qu'elle célèbre des combats; l'épopée de la civilisation doit être dramatique, parce qu'elle peint des sociétés. Et ajouterons-nous, si l'épopée lyrique doit être en vers, l'épopée dramatique doit être en prose.³²

It is important to glean as much as possible from Bertrand's short remarks, as he did not leave us longer theoretical reflections. In the above quotation, Bertrand is reflecting upon the possibility of re-discussing literary conventions whilst conferring on prose a role that had traditionally been the sole prerogative of verse.³³

The realm of new possibilities of prose, however, was yet to be defined, and Bertrand himself had difficulty describing the form of his *fantaisies*. In his attempts to do so, he oscillated between the comparison with poetry in verse, and the invention of a new kind of prose. On the one hand, in his final letter to his friend, the

³¹ Could this sentence have influenced the composition of 'Le Maçon'?

³² 'Pélage ou Léon et les Asturies sauvés du joug des Mahométans', in *OC*, pp. 603-09 (p. 604). Some critics consider Hugo's famous preface as one of the main points of reference for *Gaspard de la Nuit*, such as Jean Richer who ironically declared that Bertrand's collection, 'C'est comme un exercice sur la Préface de Cromwell!', in Jean Richer, 'Préface', p. 5.

³³ For more on the phenomenon of the *épopée* in prose, refer to Vincent-Munnia, *Les Premiers Poèmes en prose*, especially the pages on Fénelon's *Télémaque*, pp. 33-40.

sculptor David d'Anger, Bertrand confesses: '*Gaspard de la Nuit*, ce livre de mes douces prédilections, où j'ai essayé de créer un nouveau genre de prose'.³⁴ On the other, in his 'Instructions à M. le Metteur en pages', Bertrand borrows poetic language to define his compositions and, stressing the importance of the white spaces, he states:

Règle générale – Blanchir comme si le texte était de la poésie.³⁵

[...]

M. le metteur en pages remarquera que *chaque pièce* est divisée en *quatre, cinq, six*, et même *sept alinéas ou couplets*. Il jettera de *larges blancs* entre *ces couplets* comme si c'étaient des strophes en vers.³⁶

Bertrand's lexical choices in these passages are a sign of the difficulty of defining the unusual form of his *fantaisies*, a difficulty felt within a context of questioning of old poetic categories, by a poet who rallies to the *romantiques*.

This is only one symptom of a more general difficulty that started to become more evident from the early nineteenth century: that of classification by genre. To mention one small example of this difficulty, in an article about Nodier's 'Smarra' appearing in *L'Album* in 1821 (a literary magazine close to the position of the *classiques* and therefore supporting more traditional literary conventions) Nodier's 'prose poétique' caused some problems to the reviewer, who declared:

³⁴ *OC*, p. 900.

³⁵ *OC*, p. 373. This sentence has been unanimously judged to be of crucial importance by every critic who has considered Bertrand's composition from a formal point of view. Commenting on this passage Poggenburg recalls 'non seulement ... il considèrait ses fantaisies comme des poèmes, mais fait de lui un des premiers à utiliser l'espace et la typographie comme source de poésie', in *OC*, p. 384.

³⁶ Italics in the original, *OC*, p. 373.

Dans quelle classe ranger cette production? Est-ce un poème en prose, est-ce un roman, un conte à la manière des Orientaux? Nous serions embarrassés d'en définir le genre.³⁷

If today Nodier's 'Smarra' is generally defined as a *conte*, it should be recalled that this text is, first of all, a 'pseudo-translation'.³⁸ The original title page – published by the Parisian Ponthieu in 1821 – shows the title 'Smarra ou les Démons de la Nuit, songes romantiques, traduits de l'esclavon par Ch. Nodier'.³⁹ Nodier, the 'pseudo-translator' of this composition, made the task of deciding the genre of this text even more complex, as he included various subheadings; after a short 'prologue' the story is divided into parts entitled, for instance, 'Le récit', 'L'épisode', and 'L'épilogue'.

The challenge to classification represented by a text like 'Smarra' is even more evident if we consider that, in the same years, very normative studies were still supporting a rigid separation between the realm of poetry and that of prose, as two quite different spheres of literature. This is the case, for example, with Pierre Fontanier's *Les Figures du Discours*, published in the same period and adopted as a textbook in secondary schools at the time (*Manuel classique pour l'étude des tropes, ou Élément de la science des mots* in 1821 and *Des figures autres que tropes* in 1827). At the same time that the Romantics were experimenting with genres, this milestone of academic classical rhetoric provided readers with a systematic classification of all rhetorical figures and prescribed a set of explicit rules for the user. In his study, Fontanier addressed the question of the use of rhetorical figures in

³⁷ Luc Bonenfant, *Les Avatars romantiques*, p. 219. Commenting on this passage, Bonenfant underlines that: 'En écrivant que le texte est peut-être un « conte à la manière des Orientaux », le critique met en effet l'accent sur le caractère fantastique du texte plutôt que sur sa forme'. This aspect reflects the impossibility of finding a suitable generic category and the attempt to find an answer elsewhere such as in elements more related to the content of the work. A similar attitude can be detected when many critics called Bertrand's *fantaisies* 'petites ballades en prose', as I shall show in the last section of this chapter.

³⁸ So does Pierre-Georges Castex in his edition of Nodier's *Contes*.

³⁹ Charles Nodier, *Contes*, p. 44.

prose writing and, although he affirmed that such use is a natural feature of everyday life:

Les Tropes peuvent sans doute convenir à la prose [...] puisque nous n'avons pas besoin d'étude pour les apprendre, et qu'ils se glissent à notre insu jusque dans la conversation la plus familière.

Soon after he clarified that:

Mais il n'est pas moins vrai que la prose, lors même que, par son élégance ou par sa noblesse, elle s'éloigne le plus du langage commun, en est toujours par sa nature et par sa forme plus rapprochée que la poésie. Elle doit donc en général être moins ornée que celle-ci, et, par conséquent, moins abonder en Tropes.⁴⁰

These declarations by Fontanier are based on the belief that *prose* and *poésie* serve two completely different purposes and should belong to two different realms: 'la prose a pour objet [...] la vérité réelle, qui est fixe et invariable; et dans l'éloquence, l'apparence de la vérité', while, on the other hand, 'la poésie n'a pour objet que la vraisemblance [...] Elle doit beaucoup plus s'occuper d'exciter la sensibilité, de frapper l'imagination, et, par conséquent, elle doit beaucoup plus s'attacher à *figurer*, à *colorier* son langage, à le mettre en images, en tableaux, à en faire une sorte de peinture animée et parlante'.⁴¹ It is clear that texts such as Bertrand's *fantaisies* undermine this distinction – many of the compositions in *Gaspard de la Nuit* could even be defined as a 'peinture animée et parlante'! This brief example of the academic theoretical background of the time will help us to better assess the innovative character of the composition in the coming section, which will examine more specific examples of the generic mobility in the 1820s and 1830s in anthologies of Romantic texts. This will permit us to provide more concrete examples of the

⁴⁰ Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, introduction by Gérard Genette (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), p. 180.

⁴¹ Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, pp. 180-81.

literary context, which might have sparked the idea of the *fantaisies* in Bertrand and to assess the extent to which he can be considered as a formal innovator.

Challenging the Boundaries Between Prose and Poetry: Examples of the Romantic Generic Mobility in the 1820s and 1830s

‘Je me sens poète, non pas seulement quand
un heureux choix de rimes ou de syllabes
harmonieuses, quand une heureuse réunion
d’images éblouit les auditeurs, mais quand
mon âme s’élève’.⁴²

(Mme de Staël, *Corinne*, 1807)

The year 1823 saw the publication of the *Tablettes romantiques*,⁴³ a collection of compositions by both lesser and better known authors, including Chateaubriand, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Victor Hugo, and Lamartine, a collection which can be considered as the first volume of the periodical series *Les Annales romantiques* published between 1825 and 1834. The *Tablettes romantiques*, published in the 1820s, had a pioneering value because they showed the genesis of tendencies that would develop later in the century. In his bibliographical study on Romantic keepsakes and collections, Lachèvre remarks in the following terms on the groundbreaking importance of the *Tablettes*:

Il y avait quelque chose de changé dans notre poésie; les *Tablettes romantiques* en mettaient la preuve incontestable sous les yeux du public. Parues six mois avant la fondation de la *Muse Française*, elles sont la première œuvre collective qui arbore ouvertement le drapeau du romantisme.⁴⁴

⁴² Madame de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, ed. by Simone Balayé (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2000), p. 57.

⁴³ *Les Tablettes romantiques. Recueil orné de quatre portraits inédits et d'une vignette, lithographiés par MM. Colin et Boulanger* (Paris: Persan, 1823).

⁴⁴ Henri Lachèvre, *Bibliographie sommaire des keepsakes et autres recueils collectifs de la période romantique 1823-1848* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), I, p. 6.

Two crucial points can be observed from this passage by Lachèvre: the first is that the *Tablettes* demonstrated that something had definitely changed in French poetry; the second is that this volume openly defined itself as ‘romantique’.

Starting with the first point, the change in French poetry at the time is demonstrated, on the one hand, by the choice of themes in the compositions of the *Tablettes* – a fascination with the Middle Ages and with northern mythology, the revival of Christianity, to name but a few – on the other hand, this volume showed a remarkable ‘generic mobility’. Indeed this collection contains a great variety of genres, combining different kinds of compositions in verse (named, for example, ‘ode’, ‘élégie’, ‘chant’, ‘poème’) and pieces in prose of different lengths (named, for example, ‘fragment’ and ‘conte’). Of particular note is that some of these compositions in prose were written in what could perhaps be better defined as ‘prose poétique’; these texts are particularly interesting to examine in relation to Bertrand’s *fantaisies*. Indeed, not only were these texts circulating in the 1820s and 1830s – the years of Bertrand’s poetic development and writing – but some of these compositions also appeared as short, independent, and self-contained texts, much like his own *fantaisies*.⁴⁵ Moreover, the indiscriminate presence of pieces in prose together with pieces in verse in the *Tablettes romantiques*, and in the *Annales romantiques*, can be seen as an early sign of the progressive elevation of prose to the realm of serious literature and, especially, to the realm of poetry. Later in the century, this process resulted in a ‘changement dans la hiérarchie des genres’, to borrow the words of the

⁴⁵ Hermine Riffaterre clarified in these terms some of the main differences between the ‘prose poétique’ and the ‘poèmes en prose’, where these last were defined as ‘formes condensées, contraintes d’un cadre étroit’, while ‘la prose poétique [...] est diffuse alors que le poème en vers et le poème en prose sont concentrés’, in Hermine Riffaterre, *L’Orphisme dans la poésie romantique. Thèmes et style surnaturalistes* (Paris: Nizet, 1970), p. 33.

critic Lambert.⁴⁶ The years of Bertrand's poetic development and writing hence coincided with the years of this gradual change in the literary mindset of a generation of young writers, which it stands to reason would have had an important influence on this poet's formal experimentation.

The second important remark in the quotation from Lachèvre is the fact that the *Tablettes* proudly defined themselves as 'romantiques', a term repeated many times in the introductory pages of the volume. In the 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', which opens the collection, the publisher chose to remain neutral in the dispute between *classiques* and *romantiques*. Referring to himself in the third person he declared his intentions in these terms: 'il a voulu mettre le public en état de juger: les fragmens divers que renferme ce livre, tant qu'en vers qu'en prose, ont presque tous les caractères que les critiques désintéressés semblent assigner à la littérature romantique'.⁴⁷ The volume is then opened by an anthology of Romantic milestones, containing abstracts of such texts as 'Du Genre Romantique' by Charles Nodier and 'De la poésie classique et de la poésie romantique' by Madame de Staël. The very first pages of the *Tablettes* even contain a short text mocking the old school of *les classiques*: this text, entitled 'Le Classique', is signed by 'M Hoffman' and has the sound of an epitaph full of irony:

La littérature classique est malade depuis longtemps; elle l'est parce que tout finit dans ce monde; elle l'est parce qu'après avoir atteint l'apogée de la vie intellectuelle, il ne lui restait plus qu'à descendre. Mais qu'on ne se méprenne pas sur la nature des barbares qui lui font la guerre, elle ne doit peut-être qu'à leurs attaques maladroites le reste de vigueur qu'elle fait encore paraître.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ José Lambert, 'Vers et prose à l'époque romantique', p. 52.

⁴⁷ 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', in *Tablettes romantiques*, pp. v-vi.

⁴⁸ *Tablettes romantiques*, p. 1.

The pioneering value of this anthology is thus stated in its very first pages. This Romantic manifesto, overtly supporting the need for a renewal in literature, should be considered as an act of self-awareness on the part of a new generation of poets, including Bertrand.⁴⁹ After all, some of the contributors to the *Tablettes*, namely Chateaubriand and Hugo, were those same authors who, as shown in the previous chapters, had had a great influence on the poet of Dijon.

Short Self-Contained Texts in Prose

‘Ainsi chaque œuvre nouvelle est inévitablement située dans l’histoire du champ, c’est-à-dire dans l’espace historiquement constitué des œuvres coexistantes et, par-là, concourantes, qui dessinent, dans leurs relations mutuelles, l’espace des prises de position possibles, prolongements, dépassements, ruptures’.⁵⁰
(Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Le Champ littéraire’)

As briefly mentioned above, the *Tablettes romantiques* and the *Annales romantiques* also included some short compositions in prose, for example ‘Le Hulan, Chant élégiaque, imité du polonais’ and ‘Le Songe d’absence. Fragment’. These texts were collected together with pieces in verse, in volumes that proudly and openly termed themselves as ‘romantiques’. Before looking more closely at some textual examples, we first require some clear parameters to help define what constitutes a *poème en prose*, even if such parameters may fail to apply to the target texts. Suzanne Bernard provides us with a helpful starting point when she lists the main characteristics of this form: ‘Le poème en prose [...] suppose une volonté consciente d’organisation du

⁴⁹ It is likely that Bertrand knew at least some of the compositions contained in the *Tablettes romantiques* and perhaps even had the chance to get hold of a copy during his time at the *Société d’Études* in Dijon.

⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Le Champ littéraire’, p. 25.

poème: il doit être un tout organique, autonome, ce qui permet de le distinguer de la prose poétique'.⁵¹ Expanding on Bernard, in the second part of his study, Luc Bonenfant, proposes three main critical categories characterising Bertrand's texts, namely 'brièveté', 'densité', and 'unité'.⁵² Another important critical tool to support our subsequent analysis is borrowed from Dominique Combe, in his study *Poésie et récit*, where he states: 'Il faut donc attendre l'œuvre d'Aloysius Bertrand pour que le genre se distingue vraiment de la prose: c'est alors que le mode narratif est, sinon abandonné, du moins remis en question par la composition du poème, confirmant l'incompatibilité du poétique avec le narratif'.⁵³ Starting from Combe's remark, our aim will be to understand what constitutes this *mise en question* of the 'mode naratif' and to find specific examples of this process in the texts under analysis. However, in my examination, the separation between the 'narratif' and the 'poétique' will be considered as a dynamic and complex process, heeding Michael Sheringham's warning: 'S'il est forte utile de garder l'idée d'une tension entre ces deux principes, il ne peut être que réducteur d'établir le dosage exact de poétique et du narratif dans tel texte précis'.⁵⁴

The *Tablettes romantiques* contain texts reflecting Suzanne Bernard's definition of the prose poem as a 'tout organique, autonome', such as the aforementioned composition 'Le Hulan, Chant élégiaque, imité du polonais' by Pélicier (a text consisting of eight paragraphs in prose). A passage of this text reads:

⁵¹ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose*, p. 14.

⁵² These three labels are also the main titles of the three chapters composing the second part of Bonenfant's study: 'Brièveté(s)', 'Densités', and 'Unités', *Les Avatars romantiques*, pp. 99, 131, and 173.

⁵³ Dominique Combe, *Poésie et récit. Une rhétorique des genres* (Paris: Corti, 1989), p. 94.

⁵⁴ Michael Sheringham, 'Nouvelle et poème en prose: « Mademoiselle Bistouri » de Baudelaire', in *La Nouvelle hier et aujourd'hui*, ed. by in Gratton and Imbert (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 85-93 (p. 86).

«Ce n'est pas la prière du matin que l'airain de nos temples rappelle aux cœurs religieux; il annonce l'entrée d'un injurieux vainqueur dans la patrie des Jagellons.

»Viens, ô mon coursier fidèle! nourri comme moi dans l'Ukraine! celui qui du milieu des plus sanglantes mêlées sut me dérober à la mort, doit aujourd'hui me soustraire à l'ignominie.

»Pour la première fois tu vas porter un maître désarmé, car j'ai refusé de souiller ma lance des couleurs étrangères; pour la première fois tu vas éviter l'ennemi, car il ne vient plus pour combattre.»

Ainsi disait le Hulan; et, dans sa course précipitée, il avait déjà vu décroître les remparts impuissans de Praga. Il y jette un dernier regard. Partout flotte le drapeau Moscovite; partout a disparu l'aigle blanche du Polonais; partout?..... Non! regardez au casque du hulan.⁵⁵

What kind of a composition is 'Le Hulan'? It presents itself as an imitation of a *chant* in Polish, but this could simply be a literary cliché. Indeed, nowhere do there appear precise references to the original Polish version. Even after first reading, it is clear that this is not in the usual 'unmarked' prose circulating at the time, in other writings such as the *roman*, for example. The first and third paragraphs of the passage above, to note one difference, consist of only one sentence. These paragraphs are someone's direct speech, probably that of 'Le Hulan' of the title, which is later confirmed: 'Ainsi disait le Hulan'. Because of its division into short paragraphs, the organisation of this text appears more similar to that of a poem divided into stanzas. Both the brevity of this text and the shortness of its paragraphs undermine the 'mode narratif' (to borrow Combe's parameter). Indeed, even if it is still possible to determine a certain plot in 'Le Hulan', it is also clear that much information remains missing and that there are many narrative gaps to be filled in by the reader.

The very beginning of 'Le Hulan', for example, is a sudden declaration which signals the absence of important background information: 'Ce n'est pas la prière du matin que l'airain de nos temples rappelle aux cœurs religieux'. Here we can note

⁵⁵ *Tablettes romantiques*, pp. 268-69.

that some incipits in Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* show stark similarities with this passage, for instance, 'Ce n'était pas quelque tableau de l'école flamande, un David-Téniers, un Breughel d'Enfer, enfumé à n'y pas voir le diable', in 'Le Bibliophile',⁵⁶ 'Ce n'est point avec le froc et le chapelet, c'est avec le tambourin de basque et l'habit de fou', in 'La Chanson du masque',⁵⁷ and 'Ce n'est point ici qu'on respire la mousse des chênes, et les bourgerons du peuplier', in 'Sur les Rochers de Chèvremorte'.⁵⁸ This technique used both in 'Le Hulan' and by Bertrand, in the above examples, creates a sense of suspense and anticipation, thus contrasting with the linear development of the narration.⁵⁹

Beyond these linguistic resemblances, there are also structural similarities between many of Bertrand's *fantaisies* and 'Le Hulan'. As already indicated above, the first three paragraphs of 'Le Hulan' each consist of a single sentence. An analysis of the compositions in *Gaspard de la Nuit* reveals that this is a general tendency in Bertrand's collection, indeed so much so that the rare examples when this does not occur are easier to single out than the opposite occurrences.⁶⁰ This structure also characterised other texts circulating at the time, such as 'Le Chant de la Naïade' – contained in Loève-Veimars's *Ballades, légendes et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse*, which we considered as one of the possible sources for

⁵⁶ OC, p. 157.

⁵⁷ OC, p. 203.

⁵⁸ OC, p. 243.

⁵⁹ In *Gaspard de la Nuit* this sense of suspense is also created in the three central paragraphs of the *fantaisie* 'La Chambre gothique' opening with 'Si ce n'était que', in OC, pp.165-66. Bertrand used this technique in one of his journalistic writing of *Le Patriote de la Côte-d'Or*. It was in the review of the *Voyages en Bourgogne* (mentioned in Chapter 2), which was written as if it was a *conte*. This review opens with the lines 'Ce n'était pas un manuscrit d'un papier [...] Hélas non! ce n'était pas cela. C'était un cahier de charmantes lithographies', in OC, p. 609-10.

⁶⁰ This does not occur, for instance, in the *fantaisie* 'Les Lépreux', in 'Les Chroniques' section of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Bertrand, however, paid less attention to the formal organisation of the compositions included in this section, as he declared in his instruction to the typesetter, OC, p. 373. The use of one full sentence per paragraph does not occur in those paragraphs consisting of direct speech, as I shall show below.

‘Ondine’ in the fourth chapter. In ‘Le Chant de la Naïade’ every paragraph consists of only one sentence. Consider the first two:

Ma demeure est au sein de la vague; le lis d'eau est mon lit; et les perles les plus brillantes que roulent les rivières, sont enlacées autour de mon sein et de ma tête.

Le poisson nage avec indolence auprès de ma couche; souvent ses nageoires frémissantes effleurent mon front, et ses esprits s'exhalent en silence vers moi, tandis que le flot roule doucement au-dessus de lui.⁶¹

In Bertrand's work, this pattern creates the conditions for interesting stylistic and rhythmic effects. In some of Bertrand's compositions, for instance, the full stop closing the paragraph suddenly interrupts the same stream of thoughts, or the same sequence of actions, where the following paragraph starts with a capitalised conjunction, adding further elements to the same list, such as in ‘Harlem’:

Et le canal où l'eau bleue tremble, et l'église où le vitrage d'or flamboie, et le stoël où sèche le linge au soleil, et les toits, verts de houblon.

Et les cigognes qui battent des ailes autour de l'horloge de la ville tendant le col du haut des airs et recevant dans leur bec les gouttes de pluie.⁶²

A similar start can also be seen in the central paragraphs of ‘La Viole de Gamba’, which we analysed more extensively in the fourth chapter of the present work:

C'était d'abord la duègne Barbara qui grondait cet imbécile de Pierrot d'avoir, le maladroit, laissé tomber la boîte à perruque de M. Cassandre et répandu toute la poudre sur le plancher.

Et M. Cassandre de ramasser piteusement sa perruque, et Arlequin de détacher au viédase un coup de pied dans le derrière, et Colombine d'essuyer une larme de fou rire, et Pierrot d'élargir jusqu'aux oreilles une grimace enfarinée.⁶³

These enjambments create a stronger link between different paragraphs and mitigate the interruption dividing them, which in Bertrand is also graphically represented by the white spaces on the page.

⁶¹ ‘Le Chant de la Naïade’, in Loève-Weimars's, *Ballades*, p. 160.

⁶² OC, p. 115.

⁶³ OC, p. 128.

A closer look at the content of the paragraphs of Bertrand's *fantaisies*, however, also reveals the presence of a contrasting tendency. Indeed, the use of punctuation, especially in the case of direct speech, often produces fragmentation and interruptions, which break the rhythm of the sentence within the same paragraph, as demonstrated by the passages below. In 'Les Gueux de nuit':

« J'ai le nez gelé ! » – « J'ai les grêves rôties ! » – « Ne vois-tu rien dans le feu, Choupille ? » – « Oui ! une hallebarde. » – « Et toi, Jeanpoil ? » – « Un œil. »⁶⁴

In 'Les Deux Juifs':

« Ohé ! Ohé ! Lanturelu ! » – « Ma révérence à Madame la lune ! » – « Par ici, la cagoule du diable ! Deux juifs dehors pendant le couvre-feu ! » – « Assomme ! assomme ! aux juifs le jour, aux truands la nuit ! »⁶⁵

In 'La Tour de Nesle':

« Valet de trèfle ! » – « Dame de pique ! de gagne ! » – Et le soudard qui perdait envoya d'un coup de poing sur la table son enjeu au plancher.

[...]

« Pouah ! les chaircuitiers échaudent-ils leurs cochons à minuit ? Ventre-dieu ! c'est un bateau de feurre qui brûle en Seine ! »⁶⁶

In 'La Sérénade':

« Est-ce vous, d'Espignac ? » – « Hélas ! non. » – « C'est donc toi, mon petit Fleur d'amande ? » – « Ni l'un ni l'autre. » – « Comment ! encore vous, Monsieur de la Tournelle ? Bonsoir ! cherchez minuit à quatorze heures ! »⁶⁷

This kind of segmentation within the same paragraph through the use of punctuation can also be observed, for example, in 'Le Songe d'absence. Fragment', one of the compositions in the volume of the *Annales romantiques* published in 1830. It is known with certainty that Bertrand read this issue of the *Annales*, as this volume included an earlier version of his *fantaisie* 'Ma Chaumière', which he signed

⁶⁴ OC, p. 141.

⁶⁵ OC, p. 140.

⁶⁶ OC, p. 145.

⁶⁷ OC, p. 151.

‘Bertrand from Dijon’. ‘Le Songe d’absence. Fragment’ is presented in short paragraphs which echo the organisation of poetic stanzas. The first part of this composition is the monologue of the protagonist:

Mon cœur bat encore avec violence ;...ma poitrine se soulève avec bruit. Quels sentiments m’agitent ?...est-ce le plaisir ?... Hélène, puis-je en avoir loin de toi !... Une lueur d’espérance viendrait-elle enfin sillonner ma douleur, comme l’éclair sillonne un sombre nuage grossi par la tempête !...Serait-ce encore quelque surcroît à ma douleur ?

Le souvenir d’un songe remplit mon âme... Un songe !...Devrions-nous nous occuper d’un songe, lorsque notre vie entière n’est qu’erreur, songe, illusion !...Un songe ! où est la réalité ?...

Cette nuit, Hélène, cette nuit tu étais avec moi ; je te voyais, je te parlais...⁶⁸

The punctuation in this text – with its use of exclamations, rhetorical questions and suspension points – challenges the linearity of the narration and interrupts the continuity of the paragraph, which is thus fragmented into very short segments, such as ‘Un songe!’. Also notice in this passage the use of sound effects, such as alliterations – ‘cœur - encore’, ‘sillonne un sombre’, ‘le souvenir d’un songe’ – assonances – ‘en avoir loin de toi!’ – and anaphoras or repetitions, ‘Le souvenir d’un songe remplit mon âme... Un songe !...’, and ‘Cette nuit, Hélène, cette nuit’, linking the different segments.

In Bertrand’s *fantasies*, the drive towards fragmentation, represented by elements such as his use of punctuation, his use of short paragraphs and of white spaces dividing them (sometimes even *double blancs* as signalled by the asterisks in the manuscript), and his sentences starting out of the blue, plays a crucial role in the

⁶⁸ *Les Annales romantiques* (1830), p. 134. The passage ‘Un songe ! où est la réalité’, the doubtful hesitation typical of the fantastic, can be found in many of Bertrand’s *fantaisies*, such as in ‘Le Gibet’ of the ‘Pièces détachées’, in which this self-questioning occupies various paragraphs, ‘Ah ! ce que j’entends, serait-ce la bise nocturne qui glapit, ou le pendu qui pousse un soupir sur la fourche patibulaire? Serait-ce quelque grillon qui chante tapi dans la mousse et le lierre stérile dont par pitié se chausse le bois ? Serait-ce quelque mouche en chasse sonnant du cor autour de ces oreilles sourdes à la fanfare des hallalis ?’, in *OC*, p. 279.

challenging of ‘le mode narratif’. Bertrand’s formal choices, a topic I shall discuss further in the following sections, often operate on the level of the compositions’ content, entailing a change in the readers’ understanding of the overall meaning of the *fantaisie*. Here we have seen, through examples taken from the *Tablettes* and the *Annales*, that in the 1820s and 1830s, a new generation of little-known Romantic writers were challenging the difference between prose and poetry, and experimenting with independent texts organised in short paragraphs of prose, which were sometimes even fragmented by the use of interruptions, through punctuation. The kind of conscious typographical organisation of Bertrand’s *fantaisies*, however, is not present in these texts. Indeed, the wider white spaces on the page recommended to Renduel for his edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (the famous ‘Blanchir comme si le texte était de la poésie’), are examples of Bertrand’s deliberate organisation of the texts in the pages of his collection.

Le Provincial: *A Typographical Laboratory?*

‘Newspapers: their ubiquity, their very banality’.⁶⁹

In his ‘Instructions à M. le Metteur en pages’ Bertrand indicates: ‘*chaque pièce est divisée en quatre, cinq, six et même sept alinéas ou couplets*’, however, he further added that:

Cependant je dois lui faire observer que dans la dernière moitié de l’ouvrage, c’est-à-dire, à *commencer du livre IV* inclusivement, il y a plusieurs pièces qui ne sont pas [...] coupés en couplets et qui contiennent des phrases éparpillées, des dialogues, etc. M le metteur en pages blanchira les pièces comme il le jugera le plus convenable [...] toujours de manière à éteindre et à faire foisonner la matière.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 117.

⁷⁰ *OC*, p. 373. Italics in the original.

The recommendation of ‘éteindre’ and ‘faire foisonner la matière’ is here driven by a very practical consideration, rather than a theoretical one; Bertrand added a footnote explaining: ‘Le manuscrit n’est que de 270 pages, et je ne voudrais pas être obligé d’ajouter un trop grand nombre de notes à la fin du volume pour le compléter’.⁷¹

Bertrand’s attention to typography becomes even more evident after examining the manuscript of his *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Bertrand, very careful about the visual outcome of his volume, not only gave precise instructions to the ‘Metteur en pages’, but also kept adding further notes and directions on this topic throughout the manuscript. For example, next to titles such as ‘Ici commence le premier livre des Fantaisies de Gaspard de la Nuit’, he adds a comment in brackets on the right-hand side of the page stating: ‘Gothique grosses’.⁷² The titles opening the different sections of *Gaspard de la Nuit* are, very consciously, written in the middle of the page forming a downward facing pyramid:

*Ici commence le premier
livre des Fantaisies
de Gaspard
de la
Nuit*⁷³

A similar deliberate geometrical organisation is displayed in one of Bertrand’s compositions in verse, his ‘Dizain en losange’:

⁷¹ OC, p. 373. Italics in the original.

⁷² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), N.A.F. 25276, MFC 490.

⁷³ This shape was kept in the first edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. See, Document 1, Appendix B.

Du
 pendu
 le squelette,
 le soir, reflète
 les feux du couchant
 là-bas, au penchant
 morne et sévère
 du calvaire
 des trois
 croix.⁷⁴

Another sign of Bertrand's attention to the graphical aspect of his compositions in his manuscript of *Gaspard de la Nuit* is the decoration of some of the *fantaisies* (for example, 'Harlem') with red and blue inks. Lastly, Bertrand also envisaged 'un encadrement pour le texte', which would be 'le plus large et le plus historié qu'il se pourra'.⁷⁵

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Bertrand's typographical skills might have been informed by his collaboration on *Le Provincial* and more generally by his journalistic experience, both as a writer and, briefly, even as editor in chief. The previous chapters have already explored the importance of *Le Provincial* in Bertrand's poetic development and in exposing him to certain themes, while inviting cultural exchange with important figures in the capital. We shall now look at some typographical aspects of *Le Provincial* in relation to Bertrand's writings.

One particular aspect that deserves observation in *Le Provincial* is the presence of a range of different techniques used to separate the paragraphs of various texts. The first is the use of asterisks, such as in the 'Chronique' section of the

⁷⁴ *OC*, p. 510.

⁷⁵ 'Dessein d'un encadrement pour le texte', in *OC*, p. 374. It is also thanks to these declarations that *Gaspard de la Nuit* enjoyed many 'éditions illustrées' through the years.

newspaper, where a usual way of introducing a further piece of news, and of indicating the beginning of a new paragraph, was the use of three small asterisks, placed on the left of the text. This can be seen, for example, in the ‘Chronique’ section of *Le Provincial* on 29 May 1828 (Document 2, Appendix B). The use of asterisks also occurs in other sections of *Le Provincial*. For example, under the ‘Variétés’ section of *Le Provincial* on 8 May 1828, Bertrand published a composition entitled ‘La Citadelle de Mollgast’, an earlier version of what later became ‘La Citadelle de Wolgast’, a *fantaisie* included in the ‘Pièces détachées extraites du portefeuille de l’auteur’. In *Le Provincial*, every paragraph of ‘La Citadelle de Mollgast’ is preceded by a central asterisk and by a wider white space on the page (Document 3, Appendix B). The use of asterisks sometimes reappears in Bertrand’s compositions in verse, such as in the ‘Poésie’ section of *Le Provincial* on 13 July 1828, in which Bertrand published a poem in verse dedicated ‘Au gentil et gracieux trouvère de Lutèce Victor Hugo’, and entitled ‘La Chanson du Pèlerin. Qui heurte, pendant la nuit sombre et pluvieuse à l’huis du châtel’. Every one of the eight stanzas was divided by a central asterisk, recalling the graphical outcome of ‘La Citadelle de Mollgast’ (Document 4, Appendix B).

Although in the *fantaisie* ‘La Citadelle de Wolgast’ these asterisks disappear completely, the paragraph being divided simply by a white space on the page, the use of asterisks, or ‘étoiles’, remains an important feature in the manuscript of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. As already mentioned, in his recommendations to the typesetter, Bertrand remarked: ‘Je le prie de ne pas oublier de placer dans la mise en page les étoiles que j’ai figurées dans le manuscrit entre les *couplets* de quelques pièces’.⁷⁶ These

⁷⁶ OC, p. 373.

‘étoiles’, which also indicate the need for a ‘double blanc’, appear in many compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit* – such as ‘La Viole de Gamba’, ‘Le Deux Juifs’, ‘Le Gueux de nuit’, ‘La Tour de Nesle’, ‘Le Raffiné’, ‘L’Office du soir’, ‘La Sérénade’, ‘La Messe de minuit’, ‘Le Fou’, to name but a few – where they perform far more than a merely typographical role, as also briefly mentioned in my fourth chapter regarding the compositions ‘La Viole de Gamba’ and ‘Ondine’. In ‘Les Gueux de nuit’, for instance, the asterisk serves as a transition from a direct dialogue amongst the characters in the poem to the voice of the narrator, who provides readers with more information about the scene they are witnessing:

« Ah! voici messieurs du guet! » – « Vos bottes fument. » – « Et les tirelaines? » – « Nous en avons tué deux d’une arquebusade; les autres se sont échappés à travers la rivière. »

*

Et c’est ainsi que s’acoquinaient à un feu de brandon, avec des gueux de nuit, un procureur au parlement qui courait le guilledou, et les gascons du guet qui racontaient sans rire les exploits de leurs arquebuses détraquées.⁷⁷

The asterisk introduces a complete shift of perspective, operating on the interpretative level of the composition, rather than on the simple formal or typographical one. The identity of the anonymous voices is thus revealed to readers, who have to renegotiate the meaning of the dialogue itself. For instance, readers would not have imagined that a ‘procureur’ and the ‘gascons du guet’ were spending their time with the ‘gueux’ in a carnivalesque mix of social classes. Although the scene is likely to produce laughter or, at least, a surprised giggle, the mention of ‘sans rire’ denies it, in an ironic reversal typical of Bertrand’s humour.

⁷⁷ OC, p. 142.

Another particular way of organising the composition on the page can be found in ‘La Nuit d’après une bataille’, included in the ‘Pièces détachées’, where Bertrand uses a different technique in order to divide the seven paragraphs, which are preceded by a number and divided by a large white space, thus appearing as completely separated episodes:

I

Une sentinelle, le mousquet au bras et enveloppée dans son manteau, se promène le long du rempart. Elle se penche entre les noirs créneaux de moment en moment, et observe d’un œil attentif l’ennemi dans son camp.

II

Il allume les feux au bord des fossés pleins d’eau ; le ciel est noir ; la forêt est pleine de bruits ; le vent chasse la fumée vers le fleuve et se plaint en murmurant dans les plis des étendards.

III

Aucune trompette ne trouble l’écho ; aucun chant de guerre n’est répété autour de la pierre du foyer ; des lampes sont allumées dans les tentes au chevet des capitaines morts l’épée à la main.⁷⁸

It should be noticed that *Le Provincial* had already welcomed some examples of *ballades* in prose, such as ‘La Grille du cimetière’ and ‘Le Foyer solitaire’, two *ballades* respectively included in the issues of 5 June 1828 and 1 August 1828, in the ‘Variétés’ section. These compositions consist of long paragraphs (four in ‘La Grille du cimetière’ and five in ‘Le Foyer solitaire’) introduced by a number and divided by a wider white space on the page (Document 6 and Document 7, Appendix B). The typographical organisation of ‘La Nuit d’après une bataille’, is used by Bertrand also for his composition in verse ‘La Jeune Fille’, published in the ‘Poésie’ section in the very last issue of *Le Provincial* on 30 September 1828 (Document 8, Appendix B).

⁷⁸ OC, p. 273. See Document 5, Appendix B, for a reproduction of this text.

These examples taken from *Le Provincial* show that Bertrand was openly challenging the traditional distinctive features which were supposed to differentiate prose writing from poetry. Indeed, both in the case of the asterisks and of the roman numbers, there are instances of Bertrand's use of the same technique in his texts in prose and verse. It is only in his *fantaisies*, however, that these typographical devices assume a deeper significance and operate at the level of content, thus requiring a conscious effort of interpretation on the part of the reader. The examples I have presented in this section show, therefore, that Bertrand's journalistic experience should be considered as crucial for his formal innovations. The magazines on which Bertrand collaborated provided him not only with possible themes for his compositions, but they also served as a typographical laboratory.

Why call them 'Petites Ballades en prose'? An Overview of the Critical Reception of Bertrand's Gaspard de la Nuit in the 1840s

‘Nous nous empressons d’annoncer la
prochaine publication d’un livre fait pour
exciter vivement la curiosité’.⁷⁹
(Aloysius Bertrand)

As seen above, signs of Bertrand's awareness of his own formal experimentation can be gathered from some of his brief remarks, which have been extensively quoted by critics, such as his instruction to the typesetter and his last letter to David d'Angers. Not finding a traditional way of defining his compositions, Bertrand fluctuated between the realm of poetry ('Blanchir comme si le texte était de la poésie') and that of prose ('j'ai essayé de créer un nouveau genre de prose').⁸⁰ What is surprising to witness is that the contemporary reviewers of the publication of the first edition of

⁷⁹ Announcement by Bertrand regarding the publication of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, OC, p. 377.

⁸⁰ This aforementioned sentence is often taken as a testimony of Bertrand's awareness of his innovation.

Gaspard de la Nuit did not seem to acknowledge any radical formal or generic revolution in Bertrand's work. Some of them certainly acknowledged his formal skills: 'Ceci est un livre tout de forme: livre d'art pour le public artistique' in the *Revue du Calvados* of January 1843;⁸¹ 'Son livre, *Gaspard de la Nuit* [...] est une suite de petites ballades en prose dont le couplet ou verset exact simule admirablement la cadence du rythme; ces petites pièces travaillées avec une délicatesse et un art infinis, rappellent ces bijoux de la Renaissance dont la ciselure est plus précieuse que la matière' in *Revue du Lyonnais* (1843);⁸² 'C'est un recueil de petites pièces en prose travaillées, ciselées avec cette délicatesse minutieuse et ce fini de détails que l'on admire dans certains meubles gothiques'. In the 1840s, *Gaspard de la Nuit* was thus not considered as the possible beginning of a new genre in poetry. Some reviewers even warned against the danger of possible imitations of Bertrand's volume, such as the reviewer of the *Revue du Calvados*, who declared, 'c'est là un livre d'art fantasque et vagabond, exaltant la forme partout et toujours [...] il ne serait bon ni de le suivre ni de l'imiter'⁸³ and De Molènes of *La Revue des deux mondes* who remarked, 'C'est une œuvre qui a un grand charme et qu'il serait dangereux d'imiter'.⁸⁴ The warning of these reviewers perhaps reflect a perception that *Gaspard de la Nuit* was out of fashion in the 1840s, and they warned other poets not to continue with such lack of rules ('fantasque et vagabond') and with such outdated themes.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, even though *Gaspard de la Nuit* was still not widely known by the average reader the reception of this volume

⁸¹ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 330.

⁸² 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 332.

⁸³ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 331.

⁸⁴ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 334.

had radically changed, undoubtedly because of the impact of such factors as Baudelaire's *lettre-dédicace* to Arsène Houssaye, Mallarmé's interest in the collection, and new editions by prominent intellectual figures, such as that of Charles Asselineau in 1868. To take one example, on 29 March 1879, in an article entitled 'Aloysius Bertrand et David d'Angers' published in the magazine *La Semaine des Familles*, we find the following statement:

Conteur et poète, Bertrand ne sacrifie jamais la forme à la pensée ; la forme chez lui s'élève à la hauteur du vers par sa fine ciselure et sa concision ; la rime seule lui manque, mais le lecteur reconnaît bien vite que le poète ne s'est pas affranchi de la rime par impuissance : il voulait innover.⁸⁵

In contrast to the reviewers of the 1840s, the author of this article, Henri Jouin clearly supports the idea of Bertrand's awareness of his actions and his intention to innovate poetry.

Some years later, in 1927, in an article about Cargill Sprietsma's thesis on Bertrand's life, which had recently been submitted at La Sorbonne, Gustave Cohen, Maître de conférence' at this Parisian university, declared:

« Un nouveau genre de prose » ou plutôt de poèmes en prose, dont un Baudelaire héritera et un Huysmans s'inspirera, qu'un Ravel orchestrera et un Mallarmé prîsera, disant à sa fille : « Prends Bertrand, on y trouve de tout ». Et rien n'est plus vrai, car il précède ou accompagne Théophile Gautier, annonce Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Rimbaud, Verlaine et Paul Fort lui-même. Les grands succès ne sont pas toujours les grandes influences.⁸⁶

We can see that, in only a few decades, the 'horizon of expectations' of readers and critics, to borrow again Jauss's concept, had changed considerably. Jauss in fact

⁸⁵ *La Semaine des familles*, 3 March 1879.

⁸⁶ In 'Recueil d'articles de presse concernant Bertrand', Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arts du spectacle, Magasin – Richelieu, 8-RF-22295. In the same 'Recueil d'articles', we find the 1929 article 'À la recherche de scénarios neufs. Un domaine inexploré et riche: l'œuvre d'Aloysius Bertrand' in the magazine *Comédie*, where Jean-Paul Coutisson enthusiastically remarked: 'Aloysius Bertrand condense en quarante lignes ce qui pourrait servir à faire un conte de huit ou dix pages' and added, 'dans le cas qui nous intéresse le film serait en quelque sorte une suite de petits tableaux très distincts les uns des autres à tous les points de vue.'

provides us with a valuable theoretical framework when he argues that ‘the reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past, enables one [...] to pose questions that the text gave an answer to, and thereby to discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work’.⁸⁷ An attempt to reconstruct the ‘horizon of expectations’ of Bertrand’s time is thus critical in order to understand both the context of the production and the reception of the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

In the light of Jauss’s remark, some common critical responses to *Gaspard de la Nuit* in the 1840s – the first years after its posthumous first publication – can now perhaps be better understood. For example, why did some critics at the time call Bertrand’s *fantaisies* ‘ballades en prose’ or ‘petites ballades en prose’? In his ‘Notice’ opening the first edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, the very first critical review of Bertrand’s volume, Sainte-Beuve referred to the *fantaisies* as ‘Les jolies ballades en prose dont la façon lui coûtait autant que des vers’⁸⁸ and later ‘ces petites ballades en prose’.⁸⁹ It is important to notice that Sainte-Beuve used the terms ‘ballades en prose’, while Bertrand never called his compositions anything other than ‘bambochades romantiques’ in 1828,⁹⁰ and later ‘fantaisies’, in the manuscript of his *Gaspard de la Nuit*.⁹¹ The first hypothesis is that Sainte-Beuve was influenced by the

⁸⁷ Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetics of Reception*, p. 28.

⁸⁸ Sainte-Beuve, ‘Notice’, *OC*, p. 77. More than a hundred years later, Suzanne Bernard echoes this denomination: ‘Comme d’autres, en vers, adoptent la forme du sonnet, Bertrand adopte la forme de la «ballade»’, in *Le Poème en prose*, p. 60.

⁸⁹ ‘Notice’, in *OC*, p. 80.

⁹⁰ In *Le Provincial* on 12 September 1828, Bertrand published three compositions, ‘Le Clair de lune’, ‘Les Lavandières’ and ‘La Gourde et le flagelot’ and he presented them in these terms: ‘ces trois pièces font partie d’un recueil de compositions de ce genre que l’auteur se propose de publier très prochainement, sous le titre de Bambochades romantiques.’, p. 212.

⁹¹ In his *Le Conte fantastique en France*, referring to Hoffmann, Castex reminds us that: ‘Le mot fantaisies [...] dans l’usage français, évoque d’aimables caprices, des visions gracieuses ou riantes,

themes of Bertrand's *fantaisies*, especially by the important role that the fantastic plays in the collection (as analysed in the third chapter of the present work) and by its presence in many *ballades* in both prose and verse at the time. Consider, for example, the thematic similarity between Victor Hugo's *ballade* in verse 'La Ronde du sabbat' and Bertrand's *fantaisie* 'La Ronde sous la cloche', a composition inspired by Hugo's text:⁹²

Voyez devant les murs de ce noir monastère
 La lune se voiler, comme pour un mystère!
 [...]
 Le bruit ébranle l'air, roule, et longtemps encore
 Gronde, comme enfermé sous la cloche sonore.
 Le silence retombe avec l'ombre... Écoutez!
 Qui pousse ces clameurs? qui jette ces clartés?
 [...]
 Par les vitraux détruits que de mille éclairs sillonnent,
 Entrent dans le vieux cloître où leurs flots tourbillonnent!
 [...]
 O terreur! Les voilà qui chantent dans ce lieu
 [...]
 Les mains cherchent les mains... Soudain la ronde
 Comme un ouragan sombre, en tournoyant commence⁹³

Compare this with a passage taken from Bertrand's 'La Ronde sous la cloche':

Douze magiciens dansaient une ronde sous la grosse cloche de Saint-Jean. Ils évoquèrent l'orage l'un après l'autre, et du fond de mon lit je comptai avec épouvante douze voix qui traversèrent processionnellement les ténèbres.

Aussitôt la lune courut se cacher derrière les nuées, et une pluie mêlée d'éclairs et de tourbillons fouetta ma fenêtre, tandis que les girouettes criaient comme des grues en sentinelle sur qui crève l'averse dans les bois.⁹⁴

correspondait assez mal à l'inspiration souvent sombre du conteur berlinois; le mot fantastique suggère beaucoup mieux son univers et désigne son œuvre avec beaucoup plus de précision', p. 8.

⁹² In a note Poggenburg recalls the fact that this influence is mediated by Boulanger, 'il était inspiré par *La Ronde du sabbat*, lithographie de Louis Boulanger d'après la *ballade* XIV du Livre VI [...] de Victor Hugo', note 2, in *OC*, p. 322.

⁹³ *VHOP*, pp. 541-42.

⁹⁴ *OC*, p. 175.

Beyond the thematic similarities between some of Bertrand's texts and the *ballades*, in both prose and verse, which were published at the time, Sainte-Beuve and the other critics who called Bertrand's texts 'petites ballades en prose' were probably also referring to the formal aspect of the compositions. There were indeed many *ballades* in prose circulating during the years of Bertrand's writing, especially the 1820s, when adaptations into French prose of foreign *ballades* in verse were popular in France as demonstrated by Loève-Veimars's *Ballades, légendes, et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse*.⁹⁵ This anthology shows how term *ballade en prose* did not clearly refer to any particular fixed structure at the time in France, and that it could refer to compositions of very different lengths and forms.⁹⁶ Bertrand's *fantaisies* were thus compared to the texts circulating at the time of their creation, such as the famous adaptations in Loève-Veimars's volume, as well as other examples of *ballades en prose*, such as the compositions 'La Grille du cimetière' and 'Le Foyer solitaire' published in *Le Provincial* and mentioned above.⁹⁷

Due to unlucky publishing incidents, such as the bankruptcy of the publisher Renduel, the *fantaisies* of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, written mainly in the 1820s and 1830s, were published only at the end of 1842.⁹⁸ As a result, Bertrand's compositions were

⁹⁵ In her article about the first translations into French of Goethe's *Erlkönig*, Gisèle Vanhese valuably underlines: 'Au début du XIXe siècle, les traductions en prose des ballades étrangères délimitent [...] une zone de confins entre vers et prose [...] Comme témoigne l'œuvre d'Aloysius Bertrand, la genèse du poème en prose se situe en fait dans cette quête d'un registre stylistique original', p. 114.

⁹⁶ Vincent-Munnia remarks that 'Les traductions en prose de ces ballades suppriment les procédés liés à la versification [...] mais conservent la forme des textes: brève et organisée en strophes', p. 81. In the particular example of Loève-Veimars's anthology, however, not all of the examples of *ballades* in prose preserve the strophic organisation and their length can considerably vary.

⁹⁷ What is perhaps surprising to discover is that in Bertrand's literary production we find some adaptations of Walter Scott's verse ballads in French verse. This could be considered as unusual, especially because popular adaptations into French prose of the same compositions by Walter Scott were circulating at the time in France and were included in Loève-Veimars's anthology.

⁹⁸ The manuscript of *Gaspard de la Nuit* was already in the hands of the editor Renduel in 1833.

often seen as the outdated examples of a fashion of the 1820s and early 1830s, which had since passed. In a review published in the 'Bulletin bibliographique' of *La Revue Indépendante* on 25 February 1843, for example, Bertrand's collection is seen as an outmoded remainder of a 'mode éphémère' belonging to the past:

Dans la littérature [...] il est deux sortes d'œuvres bien distinctes [...] Les unes [...] traversent les âges [...] Les autres [...] flétrissent, tombent, à chaque saison, comme les feuilles des bois, pour faire place à des autres qui auront le même destin. [...] C'est dans cette dernière catégorie que nous rangeons les œuvres de l'école dite romantique. [...] C'est à elle aussi que nous rapporterons les fantaisies de *Gaspard de la nuit*.⁹⁹

Further in the same article the reviewer openly addresses the problem of the posthumous publication of Bertrand's work: 'Ce livre [...] est donc arrivé trop tard pour le succès'.¹⁰⁰

The lack of enthusiastic reception by critics at the time of its first publication is even more evident if their declarations are compared to the passionate appreciation of *Gaspard de la Nuit* by such central figures as Mallarmé and Huysmans later in the same century. As a small example of this enthusiasm, let us consider two extracts from two different letters written by Mallarmé to Victor Pavie. On 30 December 1865, Mallarmé wrote to the publisher in order to ask for a copy of Bertrand's collection:

Monsieur,

J'ai comme tous les poètes de notre jeune génération, mes amis, un culte profond pour l'œuvre exquis de Louis Bertrand, de qui vous avez eu la rare gloire d'être l'ami. Exilé, pour un temps, dans une petite ville de province, je souffre beaucoup de voir ma bibliothèque, qui renferme les merveilles du Romantisme, privée de ce cher volume qui ne m'abandonnait pas quand je pouvais l'emprunter à un confrère. [...]¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, pp. 336-37.

¹⁰⁰ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 337.

¹⁰¹ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1998-2003), I (1998), p. 686.

In February 1866 Mallarmé wrote again to Pavie inviting him to establish a new edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*:

[...] Mais on peut rééditer Louis Bertrand de loin! Ce que vous me racontez m'a navré. Un volume en vingt-sept ans ![...]

Ce monument élevé par notre génération à Louis Bertrand serait d'autant plus naturel qu'il est vraiment, par sa forme condensée et précieuse, un de nos frères. Un anachronisme a causé son oubli. Cette adorable bague jetée, comme celle des doges, à la mer, pendant la furie des vagues romantiques, et engouffrée, apparaît maintenant, rapportée par les lames limpides de la marée.¹⁰²

This 'culte profonde' for *Gaspard de la Nuit* mentioned by Mallarmé was definitely not foreseen by Sainte-Beuve, who did not seem to detect in Bertrand's work any significant poetic innovation which would have an impact on future generations of poets. Like many critics in the 1840s, Sainte-Beuve placed Bertrand's work within what he called the 'mouvement poétique de 1824-1828'.¹⁰³ When defining what he called 'petites ballades en prose, dont le couplet ou verset exact simulait assez bien la cadence d'un rythme', Sainte-Beuve also added 'on en a eu l'application, depuis, dans le livre traduit des *Pèlerins polonais* et dans les *Paroles d'un croyant*'. Commenting on this passage, Poggenburg remarks : 'Sainte-Beuve ne pouvait définir le poème en prose de Bertrand que par rapport à un type de prose poétique déjà pratiqué au XVIIIe siècle'.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the critic could only refer to what he knew and to what constituted his 'horizon of expectations'.

In his 'Prospectus' for the publication of the first edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit* on 1 October 1841, Victor Pavie, the first publisher of Bertrand's work, did not seem to recognise any considerable innovation in poetry in the *fantaisies* either. Pavie described the manuscript as 'un petit cahier en prose, divisé en six livres, de pièces

¹⁰² Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, I, pp. 689-90.

¹⁰³ 'Notice', in *OC*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ Note 19, in *OC*, p. 86.

naïves et bizarres avec des épigraphes qui leur descendaient jusqu'au talons. C'étaient mille fantaisies'.¹⁰⁵ Although Sainte-Beuve and Pavie did not acknowledge, in Bertrand's work, any radical novelty from the formal point of view, they still found it difficult to find a suitable category in which to place the texts of *Gaspard de la Nuit*. As remarked by Luc Bonenfant, 'De toutes les appellations alors disponibles pour désigner des textes brefs, aucune ne satisfait pleinement les conditions textuelles des fantaisies de Bertrand'.¹⁰⁶

The unusual form of Bertrand's compositions thus made their description uneasy. Pavie's definition 'pièces naïves et bizarres' is only one of the many creative ways in which Bertrand's *fantaisies* were defined by their first reviewers. Sainte-Beuve referred to 'imaginettes', the reviewer of the *Revue du Calvados* described them as 'charmants croquis',¹⁰⁷ in the *Revue du Lyonnais* they went back to Sainte-Beuve's 'Petites ballades en prose',¹⁰⁸ De Molènes of *La Revue des deux mondes* referred to 'une suite de tableaux'.¹⁰⁹ Only Emile Deschamps in his 'compte rendu de *Gaspard de la Nuit*' in the 'Revue Littéraire' of *La France Littéraire* on 20 July 1843, seemed to recognise a certain originality in Bertrand's formal choice when he affirmed:

Ce sont des fantaisies qui sont en littérature ce que sont en peinture celles de Rembrandt et de Callot. Rien de plus originel et de plus délicat; les quelques vers qui s'y trouvent sont d'une délicieuse perfection rythmique, et la prose a tout le *fini*, tous les prestiges de la poésie; c'est un livre qu'on peut dire unique et auquel la destinée du poète ajoute encore un intérêt profond.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ OC, p. 380.

¹⁰⁶ Luc Bonenfant, 'Le vers détourné: Aloysius Bertrand et la réinvention de la prose' in *Romantisme*, 123 (2004), 41-52 (p. 50).

¹⁰⁷ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 331.

¹⁰⁸ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 332.

¹⁰⁹ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 334.

¹¹⁰ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 338.

Moreover, in the same review, Deschamps foretold the destiny that Bertrand's volume would have later in the century: '*Gaspard de la Nuit*, de Louis Bertrand, sera bientôt dans toutes les mains littéraires'.¹¹¹

Baudelaire's *petites poèmes en prose* of *Le Spleen de Paris* changed the 'horizon of expectations' of readers and critics of the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the critical debates and writings inaugurated by Baudelaire's text created a new era open to and capable of a different reception of Bertrand's work. Only later in the nineteenth century could a link be made between Bertrand's *fantaisies* and the *poème en prose*, a link which led to the rediscovery of Bertrand's volume and to the revaluation of this poet as the creator or the precursor of this new form of poetry, a genre with great success due to poets such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. Ever since then, the name of Aloysius Bertrand has been connected to this genealogy of the *poème en prose*, rendering both the considerations of Bertrand as a creator and as a precursor as entailing an anachronism for two reasons; firstly, considering Bertrand as the 'precursor' of the *poème en prose* entails embracing the point of view of a post-Baudelairian poetic context, where the wording 'petit poème en prose' had a different meaning from what it had had in the context of the creation of the *fantaisies*, earlier in the century. Secondly, studying Bertrand's compositions in their original context also challenges the conception of Bertrand as someone who created this new form of poetry from scratch, as it shows his work within the wider picture of the general poetic experimentation occurring at his time.

This second point should not be taken to underplay Bertrand's own experimentation because, as we have seen, his use of prose should be considered an

¹¹¹ 'Annexe I', in Wanlin, *Le Sens du pittoresque*, p. 338.

aesthetic choice based on the attempt to try something new, as expressed in the following passage from the first preface, which has been extensively quoted by critics:

Ce manuscrit [...] vous dira combien d'instruments ont essayé mes lèvres avant d'arriver à celui qui rend la note pure et expressive, combien de pinceaux j'ai usés sur la toile avant d'y voir naître la vague aurore du clair-obscur. Là sont consignés divers procédés nouveaux peut-être d'harmonie et de couleur, seul résultat et seule récompense qu'eussent obtenus mes élucubrations.¹¹²

In this confession, M. Gaspard de la Nuit – the fictive author of the *fantaisies* – explicitly refers to innovation, mentioning the ‘divers procédés, nouveaux peut-être’.¹¹³ Bertrand is indeed an innovator, and his own inventiveness is especially evident when the *fantaisies* are compared to similar self-contained texts in poetic prose circulating at the time.

The unusual form of the *fantaisies* also explains the general uncertainty felt by the first reviewers when they tried to find an appropriate definition for these compositions. Lastly, Bertrand himself chose a very general term for his compositions: the term *fantaisie*, which permitted a wide range of experiment and formal freedom. As recalled by Filip Kekus in his study, in the sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1835), the definition of the term *fantaisies* included ‘des ouvrages où l'on suit plutôt les caprices de son imagination que les règles de l'art’.¹¹⁴ Calling the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit* anything other than *fantaisies* thus reflects the expectations of the reader, and inevitably distorts, to some extent, the design of their author. Calling these compositions ‘*poèmes en prose*’ entails making a critical choice, which at the very least risks overlooking other possible domains of

¹¹² OC, p. 103.

¹¹³ OC, p. 103.

¹¹⁴ Filip Kekus, ‘*Gaspard de la Nuit* et la fantaisie romantique’, «*Un livre d'art fantasque et vagabond*», p. 49.

research, and may confine the interpretation of Bertrand's work within categories that ultimately limit our understanding of his craft.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have challenged both the traditional commonplaces of Bertrand as the 'inventor' and the 'precursor' of the *poème en prose*, while studying the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit* within the time and context of their creation. Particular attention was also drawn to the role of the 'horizon of expectation' of critics and readers in defining Bertrand's compositions as either 'petites ballades en prose' or 'poèmes en prose'. The rise of what was later called *poème en prose* has here been reconsidered as the result of a lengthy process by many authors, favouring this view over that of the single-handed creation by a particular poet at a given moment in literary history. At the same time, if it is an exaggeration to consider Bertrand as the creator of the *poème en prose*, considering him as a mere precursor unfairly diminishes his contribution. Indeed, naming Bertrand as a precursor of a genre entails embracing the judgement that this poet did not manage to fully develop and refine that particular genre. In the present study, based on the understanding of Bertrand's literary and cultural context, it would have been anachronistic to continue to use the label of 'precursor' because this definition is inevitably produced from a posthumous perspective, obliging critics to formulate their 'horizon of expectations' in the light of later developments in prose poetry, such as Baudelaire's or Rimbaud's works.

Contrary to this approach, I have attempted to pay more attention to what Bertrand himself tried to achieve, which was gathered from the few declarations that he left us, and from the comparison of Bertrand's *fantaisies* with other similar works

in prose circulating at his time. I have considered how volumes such as the *Tablettes romantiques* and *Les Annales romantiques*, combining texts in prose and poetry belonging to different genres and including such pieces as the ones quoted in this chapter, challenged the normative distinction between the realm of prose and that of poetry. This represented a literary change, which I further considered as a wider cultural change infusing many literary articles, prefaces and debates at Bertrand's time, including *Le Provincial*.¹¹⁵ This regional paper was indeed an effective typographical laboratory, which led Bertrand to be very aware of the importance of the special organisation of his texts. In this regard, Bertrand seems to go beyond his contemporaries, insofar as his typographical devices, such as asterisks and white spaces, provide content in his *fantaisies*, which should be interpreted as an integral part of the texts and the scenes they are depicting.

Overall, through the examples of texts analysed here, I have attempted to demonstrate the change in poetry taking place in the mindset of poets of the time through the use of evidence and, in particular, their understanding of the possibility of a new poetry freed from verse. Their understanding is based on a new conception of what constitutes poetry itself, which is not a mere 'attribut', but a 'substance', an idea that was spread amongst the Romantics both in the capital and in the provinces. Resituating the *fantaisies* in their own time thus serves to provide a better assessment of Bertrand's own synthesis between the available literary material and his own experimentation, while avoiding at least some of the more obvious possible anachronisms. I maintain that, in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Bertrand experimented with

¹¹⁵The general importance of newspaper in the spreading of prose poetry is a topic which attracts more and more interest within the academic community as demonstrated by doctoral theses such as that by Fanny Bérat-Esquier entitled 'Les Origines journalistiques du poème en prose, ou le siècle de Baudelaire', presented at the university of Lille 3, Charles de Gaulle in 2006, which focuses on the second half of the nineteenth century.

new poetic possibilities, that his research was a conscious and deliberate attempt to innovate, which he achieved by reading, using, and reworking the available literary material of his time.

Conclusion

‘Whenever you look at any particular civilisation, you will find that its most characteristic writings and other cultural products reflect a particular pattern of life which those who are responsible for these writings — or paint these paintings, or produce these particular pieces of music — are dominated by’.¹

(Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*)

This study has considered Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit* freed from its canonical critical role as the first collection of prose poetry in French literary history, in order to expose and explore new interpretative paths, which can only be seen by going back to the original context of the creation of this collection. To this end, the first chapter examined Bertrand’s cultural context and challenged the common consideration of this poet as a *petit romantique*, a view that traditionally arose not only due to Bertrand’s limited literary production and his lack of luck in publishing during his lifetime, but also because of his geographical marginality. Critical works devoted to French Romanticism often place Paris at the centre of their analysis, considering this city and its activities as the main focus for a study of literary and cultural phenomena, which extend into the entire country. Chapter one showed that while it is true that regional writers thought very highly of Parisian cultural life and of its leading cultural figures, such as Victor Hugo and Charles Nodier, this was an attitude that they also shared with other young poets in the capital. An examination of the rediscovered cultural contribution of the French regions at Bertrand’s time, together with the study of specific examples of the cultural emancipation of Dijon, such as those displayed in the magazine *Le Provincial*, shows that intellectuals in the

¹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, p. 2.

so-called '*province*' were often proud of their origins and aware of the cultural value of their activities. Bertrand's cultural context was thus shaped not by the sole influence of Paris, but rather by the dynamic relationship between Dijon and Paris, and by the cultural exchange between the two cities. This closer look at literary life in Dijon revealed that Bertrand, often considered within French literary history as a marginal author, was a central intellectual figure in his own city, where he actively contributed to its many cultural activities, being an active member of the *Société d'Études de Dijon* since 1826, and one of the main writers first for the magazine *Le Provincial* and later for the *Patriote de la Côte-d'Or*. Although, when in Paris, Bertrand was seen as a provincial, marginal poet by Parisian intellectuals, his friends in Dijon, such as the poet Charles Brugnot, considered him as a possible mediator to promote cultural exchange between the two cultural lives.

In light of this, contrary to most of the criticism of this author, this study has shown that Bertrand's provincialism was a point of strength rather than a weakness, and this sort of view should always be explored when considering the literary production of regional authors. For instance, the second chapter argued that Bertrand deliberately used the setting of Dijon at the beginning of *Gaspard de la Nuit* in order to create an appealing atmosphere of mystery. I maintained that the author understood that the provincial setting could be an added value which would intrigue Parisian readers of his time, who would enjoy an 'exotic' location, full of *couleur locale*, in stark contrast to the banal familiarity of the contemporary Parisian setting. The regional city, perceived as more enigmatic, would also provide the perfect surroundings in which to situate supernatural events. Dijon, with its monuments and its ruins, thus became a bridge introducing two of the main features of *Gaspard de la*

Nuit: its indefinite past and its fantastic element, which also characterise many of the other sections of the collection such as ‘Le Vieux Paris’, ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’, ‘Les Chroniques’, and ‘Espagne et Italie’.

The presence of the fantastic element in *Gaspard de la Nuit* was then analysed through the lens of twentieth-century theories and debates on the fantastic, but, once again, it was only by going back to Bertrand’s time that a more impartial analysis of the texts could be undertaken. In light of the early nineteenth-century understanding of the fantastic, the third chapter assumed a broader approach to Bertrand’s texts, including the examination of some passages taken from compositions which twentieth-century theorists would not consider as well-fitting examples of the phenomenon of the fantastic. Here the background research on Bertrand’s cultural context summarised in the first chapter provided us with valuable hints illuminating the possible origins of the fantastic inspiration (considered more widely) in *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Following these hints, some passages of Bertrand’s texts were analysed alongside compositions such as ‘Smarra’ and ‘Trilby’, as well as ‘La Ronde du sabbat’, written by Nodier and Hugo respectively, who were two authors of particular relevance for Bertrand’s poetic development. This analysis not only exposed shared themes in these compositions, but also served to show that intertextual relationships are often based on a deeper cultural interchange amongst various authors, and the study of such an interchange can provide scholars with a deeper understanding of the themes as well as with a multiplicity of possible critical clues to follow.

Going back to Bertrand’s original context also permitted us to challenge, once and for all, the accusation of the thematic unoriginality of his *fantaisies*, which

is traditionally raised whenever one mentions Bertrand's formal innovations and his canonical role as the writer of the first collection of prose poetry in French literary history. In the introduction to this study, the meaning of 'originality' was challenged, suggesting that originality can persist even when an author's work is clearly inspired by specific sources. In support of this idea, the fourth chapter, through the analysis of two of the most well-known and studied compositions in the collection, argued that although Bertrand gleaned materials from his literary and cultural context, he reworked them in his own unique way, often through the use of irony and humour. The case studies of 'La Viole de Gamba' and 'Ondine' showed that even the thematic aspect of Bertrand's texts is worthy of critical attention, and they should not be dismissed as mere unoriginal imitations that deserve attention only because of their formal inventiveness. This aspect is increasingly demonstrated by the wealth of new interpretations that the same texts keep generating, such as in the case of 'Ondine', which in the last decades has attracted the critical attention of leading scholars of nineteenth-century French literature, such as Pierre Brunel and, even more recently, Jacques-Rémi Dahan.²

A more nuanced consideration of Bertrand's texts alongside typical phenomena of the 1820s and 1830s has made it possible to assess Bertrand's unique synthesis of his own creativity and his debts to literary tradition, a process that I defined as 'cultural exchange'. The concept of 'exchange', indeed, goes further than the concept of 'influence', as it entails a more active participation on the part of Bertrand. In other words, while Bertrand, like other authors of his time, 'receives' and gleans from cultural phenomena of his time, such as that of the revival of the

² Pierre Brunel, 'A propos d' «Ondine»', in *Du visible à l'invisible*, pp. 267-73, and Jacques-Rémi Dahan, 'Ondine, ou la tentation luciférienne', in *Un livre d'art fantasque et vagabond*, pp. 163 -72.

Commedia dell'Arte in the *Théâtre des Funambules* and that of the revival of northern traditional legends, he also 'gives back' to the culture of his time by reworking these materials in his unique way and, by doing so, he actively operates an interchange. Moreover, this was defined more widely as 'cultural' exchange rather than 'literary' exchange, because Bertrand gathered materials for his texts not solely from other texts, but from other arts, such as theatre and painting, from wider cultural phenomena of his time, such as the revival of legends and newspaper debates, as well as the wider exchange of ideas with literary figures of his time. If the interaction between Bertrand's texts and other forms of art has been the main topic of other critical works such as Scott's *Pictorialist Poetics* and Wanlin's *Aloysius Bertrand: Le Sens du pittoresque*, the awareness of this wider 'cultural exchange' formed the basis for my approach, which could also be applied to the study of other authors and works.

Lastly, the final chapter addressed in more detail what had become a full-blown critical convention within French literary history: Bertrand as the creator and/or the precursor of the prose poem. This chapter started by deeming both of these labels anachronistic, offering a limited understanding of this author's contribution. The comparison of some of Bertrand's texts to little-known compositions published in such collections as the *Tablettes romantiques* and *Annales romantiques* showed that also Bertrand's formal experimentation is a combination of this author's debts to contemporary literary inventiveness and his own creativity. However, the comparison of the *fantaisies* with other short texts in poetic prose did not underplay Bertrand's experimentation, which was, on the contrary, all the more evident as a result of such an analysis. Indeed, Bertrand's typographical choices (especially his

asterisks and white spaces) displayed a higher level of awareness of the creative possibilities offered by the spatial organisation of his texts on the page; an awareness that the author could have gathered through his journalistic experience. A doubt thus arises as to whether Bertrand's experimentation with typography could be at the origins of other possible critical paths, different from that of the development of the prose poem. Some critics have even suggested that Bertrand's white spaces could be at the origins of more radical inventions in poetry, which would lead to compositions such as Mallarmé's 'Un Coup de Dés', for instance. However, seeing Bertrand as the origin of yet another poetic path would risk introducing another critical anachronism.

Overall, this study based on an understanding of the cultural context of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, freeing Bertrand from his role of precursor or creator within the history of the prose poem, has allowed us to assess his own innovations both from the thematic and the formal points of view, without ignoring his sources of inspiration. It is only by going back to the context of Bertrand's *fantaisies*, without being influenced by his canonical role, that an anachronistic comparison with later authors can be avoided, such as the traditional comparison to Baudelaire, who wrote his *petits poèmes en prose* decades after Bertrand. New possible readings of the compositions of *Gaspard de la Nuit* are thus encouraged, and this interpretative exercise, supported by a historical study, can help future scholars both to better understand Bertrand's texts – as well as the texts of other authors – in their interaction with phenomena belonging to the cultural contexts that produced them, and to shed a new light on such cultural phenomena.

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