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Anxious Influencers – Reading the Nineteenth Century in 2021

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ABSTRACT

Looking at the conditions of academic work in nineteenth-century French literature as well as the foundations of the discipline of literary studies, this article argues that the study of literature in an historical context allows for a flexibility in conceptual frameworks. Readings attentive to the anxiety of overinterpreting the past, creating the possibility for us to compare the differences between historical ways of ordering perception, that is to say how new concepts emerge from textual forms. Works written around the events of July 1830, Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and Sand's *Indiana* serve as a case study.

KEYWORDS

Disciplinary; anxiety; July 1830

Time is contentious. Power flows to those who control the dominant narratives about the past and the vision of the future. Neoliberal discourse is the latest iteration of a total narrative about time, micromanaging our present in the name of science and in the service of a better world always on the horizon. Those who disagree about the past or who dispute the predictions about the future push against this temporal consensus, and find themselves labelled regressive, out of touch, ignorant, or worse.¹ As scholars of the nineteenth century, our authority depends upon our knowledge of the past and also on the pertinence of this past to the present. We then have the temptation to overestimate our knowledge of history and exaggerate the past's connection to the present, either by reading the past according to contemporary categories, or missing something in the present because we can't shake off the conceptual categories we have inherited. An honest reckoning with these temptations of historical misreading leads to a certain anxiety of reading, an anxiety of influence, both of being influenced and of influencing others to misread. Luckily, the literary objects at the centre of our research make certainties impossible and demand the cultivation of a discernment of textual strategies, which is to say of a literary taste. We can learn to embrace this anxiety in order to doubt our first impressions and to reread as we glean new and more complex patterns across texts and across decades. Our methodology is not an historical determinism that reifies events, but simply the creation of concepts that emerge through different arrangements of forms. Literature, as it was conceived

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at the beginning of the nineteenth century, teaches us that history is never settled, that the future is always to be invented.

Given the dangers of misreading the past and of projecting onto the future, I feel somewhat anxious pontificating about my own vision of what the state of the field of nineteenth-century French studies might be. Such a question implies taking stock of professional issues confronting scholars as well as looking into the future in order to see what trendy new research topics could win grants or secure employment. That might be too much responsibility for any group of academics, since as I will argue in this essay, the strength of our field – literature broadly but especially nineteenth-century French literature in particular – is based on our openness to a variety of methodologies and disciplines. Moreover, we often express a healthy reluctance to impose rigid guidelines for thought on our colleagues. We are, as a group of scholars, what I would call ‘anxious influencers’: thinkers who strive to convince others of the validity of their original ways of reading texts, yet who remain wary of totalizing forms of thought. In what follows, I will sketch out what it means, for me at least, to write about the nineteenth century in 2021, highlighting the ways that studying this historical, though ever expanding, corpus raises questions about the very notion of literary studies. I will then conclude briefly with a look at how Hugo, Stendhal, and Sand’s fictional ‘anxious influencers’ from 1830 anticipated some of our own epistemological quandaries as literary scholars today as their characters resist the dominant discourses of their times.

On the face of it, we have many reasons to be anxious in 2021. Even before Covid, before Brexit and before Trump, humanistic study in universities around the world was often described as in perpetual crisis. As the cost for students of higher education goes up along with the expansion of neo-liberal rhetoric on the part of politicians and administrators, student enrollments in our subject decline and fewer permanent research positions are maintained. Having taught in several different types of universities in two countries, I have seen these overall trends play out quite differently depending on institutional resources and cultures. In the US, scholars are encouraged to cultivate several subspecialties in order to increase their chances of finding a position and then are often required to teach a wide variety of courses to students who usually choose French as a second or even third specialization. Research funding most often comes from within the university and favours individual projects that have some claim to interdisciplinarity, especially with more scientific projects. In the UK, from my limited experience so far, undergraduate teaching remains more specialized for the time being, though there are new pressures to open up the curriculum. Research funding comes more often from outside the university, which encourages collaborative work that may or may not be interdisciplinary. The pressures of the tenure system and the REF add further stress, incentives, and obstacles to research and writing.

The material conditions of our working environment influence what kinds of topics we choose and how we conduct and then publish our research. Although we may anxiously discuss the details of these professional matters *ad nauseum* in private, we tend to leave them out of our published texts – research, ideally, should aim to transcend the narrow concerns of the present. And yet, literary criticism and research have always been faced with the competing obligations of analyzing the work in its own historical context and addressing the contemporary problems of the critic. On the positive side, the enormous differences in how we conduct research and teaching of nineteenth-

century French literature across the anglophone academic world and in France have created a particularly rich field, especially when scholars from different systems come into dialogue. As we face the new and unexpected professional and intellectual landscape of the Covid-era, it is all the more important that we continue to share research and compare solutions to our common challenges.

As scholars of nineteenth-century France, I believe we are uniquely placed, within literary studies and the university in general, to address the various disciplinary, intellectual, political, and financial crises of higher education. While we can recognize as 'literature' works from any century and from any culture, the concept itself, and therefore the disciplinary or interdisciplinary lens through which we see the contemporary university, belongs largely to nineteenth-century France. As I explored in my second book, *The Price of Literature* (Bray 2019), the very concept of literature as we know it today developed in the wake of the French Revolution as the artform of the written word liberated from representational constraints (in this I am inspired by the work of Jacques Rancière, particularly in his books *La Parole muette* (Rancière 2005) and *Les Bords de la fiction*) (Rancière 2017). Literature as aesthetic liberation unleashed the unwieldy character of textuality, where the gap between the word and its referent is exposed instead of hidden. As Michel Foucault argued, the emergence of literature in the nineteenth century allows us to perceive the 'être vif du langage' and forms 'une sorte de "contre-discours"' to positivism.² The paradox of literature's freedom to represent anything at all is that it cannot coherently represent the positivistic discourse it opposes, except obliquely in what I call literature's 'theoretical turn', that is to say when literature turns theory into form. We are all familiar with literary texts that contain long theoretical digressions on non-fictional topics (for example clam chowder in *Moby Dick* or sewers in *Les Misérables*), yet we are aware of how the novelistic frame and literary quality of the language alters how we interpret these theories represented in the literary text. Indeed, a text begins to be read as literature when its scientific or positivistic content is no longer up to date with a contemporary disciplinary consensus – the literary quality of Darwin's or Michelet's works, for instance, is even more apparent today now that biology has digested Darwinism and the Annales School among others has complexified our understanding of French history.

The study of literature, conversely, has largely been about the conundrum of how to contain literature's 'counter-discourse', its a-disciplinarity, within the discourse of an academic discipline. One of the first chairs of literary studies, Sainte-Beuve, developed his infamous biographical method of criticism, which allows for the classification of a diverse body of texts according to the unity of a single 'author'. Matthew Arnold, Hippolyte Taine, Gustave Lanson, and the other pioneers of criticism would incorporate social and historical contextualization in order to interpret a particular literary work as a product of its author and its milieu, foreshadowing Frederic Jameson's call to 'Always historicize!' The twentieth century saw the use of other disciplines to lend epistemological weight to scholarly readings from psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology, mathematics, cinema, neuroscience, and computer science, among others. Literature becomes a discipline, becomes 'disciplined', by anchoring criticism in non-literary disciplines, what we call 'theory'.³ While the interdisciplinary approach helps with the legitimacy of literary studies within the academy, it also helps question the presuppositions of these other seemingly more confident disciplines. Even while literary studies have

struggled in recent decades as the discipline without a discipline, the social sciences and even occasionally the physical sciences have been influenced by the disruptive challenges of literary theory, especially ‘French theory’.

Scholars of literature, then, have to balance conflicting tensions present in the very nature of their object of study and in relation to their place in the modern academy. The criteria that define persuasive scholarship – historical accuracy, coherence of argument, citations of other scholars, scientific reproducibility, objectivity – are flaunted by literary texts. Even worse, literature evolves to incorporate and subvert literary criticism itself; after all, Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* began as *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Literary texts refuse to stay within the boxes we build for them.

In some ways, the literary scholar (a reader who writes about what they read) is the mirror image of the literary author, in that scholarship downplays the formal, literary qualities of writing in order to accentuate evidence and demonstrate seriousness by citing ‘the literature’, by which we mean of course other scholarship. Deconstruction showed us how the separation of writing into literature and criticism leads to discursive aporia. As Barbara Johnson wrote in her reading of Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*:

the literary text conveys a difference from itself which it ‘knows’ but cannot say, while the critical text, in attempting to say the difference, reduces it to identity [...] And the difference between literature and criticism consists perhaps only in the fact that criticism is more likely to be blind to the way in which its own critical difference from itself makes it, in the final analysis, literary. (Johnson 1978, 9)

Just as Barthes’ distinction between the *scriptible* and the *lisible* breaks down in the analysis of Balzac’s short story from 1830, ‘Sarrasine’, and just as the character Sarrasine himself fails to understand the object of his affection even as he creates a beautiful sculpture of La Zambinella, Barthes’ critical text misses the mark in failing to understand the difference inscribed in Balzac’s tale, but in so doing makes his work of criticism ... literary.

I don’t mean to imply that we literary scholars find ourselves in a dead end, where we can only write literature or have to change professions and study the hard sciences. But our critical ‘reading’ needs to acknowledge that it is also ‘writing’ and that literature itself, as an artform, actively questions the distinctions between different categories of discourse. Instead of a flaw in our academic discipline that costs us grant money and steady employment, we can recognize the value of literature to articulate the connections between disciplines and occasionally point out the gaps in logic covered over by dominant discourses, especially discourses about time. The anxiety we may feel towards our own work – whether because it seems disconnected from contemporary concerns or less ‘valuable’ or perhaps less ‘monetized’ than other fields – is itself a product of our particularly twenty-first century predicament. Historical perspective and the discursive freedom promised by literature offer us a way to name this anxiety and perhaps channel it into influencing the academic and political spheres.

‘Literature’ is a concept that we often take for universal, but as I have said, has its own specific genealogy that passes through nineteenth-century France. While the concept of literature resists simplistic historical frames, contextualizing its genealogy provides a rich area to explore how writing as an artform creates new ways of perceiving and thinking. Some of the most exciting work in our discipline has shown how the literary field emerged in the nineteenth century, how canons were formed or reformed, and how

literary discourse had an impact on political and social life.⁴ But just as literary critics risk misreading a text by ignoring the literary characteristics of their own writing, scholars of an historical time period, in a foreign language no less, have to balance concerns of historical accuracy with attentiveness to contemporary problems. This can be quite tricky, since the nineteenth century is both static (there will be no new nineteenth-century novels written this year) and actualized by our discussions about it (we continue to rediscover forgotten works or marginalized authors as well as invent new ways of reading ‘old’ texts). What is ‘new’ about that century is our discourse about it, but this is inevitably shaped by our contemporary issues, subject not only to intellectual fashions but also to our own blindness to just how different modes of thinking were in the past.

We are caught between two temptations: on the one hand, escapism to what we imagine to be the nineteenth century in all its exoticism, and on the other, the plundering of the archives to find confirmation for whatever argument happens to align with today’s power structures. We are all guilty of both extremes at times. Just last year, I was asked by two colleagues in English and Comparative Literature to write an article about Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* that would illuminate the twin problems of the Gilets jaunes and Trump. While it is certainly possible to see parallels between the historical events of 1848–1851 and what is sometimes inaccurately described as ‘populism today’, I tried to argue that Flaubert’s novel rejects the interpretation of current events based on representations of the past. The editors refused my protests and I relented by incorporating a few nods to the present day in my article, but noting that as literary scholars, we must be careful to distrust our inclination to see only what repeats, and instead read for what is different and unique (Bray 2020, 439). We need to respect the strangeness of the past and our commitment to the (discourses of the) present: the nineteenth century as an historical period remains perplexing, and literature is inherently weird, since it sets out to reinvent the very language we use to describe the world. Still, as 2020 and 2021 have shown us, the present can be equally baffling.

We therefore should resist the urge to explain one century through another, either the nineteenth through the twenty-first or the twenty-first through the nineteenth. Literature has trained us in the suspension not only of disbelief but also in hasty categorization. As Friedrich Schiller argued, the playful interaction with an artwork leads to the undoing of the bonds of identity, which can therefore enable enlightened political action – freedom and aesthetics are intimately connected.⁵ A suspended reading, an ‘anxious’ reading perhaps, keeps us from falling into the trap of disciplining or hardening our interpretations, and instead allows us to compare the differences between historical ways of ordering perception, that is to say how new concepts emerge from textual forms. The work of reading literature from the nineteenth century is both timely and timeless, in that we strive to understand the past even as we find ways to break out of our contemporary intellectual frameworks.

The sublime beauty of a literary event – the literary text *as* event and the historical event *as* restaged by the literary text – comes from the impossibility of ever exhausting our interpretations of it, since the power of the literary event lies in its ability to block a clear articulation of identities and discourses, whether about the past which is depicted or in the present of reading. We return again and again to these texts because we are not looking for easy answers but rather new ways of asking questions. To take an example from canonical texts we are all familiar with, the events of July 1830 and their aftermath form one of the defining moments of how literature (as it emerged in the modern era)

could engage with historical, political, and scientific discourses. Not only the celebrated realist texts by Stendhal and Balzac (which exposed the distance between bourgeois ideology and lived experience), but also Hugo's monstrous novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Sand's questioning of gender relations in *Indiana*, Gautier's manifesto for the independence of literature in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, or Musset's staging of the anguish of political action in *Lorenzaccio*, among countless others. The monumental hopes and unprecedented deceptions of that disappointing revolution inspired literary texts that emphasized the very ambiguities of literary form even as they analyzed the hypocrisies of 1830s France. One can see similar patterns in how literary texts responded to subsequent upheavals, whether 1848, 1871, 1914, 1939, 1968, in France and elsewhere: literature captures the singularity of the differences that emerge from these repetitions of social upheaval.

Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris: 1482* remains exemplary in its political engagements through the historical transposition of July 1830 onto 1482, a prior liminal moment in France's aesthetic and social history between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Instead of directly representing the social and political issues of 1830, Hugo thematizes misreading, misidentification, and the power of sublime ambiguity: Claude Frollo unsuccessfully reads the architecture of his cathedral, Esmeralda fails to see the falseness of her lover Phœbus, and Louis XI is unable to recognize a popular rebellion. Indeed, the novel's characters meet their horrible fates because they cling to false interpretations of signs that no longer correspond to a changing reality. The sublime, in Hugo's telling, seems beautiful and monstrous because it cannot be contained in any representational system.⁶ This novel about a cathedral even refrains from providing the reader with a coherent and detailed description of Notre-Dame itself.⁷ The literary text unwilling or unable to represent social realities without distorting them, instead accentuates the political potential of its own unruliness. Combining historical analysis, architectural flights of fancy, colourful depictions of different social strata, and imitations of prior literary forms, Hugo's novel is a study in excess. In overshooting the mark, like Balzac's 'Sarrasine' or Barthes' *S/Z*, Hugo's novel exceeds the 1482 it purportedly represents and gives us the tools to question the events of 1830 or our own time. The novel resembles, in its hodgepodge of forms and themes, the people of the Cour des Miracles:

Les limites des races et des espèces semblaient s'effacer dans cette cité comme dans un pandémonium. Hommes, femmes, bêtes, âge, sexe, santé, maladies, tout semblait être commun parmi ce peuple; tout allait ensemble, mêlé, confondu, superposé; chacun y participait de tout. (Hugo 1975, 82)

The siege by the Cour des Miracles on the cathedral foreshadows, of course, future revolutionary moments, especially in so far as it cannot be understood by the anxious king or even by the historical actors themselves; hierarchies are rejected, which allows this 'people' to share and participate in everything. Literature, in all its democratic force, similarly shares with its readers experiences and perceptions which are 'mêlé, confondu, superposé'; by refusing to fix the identities of its representations, Hugo's novel keeps the revolutionary spirit alive for his readers.

Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* also challenges the reader with creative anachronisms and popular characters who defy easy classifications, thus continuing the work of (the 1789) revolution long after its disappointing conclusion. Julien Sorel as a character is

both delicate, *sensible*, a peasant, a dandy – the constant is that he is always an outsider, though one who intrigues by his force of character. His very presence warps the environment he is in, like a mirror that would distort what we see on that famous muddy road.⁸ As we all know, Julien's parlour trick is his ability to recite a text from memory, though he is only a textual character recycling other texts. He begins by reciting the Bible in Latin to the small-town bourgeois, Rousseau to a pretty girl in a medium city café, and Horace, Virgile, and Cicero to the Bishop in Besançon. His intelligence allows him to figure out which discourse will work in which situation – Julien's interlocutor is led to believe that the copied passage is chosen because Julien finds pleasure in reciting it, and that the shared pleasure of the speaker and the listener reflects their good taste and implied good political judgement. A confusion then arises because Julien's station does not correspond to that of his audience and therefore of the appropriate discourse. The other characters feel compelled to account for where this taste comes from, often inventing a story they know is false. Mme de Rênal, while trying to convince her husband to send Julien away, declares that he gets his bad taste from novels, though M. de Rênal claims to know for a fact that he doesn't read them. The chevalier de Beauvoisis, after the embarrassment of duelling with Julien, can't reconcile the good taste of Julien's 'gilet' and his boots with the famous 'habit noir' – he has to conclude that Julien's choice of black is made in order to better dodge a bullet. Subsequently, of course, the chevalier invents the story of Julien's illegitimate aristocratic father. M. de la Mole takes this invention one step further by giving him the 'habit bleu' which will allow Julien to be treated like an equal to the marquis, but only in private. Later, Mathilde tries the story of Julien's invented father out on her snobbish friends, exposing the whole social game of good manners and official rhetoric. Mathilde de la Mole, likewise, is a character 'tout à fait d'imagination' outside of all social conventions. Inspired by her sixteenth-century ancestor, Boniface de la Mole, Mathilde borrows gestures and words from the Renaissance in order to unsettle the narrow nineteenth-century perspectives of her entourage. That she can project onto Julien the dangerous revolutionary potential of Danton confirms not only the destabilizing power of Mathilde's creative anachronism, but also of Julien's ambiguous, literary we might say, interweaving of contradictory discourses in that the meaning of his actions remains forever mysterious – to other characters, to Julien himself and even to generations of critics.

In much more subtle ways than Hugo or Stendhal, George Sand's *Indiana* exposes the duplicity of hardened categories of gender, race, and political allegiance. The novel narrates how dominant modes of reading pose specific dangers to women. The two main female characters, Indiana and Noun, are described in ambiguous terms that lead first the unscrupulous seducer Raymon, and then literary critics, to identify each woman according to reductive categories. As Pratima Prasad (2003) has argued, scholars have tended to see only Noun's class difference with Indiana or, conversely, have classified her as a woman of colour; similarly, Adlai Murdoch (2002) convincingly argued that the novel itself labels both Noun and Indiana 'créoles', playing on the ambiguity of the word meaning person born in the colonies of European ancestry, person of mixed race, or person of African ancestry and so paradoxically, either colonizer or colonized. After Raymon's betrayal has doomed Noun and is about to threaten Indiana, the narrator reveals that Raymon has also seduced and manipulated the reader as an influential voice supporting the regime:

[Il] est un des hommes qui ont eu sur vos pensées le plus d'empire ou d'influence, quelle que soit aujourd'hui votre opinion. Vous avez dévoré ses brochures politiques, et souvent vous avez été entraîné, en lisant les journaux du temps, par le charme irrésistible de son style, et les grâces de sa logique courtoise et mondaine. (Sand 1984, 128)

Style, logic, and good manners can become tools of dishonest seduction that charm the reader as they charmed Indiana, leading us astray from whatever our political opinions may be. The end of the novel reveals a similar deception on the reader. The apparently masculine pseudonym Sand chose for her first novel prepares the unsuspecting reader for the narrator's casual misogyny throughout the novel; only at the very end does the reader learn that the narrator is not omniscient or objective, but is, rather, a young man who has learned about Indiana's story, not from Indiana, but from Sir Ralph. This disconcerting revelation that the events of the novel, including the revolution of 1830, and even the imagined thoughts of such a powerful heroine are filtered through the bias of masculine narrators is a perfect restaging of realist tropes and patriarchal discourse. And yet, Sand herself warned us in her 1852 preface to the novel: 'La critique a beaucoup trop d'esprit, c'est ce qui la fera mourir' (35).

As twenty-first century scholarly readers, we can take Sand's (and Stendhal's and Hugo's) texts as inspiration and warning; 'trop d'esprit' might be our undoing. The critic who claims to know exactly what the text has to say and attempts to influence others, reduces the original text to an identity to the point of erasing its historical and critical difference while usurping the role of other readers. At the other extreme, we find Jorge Luis Borges's famous French critic Pierre Menard, who supposedly rewrote chapters 9 and 38 of *Don Quixote* word for word in the 1930s. Menard's work, in Borges' ironic prose, would be superior to the original because of Menard's painstaking recreation of Golden Age Spanish. A critic who 'understands' the literary text of the past to such a perfect degree that he effaces himself all the while presenting the past as a work of the present, Menard attempts to dispel the aura we give to works of the past because of the prestige time bestows on them:

There is no intellectual exercise that is not ultimately pointless. [...] The Quixote, Menard remarked, was first and foremost a pleasant book; it is now an occasion for patriotic toasts, grammatical arrogance, obscene *de luxe* editions. Fame is a form—perhaps the worst form—of incomprehension. (Borges 1998, 94)

Borges's Menard performs a ridiculous act of criticism, but one with a democratic ideal: "Thinking, meditating, imagining", he also wrote to me, "are not anomalous acts – they are the normal respiration of the intelligence. [...] Every man should be capable of all ideas, and I believe that in the future he shall be" (95). Although Menard's radical criticism is undercut by his own utopian belief in the future, he provides a compelling lesson for us as scholars of historical literary works; reading and writing are acts with the potential for emancipating us from dominant discourses that rely on the prestige of history. Instead of filling in the silences and gaps of the historical text – whether concerning Julien's motivations, what Frollo sees in the cathedral's façade, Indiana's silence at the end of her novel, or the strangeness of Cervantes' early-modern world – we can learn to read for the gaps, for the ambiguity of literary discourse, and the blurring of categories that continue to trouble us today.

Notes

1. See Jacques Rancière's *Les Temps modernes* (2018), which examines the battle over the 'partage du temps' in politics and in art.
- 2.

On peut dire en un sens que la 'littérature,' telle qu'elle s'est constituée et s'est désignée comme telle au seuil de l'âge moderne, manifeste la réapparition, là où on ne l'attendait pas, de l'être vif du langage. Au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles, l'existence propre du langage, sa vieille solidité de chose inscrite dans le monde étaient dissoutes dans le fonctionnement de la représentation ; tout langage valait comme discours. [...] Or, tout au long du XIXe siècle et jusqu'à nous encore - ... — la littérature n'a existé dans son autonomie, elle ne s'est détachée de tout autre langage par une coupure profonde qu'en formant une sorte de 'contre-discours', et en remontant ainsi de la fonction représentative ou signifiante du langage à cet être brut oublié depuis le XVIIe siècle. (Foucault 1966, 58–9)

3. As Jonathan Culler defines it, 'theory is work that succeeds in influencing thinking in fields other than those in which it originates' (Culler 2006, 3).
4. I'm thinking for example of some of the most influential works in our field, such as Naomi Schor's *George Sand & Idealism* (1993), Ross Chambers' *The Writing of Melancholy* (1993), Richard Terdiman's *Discourse/Counter-discourse* (1985), Margaret Cohen's *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (1999), or Maurice Samuels's *Inventing the Israelite* (2009).
5. The Fifteenth Letter of Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (*Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*) argues that aesthetic phenomena are the objects of a play-drive ('Spieltriebe') that combines the object of a sense-drive (either 'sinnlicher Trieb' or 'Stofftrieb'), life, with the object of a form-drive ('Formtrieb'), form, into 'living form' ('lebende Gestalt'). Living form, or the beautiful, unites in the psyche both the material and the formal, the real and the ideal, the mortal and the divine. For Schiller, the suspension of opposites in aesthetic contemplation is the condition for freedom (Schiller 1982, 109). For Jacques Rancière, in *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, Schiller's aesthetic philosophy implies the suspension of the power hierarchy between reality and appearance, life and art, form and matter, and therefore the State and the masses (Rancière 2004, 45–7). Rancière argues that literature's 'confusions' and contradictions are not the product of modernism or post-modernism but inherent to aesthetics, and therefore to the promise of freedom inherent to aesthetics. Rancière uses Schiller's frame to interpret Stendhal's *Vie de Henry Brulard*, which, he argues, institutes 'un régime esthétique où se brouille la distinction entre les choses qui appartiennent à l'art et celles qui appartiennent à la vie ordinaire' (13), as well as Proust's *Recherche*, 'ce roman faussement autobiographique' (93), which puts forth a theory of literature contrary to the novel's own practice (93).
6. Suzanne Guerlac observes about the concept of the sublime in general that it 'had resisted theoretical closure in every attempt made to comprehend it' (Guerlac 1990, vii).
7. Suzanne Nash shows that Hugo's narrator 'never tells us precisely what [the cathedral's portals] represent. To know, the reader must look at the restored cathedral still standing today' (Nash 1983, 129).
8. Lawrence Schehr remarks, '[t]he mirror is the locus of the imaginary ... before the mirror reflects the same, and before it creates the simulacrum in which writing repeats the world, the mirror marks the unrepresentable' (Schehr 1997, 46).

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Note on the contributor

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