

## Rebecca Powers

### Charles Testut and *Les Mystères de la Nouvelle-Orléans* : Journalism in Exile

**A**lthough Charles Testut left his native France at the tender age of nineteen, he never renounced his French citizenship, and the close connection he felt to his native land would remain an overarching theme throughout his career. Little is known of his life in the metropole, and we do not know why he left France. He arrived in New York in 1839 and quickly set to establishing a French-language newspaper, *L'Indicateur*. Like many small periodicals at the time, the paper went bankrupt within a year, but Testut was unfazed and would go on to found – sometimes with others, sometimes alone – about a dozen newspapers throughout North America. Following the failure of *L'Indicateur*, Testut moved to Guadeloupe, where he practiced medicine and started a family. Following the great earthquake of 1843, Testut came back to the United States, and participated in the establishment of several small French-language newspapers in Louisiana and Alabama. Finally, in 1849, he settled down in New Orleans, where he would remain until 1858<sup>1</sup>.

New Orleans was known at the time as the center of material and cultural wealth in the American South. Its prosperity was regrettably due in large part to its enormous slave market (the largest in the country), and its unique culture to a remarkably heterogeneous population. The city streets were a hodgepodge of European, African, and Native American languages and cultures, and yet the communities remained fairly isolated from one another. For example, when the German journalist Baron von Ludwig von Reizenstein published his *Die Geheimnisse von New Orleans* (Mysteries of New Orleans) in 1853 – almost two years after Testut had begun to publish *Les Mystères* – Reizenstein makes no reference to the French version. For his part, Charles Testut does not mention the German *Die Geheimnisse*, and it is quite possible that the two journalists were unaware of each other's existence, despite their spatial and professional proximity<sup>2</sup>. The context in which Testut writes his *Mystères*<sup>3</sup> must be seen, then, as part of a tight-knit francophone community located alongside, but separate from, many other small introverted communities.

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<sup>1</sup> See Caryn Cossé Bell. "Testut, Charles"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-01618.html>; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000

<sup>2</sup> See Steven Rowan: Introduction to *The Mysteries of New Orleans*. Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Testut, Charles. *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans*. La Nouvelle Orléans: Imprimerie de A. Gaux et de L. Dutuit, editeurs, 1853. (v. 1-4). The American Antiquarian Society. Worcester, MA. For the remainder of the paper, citations from this work will be given in volume and page number. Full text available at <http://www.ittybittyurl.com/U83>

## A Double Audience

Testut's literary objectives must be seen as two-pronged. He is, on the one hand, nostalgic for and trying to remain connected to his native France, while on the other, working to establish himself as a decidedly Louisianan author. Upon his arrival, Testut immediately became deeply involved in the francophone literary community of New Orleans. During this period which Auguste Viatte would later call the "apogee of Louisiana literature," Testut was in good company<sup>4</sup>. As a series of political upheavals took place in metropolitan France, Louisiana had become a place of refuge for exiles of all ideological stripes: Republicans, socialists, Freemasons, Carbonari, and Royalists all found themselves at various times unwelcome in France, coming over in waves to settle in New Orleans. Journalists were especially apt to be exiled and numerous French-language newspapers of all persuasions popped up and quickly disappeared. "They bloom like mushrooms and die like flies," as Edward Tinker remarked<sup>5</sup>. Testut himself headed two weekly papers: first *La Chronique* and later *La Semaine*, neither of which was especially long-lived, and contributed to the literary scene in other ways, publishing several novels and poetry collections. At this time, Testut had also become involved with a group of *gens de couleur libres*, most notably Camille Thierry, a Black poet who, unlike Testut, would go on to become an influential player in the Parisian literary scene. Testut's association with this group – remarkable both for their heterodox abolitionist politics and prolific literary production – was a formative moment in his career.

But even if Charles Testut did involve himself deeply in the francophone community of New Orleans, he would always consider himself an exiled citizen of France in dialogue with his native country (a decidedly one-sided "dialogue," as there is no evidence that his works were ever read outside of Louisiana). He maintained this "relationship" through a rapprochement of the two literary scenes, a virtual denial of the cultural and geographical distances between Paris and New Orleans. For example, in the introduction to his *Veillées louisianaises* (1849), a collection of historical novels based in Louisiana, Testut renders homage to Dumas, "qui, avec les allures d'une forme attachante, a si bien magnétisé l'attention de ses milliers de lecteurs, tout en restant, au fond, historien!"<sup>6</sup> evoking a kind of parity between his own works and Dumas's, notably the wildly successful *Comte de Monte-Cristo* and the trilogy of *Les Trois Mousquetaires*. His admiration of Dumas was long-lived, and in 1876, he would publish *Les filles de Monte-Cristo*, a sequel to Dumas's best-seller. Testut's next project, *Les Portraits Littéraires de La Nouvelle-Orléans* (1850) is modeled after Sainte-Beuve's similarly-named collection of critical and biographical essays. In this work, Testut performs the same task of memorialization and celebration of past and present literary giants in French-speaking Louisiana as Sainte-Beuve had done for those of France. In each of these examples, we see Testut making use of French literary forms to convey content that is distinctly Louisianan. Indeed, we might see his use of genres and other formal devices that have had success in Paris as an attempt to appeal to a Parisian audience and to achieve success overseas.

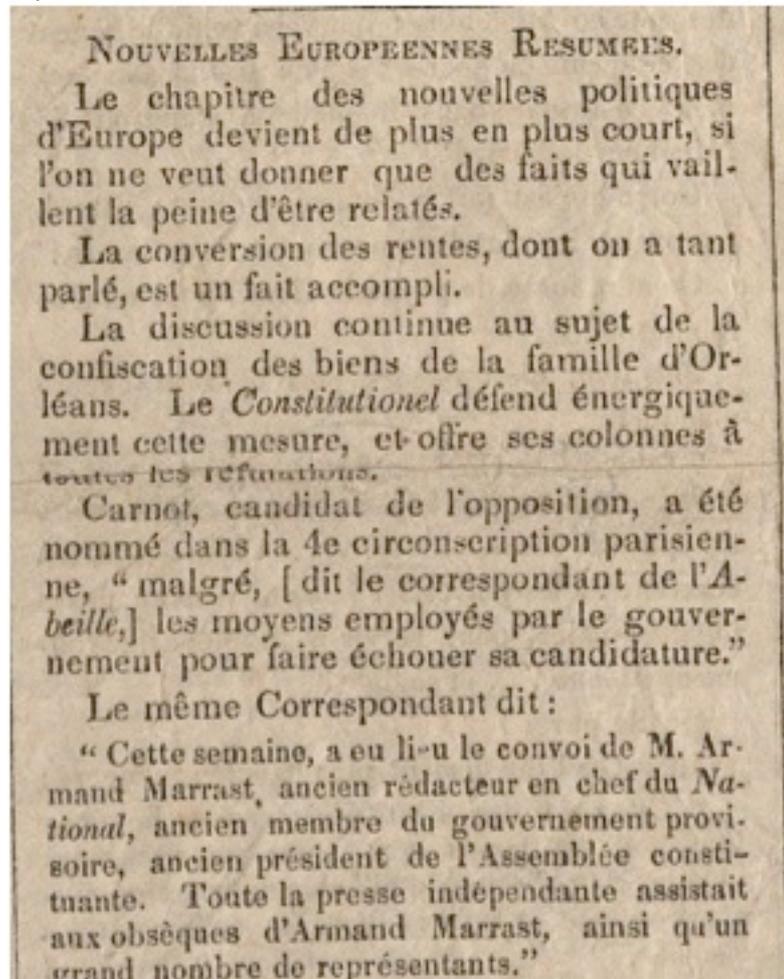
All of these gestures toward the metropole indicate that Testut considered himself not a newly-minted American, but a Frenchman in exile. In spite of his having no hope of going back his birthplace, he did not adopt the customs of his new home, but assumed the role of cultural colonizer. He considered himself vested with the responsibility of introducing French

<sup>4</sup> See Auguste Viatte. *Histoire Littéraire de l'Amérique française*. Presses Universitaires de Paris et Laval, 1954.

<sup>5</sup> Tinker, Edward Larocque. *Bibliography of the French Newspapers and Periodicals of Louisiana*. Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian society, 1933. Cited in Viatte.

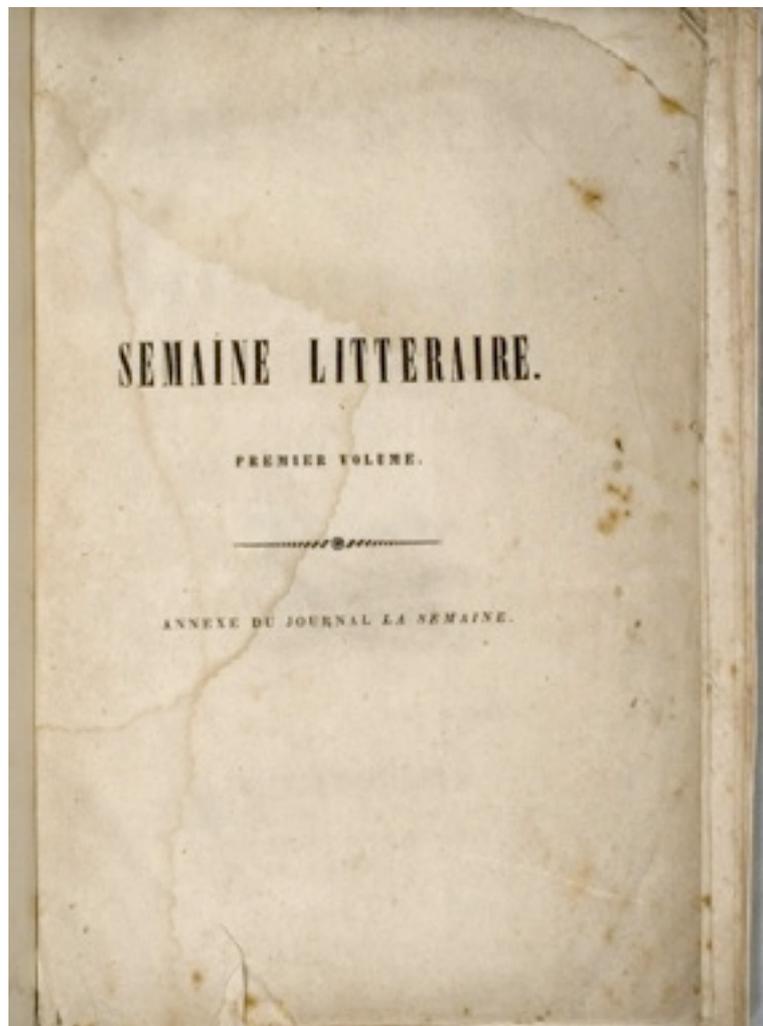
<sup>6</sup> Cited in Viatte, p. 270.

literature to the New World. His newspapers, especially *La Semaine de La Nouvelle-Orléans*, became vessels for disseminating information about the metropole to his French-speaking American audience. In keeping with the journalistic norms of the time, the content of the paper included both current events and literary publications, along with a slew of other bits of information. The paper featured, for example, a rubric entitled “Nouvelles Européennes Résumées” in which Testut took it upon himself to summarize the political happenings in France for his local public.

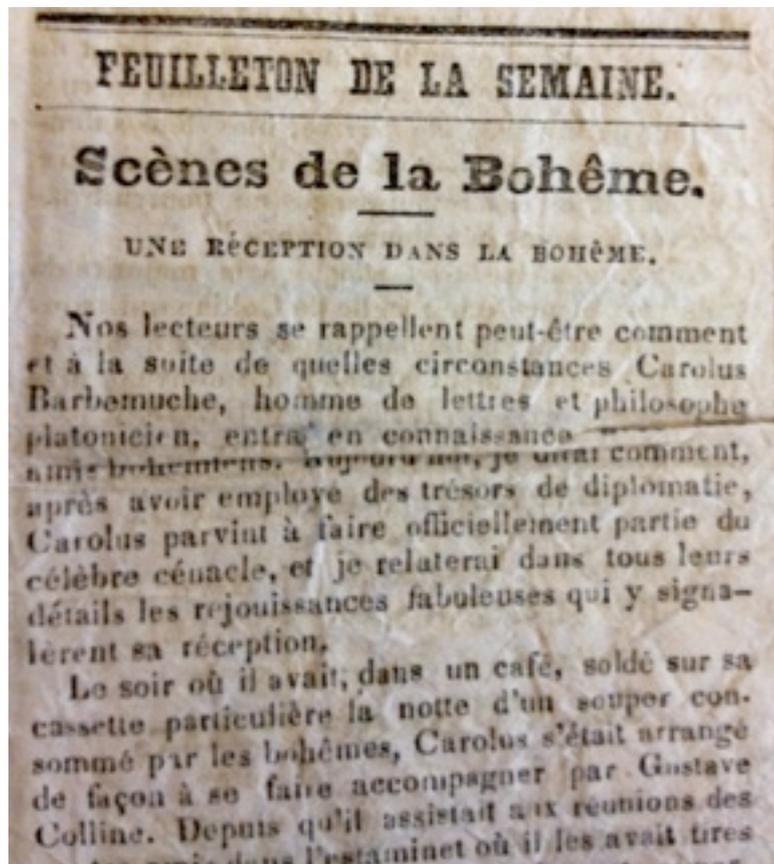


Although the writer seems to want to deny the importance of European affairs when he opens with “Le chapitre des nouvelles politiques d'Europe devient de plus en plus court, si l'on ne veut donner que des faits qui **vailent la peine d'être relatés**”<sup>7</sup> (emphasis mine), the article is actually quite lengthy and detailed, belying that opening statement. Among the many pieces of information we are given, Testut also takes care to cite carefully his sources (*Le Constitutionnel*, *L'Abeille*, *Le National*, etc.), and the French newspapers and their journalists become important actors themselves.

<sup>7</sup> *La Semaine de La Nouvelle-Orléans*. New Orleans, La.: Charles Testut, 1852. Print. Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.



*La Semaine* also republishes *romans-feuilletons* and other amusing or literary pieces, some reprinted (and probably without permission) from French papers, some written by Testut himself. Henry Murger's *Les Scènes de la vie de bohème* and a "Causerie Parisienne" by Louis Huart appear alongside a "Charivari," most likely penned by Testut himself, asking *Doit-on ou ne doit-on pas prendre du café au lait?* These rubrics each work to keep francophone New Orleanians apprised of what the public is reading in Parisian journals, and, in a way, to shorten the distance between the two cities.



### Les Mystères

Eugene Sue's original *Mystères de Paris* were first republished in the United States in 1843, and their success was immediate. Already in 1844, their popularity had reached New Orleans, when a Creole by the name of de La Gracerie began publishing his own *Mystères des bords du Mississippi* in feuilleton form<sup>8</sup>, a project he would soon tire of. The phenomenon remained popular with George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1844) and Judson's *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1847), among others. *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* were published between 1852 and 1854 in *La Semaine Littéraire*, the literary supplement to Testut's *La Semaine*, no doubt fashioned after the model of the influential *Courrier des États-Unis* and its literary supplement of the same title.

It is clear in the preface to his *Mystères* (dated November 1851), that Testut was well aware of the literary trends in Paris, and was hoping to appeal to Parisian tastes in his own work. In writing these *Mystères*, his goal, he says is

[D]e faire connaître, depuis la surface **jusqu'à une certaine profondeur**, ce qui se passe, en public ou en secret, dans cette ville...

D'arriver enfin à ce que, par la lecture de cet ouvrage, **l'étranger** connaisse aussi bien que celui qui l'habite, cette ville sur laquelle il circule tant d'opinions diverses, **dans les pays qui sont plus ou moins éloignés...**

<sup>8</sup> Viatte, p. 271.

**Toutes les faces** de la grande ville seront vues à loisir, avec leurs mille et mille variétés fantastiques, changeantes comme les facettes lumineuses et innombrables du **kaléidoscope**...

Il nous arrivera quelquefois de faire un peu comme **Asmodée**, d'**enlever les toitures** de certaines maisons, pour y faire plonger le regard public. (emphasis mine) (p ii).

These few lines contain a veritable homage to the popular literature of Paris at the time: the idea of going to “une certaine profondeur” recalls the many ways in which the *bas-fonds* are being explored in French cultural productions, not only in Sue’s *Mystères*, but also Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*, in Charles Nadar’s photographs of the sewers, and in the social-scientific *enquêtes* on of the 1830s and 1840s, such as Parent du Chatelet’s reports on prostitution and sewers. In addition to this digging deep, Testut will assume an “Asmodean” perspective, as Martina Lauster calls it, combining “a coordinating (. . . physiological or synthetic) view from above with the penetrating (anatomical or analytic) view of interiors.<sup>9</sup>” Asmodée was a particular incarnation of Satan, best known as the title character of Le Sage’s wildly successful *Diable Boiteux* who was able to lift up the roofs of city buildings to expose the moral decay going on behind closed doors.

This desire to reveal everything, to see “toutes les faces” of the city is in keeping with the objectives of realist and panoramic literature and, more specifically, the image of a “kaleidoscope” evokes the French *Physiologies*, an extensive series of small, collectable books in which individual fractions of Parisian society were characterized and typified; while these tiny booklets looked identical, they painted very different images of French society, and the reader of multiple *Physiologies* could piece together these sometimes contrasting, sometimes complementary, mix-and-match fragments into a sort of kaleidoscope of Parisian society. While the French *Physiologies* were a collective effort with over a hundred contributors, Testut’s aim was to create this same kaleidoscope effect in one novel, a task he would go about completing through many shifts in setting and tone. In addition to its similarities to the *Physiologies*, whose mechanism is primarily one of self-reflection (Parisians reading about Parisians), *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* is also conceived of as a *guide touristique*, painting a picture that will enable the Parisian (“l’étranger”), to know New Orleans just as well as he knows his own city. The long digressions on geographical and social details of the city serve not only to create a *couleur locale* in which to place the narrative, but might incite the European reader to take a greater interest in the New World. While there is no proof that Testut’s work was ever seen outside of Louisiana, Testut imagined for himself the role of ambassador of American culture.

We have already seen in the abovementioned references to multiple Parisian literary forms and fads that Charles Testut was very much aware of the French literary scene and wanted to be a part of it. *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* is no exception to this tendency, and in fact follows Sue’s original quite closely. In addition to the title, many elements of the work are clearly indebted to the *Mystères de Paris*. Most notably, the story is composed of a wide and varied cast of characters who weave in and out of the narrative, creating a dynamic and unpredictable trajectory of events. Many of these characters are obviously modeled after Sue’s: Lavinia, for example, is a seductive, mixed-race woman whose charms are used as weapons against the seemingly unstoppable villain, Alexandre. The interaction between these two – in which Lavinia withholds sexual gratification from Alexandre until his frustration makes him absolutely helpless – is quite clearly a pastiche of

<sup>9</sup> Lauster Martina, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century. European Journalism and its Physiologies, 1830-50*. Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007. Print, p. 130-131.

the scenes between Cecily and Jacques Ferrand. Other appropriations include Finot, an adept storyteller who helps out the hero by distracting his adversary (based on Pique-Vinaigre); and of course the hero who, like Rodolphe is both an adept fighter and a benevolent protector of the weak.

If *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* begins as a close adaption of *Les Mystères de Paris*, Testut, over the course of the two years of composition, will increasingly distance his writing from Sue's. In the end, the two will disagree most remarkably in their conceptions of the term *mystère*. While, according to Testut's 1851 introduction, the "mysteries" of the work should be understood, like those of Sue, as a secular and material concept, later moments in the novel reveal that Testut has a more esoteric understanding of the term, that of its older religious significance. At first, this comes in the form of rather long digressions on the subjects of spirituality and religious institutions, often arguing for a greater acceptance of alternative spiritualities, as were abundant in New Orleans at the time. This practice was not unknown to Sue, who often interrupts the narrative of his own *Mystères* to pontificate about what he sees as moral issues plaguing society. But Sue's divagations are neither as long nor as eccentric as those of Testut, who, in early 1853, becomes fascinated with Magnetism, Mesmerism and Mormonism. The next year, his fascination turns to belief, as he converts to Spiritism and becomes a Medium. The fourth volume of the *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* is greatly influenced by this conversion, the majority of the text being devoted to philosophical meditations with rare moments of intrigue, and this only when the plot helps him to demonstrate some Spiritist belief of phenomenon. For example, one chapter is nothing more than a detailed description of a séance, giving the reader a sort of dramatic demonstration of what it is like to attend such an event. In another scene, the cynical hero is healed of his mortal wounds with magnets and quickly converts to Magnetism. The elements that make a narrative – most notably, plot and character – have taken a backseat to the propagandist goals of Testut, and by the end of the novel, it is clear that the author has tired of his characters. He deals with this loss of interest philosophically, questioning what he anticipates will be the readers' desire for closure, and ending the story with the following reflection:

Et les personnages de notre roman, puisqu'il est d'usage de connaître leur fin... où sont-ils ? [...]  
Que nous importe après tout ? Est-ce qu'une vie qui se brise a jamais dit son dernier mot ?  
Est-ce qu'une lyre qu'on suspend pour toujours à la branche du saule a murmuré son dernier son ?  
L'homme voit-il quelque chose finir ici-bas ?  
Connait-il l'oméga de quelque chose ? Hélas ! non : il commence tout et ne finit rien...

The need for closure, he seems to be suggesting, is a human weakness, a misunderstanding of the eternal truth. Since his tale has shifted from narrative to treatise, Testut makes a gesture towards educating his reader rather than indulging her. But, perhaps not wanting to anger his public too much, he adds a few lines of perfunctory denouement:

Tout ce que nous pouvons vous dire, chers lecteurs, c'est que Finot et Mélanie sont partis avec les Mormons.  
C'est que les autres personnages ont embrassé la Croyance des Manifestations Spirituelles, et que, par conséquent, ils sont revenus au bien, après avoir quitté peu à peu, les sentiers de traverse qu'ils avaient pris, au lieu de la grande route.

Laissons-les donc aller au nouveau courant qui les guide, et, pour ma part, je vous souhaite, comme à eux, une bonne fin. (v. 4, p. 77)

Testut's rather philosophical closure – one which we might even characterize as an *ouverture* to future possibilities, or perhaps a refusal of the existence of finitude – could not contrast more with Sue's neatly packaged (albeit tragic) conclusion. The return to Gérolstein, the union of Rodolphe and Clémence d'Harville, and the death of Fleur-de-Marie are all signs that the future of the remaining characters will be uneventful and that all of the “mysteries” have been solved.

### The journalism effect

Sue's *Mystères de Paris* is held up as an emblematic example of the roman-feuilleton because of its successful use of both journalistic and novelistic practices to create a compelling story that would enthrall readers day after day without losing its central thread. If it is true, as Marie-Eve Thérénty suggested, that most of the subsequent urban mysteries may be seen as favoring either the novelistic or journalistic practices, then we must place *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* among the latter. The influence of American reporting practices (*le reportage* would not become a dominant practice in French journalism before the 1870s<sup>10</sup>) and the French *enquêtes* can be seen quite often in Testut's prose. The narrator is constantly insisting that what he says is true because he has seen it himself. What's more, Testut does not seem to be comfortable describing things that he has *not* seen. His depictions of New Orleans, New York, and Guadeloupe, for example, are backed by the authority of his own experience, but when his characters move to California, where he has never been, Testut quotes (without citing) another writer who *has*, providing Testut with the factual foundation necessary to his realist, journalistic objectives. Happily, this other journalist seems to have feelings about exile that coincide with his own, particularly when he writes:

En Californie, les Français se créent pour ainsi dire “une petite France” . . . Que deux de nos compatriotes se rencontrent au-delà des mers, ils se font bien vite à eux deux une nouvelle patrie. Le Français impose son influence à la région qui lui donne hospitalité ; il ne subit pas l'influence étrangère, il la domine. Partout où le Français porte ses pas, il porte avec lui ses goûts, ses habitudes, et petit à petit, sans y déroger en rien, il les fait accepter, et établit leur triomphe.<sup>11</sup>

This description of a “petite France” could very well be used to describe the community established by Testut and his fellow Francophones in New Orleans, and it explains somewhat Testut's optimistic attitude towards his exile. By maintaining the language, literature, cuisine, and general spirit of the metropole, the inhabitants of these French enclaves might more correctly be identified as colonizers who impose their culture on a new space, instead of as exiles cut off from their homeland.

Another journalistic technique employed liberally by Testut is what Marie-Ève Thérénty calls “une écriture de la remémoration constante<sup>12</sup>” a common practice in serial novels in

<sup>10</sup> See Pascal Durand. “Le reportage” in *La Civilisation du journal : Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Ed. D. Kalifa, P. Régner, M-È. Thérénty, A. Vaillant. Paris: Nouveau monde éd, 2011. Print.

<sup>11</sup> Author unknown, cited in *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* de Charles Testut. v. 3, p. 50, 1853.

<sup>12</sup> Marie-Ève Thérénty. *La Littérature au quotidien*. Seuil, 2007, p. 53.

which earlier moments in the narrative must be constantly recalled and repeated to the reader. This redundancy is necessary to the coherence of the plot which is published one chapter per week, the typical rhythm of the North-American newspaper at the time. But even beyond this obligatory weekly periodicity, Testut inserts extra interruptions into the narrative, alternating back and forth between various plotlines and settings, creating the effect of simultaneity and heightening suspense not only from one week to the next, but also within chapter interiors. An excellent example of this comes at a moment of denouement, when it seems that Testut may be hesitating where to take his story. Louis the hero has brought Anna the heroine to a safe house in Alabama, saving her from her evil husband who refuses to divorce her. The chapter begins with a conversation between Anna and a friend of hers, a young widow named Camille who will prove to be inconsequential to the rest of the *Mystères*. The two women are chatting upstairs in the safe house, and Louis is downstairs. Camille narrates most of the chapter as she recounts the story of her first love, and it is a captivating tale, but she is also constantly being interrupted “par un incident ordinaire qu’il est inutile de rapporter” (v.1 p. 98). Indeed, the causes of the interruptions are never explained, but the pauses in Camille’s narration allow Testut to change his focus to Louis, who, just downstairs, has received an important letter. Next, just as we are about to learn what was in the letter, we shift to Camille, and so on. The back and forth between the two intrigues runs on through the chapter, creating one of the most compelling moments in the work.

### Mobility

When describing Mobile, Alabama, where Louis and Anna flee from Anna’s husband, Testut, in a moment of wittiness, takes an easy dig at that other great southern port city, calling it “monotone” and “IM-Mobile” (v.1 p. 102). While it may seem facile, the silliness of the insult belies a more serious truth, that is, the importance of the freedom of movement to both Testut and the characters he creates. In spite of the title, only about a half of the action in *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* takes place in that city. Characters are constantly separating and reuniting, leaving for Alabama, New York, California, Guadeloupe and even France and then coming back to New Orleans. These voyages are taken principally by boat, and Testut is expansive in his admiration of the steamship (that product of “les mystérieuses profondeurs de l’intelligence humaine, parcelle du génie du créateur, un maître aux éléments” (v. p. 20), seeming to suffer not at all from what Pierre Laforgue calls “industrial melancholy”<sup>13</sup>.

That travel plays such a central role in Testut’s *Mystères* should perhaps come as no surprise, as Steven Knight has observed that the act of moving from one location to another is in fact an extremely important *topos* in many of the urban mysteries. However, in Knight’s examples (Paris, Londres, Philadelphia, New York and Melbourne), a voyage is not a privilege nor a joy, but rather an occasion for fear and anxiety. One has to recall the kidnapping of Fleur-de-Marie which takes place on the road to Bouqueval, the infamous roadside murder performed by the Maître d’École, and the Martial family’s piracy.

For Testut, on the other hand, travel – and steamboat travel especially – is a time not of fear but for reflection and reverie. This sentiment is expressed particularly well in a scene where Louis strolls along the deck of a ship on his way from New Orleans to Mobile, where Anna awaits him. By this time in his life, he has already traveled extensively: from Paris to

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Laforgue. « Machinisme et industrialisme, ou romantisme, modernité et mélancolie. Quelques jalons (1840-1870) » *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France*, 103<sup>e</sup> Année, n<sup>o</sup> 1 (2003), pp. 63-92.

New York to California and now this short trip to Mobile is the final leg of a long series of ordeals adventures. As Louis strolls along the deck of the ship, the narrator comments:

S'il y a, parmi toutes les circonstances vulgaires de la vie, une position où l'âme s'élève avec plus d'ardeur, à cette heure où l'on est **tout poésie**, c'est quand on est emporté, sur les flots, **vers ce qu'on aime**, ou **vers ce qu'on espère**...

This liminal space of the ship allows the hero to be purely hopeful, thinking only of his destination ("*vers ce qu'on aime*," "*vers ce qu'on espère*"), not what he is leaving. Testut sees the voyage as a sublime state, when man transcends reality to become poetry itself ("*tout poésie*"). This optimism is even more remarkable when the reason for exile is not hatred for one's homeland but some other constraint.

Ici, c'est le proscrit que le navire entraîne vers son exil : il prie pour la patrie qui le chasse...

Là, c'est l'**enfant prodigue** qui verra poindre à l'horizon, quand le soleil va se lever, la teinte grisâtre de la terre natale qu'il a fuie, dans sa juvénile exaltation...

C'est l'amant qui, ayant achevé son temps d'épreuve, revient, heureux et palpitant, vers le rivage où l'attend l'**autre portion de son cœur**...

C'est le courageux enfant qui, pour soulager sa famille, s'est fait un bonheur de l'exil, et qui revient, heureux et riche, rêvant à mille surprises que va jouer **sa modeste opulence**, au milieu du grenier qu'il a laissé presque nu... (v. 1. pp. 91-92)

This scene is thus a moment of strong identification between the writer and his hero, who both find themselves torn between their love of the familiar and their hope of what may await them in the unknown. Like Louis, Charles loves the land he is leaving but does not experience nostalgia or regret, two sentiments that often accompany exile. Instead, he sees relocation as an occasion for positive changes: moral redemption ("*l'enfant prodigue*"), true love ("*l'autre portion de son cœur*") and wealth ("*sa modeste opulence*"), among others. Testut's readers, among whom many are exiles themselves, will also identify with the character types described above: the lover, the outcast, the prodigal son, and the dutiful child sent to save the family from penury. These *types* will appear many times throughout the long narrative, and the various ways in which they deal with their exile becomes a recurring theme.

If Sue's and Testut's *Mystères* differ in their assessment of *physical* mobility – the former portraying it as a source of anxiety, the latter finding it sublime – the two are no more in agreement as to the value of *social* mobility. As Dominique Kalifa has already indicated in his work on the *bas-fonds*, the criminal world portrayed by Eugène Sue is in fact only one manifestation of a larger phenomenon of bourgeois and aristocratic anxiety in the face of a growing popular threat<sup>14</sup>. For Testut in the United States, on the other hand, the issue of class mobility is much less problematic. Testut's hero is not a prince, like Rodolphe, but someone of rather modest means who works his way up the ladder in a secret society of counterfeiters – hardly a noble profession!

<sup>14</sup> Kalifa, Dominique. *Les Bas-fonds*, Paris, Seuil, 2013. Print.

Charles Testut was modern man who conceived of himself as both truly cosmopolitan and deeply local. Although his gaze is constantly turned backwards towards the metropole, he shows he has ambiguous feelings about his status as an exile. He occupies the liminal space between exile and colonizer. Even if *Les Mystères de La Nouvelle-Orléans* did not enjoy great success at home or abroad, the work provides us with an instance of the phenomenon of cultural globalization already in place in the nineteenth century.

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