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Act 5: Cultural Sound(ing)s (1984-Present)

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Act 5:
Cultural Sound(ings) (1984-Present)

On Mondays and holidays, in my Parisian neighborhood at the foot of the Butte aux Cailles, the bakeries are all closed. Ill-timed quests for fresh bread, as mine always are each summer, require a ten-minute hike uphill to the one shop with the extra business it gladly handles on such days. Despite the physical inconvenience, I rarely begrudge the trip to this spirited quarter of town.

Demi-baguette in hand one recent afternoon, I idled back down the quaintly calm Passage Boiton. The street-sweeper had just paused to open the upper faucets, flooding the gutters with water to carry away the debris. It did not take him long to start again with his tall, green plastic broom. Swoosh, swish, swoosh. I lingered to listen before reaching the Rue Martin-Bernard behind the Eglise Sainte Anne. Swish, swoosh. Once more I was seduced by a peculiarly Parisian sound.

I have no idea why this domestic chore affects me so. My wife Anne never fails to notice the intensity of my response to the soft, mellifluous sibilance. “So weird,” she mutters, amazed. But the effect for me remains as soothing as Monsieur Robert’s rhythmic clipping and combing of my hair, as moving as the harmonic chords of a Brahms quintet, as mellow as a swaying willow along the Seine. Perhaps it is some psychic recollection of my mother’s matinal singing while she swept the kitchen floor. Whatever the reason, *le voilà*, the treat of a street-sweeper at his sonorous work.

I find other foreign tones variously enchanting. The French tongue itself is deliciously nuanced, poetic, and social in its round resonance. There are valid linguistic reasons for the complexity of politics, literature, and personal relations in France. The lan-

La lutte elle-même vers les sommets
suffit à remplir un coeur d’homme;
il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.
– Albert Camus (1942)

guage encourages political qualification, literary license, and collective repartee, habits that are as second nature to the French as their Rabelaisian wit. Audition is not everything, but it matters. However similar in the lazy mouth or the inattentive ear, *l'amour* is no more *la mort* or *le mur* than *la mer* is *la mère* or *le maire*. These approximate homonyms sound more profound in another patois.

France has raised the summer music festival to a high art, ostensibly to please the 75 million tourists who flock there year after year. African-American musicians are more prominently featured than they are at home. Each June 21, the Fête de la Musique turns every street corner into a stage for the virtuoso who registers in time at the local mayor's office. The Paris Métro accommodates more talent, amateur musicians mostly, on any one day than the average American town does in a month. As the Garnier once did, the Bastille opera season rivals those of the Metropolitan in New York and the Covent Garden in London.

Other, discordant noises emanate from garbage trucks, motorcycles, ambulances, jack-hammers, commuter trains, television sets, cellphones, and the couple whose conjugal disputes (and reconciliations) erupt unpredictably in the apartment across the courtyard. Some of these intrusions have softened since the city installed speed bumps and planted maples at my end of the Rue Barrault. Now more often one hears starlings warble, swallows screech, and, loudest of all, pigeons coo. At night Paris rumbles gently, though it is hard to know from where. It might be the snoring somnolence of more than eight million inhabitants.

Cultural difference in such auditory sensa is evident everywhere, not solely in a major city like Paris; it just seems more obvious here than elsewhere. The French have

witnessed the coming and going of ethnicities and vernaculars – from Eastern Europe and former colonies especially – to make the capital a particularly promising locus for improbable encounters. Its boundless wonders I have heard. For the past thirty years, I harkened to this world and what it offers. Akin to the joyful pop of a wine bottle uncorked, Paris opens up its resounding delights.

I understand now what the Marquise de Bellegarde meant in Henry James's The American (1879) when she confided to Christopher Newman, "We are doing you a great favour." How very French. Not only did this proud family veto Newman's engagement with the evasive Claire de Cintré, but in so doing they also made possible his self-discovery. Jilted for no reason he could fathom at first, Newman learned to appreciate the city's curious chromatic riffs, though other attentive travelers, like my grandfather Jim in 1918, left the apparent dissonance unsounded: the pleasures still drowned out the heartaches.

*Quand viendra la saison nouvelle,
Quand auront disparu les froids, ...*

My first experiences with France were with the Eatons in Ocean City – what *were* they saying to each other? – then again with Monsieur Amyot in high school – how clever he was to enact the phrases he taught. Under Charles de Gaulle the country counted in world affairs; its news came more readily to our attention. Americans like Julia Child were Mastering the Art of French Cooking (imagine that); and Jacques Truffaut's films were widely distributed in the States. Well before the May 1968 events, France enjoyed a mystique, *le je ne sais quoi*. I was not alone in its embrace.

Although I have been a mediocre student of language, I persevered through all three stages of its acquisition: the "romance" of initiation; the "precision" of grammar and pronunciation; and the "generalization" of literature. Laurence Wylie's Village en

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Comment [1]: Villanelle

Théophile Gautier's "Villanelle" was set to music by Hector Berlioz in 1838 as part of the cycle, Les Nuits d'été. Every time I hear this art song, I recall the parks of Paris and cherish their early summer scents of privet and plain trees in flower. The following is a rough translation of the lyrics, two lines of which head each section in the present chapter:

When the new season comes,
When the cold disappears,
We two will go, my belle,
To pick the lilies of the valley.
With our feet shaking free the dew drops
Seen trembling in the morning,
We will hear the blackbirds,
We will hear the blackbirds whistling.

The spring has come, my belle.
It is the blessed month of lovers;
And the bird, smoothing its wing,
Sings songs at the edge of its nest.
Oh, come, then, on this mossy bank
To speak of our fine love,
And tell me in your voice so sweet,
And tell me in your voice so sweet, "Always."

Far, very far, losing our way,
Making the surprised rabbit flee
While the stag in the mirror of the spring
Admires his bending antlers' reflection,
Then at our home, entirely happy and at ease,
Enlacing our fingers in the basket,
Let us return from gathering the strawberries,
Let us return from gathering the strawberries
in the woods.

For Anne Sofie von Otter's flawless performance of this composition, in concert with the Opéra royal du château de Versailles, the reader needs to cut and paste the following URL onto an Internet browser:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TW5UF3bH7s>

Vaucluse, which I first read as a high school senior, invited an eager youngster to dream of living among such charming people, you have to forgive them everything. As I encountered the French, their mythology evolved into a modestly more sophisticated illusion of my own, notwithstanding the efforts of my ably trained teachers – *Messieurs Godreau le québécois boiteux* and *Maczak le polonais fou*, *Madame Purdy la mère vaniteuse*, *Mademoiselles Torossian la québécoise gentille* and *Wing la new-yorkaise exaspérée* – to have me mind and mend what I learned to my detriment.

Out of favor pedagogically, there is still much to value in memorizing poetry and reading literary texts aloud in class. The melancholy verses of Paul Verlaine and Victor Hugo remain in deep memory: “Les sanglots longs / Des violins / De l’automne / Blessent mon coeur / D’une langueur / Monotone.” The fear of embarrassment before one’s peers makes for marvels; the magic of the language and its wit does the rest: “La Cigale, ayant chanté / Tout l’été, / Se trouva fort dépourvue / Quand la bise fut venue.” In Jean de La Fontaine’s lyrics, we learn Aesope’s fable of grasshoppers and ants at odds in the world; but it is the poet’s prosody that stirs us, hungry or not, to dance.

By the time I was in college, I contemplated briefly schooling in France. Family trips to Montréal and Québec had taught me to imitate an everyday French that I would not hear again until I spent my twenty-fourth birthday in Paris – thanks to Mom’s sentimental indulgence of a childhood chimera – to celebrate the end of my military service in Athens. I understood almost nothing of what people spoke to me; they understood even less of what I sputtered to them; and it took a month for me to finish reading Honoré de Balzac’s Eugénie Grandet. Clearly, like my failure to learn the piano, I had been foolish to postpone my plans to study here. I was far from alert to the city’s many church bells,

which rang the hours and called saints and sinners alike to redemption.

However engaging my high school and college instructors, they were not France itself. It was not until my work on a doctoral dissertation in 1977 that I finally began the difficult acculturation necessary for reasonable life abroad. Madame Poirier's minuscule studio on the Rue Jean-Ferrandi, my first Parisian summer home, resembled the cramped mansards inhabited by Balzac's provincial students Eugène de Rastignac and Raphaël de Valentin. Night classes at the Alliance Française followed long days in the Bibliothèque Nationale (BN). I had so much to learn and relearn to navigate the archives, the cafés, and the bus system, much less to meet others besides my fellow Americans who were everywhere in town.

Since then I have had a number of laudable landlords besides the unspeakably sweet Madame "Pear-tree": she once told me, with a wry grin, that I reminded her of a character in Molière – Monsieur Jourdain, I warrant – who parodied perfectly my linguistic ineptitude. Others were more tolerant, such as June Moravcevic, professor of French literature at the University of Illinois in Chicago, who rented me her apartment on the Rue Ginoux (1984-1995). Her living room had an impressive view of the Eiffel Tower, which served as an exquisite nightlight until its illumination was extinguished at 1:00 a.m. And Christiane Makward, another professor of French literature, at Penn State, allowed me to stay at her less elegant but better situated apartments on the Rue des Vertus and the Rue Chapon (1996-1997) near the Centre Pompidou. With effortless élan, she entertained a cacophony of polyglot Americans whose accents were certainly no worse a self-indulgent frivolity than mine.

There were still others, like Yvon and Colette Zimra, father and stepmother to my

colleague and neighbor Clarisse Zimra in the Department of English at SIUC. For two summers (1998-1999), they rented me their commodious apartment on the Avenue du Général Michel Bizot not far from the Bois de Vincennes. Yvon the bon-vivant *pied-noir* mimicked his sociable daughter – or was it vice versa? – though Clarisse had recited too many fabliaux about their stormy relations to sustain the impression for long. The reserved stepmother was endearing to Anne and me – she gave us some sublime cherry jam laced with brandy – but her indiscreet charades with Clarisse precluded our future visits. The diplomatic choreography ended when Yvon and Colette moved elsewhere in town.

*Tous les deux nous irons, ma belle,
Pour cueillir le muguet aux bois; ...*

Paris has been much more than a succession of landlords. I enjoyed memorable meals with the amiable Jean-Claude Simon and his anxious American wife Janice McCormick, fellow graduate students eager for company back in the late '70s (I wish I could say the same of their cats). Their personalities, like mine, changed from one tongue to the next. Jean-Claude was so much wittier and Janice so much sharper in French than they were in English. Dinner with Jean-Claude and an old mentor, Alain Geismar of May '68 fame, was another revelation; revolutionaries, I learned, do not regret their remorse. A leisurely afternoon near Troyes spent swilling green beans and plum brandy at the summer cottage of Jean-Claude's aunt Suzanne marked a more mundane parenthesis.

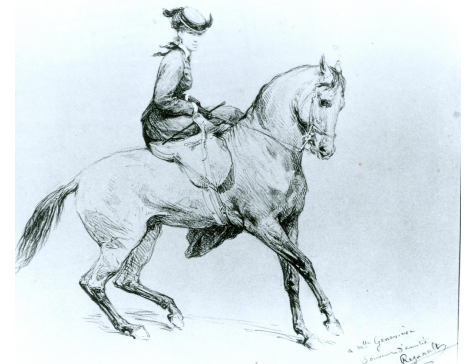
Librarians and archivists were my first important contacts in Paris. So much of my work depended on their finesse and good will. The staff at the BN, for instance, was otherworldly in its erudition. In the old Salle des Manuscrits, Florence de Lussey maintained the Masonic archives in multiple languages and with infallible recollection. No less distinguished but far more guarded in his enthusiasms was Jacques Suffel, the scho-

lar-librarian at the Bibliothèque Spoelberch de Lovenjoul in Chantilly, now housed at the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France in Paris, where I read the fan mail written to noted nineteenth-century authors. A specialist on Gustave Flaubert, Monsieur Suffel was not particularly impressed by my project to document the responses of family and friends who wrote to novelists about their books. Such a tactic he dismissed with pursed lips – “Putt!” – inauspiciously preambing my work as not worth a fart.

Other colleagues in history and literature were more circumspect in their judgments, thank goodness. The sociologist of literature Robert Escarpit and his collaborator Pierre Orrechioni were gracious hosts in Bordeaux; they extended to a neophyte the professional courtesy of listening patiently to his inchoate ideas in the social history of romanticism. Similarly, the early modern historian Roger Chartier and his modernist counterpart at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Jean Hébrard, helped me to rethink my history of reading at an early, decisive stage. I have no clue why these prominent scholars bothered with me. No matter. I am most grateful that they did.

At a working luncheon Hébrard enthused over a recently published diary by Geneviève Bréton (ill. 11). Eager to read more than the abridged version, I scurried over to the BN to see the original notebooks. They proved to be a valuable cache. In response to my questions about the manuscripts, the archivist Michèle Le Pavec gave me the telephone number of the diarist's granddaughter, Daphné Doublet, whose father had donated his papers, including the diary, to the BN in 1962. With trepidation, I called for a *rendez-vous* at her apartment overlooking the flying buttresses of Sainte Clothilde.

Daphné's home was a further lesson in European culture. On the walls were charcoal sketches by Rubens; on the dining-room table lay eighteenth-century silver; absent-



mindedly tucked into a chest of drawers were materials handwritten by her father, Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, one of the Académie Française's "immortal forty" for much of his adult life. In her personal museum and archive, Daphné was as nonchalant as a contented librarian. She never mentioned to me that her late husband Pierre had been the editor of the weekly L'Express or that her cousin Pierre Joxe was a confidant to President François Mitterrand and had been appointed to the Conseil Constitutionnel, France's supreme court. Politics just did not interest Daphné much – until she bristled in anger.

I was surprised by the outrage she expressed, for example, with the political acclamation of France's winning soccer team in the 1998 World Cup. "Le championnat, c'était truqué," she barked, her voice shaking in indignation. "Ronaldo le joueur brésilien a reçu des pots de vin" to play poorly in the final round. I took her ire for what it was, yet another intimation of a strangely elusive, elitist secret. ("Was that as interesting as it seemed?" my mother asked me later. Maybe so.) Daphné could have been privy to the chicanery, though that was nonsense this time. As with much else in France, there is always more than meets the ear. My perfervid informant was no *politologue*.

Access to another aspect of Parisian life came by meeting the Benskys, my genial Parisian landlords since 1999. Like me they had adopted France as their own, but they did so thoroughly enough to be adopted themselves. Roger is Australian by birth, French by genius, American by accident. As a youth he was fascinated by French drama and traveled to France to study it first-hand. He was entranced. Only when he got his first teaching position in the US did he make a second home, now at Georgetown in Washington, DC. Roger's wife Danielle followed a similar, incremental immigration. Before World War II, her Jewish family escaped Germany and hid in France during the occupation as

Comment [2]: Parisians in Carbondale

At my invitation in October 2004, Roger Bensky and Giovanni Vitello, actor in residence at Georgetown University, led a workshop on the commedia dell'arte at SIUC. Although I did not participate, I was thrust into a theatrical role of my own when the impulsive Giovanni, traveling without a valid driver's license, expected to have my car for the weekend. He had borrowed vehicles in France, why not here? Moved by impending disaster, I dissembled in a mincing French worthy of Harlequin himself. Unauthorized use of a parking decal, one like mine with a computer chip, I lied, meant that the campus police would certainly impound the automobile at my expense. The skeptical Giovanni relented. To dispel lingering suspicions of my subterfuge – and of my collusion with Roger – we shared a bottle of potable local wine in proper Parisian style.

best it could. Born in Paris, Danielle relocated with Roger to work in the States. The solution to their multiple identities was to buy an apartment on the Rue Barrault and live there as much as possible.

Roger's fervor for theater and Dany's for art – Roger's as well as her own – have been their special contributions to French culture. Their talent is tethered to both sides of the Atlantic, in the Francophone community of Washington and in the theatrical world of Paris. A specialist on contemporary French drama, Roger knows several consummately talented actors, directors, and playwrights – Daniel Mesguich, Hélène Cixous, and Régis Debray among them – who have provided him a privileged perspective on their work. Dany's eclectic interests aided Roger in developing these relationships, of course, but she has pursued her own work, first as sculptor and then as painter, in Washington and Paris, notwithstanding the glaucoma that has nearly blinded her in one eye. Their homes are graced by her creations.

*Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles,
Que l'on voit au matin trembler,...*

The Benskys exemplify a tension, albeit a notably fruitful one, inherent to any newcomer to France. They have succeeded in gaining access to a society that for others has been virtually closed. Certain Parisian circles, for instance, are not particularly welcoming to strangers, unlike most Americans who at first blush are eager to befriend them. This distance from French elites, if not from everyone else, is so intriguing yet so frustrating. It keeps the non-French from feeling completely at ease without a long, arduous apprenticeship; even then, an essential mystery remains. This peculiar French exceptionalism is sensed among many more people than just the hapless American visitor seeking a social entrée in Paris.

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One of the foremost historians of twentieth-century France, the American Robert Paxton, once described this phenomenon to claim a distinctive “mid-Atlantic identity.” Neither ordinary American – he speaks French well and has lived in France a good part of his life – nor altogether French – he was born, reared, and educated in the US – this informed observer (and Sunday ornithologist) embodies a fusion of two cultures. His readers on both sides of the national divide have learned more from him than they would have from either a determined outsider or a mere insider. And that vantage point seems equally suited to a throng of less capable, non-native scholars, myself among them.

All the same, I have felt simply inadequate to approach the French and their past. The linguistic obstacles remain so imposing that other scholars like Nancy K. Miller have given up and moved on to other interests. So who am I to persevere here? For decades I have asked and failed to answer that question. It became much easier to make of France an impersonal object of study no different from, say, butterflies or benzene rings. French historical artifacts, such as books and their publication, can be examined closely without the sophistication required in other fields of inquiry, such as literary expression and its layers of meaning. I compensated for my marginality by making a technical specialization of my interests. It was a relatively safe, though sterile space to occupy apart from the French and my American colleagues.

Consequently, while I succeeded in interpreting one small piece of France’s past – its social history of ideas in the nineteenth century – I was isolated, *mis à l’écart*, cut off from the day-to-day life I witnessed about me. It is fun to observe the French. They are a source of constant amusement, but I never entered fully into their world. Despite years of summer work in the libraries and archives in and out of Paris, I never could be entirely at

home. There were interludes when my loneliness got the better of me. All I wanted was to withdraw, a Pascalian hermit “en repos dans une chambre.” The less I had to do with others the better. At times the strain was unbearable. I consoled myself by passably acceptable obsessions whose symphonic complexity seldom seemed or sounded right.

The waylaid caesura came in 1984. It arrived with my new life married to Anne, a fellow reverse immigrant, not to France but to Germany. With her another world appeared on either side of the Rhine. Of the far side the border, I knew nothing other than what my mother told about family there; in graduate school I had learned to read German and see Germany as part of European history. Of the near side of the same boundary, I knew only in the abstract; it was a purely cerebral attachment. So, as Anne disclosed with loving care her Teutonic secrets, I realized the delayed possibilities of both countries. In my cultural thrall, uxoriously affirmed, I hummed the tunes to another libretto.

*Nous irons écouter les merles,
Nous irons écouter les merles siffler.*

To be sure, I had had earlier premonitions. It is hard not to labor long hours in a library without treasures to prize. The studious life has an enormous appeal to the happy few. There are people to meet, places to visit, stories to hear, all on paper for the informed to re-create and share with others. This work is as exciting as what artists do in their studios or musicians in their rehearsal halls; it is recapturing a reality and then bringing it to an audience’s attention. Such a telling scenario arrives at unexpected moments when a sequence of notes suddenly becomes a melody. For this reason, as scholars give voice to their discoveries despite themselves and their neighbors’ quest for quiet, reading rooms can be, literally and figuratively, noisy places to work.

I recall, for example, the very small archive for the Département de la Seine in

Paris back in July 1978. No more than ten people crowded into that space crammed with dirty, gray manuscripts, census and business records mostly. The readers were as seedy and their hygiene as equivocal as the materials they were examining with absorbed attention. One creature of indeterminate sex, except for her long matted hair, muttered in response to what she found, “Par ma foi, quelle bêtise!” Fortunately, I only needed to work there for a day or two, but that was just enough for me to interrupt the soft shuffling of papers when I stumbled upon something of note, the bankruptcy proceedings of Camille Ladvoat, a prominent publisher of French romantic authors. “Ouais,” I intoned, distracting my nearest neighbor, who looked up in surprise and smiled.

There were intimations of another life abroad: in 1983 I wept with pleasure at Franco Zeffirelli’s deliberately gaudy version of Giuseppe Verdi’s La Traviata. I was touched by Teresa Stratas’s Violetta and Placido Domingo’s Alfredo. The lush duos of their banal melodrama swept me into another state. I had felt similar thrills in attending concerts all my life, but I had never drawn the connections between music, literature, and history so powerfully, so immediately. It must have been what my mother experienced first reading Alexandre Dumas fils. I began to understand the latent joy tacit in the realization that this history could be mine, too. As Solomon might have said in French, “Je suis venu dans mon jardin, ma soeur, *mon épouse*” (Cantique des cantiques 5.1).

With Anne, Germany as well as France became my European home and all that means for friends and family abroad. Ursula and Christian Grawe, Dorothee and Hartmut Zitzmann, Ingrid and Werner Hoefel, Martina Backes, Michael Hardung-Backes, and countless professional contacts have made of this land, I think, what it was to my great grandparents, Gottfried and Berta Krueger, each year they returned before World War I.

It helps to have been adopted by a neighborhood on Retzbachweg in St. Georgen or by a cloister at St. Lioba's in the Günterstal, two suburbs of Freiburg-im-Breisgau.

The urbane Christian Grawe was Anne's exchange professor of German literature at the University of Oklahoma (OU) when she was working on her master's degree in 1969-1970. He was the first faculty member to invite her and other students regularly into his home to hear of traditional European middle-class sensibilities: humane learning was not a pedantic exercise for the classroom; it pervaded one's relations with others, one's world view, one's sense of self. This predisposition the Grawes modeled well, despite their little children. The puckish Henri and Philipp made a frustrated Uschi weep more than normal. Although she and Christian have lived in Melbourne for decades, we frequently encounter them for food and drink during our travels in Germany.

Anne also met Dorothee (now a Zitzmann) at OU. Their days together date from Dorothee's semester as an exchange student teaching elementary German in 1969. Since then, Dorothee has provided a refuge for and from Anne's various escapades overseas. She always had a bed and occasionally a bottle of champagne for Anne when she needed them. Now a retired gymnasium teacher of English and sport in the Swabian town of Balingen, Dorothee offers a more subdued respite from our work. She and Hartmut no longer stay up all night talking, in the German fashion, with their houseguests, but they remain sincerely sociable hosts to waifs such as us and the exotic Heidi Beck.

Since 1989, with the exception of a few summers, Anne has resided with Ingrid and Werner Hoefel in Freiburg's St. Georgen. It is hard to fathom the generosity of this couple and their neighbors. While I am working far off in Paris, they have watched out for Anne, inviting her to participate in their street "Hocks" and excursions into the Black

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Comment [3]: Heidi Beck

Ever inscrutable, Heidi Beck is a story in herself. The granddaughter of the mayor of Baden-Baden, she comes from a military family whose regimental silver she still uses. Her exquisite bearing and manners are those of an older, cultured European middle-class. For years she taught French, part-time and disengaged, at the same gymnasium where Werner Hoefel taught sport and English. Her daughter Anya is a cellist in the Staatsoper Stuttgart and her son Klaus a specialist in classical Chinese law. Every once in a while, Anne receives a nearly illegible postcard from Heidi while visiting some distant land like Nepal or Mongolia. We have always wondered what interest this singular figure takes in Anne, an ordinary midwestern American. Perhaps it is because Heidi considers her exotic, too.

Forest. Ingrid's family has prospered in St. Georgen for more than a century. Werner, a retired gymnasium teacher of sport, has been the most active member of the local tennis club; his work and play span several generations in town. Together the Hoefels offer Anne a network of support and diversion in community.

What attracts Anne most to Freiburg (population 217,547) are its university and the resources it makes available to visiting scholars. The library, the archives, the museums, and the faculty have all supplied Anne the materials she needed for three books. Her colleague, Martina Backes, is a dear friend as well as a fellow medievalist. With Anne she thinks through the problems posed by particular manuscripts to consider their historical significance in a different scholarly context. A steady stream of other German medievalists, such as Nigel Palmer of Oxford or Jeffrey Hamburger of Harvard, also passes through. There is no better place for Anne to work than in this picturesque university town on the upper-Rhine. The delicate tracery of its cathedral spire – light and airy like a Gregorian chant – promises as much.

Here, with Anne, I have come to appreciate the undeterred engagement of one's chosen endeavors. In this world the distinctions between life and work fade. They are all of a piece. Each summer is yet another demonstration of this synthesis in Anne's personal craft that led me to understand how unimportant certain cultural aberrations are in Europe, not just in France or Germany. A myriad of Europeans are immigrants, too, just inflected from what we know in the US. The differences among them are as great as those they have with us. What matters is the commitment to meaningful activity that sustains association with others. One need not be an infuriating existentialist, much less a passionate historian of French culture, to entertain that notion.

*Le printemps est venu, ma belle,
C'est le mois des amants béni,...*

The choice of activity counts, to be sure. Neither Anne nor I would be of any use in business. At every practical employment, we would lose money and sleep, not solely because our hearts are otherwise occupied, but also because we recognize our limitations. How nice it would be to digress into performance, for instance. Anne has a beautiful voice, which she raises artfully in and out of the classroom – her limpid rendition of Michael Praetorius's "Nach grüner Farb mein Herz verlangt" (1610) is fetching – and she paints impromptu with consummate ease – such as an imitation Wassily Kandinsky to hang in the office. I should really learn German better and begin the serious study of Latin; after all, my work requires advanced linguistic expertise. But these efforts are diversions from the principal purpose of our lives right now. Music, art, and languages will all happen in due time in this milieu.

For the past two decades, my attention has focused on women's autobiographical writing. When I completed the research for my previous monograph – an ambitious but soulless history of reading in France – I found myself enraptured by the people who wrote the most arresting sources for that book. They were invariably women who spoke candidly of their lives as well as of their reading. It was their autobiographical accounts that I now wanted to ponder. In light of my new home abroad with Anne, this shift made sound sense. It prepared me, albeit unintentionally, for what I am doing now, writing my own recollections. Montaigne need not be the only skeptical introspective.

How could I not be impressed by the pained expressions of Marie-Sophie Leroyer de Chantepie (1800-1888)? Her letters to family and further afield, even complete strangers, gave voice to emotions that were often the antithesis of her firmest held re-

ligious tenets. She was too much of a free spirit to feel fully at home among her petty, pious neighbors in Angers of provincial Anjou. And she poured her anguish into an stunningly frank correspondence with people as accomplished as the novelist George Sand, the historian Jules Michelet, and, yes, Monsieur Suffel's Flaubert (I found more of interest in his papers than the judgmental scholar ever surmised).

Similar revelations arose in my reading of Geneviève Bréton's diaries (1849-1915) and Céline Renooz's memoirs (1840-1927). Though much younger than Leroyer, these two equally obscure women spoke of their lives with a vigor and sensitivity hard to imagine without actually reading their papers written in a hurried hand. In Bréton's case, I had competent, worldly guides to assist me: Daphné Doublet the French granddaughter, of course, but also Jimmy Palmes the English translator of her texts. Both of them knew Geneviève's writing well, one as family, the other as interpreter, to bring her work to life. Céline was another story. Her papers at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP) have been neglected because she was as marginal in her own day as she is now, but also because her personal relations with others were so tortured and torturous. From childhood she suffered the paranoid delusions that she barely controlled in her writing. Céline pronounced perhaps the most pathetic argot of all.

Since then I have wandered into the amicable universe of Freemasonry. It was not until much later that I learned of my distant relatives Nicholas and Charles Roome's Masonic leadership in New York, or of Gottfried Krueger's honorific participation in Newark. I was more interested in the role that women played in Masonry and its many variations, especially in France where mixed lodges (for men and women) and lodges of adoption (for women only) originated. Renooz in fact belonged to a mixed lodge, La

Nota Bene:

I have come to appreciate the undeterred engagement of one's chosen endeavors. In this world the distinctions between life and work fade. They are all of a piece.
(page 201)

Raison Triomphante. There was no autobiographical element to this research. It was an outgrowth of my exploration of women's agency in a culture different from my own, the *bonhomie* – and gallantry – of French Freemasons.

My first visit to the library of the Grand Orient de France a few years ago was suggestive of this difference. Because Masonry is a private fraternal organization whose initiations are closely kept secrets, their archives are not readily available for non-Masons to examine – except in the unique collection at the BN, which was established under tragic circumstances during the German occupation of France (in their fanatic search for Freemasons to deport to work camps, the Nazis confiscated the records of all Masonic lodges and deposited them in the national library, where they have been ever since). I walked into the Grand Orient's headquarters on the Rue Cadet and asked the *gardien* for Pierre Mollier, the Masonic librarian and historian. Before directing me to Pierre's office on the fifth floor, the *gardien* inquired about my work; and when I stated off-handedly that I was inquiring about women in Freemasonry, he hesitated an instant to leer broadly and whisper, "Moi aussi, comme toi, je m'intéresse aux filles maçonniques." He must have had in mind the philanthropic Eros, Josephine Baker.

This amusing interstice in history's public and private spaces proposed other curious company. I never thought that I would be drawn to professional meetings in Britain. But during a research trip to London in 2000, I met Andrew Prescott, then the indefatigable director of the Centre for Research on the History of Freemasonry at the University of Sheffield. The next thing I knew I was attending Masonic conferences with British as well as French specialists in Sheffield (not far from where William Allen was born and reared in Manchester) and in Edinburgh (a likely town the Sutherlands visited

before coming to America centuries later).

*Et l'oiseau, satinant son aile,
Dit des airs au rebord du nid....*

Anne developed passions of her own. In time these became mine, as well. The long-suffering spouses of scholars all know that one preoccupation deserves another. It so happened that Anne's research on medieval German women's religious expression overlapped with mine on nineteenth-century French women's cultural life, as individuals (in their personal writings) and in groups (such as convents or Masonic lodges). Anne and I were listening to the same thematic arpeggio, women's quest for agency in a world controlled by men, though we arrived at this shared appreciation by separate routes. In marriage as in scholarship, the Rhine River is not as wide or as deep as it flows.

Anne's first project traced the medieval origins of the Catholic rosary. The result was a remarkably successful monograph, which sold more than eight thousand copies (most works published by university presses rarely sell more than five hundred), thanks to her genius of an editor, Peter Potter at Penn State University Press. Half of these sales went to the Catholic Digest Book Club. Much to her bemusement, Anne attracted a following of "fans" inspired by the rosary as a spiritual exercise. Little did they know that Anne was not a practicing Catholic. She was far more gratified, however, to learn of how many scholars used her book in their own work and in the classes they taught. Here was her intended audience, the mad devotees who muster each May in Kalamazoo, Michigan, for the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies.

Who prayed the medieval rosary? Women in their convents, apparently. According to Anne, the rosary was largely the collective spiritual product of the nuns living in the Observant houses of the fifteenth century. And it was these reformed convents that

Anne went on to study in her second book. Driven by an insatiable fascination with texts on cloistered life in the late Middle Ages, she discovered more than 50 documents, chronicles actually, written by the women themselves. A cascade of sources this large is almost unheard of among medievalists in the history of women. No one considered women and their spirituality momentous enough to keep their records. Someone akin to Anne, with relative if not perfect pitch, would have them speak.

These women lived full and active lives. They were not naïve pawns at the mercy of men, but members of self-sufficient communities with a proud sense of purpose, promoting the Observant reforms in sundry eponymous orders like the Dominicans, the Beguines, and the Poor Clares. Reformers across orders had more in common with each other than they had with their unreformed sisters in the same order. They realized a veritable renaissance of literary and scribal activity to fill the libraries of monasteries nearly everywhere in Europe with the books they produced. On the eve of the Protestant Reformation, it was a memorable story, including scenes of women swinging crucifixes and heaving sacks of flour to protect their communities from intruders.

One of the more colorful women in these houses is the object of Anne's third book, an examination of the artist Sybilla von Bondorf. Born of a prominent family, Sybilla was cloistered young with the Poor Clares in Freiburg. She must have learned how to paint from her parents, because she immediately started producing more than 180 full-page illustrations for the books her sisters were copying. She provided a whole series of images on the lives of Saint Francis and Saint Elizabeth, for example, all chosen and adapted to the spiritual needs and interests of the women who made the books (ill. 12). In time, she elaborated a distinctive artistic style that other artists appropriated for them-



selves. Her creative influence extended far beyond the walls of her convent.

*Oh! viens, donc, sur ce banc de mousse
Pour parler de nos beaux amours,...*

I have long admired Anne's labors of love. It has been easy to follow them in the lively, vibrant letters she writes me while I am working in Paris. Over the years, we have written each other every day. The missives tend to the mundane miseries and frustrations with the arcane ways of European institutions: public transit strikes, obscure library classification systems, and arbitrary bureaucratic barriers. Many of these letters, the earliest ones anyway, have been filed away with tax records in the attic, lost in piles of paper. But the correspondence stored elsewhere, more easily accessible, resonate with the lives and loves of inquisitive souls, like Henry Adams's spritely niece to whom "the uncle talks."

From this privileged exchange, one learns of the jealous joys and wicked mishaps of scholarly work abroad. We have been spoiled to spend time in some wondrous spaces. Besides the old BN with its lofty glass-roof, there is the new one whose reading-room windows look out onto a hectare of trees. There are only two other libraries I have found as congenial to visit: the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, whose sweeping roof was fashionable in the 1960s when it was built; and the British Library in London, both the old structure with its high sky-blue dome and the new one with its red-brick efficiency.

The BHVP, once a hunting lodge belonging to Diane de France, the illegitimate daughter of Henri II, was a privileged haven. The reading room is the former salon of the Lamoignon family, one member of which defended Louis XVI before the tribunal that sent the king to the guillotine in 1793. The ceiling beams boast original decorations painted in the early French renaissance style. Here I spent good hours deciphering Céline Renooz's handwriting with occasional glances out the large French windows onto the care-

Comment [4]: Freiburg-im-Breisgau

The quality of life in Freiburg-im-Breisgau is hard to gauge but evident to everyone who has ever lived there. For the past decade at least, the Green party has dominated the town's politics, which has meant considerable investment in public transit, recycling, and alternative living communities like the Vauban complex near St. Georgen. It is a city where public services all work. With its university, Freiburg also has much more interest than one would expect of its modest size and relative isolation. Anne's colleagues in medieval studies often ask why she has made a home there; they would understand if they bothered to consider its museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural amenities at the southwestern edge of Germany's Black Forest.

fully tended back-courtyard of grass and miniature boxwoods, manicured by an impossibly lethargic gardener; his raking and clipping were a lot like sweeping. Ah, yes.

Anne has worked in similarly delicious surroundings, such as the library at St. Paul im Lavanttal, Austria. After attending a wedding in Vienna, she took a leisurely train ride to the little town tucked into a densely wooded valley off in Carinthia. The monastery's rococo reading room – gilded and lacquered in blue and white faux marble – is appended to a magnificent collection. Unfortunately the director was preoccupied and had not arranged for Anne to examine the manuscripts she wanted to see, despite the three unacknowledged letters she had sent him. To make amends he assigned to her an attentive assistant and hosted her to a full mid-day meal in the ornate refectory. Sybilla's illustrations were even more beautiful to behold.

Normally our letters remarked the other cultural wonders we encountered during our sojourns overseas. However long one lives in Europe, there is always something new to sleuth or something old to recover. The BHVP, for example, I got to know even better when I attended a front-courtyard performance of Victor Hugo's Hernani. It was the apt setting for the romantic perorations of a drama set in Counter-Reformation Spain. Each of Paris's architectural monuments has been the scene of more than one such sonic event. Summer festivals regularly feature productions in the gardens of the Palais Royal, in back of the Luxembourg Palace, and on the steps of the Palais de la Justice. It is another way for Parisians themselves to hear as well as to see their gorgeous city.

It is a town worth listening to. The racket of street markets, for instance, is as rich as their sights, smells, and tastes. The overcharged baby-carriages and multi-wheeled market baskets, squeezed through narrow passages, pose dangers to the unwary shopper

strolling amidst these sensual cornucopias. But their hazards are small price to pay for the full gamut of regional products on display and the different trills at work behind and before the counters. My Sunday market on the Avenue Auguste Blanqui offers an unimaginable medley of spoken French, the Gallic Parisian, to be sure, but also the clipped Belgian, the twangy Provençal, the nearly perfect Touraine, the labial Creole, the guttural Algerian, and the American Franglais whose fumbling fluency taxes the usually genial *étalagistes*' patience.

This mélange of accents, indistinguishably linguistic and commercial – thanks to scarves sweated in Bondy, chocolate finished in Brussels, lavender harvested in Vaucluse, zinnias raised in Sarthes, sauces concocted in Martinique, and tabouli blended in Algiers – all marks the passing of an older, more homogeneous country. France is an altered world from what I first encountered 30 odd years ago. Immigration matters much more now. Historically, cosmopolitan Paris has always been an exception, but it is increasingly representative of trends outside the métropole, if that euphemism means anything. Just as the city's markets come to resemble those everywhere in the world, so too do its dutiful denizens.

*Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce,
Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce: "Toujours"*

Since my initial visit to Paris back in 1973, just when higher oil prices end-stopped the postwar miracle of economic growth in France, I have witnessed some seismic shifts. Most obviously the city is more tourist-friendly in its public infrastructure. Hotel clerks, bistro waiters, taxi drivers, and travel agents all speak more languages. The Métro, tram, train, and bus lines have been upgraded. With pedestrian zones and restrictions on motor vehicles, the city is much more pleasant to walk and now to bike. Imagine, a main

boulevard blocked to vehicular traffic for an entire month each year to host an urban beach, Paris Plage. Suburban commuters suffer, but the Parisian exhibitionists (and their voyeurs) frolic in the eerie calm.

For its inhabitants, the city is much more bourgeois than it used to be. Since the nineteenth century, blue-collar families have been moving to the suburbs, leaving whole neighborhoods for those who can afford to buy, gentrify, and pay the steep rents. In my arrondissement, the 13th, for instance, the railway heads and factories along the Seine have given way to complexes of upscale apartments and shops to match the prestige of the new BN and another branch of the Université de Paris. Further in from the river, the oversized blocks that created a second China town (primarily Vietnamese) in the 1960s are increasingly surrounded by quieter, professional middle-class homes like the lovely cité florale near the Place de Rungis.

At the same time as the steady embourgeoisement, there has been an equally steady Americanization of Parisian life. It is much more than the predominance of Hollywood films and fads, Silicon valley computer software, McDonalds and Starbucks franchises, and Euro-Disney to the east of town. It is the new rhythm of work and play and the new sense of private space that are developing here. Banks are ATMs, the family automobile is a mini-van or SUV, exurbs ring the city with the second domiciles of middle-aged Parisians, and plans are afoot for a third major airport near Arras. Although the French are making impressive bullet trains (the TGV) cheaper and easier to take long-distance, the traffic jams on holiday and vacation weekends are worse than ever. Adolescents here are just as spellbound by Harry Potter as they are back in the States.

Meanwhile, the disparities between rich and poor are as persistent as ever. *Cloch-*

ards still congregate in neglected public spaces to mumble unintelligibly to each other; beggars are as omnipresent as ever on sidewalks and at markets; immigrant families continue to squat in vacant apartments wherever they can; and *les filles des trottoirs* ply their trade in flesh along the same streets, not far from the pimps who control them. The so-called French Model of social welfare, mixed capitalism, and market intervention works about as well – or as badly, depending upon one’s political point of view – as always. (I would rather be poor in France than in the US – at least health care is a capably administered and affordable dispensation here.)

The status of refugees is deplorable everywhere, the French are no exception. The guest-worker program of the European Union (EU) once sought out the cheap labor of selected non-EU states to take up jobs that no natives would do, such as trash collection, farm work, and, yes, street-sweeping. Before the admission of each country to the EU, a wave of underground laborers arrived, first from the Mediterranean, then from Eastern Europe. For every subsequent boat- and truck-load of illegal aliens caught and repatriated, there are droves more who cross the borders and find refuge in France, just as they do elsewhere in Europe, for the employment opportunities there.

The rabid politics of this tumult, of course, are familiar to us in the US. The extremist political right, like Jean-Marie Le Pen’s Front National, has tried to criminalize what many people did legally not so long ago, including the beneficiaries of demographic movement: the recently immigrated and their employers. The humanitarian instinct to help the needy at home is almost as difficult to encourage as the sensible foreign policy to help the needy abroad, which would serve to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. At least adherents of the moderate political left, such as Jacques Delors of the European Commis-

Nota Bene:
Historically, cosmopolitan Paris has always been an exception, but it is increasingly representative of trends outside of the métropole.
(page 209)

sion and Bernard Kouchner of the Médecins du Monde, understand how much sense this international outreach makes, but it is not exactly music to every constituent's ear.

*Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses,
Faisant fuir le lapin caché,...*

The biggest changes – and differences – I have witnessed in the past four decades, however, are in Franco-American relations. In the intermittent diplomatic tensions between France and the US, it is facile to forget centuries of much better ties. France rushed to our aid during the war for independence from Britain; France bargained off the Louisiana Purchase; and France donated our Statue of Liberty. After two world wars the country is much in our debt, as well. The acres of military graves in Lorraine and Normandy are reminders of our shared sacrifices in murderous warfare. Because of their own wartime losses, the French have acknowledged the smart timeliness of the Marshall Plan and the reconstruction of Europe.

World War II complicated matters enormously. Tragically the US chose to recognize the collaborationist regime in Vichy, instead of the Free French in London, as the legitimate government of France (1940-1942). Charles de Gaulle never forgave us for that ill-considered gamble, and his legacy of independent foreign policy has lingered long afterwards. France is not much more committed to NATO now than it was after de Gaulle withdrew French troops from its command in 1966. Under successive presidents, Gaullist and Socialist alike, France has exercised disproportionate leadership in conceiving – and sustaining – the European Union as a counterpoint to US power.

Anti-American feelings come easy to French intellectuals and populist political leaders – some actually believe in CIA conspiracies – just as anti-French sentiments arise among American journalists and conservative politicians – they are too hasty to resent the

least hint of public tergiversation. So the outpouring of French sympathy in the wake of 9/11 came as a surprise on both sides of the Atlantic. “Nous sommes tous Américains,” proclaimed the editorial page of the normally critical Le Monde in solidarity with our national grief. Yet how quickly this empathy was lost by our audaciously pugnacious diplomacy. Oafish, ill-informed pronouncements, all worthy of thugs on the lam, prevailed during the build up to war in Iraq, based on specious neo-conservative premises and the deliberate distortion of intelligence, to cast the French opposition in the UN as worse than disloyal. That Americans entertained this overweening travesty – does anyone care to remember former Representative Bob Ney’s campaign for Freedom Fries? – bespeaks a willfully lax understanding of France (and of the world generally).

The French know the US far better than Americans know France. I have yet to encounter a Parisian who did not make a distinction between former President George W. Bush and his fellow countrymen. Americans are not the only ones aware of Bush’s tenuous legitimacy in the 2000 election, his irrational (apocryphal rather) justifications of the war and occupation of Iraq, and his violations of the Geneva Conventions in the treatment of prisoners of war. The ostensible source of our anti-French feelings, the conservative President Jacques Chirac’s challenge to Bush’s anti-terrorist policies, made so much sense in France that it gave Chirac no bump in the polls and he chose not to run for a third term in 2007.

The reasons for Franco-American differences, I believe, are deeply cultural. They are found in the way the French view themselves and others. There is no secret to their belief in a single, indivisible, secular republic; in a society of mutual obligation and community; and in the glory of their past and presence in the world. So Muslims are forbid-

den to manifest their faith by wearing foulards in public schools; this gesture violates unitary republican principles. So labor unions continue to wield considerable influence in the delivery of public services; this outsized role expresses the French sense of mutuality. Moreover, France behaves as if it remains a dominant European partner; it always has, much to American incomprehension.

*Et le daim au miroir des sources
Admirant son grand bois penché;...*

Still more difficult for Americans to understand is the French respect for historic patrimony in more than just domestic and international politics. Institutions such as universities, libraries, museums, parks, and festivals, for instance, represent the wealth of public space that the French believe belongs to everyone, not just to the corporations or the wealthy private individuals who contribute most to their cost. Only in France would one expect to see a spectacle like the 1989 bicentennial celebration of its first revolution (except, perhaps, for Germany's reunification in 1990). This widespread faith in art is preeminently French (as well as European). One cannot imagine Paris without its monuments: the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triumph, the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Sacré Coeur Basilica, the Louvre, the d'Orsay, the Panthéon....

At the heart of this patrimonial consensus lies a rare regard for beauty. It is not that Parisians are all beautiful. Far from it. But there is a propensity to value the aesthetic impulse among more than the guild of artists, authors, architects, couturiers, and chefs. TV news interviews of public officials, university professors, and corporate leaders are elegantly modulated in offices filled with designer furniture, art, and sculpture. What is a French coat without the stylishly knotted neck-scarf? Even politicians feel obligated to look chic, or at least to wink when they see others doing so, such as former prime minis-

ter Michel Rocard, who cast a longing gaze at the sharply dressed wife of a visiting dignitary during the nationally televised Bastille Day parade. It is a congenital inclination.

Some of my fondest memories are of this French “habitus,” as Pierre Bourdieu termed it. Ruminations of it are worth relishing. Dinner with Anne and an American colleague, Jim Johnson, one very hot July evening at Jim’s apartment on the Place des Vosges comes to mind every time I amble by one of the four fountains in the square. Their gentle splash filtered through the windows as we feasted on a picturesque capriccio salad of ripe, sliced tomatoes with mozzarella, fresh basil, and extra virgin olive oil. Likewise, I have a soft spot for historical painting of the nineteenth-century’s artistes-pompier and Anne has one for medieval illuminated manuscripts. To enjoy them, not the tour-bound multitudes at the Louvre or the d’Orsay, we take family visitors to the smaller, less well-known Marmottan and Cluny museums. There it is sedulously sedate enough for the polished wooden floors to creak with each step.

American travelers have noticed these same phenomena, a few more eloquently than others, since John Adams and Benjamin Franklin each found his own Paris. In addition to their official duties, Adams came to learn statecraft, Franklin to admire the ladies. So it has been for Americans in Paris over the years. The studios in quest of culture, like Henry James, rivaled the amorous in quest of adventure, like Edith Wharton, even though they both wrote of their experience overseas. Naturally, good writers do not draw these simplistic distinctions. As Thomas Jefferson once noted wistfully, every American has two homelands, his own and in France. Two hundred years later, it is still true.

Paris is no more all of France than France is all of Europe or the world. There is much to see and hear outside the French capital, I have come to realize on my travels

215: Act 5

Comment [5]: A Second Home

Gertrude Stein was not the first American to make France a second haven. A line from Thomas Jefferson’s Autobiography (1821) is translated on a monument marking the entrance to the small cemetery in Suresnes for American GIs killed near Paris during the world wars: “Tout homme a deux pays, le sien et puis la France.” It is also a quote from Henri de Bornier’s popular play, La Fille de Roland (1875), even though Jules Michelet’s Le Peuple (1846) ascribed a variation of it to “un philosophe américain.” Like all good ideas, it has many sources. This sentiment resembles another: “When good Americans die they go to Paris.” Oscar Wilde borrowed it first in A Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), then in A Woman of No Importance (1893), from a quip by Thomas Gold Appleton, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Journals (1859). Its origin seems to be Oliver Wendell Holmes’s The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table (1858).

with Anne (but also with Jane her curious sister in Cheyenne and Howard Malchow my restless friend in London). The former provinces, such as Alsace, are worlds apart from Paris. Even the local lingo spoken there is different. Allemannic, a very Germanic dialect, is used on either side of the Rhine. With their picturesque vineyards and flower boxes, the Alsatian towns of Eguisheim, Riquewihr, and Ribeauvillé closely resemble the Badsch towns around the Kaiserstuhl. The historically contested city of Strasbourg, as much German as it is French, is very nearly the capital of Europe now.

The border still matters. Just fifteen kilometers apart, Germans in Freiburg struggle as much with French as the French in Colmar do with German. The French and the Germans behave very differently on the road and in public: the cars parked illegally in Freiburg's pedestrian zone are invariably from France, and the noisiest tables in Strasbourg's restaurants are reserved for Germans. The French do not know how to fix real pastries, Ingrid Hoefel once opined, but German bakeries do not sell baguettes. Freiburg may be the most French of towns in Germany, and Strasbourg may be the most German of towns in France, but they remain in two very distinct European countries.

*Puis chez nous, tout heureux, tout aises,
En panier enlaçant nos doigts,...*

For the past fifty years the European Union has created a much more familiar world out of these differences. After all, 15 member-states use the same currency; another 12 participate with them in the EU's complex politics, markets, and cultural activities. It is immediately apparent to any traveler from one EU country to another that frontiers concern only terrorists, illegal immigrants, and rowdy sports fans. At heart, this continental effort, however slow, awkward, and conflicted, is the development of a commun-

ity of cultures, one tied together by more than mere commercial expediency or political opportunism. The EU is composing a post-modern Europe.

It remains to be seen what will become of this creation. But it has fostered a burgeoning of cultural capital, for individuals as well as whole countries. The reproduction of socio-economic status, according to Pierre Bourdieu (again), is yoked to an educational system that maintains the privileges of European elites. But the EU is not actually protecting social advantages; it is refashioning the upper-middle class, whose members now often live in one land, work in another, and have close relatives in a third. There is much more to the dark red EU passport; it is the manifestation of a transnational identity that accepts the possibilities of multiple allegiances, languages, and connections. The result makes for a new mobility.

It fascinates me to watch my European comrades and colleagues perform this arabesque. The ERASMUS program, for example, invites students to work on their degrees at any university in the EU. Appointments for university faculty are comparably European. The peripatetic Roger Chartier holds a chair at the Collège de France, teaches at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, and spends alternate terms at the University of Pennsylvania and the Universidad de Salamanca, working in French, English, and Spanish. The benefits of such intellectual facility are obvious to any ambitious figure.

These remarkable resources mark not just the French or the German but the European experience. The professional middle-class tradition has evolved and expanded to encompass those proficient in science, technology, the arts, and the media. The faculties of the French Grandes Ecoles and the German technical universities now rival the faculties of theology, law, and medicine; their graduates pass back and forth between public

service and private enterprise to run the institutions that built the continent of today. In fact, they represent their countries' substantial investment in general education and career training.

This technocratic elite is more deliberately and broadly cultivated in Europe than it is in the US. Yet this cadre defines the future nearly everywhere in the developed and developing world. Their expertise brings with it the necessary cultural infrastructure for economic growth and political stability as well as social mobility and artistic achievement. Watching them at work and at play in the European context suggests to me how education, especially at the university, makes a far wider world not just for the few but for everyone. The power and beauty of individual and public culture are evident here. With our exclusive focus on education's economic opportunity in the US, we miss its impact in other domains like personal manners and habits of mind.

The ethnic, gendered, and racial complications of this development should not be ignored, however. Europe's wealth, including its changing middle class, has come in part at the expense of the world. Cheap labor from former colonial possessions as well as from lesser-developed neighbors enriched the European Union. The unequal trade in agricultural produce and commodities produced by the non-West, and not just oil but everything from aluminum to zinc, has stalled the material fortunes of peoples everywhere, most of them people of color. The forced labor of children in Thailand and the illiteracy of women in Pakistan are not unrelated to Europe's economic clout. Major European art museums, like the Guimet, the Institut du Monde Arab, or the Quai Branly, virtually groan with artistic plunder – pinched, pilfered, or pillaged – from elsewhere.

*Revenons rapportant des fraises,
Revenons rapportant des fraises des bois.*

In July 2001, with Garga's opera glasses in hand, Anne and I attended Jules Massenot's lyrical Manon (1884) at the Opéra de la Bastille. It was a memorable performance. An inspired Renée Fleming sang a Manon marvelously in keeping with musical melodrama at its best. Fleming did more than define her role, she carried the entire cast with her. Her presence on stage was infectious. The other vocalists, especially the tenor Marcello Alvarez, followed her lead and together they brought the orchestra and the audience along with them. For three hours, a hundred musicians and two thousand spectators lived the collective spirit of a building that was designed to accommodate all such acoustical occasions. Anne and I have rarely experienced anything so admirable.

Just as Renée Fleming was truly at home in her work in another land, so have we come to feel at home in ours, equally far from where we were born. Neither Anne nor I lay claim to the talent and genius of a world-class diva – how could we? – but we appreciate the deep satisfaction she felt in her job well done. In our much more humble fashion we immerse ourselves in a second culture, we forget ourselves in the effort to understand another world. For Anne it is the art of cloistered women in fifteenth-century Germany; for me it is the sensibility of public women in nineteenth-century France. Their distant din, long ago and far away, has become our own.

In this appropriation, as American immigrants to Europe, we have had some proud moments. A couple once asked Anne, whom she met recently at lunch near Freiburg, where in Germany she was born (her German is that good). Try as they may, few professionals ever achieve a native's linguistic skill (no one would ever ask Henry Kissinger his birthplace in the US). Assimilation does not come cheap. It cost Anne years of hard, conscientious work, such as her knack for discovering medieval manuscripts, to the

Nota Bene:
*This descanted past remains,
omnipresent and profound.*
(page 221)

surprise of her German colleagues.

I claim no comparable accomplishment. Real proficiency in French is and will be effectively beyond my linguistic abilities. I do what I can to ensure that Parisians do not cringe, their animated faces undistorted in apprehension, as I speak. But I have been flattered by scholars, who know English well, to hear me out in their own idiom. Moreover, I am pleased to have participated in defining new fields of inquiry, like the history of reading and women's autobiographical writings. Although my only book to merit translation is in Italian, historians here cite my work, copies of which are in research libraries throughout France. That fact, too, is as gratifying as lunch with the Bensky's on the Butte aux Cailles or kir with Daphné Doublet in the gardens of the Palais Royal.

As Americans abroad, we still commit our share of faux pas, linguistic and otherwise: failing to shake the hands of neighbors in Freiburg, misunderstanding the intentions of a friend in Paris, or assuming a warm welcome everywhere. Their recollection nettles painfully. "It's a sort of air you have of being thoroughly at home in the world," Valentin de Bellegarde once said of Christopher Newman. In the land of trim and erect Europeans, replete Americans continue to slouch shamelessly, however improbable it is for us to remain what we were born, as Bellegarde also observed. The music of our most characteristic traits is not theirs.

When I listen to Aaron Copland's "Saturday Night Waltz" from Rodeo (1942), I know that I am not where I first heard Léo Delibes's "Sous le dôme épais" from Lakmé (1883). The pleasures are similar, but they are not the same. I live a dual reality between two cultures, one of my origins, another of my adoption, though they share an enduring emotive force thanks to their tonality in a minor key. At home or abroad, on either side

220: Act 5

Comment [6]: As in Copland and Delibes, Piaf and Smith...

Compare and contrast the distinctive, national sounds evident in the following musical performances available on the Internet:

Copland:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vu_Q9ijKx8c

Delibes:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf42IP_ipw

Piaf:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0feNVUwQA8U>

Smith:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2DsHvu6Sk>

of the Atlantic, Edith Piaf's "La Vie en Rose" (1946) and Kate Smith's version of Vera Lynn's "We'll Meet Again" (1942) elicit a hauntingly elusive longing. This descanted past remains, omnipresent and profound. "Pouvez-vous, sans la dénaturer, raccourcir la durée d'une mélodie?" asked Henri Bergson rhetorically. "La vie intérieure est cette mélodie même." It is as if my mother were still singing as she sweeps the kitchen floor, not far from the streets of Paris on the Butte aux Cailles. So it goes: swish, swish, swoosh.

Paris, July 2007

Dialogue with Sybilla von Bondorf

JSA: *“Sister Sybilla?”*

SvB: *“Der Herr sei euch.”*

JSA: *“And also with you.... I wonder if you would tell me something. Anne and I have been puzzled by why you illuminated so many manuscripts: hours, litanies, psalters, liturgies, and the like. It’s not what nuns did back in the fifteenth century.”*

SvB: *“There were many more than you think. In fact, Herr Allen, I established a whole school of artistic production by women artists. It was our great joy and calling to glorify God on behalf of our religious houses. After the Observant reform, the other sisters just followed my example.”*

JSA: *“But you must have known about art before you joined the Poor Clares in Freiburg. Your parents were more than amateurs. They were artists, weren’t they?”*

SvB: *“They were indeed, and they taught me everything they knew. It was a great gift to have such talent in the family, though my learned brother preferred books instead. But as patricians, my father and mother did not keep a professional studio. That would not have been proper. We are of a good family, after all.”*

JSA: *“Looking at a map of the Black Forest recently, I realized that you were from the tiny village of Bondorf, weren’t you?”*

SvB: *“Yes, it’s not far from the equally small farming community of Sulzfeld where your Kruegers once called home. Ours is a curious, coincidental kinship. Who would have thought our paths could cross here?”*

JSA: *“Nor were you very far away at the convent where you moved in Strasbourg not long before the Great Apostasy, the Protestant Reformation.”*

SvB: *“Ach, Herr, erhöre mein Gebet. After I had devoted so much of my life to the greater glory of God, celebrating the religious life of my sisters, the Protestants destroyed our houses and scattered our communities. What had we done to them?”*

JSA: *“What became of you? You were in your 80s, too old to make another life elsewhere.”*

SvB: *“I died of a broken soul, I don’t know what else to say. I gave my heart to art, but my life to the Poor Clares.”*

JSA: *“You, too, Sister, were caught between two worlds, one of the medieval past, safe in your convent, illuminating your manuscripts for your sisters; the other of the modern present, endangered by the outside world, lost to the historical changes around you.”*

SvB: *“But I left for your wife a corpus of devotion to study and explain to future generations. I am heartened by Sister Anne’s work.”*

JSA: *“You do know that she is not a Catholic. She grew up a conservative Protestant, not unlike the men who burned down your convent in Strasbourg.”*

SvB: *“Yes, I know, Herr Allen, but she is one of ours in spirit. It’s as if the passing of a half millennium and the distance from another continent make no difference in our work, my art and her scholarship. We are tending the same spiritual garden. And for that, ‘Dank sei Gott’.”*