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HETEROTOPIC SPACES IN MAXIME DU CAMP'S TRAVEL ACCOUNTS

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Abstract: With the 19th century French writer Maxime Du Camp, who was a travel partner and close friend of Gustave Flaubert, his travelogues represent sometimes a valorization of the travelers' reading universe, they stand for a mediated, filtered outlook on life, since the space that he visits passes through the pattern of the author's culture, which interposes between him and the world itself. Thus, he re-reads, re-invests the space, transforming it into heterotopias, which allow him to re-present reality and to cut up time according to his own mental schemes.

Keywords: space, heterotopias, difference, representations, rites.

In our approach to representations of space, we identify, in the desacralized space of the nineteenth century and throughout the entire work of Maxime du Camp, a space haunted by fantasies, defined by M. Foucault as "the space of our primary perception, that of our daydreams, that of our passions [which] hold within themselves qualities that are as if intrinsic; it is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or else it is a dark, rocky, cluttered space"[1]. This kind of space forms ***heterotopias*** which allow the cutting up of time according to a very precise system of opening and closing. For Michel Foucault, heterotopias are:

> [...] real places, effective places, places which are outlined in the very institution of society, and which are a kind of counter-sites, kinds of actually realized utopias in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are at once represented, contested, and inverted, kinds of places that are outside

[1]Michel Foucault, « *Des espaces autres* » in *Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, vol. IV, p. 756.

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of all places, although they are nevertheless actually *locatable*»[2]

These are places/sites absolutely ***other***, entirely different from the other types of sites that they reflect and of which they speak, favoring "no doubt a kind of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror" (*loc. cit.*). The function of heterotopias would be to serve as a place of return, a folding back upon oneself, like a mirror that reflects an image of oneself and invites (re)discovery of oneself. These are precisely spaces governed by *rites*:

> One cannot enter it except with a certain permission and once one has accomplished a certain number of gestures. There are even, moreover, heterotopias that are entirely devoted to these purification activities, purification half-religious, half-hygienic as in the hammams of the Muslims, or else purification apparently purely hygienic as in Scandinavian saunas.[3]

There are heterotopias that are spaces of passage and/or lodging such as *inns* and *convents*. These places of provisional halt weave a whole network of relations made up of the resting place, closed or half-closed, constituted by the house, the room, the bed, etc. On his journey in Italy, the canteen of Proz, for example, is a welcoming and perfect place of passage for travelers making their way toward the great Saint-Bernard, a beneficial provisional refuge after the arduous walk in the snow. Maxime Du Camp arrives at the Hospice of the great Saint-Bernard, situated at a height of more than 2600 meters, which receives more than twenty thousand visitors per year, on the border with Switzerland, where the traveler arrives breathless and frozen; it is a place open to all: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Greek Orthodox, etc. The hospice, inhabited and run by religious men, "good Samaritans," is a sort of mini-colony regulated by the bell. With its customs for receiving the other, it is yet another occasion for Du Camp to highlight the virtues of charity while referring back to the Gospels.

Referring to the monasteries of Calabria, which he visited during his journey in Italy, and which are found on the mountain peaks, he affirms that they are "admirably situated": height, solitude, and divinity are linked, according to him.[4] He adds, moreover, that the veneration of God and contemplative recollection should always be accompanied by the contemplation of the magnificences of nature, without which one could not attain divinity[5]:

> It is to be noted that convents are always admirably situated, in locations very skillfully chosen from the double point of view of aspect and salubrity. One would say that the monks, knowing in advance that meditation upon oneself and the love of God are insufficient to hold man within the bond of eternal vows, wished to join to it the absorbing contemplation of nature.[6]

On their journey in Egypt, after having traveled through the sinister and frightening streets of the town of Rosetta, Du Camp and Flaubert are admirably received at the barracks of Pasha Husseim, who places everything at their disposal and with whom they communicate through the intermediary of a French-speaking doctor. They stay there several days, spoiled by the gastronomic feasts organized in their honor. If Du Camp is lodged in some convent, as is the case in Lebanon, in the town of Saïda, with the Brothers of the Holy Land, he notes in passing the type of welcome, of the kind "good dinner and good rooms," to define the cordiality. But a few days later, the convent-fortress at the foot of Mount Carmel arouses in him an open enthusiasm: it is "magnificent," organized like a fortress,

[2]Michel Foucault, *op. cit*., p. 764.
[3]Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 775.
[4]For more details on the construction of our emotions in space and in time, see Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris, P.U.F., 1961.
[5]Nature was regarded above all as the space of the gods, apud Colombe Coüelle, « Improbables paysages, jardins et paradis », in S. Meitinger (texts compiled by), Espaces et paysages -- *Représentations et inventions du paysage de l'Antiquité à nos jours, op. cit.*, p. 17.
[6]Maxime Du Camp, *Expédition des Deux-Siciles. Souvenirs personnels*, Paris, Didier, 1861, p. 190.

holily guarded ("twenty regular men would make it impregnable"), with a view over the sea and the bay of St. John of Acre, an altar placed on a sacrificial site. The cordial welcome of Brother Charles, "a cunning wag," "so amiable, so obliging, so charming, so smiling" (loc. cit.), is excessive, and the monks who keep the travelers company drink like fish. To reinforce the impression of good hospitality, Du Camp pastes into his account the testimonies gathered from the travelers' book, quatrains that are mostly well rhymed. He visits and comments on everything: galleries, engravings of Scripture, monks' cells.

Du Camp openly praises the Christian convent of Jerusalem, which gives alms, pays the rent, offers food. It is a paradisiacal space where universal peace reigns. Choir, altar representing the Last Supper, grotto of the nativity — all these representations are evoked there.

In Turkey, the convent of the whirling dervishes is a confined space to which the traveler has access precisely to watch, for the price of a few minutes. In this space of recollection, the dervishes pray in a regular rotational movement that induces calm: "one feels, in spite of oneself, seized by an immoderate desire to join this singular waltz, and thus to go seek the happy dream that gives their faces the intoxicating expression of beatitude that animates them"[7].

A second type of heterotopia is the eminently enclosed *space of the Seraglio*. We have already noted the author's attraction also for *mixed, heterogeneous spaces,* which his gaze organizes in a precise manner. The most illustrative example is, in our opinion, **the space of the Seraglio**, which he affirms to be an "entire city," with its imperial pavilion, its vast apartments, the library, the gardens, the "magnificent" baths with their rest pavilion, the kitchens, the stables and the arsenal. It is a place which is, according to him, emblematic of the true Orient, mysterious, magnificent, lyrical, frightening: "At last here is the Orient, the true Orient, with its mysteries, its luxury, its terrors, its fanaticism and all its poetry."[8]

Passionate about contrasts, he expresses his dazzlement before the wealth, the magnificence of the objects that belonged to each sultan over the centuries, which he finds in "modest glass-fronted cabinets" of the apartments: weapons (sabers, yataghans, pistols, daggers) and jewels brought from every corner of the world, which by their exoticism and diversity seduce the visitor, who seems here to describe a true "journey within the journey," virtual, across distant spaces: "We remain dazzled by the magnificences that gleam before our eyes. [...] The turquoises of Persia, the rubies of Pegu, the topazes of Brazil, the pearls of Bahrain, the sapphires of Ceylon, the opals of Hungary, the diamonds of Hyderabad."[9]

Next, he describes in minute detail the throne room of the sultans, with its "mysterious" darkness, which is an imperial divan of a "fairy-tale" luxury, represented by an innumerable quantity of precious stones, "turquoises, garnets, emeralds, rubies, aquamarines," a luxury that the traveler associates with that of Moorish art "in its most elaborate fantasy" and with that of the palaces of Venice. It is a space that he populates with figures from political and diplomatic life, belonging to a bygone past, who strongly marked the history of this place: "It is behind the grille that protects [this window] that the pashas, the ministers, the ambassadors once stood, and from there they communicated with the Padishah."[10]

We have sketched out the idea that the traveler maps out the heterogeneous space of the Seraglio, dividing it, organizing it in a precise manner in his descriptions, according to the various uses of each type of place. He thus

[7]Maxime Du Camp, *Souvenirs et paysages d'Orient. Smyrne - Ephèse -- Magnésie -- Constantinople, Scio*, Paris, Didier, 1848, p. 147.
[8]*Ibidem,* p. 206.
[9]*Ibidem,* p. 201.
[10]*Ibidem,* p. 202.

refers to *the space of the garden*[11], itself also divided among its walkways, along which are found "groves of jasmine, honeysuckle, rose bushes, ebony trees," and the lawns, sheltered by larches, Italian pines and old plane trees.

His journey continues with the imperial stables, the traveler giving details on the characteristics of the breed of horses he sees there: "the withers are short, the pastern prominent, the mane sparse, and the head thick, without intelligence."

He also refers to the baths of the Seraglio which arouse his enthusiasm: "divided" into three halls in white marble where he admires the "charming" Moorish architecture. It would be interesting to note the way in which he represents this space to himself: even if the place he describes has a static character, the writer's description confers upon it a certain dynamism, an effect of movement, illustrated by verbs of movement: "to run," "to bloom,"to curve": The arabesques, the stone stalactites run around the ceilings, bloom at the capitals of the columns, curve above the doors and capriciously frame the lenticular panes of glass that give light to this palace of lace.[12]

His description continues with the "elegant" rest pavilion, itself also "divided" into two chambers, one of which forms an "adorable" reverie-couch in white marble of Arab style. We again note the author's taste for lively, dynamic images: "a thousand jets of water that cross in the air spring up and fall back in fine silvery droplets"[13]

The traveler continues his journey by visiting the imperial kitchens, a space that his gaze once again divides, according to laterality: "to the right," "to the left." They are described as an "enormous laboratory," which creates a dynamic and multi-sensory spectacle: "the fires blaze, the pots crackle, a thick, hot smoke fills the atmosphere, everyone hurries, runs, brings, carries away the dishes." However, the author does not hesitate to highlight his status as a privileged traveler: "It is an indecipherable hubbub in the midst of which, however, we are noticed by the head of the kitchen (Boulouk-Bachi), who graciously has excellent sugar fritters offered to us."[14] His walk through the Seraglio ends with the visit to the arsenal, with its "famous and terrible" cauldrons of the Janissaries, armbands, cuirasses, sabers of every shape, lances, muskets, carbines, which likewise arouse the keen interest of the author.

A third heterotopia of significant importance in the travel narrative is *the cemetery*. Du Camp displays a poignant obsession with death[15], which is triggered by the sight of ruins, when he finds himself at the greatest mountain heights and during visits to cemeteries, and which runs through all his accounts as a recurring theme. The inclination toward the macabre unfolds with greater force in the descriptions of cemeteries. During his journey in Switzerland, in the town of Rosière, Du Camp is drawn to the ***cemetery*** — as a "setting of reversibility"[16] —, in which he searches every tomb to discover inscriptions, and he takes pleasure in looking at the human bones, of which he gives a meticulous anatomical description: ribs, femurs, fibulas, jawbones, collarbones "almost reduced to dust," which are found near flowers ("speedwells, nettles, wild sorrel") and children, who play with "rotten planks" that belonged to coffins, cutting out of them traps to catch birds.

Placed outside the town, from the nineteenth century onward, the cemetery becomes an*other* town. It is certainly a *high other place* "in relation to the spaces of ordinary culture, it is nevertheless a space that is connected with the

[11]For more details on the meanings of garden space, see Gaston Bachelard, op. cit., p. 145.
[12]*Souvenirs et paysages d'Orient*, p. 204.
[13]*Ibidem*, p. 204.
[14]I*bidem*, p. 202.
[15]On the link between the redemptive value of death and the return to the cosmic cycle, see Mircea Eliade, *Mythes, rêves et mystères*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957.
[16]Valérie Wernet, « Lieux clos, cœur ouvert : l'orientation spatiale dans La Chaumière indienne de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre », in S. Meitinger (ed.), *Espaces et paysages -- Représentations et inventions du paysage de l'Antiquité à nos jours, op. cit.*, p. 88.

whole set of all the sites of the city or the society or the village, since each individual, each family finds itself having relatives in the cemetery"[17]. The mere sight of "the black dwelling" triggers the awareness of the mortal remains. The cemetery of Damascus, a "field of the dead," is crossed by rivers, and each tomb is "plumed with a bouquet of green or dried grasses" as in the Western tradition[18].

On his journey in Italy, having arrived in the large town of Orsières, after the obligatory visit to the church, Du Camp pauses to describe the cemetery surrounding it, a cramped, insufficient space, "where the dead are pressed, packed one against another"[19]. The passage testifies once again to the fact that Du Camp shows a constant preoccupation as much for the spectacle of life as for that of death:

> At the corners of the walls, human bones are scattered among the grasses: the ribs, the femurs, the fibulas, the jawbones, the collarbones, almost reduced to dust, lie in the midst of speedwells, nettles, wild sorrel; a few rotten planks that belonged to coffins are scattered here and there by the children who play with them and cut out of them traps to catch birds.[20]

In Egypt, at the foot of Pompey's Pillar stretches a cemetery "bare, without trees, desolate, filled with its uniform tombs." The lack of traditional date palms in a garden gives the traveler a feeling of poignant disappointment. Of all the cemeteries of Constantinople, the most beautiful seems to him the field of the dead at Scutari: it is above all a place for walking, of a beautiful variety of costumes, colors and movements: "[...] in the wind that roars and [through] their branches [of the cypresses], the Muslims listen in ecstasy to the song of the souls that flutter above the tombs of the bodies that they animated"[21]. Itinerant merchants sell their sherbets, jams and ices by street cry. The beauty of this exquisite space gives Du Camp "a foretaste of the sleep of eternity"[22], so as "thus to await the first and solemn hour of supreme rest" (loc. cit.).

Revisiting the city of Constantinople after six years, Du Camp arrives at the famous cemetery of Scutari, which he finds "still a marvelous forest of cypresses dotted with tombs," where veiled women and children come to sit. Seized by an inexpressible charm, he contemplates them once again in the same state. Still in Turkey, near the ruins of the Golden Horn, the cemetery is splendid, made up of the same type of tombs and cypresses, which is the specific vegetation.

A fourth heterotopia is represented by *the garden*. M. Foucault holds that, since the depths of Antiquity, the garden is "a sort of happy and universalizing heterotopia"[23]. The author recalls the profound, superimposed meanings that this "astonishing, now millennia-old creation" has developed in the Orient, a sort of microcosm that gathers together and within which all forms of vegetation are distributed[24]. In this "smallest parcel of the world" (loc. cit.) is found, paradoxically, the totality of the world.

The gardens seen in Egypt, on the banks of the Nile, are a small earthly and exotic paradise: "Date palms, banana

[17]M. Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 754.
[18]*Voyage en Orient*, p. 292.
[19]Maxime Du Camp, *Orient et Italie. Souvenirs de voyage et de lectures*, Paris, Didier, 1868, p. 147.
[20]*Ibidem*, p. 147.
[21]*Souvenirs et paysages d'Orient*, p. 140.
[22]*Ibidem*, p. 141.
[23]M. Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 753.
[24]*Ibidem.* The author refines his explanations with the example of Persian gardens: « The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that had to bring together, within its rectangle, four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space even more sacred than the others, which was like the navel, the omphalos of the world at its centre (it was there that the basin and the water jet were) [...] »

trees, colocasias, reeds, tamarisks, rice and sugar cane form impenetrable curtains of greenery"[25]. On the island of Rhoda, he visits gardens which he summarily characterizes as "large and magnificent," "full of every imaginable vegetation," "it is splendid and very poorly maintained: an artificial grotto entirely in shells of a pretty little taste"[26]. In fact, if one wishes to take an inventory of the isotopies that punctuate the description of a landscape, we are able to affirm that, in the whole of Du Camp's work, the most recurrent, repetitive and rich descriptions bear upon the vegetation encountered along the way; he thus has a veritable obsession with vegetation, a tropism that reinforces his encyclopedic knowledge. Moreover, one can identify in the traveler, whose explorer's spirit is undeniable, a keen interest in the vast domain of the *natural sciences*, which should be related to his encyclopedism, and which, from this perspective, brings him closer rather to the writer-travelers of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries: his attention turns not only to history, archaeology, but also to the physical sciences, heliography, geography, botany, the agricultural sciences, zoology, etc.

The ancient gardens of Solomon open at the foot of hard and difficult mountains; placed in a deep valley, planted with olive trees, mulberry trees and mimosas, these gardens offer the occasion to revisit biblical itineraries. The Garden of Olives is an obligatory stop in the pilgrimage of a Christian, especially on August 15th, the feast of the Virgin. Almost deserted, only eight remained in 1850. Other gardens discovered on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus are near the town of Nablus: the traveler describes their greenery as "vigorous" given the multitude of trees that populate them (walnut trees, fig trees, mulberry trees, pomegranate trees, eggplants, birthworts, palm reeds, quickset hedges, etc.), though naturally watered by the surrounding streams, but left to grow at random.

It is worth emphasizing a particularly important aspect: Du Camp is also attracted by another space, namely the zoological garden. The exoticism of such a place seduces the traveler and perhaps makes him perceive this visit as "a journey within the journey," a *mise en abyme* of the journey with symbolic significance, given that most of these animal species represent geographical zones that he has never traveled through: India, Central Africa, Australia, South America.

A fifth heterotopia identifiable in Du Camp's travel accounts is constituted by *museums and libraries*, considered by the same specialist, M. Foucault, to be characteristic of nineteenth-century Western culture. Both are "heterotopias in which time never ceases to pile up and to perch at its own summit, whereas in the seventeenth century, right up to the end of the seventeenth century still, museums and libraries were the expression of an individual choice"[27]. For Maxime Du Camp, the numerous art museums visited on his journey in Holland represent a fine occasion to display his artistic knowledge, an essential component of his encyclopedic learning. His comments, as a well-informed connoisseur, on artistic currents and the artists who illustrate them unfold over whole pages. Art museums represent sacred spaces, conducive to exquisite emotions, to spiritual elevation. The intense experiences render useless, even exclude, any explanation from the guide (shabby, in his opinion), and are likewise conducive to philosophical reflections on the universal genius of the artist. Still in Holland, it is also the anatomy museums that fascinate him, where he spends moments described at length and in minute detail, where he attends autopsies and visits collections of human bodies or skulls. In Amsterdam, the visit to the natural history museum is an occasion to display his naturalist knowledge, as with every other museum of natural sciences. At the Hospice of Saint-Bernard, Du Camp

[25]*Égypte et Nubie*, p. 23. On the following page, Du Camp launches into a botanical digression -- the description of a sycamore -- starting from its etymology, for which he apologizes in advance to the recipient of his book, Théophile Gautier.
[26]*Voyage en Orient*, p. 24.
[27]M. Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 759.

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finds a library “fairly interesting,” but he does not dwell on its description or on the books that compose it. Another library, that of the seraglio, is found “in the middle” of the courtyard, with its “invisible” manuscripts. More than the libraries properly so called, Du Camp often visits his mental library, made up of all the major or minor authors who nourish him with their accounts and their travel narratives.

Thus, the travel narrative often represents a staging of the traveler's readings; it is the sign of a mediated perception of the world, given that the space he visits passes through the screen of the author's formation, through the underlying culture that stands between him and the world. In this way, he performs a reading of space, transforming it into heterotopias, which allow the cutting up of time according to a very precise system of opening and closing.

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