



Aloysius Bertrand's
Gaspard de la Nuit

Beyond the Prose Poem

Valentina Gosetti



LEGENDA

Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge

ALOYSIUS BERTRAND'S *GASPARD DE LA NUIT*
BEYOND THE PROSE POEM

LEGENDA

LEGENDA, founded in 1995 by the European Humanities Research Centre of the University of Oxford, is now a joint imprint of the Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge. Titles range from medieval texts to contemporary cinema and form a widely comparative view of the modern humanities, including works on Arabic, Catalan, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Yiddish literature. An Editorial Board of distinguished academic specialists works in collaboration with leading scholarly bodies such as the Society for French Studies, the British Comparative Literature Association and the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain & Ireland.

MHRA

The Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) encourages and promotes advanced study and research in the field of the modern humanities, especially modern European languages and literature, including English, and also cinema. It aims to break down the barriers between scholars working in different disciplines and to maintain the unity of humanistic scholarship in the face of increasing specialization. The Association fulfils this purpose through the publication of journals, bibliographies, monographs, critical editions, and the *MHRA Style Guide*, and by making grants in support of research.

www.mhra.org.uk



LONDON AND NEW YORK

Routledge is a global publisher of academic books, journals and online resources in the humanities and social sciences. Founded in 1836, it has published many of the greatest thinkers and scholars of the last hundred years, including Adorno, Einstein, Russell, Popper, Wittgenstein, Jung, Bohm, Hayek, McLuhan, Marcuse and Sartre. Today Routledge is one of the world's leading academic publishers in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It publishes thousands of books and journals each year, serving scholars, instructors, and professional communities worldwide.

www.routledge.com

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chairman

Professor Colin Davis, Royal Holloway, University of London

Professor Malcolm Cook, University of Exeter (French)

Professor Robin Fiddian, Wadham College, Oxford (Spanish)

Professor Anne Fuchs, University of Warwick (German)

Professor Paul Garner, University of Leeds (Spanish)

Professor Andrew Hadfield, University of Sussex (English)

Professor Marian Hobson Jeanneret,

Queen Mary University of London (French)

Professor Catriona Kelly, New College, Oxford (Russian)

Professor Martin McLaughlin, Magdalen College, Oxford (Italian)

Professor Martin Maiden, Trinity College, Oxford (Linguistics)

Professor Peter Matthews, St John's College, Cambridge (Linguistics)

Dr Stephen Parkinson, Linacre College, Oxford (Portuguese)

Professor Suzanne Raitt, William and Mary College, Virginia (English)

Professor Ritchie Robertson, The Queen's College, Oxford (German)

Professor David Shepherd, Keele University (Russian)

Professor Michael Sheringham, All Souls College, Oxford (French)

Professor Alison Sinclair, Clare College, Cambridge (Spanish)

Professor David Treece, King's College London (Portuguese)

Managing Editor

Dr Graham Nelson

41 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JF, UK

www.legendabooks.com

This page intentionally left blank

Aloysius Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit*

Beyond the Prose Poem



VALENTINA GOSETTI



LEGENDA

Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge

2016

*Published by the
Modern Humanities Research Association
Salisbury House, Station Road, Cambridge CB1 2LA
and
Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and 711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017*

*LEGENDA is an imprint of the
Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge*

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

*ISBN 978-1-909662-83-4 (hbk)
ISBN 978-1-315-56055-7 (ebk)*

First published 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or disseminated or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, or stored in any retrieval system, or otherwise used in any manner whatsoever without the express permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer: Statements of fact and opinion contained in this book are those of the author and not of the editors, Routledge, or the Modern Humanities Research Association. The publisher makes no representation, express or implied, in respect of the accuracy of the material in this book and cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested*

© Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge 2016

Printed in Great Britain

Cover: 875 Design

Copy-Editor: Richard Correll

CONTENTS



	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
	<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
	<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xii
	Introduction	i
1	Louis Bertrand between Dijon and Paris	11
2	Mysterious Geographies	32
3	<i>Gaspard de la Nuit</i> : A Fantastic Text?	68
4	Intertextuality and Cultural Exchange in <i>Gaspard de la Nuit</i>	91
5	<i>Gaspard de la Nuit</i> and the Hermeneutics of Form	117
	Conclusion	144
	Appendix	148
	<i>Bibliography</i>	152
	<i>Index</i>	165

A mio papà Roberto Gosetti
(1957–2007)

‘Per me, giù che le scrif en liber isé, l’è ’n genio!’

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



My deepest gratitude goes, first of all, to Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe for her precious guidance during the years of my doctorate, and to my examiners Tim Farrant and Paddy O'Donovan for their invaluable comments and encouragement. Thanks are also due to Legenda for believing in this project and for their editorial assistance, to Graham Nelson for his exquisite efficiency, and to the anonymous reader, who was fundamental to improving the focus of my work. This book would not have been possible without the academic and financial support of St Anne's College, Oxford, where I hold the Kathleen Bourne Junior Research Fellowship; I wish to record my gratitude for this tremendous opportunity. For their assistance at earlier stages of my research, I also wish to thank Balliol College and the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, who granted me a doctoral Zaharoff award.

Many friends and colleagues were, in one way or another, a crucial part of this project; I therefore wish to thank Patrick McGuinness, Damien Mooney, Francesco Manzini, Jonathan Mallinson, Matthew Reynolds, Francesca Cavazza, and, especially, Paul Howard, whose careful and critical proofreading was essential to this work. In France, my sincere thanks go to Paolo Tortonese at the *Sorbonne Nouvelle* for welcoming me to his seminars in 2011, and to various scholars for their insights and reassurance at different stages, especially Nathalie Ravonneaux and Marion Pécher of the *Association pour la mémoire d'Aloysius Bertrand*, Nicolas Wanlin, and Steve Murphy. In Ireland, my gratitude goes to Barbara Wright and David Scott for their kind feedback on earlier versions of a paper forthcoming in the *Australian Journal of French Studies*, which is now included, in a new form, in Chapter 5. In Dijon, my warm thanks go to Martine Chauney-Bouillot, the *bibliothécaire extraordinaire* at the *Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon* for her treasured help during my research trip there, and to all the staff of the *Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or* for their assistance, and for granting permission to use the images assembled in this volume. Thanks also go to Gian Lombardo for allowing me to benefit from some of his translations of Bertrand's *fantaisies*, to Slatkine for permitting me to use some reproductions taken from *Le Provincial*, and to a private collector for making the terrific cover image available.

I also wish to express my profound gratitude to Claudio Fantoni and Adriano Marchetti, who initiated me to French literature, the first early on in Middle School, and the latter at the University of Bologna. Last but not least, my wholehearted thanks and enduring love go to all my family, but particularly to my darling, Matt, for being there next to me throughout this project.

By kind permission of the editors, Chapters 1 and 4 of this book include new versions of the articles 'Louis Bertrand et "le romantisme incarné" dans le "Récit de

famille de Paul Foisset”’, and ‘La Sensualité d’Ondine: une femme fatale grotesque’, which were published, respectively, in *La Giroflée: Bulletin Bertrand*, 6 (Autumn 2013), 37–44; and 7 (Autumn–Winter 2014), 11–18. Chapter 1 features a version of my short piece ‘*Le Provincial* of Dijon: French Romanticism and Provincial Cultural Awakening’, published in *French Studies Bulletin*, 34 (Autumn 2013), 53–57. Chapter 2 includes the reworked version of a paper that was highly commended for the SDN (*Society of Dix-Neuviémistes*) postgraduate prize in 2013, and which was invited for submission to their journal, *Dix-Neuf*, and is now published as ‘Between Representation and Imagination: The Promotion of Dijon in *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, *Dix-Neuf*, 19.2 (July 2015), 144–58.

Finally, this book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Roberto Gosetti, whose sense of humour and ironic outlook on life were handed down to my brother Riccardo and me; we could not have wished for a more cherished legacy.

v.g., Oxford, July 2015

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



- FIG. 2.1. 'Jacquemart, Jacqueline, and their children', © Christophe Finot. The symbolic statues on top of the bell tower of the Church of Notre-Dame in Dijon. Reproduced with the kind permission of Christophe Finot.
- FIG. 2.2. 'Vue générale de Dijon', © Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, in *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne ou description historique et vues des monuments antiques et du Moyen-Age dessinées par une société d'artistes*, ref. FRAD021_7NUM_D.3.4_0000746, <http://www.archinoe.net/console/ir_ead_visu_lien.php?m=&ir=7750&id=133185563>. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, Dijon.
- FIG. 2.3. 'Vue générale de Dijon', © Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, in *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne ou description historique et vues des monuments antiques et du Moyen-Age dessinées par une société d'artistes*, ref. FRAD021_7NUM_D.3.4_0000743, <http://www.archinoe.net/console/ir_ead_visu_lien.php?m=&ir=7750&id=133185583>. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, Dijon.
- FIG. 2.4. 'Piédestal', © Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, in *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne ou description historique et vues des monuments antiques et du Moyen-Age dessinées par une société d'artistes*, ref. FRAD021_7NUM_D.3.4_0000740, <http://www.archinoe.net/console/ir_ead_visu_lien.php?m=&ir=7750&id=133185521>. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, Dijon.
- FIG. 2.5. 'Portail', © Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, in *Voyage pittoresque en Bourgogne ou description historique et vues des monuments antiques et du Moyen-Age dessinées par une société d'artistes*, ref. FRAD021_7NUM_D.3.4_0000735 <http://www.archinoe.net/console/ir_ead_visu_lien.php?m=&ir=7750&id=133185485>. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, Dijon.
- FIG. 2.6. 'Le Flamand', © Bibliothèque nationale de France, in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes: encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle. Province*, (Paris: Curmer Ed., 1842) <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k207988w/f343.image>>. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
- FIG. 5.1. Cutting from the 'Chronique' section, in *Le Provincial*, n. 10, 29 May 1828, © Slatkine, in *Le Provincial. Recueil périodique dédié à 85 départements* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1973), p. 47. Reproduced with the kind permission of Slatkine (www.slatkine.com)
- FIG. 5.2. Cutting from the 'Variétés' section, in *Le Provincial*, n. 4, 8 May 1828, © Slatkine, in *Le Provincial. Recueil périodique dédié à 85 départements* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1973), p. 17. Reproduced with the kind permission of Slatkine (www.slatkine.com)
- FIG. 5.3. Cutting from the 'Poésie' section, in *Le Provincial*, n. 23, 13 July 1828, © Slatkine, in *Le Provincial. Recueil périodique dédié à 85 départements* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1973), p. 112. Reproduced with the kind permission of Slatkine (www.slatkine.com)
- FIG. 5.4. Cuttings from the 'Variétés' section, in *Le Provincial*, n. 12, 5 June 1828, © Slatkine, in *Le Provincial. Recueil périodique dédié à 85 départements* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1973), pp. 57–58. Reproduced with the kind permission of Slatkine (www.slatkine.com)
- FIG. 5.5. Cuttings from the 'Variétés' section, in *Le Provincial*, n. 29, 1 August 1828, © Slatkine, in *Le Provincial. Recueil périodique dédié à 85 départements* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1973), p. 141. Reproduced with the kind permission of Slatkine (www.slatkine.com)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS



- OC Aloysius Bertrand, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Helen Hart Poggenburg (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2000)
- OCWI Washington Irving, *Œuvres complètes de M. Washington Irving, traduites de l'anglais sous les yeux de l'auteur, par M. Lebègue d'Auteuil*, 4 vols (Paris: Boulland, 1825)
- OCWS Walter Scott, *Œuvres complètes de Sir Walter Scott. Traduction nouvelle*, trans. by Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret (Paris: Charles Gosselin et A. Sautet et Co, 1826–33)
- VHOP Victor Hugo, *Œuvres poétiques*, pref. by Gaëtan Picon, ed. by Pierre Albouy, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1964), 1: *Avant l'exil, 1802–1851*

INTRODUCTION



Beyond the Prose Poem

‘The author is a captive of his epoch, of his own present. Subsequent times liberate him from this captivity, and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation’.¹ What was perhaps missing from this declaration by Mikhail Bakhtin in his ‘Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*’ is that an author can also be a captive of subsequent times — of his critical reception — and become a victim of the opinion of his/her posthumous readership. For a long time Aloysius Bertrand² (1807–1841) has been treated as a minor poet and classed under the controversial label of *petit romantique*;³ his name has been deemed worth mentioning mainly because of his role as the author of the first collection of prose poetry in France.⁴ Bertrand himself seemed to have glimpsed this possible destiny of his work. In the opening composition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, dedicated to Victor Hugo, he writes:

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

Alors, qu’un bibliophile s’avise d’exhumer cette œuvre moisie et vermoulue, il y lira à la première page ton nom illustre qui n’aura point sauvé le mien de l’oubli. (OC, 106–07)⁵

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

Anthologies and historical surveys on the evolution of the prose poem usually grant *Gaspard de la Nuit* an important role, and yet its consideration is only fleeting, both because of the succinct nature of such overviews and because Bertrand is classed as a precursor. For instance, in his *Les Poèmes en prose*, Julien Roumette surveys what are considered the main characteristics of Bertrand’s collection (such as the ‘vague gothique’, the ‘référence à la peinture’, and the ‘raffinement de son écriture’), taking up only five pages.⁶ In *Le Poème en prose et ses territoires*, a more didactic volume presenting the evolution of the genre from its origins to the 1980s, which includes an anthology of prose poems divided by themes, Yves Vadé, again, covers Bertrand’s work in slightly more than four pages. In this work the name of Bertrand still figures amongst the predecessors, while the section ‘Les Fondateurs’ begins with Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris*.⁷

Bertrand’s collection gains more attention only in recent studies that focus more specifically on the first prose poems. This is the case, for example, in Nathalie

Vincent-Munnia's rich volume on the genealogy of the prose poem in the first half of the nineteenth century, which contains a convincing formal and thematic analysis of some of what she calls the first *poèmes en prose* by such authors as Xavier Forneret, Alphonse Rabbe, Ludovic de Cailleux, and Aloysius Bertrand.⁸ Although valuing the contribution of these first poets in prose, however, Vincent-Munnia's study risks perpetuating the traditional view of these authors, including Bertrand, as precursors of a genre that was only to become fully developed later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. 'Les premières poèmes en prose', Vincent-Munnia writes, 'ne font qu'inaugurer des caractéristiques esthétiques et des conceptions poétiques qui ne se réaliseront pleinement que par la suite'.⁹ My aim here is, instead, to move beyond the realm of the prose poem as a critical parameter. This issue will only be addressed in the last chapter, where I shall challenge the very use of 'poème en prose' to define Bertrand's texts.

The classical point of reference for the aforementioned studies is still Suzanne Bernard's *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours*, the seminal volume on the history of the prose poem in France. This monumental study contains a full section on Bertrand entitled 'Aloysius Bertrand et la naissance du genre', where Bernard presents *Gaspard de la Nuit* to readers who may be unfamiliar with this work. She briefly elucidates the main elements of his biography, his formal technique (through some convincing textual examples), and some of the central Romantic themes of the *fantaisies*. However, even here, Bertrand is seen as predating the real beginning ('Après lui le genre est créé'),¹⁰ the section on *Gaspard de la Nuit* preceding the first chapter, entitled 'Baudelaire et le lyrisme moderne'.¹¹ To borrow Todorov's declaration, Bernard too finds that 'il est tout naturel de commencer par Baudelaire'.¹²

The marginalization of Bertrand's position with respect to the *poème en prose* can sometimes be seen in the criticism of prose poetry. While Bertrand's pioneering formal experimentation is seen as valuable, his thematic banality and 'manque de souffle'¹³ are often denounced, due to his use of the many obvious Romantic themes and clichés that characterize *Gaspard de la Nuit*, a work which has even been defined as 'un bréviaire, un abrégé du romantisme'.¹⁴ This judgment is sometimes taken to the extreme, as can be seen in the example of Hermine Riffaterre's abrupt declaration: 'Let me start with something that is not great poetry; I use it for its historical value'.¹⁵ Marvin Richards was among the first critics to identify explicitly the paradox whereby 'Bertrand receives recognition only to be dismissed as a precursor', denouncing it by pointing out how 'critics have refused to admit Bertrand to the canon precisely because of his unoriginality'.¹⁶ Richards' volume on Bertrand's collection (the first English study devoted entirely to Bertrand) aimed to demonstrate the originality of *Gaspard de la Nuit* seen in the light of the generic paradoxes of prose poetry, such as those famously expounded by critical theorists, including Barbara Johnson, Jacques Derrida, and Gérard Genette. Furthermore, in support of the idea of Bertrand's originality, in his second chapter entitled 'Atomized Narrative and Serialized Poetry: *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the New Novel', Richards undertakes a comparison between some formal aspects of *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the *Nouveau Roman*.

In the same vein as the work of Richards, one of my very few anglophone predecessors within Bertrand Studies, the present study aims to show that Bertrand's contribution to literary history is greater than would be concluded from its treatment up until now. However, this analysis will differ from that of Richards in several ways. First of all, in my examination of Bertrand's *fantaisies* I shall not draw on deconstructive theories of the prose poem (such as those of Barbara Johnson),¹⁷ nor shall I attempt to situate my analyses with respect to 'the ambivalence of the prose poem's generic category'.¹⁸ Indeed, although a fruitful research avenue, I do not intend to form a transhistorical theory and formal assessment of the prose poem; rather, I aim to explore how the historical, cultural, and literary contexts inform the composition of *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

Secondly, concerning the idea of a reassessment of Bertrand's 'originality', I shall base my study on the possibility that the meaning of 'originality' itself may have shifted over time, making this concept an important one to understand within the cultural context of Bertrand's time. During the 1820s, in particular, the issues of originality and imitation were at the centre of the animated debate between the *classiques* and the *romantiques* that was taking place in influential periodicals such as *Le Globe*.¹⁹ For instance, in 1825, although some of the *romantiques* insisted on the inherent 'originality' of Romanticism, 'cette doctrine, c'est la liberté, c'est l'imitation directe de la nature, c'est l'originalité', others, like the critic Ampère, argued that originality and imitation can coexist, and that having models does not prevent an author from creating something novel and unique.²⁰ Ampère clarified the meaning of imitation in these terms: 'il n'importe que l'on imite une littérature ancienne ou contemporaine, ce qui fait l'imitation c'est l'existence d'un modèle autre que la nature'.²¹ After all, even influential literary figures like Tasso, Milton, Schiller, and Goethe drew from the literary works of other authors, and yet Ampère denounced 'l'absurdité qu'il y aurait à contester aux poètes que je viens de nommer le mérite de l'originalité'.²² In this study I shall welcome this Romantic questioning of the notion of originality and, instead of undertaking an assessment of Bertrand's originality *per se*, I shall examine this poet's own and unique synthesis of the available literary material at his time with his own poetic experimentation.

Where Richards has focused for part of his work on Bertrand's reception by subsequent generations of writers,²³ in this study I keep mentions of Bertrand's afterlife to the minimum necessary. With the exception of some fleeting remarks, I shall refrain from examining this aspect in depth. The danger is that this would end up being a way of enhancing a minor poet's legacy, by reminding readers of more famous authors such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Breton, the first 'bibliophiles' who expressed admiration for Bertrand's work, and who had the merit of rescuing him from oblivion.²⁴ For a long time Baudelaire's consideration of *Gaspard de la Nuit* in his enigmatic *lettre-dédicace* to Arsène Houssaye had fostered a feeling of belonging: 'un livre connu de vous, de moi et de quelques-uns de nos amis, n'a-t-il pas tous les droits à être appelé *fameux*?'²⁵ where to be interested in Bertrand meant joining a small circle of Baudelaire's *amis*, so to speak. Very recently, however, the destiny of the critical reception of Bertrand has changed dramatically, most notably due to the attention gained by the inclusion of *Gaspard de la Nuit* as one of the main

subjects in the programme for the French state examination *Agrégation de lettres modernes 2010–2011*. This unprecedented flourishing of publications, workshops, and conferences, by both specialists and non-specialists, investigating the contribution of Bertrand has elevated the consideration of this author well above the second-hand credit given by references from more important names.²⁶ The feeling of a small circle is still nonetheless the dominant one amongst many Bertrand scholars because, even with the enthusiasm caused by the *Agrégation*, the name of Aloysius Bertrand seems unlikely to gain its own independent place in mainstream literary histories and literary courses, where he is still often considered as the poor cousin of Baudelaire, or as a *petit romantique*, with the notable exception of the *Association pour la mémoire d'Aloysius Bertrand*, which continues to expand research on the poet from Dijon.

In the present study, Bertrand's work will thus not be considered through the eyes of his famous posthumous admirers, such as Baudelaire. As Michel Brix polemically claims in a recent essay on the prose poem:

Il conviendrait de 'débaudelaiser' *Gaspard de la nuit*, d'étudier ce recueil pour lui-même plutôt que d'essayer de lui faire avouer une esthétique qui le rapprocherait de la pratique de l'auteur du *Spleen*. Contrairement à ce que suggère ce dernier, Aloysius Bertrand, on l'a noté, n'a jamais prétendu publier des 'poèmes en prose'.²⁷

Since the gestation, writing, and posthumous publication of Bertrand's *fantaisies* (1842) came well before Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*, it is clear that, at the time of their creation, Bertrand's compositions were not classed, or read, as *poèmes en prose*; the 'horizon of expectations' of their first readers — to borrow Jauss's concept — was very different from that of the post-Baudelairean reader.

This monograph places the analysis of *Gaspard de la Nuit* back in its original cultural context, that of French Romanticism in the 1820s and 1830s, a time characterized, as I shall show, by lively cultural exchange. The investigation of Bertrand's context through such sources as correspondence, periodicals, contemporary literary works and reviews, as well as historical studies, will permit me to establish his own poetic experimentation, while understanding his debts to his contemporaries. One of the starting points for this approach is Bourdieu's theory concerning the 'champ littéraire', insofar as he explores 'l'espace des possibles [...] qui s'offrent devant chaque écrivain à un moment donné de l'histoire du champ et les dispositions à l'égard de ces possibles qu'il doit à sa position dans le champ et à la trajectoire qu'il y a conduit'.²⁸ Expanding on this observation, this study will be an investigation of the specific possibilities, which opened before Bertrand at his particular time in literary (and cultural) history. Furthermore, part of my analysis is based on Jauss's concept of 'the reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past' in order to avoid possible interpretative anachronisms.²⁹ Indeed, the reconstruction of the 'horizon of expectations' at Bertrand's time will be particularly relevant, especially in the last chapter, in order to understand how readers (and writers) at the time were likely to have considered such a literary work.

Some historians of the prose poem have already shown the importance of

studying *Gaspard de la Nuit* in its context. This is the case, for example, with the introductory study on the evolution of this genre by Christian Leroy, *La Poésie en prose française du XVII^e siècle à nos jours: histoire d'un genre*,³⁰ and studies on the genealogy of the prose poem, such as the collection of essays *Aux origines du poème en prose français, 1750–1850*,³¹ and the aforementioned pioneering volume by Vincent-Munnia, where she suggests that ‘les premiers poèmes en prose doivent [...] être analysés et définis génériquement dans le contexte historique et littéraire de leur production’.³² By considering Bertrand’s work as part of the historical development of the genre, studies like Vincent-Munnia’s and Leroy’s have the merit of producing greater awareness of the literary context that made such development possible by such authors as Bertrand, Rabbe, de Guérin, and Forneret. These volumes, in general, still class Bertrand’s *fantaisies* under the label of *poème en prose*. In contrast, in his study, Luc Bonenfant has shown the generic intricacies of Bertrand’s *fantaisies*, thus eliminating the possible historical bias of naming these compositions simply ‘poèmes en prose’. Closely analysing some of Bertrand’s texts, firstly, as if they were a *récit*, then as a *nouvelle*, and lastly as a *poème en prose*, Bonenfant seeks to understand ‘le fonctionnement générique des textes et de leurs seuils’.³³ Bonenfant also explores how Bertrand’s compositions challenge the traditional distinction between established genres, through employing stylistic and formal parameters such as ‘brièveté’, ‘densité’, and ‘unité’. I shall reconsider some of these discussions when considering the formal aspects of Bertrand’s *fantaisies*.

Beyond an assessment of the genre of Bertrand’s *fantaisies*, the rich potential of studying this writer’s context through well-documented historical research has recently been shown by Nicolas Wanlin’s *Aloysius Bertrand: Le sens du pittoresque*, an engaging volume adding to existing critical work on the relationship between *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the arts, especially the visual arts.³⁴ But Wanlin is not interested in comparing some of Bertrand’s *fantaisies* with the possible paintings that might have inspired them. By basing his thorough historical research on a solid theoretical framework, and by providing compelling historical evidence supporting his arguments, Wanlin convincingly examines the various ways in which the use of other arts in Bertrand’s collection is a means by which this poet expresses different aesthetic, and perhaps even political and moral, values. Wanlin hence demonstrates that the *pittoresque* carries different meanings in Bertrand’s collection and that his *fantaisies* should not be considered as a mere transposition of other arts (even if the names of Callot and Rembrandt are mentioned in the title).

My work is indebted to, and inspired by, that of scholars like Bonenfant, Dahan, Murphy, Vincent-Munnia, Wanlin, among others, who have demonstrated the crucial value of considering the historical context in the study of Bertrand’s collection, albeit in different ways. Building on their work, my aim here is to show that, in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Bertrand was deliberately calling into question the very definitions of art and beauty themselves. Through his *fantaisies*, Bertrand sought to have his sardonic voice heard within the wider context of contemporary debates about art, characterizing the 1820s and 1830s. In this sense, he was far from being a naive and insecure *petit romantique*, and this retrospective view is largely due to the unlucky publication history of his manuscript and to his economic struggles. But,

as a poet and a writer, Bertrand was deeply immersed in, and keenly aware of, the cultural exchange characterizing his context. In fact, he attempted to ride the wave and exploit what was in vogue at his time to the benefit of his own unique artistic quest. If *Gaspard de la Nuit* had been published earlier, during the 1830s, Bertrand might well have known fame...

By cultural exchange I generally mean a dynamic process, entailing active participation on the part of authors, 'receiving' and gleaning from cultural phenomena of their time (not solely literary ones) and 'giving back' to contemporary culture by reworking these materials in their own unique way. In this study, I seek to show that, in order to assess Bertrand's work, it is crucial to consider the poet's contribution to, as well as his position in, the wider cultural exchange typical of his time. This approach is aimed at providing a more nuanced account of the complex interaction between Bertrand and his context, in which some of its aspects will emerge as more valuable than others according to Bertrand's exposure to them. The inspiration for this kind of approach is Bourdieu's reflection on the 'field of cultural production', especially on his insight that 'ignorance of everything which goes to make up the "mood of the age" produces a derealization of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time [...], they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism'.³⁵

The emphasis placed here on cultural exchange is also partly informed by James Smith Allen's study *Popular French Romanticism*, which focuses on the exchange between what he names 'elite' and 'popular' culture in Paris during French Romanticism.³⁶ For example, Allen stresses the fact that now forgotten 'popular' authors had a much more central role in spreading and promoting Romantic ideals within society at large than canonical authors like Stendhal and Gautier. In part of my study, we shall see that now forgotten authors from the regions of France, such as intellectuals from Bertrand's circle in Dijon, namely Théophile Foisset and Charles Brugnot, had a leading role in shaping the cultural environment of their cities and in fostering cultural exchange with the capital.³⁷

Using the approach outlined here, I shall reassess some of the main traditional critical considerations of Bertrand and of his collection of *fantaisies*. This work is composed of five chapters, which draw their case studies mainly from the first three sections of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, namely 'L'École Flamande', 'Le Vieux Paris', and 'La Nuit et ses prestiges', which Bertrand considered as the core of his work. Indeed, in the 'Dessein d'un encadrement pour le texte' addressed to his publisher, it was Bertrand himself who declared that the remaining parts were 'moins importants aux yeux de l'auteur' (OC, 376). The first chapter of the present study examines the significance and complexity of the idea of provincialism in the France of the first half of the nineteenth century, while undertaking a close analysis of the cultural context of Bertrand in Dijon, and examining the relationship between Paris and Dijon through correspondence and literary magazines. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the spread of Romanticism in Dijon through the mindset of its own protagonists, a mindset that was greatly shaped by the exchange of ideas within this provincial context, but also by the wider cultural exchange with the capital.