INTRODUCTION: BYPASSING PARIS? SE PASSER DE PARIS?

Valentina Gosetti, University of New England, Australia

Heather Williams, University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, GB

'Sauver Paris, c'est plus que sauver la France, c'est sauver le monde. Paris est le centre même de l'humanité. Paris est la ville sacrée.'[1] These words, pronounced by Victor Hugo on 4 September 1870 upon returning from two decades of exile, the day following the proclamation of the Third Republic by Léon Gambetta, could not have been made with reference to any other city in the modern world. Whether as capital of the nineteenth century or capital of the World's Republic of Letters, Paris is exceptional in terms of its centrality to French-language literature and thought, and this quasi-mythical status has caused an exceptional reliance within our discipline on a centre–periphery model as a prism through which to view cultural difference.[2] In other words, if Paris is the uncontested centre, then everything else becomes periphery. In World Literature, the pull of the centre seems just as strong, with both Moretti and Casanova agreeing that World Literature has a distinct centre, 'which is a source of innovation and cannot be bypassed'.[3] In the context of postcolonial studies, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have claimed that the centre–periphery binary 'has been one of the most contentious ideas' in the field.[4]

Even those who attempt to challenge the status quo by asserting the independence of the periphery, as suggested by Janine Hauthal and Anna-Leena Toivanen, inevitably 'run the risk of perpetuating the binary and continue to subscribe to the very idea of the centre instead of destabilizing it'.[5] How can we in French Studies (broadly interpreted) question the conundrum of Paris's centrality while at the same time undoing, or avoiding, the pitfalls of the centre–periphery model, which is dogged by centripetal forces and a stubborn methodological nationalism?[6]

These considerations inform the present collective reflection on whether it is ever fruitful, or even possible, to *bypass* Paris or *se passer de Paris*, and are already at the heart of our respective research projects.[7] Some articles doubt the very possibility of bypassing Paris within our field. Others propose an investigation of 'lateral links' or 'lateral networks'[8] as a way of bypassing Paris. These can be lateral links between 'peripheries' within the so-called Hexagon,[9] as in the case of regional writers in Brittany or Savoie corresponding with members of the Occitan Félibrige, or links with other 'peripheral' cultures in the wider *Francosphère*, or even via languages other than French, as in the case of pan-Celticism or international crime fiction networks. However, the idea of 'lateral' links, just like the notion of a 'periphery', still implies a centre. The articles here thus tend towards a non-hierarchical network model such as that advocated by Caroline Levine, who argues that 'The network allows us to understand vital aspects of literary history that the nation obscures, including, paradoxically enough, the nation itself.'[10]

Others propose ways of *un*thinking the centre–periphery dichotomy altogether in order to embrace new perspectives. These include using a much broader oceanic lens, moving beyond anthropocentrism, and even the idea of scrutinizing literature under the 'ideal conditions' of a science experiment that brackets Paris off. Our aim in this special issue is to inspire further, perhaps more radical, efforts to dismantle this centralizing lens.

Our project acknowledges that working with 'Paris' as a concept is dangerous because it is so mythologized. Which 'Paris' are we proposing to bypass? Post-Revolutionary Paris was (and is) itself multilingual, multicultural, the home of many provincials (including some who were instrumental in regionalist movements), of the underprivileged, of exiles, and is not represented holistically (to the extent that this is possible) by any literary elite. Real, lived, Paris is too heterogenous to be referred to in the singular, as is evident from such works as Maspero's *Passagers du Roissy-Express*. The real Paris is plural, and we fully embrace work on this by scholars such as Forsdick, Achille and Moudileno, who have rightly encouraged an approach to Paris that will 'account more clearly for its multi-sitedness and for the heterogeneous range of cultures whose presence have shaped the capital'.[11]

Focussing largely on non-Parisian contexts in the modern world since the French Revolution, however, in 'Bypassing Paris? Se passer de Paris?', we acknowledge that pernicious *ideas of geography* are sometimes more dangerous and pervasive than real geographies themselves.[12] The idea of the tyranny of Paris became a lived experience for so many who felt excluded by the capital, whether living in it or not, '[m]ais la province à son tour est lasse d'être absorbée ou tyrannisée par la capitale'.[13] Such cries for decentralization have punctuated French history since, at least, the Revolution, even though criticism has only turned to these relatively recently.[14] In literary terms, as Casanova states, Paris has been seen as performing a function, *une fonction*, within the World's Republic of Letters, dictating literary taste, sanctioning works, turning them from texts into 'literature' proper, as opposed to 'regional literature'.[15] Among literary critics in dominant Parisian journals, exclusive *cénacles*, gate-keeping publishing houses, and the whole machinery of literary consecration, we must recall that it is official institutions, such as the iconic Paris-based Académie française, that have traditionally embodied such a function. The late *immortel* Marc Fumaroli commented that 'La France est le premier—et, en définitive, le seul—pays qui se voie doté d'un "corps littéraire" d'État.'[16] And the most sacrosanct element of such a *corps littéraire d'État* is the French language itself.

Some of the articles in this special issue highlight the importance, within French Studies broadly interpreted, of undoing the workings of 'French republican linguistic ideology', which has traditionally established 'a strong link between language and national identity'.[17] After all, this was deemed so important still in 1992 that, to fight against the increasing threat of other languages, including global English, a clause was added to article two of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, which now reads, unequivocally, that 'la langue de la République est le français'. Paris the 'berceau sacré de la Révolution'[18] and the 'guarantor of national unity',[19] a unity which has hinged on French monolingualism at least since the Abbé Grégoire,[20] thus also becomes the symbol of the *bon parler* and *bien écrire*. The dominant idea is that internal multilingualism belongs to the *Ancien Régime* or, at best, that it should be seen as a folkloristic and colourful heritage. Researching multilingually, against the grain of French glottophobia,[21] is a possible way forward that bypasses what we may term, more specifically, the methodological Parisianism that we have all experienced as scholars in this discipline. The alternative avenues suggested by this collection of articles challenge the rather stale dynamics of literary consecration and thus expand the corpus of what is *worth* including in our ever-expanding

literary republics. In their mutually enriching plurality, they do so, it is hoped, whether bypassing Paris or not, without painting *the real* Paris, in turn, as a monolithic entity. At the same time, they surely set out to challenge its function as the sacred guarantor of literary worthiness.

[1] Victor Hugo, 'Rentrée à Paris', in *Actes et paroles. Depuis l'exil. 1870–1876* (Paris: Calmann Lévy Éditeur, 1876), pp. 5–7 (p. 6).

[2] Pierre Nora's monumental collection *Les Lieux de mémoire* shows how ingrained the centre–periphery model is: many of its constituent essays reckon with this cleavage, with Maurice Agulhon's 'Le Centre et la périphérie', in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 3 vols (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2013–2017), II: *Les France* (2017), pp. 2889–2906, and Alain Corbin, 'Paris – Province', in the same volume, pp. 2851–2888 tackling it directly. A thorough recent survey of the terms is available in Janine Hauthal and Anna-Leena Toivanen, 'European Peripheries in the postcolonial imagination', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 57.3 (2021), 291–301; a recent discussion in a French context is *Des littératures périphériques*, ed. by Nelly Blanchard and Mannaig Thomas (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014). See also Sari Pietikäinen and Helen Kelly-Holmes, *Multilingualism and the Periphery* (Oxford: OUP, 2013); Dorota Gołuch, Rashi Rohatgi and Nichola Smalley, 'Comparing Centres, Comparing Peripheries: Introduction', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 11 (2014), 1–8, <https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/full/10.3366/ccs.2014.0140?role=tab≥ [accessed 10 January 2023].

[3] Franco Moretti, 'More Conjectures', *New Left Review*, 20 (2003), 73–81 (p. 75). Along with Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), Moretti's work on world systems remains influential in World Literature studies.

[4] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 32.

[5] Hauthal and Toivanen, 'European peripheries in the postcolonial imagination', p. 291.

[6] On 'methodological nationalism', see Charles Forsdick referencing Kenneth Pomeranz in 'What's "French" about French Studies?', *Nottingham French Studies*, 54.3 (2015), 312–27 (p. 326).

[7] Valentina Gosetti's Australian Research Council-Funded Project 'Provincial Poets and the Making of a Nation', and Heather Williams's research on cultural interfaces and Breton/French and Breton/Welsh cultural dialogues.

[8] We are indebted to Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih for the idea of the lateral network, which comes from their 'Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally', in *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 1-23.

[9] See Eugen Weber, 'L'Hexagone', in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, I: *La Nation* (2013), pp. 1171–90. For a kaleidoscopic mapping of the Hexagon, see the collective volume *Hexagonal Variations: Diversity, Plurality and Reinvention in Contemporary France*, ed. by Jo McCormack, Murray Pratt and Alistair Rolls (Amsterdam; New York: Brill, 2011).

[10] Caroline Levine, 'From Nation to Network', *Victorian Studies*, 55.4, special issue: *The Ends of History* (2013), 647–66 (p. 649).

[11] Étienne Achille, Charles Forsdick and Lydie Moudileno, 'Introduction: Postcolonizing *lieux de mémoire*', in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory. Sites and Symbols in Modern France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 1–19 (p. 12).

[12] Valentina Gosetti, Adrian Walsh and Daniel A. Finch-Race, 'Reclaiming provincialism', *Human Geography*, 16.1 (2023), 87-94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786221138538> [accessed 13 January 2023].

[13] René Millet, *La France provinciale. Vie Sociale. Moeurs administratives* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1888), p. vii.

[14] For a detailed intellectual history of 'décentralisation', see François Burdeau, *Liberté, libertés locales, chéries* (Paris: Cujas, 1983). 'Décentralisation', a '"magical word" that escaped definition', is also discussed in Stéphane Gerson's crucial study, *The Pride of Place. Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Cornell University, 2003), p. 97. A very recent survey of decentralizing works on the French nineteenth century can be found in David Evans and Heather Williams, 'Introduction: New Dialogues with Breton Literature and Culture', *Nottingham French Studies*, 60.2 (2021), 147–58.

¹⁵ 'Le Paris dont je parlerai ici n'est donc pas un Paris "réel", avec des monuments visitables, des "lieux de mémoire" et des signes visibles et avérés de puissance et de pouvoir. Il s'agit d'une fonction nécessaire à la structuration et au fonctionnement de l'ensemble de la République mondiale des Lettres;' Pascale Casanova, 'Paris, méridien de Greenwich de la littérature', in *Capitales culturelles, capitales symboliques: Paris et les expériences européennes (XVIIIe–XXe siècles)*, ed. by Christophe Charle and Daniel Roche (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2002), pp. 289–96 <https://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/919?lang=en>, (para. 3 of 29) [accessed 14 January 2023]. For an alternative and diversifying take on this discussion, see Richard Hibbitt's 'Introduction' in *Other Capitals of the Nineteenth Century. An Alternative Mapping of Literary and Cultural Space* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) pp. 1–30. Another recent volume that discusses the 'literary capital' and centre–periphery frameworks is *Literary Capitals in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Arunima Bhattacharya, Richard Hibbitt and Laura Scuriatti (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

¹⁶ Marc Fumaroli, 'La Coupole', in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, II: *La Nation* (2017), pp. 1923–82 (p. 1930).

¹⁷ Cécile Van den Avenne, 'French Language', in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*, pp. 327–33 (p. 327).

¹⁸ Mona Ozouf, 'La Révolution française et la perception de l'espace national: fédérations, fédéralisme et stéréotypes régionaux', in *L'École de la France. Essais sur la Révolution, l'utopie et l'enseignement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 29–56 (p. 38).

¹⁹ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *How the French Think. An Affectionate Portrait of an Intellectual People* (London: Penguin, 2016) p. 188.

²⁰ In particular documents such as the Abbé Grégoire's *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française* and Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac in his *Rapport du Comité de salut public sur les idiômes*, both presented at the Convention Nationale in 1794.

²¹ See Philippe Blanchet, *Discriminations: combattre la glottophobie* (Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, 2019).