“La pensée,” says Balzac in *Le curé de village*, “est constamment le point de départ et le point d’arrivée de toute société” [Ideas are invariably the departure point and the arrival point of any society] (9: 708). Expressing the concept of thinking by means of a metaphor of displacement, this Balzacian “axiom of social science” formulates how an initial thought wends its way toward an ultimate thought and suggests that, to result in an idea, to achieve *la pensée*, society journeys. Few and far between are the lines that Balzac dedicates to the description of his characters’ actual displacements, because he is often content merely to mention the trip, and the journey is most often little more than a parenthesis or pause in the narration of actions. It would seem that Balzac agrees with Flaubert’s complaint that the voyage genre “est par soi-même une chose presque impossible” [is in itself an almost impossible thing] (561).

But when he does take the time to recount a voyage, he is likely to associate it with reflection. For instance, Sabine du Guénic excuses herself for not being able to write to her mother during her honeymoon, because “notre esprit est alors comme les roues” [our mind goes like the wheels] (*Béatrix*, 2: 845); the mind moves as much as the body does. The hero of *Le message* describes the intimacy that arises during travel when two young men of similar fortune find themselves similarly in love with older women (like Balzac as a young man). Marked by the rhythm of the leagues covered and the cities
through which the stagecoach passes, the journey metonymically expresses and explains such a delicate thing as love for a noble (and married) woman—until the vehicle overturns past Pouilly, about fifty-one leagues from Paris, and kills the narrator’s companion in love. Gaston de Nueil follows Mme de Beauséant, in *La femme abandonnée*, all the way to Geneva, asking himself why she has left Paris: “Entre les mille réflexions qui l’assaillirent pendant ce voyage, celle-ci: ‘Pourquoi s’en est-elle allée?’ l’occupa plus spécialement” [Among the thousands of reflections that assailed him during this voyage, the one that preoccupied him especially was: “Why did she leave?”] (2: 491). Gaston has the entire length of this trip to think about it, but he finds what he considers to be the correct answer in so little time that Balzac allots it only a few lines: “Si la vicomtesse veut m’aimer, il n’y a pas de doute qu’en femme d’esprit, elle préfère la Suisse où personne ne nous connaît, à la France où elle rencontrerait des censeurs” [If the viscountess is willing to be my lover, there is no doubt that as a woman of intelligence she prefers Switzerland, where no one knows us, to France, where she would encounter disapproval] (2: 491).

In the examples studied here of journeys of reflection, thoughts change during the trip, prompting a reflection on journeys and an ultimate reflection on narration. Points of departure and arrival contribute to the definition of the Balzacian narrative of society, providing elements of the two branches that are its Prime Movers and key descriptors, Love and Money.

In *Les Chouans*, a highly geographical novel, several vehicles furrow the routes between Alençon and Fougères, passing through Mayenne and Ernée, with a round trip as well between Fougères and Saint-James and a loop into and out of la Vivetière. Marie de Verneuil will always be linked to these conveyances. At the moment we see Mlle de Verneuil for the first time, she has just arrived in Alençon by the mail coach. Already this first journey presents her full of emotion, excited and transformed by her trip. The paragraphs that initially introduce her suggest that Marie seems destined to undergo important changes during her travels. “J’aime ce renaissant péril qui nous environne,” she says. “Toutes les fois que la route prend un aspect sombre, je suppose que nous allons entendre des détonations, alors mon cœur bat, une sensation inconnue m’agite . . . c’est le jeu de tout ce qui se meut en moi, c’est la vie” [I love this constantly renewed peril that surrounds us. Every time the road takes on a somber aspect, I imagine that we are going to hear detonations. Then my heart beats, an unknown sensation agitates me . . . it is the action of everything that stirs in me, it is life] (8: 968–69). Clearly her
exalted excitement the moment she arrives in the land of the Chouans, where she confronts dangers and evils, is the fruit of a reflection about the mission she has been charged with, a reflection that will have tried to “étouffer [s]a conscience” [stifle her conscience]. She admits that “je me surprends à penser comme si j’avais cinquante ans, et à agir comme si j’en avais encore quinze” [I am surprised to realize that I am thinking as if I were fifty and acting as if I were still fifteen] (8: 969). In this narrated journey, thinking results in a consciousness of the harm she must do, but the goal of her trip will deviate from this toward the pole of love.

Going on from Alençon to Mayenne, Marie de Verneuil travels in the company of Montauran along with a republican escort. What Lucienne Frappier-Mazur in her introduction has so rightly termed their “escrime amoureuse” [love sparring] (8: 886) will last fifteen pages until the ambush just before the loop toward la Vivetière; it is, unless I am mistaken, the longest voyage of reflection in La Comédie humaine. Dispersing the clouds, the sun presides over the first moments of this innamoramento which is lengthened by the places through which they travel. The avid glance that Montauran casts on Marie in the intimacy of the carriage and the subtle actions that Marie directs toward Montauran have the function of putting them on their guard as their love grows but takes on a structure of combat. Seriously engaged, the struggle changes from jestful to grave; it adopts the weapons of conversation while the two strangers climb the hill on foot. Internal reflection goes on at the same time as the external struggle, each one trying to know the other. Marie wins one round by guessing the identity of her companion, but she has the grace and kindness to believe in the assumed name that Montauran has given himself, vicomte de Bauvan. After this interlude on the hillside, once again in the vehicle, each one keeps silent; “s’ils avaient l’un et l’autre trouvé matière à d’amples réflexions, leurs yeux ne craignirent plus désormais de se rencontrent” [although they had each found matter for ample reflection, their eyes no longer feared to meet each other] (8: 1012). Observing one another, they feel themselves pulled each toward the other, “car ils avaient réciproquement reconnu chez eux des qualités qui rehaussaient encore à leurs yeux les plaisirs qu’ils se promettaient de leur lutte ou de leur union” [for they had mutually recognized in themselves the qualities that heightened in their eyes the pleasure they were promising themselves from their struggle or from their union] (8: 1012). This sympathy of souls will take an immense step forward with the revelation of their common passion for knowing what their destiny is to be. It is not through serious reflection, but by the “chances du hasard” [chances of fortune] that they attempt to find a necessary dénouement to what has no obvious outlet. Marie’s imagination helps her contemplate “toute sa vie en se
complaisant à l’arranger belle, à la remplir de bonheur, de grands et de nobles sentiments” [her entire life, taking pleasure in arranging it into a beautiful one, filling it with happiness and grand and noble sentiments] (8: 1013). And it is love that comes to them, following the reflections that were nourished by the journey.

The ambush that puts an end to this reflection has the goal of bringing the conflict back into the center of the idyll. When the chevalier de Valois tells Montauran to be wary of the girl with whom he is traveling, everything changes; death glides into Marie’s soul, while the marquis blushes and pales in turn: “Une compression violente détruisait la gracieuse courbure de ses lèvres, et son teint jaunissait sous les efforts d’une orageuse pensée. Mlle de Verneuil ne pouvait même plus deviner s’il y avait encore de l’amour dans sa fureur” [A violent compression destroyed the graceful curve of his lips, and his complexion was turning yellow under the actions of a stormy thought. Mlle de Verneuil could no longer even guess if love still existed within his fury] (8: 1019). She searches in vain for the cause of this change, but “les événements de cette journée appartenaient à un mirage de l’âme qui se dissipait alors” [the events of this day belonged to a mirage of the soul that was then dissipating] (8: 1019–20), and she concludes: no sooner loved, no sooner abandoned. From the depths of the carriage as from the depths of her reflections, she knows her destiny: “de toujours voir le bonheur et de toujours le perdre!” [always to see happiness and always to lose it] (8: 1020)—a fair statement of the end to which the novel is headed. But, before the fatal detour towards la Vivetière, she will have recognized the noble chief of the Chouans and, her love triumphing over all (according to Balzac), she happily continues to “marcher au hasard” [walk in fortune’s path] (8: 1025), sealing their bourgeois liaison with a smile.

Balzac sought to demonstrate, with Les Chouans, that “les sentiments suivent peu la route commune” [sentiments rarely take the common routes] (8: 1003) in these times of terror. In the same manner, we could say that this romantic novel scarcely follows the common pathways of romantic narrative; its route is traced in advance not by private politics (as in Pierrette) but by governmental and military politics. The love that asserts itself here, thanks to the movements between the Brittany and Normandy towns in 1799, the struggle for a happy union (see chapter 3), comes to an ending determined by the struggle between two ideas of the novel: as a scene of military life and as a novel of romance. It is almost as if Balzac says to himself: A little too much love? Thin it out with military action. Too much political intrigue? Time to return to love. And death justifies this mix in the end, the only arrival point of the two journeys and the final image of their unity.
In *Béatrix*, Sabine du Guénic falls head over heels in love with her husband while in a carriage between Paris and Brittany during her honeymoon. The honeymoon may well be considered a special case of the reflective journey. To present the intimate thoughts of the character in this crucial passage from girlhood to married woman, the novel briefly becomes epistolary. Comparing Sabine to Louise de Chaulieu, both young women perfected by their intelligence and wit, their grand airs, and their good taste, Balzac mentions the *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* to evoke the epistolary genre of narration, where the written word reveals the self. Writing and voyaging, this reflecting person is thus the only voice determining the content and orienting the reader. While the journey takes one from place to place, thoughts pass from one state to another.

Balzac takes care to situate this crucial moment in a context that will make the reader reflect on the trip. In one of those places in *La Comédie humaine* where Balzac gives his text over to explanation—where he writes the instruction manual for his writing—he introduces this epistolary episode and the narrative of the honeymoon by commenting on the role that honeymoon trips play in human evolution. Just as a marriage is a lottery whose terms and dangers are known by women, he says, a honeymoon, of uncertain length, announces the character of the marriage it inaugurates. Because Sabine is intelligent and already thinks of herself as a woman (2: 845), she is the same type of non-virginal virgin as Modeste Mignon, a young woman whose intelligence in matters of love is not dampened by her innocence. Writing about the journey to Brittany and its moral consequences, Sabine puts this intelligence to use and confirms her new status as a woman, showing a profound understanding of the situation in a way that owes all its pathos precisely to her innocence. By an effect of his rhetoric, Balzac employs a particular tone and manner to introduce Sabine’s letters that prepares us for the style of elliptical and expressive subtlety that characterizes the letters: he makes his narrator innocently intelligent.

The newly married Mme du Guénic has so well disobeyed her mother’s recommendations that in a few hours of travel she has fallen in love with her husband. According to the letters (2: 845–59), it is precisely by traveling that she has learned how to love: “J’aime Calyste comme s’il n’était pas mon mari. C’est-à-dire que si, mariée à un autre, je voyageais avec Calyste, je l’aimerais et haïrais mon mari” [I love Calyste as if he were not my husband. Which is to say that if, married to another, I were traveling with Calyste, I would love him and hate my husband]. The experience that she has acquired
“en quelques jours, et pourquoi ne . . . dirai-je pas en quelques heures” [in a few days, and why not . . . say in a few hours] permits her to find the delicate words that one needs to speak of the things that make up the experience itself. Her mother had told her to “rester grande, noble, digne et fière” [remain grand, noble, dignified, and proud], to not do as those new brides who “commencent par la facilité, par la complaisance, la bonhomie, la familiarité, par un abandon” [begin with facility, with indulgence, good nature, familiarity, with an abandonment], who come perilously close to being like a courtesan. But Sabine is the one who will announce that she began with “cette catastrophe qui termine, selon vous, la lune de miel des jeunes femmes d’aujourd’hui” [this catastrophe that brings to an end, or so you claim, the honeymoons of young women today].

The “catastrophe” is inaugurated by a kiss, her first, given and received eight hours after the marriage ceremony, when the tale that Calyste tells of his love for Béatrix, meted out in small fragments, gives Sabine the right and the desire to take possession of her husband. This kiss will be followed by the “naufrage de cette demi-vertu” [shipwreck of this semi-virtue] that was her dignity, and which, according to Sabine’s reflection in her mother’s absence, will determine the possibility of happiness in her marriage (which happiness finally arrives, let it be said, only after several detours). “Si j’étais restée dans ma dignité,” she says, “j’aurais eu les froides douleurs d’une sorte de fraternité qui certes serait tout simplement de l’indifférence. Et quel avenir me serais-je préparé? Mon dévouement a eu pour résultat de me rendre l’esclave de Calyste” [If I had held on to my dignity, I would have had the frigid agonies of a sort of fraternal love that certainly would have simply become indifference. And what future would I have prepared for myself? My devotion has had the result of making me Calyste’s slave], where the word “devotion” takes the place of an active engagement in the sexual relations, and the word “slave” hardly needs commentary. Balzac needed to possess this intelligence of the woman’s heart during her honeymoon season, which comes here through Sabine’s reflections on her honeymoon trip, to be able to ground this marriage on a bed of complete happiness. Sabine finishes her first letter by saying: “mais que pourrai-je vous dire, si déjà mon bonheur est au comble?” [but what can I tell you, if already my happiness is at its peak?].

The final effect of the honeymoon trip is to provoke reflection on the new condition of the bride and to give permanent form to the marriage.

1. At its first publication, this part of the novel was called La lune de miel.
In *La muse du département*, Dinah de La Baudraye makes a short trip in a carriage, but her organdy dress, quickly wrinkled by Lousteau, suffices to determine the remainder of the novel. The famous episode is announced by the chapter title (which Balzac later suppressed), “Le sentiment va vite en voiture” [Sentiments go quickly in a vehicle]. Everything is premeditated and well calculated so that Dinah comes back from Cosne to La Baudraye alone with Lousteau in the wrong carriage—one that is not in good repair. The setting is such that a familiar topos seems to be announced, the topos of the vehicle that breaks down, thus favoring the initiation of a liaison between its two occupants; it is a motif that Mérimée exploited brilliantly for his long novella, “La double méprise.” But in *La muse du département* the decrepitude of the vehicle will play only a picturesque role, designed to provide supplementary effects of provincialism to characterize the provincial muse before her stay in Paris.²

Dinah seeks to make an impression and wears an extraordinary dress—one ill-suited for travel. But it is this very detail that provokes reflection about this journey. During the trip from the chateau d’Anzy to Cosne, passing through Sancerre, Mme de La Baudraye and Lousteau speak of “l’amour en théorie, ce qui permet aux amants *in petto* de prendre en quelque sorte mesure de leurs cœurs” [the theory of love, which allows the lovers *in petto* to take stock of each other’s hearts after a fashion] (4: 723). It is a process of reflection by two people whose spoken words are only the tip of the iceberg. Lousteau’s purpose is to seduce Mme de La Baudraye, and she allows herself to be seduced, since for three days “la conversation des deux Parisiens avait agi sur cette femme à la manière des livres les plus dangereux” [the conversation of the two Parisians had acted on this woman the way the most dangerous books would]. These thoughts show on her face as “la rêverie que donne l’irrésolution” [the reverie that indecision brings]. As for Lousteau, speed is the theme of his reflections. He fears he has wasted his time in this remote department, and so he recounts an example of rapid love, of the kind experienced by a woman who “pouvait succomber en quelques heures à une pensée, à un ouragan intérieur” [could succumb in a few hours to a thought, to a hurricane inside], hoping to inspire, during this quick trip, just this sort of thought in Dinah. At Cosne, while walking with Mme de La Baudraye, Lousteau pursues an interior reflection on organdy dresses, which the reader has also perhaps begun: “Il n’y a plus que les femmes de province qui portent

2. “A Cosne, il s’attroupa beaucoup de monde autour de la vieille calèche repeinte sur les panneaux de laquelle se voyaient les armes données par Louis XIV” [At Cosne, a mob of people gathered around the old repainted carriage, on whose panels one could see the coat of arms given by Louis XIV] (4: 724).
des robes d’organdi, la seule étoffe dont le chiffonnage ne peut pas s’effacer. . . . Cette femme, qui m’a choisi pour amant, va faire des façons à cause de sa robe. Si elle avait mis une robe de foulard je serais heureux” [Nobody but a provincial woman would wear an organdy dress, the only cloth whose wrinkles cannot be erased. . . . This woman, who has chosen me as a lover, will make a fuss because of her dress. If she had put on a silk dress, I would be more fortunate] (4: 725). Yet it is in opposition to this thought and directly because of it that Lousteau will think of behaving as he does in the carriage crossing the bridge: thinking that the game is lost, and fearing that the jealous Gatien is about to return to the carriage on horseback, Lousteau declares his love point-blank and takes the split-second decision to wrinkle the organdy dress in the instant that precedes Gatien’s return. Consequently, Mme de La Baudraye finds herself “dans un état à ne pas se montrer” [in such a state that she could not show herself] (4: 726). These words apply to Lousteau’s quick attack in a few seconds on the bridge at Cosne, but, devious in their suggestiveness, they are better suited to a shameful or embarrassing condition, such as an advanced pregnancy might be.

To find out what Balzac himself thought about Dinah’s choice of an organdy dress for this trip, one can read an amusing paragraph from a letter of 9 April 1843 to Mme Hanska. Balzac claims the Chamber of Deputies was in an uproar and had attacked the Minister of the Interior on the subject of Dinah’s dress:

Étienne Lousteau qui reconduit avec elle Bianchon à une voiture, se trouve seul avec elle pendant le temps que la calèche traverse le pont de Cosne. Le journaliste déclare sa passion à Dinah, et comme Dinah fait des façons, le journaliste qui voit arriver un jeune homme à cheval venu pour les accompagner et les surveiller, a l’idée, pour faire croire que Dinah s’est rendue, de lui chiffonner sa robe. Vous lirez cela; c’est assez drôle. Les députés ont cru à la plus atroce saloperie et à une action impossible, vu le peu de temps! Quand, au Messager, on m’a dit cela, les bras me sont tombés. Il y a cependant là des fabricants qui doivent savoir que ce qu’ils pensaient aurait pu se faire sur toute espèce de robe, que l’organdi seul se prêtait à cette plaisanterie. (Hanska 1: 666−67)

[Étienne Lousteau, accompanying Bianchon to a coach with her, finds himself alone with her for the length of time the carriage is crossing the bridge at Cosne. The journalist declares his passion and, because she makes a fuss, the journalist, seeing a young man arriving on horseback to accompany them and keep an eye on them, has the idea of mussing her dress to make it seem
that Dinah has succumbed. You’ll read this; it’s quite funny. The Deputies believed in the most atrocious filth and an impossible action, given the short time! When they told me that at the Messenger office, my jaw fell open. And yet there are manufacturers in the Chamber who must know that what they were thinking could have been done to any sort of dress, and that only organdy lent itself to this joke.]

(The bridge at Cosne was 356 meters long.) For Balzac, only the organdy dress allowed the scene to be played as Lousteau played it: as a piece of theatrical farce. With any other dress, the situation would have been more ambiguous. Yet what is truly astonishing is that Balzac has his other characters assume that Dinah has lost her virtue to Lousteau, thereby behaving just like the Chambre des députés he finds so unbelievably filthy-minded. And that is the desired effect of this short journey, one that is absolutely necessary for the continuation of the narrative and for its eventual outcome.

After having changed her dress at La Baudraye, Dinah continues the journey as far as Anzy with her mother and Lousteau, but when people notice the change in dress, the two contradictory explanations given by Lousteau complete the condemnation of the muse in her department. The journey has made her, if not a fallen woman, at least a compromised one, and certainly a libeled one: “La chute de la Muse du Berry, du Nivernais et du Morvan fut accompagnée d’un vrai charivari de médisances, de calomnies et de conjectures diverses parmi lesquelles figurait en première ligne l’histoire de la robe d’organdi” [The fall of the Muse of Berry, of Nivernais, and of Morvan was accompanied by a true racket of slander, calumnies, and diverse conjectures among which was featured the story of the organdy dress] (4: 730). For everyone else, this has become a story of love-making in a carriage, but not for Dinah de La Baudraye—yet another case where the character is pronounced “happy” long before she actually is, for it is only during the weeks after the voyage to Cosne that she will truly become a woman in love.

The reader who wonders why Dinah de La Baudraye put on an organdy dress will perhaps come to the conclusion that an irresolute poetess needs someone else to take the decisive step. When Lousteau wrinkles her dress, she reacts in the most stereotypical fashion: “Ah! monsieur! . . . s’écria majestueusement Dinah” [Ah! Sir! . . . Dinah cried out majestically] (4: 727). “Vous m’avez défie” [You challenged me], answers the Parisian: the organdy dress was above all a challenge that he had to answer or else find himself removed from the list of suitors. The maneuver that Lousteau accomplishes after the change of dress, by letting people think that there was a crueler reason for which Dinah had to abandon her organdy dress, will confirm
his position as winner of the contest of suitors—a glorifying trial after the central one—and the rest of the novel follows, a vast reflection of the smaller journey by carriage.

In *Illusions perdues*, Lucien de Rubempré journeys on foot between the Houmeau and Angoulême to reach Mme de Bargeton’s mansion. His mind travels while the body does; like Sabine du Guénic, his physical movement favors the movement of ideas. After having read his poems for the first time at his muse’s house, he takes the long way home,

afin d’entretenir par la marche le mouvement d’idées où l’on se trouve, et au courant desquelles on veut se livrer. . . . Chemin faisant, il ôtait un à un les traits envenimés qu’il avait reçus, il se parlait tout haut à lui-même, il gourmandait les niais auxquels il avait eu affaire; il trouvait des réponses fines aux sottes demandes qu’on lui avait faites, et se désespérait d’avoir ainsi de l’esprit après coup. (5: 211–12)

[to let walking encourage the movement of ideas in which one finds oneself and to savor the flow of the thoughts. . . . Along the way, he removed one by one the poisonous darts he had received, he spoke out loud to himself, he rebuked the simpletons he had had to deal with; he found shrewd responses for the foolish inquiries they had made, and he was in despair at having such wit after the fact.]

Here is an excellent illustration of Lucien’s capacity to deceive himself (nicely explaining the novel’s title) and of another of his character traits: his lack of a ready wit, foreshadowing the disappointments in Paris in the second part of the novel.

Along the return path he meets David Séchard and Ève Chardon, whose marriage will be decided during their stroll. Following a clearly marked structure, the two walks of opposite character meet physically and clash morally. David, resolved to speak about himself, “ne trouva plus rien à dire quand il donna le bras à la belle Ève pour traverser l’Houmeau” [found nothing else to say when he gave the beautiful Ève his arm to cross the Houmeau] (5: 212), and rather than speak of himself, he speaks of Lucien: “Chère Ève, épousez-moi par amour pour Lucien” [Dear Ève, marry me for the love of Lucien] (5: 215). Yet it is during this evening of promenades that David will expose his ambitions as inventor and as lover to Ève, in such a way that the
contrast with Lucien is stressed when the poet tells the enraged and egotistical tale of his wounded ambitions. These two contradictory manners of thinking recall the two directions that alternatively pull at Rastignac in *Le père Goriot*—to work nobly and piously for an honest destiny, or to succeed by playing the world at its game.

While walking, Lucien has been constructing a whole future for himself starting with the imaginary death of M. de Bargeton, followed by his marriage with Mme de Bargeton and his certainty of dominating this arrogant world. David and Ève have meanwhile arrived at a perfect agreement which will make their marriage one of the four happy marriages of *La Comédie humaine*, according to Arlette Michel's pessimistic census: “Les seuls mariages heureux de la *Comédie humaine* sont ceux d’Ève Séchard, de Constance Birotteau, d’Ursule Mirouët et de Modeste Mignon” (*Le mariage et l’amour* 3: 1528). Lucien, who was dreaming of marrying his sister to some powerful family to support his own position, sees in this marriage nothing but an obstacle to his ambitions. “Il venait de se voir dominant la Société, le poète souffrait de tomber si vite dans la réalité” [He had just pictured himself dominating Society; the poet was pained to see himself falling so quickly into reality] (5: 224), while Ève and David believe that his silence signifies that he is overwhelmed by David's generous plans for him. It is a misunderstanding on both sides. In the same paragraph nevertheless, with the help of the walking, the three young people will reach unison, says Balzac: “Lucien, charmé par la voix de David et par les caresses d’Ève, oublia sous les ombrages de la route, le long de la Charente calme et brillante, sous la voûte étoilée et dans la tiède atmosphère de la nuit, la blessante couronne d’épines que la Société lui avait enfoncée sur la tête” [Lucien, charmed by David's voice and Ève's caresses, forgot in the shadings of the road, along the calm and shining Charente, under the starry arch and in the warm atmosphere of the night, the cutting crown of thorns that Society had thrust down upon his head] (5: 224). The entire scene, with the two walks that melt into one another, does much to emphasize Lucien’s mobile character and clearly establishes the diagram of the movement of his state of mind in the second part of the novel and beyond.

The last journey in *Illusions perdues* shows Lucien walking towards Mesle with the intention of killing himself. It is another journey on foot; access to a carriage comes after he meets Carlos Herrera. While walking, “il tomba dans la résolution des moyens” [his thoughts fell to the resolving of the means] (5: 688), the methods of suicide; this reflection completes a short anthropological discussion on the varieties of suicides. Lucien remembers a deep basin in the river where his body will not be found, in the direction of
II: Semiotic Images of Realism

Marsac. “Il chemina donc vers Marsac, en proie à ses dernières et funèbres pensées, et dans la ferme intention de dérober ainsi le secret de sa mort, de ne pas être l’objet d’une enquête, de ne pas être enterré, de ne pas être vu dans l’horrible état où sont les noyés quand ils reviennent à fleur d’eau” [So he trudged towards Marsac, prey to his last and gloomy thoughts, and with the firm intention of thus concealing the secret of his death, of not being the object of an inquiry, of not being buried, of not being seen in the horrible state of drowned men returning to the surface of the water] (5: 689). It is this reflection prompted by vanity that makes him leave the main road when the stagecoach arrives, throwing himself onto a little sunken path, to return to the main road directly behind Carlos Herrera who is climbing the slope. It is a well-known scene and one that recalls a similar extra-vehicular moment in *Les Chouans*. The stories told by the Spanish priest quickly bring about an interesting change in Lucien’s thoughts. How quickly is shown by a narrative device: having refused the first offer of a cigar under the pretext that his death is imminent, he accepts the second offer by telling himself: “Il a raison, j’ai toujours le temps de me tuer” [He is right, I have all the time in the world to kill myself] (5: 693). Some four hundred pages later, at the end of the third part of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, it will indeed finally be the right time. His destination point is inscribed in the departure point of this scene.

Walking creates not only a change in the state of mind but a philosophical change in *L’auberge rouge*. Trying to escape insistent thoughts about murdering the rich traveler in the inn, Prosper Magnan walks away; once back in his room, he will no longer be tempted by murder, thanks to his voyage of intense reflection. The goal of his walk is precisely to strengthen the return to goodness that comes to him by means of a miracle—a voice accompanied by a light. At the point of striking Walhenfer, he throws away the instrument of murder and places himself in front of the open window. “Là, il conçut la plus profonde horreur pour lui-même; et . . . craignant encore de succomber à la fascination à laquelle il était en proie, il sauta vivement sur le chemin et se promena le long du Rhin, en faisant pour ainsi dire sentinelle devant l’auberge” [There, he conceived the most profound horror of himself; and . . . still fearing to succumb to the fascination that held him in prey, he sprang briskly onto the path and walked along the Rhine, acting as if he were a sentinel in front of the inn] (11: 103). As he paces, he goes all the way to Andernach on one side and all the way to the direction he had come from on the other. He falls into a reverie,
The temptation to steal has passed. In the room, Prosper falls asleep immediately, without noticing that his fellow traveler has departed, leaving Walhener’s head on the ground and his body in the bed.

This voyage of reflection is not a displacement from one place to another, but a physical swinging movement in harmony with the mental swings and wavering of Prosper’s thoughts. At the same time, it is this oscillating walk that permits the real assassin to go to work, since Prosper’s steps draw far enough in each direction for him to lose sight of the window, allowing his companion to escape: “Souvent, il atteignait Andernach dans sa promenade précipitée; souvent aussi ses pas le conduisaient au versant par lequel il était descendu pour arriver à l’auberge; mais le silence de la nuit était si profond, il se fiait si bien sur les chiens de garde, que, parfois, il perdit de vue la fenêtre qu’il avait laissée ouverte” [Often his hurried walk took him as far as Andernach; often also his steps led him to the hillside he had come down to reach the inn; but the silence of the night was so deep, he trusted the guard dogs so well, that he sometimes lost sight of the window he had left open] (11: 103). Reflection or meditation turn out to be not very practical—completely the opposite of an alert behavior that could have potentially saved his life. The reflective pacing is thus the event that determines the dénouement for Prosper Magnan, the hinges on which his story turns, like the shutters of the window that he was unfortunate enough to leave open. Now and then, in front of the window or facing the Rhine, Prosper, as a good romantic hero, leans on his elbows in the classic pose of contemplation, the engine of virtue, but his reflection does not save his life.
A short journey of reflection happens in *Ursule Mirouët*, and its speed is part of its significance for this novel. The doctor Minoret is returning to Nemours after a quick trip to Paris to observe and judge a demonstration of magnetism (see chapter 11). Balzac devotes only a rather short paragraph to this moment, describing the material modalities of the rapid return to Nemours, in which the character does not meditate or reflect over a course of time and distance, but in which we can readily see the symbolic incarnation of his conversion to a new way of thinking. Speed of reflection contributes to the drama of the conversion: the fast trip symbolizes the lightning rapidity of this change. The paragraph (3: 834) serves as the hinge between the doctor’s disbelief and his newfound belief.

Late at night, taking leave of his friend the doctor Bouvard with whom he has participated in the magnetism experiment, Minoret races to Nemours: after rushing to rent a bourgeois carriage for Fontainebleau, letting the horse rest at Essonne, finding a place in the stagecoach for Nemours, dismissing his driver, arriving home at 5 in the morning, Minoret is tired from the speedy travel, and “il se coucha dans les ruines de toutes ses idées antérieures sur la physiologie, sur la nature, sur la métaphysique” [he went to bed in the ruins of all his former ideas about physiology, nature, and metaphysics]. This race to Nemours is speedy because Minoret wants to verify what the somnambulistic subject saw in her last vision: Ursule getting ready for bed; “je voudrais avoir des ailes, aller à Nemours vérifier ses assertions” [I would like to have wings to go to Nemours and verify her assertions] (3: 832). While reflection normally takes advantage of the slowness of the journey to pass through stages, this is a case where the character’s reflection, to which the demonstration of magnetism has given its first impulse and a giant step along the way, would like to gallop to catch up with the somnambulist’s vision. The same speed of reflection makes the doctor young again: a new man will emerge from the rapid journey. Meditation on the facts and their confirmation, the realization of the truth of everything he saw, in short the completion of the change of thought will come after the return.

Love in a carriage, quite different from the ones in *Les Chouans* and *La muse du département*, takes place in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. The baron de Nucingen is returning to Paris after having dined with a colleague in the Brie, at eight leagues from the city. The drunken driver is asleep, the
valet is snoring, and the baron wants to think, but “la douce somnolence de la digestion lui avait fermé les yeux” [the sweet somnolence of digestion had closed his eyes] (6: 492). In the bois de Vincennes, the unguided horses come to a stop at a roundabout inhabited by other carriages, and Nucingen, feeling that the vehicle is no longer moving, awakens. Comes a vision:

Il fut surpris par une vision céleste qui le trouva sans son arme habituelle, le calcul. Il faisait un clair de lune si magnifique qu’on aurait pu tout lire, même un journal du soir. Par le silence des bois, et à cette lueur pure, le baron vit une femme seule qui, tout en montant dans une voiture de louage, regarda le singulier spectacle de cette calèche endormie. À la vue de cet ange, le baron de Nucingen fut comme illuminé par une lumière intérieure. . . . Le vieux banquier ressentit une émotion terrible: le sang qui lui revenait des pieds charria du feu à sa tête, sa tête renvoyait des flammes au cœur; la gorge se serrait. (6: 493)

[he was overcome by a celestial vision that found him without his usual weapon, calculation. The moonlight was so magnificent that one could have read anything, even an evening newspaper. In the silence of the park, in this pure glow of light, the baron saw a woman entering a rented carriage alone while gazing at the singular spectacle of this sleeping carriage. At the sight of this angel, the baron de Nucingen was as if illuminated by an interior light. . . . The old banker felt a terrible emotion: blood flowing back from his feet trundled fire to his head, his head broadcast flames to his heart; his throat tightened.]

The angel flees, the baron’s carriage cannot reach it, and the travel scene ends.

At age 60, the baron has already purchased all the forms of love; he has experienced everything and given up on everything except real love. “Cet amour venait de fondre sur lui comme un aigle sur sa proie” [This love had just descended upon him like an eagle on its prey] (6: 494). Driving through all the parks of the area for eight nights in a row fails to turn up “cette sublime figure de juive” [that sublime face of the Jewess] (6: 494) that he has before his eyes at every moment, Esther Gobseck. Not only Nucingen’s but also Lucien de Rubempré’s destiny is determined in this moment.

It is a short trip, and the character is asleep; once awake, his love comes like the proverbial thunderbolt, the result of no reflection. Is this a case that contradicts the others? While Nucingen needs no reflection, the reader is nevertheless invited to reflect—on the conduct of the narrative. Clearly this
journey in a carriage plays the part of chance, which Balzac called a powerful novelist, and determines a continuation of the diegesis that could not have existed otherwise. But it is also evident that everything in the presentation of this scene is calculated to focus the moment in the reader’s mind: the late hour, the effect of the light from the moon, the singular situation of the sleeping characters, the solitude of the courtesan and the baron in their carriages, the lightning glance, the fugitive gaze, a theatrical lexicon, even the round-about that encircles the encounter as if to frame a unique, special moment and hold it up like a medallion. Completing the somewhat Stendhalian catalog of the types of love that Nucingen has possessed thanks to his money, the real love that comes now has not only the function of inflecting the direction of the plot but also, more importantly, of completing the character who until now had lacked this weakness common to mortals. Losing his stature as a “loup-cervier,” a lynx of finance, he becomes incapable of carrying on his business affairs and for the first time in his life glimpses “quelque chose de plus saint et de plus sacré que l’or” [something more saintly and more sacred than gold] (6: 498). No doubt this can be considered a degraded version of the Balzacian idea of love as unique and predestined, uniting two beings fortunate enough to have met during their lifetimes; the portrait of the money man turned soupy with love is the fruit of an instant where love at first sight prohibits any reflection, just as sleep had replaced thought.

Journeys may represent a pause in the narration of the plot—a temporary halt in the action made necessary by the fact that the characters must find themselves elsewhere in order to continue their destiny. When travel is for a reason that is not contained in the trip itself, the narration does not show the characters’ thoughts during the journey, which is most frequently the case in *La Comédie humaine*. In *La Rabouilleuse*, Agathe Bridau and her son Joseph make their way toward Issoudun to save an inheritance, and the necessity of thinking about the goal of the journey—to assemble the elements of a legal case against a fraudulent claim—makes them ignore the distractions of the landscape. The two characters are reflecting, but for the mother, troubled by the imprisonment of her favorite son and worried for the artist Joseph who is so unskillful in practical matters, their incapacity to play this role is revealed above all in the paucity of their thinking. At the end of their trip, they are no further along.

In the examples dealt with here, to which one could add others, journeys offer the time for a change in status that would not be possible without them.
But the goal of the voyage and the intent of the narration do not always work with the same effect. The characters go elsewhere for a precise reason—Lucien de Rubempré to kill himself, Marie de Verneuil to spy, Sabine du Guénic because she has to travel on her honeymoon and meet her Breton relatives, Dinah de La Baudraye to find herself alone with Lousteau, Prosper Magnan to escape from the power of his thoughts—but something else occurs that these people have not foreseen. Thus, Lucien, wrapped up in his illusory ambitions, changes course when he encounters David and Ève’s sane ideas; later, instead of killing himself, he will begin a new life because of the chance encounter with Jacques Collin. Marie de Verneuil finds love, a true love that can be expressed only through death, which is an unforeseen result of the struggle she takes on in accepting her role as republican spy. Sabine undergoes radical changes under the direct effect of the trip; her case serves the author’s momentarily anthropological designs, which present it as an illustration of the effect ofhoneymoons on young women. Dinah de La Baudraye finds herself compromised in her department and thus embarks on her Parisian adventure; the decision to leave and become Lousteau’s mistress has been taken for her. Prosper Magnan sets out on a path of virtue, but finds himself instead headed for capital punishment; when he finishes his oscillating walk, he believes he has won the strength to be virtuous and feels liberated from the claws of evil, but he will be punished nevertheless and as a direct result of his walk. Nucingen was merely sleeping off the effects of a dinner with other bankers outside Paris when happenstance changed the focus of his life from money to love.

These examples where a change in status occurs because of a change in location show the intimate relationship of voyages to narration. When thoughts transform during these trips, their direction is not always foreseen or foreseeable. It turns out that the journeys in a carriage or on foot work to accomplish the purposes not of the traveler but of the novelist, and that these determine an unexpected diegetic consequence. Thus the reflection of the trip on the narrative consists in bending it toward the novel’s goals. Voyages of reflection reflect the movement of the narrative according to the effects of fate; they are thus the reflections of narrative journeys, and in Balzac’s narrative “journey,” the direction changes upon reflection.