Revisiting Science and Literature: Chateaubriand's Ecological Discourse

Marie-Christine Garneau de L'Isle-Adam
Languages and Literatures of Europe and the Americas,
University of Hawaii,
1890 East-West Rd.,460 Moore Hall
Honolulu, HI 96822, USA
Email: garneau@hawaii.edu

Abstract:

Seemingly, science and literature don't have anything in common. Actually, fields such as medicine and ecology have maintained a close relationship with literature, this perhaps because they share the same humanistic values. This article examines this relationship, and relies on Chateaubriand's works as a writer and his deeds as a politician to explain how the ecology of forests inherited from a long aristocratic tradition which continued to exist during the French Revolution, and allowed the reforestation of France from 1827 on.

Keywords: Ecology, medicine, literature, science, deforestation, Chateaubriand.

In his recent book, *La Fibre littéraire. Le Discours médical sur la lecture au XVIIIe s.*, Alexander Wenger demonstrated that eighteenth-century doctors, such as Tissot in 1769, generally believed that women who were avid novel readers were bound to lose their sense of reality and develop certain pathologies such as nymphomania and onanism. As a consequence, not doing their domestic chores, they would become useless at home. As for novelists whose imagination and sensitivity were judged as equally uncontrollable as their female readers', they were held responsible for the effeminacy of society.

The "violent suspicion" which had always plagued literature was not only medical. As Marc Fumaroli points out in his latest book, this suspicion used to be also "philosophical" and "theological" in the past. Today, it has been replaced by a "tenacious" belief that literature is not "democratic" enough and worse, it fails to be "scientific" (Fumaroli 2019, 643).

I would like to address this last accusation, for, as long as we will continue believing that the method used in "natural sciences" is the only "model" worth using "to understand the world" and as long as literature educational programs will go on internalizing a "complex of inferiority" toward the scientific "idol", the place given to literature, its study, and its teaching "will grow smaller and smaller" (Fumaroli 2019, 644). Hence my intention to show how science and literature have always intersected at least in two fields which regard both man and nature: Medicine and ecology.

For a surgeon-poet such as Lorand Gaspar who doesn't recognize the scientific idol as his, there is actually not much difference between literature and science. For him both are eternal means "to understand humanity, its mental and physical functioning, its relationship with the world, and with the forces of nature" (Gaspar 2004, 111). Gaspar is convinced that "since humanity is a tiny

part of Nature, poets, artists, naturalists, explorers and scientists should join hands to explore the unknown they will never be short of" (117). Moreover, he sustains that poetry and science are both intuitive since they are ways to communicate to others a subjective experience and to propose openings "on the unknown thanks to the intuitive aptitudes of the brain" (112). Poets and scientists are trailblazers according to Gaspar and translators according to Proust. In any case, their observations, their reflections on reality, their "impressions" according to Proust (117), should be considered as starting material, unknown signs which are meant to be deciphered.

Lorand Gaspar is not the only specialist in medicine who is also a poet. There were always writers who were doctors from the Renaissance period on and even before. Both Rabelais and Fracastor were doctors. The former wrote his famous stories where his medical knowledge constantly perspires, from 1532 to his death. The latter wrote a poem on syphilis in 1530. Later on, authors such as John Keats, Chekhov, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Somerset Maugham, Gertrude Stein, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Michael Crichton, were either trained in the medical field or performed as doctors. For these writers, the medical *episteme* and its literary representation weren't conflicting, to the contrary of popular belief. Nor did the conflict exist for doctors who use literary works in their medical thesis or write critiques on fictions dealing with diseases. According to Martha L. Hildrethi, the novel written by Balzac, *Le Médecin de campagne*, even became "a myth" for doctors during the Third Republic: "As a narrative of medical practice, the country doctor story constructed an ideal vision of doctor-patient relations and a model of medical understanding, where medicine was represented as a social mission and doctors were portrayed as vectors of secular morality and rational knowledge" (Hildrethi 2004, 1).

Furthermore, in an article from the French newspaper, *Le Monde*, Mathilde Gérard provided a genealogy of literary works from writers who were not doctors but nonetheless dealt with diseases such as the plague, cholera, tuberculosis, syphilis, AIDS, etc. Her genealogy included the works of Sophocles, La Fontaine's famous *Animals afflicted with the plague*, Antonin Artaud, Albert Camus, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Tony Kushner (Gérard, 2009).

Recently, a poetry contest held at the Yale University School of Medicine and at the University College London Medical School showed that students involved in medicine were highly interested in literature, this, even though the medical field is more and more invaded by "high-tech biomedical research". As the article pointed out, doctors generally believe that reading or writing requires "skills not that dissimilar from those employed in daily clinical work – an ability to connect emotionally with the subject, as well as careful attention to rhythm, whether it was in the form of verse or heartbeats and breathing". The article quoted a professor at Yale who recognizes that: "Poetry opens our minds to asking patients the right questions, while helping us address the emotional demands of doctoring, especially in the formative years". For another professor, "poetry does a better job in teaching because it is about embracing the human aspect of suffering, not just knowing how many lymph nodes are positive and where the pain is on a 1-to-10 scale." As a consequence, Yale has

"established a committee in charge of developing a required literary reading list for students that includes poetry" (Chen, 2011).

Let's finish with the article written by Alexandre Wenger, "Poetry and medicine". This article is precious in the context of our topic because it shows that, as long as a remedy to cure syphilis hadn't been found, doctors and poets interpreted syphilis as a disease transmitted by Venus. Wenger traces the use of the word syphilis in the medical and the artistic worlds from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century. As is well-known, the word syphilis came from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and, in particular, from the story of Syphilos, a shepherd failing to worship his god, and therefore punished with a disease affecting his genitals. What is less known is the painting attributed to Durer which portrayed a mercenary coming back from the New World, covered with pustules, and surrounded by the astrological signs responsible for his disease. Wenger also gives numerous examples of poets who celebrated this disease in verses holding Cupid's arrows responsible for it. He documents the fact that both artists and doctors dealt with syphilis: The Italian doctor, Fracastor, already mentioned, wrote a poem in Latin, *Syphilis*, whose explanations of the disease were similar to those of artists. The most interesting part of Wenger's research concerns the multiple translations of Fracastor's poems used by doctors and poets long after the Renaissance, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century. For instance, in 1830, a doctor, Giraudeau de Saint-Gervais, published *L'art de se guérir soi-même, ou traitement des maladies syphilitiques sans mercure* (The Art of Curing Yourself or The Treatment of Syphilis without Mercury). Then, stimulated by his success in 1840, he used the talent of a poet, Auguste-Marseille Barthélemy, to acclaim his treatment of syphilis thanks to a translation of Fracastor's poem, in a book entitled *Syphilis, Poem in Two Chants, written by Barthélemy, with Dr Giraudeau de Saint-Gervais's notes*.

Let's examine now the field of ecology, a science which is considered quite recent and unrelated to literature. However, as we will see, a politician-mathematician-poet-novelist-memoirist such as Chateaubriand could be considered as a pioneer in this field inasmuch as he expressed a great interest in nature, its fauna and flora, the environment and acted on this interest almost a century before the word ecology was coined.

As a matter of fact, Claire Robert's 2008 thesis regarding the roots of ecology and Ariane Debourdeau's 2013 book devoted to the archeology of the founding texts of ecology count Linnaeus, Buffon, and Humboldt as the genitors of ecology. Chateaubriand is not listed in these works on ecology, perhaps because historians of ecology have had a tendency to reject the facto "literary sources" focusing on nature on the basis that they are "by definition subjective" and "produced by elites", who cannot understand the point of view of scientists on nature (Cornu 2003, 173).

However, Chateaubriand was not only an admirer of Linnaeus, Buffon, a friend of Humboldt, and a colleague of Jacquelinot de Pampelune who wrote uncountable pages on the American, European and Oriental fauna and flora, he also acted, as a politician, on his belief that nature needed to be protected.

Chateaubriand's interest for nature and his love of wilderness started as a child in Brittany,

France. As all the family's small fortune was going to be inherited by his older brother who was sent to Paris, the young viscount stayed at the country-side and was raised with the local boys and girls, spending most of his time hunting and dreaming in the woods. Introduced at Versailles as a young man, he immediately disliked the Court. Along with the statesman and protector of philosophers Malesherbes, whose grand-daughter had married his older brother, Chateaubriand was part of the aristocracy favorable to the Revolution and to the continuation, after the Revolution, of the politics of forest protection which started at the end of the Medieval period, as we will see later on.

However, when he saw the heads of the two Bastille guardians at the top of spears with their eyes popping out, shown as trophies, he stopped supporting the Revolution: As the Bastille prison had hardly any prisoners, there was no reason, according to him, to massacre anyone. Besides, he believed, like his hero Rousseau, that the blood of one man was more valuable than the freedom of humankind. Convinced that there is no one more "servile, despicable, coward and narrow-minded than a terrorist," he decided to leave France and go visit America in 1791 as an explorer (Chateaubriand 1911, 235). He came back to France a year later when he heard that the king had been put in jail.

His trip to America allowed him to discover a while before Thoreau the American virgin forests which didn't exist anymore in France and in the Old World. Later on, in 1806, his trip to the Orient where primitive forests had somewhat expired reinforced his impression that North America and South America with the Amazon forest were the cradle of nature. According to the famous French ecologist politician Brice Lalonde, Chateaubriand's two trips, one in the West the other in the East, made him realize that: "Forests precede people, deserts follow them". Although this avant-garde ecological formula doesn't exist in his writings, a lot of Chateaubriand's pronouncements come close to it in his writing as we will see.

In America, the young traveler immediately noticed the exotic beauty of the American "blue birds". However, his meditation went beyond an aesthetic contemplation of the world laid in front of him: Seeing that the harvesters in the fields were forcing thousands of blue birds to flee away, he deplored their negative effect on them in the long run. His intuition was correct: Later on, in the nineteenth century, the population of blue birds almost disappeared. It reappeared only in the twentieth century thanks to strict ecological measures. This was not an isolated instance in his life where he showed awareness in face of the precariousness of an environment faced with human predation.

For instance, when his brother, his sister-in-law, and Malesherbes were sent to the guillotine the same day and when the rest of his family was put in jail in France, he was in London from 1793 to 1799. There, in exile, poor and unknown, starving at times and forced to chew on paper to get distracted from his hunger, he found solace sitting in the numerous parks full of birds in London, birds reminding him of his native Brittany that he thought he might never see again. When he came back to England as an ambassador in 1822, his new fortune didn't prevent him from immediately noticing the industrial smokes invading the atmosphere which didn't exist thirty years before in London, and the absence of the birds he loved with all his heart. The disappearance of birds in

London was as shocking as the disappearance of the blue birds in America.

Chateaubriand was well aware of living at a time when the ecologic equilibrium which had prevailed for centuries was coming to an end. Being born during the Enlightenment, he initially trusted progress and believed in perfectibility. However, after seeing blood in the streets of Paris, after the death and sufferings of his family and friends, after his trip to America where predatory settlers were annexing and destroying a land preserved for millenniums, after seeing the effect of wars on nature in France upon his return in 1800, a question regarding modern men, that he formulated in his first *Essay on Revolutions* (1797) and in the *Genius of Christianism* in 1801, started haunting: "What is this new Prometheus going to do ?" Are our scientists and those convinced of manifest destiny "going to create a world?" From an ecological point of view, his answer to these questions was again a prediction: "No, he will destroy it".

Before concentrating on his actions as a politician regarding the environment later on in his life, let's evoke his younger years to show how his sensitivity and political awareness toward nature came to fruition. During his exile in England, being sick and having been told by doctors that he didn't have much time to live, he wanted to write an essay, *Essai sur les Révolutions*, before dying, an essay in which he would use his literary and scientific training as a mathematician acquired during his youth to be "useful to his peers" (Chateaubriand 2009, 250). To do so, he tried to find not only « historic » (262), « mathematic » (972), and « moral » truths (578), but also « natural » truths (262). For him, at this early stage of his life, it was already clear that natural truths were the most "important" (262) ones. As a matter of fact, he was already convinced that men were "far from having invented anything new" since the Hellenistic glory days, this « except in natural sciences » (956-8).

A few years after his exile, having recovered from his sickness, he returned to France. As can be seen in le *Génie du Christianisme*, he regretted all his life having left America and abandoned his early dream of devoting his life as an explorer and a botanist there (Chateaubriand 1868, 65). As a full-time writer from 1791 to 1817, the year he also became a politician, he was dismayed by the separation which was starting to impose itself between abstract scientific studies and "literary studies", and considered this separation a major problem in education (210). For this reason, he particularly appreciated the work of the famous scientist, Erasmus Darwin, author of "The love of plants" and of Linnaeus who had based his approach to nature on the reproductive organs of plants and used poetic personifications to explain the « the sexual system of plants » (Duris 1993, 161). Needless to say, Chateaubriand immediately adopted Linnaeus' Latin binominal taxonomy which is still in use nowadays. This didn't prevent him, however, from admiring Buffon whose description of nature had revived the Italian descriptive poetry inherited from Homer, Hesiod, and Virgil. As Sebastien Baudoin pointed out, the "poetic and scientific discourse" could perfectly "coexist in the same poetics of effects" (Baudoin 2009, 223).

Ironically, science, scientists, botanists were not responsible for the dry prose which was starting to emerge and was going to prevail after his death in 1848 with Positivism. Very early, 1797, in *Essai sur les Révolutions*, Chateaubriand held the authors of the Enlightenment responsible for this dry prose and for the separation of nature and science. According to him, the authors of the Encyclopedia

had rejected *ekphrasis* on the basis that encyclopedic knowledge is based on reason (Baudoin 2209, 223) and can only be formulated in a dry objective prose. Inspired by the descriptive "prose of Buffon" who was hostile to the Encyclopedia, Chateaubriand reacted to this dry prose and was able to reach a beauty in his prose, "never known before" (Chateaubriand 1833, 167), prose that historians of ecology have a hard time nowadays to recognize as a valid tool of exploration because it belongs to the literary movement of Romanticism.

Neither Pluche in 1732 with his *Spectacle de la nature*, nor Delille with his scientific poetry in the *Jardins* or the *Trois Règnes de la Nature* in 1808, nor Rousseau or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, have created a nexus of animals forming a natural "galaxy in prose" comparable to the one created by Chateaubriand in his work (Fumaroli 2006, 329): The number of different flying, rampant, walking, domesticated or wild, animals from all continents Chateaubriand evoked in his work is abyssal. Let alone the other animals, 150 different kind of birds are evoked in his work. The word 'bird' appears more than 550 times in his works. A century later, Proust came close to Chateaubriand with the thirty or so different types of birds that he introduced in his works. However, Proust focused only on continental birds, his interest in birds being only literary. In turn, Chateaubriand spoke about birds from a naturalist point of view. French writers after him such as Balzac, Zola, Flaubert, Maupassant or Proust mostly used birds in metaphors or comparisons. It seems that the more science advanced during the nineteenth century, the more the presence of nature receded in literature. The industrial era having caused havoc, Zola became its reporter: Ecology, which had become indispensable, had to be invented.

François de Chateaubriand whose saint was Francis of Assisi, patron of birds, placed birds in the famous "chain of beings" (Essai 968) created by Plato on the top of the scale. In the *Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem*, he even declared that migrating birds were superior to Aristotle because they already knew America existed, Aristotle didn't. A fervent reader since his childhood of Buffon's *Natural History* and amateur of the Garden of Plants in Paris that Buffon had transformed into a museum, Chateaubriand already knew the American "white bird" before going to America. Aware that the experts, Buffon, Linnaeus, Jussieu or Lamarck disagreed about this bird in particular (Martinet 1987, 5), he was right to think that ornithology was far from being an exact science: Buffon had recognized two thousand different species of birds, now ornithologists recognize eighteen thousand different species, and who knows how many will be recognized in a century. Obviously, the naturalists of Chateaubriand's time didn't have the information naturalists have nowadays. How could they know and then declare that the ortolan belonged to Europe and the snow bird to America?

The following example of the snow bird may explain why Chateaubriand had serious doubts that science would always have the final word on anything. As early as 1797, he expressed fear that science would become entirely mechanical and only focus on "matter" (Essai 966). He used the pompous word 'ornithologist', which was introduced in the eighteenth century, only one time in his entire work. Conscious that science had its limitations, when he saw a solitary couple of "birds"

in his *Voyage en Amérique*, he humbly identified them as "white birds" and added that "ornithologists" put them in the *passer nivalis* group (Chateaubriand 2008, 173). Later on, in his *Memoirs*, he simply named them "white sparrow" or "white passerine", passerine coming from *passer*, and snow from *nivalis.* For this bird in particular, Chateaubriand had consulted Buffon's works published between 1771 and 1786: There the white birds, *passer nivalis*, corresponded either to "the snow ortolan" or "the jacobin ortolan". However, for Linnaeus that he knew well too, "the snow ortolan" was an *emberiza nivalis*, and "the jacobin ortolan" was an *embeliza hyemalis*. And nowadays it is recognized as a snow bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)!

Indeed, the natural beauty of the American birds which were unknown in Europe and discovered by the young traveler during his year spent in America contributed to his defense of nature. The red cardinal was mentioned by him only in the context of America in his works. He admired the blue herons or jays and the feathers of the parakeets served as natural clothes for the Native Americans. The ruffed grouse with it magnificent blue tail was the equivalent of the European partridge. And America had a blue thrush that Europe didn't have.

But again, with the thrush, it wasn't only the beauty of nature which inspired him. If the thrush became an important symbol in his work it is because it encapsulated what is lost forever both on a personal and ecological level. When he heard a thrush singing in Montboissier, France, he was in his Fifties. This bird's song was so powerful that it resurrected his entire youth, the world before the Revolution, and before the industrial revolution. Curiously, the thrush which is so important in his work, appears only a few times whereas the nightingale is mentioned 80 times and the lark 35 times. However, the thrush appears at crucial times and each time, it corresponds to a different group of *passer*, which goes to show how informed Chateaubriand was. The first time the thrush appears is in his *Voyage en Amérique* when he sees "thousands of blue thrush" disappearing because of the agricultural progress and the violation of a land that Native Americans had kept intact for centuries (262). The American blue thrush which is endemic to American belongs to a different group than the thrush he heard in Montboissier, France. The latter belonged to the group of the musician thrush, *Turdus musicus*, according to Linneaus in 1758 and to the *Turdus philomelos* group according to Brehm in 1831. In his *Memoirs*, Chateaubriand mentioned Agrippine's thrush in the following comparison: "The people of Orinoco don't exist anymore; a dozen of words from their dialect has only been remembered by some parrots who repeat them at the top of trees, the same way Agrippine's thrush used to warble some Greek words on the railing of Roman balconies" (Chateaubriand 1911, 393). This thrush, *Turdus pilaris*, can imitate the sounds made by other birds or by humans. In all cases, all the thrushes mentioned always appear in the context of disappearance and exile: The blue thrush are disappearing, youth is forever gone, and so do languages which were once spoken. Needless to say, this bird is a perfect symbol also because the thrush has been the most hunted bird from the antiquity on, the purple thrush's flesh being a delicacy.

Let's turn now to the later years when Chateaubriand could act on the environment. Mentioned previously as one of the genitors of ecology, Jacquelinot de Pampelune was the

rapporteur of one of the first laws requiring an annual budget for the maintenance of pavements, and he pleaded for the esthetic importance of tree alignments along the roads in France in 1824. However, almost a decade before, when Chateaubriand became a full-time politician during the Restauration in 1817, he had already rejected Title XI financial bill recommending the sale of 370.658 acres of forests belonging to the State (Le Bot 2012, 16). Instead of selling this land to private investors, the State should sell this land, according to him, to certain regions so that their forests could embellish their cities' environment and benefit the poor. His rationale was that the whole country could preserve certain indispensable families of trees that private investors would undoubtedly destroy if given a chance to buy this land. To strengthen his argument, Chateaubriand quoted the disappearance of the larch trees which once covered the Cevennes and the dense thickets which used to protect the city of Boulogne and Le Havre from the western wind which tormented them (Le Bot 2012, 16). Not only did he advocate for the utility of ancestral forests, he also maintained that well-kept plantations could have saved a plethora of streams, a third of which had already dried up. Convinced that "nature knows more than men", Chateaubriand declared that "wherever trees disappeared, men would be punished for their lack of foresight" (Le Bot 2012, 15) --formula very close to the one attributed to him: « Forests precede people, deserts follow them » (Le Bot 2012, 15).

Being also a historian, Chateaubriand knew that forests had a long history. Whereas the Romans didn't have a legislation for forests, forest being "*res nullius*" for them, French legists started to defend the royal forests, "basis of the power of the crown", as early as the thirteenth century. The principle of their inalienability came a century after. During the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, the language previously used regarding forest continued to appear in edicts such as the Moulins Edicts in 1566 (the preservation of forest being in the king's oath when crowned) or the 1613 Treaty which contained two chapters regarding forests (Morin 2010, 25-6). In 1632, a treaty entitled "Woods" claimed that laws were needed to preserve forests. It underlined the fact that the king should protect forests from any abuse of individuals, this to preserve nature for the common good. High timber should be prioritized because it was precious for society in general and for the construction of boats or of temples, in particular. The 1669 Forest Order in favor of the protection of forests which condemned any abuse of the existing forests reaffirmed again the Old Regime "administrative dogma" regarding the protection and conservation of forests (Devèze 1966, 246). The language used from the Renaissance on in the edicts regarding the rules meant to sustain forests was so "concise" that it was used again later when physiocrats meant to turn into theories ecological sustainability. And, as these rules of sustainability remained the same from aristocratic times to modern times, one could conclude that ecology has in fact aristocratic origins (Pinceti 1993).

It is actually the rising tension between the interests of commoners and those of the common good represented by the aristocracy which in part led to the French revolution: Around the middle of the eighteenth century, the population growth and the birth of industry provoked the need to have access to more land and to more woods (Devèze 1966, 247). Under these pressures, even the protected royal forests were sacrificed, especially when Louis XVI took over and left those in charge

of the finance deal with money matters (Devèze 244). During the Revolution and Napoleonic wars, the need for wood to build boats provoked the sale of vast surfaces of forests. In 1817, when Chateaubriand became a politician, the situation regarding forests was so disastrous that it was high time to reverse this current of destruction. During the Restauration, Chateaubriand's efforts were instrumental and led to policies regarding the protection of forests in 1827, policies reinforced during the Second Empire and never interrupted since then.

One can understand why Chateaubriand's worries were justified: At the beginning of the Renaissance, the surface covered with forests in France was considerable (Morin 6). Then, from 1450 to 1827, as the population tripled, the surface of land reserved for agriculture doubled. France, who could boast 22 million hectares of forests in 1450, had only 7 to 8 million hectares left in 1827, year when policies were again imposed as they had been imposed during aristocratic times.

As said before, historians of ecology seem to reject "literary sources" focusing on nature on the basis that they are "by definition subjective" and "produced by elites", especially when the literary source is produced by a writer like Chateaubriand who was an aristocrat. However, it is important to repeat again that, although he had aristocratic origins, Chateaubriand's family was part of a relatively poor nobility and that at age 25 he had lost everything, except his talent to write. In the dilapidated castle set in the village of Combray where he lived as a young man it was understood that the forest was a place where free wood for heating or building purpose could be found along with free game. Chateaubriand hunted with his father during his youth and hang around with the youngsters of the area. As the town of Dinan used to be occupied by the ancient forest of Faigne, and as a lot of places names 'coët' or 'coat' indicated that they were initially forests, it was also common knowledge that with the population growth, the impoverishment of Brittany was partially due to forests being replaced by moorlands. This being said, Brittany being a humid province, it didn't face the problem a dry place such as the Cevennes region endured (Cornu 2003). That is why the comment mentioned above made on the Cevennes by Chateaubriand is particularly interesting: It reflects a perfect understanding of what constitutes the common good and the individual interest, this not only in Brittany but also in the other regions of France or the world.

The absence of legislation in the Cevennes and the desire from local authorities to cajole the local population accounted for the "fraud" and "abuse" of the land (Morin 11). As soon as the industrial era started, the population who hadn't left the countryside to go to cities resented the control on forests which decreased their free food-producing subsidies. They ended up occupying more remote places with their cows and goats, destroying more land and forests. In the Cevennes, it is true therefore that "condemning the deforestation, meant condemning the small owners" (Morin 15). However, as Chateaubriand understood very early in his life, ecology defends long-term common good and condemns short-term personal interests. In this regard, Chateaubriand's trip to Greece, Jerusalem, and Egypt confirmed his believes regarding the environment: There he could see the effect of "the teeth of sheeps and goats" on the trees which once covered some countries he visited.

Similarly, he deplored their effect on the beech trees and chestnut trees which once covered the Cevennes in France (Morin 18).

The complex of inferiority toward the idol "science" felt by literature programs mentioned by Marc Fumaroli has therefore no reason to be. And all the more so since a lot of scientists don't even recognize the scientific idol "as theirs". Moreover, as Fumaroli pointed and as we have tried to demonstrate, this complex is based on an "epistemological confusion" (Fumaroli 2019, 644): A confusion between *sciendi* and knowledge, the French *savoir* and *connaissance*, the Latin *logos* and *mythos*, and the Greek *episteme* and *gnosis*. The *episteme*, *gnosis* and *doxa* in the case of syphilis coincided for doctors and writers for centuries until a remedy was found. Perhaps, the fact that syphilis is coming back confirms that the scientific *episteme* is in a state of constant recreation like literature.

Regarding the suspicion toward literature, we saw how, as soon as he became politician and could take part of major political decisions, Chateaubriand immediately tried to implement the preservation of forests. His input led to the introduction of an "environmental dimension" (Devèze, 248) to forests on the basis that they protected and fed the rivers and springs, they contained and solidified the mountain ground, and they were beneficial to the atmosphere. Chateaubriand's efforts led to drastic measures taken in 1827 and again in 1861 in favor of reforestation, and to the understanding that the protection of forests guarantee the wellbeing of any nation in the long run. With his attitude toward the forest environment, Chateaubriand definitely contributed to the systematic and methodical reforestation that occurred in France during the second part of the 19th century and explains why now France can boast a 20% wood surface.

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