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"The Symbol of Paris": Writing the Eiffel Tower

by William Thompson

FROM THE PERIOD PRECEDING its construction until the present, the Eiffel Tower, the acknowledged foremost universal symbol of Paris and France, has stood as the focus of attention of many an artist (Seurat, Delaunay, Rousseau, Chagall, to name but a few) and a tremendous number of writers in France and throughout the world. Studies about the Tower and its impact on contemporary culture have frequently mentioned the many references to the Tower in art and literature. However, in the majority of these analyses, little if any attempt has been made to consider the symbolic qualities bestowed upon the Tower in these works or the difficulties encountered by writers in appropriately rendering this massive three-dimensional structure within the confines of the written text. This essay will examine a selection of those texts, literary and popular, fiction and nonfiction, in which the Eiffel Tower has played a prominent role, either as a central focus or as a widely recognizable backdrop against which the text may unfurl. Rather than present an exhaustive catalogue of works which mention the Tower, this essay will be restricted to an analysis of how the Tower's unique appearance and debatable function have been represented textually by a few writers: from the initial, vehement written objections which appeared in the French press as the Tower was being constructed, to the modernist literary evocations of the Tower by early twentieth-century writers, and finally to more recent attestations to the Tower's status as universal symbol.

In March of 1885 Gustave Eiffel, at the time known primarily as a successful iron engineer, submitted a plan for a tower to the French *Ministre du Commerce et de l'Industrie* for inclusion in the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 to be held in Paris. In spite of the superiority and feasibility of Eiffel's proposal (originally designed, in fact, by *Émile Nouguier* and *Maurice Koechlin*, engineers employed by Eiffel), a competition was opened for proposals studying ". . . la possibilité d'élever sur le Champ-de-Mars une Tour en fer à base carrée, de 125m de côté à la base et de 300m de hauteur" (Eiffel 7). The winning proposal would stand as the centerpiece of the 1889 Exposition. Eiffel's was one of over 100 eventual submissions

(other fanciful submissions included plans for a giant tower pump which could irrigate and clean all of Paris, and another for a 300 meter-high guillotine commemorating the centennial of the Revolution). Eiffel's proposal was finally (and not surprisingly) chosen in June of 1886, cited by the selection committee as "un chef-d'œuvre original d'industrie métallique" (Eiffel 8), demonstrating that even before its construction, the Tower's uniqueness was proclaimed. The Tour Eiffel, as it was quickly dubbed, was finally inaugurated on March 31, 1889.

A great deal of the early commentary about the Tower focused on the apparent amalgamation of esthetic and technological ideals in this monstrous iron structure. One Italian visitor to the Exposition commented that "The Eiffel Tower seizes the imagination, it is something unexpected, fantastic, which flatters our smallness" (*L'Esposizione di Parigi del 1889 illustrata*, cited in Benevolo 116), although in actual fact the Tower was not the great technical marvel that many believe it to have been. Most of the engineering principles utilized in the construction of the Tower had already been tested and proven by Eiffel in his bridges. What *was* original about the Tower was its volume and its height, for it was indeed the tallest man-made structure in the world for several decades, at its summit dwarfing the Washington Monument, the previous record holder, by more than 130 meters. Obviously, the Tower was also unique for its unusual physiognomy, which certainly had no precedent in Parisian architecture. A Portuguese visitor described how the Tower's incomparable appearance, in fact, left one incapable of any but the most basic commentary: "Nous sommes montés à la Tour Eiffel—et *sicut licet* nous nous sommes exclamés:—'C'est splendide!' La tour ne vaut qu'une exclamation—mais celle-là lui est due, et nous ne la lui avons pas marchandée" (De Queiroz, cited in Lanoux 55).

However, not all of the early reaction to the Tower was favorable. Of this often verbose commentary, Edmond de Goncourt's statement from his famous *Journal* is perhaps the most straightforward: "on ne peut rêver quelque chose de plus laid pour l'œil d'un vieux civilisé" (Goncourt 935). Guy de Maupassant, for his part, spared few occasions to display his disdain of the Tower, vilifying Eiffel's creation in several of his works: "Ce monstre poursuit les yeux à la façon d'un cauchemar, hante l'esprit, effraie d'avance les pauvres gens naïfs qui ont conservé le goût de l'architecture artiste, de la ligne et des proportions" (cited by Thumerel 134). He feared for the future reputation of his own period if the Tower were to survive:

Mais je me demande ce qu'on conclura de notre génération si quelque prochaine émeute ne déboulonne pas cette haute et maigre pyramide d'échelles de fer, squelette disgracieux et géant, dont la base semble faite pour porter un formidable monument de Cyclopes et qui avorte en un ridicule et mince profil de cheminée d'usine. (cited by Lanoux 53)

Rarely naming the structure itself, Maupassant preferred to concoct elaborate, at times scathing descriptions which would hopefully convince the reader of the grotesqueness and inutility of the Tower.

Maupassant's contemporary Joris-Karl Huysmans was capable of even less flattering comment in his essay "Le Fer": "sa tour ressemble à un tuyau d'usine en construction, à une carcasse qui attend d'être remplie par des pierres de taille ou des briques. On ne peut se figurer que ce grillage infundibuliforme soit achevé, que ce suppositoire solitaire et criblé de trous restera tel" (Huysmans 174). Huysmans reveals a pettiness and jealousy underlying these critiques as he complains that the Tower does not appear as tall as it is claimed to be: "La Tour Eiffel est vraiment d'une laideur qui déconcerte et elle n'est même pas énorme!" (175).

Even before its completion, the Tower provoked the critical wrath of many of France's leading writers, artists, and thinkers, who composed a now notorious letter denouncing the structure. The impassioned protest, signed by Charles Garnier, Leconte de Lisle, Alexandre Dumas, Sully-Prudhomme, and Maupassant, among others, protested the construction "de l'inutile et monstrueuse Tour Eiffel que la malignité publique, souvent empreinte de bon sens et d'esprit de justice, a déjà baptisée de Tour de Babel" ("La Protestation des artistes," in Lanoux 46). The signers of the letter feared that the Tower would overshadow and even humiliate existing monuments and architectural achievements:

Il suffit d'ailleurs, pour se rendre compte de ce que nous avançons, de se figurer une Tour vertigineusement ridicule, dominant Paris, ainsi qu'une noire et gigantesque cheminée d'usine, écrasant de sa masse barbare: Notre-Dame, la Sainte-Chapelle, la tour Saint-Jacques, le Louvre, le dôme des Invalides, l'Arc de Triomphe, tous nos monuments humiliés, toutes nos architectures rapetissées, qui disparaîtront dans ce rêve stupéfiant. (46)

To demonstrate to what extent the Tower would exceed the boundaries of taste, the signers of the letter could offer no more convincing argument than the fact that even Americans would not desire to see such a structure on their shores: "Car la Tour Eiffel, dont la commerciale Amérique ne voudrait pas, c'est, n'en doutez pas, le déshonneur de Paris!" (46). The malicious commentary of these writers and artists led, of course, to no change whatsoever in the plans for the Tower, and one might point out that the reputations of most of the signers of the letter have not lasted half the life of the "monstrous factory chimney" they so despised.

Not surprisingly, Gustave Eiffel himself was an idealist as far as his Tower was concerned, as he even proclaimed the nationalistic value of the structure in response to the cries of outrage in the "Protestation des artistes":

Il me semble que, n'eût-elle pas d'autre raison d'être que de montrer que nous ne sommes pas simplement le pays des amuseurs, mais aussi celui des ingénieurs et des constructeurs qu'on appelle de toutes les régions

du monde pour édifier les ponts, les viaducs, les gares et les grands monuments de l'industrie moderne, la Tour Eiffel mériterait d'être traitée avec considération. (cited by Billington 62)

Although Eiffel's statements do at times border on self-promotion, he did fervently believe that the Tower was made by everyone and for everyone. It was a unifying structure that would incorporate each and every element of modern society. In fact, the Eiffel Tower could be considered a world in itself: "la Tour peut vivre sur elle-même: on peut y rêver, y manger, y observer, y comprendre, s'y étonner, y faire des achats" (Barthes 57). Eiffel countered attacks against the unprecedented appearance of the Tower by comparing the Tower to some ancient forerunners: "Il y a du reste dans le colossal une attraction, un charme propre, auxquels les théories d'art ordinaires ne sont guère applicables. Soutiendra-t-on que c'est par leur valeur artistique que les Pyramides ont si fortement frappé l'imagination des hommes?" (Eiffel 14). Moreover, if his argumentation in the name of esthetics was not entirely convincing, Eiffel was capable of providing a seemingly inexhaustible list of practical applications for the Tower:

Non seulement la Tour promet d'intéressantes observations pour l'astronomie, la météorologie et la physique, non seulement elle permettra en temps de guerre de tenir Paris constamment relié au reste de la France, mais elle sera en même temps la preuve éclatante des progrès réalisés en ce siècle par l'art des ingénieurs. (Eiffel 15)

Even the engineer Eiffel was aware of the symbolism inherent in the Tower, although he could not have imagined the variety of the symbolic connotations which would be bestowed on his creation over the course of the next century.

The twentieth century has been much more sympathetic to the Tower than the likes of Maupassant and Huysmans. Although intermittent attacks in the aim of dismantling it have occurred in the twentieth century, more effort has been devoted to considering the value of the Tower to French culture and society. Some twenty years after the signing of the "Protestation des artistes," a new generation of writers would produce an outpouring of poetic description of the Tower.

The poem "Zone," first published in 1912, is the first and longest poem in Guillaume Apollinaire's collection *Alcools*, and includes one of the best-known references to the Eiffel Tower in literature. "Zone" recounts a day in the life of the poet in Paris, and the internal conflict of a man fascinated by and optimistic about a modernistic future, yet also nostalgic about the past, and melancholic about the passing of time. The initial verses of the poem demonstrate the poet's discomfort with the tension between the old and the new. The first image presented is that of the Eiffel Tower, and while the Tower makes only a brief appearance in "Zone," its position in the overall structure of the poem endows it with tremendous importance:

A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien
 Bergère ô tour Eiffel le troupeau des ponts bêle ce matin
 Tu en as assez de vivre dans l'antiquité grecque et romaine
 Ici même les automobiles ont l'air d'être anciennes
 La religion seule est restée toute neuve la religion
 Est restée simple comme les hangars de Port-Aviation

Apollinaire's Tower is a maternal figure, a modern shepherdess watching over the bridges of Paris, over a city now overwhelmed by cars and planes. It is the symbol of technological advancement placed into a pastoral setting. It is a dominant, omnipresent structure. The Tower is maternal, ironic in that it is the newest addition, the new-born in the catalogue of Parisian monuments. As technological phenomena gradually dominate the changing city, the old horizontal bridges spanning the Seine are reduced to tiny, insignificant structures, overwhelmed by the sudden, striking, vertically-towering *débutante* in the Parisian landscape. The bridges' ages-old bleating is to be drowned out by the modernist din.

As Apollinaire searches for some form of order in the present, he also longs for the comfort and safety of the past. Indeed, the Tower as "Bergère" seems to hark back to the Romantic fascination with nature, to the great pastoral novels of seventeenth-century French literature, even to the Bible. The Tower, for Apollinaire at least, may stand as a unifying element, one which brings some form of harmony to the quickly changing modernized world of the early twentieth century. It allows the entirety of Paris, old and new, to be viewed from its summit, and thereby to be assembled into a cohesive whole. Its structural precision and unerodable iron framework guarantee that it will remain a fixture in the Parisian sky. If some modern innovations seem to have a questionable impact on the old order, the Eiffel Tower is the one representative of the modern which will not give way, neither to the old, nor to what is yet to come.

Blaise Cendrars's poem "Tour" dates from approximately the same period as "Zone," but Cendrars moves far beyond Apollinaire's brief albeit important acknowledgment of the Tower. While for Apollinaire the Tower represents both the apparent incompatibility and the necessary union of past and present, for Cendrars the Tower is the ubiquitous symbol of an inexhaustible list of places and objects. The Tower is the logical descendant of a long legacy of locations and monuments taken from world history, such as Carthage, Greece, and Babel. It is a multifaceted symbol whose impact varies from place to place: "En Europe tu es comme un gibet . . . En Australie tu as toujours été tabou / Tu es la gaffe que le capitaine Cook employait pour diriger son bateau d'aventuriers" (Cendrars 144), and this impact occurs everywhere: "Parmi les toupies onanistes des temples hindous / Et les cris colorés des multitudes de l'Orient / Tu te penches, gracieux Palmier" (142). As in Apollinaire's

"Zone," the Tower has a unifying quality, as if all the world can be contained in this one object. For Cendrars, the Eiffel Tower not only represents, but is everything: "Tu es tout / Tour / Dieu antique / Bête moderne / Spectre solaire / Sujet de mon poème / Tour" (144).

If the Tower in Apollinaire's "Zone" is simply a point of departure, a landmark used to introduce the complexities of a new Parisian life-style, and if Cendrars's Tower functions primarily as a symbol, and not as a physical entity in itself, other writers have placed Eiffel's metal giant into a far more prominent and physical role. Jean Cocteau's avant-garde creation *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, first performed in 1920, features perhaps the most striking example of the presence of the Tower in a theatrical work, where Eiffel's creation serves as the setting for a most unusual series of events. So dominant is the role of the Eiffel Tower in this play, in fact, that the Tower itself may be considered the central character. Far from being a banal, static setting for the action, the Tower stands as a prominent backdrop without which the play and its action would lose all significance.

A wedding party has made reservations at the Tower's restaurant. Even before the party arrives, however, the audience is confronted with telegrams falling from the sky, an ostrich escaping from a hunter, and a photographer whose oversized camera has a mind of its own. Each time the photographer says "Un oiseau va sortir," some unexpected creature, first an ostrich, then a bather, then a lion, emerges from the camera. Confusing matters even further, all the action and dialogue are described and recited by two "phonographs" located on each side of the stage. The actors, who wear masks, simply pantomime their actions (in fact, the play was first performed by the Ballets suèdes).

The setting of Cocteau's play is the first platform of the Eiffel Tower. The backdrop "représente Paris à vol d'oiseau" (Cocteau 75). Obviously the entire Tower cannot be present, but the painted décor, in which the ironwork of the Tower is clearly incorporated, leaves little doubt that the setting is indeed the Eiffel Tower. Perhaps nothing could be more stereotypically, absurdly French than a wedding party, complete with photographer, in-laws, even an aging, pontificating general, on the Eiffel Tower on the Fourteenth of July. The Tower's novelty, its status as symbol of the new, was the impetus for Apollinaire to include it in "Zone," yet for Cocteau, not even a decade later, the Tower has become an accepted, even banal symbol of things French. A contemporary of Cocteau's could state that "On ne dit plus la Tour Eiffel. On dit la Tour. La guerre et l'après-guerre ont éteint pour jamais, en cette cloche de fer, les résonances d'exposition universelle" (A. Obey, cited in Tonnet-Lacroix 132). Although still an overwhelming landmark in the Parisian cityscape, the Tower has lost some of its initial technological glamor, as the wondrous innovations it once helped advertise have now become matter-of-fact

components of everyday life. The modern age of which it was once the spectacular herald has long arrived, causing the Tower to lose its one legitimate function, and to content itself with a banal, unpromising career:

Phono deux: La Tour Eiffel est un monde comme Notre-Dame.

C'est Notre-Dame de la rive gauche.

Phono un: C'est la reine de Paris.

Phono deux: Elle était reine de Paris. Maintenant elle est demoiselle du télégraphe.

Phono un: Il faut bien vivre. (Cocteau 85)

In Cocteau's play, the Tower has become an integral and habitual part of everyday Paris: "On la voyait trop souvent; on la voyait tous les jours, en passant sur les quais, au Champ de Mars, aux Invalides, à l'Alma, voire à Passy ou à Auteuil" (Braibant 189). If lacking the utilitarian purpose of other modern objects, it nevertheless becomes a necessary component. It is the "bridesmaid": the wedding could occur without her, but it would be much less interesting, much less complete, much less a wedding.

Yet the above passage also alludes to two of the symbolic connotations which may so easily be applied to the Tower. As the comparison to Notre-Dame suggests, the Eiffel Tower's form resembles that of a church spire reaching toward Heaven, which would allow it to be incorporated within the tradition of those previously existing "towering" structures which dot the Paris landscape. Yet the "religion" of which the Tower is the physical symbol is not Christianity, but that of modernity and of the celebration of Parisian life. Indeed, one of the most succinct summaries of the Tower's significance is Marc Fumaroli's description of the Tower as "la flèche gothique de la religion du progrès" (Fumaroli 201), at which the faithful flocks continue to congregate. In addition, the Tower's stereotypically feminine portrayal in Cocteau's play (*Notre-Dame, reine, demoiselle*) can be opposed to its phallic form, which challenges even the supposed femininity of the city of Paris. (In Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le métro*, for example, Gabriel comments: "Je me demande pourquoi on représente la ville de Paris comme une femme. Avec un truc comme ça" [Queneau 118].)

Whatever symbolic connotations might be apparent in *Les Mariés*, that which makes the Eiffel Tower of such great importance as the setting for Cocteau's play is the fact that it *must* be recognizable. In his 1922 Préface to *Les Mariés*, Cocteau states that "Le poète doit sortir objets et sentiments de leurs voiles et de leurs brumes, les montrer soudain, si nus et si vite, que l'homme a peine à les reconnaître" (Cocteau 65). Many of the objects in Cocteau's play are not comprehensible at first, for their function and their accepted position in society have been altered dramatically. The camera is large enough for characters to enter and exit it (which they do frequently), and telegrams literally fly through the air across the Atlantic Ocean before they land on stage; but the Eiffel Tower, even when distorted in the cubist décor designed by Irène Lagut, remains readily familiar.

The Tower is so unlike any other existing structure, that even an alteration of its form and appearance cannot dissimulate its true identity.

Insofar as the Eiffel Tower is so recognizable to most people, one can hardly be surprised that a more elaborate analysis of this icon may have been conducted which is not restricted to the mere inclusion of the Tower as a familiar backdrop. Perhaps no one has preoccupied themselves more with the symbolic connotations of the Eiffel Tower than Roland Barthes in his essay entitled "La Tour Eiffel." Barthes's study of the Tower may be described as a nonfictional account of the fictions of this real structure. Barthes asks why we so easily appropriate this metallic agglomeration for our own needs, attributing symbolic qualities to it, and he attempts to prove that we often take the Tower for granted, unaware of, or overaccustomed to the many connotations we bestow upon it.

Although most of us would unhesitatingly consider the Eiffel Tower a symbol of Paris, or of France, Barthes demonstrates that the Tower is undoubtedly a symbol, but not within one, limited domain. Barthes proposes that Tower represents many things to many people: ". . . symbole de Paris, de la modernité, de la communication, de la science ou du dix-neuvième siècle, fusée, tige, derrick, phallus, paratonnerre ou insecte, face aux grands itinéraires du rêve, elle est le signe inévitable" (Barthes 27).

The Tower's many symbolic connotations are too numerous to list here, but one might at least point out their diversity. The Tower has been proclaimed the symbol of industrial and artistic progress, the metro, electric lights, elevators, telephones, military power, centralization, the union of workers and engineers, mathematical energy, technical utopianism, modern Paris, practical science, industrial and artistic progress, the union of workers and engineers, superhuman exaltation, the marriage of skill and imagination, and architectural eclecticism. It has been described as a gracious palm tree, mast, aging trunk, giraffe, monument and poem, tall and skinny pyramid, tragic lamppost, disgraceful skeleton, ancient god and modern beast, colossal golden Phare of industry and capital, and modern Tower of Babel. To quote Cendrars again: "Tu es tout / Tour."

For Parisians it is the inevitable physical presence, while for the rest of the world it is the inevitable symbol of France in general:

comme symbole universel de Paris, elle est partout sur la terre où Paris doit être énoncé en image; du Middlewest à l'Australie, il n'est pas un voyage vers la France qui ne se fasse, en quelque sorte, au nom de la Tour, pas un manuel de classe, une affiche ou un film sur la France qui ne la livre comme le signe majeur d'un peuple et d'un lieu: elle appartient à la langue universelle du voyage. (Barthes 27)

The fields of education, business, and entertainment have all called upon the Tower to demonstrate wordlessly that which is French. There are postcards of Paris dramatically altered just so that the Eiffel Tower will fit in, slightly displaced from the Champ de Mars and obviously somewhat larger than its true size. In contemporary culture, the Tower is not

only the inevitable sign, as Barthes states, it becomes the necessary sign, obligatory in perfume and champagne ads, where it is Paris, it is France. Maupassant complained that "Non seulement on la voyait de partout, mais on la trouvait partout, faite de toutes les matières connues, exposée à toutes les vitres, cauchemar inévitable et torturant" (cited in Lanoux 53), yet somehow it has lost none of its glamor or appeal.

Indeed, the Tower is the perfect symbol (better, in the case of the city of Paris, than Notre-Dame or the Arc de Triomphe) because it has no other function. It conjures up so many symbolic connotations, for it can do little else. Paris is full of monuments to its past. The Louvre and Versailles stand as reminders of past regal splendor, the Arc de Triomphe is a symbol of the Empire and its battles, while Notre-Dame and the other great Parisian churches have become monuments to a rich religious heritage. But the Eiffel Tower is not a monument to anything or to anybody; it serves no specific practical purpose (although Gustave Eiffel himself hoped and suggested otherwise). It would hardly be considered an economical telecommunications center, given its bulkiness. In the end, what use does it serve?: none. Perhaps its only true function is that it has become the symbol of the symbol. In fact, Barthes refers to the Tower as the "total monument": "Regard, objet, symbole, tel est l'infini circuit des fonctions qui lui permet d'être toujours bien autre chose et bien plus que la Tour Eiffel" (Barthes 28). Barthes continues, however, by pointing out that in order to be this "total monument," the Tower must be totally useless (Barthes 28). This ideal monument cannot represent any one thing, event, period, or person:

elle est le signe pur, ouvert à tous les temps, à toutes les images et à tous les sens, la métaphore sans frein; à travers la Tour, les hommes exercent cette grande fonction de l'imaginaire, qui est leur liberté, puisque aucune histoire, si sombre soit-elle, n'a jamais pu la leur enlever. (Barthes 82)

The Tower is physically and symbolically accessible to everyone, allowing each individual to choose a personalized significance of the structure, and only by having no predetermined function, by being useless, can the Tower fulfill this role. The Eiffel Tower is in fact the perfect symbol of itself, of what Barthes calls the "audace créatrice" which conjured it into existence (Barthes 73). If the Tower represents any one event, that event is its own construction.

In contemporary times the Eiffel Tower has also become an important component of a distinctly modern "literary" genre: the guidebook, that omnipresent aide to the millions of tourists who visit Paris every year. One such example, entitled *Paris in 4 Days*, might serve here as an example of how the Tower is treated not simply as a monument worthy of visitation, but as a key symbol of the tourist's pilgrimage to Paris. In the system of priorities of the anonymous compilers of this particular guide, the Tower is both a winner and a loser. It is one of the first sites visited, but only one-

half page of text out of 120 is devoted to it, as if describing the Tower is futile, while seeing the Tower more than suffices. There are, in fact, five pictures of the Tower, and the Tower does grace the cover of the guide, as if to affirm the guide's claim that "You can't imagine Paris without the Eiffel Tower" (7), although no explanation is provided as to why one cannot.

The guide provides the basic, and only the basic, information about the Tower. It is 320 meters high (no measurements in feet for the American tourists, surprisingly), and it is composed of 12,000 steel girders held together by 2.5 million rivets. After such an unromanticized description, the reader is informed that "the view from the top platform is over the whole of Paris and even the more distant suburbs" (7). This description presents a dilemma to the tourist. Does one go to the Eiffel Tower to see it, or to see from it? The guide contains no views from the Tower, only views of it. But why would one go to a Tower if not in order to climb it and appreciate the view?: "La Tour est un objet qui voit, un regard qui est vu; elle est un verbe complet, à la fois actif et passif" (Barthes 28). The incongruity between the textual description of activities at the Tower and the pictures of the Tower might be explained by the fact that if, according to this guide, you have only four days to see Paris, perhaps you do not have time to stand in line waiting for the elevator to reach the top, let alone to climb via the stairs.

Whether we climb it, look at it, or just read about it, we love the Tower, or at the very least we love what it symbolizes, whatever that might be. We might not be familiar with its architectural intricacies or the precise details of its history, but it is a ubiquitous reminder of things French and Parisian. The Tower has a unifying attractiveness for people all over the world. Miriam R. Levin indicates that the socially idealistic goals behind the very idea of the Tower in 1889 have been altered if not forgotten more than a century later, but still affect our opinion of this symbolic structure: "People even become members of that extended community of individuals who have visited the Tower and share the memory of that experience" (Levin 1052–53). For the authors whose works have been mentioned here, the Eiffel Tower, this massive symbol of mechanics, technology, capitalism, jutting high above the Parisian skyline, is a benign presence. Barthes even declares that the Tower is friendly. Even if one is not enamored of the Tower, one merely has to see it for positive, comfortable thoughts to be aroused. The Vicomte de Vogüé, in an essay written just after the completion of the Tower, suggested an unexpected utilitarian function for the Tower:

Chaque jour des centaines de milliers d'hommes passent sous les arches et se hissent à leur sommet; ils trouvent là une impression grandiose, un élargissement de l'esprit, à tout le moins une sensation de plaisir et d'allègement. Chaque gramme du fer qui compose cette masse est déjà payé par une bonne minute pour un être humain. N'est-ce pas là une utilité qui en vaut bien d'autres? (Vogüé 120)

In spite of its apparent banalization through its constant appearance in advertisements, its depiction on everything from tea towels to tee-shirts, and its immortalization in the form of to-scale or not-to-scale statuettes available from any souvenir shop in Paris, the Tower will always maintain a certain benevolent mystique throughout the world, inspiring literature, the arts, and innumerable romantic daydreams about France.

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