

The Man Behind the Letters: Jacques Boulenger and his Correspondence with Édouard Champion Regarding Au pays de Gérard de Nerval

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Introduction

This paper originated in the recent discovery at the McGill University Libraries of five manuscript letters and notes sent in 1913 and 1914 to the French publisher and bookseller Édouard Champion. They were written by Jacques Boulenger (1879-1944), an editor, medievalist, social historian and Rabelais scholar who at the time was already noted for the eclectic range of the subjects he covered. The correspondence relates to Boulenger's book Au pays de Gérard de Nerval, which would be published by Champion in 1914. The book examines the area within the Valois region of France where Nerval spent part of his childhood and which is the setting of his novella Sylvie, one of his most celebrated works. The five documents are housed in a portfolio which also contains an annotated galley proof of the book, an annotated galley proof of the cover and a finished copy of the volume.¹

Au pays de Gérard de Nerval was the last book Boulenger wrote prior to the First World War. The conflict, in which he served both as an infantryman and as a reconnaissance plane pilot, was an important transition point for Boulenger as an author. His output after the war consisted mainly of literary criticism, essays, travel reports, novels, journalism and – controversially – works reflecting his far-right political views.

The paper has two main parts: a detailed overview of Boulenger's life and career, and a description of the documents which prompted this study. In the biographical section, I have paid particular attention to source materials which provide insights into Boulenger's work methods and personality. The second section reproduces the correspondence sent by Boulenger to Champion – a long letter, a short letter, and three very short notes – to make these items more widely available for study. I have included scanned images of the documents, along with scans of the annotations on the book covers. A transcription of the letters and notes is provided, accompanied by an interpretational analysis of their contents. For reading convenience, all the scanned images are grouped near the end of the paper, between the acknowledgements and the references.

Discussion of Sources

In this study, I will refer at several points to two documents published in Boulenger's era which supply biographical information about him. Both sources are useful, but they need to be viewed with caution because they show evidence of bias.

One of the sources is the article "Jacques Boulenger (1879-1944)," which appeared in 1946.² It was written by Robert Marichal (1904-1999), a French paleographer and archivist who, like Boulenger, was an alumnus of the distinguished *École nationale des chartes*. The article appeared in *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, a journal published by the school since 1840.

Marichal's three-page sketch depicts Boulenger in generally positive terms which demonstrate institutional pride – an example being the sentence "Nous ne nous étendrons pas davantage sur son abondante production littéraire : bien qu'il soit facile de montrer ce qu'elle doit à l' « esprit chartiste », elle déborde le cadre de cette Revue." Marichal, however, obfuscates an aspect of Boulenger's life which would have reflected badly on the *École* if he had described it in one of the school's own journals right after the Second World War. The single sentence in which he alludes to the issue says less about the nature of Boulenger's failings than about Marichal's wish to avoid the subject:

Mais, dans le domaine de l'érudition, Jacques Boulenger laisse aussi une œuvre de qualité, à laquelle ne doivent pas faire tort les erreurs politiques — pour ne pas dire plus — qui marquèrent fâcheusement les dernières années de sa vie.

What Marichal downplays as "unfortunate political errors" were Boulenger's activities from 1940 to 1944, during the Occupation. Boulenger was one of the French intellectuals who contributed to collaborationist newspapers under the Vichy regime, a period during which he also published racist and antisemitic books. The phrasing used by Marichal implies that Boulenger's errors were limited to "the last years" of his life, a choice of words which sidesteps the fact that his fellow *chartiste* had actually been involved in far-right politics since at least the mid-1920s. This fact was known to Marichal: his article includes a referenced quotation from a document in which Boulenger himself admits his early affiliation with fascism and expresses his antidemocratic views in surprisingly forthright terms. This document is the other biographical source which I have mentioned, and which I will now discuss: Boulenger's book *Entretien avec Frédéric Lefèvre*.³

Published in 1926, the volume provides valuable information about the author's life and career. Its objectivity and trustworthiness, however, are suspect. Its first section – which explains why Boulenger wrote the book – shows that he placed a great deal of importance

on controlling his own narrative, and that he was willing to use intellectual dishonesty to achieve this end.

In 1925, Boulenger had published a work titled Renan et ses critiques. In December of that year, Boulenger was approached by Maurice Martin du Gard (1896-1970), the founder and director of the artistic and literary journal Nouvelles littéraires. The journal included an interview column (« Une heure avec... ») by the writer and critic Frédéric Lefèvre (1889-1949), who served as the publication's editor in chief from 1922 to 1949. Some 300 interviews would appear in the column between 1922 and 1938. Martin du Gard felt that Renan et ses critiques would be a good subject for discussion in the column, and he suggested to Boulenger that he approach Lefèvre to arrange an interview.

Boulenger did so, but decidedly on his own terms. He invited Lefèvre to his home for lunch, and asked his governess to take particular care in the preparation of the food. The charming meal and the pleasant conversation Boulenger had with Lefèvre as they ate it were expressly for the purpose of setting up Lefèvre for the proposal which Boulenger wanted to pitch to him: the idea of Boulenger writing the interview himself (including Lefèvre's purported questions) and handing it to Lefèvre for publication.

Boulenger spends two entire paragraphs of his book explaining his rationale. The explanation is laborious, and its tone is slightly defensive. In the first paragraph, Boulenger claims that he is a poor speaker, that he has little taste for conversation, and that he is much more comfortable writing. The paragraph aims to justify his request to Lefèvre, but intentionally or not it reveals that Boulenger often made an unpleasant impression on people:

En effet, je ne suis à l'aise que la plume à la main : je parle très mal, mon éloquence est nulle et je n'ai pas d'esprit. Avancé-je une phrase ? je me demande aussitôt si j'y ai bien dit ce que je voulais, et si ce que j'y ai dit est exact, ou méritait d'être dit ; je souhaiterais de corriger, mais je ne le puis : alors je rectifie souvent dans la phrase suivante, qui ne me contente pas davantage, j'hésite, je tâtonne, et cela donne beaucoup d'incertitude à mon discours que je débite pourtant sur un ton d'assurance destiné à cacher mon inquiétude. Ou bien encore je m'excite, voire m'irrite, et m'abandonne à un bavardage autoritaire, plein de véhémence et, à l'occasion, de gaffes. Mais c'est surtout quand je m'applique, que ça va mal, car je veux alors trop « en mettre », comme on dit : mes propos sont tendus et pleins d'intentions si subtiles qu'on ne les démêle pas ; bref, je ressemble à cette vieille fille que Zola nous montre dans l'Assommoir, ou aux deux tantes du héros de Marcel Proust, dans Du côté de chez Swann. Au total, je goûte peu l'art de la conversation, n'y réussissant guère : c'est-à-dire que je ne me plais à causer qu'avec des gens que je connais bien et qui, ayant supporté ce que je leur présente de désagréable au premier abord (ou, par miracle, ne s'en étant pas aperçu), sont devenus des amis auprès desquels on s'abandonne. Mais Frédéric Lefèvre n'en était pas.⁴

The second paragraph attempts to legitimize Boulenger's proposed modus operandi by claiming that other writers featured in Lefèvre's column had done the same thing, and that the practice of reporters accepting manufactured interviews is journalistically legitimate:

Je dois dire que j'avais néanmoins quelque espoir d'obtenir de lui ce que je souhaitais, car je savais que, si certains de ceux avec qui il a eu des entretiens en avaient profité pour lui dicter tout un volume de leurs idées, beaucoup d'autres, qui n'avaient passé qu'une heure en sa compagnie, l'avaient employée à fumer des cigarettes et boire en faisant des pronostics sur le temps du lendemain, après quoi il avait reçu par la poste leurs interviews toutes rédigées, demandes et réponses. La plupart n'en font pas mystère ; de plus j'avais vu le manuscrit de l'un d'eux, entièrement de sa main, y comprises les questions prêtées à Lefèvre ; enfin il est facile de reconnaître le style, la manière : par exemple, je mettrais ma tête à couper que, dans l'Entretien avec Julien Benda, qui a été « tiré à part » et dont je possède un exemplaire orné d'une aimable dédicace de Lefèvre, il n'y a pas un mot de celui-ci... Hâtons-nous, au reste, d'ajouter que c'est un usage bien légitime, chez les reporters, que d'accepter avec reconnaissance les interviews qu'on leur donne ainsi toutes faites. Peut-être Frédéric Lefèvre exagère-t-il un peu en signant de son nom les volumes où il recueille les siennes. Mais cela ne fait de mal à personne, vraiment, et cela lui fait du bien, à lui.⁵

Boulenger's rationalizations fail to consider that he could have requested an interview format which would have accommodated his discomfort with conversation without the need to cut any ethical corners. The interview could have consisted of a list of questions sent by Lefèvre to Boulenger, who could have answered them in writing at his leisure; the article could then have been published without misrepresentation by stating that the interview had been conducted by correspondence rather than in person. The subsequent course of events, however, suggests that Boulenger had the additional motive of wanting to control the interview questions just as tightly as the answers – hence his proposal to Lefèvre to "lui remettre tout cuit son article pour les Nouvelles."

Lefèvre accepted, but on the understanding that he would add (as was his custom for the column) a prefatory "chapeau" of some thirty lines, signed by Lefèvre, offering a brief profile of the interviewee. The two men concluded their lunch engagement, which had been on a Friday. The following Monday morning, Boulenger delivered his manuscript to the Nouvelles littéraires office. Two days later, Boulenger returned to examine the galley proofs of the article. He was outraged to discover that Lefèvre had modified parts of the text. Boulenger concedes that Lefèvre "n'avait pas changé grand chose," especially in comparison to the degree to which the prepared answers of another of the "victimes de Lefèvre" (a writer who had complained to Boulenger) had allegedly been distorted. The unauthorized edits nonetheless set off an acrimonious back-and-forth exchange between Boulenger and Lefèvre. Martin du Gard eventually threw his hands up in despair and invoked closure when the publication deadline was reached.⁶

Unsurprisingly, the article's publication in the Nouvelles littéraires issue of January 16, 1926, did not end the matter. Boulenger felt compelled to set the record straight (as he saw it) by writing Entretien avec Frédéric Lefèvre, which was printed in September 1926. In the preface, Boulenger spends eleven pages explaining "pourquoi j'ai repris mon bien." The overstated accusations in this part of the book bring to mind Boulenger's description of the defects of his speaking style: "je m'excite, voire m'irrite, et m'abandonne à un bavardage autoritaire, plein de véhémence." Boulenger may well have been sincere when he claimed that "je ne suis à l'aise que la plume à la main," but this says nothing about whether he believed that his writings sounded less intemperate than his conversations.

The second section of the book, which is thirty-four pages long, is an edited version of the article which had appeared in Nouvelles littéraires. Boulenger says that "Je n'y ai fait que de légères corrections de forme avant de l'imprimer ci-dessous," but he pointedly draws attention to each and every "Question rédigée par Frédéric Lefèvre." Boulenger's disownment seems intended to convince his readers that these questions are illegitimate. He does not appear to realize, however, that by emphasizing that they were written by Lefèvre he also highlights the fact that most of the "interview" questions are fake ones written by Boulenger himself.

The remainder of the book devotes thirty-five pages to another heated dispute, this one between Boulenger and the literary critic and essayist Henri Massis (1886-1970). Massis had published in the immediately subsequent issue of Nouvelles littéraires a response to Lefèvre's "interview" with Boulenger, who vehemently disagreed with his fellow critic's analysis. The details of the ensuing polemic are of no particular interest in the context of the present paper, other than to say that what Boulenger writes (including an assertion, on the very first page, that Massis had falsified two of his citations)⁷ is consistent with his aggressive tone in the first part of the book. An ironic aspect of the feud between Massis and Boulenger is that, despite their differences over literary matters, the two men had similar political outlooks and both ended up collaborating actively during the Occupation.

Part 1: "Il vit de sa plume..."

An Overview of Boulenger's Life and Career

Early Works and the First World War

Jacques Boulenger was born on September 27, 1879,⁸ in the 8e arrondissement of Paris.⁹ He studied at the Lycée Condorcet,¹⁰ then at the École nationale des chartes, from which he graduated in 1900.¹¹

Like his brother Marcel Boulenger (1873-1932),^{12, 13} a novelist, essayist, journalist and critic who enjoyed horse-racing, fencing and writing autobiographical forgeries, Jacques had a diversified career in letters. His thesis Les protestants à Nîmes au temps de l'Édit de Nantes was his first book. It was published in the same year (1903) as his article “Étude critique sur les lettres écrites d'Italie par François Rabelais,” which appeared in the Revue des études rabelaisiennes. Boulenger subsequently published further studies relating to medieval history and books on various other topics, and edited both individual works by Rabelais and the collected works of the author.

Boulenger's literary career was interrupted by the First World War, then took a different course after he returned to civilian life. Boulenger discusses this shift in his “interview” with Frédéric Lefèvre, which opens with a passage that contrasts his life and work as they were before and after the Great War:

— j'ai lu vos ouvrages d'avant la guerre, les Dandys, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, dont on annonce la réimpression, est-ce vrai ?

— Réimpression ? J'ai entièrement refait le livre !

— ... Votre Grand Siècle ; je sais que vous avez fait beaucoup d'autres travaux d'histoire et d'érudition technique, et jusqu'à des ouvrages sur le sport, sur la mode. Mais il me semble que, depuis 1919, vous vous êtes orienté autrement.

— Que voulez-vous ? Lorsque je suis revenu après ces quatre ans de guerre et que j'ai retrouvé mes beaux vieux bouquins, mes fiches, mes objets anciens, etc., tout cela m'a paru mort, complètement mort.

Nous nous étions fait, dans notre petit groupe, une sorte d'idéal d'humanisme élégant, de « dandysme » cultivé : on se réunissait au bar, et il ne s'agissait pas d'ignorer plus la mode des chapeaux de femmes que les hypothèses sur l'auteur des miniatures des Heures du duc de Berry. Le souvenir de Jean de Tinan régnait ; le charmant P.-J. Toulet triomphait. On blaguait la « philosophie » et la « pppensée » ; on citait Catulle ; on se battait en duel ; on revenait toujours d'Italie ; on inventait des cocktails ; on discutait sur des points de langage... En 1919, ah ! que tout cela m'a paru fané ! En rentrant chez moi, je croyais arriver au royaume des ombres.¹⁴

Boulenger's nostalgic description of his pre-war associates is quoted almost in its entirety by Marichal in his 1946 article. Its opening paragraphs portray most of the group's members – with the exception of Boulenger – as slightly tragic figures who were unable to cope with the transition from the Belle Époque to the Lost Generation:

Avec Jacques Boulenger a disparu, le 22 novembre 1944, l'un des derniers héritiers d'un monde auquel la guerre de 1914 avait porté un coup fatal. [...] Disciples de France, de Régnier, de Gourmont, ces esprits charmants et un peu vains se virent soudain, malgré tout leur talent,

éclipsés par des écrivains : Péguy, Gide, Claudel, Valéry, Giraudoux, Proust, dont le succès, « forcé » comme dans une serre par la guerre, s'épanouit plus vite qu'on n'aurait pu le soupçonner. Retranchés du monde pendant quatre ans, ceux d'entre eux que la mort avait épargnés se trouvèrent, en 1919, dépayés. Leurs cadets, qui avaient assuré le précoce succès des nouveaux maîtres et marchaient dans leur ombre, les dépassèrent ; certains, inadaptables, sombrèrent, à quarante ans, dans l'oubli.

Boulenger, qui avait fait brillamment la guerre comme aviateur — dandysme oblige, et celui-là se teintait d'héroïsme, comme en fait foi la belle citation qui lui valut la croix de la Légion d'honneur — sut surmonter l'épreuve. Prolongeant quelques années encore son personnage, il fut, vers 1930, le héros d'un des derniers duels que Paris ait connus ; il fut « candidat au Stendhal-Club », membre du « Grammaire-Club » ; il rééditait, en 1923, *Monsieur ou le professeur de snobisme*.¹⁵

As Marichal notes, Boulenger was decorated for his wartime service. The citation which Marichal mentions in his *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* article appeared in a 1917 issue of the same publication:

Ont été nommés chevaliers de la Légion d'honneur :

Boulenger (Jacques), sous-lieutenant, pilote à une escadrille d'aviation :

Officier très méritant, passé dans l'aviation après trois blessures reçues dans l'infanterie; pilote qui recherche les missions périlleuses et s'est mesuré avec succès avec des avions de chasse ennemis. Les 28 et 29 juillet 1917, est descendu très bas sur les batteries ennemies pour faciliter à son observateur la reconnaissance des objectifs, malgré un feu violent des mitrailleuses de terre. Blessé le 29, a réussi à surmonter une défaillance physique passagère et à ramener au parc l'appareil et le passager. Trois fois cité à l'ordre.¹⁶

A contemporary [photograph](#) of Boulenger shows him posing with a military greatcoat over his shoulders, a walking stick behind him and a monocle in his left eye. His right arm is in a sling, which suggests that the picture was taken while he was recuperating from a wound. The image is interesting to compare with a similar [photograph](#) of his older brother Marcel taken in 1921. The two writers, whose physical resemblance is notable, are both standing indoors, shod in tall boots and looking at the camera with somber expressions. The main contrasts between the portraits involve the clothes and the surroundings. Jacques, who is described by Virginie Greene as “le critique érudit” in her short biographical profiles¹⁷ of Proust’s correspondents, is in a field uniform and is wearing a képi. He is leaning back against a plain closed door in a nondescript room, with two small framed pictures and a chair to his left. Marcel, called “le critique mondain” by Greene, is wearing an impeccable three-piece civilian riding outfit, complete with necktie and collar. With a hound beside him, he is posing in an elegant

carpeted room, his left hand resting lightly on the mantelpiece of a wide fireplace topped with an ornate clock and a ceiling-high mirror.

Interwar Criticism and Marcel Proust

Boulenger wrapped up his years of military service by publishing his 1918 book En escadrille, which dealt with aerial operations during the First World War. His article “L'affaire Shakespeare,” which appeared in the February 1, 1919 issue of the Revue de Paris, marked his return to the field of literary studies. In 1921, Boulenger became editor in chief of the weekly newspaper L'Opinion, which featured a literary supplement. He also contributed articles to the conservative daily L'Écho de Paris and occasionally wrote works of fiction, including the novels Le Miroir à deux faces (1928), Crime à Charonne (1937) and Adam et Ève (1938).

One of Boulenger's early postwar articles, published in the December 20, 1919 issue of L'Opinion, was the starting point of his complicated relationship with Marcel Proust.¹⁸ The novelist had recently been awarded the prestigious prix Goncourt for his book À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, the second volume of his seven-part work À la recherche du temps perdu. Boulenger (to Proust's delight) defended him against the detractors who considered him “trop riche ou trop vieux pour un prix Goncourt”, but he did so as a matter of principle rather than on the grounds of taste. Although Boulenger recognized the importance of the novel and the originality of its author, he regarded the book as badly written and he believed that Proust “n'a de souci que de vérité au sens scientifique et se moque de l'esthétique.” As was his practice with other important critics, Proust thereafter tried to charm Boulenger by flattering him with invitations to dinner and introductions to aristocrats. This method – whose ulterior motives are similar to those of Boulenger when he treated Frédéric Lefèvre to a fine lunch in 1925 – only succeeded in making him suspicious of Proust.

Interwar Political Affiliations and Antidemocratic Views

In 1936, the year of its foundation, Boulenger joined the Parti populaire français (PPF),¹⁹ the country's main fascist-leaning party in the period from 1936 to 1939. Along with the Rassemblement national populaire (RNP), it was one of the two primary collaborationist parties in France during the Occupation.

Boulenger's attraction to fascism had started at least ten years earlier, as can be seen in his 1926 book Entretien avec Frédéric Lefèvre. The last seven pages of the interview section of the volume are devoted to his political views – a topic he evidently wanted to

address because (as will be remembered) he wrote nearly all of the “interview” questions himself.

He begins this part of the book by making a few remarks about the far-right Action française movement, then disingenuously says “Mais laissons la politique.” Boulenger then switches to his Lefèvre persona and gives himself an opening to launch into a denunciation of democracy in general and of socialist governments in particular:

— Parlons-en au contraire. Je voudrais savoir pourquoi vous vous êtes rallié à certain groupement fasciste. Pensez-vous vraiment que la dictature est un bon régime ?

— Renan souhaitait de vivre sous un bon tyran. Or, nous vivons actuellement sous une tyrannie en formation qui peut devenir parfaite sous un ministère socialiste ; et déjà elle est bien armée : vous connaissez la fameuse loi, votée d ailleurs sous le ministère Poincaré (sauf erreur), qui permet de poursuivre n'importe qui pour « atteinte au crédit de l'Etat ». Mais cette tyrannie est mauvaise, non pas en tant que tyrannie, mais en tant que tyrannie anonyme, collective, incapable de vouloir, en raison de son origine et de son essence même. C'est cela qui fait son incapacité à rétablir les affaires de l'Etat.

Les élections prétendent exprimer la « volonté du peuple » ; mais la « volonté du peuple » n'est qu'une fiction. Une foule, une masse, de quelque façon qu'elle soit composée, n'a pas de volonté, puisqu'elle n'a pas de raison. On parle du « bon sens populaire », cela ne veut rien dire. Individuellement, chaque Français est doué de bon sens : c'est même une des qualités les plus précieuses qu'il doive à son hérédité. Mais prenez mille personnes pleines de bon sens, assemblez-les, bref faites-en une foule : vous créerez ainsi un être collectif, qui n'aura presque plus d'intelligence, qui sera entièrement soumis aux mouvements de sensibilité les plus spontanés, les plus absurdes, à l'enthousiasme, à la panique, à tous les instincts. Rien de plus ignoble que cet être collectif qu'on appelle une « foule ». Or, nous vivons sous la tyrannie d'une foule.²⁰

Boulenger's editorial against parliamentarism then continues for five more pages. One of his paragraphs draws a parallel between his low opinion for the performing arts and his evident contempt for the masses, while another implies that socialist dictatorships are objectionable not because they are authoritarian but because they are collectivist :

Les arts les moins élevés dans la hiérarchie intellectuelle sont ceux qui, par définition, s'adressent aux foules : tels le théâtre et l'éloquence. Entendez-moi : je ne prétends pas que l'artiste doive travailler pour satisfaire quelques personnes seulement : au contraire, c'est le propre des grandes œuvres que d'avoir une large audience. Mais le livre, s'il s'adresse à nous tous, c'est en tant qu'individus : il parle à chacun de nous seul à seul, pour nombreux que soit son public, et au moment où nous sommes le plus maîtres de nous-mêmes. Au contraire la pièce de théâtre, et surtout le discours s'adressent à nous en tant que collectivité : ils sont faits pour plaire à des gens assemblés, à une foule ; ils se proposent de toucher, non pas notre âme individuelle, pour ainsi parler, mais notre âme collective, non pas ce qu'il y a de plus intelligent et de plus fin en nous,

mais ce qui s'y trouve de plus grossier et de moins intellectuel : aussi ne cherchent-ils pas à faire réfléchir, mais à émouvoir...²¹

[...]

Beaucoup de Français commencent d'ailleurs à comprendre que le parlementarisme est, à tout prendre, un régime de luxe et que leur pays ne peut se payer ce luxe en ce moment-ci. Ils se disent que le redressement financier, les économies qu'il comporte, la réforme monétaire, le réajustement des impôts, tout cela ne pourra être fait rapidement, complètement et aux moindres frais que par une dictature financière. Les socialistes eux-mêmes, remarquez-le, ne proposent rien autre que la dictature d'un groupe (mauvaise à cause de cela même, je l'ai dit). Et remarquez encore que la dictature est dans la plus pure tradition républicaine : les républiques de l'antiquité y ont toujours recouru dans les moments de danger.

— Alors une dictature, un chef non contrôlé ?

— Qu'entendez-vous par « contrôlé » ? Nous ne voulons pas pour chef d'un président de soviet. Aucune « affaire », quelle qu'elle soit, ne marche qu'à la condition d'être menée par un chef responsable.²²

Boulenger concludes his comments by arguing that society would best be served by a corporatist model, a notion which was influential within fascist circles. He eventually stops himself – and wraps up the interview – by having “Lefèvre” say:

— Arrêtez, cher ami ! Ici nous disons : pas de politique, mais littérature d'abord et toujours. C'est notre façon d'être des hommes d'ordre !²³

The remark is in line with the intellectual elitism Boulenger had just demonstrated in his musings about how the State should and should not be run. At the time, 1926, he was presumably writing in the abstract. The Second World War, however, would later give Boulenger an opportunity to use his talents as a man of letters in a practical way to help an authoritarian government maintain “order” within French society.

Collaboration During the Second World War

Germany's conquest of the Low Countries and France in May and June 1940 led to the end of the Third Republic. Under the terms of the Armistice signed at Compiègne on June 22, France was divided by a demarcation line into a *Zone occupée* administered by the German Army and a notionally free *Zone libre*. The occupied zone, in the northern and western areas of the country, comprised about three-fifths of France's territory

During the Occupation, France and its colonial empire were technically an independent state, dubbed the *État français*. In practice, this entity had a collaborationist government

until November 1942 (when the *Zone libre* was occupied by Germany in response to the Allied landings in French North Africa) and was a puppet regime thereafter. Its head was Marshal Philippe Pétain, and its seat was at Vichy, in central France. The *État français* officially came into being when the National Assembly voted on July 10, 1940, to grant Pétain – who since June 16 had been *Président du Conseil des ministres* – full authority to promulgate a new state constitution. Over the next two days, he signed constitutional acts granting himself all legislative, judicial, administrative, executive and diplomatic powers – a literal application of Louis XIV’s apocryphal remark “L’État, c’est moi.”

Pierre Laval, who was named *Vice-président du Conseil des ministres* by Pétain on July 11, had presaged the character of the new government five days earlier when he had stated that “la démocratie parlementaire a perdu la guerre ; elle doit disparaître pour céder la place à un régime autoritaire, hiérarchisé, national et social.”²⁴ His words bear a striking resemblance to the views which Boulenger had expressed in his 1926 “interview” with Frédéric Lefèvre. And some of Boulenger’s literary activities during the Occupation were similarly presaged by Laval on the same occasion. When Pierre Massé, a member of the Senate, asked for assurances that the new constitution would guarantee personal rights and freedoms, Laval replied, “si vous entendez par liberté individuelle le droit pour tous les mètèques et les étrangers..., je préciserai par exemple que personne ne pourra être député s’il n’est français depuis plusieurs générations. C’est notre manière à nous de faire de la politique raciale.”²⁵

This is the territory into which Boulenger ventured in his 1943 book Le sang français.²⁶ The belly band with which the book was issued described it in the following terms:

Les questions de race, d’ethnie, de nation ont été étudiées depuis Gobineau par un grand nombre de savants et de chercheurs. Il n’existe pas en France d’ouvrage qui donne de ces concepts une idée claire au public non spécialisé ; pas d’ouvrage non plus qui analyse la composition du peuple français, qui montre à la fois les disparates et l’homogénéité. Jacques Boulenger a consacré des années à l’étude de ces problèmes. LE SANG FRANÇAIS nous apporte, avec les vues personnelles de l’auteur, une synthèse de tous les travaux importants publiés sur ces questions d’une brûlante actualité. Nous ajouterons que dans ses conclusions l’auteur se montre beaucoup plus optimiste que ses prédécesseurs et qu’il s’élève avec vigueur contre la qualité de « mètis » que l’on attribue généralement au peuple français.

A work of scientific racism, Le sang français shows the influence of René Martial (1873-1955), a French medical doctor and eugenicist. Martial felt that unregulated immigration was a threat because it led to the non-selective hybridization (“métissage anarchique”) of French blood, which in his view would result in “la désagrégation de la race.”²⁷ The title of one of his books is a virtual checklist of his areas of interest: La race française : le sol, les racines, la souche, la croissance et les greffons (Arabes, Normands, Italiens, Hollandais,

etc.) : la greffe inter-raciale, la trilogie, histoire, psychologie, biologie : le nouveau rejet ou transfusion sanguine ethnique.

What Martial opposed was not “hybridization” of the French population in and of itself, but rather certain racialized types of hybridization. His proposed solution was to use blood groups as a criterion for the selection of immigrants. He described this concept in works such as Les Métis : nouvelle étude sur les migrations, le mélange des races, le métissage, la retrempe de la race française et la révision du code de famille, published in 1942. This particular book included more direct statements of some of the measures Martial was advocating, notably “Dans le code de la famille interdiction du mariage d'un Français ou une Française avec un Jaune ou un Noir.”²⁸

In his own book on the subject, Boulenger refers to Martial when he similarly calls for the creation of a “ministère de la race et de la famille.”²⁹ There are also echoes of the distinction made by Martial between good and bad “hybridization” in this metaphorical discussion by Boulenger of the concept of racial superiority:

C'est ainsi qu'à force de métissages et de tâtonnements tout d'abord, puis de pureté, on est arrivé aux admirables chevaux de course d'aujourd'hui, qui sont, non seulement de beaucoup les plus rapides du monde, mais aussi les plus endurants [...] A quoi tient la supériorité du cheval de pur sang en tous les domaines, aussi bien en vitesse qu'en endurance ? A son excellente construction physique et à la qualité des « matériaux » dont il est fait, c'est certain, mais non pas à cela seulement. Elle tient aussi, puisqu'elle n'est pas spécialisée, à la valeur de ce qu'on pourrait appeler son « influx nerveux », à son « courage » ou aux instincts qui correspondent jusqu'à un certain point à ce qui seraient chez un être humain ces qualités-là. Et, s'il était ici besoin d'une preuve, la supériorité générale du pur sang montrerait que les caractères moraux font partie de l'héritage reçu et légué aussi bien que les caractères somatiques ou, pour mieux dire, corporels. Ainsi, depuis longtemps, les éleveurs savent isoler par des croisements calculés tels ou tels caractères, et de belles races d'animaux sont nées. Ces créations sont devenues beaucoup plus faciles depuis que les lois de Mendel sont connues.³⁰

Boulenger's “synthèse de tous les travaux importants publiés sur ces questions d'une brûlante actualité” includes references to such figures as Egon von Eickstedt (1892-1965), one of the leading racial theorists of Nazi Germany; Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), the author of An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races; and Georges Vacher de Lapouge (1854-1936), the founder of anthroposociology and a theoretician of eugenics and scientific racism. On the first page of his introduction, Boulenger adopts von Eickstedt's definition of race:

Il est nécessaire d'abord de passer rapidement la revue de quelques termes un peu ondoyants que j'emploierai souvent : race, lignée, ethnie, nation, nationalité, patrie, nationalisme, patriotisme, peuple, et qui correspondent à d'assez obscures idées claires. [...] Von Eickstedt voit dans la race

« un groupe d'individus présentant une réunion constante et caractéristique de traits corporels normaux, héréditaires et possédant une latitude limitée de variations. » Nous donnerons au mot cette signification que nous examinerons plus à plain au chapitre premier.³¹

Near the end of the book, Boulenger offers a whimsically-toned assessment of Lapouge relative to Gobineau, in which he praises Lapouge for having a superior grasp of the distinction between race and ethnicity but faults him for placing too much emphasis on cranial measurements:

En France l'auteur de l'Essai sur l'inégalité des races n'eut jamais qu'un seul et unique disciple : Vacher de Lapouge. Celui-ci [...] a précisé sur certains points les idées que Gobineau émettait trente ou quarante ans avant lui avec infiniment plus de pénétration, de brillant et de talent. C'est ainsi qu'il distingue plus nettement que son prédécesseur la race de l'ethnie (et c'est capital) [...]. Lapouge voit très bien l'importance de l'hérédité [...]. Mais il tient vraiment trop de compte du gabarit des crânes. Ah ! ces "brachycéphales", ces "dolichocéphales" ! Pour lui, tout est là. Le crâne témoigne de tout.³²

Prior to Le sang français, Boulenger had published the books Quelque part, sur le front (1940) and Accusés, levez-vous! (1941). I have not seen any complete or even partial reproductions of these two volumes, but the information I have obtained from other sources gives an adequate idea of their contents.

Quelque part, sur le front : images de la présente guerre was written by Boulenger. The bibliographic records for the book indicate that it is a personal narrative and that its title page says “Les lettres ... ont été adressées au Directeur du Temps entre le 12 octobre 1939 et le 6 janvier 1940.” The website Écrits de Guerre et d’Occupation (EGO 1939-1945) provides this summary of the work, written by Françoise Passera:

Jacques Boulenger est correspondant de guerre. L'ouvrage reprend ses articles adressés au "Temps" entre le 12 octobre 1939 et le 6 janvier 1940. Les papiers censurés et remodelés sont signalés dans la préface. L'auteur offre des récits détaillés de la vie militaire pendant la Drôle de Guerre. Valorisant à tout moment l'Armée, du général à l'homme du rang, Boulenger rassure sans cesse son lecteur sur le courage des soldats et la modernité de l'armement. S'il s'arrête sur la capture de soldats allemands à l'occasion de coups de main dans le no man's land, le journaliste-écrivain met aussi l'accent sur les spécificités de la guerre qui se prépare. Il insiste sur ses dimensions économique et psychologique, évoquant notamment la propagande allemande diffusée par haut-parleurs et destinée aux soldats français.³³

Accusés, levez-vous! : dessins d'hier, vérités d'aujourd'hui, 1934-1940 is a compilation of political cartoons drawn by André-René Charlet (born 1906), with accompanying text written for the book by Boulenger. According to the Bibliothèque nationale de France's <https://data.bnf.fr/> reference file, Charlet was a nationalist, antisemitic, anticommunist newspaper cartoonist whose work appeared primarily in L'Espoir français.³⁴ His career

ended with the liberation of France. Several copies of the book were on offer by various antiquarian dealers on the www.livre-rare-book.com site when I was doing the research for this paper, and two of the vendor descriptions characterized some of its material as firmly antisemitic. According to one of these descriptions, many of the cartoons target the *Front populaire*, a coalition of left-wing groups (including the Parti radical, the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière and the Parti communiste) which existed from July 1935 to November 1938. The other vendor description provides the following list of section titles: Prologue – Les élections de 1936 – Les chefs – Les députés – Les juifs – Les fauteurs de guerre – Epilogue.

The book's 1941 publication date and the reference to 1940 in the subtitle suggest that the "vérités d'aujourd'hui" which Boulenger had in mind were the beliefs and policies of the Vichy-era government. Pétain's reactionary *État français* was not, strictly speaking, a fascist state, but it was profoundly conservative and authoritarian. It rejected liberalism, intellectualism and the equalitarian principles of the French Revolution; it depicted the period of the Third Republic as an era of decadence, for which it blamed communists, Jews and freemasons; it promoted an agrarian, Catholic vision of French society; and it created an omnipresent personality cult around the *Maréchal*, whose radio and newsreel addresses to the nation conveyed his stern paternalism:

Croyez-moi, le moment n'est pas venu de vous réfugier dans l'amertume ou de sombrer dans le désespoir. Vous n'êtes ni vendus, ni trahis, ni abandonnés. Ceux qui vous le disent vous mentent et vous jettent dans les bras du communisme. Vous souffrez et vous souffrirez longtemps encore, car nous n'avons pas fini de payer toutes nos fautes. L'épreuve est dure et beaucoup de bons Français, et parmi eux les paysans et les ouvriers, l'acceptent avec noblesse. Ils m'aident aujourd'hui à supporter ma lourde tâche. Mais il me faut mieux encore. Il me faut votre foi, la foi de votre cœur, la foi de votre raison. Il me faut votre sagesse et votre patience. Vous ne les acquerez que dans la discipline que je vous impose et dont seuls les oublieux de notre Histoire ou les adversaires de notre unité cherchent à s'évader.³⁵

In addition to the monographs he published during the Occupation, Boulenger wrote numerous articles for collaborationist periodicals. His work in this area is summarized by Gisèle Shapiro in her study "La Collaboration littéraire," an examination of the activities of fifty-five authors who collaborated with the Vichy regime.³⁶

Shapiro identifies three categories of periodicals for which Boulenger wrote. One of these groups consists of intellectual journals such as *Panorama* and of politico-literary weeklies such as *L'Appel* and *Je suis partout*. *L'Appel*³⁷ was an organ of the political movement called the Ligue française d'épuration, d'entraide sociale et de collaboration européenne, later known as the Ligue française antibritannique et antibolchévique. *Je suis partout*³⁸ was the most important and influential collaborationist and antisemitic

periodical during the Occupation. Its editor in chief, Robert Brasillach, was executed after the war; other staff members received a range of harsh sentences from the postwar French courts, including four death sentences pronounced in absentia.

Boulenger also contributed to periodicals connected to the Parti populaire français (PPF) and the Rassemblement national populaire (RNP), which have already been mentioned as the two primary collaborationist parties in France during the Occupation. Le Cri du peuple,³⁹ a daily newspaper, and L'Émancipation nationale,⁴⁰ a weekly, were issued by the PPF. Révolution nationale⁴¹ was published by the Mouvement social révolutionnaire, which was close to (and later merged with) the RNP.

The other serial publications in which Boulenger's articles appeared were national daily newspapers which were allowed to operate during the Occupation. One of these, Le Matin,⁴² established in 1884, drifted towards the extreme right during the interwar period and promptly became collaborationist at the time of the Armistice. Les Nouveaux temps⁴³ was founded with German assistance in November 1940; it operated at a loss, and was subsidized by Germany to make up for its lack of readership. Aujourd'hui,⁴⁴ established on June 22, 1940, was intended by its founder, Henri Jeanson, to be an independent paper. Jeanson resigned in November 1940 when the German authorities ordered the newspaper to take a pro-collaboration and anti-Jewish stance, a position which was then implemented by his successor, Georges Suarez. Arrested after the 1944 liberation of Paris, and sentenced to death in October of the same year, Suarez was executed by firing squad the following month at the Fort de Montrouge,⁴⁵ where in 1945 Marshal Pétain would be detained for three months by the postwar French authorities before being placed on trial for treason.

Last Months

The liberation of France began with the D-Day landings of June 6, 1944. As the Allied forces advanced through Normandy, the territories they cleared came under the authority of the recently-formed Gouvernement provisoire de la République française, headed by General Charles de Gaulle. The Allied invasion of southern France on August 15, 1944, accelerated the collapse of the Vichy regime, which for practical purposes ceased to exist on August 20 when Pétain was removed from Paris by the German army. German forces in the capital surrendered on August 25, and de Gaulle entered the city in triumph on the following day.

On October 14, de Gaulle gave a speech in Paris calling upon all French citizens to put aside their differences and join in the task of rebuilding the nation. Conscious that the

bitter events of the past four years “nous ont blessés et opposés les uns aux autres,” he sought to minimize the extent to which there had been collaboration with the occupiers:

Mais, à part une poignée de misérables et d'indignes, dont l'État fait et fera justice, l'immense majorité d'entre nous furent et sont des Français de bonne foi. Il est vrai que beaucoup ont pu se tromper à tel moment ou à tel autre, depuis qu'en 1914 commença cette guerre de trente ans. Je me demande même qui n'a jamais commis d'erreur ? Il est vrai que certains ont pu céder à l'illusion ou au découragement quand le désastre et le mensonge avaient submergé notre pays. Il est vrai que même parmi ceux qui s'opposèrent vaillamment à l'ennemi, il y a eu des degrés divers dans le mérite [...]. Mais quoi ? La France est formée de tous les Français. Elle a besoin, sous peine de périr, des cœurs, des esprits, des bras de tous ses fils et de toutes ses filles. Elle a besoin de leur union, non point celle que l'on proclame dans des programmes ou des discours pour la compromettre en même temps par querelles, outrages et surenchères, mais de leur union réelle, sincère, fraternelle.⁴⁶

De Gaulle's narrow conceptualization of the writers who had supported the Vichy regime is rejected by Shapiro:

Cette enquête montre que la collaboration intellectuelle ne peut être réduite à une « poignée de misérables » selon la vision que le général de Gaulle tenta d'imposer de ces « traîtres » à la nation. [...] La collaboration littéraire est formée, pour ce qui concerne les hommes de lettres, d'une élite sociale et culturelle distinguée et honorée ainsi que de prétendants bien nantis en titres scolaires.⁴⁷

She also partially rejects the collaborator portrait sketched by Jean-Paul Sartre in his 1949 essay “Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?”

Selon Sartre, le collaborateur était en effet issu le plus souvent de la bourgeoisie. Cependant, d'après Sartre, qui emprunte à Durkheim son analyse des causes du suicide, la collaboration n'est pas un phénomène de classe mais « un fait de désintégration », comme la criminalité et le suicide. Or notre enquête montre au contraire que, le plus souvent, le collaborateur est un homme de lettres professionnalisé et socialisé dans les instances représentatives du métier, non pas un individu désaffilié.⁴⁸

Although the fifty-five writers in Shapiro's sample do not constitute a uniform group, she notes that more than half of them were men aged 50 and older, with the vast majority on the political right (and a good many of them on the extreme right), and that the pro-fascist sympathies of several dated back to the 1930s. This is a description which fits Boulenger comfortably, as does this part of the general profile which Shapiro draws:

L'écrivain collaborateur appartient à une « élite » sociale. C'est plutôt un homme en fin de carrière, issu le plus souvent de la moyenne bourgeoisie parisienne, ayant fait des études, mais pas assez poussées pour accéder à un poste élevé dans la fonction publique ou à l'enseignement

supérieur ; il vit de sa plume comme journaliste professionnel tout en poursuivant des ambitions littéraires.⁴⁹

De Gaulle's October appeal to his compatriots included the assurance that the alleged minority of French individuals who had not been "of good faith" would face a judicial reckoning for their actions. This reckoning was the *épuration légale* which began with the liberation and whose main period of activity lasted until about 1949. Boulenger never faced these legal proceedings. He died on November 22, 1944, just thirty-nine days after de Gaulle's speech, in the same 8e arrondissement of Paris where he had been born sixty-five years earlier.⁵⁰

Some idea of what might have happened to Boulenger if he had lived can be gathered from the individual cases (such as those of Robert Brasillach and Georges Suarez) which have already been discussed, and from Shapiro's study, which ends with a summary of the fates of the other writers in her sample. Most were blacklisted by the Comité national des écrivains, which published in September 1944 a first inventory (a second one would subsequently be issued) of authors who were deemed undesirable or who were banned outright from publishing. About half of them were sentenced to punishments which ranged up to the death penalty (though only two of the executions actually occurred). The other sanctions imposed included imprisonment (for life or shorter durations), hard labour and *dégradation nationale* – exclusion from certain fields of activity, and the loss of various civil rights. Some of the sentenced authors were ultimately able to establish careers in lower-profile writing jobs after 1953, when a general amnesty was declared.⁵¹

Part 2: "La petite étude que je me propose..."

Boulenger's Au pays de Gérard de Nerval

Unlike Jacques, whose life began and ended in the French capital, Marcel Boulenger was born in Paris but died in Chantilly, twelve years before his younger brother.⁵² The family seems to have had a long-standing presence there: a 1911 electoral roll shows that Marcel was residing in Chantilly in that year, and an earlier telephone directory indicates that his father Jules Romain Boulenger lived there in 1908.⁵³

Chantilly is north and slightly east of Paris, about 40 kilometers away by the most direct road. It is historically part of the Pays de Valois, one of France's natural regions. As Jacques no doubt appreciated while he was doing the field research for his 1914 book, the town is conveniently close to the places where the Paris-born Gérard de Nerval spent the first few years of his childhood: the hamlet of Loisy and the commune of Mortefontaine, which are roughly 17 kilometers south-east of Chantilly. The area is described in the following terms by Catherine Clot at the beginning of "Le Valois, de Gérard de Nerval,

illustré par Germaine Krull,” her examination of the pictures which Krull, a German photographer, took there in the 1930s:

Le Valois, un lieu géographiquement identifiable. La carte y montre à vol d’oiseau des forêts, des étangs dont l’ovale s’étire, entre la Thève et la Nonnette, des routes bordées d’arbres, bandes tachées d’ombre en été, aux côtés desquelles courent les murets de pierres ajustées, derrière se cachent de grands parcs. Et puis les brumes qui effacent tout.

Un lieu historique aussi, où les villes Senlis, Ermenonville, Chaalis, Mortefontaine... parlent des rois de France et des philosophes.

Le Valois, c’est peut-être plus encore le pays de Sylvie, sur lequel Gérard de Nerval laissa durablement son empreinte par la vision qu’il en eut, vision inscrite dans notre mémoire collective. Cette poétique des lieux, où se mêlent souvenirs lointains et pérégrinations, parcourt l’œuvre de l’auteur, revenant comme un leitmotiv dans plusieurs de ses textes.⁵⁴

Sylvie: souvenirs du Valois was originally issued on its own in 1853 in the Revue des deux mondes. It then became part of Les Filles du feu, a collection of stories by Nerval which was published in 1854. Nerval considered Sylvie to be his best story. The work is a complex, memory-driven tale in which past and present sometimes blur together as the narrator sets out from Paris to revisit the region where he was born.

Some critics (like Théophile Gautier) characterized Sylvie as a naïve pastoral idyll, or (as in the case of Maurice Barrès) praised it as a lovely and traditional French text.⁵⁵ Proust scoffed at such interpretations, which in his view reduced Nerval to “un écrivain du xviii^e siècle attardé et que le romantisme n’influença pas. Un pur Gaulois, traditionnel et local, qui a donné dans Sylvie une peinture naïve et fine de la vie française idéalisée.”⁵⁶ For his part, Proust regarded Sylvie as a proto-Modernist work of genius⁵⁷ – unsurprisingly, given the parallels between Nerval’s story and Proust’s own À la recherche du temps perdu. Proust does not make the connection explicitly in the “Gérard de Nerval” chapter of the posthumous collection Contre Sainte-Beuve, but Bernard de Fallois does so in his preface to the 1954 Gallimard edition:

Nerval [...] a tout pressenti. Le Valois de Sylvie c’est la campagne de Combray, le pays de l’enfance retrouvé, âme et décor du roman. L’attaque du récit, lorsque Gérard sur la route de Loisy, revoit les scènes de sa jeunesse, c’est le début de La Recherche, et les chambres qui défilent successivement devant les yeux du narrateur.⁵⁸

Boulenger had been planning a book about Gérard de Nerval since at least 1913, as his long letter to Champion indicates. He also wanted (as will be noted in the analysis of the letter) to see a new edition of Nerval’s complete works published, preferably with himself

as its editor. The larger context of Boulenger's two interrelated projects is given by Clot in her study of Germaine Krull's photographs:

L'intérêt que suscite Nerval après sa mort aboutit à une première publication des œuvres complètes de 1867 à 1877 chez Lévy, mais elle comporte de nombreuses approximations. Grâce aux symbolistes comme Remy de Gourmont, Odilon Redon, qui partagent les visions du poète, une redécouverte de son œuvre est rendue possible. Au début du xxe siècle, certaines études comme celle d'Aristide Marie, publiée en 1914, présentent l'œuvre à travers l'homme. Cette biographie est accompagnée d'un certain nombre de documents inédits et de photographies à caractère documentaire, notamment celles des frères Neurdein, et témoigne d'un désir d'identification des lieux nervaliens, en particulier le Valois, berceau de son enfance. Le livre de Jacques Boulenger, publié la même année, va plus loin encore en partant au pays de Gérard de Nerval pour y mener une véritable enquête sur les traces de « Gérard Labrunie » afin de démêler le vrai du faux dans l'œuvre du poète, là encore photos à l'appui.⁵⁹

The long letter is the only piece of correspondence to Champion which carries a specific date: September 13, 1913. The date and the place of origin, Chantilly, appear both on the letter itself and on the envelope's postmark. It was sent five months after the death of Honoré Champion (1846-1913), who in 1874 had founded the publishing firm which still bears his name today. The letter is addressed to the Honoré's son Édouard (1882-1938), who had succeeded his father as the director of the family business.

13 s[eptem]bre 1913. Chantilly

Mon cher ami,

je ne savais pas que vous pensiez à une édition de Gérard de Nerval ; en revanche je croyais que vous prépariez, vous Édouard, un livre sur lui. L'édition me paraît si nécessaire que j'en avais moi-même parlé déjà à un de vos confrères. L'édition Calmann est moins fantine matériellement que les premières éditions Lévy, mais beaucoup plus inexacte, car, pour ne pas répéter dans la Bohême galante certains morceaux de Sylvie et d'Angélique, les éditeurs ont froidement, non seulement coupé, mais aussi modifié un bon nombre de phrases du texte de Gérard. Il va de soi qu'il suffit que vous projetiez une édition de Gérard pour que je renonce, moi, à mon projet, – à moins que nous puissions nous entendre ensemble. Mais M. Tourneux, aidé de M. Paul Lacombe, pour ce qui est de l'érudition, vous ne sauriez trouver mieux. Quand à Vaudoyer, c'est un amateur en pareille matière : je ne crois pas qu'il songe à autre chose qu'une étude de seconde ou de troisième main, une critique littéraire et esthétique. Et mon frère, je crois, n'aime pas

beaucoup Gérard de Nerval – ce qui ne l’empêchera pas, je l’espère, d’en parler quelque part, ne fût-ce que pour s’expliquer.

Je me permets de garder quelque jours encore votre dossier, puisque vous m’y autorisez : il m’est bien utile pour la petite étude que je me propose sur le "pays de Sylvie". Je ne sais si elle amusera ceux qui la liront, mais, à moi, elle m’aura fait faire de bien belles promenades, et, pour le sage ... Non, ne faisons pas nos Horace à la manque.

Ma Mère vous remercie de votre aimable souvenir ; veuillez trouver ici ceux de ma famille et toutes les amitiés de votre

Jacques Boulanger

The beginning of the letter ("je ne savais pas que vous pensiez à une édition de Gérard de Nerval ; en revanche je croyais que vous prépariez, vous Édouard, un livre sur lui") and a line near its end ("Je me permets de garder quelque jours encore votre dossier, puisque vous m’y autorisez") both indicate that Boulenger and Champion had already been in contact with each other regarding Nerval. Champion had lent some documentation to Boulenger on the subject and had given him permission to hold on to it for a while. The letter provides no further details about the earlier exchanges between the two men.

Boulenger refers to three editions of Nerval’s complete works. One is the edition already mentioned by Clot: Oeuvres complètes de Gérard de Nerval, published by Michel Lévy frères from 1867 to 1877. He also mentions the Calmann-Lévy version, titled Oeuvres complètes, which likewise began publication in 1867. As for the planned Champion edition, its appearance would end up being delayed by the war: titled Oeuvres complètes de Gérard de Nerval, it was issued from 1926 to 1931.

Boulenger was one of the editors of the Oeuvres de François Rabelais, which Champion had started to publish in 1912. Evidently hoping to be given the same role for an edition of the complete works of Nerval, he had already been lobbying Champion’s firm to that end ("L’édition me paraît si nécessaire que j’en avais moi-même parlé déjà à un de vos confrères"). Having now discovered that such a project was already in the works, he signals to Champion his interest in working out a deal: "Il va de soi qu’il suffit que vous projetiez une édition de Gérard pour que je renonce, moi, à mon projet, – à moins que nous puissions nous entendre ensemble". His frosty critique of the earlier Calmann and Levy editions probably expressed a genuine feeling of disapproval towards them, but it

may also have been intended to convince Champion that Boulenger was an expert on Nerval's works and therefore the ideal candidate for the job.

As a fall-back position, Boulenger then proceeds to offer his advice on who should edit the contemplated set of volumes if Champion were to decline to use Boulenger himself. He recommends "M. Tourneux, aidé de M. Paul Lacombe," on the grounds that "pour ce qui est de l'érudition, vous ne sauriez trouver mieux." Maurice Tourneux (1849-1917)⁶⁰ was an archivist, bibliographer and literary historian; he completed the Garnier edition of the Oeuvres complètes de Diderot which had started under the editorship of Jules Assezat (1832-1876). Paul Lacombe (1834-1919)⁶¹ was an archivist and historian who dabbled in such fields as sociology and psychology. Gérard Noiriel, a French socio-historian born in 1950, dismissed Lacombe as "un 'touche à tout' assez représentatif de la génération qui a précédé la professionnalisation de l'histoire," and called his major work De l'histoire considérée comme science "un tissu de banalités."⁶²

Boulenger also makes clear who should *not* be charged with editing Nerval's complete works: "Quand à Vaudoyer, c'est un amateur en pareille matière : je ne crois pas qu'il songe à autre chose qu'une étude de seconde ou de troisième main, une critique littéraire et esthétique." Jean-Louis Vaudoyer (1883-1963)⁶³ was a novelist, poet, essayist and art historian. Boulenger's unfavourable view of him may have had something to do with the sharply contrasting personalities of the two men. A tribute written in 1957 by Maurice Martin du Gard – the journal publisher who had inadvertently put Boulenger and Frédéric Lefèvre on a collision course with each other in 1925 – described Vaudoyer in these terms: "Une politesse égale, sans flatterie, point de masque, c'est l'honnête homme, le Français classique qui rend aimable la rectitude, séduisant le scrupule, plaît par une harmonieuse alliance de la bonne grâce et du bon sens ; esprit libre, ardent, mais sans délire, réglé et voluptueux."⁶⁴

Another potential editor whom Boulenger disqualifies is his brother Marcel: "Et mon frère, je crois, n'aime pas beaucoup Gérard de Nerval – ce qui ne l'empêchera pas, je l'espère, d'en parler quelque part, ne fût-ce que pour s'expliquer." Boulenger's statement is perhaps connected to the fact that Marcel had published in 1904 a collection of stories titled Au pays de Sylvie, but the overall meaning of the sentence is unclear.

The position for which Boulenger was angling ended up going neither to him nor to any of his nominees: the 1926-1931 Champion edition of the complete works of Nerval was directed by Aristide Marie, Jules Marsan and Édouard Champion himself. Marie has already been mentioned in one of the passages quoted from Clot, and I will return to him in my analysis of Boulenger's short letter. Jules Marsan (1867-1939)⁶⁵ was a professor at

the Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Toulouse; he edited Nerval's letters, which he published in 1911 under the title Correspondance: 1830-1855.

One of Boulenger's paragraphs is of particular interest because it mentions the writing project which would eventually become as Au pays de Gérard de Nerval:

Je me permets de garder quelque jours encore votre dossier, puisque vous m'y autorisez : il m'est bien utile pour la petite étude que je me propose sur le "Pays de Sylvie". Je ne sais si elle amusera ceux qui la liront, mais, à moi, elle m'aura fait faire de bien belles promenades, et, pour le sage ... Non, ne faisons pas nos Horace à la manque.

This part of the letter suggests that the draft title for the book was "Le pays de Sylvie." If so, Boulenger may perhaps have decided later that this was too similar to the title of his brother's collection of stories Au pays de Sylvie. A notable element of the paragraph is the nonchalance with which Boulenger – who ordinarily took a very serious view of his intellectual output – discusses his current writing project. He calls it a "petite étude," and he makes his pleasant excursions in the Valois region sound as if they were gratifying in and of themselves. He also underplays the significance of the book he is planning: his only stated ambition is to amuse his readers, and he expresses this goal as a low-key question ("Je ne sais si elle amusera ceux qui la liront") rather than as an assurance of success. His reference to Horace ("et, pour le sage ... Non, ne faisons pas nos Horace à la manque") is perplexing, but it possibly refers to the phrase "Wisdom is not wisdom when it is derived from books alone."

Boulenger closes his letter by conveying an amiable greeting from his mother and the good wishes of his family. Léonce Emma Augustine Morel was born in 1851; her husband, Jules Romain Boulenger, was born in 1843, and they married in 1872.⁶⁶

The next piece of correspondence to Champion is an undated note which accompanied the last part of Boulenger's manuscript when it was delivered to Champion:

Cher Edouard,

Voici la fin de mon ms.

*Amitiés,
J. B.*

This short and straightforward note stands in marked contrast with Boulenger's next letter to Champion. It was probably sent in early-to-mid April 1914, and the content shows that Au pays de Gérard de Nerval was being prepared for publication at this time:

Dumoulin se f... de nous (sf. votre respect), carissimo Eduardo. Ils m'ont réclamé il y a 2 jours les fumés du photgraveur qui, paraît-il, leur sont indispensables pour tirer leurs clichés ? ? ? Et depuis 15 ou 20 jours (mettons 15) les bons à tirer sont donnés ! Dès que vous aurez les exemplaires, prévenez-moi ; je ferai l'essentiel de mon service. Car il faut bien une 15aine de jours pour qu'on se décide à faire des articles (si on en fait, ce que j'espère, Dieu et vous (surtout) aidant).

Et le 26 commencent les élections ; et vlan ! Et je ne sais pas quand Marye doit paraître ; il m'avait dit en juin ou juillet, mais peut-être va-t-il se dépêcher. Et je compte fermement vous faire vendre ces 1000 exemplaires en 15 jours ; Arrangez tout cela !

Amicalement Jacques B.

The uneven but generally ill-tempered tone of the letter is set by the first sentence, which aims the censored vulgarism “se f[out] de nous” at Joseph Dumoulin (1875-1953),⁶⁷ a fellow graduate of the École nationale des chartes whose firm printed Boulenger's book. The “sf.” in the parenthetical remark is the abbreviation of “sforzando,” an indication that a musical piece should be played with prominent stress or accent. Combining this term of emphasis with “votre respect” in probably intended to mean “with all due respect to you,” and this usage may also explain why Boulenger then renders the affectionately polite phrase “dearest Édouard” in Italian.

Boulenger's letter is primarily motivated by his wish to complain about Dumoulin's requirements for the book's illustrations. The phrase “paraît-il” implies that the printer is either incompetent or unreasonably fussy, and Boulenger highlights his incredulity by ending his sentence with three question marks (which he circles for further emphasis). He then gives directions to Champion which seem to involve either proof copies of the plates or galley proofs of the entire book. The “Dieu et vous (surtout) aidant)” remark which follows these instructions can be interpreted as humour or flattery or sarcasm – or perhaps as some combination thereof – directed towards Champion.

The line “Et le 26 commencent les élections ; et vlan !” refers to France’s 1914 legislative elections, the two rounds of which took place on April 26 and May 10.⁶⁸ It implies a date of composition after March 26 but before April 26. I will discuss this line in more detail in the paper’s conclusion.

The sentence “Et je ne sais pas quand Marye doit paraître ; il m’avait dit en juin ou juillet, mais peut-être va-t-il se dépêcher” is (despite the spelling) a reference to the essayist Aristide Marie (1862-1938).⁶⁹ His book Gérard de Nerval : le poète, l’homme, d’après des manuscrits et documents inédits was published by Hachette in 1914. The spelling “Marye” may be a simple error, or it may have some sort of connection to a journalist and minor poet named Édouard Marye⁷⁰ who later edited the twelfth volume of Les oeuvres complètes de Gérard de Nerval (published by François Bernouard from 1927 to 1931).

The letter ends, as it began, with a blend of tones. Boulenger writes: “Et je compte fermement vous faire vendre ces 1000 exemplaires en 15 jours ; Arrangez tout cela ! Amicalement Jacques B.” An innocuous interpretation is that Boulenger is expressing confidence that his book will be a best-seller. A more literal reading is that Boulenger is ordering Champion to promote the book aggressively in his twin capacities of *éditeur-libraire*. Depending on what Boulenger meant, the salutation “amicalement” may only have been superficially friendly.

The remaining pieces of correspondence from Boulenger are two short notes. They are undated, but their content shows that they were written a day apart:

Lundi 7 heures

Mon cher Edouard

voulez-vous être assez gentil pour apporter à votre magasin le texte de mon ms. que vous avez chez vous – si toutefois vous ne l’avez point encore fait ? Je l’enverrai chercher demain mardi après déjeuner ; de manière à pouvoir vous remettre l’autre pour l’imprimerie et garder celui-là pr. la Rev. critique.

Amitiés

Jacques Boulanger

22 rue Oudinot

Cher ami,

voulez-vous remettre mon ms. à la bonne ci-jointe, s.v.p.

A vous

J.B.

Boulenger wrote these two notes to make arrangements to recover the manuscript of his book from Champion. The phrase “vous remettre l’autre pour l’imprimerie” implies that the book was still in production, but this does not indicate clearly whether the notes were sent before or after the short letter. I have assumed the latter case for the purposes of this discussion and for the sequencing of the scanned image reproductions.

One of the two notes carries Édouard Champion’s address: 5 quai Malaquais. This is the same address which appears on the envelope in which Boulenger’s 1913 letter was sent. Champion’s bookstore had moved in 1905 to this location in the 6e arrondissement of Paris, on the edge of the Seine. The note also gives Boulenger’s own address: 22 rue Oudinot, a building at the corner of the boulevard des Invalides, situated in the same 6e arrondissement as Champion’s store. Boulenger was still living there in 1919, as some of his correspondence with Proust indicates.⁷¹

Boulenger’s insistence on the return of his manuscript perhaps offers a clue regarding the provenance of the items now held by Rare Books and Special Collections. Although the letters and notes were addressed to Édouard Champion, they may have been sent back to Boulenger along with the galley proof and the finished copy of Au pays de Gérard de Nerval. In this scenario, the material being described would originally have been part of Boulenger’s personal papers rather than having been in Champion’s files.

This still leaves unresolved the question of how these documents made their way to McGill. The portfolio housing them has an undated label with the accession number 386897, which is outside the range of the accession registers which have been retained. The material was most likely acquired by McGill around 1949. This estimate is derived partly from an unrelated book which carries a label giving both an accession number (371752) and a year of acquisition (1947), and partly from a shelflist record for the Boulenger portfolio. The shelflist entry includes a number (10864-7-4-49) whose last part may express a date (July 4 or April 7, 1949). The portfolio also has a bookplate reading “McGill University: Soldiers’ Memorial Book Fund – James Sutherland

Bequest.” This appears to be a reference to James Sutherland Thomson (1892-1972), who served as Dean of McGill’s Faculty of Divinity from 1949 to 1957.⁷²

Conclusion

The five pieces of correspondence sent to Édouard Champion in 1913 and 1914 are a small window through which we can catch a few glimpses of Jacques Boulenger shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. These glimpses are fleeting ones, but what they show of him is in character with what we know about him from other sources.

The long letter he wrote in September 1913 is polite and finely styled. In it, we recognize Boulenger the professional man of letters as he makes overtures to advance his career, and Boulenger the opinionated intellectual who speaks with the voice of authority as he states his views to Champion. By contrast, the short letter sent in 1914 is poorly focused in content and annoyed in tone. Boulenger addresses Champion in a manner which is at times fawning and at times peremptory; he complains angrily but none too clearly about Champion's printer; he expresses what seems to be impatience towards his fellow writer Aristide Marie; and he makes a cryptic comment about the upcoming national election. In this letter, we see the abrasive side of Boulenger’s personality: his quick temper, his aggressive way of exercising control on matters related to his literary output, and his tendency to go on the attack when he was displeased with particular individuals and situations.

An intriguing question about the letter is whether Boulenger’s remark about the election was motivated by the same political beliefs he would express in his 1926 "interview" with Frédéric Lefèvre. The remark ("Et le 26 commencent les élections ; et vlan !") is short and vague, and Boulenger does not elaborate upon it. "Vlan!" – the equivalent of "Wham!" in English – is an onomatopoeic term which denotes a sudden and dramatic development. Its sense is not necessarily negative, but in this instance the crankiness of Boulenger’s other comments to Champion implies that he was expressing disenchantment rather than enthusiasm about the forthcoming ballot.

Boulenger was 34 years old when he wrote the short letter. Given that he admitted an attraction to fascism just a dozen years later, in 1926, he was more likely to have been on the conservative right of the political spectrum in 1914 than in the centre or on the left. If so, he could not have been pleased that the legislative elections of 1902,⁷³ 1906⁷⁴ and 1910⁷⁵ had all produced governing coalitions dominated by the left. Boulenger may thus have been predicting ruefully that the upcoming vote would do likewise – which indeed turned out to be the case.

An even harsher possibility is that Boulenger already had antidemocratic views at the time he wrote to Champion. Fascism in the strict ideological sense emerged in 1919, but contempt for republicanism and parliamentarism existed in France (notably in the Army, as was highlighted by the Dreyfus Affair of 1894 to 1906) before the First World War. Boulenger may therefore have been complaining not so much about the vote's expected result but rather about the fact that the government was being chosen by popular ballot.

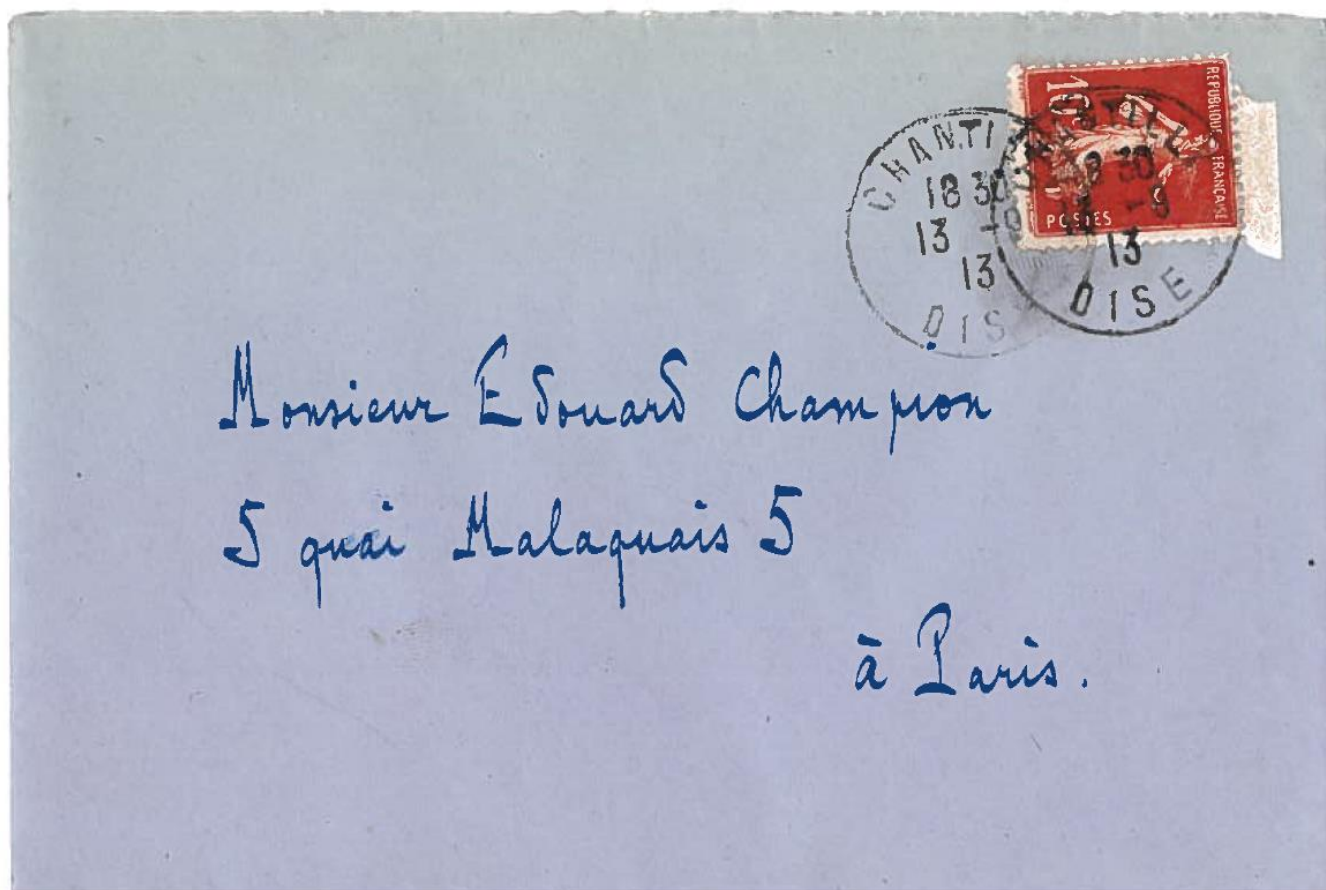
As I noted in the first part of this paper, Boulenger wrote in 1926 that the Great War had changed his outlook on life. The conflict was a transformative experience for millions of individuals, so there is nothing implausible about Boulenger's statement. What is unclear is whether his authoritarianism was a product of the war and the political developments which followed it, or whether these events simply reinforced convictions he may already have had. Both scenarios are credible: by the time of the 1926 "interview" in which he said, "nous vivons actuellement sous une tyrannie en formation qui peut devenir parfaite sous un ministère socialiste," the political landscape in France had tilted even further to the left than in 1914. The legislative elections of 1924 had not only given the socialist parties – the "Cartel des gauches" – their first majority, they had also resulted in the election of the first communists to the *Chambre des députés*.⁷⁶

An ironic footnote to the story of Boulenger's life is a coincidental connection between his 1914 book Au pays de Gérard de Nerval and two events which ultimately led to his activities as a collaborator. The "pays" in question is the Valois, in whose southwest corner Nerval's tale Sylvie is set and on whose western edge Chantilly is located. The northern tip of the Valois region encompasses the forest of Compiègne and the town of the same name. It was in the forest of Compiègne that the Allied powers and Germany signed the Armistice of November 11, 1918, which for practical purposes ended the war in which Boulenger had been fighting. And it was in the same location – chosen for its symbolic value by Adolf Hitler, in order to avenge Germany and humiliate France – that representatives of the two governments signed the Armistice of June 22, 1940, which for practical purposes marked the Third Republic's capitulation to the Third Reich.

Boulenger had been a war correspondent rather than a soldier during the first months of the conflict. He continued to "vivre de sa plume" (to borrow Gisèle Shapiro's phrase) after the Armistice, but he was now living in the kind of state he had advocated in 1926: an authoritarian regime of the far right, led by a single man and freed from the defects of parliamentary democracy. He spent his remaining years using his pen to support the Vichy government, producing works far removed from the harmless historical and literary studies – like Au pays de Gérard de Nerval – which he had written prior to the First World War.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my deep appreciation to my McGill University Libraries colleagues Ann Marie Holland and Octavian Sopt (Rare Books and Special Collections) and Tina Liu (Collection Services) for their valuable help with this paper.



13 ^{7^h} 1913. Charvilly

Mon cher ami,

je ne savais pas que vous pensiez à une édition
de Gérard de Nerval ; en revanche je voyais que
vous prépariez, vous L. Souart, un livre sur lui.
L'édition me paraît si nécessaire que j'en avais
moi-même parlé déjà à un de vos confrères.
L'édition Calmann est moins fautive matériellement
que les premières éditions L'éry, mais beaucoup plus
inexacte, car, pour ne pas répéter sans la Bohême
galante certains morceaux de Sylvie et S^t Angélique,
les éditeurs ont frileusement, non seulement coupé,
mais encore modifié un bon nombre de phrases du texte
de Gérard. Il va de soi ^{qu'il suffit} que vous projetiez une

édition de Gérard pour que je renonce, moi, à mon projet, — à moins que nous ne puissions nous en-
-tendre ensemble. Mais M. Tournier, aidé de M.
Paul Lacombe, pour ce qui est de l'édition, vous ne
sauriez trouver mieux. Quant à Vautour, c'est
un amateur en pareille matière : je ne vois pas
qu'il songe à autre chose qu'une étude de seconde
ou de troisième main, une critique littéraire et esthé-
-tique. Et mon frère, je vois, n'aime pas beaucoup
Gérard de Nerval — ce qui ne l'empêchera pas, je
l'espère, d'en parler quelque part, ne fût-ce que
pour s'expliquer.

Je ne permets de garder quelque jours encore
votre dossier, puis que vous m'y autorisez : il m'est
bien utile pour la petite étude que je me propose

sur le "pays de Syon". Je ne sais si elle amusera ceux qui
la liront, mais, à moi, elle m'aura fait faire de très belles prome-
-nades, et, pour le sage ... Non, ne faisons pas nos Horace à
la manqué.

Ma Mère vous remercie de votre aimable souvenir; veuillez
trouver ici ceux de ma famille et toutes les amitiés de votre

Jacques Doucenger

Cher Édouard,
voici le fin de mon ms.

Amitiés

J. B.

Dumoulin se f... de nous (cf.
votre respect), carissimo
Eduardo. Ils m'ont réclamé
il y a 2 jours les fumes du
photographeur qui, paraît-il,
leurs sont indispensables pour
venir les clichés ???. Et
seuls 15 ou 20 jours (mettons
15) les bons à venir sont son-
nés! Dis que vous avez les
explications, prévenez-moi; je
ferai l'essentiel de mon service.

Car il faut bien une 15 aïe
de jours pour qu'on se séci-
-se à faire des articles (si on
en fait, ce que j'espère, Dieu
et vous (surtout) aidant).

Et le 26 commencent les
élections ; et vas ! Et

je ne sais pas quand Marye soit
paraître ; il m'avait dit y juin
ou juillet ; mais peut-être
va-t-il se sécher. Et je compte
fermement vous faire rendre les 1000
exemplaires en 15 jours ; Avez-vous tout
cela ! Amicalement Jacques B.

Lundi 7 heures.

Mon cher Edouard

voulez-vous être assez gentil
pour apporter à votre magasin
le Verté Je mon ms. que vous
avez chez vous — si vous le fais
vous ne l'avez point encore fait?
Ne l'envoie-je chercher Je ne
marche après la semaine ; Je
manière à pouvoir vous remettre

l'autre pour l'imprimerie
et garder ainsi la p. la
Rev. vit pu.

Amitiés

Jacques Bonlangier

22 RUE OUDINOT

Cher ami,
voulé - vous remettre mon nr.
à la bonne ci-jointe /

2. v. p.

A vous

J. B.

Le titre en bon à l'écrit a déjà
été envoyé. Pour la 4^e p.
voir H. Champion

JACQUES BOULENGER

J.B.

AU PAYS
DE
GÉRARD DE NERVAL

NUIT PERDUE. — LA ROUTE DE LOISY. — LE HAMEAU
DE SYLVIE. — LE VILLAGE DE GÉRARD. — MORTE-
FONTAINE. — ADRIENNE. — CHAALIS. — BRMENON-
VILLE. — AURÉLIE. — CHANTILLY ET SENLIS.

AVEC HUIT PLANCHES HORS TEXTE

PARIS
LIBRAIRIE HONORÉ CHAMPION, ÉDITEUR

5, QUAI MALAQUAIS (VI^e)

1914

14 MAR 1914

Y39.G31.Y60

Nelle - efrance

JACQUES BOULENGER

Champion

25 mars 1914.

AU PAYS
DE
GÉRARD DE NERVAL

NUIT PERDUE. — LA ROUTE DE LOISY. — LE HAMEAU
DE SYLVIE. — LE VILLAGE DE GÉRARD. — MORTÉ-
FONTAINE. — ADRIENNE. — CHÂALIS. — ERMENON-
VILLE. — AURÉLIE. — CHANTILLY ET SENLIS.

AVEC HUIT PLANCHES HORS TEXTE

PARIS
LIBRAIRIE ANCIENNE HONORÉ CHAMPION
ÉDOUARD CHAMPION
5, QUAI MALAQUAIS

1914

Edouard Champion

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