

## The Meaning of Space and the Choice of Places in Prévost

Jean Norgaisse

Spelman College, Atlanta University Center

**F**rom the outset the sixth book of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, one reads: "Je laisse aux géographes, et à ceux qui ne voyagent que par curiosité, le soin de donner au public la description des pays qu'ils ont parcourus."<sup>1</sup> The opening suggests that geography is important to the understanding of Prévost's literary universe. It also serves both as an introduction to the story and as a foreword to the reader who realizes that Prévost's novels constitute a geographical repertory founded on the constant trips undertaken by his characters all over the world. This foreword not only applies to *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité* but also to Prévost's literary universe. It goes without saying that literary space in Prévost is geographically vast. Thus the literary territory characterized by the protagonists' unpredictable adventures distends itself. Prévostian novels, in this respect, take on the value of a dramatic novel, according to the meaning given to the latter by Edwin Muir. "The dramatic novel, he says, is an image of modes of experience, the character novel a picture of modes of existence."<sup>2</sup> Four situations: des Grieux's in New Orleans, Cleveland's in America, the Commander of Malta's in Europe, and Captain Robert Lade's various voyages overseas suggest the validity of Muir's definition.<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, studying the features of the

1 Prévost, *Œuvres*, ed. Jean Sgard, Grenoble, 1977-1986, vol. I, p. 119. All possible quotations will be taken from this edition, followed by abbreviation of the title of the novel and the page number.

2 Muir, Edwin, *The Structure of the novel*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969, p. 60.

3 See *Voyages du capitaine Robert Lade*. This Prévostian work consists only of voyages. The captain Robert Lade, who is the main character of the story, travels all over the world.

novel of hardship and adventure, writes: "Pour que l'aventure puisse se déployer, il lui faut de l'espace, beaucoup d'espace."<sup>4</sup> In fact, Prévost's literary universe is, in some respects, founded on this principle, for the imaginary geographical environment, sometimes based on a real physical geography, serves literary fiction. Here we are in agreement with Numa Broc, who explains that geography gives novelists "un cadre commode pour des actions fictives."<sup>5</sup> His comment applies to Prévostian novels, which contain a vast geographical toponymy generated by his characters' numerous destinations. Among eighteenth-century French novelists, Prévost stands out for awakening the reader's geographical curiosity. His novels present space as a vision of the world, a manner of being, and an existential experience.<sup>6</sup> Such is the fundamental axis of this study. The conditions of the physical environment (desert, hill, forest, roads) and the circumstances in which the characters travel (meeting enemies during their trips) determine this experience. Characters develop relationships with one another and with the places in which they meet. From this one discovers in Prévost's novels what we can call a behavioral geography.<sup>7</sup> "L'homme qui

4 Bakhtine, Mikhail, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 250.

5 See *La Géographie des philosophes*, Paris, 1977, p. 263, cited by Henri Lafon in *Les Décors et les choses dans le roman du dix-huitième siècle*, London, Oxford University, Studies on Voltaire at the Taylor Institution, 1992, p. 85.

6 As Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes: "Les relations entre les choses ou entre les aspects des choses étant toujours médiatisées par notre corps, la nature entière est la mise en scène de notre propre vie ou notre interlocuteur dans une sorte de dialogue." See *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945, p. 369-370.

7 In an interesting study, Alexandros-Ph. Lagopoulous writes the behavioral geography: "[...] les processus psychologiques de l'esprit conduisent à une représentation subjective du monde extérieur; ils guident l'observation de la réalité, la sélection de l'information qui y est rattachée et la structuration de cette information. Ces processus comprennent la perception, les sensations, la cognition, et sont inséparables des attitudes, valeurs, émotions, désirs et motivations [...]. Les choix spatiaux sont à leur tour mis en relation avec des évaluations, ce qui aboutit à la sélection d'une action spatiale. Il y aurait une relation de cause à effet entre cette sélection et le comportement spatial manifesté, lequel soit correspond à un déplacement ou à un emploi spatial, soit entraîne une altération de la réalité spatiale." See *Urbanisme et sémiotique*, Paris, Antropos, 1995, p. 22. Cf. Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris, Plon, 1958.

« vit » l'espace dans toutes ses fibres le bâtit au surplus simultanément sous nos yeux. Ce qui signifie que l'espace suggéré par les mots du récit est déterminé au premier chef par la personne et la situation du narrateur.<sup>8</sup> Such is the significance of the first narrative scene described in *Manon Lescaut*.

[...] j'arrivai le lendemain pour dîner à Pacy [...]. Je fus surpris, en entrant dans ce bourg, d'y voir tous les habitants en alarme. Ils se précipitaient de leurs maisons pour courir en foule à la porte d'une mauvaise hôtellerie, devant laquelle étaient deux chariots couverts [...]. Je m'arrêtai un moment pour m'informer d'où venait le tumulte [...]. Enfin, un archer revêtu d'une bandoulière, et le mousquet sur l'épaule, ayant paru à la porte, je lui fis signe de la main de venir vers moi [...]. Ce n'est rien, monsieur, me dit-il; c'est une douzaine de filles de joie que je conduis, avec mes compagnons, jusqu'au Havre-de-grâce, où nous les ferons embarquer pour l'Amérique [...]. Parmi les douze filles [...] enchaînées six par six par le milieu du corps, il y en avait une dont l'air et la figure étaient si peu conformes à sa condition, qu'en tout autre état je l'eusse prise pour une personne du premier rang [...]. Comme les six gardes qui accompagnaient cette malheureuse bande étaient aussi dans la chambre, je pris le chef en particulier et je lui demandai quelques lumières sur le sort de cette belle fille [...]. Voilà un jeune homme, ajouta l'archer, qui pourrait vous instruire mieux que moi sur la cause de sa disgrâce [...].<sup>9</sup>

The narrator, « L'Homme de qualité, » observes the public space, the street, attentively. The factual features, which capture his attention, mold the passage into a linear structure. Each sentence represents a narrative entity which anchors the story, and gradually reveals its significance. The organization of the semantic universe of the passage leads us to a "semiotic approach,"<sup>10</sup> because this approach permits an analysis of the most subtle connections between grammatical structures within the text and the

8 Weisgerber, Jean, *L'Espace romanesque*, Lausanne, L'Age d'Homme, 1978, p. 12.

9 ML, p. 29-31.

10 See Greimas, Algirdas J., *Maupassant: la sémiotique du texte: exercices pratiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1976. The first part of Greimas' study constitutes a significant impulsion to mine.

representation of space in literature.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, we will consider the outlines of the expression and the contents.

To begin, let us consider the temporal and spatial components of the narration, for the facts narrated by « L'Homme de qualité » fill a precise length of time and adhere to a specific spatial context.

## Temporal dimension

The first words of the narrator, « L'Homme de qualité, » indicate that the narrated event starts at a specific time (« la nuit ») and continues into the next day (« le lendemain »). The temporal markers indicate the circumstances in which the event occurs. It is clear that the narrative scene lasts one day. The duration of the literary action creates an illusion of truth, for the temporal word « le lendemain » in itself suggests the time which immediately follows the event:

« la nuit »      vs      « le jour »  
« le lendemain »   vs   « la veille »

The temporal deictics are concentrated in the first sentence of the paragraph (« Ayant repris mon chemin par Evreux, où je couchai la première nuit, j'arrivai le lendemain pour dîner à Pacy »). Here, at the beginning of the story, they reveal the temporal limitations of the narrative scene. In the fourth sentence (« Je m'arrêtai un moment pour m'informer d'où venait le tumulte... »), the reader discovers a temporal aspect founded on the word « moment, » which nonetheless fits into the duration of the same event.

## Spatial aspect

Although « L'Homme de qualité » travels from Evreux to Pacy, there is no doubt that the borough of Pacy, in light of the second sentence, constitutes the spatial setting of the literary action (« Je fus surpris, en entrant dans ce

---

11 I agree with J. J. Van Baak, who acknowledges that “[...] a semiotic approach of literary space, connected with some form of text grammar may offer a satisfactory solution [...]” See *The Place of space in narration*, Amsterdam, Rodopi B.V., 1983, p. 5.

bourg, d'y voir tous les habitants en alarme. »). The spatial deictic, « dans »<sup>12</sup> followed by the words « ce bourg, » characterizes the place of the event. The borough of Pacy, which represents "l'espace topic"<sup>13</sup> of the scene, becomes significant, because of the alarmed crowd teeming into its streets. Suddenly, the public space becomes a place of confusion:

encompassed vs encompassing  
Borough of Pacy Borough of Pacy

Although the novelist situates the event in the borough of Pacy, it is also interesting to note that « L'Homme de qualité » travels from Evreux to Pacy. To characterize the change of place, the narrator mentions that five or six « lieues » separate Evreux from Pacy. « L'Homme de qualité » undertakes a trip, which demonstrates at once spatial and temporal unravelling. With temporal signs like « nuit » and « lendemain, » Prévost establishes a relationship between time and space. Spatial unravelling commences at the beginning of the scene and continues to the end. The verbs (« entrant, » « se précipitaient, » and « courir ») of the second and third sentences of the passage not only indicate the displacement of « L'Homme de qualité, » but also of the crowd. Thus the reader has experienced what one calls « l'embrayage paratopique » in this opening paragraph.<sup>14</sup>

The structure of the paragraph shows us that many sentences take on a significant value. Thus, one discovers two fundamental elements framing the narrated facts in the syntagmatic axis as well as in the paradigmatic axis: a temporal deictic (« moment ») and the names of the principal characters of the scene (« Je m'arrêtai un moment pour m'informer d'où venait le tumulte »). The word « moment » is the common denominator of the

12 As Claude Vandeloise writes: "Le langage ne laisse pas au hasard les positions de la cible et du site dans la relation spatiale [...] J'appellerai cible l'objet à localiser et site l'objet de référence." See *L'Espace en français*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 34. Cf. Matoré, Georges, *L'Espace humain*, Paris, Nizet, 1976.

13 As Dominique Maingueneau explains: "Il s'agit de lieux soustraits dans une certaine mesure aux contraintes de la société « ordinaire »." See *Le Contexte de l'œuvre littéraire*, Paris, Dunod, 1993, 174

14 According to Dominique Maingueneau, "l'embrayage paratopique" suggests "des éléments d'ordres variés qui participent à la fois du monde représenté par l'œuvre et de la situation paratopique à travers laquelle se définit l'auteur qui construit ce monde." See *Le Contexte de l'œuvre littéraire*, op. cit., p. 174.

framework of the scene, for « L'Homme de qualité » asks several people why there is such a crowd in the street. He talks to five different categories of people in the street (« populace, » « un archer, » « vieille femme, » « chef des gardes, » and « un jeune homme: des Grioux. »), and spends a certain amount of time with each of them. In the syntagmatic and paradigmatic order, the passage can be divided into five parts:

« un moment »  
« foule, populace »

« un moment »  
« un archer »

communication (verb: to say)  
actor: « L'Homme de qualité »

« un moment »  
« vieille femme »

« un moment »  
« chef des gardes »

« un moment »  
« un jeune homme »

With two repetitions of the verb of communication (« me dit-il ») twice and (« lui dis-je »), the narrative scene takes on the value of a dialogue elucidating the meaning of the story. In light of this diagram, one observes an asymmetrical aspect in the communication between « L'Homme de qualité » and the different personalities described throughout the passage. On the other hand, the paradigmatic relations and the syntagmatic development interweave around the common role of the temporal deictic (« moment ») in the two semantic axes. This narrative dimension also expresses a spatialization of time founded on the duration of the event in the street.<sup>15</sup>

## A spatial theoretical aspect

The narrator of this scene found in *Manon Lescaut* is also the main character. Within the framework of the story, he is a party to the event. This narrative technique is common in all Prévostian novels. One finds the same principle in other eighteenth-century French novelists, notably in Marivaux, Lesage, and Crébillon. The narration of the scene indicates that all of the narrative discourse is basically founded on what one can call

15 "It can occur on various levels of the narrative structure; in descriptions or successions of narrative situations." See Baak, J.J. Van, *The Place of space in narration, op. cit.*, p. 118.

“l’instance narratrice.”<sup>16</sup> With this in mind, we will attempt to demonstrate how space inscribes itself in the story, which is a fundamental aspect of the Prévostian literary structure. Likewise, we will consider the role of characters’ movements in the text of the novel. One cannot conceive of a spatial study of the novel without considering the characters’ physical displacements, because they generate the meaning of the narrative framework. A failure to recognize the importance of characters’ dynamic represents the fundamental weakness of Fernando Lambert’s theoretical study entitled, “Espace et narration.”<sup>17</sup> From a narratological viewpoint, the succession of spatial figures in the literary composition suggests the shift from one place to another by the hero and other characters as well. The construction of the narration fundamentally depends on the displacements of the principal protagonists.

Let us also point out that our spatial theoretical perceptions in Prévost’s novels are completely different from those of Algirdas J. Greimas, which are founded, according to his own words, on “une sémiotique topologique,”» derived from the spatial languages.<sup>18</sup> Thus, after examining spatial figures which characterize the various spatial inscriptions in the story, we will analyze spatial configuration. The latter governs the structure of different spaces described by the novelist and various spatial figures like deserts, forests, cities, provinces, and meadows. Geographically, the spatial figures are built on the characters’ voyages, the trademark foundation of Prévostian novels.

A significant difference exists, on the other hand, between spatial figures and spatial configuration. Spatial figures, which come from movements or entire trips, reflect the characters’ situation. For example, discord among characters provokes diaspora and exile. As for spatial configuration, it is more of a question of the organization of space in the story. Although these fundamental aspects of this structure are distinct,

16 As Vincent Jouve explains, “[...] l’instance narratrice a pour fonction principale de servir de relais entre le lecteur et les personnages: «le lecteur et le narrateur sont, l’un et l’autre, éléments de l’univers poétique et indissolublement corrélatifs”. See *L’Effet-personnage dans le roman*, Paris, PUF, 1992, p. 17.

17 Lambert, Fernando, “Espace et narration”, in *Études littéraires*, volume 30 # 2 hiver, 1998, p. 115-121.

18 Greimas, Algirdas J., *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*, Paris, Seuil, 1976, p. 19-157. See also Bertrand, Denis, *L’Espace et le sens, Germinal de Zola*, Paris-Amsterdam, Hadès-Benjamins, 1985.

they are linked to one another in the organization of the narration, for one depends on the other. With the movements of Prévost's protagonists, the spatial configuration reflects different spatial figures, which can be diversified according to the scene or the episode.

## Spatial figures

The first scene of *Manon Lescaut* begins in a public space, a borough of Pacy. Its main street constitutes the principal spatial figure, and develops into a literary scene with the multitude of people who follow the convoy of the twelve young girls. The "houses" themselves represent a constitutive element of the second spatial figure of the scene. As closed and private spaces, the "houses" represent a decorative and an emblematic element, which anchors the narrative. Indeed, there would be no dwellers if there were no houses located on the two sides of the street. (« Je fus surpris, en entrant dans ce bourg, d'y voir tous les habitants en alarme. Ils se précipitaient de leurs maisons pour courir en foule à la porte d'une mauvaise hôtellerie, devant laquelle étaient deux chariots couverts. ») « L'Hôtellerie » itself, which is a public and closed space, constitutes the third spatial figure. It characterizes both the convoy's destination and the judgment of twelve young prostitutes who have been deported to America. It represents the landmark of this event, for it is the last spatial image mentioned in the narrative.

Similarly, the story of the fifth book of *Le Philosophe anglais* will lead to a better understanding of the present theoretical demonstration. The narration is built on successive spatial figures, which are diversified in the framework of the story. The dramatic situation of the characters, which creates spatial figures, invigorates and animates the narrative. In the first scene, for example, one discovers the vast desert of Drexera, in which Mylord Axminster will find himself for some time. In this public, open, and dangerous space, he is protected by a brave "Abaquis" among the savage people, most of whom are cannibals. During Cleveland's trip in the company of his wife, Fanny, his daughter, and several other people, a new spatial figure occurs in the narration: a river which, in clear opposition to the desert, represents an exuberant landscape. "[...] je suis tombé en partage, avec Mylord et vingt de nos compagnons, à une bande des moins cruels et des moins avides de chair humaine [...] l'on nous a fait faire un voyage pour arriver à la rivière [...]"<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, in the same

---

19 CL, p. 218.



framework of the story, the desert space reappears. It acquires a mythic and symbolic value: "Nous avons été reconduits vers le désert de Drexera pour attendre l'année prochaine."<sup>20</sup> The circumstances in which Cleveland finds himself with his family in the American desert force him to leave. Thus, he undertakes a long trip during which several of his companions succumb to exhaustion. Afterwards, one finds Cleveland in a meadow where he spends three weeks. The meadow, from the perspective of a landscape painter, would be diametrically opposed to the desert in that Cleveland has moved from a dysphoric space to an euphoric space. "Je choisis, pour prendre quelques jours de repos, une prairie agréable, au long d'une rivière dont les bords étaient couverts d'arbres assez touffus pour nous défendre de l'ardeur du soleil."<sup>21</sup> After the three weeks of rest that Cleveland spends in the meadow, the narration returns to his trip. The road taken becomes an essential spatial figure and can be read in terms of chronotopes.<sup>22</sup> Cleveland and many other travelers reveal their apprehensions about the difficulty of their trip. "L'une regardait les périls de la route. Nous allions nous trouver exposés à la rencontre et aux insultes de tous ceux qu'il plairait au ciel d'amener sur notre chemin: mais le danger était égal de quelque côté que nous pussions tourner [...]"<sup>23</sup>

One notices that the narration is built around such trips, which, in turn, give rise to many spatial figures. The narrative progression of the fifth book of *Le Philosophe anglais* shows this. In fact, the more the characters travel, the more spaces emerge throughout the story. For instance, Cleveland's trip from the meadow leads him to the top of a hill where his life is endangered. For two consecutive days he crosses many roads before finding himself in this dangerous place. Subsequently, the story returns for a second time to the desert of Drexera, which is the largest descriptive space in the narrative of Cleveland's journey. "Je suis un malheureux étranger que le hasard a conduit dans ce désert, et qui ne venait à vous avec les Abaquis que pour vous demander de la protection et de l'amitié."<sup>24</sup> After the dialogue between the "Brave Americans" and Cleveland, the latter feels assured that he will be safe and pursues his trip with his companions for six consecutive weeks. Instead, the journey leads them to a vast and dangerous forest; a sharp contrast to the safety of the desert of

20 CL, p. 218.

21 Ibid., p. 219.

22 See Bakhtine, Mikhail, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978.

23 CL, p. 223.

24 Ibid., p. 226.

Drexera. "Nous gagnâmes en moins de deux jours une vaste forêt, dans laquelle ils nous firent pénétrer fort avant, et nous fûmes surpris de nous y trouver tout d'un coup au milieu d'une infinité d'autres sauvages, qui nous reçurent avec de grandes acclamations."<sup>25</sup> Later, upon leaving the forest, Cleveland and the other travelers find themselves on the banks of another river. "Notre route ne dura que quatre jours. Nous arrivâmes au commencement du cinquième sur le bord d'une rivière médiocre, où nos conducteurs nous firent arrêter."<sup>26</sup> Their journey leads the reader to the discovery of a new spatial figure that, like the previous one, fits into the construction of the literary space of the fifth book of *Le Philosophe anglais*. By identifying these spatial figures, one deduces that the places of events described by the narrator comprise a linear narrative order. They constitute the story's discursive framework.

Let us emphasize that *Manon Lescaut* and *Le Philosophe anglais* are not the only Prévostian literary texts containing spatial figures. In the eleventh book of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, we see several more of them, which, with the trips undertaken by Prévost's characters through several English provinces, construct the narration. The voyages overseas and the internal movements from one place to another through the cities and provinces create literary spatial figures similar to those found in *Le Philosophe anglais*.

From the outset of the eleventh book of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, travel is perceived as a literary topos. One reads, for instance, in the first scene: "Le voyage dont je parle fut celui de quelques provinces d'Angleterre."<sup>27</sup> The travelers visiting all of England's southern islands, begin in Rye; and, subsequently, on the same day, they go to Battel which, through its architecture, represents a famous province. In this place, one also finds an abbey that can be perceived as an historical monument and the largest spatial figure in the area. Later on, the travelers find themselves in a new place called Chichester. "Chichester est une ville épiscopale. La cathédrale est belle, et pleine d'anciennes tombes et de monuments, telles que nous en vîmes dans la suite un grand nombre à Salisbury, à Wells, à Bristol et dans la plupart des villes d'Angleterre [...]"<sup>28</sup> The travelers' curiosity allows the reader to discover the prelate's villa and gardens, otherwise private and closed spaces. Similarly, the narrative

---

25 Ibid., p. 232.

26 Ibid., p. 233.

27 MAHQ, p. 263.

28 Ibid.

framework shows Prévost's characters travelling to Portsmouth, one of the principal English seaport towns. From there they go to Salisbury and Winchester, and discover in the latter a magnificent castle built by King Charles II. Unlike the travelers Cleveland, Fanny, Cécile and their companions, they do not experience any difficulties during their trips through the cities and the provinces of England. They are delighted by the cultural elements characterizing the different places they have visited:

Salisbury est plus grand que Winchester. On nous y fit remarquer plusieurs restes curieux de l'antiquité. Wilton, qui est la maison de Mylord Pembroke, dont j'ai déjà, en pourrait fournir seul un volume. C'est une des plus curieuses collections de marbres, de statues antiques et de peintures que j'aie vues dans tous mes voyages. Blandfort et Dorchester sont deux bonnes villes. Nous vîmes, à deux milles de celle-ci, un ancien amphithéâtre des Romains, qui s'est fort bien conservé. Un peu plus loin, sur le haut d'une montagne, est un reste de camp de romain, que le peuple du pays nomme Maiden-Castel."<sup>29</sup>

In this passage, one discovers several spatial figures (« Wilton (la maison de Mylord Pembroke), amphithéâtre, camp romain ») which in themselves constitute a tableau of the two cities, Blandfort and Dorchester. In the narrative composition, they represent historical monuments. One makes the same observations in the city Devonshire, whose beauty fascinates the travelers: "La ville en elle-même n'a rien d'extraordinaire; mais ses trois ports, sa citadelle, ses magasins, ses arsenaux, le Duk, c'est-à-dire le lieu où se construisent les vaisseaux, le quartier des officiers de mer, etc., sont autant de choses qui méritent l'attention des voyageurs."<sup>30</sup> As one can see, most of the spatial figures constitute public spaces which enclose narrator-hero's memories. Their narration follows a linear order, and the description of each place visited constitutes a separate stage in the narration of the trip. Among eighteenth-century French novelists, only Voltaire's work, especially *Candide*, contains some similar aspects to Prévost's novels.

---

29 Ibid., p. 264.

30 Ibid., p. 265.

## The spatial configuration

As the preceding analysis reveals, Prévost's literary universe comprises a rigorous spatial narrative program essentially founded on the characters' travels. Their instability leads to the discovery of places that constitute the foundation of the narrative discourse. The spatial configuration, like the temporal configuration, stems from the organization of the spatial figures, and gives the story a significant structure characterizing its unity, progression, and value.

In *Manon Lescaut*, the spatial figures are not as numerous as in *Le Philosophe anglais*. The narration of the first scene, for instance, shows us that the street of Pacy is the principal one that, with the gathering crowd, leads to the discovery of other figures, such as the houses and « l'Hôtellerie. » These are both imaginary and symbolic figures, since they do not have any fundamental function in the narrative construction. The same holds true for the last episode describing Manon's deportation to America when des Grieux accompanies her. The lack of description in this scene gives the impression of restrictive figures. The text only briefly evokes spaces and such landscape features as the sterile countrysides, high and steep mountains, and the desert of Louisiana.

In *Le Philosophe anglais*, on the other hand, the spatial figures multiply because of the incessant trips of Prévost's characters, for travel generates new landscapes. The narration of the fifth book of *Le Philosophe anglais*, for instance, indicates that the desert of Drexera is the prominent spatial figure of the story. There is an alternation between the spatial figures, which lends a symmetrical quality to the scene. For example, one finds Cleveland in various spaces that, in some respects, are similar to forests, hills, and meadows. He leaves an euphoric space and finds himself in a dysphoric one. This is exactly what is indicated by his movement, along with his wife, Fanny, and his daughter, Cécile, from the meadow to the hill. Because of the obstacles that emerge during his journey, Cleveland must stop several times in order to recover. One observes the same situation through the last episode of *Manon Lescaut* describing des Grieux's and Manon's journey, when they flee to the desert of Louisiana. "Nous marchâmes aussi longtemps que le courage de Manon put la soutenir, c'est-à-dire environ deux cent lieues, car cette amante incomparable refusa constamment de s'arrêter plus tôt. Accablée enfin de lassitude, elle me confessa qu'il lui était impossible d'avancer davantage."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the

---

31 ML, p. 187.

narration of the fifth book of *Le Philosophe anglais* shows that trips create new difficulties, like the convalescence of the travelers and encounters with enemies:

Il y avait deux difficultés qui me causèrent beaucoup plus de crainte et d'embarras. L'une regardait les périls de la route. Nous allions nous trouver exposés à la rencontre et aux insultes de tous ceux qu'il plairait au ciel d'amener sur notre chemin: mais le danger était égal de quelque côté que nous pussions tourner, et nous n'eussions pas été plus sûrs de l'éviter en nous déterminant même à ne pas changer de lieu [...]. Le second obstacle était la fatigue d'une marche de dix jours, que les deux dames et leurs femmes ne pouvaient avoir la force de supporter.<sup>32</sup>

The spatial figure of the road, like the meadow, the hill, the desert, and the forest, fits into the organization of places that, in light of the hardships experienced by the travelers, take on a chronotopic value.<sup>33</sup> One notices, in this respect, affinities among the spatial figures, from interwoven relationships in the narrative composition to similarities between landscape features. From one scene to another, one finds, in fact, mostly the same narrated facts, since each of Cleveland's trip produces the same effects, but with the emergence of new spatial figures. The story of the eleventh book of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité* also offers the same aspects. Like the narration of the fifth book of *Le Philosophe anglais*, it is comprised of a rigorous and linear narrative gradation. The difference between the two is that the movements and the trips undertaken by the characters in the first one are more risky than in the second one. For instance, Cleveland and his companions, who travel tirelessly, is led to invigorate themselves and also to arm themselves against enemies. One makes the same observations in the last episode of *Manon Lescaut* regarding the hero's situation when he flees to the desert of Louisiana with Manon. Thus, the spatial configuration in the first and last scenes of *Manon Lescaut* and the description of the difficulties experienced by Cleveland in the fifth book of *Le Philosophe anglais, ou Histoire de Monsieur Cleveland* render the narrative dynamic. This is also true for the narration of the eleventh book of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, with the various trips undertaken by the visitors through the English provinces. The narrator-

---

32 CL, p. 223.

33 Paris, Gallimard, 1978.

hero, by presenting the facts from his own viewpoint, governs the narrativization of the Prévostian space.

As we have seen, each episode, or each great narrative scene, in Prévost's literary universe, contains a repertory of spatial figures. They arise from the movements of the characters, who are nomadic beings. With their constant movements, the structure of the spatial narrative meets the demands of geographical mimesis, whose requirements the novelist evokes at the beginning of the sixth book of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité* ("Je laisse aux géographes, et à ceux qui ne voyagent que par curiosité, le soin de donner au public la description des pays qu'ils ont parcourus." p. 119). Prévost, in this respect, is completely different from Rousseau and his contemporaries whose characters are sedentary beings. And yet, the author of *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* is one of the greatest landscape painters among eighteenth-century French novelists.



MARTINE LAMY