

Rebecca Stolzer

*The Romanticist's Cure for Cholera:  
An Alternative Reading of  
Alexandre Dumas's "Travels in Switzerland" (1834)*

ABSTRACT: This article addresses how the nineteenth-century French writer Alexandre Dumas applied Romanticist ideals in his work "Travels in Switzerland" (1834). Based on *Travels in Switzerland*, biographies of Dumas, and scholarly assessments of Romanticism, it first analyzes Dumas's intellectual depression and his "Romanticist Cure," then moves to the specific ways in which Romanticism cured Dumas's intellectual depression – namely by focusing on nature, heroism, and individualism, and finally provides examples of specific individuals Dumas met during his travels, who aligned with his own Romanticist ideals. The author demonstrates that – to Alexandre Dumas – Romanticism was both the cause and cure for his "cholera," or what can be interpreted as his depressed mental and artistic state.

KEYWORDS: nineteenth century; Paris; Switzerland; Alexandre Dumas; François-René de Chateaubriand; travel; *Travels in Switzerland* (1834); Romanticism; existentialism; cholera

*Introduction*

Alexandre Dumas's *Travels in Switzerland* (1834) details his trip to Switzerland following a bout of cholera while living and working in Paris. Although it does discuss his travels abroad, *Travels in Switzerland* does not belong to the "travel narrative" genre. Rather, it must be evaluated primarily as a Romanticist's journey to self-realization and spiritual awakening. Through an examination of Dumas's travel account, this article will address the following question: In what ways did Dumas's Romanticist lens provide him with a cure to his "cholera," that being a metaphorical representation of his intellectual depression, as well as the general sickness in nineteenth-century French society? This question serves as a foundation for analysis, as Romanticism—relating to society—proves to be the central worldview under which Dumas operated while on his journey. During his time in Switzerland, Romanticism provided Dumas with a personal cure to his intellectual and artistic depression, which had manifested itself as a product of the illness in nineteenth-century French society, through his return to nature and encounters with individuals who displayed heroism and individualism. The approach used to analyze *Travels in Switzerland* is to evaluate how a Romanticist abroad found a cure for both personal and societal psychological ailments through Romanticist ideals.

*Travels in Switzerland* was first published in 1834, and it relates a vacation to Switzerland that Dumas had taken beginning in July 1832. At first glance, the narrative describes Dumas's adventures with locals through the various natural and geographical features the country had to offer, including his daily itinerary and meetings with both locals and other foreigners. Fundamentally, this narrative provides insight into the mental and emotional state of Dumas upon his departure from Paris. It is, first and foremost, an account of the self-reflection that Dumas came to have as a result of this change of scenery. This self-reflection

concerned the French politics and lifestyle that Dumas had left behind, as well as a deeper contemplation of his intelligence relative to that of others, and the significance of his existence in the world that God had provided for him.

In the foreword, Dumas stresses that it was the ultimate result of his trip that he found a cure for cholera.<sup>1</sup> The focus of this article is the analysis of this statement. I assert that “cholera” stands for the mental, emotional, and artistic state Dumas was in following his experience with the sickness, and as a result of living in Parisian society. I will explore the psychological, emotional, and artistic state in which Dumas found himself as a result of living in Paris and his decision to leave, as life in Paris was the cause of this crisis, and leaving to Switzerland proved to be the logical remedy for his “cholera.” This analysis demonstrates the impact of the Romanticist movement in nineteenth-century France on everyday experiences that shaped human intellectualism.

Romanticism was a movement that demonstrated a shift away from classicism or neo-classical movements in western attitudes toward politics, society, and the arts. It was a result of the decline of monarchies and therefore called for self-determination and independence, leading to hero worship among those who followed their convictions. Romanticism also emphasized returning to nature as a source of personal growth and spiritual freedom. It emphasized living a natural life—unrestricted by the exploitations of man, with the freedom to achieve personal spiritual fulfillment and the opportunity to express oneself freely, particularly through the arts.<sup>2</sup> Dumas identified himself as a follower of this movement and therefore viewed the world with a Romanticist outlook.<sup>3</sup> Having a Romanticist outlook—or what I will refer to as a Romanticist lens—while on his trip affected him differently in mind and spirit. It was responsible for Dumas’s self-reflection during his journey that ultimately led to profound conclusions about his place in the world and the true nature of his intelligence. A Romanticist perspective also provided Dumas with newfound inspiration to write out of desire rather than obligation.

### I. Alexandre Dumas

Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) was a French Romanticist writer of novels, plays, and newspaper publications. He was born in Villers-Cotterêts (northern France) to a French mother and a half French and half Haitian father who was a general in the French army under Napoleon.<sup>4</sup> Upon the general’s death, the family experienced financial distress as the army awarded the family the honor of the

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland* (London: Read Books Ltd., 2013, first published 1834 in French as *Impressions de voyage*), 7.

<sup>2</sup> See Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), published online, s.v. “Romanticism.”

<sup>3</sup> Craig A. Bell, *Alexandre Dumas: A Biography and Study* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1950), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Lora Pierce, “Celebrating our Multicultural Heritage,” *Biracial Child* (January 31, 1994), 12.

father's title rather than monetary compensation.<sup>5</sup> Dumas received an extensive education, as his tutors soon recognized his talents in reading and writing. During his early childhood, Dumas experienced the progression of Napoleon's army through Europe and later saw the sacrifices the French people had to make due to the collapse of their empire. Seeing the military action in his home country from a young age had a lasting influence on his political and social opinions, and later shaped his involvement in the Romanticist movement. Having moved to Paris to work as a clerk for various attorneys, Dumas made an impression, through his writing and excellent penmanship, on the royally-connected Maximilian-Sébastien Foy who was more than happy to "ask the Duc d'Orléans for a position for the Republican General's son."<sup>6</sup> A position working as the Duc d'Orléans's clerk gave Dumas connections and opportunities to begin writing literature, which had been the reason for his move to Paris.<sup>7</sup> As he transitioned from adolescence to adulthood, Dumas's development as a Romanticist playwright and novelist was influenced by his depressed social status after his father's death, as well as the political upheaval and military action that followed his family throughout his childhood and adolescence.<sup>8</sup>

At the start of his career, Dumas experienced his first successes amongst the middle-class, theater-going audience through his various commissions to write for the stage. Some of his most popular plays were *Antony* (1831), *Napoleon Bonaparte* (1831), and *Catherine Howard* (1834), historical Romanticist plays that Dumas was able to adapt to the popular tastes of his audience.<sup>9</sup> The 1830s marked a change in French theater as the Romanticists seized the day to take over the popular theater.<sup>10</sup> However, the Romanticist playwrights faced an unresponsive audience, as the general public had a hard time relating to the themes of Romanticist plays which were primarily anti-bourgeois and anti-social.<sup>11</sup> Dumas had the most success of all the Romanticist playwrights because he assimilated to fit his work to align with popular theater while still staying within the genre. He first earned his fame and fortune through his dramatic writings and was soon seen walking around Paris in the newest fashion or being carried around in his personal carriage drawn by the horse he owned.<sup>12</sup> Yet French Romanticist theater was ultimately a failure due to the middle-class audience's unwillingness to hear Romanticist social ideas that called for the

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<sup>5</sup> Claude Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas: Genius of Life*, trans. A. J. Koch (New York: Franklin Watts, 1988), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> See Pierce, "Celebrating our Multicultural Heritage," 12.

<sup>8</sup> Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 17-29.

<sup>9</sup> Barry V. Daniels, *Revolution in the Theatre: French Romantic Theories of Drama* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 229.

<sup>10</sup> Daniels, *Revolution in the Theatre*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Daniels, *Revolution in the Theatre*, 229.

<sup>12</sup> Bell, *Alexandre Dumas*, 61.

rejection of conventional nineteenth-century themes, championed the expression of individual emotion, and rejected the expectation to live according to the constraints society placed on the individual.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Dumas had a greater and lasting success within the realm of the historical novel.<sup>14</sup>

Today, Dumas is mostly remembered for his most popular historical novels, *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844). Dumas transitioned from playwright to novelist when he was in his forties, even though he never fully abandoned the theater. It was a perfect time to take advantage of the popularity of serial publications of novels in newspapers, as literacy was on the rise and the standard of living increased due to the Industrial Revolution, allowing for a wider readership.<sup>15</sup> The publication of novels in many installments over time proved profitable, as talented writers were able to keep the public in suspense, which turned many middle-class citizens into repeat-customers who brought in money continuously for however long a novel lasted. Dumas was extremely successful with his serial publications. His work presented seventeenth-century France as an ideal time, omitting the realities that would have made this century very uncomfortable. This Romanticization allowed readers to escape from their own political and social troubles, and to temporarily travel to an era that, supposedly, had been free from problems like theirs—another aspect that made Dumas a successful historical novelist. This is exemplified by the immense popularity of *The Three Musketeers* (1844), which glorified the heroic life of a musketeer in the 1620s.

His success meant that Dumas “worked non-stop from the moment he woke up in the morning” to keep up with the high demand for his work; Frederick William J. Hemmings notes that this often led to bouts of fever, resulting from the large volume and variety of work he had at any given time and the accompanying high demand and pressure to produce high-quality writing.<sup>16</sup> As his means of artistic expression turned into a demanding job that could no longer be done for personal pleasure only, he lost sight of why he was writing at all and slipped into an apparent depression. This is important to note, as Dumas demonstrates in *Travels in Switzerland* that this high demand for his work was one aspect that directly caused his “cholera” or Romanticist illness.

## II. Alexandre Dumas's Romantic Illness and the Romanticist Cure

Dumas credited his trip to Switzerland with helping him find a cure for cholera. In 1832, Paris experienced the first mass cholera outbreak of many that had a devastating effect on the population. The large number of deaths proved to be a problem for medical practitioners and public administrators alike, both in their

<sup>13</sup> Daniels, *Revolution in the Theatre*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Daniels, *Revolution in the Theatre*, 8-19.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick William J. Hemmings, *The King of Romance: A Portrait of Alexandre Dumas* (New York: Scribner, 1979), 116.

<sup>16</sup> Hemmings, *King of Romance*, 124.

efforts to prevent mass hysteria and to dispose of the bodies.<sup>17</sup> The cholera outbreak caused Parisians to question how healthy life in an urban, industrialized city actually was. The epidemic had an adverse physiological and emotional effect on Parisians due to the immense loss and traumatizing nature of death all around them. As the epidemic hit shortly after the French Revolution of 1830, distressing political events and physical illness were linked together by some—primarily by those opposed to the new regime—due to the widespread terror both entailed.<sup>18</sup> The suspected link between disease and revolt made Paris a troubling city to live in, as political unrest was a common occurrence for nineteenth-century Parisians.

Although Dumas had fallen ill with cholera in Paris shortly before deciding to leave the city, he did make a full recovery. Therefore, one cannot take the word “cholera” at face value, but instead must look for the intended meaning behind this choice of word. In actuality, “cholera” represents Dumas’s depressed state, both intellectually and spiritually, that he was left in after recovering from cholera. Dumas mentions the need he had to “reassure [...] [him]self of [...] [his] existence,”<sup>19</sup> a statement that indicates an existential crisis. Dumas also indicates that the efforts that his writing commissions now required “drove [him] [...] nearly mad,”<sup>20</sup> evidence that Dumas’s artistic freedoms in writing were restricted by a financial necessity to write rather than the desire to do so. The questioning of his existence and his dissatisfaction with the motives behind his writings are really what the term “cholera” represents.

The search to find aspects of Romanticism in his own life was both the cause and the cure for Dumas’s illness. It was the cause of his illness due to his Romanticist lens—meaning that Dumas applied Romanticist ideals to the world he was living in. He looked at the Paris of his day and saw a distinct lack of individual freedom, the devaluation of the role of emotion in everyday life, and the inability to retreat to nature for spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. This distinct lack of Romanticist ideals in Parisian society and his own life was the direct cause of his illness, as he could not directly apply his Romantic lens to nineteenth-century Parisian society. The physical illnesses Parisians experienced as a direct result of living in a dirty and dense city, as well as Dumas’s affliction, contributed to his physiological “cholera.” By extension, this illness was a reflection of the general physical and cognitive sickness of the nineteenth-century French population. Therefore, the text’s term “cholera” stands for the general intellectual and artistic depression as a result of industrialization and modernization in nineteenth-century France.

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<sup>17</sup> Catherine J. Kudlick, “Learning from Cholera: Medical and Social Responses to the First Great Paris Epidemic in 1832,” *Microbes and Infection* 1 (October 1999): 1051-1057, here 1051.

<sup>18</sup> Kudlick, “Learning from Cholera,” 1052.

<sup>19</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 8.

This societal sickness ties directly to Romanticist ideals regarding social impurities and corresponding solutions to these impurities. Romanticism came about as “a child of the [French] Revolution,”<sup>21</sup> as political and social unrest crossed over into literature and art. Major themes of Romanticism include the emphasis on individuality and self-expression, the importance of originality over imitation, and the boundlessness of human emotion and imagination.<sup>22</sup> Traveling to a place, namely to Switzerland, which allowed Dumas to apply his Romanticist ideals more directly to his everyday life, provided Dumas with a cure for his psychological illness, as he could see his Romanticist principles work emotionally and intellectually, which gave him a sense of spiritual fulfillment. The Romanticist themes that emphasized nature, heroism, and individualism provided Dumas with the cure for his existential crisis and artistic depression, as well as an alternative worldview and lifestyle that could potentially cure the perceived nineteenth-century French “sickness.” Dumas proved that operating under a Romanticist lens could provide “sick” individuals with a cure for the ailments of the society in which they lived. Not only was Romanticism a cure for Dumas’s personal existential and artistic crisis, but it also gave industrialized cities a solution to cure psychological and spiritual sickness in society.

### III. Romanticism as a Cure: Nature

Romanticism emphasized the importance of spending time in nature,<sup>23</sup> an ideal that made a strong contribution to the application of Dumas’s Romanticist lens while he was in Switzerland. This ideal was a result of industrialization, as nature disappeared in increasingly urbanized areas like Paris. Romanticists believed that humanity’s spiritual and intellectual well-being was dependent on spending time in nature.<sup>24</sup> Dumas’s return to nature as a Romanticist through his travels in Switzerland had a profound effect on his intellectual state. Dumas notes that what he experienced in Switzerland could not be found in his adopted hometown of Paris,<sup>25</sup> which is the key to the impact this trip had on him. There are several examples where the scenery of the Swiss countryside sent Dumas into long periods of contemplation, from which he drew new, profound conclusions about life. He was hit with this phenomenon when he first set foot in the country and noted that “under such blue sky, by such a beautiful expanse of water, one’s limbs feel superfluous: one has only to breathe to be completely alive.”<sup>26</sup> This connection between nature and one’s conscious state is very present in

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<sup>21</sup> Bell, *Alexandre Dumas*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Peyre, *What is Romanticism?* trans. Roda P. Roberts ([Tuscaloosa]: University of Alabama Press, 1977), 28.

<sup>23</sup> Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “Romanticism.”

<sup>24</sup> Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “Romanticism:” “nature [...] as a responsive mirror of the soul.”

<sup>25</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 91.

<sup>26</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 14.

Romanticism, and credit for this goes to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who believed that nature is essential because it provides symmetry and balance between the mind and the body.<sup>27</sup> Here, Dumas's feeling of non-existence is immediately reversed by simply stepping out into Swiss nature. Dumas's descriptions of Swiss topography are very imaginative, riddled with metaphor, fantasy, and emotional implications. He describes a waterfall as "looking like a gigantic stream of milk."<sup>28</sup> He compares an area of sparse pine trees to "an army of giants who had been stopped in their course by rocks rolled down upon them from the heights above by an invisible hand."<sup>29</sup> To Dumas, the echoing of thunder "was the prologue to the last judgment."<sup>30</sup> This imagination had been lost in Paris, but was found again in Switzerland, and it allowed for his writing to be once again influenced by an atmosphere that allowed him to validate his human existence.

The outcome of such contemplations and self-reflection was a new understanding of his existential state. Dumas notes that he felt "puny"<sup>31</sup> in the midst of such landscapes. This self-reflection mirrors Rousseau's belief that introspection and subsequently changing oneself as a result of introspection was necessary to bring harmony to the human psyche.<sup>32</sup> Dumas has the most significant epiphany as he lays down to bed one night with a view of the landscape of Switzerland:

To lie down is always pleasurable; to lie down in an historic place, by the side of a lake overlooked by mountains; to watch a phantom-like boat disappearing into the distance, carrying in it someone who brings back memories of other times and places; to feel the past and the present blend and blur; to be in Switzerland and yet think of France—such is a vigil of one's dreams, above all if you can dream it at the coming on of twilight while the sinking sun enflames the mountain peaks above you and the dusk, heavy with perfumes and dew, is pierced with night's first pale stars. Then it comes over you with fresh certitude that earth exists for itself alone and not for you; that you are a mere spectator invited by the bounty of God to witness this splendid spectacle which is itself only a fragment of the universe. You realize suddenly, with feeling akin to terror, how small a space of earth is yours. But soon soul reacts on matter, one's thoughts grow proportionate to the ideas which motivate them. Past becomes linked to present, world to worlds, man to God, and overcome by such littleness and such immensity, a voice within cries: Lord, thy hand has made me small, but thy spirit has made me great!<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Vanessa Sage, "Encountering the Wilderness, Encountering the Mist: Nature, Romanticism, and Contemporary Paganism," *Anthropology of Consciousness* 20, no. 1 (March 2009): 27-52, here 28-32.

<sup>28</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 101.

<sup>31</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 45.

<sup>32</sup> See Sage, "Encountering the Wilderness," 28-32.

<sup>33</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 140.

This epiphany, relating directly to existentialist ideals, is a synthesis of Dumas's experiences due to the splendors of nature in Switzerland. When questioning his existence in the foreword, Dumas had felt dread, uncertainty, and hopelessness with regard to his existence. He left Paris questioning who he was and what he had to live for. Switzerland—as seen from a Romanticist point of view—made him absolute and resolved regarding his existence and place in the universe. Proving his identity as a Romanticist, Dumas experienced profound emotional responses to nature that he attached to thoughts of God. Although he notes that terror is still an accompanying factor in realizing how small his place is in the world, he recognizes that his existence—which is God-given—is final and decided. His epiphany fundamentally allowed Dumas to restore his faith through reconnecting with God. Industrial Paris was devoid of any such nature that could have reawakened Dumas's spirituality in this way. Switzerland provided Dumas with answers he could not have found in nineteenth-century Paris due to Dumas's identity as a Romanticist.

#### *IV. Romanticism as a Cure: Heroism and Individualism*

As Romanticism emerged out of revolution and political dissent, the ideals of heroism and individuality were prevalent in the movement and therefore prevalent in Dumas's writings. Romanticists looked for heroic characters in society and included them in their narratives. Individuality was also an idealized trait, as the growing trend of republicanism over kingship allowed for the participation of individuals in government.<sup>34</sup> Freedom of individual expression and spiritual fulfillment was a fundamental principle of the Romanticist movement. Dumas's appreciation for individuality and heroism is evident in several passages, and a pattern emerges, as Dumas repeatedly brings up the concept of courage. This is a trait that Dumas appears to be lacking, while he often notes that Swiss people, in general, are very courageous in all aspects of life. During his adventures, he exhibits the physical symptoms of anxiety and fear, namely perspiring, shaking, and feeling faint.<sup>35</sup> These instances usually involve an activity such as spelunking or hiking high mountain peaks, where physical strength meets the need for mental soundness and courage. Dumas does not give a reason for his lack of courage, but it is likely a result of his easy life in urban Paris compared to the rural lives the Swiss lived. The first time Dumas presents this fear, his Swiss guide criticizes it as being an unattractive trait. When Dumas puts his life in jeopardy—resulting from his apparent cowardice during an expedition in the depths of a salt mine—his Swiss guide chastises him regarding his fear: "Must you really do that? It's very unhealthy in this part of the world!"<sup>36</sup> Dumas wonders why anxiety and apprehension follow him

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<sup>34</sup> See Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. "Romanticism."

<sup>35</sup> See examples in Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 29, 63, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 30.

through his travels and contrasts this with the Swiss tendency to go through life without the same sense of unease. Dumas often chastises himself in the text for his constant worry and anxiety over what the Swiss consider every-day tasks. He admires the Swiss for their courage, attributing this trait to be a comment on the greatness of their character. This heroic quality was attractive to Dumas and provided him with artistic inspiration. Such examples of real-life heroes mirrored the larger-than-life heroes that were common characters in Romanticist writings.<sup>37</sup> These heroic characters would later appear, following Dumas's return to Paris, in *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844).

In Switzerland, Dumas met Jacques Balmat (1762-1834), a Swiss mountaineer who led Dumas to believe that he had been the first man to reach the top of Mont Blanc, located in the Alps, although the editor notes that this claim to fame is highly suspect.<sup>38</sup> Balmat and Dumas, over a cozy dinner and a lot of wine, proceeded to talk about their life's triumphs. Dumas dedicates ten pages of the narrative to retell Balmat's extraordinary expedition in detail.<sup>39</sup> The tale of Balmat's ascent to the top of Mont Blanc with his partner, Doctor Paccard (1757-1827), is one of hardship, emotional turmoil, and eventual victory. Despite running into obstacles like brutal weather and health concerns, Dumas's report of the journey portrays Balmat as a persistent fighter whose cannot be deterred by adversity. The importance of meeting Balmat becomes immediately apparent as Dumas "thanked him for honouring me with his presence."<sup>40</sup> Dumas was so impressed by Balmat's heroism, despite the hardships his task had entailed, that the one characteristic he attributes to this man above all else is "courage."<sup>41</sup> Courage is another trait that Dumas himself lacked, but one that he also admired in others. Meeting Jacques Balmat is an example of an instance that struck Dumas with the inspiration to write. This inspiration to write for pleasure, which had long been lacking back home in Paris, is evidence of the curative nature of this particular meeting with the heroic Jacques Balmat in Switzerland. Dumas held Balmat in such high regard that he notes, "I thought of him in the same way as I did of Columbus, who had discovered an unknown world, or Vasco de Gama, who had rediscovered a lost one."<sup>42</sup> This high opinion demonstrates that Balmat is an example of the Romanticist hero, one that Dumas had been looking for on his journey, and one that fulfilled his individual Romanticist ideals and would later serve as inspiration for Dumas's Romantic heroes in his historical novels.

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<sup>37</sup> Anita Brookner, *Romanticism and Its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2000), 33.

<sup>38</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 49-59.

<sup>40</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 48.

Later in the text, Dumas recounts meeting the famed French native François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), a politician and writer who was concerned with what he considered to be the decline of French society.<sup>43</sup> Dumas already had a very high opinion of Chateaubriand before ever coming to Switzerland. Considering himself a fan of Chateaubriand, Dumas declares that he had wanted to meet Chateaubriand since childhood and notes "my admiration for him was a religion."<sup>44</sup> Dumas was nervous to meet his childhood hero and feared that he would not come across as intelligent enough to be considered an associate. In Chateaubriand's writings, which Dumas had studied and admired, Chateaubriand had often mourned the loss of glorified France and conveyed a certain nostalgia for what he considered to be the glorious days of the French empire.<sup>45</sup> These ideas are very present in Dumas's and Chateaubriand's conversations, as Dumas tried to gain insight into Chateaubriand's decision to leave his home country through self-exile. Dumas and Chateaubriand had differing political opinions, with Dumas being a self-proclaimed socialist and Chateaubriand opposing revolution and the toppling of monarchies. His conversations with Chateaubriand were all political, revolving around the French revolutions of 1789 and 1830.<sup>46</sup> Dumas was enchanted by Chateaubriand due to the latter's unwavering faith in his political convictions and the individuality of thought by which he lived. Chateaubriand was so resolute in his beliefs that he had exiled himself to Switzerland, and he made it clear to Dumas that he would never return to France as long as the monarchy remained overthrown. Once again, here we see that this man's individualistic convictions inspired Dumas to the extent that he began to write again right away.<sup>47</sup> Chateaubriand perfectly represented the Romanticist ideal of individuality, freedom of expression, and spiritual self-fulfillment.

### *Conclusion*

During his travels in Switzerland, Romanticism provided Alexandre Dumas with a personal cure to his intellectual and artistic depression, which had manifested itself as a product of the illness in nineteenth-century French society, through his return to nature and encounters with individuals who displayed admirable heroism and individuality. Dumas states that his travels helped him cure his so-called "cholera." This word is a euphemism for the spiritual depression in which Dumas was stuck following his experience with cholera while living in Paris. This sickness can also represent the general sickness within an industrialized society like Paris. Romanticism provided a cure for this societal sickness, as the

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<sup>43</sup> Benjamin Hoffman, "Chateaubriand and the Mourning of (New) France," *French Forum* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 201-216, here 209.

<sup>44</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 151.

<sup>45</sup> Hoffman, "Chateaubriand and the Mourning of (New) France," 202.

<sup>46</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 152.

<sup>47</sup> Dumas, *Travels in Switzerland*, 49.

movement emphasized a worldview that idealized characteristics opposite of what was seen in nineteenth-century Paris. The major Romanticist ideal that helped Dumas come to terms with his existential crisis was the importance of returning to nature. Dumas's return to nature while in Switzerland and his interaction with the natural environment allowed for several profound self-reflections on the condition of his soul and his place in the universe.

Furthermore, Dumas viewed the people he met in Switzerland through a Romanticist lens with an emphasis on individualism and heroism. He admired the courage of the Swiss people, and as he noticed this courage more and more, it made him reflect on his lack of courage and question what had led to his general anxiety. Meeting the courageous Jacques Balmat made such an impression on Dumas that he finally found the inspiration to write again, out of pleasure rather than obligation. Balmat represented the Romanticist hero Dumas had been looking for. Then, meeting François-René de Chateaubriand provided Dumas with someone who fully represented the Romanticist ideal of individualism. Chateaubriand was someone who held so strongly to his convictions, even when they were against the norm, that he had exiled himself to Switzerland. Dumas was again inspired to write after meeting the man who had been his childhood hero. Ultimately, Dumas's time in Switzerland served as a journey of self-realization and spiritual fulfillment. His Romanticist lens provided him with a unique experience in this foreign environment that healed his mind and soul. This perspective provides a real-world demonstration of Romanticism as a movement directly applied to a nineteenth-century individual's life, as an alternative to the traditional remedies to existential crises and depression.

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Rebecca Stolzer of San Diego, California, earned her B.A. in European Studies, with a concentration in European History, from California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) (2018). The article printed above originated in a senior research seminar on Travel and Travel Writing offered by CSUF's History Department.*