

CLASSIQUES MODERNES



# CHATEAUBRIAND

MÉMOIRES  
D'OUTRE-TOMBE  
Préface de Julien Gracq



*La Pochothèque*

## Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe

*François-René de Chateaubriand*

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# Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe

*François-René de Chateaubriand*

## Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe François-René de Chateaubriand

The only available edition in English of the greatest of all French autobiographies

By the time he came to write his extraordinary, highly entertaining memoirs, Chateaubriand had witnessed some of the iconic figures and events of French history—from the court of Louis XVI, to the reign of Napoleon, to the disaster of Waterloo, to life under the Restoration. Written across different times and places, Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb tells of exotic adventures to the farthest points of the globe, of heroic battles and political struggles, and of the loneliness of a restless soul. And its startling candor—because it would be published only “from beyond the tomb”—makes it almost ridiculously enjoyable.

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## Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe Details

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Author : François-René de Chateaubriand

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## From Reader Review *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* for online ebook

### **Gabrielle Dubois says**

I read this book in French (because I'm french!). But I comment it in English, because I'd like you, English readers who would like to discover French state of mind from the late 18th and early 19th century and also the great History he really lived. It's not really fun, but it's Chateaubriand! So it's clever, pretentious (he could be!), historically very interesting and so many things more!

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### **Justin Evans says**

Fascinating stuff; it's easy to see the influence Chateaubriand has had on later French writing; it's also just damn enjoyable to spend time in his company. I read this too quickly, but I'm very excited to re-read with pencil in hand, because the bon mots come thick and fast. His description of listening to shovelsful of dirt being dropped on a coffin might be the most affecting thing I've read this year. It would be wonderful to have the rest of the *Memoirs* translated in a modern edition, but I suspect that's not really a good business proposition.

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### **Stephen Durrant says**

For an understanding of the romantic temperament that shaped so much mid-19th century European literature, art and music, Chateaubriand's "Memoirs from beyond the Tomb" is a good place to start. The title itself envisions a writer, now nothing more than dust, speaking from beyond the grave--a reminder to us, I suppose, of where we will soon enough be (in case we need a reminder!). A common enough perspective, I suppose, but the living author who has become a dead author, in this case Chateaubriand, repeatedly contemplates his future death as preferable to his melancholy, unhappy life. In his construction of things, despite all the good moments--he loved food, took as a lover Madame Récamier, a woman of stunning beauty (see the Francois Gerard portrait), spent time in positions of political importance in London and Rome, traveled to the United States where he claims to have met George Washington, became famous as a writer during his lifetime, etc.--he insists his life was exceedingly bleak. No number of good moments, it seems compensates for the general melancholy of mortality, at least in the eyes of the genuine romantic. This all might seem quite passé, but it remains instructive for those of us who want to understand the past--for some of us not just the 19th century but an earlier time in our own lives when we might, alas, have cherished just such ideas. But this book is much more than just a monument to the Romantic Movement.

Chateaubriand, born only twenty days after Napoleon and seeing himself as somehow linked to the complex conqueror, writes of the march to Moscow and back, as well as many other Napoleonic adventures, with great shrewdness and real ambivalence. His account becomes a rich history of his own age; a history told from the perspective of a royalist with, I am sure he would insist, genuine democratic tendencies. A rewarding, important, and at times beautifully written book.

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### **Bud Smith says**

The first half was INCREDIBLE.

Second half was really good too, focuses on Napoleon a lot, almost a mini biography of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Francois Chateaubriand was a cool guy. I like him. We would have been friends. We have a similar haircut.

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### **Aurélie Knit & Read says**

J'avais choisi de découvrir ce monument de la littérature française en version abrégée, parce que l'œuvre m'intimidait beaucoup (et je ne dois pas être la seule ^^).

Mais au final je me suis fait avoir, car ce que j'ai lu m'a tellement plu que je n'ai qu'une envie : m'attaquer à la version intégrale !!!

Ne passez pas à côté de ce chef d'œuvre, quitte à tremper vos pieds dans le petit bain pour commencer, grâce à cette très bonne édition abrégée...

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### **Fazackerly Toast says**

simply loved this. One of those books that you internalise and stays with you. His childhood! His forbidding father pacing the room from the fire to the end plunged in darkness, in silence! Those encounters with Napoleon. That occasion when the Napoleonic army crosses the river into Russia and he hears music, like in Antony and Cleopatra, the god of war whom he loved now leaving him. Heaven.

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### **Hadrian says**

The name Chateaubriand is known for two things - a cut of beef, and a set of memoirs.

This new English translation covers the first fourth of the memoirs - twelve 'volumes' - which cover the author's childhood in Brittany, the first years of the French Revolution and the deaths of family members in the Reign of Terror, a six month long trip to North America, fighting alongside the Royalists, surviving smallpox, wandering the countryside half-dead, and then fleeing to England.

And while the books are a useful document for *some* historical events (the translator reveals that a meeting with George Washington almost certainly did not happen), what stands out is how Chateaubriand discards any pretense to objectivity, and admits freely how his memoirs of the past and the present come together. He, an older man, experiences his memories differently than how he did ten years before. A chapter may be written in both 1812, 1822 and 1830. Of course, this is done in other memoirs, but Chateaubriand is so forward about his biases and takes the processes of his imagination and his beliefs so sincerely, that the writing adds to his experience. He writes about a house that was destroyed in the revolution, or of elusive bliss, and he remembers the fleeting moments of the past and to write them while he still can.

He is too world-weary to imagine childhood as a time of complete innocence. He knows better than to lose himself completely to nostalgia in this way. That past is, unequivocally, gone - of a French aristocracy, the world it inhabited, and the rotten system that sustained it - but his book, the baggy old-fashioned monster

that it is, is a monument to human memory, and a guide stone to literature that came after.

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### **Markus says**

Review after the second volume.

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### **César says**

No he leído propiamente las "Memorias de ultratumba". He leído una antología o selección de las mismas. ¿Por qué? Porque soy cobarde.

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### **Eric says**

*Chateaubriand's style is not that of Racine, it is that of the Prophet.* (Napoleon)

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### **Mia (Parentheses Enthusiast) says**

Whoops, turns out I don't know French. But someday I might. I'm keeping this little book around for that day.

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### **P.E. says**

- **Saint-Malo, as seen from the Petit Bé, near Chateaubriand's tomb**

- **The bulwarks of Saint-Malo**

- **The maritime fort**

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### **AvvαΦ says**

Ho un debole per le biografie e le autobiografie, come per i trattati storici e le digressioni romantiche. *Memorie d'oltretomba* racchiude tutte le mie predilezioni, non potevo non leggerlo, dopo averlo guardato e scansato per molto tempo, ma infine arriva il tempo per ogni cosa.

Un libro affascinante, ricco di sfaccettature, forse non per tutti ma certo per gli amanti dei resoconti storici e gli affreschi d'epoca. Chi fosse spaventato dal cofanetto di oltre 2000 pagine sbaglierebbe, moltissime sono note, e il resto è una lettura molto godibile, lo stile di Chateaubriand è elegante e ironico, tranne quando indulge in una pompa autocelebrativa che sa un po', ebbene sì, *pardon*, di trombone.

I suoi dispacci di ambasciatore, i suoi discorsi alla Camera dei Pari, le sue lettere a vari personaggi hanno spesso il tratto della pompa e dell'autocelebrazione, inoltre i frequenti riferimenti al Cristianesimo pongono molti veli sulla sua vita di galante gentiluomo ammogliato (ebbe infinite amanti, relazioni contemporanee durate anni, la povera Madame de Chateaubriand doveva sopportare la presenza di queste *Madames* come le chiamava, perfino nella residenza della famiglia alla Vallée aux Loups, nelle Memorie di queste donne non si fa alcun cenno).

Del resto ogni autobiografia lavora di taglio e di cesello, non ci si aspetta la Verità, ma la sua rilettura, l'autoritratto che l'autore regala al mondo e le vicende autobiografiche qui sono anche le meno interessanti, per nostra fortuna le pagine di pompa autocelebrativa sono abbastanza limitate come numero, il resto è una delizia di affresco storico della Francia tra due secoli e due mondi. Chateaubriand ebbe la fortuna di vivere in anni ricchi di cambiamenti ed il meglio di sé, a mio avviso, lo dà come memorialista descrivendo gli eventi storici e i suoi personaggi (La Rivoluzione Francese, Vita di Napoleone) e poi l'infanzia e la giovinezza, i suoi viaggi, il suo esilio a Londra – esilio politico a seguito della Rivoluzione Francese, come sostenitore della monarchia – . Nella descrizione dell'amatissima Bretagna e dei suoi boschi di Comburg si scorge chiarissimo il Romanticismo di cui in Francia fu l'iniziatore, lasciando la residenza della Vallée aux Loups, che dovette vendere per disseti economici, amatissimo luogo dove aveva piantato personalmente ogni albero, ogni pianta, romanticamente, mestamente sospirava quale Adamo esiliato dal suo Paradiso “Tutti i miei giorni sono degli addii”.

Tra le pagine migliori io annovero anche il viaggio in America, il ritorno e il naufragio, le peripezie come soldato realista in lotta contro le forze rivoluzionarie, la caduta in una vita piena di stenti a Londra, (con gran parte della famiglia uccisa o incarcerata durante la Rivoluzione) e a seguire la risalita ai vertici della società dopo il ritorno dell'Impero e della monarchia Borbonica, traversie che ne fanno l'emblema del vero eroe romantico, di cui ha tutto l'ardore del pensiero e dell'azione.

Memorabili le sue invettive contro Napoleone, dopo l'assassinio del duca d'Enghien, Chateaubriand fu un oppositore feroce e palese dell'imperatore, non si fece intimorire dalla possibilità che Napoleone lo facesse “far fuori a sciabolate sulle scale delle Tuileries”, come gli aveva preannunciato, né fece sconti dopo la caduta, la morte e l'esilio dell'amato/odiato corso (più odiato, in verità). Chateaubriand non perde occasione per dire quanto Napoleone fosse poca cosa dal punto di vista umano – egoista, maniaco, arrogante oltre misura, privo di gratitudine e feroce, ambiziosissimo e senza pietà – e politico, ma ne riconosce la grandezza militare, almeno fino alla campagna di Russia. La cosa che io trovo ammirabile è che glielo dicesse in faccia o in pubblico, senza sconti né mezze misure, già per questo Chateaubriand mi sta simpatico, tra i suoi difetti non si può certo annoverare l'ipocrisia o il calcolo opportunista. Né opportunista e né ipocrita e come mostra il suo atteggiamento quando, a seguito della Rivoluzione del 1830, ci fu un ribaltamento nella successione al trono di Francia, nemmeno voltagabbana: si schierò sempre con la legittimità Borbonica contro il ramo cadetto “usurpatore” degli Orleans, malgardo le lusinghe e i prospettati favori.

Le *Memorie* dovevano essere pubblicate dopo la morte dell'autore, in realtà già nel 1836 ne cedette i diritti all'editore, con questi soldi Chateaubriand, di nuovo la fortuna economica gli aveva voltato le spalle, visse dignitosamente per altri 12 anni. E' seppellito davanti al mare a Saint-Malò, nella sua Bretagna. Luogo non sarebbe stato più adatto a lui che del mare e della Bretagna ha fatto i protagonisti di alcune delle più belle pagine delle sue *Memorie*.

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## Bettie? says

**"I want to be Chateaubriand, or nothing" </b>**  
- Victor Hugo

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-...>

To hunt down...

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## Markus says

Memoirs d'Outre Tombe  
By Francois-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848)

Chateaubriand started his memoirs in 1803 at 35 years of age and wrote the last lines in 1841.  
He meant to remember his ideas and convictions rather than his personal life.

He did well; his life was exceptionally rich in historical events and his personal engagements important and outstanding.

A writer, a politician and a diplomat. A loyal aristocrat, at the French revolution of 1789.  
To save his head from the guillotine he had to flee to London.  
His elder brother did not take this precaution and was executed together with his wife.

In this first book of two, of this edition, his 'Memoirs' cover his life at a young age.  
From his birthplace Saint-Malo and then with his parents at Chateau Combourg.

As the second in line of birth, he had the traditional choice of going into religion or become a soldier. After a wrong start, he preferred becoming a soldier.

During the early years of the French Revolution, in 1791 he undertook a short voyage to America with a letter of recommendation and a meeting with George Washington.

He had the dream and illusion to be the first to discover the North-West passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. George Washington did not seem to have encouraged him.

Young Chateaubriand had underestimated the distances, the terribly cold weather and the cost of hiring a ship and its crew.

Instead, he went 'native,' he had a romantic adventure with two indigenous girls who had taken a liking to him and followed around wherever he travelled.  
When the rightful family came to take the girls back, he did not fight. He was never a great fighter with the

sword.

His arms were ink and feather an he became an extremely brave and respected soldier in this art of warfare.

After only five or six months in America, he embarked on a vessel to take him back to France. He had not gained much knowledge of George Washington, nor of America.

On his return to France, for financial reasons it seems, Chateaubriand was encouraged by his family to get married.

In 1792 he was wed to Celeste Buisson de la Vigne.

Only on very rare occasions throughout his memories does Chateaubriand mention his wife.

The reader can only guess of her whereabouts during her husband's extensive travels as well as an exile to London, his life as a soldier and travels to the Orient, etc.

He seemed to have great respect if not love for her, and he praised her never failing loyalty.

On the other hand, Chateaubriand mentioned a good number of his lady-friends with whom it is unclear to which extent these relations were intellectual and platonic only.

In July 1792 he enrolled into a Royalist army and battles at Thionville, get wounded and discharged.

Remarkable for me is the fact that aristocrats when fighting for the king, had to bring their own armament and provide for their daily substance. A fact which can explain the pillages and robberies of the population. For Chateaubriand, a poor aristocrat, it was a miserable experience.

Follows his exile to an uncle in Jersey and then to London. Lodging in an attic belonging to a cousin. Aristocrats had not learned how to make a living other than intellectually.

Young Chateaubriand was soon starving and had troubles surviving a few months.

Then he started works of translations and published an "Essai on Revolutions."

1794 he learned of the death by guillotine of his brother and family.

1800 With a fake passport Chateaubriand returned to France and succeeded in publishing the first chapters of "Le Genie du Christianisme."

It is by this work composed at a time when the revolution is persecuting religion that he became known and admired.

The years of Napoleon Bonaparte's Empire.

1803 Chateaubriand after a meeting with Bonaparte is appointed Secretary to the French delegation in Rome. Later that year he is promoted by the First Consul to Chargé d'Affairs in The Valais.

1804 When he learns of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien, Chateaubriand resigns from his function of a minister. He expects to be arrested any time, but Bonaparte who has a surprising sympathy for Chateaubriand decides to ignore him.

Chateaubriand as a first-hand eyewitness includes an interesting biography of Bonaparte from his successful years of European Wars to the disastrous Russian invasion to the lost battle of Waterloo to his second and final downfall and exile to St. Helena.

Throughout his memories, Chateaubriand keeps a fair balance of admiration and contempt for Napoleon Bonaparte. According to him, Napoleon was the right man at the right time for France.

France, following the revolution of 1789 had fallen into an endless reign of bloodshed, terror and anarchy. Napoleon established order, discipline and a legal frame, called ‘Code Napoleon’.

It was easy for him to enrol numberless and workless Frenchmen into an enormous army and with thousands of canons, he soon overrun all the European Kingdoms on victorious battles. All in a short few years, until he committed the error of attacking Russia over the great distances and terrible winter which was fatal to his glory and reign.

Chateaubriand’s admiration for Napoleon ended when he had crowned himself Emporer and started ruling as a despot, murdering or exiling every opponent, and censoring freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

Throughout the book, it became clear that Chateaubriand had become the champion of the freedom of the Press.

1806 Departure for his Voyage d’Orient and Jerusalem. These events, mentioned only in an abbreviated form in the memories, were published as a book under “L’Itineraire.”

This first book ends with two extremely important events in the History of France, the end of Bonaparte’s Era of the Empire and the beginning of the Restoration of the Monarchy.

March 1814 at the final downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte, Chateaubriand publishes a brochure: “De Bonaparte et des Bourbons.”

Mai 1814 The Restoration of King Louis XVIII.

Chateaubriand is at the start of higher political status.

He is named minister to Sweden then decorated with “Croix de St. Louis.”

Then he is promoted to “Colonel de Cavalerie.”

But then he had a bad idea to publish “The Chart.”

They were to be the laws of the aristocratic ruling as from this time.

It brought him many admirers but also many enemies among his peers.

“The King reigns, but does not govern”!

Imagine the stun and awe at this statement at a time of a new Monarchy.

In consequence of this farsighted but untimely project, Chateaubriand was evicted as a minister, disgraced by King Louis XVIII and deprived of any income.

Chateaubriand’s political position was between a Constitutional Monarchy and the Republican Party.

As a loyal Aristocrat, forever faithful to the King, he could not be a leader of the Republicans.

And as a convinced Democrat in favour of a Constitutional Monarchy, he was suspicious and perceived as a danger to the King and therefore was in and out of favour according to whatever convictions he expressed. By consequence, the Chateaubriands were poor and rich over the years according to his political success of the time.

1821 Chateaubriand returns to favour. He is appointed Minister and is attaché to Berlin.

Then he is appointed Member of the Private Council and Minister of State.

He is decorated with the “Legion d’Honneur.”

1822 Chateaubriand is appointed Ambassador to London and is a celebrity among the Royalty and members of the Government.

In September that year, he attends the Conges of Verone and has an important meeting with Czar Alexander and writes a separate book on this event.

In December Chateaubriand is appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs.

1824 June Chateaubriand is again evicted from his position as Minister.

In September that year, King Louis XVIII dies, and his King Charles X is crowned King.

1825 Chateaubriand attends the crowning ceremony.

1828 Chateaubriand is appointed Ambassador to Rome.

In Mai that year he returns to Paris where he meets Mme. Recamier. He will continue meeting this lady throughout the rest of his life. It remains secret whether their relationship was purely intellectual.

1929 August. He resigned from his position of ambassador in Rome.

### Revolution of 1830

King Charles X is forced to the abdication in favour of Louis Philipe, now Roy des Francais.

Chateaubriand considered Louis Philipe as an imposter.

He remained loyal to the Bourbon family, The Duchess of Berry and her son Luis V, a child, whom Chateaubriand considers the legitimate King.

The Duchess of Berry was arrested and accused of preparing a coup d’etat and

In this connection, Chateaubriand was also arrested but discharged innocent after two weeks.

Then in the following year on missions for The Duchess of Berry, Chateaubriand makes two long voyages to Prag (by coach, imagine!) where young Luis V in custody of Charles X, was brought up and educated.

Unfortunately, as the future did show, young Louis V was never to become the last Bourbon King.

Ultimately, our author’s implications in politics came to an end, and he returned to Paris to his final destination.

He died on 4th of July 1848.

To a French reader, the preeminent quality of Chateaubriand's work is the unique style of the early nineteenth romantic way of writing.

Even today it is a reference for scholars and repeatedly referred to as the best French ever written.

Reading this book in depth is a work of slow progress. Chateaubriand did not follow a chronological order of progression. He went back and forth over the years of his travels, his successes of editions of literature and over his political careers.

Some unique aspects of this book are the detailed accounts of personal historical experiences, the assault of the Bastille by an infuriated crowd, his conversations with Bonaparte and King Luis XVIII as well as many

other dignitaries at court and government assemblies. His memoirs take into account many original documents made available to him by Generals, Ministers, and many aristocratic families his close relations at the time.

Only an extremely gifted author of literary works as well as a politician and philosopher could provide the analytical insight that Chateaubriand was able to contribute.

It goes without saying that I recommend this unique work to my reader friends interested in French and European History at the time of the French Revolution and the years after.

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