



Journey Around My Room and a Nocturnal Expedition Around My Room

Xavier de Maistre , Alain de Botton (Foreword by)

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What do you do when you find yourself imprisoned in your room for 6 weeks? Xavier de Maistre, a 27-year-old Frenchman found himself in this uneasy situation when he was arrested in Turin after a duel, in the Spring of 1790. But with only a butler and a dog for company, Xavier de Maistre managed to fill his time by embarking on a journey around his bedroom, later writing an account of what he had seen. Whether venturing from his bed to his sofa, or even to his mirror, he wears his "traveling outfit"--his favorite pink and blue pajamas. Out of his forced reclusion comes a captivating fantasy--a novel take on travel literature that would inspire many later writers, including Marcel Proust. This edition also contains de Maistre's "A Nocturnal Expedition around My Room." Xavier de Maistre was a military man, who supplemented his army career with short works of fiction.

Journey Around My Room and a Nocturnal Expedition Around My Room Details

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Alex Sarll says

With an acknowledged debt to Sterne, a young Frenchman under house arrest in 1790 writes an account of his travels - which, as the title suggests, take him no further than the bedroom door. Except by association, of course, and there's the rub, for through association he can roam infinity. Neither the 'Journey', nor its sequel 'A Nocturnal Expedition Around My Room' (also included here) is quite on Sterne's level, but then who is, especially in translation*? Still, there is a whimsy here, mixed with a melancholy and a numinous sense, which by any other standard are most impressive.

*No disrespect intended to translator Andrew Brown, whose prose is both charming and fluent.

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

See more of my book reviews on my blog, Literary Flits

I learned about A Journey Round My Room by reading Traveling In Place by Bernd Stiegler. I read that book a couple of years ago, not getting around to downloading its predecessor until recently. Unfortunately I was quite disappointed!

De Maistre's book is a series of short self-indulgent essays tediously strung together by the Journey concept. Some are humorous and I can imagine that, for people who actually knew de Maistre, his chattering might have been amusing, but overall I found this book dull and I couldn't see why it has endured so long. I am not sure I will go on to read the sequel.

Mikko Saari says

A interesting piece of work, particularly for something so old. References to Sterne are appreciated, and I clearly should go and read A Sentimental Journey. This is an interesting mixture of profound and even silly (de Maistre hitting his head on the sloped roof), a nice dose of 200-year-old humour and thought.

This is a fine combination of two works that complement each other. Makes sense to publish them in one book – one can see how the first one is clearly a work of a younger author, and the second one feels somewhat matured.

Anubha says

2.5/5

Brenda says

My three-star rating might be a little harsh because it's a combined rating for both stories in the book. A true evaluation would be four stars for the first story in the collection and two stars for the second.

The first part, "A Journey Around My Room," was wonderful. It captures emotions that are difficult for people to write about like malaise, wealthy guilt, and simple pleasures. I loved it and thought the entire story from start to finish was witty and sweetly written.

The second part, "A Nocturnal Expedition Around My Room," focused more on modern philosophy...if you lived in the late 1700's. Debates about the theories of the enlightenment, whether or not man is ruled by head or heart, and the role the government should play in one's life absorb most of the text. It got a little dull - and was not nearly as delightful or as timeless as the first story.

All around worth the read, though and I would recommend it to people.

Anna says

I discussed this charming little book with my dad and he suggested it sounded vaguely like Proust (not that I have read any Proust). The author sits in his room and contemplates his possessions and all that he can see around him, which sparks a chain of memories and contemplation. Thus, 'A Journey around My Room' is like Proust, but glib and flippant. Although de Maistre discusses some quite profound matters, he always adds a certain absurd bathos to them, or suddenly breaks off to mention something superficial. The author gives the impression of being an indolent, contented aristocrat who disdains and dismisses the French Revolution for considering people like him parasites. I am more inclined to sympathise with the revolutionaries. Although de Maistre is a pleasant fellow and his book enjoyable to read, he clearly has a very strong sense of entitlement.

In the first part of this volume, de Maistre is under house arrest for dueling and introduces us to his dog Rosine (who gives every impression of being adorable) and his manservant Joannetti (who gives every impression of being long-suffering). He discusses a theory of humanity as consisting of soul and beast (the latter referred to with feminine pronouns, an interesting translation choice), but does not explore the implications in any depth. In the second part, de Maistre has moved house and sits on his windowsill, contemplating the stars, love, and what Fatherland (presumably 'La Patrie') means to him. I enjoyed this latter voyage more, as the image of him balancing upon the windowsill was vivid and amusing, moreover he seemed more inclined to poke fun of himself. My favourite bit was probably chapter 14, in which he contemplated being a ruler who makes a law that everyone must take time to look up at the sky. This hypothetical law then requires endless caveats, such that it does not apply to the sick, the blind, lovers, etc. In the end, he gives up and asks his aide to write a memo about it.

I found the book a pleasant read, as I am myself more inclined to travel through daydreams than in a literal sense. de Maistre is rather a reactionary wastrel, though, and his ideas about women are strange.

Erin Boyington says

This is actually two books in one: both are the playful, tongue-in-cheek musings of a young French soldier confined to small quarters who takes on the style of travel narratives for considerably shorter journeys.

In *A Journey Around My Room*, de Maistre has been confined to 42 days of house arrest for dueling. But de Maistre knows how to make lemonade out of his lemons: he takes the opportunity to tour his own room as though it were a foreign country. In the introduction Alain de Botton puts it this way: "Wrapped in his dressing gown, satisfied by the confines of his own bedroom, Xavier de Maistre was gently nudging us to try, before taking off for distant hemispheres, to notice what we've already seen."

Making excellent use of his classical education, de Maistre's prose is witty, urbane, sparkling - all those wonderful adjectives I don't get to use often enough when talking about nonfiction (though they always seem to come up with 18th-century French writers). He inspired Marcel Proust and later writers, and it's obvious why. I've added this book to my list of favorites, and look forward to rereading it someday soon.

The second book, *A Nocturnal Expedition Around My Room* continues the story a few years later. We get to know the fates of Joannetti the servant and Rosine the faithful dog, but we also get another journey into de Maistre's mind as he contemplates the night sky.

As I was reading I was strongly reminded of *The Pillow Book* of Sei Shōnagon. Written by an eleventh-century Japanese court lady, it has a similar effervescence and beauty - though a markedly different culture informs Shōnagon's writing. I think these two writers would have been a perfect match for each other, could they have met. (In my imaginary dinner party of great writers of the past I'd seat them together.)

De Maistre is an admirer of the satirical masterpiece *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (more commonly called *Tristram Shandy*) by Lawrence Sterne, so that classic shaggy dog story may be a good fit if you enjoy de Maistre's two journeys.

Quotable:

It's best to let someone like de Maistre speak for himself - from *A Journey*:

"A nice fire, books, pen; how many resources there are against boredom!"

"When you start to investigate a question, you usually adopt a dogmatic tone since you have secretly already made up your mind [...]; but discussion awakens objections, and everything ends up in doubt."

"Today is the day when certain persons on whom I depend say they will restore me to freedom. As if they had taken freedom from me! As if it had been in their power to deprive me of it for a single moment, and to prevent me from exploring at will the vast space that always lies open before me! - They have forbidden me to roam around a city, a mere point in space; but they have left me with the whole universe: immensity and eternity are mine to command."

from *A Nocturnal Expedition*:

"And then, who *can* flatter himself that he will always live with the people he loves? Similar to those swarms of little flies that you see spinning in the air on fine summer evening, men meet by chance and for only a very short time. And they are lucky if, in their rapid movement, they are as skilful as the flies and don't dash their heads against each other!"

"The horrible emotion of envy has only ever once, on one single occasion, entered my heart, and it was an envy of cranes. I followed them with jealous eyes to the limits of the horizon."

"If we assign limits to creation, however remote those limits may be, the universe appears to me no more than a glowing point in comparison with the immensity of empty space surrounding it, that dark and dreadful void in the midst of which it seems suspended like a solitary lamp."

Mateus Pereira says

My life.

Meaghan says

I don't get it. This book was apparently a great seller when it first came out back in the 18th century, and people found it profound or something. I only find it silly and self-indulgent. If it had not been less than 70 pages long (I only read the first book, not the second nocturnal one) I could not have finished it. I can certainly understand why someone, confined to their room for over a month in the days before internet and television, would write something like this to pass the time. But why PUBLISH it? More to the point, why READ it?

Unless there's something I'm completely missing -- and there must be, I guess I'm just not the type of person for this book -- this was only a waste of paper and a waste of my time.

bellatrix begins says

Bu kitap, biri yazar'ın ilk, biri de son kitabı olan ancak aynı fikir ve konu etrafında döndükleri için beraber başlan iki ayrı eserden oluşuyor. "Odamda Seyahat" dönemin kişisel blogu sayılabilecekken, "Odamda Gece Seferi" De Maistre'nin yeni nesil (eskiçağ filozoflarına nazaran yeni tabii) düşünürler arasında iddialı olduğunu gösteriyor.

İlk kitabı çok sevmedim ya da üzerinde düşünecek çok şey bırakmadı, diyebilirim. Biraz fazla da mı? Ya da yazar konudan konuya atlamakta serbest olsa da bu bazen amatörce oluyor. Öyle sadece son kitap olan "Odamda Gece Seferi"ne not vermem gerekseydi, 4 daha uygun düşerdi. Yazar'ın düşünsel olarak belli bir seviyeye ancak ulaşmış mı? düşündüğüm bu bölümde bana tanıdık gelen ya da beni etkileyen, altını çizdiğim, notlar aldığım pek çok cümle oldu. Sonuç olarak, okuduğuma memnunum.

Merve Eflatun says

Odanın sadece bir oda olmadığını, kendi kişisel tirmemizin aynı zamanda düşünsel yolculuğumuzun bir parçası olabileceğini kefedilmeden yıllar önce yazılmış bir kitap. Belki de öncülerinden biridir.

Simon says

A bit of a misleading title, as the promised journey is simply a pretext for a series of Tristram Shandy-style digressions. When those digressions are this varied, witty and wise, however, it's hard to complain. Not many writers can discuss mind-body dualism and make you laugh out loud at the same time...

Mirandajo says

Really liked it. There were some excellent passages that I loved and really hit home with me. Kind of those "aha!" moments.

Gwen says

From Dirda's 4/17/05 review in The Washington Post:

Life, after all gains value from the intensity of one's engagement with it...

Anything is grist for this restless and digressive Tristram Shandy-like imagination because "there's no more attractive pleasure, in my view, than following one's ideas wherever they lead. " [Xavier de Maistre:] takes up and considers various prints and paintings, including one of his mistress, over which he sighs -- until his servant complains that the portrait's eyes seem to follow him around the room, that it seems to smile at every visitor. Ah, reflects de Maistre, the fickleness of women! He studies a mirror and concludes that it is "a perfect picture, one with which it is impossible to find fault." In judging the arts, he decides that painting should be viewed as superior to music because it is less prey to fashion. "The paintings of Raphael will delight posterity just as they delighted our ancestors." (He was wrong about this -- Raphael seems over-sweet to modern eyes.)

In his introduction [Andrew Brown:] compares de Maistre to Descartes, who hunched over a stove in an inn and built up an entire philosophy (cogito ergo sum -- I think, therefore I am). The introspective de Maistre maintains that he is himself a dual being -- a soul and the Other, which he sometimes calls the Beast. Sometimes the two work together, but not always, for there are times when we surrender to the body and other times when the soul wings its way into spiritual realms or "the enchanting land of imagination." In particular, though, de Maistre repeatedly finds himself obsessing about the passage of time:

Stephen says

I can tolerate only about 60 pages of 18th century sentiment; this book is 64 pages long.
