

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

From Walking as a Relationship to the World to Walking as an Exploration of a Work and a Country: A Geopoetic Approach to the Work of Max-Philippe Delavouët

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Abstract: This article considers the place of walking in the work of the Provençal poet Mas-Felipe Delavouët and its implications for the knowledge of the contemporary Provençal territory. After a presentation of the biographical itinerary of this poet allowing to define his geographical anchoring, marked by an initial wandering and a rooting, we present the paths in the work of Delavouët, showing that walking is an expression of being in the world because it appears as the primary modality for inhabiting a country, going so far as to make walking the existential metaphor of a journey towards oneself. In a second step, we show how walking in the poetry of Delavouët allows an attention to places and an intimate relationship with the landscape, natural and architectural. Thus, this work can be thought of as a resource to guide those who venture into this territory today, following for example the initiatives of the Study and Research Centre dedicated to him, in the farmhouse that was his home, which develops initiatives at the heart of the challenges of promoting these natural, literary, cultural and linguistic riches.

Keywords: Provence; provençal landscapes; provençal literature; ecopoetry; ecocriticism; provençal literature.

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Introduction

Following Marc Brosseau's observation that 'literary geography has undergone decisive developments by establishing the encounter with literature on the level of discourse and textuality' (Brosseau 2019: 18), I propose here to explore the poetic work of a Provençal poet, Mas-Felipe Delavouët, through the lens of the dialogue between geographical and literary knowledge. This is thus a geopoetic approach that sees in the relationship between literary creation and space, but also in textual reality itself, a relevant mode of understanding and apprehending texts and spaces (Collot 2014: 11). My geopoetic approach to this poet's work will focus on the question of walking as a mode of geographical understanding, in two parts. The first part, centered 'around the text' (Brosseau 2022: 17), will explore the geographical and cultural grounding that shapes the text. Therefore, I will begin our reflection with a presentation of the poet's biographical journey, allowing me to define his geographical grounding, marked by an initial wandering and subsequent rootedness. I will also present the omnipresence of journeys in Delavouët's work, showing that walking is an expression of being in the world because it appears as the primary way of inhabiting a country, even making walking the existential metaphor for a journey toward oneself.

In a second step, we will show how walking in Delavouët's poetry allows for an attention to places and an intimate relationship with the landscape, in its natural (particularly botanical) and architectural reality. This is a central element of the geopoetic approach, at the crossroads of disciplines (Bouvet 2013: 14). It is this aspect which, opening onto the geography of the 'post-text' (Brosseau 2022: 18),¹ will finally allow us to consider this work as a resource to guide those who venture into this territory today, following, for example, the initiatives of the Center for Study and Research dedicated to Delavouët, in the farmhouse that was his home, at the heart of the challenges of promoting these natural, literary, cultural, and linguistic riches.

It is important to clarify here, before proceeding, that in my approach, the linguistic question, the attention to language in its concrete reality, will be central. As Marc Brosseau points out, 'language is more than the clothing of words for thought, but rather its material and its mode of elaboration and expression' (Brosseau 2019: 18), and, specifically for the case of the poet we are studying here, because the language chosen by this French poet is a minority language.

Indeed, the poetry of Mas-Felipe Delavouët (1920-1990) is largely unknown, for various reasons, including that of having been written in Provençal, a language long considered by the French state, like other so-called regional languages, as a 'patois' that should be eliminated. I will not return here to the policy pursued by France against its regional languages, nor to the current place of what should today be called the 'Languages of France', questions on which one could refer to studies concerning the relationship between school and regional languages (Blanchet 2016; Martel 2016; Lespoux 2021). However, Delavouët's work was recognized as the expression of a great voice of the twentieth century by several renowned authors including Jules Supervielle and Lawrence Durrell. The latter considered that Delavouët deserved the Nobel Prize for Literature, as he declared on television during an interview in a famous literary

program, 'La rage de lire', in 1981: a statement which was met with indifference mixed with ignorance from those present, including Georges Suffert who directed the program. This moment of Durell's interview is included in the introductory sequence of the film that the filmmaker Jean-Daniel Pollet dedicated to Delavouët (Pollet 1990).

M-F Delavouët, who was also a playwright, graphic artist, publisher and even a typographer, was a farmer by profession. As a self-taught writer with a very broad culture, he built a vast body of work, among which the impressive *Pouèmo* stands out. This imposing poem of five volumes and more than thirteen thousand verses is punctuated by an original regular stanza, a quatrain of cross-rhymed alexandrines followed by a couplet composed of an octosyllable and an alexandrine with flat rhymes (Mauron 1995), and was written from the end of the fifties to the end of the eighties. It constitutes a powerful fresco of human existence. Delavouët himself published the first poems that compose it individually, then the first three volumes were published by José Corti (1971 for the first two, 1973 for volume three). Volumes four and five were then published by the CREM in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in 1983 and 1991.

It is an organic work whose structure is thought out, like a symphony, from the beginning, while unfolding as the writing progresses. Even if only a global reading allows one to grasp the complex network of resonances that run through it, the different 'poems' that compose it can also be read independently. Rooted in the landscapes of rural Provence where the poet lived, this long poem nevertheless has a universal dimension through the intense questioning it proposes on the place of man in the world, in an epic narrative where rereadings of the great myths, from Orpheus to Ulysses, from Roland to Tristan, intersect with echoes of great European artists, from Piero Della Francesca to Shakespeare, Mozart or Beethoven, in a crucible from which emerge singular and intense images that contribute to the strength of this work. As Philippe Jaccottet notes in the review he wrote for the *Nouvelle Revue Française*:

These are long poems, of strict form, in which no less traditional themes intertwine: celebration of women, of the seasons, of the work and games of men, harvests, grape harvests, hunting, fishing, war; evocation of the great moments of the day and of human life; revival of old legends or of the Passion; sometimes, finally, of the more intimate world – daydreams and memories – of the poet. All this brought to light by a powerful breath, warm at the same time as controlled, in a language both noble and simple, with an eloquence without emphasis. And to reach lyrical moments of a splendor (in the literal sense) comparable to that which sometimes radiates, by other means, from Saint-John Perse. (Jaccottet 1973: 83-85)

By his choice to build a work anchored in the places of his existence – a work that he chose to write in Provençal, a language that at the time of his youth was still widely present in the rural world, despite its disappearance from urban areas and the customs of the elites – Delavouët offers the contemporary reader a poetry carrying precious knowledge from a triple point of view. First, he shows us a landscape that is today undermined, then he invites us to understand the depth of the culture of the agro-pastoral world whose end was signed by

modernity, finally, in the wake of the work of Frédéric Mistral, he shows the dignity and the value of the linguistic reality that constitutes the Provençal language.

A geopoetic exploration of Mas-Felipe Delavouët's biographical journey: from the 'City of the Sea' to the rural Provence of Crau

The question of spatial anchoring is absolutely essential in understanding the poetic work of Delavouët. It is the prerequisite which allows us to understand from the outset how this poetic work touches on both the intimate understanding of the poet's places and its universal dimension, overcoming the paradox which would oppose the 'despatialization' of literatures perceived as universal and the 'exiguity', the 'confinement', of a literature turned towards the local, minor, minority dimension (Brosseau 2022: 184).

Born in 1920, the young Mas-Felipe Delavouët spent his early childhood between Marseille and Cannes. Marseille, his hometown, left a deep mark on his life, and its memory surfaces in several places in his work, although he was forced to leave it while still very young due to two dramatic events. He lost his father at the age of four, then his mother when he was not yet eight, which led to a radical change of residence. Taken in by his maternal grandparents, the very young Mas-Felipe left the city, the comfort he had known there, and its maritime landscape, for the profound rurality of a farmhouse in Crau. He lived there alongside his maternal grandmother, an uncle disabled in the First World War, and his aunt. The only child in this home, he finds comfort in discovering the surrounding nature. For anyone wishing to discover this universe, Clément Serguier's book, enriched with period photographs, is a valuable guide (Serguier 2022).

The wild agricultural plain of the Crau, around the village of Grans, for this reason became the 'piece of Creation', the world that the young Delavouët would explore, an exploration that, having become a poet, he would endlessly pursue in his writing, making it the stable point where he could anchor himself, ensuring the stability that would allow him to journey toward the universal, as he declared: 'There is no other way to know the world than to fully possess a piece of it' (Delavouët 1981: 1). A few words, however, about this environment, to describe its landscape and ecological reality. The Crau, a fossil delta unique in Europe, is a steppe plain, arid, covered with pebbles of a characteristic yellow hue, dry grass, and rare stunted trees twisted by the mistral wind. This is the Crau unaltered by humans, which is called 'Dry Crau', used for extensive grazing of flocks of sheep, which has been, since antiquity, an essential element of rural activities in the region. There is also another Crau, shaped by human activity: the so-called 'Green Crau', which, thanks to irrigation made possible by the canals bringing water from the Durance via the Crau Canal (built in the mid-sixteenth century), has become an important farming area dominated by hay production. This unique hay is the only one to be awarded a Controlled Designation of Origin and is renowned worldwide for its quality.



Figure 1. The ‘Dry *Crau*’ with the Alpylles hills in the background. (SYMCAU: Courtesy Sarl Distia)



Figure 2. The ‘Green *Crau*’ (SYMCAU: Courtesy Sarl Distia)

It was here, in this contrasting landscape, between the stony desert traversed by shepherds and sheep, with the blue-tinted Alpylles mountain range on the horizon, and the green oases of the meadows, crisscrossed by canals, that the young Delavouët spent his childhood, gradually overcoming the trauma that had marked his early years. He grew up in a

deeply rural world, helping with the work in the fields, rubbing shoulders with farmers and shepherds. While one of his teachers, noticing his liveliness, guided him in his reading, he built up a vast culture as an autodidact. A volunteer after the Munich Agreements, demobilized in 1941, he returned home and decided to devote himself to working on the farm, becoming a farmer in Crau, mainly producing hay.



Figure 3. Young Delavouët making hay. (Courtesy AD)

Upon his return, however, like the young Frédéric Mistral returning to his farm of Mas du Juge and setting himself the mission of reviving the Provençal language through literature, he decided to devote himself to writing and poetry, in Provençal. This linguistic choice, which went against the grain of fashion and was counterproductive from the point of view of the dissemination of the work in the French context, was quite clear to the author. Here is how he explained it in response to a student from the University of Aix-en-Provence who asked him about his point of view on other Provençal writers (Daudet, Arène, Giono, Bosco, Char):

The writers you cite are above all ‘Parisians,’ I mean that they belong to a traditional French literature. If I remove René Char – whom I don’t understand and about whom I have no opinion – and Giono, who is, nonetheless, of a superior caliber, all the others are exotic. I mean that Provence can be found in their work as Turkey can be found in

Pierre Loti. Writing in French and speaking of Provence, they are at best regionalist writers. In truth, Provence is for them only an ‘object.’ If I take the opposite view of all that, I answer your first question: I wrote in Provençal so as not to be a regionalist writer; Provence has never been an object for me. An object is seen ‘from the outside,’ I have always tried to speak from the ‘inside.’ I never had to prove my Provençal identity to myself, nor to others. (Serguier 2020: 108)

Thus, it is the very link to the lived biographical space which conditions the choice of the language of writing, in the search for an expression as intimate as possible of the lived reality of the place, a place which has seen the growth, simultaneously, of vegetation and a language, as he explains elsewhere:

Man holds within himself his images of the world, truer and more alive than all paintings. From the air that bathes them, from the scent of eternity that emanates from them, between the inner limits of man, a music is born and swells up to his lips. And for the song that will have to exist if by chance music is embodied to be well understood, the words must be those that name these things in the language that will not betray them, Provençal as they are in figure and spirit... a language that grows little by little at the same time as the garden to coincide with it in a way so profound and so irreplaceable that Adam, who is constantly reborn, has no other to name everything... (Delavouët 1981:7).

In this way, for this poet, choosing Provençal as a language of expression is an embrace of the ‘garden’, the land he inhabits, deepening through the act of writing an intimate knowledge that opens up, first and foremost, in walking and journeying.

Journeys in the work of Mas-Felipe Delavouët: walking as an expression of a concrete relationship with the world

In the film *L’Arbre et le Soleil – Mas-Felipe Delavouët et son pays* (*The Tree and the Sun – Mas-Felipe Delavouët and his country*), which Jean-Daniel Pollet dedicated to him (Pollet 1990), the presence of long shots in which the camera follows the elderly poet walking along the paths dear to him, reveals the major role that journeying plays in the relationship with the world expressed in Delavouët’s poetry.

He has explained this elsewhere:

Being here and now is an absolutely necessary condition for existing, because, whether we like it or not, people can tell me that the world is shrinking, that this, that there... I remember a man who said to me ‘I, who have been around the world, who know the vast world...’; in fact, he knew the airports, he knew the halls of the Alliance Française, but, between Paris and Tokyo, what did he know? He had seen fewer things than I do if I walk five kilometers; I look at one tree after another; so if we want to exist strongly,

it is in our best interest to gather the world around us, which at the same time means that you have more facility to project yourself to the borders of the world: there is a kind of double movement, as in dance where the dancer on the spot attracts the world to him, but makes his person explode to the borders of the world; see, there is a bit of this movement when you are in the middle of a country. (Serguier 2020: 138-139)

Consequently, for Delavouët, walking is the elementary act that allows man to discover his country, to truly inhabit it: a country that can only be truly known if it is on a human scale. This appears in a book published at the very beginning of the 1980s, mixing extracts from poems and large-scale photographs, entitled *Patrimòni (Patrimony)* (Delavouët 1981). This work is a sort of poetic and photographic ‘walking guide’, which, starting from Grans, unfolds in a star-shaped way towards the West and the Alpilles, Arles, Aigues-Mortes, and towards the East and Marseille. It also invites the reader, through its long bilingual preface (Provençal-French) ‘La dicho dóu vièi Granouien’ (‘The saying of the old Gransois’), not only to contemplate the natural and architectural beauty of the poet’s country but also to become aware of the links that are created between human and the place where his life takes place, links that are woven all the better as human crosses this country on foot:

Setting out from his threshold towards whatever wind it may be, he who goes on foot finds the country very vast and he says to himself that, if he knows so many roads and tracks, so many paths among the hedges and so many different trees to find shade, there are still many more which, even in the immediate vicinity, will never be known to him. A short life is barely enough and the walker’s strength is not infinite for him to go and distract himself in new deserts: there is no other way to understand the world than to fully possess a piece of it. He knows at least, firmly planted in his country, a little of who he is, a little of where he comes from, a little of where he is going. (Delavouët 1981: 1)

Delavouët pursues a little further this idea of the need to delve deeper into the particular, even making a concrete path to reach the universal:

When he descends to the depths of himself like a well-digger, man, in his stubbornness, digs even deeper beneath the dark stones to find, lower than all the streams, the finest roots of his thoughts. And if others do the same, from the Eskimos above in their ice to the Blacks below in their savannahs, as if all were ferreting in the same earth, there could perhaps be, at the center of the sphere, something that closely blends both the warmth of nests and the freshness of springs to bring to every place in the world – from the original center that every man will seek by diving within himself – to bring to the suns that have dissimilar lights, the branch of unique and different myths. This is how every inhabitant of the earth, following the vertical path, without getting lost far away to the right or to the left – alas, always on the surface! – will be able, through love, in his garden and under his sky, in his words and in his soul, to reach a little of what is

called, learnedly like the magisters, the Universal – or something close to it. (Delavouët 1981: 8)

The poet here invites us to this awareness, in an approach that praises the diversity of landscapes and cultures, enshrining the idea that from this intimate knowledge of each person's world can arise a positive conception of diversity as the foundation of the universalism of the human condition.

This book and its preface highlight this intimate connection to a country that the poet had been building through poetic writing for several decades. Indeed, the country that the five volumes of *Pouèmo* invite us to explore is primarily (but not exclusively) Provence. However, it is important to note that this is in no way a matter of ethnographic illustration, so much so that the country is virtually unnamed (in the 5 volumes, the name 'Provence' appears only once) and no place name is stated. Yet, there is a whole journey through the landscapes of lower Provence, between maritime Provence, agricultural Provence and wild Provence. This is what Claude Mauron shows in his 'Initiation à la géographie poétique de Mas-Felipe Delavouët' ('Introduction to the poetic geography of Mas-Felipe Delavouët') (Mauron 2000), emphasizing how reading *Pouèmo* is like embarking on a Provençal geographical itinerary transfigured by symbolic and cosmological abstraction. This itinerary crosses the world of shepherds, herds, peasants leading their horses, mowing the meadows, skirting the hedges, to reach the world of arid hills sliding towards the sea, to the small ports where the fishermen live, to his native city, Marseille, its islands, at the edge of the poet's end of the world.

This experience of intimate knowledge of the country, explored on foot, observed, then the object of poetic symbolization, is particularly well perceived in the attention paid to the place of plants, in the wandering to which the poet invites us. He paints the world by paying attention to the spaces that structure it, which unfold in concentric circles around the 'mas', the house, this 'nest' of man and his garden, then from the garden to the meadows, the wild hills, the forests, to the marshes, and finally the sea, the image of infinity. This attention to spaces is intimately linked to the attention to biotopes, and is expressed by the words for trees and plants. This movement begins with the known, with the enclosure, a protection against infinity, the one that delimits the *mas* (farm), *lou bòn* (the domain), and its finite spaces: garden, *ort* (enclosed garden), *sebisso* (hedge), *tiero* (hedge, row of trees), *lèio* (paths). Beyond, little by little, the spaces expand, where the cultivated lands are found: the field, and above all, for the peasant of humid Crau that Delavouët was, the pastorale lands that are divided into *prat* (meadows), *pradarié* (pastures), or *pradau* (grassland).

Moving further from his refuge, the poet describes the transitional spaces, between the countryside shaped by humans and the wild, between the known and the unknown. In these moors and hills: *erme* (heath), *campas* (wasteland, heath), *coussou* (which designates the pastures of the dry Crau). Beyond these places of transition, it is the wild, of which the forest becomes an emblem, as in the 'Balado d'aquéu que fasié Rouland' (Walk of the one who played Roland') (Delavouët 1973) where the *fourest sòuvertouso* (wild forests) are opposed to *tranquili pradau* (peaceful grassland). However, there are also places where the tree can no longer grow, where its reign capitulates to the reign of the sea and salt. The marsh marks this passage: a place of

the indeterminate, of dissolution ‘*uno palun d’ounte lou nivo s’esvapouro*’ (a swamp from which the cloud evaporates) (Delavouët 1973: 36), it is *palun* or *palunaio* (marsh, swamp). Finally, only the algae remains of the plant. So much for the words that broadly outline the spaces where his survey leads the poet. Let us move on to the words that, by touches, offer a more precise view of the world traversed by this poetic journey. Here the genius of Delavouët’s language is displayed, this Provençal language that he reappropriated in the poetic experience and whose beauties he deployed in a precise and mastered play of linguistic and poetic variations. If Delavouët never aims to illustrate the Provençal flora, a careful survey is revealing of the richness born from the poet’s gaze, who, observing the landscape, immersed in its reality by the long friendship of walks, knows its details. Here and there, he names cultivated trees: *ciprès* (cypress), *oulivié* (olive tree), *figuiero*, (fig tree), *poumié* (apple tree), *vigno* (vine), like their fruits: *ambricot*, *pessegue*, *moulán*, *pruno*, *figo*, *poumo*, *agrioto* or *miongrano* (apricot, peach, soft peach, plum, fig, apple, cherry, pomegranate). He also says the trees of the gardens: *seringat*, *lausié*, *platano*, *òume*, *pìbo* or *aubo*, *sambu* (seringa, laurel, plane tree, elm, poplar, white poplar, elderberry); the wild trees found in the area that stretches from the canals to the moors, from the hills to the sea: *faiard* (beech), *chaine* (oak), *roure* (gall oak), *aglanié* (holm oaks), *agarrus* and *avaus* (kermes oak), *arnavèn* (thorny willows), *saussè*, *sausseto* (willow, willow grove), *redorto* or *vergan* (osier). Further away, towards the marshes, only the *tamarisso*, the *tamarin* (two varieties of tamarisk), the *gacholo* (tamarisk grown in trees) remain, while isolated, the *mèle* (larches) mark the distant horizon to the north.

The smaller plants, grasses and flowers, are just as present under the gaze of the walker, and, despite the humility their small size gives them, the poet, from *Pouèmo I* in the ‘Blasoun de la Dono d’estiéu’ (‘Blazon of the summer Lady’), elevates them to dignity, making them the emblems of what links him to the landscape which has become, through the love that binds him to it, his homeland: ‘*Tambèn ta patriò a pèr noum / lou noum dis erbo en flour que fruston ti geinoun*’ (Your homeland also has as its name / the name of the flowering grasses that brush against your knees) (Delavouët 1971a: 128-129). It is precisely because he walks on foot that the poet can note the beauty of these grasses and flowers, whose names he takes the trouble to say, which little by little weave the identity of his country. So, we find the grasses of the Crau meadows: *erbage*, *germe* (herbage, after-crop), *esparset* (sainfoin), *margai* (ray grass), *grame* (couch grass), *trèule* (clover), *erbo-bruno* (plantain) or *luserno* (alfalfa). Peasant crops also have their place there: *ourtoulaio* (market gardening produce), *blad* (wheat), *estoublo* (stubble), *òrdi* (barley), *sègle* (rye) or *civado* (oats). The flowers of the roses’ garden, perceived as a mirror of feminine figures, combine *verbena* (verbena), *muguet* (lily of the valley), *jacinto* (hyacinth), *plumachié* (lilac), *iris* (iris). Along the canals that cross meadows or along the Touloubre river, *ninfèio* (water lily), *mento* (mint), *moufo* (moss), *glaujo* and *glaujòu* (clay flowers, yellow irises or gladiolus) reminiscent of Frédéric Mistral like the *esparganèn* (the “flower of the Rhone” from Mistral’s 1897 *Pouèmo dóu Rose – The Poem of the Rhone*). From the meadows to the hills, the wild plants that the walker encounters are numerous: *margarido* (daisy), *auriolo* (knapweed), *gau galin* (poppy), *gironflèio* (wallflower), *maulo* (mallow), *courbo-dono* (narcissus), *jaunoun* (buttercup), *artemiso* (arthemia), *massugo* (rockrose), *mentastre* (wild mint), *ferigonou* (thyme), *pebre-d’ai* (savory), *espi* (lavender), *cabrifuei* (honeysuckle), *baucò* (brachypode), *genèsto* (broom), *caussido* (thistle),

ourtigo (nettle), *panicaut* (maritime panaut), *fenoun* (wild fennel), *èurre* (ivy), *jounc* (rush), *agoulênço* (rosehip), *petelin* (pistachio) or *argelas* (thorny rushes). Reaching the boundaries of land and sea, *canié* (expanse of reeds), *rouseliero* (reed bed) or *engano* (samphire) green the marshes and salt meadows. On the beach, only the *iéli marin* (sand lilies) remain, or in the water, the seaweed: *augo* (seaweed) or *varage* (kelp).

In this way, it is precisely because the figure of the poetic protagonist who traverses *Pouèmo* is a walker that he can connect with his own territory, bonds of intimate knowledge, and attempt to express this ‘garden’ that is the world he traverses.

‘Entre danso e marcha’ (‘Between walking and dancing’): inhabiting the earth poetically

However, one should not think that walking is limited to its literal presence in Delavouët’s work. It appears there just as much as a symbolization of being-in-the-world, a metaphor for the existential path that each person traces, which could be linked to what White describes as ‘inhabiting the earth poetically’ (White 2023: 13).

This journey has its roots in the childhood of the poet, who, through his play, was able to explore the place where he had been taken in as an orphan, finding in this new anchorage the conditions for overcoming the initial trauma of losing his parents and for rebuilding after the exile from the maritime world of early childhood. The discovery of the country, step by step, is then, after this first wandering, this first founding exile, from Marseille and Cannes to the village of Grans, a path of rebirth. We find the poetic expression of this in the opening of the ‘Lusernàri dóu cor flecha’ (‘Lucernaire of the arrowed heart’) (Delavouët 1971b).

The poet depicts himself in the guise of a Ulysses, a hero leaving the coast, going inland, his oar on his shoulder until, having arrived at the foot of a village bell tower, which has metaphorically become a signal for a new port, he does not drop anchor there.

Navegaire escapa de la pòu dis espousc,
prendras la routo griso au rescontre de l’aubo
vers li terro ount la mar s’escound au founs di pous.

...

Pèr camin e campas, vas barrula, nauchié
que portes meme plus ta remo sus l’espalo.
T’adaira lou semafore d’un clouchié

...

À la racino de l’oumbro, coume en un port,
escamparas lou ferre e ta duro cadeno
aura loui moui que fau pèr que posque toun cor
s’alanda sèns dangié mounte soun van lou meno.

(Delavouët 1971b : 188-190)

A navigator escaped from fear, from splashes,
 you will take the gray road to meet the dawn
 toward the lands where the sea hides at the bottom of wells.

...

You will wander along paths and moors, a sailor
 who no longer even carries your oar on his shoulder.
 The signal from a bell tower will guide you

...

At the root of this shadow, as in a port,
 you will drop anchor and your hard chain
 will have the necessary slack so that your heart can safely wander wherever its impulse
 takes it.

Existence, then, is for the protagonist a journey, a march towards destiny that is very concretely expressed. The opening of this great poetic work, the 'Pouèmo pèr Èvo' ('Poem for Eve') (Delavouët 1971a) is traversed by the journey of a poet-Adam walker. This Adam must, in order to live, set out:

D'aquéu matin de l'iero entamenère un tour
 Que m'aduguè d'un pau pertout pèr lou terraire ;
 N'en voulènt saupre, alin, li raro e la vastour,
 Dins li camin d'escourcho aviéu pòu de me traire
 E, coume fasiéu un plantié,
 Lou camin lou mai long lou teniéu voulountié.

(Delavouët 1971a: 48)

That morning, I began a tour
 Which took me almost everywhere in the country;
 Wanting to know its limits and depths there,
 I didn't want to take shortcuts
 And, as I was seeking adventure,
 I deliberately followed the longest paths.

This journey is a discovery, an adventure, a goal in itself, and for this reason it must absolutely endure. This is an expression of a highly significant conception of walking: because it aims at self-discovery through the discovery of the world, it is, in itself, the goal and not an indifferent means of travel.

The walk through the countryside is then, once the couple of lovers has formed, a rediscovery of the countryside in another way, that of the journey through the loving relationship. We find images of walks for two in several places in the work, in remodeled forms: from 'Pouèmo pèr Evo' ('Poem for Eve'), to 'Blasoun de la Dono d'estiéu' ('Blazon

of the summer Lady'), to 'Danso de la pauro Ensouleiado' (Dance of the poor sunny Woman'), or 'Lusernàri dóu cor flecha' ('Lucernaire of the arrowed heart'), to 'Cant de la tèsto pleno d'abiho' ('Song of the head full of bees'). For example, in the 'Blasoun de la Dono d'estiéu', the poet invites the woman he loves to follow him on a walk that is a symbolic invitation to a curious and lively journey through existence:

Pren ma man, tiren-nous d'aquéu paradis claus
e, remountant li lèio, aganten, sout sa vouto,
la pousterlo de cèu que n'an perdu la clau
li qu'an perdu lou vanc d'estrena d'àutri routo.

...

Oubliden lou païs di fueio e di valat
pèr gagna li counfin de noste bèu reiaume...

(Delavouët 1971a: 116)

Take my hand, let's escape from this enclosed paradise
and, climbing the paths, let's regain, under their vault,
the postern of heaven whose key has been lost
by those who have lost the desire to try other roads.

...

let's forget the land of leaves and streams
to reach the confines of our beautiful kingdom...

This walk is also a search for harmony, in rhythm and step, within the couple. For this reason, it is a walk that must be a 'dance', in search of balance:

'Gaio, dóu bout di det t'apieles sus moun pounç
mai retène pulèu quauco idèio de danso
qu'à chasque pas pausa te coutigo e te poun.
Entre danso e marcha trouban quauco acourdanço
pèr jamai nous dessepara
maugrat l'estré passage e li cledoun barra.'

(Delavouët 1971a: 100)

Lively, you lean on my fist with your fingertips
but I rather hold back a desire to dance
which, with each step taken, teases and pokes you.
Between dancing and walking, we find some harmony
never to separate us
despite the narrow passage and the barriers that close it off.

In this manner, the couple's walk through the landscape becomes a way of being-in-the-world, of being part of it with a joyful, vital impulse, a metaphor for the couple seeking, step by step, their way of being together harmoniously, their *acourdanço* (harmony), managing to remain united despite the obstacles life throws in their path.

And it is the absolute of desire that is also symbolized by this impulse of the couple, always ready to set out on the journey. The poet declares:

Noste mounde es sarra tout autour d'un clouquié;
sarié grand quasi proun pèr ié passa la vido
s'avian pas, tu 'mé iéu, aquéu cor tant inquiet
que s'escapo toujours pèr nous faire sa crido
coume, en sounaiant lou ramèu,
la cabro vers l'avans atrivo lou troupèu.

(Delavouët 1971a: 106)

Our world is huddled around a bell tower;
it would be large enough to spend a lifetime in
if we didn't have, you and I, this heart full of anxiety
which always escapes to call us later
like, with its bell-ringing,
the goat draws the herd forward.

Like the goats that the shepherds in Provence usually mix with the sheep so that, through their curiosity and adventurous spirit, they guide the flock, the lovers are the ones who, through their desire for the absolute, set off far from the habits of everyday life in the adventure of a life dedicated to the discovery of the world and its beauty, which is then expressed in poetry.

The symbolic journey is also the journey of one who, meditating, journeys deep within himself. This figurative dimension of the journey increases as the poet grows older, and it is in the last composition of his great work that we find its clearest representation. Indeed, in 'Cant de la tèsto pleno d'abiho' ('Song of the head full of bees') (Delavouët 1991), we follow a peasant, the poet's alter-ego, who after spending his morning picking his olives, goes for a walk.

Chima lou chicouloun, abra lou cachimbau,
l'ome s'espaco, plan-planeto, long di tiero,
en oubliant soun obro e si menut trebau
pèr segui d'un pantai la lèio plasentiero,
coume d'au pas dóu loup avié
de remounta lou tèms entre sis óulivié.

Sènso s'enroumega, l'ome gagno l'escamp
 Mai, bèn lèu, marcho plus qu'au founs de si pensado.
 Pèr bello fin, sout li racino s'entraucant,
 Pas mai tengu que dins de nèblo travessado, `countùnio en terro soun plantié
 Bèn plus bas que jamai s'encapè 'n pousatié.

(Delavouët 1991: 100)

After a quick drink and lighting his pipe,
 the man strolls slowly along the rows of trees
 forgetting his work and his petty worries
 to follow the pleasant path of dreams,
 as if, stealthily, he had
 to go back in time among his olive trees.

Without clinging to the brambles, the man sets out
 but soon, he walks only in the depths of his thoughts,
 for a happy ending, penetrating beneath the roots,
 without being held back any more than in mists traversed,
 he will continue his truant school in the earth
 much lower than a well-digger could ever go.

It is indeed the slow, concrete walk of the peasant among his olive trees that, as he delves into his thoughts, becomes an inner journey, returning to the vertical path evoked earlier in the 'Dicho dóu vièi Granouien' ('The saying of the old Gransois'), as suggested by the image of the well-digger that closes this passage.

So, in this metaphorization of existence in the guise of walking, the end of the path is also ultimately associated with old age. It is in the guise of Adam's fatigue, having grown old but having lost none of his determination to live by walking, that this is expressed in the two isolated stanzas that close the large ensemble of *Pouèmo*:

Lou vèspre es vengu pièi. Sian las e fai pas caud.
 Tant de pèiro an leissa nòsti simello routo,
 qu'acaban la batudo en caminant descaus.
 S'un cop nous separan à la roso di routo,
 chascun gagnara, bèus ami,
 sa taulo pèr soupa, sa paio pèr dourmi.

Chascun retroubara la niuechado e sa pas
 e saupra plus se, pèr bressa sa sounnoulènci,
 lou tèms toujours dins éu picara coume un pas

o se, mai liuen qu'un cor mesurant lou silènci,
 entendra marcha, dins lou tard,
 toujours vers sa vièio orto Adam toujours testard.

(Delavouët 1991: 182)

Evening has finally come. We are tired and it is cold.
 So many stones have worn away our soles
 that we finish the race walking barefoot.
 When we part at the compass rose of the roads,
 each will return, beautiful friends,
 to their table for supper, their straw for sleeping.

Each will find the night and their peace again
 and will no longer know if, to lull their drowsiness,
 time will still strike within them like a footstep
 or if, further than a heart measuring the silence,
 they will hear Adam walking, in the evening,
 still toward his old garden, always stubborn.

The weariness of age is expressed here by the metaphor of the journey: the weariness of the years travelled is the weariness of a walker at the end of a long journey, its bareness and its pains are those of those who, soles worn by the trials of existence, like the stones of the path, must go barefoot. So, the friends who at the crossroads take their leave to return home are those who sense that a greater separation is looming. Despite everything, even in the stillness imposed by age, or on the threshold of a completely different sleep, the life that remains within them will take the form of walking: the beating of the heart becoming the sound of footsteps, the hammering of time marching within man or the inner image of the eternal man who, like Adam, persists in walking.

From the work of the poet roaming his country to an eco-poetic awareness

Since the seventies, Delavouët has been attentive to the effects of advancing industrialization and urbanization, which are destroying natural spaces that agro-pastoral civilization had preserved. In 1973, when he received the 'Grand Prix littéraire de Provence' in Ventabren, he chose to denounce this in his speech. In a text in which he establishes a connection with Frédéric Mistral's poem 'Parangoun' ('Paragon'), he deplores the extension of industrialization into the wildest areas of lower Provence, evoking three examples: his Crau plain, whose desert solitude was scarred in 1970 by the construction of the motorway, the Berre pond, the largest inland sea in Western Europe, disfigured by the petrochemical industry, and the Plan de Bourg marshes where the poet-guardian Joseph d'Arbaud lived, where the industrial complex of Fos-sur-Mer stands, the latter appearing as places of wild beauty transformed into ecological hells.

But faced with this bitter observation of man's destruction of the world's beauty, Delavouët does not resign himself, entrusting, like Mistral, to poetry the mission of being a refuge for beauty. Delavouët then expresses a position combining early ecological awareness and poetry: if man destroys the beauty of the world, which is so necessary to him, poetry will keep a trace of it, making itself a refuge for the memory of destroyed beauty, a refuge for humans who will be able to rediscover there the idea of beauty so that, perhaps, it may be reborn. He continues in this way:

One will always be able to rediscover in it [poetry], if necessary, in a country saved from imbecile death, the irreplaceable ceremonial of life. For there to be life, worthy of being lived and lovingly lived, we will understand better and better now that we need, necessarily and above all, these simple fundamental things, eternal like the sun above them: the sky stirred by wings, the living sea and its fish, the earth of Genesis and, strengthening themselves with their love as with their miseries, the man and the woman around the tree. It is the elementary heritage that, constantly, on the paths of memory which are the paths of the future, poetry must stubbornly embrace, so that, from there, we can always begin the world anew. (Serguier 2020:56-61)

Poetry is therefore for Delavouët an expression of awareness of the beauty of the world, of landscapes, of nature threatened with destruction, but also a place where we can preciousely preserve an indispensable memory of this beauty so that, if they wish and are able, the people of tomorrow can rediscover it. It is striking to see here expressed with such precision the observation of the ecological disaster that has only spread since then, and to see how Delavouët links poetry and the protection of the natural world, in a way that prefigures the links between literature and ecology highlighted today by eco-criticism.

So, this work carries a precious message for the walker who today traverses these spaces. Not only can it accompany them on an intimate discovery of Lower Provence, but it can also help them become aware of the precious nature of what remains of the natural spaces of the Crau plain. More broadly, since, as Delavouët himself affirmed, the individual only has value because it is part of a universal dimension, this work can find a valuable resonance in the contemporary context of eco-poetic reflection.

'Beyond-the-text', the Delavouët Centre: transmitting the work, participating in the protection of a place and a landscape

About ten years after the poet's death in 1990, a research center dedicated to his work was created. On its website, you can discover the different facets of Delavouët's work (and even hear passages from his work spoken by himself) (Centre Delavouët 2025). The Delavouët Center, located in the *mas* (farm) where the poet lived, is, from a concrete point of view, at the heart of this eco-poetic reflection. Indeed, dedicated to making a poetic work known, the *Mas du Bayle-Vert* is, by its very location, in the middle of a growing network of urbanization and industrialization.



Figure 4. The *Mas du Bayle-Vert*, Delavouët's original farm house and Delavouët Center headquarters, (photo by the author)

It is located a few kilometers south of Salon-de-Provence, once a modest-sized commune within a vast rural area, which has become a growing urban area, boosted by its proximity to the Marseille metropolitan area. If we look at a satellite map, the *Mas du Bayle-Vert* is at the center of a small, unspoiled area with, to the north, the A54 motorway, a major route linking Italy to Spain, and, to the south, the important Clésud logistics platform, near Miramas – a platform still seeking to expand, given the importance of logistics activity here.

Paradoxically, it was the very fact that the poet lived in this farmhouse that supported its inclusion in the inventory of historical monuments, preventing the area from being urbanized as well. The motivation for the inscription is interesting because it links the architectural interest of the building to the role of the place in the poet's inspiration:

House from the late 18th century, enlarged in the early 19th century and transformed in the early 20th century. A place of writing and a source of inspiration for the writer-poet Max-Philippe Delavouët, who lived there his entire life, from 1920 to 1990. The complex is considered a place of remembrance. (Historical Monuments Database: Mas du Bayle-Vert ou maison de Max-Philippe Delavouët)

We are thus faced with an interesting case of the protection of a rural space thanks precisely to the presence of a poet: it is indeed the geopoetic scope of Delavouët's work, its enduring presence in this place, the fact that he made this space the anchor point of his poetic vision of the world, that has allowed for its protection and preservation.

The center dedicated to him is part of this perspective: open to the public (by appointment), it offers today's reader the opportunity to access a rural site all the more precious for being located in the heart of a territory where urbanization is progressing. Aware of the need for solid institutional support, the Delavouët Center became a member of the

National Federation of Writers' Houses and Literary Heritage Sites and received the 'Maison des Illustres' (House of the Illustrious) label from the Ministry of Culture in 2014. Furthermore, the Centre's activities extend beyond those directly related to the poet's work (including editions and re-editions, and hosting researchers). It promotes initiatives that foster interaction between poetic text and space, adopting this 'beyond-the-text' approach (Brousseau 2022: 197). The Delavouët Center makes accessible the very places where the poet lived and offers occasional literary walks that allow visitors to discover the landscapes that inspired him. These literary walks are, in their own way, an invitation to explore Provence and the Crau region in the footsteps of Mas-Felipe Delavouët, so that, like him, the walker may be attentive to the fragile beauty of the land. To extend these suggested walks, two GR2013 long-distance hiking trails, 'from Miramas to Grans' and 'from Grans to Salon-de-Provence', will allow today's reader to be guided in their discovery of Delavouët's Provence. These aspects, still in their infancy for Delavouët's work, would benefit from being developed by local institutions (the municipalities of Grans and Salon-de-Provence, the Aix-Marseille-Provence Metropolis, the Crau Ecomuseum, among others) within a territorial promotion framework that would find in literary heritage a valuable lever to support the discovery of the countryside around Grans and in the Crau. It would thus be relevant to imagine, as Maria Luisa Mura proposes when she examines the link between walking and literature in one of the most famous Provençal writers, Jean Giono, 'specific mechanisms for understanding and reactivating a local memory, to be grasped during the sensitive stratifications at the basis of a writing that is both geographically referential and strongly experiential, a writing capable of guiding paths of knowledge and alternative interpretations of contemporary Provence' (Mura 2023: 155).

Thus, we have traced here how the poetic work of the Provençal poet Mas-Felipe Delavouët, centered on the exploration of a familiar space through walking, allows the contemporary reader, from an ecopoetic perspective, to explore and understand what remains, very much present, of this pastoral Provence whose language and culture have not completely disappeared. It can also serve as a guide for today's walker who wishes to discover what, despite partial degradation by urbanization, remains of these landscapes of Lower Provence, on the fringes of the Marseille metropolis. Reading this Provençal poetic work, discrete due to its linguistically marginalized status but powerful in its scope, becomes an opportunity to discover places and spaces that modernity relegates to its margins. This great poetic work thus appears as a geopoetic resource that should be embraced by any territorial promotion focused on preserving landscapes and cultural diversity. Finally, this work is an invitation to a much deeper exploration, through the importance it gives to walking as an essential modality of being in the world, in a relationship to walking that, more than a simple movement, opens onto what it can mean to 'inhabit the earth poetically' (White, 2023: 13).

Notes

¹ All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

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