



# The Loire: A Cultural History (Landscapes of the Imagination)

*Martin Garrett*

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Gustave Flaubert called the Loire "the most French of French rivers." It is the longest river in France and the most varied in scenery and moods. Beginning as a mountain stream in the Ardèche, it issues, 630 miles later, into the Atlantic beyond the great modern port of St.-Nazaire. Small and rapid at first, the Loire runs through dark volcanic hills; further downstream it becomes the broad, slower river of sandy islands, poplars, and châteaux and of the vibrant cities of Orléans, Blois, Tours, and Nantes (the former capital of Brittany). It is lined with vineyards, forests, medieval fortresses, and flamboyant Renaissance palaces. It is fed by countless tributaries, from rivulets to mighty rivers like the Allier, Cher, and Vienne, each with their own remarkable sights.

Martin Garrett follows the Loire's course through cities and countryside, tracing its dramatic history from the days of feuding warlords and barons to the battles of 1940. Looking at the wide range of literature, art, and architecture created along its banks, he considers works from Du Bellay and Balzac to Virginia Woolf, from Renaissance palace builders to Le Corbusier.

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