



# The Salt Smugglers

*Gerard De Nerval*

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# The Salt Smugglers

*Gerard De Nerval*

## **The Salt Smugglers** Gerard De Nerval

First published as a feuilleton in a left-wing newspaper in 1850, *The Salt Smugglers* provides a political satire of the waning days of France's short-lived Second Republic. With nods to Diderot and Sterne, this shaggy-dog story deals less with contraband salt smugglers than with the subversive power of fiction to transgress legal and esthetic boundaries. By writing what he claimed was a purely documentary account of his picaresque adventures in search of an elusive book recording the true history of a certain seventeenth-century swashbuckler, Nerval sought to deride the press censors of the day who forbade the serial publication of novels in newspapers – and in the process he provocatively deconstructed existing distinctions between fact and fiction. Never before translated into English and still unavailable as a separately published volume in French, *The Salt Smugglers* is a pre-postmodern gem of experimental prose. Richard Sieburth's vibrant translation and illuminating afterword remind us why Gérard de Nerval's blend of sly irony and acerbic social criticism proved so inspiring to authors as various as Baudelaire, Proust, and Leiris.

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