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Conspiracy in Balzac and Sand's July Monarchy Fiction

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PREFATORY DECLARATIONS

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

It does not exceed the statutory word limit prescribed by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages.

This dissertation is formatted in conformity with the *Handbook for Authors* of the Modern Humanities Research Association.

Rebecca Sugden

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of conspiracy in the literature of the July Monarchy (1830–1848) and its engagement with conspiracy thinking, with particular reference to the work of Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) and George Sand (1804–1876). In providing the first sustained scholarly exploration of conspiracy and cultural production in nineteenth-century France, it situates the novel within wider discourses on European political history in the years leading up to the upheaval of 1848. Through close readings of Balzac and Sand's common investment in conspiracist modes of explanation, this study makes the case for a new generic category, the novel of conspiracy, around which literary poetics, historical imagination and political fantasy come to coalesce.

Chapter one proposes a re-evaluation of the dialectic between models of surface and depth reading in Balzac's *Une ténébreuse affaire* (1841), arguing that the conspiratorial landscape of this proto-detective novel belies Balzac's fraught relationship to the severed referentiality of his narrative. As illustration of a Balzacian poetics of conspiracy, *Une ténébreuse affaire*, it is suggested, points forward in literary history towards the Flaubertian aesthetic of platitude. Chapter two looks to the political criticisms Jacques Rancière makes of Sand's patrician benevolence to inform its reading of *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), which depicts workers' secret societies and the underground networks of Restoration liberalism. Accusations of misguided idealism, this thesis shows, align Rancière's critique and the literary-critical narrative informing Sand's twentieth-century aesthetic devaluation with the reproach that she herself levels at the Carbonarist conspirators of her novel. Chapter three, finally, turns to the alternative origin myth of 1789 that Sand elaborates in *Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1842–44). Her engagement with the founding text of the conspiracist tradition of explanation, it argues, provides the cornerstone for the interrogation of the tensions of a pre-Revolutionary Europe torn between Enlightenment and Illuminism.

Framing the Balzacian and Sandian novel as emblematic of a wider discourse on the conspiratorial origins of 1789 has a two-fold advantage. On an immediate level, it nuances received critical ideas on these authors' relationships to history and literary genre (a realist Balzac incapable of looking back further than the Restoration whose demise he so lamented; an idealist Sand too caught up in a utopian future to envisage the historical past). In doing so, this study seeks to problematize the narrative of oppositionality behind the Balzac–Sand binary in terms of which the literary history of nineteenth-century France is habitually couched. Yet, more significantly, it also gestures towards the importance of the conspiratorial as a prism through which to approach the porosity of the very categories of 'literature' and 'history' in the nineteenth-century French context.

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My final thoughts as I write this are with my grandmother, Shelagh Higgins, who didn't quite see the end of this project. I dedicate this thesis to her.

ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

The following abbreviations are used in this dissertation:

<i>CH</i>	Honoré de Balzac, <i>La Comédie humaine</i> , ed. by Pierre–Georges Castex, 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard–Pléiade, 1976–81)
<i>Corr. Bal.</i>	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Correspondance</i> , ed. by Roger Pierrot and Hervé Yon, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard–Pléiade, 2006–17)
<i>Corr. Sand</i>	George Sand, <i>Correspondance</i> , ed. by Georges Lubin, 25 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1964–91)
<i>HV</i>	George Sand, <i>Histoire de ma vie</i> , ed. by Martine Reid (Paris: Gallimard, 2004)
<i>LMH</i>	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Lettres à Madame Hanska</i> , ed. by Roger Pierrot, 2 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1990)
<i>MECW</i>	Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>Collected Works</i> , 50 vols (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975–2004)
<i>Mém. Barr.</i>	Augustin Barruel, <i>Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme</i> , 4 vols (London: L'Imprimerie française; Hamburg: Fauché, 1797–98)
<i>OA</i>	George Sand <i>Œuvres autobiographiques</i> , ed. by Georges Lubin, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard–Pléiade, 1970–71)
<i>OCM</i>	Jules Michelet, <i>Œuvres complètes</i> , ed. by Paul Viallaneix, 21 vols (Paris: Flammarion, 1971–87)
<i>OCZ</i>	Émile Zola, <i>Œuvres complètes</i> , ed. by Henri Mitterand, 20 vols (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2002–09)
<i>SE</i>	Sigmund Freud, <i>The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud</i> , ed. and trans. by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74)

Reference to these works will be given in the form (*CH*, II: 695), (*Corr. Sand*, V: 76), etc.

Hereafter, and throughout the thesis, the place of publication for books in English is London, and for books in French, Paris, unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION

In the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, his ironic compendium of middle-class bluster, Gustave Flaubert pinpoints four ‘causes’ of the French Revolution:

FIGARO (LE MARIAGE DE) : Encore une des causes de la Révolution !

FRANC–MAÇONNERIE : Encore une des causes de la Révolution ! Les épreuves de l’initiation sont terribles. Mal vue des ecclésiastiques. Quel peut bien être son secret ?

JÉSUITES : Ont la main dans toutes les révolutions. – On ne se doute pas du nombre qu’il y en a. – Ne point parler de la ‘bataille des Jésuites’.

PHILIPPE D’ORLÉANS–ÉGALITÉ : Tonner contre. – Encore une des causes de la Révolution. – A commis tous les crimes de cette époque néfaste.¹

In the discursive echo chamber of Flaubert’s bourgeois antagonists, the hidden hand of conspiracy revealed its cards in 1789, with covert human agency behind the Revolution that Victor Hugo would term the ‘mère auguste’ of the nineteenth century.² In the hugely influential version of literary history championed by Roland Barthes,³ the infamous compendium of *bêtise* stands as a metonym for a citational poetics that seeks to draw attention to the cliché-laden vocabulary of a century. Flaubert’s dictionary entry testifies to the extent to which speculation regarding the supposedly conspiratorial origins of the Revolution had, in time, cemented into the doxic certitudes of an *idée reçue* endemic to French society. Indeed, not even the most prominent European statesmen were immune. If, in 1820, Klemens von Metternich termed secret societies ‘a moral gangrene’,⁴ Benjamin Disraeli, writing at the mid-century, could still assert that ‘these confederations [...] now cover Europe like a network [...]. Acting in unison with a great popular movement they may destroy society, as they did at the end of the last century’.⁵ An age so often

¹ Gustave Flaubert, *Œuvres*, ed. by René Dumesnil and Albert Thibaudet, 2 vols (Gallimard–Pléiade, 1951–52), II (1952), 1010, 1010, 1015, 1020.

² Victor Hugo, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Jean Massin and others, 18 vols (Club français du livre, 1967–70), XII (1969), 305.

³ See Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Seuil, 1973).

⁴ Klemens von Metternich, *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, ed. by Prince Richard Metternich, trans. by Mrs Alexander Napier and Gerard W. Smith, 5 vols (Bentley, 1880–82), III (1881), 464.

⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography* (Colburn, 1852), pp. 553–54. Historians converge on the conclusion that the coherence, coordination and effectiveness of a secret network of revolutionary networks was, in fact, much exaggerated to serve strategic political ends. See, for example, Richard J. Evans, *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815–1914* (Penguin, 2017), pp. 36–46.

deemed to be predicated on Enlightenment transparency and critical rationality displayed, then, a cultural obsession with its very opposite: the hidden, the secret, the occult. The 1789 Revolution stands at the origin of a paradoxical political imaginary that Raoul Girardet has termed 'l'Âge d'or de la Conjuración'.⁶

Taking its cue from the semantic plurality of the word *plot*, the present study explores the positioning of the novel within this golden age of conspiracy. If nineteenth-century France saw a 'multiplication des théories du complot',⁷ how, I ask, might the literary text inform that process described by Girardet as 'l'invincible mouvement [...] qui part de l'événement historiquement définissable pour conduire à sa lecture imaginaire' (53)? With particular reference to the July Monarchy (1830–1848) works of Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) and George Sand (1804–1876), the two names around which the literary history of nineteenth-century France has so often been articulated, I argue that the novel entertains a symbiotic relationship with the conspiracy theories that proliferated during a century of great intellectual ferment and enormous social turmoil. In telling tales of conspiracy, Balzac and Sand rehearse the substance of a historical debate that testifies to an uncharted form of recursivity, perhaps even reflexivity, in cultural production. The common investment in 'secret history' of these two 'maîtres à roman de la première moitié du XIX^e siècle',⁸ this thesis suggests, takes aesthetic form in what I term the *novel of conspiracy*. Yet the importance of novelistic engagement with the conspiracy motif for the wider political and intellectual culture of the period has been subject to a surprising degree of critical neglect. Literary and cultural–historical scholarship of nineteenth-century France, then, still lacks an analysis of the historical conditions animating the development of an aesthetic niche for conspiratorial discourses that remains sensitive to their mutually constitutive relationship. It is this critical lacuna that the present thesis seeks to fill.

Where the most sensitive analyses have sought to deconstruct the Balzac–Sand binary given paradigmatic expression in Émile Zola's vision of 'le réel et le rêve [qui] se battent' (OCZ, X: 729), criticism has typically resorted to a discourse of oppositionality in terms of gender, politics (the legitimist vs. the utopian socialist) and aesthetics (Balzacian realism vs. Sandian idealism). Yet if their collocation has become something of a commonplace, there exist only a very small number of monographs that engage sustainedly and simultaneously with these two giants of nineteenth–

⁶ Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (Seuil, 1986), p. 59.

⁷ Emmanuel Kreis, *Les Puissances de l'ombre: la théorie du complot dans les textes* (CNRS Éditions, 2012), p. 49.

⁸ Véronique Bui, 'Balzac/Sand ou la grande fabrique du roman dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle', in *Discours critique sur le roman, 1670–1850*, ed. by Orla Smyth and Jeffrey Hopes (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2010), pp. 169–86 (p. 169).

century French literary and intellectual culture.⁹ In seeking to redress this surprising imbalance, the present study also demonstrates that there is a case to be made for a complementary exploration of their lesser-discussed commonalities, or what Balzac himself would term ‘ces sympathies qui se continuent malgré les distances que met le travail entre certains esprits occupés de la pensée motrice de ce siècle’ (*Corr. Bal.*, III: 24). Crucially, I argue, the ‘pensée motrice’ of the nineteenth century is a fitting moniker for that discourse of conspiratorial speculation so deftly ironized by Flaubert. In contextualizing Balzac and Sand’s shared recourse to conspiracist modes of explanation with reference to wider discourses on European political history, this thesis highlights the analytic and literary qualities at the heart of a mode of cognition in which – in the mediated, imaginary sphere of aesthetic productivity – a post-Revolutionary world becomes legible. Taking these two authors – friends and correspondents – as privileged instances of conspiratorial July Monarchy discourses, ultimately, has a two-fold advantage. On an immediate level, it nuances received critical ideas on their respective relationships to history and literary genre (an ardently realist Balzac incapable of looking back further than the Restoration whose demise he so lamented; an idealist Sand too caught up in a utopian future to envisage the historical past). Yet, perhaps more significantly, it also gestures towards the importance of the conspiratorial as a prism through which to approach the porosity of the very categories of ‘literature’ and ‘history’ in the nineteenth-century French context.

It would, of course, be overstating the case to suggest that the phenomenon of plotting was an exclusive feature of a place, a period, or a particular literary imagination. What might reasonably be posited, though, is that the renegotiation of the nature and conditions of authority in post-1789 France lends an unexplored significance to the contemporaneous foregrounding of the conspiratorial as literary theme and narrative mode. Conspiracy thinking informs, to re-appropriate Fredric Jameson’s terminology, the *political unconscious* of the July Monarchy literary

⁹ To my knowledge, the only monograph that accords equal weighting to the two is Deborah Houk Schocket, *Modes of Seduction: Sexual Power in Balzac and Sand* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005). The foundational discussion of the realism-idealism divide metonymized in the Balzac-Sand dyad is Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). More recently, Manon Mathias has explored Sandian idealism vis-à-vis realism through the prism of vision: see *Vision in the Novels of George Sand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). If virtually no monographs have taken Balzac and Sand as their exclusive concern, there are, of course, numerous shorter articles dealing with specific aspects of their relationship. For a selective bibliography, see Nicole Mozet, ‘Balzac’, in *Dictionnaire George Sand*, ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths and Pascale Auraix-Jonchière, 2 vols (Honoré Champion, 2015), I, 71–76 (pp. 75–76). The *catalogue d’exposition* that accompanied the exhibition ‘Mon cher George: Balzac et Sand’, held at the Musée Balzac in Saché (24th March – 20th June 2010), is deserving of special mention: see Thierry Bodin and others (eds.), *Mon cher George: Balzac et Sand, histoire d’une amitié* (Gallimard, 2010).

text.¹⁰ Set against the post–1830 revival of interest in the events and ongoing legacy of 1789, Balzac and Sand’s novelistic production testifies to the blurring of the boundaries between history and fiction that took on a new urgency during the reign of the citizen–king. This was a regime framed by two failed revolutions and plagued by an awareness of the discrepancy between its symbolic foundations and its political and economic organization.¹¹ Viewed through the angle of the conspiratorial, novelists’ explicit positioning of themselves as ‘secret’ historians, I suggest, has a bearing that goes beyond the merely rhetorical. In examination of the interaction of literary poetics and the history of ideologies, there emerges a historically specific fascination with regard to a certain kind of plotting.

Yet this focus on Louis–Philippe’s France is more than a convenience of periodization. For this moment also corresponds to a privileged chapter of French *literary* history. Betokening that ‘[triumph] of Realism’ celebrated by Friedrich Engels in his famous letter to Margaret Harkness (*MECW*, XLVIII: 168), 1830 stands as a watershed moment in the history of the novel in France, as Sandy Petrey and Margaret Cohen have persuasively demonstrated.¹² Similarly, the other revolutionary year bookending the July Monarchy, 1848, emerges as a site of rupture not only in the political history of nineteenth–century France, but also in its literature. Barthes – and, subsequently, Richard Terdiman¹³ and Ross Chambers¹⁴ – posits a post–1848 political disillusionment at the root of literary modernism, a disengagement from history that takes as its correlate a retreat into art for art’s sake:

Sous le poids de l’Histoire, la Littérature s’est trouvée disjointe de la société qui la consomme. Entre la troisième personne de Balzac et celle de Flaubert, il y a tout un monde (celui de 1848) : là une Histoire âpre dans son spectacle, mais cohérente et sûre, le triomphe d’un ordre ; ici un art, qui, pour échapper à sa mauvaise conscience, charge la convention ou tente de la détruire avec emportement. La modernité commence avec la recherche d’une Littérature impossible.¹⁵

¹⁰ See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Routledge, 2002).

¹¹ For a concise history of the period, see, for example, Bertrand Goujon, *Monarchies postrévolutionnaires: 1814–1848* (Seuil, 2012).

¹² See Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Sandy Petrey, *In the Court of the Pear King: French Culture and the Rise of Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹³ See Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth–Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

¹⁴ See Ross Chambers, *Mélancolie et opposition: les débats du modernisme en France* (José Corti, 1987).

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques* (Seuil, 1972), p. 31.

July Monarchy cultural production, then, ultimately occupies an uneasy parenthesis, aesthetically caught between a Hugolian Romanticism that sought to ‘voir dans les choses plus que dans les choses’¹⁶ and the post-1848 critique of the totalizing pretensions of realism. Yet *pace* Nathalie Sarraute’s alignment of the *nouveau roman* with an ‘ère du soupçon’,¹⁷ it is, I show, its ostensibly *lisible* generic predecessor that best evidences Peter Brooks’s assertion that ‘there have been some historical moments at which plot has assumed a greater importance than others’.¹⁸ Invested in a ‘consciously historical conception of the present’,¹⁹ to extend Georg Lukács’s famous assessment of Balzacian realism, the July Monarchy novel of conspiracy, this thesis suggests, both informs and responds to a wider cultural desire ‘to seek the expression of central individual and collective meanings through narrative design’.²⁰

In the wake of the ‘linguistic turn’, the debate concerning the role of narrative emplotment in the theory and practice of history is not a new one.²¹ Summarizing this paradigm shift in the early 1990s, Carlo Ginzburg remarked that ‘the peripheral, blurred area between fiction and history [had been brought] close to the center of contemporary historiographical debate’.²² What has escaped critical attention, however, is its particularly problematic nature in relation to the discourse of conspiratorial speculation, that explanatory mode characterized, in Jean-Noël Tardy’s words, by an ‘interpénétration des discours’ in which ‘les frontières entre le témoignage historique et la fiction littéraire sont brouillées’.²³ Indeed, as Michael Barkun has felicitously observed, the conspiracy theorist invests in an epistemological chiasmus, believing not only that ‘what the world at large regards as fact is actually fiction’, but also that ‘what seems to be fiction is actually fact’.²⁴ In making the case for a new generic category in the history of nineteenth-century French fiction, I draw on this ‘blurring’ to posit a sub-genre of the–novel–as–conspiracy–theory. At this nexus

¹⁶ Victor Hugo, ‘Odes et ballades. Préface de 1822’, in *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. by Pierre Albouy, 3 vols (Gallimard–Pléiade, 1964–74), I (1964), 265.

¹⁷ See Nathalie Sarraute, *L’Ère du soupçon: essais sur le roman* (Gallimard, 1987).

¹⁸ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 5.

¹⁹ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 81.

²⁰ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 5.

²¹ See, for example, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975). For an overview of these questions, see, for example, Geoffrey Roberts, ‘Introduction: The History and Narrative Debate, 1960–2000’, in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. by Geoffrey Roberts (Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–21.

²² Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian’, *Critical Inquiry*, 18.1 (Autumn 1991), 79–92 (p. 87).

²³ Jean-Noël Tardy, *L’Âge des ombres: complots, conspirations et sociétés secrètes au XIX^e siècle* (Les Belles Lettres, 2015), p. 20.

²⁴ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 29.

of the fictional, the fictive and the fictitious, literary poetics, historical imagination and political fantasy come to coalesce.

Towards a Definition of Conspiracy and Conspiracy Theory

The lexical field of conspiracy occupies a fraught definitional terrain, in English as in French. The word's etymology, *cum spirare*, to breathe together, gestures towards an essential ingredient: insofar as one cannot conspire alone, a conspiracy is axiomatically plural, requiring collusion amongst several actors. (If the English *conjuraton*, from *cum jurare*, to swear together, has fallen into disuse, other European languages maintain the link with the taking of an oath: in this respect, the German *Verschwörung*, the Spanish *conjura*, and the Italian *congiura* align with the French *conjuraton*.) The question of necessarily malevolent intent is less clear cut than some critics would have it,²⁵ as I demonstrate below. A more useful approach, perhaps, would be to posit a notion of relative malevolence, with a conspiracy directed against some other party, be it the ruling political powers, or public order more generally. What remains undeniable, though, is the importance of secrecy. An operational necessity of statecraft – sanctioned even by a post-Enlightenment thought that invariably aligns democracy with transparency, as Alain Dewerpe has shown²⁶ – secrecy combines with those connotations of collusion, planning and deception as germane to the idea of conspiracy. Where clandestinity is a political consideration imposed from without, and thus a frequent prerequisite of conspiratorial association, secrecy, as Georg Simmel's seminal analysis demonstrates, carries a sociological and an epistemic import.²⁷ (The divergence between clandestinity and secrecy is perhaps best illustrated in the French distinction between a *société secrète*, such as the Carbonari, and a *société à secret*, such as the Freemasons.) Bearing on the stratification of knowledge, secrecy functions as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. It posits a group of privileged insiders, here seeking to exert an influence over events through covert action. As the

²⁵ See, for example, philosopher Charles Pigden's assertion, in his critique of Karl Popper's 'conspiracy theory of society', that conspiracies 'can be either good or bad depending on the purposes, circumstances, and methods used. Conspiracy [...] is not necessarily a pejorative word. However, in a democracy, where politics is supposed to be above board, there is perhaps a presumption (but no more) that conspiracies are morally suspect' ('Popper Revisited, or What Is Wrong With Conspiracy Theories?', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 25.1 [Mar. 1995], 3–34 [p. 5]). For Popper's concise reflections, see *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 352–54.

²⁶ See Alain Dewerpe, *Espion: une anthropologie historique du secret d'État contemporain* (Gallimard, 1994), pp. 79–81.

²⁷ See Georg Simmel, 'The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies', *American Journal of Sociology*, 11.4 (Jan. 1906), 441–98.

narrator of Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988), his postmodern rewriting of the events shaping the JFK assassination, comments:

If we are on the outside, we assume a conspiracy is the perfect working of a scheme. Silent nameless men with unadorned hearts. A conspiracy is everything that ordinary life is not. It's the inside game, cold, sure, undistracted, forever closed off to us. We are the flawed ones, the innocents, trying to make some rough sense of the daily jostle. Conspirators have a logic and a daring beyond our reach. All conspiracies are the same taut story of men who find coherence in some criminal act.²⁸

Arguably more than any other, the French language boasts an array of terms: *cabale*, *complot*, *conspiration*, *conjururation*, *intrigue*, *machination*, to name but the most common. This semantic plurality lies at the heart of Jean-Claude Waquet's analysis of what he terms 'la conjuration des dictionnaires'.²⁹ In his painstaking lexicographical survey, Waquet detects a progressive politicisation of the words *conjururation* and *conspiration* in the dictionaries of Richelet, Furetière and the Académie française over the course of the eighteenth century. Where *cabale* and *complot* seem to be the preserve of the Court or of small-scale intrigue amongst individuals, *conjururation* and *conspiration* designate those wider 'machinations ourdies contre le prince, l'État ou la liberté publique' (96). They constitute 'une catégorie à part, distincte des entreprises tramées contre des personnes privées, appelant de ce fait une terminologie particulière et peut-être un traitement spécifique de la part du pouvoir' (96). The most striking conclusion of Waquet's survey, though, is precisely the absence of semantic clarity, even under an absolutist regime. As he remarks, chiasmically: 'on croyait avoir découvert un discours d'ordre. On retrouve en fait le désordre des discours' (134).

Post-1789, things remain just as semantically confused. Only *complot* is invested with a legal definitional apparatus, making its entry into the Code pénal in 1810. Emphasis is accorded to intention over action: 'il y a complot dès que la résolution d'agir est concertée et arrêtée entre deux conspirateurs ou un plus grand nombre, quoiqu'il n'y ait pas eu d'attentat' (art. 89). Here, then, the key dimension of the undertaking is not its secretive nature or even its implementation but the common resolution amongst a number of individuals, as François Guizot would note in 1821. This law, Guizot writes approvingly, 'est sévère, car elle trouve le complot avant qu'aucun acte

²⁸ Don DeLillo, *Libra* (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 440. On *Libra*, see, for example, Skip Willman, 'Traversing the Fantasies of the JFK Assassination: Conspiracy and Contingency in Don DeLillo's *Libra*', *Contemporary Literature*, 39.3 (Autumn 1998), 405–33.

²⁹ See Jean-Claude Waquet, *La Conjururation des dictionnaires: vérité des mots et vérité de la politique dans la France moderne* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2000).

extérieur ou matériel, aucun commencement d'exécution, aucun attentat vienne le lui révéler'.³⁰ Instead, he continues, positing something akin to a thought crime, 'elle le saisit dans la pensée, dans la volonté des conspirateurs. C'est un fait qu'elle découvre et incrimine avant qu'il ait revêtu un corps, quand il n'a encore, pour ainsi dire, qu'une réalité intellectuelle' (106). Leaving aside *complot*, Duclerc and Garnier–Pagès's *Dictionnaire politique* attempts instead to distinguish *conjuración* from *conspiration* with reference to the number of conspirators involved:

Au point de vue étymologique, on pourrait dire que Conspiration, *cum spirare*, a un sens beaucoup plus large que Conjuración, *cum jurare*. On conçoit en effet, plus facilement, la réunion d'un très grand nombre de personnes dans un désir commun, dans une *aspiration* commune que dans une *résolution* commune. Mais, au point de vue politique, Conjuración et conspiration ne signifient qu'une seule et même chose : la préparation d'un attentat. Dans le langage légal, la Conspiration c'est donc le complot.³¹

If there was clearly a lexicographical will to establish a differential sense of *conspirer* and *conjurer*, the matter was far from easily resolved. As early as 1797, former mayor of Paris Jean–Nicolas Pache notes that:

Il serait utile d'avoir des mots différents pour exprimer les conspirations relatives aux principes, et celles relatives aux personnes, pour exprimer dans l'un et l'autre genre les conspirations vertueuses et vicieuses ; mais la langue dans son état actuel ne fournit pas à cet égard des ressources suffisantes.³²

In 1801, Louis–Sébastien Mercier, now remembered chiefly for his *Tableau de Paris*, took up Pache's challenge, attempting to solve this definitional quandary by invoking 'good' and 'bad' conspiracies:

Conspirer. Ce mot, jusqu'à présent, a signifié la résolution prise par un certain nombre de personnes, d'anéantir une chose funeste au bien de la société générale ou particulière : il entraîne avec lui l'idée de destruction [...]. Maintenant, le mot Conspirer se prend dans un sens différent : au lieu d'indiquer l'idée de destruction, il fait naître celle d'établissement aussi glorieux qu'utile, comme dans ce trait du discours de Lakanal : 'Jaloux de la liberté

³⁰ François Guizot, *Des conspirations et de la justice politique* (Ladvocat, 1821), pp. 105–06.

³¹ Eugène Duclerc and Étienne–Joseph–Louis Garnier–Pagès (eds.), *Dictionnaire politique, encyclopédie du langage et de la science politique* (Pagnerre, 1860), p. 270. Original emphasis.

³² Jean–Nicolas Pache, *Sur les factions et les partis, les conspirations et les conjurations, et sur celles de l'ordre du jour* (René Vatar, 1797), p. 6.

qu'ils avaient conquise, les Français offrirent le spectacle sublime et terrible d'un peuple conspirant pour la patrie.³³

Some fifty years later, the grammarian Prosper Poitevin, proffered the following tripartite typology: 'Comploter, c'est ourdir une basse intrigue ; conjurer, c'est entrer dans de sourdes menées qui ont pour but le renversement du prince ou de l'État ; conspirer, c'est concourir secrètement à l'accomplissement de quelque grand dessein.'³⁴ Perhaps the best known intervention in this drive towards differential definition, however, is that of Pierre Larousse. In a spirit of republican *engagement*, his *Grand dictionnaire universel* seeks to situate *conspiration* and *conjuración* in an oppositional hierarchy, attempting to impose a clear distinction between malign plotting for self-interest and a more noble, temporary abandonment of the Enlightenment dream of a transparent polity. Accordingly, we read, 'si les conspirations n'exigent que de l'ambition et un esprit aventureux, il n'en est pas de même des conjurations, qui ont besoin de convictions sincères et d'un amour ardent, soit de la patrie, soit de la liberté'.³⁵ The *conspiration*, for Larousse, is the inferior term, of a lesser ideological purity, carried out as it is 'le plus souvent dans un intérêt étroit et personnel' (946). The most recent of these attempts to combat semantic slippage is that of Frédéric Monier, who leaves little room for discussion in his concise definition, categorical in all senses of the word. Monier's study of conspiracy in Third Republic France, he writes, seeks to 'proposer un mode d'analyse global du phénomène, qui restitue sa triple dimension subversive, révolutionnaire – la conspiration –, répressive, judiciaire – le complot –, enfin fabuleuse, mythologique – la conjuration'.³⁶

If the difficulty of pinning down this constituent term seems to herald something of a semantic struggle, *conspiracy theory* or *théorie du complot*, surely enough, reveals itself as equally slippery in terms of definition. Much critical ink has been spilled regarding terminology. Does the appeal to the scientifically grounded concept of a 'theory', we might ask, lend conspiracy thinking a rationalizing legitimacy that belies its more extravagant delusions? In referring to *conspiracy theories* or *théories du complot*, this thesis does so in awareness of both its terminological limitations and its French-language variants (namely the neologisms *complotisme* and *conspirationnisme*, often taken as

³³ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Néologie, ou Vocabulaire de mots nouveaux, à renouveler, ou pris dans des acceptations nouvelles*, 2 vols (Moussard & Maradan, 1801), I, 125.

³⁴ Prosper Poitevin, *Dictionnaire de la langue française: glossaire raisonnée de la langue écrite et parlée* (Chamerot, 1851), p. 231.

³⁵ Pierre Larousse (ed.), *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle*, 17 vols (Administration du Grand Dictionnaire universel, 1865–79), IV (1869), 946.

³⁶ Frédéric Monier, *Le Complot dans la République: stratégies du secret, de Boulanger à la Cagoule* (La Découverte, 1998), p. 20.

synonyms). The term *conspirationniste* ('se dit de quelqu'un qui se persuade et veut persuader autrui que les détenteurs du pouvoir [politique ou autre] pratiquent la conspiration du silence pour cacher des vérités ou contrôler les consciences'³⁷) made its debut in the 2012 Petit Larousse, with the entry speaking to the dual components of belief ('se persuade') and proselytism ('veut persuader autrui'). *Complotiste* ('se dit de quelqu'un qui récuse la version communément admise d'un événement et cherche à démontrer que celui-ci résulte d'un complot fomenté par une minorité active') first appeared in the 2017 edition. We might, however, make one important narratological distinction: a *théorie du complot* is a *récit*, whilst *conspirationnisme* and *complotisme* are *discours*, the discourse that furnishes the conspiracy theory with its narrative structure.

Conspiracy theory stands as the most successful example of the labels attached to the phenomenon that American historian Richard Hofstadter terms 'the paranoid style',³⁸ roughly synonymous with Daniel Pipes's more recent coinage, 'conspiracism'.³⁹ Conspiracism is the tendency to think of politics and society in terms of conspiratorial machinations, elevating conspiracy theory to a world view. 'Diffuse' conspiracism, as Geoffrey Cubitt glosses, habitually seeks conspiratorial explanations of events 'without necessarily joining them together in a larger pattern', whilst the more developed version 'posits the conspiratorial agency of a particular group – the Jews, or Jesuits, or Freemasons, or Communists, for example – as a driving force in contemporary affairs, and perhaps in history more generally [...], maintain[ing] this as a standing explanation and a key alarmist theme over a significant period'.⁴⁰ Pipes takes his cue from Hofstadter's seminal essay, which, in its examination of the burgeoning of conspiracy narratives in the United States since the assassination of John F. Kennedy, constitutes the degree zero of contemporary scholarly interest in the conspiratorial. Careful to distinguish the paranoid style, described as such because no other word adequately evokes the register's 'qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness and conspiratorial fantasy' (3), from paranoia as clinical entity, he suggests, highlighting the importance of 'style', that it is above all 'a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself' (4). For Hofstadter, 'the distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there in history, but that they regard a "vast" or "gigantic" conspiracy as the motive force in historical events. History *is* a conspiracy...' (29,

³⁷ What this entry fails to note, however, is that these supposed 'détenteurs du pouvoir' may not, in fact, exist.

³⁸ See Richard J. Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 3–40.

³⁹ See Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

⁴⁰ Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France: Denouncing the Jesuit Menace', *Historical Social Research*, 38.1 (2013), 107–28 (p. 111).

original emphasis). If Hofstadter's analysis privileges the political discourse of post-McCarthy America, he nonetheless notes that this 'way of seeing the world and expressing oneself' has 'a long and varied history' (3–4). Drawing on a substantial body of historical scholarship, nineteenth-century France, this thesis contends, witnesses a privileged moment in this history.

In the most literal sense, any explanation, be it speculative or evidence-based, that suggests collusion between individuals in attributing the cause of events to a plot is, strictly speaking, a 'conspiracy theory'. Yet in everyday parlance, the term also carries an evaluative bearing, with pejorative consequences. It implies a judgment on the epistemic status of an account that, as sociologists Ginna Husting and Martin Orr have suggested, seeks to exclude its exponent 'from the imagined community of reasonable interlocutors'.⁴¹ The conspiracy theory is, in Barkun's neat phrasing, a form of 'stigmatised knowledge' (26). The effectiveness of the label as a means of exclusion hampers any attempt to arrive at an unambiguous definition. Such an endeavour must, then, as anthropologist Charles Briggs reminds us, 'keep in mind the political-economic parameters that shape how some narratives are admitted to official regimes of truth and how others become conspiracy theories'.⁴² Plausibility is political. Conspiracies, though, do arise and have existed. How, in this light, to distinguish between genuine conspiratorial politics, based in reality, and spurious claims of secret collusion? For Pipes's confident distinction between 'conspiracies, which are real', and conspiracy theories, 'which exist only in the imagination' (20–21), seems to require nuance.

A useful distinction might be between 'theories of conspiracy' and 'conspiracy theories'. Where a theory of conspiracy constitutes a working hypothesis that can be discarded after further investigation, the conspiracy theory is unfalsifiable, interpreting the presence of refutational evidence or absence of proof as confirmation of a cover-up. What Hofstadter terms the 'careful preparation for the big leap from the undeniable to the unbelievable' (37–38) is, then, a 'monological belief system'.⁴³ Conspiracy theories are thus, as Brian Keeley notes, 'the only theories for which evidence against them is actually construed as evidence in favor of them. The more evidence piled up by the authorities in favor of a given theory, the more the conspiracy theorist points to how badly "They" must want us to believe the official story.'⁴⁴ The key difference, though, is one of publicity. 'Theories of conspiracy' purport to explain an event in terms of the

⁴¹ Ginna Husting and Martin Orr, 'Dangerous Machinery: "Conspiracy Theorist" as a Transpersonal Strategy of Exclusion', *Symbolic Interaction*, 30.2 (Jul. 2007), 127–50 (p. 127).

⁴² Charles L. Briggs, 'Theorizing Modernity Conspiratorially: Science, Scale, and the Political Economy of Public Discourse in Explanations of a Cholera Epidemic', *American Ethnologist*, 31.2 (May 2004), 164–87 (p. 181).

⁴³ Ted Goertzel, 'Belief in Conspiracy Theories', *Political Psychology*, 15.4 (Dec. 1994), 731–42 (p. 740).

⁴⁴ Brian L. Keeley, 'Of Conspiracy Theories', *Journal of Philosophy*, 96.3 (Mar. 1999), 109–26 (p. 120).

malign intent and secret collusion of a small group, yet can themselves remain secret. This, for example, would be a fitting way of describing the early stages of a piece of investigative journalism, or the approach of the police in the wake of a terrorist attack. ‘Conspiracy theories’, on the other hand, involve more than a mere causal explanation of an event, but seek also to produce a ‘secret history’, a kind of knowledge that will both make sense of a happening and, crucially, reveal the true motives of those who present the ‘official history’ of the dominant account. They are, in this respect, necessarily dialogic, a counter–discourse running, in philosopher David Coady’s words, ‘contrary to an explanation that has official status at the time and place in question’.⁴⁵ In pitting the powerful against the powerless, conspiracy theory, then, takes as its correlates an establishment and a cover–up, denoting an epistemological challenge to the realm of the official secret in adopting an antagonistic approach towards the standard version of how things happened.

Conspiracy Thinking in Nineteenth–Century France: A Brief History

With these definitional considerations in mind, the present study argues that the July Monarchy novel of conspiracy both emerges from and responds to a particular historical conjunction. For, from the ‘gigantesque fausse nouvelle’⁴⁶ of an aristocratic ‘famine plot’⁴⁷ to the state–sanctioned anti–Semitic accusations of the Dreyfus Affair,⁴⁸ the long nineteenth century is one bookended and traversed by allegations of conspiracy. As France floundered from nascent republic to Napoleonic empire to restored monarchy and back again, the country bore witness to a

⁴⁵ David Coady, ‘An Introduction to the Philosophical Debates about Conspiracy Theories’, in *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate*, ed. by David Coady (Ashgate, 2006), pp. 1–12 (p. 2).

⁴⁶ Georges Lefebvre, *La Grande Peur de 1789* (Armand Colin, 1970), p. 87. Cf. Timothy Tackett, who has sought to demonstrate that the peasantry was less given to belief in aristocratic conspiracy than Lefebvre alleges. Arguing that, if the third estate feared anything in the summer of 1789, it was the collapse of law and order, Tackett suggests that a more significant moment in the genealogy of speculation concerning a supposed *complot aristocratique* came in June 1791, when Louis XVI and Marie–Antoinette unsuccessfully attempted to flee Paris. See ‘Collective Panics in the Early French Revolution, 1789–1791: A Comparative Perspective’, *French History*, 17.2 (Jun. 2003), 149–71.

⁴⁷ For a pre–history of the 1789 ‘great fear’ in terms of the conspiracy theories surrounding subsistence crises in *ancien régime* France, see Steven L. Kaplan, *The Famine Plot Persuasion in Eighteenth–Century France* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1982).

⁴⁸ There is a vast body of scholarship on the Dreyfus Affair; for a concise discussion of the role played by conspiracy in the case, see Vincent Duclert, ‘Réflexions sur les usages du complot dans l’affaire Dreyfus’, in *Complots et conspirations en France du XVIII^e au XX^e siècle*, ed. by Frédéric Monier (Valenciennes: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2003), pp. 75–90. The accusations levelled against Alfred Dreyfus were a flashpoint for allegations concerning the so–called ‘Jewish plot’. The classic studies of anti–Semitic conspiracy theories are: Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967); and Léon Poliakov, *La Causalité diabolique: essai sur l’origine des persécutions* (Calmann–Lévy, 1980).

proliferation of clandestine organisations, which cast genuine political movements in conspiratorial forms, and speculative discourses concerning the latter's existence and activities. Freemasons, Illuminati, *ultras*,⁴⁹ Jesuits, Communists, capitalists, Jews, and various hyphenated permutations thereof ('Judaeo-Masonry'), to name but a few, accordingly found themselves cast in the role of conspiratorial movers of history. Yet if, as Tardy has recently argued, the nineteenth century is 'la période la plus riche en complots de l'histoire française' (9), the disjunction between the ubiquitous discourse on conspiracy and empirically observable conduct remains striking. For those theories masterfully ironized by Flaubert were, ultimately, predicated on the idea of a clandestine efficacy that bore little relation to the realities of the shifting political landscape of nineteenth-century France. As Tardy himself concedes, 'de 1820 à 1870, aucune conspiration ne fait tomber un régime politique établi' (11). Richard Evans, too, paraphrases Franklin D. Roosevelt to suggest that 'nineteenth-century states had less to fear from revolutionary conspiracies than they did from fear itself',⁵⁰ whilst, for J.M. Roberts:

Though secret societies existed in large numbers in Western Europe between 1750 and 1830 and strove to influence events, their main importance was what people believed about them. This always mattered more than what they did and their numbers and practical effectiveness were in no way proportionate to the myth's power.⁵¹

In one of the first studies to establish conspiracy and its attendant theories as a subject of reputable academic enquiry, Roberts highlights a unique conspiracist bent in the nineteenth-century popular imagination: 'for about a century and a half,' he suggests, 'large numbers of intelligent Europeans believed that much of what was happening in the world around them only happened because secret societies planned it so [...]. More believed such nonsense, probably, between 1815 and 1914 than at any other time' (16). An 'aberration of maturing bourgeois society' (16), the grip held by the mythology of the secret societies over the European imagination, Roberts argues, 'was at the peak of its strength between 1815 and 1848' (28–29).

If the *Annales* school's critique of *histoire événementielle* implied a certain decentring from action to function, historians of nineteenth-century France have nonetheless seized on the prevalence of this paranoid style of imagining politics. These analyses span the immediate post–

⁴⁹ On the influence of anti-Jesuit conspiracy theories on nineteenth-century French secular politics, see Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Michel Leroy, *Le Mythe jésuite de Béranger à Michelet* (Presses universitaires de France, 1992).

⁵⁰ Evans, *The Pursuit of Power*, pp. 44–45.

⁵¹ J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (Paladin, 1974), p. 361.

Revolutionary decade through to the Third Republic. The question of ‘conspiracy in the French Revolution’ is, for example, the subject of the collective volume edited by several prominent scholars of the Revolutionary period,⁵² taking as its starting point François Furet’s revisionist attack on the social interpretation of 1789 and on the concomitant Marxist hold over historical scholarship in France. Furet’s analysis emphasizes the importance of ‘l’idée de complot dans l’idéologie révolutionnaire’, outlining a way of imagining politics that relies on a ‘perversion du schéma causal par laquelle tout fait historique est réductible à une intention et à une volonté subjective’.⁵³ For Lynn Hunt, too, ‘the obsession with conspiracy became the central organizing principle of French revolutionary rhetoric’, with ‘the narrative of Revolution [...] dominated by plots’.⁵⁴ By 1793, she continues, ‘the phraseology of conspiracy had become a regular, required part of revolutionary discourse’ (39). Timothy Tackett echoes Hunt in detecting a veritable ‘conspiracy obsession’ in the years preceding the Terror,⁵⁵ which Cubitt has discussed with reference to Robespierre and his consistent recourse to an imaginative model that treated despotism as ‘the self-reconstituting serpent of legend’.⁵⁶ In his critical reassessment of the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere, James Van Horn Melton, too, diagnoses a ‘predisposition for conspiracy theories’ as a hangover from *ancien régime* political opacity, arguing that ‘rumor and allegations of conspiracy were structures of belief pervading all levels of French society’.⁵⁷ Karine Salomé’s study engages closely with the series of conspiracies against the life of Bonaparte and their discursive afterlives,⁵⁸ whilst, moving later into the century, Emmanuel Fureix, François Ploux and Andrew Counter have explored the atmosphere of a Restoration characterized by ‘an extraordinary degree of paranoia, on all political sides, about plots, conspiracies and espionage’.⁵⁹ Gilles Malandain and David Skuy, too, highlight the significance of the assassination

⁵² See Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser and Marisa Linton (eds.), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁵³ François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Gallimard, 1978), p. 91.

⁵⁴ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 39.

⁵⁵ See Timothy Tackett, ‘Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792’, *American Historical Review*, 105.3 (Jun. 2000), 691–713. These concerns are developed fully in Tackett’s recent monograph, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Cubitt, ‘Robespierre and conspiracy theories’, in *Robespierre*, ed. by Colin Haydon and William Doyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 75–91 (p. 86).

⁵⁷ James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 70–71.

⁵⁸ See Karine Salomé, *L’Ouragan homicide: l’attentat politique en France au XIX^e siècle* (Champ Vallon, 2010), pp. 177–96.

⁵⁹ Andrew Counter, *The Amorous Restoration: Love, Sex, and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 15. See also Emmanuel Fureix, ‘Histoire d’une peur urbaine: des

of the duc de Berry in February 1820 as a flashpoint for conspiratorial accusations that stretched across the political spectrum.⁶⁰ Tardy's ambitious study takes as its parameters the half-decade stretching from 1820 to 1870, covering the July Monarchy, the short-lived Second Republic and the Second Empire.⁶¹ Monier, finally, has revisited the history of the Third Republic in light of the conspiracy motif, moving from the 1889 Boulanger affair to the far-right street demonstrations of 6th February 1934 as he draws out 'l'existence d'une inquiétude républicaine, pas toujours infondée, une crainte de voir le premier régime démocratique stable qu'ait connu le pays céder sous les assauts de minorités résolues, unies dans le secret, prêtes à employer la force'.⁶²

Reading across this body of scholarship, which encompasses divergent political and methodological affiliations, two elements remain constant. The first is the difficulty of circumscribing act from perception, of filtering out the kernel of historical truth at the heart of its more speculative discursive manifestations. Girardet has, in this vein, drawn attention to the peculiar historical weighting of the conspiratorial narrative. The latter, he suggests, is freighted with a 'charge de densité historique [qui] se révèle de toute évidence particulièrement lourde : il n'est en effet aucune ou presque de ses manifestations ou de ses expressions que l'on ne puisse mettre plus ou moins discrètement en rapport avec des données factuelles relativement précises, aisément vérifiables et tout cas et concrètement saisissables' (51). The second bears on the pivotal role accorded to the events of 1789 in the development of the conspiracist mode of explanation.

"piqueurs" de femmes sous la Restauration', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 60 (2013), 31–54; and François Ploux, *De bouche à oreille: naissance et propagation des rumeurs dans la France du XIX^e siècle* (Aubier, 2003).

⁶⁰ See Gilles Malandain, *L'Introuvable Complot: attentat, enquête et rumeur dans la France de la Restauration* (Éditions de l'EHESS, 2011); and David Skuy, *Assassination, Politics, and Miracles: France and the Royalist Reaction of 1820* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2003).

⁶¹ The demise of the Second Republic at the hands of a prince-president is a notorious example of a specific kind of conspiracy, the *coup d'état*. On its particularities as a mode of political action, see Sarah Delos-Hourtole and Emmanuel Cherrier (eds.), *Coups d'État et révolutions* (Valenciennes: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2005).

⁶² Monier, *Le Complot dans la République*, p. 10. It is hoped that the present study of the literary import of July Monarchy discourses on conspiracy will go some way towards bridging the chronological divide between the scholarship on the opening decades of the century outlined in this section, and the work of scholars such as Monier and, more recently, Jason Earle, on secret societies in Third Republic and interwar France (See 'Conspiracies and Secret Societies in Interwar French Literature' [unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2013]).

1789: A Transitional Moment

No longer the preserve of what one commentator memorably terms ‘the light-headed, the fanciful, the altogether un-scholarly and the lunatic fringe of the British Museum Reading Room’,⁶³ conspiracy narratives have in recent years become the object of serious academic attention. A small number of attempts have been made to shift the ‘birth’ of modern conspiracy culture back to a pre-Revolutionary, even pre-modern, era. Joseph Roisman, for example, detects a ‘rich lexicon of conspiracy’ in Athenian political discourse,⁶⁴ lending credence to Eli Sagan’s assertion that paranoia constituted a key element of the collective psyche of ancient Athens.⁶⁵ Victoria Emma Pagán’s studies emphasize the prevalence of allegations of conspiracy in ancient Rome, of which the most famous remains the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44BC, whilst Barry Coward and Julian Swann highlight the parallels early modern commentators drew between Roman clandestine political manoeuvrings and those of their own era.⁶⁶ Yves-Marie Bercé, finally, has argued that ‘la fin du XVII^e siècle, correspondant à l’affirmation de la plupart des absolutismes européens’ marked, in an echo of Girardet, the end of an ‘âge d’or de la conspiration comme moyen de parvenir’.⁶⁷ The overwhelming consensus that emerges from historical scholarship, however, is that the origins of the conspiracist mode of explanation can be traced to a variant of the mythology of the secret societies that developed in the immediate aftermath of the demise of the *ancien régime*.

With the publication of Augustin de Barruel’s mammoth *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du jacobinisme* (1797–98), which focussed the crosshairs of a paranoia that had built throughout the post-Revolutionary decade, the world saw the first systematic attempt to reveal the role of conspiracy in a revolution of world-historical importance. This *Urtext* of the paranoid style of writing 1789, the veritable ‘bible of the secret society mythology’,⁶⁸ became one of the founding

⁶³ John Saltmarsh, review of Douglas Knoop and G.P. Jones, *An Introduction to Freemasonry* (1937), *The Economic History Review*, 8 (Nov. 1937), 102–04 (p. 103).

⁶⁴ Joseph Roisman, *The Rhetoric of Conspiracy in Ancient Athens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 6.

⁶⁵ See Eli Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock: Democracy and Paranoia in Ancient Athens and Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁶⁶ See Barry Coward and Julian Swann (eds.), *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution* (Ashgate, 2004); Victoria Emma Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); and Pagán, *Conspiracy Theory in Latin Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

⁶⁷ Yves-Marie Bercé, ‘Introduction’, in *Complots et conjurations dans l’Europe moderne*, ed. by Yves-Marie Bercé and Elena Fasano Guarini (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1996), pp. 1–5 (p. 4).

⁶⁸ Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, p. 204. The most detailed and authoritative discussions of Barruel remain Amos Hofman, ‘The Origins of the Theory of the *Philosophe* Conspiracy’, *French History*, 2.2 (1988), 152–72; and Hofman, ‘Opinion, Illusion, and the Illusion of Opinion: Barruel’s Theory of Conspiracy’, *Eight*

documents of the right-wing interpretation of the Revolution, winning praise from Edmund Burke, amongst others, for its ‘wonderful narrative’, supported by documents and proofs with ‘the most judicial regularity and exactness’.⁶⁹ The work emerged virtually simultaneously with (yet independently from) Scottish physicist John Robison’s *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe*, which alleged a near-identical cause of Revolution in France. Robison, too, posited a malevolent conspiracy that had brought about and seized on ‘the present awful situation of Europe and the general fermentation of the public mind in all nations’.⁷⁰ Seeking to impose order and clarity on the chaos of orchestrated obfuscation, Barruel’s magnum opus weaves, across four weighty volumes, the narrative of an unholy trinity of *philosophes*, Freemasons and Illuminati together bent on overthrowing throne and altar, united in ‘le jeu de la ruse, de l’artifice, de la séduction, des moyens ténébreux, mensongers et les plus révoltants dans l’art affreux de séduire les peuples’ (*Mém. Barr.*, I: 387). Casting himself as empirically minded historian who grounds his proof in archival research – for, he recognizes, ‘l’importance de l’accusation m’impose le devoir de produire les preuves’ (III: 4) – Barruel writes:

Le résultat de mes recherches et de toutes les preuves que j’ai puisées surtout dans les archives des Jacobins et de leurs premiers maîtres a été que leur secte et leurs conspirations ne sont elles-mêmes que l’ensemble, la coalition d’une triple secte, d’une triple conspiration dans lesquelles se tramèrent longtemps avant la Révolution et se trament encore la ruine de l’autel, celle du trône et enfin celle de toute société civile. (I: xvii)

‘Dans cette Révolution française’, he thunders, ‘[...] tout a été prévu, médité, combiné, résolu, statué : tout a été l’effet de la plus profonde scélératesse, puisque tout a été préparé, amené par des

eenth-Century Studies, 27.1 (Autumn 1993), 27–60. For a pre-history of anti-Masonic discourse (that is, in the decades leading up to the appearance of Barruel’s work), see Jacques Lemaire, *Les Origines françaises de l’antimaçonnisme, 1744–1797* (Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1985).

⁶⁹ Edmund Burke to Augustin Barruel, 1st May 1797. *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, 1729–1797*, ed. by Thomas W. Copeland and others, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958–78), IX (1968), 319–20.

⁷⁰ John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Freemasons, Illuminati and Reading Societies* (Cadell, Davies & Creech, 1798), p. 425. In the prefatory note to the third volume of his *Mémoires*, Barruel draws attention to Robison’s work: ‘Cet ouvrage a paru au moment où j’allais livrer à l’impression cette troisième partie de mes *Mémoires*. M. Robison, qui ne connaissait pas d’abord mes deux premiers volumes, a bien voulu en faire mention dans son appendix. Je suis assurément flatté de son suffrage ; je ne saurais lui refuser le mien sur le zèle qu’il a montré à dévoiler les ennemis du bien public [...]. Sans nous connaître, nous avons travaillé sur le même objet et pour la même cause’ (*Mém. Barr.*, III: xvii–xviii). He does, however, go on to criticize Robison for his lack of attention to detail, certain chronological errors, and a careless approach to the key philosophical texts of the Bavarian Illuminati.

hommes qui avaient seuls le fil des conspirations longtemps ourdies dans des sociétés secrètes' (I: xi).

Why, then, does Barruel represent something of a paradigm shift? For conspiratorial speculation was, as Gordon Wood has shown, ubiquitous in eighteenth-century political culture on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷¹ It tended, however, to posit fairly specific instances of collusion amongst identified and identifiable powerful figures and persons of authority, said to be working for prosaic, worldly aims such as financial or political benefit. The transition that historians have traced to 1789 and its aftermath is effectively one of scale: through the conflation of a succession of imagined conspiracies of this older type, such as court intrigues or *complots de famine*, the hub of alleged plots came to be located amongst anonymous, diffuse groups of conspirators whose motivations were shrouded in mystery and geared towards a less tangible reward.⁷² The occult powers behind these alleged conspiracies of world-historical importance were no longer limited temporally by a political career or life, nor, as Jovan Byford emphasizes, spatially by a 'finite sphere of influence'.⁷³ If the Revolution was, in Cubitt's words, 'ideologically founded on the attribution of sovereign authority to an abstract entity',⁷⁴ namely the people or the nation, claims about a large-scale, comprehensive and universal plot gave concrete form to this new entity's elusive will. As Roberts suggests,

What the Revolution [...] brought about in men's minds was the conviction that there was almost no institution, no traditional value, no social landmark which was not threatened in some way, and a ready audience was available to someone who could link together in an ordered scheme the various plot theories which were lying about and provide with their aid a rationale for the colossal psychological and political changes which men felt they were undergoing. This was Barruel's opportunity. (212–13)

1789, then, as Monier has argued, emerges as 'un événement fondateur', a moment of 'rupture'.⁷⁵ Paul Zawadzki, too, summarises this historiographical tendency with his assertion that 'il y a, dans l'histoire de l'imaginaire du complot quelque chose de fondamentalement nouveau à penser du

⁷¹ See Gordon Wood, 'Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 39.3 (Jul. 1982), 401–41.

⁷² This process is set out in detail in Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Conspiracy myths and conspiracy theories', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 20.1 (1989), 12–26.

⁷³ Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 43.

⁷⁴ Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth*, p. 305.

⁷⁵ Frédéric Monier, 'La Part du secret: un état des lieux', in Monier (ed.), *Complots et conspirations*, pp. 7–13 (p. 10).

côté de la modernité'.⁷⁶ The Revolution ultimately encodes a historical and symbolic shift in which we see, in Tardy's words, 'la naissance d'une culture nouvelle de la conspiration qui accompagne les bouleversements de ce vaste premier XIX^e siècle' (24).

In his study of the American revolutionary psyche, Wood highlights the significance for conspiracy thinking of the rise of the explanatory paradigm of mechanistic causality that informed the scientific revolution of the late seventeenth century. Excluding divine intervention and chance and asserting an indissoluble connection between effect and cause, Enlightenment thought, he argues, also privileged the principle of free will as the necessary basis for morality. In assigning to human motives the role of causes, with negative social effects derived from subversive human intention, eighteenth-century secular thinking was structured in such a way as to attribute a decisive role to human agency, intentionality and collusion in social and historical causality. Accordingly, Wood concludes, 'conspiratorial explanations of complex events became normal, necessary and rational' (421), the correlate of a 'man-centered causal history' (415). In their dualism, occultism and intentionalism,⁷⁷ such explanations work as a radical counter-thesis to the possibility of chance 'as motivational trace in historical writing', as Reinhart Koselleck would have it.⁷⁸ Brooks, too, has highlighted the generalized post-Enlightenment tendency to interpret society in terms of causality. In a nineteenth-century world in which history came to replace theology as the key discourse in terms of which humans made sense of the world around them, he adds:

Not only history but historiography, the philosophy of history, philology, mythography, diachronic linguistics, anthropology, archaeology and evolutionary biology all establish their claims as field of inquiry, and all respond to the need for an explanatory narrative that seeks its authority in a return to origins and the tracing of a coherent story forward from origin to present.⁷⁹

If contingency is anathema to its exponent, conspiracy theory, too, responds to this 'need': drawing on a set of interpretations and assumptions about causal relations in the world, it stands as a compensatory fiction, a narrative of reassurance that seeks to render intelligible a world that appears to have lost its legibility and coherence. The recourse to covert action as a cognitive

⁷⁶ Paul Zawadzki, 'Historiciser l'imaginaire du complot: note sur un problème d'interprétation', in *Les Rhétoriques de la conspiration*, ed. by Emmanuelle Danblon and Loïc Nicolas (CNRS Éditions, 2010), pp. 45–58 (p. 49).

⁷⁷ See Cubitt, 'Conspiracy myths and conspiracy theories', pp. 13–18.

⁷⁸ See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 115–27.

⁷⁹ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 6.

anchorage point denotes a world that is meaningful rather than arbitrary, in which cause and effect can be unproblematically yoked together. As Pierre–André Taguieff notes:

[Le] dogme du complot efface l'imprévisibilité de l'Histoire : il fournit à bon compte le sentiment de pouvoir maîtriser le présent, prévoir l'avenir et déjouer les pièges du futur, sur la base d'une connaissance supposée des causes profondes de la marche du monde. Illusion suprême, certes, mais sentiment réel : celui d'une maîtrise intellectuelle de la suite des événements. L'idée de complot offre un puissant moyen de faire renaître de la certitude dans une époque qui en manque – dans tous les ordres, de la pensée, de l'action et de la création.⁸⁰

Bereft of traditional and stable reference points, the proliferation of denunciatory, conspiratorial discourses to which nineteenth-century France bore witness, we might venture, is to be aligned with what Girardet terms those 'grandes peurs collectives' (53) symptomatic of a society in turmoil. As a socially and historically bounded explanatory discourse, his golden age of conspiracy belies 'un climat psychologique et social d'incertitude, de crainte ou d'angoisse' characterized by 'des déchirements spirituels', 'des affrontements politiques' and 'des mutations économiques' (53). Similarly, for Taguieff, such discourses form a 'nouvelle religiosité extra-institutionnelle' (188) seeking to 'réenchanter' (428) a disenchanted (that is, modernized, bureaucratic and secularized) world whose inhabitants are hounded by 'une impuissance cognitive productrice de désarroi et d'anxiété'.⁸¹ Post-1789, these narratives emerge, to borrow Jameson's oft-cited formula, as 'the imaginary resolution of the objective contradictions' to which they constitute 'an active response' (104). Whilst rehearsing the usual post-structuralist caveats concerning the now-ubiquitous suspicion of nineteenth-century narrative and its referentiality, put in its simplest terms, then, the history of the period cannot help but change the way in which plotting is conceptualized. *Pace* Franco Moretti, this thesis argues, it is not the *Bildungsroman* that stands as the 'symbolic form of modernity', but conspiracy theory.⁸²

⁸⁰ Pierre–André Taguieff, *La Foire aux 'Illuminés': ésotérisme, théorie du complot, extrémisme* (Mille et une nuits, 2005), p. 80.

⁸¹ Pierre–André Taguieff, *L'Imaginaire du complot mondial: aspects d'un mythe moderne* (Mille et une nuits, 2006), p. 197.

⁸² Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. by Albert Sbragia (Verso, 1987), p. 5.

The View from Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies

The consensus that emerges from historical scholarship, we have seen, is that the long nineteenth century is the juncture in history at which conspiracy theories acquired the comprehensive and all-encompassing character that they retain in their current guise. The discursive aftermath of 1789, it is suggested, sees the birth of modern conspiracy culture. If I argue that this scholarship contains a blind spot – that of the role of literary fiction in the development of the conspiracist tradition of explanation – it should be emphasized that the present thesis stands as a complement and not as a corrective to the work of historians such as Furet, Hunt, and Girardet. This is not the case, however, as regards literary criticism and its offspring, cultural studies. The last moment in human history at which cultural practice is not dominated by technologized media, the birth of modern, mass politics also coincides with the birth of mass culture, namely the novel. Yet literary critics and cultural theorists have almost exclusively understood the literature of conspiracy as a development of the second half of the twentieth century, centred in the United States. In suggesting that this critical meta-narrative is partially sighted, requiring nuancing in terms of both chronology and geography, the guiding contention of this thesis works against a highly influential *idée reçue*. This is that vision that stages conspiracy theory as the prerogative of postmodernity, attributing to the cultural production of the post-Kennedy United States ‘a peculiar affinity for the countersubversive imagination’,⁸³ as Peter Knight comments in his recent assessment of the field. In the hidden agenda of manifest destiny, paranoia, Knight writes elsewhere, has become ‘as American as apple pie’.⁸⁴ The present study, then, seeks to offer a two-fold corrective to this narrative, demonstrating that the phenomenon of conspiracy thinking in fact begins much earlier, in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, and that Europe is far from immune to the attractions of the conspiratorial.

Seemingly taking its cue from the musings of DeLillo’s *Running Dog* (1978), an authoritative version of literary history posits the postmodern United States as the location and ‘age of conspiracy [...], the age of connections, links, secret relationships’.⁸⁵ Conspiracy as motif and narrative mode emerges as the exclusive textual domain of contemporary American novelists, most

⁸³ Peter Knight, ‘Plotting Future Directions in Conspiracy Theory Research’, in *Conspiracy Theories in the United States and the Middle East: A Comparative Approach*, ed. by Michael Butter and Maurus Reinkowski (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 345–69 (p. 357).

⁸⁴ Peter Knight, ‘Introduction: A Nation of Conspiracy Theorists’, in *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America*, ed. by Peter Knight (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 1–17 (p. 5).

⁸⁵ Don DeLillo, *Running Dog* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 111.

notably DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon, ‘American literature’s greatest conspiracy theorist’.⁸⁶ ‘The writing of Pynchon and DeLillo’, Emily Apter has argued, is a ‘symptom of this postwar paranoid culture’.⁸⁷ Indeed, this understanding of Pynchon’s aesthetic has become common currency: as Amy Elias remarks, ‘it is now an accepted critical commonplace that Pynchon’s novels promote a conspiratorial view of history’.⁸⁸ The work of scholars such as Knight, Mark Fenster,⁸⁹ Kathryn Olmsted,⁹⁰ and Robert Goldberg⁹¹ has reinforced the meta-critical conviction that the paranoid is to be packaged within a postmodern framework. ‘Conspiracy theory’, Timothy Melley notes, has been ‘a fundamental organizing principle in American film, television and fiction since World War II’.⁹² Lending credence to Elias’s suggestion that ‘the central logic of postmodernist art is paranoia’ (126), Jameson himself also contends that the postmodern age is characterized by ‘the omnipresence of the theme of paranoia as it expresses itself in a seemingly inexhaustible production of conspiracy plots of the most elaborate kind’.⁹³ Seeking to formulate the relationship between narratives of conspiracy and the socio-economic situation under late capitalism, he suggests that the insistent presence of the paranoid in instances of contemporary American cultural production bears witness to a state of affairs in which many of us are no longer able to make sense of our lives within a wider historical and socio-economic context. Conspiracy theory emerges as what he (somewhat condescendingly) terms ‘the poor person’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age’, a ‘degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter’s system’ (357). Insofar as it claims to reveal a hidden agenda beneath the chaotic surface of history, conspiracist discourse, Jameson argues, provides a compensatory sense

⁸⁶ John Walsh, ‘Thomas Pynchon on 9/11: American Literature’s Greatest Conspiracy Theorist Finally Addresses His Country’s Greatest Trauma’, *Independent*, 20th September 2013 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/thomas-pynchon-on-911-american-literature-s-greatest-conspiracy-theorist-finally-addresses-his-8830225.html>> [accessed 20th May 2016].

⁸⁷ Emily S. Apter, ‘On Oneworldedness: Or Paranoia as a World System’, *American Literary History*, 18.2 (Summer 2006), 365–89 (p. 368).

⁸⁸ Amy Elias, ‘History’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Inger Dalsgaard, Luc Herman and Brian McHale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 123–35 (p. 127). On Pynchon, see, for example, Leo Bersani, ‘Pynchon, Paranoia and Literature’, *Representations*, 25 (Winter 1989), 99–118.

⁸⁹ See Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁹⁰ See Kathryn Olmsted, *Real Enemies: Conspiracy Theories and American Democracy, World War I to 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹¹ See Robert Goldberg, *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁹² Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 7.

⁹³ Fredric Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 347–57 (p. 356).

of historical location ('cognitive mapping') that speaks to fears bearing on both 'the collective and the epistemological'.⁹⁴

In his analysis of the culture of conspiracy in contemporary American fiction, Samuel Coale, too, proposes that the postmodern subversion and questioning of 'every form of authority, including that of language itself', has led to a generalized view of the world in which everything is 'relational, debatable, elusive and precarious'.⁹⁵ Conspiracy thinking, in which 'everything becomes a sign, a clue, a piece of a larger puzzle', responds to a deep human yearning for coherence, 'unity and wholeness'. It offers explanation, he adds, a 'metanarrative of deceit and deception unmasked' that denies or undercuts 'the singularity of particular information and interprets it as part of some larger allegorical structure' (4–5). For both Jameson and Coale, then, the persistent presence of the conspiratorial threatens to become the ultimate postmodern master–narrative. The paranoid style emerges as a way of grounding meaning and interpretation in a world that, in Coale's words, has become 'so mediated, dispersed, intricate, and coded that one cannot possibly fathom it' (11). Extending the definition of conspiracy to signify 'a broad array of social controls' (8), Melley, similarly, attributes its attendant discourses to a kind of 'agency panic' (7) induced by concerns surrounding the structural and the intentional.

Exceptions to this critical chronology are few and far between, and, where they exist, bear almost exclusively on Anglophone literature. Robert Levine explores the anxieties surrounding subversive agents that play out in antebellum American literary texts, encompassing French revolutionaries, Catholic immigrants, and African slaves,⁹⁶ whilst Albert Pionke and David Trotter have discussed the paranoid style in nineteenth– and early twentieth–century cultural production on the other side of the Atlantic.⁹⁷ Adrian Wisnicki draws on affect theory in his exploration of conspiracy narratives in a series of Victorian and Edwardian novels and early spy thrillers.⁹⁸ In the current state of literary–critical affairs, only three studies engaging with the conspiracy motif consistently seek to look beyond an Anglophone linguistic boundary. Theodore Ziolkowski's recent survey of conspiracy fiction gestures intriguingly towards the significance of the German

⁹⁴ Fredric Jameson, 'Totality as Conspiracy', in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 9–84 (p. 9).

⁹⁵ Samuel Coale, *Paradigms of Paranoia: The Culture of Conspiracy in Contemporary American Fiction* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), p. 4.

⁹⁶ See Robert Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁹⁷ See Albert Pionke, *Plots of Opportunity: Representing Conspiracy in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004); and David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁹⁸ See Adrian Wisnicki, *Conspiracy, Revolution and Terrorism from Victorian Fiction to the Modern Novel* (Routledge, 2008).

‘league’ or ‘lodge novel’ [*Bundesroman*] for the literary development of the secret society motif, yet ultimately eschews engagement with textual detail in favour of sketching out a broader ‘genre history’.⁹⁹ Thomas Pfau provides a reading of paranoia as a paradigm of emotive experience in British and German Romanticism,¹⁰⁰ whilst John Farrell has highlighted the recurrent constellation of paranoid symptoms (grandiosity, suspicion, unfounded hostility, delusions of persecution and conspiracy) in the psyche of the modern literary protagonist post–Don Quijote.¹⁰¹ Yet Pfau and Ziolkowski’s concerns lie outside France, and Farrell’s parameters take as their limit point Rousseau’s *Émile, ou De l’éducation* (1762) – that is, the decades immediately preceding the upheaval of 1789 that I posit as a transitional moment in the history of conspiracy thinking. There remains, then, no monograph dedicated to the relationship of the nineteenth-century French novel to that ubiquitous discourse on and of conspiracy highlighted by historians of the period.

This dearth of scholarship is all the more surprising given the apparent critical awareness of the pertinence of such an analysis. Monier briefly name-checks Arthur Ranc’s now-forgotten *Le Roman d’une conspiration* (1867) in making the suggestion that ‘l’objet conspiratoire fait jouer et met en scène des figures de fiction, fascinant les imaginaires collectifs’.¹⁰² His analysis, though, is restricted to the rather underwhelming remark that, ‘au soir du second Empire, le thème [du complot] est présent dans la production littéraire’ (16). If Girardet notes the affinity between the hermeneutic code of the narrative of conspiracy and the structural suspense built into ‘le roman-feuilleton tel qu’il fut conçu et pratiqué au cours du siècle dernier’ (33), he, too, ultimately subsumes the literary into the political. Both Monier and Girardet, then, exclude any possibility of the literary text as conspiracy theory functioning as a counter-discourse of symbolic resistance to a culture’s ‘determined and determining structures of representation and practice’.¹⁰³ Tardy, more encouragingly, makes the tantalizing observation that ‘les conspirateurs utilisent pour se défendre ou rappeler leur expérience des mots empruntés à des tirades de théâtre ; les romanciers et les dramaturges s’emparent des conspirations les plus récentes pour les héroïser’ (20–21). ‘La littérature’, he adds, ‘s’empare de la conspiration, joue sur les craintes et les fantasmes des individus, reflète et transforme les manières de conspirer. Cette production inquiète l’autorité qui surveille les conspirateurs de papier comme les conspirateurs réels’ (24). His analysis, however, fails to fully develop the implications of this discursive imbrication, largely restricting itself to exploration of

⁹⁹ See Theodore Ziolkowski, *Lure of the Arcane: The Literature of Cult and Conspiracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ See Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 77–188.

¹⁰¹ See John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹⁰² Monier, *Le Complot dans la République*, p. 16.

¹⁰³ Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, p. 12.

censorship of obscure Romantic theatrical productions whilst insisting on that idealized circumscription between the historical, the fictional and the fictitious so evidently questioned by the conspiratorial narrative.

The only study to draw out a more substantial link between nineteenth-century literary works, socio-political formations and the conspiratorial ‘mise en question de *la réalité de la réalité*’ is that of sociologist Luc Boltanski.¹⁰⁴ Engaging with the detective novel and its early twentieth-century offshoot, the spy novel, in the English and French contexts, Boltanski explores the concomitant emergence of these fictional forms, of the academic discipline of sociology, and of the diagnostic category of paranoia, in turn shifted from the psychic to the social realm. Each of these instances, he suggests, shared a common way of problematizing reality and working through its contradictions, with the nation-state as guarantor. Boltanski argues that:

La figure du complot focalise des soupçons qui concernent l’exercice du pouvoir. Où se trouve réellement le pouvoir et qui le détient, en réalité ? Les autorités étatiques, qui sont censées en assumer la charge, ou d’autres instances, agissant dans l’ombre, banquiers, anarchistes, sociétés secrètes, classe dominante, etc. ? (15)

The political imaginary he describes, then, is one built on a perception of ‘une réalité distribuée’, a spatialization of truth and falsehood. ‘À une réalité de surface’, we read, ‘apparente mais sans doute illusoire, bien qu’elle ait un statut officiel, s’oppose une réalité profonde, cachée, menaçante, officieuse, mais bien plus réelle’ (15). Yet if the import Boltanski accords to the literary is salutary, he is rather too swift to suggest that the popularity of the *roman policier* or the *roman d’espionnage* as cultural object might unproblematically constitute the unmediated source of a generalized societal paranoia, which, in an echo of Paul Ricœur,¹⁰⁵ he terms ‘le soupçon généralisé’ (41). Boltanski’s study frames literary genre as a mere reflection of contemporaneous socio-political processes, with no attention turned towards the internal history of literature, those ways in which retroactively designated literary modes tentatively emerge in relation to one another as well as in relation to their situational context. There remains a need, then, for an analysis of conspiracy thinking in nineteenth-century narrative fiction that remains sensitive to these internal developments, and to the broader, mutually informative relationship between literary poetics and

¹⁰⁴ Luc Boltanski, *Énigmes et complots: une enquête à propos d’enquêtes* (Gallimard, 2012), p. 41. Original emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ In his meta-critical analysis of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, Ricœur coins the expression ‘l’école du soupçon’. See *De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud* (Seuil, 1965), pp. 40–42. Their school of interpretation as suspicion, he suggests, confronts not an implicit meaning which must be made explicit, but rather the systematic (conspiratorial, we might say) attempt to conceal or to distort that meaning. I return to Ricœur in the conclusion to this thesis.

the history of ideologies. The two elements come together, I suggest, in the novel of conspiracy, both a response to a particular historical experience and an aesthetic intervention therein.

The July Monarchy Novel of Conspiracy: A Working Hypothesis

Bookended by revolutions both aesthetic and political, the France of the citizen-king is as parenthetical as it is paradoxical. Witnessing a revival of interest in the events of 1789, this was, following Ann Rigney, ‘a period of historiographical experimentation’.¹⁰⁶ As Lionel Gossman¹⁰⁷ and, more recently, Maurice Samuels have shown, Romantic historiography betokened the rise of a new historical consciousness. Investing in the legacy of Revolution, history, Samuels suggests, became ‘overtly political, as well as increasingly relevant to an understanding of the emergence of the modern world’.¹⁰⁸ This tendency embraced ‘not only the relatively limited production of professional historians’, but also a ‘veritable explosion’ (5) of popular forms of historical representation, which, as Samuels illustrates, ran from the traditional media of painting and the novel to other, ‘spectacular’ forms of visual entertainment. What Terdiman has called the “renaissance” of history-writing in nineteenth-century Europe¹⁰⁹ has been amply and eruditely explored by scholars such as Gossman, Lefebvre,¹¹⁰ and Linda Orr,¹¹¹ and it is not my intention to rehearse these findings here. Rather, in positing conspiracy theory as a privileged inflexion of these wider trends, I hope to offer a tentative outline of a new generic category within the historical niche of July Monarchy France.

What I term the novel of conspiracy, or conspiracy theory as aesthetic form, testifies to and performs the ‘close and competitive relationship’ between July Monarchy literary and historical texts. For both disciplines were, also in Rigney’s words, ‘mutually invested in the task of ‘chasing after the history—that-got-away in search of hitherto hidden aspects of the past’ (1). Insofar as, as Jameson has rightly stressed, literary genres are ‘experimental constructs’,¹¹² constantly renegotiated by new works that come into contact with them, this thesis aims not to provide a

¹⁰⁶ Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 67.

¹⁰⁷ See Lionel Gossman, *Between History and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 227–324.

¹⁰⁸ Maurice Samuels, *The Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 32.

¹¹⁰ See Georges Lefebvre, *La Naissance de l'historiographie moderne* (Flammarion, 1971).

¹¹¹ See Linda Orr, *Headless History: Nineteenth-Century French Historiography of the Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹¹² Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 145.

watertight definition of the novel of conspiracy, but to gesture towards some of its constituent elements. In doing so, it seeks to open up a field of enquiry, laying the groundwork for future research into the works of other authors, or even wider historical periods. If the scope of the present study is necessarily restricted to those metonyms for the competing genres of a century, Balzac and Sand, the literary production of Stendhal, Alexandre Dumas and Eugène Sue, to name but a few of their most immediate peers, would also be ripe for this kind of exploration. In what follows, then, I aim not to provide an exhaustive thematic taxonomy, nor a comprehensive cultural history, but, more modestly, to draw attention to a phenomenon that, as Moretti writes of the European *Bildungsroman*, captures ‘the rhetorical and ideological essence of a historico–narrative culture’ (7).

From the very opening paragraphs of his study of chance in nineteenth–century French narrative, David Bell aligns the period’s extra–literary (Newtonian–Laplacean) interest in causality with a nascent historicist methodology. A crucial coeval of this alignment, he argues, was a major development in literary history:

Born in the first years of the nineteenth century, at essentially the same moment as the fledgling but rapidly developing discipline of historical analysis, the realist novel shared a set of presuppositions with the texts and the types of reasoning that the activity of historical study was beginning to produce. Not the least of these was a strong faith in the interpretative power of causal explanation, in the potential for using such explanation to decipher the significance of events by revealing hidden sequences of causes leading to them.¹¹³

In its challenge to the view of realism as a deterministic genre, rooted in a predictable pattern of cause and effect, Bell’s intervention provides a welcome corrective to that tendency, fostered by Balzac himself, to foreground only his taxonomic ambitions. ‘La cause’, he asserts, ‘fait deviner un effet, comme chaque effet permet de remonter à une cause’ (*CH*, X: 657). Accordingly, ‘ni le peintre, ni le poète, ni le sculpteur ne doivent séparer l’effet de la cause qui sont invinciblement l’un dans l’autre !’ (418). Yet if Bell is justified in stressing realist narrative’s engagement with that counter–current positing chance and disorder as a fundamental part of human existence, he accords less attention to the ‘coping’ strategies – aesthetic and political – deployed by novelists. This concern, I argue, is one that afflicts the ardent idealist as much as the arch–realist: faced with the shifting sands of a post–Revolutionary century, both Balzac and Sand turn to conspiratorial

¹¹³ David F. Bell, *Circumstances: Chance in the Literary Text* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 1.

speculation as a heuristic device of hermeneutic comfort. The novel of conspiracy is, ultimately, a symbolic form seeking to reconcile the contradictions of modernity.

Insofar as it invests in causal explanation, this is a form that also invests in *meaning*. It insists, then, that, in spite of an ambient chaos, history can *make sense* to the ‘happy few’ in possession of the facts occluded by the official version of events. Balzac’s oft-cited contention that ‘il y a deux Histoires : l’Histoire officielle [...] et l’Histoire secrète’ (*CH*, V: 695) readily figures, of course, an aesthetic invested in the revelation of the hidden manoeuvrings of nineteenth-century French society. An unexplored consequence of the aesthetic hegemony of realism has been the occlusion of Sand’s idealist, but no less conspiratorial, vision of the historical process: writing to Pierre Leroux in 1843, she expresses her desire to ‘faire un grand travail sur l’histoire *occulte* de l’humanité’, which, as Balzac would also contend, ‘n’est qu’indiqué dans l’histoire *officielle* du monde’ (*Corr. Sand*, VI: 179). The novel of conspiracy, I suggest, cuts across the realist–idealist generic divide. In explicitly invoking the mantle of secret history, unveiling ‘les raisons ou la raison de ces effets sociaux [...], le sens caché dans cet immense assemblage de figures, de passions et d’événements’ (*CH*, I: 11), it is an aesthetic mode that bears privileged witness to a particular historico–literary conjunction.

This sub-genre, in this way, constitutes a privileged laboratory for the exploration of what Moretti identifies as ‘the centrality of *history* in nineteenth-century culture’ and ‘the centrality of *narrative* within the domain of literature’ (6, original emphasis). Narrative and history, Moretti continues, ‘do not retreat before the onslaught of events, but demonstrate the possibility of giving them order and meaning. Furthermore, they suggest that reality’s meaning is now to be grasped solely in its historico–diachronic dimension. Not only are there no “meaningless” events; there can now be meaning only *through* events’ (6). Yet the novel of conspiracy’s engagement with the meaning of the historical past, I would venture, cannot be divorced from a presentist aim. For the July Monarchy time and process of the writing itself feeds back into the representation of prior events, lending them what Brooks has elegantly termed, with reference to Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le noir* (1830), ‘a kind of stereoscopic historical presence’.¹¹⁴ Both Balzac and Sand write with the dissipated illusions of hindsight: the Restoration of *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), for example, is that of those who witnessed what the Balzac of *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine* (1848) terms ‘les infâmes déceptions de la charbonnerie française’ (*CH*, VIII: 328) – and, of course, of 1830. The Restoration liberalism of Sand’s Carbonarist conspirators is doubly set against what it

¹¹⁴ Peter Brooks, ‘Secret Notes and Pistol Shots’, in *Approaches to Teaching Stendhal’s ‘The Red and the Black’*, ed. by Dean de la Motte and Stirling Haig (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1999), pp. 32–38 (p. 35).

was to become with the betrayal of the *Trois Glorieuses*. The novel of conspiracy, then, is always—already politicized faced with the story’s ceaseless invasion by the narrative discourse.

Where Balzac’s secret societies of ‘*rois inconnus*’ (V: 792), ‘*silencieux [...], les arbitres de vos destinées*’ (II: 976), ‘*ne se recrutant que parmi les hommes d’élite*’ (V: 787), posit an alternative nobility divorced from birthright, the utopian socialist Sand figures a process of homeostasis in the body politic, with conspiratorial association restoring egalitarian equilibrium in the face of absolutism. In both cases, though, it is the secret society that constitutes the motor of historical change. ‘History’, as Hofstadter would have it, ‘*is a conspiracy*’ (29, original emphasis) – in both content and form. Yet the mere thematization of conspiratorial association, I would venture, does not a novel of conspiracy make. If it often invokes historical figures, in this respect, it differs fundamentally from the *roman historique* seminally analysed by Lukács and, in the nineteenth-century French context, by Claudie Bernard.¹¹⁵ If July Monarchy France was, Balzac asserts, ‘*rassasié[e] [...] de l’histoire de la France walterscottée*’ (CH, X: 54), both he and Sand remain convinced of the novelist’s historical task – displaced from the diachronic to the synchronic. The novel of conspiracy is the fruit of a self-understanding as *historian of the present*, seeking to ‘*écrire l’histoire oubliée par tant d’historiens*’ (I: 11). Unlike the historical novel, this is a form that explicitly demarcates itself aesthetically and politically: as a ‘secret’ or ‘lost’ history, it necessarily exists as a counter-discourse, maintaining an oppositional stance to the officially sanctioned version of events. I demonstrate that, as it politicizes plausibility, that reflexive insight into its own fictionality that we might habitually attribute to the novelistic form seems to waver. Through close yet contextualized readings of Balzac’s *Une ténébreuse affaire* (1841) and Sand’s *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840) and *Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudoltadt* (1842–44), I suggest that the novel of conspiracy is, ultimately, ‘*un poste privilégié d’observation des peurs, des appréhensions, et, au-delà, des sensibilités politiques et sociales*’.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See Claudie Bernard, *Le Passé recomposé: le roman historique français du dix-neuvième siècle* (Hachette, 1996).

¹¹⁶ Monier, ‘La Part du secret’, p. 13.

CHAPTER ONE

Malicious Fictions: Post–Revolutionary Plotting in *Une ténébreuse affaire*

Retrospective Prophecy: Zadig’s Method

In his essay ‘Clues’, Ginzburg retraces the genealogy of what he terms the *conjectural* or *evidential* paradigm back to the ‘storehouse of knowledge’ of the hunter.¹ This venatic expertise manifests itself in the latter’s practice of reconstructing ‘the shapes and movements of his invisible prey from tracks on the ground’ (102), moving from the fragment to the totality. If Ginzburg’s hunter possesses a form of knowledge that allows for the reconstitution of the form of an animal from the traces it leaves in its wake, he is also, first and foremost, a storyteller. He engages with a surface in its materiality to assemble the deeper story that might be summarized in its most rudimentary terms as: ‘someone passed this way’. Ginzburg goes on to speculate that ‘the actual idea of narration [...] may have originated in a hunting society, relating the experience of deciphering tracks [...] The hunter would have been the first to “tell a story” because he alone was able to read, in the silent, nearly imperceptible tracks left by his prey, a coherent sequence of events.’ This, then, is a model of retrospective prophecy, whose distinguishing characteristic lies in ‘the ability to construct from apparently insignificant experimental data a complex reality that could not be experienced directly’ (103).

If Ginzburg’s method dates back to man’s earliest days as hunter–gatherer, it also contains the embryo of an epistemological model whose slow, ‘silent emergence’ (96) most clearly made itself heard in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. For Ginzburg, the work of the art historian Giovanni Morelli, the detective Sherlock Holmes, and the father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud exemplifies a process in which the reading of ‘infinitesimal traces permit[s] the comprehension of a deeper, otherwise unattainable reality’ (101): the semiotic shades into the anatomic in a dialectic of surface and depth which spatializes the interpretative act. The conjectural procedure of these three exemplary cases, he suggests, is underpinned by a cognitive process based, crucially, on the *inaccessibility* of the object envisaged or narrated. It necessarily proceeds from an absent origin to reconstruct a series of ‘events that could not be directly experienced by the observer’ (103). The conclusions it yields, then, are inevitably speculative interpretations, impossible to verify in moving back along a narrative chain towards a point of grounding in a

¹ Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm’, in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, trans. by John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 96–125 (p. 102). The French translation, *le paradigme cynégétique*, adheres more closely to the venatic metaphoricality of Ginzburg’s model.

referent. If the figure of a firmly *grounded* plot gestures in its most literal sense towards the material concerns of traces left on the surface of a landscape, it also bears on wider questions of narrative anchoring and referentiality. There emerges, in this light, a narratological perspective on the referential underpinning – or, indeed, the lack thereof – of the conjectural paradigm, betokening an absent, or at the very least inaccessible, origin. Absence, born of a lack of grounding or severed referentiality, makes possible the act of narration.²

As a consequence, the ‘truth’ of the account of Ginzburg’s hunter can only ever be an approximation whose veracity is a function of socially sanctioned plausibility. The conjectural process seeks, as Boris Lyon–Caen has suggested, to ‘occasionner une reconstitution *plausible* du vrai’.³ We might, moreover, posit the synonymy of *le plausible* and *le vrai* in the conjectural context. In the continued absence or inaccessibility of its ultimate referent, the conjectural narrative derives its ‘truthfulness’ not as a function of the object being narrated, but from its success as a narrative technique that demonstrates a relationship of cause and effect between the fragmentary elements that said object leaves in its wake. Faced with an origin that can no longer be interrogated, we move beyond what Alexander Welsh terms ‘mere authenticity as a criterion of effective narrative’⁴ towards power–inflected questions of social approbation and their involvement in the construction and validation of narrative accuracy. For if truth is but a function of plausibility, the success – or perceived truthfulness – of an interpretation derives from the exploitation of socially sanctioned interpretative codes, the appeal to which involves the sustained demonstration of a relationship of causality over mere coincidence. The ‘moment of triumph’ to which Ginzburg refers following the ostensibly accurate description of an animal upon which the hunter has ‘never laid eyes’ (102) testifies, then, to a moment of consensus on the *vraisemblance* of an explanation. It is the social confirmation of an interpretative paradigm.

Yet the narrative manipulation made possible by a compromised referentiality or lack of grounding can be employed in the service of more sinister designs. In gesturing towards the mechanisms of power underpinning creative and interpretative activity – and, indeed, towards those concerns bearing on grounding in its properly topographical sense – Ginzburg’s paradigm

² Benjamin Elwood’s analysis also makes note of this absence: see ‘Secret Histories: Narratives of Conspiracy in Balzac and Zola’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1996). If Elwood’s focus falls on the figure of conspiracy as imposed interpretation, the present study nuances this understanding of the conspiratorial narrative as merely another ruse of power, according equal emphasis to the manner in which it may function as a counter–discourse of symbolic resistance.

³ Boris Lyon–Caen, *Balzac et la comédie des signes: essai sur une expérience de pensée* (Saint–Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2006), p. 10. Emphasis added.

⁴ Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 6.

speaks to the heterogeneous meanings of the term *plot*. In his discussion of the semantic range of the word, Brooks helpfully delineates the following categories:

1. (a) A small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose. (b) A measured area of land; lot.
2. A ground plan, as for a building; chart; diagram.
3. The series of events consisting of an outline of the action of a narrative or drama.
4. A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; scheme.⁵

There may, Brooks suggests, be a ‘subterranean logic’ connecting these meanings; the sense of plot as underhand scheme or conspiracy, he notes, ‘nearly always attaches itself to the others: the organizing line of plot is more often than not some scheme or machination, a concerted plan for the establishment of some purpose which goes against the ostensible and dominant legalities of the fictional world’ (12). The narratological underpinnings of Ginzburg’s model expose its potential to be employed to persecutory ends, with the problematized referentiality of an inaccessible object making possible the imposition of an inculpatory causal narrative where there might have been only coincidence.

Plotting, then, is not simply a literary device. It also bears on questions of power–inflected social relations: it is a politicized phenomenon that, this chapter argues, represents a particularly acute concern for Balzac. Set against the novelist’s own rhetorical positioning as *historian of the present*, Balzac’s politics of cultural despair, I suggest, is also a poetics, an anxiety born of the impossibility of grounding novelistic or historical truth in a stable referent. Any reflection on the conspiratorial is haunted by the ever–present threat of slippage from reality to myth, from conspiracy to conspiracy theory, belying a fraught relationship to narrative that, this thesis contends, makes the literary text a privileged object of analysis. Famously imbued, we recall from Lukács, with a ‘consciously historical conception of the present’ (81), the Balzacian novel of conspiracy lends itself particularly well to this task. For it is, I show, around the figure of plotting that, in Christopher Prendergast’s words, the Balzacian ‘historical imagination and reactionary fantasy begin to coalesce’.⁶ With particular reference to *Une ténébreuse affaire* (1841), this chapter

⁵ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, pp. 11–12. Janet Beizer develops Brooks’s play on the semantic range of the word, which, as she reminds us, also carries the meaning of burial place: ‘Balzac’s plots about the family are inextricably engaged with schemings against the family and with burial sites for the family. Plot, in its Balzacian narrative context, persistently reminds us of its alternative lexical affinities with subversion on the one hand and death on the other’ (*Family Plots: Balzac’s Narrative Generations* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986], p. 2).

⁶ Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 83.

posits that the referential concerns crystallized in Ginzburg's paradigm inform Balzac's vision of the conspiratorial as it plays out across the narrative topography of this little-studied text. Those familiar Balzacian anxieties bearing on questions of origins and authority, I suggest, can be illuminated with reference to contemporaneous developments in descriptive psychopathology. Historicizing Balzac's poetics in light of the emergence of paranoia as diagnostic category, I examine the way in which his conspiratorial vision of a particular series of post-Revolutionary historical events engages with, and is informed by, the mechanisms of power underpinning creative and interpretative activity.

Balzac scholarship has all too often aligned his work with a naïve epistemology: where literary modernity shades into literary modernism, the story goes, the novel divests itself of its Balzacian certitudes. Yet his treatment of a cabal of counter-revolutionary dissidents in *Une ténébreuse affaire*, I argue in this chapter, in fact belies a more nuanced relationship to novelistic and historical truth, gesturing towards the uneasy synonymy of the true and the merely plausible in a conspiratorial context. In this proto-detective novel composed of proliferating plots and counter-plots, conviction is achieved thanks to the damning evidence provided by the indicial and the fragmentary. Testifying to the nineteenth-century ascension of evidentiary epistemology identified by Ginzburg, it is from hoof-prints in the mud and traces of plaster that is constructed the comprehensive narrative which ends, for Balzac's royalist conspirators, in another kind of plot, that of the grave dug by 'le couperet de la Loi' (CH, VIII: 503). Drawing on the notion of the grounding of plot in its diverse declensions, this chapter argues that the value of Ginzburg's model for Balzac's 'histoire secrète de ce temps' (694) far exceeds its dependence on a venatic metaphor literalized to the point of ubiquity in the narrative detail of the text. At stake, then, is an exploration of the novel's idiosyncratic spatial imaginary and of the implications of the surface-depth (semiotic-anatomic) model for the question of the conspiratorial as literary motif and narrative mode. Ultimately, I demonstrate, the spatial articulations of the Balzacian landscape of conspiracy point forwards in literary history, not only towards the detective novel in its most developed form, but also towards a proto-Flaubertian aesthetic of the surface.

Secret Histories

The proper name 'Balzac' has become something of a shorthand for a particular epistemological moment. He is, after all, as Oscar Wilde once quipped, the man who invented the nineteenth

century as we know it.⁷ Even so, the regularity with which references to the vast Balzacian oeuvre crop up in historical scholarship on the conspiratorial in nineteenth-century France is striking. Tardy, for example, opens his study with a list of failed political conspiracies now ‘largement tombées dans l’oubli’, which he terms ‘le refoulé bien plus que l’envers de l’histoire contemporaine’ (9).⁸ In echoing the title of Balzac’s final novel – which, incidentally, stages the workings of a benevolent secret society and its self-professed objective to ‘délouer la conspiration permanente du mal’ (*CH*, VIII: 323)⁹ – Tardy joins the ranks of those historians who turn to the father of French realism to illustrate the conspiratorial bent of the nineteenth-century socio-political imaginary. For Girardet, it is the Treize who epitomize the century’s fascination with the secret society whose members plot precisely to emplot to their own ends a prospective narrative of historical development. Accordingly, he invokes Balzac’s ‘monde à part dans ce monde [...], treize rois inconnus, mais réellement rois, et plus que rois’, ‘ayant les pieds dans tous les salons, les mains dans tous les coffres-forts, les coudes dans la rue, leurs têtes sur tous les oreillers, et, sans scrupules, faisant tout servir à leur fantaisie’ (V: 792). The Treize emblemize, Girardet writes, ‘ces petits groupes d’hommes résolus, liés par le serment et le secret, ayant choisi l’ombre pour agir et qui, pour leur gloire, leur profit ou le triomphe d’une grande cause, rêvent de réduire à leur volonté l’ordre existant des choses’ (60). Taguieff, too, frames a chapter on the mythologizing impulse subtending conspiracist thinking with an epigraph drawn from *La Vieille fille* (1837): ‘Les mythes modernes sont encore moins compris que les mythes anciens ; et cependant nous sommes dévorés par les mythes, ils nous pressent de toutes parts ; ils servent à tout, ils expliquent tout, ils sont [...] les flambeaux de l’histoire’ (*CH*, IV: 935).¹⁰ It is, however, *Illusions perdues* that seems to constitute the brightest illustrative ‘flambeau’. Taguieff notes that ‘les auteurs conspirationnistes “classiques”’, amongst whom he includes the Italian fascist esotericist Julius Evola and the Catholic anti-Semite Henri Roger Gougenot des Mousseaux, ‘citent volontiers’¹¹ that oft-quoted scene in

⁷ See Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 309.

⁸ These are the execution of four *carbonari* (the sergeants of La Rochelle), the primal scene of Blanqui’s commitment to revolutionary socialism; Fieschi’s ‘machine infernale’; and Orsini’s attempt on the life of Napoléon III.

⁹ If I explore the motif of benevolent conspiracy in Sand’s work in later chapters, the necessity of restricting the scope of the present study precludes sustained engagement with Balzac’s other, more frequently studied novels. On conspiracy in *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine*, see, for example Sarah Mombert, ‘L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine: conjurations, complots et sociétés secrètes, moteurs souterrains du récit romanesque romantique’, in *Stendhal, Balzac, Dumas: un récit romantique ?*, ed. by Marie-Rose Corredor, Lise Dumasy and Chantal Massol (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2006), pp. 21–31.

¹⁰ Pierre-André Taguieff, *Court traité de complotologie suivi de Le ‘Complot judéo-maçonnique’: fabrication d’un mythe apocalyptique moderne* (Mille et une nuits, 2013), p. 119.

¹¹ Annick Duraffour and Pierre-André Taguieff, *Céline, la race, le Juif: légende littéraire et vérité historique* (Fayard, 2017), p. 764.

which the priest Carlos Herrera (alias Vautrin) encounters for the first time a suicidal Lucien. ‘Vous ne me paraissez pas fort en Histoire’, says the pseudo-clergyman to the poet. ‘Il y a deux Histoires : l’Histoire officielle, menteuse, qu’on enseigne, l’Histoire *ad usum delphini* ; puis l’Histoire secrète, où sont les véritables causes des événements’ (V: 695). Cast in the Balzacian paranoid style, then, true history is secret history.

In his guise as conspiracy theorist, opposing an official version of events to a true account shrouded in institutionally mandated secrecy, Balzac’s Herrera suggests that the former is a narrative composed *ad usum delphini*, ‘for the uses of the Dauphin’. The corresponding entry in Larousse’s *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle* tells us that this is a fig-leaf edition of history, a ‘discours arrangé pour les besoins de la cause, accommodé aux vues d’un parti’ (I: 104). This adulcorated, bowdlerized history is a false history, crafted to serve the ends of a particular group and providing a point of convergence for the narrative and conspiratorial declensions of the term *plot*, as brought out in Brooks’s analysis. We might note, in this light, that Herrera’s mendacious version of history, peddled to everyone from the dauphin downwards, relies precisely on the *inaccessibility* of the hidden ‘véritables causes’ of events. As was the case for Ginzburg’s hunter, the referentiality or grounding of the narrative is compromised, opening up a space of speculation in which rival ‘truths’ vie for credibility. There begins to emerge, then, a poetics of conspiracy, a discourse born of a missing referent, a cause or origin that can no longer be directly addressed or interrogated. Staging the official as the ‘true’ necessarily proceeds through a manipulation of the categories of causality and coincidence, a need to impose plausibility by accounting convincingly for the causal connections between the fragmentary components of the replacement narrative sequence posited. Deprived of anything in which to truly ground meaning, the ‘truth’ of the official version of history as Herrera tells it is not a function of the events being explained, from which the narrative is inescapably severed, but of the dominant interpretative paradigm and its inevitable ideological colourings. Socially sanctioned plausibility is the only index of veracity.

Poetics and pathology: *Balzac paranoïaque*?

Whilst remaining mindful of the risk of reducing Balzac to ‘Balzac’, that reified metonym for a century and its discontents, this chapter suggests that the very frequency with which his name is deployed to the illustrative ends detailed above lends weight to a certain hypothesis: namely, that the Balzacian mentality displays a particular insight into – and affinity with – his century’s wider fascination with the secret and the conspiratorial. This cultural obsession, we have seen, takes as its origin the foundational moment of 1789. The vast question of Balzac and history has, needless

to say, been subject to much critical exploration, neatly encapsulated in the collective volume of the Groupe international d'études balzacienne, *Balzac dans l'Histoire*.¹² Samuels, Petrey,¹³ René–Alexandre Courteix¹⁴ and Ronnie Butler¹⁵ have explored his engagement with the Revolution, which was also the organizing thematic of the 1990 *Année balzacienne*. Yet other than Chantal Massol's meticulous analysis of the structure and motif of the enigma in 'le récit herméneutique balzacien',¹⁶ there exists no wider account of the Balzacian investment in a paranoid style of history. James Mileham has exhaustively detailed thematic conspiracies in *La Comédie humaine*, yet his study eschews close readings and, as a consequence, is ultimately reducible to a quasi–mechanical list of textual instances of secret collusion.¹⁷ Anne–Marie Baron, too, has dedicated a chapter to secret societies in Balzac's work, but shies away from fully developing their relationship to the conspiracy motif. In this way, she neglects to consider how the figure of the secret society might link individual secrecy with institutional practice.¹⁸ With reference to *Une ténébreuse affaire*, then, the present study seeks to open up this field of inquiry.

In his discussion of conspiracy thinking in the early twentieth–century spy novel, Boltanski makes explicit the rapprochement between the paranoid mentality and conspiracy thinking. 'On qualifie aujourd'hui souvent de "paranoïaques"', he writes, 'ceux qui [...] se donnent pour mission de dévoiler de vastes complots. Le rapprochement entre les conceptions politiques de ces personnages et les délires de la folie constitue un lieu commun accepté sur le mode du cela–va–de–soi' (240). Anecdotal evidence tells us that Balzac was, in fact, a regular dining companion of *médecin aliéniste* Esquirol, whose work on *monomanie intellectuelle* provides what one critic has termed 'the fundamental paving stone in the modern doctrine of paranoia'.¹⁹ Contemporaneous accounts suggest that the young Honoré proved to be something of an unwitting 'patient', playfully diagnosed in spite of himself. A tale that seems to have enjoyed particular currency relates the

¹² See Nicole Mozet and Paule Petitier (eds.), *Balzac dans l'Histoire* (SEDES, 2001).

¹³ See Sandy Petrey, *Realism and Revolution: Balzac, Stendhal, Zola and the Performance of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ See René–Alexandre Courteix, *Balzac et la Révolution française: aspects idéologiques et politiques* (Presses universitaires de France, 1997).

¹⁵ See Ronnie Butler, *Balzac and the French Revolution* (Croon Helm, 1983).

¹⁶ See Chantal Massol, *Une Poétique de l'énigme: le récit herméneutique balzacien* (Geneva: Droz, 2006).

¹⁷ See James Mileham, *The Conspiracy Novel: Structure and Metaphor in Balzac's 'Comédie humaine'* (Lexington: French Forum, 1982).

¹⁸ See Anne–Marie Baron, *Balzac occulte: alchimie, magnétisme, sociétés secrètes* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2012), pp. 143–212.

¹⁹ Edward Shorter, *A Historical Dictionary of Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 206. Despite important revisions of terminology and emphasis, the basic understanding of this delusional disorder has remained remarkably consistent for the past two centuries. For an intellectual history of Esquirol's work, see Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

events of a lunch during which a newcomer to Esquirol's table is presented with the challenge of identifying 'le fou' amongst his two fellow invitees. 'Voici un aliéné et un écrivain de génie', says Esquirol. 'Je vous mets au défi de deviner lequel des deux est fou,' he adds.²⁰ Faced with 'l'un correct jusqu'à la perfection dans sa tenue et dans son langage, l'autre exubérant, plein de lui-même et de son avenir',²¹ the task would appear to be a simple one. For, as the reader learns in an alternative version of the tale:

M. Honoré ne cessa point, pendant le déjeuner, de parler et de parler de lui-même.

– Je n'ai encore fait que de mauvais romans, disait-il. Les cent volumes qui portent mes divers pseudonymes sont des essais informes, je l'avoue. La célébrité, l'Institut, et surtout la fortune m'attendent cependant, et me prodigueront leurs faveurs le jour où je me sentirai assez fort pour daigner signer mes œuvres de mon véritable nom. Or, ce jour est bien prochain !

Une fois cette thèse établie, il se jeta dans les rêves les plus éblouissants et les plus impossibles, bâtit des châteaux en Espagne d'or et de diamants, et se livra à des utopies aussi amusantes qu'absurdes. (*PCS*, 222)

Their fellow guest, a certain M. de Saunières, on the other hand, 'ne prononça durant le repas que peu de paroles ; toutefois il le fit toujours avec autant de réserve que d'esprit'. Leaning conspiratorially towards his guest, Esquirol 'pinç[e] ses lèvres minces et railleuses et réprim[e] un sourire' as he waits for the pronouncement. Unsurprisingly, the newcomer concludes that 'il n'y a point à hésiter, c'est ce M. Honoré' (*PCS*, 222). 'Quel étourdi ! quel casse-tête, il est vraiment à enfermer' (*RF*, 82). M. de Saunières, on the contrary, strikes the narrator as 'un gentilhomme accompli [...], un esprit lucide et sérieux' (*PCS*, 222). It falls, then, to Esquirol to disabuse him:

M. Honoré de Balzac est un jeune écrivain d'un immense avenir, témoin les *Scènes de la Vie privée*, qu'il publiera sous quelques jours dans la *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Quant à M. de Saunières, voici quinze ans qu'il habite comme pensionnaire – c'est-à-dire comme aliéné – la maison de Charenton ; il se croit Dieu le Père ! (*PCS*, 222)

Eh ! bien, lui dit Esquirol, vous êtes dans l'erreur ; celui que vous prenez pour un sage se croit Dieu ; il met dans son attitude la réserve et la dignité qui conviennent à son rôle, c'est un pensionnaire de Charenton. Quant au jeune homme que vous prenez pour un fou, c'est un de nos bons littérateurs, c'est M. Honoré de Balzac... (*RF*, 82)

²⁰ Samuel-Henry Berthoud, *Les Petites Chroniques de la science*, 10 vols (Garnier, 1861–72), II (1862), 599. Hereafter, *PCS*.

²¹ Victor Parant, *La Raison dans la folie: étude pratique et médico-légale sur la persistance partielle de la raison chez les aliénés et sur leurs actes raisonnables* (Octave Doin; Toulouse: Édouard Privat, 1888), p. 82. Hereafter, *RF*.

Whilst there is little to be gained from seriously attempting to pathologize the Balzacian mentality, Esquirol's post-prandial amusement nonetheless gestures towards a quasi-clinical basis for the former's megalomaniac fantasies of the artist: if M. de Saunières 'se croit Dieu le Père', his erstwhile lunch companion would go one step further in asking, 'doter son pays d'un Homère, n'est-ce pas usurper sur Dieu?' (*CH*, V: 788). Indeed, we might note that the famous hermeneutic imperative of *La Comédie humaine*, the systematic and systematizing drive to 'surprendre le sens caché dans cet immense assemblage de figures, de passions et d'événements' (I: 11) is one that also underpins the conspiracist world view of a very particular subset of Balzac's contemporaries: those interned in the nineteenth-century asylum. For, as Trotter has argued, in spite of differences of gender and social standing, Esquirol's case histories of monomaniac patients at la Salpêtrière and his private *maison de santé* at Charenton unite around the common denominators of mutually reinforcing delusions of grandeur, fantasies of power and an overactive hermeneutic impetus:

Nous avons à la Salpêtrière une demoiselle qui avait reçu quelque instruction, et qui croyait diriger le soleil, la lune et les nuages ; impatiente de son séjour dans l'hospice, tantôt elle nous menaçait de la pluie, tantôt du soleil. J'ai vu, dans le même hospice, plusieurs femmes qui se croyaient impératrices, etc. Quelques monomaniaques se croient rois, princes, grands seigneurs, veulent commander à l'univers, et donnent avec dignité et protection des ordres à ceux qui les entourent...²²

We might take, as an illustrative example, the story of M, a 36-year-old man who, placed under the care of Esquirol in December 1817, seemed to make a rapid recovery. Shortly after his discharge, 'en sortant d'un café où il avait lu un journal dans lequel il était question du *faux dauphin*, M... s' imagine être le fils de Louis XVI, se rend aux Tuileries, pénètre jusque dans les appartements du roi, afin de réclamer ses droits' (14, original emphasis). Returned to the clinic in February 1818, he persists in his delusion: 'il proteste qu'il n'est point malade, qu'il est le dauphin, que son arrestation est arbitraire, qu'il s'en vengera un jour' (14). The *aliéniste* is careful to note the apparent triggering effect of M's perusal of the newspaper, with the adverb of temporality 'aussitôt' clearly gesturing towards a relationship of causality: 'M... devient monomaniac, aussitôt après la lecture d'un journal. Cette lecture suffit pour produire une conviction indestructible. M... se croit dauphin de France' (15). The patient's delusional reflexion on the nature of political authority thus brings out the importance of the act of 'lire' for his 'délire', framing his grandiosity as a product of

²² Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales considérées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique et médico-légal*, 2 vols (Baillière, 1838), II, 8. I am indebted to Trotter's analysis for drawing my attention to the importance of these case studies for the pathological paranoid hermeneutic.

hermeneutic activity that he seeks to ground in a relation of mimesis: ‘On a beau me renier, on ne peut me méconnaître, car je ressemble trait pour trait à Louis XIV’ (16).

If M reserves his opprobrium for an inaccessible ‘ministre de la police, qui l’empêche de remplir ses hautes destinées’ (15), those on the receiving end of the fantasies of persecution of other Esquirolian monomaniacs were often less fortunate. A second M, a 30-year-old man who, ‘très sensible au manque d’égards qu’on se doit dans la société’, had ‘l’ambition de passer pour un personnage très important’ (16), is the protagonist of an almost farcical scene that further illustrates the intellectual monomaniac’s construction of a parallel universe by acts of (over-)interpretation. ‘Après s’être fatigué à lire, même pendant la nuit’, Esquirol observes that M finds himself ‘pris d’un amour d’étude, et se persuade qu’on veut attenter à ses jours’ (17). To this end, the doctor recounts a scene in which, convinced he is ‘le premier homme du monde par son génie’ (17) and having imagined himself as the target of a corresponding degree of hostility, M’s erroneous interpretation of another’s intentions causes him to come to blows with an unfortunate barber: ‘un perruquier, qui venait pour le raser, se baisse pour ramasser quelque chose; sans aucune altercation préalable, M... lui tire un coup de pistolet et lui fracture un bras : tout porte à croire qu’il a pris ce malheureux pour un assassin’ (18). If we might speculate that M’s formative experiences ‘vivant [...] au milieu des événements de la Vendée’ (17) inform both his recourse to violence and his heightened sensitivity to questions of noble social status, what remains certain is that it is his nefarious entrapment within misdirected hermeneutic activity that leads him to construct a world view based on ‘des convictions fausses, erronées, bizarres’ (2).

Beyond the French borders in the German-speaking countries, the development of the ‘paranoia question’ found full expression in the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902), whose *Textbook of Insanity*, in Trotter’s words, ‘exemplifies the European understanding of paranoia in the period immediately before the arrival of dementia praecox’ (25–26). Krafft-Ebing readily acknowledges the import of Esquirol’s work, happily citing ‘monomanie intellectuelle’ as a direct synonym of his own terminological predilection, ‘paranoia’. For Krafft-Ebing as for his French predecessor, the delusions of paranoid fantasy are accompanied by an ‘apparent lucidity of consciousness’; they are ‘systematized, methodic, and combined by the process of judgment, constituting a formal delusional structure’.²³ Infinitely resourceful hermeneuts, Krafft-Ebing’s paranoiacs condemn themselves to meaning for, unable to accept the world as it really is, they look incessantly for secrets, concealed motives and intentions: ‘something behind the phenomena’, he notes, spatializing the interpretative act, ‘is noticed and sought which does not belong to them’

²³ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Textbook of Insanity Based on Clinical Observations for Practitioners and Students of Medicine*, trans. by Charles Gilbert Chaddock (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1903), p. 373.

(373). Krafft–Ebing, like Esquirol, brings out the extent to which the paranoiac finds himself locked into interpretation and system, caught in a drama of social recognition centred on his delusions of grandeur and the corresponding over–interpretation and inflation of the mundane into persecutory fantasy. A misdirected hermeneutic impetus, or the logical following of an interpretative chain leading from a fallible point of origin, would thus seem to be characteristic of the paranoid mentality. Paranoia is a disease of narrative.

Two interwoven strands, then, emerge from these early case studies of proto–paranoiacs convinced of their status as the target of an unacknowledged conspiracy. Firstly, most notably in Esquirol’s observations, there is the recurrent claim laid to membership of the upper echelons of a class whose members had derived their political authority from their noble birth in the *ancien régime* society so recently turned on its head. Secondly, if the delusions of Esquirol and Krafft–Ebing’s patients constitute something of an attempt to craft a parallel life narrative more amenable to their perceived high–ranking status, it also becomes apparent that the stories they tell about themselves owe much to questions of ‘reading’ both texts and other people: *monomanie intellectuelle*, or paranoia, is a pathology of interpretation. For paranoid thinking, as Leo Bersani argues in his discussion of Pynchon’s poetics, hesitates between ‘the suspicion that the truth is wholly obscured by the visible, and the equally disturbing sense that the truth may be a sinister, invisible design *in the visible*’ (102, original emphasis).

In lieu of elaborating a retrospective diagnosis, what we might more usefully take from the descriptive psychopathologies of Krafft–Ebing and Esquirol – who, incidentally, makes a cameo appearance in *Louis Lambert* – are the parallels that emerge between the properly pathological paranoid hermeneutic and that subtending the methodology of Balzacian realism. Pathologizing the encounter between an event and its recuperation in narrative form, the paranoiac as hyperactive hermeneut scours the visible world for evidence of an invisible, conspiratorial design directed against him. His, then, is a form of storytelling performed by an interpreter whose hermeneutic project is one of a particularly ambitious and systematic kind. If Balzac’s self–aggrandisement is, one hopes, something more akin to a rhetorical strategy than an unshakeable belief in a Julien Sorel–esque fantasy of displaced nobility and corresponding persecution, his desire to ‘arriver à la synthèse par l’analyse, de dépeindre et de rassembler les éléments de notre vie, de tracer enfin l’immense physionomie d’un siècle’ (*CH*, II: 267–68), nonetheless partakes of the same totalizing vision. Invested in an epistemology and an aesthetics that seeks to track, tame and frame the ‘semiotic disaster area’²⁴ of his surroundings, Balzac as ‘herméneute des signes sociaux’²⁵ makes

²⁴ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 34.

²⁵ Baron, *Balzac occulte*, p. 24.

much of his desire to counter, cognitively, politically and aesthetically, the ambient *désorganisation* intrinsic to his century.

The paranoid will-to-order is unleashed with full force in that realist methodology of epistemophilia which, as Prendergast has argued, speaks to issues of both intelligibility and control. For Prendergast, Balzac may well be ‘the most spectacularly paranoid’ (227) of nineteenth-century French novelists, creating a universe ‘subject to a super-saturation of meaning, and dreaming of a master-discourse with which to take it in charge’. The endeavour of *La Comédie humaine*, he continues, ‘is to subjugate that inflow of meaning from a position of despotic transcendence’ (228). Tobias Boes, too, attributes to Balzac a ‘mildly paranoid fantasy of historical mastery’,²⁶ whilst Girardet’s summary of the Organisation, ‘redoutable et redoutée’ (33), at the centre of the paranoid conspiratorial world view might just as well refer to the archetypal omniscient narrator of the Balzacian text. ‘Au sommet, là où aboutissent les fils de toutes les intrigues et d’où partent tous les mots d’ordre’, Girardet writes, ‘siège une autorité souveraine, définie à la fois comme implacable et invisible’ (34, emphasis added). If Girardet’s evocation of an anonymous puppet-master as the agent holding ‘les fils de toutes les intrigues’ gestures, yet again, towards the semantic multiplicity of plotting as bearing on both the conspiratorial and the narratological, it also seems to speak to Flaubert’s articulation of the paradigmatic realist author who, we might recall, should be ‘dans son œuvre [...] comme Dieu dans l’univers, présent partout et visible nulle part’.²⁷ Within this ‘melodrama of uncertain agency’,²⁸ recast in a discourse of mastery and intentionality, there begins to emerge an image of the realist author as both conspirator and conspiracy theorist. Convinced that, to borrow the slogan of one of the best-known fictionalizations of conspiracy theory in contemporary cultural production, *the truth is out there*, the quasi-paranoid strategies of ‘reading’ by which he proceeds to expose that ‘sens caché’ (*CH*, I: 11) of nineteenth-century French society, in fact, partake of the very same conspiratorial logic. The Balzacian novel does not flinch at the idea of entrusting a shadowy, ill-defined entity with the ultimate authority to control and emplot historical development, yet simultaneously urges the reader to develop a hermeneutic of suspicion, to ‘read’ the world around him symptomatically, searching for the hidden design or ‘true’ meaning concealed beneath or behind innocuous surface appearances. As ‘archéologue du mobilier social’ (11) Balzac warns his reader that ‘rien dans la vie exige plus d’attention que les choses qui paraissent naturelles’ (V: 281). As D.A. Miller would have it, ‘Balzac’s fiction characteristically inspires a sense

²⁶ Tobias Boes, ‘Apprenticeship of the Novel: The *Bildungsroman* and the Invention of History’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45.3 (2008), 269–88 (p. 282).

²⁷ Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau and Yvan Leclerc, 5 vols (Gallimard–Pléiade, 1973–2007), II (1980), 204.

²⁸ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (Routledge, 2015), p. 84.

that the world is thoroughly traversed by techniques of power to which everything, anything gives hold. The world is not so much totally intelligible as it is totally suspicious.’²⁹ Where it seeks to undermine and reveal the conspiratorial, the secret and the concealed, the Balzacian text has already reinvented it, or at the very least displaced it, in its very practice of novelistic representation.

This ‘discreet *Aufhebung*’ of a narrative divided against itself, disavowing a practice to which it falls victim at a less visible, meta-textual level, would seem to lend credence to Miller’s hypothesis, in his influential socio-poetics of the realist novel, that ‘the genre of the novel *belongs* to the disciplinary field that it portrays’ (20–21, original emphasis). In his Foucauldian analysis of crime narrative’s collusion in/reinforcement of the disciplinary power of the social panopticon, Miller was to breathe fresh life into a wider discourse on the genre’s emphasis on a structural return to order.³⁰ Shifting the emphasis from the police in fiction to the policing function of fiction, Miller suggests that the surreptitious strategies of secrecy and surveillance at play in the Victorian novel make of it the largely unconscious agent of a new kind of ‘diffuse social discipline’ (14). There is, he argues, ‘a radical entanglement between the nature of the novel and the practice of the police’ (2); the novel testifies to, ‘as Stendhal might say’, society’s move ‘from red to black’ (14). This is a move from the spectacle of punishment wrought publicly on the criminal’s body, that ‘*cérémonial de la peine*’³¹ with which Michel Foucault infamously opens his account of disciplinary culture, to the ‘less visible, less visibly violent modes of “social control”’ (viii) associated with the docile bodies of rationalized, secularized, bureaucratic modernity. In light of his oft-quoted aim to ‘faire concurrence à l’État-Civil’ (*CH*, I: 10), Balzac and his totalizing vision – which, as we have seen, is not dissimilar to that animating properly pathological paranoid delusion and its attendant conspiracism – would appear to be a prime candidate for this kind of analysis. Indeed, it is precisely to Balzac that Miller turns to illustrate a ‘crucial episode’ in the genealogy of what he terms, following Foucault, ‘the ‘micro-politics’ of novelistic convention’ (21). This is the encounter between Fouché’s secret police and the omniscient narrator of *Une ténébreuse affaire* (1841) – a novel which, in an echo of Herrera’s conspiratorial vision of history, the author terms his ‘histoire secrète de ce temps’ (*CH*, VIII: 694).

Miller frames his analysis by drawing on the contrast between old and new policing styles elaborated by Foucault. This is the movement from a police whose ‘dominantly corporeal and spectacular’ methods of punishment are epitomized in the act of capital execution, ‘occupying a

²⁹ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 29–30.

³⁰ For an overview of the debates surrounding the conservative roots of crime fiction, see Andrea Goulet, *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space and Crime Fiction in France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 11–35.

³¹ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Gallimard, 1975), p. 14.

single moment in time at a single point of space', to a 'secret' police well-versed in 'disguises and dissimulation', defined in terms of 'the spatial extension of its networks and the temporal deployment of its intrigues' (22–23). An all-pervasive and unlocatable power emerges not from the visible spectacle of brutal state oppression, but from within a regime of carceral and bureaucratic surveillance. This movement, Miller suggests, is played out across Fouché's two agent-emissaries, Peyrade and Corentin:

Le premier pouvait couper lui-même une tête, mais le second était capable d'entortiller, dans les filets de la calomnie et de l'intrigue, l'innocence, la beauté, la vertu, de les noyer, ou de les empoisonner froidement. L'homme rubicond aurait consolé sa victime par des lazzis, l'autre n'aurait pas même souri. Le premier avait quarante-cinq ans, il devait aimer la bonne chère et les femmes. Ces sortes d'hommes ont tous des passions qui les rendent esclaves de leur métier. Mais le jeune homme était sans passions et sans vices. S'il était espion, il appartenait à la diplomatie, et travaillait pour l'art pur. Il concevait, l'autre exécutait ; il était l'idée, l'autre était la forme. (CH, VIII: 514)

The quasi-chiasmic structure of this final line bespeaks a break that is more than just grammatical. For if, like the novelist, the two are cast as seers capable of penetrating social surfaces, they come to be aligned with very different models of vision. Peyrade's eyes, 'deux yeux fureteurs et perspicaces, d'un bleu glacial et glacé, pouvaient être pris pour le modèle de ce fameux œil, le redoutable emblème de la police, inventé pendant la Révolution' (513), making manifest their perspicacity. In doing so, as Miller notes, they 'virtually constitute a warning against their own powers' (23); they announce a power better served in the inscrutable, 'impénétrables' eyes of Corentin, '[dont] le regard était aussi discret que devait l'être sa bouche mince et serrée' (CH, VIII: 514). Peyrade's singular eye of the Police is thus juxtaposed with and absorbed into the facelessness of a gaze figured as multiple by Foucault. For this is 'une surveillance permanente, exhaustive, omniprésente, capable de tout rendre visible, mais à la condition de se rendre elle-même invisible. Elle doit être comme un regard sans visage qui transforme tout le corps social en un champ de perception : *des milliers d'yeux postés partout*, des attentions mobiles et toujours en éveil...' (215–16, original emphasis). If that narrative logic of secrecy and visibility that makes of the detective a *private eye* is clearly in evidence here, we might also note that the description-characterization of Corentin dovetails with Charles Nodier's 1841 portrait of Fouché (which, for Jean Tulard, 'assure la transition entre le témoignage des contemporains et *Une ténébreuse affaire*'³²):

³² Jean Tulard, 'Fouché dans *La Comédie humaine*', *L'Année balzacienne*, 2nd ser., 11 (1990), 7–12 (p. 11).

J'ai souvent raconté au duc d'Otrante des événements flatteurs et inespérés ; j'étais près de lui, et seul avec lui, à l'arrivée de plus d'un message désolant, et je n'ai jamais vu se démentir d'un clin d'œil *l'impassible immobilité de ses yeux de verre* [...]. [J]e me demandais par quelle incroyable opération de la volonté on pouvait parvenir à éteindre son âme, à dérober à la prunelle sa transparence animée, à *faire rentrer le regard dans un invisible étui*, comme l'ongle rétractile des chats. Ce devait être là l'objet d'une étrange étude !³³

In these implicit puns on the supervision entailed by a super-vision, an instantiation of the coercive implications of the panoptical that Foucault would critique so influentially, the models of vision of both Corentin and Peyrade are, however, subservient to the 'faceless and multilateral' (24) gaze of the omniscient narration, more perspicacious than the one and more impenetrable than the other. For Miller, the panopticism of the realist novel coincides with its monological character, the implied master-voice which, if it feigns a 'sham struggle'³⁴ for dominance between those other voices it deigns to let speak, has itself already unified the world in a single interpretative centre. The strategic deployment of narrative thus masks an arbitrarily circumscribed field of meaning.

And yet, I would ask, does Miller's absolute adherence to a Foucauldian method of analysis not itself enact an analogous form of monological critical resolution, circumscribing the field of meaning of the Balzacian text to an instantiation-reinforcement of the social panopticon? If Foucault's supposed failure to account for the possibility of resistance to a power conceptualised as 'a spider's web without the spider'³⁵ has become something of a critical commonplace, Miller's reading of a novel which, for one critic, stages Fouché as 'l'araignée au centre de sa toile',³⁶ also seems to reduce its conspiratorial intrigue to merely another ruse of power. In setting forth a paranoid critical vision that monomaniacally detects a sinister, depersonalized panoptic gaze subtending and penetrating instances of nineteenth-century cultural production, Miller becomes something of a conspiracy theorist, working within a hermeneutic whose discoveries invariably reiterate its initial assumptions. In what follows, I seek to rehabilitate the neglected dimension of the conspiratorial as counter-discourse, that productive political potential that Miller would subsume and negate into a master-voice speaking from a single interpretative centre. This chapter, too, will privilege the example of *Une ténébreuse affaire*. Yet where Miller diagnoses a 'bringing-under-surveillance of the entire world of the narrative' (35), I show how Balzac's novel in fact resists monological resolution. If Miller's ultimate denial of semantic plurality is articulated spatially

³³ Charles Nodier, *Nouveaux Souvenirs et portraits* (Brussels: Société belge de librairie, 1841), pp. 281–82. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by R. W. Rostel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), p. 168.

³⁵ Edward Saïd, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 221.

³⁶ Françoise Taylor, 'Mythe des origines et société dans *Une ténébreuse affaire* de Balzac', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 14.1–2 (Fall–Winter 1985–86), 1–18 (p. 5).

as ‘a single interpretative centre’ (25), this analysis also explores the spatiality of the Balzacian narrative, drawing on the Foucault of *Les Mots et les choses* to examine the surface–depth model in terms of which the realist hermeneutic drive is articulated. The poetics of conspiracy illustrated by Herrera, that socially sanctioned speculative discourse born of an absent referent, will be shown to participate in the spatial dialectic of the semiotic and the anatomic that we also detected as germane to Ginzburg’s conjectural paradigm, with the figure of a firmly ‘grounded’ plot working on a number of semantic levels. In its dramatization of a power continually able, like Ginzburg’s hunter, to appropriate the most trivial detail, Balzacian narration bases what Miller terms its ‘interpretative mastery’ (29) on minutiae whose legibility is, for the semiologist, the hallmark of the ‘readerly’ text. Beyond the conventions of the detective novel and its recourse to semiotic red herrings, *Une ténébreuse affaire*, in contrast, seems to testify to a more radical sense of unintelligibility, as a result of which the omniscient narrator is forced to implicitly admit defeat, finally transferring his authority to an avatar who stands both homo– and heterodiegetically. Ultimately, I argue in what follows, the novel enacts a cognitive crisis born of the post–Revolutionary experience of history and the changes it entails in the way plots are consumed and constructed. In considering how a Balzacian literary poetics might be brought to bear on the history of ideologies, conspiracy as fact becomes less significant than conspiracy theory as discursive figure that generates its own ‘facts’ according to the particular historical agents involved.

‘La Clio classique’

For those patients of Esquirol living in France during and in the aftermath of Revolution, the nature and conditions of political authority are palpably renegotiated in the parallel narratives of their proto–paranoid fantasies, both cognitive malfunctioning and counter–revolutionary counter–discourse. If, proleptically figuring Miller’s terminological predilections, Esquirol’s first M deemed himself the victim of a shadowy ‘ministre de la police, qui l’empêche de remplir ses hautes destinées’ (15), such fears also play out across the narrative landscape of *Une ténébreuse affaire*. Where Balzac purports to ‘écrire l’histoire oubliée par tant d’historiens’ (*CH*, I: 11), his project participates in the unearthing of Herrera’s secret history, ‘où sont les véritables causes des événements’ (V: 695), buried beneath the weight of the discourse *ad usum delphini*. Self–avowedly ‘plus historien que romancier’ (VII: 894), seeking to ‘peindre la police politique aux prises avec la vie privée et son horrible action’ (VIII: 492), he stages a veritable web of royalist conspiracies and counter–conspiracies. Their complex emplotment, this chapter shows, aligns more readily with the shadows

of the novel's title than with the clarity born of any attempt to 'éclaircir ce coin obscur de notre histoire' (692).

Amongst the panoply of texts of the vast Balzacian oeuvre, *Une ténébreuse affaire* is, for Alain, 'un des plus difficiles à lire'.³⁷ It is 'not the most accessible of Balzac's novels',³⁸ in Gwen Thomas's qualified understatement. We might speculate that it is for this reason that it seems to have occupied something of a critical blind spot, subject only to 'une attention critique sélective',³⁹ as André Vanoncini notes. The *revues bibliographiques* (comprising conference proceedings, journal articles, book chapters and monographs published both in France and abroad) of *L'Année balzacienne* attest to only six scholarly publications making more than a passing mention of *Une ténébreuse affaire* since the journal began its third series in 2000.⁴⁰ (By way of comparison, the two tales of conspiracy bookending *La Comédie humaine*, *Les Chouans* [1829] and *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine* [1848], were the subject of at least double that number of chapter- or article-length studies over the same period.) Similarly, only two articles on the novel appeared in the pages of *L'Année balzacienne* itself between 1980 and 1993, both of those in 1990.⁴¹ Indeed, in spite of its oft-cited status as one of the begetters of the detective novel, *Une ténébreuse affaire* barely features in Andrea Goulet's magisterial analysis of the genre's narrative tensions, even as she remarks upon the apposite nature of its 'shadowy title and themes' given the 'mysterious textual space of the *roman policier*'.⁴² If this chapter takes its cue from the emphasis that Ginzburg places on the detective story as an instantiation of Zadig's method, its concern lies less with the imperfections of Balzac's

³⁷ Quoted in René Guise's introduction to the Folio edition of *Une ténébreuse affaire* (Gallimard, 1973), p. 7.

³⁸ Gwen Thomas, 'The Case of the Missing Detective: Balzac's *Une ténébreuse affaire*', *French Studies*, 48.3 (Jul. 1994), 285–98 (p. 285).

³⁹ André Vanoncini, 'Balzac et la ténébreuse naissance du roman policier', *Romanische Studien* [online] 3 (2016), 261–73 <<http://romanischestudien.de/index.php/rst/article/view/57/321>> [accessed 27th December 2016] (p. 261).

⁴⁰ These are: Jacques–David Ebguy, 'Une ténébreuse affaire, un roman politique? Souveraineté, société et dissensus', in *Les Fables du politique des Lumières à nos jours*, ed. by Éléonore Reverzy, Romuald Fonkoua and Pierre Hartmann (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2012), pp. 81–98; Katarina Marinčič, 'Reportage d'un événement quasi-historique: Une ténébreuse affaire de Balzac', in *Le Sens de l'événement dans la littérature française des XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, ed. by Pierre Glaudes and Helmut Meter (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 15–24; Michael Tilby, 'Plotting and the Novel: The Duplicity of Espionage in Balzac's *Une ténébreuse affaire*', *MLR*, 110.2 (2015), 422–37; Vanoncini, 'Balzac et la ténébreuse naissance du roman policier'; and Andrew Watts, 'An Overwritten Mystery: Balzac, Television, and *Une ténébreuse affaire*', in *Rewriting Wrongs: Detective Fiction and the Palimpsest*, ed. by Angela Kimyongür and Amy Wigelsworth (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 95–110. To this we might add Owen Heathcote, *Balzac and Violence: Representing History, Space, Sexuality and Death in 'La Comédie humaine'* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 101–24.

⁴¹ These were Franc Schuerewegen, 'Une ténébreuse affaire ou l'histoire et le jeu', *L'Année balzacienne*, 2nd ser., 11 (1990), 375–88; and Mireille Labouret, 'Le Sublime de la Terreur dans *Les Chouans* et *Une ténébreuse affaire*', *Ibid.*, 317–27.

⁴² Andrea Goulet, *Optiques: The Science of the Eye and the Birth of Modern French Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 111.

novel as generic archetype than with its idiosyncratic spatial imaginary and the implications of the surface–depth (semiotic–anatomic) model for our interest in the conspiratorial as literary motif and narrative mode. It is, I argue, around the figure of *plot* in its topographic, narrative and conspiratorial declensions that coalesces Balzac’s fraught relationship to a post–Revolutionary history which, like that of the conspiracy theorist, is not that of the historian.

Une ténébreuse affaire stages history as palimpsest, testifying to that process of emplotment which, for the proponents of the linguistic turn in historiography, constitutes the manner in which a narrative imagination produces, distributes and consumes historical meaning. In his lengthy preface to the 1843 edition, Balzac takes umbrage with an article published in the sixth volume of Saint–Edme and Sarrut’s *Biographie des hommes du jour*. The article in question is dedicated to a certain colonel Pierre–François Viriot, who presided as a judge over the *affaire* of the 1800 kidnapping of the senator Dominique Clément–de–Ris, which Balzac fictionalizes in his novel (and which, incidentally, remains unsolved). Appended to Viriot’s biographical entry is a short note which reads as follows:

M. Balzac a donné naguère, dans le journal *Le Commerce*, une série de feuilletons sous le titre de : *Une ténébreuse affaire*. Nous le disons dans notre conviction intime, son travail, remarquable sous le rapport dramatique et au point de vue du roman, est une méchante et mauvaise action au point de vue de l’histoire, car il y flétrit, *dans sa vie privée*, un citoyen qui fut constamment entouré de l’estime et de l’affection de tous les hommes honnêtes de la contrée, le bon et honorable M. Clément–de–Ris, qu’il représente comme l’un des spoliateurs et des égorgeurs de 1793. M. Balzac appartient cependant à ce parti qui s’arroge fort orgueilleusement le titre de *conservateur*.⁴³

Saint–Edme and Sarrut suggest that the key to the mystery of the Clément–de–Ris kidnapping is to be found in the *Mémoires* of the duchesse d’Abrantès.⁴⁴ She is, they inform us, the first to have ‘élevé contre Fouché l’accusation d’avoir été l’instigateur de ce crime’ (88). Apparently somewhat piqued at the accusation of derivativeness, Balzac cites at length the opening passages of the sixth chapter of the seventh volume of the duchess’s *Souvenirs historiques sur Napoléon, la Révolution, le Directoire, le Consulat, l’Empire et la Restauration*, suggesting that it was in fact he who, in 1823, ‘causant avec Mme d’Abrantès du fait de l’enlèvement de Clément de Ris, lui raconta le secret de cette

⁴³ B. Saint–Edme and Germain Sarrut, *Biographie des hommes du jour*, 6 vols (Pierre Baudoin, 1835–41), VI (1841), 88. Original emphasis.

⁴⁴ In her 1975 analysis, Renée Arlettaz argues that ‘une même source’ – that of the duchess’s *Mémoires* – lies at the origin of *Les Chouans*, *Une ténébreuse affaire*, *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine* and *Mademoiselle du Vissard*. Arlettaz’s discussion, however, focusses heavily on the first of these, and makes virtually no mention of *Une ténébreuse affaire*. See ‘Balzac, la duchesse d’Abrantès et les romans chouans de *La Comédie humaine*’, *L’Année balzacienne*, 14 (1975), 81–88 (p. 81).

affaire' (CH, VIII: 491). Seeking to ground 'truth' in the biographical, removing the layer of mediation between story and event that he detects in the duchess's version, it was, he reveals, 'une personne de sa famille [à Balzac] à qui Clément de Ris [sic] montra l'endroit où les proclamations et tous les papiers nécessaires à la formation d'un gouvernement révolutionnaire avaient été brûlés'. In a magnanimous feint, Balzac divulges that 'quand Mme la duchesse d'Abrantès mit dans ses *Mémoires* le passage cité, l'auteur lui reprocha moins de l'avoir privé d'un sujet, que d'avoir tronqué l'histoire dans sa partie la plus essentielle' (491). *Une ténébreuse affaire*, then, is paratextually staged as a corrective to both her narrative inadequacies and the hermeneutic insufficiency of the authors of the *Biographie*.

The stage is set for a discursive battle in which Balzac plays his trump card with glee: 'l'auteur a d'ailleurs trouvé d'amples compensations dans le plaisir qu'a fait *Une ténébreuse affaire* à un personnage encore vivant, pour qui son livre a été la révélation d'un mystère qui avait plané sur toute sa vie ; il s'agit du juge même de qui les biographes ont écrit la vie' (494). He recounts a visit from Colonel Viriot himself who, destitute, confesses, 'je dois ma longue disgrâce à l'affaire que fait le fonds de votre ouvrage. La lecture du journal *Le Commerce* m'a seule appris le secret du mystère qui, pendant quinze ans, a pesé sur mon existence' (498–99). It is, then, in the fictional that Viriot detects the true, secret history of a conspiracy orchestrated and covered up by the discourse *ad usum delphini* propagated by the minister of police. Claiming to prove 'what *really* really happened' by recasting history in fiction, the novel 'plays the historian's role on the stage of real history', in Armine Kotin Mortimer's helpful phrasing.⁴⁵ If Balzac's prefatorial posturing clearly cannot be unproblematically taken at face value, we nonetheless find ourselves returned to the apparent impossibility of definitively circumscribing historical 'truth' from its more speculative discursive manifestations. Where Balzac congratulates himself on having '*transposé*, dans un milieu vrai, le fait le plus invraisemblable' (493, original emphasis), he is equally swift to note the exigencies of emplotment for a series of events in which truth appears stranger than fiction:

Si quelque romancier s'avisait d'écrire comme il s'est passé le procès des gentilshommes mis à mort malgré leur innocence proclamée par trois départements, ce serait le livre le plus impossible du monde. Aucun lecteur ne voudrait croire qu'il se soit trouvé, dans un pays comme la France, des tribunaux pour accepter de pareilles fables. L'auteur a donc été forcé de créer des circonstances analogues qui ne fussent pas les mêmes, puisque le vrai n'était pas probable [...]. Aussi, peut-être ceux à qui l'histoire est connue et qui liront *Une ténébreuse affaire*, remarqueront-ils ce prodigieux travail. Il a changé les lieux, changé les

⁴⁵ Armine Kotin Mortimer, 'Balzac: Tenebrous Affairs and Necessary Explications', in *The Play of Terror in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by John T. Booker and Allan H. Pasco (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), pp. 242–55 (p. 243).

intérêts, tout en conservant le point de départ politique ; il a enfin rendu, littérairement parlant, l'impossible, vrai. (493)

If plausibility is political, a world of conspiracy in which 'le vrai n'était pas probable' clearly presents something of a challenge to the realist author. We are confronted with a move beyond mere authenticity as a criterion of effective narrative towards socially sanctioned verisimilitude ('Aucun lecteur ne voudrait croire...') as guarantor of veracity. Where the footnote to the Viriot article sought to circumscribe literary prowess from historico-biographical 'truth', Balzac, in contrast, seeks to bring the two together, effecting both paratextually and diegetically what Marthe Robert has termed a 'confusion systématique entre les figures romanesques et leurs homologues historiques, le passage continu du feint dans les annales du réel'.⁴⁶ The fundamental Balzacian problem of the historical and the fictional rears its head, gesturing towards the mutually constitutive nature of narrative discourse and historical representation which seems to culminate in Robert's assertion that, 'ce ne sont pas les hommes politiques, *mais les personnages de Balzac* qui ont fait l'Histoire du pays' (258, original emphasis).

In the unpublished 'Avertissement' to *Le Gars* (1828), an early title for that other tale of royalist conspiracy featuring Corentin, *Les Chouans* (1829), Balzac dismisses the dry and uninformative nature of 'academic' or 'official' historical exposition. The latter, he suggests, makes of history 'un charnier [...], un squelette chronologique' (*CH*, VIII: 1680) whose bare bones lack the fleshy interest that only narrative can bestow. Accordingly, he suggests, the would-be historian should take inspiration from Sir Walter Scott, whose work contains 'des enseignements aussi majestueux, moins ennuyeux, plus pénétrants peut-être que ceux de la Clio classique', allowing the reader to – in an uncharacteristically liberal and anti-clerical turn of phrase – 'retrouver la vérité cachée par le sacerdoce, mutilée par l'aristocratie' (1680). Yet Balzac's strategy in *Une ténébreuse affaire* – on which, we can surmise, the authors of the *Biographie* base their accusation of 'une méchante et mauvaise action' (88) – is something of a curious one: 'rattacher l'origine du procès politique à un autre fait vrai, une participation inconnue à la conspiration de MM. de Polignac et de Rivière' (*CH*, VIII: 493). For, as he notes, somewhat conspiratorially, playing his own secret history off against the discourse *ad usum delphini* of public opinion, '[c]eux qui lisent aujourd'hui des histoires de la Révolution française ne sauront jamais quels immenses intervalles la pensée publique mettait entre les événements si rapprochés de ce temps' (509). *Tout est lié*, it would seem...

Let us, then, attempt to shed some kind of light on Balzac's tenebrous emplotment of a series of plots of all political colours, each as shadowy as the next. If, for Michael Tilby, the text

⁴⁶ Marthe Robert, *Roman des origines et origines du roman* (Grasset, 1972), p. 259.

operates ‘a radical break from the adventure story with its privileging of plot’ (437), this downgrading of novelistic intrigue derives in no small measure from the superposition of a number of politically motivated conspiracies, plots of a different kind. In 1803, the police detective Corentin and his sidekick Peyrade, the former a protégé (and, it is implied, the illegitimate son) of the formidable Fouché, arrive in the – somewhat ironically named – *département* of l’Aube at the request of Malin de Gondreville. The latter is the aptly-monikered republican senator who has acquired the estate from which he derives his new *particule*. The Gondreville domain is the ancestral home of the aristocratic Simeuse family, proscribed émigrés, whose clandestine return prompts the senator to appeal to Fouché. Malin, however, gets somewhat more than he bargained for with the arrival of these two ‘lynx de choix’ (*CH*, VIII: 526): ‘Ces deux hommes sont les deux bras de Fouché [...]. J’avais demandé un agent sans conséquence, appuyé d’un personnage officiel, et l’on m’envoie ces deux compères-là [...]. Fouché veut sans doute lire dans mon jeu’ (524). For, as his confidant Grévin reminds him, ‘Fouché ne joue pas un tour pareil sans une raison quelconque’ (527). He is right to be wary: the Simeuse brothers, along with their cousins, the Hauteserres, are conspiring against the life of Bonaparte, ‘cet ancien sous-lieutenant [qui] veut créer une dynastie’ (525). The figure of the factional émigré conspirator, operating in the shadows and supported by foreign governments, haunted the post-Revolutionary imagination as the antithesis of the 1789 ideal of transparent, public politics.⁴⁷ The discourse *ad usum delphini* thus becomes something of a counter-discourse. Balzac fictionalizes here the Pichegru–Cadoudal conspiracy of 1804 which, following the failure of the 1800 *attentat de la rue Saint-Nicaise*, sought to do away with Bonaparte and whisk a royal prince to Paris to prepare a restoration.⁴⁸ (Royalist conspirator Georges Cadoudal was, we read in *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine*, one of the ‘géants de cette lutte entre la République et la Monarchie’ [312].) Yet the loyalties of Malin as ‘comparse du grand drame de la Révolution’ (492) are somewhat less transparent than the ostensibly republican politics to which he owes his ascension might suggest: he is ‘dans les secrets de la maison de Bourbon’ (524), and a mysterious and unlocatable ‘on’ has offered him the opportunity to ‘rallier le Conseil d’État au moment critique, de diriger l’action légale de la restauration des Bourbons [...]. On m’offre les Sceaux’ (526). Confronted with a royalist plot seeking to ‘renverser l’idole actuelle du peuple français et son futur empereur, pour asseoir le vrai trône sur ses débris’ (526), Malin is, as he informs Grévin, ‘à la merci d’un événement, d’un heureux coup de pistolet, d’une machine de la rue Saint-Nicaise qui réussirait’ (526). Fouché and Bonaparte himself ‘tiennent une partie des fils de cette trame

⁴⁷ See Simon Burrows, ‘The émigrés and conspiracy in the French Revolution, 1789–99’, in Campbell, Kaiser and Linton (eds), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, pp. 150–71.

⁴⁸ On the Cadoudal conspiracy, see, for example, Henri Gaubert, *Les Conspireurs au temps de Napoléon I^{er}* (Flammarion, 1962), pp. 161–261; and Peter de Polnay, *Napoleon’s Police* (W.H. Allen, 1970), pp. 59–93.

immense ; mais ils n'en connaissent pas toute l'étendue, et dans le moment actuel, ils laissent libres presque tous les conjurés pour savoir tout' (525). Malin is thus faced with a dilemma born of his 'jeu double' (524), which he articulates accordingly: 'Les deux Simeuse conspirent, ils sont dans le pays ; je dois, ou les faire suivre, les laisser se compromettre et m'en faire débarrasser, ou les protéger sourdement' (526).

The senator, however, is not the only one to *bien cacher son jeu*. Michu, the steward of the Gondreville estate, is a man of seemingly impeccable republican credentials: this 'patriote dévoué, gendre du président du tribunal révolutionnaire de Troyes' (507), 'président du club des Jacobins d'Arcis' (506), is said not to have hesitated to attend the 1793 trial and execution of the marquis de Simeuse and his wife. As a result, 'Michu, depuis 1789, mais surtout depuis 1793, était à peu près le maître de cette terre' (506). The presence in his household of a servant-girl named Marianne, and the parallels established between the steward, a 'Judas' bearing a 'singulière ressemblance' to the 'treizième apôtre' (511), and his father-in-law as 'apôtre de la Révolution' (507) only serve to enhance his fearsome reputation as apostle of Terror. And yet beneath his Jacobin façade, Michu is revealed as staunch counter-revolutionary, the faithful retainer of the redoubtable aristocrat Laurence de Cinq-Cygne, cousin of the Simeuse twins and sworn enemy of Bonaparte. If, surreptitiously observing the exchange between Malin and Grévin, he decides against his planned assassination of the former (with a view to enabling the Simeuse family to recover their estate), he continues to hide the brothers in a secret cave at the heart of the forest, having also buried their family fortune to protect it from the 'spoliateur[s]' (613) of the post-1789 political stage. The cave, of which Michu '[s'en approprié] le secret' (565), is a perfect hiding place: in spite of Corentin's orders from Fouché 'd'explorer le château de Gondreville, d'en inscrire le plan dans sa mémoire, et d'y reconnaître les moindres cachettes' (514), the two policemen are forced to leave the estate empty-handed – even if, as Michu remarks to Laurence, 'de tous les nobles fourrés dans cette conspiration, vos cousins s[ont] les mieux traqués' (567). To add insult to injury, Laurence, a formidable horsewoman, humiliates Corentin, providing a parallel to an earlier episode in which Malin comes in for similar treatment. Arriving home mid-perquisition to find him clutching the precious box in which, it is revealed, she keeps love letters from and portraits of the Simeuse twins, she strikes him with her riding crop.

En apercevant cette héroïque fille, pâle et les traits tirés, son voile d'un côté, sa cravache à la main, sur le seuil d'où son regard brûlant embrassa toute la scène et la pénétra, chacun comprit, au mouvement imperceptible qui remua la face aigre et trouble de Corentin, que les deux véritables adversaires étaient en présence. Un terrible duel allait commencer. En voyant cette cassette aux mains de Corentin, la jeune comtesse leva sa cravache et sauta sur

lui si vivement, elle lui appliqua sur les mains un si violent coup, que la cassette tomba par terre [...]. Le mépris flamboyait dans les yeux de Laurence, son front pâle et ses lèvres dédaigneuses insultaient à ces hommes encore plus que le geste autocratique avec lequel elle avait traité Corentin en bête venimeuse [...]. Le coup de cravache sur les doigts fut pour Corentin, douleur à part, le coup de canon qui troue la carapace ; de la part de cette sublime et noble fille, ce mouvement plein de dégoût l'humilia, non pas seulement aux regards de ce petit monde, mais encore à ses propres yeux. (580–81)

In this ‘terrible duel’ between fire and ice, it is Laurence who is accorded the privileges of the quasi-panoptic *regard*, which encompasses and penetrates the scene, its actors and their motivations. Corentin’s gaze, that impassable surface which Miller aligns with the faceless, multiple eyes of Foucauldian *surveillance*, is turned inwards (‘à ses propres yeux’), rupturing the ostensibly impenetrable externality of his ‘carapace’ in a sign of momentary defeat. And yet, we might note, in a move symptomatic of the novel’s poetics of displacement, it is not in the box’s hidden compartment that lies Laurence’s true secret (‘Désormais mon cœur n’aura plus de secrets pour personne, voilà tout’ [583]), but in the underground forest cave in which the brothers have taken refuge.

This apparently minor episode is, in many ways, the pivot on which the entire narrative turns. The novel’s second part, cryptically entitled ‘La Revanche de Corentin’, is set three years later, in 1806. ‘Rayés de la liste des émigrés’ (596), the Simeuse brothers are peacefully settled with Laurence on the Cinq-Cygne estate. As the result of a constellation of unfortunate circumstances, they, the Hauteserres and Michu are accused of the kidnapping of Malin, abducted by five masked men and kept prisoner in the very cave which previously served as their sanctum, the secret *caveau-cachette* whose existence ‘au milieu de la forêt n’était connue que de Marthe, de son fils, de Michu, des quatre gentilshommes et de Laurence’ (650). Balzac’s fictional recasting of the 1800 abduction of senator Clément-de-Ris attracted, as we have seen, the opprobrium of Sarrut and Saint-Edme in their *Biographie*. Linked to the royalist counter-revolutionary plot by means of temporal manipulation, the abduction plot and subsequent trial of Michu and the nobles bring out the semantic multiplicity of ‘framing’ and ‘conviction’ as bearing on both the narrative and the criminal. The evidence against them turns – notably, in light of our sensitivity to the Ginzburgian paradigm – on those fragments from which the ‘whole truth’ is extrapolated: the discovery of hoof prints, identical to those of their horses, and of traces of plaster, supposedly used to ‘claquemur[er]’ (650) the senator in the secret cave. All five men are condemned: Michu is sentenced to death, and only the appeal that a humbled Laurence makes in person to her nemesis, now Emperor, on the eve of the battle of Jena saves the life of her cousins, ‘graciés’ (683). The narrative subsequently comes to something of an abrupt end, swiftly dispatching three of the Simeuse and Hauteserre

brothers. They meet as soldiers in the Grande Armée the end proleptically figured in their aristocratic family mottoes ‘cy meurs’ and ‘mourir en chantant’ (615). Only Adrien d’Hauteserre, ‘ce débris des quatre gentilshommes qu’elle [Laurence] avait vus un moment autour d’elle’, survives long enough to accept her ‘cœur flétri’ (684) and hand in marriage. Upon his death in 1829, ‘personne n’avait encore pénétré le secret de l’enlèvement du sénateur’ (684). The secret history that remains untold, then, is, in Thomas’s words, the answer to the following questions: ‘Who were the five *sosies* who kidnapped Malin, impersonating the nobles and Michu, even to the latter’s red hair and the prints of their horses’ shoes? Who are their enemies, and what reason could they have for implicating the innocent?’ (288). If, as Tzvetan Todorov would have it, the classic detective story is ‘l’histoire d’une absence’,⁴⁹ *Une ténébreuse affaire* stages the process of recuperation of the first, absent story that has taken place before the text itself begins.

It is at this point that the omniscient narration of which Miller was to make so much divests itself of its own authority, effectively leaving the last word to a *sosie* of its own. In an epilogue situated some twenty–five years after the action of the diegesis, Henri de Marsay – one of Balzac’s most privileged narratorial figures – is at the centre of a gathering at the princesse de Cadignan’s *salon*. Laurence, accompanied by her daughter, Berthe, is also in attendance. If her political convictions remain ‘intraitables’ (686), as evidenced in her refusal to refer to Louis–Philippe as anything other than ‘monsieur le duc d’Orléans’ (686), we learn that Malin, too, displays a consistency of his own – that of the inexorable rise played out through the repetition of the word ‘ancien’, betokening here constancy in rupture and social ascendancy: ‘L’ancien clerc venu d’Arcis, l’ancien Représentant du Peuple, l’ancien Thermidorien, l’ancien tribun, l’ancien conseiller d’État, l’ancien comte de l’Empire et sénateur, l’ancien pair de Louis XVIII, le nouveau pair de Juillet...’ (687). As the comte de Gondreville is announced, Laurence ‘se dress[e] comme si son siège eût été de fer rougi’ (687) and promptly leaves with Berthe, addressing only a curt goodbye to the hostess. Whilst Malin fails to recognize Laurence and remains unenlightened as to the reasons for the ‘réserve générale’ (687) displayed towards him, he nonetheless senses that ‘sa présence gênait, il partit’ (688), dispatched in the plosive singularity of the past historic. As Malin’s carriage rolls away, de Marsay, tasked with explaining this enmity, proceeds to recount a secret meeting in 1800 between Fouché, Talleyrand (designated only obliquely by reference to his limp), Sieyès, Carnot and Malin. It is the eve of the battle of Marengo, and a coup is planned, to be carried out if Bonaparte’s Italian campaign fails. Recasting to their own ends the narrative of the coup d’état which brought their target to power, the conspirators conclude: ‘Notre Dix–huit Brumaire doit être prêt’ (691). Malin is tasked by the ‘génie ténébreux’ (692) that is Fouché with the production

⁴⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la prose* (Seuil, 1971), p. 58.

and dissemination of the documents proclaiming the advent of the new government in the event of Bonaparte's defeat. When the news of victory reaches the conspirators, Malin, 'sur qui toute la responsabilité du complot pouvait tomber, fut si effrayé, qu'il mit les ballots dans des charrettes et les mena nuitamment à Gondreville, où sans doute il enterra ces sinistres papiers dans les caves du château' (693). If de Marsay's equivocating 'sans doute' seems to at least partially give the lie to the Balzacian fantasy of historical mastery through seamless emplotment, he is nonetheless staged as expert storyteller who has 'admirablement peint' (689) the intricacies of the scene.

And yet, by the end of de Marsay's putative explanation, the reader is none the wiser as to 'le secret de l'affaire': *peindre* is to cover over as much as to depict, and de Marsay's tale of the abortive coup and its aftershock refers only to the political dimensions of the *affaire*. Rastignac, a fellow salon invitee, comments as much: 'Mais [...] je ne vois pas dans tout ceci Mme de Cinq-Cygne' (695). De Marsay supplements his story in a sweeping, breathless paragraph, 'a kind of afterthought'⁵⁰ which effectively serves to devalorize the lengthy narrative that precedes it. In 1806, when domestic politics are ostensibly less volatile, Fouché, 'tout en cachant la main qui remuait les cendres de ce foyer' (692), sends Corentin to recover the incriminating documents from the Gondreville estate:

[L]es cinq inconnus étaient des escogriffes de la Police générale de l'Empire, chargés d'anéantir des ballots d'imprimés que le comte de Gondreville était venu précisément brûler en croyant l'Empire affermi [...]. Mais, dans cette épouvantable affaire, il y a eu de la passion de la part de l'agent principal, qui vit encore, un de ces grands hommes subalternes qu'on ne remplace jamais, et qui s'est fait remarquer par des tours de force étonnants. Il paraît que mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne l'avait maltraité quand il était venu pour arrêter les Simeuse. (695)

The abortive royalist conspiracy is thus neutralized and superseded by a shadowy counter-plot masterminded by the formidable Fouché, itself looking back to the *Urplot* of the early days of the Consulate. Corentin, 'l'agent principal,' uses his orders as the pretext to avenge Laurence's slight: Corentin hired the *sosies* and fabricated the incriminating letter that damns the nobles and Michu at their trial. This strategy, we might note, served him well in *Les Chouans* – as, in a signposting of Balzacian intratextuality, he reminds us in his oblique reference to Marie de Verneuil: 'J'en ai fait crever une qui la valait bien, et qui m'avait par trop échauffé la bile! Si elle [Laurence] retombe sous ma coupe, je lui paierai son coup de cravache' (590).⁵¹ The kidnapping of Malin, then, is tangential

⁵⁰ Thomas, 'The Case of the Missing Detective', p. 294.

⁵¹ On Balzac's female counter-revolutionary conspirators, see Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, 'Le Complot royaliste dans *La Comédie humaine*: traîtres, héros et viragos', *L'Année balzacienne*, 3rd ser., 6 (2005), 241–63.

to the political machinations, and the spheres of public and private motivation overlap to bewildering effect. Set against the high stakes of high politics, such ‘petty motivation’ (427), in Tilby’s words, cannot but cast an ironic shadow over the plot and the plots it narrativizes in relation to their assumed significance as subject matter. We might ask, with Julien Sorel, ‘n’est-ce que ça?’.⁵² If, as Karl Marx would have it, history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce, the ‘passion’ (695) with which Corentin plots to have Marie betray Montauran is desublimated in the risible motives underpinning the considerable efforts he deploys to frame Laurence and her cousins.

An epilogue that looks back to a point outside narrative time, an ironic devalorization of plot in relation to its presumed importance, a difficulty in squaring action with motivation – such features would seem to align *Une ténébreuse affaire* less with the commonplaces of Balzacian realism than with the more radical sense of uncertainty pervading the novel in its later, Flaubertian guise. If Balzac’s bewildering superposition of plots and counter-plots undermines the possibility of coherent emplotment and perhaps even the notion of plot itself, *Une ténébreuse affaire* is less *un livre sur rien* than a book in which nothing makes sense, or rather makes *too much* sense, incessantly over-signifying. Where a certain version of literary history would reserve aesthetic modernity in the nineteenth-century novel for the hermit of Croisset and he alone, the self-questioning narrative voice of *Une ténébreuse affaire* undermines the Balzacian pretention to the ‘interpretative mastery’⁵³ of minutiae whose legibility is the hallmark of the readerly text. Beyond the conventions of the detective novel and its recourse to semiotic red herrings, the novel testifies to a more radical sense of unintelligibility that undercuts the certainties of the famous Balzacian hermeneutic imperative. Bespeaking an anxiety concerning the continued validity of the spatial dialectic of the semiotic and the anatomic germane to both Herrera’s conspiratorial secret history and Ginzburg’s conjectural paradigm, *Une ténébreuse affaire* enacts the cognitive and narrative crisis of the post-Revolutionary experience of history.

Man-Hunts and Treasure Hunts

In light of our concern with the Ginzburgian model and its venatic metaphoricality, we might note that hunting is the *raison d’être* of the Gondreville domain. Built by a wealthy marquis ‘uniquement pour se faire une belle chasse’ (504), these grounds are a ‘magnifique théâtre’ (503) that provides the stage for a man-hunt far more sinister than the pre-Revolutionary pursuits of the titled

⁵² Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, ed. by Anne-Marie Meininger (Gallimard, 2000), p. 148.

⁵³ Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. 29.

nobility. Hunting is the cherished pastime of the novel's protagonists, most notably the redoubtable Laurence, whose 'adresse à la chasse tenait du miracle' (536). Likened to Diana Vernon, Walter Scott's 'chasseresse écossaise' (536), we learn that, in spite of her 'forme la plus féminine et la plus faible en apparence', she is able to 'mani[er] un pistolet, un fusil, avec la vigueur d'un chasseur exercé' (537). The elder Hauteserre brother, Robert, is also a 'grand chasseur' (602), with all of the nobles finding 'une distraction violente dans les plaisirs de la chasse, qui, en fatiguant excessivement le corps, ôtent à l'âme les occasions de voyager dans les steppes si dangereux [*sic*] de la rêverie' (608). If this 'rêverie' translates into the 'rage froide et calculée' applied in the services of 'la conspiration des hommes qui tentèrent de retourner le 18 brumaire contre le Premier consul', the 'haine' of Bonaparte is not the only thing 'commune' (538) to the plotters. A 'passion pour la chasse' (549) would also appear to transcend divisions of social status: our first encounter with Michu, for example, finds him 'vêtu d'une veste de chasse en coutil vert', cleaning a rifle 'avec le soin que mettent à cette occupation les chasseurs adroits'. It is, moreover, through recourse to the hunting motif that we learn that all at Gondreville is perhaps not as it seems: the narrator observes that, despite his outfit, 'cet homme [Michu] n'avait ni carnier, ni gibier, enfin aucun des agrès qui annoncent ou le départ ou le retour de la chasse' (502). With casual recourse to an adverb that serves as much to emphasise the stratification of knowledge of the world of the diegesis as it does to incite the reader's hermeneutic drive, the narrator comments: 'évidemment un chasseur ne prend pas de si minutieuses précautions pour tuer le gibier et n'emploie pas, dans le département de l'Aube, une lourde carabine rayée' (502). Encoding Michu's counter-revolutionary secret from the novel's opening pages, posing the question of what novelistic discourse can take in in order to take in the reader, the Balzacian narrator thus casts hunting in a more sinister guise, concretised in the 'chasse à l'homme' in which Corentin and Peyrade, 'deux limiers à la piste de faits inconnus et cachés' (579) are said to be engaged. To this end, in a politicization of the reconstitutive practice of Ginzburg's hunter:

L'homme de police a toutes les émotions du chasseur ; mais en déployant les forces du corps et de l'intelligence, là où l'un cherche à tuer un lièvre, une perdrix ou un chevreuil, il s'agit pour l'autre de sauver l'État ou le prince, de gagner une large gratification. Ainsi la chasse à l'homme est supérieure à l'autre chasse de toute la distance qui existe entre les hommes et les animaux. D'ailleurs, l'espion a besoin d'élever son rôle à toute la grandeur et à l'importance des intérêts auxquels il se dévoue. Sans tremper dans ce métier, chacun peut donc concevoir que l'âme y dépense autant de passion que le chasseur en met à poursuivre le gibier. (578–79)

The most significant role of the hunting motif, however, is its status as the subject of statements of equivocal meaning. Made in jest, these utterances are turned against the nobles to frame them for the kidnapping of Malin that provides the thematic crux of the novel. Michu explains to Laurence that he has ‘joué le rôle d’un Jacobin enragé, pour rendre service à mes jeunes maîtres’; he is, ‘à l’insu de messieurs de Simeuse, le gardien de leur fortune’ (562). Having ‘fait [...] le jacobin’ (563) to avoid suspicion, the nobles’ faithful retainer has secretly buried this fortune in the Nodesme forest that borders the Gondreville estate. They accordingly set out to dig up their gold, using the pretext of a hunting expedition as cover. They soon encounter the farmer Beauvisage, who, having asked ‘vous allez donc à la chasse, malgré les arrêtés de préfecture ?’, reminds them that, ‘si vous avez des amis, vous avez aussi des ennemis’ (619). Their worst enemy is, in fact, one of their own, as one young aristocrat innocently utters ‘le mot qui [les] perd tous’ (644), ‘ces paroles [...] auxquelles l’événement donna un tout autre sens’: ‘Dieu veuille que notre chasse réussisse, et tu retrouveras tes maîtres!’ (619). That this ‘fatale parole’ (619) is referring to a *treasure* hunt ultimately makes little difference to the court.

In the novel’s dialectic of exposure and concealment, the Gondreville estate as landscape of conspiracy proves to be both friend and foe. If the venatic motif is omnipresent, the truly privileged figure of the narrative is the secret cave at the heart of the forest, known only to Michu by virtue of its strategic emplacement where ‘les chasseurs n’avaient jamais visité, fouillé ni sondé’ (565). A space at the centre of the story that serves as both shelter to the émigrés and prison to the kidnapped senator, it is a sign without value, ready to have meaning projected onto it. Similarly, if the thick trees dissemble both the buried fortune and this multivalent *cachot*–*cachette*, the soft earth of the forest floor also betrays the hoof prints that lead to the conviction of the nobles and their loyal factotum: ‘nous reconnâtrons’, says Peyrade, ‘à l’empreinte des pieds, quels sont les êtres qui ont passé [*sic*] par là’ (572). In a later, pre-trial discussion with Laurence, the defence lawyer Grandville, ‘pour qui une machination quelconque devenait évidente’ (670), remarks that ‘tout dépend des débats devant une cour criminelle, et les débats rouleront sur de petites choses que vous verrez devenir immenses’ (647). Remaining mindful of the optic of Ginzburg’s paradigm with which we began, we should note the emphasis placed on the weaknesses of the semiotic model, the possibility of reading surface traces to reconstruct the deeper, lost story of these ‘petites choses’: the aristocrats are caught in a trap when, unable to account for their movements in admitting that their ‘hunting’ expedition was in pursuit of the buried treasure, the hoof prints of their horses are imitated by five *sosies*. As Peyrade comments to Michu: ‘regardez les fers de vos chevaux, et vous verrez que vous vous êtes trahis vous-mêmes’ (599). Consequently, they suffer the indignity of taking an order from the magistrate Lechesneau: ‘suivez-moi tous les quatre aux

écuries où il est nécessaire de détacher en votre présence les fers de vos chevaux, qui deviendront des pièces importantes au procès, et démontreront peut-être votre innocence ou votre culpabilité’ (636). By virtue of its materiality, then, the surface of the landscape is subject to semiotic manipulation: Corentin’s plot is all too well-grounded in the most literal sense of the term.

Plaster and Platitude

If the necessities of emplotment subtending the criminal trial bear on the semantic multiplicity of *framing* as persecutory activity and narrative control, Michu’s final encounter with ‘le couperet de la Loi’ (503) suggests that the narrative manipulation made possible by the compromised referentiality of a poorly grounded plot can be applied in the service of more sinister, inculpatory, and conspiratorial designs. What, then, might this possibility of semiotic manipulation imply for the familiar Balzacian incitement to read ‘symptomatically’,⁵⁴ moving, as ‘archéologue du mobilier social’ (I: 11), from surface appearance to that deeper, hidden truth in which one might find the secret history?

For Lyon–Caen, ‘la dialectique de la surface et de la profondeur, fût-elle fondée sur une simple pellicule, est essentielle à l’herméneutique balzacienne’ (27). In the textual universe of *La Comédie humaine*, he adds, ‘la surface du monde, arpentée et/ou découverte par les personnages, découpée et sondée par le narrateur, y est tout à la fois un tissu d’apparences à déchiffrer et une réserve d’essences à retrouver’ (8). In a happy convergence with our own interest in Ginzburg’s model and its venatic metaphoricity, Balzac’s magnum opus is, in this way, ‘inséparable [...] des pratiques scientifiques et culturelles ayant fécondé, dans la première moitié du siècle, le paradigme indiciaire’ (10). Sustained engagement with *Une ténébreuse affaire* is notably absent from Lyon–Caen’s analysis of the relationship between meaning and matter in the Balzacian text. If the importance he accords to the notion of the surface is salutary, his neglect of this novel is all the more surprising in light of his (welcome) suggestion that ‘l’inflexion du statut accordé aux surfaces et aux corps sensibles doit être réinscrite dans l’histoire littéraire du réalisme au dix-neuvième siècle’ (146). With this in mind, we might note that the second strand of evidence put forward against the counter-revolutionary conspirators is the traces of plaster left on Michu’s clothes, those ‘habits [qui] faisaient partie des pièces à conviction’ (*CH*, VIII: 655). The plaster is, in reality, used as a security measure to ‘murer le caveau’ (631) in which the Simeuse brothers’ recently unearthed treasure is hidden. Deploying the term conviction along the semantic axes of the narrative and the judicial,

⁵⁴ On ‘surface’ and ‘symptomatic’ reading, see Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, ‘Surface Reading: An Introduction’, *Representations*, 108.1 (Fall 2009), 1–21.

the prosecution emplots a version of events in which this plaster is to have served to ‘claquemur[er]’ (663) the missing senator, ‘scellé [...] avec des pierres et du plâtre’ (664). The figure of plaster reveals itself as the nexus of a tension between surface (semiotic) and depth (anatomic) models of reading, gesturing towards an alternative version of literary history in which the Balzacian text adumbrates what Lyon–Caen terms ‘l’écriture flaubertienne de la surface’ (147). This, I show, ultimately gestures towards an alternative version of literary history in which, to borrow José–Luis Diaz’s tectonic phrasing, ‘le continent Balzac dérive vers le continent Flaubert’.⁵⁵

In his analysis of the spatial logic and architectural metaphoricality of nineteenth–century France, Philippe Hamon aligns a post–1848 ‘avènement d’un règne de la non–épaisseur’ with ‘des désillusions d’ordre politique’.⁵⁶ Set against the Romantic world of lapidary inscriptions and a vision which sought – much like the Esquirolian monomaniac – to ‘voir dans les choses plus que dans les choses’,⁵⁷ the widespread use of plate and plaster at the mid–century testifies, for Hamon, to the ‘intrusion d’une modernité illisible dans le cadre bâti’ (128). In an unease foreshadowing what Walter Benjamin would later theorize as the lost ‘auratic’ quality of the mechanically reproduced work of art, plaster, ‘ersatz de la pierre’, ‘plaquage mensonger et masquage des façades’, became, Hamon argues, a ‘thématique et métaphorique littéraires obsédantes’ (137). If the city of Paris was, for the Balzac of *Le Père Goriot*, an ‘illustre vallée de plâtras incessamment près de tomber’ (*CH*, III: 49–50), plaster throws something of a spanner in the smooth works of a physiognomic discourse that would seek to seamlessly align surface appearance and deeper truth: ‘le plâtre’, Hamon notes, ‘masque, cache, trahit, met un “fard” sur un bâti qui peut alors être, en dessous, aussi médiocre qu’on voudra’ (137). What is at stake, then, is not merely a semiotics and an aesthetics, but also an ethics. How to distinguish between real and fake, copy and original? Plaster emerges as the privileged medium for the inscription – the emplotment, we might venture – of a narrative of falsehood or a false narrative, as Laurence and her co–conspirators come to know only too well.

The interest of this wider nineteenth–century discourse on plaster for our purposes, though, goes beyond a mere rehearsal of the tropes of the familiar Balzacian anxieties concerning the legibility of the façade. In *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838–47), Corentin is revealed to be moonlighting as a private detective under the Restoration, with the reader even given privileged insight into his living quarters:

⁵⁵ José–Luis Diaz, ‘Destins du deux: oxymore, ironie, répétition dans *Les Parents pauvres*’, in *Balzac et Les Parents pauvres*, ed. by Françoise van Rossum–Guyon and Michiel van Brederode (SEDES/CDU, 1981), pp. 199–208 (p. 203).

⁵⁶ Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: littérature et architecture au XIX^e siècle* (José Corti, 1989), p. 145.

⁵⁷ Hugo, *Œuvres poétiques*, I, 265.

Le logement de Corentin n'était connu que du Directeur–Général de la Police du Royaume et de Peyrade [...]. Dans cette chambre sans aucune apparence se tramèrent des plans, se prirent des résolutions qui fourniraient d'étranges annales et des drames curieux, si les murs pouvaient parler [...]. Là se découvrirent dans leur germe les événements qui devaient peser sur la France. (CH, VI: 537)

If Balzac's narrator expresses regret that Corentin's walls cannot speak, the surfaces of *Une ténébreuse affaire*, which he conspiratorially manipulates, speak, or at least signify, all too much. The use of traces of plaster as one of the prosecution's *pièces à conviction* against Michu and the nobles, then, returns us to the familiar play between the semiotic and the anatomic, gesturing towards the spatialization of the secret that we brought out in relation to Herrera's secret history. If plaster comes to be aligned with a loss of origin, a missing referent, it is precisely this absence that opens up the space of conspiratorial speculation within which Corentin positions himself with such expertise. Where, for one journalist writing on conspiracy theory, 'paranoia is the watery plaster that seals over the gaps in unsound reasoning',⁵⁸ Balzac's prosecution, too, has recourse to the material in their emplotment of a smooth narrative of the nobles' culpability – to such an extent that 'les plaisants de la ville dirent qu'on avait replâtré l'affaire, que l'Accusateur public avait gâché sa position, et que les Simeuse devenaient blancs comme plâtre' (VIII: 659).

It is, then, by virtue of Grandville's 'petites choses' that is constructed a false, inculpatory narrative: the purported plot to kidnap Malin is emplotted with fatal consequences. There is a questioning of the indicial relation, a discord between the manifest signs of the horses' prints, the traces of plaster and the false 'vérité' of the story of the nobles' guilt towards which they point. If, for Umberto Eco, 'semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie',⁵⁹ this statement is unleashed in full force across the narrative landscape of *Une ténébreuse affaire*. The deceptive surface of the falsified 'précieuses empreintes' (150) points, supposedly, to a 'deeper' truth, located, crucially, beyond the reach of the untrained eye: 'ils auront tué le sénateur et l'auront plâtré dans quelque muraille' (636).⁶⁰ For Hamon, the plastered surface can be aligned with two hermeneutic axes, either the excess of a 'hypertrophie sémiotique' or the

⁵⁸ Clarence Page, 'Evasive Genocide Blamers', *The Washington Times*, 16th August 1991. Quoted in Pipes, *Conspiracy*, p. 173.

⁵⁹ Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 7.

⁶⁰ This hypothesis echoes the gruesome events recounted in the sub-section of *Autre étude de femme* entitled 'La Grande Bretèche', in which a vengeful husband has the closet in which he knows his wife's lover to be hiding sealed over with plaster. On the *épisode de la Grande Bretèche*, see, for example, Lucienne Frappier Mazur, 'Lecture d'un texte illisible: *Autre étude de femme* et le modèle de la conversation', *MLN*, 98.4 (May 1984), 712–27; and Peter Lock, 'Text Crypt', *MLN*, 97.4 (May 1982), 872–89.

lack of a ‘non–signification radicale’ (128). The cave at the heart of the forest is invested, respectively, then, with too much meaning for the prosecution and not enough for the accused, the latter situation bespeaking a total absence of understanding not so far removed from that of the reader, even after de Marsay’s putative clarification. The fragmentary traces left on the landscape are subsumed into a conspiratorial totality of scapegoating. In a post–Revolutionary world in which ‘royaliste [...] veut dire brigand’ (CH, VIII: 644), we bear witness to the ‘injuste condamnation’ of ‘cinq victimes d’un horrible complot’ (672). As the lawyer Bordin explains the predicament in which Michu and the nobles find themselves:

Si, par malheur, vous disiez être allé chercher onze cent mille francs d’or dans la forêt, vous enverriez tous les accusés aux galères comme voleurs. Accusateur public, jurés, juges, audience, et la France croiraient que vous avez pris cet or à Gondreville, et que vous avez séquestré le sénateur pour faire votre coup. En admettant l’accusation telle qu’elle est en ce moment, l’affaire n’est pas claire ; mais, dans sa vérité pure, elle deviendrait limpide ; les jurés expliqueraient par le vol toutes les parties ténébreuses, car royaliste aujourd’hui veut dire brigand ! (644)

They are, as Grandville cries in despair, ‘le jouet d’une puissance inconnue et machiavélique’ (671). Faced with the impossibility of showing either ‘le corps du délit’ (663) of the missing senator or ‘[le]s cachettes, le plan de la forêt, les tuyaux de fer–blanc, l’or pour justifier l’emploi de [la] journée’ (645), the nobles and Michu are deprived of a point of origin in which to ground their story. The referents of the competing versions of events – the buried fortune and the kidnapped senator – are manifestly absent: there is a black hole, an interpretative gap, at the centre of the story that mirrors that of the cave at the centre of the forest. The possibility of narrative manipulation comes to the fore; the prosecution ‘mass[e] les preuves, les semi–preuves, les probabilités’ (663). The narrative of their innocence is thus undermined by its severed referentiality, overshadowed by the literally grounded plot etched on the surface of the landscape. It proves impossible to demonstrate that the relationship between the hoof prints, the plaster, the nobles’ outing and the kidnapped senator is but a coincidence when a causal account appears so much more *vraisemblable*. In the politico–historical context of a post–Revolutionary society where ‘royaliste [...] veut dire brigand’, the story of the kidnapping of a republican senator by resentful counter–revolutionary conspirators enjoys a degree of plausibility superior to any alternative version of events. Politics thus dictates the plausible and, to this end, ‘le devoir de la Défense est [...] d’opposer un roman probable au roman improbable de l’Accusation’ (656). The prosecution’s task is an imposition of an interpretation *ad usum delphini*, with the ‘discours arrangé pour les besoins de la cause’ that of the

synonymy of ‘royalist’ and ‘brigand’ that underpins the story of the nobles’ guilt. The tenebrous hermeneutic depths, then, are but an empty space, ready to have a meaning imposed upon them.

In its invitation to read ‘symptomatically’, seizing on surface detail to move towards those all-important ‘faits inconnus et cachés’ (579), the Balzacian text takes meaning and form in the *épistèmè de la profondeur* that, for Foucault, appears at the end of the eighteenth century. This, he suggests is a new, post-Classical epistemology which seeks to ‘rapporter le visible à l’invisible, comme à sa raison profonde, puis remonter de cette secrète architecture vers les signes manifestes qui en sont donnés à la surface des corps’.⁶¹ But does this really hold for *Une ténébreuse affaire*, where Foucault’s ‘secret architecture’ is made literal in the image of the underground cave, the empty space where depth should have been? Does the emphasis placed on the problematic materiality of the surface (be it plaster or the soft earth of the forest) not, rather, point towards, if not a complete lack of depth, at the very least a false profundity? Indeed, the ‘oeuvre archéologique’ in which Michu engages in order to find the cave that serves as the novel’s master-figure comes to fruition when ‘il sentit le terrain sonner le creux’ (565). This *surface à fausse profondeur* thus thematizes a figure of the novel’s own structure, signalling a misleading surface against which, to recast an expression made in reference to Laurence, ‘le vide ressemble à de la profondeur’ (537). By virtue of its materiality, the surface of the conspiratorial landscape of *Une ténébreuse affaire* is subject to semiotic manipulation, framing a narrative of false depth that both frustrates the hermeneutic drive and points forward in literary history towards the Flaubertian aesthetic of *platitude*, that ironic emptying-out of meaning born of a citational poetics. And yet, in its acknowledgement of the problematic synonymy of truth and mere plausibility in a conspiratorial context, *Une ténébreuse affaire* works in opposition to the *idée reçue* of an incorrigible Balzacian investment in the unearthing of stable, underground secret history to be captured and represented in language. Reading Balzac’s little-studied novel of conspiracy against the grain of this critical doxa, whose renegade proponents have come to inhabit the fortress of Anglophone *études balzaciennes*, gestures, then, towards the possibility of re-visiting this latest version of literary history *ad usum delphini*.

The meta-critical narrative of ‘Balzac’ vs. ‘Flaubert’—or, in Barthesian terms, of classical *lisibilité* vs. proto-modernist *scriptibilité*—we might note, is inevitably expressed via a metaphors of surface and depth. The trope was seemingly adumbrated by Flaubert himself: Bouvard and Pécuchet, ‘[qui] n’avaient pas soupçonné la vie moderne aussi profonde’, are initially ‘émerveill[és]’ by the Balzacian œuvre, ‘[où] dans les choses les plus banales, des aspects nouveaux surgirent’. Yet the collectors soon come to find Balzac ‘chimérique’ in his insistent drive to ‘gonfler ce qui est

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Gallimard, 1966), p. 242.

plat'.⁶² Flaubert's 'intelligence tout en surface',⁶³ which takes paradigmatic form in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, is set in opposition to Balzac's investment in the unearthing of a stable yet hidden truth. Indeed, what Lyon–Caen terms the 'écriture flaubertienne de la surface' (147) is far from an invention of recent criticism. Flaubert's contemporaries were equally swift to align his work with the plane and the *plat*: for Gustave Merlet, for example, 'M. Flaubert ne connaît que les surfaces planes'.⁶⁴ Similarly, whilst insisting in his study of European naturalism on the 'trace profondément empreinte' that Flaubert had left on 'l'histoire de la littérature d'un siècle', Ferdinand Brunetière asserts that 'l'œil de Flaubert ne va guère plus loin que la surface des choses, et s'il lui manque un don [...], c'est le don de voir au-delà du visible'.⁶⁵ Almost a century later, Barthes would make a virtue of the Flaubertian eschewal of depth, sketching out a history of literary modernity which forks irrevocably at a Balzac '[dont] toute une partie du réel lui échappe : précisément sa *surface*'. 'Le réalisme de Balzac', Barthes asserts, 'est un réalisme profond, un réalisme des types et des essences'.⁶⁶ For Alain Robbe-Grillet, too, the epistemological naivety of the Balzacian project – in opposition to which he defines *le nouveau roman* – derives largely from its investment in 'les vieux mythes de la "profondeur"', that quest for the 'âme cachée des choses' undertaken by the writer as leader of a pack of 'vaillants spéléologues'.⁶⁷

Indeed, even more sympathetic critics have recourse to this semantic field. In his study of Balzac and Henry James, Brooks, for example, writes of the 'pressure of the prose' that must uncover his true subject, 'hidden and masked', unearthing a realm of meaning which cannot be accessed without 'the "pressure" applied to the surfaces of the real, the insistence of the recording glance'.⁶⁸ Prendergast, too, insists that, for Balzac, 'everything signifies; there is no surface without depth, no exterior without interior [...], nothing that escapes the net of identification' (228). And yet, as this chapter has sought to show, the conspiratorial narrative of *Une ténébreuse affaire* works against the grain of the meta-critical narrative that Claude Burgelin memorably terms *la Flaubertolâtrie*.⁶⁹ The novel testifies to a peculiarly Balzacian form of aesthetic modernity stemming not from a proto-postmodernist pleasure in the unfettered play of the signifier, but from an

⁶² Flaubert, *Œuvres*, II, 89.

⁶³ Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, *De Balzac à Zola: critiques et polémiques*, ed. by Michel Lécureur (Les Belles Lettres, 1999), p. 49.

⁶⁴ Gustave Merlet, *Le Réalisme et la fantaisie dans la littérature* (Didier, 1861), p. 101.

⁶⁵ Ferdinand Brunetière, *Le Roman naturaliste* (Calmann-Lévy, 1883), pp. 136, 181.

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Nouveaux problèmes du réalisme', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 3 vols (Seuil, 1993–95), I (1993), 549–51 (p. 550). Original emphasis.

⁶⁷ Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman* (Minuit, 1961), p. 22.

⁶⁸ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 5, 125.

⁶⁹ See Claude Burgelin, 'La Flaubertolâtrie', *Littérature*, 15 (Oct. 1974), 5–16.

anxiety born of the impossibility of truly grounding discourse, of anchoring novelistic truth in a stable referent. The conspiratorial reveals itself as a particularly fertile field in which to explore this semantic paranoia. It is not, then, *pace* Barthes, ‘à partir de Flaubert [...] [que] s’instaure l’ère du soupçon’,⁷⁰ but, rather, somewhat earlier, as we have sought to show in sketching the contours of a poetics of conspiracy. In consideration of how literary poetics might be brought to bear on the history of ideologies, conspiracy as fact becomes less significant than conspiracy theory as discursive figure that generates its own ‘facts’ according to the historical agents involved. For, as Balzac’s narrator comments, in a phrasing which speaks to the credo of the realist author, ‘si, en justice, la vérité ressemble souvent à une fable, la fable ressemble aussi beaucoup à la vérité’ (657). Confronted with the fragmentary epistemologies subtending secrecy and falsehood, we readers cling ever more tightly to the idea of the centre of a narrative as stable locus of truth, that place of the secret as a ‘place of ultimate knowing at which the writing would come to rest’.⁷¹ And yet, with *Une ténébreuse affaire* and its master-figure of the *caveau–cachette–cachot*, we find that, as Geoffrey Hartman writes of the mystery story, ‘the centre [it] scan[s] is an absence; the darkness [it] illumine[s] has no heart [...]’. Instead of a whodunit we get a whodonut, a story with a hole in it.’⁷²

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷¹ Lock, ‘Text Crypt’, p. 879.

⁷² Geoffrey Hartman, ‘Literature High and Low: The Case of the Mystery Story’, in *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader*, ed. by Geoffrey Hartman and Daniel T. O’Hara, pp. 164–79 (p. 166). I am indebted to Elwood’s analysis for drawing my attention to the importance of this observation for *Une ténébreuse affaire*.

CHAPTER TWO

Compagnonnage and Carbonarism: The Inadequacies of Restoration Idealism in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*

De Bourges, Buonarroti, Babeuf

Reflecting on an early encounter with Michel de Bourges in *Histoire de ma vie*, Sand recounts a moonlit stroll along the pont des Saints-Pères in April 1835. Accompanied by 'Éverard', who would secure her legal separation from Casimir Dudevant the following year, and her fellow *berrichon* Gabriel Rigodin-Planet, she wanders happily, enveloped in 'parfums printaniers' (HV, 1390). Absorbed in the contemplation of festivities at the nearby Tuileries palace, Sand recalls: 'je jouissais de cette nuit charmante, de ces vagues mélodies, des doux reflets de la lune mêlés à ceux de la fête royale.' All of a sudden, a voice pierces her 'rêverie'. 'Ainsi, mon bon ami', exclaims an incredulous Planet to de Bourges, 'vous vous inspirez du vieux Buonarroti [*sic*] et vous iriez jusqu'au babouvisme ?' (1390). A fitting counter-point to the regal spectacle just across the river, the mention of the doctrine of François-Noël (Gracchus) Babeuf, the egalitarian conspirator and firebrand journalist whom Alexis de Tocqueville would term the 'grand-père de tous les socialistes modernes',¹ brings Sand firmly back to earth. She, too, is somewhat taken aback by de Bourges's zeal:

Vous voulez faire revivre cette vieillerie ? Vous avez laissé chez moi l'ouvrage de Buonarroti [*sic*], je l'ai lu, c'est beau ; mais ces moyens empiriques pouvaient entrer dans le cœur désespéré des hommes de cette époque, au lendemain de la chute de Robespierre. Aujourd'hui ils seraient insensés, et ce n'est pas par ces chemins-là qu'une époque civilisée peut vouloir marcher. (1390)

If, just a few pages earlier, Sand could write of a de Bourges who 'n'eût pas voulu occire seulement une mouche pour réaliser son utopie' (1384), the transformation into 'Robespierre en personne' (*Corr. Sand*, II: 855), as she would write a decade later, is an abrupt one. 'La civilisation !', he cries, gazing down from the bridge. 'Moi', he continues, 'je vous dis que pour rajeunir et renouveler votre société corrompue, il faut que ce beau fleuve soit rouge de sang, que ce palais maudit soit réduit en cendres, et que cette vaste cité où plongent vos regards soit une grève nue, où la famille

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Études économiques, politiques et littéraires* (Michel Lévy, 1866), p. 546. The cover illustration of the first volume of Jean Jaurès's *Histoire socialiste, 1789–1900* (Rouff, 1901–08) seems to bear out Tocqueville's assertion: Babeuf appears at the root of a family tree comprising Saint-Simon, Fourier, Marx, Blanc, Proudhon and Blanqui.

du pauvre promènera la charrue et dressera sa chaumière !' (*HV*, 1390). Sand and Planet's incredulity only adds to the revolutionary 'verve' of the lawyer's 'déclamation horrible et magnifique'. Their 'farouche pédagogue' launches into 'un appel au poignard et à la torche', moving from these 'funèbres images' to conjure up 'le monde de l'avenir comme il le rêvait, l'idéal de la vie champêtre, les mœurs de l'âge d'or, le paradis terrestre florissant sur les ruines fumantes du vieux monde' (1391). The author who, for many years, was to remain known precisely for her 'romans champêtres'² is, however, unconvinced by these 'croyances que la raison n'a pas encore mûries' (1397), which she dismisses as a 'déclamation antisociale et antihumaine' (1396). Faced with her scepticism, de Bourges, Sand writes, 'était à la fois furieux et désolé de ne m'avoir pas persuadée. Il me suivit jusqu'à ma porte, voulant m'empêcher de rentrer, me suppliant de l'écouter encore, me menaçant de ne jamais me revoir si je le quittais ainsi. On eût dit une querelle d'amour, et il ne s'agissait pourtant que de la doctrine de Babeuf' (1391). Sand's reaction to this Babouvist 'rêve de destruction colossale' (1392) is one of uncharacteristic frustration. 'J'en ai assez de vos républiques', she retorts. 'Je reviendrai vous applaudir et vous couronner dans un meilleur temps, quand vous aurez usé vos utopies et rassemblé des idées saines' (1396). Further debate, she insists, is futile: '[j'ai le] droit de me retirer de cette mêlée, où je ne peux porter aucune lumière, et où je ne peux pas suivre la tienne, qui est encore enveloppée de nuages impénétrables' (1398). This vision of a revolutionary tabula rasa, then, is, for Sand, unenlightened in more ways than one. Yet the indomitable lawyer refuses to let the matter lie – a consequence, no doubt, of what she terms 'la tendance dictatoriale de son esprit' (1384). A conciliatory Sand eventually capitulates: 'allons diner et chercher quelque chose de mieux que Babeuf pour notre nourriture intellectuelle' (1401), she suggests. 'Ah !', cries de Bourges, as he acquiesces, 'maudits soient le pont des Saints-Pères et la question sociale !' (1403).

Sand's account of de Bourges's 'fantasmagorie babouviste' (*OA*, II: 315) testifies to the extent to which a 'vocabulaire des temps les plus aigris de la Révolution' (*HV*, 1405) remained common discursive currency amongst the leftist intellectual elite of the July Monarchy. Faced with the disappointments of 1830, 'le quatre-vingt-treizisme des vaincus de Juillet', as Furet would have it, is 'l'inventaire d'une promesse avortée et d'une société à refaire'.³ The work at the heart of Sand and de Bourges's heated exchange was the Italian writer and agitator Philippe [Filippo] Buonarroti's 1828 *Histoire de la conspiration pour l'égalité dite de Babeuf*, written in French and published

² George Sand, *La Mare au Diable*, ed. by Léon Cellier (Gallimard, 1973), p. 27.

³ François Furet, *La Révolution française* (Gallimard, 2007), p. 849.

upon his return from exile.⁴ For J.L. Talmon, ‘Babouvism as a theory and legend owes probably more to Philippe Buonarroti than to Babeuf’.⁵ An insider’s account of the 1796 Conspiracy of Equals, ‘whose realities were seen through intervening experience, and transformed by the desire to speak to a newly rising revolutionary and socialist generation’,⁶ this was a ‘practical handbook for revolutionaries [...], much admired later in the century by anarchists’ (75),⁷ in Evans’s words. More significantly, though, Buonarroti’s text bequeathed to the July Monarchy an account of a minor episode of the French Revolution that, as a consequence, came to be staged as a major precursor of European socialism as it developed in the nineteenth century. Buonarroti was, to borrow James Billington’s neat characterization, ‘a kind of Plato to Babeuf’s Socrates – recording the teachings and martyrdom of the master for posterity’.⁸

In the autumn of 1795, an uneasy alliance of various critics of the government, comprising both critical supporters and outright opponents, had attempted to revive the Jacobin tradition of revolutionary clubs. The Panthéon Club, so named after its meeting place in the Latin Quarter, took as its explicit political reference point the constitution of 1793, based on universal (male) suffrage and the right to instruction, work, public assistance and insurrection. This soon attracted the attention of the authorities, and was closed down in February 1796, with a certain General Bonaparte personally supervising the operation. Forced underground, a number of former members set up the *Directoire secret du salut public*, soon rebaptised as the *Comité insurrecteur*, on 30th March 1796. With Babeuf at its centre, the committee comprised Buonarroti, veteran of the storming of the Bastille Augustin Darthé, and Sylvain Maréchal, amongst others. There were significant political divergences between the various members. Darthé, for example, advocated something closer to Jacobin authoritarianism than to Babeuf’s brand of proto–communism, whilst Maréchal was effectively an anarchist.⁹ In the short term, the conspirators aimed simply to generate popular insurrection to overthrow the Directory and install a new government. Their long–term

⁴ The 1890 *Catalogue de la bibliothèque de Nohant*, published as the estate’s contents were auctioned off following the death of Maurice Sand, does not attest to a copy of Buonarroti’s book. On Buonarroti’s life and thought, see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The First Professional Revolutionist: Filippo Michele Buonarroti (1761–1837)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

⁵ J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Secker & Warburg, 1952), p. 174. For Roberts, too, ‘before Buonarroti wrote, Babeuf was almost forgotten’ (244).

⁶ Robert Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 553.

⁷ Mikhail Bakunin, for example, spoke highly of Babeuf and Buonarroti, terming the latter ‘the greatest conspirator of this century’. Thanks to Buonarroti, Bakunin writes, Babeuf’s ‘ideal of a socialist republic [...] was transmitted as a sacred trust to new generations, and, owing to the secret societies which he founded in Belgium and France, Communist ideas blossomed forth in the popular imagination’ (*The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, ed. by G.P. Maximoff [New York: Glencoe, 1953], p. 277).

⁸ James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic, 1980), p. 87.

⁹ On Maréchal’s thought, see, for example, Sanja Perovic, *The Calendar in Revolutionary France: Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 53–86.

objectives, most notably with regard to the status of the 1793 Constitution as an end in itself or a means to something more radical, bearing on the question of private property and the collective administration of the production and distribution of goods, are less easily established. These had remained incompletely defined when the conspiracy was denounced and dismantled in May 1796.

What remains certain, however, is that this post-Revolutionary embrace of the plot in the name of the Republic constituted a kind of epistemic break in the radical Left's forms of organization and self-conceptualization. If the Jacobin politics of open, direct democracy had taken as its corollary a tradition of *sociétés populaires* and public debate, the dominant republican political language of 1789, as Thomas Kaiser reminds us, 'most commonly represented "conspiracy" as the preferred weapon of "despotism"'. Both, Kaiser continues, 'were antithetical to the Revolution: secretive, whereas the Revolution was transparent; corrupt, whereas the Revolution was virtuous; aristocratic, whereas the Revolution was popular; and retrograde, whereas the Revolution was progressive'.¹⁰ Faced with the failure of the Conspiracy of Equals, a number of historians have argued for the fundamental incompatibility of secrecy and the radical republicanism to which Babeuf gave voice. For Richard Andrews, the Equals were 'prisonniers de leur formation et des sites de leur action [...], incapables d'opérer la mutation de leurs identités et de leur comportement'.¹¹ Theirs, he suggests, was a world characterized by 'une absence de renouvellement et d'adaptation. Doublement axé sur une nostalgie aiguë et un rêve millénaire, il était le fait d'hommes écartelés entre un passé mort et un avenir imaginaire, d'hommes sans présent' (105). Marc Sageman's recent genealogy of terrorism argues that 'the transparent culture of former *sans-culottes* was not compatible with a clandestine conspiracy',¹² whilst, for Pierre Serna, too, Babeuf 'combat à visage découvert. Pour Babeuf, la démocratie est liée aux principes de la publicité. Elle est l'opposée de la société secrète et ne saurait fonctionner que dans l'énoncé de lois universelles'.¹³ Yet, *pace* Andrews, Sageman and Serna, the fact remains that with Babeuf, we witness a turning point in the genealogy of post-Revolutionary conspiracy thinking. His radicalism emerges not just in his advocacy of a primitive form of 'communism', to which I return presently, but in his inversion of a dominant discourse of the Revolution, which had contended that

¹⁰ Thomas E. Kaiser, 'Catalina's revenge: conspiracy, revolution, and historical consciousness from the *ancien régime* to the Consulate', in Campbell, Kaiser and Linton (eds.), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, pp. 189–216 (pp. 189–90).

¹¹ Richard Andrews, 'Réflexions sur la Conjuration des Égaux', *Annales*, 29.1 (Jan.–Feb. 1974), 73–106 (p. 99).

¹² Marc Sageman, *Turning to Political Violence: The Emergence of Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), p. 100.

¹³ Pierre Serna, 'Pistes de recherche: du secret de la monarchie à la république des secrets', in *Secret et République, 1795–1840*, ed. by Pierre Serna and Bernard Gainot (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2004), pp. 13–38 (p. 32).

conspiracy was antithetical to the republican watchwords of transparency and democracy. Rather, it is ‘benign conspiracy’,¹⁴ committed to radical egalitarianism, that comes to be framed as the only hope for the fulfilment of the uncompleted agenda of 1789.

Babeuf and his collaborators were formally indicted for ‘conspiration tendant au renversement de la constitution actuelle [de 1795], au rétablissement de celle de 1793, à la destruction du Corps législatif, et du Directoire exécutif, à la mutation des autorités civiles et militaires, d’armer les citoyens les uns contre les autres, et au pillage des propriétés’.¹⁵ Due to the politically sensitive nature of the trial, it was decided that the case would be heard by the Haute Cour sitting at Vendôme, a small town some hundred miles to the south–west of Paris. (Not least amongst these political concerns was the presence amongst the accused of Jean–Baptiste Drouet, an elected member of the Convention who, in his previous life as a postmaster, had become a revolutionary hero when he recognised the royal family during their attempted flight in 1791.) Proceedings began on 20th February 1797, with 47 prisoners in court and 18 (including Drouet) tried *in absentia*. The trial was to make legal history as the first at which a verbatim record was kept by stenographers. With the exception of Darthé, who refused to recognise the authority of the court and took no part in proceedings other than to make statements on his own terms, the core conspirators – namely Babeuf, Buonarroti, and Charles Germain, whom Babeuf had met during an earlier period of imprisonment – adopted a curious defence strategy.¹⁶ This was to plead not guilty, whilst nonetheless explaining why it was legitimate to conspire to egalitarian ends. Whilst flatly denying any realisation of their principles, they sought to justify conspiracy as a philosophical project in the face of despotism: thus, accused of the ‘création d’un directoire insurrecteur’, Babeuf argues that ‘tout cela n’a existé qu’en imagination et en simple projet, et [...] ne fut autre chose qu’un simple rêve philanthropique’. This, he attempts to show, was something quite different from ‘un complot formé, sérieusement arrêté et déterminément mis en action’.¹⁷ Quoting from Gabriel Bonnot de Mably’s treatise *Des droits et des devoirs du citoyen* (1758), Babeuf told the court:

¹⁴ Peter Campbell, Thomas Kaiser and Marisa Linton (eds.), ‘Introduction: conspiracy issues and debates’, in *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, pp. 1–14 (p. 11).

¹⁵ *Débats du procès instruit par la Haute–Cour de Justice, séante à Vendôme, contre Drouet, Babœuf et autres, recueillis par des sténographes*, 4 vols (Baudoin, 1797), IV, 251. Hereafter, *Débats*.

¹⁶ For detailed discussion of the defendants’ tactics, see Ian Birchall, ‘The Vendôme Defence Strategy’, *British Journal for Eighteenth–Century Studies*, 20 (1997), 141–53. In the only analysis to engage in detail with the paradoxes of the democratic Equals’ rejection of transparency, Laura Mason has examined this strategy in light of the question of intent and the nature of revolutionary jury trials. See ‘Never was a plot so holy: Gracchus Babeuf and the End of the French Revolution’, in Campbell, Kaiser and Linton (eds.), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, pp. 172–88 (pp. 178–85).

¹⁷ Quoted in Victor Advielle, *Histoire de Gracchus Babeuf et du babouvisme*, 2 vols (Éditions du CTHS, 1990), II, 127.

Tout citoyen a droit d'aspirer au gouvernement le plus propre à faire le bonheur public, et il est de son devoir de travailler à l'établir par tous les moyens que lui peut fournir la prudence [...]. Je conclus donc qu'un citoyen n'est ni un conjuré, ni un perturbateur du repos public, s'il propose à ses compatriotes une forme de politique plus sage que celle qu'ils ont adoptée librement, ou que les événements, les passions et les circonstances ont insensiblement établie. (*Débats*, II: 303)

Buonarroti, too, sought to emphasise the question of intent, putting forward a working definition of conspiracy (*la conspiration*) as 'une réunion de volontés et de forces pour l'exécution d'un projet contraire aux lois'. Yet 'avec une pareille définition', he adds, 'les plus légers mécontentements, les moindres velléités, les projets les plus romanesques deviennent des crimes sévèrement punissables' (IV: 253). Something more, then, was needed 'pour constituer une conspiration véritablement criminelle' (254). With masterful use of anaphora, Germain would also attack from this angle, redefining the notion of conspiracy whilst suggesting that such activity was necessary to defend the gains of 1789:

Est-ce conspirer que d'être douloureusement affecté de la misère du peuple [...] ? Est-ce conspirer que de s'indigner de la renaissance audacieuse et rapide des abus que la tyrannie faisait peser sur la France, de la rentrée des émigrés, des cris séditieux des prêtres et de leurs fanatiques prosélytes [...] ? Est-ce conspirer que d'avoir l'œil ouvert sans cesse sur le monstre du royalisme, sur ses menées, ses démarches, ses trames, à l'effet de l'empêcher de consommer son crime, s'il devenait jamais assez hardi pour entreprendre quelque chose contre la liberté ? Le jour où l'on déclarerait que c'est là conspirer, la République serait anéantie, la liberté s'enfuirait loin de nos contrées, et une servitude plus odieuse mille fois que celle de 88 étendrait ses dures chaînes sur tous les Français. (II: 151)

Setting the worthy yet clandestine activism of the Equals against the nefarious 'menées', 'démarches' and 'trames' of the Republic's enemies, Germain stages a chain of conspirators as the antidote to the 'dures chaînes' of the *ancien régime*. Through a marriage of denials of outright involvement and justifications of hypothetical conspiracy, the defendants thus appealed to the legacy of Revolution to argue for the possibility of well-intentioned, secret organization.

Unlike Babeuf and his co-conspirators, Sand refuses to sanction revolutionary violence. In her recollections of the attempted insurrection of the Société des saisons, led by Barbès and Blanqui in May 1839, she argues that 'le conspirateur n'est [...] pas à la hauteur de sa mission quand il manque de sagesse, de clairvoyance et de ce génie particulier qui devine l'issue nécessaire des événements' (*HV*, 1489). Conspiracy calls for both clear-sightedness and level-headedness, for immunity to the attractions of revolutionary celebrity: 'C'est une chose si grave que de jeter un

peuple, et même une petite fraction du peuple, dans l'arène sanglante des révolutions, qu'il n'est pas permis de céder à l'instinct du sacrifice, à l'enthousiasme du martyr, aux illusions de la foi la plus pure et la plus sublime' (1481). Yet she nonetheless concedes to de Bourges that the Babouvist credo, crystallized 'au pied de l'échafaud où montèrent, déjà frappés de leur propre main, l'enthousiaste Gracchus et le stoïque Darthé', might have contained '[de] grandes lueurs de vérité et de touchantes aspirations vers l'idéal' (1392). Bringing together the optical meta-language of literary realism and a more familiar vocabulary of the ideal, Sand's conciliatory characterization of the Babeuf plot bespeaks a duality that comes to inform her understanding of the conspiratorial. Secret association emerges as an idealist *Realpolitik* in the service of egalitarian goals and the social contract, a virtuous struggle and the inevitable recourse of an oppressed people striving for equality and self-determination. Implemented responsibly, the notion of conspiring to egalitarian ends, ultimately, forms the cornerstone of Sand's philosophy of history. This, I show, with reference to *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), is centred on the dialectical interplay of 'la lutte de l'égalité qui veut s'établir, contre l'inégalité qui veut se maintenir',¹⁸ as she writes in *Jean Ziska* (1843).¹⁹ Dismantling the discursive antinomy of 'conspiracy' and 'republicanism', Sand attempts to surmount a definitional quandary to recast the conspiratorial along ethical lines. The result of this, I demonstrate, is the elaboration of a republican philosophy of conspiracy, centred on the legacy of 1789, that stressed the responsibility of the activist in times of crisis.

The Afterlife of a Conspiracy

With Babeuf's execution on 27th May 1797, the Directory seemed to have finally succeeded in silencing this perennial agitator. Yet, with his memory revived for a new generation thanks to Buonarroti, competing July Monarchy discourses on the Revolution took as their lightning rod the leader of this 'stillborn conspiracy'²⁰ – in spite of its status as, in the unsympathetic assessment of one commentator, 'a pitiful failure and a historical dead end'.²¹ Babeuf sits at the centre of those

¹⁸ George Sand, *Jean Ziska: épisode de la guerre des Hussites* (Brussels: Muquardt, 1843), p. 26.

¹⁹ Marx cites *Jean Ziska* in the closing lines of his critique of Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy*: 'It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions. Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: *Le combat ou la mort ; la lutte sanguinaire ou le néant. C'est ainsi que la question est invinciblement posée* (George Sand)' (*MECW*, VI: 212. Original emphasis.). I return to *Jean Ziska* in the next chapter.

²⁰ François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 179.

²¹ R.B. Rose, 'Babeuf, dictatorship and democracy', *Historical Studies*, 15.58 (1972), 223–36 (p. 224). Cf. Richard Cobb, who asserts that 'the Babeuf Plot [...] has never ceased to plague and bore historians right

three traditions of interpretation that we might schematize as conservative, liberal and socialist. For Furet, the ‘trois solutions [qui] s’offrent aux générations qui suivent l’effondrement de l’Empire dans la politique française’ consisted of the following options: ‘défaire la Révolution, ou la parfaire, ou la refaire’.²² To the first of these, Babeuf is the ‘grand apôtre du communisme autoritaire’,²³ in Hippolyte Taine’s words, serving as a metonym for the blood-soaked end-point of an unreconstructed Jacobinism, the preserve of ‘violent men immune to the appeals of reason and moderation’.²⁴ For those partisans of a liberal interpretation of 1789, he came to incarnate the extremism from which they sought to dissociate themselves whilst defending the gains of Revolution. For Guizot, for example, ‘corrompus ou trompés, les Directeurs avaient néanmoins protégé le repos de la société frémissantes contre les criminelles folies de Babeuf.’²⁵ Similarly, his, we might note, is the first proper name to make an appearance in Michelet’s *Histoire du XIX^e siècle*: ‘Né sous la Terreur de Babeuf’, Michelet writes in his Preface to the first volume, ‘je vois avant ma mort celle de l’Internationale’ (OCM, XXI: 57).

Of the greatest interest, though, is Babeuf’s reception by those for whom 1789 had been but a preparatory political revolution, with a greater, social revolution yet to come. As conservative fears of the subversive activities of secret societies grew stronger throughout the nineteenth century, the Babouvists were drawn into this widening circle thanks to Buonarroti’s reinvigoration of Babeuf’s reputation: returning to France from exile after the July Revolution of 1830, he found his work prized by socialists. Babeuf’s rather unsympathetic biographer, Édouard Fleury, decried this tendency in 1851:

Les socialistes, sous n’importe quel nom, Egalitaires, Fraternelles, Icariens, Fourieristes, Proudhonistes : les socialistes, pour nous servir d’une appellation générique, ont été couvés, élevés par Buonarroti [sic]. Pour nous, c’est encore Babœuf vivant de nos jours. C’est Babœuf avec cent têtes. C’est Babœuf qui tourmente notre époque avec plus de succès qu’il n’a tourmenté la sienne. C’est Babœuf après sa mort révolutionnant la société, ce qu’il n’avait pu faire de son vivant.²⁶

up to the present day’ (*The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789–1820* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970], p. 171).

²² François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture: The Transformation of Political Culture, 1789–1848* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), p. 507.

²³ Hippolyte Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine: la Révolution* (Hachette, 1899), p. 6.

²⁴ Isser Woloch, *Napoleon and His Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship* (W.W. Norton, 2002), pp. 68–69.

²⁵ François Guizot, *L’Histoire de France depuis 1789 jusqu’en 1848 racontée à mes petits-enfants, leçons recueillies par M^{me} de Witt, née Guizot*, 2 vols (Hachette, 1878–79), I (1878), 382.

²⁶ Édouard Fleury, *Babœuf et le socialisme en 1796* (Didier, 1851), pp. 351–52.

Not least amongst these thinkers were Marx and Engels. Scholars concerned with the origins of the revolutionary socialist tradition have seized on the prestige accorded to Babouvism in a short but telling paragraph of *The Holy Family*, their 1844 polemic against Bruno Bauer and his fellow Young Hegelian supporters:

The French Revolution gave birth to notions which went beyond the ideas of the established state of things. The revolutionary movement, which began in 1789 with the Cercle Social [...] and which ended in Babeuf's conspiracy, gave birth to the Communist idea which Buonarroti, friend of Babeuf, reintroduced into France after the Revolution of 1830. This idea, enhanced by its consequences, is the idea of the new state of things. (MECW, IV: 119)

If Babeuf's appearance in *The Holy Family* has received the most critical attention, there is, however, an earlier reference to be found in the work of the two thinkers, which proleptically figures this portrayal of Babouvism as an embryonic communism. In a newspaper article of November 1843, Engels explicitly evokes Buonarroti's book in terms which suggest that the latter's account of the conspiracy had already gained a certain notoriety. Aligning Napoleon with 'an undisguised despotism' and Babeuf with 'real liberty, and real equality – that is, Communism', Engels writes: 'I think I may be short upon the subject of Babouvism, as the history of his conspiracy, by Buonarroti, has been translated into the English language. The Communist plot did not succeed, because the then Communism itself was of a very rough and superficial kind; and because, on the other hand, the public mind was not yet far enough advanced' (III: 393–94).²⁷ The section entitled 'Critical–Utopian Socialism and Communism' of the 1848 *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, too, ring-fences Babeuf's project off from the criticisms directed at his compatriots, the utopian *phalanstères* of Fourier and Cabet's *Icaria*. 'We do not', Marx and Engels write in their opening lines, 'here refer to that literature which, in every great modern revolution, has always given voice to the demands of the proletariat, such as the writings of Babeuf and others' (VI: 514).

Unsurprisingly, much critical ink has been spilled over the relationship between a developed Communism and Babeuf's doctrine of revolutionary egalitarianism elaborated in the context of a pre-industrial economy.²⁸ This vein of scholarship pits those who align him with a classic utopian communism, ascetic and agrarian, against those who argue that his was a forward-looking credo. Following this second critical narrative, there emerges a vision of a Babouvian

²⁷ Although difficult to date with any certainty, it is likely that Marx read the original, French version of Buonarroti's book some months later, in the summer of 1844.

²⁸ For an overview of this debate, see Patrice Higonnet, 'Babeuf: Communist or Proto-Communist?', *Journal of Modern History*, 51.4 (Dec. 1979), 773–81.

communism sensitive to the possibility of a collective organization of production, anticipating the ‘scientific’ socialism of Marx and Engels in its materialist understanding of the impact of nascent capitalism on the rural French economy. At issue, too, is the question of Babeuf’s ultimate advocacy of revolutionary dictatorship by an élite, which has brought together scholars across the political spectrum, from the far-left perspective of dissident Marxists Daniel Guérin and Herbert Marcuse to the conservatism of Talmon.²⁹ For the latter, writing at the peak of the Cold War, there was a ‘living and unbroken tradition’ running from ‘the Babouvist scheme of an egalitarian communist society’ to ‘modern political Messianism’ (249) – that is, Stalinism. In Talmon’s tripartite schematization of the stages of slippage from Enlightenment social ideals to the totalitarian democracy of his title, Babeuf occupies a prime position: ‘these stages’, he writes, ‘are taken to be three: the eighteenth-century postulate, the Jacobin improvisation, and the Babouvist crystallization; all leading up to the emergence of economic communism on the one hand, and to the synthesis of popular sovereignty and single-party dictatorship on the other’ (6).

Yet regardless of ideological colouring, these analyses concentrate exclusively on Babeuf’s economic thought, neglecting the significance of the conspiratorial to his radical egalitarian project. Conspiracy is treated as the simple means to an end (that of transforming the community of goods from utopian fantasy to social fact), and consequently devalued or excluded altogether as an object of study. In so doing, this chapter suggests, existing studies have failed to fully acknowledge Babeuf and Buonarroti’s place in an ongoing nineteenth-century debate surrounding conspiratorial organization and leftist political activism. This, I show, plays out across the ‘direct dialogue’ that Cohen, with particular reference to Sand, discerns between ‘sentimental social novelists and political theorists interested in a community beyond social division’ (157). No longer synonymous with malevolence, deceit and corruption, conspiracy for Sand, this chapter argues, operates through the idealization of the secret society motif. Conspiring to egalitarian ends, in that vein opened most radically by Babeuf, is, ultimately, ‘an ideal to empower and to mobilize the disenfranchised’,³⁰ inextricably bound up with social consciousness.

How, in this light, to situate the present analysis with regard to existing literary scholarship? For, if we are confronted with a divergent definition of conspiracy, divorced from connotations of deceit and destruction, Sand’s meta-textual proclivity for the ideal and the sentimental has also provided critics with a ready lexicon for the articulation of difference as it bears on both gender

²⁹ See Daniel Guérin, *La Lutte des classes sous la première République, 1793–1797*, 2 vols (Gallimard, 1968); Babeuf, *The Defense of Gracchus Babeuf Before the High Court of Vendôme*, ed. and trans. by John A. Scott, with an essay by Herbert Marcuse (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), pp. 96–105; and Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, pp. 201–21.

³⁰ Schor, *George Sand and Idealism*, p. 14.

and genre. In her revisionist archaeology of the modern French novel, which marries Bourdieusian insights with feminist literary history, Cohen turns to its ‘sentimental education’ in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Female novelists, she argues, were instrumental in forging a form that was realism’s ‘principal competition’ (8) throughout the 1830s and 40s, the ‘sentimental social novel’. Her study argues that the most pressing problem writers confronted was that of unequal social division, with the events surrounding the July Revolution revealing the shortcomings of the compensations early nineteenth-century sentimentality had offered for one of the great impasses of Revolutionary ideology. This was the reconciliation of the citizen’s ‘negative’ rights to life, liberty and happiness with the ‘positive’ rights to participate in decisions concerning the welfare of the collective. In a post-1830 world in which an Enlightenment distance between aesthetics and politics no longer held, novelists, Cohen suggests, were newly authorized to intervene in political culture. If Cohen accords much importance to Sand in her analysis of the ‘paradigm of women’s absence from the great nineteenth-century realist lineage’ (24), her take on the Sandian embrace of ‘sympathetic community as a response to unequal social division’ (157), this chapter demonstrates, can be further nuanced with reference to conspiratorial association.

If Cohen’s study has become an indispensable point of reference in the writing of a feminist literary history of nineteenth-century France, it takes as its correlate Schor’s seminal work on Sand and idealism.³¹ In her inquiry into the politics of inclusion and exclusion of the French canon, Schor examines the way in which the gendering of aesthetic categories impinges on the valorization – or lack thereof – of female-authored texts. Sand, she suggests, ‘names [...] a moment of linkage between the feminine and the ideal’ (21). For Schor, what has been occluded by the equation of idealism with high German philosophy, and reinforced by the scientific Marxist critique of utopian socialism, is the ‘transformative, revolutionary’ potential of idealism. ‘Sandian idealism’, she concludes, ‘is a politics at least as much as an aesthetics’ (14). In a similar vein, Cohen writes, ‘the sufferings of individuals in dominated social positions are the “ideas” [*idées*] that led contemporaries to qualify the sentimental social novel as a literature of ideas’ (135). Yet, she argues, the usage of the term to designate an overt engagement with political and social issues is absent from Schor’s situation of Sandian generic practice within nineteenth-century philosophical discourses (135 n. 43). Schor’s magisterial analysis of Sand’s attempt to engineer the transcendence of class difference through marriage in *Le Compagnon* seems to suggest that this absence is perhaps less glaring than Cohen would have it. What is certain, however, is that both studies elide the

³¹ If Schor’s work has been indispensable in the recanonization of Sand, Jean-Marie Seillan’s recent study has argued for the importance of moving beyond this reference point to examine a wider corpus of idealist authors. See *Le Roman idéaliste dans le second XIX^e siècle: littérature ou ‘bouillon de veau’?* (Classiques Garnier, 2012).

significance of the secret society motif for Sand's politics and poetics, be they critically articulated in a language of 'sentimentality' or of 'idealism'. The conspiratorial substrate of Sand's philosophy of history, then, remains to be explored. Working both with and against Cohen and Schor, this chapter contends that examining the secret society in its Sandian guise allows for the rediscovery of the political and counter-discursive thrust both of her strategic idealizations and, more broadly, of conspiracy itself.

Artisan Socialism: Perdiguier, Sand, Rancière

In the 'Avant-propos' to *Le Compagnon*, Sand laments that 'les historiens ont trop été jusqu'ici cet observateur superficiel dont l'œil s'arrête à la surface des choses'. 'Que de peines ils se donnent souvent pour parer des cadavres !', she continues. 'Que ne s'occupent-ils plutôt à percer le mystère de ce qui s'agite et vit dans ces cadavres [...] ! Il y a des instants, dans l'histoire des empires, où la société générale n'existe plus que nominalement, et où il n'y a réellement de vivant que les sectes cachées en son sein' (40). Inequality emerges as something of a creeping rigor mortis, slowly paralysing 'general' or 'official' society. It is, then, only in the affinities born of conspiratorial association that one might find a pulse. The Sandian secret society is homeostatic, re-orienting the body politic towards egalitarian equilibrium:

Les sociétés secrètes ont été jusqu'ici une nécessité des empires. L'inégalité régnant dans ces empires, l'égalité a dû nécessairement chercher l'ombre et le mystère pour travailler à son œuvre divine [...]. On peut dire qu'il ne se commet pas dans les sociétés humaines, une seule injustice, une seule violation du principe de l'égalité, qu'à l'instant même il n'y ait un germe de société secrète implanté aussi dans le monde, pour réparer cette injustice et punir cette violation de l'égalité.³²

This form of class-conscious, clandestine sociability is, she asserts, 'le résultat nécessaire de l'imperfection de la société générale' (41). Scholarship has nonetheless been slow to engage with the conspiracy motif in her writings. In spite of Sand's class-conscious definition of the secret society, this is all the more true for those 'roman socialistes' identified by Michèle Hecquet.³³ Of the limited existing studies of Sand's treatment of the motif, focus has disproportionately fallen on

³² George Sand, *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès (Librairie Générale Française, 2004), pp. 39–40.

³³ See Michèle Hecquet, *Poétique de la parabole: les romans socialistes de George Sand, 1840–1845* (Klincksieck, 1992).

the internecine wars between journeymen's trade organizations (known as *compagnonnages* in France and *Gesellenverbände* in Germany), staged in *Le Compagnon* and its paratexts.³⁴ Brigitte Lane, for example, proffers the rather lukewarm assertion that Sand's recourse to such 'mouvements issus de sociétés secrètes' allows the author to imbue her text with a certain 'exotisme'.³⁵ 'Le mystère régnant autour de ces deux groupes', she suggests, 'ne pourra que séduire son public éduqué tout en permettant à l'auteur de valoriser ses personnages qui se trouvent ainsi auréolés d'un mystère (et, dans le cas de la tradition compagnonnique, d'une mystique)' (46). Others have rightly sought to emphasise the supra-commercial import of the Sandian deployment of the secret society motif. Pierre Reboul adopts a genetic approach, examining the manuscript of *Le Compagnon* and its suppressed ending,³⁶ whilst Bernard highlights the significance – and ultimate reconciliatory inadequacy – of the familial metaphoricity of 'les "frères" compagnons' in a nation that no longer looked to the king as father.³⁷ Indeed, for Hecquet, Sand is 'de nos grands romanciers du XIX^e siècle celle qui a le plus largement reconnu le fait politique, la réalité populaire des sociétés secrètes'. 'L'introduction de ce motif éminemment romanesque', she justly notes, 'est d'abord une prise en compte des réalités sociales méconnues'.³⁸

More akin to a *société à secret* (structured around hierarchies of knowledge) than a *société secrète* (whose very existence must remain hidden), the figure of the *société compagnonnique* undeniably provides a ready way into the politics of representation of what Claire White has called 'Sand's novel of artisanal labour'.³⁹ Sand's correspondence testifies abundantly to the influence of the *compagnon menuisier* Agricol Perdiguier, whose 1839 *Livre du compagnonnage* had enjoyed unanticipated success amongst socialists and bourgeois moralists alike.⁴⁰ For a disdainful Maupassant, Sand 'accompli[ssait] [l]e métier superbe de pondeur d'idées, comme un menuisier fait des tables, avec

³⁴ See, for example, Martine Watrelot, *Le Rabot et la plume: le compagnonnage littéraire au temps du romantisme populaire* (Lille: Atelier national de la reproduction des thèses, 2000).

³⁵ Brigitte Lane, 'Mystique ouvrière et utopie sociale dans *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*: le "mariage" du Christ et la (recon)naissance du "peuple-roi", deux contrats sociaux impossibles', *George Sand Studies*, 14.1–2 (Autumn 1995), 45–58 (p. 46).

³⁶ See Pierre Reboul, 'Intrigue et socialisme dans *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*', *Romantisme*, 16 (1977), 56–63. In light of the novel's concern with the conspiratorial, it is curious that Reboul neglects to highlight the semantic plurality of the word 'intrigue'.

³⁷ Claudie Bernard, 'Association et alliance dans *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*', *George Sand Studies*, 20.1–2 (2001), 38–65 (p. 54).

³⁸ Michèle Hecquet, 'Situation de l'Avant-propos', in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France de George Sand*, ed. by Michèle Hecquet and Martine Watrelot (Lille: Université Charles de Gaulle–Lille III, 2009), pp. 61–69 (p. 64).

³⁹ Claire White, *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture: Time, Politics and Class* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 24.

⁴⁰ See William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 222; and Cynthia Truant, *The Rites of Labor: Brotherhoods of Compagnonnage in Old and New Regime France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 252–55.

la pensée constante de l'argent gagné'.⁴¹ She was of course, known for her deep pockets when it came to the defence and assistance of the artisanal classes – to the extent that, in his introduction to the writings of Gabriel Gauny, 'face à ombre' of Perdiguier and the social Romantic ideal of the noble artisan, Jacques Rancière writes of those who sought to 'mont[er] l'escalier de George Sand, la protectrice des écrivains ouvriers'.⁴² (The staircase, of course, is the master figure of *Le Compagnon*, both a canvas for the noble artisan's talent and a ready metaphor for the upward mobility and human perfectibility possible in an ideal, post-class society.) Yet her relationship with Perdiguier, as Bettina Lerner has recently argued, went beyond that of one-sided literary patronage.⁴³ Notably for our purposes, Martine Reid's authoritative biography of the novelist pinpoints their relationship as a turning point in the formation of the Sandian conspiratorial imagination. 'Avec lui [Perdiguier]', Reid suggests, 'elle apprend le fonctionnement du compagnonnage, son histoire et ses traditions. Son goût des sociétés secrètes, de l'illuminisme, de la franc-maçonnerie et du carbonarisme s'en trouve ravivé.'⁴⁴ It would be several years before Freemasonry and Bavarian Illuminism received their full novelistic treatment in the *Consuelo* cycle, which I discuss in the final chapter of the present study. Carbonarism, though, was already very much on the Sandian agenda. In light of Reid's insightful observation, the critical neglect of Sand's engagement with this underground inflexion of Restoration liberalism is all the more surprising.

Writing in August 1840, Sand is effusive in her praise of the *Livre du compagnonnage*, aligning her correspondent with the inspirations of the writerly muse: 'Je suis très occupée d'un roman qui est plus qu'à moitié fait, et qui sera lu, j'espère, sur le Tour de France. C'est votre livre qui me l'a inspiré, et s'il y a quelque poésie et quelque bon principe l'honneur vous en revient' (*Corr. Sand*, V: 105). The following month, she continues to Ange Guépin:

Le roman que j'écris est presque fini, mais il n'est que le frontispice d'un recueil plus étendu et qui paraîtra en plusieurs séries (toujours sous forme de roman), et marquant une succession de sentiments et d'idées chez le prolétaire. Je n'ai eu ici pour guide que le petit livre d'*Agricol Perdiguier* sur le compagnonnage, et j'y ai trouvé assez de poésie forte et vraie, assez de vues droites, et d'assez généreux sentiments pour défrayer deux volumes d'imagination. (135, original emphasis)

The proof, Sand asserts, 'que je ne suis point refroidie dans mon amour pour l'égalité, le vrai, le juste et la liberté' (107), *Le Compagnon* takes its cue from Perdiguier's quest to reconcile the warring

⁴¹ Guy de Maupassant, 'George Sand d'après ses lettres', *Le Gaulois*, 13th May 1882, pp. 1–2 (p. 2).

⁴² Gabriel Gauny, *Le Philosophe plébéen*, ed. by Jacques Rancière (La Découverte/Maspéro, 1983), p. 5.

⁴³ See Bettina Lerner, *Inventing the Popular: Printing, Politics, and Poetics* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 193–255.

⁴⁴ Martine Reid, *George Sand* (Gallimard, 2013), p. 162.

factions of a fractious journeymen's movement, divided into three competing orders (the Enfants de Maître Jacques, the Enfants de Salomon, and the Enfants de Père Soubise). 'Je le livre à l'impression', he puns of his exemplary tale of enmity reconciled between two brothers from rival *devoirs*. 'Puissent les ouvriers le lire avec plaisir ! et je promets bien de reprendre un jour la plume, non pour faire des phrases pures et élégantes, chose dont je me sens incapable, vu mon ignorance et mon peu d'habitude d'écrire, mais pour dire de bonnes vérités et opérer quelque bien, si cela m'est possible.'⁴⁵ Not least amongst those 'impressed', needless to say, was Sand. Indeed, in ventriloquizing the carpenter's conviction that recalcitrant splinter groups of *compagnons* should 's'unir à la masse pour ne former qu'un tout compacte et solide, [...] une alliance intime et durable' (207), *Le Compagnon* looks to Perdiguier as a model for its noble-hearted, working-class hero Pierre Huguenin. Sand reveals herself to be keenly concerned with maintaining the reality effect – avoiding 'inexactitude' (*Corr. Sand*, V: 105), 'erreurs ou invraisemblances' (171), as she puts it in letters requesting Perdiguier's assistance as proofreader – whilst staging a modernized *compagnonnage* aligned with an Enlightenment faith in geometrical abstraction over traditional empiricism. (Pierre, we might recall, is nicknamed '*l'Ami-du-trait* à cause de [ses] connaissances en géométrie' [126, original emphasis].) The impressions gleaned from Perdiguier's reflections on secret societies, then, lie at the heart of a novel intimately bound up with the author's oft-expressed conviction that 'c'est dans le peuple, et dans la classe ouvrière surtout, qu'est l'avenir du monde' (*Corr. Sand*, V: 103).

Marrying a range of rhetorical and generic components,⁴⁶ *Le Livre du compagnonnage* sets out a programme to combat the social and economic instability which plagued France's workers. *Pace* those who rejected corporatism in favour of other kinds of association less indebted to a hierarchical *ancien régime* past, this upward levelling, Perdiguier argued, was best achieved through the revitalization of the centuries-old guild system that had been dismantled by the Revolution, notably the 1791 Loi Le Chapelier. Under Bonaparte and the restored Bourbons – that regime which, for Reid, 'pla[ce] l'Histoire sous le signe, significatif, mais politiquement difficile, de la

⁴⁵ Agricola Perdiguier, *Le Livre du Compagnon[n]age* (Pagnerre, 1841), pp. 206–07.

⁴⁶ These comprised: dialogues, generally between reactionary and enlightened *compagnons*; cautionary tales; model songs to reconfigure the ritual of *topage* along less conflictual lines; histories of *compagnonnage*; encomiastic letters; and treatises on architecture, geometry and drawing. On Sand's reworking of Perdiguier's account of *topage* in his 'Rencontre entre deux frères', see Martine Watrelot, 'Le Compagnon du Tour de France entre tradition et invention', in *George Sand: pratiques et imaginaires de l'écriture*, ed. by Brigitte Diaz and Isabelle Hoog-Naginski (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2006), pp. 107–17. The resolution of this parable effectively serves as a synecdoche for the book's overall aim of reuniting a fractious movement of artisan journeymen.

répétition⁴⁷ – these structures partially re-emerged in tandem with analogous organizations such as mutual-aid and philanthropic societies. If Perdiguier's manifesto sketches out a history of *compagnonnage* with origins dating back to biblical times, his immediate concern lies less in laying claim to the symbolic capital of the historian than in demonstrating the continued relevance of the trade association for the nineteenth-century worker. In his plea for unity beyond the 'mutual isolation, suspicion, and intense rivalry between trades', culminating in the threat of 'open warfare',⁴⁸ Perdiguier argues for a union based not on relation to the means of production, but on one's status as producer or consumer. In doing so, he seeks to situate his programme for labour reform within a broader framework: modernized and shorn of old rivalries, the particular declension of corporatist confraternity that was *compagnonnage* emerges as a prototype for an ideal form of political association that transcends class boundaries. Ventriloquized by a *compagnon* stonemason in *Le Livre du compagnonnage*, Perdiguier extrapolates from the bonds forged between journeymen of the same association to model a universal – if falsely so⁴⁹ – ideal of fraternal humanity:

Vous nourrissez entre vous, membres de la même Société, le sentiment de l'égalité, de la fraternité ; que ce sentiment soit étendu. Regardez également comme frères tous les ouvriers, tous les Français, tous les hommes qui ne sont point indignes d'en porter le nom. Votre dévouement est sans bornes pour le Compagnon[n]age que vous avez embrassé ; qu'il soit sans bornes pour la patrie, pour la cause de l'humanité. (96–97)

Felicitously published as concerns over the economic and moral status of France's working classes came to take centre stage in the public discourse of bourgeois intellectuals and reformers, Perdiguier's 'journeyman's primer',⁵⁰ in Walter Benjamin's terms, gave voice to the difficulties trade organizations experienced in recruiting members and sustaining their practices under Louis–

⁴⁷ Martine Reid, 'Introduction', in *Repenser la Restauration*, ed. by Jean-Yves Mollier, Martine Reid and Jean-Claude Yon (Nouveau Monde, 2005), pp. 7–13 (p. 7).

⁴⁸ Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, pp. 52, 54.

⁴⁹ The gendered nature of the brotherhood's false claim to universalism was not, we might reasonably speculate, lost on Sand. Pierre's social philosophy is rejected by the brotherhood of artisans as insufficiently virile: 'Si vous aviez affaire à des femmes', a fellow *compagnon* retorts, 'vous les feriez peut-être pleurer. Mais nous sommes des hommes, des enfants de Salomon' (192). Yet the 'tranquillité d'âme presque fraternelle' (457) that Yseult feels in Pierre's company is undermined by the modifier; their heterosexual attraction ultimately occludes any idealist recasting of the homosocial laws of fraternity. For a more sustained novelistic exploration of the heterosocial ideal of the mixed egalitarian secret society on Sand's part, one must turn to the Invisibles of *Consuelo–La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1842–44). On the claims laid by women to active participation in nineteenth-century fraternal orders, see Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, Fraternalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 178–210; and Máire Cross (ed.), *Gender and Fraternal Orders in Europe, 1300–2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 180–243.

⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedmann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 612.

Philippe's regime. 'This document', Benjamin asserts, 'shows that the moribund customs of the trade guilds were a breeding ground for secret societies' (612). This 'moribund' nature – or otherwise – of these practices has given rise to an extensive literature on the category of the 'worker' and discourses of class consciousness in France, with the figure of Perdiguier serving as a metonym for a wider historiographical debate. This debate concerning the patrician idealization of the working classes and, indeed, of work itself, I show in this chapter, is one proleptically figured in Sand's take on the secret societies of Restoration liberalism.

Compagnonnage and Class Consciousness

In his study of the language of labour in the period bookended by 1789 and 1848 – that 'ghost of the old revolution' (*MECW*, XI: 105), for Marx – William Sewell argues for a distinct artisan form of socialism which reached its apex in 1848. Positing a dialectic of corporatism and revolution, Sewell asserts that the idioms of the *ancien régime* guild system were recast into an egalitarian language of association. Workers' culture, he suggests, was defined by a persistent corporatist tradition that was decisively reshaped by the liberal conception of property and concomitant re-evaluation of labour that emerged from the events of 1789. The distinctive class ideology of the artisan that Sewell proposes, then, arose from an understanding of the right to association and a language of class conflict which married an entrenched corporatist mentality and a new relationship to property. The idea and 'idiom of association' (204) of workers' corporations made of their members the agents for the transformation of society, allowing them to marry the collectivism of the guild tradition with the egalitarianism born of 1789. Thus, Sewell argues, was born the artisan socialism and class consciousness that came to a head with the revolutions of 1848.

Other (pre-)histories of nineteenth-century French socialism have questioned Sewell's case for the persistence of corporatist idioms and traditions in working-class movements. Secretive artisanal fraternities, such accounts claim, were characterized less by cooperation than by conflict, with a negligible – even dissuasive – political influence on their constituent workers. Balzac himself would highlight this tendency in his prefatory musings to the *Histoire des Treize*. 'L'attachement des Compagnons à leurs lois est si passionné', he notes, 'que les diverses tribus se livrent entre elles de sanglants combats, afin de défendre quelques questions de principes.' In a comment almost worthy of the *bonnêtes gens* of Flaubert's *Dictionnaire*, he adds: 'heureusement pour l'ordre public actuel, quand un Dévorant est ambitieux, il construit des maisons, fait fortune, et quitte le Compagnonnage' (*CH*, V: 790). Alain Faure, too, writes of the 'tradition compagnonnique de lutte' or the 'rixé compagnonnique', arguing that the traditions of *compagnonnage* were, in fact, 'de[s] freins

à la participation [...] à l'agitation politique' in certain sectors.⁵¹ 'Les professions demeurant à dominante compagnonnique', he concludes, 'fournirent un nombre très faible de sectionnaires et d'insurgés' to the insurrectionary movements of the July Monarchy; ultimately, their 'participation aux luttes politiques était faible' (82). In his study of nineteenth-century artisan radicalism on both sides of the Channel, Iorweth Prothero also emphasises that the various forms of collective organisation developed by artisans are to be located in a 'context of insecurity and disunity'.⁵² If 'a very strong male camaraderie could [...] develop at the workplace', with 'close relations established' and 'workshop slang absorbed' (48), this unity was 'precarious and fragile, and in any case often contributed to wider disunity' (49). It was, then, not solidarity amongst the artisanal working classes but 'jealousy and division that characterised the world of labour' (47). 'Divisions and hierarchies in the workforce, and hostilities and conflicts between organisations' were the norm – 'none of them', Prothero notes, 'obvious sources of strength for radicalism' (46).

The most sustained and strident opposition to Sewell's thesis of the persistent corporatist traditions and mentalities at the root of nineteenth-century revolutionary militancy, though, is to be found with Rancière, perhaps the sharpest of the 'épines au flanc [de l'histoire sociale]'.⁵³ In an eclectic body of work spanning social history, literary and film criticism, and philosophical aesthetics, Rancière has consistently concerned himself with the study of workers' cultural production in nineteenth-century France,⁵⁴ seeking not to ventriloquize in the name of an abstracted *Ouvrier*, but to let these voices speak for themselves. Through the archival recovery of a corpus of forgotten works ('brochures, articles, lettres, poèmes, affiches') produced 'par des militants ouvriers pour exprimer les protestations et les aspirations de leur classe', he highlights the plurality of 'cet effort singulier d'une classe pour se nommer, pour exposer sa situation et répondre aux discours tenus sur elle'.⁵⁵ Pace Marx and Engels, Rancière insists that the artisanal classes had not, in fact, been held back by the aporias of utopian theories, 'le rendez-vous manqué

⁵¹ Alain Faure, 'Mouvements populaires et mouvement ouvrier à Paris (1830–1834)', *Le Mouvement social*, 88 (Jul. – Sep., 1974), 51–92 (pp. 63, 67, 80).

⁵² Iorweth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 49.

⁵³ I borrow this expression from Arlette Farge, for whom Rancière forms part of a counter-discursive garden of 'thorns' also comprising Foucault, Paul Veyne, and Italian microhistory. See 'L'Histoire sociale', in *L'Histoire et le métier d'historien en France 1945–1995*, ed. by François Bédarida (Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1995), pp. 281–300 (p. 290).

⁵⁴ For an overview of Rancière's understanding of working-class militancy in the nineteenth-century French context, see Bettina Lerner, 'Rancière's Nineteenth Century: Equality and Recognition in *Nights of Labor*', in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism*, ed. by Patrick Bray (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 33–49.

⁵⁵ Alain Faure and Jacques Rancière, *La Parole ouvrière, 1830–1851* (Union générale d'éditions, 1976), pp. 8, 10.

du prolétaire avec l'utopiste',⁵⁶ but were in fact deeply engaged in philosophical reflection on their condition. The truly radical nature of this class's claim to equality, as the very title of *La Nuit des prolétaires* (1981) suggests, is located in the temporal dimension of the protest of the worker–intellectual. Emancipation, then, is defined as the effort to 'gagner sur la nuit destinée à reproduire la force de travail le temps de lire, d'écrire ou de parler : d'écrire ou de parler non point en ouvrier mais comme tout autre'.⁵⁷ Revolutionary militancy born of class consciousness crystallizes not around the artisans' shared idiom of manual labour, as Sewell would have it, but in the space of intellectual freedom made possible by what Lynn Hunt and George Sheridan understand as a precise 'lack of commitment to the work itself'.⁵⁸

In the framework of their shared endeavour of rethinking working–class identity in nineteenth-century France, Rancière and Sewell engaged in an extended debate over what the former terms 'the myth of the artisan'.⁵⁹ Yet where the latter argues for the close imbrication of militancy and workers' secret societies, Rancière maintains that militant activity was 'perhaps inversely proportional to the organic cohesion of the trade, the strength of the organization and the ideology of the group' (4). If it is to Perdiguier that history has assigned the role of the 'archetypal militant artisan' (5), turning to art to vehicle his message of associational reform, Rancière is rather more circumspect in his assessment. What, he asks, are we to make of the fact that this 'proud artisan' sought to supplement his income by taking in lodgers and giving lessons as a self-styled 'professor of architecture', not hesitating to 'badger George Sand into giving his wife some sewing-work' (6)?⁶⁰ Reading the exhortations of *Le Livre du compagnonnage* against Perdiguier's 1846 *Biographie de l'auteur du 'Livre du compagnonnage'*, Rancière argues, reveals another side to the story, a demythologization of artisanal labour and identity. In a vocabulary familiar to the Sand scholar, he proposes a law of inverse proportionality: accordingly, 'the men who are the loudest in singing the glory of Work are those who have most intensely experienced *the degeneration of that ideal*' (6, emphasis added). The very activity of authorship, it is suggested, is itself significant,

⁵⁶ Jacques Rancière, 'Le Prolétaire et son double, ou Le Philosophe inconnu', *Les Révoltes logiques*, 13 (Winter 1980–81), 4–12 (p. 8).

⁵⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres* (Flammarion, 2007), pp. v–vi.

⁵⁸ Lynn Hunt and George Sheridan, 'Corporatism, Association, and the Language of Labor in France, 1750–1850', *Journal of Modern History*, 58.4 (Dec. 1986), 813–44 (p. 825).

⁵⁹ See Jacques Rancière, 'The Myth of the Artisan: Critical Reflections on a Category of Social History', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 24 (Fall 1983), 1–16. Sewell's rejoinder to Rancière's critique can be found in 'Response to J. Rancière "The Myth of the Artisan"', *Ibid.*, 17–20.

⁶⁰ Sand's correspondence attests to this service. On 20th August 1840, Sand writes to Perdiguier: 'Je compte lui donner [à votre femme] tout l'ouvrage d'aiguille qu'il y aura dans ma petite maison. Ce sera de quoi l'occuper pendant la morte saison, et cela me procurera le plaisir de la voir plus souvent' (*Corr. Sand*, V: 104).

for, if Perdiguier ‘takes up the pen to sing the glories of the work of the *compagnons* and to rebuke them for their quarrels, is it not also in order to escape this “glorious” work himself?’ (6). Rancière’s scare quotes are almost surplus to requirements; the unstable ideological foundations of Perdiguier’s status as the retrospectively anointed ‘hero and eulogist’ (6) of labour are belied by the divide the carpenter seems to reinforce between ‘useful’ work and aesthetic–intellectual activity.⁶¹ This schism, we might note, surfaces in *Le Compagnon* itself: Pierre’s exhortations to abandon ‘des chants de guerre et d’anathème’ (191), to ‘tenter, au lieu d’une épreuve douteuse, une paix honorable’ (190) between *devoirs*, are, for example, met with scorn. ‘Voilà un beau discours’, retorts a fellow journeyman:

Si tout le mérite d’un Compagnon est de connaître les livres et de parler comme eux, honneur à vous, pays Villepreux l’Ami-du-trait [...] ! Mais votre esprit s’est égaré dans les livres, et ceci doit servir d’enseignement à tous ceux qui ont entendu. Qui en sait trop, n’en sait pas assez ; et quiconque apprend beaucoup de choses inutiles, risque d’oublier les plus nécessaires, les plus sacrées. (192–93)

If Rancière gives short shrift to those worker–poets who, like Perdiguier, ‘[ont] monté l’escalier de George Sand’,⁶² the metaphor in which he couches his disdain is a telling one. Privileging the writings of carpenter Gauny, ‘[qui] a fait demi–tour avant le palier’ (5), Sand and Perdiguier, he concedes in *La Nuit des prolétaires*, ‘ont donné à sa profession sa dignité littéraire. C’est [...] par un tour de littérature que l’antithèse de l’ouvrier perdu doit être un menuisier philosophe.’⁶³ Yet the vertical metaphoricality of the Sandian staircase–as–social–ladder, it is suggested, betokens the hierarchies unwittingly upheld by her brand of social Romanticism. Gauny’s supposed ‘demi–tour’, then, gestures towards his unwillingness to perpetuate the myth of the glories and secrets of artisanal labour for a bourgeois readership, lamenting instead the incessant struggle to ‘dérober des lambeaux de loisir’ from the ‘frénésie d’activité tyrannique’ of the workshop.⁶⁴ Less interested in labour reform than in creative self–determination, Gauny, Rancière suggests, provides an explicitly temporal take on the issue of equality: his is not a suffering

⁶¹ In her analysis of a Sandian metapoetics of digging, White draws on Rancière to discuss this divide with particular reference to a number of the ‘worker–poets’ Sand assisted, including the stonemason Charles Poncy and the locksmith Jérôme Gilland. Far from a belaboured perfection of form *à la* Flaubert, Sand, White concludes, sought to distinguish her own art of writing from aestheticism’s account of formal artisanship. See ‘George Sand, Digging’, in *The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830–1919: Authorial Work Ethics*, ed. by Marcus Waithe and Claire White (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 61–78. See also Martine Reid, ‘George Sand: l’art et le métier’, in *L’Écrivain éditeur: XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, ed. by François Bessire (Geneva: Droz, 2002), pp. 57–75.

⁶² Gauny, *Le Philosophe plébéien*, p. 5.

⁶³ Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires: archives du rêve ouvrier* (Fayard, 2012), p. 61.

⁶⁴ Gabriel Gauny to Charles Poncy. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 61.

born of ‘la misère, les bas salaires, les logements inconfortables ou la faim toujours proche’ but of ‘la douleur du temps volé chaque jour à travailler le bois ou le fer, à coudre des habits ou à piquer des chaussures sans autre but que d’entretenir indéfiniment les forces de la servitude avec celles de la domination’ (v). In an 1844 letter to the stonemason Charles Poncy, Sand is scathing as to the ‘mauvaises rimes’ of the cobbler Savinien Lapointe and ‘la bourgeoisie littéraire qu’il fréquente et qu’il singe’ at the expense of his fellow ‘poètes [...] et penseurs prolétaires’ (*Corr. Sand*, VI: 410–11). Yet Rancière, echoing Baudelaire’s vehement condemnation of her ‘*style coulant*, cher aux bourgeois’,⁶⁵ ultimately turns to Gauny to tar her with the same brush. Neither militant socialist nor self-sacrificing noble artisan, Gauny, he argues, had little interest in appealing to figures such as Sand in cultivating a readership beyond the working classes. The nocturnal nature of Pierre’s ‘heures de mystérieuse étude’ (94) amongst Yseult’s books initially seems to trouble Rancière’s insistence that Perdiguier’s plea for labour reform was less revolutionary than Gauny’s defiance of the temporal divisions that excluded worker-poets from the aesthetic realm. ‘Mais’, the Sandian narrator concedes, ‘il ne fallait pas négliger le travail, et au bout de quelques séances nocturnes dans le cabinet de la tourelle, Pierre s’était aperçu qu’il avait la tête pesante et les bras engourdis le lendemain’ (93). Ultimately, then, it is suggested, the bourgeois novelist’s mythologization of artisanal labour in the proletarian literary field solidifies unequal social stratification at the expense of constructing, in Lerner’s words, any kind of ‘emancipatory space of cultural mixity’.⁶⁶

The critical path highlighting the fraught relationship of radical bourgeois culture to its proletarian counterpart is, of course, a well-trodden one. What seems to have escaped scholarly attention, however, is the manner in which the criticism Rancière makes of Sand aligns with that she herself levels at the other, less-studied secret society of *Le Compagnon*. This is the Carbonari, who, like the Sand of *Le Philosophe plébéien* and *La Nuit des prolétaires*, find themselves tasked with an inadvertent elitism and, to borrow Bernard’s terminology, a ‘philanthropie confuse’.⁶⁷ In her 1840 novel, Sand writes with the dissipated illusions of hindsight: hers is the Restoration of those who witnessed the failures of the Carbonari conspiracies of the early 1820s and, of course, the disappointments of 1830. *Le Compagnon* decries the fate of what had become, in the withered hands of ‘le vieux libéralisme’, ‘le crime d’association secrète, chose sainte et sacrée sous la Restauration, illégale et abominable sous Louis-Philippe’ (436).⁶⁸ For Sand, then, conspiratorial Restoration

⁶⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Gallimard–Pléiade, 1975–76), I (1975), 686. Original emphasis.

⁶⁶ Lerner, *Inventing the Popular*, p. 204.

⁶⁷ Bernard, ‘Association et alliance dans *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*’, p. 51.

⁶⁸ In April 1834, Louis-Philippe’s regime sought to counter the influence of the republican Société des droits de l’homme in banning associations of more than twenty people: ‘nulle association de plus de vingt

liberalism is to be doubly set against the betrayal of the *Trois Glorieuses*. Yet, with the notable exception of Bernard's discussion of the rhetoric of 'cousinage' (52) of this 'éphémère floraison du règne de Louis XVIII' (42), scholarship has generally limited itself to a cursory nod towards the novelistic role Sand accords to the Carbonari – in spite of Roberts's assertion that they 'must be placed with the Freemasons, Jesuits and Illuminati as the greatest contributors to the mythology of the secret societies' (296). In the introductory notes to his critical edition of the novel, René Bourgeois, for example, provides a brief history of Carbonarism, yet does no more than designate the movement as part of the 'décor parfaitement vérifiable' of the 'climat' of 1823.⁶⁹ Similarly, the initial promise of Simone Vierende's discussion is, unfortunately, undermined by the basic error of repeated references to the Carbonaro 'Alexis Lefort' – in reality, 'Achille'.⁷⁰ In exploring Sand's engagement with that 'grande conjuration du libéralisme adolescent',⁷¹ as her *maître à penser* and former member Leroux would have it, this chapter, then, aims to redress a surprising critical imbalance. Existing scholarship, I have suggested, has privileged the importance of secret journeymen's associations as a vehicle for Sand's class-conscious writing in the early 1840s. Yet like *compagnonnage*, Carbonarism, it soon becomes clear, is far from a lost panacea to the ills of the Sandian worker.

1820, conspiratorial année charnière

As she sings the praises of Perdiguier's book in a letter to Guépin in September 1840, Sand makes a bibliographical request. 'Je vous serai très reconnaissante, monsieur', she writes, 'si vous voulez bien me donner les renseignements que vous m'indiquez, relativement à la réunion des Compagnons de 1820' (*Corr. Sand*, V: 133–34). The victim of his youth, Perdiguier regrettably lacks the historical consciousness that would provide the novelist with a 'branche' on which to hang her account of Restoration secret societies. 'Ce que Perdiguier qui est encore assez jeune, n'a pu m'apprendre', she writes, 'c'est l'histoire des tentatives faites par les ouvriers pour s'éclairer et se moraliser sous la forme *des Devoirs* ou *Sociétés*, durant les années écoulées depuis l'empire jusqu'à

personnes, dont le but sera de réunir tous les jours où à certains jours marqués pour s'occuper d'objets religieux, littéraires, politiques ou autres, ne pourra se former qu'avec l'agrément du gouvernement, et sous les conditions qu'il plaira à l'autorité publique d'imposer à la société' (Code pénal, art. 291). The significance of the number twenty as a limit point for unthreatening sociability gestures towards the lingering fear induced by the Carbonari, the pan-European conspiratorial network organised into *ventes* which drew their name from Italian numeration.

⁶⁹ George Sand, *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, ed. by René Bourgeois (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1979), pp. 16–22 (pp. 16, 18).

⁷⁰ See Simone Vierende, *George Sand et la franc-maçonnerie* (Éditions maçonniques de France, 2001), pp. 36–45.

⁷¹ Pierre Leroux, *La Grève de Samarez: poème philosophique*, 2 vols (Dentu, 1863), I, 363.

présent' (135–36, original emphasis). It is, we learn, 'un instinct secret' and not historical research that has guided Sand in her portrayal of the idealized worker–protagonist Pierre Huguenin. In pleading with Guépin that he summarize 'en quelques pages [...] l'histoire de la *morale sociale* chez les ouvriers, sous la Restauration', Sand looks to what she terms 'cette réunion de 1820' as a means of anchoring her 'fantaisie d'artiste' (135, original emphasis). For, keen not to 'farder la vérité', she insists that 'la poésie n'a pas le droit de filer sa toile dans le vide'. History, Sand hopes, is not a corrective to the 'généreux sentiments' of Perdiguier's book, but rather a complement, allowing for the construction of a genealogy within which to inscribe and legitimize her idealist recasting of his account of journeymen's secret societies: 'j'ignore jusqu'à quel point les idées émises par lui dans son livre [...] sont anciennes parmi les ouvriers, et il m'importe beaucoup de le savoir' (136). In his gloss on this letter in the critical edition of Sand's vast correspondence, Georges Lubin laments that, 'nous ne savons, faute d'avoir retrouvé la lettre de Guépin, ce que G[eorge] S[and] entend par la réunion de 1820' (134 n. 1). What Lubin's focus on *compagnonnage* has occluded, though, is the significance of the year 1820 in the Sandian – and, indeed, the broader nineteenth-century – conspiratorial imaginary.

The evening of 13th February 1820 saw the assassination of Charles–Ferdinand d'Artois, duc de Berry, nephew of Louis XVIII and the Bourbon dynasty's last hope of obtaining a male heir. The assassin's blade, as Furet observes, '[a] fait rentrer le régicide dans la politique française'.⁷² The duke's violent death shook France to its very foundations, hastening the collapse of the moderate Decazes government and heralding what Malandain has termed a 'virage à droite' (9) in Restoration politics. Stunning public opinion, the crime prompted the introduction of a panoply of restrictive legislation, not least increased press censorship and the notorious *loi du double vote*, which weighted the electoral system in favour of wealthy landowners. If the recent work of Counter and Corinne Legoy is largely exceptional in its examination of the political uses of the literary during the affair,⁷³ historical scholarship, on the other hand, has taken great interest in the crime's discursive afterlife in other media. Histories of the Restoration have consistently posited a peak in conspiratorial speculation as a corollary of the political polarization that ensued from the duke's death. In his work on the role of rumour in the social imaginary of nineteenth-century France, Ploux, for example, has explored the transmission of the 'fatale nouvelle' (32) and the

⁷² François Furet, *La Révolution: de Turgot à Jules Ferry* (Hachette, 1988), p. 195.

⁷³ See Counter, *The Amorous Restoration*, pp. 77–110; and Corinne Legoy, *L'Enthousiasme désenchanté: éloge du pouvoir sous la Restauration* (Société des études robespierristes, 2011). Sheryl Kroen's study uses the literary (Molière's *Tartuffe*) as a prism through which to explore Restoration France, but makes no reference to the duke's assassination. See *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815–1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

divergent motivations attributed to the assassin's act in the context of a political 'réorientation à droite'.⁷⁴ Tardy, crucially, argues that the perceived threat to the principles of constitutionalism, representative government and basic liberties enshrined in the Charte 'favorise la constitution d'une conspiration d'un nouveau type, menée par des hommes favorables aux idéaux de 1789. Contre un gouvernement dont ils dénoncent la politique réactionnaire et rétrograde, ils entreprennent un vaste travail intellectuel pour inventer une conspiration adaptée à la modernité' (47). Similarly, for André Jardin and André-Jean Tudesq, 'the basis of clandestine activity' amongst Restoration liberals was 'the discontent of well-defined social classes to whom the regime denied any other means of expression',⁷⁵ whilst Pamela Pilbeam suggests that the 'first reaction of liberals' to the suffrage restrictions was 'to retreat into conspiracy'.⁷⁶ Malandain, we might note, posits the Carbonari as a privileged example of this process: 'la restriction récurrente des possibilités d'action ou même d'expression politique', he writes, 'tend à favoriser le développement effectif de conspirations, comme le montre exemplairement l'histoire de la Charbonnerie française de 1820 à 1823' (12). The proliferation of leftist conspiratorial activity from 1820, then, seems to bear out Sand's assertion, in the 'Avant-propos' to *Le Compagnon*, that 'il ne se commet pas dans les sociétés humaines [...] une seule violation du principe de l'égalité, qu'à l'instant même il n'y ait un germe de société secrète implanté aussi dans le monde' (39–40). The most significant instantiation of this clandestine activism in the wake of the political turning point of 1820 was the Carbonarist movement, the *compagnons'* great Other in Sand's 1840 novel of conspiracy.

Reflecting on her girlhood convent days with the Dames augustines anglaises in *Histoire de ma vie*, Sand recalls an evening of frivolity cut short. 'Tout allait le mieux du monde ; le carnaval arrivait, et nous préparions une soirée de comédie comme jamais nous n'avions encore espéré de le réaliser', she writes. Suddenly, 'un événement politique, qui devait naturellement retentir comme une calamité publique dans un couvent, vint faire rentrer les costumes au magasin et la gaieté dans les cœurs' (HV, 986). In a spectacle undoubtedly more theatrical than the 'pièce de Molière ou de Regnard' that Sand and her fellow pupils had prepared, the duc de Berry was assassinated by the Bonapartist saddler Louis-Pierre Louvel – fittingly, on the steps of the Paris Opera. Indeed, Sand adds, transposing the register of theatricality from the comic to the tragic, 'le récit d'une mort tragique et les larmes d'une illustre famille étaient émouvants pour nos jeunes imaginations comme une pièce de Corneille ou de Racine.' In the midst of this discursive and affective 'entraînement

⁷⁴ François Ploux, 'L'Imaginaire social et politique de la rumeur dans la France du XIX^e siècle (1815–1870)', *Revue Historique*, 614 (Apr. – Jun. 2000), 395–434 (p. 402).

⁷⁵ André Jardin and André-Jean Tudesq, *Restoration and Reaction, 1815–1848*, trans. by Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 50–51.

⁷⁶ Pamela Pilbeam, 'Revolutionary Movements in Western Europe, 1814–1830', in *Themes in Modern European History*, ed. by Pamela Pilbeam (Routledge, 1995), pp. 125–50 (p. 137).

général', 'amplifié[] et poétisé[] par les journaux royalistes et les lettres particulières', only the self-proclaimed 'bonapartiste' Sand remains circumspect as to the political stakes subtending the representation of Louvel's crime. For, with retrospective recourse to the conspiratorial 'on' of uncertain agency, she notes that 'on ne nous disait pas que le duc de Berry avait été un peu brutal et débauché, on nous le peignait comme un héros, comme un second Henri IV, sa femme comme une sainte, et le reste à l'avenant' (986–87). Gesturing towards what Malandain aptly terms 'la fécondité heuristique de l'attentat politique' (13), Sand observes that the duke's murder 'servit de prétexte à des persécutions, ainsi qu'à un revirement subit dans l'esprit du règne de Louis XVIII' (HV, 986). It is this 'revirement', I argue here, that makes of 1820 something of a *moment charnière* in the history of conspiracy and its discontents in nineteenth-century France. This contextualization is the necessary precursor to any analysis of Sand's engagement with the conspiratorial Restoration liberalism of the Carbonari.

'La société du XIX^e siècle', writes Alain Corbin, 'ne parle jamais tant d'elle-même que lorsqu'elle se dévisage dans le miroir tendu par l'assassin, lequel lui impose un intense travail de réflexion.'⁷⁷ Indeed, the assassination of the king's nephew exposed the gaping holes in the political fabric of the banner of Restoration *union et oubli*, under which the country, it had been hoped, would set aside factionalism and transcend past hostilities. As these divisions came to an ugly head in the days following the events of 13th February 1820, the figure of conspiracy emerged as an omnipresent explanatory mechanism, not only for fringe radicals but also for the political mainstream: 'les mots de conspiration permanente, de vastes complots révolutionnaires avaient passé dans le langage courant de la politique', recalled Charles de Rémusat.⁷⁸ The duke's murder brought about a veritable groundswell in conspiratorial speculation. For liberals as for royalists, the *affaire Louvel* pointed towards a 'complot introuvable', to borrow Malandain's phrasing, 'aussi obsédant qu'évanescent' (13). No longer a 'crime isolé' (HV, 986), as Sand's recollections would have it, Louvel, the resurgent *ultras* alleged, was a mere cog in a vast machinery of conspiracy which sought, in 1820 as in 1789, to do away with France's legitimate rulers. On 14th February 1820, the newspaper *Le Drapeau blanc*, whose very title belies its political orientation, opened with a call to arms of hysterical hyperbole, couched in the language of conspiracy:

Minuit. Ô crime !... Les horribles complots des révolutionnaires, des régicides se manifestent par des assassinats !... Le sang a coulé !!! et quel sang, grands dieux !... Cet

⁷⁷ Alain Corbin, 'Le XIX^e siècle ou la nécessité de l'assemblage', in *L'Invention du XIX^e siècle : le XIX^e siècle par lui-même (littérature histoire, société)*, ed. by Alain Corbin, Pierre Georgel and others (Klincksieck–Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999), pp. 153–59 (p. 154).

⁷⁸ Charles de Rémusat, *Mémoires de ma vie*, ed. by Charles Pouthas, 5 vols (Plon, 1958–67), I (1958), 417.

attentat ne peut être que le prélude de plusieurs autres. Royalistes ! soyez prêts à défendre et venger vos princes !!!⁷⁹

Not to be outdone by what Paul Bénichou has termed 'l'exploitation réactionnaire de l'assassinat',⁸⁰ liberal apologists provided an equally conspiratorial counter-weight, suggesting that the murder was, in fact, a pretext for the former aristocracy to stealthily regain its old privileges.

The ultra-royalists seized on the figure of Decazes, the king's *favori* and moderate chief minister. Perhaps sensing his imminent political demise in the ensuing reaction – in all senses of the word – 'nous sommes tous assassinés!', Decazes is said to have despaired upon hearing the news. He was soon to find himself assailed by conspiratorial accusations ranging from ministerial negligence to outright treason. Paying his 'tribut de douleur' in the pages of the royalist mouthpiece *Le Conservateur* in the days that followed the assassination, Chateaubriand, for example, asserts that 'la main qui a porté le coup n'est pas la plus coupable'.⁸¹ The real puppet-master, Decazes, he continues, sought to 'teindre sa pourpre dictatoriale dans le sang de M^{gr} le duc de Berry' (384). In the pages of the same periodical, a certain M. Salaberry, representative for the Loir-et-Cher in the Chambre des députés, melodramatically likens men such as Decazes to the harpies of Greek mythology, 'dont ils ont le signe de famille, la rapacité'. The minister and his ilk emerge as a malevolent infiltration, slowly eating away at 'la monarchie légitime', '[qu']ils gangrènt', soon to 'tomber de pourriture'. Staging this 'ministre tout puissant' as something akin to an ideological blacksmith, forging the dagger of murderous insurrection, Salaberry cries: 'C'est sous votre règne qu'un Fils de France vient de tomber sous le poignard révolutionnaire. Ce sont les doctrines affreuses, les écrits incendiaires et sacrilèges que vous avez protégés, qui ont forgé, aiguisé le poignard, poussé le bras de l'assassin...' (379). These sentiments were echoed by Alphonse Martainville of *Le Drapeau blanc*, for whom 'le meurtrier n'a été que l'instrument' of the 'feuilles sanguinaires', 'principaux missionnaires de la sédition, de l'anarchie et du régicide' marshalled by the minister. 'C'est vous qui avez tué le duc de Berry', he thunders to Decazes, his imagined interlocutor.⁸² The most virulent accusations, however, were levelled by the ultra-royalist politician Jean-Claude Clausel de Coussergues. Denouncing 'une conspiration tramée dans l'ombre contre l'honneur de la couronne et de la nation française', he does not hesitate to resort to the hyperbolizing rhetoric of the hypothetical:

⁷⁹ *Le Drapeau blanc*, 14th February 1820, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Paul Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes: doctrines de l'âge romantique* (Gallimard, 1977), p. 85.

⁸¹ *Le Conservateur*, VI (1820), p. 382. Chateaubriand's article is dated 18th February 1820.

⁸² *Le Drapeau blanc*, 17th February 1820, p. 2.

Ah ! Si nous avions eu un ministre de la police qui eût eu pour la famille royale un amour aussi ardent et aussi éclairé que l'était la haine de Louvel, nous aurions encore le Prince qui devait la perpétuer ! M. Decazes est coupable, comme un commandant de place forte qui laisserait entrer l'ennemi par surprise et en plein midi. Mais combien est plus grande la culpabilité d'un ministre qui laisse enlever à un grand royaume, non une place frontière, mais la plus forte garantie de son existence politique, la vie d'un Prince, à défaut duquel de longues guerres pourraient désoler la France et l'Europe ; et qui, si la Providence ne protégeait notre patrie, pourrait encore, après un long intervalle, faire le malheur de nos petits-fils ! Je vous propose, en conséquence, messieurs, d'accuser M. le duc Decazes, ancien président du conseil des ministres, ancien ministre de la police générale du royaume, *d'avoir, par la criminelle omission de ses premiers devoirs, facilité l'attentat qui a privé de la vie S.A.R. M^{gr}. le duc de Berry, petit-fils de France.*⁸³

Chiasmically recasting his earlier assertion that Louvel was the 'auteur' of the crime and Decazes his ideological accomplice, it was in fact, Clausel de Coussergues asserts, 'Louvel qui était le complice du ministre' (vi). Faced with a royalist discourse that invested the killing with premeditated meaning, the liberals' counter-offensive sought to denounce the *ultras*' calculated instrumentalization of a senseless act. Springing to his son-in-law's defence, the comte de Ste-Aulaire published a pamphlet that decried the 'libel [*sic*] diffamatoire contre le duc Decazes', railing against 'ceux qui l'accusent, avec plus ou moins d'aveuglement, d'avoir vécu constamment pendant quatre années en état de conspiration contre le monarque, son bienfaiteur'.⁸⁴ Their conspiracy theories, he alleges, had been concocted with 'l'espérance de faire la contre-révolution avec la Charte, d'enter les abus de l'ancien régime sur un simulacre de liberté, et de donner par surcroît le monopole du gouvernement représentatif à ceux qui ont, d'ancienne date, le monopole de la cour' (42–43).

As intellectual historian Alan Spitzer has argued, the spectre of an aristocratic plot seeking to resuscitate absolute monarchy had become common intellectual currency. There was, he writes, 'a virtually unanimous conviction' amongst liberals and other opponents of the regime that there existed 'a cabal of reactionaries and priests, certainly hostile to the spirit of the Charte and probably conspiring to destroy it'.⁸⁵ Under the political pressures of 1820, the mythology that had crystallized around the alleged *conspiration du bord de l'eau* of 1818 compacted into a solid foundation for accusations of reactionary conspiratorial collusion. Spitzer, Tardy and Skuy cite a widely

⁸³ Jean-Claude Clausel de Coussergues, *Projet de la proposition d'accusation contre M. le duc Decazes, à soumettre à la Chambre de 1820* (Dentu, 1820), p. 145. Original emphasis.

⁸⁴ Ste-Aulaire, *Réponse au mémoire de M. Berrier, pour M. le général Donnadien* (Ladvocat, 1820), pp. i, 37.

⁸⁵ Alan Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes: The French Carbonari Against the Bourbon Restoration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 32.

disseminated petition addressed to the Chambre des députés by a certain Madier de Montjau, judge at the royal court of Nîmes.⁸⁶ If the ironies of history tell us that, in reality, liberals largely failed to discern the genuine existence of clandestine reactionary groups such as *la Congrégation*, the Chevaliers de la foi or the *Associatio amicorum* (Aa),⁸⁷ they were unshakeable in their conviction that a shadowy network of radical royalist intrigue was at play in the duke's murder. Perhaps nowhere is this better exemplified than in Madier de Montjau's self-professed exposure of a Catholic 'gouvernement occulte' sowing seeds of sedition to target Protestants and liberals, a 'comité directeur qui couvre notre avenir de ténèbres et d'orages'. He continues:

Le lendemain d'un assassinat d'un prince digne de tous nos regrets, *des joies atroces* n'ont-elles pas été aperçues [...] ? Des sicaires, animés d'une rage soldée, n'ont-ils pas troublé la paix publique ? ne les a-t-on pas entendus au Palais Royal s'écrier : *Il faut nous laver les mains dans le sang de tous les libéraux* ? N'est-ce pas alors que des feuilles dégoûtantes de bassesse et de lâcheté fomentaient le désordre, marquaient les victimes, exigeaient des proscriptions ?⁸⁸

Plus royalistes que le roi, as the saying goes, the *ultras*, it is suggested, are paradoxically disloyal to the monarchy, conspiring to provoke conditions that would lead to the re-occupation of France by the armies of Metternich's Holy Alliance, quashing any revolutionary upheaval with the ultimate aim of abrogating the Charte. If the fanatically incompetent plotters so deftly sent up by Stendhal in the *épisode de la note secrète* of *Le Rouge et le noir* were a caricature of the *ultras* of 1818, our tour of Restoration conspiracy theory suggests that their representation also aligns perfectly with this particular inflexion of the 'état du discours social'⁸⁹ of Bourbon France.

The moderate Decazes was the first political casualty of what Skuy has termed 'the Royalist Reaction of 1820', replaced initially with the conservative duc de Richelieu and, subsequently, the

⁸⁶ See *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32; Skuy, *Assassination, Politics, and Miracles*, p. 51; and Tardy, *L'Âge des ombres*, p. 50.

⁸⁷ On secret societies and the Catholic culture of conspiracy in nineteenth-century France, see John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France: The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 181–88; and Tardy, *L'Âge des ombres*, pp. 29–36.

⁸⁸ Madier de Montjau, *Pétition adressée à la Chambre des députés* (Librairie politique/Corréard, 1820), p. 28. Original emphasis.

⁸⁹ I borrow this term from Marc Angenot: see *1889: un état du discours social* (Longueuil: Le Préambule, 1989). If Angenot eschews discussion of conspiracy theory in this landmark study, he has recently made a brief foray into its role as 'une *logique*, un dispositif cognitif et herméneutique', which dovetails with my own approach to the conspiratorial as explanatory mechanism. See 'La Pensée conspiratoire: une histoire dialectique et rhétorique', in Danblon and Nicolas (eds.), *Les Rhétoriques de la conspiration*, pp. 25–42 (p. 28). Original emphasis. If the scope of the present study is necessarily limited, Stendhal's work would be ripe for further exploration through the prism of the conspiratorial. See, for example, Ann Jefferson, *Reading Realism in Stendhal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 155–80; and Frank Lestringant, 'Le Complot des ultras dans *Le Rouge et le Noir* de Stendhal', *Studi Francesi*, 183 (2017), 466–74.

ultra–reactionary comte de Villèle. Pierre Rosanvallon’s influential ‘impossibility hypothesis’,⁹⁰ in Counter’s terms, posits the Bourbon regime as structurally flawed, teetering atop an inadequate constitutional settlement that distributed authority only ambiguously. The first censitary monarchy, for Rosanvallon, was congenitally defective, containing the seeds of its own destruction from its very inception in the 1814 Charte.⁹¹ Skuy, on the other hand, locates the roots of the Restoration’s eventual – inevitable – collapse precisely in 1820. His suggestion is that the assassination of the king’s nephew triggered an irredeemable factionalization of political life, fuelled by incessant conspiratorial speculation, which ultimately provoked unity within the liberal opposition and culminated in the 1830 revolution. The restricted temporal parameters of Skuy’s study, however, lead him to eschew engagement with the French Carbonari, even as he notes that the movement was the ‘principal result’ of that post–1820 political climate we have sought to describe, which pushed radical liberals ‘further underground’ (58). Skuy’s account of what Malandain, drawing on Monier’s typology of conspiracy highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, characterizes as the ‘obsession du complot, voire de la conjuration’ (11–12) in and around 1820, then, is perhaps less comprehensive than he would have it – indeed, other notable omissions include *la Congrégation*, the Jesuits and that favourite bugbear of the Right, Freemasonry.

Youthful Idealism

Certainly, the idea that Restoration France saw an upsurge in conspiracies, real and imagined, remains common currency amongst historians and near–contemporaries alike. It was, for example, precisely a fictionalized Decazes that Étienne de Lamothe–Langon, in his 1833 account of the Berry assassination, had voice the conviction that ‘la manie des conjurations est une des plaies du siècle’. ‘Depuis 1814’, he adds, ‘on ne fait autre chose ; chacun s’en mêle : royalistes purs, jacobins forcenés, les libéraux, la petite église : tout salon où un mécontent se glisse devient aussitôt un *point de ralliement*’.⁹² Where Lamothe–Langon stages something of a universal inclination towards the conspiratorial, Balzac, on the other hand, suggests that this propensity might be located generationally. In that passage from *Illusions perdues* that so captured the imagination of Lukács, he

⁹⁰ Andrew Counter, ‘Mingrat: Anatomy of a Restoration *cause célèbre*’, *French History*, 29.2 (2015), 225–46 (p. 227).

⁹¹ See Pierre Rosanvallon, *La Monarchie impossible: les Chartes de 1814 et de 1830* (Fayard, 1994). Rosanvallon’s terminology echoes in the title of Francis Démier’s more recent study of Restoration cultural and intellectual life: see *La France de la Restauration: l’impossible retour du passé* (Gallimard, 2012).

⁹² Étienne de Lamothe–Langon, *Louvel et l’inconnu*, 2 vols (Dentu, 1833), I, 84–85. Original emphasis.

condemns the Bourbon regime for its failure to harness the energies of the Revolution and the Napoleonic empire:

Aucun fait n'accuse si hautement l'ilotisme auquel la Restauration avait condamné la jeunesse. Les jeunes gens, qui ne savaient à quoi employer leurs forces, ne les jetaient pas seulement dans le journalisme, *dans les conspirations*, dans la littérature et dans l'art, ils les dissipaient dans les plus étranges excès, tant il y avait de sève et de luxuriantes puissances dans la jeune France. Travailleuse, cette belle jeunesse voulait le pouvoir et le plaisir ; artiste, elle voulait des trésors ; oisive, elle voulait animer ses passions ; de toute manière elle voulait une place, et la politique ne lui en faisait nulle part. (*CH*, V: 490, emphasis added)

If Balzac's implication that clandestine collusion was the exclusive preserve of the *jeunes gens* is exaggerated, it nevertheless points towards a significant characteristic of the most influential instantiation of the Restoration conspiracies that concern us here – remembered by François de Corcelle as 'la seule entreprise qui, dans tout le cours de la restauration, ait mérité d'être considérée comme une conspiration puissante'.⁹³ This is the 'sense of generational mission' that, for Spitzer, came to be identified with the conspiratorial 'politics of insurrection' of Carbonarism.⁹⁴ In his masterful analysis of the self-professed generational autonomy of the young opponents of the restored Bourbons, Spitzer argues that the 'period between 1815 and 1823 was characterized by an "epidemic of conspiracy", and not only in France'. 'What distinguished Carbonarism from the other conspiracies', he continues, 'was the resolution of the young founders to retain control of the revolutionary coalition in the hands of their own generation' (67). Repeatedly given the epithet 'le jeune carbonaro' (355, 437), the youthful idealism of Sand's Achille Lefort, then, serves as something of a metonym for the inchoate Carbonarist attempt to construct a 'generational coalition'⁹⁵ in response to resurgent gerontocratic ultraroyalism. Sand frames the ideological confusion of the Carbonari as a correlate of the conspirators' youthfulness:

Achille Lefort [...] était l'homme de son temps, un des mille jeunes gens braves, entreprenants, dévoués, mais ignorants et téméraires, que la France voyait pulluler alors dans ses flancs en travail. Dominée par une seule grande idée patriotique, celle de chasser les Bourbons et de ramener les institutions à un libéralisme plus sincère, cette courageuse jeunesse allait à l'aventure, ne se souciant pas de formuler des théories immédiatement applicables [...], obéissant néanmoins à la foi du progrès qui entraînait tous ses membres pêle-mêle, chacun avec son petit bagage de philosophie scolaire et de passion politique :

⁹³ François de Corcelle, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire des conspirations* (Paulin, 1831), p. 10.

⁹⁴ Alan Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 67.

⁹⁵ Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820*, p. 55.

Voltaire, Adam Smith, Bentham ; la Constituante, la Convention, la Charte ; Brissot, La Fayette, le duc d'Orléans et *tutti quanti*. (353–54).

If Spitzer is humorous in his allusion to a fresh-faced 'Revolutionary International',⁹⁶ the charge that liberalism's moderate surface was but a front for more radical, Jacobin tendencies was one repeatedly levelled in anti-Carbonarist rhetoric. In his conspiracist exposé of the French Carbonari and their destructive machinations, Saint-Edme (with whom, we might recall, Balzac took umbrage in his 1843 preface to *Une ténébreuse affaire*), for example, writes:

S'il pouvait s'élever encore quelques doutes sur les intentions de certains hommes qui s'intitulent libéraux, la Constitution des Carbonari que je donne au public, traduite de l'italien, est bien faite pour les dissiper [...]. Que veulent les Carbonari ? Rien autre chose [*sic*] que la destruction des gouvernements légitimes. À leurs yeux les rois sont des brigands couronnés. Les jacobins de la république, les soi-disant libéraux de tous les temps et de tous les pays, les illuminés et les Carbonari ont toujours visé au même but, travaillé aux mêmes résultats.⁹⁷

In the more sympathetic July Monarchy recollections of former member Leroux, 'ce premier essai de société secrète' had 'pour but de *délivrer la France*', no less.⁹⁸ Whilst, broadly speaking, Carbonarism was a link between political generations in a climate of unrest, intrigue and dissent, it must also be historicized as, in Spitzer's words, 'an alternative of Restoration politics and an element in the daily play of political forces between 1820 and 1823'.⁹⁹ 'Le vieux libéralisme', Sand notes in *Le Compagnon*, looking to the Restoration from the July Monarchy with the disabused perspective of hindsight, 'adulait la jeunesse de ce temps-là, en attendant que, monté à son tour sur les bancs de la pairie, il l'envoyât dans les prisons expier le crime d'association secrète' (436). If, as Ulysse Trélat asserts in his sympathetic participant's account, 'c'est la Charbonnerie qui a vaincu en juillet', those 'principes renfermés alors dans le mystère des ventes charbonniques [...]

⁹⁶ Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes*, p. 271.

⁹⁷ Saint-Edme, *Constitution et organisation des Carbonari, ou Documents exacts sur tout ce qui concerne l'existence, l'origine et le but de cette société secrète* (Brissot-Trivans, 1822), p. i. Original emphasis.

⁹⁸ *La Revue indépendante*, 25th January 1843, p. 276. Original emphasis. Leroux's account diverges from those of his coevals who attribute the movement's failure to internal divisions and ideological inconsistencies; instead, he suggests, the roots of its eventual collapse lay in the lack of shift from 'conspiration à main armée' to a 'conspiration morale' – that is, a 'conspiration pacifique, ayant pour but de propager les idées libérales qui en étaient l'âme' (276–77).

⁹⁹ Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes*, p. 9.

[qui] réchauffent aujourd'hui tous les cœurs'¹⁰⁰ had, for Sand, come to cool off with the advent of Louis-Philippe.

Consequential Conspiracy: From the duc de Berry to the Carbonari

What persisted in France following the groundswell of reaction of the post-1820 political climate was a revolutionary ideal – inherited from Babeuf¹⁰¹ – which justified illegal conspiratorial action in the name of (egalitarian) principles understood as lying beyond the legal order. 'Cette forme d'association', writes Trélat, 'était une nécessité du temps' (222). Similarly, for Trélat's fellow former Carbonaro, Godefroy Cavaignac, 'le progrès naît du mal, de l'horreur qu'il inspire' (xxii). 'L'égalité absolue parmi les hommes', Cavaignac insists, is the 'but' of 'la doctrine du progrès' (xv, original emphasis); 'ce sont les sentiments ou les croyances blessées qui ont, ou produit les religions nouvelles, ou lancé les révolutions' (xxvi). That a peak in clandestine left-wing conspiratorial activity coincided with the ascension of the *ultras* was, of course, no coincidence: as Corcelle observes in his early July Monarchy history of the movement, 'il a fallu que la charte fût changée dans sa base par la loi du double vote, pour qu'un parti franchement révolutionnaire eût l'idée de se constituer' (5). 'Ce fut au moment où commençait la confusion de cette moderne Alexandrie, que les traditions ultramontaines monarchiques s'imposèrent au gouvernement avec un redoublement de violence', he adds. 'La loi du double vote venait d'être votée. Dès lors, une grande partie des penseurs et des politiques, désespérant des ressources légales, entreprit le jeu des révolutions' (8). Theory shaded into practice as the political fallout from the supposed plot to assassinate the duc de Berry led, in turn, to another conspiracy. By the summer of 1820, a loose coalition of disaffected opponents of the regime, modelling itself after similar groupings in Spain and the Italian and German states, had hardened into a conspiratorial coalition aimed at overthrowing the Bourbon monarchy. Bringing together a ragtag alliance of students, clerks, former soldiers and half-pay officers from the Napoleonic armies, the young movement looked to the military in support of their transition from constitutional to revolutionary opposition. Doctrinally ambiguous, theirs was an umbrella organisation whose political tendencies

¹⁰⁰ Ulysse Trélat, 'La Charbonnerie', in *Paris révolutionnaire*, ed. by Godefroy Cavaignac and others (Guillaumin, 1848), pp. 217–60 (pp. 259, 260). Trélat ends his account with the repetition of the assertion that 'la Charbonnerie, fondée en 1820, et qui n'était que le pressentiment et le germe de la révolution de 1830, était imbue des principes les plus avancés de l'époque présente' (259).

¹⁰¹ See Gregory Claeys and Christine Lattek, 'Radicalism, Republicanism and Revolutionism: From the Principles of '89 to the Origins of Modern Terrorism', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 200–53 (pp. 225–26).

encompassed Bonapartism, republicanism and liberalism, apparently more enamoured of the opportunity to unite against a common enemy than concerned with specifying concrete goals for the desired post-Bourbon France. It was, as Corcelle writes, ‘un résumé des différentes nuances du libéralisme révolutionnaire’ (18). Accordingly, ‘eux-ci penchaient pour un régime monarchique et représentatif ; ceux-là pour une république fortement liée par une administration centrale ; d’autres pour un plan de république fédérative’ (19).

As socially homogeneous as it was ideologically diverse, French *charbonnerie* was, moreover, tasked with an unfeeling elitism. This was particularly the case for those July Monarchy commentators, writing, for Trélat, at a moment when ‘le temps de la charbonnerie et des sociétés secrètes est passée’ (217), when ‘une impatience irrésistible de publicité rend tout mystère impossible’ (222). Trélat argues that the Carbonarist goal to ‘briser le présent pour édifier l’avenir’ (219) was a noble one in a moral sense:

L’association était républicaine ; toutes les allocutions adressées aux récipiendaires étaient empreintes des principes les plus avancés que propage aujourd’hui la presse indépendante. C’était pour faire cesser la corruption qui dévorait la société que la Charbonnerie avait été instituée ; c’était pour réunir en une même famille tous les gens vertueux contre les fripons, tous les opprimés contre les tyrans ; c’était pour appeler les hommes à l’exercice de leurs droits, pour doter les bienfaits de l’égalité, pour faire cesser le système ruineux de gouvernement qui les épuisait, pour rendre la guerre impossible entre les nations, pour abolir les armées permanentes et ne faire de chaque continent qu’un peuple de frères ; c’était pour faire de l’instruction une charge de l’état au profit de tous ses membres ; c’était, avant tout, pour appeler le peuple souverain à constituer son gouvernement comme il l’entendrait, que les hommes libres se concertaient alors et s’associaient entre eux. (222–23)

Yet in terms of the social stratification of Restoration France, the conspirators of Trélat’s ‘austères conciliabules’ (227), it was more widely suggested, looked up rather than down. If, as the adage would have it, the bourgeoisie is the class that dare not speak its name, the movement defined itself instead through antithesis: it was, Tardy reminds us, ‘un discours antinobiliaire et anticlérical qui constitu[ait] le ciment idéologique de l’association’ (99). In his *Histoire de dix ans*, his account of the first decade of the July Monarchy, socialist historian – and Sand’s friend and correspondent – Louis Blanc provides a concise take on a conspiracy beset by internal division and ideological confusion, in which ‘quelques-unes [des ventes] conspiraient sans autre but que

de conspirer'.¹⁰² 'La charbonnerie', he observes, 'n'était point descendue dans les profondeurs de la société, elle n'en avait point remué les couches inférieures. Comment se serait-elle longtemps préservée des vices de la bourgeoisie : l'individualisme, la petitesse des idées, la vulgarité des sentiments, l'amour exagéré d'un bien-être tout matériel, la grossièreté des instincts ?' (114–15). The later efforts of scholars such as Spitzer, Tardy and Pierre–Arnaud Lambert¹⁰³ to identify the class composition of the conspiracy's membership are undeniably laudable. Yet of greater interest, ultimately, is the association's status as both a stage in the intellectual development of a political generation and a rich source of mythology to the French republican tradition.¹⁰⁴ Sand's *Le Compagnon*, I show in what follows, both participates in and recasts this mythology, positing a vision of a patrician conspiracy guilty of selective idealization whilst lacking any kind of ideal. In this way, the representation of conspiratorial politics in *Le Compagnon* seems to align with Schor's comments on idealization as interventionist discursive mode in Sand's work: 'At best', she writes, 'it works within the constraints of ideology as a contestatory, and even [...] revolutionary strategy; at worst, it subtly underwrites dominant forms of oppression and reinforces existing iniquities and prejudices' (91). The charges Sand levels at the Carbonari, then, reproduce the very criticisms made of her own political and novelistic practice.

Carbonarism was but a brief phase in the history of Restoration opposition politics, and its influence remained limited as the movement collapsed under the weight of its own internal schisms. Its old boys' network nonetheless remains an impressive one – as Spitzer notes, 'many social theorists and radical reformers [...] shared a political baptism in the conspiracies of the 1820s.'¹⁰⁵ Corcelle, too, characterises as 'remarquable' the fact that 'un très grand nombre des anciens carbonari se soient plus ou moins distingués dans les plus diverses positions' (15), attributing this to personal distinction over nepotism: 'assurément', he observes, 'ce n'est pas qu'on

¹⁰² Louis Blanc, *Histoire de dix ans: 1830–1840*, 5 vols (Pagnerre, 1842–44), I (1842), 115. The *Catalogue de la bibliothèque de Nohant* attests to a copy of this work, as well as a signed copy of Blanc's *Histoire de la Révolution française* ('le meilleur livre d'histoire qui ait jamais paru', Sand wrote in November 1847 [*Corr. Sand*, VIII: 122]) and his *Pages d'histoire de la Révolution de février, 1848*.

¹⁰³ See Pierre–Arnaud Lambert, *La Charbonnerie française, 1821–1823: du secret en politique* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ For the young Blanqui, for example, witnessing the execution of the four Carbonarist agents known as the 'sergents de La Rochelle' was something of a primal scene in his career as a conspirator. Reflecting on the event, he would write, referring to himself in the third person: 'Le 22 septembre 1822, à l'âge de 17 ans, ses angoisses le poussèrent sur la place de Grève pour voir mourir les quatre sergents de La Rochelle, et il jura de venger ces martyrs de la Liberté. À peine sorti du collège, son premier désir, son vœu le plus ardent fut d'obtenir l'affiliation aux ventes de Carbonari qui préparaient la chute de la Restauration.' Louis–Auguste Blanqui, *Œuvres I: des origines à la Révolution de 1848*, ed. by Dominique Le Nuz (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1993), p. 40.

¹⁰⁵ Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes*, p. 7.

se soit beaucoup entr'aïdé, car ces sortes de relations ont fait naître plus de rivalités et de préventions mutuelles que de véritables attachements' (16). If Sand's gender circumscribes her from that cohort born between 1792 and 1803 whose 'historically significant behaviour'¹⁰⁶ Spitzer traces in his study, these conspirator–luminaries, we might note, are almost over–represented within her entourage. (The assertion of the editors of the *Dictionnaire universel de la franc-maçonnerie*, according to whom Sand, that 'républicaine de la première heure', was 'recrutée par la charbonnerie en 1821, à l'âge de 17 ans', however, appears unfounded.¹⁰⁷) Sand critics have made much of what Bernard Hamon has termed 'les années Leroux' (1838–47) in the development of her social conscience and corresponding political engagement.¹⁰⁸ Leroux, she would write of their break to Giuseppe Mazzini, 'ce patriote italien qui ne cessa de conspirer',¹⁰⁹ was an 'admirable cervelle [qui] a touché [...] la limite que l'humanité peut atteindre' (*Corr. Sand*, VIII: 257). Yet equally significant in the development of the Sandian conspiratorial imaginary, we shall see in the next chapter, was Cavaignac – like Leroux and Mazzini, a former Carbonaro – who was to prove invaluable to Sand's research on the history of secret societies as she composed her *Consuelo* cycle.

Risorgimento Revolutionaries

What little scholarship exists on novelistic engagement with the Carbonarist movement has almost invariably turned to Stendhal's 1829 *Vanina Vanini, ou particularités sur la dernière vente de carbonari découverte dans les États du Pape* and the context of early Risorgimento Italy from which French *charbonnerie* derived.¹¹⁰ If Charles Didier is now better known as Sand's one-time lover than as a novelist in his own right, his *Rome souterraine* (1833) – the tale of a Carbonarist uprising set against papal power struggles – enjoyed considerable success amongst contemporaries, running to eight editions and translated into multiple languages.¹¹¹ Indeed, such was the risk to morality it was

¹⁰⁶ Spitzer *The French Generation of 1820*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Marc de Jode, Monique Cara and Jean-Marc Cara (eds.), *Dictionnaire universel de la franc-maçonnerie* (Larousse, 2011). Google ebook.

¹⁰⁸ Bernard Hamon, *George Sand et la politique: 'cette vilaine chose'* (L'Harmattan, 2001), p. 91.

¹⁰⁹ Louise Vincent, *George Sand et le Berry*, 2 vols (Champion, 1919), I, 418.

¹¹⁰ On *Vanina Vanini*, see, for example, Kris Vassilev, 'Vanina Vanini: la promesse du roman et la subversion du romanesque', *Romantisme*, 170.4 (2015), 99–112. In *Le Rouge et le noir*, the Stendhalian narrator, ventriloquizing the marquis de Croisenois, describes the Carbonarist Altamira as a participant in a 'conspiration manquée, ridicule, absurde' (395). Yet Stendhal goes on to portray the conspirator in a rather more positive light, from Mathilde de la Mole's very response to the marquis's description: "'Très absurde !' dit Mathilde, comme se parlant à elle-même, 'mais il a agi. Je veux voir un homme ; amenez-le-moi'", dit-elle au marquis très choqué' (395).

¹¹¹ The first critical edition of the text appeared only in 2007: see Charles Didier, *Rome souterraine*, ed. by Sophie Guermès (Geneva: Droz, 2007).

deemed to present that in 1835, it was placed at the top of the list of those works in French condemned by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation of the Index. Writing of her relationship with Didier in *Histoire de ma vie*, Sand herself terms *Rome souterraine* 'un fort beau livre', the peak of Didier's career after which 'son talent n'avait pas progressé' (HV, 1358). Her correspondence attests to her encounter with his text whilst she was working on the manuscript to the abortive project *Engelwald*, the story of a conspiracy to assassinate Bonaparte promised to François Buloz for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.¹¹² In late December 1835, for example, she asks Hippolyte Fourtoul that he pass on 'mille amitiés pour moi à notre bon Didier. Je viens de relire *Rome souterraine*. J'en ai lu le 2^e v[olume] cette nuit (il est trois heures du matin). J'ai barbouillé l'exemplaire d'exclamations admiratives.' 'Je l'avais lu à la hâte, il y a deux ans, et je ne l'avais pas apprécié', she admits, having firmly changed her mind on her second attempt (*Corr. Sand*, III: 197). To Buloz, too, the following month, she insists:

Quant à *Engelwald*, j'y travaille toutes les nuits jusqu'au jour [...]. Je suis obligée de lire beaucoup [...]. J'ai été obligée de relire *Rome souterraine*, et à propos de cela sachez que c'est un beau livre, et que le chapitre intitulé le *Mont Mario* est une chose sans défaut. Si vous en doutez, relisez-le et faites un peu plus mousser l'auteur qu'on ne l'a fait jusqu'ici. Sa réputation n'est pas à la hauteur de son talent. (232–33)

On 20th March 1836, Sand left Nohant for Paris, where she would remain until 3rd May. Inspired by her readings, she continued work on *Engelwald* and, ensconced in Didier's lodgings, would read it aloud to him. In his journal, Didier recalled: 'Nous lisons *Engelwald* dans la soirée et puis restons la nuit en tête à tête... Son installation chez moi provoqua mille cancans, d'abord dans la maison, puis au dehors.'¹¹³ Their affair was a short-lived one and the work never saw the light of day. This was ostensibly due to the sensitive political climate. Keen to avoid being tarred with the brush of the apologist for regicide, Sand remarks of *Engelwald* that:

Ce roman était fort avancé lorsque arriva l'explosion du complot de Fieschi. Alors les théories des Illuminés d'Allemagne, espèce de Tribunal secret qui s'était arrogé le droit de vie et de mort sur les hommes politiques, me parurent tout à fait hors de saison. Je n'ai pas plus songé à encourager l'application de semblables principes, que Voltaire n'y songea en écrivant la *Mort de César* ou M. Horace Vernet en faisant le tableau de *Judith immolant*

¹¹² Thierry Bodin has discussed Sand's annotations of her copy of Didier's text: see 'La *Rome souterraine* annotée par George Sand', *Présence de George Sand*, 18 (1983), 18–29.

¹¹³ Quoted in John Sellards, *Dans le sillage du romantisme: Charles Didier (1805–1864)* (Champion, 1933), p. 57.

Holopherne, etc. Mais du moment que des actes de ce genre passaient dans le présent, il devenait de mauvais goût de s'en occuper.¹¹⁴

Vraisemblance is clearly a risk; the possibility of historical grounding shading into the reality effect, it would seem, is to be excluded. Just as, for Stendhal, there was 'rien de plus *poétique* et de plus absurde que le libéral italien ou *Carbonaro* qui entre 1821 et 1830 peuplait les salons libéraux de Paris',¹¹⁵ so too does Sand articulate the political (her reluctance to publish *Engelwald*) in the language of the aesthetic ('de mauvais goût').

As she penned this note, Sand's attentions were clearly already shifting away from the Italian Carbonari across the Rhine, to the revolutionary conspiracy of the Bavarian Illuminati, which I discuss in the following chapter. Indeed, in the totalizing gesture of conspiracy theorists the world over, she establishes a textual and political contiguity between the supposedly regicidal ambitions of this short-lived Enlightenment-era secret society and the July Monarchy *machine infernale* of Fieschi. With the help of Cavaignac, she would eventually come to cast a more sympathetic eye on their clandestine activities. Yet before she could fully turn her attention to other conspirators in the *Consuelo* cycle, Sand had unfinished novelistic business with the Carbonari.

If Sand's best-known engagement with this clandestine network of Restoration liberals is to be found in *Le Compagnon*, a precursor to this treatment lies in the little-studied *La Dernière Aldini*. The conspiracy motif is, it should be noted, treated largely in passing. Yet it merits attention insofar as it adumbrates those concerns developed more extensively in Sand's novelistic production of the early 1840s, not least the class-conscious dimensions of a certain kind of conspiratorial association. Sand herself was brutal in her assessment of the work, dismissing it as 'une espèce de cochonnerie' (*Corr. Sand*, IV: 290). Writing to Franz Liszt and Marie d'Agoult as her alter ego Piffoël, she remarks, in an uncharacteristic lapse into English, that 'Piffoël beseaches [*sic*] Fellow not to read *dernière Aldini*, but to read next production which is much better, and not yet finished' (315). Published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* to a muted response – yet appreciated abroad by Turgenev

¹¹⁴ This (unpublished) text is housed in the Spoelberch de Louvenjoul collection in Chantilly. Quoted in Pierre Reboul, 'Un roman détruit de George Sand: à la recherche d'*Engelwald*', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 55.1 (Jan. – Mar., 1955), 23–35 (p. 32). In a letter to Buloz of July 1836, writing in the wake of Louis Alibaud's attempt on the life of Louis-Philippe on 25th June, Sand takes a rather different tack, apparently more amenable to violence: 'Alibaud [*sic*] est un héros, son nom sera mis dans l'histoire à côté de celui de Frédéric Stabs [*sic*]' (*Corr. Sand*, III: 456–57). Friedrich Stabs had attempted to assassinate Napoleon at Schoenbrunn on 12th October 1809. Reboul detects an inconsistency in Sand's account of the genesis of *Engelwald*: using his *machine infernale*, former soldier Fieschi had made his assassination attempt on 28th July 1835. Yet, he suggests, Sand did not begin work on *Engelwald* until 8th November 1835. 'On se demande si', Reboul concludes, 'loin d'avoir empêché la publication d'*Engelwald*, Fieschi n'en a pas provoqué la conception' (32).

¹¹⁵ Stendhal, *Souvenirs d'égotisme*, ed. by Philippe Berthier (Flammarion, 2013), p. 112. Emphasis added.

and Dostoevsky, who would even translate it into Russian – between December 1837 and January 1838, *La Dernière Aldini* recounts the adventures of the bohemian narrator–protagonist Léo, a dilettante singer whose dreams of ‘démocratie romanesque’ lead him towards those ‘premiers éléments du carbonarisme, qui fermentaient dès lors, sans forme et sans nom, de la Prusse à la Sicile’.¹¹⁶ ‘Le signor Léo’, comments a would-be student of the singer, is rumoured to be ‘affilié à ce qu’on appelle, je crois, la carbonnerie, c’est-à-dire qu’il a fait serment d’exterminer tous les riches et les nobles, et qu’en attendant il les déteste’ (190). The purportedly clarificatory ‘c’est-à-dire’, appended to a statement divided between the ‘on’ of doxic certitude and a more hesitant ‘je crois’, we might venture, is set forth with an almost Flaubertian irony, announcing an interpretation devoid of nuance than nonetheless speaks to the anti-aristocratic fervour of the Carbonari.

Elsewhere, the text treats the aims of the movement with a light touch. In conversation with the young countess whom he is forced to spurn, Léo recounts that ‘elle me plaisait d’abord sur ma mine de carbonaro et me demanda en riant si je songeais à détrôner le pape, ou à reconstruire l’empire romain’ (166). ‘Mon héroïsme’, he recalls of his youth, ‘était naïf et brûlant, comme le sont les religions à leur aurore.’ He continues:

Je portais dans tout ce que je faisais, et principalement dans l’exercice de mon art, le sentiment de fierté railleuse et d’indépendance démocratique dont je m’inspirais chaque jour dans les clubs et dans les pamphlets clandestins. Les *Amis de la vérité*, les *Amis de la lumière*, les *Amis de la liberté*, telles étaient les dénominations sous lesquelles se groupaient les sympathies libérales ; et jusque dans les rangs de l’armée française, aux côtés mêmes des chefs considérants, nous avions des affiliés, enfants de votre grande révolution, qui, dans le secret de leur âme, se promettaient de laver la tache du 18 brumaire. (110)

As he traces Carbonarist fermentation to a trio of Masonic lodges, Léo, crucially, posits his career as ‘histrion’ (68) as a pendant of this political engagement, with his role as Romeo allowing him to ‘exprimer des sentiments de lutte guerrière et de haine chevaleresque’. In this way, it is suggested, he operatically avenges the ‘abaissement national’ (110–11) of an Italy under the rule of Metternich’s ‘despotisme autrichien’ (55).¹¹⁷

‘L’artiste’, Léo cries, ‘a pour patrie le monde entier.’ *La Dernière Aldini* aligns the expansive politics of Carbonarism with the pan-European community of artists of ‘la grande Bohême’ (55), that ‘patrie fantasque des âmes sans ambition et sans entraves’, as Sand would write in her *Lettres*

¹¹⁶ George Sand, *La Dernière Aldini*, ed. by Alex Lascar. In *Œuvres complètes: 1838*, ed. by Béatrice Didier (Honoré Champion, 2012), pp. 180, 109.

¹¹⁷ On the role played by secret societies in the *risorgimento*, see Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), *passim*.

d'un voyageur (OA, II: 817).¹¹⁸ If commentaries on the artist figure in Sand's fiction are legion, scholarship has been rather more slow to draw out the connection between the actor's bohemian sensibilities and the necessarily protean form – and freedom of movement – of the conspirator. For Marx and Engels, 'the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass thrown hither and thither, which the French term *la bohème*' was to be written off as a politically irresponsible pseudo-community of 'decayed *roués*' and 'ruined and adventurous off-shoots of the bourgeoisie' (MECW, XI: 149). The 'self-consciously Bohemian'¹¹⁹ Sand of *La Dernière Aldini*, in contrast, posits these actors as an oppositional community focussed on progressive social action. In this vein, noting Sand's tendency to refer to Heinrich Heine and Eugène Delacroix as 'cousin', Hecquet observes that, 'comme c'était le mot utilisé entre eux par les carbonari, une certaine connotation de secte révolutionnaire, inégalement actualisée selon les destinataires, s'attache à la communauté dispersée des artistes.'¹²⁰ (Lucienne Frappier–Mazur's assertion that it is *Consuelo* '[qui] amorce [...] un tournant en associant le thème théâtral et le thème politique', then, seems to require modification.¹²¹) Yet where, for Evelyn Gould, the text expresses an optimistic vision of middle-class association, a 'bourgeois hopefulness or hopefulness about bourgeois culture',¹²² reading *La Dernière Aldini* in dialogue with *Le Compagnon* strikes a rather more sober note. For in both texts, the insufficiently egalitarian aims of the failed plot of Carbonarist conspiracy come to parallel the failed plots of social engineering through cross-class marriage (Yseult and Pierre; Léo and Bianca/Alézia). Having exhausted the Carbonarist motif, it is only in the *Consuelo* cycle, in which Sand posits a different kind of pan-European conspiracy, a true 'conspiration universelle contre le despotisme et l'intolérance',¹²³ that clandestine association is definitively recast as a valid means to a social-utopian end.

¹¹⁸ On Bohemia in the cultural imagination of nineteenth-century France, see Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830–1930* (New York: Viking, 1986); and Daniel Cottom, *International Bohemia: Scenes of Nineteenth-Century Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

¹¹⁹ Miranda Gill, *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 91.

¹²⁰ Michèle Hecquet, 'Enfants de Bohême: naissance et légitimation chez Sand', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 226 (Apr. – Jun. 1992), 99–116 (p. 104).

¹²¹ Lucienne Frappier–Mazur, 'Le Monde du théâtre et le rêve communautaire dans les romans de George Sand', *Romanic Review*, 96.3–4 (May – Nov. 2005), 409–20 (p. 410).

¹²² Evelyn Gould, 'George Sand's Forgotten Bohemia', in *Le Siècle de George Sand*, ed. by David Powell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 357–65 (p. 357).

¹²³ George Sand, *Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, ed. by Léon Cellier and Léon Guichard, 2 vols (Gallimard, 2004), III, 391. The 2004 Gallimard re-edition of Cellier and Guichard's 1959 text condenses the three volumes of the original into two, yet respects the double pagination of the original, which I designate with 'I', 'II' and 'III'.

‘Vous êtes trop dans l’idéal !’

If, for Marx and Engels, Bohemian anarchy was the enemy of that future revolution that would finally emancipate the proletariat, *Le Compagnon*, too, frames the Carbonarist movement as hostile to the working classes. The final exchange between Pierre Huguenin and Achille Lefort (‘prétendu commis voyageur, en réalité membre du comité de recrutement de la Charbonnerie’ [251], who targets Pierre as ‘une des plus belles conquêtes qu’il pût faire pour sa vente’ [437]) ends with the former proclaiming that ‘nous conserverons entre ouvriers notre compagnonnage, malgré ses abus et ses excès, parce que son principe est plus beau que celui de votre charbonnerie. Il tend à rétablir l’égalité parmi nous, tandis que le vôtre tend à maintenir l’inégalité sur la terre’ (417). *Pace* Pierre’s sceptical father, ‘mal disposé [...] contre les sociétés secrètes’ (102) and decrying ‘la *franche maçonnerie* des Compagnons’ (100, original emphasis), it is suggested that the journeymen’s guild ‘sert à s’entendre, à se connaître, à se soutenir les uns les autres, à s’entr’aider, ce qui n’est pas si fou ni si mauvais’ (100). The ‘conspirateurs aux mains blanches’ (246), ‘révolutionnaires au petit pied’ (247), of the Carbonari, in contrast, emerge as the ideologically deficient, distorted mirror image of the Compagnons, as figured in the negative anaphoric triad of the Orleanist doctor: ‘Il faudra bien chercher quelque chose de mieux que votre Charbonnerie, où personne ne se tient, où personne ne se connaît, et où personne ne s’entend’ (254). Egalitarian conspiracy, for Pierre, imperatively gestures beyond the material trappings of association: if he decries the ruinous internal feuds between *compagnons* over ‘le droit de porter exclusivement l’équerre et le compas [...], la couleur d’un ruban placé un peu plus haut ou un peu plus bas, l’ornement d’un anneau d’oreille’ (153–54), he is equally swift to remind Lefort that ‘tant qu’il y aura des êtres humains couverts de la lèpre de la misère, je dirai que vous n’avez rien fait de bon avec vos conspirations, vos chartes bourgeoises et vos changements de cocarde’ (411).¹²⁴ In keeping with this emphasis on (and disdain for) the material, Pierre deflates the quasi-transcendental rhetoric of enlightenment in which Lefort attempts to couch his conspiratorial mission, bringing the Carbonaro firmly back down to earth. Faced with the latter’s contention that it falls to ‘les hommes supérieurs à la masse par la science et la méditation’ to ‘v[enir] au secours du peuple pour l’éclairer sur ses véritables intérêts’ (413), Pierre’s protests earn him the accusation of naïve resistance to ‘toute espèce de lumière venant des chefs du libéralisme’ (414). Yet, the carpenter retorts, the Carbonarist ‘mission [...] de nous agiter et de nous soulever’ is far from ‘reçu[e] du ciel’: ‘vous [...] n’avez jamais réfléchi sérieusement à notre condition, et [...] tout en la plaignant, ne savez nullement le moyen de la

¹²⁴ Pierre’s remarks speak outwards to the July Monarchy context of the novel’s publication: with Louis-Philippe’s accession to power in 1830, the white cockade and flag of the Bourbons were replaced with tricolour equivalents.

changer' (409). The well-intentioned liberal conspirators can but reproduce 'des habitudes tout aussi jésuitiques' than those of the diegetically restored Bourbon regime, the 'gouvernement corrupteur' (409) that Lefort accuses of spreading a 'système de calomnies pour [...] détacher le peuple de ses vrais, de ses seuls amis' (408). Accordingly, Lefort's attempts to subvert class hierarchy, casting the people as 'l'aristocrate, le souverain' through the implacable logic of synonymy of 'c'est-à-dire' (408), fall on deaf ears. Irreparably divided between 'de si belles théories' and 'de si misérables applications' (572), this movement of self-professed 'conspirateurs du tiers-état' (408), then, reveals itself as incapable of speaking the language of those it professes to liberate.

Under Sand's pen, the chasm between theory and practice is a recurrent criticism made of Carbonarism, framed as a consequence of '[des] idées purement politiques et nullement morales' (409). Ethics, then, are a necessary correlate of politics; in a Sandian universe there can be no class-conscious conspiracy without compassion. In response to the plea that he align himself under the 'bannière' of the Charte constitutionnelle – framed by his interlocutor as synonymous with 'ce que nos pères appelaient République indivisible' (243) – Pierre readily admits that he is 'pour ce principe inscrit en tête de la Charte constitutionnelle : *Tous les Français sont égaux devant la loi*' (243, original emphasis). He is, however, swift to append a qualificatory footnote to his concession, emphasising the discrepancy between the restored Bourbon regime's symbolic foundations and their rather less evident implementation. 'Comme je ne vois pas que ce principe soit mis en pratique dans les institutions consacrées par la Charte', he adds, 'je ne puis me passionner pour un gouvernement constitutionnel quel qu'il soit, tant que je verrai le texte de la loi divine écrit sur vos monuments et rayé de vos consciences' (243–44). If, earlier in their exchange, Lefort sought to steer the carpenter towards a republicanism not of Rousseau or Robespierre, but the middle way of Lafayette and his 'système [...] des gens sages, des ennemis de l'anarchie, des vrais libéraux' (241), Pierre dismantles his suppositions in voicing a preference for an unyielding 'rigueur sauvage' over 'un système vague qui nous promettait l'égalité sans nous la donner' (244). Ultimately, it is suggested, Lafayette's ideal of a conspiratorial 'révolution sans proscriptions, sans échafauds' (241) is insufficiently bold, devoid of that counter-discursive thrust from which true popular contestation *à la* Babeuf draws its energy.

It is difficult to overstate the influence of the literary-critical narrative – given its most sophisticated expression in Schor and Cohen – which aligns the condescending treatment posterity has accorded to Sand with her use of discredited aesthetic modes (idealism, sentimentalism, a naïve social Romanticism). If Sand's treatment of the conspiratorial has generally received little sustained scholarly treatment, what also seems to have escaped attention is the manner in which this question

has a bearing beyond the purely thematic, speaking as it does to the vexed realism/idealism divide. In the vast body of criticism on *Le Compagnon*, for example, nowhere do we find discussion of the analogous terms in which Sand casts her criticism of the Carbonarist view of the working classes.¹²⁵ For where Blanc, we saw, tasks these conspirators with an excessive bourgeois materialism, 'l'amour exagéré d'un bien-être tout matériel' (92), it is to the ideal that Sand turns in her criticism of the movement. Crucially, Pierre suggests to his sparring partner, Lefort, that his conspiratorial vision of progress is ideologically deficient insofar as it is informed by an idealized vision of *le peuple*. In maintaining a problematic typology of working-class liberation, Lefort, he argues, is simply not 'realist' enough. Ventriloquizing a bourgeois discourse perhaps most infamously figured in Hugo's exhortation to 'avoir les populaces en dédain et le peuple en amour',¹²⁶ Pierre rages:

Le peuple, dites-vous, ce n'est pas cette vile populace qui hurle dans les attroupements, qui demande le sang et le pillage, qui mendie, un bâton à la main, prête à arracher la vie à quiconque ne livre pas sa bourse. Le peuple, c'est la partie saine de la population, qui gagne honnêtement sa vie, qui respecte les droits acquis, cherchant à mériter les mêmes droits, non par la violence et l'anarchie, mais par la persévérance au travail, l'aptitude à s'instruire et le respect aux lois du pays. Voilà comme vous définissez le peuple, et comme vous endossez sa livrée des dimanches pour vous présenter devant les tribunaux, devant les Chambres, et devant tous ceux qui ont les moyens de s'abonner à vos feuilles. (410)

This, Pierre maintains, is only half the story. For those 'realist' elements ('l'habit grossier que porte le travailleur en semaine', 'ses plaies horribles', 'ses maladies honteuses et sa vermine' [410]) that Lefort and his conspirators-in-arms are all too ready to exclude from their saccharine vision are equally deserving of solidarity. In a typographical gesture towards the erudition of her 'artisan philosophe' (438) – that is, a 'belle intelligence' (438) which ultimately validates his admissibility to idealized representation – Sand highlights Pierre's familiarity with an intertextual network of denigration of the popular. If the carpenter previously railed to Lefort against the liberal 'journaux [...] pleins de protestations de vos avocats et de vos orateurs qui nous renient et nous méprisent'

¹²⁵ The only reference I have found, which is not developed further, is Carolyn Betensky's reading of *Le Compagnon*, in which, she suggests, Sand 'complicates her representation of the people, and the very idea of their representability, in a number of ways. She does this first by representing different bourgeois attitudes towards *le peuple*, including reformist ones, and letting them self-destruct [...]. Achille Lefort, the bumbling Carbonarist conspirator, is the one who falls flattest on his face for his disingenuous, ingratiating and ultimately rather hostile attitude towards the very *peuple* he purports to revere.' See 'When the People Are Not the People: Populist Paradoxes in Sand and Michelet', in Powell (ed.), *Le Siècle de George Sand*, pp. 101–09 (p. 108).

¹²⁶ *Discours prononcés dans la séance publique tenue par l'Académie française pour la réception de M. Victor Hugo, le 3 juin 1841* (Firmin Didot, 1841), p. 31.

(409–10), he deploys a similarly accusatory possessive in his indictment of the Carbonarist willingness to ignore the worker's 'délires affreux lorsque le regret de la veille et l'effroi du lendemain le forcent à *boire*, comme a dit un de vos poètes, *l'oubli des douleurs*' (410, original emphasis).¹²⁷ The inverse reflection of the idealized Sandian worker figure, this is a proto-Zolian 'vil troupeau' (411) of denizens of the *assommoir*, a *lumpenproletariat* that is the object not of Carbonarist admiration but of disgust: 'tout ce qu'il y a de rage, de désordre et d'oubli de soi-même dans le fait de la misère, vous vous en lavez les mains ; vous ne connaissez pas cela ; vous rougiriez de la justifier ; vous dites : "Ceux-là sont nos ennemis aussi ; ils sont l'épouvante et l'opprobre de la société"' (410–11).

Yet, lest we forget, Pierre insists, 'ceux-là aussi, c'est le peuple !' (411). Verging on the sub-human, 'oublié et foulé', a 'bête enragée' 'réduit[e] aux abois' by 'la misère' (409–10), his realist masses emerge as the counter-weight to Lefort's sanitized vision of the working classes. The 'lightness' of the Carbonarist 'républicains sincères, mais légers' (412) stems from what Sand frames in her preface as its rhetorical opposite, 'le poids des anathèmes de deux castes, la noblesse et la bourgeoisie' (38). Lefort's ideology is 'light' because his understanding of the object and willed beneficiary of his conspiratorial action is patently incomplete; it falls to Pierre to provide the supplement that is at the same time a corrective. These self-professed 'médecin[s] de l'humanité morale' (412), then, are far from qualified to attend to the sufferings of the body politic. Extending his interlocutor's medico-scientific metaphor, couched in moralizing terms, Sand's protagonist asks:

Est-ce donc chercher le remède que de détourner les yeux avec horreur et de se boucher le nez, en disant qu'il n'y a que corruption et infection dans l'infirmerie ? Que penseriez-vous d'un carabin qui ne pourrait voir sans s'évanouir de dégoût un membre gangrené ? Serait-ce là du dévouement ? Serait-ce seulement l'amour de la science ? Serait-ce l'indice d'une vocation réelle ? Eh bien ! osez donc descendre dans les léproseries de l'humanité morale, comme vous dites ; osez donc sonder de vos mains l'abîme de nos maux, et ne perdez le temps à dire que cela est horrible à voir ; songez à y porter remède : car je n'ai jamais vu un médecin, si paresseux et si borné qu'il pût être d'ailleurs, abandonner un malade sous le prétexte qu'il était trop dégoûtant pour être guéri. (412)

If the image of the scalpel-wielding realist has gained a particular critical currency in the wake of Sainte-Beuve's essay on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*,¹²⁸ the analogy of the inadequate diagnostician

¹²⁷ The reference is to Senancour's *Obermann* (1804).

¹²⁸ 'Fils et frère de médecins distingués, M. Gustave Flaubert tient la plume comme d'autres le scalpel. Anatomistes et physiologistes, je vous retrouve partout !' Charles-Auguste Sainte-Beuve, *Madame Bovary*

was, we might note, one levelled against Sand by none other than Zola.¹²⁹ Setting the arch-idealist against her old sparring partner, Balzac, Zola figures Sand as an ideologically compromised physician ‘qui observe plutôt pour guérir que pour constater’ (OCZ, X: 278). ‘Comme le chirurgien’, Zola’s Balzac, on the other hand, ‘n’a ni honte ni répugnance, lorsqu’il fouille les plaies humaines. Il n’a souci que de vérité, et étale devant nous le cadavre de notre cœur’ (II: 510). The idealist ‘pays des chimères’ (X: 746), then, is of false comfort, whilst the realist writer, in White’s elegant summation, ‘strips bare the mechanics of human passion and undertakes unflinchingly the dissection of sentimental fiction’.¹³⁰

The unfeeling elitism of the Carbonarist conspirators, convinced of their own paternalistic ‘génie supérieur’ (187), is neatly figured in the cynical *Realpolitik* of the comte de Villepreux, who sweet-talks the most radical faction of the movement only as ‘un instrument utile, un appau à prendre les courages, un allié propre à échauffer l’ardeur des étourdis, et à tirer les marrons du feu’ (470–71). This one-time partisan of the ‘système de Babœuf’ (389) who knows, ‘fort bien, au fond de son âme, qu’il était *Orléaniste*’ (471, original emphasis), adopts the mask of the liberal ‘député conspirateur [...], affilié à la Vente Suprême’ (412). Villepreux’s cynicism is belied in the characterization of the decision to ‘quitter le sentier *vulgaire* de la politique officielle pour se lancer dans les conspirations’ (469, emphasis added). Indeed, in spite of its revolutionary pretensions, Carbonarism, it is suggested, is not so far removed from *la politique officielle* after all, absorbed into the official whilst evidencing the officiousness with which it is cognate. Beset by a lack of conceptual clarity, ‘cette diversité de causes que toute opposition politique rassemble sous sa bannière’ (387), this one-size-fits-all approach to conspiratorial politics is figured in the image of ‘le capitaine napoléoniste, l’avocat lafayettiste et le médecin orléaniste, groupés sous le manteau de la cheminée, [qui] s’entretenaient à demi-voix’ (251). The conspirators are staged as textually and ideologically contiguous with ‘le côté gauche de la Chambre’ (387). If the opposition possesses its own ‘langage avoué et officiel [...], au fond’, we learn, ‘ce langage cachait bien quelques mystères, et l’extrême gauche avait, dit-on, certains rapports avec la société du Carbonarisme’ (387). Carbonarism, then, is far from an authentic counter-discourse, its political programme so lost in the vagueness of ‘dit-on’s and ‘certains rapports’ that it ultimately emerges as all too readily assimilable to the existing order of things.

par M. Gustave Flaubert: lundi, 4 mai 1857’, in *Causeries du lundi*, 15 vols (Garnier Frères, 1851–62), XIII (n.d.), pp. 346–63 (p. 363).

¹²⁹ Reid provides a sensitive and nuanced discussion of Zola’s reading of Sand: see *Signer Sand: l’œuvre et le nom* (Belin, 2003), pp. 199–223.

¹³⁰ Claire White, ‘Labour of Love: George Sand’s *La Ville Noire* and Émile Zola’s *Travail*’, *MLR*, 106.3 (Jul. 2011), 697–708 (p. 697).

Le Compagnon is thus swift to deflate the revolutionary pretensions of the Carbonari in its suggestion that their paternalistic conspiracy is grounded in a partially-sighted idealism. Their sanitized vision of *le peuple* is the result of an idealism that remains ethically and politically lacking, ill-accommodated to the ‘abjection’ of the ‘caste[s] inférieur[s]’ (411). The Carbonarist privilege, it seems, is one of distance. Yet far from allowing the clarity of the Archimedean point, that position from which one might cause the earth to shift, this distance leads only to an inadequate, blurred perspective. In this way, Sand’s critique of Carbonarism echoes that idealized vision underpinned by a willed ignorance of detail – a masculinist disdain for a category gendered as feminine, in Schor’s seminal account¹³¹ – that Pierre detects in his secret readings in Yseult’s library. With typographic recourse to an ironizing italics of intertextuality, the Sandian narrator highlights the discrepancy between a *beau pastoral* aligned with ‘éloignement’ and the grubbier realities of working-class life on the ground:

Il avait lu, dans les philosophes et dans les poètes du siècle dernier, que *la cabane du laboureur*, la prairie *émaillée de fleurs*, et le champ semé de glaneuses, étaient plus beaux que les parterres, les allées droites, les buissons taillés, les gazons peignés et les bassins ornés de statues qui entourent *le palais des grands* ; et il s’était laissé aller à le croire, car cette idée lui plaisait alors. Mais, forcé de parcourir la France, à pied et en toute saison, il avait reconnu que cette *nature* tant vantée au dix-huitième siècle n’était réellement nulle part, sur un sol divisé à l’infini et indignement torturé par les besoins individuels. Si, du haut d’une colline, il avait contemplé avec ravissement une certaine étendue de pays, c’est que, dans l’éloignement, cette division s’efface et se confond à la vue ; les masses reprennent leur apparence de grandeur et d’harmonie ; les belles formes primitives du terrain, la riche couleur de la végétation que l’homme ne peut détruire, dominant et dissimulent à distance la mutilation misérable qu’elles ont subie. Mais en approchant de ces détails, en pénétrant dans ces perspectives, notre voyageur avait toujours éprouvé un désenchantement complet [...]. Les pittoresques chaumières étaient sales, entourées d’eau croupie, privées d’abris naturels contre le vent ou le soleil. Nulle chose n’était à sa place [...]. Point d’harmonie, point de goût, et surtout point de fertilité réelle. (365–66)

The unfocussed perspective born of distance, it is suggested, can be transposed onto the very level of Carbonarist ideology: if Pierre attempts to ‘débrouiller quelque chose dans le chaos des théories qu’Achille avait mêlées devant lui’, this results only in an explicit move away from enlightenment as ‘ses idées s’obscurcissent’ (363). ‘Il y avait un tel vague dans la cervelle du Carbonaro’, we learn, ‘qu’il n’avait laissé dans celle de son néophyte qu’incohérence et confusion’ (363). In insisting that the ‘ideal’ worker, ‘celui qui travaille dans vos maisons, souriant, tranquille et bien vêtu’, cannot

¹³¹ See Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

be divorced from his ‘realist’ counterpart, ‘[celui] qui rougit à vos portes, irrité, sombre et couvert de haillons’ (411), Pierre desublimates the idealizing rhetoric of these ‘serviteur[s] obscur[s] de la cause’ (416) whose love for the proletariat is predicated as much on his docility as on his decency. In this way, the carpenter’s debate with Lefort ironically rehearses the earlier narratorial lament decrying the internecine wars between *devoirs* of *compagnons*: ‘Que ne devait pas souffrir, en effet, cette organisation toujours portée vers l’idéal, et rejetée sans cesse dans la plus brutale réalité !’ (210). Engagement with that ‘brutal reality’ from which criticism has so often sought to distance Sand is, in fact, part and parcel of her vision of the conspiratorial, on which ethics and politics converge.

The idealist underpinnings of the Carbonarist philosophy ultimately emerge as unstable foundations. Their conspiracy is shown to be shakily grounded in a blinkered idealism, its ethical and political deficiency stemming from the dearth of those *idées sociales* with which Pierre is repeatedly aligned: ‘vous avez des *idées sociales*, comme votre ami Pierre’ (428); ‘l’idée sociale qui tourmentait l’artisan philosophe’ (438). Carbonarist idealism, then, as Sand’s narrator remarks of the comte de Villepreux, is essentially assimilable to an ‘engouement facile pour tous les principes généraux et pour toutes les idées sociales sans application et sans conséquence’, a tolerance for plurality ‘pourvu que l’ordre social n’en fût point trop ébranlé et que les théories n’eussent pas la prétention de passer dans la pratique’ (390). Yet, faced with the accusation of proposing only solutions that are ‘orgueilleuses, cruelles et antihumaines’ (416), it is precisely with an excessive idealism that the Carbonaro tasks the carpenter. ‘Vous êtes trop dans l’idéal’, Lefort cries:

Vous en demandez plus aux hommes qu’ils ne peuvent faire. Vous voudriez des chefs et des conseils qui résumassent en eux l’audace de Napoléon et l’humilité de Jésus-Christ. C’est un peu trop exiger de la nature humaine en un jour ; et d’ailleurs, si un tel homme venait, il ne serait pas compris. Vous raisonnez, vous, et le peuple ne raisonne pas. (416)

If, in the Restoration France of Sand’s novel, ‘les germes d’une philosophie sociale et religieux couvaient dans de secrets conciles’ (190), it is not the Carbonarist conspirators who might translate this philosophy from the abstract into the concrete.

Pierre, we might recall, is swift to denounce the ‘abus’ and the ‘excès’ (417) of the secret sociability of the *compagnons*, railing against their mythologizing tendencies (‘À mesure que je m’éclaire sur la véritable histoire des peuples, la fable du temple de Salomon me semble un mystère puéril, une allégorie grossière’ [152]) and the ‘barbare usage de créer des distinctions, des castes, des camps ennemis entre nous tous’ (153). Yet if he sets this against ‘le sentiment d’une destinée commune à tous les travailleurs’ (152–53), the *artisan-philosophe* insists, with recourse to the faceless

‘on’ of indeterminate conspiratorial agency, that ‘cependant l’on conspire’ (241). ‘Moi, je conspire’, he says to Lefort. ‘Tout seul, dans le secret de mes pensées, en rêvant presque toujours, en pleurant quelquefois. Je conspire contre tout le mal qui existe, et dans le but, sinon dans l’espoir de tout changer’ (241–42). In highlighting its status as counter–discourse, for Pierre, then, conspiracy can be divorced from plurality. Where the Carbonari put forward a paternalistic conspiracy grounded in a prejudiced typology, dividing *peuple* and *populace* on the basis of a partial idealization, Pierre pleads for popular unity, or what Sand herself termed ‘la fusion de ses intérêts en un seul intérêt’ (*Corr. Sand*, V: 104).

Where, for Balzac, *l’histoire officielle* was dictated *ad usum delphini*, serving the shadowy interests of those in power, Sand’s ‘lost’ history is defined not in terms of its ends but of its substance. ‘Les arcanes de l’histoire’, we have seen, are determined by the question of social class, that ‘refoulé social’ to which, for Georges Duveau, the development of industrial capitalism had consigned the worker.¹³² The Sandian investment in conspiracy thinking, then, aligns with her deeply–held conviction that ‘c’est dans le peuple, et dans la classe ouvrière surtout qu’est l’avenir du monde’ (103). Inscribed within her reflection on aesthetic dignity and the conditions of admissibility to representation, this divergent understanding of what constitutes ‘secret’ history can be mapped onto those oft–cited differences between herself and Balzac that Sand sets out in her ‘Notice’ to *Le Compagnon*. Pinpointing Balzac as a turning point in the history of the novel, Sand asks:

Depuis quand le roman est–il forcément la peinture de ce qui est, la dure et froide réalité des hommes et des choses contemporaines ? Il en peut être ainsi, je le sais, et Balzac, un maître devant le talent duquel je me suis toujours incliné, a fait la *Comédie humaine*. Mais, tout en étant lié d’amitié avec cet homme illustre, je voyais les choses humaines sous un tout autre aspect, et je me souviens de lui avoir dit, à peu près à l’époque où j’écrivais le *Compagnon du Tour de France* [...] : ‘En somme, vous voulez et savez peindre l’homme tel qu’il est sous vos yeux, soit ! Moi, je me sens porté [*sic*] à le peindre tel que je souhaite qu’il soit, tel que je crois qu’il doit être.’ Et comme nous ne nous faisons pas de concurrence, nous eûmes bientôt reconnu notre droit mutuel. (36)

Here, the metaphor of ocularity is aligned less with the – self–professedly objective but nonetheless ideologically fraught – exposure of the hidden workings of society, *à la* Balzac, than with an ameliorative project. The Sandian novel of conspiracy necessarily involves a degree of revelation in its most immediate sense – that is, the making–known through the making–visible of a world

¹³² Georges Duveau, *La Vie ouvrière en France sous le Second Empire* (Gallimard, 1946), p. 14.

of secret manoeuvring. Yet in the negotiation of the difficult boundary between realism's dispassionate gaze and a visionary romantic socialism, it also speaks to the more visionary element of the term, proposing, as Pratima Prasad has suggested, 'new ways of looking at and imagining th[e] world'.¹³³

What, then, might a true idealist conspiracy look like? For, following Naginski, we might understand Sand's idealism as a 'réalisme prophétique' (176), an anticipation of 'une réalité en train de s'accomplir *mais encore invisible*' (177, emphasis added). How does Sand seek to reconcile that political and ethical antinomy, fraught since Babeuf, between secretive plotting and the democratic transparency on which republicanism prided itself? Is this antinomy also an aesthetic one, given the idealist eschewal of the hermeneutic code that Barthes identifies as an essential element of realist plotting? (This is a genre that is, for Schor, 'by definition antienigmatic' [121].) Or is the Sandian novel of conspiracy, in Jamesonian terms, an unexplored arena of the aesthetic that allows precisely for the reconciliation of imaginary solutions and real contradictions? For, as Reid has argued, 'on peut appeler *idéisme* cette façon singulière d'exposer en littérature non un problème mais une solution, *romanesque* cette manière de voir les choses comme elles pourraient être et non comme elles sont'.¹³⁴ Martine Watrelot, too, emphasises the role of the aesthetic 'solution' in that Sandian poetics that is always-already a politics: 'pour [Sand], la fiction romanesque se propose comme un efficace moyen d'affranchissement du déterminisme sociologique en illustrant de possibles devoir-être', she writes.¹³⁵ Idealism, then, is inevitably future-orientated, the preserve of the anti-Cassandra who predicts progress in a framework of human perfectibility. This Cassandra-conspirator seems to act as a protagonist in Sand's remarks to Poncy on the curse of the idealist:

Quelqu'un conçoit un idéal ; on en rit, et on lui pardonne, en disant : c'est beau, mais trop beau. Puis les temps marchent, les faits s'accomplissent, et il arrive que l'idéal est dépassé. Les hommes alors comparent, et se retournent en souriant vers la prédiction. Ils s'étonnent de la trouver si timide, et pardonnent alors son peu d'ampleur, à cause de la bonne intention : ce qui ne les empêchent pas, les enfants qu'ils sont, de recommencer à railler toute prédiction nouvelle. (*Corr. Sand*, VII: 187)

Yet in its critique of the blurred ideological contours of Carbonarism and the internal divisions of *compagnonnage*, *Le Compagnon* ultimately remains ambivalent as to the value of secret association in

¹³³ Pratima Prasad, 'Contesting Realism: Mimesis and Performance in George Sand's Novels', *Dix-Neuf*, 3 (Sept. 2004), 34–54 (p. 51).

¹³⁴ Martine Reid, 'Preface', in George Sand, *Mademoiselle Merquem*, ed. by Martine Reid (Arles: Actes Sud, 1996), pp. 7–19 (p. 12).

¹³⁵ Martine Watrelot, '*Le Juif errant* d'Eugène Sue et *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*', *George Sand Studies*, 22 (2003), 68–79 (p. 68).

‘la tâche d’écrire l’histoire moderne du prolétaire’ (49). The novel is reluctant to articulate an alternative vision of conspiratorial sociability that responds to the present in a focus on potentiality. In her most sensitive denunciation of the actual via a portrayal of the possible, Sand, in fact, looks back to the history of eighteenth-century Freemasonry and pre-Revolutionary secret societies. It is with this in mind that we turn to *Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1842–44).¹³⁶

¹³⁶ The name of the eponymous heroine of the *Consuelo* cycle seems to speak intertextually to the Frères de la Consolation, the benevolent secret society of *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine*: the Brothers’ aim to ‘déjouer la conspiration permanente du mal’ (CH, VIII: 323), endowed with ‘une omnipotence plus certaine que celle des despotes’ (329), echoes the Invisibles’ ‘conspiration universelle contre le despotisme et l’intolérance’ (III: 391).

CHAPTER THREE

Liberty, Equality, Conspiracy: Rewriting the Origins of 1789 in *Consuelo-La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*

From *Le Compagnon* to the *Consuelo* cycle

Reflecting on strategies for narrative closure, E.M. Forster famously mused: ‘if it were not for death and marriage, I do not know how the average novelist would conclude.’¹ The ending to *Le Compagnon*, however, remains resolutely free of both: having debated ‘pied à pied leur différente manière de comprendre le beau idéal’ (576), Pierre and Yseult ultimately fail to concretize through any kind of union the novel’s take on the post-1789 politicization of affect. If Pierre’s resultant colouring, ‘pâle comme un linceul’ (577), seems to edge the conclusion closer to the other term of Forster’s dyad, there remains, as Schor observes, ‘no closure, no final resolution, only deferral’ (90). Seemingly in keeping with Sand’s conviction, expressed in a letter to Antenor Joly, that ‘les romans ne doivent jamais finir tout à fait’ (*Corr. Sand*, VII: 145), what Sand’s narrator does promise, though, is a sequel. Gesturing, through the temporal divisions of *Bildung*, towards the archetype of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*,² the narrator comments: ‘si la jeunesse de Pierre Huguenin, le Compagnon du Tour de France, a pu vous intéresser quelque peu, sa virilité, dont je compte vous entretenir dans un second roman, vous intéressera davantage, je l’espère’ (572). Indeed, writing to Perdiguier a couple of years later, working ‘sans relâche et sans repos à l’interminable roman de *Consuelo*’, Sand reassures him that ‘je ne renonce pas [...] à la suite du *Compagnon*’ (*Corr. Sand*, VI: 211). This sequel, though, was never to appear.

For Schor, the ‘unwritability’ of Pierre’s adventures beyond *Le Compagnon* is to be located in the idealist interleaving of the erotic and the political. The ‘unrepresentability of the union of its highly idealized main protagonists’ (90), she argues, belies Sand’s ‘rejection of the private solution to social conflict’ – that is, her attempt to hold to account the ‘privatization’ of love under realism (90). In a letter to Perdiguier of February 1860, Sand herself would posit the industrial novel *La Ville noire* as ‘un ouvrage qui pourrait faire suite au *Tour de France*’. She adds: ‘ce n’est pourtant ni une suite, ni une étude du même genre. Je ne me suis pas occupée, cette fois, des détails réels et

¹ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927), p. 143.

² Kari E. Lokke draws on this recurrent collocation in her brief discussion of the parallels between the benevolent conspiracies of Goethe’s ‘Society of the Tower’ and Sand’s Invisibles, which would merit further critical exploration. See *Tracing Women’s Romanticism: Gender, History and Transcendence* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 133–37.

positifs de la vie ouvrière' (*Corr. Sand*, XV: 691).³ An incredulous Schor is swift to dismiss Sand's claim for this pseudo-sequel on the basis that 'the characters are not the same, and the setting is totally different!' (90). Other critics have been more open to the potentialities of narrative continuation beyond differences of person and place. Like Schor, some turn to *Le Meunier d'Angibault* (1845) as the vehicle for Sand's continued attempts to novelistically reconcile a French people divided along class lines. For Jean-Louis Cabanès, for example, *Le Compagnon* 'trouve son prolongement' in *Le Meunier*, 'qui ménage une issue heureuse à la mésalliance'. In invoking the possibility of a happy ending to what we might envisage as a kind of class-based miscegenation, Cabanès, crucially, also gestures towards the *Consuelo* cycle, 'où l'initiation de l'héroïne se parachève dans *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*' (572 n. 1). Similarly, in the introduction to their critical edition of the latter, Léon Cellier and Léon Guichard highlight the common marriage motif underpinning both works:

Déjà, dans *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, où deux menuisiers sont aimés, l'un d'une marquise, l'autre d'Iseult [*sic*], fille du comte de Villepreux, George Sand avait, dans une fiction romanesque, cherché à rapprocher les 'classes' par 'un mariage contraire aux idées et aux coutumes de l'hérarchie sociale'. Elle reprend ce thème dans *Consuelo*, en unissant la *zingarella* au comte Albert de Rudolstadt, et cette fois le comte Christian, le père d'Albert, accepte l'union que le comte de Villepreux, malgré son libéralisme, aurait refusée. (I: xvi)

WatreLOT, too, sees in the cycle the prolongation of those concerns adumbrated with Pierre and Yseult: 'alors que *Le Compagnon* espérait l'alliance de la patricienne et du plébéien', she notes, '*La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* rend effectif l'hyménée de l'aristocrate et de la bohémienne'.⁴ Invoking the Goethean archetype, Bourgeois, finally, makes a similar rapprochement, gesturing towards questions of novelistic – and, indeed, existential – periodization:

Le schéma classique du roman d'éducation, selon le modèle de *Wilhelm Meister* de Goethe, est ainsi clairement tracé : après les années d'apprentissage, les années de maîtrise. Si l'auteur renonce à le développer, le sujet du *Compagnon* se prêtant mal à une suite qui reste dans les limites de la vraisemblance romanesque, elle le reprendra un peu plus tard pour *Consuelo* et *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*. (379 n. 1)

³ White notes how the factory setting of *La Ville noire* figures the changing face of labour 'from a tradition of *compagnonnage* to the increasingly industrial and commodified work model of post-1848 France'. The romantic plot left 'suspended and unresolved' at the close of *Le Compagnon*, she suggests, 'is worked out' in this utopian setting ('Labour of Love', p. 701).

⁴ Martine Watrelot, 'Femmes et sociétés secrètes: de la maçonnerie des héroïnes dans *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*', in *Lectures de Consuelo–La Comtesse de Rudolstadt de George Sand*, ed. by Michèle Hecquet and Christine Planté (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2004), pp. 387–400 (p. 394).

The psychodrama of Sand's own dual familial origins has, of course, never ceased to fascinate, and may go some way towards explaining the critical proclivity for the changing fortunes of the Sandian cross-class marriage plot.⁵ There is, however, another way in which *Consuelo*–*La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* reworks and develops – ‘sequelizes’, we might venture – the class-conscious anxieties of *Le Compagnon*, which has gone virtually unnoticed in Sand studies.⁶ This is the novel's treatment of the kind of egalitarian conspiracy initiated with Babeuf, road-tested via Pierre Huguenin in its Carbonarist and *compagnonnique* declensions to receive, finally, its fullest idealist expression in Sand's *Invisibles*. Sitting at the nexus of the historical, the fictional and the fictitious, this imagined secret society is a hybrid of the Freemasons and the Bavarian Illuminati, whom, we shall see, she encountered via Barruel's *Urtext* of counter-revolutionary conspiracy theory. In the transition from what criticism has sought to periodise as Sand's ‘feminist’ and ‘socialist’ phases, the possibility of class conciliation shifts from the personal to the political, from the ‘micro’ of marriage to the ‘macro’ of a network of conspirators. The affective vocabulary of the ethical nonetheless remains present: in the ‘doctrine fraternelle’ (III: 457) of her conspiratorial vision of the historical process, initiates both ‘plébéiens et patriciens’ are ‘mêlés dans une tendre intimité’ (501). Yet, more than just an organization of benign sociability, Sand's ‘phalange illustre et vénérable’ is invested with genuine political power to ‘redresser les torts, protéger les faibles [et] réprimer la tyrannie’ (149). Drawing inspiration from the counter-discursive thrust of fifteenth-century ‘heretic’ thought, theirs is ‘un réseau de conspiration permanente et universelle pour prendre à la nasse et paralyser l'action des méchants dans le monde’ (322), devoted to ‘la possibilité humaine, la nécessité sociale et l'obligation morale de ce triple précepte : liberté, égalité, fraternité’ (372). In this way, Sand embraces the plot in the name of ‘la conception idéale d'une société future, diamétralement opposée à celle qui couvre et cache encore leur action dans l'histoire’ (480–81). At

⁵ On the autobiographical elements of *Consuelo*, see Michèle Hecquet, ‘De *Consuelo* à *Histoire de ma vie*’, in *Lire ‘Histoire de ma vie’ de George Sand: études*, ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2006), pp. 351–62.

⁶ I have found only two passing references to the novels' common conspiratorial thread, neither of which develop the question further. In his discussion of the Sandian ‘imaginaire dix-huitémiste’, Damien Zanone notes that ‘George Sand, qui est en ses belles années socialistes au moment où elle écrit *Consuelo*, a déjà dit deux ans auparavant, en préface à son roman *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840) tout le bien qu'elle pensait des sociétés secrètes comme lieux d'élaboration théorique du sens de l'histoire et de premier accomplissement concret de ce sens à travers des actions anticipatrices de l'avenir.’ See ‘Le romantisme de *Consuelo*, ou la méditation sur les Lumières de George Sand’, *Revue italienne d'études françaises*, 3 (2013) <<http://rief.revues.org/254>> [accessed 23rd June 2018] (para. 13 of 16). Watrelot, in a similar vein, observes that ‘les années qui suivent la parution du *Compagnon* seront pour la femme de lettres celles de toutes les audaces. Ses romans, qui jusqu'alors interrogeaient [...] les conditions d'égalité dans ce contrat social spécifique qu'est le mariage vont désormais interroger l'histoire politique, sonder les possibilités d'alliance de la classe ouvrière et cerner le rôle des sociétés secrètes.’ See ‘*Le Juif errant* d'Eugène Sue et *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*’, *George Sand Studies*, 22 (2003), 68–79 (p. 69).

stake, then, is an aesthetic and epistemological challenge to what she terms, in an echo of Balzac, 'l'histoire officielle du monde' (*Corr. Sand*, VI: 179). For 'secret' history, lest we forget, is not a realist prerogative, but also serves as a class-conscious, idealist counter-discourse on 1789.

Positing an establishment and a cover-up, the *Consuelo* cycle, I show in this chapter, inscribes '[l]es sociétés secrètes de la mystique Allemagne' (III: 480) within a genealogy of egalitarian conspirators. This trans-historical network runs from the heretics of fifteenth-century Bohemia to those eighteenth-century associations which, in an idiosyncratic recasting of Barruel, Sand, too, aligns with the origins of Revolution. Her interest in the counter-discursive thrust of 'heretic' thought has a bearing beyond the strictly spiritual. Indeed, it is fundamental to her understanding of the historical process, protagonizing as it does Bohemia's 'martyrs de la liberté, de la fraternité, et de l'égalité'.⁷ If Sand studies has been drawn to analysis of her engagement with Bohemia as a cultural construct, critics have been rather more reluctant to explore its significance as concrete historical-geographical entity. Yet the conviction that the fifteenth-century struggles of central European emancipatory armies were 'intimement liée[s] à la solution des problèmes qui agitent les peuples aujourd'hui' (195) was to remain a constant. 'La guerre des Hussites', she insists in the little-studied *Procopé le Grand*, 'est, non seulement dans ses détails, mais dans son essence, très semblable à la Révolution française' (198). Reflecting many years later on Babeuf and de Bourges in *Histoire de ma vie*, Sand traces a radical thread from the Hussite wars to the 1848 uprisings.⁸ The 'farouche doctrine' epitomized by Babeuf, she writes, 'a eu son temps dans le monde, elle a soulevé la Bohême au nom de Jean Huss, elle a dominé souvent l'idéal de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, elle a bouleversé bien des imaginations à travers les tempêtes de la révolution du dernier siècle, et même encore à travers les agitations intellectuelles de 1848 elle s'est fondue en partie dans l'esprit de certains clubs de cette époque' (*HV*, 1392). Ultimately, I argue in what follows, it is less in the critical rationalism of the French Enlightenment than in the occultism and proto-Romanticism of Germany and their fifteenth-century heretic roots that Sand locates her conspiracy theory of Revolution.

Leaving west of the Rhine the inadequate idealism of the conspiracies of *Le Compagnon*, the Sand of the *Consuelo* cycle turns her attention to an Enlightenment Europe 'remplie de sociétés secrètes, laboratoires souterrains où se prépare une grande révolution, dont le cratère sera l'Allemagne ou la France' (372). 'Ces sociétés eurent-elles plus d'effet en France que dans le sein

⁷ George Sand, *Jeanne, suivi de Procopé le Grand: 2^e épisode de la guerre des Hussites au XV^e siècle*, 2 vols (Brussels: Meline & Cans, 1844), II, 198.

⁸ Deeply engaged ideologically yet maintaining distance from direct participation in street uprisings, Sand's position in and around the events of 1848 is an ambiguous one. For discussion of these questions, see, for example, Hamon, *George Sand et la politique*, pp. 233–321.

de l'Allemagne qui les avait enfantées ?', the Sandian narrator asks. The answer is forthcoming: 'La Révolution française répond avec énergie par l'affirmative' (516–17). Cast in the rhetoric of tenebrosity germane to the lexical field of conspiracy, what Sand terms 'la plus formidable et la plus savante des conjurations politiques et religieuses' underpins a century in which 'la Révolution française fermentait à l'ombre et germait sous terre' (480). In reworking Barruel's hostile mythology, Sand looks backwards beyond the Bourbon Restoration of *Le Compagnon* to the decades preceding the *grand drame* of 1789, that crowning glory of 'ce siècle étrange, qui commence par des chansons, se développe dans des conspirations bizarres, et aboutit, par des idées profondes, à des révolutions formidables !' (I: 6). If the *compagnons* and the Carbonari failed to fulfil idealist expectations, the 'secret Germany'⁹ of *Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, I show, emerges as the vehicle for Sand's most sensitive denunciation of the actual via a portrayal of the possible.

The Lost Histories of 'Official' Society

In the 'Avant propos' to *Le Compagnon*, Sand declares herself to be invested in unearthing the 'clef nouvelle pour pénétrer dans les arcanes de l'histoire'. Crucially, this key, she argues, is to be found in 'la filiation qui s'établirait entre toutes les sociétés secrètes', in which 'une grande partie de la classe ouvrière est constituée' (44). These secret societies, 'cette multitude de ténébreux conciles, des conspirations avortées, de sciences occultes, de schismes et de mystères' (43), are, for Sand, a necessary by-product of social stratification. For, echoing the vocabulary of caste that saturates the lexicon of her *maître à penser*, Leroux, she asserts that:

Tant que la société officielle ne sera pas construite en vue de l'égalité humaine, la société officielle sera caste ; et tant que la société officielle sera caste, la société officielle engendrera des sociétés secrètes. C'est à l'avenir de réaliser l'œuvre qui a germé si longtemps dans l'humanité et qui fermente si énergiquement aujourd'hui dans son sein. (42)

Conspiratorial association, then, forms the very bedrock of the Sandian vision of the historical process, borne forth by a dialectic of equality and inequality. As Isabelle Naginski has suggested,

⁹ I borrow the expression 'secret Germany' from the proto-fascist poet-prophet Stefan George (1868–1933) and his circle of devotees. The term dates back to a 1910 essay by one of George's original associates, who described his poetry as the manifestation of a distinct 'geheimes Deutschland', wholly separate from the 'offizielles Deutschland' of Wilhelmine and Weimar society. On George, see, for example, the intellectual biography of Robert Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Sand's engagement with the secret workers' societies of *compagnonnage* 'l'a aidée à ranimer le passé d'une classe échappant quasiment à l'histoire', 'procur[ant] au prolétariat une généalogie'.¹⁰ Yet, as we have seen, her treatment of the *compagnons* and the Carbonari is, ultimately, an ambiguous one, the former plagued by internal divisions and caught up in the trappings of mythologization, the latter invested in a prejudiced typology, dividing *peuple* and *populace* on the basis of a partial idealization. Post-*Le Compagnon*, however, she was not prepared to abandon the notion of egalitarian conspiracy in the service of social justice. It is the Invisibles of the *Consuelo* cycle who take up the baton: '*Liberté, fraternité, égalité*', Sand writes, approvingly, 'voilà la formule mystérieuse et profonde de l'œuvre des Invisibles' (III: 371, original emphasis).

The guiding contention of this chapter is that Sand's continued engagement with the conspiratorial in *Consuelo*–*La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* is to be aligned with her idiosyncratic contribution to a wider debate amongst left-wing July Monarchy intellectuals concerning the means of expression of *le peuple*, that class which was yet to find its voice in spite of 1789 and 1830. This, I suggest, was bound up with the July Monarchy transvaluation of the novel in France and the concomitant revival of interest in the writing of history. In the fraught negotiation of how to give voice to popular consciousness without subsuming it into her own – a task in which, we recall from our discussion of *Le Compagnon*, Rancière deemed her unsuccessful – Sand, too, seeks to remedy the shortcomings of historiography. The difficulty faced by many thinkers of the mid-century, writes Julian Wright in his recent study, 'was how to build connections to the working class'.¹¹ If, for Edgar Quinet, the people woke in 1789 'd'un sommeil de mille ans', '[il] écoutait', yet '[il] ne parlait pas'.¹² Michelet, similarly, lays claim to membership of a class of which he could, in Barthes's words, but 'chanter une impossible parole'.¹³ 'Je suis né peuple', he writes, 'j'avais le peuple dans le cœur [...]. J'ai pu en 46 poser le droit du peuple [...] ; en 64 sa tradition religieuse. Mais sa langue, sa langue, elle m'était inaccessible. Je n'ai pas pu le faire parler' (OCM, XX: 497–98). Such failures on the part of historians, I suggest, open up an opportunity in fiction. For, following Naginski:

Si le peuple reste silencieux dans le tissu de l'histoire, c'est dans le domaine de la fiction qu'il va pouvoir s'animer et se mettre à parler. Pour les romanciers 'de gauche' tels George

¹⁰ Isabelle Hoog Naginski, *George Sand mythographe* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2007), pp. 23–24.

¹¹ Julian Wright, *Socialism and the Experience of Time: Idealism and the Present in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 62.

¹² Edgar Quinet, *La Révolution*. Quoted in *Peuple, mythe et histoire*, ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths and Alain Pessin (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1997), p. 15.

¹³ Roland Barthes, *Michelet* (Seuil, 1974), p. 161.

Sand et Eugène Sue, il s'agit de récupérer leur histoire perdue, de déchiffrer leurs secrets, de leur donner une voix. (141)

In her study of the Sandian mythographical imagination, Naginski argues that 'pendant la Monarchie de Juillet, on voit les "intellectuels de gauche" se passionner pour l'histoire', which they sought to endow with 'une nouvelle orientation'. This revisionary project crystallizes along two axes. The first, she argues, turns on the rediscovery and rehabilitation of 'les racines gauloises de la France', elevated by historians such as Michelet to create 'un culte des Gaulois' (139). The Gauls, according to this narrative, represented 'la plus perfectible des races humaines' (*OCM*, IV: 109). More interesting for our purposes, though, is the second, which emerges as a move away from what Naginski terms, tellingly, 'la conception officielle de l'histoire' (140). This shifting relationship of the novelist to history, I suggest, is best understood in the context of what Eric Hobsbawm has characterized as 'the overwhelming victory of political art between 1830 and 1848'.¹⁴ Yet the manner in which novelists' newfound vocation is bound up with a socially conscious vision of the role of conspiratorial association in the historical process has largely escaped critical attention. The result is that a fundamental element of Sand's understanding of and engagement with historical (Bohemia and the Hussite wars) and political (Illuminism¹⁵ and hereticism) thought in the run-up to the 1848 revolutions has remained woefully underexamined.

¹⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 269. 'There has rarely been a period', Hobsbawm continues, 'where even the least "ideological" artists were more universally partisan, often regarding service to politics as their primary duty' (269).

¹⁵ By 'Illuminism', I denote that branch that M^{me} de Staël, in *De l'Allemagne*, terms 'les illuminés politiques' (as distinct from 'les illuminés mystiques' and 'les illuminés visionnaires'). 'Les illuminés politiques', she writes, are 'des hommes qui n'avaient pour but que de s'emparer de l'autorité dans tous les états'. '[E]n Allemagne', she continues, 'cette secte est la seule peut-être qui ait été fondée sur une combinaison politique ; toutes les autres sont nées d'un enthousiasme quelconque, et n'ont eu que la recherche de la vérité pour but.' M^{me} de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, ed. by M^{me} de Pange and Simone Balayé, 5 vols (Hachette, 1958–60), V (1960), pp. 149–50, 152, 151, 152. In his Saint Petersburg dialogues, Joseph de Maistre highlights the lexical and conceptual slippage surrounding the term: 'On donne ce nom d'*illuminés* à ces hommes coupables qui osèrent [...] de nos jours concevoir et même organiser en Allemagne, par la plus criminelle association, l'affreux projet d'éteindre en Europe le christianisme et la souveraineté. On donne ce même nom au disciple vertueux de Saint-Martin qui ne professe pas seulement le christianisme, mais qui ne travaille qu'à s'élever aux plus sublimes hauteurs de cette loi divine. Vous m'avouerez, messieurs, qu'il n'est jamais arrivé aux hommes de tomber dans une plus grande confusion d'idées.' See *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, ed. by Jean Louis Darcel, 2 vols (Geneva: Slatkine, 1993), II, 546. Auguste Viatte's 1928 analysis situates Illuminism – understood in its broadest sense – within intellectual history and explores its influence on Romanticism. Viatte, however, explicitly excludes political Illuminism from his study: 'Si nous n'expliquions l'un par l'autre les vocables d'"illuminisme" et de "théosophie", ils prêteraient à l'équivoque [...]. [L]e premier n'éveille-t-il pas, depuis Weishaupt et Barruel, l'idée d'une entreprise révolutionnaire ? [...] Nous ne nous en occuperons pas [des illuminés de Bavière] : [...] nous nous bornerons à ces autres sectes, qui prétendaient, par la contemplation intérieure ou par des procédés magiques, entrer en communication avec un monde supérieur.' See *Les Sources occultes du romantisme: illuminisme, théosophie, 1770–1820*, 2 vols (Honoré Champion, 1928), I, 9.

Positioning *Consuelo*–*La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* as a privileged example of Sand’s persistent social–utopian tropism, though, involves working against that most influential of (Anglo–American) analyses of the Sandian oeuvre – that is, Schor’s seminal enquiry into the gendered politics of exclusion of the French canon. Her contention that ‘rethinking idealism is a way of reclaiming its utopian dimension, the ability of an ideal to empower and to mobilize the disenfranchised’ (14), this chapter will show, maps onto the Sandian vision of conspiratorial association in the *Consuelo* cycle. Yet where she accords much attention to *Le Compagnon* and its concern with ‘la légitimation [...] des sociétés secrètes anathématisées par les historiographes’ (43), *Consuelo* is explicitly excluded from Schor’s study of Sand’s ‘socialist idealism’ (89). Set in eighteenth–century Venice, Austria and Germany, these novels, she insists, lack the ‘landscape of verisimilitude’ and setting in the ‘historical present’ that denote the ‘paradoxical realist underpinning’ (100) necessary to Sand’s idealist political fiction. If the message wasn’t clear enough, *Consuelo*, she adds in a supplementary footnote, ‘does not belong in a study of Sand’s socialist fiction’ (238 n. 27). Indeed, in circumscribing the adventures of the eponymous gypsy heroine from her *Sozialroman* triptych, Schor reserves a distinctive critical opprobrium for the novelistic cycle which, for the philosopher Alain, made George Sand ‘immortelle’.¹⁶ ‘Œuvre forte, trop peu lue’ (I: 161), ‘que je voudrais mettre sous le nez des critiques’ (922), *Consuelo*, Alain insists, is ‘notre *Meister*, plus courant, plus attachant par l’aventure, et qui va au plus profond par la musique’ (II: 627). Alain’s lamentation of the fact that ‘on parle mal de George Sand’ (I: 804) speaks to Schor’s self–professedly ambivalent relationship to *la bonne dame de Nohant*. For what Schor terms her ‘critical distance from Sand’s world’ is articulated, crucially, with reference to *Consuelo*. This, she suggests, is, ‘curiously’, both ‘the Sandistes and the non–Sandistes’ (not to say antifeminists’) favourite novel by Sand’:

For the first (generally women), it brings together so many of the Sandian themes they hold dear (the woman artist–messiah, music, Venice, grottoes, initiations, the search for the mother); for the second (generally men), it is simply the only major novel by Sand they know, because it was championed by an earlier generation of male romanticist Sand scholars, notably Léon Cellier. (215)

The ungenerous reader might task Schor with somewhat overstating the case for *Consuelo*’s continued popularity in the wake of Cellier and Léon Guichard’s 1959 Garnier edition of the work.

¹⁶ Alain, *Propos*, ed. by Maurice Savin and Samuel de Sacy, 2 vols (Gallimard–Pléiade, 1956–70), II (1970), 627.

Indeed, if the 1976 centenary of Sand's death saw the appearance of a series of 'entretiens sur *Consuelo*', a volume of conference proceedings edited by Cellier,¹⁷ it was to be almost thirty years before a second collective study emerged, edited by Hecquet and Christine Planté in commemoration of the bicentenary of her birth in 2004.¹⁸ Schor is nonetheless undoubtedly justified in highlighting the overwhelming importance accorded to the musico-theatrical and to the *Künstlerroman* model in existing analyses.¹⁹ (It was not until *Les Maîtres Sonneurs* of 1853 – and hence outside the July Monarchy temporal parameters of this thesis – that Sand would explicitly marry the question of music with that of secret association. The most notorious example of this alignment remains, of course, the masonic allegory of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.²⁰) Yet whether or not Schor's wider assertion is truly borne out in the realm of the scholarly bibliography, what this critical focus on the 'Italian' dimension of the work ('the woman artist-messiah, music, Venice') also brackets out is its Germanic narrative double. If Sand, as Damien Zanone has suggested, 'écrit [...], avec *Consuelo*, à la fois son *De l'Italie* et son *De l'Allemagne*',²¹ the unabashed privileging of the former in critical discourse has led to a significant oversight in Sand studies. This is the pivotal role the 'secret Germany' of the *Consuelo* cycle occupies in Sand's historical thought, and more specifically in her conspiratorial vision of 1789. Leaving behind the Carbonari and the *compagnons*, Sand shifts her attention to the Freemasons and their radical Bavarian offshoot, the Illuminati, to posit a 'courant électrique d'enthousiasme sublime, de foi ardente et de fanatisme terrible' (480) at the root of Revolution in Europe. In politicizing and putting the 'German' in what a waggish Balzac would term 'le train républico-communico-Pierre Lerouxico-Germanico-Déisto-Sandique' (LMH, I: 791), *Consuelo-La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* sees the fullest development of the Sandian vision of conspiracy as the motor of the historical process.

¹⁷ See Léon Cellier (ed.), *La Porporina: entretiens sur Consuelo* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1976).

¹⁸ See Hecquet and Planté (eds.), *Lectures de Consuelo-La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*.

¹⁹ See, for example: Peter Dayan, *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (Ashgate, 2006), pp. 11–24; Françoise Escal, 'La Musique est un roman: *Consuelo* de George Sand', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 76 (Jan. – Mar. 1987), 27–54; Linda Lewis, *Germaine de Staël, George Sand and the Victorian Woman Artist* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), pp. 13–63; Felicia Miller-Frank, *The Mechanical Song: Women, Voice and the Artificial in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 64–83; David Powell, *While the Music Lasts: The Representation of Music in the Works of George Sand* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001).

²⁰ On Mozart and Freemasonry, see, for example: Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas* (Faber, 1992), pp. 117–39; and Katharine Thomson, *The Masonic Thread in Mozart* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1977). Thomson suggests that Mozart 'may have attended gatherings of the Illuminati before his initiation as a Freemason' (17).

²¹ Zanone, 'Le romantisme de *Consuelo*', para. 16 of 16.

Enlightenment and Illuminism

In positing conspiratorial association at the root of Revolution in France, the *Consuelo* cycle takes as its explicit point of reference two secret societies: the Freemasons and the Bavarian Illuminati. In his influential study of the structural transformation of the public sphere during the Enlightenment, Jürgen Habermas argues that such societies ranked, along with salons, academies and coffee houses, amongst the important new institutions of Europe's emerging bourgeois elite.²² These spaces were predicated on the dissolution of distinctions of rank to foster a more egalitarian style of sociability, providing a forum for public discussion and activity in a society previously dominated by the elitist culture of absolute monarchies. Set against the eighteenth-century culture of privacy identified by Philippe Ariès and William Reddy,²³ Enlightenment Europe, historical scholarship has shown, witnessed a veritable 'associational revolution'.²⁴

The most widespread civic voluntary organization in eighteenth-century France was the fraternal order of the Freemasons. Taking into account the archival peculiarities of the study of secret societies, it is generally accepted that Freemasonry arose in England following the establishment of the first Grand Lodge in 1717 and the drafting of its official Constitutions in 1723. The movement spread rapidly amongst the liberal thinkers of Enlightenment Europe. For Roberts, France 'was the first continental country in which Freemasonry enjoyed the widespread and fashionable success it had already achieved in England' (47), with the first lodge founded in the mid-1720s and the first set of French-language official guidelines, the *Devoirs enjoints aux Maçons libres* published in 1735. Indeed, it has been suggested that Freemasons may have comprised as much as 5% of the urban, adult male population in France on the eve of the Revolution.²⁵ What distinguished Freemasonry from the other enclaves of Enlightenment associational life, however, was the movement's insistence on secrecy. In this respect, it sits uneasily with that alignment with

²² See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991). Given Sand's concern with the gendering of Masonic sociability in *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, it seems significant to point out that Habermas's analysis fails to explain why the values of a more egalitarian intimacy – which arose, he suggests, out of the bourgeois family as much as the habits and practice of commerce – produced a public sphere intended solely for men. On women and Freemasonry in the French context, see James Smith Allen, 'Sisters of Another Sort: Freemason Women in Modern France, 1725–1940', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 783–835; and Janet Burke and Margaret Jacob, 'French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship', *Journal of Modern History*, 68.3 (Sept. 1996), 513–49.

²³ See Philippe Ariès, 'Pour une histoire de la vie privée', in *Histoire de la vie privée*, ed. by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, 5 vols (Seuil, 1985), III, 7–19; and William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 149–54.

²⁴ Kenneth Loiselle, *Brotherly Love: Freemasonry and Male Friendship in Enlightenment France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 5.

²⁵ Daniel Roche, *La France des Lumières* (Fayard, 1993), p. 392.

transparency that permeates the very metaphoricity of *les Lumières*. Unsurprisingly, a denunciatory literature swiftly sprung up. A flood of anti-Masonic tracts depicted the lodges as places of sedition, atheism and Anglophilia, ‘the Enlightenment fanaticized’.²⁶ Vulnerable by virtue of their ritualistic secrecy, the Masons found themselves the object of lurid conspiratorial speculation, which was to reach feverish heights with the events of 1789. A tight causal sequence between Freemasonry and revolutionary politics rapidly gained intellectual currency, to the extent that one pamphleteer could simply declare: ‘Il est difficile d’expliquer combien l’assemblée nationale de la France doit à la franc-maçonnerie.’²⁷

We find here the early stages of a long historiographical tradition that has sought to reaffirm the relationship between the brotherhood and the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century.²⁸ Margaret Jacob, for example, has emphasized the Craft’s liberal and constitutional legacy whilst, in a more sinister, Cold War-era interpretation, Furet, drawing on Auguste Cochin, detects in Masonry not liberalism but the origins of totalitarian communism. The figure of the lodge, for Furet, foreshadows the bloody Jacobin quest for ideological purity. ‘La société de pensée’, he writes, ‘devient un parti politique, supposé incarner à la fois la société et l’État, en situation d’identification réciproque’.²⁹ In his inquiry into the ‘pathogenesis’ of modernity, Koselleck argues that Freemasonry was ‘an intellectual weapon against the Absolutist State’ whose ‘social function [was] to unite the bourgeois world’ under the cover of secrecy.³⁰ For Koselleck, too, the movement’s utopian dimensions – as figured in its more radical political offshoot, the Bavarian Illuminati – are to be understood as ultimately totalitarian in their implications, harbouring a ‘secret plan to abolish the State’ (132). In an interpretation that, for Ginzburg, ‘cleverly reworks the old conspiratorial thesis advocated by the Abbé Barruel’,³¹ Koselleck asserts that the Enlightenment contained the seeds of its own destruction: ‘Quite in keeping with the lodges’, the fraternity of the bourgeois elite, he contends, sought to control ‘not only actions, but above all ideas, [which] must be coordinated’ (165).

²⁶ Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 10.

²⁷ Anon., *Le Voile levé pour les curieux, ou le secret de la Révolution de France, révélé à l’aide de la Franc-maçonnerie* (Crapart, 1792), p. 34.

²⁸ For an overview of masonic historiography, see Charles Porset, *Hiram sans culotte? Franc-maçonnerie, Lumières et Révolution: trente ans d’études et de recherches* (Honoré Champion, 1998).

²⁹ Furet, *Penser la Révolution française*, p. 280.

³⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 80, 81.

³¹ Carlo Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. by Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (Verso, 2002), p. 198 n. 102.

What remains constant across these analyses is the conviction that the Craft was fundamentally antagonistic to the social and political structures of the *ancien régime*. In the historiographical narrative of Freemasonry and Revolution, the brothers are consistently mentioned in the same breath as their purported ideological bedfellow, the Bavarian Illuminati of Adam Weishaupt. For Taguieff, for instance, the Illuminati were ‘une organisation para-maçonnique’,³² whilst Jacob’s most recent study terms the group an ‘overtly’ political ‘imitation of Freemasonry’.³³ Similarly, in James van Horn Melton’s assessment, ‘the revolutionary Illuminati in Germany illustrate the radical directions in which Freemasonry could develop.’³⁴ ‘One of the few convinced egalitarians of his day’ (134), in Roberts’s evaluation, Weishaupt was the youthful holder of the chair of canon law at the University of Ingolstadt – the first non-Jesuit to occupy the position since the movement’s dissolution on papal orders in 1773. He maintained an abrasive relationship with his colleagues and the forces of religious reaction, and came to conceive of the idea of a band of proselytes who would join him in his struggle against the supposedly enduring obscurantist influence of former members of the Society of Jesus. Jonathan Israel, whose engagement with the movement and its philosophies remains one of the few detailed accounts available in English-language scholarship, writes that:

Weishaupt felt driven to found his secret society by the hostility to his enlightened standpoint he encountered everywhere in the Bavarian context. He felt trapped in a deeply inhospitable milieu aggravated by the spreading influence within the university of ex-Jesuits [...] fired by the most vehement opposition to Enlightenment ideas, proselytes increasingly busying themselves with recruiting students to what was eventually to prove the highly successful ideology of *Gegenaufklärung* [Counter-Enlightenment].³⁵

³² Taguieff, *La Foire aux 'Illuminés'*, p. 14.

³³ Margaret Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts and Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 15.

³⁴ James van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 253.

³⁵ Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–90* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 828–41 (p. 828). See also Richard van Dülmen, *The Society of the Enlightenment: The Rise of the Middle Class and Enlightenment Culture in Germany*, trans. by Anthony Williams (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 104–18; and Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 87–104. Taking the Illuminati as an object of serious scholarly enquiry largely remains the prerogative of academics writing in German. There are a small number of French-language exceptions, e.g. Taguieff’s 2005 study, *La Foire aux 'Illuminés'*, which is less concerned with the group’s genesis and historical reality than with the manner in which the Illuminati mythology has continued to exercise a hold over the popular imagination. The definitive study of the movement in French remains René Le Forestier, *Les Illuminés de Bavière et la franc-maçonnerie allemande* (Hachette, 1914).

What Roberts terms Weishaupt's 'social idealism, nurtured on Rousseau, Morelly, and Mably' (136), culminated in a subversive purpose, and on 1st May 1776, he founded what would become known as the Order of the Illuminati, initially named the Perfectibilists [*Perfectibilisten*]. Modelled on the structure of Masonic lodges, from which it recruited, the Order was both an agency for the transmission of the Enlightenment commonplaces of anti-clericalism, egalitarianism and rationalism and a space for the contemplation of 'an ultimate utopian regeneration of society' (137). This was to be brought about not by revolutionary upheaval, but in gradually securing strategically important positions in the machinery of the absolutist state. In this respect, this 'radicalized mutation of the Masonic gene',³⁶ in Jacob's memorable phrasing, had a good deal common with their Jesuit adversaries. Indeed, at least according to the account of one nineteenth-century encyclopedia: 'Weishaupt prétend qu'il a rédigé ses statuts sur ceux des jésuites, voulant, dit-il, faire servir au bien général ce qui n'avait, chez eux, d'autre but que la satisfaction égoïste de leur ambition.'³⁷ The group's existence was short-lived, and there are no traces of activity following an edict of 2nd March 1785, which explicitly condemned Freemasons and Illuminati in Bavaria based on religious, social and political considerations. The order has nonetheless come to occupy a disproportionately large place in the popular conspiratorial imaginary, fuelled in no small measure by the success of Dan Brown's novels.

If the Illuminati marriage of Enlightenment principles with social sedition – so often framed as the prerogative of a post-1789 world – was, in its explicitly politicized agenda, distinct from the professed Masonic aims of benign sociability, the two were almost invariably conflated in nineteenth-century denunciatory discourse. In his Third Republic exposé, Louis-Gaston de Ségur, for example, posited a split between the 'visible' lodges and 'la vraie Franc-Maçonnerie, qui est occulte et toute secrète', with the latter in the hands of the puppet-master Weishaupt. 'Cette Franc-Maçonnerie', he writes, 'n'est plus celle des Loges [...] : elle est purement et simplement *la société secrète*.'³⁸ He continues:

Dans l'arrière-Loge, les Maçons jettent le masque [...]. Là [...], une unité effrayante, réalisée par un gouvernement occulte, aussi simple que savamment organisée. 'Souvenez-vous', disait récemment le scélérat Mazzini, 'souvenez-vous qu'une association d'hommes

³⁶ Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, p. 158.

³⁷ Ange de Saint-Priest (ed.), *Encyclopédie du dix-neuvième siècle*, 26 vols (Bureau de l'Encyclopédie du dix-neuvième siècle, 1836–53), XIV (1852), 306.

³⁸ Louis-Gaston de Ségur, *Les Francs-Maçons: ce qu'ils sont, ce qu'ils font, ce qu'ils veulent* (Tolra & Haton, 1867), p. 42. Original emphasis.

libres et égaux (toujours la même formule !), qui veulent changer la face d'un pays (il aurait pu dire : de tous les pays !) doit avoir une organisation simple, claire et populaire'.³⁹

À la tête de toute cette armée ténébreuse, il y a un chef unique et inconnu, qui reste dans l'ombre et qui tient tous les Ateliers et toutes les Loges dans la main ; chef mystérieux et terrible auquel sont liés, par un serment d'obéissance aveugle, tous les Maçons de tous les rites et de tous grades [...]. Cet homme diabolique est plus puissant qu'aucun roi de ce monde. Au dernier siècle, ce fut pendant, de longues années, un Allemand obscur, nommé Weishaupt. (42–43)

The idea was clearly a tenacious one: 'le but de cette secte', one similarly hostile pamphleteer had declared almost fifty years earlier, 'est la domination universelle.'⁴⁰ These denunciations lie at the origin of that historiographical alignment of Freemasons and Illuminati with Revolution. Where nineteenth-century conspiratorial speculation diverges from more recent historical scholarship, though, is in its obstinate insistence on thinking 1789 in terms of causality rather than ideology. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Barruel's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme*.

'The vilest and most unsupported falsehood...'

The *Urtext* of the paranoid style of writing history, Barruel's conspiracist narrative recounts a plot that began with the *philosophes*' attack on Christianity, which laid the groundwork for the Freemasons' assault on the monarchy. Finally, the Illuminati, he alleges, went further still in targeting all religion, all government and the very principles underpinning organized society, most notably private property. The first volume of the *Mémoires* directs its opprobrium towards a supposed anti-Christian conspiracy on the part of those *philosophes* 'sophistes de l'incrédulité et de l'impiété' (*Mem. Barr.*, I: xvii), led by Voltaire, d'Alembert and Diderot, with Frederick the Great as 'le protecteur et souvent le conseil' (2). Their subversive project, Barruel suggests, is metonymized in the *Encyclopédie*, that 'immense dépôt de toutes les erreurs, de tous les sophismes, de toutes les calomnies qui [...] pouvaient avoir été inventées contre la religion'. This Encyclopedic

³⁹ The quotation is from the Italian revolutionary and former Carbonaro – and Sand's friend and correspondent – Giuseppe Mazzini's 1834 Young Europe manifesto.

⁴⁰ [Vincent Lombard de Langres], *Des sociétés secrètes en Allemagne et en d'autres contrées* (Gide, 1819), p. 32. A riposte, by 'un ancien illuminé' was soon to appear: see Anon., *La Vérité sur les sociétés secrètes en Allemagne, à l'occasion de l'ouvrage ayant pour titre 'Des sociétés secrètes en Allemagne et en d'autres contrées'* (Dalibon, 1819). In a letter to Ferdinand François of June 1843, Sand specifically requests both texts: 'Dans la liste dont vous parlez, je vois un ouvrage qui contient peut-être tout ce que je demande, celui intitulé "*la Vérité sur les sociétés secrètes en Allemagne, à l'occasion de l'ouvrage ayant p[ou]r titre les Sociétés secrètes en Allemagne, et en d'autres contrées*, par un ancien illuminé, Paris Dalibon 1819 in–8°" – Si vous pouvez me procurer l'un et l'autre ouvrage, il est probable que tout est là' (*Corr. Sand*, VI: 175).

toxin was to be diffused slowly, subtly; the ‘objet secret’ of its authors was to ‘cacher si bien le poison, qu’il se versât très insensiblement dans l’âme des lecteurs, sans qu’ils pussent s’en apercevoir’ (60). The second book details the anti-monarchical plot of the Masonic ‘sophistes de la rébellion’ (xvii), said to have been inspired by Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit des lois* (1748) and Rousseau’s *Du contrat social* (1762). The realisation of ‘l’esprit de Montesquieu et de Jean-Jacques’ (II: 119), Barruel claims, is synonymous with ‘cet esprit d’inquiétude sur les titres des Souverains, sur les bornes de leur autorité, sur ces prétendus droits de l’homme libre, sans lesquels tout citoyen n’est qu’un esclave, et tout Roi qu’un despote’ (132–33). The Masons, he contends, are the children of the *Encyclopédie*, whilst, complementarily, all the *philosophes* were initiated into the Craft. Accordingly, he asserts:

Par un développement successif de son double principe *d’égalité et de liberté*, de son allégorie du Maître des Maçons à venger, de la parole à retrouver, la secte conduisa[it] ses adeptes de secrets en secrets, les initi[ait] enfin à tout le code de la Révolution et du jacobinisme. (II: 319, original emphasis)

The final part of the work – which, in René Le Forestier’s authoritative assessment, is ‘la partie [...] la plus solidement et, malgré la partialité de l’auteur, la plus consciencieusement établie’ (687) – is dedicated to the ‘anti-social’ conspiracy of the Illuminati, ‘sophistes de l’impiété et de l’anarchie’ (*Mem. Barr.*, I: xviii). ‘Sous le nom d’Illuminés’, we learn, ‘était venue se joindre aux Encyclopédistes et aux Maçons, une horde de Conjurés, plus ténébreuse encore, plus habile dans l’art de tramer les complots ; plus vaste en ses projets dévastateurs ; creusant plus sourdement et plus profondément les mines des volcans’ (II: 466).

The Illuminati order emerge as the demonic mirror-image of the Society of Jesus. Counselling by ‘le Démon même des révolutions et de l’impiété’ (IV: 84), Weishaupt, Barruel alleges, ‘admirait surtout ces lois, ce régime des jésuites, qui sous un même chef, faisaient tendre partout un même but, tant d’hommes dispersés dans l’univers ; il sentit qu’on pourrait imiter leurs moyens *en se proposant des vues diamétralement opposées*’ (III: 11, original emphasis). In an intertextual echo of Joseph de Maistre’s conviction that ‘il y a dans la révolution française un caractère *satanique*’,⁴¹ the ‘infernal objet’ of the ‘vœux démoniaques’ of the Illuminati is summarized as:

⁴¹ Joseph de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, ed. by Jean-Louis Darcel (Geneva: Slatkine, 1980), p. 109. Original emphasis. As a high-ranking Freemason for nearly twenty years (1773–1792), it is perhaps unsurprising that Barruel’s thesis failed to convince the Savoyard moralist. De Maistre saw the events of 1789 as a work of divine retribution rather than of calculated human agency, thus positing as an effect what Barruel enshrines as a cause.

Plus d'Autels, plus de Trônes et plus de Magistrats ; plus d'autorité et plus de société religieuse ou civile ; plus de propriété ni pour le riche ni pour le pauvre ; plus même de ces arts ou de ces sciences qui ne peuvent être cultivés hors des sociétés civiles. (285)

Moreover, under his code name 'Spartacus', Weishaupt himself is staged as textually contiguous with the Antichrist:

Quand cette loi sera enfin remplie [...], le dernier Spartacus pourra sortir lui-même de son sanctuaire ténébreux et se montrer au grand jour. Il n'existera plus ni empire ni loi ; l'anathème prononcé sur les nations et sur Dieu, sur la société et sur les lois, aura réduit en cendres nos autels, nos palais et nos villes [...]. Le dernier Spartacus contemplant ces ruines, et s'entourant de ses Illuminés, pourra leur dire : [...] 'Si jamais les nations et leur religion et leur société pouvaient renaître, ce code de Weishaupt les a détruites, et les détruira encore.' Il le dira le dernier Spartacus, et les démons aussi sortiront des enfers pour contempler cette œuvre du Code illuminé, et Satan pourra dire : 'Voilà les hommes devenus comme je les voulais.' (406–07)

Having coordinated their triple conspiracy under the 'nom commun' (I: xviii) of Jacobins, then, *philosophes*, Freemasons and Illuminati proceeded to spread sedition across the continent, with a view to 'abbattre [*sic*] tous les Trônes, renverser tous les Autels, anéantir toute propriété, effacer toute Loi, et finir par dissoudre toute société' (III: 16). 'C'est par eux', we read, 'que la Révolution française est devenue le fléau de l'Europe, la terreur des puissances vainement combinées pour mettre un terme aux progrès de ces armées révolutionnaires' (I: iv). France's national tragedy, Barruel contends, took root in her tragic susceptibility to action before reflection, mercilessly exploited by the Jacobin conspirators:

Pour ouvrir en Europe la carrière des révolutions, pour donner l'impulsion à cette multitude d'initiés désorganiseurs, la Secte n'avait plus besoin que de porter les vœux et les mystères, chez une nation active et puissante, mais hélas ! souvent plus susceptible de cette effervescence qui prévient la pensée, que de la réflexion qui prévoit les désastres [...], qui, avant d'appeler la sagesse à ses conseils, pouvait dans les premiers accès, briser les Trônes, renverser les Autels, et ne sortir d'un funeste délire, qu'au moment où il ne resterait plus qu'à pleurer sur des ruines. (IV: 332–33)

Citing an extract from Babeuf's papers, outlining a vision of 'le bien commun, ou la communauté des biens' that does away with '[la] propriété individuelle des terres' and '[les] révoltantes distinctions de riches et de pauvres, de grands et de petits, de maîtres et de valets', Barruel appeals to a communal font of knowledge in asking, 'qui ne voit au moins qu'ils [les auteurs de cette

adresse] ont parlé comme [...] Weishaupt ?' (447). 'Si Babœuf est mort [...]', he warns the reader, staging the Equals as the ideological bedfellows of the Illuminati, 'ses complices vivent encore [...]. Les adeptes attendent d'autres temps' (448).

If the 'ferocious and absurd'⁴² conspiracy thesis of this 'unbalanced and indiscriminating priest' (213) is, for scholars such Roberts and Seamus Deane, a 'farrago of nonsense' (207), it was nonetheless a huge commercial success, running to countless editions and translated into English, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish and Russian. Illustrious figures ranked amongst Barruel's readers. Percy Bysshe Shelley, for example, was swift to recommend the work to a friend: 'although it is half-filled with the vilest and most unsupported falsehood', he concedes, 'it is a book worth reading.'⁴³ Thanks to Barruel, Weishaupt's name would remain on the lips of conspiracy theorists well into the twentieth century. In their inquiry into the historical development of right-wing extremism in America, Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, for example, cite one article, published in a 1965 journal, which confidently asserts that 'Adam Weishaupt is really the father of Bolshevism – not Karl Marx. The Jacobins of the French Revolution', the author continues, 'were controlled by the Bavarian Illuminati [...]. The "Conspiracy" today controls communism.'⁴⁴ Writing in 1966, Robert Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society, also denounced the connection between the Bavarian Illuminati and the Cold War spectre of communism, affiliating the group with Babeuf's conspiracy for good measure. As illustration of an exercise in conspiracist thinking, subsuming various plot theories into one master narrative positing secret collusion as the motor of history, the allegations of the 'spearhead of the Radical Right movement'⁴⁵ bear quoting at length:

Two hundred years ago, or during the last half of the Eighteenth Century, there were in Europe many secret societies with grandiose dreams of overthrowing all existing human institutions, and of rising out of the resulting chaos as the all-powerful rulers of a 'new order' of civilization. Of these groups the Illuminati, founded in Bavaria by Adam Weishaupt on May 1st, 1776, was undoubtedly the most important. By 1789 the Illuminati were already strong enough to have had a great deal to do with planning and preparing the

⁴² Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789–1832* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 11.

⁴³ Shelley to Elizabeth Hitchener, 27th February 1812. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederic Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 264. Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein studies at the University of Ingolstadt, Weishaupt's institutional home, where he acquires the knowledge necessary for the creation of his monster.

⁴⁴ 'Ancient Conspiracy Linked to Jacobins and Bolsheviks', *Councilor*, 1st February 1965. Quoted in Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 280.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Epstein and Arnold Forster, *The Radical Right: Report on the John Birch Society and Its Allies* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 3.

holocaust known as the French Revolution. In that upheaval we find many elements of Communist strategy and purpose with which we are familiar today [...]. By 1795 the French Revolution had run its horrible course, and there was a gradual return even in France to traditional beliefs, values and institutions [...]. [The] revolutionary fire in France had failed to set off a continent-wide social conflagration, as the Illuminati and similar groups had hoped and planned. And henceforth the Illuminati observed even more closely than before the original Weishaupt instruction that the very existence of the order should be denied and kept secret at all costs. But the fact that the Illuminati *were* active, at the end of the Eighteenth Century, with growing reach and influence in many countries, is clearly proved in the detailed histories of Robinson [*sic*] and the Abbé Barruel. And the short-lived Babeuf conspiracy reveals that other groups, though possibly allied or subsidiary to the Illuminati, were working for the same totally destructive purposes. During the Nineteenth Century, some of these secret societies and subversive groups appear to have grown and coalesced into the Communist conspiracy as we know it today.⁴⁶

Weishaupt and his acolytes, for Welch, were to be held ultimately responsible for the central banking system of the Federal Reserve, graduated income tax, both World Wars, and Medicare. If such claims are now more likely to evoke sniggers than sympathetic adherence, the sheer ideological impact of the theory underpinning them should not be understated: as W. Daniel Wilson reminds us, the Nazis were to turn to Barruel's mythology of Illuminati involvement in the French Revolution in their persecution of Freemasons. It was, he asserts, 'one of the most important conservative discourses of the revolutionary period'.⁴⁷ Indeed, in the summary of one authoritative twentieth-century scholar of Freemasonry, 'dès qu'il s'agit de la maçonnerie et de son influence sur la Révolution de 1789, nous sommes tous plus ou moins victimes – bien souvent plus que moins – de la légende barruelliennne'.⁴⁸

Existing scholarship has largely concerned itself with the attractiveness of the Jesuit priest's thesis to those men of the Right who balked at the century's liberalizing, democratizing and secularizing currents. Klaus Epstein, for example, has explored the role of the Illuminati scare in

⁴⁶ Robert Welch, 'The Truth in Time', *American Opinion*, 1st November 1966, pp. 1–27. Original emphasis. Partially reproduced in *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Peter Knight, 2 vols (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), II, 823–25 (p. 824). On Welch, see, for example, James Francis Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 151–74.

⁴⁷ See W. Daniel Wilson, 'Weimar Politics in the Age of the French Revolution: Goethe and the Spectre of Illuminati Conspiracy', *Goethe Yearbook*, 5 (1990), 163–86 (p. 164).

⁴⁸ Daniel Ligou, 'Structures et symbolisme maçonniques sous la Révolution', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 197 (Jul. – Sept. 1969), 511–23 (p. 511).

the development of German conservatism,⁴⁹ whilst Michael Taylor⁵⁰ and James Schmidt⁵¹ have discussed the impact of Barruel's charges in the British context. There is also an extensive literature on the take-up of the theory in antebellum American culture.⁵² What seems to have escaped critical attention, however, is the fact that endorsement of Barruel's conspiracy theory of the Revolution was not the preserve of reaction. Sand, in this way, represents something of an exception, providing a further counter-discourse to a conspiratorial counter-discourse. It is, I show in what follows, the re-appropriation of Barruel's vision of 1789 that undergirds her idealist historiography of Revolution. Yet her utopian socialist recasting of his hostile mythology has remained singularly unexplored. Even those analyses which, in the wake of Cellier's seminal (if brief) analysis of Sand's deployment of the occult motif in the *Consuelo* cycle,⁵³ highlight the work's engagement with initiation, ritual and esotericism, largely neglect to draw out the full significance of counter-Enlightenment thought in her conspiratorial vision of the historical process. In his comprehensive study of Martinism, David Allen Harvey has sought to rehabilitate the occult as an alternative face of French modernity, deeply rooted in and responding to its socio-political context.⁵⁴ If Harvey's problematization of the apolitical self-representation of modern French occultism is welcome, his broader alignment of the movement's currents with the Right, I argue, nonetheless requires nuance in light of the Sandian reappropriation of its tropes. Frank Paul Bowman makes brief mention of Sand in his concise discussion of occultist initiation in French Romantic thought, but erroneously characterizes *Consuelo* as a 'realist novel',⁵⁵ whilst Theodore Ziolkowski's recent survey of conspiracy fiction gestures intriguingly towards the significance of the German 'league' or 'lodge novel' [*Bundesroman*] for the literary development of the secret society motif, yet ultimately eschews engagement with textual detail in favour of sketching out a broader 'genre history'.⁵⁶ (The *Consuelo*

⁴⁹ See Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, pp. 503–46.

⁵⁰ See Michael Taylor 'British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797–1802', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 47.3 (Spring 2014), 293–312.

⁵¹ See James Schmidt, 'Inventing the Enlightenment: Anti-Jacobins, British Hegelians, and the Oxford English Dictionary', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64 (2003), 421–43.

⁵² See, for example, Bryan Waterman, *Republic of Intellect: The Friendly Club of New York City and the Making of American Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

⁵³ See Léon Cellier, 'L'occultisme dans *Consuelo*', *Romantisme*, 16 (1977), 7–19.

⁵⁴ See David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ Frank Paul Bowman, 'Illuminism, Utopia, Mythology', in *The French Romantics*, ed. by D.G. Charlton, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), I, 76–112 (p. 83).

⁵⁶ See Theodore Ziolkowski, *Lure of the Arcane: The Literature of Cult and Conspiracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013). The term *Bund*, Ziolkowski explains, 'designates leagues, orders, societies and associations generally; more narrowly, as *Geheimbund*, it refers to secret societies' (211 n. 16). Ziolkowski highlights the existence of a number of studies of Freemasonry and eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century German literature, primarily in German-language scholarship. See, for example: Marianne Thalmann, *Der Trivialroman des 18. Jahrhunderts und der romantische Roman: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der*

cycle does not appear in Reinhold Taute's – now dated – bibliography of 447 *Bundesromane*; *Le Compagnon*, however, does.⁵⁷) Jacques Viard's insistence that we treat the novel as 'un roman policier, un roman d'espionnage' detecting 'comment ont été "préparés" 89 et les droits de l'homme' usefully emphasises Sand's 'recherche de l'âpre vérité historique' over 'le côté fantastique et les inexactitudes de détail', but ultimately displays a confused understanding of literary genre.⁵⁸ Michèle Riot-Sarcey's assertion that, 'dans la fiction romanesque, George Sand aime à revenir sur le passé de la Révolution' is, finally, a welcome one. Yet her contention that '*Nanon* en est le roman', the *Consuelo* cycle demonstrates, requires nuancing.⁵⁹

Naginski, in a similar vein, has compellingly demonstrated that Sand's work 'can be envisaged as a voyage through the Revolution's prophetic undergrounds',⁶⁰ detecting in the novel of initiation the 'most original and fertile embodiment' (203) of idealism. The pure product of a nineteenth-century syncretic sensibility, *Consuelo*, she rightly notes, incorporates Greek and Latin mythology,⁶¹ Hussite lore, sectarian heresy, the philosophy of Leroux, 'historical documents of the eighteenth century and Freemasonry texts' (210). Naginski's suggestion that '*Consuelo* is the most perfect expression of Sand's utopian imagination' (189) nonetheless fails to account for the central place of the secret society in catalysing fraternal association, that 'centripetal force that binds all humankind' (182). (Indeed, recourse to a lexis of utopia is virtually ubiquitous in existing analyses of the novel: for Michelle Perrot, for example, this is a 'récit d'initiation où triomphe l'utopie',⁶² whilst for one rather less sympathetic critic, *Consuelo* is the brainchild of a 'congenitally feeble' thinker, 'compounded from a jumble of absurd utopian and spiritualist theories'.⁶³) Vierende and Watrelot have, finally, comprehensively explored Sand's engagement with the occultist trappings

Geheimbundmystik (Berlin: Ebering, 1923); and Michael Voges, *Aufklärung und Geheimnis: Untersuchungen zur Vermittlung von Literatur- und Sozialgeschichte am Beispiel der Aneignung des Geheimbundmaterials im Roman des späten 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987). The only example I have found in a language other than German is Scott Abbott, *Fictions of Freemasonry: Freemasonry and the German Novel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991). Abbott, however, uses 'Freemasonry' as something of a catch-all term for a range of secret associations with initiatory rituals.

⁵⁷ Reinhold Taute, *Ordens- und Bundesromane: Ein Beitrag zur Bibliographie der Freimaurerei* (Frankfurt a.M.: Mahlau, 1907), p. 289.

⁵⁸ Jacques Viard, 'L'Image de la Révolution française chez George Sand, Leroux, Erckmann-Chatrian', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 4–5 (Jul.–Oct. 1990), 765–78 (p. 767).

⁵⁹ Michèle Riot-Sarcey, 'George Sand face à l'événement', in *George Sand: littérature et politique*, ed. by Martine Reid and Michèle Riot-Sarcey (Nantes: Pleins Feux, 2007), pp. 27–42.

⁶⁰ Isabelle Naginski, *George Sand: Writing for Her Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 139.

⁶¹ For detailed discussion of Sand's engagement with mythology in the *Consuelo* cycle, see Naginski, *George Sand mythographie*, pp. 215–41.

⁶² Michelle Perrot, 'George Sand et l'idée de progrès', in *Genèses du roman: Balzac et Sand*, ed. by Lucienne Frappier-Mazur (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 233–44 (p. 235).

⁶³ Christopher Robinson, *French Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (David & Charles, 1978), p. 105.

of Freemasonry and the stakes of her proto-feminist recuperation of historically gendered initiation rites in *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*.⁶⁴ Their common focus on the question of the spiritual transformation of the individual and its archetypes, however, again serves to obscure the historical and political implications of the close connection Sand imagines between egalitarian conspiracy and the ethical requirements of human community. In their investment in the mysterious and the suprarational, Romanticism and Symbolism, of course, bore a certain affinity with occultism. Yet in lieu of an introspective, world-renouncing and timeless discourse, Sand's *Consuelo* cycle, I argue, reappropriates the 'terreur que les sciences occultes inspiraient à toute l'Allemagne' (III: 157) as a legitimate response to a historically grounded, supposedly enlightened despotism. Nineteenth-century studies, then, still lacks an analysis of Sand's take on conspiratorial association that attends fully to her investment in both Enlightenment and Illuminism. With 1789 as its pivot, the 'secret Germany' of the Bavarian Illuminati, this chapter suggests, is the vehicle for her conspiracy theory of history, displacing Barruel's plot across the political spectrum to transform the voice of royalist reaction into a vision of utopian socialism.

Sand and Barruel: The Genesis of an Idea

Sand's correspondence attests to an early encounter with Barruel. On 26th December 1835, she received a letter from the abbé Georges Rochet, in which he informs her: 'J'ai fait votre commission chez Suard et me suis occupé de vous trouver l'abbé Barruel qui m'arrivera sans doute sous huit jours' (*Corr. Sand*, III: 167 n. 1). It was not until the 1840s, however, that she would truly exploit her reading of this hostile mythology of 1789, appropriating the well-rehearsed narrative of the conspiratorial origins of the Revolution to recast it in an idealist guise. This kind of speculation had, we have seen, become common intellectual currency. In an 1843 letter to Leroux, Sand gestures towards this *doxa* in writing of her desire to 'faire un grand travail sur l'histoire *occulte* de l'humanité' – which, as Balzac would also suggest, 'n'est qu'indiqué dans l'histoire officielle du monde' (VI: 179, original emphasis).

In May of the same year, she would contact Cavaignac with a related bibliographical request. Thanking him for a previous loan, she adds: 'Je garde encore le volume 2 de l'abbé Barruel.

⁶⁴ See Simone Vienne, *Rite, roman, initiation* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2000); Vienne, *George Sand et la franc-maçonnerie* (Éditions maçonniques de France, 2001); and Watrelot, 'Femmes et sociétés secrètes', in Planté and Hecquet (eds.), *Lectures de Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, pp. 387–400. Scholarship on Sand's 'feminism' is legion; for a concise overview of the debate, see Martine Reid, 'George Sand féministe?', in Reid and Riot-Sarcey (eds.), *George Sand: littérature et politique*, pp. 223–29.

Pouvez-vous m'envoyer le 1^{er} ? Pouvez-vous me dire aussi quelque chose de l'illuminisme antérieur à Weishaupt ?' (140), she asks. 'Madame', Cavaignac had written some ten days earlier,

Je remets à votre porte deux livres [...] [où] vous trouverez d'assez longs détails sur les doctrines des illuminés d'Allemagne, notamment quant à la propriété. Il est curieux de voir que le travail qui, au dernier siècle, s'est fait chez nous par l'incrédulité, se faisant en Allemagne par l'illuminisme, tout chemin conduit au but de notre temps. (117–18)

In a July Monarchy inaugurated by the lost illusions of 1830, this 'but' is, of course, Revolution: Cavaignac's implication is that a democratic age supposedly predicated on Enlightenment transparency was borne forth by its apparent opposite. Here aligned along Franco–German national axes, cold Voltairean scepticism is set against that antithetical yearning for the mysterious that Robert Darnton frames as 'the genesis of a revolutionary mood', marking 'the dawning of the nineteenth century'.⁶⁵ Informed by her reading of Barruel, the Freemasons–Illuminati couplet had clearly captured Sand's attention. 'Lisant beaucoup pour connaître les sociétés secrètes d'Allemagne où je vais lancer Consuelo', she writes in June 1843, 'je suis dans la franc-maçonnerie jusqu'aux oreilles' (183). 'Il va en résulter un roman des plus mystérieux' (161). To Leroux, a week later, she strikes a tone of gratitude and admonishment in equal measure:

Vous ne savez pas dans quel labyrinthe vous m'avez fourrée avec vos francs-maçons et vos sociétés secrètes. C'est une mer d'incertitude, un abîme de ténèbres. Il y a tant d'inconnu dans tout cela, que c'est une belle matière pour broder et inventer et au fait, l'histoire de ces mystères ne pourra, je crois, jamais être faite que sous la forme d'un roman. (179)

If the task of the July Monarchy novelist, as we have suggested, is to assume the role of the historian, Sand deploys considerable efforts to find a chronologically accurate precursor to the Illuminati prior to their foundation in 1776. Having assimilated Barruel's guiding contention that it was they, alongside the *philosophes* and the Freemasons, who brought Revolution to France, she writes to Ferdinand François: 'il me faut un personnel de francs-maçons précurseurs des illuminés, imbus des mêmes principes révolutionnaires, et préparant l'illuminisme, comme l'illuminisme (éclos seulement en 1776) a préparé le Jacobinisme' (174–75). 'Avec Weishaupt et l'illuminisme, qui sont en effet un point lumineux et magnifique dans cette histoire, j'aurais eu mes coudées franches', she complains to Leroux, unable to translate the conditional into the historical. 'Je place

⁶⁵ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 165.

Consuelo en 1750 environ’, she writes, ‘et [...] je ne veux pas faire de gros anachronismes. J’inventerai les personnages de ma société secrète, mais il me faudrait les rattacher à quelques noms *historiques* dans leurs fastes allemandes’ (175, original emphasis). Yet the ‘avènement’ of Weishaupt’s Illuminati, Sand is all too aware, ‘est en 1776 et je suis forcée d’inventer des origines qui doivent exister, mais dont je ne trouve nulle part les traces bien marquées’ (179).

It was not long, however, before Sand was to find a solution. Prompted by her reading of a complementary work to Barruel’s, François–Timoléon Bègue–Clavel’s 1841 *Histoire pittoresque de la franc-maçonnerie et des sociétés secrètes anciennes et modernes*, she writes to François:

De tout ce que je viens de lire sur les sociétés secrètes et les sectes, il résulte pour moi que la vérité de notre cœur et de notre temps était plus dans le 15^e siècle que dans le 18^e, et j’aurai gagné à mes lectures de bien savoir que j’ai tout à inventer dans mon roman, sous ce rapport. Je ne me servirai des sociétés secrètes qui ont eu à cette époque une sorte de réalité historique que pour passer à travers, et ne pas m’y heurter. Jamais, je crois, l’égalité, la liberté, la fraternité n’ont été moins comprises à l’étranger que dans ce beau siècle. Cependant, il est curieux que les formules s’en soient conservées comme des mystères à travers la dépravation des temps, et qu’il ait suffi de ces trois mots pour allumer dans toutes les imaginations une soif de merveilleux, et l’idée d’un secret redoutable qui devait changer la face de l’univers. J’aurais pu faire mon roman avec cette première idée que j’avais des mystères maçonniques, et, après avoir lu une quinzaine de volumes, j’y reviens. Mais ma conscience n’eût pas été en repos, et elle y est maintenant. (208–09)

If Sand lays claim to room for idealist manoeuvre (‘j’ai tout à inventer’), she nonetheless remains fully invested in close engagement with the historical past, inscribing her secret society in a genealogy stretching back to fifteenth-century Bohemia, that age of ‘la vérité de notre cœur et de notre temps’ (208).

The tensions of what Sainte–Beuve, writing in 1840, would term ‘ce dix–huitième siècle tant dénigré’⁶⁶ play out in the series of historical figures enlisted to synecdochally speak to its divergent tendencies. Shifting historical investigation from the diachronic to the synchronic, Sand as historian of the present looks to the ‘siècle [...] de Voltaire et de Cagliostro’ (I: 6) to suggest:

Si notre siècle arrive à se résumer lui-même, il résumera aussi la vie de son père le dix–huitième siècle, ce logogriphe immense, cette brillante nébuleuse, où tant de lâcheté s’oppose à tant de grandeur, tant de savoir à tant d’ignorance, tant de barbarie à tant de civilisation, tant de lumière à tant d’erreur, tant de sérieux à tant d’ivresse, tant d’incrédulité à tant de foi, tant de pédantisme savant à tant de moquerie frivole, tant de superstition à

⁶⁶ Charles–Auguste Sainte–Beuve, *Portraits de femmes* (Garnier, 1886), p. 213.

tant de raison orgueilleuse : cette période de cent ans, qui vit les règnes de [...] Voltaire et Swedenborg, Kant et Mesmer [...], Louis XIV et Philippe–Égalité, Marie–Antoinette et Charlotte Corday, *Weishaupt, Babeuf et Napoléon*... laboratoire effrayant, où tant de formes hétérogènes ont été jetées dans le creuset, qu'elles ont vomi, dans leur monstrueuse ébullition, un torrent de fumée où nous marchons encore enveloppés de ténèbres et d'images confuses. (III: 481, emphasis added)

Conspiracy reveals itself to be a disruptive force on a historical and a textual level; the neat syntactical parallelisms of her couples ('Voltaire et Swedenborg, Kant et Mesmer') break down in the transition to the final trio of 'Weishaupt, Babeuf et Napoléon'. Sand's anaphoric constructions, which cast the readerly gaze backwards whilst textually moving forwards, perform the historico–political stakes of her narrative. For it, too, enjoins the reader to look back to the 'rêve de révolution universelle' (480) of eighteenth– and fifteenth–century Europe to better ground a new, future–orientated social contract.

Italia, Germania, Bohemia

The *Consuelo* cycle appeared in the *Revue indépendante* from 1st February 1842 to 10th February 1844. In October 1841, Sand's strained relationship with Buloz and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* had reached breaking point: faced with the overtly political dimension of *Horace*, the editor balked in telling terms. 'Dans l'état du pays et avec le travail des sociétés secrètes', he writes, 'il serait imprudent et peut-être coupable de jeter un aliment aussi facile à saisir l'agitation des masses [...]'. '[J]e vous demande de vous abstenir de parler contre la propriété et du [*sic*] trop proclamer les idées républicaines [...] dans le récit de choses brûlantes' (*Corr. Sand*, V: 456–57). Sand refused, in no uncertain terms ('Je ne veux pas le *changer*. *Non, cent fois NON*.'⁶⁷), and ended her contract with Buloz on 8th October (453–54).

Sand's longest novel – 'l'ennui en 16 volumes' (*LMH*, I: 699), for Balzac – recounts the adventures of 'la petite Consuelo, née en Espagne, et arrivée de là en Italie en passant par Saint–Pétersbourg, Constantinople, Mexico [*sic*], or Arkangel, ou par toute autre route encore plus directe à l'usage des seuls Bohémiens' (I: 13). Aligned from the very opening pages with Bohemia not as imagined cultural construct, but as historical–geographical entity, the eponymous heroine is, in fact, the daughter of an itinerant Spanish songstress. She is orphaned in Venice at a young age and taken in by 'le savant professeur et compositeur célèbre' (29) Nicolas Porpora, who becomes the

⁶⁷ George Sand, *Lettres retrouvées*, ed. by Thierry Bodin (Gallimard, 2004), p. 47. Original emphasis. I am indebted to Reid's recent biography of Sand for this bibliographical indication.

mentor of this talented singer. Consuelo's plain looks belie her beautiful voice, and the young 'laideron' (11) finds herself the object of the jealousy of the other girls of Porpora's *scuola* when her success on the operatic stage attracts the attentions of wealthy theatre-owner Count Zustiniani. A number of years later, Zustiniani's mistress and Consuelo's great rival, la Corilla, betrays him with Consuelo's betrothed – and Zustiniani's protégé – Anzoleto, 'un artiste vaniteux' (145) who has in turn sought to use Consuelo as leverage to further his own career. Devastated when Porpora reveals the affair to her, Consuelo flees Venice for the liminal zone of 'la ramification occidentale des monts Carpathes qui sépare la Bohême de la Bavière, et qui prend dans ces contrées le nom de "Boehmer-Wald" (forêt de Bohême)' (161). The light Italian musical 'nouvelle' (4) that Sand had originally envisaged is here supplanted by a darker, Germanic décor, reproducing that north/south typology immortalized in M^{me} de Staël's *De la littérature* (1800).

The reader finds her installed in the Château des Géants as 'gouvernante' (172) and companion to the daughter of the Rudolstadt family, Amélie. Living in a state of 'isolement' (174) and 'claustration' (251) in their castle, the family are wracked with worry over the disturbing behaviour of its last scion, Albert, who regularly falls into cataleptic trances and disappears for days on end. If the rather heavy-handed ventriloquization of the history of 'la vieille Bohême' (186) and the Hussite wars initially strikes the reader as incongruous, the interest of Amélie's revelation that her ancestors, 'd'origine bohême, avait germanisé [leur] nom' (161) soon becomes apparent. Albert's mother, he claims, 'n'avait ni Saxons, ni Bavares, ni Prussiens, dans son arbre généalogique' (207); '[elle] descendait en ligne directe de Jean Ziska par les femmes' (208). 'Le dernier des Rudolstadt' (164), we learn, 'prend des siècles pour des semaines' (167); his metempsychotic identification with his heretic Hussite forebears literalizes the concept of historical memory that, we have seen, took on a new urgency for July Monarchy novelists. Albert is afflicted by a kind of genealogical madness that leads him to carry a monstrous burden of guilt for 'les crimes, les malheurs, et les exploits de nos pères' (206). His apparent 'folie' (235), then, acts as a vehicle for 'les voix terribles' (206) of a repressed family history of violence. The young count takes as his avatar 'le nom sublime et abhorré' of Jean Ziska himself, 'le redoutable aveugle [...], chef des Taborites, sectaires qui renchérent durant la guerre des Hussites sur l'énergie, la bravoure, et les cruautés des autres religionnaires' (207). 'Le fanatique sanguinaire' (II: 6) Ziska is said to have single-handedly slaughtered twenty Augustinian monks and suspended their bodies from an oak tree over a cistern containing the remains of ten of his murdered Hussite followers. The Protestant heretic and insurrectionary emerges as both a republican opponent of despotic, imperial power and a proto-Babouvist advocate of the breaking-up of Church properties to redistribute the land to peasants. 'On a beau brûler les archives des familles et les documents de

l'histoire', Albert cries, 'on a beau élever les enfants dans l'ignorance de la vie antérieure ; on a beau imposer silence aux simples par le sophisme, et aux faibles par la menace : ni la crainte du despotisme, ni celle de l'enfer, ne peuvent étouffer les mille voix du passé qui s'élèvent de toutes parts' (I: 206).

Intrigued by Albert's 'mélange d'hérésie, de superstition, de métaphysique obscure, de délire poétique' (212), Consuelo decides to investigate the mystery of his disappearances. Having negotiated the Gothic terrors of 'des galeries souterraines et des passages ignorés dans le château des Géants' (III: 418) – worthy, despite the Sandian narrator's protestations to the contrary, of 'l'ingénieuse et féconde Anne Radcliffe' (I: 252) – she traces him to an underground grotto, where he is tended by his mad companion Zdenko. Here, Sand's re-gendering of the Orpheus myth takes as its correlate an idealist reworking of the alignment between *les bas-fonds* (decoupled from their habitual urban setting so deftly explored by Dominique Kalifa⁶⁸) and murky, criminal machinations. The subterranean 'abords de la retraite d'Albert' are, on the contrary, 'gracieux, faciles et sûrs' (314):

Un sentier de sable frais et fin remontait le cours de cette eau limpide et transparente, qui courait avec un bruit généreux dans un lit convenablement encaissé [...]. Ce sentier était relevé en talus dans des terres fraîches et fertiles ; car de belles plantes aquatiques, des pariétaires énormes, des ronces sauvages fleuries dans ce lieu abrité, sans souci de la rigueur de la saison, bordaient le torrent d'une marge verdoyante [...]. C'était comme une serre chaude naturelle, préservée par ses voûtes du froid et des neiges, mais suffisamment aérée par mille soupiraux imperceptibles. On eût dit qu'un soin complaisant avait protégé la vie de ces belles plantes, et débarrassé le sable que le torrent rejetait sur ces rives des graviers qui offensent le pied [...]. Consuelo commençait à ressentir l'influence bienfaisante qu'un aspect moins sinistre et déjà poétique des objets extérieurs produisait sur son imagination bouleversée par de cruelles terreurs. (313–14)

Indeed, this disconnect between luminal and ethical tenebrosity is figured chromatically: as she approaches Albert's sanctuary, Consuelo 'se sentait renaître, et l'accueil qui l'attendait au terme de son héroïque pèlerinage, se peignait dans son esprit sous des couleurs moins sombres' (314). Struck by the sound of 'un Stradivarius chantant un air sublime de tristesse et de grandeur sous une main pure et savante', the singer discovers that Albert, too, 'avait la révélation de la vraie, de la grande musique [...] ; il avait en lui le souffle divin, l'intelligence et l'amour du beau' (318).

If he resembles an angel worthy of the 'compositions apocalyptiques' (II: 28) of Albrecht Dürer, Albert's music also conjures forth the image of Satan not as archetype of evil, but as 'celui

⁶⁸ See Dominique Kalifa, *Les Bas-fonds: histoire d'un imaginaire* (Seuil, 2013).

à qui on a fait tort' (I: 277, 310; II: 32, 545). Working against the official history of the Church, given voice in the castle chaplain's denunciation of '[l]es abominations de l'antique hérésie' (I: 277), the Satan invoked in *Consuelo* emerges as the heretic champion of the politically oppressed and the spiritually downtrodden:

Il sembla à Consuelo que le violon d'Albert parlait, et qu'il disait par la bouche de Satan : [...] 'Il est temps que vous me connaissiez, et qu'au lieu de m'appeler l'ennemi du genre humain, vous retrouviez en moi l'ami qui vous a soutenus dans la lutte. Je ne suis pas le démon, je suis l'archange de la révolte légitime et le patron des grandes luttes. Comme le Christ, je suis le Dieu du pauvre, du faible et de l'opprimé. Quand il vous promettait le règne de Dieu sur la terre, quand il vous annonçait son retour parmi vous, il voulait dire qu'après avoir subi la persécution, vous seriez récompensés, en conquérant avec lui et avec moi la liberté et le bonheur.' (II: 28)

In spite of his virtuoso performance, Albert's 'attitude brisée et abattue' betrays his quasi 'aliénation [...] de la volonté humaine' (I: 318), and his disappearances are revealed to be periods of solitary penitential meditation. By a 'sorte d'identification étrange' (II: 6), the young count, we learn, 'se croyait Jean Ziska' (I: 320), and his 'mémoire surnaturelle' (321) has him convinced that his 'grotte Hussitique' (II: 461) must serve as a space of atonement, a 'lieu d'exil et de souffrance' (I: 319).

Consuelo succeeds in bringing Albert back to his senses and returns him to his worried family. Her underground adventure, however, leaves her physically and emotionally drained, and she takes to her bed, tended by Albert, who, in love with his patient, reveals himself to be 'aussi bon médecin que bon fils et bon ami' (387). During her convalescence, the two develop a close philosophical and intellectual bond, and he introduces her to the radical egalitarian 'doctrines qui avaient leur source dans le hussitisme de la vieille Bohême' (II: 532). Albert convinces Consuelo to return with him to the Schreckenstein grotto, where he takes up his violin at her request. In a representation shifted from Amélie's earlier tales into the non-linguistic realm, Albert's playing powerfully conjures forth 'les spectres des vieux héros de la Bohême' (27). The chequered morality of the latter's violent means to an egalitarian end plays out in Consuelo's mental oscillation between images of light and dark: 'tantôt c'était une nuit d'épouvante et de ténèbres [...] ; tantôt c'était un jour ardent dont elle osait soutenir l'éclat' (27). Here, then, it is music that provides the vehicle for Sand's conviction, expressed in her letter to François, that 'la vérité de notre cœur et de notre temps était plus dans le 15^e siècle que dans le 18^e' (*Corr. Sand*, VI: 208). Albert's melancholy is one of historical consciousness, and his music as the agent of repressed collective voices is polyphonic in all senses of the word. In contrast to Consuelo's mentor Porpora and his investment in a musical aristocracy of genius ('tu n'as qu'à te montrer et chanter pour prouver que tu es reine de droit

divin' [329]), the 'voix divinement humaine' (I: 379) of Albert's violin foreshadows Consuelo's class-conscious investment in the ameliorative qualities of her art. In light of the wealth of existing scholarship concerned with the prevalence of the operatic motif in the *Consuelo* cycle, it is all the more surprising that such instances in which the musical marries the politico-historical seem to have escaped critical attention.⁶⁹

As the two return to the surface, the sudden arrival at the Château des Géants of her former fiancé Anzoletto – posing as her brother – spooks Consuelo, and, feeling unable to accept in good faith Albert's hand in marriage, she flees again. The *Künstlerroman* generic element remains a constant as, disguised as a man,⁷⁰ she makes the long journey to Vienna to rejoin Porpora in the company of a young Joseph Haydn, with whom she enjoys a chaste, 'douce [...] et loyale amitié' (II: 279). In another reproduction of that Staëlian dichotomy of north and south, cast along the axis of the musical, Consuelo arrives in Maria Theresa's Vienna to be met with waspish speculation: 'Cette belle voix, qui n'avait pas sa pareille dans toute l'Italie, aurait-elle souffert du séjour de la Bohême, nous dit-on ; dans le pays le plus froid et le plus triste du monde. C'est bien mauvais pour la poitrine' (286). Echoing the musical dichotomy of 'Son du Nord – Son du Midi' (*OA*, II: 983) that Sand lifts from E.T.A Hoffmann in her *Entretien journalier* of 5th June 1837, the tone for Consuelo's ostracism is set from an early stage in a similar vein. For the divide between Italia and Germania is clearly more than a question of narrative organisation, figured as it is in her sense of being out of place under the Viennese night: 'ce n'était pas la lune de Venise, les nuits embrasées par l'amour et l'espérance ; mais c'était la nuit allemande plus rêveuse et plus froide, la lune allemande plus vaporeuse et plus sévère' (II: 333). The 'severity' of the moon is offset, however, by the frivolity of Maria Theresa's court, populated with 'personnages guindés, fardés et frivoles' (334) who make of Consuelo the object of jealous intrigues. 'Cette cour de Vienne', she remarks, 'est donc bien hypocrite' (338). Much like in the novel's opening Venitian scenes, 'la scène se montre petite et mesquine' (418), and 'la vanité, la jalousie des autres, le lâche besoin du triomphe' (416) are shown to transcend national borders. 'Horrible métier !' (436), she cries. Consuelo 'conçoi[t] un autre but, une autre destinée à l'art que la rivalité de l'orgueil et la vengeance de l'abaissement' (332) – more akin, undoubtedly, to 'l'apostolat de l'art' (331), that 'idéal de [l]a vie de théâtre' '[qu']Albert s'était fait' (460) in the course of their spirited exchanges. In spite of the animosity of Holzbaüer, the director of the Empress's theatre, Consuelo's vocal virtuosity impresses Maria Theresa, who expresses the wish to recruit her for the court opera. The condition

⁶⁹ Cf. the passing reference in Albert Sonnenfeld, 'George Sand: Music and Sexualities', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 16.3–4 (Spring–Summer 1988), 310–321 (p. 321).

⁷⁰ Françoise Ghillebaert has explored this motif in a number of Sand's works: see *Disguise in George Sand's Novels* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009).

of this engagement, however, rests precisely on an engagement of a different kind, for 'l'impératrice [...] [faisait] du mariage de Consuelo avec Haydn la condition de l'engagement définitif de cette dernière au théâtre impérial' (457). La Porporina, as she has become known, remains loyal to Albert, who, she is convinced, 'sans aucun doute, était là' (450) in Vienna. Proleptically figuring the benevolent panopticism of the conspiracy of the Invisibles – which, we later learn, proves her suspicions to be founded – she believes that 'il l'observait, il suivait tous ses mouvements, il veillait sur elle' (450). Unable to comply with the Empress's wishes, Consuelo leaves Vienna for Berlin with Porpora, who has signed a contract to conduct at the theatre of Frederick the Great at his (ironically named) Sans-Souci palace. Yet, in a final twist to this weighty, quasi-picaresque section of the narrative, which occupies the entire first volume of Cellier and Guichard's hefty Folio edition, she learns in Prague that Albert is 'moribond' (522). Having rushed to his bedside, Consuelo agrees to marry him out of compassion, and their union is made official just moments before his death. The novel ends with the newly titled Comtesse de Rudolstadt renouncing her privileges and claims on the family fortune as she sets out for Germany in the company of her mentor.

Socialist Heresy

Much like *Le Compagnon*, the closing words of *Consuelo* bear the promise of a sequel. The Sandian narrator playfully gestures towards the fact that, *pace* Forster, death is not, in fact, a guarantee of narrative closure:

Ceux de nos lecteurs qui se sont par trop fatigués à suivre Consuelo parmi tant de périls et d'aventures, peuvent maintenant se reposer. Ceux, moins nombreux sans doute, qui se sentent encore quelque courage, apprendront dans un prochain roman, la suite de ses pérégrinations, et ce qui advint du comte Albert après sa mort. (546)

Before picking up the plot of Consuelo's adventures in Berlin, however, Sand would continue to explore the relationship she draws out between the repressed history of Bohemia and its heresies, and revolution. It is perhaps unsurprising that Sand studies has shown a critical predilection for discussion of Bohemia as cultural construct, dovetailing as it does with the well-worn topics of the musico-theatrical, the development of the (female) artist and the mother. 'Ma mère', Sand writes to Poncy in December 1843, 'était de la race avilie et vagabonde des Bohémiens de ce monde...' (*Corr. Sand*, VI: 327). Yet much less attention has been paid to Bohemia's significance

as concrete historical–geographical entity, a divide sketched out by Consuelo herself in conversation with princess Amélie and M^{me} de Kleist in *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*:

Dans notre langage d'artistes aventuriers, nous disons souvent *courir la Bohême*, pour signifier qu'on s'embarque dans les hasards d'une vie pauvre, laborieuse et souvent coupable, dans la vie des *zingari* qu'on appelle aussi bohémiens, en français. Quant à moi, je partais, non pour cette Bohême symbolique à laquelle mon sort semblait me destiner comme tant d'autres, mais pour le malheureux et chevaleresque pays des Tchèques, pour la patrie de Huss et de Ziska. (III: 77, original emphasis)

Any comprehensive discussion of Sand's historical thought cannot but attend to her engagement with Bohemia not as an imagined space of artistic freedom – or, in the less sympathetic assessment of Marx and Engels, a politically irresponsible pseudo–community – but as 'la patrie de Huss et de Ziska', already aligned in *La Dernière Aldini*, we recall, with egalitarian conspiratorial association.

La Comtesse de Rudolstadt appeared in the *Revue indépendante* from 25th June 1843, to conclude on 10th February of the following year. Two shorter works bookend its publication: *Jean Ziska*, serialized from 25th April to 25th May 1843, and *Procope le Grand*, which appeared on 25th March 1844, together forming what one critic has termed a 'cycle hussite'.⁷¹ Writing in the 1853 'Notice', Sand posits *Jean Ziska* as a kind of amateur historian's primer:

L'histoire de la Bohême est peu répandue chez nous. Pour en faire une étude particulière il faudrait savoir le bohème et le latin. Or, ne sachant pas mieux l'un que l'autre, je me vois forcé d'extraire d'un gros livre, estimable autant qu'indigeste, quelques pages sur la guerre des hussites [...] comme documents à consulter entre les deux séries principales d'aventures que j'ai entrepris de raconter sous le titre de *Consuelo*. En parcourant la Bohême à la piste de mon héroïne, j'avais été frappé [*sic*] du souvenir des antiques prouesses de Jean Ziska et de ses compagnons. Je pris alors quelques notes que je publie maintenant, avec prière aux lecteurs de ne prendre ceci ni pour un roman, ni pour une histoire, mais pour le simple récit de faits véritables dont j'ai cherché le sens et la portée dans mon sentiment plus que dans les ténèbres de l'érudition. (5)⁷²

Here, the trope that aligns knowledge with enlightenment is reversed, prefiguring the satirical presentation of the French *Lumières* that, we shall see, Sand sets against Germanic occultism in *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*. This mistrust of reason circumscribed from sensation and sentiment was

⁷¹ Renata Listikova, 'L'Image de la Bohême et des Tchèques dans les lettres françaises, XV^e–XIX^e siècles', *Revue des études slaves*, 78.4 (2007), 475–81 (p. 477).

⁷² This 'indigestible' book was Jacques Lenfant's 1731 *Histoire de la guerre des Hussites et du concile de Bâle*.

something of a Sandian constant: in *L'Homme de neige* (1859), for example, it is further asserted that 'ce n'est [...] pas la raison qui gouverne l'homme, c'est l'imagination, c'est le rêve'.⁷³ Indeed, these affirmations are borne out on a diegetic level in the *Consuelo* cycle. In conversation with his circle of sycophantic philosophes, the despotic Frederick, 'le grand réalisateur de la force logique et froide' (III: 482), for example, insists that 'l'érudition ne suffit pas pour expliquer l'histoire. Il faut [...] une profonde connaissance du cœur humain' (26). The eponymous protagonist, too, 'était toujours éclairée par le cœur avant de l'être par le cerveau'; 'elle ne prétendait pas à concevoir savamment un monde philosophique dans son esprit', yet 'elle sentait la chaleur des secrètes révélations qui sont accordées aux âmes poétiques' (332). In spite of her anti-intellectual rhetoric, which privileges sentiment over scholarship, Sand's endeavours nonetheless met with approval in certain quarters. In his study of Sand's religious thought, Bowman, for example, terms *Jean Ziska* and *Procope le Grand* 'deux livres d'érudition',⁷⁴ whilst Blanc goes as far as to direct the reader of his *Histoire de la Révolution française* in search of further information on the Hussite wars ('un mélange vraiment inouï d'aspirations idéales et de cruauté') towards 'l'éloquent récit qu'en a fait un de nos plus grands écrivains, George Sand'.⁷⁵

If *Consuelo* does not feature as a character in this intermezzo, her story is not so much interrupted as contextualized: Sand's portrayal of the Hussite wars of fifteenth-century central Europe stages the pre-history of the idealist politics of conspiracy that takes its fullest expression in *Consuelo*—*La Comtesse's* secret history of 1789. The figure of radical Protestant general Ziska, Albert de Rudolstadt's matrilineal forebear, emerges as a privileged point of reference, a metonymy for a movement of egalitarians who 'troublent et confondent tous les droits humains, en disant qu'il ne faut point obéir aux rois, que tous les biens doivent être communs, et que tous les hommes sont égaux' (II: 195, original emphasis), as the epigraph to *Procope le Grand* would have it. The family resemblance between the struggle of Jean Ziska's Protestant followers and that of *le peuple* of late eighteenth-century France is all too apparent, as Blanc notes:

[Les prêtres] brisaient l'égalité sociale dans la forme la plus élevée : la forme religieuse. Aussi la retrouverons-nous à la fin du XVIII^e siècle, cette question libératrice et inévitable, occupant les esprits, dominant les âmes, et elle n'aura pas changé d'essence. Seulement, sa formule théologique aura fait place à sa formule politique ; et ce que nous en verrons sortir, ce sera le second acte de la Révolution française. (20–21)

⁷³ George Sand, *L'Homme de neige*, ed. by Joseph-Marc Bailbé, 2 vols (Grenoble: Éditions de l'Aurore, 1990), II, 53.

⁷⁴ Frank Paul Bowman, 'George Sand, le Christ et le royaume', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 28 (1976), 243–262 (p. 248).

⁷⁵ Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Révolution française*, 12 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), I, 25, 25 n. 4.

The Revolution, ‘préparée par les philosophes, continuée par la politique’, Blanc argues, ‘[...] devait donc naturellement commencer par la théologie’ (19). ‘La guerre des Hussites’, Sand herself insists in *Procopée le Grand*, ‘est, non seulement dans ses détails, mais dans son essence, très semblable à la Révolution française’ (II: 198). This, then, is a version of history that speaks to the pre-history of 1789 that the young Jean-Paul Sartre so admired in Michel Zévaco: ‘cet auteur de génie’, he writes in *Les Mots*, ‘[dont] les héros représentaient le peuple ; ils faisaient et défaisaient les empires, prédisaient dès le XIV^e siècle la Révolution française...’.⁷⁶ Heresy is not just spiritual but political. As an indispensable part of Sand’s genealogy of 1789, socialism, we shall see, is the new heresy.

Dear to Marx, who cites *Jean Ziska* in the closing lines of his critique of Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, critics have nonetheless snubbed Sand’s para-*Consuelo* novelistic production, referencing it only in passing, if at all. The MLA International Bibliography, for example, does not contain a single entry for either *Procopée le Grand* or *Jean Ziska* (nor for the variant spelling *Jean Zyska*), and Sand’s engagement with Hussite history is explicitly excluded from one of the more recent edited volumes dealing with Bohemia as motif in the French literary imagination.⁷⁷ The only exceptions to this rule are Naginski’s brief discussion of *Jean Ziska* in the context of her analysis of Wanda de Prachalitz (Albert’s mother) as sibyl,⁷⁸ and a concise essay by Hamon, which opens with the words: ‘On ne lit plus guère *Jean Ziska* ni *Procopée le Grand*, certainement éclipsés par *Consuelo* et *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, bien qu’ils aient été publiés dans la même *Revue indépendante* en alternance avec ces romans.’⁷⁹ Indeed, this lack of scholarly interest is reflected in the continued lack of modern critical editions of the two texts. They are nevertheless fundamental intertexts for the *Consuelo* cycle, closely imbricated as they are in Sand’s conspiratorial vision of the historical process.

In the opening pages to *Jean Ziska*, the Sandian narrator reflects on the difficulties of establishing a history of contestatory movements. Couched in that familiar vocabulary of spatial and epistemological tenebrosity, ‘l’histoire de l’hérésie’ (21), we learn, has been ‘ensevelie [...] sous les ténébreux arcanes de l’histoire’ (24). As a result, ‘à cet égard, *l’histoire n’existe pas ; l’histoire n’est pas faite*’ (21, original emphasis). Under the yoke of Church as of State, chiasmically termed ‘l’hypocrisie sceptique de l’Église et [le] scepticisme hypocrite de l’université’, the official narrative has censored its opposite, to the extent that ‘nous en sommes à devenir l’histoire’ (23). ‘Secret’

⁷⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots* (Gallimard, 1964), p. 109.

⁷⁷ See Hana Voisine-Jechova (ed.), *Images de la Bohême dans la littérature française: réciprocité culturelle des Français, Tchèques et Slovaques* (Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004), p. 8.

⁷⁸ See Naginski, *George Sand mythographe*, pp. 218–20.

⁷⁹ Bernard Hamon, ‘*Jean Ziska* et *Procopée le Grand* ou les vertus de l’hérésie’, in Hecquet and Planté (eds.), *Lectures de Consuelo–La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, pp. 250–59 (p. 250).

history emerges as a counter-discourse working against censorial human agency: in a passage saturated in conspiratorial rhetoric, Sand's narrator asserts that 'il y a [...] toute une moitié de l'histoire intellectuelle et morale de l'humanité, que l'autre moitié du genre humain a fait disparaître, parce qu'elle la gênait et la menaçait' (24). Elaborating a history of popular contestation, 'où tout est plongé dans un épais brouillard' (23), necessitates looking back to those pre-Revolutionary 'siècles [...] étouffés' (28), tracing a thread of secret yet benevolent association culminating in the events of 1789. Redressing the imbalances of the narrative of the past to better shape that of the future, though, is no small task, as Sand acknowledges: 'si vous cherchez dans les historiens l'histoire suivie, claire et précise des manifestations progressives qui ont amené celle du dix-huitième siècle et celle d'aujourd'hui, vous ne l'y trouverez que confuse, tronquée et profondément inintelligente' (27).

If the prefatory musings to *Le Compagnon* explicitly aligned the existence of secret societies with the stratification of 'la société officielle', her concern in *Jean Ziska* also brings the question of gender to bear on these earlier reflections. Women, Sand argues, display a particular affinity for the secret history of silenced protagonists. As she writes in a direct address:

L'histoire de l'hérésie doit vous intéresser et vous toucher particulièrement ; car vous êtes les filles de l'hérésie, vous êtes toutes des hérétiques ; toutes vous protestez dans votre cœur, toutes vous protestez sans succès. Comme celle de l'Église *protestante* de tous les siècles, votre voix est étouffée sous l'arrêt de l'Église *sociale* officielle. (25, original emphasis)

It is to the injustices of their lot, Sand suggests, that women, disciples of the 'grands apôtres de l'idéal', owe their 'tendance idéaliste' and their 'puissance de sentiment' (25). Anticipating Schor's seminal analysis, Sand thus politicizes the genesis of female spirituality, positing the revolutionary cultural potential of women's idealism as born of their exclusion from existing power structures. Indeed, there emerges a close affinity between heresy (decoupled from the exclusively spiritual to take on a political bearing), revolution, and those questions of gender and class which would remain a lifelong concern for Sand. Listing 'les saint-simoniens, les doctrinaires, les fouriéristes, les communistes de Lyon, les chartistes d'Angleterre' (26) in the same breath as Jacobins, Montagnards, Girondins and – notably given Babeuf's place in the genealogy of leftist conspiracy – Babouvists, she goes on to argue that:

Ce que vous trouvez au fond de toutes ces sectes philosophiques et de tous ces mouvements populaires, c'est la lutte de l'égalité qui veut s'établir, contre l'inégalité, qui veut se maintenir ; lutte du pauvre contre le riche, du candide contre le fourbe, de l'opprimé contre l'oppresser, de la femme contre l'homme [...], de l'ouvrier contre le maître, du

travailleur contre l'exploiteur, du libre penseur contre le prêtre gardien des mystères [...],
lutte générale, universelle... (26)

Just as, for Sand, the republican and egalitarian objectives of the Hussite rebellion presage the events of 1789, so too does the torch of Revolution remain lit in the efforts of the followers of Saint-Simon and Fourier, amongst others. Recast in a nineteenth-century context, then, it is socialism that should fulfil that spiritual and socio-political function once served by religious heresy. Reading Sand's assertions in *Jean Ziska* in dialogue with the paratextual proclamations of *Le Compagnon* – in which, we might recall, the secret society emerges as a result of injustice and 'violation[s] du principe de l'égalité' (39) – only confirms this alignment between conspiracy, heresy and revolutionary egalitarianism. Indeed, were this not explicit enough, the narrator of *Jean Ziska* continues, invoking the sword of Damocles of political and material inequality:

L'hérésie du passé, c'est le communisme d'aujourd'hui, c'est le cri des entrailles désolées et du cœur affamé qui appelle la vraie connaissance, la voix de l'esprit, la solution religieuse, philosophique et sociale du problème monstrueux suspendu depuis tant de siècles sur nos têtes. (31)

'Voilà ce que c'est que l'hérésie', she continues, not a dry matter of theological hermeneutics, 'une stérile dispute de mots', but 'une idée [...] révolutionnaire dans ses tentatives et ses réclamations' (31). Uncovering the secret history of contestatory movements, then, cannot but be a politically charged endeavour.

The assimilation of revolutionary egalitarianism and what *Consuelo* terms 'la fameuse formule hérétique' (I: 310) of Bohemia, figuring Satan as 'l'ange méconnu, l'ami du malheureux' (II: 33) was not, moreover, the prerogative of Sand's vision of the historical process. The heretic leitmotif of the *Consuelo* cycle (I: 277, 310; II: 32, 545), which frames him as '[non] pas l'ennemi du genre humain, mais au contraire son protecteur et son patron' (I: 279), in the chaplain's gloss, finds its echo in the infamous Baudelairian appeal to that 'Prince de l'exil, à qui l'on a fait tort'.⁸⁰ Naginski has even gone as far as to suggest that we might classify Sand's 'socialist' novels of the 1840s as an 'épopée hérétique',⁸¹ making the contestatory thrust of the political synonymous with the spiritual. Indeed, decoupled from its religious associations in an appeal to the downtrodden and disenfranchised, the clarion call that so perplexed Albert Camus emerges as a metonym for the dialectic of secret and official history. Citing anarchist revolutionary Bakunin, Camus writes:

⁸⁰ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, I, 124.

⁸¹ Naginski, *George Sand mythographe*, p. 241.

‘Comme les Fraticelli de la Bohême au XIV^e siècle (?) [*sic*], les socialistes révolutionnaires se reconnaissent aujourd’hui par ces mots : *Au nom de celui à qui on a fait un grand tort.*’⁸² Updated for a post–Enlightenment world tending inexorably towards openness and transparency, Sandian heresy, ‘la solution [...] philosophique et sociale du problème monstrueux suspendu depuis tant de siècles sur nos têtes’ (31), reveals itself to be synonymous with conspiratorial collusion. Nowhere is this figured more acutely than in ‘la conspiration sociale et philosophique des Invisibles’ (III: 506).

For Anna Szabó, ‘Sand ‘a imaginé de faire planer l’esprit du hussitisme au-dessus de l’histoire de Consuelo [...] ; la société secrète des Invisibles sert de relais entre l’hérésie du Moyen Âge et les mouvements progressistes du XIX^e siècle.’⁸³ Deconstructing the illusions of objectivity to posit a secret history of humanity, emphasizing the role of sentiment and expressed in terms of both gender and class, Sand insists on the ‘heretic’ nature of revolutionary praxis. Yet if fifteenth-century Bohemia and its struggles appear as something of a leitmotif, it is not until the transposition of Consuelo’s adventures to Frederick the Great’s Prussia that Sand truly sets forth her paeon to the transhistorical import and prophetic perspicacity of Illuminism. Gleaned from her reading of Barruel, this, we learn, is ‘le fond de cette doctrine [...] implanté de tout temps dans les âmes populaires de nombreux philosophes et prophètes inconnus, qui ont jadis fanatisé la Bohême, et qui, aujourd’hui, couvent un feu sacré sous la cendre dans toute l’Allemagne’ (III: 240). Germany thus finds itself staged as a successor to Bohemia as host to ‘ce vaste monde souterrain des sociétés secrètes qui s’agite [...] dans les ténèbres’ (572) that takes on such importance in Sand’s genealogy of 1789. The privileged locus of this ‘mystérieuse révolution, que les sectes du passé avaient rêvée chacune pour son temps, et que les conspirateurs mystiques du siècle dernier avaient vaguement prédite cinquante ans d’avance’ (482), for Sand, is not the ancestral home of Cartesian rationalism and Voltairean scepticism, but ‘la mystique Allemagne’ and its ‘tradition des sociétés secrètes’ (480).

Blinded by the Light: *Philosophie* and its Discontents

La Comtesse picks up ‘le fil d’Ariane’ (III: 539) of Consuelo’s story a year after her deathbed marriage ceremony with Albert. Engaged as a singer at the court of Frederick the Great, Consuelo ‘ne

⁸² Albert Camus, *L’Homme révolté* (Gallimard, 1951), pp. 197–98. The full quotation can be found in Mikhail Bakunin, *La Théologie politique de Mazzini et l’Internationale* ([n.p.]: Commission de Propagande socialiste, 1871), p. 56.

⁸³ Anna Szabó, ‘*Procopé le Grand*’, in Bernard–Griffiths and Auraix–Jonchière (eds.), *Dictionnaire George Sand*, I, 1000–02 (p. 1001).

chantait pas en Prusse avec tout l'élan dont elle s'était sentie capable dans des jours meilleurs' and is far from fully 'accoutumée aux glaces du Nord et à celles d'un public de caporaux prussiens' (6). In the middle of an evening performance, the heroine collapses on stage, convinced that she has seen Albert in the audience. Frederick's visit to the ailing singer is the narrative pretext for the presentation of his court, which – in spite of his pretensions to a rational 'philosophisme égalitaire' (17) – is revealed to be rife with superstition, 'sous le coup de cette vague et puérile terreur que les sciences occultes inspiraient à toute l'Allemagne' (157). In Consuelo's tellingly worded summary, there is 'dans ce royaume de la raison, une conspiration permanente contre la raison' (128). The king's coterie of sycophantic *philosophes* (chief amongst whom are Voltaire, La Mettrie and the marquis d'Argens) as guarantors of 'la raison du jour' (18, original emphasis) do little to offset the appearance of the mystical comte de Saint-Germain and Cagliostro,⁸⁴ whose presence in cultural production (notably Schiller's *Der Geisterseher* [1789] and Alexandre Dumas père's *Joseph Balsamo* [1846]) would be worthy of a study in its own right. Divided between Enlightenment and occultism, Frederick's very court, then, seems to perform the hybrid nature of 'les nobles chimères du dix-huitième siècle' (482) evoked by Sand in her 'Notice'.

The paradoxical coexistence of 'la froide raison' (547) and 'les promesses de la magie, alors si répandues en Allemagne' (153) has not, of course, escaped the attention of critics. Yet analysis of the historical significance of this covality as it plays out in *La Comtesse* is surprisingly lacking. Robert Godwin Jones's assertion that 'Sand effectively uses these oppositions for dramatic effect',⁸⁵ for example, is woefully short-sighted. Vierende's analysis makes the welcome observation that:

Ce cadre historique du XVIII^e siècle dans l'Europe centrale insiste sur les thèmes politiques qui lui sont chers [à Sand] [...]. Le *leitmotiv* 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité',⁸⁶ qui devient de plus en plus utilisé dans *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, trouve dans ces évocations historiques des références solides, l'élargissant à une grande partie de l'humanité, et justifie les luttes dans lesquelles elle s'engage à cette époque.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Born in 1743, Cagliostro could not have been at Frederick's court in the mid-1750s, as Sand suggests.

⁸⁵ Robert Godwin-Jones, *Romantic Vision: The Novels of George Sand* (Birmingham, Ala.: Summa, 1995), p. 124.

⁸⁶ Slightly more common in the *Consuelo* cycle is a different ordering of the republican triad: 'liberté, fraternité, égalité' appears three times (III: 371, 455, 486), and 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' only twice (III: 372, 472).

⁸⁷ Simone Vierende, 'Consuelo–La Comtesse de Rudolstadt', in Bernard-Griffiths and Auraix-Jonchière (eds.), *Dictionnaire George Sand*, I, 227–33 (p. 231).

Yet, in an exclusionary gesture that devalues the novel's historical import, Vierre continues precisely by bracketing out the historical, locating the value of the work in those perennial 'Italian' Sandian themes identified by Schor ('the woman artist-messiah, music, Venice [...], the search for the mother' [215]):

Mais ce qui est plus remarquable encore, et atteste le génie de la romancière, c'est l'entrelacement des thèmes qui fait de *Consuelo* et de *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* un roman de la musique, un roman d'amour, et un roman initiatique, avec des passages ou des situations proprement fantastiques. (231)

Similarly, Zanone's sensitive discussion of 'la représentation bouffonne [...] des Lumières françaises' concludes with the suggestion that 'la méditation sur les Lumières de George Sand, dans *Consuelo*, s'arrache donc aux contingences historiques pour devenir une méditation sur l'idéal'.⁸⁸ This thesis contends that, on the contrary, Sand's reflection on the ideal – whose realisation, we have seen, is intimately bound up with conspiratorial association – cannot be understood without reference to history. Far from an introspective search for eternal, transcendent truth, the ameliorative thrust of Sandian idealism is necessarily rooted in its post-Revolutionary historical context. In the oppositional historiography of 1789 elaborated in the *Consuelo* cycle, Enlightenment and the Illuminati are two sides of the same coin.

An atmosphere of paranoia reigns at Frederick's court: 'dans l'air où nous vivons', remarks his sister, princess Amélie, 'il faut respirer en cachette' (55). Similarly, in conversation with the king himself, Consuelo boldly informs him that 'le soupçon pèse ici sur tout le monde' (136). He is nonetheless not unfamiliar with secret societies, having been 'reçu franc-maçon avant d'être roi', at a time which, in an echo of Barruel's take on the masonic origins of the republican triad, 'la liberté parlait à son coeur, l'égalité à sa raison' (377). Frederick, we learn, 'soupçonne, surveille et persécute un autre rite maçonnique qui s'est établi à Berlin, en concurrence de la loge qu'il préside, et d'autres sociétés secrètes' protagonized by his brother and sister, who 'conspireraient volontiers' (378) against him. His 'soupçons affreux' (56) extend even to his inner circle of *philosophes*, who, in that trajectory of panopticism traced by Foucault, have internalised the possibility of his surveillance: as he leaves them at the dinner table, 'au lieu de se sentir soulagés de la secrète gêne qui les opprimait, ils se trouvèrent plus mal à l'aise, et ne purent se dire un mot sans regarder cette porte entrouverte par laquelle était sorti le roi, et derrière laquelle il était peut-être occupé à les surveiller' (20). This, it is suggested, is as much the result of political pressures as a correlate of his

⁸⁸ Zanone 'Le romantisme de *Consuelo*', para. 15 of 16.

own lack of privacy, for, as Voltaire argues, ‘certains hommes n’ont le droit de rien cacher, lorsque la moindre de leurs paroles est un précepte, et la moindre de leurs actions un exemple’ (36). Yet where Barruel diagnoses a conspiracy of *philosophes* as the first step in a tripartite Revolutionary take-over, Sand reduces ‘le grand Voltaire [qui] boudait la France’ ‘comme un grand enfant’ (3) to the role of ‘premier chambellan’ (19), victim of ‘ce spleen prussien qui s’emparait bien vite de tous les heureux mortels appelés à contempler Frédéric dans sa gloire’ (31). The enlightened absolutism of this most tyrannical of ‘tyrans philosophes’ (378) thus takes on an alternative meaning, bearing on the ceaseless attempts to shed light on the shady ‘infernales machinations’ (155) the paranoid sovereign discerns everywhere. Indeed, the ellipsis at the end of ‘Quant à ceux qui veulent, à l’abri de ces supercheries infâmes, tramer des conspirations et déjouer la vigilance des lois...’ serves only to enhance the threats of ‘le terrible Frédéric’ (156) in opening up a space, textual and discursive, to be filled by the reader’s punitive imagination.

If the king is steadfast in his assertion that ‘tout souverain a le droit de faire périr quiconque vient dans ses États [*sic*] conspirer contre lui’ (159), we might note that the suspicions of this ‘grand réalisateur de la force logique et froide’ (482) are just as frequently directed towards the trappings of occultism that have flourished at Sans-Souci. The Voltairean injunction to ‘Écrasez l’infâme’ is transposed onto ‘les fausses révélations’ (35) of the charlatan ‘nécromant’ (28) Balsamo. ‘Tout cela est infâme’, Frederick cries, ‘et convenez que j’ai eu raison d’éloigner de mes États ce Cagliostro’ (35). The masonic affiliations of Thomas Carlyle’s infamous ‘Quack of Quacks’⁸⁹ – as a result of which the real-life Balsamo was arrested, imprisoned and subsequently sentenced to death in 1789 – are later set against Albert’s purer take on the secret society, as recounted by his mother, Wanda, Consuelo’s initiator. Relaying Albert’s initial encounter with the Invisibles, ‘Cagliostro, l’intrigant et le cupide [...] avec son éloquence captieuse qui parodiait les grandes inspirations révolutionnaires’, she tells Consuelo, ‘fit horreur au noble adepte’ (415). The base connotations of ‘intrigant’, then, contrast with the grander aims of the ‘conspirateur’, and the Italian occultist serves as a metonym for a movement that has deviated from its aims. Sand’s Invisibles, ultimately, transcend the Freemasons from whom they draw inspiration: no sooner has Albert encountered ‘tous ces éléments divers qui composent les affiliations maçonniques’ than he recognises ‘l’erreur, l’engouement, la vanité, l’imposture, la fraude même qui commençaient dès lors à se glisser dans ces sanctuaires déjà envahis par la démence et les vices du siècle’ (414–15). The familiar analogy of the conspiratorial chain (‘une chaîne de mains invisibles’ [145]) is reworked in a vocabulary of moral and elemental purity with the prediction that the project of the Invisibles ‘échouer[ait] pour

⁸⁹ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Count Cagliostro in Two Flights’, in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by Henry Duff Trail, 30 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), XXVIII, 249–318 (p. 284).

avoir laissé l'alliage pénétrer trop avant dans la chaîne d'or' (415). However, if the sympathies of the Sandian narrator clearly lie with Albert's 'âme ferme et ardente', it is nonetheless implied that his vision is incompatible with certain 'nécessités terribles de l'œuvre des conspirations' (415), notably the question of clandestinity. In a passage of reported speech, he exhorts his conspirator–interlocutor Wanda to 'jete[r] vos masques noirs [...], sort[ir] de vos cavernes' and 'efface[r] de votre temple le mot *mystère*' (416, original emphasis). In demanding that the Invisibles 'paraisse[nt] à la lumière du jour', Albert insists that they count on 'la sympathie des peuples, et sur la spontanéité des instincts généreux' (416). Yet he, too, is tasked with excessive idealism, the consequence of a 'vie de retraite et d'études' that precludes engagement in all senses of the word: 'Albert avait raison en principe ; mais le moment n'était pas venu pour qu'il eût raison dans la pratique. Ce moment est peut-être encore loin !' (416). What Sand prizes, then, is a 'science occulte [...] [qui] n'a rien de surnaturel, puisque c'est purement et simplement celle du cœur humain [...], la connaissance profonde de la vie humaine, dans ses ressorts les plus intimes et dans ses actes les plus secrets' (147). An education in secret history is necessarily a sentimental one.

Where Cagliostro is unambiguously portrayed as a charlatan, the Sandian narrator is less swift to give short shrift to the 'personnage intéressant et remarquable' (26) that is the comte de Saint–Germain ('more interesting than Voltaire'⁹⁰ to women, according to Umberto Eco's self–styled 'Bouvard and Pécuchet for occult idiocy',⁹¹ *Foucault's Pendulum* [1988]). Saint–Germain is credited with the capacity – beloved of the conspiracy theorist – to 'explique[r] des événements restés à l'état de problèmes fort obscurs dans l'histoire', to 'jeter un nouveau jour sur les faits les plus mystérieux' (26). All is, in any case, not as it seems: Amélie, apparently taken with that mysticism that Staël read as germane to Germany, explains that this 'prétendue nécromancie peut servir de prétexte à bien des choses' (103). The princess is a moderate admirer of 'Jean Ziska et le génie républicain de la Bohême', having deconstructed the official history of aristocracy, 'ce que [s]es pédants [lui] avaient enseignée sur les droits des peuples' (80). She feigns a fascination with Saint–Germain's 'science occulte' (146), using him as an intermediary via whom she can communicate with her beloved, Trenck, who also happens to be Frederick's nemesis. Intertextually prefiguring the conspiring court performer of Baudelaire's prose poem 'Une Mort héroïque',⁹² Consuelo finds herself 'conspira[n]t contre sa volonté en recevant les confidences de la princesse Amélie' (129), raising questions concerning the necessity of conspiratorial agency as she passes on

⁹⁰ Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, trans. by William Weaver (Vintage, 2001), p. 496.

⁹¹ Umberto Eco, 'Borges and My Anxiety of Influence', in *On Literature*, trans. by Martin McLaughlin (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), pp. 118–35 (p. 125). Title not italicized in original.

⁹² On 'Une Mort héroïque', see, for example, Debarati Sanyal, 'Conspiratorial Poetics: Baudelaire's "Une Mort héroïque"', *Nineteenth–Century French Studies*, 27.3–4 (Spring–Summer 1999), 305–22.

messages from Trenck. When Trenck's former friend La Mettrie is found dead 'à la suite d'un excès de table', a 'sombre fantaisie' leads the king to 'attribuer sa mort tantôt à la haine des jésuites, tantôt aux machinations des sorciers à la mode' (157). The supposed representative of 'ce milieu raisonneur et clairvoyant du monde de son temps' (331), then, is tasked with extravagant delusion; clearly, for Sand, some conspiracy theories are worth more than others.

Consuelo is wrongly accused of being a 'complice' in this 'prétendue conspiration' (227) and is sent to Frederick's 'citadelle [...] inexpugnable' (165) at Spandau, 'sous la prévention de complicité dans une conspiration politique' (174). Whilst imprisoned in the fortress, she encounters Gottlieb, the son of her jailer, Schwartz. Equally aptly monikered, the simple, good-hearted Gottlieb ('nom pieux et sacré [196]) is a foil to his grasping, 'scélérat' (235) father. Prior to his illness, which has left him 'idiot' and physically 'plus semblable à un navet mal épluché qu'à la mine d'un chrétien' (197), Gottlieb, we learn, was 'destiné à l'état ecclésiastique', having made 'de rapides progrès dans la liturgie protestante' (196). Unbeknownst to his parents, Gottlieb is a secret devotee of 'le sublime cordonnier' (234), German mystic Jakob Boehme. Consuelo aligns her reading of Boehme with the gospel formerly preached by her husband at the Château des Géants. 'Ce qui m'a le plus frappée', she writes of Boehme's theology in her secret prison diary, 'c'est sa théorie sur le diable [...]. Je me rappelle qu'Albert expliquait à peu près de même le règne terrestre et transitoire du principe du mal, et que le chapelain de Riesenbourg l'écoutait avec horreur' (238). Recalling the socialist rallying call of 'Au nom de celui à qui l'on a fait tort', the heretic motif familiar from Albert's tales of Jean Ziska is thus kept alive. Indeed, the link between Gottlieb's beliefs and the fifteenth-century Hussite martyrs is soon made explicit: he assures Consuelo that 'le fond de cette doctrine est implanté de tout temps dans les âmes populaires de nombreux philosophes et prophètes inconnus, qui ont jadis fanatisé la Bohême' (240). 'Je me souviens, en effet', she adds, 'des ardents cordonniers hussites dont Albert me racontait les prédications audacieuses et les exploits terribles au temps de Jean Ziska' (240–41). Socialism, Sand continues to suggest, is the heresy of the nineteenth century, 'une religion secrète [...], une croyance raillée, persécutée ou méprisée' (240) working in contradistinction to despotism, the political equivalent of those 'violations exercées par les jésuites dans les vieux châteaux hérétiques de l'Allemagne, lors de la guerre de trente ans' (331). Proleptically figuring the utopian socialist project in a sacralization of the political, Consuelo concludes that 'cette religion est la mienne, puisqu'elle proclame la future égalité entre tous les hommes et la future manifestation de la justice et de la bonté de Dieu sur la terre' (241). 'Il y a dans ces têtes germaniques, même les plus détraquées', she remarks, 'un luxe d'imagination que j'admire' (214). This 'Germanic' capacity for feeling and imagination is set against the French 'école de Descartes [qui] se perd dans la raison pure, faisant de l'homme une

machine à raisonnement [...], un instrument de logique' (564). This, it is suggested, makes of these lands the cradle of an egalitarian revolution predicated on a capacity for empathetic identification with the Other that, we recall from *Le Compagnon*, the elitist Carbonarist conspirators so keenly lacked. The German setting of *La Comtesse*, then, is more than a backdrop, but the very condition of possibility for Sand's secret history of 1789.

Consuelo befriends Gottlieb, and he informs her of the existence of a secret society known amongst Sand's subject of predilection, 'les ouvriers et le pauvre peuple ignorant' (245), for coming to the aid of an injured worker. Consuelo's questions as to the purpose and existence of 'ces amis inconnus, ces protecteurs merveilleux' (242) are the consequence of a note delivered by the jailer's son, which assures her that:

Nous travaillons à ta délivrance ; le moment approche. Mais un nouveau danger te menace qui retarderait le succès de notre entreprise. Méfie-toi de quiconque te pousserait à la fuite avant que nous t'ayons donné des avis certains et des détails précis. On te tend un piège. Sois sur tes gardes et persévère dans ta force.

Tes frères :

Les Invisibles

(242, original emphasis)

With its recourse to a pronominal language of uncertain agency ('quiconque', 'on'), the Invisibles' missive performs its conspiratorial content, pitting one plot against another. In an overt onomastic challenge to realist narrative scopophilia, taking transparency, chameleon-like, to its logical endpoint, the Invisibles, Gottlieb informs us, are:

Des gens qu'on ne voit pas, mais qui agissent [...]. On ne sait pas s'ils demeurent quelque part, mais il y en a partout. On dit qu'on en trouve dans les quatre parties du monde [...]. Ils sont les instigateurs de toutes les révolutions : ils vont dans toutes les cours, dirigent toutes les affaires, décident la guerre ou la paix, rachètent les prisonniers, soulagent les malheureux, punissent les scélérats, font trembler les rois sur leurs trônes... (244–45)

Faced with the existence of these 'êtres terribles et bienfaisants', Consuelo is troubled. 'Sont-ce des sectaires, des charlatans, ou des conspirateurs ?' (247), she asks. That 'filiation [...] entre toutes les sociétés secrètes' (44) that Sand imagined in *Le Compagnon* is performed in the speculation amongst *le peuple* reported by Gottlieb as to the identity of the Invisibles:

Chacun faisait son commentaire : 'C'est l'ancien ordre des Templiers, disait l'un. – On les appelle aujourd'hui francs-maçons, disait l'autre. – Non, disait un troisième [...], c'est la

vieille Bohême qui est toujours debout et qui menace en secret toutes les puissances de l'Europe, parce qu'elle veut faire de l'univers une république.' (III: 245, original emphasis)

Gottlieb's millenarian response is even more perplexing. 'Il est bien évident', he tells her, 'que la fin du monde approche. Des signes manifestes ont éclaté. L'Antéchrist est né. Il y en a qui disent qu'il est en Prusse et qu'il s'appelle Voltaire ; mais je ne connais pas ce Voltaire, et ce peut bien être quelque autre, d'autant plus que V n'est pas W, et que le nom que l'Antéchrist portera parmi les hommes commencera par cette lettre, et sera allemand' (247). Sand's heretic Antichrist, 'celui à qui on a fait tort', lest we forget, is the harbinger of egalitarian revolution. 'Au fond', it is explained to Consuelo, 'tous les hérétiques [...] sont d'accord sur le point principal, celui de détruire la tyrannie intellectuelle et matérielle' (367). As the stereoscopic presence of history makes itself felt on a narrative level, this mysterious figure, it becomes apparent, is not Voltaire, but that 'Allemand obscur'⁹³ so decried by Barruel and his followers, Weishaupt, leader of the Illuminati. In this way, Sand comes to recast the theory inherited from Barruel to posit 'les grands prodiges qui [...] éclate[nt] dans le courant de ce siècle' (247) as the work not of a malevolent conspiracy, but of a valiant 'armée marchant à la conquête d'une société idéale' (368). Accordingly, the guiding Barruelian suggestion that 'le secret de la franc-maçonnerie consiste dans ces mots : *égalité et liberté ; tous les hommes sont égaux et libres, tous les hommes sont frères*' (*Mém. Barr.*, II: 273, original emphasis) is valorized rather than reviled.

The 'chevaliers invisibles qui travaill[aient] à la délivrance de notre héroïne' (253) make good on their promise, and Consuelo is rescued from Spandau after three months. Accompanied by a mysterious masked figure named Liverani, to whom she is irresistibly erotically drawn, she is taken to the Château du Graal, a vast estate several days' journey from Berlin. Liverani, she comes to understand, also belongs to 'un de ces ordres mystérieux qu'on appelle [...] *sociétés secrètes*, et qu'on dit être nombreuses en Allemagne' (303, original emphasis). She spends a number of weeks in solitude, punctuated only by Liverani's love letters, and is eventually guided to an underground hall, where she is interviewed by a masked council of eight 'hommes aussi parfaits dans la vertu que puissants dans la société' (315). Sand's idealized secret society of self-proclaimed 'hérétique[s] passionné[s]' (400), then, is a meritocracy of integrity. Where Gottlieb's account of the Invisibles made of them an amalgam of a series of secret societies throughout history, it is indeed revealed that they hold 'la direction suprême' (339) of a number of other such groupings, notably the Freemasons:

⁹³ Ségur, *Les Francs-Maçons*, p. 43.

Grâce à l'organisation savante de notre ordre, aux rapports établis avec toutes les autres sociétés secrètes, à une quantité de néophytes et d'adeptes dont les fonctions consistent à examiner avec la plus scrupuleuse attention les choses et les personnes qui nous intéressent, il n'est rien qui puisse échapper à nos investigations. Il n'est point de secrets pour nous dans le monde. Nous savons pénétrer dans les arcanes de la politique, comme dans les intrigues des cours. (425–26)

Incorporated and transcended into a superior order, the Masons, 'grande confrérie qui [...] travaille à organiser la pratique et à répandre la notion de l'égalité' (373), it is revealed, are a 'société préparatoire' (410) for the Invisibles. If Sand stops short of positing a veritable pan-European network of conspiracy, the heroine is informed that 'les autres sociétés secrètes des diverses nations de l'Europe te seront ouvertes également par le talisman de notre investiture, afin que, quelque pays que tu traverses, tu y trouves l'occasion de nous seconder et de servir notre cause' (374). The more sinister aspects of the situation are tempered by the familial vocabulary in which her 'adoption bienfaisante' (150) is couched: 'tu es ici dans le sein d'une famille qui cherche la pratique de l'idéal' (336), the heroine, 'fiancée de l'idéal sacré' (I: 146), is reassured. Consuelo is, she is told, 'notre fille, notre sœur et notre égale' (III: 374).

Agreeing that she shares the Invisibles' faith in 'la perfectibilité humaine' (327), in a vocabulary that recalls Weishaupt as much as Leroux, Consuelo undergoes a series of initiatory trials targeting '[l']esprit' (by solitude and study), '[le] cœur' (by confession) and '[l]es yeux' (by confrontation with torture instruments and the bones of victims, tokens of humanity's past crimes committed in the name of religion) (472). Prepared for active participation in 'un réseau de conspiration permanente et universelle pour prendre à la nasse et paralyser l'action des méchants dans le monde' (322), henceforth she is to be devoted to 'la possibilité humaine, la nécessité sociale et l'obligation morale de ce triple précepte : liberté, égalité, fraternité' (372). During her initiation, it is revealed to Consuelo by her confessor, Wanda, that Albert is not, in fact, dead, but was revived from a cataleptic seizure by the Invisibles, of which he is a high-ranking member. Cast into a dilemma of disloyalty to the husband she married without loving unreservedly, Consuelo remains faithful to Albert, who is eventually revealed to be one and the same with Liverani. The novel ostensibly ends on a celebratory note, with the consecration of their marriage and her definitive initiation into the order of these 'constructeurs cachés d'une société nouvelle' (381). The lengthy series of trials 'la néophyte' (380) undergoes have been subject to a wealth of critical readings, derived largely from structural and psychoanalytic approaches, and bearing frequently on the question of myth and the symbolic death and rebirth of the gendered subject. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, for example, draws on the work of Julia Kristeva to posit the *Consuelo* cycle as an explicit

challenge to the phallogocentric model governing the structure of the novel of initiation,⁹⁴ whilst Gérard Schaeffer and Evelyne Cosset have analysed the propaedeutic function of Sandian space in this section of the narrative.⁹⁵ Yet more significant for our own purposes – and virtually unacknowledged in existing scholarship – is the manner in which the figure of the benevolent secret society that emerges from this initiatory process sublimates Sand's readings on Freemasonry and the Illuminati, which aligned the Germanic with the subversive.

The novel's curious epilogue, set in 1774, takes an epistolary form, framed as a letter from noted *Illuminat* Baron von Knigge and recounting a meeting between Albert de Rudolstadt and a certain Spartacus. Barruel asserts that 'Weishaupt, en s'installant chef des Illuminés, eut soin de prendre pour caractéristique le nom de Spartacus, de ce chef si fameux à Rome dans la guerre des esclaves révoltés contre leurs maîtres' (*Mém. Barr.*, III: 64), lending credence to the Sandian narrator's playful, almost Stendhalian, footnote. For, in a stratification of intra– and extra–diegetic knowledge, the sender of the 'Lettre de Philon', we read, is 'probablement le célèbre baron de Knigge, connu sous le nom de Philon dans l'ordre des illuminés'. Similarly, 'on sait que [Spartacus] était le nom de guerre d'Adam Weishaupt. Est-ce réellement de lui qu'il est question ici?', the narrator muses. 'Tout porte à le croire' (532). That utopian thrust that Perrot and Naginski detected in the novel is seemingly absent: 'Les Invisibles avaient disparu sous la persécution', Albert's metempsychotic madness has returned, and Consuelo has 'irrévocablement perdu la voix' (531). 'Quel fut le succès réel de l'ardent et infatigable pèlerinage qu'Albert et Consuelo poursuivirent à travers la France, l'Espagne, l'Angleterre et l'Italie?', the narrator asks.

Il n'y en eut point de manifeste pour le monde, et je crois qu'il faut se reporter à vingt ans plus tard pour retrouver, par induction, l'action des sociétés secrètes dans l'histoire du dix-huitième siècle. Ces sociétés eurent-elles plus d'effet en France que dans le sein de l'Allemagne qui les avait enfantées? La Révolution française répond avec énergie par l'affirmative. Cependant la conspiration européenne de l'illuminisme et les gigantesques conceptions de Weishaupt montrent aussi que le divin rêve du saint Graal n'avait pas cessé d'agiter les imaginations allemandes, depuis trente années, malgré la dispersion ou la défection des premiers adeptes. (516–17)

The relative adverb 'cependant' suggests that, in spite of the Invisibles' failures, hope is not lost: collapsing the boundaries between fiction and history, the novel's self-reflexive insight wavers as

⁹⁴ See Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, 'Desire, Writing, and Identity in the Romantic Mystical Novel: Notes for a Definition of the Feminine', *Style*, 18.3 (Summer 1984), 328–54.

⁹⁵ See Evelyne Cosset, 'Consuelo: nature et fonction de l'espace', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 27.1–2 (Fall–Winter 1998–99), 51–61 (p. 58); and Gérard Schaeffer, 'Consuelo, le temps et l'espace: lieux symboliques et personnages', in Cellier (ed.), *La Porporina*, pp. 53–67.

it stages the Illuminati as the next step in the Sandian genealogy of secret societies. Again, then, it is Germany and not France that provides Sand with a vision of the occult that goes beyond Romantic cliché to posit a veritable philosophy of history, centred on that dialectic of equality and inequality, ‘la lutte de l’égalité qui veut s’établir, contre l’inégalité qui veut se maintenir’ (26) framed in *Jean Ziska*.

Weishaupt and his acolyte track down the Rudolstadt couple ‘errant dans la forêt de Bohême’ (531), ‘le chemin sans maître de la forêt’ (579) gesturing towards their freedom from material considerations. Intertextually recalling Barruel’s alignment of the Illuminati with the end of private property, Consuelo, ‘la bonne déesse de la pauvreté’ (553), ‘[qui] a marché plus que le Juif errant’ (552), tells the founder of the Illuminati that ‘tout ce qui n’est pas l’échange doit disparaître dans la société future. En attendant, Dieu nous permet, à mon époux et à moi, de pratiquer cette vie d’échange, et d’entrer ainsi dans l’idéal’ (547). Weishaupt has, he tells Albert, ‘venu de bien loin pour t’interroger et m’instruire auprès de toi’ (539):

Ce que je suis venu te demander, dit Spartacus, c’est ton utopie ; c’est la société nouvelle que tu portes dans ton cerveau et dans tes entrailles. Nous savons que la société des Invisibles en a cherché et rêvé les bases. Tout ce travail a mûri en toi. Fais que nous en profitons. Donne-nous ta république ; nous l’essaierons, en tant qu’elle nous paraîtra réalisable, et les étincelles de ton foyer commenceront à remuer le monde. (569)

‘Cours en France, *Spartacus* !’, Albert advises him. ‘La France bientôt va détruire... Elle a besoin de toi... Cours, te dis-je, hâte-toi, si tu veux prendre part à l’œuvre... C’est la France qui est la prédestinée des nations’ (576, original emphasis). Strength lies in unity; it is to be hoped that the future will witness ‘ce vaste monde souterrain des sociétés secrètes qui s’agite aujourd’hui dans les ténèbres, se réunir sous une seule doctrine’ (572). The import of the *Consuelo* cycle as novel of conspiracy, then, is precisely the historicization of Sand’s oft-denigrated ‘éternelle aspiration vers les choses idéales’ (407):

Bien qu’un siècle à peine nous sépare de l’existence de ces Invisibles, elle est problématique pour l’historien ; mais trente ans plus tard l’illuminisme reprit ces formes ignorées du vulgaire, et, puisant à la fois dans le génie inventif de ses chefs et dans la tradition des sociétés secrètes de la mystique Allemagne, il épouvanta le monde par la plus formidable et la plus savante des conjurations politiques et religieuses. Il ébranla un instant toutes les dynasties sur leurs trônes, et succomba à son tour, en léguant à la Révolution française comme un courant électrique d’enthousiasme sublime, de foi ardente et de fanatisme terrible. (480)

Lending credence to Perry Anderson's contention that 'within the huge multiverse of prose fiction the historical novel has, almost by definition, been the most consistently political',⁹⁶ Sand, we have seen, stages the pre-Revolutionary conflict between declining and ascending forms of social life, the ideological effects of historical change that Lukács read as fundamental to the historical genre. Where, for Lukács and his Marxist conception of history as dialectic, the classical historical novel is an affirmation of human progress in and through division and opposition, so too does Sand posit a narrative of human perfectibility amidst sweeping social forces. Yet in the conflict between the despotism exemplified by Frederick, 'ce maître absolu' reigning over 'le terrible régime militaire de la Prusse' (99), and 'le génie républicain de la Bohême' (80), 'qui menace en secret toutes les puissances de l'Europe, parce qu'elle veut faire de l'univers une république' (245), the raising agent of egalitarianism of Sand's novel of conspiracy is not the inevitable, teleological movement of history, but the secret society. Neutralizing the negative connotations of secret association to craft an alternative origin myth for her century, the 'conspiration sociale et philosophique' (506) of the Invisibles-Illuminati deconstructs both the 'official' history of Revolution and Barruel's counter-discourse, reformulated as *liberty, equality, conspiracy*. Attending to this secret history of 1789, then, allows for the nuancing of that critical vision of Sand as 'prophétesse [...] résolument tournée vers l'avenir',⁹⁷ eschewing engagement with the historical past to better articulate a utopian future. *Pace* those who leave, post-Lukács, to Balzac the prerogative on the novelistic annexation of history, Sand is more than deserving of a place amongst those 'historien[s] de la pensée européenne'⁹⁸ in her interrogation of the tensions of a century that saw the emergence of both the Enlightenment and the Illuminati.

⁹⁶ Perry Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe', *London Review of Books*, 28th July 2011, pp. 24–28 (p. 24).

⁹⁷ Yves Chastagneret, 'George Sand et la Révolution française', *Dix-huitième siècle*, 20 (1988), 431–48 (p. 431).

⁹⁸ Cellier, 'L'occultisme dans *Consuelo*', p. 7.

CONCLUSION

For the Balzac of *Illusions perdues*, ‘le dix-huitième siècle a tout mis en question, le dix-neuvième siècle est chargé de conclure’ (*CH*, V: 460). In examining the engagement with conspiracy thinking of these two self-styled ‘grands bergers’, leading ‘les troupeaux d’hommes’ (*LMH*, I: 442) of July Monarchy France, this study has sought to bring out the significance of 1789 in their mutual *agon* with ‘official’ history. Literary scholarship attentive to the material factors shaping cultural production has invariably taken Balzac as a metonym for a realist poetics invented, in Cohen’s words, ‘in the heroic struggle to make sense of the economic, social and political upheavals resulting from the Revolution’ (3–4). The prism of the conspiratorial, this thesis shows, allows us to nuance this influential critical narrative in attending to Sand’s idealist philosophy of history, equally invested in providing a form of aesthetic consolation that is always-already political.

Shifting the axis of historical enquiry from the diachronic to the synchronic, Balzac and Sand adopt the mantle of historians of the present, positing a ‘secret’ or ‘lost’ history that aspires to, as Sand would have it, ‘donner la clef des grands événements qui sont encore proposés pour énigmes aux érudits de notre temps’.¹ The shared endeavour to provide answers to those questions wracking nineteenth-century society, beset by an ‘unrationalized coexistence’² of competing political and aesthetic forms and expectations, takes form in what I have called the *novel of conspiracy*. Deeply engaged with history and freighted with an acute awareness of the discrepancy between revolutionary ideals and July Monarchy economic and social practice, this new generic category, I have suggested, draws on the aesthetic language of the possible and the plausible to politicize *vraisemblance*. It is not my intention here to join the revisionist drive in literary history that seeks to shift the birth of modernism ever earlier, and which takes perhaps its most sophisticated expression in Susan Harrow’s recent study of Zola.³ Yet, debates surrounding periodization and nineteenth-century cultural production aside, it should be noted that if Sand’s utopian tropism points to an imagined political future, it is in its ostensibly *lisible* Balzacian guise that the novel of conspiracy emerges as the most aesthetically forward-looking. Suspicion, then, is not merely a

¹ George Sand, *Questions d’art et de littérature*, ed. by Henriette Bessis and Janis Glasgow (Des femmes, 1991), p. 49.

² Taking my cue from Counter’s recent study of the Bourbon Restoration, I borrow this term from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to speak to the confused, transitional nature of both the political regime of the ‘citizen-king’, and a contemporaneous aesthetic regime ostensibly divided between the realist and the idealist. (My own use, of course, decouples the expression from the concerns underpinning Counter and Sedgwick’s shared interest in the history of sexuality.) Conspiracy thinking, I have argued, emerges as a powerful means of rationalizing the contradictions underpinning July Monarchy France.

³ See Susan Harrow, *Zola, The Body Modern: The Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010).

matter of content or theme, but is actively instigated by the literary medium and its inability to provide unambiguous answers to the questions it prompts.

Extending the corpus of primary texts (or, indeed, authors) beyond the necessarily restricted scope of the present study would doubtlessly allow for the nuancing of the conclusions we have been able to draw – Sand’s *Spiridion* (1838–39/1842) and *Nanon* (1872) and Balzac’s *Les Chouans* (1829) and *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine* (1848) would be but the most obvious examples. Similarly, without wishing to sanction the kind of reductionist reading that would frame the literary text as the passive reflection of a particular stage of historical development or ideology, there would be critical mileage in examining the novelistic engagement with conspiracy thinking under nineteenth-century France’s political regimes beyond the July Monarchy. In laying the groundwork for a ‘secret’ – or, at the very least, ‘forgotten’ – history of nineteenth-century French literature, this thesis has sought to invite wider reflection on the value and limitations of categorization for the writing of literary history and the associated politics of intellectual culture. Were further confirmation needed of the status of the conspiratorial as a privileged angle from which to approach these aesthetic and political questions, I would like to highlight, by way of conclusion, the extent to which it permeates the very meta-language in which we seek to speak authoritatively on the subject. For the suspicious hermeneutic or paranoid style that takes its most elaborate guise in grandiose conspiracy theories, ultimately, also has a bearing on the literary–critical enterprise itself.⁴

This contention might be illustrated with a number of examples from Sand studies. For, in mapping the mechanisms of canonization to expose the contingencies of literary value, Anglo–American feminist scholarship has seen a revival of interest in the politics and poetics of a novelist who, in Viard’s telling formula, was long consigned to the critical wilderness as victim of ‘une conspiration du silence’ (766). In her gloss on Sand’s aesthetic devalorization, which she, like Cohen and Schor, attributes to the rise of Marxist criticism and the realist novel, Françoise van Rossum–Guyon also resorts to a conspiratorial vocabulary of covert collusion:

C’est en tant que faiseur de romans que George Sand prend place au rang des ‘grands écrivains’. C’est là un point important que l’histoire littéraire, pour de multiples raisons qu’il faudrait étudier de près, s’est comme ingéniée à occulter. Il est évident en particulier que le triomphe des théories marxistes avec sa contrepartie, le rejet des socialismes utopiques, y est pour beaucoup. Dans le domaine plus étroit de la critique littéraire, la valorisation extrême du

⁴ Rita Felski’s masterful *état présent* of literary studies challenges this critical sensibility to make a case for what she terms ‘postcritical reading’. See *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 14–51.

‘réalisme critique’ avec en corollaire la dévaluation systématique du ‘romantisme révolutionnaire’, n’en est qu’un des avatars récents, mais des plus pernicieux, quant à l’intérêt que l’on pouvait reconnaître à des formes littéraires différentes, qualifiées d’‘idéalistes’ et comme telles disqualifiées.⁵

Similarly, in highlighting the fact that, pre–Walter Scott, the French historical novel was one associated primarily with a women’s literary tradition, Samuels has argued that ‘by focusing on the *secret history* of behind–the–scenes romance and rivalry in which women played a leading role, these writers offered a corrective to the official male–authored historiography of the period that focused on the king and his battles’ (153–54, emphasis added). Jameson, too, tasks the Marxist critic with the objective of uncovering the ‘single vast unfinished plot’ (4) in which one might find an ‘account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past’ (3, original emphasis). If the novel of conspiracy, as I have sought to demonstrate, participates in a historiographical counter–discourse, so too does literary criticism adopt an analagous vocabulary of conspiracy theory.

These examples testify to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has termed the ‘prestige’⁶ accorded to the stance of paranoid criticality in literary studies. This depends, of course, on the decoupling of paranoia’s literal and metaphorical ascriptions, on which its symbolic capital as interpretative discourse in turn depends; the discursive prerogative to *dé-lire*, or unread, must be circumscribed from that *délire* with which it is cognate. Paranoid delusion and its attendant conspiratorial speculation, we observed with reference to Balzac, turns on an overactive hermeneutic impetus. Yet if Esquirol’s patient ‘M’ expressed his outrage at the fact that ‘la raison la plus supérieure se trouve confondue avec la folie’ (18), his remark also gestures towards the structural complicity between this misdirected hermeneutic drive and the larger project of scientific enquiry and critical thinking that would analyse it. Freud, for example, was clearly aware of these parallels, playfully remarking that ‘the delusions of paranoiacs have an unpalatable external similarity and internal kinship to the systems of our philosophers’ (*SE*, XVII: 261), amongst whom, needless to say, he included himself. ‘Details which are usually overlooked by others’, he writes elsewhere, are ‘interpret[ed] and utiliz[ed] as the basis of far–reaching conclusions [...]. [The paranoiac] perceives something that escapes the normal person, he sees clearer than one of normal intellectual capacity’ (XI: 254–56).⁷ Paranoia, then, is slippery, occupying a tropism that readily tends from object of

⁵ Françoise van Rossum–Guyon, ‘Puissances du roman: George Sand’, *Romantisme*, 85 (1994), 79–92 (p. 79). Emphasis added.

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ‘Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading’, in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 2–37 (p. 6).

⁷ If Freud generally avoided discussion of the psychoses, the fact remains that he judged the unmistakably paranoid(–schizophrenic) Daniel Paul Schreber (1842–1911) as worthy of intensive analysis, culminating in

study to methodology. The paranoid style is as much a meta–narrative technology as a thematic or a cultural pathology.

The father of psychoanalysis of course, sits alongside Marx and Nietzsche in the founding triumvirate of Ricœur’s school of suspicion, those practitioners of a style of interpretation that confronts not an implicit meaning which must be made explicit, but rather the systematic (conspiratorial, we might say) attempt to conceal or to distort that meaning. The influence of Ricœur’s triumvirate on the literary–critical field cannot be understated. *À trois*, they constitute, in Sedgwick’s words, ‘a pretty sufficient genealogy’ (5) for a movement of French intellectuals, not least Foucault, who took pride in renouncing the meta–narratives of freedom, truth and value. Theirs is the iconoclastic force that underpins those post–structuralist analyses that posit enemies (discourse, capital, power) so insidious that the possibility of resistance is effectively foreclosed. In casting aside models of agency, teleology or intentionality, post–structuralism, ultimately, elaborated an account of the human situation which made it impossible to distinguish our thought from coherent delusion or manipulative contrivance. As Farrell notes:

The sense that we are being manipulated and controlled cannot be labelled false because we are indeed, according to this view, the victims of social relations of unfathomable and inescapable manipulative power; nor can it be labelled true because that would be to fall back into the myth of the plenitude of metaphysical discourse that is one of the effects of power itself. (4)

The result, I would venture, has been the naturalization of a paranoid framework for the study of literature seemingly animated by the prospect of a generalized, controlling and alien conspiracy without conspirators.

Yet if conspiracy is everywhere, defanged and domesticated, the paranoid hermeneutic becomes so successful that it is in danger of undermining the initial critical impulse. It permeates even those ‘suspicious’ meta–discourses that seek to speak authoritatively on the phenomenon. Providing an unambiguous route out of this critical impasse is perhaps – regrettably – beyond the scope of the present study. What should be emphasised, though, is that if the hermeneutic of suspicion can be envisaged as a mode of literary–critical cognition, it also bears on the historical conditions animating the development of a certain aesthetic niche. As examination of Balzac and

his seminal 1911 account of Schreber’s memoirs. Eric Santner’s tellingly titled study provides a detailed discussion of the transference dynamic informing Freud’s commentary on the *Memoirs* in the context of his relationship with Wilhelm Fliess and his elaboration of the putative relations between paranoia and homosexuality. See *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber’s Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 19–62.

Sand's novels of conspiracy has shown, it is intimately bound up with the articulation of an individual's relationship to his/her socio-political reality. In attending to its role as nineteenth-century conceptual toolkit rather than as universal theoretical prescription in a postmodern age, this thesis has sought to rehabilitate the neglected dimension of the conspiratorial as counter-discourse. In so doing, I have aimed to draw attention to the productive political potential of the secret history staged by the literary text, its bearing on the ever-problematic encounter between events and their recuperation in narrative form. In making the case for this new generic category, then, the present study moves beyond the tendency to devalue conspiracy theories in consigning them to a kind of epistemological dustbin, fit only to be debunked with the tools of *Ideologiekritik*. On the contrary, it posits conspiracy thinking as a form of critical political and, crucially, aesthetic thinking. The novel of conspiracy is to be taken seriously as an explanatory tradition, characterized by a particular rhetorical style, that seeks to bring about a reorganization of knowledge. Ultimately, then, this is a style of thought and a way of writing that has a history – a history that entertains a privileged relationship with the literary field.

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